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Vol. 5 Contents for May, 1944 No. 2

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The WITNESS CHAIR

NOT long ago a young woman turned up in New York at a fashionable and expensive hotel where she signed the register, "Honorable Eva Fox-Strangways."

When the local papers copied the register for their society columns, they looked up the name in Burke's Peerage and found Fox-Strangways was the family name of the Earl of Ilchester. They added this information to their notice of her presence in New York.

What happened was what the young lady expected. Ambitious social climbers and others who should have known better showered her with attention and invitations.

Meanwhile, the Honorable Eva was cashing at the hotel checks so large that she always received a hundred or more in change. These checks were drawn on far distant banks—the Bank of England, The National Provincial Bank of England and the Capital and Counties Bank. It would take time for them to go through. The hotel, impressed by the hospitality extended to her, not only let her bill run on, but even paid charges on packages sent C.O.D. from stores.

Then the Honorable Eva left for a week-end visit, taking as might be expected, a well-filled collection of suitcases.

The week-end passed, a week, ten days, and the Honorable Eva had not returned. Then came a check back from London.

Too late, the hotel communicated with the Earl of Ilchester; he had no daughter, he answered.

Altogether the hotel had been rooked of $60.000. In the thirteen trunks left behind by the young lady was a collection of old clothes, linen, and nondescript articles of practically no value. The new furs, jewelry and frocks had, of course, been taken away in the suitcases.

The Honorable Eva was traced by hotel detectives to Toronto where, as plain Margaret Sinclair, she was living in cheap lodgings.

Her story was an old one, known to the police in England, Canada and Australia.

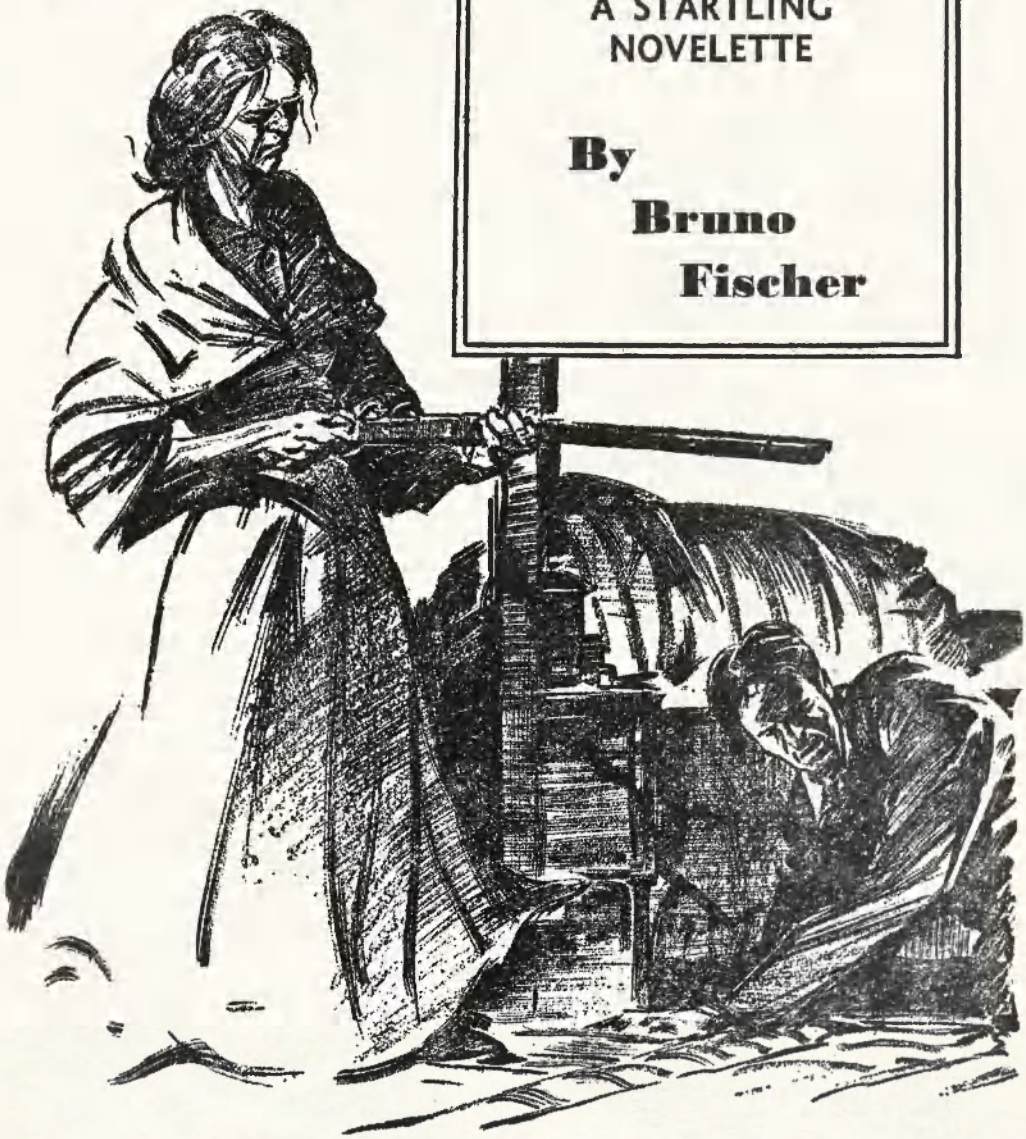
She was the daughter of a perfectly respectable coastguard in England. Stung by a yen for extravagant living, she began to travel, passing herself off in Australia as an Irish heiress with 2000 idle acres in County Mayo. In Canada she said she was the fiancee of a well-known Australian millionaire.

The hotel and the store keepers who had trusted her in New York were not so forgiving. Brought back to New York, Eva disappeared from circulation.

FATALLY YOURS—

A STARTLING NOVELETTE

By Bruno Fischer



Out of the night it came, that stark, accusing summons to eternity—the hand of a man long dead, with the fingers pointing to—Murder!

CHAPTER ONE

Death in the Back Seat

THE doorbell rang as we were finishing supper. Celia started to rise from the table, but Amy said quickly: "I'll answer, mother."

We heard Amy's heels click down the hall and then the street door open. "Telegram for Mrs. Wheeler," a voice on the porch announced.

Celia almost knocked over her coffee cup. I reached across the table to cover her hand with mine, and I could feel no blood in my fingers.

"Mrs. Celia Wheeler or Mrs. Amy Wheeler?" I heard Amy ask in a voice which did not sound like hers.

"Let's see." The messenger on the porch took an eternity. "Mrs. Amy Wheeler. That you? Sign right here."

Celia made a low moaning sound in her throat. "Danny's next-of-kin is no longer his mother—no longer me. It's his wife. They'd send Amy the—the—" She couldn't go on.

With my fingers tight over my wife's hand, I listened to Amy close the door and come back to the dining room. Her steps dragged now. I thought: *This is it. From the War Department. The telegram will begin, "We regret—" and it will mean that Danny is killed or missing.*

Amy appeared in the dining room doorway and stopped. There was no color, hardly any life, in her face. The telegram was crumpled unopened in her fist.

Her fierce, hawkish eyes held murder.

"Open it, Amy," I said quietly to my daughter-in-law.

She nodded as if awakening from a dream and slowly ripped open the envelope. Celia aged terribly in those few seconds. I watched Amy's face, and it told me that the news was as bad as it could be.

"Is it—" I said, then stopped to wet my lips. "What does it say?"

"What?" Amy said, and lifted her wide frightened eyes. "It's for me."

"Don't keep it from us!" Celia cried. "It's about Danny."

"Danny?" Amy echoed dully. "No, this wire is from a friend." Hastily she added: "From a girl I used to know very well. She wired me she's coming to visit Gilport."

Celia uttered a little sigh, and I felt all of me relaxing. Then I looked again at Amy and saw that the terror was still in her eyes. I wondered about that.

"You must invite her to the house," Celia was saying.

"Invite who?" Amy muttered. "Oh, yes —my friend. I might." And she turned and left the room. It seemed to me that she was running from us.

"Poor girl!" Celia said. "She had as bad a fright as I did." My wife stared down at her coffee. "Sam, I've been reading in the papers—so many Flying Fortresses are lost."

"Only a small proportion," I said, trying to make my voice light. "And Danny will get a leave home after twenty-five missions. He was close to that two weeks ago."

"Lieutenant Daniel Wheeler," Celia said, proudly savoring the sound of the title. "Sam, a navigator is the most important person in a bomber, isn't he?"

"Every member of the crew is important."

"I mean, without the navigator the plane couldn't get where it's going or come home. And he has to be awfully smart."

"Danny was always smart," I said.

She smiled. "I'm glad now Danny married Amy. He loves her so much."

"Yes," I said, and wondered again why Amy should be so frightened because a girl friend wired that she was visiting Gilport.

AN HOUR or so later Judson Carter honked the horn outside my house and I went out to his car. I was chairman of the Gilport Draft Board and he was one of the board members. Because of gas rationing, Carter and I, who lived within a block of each other, used our cars in turn to drive to the meetings.

Jud Carter was a plump, jolly lawyer who had two fine sons in the Navy. Tonight, however, he was quite solemn.

"Sam," he said, "there's an undercurrent of talk around town. Have you heard it?"

"About what?"

"That deferments from the draft can be bought from the board for five hundred dollars."

"Nonsense!"

"Of course it's nonsense, but there's a lot of talk. I don't like it."

I opened my mouth, but never said whatever I was going to say. At that moment Jud Carter swung his car around a quiet, empty corner. The sweeping headlights caught a man and woman standing very close together in the doorway of a dark store.

They sprang apart at the sudden flood of light, and for an endless moment their faces were turned toward us.

The girl, beyond doubt, was Amy. And I knew that sleekly handsome face of the man. It belonged to Lee Betta.

Then the car was past. I twisted in my seat to look back, but without the headlights it was too dark to see anything. I had seen enough.

Jud Carter had recognized them also; I could tell by the pitying, sidelong glance he gave me. He said dryly: "Lee Betta's case is coming up tonight. I see no reason for holding it up another week."

My voice sound hoarse in my ears. "Betta's records aren't in order. His answers are shifty."

"The rumor has it that he's one of those who paid five hundred dollars for a deferment."

"Paid who—you or me or George Sykes? It would be worse than bribery; it would be rank treason. Anyway, Betta says he wants to be in the Army." My voice went shrill. "I'd like to break his damned neck!"

After that we drove in silence. We had talked about Betta without mentioning Amy's name, but it was Amy we were both thinking about.

I was afraid. Afraid that somehow in England Danny would find out how his wife was carrying on while he was risking his

life in the skies over Europe. And I thought: *Celia was right at the beginning. After all, what do we really know about Amy?*

One night, a month before Danny was sent abroad, he had brought that tall, lovely girl home with him. Grinning as shyly as a schoolboy—and that's really all he was in spite of his lieutenant's bars—he had announced: "Folks, meet your daughter-in-law. We were married a couple of hours ago."

Celia had been very much upset. That night in our room she had complained bitterly: "Danny is so young. And he admits he's known her only two days!"

"Danny has so little time left," I had said. "He has a right to all the happiness he can get."

"How do we know what she is? He might have picked her off the street."

I had my hand on her shoulder. "She seems to be a very nice girl. Be kind to her, Celia."

"If we only knew something about her," Celia had said.

After Danny was sent abroad with his squadron, Amy had come to live with us. She hadn't wanted to, but I had insisted, and it had worked out fine. It hadn't taken very long to accept her almost as a daughter.

Amy always showed us the letters Danny sent him. They were filled with a bright, enduring love that must have made it easier for her to face the deadly job he was doing. Only a man who was himself unutterably lonely and at loose ends, the way I was in France in the last war, can understand what a girl like Amy must have meant to him.

And now!

Now I had seen Danny's wife in another man's arms. Well, not exactly seen them in each other's arms—it had happened too quickly—but why else would those two have sprung apart guiltily when sudden light had hit them? Amy had slipped out through the back door to meet Betta; she had left the house before I did and I hadn't seen her go out the front way. Sneaking out at night like any—

I thought: *If Danny learns of this, it will kill him more surely than Nazi flak or Messerschmitt machine-gun bullets. He must never know.*

THE Draft Board office was in the high school building. George Sykes was waiting impatiently for us. He was a dour, gruff man who owned a small chain of grocery stores. Although he was the third member of the board, I had not been able to get on friendly terms with him. He wasn't a man who had friends.

Strangely, however, Sykes was very soft about sending men into the service. That may have been because he was a bachelor and had no children of his own in the armed forces, like Carter and myself.

I nodded to Sykes and took my seat at the head of the table. My mind wasn't on the work. I couldn't banish that vision of Lee Betta and Amy in the doorway. Betta was due before the board tonight. When he came, I would have to fight myself to keep from doing something rash.

We were listening to appeals that night by men who protested being classified 1-A or who asked for deferments. They came in with their parents or wives or employes, and their pockets were filled with affidavits. Some were justified and some weren't, although I noticed that there was an unusual amount of resentment when we decided against anybody. As if, it struck me, they thought they were being cheated.

This was particularly true of Mrs. Kevin. I don't mean her boy Alan, who, after all, was the one concerned. He seemed willing enough to go. In fact, he reminded me somewhat of Danny—gangling, with that same lazy, boyish, careless manner of posture and speech.

His mother was a hellion. She had unruly gray hair and a beak and mouth like a hawk. She said she was a poor sick widow whose only support and comfort was her son. The government couldn't possibly need him as much as she did.

I said we would give our answer by mail. At that, Mrs. Kevin gave me a knowing smirk, as if she were sure what the answer would be, and departed with her son. For some reason I didn't understand, that smirk of hers made me very uncomfortable.

"Poor and sick, hell!" Jud Carter said. "Everybody knows that Mrs. Kevin has a fortune socked away."

"We've got to be sure," George Sykes pointed out. "I move we investigate her ability to support herself."

We agreed with him and the next case

came up and the next. I kept watching the door for Lee Betta to appear.

Toward midnight George Sykes stretched his arms. "I guess that winds up tonight's work."

Carter looked at me and then said to Sykes: "It seems Betta doesn't intend to show up. I move we get tough with him."

"Oh, Betta." Sykes took a typewritten report out of a file. "This completely slipped my mind. The report on Betta came in this morning. He lied about his background because he wants to be in the Army. He's a criminal."

I sat very still.

Carter leaned across me to reach for the support. "Heinous crime?"

"Yes. A number of minor felonies and misdemeanors, but the one that counts is a conviction for murder in the second degree. He served seven years. All in all, his record is that of a vicious criminal."

"Vicious is right." Carter dropped the report in front of me.

I didn't even glance at it. Dully I was thinking: *Amy is not only betraying Danny with another man, but with a criminal, a murderer.*

"That let's Betta out of the draft," Sykes was saying. "I saw him this afternoon and told him so. That's why he isn't here tonight."

My voice was bitter in my throat. "So good, clean boys like Danny have to do the dying, while criminal rats like Betta stay safely at home!"

"Easy, Sam." Carter's hand gripped my arm. "Wearing a uniform is an honor and a privilege. You don't want a criminal in one."

I nodded and rose. Carter and I went down to his car. *Danny mustn't know,* ran through my head. *He mustn't find out about Amy till the war is over. He's got to keep believing in her.*

We were about halfway home when Jud Carter exclaimed: "Say, Sam, isn't that your car?"

He braked his own car in the middle of the street. It was after midnight; the street was empty except for that other sedan parked at the curb. I looked at it.

"Same make and color," I muttered, "but mine is home in the garage."

Carter's plump face frowned at the car. "Look, Sam, that front fender is nicked just like yours. I could swear—" He backed up a few feet so that his headlights sprayed the license plate. "What's your number?"

I jerked erect in the seat. That was my license number, all right. My car.

"Funny," I muttered. "I keep the key in the car so that Celia and Amy can use it whenever they have to. But what's it doing here if one of them took it out?"

"They must have had a breakdown and left it."

That made sense. I got out of Carter's car and slid behind the wheel of my own. The ignition key was still in the lock. I turned it and pressed the starter and the motor leaped into life. I threw in the gears and the car rolled all right.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it," Carter called.

"No. Then why on earth was it left here?"

"Celia probably flooded the carbureter and didn't know enough to wait," he chuckled. "You know how women are with cars. Well, so long, Sam."

I waved to him and he shot his car ahead. I started off slowly, but the car rode as nicely as it ever had.

I had gone about a block when I heard the moan. Looking from side to side, I saw nobody. The street remained empty. I drove another block and heard it again. Close to me, almost in my ear. I could feel the hair in the back of my neck stiffen. Good Lord, the moan was f ng me!

Then somebody touched my shoulder. Fingers clawed my coat, and the moan was louder.

My feet slammed down on the brake. I turned, and saw a hand waving feebly above the back of the seat. Somebody was crouching there on the floor of the sedan.

"Who are you?" I asked hoarsely.

Words sounded then, but no words that made sense. The hand vanished. I reached for the light switch and snapped it on.

A man lay doubled face down on the floor. He was coughing wrackingly, trying to force words out, and not able to. Slowly the hand clawed up the back seat again, and now I could see that the hand was wet with blood. And there was blood splashed wildly on the back seat upholstery.

"What happened to you?" I said. "Are you badly hurt?"

There was no attempt at speech now; only that horrible coughing.

For a long second I looked down at that hunched back, then turned in the seat and gunned the motor. The city hospital was only five minutes away. I made it in half the time and roared up to the emergency entrance. A white-coated interne came up.

"A hurt man!" I gasped. "In back!"

The interne flung open the door. I realized then that the moaning and coughing had ceased. Kneeling on the front seat, I looked back.

The interne had lifted the head. The face was tilted up at me, and I knew it. In death it was like a lump of putty carelessly thrown together. Lee Betta was no longer sleekly handsome.

The interne let the head drop. He turned his gaze to me.

"Did you murder him?" he asked.

CHAPTER TWO

Crazy to Kill

WALTER MOTT and his wife often visited my house for an evening of bridge. I hardly thought of him as a cop, although he was the Gilport chief of police. He was a dapper man, quiet-spoken, and gave the impression of being dull. He wasn't.

Walter Mott looked very much like a cop now. It was his eyes mostly, I think—absolutely blank and at the same time curiously incisive. And his mouth had become very thin.

We had left the hospital for the street where Carter and I had come across my car. Several men were examining the sidewalk under strong lights.

"How do you figure it out, Sam?" Mott asked me.

I took time to light a cigar, thinking: *Careful! It won't be easy to fool Walter Mott.* Aloud I said: "Lee Betta was a criminal, a gangster. Probably it was a gang murder."

"How did he get into your car?"

"I imagine my wife took the car out tonight and had trouble with it and left it here," I said. "Probably she flooded the carbureter and didn't know why the car didn't start. Betta was stabbed on this street and managed to get as far as the parked car and tumbled inside."

Mott turned his head and called: "Anything, Baker?"

A plainclothesman straightened up from the sidewalk and snapped off a lantern. "Not a sign, chief."

"Betta was stabbed in the chest, missing his heart by a couple of inches," Mott explained to me. "Then the knife was withdrawn. Evidently the killer took it away with him so it couldn't be traced."

"So it's the knife they're looking for?" I said.

"No. Blood. Betta must have bled like a pig, yet there's no sign of blood anywhere on the sidewalk. And there wasn't any on the running board of your car."

"Couldn't he have held his hand over the wound, holding back the blood, until he got into the car?"

Mott said dryly: "No, Sam, he couldn't. Why, mortally wounded, would he flop into a parked car? He'd have stayed on the sidewalk where passers-by would see him, and he'd have yelled. And the back seat and floor of your car looks like a bucket of blood was spilled in it. In other words, Betta thrashed about in the car. He was stabbed in the car."

I tried to keep my face as impassive as Mott kept his. "I see. Betta and the gangster who murdered him were talking something over. Say they met on this street and wanted to sit somewhere. Why not an empty car?"

When the words were out, they didn't sound so good. They sounded pretty feeble.

Mott said wearily, "I guess we've accomplished all we can here," and started toward the big official sedan.

"Do you mind dropping me off at my house?" I asked.

Mott looked at me with those veiled eyes of his. "I'm afraid you'll have to go back to headquarters with me."

When we reached headquarters, I went into one of the public telephone booths in the lobby and started to dial my home number.

The door folded open and Mott reached in to grab my arm.

"I'm sorry, Sam. I'd rather you didn't make any calls for a while."

"What is this?" I demanded angrily. "Am I under arrest?"

"Not exactly. Let's say you're being held for questioning."

"At least let me phone my wife and tell her I won't be home."

"I'll tell her," Mott said. "I'll be over there in a few minutes."

Walter Mott was no fool. He was giving me no chance to give Celia a line on what to tell him before he himself saw her. Somehow I had to get word to Celia to say she had taken the car out tonight and left it on that street.

I forced myself to shrug. "I don't know much law, but I know I'm entitled to call my lawyer."

"Is Jud Carter your lawyer?"

"Yes."

"And Carter is the man you say you were with when you came across your car." Mott rubbed his jaw. "He's somebody else I'll see tonight. You can make all the phone calls you want in the morning. I'm sorry, Sam. We'll try to make you as comfortable as we can."

Angry and frightened as I was, I had a new respect for Walter Mott. He was a cop, all right, and a very good one. Vaguely I recalled that every arrested man had a right to make two phone calls, but I wasn't arrested—yet. Mott might or might not be skirting the limits of the law; I didn't know. But I did know that protest would do me no good.

A detective led me upstairs as diffidently as a bellhop, and the room he showed me to was as good as many I'd slept in in hotels. This was Mott's private bedroom which he used when he had to spend the night at headquarters. Nothing like being the pal of the chief of police.

IN THE morning I didn't have to phone Judson Carter. He came in to see me right after breakfast.

"How's Celia?" I asked him.

"Quite upset, naturally. She told Mott she didn't take the car out at all last night. She heard the car being driven out of the garage about nine-thirty and assumed that Amy was taking it."

"And Amy?"

Carter looked at his feet. "She claims she didn't take it, either. She said she was in a movie last night—alone. And I pulled a boner, Sam. I'm an attorney and should know better, but Mott dragged me out of bed and I was still groggy with sleep. Anyway, I didn't know there had been a murder, so when Mott questioned me about Amy and Lee Betta, like a sap I blurted out that we had seen them together earlier last night."

"That's all right," I said.

His eyes widened. "Don't you realize how Mott will figure it? Either that Amy went back for the car and took Betta riding—or that after I left you, you met Betta walking and gave him a lift and stabbed him. After all, you have motive. Everybody knows how you feel about Danny."

By then I had made my decision.

"How do you know I didn't meet Betta?" I said coolly.

Jud Carter walked across the room and put his back against the wall. "You're not doing this for Amy?"

"Her!" My lips curled. I hated my daughter-in-law more than I had ever hated anybody.

"For Danny then," Carter said. "Danny is very fond of you too, Sam."

"Not the way he is of Amy. They're different—a father and a wife."

He shook his head. "It won't work, Sam. If there's a trial, everything about Amy will come out. Danny will hear."

"Not if I'm the one who's tried," I said. "I'll make a deal with the district attorney. He'll keep Amy's name out of it if I'll plead guilty. Danny will never know. He's going through too much to have his heart broken."

"You're a fool, Sam."

"For having killed Lee Betta?" I said, pretending to misunderstand. "I suppose so."

Jud Carter went to the door. With a pudgy hand on the knob, he turned. "Anyway, I can get you out on a writ of habeas corpus."

"Don't," I said. "I want as little fuss as possible. I don't even want a lawyer."

"And especially not a further investigation. You think a confession will stop an investigation cold."

He went out angrily.

The door hardly closed behind him when Walter Mott came in.

"Sorry I had to keep you here, Sam," he apologized. "A police chief can't let friendship interfere with duty. I couldn't have you talk to certain people before I did."

"You showed sense," I said. "Tell the district attorney I'm ready to make a statement. I picked Lee Betta up in my car

last night. I was very bitter because a criminal like him could remain safe behind the lines while my own boy risked death every day. We argued and he pulled a knife on me. Somehow I got it away from him and stabbed him."

Mott studied me. "How come it happened in the back seat?"

"When Betta saw I had the knife, he threw himself over the seat. I was crazy with rage. I followed."

"Cut it out, Sam!" Mott snapped. "You couldn't have taken your car from the garage; you drove to the school at eight with Carter and were there until about midnight. It had to be your daughter-in-law who took the car. She was with Betta earlier that evening, as you know. At nine-thirty she went back to the house to get the car, either with Betta or else she met him again later."

Cautiously I asked: "What does Amy say to that cock-and-bull story?"

"First she denied having seen Betta at all. She claimed she went to the movies alone and got home close to twelve. That's no alibi; nobody saw her enter or leave the theater. First thing this morning I had my men investigate her relationship with Lee Betta. It took almost no time. Betta has a sister living in Gilport. She told us that Amy had been Betta's wife."

It knocked the breath out of me.

"You didn't know that, did you, Sam?" he said pityingly. "I don't suppose Danny knows, either. She married Betta shortly after he got out of the pen after the second degree murder rap. The marriage didn't last long. They were divorced two months before she married your son. But the divorce didn't stop her from seeing Betta while Danny was abroad."

"That doesn't prove she murdered Betta," I muttered.

"Her confession does. An hour ago she broke down. She says Betta threatened that unless she shelled out blackmail money he'd tell you and Danny she'd been married to an ex-convict. I don't know what's so terrible about that, but she claims she was frantic. She went back to the house, she says, and got the car and a knife, and met Betta again and drove around with him. They were sitting in the back seat, talking,

when she shoved the knife into him."

There was nothing more I could do. It couldn't be kept from Danny. I had subscribed to the Gilport *News* for him, and he would read the horrible, lurid details spread all over the paper. And if I canceled the subscription, a smart boy like Danny would suspect something was wrong.

"I'll have one of the boys drive you home," Mott said gently.

I nodded, but I didn't immediately rise from my chair. I was realizing how old I had become.

CELIA was waiting for me on the porch. She flew into may arms.

"To think that we treated Amy like our own daughter!" she moaned. "Danny is well rid of her."

Would Danny think so? I thought of the bright, clean ardor of Danny's letters. Love like that doesn't die so easily. It can hurt a man—God, how it can hurt a man!—but it doesn't die.

Celia and I went into the house. In the hall a man was working on the telephone.

"He's from the telephone company," Celia explained. "It seems our phone was out of order all day yesterday. I didn't know it till I tried to phone the police station this morning. I used Mrs. Goldblatt's phone next door and Walter Mott told me you were on the way home."

The repair man had the telephone to his ear. "Okay now," he said into the mouth-and hung up. A moment later the bell rang and he picked the handset up again. "Oh, a personal call. Yeah, I guess he's here." He turned to me. "You Mr. Wheeler? There's a call for you."

It was George Sykes, and his voice was even harsher than usual. "I just heard what happened last night to Lee Betta. So they let you get away with it, Wheeler?"

"I don't understand."

"You damn well understand. I told you I spoke to Betta yesterday afternoon. Well, I didn't believe him then. It sounded too fantastic."

"What the devil are you talking about, Sykes?" I said. "What did Lee Betta tell you?"

"Look here, Wheeler. When I put it in words, it'll be when I can make it stick. I don't want to give you a chance to jab a knife in me also."

"What's that, Sykes?" I said. "Are you accusing me of—"

But I was talking to a dead line. Slowly I hung up. Either George Sykes was crazy or I was.

Celia was no longer in the hall. I heard her voice in the living room, so I went in there.

Mrs. Kevin and Alan Kevin were seated on the couch. Alan was squirming uncomfortably, like a schoolboy visiting his teacher with his parent.

"They arrived a few minutes ago," Celia told me. "I said you'd be home soon, so they insisted on waiting for you."

The widow raised her hawkish face. "Mr. Wheeler, you can't send my boy to the Army."

Alan Kevin flushed. "Gee, Ma, I told you you'll get a dependency allowance."

"Quiet, Alan!" she snapped. "It's a mere pittance." She stood up and fixed her fierce eyes on me. "Mr. Wheeler, I was surprised at the way you acted last night. I was expecting you to get my son off."

It wasn't easy for me to hold my temper in. "Only the board as a whole considers reclassifications. I'm merely the chairman. Your son will be classified according to the rules."

Mrs. Kevin took a step toward me and her fingers curled into talons. For a moment I thought she was going to try to claw my eyes out. Alan touched her shoulder. "Ma, please—" he began, but a look from her shut him up. I felt sorry for him. He seemed willing enough to do his duty, but his mother had him under her thumb.

"Mr. Wheeler, you're a crook!" she hurled at me.

Celia, who was watching the scene in bewilderment, uttered an outraged little cry. Fury shook me. I had never before been called a crook or anything like that. And a few minutes ago, over the phone, George Sykes had accused me of other things, of what I wasn't quite sure, except that cold-blooded murder was one of them. What in the world was going on?

I said: "I think you'd better go, Mrs. Kevin."

The widow brushed her unruly gray hair from her face. "Come, Alan. I won't stay another minute in this crook's house." She swept by me. Sheepishly her son followed in her wake.

Celia looked at me with a strange, half-frightened expression. "What did she mean. Sam, calling you a—a crook?"

"Merely the gibberish of an angry woman," I answered.

But without knowing what they really did mean, I knew that Mrs. Kevin's words had meant a great deal.

I went out to the hall and telephoned Judson Carter's office.

"It was plain you couldn't get away with your sentimental stunt," Carter said. "A child could have doped out at once that Amy murdered Betta though it might have been hard to prove. You're lucky she confessed."

"Am I?" I said. "Jud, you remember last night you mentioned rumors about draft deferments being sold? Just what do the rumors say?"

His tone became cautious.

"Just rumors started by sourheads. Nothing definite."

"Are names mentioned?"

"Well, by implication you and Sykes and myself would be the ones. Don't tell me you're letting that nonsense bother you? Every public servant has to stand for rumor mongering."

"I suppose so," I said. "Jud, I want you to defend Amy. I'll foot the bill if I have to mortgage my house."

He was silent for a moment. "You don't really care what happens to her, do you, Sam?"

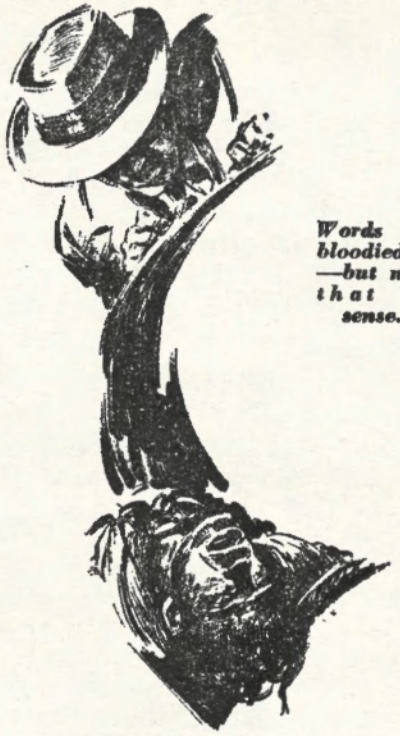
"No," I admitted. "But I know what Danny would want me to do for his wife."

CHAPTER THREE

No End To Murder

WHEN I hung up, I stood looking down at the telephone. Last night it had been out of order. Was that why Amy had received that telegram—because whoever had wanted to get in touch with her had been unable to do so by telephone?

Amy had lied about the contents of the telegram to Celia and me last night. It hadn't come from a girl friend. Whatever it had said had frightened her almost as much as possible bad news about Danny. Had she known then, when she read it, that she would have to murder Lee Betta?



Words left his bloodied mouth —but no words that made sense. . . .

I went upstairs to Amy's bedroom. It was still more of a man's room than a woman's, for it had been Danny's room, and then *their* room for those few brief nights they had been together in the house. Bitterness choked me. In England Danny was dreaming of coming home to this room —and Amy.

I didn't really hope to find the telegram, but there it was in her wastebasket. I smoothed it out on her dresser and read it:

COULD NOT GET YOU ON PHONE. MEET ME AGAIN TONIGHT SAME CORNER SAME TIME. HAVE MORE DOPE. I'M SURE NOW. I'LL DO WHAT I CAN KID.
LEE

Three times I read the message. She had met him before, and this obviously wasn't a wire from a blackmailer. Was there something in the information he had given her that had caused her to murder him?

Judson Carter was a clever lawyer. Perhaps he could get Amy off by showing temporary insanity caused by the strain of being blackmailed. Nobody loves a blackmailer, and a jury would be lenient. But

with this telegram in his hand, the district attorney could undermine any such defense.

I took the telegram into the bathroom and tore it into small pieces and flushed them down the drain. I was destroying evidence; my duty, of course, was to turn the telegram over to the police. And now, because she had tricked my son into marrying her and loving her, she was making me an accomplice to murder. God, how I hated that girl! . . .

Police Chief Walter Mott was in the county jail. He had just come from having a talk with Amy.

"I was wondering why you didn't come to see her this morning," Mott said.

"I didn't want to and I still don't, but I guess I ought to."

His eyes were cop's eyes studying me. "I don't like any of this, Sam. At first I figured you handed me that phony confession this morning to protect your daughter-in-law, but now I'm not sure where you stand. Frankly, I don't like her confession either."

"What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"For a girl who's ready to tell all, she's strangely close-mouthed. All she'll say is that she killed Betta because he was trying to blackmail her. Blackmail her for what? As far as I can find out, she hasn't a cent of her own. You're just a minor executive for the electric company and they don't pay much. Anyway, Betta's threat was to tell you she'd been married to him. How did he intend to collect?"

I said nothing.

He came close to me, "Sam, you and I are friends, but, by God, that won't help you any. Murder is bad enough, but there are some things even worse."

"What are you talking about?" Everybody seemed to be speaking in riddles.

"I wish I knew," Mott said. "I've been hearing things. About Lee Betta. About you. If any of it is true—"

"I never saw Betta outside of his one appearance before the Draft Board."

Wearily Mott waved a hand. "Wait in that room on your right. I'll have her brought in."

Amy was led into the room by a matron who left us alone. I expected Amy to come in cringing, ashamed to face me, but her head was high and her fine eyes blazed. She was very lovely. I could have been proud of a daughter-in-law who looked like that.

"I suppose I ought to be grateful," she said contemptuously, "because you hired a lawyer for me. Mr. Carter was here."

"I don't expect you to be grateful. I did it for Danny."

Her mouth went crooked. "Sure you did! How can you look anybody in the face, with your only son giving all he has for his country?"

There it was again—words that didn't make sense. I simply stood there staring at her. She was shaking with rage; she seemed to have lost her mind.

"You traitor!" she flung at me.

"Traitor?" I mumbled. Within a few hours I had been called a murderer, a crook, and now a traitor. "What am I supposed to have done?"

"Don't try to act innocent! You sold draft deferments!"

I gawked, suddenly understanding. George Sykes believed it; Walter Mott suspected it; Judson Carter had heard rumors. But the whole thing was obviously absurd. No deferments could be granted unless all three of us on the board agreed. Of course, a single board member could exert particular influence on a certain case, but we were all honest men.

Or were we? I was, I knew, but—"

"That's not true, Amy," I said. I wouldn't—I couldn't—" The lie was so monstrous that a mere denial seemed inadequate.

She laughed harshly and went to the door.

"Wait, Amy. What has this to do with the murder of Lee Betta?"

"I confessed, didn't I?" She flung the door open and slammed it in my face.

I stood looking at the door. Then I took my hat from the table and went out.

GEORGE SYKES' office was in the rear of the busiest of his three grocery stores. The bookkeeper told me that a couple of hours ago he had left for the day.

"Do you know where he went?" I asked anxiously. Sykes was the only one who appeared willing to do plain talking. When he had telephoned me at the house, I hadn't known enough about what he meant to ask the right questions. Now I thought I did.

"He left a number to call him in case anything important came up," the bookkeeper said.

It was the number of the Draft Board office. Why would Sykes go there during the afternoon with the evident intention of staying there for some hours? There wasn't any particular work with the board that a secretary or the volunteer clerks couldn't handle this afternoon.

I took a taxi to the school.

It was a few minutes after six o'clock, and already night. As I walked up the circular staircase, my steps echoed hollowly through the building. It was that empty, silent period between the classes of the day and the activity of the various war boards which functioned from the school.

The janitor had put on only the staircase lights, so that the third floor hall was like a dark tunnel which in vague light glimmered remotely at either end. I found the proper door more by familiarity than by sight. The lock was snapped shut, and the frosted glass door showed that the outer office was unlit. The secretary had left for supper, and obviously Sykes had left also. Nevertheless, I took out my key and fumbled for the lock.

Beyond the door somebody walked. With the key outstretched, I hesitated, listening. Sykes was in there after all and he was leaving after putting out the light.

The door swung inward.

I didn't actually see anybody. In the hall a little light flowed from the stairhead, so that I must have been dimly outlined; but that other man, facing me across the office threshold, was in total darkness, no more than a bunching of shadows. I would not have been sure that a man stood there if the door had not been opened.

"Sykes?" I said. "This is Sam Wheeler. I came to ask you—"

My voice trailed off into the vast silence of the empty school. The darkness moved toward me, flowing out into the hall. I thought, *Why didn't he answer me?* and automatically I stepped back.

That movement saved my life, for the first frantic lunge missed. I felt something rake my coat sleeve, and the weight of a body brushed against me. Without taking time for thought, I threw myself against the farther hall wall and rolled a little way along it.

I saw the shape then. It might have been a man or a woman or even a child—all I could tell was that it was human. And I knew that what had ripped my sleeve was the blade of a naked knife, and I glimpsed that shape coming toward me again.

Yelling, I plunged toward the stairhead. It was a good hundred feet away; it might have been a mile. The steps behind me were soft, yet very quick—cat-like steps, the steps of a killer.

Abruptly the darkness became solid substance. In my frenzy, I had run into the unseen side wall. Plaster struck my forehead and nose. I reeled, and a moment later the shape was on my back. An arm was flung around my neck, bearing me down to the floor. The other arm, I knew, was lifting the knife.

I screamed again. Miraculously the arm about me loosened. The knife did not complete its plunge. The steps were running away from me now, and my voice dried in my throat, and I heard somebody at the stairhead demand sharply: "What's that? What's happening?"

I could not answer. My breath clogged in my burning lungs. Abruptly light poured down into the hall.

Tabor, the stooped, aged school janitor, came toward me. "Why, it's Mr. Wheeler! Was that you yelled?"

I looked down the other end of the hall. It was empty.

"Where is he?" I said hoarsely.

"Where's who?"

"Somebody tried to kill me. He ran when he saw you coming. He went that way."

Tabor peered down the hall. "I don't see nobody. I was coming up the stairs when I heard you yell. You see who it was, Mr. Wheeler?"

I was shaking all over and there was sweat in my eyes. "It was too dark. It was a man, though—seemed quite strong. I guess he's out one of the doors by now."

Tabor clucked his tongue. "Why'd he want to kill you?"

Why? My brain was in a tumult. He had been prepared for me. He hadn't needed to take the time to reach into his pocket for the knife; the naked blade had been ready in his hand. But that was odd. He couldn't have known that I was on the other side of the door. Had he heard my footsteps? Then why hadn't he waited in the office, to trap me there when I entered.

That naked knife in his hand. . . .

I spun suddenly, almost running, and I heard Tabor trotting beside me, asking bewildered questions. I snapped on the light in the outer office and then in the inner office. My hand froze on the second switch, and Tabor made ragged noises in his throat.

In front of one of the desks George Sykes lay face down on the floor. A great red splotch dyed his coat under the left shoulder.

"Dead!" Tabor whispered. "Murdered!"

I forced myself to go forward and touch one of Sykes' outflung hands. The flesh was cooling. He was dead, but he had been alive a few minutes ago.

