



THE NEWEST IN CRIME FICTION

OCT. 25¢

NEW DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE



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KNIFE
IS
RED!**

A SUSPENSE
NOVELETTE

by G. T.
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ROBERTS**

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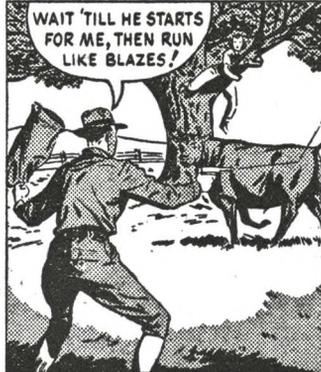
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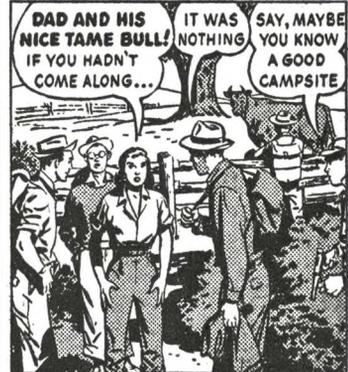


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NEW DETECTIVE

BEST IN CRIME FICTION 25c

MAGAZINE

Vol. 16

Contents for October, 1951

No. 4

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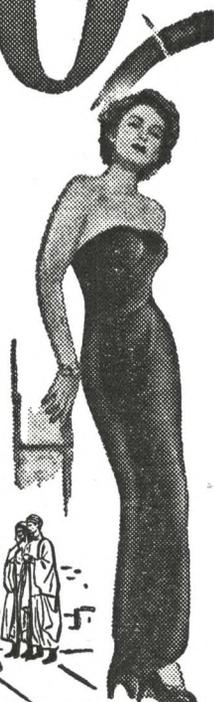
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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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in Damascus--where
day begins when the
sun goes down!



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"Coup de Grace", by **Joseph Kessel** · A **SANTANA PRODUCTION** · Produced by **ROBERT LORD** · Directed by **CURTIS BERNHARDT**



THE WITNESS CHAIR

A LONG with the classic question in any detective story, viz: Whodunit? there's a subsidiary and no less fascinating facet that appeals to your dyed-in-the-blood murder aficionado—the simple, ubiquitous inquiry: Why?

Conning the contents of this issue's mail bag, we are given to idle wonder that some forward-looking entrepreneur of the correspondence school business doesn't run an ad something like this:

NEED MONEY FAST?

Are you, too, suffering from that uncomfortable, embarrassing malady of being too short on the long green? Take our new streamlined course to correct this sorry condition. Simply insure your wife, husband, friend and then collect handsomely from the insurance company. Our course in Murder for Profit tells you how to do it. We can't guarantee your own life expectancy, but you can't expect egg in your beer *all* the time.

Also, cut rates on carving knives, cheap pistols, strange poisons and muscle builders. Send coupon today!

So it seems that if the profit motive is an integral part of life, it is also a part of much death by violence. Here, then, are some extra choice examples of people who did their best to repair leaky finances by the old dodge of murder, or some other picturesque, extra-legal activity, done with more or less finesse.

Dear Editor:

To murder one woman is a conspicuous business. Police can concentrate on a single corpse, and perhaps discover that someone, somewhere, hated her. Therefore, Joseph Albert Guay of Quebec decided that his unwanted wife should lose her life in a mas-

sacre. He invented a phony business errand for her, put her on the Quebec Airways passenger plane for Baie Comeau, along with a package which she would never deliver—as it happened to contain a time bomb. In the subsequent explosion, not only Guay's wife, but

(Continued on page 8)



"I pinned my hopes to a penny postal"

JESSE K. KIMBALL
Chief Building Inspector, Washington, D. C.



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(Continued from page 6)

twenty-two others, total strangers to him, lost their lives. The plane was completely destroyed.

Spendthrift that he'd been with murder, Guay's inbred Gallic penny-nursing proved his undoing later. The reservations clerk, at the booth where he'd bought his wife's fatal ticket, remembered him all too well. When buying the customary travel insurance that went with the fare, Guay had insisted on saving fifty cents—by buying one-way insurance with a round-trip ticket!

Such prescience interested the authorities. What Guay collected for his carefully planned massacre was not ten thousand dollars, but a sentence of death.

Winfield Zachary,
South Dakota.

Dear Editor:

Changing times bring changing customs. But little boys in the suburbs have always done odd jobs for small change. Once, their business was with murder. In the early years of this century, when New York City still used coroners to perform its autopsies, an anxious rivalry developed between the respective coroners of Brooklyn and Queens for the possession of corpses floating between the boroughs in Newtown Creek. Each corpse meant an autopsy fee of eleven dollars and fifty cents to the official doing the cutting. Since official dignity prevented these gents from doing their own grabbing, little boys with rowboats were hired to haul in as many stiffs as they could.

It was considered better-paid work than peddling newspapers, or mowing the neighbors' lawns.

Elmer Pickens,
California.

Dear Editor:

This is the amazing story of four well-born Southern ladies, who fell upon evil days but never forgot their pride. The three Wardlaw sisters survived the Civil War, but their fortunes did not. A kinsman's will bequeathed them, of all things, a debt-ridden college in Virginia. Caroline, the eldest, literally lost her mind while trying to make a go of it—but not her belief in keeping up appearances.

After the college shut down, she herded her two younger sisters and her daughter, Oceana, north to Newark, New Jersey, to look for Yankee gold. They lived in a fine house in East Orange—fine, at least, from the front. Within, there were only the four women, their good manners, and some bread crusts. All the movable furniture was sold, to maintain a decent facade on the street outside.

Starvation was only a temporary problem. The ladies put the last of their funds into life insurance policies, secure in the knowledge that one of them must finally succumb to hunger. Oceana, Caroline's daughter, failed first. But when authorities broke in, they found the girl drowned in a bathtub, not merely dead from starvation.

Had she drowned herself in despair—or had her hungry mother pushed her privately under water, to rush the insurance payments which would mean hot biscuits again for the survivors?

The State of New Jersey was never able to prove its point. Caroline Wardlaw Martin, the dead girl's mother, had to be committed to an insane asylum. Aunt Mary, the second sister, proved too weak-willed to have understood the proceedings, and was released. Aunt Virginia, the only really sane party to the plot, horrified at finding herself in a common jail, turned the ladylike Wardlaw weapon against herself, refused all food, and died officially of starvation while awaiting trial.

Dear Editor:

Wherever he is, whatever happens to him, a good man gets ahead.

Charles Ward started life in complete poverty, vowed he would one day be rich. Almost at his goal, he got in trouble on a narcotics charge, was sent to Leavenworth. Few would have gambled on his chances for success, from then on—but for Ward, it was the biggest opportunity in his life. He made fast friends with convict Herbert Bigelow, also serving time, for income tax evasion. When both men were freed, Ward became Bigelow's business partner, later became a millionaire many times over, perhaps the only businessman in history who really made crime pay.

William Fayson,
Georgia.

Dear Editor:

The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo wasn't a myth. His name was Charles Wells, an Englishman. Nor did he break the bank just once—he seems to have had the knack of it. Six times in two years, they had to close the casino business because of his winnings, back in the 1890's.

Lucky? Not exactly. Odd as it seems, Mr. Wells' gambling was the only honest thing he ever did. In his native land, he was a professional swindler—and when news of his great coup reached England, his dupes wondered what he was doing in Monte Carlo in the first place. He had told them he was an inventor and engineer, and they had supposed him to be on the high seas, testing a new type of fuel in which they had invested thousands of pounds.

As a result, the man who won half a million dollars in an evening—and spent a little more than that on high living—returned at last to England, to spend the next eight years in jail.

Bill Dixon,
Montana.

Dear Editor:

Few judges, fortunately, are likely to have experiences similar to that of Police Court

(Continued on page 108)



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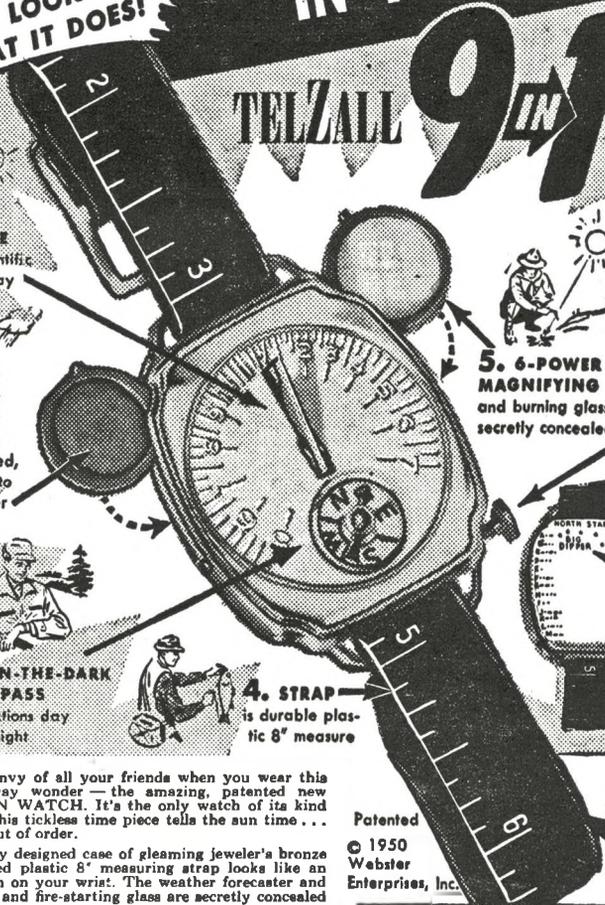
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MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE — ORDER TODAY

TELZALL, 430 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Ill.

MY KNIFE IS RED!



As the gun appeared, O'Mara pitched the Gladstone.

CHAPTER ONE

Whose Knife?

HE CAME into the street with the early dark. It was that in-between hour when the marrieds do up the dishes and the unmarrieds dress for their dates. Too early for movies and too late for the shops, that off-hour when Sixteenth

Street always looks tired and discouraged, he came along with his hard heels banging the cold pavement as though they knew where they were taking him. Maybe they did. Maybe his shoes were in on the plot. But he had nothing whatever in mind. His destination was *out*. You could tell that by the way the belt-ends of his topcoat were bunched in his pockets. You could tell

By G. T. Fleming-Roberts



by his hat, worn too far back on his head, dented wrong, jammed on any old way when he'd left.

Halfway along some block, he stopped in a red puddle of light and tipped up that thin, sour, black-Irish face of his to the overhead sign. A pair of neon dice rolled double-aces. The Snake Eyes—a hell of a name for a tavern.

What would you do if you found yourself riding a bus you never took; wearing clothes you never bought; carrying a wad of money in someone else's wallet—and a bloodstained knife you hoped you hadn't used . . .?

It was very quiet, then, in the street, as though the night held its breath, waiting to see if this was the time and the place. If not tonight, then tomorrow night or the next. But a time like this, and just such a place. . . .

O'Mara pushed through the steam-pebbled door of the Snake Eyes. He noted the subdued light and the warmth and how thin the crowd was at the bar. He went back to a vacant booth, sat down, flattened a ten dollar bill on the table. He didn't look at the waitress. She might have had two heads—he wouldn't have known.

"Double Scotch," he told her. "Keep them coming as long as my sawbuck buys." That's how it was with him; no place to go and in a hurry to get there. He was working on his second double Scotch when the woman in the booth just ahead of him picked up her Collins glass and came around the flimsy partition. She was a rather cute, young little thing dressed in a gray tweed storm coat with the hood thrown back from hair that was neither brown nor blond but some shade in between. Her button nose was saddled with large, black-rimmed glasses that lent her the aspect of a Walt Disney goldfish. She was smoking with one of those aluminum cigarette holders that should be trade-named *Plumber's Dream*.

"In bars, yet," she said and sat down at his table.

He nodded. She meant even in bars they were neighbors. Tickey Davis occupied the other utility flat at Mrs. Runge's along with the world's noisiest typewriter and a mongrel dog that barked to go bye-bye at odd hours. Tickey wrote magazine stories that were read, O'Mara firmly believed, by persons who were curious as to what kind of stories anybody named Tickey would write.

She crinkled her small nose and took off her glasses. Her eyes, he discovered, were large and gray, fringed with long dark lashes.

"Need a shoulder to cry on, Peter?" she asked soberly. "Or don't the damned cry?" "Damned?" he repeated. "I look that bad?"

"It's a fey look, Peter."

He said pointedly, "I cry on my own shoulder."

"Contortionist!" Her smile quivered and tried to make friends. "Is your model giving you a hard time again?"

Tickey Davis always referred to Jean Norman as "your model." Since Jean wrote ad copy for Prescott & Doan and was no longer his, the term was a trifle misleading.

"Look, Tickey—" using the club as gently as possible, "why not go write your love stories and let me handle mine?"

She looked down at her glass, then nodded meekly and slipped out of the booth. "I'll be working late. You might drop in for coffee when you come home. If you come home."

Ominous? As though he were actually fey? He didn't think so. In fact, he didn't think about it at all. As Tickey moved away, the waitress came with a refill. It became automatic like that—a double shot every ten minutes. Even when he went to the little boys' room and came back, there was the glass, brim full of Scotch. He drank it, and that was *the* one. On every binge, he supposed, there's always *the* one, but it came much sooner tonight than expected. It came differently. No glow at all, just a creeping lethargy. He scarcely moved except to fumble listlessly in under his coat. But nothing came of that. The ring was still there in a vest pocket. His poor little diamond. It burned with cold fire, a dead ember that branded him with the sign of the sap. She'd kept the ring, Jean Norman had, until she was sure of another and larger one. That kind of a woman, he told himself in the cold light of retrospect, lovely but earthy, with shallow and prolific roots that would always be searching for new fields to ravage.

He laughed off-key.

"Pete, old man—"

That came from somewhere on his left and about six miles away. O'Mara turned his head carefully as a hand heavy with camaraderie dropped on his shoulder. The face that emerged from his personal Scotch mist was ruddy and boyish, blocked out of the murk by crew-cut blond hair and a maize yellow scarf. It bobbed and smiled. O'Mara wondered why some people could have pink elephants with their binges and he had to have Byron Phelps. Byron, the ninety-day wonder. Byron, who was somebody's cousin and got kicked upstairs and had ever since run the ad department of Prescott & Doan like a community sing. Byron's was the larger diamond. His was the voice that spoke from six miles away.

"Pete, fella, your neighbor Miss Davis told me I'd find you here. I want to talk to you."

The desire, though, is not mutual, fella, O'Mara thought of saying. Not that you could insult Byron. In the ad department that was daily attempted by experts.

"Pete, deadline tomorrow. Haven't you had enough?"

Why, you officious jerk, O'Mara thought of saying. And thought of saying, You holier-than-thou do-gooder, you act like the red-blooded, clean-living supervisor of Camp Chikamauek about to impart the facts of life to a group of kids tormented no less by poison ivy rash than by your platitudes.

O'Mara tried to get up, but a frightening torpor had settled down upon him with the smothering weight of a feather bed. The light was increasingly dim. Another face had edged in beside Byron's. A sharp pale face that O'Mara had never seen before. O'Mara half stood, feather mattress and all, and the room started to spin. All the dim, far-away lights spun, caught in a mad whirl, with the dark rushing in, roaring down like a million gallons of ink through a funnel.

O'Mara was washed through the small end of the funnel by the weight of the dark. He went swirling away into bottomless silence. . . .

WHEN he was again aware of anything there was motion, spent gasoline fumes, and the thin scream of a transmission above the muted throb of an engine. It required conscious effort on his part to identify these sensations and sounds, and after he had considered them for a brief space of time with no understanding of how they concerned him, O'Mara opened his eyes to peer around a gray homburg worn by somebody directly in front of him. The rows of windows blacked out by the night, the all but deserted seats on either side of a littered aisle, the curtained sanctum of the driver—all confirmed his suspicions. He was on a bus.

And what, O'Mara wondered with hung-over indifference, would I be doing on a bus? He shifted his position slightly, and his head started to throb. He swore quietly. The man in the homburg turned, and his was not the sort of face O'Mara drew under homburgs available on the Famous Fifth Floor For Men for Prescott & Doan advertising. Straight lines, yes, but without any convergence toward the chin. The effect was as oblong as a garden spade. A downy brown mustache calipered a thick mouth where, even in repose, there was a glint of teeth. The nose was big-nostriled—a very nosy nose, O'Mara decided, not liking the man for no other reason except that right now O'Mara liked no one. He watched the man prop up one leg of the caliper mustache with a king-size cigarette.

"Do you have a light?" he asked pleasantly.

O'Mara mechanically thrust his right hand into the side pocket of his coat where ordinarily he accumulated matchbooks. He discovered a singular thing: he was wearing somebody else's coat of rich tan fleece

and in its pocket his fingers encountered something slim and cold and sharp. A knife. A kitchenlike knife. He withdrew his hand, empty.

"No matches."

The stranger said thanks anyway and returned to his magazine. O'Mara pushed compressed lips around over clenched teeth, noting the familiar furriness that belongs to mornings after, and gingerly put his hand in the pocket. He got the knife handle in his fingers, partially withdrew the knife as he looked down and to the right. The five inch, hollow-ground blade was blotched with red stains.

The knife slipped from nervous fingers and fell back into the pocket. O'Mara's puffy-lidded glance scouted backward. The three seats behind him were empty. He turned back, rolling slightly in the seat as the bus rounded a curve. Forward and on the opposite side of the aisle an aged couple were sharing a bag of peanuts. O'Mara's gaze shifted to the window. Beyond his own ghastly image vast darkness was sparsely flecked with flying snow.

He thought about ditching the knife under the seat, and that didn't seem like such a hot idea. While he had thought there was something familiar about it, the knife was not his. If he ditched it, though, it might seem to be his.

And I've got to get off this damned bus, he resolved, before I wind up in Zionsville, Bridgeport, or some other suburb. But when he regarded the swaying length of aisle the unrest in his stomach increased. He'd never make it as long as the bus was in motion. He absently fumbled into the inner pocket of his suitcoat where he carried cigarettes in a flat leather case. What he came up with was a black wallet of pin-seal. He stared at it dully for a moment, then lifted the skirt of the overcoat to look down the knife-edged creases in brown, hard-finished worsted to polished brown oxfords. It was one thing to find yourself in another man's shoes—as O'Mara cer-

tainly was—but something else to discover you'd acquired the other man's pants.

O'Mara gulped as he opened the wallet. The name of Fred T. Regen was neatly typed on the identification card together with a Walnut Street address in Norwood, a suburb twenty miles south of downtown Indianapolis. Business cards that spilled out of a slot indicated that Mr. Regen was a manufacturers' representative with an office in the Life Building, Lafayette, Indiana.

The driver's license also carried a Lafayette address. In a transparent photo compartment was the picture of a young woman autographed, *To Fred with love, Roma*. There was a faintly mocking smile on Roma's full lips as she looked over a creamy shoulder with long, oddly tilted dark eyes that now challenged, now fled. The currency compartment of the wallet was disappointingly empty.

"Is this yours?"

The homburg man again. Startled, O'Mara looked up to find that the man had half turned, his right arm in a dark blue overcoat sleeve extended along the back of the seat. His left hand held one of the cards O'Mara had dropped from the wallet.

"I'm Wally Cobb," the homburg man said. "I'm a neighbor of yours, Regen."

"You are?" O'Mara made his eyes blank. If he denied he was Fred Regen, Cobb would naturally wonder what O'Mara was doing with Regen's wallet. This could get you trouble if you did not have enough of that commodity already.

Wally Cobb had a pleasant laugh. "You wouldn't know, of course. I met the charming Mrs. Regen the other day for the first time, and she explained you hadn't seen your new home yet; you were cleaning up tag ends of business in Lafayette."

O'Mara took the proffered hand. It was lean and strong and he got rid of it as soon as possible. He turned to the window. The bus had slowed and a street lamp showed the faces of sleeping houses.

"I'll be glad to do anything I can to help you get settled," Wally Cobb persisted. "I'm with Mid-Continent Mutual."

O'Mara said that was nice. The bus had pulled up in front of the unlighted windows of a drugstore. Wally Cobb stood, tall in his dress overcoat, and said well, here they were, and moved along the aisle currently blocked by the old couple and their numerous packages. O'Mara dug down into a pants pocket where he had noticed a promising jingle and scooped out four keys. Also three cents. I might, he thought bitterly, post a letter to my congressman about this. Dammit, I'll have to find Fred Regen and find out if he's got *my* clothes and *my* wallet.

GLANCING up, O'Mara saw that he was alone on the bus except for the driver who had pushed back curtains and was now staring at O'Mara without much enthusiasm.

"All right, Lord Calvert—" The driver stood on bowed legs and wallowed up the aisle. He glared at O'Mara who said, "How soon do you start back to Indianapolis?"

The driver shook his head. "This is the last trip tonight."

He added, "You look kinda green around the gills."

O'Mara suspected he did. He stood, and the sense of motion was still with him. "How did I get on here, anyway?"

The driver shrugged broad shoulders. "You're maybe equipped with casters. When I got on at the yard to pull into the depot for loading, there was your suitcase and you back here asleep with your ticket stuck in your hatband."

O'Mara supposed he'd been put on the bus before loading time. That could be managed without attracting attention. He followed the driver up the aisle, taking hand-holds where he found them, and then there was the matter of the suitcase—a goat-grained leather Gladstone tagged with the

name and address of Mr. Fred T. Regen. O'Mara showed his teeth, picked up the Gladstone, and nearly fell over the bent-over back of the driver.

"What the hell?" O'Mara said harshly.

The driver picked up a long envelope from the mat in front of the door, straightened, his face flushed. "They drop things, they leave things. Here—" He thrust the envelope under O'Mara's nose. An improvised label of plain paper had been stuck to the front of the envelope with cellulose tape. The label carried Wallace Cobb's name and address along with an Indianapolis postmark. O'Mara looked up at the driver with hostile eyes.

"What'd you mean, 'here'?"

"Well, you might give it to Mr. Cobb. He's a neighbor of yours."

"What do you think I am—an errand boy?" And O'Mara sidled past the driver, lurched from the bus with the Gladstone but without Wally Cobb's envelope. He stood on the sidewalk and shifted the bag to his left hand. The damned thing seemed to be loaded with rocks. He glanced about. It was a street of small shops, all dark and deserted. Nearly a block to the east, O'Mara saw the tall figure of Wally Cobb against the white blur of flying snow under a street lamp. O'Mara started off in the same direction.

Walnut was two blocks up and to the right, and here accumulated snow cut white geometrics out of the roofs of quiet homes. The Gladstone grew heavier as O'Mara stumped along in shoes too tight for his feet. Only one car passed him in three blocks and this one pulled up in front of the only house where an entryway light still burned. A man got out of the car and went into the house. I'll ask there, O'Mara decided. I'll ask where Fred Regen lives, I want to give him back his damned shoes.

He didn't have to ask. 419 was the house with the entry light—a two-story red brick colonial with phony white shutters at the front windows. O'Mara went

up the approach walk, climbed to a sheltered stoop, and hopefully clacked the knocker. Maybe this would all turn out to be something he could tell at the office for laughs.

The door was opened by a short slight man of no particular age who had not yet had time to take off his overcoat. His was the same sharp narrow face that had edged into the picture at the Snake Eyes Tavern just before O'Mara had passed out. The man's thin-skinned, blue-templed pallor was emphasized by center-parted black hair that might have been applied to his skull with two strokes of a sash brush. The set of his mouth, the squinted eyes, suggested an acquired cynicism, and on him the effect was one of brittleness rather than toughness.

"Judas H. Particular Priest!" he said when he saw O'Mara, and left the last syllable on his lips as a sneer.

"Regen?" O'Mara asked, realizing this little sharpie would have had to turn up an eight-inch cuff in the brown trousers.

"Come on in," the man said. He hung onto the door, closed it after O'Mara had entered a hall carpeted in deep rose. There was a stairway to the left. A softly lighted living room to the right, and the woman came through its cased opening like stepping out of Fred Regen's wallet. That woman. Roma. She was wearing a black street-length dress with a ballroom neckline. She was tall in her stilt heels, not too slender though her face had hungry hollows under the cheekbones. Dark curls clustered above a rather short brow where her frown started and crept down to cloud the long dark eyes. Her voice was deep and cool.

"So you finally got here, did you?"

"Walked right in like a little man, didn't you, Fred?" The sharpie came from behind O'Mara, rubbing pale hairless hands, pleased about something. "I told you he would, Roma."

O'Mara was still holding the Gladstone. His flat black eyes shifted from one to the

other of the pair. He was tired and sick and furious. He was not yet afraid.

"Now, wait a minute," he said softly. "What's with this Fred business? Where's Regen? I've got his wallet, and I'd like mine."

The woman touched the man's arm with the tips of long fingers without taking her eyes off O'Mara's face. She said, "It's your fault, Bobby. You'll have to take him."

And that, O'Mara thought, would be the trick of the week if he pulls it off—that little squirt. O'Mara had not supposed there would be a gun. When there was—it had seemingly jumped into the fragile-looking hand where it appeared black and deadly—O'Mara pitched the Gladstone that was maybe loaded with rocks. The end of it caught Bobby in the gut. He made mouthy, yawping sounds and sat down on the floor with the Gladstone in his lap.

O'Mara swung around, got the door open before Roma's claws took up some of the fullness in the back of the fleece overcoat. O'Mara warned her, and when she didn't let go he twisted to the left, swung backhandedly to land one on Roma's jaw. Then she let go, her cry not loud, nothing intelligible, and O'Mara ran into the street, got the parked car between himself and Bobby's gun. Across the street there was a dark slot between buildings, and O'Mara ran for it with panic nipping at his heels.

CHAPTER TWO

Escape into Hell

THE truck had a feed sack stuffed in a hole in the windshield and seemed to be upholstered in paving blocks. But the important thing was that it had happened along the highway when O'Mara had needed it most, and it had stopped. Behind him in Norwood two flashlights possibly still needed the back alleys and dark corners. It had been a quiet, purposeful search, no shots and no shouts. Just Bobby

and Roma and Peter O'Mara playing hide-in-the-dark all over town.

The driver of the truck was a young farmer with hands like hams, shy, not given to talk. Not concerned with much beyond the importance of getting his birds to the city before the poultry market collapsed. The lack of conversation gave O'Mara a chance to think. He'd been drugged at the Snake Eyes—Bobby was there—but to what possible purpose? Maybe part of the plot had broken down somewhere. Maybe he wasn't supposed to have recovered consciousness on the bus. If he hadn't, if the neighbors—Wally Cobb and the old people—had delivered O'Mara to 419 Walnut, he might have gone on sleeping forever.

He shuddered. Maybe that's what they'd had in mind. It might be an insurance swindle, an attempt to bury O'Mara as Fred T. Regen so Fred could collect. Which didn't explain the knife and some previous blood-letting.

The truck rattled into Indianapolis at 3:10 A.M. by Fred Regen's gold watch. O'Mara borrowed a buck from the farmer for taxi fare and got out on Washington Street. He thought about calling the cops, but the bloodstained knife deterred him. Later, perhaps, after he'd read all about it in the paper tomorrow, he'd go to the cops. But right now he wanted to be back on Park Avenue where the kids kicked tin cans in the alley on Sunday morning. Where Tickey Davis' typewriter clattered half the night. Where he'd hung the water colors he'd painted while on Okinawa against the drab walls of his bed-living room. Where the shower dried up if Mrs. Runge was doing the wash. These commonplace things had taken on lustre.

It wasn't much of a place. Mrs. Runge, a railroad man's widow, had remodeled the second floor of her home to make two apartments, each with a kitchenette, a cubbyhole bath, and one fairly large room. Tickey Davis' light was still burning, O'Mara noticed, as he turned through the

straggling hedge and headed for the north end of the house. The wind had died down, or had got lost in the canyons of the city and the treads of the open stairs were lightly powdered with snow. Before he was halfway up, the mongrel dog started to bark. He knocked at the door and peered into the lighted hall through the glass. His own place, and he was outside, looking in. It gave him a shucked clam feeling.

Tickey Davis, preceded by what she described as "a white airedale" and trailing smoke from the plumber's dream holder, came into the hall. Between soiled sheepskin slippers and an Indian blanket cloth bathrobe, five inches of black satin pajama legs put in a surprising appearance. She unlocked the door, and the mongrel darted out to give O'Mara a bad time.

"Walter, don't be silly!" Tickey said to the dog.

O'Mara spoke politely to Walter who backed off, an unkind rejoinder deep in his throat. O'Mara laughed. "Thanks, Tickey. You're a dear, sweet girl."

Tickey Davis gave him a quick, a rather suspicious look through her glasses. "Your phone is ringing. It's been ringing all night." She padded back to her flat with Walter.

O'Mara found his door unlocked. He snapped on the light, glanced nervously around. The lounge chair, his books, water colors—everything just as when he had left. He picked up the phone.

"Well, finally!" Jean Norman's voice said. "Pete, do you know what time it is?"

He had a vague notion but was mystified as to how it concerned her. He was grateful, however, for this preview of what life-sharing with Jean might have been like.

"Where's Byron?" she demanded.

"Byron?" he repeated. "Oh, yes—Byron." O'Mara was momentarily startled by Tickey Davis who entered and made straight for his kitchenette.

Jean Norman was saying, "Byron

phoned about seven and said he might be late for his date because he wanted to drop off and see you about that layout for the *Times*."

"Darling, where's your coffee?" This from the kitchen.

Jean Norman asked, "Who was that?"

He chuckled maliciously. "Well, it wasn't Byron."

"Obviously not," Jean said coldly. "Is he there?"

"Byron ran onto me in a pub," O'Mara explained. "That was early, say nine-ish. I haven't seen him since. But I wouldn't worry. Byron's a big boy now, an Eagle Scout—" But Jean Norman had slammed down the phone. O'Mara hung up to look over at Tickey Davis in the kitchenette door—a very small girl in a very large bathrobe, her brownish-blond hair in pig-tails. She was definitely cute, he decided, especially if you liked them nutty and freckled and didn't mind if they smoked something that looked like a part of a faucet. He tried not to smile.

"What's with this darling stuff?"

"Oh, was that your model?" she asked innocently.

"My old flame," he said, reasonably cheerful about the subject all of a sudden. He followed Tickey out into the kitchen to show her where he kept a jar of instant coffee. Apparently she intended to make it here, for she had water heating on the stove.

"Our landlady was called out of town," she chattered as she measured coffee into two cups. Tickey's glasses dismounted and she scratched her button nose on the shoulder of the robe. "I had to drop everything and drive her to the train. Writers are always so handy. Then your phone kept ringing. Oh, I've had a terrible night."

"You have," O'Mara scoffed. He took off the fleece overcoat and the brown crusher hat, left the kitchen for the bed-living room closet which, when he got it open, presented a skeletal appearance with six

naked wire coat hangers on the pole and absolutely nothing else. "Damn them to hell!" he said. He flung the hat and overcoat on a chair, crossed the room to the chest, and began opening drawers. And they'd cleaned him, moved him out. Everything. He ran thin fingers distractedly through straight black hair and paced back to the kitchen. Tickey had a drawer open and was looking at him out of the ends of gray eyes.

"Tickey—" he began.

"Where's our paring knife?" She pushed that at him, and he said, "What?" dully. His face had a stunned look.

"Well, my paring knife," she said, adding, "if you feel the plural possessive suggests intimacy you find abhorrent."

Her paring knife. He'd borrowed it six weeks ago, had used it once, and forgot to return it. So it had been lying around somewhere, possibly in a cabinet drawer, and somebody had picked it up here and—had used it here?

O'Mara turned out of the kitchenette and sharply to the right, to the door of the cubbyhole bathroom. He went in, flipped the light switch. His glance jerked to the right, drawn there by the thing in the tub. Byron Phelps in the tub. Byron Phelps fully dressed including overcoat and scarf, on his back in the dry tub with his legs dangling over the curved end. Blood had pooled and dried on white porcelain and on the shower curtain.

Hours ago, his throat had been cut.

THROUGH the fog of confusion and horror, O'Mara saw it for the first time. The deep end. The crumbling edge. He was oblivious to Tickey Davis until she said, "Peter, your coffee—" and then he turned and lunged, too late to spare her the shock. But he hung onto her shoulders and forced her back from the door.

"Tickey, don't—don't scream. Now—now look at me, Tickey. It's all right." Oh, sure, everything's fine, he thought. My

face must look as though this is the climax of a perfect evening. Tickey's gaze shifted from the bathroom door to his face. She was white around her mouth, her eyes round and bright.

"Not me, Tickey. And don't scream, please."

"I gave up screaming when I was eight," she said in a small tense voice. "But who —isn't that—"

"Byron Phelps. My boss. Jean's fiancé, police kindly note."

"He was here asking for you. Then later he brought you home, Peter."

"Not me." He pushed Tickey back and down into the lounge chair. "Damn it, don't look at me like that."

"But, Peter—" She broke off, her eyes puzzling over his face.

He said, "Byron came to the Snake Eyes, and about that time I passed out. I was doped."

"He drives a pale blue Buick?" she asked, and he nodded. "Well, about ten o'clock or a little after, I happened to look out my window as a pale blue Buick pulled up at the curb. I think it was Mr. Phelps who got out. A few seconds later, I heard two sets of footsteps in the hall, both male. I supposed it was you and Mr. Phelps. Then, after a while, a man left your flat and I heard the Buick drive away."

O'Mara wheeled to the window, pinched up one side of the blind to look out at the parked cars. Byron's blue Buick was not among them. He came back to Tickey whose shaky fingers were fitting a cigarette into the aluminum holder. He helped himself from her cigarettes, held a lighter for her.

"Not me," he said for the umpteenth time. He took a long drag on the cigarette. "You wouldn't have noticed two distinct sets of footsteps, because Byron would have had to drag me." He remembered Roma and Bobby in the house out at Norwood, and Roma was saying, "It's your fault, you'll have to take him." As though some-

thing had gone haywire. Suppose Bobby had been delegated to dope O'Mara's drink. But Byron had come along and had insisted on taking O'Mara home. Byron would. His good deed for the day. He'd be a hard man to argue with unless Bobby had shown a gun, which Bobby wouldn't have done in the Snake Eyes. So Byron had brought O'Mara home in the car, and when Byron stepped out, there was Bobby, this time with his gun. And while O'Mara lay in Byron's car, Bobby must have forced Byron up into the flat, there slugged him, and used the knife.

"That was before Bobby changed my clothes," O'Mara said, thinking aloud, "and planted the knife in the overcoat pocket. He took me in Byron's car to the bus depot, got me onto the bus before loading time. And I wasn't supposed to wake up, but if I did there was the knife in my pocket to scare me into not calling the cops. They reasoned it was my knife—not yours, Tickey—and I wouldn't know but what I'd killed somebody."

Tickey wrapped the Indian blanket robe tightly about her legs. "But you didn't," she said, "did you?"

He said good Lord no, he hadn't, and then told her about the bus trip to Norwood, about Bobby and Roma. Tickey hugged her wrapped knees and listened without interruption. When he had finished she said, "That's the most fantastic thing I ever heard."

He stared at her with pained eyes. "But it's the God's truth. Look at me. I hate brown. I'm wearing brown. I can't wear pointed toes. I'm wearing pointed toes. And here—" He got out the pinseal wallet, pushed it into her hands. Then he paced to the other side of the room and booted a brown hassock halfway to the sofa. Tickey was reading the description on Fred Regen's driver's license: height, six-one; weight, one-six-five; hair, black; eyes, brown. . . . "Peter, that's you."

"Also two million other guys," he

snarled. "And don't, for mercy's sake, dig up that Chinese proverb about the inevitable twin."

"This girl—" She'd found Roma's picture. "I've seen her around here."

"Casing the joint, probably. Picking me out as the ideal sucker." O'Mara waved an arm toward the bathroom. "Tickey, what am I going to do about that?"

Tickey rubbed her nose thoughtfully. "The police?"

"They'd fry me," he said, his eyes wild. "Jean traded me in on that guy. I've got motive."

"Then get Mr. Phelps out of here. Have him turn up somewhere else."

"Yeah, on page one!" he said sarcastically. "Drag Byron out of here with this snow and you've left a trail. I'd never make it. I'm not that lucky."

"But if you go back to Norwood and take up as Fred Regen—don't you see, Peter, that's what *they* want. That's your way out of the police frying pan into *their* fire. This just didn't happen to you—it's been planned. You're *their* boy. I said you looked fey. They've tried to create an impossible situation in which you've got to fall in with their scheme, whatever it is."

"What would they have used for a corpse if Byron hadn't turned up when he did?" O'Mara wanted to know.

But Tickey seemed to have run out of answers. She watched with anxious eyes as O'Mara put on the fleece overcoat and the brown crusher hat. She asked him what he was going to do, and he didn't know.

"Get out, I guess."

She said, "Wait a minute." She scrambled out of the chair, left his flat for her own. O'Mara took the knife out of the coat pocket, rubbed the handle of it with Fred Regen's handkerchief as he went into the bathroom. He dropped the knife on the linoleum floor, wiped the switch plate. He went into the kitchenette, put the dishes into the sink, and opened the hot water tap.

He wiped drawer handles and stove knobs that Tickey might have touched.

As he returned to the bed-living room, Tickey came through the door with the bathrobe flopping about her ankles. He said, "As soon as I get out of here, you call the police. Tell them you developed a headache and came over here for some aspirin. And about the knife, give them the straight story—how I borrowed it some weeks ago. Got that?"

She nodded. "Here—" She handed him Fred Regen's wallet. "I put some money in it, and if you—" She broke off, and their eyes clashed, shiny with alarm. Somebody was pounding on Mrs. Runge's front door. O'Mara jammed the billfold into a pocket, turned to the front window, pinched up the edge of the blind. A black car with a fish-pole aerial and a blue shield on its door had pulled up in front of the house. He thought, Bobby and Roma—they've put on the pressure. He swung around to Tickey, his face white and drawn.

"The cops." He pushed her out into the hall. The inside stairway, he thought, and out Mrs. Runge's back door. If I get that far. He opened the door at the head of the stairs, started down.

"Oh, Peter—" Tickey's faint moan. He didn't look back but groped his way down into a darkness that was absolute until the pointed toes of Fred Regen's shoes kicked the door at the bottom. Glass in the front door shattered under a blow from a gun-butt. And upstairs the mongrel dog had started to bark. O'Mara opened the door at the foot of the stairs, went through into Mrs. Runge's dining room, crossed it, brushed aside the swinging door into the kitchen, got to the back door where he had to work the tight bolt from its socket. Heavy police feet tramped into the front hall. O'Mara got the door open, stepped out onto the back porch, kicked over a milk bottle. It made a hell of a noise as it rolled down the steps.

Then he was running again. He guessed

once you started to run you were never able to stop. . . .

IT WAS still dark as O'Mara limped along Capitol Avenue in Fred Regen's shoes. And quiet—a pocket of silence beyond which the awakening city grumbled as though indulging itself in a pre-breakfast grouch. O'Mara looked east across a parking lot where a few cars were thinly blanketed with snow. Still farther east was the paved yard where the buses drew up to wait for loading time, while directly south the terminal itself with its girdered roof was dimly lighted and cavernous. O'Mara glanced back. The inevitable old man with a pushcart was crossing the street. Any time, anywhere, in downtown Indianapolis, you saw an old man with a pushcart. But the sidewalk was deserted, and the nearest car headlights were blurred in the distance.

O'Mara turned into the parking lot.

Here the rays of flood lamps diffused by the high flying snow created an unearthly twilight, pale and shadowless. He felt like a maimed fly crawling across a window of frosted glass. As obvious as that. As perfect a target.

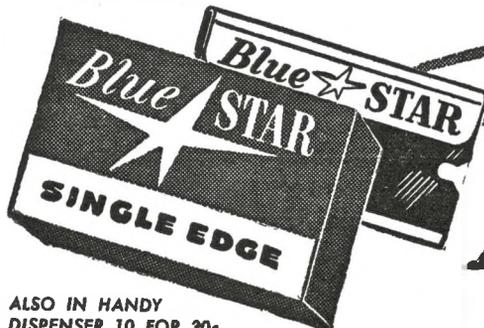
Over near the edge of the bus yard, a blue Buick sedan stood by itself with snow packed on its windshield. O'Mara came up to it, paused, peered through a window. Byron's? Maybe. If you were a detective you could maybe start here and work back and prove something. I'm not a detective, O'Mara decided as he skirted the car. I'm the kind of a guy who, in proving how sharp a knife is, cuts a slice out of the ball of his thumb.

He moved on into the yawning mouth of the terminal. A cross-country behemoth was loading in one of the lanes. The smaller suburban buses were lining up. There were soldiers of the new war with their duffel bags and soldiers of the old war in

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old flight jackets with tool boxes and dinner pails in gloved hands. There were a few slatternly women out here in the cold. O'Mara went through the swinging glass doors into steam-heated waitingrooms. The cops were here. Maybe they always were, but O'Mara felt they'd been alerted for him. He passed one who had a bad cough. He took a shallow breath and looked up at the clock over the south door. 5:52. He glanced about. All the men looked like cops in plainclothes except the ones who wore jeans and moleskin cloth jackets.

O'Mara cut diagonally across the station and through a door into Fendricks. He hadn't eaten since noon of the previous day, but he wasn't hungry. He was too afraid to be hungry. He gulped down a coffee in Fendrick's, thinking, I'll go out to Norwood. Beard the lion. Find out what gives. Then he went back into the station, down broad steps into the basement. There were a couple of porters pitching pennies—was it quarters?—and O'Mara went through the door indicated as *Men's*.

He was drying his hands on a paper towel when somebody said, "O'Mara?" He didn't look up, kept rubbing his hands, made no outward sign he'd ever heard of the name. His heart was up in his throat, choking him. Somebody touched his arm. O'Mara glanced around with what he hoped was exactly the right expression of mild surprise. The man was stocky, of medium height, Latin looking with just a touch of flash in his clothes. A small time gangster, if Hollywood ever saw one.

"Your name O'Mara?"

"Regen," O'Mara said and the steadiness of his voice surprised him.

The man took out a leather folder and let O'Mara peek into it at a badge that proved how wrong Hollywood—and O'Mara—could be.

"I'm skeptical," the plainclothesman said. "If you'll just hold your arms out from your body a second."

"Wh-what?" O'Mara stammered. But

he held his arms out a little way, and the dick patted him expertly in a seemingly offhand manner, his eyes sometimes on the mirror behind O'Mara. A dirty old man with gray beard stubble sent a red-eyed glance over his shoulder as he moved out through the door at a hurried shamble.

O'Mara said resentfully, "Why don't you go after that old snowbird instead of putting the arm on innocent taxpayers?"

The dick said, "He'll be back. They always come back here." He stopped patting. "Any identification?"

O'Mara took out the pinseal wallet, opened it, passed it to the other. The dick took his time about looking it over, and his face didn't indicate anything. A dark smooth face, tough looking.

"How does it happen this identification card has one address, Mr. Regen, while your driver's license has another?"

O'Mara said, "We just moved to Norwood from Lafayette."

"And your present address?" the dick asked quietly.

"Four nineteen Walnut." O'Mara's mind was instantly thrown into a state of panic. What was the address on the driver's license—the address in Lafayette? Kossuth Street—but the number?

"This your wife, Mr. Regen?" the dick asked in the same quiet voice. He'd found Roma's picture. When O'Mara nodded, the dick asked, "Is she at home now?"

O'Mara nodded again. He supposed Roma was home.

"Your phone number?"

"I don't know. I told you we just moved to Norwood. That is, my wife has been there for some time, but I've been on the road." His smile was sickly. "Haven't got to phone numbers yet."

The dick said, "All right," but his tone indicated that was not to be taken literally. Nothing was all right. "I don't want to embarrass you unnecessarily, Mr. Regen, if you're on the level. You happen to look like somebody we want. If you'll just come

upstairs with me—and stick close, understand? I've got a medal for shooting. Don't make me prove it."

He and O'Mara left the men's room together, went upstairs and to the west door where the uniformed cop was warming himself against a steam radiator.

"Watch this one a minute," the dick ordered. And to O'Mara, "Hennessey has a medal too."

O'Mara said, "All God's chillun got medals. Even I."

The dick didn't laugh. "Let's hope yours is the Good Conduct." He left O'Mara there and went to the battery of phones at the north end of the room. It occurred to O'Mara that he hadn't showed enough interest in what he was alleged to have done. He turned to the big cop who was watching him closely with pale blue, disillusioned eyes.

"What is this, anyway? Somebody go south with the Soldiers and Sailors Monument?"

Hennessey coughed. He said, "Could be." And that was all that could be got out of him except maybe a good dose of virus-X. O'Mara stood there with the cop and watched with envious eyes people who batted in and out of the doors at will. After a while the Latin-looking man came out of the phone booth and headed toward the west doors. There was a tight little smile on his face. And, O'Mara thought, whatever the smile means, it'll be bad.

The dick said, "Your wife says I'm to put you on that six-forty bus for Norwood. And"—adding this pointedly as he returned the pinseal wallet—"if I had anything as nice looking as Mrs. Regen at home, I wouldn't spend *my* nights on the town."

O'Mara pushed his lips into a smile. "I need a change once in a while," he said and moved to the ticket desk. He thought, now I really am stuck. They've pushed me out of the pan into whatever fire is smoldering at Norwood. And there just isn't any way out.

CHAPTER THREE

Murder for Breakfast

NO WAY out, and they knew it. O'Mara had fully expected that Bobby and his gun would be waiting at the other end of the line, but he wasn't. They were sure of O'Mara now. He was their boy, and he had that fey look.

He walked painfully up the main drag of Norwood. A few snowflakes loitered down from the gray sky. Shopkeepers, sweeping their walks, smiled at O'Mara as though he belonged. And in the four hundred block along Walnut, some old codger leaned on his snow shovel to say, "Howdy, neighbor." If O'Mara returned the greeting without much enthusiasm that was because of a little chill playing across his shoulders. He realized that he'd already been established in some minds as Fred Regen. That was *their* purpose. And why? The only answer O'Mara could think of suggested flowers and sad music.

He turned up the approach walk to the Regens' colonial and got out keys. The first Yale he tried opened the door. There were voices in the living room, a conversation that broke off no particular place. And then there were quick light footsteps.

"Dar—ling!" Roma cooed happily. She fluttered out of the living room in a pale blue negligee, and as she threw her arms about O'Mara he thought, oddly, of Tickey Davis in her Indian blanket bathrobe. Roma kissed him full upon the mouth. He would have enjoyed that more had he not been troubled by the notion that her lips tasted of blood. A kiss of death, perhaps, for the benefit of somebody in the living room who witnessed the whole proceedings and laughed that silly laugh the whole world has for lovers. When Roma put her arms around him to steer him into the living room, O'Mara got some satisfaction out of noting the bluish lump on her jaw where he'd belted her the night before.

A comfortably fat old woman was sitting on the sofa with a teacup containing sugar in her two hands. She beamed up at them through the tops of gold-rimmed bifocals.

"I guess Mrs. Dunwoody had about concluded I didn't have a husband," Roma said gayly. "Mrs. Dunwoody, this is Fred."

Mrs. Dunwoody drew her lower lip into her china clippers and looked coy. "Now Miz Regen, I thought no such thing. In fact, Mr. Dunwoody and I come home on the bus last night with Mr. Regen, though you don't likely remember, do you, Mr. Regen?"

"Oh, yes," O'Mara said. "I remember perfectly."

Mrs. Dunwoody laughed. "Mr. Dunwoody likes a drop now and then himself. I'm broad-minded, I am." She stood, obviously broad in other regions than her mind. "I'll get on now with the sugar, and thank you kindly, Miz Regen."

O'Mara and Roma followed Mrs. Dunwoody into the hall, and as Roma closed the door behind her visitor she said something like "gabby old witch." She stopped hugging O'Mara, and he said, "I'll bet that's the shortest second honeymoon on record."

Roma's tilted eyes gave him a calculating look. She said, "We're having breakfast if you want any."

O'Mara took off overcoat and hat, left them on a chair in the living room, and followed Roma into the kitchen. A newscaster was talking from a white plastic radio in the breakfast nook. Bobby was spooning half a grapefruit. He turned his pale, fragile-looking face toward O'Mara and sneered.

"The prodigal husband returns," Bobby said.

There was a third place setting next to Bobby's—they had been that sure of O'Mara—and Roma's lofty gesture indicated he was to sit down. He sat. The newscaster said something about "orderly withdrawal in Korea." Toast popped up out of

a chrome gadget, and Roma put a slice on O'Mara's plate. He wondered if you could poison toast. Only they wouldn't try anything as bald as that, he decided.

"Now that I'm established as Fred Regen—" O'Mara began uneasily and got one of Bobby's sharp elbows in his ribs. "Shut up," Bobby said, "I want to hear this."

"Police," said the newscaster, "combed Indianapolis early this morning in search of Peter O'Mara, a commercial artist, wanted in connection with the knife slaying in his apartment of Byron Phelps, advertising manager of a local department store. Questioned by police, Miss Jean Norman, the victim's fiancé, stated she had jilted O'Mara, so the murder takes on the familiar triangle pattern."

"Oh, turn it off," Roma said irritably. "He knows all about it. He wouldn't be here if he didn't know."

"Yes," O'Mara said, "you're ruining Roma's breakfast. When she's having her Wheaties she doesn't like to be reminded she was in a blood-letting." Roma, he thought, looked a trifle pale except for her rouged mouth and bruised jaw.

She said with what passed for coolness. "I happen to have been playing canasta with the Richmonds last night."

"And don't look at me," Bobby said to O'Mara who was looking at him. "Your pal Byron cut in on our dance last night and, if it ever comes to that, cops'll find out I spent the entire evening at the Snake Eyes." He spooned another section of grapefruit. "Nuh uh, this one's on you, pal, as you'll find out if you make one false move."

O'Mara nibbled toast. He watched Bobby fill his own cup from the silex. Between Bobby and Roma there was a strong bond of enmity this morning.

"As I started to say, now that I'm established as Fred Regen, how do we explain *that*?" O'Mara pointed at Bobby. "I refused to claim it as a son."

"Cousins," Bobby and Roma said in a

chorus as though it was something they had rehearsed.

O'Mara made sounds like laughter. Roma glared at him. She said, "You don't think— That little wart?" She made the same sounds, louder and funnier. And Bobby said resentfully, "All right, all right. Only where would you be today, Mrs. R—"

"Shut up!" Roma pounded the table with both fists. She was furious. Also perhaps she was afraid.

O'Mara swallowed dry toast while they glared at each other across the table. When the tension relaxed somewhat, he asked, "Now, what's the deal? There's got to be one somewhere."

THE glances across the table offered a truce. Roma nodded at Bobby, who twisted around to face O'Mara and hung a knee on the edge of the table.

"The deal is this, chum. You happen to

look a hell of a lot like Fred Regen. And Fred—the real Fred—walked out on Roma. Disappeared, you might say. While he's financially well off, he neglected to put anything in the joint checking account before he went bye-bye. Roma's in a spot. No dough, and the rent on this place coming up. She'd like to sell the Regen home in Lafayette, but she can't without Fred's signature on the deed. She'd like to get some cash and securities out of the safe deposit box."

O'Mara took a cigarette from a pack on the table. Roma held a light for him, and he wondered, if the cigarette were to blow his head off, could Roma collect double indemnity.

Bobby said, "It's simple. You take up where Fred left off, do what Roma tells you to do. Sell the house in Lafayette for maybe forty grand, get the stuff out of the bank vault."

It sounded fishy enough to fry and serve



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on Friday. O'Mara said, "I was never any great shakes at forgery."

"Look, honey—" Roma leaned across the table toward him in as pretty a come-on gesture as he'd ever seen, "you're an artist. You have a feeling for line. You know perfectly well that with a little practice you'd be able to sign Fred's name to anything."

An electric chime sounded and Roma got up to answer the door. As she left the kitchen Bobby followed her with admiring eyes over a coffee cup.

"Can you imagine anybody running out on anything as good as that?"

O'Mara nodded. "I can. Particularly if it was only a temporary separation. Particularly if Fred Regen thought there was a sap somewhere who could be maneuvered into his shoes and would then obligingly lie down in a coffin somewhere so that Fred could collect on his own insurance policy."

Bobby put the cup down so suddenly he slopped some of its contents. His squinted eyes were hard and bright. "That's a hell of a screwy idea."

"It's not as screwy as the other one—about me selling Regen's home and getting into his safety deposit vault." O'Mara cocked an ear for a vaguely familiar voice in the next room. He sidled and stood, smiled down at the brittle little man. And then stopped smiling because there was that gun again in Bobby's right fist, the muzzle tipped up toward O'Mara's belly.

"Sit down, baby," the little man whispered. "Sit down and take it easy. Play this right, and you get airline passage to Mexico. Maybe you don't realize the kind of spot you're in."

O'Mara's face slid into long lines of weariness. "Maybe I do," he sighed. "Maybe I've got to the point where I don't give a good damn whether you do it or the cops do it. Only if you ever do it I don't think it'll be under these circumstances, and I don't think you'll do it this way." He

turned his back on the gun, walked to the swinging door, and into the living room.

Wally Cobb was talking to Roma, his homberg in his hand. His hair matched the light brown of his mustache, was quite wavy and, with his hat off, he looked less like a block-head. To O'Mara, Wally Cobb even looked good with his friendly wood-chuck smile.

"How are you this morning, Regen?"

O'Mara said, "A little hung-over."

"I just told Mrs. Regan I've missed my bus, and my car is laid up in town. I thought if you were driving into the city I'd beg a ride."

"Oh, but he isn't," Roma said. She flashed O'Mara a warning look then smiled quickly. "Are you, dear?"

"Oh, but I am," O'Mara said, his smile slight. He reached for the fleece overcoat. "Be right with you, Cobb."

"But I need the car," Roma protested.

O'Mara put on the coat and stepped over to face the woman. "Bye-bye, dear," he said firmly. He took her chin in his hand, thumb on the bruised part of her jaw. He did all the kissing. Her lips still tasted of blood.

O'Mara led Wally Cobb out to the black seven passenger car parked at the curb. The back of the sedan was piled to the roof with cartons stenciled ASPH TILE MAHOG 9 x 9. Possibly Fred Regen represented manufacturers of asphalt tile, something that O'Mara knew less than nothing about. While he was trying to fit one of the keys into the door lock, Wally Cobb lighted a cigarette.

"I think you'll find this is Garden's car, Regen," Cobb said dryly. "Robert Garden, you know—Bobby?"

The keys telegraphed O'Mara's nervousness. He said, "Ha-ha," flatly. "I'm absent-minded." He turned. In spite of the glint of teeth, Cobb was not smiling. He nodded toward the brick flat building across the street.

"I live over there. I saw you bolt the

house last night. You ran under my window." He touched O'Mara's arm and steered him toward a gray Dodge parked in the drive at the side of the Regen house. "On our way into town, you might like to tell me about it. Maybe I can help you."

O'Mara uttered a toneless laugh. How the hell would you help me? he wondered as he got in under the wheel of the Dodge. I'm stuck either way. It's either the cops, or it's Bobby, Roma and my own funeral.

They rode in silence out of Norwood. It was not until they had headed south on the highway that O'Mara spoke.

"You're an insurance salesman, aren't you?"

"I used to be. I'm in claims work now."

O'Mara shivered. He thought, That's me. I'm a potential claim. He said, "I've heard that policy holders sometimes attempt to collect on their own life insurance. Could it be done if you found somebody to serve as a stand-in for the corpse at your own funeral?"

"It's been tried by experts," Cobb replied. He had the damndest smile, like the front end of a Buick. "Not too many years ago in Chicago, a girl by the name of Marie Defenbach hit on such a scheme and enlisted the help of a crooked doctor and undertaker."

"Did they get away with it?" O'Mara wanted to know.

Cobb shook his head. "They went up for fraud." He added with the same smile, "They got away with the murder, though."

O'Mara laughed harshly. "If you'll pardon my selfish viewpoint, that's what I'm interested in—in not being murdered—and to hell with the insurance company." And then he unloaded the whole thing in Cobb's lap. By the time they had entered the smog belt that surrounded the city the story was finished. Cobb remained silent, apparently in deep thought.

"So you're *the* O'Mara," he said finally and tugged at one leg of his caliper mustache.

O'Mara thought this was obvious. "Go ahead, say it," he suggested morosely. "Tell me I'm a liar and you're going to turn me in."

"No," the insurance man said slowly. "I believe you, but I'm damned if I know why. Nobody else would. You see, their whole scheme, as you outline it, depends on coincidence. What would they have done to force you into this position if this Byron Phelps hadn't turned up when he did?"

"THERE would have been somebody else," O'Mara said. "They had to kill Byron because, if he got me home, their whole plan would have fallen through." He added, the thought occurring to him for the first time, "Byron was protecting me from Bobby." Not just from Bobby, he thought, but from the Forces of Evil. Byron must have always been terribly conscious of the Forces of Evil. Byron, the boy scout, the do-gooder. While he'd managed to make himself a pain in the neck, Byron had apparently died by the creed by which he had lived.

"Who else, if not Byron?" Wally Cobb persisted.

"I don't know." O'Mara was still thinking about Byron and beginning to feel like a heel.

"It would have to be somebody you'd have a motive for killing. Got any idea?"

"No," said O'Mara. "I never cared about killing anybody."

"Suppose we drive around to your place and poke around, see what we can dig up," Cobb suggested.

"Like this? In broad daylight?"

Cobb laughed easily. "I'm not involved in this. You're Fred Regen, and you can prove it. Don't worry about it."

O'Mara said dubiously, "You actually think you could find something the police might have missed?"

"I'm working a different angle—the premise that you're innocent." Cobb said

this with a good deal of assurance. But then this wasn't his baby. Cornered, he'd only have to point the finger at O'Mara and retire to the safe position of a solid citizen.

O'Mara nervously fought the heavy morning traffic, got through to Sixteenth Street, and turned east. He was trembling inwardly by the time he berthed the car along narrow Park Avenue.

"Take it easy," Cobb said quietly.

They got out. They crossed the deserted street to the sidewalk on the east side, passed an old woman with a baby buggy full of day-old bread. Cobb, O'Mara noticed, kept his eyes on the ground as though a clue was something you might fall over. Just outside Mrs. Runge's, Cobb stooped, dipped into the slush along the gutter to pick up an envelope. It was open and empty. Tickey Davis' name and address were typed on the front.

"That's the girl I mentioned," O'Mara said. "In the flat next to mine."

Wally Cobb frowned, put the envelope in this overcoat pocket. He glanced up at the house. "This the place?"

O'Mara nodded. "You're not going in?"

Cobb sucked his front teeth. "Why not? I'd like to get at the scene of the crime." He led the way through the hedge. O'Mara, his pulse galloping, indicated the open stair at the north end of the house. They had reached the landing, and Cobb had just raised a fist to knock at the door, when somebody said, "Looking for someone?"

O'Mara nearly fell down the steps. Coming up toward where they stood was a man dressed in gray with cop written all over his big gray slab of a face. He was about six-two and half as broad, and his muddy brown eyes had a tired, maybe a sad look in them.

Wally Cobb said, "We're looking for a Miss—" He pulled the old envelope out of his pocket. "A Miss Davis."

The big gray man showed his badge. "Schoff," he rumbled. "Detective Bureau.

Had a little trouble here last night. Checking all callers." He coughed. It sounded like Officer Hennessey's cough.

"What sort of trouble?" Wally Cobb appeared mildly interested, perfectly cool. This wasn't Cobb's baby.

"Throat slashing." Schoff moistened a thumb and turned smudged pages in a paper bound notebook.

"Was it bad?"

"Not good." Schoff looked hard at O'Mara whose knees started to cave. He stiffened them, clutched at the railing. "Have to have names, addresses," Schoff rumbled on. "Routine."

Cobb introduced himself and gave Schoff a card. "I'm with Mid-Continent Mutual, as you see, and this is Mr. Regen, a new man we're breaking in."

Schoff asked, "Drivers' licenses?" As though murder was a traffic offense. Cobb and O'Mara got out wallets. Schoff looked at them briefly and made jottings, mumbled, "Miss Davis isn't in right now."

"We'll call again," Cobb said. "Have you picked up any clues, Lieutenant?"

"Clues?" The muddy brown eyes showed an unexpected twinkle. "Now what's a clue like, mister?"

Wally Cobb laughed. "I mean, do you know who you're looking for?"

Schoff coughed again. "This O'Mara, I guess," looking at O'Mara. "An artist, you know."

O'Mara managed to nod in spite of partial paralysis. "They're nuts. Remember the Mad Sculptor?"

Schoff seemed to remember. He pulled in his paunch so that O'Mara and Cobb could descend the stairs. They walked around to the front of the house, out through the hedge, and back to the gray Dodge.

O'Mara said, "What is wrong with our police department?" He was very pale.

Cobb laughed. "You act disappointed."

"I feel that way," O'Mara said as he got in under the wheel. "As long as I'm

walking around as Fred Regen, I smell flowers and hear sad music." He fitted the key into the switch, glanced over at Cobb to ask ironically, "Got any more ideas as good as the last?"

Cobb's round brown eyes were resentful. After they'd pulled away from the curb, he said, "I'd like to check with some of the insurance offices to see how much insurance Fred Regen is carrying. That's an interesting theory of yours."

"Well, include me out," O'Mara said. "I'll drop you somewhere. I'm going to Lafayette."

Cobb paused in the act of lighting a cigarette. "Why?"

"Why? Because I've got to find Fred Regen."

"He certainly won't be in Lafayette if that's his home town."

"I want to know more about the guy." O'Mara turned a corner recklessly, missing a beer truck by a coat of paint. "Where'll I drop you?"

"Delaware Street." Cobb lighted his cigarette. "You're sure you know what you're doing? Here you seem to have acquired a certain amount of immunity from the law. But Regen may be well known in Lafayette. You'd lose your immunity. Here you're safe for a while because you're Fred Regen."

"I'm getting damned tired of being Fred Regen." There was tension in O'Mara's voice and he tried to break it with laughter. "His shoes are killing me."

CHAPTER FOUR

Funeral Without Tears

IT WAS nearly noon when O'Mara got to Lafayette. Where five icy streets converged on the brow of a hill overlooking the Wabash, he parked and went into the Five Points Drugstore. He had a malted at the fountain, bought cigarettes, and then asked for a look at the city direc-

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tory. He turned to the G's, found Garden, Robert along with the same Kossuth Street address that appeared on Fred Regen's driver's license. Bobby's occupation was listed as chauffeur. The Regens' chauffeur, you could take it to mean, which changed the complexion of everything. Not a cousin, a chauffeur. When a chauffeur is taken into a family, as Bobby had been at the house in Norwood, you suspected romance, which Roma had angrily denied, or blackmail, which nobody had mentioned.

O'Mara asked directions from the soda jerk, left the store, and drove to Kossuth Street. It was an old and a sedate part of town where the Regens had lived, their house substantially constructed of buff brick with green tiles on the roof. A big square practical house on a larger lot than its neighbors with great trees arching over the snow-covered lawn. Drawn blinds gave the place an un-lived-in look, but there were fresh tracks in the snow on a drive that wound around to the rear. O'Mara walked in the tracks. Bobby's black seven passenger car was parked between the garage and the rear of the house. Bobby's small feet had left a lot of tracks in the snow from the car to the back door, and the asphalt tile cartons were no longer piled on the back seat. Things started to tumble around in O'Mara's head. Little things. Small parts of a puzzle tumbling around, falling into place automatically now while he gaped at the gradually completed picture and the short hairs at the back of his neck prickled up. He saw dark passion and greed, the stout stuff of which murders are woven. He saw blackmail and blood, some of the blood merely indicated, not yet painted into the picture. The same blood that now coursed swiftly through O'Mara's pounding arteries as he stepped up to the door.

It was locked. He took out Fred Regen's keys and they jingled like bells in his trembling fingers. Beyond the door there were faint strains of music. O'Mara tried a key. The wrong one, and there was only

one more besides the keys for the car. He wished he had a gun. Or the cops. A whole squad of cops. But that was impossible, the way he stood with the law. No, this was his baby. But now for the first time he began to see a thin ray of hope, a slip of a new moon over his right shoulder.

The second key fitted. The lock turned. He opened the door without sound and stepped into a concrete-floored entryway where three steps led up to a back porch and many more steps led down to a basement. They put asphalt tiles on basement floors. This would be in the basement. That's where the music was, louder now, jive.

He went down, both hands on the rail, one step at a time. The air was cold and stagnant and moist. A bulb dangled from an outlet hung between floor joists. There was an opening in a masonry wall on his right. He went through into a furnace room with its oil-fired boiler. The music was louder—Spike Jones on recording. And still another door through which O'Mara could see a vast naked room with concrete block walls, a floor of concrete, a five gallon pail of asphalt tile cement. In there was the funeral, with jive for a requiem. Call it interment delayed, the final, the absolute sealing of some shallow crypt. O'Mara moved toward it, thankful that Mrs. Jones had given birth to the world's noisiest boy. He moved to the door, stood and watched Bobby as he sealed in the secret. Bobby, down on his knees in stained overalls, laying asphalt tile in some sort of mastic he had applied to the concrete with a toothed spreader. Near at hand was a portable radio, the cartons of tile, Bobby's hat and coat.