Battling the nausea that welled up in me, I picked up the telephone and called the police. Then I started looking through the files.

IN A very short time Walter Mott and a squad of his men arrived. Tabor and I explained what had happened.

"You didn't see the attacker at all?" Mott asked Tabor.

The aged janitor shook his head. "Didn't even know anybody but Mr. Sykes was in the building. Of course it's a big school and anybody can get in and out without me seeing them."

I said pointedly: "The fact is that it couldn't have been Amy who murdered Sykes and attacked me."

Mott's eyebrows lifted. "Are you trying to say that Betta and Sykes were murdered by the same person?"

"It's possible. The method was the same. And evidently Sykes had been in Betta's confidence about something."

"Amy confessed to Betta's murder," Mott reminded me.

"You said you're not satisfied with her confession."

Mott's eyes bored into me. He said, "Wait here," and joined the other policeman in the inner office. Tabor drifted out to attend to his duties. I smoked cigarettes in a chain in an attempt to settle my stomach.

After a while Judson Carter entered from the hall. He was panting, probably from having run all the way up the stairs.

"Is it true about Sykes?" Carter gasped.

"Yes." I told him the details.

"Sam, it looks bad," he said, compressing his lips.

"Very bad."

"I mean for you, Sam. There wasn't any witness of the attack on you. Not even Tabor. Your coat is ripped, but you could have ripped it yourself." He held up a hand as I opened my mouth. "Of course I'm not accusing you. But I know how Mott's mind will run."

Mott came out then. He glanced at Carter and then glared at me. "You didn't waste any time getting your lawyer here," he said dryly.

"Sam didn't send for me," Carter protested. "I went to headquarters to have a talk with you about Amy Wheeler's confession, and there I heard about Sykes. Naturally I rushed right over."

Mott's eyes didn't believe him. He wore the expression of a man who had decided not to believe anything. He asked me: "What was Sykes doing here this afternoon?"

"I'm not sure," I said slowly. "I think he wanted to check up on some draft records. Especially Lee Betta's records."

"Did Sykes tell you that?"

I lit a fresh cigarette. Both men watched me narrowly.

"Lee Betta's records are missing from the file," I said. "They were there last night. In other words, the murderer came to steal them and had to kill Sykes in order to get them. Or perhaps he wanted to kill Sykes because he knew too much and did both jobs at once. It ties up. It has to. Lee Betta is murdered and then the next day all his selective service records are stolen. As far as I can tell, nothing else is missing from the files."

"When did you find out those records were missing?" Mott asked icily.

"After I found Sykes' body, while waiting for you."

Thoughtfully Mott rubbed his jaw. Jud Carter stood very still, not taking his eyes from my face.

"Let me get this straight," Mott said. "Out of hundreds of records, you could tell within a few minutes that Betta's were missing."

"It struck me at once that there was a tie-up between the two murders. There is something in Betta's record that must contain a clue of why he was murdered."

"And where does Amy's confession come in?"

We were at the point I was leading up to. "It doesn't," I said. "Whatever her confession means, it's plain she didn't murder Lee Betta."

"Plain, is it?" Mott laughed without mirth. "What's plain is a red herring."

"A what?"

"Red herring," Mott repeated. "The one you're trying to spread across the trail. You could have taken those records yourself to confuse us. You could have ripped your coat yourself. You could have yelled in the hall for no reason except to back up a story that you were attacked. And, of course, the fact remains that two men were murdered and you were there both times, with all the opportunity and plenty of motive."

"Motive?" I mumbled.

"Sure. Betta—well, maybe the unwritten law business. He was messing with your son's wife. Or maybe a lot nastier motive—something about the sale of draft deferments or reclassifications. And the same with Sykes. He got wise to you, Sam. He heard what everybody has heard about you selling out. He was here to check the records, and you—"

"Whoa!" Jud Carter cut in.

Mott planted his feet wide apart, like a wrestler, and looked pugnacious. "Whichever way you figure it, Sam is it. If the two murders aren't connected, then we have Amy for one and Sam for the other. If they're tied up, then Amy is out, and Sam is in even further."

Wearily I slumped down on a bench. "No," I heard myself say. "You're wrong about everything."

But they were arguing with each other, the lawyer and the cop, and not paying any attention to me. What was the use fighting? No matter what happened now, Danny would find out about Amy. And in England he would hear also that his father was accused of murder and of being a traitor to his country.

CHAPTER FOUR

Buried Evidence

A HAND touched my shoulder. I looked up and saw Jud Carter standing over me. Mott was no longer in the outer office.

"He's not arresting me then?" I said dully.

"He doesn't dare. He hasn't any concrete evidence against you. Mott will be tough, though. I'm worried. There's a lot of bulldog about that guy."

I stood up and started toward the door. Carter's plump figure tagged after me.

When we were in the street, he said: "Sam, isn't there anything you want to tell me? Needless to say, it will be in the strictest confidence."

"So you don't believe me either?" I said.

His eyes shifted away from mine. "Sure I do, Sam. But—let's talk about it while I drive you home."

I walked with him to his car which was parked at the curb, but I didn't get in with him.

"I'll walk," I told him.

"It's a couple of miles to your house. You look terrible, Sam. You look as if you couldn't cross the street under your own power."

"I'll walk," I repeated dully and started up the street. At the corner I glanced back. Carter's car had started rolling in the opposite direction.

The crisp night air was good. It washed some of the tiredness from my body and brain.

Sam Wheeler, you're a quitter, I said to myself. *What would Danny think of a father who's a quitter? He can't quit where he is when the going gets tough. You're chairman of the Gilport Selective Service Board, so in a way you're part of the armed forces too.*

I walked faster. I knew now where I was going, though I had no idea what I would do once I got there.

Presently I stood in front of a small stucco cottage sitting back from the road. There was dim light in one of the front windows, but as far as I could see the rest of the house was dark. I started up the narrow gravel walk.

Halfway to the porch I heard the sounds. For a long minute I stood listening to the steady muffled thumping. Why would anybody be digging after dark? I crossed the small patch of front lawn and walked down the driveway along the side of the house. I stopped at the rear of the house and looked around the corner.

The man who was digging in the back yard of the cottage did not have a light with him. He worked under the half-moon. In that vague mellowness, he was a shadow rhythmically bending and straightening as he filled a hole from a small pile of dirt on the side. He dug in the midst of what had been a vegetable garden in the summer, so that when he was finished there was no sign that the ground had recently been disturbed.

I shrank against the corner of the house as he stretched his muscles and turned toward me. But his eyes were not searching; he seemed to feel secure in the privacy of his own back yard. He picked up a mattock and shovel and entered the cottage through the back door.

For long minutes I forced myself to wait there without stirring. No light went on in any of the back or side windows. When I moved forward, I hunched my shoulders in a rather foolish attempt to make myself small in the moonlight.

I would not have dared use a shovel if I had one. Getting down on my hands and knees, I scooped dirt with my hands. The hole was deep; he had dug down at least three feet. My nails broke; skin scraped from my fingertips. It was nothing. My knuckles touched a hard metallic substance, and there it was.

I was sure then that it was a knife, although I had guessed that from the first—the knife which had twice been driven into living bodies and twice withdrawn. My instinct was to cover up the hole and run to the police. But I had to be dead certain. I struck a match, shielding it from the house with my body, and dipped the tiny flame into the hole. Only the handle was as yet visible, but that was enough. I must not touch it, must not get my fingerprints on it.

And merely producing the knife was not good enough. It must be found here by the police, in back of this house, where he had buried it. I started to push the loose dirt back into the hole.

Behind me something whispered over the ground. My blood froze. Crouching there on hands and knees, I turned my head.

Alan Kevin was coming cautiously across the yard. He was still a good fifteen or twenty feet away and he was coming in to throw himself on my back, but the sight of my face checked him. "Mr. Wheeler!" he gasped, and he came on again, still not hurrying because he knew I was trapped.

Ahead of me was a high wooden fence. By the time I rose to my feet and tried to dart away to my right or left, he would be on top of me. His hands were bare of a weapon, but he didn't need one. He was strong with the wiry strength of youth.

Twenty years ago I might have met somebody like him on even terms, but I was old and soft now. He would get his hands on my throat, and I would not be able to break his grip or make an outcry. Once before tonight, in the school hall, he had tried to kill me. This time he would not fail. If only I had a weapon. . . .

I had a weapon!

I crouched deeper over the hole, then leaped to my feet, twisting my body to face him. He was still at least five feet from me, but closing in fast now. I thrust the knife out in front of me, and he saw it and caught himself.

"Don't!" he whined, bringing his body to a stop with the point of the knife inches from his belly.

EVEN then Alan Kevin might have been able to take me, but he was a coward. He stared down at the knife.

"What's the matter, Mr. Wheeler?" he said tightly, deciding to bluff it out. "Why did you pull that knife on me?"

"Turn around!" I ordered.

"You're not going to kill me?"

"If you don't turn around," I said.

He obeyed. I put the knife between his shoulders. "Walk ahead of me into the house. If you try to make a break, I'll slip this knife into you. You ought to know how sharp it is."

"Why should I run? I didn't do anything."

"Let the police decide. Move."

We crossed the yard that way, Alan Kevin leading and myself at his heels with the point of the knife caught in his jacket. We entered the cottage and walked along a hallway and into a living room. A single floorlamp was lit—the light I had seen from the street. His mother didn't seem to be home; I didn't care if she was.

The telephone was on an endtable. I marched him to it.

"Phone the police," I ordered. "Tell them to come right over."

He stood rigid. "But why, Mr. Wheeler?

"You murdered two men with this knife."

He turned his face to me, and a sickly smile appeared on his lips. "There's only your word for it. The fact is I caught you burying this knife when I came out to the yard. You're trying to frame me. Listen, Mr. Wheeler. I'm willing to forget the whole thing."

"I'm not," I said. "I was coming to see you because your mother said in my house this morning that I was a crook, intimated you had paid me for a draft deferment. I think she believes it, or she wouldn't have said it to my face. And then I remembered that you were in the other room when I spoke to George Sykes on the phone. I mentioned his name and Betta's, and you could tell from the conversation that Betta had talked to Sykes and that Sykes knew a great deal. Then, later that day, Sykes was murdered."

"How does that prove anything?"

"That doesn't, but seeing you bury this knife told me nearly everything. This knife can be traced to you. That's why you didn't leave it in the bodies."

"Then you stole it from me. Why shouldn't the police believe me instead of you? You had plenty of motive."

"Motive?" I said. "Wait till the police start investigating Wait till they discover to whom the bribes were really paid."

His face was still turned over his left shoulder, and the sweat of fear glistened on his face.

"Mr. Wheeler, I have two thousand dollars. Will you take it?"

"Damn you!" I said. "I ought to kill you now instead of letting the law do it."

Somebody walked in the hall. I tensed. Mrs. Kevin was in the house after all and she was coming. Let her. I had the knife.

Then she appeared in the doorway, and there was a double-barreled shot-gun in her hands. Her thin gray hair straggled over her face; her fierce, hawkish eyes held murder.

Glancing at her was a mistake. While I held the knife between her son's shoulders, she would not have dared to use that scatter gun. Alan saw his chance and threw himself sideways. I lunged after him.

"No!" Mrs. Kevin barked.

I checked myself. Alan was lying on the floor, too far away. From where she stood, Mrs. Kevin could blow my head off. So I faced her, the knife dangling useless in my hand. The shotgun was very steady in her grip. I knew now what an evil old witch looked like.

She looked past me to her son who was rising to his feet. "Is it true, son, what this man said to you?"

"No, ma. He's a crook, like I told you. Didn't I pay him your five hundred dollars for a deferment?"

"Where did you get the two thousand dollars?" she demanded. "Why were you just trying to bribe him again?"

I saw my chance. It was a matter of life and death to get the old woman on my side and keep her from using the shotgun.

"So that's the way it was?" I said. "Your son told you he could bribe me with five hundred dollars. You gave it to him. Actually he wanted the money for himself."

Mrs. Kevin kept looking past me. "Is that true, son?"

"I owed that money to a guy," he whined. "A loan shark. He said he'd have me beaten up if I didn't pay. Gosh, ma, I had to have that money. I was scared to tell you what I really needed it for."

"And then you saw a good thing," I said. "You got in touch with other yellow rats who wanted to beat the draft. You boasted that you had bribed me and obtained a deferment, and that for five hundred dollars you could also fix it up for them. That's how word got around that I was selling deferments. You didn't know then that it would lead to murder."

"Murder?" Mrs. Kevin muttered. "Did you murder, son?"

"Ma, I—I—he's lying."

"You thought Lee Betta would be another sucker," I went on. "After all, he was an ex-convict. But Betta had a core of decency in him. He was a crook, but not a coward. He wanted to be in the Army. When you learned that he was going to expose you, you had to kill him. And you saw a chance to kill two birds with one stone. The ones who paid you to obtain deferments were clamoring for action. You thought that if you could frame me for murder, you could explain to your suckers that I had let you and them down. That I was demanding more money and had murdered Betta in a quarrel over the amount.

"Last night you sneaked my car out of

the garage and met Betta. You killed him, but there's no end to murder. In my house this morning you learned that Betta had done too much talking to George Sykes, so Sykes was your second victim."

There was silence.

"Son, why don't you deny it?" Mrs. Kevin suddenly pleaded with him. "It's true, then?"

"Ma, you didn't want me to go to jail, did you? If Betta had told the police—"

SLOWLY, trying to appear casual, I moved toward the widow, wondering if she would let me get by her into the hall and to the street.

"Ma!" Alan cried. "You're not going to let him call the police?"

"No, son." Both barrels of Mrs. Kevin's shotgun gaped at my chest. "Stay where you are, Mr. Wheeler."

That was the way it was going to be then. I could tell, looking into those fierce eyes of hers, that no matter what her son was or had done, she would kill if necessary to protect him. And it was necessary.

"Don't be as foolish as your son," I said, trying to keep the quaver out of my voice. "A third murder won't settle the other two."

"I think it will." Her finger was tight on one of the twin triggers. "Alan will admit to the police that he bribed you with five hundred dollars. He will say that you murdered Betta and Sykes because they were about to expose you. You came here to murder Alan also to keep him quiet. I shot you to save my son's life."

It was a good story, even better than either of them suspected. Because it fitted in nicely with Walter Mott's notions. And I would be dead and forever branded as a murderer and a traitor. Danny and Celia would never be able to live it down.

"Ma, I'll have to do it," Alan said hoarsely. "You—you're a woman." He moved past me to his mother.

She threw her son a look that contained all the contempt in the world. For a moment hope surged in me, but almost at once it died.

"No," she said. "You've done enough killing." And the gun lifted higher.

She hated what she was going to do, I could see—but Alan was her son and this was the only way to save him.

The twin muzzles filled all of my sight. Then suddenly they seemed to vanish and I saw Danny.

He stood in the doorway, slim and tall and very handsome in his uniform. Both his hands were thrust in the pockets of his great coat, and his coat was open, showing his silver bar on his shirt collar and the Air Medal ribbon on his chest. His mouth wore that crooked grin of his, but it was no longer a boy's grin. He was a man now, with eyes older than most men's.

A dying man's last vision, I thought dully. *Because Danny is in England.*

They saw me staring past them and Alan Kevin turned to look. "Danny Wheeler!" he gasped.

It was odd. Why should they also see a vision which was so intensely personal?

And the vision of Danny spoke in a normal, living voice. "I heard part of it from the front door. It was unlocked. I think you'd better drop that gun."

"Danny, it can't be you," I muttered. "Ten days ago you wrote an airmail letter to me in England."

His grin broadened. "I completed my twenty-fifth mission and got my leave home. You forget how quickly planes can fly from England. What about dropping that gun Mrs. Kevin?"

I shrieked a warning. Alan Kevin had snatched the shotgun from his mother and was swinging it toward Danny.

Danny stood still in the doorway while a gun roared. Not the slam of a shotgun, but the sharp crack of a pistol. The shotgun clattered from Alan's hands. He leaned against a chair and then sank to the carpet.

Mrs. Kevin's strident voice overlapped the last report of the shot. She started to bend toward Alan and pitched forward on her face in a dead faint.

I gawked at Danny. His right hand was out of his coat pocket now, holding a service automatic. There was a hole in his coat torn by the bullet when he had shot through his pocket. He went to where Alan Kevin lay and bent over him.

"He'll live, I think," Danny said. "We'll need his testimony to clear you completely."

I muttered, "Danny boy!" and picked up the telephone and called the police. Then I turned back to him. "How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't," Danny said. "I got in late this afternoon and learned from Mother that Amy was in prison. Naturally I went to see her at once.

Amy didn't want to tell me at first, but she was so bitter about you that I managed to worm it out of her. It seems that Lee Betta believed that you were selling deferments and—"

"That's not true!"

"Of course not. I didn't believe it for a moment.

"Betta was sure the police wouldn't take his accusation seriously because of his criminal record. He got in touch with Amy to get her to use her relationship to you to make you stop.

"Funny guy, this Lee Betta. I never met him, but—"

"You know about him, Danny?"

"You mean that he had been Amy's husband?

"Of course. Amy told me before we were married. He had a lot of charm, I gather, and Amy knew nothing about what he really was. When she found out shortly after their marriage, she divorced him. I didn't want to tell you and mother. I was afraid you mightn't understand."

I found myself laughing, and my laughter was edged with hysteria. I turned away to hide my face.

"Well, Betta was convinced you were selling out your country, and in spite of what he was, he didn't like it," Danny said. "Naturally Amy was terrifically upset. She didn't know what to do. Even when I spoke to her an hour ago in jail, I had a terrible time dragging anything out of her. Finally she broke down.

"Among other things, she told me that, according to Betta, Alan Kevin was your agent in this messy business.

"So naturally I headed here to have a talk with Alan Kevin. And here I am."

"Wait!" I rubbed my forehead. This was all too much for me. "Why did Amy confess to the murder of Lee Betta?"

"She thought you'd murdered him. From all the information she had, you had plenty of motive because he was going to expose you, and it had happened in your car." He showed his crooked grin. "She knows how much I think of you. She said she didn't want me to go through life believing that my father had sold out the country for which I had fought."

So that was it! The incredible explanation!

I pulled air into my lungs and walked over to him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"That's a damned fine girl you married, Danny."

"You're telling me!" Danny said.

We stood there, grinning like fools.

The DAGGER from SINGAPORE

From Singapore to Zanzibar that deadly man trap waited—and Elephant Phipps was the pinch of poison inside the bright steel jaws!

His body swung like a pendulum. . . .

By F. Orlin Tremaine

CHAPTER ONE

Murder Alley

ELMO PHIPPS moved slowly down the gangplank, his long, lanky figure hesitating at each step. Three months at sea, on the round-trip to Murmansk, and his legs were gaited to the roll of the ship.

It was good to be back, good to be alive. Phipps inhaled deeply. Shore leave ahead, and this time two weeks of real celebration.

He caught a remark that drifted from down the storm rail, and frowned.

"If you're lookin' for a good time," a heavy voice said, "stick with us. But if you're lookin' for trouble, follow Elephant Phipps. He'll find it, fall into it or stumble over it."

Phipps forgot to watch his footing as he listened. He tripped on the last cleat and sprawled flat on the pier. Jeers and laughter echoed from as high up as the bridge.

"Elephant's down again."

That would be Boggs speaking.

"They'd oughta swing him ashore in a derrick."

That would be Peter's voice.

Phipps lay perfectly still so he'd catch the remarks and remember them. Some day, somewhere, each remark might mean something. His nickname "Elephant" fitted him, for his memory was as keen and accurate as that of his amazing—and sometimes vengeful—namesake.

"*De*-tective Phipps trailin' a suspeck!" That last parting jibe would be from Peterson.

The babble of voices moved on along the dock though the dusk toward shore. The last of the men had stepped across Elephant's prone body. They left in pairs and groups. Only Phipps would make his way alone.

Getting to his feet slowly, Elmo dusted off his blue uniform with his left hand. The right palm was bleeding from a deeply imbedded splinter. He examined the injured hand. No sense going back aboard. Sawbones would bandage it and hold up his leave. He was ashore after three months, and he'd stay ashore.

Phipps stepped gingerly along the dock to avoid further mishaps. He juggled his pass with one hand and got by the gate guards without notice. The street was dark, but Elmo stopped and took a deep breath of satisfaction.

South Street, New York, and adventure ahead! He could smell it. But first of all he had to find a drugstore.

"Lost, sailor?" Phipps could just discern a woman's figure in the shadows.

"Right now, sis," he told her, "I'm lookin' for a drugstore. Do you guide?"

"On South Street?" The girl laughed. "You got quite a hunt ahead, sailor." She turned away. Then, as an afterthought she called back, "Cut through the alleys, headin' north, bud."

"Thanks, sister," Phipps said softly and started to cross the street.

A motor roared to sudden life in the shadows, and a car zoomed past, missing Elmo by inches. He ducked back, throwing up his right hand for protection. The back frame of the rear window stung as it clipped by, but Phipps grinned with satisfaction as he saw the streak of blood smeared across the glass. He'd left his mark, and he was thinking hard.

The flare of a match in the back seat of that car had illumined a face for just a flash. It was not enough to give him a full impression—yet Elephant was certain he'd seen that face before somewhere. He groped through the files of his brain but missed it. If only he'd had a better view. . . !

Still pondering, and having no better directions, Elmo moved with long strides through dark alleys and along dimmed-out streets, cutting a checkerboard trail that led between warehouses, ramshackle frame buildings, deserted stores.

He paused under the shadowy structure of Brooklyn Bridge and moved on toward the polyglot section that includes the lower Bowery, Chinatown and Mulberry Street. No drugstore yet, and Elmo's right hand was beginning to throb.

Dimmed street lights made the way he had chosen even more uncertain than it would normally have been. Phipps decided he was lost as he moved toward the end of still another alley. All his life seemed to be mixed up with blind alleys. Twenty-seven years old with a war on, and he had to stay in the merchant service, rejected for active duty because of a punctured eardrum. . . .

Nine years he'd been at sea. Great years in a way. His father had said he belonged to the sea. Even his name, Elmo, that plagued him, was to honor St. Elmo, whose lights tipped the masts of a clipper ship on foggy nights. He'd been torpedoed twice and escaped—so maybe there'd be a way out of these alleys, too.

He lengthened his stride, determined to learn the name of the next street, and find someone to put him straight.

A SUDDEN glare of light from an open door blinded Phipps for a moment. He blinked and put his left hand over his eyes. There was the sound of scuffling feet, of yells, and cursing. A living ball of human figures rolled out into the street just as he looked again. It all happened so fast he couldn't even tell how many there were.

The door banged shut and the resulting darkness blinded him again, but all around him were rasping breaths, and struggling figures. The cursing and yelling had stopped when the door closed and now they fought in eerie silence.

A hand gripped Elephant's throat as a figure hurtled past. The fingers tightened and the other arm wrapped about him like the tail of a cobra.

In self-defense Phipps struggled to loose the strangle-hold on his throat. He realized that the man was kicking at him.

Elephant saw red. The muscles in his shoulders, strengthened and toughened by his life at sea, tautened. He picked his assailant up bodily and tried to hurl him at the squirming figures which he could see dimly. But the man's grip held. Phipps was catapulted into the thick of the melee

by the very force of his own throw.

He didn't know what it was all about, but he ignored kicks, punches and falling bodies as he pried a finger loose from his throat. A little air trickled into his tortured lungs; a little more as he pried another finger loose. He gasped. Reluctantly his right hand balled into a fist and struck. It missed, but struck again and again. The fourth blow hit something solid, just as Elmo's senses began to fade.

He could feel his opponent's hot breath on his neck, and his right hand found the man's throat and squeezed with a vicious pressure born of desperation. The harder he gripped, the more acute was the pain from the injured hand, but he had to get his breath some way or he'd die!

With all the strength in his tall, gangling body, Phipps held his grip on the man's throat. Levering upward with his left hand and his legs, he rolled, got to his knees, then to his feet, but the man's grip clung to his throat like grim death.

Elephant drew his hand back and punched the man's midsection. He heard a grunt and hit again, but his brain was fogging. He fell forward on top of the man, his antagonist's grip relaxed, and Elmo got to his feet again.

As he stood, wobbling unsteadily and drawing great draughts of air into his lungs, he seemed to feel the prick of a thousand needles inside. Dizziness swept him and he put out one hand unsteadily, groping for something to lean against.

His hand came in contact with a man's skull. The fellow cursed under his breath and swung around. In an instant Elmo was locked in a death struggle with a second assailant. This one didn't try to choke. He slugged sledgehammer blows that had Elmo gasping for breath again as they rained on his solar plexus.

Phipp's long arms swung in slow arcs. The first swing missed completely, but the second caught the man in the chest and knocked him sprawling. Again, Elephant stood still, on wobbly legs, drawing long, labored breaths into his tortured lungs.

Something hit Elephant below the knees like a football tackle and knocked his feet clear of the pavement. He landed on wriggling bodies. Legs and arms tangled with his. Another man landed atop them all. Elephant tried to crawl free, but fists struck in the darkness, hands clawed for holds, and Elephant struck back with vicious, driving blows that brought grunts when they landed.

One man found his feet and staggered away in the shadows, but Elephant's leg was pinned helplessly between two silently struggling figures.

The man who had gotten free staggered back to the squirming three on the ground, hands lifted to bring down a heavy object. Elephant twisted his leg free and squirmed away from the melee like a frightened snake. He turned and sat up, puffing, braced on his two outstretched hands.

His eyes caught motion and he glanced up, too late to avoid the descending blow. His head seemed to crack open as he saw a burst of stars. Then everything was still.

ELEPHANT gazed blankly upward from the sidewalk when his senses returned. Where was he? How did he get here? Oh, yes. He had been going through an alley when hell broke loose! He sat up sheepishly, and looked around. He still didn't know where he was. But there was a street about twenty feet ahead, and a man sat propped against the building on the corner. Most likely stiff drunk, Elmo thought disgustedly as he got to his feet, dusted off his clothes and pushed his mop of hair up under his uniform cap.

He took a few steps toward the corner, and spoke to the sitting man.

"Hey, bud," Phipps' voice echoed from the surrounding walls.

The man he addressed said nothing but tipped slowly sidewise and fell prone at Elephant's feet. He started to turn away, then stopped, eyes popping from his head. Even by the dim glow of the street lights he could make out the handle of the knife that protruded from the man's back.

Elephant Phipps whistled softly. He did not touch the body. Long, eager reading of detective stories had taught him not to do that. But he leaned close so he could see clearly and his eyes traveled over the body, missing little.

It never occurred to him that this might mean trouble for him. A thrill of discovery ran through him as he straightened up, backed a couple of quick steps away and yelled:

"Hey, listen, *anybody*. Call the police.

"This man's dead!"

Shouting across a storm at sea had toughened Elmo's lungs. He did not realize it, but his voice could have reached police headquarters without relay.

Of the three pedestrians within sight, two quickened their steps and disappeared. The third turned back and crossed the street to see for himself.

Two windows screeched upward.

"K-viet. Shod up," one voice shouted in the night.

"Allatime tlouble," another said.

A window banged shut. Another slid open.

A car slowed down, stopped. Elephant repeated his request. One of the men looked at the other.

"There's a police prowl-car two blocks up. We could go back and tell them. Wouldn't take much gas."

"Thanks," Elmo said. "Hey, don't touch him until the police get here." He had one eye on the wall behind him, trying to locate the door from which the fight had found its way into the alley.

The sedan wheeled around and sputtered as it moved back the way it had come.

Elephant turned back to the dead man. There was no crack or keyhole through which light filtered. He'd been so taken by surprise he was not sure of the alley's location. For that matter, he couldn't even swear that this was the same alley in which he had lain unconscious.

Phipps stood gazing down at the corpse. The man was well-dressed, medium-sized. There was no smell of whiskey. One by one he tabbed the facts in his mind as detectives did. He was silent, oblivious to the slowly gathering crowd, which kept to a respectful distance.

But Elephant's brain was suddenly racing. That knife! The peculiar angle at which the handle stuck out and down. It had gone in between the man's ribs from the back so as to puncture one lung and pierce the heart, yet cause little bleeding.

Like a movie running backward, Elephant's mind skipped over the years to a night in Singapore. Seven years ago it had been. A barroom brawl. Same kind of knife. Same thrust! He'd been just twenty then and filled with love of the sea. Far places and adventure were his. But something had clicked in his brain that night and his life ambition had been born. He'd kept at it, reading, practicing deduction whenever he got the chance. . . .

The rasp of a police siren snapped him out of his trance. The prowlcar brakes tightened at the curb and a police sergeant edged through the crowd, confident, authoritative. The officer's eyes swept the crowd, the corner, the prone figure. Elephant watched the sergeant look closely at the body, taking special note of the neck artery. A policeman followed him and the sergeant spoke brusquely:

"Call the morgue car. Medical examiner. Photos. Fingerprints. This guy's not a bum. Get headquarters."

The policeman turned and elbowed his way back to the car. The crowd closed in behind him. A sizable crowd now. Funny how people can appear from nowhere.

"Who found the body?" The sergeant demanded.

"I did." Elephant said. His hand was beginning to pain. It needed attention.

"Did you touch it?"

"Nope."

"How'd you know he was dead?" The sergeant barked.

"Why—" Elephant was at a loss for a second, "he keeled over when I asked my way. I saw the knife, an' how it went in. So I yelled for the police. Was that wrong?"

The sergeant relaxed slightly and grinned.

"Anybody else here, sailor?"

"Nope. The fellows he was fighting with vamoosed. One man came back right away when I yelled 'police'. He—", Elephant looked through the crowd as well as he could in the dark, "Guess he's gone."

Somehow the atmosphere had turned a little grim. It was as if he himself were under suspicion.

"All right, move back, all of you." The sergeant motioned and the circle thinned. "You, sailor, better stick along with me."

"Why, *thanks,* Sergeant," Elephant grinned at the officer who looked at him in amazement, "Maybe I *can* help."

The morgue car clanged to the curb. The medical examiner's sedan was right behind it. Phipps' eyes and ears missed nothing.

A third car zoomed up and authority emerged in the form of a captain and two detectives from the homicide bureau.

"A fine call at dinnertime," the captain's voice barked. "Hope it's important, Sergeant. Do we have to hold autopsies in the street?"

THE M.E. was on his knees beside the corpse, stethoscope and forceps in hand, but he stayed there only a minute. The photographers moved in close as the examiner stood up.

"Knife stuck skilfully between ribs from the rear," he told the captain. "Punctured and collapsed left lung and punctured heart. No struggle. Death almost instantaneous. Little external bleeding. Lung cavity evidently absorbed blood leakage from heart. Dead about thirty minutes. Killer no amateur. A studied thrust."

Elephant listened intently. His eyes gleamed. His fists started to clench, but a stab of pain from his right hand made him wince and open it quickly. The captain noticed.

"What is it, sailor?"

The seargeant nodded toward Phipps. "He discovered the body. Says he can help."

"So-o-o?" The captain turned toward Elephant. His eyes narrowed as he saw the wrinkled, dirt-covered uniform. "What were you doing here?"

"I—as a matter of fact," Elephant knew he sounded very peculiar, but he blurted out the truth. "I was looking for a drugstore."

For just a moment there was complete and total silence among the officers. Every one turned on him. Then the captain took Phipps by the arm and led him aside, through the crowd, over to the car. He didn't raise his voice or lift a finger.

"Why, sailor?" He asked evenly, "And why here? My name's March, Captain March of Homicide. You can tell me quietly, but keep it straight. Your story will be checked."

Elephant felt fierce resentment stirring deep inside, but he said nothing. Instead he held up his right hand so the car lights shone on it. It was swollen an ugly red.

"Whew. How did that happen?" The captain was fishing shrewdly for the suspicious note in his story.

"Fell on the pier as I left my ship. Didn't go back because I didn't want my leave held up. Started from South Street."

"I see," Captain March nodded gravely. A man wouldn't be likely to get a greasy splinter like that from fighting on a paved street. "How many times have you been in New York?"

"This is the second time," Elephant said shortly. He had realized the implication behind the captain's questions. "First time we docked on the North River. And while we're at it, my name's Elmo Phipps. Born and raised in New London. Called 'Elephant' aboard ship because I remember things."

The captain's amused eyes bored into him.

"You told the sergeant you might help, Phipps. Out with it. What do you know?"

CHAPTER TWO

A Pinch of Poison

ELEPHANT straightened up, careful not to move his right hand. His eyes looked through the captain, back across the years. He was nervous, but this was adventure—and adventure is always dangerous.

"Seven years ago, in Singapore," Elephant said, "I was in a bar on shore leave when a man was killed. The place was known as Keypoint Tap. The dead man turned out to be a British Intelligence agent named Trinkle. He was killed with the same kind of knife, struck at the same angle. You'll find the medical examiner's report is like the one you heard tonight. The police knew who did it. It was a man known as Scuds Scupper. I saw him, and I have a keen memory. Somehow he got away. . . ."

Elephant stopped to get his breath. The captain eyed him closely in the darkness. Little beams of light from the car caught both men's features as they swayed slightly before the door.

"You think he did this?" Captain March pressed him.

Phipps nodded. "I'm sure of it."

"Yet you say the whole fight was in the dark, and nobody spoke."

Elephant's hand was paining fiercely, which didn't help his temper.

"Ask the examiner," he suggested sarcastically, "if there would be two men who'd use a knife exactly the same way. Then check your report from London."

"And you think you can help the police?" March bored in.

"Help?" Elephant snapped. "I've identified your man. I can do more. I'd remember his voice. I'd spot his face. I know he's in New York. There's more if you're interested."

March was unruffled.

"Listen, Phipps. Even you must realize how peculiar it is that you of all people, landed in this obscure alley in New York, got into a fight in the dark and got knocked out—then came to, found this body and are able to click through with a solution. Naturally it looks queer to us—and just as naturally we want all the information we can get."

Elephant listened closely. The way March put it the whole thing sounded funny, but he was in up to his neck now and he might as well plunge deeper.

"All right then," he said, "Scupper had an insane weakness for what they call *Tomango* rum. It's made in Java. There probably aren't many places in town that still have it."

Elephant stopped again.

"What makes you so sure Scupper's in town?" March asked.

Elephant shrugged hopelessly. He'd read stories in which the police were made out to be thick. This proved they were. He counted off the points with his fingers.

"*One,* the dead man. *Two,* the knife. *Three,* the angle of the thrust." A flashlight flared and Elephant looked toward the crowd. The photographers were shooting pictures of the scene.

"*Four,*" he resumed, "a car started up just after I left the dock. I had to duck back on the curb, it came so close. I saw a man's face by the flare of a match. Couldn't quite place it but remembered it from somewhere. This killing proves it was Scupper up to something nasty. Otherwise, why was he down by our ship just after it docked? He had plenty of time to get here in a car and get into a fight. And my hand wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't used it to shove away from his car. Anyway, I left a smear of blood on the right rear window. Listen, do I have to fight the police force in order to help catch a murderer?"

March was shaking him by the arm. "You *sure* you left a streak of blood on the back right window?" he broke in sharply.

"Certainly I'm sure, or I wouldn't have mentioned it," Elephant snarled. "Why?"

"I'll tell you when I check and make sure of something," March evaded.

A second flash flared as the photographers took another shot. Elephant hesitated, then plunged.

"Listen, Captain March, can't I watch the fingerprint men and such stuff? Then I'd like to get this hand patched up before I do anything else. It hurts."

March grinned in the darkness. He was beginning to understand, a little. That smear of blood—it was much too soon to be sure—might possibly prove a very lucky break for the sailor. Phipps was an interesting one!

"Sure," he said, softening, "Come on. Interested in all this routine?"

"I've wanted to be a detective ever since that night in Singapore," Phipps told him as they made their way back through the crowd.

The men were just dusting off the prints of the dead man's fingers. Elephant watched eagerly. The examiner removed the knife with a silk kerchief, touching only the wide guard. He motioned to the men from the morgue car. They came forward with their basket, rolled the corpse into it and departed. The crowd began to fade. The prowl car went its way. The examiner followed.

"Come on, Phipps," March said, "let's find a doctor. Then we'll go into this farther."

ELEPHANT stumbled on the car step and fell into the seat beside the police captain. The two homicide men piled into the front seat with the driver as the motor started. Despite his rankling resentment, Elephant thrilled clear to his heels at the sound and feel of the police car.

"Get this, you two," March said as the car pulled away from the curb with siren blasting, "send out a call, shortwave, to pick up a man known only as Scuds Scupper. Present alias unknown. Height?" March turned to Elephant.

"About five feet nine inches," Phipps said. "Weight about a hundred and seventy-five pounds. Brown hair. Brown eyes. Swarthy complexion. Scar from tip of right eye curves in toward end of nose and causes a slight squint. Has very wide feet, and no

matter how he is dressed, will be wearing square-toed brogans. Big hands, short, wide fingers."

Elephant paused apologetically.

"That's all I can give now. It's seven years. But if I see him I'll know."

March grinned. "That's better than most pickup descriptions. We'll probably have ten of 'em by morning."

"But," Elephant blurted, "I don't think you should short-wave it, Captain March."

"And why not?" March demanded. Two dicks turned and looked questioningly toward the rear seat.

"If he's a spy his gang will be tuned in on your wave-length and he'll skip town fast."

"Too late now. It's already gone out," a homicide man said shortly. "Headquarters was tuned in on your words."

As the car screeched to a quick stop in the headquarters garage, the two homicide men jumped out and went off on the trot. March waited for Phipps to climb out and then led him up the steps to the offices.

So far the night had been marvelous. Elephant was thoroughly enjoying his role of assistant detective. Even his injured hand was a piece of good luck in view of the captain's suspicious attitude. He couldn't have stabbed the man with that hand crippled.

"I'll get the doctor to patch you up while we start to work on this business. You'll stay here at headquarters as a witness until we catch Scupper," March said, ringing one buzzer after another. Doors began to pop open, and half a dozen men came parading in. March introduced Elephant to a white-aproned individual and waved them out together.

The doctor led Phipps down a long, wide hall and into an office that reeked of antiseptics.

"Now let's see," the man said quietly. Elephant held out his hand.

"Wow. When did that happen?"

"About six o'clock," Phipps told him. "I fell on the pier as I left my ship. I've been busy ever since."

"Should have been tended to at once." The doctor was all business. He held the hand under antiseptic for a moment, then examined it again.

"I'll have to cut that piece of planking out," he said. "I thought they said it was a splinter!" He went to work efficiently, but before he finished he added, "That's a nasty bump on your head. Let's tend to that, too."

A detective entered the room before the dressing was completed. He stood waiting until the doctor nodded and then he motioned Elephant to follow him.

Halfway down the corridor a door opened and Elmo Phipps stepped through expectantly. The door clanged shut behind him. He heard a key turn in the lock.

"Hey! What goes on?" Elephant whirled back and tried the door, but it was solid steel.

"Calm down, pal. You're here until they let you out, so take it easy. Anyways, you have all the comforts of home, except liquor."

Elephant looked around, surprised. Sitting in an old-fashioned rocker beside the one barred window, a bald, stoutish, middle-age individual was gazing at him complacently.

"Welcome to our village, sailor. Glad to have a roommate. It's been sort of quiet

these last three weeks. What they got you in here for?"

Elephant grinned sheepishly and folded his gangling form into the second rocker. He looked about the fair-sized room with its two comfortable beds, twin dressers, table, and adjoining bath, then shook his head.

"In?" he said, "I didn't know I was in. I just came from getting my hand doctored up. All I did was find a stiff and call the police." He was seething like a volcano. So this was what Captain March had meant with his "hang around headquarters"!

A disturbing thought struck him. He could stand having his leave spoiled, but it was for only two weeks. He couldn't overstay it.

"How long did you say you'd been here, stranger?"