O'Mara took a step, two steps across concrete as yet uncovered by either the tile or the mastic. Three steps, watching Bobby's hands as they fitted a tile into place. Four steps, watched Bobby reach into a carton, hunker down again. Five steps,

and Bobby jerked a glance over a shoulder, his eyes widening. And then he reached toward his coat where his gun probably was—a long reach, too long with O'Mara rushing him from the side. Bobby uttered a frightened animal sound, knowing how long the reach had to be, and that was the instant before O'Mara kicked him hard in a blue-white temple.

Bobby floundered over onto his back on freshly laid tile. He didn't move after that. He looked dead. That was O'Mara's first thought—that he might have killed Bobby. He knelt beside the thin little man, anxiously prodded under Bobby's jaw with his fingers. There was pulse. Bobby was all right. O'Mara half stood, got Bobby under the armpits, and dragged him over onto that portion of the floor that had not yet been covered. O'Mara went back to the tiles, got down on his knees, tried to pick up one of the asphalt squares with his fingers. He glanced about, reached out to the radio, turned off Spike Jones. He picked up the toothed spreader, drove the blade under a freshly laid tile. It came up easily enough, but the surface revealed was not what O'Mara was looking for. He wanted a fresh patch of concrete large enough to cover a corpse. He wanted the grave that had to be hidden forever if Roma was to dispose of the house. And she'd want to liquidate everything, get her hooks on the cash, buy Bobby off—and he wouldn't come cheap. He'd probably cut himself in as a full partner, judging by the risks he'd been willing to take. Convert the house into cash, then the insurance—that was the big thing, the miracle score. . . .

All this was going around in O'Mara's head as he hacked up tiles with the spreader. And when he had worked his way back to the third course of tile, he revealed the irregular line of a patch of new concrete. The grave. Fred Regen's grave.

O'Mara thought, the corpse with my face? Probably not. Probably only a superficial resemblance. There wouldn't

have to be more than that if they worked it right.

He shuddered, thinking how they might have worked it.

And then he sat back on his heels and glanced up.

Wally Cobb stood just within the room, his teeth glinting, that woodchuck smile of his.

O'Mara said, "Got him, Cobb. Regen. Under the floor, Roma must have murdered him. Insurance companies won't pay off to murderers, will they? What was so dumb about me coming to Lafayette, huh? What was so—" O'Mara broke off, sitting there on his heels with the toothed spreader in his hand and the things rattling around in his head again. New things tumbling into new places. And O'Mara's dark eyes got a flat look. His voice developed a flatness. "Change that," he said, "to how dumb can you get?"

Cobb kept smiling. "Oh, I wouldn't say that."

"I'm a patsy," O'Mara insisted. "On the bus last night, you asked for a match. You knew where I carried matches—in the side pocket of my overcoat where you'd planted the knife. I wasn't supposed to come to when I did—you and the Dunwoodys would have taken me to four nineteen Walnut if I hadn't come to—but you'd planted the knife anyway, just in case. You thought it would make me think twice before calling the cops. You thought it was my knife, and I was supposed to wonder if I'd killed somebody."

Cobb cocked an eyebrow. "It wasn't your knife?"

"Tickey's. I'd borrowed it. You killed Byron with Tickey's knife which you found in my flat. Killed Byron because he was hell bent on taking care of a pal who was too drunk to take care of himself. Byron brought me home in his car. You were waiting there, outside. It was supposed to have been Bobby, wasn't it? You'd have killed Bobby, instead of Byron, to get a

blackmailer off your neck. Your neck and Roma's. But Byron turned up, and either you had to drop the whole thing right there, or you had to kill Byron."

C OBB said, "You've got a nice grasp on the situation. So much had gone into the scheme at that point that I hated to see it flop on what was a mere technicality. As it turned out, the circumstances were an improvement over the original idea. I didn't know you and Byron were rivals for the affection of the same girl until I heard about it this morning."

"So you forced Byron up to my flat and there killed him. You cleaned out my closet and drawers—it was to look as though I'd skipped town—brought them down to Byron's car where I lay unconscious, and simply drove off somewhere. Then the clothes switching took place—you'd brought these things I have on—"

"That was a hell of a job," Wally Cobb said pleasantly. "changing your clothes."

"Then you drove down to the bus terminal in Byron's car, put me on the bus while it waited for loading time in the yard. And what the hell did you do with my clothes?"

Wally Cobb laughed. "You carried them to four nineteen Walnut in that Gladstone. I like that touch, don't you?"

And speaking of the Gladstone reminded O'Mara of something else—the letter Wally Cobb had dropped on the bus. He said, "Lord, but that's funny!" not laughing about it. "The clue that wasn't there. That's why you were so eager to get back to the scene of the crime this morning. You'd discovered you'd dropped a letter somewhere. A long envelope you probably thought you were putting in your inner suitcoat pocket but actually put between your overcoat lining and the *outside* of your suitcoat."

Cobb nodded. "I was hurried. Where is the letter? Did you find it?"

"The bus driver did. It didn't work its

way out until you got off the bus," O'Mara said. "That's what's funny, and you hot and bothered about it, double checking with everybody, even with Schoff the cop, and picking up old envelopes out of gutters—You were scared, weren't you? And you wanted me along because, if we were cornered, you thought you could put a finger on me and retire to a safe spot."

O'Mara stood up. Wally Cobb's gloved hand dipped into an overcoat pocket and took out a revolver. He was casual about it, a just-in-case gesture, like parading your army in front of the foreign diplomats.

"Why didn't you telephone Bobby and warn him I was on my way?" O'Mara asked.

Cobb said, "I tried. The phone has been disconnected."

"You made a nice team," O'Mara said. "You and Roma, with Bobby horning in from the sidelines. Somebody ought to have told the Defenbach girl you mentioned that the way to get by with an insurance swindle is to have a crooked claim investigator on your team."

Cobb nodded. "You tell her when you see her. She's dead, by the way." He glanced over at Bobby, asleep on the concrete.

O'Mara asked, "Just how much do I look like Fred Regen, anyway?"

"Not much. You don't have to—not the way we'll work it." Cobb looked at Bobby again. "Hey, Bobby, snap out of it."

Bobby didn't snap. O'Mara said, "We're not waiting for Bobby. I'm not." He took a step toward Cobb, and the revolver lifted and firmed. Cobb's eyes were steady.

"Oh, yes you are. You damned well have to, O'Mara."

O'Mara shook his head and took another step. "I don't have to do anything I don't want to but die. And you don't want me to do that here, with Regen's grave showing. You don't want it to happen in Lafayette at all, where Regen was known. You don't want it to happen this

way, either—not with a gun. You and Roma are shooting at double indemnity. It's got to look like an accident. Maybe I'm supposed to fall off a train, like the guy in the book."

"I'm shooting at you," Cobb warned. "You'll find out. One more step, O'Mara, and you'll find out."

"That's what I'm telling you," O'Mara said. Now he was smiling and Cobb wasn't. "I've got the whip hand, though you're holding the gun. I can make it happen here. And if it does, the whole thing falls through. All of the work and the worry are wasted if you kill me here." And then he threw the toothed spreader at Cobb. That was intended to disconcert. That was all that it did. It hurried Cobb's shot, and as the roar of it filled the room, O'Mara was rushing in, forcing Cobb back to the wall. He had Cobb's gun wrist, got it up out of the way, roughed it against concrete blocks of the wall, slammed the heel of his

hand against Cobb's chin to bounce Cobb's head against the wall. And Cobb was one of those guys who think that if you've got a gun you've got everything.

O'Mara kneed Cobb and he screamed. O'Mara roughed the gun hand again, grinding flesh off on the concrete. Cobb threw himself forward, away from the wall. He had the weight. O'Mara went over backward, hit the floor with Cobb on top. But the gun skittered off somewhere—O'Mara heard the sound of it and rammed up with two fingers into Cobb's eyes. Cobb reared up, and O'Mara threw him over onto his back. Then O'Mara was on top. O'Mara was banging Cobb's head against the concrete. But not for long. Not long enough. They wouldn't let him keep banging Cobb's head until it was mashed to a pulp. They laid hands on O'Mara and dragged him, panting and slavering, off Cobb and onto his feet.

They—O'Mara's trapped glance darted

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about—they were the cops. Lafayette's finest augmented by Schoff and the Latin-looking dick from Indianapolis. And Schoff was rumbling, "Take it easy, O'Mara. You've had it tough, I know, but we couldn't let you kill the guy."

O'Mara took a long, a shuddering breath. "O'Mara," he repeated. "You—you called me O'Mara."

Schoff nodded, sad-eyed. "Sure. I had your picture in my notebook, there on the landing at your place. A picture Jean Norman had given us."

"Then—then why in the hell—" O'Mara couldn't go on. He stared at the cops who were hauling Wally Cobb to his feet. Wally Cobb didn't seem to have any fight left in him. Besides, he was handcuffed. And Bobby was sitting up on the floor, surrounded by legs in blue serge, not looking happy.

"Why didn't I arrest you?" Schoff said. "Because I knew you weren't the guy we were after, that's why. But maybe Cobb was. So we put a tail on Cobb and that brought us here."

"You knew—how did you know?"

Schoff showed big empty hands. "Miss Davis told us your story, the one you told her. About the bus trip, the whole works."

O'Mara was incredulous. "And you *believed* that?"

Schoff smiled slightly. "Frankly, no. Not at first. Not until the letter turned up. The letter Cobb dropped on the bus. I'll show it to you when we get back to Indianapolis."

IT TOOK them a long time to tie all the strings. They had to break Cobb and Roma and Bobby, playing one against another, the way the police have to do to winnow out the lies and get a look at the shining grains of truth that remain. Bobby and Roma were the ones who broke down, with Cobb keeping his mouth shut. And the truth, Schoff told O'Mara, was rather simple and very sordid. Another triangle, so help him.

"They all lived in Lafayette when it began," Schoff explained. "Bobby was the Regen chauffeur, remember? Fred Regen had an office in the Life Building, but he was on the road a lot, self-employed, and making good money. Cobb was selling insurance for Mid-Continent, and he loaded Regen up on policies. Regen put damned near everything he had into insurance, and nobody was thinking much about murder until Regen brought home Cobb to dinner one night. Then Cobb and Roma fell for each other.

Cobb and Roma kept seeing each other secretly even after Cobb got transferred to the claims department of Mid-Continent in Indianapolis. Regen got wind of it, accused Roma of playing around. She blew her top, picked up a gun that was licensed in her own name, and emptied it into Regen. She phoned Cobb to come up from Indianapolis and get her out of what had begun to look like a very bad jam. There wasn't much they could do except bury Regen in the basement, under the concrete. They didn't know at the time that Bobby was a witness to the interment. Then Bobby attached himself to the pair, made demands that simply couldn't be met because most of everything Regen had was tied up in insurance.

"So," Schoff said with a sigh, "they had to evolve a smart scheme. Regen wouldn't be missed for a while, since he was on the road a lot. Roma and Bobby moved to Norwood to a house Cobb had found for them. Roma was to make like her husband was away until they found a patsy."

"Me," O'Mara acknowledged. "I was scheduled to lie down and play dead in the most convincing of all manners whenever the time was ripe. Roma would identify me as her husband. Cobb would be handling the insurance claim end of it, and they had it made. But what about that envelope Cobb dropped on the bus?"

Schoff took the letter out of a drawer. It was the same envelope O'Mara had seen

before with the improvised label stuck on with cellulose tape except that somebody had peeled back the tape so you could look under the label.

"The bus driver," Schoff explained, "said he was carrying the letter around, waiting for a chance to give it to Cobb, and the label started to come off. Either that or the bus driver is one of those guys who always peel off old wallpaper to see what's underneath."

And what was under the label was the typed name and address of Peter O'Mara.

"When the bus driver heard your name mentioned on the radio newscast this morning," Schoff said, "he brought us the letter. Go ahead, O'Mara, look at the contents."

Inside was a piece of white bond paper on which had been typed:

O'Mara:

No fooling this time. Have five grand for me when I get to your flat this evening or I go to the cops.

R. G.

O'Mara looked up. "R. G. That would be Bobby—Robert Garden. I don't get—Wait a minute." He brightened. Maybe I *do* get it. Cobb was going to kill Bobby in my flat—not Byron Phelps. That would rid Cobb and Roma of a nasty blackmailer and still frame me into a position where I'd have to play along with them for a while as Fred Regen. This"—he indicated the typed note—"was to have supplied motive for *me* to kill Bobby. It was intended to mislead the police into thinking Bobby was blackmailing me."

Schoff nodded. "Only blackmailers don't write letters. I knew it was a phony. And the label business—you get that, don't you? That's cute. Cobb sent the letter to himself. That way, it would acquire a postmark. Peel off the label, and it would look like it was delivered to you, and he could plant it at the scene of the crime. That way it would still go through the mail and have the right address but Cobb wouldn't

run the risk of you getting your hands on it." Schoff coughed. "Real cute. So cute he outsmarted himself with it. Take that and your story, as related by Miss Davis, and we knew you were being had. We had only to watch Cobb and get him red-handed."

Somebody had brought O'Mara's clothes down to police headquarters. He changed there, got out of Fred Regen's shoes, put on his own, put his own wallet into his pocket. He carried the rest of his stuff in the Gladstone and went back to Park Avenue with it. He let himself in with his own keys, dropped the Gladstone in front of his door, and went on to Tickey Davis' door where he knocked. The dog started barking, the typewriter stopped clattering. Tickey Davis opened the door, and she was wearing high heels and nylons and a slim black skirt and a fluffy white blouse. Also the big glasses. Also the plumber's dream holder. Her hair was brushed out and down in soft waves to frame her cute, her funny, but especially her pretty little face.

She said, "Oh, it's you. Say something to Walter." And she turned and went back to her typewriter, sat down, started banging again.

He spoke politely to Walter, who allowed him to come in. Then he walked over to Tickey's desk, to Tickey herself, reached down, took the chunk of aluminum out of her mouth, stooped over and kissed her, or at least tried to. She jerked back, whirled in the chair, came way up on her high heels, and glared at him.

"Gratitude?" she shrilled. "Is that it? Because I helped get you out of that mess you were in?"

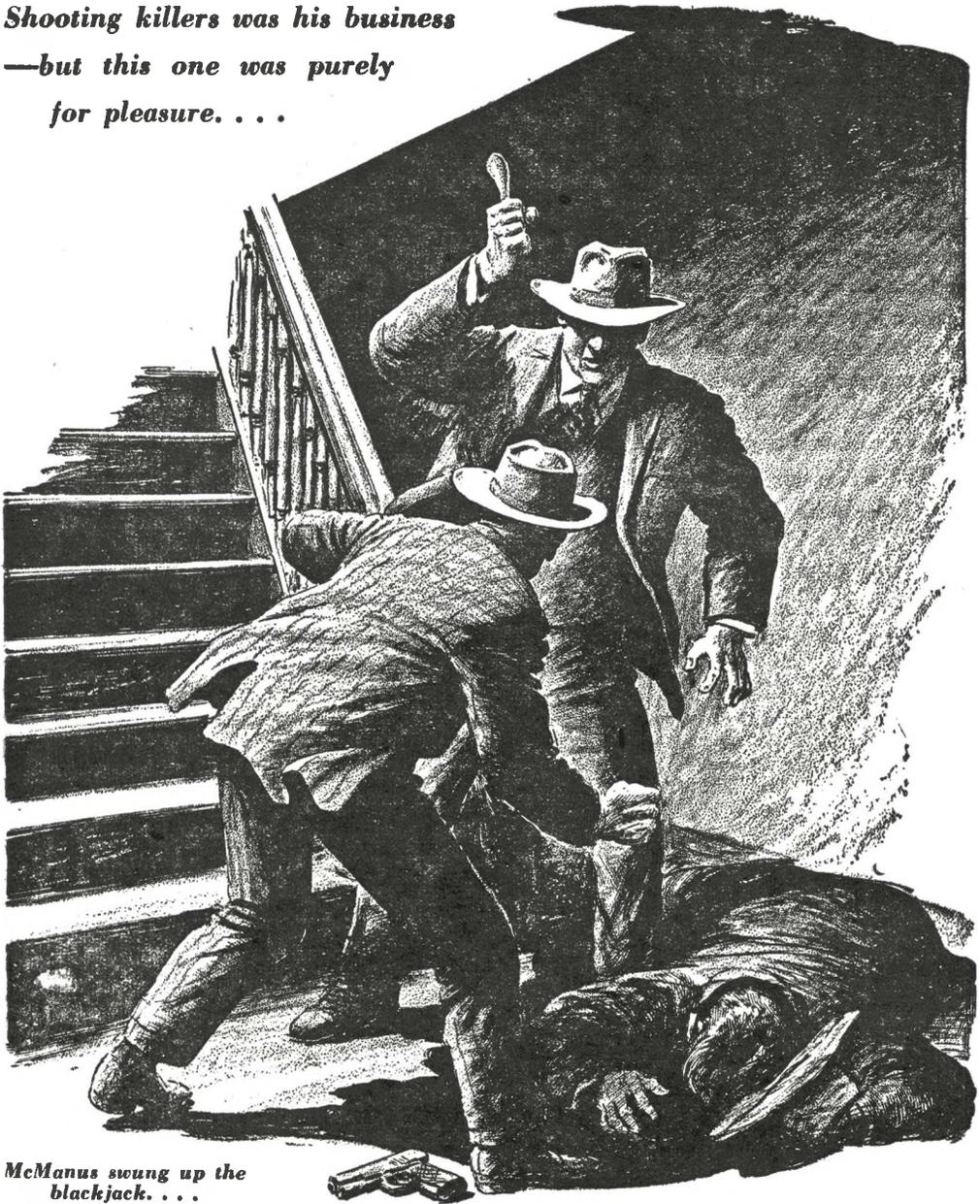
"No-uh," he said.

"Rebound, then," she said nodding wisely. "Rebound from your model. A normal reaction."

"The hell with my model," he said. "I just wanted to, that's all."

"Oh," she said softly. She took off her glasses. ■ ■ ■

*Shooting killers was his business
—but this one was purely
for pleasure. . . .*



*McManus swung up the
blackjack. . . .*

This Shroud Reserved **By Larry Holden**

THE SIGN that hung over the sidewalk said *The Amsterdam House*, but it was just another Hoboken-River Street gin mill. Lee stood outside on

the sidewalk and watched through the window. He attracted no attention because he looked so little different from the rummies who stood outside other River Street gin

mills, begging a dime or a quarter for a drink. But Lee did not want a drink. He wanted Marky. In six months he had dogged Marky over two thousand miles and had spent almost thirty-five hundred dollars. Under his left armpit lay holstered a blunt, Savage gun. That was for Marky.

He peered through the window again and watched the bartender. He did not dare go inside because his picture had been in the paper the time Georgie had been killed, and there was always the chance somebody might recognize him. The bar was crowded with sailors from the Holland-American boats, and the bartender was kept busy. He was a fat man whose dull black hair was parted in the middle, and he was sweating wearily. He was Marky's brother, and the resemblance was unmistakable, except that Marky wore two-hundred-dollar suits and put stuff on his hair to make it shine.

Lee's lips thinned grimly. Ever since Marky had started running in Chicago after killing Georgie, Lee had known it would wind up with the brother. Once before, when the heat was on, Marky had run to his brother because nobody else wanted any part of him. The brother had tended bar in Cincinnati that time. Now he was in Hoboken, and Marky had to be here, too, because the heat was really on this time. Things were tough for cop killers, and Georgie had been a rookie cop, Lee's kid brother.

Lee glanced at the clock over the cash register. It was eleven-thirty. The bar wouldn't close until three. Helen was waiting for him back in that dreary room in the hotel on Washington Street. The thought of Helen was a dull ache. She shouldn't have come with him. He didn't want her. This was no business for a woman.

But she had said with calm desperation, "If you don't take me, Lee, I'll follow you. I want to be with you."

She had not tried to stop him, and she

hadn't said a word even when he turned in his badge.

But there was no room for his wife or anyone or anything in his heart while this black hate and fury burned within him! Still, the ache that had once been love was there when he thought of her sitting patiently, waiting for him.

He had three and a half hours before Bert Marky could leave his bartending, and the hotel was only ten minutes away. He started toward the corner with that long, prowling stride of his. He stopped in the drug store on Washington Street for a pint of chocolate ice cream. Helen liked chocolate ice cream.

It was a dingy hotel. It was dark and smelly, but it was the best he could afford. He had started off after Marky, drawing every cent he had in the bank—thirty-five hundred dollars—and now he was down to his last eighty.

Helen quickly opened the door of their room when she heard his key slide into the lock. She always did that. She always greeted him. She smiled up at him. He did not notice how tired and worn her smile was.

"I brought you some ice cream," he said.

She put her hand on his arm and said a little breathlessly, "Ben's here, Lee. Ben McManus. He wants to talk to you." Her hand was trembling, and there was a kind of hope in her voice.

Lee neither saw the shaking of her hand nor heard the lift in her voice. His face hardened. McManus was lieutenant of detectives, his ex-boss back in Chicago. He pushed the package of ice cream into Helen's hands and walked into the room.

McManus was standing at the window, a heavy, bulky man with a tough face but brown eyes that weren't tough at all.

He said quietly, "Hello, Lee."

Lee ignored the outstretched hand. "What do *you* want?" he demanded harshly.

"I want to talk to you, Lee."

"There's nothing to talk about."

Helen still stood at the door, holding the package of ice cream. "Please, Lee," she pleaded, "listen to what Ben has to say. It won't hurt you to listen, will it?"

Lee's gray eyes flickered at her without expression. He looked back at McManus, then shrugged and sat down on the edge of the bed. He put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it.

"I'm listening," he said shortly.

McManus looked at Helen, and the look said that he was going to do his best. "I brought you something, Lee," he said. He held out his hand.

It was Lee's old badge, the badge he had turned in when he set out after Marky on his own, after the Department had turned him down, refused an extended leave of absence. Lee's lip lifted a little at the corner.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"It's yours, Lee," said McManus persuasively. "We never accepted your resignation. It's your badge. I want you to take it."

"Nuts."

"Now wait a minute, Lee. Don't be hasty. . . ."

"I said nuts!"

McManus' face turned red, but he saw Helen's pleading eyes on him, and he fought down the surge of temper. "I don't want to fight with you, Lee," he said heavily. "You were one of the best men we had in the department. I want you back. Let's say I made a mistake six months ago when I turned down your leave of absence, but it was the only thing I could have done. I had a department to run."

"You still do."

McManus took a breath. This time he did not look at Helen, but he made one more effort. "Take back your badge, Lee. A good cop doesn't turn killer, and you always were a good cop. This isn't something between you and Marky. Marky belongs to the law, and you're not the law."

"Tell that to Marky. He's laughing at

you. For six months he's been laughing."

"One of these days he'll stop laughing."

"Sure, but you won't have anything to do with it."

"For the last time, Lee, I'm offering you your badge back. . . ."

"You're wasting your time."

McManus' jaws clamped shut and he thrust the badge back into his pocket. "Anything I hate," he said, "is a renegade cop, and you're a renegade. Marky's a rat, but when he killed Georgie, he at least had the excuse that Georgie was shooting at him. You don't even have that. You're going to kill in cold blood."

Lee raised his thinned face and his red hair glinted harshly under the light. "Georgie was my kid brother, and he didn't have a chance. I didn't yap when he was given the toughest beat in the city, but I knew goddam well it was no beat for a green cop. . . ."

McManus said angrily, "Talk sense! The flu epidemic had crippled the department, and we had no choice. We gave Georgie that beat because we had nobody else to put there."

"So he lasted a week. Marky wouldn't even have tried that holdup if there hadn't been a green cop on the beat." Lee rose from the bed and glared at McManus.

McManus glowered back. "I'm going to take Marky in," he said deliberately and biting, "and I'm not going to let any hoodlums, you included, stand in my way. That's clear enough, isn't it?"

Lee leaned forward and when he spoke, his words were whetted by the long hate and fury that burned in him. "I'll make it even clearer. Keep away from me or you'll get hurt."

McManus nodded curtly and walked toward the door. Helen stepped out of his way, and he went past her without a glance. Lee stabbed out his cigarette in the ash tray on the table beside the bed and walked stiffly into the bathroom for a caffeine pill. He had been on the raw edge of fatigue be-

fore he talked to McManus, and now he felt wrung-out. He took the pill, then stripped and stepped into the shower stall! The cold water washed some of the weariness away. As he was dressing, he heard Helen in the other room, and when he looked out, he saw her sitting on the edge of the bed, sobbing. At the sight of her, the dull ache lumped coldly in his heart.

Georgie; it was a picture of himself taken twelve years before on the very first day he had proudly put on his uniform.

He stood there staring at it, frowning, trying to remember, but it was like looking at the picture of someone who had been twelve years dead. The cocky grin was boyish, and the face was rounder. His hand lifted automatically and he felt his sharp cheekbones and the thin, flat fall of cheeks beneath them, the hard muscle at the ends of his mouth that came from scowling. Had he ever looked like that kid in the photograph? So young. Too young. Too young to be a cop. Then, uneasily, he remembered that Georgie had looked like that. Was that why Helen had been crying?

HE FINISHED dressing quickly, but when he went outside, she was gone. He looked around the room with a feeling of bewilderment. She had never gone out before without telling him. He saw a white oblong of paper lying on the floor beside the bed, and he snatched it up, thinking it was a note. It wasn't. It was a snapshot of a young policeman in uniform, and at first he thought it was Georgie, because this must have been what Helen had been holding in her hand when she sat weeping on the bed. But it wasn't

He put the snapshot down carefully on the table between the twin beds. It grinned up at him. He turned it over quickly and walked to the window, thinking savagely of Georgie taking ten hours to die.

There was a stale cigar reek at the win-



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dow, and he looked down. On the window sill was an ash tray with two cigar butts in it. McManus always smoked cigars.

It took a long time to smoke two cigars. So McManus had waited for him. His face hardened. If McManus had been hot on the tail of Marky, he wouldn't have hung around like that. A glint of cynical understanding lighted Lee's eyes. Now it was a laugh, that business of giving him back his badge. McManus didn't give a damn whether he took back his badge or not. All McManus wanted was Marky— *and he didn't know where Marky was!*

There it was. The two cigar butts told the whole story. McManus hadn't followed Marky to Hoboken. McManus had followed him, hoping Lee would lead him to Marky, making that play with the badge to cinch it. Lee flipped his fingernail against the ash tray and lifted his lip in the bare bones of a grin. There was a promotion in it for McManus if he was able to take Marky back to Chicago.

Now Lee knew that he would have to be very careful. It was three cornered now—Marky, McManus and himself, and McManus could be more dangerous than Marky. McManus would be waiting outside the hotel for him, waiting to be led to Marky. McManus hadn't been bluffing when he said he wouldn't let anybody stand in the way of his taking Marky in.

Lee looked down into the wide quietness of Washington Street. He couldn't see McManus, of course, but he knew he was down there. Lee's eyes narrowed. Let him have a good long wait. Marky would be dead before the night was over, and McManus would still be waiting.

Unconsciously, Lee touched the gun under his left arm. He didn't want trouble with McManus, but he wasn't going to run just because McManus had barked.

He looked down into the street again. He had to blink because the lights kept blurring. He looked at his wrist watch. It was a little after midnight, almost three

hours before the Amsterdam House closed. He recrossed the room, heavy with fatigue, and sat 'down on the edge of the bed, reaching for the alarm clock. He set the alarm for two o'clock, and as he lay back on the pillow he caught sight of the snapshot again and tears came to his eyes.

He whispered, "Georgie, Georgie. . . ." But, when he closed his eyes, it was Helen's face he saw.

He fell almost immediately into exhausted sleep.

When the alarm went off at two, he at first thought it the fire alarm that used to ring down at headquarters in Chicago. He had been dreaming, and for some reason it had been Christmas and he had a turkey he had won in a raffle and he had been wrapping it up to take home and surprise Helen. That had been eight years ago, and the fire alarm had gone off just as he was walking out the door with the turkey under his arm, and he had spent Christmas Eve on the fire lines, but they'd had the turkey the next day, and Helen had brought him dinner in bed and they had eaten it and opened their gaily wrapped packages all over the covers.

But it wasn't Christmas. It was Hoboken, and he had to get up. His eyes stuck together and he fumbled for the alarm clock and turned it off. He stumbled across the room into the bathroom and splashed his face with cold water. It woke him up. He took another caffeine pill and walked back into the bedroom, running his fingers back through his harsh red hair.

He didn't see Helen until he was halfway to the door, and there she was beside the door, lying on the floor, her legs sprawled limply. Her head was cradled on one outflung arm, and she was breathing heavily. With horror, he realized that she was drunk, dead drunk. He could smell the liquor fumes from where he stood. Seeing her lying there like that was a slap across the face. Helen had never been a rummy.

He picked her up and grimly carried her to the bed. It wasn't until he was bending over, laying her on the bed, that he felt the lightness of her. His fingers tightened around her shoulder. She was bony. There was nothing under his fingers but the hard bone, not the firm flesh he had remembered. He pulled the blanket over her. Her head rolled from side to side on the pillow and she was muttering. He leaned over to hear what she was saying, but all he could understand was, "Lee . . . Lee . . . please. . ."

He scowled and glanced at the clock. It was two-fifteen. He didn't have time to snap her out of it now. He pulled off her shoes, tucked the blanket higher under her chin and walked softly toward the door. There was a flat pint bottle of whiskey, half full, on the floor where she had been lying, and he picked it up. He looked at it, then angrily threw it on his bed and went out.

He did not take the stairway to the lobby, but went down the corridor to the rear of the building. He climbed down the fire escape and dropped into the darkness at the bottom. He went quickly through a long alley and came out on the street behind the hotel. There was a delicatessen there, closed for the night, and he stepped into the doorway. He forced himself to wait for five minutes in case McManus had figured this angle and had covered the back of the hotel instead of the front.

While he was waiting, he took his gun from its holster and checked the load by feel. After all these years, that was something he could do in the dark.

WHEN he was finally sure that McManus wasn't coming through the alley, he stepped out of the doorway and walked quickly down the sidewalk to River Street. It was twenty minutes of three when he reached the Amsterdam House. There were still three sailors inside, all quietly and sleepily drunk. Fat Bert, Marky's brother, leaned against the

cash register, dozing, his chin resting against his breastbone in a triple tier.

Lee crossed the street and stood in the dark behind a parked car. All that remained now was to wait for Bert to close up and go home. Bert would lead him to Marky. Lee felt no excitement, no triumph, now that he was practically at the end of the six-month trail. There was a deadness in his chest. He wished now he had poured the rest of that whiskey down the sink instead of throwing the bottle on the bed. If Helen woke up, she would find it.

At five to three, Bert stirred, turned and looked at the clock over the cash register. He yawned heavily and turned out the lights over the back bar. Lee tensed and put one hand on the fender of the car, watching. The three sailors wanted another drink, but Bert shook his head and motioned them toward the door. They left, protesting. They stood for a moment on the sidewalk, talking, then staggered down the street toward the lights of the H. & M. train station.

Bert locked the front door and switched off the sign and window lights, then plodded back to the cash register and started putting the cash in a little canvas sack. He stooped and disappeared behind the bar for a moment. There must have been a safe there, for when he reappeared he did not have the money sack. Yawning and rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand, he came out from behind the bar, reached up and turned out the sole remaining ceiling light.

Lee put both hands against the car and steadied himself. He was shaking a little. In a moment the front door would open and Bert would come out. Lee waited, breathing shallowly through his mouth.

The front door did not open, and Bert did not come out. Lee ran his tongue over his lips. Had Bert gone out a rear door? He forced himself to wait another few minutes in case Bert had gone out for just a few minutes—then suddenly the lights

sprang on in the windows directly over the bar. The shades were tightly drawn, but as Lee watched he could see Bert's bulky shadow cross the windows.

Lee's momentary excitement passed and the numbness was back again. He touched his gun as if to reassure himself that it was still there. This was it. He tried to whip himself up by saying that. *This is it.* This was it, all right, and all he had to do now was cross the street, go through the dark doorway, climb the stairs. . . .

This is it!

He went around the car and walked rapidly across the street. He turned the doorknob, but the door was locked. He was prepared for that. He took out his keyring, and the second gimmick he tried opened the door. He opened it wide and, taking an envelope from his pocket, wedged it open. If he had to leave fast; he didn't want any closed doors in his way.

There was a rustle in the darkness, and his hand darted to his gun, but it was too late. Something hard was jabbed into his back and a tough voice said:

"Where do you think you're going, pal?"

Lee swore silently. He should have known Marky would have a stake-out, a watchdog. A hand fanned him roughly, found the gun under his arm.

"And a heater, too," he voice said. "I think we better go upstairs and see the boss, pal."

Sickeningly, Lee realized it was lighter in the hall than it had first seemed. There was a light on the second floor, and now he could see the steps before him—which meant that Marky's gunnie could see perfectly, too. He knew what was going to happen when he was marched into Marky. Marky would recognize him, and that would be curtains.

The gun muzzle was pulled from his back, and he knew the gunman had stepped warily away. This guy was no amateur. He wasn't leaving any openings. Lee took a breath and started toward the stairs. As

he reached out with his foot, he heard a meaty smack and a grunt behind him. He whirled as the gunman fell beside him.

McManus stood there with a blackjack in his hand.

He said, "Put up your hands, Lee. I told you I wasn't letting anybody stand in my way. Put up your hands and you won't get hurt."

McManus' head turned a little, uncertainly, and suddenly Lee realized that McManus' eyes hadn't yet become fully focused in the dim light. Lee scuffed the floor with his heel, and McManus swung up his arm with the blackjack. Lee went under it and hit him heavily in the stomach. McManus choked and sagged against the wall. Lee hit him again, this time just behind the ear, and the big man slumped.

Lee left McManus where he was and bent over the unconscious gunman, feeling for his gun. He started for the stairs again, but stopped, swore, and went back to the gunman. If he came to first, it would be just too bad for Ben McManus. Lee tied his hands and ankles with his belt and tie. While he was down on one knee, Lee slipped off his own shoes so he would make no noise going up the stairs.

He did this methodically. He wasn't keyed up, and that was bad. When he was keyed up, he did things swiftly and just right; now he had to think before he did anything, and that made him feel unsure.

HE CREPT upstairs, but for all his caution, his toes tangled in the torn carpet and he fell forward heavily, sprawling over the head of the stairs. The hall door opposite him opened and fat Bert, dressed only in a pair of pants, appeared and called anxiously:

"That you, Ernie?"

His jaw dropped when he saw Lee sprawled on the floor, practically at his feet, with a gun clutched in his right hand. He gave a bleating cry and jumped back, slamming the door.

Lee scrambled to his feet and flung himself at the door. It was fastened only by a bolt and the screws came out of the dry old wood with a screech. Lee plunged into the room, digging with his heels to regain his balance. The room was empty, but there was a second room.

Lee dived for the wall beside the door, and an instant later, Bert charged back into the room, clutching a gun. He did not see Lee, for he had passed him in his rush, and he stood there, his head jerking from side to side. He was trembling and he held the gun away from him as if he were afraid of it.

Lee stepped forward and brought down the flat of his gun across Bert's head. The fat man fell to his knees, then fell to the floor with a sigh.

There was a noise, a crash of furniture from the other room, and Lee spun around. He waited with his gun lifted, and the crash came again, as if someone in there had fallen across a chair, then the heavy thump of a body against the wall. Lee stiffened and walked slowly to the doorway.

There was Marky on his hands and knees on the floor, trying to raise himself to his feet, but his hands kept sliding down the wall. Lee's mouth lifted contemptuously and with disgust. Marky was soused. There were bottles on the bed and under the bed.

Marky steadied himself with his left arm and his coat fell open, showing the gun strapped under it. His right hand came up and shakily fumbled for the butt. Dimly,

he seemed to realize that this was not Bert standing over him, that this might be danger. His hand closed around the gun.

Lee sucked in his breath and waited for Marky's gun to clear the holster. He'd give him that much of a chance. He'd wait till the gun came out. Marky raised the gun and tried to steady it. It roared and plaster showered down on Lee's head from the ceiling.

Lee stared down at him as Marky frantically and blearily patted the floor to find his gun again. Was this what he had come down those six stark months to find? Was this the tribute of vengeance to Georgie, this dirty room, this gaunt, drunken scarecrow? This was not vengeance; this was butchery. This was the way Marky would have done.

Lee stepped forward and savagely kicked as Marky found the gun. The man whimpered and fell against the wall, cradling his wrist against his chest. Lee reached down, twisted his fingers in Marky's collar and started from the room, dragging the man after him. There were footsteps and he stopped as Ben McManus burst through the doorway from the hall. Lee gave Marky a heave and flung him at McManus' feet. Marky lurched to his hands and knees and blindly tried to crawl away. Lee met McManus' eyes and he felt the truculence seep out of him. He held out his hand. It was shaking a little. "Please, Ben," he said in a low voice, "if it's all right with you, I'd like my badge back now." ■ ■ ■

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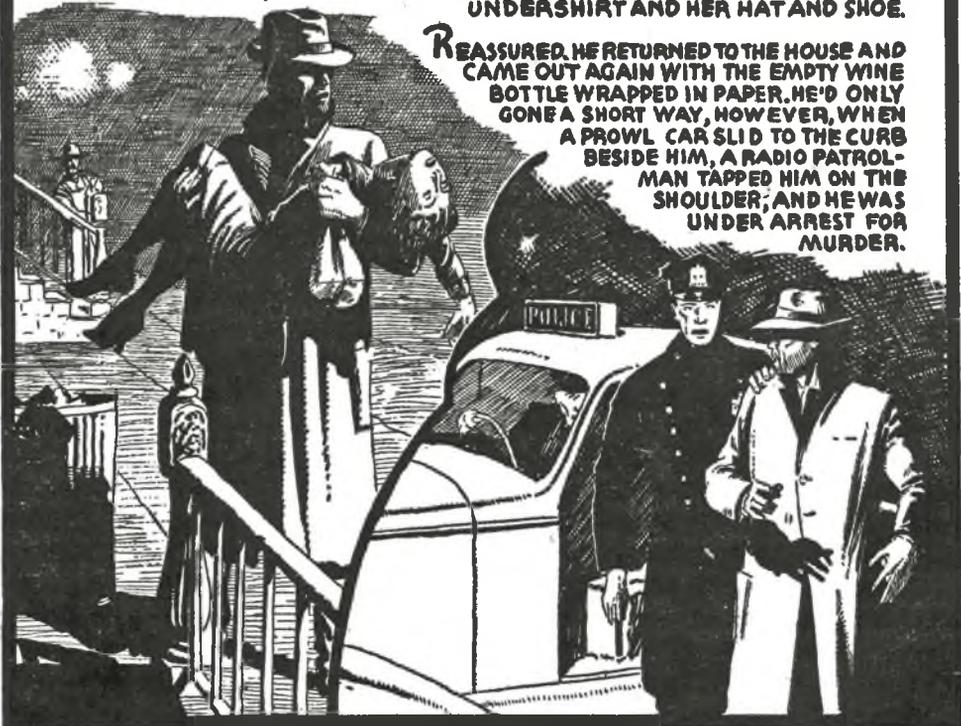
STRANGE TRAILS —

When Chance Fingered a Killer

JOHAN MANOS, A HARD WORKING CHEF, SAT IN HIS IMMACULATE SECOND-FLOOR-FRONT ROOM IN A NEW YORK BOARDING HOUSE, DRINKING WINE WITH A PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN, ONE MARCH EVENING IN 1943. A FEW MINUTES LATER THERE WAS A SCUFFLE, JOHN'S POWERFUL FINGERS CLOSED AROUND HER THROAT, AND BEFORE HE KNEW IT SHE WAS DEAD.

WHAT MANOS DID THEN, OUT OF DESPERATION, WAS CLEVER. HE SIMPLY WAITED. THE NEXT DAY HE TOLD THE MAID -- THROUGH THE DOOR -- THAT HE HAD A COLD AND WOULD STAY IN BED. THAT NIGHT HE WATCHED UNTIL 2:30 A.M. WHEN THE SHADOWY STREET WAS DESERTED. THEN HE CARRIED HIS VICTIM DOWN, DUMPED HER BODY IN AN AREAWAY, AND FARTHER ON TOSSED AWAY A BAG CONTAINING HIS UNDERSHIRT AND HER HAT AND SHOE.

REASSURED, HE RETURNED TO THE HOUSE AND CAME OUT AGAIN WITH THE EMPTY WINE BOTTLE WRAPPED IN PAPER. HE'D ONLY GONE A SHORT WAY, HOWEVER, WHEN A PROWL CAR SLID TO THE CURB BESIDE HIM, A RADIO PATROLMAN TAPPED HIM ON THE SHOULDER, AND HE WAS UNDER ARREST FOR MURDER.



to MURDER by LEE

UNKNOWN TO MANOS, THE NIGHT WATCHMAN IN THE BUILDING NEXT HIS BOARDING HOUSE HAD COME TO THE DOORWAY TO SNEAK A SMOKE, HAD SEEN THE BODY DUMPED, AND INVESTIGATED IT. WHEN THE KILLER RETURNED AND CAME OUT AGAIN, THE WATCHMAN FOLLOWED HIM AND PUT THE FINGER ON HIM. OTHERWISE, MANOS MIGHT NOT HAVE EVEN BEEN SUSPECTED. AS IT WAS, HE SWORE HE WASN'T THE MAN WHO CARRIED OUT THE BODY-- ACTUALLY THE WATCHMAN HADN'T SEEN HIS FACE-- AND IT LOOKED



FOR A WHILE AS THOUGH HE MIGHT GET AWAY WITH IT.



BUT THE BAG WAS FOUND AND THE UNDERSHIRT IN IT, TOGETHER WITH ONE BELONGING TO MANOS AND A PIECE OF LINOLEUM BEARING TWO SCARCELY DISCERNIBLE STAINS FROM HIS FLOOR, WERE TURNED OVER TO THE POLICE LABORATORY, WHERE SCIENTIFIC SLEUTHS BEGAN TO WEAVE AN INEXORABLE WEB AROUND THE KILLER.

TESTS DISCLOSED THAT THE SWEAT ON BOTH UNDERSHIRTS WAS THE SAME, AND THAT THE SPITTLE STAINS ON THE LINOLEUM, WHICH HAD BEEN PARTIALLY WIPED UP BY THE UNDERSHIRT IN THE BAG, HAD COME FROM THE THROAT OF A WOMAN WHO HAD DIED OF STRANGULATION.

CONFRONTED WITH THIS EVIDENCE, JOHN MANOS CONFESSED, EXPLAINING THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN INTO AN ARGUMENT AND HE HAD PUT HIS HANDS AROUND HER THROAT TO STILL HER CRIES. HE DREW A LONG PRISON TERM BECAUSE, FOR ALL HIS CLEVERNESS, HE FAILED TO FORSEE THAT ONE BLIND IMPONDERABLE--CHANCE.



JOHNNY ON THE SPOT

*Johnny groaned,
"Jean!" as the man
brought him in.*



CHAPTER ONE

Death on Every Corner

THE CLOCK on the wall of the cafeteria said a quarter to four in the morning when he came in from the street. He wasn't even twenty-eight yet,

Johnny Donovan. Any doctor in town would have given him fifty more years. Only, he himself knew better than that. He didn't even have fifty days left; maybe it was only fifty hours, or maybe fifty minutes, depending on how good he was.

There hadn't been anyone in sight on the street when he came in just now. He'd

By Cornell Woolrich



made sure of that. And this place was half of Manhattan Island away from where anyone would expect to find him. That was why he'd told Jean to meet him here tonight, after her last show at the club, if she couldn't hold out any more; if she had to see him so bad. Poor kid, he sure felt sorry for her! Married at seventeen, and widowed at eighteen—any minute now.

There was one thing he was glad of, that he'd managed to keep her out of it. She knew about it, of course, but they didn't know about her; didn't even know she existed. And dancing twice nightly right at one of Beefy Borden's own clubs, the prettiest girl on the floor! Taking fifty every Saturday from Beefy's "front" down there, while Beefy had guys out

looking for him all over town, and would have given ten times that much just to connect with him!

But it wasn't so surprising at that. Beefy was one of those rare, domesticated big-shots who, outside of killing-hours, thought there was no one like that silver-blond wife and those two daughters of his. Johnny, when he used to drop in their Ocean Avenue apartment on business in the old days, plenty of times found him there helping his kids with their homework or playing with them on the floor, maybe a couple of hours after he'd had some poor devil buried alive in quicklime out in the wilds of Jamaica or dumped overboard from one of his runners with a pail of cement for shoes. That being the case, even a lovely number like Jean couldn't be expected to make a dent in him, often as he must have seen her hoofing around on the hardwood down at the Wicked Nineties.

Otherwise Beefy would have asked questions, tried to find out something about her. But to him she was just a girl called Jean Marvel—her own idea of a stage-tag at sixteen—just a name on one of the dozen payrolls he checked once a month with his various fronts.

The way he felt tonight as he waited for her, Johnny almost wished Borden's gang would catch up with him, get it over with! What was so awful about choking yourself to death in a gunny-sack, anyway? You couldn't do it more than once. He was tired of hiding out or dodging, trying to save his precious hide. . . .

But there was Jean. Outside of wanting him straight, which had started the whole mess, she also wanted him alive—for some wacky reason or other. He could hear her now, like she had been the last time they'd stolen a brief get-together riding hidden on the back platform of the Shuttle. That was last Sunday.

She had laced it into him, eyes flinty, voice husky with scorn:

"Yellow. No, not even yellow, orange!

A quitter. And that's what I married! Ready to take it on the chin, aren't you?" And then pointing to her own lovely dimpled one: "Well, this is your chin!" And pounding herself furiously: "And this is the chest that gets the bullets when you stand up to 'em! Don't I count? No, I get left behind—without my music, without my rhythm, without my guy, for all you care! Not while I know it! Who is this Beefy Borden—God?"

Then suddenly: "See it through for me, Johnny. Stay alive. Don't welsh on me now. Just a few days longer! The dough will come through by the end of this week—then we can both lam out of this hell-hole together!"

And after the train had carried her back to the Times Square end and he'd lost himself in the Grand Central crowd, hat down over his mouth, he could still hear it ringing in his ears: "Stay alive for me, Johnny. Stay alive!" Well, he'd done his best, but it couldn't keep up forever.

THERE was a taxi driver dozing in the back of the place. He was the only other one in there. He'd have to quit coming here after tonight; he'd been here three nights in a row now; time to change to another place. He loosened the knot of his necktie and undid the top button of his shirt. He hadn't changed it in ten days and it was fixing to walk off his back of its own accord.

He picked up a greasy aluminum tray and slid it along the triple rails that banked the counter. He hooked a bowl of shredded wheat, a dwarf pitcher of milk, and some other junk as he went along. When he got to the end where the counterman was, he said, "Two, sunny side up." He hadn't eaten since four the night before. He'd just gotten through collecting a meal in a place on Sixth Avenue around two when he'd spotted someone over in a corner that looked familiar from the back. He had had to get up and blow—couldn't risk it.

The counterman yapped through a hole in the wall behind him, "Two—on their backs!" and something began spitting. Johnny picked a table all the way in the rear and sat down with his back to the street. He couldn't see who was coming in that way, without turning, but it made him harder to recognize from outside through the plate-glass front. He turned his collar up in back to hide the shape of his neck.

He took out a much folded newspaper, fished for a pencil, and while crunching shredded wheat began to fill in the blank squares of a crossword puzzle. He could do that and mean it! You go arm in arm with death for ten days or a couple of weeks, and it loses most of its sting. Even the answer to "what is a sap-giving tree?" can be more interesting for the time being—can help you forget.

He didn't see the maroon car that drew up outside, and he didn't hear it. It came up very softly, coasting to a stop. He didn't see the two well-dressed individuals that got out of it without cracking the door behind them, edged up closer to the lighted window-front and peered in. They exchanged a triumphant look that might have meant, "We'll eat in here; this is our dish."

He was half dozing over his puzzle by this time, splinters of shredded wheat clinging to his lips. On the other hand, the somnolent taxi driver, peculiarly enough, suddenly came wide awake and seemed to remember something that required his presence in the washroom. He slipped in there very deftly without making a sound; got as far away from the door as possible, and then just stood around like he was waiting for something to be over. He passed the time away counting over a fairly solid wad of fins and sawbucks. Then he met his own eyes in the mirror and he quickly turned his head away, like he wasn't glad to meet himself, for once.

The two came in, and they weren't in

a hurry, and they weren't trying to sneak up on their quarry any longer. They didn't have to; they had him. One of them, who went in for artistic flourishes, even hung back a step behind the other and deliberately yanked two bright green pasteboards from the box near the door, which made a dyspeptic bell sing out a couple of times; as if to show how law-abiding, how housebroken, he and his friend could be when they came in a public place. It was like a rattlesnake warning before it strikes. It couldn't have made any difference anyway; they each had a right hand stuck deep into a coat pocket, and both of the pockets were sort of stiff and weighted down.

The bell woke Johnny without registering; by the time his eyes opened, he'd forgotten what did it. Then he saw them sitting at the table with him, one opposite and one right next to him, shoulder to shoulder, so close the loaded pocket dug into his hip. The one across the china table top had his pocket up too, just sort of resting on the lip of the table, pointing Johnny's way. The counterman was busy transferring pats of butter to little paper rosettes; it wouldn't have mattered even if he hadn't been.

Johnny looked from one face to the other, and his own whitened a little. Just for a second, then the color came right back; he'd been expecting this for too long to stay scared.

They looked like three brothers, or three pals, sitting there huddled over the table together, intimately, familiarly.

"Put it on the table in front of you," suggested the one next to Johnny. "Keep the newspaper over it."

Johnny reached under his left arm and took out something. If his coat hadn't been buttoned, he could have turned the gun around, fired through the cloth. He would have gone, but he could have taken one of them with him. But there wasn't room enough to turn it under his coat, it

faced outward where there was nothing but a glass caseful of desserts to get at. He slid it under the newspaper and the one opposite him hauled it out on the other side and it disappeared into his clothing without the light once getting at it.

When this tricky feat had been accomplished satisfactorily, the first one said, "We wanna see you, Donovan."

"Take a good look," Johnny said in a low voice. "How does a guy that's gone straight appeal to you?"

"Dead," answered the party across the table.

"I've got something you can't kill," Johnny said. His eyes lit up like radio dials, and all of a sudden he was proud of himself for the first time since he was in long pants. "I'm straight now. I'm on the level. Not all the bullets in all the gats in all New York can take that away from me."

"They can make you smell a lot different in twenty-four hours," the one next to him said. And the one across the way put in: "He thinks he's gonna get bullets, no less! You'll beg for bullets. You'll get down on your knees and pray for 'em before we get through with you!"

JOHNNY smiled and said, "When the State turns on the heat, they give a guy a last meal; let him order his head off. This being my last meal, let's see if you're big enough to lemme finish what I ordered." He took up his spoon in his left hand.

"We got all night," one assured him. "We'll even pay your check for you. Sing Sing has nothing on us."

The other one looked at the shredded wheat and laughed. "That's a hell of a thing to have in your guts when you croak!"

"They're my guts," observed Johnny, chewing away, "and it's my party." He took up the pencil in his right hand and went ahead with the puzzle. "What's a five-letter word for the goddess of love?"

They exchanged a dubious look, not in reference to the goddess of love, however. "Can't you see he's stalling you?" one growled. "How do we know what this place is? Let's get going."

The ticket bell at the door rang and a very pretty girl came in alone. Her face turned very white under the lights, like she'd been up all night. But she wasn't lousy at all. She seemed to know just what she was doing. She glanced over her shoulder just once, at the maroon car outside the door, but did not look at the three men at the table at all. Then she picked up a cup of coffee from the counterman and brushed straight by them without a look, sat down facing them one table farther back, and, like any respectable girl at that hour of the night, kept her long lashes down over her eyes while she stirred and stirred the java with a tin spoon.

Johnny looked at her and seemed to get an inspiration. "Venus," he said suddenly, "that's the word! Why didn't I think of it?" But instead of "Venus" he scribbled on the margin of the diagram: Stay back—I'm covered. Good-by.

The others had been taking a short, admiring gander at her too.

"Boy, oh boy!" said one of them. "Is that easy to take!"

"Yeah," agreed the other. "Too bad we're on business. Y'never see 'em like that when you're on y'own time!"

"What's a three-letter word—" Johnny began again. Then suddenly losing his temper, he exclaimed: "Hell! I can't do this damn thing!" He tore the puzzle out of the paper, crumpled it irritably into a ball, and tossed it away from him—toward the next table.

The girl seemed to drop her paper napkin at that minute, then stooped to pick it up again and smoothed it out in her lap.

The three men got up from the table together and started toward the front of the place. They walked fairly slowly, Johnny in the middle, one on each side. Their three

bodies were ganged at the hips, where the coat pockets were. The one on the inside, although he hadn't eaten anything, helped himself to a toothpick from the counter from force of habit and began prodding away with one hand. The washroom door opened on a crack, a nose showed, and then it prudently closed again. The girl at the table was very white and kept stirring her coffee without tasting it, like she didn't know what her wrist was doing at all.

The counterman just then was farther down the line, hauling a platter of fried eggs through the hole in the wall. It was exactly ten minutes since Johnny Donovan had first come in, five to four in the morning. The short-order cook must have had to heat up the frying pan first.

"Two bright-side up!" bawled the counterman. Then he looked at the table and saw that they weren't there any more. They were all the way up by the cash register. He came up after them, behind the counter, carrying the eggs. "Hey!" he said. "Don't you want your eggs?"

"Naw, he's lost his appetite," one of them said. "Get in the car with him," he murmured to his companion. "I'll pay his check."

He let electric light in between himself and Johnny, fished out some change, and tossed down the three checks, two blank and one punched. Johnny and the other fellow went out the door, still shoulder to shoulder, drifted across the sidewalk,

and got into the back of the maroon car. The door slapped smartly and the curtains dropped down behind the windows.

The counterman didn't like people who just came into his place to warm chairs and then walked out again on blank checks. He made the mistake of charging for the eggs which hadn't been eaten. The girl in the back had gotten up now and was moving with a sort of lazy walk toward the man who had stayed behind. She'd tacked on a bright-red new mouth with her lipstick and suddenly didn't seem so respectable any more.

"So I'm paying for the eggs, am I?" barked the man at the counter. "Okay, hand 'em over." He pulled the plate away from the counterman, tilted it upward on his palm, fitted it viciously across the other's face, and ground it in with a sort of half turn. Egg yolk dripped down in yellow chains. "Have 'em on me, jerk!" he magnanimously offered.

The girl gave a shrill, brazen laugh of approval that sounded as if her voice was cracked. "Gee, sweetheart," she said, "I could go for a guy like you. How does it look for a little lift in your car? I been hoofing all night and my dogs are yapping." She deliberately separated a nickel of his change and skimmed it back across the glass to pay for her coffee, then nudged him chummily with her elbow. "You and me and a flock of etchings, how about it?" she invited.

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

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"Some other time, baby," he said tersely. "Got no time tonight." He pocketed the rest of his change and stalked out. The counterman was shaking French fried potatoes out of his collar, but he knew enough not to say anything out loud.

The girl went out after the fellow who had just turned her down, as if some sort of a magnet was pulling her toward the car.

He'd already gotten in at the wheel when she got over to it. "C'mon, whaddya say?" she pleaded hoarsely. "Don't be selfish. Just a couple blocks lift would be a life saver." She put one foot up on the running board, put one hand to the latch of the door. Her face was all damp and pasty-looking, but it took more than that amount of dishevelment to fog its beauty.

The one at the wheel hesitated, with the motor already turning over. He looked over his shoulder into the darkness questioningly, even longingly. Evidently she'd gotten under his skin. "How about it?" he said to the other one. "Drop her off at your place and then come back for her when we're through?"

She had the door open by now. One more move and she would have been on the front seat next to him. The answer did not come from the one to whom he'd put the question. It came from their "guest." It was Johnny Donovan's voice that answered, that put the crusher on it, strangely enough. A word of warning, a single cry for help from him, and they would have been compelled to take her too, in self-defense, because she would have caught onto what they were doing. He knew enough not to do that. Instead, he said almost savagely, "Kick her out—or is this part of what I get too?"

There was a vicious slap from the rear of the car, but the remark snapped the driver out of it, showed him what a fool thing he'd been about to do. That twist had magnetism or something. He gave her a terrific shove at the throat that sent her skit-

tering backward off the running board and very nearly flat on her back, grunting, "Where's ya manners? Don't crowd like that!" And a minute later the whole car was just a red tail light a block down, and then it wasn't even that.

She was still lurching from the push he'd given her. She said, "Johnny, oh my God, Johnny, you've killed yourself!" But she said it very low, so low that the taxi driver who had come out just then and was standing beside her looking in the same direction she was, didn't even hear her.

They weren't going to kill him—it was he who had killed himself! Didn't he know she could have saved him? He knew she'd have that little gun in her handbag. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Ride

JOHNNY took a deep belly breath of relief as he saw the guy in front push her off the car.

They hadn't, evidently, either one of them recognized her from the club; Beefy had two or three clubs, and the Long Island City one was where they did most of their hanging out when they did any. It had been chiefly a Long Island outfit from the beginning. But one peep from her just now, one "Johnny!" and she would have been sunk. He'd been scared stiff that she'd give herself away. It was okay now though. She'd look pretty in black, poor little monkey. She looked pretty in anything. He turned his head around and looked back at her through the diamond shaped rear pane as they zoomed off, then covered himself by grating, "Damned little dope, trying to horn in! I like to die private."

The one next to him gave him another slap, backhand across the eyes, and they filled with water. "You're gonna," he promised.

They followed St. Nick, cut west, and

connected with Riverside. "Y'got pretty far uptown for a Brooklyn fella," the one at the wheel mentioned, "but not far enough."

"Is Ratsy gonna be burned!" laughed his mate. "The Big Boy sends him all the way to Buffalo on a phony tip day before yesterday. And Ratsy hates Buffalo, he went to Reform School there! And while he's gone we snag the song right here!"

There wasn't a car in sight on the Drive at that hour; the lights of the bridge were like a string of pearls hanging up in the air behind them. They turned south, slowed and drew up almost at once. "As quick as all that?" thought Johnny, thankfully. "Then I'm not going to get the trimmings! There wouldn't be time, in the open."

The one in front cut the dashboard lights, said, "Hurry it up now! We don't wanna be hanging around here too long—"

"We shoulda brought that dame after all," the other one said. "She coulda fronted for us." He took his gun out, turned it, swung back, and brought the butt down on the side of Johnny's head with a crash. Johnny groaned but didn't go right out, so he smashed him again with it, this time on the other side, then went on, "That gal coulda made it look like a necking party, while we're standing still here like this."

"Get busy, and we don't need to be standing still!" was the answer. "Got the blanket? Fix it so it looks like he's soused."

The one in back took out copper wire from the side pocket, caught the limp figure's wrists behind him, coiled it cruelly around them. The skin broke instantly and strands of the wire disappeared under it. Then he did it to his ankles too. Then he propped him up in the corner, took the lap robe and tucked it around him up to his neck. He took out a bottle of whiskey, palmed a handful, sloshed it across Johnny's face, sprinkled the blanket with it. "Let's go," he muttered. "He smells like a still. He oughta be good for a hundred-fifty traffic lights now!"

The lights went up, the driver kicked his foot down, and they arched away like a plane taking off. "It musta been great," he lamented mournfully, "in the old days before they had traffic lights!"

"They had no organization in them days," said his companion scornfully. "They went to jail in swarms, even for cracking safes, mind ya! Take it slower, we're getting downtown."

Johnny came to between two red-hot branding irons just as they swerved out onto the express highway. The outside of his mouth was free, but a strip of tape fastened to his upper teeth clamped his tongue to the roof of his mouth. The only sounds he could make sounded like the mumblings of a drunk. He saw the black outline of the Jersey shore skimming by across the river. His wrists felt as if mortification were setting in, waves of heat going up to his elbows.

They took Canal Street across, then followed the Bowery, which still showed signs of life; he knew it by the El pillars flashing past. Then the wire lacework of one of the bridges, Brooklyn probably. A tug bleated dismally way under them. They had to slow up once, in downtown Brooklyn, for a street accident, and there must have been a cop near. They both got very talkative and solicitous all at once. "Head still going round and round, Johnny?" the one in front asked. "Never mind, you'll be home in bed in no time now."

"What he needs," said the one in back, gun out under cover of the blanket, but not pointing at Johnny this time, "is a good strong cup o' black coffee."

"Looks like your friend can't hold his liquor," said a third voice, outside the car, and a face peered jocularly in at him, under a visor.

"Ing, ing, ing," Johnny panted, sweat coursing down his face.

He reared desperately toward the silhouette.

The face pulled back again. "Ouch, what

a breath! I could get lit meself on that alone."

"I told him not to mix his drinks." They swerved out, then in again, sloshed through some water, sped on. The one next to him caught him by both cheeks with one hand, dragged them together, heaved his head back into the corner of the seat. His lower lip opened and blood came out. "That cop," he observed calmly, "don't know how lucky he is he didn't get what you were trying to tell him!"

"Did he see the plates?" he asked the driver.

"I turned 'em over just as we came up." He did something to the dashboard and there was a slapping sound from the rear fender.

The lights got fewer, then after a while there weren't any more; they were out in the wilds of Jamaica now, Beefy's happy hunting ground. A big concrete building that looked like a warehouse or refrigerating plant showed up. "Well, anyway," one of them said to Johnny, "we gave you your money's worth; it wasn't one of those short hauls!" When he looked closer he saw that Johnny was out again; he'd been lying on his mangled wrists at an acute angle ever since they'd left the place where they met the cop.

THEY DROVE into the building, car and all, and got him out between them, and a new guy took the wheel of the car and an elevator took it down below some place out of sight. Yet this wasn't a garage. When Johnny Donovan regained consciousness for the second time that night it was with the help of a fistful of shaved ice being held between his eyes. He was up in the loft of this building, a big barn of a place, half if it lost in shadows that the row of coned lights overhead couldn't reach; it was cold as a tomb, sawdust on the floor, and a row of porcelain refrigerator doors facing him gleamed clinically white, dazzled the eyes.

Beefy Borden was there, with a white turtle-neck sweater under his coat jacket, perched on a tall three-legged stool, gargoyle-like. The two that had brought Johnny had turned their coat collars up against the cold, but him they promptly stripped to the waist as soon as he had opened his eyes. The skin on his stomach and back crawled involuntarily, half dead as he was, and contracted into goose pimples. They had left him upright for a moment, and his knees immediately caved under him, hit the sawdust. He held his spine straight by sheer will power and stayed that way; wouldn't go down any farther.

Beefy lit a cigarette, handed his two henchmen two, studied Johnny interestedly, seemingly without hatred. "So that's how they look when they go straight," he murmured. "Why, I thought I'd see something—pair of wings at least, or one of these here now hellos shining on top of his conk. I don't notice anything, do you, boys? I wouldn't have gotten up at this hour and come all the way out here if I'da known."

One of them jerked his head back by the hair, pried his mouth open, and tore out the tape. A little blood flowed. They took away the copper wire from his wrists, while beads of sweat dripped into his eyes.

Beefy flicked ashes from his cigarette, drawled, "Well, I'll tell you, I think he's had enough, don't you? We just set out to frighten him a little, didn't we, boys? I think he's learned his lesson. Whaddya say we let him have his clothes back and send him home?"

"Only first, of course, he's gotta show the right spirit, ask for it in the proper way, say he's sorry and all like that. Now suppose you crawl over here, right in front of me, and just ask, beg real hard—that's all y'gotta do, fella, and then we'll call it quits."

Johnny saw his foot twitch; knew it was loaded with a kick for his face when and if he did ask. It wasn't the obvious phoni-

ness of the offer that held him back. Even if it had been genuine, even if it had been as easy as all that to get out of it—he still wouldn't have done it. Life wasn't that precious.

He writhed to his shackled feet and hobbled a little way toward Beefy. One of them was holding his coat and shirt up for bait, but Johnny didn't even glance that way. He stared into the pig-eyes of the Big Shot. Then suddenly, without a word, he spat blood and saliva full into his face. "That's the cleanest thing ever touched you," he said hoarsely. "Gimme death, so I won't have to keep on seeing and smelling you! Those are my last words. Now try to get another sound out of me!"

They knocked him down flat on his back, and he just lay there looking at the ceiling. Beefy got down from the stool very slowly, face twitching all over and luminous with rage. He wiped the back of his hand across one cheek, motioned with the other. "Hand me that belt of his." They put it in his hand. He paid it around, caught it at the opposite end from the thin, flat silver buckle.

"Go down below and bring up a sack of salt on the elevator with you." His eyes never left Johnny's face. He addressed the remaining man. "Put your foot on his neck and hold him down. When I tell you to, you can turn him over on the other side." Then he spoke directly to Johnny. "Now listen, while you're still able, to what's coming to you. You're gonna be beaten raw with your own belt. The salt—that's so you'll know it. That'll keep the blood in, too, so you'll last awhile, an hour or two anyway. Stinging and smarting to death."

Johnny didn't answer. Beefy stripped off his coat, swung the buckled strap back in a long hissing arc, brought it over and down again with the velocity of a bullet. His assistant steadied his foot against the spasm that coursed through what he was holding down. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Turnabout Is Fair Play

IT WOULDN'T be listed in the phone book, of course, so she didn't even bother looking it up. Every second counted. The wheels of that death car were racing around like mad under him this very minute, and here she was stuck way the hell up here on the edge of creation, miles from anywhere. But that bloated swine that was behind all this, he had a home somewhere, he lived somewhere in this town, there was somewhere she could reach him. Oh, it was too late by now to beg or plead for Johnny's life—the ride had been started already—and even if it hadn't, she knew how much good it would have done her, but at least she could put a bullet through him!