"Not stranger, my friend and roommate," the man said. "John Parsons at your service. I had the misfortune to witness an unfortunate accident, a *most* unfortunate accident. The man died and I was ushered in here to ponder on whether I had forgotten to mention any little detail. However, they thoughtfully provide fruit and reading matter. These three weeks have not been at all uncomfortable."

Elmo Phipps took to pacing the floor in long, awkward strides. He tossed and turned on his bed that night, and walked the floor most of the following day. Five days passed with only eleven interruptions except for the meals. Eleven times he was taken down the hallway and asked to look through bars at some hapless individual. The question was always identical.

"Is that Scuds Scupper?"

And always, after a quick scrutiny, he shook his head and demanded that he be taken to see Captain March. Each time the request was curtly refused and he was returned to his room where he resumed his tireless pacing back and forth.

FIVE evenings after his detention, Phipps was ushered into the office of Captain March at seven o'clock to find that gentleman blasting the air blue. Two plainclothesmen stood silently before the desk. Elephant paused inside the door, but March swung around to him without missing a breath or a syllable.

"How many drinks can you take and still be yourself, Phipps?" he demanded, ignoring the fact that five days had elapsed since their last meeting.

Elephant answered without even stopping to think.

"Well, after about seven I begin to feel dizzy. That is, on rye highballs. I don't drink beer."

"Okay. Now listen, Phipps. I've checked your stories and they match up. The report from London came through this morning and it checks. The man you found dead was American secret service. It all clicks." March was puffing as if after a long run, but he took a deep breath and continued.

"You wanted a chance to play detective. Well, take your choice of staying angry, or getting that chance. There's only one wholesaler in town still handling *Tomango* rum. He's made small deliveries to exactly seven cafes in six months. No other customers."

March didn't wait for Elephant to indicate a choice. He kept right on talking.

"You three," he said, pointing to Phipps and the two detectives, "are going to tour these cafes every night—for a week if necessary. One drink in each. The fingerprints on the knife match Scupper's. We got 'em from London."

The captain turned directly to Elephant again, "Now, just so we understand each other, sailor. Your hand could have been hurt in the fight *you* say preceded the murder. From where I sit, your story still looks fishy. But—I'm taking a chance. Now get going."

March glared at the two dicks as one nudged the other and they headed for the door. Elephant hesitated only a second, then joined them.

"It's after seven now," March yelled after the trio. "I want a report by eleven-thirty. So step on it!"

Phipps was torn by conflicting emotions as he went down the stairs. He could have throttled March with his bare hands for keeping him locked up five days; but he could have cheered at the chance to be a detective, with a drinking tour at departmental expense thrown in! Balanced off, maybe tricks were even. He followed the detectives as fast as his ungainly legs could negotiate the stairs.

"Two of these joints are on South Street. Three more are clear across town on Tenth and Eleventh Avenues. Where'll we look

first?" one of the men asked Phipps as they reached the street level.

"Try South Street," Elephant suggested. "I saw him there five nights ago."

"Good sense," the man said. "I'm Horgan. This is Brett. Boy, is the old man hot under the collar!"

Elephant nodded in response to the introduction and the three climbed into an old sedan. Seven bars and seven drinks later, the three looked at each other questioningly. All of them were feeling fine, and a definite comradeship had sprung up between them. Only one thought bothered the three. They had to go back and report to March!

But a new worry began to grow in Elephant's mind. Maybe Scupper wasn't drinking tonight. Or maybe he was now in one of the places they had visited earlier.

"What say to a hamburger 'n onions before we report?" Brett suggested.

Elephant spent another night and day with his strange room-mate, then another evening touring the cafes with Brett and Horgan. The third and fourth days passed in the same routine. The lure of the detective role was enough to prevent Phipps from breaking away during the evenings.

"The old man keeps you at headquarters for your own safety," his companions argued. But Elephant became worried as the nights passed without result.

The fifth night progressed in much the same fashion as the others. Then, at a point midway of the fifth drink, in a dim, not-too-clean saloon on Tenth avenue, things began to happen. Elephant was scanning the faces of the customers casually when his eyes suddenly focused on a man sitting quietly by himself in one of the booths along the side of the room. His senses steadied as he turned back to the bar, nudging both companions.

"He's here," Elephant whispered, his voice quivering with excitement, "sitting alone four booths back."

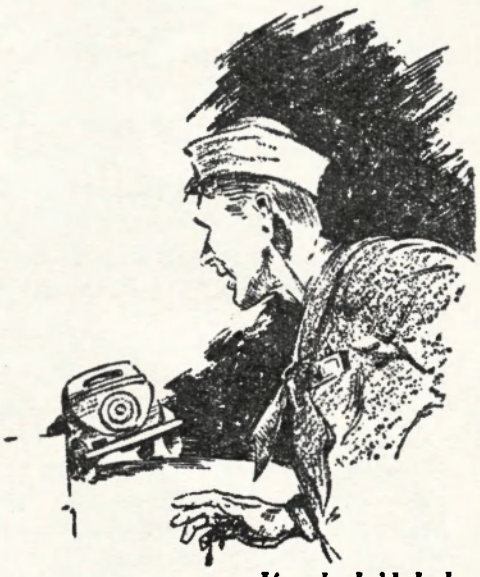
Horgan looked. Then all three gazed regretfully down at their drinks and without a word finished them hurriedly.

"You stay here at the bar, Phipps," Brett said. "Keep your eyes open in case of trouble. Join us when we get the cuffs on him."

The two plainclothesmen sauntered toward the rear.

"Hello there, Scupper," Brett spoke jovially, "drinking alone?"

He put one hand on the man's shoulder. The fellow didn't give a sign of recognition or move for an instant, then he tipped forward, sprawling across the table, one arm



If only he'd had a better view!

extended before him. His face lay in the spilled liquor from his glass.

Hands still gripping a glass he'd been wiping, the bartender stared. He shook his head, clucked, and remarked to the room in general:

"Dunno how he'd get *that* drunk. Stone sober when he come in. Only had three."

"Drunk?" Horgan said. "This man ain't drunk. He's dead. Stay where you are everybody. Phipps, watch the door. Nobody goes in or out. Brett, phone March. Hop!"

Silence enveloped the place like a thick fog. The only sounds were Elephant's footsteps as he moved to guard the door, and the muffled tones of Brett's words in the phone booth.

The clock ticked away the minutes, five, ten, before the police cars began to draw up.

For the second time in ten days Elephant watched the full police procedure in a homicide case.

He carefully memorized each step, and found time to wonder why no member

of the district attorney's staff had appeared in either case, when they always did in detective stories.

March was pacing up and down, fuming.

"You sure that's your man, Phipps? All right, we'll know when we check the prints! But if he's the murderer, why's he killed like this?"

"I told you that shortwave was a mistake, Captain. This proves it. They picked it up. They tried to get him out of the country; he wouldn't leave, so they got rid of their own man." Elephant's voice was a little truculent. "Standard behavior for a spy ring."

"You sure hang a lot on a little, Phipps. There's nothing yet to prove your spying theory, nothing to prove this man was the killer, except your word. All we know is that the same man that did the first killing is wanted by the British authorities."

"And how did you find that out?" Five drinks made Phipps bold. "It was my word! His fingerprints will prove he's the man within an hour, and that'll mean your murder case is solved."

March swung around on him.

"Who's in charge on this case, you or me? How many drinks have you had tonight?"

"Five," Elephant told him, grinning. "Thanks."

March grunted and turned to listen to the grilling of the patrons. No one had noticed anything unusual. No one had been near the booth where Scupper sat.

"Let 'em go," March said, then, bowing to Phipps, "—unless you have some objection."

Elephant, five drinks to the good, ignored his sarcasm.

"All but one can go," Phipps said ponderously. "That fellow next to the end lied. He was sitting in the booth next to Scupper when we came in."

March looked startled, then nodded.

"Okay. Hold him for questioning. Let the rest go."

"It was poison," the examiner told March. "Subtle. Can't tell what until we analyze it. Let you know in the morning. Could've been dumped in the glass. Might get me the bottle this drink came from, just in case."

Captain March nodded and motioned toward the bartender. The man reached up and took a bottle of rum from the shelf.

"That's not the bottle." Elephant's voice boomed at the bartender, punching the words off one by one. The man hesitated and looked startled. Phipps' eyes narrowed. He seemed to grow as the police officers watched him straighten up before the bar.

CHAPTER THREE

Passport to Crime

THE room had been cleared except for the one man the detectives were holding. The morgue men, with their inevitable basket, paused and looked up.

"It's *Tomango,"* the barman said. "That's what he was drinking."

"What's your name?" Elephant boomed.

"George Tabor."

"Four years ago, in Panama City, it was Bat Kearns. You disappeared when that spy ring got cleaned out. Funny you should turn up here tonight." Elephant was sure of himself.

March turned to the barman.

"Well?" March said.

"The sailor means well, Captain." The man spoke in a low voice. Phipps moved closer so he could hear. "But please don't advertise my activities here. I'm in intelligence. Here are my papers."

He passed some folded documents across the bar. March examined them closely.

"They seem to be in order." The captain passed them back.

"Same old gag," Elephant said, his hands braced against the bar as if he were going to vault over. "Intelligence! He's no more Secret Service than you are."

"Quiet." March said. And then to the barman, "Was that the right bottle?"

"I was under orders from this group, and also under orders to play through with them," Tabor replied, ignoring the question. He was breathing slowly and with difficulty. His eyes never left Elephant Phipps for a second.

"You'll find the right bottle if you search under the bar," Elephant said slowly. Brett and Horgan were both watching him for a sign. They saw something coming. Neither knew what.

"That's how he got away in Panama," Elephant sneered. "False papers. Intelligence? Bah!"

March saw trouble ahead whatever course he took, but he played safe.

"We're holding you," he told the barman brusquely.

Tabor nodded, removed his apron and bent down to put it away. But as his head disappeared below the counter level, Elephant vaulted over; or rather he dove—because he disappeared head first.

How his gangling six-foot frame cleared the bar, Phipps never knew, but there was no time to guess. Below him, as he slid across, yawned an open trap, black as the ace of spades.

He fell into it head first, headed for death or injury, but instinctively his fingers, strengthened by desperation, grabbed at the edge of the frame.

Elephant's strong fingers held. They swung his body like a pendulum. The full force of his weight hit at the end of the arching swing and his body angled downward, feet foremost, as his fingers were torn loose.

The square of light blanked out and he plummeted through the dark—to land awkwardly against grunting flesh!

He rolled, fell again and hit the earth floor. His wind knocked out by the force of the fall, he felt an instant of dizzy nausea. Then, he got a two-handed hold on a trousered leg and held on while he gulped air into his lungs.

The leg jerked hard once, twice, then steadied on the floor. Elephant braced as he sensed what was coming. He could feel the tensing muscles as the leg swung in a kick. It missed his head, caught his shoulder. He felt a jab of pain, then his long arm encircled the kicking foot and the man crashed to the floor.

The man's body arched upward at the waist and Elephant's thoughts jerked back to the present. His opponent had found a weapon. His hips pressed the floor as the shoulders raised, and Elephant rolled quickly, desperately to the left, throwing the fellow's body with him. His hold slid down onto the legs. A scantling struck the floor within a foot of his head and swung upward again.

He could feel the wind stirred up by the swing and dared not chance a second. Impulsively he jumped to his feet, lifting the other man's legs waist high.

The club swung again, not as hard as the first time, but hard enough. It caught Elephant on the right arm just below his shoulder. For an instant the arm went numb, and he staggered and fell.

One of the man's legs worked free as the feeling came slowly back into that numbed arm. They fell again, but somehow the club had been lost in the darkness.

There was an instant's breathing space, then the man's free leg kicked downward once, twice, three times with increasing strength and accuracy.

Elephant, lying on top of the man, clung with the grip of death to his other leg. His head numbed at the first kick, jerked sickeningly at the second. At the third he saw a burst of stars, and his senses faded, and blanked.

ELEPHANT was drifting peacefully through space. Nothing disturbed him, except that now and then a distant voice seemed to be calling him to come back. At first he shook off the urge to answer, but the voice grew more insistent.

"Phipps," it said, "Elephant Phipps, do you hear me?"

He stirred a little. A feeling of discomfort spread over him, as if the night were damp.

"Elephant, wake up."

Wake up? He wasn't asleep. He was cold. He was wet! His eyes opened, blinked shut, opened again.

Captain March was bending over him.

"Where in hell is Horgan?" Elephant asked.

"Right here, Elephant." Horgan's head appeared next to March's face.

"What happened to Brett?" Elephant asked.

"Here, sailor." Brett's face appeared beside the others.

"I thought you two were detectives," Phipps remarked and closed his eyes.

"Come. Wake up, Phipps. You can't keep a grip on this man all night."

That was March's voice and Elephant scowled. Then something clicked into place in his brain and he tried to sit up. He couldn't.

He looked down. His arms were still locked in a death-grip around a man's leg! His eyes followed up the leg, up a torn and tattered suit to Tabor's unconscious and battered face.

Elephant threw the leg from him, sat up and laughed aloud.

"Hey, doc," he yelled at the M.E., "see if this rat broke my head or shoulder, will you?"

"I looked you all over while you slept," the examiner told him. "You've even been patched up and had your pants sewed. You're scratched, bruised and will probably be lame for a few days, but nothing is broken. You're as lucky as a brass elephant with its trunk lifted!"

"Good." Elephant grinned and climbed unsteadily to his feet. His legs felt wobbly. Brett and Horgan supported him on either side. They backed against the bar.

March came over to the bar.

"Just one question, Phipps. How did you know this man Tabor's papers were faked?"

Elephant put down his glass, felt his lame shoulder, looked ruefully at his soaked, bedraggled uniform, then laughed in the captain's face.

"Didn't," he said. "But I saw him switch bottles."

March's face was a study, "I thought you did everything from memory."

"Always did—until this time. I told you I was studying to be a detective. I remembered him from Panama, and remembered when he disappeared. Didn't seem as if the Intelligence Service would use the same man both places, but a spy ring would. I was right. He's the key to something bigger if you sweat it out of him. He murdered Scupper. You'll find he served him poisoned rum right from the bottle."

March didn't crack back this time. He nodded thoughtfully. Elephant looked him up and down, noticed big smudges of basement dirt on his uniform, a tear in his coat. That changed things slightly.

"You are lucky, Phipps," March was saying. "That car was picked up. It had been stolen in Texas. The blood typed with yours. You saw Scupper in it. It was registered in Tabor's name. This report came in by phone while you slept. It's like finding the missing link in the chain."

"Well," Elephant said, holding out his hand, "thanks for the hospitality, Captain March. I'm going to find something to eat."

March laughed and waved his hand.

"Don't mention it, Phipps. But you mustn't think of leaving us yet. I want you to stay in headquarters hospital tonight and get patched up properly. Horgan, Brett, are you two sober enough to keep going?"

Both detectives straightened indignantly.

"Then take Phipps out for a good meal. When you've finished, back to headquarters hospital. He's still held as a material witness in case he kicks too hard."

Elephant was boiling. He'd been ready to call it quits out of gratitude for the captain's help in fighting Tabor, but this was too much!

"I object! After all I've done, Captain—"

Elephant found his voice too late. March was on his way out the door. There was no further appeal.

"You fellows wouldn't lock me up again, would you?" Elephant demanded.

"It's our jobs if we don't, old-timer," Horgan said, "Orders are orders."

"Yes," Brett nodded, "Orders are orders—but it's midnight, and the way I feel we can eat for three hours. After that it's not long until morning. Remember, this is on the department."

Arm in arm, the three made their way to the battered sedan. They'd find the biggest, juiciest steak in New York and wind up the night in a manner befitting the significance of Tabor's capture.

Three hours later, an alcohol massage made Elephant Phipps fall asleep like a child on his hospital cot. It was near noon when he awoke to find a doctor waiting to massage his scalp and shoulder with pungent ointment. He hated to admit the fact, but it eased the stiffness which had crept into his joints.

He was startled by the appearance of an attendant with breakfast. Breakfast in bed! Elephant had read about such things. But he didn't question. He ate while the doctor continued his massage.

"My clothes?" He asked when he had finished. The doctor nodded to a chair beside the bed. Everything was clean, and a brand new uniform replaced his torn one. He got up and dressed. The fit was perfect.

So this was also March's idea! He wasn't such a bad egg all in all. Just dumb. Not too dumb, though, at that.

Captain March dismissed everybody else from his office when Elephant entered. He smiled and motioned to a chair.

"Feel any better, sailor?"

Phipps sat down. He was a little stiff. That tussle must have been tougher than he realized. He looked up, smiled and nodded.

"You see the old man knows best in the long run," March said laughingly. "You young fellows think you're tough, but a few kicks in the head and shoulder can play hob. Now let's get this over with. The department owes you a real debt which it can't pay. You've been instrumental in the quick solution of two murders. We are sorry it spoiled your shore leave but—" the captain handed a paper across the desk —"here's our check for thirty dollars, payment at three dollars per day while you were held as a material witness. Also we are issuing a police card in your name. It will be ready before your ship sails. Carry it and it will help to avoid future embarrassment if such a situation as this ever arises again either in New York or in some other city, here or abroad."

March stood up and stuck out his hand. "Shake, sailor?"

Elephant rose and shook hands gladly. The tricks balanced again and life was good.

"By the way, Captain," Phipps said casually, "my cellmate who calls himself John Parsons, was running a grog shop on the waterfront in Rio de Janiero back in thirty-nine. His nickname then was Parson John but his legal name was Sam Beady."

March turned and started thumbing through a file on his desk. Elephant started to leave.

"Wait a minute, sailor!" March was excited. He found a card and pressed a button.

"Get me police headquarters in Rio de Janiero, Brazil," he said and sat back with a half-smile on his face.

"Damn it all," Elephant said. "Why don't I keep my big mouth shut!" He dropped disgustedly back into a chair, and watched his last few hours of shore leave take wing in his mind's eye.

"How in hell," March asked after a minute, "do you meet all these people?"

"Didn't anybody ever tell you that sailors get around, Captain?" Phipps grinned and made the best of the new development. "They all get around—but this one remembers faces."

March shook his head slowly. The buzzer sounded and he grabbed the phone. The conversation was in Portuguese so Elephant missed most of it, but when the captain finally banged the receiver down he was smiling.

"There's a thousand dollar reward on that one, Phipps. American money. Half of it is yours, half goes to the police pension fund. We'll advance your share."

Elephant's jaw dropped and he sat limp. He had almost a thousand dollars in his pocket, and here, suddenly, was five hundred and thirty more! And shore leave was over. . . .

"I'd like it if you'd have somebody help me bank about twelve hundred," he said, finally. "Two more trips like this and I'll be able to take a crack at being a regular detective. That would really be living!"

March sat staring at him. "Two fights and all the mess you've been in, and nobody even robbed you," he said. "Well!"

HORGAN was coming down the gangplank as Elephant reached his ship. Phipps frowned.

"More tricks, Horgan?" he asked.

Horgan pounded him on the back and laughed.

"No tricks, pal. I just delivered a letter to your skipper." Horgan started on, then called back: "Good luck, sailor."

Captain Brady had Elephant come directly to his cabin.

"Sit down, Phipps," he said, looking the gangling seaman over. "I understand from this letter that you have performed an outstanding service for the New York police. Congratulations. I didn't know we had an embryo detective aboard. We'll have to talk about it next time we're in port."

"Thank you, sir," Elephant said, and turned to leave.

"Here. Wait." Brady called, "This is for you. I called you in to give it to you."

The captain reached out a colored card that looked very official. Elephant Phipps guessed what it was and took it in trembling hands."

"Never abuse that, Phipps," Captain Brady said. "It's an unusual honor and a privilege. Few private citizens attain it."

Abuse it? That card was the first step toward the accomplishment of Elephant's life ambition.

God! he thought, looking down at it, *it must be great to be a detective!*

NOVEL

By Frederick C. Davis

Christine huddled on the floor, a brass candlestick at her feet. . . .

CHAPTER ONE

Human Target

REGULARLY every Sunday afternoon the skeet club broke the Sabbath into little bits. The two ranges resounded with cries of "Pull!" and "Mark!" or sometimes just "Rumpf!" Clay birds flew right and left, shotguns boomed from all angles and empty shells bristled in the grass around the shooting stations. It was going full blast again today, pleasantly, but with a difference.

The difference became notable when Christine went right on smacking targets out of the air without a miss, to her own delighted amazement. It took an ominous trend shortly afterward, when a maroon sedan swung to a stop behind the clubhouse.

Janet Bronson alighted with anxious haste. Carl Polk, her uncle, came with her to my favorite spot beside the puller's hut on the main range. They had something urgent on their minds.

"Janet insisted we'd find you here, Jock," Carl said, mopping his fine, sun-browned forehead. A retired attorney, he now held a vital but thankless office as secretary of the local Selective Service board. "We have something to show you."

"It's about Blaine," Janet added earnest-

DEATH MARKS THE SPOT

ly. Her blue eyes, usually wistful, were alert. "He's simply got to be cleared, Jock, and you're the man to do it."

"Hold it a minute, please," I said, "or I'll go into a nervous collapse. Watch Christine."

Christine had advanced to Station Seven in high hopes of polishing off her last doubles.

Shooting last in the team of five, she'd already cracked all her singles—two shots from each station, a target called first from the high trap, then a second from the low. Three of the other gunners had lost several

This postman rang no bells, his footsteps were silent—but they echoed hollowly in the heart of a murderer whose weapon was—Fire!

of their singles. Only one among them, a cheerful scarecrow of a man named Oliver Dockery, had equalled Christine's marksmanship in the doubles, those tricky shots demanding a fast trigger and a faster eye because the targets rose simultaneously from both traps.

Once he'd come skittering up to reassure me, "Mrs. Quirke's goin' to do it this time, Jonathan, sure as shootin'!"

Then, at Station Seven, Oliver Dockery had dropped a bird. He'd stepped back with a good-natured cackle and now Christine stood there at the post with her gun poised.

She cried, "Pull!"

After two uncertain seconds a clay target sailed from the high trap-house at the far point of the semicircular range. Instantly, as it spun in an arc toward her, another target took off from the low trap at her back. Bobbing down a little in that funny way of hers, she boosted her gunstock snug against shoulder and cheek. I forgot to breathe.

She banged at the incoming bird and her shot at the outgoer was a quick banging echo. In a twinkling the skimming discs became two puffs of black dust dissolving in the September sunset.

"Good shooting!" Carl said, his mind still on something else.

"Golly!" said Janet in an awed tone. "Aren't you proud of her?"

My vest buttons were popping. Though Christine had never before cracked more than eighteen birds out of a round of twenty-five, she'd just smacked off twenty-four running. Dazed with elation, she now faced her final shot, the optional.

She could take it from any of the eight stations. Veteran skeet-gunners usually selected the easiest; but she hesitated.

The mission that had brought Janet and Carl must be important, but this was very important too. For our second anniversary last year, Christine and I had each given the other a sixteen gauge Trent. Almost every Sunday since then, fanatically braving blizzards, thunderstorms and scorching suns, we'd blazed away here at the Twin Glen Skeet Club. It had a magnificent setup, including a Mount Vernon clubhouse in an elm-bordered field adjoining Mike Courtney's place. I'd achieved my first "straight" last month, and now Christine had come within an ace of winning a coveted Twenty-Fiver button to match mine.

A crucial moment, this, with a crowd of gunners and their indulgent families watching her from the benches scattered on the lawn. She was very nice to watch—a pictorial, tawny blonde sporting a peaked green hat with a bright red feather, the kind Robin Hood wore when he was Errol Flynn—except that she continued to hesitate. I held my breath to keep from yelling at her.

Your first straight is an historic event, like your first tooth or your first million dollars. It credits you with more skill than a golfer's hole-in-one. It initiates you into the fellowship of envied experts. When you have your first straight practically in the bag you don't take unnecessary chances, but there was Christine, tempting fate; and finally she decided. I choked down a howl. The wrong thing!

Instead of calling for an outgoer right there at Station Seven, her best possibility of cracking that all-important twenty-fifth bird, what did she do? She moved over to Station Eight, the toughest!

"Pull!" Christine cried optimistically, her gun poised again.

Located midway between the two trap-houses, which placed her directly under the bird's path, Station Eight called for lightning precision. The target would zoom out at a speed of sixty miles an hour. She'd have to snap up her gun and paste it before it had gone more than thirty feet—that is, within half a second after it had flashed into sight. It was a spectacular choice, but also the most risky. I groaned.

Adding to my torture, the automatic timer which worked the trap gave her a nerve-racking delay of three full seconds. Then it came. Christine bobbed down in that same funny way, and beaded it. Something upset her coordination. She flinched; she waited too long. Her gun boomed in the general direction of the new moon while the target floated intact over her head.

She'd lost it!

CHRISTINE hopped off the platform as if it had suddenly become red hot. There were murmurs of "What a shame!" as she turned and slowly left the range. To my astonishment she didn't look furious at herself, or teary. She seemed pensive.

She said, "Hello, Janet. Hello, Carl. How're you feeling, Jock?"

"You had to do it the hard way!" I scolded her. "You had to show off. Come a little closer, darling, and let me throttle you. Why don't you say something?"

"I'm thinking," Christine murmured.

"You don't even look ashamed of yourself," I said. "Have you no sense of remorse?"

"I'm wondering," Christine answered, "why somebody should want to murder me."

She was serious. Startled, I asked her to say that again. Instead of repeating it, she pulled off her peaked green hat and showed me the holes. There were two holes in her hat, rather ragged, one directly opposite the other.

"A bullet made 'em," Christine said. "I felt it whiz through. That's why I missed." Then she gazed past me, wide-eyed. "Jock, look—look at Mr. Dockery!"

We all stared at Mr. Dockery. The other gunners had left him alone at the low trap-house. He was leaning one shoulder against it, standing perfectly still; and there was something odd about his fixed, rapt expression.

We hurried toward him, then slowed, then stopped. A thin red line was drawn along the sharp bridge of Oliver Dockery's nose. A single glistening red drop hung quivering from its sharp tip. The blood was seeping down between his bushy gray-brown eyebrows from a black spot centered in his weathered forehead.

He remained in the position he'd taken behind Christine to watch her last shot. An uncanny equilibrium of shocked nerves and muscles held him propped there, still looking brightly hopeful for her. As I reached for him he folded loosely at the knees and the waist and slumped into the grass. . . .

The crowd swarmed all around. Dr. Bill Westrick, a charter member of Twin Glen, elbowed through, switched his shell-apron out of the way as he knelt beside Oliver Dockery and immediately shook his head. It was not understandable; we always took pains to avoid mishaps. Oliver Dockery had always been so cheerfully busy, and now he lay there so flat and still—with, I noticed oddly, his left shoulder sloping much lower than his right.

Pushing back to Christine, I found her white-cheeked and shaky, still holding her punctured hat.

"Nobody tried to kill you, Christine," Carl Polk was saying.

"Of course not," Janet assured her. "It was an accident."

"I'm going to find out about that," I said.

While standing at Station Eight Christine had faced eastward toward the high trap tower. The bullet must have come directly past it, from the woods on Mike Courtney's place. Had it come two inches lower Christine, instead of Oliver Dockery, would now be lying lifeless in the grass.

I held her hand tightly and she hurried alongside me to the car, stumbling a little. Carl and Janet ducked into the rear seat. As we rolled down the driveway I recalled that Mike Courtney owned a dozen costly rifles and invariably had too many weekend guests who drank too much. A twenty-two caliber bullet could kill within a mile, which most people didn't realize, and the woods fringing Mike's property lay half that distance from the skeet range.

"Sit close, Christine," I said. "Sit very close. It's nice having you here."

She hugged my arm. "I'm glad I married a man who knows what to do when people get shot, darling. If it hadn't happened, I'd have cracked that last bird, Jock, really I would."

"Remember how I've tried to break you of your funny trick of weaving down just when you pull the trigger? Please forget I ever mentioned it."

If she hadn't done that it would be Christine, instead of Oliver Dockery—

"You knew him, Jock?" Carl asked from the rear seat.

"He came to the club every single Sunday, and he was good. He raked up all the empty shells for scrap metal. He salvaged tons of lead by using an old road-grader in the fields. The friendliest, helpfulest little guy I ever saw, very patriotic in a fussy way, though he sometimes seemed a little on the sly side. That's all I know."

"I've seen him half a dozen times, officially," Carl said. "Every time I called up a new batch of selectees he'd come bustling into the office wanting to know why he wasn't included. He tried over and over again to enlist, but they wouldn't have him."

Two lanes led into Mike Courtney's ninety acres. The farther one curved across the lawn to the huge Dutch Colonial house.

I turned into the nearer, which threaded through the narrow arm of the woods abutting the club's property.

"Jock," Janet said abruptly, "what we wanted to see you about—you must have wondered why Blaine hasn't been called up."

"It isn't generally known," Carl explained soberly, "—we've wanted to keep it quiet—but he's 4-F."

4-F—Unfit for any form of military service.

It couldn't be possible Blaine Trent was unfitted by reason of any physical defect. Strapping big and twenty-eight, he was first class officer material and also highly skilled as a gunsmith.

"You see, Jock," Janet added, the words hurting her, "Blaine is—an ex-convict."

Christine's lips parted on a silent gasp. We'd known Blaine ever since moving out to Bucks County from Manhattan two years ago, and we'd never heard even a hint of it. Blaine—a felon!

Neither of us spoke; just then we swung out of the woods. We'd seen no one target-practising, but as we rolled clear of the trees we saw Blaine Trent. Blaine Trent with a rifle.

THE two men with him on the lawn near the springhouse were Dwight Trent, his younger brother, and Mike Courtney. Blaine and Mike, talking together intently, didn't notice our approach. Dwight came up as I braked. His dark, habitually anxious eyes were pinched, indicating a hangover.

"Who's been shooting?" I asked him at once.

"Nobody," Dwight said.

Puzzled, I got out with Carl while Dwight talked with Christine and Janet in the car. Blaine looked up from the rifle, grinning a hello, and Mike greeted us affably. The gravity of Carl's face and mine quickly sobered them.

"Did either of you fire that gun a few minutes ago?"

"It won't fire," Blaine answered. "I just tried. The pin's jammed. I've got to take it back to the shop for a bit of honing."

Blaine had forged the rifle. Trent guns, custom-fashioned in the old shop in Doylestown which Blaine had inherited from his famous father, were renowned for their excellence of craftsmanship. Christine and I felt it an honor to own ours, particularly since there would be no more for the duration. Several of Mike Courtney's finest Trents had cost fifteen hundred each.

"Has any of your guests been in the woods with a gun, Mike?" I persisted.

"They're all over the place," Mike answered. He was a rangy male, beautifully got up in cocoa-colored slacks, checked jacket and yellow ascot-tied muffler. "But I doubt that any of them has wandered that far from the bar."

His twenty-odd guests were draped about the swimming pool, bouncing around the tennis courts and prowling among the croquet wickets. Always they included big names in the theatre and hot-shot literati. I couldn't understand how Mike ever got any work done with his place eternally cluttered up with celebrities, but every season Broadway saw one or two of his sparkling, smash-hit comedies. Invariably the movie rights brought fabulous prices. He shuttled constantly between his Sutton Place apartment, his Hollywood ranch and this elaborate Pennsylvania estate. Mike reputedly raked in a quarter million a year and needed every dollar of it.

"Did you hear a rifle shot near here?" I went on.

Mike shook his handsome head. "How could we, with the club laying down a double barrage?"

Realizing that with the shotguns blasting away the Sabbatical peace over at Twin Glen, a rifle shot couldn't have been heard, I told them what had happened.

"An accident," Carl Polk said, winding up my account. "Criminal carelessness. Strange . . . but apparently there's nothing more we can do about it here."

"There's something I can do about it somewhere," I said, "and I will."

"Blaine," Carl suggested, "can you come back with us? Janet is asking Jock to help."

Blaine kicked his heels through the grass, carrying Mike's rifle to the car. Dwight, darker and shorter than Blaine, with crisply curling hair unlike Blaine's unruly crop, still looked as if he painfully regretted last night. He'd probably spent it here; Mike's place on a weekend was Dwight's wife's idea of paradise.

"Where's Fern?" Christine asked him.

"Home in bed," Dwight said miserably.

"A touch of grippe. That's all. In between touches of grippe she just had bad colds, poor kid."

Mike stuck his head in the door as I stepped on the starter.

"Come back, whenever you can, and help me celebrate. I've just been sued for divorce. Thank God she's charging me with nothing worse than brutal cruelty!"

We retraced the lane through the wood. The rear-view mirror showed me the quiet-mannered, thoroughly likable ex-convict in the back seat.

Carl's revelation explained a great deal about Blaine—why he'd seemed something of a hermit, avoiding his friends and worrying; and why he and Janet had been tacitly engaged for years without ever seeing a minister about it.

Blaine was the sort who would consider himself forever tainted by the fact that he'd done time.

"Jock," Carl spoke from the seat beside me, "This about Blaine is important."

I'd investigated several cases of evasion. Though it cut heavily into my production, I was happy to be of service.

As a writer of mystery novels I felt appallingly nonessential, but as an ex-private detective from New York my experience was useful to the frantically busy Selective Service board.

"We need this man," Carl asserted, turning to slap Blaine's knee. "He's highly qualified to help supply our Army with new fighting tools. They're developing hundreds of experimental arms and Blaine's knowledge of guns is priceless. In this war where fire-power means everything— Damn it all, Jock, we've got to have him! We've got to work it out somehow."

"His record all that's stopping you?"

"The board is allowed to use their discretion in many 4-F ratings, but not in Blaine's case.

"He's definitely excluded by the regulations as matters stand. No branch of the service will enlist him and we can't touch him until his situation is changed and his record wiped clean."

"How serious is it?"

"Almost hopeless," Carl admitted. "Blaine was convicted in New York City six years ago and sentenced to five years in Sing Sing.

"Actually he served less than four, with time off for good behavior. Only one thing will suffice, Jock. His prison record must be wiped out."

"What you're asking me to do, then, is prove, in a case officially closed six years ago, that Blaine's conviction was an error."

"It *was*, Jock," Janet said earnestly. "Blaine's innocent. I've always believed that."

"How about it, Blaine?" I asked, finding his eyes in the rear-view mirror. "Did they hand you a bum rap?"

His smile came, slow and wry. "If I'd really done it, I'd be one hell of a heel to let Janet get you and Carl mixed up in it now."

"That's enough for me," I decided. "Let's go to your place, soon as we can, and dig into it."

"Understand, this is a personal request, not official," Carl added. "Officially I'm obliged to ignore this letter, but you might make something of it."

As I parked behind the clubhouse he passed the letter over my shoulder. It was addressed to Carl Polk, Secretary, Selective Service Board No. 5. Typed on an old machine with a dried-out purple ribbon, it had neither salutation nor signature.

"Don't be misled in Blaine Trent's case. There ought not to be any mistakes made. I know the facts, but I am not going to give them out until I am sure they will be taken for what they are worth. Think it over."

"Have you any idea who sent this, Blaine?" I asked, getting out of the car.

"Not any."

"It will mean very little unless I can trace the sender."

A MAN appeared from inside the clubhouse, pushing his way through the curious crowd on the portico. He was Tom Pettie, the soft-bellied but hard-minded county detective.

Seeing us, he came up, squinting at Blaine.

"Mr. Trent, I want you to take a look at that dead man in there."

"Sure," Blaine said, not understanding why he should.

With an air of impartial deliberation, his old straw hat tilted back on his stiff russet-gray thatch, Tom led Blaine into a rear room where hundreds of cases of ammunition were stored. Carl and I followed them. Oliver Dockery's corpse lay on the floor. Blaine's clear gray eyes took on a far-away, seeking look.

"What about him, Mr. Trent?" Tom inquired. Obviously, he had something up his sleeve.

"He lived about a mile up the road from us. Bought a little place there some years ago," Blaine said. "There's one queer thing. I've always felt I ought to remember him from some place further back, but I could never think just where."

"Why should he write a letter about you?"

"What letter?"

Tom produced an envelope addressed in pale purple typing exactly like the one Carl had just shown me. This second one was stamped but unmailed. Tom had peeled it open.

"Read it," he said.

Looking over Blaine's shoulders, Carl and I exchanged an astonished glance.

"About Blaine Trent's case. If you are willing to listen in good faith, go to the Twin Glen Skeet Club at midnight Tuesday. Be alone, turn out your headlights and wait. I will come with the truth."

"I'll ask you again," Tom said judicially. "Why should Mr. Dockery write such a letter about you to the draft board?"

"I hardly knew him!" Blaine blurted.

"How could he know so much about your case?"

"He wrote that letter," Tom pointed out, "and before he got around to mailing it he was killed."

"But it was an accident, wasn't it?" Blaine asked in confusion.

"Strange about that letter, Mr. Trent," Tom commented cryptically. "I'll come over to your place a little later and talk to you about it."

The strange and confusing thing about both letters was their earnest yet noncommittal tone. They might mean that Oliver Dockery had somehow definitely known Blaine to be innocent of the crime of which he had been convicted—or, on the other hand, they might mean he had definitely known Blaine to be guilty. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Invisible Man

CARL stayed with Tom at the club. Blaine and Janet came with Christine and me. We wound over the back roads toward the Trent place.

"Let's have it, Blaine," I suggested. "What did they get you for?"

"Arson," he said.

Janet slipped her arm loyally through his, and after a moment he went on.

"We had a store on Madison Avenue then. Our own outlet. It was chiefly Thatcher's idea."

Thatcher Rumsey had been the business partner of John Trent, Blaine's father; as he was Blaine's partner now.

"Thatcher ran the shop here and I ran the store in New York," Blaine went on. "Dad was there, too, but he was getting pretty old and his mind was failing a little, so he puttered around while I handled what little business there was. We lived in an apartment above the store and Miggy took care of us."

Kate Miggs had been the Trents' housekeeper as long as any of them could remember.

"After two years in New York Dad died. When we came back from the cremation services we found the store burning. That was an uncanny sort of shock, Dad's body having just been—well, turned into ashes—and now the store, too. We'd left it empty; nobody'd been inside to turn in an alarm and the fire had gotten a good start before the engines came. The firemen brought out wads of excelsior soaked with oil and polish, so they arrested me."

"On the theory that business was so bad you'd planned to collect the insurance?"

"I had to admit I couldn't see any other reason why the fire was started deliberately."

"But Blaine," Janet said quickly. "That really isn't the only reason. Tell Jock about the—"

"That was the only possible motive—the insurance," Blaine interrupted.

His face was so set that Janet subsided, pinching her lips together. Whatever point she'd been about to make, he didn't want it brought up. Strange, that, since she obviously felt it might help to clear him.

"Thatcher shared in the insurance as a partner, of course, but he hadn't been near the store that day. It had to be me."

"But it wasn't."

"I didn't set that fire, Jock. Dwight and Miggy swore I couldn't have done it, but the jury thought they were lying to save me."

"Do you have any idea who's actually guilty, Blaine?"

"I haven't. That makes it tough, doesn't it?"

"That makes it tough as hell. Go on. They gave you five years."

"Thatcher kept the machine shop running while I was away. When I got out I came back to making guns." His hand tightened on Janet's. "My girl waited all that while, though I'd told her she'd be foolish to do it."

"I'm foolish," Janet murmured, "about you."

"But Oliver Dockery," I said. "Where does *he* fit into this picture?"

"Damned if I can even guess, Jock," Blaine said.

We'd swung onto Windy Hollow Road, which led past the Trent place, and had come to a little frame house sitting on five carefully tended acres. The mailbox near the white pocket gate bore Oliver Dockery's name. A big, bright American flag waved in the evening breeze from a tall, hand-hewn, eagle-mounted pole. A black-and-white State Police car sat in the driveway, a natty trooper stationed beside it.

"Hello, Frank," I called. "Is it your bounden duty to keep us out?"

"Afraid so, Mr. Quirke. Mr. Pettie wants the place watched until he gets here. I haven't been inside myself."

Oliver Dockery would never have allowed that flag to stay masted after sunset. It was growing dark now. We drove on, with a pair of headlights trailing us all the way into the Trent yard. It was Dwight's car. Still looking distressed, he escorted us into the house where we found Fern curled up in a huge chair that made her look little and frail.

"What're you doing out of bed, honey?" Dwight said with instant solicitude. "You're not well. You'd better hop right back. I don't want you getting really sick."

"The telephone kept ringing," Fern explained, scribbling something on a pad with a well-chewed pencil. She was wearing red slippers and a red flannel robe over her pajamas. "Hello, everybody. Anyway, Dwight," she added, tucking her snub nose into a handkerchief, "I'm giving a party next Saturday if it kills me."

She would, too. She lived on a social merry-go-round which, for the most part, she kept pumping herself. Perfect happiness, to Fernella Trent's mind, consisted of a Main Line mansion full of rumpus rooms, banquet halls and Elsa Maxwell. Striving to out-entertain a circle of superlative hostesses, she exhausted both Dwight and his bank account, but he indulged her and was mad about her just the same.

"Get drinks, Dwighty," she said. "Ask Miggy to make sandwiches. No, Miggy's out. Bring salted nuts and pretzels. What'll you have, everybody? My, I'm glad we've got company!"

As Dwight hustled about it, Christine called after him, "Make 'em light, Dwight. Jock's got a lot of important listening to do—about Blaine."

Fern said, "Oh. I wish I could help." Her tone implied she couldn't.

"Weren't you in New York with the others, for the services that day?" I asked.

"Couldn't go," Fern answered. "Flu."

"But everyone else was there?" I inquired of Blaine.

"Miggy and I'd been there all along," Blaine said. "Dwight came in the day before."

"Leaving you here alone, Fern?"

"I told Dwight I could manage." Fern sniffled, smiling apologetically. "I just stayed in bed with a big pitcher of fruit juice, and ached."

"Go on, Blaine. Thatcher came into town, of course?"

"He had car trouble and arrived late," Blaine said. "He'd previously arranged to meet us at the apartment, but he phoned from home to say he was delayed and would come to the crematory instead. He and Gretta arrived there just in time."

DWIGHT reappeared with the drinks, passed them all around with the nuts and the pretzels, then sat, unable to keep his eyes off Fern. She was that child-like and pretty.

"It's not easy to reconstruct a day six years gone," I said, "but now we're getting at it. Fern stayed here. Thatcher and Gretta Rumsey left for New York later than they'd expected that morning, and drove direct to the services. Dwight had come in the previous day to stay overnight at the apartment on Madison Avenue with Miggy and you, Blaine. The store, where the fire started, you said, was directly under the apartment. Any connection between them?"

"A stairway in the back."

"Who had keys?"

"Miggy and I had keys to the apartment. The outer door was on the street, alongside the store, with a front stairway leading up. The store, of course, had a separate door. I also had a key to that one, and Thatcher had, too."

"The one door gave directly into the store, then, and the other indirectly, by way of the back stairs. Were any duplicate keys lying around loose anywhere?"

"None," Blaine said.

"Were you and Dwight and Miggy all in one another's sight that whole morning?"

Blaine squirmed. "I did go down into the store once before we left, to look around."

"The district attorney evidently wormed that admission out of you on the witness stand," I surmised. "When you looked around the store, you didn't see any excelsior soaked with oil and polish?"

"No." Blaine stated it flatly. "I couldn't have overlooked it, Jock. It simply wasn't there at the time."

"Neither Miggy nor Dwight had an opportunity to scatter that stuff around later?"

Dwight frowned. "See here, Jock—"

"Please don't be offended," I put in. "If Blaine's innocent, somebody else must be guilty, but I'm not building a case against anyone. So far I'm simply getting the picture straight in my mind. Well, Blaine?"

"I can't see how either Dwight or Miggy could possibly have done it. As soon as I came up from the store we all left the apartment, got into the car and went to the funeral."

"Leaving both street doors locked?"

"Sure."

"Did you carry both your keys on your person at the services?"

"Sure."

"And Miggy had hers?"

"In her purse," Blaine said.

"Thatcher also carried his?"

"He always had it on a chain with his others."

"What about you, Dwight?"

Dwight's frown darkened a little. "Didn't have mine. Hadn't carried it for months. I'd been sort of cast out, you know. Dad and I had had a serious disagreement."

"Over me," Fern said quietly.

I'd heard about that, of course. "Then, when you came back—all together, I assume; you, Dwight, Miggy, Thatcher and Gretta—the whole building was burning, going up fast."

"There you are," Blaine said. "No outsider could have done it, and none of us

could have done it either; but it was done."

I sat back. "Carl was right. It sounds hopeless. As a detective, I feel horribly out of practice."

"But Jock," Christine said. "Blaine's innocent. The Army needs him and you can't let the Army down."

A car pulled into the yard from the direction of Doylestown, its headlights streaking across the windows. Dwight answered a firm knock. Coming in, Tom Pettie politely took off his unseasonable straw hat. We all watched him in expectant silence while he peered mildly at Blaine.

"Mr. Trent, you told me about feeling you ought to remember Oliver Dockery from some place 'way back and not being able to. You said it was queer. Maybe you've thought it over and can tell me something more about him now."

Blaine thought again. "Well, he was always showing up unexpectedly to help me out of trouble. The first time it happened I was changing a flat tire. He came along and insisted on doing the whole job. Another time, when the creek flooded the shop, he hustled in and worked all night helping to bail out. There were a dozen instances like that. In between times I rarely saw him, but I actually began to look for him to pop up whenever anything went wrong."

The county detective wagged his head. "That's not exactly what I meant. Before he moved out here he used to live in a place called the Bronx and he worked in downtown New York, as a postman."

"A postman!" Blaine's jaw dropped. "That's it! I do remember him now. He delivered the mail to our Madison Avenue store!"

I sat up again, up straight. A mail-carrier seen every day but scarcely noticed because he's a sort of perambulating fixture —Chesterton's invisible man. Suddenly Oliver Dockery took on a startling if still obscure significance.

That busy little rooster with his left shoulder drooping lower than the other from years of lugging a heavy bag up and down Madison Avenue! Blaine's city mailman settling on a little farm near Blaine's home in the country, eighty miles from Grand Central postoffice! A fussy old patriot writing cagey, unsigned letters, then getting hit by a bullet!

"Jock, it couldn't have been an accident after all!" Christine voiced my inevitable conclusion. "Oliver Dockery was murdered."

Murdered, I thought further, by someone in such desperate haste to destroy him that Christine had almost stopped the bullet instead. . . .

ANOTHER car had come rolling down the road from the direction of Doylestown, gathering speed until its brakes squealed outside the gate. We speculated in silence about the mysterious, transplanted mailman while rapid, flat-sounding footfalls ran to the entrance. Miggy burst in and breathlessly stopped, making excited gestures.

Motherly and balloon-shaped, Miggy had just returned from one of her all-day excursions.

On alternate Sundays she floated off to church and afterward visited her friends, leaving the Trents to shift for themselves. The rest of the week she bossed them, fed them, kept them tidy, clucked over them and grumbled about Fern's too frequent and too extravagant parties. Her chief concern was always Dwight. Even now, full of gulping urgency, she took one look at his pinched face and pointed to the stairs.

"You go right up and take a couple of aspirins, Dwight!" Then, swinging both her fat hands toward a window, "Look at poor Mr. Dockery's nice little house—burning!"

She scampered out the door as we sprang up to the window. Red flames were flickering in the north sky. Embers flew like a fountain sparkling with gold flecks against the night. Beyond the crest of the intervening hill we saw Oliver Dockery's flag flying in the glare.

"Damnation!" Tom Pettie blurted. "Should've stopped there first!"

He loped out to his car. Miggy, wedged again under the steering-wheel of her ancient coupé, was already bouncing on toward the blaze. Blaine, Janet, Christine and I hurried with Dwight to his sedan. Even Fern padded along in her slippers and robe, ignoring his protests.

A bell clanging beyond the hill announced the approach of the volunteer fire department from nearby Danville. The trooper stationed at Oliver Dockery's house had

evidently broken in to phone the alarm. The red truck careened onto the lawn while we pulled up behind Tom Pettie's car in the road.

A whirlwind of neighborly helpfulness, Miggy beat the firemen to the door and disappeared into the front room. We could see her frantically plodding about in a fog of smoke. The blaze was in the rear. Apparently having started on the first floor, it had spewed up through the second and now was devouring the shingle roof with a steady, hungry roar. Rubber-helmeted firemen swarmed around, some with axes, others unreeling lines of rubber hose.

Miggy loomed out again, choking, her outraged eyes full of smoky tears. In one fist she clenched a sheaf of rescued War Savings bonds. Pushing them into Dwight's hands, she started back, but the state policeman grabbed her. Though she bulked twice his size, he held her. Those troopers were equal to any emergency, however large.

I skirted around the house. The spreading flames illuminated the interior. In a rear room Oliver Dockery had set up his woodworking equipment—bench saw, drill press, lathe and a fine assortment of tools in racks. On a rolltop desk in one corner sat an ancient double-decker typewriter—with, I was sure, a dried-out purple ribbon. The fire was hottest there.

A sign was tacked in one front window: *Your Air Raid Warden Lives Here.* Huge lithographs of President Roosevelt and General Douglas MacArthur hung in the parlor. A separate blaze burned under the dining table. A fireman was trying to reach it with his big boots.

As he groped into the open I went after him. He stopped near Tom Pettie to smell of the charred towel he'd recovered. In his other sooty hand he had a partially melted candle and a gallon spot-can, its label blackened, its screw-cap missing.

"Soaked with kerosene," he muttered, dropping the fuming towel at Tom's feet. "One corner was wound around the candle. When the candle burned down far enough the towel caught. Must've been another one like that alongside the scrap lumber in the workroom."

"Fixed right after Dockery was killed, I bet!" Tom said.

A second volunteer fireman had come up, wheezing smoke out of his lungs. He passed a small bright metal object over to Tom.

"Found it on the hallway floor."

It was a cigarette lighter decorated with the initials D. T.

Tom's narrowed eyes turned, seeking. Dwight was there, suddenly pale. Fern, tugging her robe tightly around her body, leaned toward the lighter with her lips parted.

"Why, Dwight hasn't carried it lately!" she exclaimed.

"The last time I saw that lighter, weeks ago," Dwight said quickly, "it was kicking around my bureau drawer."

"Really," Fern insisted, "he hasn't used it in months!"

" 'Course he hasn't!" Miggy put in forcefully. She breathed hard, frowning at Tom. "It was broke—wouldn't work. I took it over to Mr. Dockery days ago. Asked him to fix it. That's how it got in his house. 'Course it is!"

In the glare of the fire Blaine's face was set in sick-hearted lines. Christine slipped her arm through mine, shivering despite the heat radiating from Oliver Dockery's house. We all became acutely conscious of the growl of the flames—flames which were deliberately set. Miggy's indignant gaze challenged the county detective to doubt her as he slipped the initialled lighter into his pocket.

"Have you noticed, Jock?" Christine asked, thinking again. When Christine got to thinking, nobody, not even Christine, could ever know where she'd come out. "The Rumseys?"

Looking around, I said, "I don't see them."

"That's because they aren't here. Their place is right down the road, but neither Thatcher nor Gretta has come to the fire. It's not natural. Everybody goes to fires, even the people who set 'em."

"I'll answer that one and take the sixty-four-dollar question. They're not at home."

"But I saw lights there a few minutes ago, Jock."

"We'll check on that."

Hissing streams of water played into Oliver Dockery's house. Before long all but a few straggling flames were under control. Steam and fumes billowed up from the shell of walls, and the flag still waved, marked as if by shrapnel, against the night sky.

Tom Pettie herded Miggy and the Trents together with orders to go back home. Further questions, I suspected, would bring forth no more information than I'd already heard. After a word to Blaine, promising to work back to him soon, I drove with Christine past his place and toward the Rumseys'.

THEIR house was the second of four sitting widely spaced along Windy Hollow Road. The first, and the nearest to the main highway, belonged to a Naval Reserve officer who had perforce closed it for the duration. The Rumseys' sat on a knoll within sight of the Trents', which came next; and the fourth, deepest in the valley, was the ruined property of the man murdered at Twin Glen.

I wondered if Christine had really seen any lights in the Rumsey home. Not a glimmer was visible now.

I rapped, waited, then rapped again. As we turned away we heard movements inside. A lamp came on and Gretta opened the door. She hadn't responded to the sound of the car; she'd answered my knock with reluctance. Her eyes unadjusted to the light, she didn't recognize us standing there on the stoop.

"It's Christine and Jock."

"Oh? I've been asleep. Come in." There was no welcome in her tone; she sounded tired and aloof.

"I want to talk to Thatcher," I said.

"He's still at the shop. He works even on Sundays. He's always there very late, you know. That's what he tells me."

Gretta's mouth puckered with odd bitterness. Her color was feverishly high, her brown eyes too bright. Lately she'd begun to fret over a few gray hairs, and she'd grown too thin, not from ill health, Christine had said, but from brooding—about what, Christine couldn't exactly explain.

"We'll go to the shop, then, Gretta," I said. "Sorry we disturbed you."

Scarcely seeming to hear and without saying good night, she closed the door. Through a window we saw her sink into a deep chair turned to face another window looking south. She was strangely intent; we felt we'd interrupted her at an important vigil.

Christine thoughtfully gazed back at the house as we drove on. "She wasn't really asleep, Jock. She'd been sitting alone in that dark room. . . . There! The light's gone out again."

"What's she watching for and worrying about?"

"Must be Thatcher."

"But why?"

"She's six years older than Thatcher, though that's scarcely reason enough, is it?"

"I would still love you if you were sixteen years older than me, darling."

"Certainly," Christine said, settling down. "Anyhow, who's the detective in this family, anyhow?"

"If Blaine's case keeps on looking as tough as it looks right now, nobody will be, nohow."

In Doylestown we turned to Blaine's gunsmithy. A hundred years ago it had been a grist mill; cobwebby and darkly seasoned, it picturesquely straddled a creek. The path leading to it had been beaten on the better-mousetrap principle, and the faded sign above the door still read simply, "John Trent, Gunsmith."

Thatcher Rumsey hustled from the office to answer my knock. Greeting us cordially, he led us through a corner of the shop, which worked long hours these days under a sub-contract to make machine-gun parts. Round-faced, with a dapper little mustache precisely pointed, and liking sporty clothes, Thatcher achieved a man-about-town air, though he'd never been very much about any town other than this one, population five thousand.

When I'd explained why I was there—without mentioning the bullet which had buzzed so appallingly close to Christine's lovely head—he said, "Glad to hear it, Jock. I hope to heaven you can get it straightened out. It was a frightful mistake in the first place, and if ever a man deserves a break now, Blaine does."

Offering him a cigarette, which he refused, I suggested, "Tell me what you did that day six years ago."

"Glad to." Thatcher thoughtfully sharpened his mustache. "Gretta and I planned to leave for New York early on the day of the services, but the damned car wouldn't start. I had to call a mechanic from a garage in Doylestown. The fuel pump was on the blink, and of course he hadn't brought a replacement and had to make a second trip.

Knowing we'd be late, I phoned New York to tell Blaine we'd go directly to the crematory and do our best to get there on time. That's really all there is to tell, Jock."

"You did drive direct to the crematory and arrive in the very nick?"

Thatcher nodded. "Didn't go near the store until afterward, with the others, and there it was, blazing."

"How did the insurance company settle the claim?"

"Finally they paid half to me, as half-owner. The books show how it was used. It helped us through a bad period, until Blaine came back."

"Somebody set that fire, Thatcher."

"It wasn't Blaine," Thatcher said emphatically, "and it wasn't me."

"So far I've so little to go on, I want you to cut loose and accuse somebody, even though you may be mistaken."

"I've been thinking about it for six years, Jock," he answered, "and there's nothing I can add, actually nothing."

Another knock echoed through the shop. Thatcher went quickly to the door and returned with Tom Pettie. Because he could have prevented the fire at Oliver Dockery's home if only he'd arrived there sooner, Tom was hurrying to cover other possible points of interest. Soberly he frowned at the gun-rack on one wall of the office where four Trent rifles and four Trent shotguns gleamed behind glass.

"I want those rifles," Tom said bluntly.

"Those rifles?" Thatcher repeated. "All of them? What for?"

"We've got a kind of crime laboratory in this county," Tom reminded him. "We've dug a bullet out of a dead man's head and somewhere there's a rifle to match it. You'll get 'em back."

"I should think so!" Thatcher exclaimed. "A dead man? Whoever he was, the gun you're looking for is certainly not here."

Tom offered Thatcher no enlightenment. After attaching identifying tags to the trigger-guards, he trudged out bristling with armament. Saying good-night to Thatcher, Christine and I followed him to his old sedan. He had fully a dozen more rifles on the back seat, all similarly tagged. Some were Mike Courtney's, I surmised, and the others he'd just brought from the Trent place.

"Looks bad," Tom ruminated, tucking his paunch under the steering wheel, "in spite of that lighter. A man gets sent to prison for arson, then all at once a house right next door to his, belonging to a dead man who knew something strange about him, goes up in flames in the same way. I was hoping Carl Polk would sort of squeeze Blaine Trent around that first one, but now— Looks bad, Jock."

CHAPTER THREE

Death Help

RAIN began falling just as we reached home. It whispered at the living room windows while we sat with highballs and cigarettes, thoughtfully quiet. Ours was a comfortable house, colorfully furnished, but tonight a chill pervaded the air. Christine had placed her perforated hat on the coffee table and couldn't stop staring at it.

"Did somebody try to get two birds with one bullet, Jock?"

"If you hadn't happened to step forward at Station Eight at just the right instant, Christine, the bullet would've missed you by inches more, intentionally, and you'd never have known it."

I wanted her to believe that. I wanted to believe it myself.

"Somebody may have learned you'd soon be looking into Blaine's case. He may have thought that by almost clipping your wife he could scare you off."

"If so, he's pretty nearly succeeding. I'm scared enough to want you to stay indoors as much as possible, Christine."

"I'll just keep moving around. A moving target is harder to hit." She'd intended it to sound funny but it didn't, quite. "We've got to *do* something, Jock."

"I keep asking myself why Oliver Dockery was killed. It wasn't done simply because somebody wanted to keep Blaine out of the Army."

"Say that again."

"What does Oliver Dockery's death accomplish? By silencing him it may make the job of getting Blaine into the Army impossibly hard, but that's not the real motive. Nobody can gain through that. There's more behind it, much more."

"But what, Jock, possibly?"

"Something important enough to drive

an expert marksman to a point of desperation. We're mixed up in it now, trying to find out exactly what. That's why, honey, I want you to avoid fresh air and sunshine."

Christine took a quick sip of her drink and the rain rustled on the panes.

"Everybody concerned is a crack shot. Blaine and Thatcher because they're gunsmiths. Dwight naturally, guns being in the family blood. Gretta and Fern and Janet because their men taught them—though of course, as a suspect, Janet's out. Everybody can shoot except Miggy."

"Even Miggy may have sneaked out behind the barn to target-practise."

We took our nightcaps upstairs and began to undress. The rain drummed on the roof directly overhead.

"Carl said they'd been keeping it quiet about Blaine's being 4-F," Christine began again, "so how did Oliver Dockery know?"

"He was Blaine's mailman in the city, Blaine's neighbor in the country, Blaine's air raid warden, and also Blaine's friend in a queer, furtive way. He knew so much it cost him his life."

"And how did Miggy know about those War Savings Bonds she saved from his burning house? She went right in to the right spot and came out with a whole fistfull."

"Miggy's as much of a busybody as you are, darling, almost."

"Anyway," Christine said indignantly, "Blaine's swell and decent, and I don't see why the Army won't let him in on account of he burned down just one little store six years ago, which he actually didn't."

"The Selective Service regulations put the crime of arson in the same bracket with dope peddling and even worse things. Arsonists are psychopaths; the motive and the crime are so disproportionate, showing a dangerous lack of moral and social judgment. An arsonist belongs in an institution, far removed from an arsenal, a proving grounds or a fighting front where there are ammunition dumps, stores of high-octane gasoline and priceless planes."

"Not Blaine!" Christine insisted.

"Not Blaine," I agreed. "But I doubt that Blaine will want himself cleared at his brother's expense."

"You mean that lighter?"

"Let's sleep on it."

We sat in the dark side by side, Christine's head on my shoulder.

"It *was* a crazy thing, Jock, setting fire to Mr. Dockery's house after already killing him."

"The purpose wasn't simply to destroy the house, but to destroy every possible scrap of evidence inside it."

"Evidence of what?"

"Blackmail. Oliver Dockery, with all his virtues, was a blackmailer."

"But Jock! How do you know?"

"Unquestionably Oliver Dockery's feet used to hurt him."

"Being married to a detective can be the most baffling experience!" Christine cried.

"It's simple. Tomorrow I'll ask questions and verify all this—first that Oliver Dockery quit his Civil Service job long before he was due to go on pension. Second, Oliver Dockery bought his farm out here soon after Blaine went to Sing Sing. Third, he tinkered around year after year, enjoying himself, living in comfort but earning nothing—until recently, possibly, when his patriotism may have put him to work in a defense plant. He had an income in the shape of blackmail paid him by the person who actually burned down the Madison Avenue store."

Christine sat bolt upright. "You've got to prove that, Jock! For Blaine's sake!"

"If ever there was any documentary proof—any cash accounts that Oliver Dockery may have kept—they're gone now, along with most of his house. His bank records, if he used a bank, won't point to any particular person. I've a damned hard nut to crack, my sweet. The original crime of arson was committed long ago, no evidence concerning it remains, the case is officially forgotten and a new building has been erected on the site."

"Make the truth rise up out of its ashes, Jock! You've got to do it for Blaine. Third-degree somebody!"

"Unfortunately," I pointed out, "it wouldn't solve Blaine's problem even if the real culprit confessed to the draft board. The board will be permitted no discretion in the matter until Blaine's criminal record is wiped out, as Carl said; and that can be accomplished only by a special commission appointed by the Governor of the State of New York, which means I've got to produce evidence strong enough to merit a

pardon. You see what I'm up against? How badly I need my sleep?"

Christine's head nestled quietly on my shoulder. Soon her breathing deepened. She slept so peacefully that I couldn't resist an impulse to poke her.

"Why *did* you shift over to Station Eight for your last shot, you little show-off?"

"I wanted to make my first straight a really good one. I'll do it yet, too. Jock, remember how Janet wanted to tell you something—some possible reason, other than the insurance, why the store was set on fire—and Blaine wouldn't let her? Well, I think she's going to tell you soon anyway."

Just then, uncannily, the telephone began trilling. I groped for the bedroom extension, yawned into it and, sure enough, heard Janet's voice answer softly.

"I'm at Blaine's, Jock, staying the night. Everyone else has gone to bed, but I can't sleep a wink. I've got to talk to you."

"Now?"

"Blaine won't let himself think it's important, but I'm sure you ought to know, and the sooner the better. About the will."

"Whose will, Janet?"

"Blaine's father's. It was destroyed in the fire in New York. Can you come, Jock?"

"Coming."

Christine was already getting into her coat. We hurried out to the car and chose a short-cut. The rain gradually let up and when we swung into the Trent yard it had stopped.

NO ONE appeared at the door, so I worked the knocker quietly. Darkness filled the whole house, except the living room, where only one lamp burned.

We heard someone coming down the stairs to the entrance. It was Blaine.

"It's not supposed to be you," Christine said. "Where's Janet?"

"In bed, I suppose."

We stepped in curiously, having expected Janet to be waiting, of course, but there was no sign of her. Blaine tried to smooth his hair, which would never smooth, and tied the cord of his bathrobe.

"Janet phoned you," he guessed.

"Bring her down, Blaine."

"Look, Jock. You know how important this is to me, but that stuff about Dad's will hasn't any bearing."

"If it really hasn't any bearing I'll skip it, but first I wish you'd bring Janet down here."

Blaine moved to the stairs, then turned about and came back stubbornly to face us. "What Dad said during his last year or so couldn't be relied on, Jock. I didn't believe he'd actually written any will, and I still don't."

"Janet said it was destroyed in the New York fire. She'll tell me about it, purely for your sake, even if you won't."

Blaine unwillingly met the necessity of discussing it. "Sit down. No need to disturb her. She exaggerates its importance simply because she's so anxious for me."

We sat, still wishing he'd call Janet down, and he began.

"Toward the last Dad's mind went off on queer tangents. He hid things. Sometimes he talked about the stock market and certain real estate deals. I thought he was daydreaming. After he died, though, I learned he'd actually made a lot of money speculating. He had much more than I'd ever suspected—a couple of hundred thousand."

"Did Dwight know how much?"

Blaine squirmed. "Janet feels certain he did. She had a pretty good idea herself. At least Dad talked to her about having changed his original will, and she believed him."

"Did he tell Janet what his original will provided?"

"It left everything to Dwight and me equally, except five thousand for Miggy."

"And he changed that?"

This was the part Blaine hated to talk about. "Dwight had been at Yale, preparing for law school. He'd gotten into trouble one weekend—too much drinking, and a girl. They kicked him out."

I'd heard about this little scandal. "The girl was Fern."

Blaine nodded. "Dwight immediately married her. Dad disliked Fern—considered her an ambitious little nobody, without background or breeding, who'd put her hooks into Dwight for all he was worth. Well, he was too harsh; they've been married seven years now; but after a violent quarrel Dad ordered Dwight out. A little later Dad told Janet he'd changed his will, cutting Dwight off with a dollar, leaving

Miggy five thousand again and everything else to me."

"Getting bounced out of college and marrying Fern, then, had cost Dwight about one hundred thousand dollars."

"Dwight didn't care much, he was so crazy about Fern. When he gets mad at somebody he stays mad, too. He moved out here with Fern, got a job selling real estate, then opened an office of his own. He did very well until tire and gas rationing began cutting into sales."

"Why do you doubt the existence of the changed will? Didn't you ever see it?"

"Never. Dad had hidden it somewhere in the apartment, so well that not even Miggy could find it. She knew where all his bankbooks were concealed, but not the will. She'd planned to ransack the place right after the services, but then, of course, it was too late."

"The will was destroyed along with the building. The bankbooks too?"

"Miggy rescued them."

From an antique secretary Blaine brought a yellowed newspaper clipping. A headline read, "Housekeeper Saves Hidden Fortune From Fire." Miggy, the item related, had rushed into the burning apartment despite the efforts of several firemen to stop her, had been brought out clutching an entire ten-volume set entitled *Pictorial History of the World War,* and had collapsed. Twenty-odd bankbooks were found tucked between the leaves. Being a thorough house-cleaner, Miggy had previously come upon them and knew where they were. A halftone cut pictured her lying on an ambulance litter while an intern worked at the big job of reviving her.

"Miggy and Oliver Dockery's War Savings Bonds tonight!" Christine said. "A repeat performance!"

I thought I heard a car starting up in a hurry not very far away.

"Go on, Blaine. The will wasn't recovered. It was never seen by anyone at all, apparently, except John Trent himself. Lacking proof of its provisions, the Surrogate Court would consider he'd died intestate."

Uneasily Blaine nodded. "The estate was eventually divided equally between Dwight and me, and together we gave Miggy her five thousand, but—"

"Janet's idea can't be ignored, Blaine. The will was a much stronger motive than the insurance. Its destruction brought Dwight about one hundred thousand dollars more than he would have received otherwise."

Blaine frowned. "Jock, listen to me. If I'd ever thought Dwight could possibly be guilty, I wouldn't be letting you mix into this thing for one minute."

"I don't know why Janet isn't right here telling us what *she* thinks," Christine said. "I'm going to get her."

Christine ran up the stairs. We heard her moving about rapidly. When she hurried back down her violet eyes were alarmed.

"Janet's not there—not in her room!"

Then we heard the shot—the crack of a rifle somewhere out in the wet night.

BLAINE snatched up a flashlight and pulled the entrance open. The thin white beam reached out. The crescent moon had reappeared; the garage and the guest house stood clearly outlined, but we saw nothing more until a quick, bright gleam appeared on the distant knoll.

It shone through an opened door of the Rumsey home. The figure of a man was silhouetted as he hurried in. Then the door closed; the man and the light disappeared.

"Janet!" Blaine called.

No answer came from either inside the house or outside. Blaine went along the driveway. I brought another flashlight from our car. Christine ran between us, teetering on her high heels.

"Something in the road!" she gasped.

Looking like a heap of clothing, Janet lay huddled in a muddy rut, fully dressed and very still. A small flashlight near her feet had been broken by her fall. Blaine gently turned her, lifting her head. Blood had trickled from a bright red spot above her right eye and from another two inches behind it. The rifle bullet had furrowed under the skin. She was unconscious.

Blaine lifted her in his arms. Christine used his flash to light his way back. Carrying Janet, he strode without effort, swiftly.

Judging from Janet's position when found, she'd left the house for some reason, had gone up the dark road and had been returning when the bullet struck her. Facing toward the Trents', I decided the rifle had been fired from a point near the garage. My flashlight swept across the

field stretching between it and the Rumsey place, disclosing nothing. I was about to boost myself over the stone wall for a closer look when a sound stopped me—a woman's sobbing.

It came faintly on the night wind from the Rumseys'.

Hurrying farther along the road, I heard Gretta's voice, high-pitched, clashing with Thatcher's. His usual suave tone was gone; he was gruff. They kept up their quarreling until I knocked.

Gretta swung the door wide open. She stood there drawn tense as a thin spring, her face furiously white. Thatcher looked shamefaced and confused—and licked.

"I'll need a witness, Jock," she said tightly. "You come with me."

"Gretta!" Thatcher roared.

Heedless of him, she brushed past me, disappeared from the light radiating from the windows and ran breathlessly up the road.

"Pay no attention to her, Jock!" Thatcher blurted. "It's all her imagination. She doesn't know what she's doing!"

Whatever it was, Gretta was hell-bent on doing it. I went after her. Without speaking, her breath rushing, she turned into the yard of the house nearest the highway, the empty one owned by the Naval officer. She grabbed the flashlight from my hand.

Ignoring the door, she turned the beam on a window at one side of the house.

The circle of light cut straight across the yard and caught Fern pressing back against the clapboard wall, speechlessly frightened.

"Three and four nights a week you've met him here!" Gretta's voice rang with bitterness.

Clutching at the lapels of the man's dark coat she'd put on over her sweater, against the rain, Fern stared blindly into the glare, as still as a cornered, terrified kitten.

"I've watched him coming home from the shop," Gretta lashed at Fern. "I could see the glow of his headlights. You could see them too, from your bedroom. Then he'd stop at this house and blink them. You'd sneak out and across the field to join him here in the yard before Thatcher came the rest of the way home, pretending he'd worked late."

Fern said, "Thatcher?"

"It's been going on for months between you and Thatcher, without Dwight's ever dreaming of it, and at last I've caught you. What will Dwight think of you now? He'll stop idolizing you, you two-timing little idiot."

Suddenly Fern wasn't huddling there in the spotlight any more. Eyelids fluttering, she melted to the ground in a faint.

I climbed in the window while Gretta remained scornfully outside. The electricity had been disconnected, but there was a candle. Hoisting Fern inside to a couch, I put a pillow under her tiny feet. Her spectator pumps were muddy.

While she took her time coming out of it I glanced around.

Certainly the Naval officer had left the room in unshipshape condition. The ashtrays brimmed with cigarette butts, half of them bent and twisted. Two glasses sat on a table beside several empty bottles that had contained very good stuff. Releasing the bolt of the front door, I saw Gretta waiting in the yard. Her light revealed overlapping tire-tracks, recent ones. Unquestionably more than one car had driven into this yard since the owner's departure. The fact offered a new clue.

Fern stirred, and as I helped her up she said plaintively, "I can explain, Jock."

"Better explain to Dwight."

"Really, I can explain the whole thing and it's not at all what Gretta thinks."

"He'll be glad to hear that. Let's go."

I took the light from Gretta. She followed a few paces behind, determined to see it through. As we passed the Rumsey place Thatcher stepped out, stared, then hustled to join us. Gretta coldly ignored him. Nobody spoke. We made a strange procession to the Trents' door.

Dr. Bill Westrick's car stood in the driveway. He lived nearby and Christine must have called him at once. As we entered, Dwight hurried down the stairs. He stopped short, his eyebrows lifted with relief.

"I just came from your room. I didn't know what to think. Where've you been? Are you all right, sweetheart?"

"I'm in an awful mess, Dwighty," Fern said, "and all because of wanting to help Blaine in the only way I could."

She ran upstairs, leaving him in suspense. I asked quickly, "Where's Janet? How is she?"

"They took her up to Blaine's room." Dwight gazed anxiously after his wife. "The doctor's with her. Miggy and Blaine and Christine, too."

Thatcher asked, "What happened to Janet?"

"She was shot."

"Shot!" Thatcher seemed astounded. "I heard the report of a rifle."

"She's still unconscious, but she's going to be all right," Dwight mumbled. "What were you all doing out there—Fern dressed, when I thought she'd been in bed for hours. What's up?"

Fern reappeared on the stairs without the man's coat she'd been wearing. Eyeing her, Gretta let Dwight have it.

"Your wife's been secretly meeting my husband night after night." Her tone was still vindictively bitter. "I've known it for weeks.

"Thatcher actually sneaked out of my house, thinking I was asleep, just as Fern has sneaked out of your place over and over, to meet him."

A stunned look settled on Dwight's face. Thatcher's jaw dropped.

"For God's sake, Gretta, won't you listen to me?" Thatcher said. "I've already told you it's not true."

"She's all wrong about it, Dwighty," Fern put in. "Thatcher thought I was meeting him for—well, for romantic purposes, but it wasn't that at all."

"You were meeting me—?" Thatcher stared at her. "You've never met me anywhere, Fern!"

Flicking him with a brush-off glance, Fern continued to appeal to Dwight. "He's made passes at me, of course, but it's too ridiculous for Gretta to believe there's really anything between us. It was just that I decided—well, to take advantage of his attentions, for Blaine's sake."

Thatcher's jaw sagged even lower.

"Am I hearing this girl straight? I don't know what in heaven's name she's talking about!"

Fern persisted. "I let Thatcher think I meant it, but I was only leading him on, and of course I had to keep it from you, Dwighty, because you'd have objected. I've met him three or four times recently, but only to get him to talk about Blaine and the New York fire. I hoped he might brag to me about what he'd gotten away with at Blaine's expense. Then Gretta had to go and spoil it—almost."

"Gretta," Thatcher said in an anguished voice, "she must be out of her head! What she's saying is a lot of nonsense. It never happened!"

"I know she wasn't merely sounding you out," Gretta answered levelly. "There was more to it than that. It was serious between you and Fern. I'm finished, Thatcher. After this you can tell your own lies."

"Gretta, for God's sake, don't say any more!"

Gretta turned stiffly to the door and paused, with more to say and a rancorous urge to say it.

"I mean Thatcher's story about that day six years ago, Jock—his story about arriving in New York so late that we drove direct to the services. It's false. He *did* go to the Madison Avenue store that morning. He was the last to leave the store before the fire started."

Gretta went out with a take-that-damn-you toss of her head; and the door slammed.

CHAPTER FOUR

"He Didn't Do It"

WITH a gesture of utter confusion, Thatcher folded into a chair. We stared at him, shocked by Gretta's accusation.

"Is that true, Thatcher?" I asked.

A grim sort of recklessness took hold of him. "Yes, it's true; but it doesn't mean what she implied."

"Let's have the rest, then; and let's have it straight this time.

I offered him a smoke, thinking it might soothe his shaken nerves, but he declined.

"The start of it was just as I've already said. Gretta and I were ready to leave for the services in New York that morning, but something was wrong with the car. I did call a mechanic. I did phone Blaine to say we'd go direct to the crematory instead of meeting him at the apartment. But while waiting for the mechanic I tinkered with the motor and found that the wire from the ignition coil had jiggled loose. I connected it and the engine worked fine. When Gretta and I started off we still had just about

enough time to meet Blaine at the apartment as we'd originally planned."

"So, as originally planned, you went there?"

"Yes; but nobody answered the bell. Wanting to make sure they'd really left, I unlocked the store door and went in, leaving Gretta waiting in the car. The store was empty, of course."

"You didn't see any excelsior scattered about?"

"No," Thatcher said. "I thought I heard somebody in the apartment, so I went up by way of the rear stairs, but I didn't see anyone. Things were out of place, though. It looked like somebody had been searching. I supposed Miggy had left it that way. Being in a hurry to catch up with Blaine and the others, I went back down—"

"Without looking in the closets, on the chance that a prowler might be hiding in one of them?"

"Without doing anything but glance around. I was inside the building no more than two minutes by the clock. I left the door locked and went on with Gretta. Traffic held us up; when we arrived at the crematory the services were just beginning. Afterward I didn't happen to mention I'd been at the store—it seemed unimportant —and then we found the store burning. It was arson, a serious criminal act. Gretta and I agreed to keep quiet about the fact that I'd been there."

"You sidestepped a hazardous situation, then, by withholding the truth, Thatcher. Didn't you realize that by coming forward you might have gotten Blaine acquitted?"

Thatcher's ruddy face grew redder. "Once I'd told my story I had to stick to it. Changing it would have put me in a damned suspicious light. The insurance was payable to me as well as to Blaine. I'd had an opportunity to set the fire, but I couldn't prove I hadn't set it. I hated seeing Blaine put through the wringer; but I couldn't speak up for him without taking the same punishment, in his place, for a crime I hadn't committed."

Dwight said hotly, "I ought to throw you out of here. First you were too afraid of your own skin to help your friend and partner out of a damned tough spot; and now this thing with Fern."

Footfalls on the stairs interrupted. Coming down with Christine and Blaine while Miggy remained with Janet, Dr. Bill Westrick looked grave.

"Severe shock and concussion," he told us. "I don't want the risk of moving her now. Everything that might be done for her at the hospital can be done for her right here. I'll be back first thing in the morning, or sooner if I'm called. Meanwhile someone should be with her constantly."

After he'd gone, Blaine hurried back upstairs and I asked Christine, "Is she still unconscious?"

"Yes, and she's likely to stay that way for quite a while. Bill gave her a shot of morphine," Christine answered. "She came to for just a minute, though. We could hardly make out what she said. Something about hearing somebody sneaking out of the house."

"It must have been me she heard," Fern said. "But why should she follow me?"

"She had Blaine on her mind," I pointed out, "and besides, there'd been a murder and a second case of arson. Did she follow you all the way to that empty house, Fern, and see you there with Thatcher?"

"Someone came to the open window," Fern said. "It must have been Janet. She must have seen us, or recognized our voices."