The police? Weren't they those men in blue that directed traffic at crossings? They'd find Johnny's body eventually—and that was about where they fitted in. And even then—that Druckman case awhile back, for instance. There was only one man who could stop what was going to happen in time, and that was the man who had started it. Thank God, she knew that much at least; knew which direction the blow had come from. She had wangled the whole set-up out of Johnny weeks ago.

She darted out into the roadway, where anything on wheels would have to stop for her, and began to run crazily along.

She got her cab a minute late. It had turned in toward her. "The Wicked Nineties Club," she strangled. "No, never mind your meter. I'll give you twenty dollars flat, twenty-five, anything, only get me there. Cut loose!" She took out the hard-earned money that was to have gotten them to Miami, shook it at him. "It's a matter of life and death, d'you understand?"

She took out the gun, fixed it, while they lurched down the endless lengths of St. Nicholas Avenue. Bannerman, her boss,

Beefy's "front" down there—he'd know; he'd be able to tell her where to reach him, if she had to shoot him too to get it out of him!

"Good boy!" she breathed fervently as he tore into the park at 110th instead of taking Fifth. Fifth was straight and the park had curves, but he knew what he was doing; you could make any speed you wanted to in there at this dawn hour. When they came out at Fifty-ninth, the street lights had just gone out all over town. Two two-wheeled skids more and they were in front of where she worked, not a light showing outside of it any more.

"Here's thirty," she said, vaulting out. "Now stay there, wait—you've got to take me some place else yet! You'll get all the rest of this, if you'll only wait!"

She ran down the long carpeted foyer, past her own picture on the walls, burst into the room beyond like an avenging angel. The last customer was out, the lights low, the tables stacked, the scrub-women down on their knees. If he'd gone already, Bannerman, if she'd missed him! His office door flew open at her push, so he was still around somewhere. He wasn't in there; she could hear him washing his hands in his little private cubbyhole beyond. He heard her, but she beat him to the lavatory door, locked him in from the outside.

"Hey you!" He began to pound.

She went through the desk like a cyclone, dropping papers and whole drawers around her. She couldn't find it; it wasn't left lying around like that. Then she saw he'd hung his coat up on a hook before he went in; it was in a little private memorandum book in the inside pocket of that. Both of them, the home address and the telephone number. Just the initials, B. B. But that was it. Way the hell over in Brooklyn somewhere.

She grabbed up the handset and began to hack away at it. Dead. More grief; the club operator had gone home long ago. She

picked up Bannerman's bunch of keys, found the one to the office door, slipped out, and locked that up after her too. A minute later she heard a crash as he broke down the lavatory partition. She was already around at the main switchboard off the foyer, plugging in her call herself. Not for nothing had she once done a stretch of that.

No answer—but then it was a 5 A. M. call. "Keep it up, operator, keep it up!" She turned her head and yelled at one of the terrified scrubwomen: "Keep away from that door, you! He's drunk as an owl in there!"

Suddenly there was a woman's voice in her ears, sleepy, frightened too. "Hello, who—who do you want?"

"Lemme talk to Borden. Borden, quick! Got an important message for him!"

"He's not here—"

"Well, where can I reach him! Hurry, I tell you, I'm not kidding!"

"He didn't say where he was going—he never does—he—"

"Who is this? Speak up, can't you, you fool! No one's gonna bite you!"

"This is his wife. Who are you? How'd you know where he lives? No one ever rings him here—"

"I'm the girl with the dreamy eyes! And I'm coming over there and give the message myself!"

The driver was still turning the three tens over and over when she landed in back of him. "Ocean Avenue—and just as fast as ever!"

Bannerman got to the club entrance all mussed-looking just as they went into high. Breaking down two doors in succession had spoiled the part in his hair.

IT WAS a skyscraper apartment house on Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue, the number that had been in Bannerman's memo book, and naturally he'd have the roof apartment; she didn't need the night operator to tell her that. She gave the hackman another thirty. "Now wait some more.

I know you think I'm crazy, but—but maybe you once loved someone too!"

"It ain't my business," he said agreeably, and began thumbing his sixty lovingly.

She wasn't coming back this time, at least she didn't think so then, but it wouldn't hurt to have him handy. "Certainly I'm expected," she told the hallman. He didn't like the hour, but he'd already made a half turn toward the second of two elevators. "Well, just a minute until I find out." He went over to the house phone.

It was Beefy's private lift, no doors in the shaft up to the penthouse, and it was automatic; by keeping her thumb pressed to the starter she could reverse the car and prevent him from getting her down again. He'd bring cops in right away; they were probably eating out of Beefy's hand for miles around here, too.

The elevator slide let her out into the apartment, and the hallman was already buzzing like mad from below to warn them. Borden's young wife was heading for the instrument from the room beyond, in pattered-bare feet, as Jean got there. She'd thrown a mink coat over a cellophane nightgown. She stopped dead for a minute, then went right on again under pressure.

"Don't make me do something I don't want to," Jean said softly. "Just say it's all right; that you were expecting me. Well, go on, say it!" She motioned with the little gun.

"S'allright, was expecting her," the woman slobbered into the house phone. Jean clicked it off for her.

"Now, where is he?"

"Uh-uh-uh," the Borden woman sputtered, stalling for time.

"Come on! Can't you tell by my face not to fool around with me?"

She didn't know. He'd been gone since about ten that evening. He never told her anything about his business.

"Business—ha!" There was more to be leery of in her laugh than there had been in her anger. "He's got my man in a spot

—right now, this very minute—and I'm going to pay him back in his own coin! Either you help me head him off in time or you get it yourself!"

"He doesn't do things like that, not my Beefy. You've got him wrong. They've given you a bum steer. Now, wait a minute, honey; don't lose your nice ways! Honest, if I knew where he was I'd tell you. One of his club managers, Bannerman, he might know." Her loosened hair fell down over her face.

"That's what I'm thinking too," Jean said curtly. "I just came from Bannerman, but I didn't have any—inducement—then, to get him to tell me. We'll try our luck now—but not from here. Come on. You're coming with me—back to my own place! Pick up that house phone! What's the guy's name down there? Jerry? Say, 'Jerry, will you come up here a minute? Take the public elevator.'"

The gun raised the woman to her feet like a lever. "Jerry, will you come up here a minute? Take the public elevator," she parroted. Then she said craftily, "Yes."

Jean's hand sealed the orifice like a flash. "He asked you if there was anything wrong, didn't he?" She raised the gun. "Make it, 'Yes, we think we see a man outside on the terrace.'" When she obeyed, Jean tore her away from the phone. "Now, come on!" She began pulling Beefy's wife after her to the waiting private elevator.

"My feet are bare!" the captive wailed.

There was a pair of galoshes standing near the elevator. Jean scuffed them into the car. "Stick 'em in those going down!" Farther back, in a recess, a red-glass knob had lighted up warningly.

They started down. Again Jean kept the ball of her thumb on the button. He couldn't cut them off from above. The lobby was deserted. She pulled Mrs. Borden, in nightgown, galoshes, and mink coat, into the cab after her. "Manhattan!" she clipped at the avaricious driver. "And this time you're really going to get dough!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Ten Minutes

IT WAS getting lighter by the minute now, but was still too early for anything to be open. She stopped him at an all-night drug store down near Borough Hall, hauled her furred freight in after her. "This woman's real sick," she threw at the the sleepy clerk, and the two of them crushed into one phone booth, Mrs. Borden on the inside.

She didn't know where to reach Bannerman at his home, any more than her prisoner did, but she was praying he'd stayed on at the Nineties on account of those two smashed doors and to see if she'd lifted anything from his office. He answered, himself.

"Now listen, and listen carefully! Get Beefy Borden on the wire from where you are—I don't care where he is, but get him—and keep the line open, waiting! I'm going to call you again in ten minutes from some place else. You better have him, when I do! And he better have Johnny Donovan still alive for me!"

"I don't know whatcha talking about," he tried to say. "Who's Johnny Donovan? And for that matter who's Beefy Borden?"

"He thinks I'm ribbing!" she raged at Mrs. Borden. "Tell him about it yourself!"

"Dave, for God's sake, do what she says!" the haggard blonde croaked into the transmitter. "It's June, can't you hear me? June! She's taken me off with her in a cab and she's got a gun on me!"

Jean pushed her aside. "Do you know who that was or don't you? Ten minutes," she warned him, and hung up. They went hustling out again, Jean's right fist buried deep in the rich mink.

They lived on Fifty-eighth, she and Johnny; at least he had until two weeks ago, when the lousy-mark went on him. All his things were still up there, and it had

broken her heart nightly for fourteen nights now, just to look at them. Just one-room-and, but in a fairly slick place, the Parc Concorde.

She brought out all the rest of the Miami money, spread it out fanwise in her hand, offered it to the driver. "Help yourself—and forget all about what you've seen tonight!" Mrs. Borden was too near prostration by now to budge, even without a gun on her.

"One from each end and one from the middle," he gloated, picking them out.

She crammed the rest of it back into her bag.

Too late, in the elevator, June Borden came to. "Don't let her take me in there! She's—I dunno what she's gonna do!"

"All this row just because I bring you home to put you under a cold shower! You *will* mix your drinks!" She slipped a ten into the hallman's hand.

He grinned reassuringly. "You'll be all right in the morning, lady." Gave Jean the office. "Mrs. Donovan would not think of hurting ya, wouldja, Mrs. Donovan? You just do what she tells ya!"

Jean closed the door after them and locked it. "Sit down in that chair and let's find out if you live or die. I wouldn't try yelling out the window either, if I were you—it would take too long to get results."

She got the Wicked Nineties back, calmly stripping off her hat and coat while she waited. She opened her bag with one hand and took the gun out and kept tapping it on the muzzle against the telephone stand.

Bannerman had a voice waiting for her on another wire, but they couldn't connect the two lines. She hadn't thought of that in time. So near and yet so far! "Plug me through the club switchboard!" she rasped. June Borden was shedding one cigarette after another with quivering fingers, forgetting to light them.

"I don't know how, I never worked it!" He tried it and she found herself talking to a produce market up in the Bronx. She

got him back again, her heart turning inside out. "Is he alive—only tell me that, is he alive?"

"I can't swing it while both lines stay open. Gimme your number, then hang up a minute, let them call you—"

Mrs. Borden came over, starting to cry. "Dave, Dave, do what she says! You gotta get Beefy, I tell you!"

"Listen," Jean said. "Pull out his plug on your callboard, got that? Then cut mine into the socket you got his out of—that's all you've got to do!"

There was a click, and then another voice came on. It was Borden's. She knew it just by that same "Who the hell wazzat?" he'd thrown after her in the club alley one night. It echoed hollowly, as though he was in some sort of a big hall or arena. "All right. What's all this yapping you're handing out?"

"You've got Johnny Donovan there with you. I've got June Borden here with me. Do we swap, or don't we?"

"Watcha trying to do, throw a scare into me? You'll wish you'd never been born when I get good and through with—"

"I know you're checking this number like blazes while you're trying to string me along. Listen, you could be right at the door now and you wouldn't be in time to save her. What's the matter—don't you believe I've got her here? Don't you believe Bannerman? All right, help yourself." She handed her prisoner over. "Sell yourself!"

"Max! Max!" his wife bleated. "I'm alone with her here—she came and took me out of my bed. Max, don't you know my voice? Max, you're not gonna let me be murdered—" She dropped the phone and went staggering around in a sort of drunken circle, hands heeled to her eyes.

Jean picked it up again. His voice was sort of strained now. "Now wait a minute. Don't you know you can't get away with—"

"You're gonna hear the shot right over this wire—" Then she heard something

that went through her like a knife. The scream of a man in mortal agony sounded somewhere in the background, muffled, blurred in transmission. She moaned in answer to it.

Borden said, almost hysterically, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, that wasn't him, that was one of my own men—he, he got hurt here!"

"Then put him on the phone," she said. "I'll count five. Come over here, you! I'm holding the gun right at her!" She began to count, slowly, remorselessly. The woman was half dead already, with sheer fright.

She could hear his breathing across the wire, hoarse, rasping. The tension was almost unendurable; she could feel her mind slipping. The woman's whole weight came against her. She held her upright.

"Four," she heard herself say. "Better put him on the phone quick!"

"I can't," came from the other end. "He's gone—half an hour ago. You're—too late!" There was a choked terror about the way he said it that told her it was true. She let the receiver drop to the end of its cord like a shot.

His wife read her doom in her eyes. She gave a single, long-drawn scream of nameless terror that hung in the air. Then the pounding at the door told Jean why he'd come out with it like that just now, made no bones about it; they'd traced her fast, all right. They'd gotten here already—her address was on tap at the club—but just the same, he'd timed himself wrong. They weren't in yet, there was still a door between, and a pin can fall on a cartridge much quicker than a door can swing open! She'd been half an hour too late—but he'd been half a minute too soon! They'd both lost, and the winner was the same old winner—death.

A PASS key turned in the door and a voice from the other world groaned, "Jean!"

She shivered all over and turned to look,

and the hallman was holding Johnny up in the doorway. He was naked under a coat, and his feet were hobbled with copper wire, but his eyes were alive and he groaned it again, "Jean!" as the man brought him into the room, leaning on him. He'd kept his word, he'd stayed alive!

She saw through the open coat what they'd done to him, and choked back a scream. "They strapped the hell out of me," he said, and smiled a little, "but—but—I left before the finals—" And he fainted.

"Whisky!" she said. "Bandages—they're in there! And get me some boracic acid! Quick!"

Yet it wasn't as bad as it had looked. Cut-up wrists and ankles, a flaming chest and abdomen—but he'd stayed alive, he'd made history, he'd come back from a ride. The very same maroon death car was at the door right now! She pitched the gun into a corner. Mrs. Borden was sitting there snuffling a little, slowly calming down. She didn't make a move to go; seemed to be lost in thought—unpleasant thought.

He opened his eyes again, gave a deep sigh, as if pain was a habit by this time. She gave him the cigarette he asked for, then went ahead washing and bandaging. Tears were slowly coursing down her cheeks, tears of gratitude.

"Can you make Penn Station with me, Johnny? Take another drink. I've got to get you on the train to Miami!"

He didn't tell her what they had intended doing; just told her what they'd actually done. "They kept sprinkling salt, as the belt buckle opened the skin. I gave a heave, I guess, I don't know; threw the one that was holding me down with his foot off balance, sort of forward. The buckle coming down caught him, tore his eye out.

"He went mad with pain, went for Beefy; picked up a sharp knife they had waiting for me. They had a terrible time with him. My arms were free, but my feet weren't.

I kept rolling over and over—just to ease the burning at first—then I rolled right onto this flat freight elevator that had no sides, pulled the rope and went all the way down, into the basement without knowing it. The car was there they'd brought me in, and the mechanic was dozing.

"I cracked him with a wrench, dragged myself in, drove it onto the elevator and managed to get off with it at street level. Then I drove it all the way back here with a blanket around me, so I wouldn't get pinched for indecent exposure. The open air sort of kept me going—"

"It's my fault. Are you sorry," she sobbed, "you went straight?"

"No," he murmured. "It was worth it—even if I hadn't come back. Just help me with a pair of socks and shoes, and I can still make the train with you—"

Mrs. Borden was saying, in a strange smoldering voice, "I never thought he'd go that far—"

She seemed to be talking to herself more than to the two of them. "I never thought he'd try to take someone's life. Oh, if they don't stop him, he'll kill someone yet!"

All Johnny said was, "Yet?"

She stood up suddenly, staring at him. "Then you mean he has already? Me and the kids, we been living on blood money! But it's not too late! I love him! I don't care what he's done! I'll save him from that. Anything but that! I'll put him where he's safe! If I can't have him, the chair won't get him either!" She picked up Jean's phone. "Get me the district attorney's office," she sobbed.

Jean was buttoning her husband's coat. "Lean on me, darling," she whispered. "We've got a date with ourselves down in Miami."

"Mrs. Maxmilian Borden," the woman at the phone was saying as they limped out of the room arm-in-arm and quietly closed the door behind them. "You tell the attorney I want a personal interview with him—in strict confidence!" ■ ■ ■

*Who cared if the clue was false
—if it brought in a true con-
fession?*

**By Richard E.
Glendinning**



*His heart in his throat,
he pulled down the
cloth.*

THE LAW LAUGHS LAST

I TAKE it you seen the corpse," the ponderous sheriff said wheezily, fixing his watery blue eyes upon his youthful deputy, Sam Kinder.

Sam nodded listlessly and sat down in the chair next to the sheriff's desk. "Aw-

ful," he said in a quavering voice. "Terrible."

"There's nothing pretty about death in any form, but a floater's the worst of all." Sheriff Mack Sommers looked sharply at Sam. "I hope you're satisfied now."

"I still say there's something wrong about it."

"Your big trouble is you've been seeing too many murder movies."

"All I said was—"

"You've said too much already."

"And I'll keep on saying it," Sam said stubbornly. "How can you be certain Barry Strale died an accidental death? With no autopsy, no competent medical report—"

"According to law, there's only one way I can ask for an autopsy in an unexplained death and that's by having definite evidence of foul play. There isn't any such evidence in Barry Strale's case. We know he always fished off the Tenth Street bridge. Well, he fell over the—"

"Fell over? That rail is three and a half feet high! Strale couldn't have jumped it let alone fallen over it."

"—rail into the water and drowned," the sheriff went on, brushing aside his deputy's interruption. "It was night and nobody seen him go in. A couple of days later, he come up on the beach."

"In this county," Sam said ominously, "a man could get away with murder. Plenty have."

"Bosh! Anyway, who'd want to murder an old coot like Strale? Spent most of his time fishing. Never bothered nobody. Didn't have no kin. No money, neither, except for what he got from a World War One pension."

"I didn't know about the pension," Sam said.

"Lots of things you don't know. Strale liked to make believe he was a coupon-clipper with a flock of gilt-edged investments, but all the money he had was his pension." The sheriff heaved his elephantine body from the oversized chair and glared ferociously at Sam. "I hope you don't talk this crazy autopsy stuff outside the office."

"No."

"Keep it that way. Clear?"

"Very." Sam sighed morosely and left

the sheriff's office, disgruntled by the sheriff's laziness and stupidity.

At twenty-three, Sam Kinder was happy with the cards life had dealt him and, even if he could have taken his pick, he would have refused a new hand. He had no desire to change the world or revamp it in accordance with his own viewpoint. He was a personable giant with broad shoulders, big chest and lean hips, and it was a rare moment when there was not an infectious grin spread all over his freckled face.

But this was one of those moments. He stood at the curb outside the county courthouse and frowned at the late afternoon traffic which was trying to circumnavigate without mishap the small circular park which, like a bull's-eye, was the center of the Florida town. A half dozen green benches were scattered here and there under the palms and poincianas in the park, and every bench was occupied. A man had to get up early in the morning to find a seat. The present bench-warmers had established squatter's rights and were out every day, sometimes even in driving rain to watch the world go by.

Barry Strale, Sam remembered, had been one of the squatters in the park, sharing his throne with three other regulars. Sam crossed the street to the park in the hope that Barry's former cronies would have something substantial to contribute.

"Hey, Sam!" a voice called to him as he reached the far curb.

Sam turned toward the green and white bus which was parked in its space. John Redley, who was waiting for four o'clock to begin the scheduled run, was standing in the doorway of the bus.

"Why the big frown, Sam?"

"This Barry Strale thing," Sam said, walking over to John. "I don't like it."

"He seemed like a nice enough fellow. They found him last night, eh?"

"A gang of teen-agers was throwing a beach party. One of the girls found—well,

it broke up the party in a hurry. Say, your route takes you over the Tenth Street bridge where he usually fished. Maybe you saw him."

"Sure, but—"

"When?" Sam asked eagerly. "This is important. It'll help me fix the time of death."

"But, Sam, I—" John began. He shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "I can give you exact times, all right. See, I leave here, the start of the run, on the hour. At four, five and six, the bus is pretty crowded and I have lots of stops to make, but from seven on, I can make time."

"Never mind that. What about Barry Strale?"

"I'm getting to it. Three nights ago—that was Monday—I pulled out of here at ten and it took me twenty minutes to make the bridge. That puts me there at ten-twenty, right? I saw Strale then."

"Fishing?"

"Sure, fishing. He was leaning on the rail with his pole, and his bucket was at his feet. What's that if it isn't fishing? I blew the horn at him like I usually did when I saw him out there, but I don't remember him waving back. Then I drove to the end of the route, another mile beyond the bridge."

"That would take you about two minutes."

John nodded. "The schedule calls for me to stay there three minutes before I head back, so, right on ten-twenty-five, I started back. That makes it ten-twenty-seven at the bridge again, right?"

"Right."

"No Barry Strale."

Sam's mouth dropped open. "No sign of him at all?"

"His bucket—he kept his fishing gear in it—was still there, and maybe his pole but I didn't see that. No sign of Barry, though."

"Did you stop?"

"I had a schedule to keep."

"Why didn't you report this at the time?" Sam asked sternly.

"Do you call the fire department every time you find an empty match cover? How was I supposed to know anything happened to the guy?"

"I still don't see how he tumbled over a three-and-a-half-foot railing."

"Easy. You ought to see how some of these bridge fishermen sit. They get up on the rail and let their feet dangle over. Barry used to do that. Now suppose he got a bite and, trying to play it, lost his balance? In he'd go."

"You said he was leaning against the rail."

"He could have gotten up on it after I passed him." John glanced at his watch. "Time to get rolling."

"Well, one thing," Sam said, smiling triumphantly, "I can fix his death between ten twenty and ten twenty-seven on Monday night. Not even an autopsy could come that close. Just wait until I tell the sheriff. He'll burn."

"That's what I tried to tell you before," John said, sliding behind the wheel. "Somers roused me out of bed at seven this morning to ask me these same things I've been telling you. He already knows all about it."

"Oh," said Sam in a small voice, the taste of victory turning to gall. Perhaps the gargantuan sheriff, who hated to stir from the comforts of his padded chair, was not so stupid after all.

"John," Sam called, "are you sure Barry was alone out there?"

"No question of it." The bus driver peered down suspiciously. "You think there's something funny about how he died?"

"I don't know. Most places you find a murder before you go looking for the murderer, but here you've got to catch a murderer before you can find out what he did."

"I'd rather drive a bus," John said. He shut the door and pulled away.

DEPRESSED, Sam stood quietly for a moment and stared at the cars whizzing by. The bus driver had satisfactorily explained how Barry Strale could have tumbled into the water. A less stubborn man than Sam Kinder, or a man who was not champing at the bit to lord it over the sheriff, might have given up then and there, but Sam still refused to accept a verdict of accidental death. There had been bruises on Barry Strale and they puzzled Sam. It was the sheriff's contention that the tides had bumped the body against pilings, thus causing the bruises, but did dead men bruise? A skilled medical examiner—not an undertaker who dubbed as coroner—would have known.

Remembering then why he had come to the park in the first place, Sam squared his broad shoulders and walked toward the bench which had once been Barry Strale's. Three men, none younger than fifty, watched his approach. Their faces were set in the impassive masks of men who, beyond the age of participation, could only sit and watch, censuring the passer-by with the lift of a shaggy eyebrow or approving with a twitch at the corner of the mouth.

Sam knew them all. Ben Grimes, the thin, wiry one in the middle, was a retired citrus grower. He had sold his grove a few years before and had moved to town to finish his lonely, widower days. Harry Barnes, on the right, had been a Northern railroad man, an engineer, and had fled to Florida the day after he became eligible for a pension; now he wished he were back in a Diesel's cab with work to occupy his mind. The third man, Laird Corger, was a spry, black-eyed man who had once been a traveling salesman until ill health had brought an end to his rugged routine.

"Heard you asking John about poor Barry," Laird said. "That sure hit us hard. We were his best friends."

Ben Grimes and Harry Barnes nodded soberly, and Ben said, "I played checkers with him just a couple of nights ago."

"What night was that?" Sam asked the fruit-grower.

"Monday."

"The night he died," Sam said.

"We all saw him," said Harry Barnes, mopping his red face with a flamboyant handkerchief. "Down at Jimmy's tavern."

Jimmy's was an unpretentious place which made no effort to cater to tourists. Simple in decor, its clientèle was mainly made up of quiet middle-aged people who liked to sip their beers while they rehashed their yesteryears. Shuffleboard, checkers, chess and garrulous men were the order of the day at Jimmy's.

"Barry was buying beers for the boys," Laird said, chuckling. "It seemed pretty funny at the time."

"Why?"

"He only bought once a month. All month long, he'd mooch beers. Take over a month and that adds up to a lot of free ones. Then, along toward the first of every month, he'd come in and let everybody know he had his dividend check. Barry had some big investments."

"No, he didn't," Grimes said. "That money was a vet's pension."

"For a fact?" Laird asked, surprised. "He always said he had a big investment and—"

"He didn't," repeated Ben Grimes. "I'll tell you about that check. It was a vet's—"

"All right," Sam interrupted hastily, knowing that Grimes would find a dozen ways to say the same thing. "What about the beer?"

"Oh, that," Laird Corger said. "Well, he'd shout that he wanted to repay for all the beers he'd mooched. He'd round up about a dozen fellows and buy 'em one-beer apiece. See? Just one, no more. He'd buy twelve beers after mooching maybe a hundred during the month. It was kind of funny."

"That wasn't the funniest part," Harry Barnes put in. "After he bought that one round, he'd remember something important

he had to do and he'd go running out of the place. That way, he kept from buying another round."

"He'd go fishing," murmured Ben Grimes. "That's what he must have done Monday night."

"What time did all this happen?" Sam asked.

Ben scratched his head thoughtfully. "We played checkers from about eight to a quarter to nine. All of a sudden, Barry stood up and said his check came and that he wanted to buy, so we went to the bar and—"

"And Harry got in a tiff with him," Corger said. "Remember, Harry?"

Barnes' fat face turned redder. "I remember and I'm sorry about it, now that Barry's dead, but it was all in fun. Just kidding him along, was all."

Sam kept the excitement out of his voice with a great effort. "What was it all about?"

"Barry's check," Barnes muttered. "I said to him, 'You've got all these big investments, Barry, how come you don't buy better than beer?' He got hot under the collar at that. Seeing I had him going, I said, 'What are these big investments, anyway?' You know, sticking the needle in him."

"Looking back on it," Ben Grimes said, "it seems kind of mean the way you rode him."

"Only way it'd be mean," Harry snapped defensively, "would have been if I'd known it was a pension check he was spending. I thought he really did have some big investments."

Sam turned to Ben Grimes. "How did you know about the pension? I only found out about it a little while ago myself."

"I've known it a long time," Grimes replied. "Jimmy there in the tavern used to cash the checks for Barry and he told me the truth of it. It was Barry's secret so I let him keep it."

The explanation was logical enough and

Sam accepted it for the time being. "All right," he said, "Barry bought the drinks at about a quarter to nine, then got in an argument with Harry. What happened next?"

"Not much," Laird Corger said. "At nine-five—I know because I looked at the clock and said, 'Well, Barry's right on schedule.'—Barry remembered something he had to do and he left the place."

"That's the last anyone saw of him?"

Corger and Grimes nodded, but Harry Barnes said, "No. I saw him about nine-thirty. I was coming out of Jimmy's—Laird and Ben had already left—and I saw Barry scooting down the street with his fishing pole and bucket. I called him but he didn't hear me."

"Sam," Grimes said, "I don't get all these questions. It's a shame Barry had to die but questions aren't going to bring him back. Only surprising thing to me is the way he died. I would have bet my bottom dollar he'd keel over on the street from a heart attack. His ticker was pretty bad."

With deliberate slowness, Sam said, "Suppose someone was to tell you Barry Strale was murdered?"

"I'd say someone was loony," declared Harry Barnes.

"Any proof of murder?" Ben asked quietly.

"None to speak of," Sam admitted. "I'd need an autopsy to get evidence."

"What would an autopsy show?" Barnes asked.

"If Barry really drowned," Sam said, "there would be water in his lungs, but if he was dead when he hit the water, his lungs would be—"

"To get evidence you have to have evidence," Ben Grimes said, a twinkle of amusement in his gray eyes. "Puts you in a hole, doesn't it?"

"It sure does." Sam's strong jaw tightened. "For two cents, I'd go over to Frank Dilling's funeral parlor and take another look at the body."

"Why don't you?" Grimes chuckled. "Laird's got a car. He'll drive you."

"Sure," Laird said. "I'd be glad to give you a lift."

"You can't!" Harry Barnes protested. "You promised to drive us down for sea food at the Half Shell."

"I'd rather walk anyway," Sam said. "I do my best thinking when I'm walking."

He left the trio on the bench and strode south, crossing the street to Bay Road, then west until a brisk five-minute walk brought him to Frank Dilling's funeral home. Dilling's establishment was a handsome colonial building which sat well back from the street on a broad, well-manicured lawn. Frank was in his office, making arrangements over the phone for an elaborate funeral which was to be held on the morrow. He motioned for Sam to wait a moment, and then, completing his phone conversation, came around the desk.

"Back so soon, Sam?" he asked pleasantly. Frank was not at all like most of the morticians Sam had met. He was a husky fellow who walked through life on heavy feet and not in the undertaker's minuet. He refused to clench his hands across his chest and view the world with a melancholy eye.

"You've looked Strale over, haven't you?" Sam asked.

"Superficially. That's just about all I can do."

"Wouldn't you like to have a county medical examiner?"

Frank grinned. "You bet your life I would. It would take a big load from my shoulders. I can bury the dead but I don't know the first thing about death itself. A coroner's job should be to handle the legal aspects, not the medical angles."

"Mind if I go back and take another look?"

"Go ahead, but you'll have to go alone. The work is piling up on me."

Sam nodded and went to the dark rear room where Barry Strale's corpse was ly-

ing under a white cloth. His heart in his throat, Sam stepped around a big floral piece and pulled down the cloth to reveal Strale's nude body. He disliked to view death in any form, but this, the body of a man who had spent three days in the water, was particularly upsetting. Yet Sam forced himself to study the bruise on Strale's chest, the smaller bruises on his right hip and leg. If Barry Strale had fallen into the water, the bruises might have come in his struggle for survival, perhaps in a frantic effort to clutch a truss of the bridge and pull himself up to safety. . . .

SAM stayed in the room with the corpse for several minutes, and then, his face green, he stumbled back to Dilling's office.

"Frank," he gasped, wiping beads of perspiration from his face with the back of his hand. "Listen, Frank—" He sat down heavily and leaned back with his eyes closed.

Frank handed him a glass of water. "What happened to you?"

"I—I just looked the body over carefully. I swear I wouldn't be a medical examiner for a million dollars. Frank, I found something I hadn't seen before. Behind Strale's left ear. A puncture!"

"A what?"

"Puncture. The kind of a small round hole that something sharp—something like an ice pick—would make."

"Come show me."

"Good Lord, no! I'll stay here. If someone offered me four, no, five million dollars, I wouldn't go near that. . . ." His voice trailed off in exhaustion as Frank left the room.

Frank was back in less than two minutes. "You're right, Sam. This puts a different slant on it."

"Can you perform an autopsy?"

"No. The sheriff will have to appoint a doctor to do it."

"I'll call the sheriff. It will be a pleasure."

Sam gathered his strength and got to his feet. He went to the phone, called Sommers and told him what he had just found.

"Ain't much doubt of foul play, eh?" the sheriff said.

"Not a bit. Something like an ice pick—"

"Yep," the sheriff grunted, "I get all that. Well, I'll round up a doc and haul him down."

"And, Sheriff—" Sam said hesitantly. "About the suspects. . . ."

"I figured you'd be saying something about that next. Who's your customer?"

"Either Ben Grimes, Laird Corgor or Harry Barnes."

"Too bad. They're all nice enough boys. I'll bring them all along."

Twenty minutes later, the porcine sheriff lumbered into the funeral home with Dr. Peter Vale and Sam's three suspects. "You three sit over there," Sommers said to Grimes, Barnes and Corgor, "and keep quiet. You, doc, I guess you can go right on back." He led Vale to the body, and, on his return, Sheriff Sommers came across the room to smile blandly at Sam. "Had a busy day, eh, sonny? I'm proud of you. Only thing is, are you right?"

Sam nodded.

"You better be," said the sheriff. "You go over and sit down and think over all the things that could happen to you if you're wrong."

"Barry Strale was dead when he hit the water."

The sheriff sighed. "And I had it all figured for a drowning. Sit down. It'll take the doc quite awhile."

Sam sat down impatiently and listened to the sheriff's voice drone on and on as he talked to the three suspects about baseball, fishing, the affairs of state, as if one of the three were not a murderer.

After a time which seemed interminable, Dr. Vale emerged from the rear of the funeral home. Taking the sheriff and Sam aside, he said crisply, "No doubt of it, the man was murdered."