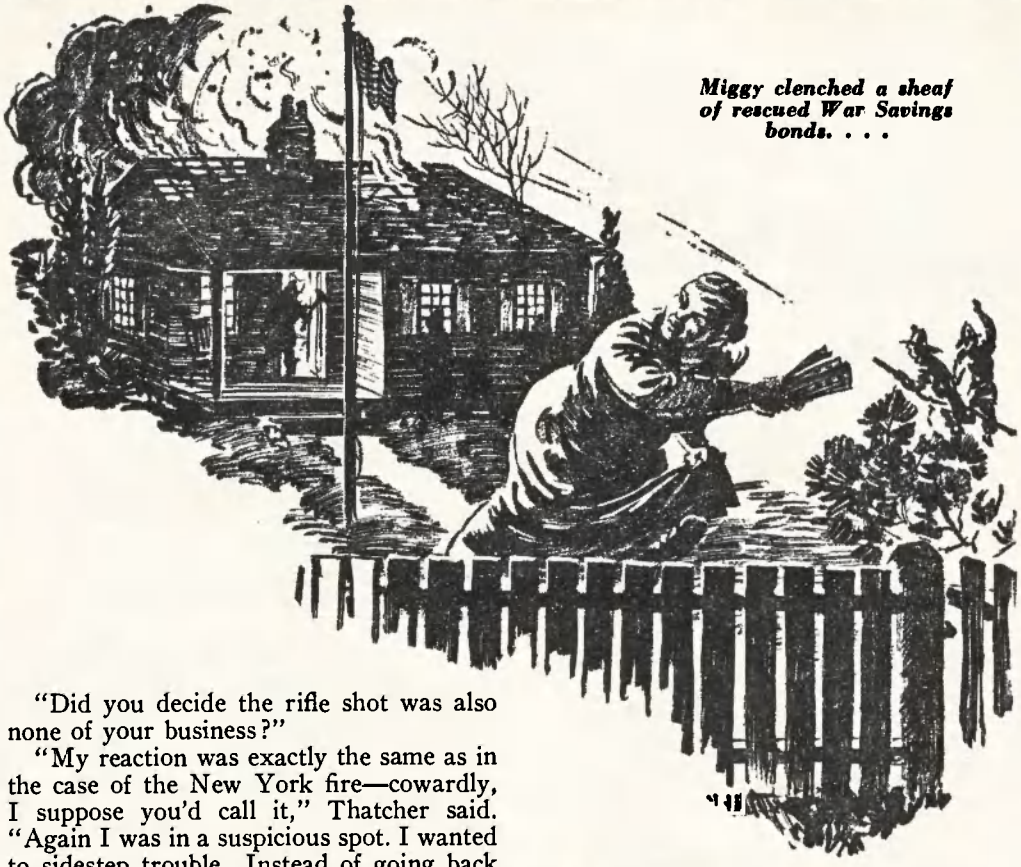
Thatcher jerked himself to his feet. "For God's sake, Fern, what're you trying to do? I wasn't in that house with you, and you know it."

"Look, Thatcher," I said. "All this is pretty confusing. You admit things up to a certain point, then deny other things. Fern says you met her in the empty house tonight, and you say you didn't meet her. Let's hear your version all in one piece."

Thatcher glowered at Fern. "All right; and this is the truth. I came home late from the shop, as you know, Jock. Presently Gretta went to her room, but I stayed downstairs. I thought she was asleep, but apparently she was keeping an ear cocked. I saw a car arriving here. It was late, I knew you were investigating Blaine's case and my curiosity was aroused. I walked over."

"But you didn't show yourself."

"I saw you and Christine in here talking with Blaine. I decided that if you'd wanted me in on it, you'd have called me, so I started home. When I was a short distance from the house I heard the rifle shot."



Miggy clenched a sheaf of rescued War Savings bonds. . . .

"Did you decide the rifle shot was also none of your business?"

"My reaction was exactly the same as in the case of the New York fire—cowardly, I suppose you'd call it," Thatcher said. "Again I was in a suspicious spot. I wanted to sidestep trouble. Instead of going back to find out what had happened, I hurried into the house—and ran into still worse trouble from Gretta. You know what she thought—that I was just coming back from meeting with Fern. But I hadn't seen Fern at all."

Fern was pale, conscious that Dwight was studying her with an anxious gaze.

"Now I'll tell you how it really was," she said. "On two or three previous nights I'd met Thatcher in front of the empty house. I've already explained why. Tonight we'd secretly arranged to meet there again, and we did."

Thatcher got up, strode straight across the room and stared down at her.

"Fern," he said, "you're a damned little liar."

Fern scornfully met his eyes. "You're denying it because you let me make a fool of you, and because you want to keep Gretta. Well, you deserve to lose her; but I'm not going to let Dwight think I've been interested in you."

"This girl's out of her head!" Thatcher said hoarsely.

He was no longer able to cope with Fern's unshakable story. His hopeless confusion overwhelmed him. Turning quickly, he strode out.

We heard his rapid, uneven footfalls in the driveway, fading.

Dwight now took a hand. "Go on, honey. You were trying to get Thatcher to open up about Blaine, and you think Janet found out you were there in the yard with him."

"When we heard someone moving near the house," Fern said then. "Thatcher got scared, probably thinking it was Gretta. He beat it, trying to get home ahead of her, leaving me to find my own way. Not having any light, I'd just begun feeling my way across the field when I heard the shot. Then *I* got scared, so I hurried back."

"Did you see the flash of the rifle?" I asked. "Could you tell where it was?"

Fern shook her silky head. "I was so frantic, thinking I might get shot next, I

just headed quickly for the nearest cover."

"Now look, Fern. When you first explained the purpose behind your meetings with Thatcher you said, 'Then Gretta had to go and spoil it—*almost.*' Did you mean Thatcher actually had told you something important about the New York fire?"

Fern shuddered a little. "Yes, he had."

"What was it?"

She looked down. "I can't tell you, Jock!"

"Why not?"

"I can't tell anybody!" It seemed she was striving to keep her eyes off Dwight. "I can't tell anyone anything about it—except that Thatcher convinced me ***he*** didn't do it."

FERN sprang to her feet, looking like a frightened child who'd let slip something she shouldn't have said, and scurried up the stairs. The room was very quiet for a moment.

"She didn't realize how that would sound," Dwight said, looking staggered. "She couldn't have meant that Thatcher told her something about me. Everybody knows I had nothing to do with it."

"This is awful, Jock!" Christine wailed. "Having to suspect our friends of such terrible things! And I still don't see why somebody had to try to kill Janet."

"Somehow Janet had made herself a threat to a murderer's plans," I said. "She's still a danger. Before very long she's going to wake up and tell us something which a murderer doesn't want us to hear. Are Blaine and Miggy staying with her up there?"

"Yes, and I'll spell them later."

"She shouldn't be left alone for a single minute. I have some more detecting to do, Christine, and I want you right alongside me."

As we left, Dwight headed up the stairs after Fern. He'd hold her hand, I surmised, and if she should refuse to enlarge upon that last cryptic utterance of hers, he wouldn't press her.

"I wonder how he really feels about those secret meetings Fern pulled off," Christine whispered. "I'm sure of one thing. If all of Dwight's love for her should suddenly turn into an equal degree of hate, it would be terrific."

Angling through Doylestown, I saw lights behind several second-floor windows in the court house. I parked and we climbed the broad, black stairs. Airplane spotters were on duty in the clock tower. In the Selective Service office, directly below it, Carl Polk sat at his desk, poring over several cards taken from his files.

"These are Oliver Dockery's, including his occupational questionnaire," Carl said after greeting us. "I've also picked up information about him from other sources. I can see now that his situation was a suspicious one, Jock."

"Of course it was," Christine agreed brightly. "When he quit his job as a New York postman he had years to go before he'd begin getting his pension. His salary wasn't high, so he hadn't been able to save much if anything, but he bought a farm out here soon after Blaine was sent to Sing Sing. He lived an idle, comfortable, puttering-around kind of life, exactly the kind he liked best, and did it without earning a cent. Strange, isn't it, that such a patriotic, helpful, neighborly man could also be a blackmailer?"

Carl regarded her with awe. "How in the world did you learn that!"

"My husband has a very fine crystal ball, into which he sometimes lets me peek," Christine answered with a straight face. "I've also seen visions of Oliver Dockery working down at the Milliard Airplane plant recently. He was doing his bit doubly—helping to build bombers and putting all his wages into War Bonds."

"The facts exactly, and the inference is inescapable," Carl nodded. "His being a blackmailer accounts for the careful tone of the two anonymous letters he wrote me."

"Oliver Dockery was probably the best-hearted blackmailer who ever lived," I said. "His conscience troubled him, so he went out of his way to be helpful to Blaine in small ways. As best he could, he tried to make up for having failed to appear in Blaine's defense at the trial."

"But in order to clear Blaine at this late date," Carl pointed out, "he'd have had to confess his blackmailing."

"He'd made himself ready and willing to do exactly that, even if it meant he'd suffer for it. He hadn't been able to get into our armed services, but by sacrificing himself to the law he could send Blaine in his place."

"Was he killed, Jock, by someone anxious to avoid paying the same penalty Blaine paid for arson?"

"Behind Oliver Dockery's death lies something more important than a possible five-year stretch in the clink. And it wasn't simply Dockery's determination to get Blaine into the Army. Strangely enough, I think the murderer may also be helping us to open the way for Blaine."

"How do you mean, Jock?"

"Dwight's initialled cigarette lighter left in Dockery's burning house. If Dwight had started that blaze, he wouldn't conceivably have been so careless as to leave such pointed evidence behind. It was planted. The house was set afire this evening in almost exactly the same way the store was set afire six years ago, and it points *away* from Blaine."

Carl rubbed his high, sunbrowned forehead. "A murderer cooperating with us! I'm too dizzy to understand that. Let's call it a day."

We went down. Carl asked me to keep in close touch with him and said good night. With Christine I drove around to the county jail.

Tom Pettie glumly admitted us to the laboratory. Organized on a volunteer basis, with private donations, it was surprisingly well equipped. All the rifles collected by the county detective lay on a bench alongside a number of grooved slugs, also tagged. The pungency of burned gunpowder still hung in the air. Tom pursed his lips over the specimens.

"None of those rifles is the one, of course," I said.

" 'Of course?' " Tom snapped. "What makes you so sure?"

"The rifle used to kill Oliver Dockery was used again tonight to shoot Janet Bronson."

Listening to the rest of it, Tom bristled because he hadn't been notified at once.

"I've got to find that rifle, Jock," he declared before I'd half finished. "Come on."

With less deliberation than usual he went out to his car. He sent it rattling over the road to the Trent place while we stuck close behind. Dwight was alone in the living room, nervously moving about, a peculiarly hard look on his drawn face. Fern had evidently wanted him to leave her alone.

"Ask Blaine and Miggy to come down, Christine," I suggested. "Meanwhile please keep an eye on Janet."

Christine hurried up and after a moment Blaine appeared, Miggy looming behind him. His anxiety for Janet wore on him, and the county detective's presence didn't help.

"Mr. Trent," Tom said sternly, "there's another rifle somewhere, and I want it."

"You took all of them," Blaine answered. "There's no other rifle in this place."

Then Miggy gasped. Halted, her eyes rounded with a sudden recollection, she put one hand over her open mouth.

"There *is* another one!" she exclaimed. "I forgot!"

Looking ill, Blaine said, "Yes, there's another after all. Miggy has it."

"The one I was going to give to Mr. Dockery," Miggy explained. "Blaine made it for me and I was keeping it until Mr. Dockery's birthday."

"Where is it, Miggy?" I inquired.

"I put it on the top shelf in my closet. I —I'll show you."

TOM and I trailed her as she bounced flatfootedly across the yard. She occupied a room in the near corner of the guest house. Wedging herself into a small closet, she reached to the shelf, then backed out contritely clasping her fat hands together.

"It isn't there!"

"Who knew you'd gotten that rifle to give to Oliver Dockery?" Tom asked.

"Everybody. It was made in Blaine's shop. The whole family sort of laughed about it—made jokes about me and Mr. Dockery. Everybody knew, except poor Mr. Dockery himself."

"Then anyone could have slipped in here and taken it," I said. "What kind of rifle, Miggy?"

"A nice one. It came apart in two pieces and had a nice canvas case."

"You go back to the house and wait, Miss Miggs," Tom suggested, "while Mr. Quirke and I sort of look around."

Miggy reluctantly complied. Tom and I stood outside the guest house, judging the probable movements of the unknown person who had stolen the rifle from her closet.

"Oliver Dockery was to receive it as a gift, and instead he received a bullet in the

head from it," I said. "After he was killed the rifle wasn't put back, but hidden somewhere else close at hand; then it was used again tonight on Janet."

"According to what you tell me, Jock," Tom reflected, "it ought to be somewhere near this place. Whoever shot Miss Bronson, he didn't have much time to hide it again afterward."

Gazing toward the deserted house nearest the highway, I saw that the Rumseys' stone barn stood directly in line. We went across the field toward it—a rearing structure used chiefly as a garage. The house was dark except for a bedroom upstairs. Sidling into the stalls for their two cars, we took care to avoid attracting attention. Tom's light probed methodically.

"Here it is, Jock."

The rifle leaned in a corner, concealed by a pair of paint-spotted overalls hanging from a wooden peg.

"But where's the carrying case?" I wondered.

Taking up the rifle, Tom tramped directly to the Rumseys' kitchen door. His knuckles banged until Gretta appeared, still dressed, wan-faced and seeming years older. Thatcher also came, drifting dazedly into the kitchen.

"Can you explain how this rifle came to be in your garage, Mr. Rumsey?" Tom asked.

"No, but why should you believe me?" Thatcher retorted dispiritedly. "Nobody believes a word I say."

"Gretta," I said, "you're speaking out and not pulling your punches. How much blackmail did you or Thatcher, or both of you, pay to Oliver Dockery?"

"Blackmail?" Gretta answered with a bite. "We couldn't afford to pay anyone any amount."

She closed the door in our faces and snapped out the kitchen light. I left the stoop with Tom, moving back toward the Trents'.

"But where's the carrying case?" I wondered again. "If we can find it, it will help to trace the murderer's movements."

I led him toward the Trents' barn, a frame one painted red and decorated with hex symbols, which also served as a garage. Three cars sat inside it: Blaine's, Fern's and the one Dwight used for showing properties to prospective buyers. After a minute's search we found the carrying case. It had been thrown into the space behind an oil drum.

"Now do you know how the murderer moved around, Jock?"

"I think I do. First the rifle was taken from Miggy's closet by one of the persons who knew it was there, which includes everybody. After Oliver Dockery was shot it was hidden behind his oil drum, with its case, in order to avoid the risk that someone might come back at any minute and catch the murderer in the act of returning it to the guest house. Tonight it was taken again, hurriedly, the case left here. Instead of being brought back after Janet was shot, it was next hidden in the Rumsey garage. All that means a lot."

"If you say so," Tom grumbled.

Miggy was waiting alone in the living room. Dwight was upstairs somewhere, and Blaine was just coming down, having taken another anxious look at Janet. Still holding the weapon of murder, Tom politely removed his stained straw hat, uncertain as to where to resume his questions.

"Intending to make Oliver Dockery a present of this gun, as you did, Miss Miggs, you must have known him pretty well."

Miggy's full-moon face turned pink. "He was a good neighbor."

"Was it from you he found out Blaine was 4-F?"

"Yes, it was."

"Did he tell you he was going to write those letters to Carl Polk?"

Miggy stiffened a little. "What letters?"

"We can be sure, Tom," I said, "that Oliver Dockery warned the guilty party of his intentions before he wrote them. Very probably he wrote them because the culprit refused to come clean and voluntarily clear Blaine."

Tom mused over this, then asked abruptly, "Now, Miss Miggs, you didn't really take that cigarette lighter over to Mr. Dockery's days ago, to have him fix it, did you? . . . Did you?"

Miggy pressed her lips together and stirred like a sitting hen determined to stay put.

"Tom regrets having to ask you such questions, Miggy," I said, "but he can't let his sympathies interfere with his duty. I don't like detecting either, because it sometimes forces me to crack down on people I

like. You have sympathies too, but you wouldn't let them stand in the way of clearing Blaine's name, and getting him into the Army, would you?"

Miggy stirred again. I recalled that she'd lavished her care on the two Trent boys ever since they were toddlers. Following their mother's death, she would have married John Trent if ever he had asked her; but he'd been too closely wedded to his guns and milling machines to think of it. Her emotional attachment to Dwight and Blaine went deep.

"I mean, Miggy, you've always considered Blaine capable of looking out for himself, but Dwight needed mothering. Going back to the time of John Trent's death, you were really reluctant to find the new will, weren't you—because it would cost Dwight so much?"

"John was too hard on Dwight," Miggy stated.

"You put off searching for it until after the services, and then it was too late. Tell me, Miggy. On the night before the fire in the store, did Dwight make any telephone calls?"

"He called home, naturally, to see how Fern was feeling. She was all alone here."

"Did he mention the will?"

"I think he said we hadn't found it yet."

"You actually hoped it would never be found, didn't you? Dwight has never cared much about money; he left his finances to Fern; but I think you've always been keenly conscious of its value. I say that because you've apparently spent very little on yourself. Or possibly it's because you have had very little left to spend after paying Oliver Dockery's demands."

Miggy glared at me. "What demands?"

"I'm very unwilling to think, Miggy, that your profound solicitude for someone else may have led you to silence Oliver Dockery."

Miggy's reaction caught me by surprise. She began quietly to cry. Big tears tumbled down her plump cheeks and she bowed her head.

"You don't understand at all, Mr. Quirke. Mr. Dockery had—had asked me to become his wife—and I'd said I would."

After that Tom and I could think of nothing more to say. Miggy rose and we watched her plod, still sobbing, in the direction of her lonely room. I felt like a louse. Tom Pettie, taking the rifle which Miggy had intended to present to her future husband, solemnly went away.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lethally Yours

DWIGHT bounded down the stairs. He was breathless, wide-eyed. He stopped, staring at Blaine and me fearfully.

"Fern's not in her room! I just looked in, to see if she was resting, and she's not there. She's not anywhere!"

He strode toward the outer door. Reaching it first, I stopped him.

"She's all right, Dwight. Nobody's going to hurt her. You'd do better to look out for yourself."

"But she's gone!" Dwight blurted. "Where? Why?" His dark eyes grew sharp. "Look out for myself? What do you mean by that?"

"I don't like saying this, but you need your wits about you. You're going to have to take it on the chin."

Some of the pressure went out of Dwight. I steered him back to a chair. Blaine watched us uneasily.

"Just what are you warning Dwight against, Jock?" Blaine asked.

"A terrific jolt. Or perhaps it won't be so terrific. Dwight has suspected part of it all along. Anyway, this is it—the answer."

Dwight faced me from the chair, his hands tight on its arms.

"An answer made inescapable by the circumstances," I went on. "The fire in the New York store six years ago, and the fire in Oliver Dockery's house tonight, were both set by the same hand and for almost the same reason. Blaine swears you couldn't have started the first fire and, as for the second, you wouldn't have planted your cigarette lighter as evidence against yourself—so you're eliminated. Neither could Miggy have started the first, nor would she have deliberately incriminated you in the second—so she's also out. Both Blaine and Janet are impossible as suspects. Scratch off both the Rumseys. Gretta's been telling the brutal truth; she says they've paid no blackmail to anyone. Only one person is left, Dwight."

Dwight sat defiantly stiff.

"At times during the past six years you've suspected it, against your will. Because of your key. You'd left it in your dresser drawer—the only key the arsonist could have used."

Blaine intently watched Dwight.

"You went into New York the day before the cremation, Dwight, leaving Fern here. Phoning her that night, you told her your father's new will hadn't yet been found. If the will should remain missing it would mean about one hundred thousand dollars to you. To a young woman as socially ambitious and extravagant as Fern the acquisition of so much money was desperately important. Next morning, even though ill, she drove her own car into New York and arrived at the Madison Avenue store when she knew all the rest of you would be at your father's services."

Dwight kept shaking his head, without speaking.

"Using your key, she searched the apartment for the will, intending to destroy it. When Thatcher came in she hid in a closet until he went out again. Time grew short. You and the others would soon return. She was forced to resort to a drastic means of destroying the will even though she hadn't found it. She scattered excelsior around the rear room of the store, sprinkled polish and oil over it, touched it off, then ran out—and Oliver Dockery saw her."

Still as a statue, Blaine listened.

"Oliver Dockery, the weary little man whose feet ached, who longed for a little place in the country where he could putter around to his heart's content, was probably dropping mail into the slot when Fern fled. Perhaps he thought little of it at the moment, but before many minutes had passed he was thinking a great deal. The store was burning. Engines came screaming up. A crowd collected. Somewhere in that crowd was Fern, making sure the will would go up in smoke. Fire-setters always watch the result of their work. Oliver Dockery found her. He may not have accosted her then. He may simply have kept an eye on her until she returned to her car, which she'd probably run no farther away than the next block. Through her license plates he could reach her—and he did."

Dwight mumbled, "You can't prove any of this, Jock, you know you can't."

"Fern handled the money here. Spending so much for entertainment, she could easily hold out enough to meet Dockery's demands, particularly after the estate was settled. Did you turn part of your share over to her? Your face tells me you did. So Dockery acquired his little farm. Frequently, ever since, Fern has driven past his place to leave an envelope containing money in his mailbox."

"It's impossible—" Dwight began, and stopped.

"Eventually Oliver Dockery's attitude changed. This country went to war; his patriotism hit a high pitch. His wages from the airplane plant made Fern's payments unnecessary to him, except to buy more War Bonds with. He grew to desire very much to right the wrong he'd done Blaine, which at the same time would help him to get Blaine into the Army, where Dockery himself couldn't go. He tried to persuade Fern to confess, not knowing how much she had at stake. When she refused he warned her he intended to talk, regardless of the possible consequences to himself. He didn't dream that one possible consequence was that he'd become a victim of murder."

"Good lord, Jock!" Blaine said. "You can't say all this without being perfectly certain of it!"

"Nothing else is even probable. Dockery probably told Fern he'd already mailed one letter to Carl Polk and had another ready to mail. She had to stop him. She knew he went to the skeet club every Sunday afternoon. She stayed alone in this house, on the plea that she wasn't feeling well—repeating her opportunity of six years ago. Taking the rifle from Miggy's closet, she drove into the woods flanking the skeet club, on Mike Courtney's place. Unseen and unheard, she fired the shot that killed Oliver Dockery, then drove back, stopping at his home to contrive a fire in very much the same way she'd done it six years ago, except that this one was a delayed-action affair."

"It's impossible to think—" Dwight pushed the words out—"impossible to think Fern would kill that old man simply because he'd decided to speak up for Blaine's sake."

"It is; but it wasn't merely that. This part is going to be even harder on you, Dwight. You've suspected all I've told you so far—suspected it vaguely, as much

as your love for Fern would let you—but you haven't had an inkling of what's coming next. Fern not only planned to protect herself, and to save all she hoped to gain, but also . . . Your cigarette lighter, Dwight, kicking around in your drawer, like the key. She took it, planted it. Later she said, concerning the New York fire, 'Thatcher convinced me *he* didn't do it'—indirectly but deliberately pointing suspicion at you.

"Are you trying to tell me that Fern has been trying to get rid of me?"

This was the toughest part of all. "Go upstairs to Fern's room, Dwight. Somewhere, probably in her closet, you may find a man's dark coat. Bring it down."

DWIGHT rose, almost too dazed to move. As he dragged himself up the stairs I took up the telephone. The number I dialed was Mike Courtney's.

"Jock Quirke calling. I'm at the Trent place, Mike. Come right over, will you?"

Dwight was slowly descending the stairs. He had the coat. It was badly wrinkled.

Taking it, I uncovered the black-and-white silk label sewn inside the collar. It read, "Burroughs-Wilshire, Los Angeles."

"Thatcher never met Fern. It was Mike Courtney."

A bitter light began to glimmer in Dwight's eyes.

"You remember Mike's announcing he'd just been sued for divorce. Mike and Fern met again tonight. The rain was chilly, so he put his coat on her.

"Mike had signalled with his headlights. Fern stole from her room and out the back way to meet him. Janet heard her and followed.

"From the beginning Fern had realized that she couldn't divorce you or walk out on you—that above all she couldn't allow you to learn you were losing her to Mike—because of your dormant suspicions of her in connection with the New York fire. She didn't dare risk the possibility that you might grow to hate her, particularly now that she'd killed Oliver Dockery. Then suddenly she found Janet also holding the power to ruin them.

"Janet came back by way of the road. Mike left hurriedly in his car while Fern came in this direction by the shorter way, running across the field. Just as she had had to stop Oliver Dockery, she had to stop Janet now. Janet carried a flashlight that made her a rather clear target. Fern fired and Janet fell. Marrying Mike Courtney was that important."

"Marrying—Mike?"

"We came outside and Fern had to retreat. She got rid of the rifle in the Rumseys' garage, then was forced by our nearness to take cover in the empty house. But for Gretta she might have escaped being seen there. And then suddenly Gretta appeared; but Gretta's mention of Thatcher, instead of Mike, was such a stunning re-

lief that Fern fainted. Afterward she shrewdly played up the false angle Gretta had given her. Thereby she was able to continue to delude you and at the same time turn suspicion on you again. I can't help repeating it, Dwight. Fern's was a double purpose: first to get rid of you by subtly pinning her own crimes on you while appearing to defend you; second, to make Mike your successor."

"Fern?" Dwight whispered it again: "Marry Mike?"

"Your income is down for the duration, but Mike's is skyhigh. He's charming, handsome, famous. His life is Fern's idea of paradise—the glamour of the theatre, swarms of celebrated actors, actresses, directors, producers—and especially the super-glamour of Hollywood. She has always plugged herself toward the upper brackets, and she was within grabbing distance of a superlatively extravagant dream-come-true when suddenly it was threatened—first by Oliver Dockery, then by Janet. She was utterly desperate to gain everything she almost had; and the great danger she faced was simply the fact that Mike Courtney never could, even if he would, make an arsonist-murderess his wife."

Dwight pushed himself up. "If it's true, I'll not defend her. But I don't believe it. No one will ever believe this of Fern. You'll never be able to prove it. . . Why has she gone? Where is she?" And he started again for the door.

"Don't go out there." I caught his arm again. "Fern isn't aware you've learned all this. She still thinks that Janet is the only one who knows about her and Mike. Fern wants us to be worried by her absence. She wants us to search for her, to leave Janet alone and unconscious in this house—"

Head lifted in alarm, I drew a deep breath. Dwight's nostrils caught the same pungency that had crept into the air.

"Smoke!"

HE STOOD numbly still. Blaine and I turned quickly to the stairs. Fog floated at the top of the flight. We ran up, swung into the hallway and saw the smoke seeping and curling through the crack under the door of Blaine's room.

The door resisted us. It was bolted on the inside. I banged my fists against it.

"Christine!"

Janet lay inside that room, still unconscious, and Christine was with her.

"Christine!"

The only sound beyond the door was the crackling and the dull, growing growl of flames.

Dwight's strained voice was audible below. He was calling the volunteer fire department from Danville.

Blaine hurried into Fern's room, directly across the hall, then back with a chair. He crashed it against the bolted door. It was a light chair; at the first blow it began to crack apart.

I turned to a window at the end of the hallway and raised the sash. The roof of the porch sloped directly below. Crawling out, I moved along the wall, my leather soles slipping on the shingles, toward the next window. It was open a few inches. Orange-red light flickered through it. The curtains were burning.

Slamming the sash up, I could scarcely see inside. Thick, swirling gray clouds filled the whole room. At the foot of the bed a throw-rug blazed. Fern had probably doused it with rubbing alcohol brought from the adjoining bath. No one but Fern could possibly have started this third fire. It would flood through the whole house unless the firemen arrived within a very few minutes. The floors and beams were pine that had seasoned for a hundred and fifty years. With all that, the flames were the least of the danger so far. Smoke—the fumes of smouldering wood and wool—could be as toxic as poison gas.

Groping to the door, I freed the bolt and Blaine thrust in. Janet lay on the bed as if asleep, completely unaware of the fire snapping around her. Christine huddled on the floor near the bedside table, knocked out. A brass candlestick had been dropped at her feet. She'd been struck on the head from behind.

Blaine had Janet in his arms. Carrying Christine, I tottered after him. The smoke in the hall was thicker now. Acid tears blinded us. Dwight guided us out the entrance. We could breathe the air outside.

Hugging Janet, Blaine strode straight for the guest house. Miggy ran toward us, switched about and followed us in. Christine began to squirm as I put her on a bed.

Blaine and Miggy stayed there while I

hurried back. The upstairs bedroom was bursting with glaring light, but the fire was still confined within it. Dwight stood helpless, staring up at the windows, until I began circling the house; then he stumbled after me. At the end of the porch, near the kitchen, I found the stepladder.

Because we hadn't at once come out to search for her, and because she feared Janet might recover consciousness at any moment, Fern had climbed to the porch roof and had prowled into the bedroom through a window behind unsuspecting Christine's back. Looking around, I remembered myself saying, "Fire-setters always watch the result of their work."

Dwight followed me again, across the yard, then across the field toward the Rumseys'. Thatcher and Gretta ran out as we passed, not seeing us. The empty house beyond sat silent and dark. I went to the open window with Dwight.

"Come out, Fern."

A strained little wail answered. The front door banged open. Fern's running footfalls crossed the yard toward the road. We had no flashlights, but we could see her against the shine of a pair of headlights speeding closer. The car rushed, heading past the gate, but Fern, in her frantic attempt to elude us, didn't see it until too late.

Suddenly she became something almost shapeless, tossed with horrible looseness back through the air.

The car's brakes cried. Mike Courtney ducked from it. Dwight lifted Fern from the ditch. She wasn't dead; she whimpered with pain. Dwight carried her into the house, and as I lighted the candle he lowered her to the couch. Mike stood dazed outside the door.

"Get into the Rumseys' place and call Bill Westrick," I said. "Then you can go back home."

Dwight sat beside the couch, wretchedly watching over Fern.

Its bell bonging, the fire engine snorted into the Trent driveway. When I reached it the volunteers were already unreeling hose and swarming into the house. Inside the guest cottage Blaine was making sure that Janet hadn't been injured further. Miggy fussed over Christine while Christine sputtered protests that she was perfectly fine except for a terrible headache.

"Jock! Blaine told me. After six years you cracked it in one night!"

"Get back under those blankets! You're a patient being treated for shock."

Loud, startling reports began echoing from the house. Firemen with axes scattered in all directions, though those with the hose kept their streams playing into the broken windows above, with a fair promise of saving the place. The repeated banging noises meant that the flames had reached a cabinet where Blaine stored his shotgun shells.

SHOTGUNS blasted again at the Twin Glen Skeet Club. Another Sabbath was being shattered to smithereens, along with innumerable clay targets. And it was another nervous ordeal. Christine, in spectacular form, had marched up to Station Seven for a crack at her last doubles.

She had me gasping with suspense. So far she hadn't missed a single bird. Everybody else had let at least one bird fall intact, but not Christine. She'd smacked them all; and now, at Station Seven, she unerringly pasted her twenty-third and twenty-fourth.

After that, of course, there was only one move she could make. Despite a mental hazard acquired that Sunday weeks ago, she crossed the range to Station Eight.

She stood there with her gun resolutely poised as I saw a car stopping nearby. Janet, all aglow, hurried up with Carl Polk and Blaine. Carl wore a broad smile of gratification, and Blaine looked trim in his uniform. It was the first time I'd seen him since the commission appointed by the Governor of New York had granted him a full pardon. On that same day he'd enlisted.

"Watch Christine!" I gulped.

"Pull!" Christine cried.

The target flew out of the high trap tower at a speed of sixty miles an hour. Christine banged at it within half a second, before it had skimmed thirty feet. She didn't merely crack it apart with a near-miss. She plastered it so squarely that it instantly disintegrated into a little puff of vapor.

Christine strutted jubilantly off the range, scarcely hearing the applause.

"O joyous day!" I said. "Twenty-Fiver Quirke, shake hands with Lieutenant Blaine Trent of Ordnance."

STRANGE TRAILS —

The CASE OF THE TELLTALE FACE

THE THIRD IN A SERIES OF BAFFLING TRAIN WRECKS OCCURRED WHEN AN EXPLOSION DESTROYED THE BIATORBAGY VIADUCT, NEAR BUDAPEST, HURLED THE VIENNA EXPRESS INTO A RAVINE 80 FEET BELOW AND KILLED 29 PASSENGERS.

INDICATIONS THAT ECROSITE BOMBS HAD BEEN USED WAS THE ONE CLUE LINKING THIS DISASTER WITH PRECEDING ONES AT JUETERBOG AND ANSBACH, IN GERMANY. DETECTIVES AT ONCE BEGAN THE TREMENDOUS TASK OF CHECKING ALL PURCHASES OF THIS EXPLOSIVE.

BUDAPEST POLICE, QUESTIONING TRAINMEN, WERE STRUCK BY THE ODD REPORT OF A PASSENGER WHO SEEMED UNINJURED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ACCIDENT, BUT LATER WAS SEEN TO HAVE A GASHED FACE.

WHEN BERLIN REPORTED ON A MAN WHO HAD BOUGHT 15 LBS. OF ECROSITE & WAS SUSPECTED AS THE WRECKER OF GERMAN TRAINS, BUDAPEST DETECTIVES NOTICED HIS DESCRIPTION FITTED THEIR MAN WITH THE FACE INJURIES.

A MONTH LATER, ON A TIP, VIENNA POLICE PICKED UP SILVESTER MATUSKA WHO HAD BOASTED TO FRIENDS HIS FACE WAS CUT AT BIATORBAGY.

... to MURDER

By LEE AND BEN NELSON

HE TRIED DESPERATELY TO EXPLAIN AWAY HIS PURCHASE OF THE UNUSUAL EXPLOSIVE BY CLAIMING HE HAD USED IT TO DESTROY AN OLD CHIMNEY, BUT POLICE FOUND THE CHIMNEY INTACT. THEN HE SAID THE EXPLOSIVE WAS BOUGHT FOR A FRIEND. THE FRIEND COULDN'T BE LOCATED. WHEN HIS CLAIM THAT IT HAD BEEN DUMPED IN A BROOK WAS DISPROVED BY DRAINING THE STREAM. HE CONFESSED.

IN COURT MATUSKA ADMITTED THE CUTS WERE SELF-INFLICTED AND AMAZED LISTENERS WITH AN INCREDIBLE, DETAILED ACCOUNT OF HOW HE HAD GLOATED OVER THE AGONY OF HIS VICTIMS.

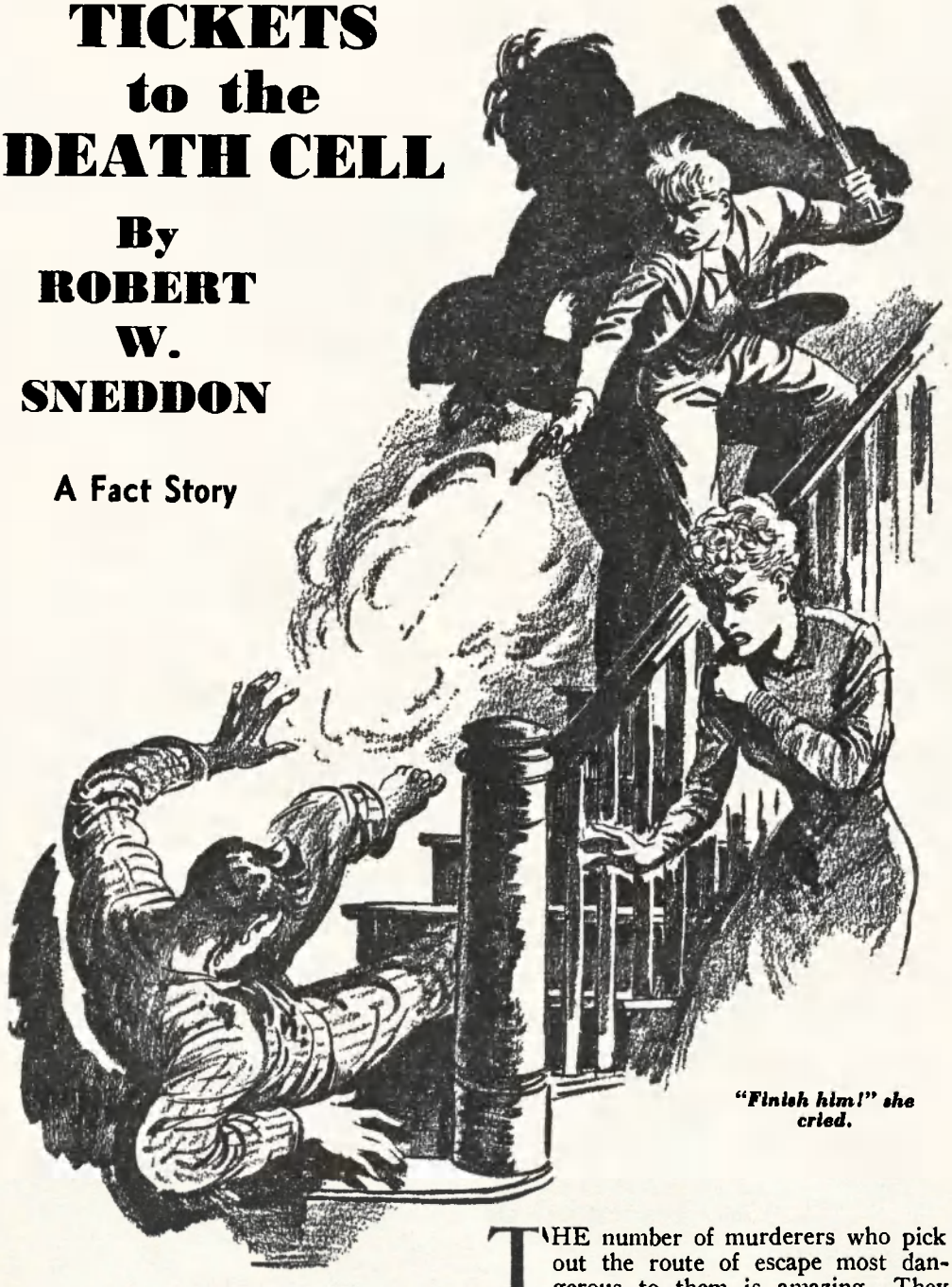
HE MAINTAINED HE WRECKED TRAINS AS THE RESULT OF AN HYPNOTIC SPELL CAST OVER HIM BY LEO SCHLESSINGER, A PROFESSIONAL MAGICIAN & HYPNOTIST. SCHLESSINGER HAD BEEN DEAD 3 YEARS.

ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING MURDERERS ON RECORD. HE WAS FOUND SANE AND SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

TICKETS to the DEATH CELL

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

A Fact Story



"Finish him!" she cried.

Strange travelers on the Murder Express—whose destination is the Death Cell!

THE number of murderers who pick out the route of escape most dangerous to them is amazing. They have heard over and over again what happens to those who label and ship their victims. Yet in spite of these warning examples, scores of criminals, with a dead body to dispose of, can conceive of no more brilliant plan than to pack it in a trunk or

suit case. Then, having shipped it to some fictitious consignee or dumped it in a ditch, they heave a sigh of relief and flatter themselves they need never give the matter another thought.

Others, perhaps distrustful of expressmen, labels, tickets and all that involves witnesses, are content to hide the trunk in cellar or attic; but sooner or later, somehow or other, the trunk with its hideous contents is discovered.

In December of 1915, two workmen who were digging in the cellar of a building in Kensington Avenue, Philadelphia, preparatory to laying a cement floor, came on a packing case buried in the earth near the furnace. They pried it open to find inside a decayed trunk and, within the trunk, the mouldering remains of a dead man.

The police were called to the building and the trunk removed to the morgue where its contents were examined. Packed in lime and scraps of leather, the body was practically a skeleton. The shoes were good, the clothes rotted to shreds. The face had become a grinning skull, but the teeth were intact. Death had occurred at least a year and a half or two years earlier. A .32 calibre bullet rested in the base of the skull, where it had penetrated the brain.

The teeth and a tailor's label on what had been the man's coat, made identification possible. Shown photographs, a dentist recognized the teeth as belonging to one of his clients, Dan McNichol, aged 30, a former Notre Dame football star and partner in a leather business, who had been missing since March, 1914.