Sam chortled and Sheriff Sommers coughed noisily. "Any theories on it, doc?" the sheriff asked.

"He was dead before he went into the water."

"About a half hour before?" Sam asked.

"Possibly. In my opinion, he was in some kind of a fight and received a heavy blow over the heart which was sufficient to kill him. During the fight, he fell, thus explaining the marks on leg and hip." The doctor frowned. "Of course, the puncture behind the ear—"

"Okay," the sheriff interrupted. "Let Sam take it from there, eh, Sam?"

Sam nodded and stepped to the center of the room. "I thought this was murder from the start," he said. "I couldn't see how Barry could have fallen over that rail. Later, John Redley told me that Barry often sat up on the rail, so that would explain how he could have fallen. But by that time, I was convinced enough of murder not to be stopped by what John told me."

"Now we know what a smart youngster you are," the sheriff said. "Would you mind coming to the point? I'm getting hungry."

"I figured no one would kill a harmless character like Strale unless there was money behind it. We know now that he didn't have any money but his pension check, but there weren't many people who knew that before he died."

"I knew it," Ben Grimes said.

Sam nodded and continued, "I think someone thought Barry had a big roll of cash on him from the dividend check—the big investment—and jumped Barry to steal the money. Barry resisted and got himself killed."

"Care to be specific?" the sheriff asked.

"Sure. It wasn't Grimes, because he knew the truth about Barry's money. That leaves just Harry Barnes and Laird Corgor. Harry had had a fight with Barry, admits he saw Barry again at about ninety-three—"

"Hold on!" Barnes protested.

"But," Sam continued, "Harry Barnes doesn't have a car. Corgor's the one with the car."

"So have twenty million other people," Corgor said.

"And Corgor killed Barry Strale," said Sam. He pointed his finger at Laird Corgor. "You knew he was going fishing, so after you killed him, you put him in your car and drove him to the Tenth Street bridge where he usually went."

"Seems like a lot of trouble to go to," the sheriff said.

"Corgor wanted to establish the fact that Barry had really gone fishing. He propped Barry against the rail for John Redley to see when he drove by. John blew his horn at Barry but Barry didn't wave back. He couldn't. He was dead. As soon as the bus went past, Corgor pushed Barry over."

"Sonny," the sheriff muttered warily, "what was Corgor doing while Barry was leaning on the rail?"

"Hiding in the woods off the road on the bridge approach. I'll bet we'll find the tracks of his tires, and"—Sam glared at Laird Corgor—"tire tracks are about as individual as fingerprints."

"What makes you drag me and my car into this?" Corgor demanded heatedly.

"Even when traffic is light," Sam said, "it takes the bus twenty minutes to make the run from town to the bridge outside the city limits. Now, Harry Barnes saw Barry Strale at nine-thirty. You expect me to believe that a middle-aged man walked from town to the bridge fast enough to be fishing when the bus went by at ten-twenty? Not on your life."

"Just one thing wrong with your thinking, sonny," Sheriff Sommers said, waddling forward. "Strale wasn't killed in town. He got a lift to the bridge and was killed out there. I seen the place it happened, just this side of the bridge where the grass is bent down from a scuffle. Another thing I seen out there is tire tracks."

"Whose?" Laird Corgor asked.

The sheriff beamed like a fat, smiling Buddha. "Oh, the youngster had the right man. They're yours, Laird."

The confidence on Corgor's face turned swiftly to despair and his narrow shoulders slumped. He shook his head in complete bewilderment and then he looked at the sheriff with tear-brimmed eyes. "It's the—it's the truth. I killed him, but it was an accident. I didn't mean to kill him. I wanted all that money I thought he had. We got in a fight and I must have hit him too hard—he had a bad heart—and I—"

"Sure, you meant to kill him," the sheriff said smoothly.

Sam was listening with only half an ear. He was staring in wonder at the big sheriff and wondering how early he would have to get up in the morning to be up before Sommers. He grasped the sheriff's arm. "Mack, if you knew all these things, why didn't you order an autopsy?"

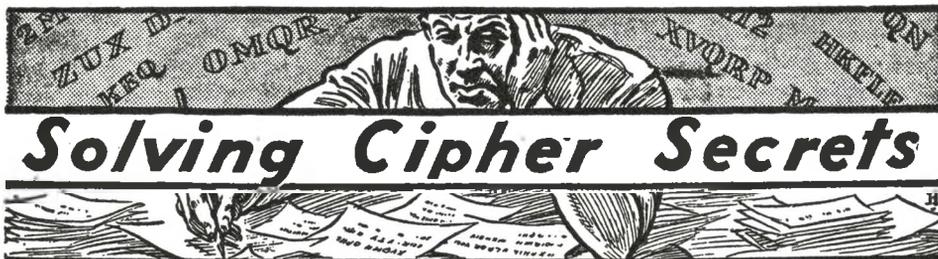
"No proof of a crime. Yes, sir, if you hadn't of found that puncture behind Strale's ear, Corgor would be a free man."

"About that puncture," said Dr. Vale, "I still don't see—It didn't kill Strale."

"Why worry about it, then—eh, doc?" The sheriff slipped something into Sam's hand. "You dropped this in the back room, sonny. Blamed if I know why I didn't think of it myself, especially after I went over the corpse with a magnifying glass this morning and couldn't find a thing."

Sickened by the memory which was brought back to him by the object he held in his hand, Sam's face turned sweaty green and he staggered dizzily out to the trash barrel behind the funeral parlor. Then, as if it were a red-hot ingot, he dropped into the barrel the long, green florist's pin, which had just a little while ago held a ribbon to a wreath in Dilling's parlor.

Even then he could not shake the memory of the cold white flesh behind Barry Strale's ear. ■ ■ ■



Founded in 1924

Article No. 857

M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 5403—Understandable Haste. By °Ty Roe. Here's a limerick, so watch for rhymes! Try KR KDI and KR C as "to the" and "to a." Next, DILYKCKYTE (he- -tat - -); etc.

C SRPKRN YT ECB *ACNKVILGYVVI, RTPI ECGI KR C VCSB
C QYVV; DILYKCKYTE, LDI LFCVRFIS, KDIT OHYPXVB
LDI ZRVRFIS DIN TRLI KR KDI ACKDNRRU, OHYKI YVVI!

No. 5404—Twelve Old-Timers. By Captain Kidd. Compare KP, and endings -KPB and -KPBZ. These will unlock ZKBPKDKHZ. Thus to ZHPYKOHPY; and so on.

FRXTY FETGZ, KP E GHFL RD SNEUKPB FETGZ, AEMH
ZSHFKEN OHEPKPBZ. YAH LKPB ZKBPKDKHZ OEPARRG;
JXHHP, VROEPARRG; QEFL, URXYA. GKEORPGZ, VHENYA;
FNXCZ, SRVHT; AHETYZ, ZHPYKOHPY; ZSEGHZ, GHEYA.

No. 5405—Autumn Festival. By †Diana Forrest. Choice of entries: P and PYY, leading to *MYZBPOMFK; or ZV, VU, and UDV, taken with MVFKHUVUM.

"*XZGGUEHZ ZV *USFUOMH KPG P OMPEFC PYY ZFG
UDV; VU UFKMH FZXM, VU UFKMH SYZXM GESK RYUHC
TUMG MVFKHUVUM."—*MYZBPOMFK *OMTAUHT.

No. 5406—Unlucky Day. By Londoner. Try for ANDFALLS, noting pattern, and checking with DS and KS, and phrase AK ANL. Follow up with YSO, *LSPBYSO, and NYSPDSPH.

DS ELODLCYB *LSPBYSO, NYSPDSPH XLFL YBXYZH
UYFFDLO KRA KS *GFDYOZ. YSO ANL HALTH GFKE
ANL PFKRSO AK ANL HUYGGKBO SREVLFO ANDFALLS.

No. 5407—Seldom Seen. By Crypt-I-Cal. Guess connective RKZ between long words. Then substitute in PODNKZTZ, and fill in. Other entry: HUN, HE, and HUTP.

ATPTSDN ILEX HUN FYOEDR RHEO *JRPUTKVHEK *FROTHED
 ZEXN: PODNKZTZ ORKELR XR. UEJNANL, EJTKV HE
 IRYDHG PHLFYHYLN RKZ FYLLNKH LNFEPHLYFHTEKRD
 EONLRHTEKP, INJ URAN ESPNLANZ HUTP ATNJ IEL GNRLP.

No. 5408—Ice Substitute. By °Jaybee. Identifv symbols R and K through high-frequency, finality, and doubling. Substitute in TRNURRK and EURKKOUR.

PURFA HSRDQR, TGVLDUFUF-TGPDUFUF-BRHLZAR, BFKH
 EFEODZU URPUGNRUZH XRVZOKR FP GHK ELMKGVZD
 COZDGHGRK, XFGDK ZH HSRAHM-HSF TRNURRK XRDFS
 YRUF *PZLURALRGH, ZH ZHBFKELRUGV EURKKOUR.

No. 5409—Sweet Treat. By °Jack-Stay. Apostrophe helps with -'U, and high-frequency, etc., shows Z. Substitute in pattern ZUNVZU, and fill in.

ZYXVUT SQPTVO NYKHU VGNVUT TFKE. NSDU FQKOCZ
 VO TZO'U OZUD. KYZQD PTVPB ZUNVZU XQSVD; PTVQNU,
 "TZH, XZYYKU, YFFBVD DTZ FQKOCZ GKGGK YKVA!"

No. 5410—Scribes Decide. By Bill Thomas. What group signifies the number of words following the colon? Or try for suffix -HYW, noting repeated syllable CDO.

PNNQHYW ANY CRPA XNZDAHTDF GROUP, GOHANO-WORDS
 PNFNVANU AKNPN: VKHCNP, KDPK, CNFRUB, AOZYEDHF,
 UZGY, FDFZXB, CDOCDOHYW, WRFUNY, CHPA, FDCHYRDP.

No. 5411—Bargain Hunter. By †Rebbina. Here's an alliterative message featuring initial symbol P. Start with endings -CEB and -ACGE. Substitute in PFCACGE, and fill in.

PROPELCUP PHOGKCTH PRDCZCAL *PHPKLGE'L *PLLXNL,
 PSCAP PFCACGE. PSFPKSN PFTYXAGK, PXBSP-PNPF
 PHPKCATL, PLONCEB PVVXYPHPEA, PEQGCEL PHOSGNPP,
 PVPYAL PYGEGHCYXS PHOACGE. PRCAL PRTSAXEASN.

No. 5412—The Truth Machine. By Vedette. Find your own clues, fans, in this final cipher! Asterisks in cryptograms are prefixed to capitalized words.

GFS-VSBSXBPT NTZHK TSCSZGU SRBFPZG UBTSUU.
 BEYS ZTPEAV XKSUB UKPDU TSUHFTZBFPA, BPH GFAS;
 KZAV SGSXBTPVSU, UDSZB HTPVEXBFPA, RFVVGGS GFAS;
 ZTR, XEOO, YGPPV HTSUUETS ZAV HEGUS, YPBBPR GFAS.

FOR something distinctively different in a cryptographic puzzle, try Emil Lowe's No. X-5414. Here we have a transposition cipher featuring words of but one length, beginning with the same letter, and all of a single syllable! The words have been divided in half, the beginning of each word then being joined to the end of some other word, in a definite method of transposition. Proper names occurring in the message are bona fide, and all other words are in the dictionary. Solve the cipher, then read it rapidly out loud!

No. X-5414—Barroom Battle. By Emil Lowe.
 SCHWIGHT SPLUARTZ SNITWLED
 SCHNEKED SPLAAUDT SCHREICH
 SMUTPPED SCHNAMED SCHLOECK
 SCREARTZ SCHWENED SCHREICH
 SCREAUDT SCRACHED SCHLOECK
 SCHNSHED SHRIAPPS SPRACHED
 SCHWRGED STRAARTZ

As explained in last issue, in Zadig's No. X-5402 the 123 plain-text letters were numbered serially, taken in alphabetical order. Thus, "a," used 10 times, was numbered from 1 to 10, from start to finish of message; the single "b" became 11; and so to "y," used but once, as 123. Observe that "o," occurring twice in the example herewith, is 71 and 72. Groups 2-63-17 and 4-64-18 tried as "and," and 113-38-22 and 115-39-23 as "the," gave six important letters for quick entry.

No. 5402. Two groups of patterns, loops and arches, whorls and composites, fix the primary fraction in the infallible formula for fingerprint classification.

• Cipher: 109-120-71 34-89-72-118-83-100 etc.
 Text: T W O G R O U P S etc.

New cryptofans: P. M. Floyd, Jr., who sends in his first set of ten answers; and Jayeff, who opens with these words—"Quite by accident I came across your magazine on the newsstands, and having finished reading it, decided to take a whack at the cryptograms. Needless to say, I am a raw novice, but with your hints and considerable brow furrowing, I managed to untangle seven of the ten!" Old-timers returned: *W. C. Babcock, previous score, 746 in 1942; *F. Llewra, 642 in 1944; Mr. E., 66 in 1947. And the following, away since 1949: °Ty Roe, score 1559; *Marguerite Gleason, 624; †Virsat. 167; Doc V, 17; and Les Noyse, 11. Welcome fans, one and all! And everybody, look for current cipher answers in next issue.

No. 5413—Cryptic Division. By †Jayemen. Find zero by inspection and elimination. Subtractions then give two key-sequences. The key-phrases runs: 012345 6789.

A R E A) H E R E I N (U N I
 I H S I
 U I A H I
 U R Q N Q
 U U U E N
 U S N Q C
 Q E A H

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

5391—One-half ounce of the deadly alkaloid brucine, bitterest substance known on earth, will render bitter all the water in a thousand-gallon well.

5392—Energy produced at the sun's center each second exceeds that of ten billion atom bombs, and is believed to be generated by an atomic-energy process that converts hydrogen into helium.

5393—Tommy, ill upstairs, when mother began reading to him, fretted: "What did you bring that book I didn't want to be read to from out of on up for?"

5394—"Dazzling light shone through the mine shaft. Walls grew crystal clear. Jewels, streaming with fire, hung like fruits, buds, and blossoms upon glorious metallic trees."—Hoffmann.

5395—Caoutchouc is an elastic substance made from the juice of certain tropical plants. It has many uses, including making fabrics waterproof.

5396—Horse, State Fair thoroughbred entrant, bites admiring bystander. Injured gent approaches owner, complains. Owner's canine agrees with equine, also bites man! Dogged horse sense.

5397—Animal-eating plants, sundews, pitcher plants, butterworts, inhabit watery places, damp heaths, bogs, marshes, trap and consume small birds, toads, mice, lizards, similar animals, insects.

5398—Tardy termagant tends tryst; takes trousseau: tam-o'-shanter, taffeta tabard, topaz tarlatan tunic, tweed trunks. Traveling tenderfoot.

5399—Government guided-missile vocabulary, official pamphlet, quotes words like: blip, squib, burble, trrace, downwash, hangfire, leakance, var-sitor.

5400—Ancient penalty: culprit staked, chained prone upon ground; belly ripped open, stuffed with corn; ravenous hogs turned loose, devouring grain also shrieking victim's living entrails.

5401—Key:
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 W H I T E L A M B S

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB for JULY, 1950

Current Grand Total: 912,635 Answers

Eleven Answers—°Aachen, 3444; °Alphamega, 613; *Amoroj, 625; Carl Ardra, 48; *Attempt, 927; °See Bee Bee, 2871; °S. H. Berwald, 1128; °Alpha Bet, 1043; *Flor- (Continued on page 112)

*The corpse threw cold water
on a red-hot alibi!*



*A scream broke the
reverent silence. . . .*

THE SAD SISTERS

By Robert Turner

IT WAS a beautiful funeral, Mercy Delroy decided. By far the best one they'd had yet. The small town chapel was jammed and the weeping and sniveling nicely subdued. Mercy hated it when people grew maudlin and hysterical. It was in

bad taste, she thought—and foolish. What was so terrible, so sorrowful, about death? Why, death could be a beautiful thing; it could do wonders for people. Take Gustave, for instance, her brother-in-law, so peaceful in his silk-lined casket.

In life, Gus Iles had been a hulking, red-faced, blustering oaf who drank too much, was addicted to heavy-handed humor and purely deplorable manners. In death, Gus's booming, raucous laugh was silenced. He had dignity for once. With his unruly gray hair flattened and slicked down by the mortician, Gus hardly looked like himself. He looked positively distinguished.

Gus was so much better off dead, too. He'd lived out the best years. A man over fifty had little but the downgrade to look forward to, and her sister, Faith, had been good to him the few months they were married.

That was one thing about Faith. She was conscientious; she was always nice to her husbands before they died. So Gus Iles had enjoyed the best of everything, the best of life, the best of marriage, in the honeymoon months before he and Faith could start snapping and snarling at each other in the inevitable way of husbands and wives. The flame of his life had been snuffed out quickly and efficiently, with a minimum of suffering. Poor Gus, indeed!

Mercy Delroy caught and stopped a smile that was beginning to form on her lips. She must be careful. It wouldn't do to give people anything more to talk about. Not that they could prove anything, no matter what their suspicious small-town minds suspected. She and Faith were much too clever. But even these little slips made Faith nervous and peevish for days. Like the time when Mercy hadn't hit that foolish, skinny old Edwin hard enough over the head. Which one had Edwin been, the fourth or the fifth? It didn't matter.

But, anyhow, when that first blow had not killed him, hadn't even knocked him out, he'd moaned and cursed them something fierce. She'd had to land him one again with that loose brick from the fireplace that could be replaced so easily, so that it would look as though he had fallen against it. Faith had been quite upset about that. Honestly, she didn't know what she was

going to do about Faith. What was happening to the silly girl, lately?

Up in the pulpit the Reverend McCloon's sepulchral voice droned on. The scent of flowers banked and blanketed over the big casket began to mix with the sachet of middle-aged ladies and became cloying. The chapel was so small, so crowded. Gus Iles had been such a popular man.

Through an opened stained-glass window, a sun-shaft spotlighted Mercy Delroy. It sent pale highlights glinting from her neatly, conservatively coiffed hair. It gave an ethereal quality to her quiet, fragile beauty. The black dress she wore, so simply tailored, made her look small and alone.

Two pews back, an old lady's audible stage whisper carried to Mercy quite clearly: "I declare, look at the younger one, that Mercy! See how broken she looks. Even more affected than Gus's wife. The poor, dear child's ready to break down weeping any moment. I hear she was fond of Gus, too. In a sisterly way, of course."

Mercy Delroy nibbled her full lower lip as though holding back tears. She was really suppressing a chuckle. That was one for you—*fond of Gus!* She had despised the red-faced, loud-mouthed lout.

Faith was as dark as Mercy was fair and she wasn't carrying her years well at all. Faith was getting grim about the mouth and eyes, too. Mercy couldn't understand that. Faith never did any of the really hard work. She never committed any of the murders. All she did was lure and marry the wealthy, mooning old codgers. Yet Faith was the one always complaining, worrying and acting highly strung.

Perhaps, Mercy thought, she'd better get Faith away for awhile. A vacation in South America or some place, after this one. Lord knows, they needed it. They were getting stale, dull-witted, to almost make a fatal error such as they'd done this time. It had never occurred to either of them that lusty old Gustave Iles never took a tub bath. They hadn't known how he had nearly

drowned in a bathtub as a child and from that day couldn't be made to immerse himself by threat of damnation. He only took showers. But they should have been more careful checking things like that. There was no excuse for such carelessness.

THESE had been a real to-do, a regular hubbub about it when Faith told the stupid small-town police that was how Gus had died, two days ago. Some busybody friends of Gus's had insisted that it couldn't have happened that way, that something was wrong. . . .

Mercy felt Faith's slender body, beside her, twitch convulsively. She saw Faith's lips flatten against her teeth with strain. Her eyes stared straight ahead, unseeing, carefully avoiding the casket. . . . And folks thought Faith was the controlled one, the brave one! It showed how wrong people could be. The close call they'd had with Gus's murder had all but torn poor, jittery Faith apart. Mercy would be glad when this funeral, enjoyable as it was, would end and she could get Faith out of here.

Reverend McCloon was rolling, now. His voice rose to a dramatic crescendo. He reassured the mourning congregation that this dear heart and gentle neighbor, Gustave Iles, wasn't really dead but had merely passed beyond the vale, into another realm. Just because he no longer moved among them, it did not mean that. . . .

A scream drowned the Reverend's tolling words. It was a fire whistle sound that lanced eardrums. It came from a woman in the first row, in front of the casket. It was contagious and the screaming spread through the female section of the congregation.

The bottom half of the casket lid raised and the man who had been lying there, rose up and climbed out. His eyes remained closed. He moved slowly with hands extended like a sleepwalker's, straight up the aisle.

The screaming had stopped now but the

congregation was on its feet, staring in dumb horror. Those in aisle seats shrunk back, crowding the rest of the pew. There was whimpering and moaning and desperately blurted prayers.

The figure walked up the aisle with funereal, deliberate steps, its closed eyes toward the pew where Mercy and Faith Delroy stood. From the first scream, Mercy's heart had hammered her ribs. Terror had scrambled her senses. But her reflexes recovered swiftly. She knew this couldn't be happening. It couldn't be Gustave Iles rising from his coffin, walking up the aisle. The dead didn't rise. And Gus Iles was dead. She knew it. She'd killed him, drowned him in the bathtub. She'd seen the coroner make tests. She'd discussed the embalming process with the mortician.

She searched desperately for the answer before the shock of this scene crumpled Faith completely. When she got it, she whipped around and clutched Faith's arm. She said, vehemently, "It's a fake, Faith, a crude hoax! Pay no mind. Don't let it get you. It's not Gus. They've hired an actor who resembles him, from that summer stock company. They're trying to trick us, Faith."

Faith Delroy didn't hear. She was staring so hard her dark eyes looked as though they would roll down her cheeks. Her jaw hung.

"Gus!" Her voice was thin and breaking, like a beaten child's. It rang through the silence for all to hear. "No, Gus, no! I—I didn't do it, Gus! It was Mercy! *She* got you drunk! She held your head under the water, Gus. *She—*"

Mercy slapped her so hard that Faith's dark curls jounced against her neck. It shut the younger girl up with a sharp intake of breath. But Mercy Delroy knew it was too late as she wheeled and saw, standing at the back of the church, watching, the constable and the small group of Gustave Iles' closest personal friends, who had staged the show. ■ ■ ■



THE THIRD DEGREE

By Hallack McCord

HOW's your crime I.Q. these days? Or, put differently, do you know a fresh fish from a seasoned vic? Test yourself on the twenty questions to follow, and see how you rate. A score of eighteen or more answered correctly is excellent. Answer sixteen or seventeen, and you're good. But answer fewer than fourteen, and you're crowding into the novice class. Good luck! Then turn to page 111 to see how you stand.

1. What is the meaning of the prison term, "banner"?
2. If a detective friend of yours told you he was on the lookout for a "booster," which of the following individuals would you think he was seeking? A bandit? A murderer? A shoplifter?
3. If a convict acquaintance said he was going to take a "bush parole," what would you think he was planning to do?
4. According to the underworld's way of thinking, what is a "chiv man"?
5. If a prisoner referred to his "clinkers," what would he be talking about?
6. True or false? The underworld slang expression "cop a heel," means to escape.
7. True or false? The person poisoned by atropine is likely to show symptoms of manic excitement, delirium, etc.
8. True or false? A victim poisoned by phosphorous should be given lots of fats and oils as an antidote.
9. True or false? It is possible to become addicted to chloroform.
10. If the chief of police sent you out to pick up a "digger," which of the following individuals would you return with? A safe-cracker? A jewel thief? A pickpocket?
11. In the language of the underworld, what is a "dock pirate"?
12. Would it be logical to hunt for a dyno rouser around drunken men?
13. What is the meaning of the prison slang term "to graduate"?
14. If a crook acquaintance of yours told you he'd been tagged with a "hammer," what would he mean?
15. What is the meaning of the underworld slang term, "kid's pen"?
16. Persons accused of arson sometimes claim a fire has been set by the action of the sun's rays through a bubble in a window glass which acts as a lens. Is this actually a frequent cause of fires?
17. True or false? Different kinds of ink are generally readily distinguishable by their individual compositions.
18. True or false? There is a special table which can aid the scientific detective in reconstructing torn paper.
19. What is a "lush worker"?
20. Why is a "rusty" often in danger from various members of the underworld? ■ ■ ■

By
**Johanas L.
Bouma**



He pointed the gun, not at Al, but at Nora. . . .

KILLER ON THE LOOSE

It was homicide, and Al was a cop. He could get his man only over his own girl's dead body.

DOC RUGEL bandaged the wound without any fuss or bother. It wasn't a big bandage because it wasn't a big wound, the Doc explained. "It'll be stiff for a week or so, but you'll live."

"An Irishman's luck," Al Finney said. He flexed the arm slowly. It didn't feel too bad.

Doc Rugel looked at Al, then gathered his instruments. He said, "Who did it, Al?"

"A hoodlum named Ruby Norton," Al said.

"Al's the last cop he ever plugged," Duff Moxx put in. Duff was short and wiry, and his hair was the color of wet straw. He was Al's partner. "My baby," he said, buttoning Al's shirt.

"Gimme," Al said and grabbed the green-and-black checked muffler out of Duff's hand. He looped it in a fat knot under his chin, pulled it tight.

"That rag," Duff said. "You've had it how long?"

"Got it during the war," Al said, grinning. "It's to keep my neck warm when I stick it out."

Al thanked the doc and he and Duff went through the emergency ward and down the steps to the windy street. The city hall loomed high against the turbulent sky.

"You seen the chief?" Duff asked.

"I'll see him," Al said. "Let's get some coffee."

They crossed the street to the lunch-room where the waitress pushed steaming mugs of coffee in front of them.

They're still questioning her," Duff said, stirring his coffee.

"Yeah."

"You think she was in on it?"

"Shut up!" Al said. His eyes narrowed in his hard face. He was tall, with curly black hair, and his hands were thick and muscular. They relaxed on the counter. "Of course she wasn't in on it," he said dully.

"Okay. You tell that to the chief. You tell that to the D.A. You tell them how come she went straight there from the hospital." Duff took a gulp of the coffee, blinked his bright little eyes. "And then you tell them how come you went there after her. What did you do? Follow her?"

"Something like that."

"It wasn't your move. Bernard's robbery detail. You should've notified him. Or me," Duff added, grumbling.

Al fished for a cigarette and tossed the pack between them. He didn't speak.

"Al, boy, get wise to yourself," Duff's voice pleaded. "She isn't for you. Can't you get that through your thick Irish skull? You're gonna be up for questioning. And why? Because of her. Don't, for God's sake, louse up your record. Not for a—"

"Don't say it, Duff," said Al softly.

"I don't mean it that way, Al. But you remember when we pounded our first beat together? Back in forty-one? You remember how she was then? And only fifteen years old—"

"Yeah."

"It's that brother of hers," Duff said angrily. "That Marty Kemp. She can only see him as a brother. From the first. This time he went too far. A fifty grand robbery, Al. His own sister slugged, a guard dying. And the gas pipes for Marty if he does."

But Al wasn't listening. He was buried deep in his thoughts, gone out of that lunch-room, gone back in his mind to that night when he and Duff had the midnight-to-eight beat, when they were rookies still. Spanking new uniforms with the fuzz still on them, and a creak in their cartridge belts. Pounding beat in the toughest neighborhood in the city. Swinging along, silently alert, through streets dark and narrow. Ugly façades and the smell of garbage. And the sound of glass breaking in an alley. The crash and tinkle of it breaking.

So they found two punk kids crawling through the rear window of a clothing store. When Duff put the flash on them, Al slipped his gun back in its holster. It shamed him to shove a gun at kids that age. Al was twenty-two, then.

Duff said, "They learn young around here."

"We'll have to take them in just the same."

Duff lowered the flash on the suits, the sweaters, shirts, ties, the loot piled in the alley.

He grunted. "A nice haul."

Then he raised the light and they saw the gun. It was pointing straight at Al's middle, and Al not six feet away.

"Take us in," the kid sneered. He was blond and chunky, with the pale, impersonal eyes of a cat. "Big copper take us in."

Al got damp and cold all over. That gun looked steady in the kid's hand, and it had happened before. It could happen now. A gun hungry kid. Happy on the trigger. Not able to see ahead of the next minute. Al was sweating. "Put that thing away," he said hoarsely.

The kid laughed. "Get ready to run, Ruby."

Ruby was shaking. Scared stiff. For an eternity Al stared at the gun. He got set to make his move.

Then this girl came running. High heels running down the dark alley, sobbing for breath she came, her dark blond hair tousled. She looked pretty frightened.

"Marty! Give me that gun!" She bit the words off between her teeth, stepped in front of the kid, wrenched the gun out of his hand. Al's hand snaked out and took it. The kid glared sullenly at the ground. A kid caught stealing.

"I wasn't gonna shoot him, Nora."

"You fool!" She started to shake, gasping for breath. Duff and Al herded them up the street to the corner call box, and Duff called a prowl car.

Al took their names. Marty Kemp: age, fourteen. Ruby Norton: age, fifteen. And Nora Kemp: age, fifteen.

Nora tossed her head. "You've got no right to take my brother in. He wasn't doing anything. There's no law against walking in an alley, and—"

Ruby was breaking. He started to shake, blubbing. "Marty made me do it."

"You stinking rat!" and Marty swung on Ruby, but Al caught the kid's arm, jerked him around. That's when Nora jumped him, her small fists pounding, yelling for him leave her brother alone.

"Duff," Al gasped, "get this wildcat off my back."

"Sure," grinned Duff, grabbing her from behind. "Take it easy, baby." He whistled. "Wow! She was probably in with 'em, Al. Their lookout, most likely."

"She wasn't, either, in on it!" her brother screamed. "Ruby, tell 'em! Was she in on it?"

Ruby shook his head, crying openly. Al took a deep breath. A cop's life. The keeper of law and order, he thought. For two cents I'd quit. He looked up and down the street for the prowl car. "What's the matter with you kids?" he exploded. "What do you want to go and louse your lives up for when you haven't even started to live?"

HE KEPT looking at Nora. She was eyeing him fixedly with something close to contempt. Fifteen. She seemed older, cold beyond her years. Something about her, the look of her, got inside Al. Coming from her eyes to his, so that he had trouble looking away. Something that leaped and shook him, so that he wanted to get this over with instantly. Forget it. Mark it off on the books. Fifteen years old, he told himself contemptuously.

But it kept hanging around. He got the dope the next day, but long after that it kept hanging around. The two boys were sent to a reformatory. Nora was cleared. Al spoke up for her. Two weeks later he got his draft notice, took his physical. Report in three weeks. He worked two of them, took one off.

One day he found himself wandering around his old beat.

In slacks, a sports shirt and jacket, he didn't look old enough to vote. Didn't look like a cop. He walked across the street from the tenement where the Kemps lived.

He had the dope. Mr. Kemp dead. The widow a drudge, a familiar story in the neighborhood. And he saw Nora. Coming home from school. Saddle oxfords and bobby socks. A green skirt and sweater. A school kid. She saw him coming, and in his eyes she grew older. She came slowly to meet him, and they looked at nothing but each other, at nothing else, and the pull was there between them for a moment, so strong and so intense that they were lifted out of themselves. And then it was gone, and he trembled inside and saw her eyes cool on his.

"I was coming by and saw you." His voice was hoarse, and the laugh didn't come off. "Thought I'd thank you."

"For what?"

"Your brother might've pulled that trigger."

She just looked at him. It hadn't been the right thing to say. He felt a fool. He wished he hadn't come and wondered why he had. "I just happened by," he said lamely. "If there's anything I can do—"

"Nothing, thanks."

"I'm going away, so I thought I'd drop by and ask."

She faced him, her head up. She searched his eyes. "You're going into the Army?"

He nodded. "Day after tomorrow."

"Well, take care of yourself."

She walked away from him and he looked after her. He sighed with relief. He had that out of his system. What had he been thinking of? But he kept thinking about her.

That was the beginning. That was in '41, and Al didn't see her again till '46. Five years in the MP's behind him. European Theater. Then back to the city jungles. Duff was back already. A sergeant. A month later, Al earned his stripes.

He had the green-and-black checked scarf in his apartment. Wrapped in the box it had come in, to Italy, in '44. A return address but no name. And a note inside saying, "Here's something to keep your

neck warm the next time you stick it out." He'd wondered. Nora? Or Marty?

He called at the address the first day back. It was boxed in between the slums and the middle-class district. An old man with a shuffling walk and wearing steel-rimmed glasses low on his nose, answered the door. He was just living there. He didn't know what Al was talking about. What scarf? His name was Petersen. Sure, Elmer Petersen. No, he hadn't sent anybody a scarf. Lived here for years. Alone. Somebody had played Al a joke.

So Al skipped it. For the time at least. For a few months he was on the prowler car detail. He wondered about Nora, still thought about her. She would be twenty now. Marty was still in the neighborhood. Al saw him once or twice, standing on street corners, in front of a pool hall. A flashy kid. Sharp. Shoes polished and a crease in his pants. One day they brought him in. Suspicion of robbery. It was none of Al's affair, but he was there at the show-up. When he came outside he found Nora waiting.

They looked at each other, and all of their yesterdays called, but their tomorrows were silent. Shut off by a wall. Shut off by laws and dogmas beyond them. But their yesterdays flooded Nora's eyes for a moment. He saw that much before he really saw her.

She was lovely, but there was a sadness inside her that broke through. It touched his heart. There was in her, he felt, a quiet acceptance of things as they were. Her look reached for him and rejected him, so that nothing was changed. Nothing changed.

"Nora." He could call her that now, take her hands in his. "You look the way I remember. Only lovelier."

"And five years older, Al." She drew her hands away, her eyes anxious. "And Marty—"

"They identified him."

Without moving, she sagged, turned

away. "It's my fault." Her voice was dull. "I tried, I tried—it wasn't enough. Now he'll have to stand trial."

"Yes."

"They'll send him to prison. Can I see him, Al?"

"Later. You can see him later."

"I wasn't enough for him—"

"Let me take you home, Nora."

They walked along the sidewalk. It was bitter cold with the wind. His car was right there, and she was what he wanted, and he what she needed. She looked at him, not crying, the failure there for him to see, but no tears to wash it away. She drew away from him. "It's no good, Al—no good. There's no meeting place for us while Marty—"

For the second time in his life he watched her walking away from him.

San Quentin for Marty. Two to ten for armed robbery. And Nora gone. Disappeared. Al traced her to San Francisco, as near to Marty as she could get. Al knew there was nothing he could do about it.

DUFF got married and Al was best man. They moved up a step: plain-clothes, homicide. They were a smooth team, and they got results.

Marty came out in '49, back to the city. They somehow always came back to familiar surroundings. Maybe to sweeten plans that had turned sour. Maybe to settle unfinished business. But Marty came back. And so did Nora.

Al didn't try to see her. It wasn't time. He felt the moment would come when it was time, when they could look at each other and know it. But how it would come, or when, he didn't know.

Nora must have saved her money. She set her brother up in business. A cleaning establishment, a hole-in-the-wall and a panel truck.

Ruby Norton was in on it with Marty. Ruby had been circulating all this time. Nothing big. Runner for a bookie outfit.

A few dollars shooting pool, or maybe rolling a drunk if it didn't look dangerous. The police knew all about Ruby. Sometimes they picked him up to show him they were still around, but he never caught a finger. They knew he was operating, and they had him pegged for a pigeon, if they ever needed him. They figured he would deal when the time came.

The police watched Marty and Ruby pretty closely, but they didn't step out of line. They drummed up business, sent the stuff out to a big cleaning plant, picked it up, delivered it. They did all right, especially after Nora got them the contract at the place she worked.

This was a candy factory on the outskirts of the city, where Nora was the bookkeeper, and a good one. She hadn't wasted the years. There were fifty to sixty employees at the factory, and the men wore ducks and white shirts at their work, the women a kind of nurse's uniform. The factory supplied the clothes, and they wanted them clean, always. So Nora talked to the boss and fixed it up for Marty and Ruby, and twice a week after that they drove the panel truck into the factory yard to deliver a clean batch of clothing.

Then it happened. Al and Duff were in the squad room when Bernard, from robbery detail, came in and told them. Payroll robbery at the candy factory. At noon, not two hours before. All the employees and most of the office staff out to lunch. The cleaning truck drove up, and the guard at the gate didn't realize that this wasn't delivery day. He let the truck through and Marty and Ruby ran inside the main office building.

All the offices had been empty. All but Nora's. She was there with a guard for company, the monthly payroll, just delivered, on her desk. Checking the payroll from the executives on down to the office boys. That was the setting. Bernard had it from the guard who lay dying in the emergency ward, a bullet in his lungs. One

of the robbers, the guard wasn't sure which one, had slugged Nora with a gun. Nora wasn't sure either. Dazed. It had happened so fast.

But she'd given them two names: Marty Kemp and Ruby Norton.

By that time Al was on his feet. Was she hurt bad? Where was she?

He grabbed Bernard and shook him. "Speak up, man!"

"Easy, Al." That was Duff, a restraining hand on Al's shoulder.

And Bernard, a stunned look on his face, said, "She's upstairs with the chief. But what the hell do you care—"

But Al was tearing up the stairs. They wouldn't let him into the chief's office. A big shot of the candy factory was in there with Nora, and by the time the door opened Al had cooled down.

He looked at Nora. Her face was white and drawn. The candy executive had his arm around her shoulder. He was on her side, Al saw, and that was a break. Al eased out of the office, waited outside, on the steps.

Then he went back inside and spoke to the desk sergeant, who had most of the story on hand.

Marty and Ruby were on the loose. They'd abandoned their truck. With fifty grand in their pockets they no longer needed it. Al waited, smoking nervously. He knew the rest of it, the roads blocked, the squad cars combing the city, every available cop alerted.

Nora came down with her boss. They passed Al and didn't glance at him. He watched them through the glass door, standing on the sidewalk, talking. Nora was shaking her head, and the man patted her shoulder and walked away. And Al came through the swinging doors just as Nora flagged a cab.

Al's car was parked around the corner. Some fast and fancy driving brought the cab in sight. He followed it for a dozen blocks, then got boxed in at an intersection

and lost it. But he had the general idea by that time, and he didn't think he was wrong. He took his time going there.

It was a four-unit flat, and Elmer Petersen lived in the downstairs left. Al parked a block away and walked to the corner bar. He flashed the shield at the bartender, asked questions. Yes, Elmer came in once in a while for a beer. He'd been around a long time. A quiet old guy living on a railroad pension. Friends? Relatives? The bartender paused in the act of wiping a glass. It seems Elmer had a sister. He'd mentioned her once or twice, but she was dead now. Agnes, was her name. That was enough for Al. Mrs. Kemp had been named Agnes.

He walked outside, thinking he should call headquarters. This was official business, and his personal feelings had no part in it.

He was a cop. Homicide. His duty was clear. But looking across at the flat, he was remembering a fifteen-year-old girl snatching a gun out of a kid's hand, and then he was crossing the street.

He took a note out of the MP manual. You don't ease into a room after suspects. You barge in, gun drawn, and you're the boss, and you don't give an inch to anyone.

They were in the front room, all four of them, the shades down, when Al broke in. A leather satchel stood on the table, and a gun lay beside it. Marty tried for it and stopped when he saw Al's gun, and Marty's face was vicious with hatred.

"You again. Dirty copper sticking his neck out again."

Ruby was like Al remembered him from the first time—scared, cowering, his guts running out of his eyes. *Marty made me do it!* Old man Petersen was nursing a bloody head, mumbling to himself, and Nora, who'd been washing the wound, stared at Al as if all the years of her life were crushed around her and could never again be put together.

"You knew," Al said dully.

Marty growled a laugh. "You'd like that. You been after her for years, but you can't touch her. Now you'd like her to be in on it so's she can take a rap. But you're wrong again, copper. She wasn't in on it. She was just smart. And you followed her here."

"You dumb punk!" Al said it savagely. "I didn't have to follow her. You put yourself in the chamber when you sent me this scarf." He was a cop now. All cop. Watching Ruby, saying it slowly. Giving Ruby a picture that could be true if the guard died. "The gas chamber where you take the last deep breath. The last one, Ruby—"

"I didn't shoot him!" Ruby screamed it, seeing himself strapped in the chair, holding his breath as the fumes drifted about the room. Holding his breath. Holding it. . . .

"It don't make any difference who shot him." There was a phone in the room, and Al moved toward it. "You and Marty will both take that last breath."

"It was Marty did it! Marty planned it. I'll swear in court that Marty did it—"

Marty lunged across the room, and there was suddenly a gun in Ruby's hand. He fired, wild, and Al shot him. Somehow, as the sound shook the walls, Marty got to the table, grabbed the gun, the satchel.

He pointed the gun not at Al, but at Nora.

"Now," he said, triumphant. "Drop it, copper," and Al looked at Nora's stricken face and dropped his gun. Marty backed to the door, opened it.

"Now," he said, and the gun moved and he fired.

Al dropped, rolling, and the slug ripped his upper arm. When he got up, Marty was gone, and Al used the phone. And he looked at Nora, but their eyes didn't meet. The wall between them was too thick, too high. . . .

THAT'S how Al thought about it in the lunchroom, drinking coffee with Duff. Marty on the loose. A guy with a gun, with hate in his guts, ready to kill. And Al on the end of a string. *Why the grandstand play, Finney? Trying to be a hero? And how come you knew that was where they would be? Explain yourself, Finney.*

That would be the chief, probing for answers. The door of the lunchroom opened and a cop came in. "Hey, Al, that guard died."

Duff groaned. "You fixed it, Al—you fixed it. All on account of her. Al, they'll bust you sure."

"They can't bust me, Duff. Not if I throw in the badge."

Duff opened his mouth and stared at Al. "You wouldn't do that. No, Al. Not after ten years."

Al didn't answer. Outside it was getting dark. Cars were using headlights. It was time to see the chief. Throw the badge on his desk. Al lifted his head when he heard the sirens. He walked to the door and pushed it open, looked out. Four police cars rolled up the wide drive from the basement garage, crawled out of there like moles.

Duff breathed beside Al, "They got Marty cornered—"

They crossed the street and asked questions. Duff had been right. A cop had spotted Marty, the satchel swinging from his hand. He had disappeared into a tenement. Al took the address. He knew the district. His and Duff's beat from long ago.

Al said, "Let's go."

The cops had the block surrounded. Prowl cars at each corner, a cordon of uniforms covering all exits. Al saw the chief and two of his captains talking to a half dozen reporters. He led Duff through the alley, and cops came out of the darkness to put lights on them.

"It's Al and Duff," one of the cops said.

He pointed a thumb at the building. "He's in there somewhere."

"Anyone go in after him yet?" Al's voice was hoarse, the way it had been the night Marty had held the gun on him.

"Not from this side," the cop said.

Al looked at Duff in the darkness. "You better stay here."

"Like hell I will," Duff said flatly.

They went up the back stairs. The cops had cleared the first and second floor, and the halls were fully lighted. Two cops waited at the landing on the third floor, guns ready. Marty was somewhere above. Had to be. Only one more floor up there. Then the roof. Al took a flashlight from one of the cops. He led the way upstairs, to the roof. Marty didn't stand a chance with the block surrounded, but that's where he'd be.

A searchlight touched the edge of the roof, moved along it, shot its splintered beam into the night. Al and Duff started at one end, worked down. There was no triumph in Al, nothing at all, only the feeling that it would end here, tonight, one way or the other.

"There he goes!" Duff said it suddenly, and in the spray of the flashlight Al saw a figure vaulting the low wall to the lower roof of the next building.

They ran and a shot rang out, and the bullet hissed between them. Duff held his fire.

They flattened against the roof as two more shots ripped past them. Al counted them in his head. One for the guard. One in Al's arm. Three here on the roof. One left. Maybe. You could never tell.

There were other men on the roof now. A portable spotlight. Marty was somewhere at the edge of the roof, cornered. Ducked down behind a skylight. With Al on the other side.

Al said, "It's all over for you, Marty," and he heard Marty's hoarse cry of defiance, saw the shape of him leap up, full in the spotlight, saw the gun flame in Marty's

hand. Al didn't reach for his own gun. There were other shots, and Marty crumpled, slowly, came erect, slowly, and staggered backward with the blood on him, with the satchel clasped in his arms. Marty grinning foolishly with the loot in his arms. Falling with it under him.

Al stood over the body, the green-and-black muffler in his hand. He let go of it. "You needed this, Marty; I didn't," he said.

The chief came over. "Come along," he growled. "I want you downtown."

Al followed him downstairs. They drove through the city in the chief's car. Al said, "She wasn't in on it, Chief," but the chief didn't answer.

Nora was in the chief's office. Al stared at her, his throat dry. She knew. He saw that at once. The minute he saw her he knew because she'd been crying. All finished now. Dry-eyed and quiet.

"You played hell," the chief said to Al. "Damn it, Finney, don't you have faith in your police force? Consider yourself suspended, Finney. For a month. This case is closed. Now get out of here. The both of you."

They walked outside. They stood close together on the sidewalk. Al said, "The chief knows how it is."

"Duff told him. Right after he learned that Marty had shot you. Duff knew. He wanted the chief to get it straight."

"He didn't tell me."

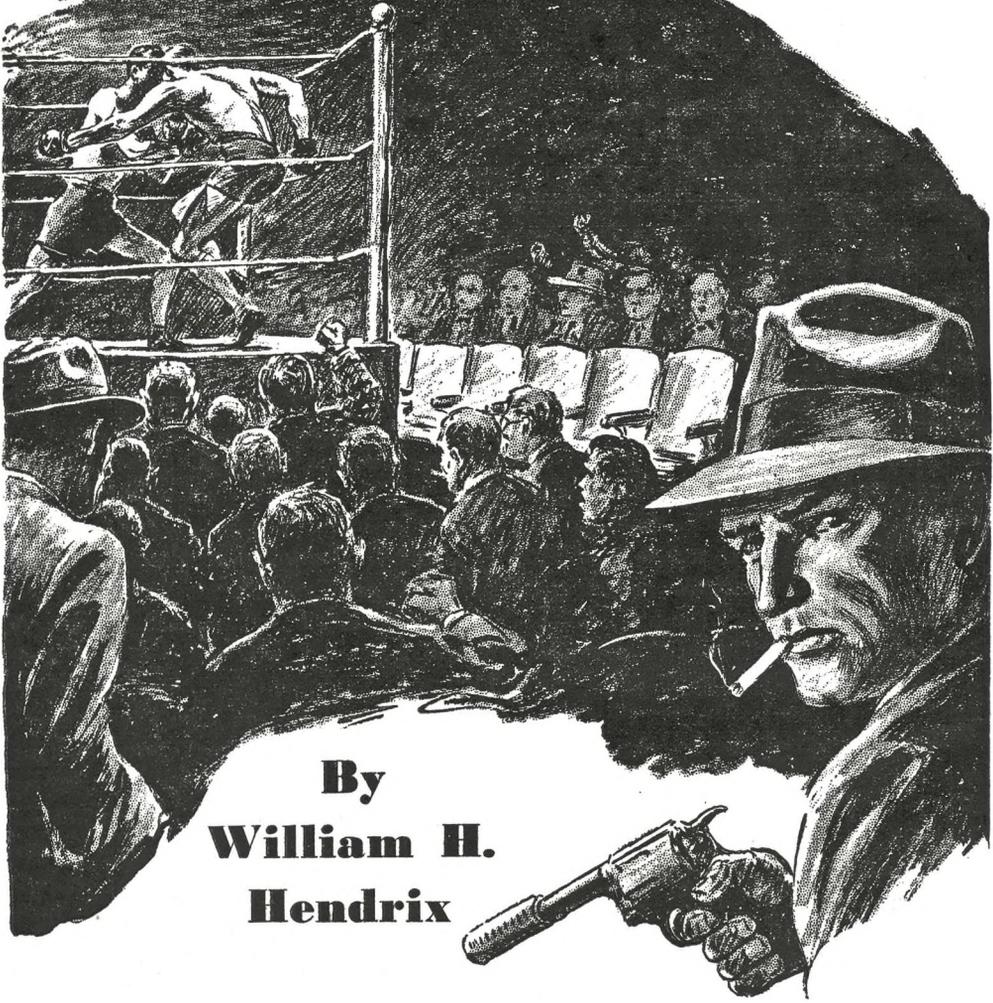
"Because he wasn't sure I was right for you. Now he knows."

She faced him in the darkness, and his arms went around her, where they had wanted to be for so long a time. Nothing and everything had changed. It was no different from the first time with him, no different with her. He felt her tremble.

"And do you know?" Al asked.

Her arms tightened around him and the wall was gone. Gone. Together they turned and walked away, beyond the place where it once had been. ■ ■ ■

Ten armed men were scattered about the ringside. . . .



By
**William H.
Hendrix**

While Guns Were Waiting

A FACTUAL CRIME-DRAMA

It was a sure tip—the Big Boss was as good as dead—but a character like the Big Fellow isn't necessarily dead, even when you see him in his grave. . . .

WHEN Al Capone died in the tranquil quiet and dignity of his Florida mansion, a flood of stories were revived recalling his sensation-packed career as underworld czar of the Prohibition Era. These tales of gang rivalries fought out with "pineapples" and machine guns, one-way rides and kidnapings, were mainly true, of course—including the most sensational episode of all, the St. Valentine's Day

massacre in Chicago, which has been generally recorded in crime annals as a Capone exploit.

But in the mass of stories about the gang-empire boss there was missing one bit of history that perhaps is the most exciting of all—the story of Capone's closest call, the time that, at the height of his power and ruthless leadership, he came nearest being slain by the very method he himself had perfected. The story has been known to a few newspapermen who were actors in the drama, and this it is.

It was a dull, lifeless night in the news-room of the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*. May 20, 1927. Rain was drizzling down; the Loop was deserted. The late Frank Carson, dynamic editor who craved thrills and startling news stories—and who was often accused of creating them if they didn't happen normally—was chafing over the lack of "reader interest" material at hand. Gruffly he had just sent a couple of reporters and photographers to the west side to cover what appeared to be a small, humdrum fire; some others he dispatched on what appeared to be an equally fruitless mission. And just at that moment a policeman, who obviously had tarried a bit too long in a north side speakeasy, telephoned a "tip" to a reporter whom he remembered pleasantly—because the reporter had recently done him a favor.

His tongue thickened by his long session with gin, the cop said, low and confidentially, "Listen, George—they've got the Big Boy. He's rubbed out, see? Now, don't get me in this, but get busy and check up. Capone's out like a light!"

The reporter relayed the incident to the city editor, explaining the source and circumstances. The particular policeman was well known to the desk as a souse and generally unreliable. So all this "tip" got was a shrug and an understanding wink from the city editor. "Forget it." He grinned, and went ahead with his routine.

Within five minutes after the call by the

north side policeman, the *Examiner's* own staff reporter in the South Park district—far on the south side, miles from the spot the policeman had telephoned from—called the desk with a sizzling hunch.

"Hey," he bellowed, "this thing's sort of vague—you can't exactly pin it down to anything tangible—but there's a tip in a speakeasy down here that Capone's bumped. A guy, drunker'n hell, whispered it to me right after he was pushed out of a joint down here. Better get the boys checking."

With this second call the city editor lifted an eyebrow and laid the matter in the boss's lap. But oddly, Carson wasn't sold on the idea. Capone's apparent immunity to destruction had become a legend hard to challenge. So Carson figured it was a little phony business and told his city editor he didn't think it was worth bothering with. But while they discussed the coincidence of the two calls from remote points at almost the same instant, there came a third message that upset the equilibrium of the *Examiner's* news room and sent Carson on a memorable chase for a story. A taxicab driver in Cicero, far to the west—Capone's capital, where he owned a hotel and from which spot he directed his entire empire—called and refused to talk above a whisper to report, "Listen, you mugs . . . Al's knocked over. I'm a taxi driver, understand—I ain't givin' my name, but you run this down . . . an' if it pans out, I'll be in, identify myself, and claim pay for the tip. Understand?"

Three tips in a row were too many to ignore, and Carson swung into action. "I want every reporter on the staff in this room in thirty minutes!" he ordered his city editor, and then and there was launched the reporting of the biggest story in Chicago's gang era history—only the story didn't happen, and it didn't happen because of Carson's insatiable zeal for news, in technicolor. His battle to get a scoop on Capone's slaughter saved the gang king-

pin's life in perhaps the most startling melodrama of the decade.

THE staff assembled, Carson barked his commands. "You, Proctor, get out to Cicero and contact Capone right away—if he's there! If not, get the lowdown—and quick! And you, Friedman, take a run north to the Capone spots for the checkup. . . . And Parker, you go south to the regular Capone spots. . . . You, Ellinson, get to the Loop hangouts. . . ." Swiftly he sent his reportorial aces to the Capone spots, and to the dives of the opposition, too. All went "muzzled"—that is, there was to be no leak on the tip, not even to police; for it was Carson's idea the police were not in on the tip, so why let them in, and thus inform the opposition newspaper? This was to be another Carson triumph—another notch on his gun for scoops that through the years had made his opposition editors tear their hair.

Half the staff were put on telephone work. Junior reporters and office boys worked in relays with the library, bringing the reporters files on both the Capone forces and the rival gangs as well. Feverishly for a half hour the men outside on the assignment and their comrades on telephones in the office were contacting Capone haunts and the hubs of the opposition, all of them well known after the years of gangland expansion and warfare.

To the south was the bailiwick of the O'Donnells—Spike and the others, who had fought ineffectively against the Capone expansion. To the west were the Aiellos, alcohol cookers, whose forces had been decimated slowly but steadily by the growing Capone. To the north was the Moran gang, still battling mightily against the Capone trust—it was the Moran aggregation which later was slaughtered in the garage on that St. Valentine's Day wholesale slaughter. Clearly, if Capone had been slain, it was one or the other of these gangs, or a combination of them, that had done the job.

An hour of frenzied effort yielded exactly nothing. All was quiet on the Chicago scene. Proctor, the star reporter sent to the Cicero headquarters, reported every ten minutes—with exactly no tips. Yes, he was at the Capone hotel—unable to get farther than the lobby. Tight-lipped attendants said only that "the boss is okay, but busy upstairs in his suite." Proctor could get no farther than that. Sure, an attendant conceded, he knew Mr. Proctor was a friend of Mr. Capone; but after all, the Big Boy is too busy tonight to see anybody, so what?

Carson was biting his nails, swearing over his inability to nail down a story which he felt certain by this time was an actuality. Three tips, he reasoned, couldn't be wrong. The old rule of three. . . .

In all the gangland haunts, both Capone spots and the dens of enemies, opponents, rivals—all was quiet. Too quiet. "Sure as shooting, it's true," Carson wailed to his bedraggled, weary staff, "and here we are without a thing to pin it on! Boy, oh, boy, what a story!" The veteran editor visioned two, three pages of gory pictures, streamline banner heads—all beyond his reach!

To make his agony more acute, police headquarters called. The detective lieutenant in command said, "Frank, I imagine you got the same tip we did an hour or so ago—the Capone-bumped-off tip. . . . Well, if you did, it isn't your worry or ours, thank goodness. Al is in New York tonight for the Sharkey fight. Yeah, we double-checked with the railroad, and it's the McCoy. Yeah, went over last night, special private car, with his staff. . . . Yeah, if it's happened, it happened over there and it ain't your worry or ours. We figured you had the tip, so we're relaying the straight dope to you."

Instead of relieving Carson's anxiety in his news quest, the police information only whetted it. "Now look!" he screamed to his toiling staffers. "I'm surer than ever, now, that this is a straight tip-off—Capone's been rubbed out, and in New York,

of all places! Hell's bells—the New York papers will get the break on everything—pictures, eyewitness yarns, everything! And here we've been building up this guy for years, and the other guys get this break! There is no justice!" Carson tore his hair and writhed; but there wasn't much he could do. New York was a good many miles away.

* * *

One week before, Al Capone, in his Cicero hotel headquarters, had been guilty of an indiscretion that surely would have meant death to one of his subordinates—he had opened up and talked too much, a thing he almost never was guilty of, and which he never forgave in others. At breakfast he was served by a new waitress, a girl who was awed by being assigned to serve the great Capone and who conducted herself with proper courtesy toward the mighty man.

Al browsed through his big breakfast, expertly served, and was impressed at the moment by the girl's efficiency.

"Say, Babe," he smiled at her, "how long you worked here?"

"I just came on, Mr. Capone." She was thunderstruck by the Big Boy's attention. "I hope I make good."

"Say, you're swell," he observed amiably. "How'd you like to go over to New York with me and some of the boys Friday night to see the Sharkey fight?"

The girl was soaring to the heights, upset by the master's attention. "Oh, my mother wouldn't let me do that," she stammered, "but it's perfectly wonderful of you to ask me, sir!"

"Okay, Babe, always do what your mother asks," said the genial Al. He tossed the new waitress a fifty dollar tip—and promptly forgot the incident.

The next night the waitress was with her boy friend imbibing gin in a speakeasy far from Cicero—on the south side, to be ex-

act. The couple sat at a table near the bar, where two grim and silent men were standing up, drinking their gin. As the girl's spirits rose under the impact of the bootleg gin, she began telling her escort about her marvelous experience.

"Just imagine!" she shrilled, "being asked to go to New York to the Sharkey fight by *Mr. Capone* personally! I never was so absolutely thrilled in my whole life!"

One of the men at the bar nudged the other and walked toward the door. His companion followed silently. Once outside, they leaped into a big limousine and drove wildly to another speakeasy. A hurried interview with a third man followed; then the trio drove to another place on the north side, where a fourth man was added to the group.

These four went into executive conference.

"Yes, that's the place to do the business," they agreed. "We ought to use about eight, maybe ten, torpedoes. We'll get the ringside seats right away, all separate, scatter 'em all around the ring. That's a lot better than scrambling him here in Chicago; it'll be just another thing, there at ringside, while everybody's whoopin' an' hollerin' about a knockout. . . . Safe, clean, certain . . . and no questions to answer here. Clean as a whistle. What're we waitin' for?"

And so it was that among the early rivals at the Polo Grounds that night were ten men, all entering separately into ringside seats, encircling the arena. Each man packed a powerful gat equipped with a silencer, each grimly bent on the greatest mission of his life, to kill Capone. For these gunmen hirelings of Capone's rivals in Chicago knew that to the man who actually did the job would come a cash payment enabling him to quit the racket, if he wished, and retire forever to live in luxury, far from gangland trails—if he cared to make the change.

AT THE hour when Carson was performing mental acrobatics in the *Herald and Examiner* office in Chicago, Al Capone sat with about fifteen of his cabinet henchmen in a suite of a luxury hotel in New York enjoying a dinner served by his own private chef, whom he always took along on such trips. Al was always cautious, had a fear of poisoning, and acted guardedly. The hotel management was of course unaware of the identity of its free-spending guests. This had been handled precisely in the manner of all Capone's similar junkets after he reached the top of gang power and wealth.

Through a New York agent, the required number of ringside seats had been obtained—of course, under false names. A front man had arranged the hotel registration, identifying the party as a furniture makers' group from Grand Rapids. The railroad accommodations had been obtained in Capone's regular way—waiting until shortly before train time, then having a representative rush in for fifteen or twenty reservations.

Naturally, at such a late hour there wouldn't be so much space available; so the agent would purchase enough room to acquire a private car. Thus, Al not only avoided the publicity of taking a train through the regular station entrance—going to his private car by another gate—but his travel was assured of safety, with a slant-eyed, tight-lipped gunman continually on duty at each end of the sleeper. He traveled safely, and no one knew of his comings and goings.

Capone was especially happy on this night. Business had been particularly good lately; his grip on the whole Chicago region for beer, liquor and vice—gambling, too—appeared secure. His enemies were on the run and discouraged. He reveled in the company of his trusted aids and looked forward eagerly to the fight. He was an avid boxing fan, making it a point to see most of the important bouts. And, just to

keep his interest keen, he always made it a point to place a bet on the underdog.

This night he had \$5,000 bet on Jim Maloney.

Dining in the fashionable hotel among his cronies, Al was expansive—but ever cautious. "We don't know a lot about the lay of the land here right now," he warned his band. "So let's keep our heads clear and our eyes open. Now, let's not scatter about; stay all in a bunch. And say, I looked over the list of preliminary fights tonight and they're all sour. Not worth bothering with. So, let's not get out there too early. . . . We'll have a little time to wait here, then we'll telephone down, have enough cabs ready, and go out and crash in just in time for the main go . . . Get it, boys?"

Everybody got it. Nobody ever questioned Mr. Capone's orders.

So the boys sat tight, bided the time for the main go.

An hour after the three tips had come to the *Herald and Examiner* office, and as Carson and his staff reached the depths of despair, Mel Jenkins, the cub of the staff, sauntered in. It was Mel's day off, but he had dropped in to see what the gang was doing. Carson had one of his valuable hunches.

"Look, Mel," he called. "It's your day off, but we're sort of stuck on a story. Suppose you give us a hand. You know some of these big-shot gangsters, don't you?"

The cub smiled proudly at such recognition from the chief. "Well, I know Bugs Genaro, if that's any help," he offered. Carson snapped back into hopefulness. "Say!" he yelled. "Any of you guys contact Genaro yet?"

Genaro was a Capone kingpin, operating a sumptuous bar with entertainers in the south side, just outside the Loop. Nobody had talked to him; one or two staffers remarked they had tried to get him on the telephone, but had failed.

"Take a run to Genaro's joint," Carson

ordered Mel, "and I think we might as well drop the secrecy stuff and lay it on the line. Tell Genaro just what the dope is . . . see how he reacts." He gave the cub reporter a thorough briefing on what had happened and dispatched him by taxicab to Genaro's famed hotspot.

Mel dashed into the palatial grill and asked for Genaro. Big Hal Peterson, gigantic Swede bartender, was on duty. "Bugs ain't around here, no place," he said—the usual reply to such a query. But Mel was persistent. He drew the big Swede apart from the crowd and whispered something in his ear. Excitedly Peterson pressed a buzzer . . . yes, Genaro was present, when such news as that came in through the door.

Mel quickly told Genaro about the three tips.

The gang leader's face twisted with bitter anger.

"It's them damned—" he muttered, and then caught himself before he broke the most binding of gangland rules—that of naming a possible enemy. But he grabbed the reporter by the shoulders and shoved him through the door.

"Here," he said, "I'll take you to the only spot where we can get the lowdown on this!" He pushed the reporter into a big limousine equipped with bullet-proof windows and with a guard sitting on the back seat. Genaro drove wildly to the big speakeasy of Ralph ("Bottles") Capone, Al's brother, also on the south fringe of the Loop and one of Chicago's largest drink spots. Dashing through the door, Genaro spotted "Bottles" at the rear of the bar. With a commanding sweep of his arm he summoned the mighty gang chief's brother.

"Here, kid," Genaro, said, turning to Mel, "tell him what you told me, and quick."

Mel told Capone about the tips. Capone paled, then said:

"Wait a minute, kid. I think I can get

you some news about that. Want a good story? Then stand right here."

Capone raced to a telephone booth which was right behind the front door. He closed the door of the booth, but there was a crack in it and the reporter heard the hurried call for a New York number. There followed an excited conversation in Italian which Mel could not understand; then the talk turned into English, and Mel heard the younger Capone say, "Listen, Al, this young kid here is the cause of everything and I think you ought to speak to him. Yes, I do. I told him I'd get a good story for him. Wait; I'll call him."

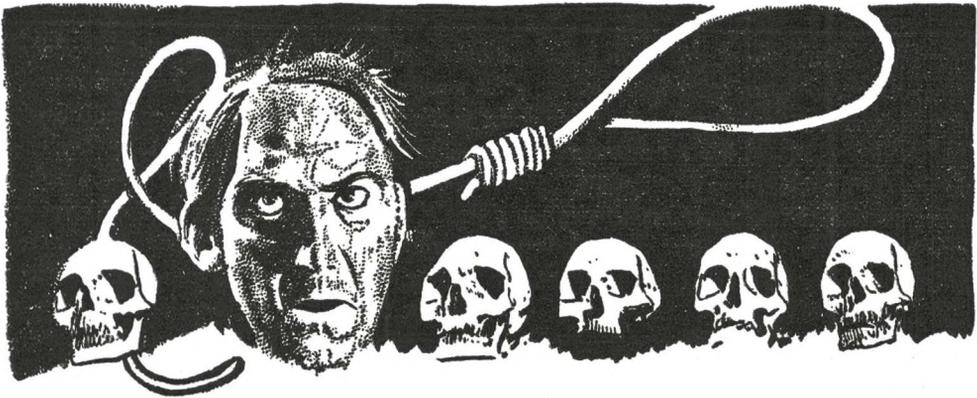
Smilingly he opened the door of the booth and called, "Here, kid, I told you I'd get you a good story for your paper. This is Al on the wire. Go ahead, you can talk to him."

Mel took the receiver.

"Hello—Al?"

"Yeh, kid," came the deep, booming voice of the Big Boy. "Say, kid, I think them reports are a little screwy, don't you? And let me tell you this, kid: I was just putting on my hat to go out to the fight, but now I don't think I'll go." The mighty Al chuckled. "Yeh, kid, thanks a lot, and I want you to drop out and see me in a day or so, when I get back. I want to tell you how much I appreciate this." "

And so, while 15,000 fans in the Polo Grounds watched Sharkey kayo Jim Maloney in the fifth round, there was no knockout for Capone, though ten eager men sat waiting to fire the knockout shot. So confident were those who had planned the job, so perfect was the setup, that three persons in on the plot, in widely separated points in Chicago, couldn't withhold a gloating "hint" that the deed already was accomplished. But they talked, each of the three, an hour too soon; and a Chicago editor's enterprise kept the prize story of the Dry Era from his Eastern contemporaries, and preserved Capone for a stretch at Alcatraz. ■ ■ ■



VAMPIRE OF CALABRIA

By Earl L. Wellersdick

How do you like your murders? Mystical—or just mysterious?