McNichol's wife had reported his absence and the police had investigated, only to withdraw when a cousin, James, reported that the family had had word of the missing man and his whereabouts through a friend. The "friend" and informant was Edward Keller, once McNichol's partner in a leather factory.

Keller's story, told at the time, was that he saw McNichols in New York a few days after his disappearance. Again, in October, he told Mrs. McNichol, he met Dan in Philadelphia, looking like a bum, down and out. McNichol, he said, had asked him to go to Dan's wife and mother for the clothes and money Dan wanted; he was coming home soon. The grieved women gave Keller ten dollars and packed the clothes which they thought he was to pass on to Dan. Later he reported that Dan had thanked him, had taken the money and clothes and then left him, refusing to tell where he was living. McNichol's family waited patiently, but the missing man never showed up at his home as promised. In fact, nothing further had been heard of him.

When the police added this account to the information that the laundry in the building, where the body was found, had at one time been operated by Keller and another man, they developed a desire to interview Keller. Brought to headquarters for questioning, he soon showed himself in such a light that police suspicion became certainty. He was an odd looking man. One side of his face looked easy going, mild; the other belonged to a cruel, malicious and ruthless desperado.

But Keller stuck to his story of a wandering, disappearing McNichol. He had no idea what had become of his friend. He had had no quarrel with him. He knew nothing about the trunk or anything else connected with the crime.

Then, McNichol's cousin, James, testified that there was trouble between Dan and Keller when they were partners. Keller had had a trick of endorsing firm checks to himself.

Keller's partner in the laundry business recalled coming upon Keller in the cellar. On that occasion, Keller had acted like a madman, yelling and ordering him to get out and mind his own business. This had occurred at about the time of the crime.

A motive for the murder came to light. It was almost certain that, payment of a mortgage having just been made him, McNichol was carrying a considerable sum of money on his person at the time of his death.

The packing case was traced to Keller. A storekeeper swore he sold the trunk to Keller and a young man identified as his nephew. This nephew had disappeared not long after McNichol's murder and could not be traced. The police did not doubt that uncle was responsible. While they wondered about this probable second murder, they learned that Keller was in reality an ex-convict, Keilblock, who had served fourteen years in Sing Sing for burglary, grand larceny, etc.

Brought to trial, Keller-Keilblock admitted buying the trunk. He acknowledged that his story of meeting McNichol was false. But he had invented it solely to get money from the family. The jury brought in the somewhat amazing verdict of "Guilty of voluntary manslaughter" and Keller was sentenced to twelve years in Eastern State Penitentiary.

The sequel is matter for moralists.

Released in 1924, Keller married an elderly prison worker who had labored to get his pardon. It was an unhappy marriage for Mrs. Keller. The convicted murderer forced his poor wife to keep watch all night while he slept. There was a ghost in the darkness of his bedroom, in any darkness, he said. . . .

Mrs. Keller managed to pull strings to get him a job as night watchman in the Corn Exchange National Bank, Chestnut Street. He was in charge of late deposits and had to ring in every hour. The pre-Christmas deposits were fairly heavy on the night of December 20, 1925, somewhere between ten and twenty thousand dollars.

Keller's old criminal craving was roused by the sight of so much money. He put the cash into a bag, rang in at one A. M. and left the bank. Hailing a taxi, he went to his rooming house. There he transferred the cash to a suitcase and took a taxi to the Lorraine Hotel where he registered under an assumed name. He acted in a nervous excited way, so that the night clerk assumed he had been drinking. But he did not stay long in the hotel. In less than an hour he was out in the street with his suitcase. He stopped a third taxi with the request that he be driven to an address in Germantown, just outside of Philadelphia.

The car stopped and the driver reached his hand behind him to swing open the door. No one came out. The driver got out to look. His passenger lay dead on the floor, crumpled over a suitcase which was open and shedding bills.

The driver was telling his story to the police when a call came through from the Protective Agency. Representatives investigating at the bank to find out why there had been no signal at two A. M. had discovered the watchman missing with the day's deposits.

The connection was made at once and the passenger in the taxi identified.

Death, according to the coroner, was due to "heart failure, aggravated by the knowledge that he had done wrong."

ANOTHER killer who packed a trunk for Murder Express was a woman who coveted her neighbor's house.

Mrs. Mary Farmer lived next door to Mrs. Brennan in Brownsville, a village about five miles from Watertown, New York, and every time she looked from the windows of her own little house her heart burned with bitter envy.

Why should her neighbor be so fortunate? Mrs. Brennan's husband made good wages in the paper mills, while her own Jim had to pick up odd jobs as painter and carpenter. Mrs. Brennan had a fine house free and clear, filled with carpets, rugs, easy chairs, a heating system, a fine kitchen range, nicknacks, pictures. She had a nice yard, and behind the house a profitable orchard.

Why should such good fortune not be bestowed on the Farmers?

Mrs. Farmer thought of the future of her little son. He must have what she never had, what her husband never had, and what he never would have, the way things were going now. And gradually it came to Mrs. Farmer that her neighbor was old and sickly, she would probably die soon. The other idea came more quickly: Before Mrs. Brennan died, her property must be transferred to Jim Farmer. Only Jim, who had no head at all for business, must not know what was going on.

One day in October Mrs. Farmer told Jim he was to go with her to Watertown on business for Mrs. Brennan. First though, Mrs. Farmer went alone to a lawyer who did not know her, introduced herself as Mrs. Brennan and asked him to draw up a transfer of the deed to the Brennan property, making it over to James Farmer. She asked, too, for a bill of sale of the furnishings. She could not find the property deed, she added, but the lawyer could get the description from the copy filed at the court house. The gullible attorney drew up the documents and she signed them as Mrs. Brennan, saying she had received full payment from Farmer. She then brought in her husband, telling him before-

hand that he was to sign a paper for Mrs. Brennan. This he did without question.

An advertisement in tiny print in a state newspaper completed the transaction. Mrs. Brennan's property was now in the name of James Farmer, who had no more knowledge of the fact than had Mrs. Brennan. The months went by, while Mrs. Farmer watched her neighbor closely. Instead of growing worse the ailing woman seemed to take on a new lease of life. Mrs. Farmer looked out of her windows with desperate, hate-filled eyes. Then, early one afternoon in March, Mrs. Brennan came calling with a small gift. . . .

When Mr. Brennan came home from work, Mrs. Farmer stopped him in front of her house. Bluntly, she announced that his wife had gone away to stay with relations. Furthermore, he had better make arrangements to move out, since Mrs. Brennan had sold her house to James Farmer and she, Mrs. Farmer, wanted to move in at once. Stunned and incredulous, Brennan gaped at her. She added, defiantly, that he could go to the county clerk's office, see the papers. They were all legal and in order.

In Watertown Brennan could get no news of his wife. The next morning he hired a lawyer and went with him to look at the transfer and the bill of sale. Mrs. Brennan's supposed signature was a forgery!

Next, two men visited the lawyer who had prepared the deeds. His description of the woman who had instructed him identified Mrs. Farmer. The two lawyers agreed the matter was one for the sheriff.

Accompanied by the sheriff, Brennan went back to Brownsville. It was hardly ten in the morning and the Farmers were already occupying the Brennan house! Immediately the sheriff found witnesses who had seen Mrs. Brennan go into the Farmer house, but none who had watched her come out. Significantly, the only piece of furniture that the Farmers had moved with them was a large trunk.

That night, while the village was sleeping, the sheriff and his aides made their way into the vacated Farmer house. The floors and the woodwork had been newly scraped. Tucked away behind the sink in the kitchen, they found a pile of bloody rags.

Early the next morning, Sheriff Ezra Bellinger called on Mrs. Farmer. He found her knitting, placidly rocking to and fro in what had been Mrs. Brennan's favorite chair. When he charged her with guilty knowledge of the disappearance of the late mistress of the house, Mrs. Farmer told him sharply not to make a fool of himself. If he thought she was hiding anything, he was free to search the house.

"I'll take you at your word, ma'am," said the sheriff.

A few minutes later he called to Mrs. Farmer to come upstairs. She came, reluctantly.

The sheriff was in the attic, standing by a large trunk.

"What you got in this?"

"That?" said Mrs. Farmer. "A passel of old books, clothes and the like. T'aint nothin'."

"Open it."

"I lost the key. Lan'sakes, 'taint nothin' to make a fuss about."

The sheriff called for an axe and split the lid. The trunk gave up its secret. Packed into it was the body of Sarah Brennan. For only six hours did Mary Farmer enjoy possession of the house she had coveted so long. Now she was led away to prison. Her husband, she said, committed the actual killing, and his alibi was worthless. The sheriff, however, proved that Farmer had worked steadily, shingling a house, all the day of the murder.

Confronted with this evidence, Mrs. Farmer confessed that she and she alone had planned and carried through the property deception; that, weary of waiting for Mrs. Brennan to die a natural death, she had killed her, cleaving her skull with an axe. Then, stricken with fear, she could think of no way to rid herself of the accusing body except to pack it into a trunk and clean up the house. When her husband came home she told him a fantastic tale of Mrs. Brennan's departure. Now he must claim the property. They moved out, leaving all their old sticks of furniture. Mrs. Farmer nagged her husband until he lugged the trunk to the other house. The trunk, she told Jim, contained old books and the like, keepsakes.

Mary Farmer came from the death cell only to die in the electric chair in Auburn prison.

THE woman born Emma Head came of well-to-do-parents and had little reason for traveling the Murder Trunk Line. Before she was out of her teens she had rid herself of husband number one in the divorce courts of California. She then married number two, Williams, and went with him to Arizona. She insured him heavily; and immediately afterward he died under suspicious circumstances.

Husband number three was Albert McVicar, whom she met in Arizona and soon left. Without obtaining a divorce, Emma married Eugene Le Doux and set up house with him near Jackson, Amador County, California, where she was born.

About nine months later, McVicar wrote to her to meet him in Stockton, California. He had a job in a mine at Jamestown. He had no idea that Emma had committed bigamy, while she, on the side, had conceived the comfortable notion that McVicar would never bob up again in her life. Something had to be done about this problem of two husbands. She rather liked Le Doux, so it seemed to her that the easiest way to solve it was to remove McVicar to another world.

She told Le Doux some fairy tale of having to visit a sick relative, kissed him good-by, and went to meet McVicar in Stockton. Overjoyed at the prospect of renewed life with Emma, McVicar registered at a hotel as Mr. and Mrs. McVicar.

Next morning, the reunited couple appeared in a furniture store, where they bought a load of furniture, and gave orders that it was to be shipped to Jamestown where they were going to set up house. This was on March 11, 1906.

On the following day, they arrived in San Francisco and put up at the Lexington Hotel. From there, Emma telephoned the Stockton Furniture Company to delay shipment until further notice. McVicar was taken sick that night. The doctor Emma called in treated him for ptomaine poisoning and pulled him around. During a moment when she was alone with the doctor, Emma poured out a sad story that she was a morphine addict, desperately sick with craving for the drug. She put on such a good performance that she wheedled the doctor into giving her a few tablets.

McVicar was well enough to travel on the 15th, and on that date they went to Jamestown where they registered at the California hotel. Emma made a point of telling McVicar's friends that they were making the town their permanent home.

However, McVicar quit his job and drew his back pay a few days later. His wife, he told friends, had persuaded him to take a job as superintendent of his mother-in-law's farm where the pay would be better. On the following day the couple went back to Stockton. There Emma ordered more furniture, telling the salesman to send it with that previously ordered to "my brother-in-law, Eugene Le Doux, Jackson."

In the evening McVicar went out, bought three flasks of brandy, and retired to his room.

Morning came and Emma was up bright and early—to buy a good-sized trunk. She asked the storekeeper to deliver it to her room at the hotel immediately. Next, she put in a call for an expressman to pick up the trunk in time for the one o'clock train. The rope she bought at a hardware store she explained as being "to tie up a trunk filled with dishes." The salesman jokingly told her, "Be careful you don't hang yourself," and she smiled: "Oh, I'll be careful all right."

These little errands completed, she sent a telegram to Joseph Healy, an old flame in San Francisco, asking him to meet her there. She went back to the hotel. The trunk was standing outside her door. She dragged it in, locked the door, and went about the gruesome business of filling it with the remains of her dead husband. Calmly, she roped the trunk, went downstairs and paid her bill. Just as calmly, she told the clerk that an expressman would call for the trunk in her room. She then went off to the station, carrying her own suitcase.

The trunk, put on the baggage car of the San Francisco train, attracted attention as it had no check or identification tag. It was taken off and sent to the baggage room. There, after a day or so, the corpse revealed its presence in the usual way. The police opened the trunk, discovered McVicar, dead of asphyxiation and morphine poisoning. He had been alive, though in a coma, when his murdering wife packed him into the trunk. The baggage clerk recalled having heard a strange thumping noise which he could not identify or place.

A call was sent out for the woman who had shared McVicar's hotel room. One of those who read the newspaper story was Joseph Healy. He told Detective Gibson of San Francisco, "I got a telegram from her and met her. She told me McVicar had died and she was shipping his body to a brother in Colorado. When I read in the paper that the body had been found in a trunk in Stockton, I told her. She acted astonished and said she would go there at once. She bought a ticket for Stockton, I know that."

All stations along the line were notified. A woman answering to Emma's description had got off at Antioch. The constable there found her at a local hotel under the name of Mrs. Jones. She had McVicar's watch and chain in her possession.

She told a neat little story:

At the Stockton Hotel McVicar had run into an old friend named Joe Miller (not he of joke book fame, but one as mythical). They began to drink brandy and Joe put poison in McVicar's glass. Death was instantaneous. She was afraid she would be accused, so she helped Joe put the body in a trunk, and they left together for San Francisco.

But the flaws in Emma's story showed when the doctor, the trunk salesman, hardware clerk and expressman all appeared as witnesses. The motive for the crime was clear. McVicar was about to discover his wife's bigamy.

Brought to trial, Emma was convicted of wilful murder and sentenced to be hanged. An appeal was made to the Supreme Court, a technical flaw found and a new trial ordered. But on the morning of the hearing Emma's nerve broke and she plead guilty. However, her lawyer's plea for leniency was granted. Emma got off with life imprisonment.

THINGS had been going from bad to worse in the household of George B. Nott in Bridgeport, Connecticut. His wife, Ethel, of a tricksome turn of mind, began to think of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" as "Thou shalt kill Nott."

Her husband earned his living as a gambler, but he had a reputation of being square in this frowned-on profession. Nor was he a bad husband. He was faithful to her, he provided a good home, even luxuries. He had bought her an expensive player piano, an instrument much in vogue in 1920. He was a good father to his eleven-year-old boy and eight-year-old girl. Apart from his profession, Nott was a good citizen.

But Ethel, after fourteen years of marriage, had fallen in love with a young married man, Elwood Wade, who had been given a milk route by his father, and in her case was combining pleasure with business. This had been going on for some time when the neighbors told Nott. The husband took the news grimly, warned his wife that he would shoot Wade if he found him in the house, and warned Wade himself. Far from being frightened, Ethel bought Wade a revolver.

This state of suspended antagonism came to a head on Sunday morning, August 29, 1920. Astonished and annoyed neighbors heard the piano player, which had been silent for weeks, going continuously, hour after hour. Interspersed with the sounds of music had come the noise of shots being fired. The circumstances were so suspicious that one of Nott's friends called at the house. Ethel came smiling to the door. Nott's friend demanded: Had anything happened to George? Had he been shot? Ethel denied anything of the sort, but said there had been a quarrel, Nott had struck her, and she had fallen and bruised herself. Nott had then rushed from the house in a fury. She was through with him.

When the friend remarked that he had been watching and had not seen her husband go out, Ethel took him over the house. He noticed a trunk with rounded top in the bedroom. She told him it contained her things, and seeing no sign of Nott, this friend left.

Later in the day another neighbor who was sure he had heard shots in the Nott home, saw a truck with two men on it call there and take away a trunk with a rounded top. Sunday was an odd day for an express truck to call. This neighbor spoke to an official at police headquarters. A detective was sent out to see Mrs. Nott. She repeated the story of the quarrel, said she was leaving Nott, and had already sent off a trunk to her old home in Chelsea, Mass. But the detective, checking on this, found no trunk had been shipped to this place.

Mrs. Nott was brought to headquarters and questioned. She was vague as to the trunk. No, she didn't get any check. She did not know the expressmen. She did not know where her husband was.

Detectives began to check on every truck seen in the neighborhood of the Nott home that Sunday. One acute pair of eyes had seen a Wade truck. "Get Elwood Wade" was the order; and in less than an hour this young man, with his helper, John Edward Johnson, was being questioned by Captain Regan, chief of the detective force. Nothing could be obtained from Wade, but he was held for further questioning.

Johnson, who was only nineteen, proved more talkative when the danger of his situation was pointed out to him. He had helped Wade remove the trunk. They had taken it to the swamp at Easton, a few miles from the city, a place reputed to have quicksands which had once swallowed up a horse and wagon. Johnson had helped Wade heave it into the swamp where it sank.

Told that Johnson had confessed, Wade sought to free himself by saying Ethel had killed her husband. She had telephoned him to help her dispose of the body. That was all he had done.

Mrs. Nott denied everything until the slime of the swamp gave up the trunk with her husband's body in it. Then she confessed. She had admitted Wade and Johnson to the house. They took off their shoes. Johnson carried an axe, Wade, a length of iron pipe and a revolver. Wade crept upstairs. Wade fired at Nott lying in bed and missed. Nott sprang up and grappled with Wade, forcing him out of the room and down the stairs. Wade kept striking Nott on the head with his pipe. Nott's grip on the wrist of the hand which held the revolver loosened. As he fell in a heap, stunned, Wade emptied the revolver into his body.

Wade clicked his revolver. It was empty. He looked down at the writhing figure. All at once a carving knife was thrust into his hand. As Wade stood there, holding the knife, Ethel commanded him fiercely, "Do something, can't you?" Wade bent over the wounded man. Nineteen times his hand rose and fell.

Johnson had fled from the house in horror. Later, however, he came back to assist in the removal of the trunk, which Wade had helped to pack. The two children, who had kept their room, terrified by the shots, were now told to go to the living room and keep the piano going. They had seen nothing of what happened.

Wade was brought to trial in January, 1921. Convicted by the testimony of Johnson, he was hanged. Mrs. Nott and Johnson were tried in May. Johnson was let off with a year's imprisonment. Ethel Nott withdrew her plea of not guilty and changed it to guilty of murder in the second degree. Her brief trip on the Murder Trunk Line ended in a prison cell—for life.

IF MURDER trunks had wings or some method of self-propulsion, fewer murderers would be brought to justice. But unfortunately for those men and women who go in for killing, the trunk containing the body of the victim has to be moved and third parties must be brought in to assist. Taxi drivers, expressmen, those who sell trunks, rope—all turn out to be the agents of final punishment.

In September, 1908, Superintendent Michael H. Crowley of the Boston police force, then only Sergeant Crowley, walked along Hancock Street. A horse cab drew in to the sidewalk and the driver bent down. Crowley knew him as James Collins.

"I don't like to be after troubling you, Sergeant, but a queer and strange thing come my way, what you might be calling mysterious. About an hour ago I was stationed at the Essex Hotel thinking to pick up a flare, when out comes a gentleman. Tall as they make them and taller, well over six feet, three or four inches it might be; and says he, he has a trunk over the way at the South Station and would I go with him to get it? So we drive over and get the trunk and I gives him a hand to set it on top of the cab. Then, says he, 'Drive to the dock for the Boston to New York boat.' But when we gets there, it's to find there is no boat that night. That seems to bother me gentleman. So he says to drive to the South Station again, but before we get there, he stops me and gives me an address in Hancock Street, number seven, and there I leave him and the trunk."

Crowley listened quietly.

"What do you want me to do?" he said.

"Well, now, Sergeant," said Collins, "the gentleman seemed very anxious about the trunk."

"All right. Take me to number seven," said Crowley.

At the lodging house he asked the keeper to take him up to the room just rented by the gentleman with the trunk. The tall stranger identified himself as Chester Jordan, of Somerville, a Boston suburb. He said the trunk contained clothes and that he had lost the key. Now thoroughly suspicious, Crowley searched him and found the key. The Sergeant opened the trunk, ruffled up the clothes on top—and drew back in disgust and horror as he touched cold flesh. Jordan hurled himself toward the window, but fell and Crowley, pouncing on him, handcuffed him.

Within the trunk were the scattered remains of a woman. The body had been carved with sharp implements and a hacksaw. Though the head was missing, the body was identified as that of Jordan's wife, Honora. They had been a theatrical couple, playing small time vaudeville whenever they could get an engagement. Both drank to excess and quarrels were frequent.

During one of these drunken brawls, Mrs. Jordan's talent for name-calling led her too far. Jordan struck her with a flat iron, then strangled her. With a butcher knife he began to saw the body apart. The unspeakable job was too much for him. He left off, went out, and came back to sleep. Next morning he resumed his surgery. He carried the head down to the cellar and thrust it far back into the furnace. Other parts of the body he burned in the kitchen range. What was left he packed in the trunk and covered over with clothes.

He then telephoned an expressman to call, with instructions that the door would be open. The trunk was to be taken to South Station. He then went out, picked up Collins, got the trunk from South Station and set off to the boat. He intended to engage a cabin with a porthole through which he would empty the contents of the trunk into the sea.

Here was a dilemma indeed. Jordan was stuck in Boston with baggage exceedingly difficult to dispose of. He ordered Collins to drive him to number seven in order to have time to think what to do next.

However, Crowley arrived in time to upset any plans.

A jury found this killer guilty of murder in the first degree, and he died in the electric chair of the State Prison in Charlestown.

AFTER Dr. Crippen had disposed of his annoying wife in the cellar of his London home, his secretary, Ethel Le Neve, was seen wearing her furs and jewels. Friends began to comment and finally went to Scotland Yard, an act that resulted finally in the arrest of the pint-sized wife-killer and his guilty companion.

In like manner, friends of an elderly and wealthy widow who had lately become the bride of a much younger man, James Mahoney, began to make remarks. The husband said his wife had gone on a trip to Cuba, a strange thing to do when the honeymoon was barely over. But what was stranger still was that Mahoney openly wore his wife's largest diamond ring on one of his fingers. Mrs. Mahoney's friends had never known her to take off this particular ring, even to wash her hands.

The Seattle Police Department became interested when it was learned that Mahoney was an ex-convict who had served time for a brutal assault. They soon discovered he had the rest of his wife's jewels in his possession and that he was selling property belonging to her. Questioned, he produced a power-of-attorney entitling him to handle all her property, real or personal.

To prove that his wife was in touch with him he showed letters and checks bearing her signature. These documents, examined by an expert, proved to be forgeries. The lawyer who drew up the power-of-attorney was found and he described the woman who had signed it. The description fitted Mahoney's sister, Dolores Johnson.

The police were able to trace Mrs. Mahoney's movements up to April 16th. She was last seen in her apartment on that date. There was not the least evidence, be-

yond the forged letters, that she had ever left the apartment.

On that day, Mahoney had bought rope and lime and, in the evening, had hired an expressman to haul a trunk to a dock on Lake Union. There, Mahoney had placed the trunk in a rowboat, after which he had rowed away out of sight.

Dragging operations brought the trunk and its contents to the surface. Mahoney, the murderer, went from the death cell to the gallows, and the forger sister to a prison sentence.

TWO Englishmen, Lenox Maxwell and Arthur Preller, took a suite in a St. Louis hotel. After a few days during which they painted the town red, Preller apparently paying all the bills, Maxwell paid his bill and departed, saying regretfully that he had to leave his friend and go on his way.

After he left, Preller was not seen about the hotel, though the chambermaid reported that his baggage was still in his room. Hotel authorities concluded that he was having a gay time somewhere else in town. But as days passed, guests began to complain of unpleasant odors, among them a mixture of chloroform. The manager investigated. He traced the odor to the absent guest's room, and then to a metal trunk. The police were called and the trunk opened. Within lay the body of Preller. It bore no sign of violence except a couple of crosses scratched on the chest. Affixed to the chest by four thumb tacks was a roughly lettered sign, "Thus perish all traitors to the cause."

At first sign this looked like a Black Hand killing, but the police soon discredited the idea. The victim was English, not Italian, and little likely to be involved in any secret society business. Furthermore, when the room was searched, some sheets of drawing paper, india ink, and thumb tacks were found in a bureau drawer. The chambermaid remembered that she had seen Maxwell making pen and ink sketches. His beard had caused her to think he might be an artist.

Maxwell had now been gone ten days. No trace of him was found until a San Francisco detective, who had seen a newspaper sketch of the bearded man, reported a guest in a city hotel who answered the description, only he was clean shaven. A canvass of the city barber shops brought to light the fact that this man had arrived in San Francisco with a beard and had since had it shaved off.

Before St. Louis police could act on the tip, the suspect took a ship to New Zealand. A young San Francisco woman brought to headquarters a crayon portrait which Maxwell—now calling himself D'Augier—had done of her. The paper was similar to that pinned to Preller's chest.

The police at Auckland, New Zealand, were notified by cable to hold D'Augier when he landed. Extradited and brought back to this country, he tried to bluff detectives as to his nationality. But his bad French did not fool them, and he was identified by the St. Louis hotel clerk and others as Maxwell.

Maxwell then told a story of leaving Preller at a party while he returned to the hotel alone. Preller had still not come back when he checked out of the hotel. He had no idea what had happened to his friend, but suggested he might have been killed by thugs. He could offer no reasonable explanation as to how such thugs were able to bring the body back to the hotel.

He changed his story when a drug clerk identified him as the purchaser of two doses of chloroform. He then said Preller had been in pain; and that he, being a doctor, had offered to perform a slight operation. But when he came back to the hotel with the chloroform there was no sign of the sick man. Later, he modified this story by saying he had started the operation when he found he had not chloroform enough. He went out for more. When he came back Preller was dead, and in a panic he packed the trunk, and faked the Black Hand sign. Then he fled.

At his trial he said his real name was Brooks. He again changed his story. This time he claimed Preller was alive, that Preller had killed and concealed an unknown man in the trunk, then gone into hiding. Those who identified the body as Preller's had been mistaken.

A jury decided that Brooks alias Maxwell alias D'Augier had too much imagination. The prisoner, they concluded, had lured his wealthy friend to St. Louis, had murdered and robbed him, and deserved to end up in the Terminal known as Death Cell.

THREE DAYS TO HOWL

Three days' leave they gave him, one last fistful of hours— but he didn't know that they had to be used on a one-way trip to Death!

"Get the hell away!"

By

J. F. Hutton

STEVE WARREN dropped his coat on the back of the chair and flopped happily on the hotel bed.

"Three days to howl," he said exultantly, "and Uncle Sam to take care of my hangover!"

The traffic of San Francisco's Market Street clanged up to his window, and the sound of it was sweet. His affairs were in order. He had two hundred dollars in his pocket and the rest of his capital in War Bonds. In three days the Army would take full charge of him. He couldn't help grinning, there by himself.

"Ah, me," he said, "I feel like a kid in a candy store." He mused a moment. "Old-fashioneds, to start with," he decided. "Then I'll ease over to Chinatown."

He stretched mightily, rubbed his rusty-colored hair, and gave a tremendous bounce of sheer exhilaration. It was followed by an odd tinkle, then the sound of something falling to the floor under the bed.

"Hey," Steve said. He leaned over, muttering, and fished on the floor. He brought the object up to view. It was swathed in cloth and apparently it had been tied to the springs, for a frayed piece of cord hung from it.

He unwrapped it, blinked, then rubbed his eyes. The thing had been beautifully machined of some light metal. It was ob-

long, about two by four inches. It was an amazing complex of planes and notches and unexpected slots.

"I'll be damned," Steve said mildly. He'd been an industrial chemist, and a good one, till his draft board decided to shift him out of Class 2B. He'd seen a lot of odd equipment, but never a thing like this.

Well, it was none of his business. He'd leave it at the desk. He got up and slid it into his pocket. He shrugged on his coat, combed his hair, and winked at himself in the mirror. "Off to the party, son," he said. "Your first in two years, and your last in God-knows-when!"

He turned toward the door—

"Hold it, brother."

Steve gaped at the man. How the hell had *he* got in? What was this, a public park?

The gun jerked sideways.

Steve moved over. The newcomer wore a double-breasted suit that was none too clean. He needed a haircut. He had a little sour-looking mouth and eyes that were dark and restless.

"Well," Steve said, "what's—"

"Shut up."

Steve's own eyes began to flicker. He had been working fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, for two years. He had spent most of his time before induction at the plant, getting things ready for his successor. Nobody was going to cheat him out of one more minute of his three days!

"When you moved in here," the man said, "did you find anything? A little shiny, funny-lookin' thingamajig?"

So that was it! Steve's pocket began to feel like it held a machine shop. He shook his head emphatically.

"It's gotta be here!" the man burst out. He glared around the room. "It wasn't in the other one. It's gotta be here!"

With one hand he yanked at the bureau drawer. It came clear out and Steve's ties and handkerchiefs cascaded to the floor. Steve clenched his fists and made an involuntary sound.

"That's right," the man said. "I kinda forgot about you."

Steve saw the gun start to swing and made a desperate lunge, so that it smashed his shoulder instead of his head. He hit the floor rolling, fighting mad. Two years in a lab had made him a little soft, but behind that were other, tougher years. He grabbed the bedside table and felt it splinter under the next swipe of the gun.

Steve didn't realize he was snarling. He hurled the remains of the table into the man's face and jerked to his feet. As he did so, he yanked the metal thing from his pocket and flipped it behind him through the open window. *Now try to find it!* he thought.

Then the man closed in savagely, thudding blows on Steve's guarding arms. Steve grunted with pain and tried to grab the gun, the arm, anything he could get.

A violent knocking at the door startled them both, stopped their struggle. Steve was the first to recover.

"Hey," he bawled, "there's—"

His visitor swore and dived for the door. He charged into the man who had knocked, sending him down like a log, then trampled on over him and sprinted down the hall.

STEVE hurdled the groaning body and pounded in pursuit. He was mad clear through, too worked up to realize he was chasing an armed, desperate man into a corner. Everything about the affair—the attack, the loss of his precious time, the emotional build-up of his going into the Army at last—combined to fill him with a reckless, unreasoning fury.

He followed the racing figure down the service stairs, taking wild chances on the turns. He burst out the back door into a cluttered, dead-end alley. He thought he saw someone dodging out the open end, and galloped that way. But when he got to the corner there was no sign of the man he was after. The few pedestrians blinked at him in surprise.

Scowling, Steve turned and surveyed the alley. Halfway down it, was a panel delivery truck, with the driver at the wheel. He had run right past it.

He hurried back. "Did you see a guy come out of that door?" he panted to the driver. "Running like hell?"

The driver had a broad, stupid-looking face. A grin slowly spread over it. "Buddy, the only guy I seen was you. What was it, butterflies?"

"A crook," Steve said shortly. "He tried to lay me out. He had a gun."

The driver's grin faded away. He leaned his arms on the steering-wheel. "Honest, I

didn't see anybody." Then, gradually, his eyes began to widen. "Say, come to think of it, there was somethin'."

"What?"

The driver licked his thick lips. "Somethin' I felt. Kind of a jar, at the back end."

Steve moved quickly, tip-toeing to the back and reaching for the latch on the doors. Then he pulled back his hand. "Don't be a fool," he told himself. "Now is the time for the law."

The driver had followed him around. Steve turned and motioned him to be quiet, then started to whisper to him to go after the cops. Too late, he heard a slight sound, like the scrape of a metal door. Even as he whirled the back of his head seemed to explode. And as he fell, he carried a fading memory of the sour-faced man's contorted features. . . .

Consciousness must have teased him a while, because when he finally got his eyes open, he had vague recollections of sounds, movement, an odd smell. Then he became aware of the drop-hammer crunching relentlessly against the back of his head.

He fought back pain and nausea and struggled to sit up. He felt his head. There was an impressive swelling and a large cut place; the hair was tufted and sticky.

He remembered the hundred dollars he'd had in his billfold, and went cold. Frantically he grabbed his breast pocket. His money was there, intact.

He slouched against the wall. He had the other hundred in his suitcase, of course. But even the thought of losing half his capital, his spree-money. . . .

Steve Warren, he thought bitterly, you're a prize cluck! Now look at what you've got yourself into!

He found a cigarette. The brief flare of the match gave him a view of the room. It was bare and musty. He was lying against the far wall, on crumpled newspapers and other rubbish. He noticed that odor again. It was pungent, provocative; it tugged at his memory.

Shakily, he got to his feet. The more he moved the stronger he felt. After a bit he groped his way over to the door. He was startled to find it unlocked. He opened it slowly to the light of a dingy hallway. Then he gulped. Two feet from him, sitting in a tipped-back chair, was the sour-faced man.

"Well?" he said.

"Nothing," Steve muttered. "Nothing at all."

The other gave a thin, twisted shadow of a smile.

"Who's boss around here?" Steve asked after a moment.

"Right now, I am." The gun came out and nestled in the strong, dirty hand.

Steve chewed his lip. "Well, what's the deal? What do you want from me?"

For answer the other reached up with his gun and knocked on the wall. Heavy steps came to the door of the next room. The broad-faced driver of the delivery truck came out. He walked up, grinning. "Look who's here!" he said.

"Very funny," Steve said wearily.

The driver said, "Too bad, Matches, we can't show him how funny it really is."

The sour-faced one took a wooden match out of his coat pocket and rasped it across his thumb-nail. He gazed at the flame critically.

"Guys who stick their necks out," the driver said, "are bound to get clipped."

Matches tossed his match to the floor and trod on it. "Let's get goin'."

Steve's stomach tensed. Now what?

"Mister," the driver said, "you're lucky, and don't ever forget it. The boss said take you back. He said you got what was comin' to you and there ain't no reason to keep you."

"Who's the boss?" Steve said. The minute it was out he knew it had been a mistake.

The grins, the bantering manner disappeared. The driver stuck out a huge hand and crushed Steve's biceps. "One more peep, Nosey, and you'll be back where you started."

HE PROPELLED Steve along the hall, his heavy face grim. Matches switched out the light before they opened the door and stepped out into the blackness of night. The air was cold and damp with fog.

The driver shoved Steve against a solid object and growled, "Get in."

Steve recognized the back of the delivery truck. He fumbled for a grip on the bed and scrambled in. Matches followed. The driver swung the doors shut, latched them.

Steve squatted in the utter darkness and

tried to keep his balance as the truck lurched along. They seemed to go a long way, through traffic, up and down San Francisco's plentiful hills. Finally the truck stopped and backed some distance. The driver got out and unlatched the door.

Matches pointed with his gun. "Up that way," he said. "And don't turn around."

Steve did as he was told. Maybe he'd feel differently tomorrow. But right now he was glad to be out of the whole business with only a lump on his head.

The truck leaped away in a whine of gears just as he realized where he was—in the alley behind the hotel. He heard the mutter of traffic around on Market Street. It brought back with a rush his plans for a spree.

Steve shook his head and grinned ruefully. "Well," he thought, "at least I can make up for lost time."

He was glad to enter the back way. The hotel would undoubtedly have plenty of questions to ask and he didn't want to face that till he had a meal and a few drinks under his belt.

He went slowly up the service stairs. His head pounded and his muscles reminded him of the last trip he had made here. He reached the fourth floor and glanced thankfully toward his room.

There was a cop standing guard in front of his door.

Steve backed down, thanking his stars for the runner that muffled his steps. He might have known he'd find something like that. But it was all right. It could all be explained.

Well, couldn't it? His finding the gadget; the way Matches had broken in; the way they tapped him on the head and took him away; the way they brought him back.

He paused. That was a hard one—the way they brought him back. It didn't make sense. Come to think of it, the whole business didn't make sense. And cops kept you down at the station while they got things figured out.

So help me, Steve thought, *they're going to have to wait. My time's running out!*

Damp wisps of fog hung in the alley. Steve moved along, undecided. The light from a doorway gave him a glimpse of his suit. It was brown tweed, made to take a lot of wear. And it looked as if he had been testing it out.

He slapped at it half-heartedly. He'd have to get cleaned up before he did anything, or they'd have him in as a vagrant. Especially with that lump on his head.

From the lighted doorway came a warm, meaty puff; the clink of dishes being washed. Steve's stomach jumped eagerly. He stepped close enough to look in. A short hall opened into a large restaurant kitchen, where a man was busy washing dishes. A few steps down the hall was an open door—an unmistakable door.

Steve didn't hesitate. He slipped past the garbage cans and into the lavatory. There was an inside latch, and he felt like a king.

Luckily, there was a brush hanging by the cracked mirror. He used it with fair results. He had a hard time trying to see the back of his head, and finally cleaned it up by touch. Water subdued his rusty hair somewhat, though it brought out the curliness he disliked. He knew there must be blood on his shirt collar, but all he could do about that was to hitch up his coat.

Finally he felt he was passable. He opened the door and walked into the kitchen as if he owned the place. The man was still washing dishes. Across the room was a cook, who glanced at him and nodded shortly.

Steve nodded back and pushed through the swinging door. It looked to be a fairly swanky place, with an archway into a darkened bar. Steve grinned to himself as he slipped into a booth. He ordered two old-fashioneds and—for a wonder—found New York steak on the menu.

He went through his drinks in a hurry and then blinked happily, a little breathless. He noticed that someone had left an evening paper in the booth across the way, and went over and snagged it. The first thing he saw was his own name. . . .

The steak came; and sent its savory vapors up into his face. Steve didn't even know it was there. He finished the story and folded the paper and tucked it away out of sight. Then he just sat with a shocked look in his eyes.

From the very beginning, "Inventor Found Dead," right on through to the final phrase, "expect an arrest shortly", it pointed a blunt, accusing finger at one "promising young chemist". It wove a net of evidence that he couldn't push through.

Steve Warren had registered that afternoon at the Del Mesa Hotel. He had appeared excited. Shortly thereafter, such a racket came from his room that the house detective rushed up to investigate. The door was flung open and the detective assaulted with such savagery he was still unconscious from a concussion. Steve Warren had thereupon rushed down the back stairs and disappeared.

In the room directly opposite, dead from suffocation, with his bare feet horribly charred, was the inventor, Herbert Arlington. The conclusions were obvious, and the tone of them was ugly. Arlington was supposed to be working on secret stuff. Naval Intelligence was greatly disturbed at his death. The F.B.I. was already in motion.

STEVE wiped sweat off his forehead. He became aware of his steak, and took a desultory poke at it. He tried a French fried potato; it tasted like the grindings from a pencil sharpener. He picked up his water glass and put it down again. Then, abruptly, he reached for his billfold and headed for the bar.

The comfortable dusk enfolded him. From a stool near the end he ordered another old-fashioned. He took out a cigarette and had a match folder half open before he realized what he was doing. He dropped the folder back into his pocket and got his light from an abandoned cigarette on a nearby ashtray.

His hands trembled slightly. This being a fugitive didn't rest easily on him. He needed some quiet minutes to think this thing out. . . .

In a kind of fascination, he felt that small, hard thing bore deeper into his spine, heard the husky, business-like voice whisper: "Quiet! Don't try anything!"

His startled eyes looked at him from the bar mirror, shifted to the figure by his left shoulder. He gaped. Then, though the hard object jabbed him viciously, he turned.

Her eyes were deep blue. Her features were beautifully firm and regular. The little nose had just the right, impudent angle. Her hat was small, and matched her eyes.

Steve tried to stare her down. But he had never faced eyes that were steadier, more serious. A smile tried to find a foothold on his lips, failed. He cleared his throat. "Simmer down. Take that fountain pen away and I'll buy you a drink."

"Walk down to that last empty booth," she said. "I'll take your arm. This isn't a fountain pen; it's a gun."

She waited, grimly, while he downed his drink and picked up his change. Then her left hand slipped under his arm and she brought her other across to rest on it, casually. Her right wrist went through the strap of a large, square handbag, which hid the thing she pressed so tightly against his side.

She watched him slide into the booth, then sat opposite with the handbag in front of her.

"You're Steve Warren."

He met her cold eyes and said nothing. He'd heard about women with guns. He wasn't going to stir this one up.

"I saw you coming into the Del Mesa today. I verified your name on the register."

"All right. I'm Steve Warren."

"A lot of people are looking for you. I was lucky enough to see you first, there in the restaurant."

"Okay," Steve said. "So you found me. Why don't you turn me in, and get it over with?"

Her composure seemed to weaken. She bit her lips, and her eyes clouded with a kind of despair.

A waiter had spotted them, was hovering. "May I?" Steve asked. At her nod he ordered two old-fashioneds. Any more of these on an empty stomach, he thought wryly, and I won't care what happens.

Aloud, he said, "The newspapers make it sound bad. But I've got nothing to hide."

She didn't seem to be listening. She acted like she was trying to figure out what to do next.

The drinks came. Steve said, "Do you

mind telling me exactly who you are?"

"I'm Ruth Denny," she said. "Dr. Arlington's secretary."

Steve stared at her. "No wonder," he said softly. Then he made a sudden decision. "Will you believe me if I tell you what really happened today?"

Her lips tightened. She shook her head.

"I don't blame you. But I'm going to tell you anyway." Quietly, Steve told her his story. His voice was bitter as he finished. "So you found me sitting there making up my mind to turn myself in."

He twirled his glass and gave a mirthless chuckle. "Come to think of it, I'm not sure the police can touch me. I've already been sworn into the Army. Does that make me a prospect for a court-martial?"

Ruth Denny's face had lost its hard lines as he talked. Her expression became one of deep disappointment. She picked at the seam of her handbag and said nothing. Lord, she was pretty!

Steve said, "Well, don't you want to stick that gun into me again and hunt up the nearest cop?"

She rubbed her free hand wearily across her forehead. She opened her purse and put the gun away. "It doesn't matter now. It's too late."

"I don't understand."

"The part you threw out of the window. It's what they were after. It's the core of a new fire control mechanism."

Steve frowned. "If the Navy was interested, why didn't they protect Dr. Arlington?"

"They hadn't approved it yet. He had an awful time to even get an appointment with them. You wouldn't believe how many inventions a war brings out. The Navy can't take every inventor under its wing just because he's designed good peace-time products."

"I get it."

"His appointment was for tomorrow, and he was trying to keep away from *them* till then. You see, we had a man working for us, Holger, who was supposed to be a deaf mute. Well, he wasn't. He passed along everything he learned. And when his boss found out what this new control could do, the trouble started.

"Dr. Arlington was like a lot of inventors, suspicious of everybody. He caught on to Holger, fired him, and finished the work himself. Finally, after he got shot at and nearly kidnapped, I persuaded him to go to the Del Mesa to hide till his appointment. He had this central part, without which the control wouldn't work. There weren't even any plans. I spent three days there in the lobby, just checking up on people who came in. That's how I remembered you. But —" her voice wavered—"I didn't do a good enough job."

"At least they didn't get the part."

"But neither did we! Dr. Arlington was wild over what it could do."

"It must have been good, if they killed him trying to get it." Steve paused. "But wait! Maybe it isn't lost!"

She stared at him. "Thrown out of a fourth-story window onto the busiest street in the city? The first car that came along crushed it. Or some one carried it off."

"That's just it," he argued. "It was too odd to be overlooked. There are lots of ways it could have been noticed and kept."

Ruth shook her head pessimistically.

"Listen," Steve said, "maybe you've forgotten how important that gadget is to me. It's the only thing that would make my story hold water. If I can produce it, and you can identify it—"

She eyed him for a moment. "All right. It's worth a try. Let's go."

"Not me. I'm a marked man. I can't go wandering around by that hotel. I'll wait here. You go look for a news-stand, or a shoeshine. Anything."

She tucked her bag under one well-tailored arm and was gone.

Steve noticed she hadn't finished her drink and absently finished it himself. There was a dreamy look on his face.

The waiter came back. "Can you get me a ham sandwich?" Steve asked.

The man nodded.

"Make it two."

Steve hunched his coat-collar up and rubbed the bump on his head. It was a screwy set-up, all right. And screwed into the middle of it, tight, was himself. Tight.

"That's right," he muttered. "I'm celebrating. Remember?"

WHEN Ruth Denny came back, her face showed she had found something. She slipped into her seat and opened her mouth.

"Hold it," Steve said, full of ham sandwich and good will.

"First, and just for the record, let me say I think you're the prettiest girl I ever saw, and the nicest."

She looked at his plate. "Food," she said. "Food'll do anything to a man."

Steve winked at the plate. "Okay. Now what did you find?"

"A War Bond booth, right below. The girl remembered a funny piece of metal on the sidewalk this afternoon. Somebody picked it up and put it in the scrap container on the corner. "

Steve sat up straight.

"The scrap container was empty."

"Damn!"

"The old fellow who sells newspapers said they collected it about six o'clock. He didn't know who. A big truck."

Steve frowned a moment. Then he rose and went to the public telephone booth against the back wall. In the dusky light he hunted up scrap dealers in the classified section of the directory. He jotted down a name and number and quickly came back to Ruth.

"Here's a nickel. Call Mr. Coates. If he didn't get the contract to collect war scrap, he'll be mad enough about it to tell you who did."

In a few moments Ruth returned from the telephone. "Mr. Coates didn't answer, so I called another one. The lucky man is Mr. Mordecai, and here is his home address. No phone."

Steve beamed. "Now call a cab and we'll go out to see Mr. Mordecai."

Ruth tapped on the table. "And who usually does your errands?"

"The light inside the booth, you dope. Don't forget you're with a hunted man."

When she came back they quickly threaded their way to the front door. Steve winced at the glare of light under the canopy. He ducked to one side as they hurried into the waiting cab.

"Denwall Street," Steve said. "Out in the Mission. Make time, but don't be conspicuous about it."

The driver nodded and pulled away from the curb.

"What did I tell you?" Steve said to Ruth.

She moved a bit closer to him. "I guess I should apologize for sneaking up on you that way tonight. I was ready to do anything."

Steve enclosed her hand in his big one. "I'm glad we got together. I've got a little something to take care of myself."

Mr. Mordecai's house was a bleak, weathered box on a street lined with them. Steve hurried up the steps. He cranked the old-fashioned doorbell steadily till he heard the thump of feet. Touseled and bleary, in a faded bathrobe, Mr. Mordecai opened the door.

"So it's being another blackout?" he said complainingly.

"No," Steve said. "You've got to get dressed and come down to your junkyard with us."

Mordecai's eyes widened. "Fire?"

Steve shook his head. "We want to find a little metal gadget that was picked up on Market Street late this afternoon."

Mordecai gaped. "You're crazy," he said decisively, and started to shut the door.

"If the F.B.I.," Steve said, "asks you why you didn't go down with me, you'll have a hard time answering."

The junk-dealer's jaw sagged. "F.B.I.?" he said huskily. He pointed a finger. "You wait. I get my pants."

He was obviously surprised to find a woman in the cab, but nodded at Steve's sign for silence. Steve sat back and marveled at the magic of those three letters. All you had to do was say them, and people dropped anything to help. He hoped that under the circumstances the F.B.I. wouldn't mind.

The junkyard was enclosed by a scabrous, leaning fence. Mordecai fumbled with the lock and swung his gate open, then led them through a jungle of ghostly shapes to a small building in the center.

"I got a floodlight," he said. It turned out to be a bare globe suspended from a pole, that shone on a gaunt assemblage of rusted frames, old auto fenders, stacks of boilers, and other things less readily identified.

Two ancient trucks, one piled high with debris, were parked beside the shack. "Ain't unloaded yet," Mordecai said. "Now what is it we are looking for?"

Steve described the object, with some help from Ruth. His heart sank as he saw the mass of stuff that had to be searched. Mordecai, however, seemed unabashed by

the job. A pile of junk was no mystery to him.

"Market Street, eh?" he grunted. "Then should be in the top layer." He took a rod and began to peck away.

After watching a moment Steve climbed up, found a piece of pipe, and hunted, too. The light globe, swaying in the night air—free from fog here in the Mission District—gave them an in-and-out sort of illumination.

Ruth walked nervously up and down beside the truck.

"Like aluminum," Mordecai muttered. "Or maybe like Monel. Huh?"

"Right," Steve grunted.

"Hanh!" Mordecai said suddenly.

Steve's heart gave a leap. "Yeah," he said, "that looks like it. Toss it down to Ruth."

Her delighted response confirmed it.

"Was easy," Mordecai said as they walked back to the cab. "Forget it. For the F.B.I., I do anything." He stopped to lock his gate. "Could I," he added wistfully, "maybe know what it's all about?"

"You read tomorrow's paper," Steve said, reaching forward to open the door for Ruth. She stepped in and he motioned to the junk dealer to follow.

"Ak!" Mordecai said, recoiling. Then Steve saw the gun aimed from the cab's front window.

"Get the hell away!" Matches snarled, leaning to shut the back door. Before Steve could more than set his muscles, the cab roared away.

MORDECAI said in a hoarse whisper, "Who is that?"

Steve's own voice was far from normal. "A guy by the name of Matches. A guy I'm going to get if it's the last thing I do."

Mordecai shook his head, raised his arm. "I mean *that!*"

He was pointing at a telephone pole some way off. A street light showed the fire-alarm box it supported. A dark figure was clawing at that box, jerkily, queerly.

Steve got there yards ahead of Mordecai. The figure had slipped to the ground. It twitched and made bubbly sounds. Steve had his arm around the man's shoulders when Mordecai puffed up.

"It's the cab-driver. They shot him through the chest. The poor devil was calling for help the only way he could."

The junk dealer stared at the dark froth on the stricken man's mouth. "We didn't hear no shot."

"Silencer, probably. We were clanking that junk, too."

The driver shrugged and then gargled.

"Well," Steve said, "he's through needing help now."

Mordecai raised a warning finger. Far off in the night sounded the rising tone of a siren. Steve grabbed the other's arm and urged him along the sidewalk. "Quick! Back to the yard!"

The dealer hung back.

"Listen," Steve said tensely. "they'd love to pin that killing on me. I'm the fall guy in this whole deal. I'm beginning to see a lot of things now. They took me back to the hotel so they could watch me. They followed us out here."

"I'm watching you, too," Mordecai said gloomily. "I'm thinking all you bring me is trouble."

Steve halted abruptly. "That's true. I've got no right to pull you into this. Thanks for what you did. Run along. I'll get by."

Mordecai sighed and pulled out his keys. "I've had troubles all my life. What's one more?"

They slipped inside the gate just as the first engine roared up. They sat in the close darkness of the shack, hearing the arrival of other fire equipment. The excited shouts died away. A shriller siren came and went.

Steve sweated and writhed impatiently. He couldn't stand the thought of Matches having Ruth. Bit by bit, he told Mordecai the story.

The dealer turned and fumbled in a locker. "Here. A bottle of brandy. Strictly for emergency."

"This is one," Steve said, and took a big gulp. Mordecai took one, too, and then got out a pipe and packed it. "Now we do what?"

"God," Steve groaned, "if I only knew!"

The dealer puffed at his pipe. "Gotta start somewhere."

"The only clue I have is the smell, there where they took me."

"You should be knowing smells. A chemical man."

Steve shook his head. "It wasn't that kind of smell. It was sort of sharp and

sweet and earthy. It goes way back in my memory. I *know* it, but I can't pin it down."

"What is it going along with in your memory?"

"Give me another drink," Steve said, "and then shut up."

He sat with his head in his hands while minutes ticked by. Finally he looked up. "The ranch," he said. "The little ranch my Dad had after the last war. I remember the early-morning fog, and the goats, and the baby rabbits."

"What kind of ranch?"

"Oh, I guess you'd call it truck garden. We had about five acres, in vegetables." Then Steve gasped. "Carrots! That's the smell. *Carrots!*"

Then his excitement collapsed. He stared at Mordecai. "What smells like carrots?" he asked helplessly.

"Carrots."

"Yes, of course, but. . . ." He stopped as Mordecai got up, knocked out his pipe, and began to rummage in another locker. The dealer turned and handed Steve an old nickel-plated revolver. "Careful," he warned. "It's full."

"Thanks. But what—"

"Ain't I been a junk dealer for thirty years? Don't I know every back alley in the city? I know two of 'em that smell strong of carrots!"

The empty truck made an awesome clatter in the darkness. Steve shrank into the corner of the seat every time they passed a prowl car. But they were not objects of suspicion. Mordecai drove calmly, chewing on his pipe.

They neared the Civic Center and turned down Market Street. Several blocks past the Del Mesa Hotel they turned left, into the warehouse district. They were in the fog again now. The truck slowed to a crawl.

When they reached the sprawling stretch of the produce markets, Mordecai sent the truck into an areaway and switched off the motor. Steve hopped out and fidgeted on the pavement while the dealer tugged at something under the seat. Mordecai finally got it loose, spat on his hands, and said, "Okay."

"What's that?"

Mordecai chuckled. "Just a junkman's tool."

It looked like a pinch-bar. But one end was a metal knob and the other branched into a spike and a formidable cutting edge.

"Handy little item," Steve murmured. The gun felt cold and good to his hand as they walked.

AFTER a block and a half Mordecai halted. "Try this alley. Runs beside Spinazzo's Produce. He's got tons of carrots."

"Smells right," Steve said. "I'll take a look."

"There's an old building at the end of it."

"Okay. You wait here. This isn't your party. God knows you've done enough already."

Mordecai's voice rose indignantly. "You should cheat me out of it now!"

They went slowly, feeling their way over cobblestones. Steve felt something loom up. He stopped, and explored a cold surface. He leaned close to Mordecai's ear. "The delivery wagon. This is it, all right. They must have ditched the cab and come back in this."

Carefully, they inched around the machine and on to the end of the alley. Steve found boarded-up windows, the outline of a door.

"This opens into a hall," he breathed.

Mordecai lifted his tool, adjusted it, then grunted. There was a sharp groan of tortured wood and metal. The door swung inward to darkness.

Patiently, they waited.

"Okay," Steve said.

They eased along the hall. Steve felt his heart pounding. He strained his ears for some sound that would indicate Ruth was here. The floor creaked slightly.

They came opposite a door and saw slivers of light. Steve groped for Mordecai's arm. Then, in a movement that seemed endless, he reached for the knob, tested it ever so slightly. He took a deep breath and shoved the door open.

Facing him, across a table strewn with shiny parts and blue-prints, was a middle-aged man. He was thin and very neatly dressed. He might have been a bank clerk or a shoe salesman, except for his eyes.

For long seconds that intense black stare met Steve's, over the damning evidence on the table. Then the man exploded into action. He flung his chair back, dodged, and hurled a casting straight at Steve's face.

Steve ducked automatically and felt the gun buck in his hand. One of those black, venomous eyes went out.

There was a terrific uproar in the hall. Mordecai was thrashing and grunting. Steve whirled to hear a sickening crunch. A body fell heavily.

"The light!" Mordecai hissed.

Steve got it out just as a gun blazed down the hall. He pulled back the hammer of his own gun and put a shot in that direction. There was no response. For what seemed a year, there was no sound but heavy breathing.

Steve heard Mordecai's tool scrape against the wall. The junk-dealer's stocky shoulders jerked, and the bar spun down the hall with tremendous force. There was a crack and a howl of anguish. Something clattered to the floor.

Steve made a sound deep in his throat and lunged. He was on top of the man, pinning the wildly-flailing arms, when Mordecai found the hall switch. Steve doubled his fist and hit Matches in the face with all the strength he had. The struggling ceased.

Mordecai stepped over the body of the broad-faced driver. "All through," he said. He sounded sorry.

"Tie this one up," Steve grunted.

Then he started opening doors. In the third room he found Ruth, tied and gagged. His hands trembled as he loosened the cords. "It's all right, honey," he said over and over.

She clung to him, wordless.

He rubbed her wrists, tried to straighten her hair, picked up her ridiculous little hat and dusted it.

"Matches and Holger," she whispered.

"We got them. It's all over. Nothing now but—"

A hideous shriek drowned his words, froze his muscles. Again and again that frightful scream rang out.

"S-stay here," Steve commanded her and rushed headlong into the hall.

Mordecai was squatting on the floor, lighting up his pipe. Matches was helpless against the wall in front of him. His shoes were both off!

The junk dealer scratched a match on the floor, cupped the flame carefully. "I guess that'll bring the cops. Better grab your ears. I think I'll really burn the dirty rat this time."

IT WAS nearly dawn when Steve and Ruth got through with the officials. The last, puzzling point had been cleared up. Dr. Arlington had somehow obtained a key to the room across the hall and had hidden his vital part in the bedsprings. Matches' boss had sent him back with that extra key, to search whatever room it opened.

Meanwhile, of course, Steve had given that mighty bounce, and had discovered the gadget. . . .

Steve took great breaths of the cool, salty air.

"Go ahead, howl," Ruth said. "You've earned it."

"After tonight, the Army'll be an anti-climax."

His grin turned slowly into a prodigious yawn.

"You need rest, young man."

"Maybe a little," Steve admitted. "A few hour's sleep, a shower, six eggs for breakfast. By noon I'll be raring to go. I've got nearly two days left."

Ruth looked down. "Have you any special plans?"

"Well, I thought we might go to Golden Gate Park, first. Then come back and have dinner in Chinatown. After that, a long evening with plenty of old-fashioneds and no interruptions. And wind up on top of Telegraph Hill."

Ruth's face was cool and damp from the fog. Her lips were warm and soft. . . .

He shook himself. "Come along, girl," he said gruffly. "We've got two big days ahead of us. And a farewell dinner at Mr. Mordecai's."

HELLO SUCKER!

By Frank Brock

Readers wishing to obtain a reprint of the complete *Dictionary of Fraud*—one installment of which has appeared in *New Detective Magazine*—may obtain one by mailing 10c to the Philadelphia Better Bnsiness Bureau, 1700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to partly cover the cost of preparation and mailing.

IT'S the larceny in a sucker's heart which marks him as the swindler's prospective victim. This is an axiom of crooks everywhere. In an effort to show the "fall guy" just how and why he falls, I have attempted to outline the basic principles behind today's most popular rackets.

There are no informed suckers. Only the ignorant—and the greedy ignorant, at that—can be taken in by fraudulent schemers!

MAIL FRAUDS

Q. What is the "unordered merchandise scheme.

A. The practice of sending small articles, usually with a charity plea, to a selected list of names with a request for a remittance. There is no obligation on the part of the recipient to pay for or even return such articles. They may be given away or otherwise disposed of. If the sender *calls* for them, storage charges may be demanded before the items are returned.

Q. What is the song publishing racket?

A. So-called "publishers" advertise that they will compose suitable music to an author's lyrics and publish the completed song. The music they compose isn't suitable and the song isn't published. A few copies of the inane composition are printed and mailed to the hopeful author, for which he pays a high price. No reputable song publisher ever makes a charge to an author, but publishes accepted songs under a royalty arrangement and at the publishers' expense.

Q. What is the home work scheme?

A. Through newspaper want ads, an op-

portunity to make money at home by gilding cards, making aprons, house dresses, etc., is offered shut-ins and others. The company agrees to supply you with materials (at a price) and then repurchase the completed products at a profit to you. After you have paid for the materials and finished the work, the company rejects it as not up to sample.

STOCKS AND BONDS

Q. What is the difference between a bond and a stock?

A. A bond is an interest-bearing certificate of indebtedness. Stock is evidence of ownership of a fractional part of a corporation.

Q. What is a debenture bond?

A. An unsecured bond. Most bonds are secured by mortgages or the pledging of tangible assets. Debentures are merely a promise to repay money with specified interest.

Q. What is the difference between common and preferred stocks?

A. Preferred stocks are "preferred" as to assets and dividends. Preferred stock dividends—usually restricted to 6%—must be paid from the company's earnings before any money can be divided among the common stockholders. In the event of liquidation, the preferred stockholders must be paid par value for their stock before common stockholders participate in the division of the company's assets. Common stocks are more speculative, but frequently more profitable than preferred stocks.

Q. What is the difference between a listed and an unlisted security?

A. Listed securities are those which have been accepted for trading by some legitimate stock exchange after an investigation. Unlisted securities are bought and sold in the open market—but not in stock exchanges.

Q. What does "over the counter" mean?

A. Stocks sold by dealers at private sales, at an agreed price, frequently "away" from prices quoted on the Exchange. Also the sale of unlisted securities.

Q. What is "margin" in the trading of stocks?

A. The percentage of the cost of the stock which must be paid by the purchaser in cash at the time the order to buy or sell is given the broker. The balance of the purchase price is borrowed from banks by the brokers, and the banks retain the stocks as collateral for the loan.

Q. What is the difference between a bull and a bear?

A. A bull is a trader who buys stocks in the expectation that they will increase in value.

A bear sells stocks short, in the belief they will depreciate in price.

Q. What are "short sales" in stocks?

A. "Selling short" is the sale of a stock (without previously buying it) in the expectation that it will decrease in price. Buying the same number of shares at a lower price completes the transaction and the difference between the selling and the buying price is the operator's profit.

Q. What are "puts and calls?"

A. Options to buy or sell a certain amount of a particular stock within a specified price range and within a time limit. They are legitimately used for hedging purposes by expert operators but when sold to the uninformed are usually swindling operations.

Q. What are wash sales as applied to stocks?

A. Sales of stock between two brokers employed by the same principal. Sold at successively increasing—or decreasing—prices without change of ownership, the market price is "made" according to the desires of the market manipulator. Now an illegal practice.

Q. What is a bucket shop?

A. Now extinct. Sharpshooting brokers who accepted orders for the purchase or sale of small lots of stock—but who did not actually buy or sell them. They "bucketed" the orders; that is, accepted the risk that the customer was wrong, as he too frequently was. Bucket shops remained in business only as long as their profits exceeded their losses. But don't we all?

Q. What is a tipster sheet?

A. A publication which purports to give sound stock market advice. The stocks it recommends for purchase, however, are those in which the publisher has a financial interest. This device was first used in stock swindling by the notorious George Graham Rice (Simon Herzog) who had been a racing tout in his earlier days.

Q. What is a boiler room?

A. A salesroom equipped with a battery of telephones for high-pressure selling. Originated by gyp stock salesmen. Misrepresentation by telephone is fairly safe. In a prosecution for fraud the identity of the telephone salesman must be established before testimony regarding a telephone conversation is admissible evidence. It is this feature which endears it to the gyp.

Q. What is a "bird dog?"

A. A flusher of game. In other words, a man employed to develop prospects for stock swindlers and real estate racketeers.

Q. What is a "hundred percenter?"

A. A salesman who sells stock or other securities which are absolutely worthless. His profit is 100 per cent.

Q. What is the "one-call system?"

A. The completion of a sale of stock on the salesman's first call. This precludes any investigation of the stock before purchase—a highly desirable thing from the salesman's standpoint, but it spells ruin to the customer.

Q. What is a reloading operation in stocks?

A. Stock swindlers frequently sell a new customer a stock having some value. After they have gained his confidence they "switch" him into some of their own offerings *taking his good stock as collateral.* They then resell him as often as possible, getting some cash with each new purchase. When payment of the entire amount is suddenly demanded, the customer is obligated to such an extent that he cannot pay, so he is "sold out." This "selling out" however, merely means that the swindlers acquire all of his stock holdings which are in their possession as "collateral."

Q. What is the "pete" game?

A. This swindle opens with a cash offer to stockholders of defunct companies of "par" for their worthless stock. During the negotiations, the prospective victim is informed that he has failed to exercise previously offered stockholders' "rights" to buy more stock from the company at a low price. The swindler offers to buy this additional stock from him at "par" as soon as it is acquired, and holds up his purchase of the original stock. After the new stock is purchased by the sucker the swindler disappears.

Q. What is a "dynamiter?"

A. A ruthless, unscrupulous, high-pressure salesman.

Q. What is an oil royalty?

A. Every eighth barrel of oil, or its monetary equivalent, paid to the owner of the land on which a producing well is located. When sold, these are highly speculative investments, due to the uncertain productive capacity and life of the oil well.

Q. What is a "doodle bug?"

A. Any non-scientific contraption used for

locating oil or minerals in the earth. Among the early "doodle bugs" were the branches of trees which were supposed to be "attracted" when carried over mineral deposits.

Q. What is a divining rod?

A. A stick used to determine the location of water beneath the earth's surface. An old device, but not practical.

Q. What is a salted mine?

A. One which has been prepared to deceive prospective buyers—either of stock or interest. One method of "salting" a gold mine is to load a shot gun with pellets of gold and fire it into the earth where the avid but guileless prospectors can dig it out with their own hands.

Q. What was the Mississippi bubble?

A. A disastrous stock swindle promoted in France by John Law.

MERCHANDISE FRAUDS

Q. What is meant by the term, "flash merchandise?"

A. Cheap, gaudy articles which look good, but which have little practical utility. The sort used as premiums in games at country fairs, beach resorts, etc.

Q. What is the "pitch game?"

A. The sale of merchandise on the street or in temporary store locations accomplished by means of a lecture or demonstration by the seller. When done on a platform in a store it is called "high pitch;" on a street stand, "low pitch." The lecture is the "pitch," the lecturer a "pitchman."

Q. What are "jam sales?"

A. The forced sale of "flash merchandise" in temporary store locations on busy streets. By means of a clever "spiel" buildup, during which the spieler (lecturer) returns small sums of money (25 or 50 cents) paid for small articles, he conveys the impression that *all* money paid for his merchandise will be refunded—his company's method of advertising.

Then he offers a gold watch or ring and asks who will risk $10. Several respond. *That* money is not refunded and the "jam" is over. The audience is shunted out, but another forms very quickly.

Q. What is a "capper?"

A. A confederate. Usually employed in fake auctions, jam sales and by pitchmen to stimulate business by pretending to bid or buy or to urge customers to buy. A shillaber, or "shill."

Q. What is a transient merchant?

A. Usually the proprietor of a "schloch" shop. One who rents a store on a monthly basis, and employs flamboyant and misleading advertising to dispose of his inferior merchandise. Many cities now attempt to protect legitimate business by controlling transient merchants through a system of licensing and the posting of bonds.

Q. What is a sidewalk puller?

A. A man employed to accost pedestrians in front of retail establishments—usually clothing stores—in an effort to induce them to enter the store. The practice is now outlawed in many cities.

Q. What is meant by "borax" in selling?

A. The term generally is applied to low-grade furniture stores which defraud customers. "Borax" derives from the German *borgen*—to borrow. In the early installment days, the customers "borrowed" the furniture from the store until it was fully paid for. "Borax stores" today have an elaborate system of swindling. Their prices are marked in code, and the salesmen have an argot of their own, common to all "borax stores," which enables them to discuss a sale in the customer's presence, without her knowing what they are talking about.

Q. What is a "PM?"

A. The origin of the term is obscure. Some say it derives from "pin money" while others assert it is an abbreviation of "premium."

It actually is both, because it is an extra commission paid to salesmen who foist old merchandise on customers at high prices.

Q. What is a "spiff?"

A. Any piece of slow-moving mechandise. In order to spur salespeople to greater efforts to dispose of it, astute merchants put a "PM" on "spiffs." In this way the salesmen, and not the public, profit from the merchant's buying miscalculations.

Q. What is meant by the "T. O. system?"

A. "T.O." is an abbreviation for "turn over." This is a part of the intricate "borax system" used by unscrupulous merchants to prevent a customer from leaving the store without buying. When a salesman finds he cannot sell a particular customer he calls the "manager" ("another salesman") and explains in "borax" argot the prices he has quoted and then turns over the customer to this second man. The "manager" then quotes lower prices. If he puts through the sale these two salesmen split the commission.

Q. What is bait advertising?

A. The use of fictitious low prices at which merchandise is *not intended* to be sold. It is sometimes possible, if you are sufficiently persistent, to buy the merchandise at the "bait" price. By disparaging the advertised merchandise, the storekeeper hopes to "switch" you to higher priced goods on which he makes a profit.

Q. What is "schloch" merchandise?

A. Tawdry and sleazy. Usually wearing apparel.

Q. What is the difference between warp and woof?

A. Warp threads in a fabric run lengthwise. Woof, or filling, runs from edge to edge.

Q. Does the term "pre-shrunk" mean that the cloth will not shrink?

A. Yes, it should. However, in many preshrunk fabrics a residual shrinkage remains. In the case of cotton piece goods, the Federal Trade Commission requires disclosure of the residual, or remaining, shrinkage in the fabric.

Q. What is Harris Tweed?

A. A hand-woven cloth of Scottish wool.

Q. What are the distinguishing characteristics of an Oriental rug?

A. Orientals are hand-woven of wool, silk, camel's or goat's hair—rarely of cotton. Each tuft of the pile is tied separately with a special knot which, in modern Orientals, run between 100 and 200 to the square inch. The pattern on the face of the rug is repeated on the back, although this is not a test of genuineness. Small irregularities in design and coloring, due to hand weaving, are characteristic of true Orientals.

Q. What does the word "roller" mean in connection with canaries?

A. A bird which sings with a long rolling trill, as distinguished from a "chopper" whose notes are quick and sharp. "Rollers" are the most desirable—many inferior birds are misrepresented as "rollers."

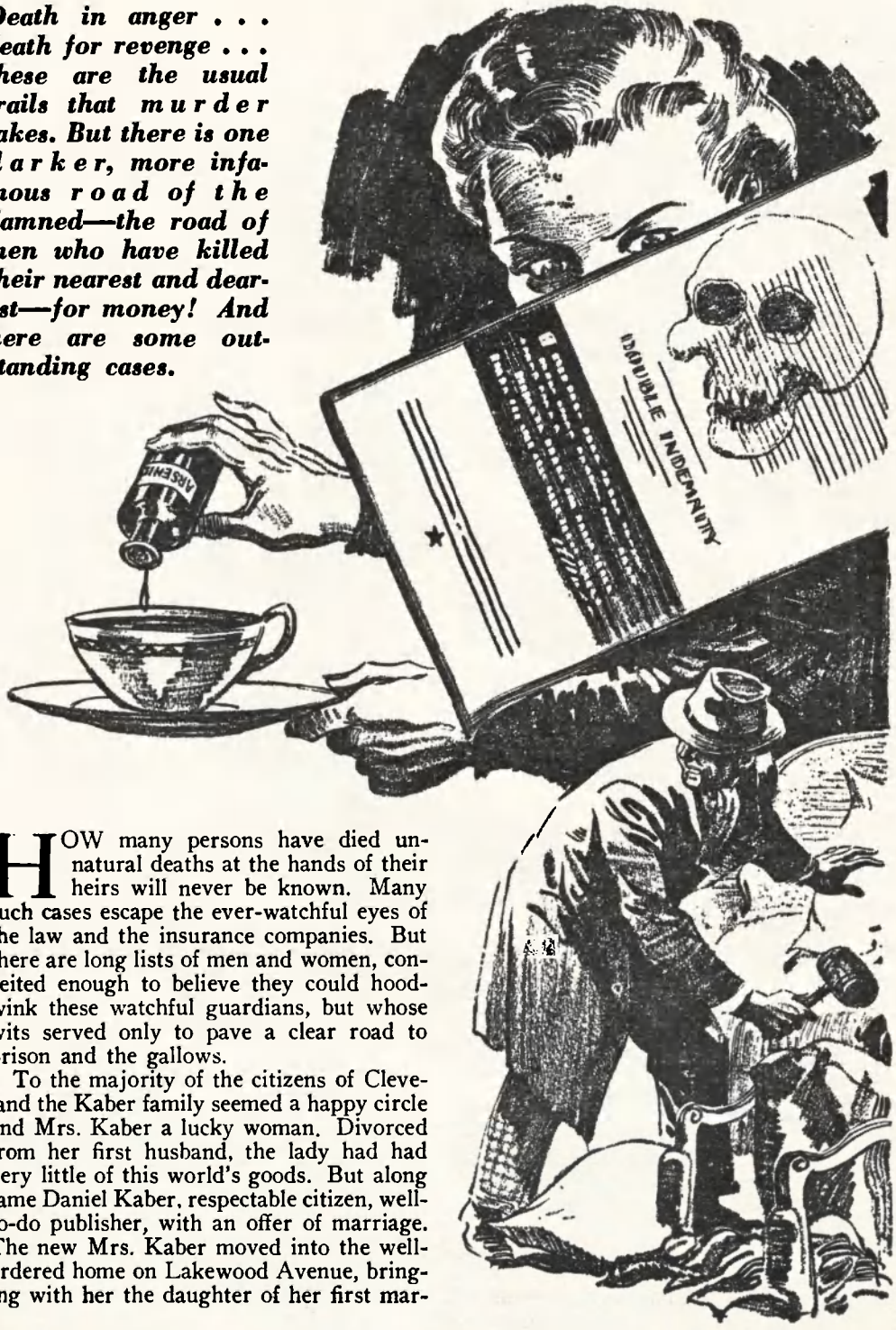
Q. What is meant by "seconds?"

A. Slightly imperfect merchandise. It is an elastic term, however, and some merchants and manufacturers label almost anything "second quality" regardless of the extent of the damage.

Q. What are "menders?"

A. Hosiery and other garments which have been damaged in the process of manufacture and mended at the factory. The lowest grade of substandard merchandise. You won't like them.

Death in anger . . . death for revenge . . . these are the usual trails that murder takes. But there is one darker, more infamous road of the damned—the road of men who have killed their nearest and dearest—for money! And here are some outstanding cases.



HOW many persons have died unnatural deaths at the hands of their heirs will never be known. Many such cases escape the ever-watchful eyes of the law and the insurance companies. But there are long lists of men and women, conceited enough to believe they could hoodwink these watchful guardians, but whose wits served only to pave a clear road to prison and the gallows.

To the majority of the citizens of Cleveland the Kaber family seemed a happy circle and Mrs. Kaber a lucky woman. Divorced from her first husband, the lady had had very little of this world's goods. But along came Daniel Kaber, respectable citizen, well-to-do publisher, with an offer of marriage. The new Mrs. Kaber moved into the well-ordered home on Lakewood Avenue, bringing with her the daughter of her first mar-

By Zeta Rothschild

COME HOME TO DIE!

Shall it be poison, gun or knife—
That kills my daughter, husband, wife?

riage, Marian McArdle, and her mother, Mrs. Brickel.

In the spring of 1919, Daniel Kaber, hitherto in the best of health, became ill. The family physician was puzzled but finally diagnosed the acute pains, which made Daniel Kaber a bed-ridden invalid, as neuritis. A male nurse, Frank Utterback, was engaged to take care of him.

Several weeks passed. Daniel Kaber's neuritis continued, with the addition of violent spells of vomiting.

Came the night of July 18th. In the living room on the ground floor, Marian McArdle and a girl friend were playing the piano. The cook, the only servant in this large house, was in her room. Utterback, the nurse, had retired, and Mrs. Kaber was out. Suddenly, above the sounds of the music, rose a scream. It came from Kaber's room, and continued, resounding throughout the house.

Barely a minute passed before Utterback reached his patient's room. There lay Daniel Kaber, blood spattering the bed clothes. Beside him, lay a file, one end sharpened to a point. Close to it was a blood-stained cotton glove. Utterback called, first, a doctor and then, the police.

Dr. S. T. Parsons, first to reach the house, found Kaber still conscious. "Two men," muttered the gasping man. "I know who had this done to me," he gasped again as he drifted into unconsciousness.

Police Lieutenant L. B. Mille and Chief of Police S. P. Christensen arrived shortly afterwards. Kaber, it was decided, should be removed to the Lakewood Hospital. This done, the two officers made a careful search of the house.

Evidently the assailants had entered on the ground floor and had first ransacked the dining room. Marks on the door of a walnut cabinet showed a sharp instrument had been used to pry it open.

Here had been kept the best silver, used only for formal dinner parties. Silver is cumbersome and easily traced. Burglars do not, as a rule, bother with it.

There were no other signs of the thieves' activities. Evidently the two men had left the dining room for the second floor where

they had made straight for Daniel Kaber's bed-room.

But here was another puzzling condition. The men had made no attempt to ransack this room for money and jewels, but had gone directly to the bed and attacked the helpless invalid.

"It looks to me as if the theft was a blind," Christensen told reporters who flocked to the house. "These men were after Kaber himself."

The two girls in the living room had heard no sound until Kaber screamed. The loud piano music had covered the noise of the intruders.

Daniel Kaber lingered several days, then died.

Mrs. Kaber knew of no one with whom her husband had had trouble. Nor could Daniel Kaber's family or business associates recall any trouble that might have led enemies to attack him. The investigation was petering out when Moses Kaber, father of the dead man, called on the Pinkerton Agency to take over the case. To J. H. Walker, head of the Cleveland office, he voiced his suspicions.

Mrs. Kaber had been many miles away at the home of her sister the night of the attack. Moreover, she bore an excellent reputation for good deeds. She had founded the Marion Home for Young Business Women; she was on the board of directors of the Rosedale Home which conducted a day nursery for the children of working mothers, and she took an active interest in the Florence Crittenden Home for Unmarried Mothers.

But even these activities could not eliminate Mrs. Kaber as a suspect. For the widow now stood to inherit not only the income from a good-sized estate, but acquired outright several large sums on insurance policies.

Still the Pinkerton Agency could see no connecting link between the two assailants and the wife.

Months passed. And gradually detectives began to line up a number of facts that threw an unusual light on Mrs. Kaber's interests.

The lady was addicted to fortune-tellers and mediums of all sorts. Pinkerton men began making the rounds armed with a photograph of Mrs. Kaber.

Mrs. Mary J. Wade, well-known in spiritualistic circles, admitted that Mrs. Kaber was one of her regular clients.

"Once she asked me if I knew of any way she could get rid of her husband," Mrs. Wade told detectives. "I thought she was joking."

Mrs. Maria Matthews, a palmist, added another bit of interesting information. During the second week in July Mrs. Kaber, a regular patron, had asked her to keep a large box for her.

"She didn't explain why," added Mrs. Matthews. "The box was very heavy. And I asked her what was in it. She told me silver."

"You have the box?" asked the detective.

THE day after the attack on Daniel Kaber, Mrs. Kaber had dropped in without an appointment. She seemed flustered. She handed Mrs. Matthews a thick, sealed envelope. A friend, said Mrs. Kaber, would call for it the next day. And also for the box of silver.

"And some one came?" demanded the detective. "Some one you know?"

Mrs. Matthews admitted knowing the woman, a well-known medium supposed to have really supernatural powers. The medium, Mrs. Eva Colavito, had torn open the flap of the envelope and had quickly counted the bills with which it was crammed.

Then she had turned with a look of disgust and resentment to Mrs. Matthews.

"Only five hundred dollars," Mrs. Colavito had exclaimed. "Does she think they will be satisfied with this amount? What does she take them for? Hasn't she any sense?"

That was all. Mrs. Matthews had asked questions of the angry medium as she carried the box of silver to the waiting car outside.

After considerable persuasion, Mrs. Eva Colavito agreed to talk.

Mrs. Kaber had first come to her several months earlier. She asked for a potion to get rid of her husband. "He is so ugly to my daughter and my mother," she complained bitterly.

Whatever the medium had given Mrs. Kaber, the potion had not brought about the results her client wanted. Mrs. Kaber had then asked if she did not know some men who would help her.

Mrs. Colavito had arranged a meeting between Mrs. Kaber and one Di Corpo, a fairly well-known Italian gangster.

After that, the medium insisted, she knew nothing more. What the two had worked out together, she could not say.

"But you went to Mrs. Matthews and got the box of silver and the money," the woman was reminded. "To whom did you hand over the money?"

"To Di Corpo," she answered promptly.

And though the detectives suspected Mrs. Colavito knew more, they could not get her to talk.

Brought to headquarters, Di Corpo was accused of having engineered the attack on Daniel Kaber.

At first he denied contact with the widow. But eventually he talked. Mrs. Kaber, he said, had asked him to find some one to murder her husband. He had brought Salvator Cala and Vittorio Pisselli to her house when Kaber was ill in bed. She had taken them through it, shown them how easy it would be to enter through a dining-room window which she would leave unlocked.

The sum agreed on was five thousand dollars. She would have the money as soon as the insurance companies paid up. But she had welched, said Di Corpo bitterly, and the murderers had held Di Corpo responsible. He and Mrs. Colavito had been so frightened by their threats that they had gone to the Kaber house while Daniel Kaber was still alive to demand the money due.

Mrs. Kaber had said the insurance companies refused to settle. But she had gone to her room and brought back a diamond ring, a watch studded with diamonds and a diamond-studded bracelet, which she had given to him.

When the detectives hurried to the Kaber home to bring Mrs. Kaber in for questioning, they found the women had fled. But with the help of Captain Arthur Carey, head of New York's homicide squad, Mrs. Kaber and her daughter were located in that city and brought back to Cleveland.

The two men accused of having carried out the attack had also disappeared. Salvator Cala was soon located, but Pisselli had sailed for Italy.

Not until July, 1921, exactly two years after Daniel Kaber had been attacked, did Mrs. Kaber go on trial.

In addition to being accused of engineering the fatal assault, Mrs. Kaber was also charged with attempted poisoning. Dr. John G. Spenser, who had performed the autopsy, testified he had found more than forty grains of arsenic in the dead man's organs. Mrs. Emma Wagner, the cook, swore that Mrs. Kaber had insisted on carrying all the trays to the sick room. And Mrs. Chrystal Benner, the nurse in attendance on Daniel Kaber during the two weeks he survived at the Lakewood Hospital, testified that the only vomiting spell Kaber had while in the hospital occurred after Mrs. Kaber brought him some candy which she insisted he eat.

Mrs. Kaber, County Prosecutor Edward C. Stanton argued, had first tried to poison her husband. This failing or proving too slow, she had hired gangsters to complete the job. First she had asked Di Corpo to run Kaber down with an automobile and had offered him a half-dozen fifty dollar bills for a down payment on the car. So Di Corpo testified. When Di Corpo turned down this suggestion, she had engaged Pisselli and Cala.

Defense Attorney William J. Corrigan argued that the arsenic came from embalming fluid used by the undertaker. Although it could not be denied that Mrs. Kaber had engaged the two Italians to attack her husband, it was not meant that they should kill him. No; they were only supposed to punish him enough to change his disposition. Moreover, Mrs. Kaber was insane, argued the defense.

Judge Maurice Bernon advised the jury to ignore the presence of arsenic in the body. But the jury saw no reason to accept Mrs. Kaber's explanation that she believed an attack on a bed-ridden invalid would bring about a change in his disposition. Moreover, the defense had not brought out any evidence to prove that Daniel Kaber had been anything but kind and generous.

The jury found Mrs. Kaber guilty but recommended mercy, and the lady was given life imprisonment.

The daughter, the mother, and Mrs. Colavito were acquitted, as having been ignorant of the plot. The men involved did not get off so easily. Two of them were sentenced in this country. The third, tried in Italy, was convicted there.

IT WAS close to one thirty A. M. of August 8th, 1939. The police on duty at headquarters, Camden, New Jersey, were taking turns stepping out of doors for a breath of the fresh night air, when a man walked in.

"My daughter didn't come home tonight," he told them. "Have you heard anything about . . . ?" and his voice trailed off. His manner was tense, his face drawn with worry and fear.

He was the Rev. Walter Dworecki, pastor of the First Polish Church in Camden. His daughter Wanda was eighteen; he had another daughter, fourteen. Their mother had died a year earlier.

On Tuesday at six o'clock he had gone to Philadelphia to hold religious services at the bedside of a dying woman. When he returned home at night his younger daughter told him Wanda had gone out about six-thirty. She had not yet come back. He had walked the streets, dropping in at drug- and candy stores. But no one had seen her that evening. Had the police any record of an accident?

Detective Carr shook his head. "Give us a description of Wanda," he asked the father.

"She's about five feet, four, red hair, brown eyes; she was wearing a pink and white dress and a tan coat. It was drizzling when she went out and I think she carried an umbrella."

The Reverend Dworecki was advised to go home. Maybe the girl had gone dancing with friends. Perhaps she would be at home when he got there. But the father did not seem consoled. "Something awful has happened to her, I know," he protested. "I can feel it. My poor little motherless Wanda."

The next morning early the father was back at the police station. Wanda had not returned home. A call was put through to the Bureau of Missing Persons, but without gaining news of the missing girl. The desk sergeant hesitated.

"A young woman is over at City Hospital," he told Dworecki. "Maybe she's your daughter. You'd better go over there and look."

An officer accompanied Dworecki to City Hospital where the father learned the young woman he was to see was in the morgue.

A sheet covered the body. Slowly the attendant withdrew the covering from the girl's face. The father took one look, shivered, put his hands over his face.

"It's my Wanda," he said, his voice broken. And then he fainted.

At about eight o'clock that morning, two boys walking on the unpaved Park Boulevard between Vesper and Euclid Avenues had found the body in the mud of a lane not far from the athletic field.

Coroner Franklin Jackson examined the body at City Morgue. The girl had been strangled and then beat over the head repeatedly with a rock.

It looked as if she had been thrown from a machine; the soles of her shoes were dry. On her coat was pinned a small bunch of red and white roses. The personal touch puzzled the detectives. Whoever had been with the girl must have been on friendly terms with her. What enemies could an eighteen-year-old girl have that made murder necessary?

The place where the body was found yielded no clues. The drizzle of the night before had washed away any footprints. Tire-treads had left deep imprints on the unpaved roadway. But who could tell whether or not these prints were made by the machine that brought Wanda Dworecki there?

Detectives Augustine Fortune and Tom Murphy, detailed to question neighbors of the Dworecki family, especially the young friends of the dead girl, came back with an astounding collection of information.

Only five weeks earlier Wanda Dworecki had returned from the hospital where she had been since the first weeks in April. At that time she had been thrown out of a car close to Salem, New Jersey. When the girl recovered consciousness, she told police she had been hauled into the machine while walking on the street in Camden. She swore she did not know the men in the car nor had she entered it willingly.

One man, she said, had held his hand over her mouth while the other stayed at the wheel. On a lonely road they had started to beat her up. Her skull had been fractured. Evidently the approach of other cars had frightened her attackers away.

The driver of one machine had noticed the huddled form on the side of the road, had stopped, picked her up and brought her in to the hospital.

All efforts to find her mysterious assailants were unsuccessful. The night had been dark, the men had kept their hats pulled down over their faces. They spoke English, Wanda said.

Now, the grieving father testified that, since the attack in April he had forbidden

Wanda to go out in the evenings alone. Why she had disobeyed him the evening of the tragedy, he did not know.

A neighbor on Van Hook Street gave the detectives their first break.

"I saw Wanda Dworecki about eight o'clock," she said. "She was standing at the corner of Vesper and Euclid Avenue and seemed to be waiting for some one."

"Did you see her talk to any one?" Mrs. Mary Rudolph was asked.

The woman nodded. "The young fellow that lived with the Dworeckis last year. I know him well. It was Peter Shewchuk."

Mrs. Rudolph saw no reason why she shouldn't tell what she knew of Shewchuk. He had had a job in Camden for a year or so and while there had made his home with the Dworecki family. Then when he lost his job and couldn't find another, he had gone back to his family in Chester.

No one had thought of Shewchuk as Wanda's beau. The two young people were friendly. But that was all.

Had this meeting been accidental? Had Wanda left Shewchuk to meet another man?

Mildred Dworecki had been at home with her older sister until she went out. Detective Murphy hurried to the house on Van Hook Street for a talk with the fourteen-year-old youngster. The father wasn't there but the child, her eyes, red with weeping, asked the detective to come in.

"By the way, did Wanda get a telephone call after your father left and before she went out?" he asked casually.

Mildred nodded. "About half-past seven," she answered.

"Was it Peter Shewchuk who called?" went on Murphy.

The young girl shook her head.

"Are you sure?" asked Murphy. "You'd know his voice, wouldn't you?"

"It wasn't Peter," answered Mildred firmly, "it was Daddy."

Wagner tried to hide his surprise.

"I called Wanda to the phone. Daddy wanted her to go somewhere and Wanda didn't want to go. But he made her," continued the young girl.

When Detective Murphy relayed this information to Chief of Detectives Doran, the latter was puzzled. Why hadn't the Reverend Dworecki told them of this telephone conversation with Wanda?

Now Dworecki is not an ordinary name. True, the homicide squad had never come up against it before. But some other branch of the police might have, it was decided. Police began to search through the records.

Dworecki had been in trouble before.

A house he owned in Chester, Pennsylvania, had burned down. The house was unoccupied. Also, it was insured. And the underwriters had refused to pay the insurance. The Chester police, who had cooperated in the investigation with the insurance company, had decided the evidence

warranted an arson charge against the minister.

Now a horrible suspicion entered the mind of Chief of Detectives Doran. What had the father to gain by the death of his elder daughter?

Within twenty-four hours Doran had his answer.

"About six months ago Walter Dworecki took out a $5,600 insurance policy on his daughter Wanda with double indemnity for accidental death," reported W. Harold Leap, Philadelphia underwriter's agent.

That wasn't all. In April, only two weeks before that mysterious ride which sent the girl to the hospital Dworecki had taken out two more policies, with different companies, each for a thousand dollars, and both policies held that double indemnity clause.

"Did Dworecki take out any policies on his other daughter, Mildred?" asked Doran.

He hadn't.

Why should the man have been so anxious to insure the one daughter? Dworecki, who had an income considerably less than two thousand a year, must have been hard put to meet the premiums.

Dworecki himself could have had no part in the actual killing. His alibi for the evening of Wanda's death had been verified. But this Peter Shewchuk—where was he?

Doran hurried to Philadelphia and on to Chester. The Shewchuks were a respectable family of good reputation. Peter had been at home looking for a job but had left the day after the tragedy. His family did not know where he was.

Held for questioning Walter Dworecki protested complete ignorance of his daughter's murder.

But the last week in August, Doran received a telephone call from Peter Shewchuk's father; Peter had come home and he, the father, was bringing him to Camden.

Peter Shewchuk, a good-looking youth of twenty-one, denied having met Wanda Dworecki the night of the tragedy. But later, under questioning, he broke down.

"I met the reverend in Philadelphia about six-thirty," he confessed. "He asked me to kill Wanda. I was to get fifty dollars."

The arrangement made, Dworecki phoned home and told Wanda to meet the young man. In the dark of the unpaved boulevard Shewchuk put his arm around the girl's neck and slowly strangled her. Then to make sure she was dead, he beat her over the head with a rock taken along for the purpose.

"The other fellows failed," he told police, "but I promised the reverend I wouldn't."

"Other fellows?" Doran demanded.

"The two guys who tried to kill her in April," explained Peter Shewchuk. "Her father got them to do the job but they muffed it. They had nothing against Wanda any more than I had."

Confronted with Shewchuk, Walter Dworecki confessed. He was desperate for money. He had promised the first two hired assailants a thousand dollars. To Peter he had agreed to pay fifty dollars when he collected the insurance he had taken out on his daughter's life.

It was a gruesome story. That a father, hard-up for money, had deliberately taken out three insurance policies on his eighteen-year-old daughter and hired men to kill her was hard to believe. But Dworecki's confession cleared up all doubts.

In October a jury found Dworecki guilty and he was sentenced to die in the electric chair. Shewchuck, the stupid catspaw, met the fate he deserved.

WHEN Sidney Fox signed the register of the Hotel Metropole at Margate for himself and his mother one October day, those elderly ladies who congregate in hotel lounges commented on his devotion to his parent.

That evening after dinner, young Fox escorted his mother to her bedroom and then returned to join the permanent guests in the lobby. He was profuse with information.

He and his mother had just returned from France where they had gone to see the grave of a brother who had died in the World War. His mother wasn't well. They were about to move into a new house in Norfolk, but a telephone call from there had informed him the painters were still at work and he thought it wiser to stay away until all was ready. Their housekeeper would let them know.

No one doubted this story. Fox was an amiable-looking young man with pleasant manners. He was unusually attentive to elderly ladies, and his blue eyes had a look of innocence that seemed to hang over from his childhood.

However, there was much about the pair

(Continued on page 106)

NO END TO MURDER

By James McCreigh

He left the ground in a flying leap, hit the platform. . . .

Rats had a special meaning for old man Weiss. He killed them thoroughly and every time one died, he said to himself, "He'll die like this—some day—paying for his murders. . ."

RILEY pulled his coat collar up around him as he got off the elevated train. He pushed his way through the turnstile and nodded to old man Weiss, the six-to-twelve ticket agent.

The station was nearly empty. Weiss blinked fuzzily at him through the bars of the change booth and said, "Hello, John. Cold night."

"Sure is," said Riley. "How's hunting?"

Weiss grinned, but the weary look did not leave his face. "I got one," he said. He jerked a thumb at the waste can that stood by the door. "That makes three since the

first day o' the month. Not bad—for me."

Riley paused to push the lid of the can open and look inside at the carcass of a fat gray rat, crumpled on a heap of cast off newspapers. It had been shot through the body. The needlesharp point of a feathered air-pistol dart projected from its side.

Riley shook his head. "You don't shoot rats, you poison them," he said; and added quickly, at the look on the old man's face, "Happy hunting, fella. You and your air gun will have this place cleaned up in less'n forty years, if nothing goes wrong."

He stepped inside the booth, set down the brown-paper bundle under his arm. Weiss eyed it thoughtfully.

"Listen, John," he said. "If you don't eat all your sandwiches, maybe you can throw the pieces behind the bench over there. There's a couple of rats left, and Lord knows what they eat on."

Riley stared, then burst out laughing. "You're a funny duck. For the Saint's sake, make up your mind. Whose side are you on—us or the rats?"

"Shooting's a clean way to die," Weiss said defensively. "There's plenty rats, human and otherwise, such—" The old man tucked in his lips. "Anyway, do those rats get too hungry they might take a bite out o' somebody. You ever hear of typhus? Rats carry typhus germs."

"Sure. Rats mean something to you, don't they, Pop?" The smile lingered on Riley's face. He took up his ledger and pencil, made a quick check of the numbers on the turnstiles, then nodded. "Okay, Pop," he said. "Go on home now. Here's your train."

WHEN old Weiss had hurried into his coat and caught his train, Riley put fresh coal on the glowing potbelly stove, took a swig from his thermos of coffee and settled himself behind the charge counter with a magazine. It was a February midnight and the trains were few. There was plenty of time for reading.

Ten minutes crept by, and the platform began to rumble. A north-bound train stopped long enough to disgorge a solitary drunk. The man stared about blearily, then weaved across the platform, leaned against the stile, teetered down the stairs. Riley watched him out of sight.

A voice from below said remonstratively, "Easy does it, boy. Take yer time—no hurry."

A moment later Patrolman Calhoun appeared.

"Hello, shamus," Riley said.

Calhoun grunted and slid a folded newspaper through the wicket. "Cold as a witch's breath," he said. "Me teeth are crackin' from it."

Riley looked at the headlines. "Old Hitler's still runnin' out of Russia," he said. "Good. How's yourself?"

Calhoun sighed and shook his head. "I dunno. I seen somebody I niver expected to see again tonight. I wish I hadn't."

"Who?"

Calhoun pursed his lips moodily. "Fella named Rassig. Big, dark fella. He stuck up a movie theayter two, three years ago and shot a man. I was one of the guys caught him. The man lived, so he only got four years. I figgered him for one o' these nasty guys, but he must've turned good in the pen. He's out now, because I seen him not five blocks from here."

Riley looked interested. "This guy Rassig after you?"

"After me?" Calhoun stared accusingly. "Nah. You been readin' too many murder stories. Them things never tell you right. Rassig won't kill for revenge, only for money. He was only bloomin' out, so to say, when we put 'im away, but I bet he's a full-blowed blossom now. A full-blowed murder flower. They oughta kept him in the pen."

Calhoun nodded for emphasis. He reached in and picked up Riley's magazine, looked at the cover and snorted impatiently. It showed a girl taking careful aim at a murderous-looking man with a knife. "Women shootin' thugs," he said. "These things is halfwitted. That's what cops are for . . . Say," he said abruptly, "I been lookin' for Weiss. Too late to see him tonight?"

"I guess so," said Riley. "He left 'bout fifteen minutes ago. Anything wrong?"

Calhoun shook his head. "It can wait," he said. " 'Tisn't line-o-duty, just something I wanta talk over with him." He craned his neck to stare down the southbound track. He glowered and moved a little closer to the potbelly stove. "No train in sight," he complained.

"Nope," Riley agreed. "The money train's due anyhow. You can't ride on that even if you do have flat feet. Sit down and rest yourself a couple of minutes."

Calhoun hitched up his heavy service coat, extracted a battered pack of cigarettes from his pants pocket and lit one carefully. He poked into the pack with a broad finger, found it empty and crumpled it. He pushed back the lid of the trash can to throw it away.

"Sweet Mother," he said. "You do grow 'em big here, do you not?" He was staring at the corpse of the rat.

"Old man Weiss' hobby," Riley explained. "He wanted to be Frank Buck when he was a fingerling—or more likely Dr. Livingston. Now he takes it out on shootin' rats in the station."

"Takes all kinds," Calhoun said philosophically. "Say—" He pointed to the door labeled *Men*. "Is it locked?"

Riley shook his head, and Calhoun disappeared behind the crack-painted wooden door.

RILEY spread his newspaper, but heard steps scuffling up the stairs. He saw a coat appear in the wicket before his downcast eyes, reached automatically for change as the sleeve moved up the counter.

But the coin he expected did not appear. Instead, the hand held a snubnosed black automatic.

"Keep your nickels," a taut voice snarled. "Put your hands up!"

"What the devil!" said Riley. "What d'you think you're doing?"

He raised startled eyes to see a sallow face, heavily lined. Lack of sun had bleached the once mahogany colored skin to wormy white. The eyes were small and dull. A corner of the mouth twitched, showing broken teeth. *Dope!* Riley thought. *Heaven help me this night!*

The sallow man was walking cautiously around the change booth to the door at the side. "I see a cop come up here," he said. "Where'd he go?"

Riley lied instinctively.

"Caught a train," he said promptly, praying the sallow one hadn't noticed that there had been no trains. *Calhoun, sweet Calhoun with a gun*—Riley began forming a prayer that would bring the cop to his aid.

The dark man opened the door, and Riley backed away, hands in the air. "You got a gun?" the man asked.

"N-no."

"You're lying," the man said conversationally. His dull eyes were hot now, staring at Riley. "What you call that?" His left hand thrust out at a glittering object on the ledge below the change counter—Weiss' air pistol.

"That's just—" Riley started hastily, but the man snarled at him.

"Shut up. I figured you'd lie anyhow." He picked the air gun up without looking at it, eyes steady on Riley, slipped it into his overcoat pocket. "One more question, Joe. There's a train coming in with money on it. When is that gonna be?"

"Ten minutes," Riley said sullenly. "If you got ideas, it's creepin' with guards."

The man looked at him silently for a second. Then, "Boy, you lie too dam' much. They's one guard and a motorman on that train. Stop lying. It makes me nervous. Now turn around."

Riley turned, heard the quick step behind him. He started when the rope went around his wrists, then compressed his lips as it was drawn murderously tight.

"Ha." The gunman grunted with satisfaction. "That'll do it. Now if you'll just keep out of trouble you might live past tonight. Just remember who's the boss. You can turn aroun' if you want to. I don't care."

Riley faced the gunman. Behind his back his hands began to strain at the knots. But the gunman was good at his trade. He watched Riley with a smirk on his grayish face. "Don't work too hard," he suggested.

Then he tensed. There were slow footsteps coming up from the street. "Don't try anything," he whispered.

Riley held his breath, eyes locked to the head of the stairs. The feet came down first, then a bent old figure in a shabby gray coat. Old man Weiss.

"For—" Riley began in astonishment, forgetting the gunman's orders. "Weiss, what are you doing here?"

The old man came to the head of the stairs and paused. "I got off the train and came back," he said in a weary monotone, his eyes bright in his leathery face as they gazed at Riley and the sallow man.

"I had an idea this might happen tonight."

Amazingly, the sallow man grinned crookedly. "Good to see you, Pop," he said. "Always glad to have you with me when I'm workin'."

Riley gulped. Old man Weiss and a thug! That was how the gunman had known about the train, the number of guards on it. But Weiss, a union man, a veteran with three five-year stripes on his shabby blue sleeve. . . .

Weiss sighed heavily and walked unsteadily toward the cage. "You can't do this, Sam," he said. "I'm not goin' to let you. You ruined your sister's life an' killed her with shame, you and your crooked ways. My wife—I owe you something for that, Sam."

The sallow man stepped back easily, still grinning, the gun out of his pocket. "What you going to do about it, Pop?" he taunted. "I need money to get out o' here quick. Too many people know I'm here. I ain't comin' back, and I don't care what I leave behind, because I'm goin' to be too far away for the law to catch. Pop, I just as soon kill you as not if you want it that way. Don't make me no trouble."

Weiss shook his head. "If your sister could see you," he said, and continued his slow, uneven walk, eyes on the gunman's face, the gun a thing that Riley might have dreamed for all the attention he paid it.

"Don't come any closer," said the sallow man.

All right, Calhoun, Riley said fervently, but only to himself. *You can come out now. You been in there long enough, Calhoun. Things are gettin' out of hand. For God's sake, Calhoun!*

The door marked *Men* stayed shut.

Riley gaped at the sallow man. The puffy face was hardening. The gun came slowly up, centering on Weiss' abdomen. There was a quick ripple of tendons across the back of the hand as it tightened around the butt, eased down on the trigger.

"Hey, listen," Riley yelled desperately. "Train's coming!"

IT WAS. He felt the rumbling of it, knew it was on its way. The money train, come to collect the day's receipts from the stiles. And this was the showdown.

The sallow man's face froze. He sidestepped out of the booth, started for the edge of the platform. Weiss stepped in front of him, lean hands outstretched.

"Stop, Sam," he said. "You done enough already."

"Out of my way!" The gunman brought up his left hand, straight-armed the old man in his thin chest. Weiss slammed back against the wall, hung there, coughing. The gunman started through and Weiss pushed himself frenziedly to his feet, plunged for the gunman, circled the thick waist with his trembling arms. The sallow man laughed shortly, brought the automatic up with a savage whipping motion. There was a horrid soft sound as the heavy barrel rasped across the old man's temple, and Weiss dropped.

"Hey!" squawked Riley. The laughter left the sallow man's face. He whirled on Riley.

"Shut up!" he said. "I'm going after this train. You hear? Stand right where you are."

He shouldered the door open, stepped out to the platform. Riley thought momentarily of a quick break, dodging behind the sill of the windows that looked out on the station. But the wood was so thick, nothing that would slow a fat .45 slug. Riley was perfectly visible to the gunman through the open door.

The approaching train groaned as its old brakes squeezed against cold iron wheels. It creaked to a stop in front of the station.

The door opened and the guard came out. He glanced incuriously at the gunman, started toward Riley. It was the Orangeman, Donovan, Riley saw.

Donovan's step faltered and he stared at the prostrate form of Weiss, suddenly glimpsed. The old man was moaning.

"What the hell!" Donovan said.

"Don't worry about it, Joe!" The gunman's thick voice came through the door, reached to where Riley stood. Donovan turned, mouth still open. His hand shot up—but he saw the gun and halted the instinctive grasp for his own.

"Turn around," said the gunman. "Turn around and keep walking. Tell your friend inside that this is business. I got plenty bullets for everybody!"

"Devil take you," said Donovan. "D'you think you can get away with this?"

"I can try real hard, Joe," said the gunman. "Do what I tell you! No shillying!"

Now or never, Riley thought swiftly. And he made his bid.

He swiveled out of the cage, jumped for the door. A part of his brain kept telling him that it was suicide, that he was unarmed, his hands tied, against a hopped-up killer with a big black gun. He smothered the thought and ran, staggering awkwardly as he tried to keep his balance.

Of course the gunman heard him. He turned, face contorted, and thrust the automatic at him. It banged three times—but Riley had left the ground in a flying dive, hit the platform rolling, slammed into the gunman's feet. He went down and the gun went flying. A savage foot lashed out and caught Riley in the side of the head. There were stars and galloping comets in his eyes then, and the world seemed to spin far away. It was only with half his consciousness that he saw Donovan beginning to turn, the gun at his waist coming out and into his hand. The gunman, face screwed up in fear and hatred, clawed the air pistol desperately out of his own pocket and leveled it, with dope-induced speed—

A curious blend of wonder and horror appeared in the gunman's eyes as he pulled the trigger of Weiss' air pistol, and saw the tiny feathered dart appear in the thick coat of the guard, and the gun coming around at him. Then Donovan's gun spoke twice, and there was no more expression on the gunman's face, just blood.

WEISS was still alive. Riley, not looking at the faceless corpse of the gunman, still and contorted under its own coat, knelt by the old man. By strenuous twisting he managed to touch the wrist with one of his bound hands. The ancient heart was still going. Weiss' eyes opened, flickered worriedly past Riley.

"Rassig?" he asked tiredly, pointing feebly to the body. "You took care of him?"

"Rassig!" Riley repeated. The man Calhoun had mentioned—the killer. "Was *he* your wife's brother? Him that's layin' dead there now?"

Weiss nodded. "That was him. You got him for me. Good boy, John. I tried, but I guess I'm too old."

Riley felt Donovan behind him, loosening the ropes on his wrists, but he paid no attention. He asked, "What is this, a circus? How come you're tied up with a hood like that one?"

Weiss sighed. "He never was any good. My wife was a saint, but him—well, he nearly killed a man three years ago. Bad clear through. She died of heartbreak, I guess, and I never told anybody. Ashamed of it. Then a week ago he comes walking in on me, says he's reformed, out of jail for good behavior. I caught him hittin' the needle, an' then I figured he was takin' a little too much interest in my work. It didn't make sense till tonight, when I happened to think o' the money train."

"Can't blame you for sayin' nothing," Riley said. "As far as I'm concerned, I haven't heard a thing you said. And I bet that goes for Donovan too."

"Sure," said the Irishman. Out of earshot, the train's motorman was staring awedly at the corpse.

Weiss nodded. "Thanks," he said. "That cop, Calhoun, knew about it, though. He was a friend o' my wife's family—"

Calhoun! "Excuse me," said Riley, getting up. "I just happened to think. We've got more company here." He trotted into the station, banged on the door to the men's room. "Calhoun!" he bawled. "Come on out of there!"

The door opened and the cop stood there, looking a little shamefaced, Riley's detective magazine open in his hand.

"No need to yell at me," he said. "Have I missed me train? I got int'rested in this thing o' yours. It's crazy, all this talk about guns an' killing. It don't happen that way. I been on the Force seventeen years—"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, Calhoun," Riley said disgustedly. "Come out here. You know that hood, Rassig, you were talking about? Well, he's out here on the platform, with a gun. You better get on out there and shoot 'im, Calhoun. Course, he's dead now, but I guess that don't count. He might get up again, or something. Takes a cop to do these things right." He shot out an arm, grabbed Calhoun's shoulder. He held him, enjoying the mixed emotions that flickered over the cop's face.

"Like you always say, Calhoun," he said, "whenever there's trouble, there's a cop around to take care of it. That's what we pay 'em for. Only thing is—if you need him in a hurry, it's liable to be a mite indelicate gettin' him to the scene!"

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that might have aroused suspicion. The mother and son had arrived without luggage. Their toilet articles, toothbrushes, soap, were carried in a small package that went into the son's pocket. Neither had brought a single article of clothing.

Mrs. Fox usually retired around nine-thirty, the son remaining in the lounge an hour or so longer. On the night of October 23rd Mrs. Fox went up to bed as usual. The son remarked that she had complained of a slight cold and that he had called a doctor for her the day before.

Sidney Fox went upstairs shortly before 11:40. Immediately afterward, he came rushing down the stairway to the lounge. screaming—"My mother's room is on fire!"

One of the guests bounded up the stairs, went into Fox's room and threw open the door to the adjoining room. Billows of thick smoke rolled out. Forcing himself to enter, the brave guest managed to open a window. Then, as the smoke cleared, he made out the body of Mrs. Fox on the bed. She lay on her back, her feet dangling over the side. He picked her up and carried her into Sidney Fox's room.

Others now came rushing in with buckets of water. The fire which had been confined to the armchair before the gas logs in the fireplace was quickly put out. The thick horsehair stuffing had been enough to provide that suffocating smoke.

The two doctors who arrived almost immediately tried artificial respiration but with no results. They agreed that Mrs. Fox had died of suffocation.

At the inquest the following day Sidney Fox testified that he went upstairs with his mother around 9:45. She had remarked that she was going to read the paper and go to bed. He saw her last sitting in the arm chair close to the fire, reading the Evening Standard.

Perhaps she had dozed. Because she seemed to tire so easily, he had bought a pint bottle of port that afternoon and suggested she take a drink of it. He had poured out a drink for her before going back to the lounge. Probably the port had made her drowsy and the paper had slipped from her fingers while she sat close to the fireplace, caught the flame and burned up to the chair.

When he came upstairs at 11:40 he had listened at her closed door. Hearing no movement, he decided his mother was asleep. He was getting ready for bed himself when he noticed smoke seeping under the door sill.

The hotel manager testified to the condition of the room. The carpet under the armchair was burnt—though a piece of the drugget between it and the fireplace was not even singed.

However the fire had not spread beyond the armchair. Presumably Mrs. Fox, arousing and seeing herself surrounded by smoke, had managed to get to the bed before she collapsed.

The testimony of the attending physicians, that she had died of shock completed the evidence. The Margate coroner, after extending sympathy to the grieving son, announced his decision—

Death by Misadventure.

On October 25th, Sidney Fox left Margate to accompany the body of his mother to Norfolk, where she was to be buried. On the same day he engaged a solicitor to collect the insurance on three policies.

Fox had taken out two short term policies on his mother, one for £3000 ($15,000) with the Ocean Accident Guarantee Corporation, the other for £1000 ($5,000) with the Cornwall Insurance Company. Both carried insurance against death by accident or any other calamity engendered by travel.

But—and this was what caused the investigation—since the 11th of September Fox had taken out exactly eleven one-day policies on his mother.

Mrs. Fox, very conveniently, had died of suffocation at 11:30 the night of October 22nd, less than half an hour before the policies were due to expire.

The insurance agents working with the local Margate police, turned up the fact that Fox had lied in telling fellow guests he had an independent income. Mother and son had a total income of eighteen shillings a week.

And Fox received eight shillings weekly from the government for injuries sustained during the first World War and a ten shilling allowance was granted the mother for the death of another son in the same conflict.

The Foxes had not just returned from

France as the son had said. Instead they had been making the rounds of seaside resorts, leaving unpaid hotel bills behind them. Their baggage had been held at one establishment, which accounted for their lack of it when they arrived at Margate.

The authorities started proceedings to have the body of Mrs. Fox disinterred for further autopsy.

Meanwhile, the Margate police considered the fact that the fire had burnt only the arm-chair. The carpet between the chair and the fireplace had escaped the flames completely. Odd that fire should leap across this twelve-inch space!

And Sidney Fox had used petrol, said a chambermaid, to remove spots from his suit.

On the evening of the fire Sidney Fox had given his mother port. Was this to stupefy her while the blaze started?

But the report of the Crown Coroner, Sir Bernard Spillsbury, showed there was no soot whatsoever in the nostrils of Mrs. Fox. This meant she had not inhaled any smoke—in fact, had been dead before the fire started. But what interested the authorities most was the condition of her larynx. Back on it was a small bruise, occasioned, said Spillsbury, by manual strangulation. There were no other marks or bruises on the outside of the throat. Fox had probably thrown his mother on the bed, then grasped her only an instant by the throat before he put a pillow over her face and held it there until she was suffocated.

Despite his repeated denials, Sidney Fox went on trial for the murder of his mother. Experts disagreed as to the cause of death. But the jury was impressed by the testimony of the insurance agents concerning those policies, timed to expire less than half an hour before Mrs. Fox died.

Sidney Fox was convicted and sentenced to the gallows. One more insurance racketeer had met the fate he deserved.

WHEN Eva Coo hired Harry Wright, known locally as Gimpy, to be handyman at her roadhouse in the hills of Otsego county, the people of Cooperstown were pleased.

For Gimpy was a local problem. Afflicted with an awkward limp and other ailments, he was not exactly self-sufficient.

But with Eva Gimpy made good. For Eva kept him on. He painted the outside of

the one-room tourist cabins, cleaned inside, hoed the garden and did the odd jobs.

Many of Cooperstown's citizens had found in Eva Coo a generous and sympathetic friend, one to turn to in time of trouble. Mrs. Martha Clift, a widow with two children who worked as hostess at the roadhouse, considered Eva her best friend. Mrs. Gladys Shumway had turned to Eva in trouble and Eva had given Gladys a job as entertainer. Mrs. Edna Hanover, too, knew that she could always count on Eva.

On June 15th a call came to the Cooperstown headquarters of the state troopers that Gimpy Wright hadn't returned home the night before.

"Something has happened to him," explained Eva Coo. "I'm so worried. I wish you'd have a look for him."

Eva was right. On the concrete road, thrown to one side, lay the wrecked body of Gimpy. His chest was crushed; you could almost see the marks of the tires that had passed over it. His head, too, had been battered. A hit-and-run accident, said the authorities.

But soon they were taking a posthumous interest in him. Odds and ends of gossip kept seeping in. For instance, some one talked of seeing Eva and Martha Clift in Martha's new Willys-Knight sedan shortly after six o'clock the night of Gimpy's death and there in the back seat sat Gimpy, looking very pleased with himself.

Mrs. Eva Fink, who owned a vacant house on Crumhorn Mountain not far from Eva Coo's roadhouse, had gone that Thursday to look over her property with her daughter and son-in-law. She was just turning up the drive when her headlight picked up a sedan in the middle of the road. One woman sat at the wheel of the car.

Mrs. Fink thought she recognized Eva Coo, though in the dusk she couldn't be sure. She had stopped long enough to warn them of trespassing. Then Mrs. Fink, pausing to jot down the license number of the sedan, had driven on.

Now the coroner had decided that death came to Gimpy from fourteen to sixteen hours before he was found— that is, at about six or seven of Thursday night. Eva Coo had volunteered an explanation of her whereabouts at the time. She was visiting her nearest neighbor, a Miss Meyer.

The condition of Gimpy's body was also

puzzling. The circular marks on his head were barely deep enough to have knocked him out. It was difficult to explain them. It was clear that death had been caused by the wheels of the car running over the chest. But there were no other marks on body or the clothing. If he had been knocked unconscious by the car, surely there would have been bruises elsewhere.

And what part of an automobile could have left those impressions on his head?

Suspicion simmered over when word seeped through Cooperstown that a couple of insurance men were asking questions about Harry Wright. Poverty-stricken Gimpy who wore anybody's old clothes had in the last three years taken out fourteen insurance policies! Altogether they amounted to over nine thousand dollars.

The beneficiary named in all these policies was—Eva Coo.

That these policies had been taken out fraudulently the insurance people were convinced. The company possessed a letter written by Gimpy only a few months earlier. This letter showed a different handwriting from that in the letters which arranged for the policies. Nor did it take a handwriting expert to reach this conclusion.

Another detail caught the attention of the insurance agents. Gimpy came of a provident local family which believed in making as much as possible all preparations for its final resting place. So Gimpy's mother, alive when he was still a young boy, had had the date of his birth chiseled on the family monument.

This date was 1880; in 1934 Gimpy was a little over fifty. Insurance rates for the over-fifty class are much higher than for those under the half-century mark. As if in anticipation, Eva Coo had hired a stone cutter to go to the cemetery and change that 0 into a five. But Eva had forgotten the birth records in county courthouses.

Mrs. Fink's story now began to receive more careful attention. Detectives went to the driveway and studied the ground.

It was easy to see where the new car had stood. A recent rain had left the earth soft; the parked car had made unusually deep impressions and, because no one used this drive, the marks remained.

There was still another puzzling detail. At one spot for about eighteen inches one wheel had left no print! The answer?

Come Home to Die!

There had been something between the ground and the wheel.

Eva Coo was hard to tackle. Her cold blue eyes stared right back at the D.A.

"You can't get anything on me," she sneered.

Finding Eva steadfast in her denials, the district-attorney turned to the three women who were closest to her.

Martha Clift was approached first. "Eva bought you that new car because she wanted your help," said Grant. "You helped her kill Gimpy." He watched her face as he made his next thrust. "You sat behind the wheel and drove the car back and forth over Gimpy," he announced calmly, casually as if he was stating a well-known fact. "Mrs. Fink saw you inside the machine."

The woman began to wilt. "Eva's been a good friend to me," she whimpered. "I don't like to go back on her."

The district attorney showed no special interest. "Take your time," he said. "We know enough without your confession. But I'll make a deal with you. If you will tell the truth, I'll do my best to have the murder charge against you modified."

Martha Clift gave in.

Two months earlier, she said, Eva Coo had first voiced her intention of getting rid of Gimpy. She didn't tell Martha about this until the night of the murder. That day Eva had paid an installment on the new sedan. Martha, Eva ordered, was to get it and return to the roadhouse tomorrow.

Martha arrived there about 5.30. Eva explained to Gimpy that all three were going to get some shrubs from Crumhorn Mountain. Harry got in the back, Eva joined Martha in the front seat.

As the car turned into the drive of the abandoned house, Eva turned to Harry. "Get out and come with me," she told him. They started up the drive together. Eva to Martha to keep the motor running.

When Eva beckoned again, Martha started up the drive slowly. Harry heard the car coming and started to step out of the drive, but Eva Coo took a mallet from inside her sweater and hit him on the head.

He put up his hands to ward off the mallet. Eva struck again and again. Harry fell to his knees. Eva kicked and pushed him flat on the road.

(Continued on page 113)

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ICS

Come Home to Die!

(Continued from page 111)

"Back up over him now," Eva called; and then, "Run over him again." Martha followed orders.

When Mrs. Fink stopped on the drive, Gimpy was lying under the machine, breathing his last. The two women had shivered as he talked—suppose Gimpy should moan or call out! But poor Gimpy had died without a sound.

As soon as Mrs. Fink moved on, Martha got out and together she and Eva stowed the body in the back of the car and covered it with a rug.

On the way back down the mountain, Martha stopped the car and kept watch while Eva hoisted the body out and pushed it into a ditch.

The idea of getting rid of Gimpy had been simmering in Eva Coo's head for some time, said Eva Hanover to whom she had also confided her plans. At one time, she had planned to murder Gimpy on a back road between Cooperstown Junction and Portlandville, where there was a steep hill. She would drive up the hill, pretend to have a flat and then ask Gimpy to get out and look at the tire. While he was looking, she would release the emergency brake and let the car slide down hill, and over Gimpy.

Another time she planned to drive him over a cliff, but then there was the question whether she could get out of the car in time herself.

In August Eva Coo went on trial for the murder of Harry Wright. Her girl friends testified against her.

"They can't convict me," insisted Eva confidently, "it wouldn't be just. I didn't run the car over Gimpy. It was Martha Clift who did that."

But the jury could and did find Eva guilty. She went to the electric chair June 27th 1935. Martha Clift pled guilty to murder in the second degree and received a twenty-year sentence.

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