SOMEWHERE in the steep craggy mountains of Calabria, in the toe of Italy's "boot" is a cave which no human being has seen and lived to tell about, according to the Calabrian peasants' centuries-old folk lore. In the cave, they say, dwells the "Vampire of Calabria" who appears every one hundred years in the villages and orchards of the rocky countryside to slake his awful thirst, tearing victims' throats to drink of their blood. Having had his fill, the vampire, reinvigorated and preserved for another century, goes back to his cave.

With this legendary base, it was no wonder that during the reign of Mussolini a series of six vampire-like murders threw all of Calabria into a frenzy of fear and terror.

The story of the vampire's most recent return to the world of the living began with the disappearance of Laura Caesarini, the prettiest girl in the hamlet of Villa Manti. Several days later searchers found her body in a lonely spot. Her hands had been tied behind her back, her mouth was covered by a gag and her clothing was torn to shreds. Yet the only injury she had

suffered were savage bites on the neck.

In less than two weeks there was a second victim, Contessa Ruzzi, daughter of a wealthy landowner. She too had been bound and gagged, the only trace of violence being teeth marks on her throat.

Panic now took hold of the people of the area. Children had been brought up on the story of the vampire, and it now looked as if he had returned. The words of the day were "the vampire is awake" or "the vampire has left his cave and is here."

Although it was only seventy years since the previous appearance of the monster, the peasants pointed out various reasons for his early return, some explaining that his appetite had increased for blood.

No one knew where he would strike next, but they were certain he would have other victims before returning to his cave. And he had. Within the next five days there were three more murders of the very same type. This time his victims, included a young boy. The news of these latest crimes swept the province, creating panic among the people. Work was stopped, doors were locked at sundown and natives

hung horsehair wreaths in the windows. There was such a demand for the latter articles that horses' tails were clipped by the thousands to fulfill the demands. And then there was still another victim, a girl student of an Italian university who was studying archaeology in the mountains. She too had been bound and gagged and had had her neck bitten.

The murderer's lust for blood now took a new turn. The police of the area reported finding dead chickens, pigeons, geese and dogs with their throats bitten like those of the six human victims.

The carabinieri set up road guards between villages, allowing no one to pass without a special permit. Violence flared. Seeped in traditional superstitions, the natives remembered tales of witches, sorcerers and spells. In the village of San Domineo a fear-crazed crowd branded Nonna "Grandmother" Vanna, a witch. For years she had existed by selling herbs. Now, to the crowd, she was a witch. They said she was helping the vampire select his next victims. The police stepped in before the old lady was badly manhandled, but the witch-hunt spread to other villages. One man was given a beating by his neighbors because someone reported seeing the accused in mysterious conversation with a horse. A girl famous for her possession of second sight was driven from her home by a mob armed with sticks and stones.

Then suddenly, with the people driven to a fear which could have resulted in the taking of innocent lives, and the troopers at their wits' end, the solution was found.

A little girl, carrying her baby sister, her dress torn and arms and face scratched, rushed into police headquarters in one of the villages and told a story of fighting off a bent, dwarfish man who had come upon her and her sister in the fig garden of their father's farm.

She had struck the intruder on the head with a pair of pruning shears and knocked him to the ground.

In moments the alarm had sounded and all the villagers and police sped to the scene of the attempted attack. There a strange sight met their eyes. A little old man, dressed in dirty, torn clothes, sat at the base of a fig tree holding his bloody head in his hands. Beside him was a stick with a bunch of twigs lashed to the handle, similar to a witch's broom. He was hardly a human-looking figure, and the moment his eyes rested upon the young girl who had escaped him a crazy gleam came into his eyes and he leaped forward, teeth bared.

The terrified villagers screamed, "The Vampire," and would have lynched the strange man on the spot if the police hadn't stopped them. They were persuaded the creature was human, and not a vampire, and as such should be given a trial.

EXAMINATION by the police revealed the strange story of the man, John Bartman, American. Twenty-five years prior to his capture, Bartman had been a university professor and gone to Italy from Witchita, Kansas. There he studied archaeology and heard the strange story of the Vampire of Calabria. He became so fascinated by the tale that he abandoned all other studies and concentrated on tracing the vampire story as the subject for a book.

He became so engrossed in the research that after a time he believed the spirit of the vampire had entered his own body and taken possession of his mind. Later he was confined to the state lunatic asylum at Naples, from which he had escaped to commit the series of murders related here. Living on roots and fruit of the forest he had made his way from the asylum to the foothills of the Calabria range. There, completely dominated by his odd obsession, he committed the six murders and spread the cloak of fear over the neighborhood.

Bartman was taken back to the protection of the asylum, but the people of Calabria are still wondering—will the vampire return?

■ ■ ■



The tonguesless clown continued his preparations. . . .

MAN WITHOUT A TONGUE

By
David Crewe

CHAPTER ONE

The Doll That Moved

SLEEP all the while—Humbel style! cajoled the sign in the furniture window.

Beneath the sign were two twin beds. In them, as though doggedly obedient to the slogan, lay a wax dummy man and woman. Stiffly at rest, artfully displayed. Sleeping all the while—forever.

Outside, it was cold. So cold that here and there among the crowd spewed from the subways a man would sink his neck into a turned-up collar and gaze enviously in at the sleepers, so warm and still. But the wax husband slept woodenly on, with the blankets slipped bravely from his tinted neck, so that the curve of his wax shoulders showed. It was lifelike, intimate. Humbel's would sell a lot of beds today, with such a window show to follow up their full page Sunday ad.

On the second bed the wax lady, with

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*Fate had made him something less than human—
and hate had made him something more than in-
human . . . the man who could not speak, but whose
“song” of vengeance was hell’s own music in his
dying victims’ ears. . . .*

feminine perversity, had buried her head in the sheets. Only her startlingly realistic hair could be seen, spread in charming disarray upon the silk pillow. So they lay there, while envious shoppers looked and went about their business and forgot them, and the sun turned the walks into coffee-hued slush and it was noon.

At noon the woman sleeper moved. It was not the first time. For hours, she had been moving, with stealthy, cunning genuflections of her covered body, but no one had noticed.

Instead, her painted mate, with his shoulder so staunchly bared, his too-nice face, had stolen the show.

But now, for the first time, her movements were visible. Stiffly, as became a store window automaton, she elevated her upper body slightly from the hips, so that the sheets slid slowly across her forehead; her hair began to trail along the pillow as her head lifted.

Then it was seen by some that her hair was gray. Strange, they thought, that this handsome young wax man should take to wife a creature with sooty, gray hair!

Until after two the gray lady moved; furtively, as though she were pushing against the drag of the blankets which held her to her bargain sale bed. The silly, baby-blue binding on the side of the blanket began to strain and quiver where it was jammed against the tucked-in sheets. A thin edge came free, snaked jerkily loose. The gray lady was held no longer against her will.

Only a few late bargain hunters were looking at that precise moment, but those few stopped, nudged one another. What would these merchants do next! See—the lady is even sitting up in bed. You'd almost believe it, it was that real!

A blowsy old slattern tittered vacantly, pressed her nose flat against the cold glass. And stiffly, as if her dummy soul had been curious to see who thus profaned her rest, the gray lady sat up to meet her.

As she arose, her hair fell suddenly down across her eyes. It was unlovely, spare; it cut a sorry figure beside the pomaded gloss of the wax man beside her. It was not the kind of hair poets sing about. Not the kind to sell twin beds. Not—not the kind of hair for a wax dummy.

"I—Gawd, I nearly—thought—"

The gray lady sat up straight, so that her face came out of the shadows. And the watchers gasped at the grayness of it, on lips too dark, too bruised for a store window doll. Suddenly the mouth gaped horribly and the afternoon sun hit coldly into the orifice of her throat.

And the slattern screamed harshly and pushed her elbows into those who blocked her way, and ran tipsily down the sidewalk, still screaming.

Still the gray lady sat in her bargain bed, simpering stiffly with smeared, set lips, while they hurriedly pulled the curtains over the furniture window and ran to phone the police.

The gray, murdered lady, without a tongue. The gray, murdered lady somebody had put in the twin bed in Humbel's window, where she had lain until, with the stiffening of *rigor mortis*, she had sat up to gape sightlessly out at the street.

THAT was item one. Item two came six days later, as Detective Sergeant Ricco Pasquale Maguire stared glumly at the top of his scarred desk. On the desk was a tabloid. Its inch-high lead screamed blackly across the page:

NO CLUES TO WAX DOLL MURDER!

Sergeant Maguire cursed roundly in a surprisingly cultivated voice and stared at the fly-specked ceiling.

A fist like a small, underdone ham rested on one knee. After a minute the fist started to wave. Maguire swiveled around, faced its owner.

"Bellamy," he said, "there's no need to

kid ourselves. Or get excited. Or get sore, like you are now. This is a case we'll probably never break."

"Why, you—"

Captain Pat Bellamy was fat; his jowls hung loose under the frame of a fighting jaw. He hit the desk and the ink bottle jumped. He said hoarsely, "We got to, and you damn well know it."

Ricco Maguire riffled the sheaf of papers headed: *Homicide—Humbel's*.

"I know," he said. "They're on your tail. From that commissioner down. Humbel's put him in office. Now he has to deliver for them, and when he can't he's griped like a bound-up alligator." He pulled the ink bottle out of range. "Did it ever occur to you," he said, "that the old girl was the second victim of this fellow—and that the first one didn't even make a headline on an inside page?"

"To hell with the first!" screamed Bellamy, and Maguire put the ink in the drawer. "This one means my job!"

"It's all alike you are," Maguire grimaced. "You and the commissioner and the papers. This poor lady down in the morgue is a symbol to all of you. A symbol to the power and the balance sheet of Humbel's. You're hot as hell and yelling about her fate—because she died in Humbel's window and like to spoiled their sale. The first victim wasn't so lucky. They fished him out of the East River nice and quiet, and no dames to faint when they carted him off to a slab. A nice-looking lad, too."

"A damned floater, you talk about." Bellamy's face was red.

"A nice, clean-looking fellow he was," said Ricco Maguire, "all lost and dead on a slab, and him holding in his hand the note that may cleave a path to the devil who sent him there. D'you look over that music, Captain?"

Pat Bellamy spat wide of the cuspidor. "Phah." He fished in his pocket. "I know. Two pieces of music. One of them in the pocket of the stiff they fished out of the

river, the other one held in the fist of the lady in Humbel's window." He threw two stained fragments of sheet music on the desk and scowled at them. "My daughter stuck 'em together and played 'em to me on the piano. They sound like hell and it's a hell of a clue to give a man before they throw him out on his fanny. Me, the best damn—"

Ricco Maguire took the paper from his superior and tore it neatly in half. "Sure it must have sounded like Chinese," he said grinning, "with the front on the back like you pasted it. Listen!"

He put his feet on the desk, gazed soulfully at his toes, and sang:

"Tum, tum, didee di, ta tum ti di di de-e, di—"

"Rick," wheezed Captain Bellamy, "I'm not a patient man, and—"

Maguire waved him to silence.

"That," he said, "is a death threat. And all we know of the murder of the floater in the river. And here, sir, is its supplement, the message the poor lady hugged to her when she lay murdered in a store window bed." Ignoring the chief's apoplectic squirmings, he cleared his throat mightily and intoned:

"Ta, ta, de dah-h-h, de dah de dah-h-h, de dum."

There was a knock at the door and a patrolman poked his head in.

"A man's outside, Maguire. Wants to see you personal."

"Make him wait," Bellamy yelled. The door shut hastily. When the latch clicked Bellamy wailed, "I hand him a case and ask for action. And everybody gives me hell and you give me music! Jumping be glory!" Bellamy wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand.

Ricco stopped smiling. "Take it easy, Captain. You're tired and bedeviled and up a tree. So'm I. Because the day—God forbid—they send you pounding a beat, that day I'll turn in my badge." He looked fixedly out the window. After a time he

said, "I guess you know I don't want that to happen—yet."

Bellamy sat down massively. He said, very quietly, "Sorry, Rick. Allus right, you are. Only you, a millionaire, can walk out of here and tell them to go to hell."

"No," said Ricco Maguire, "not until a certain job is finished."

Bellamy said hastily, "You mean your mother?" And, "Sorry. I don't mean all I say, Rick. Only"—he spread his hands—"I got two years to go for a pension, and the girl to think of. Helen's a big girl now, Rick. Big enough to gallivant around with a guy I wouldn't spit on, an' workin' on crazy heathen jobs—oh, well, give me the story. I'll listen quiet. Honest."

"This thing the papers call the wax doll murder," Ricco said, "is crazy. It breaks all the rules. Because we know everything. We know the killer was one Ray Salvo. We know he was a night watchman at the store."

"And the old dead 'un was a scrub lady there," moaned Bellamy, beginning to wave his arms again. Ricco looked at him, and he subsided.

"Last Saturday night," said Ricco Maguire, "this Salvo killed and mutilated the woman on the steps of the toy department. He concealed the body in Humbel's best sale bed. He punched the time clock every hour along his round. He waved good-by to the man at the time gate at seven in the morning and went out. Leaving a corpse. Good old *rigor mortis* made her sit up and raise hell with the commissioner."

"My head," said Bellamy tentatively. "It don't feel so good, sittin' quiet like this."

"He went out," said Ricco, "leaving nothing. Only a name and locker number. And the fact that he's old and average size. No one down there can describe him, not even his voice. Nothing."

Bellamy muttered, "I guess maybe I'll trot along an' let you work on—"

"The man called Ray Salvo," said Ricco Maguire, "was one crazy smart *tillicum*. So

smart he sent taunting notes to his victims, musical notes they couldn't read."

"Yeah," growled Pat Bellamy ominously, "it's my head that can't stand the talking and doing nothing. I got to move my fists to—"

"So we've got to be crazy smart, too," said Ricco Maguire inexorably, "and here's a start: the musical notes came from a suite of chamber music called 'Songs Without Words,' and the title of this particular song is 'Consolation.'"

"Get 'im," grated Captain Bellamy. "Find 'im for me, Rick. Give me an hour alone with him—an hour of reasonable grilling, as you might say. But"—he bounced up to the thus-and-so and by-whose-ancestors rhythm of good unprintable words—"I'll be a"—he added to them—"before I'll sit and listen to a blasted music lesson."

"'Consolation,'" murmured Ricco to the slamming door. "'Songs Without Words.' I wonder. . . ."

CHAPTER TWO

A Lump of Dead Flesh

A MOMENT later the visitor entered.

A middle-aged man, who bore his leanness erectly. His face was austere, alert, the face of a retired soldier or a professional man. Just now it was moist and a little whitish.

He shut the door, surveyed Ricco Maguire. What he saw seemed to reassure him.

"I'm in a bit of a mess," he said. "So I came to you. That man Bellamy—I heard about you from him."

Ricco sighed. "Why didn't you see Bellamy yourself, sir?"

The visitor made sundry clucking noises, leaned forward. "Because," he whispered, with the air of a man imparting a secret, "I detest Captain Bellamy. I may add, sir, I have good and personal reasons for doing so. Captain Bellamy is a fat pig and no

gentleman. A pig, even, would treat me better than Cap—”

Ricco said, “Oh,” he was thinking: the damned, fighting slob. Doing three men’s work, blustering, crazy-brave when the danger came. And too pig-headed, stubborn to do the hard thing—keep peace with the right people. Making enemies, antagonizing the gray lean men of the world, the men who hired and fired. They wouldn’t fire Bellamy; he left too many scars on the rats the gray men feared—but when there was a vacancy in the department it was easy to pass over a man who had insulted them, keep them on the battle front.

Ricco said, “Let’s have the grief. Begin at the beginning. For instance, who are you?”

The thin man smiled wanly. “Bleakney—ah, Doctor Bleakney’s my name.

“Some months ago,” Bleakney continued, “I found a newspaper clipping in my mail. Sort of a crazy thing. About the discovery of a corpse in the river. I recognized the name as that of a man who used to be an intern at Bellevue when I was there.

“I reported it here. We doctors get funny notes sometimes.” The thin man frowned. “Bellamy told me to forget it. Said hundreds of crank notes are mailed every day. We—he got rather abusive. I left.

“A week ago I got another clipping. This time about a woman’s death. Quite a widely discussed case, I understand. They called it the wax doll murder.” He leaned forward solemnly. “There was more, this time, in the envelope. With the clipping—”

Ricco said, “I know. This time there was a piece of music.”

Dr. Bleakney gulped. “My word!” he said faintly.

“Your death note,” said Ricco Maguire. In his black eyes a lambent flame had kindled. He said, “And that was—a week ago?” For six days he and Bellamy had combed Manhattan for a single thread

of information, anything to stall off a hostile press and save Bellamy his shield.

“Precisely,” Bleakney said primly, “and except for one thing I’d never have bothered you. Only—”

He handed Maguire a piece of music.

Ricco fitted it mechanically to the torn edge of the paper the wax lady had clutched in death. It fitted, note against note, stave against stave. He grunted, pulled the desk lamp closer, saw the writing in the corner. A date, scrawled in ink the color of fresh-spilled blood. December 10. His eyes sought the date on the tabloid on his desk.

“That,” said Dr. Bleakney, “is why I had to come back here. Today is the tenth of December. I—I haven’t been sleeping well lately.” And quite suddenly his austerity and pomp fell like a cast-off mask, and left a pale, troubled man.

“I’m scared,” he said simply.

“You should be,” said Ricco Maguire.

“Don’t misunderstand me.” The doctor stiffened, not without a certain dignity. “I’m no hero. But I’m getting along. I wish that murdering devil knew how little I dreaded death, as such. Death’s an old story, Sergeant, to a doctor. Only,” he pulled at his mustache, “there’s a girl. A young girl I’m fool enough to be very fond of. I’m not anxious for the curtain call yet.”

Ricco stood up. “Doc, you were crazy to stall around on a thing like this, even if you did get a bum steer the first time you saw us. In a way, without meaning to, you’ve put us in a bad hole. Now, the man mentioned in the first clipping turned out to be someone you once knew. That wasn’t just a coincidence, if I know anything. Chances are, this wax doll lady, being tied up with you too, must be someone you can recognize and identify.”

“I have an appendectomy at ten,” protested the doctor.

“Nearly an hour. Five minutes will tell us a lot right now. Hop into that coat. It’s heading for the morgue we are, fast.”

Ten minutes later they stood beside a

cold slab. On the slab lay something covered by a sheet.

Without any hesitation the surgeon pulled down the cloth, gazed on the ravaged features of the gray lady. Quite suddenly he hit his forehead with his clenched fist.

"My God, Peters," he said dully to the gray lady. And, turning to the sergeant, "I begin to get the picture, sir. I—I haven't seen Peters for fifteen years, but I murdered her last Sunday night!"

RICCO PASQUALE MAGUIRE was no ordinary shamus. In appearance he was an old man. But if you got close enough to him to see past the gray hair and the ravaged look of his eyes you would be looking at the face of a man of thirty. Ricco Maguire was, in fact, thirty. But his hair had turned gray in a single night—the night that they paged him at a Plaza dinner dance to gaze for the last time on the face of his murdered mother.

Terry Maguire, his father, had been wealthy, and full of the joy of living as only an Irishman can be. And as ready to fight for the love of fighting or to settle a round of drinks.

Then, one night, Terry met Rosa De-Lisa. He met her on the ebb of a roistering brawl which began in the Waldorf and ended in a dirty side street just off Chinatown. When he saw her he went strangely and completely sober, and as soon as the City Hall opened in the morning they were married.

Ricco Pasquale Maguire had been the only child of that union. A curious-looking child, with a square Irish chin and fair features, topped off by the blackest eyes north of Sicily.

Ever since Ricco could remember, his mother had carried her East Side birthplace in her thoughts. Had kept, with her joy of new wealth, a fervor to use much of it to help old and poorer friends. Which was why she made weekly charitable visits to

the narrow, dark streets of her youth. And which was most certainly why, one day, a cold-eyed young punk had crept from under the arch of Brooklyn Bridge to wait for her in an alley off the Bowery and take her purse and beat her to death in the taking.

Ricco Maguire remained the same man, externally. But from that day he took upon himself a holy mission. Just what it was he probably couldn't define. Even after he, a millionaire in his own right, had taken police examinations and on his merits had reached the homicide squad in four years.

Ricco Maguire had the Celtic frame to carry him through the fighting and the Machiavellian guile to find the way to it. Ricco Maguire ate lunch with the commissioner on odd Mondays. Ricco Maguire got along with Pat Bellamy, who said he was a natural. Ricco Maguire could trace his ancestry, by virtue of one murder and two scandals, to a second Borgia dynasty. Ricco Maguire paid his dues as a member of the Order of Hibernians, and had gone to school in Milan.

So, being what he was, Ricco Maguire had neither handcuffed Dr. Bleakney nor called the psychopathic ward when that distraught man had shouted that he had murdered the wax doll lady. Instead he had set his square jaw and let his black eyes narrow very slightly. He said, "You'll make that operation in time, Doc. But I want some information first."

* * *

"Peters," said Dr. Bleakney, again seated in Maguire's office, "was a nurse at Bellevue. A damned good one. She was that rare kind that would work extra hours and wear herself to a frazzle and not tell anyone about it. It was back in nineteen seventeen, as I recall—"

Ricco Maguire said, "About this wax doll murder, now—"

But the doctor waved a hand peremptorily.

"One day, back in seventeen, I was in

charge of the emergency ward. The flu was on us like a scourge and we had been working like dogs. Peters, as usual, the most. She, I later discovered, was running a temperature herself and should have been in bed. But she wouldn't quit.

"A stretcher case came in. It was a young fellow, about thirty, who'd been in an auto crash. Not serious, but his head had been snapped forward by the collision, and he had jolted his chin against the wheel. The blow had caused him to bite his tongue nearly off."

Ricco Maguire hummed softly.

"It wasn't as bad as it sounds. I could stitch the thing back on, since it was hanging by a thin shred of tissue. The patient was fully conscious, of course. And he was crying. I was a little sharp, gave him hell for being such a baby.

"His sister was with him. She was carrying on, yelling—you know how these damned Latins are. Er, yes, quite. Anyhow, after a time she got a grip on herself and explained what the grief was all about. Her brother, the injured man, was a wonderful singer, she said. San Carlo, Covent Garden—he'd been through the mill. He was angling for a Metropolitan contract.

"He thought, you see, he was losing his tongue, that he'd never be able to sing again. That's why he was crying. He was saying good-by to music, his life."

Ricco Maguire, who had known music with the Italian soul of him, nodded gravely. "Songs without words," he murmured to the ink bottle.

"I laughed at him, told him we'd have him back on the stage in a month, shot a hypo to calm him, and told Peters to prepare him for the operation. Then I went into my office to get aseptic, leaving him alone with a new intern and a girl, Peters, who was herself a walking hospital case.

"When I came out to operate, something seemed wrong, something I couldn't place. I made the preliminary sutures, took off the clamps, picked up the tongue

to join it to the oral muscle. It wasn't the right color. Awful, dead looking. Then I looked at Peters, and I saw what she had done, and I knew.

"Living tissue, you see, can be made aseptic by certain things. It can be made sterile by others. And in her addled state Peters had somehow laved the wound, saturated it with the wrong stuff. The tongue of my crying friend was a tongue no longer. Just a hunk of sterile, dead flesh. It wouldn't have done any more good to sew it back than a piece of raw liver.

"I went sort of crazy for a minute. I caught myself up, but not before the patient—who was fully conscious, mind you—had heard me yell at Peters, and had heard what I said. There was only one thing to do. I put him under complete anaesthesia, pressed his eyes closed so I didn't have to look at them, and did the only thing left. I cut off the tongue which a tired, sick nurse had robbed of the thing that made it live.

"Hell broke when I made my report to the chief of staff. I was fair, but you can't excuse a thing like that. Anyway, Peters was fired. Disgraced. Done for.

"I never saw Peters again until I found her under that sheet. On a slab."

Dr. Bleakney blew his nose loudly. He took some time doing it.

Ricco Maguire said, "You've helped us no end, Doc. When our murdering friend comes for his third trophy, he's due for hell on a raft. Captain Bellamy'll—"

"Not Bellamy!" the doctor fairly bleated; the ends of his chin quivered. "I—there's reasons. Personal reasons. I can't allow you, sir—"

"Sorry," Ricco Maguire soothed, "this isn't any time for nice social distinctions. When there's this kind of work, sir, they don't send out the contact boys and the glad-hand artists. They send Bellamy."

Bleakney put on his gloves. He looked as though he wanted to be sick. As though he hadn't heard anything. He scribbled

hurriedly on a card, handed it to Ricco.

"When—if I get killed," he said, "please go to this address and ask for—for Doc Bleakney's fiancée. I'd like—a gentleman to break the news to her. Not—not a pig."

Ricco looked at the card, laughed, and sent two of the boys to escort the doctor to the hospital, telling them that Bellamy would arrive later to take charge.

But after Dr. Bleakney had departed, Ricco Maguire breathed, "*Mama mia!*" and scowled at the dirty wall. A poor, mad, homicidal fiend. A singer with a mute voice in him, a throat with imprisoned glory rotting within, a man who, when he curses his fate, hears only horrible, inarticulate squawks come from the botched mess three people had made of his mouth. Yes, Ricco Maguire could understand how such a man could go mad, go looking for the thing he called "Consolation."

He dialed Captain Bellamy. "We have a hot lead," he murmured into the phone, "on the wax doll murder at Humbel's. Now don't shout, Chief, it's a lulu. Because all we have to do to solve the crime is to find, in a city of eight million, a man of forty-five. A man without a tongue!"

CHAPTER THREE

An Echo From Hell

ITEM three was the perspicacity of Patrolman Gannon, while on desk duty. At three-fifteen Patrolman Gannon poked his head into Maguire's office.

"Sarge," he said, "I thought I heard a drunk sounding off."

The man at the desk looked up. His eyes were black puddles of fatigue. "Curious," said Ricco Maguire. "Come in. Any news from Bellamy?"

"He's swearing like hell because you're sitting here, but he's got Bleakney's place covered like a blanket," Gannon said. "I'd hate to be the wax doll killer when Pat Bellamy gets his mitts on him."

"A fine, fighting copper he is," said Ricco, absently.

"The big, dented fists on him," enthused Gannon. "Say, that damned croaking, like a wake. I thought I'd better check up—"

"That noise," said Ricco Maguire, "was me. It's singing I've been for five hours."

"Yes, Sarge." Gannon lost his aplomb and his color. "'Course in that case—"

"Fine, grand music it is," said Ricco soberly. "No tune to be murdered by, but two people were. It's called 'Consolation.' I'll render it now to you." Unsmiling, he hummed the themes found on the first two victims.

"Maybe," said Gannon helpfully, "you got a cold."

"You see," said Ricco Maguire, "those musical phrases are all we know about two murders. They are threats to kill. Threats which ended with a man and a woman dead in the morgue. Now, Gannon, you're a bright lad with a fine future. I want you to tell me what's wrong with this passage, the third threat, which is due to be consummated before midnight tonight." He sang it.

"I think," opined Gannon sagely, "you're flat and hoarse, like."

Ricco Maguire looked unhappy. "My old man could hear the banshee wail," he said, "but maybe I'm just a nut. That ending doesn't sound like another wax doll murder to me."

"It sounds like hell, anyway," Gannon assured him. "Forget it, Sarge. Bellamy's waiting for you. He says Bleakney smells bad."

"It's far grander, more passionate music than the rest," Ricco said. "It's the sun after the moon has been shining. Remember, the man who sent those notes knows his music. And in those notes he says what he'd going to do."

"Bellamy'll get him," said Gannon, confidently.

Ricco stood up. "Don't you see?" he

cried. "This is the climax of the poor, daft fellow's revenge! His final masterpiece. And Bleakney said to me, 'I'm old. I'm not afraid to die.' What good's it going to do the wax doll man, where's the passion and the fire of that music, bumping off an old, tired man—who isn't afraid of death?"

"I saw a movie like that once," said Gannon brightly.

"You," said Ricco, "annoy me."

"This movie," said Gannon raptly, "had a guy going to kill the heroine's old man. But then he said no. I'll make him suffer through the ages. That was the caption. So instead of killing the old coot, he went chasing after the girl."

Ricco Maguire looked up. The weariness sloughed from his eyes. "Suffer through the ages," he said. "Suffer a million deaths, remembering how his loved one died. Yes, that's the kind of music—"

He smiled. "Some day, Gannon," he said, "you'll be a fine copper like Bellamy." He took out the card Dr. Bleakney had given him. It said:

The Mott Mission, 27 Mott St.

"I'm going downtown," he said "to find a girl. Going to save, maybe, a girl's life."

"Sarge," Gannon said, "Bellamy's kind of touchy about—"

"What do you think Bellamy would do if he should hear, maybe, that this wax doll killer was alone with his victim?" Ricco Makuire said. "Cornered, maybe, holding the victim as hostage?"

"Hell or taxes wouldn't stop Bellamy," paeaned Gannon. "The grand fighter he is. He'd be first in the door, and the squad behind him. And when he came out there'd be blood on his fists and the wax doll killer draggin' after."

"And the victim, now?" said Ricco Maguire.

"The victim?" Gannon grunted, "Hell! Bellamy'd have the killer!"

"A good cop you'll be, like Bellamy,"

said Ricco Maguire. "Reminds me of a general in the war. He could wipe out a German trench, could that general, but for one thing. There was a handful of doughboys there, fighting hand to hand with those Germans. Only a few, though, and a hell of a lot of Germans. So he blasted the whole lot to hell."

"That's the way Bellamy works," chanted Gannon.

"A medal he got, and he saved the day," said Ricco Maguire. "But they sent him home to Plattsburg, so's he wouldn't get shot in the back. Some people don't like to see their own kind killed.

"If I'm right, Gannon, a girl may be in that kind of fix. Bleakney's sweetheart, she is. I don't even know her name. But she's on our side. Like the handful of doughboys. I'm going to do this alone."

"Bellamy hates Bleakney," Gannon said. "I wonder why."

"Listen," said Ricco. "I'm going hunting for that girl. If I find her and if she's in danger, I'll call you, tell you where I am. I want you to skip regulations, Gannon. I don't want Bellamy to know."

"Huh?" said the bewildered Gannon.

"Not for thirty minutes after my first call," said Maguire. "But if I don't call you again in thirty minutes, get Bellamy and the squad. Let the big slug crash through then, and to hell with the torpedoes. Because," he added quietly, "if I don't call you that second time, I'm going to need Bellamy—bad!"

THE Mott Mission was hot and it stank.

At the door an old man set aside a dog-eared book and smiled toothlessly.

"You Mr. Mendelsohn?" the ancient croaked.

Ricco shook his head and made for the fat, perspiring woman who seemed to be in charge.

"Where can I reach Dr. Bleakney's fiancée?" he inquired.

The woman squinted up, pushed back her hair.

"I wish I knew," she said resignedly. "She's the only one who can keep these flop artists in order."

Ricco felt his temples begin to throb.

"She's gone?"

The woman looked at him quizzically. "You have a date? She left here half an hour ago. An old man was taken sick upstairs, and she said she was going to help him home. She ought to be back by—"

She gave a little cry of alarm when Ricco grabbed her arm. Silently, he showed her his shield.

The woman looked surprised. "Why—why, I do hope there's nothing wrong?"

"Who was he—this old man? Where does he live?"

The custodian looked relieved. "I knew it couldn't be her you was after. She's kind of tops around here. No, I never saw the old man before. Just another bum. She was teaching him the sign language. He was deaf and dumb, I guess."

Ricco swore softly. So he had guessed right, five hours too late! The man without a tongue had been here, in this dingy room. And now the wax doll killer was gone—gone through Ricco's fingers to the most pitiful triumph of all.

Someone tugged at his coat. It was the studious oldster. When Ricco whirled around he sighed disappointedly.

"Excuse it," he wheezed. "I didn't recognize you from the back. I thought you might be Mr. Mendelsohn."

Undoubtedly the girl was dead by now.

Ricco whistled between his teeth. It was not music, that which he whistled, and the notes of it made his blood freeze. It was a girl's dreadful requiem—the last passionate bars of the song called "Consolation."

He went to the door, had it half open when the thought came. Or was it the banshee wail? His dash to the desk at the corner made the goggle-eyed custodian duck in alarm.

"Say," cried Ricco Maguire. "For sure, I am Mr. Mendelsohn!"

It was insane, but so was the creature Ricco trailed. Insane enough to strew his path on previous killings with taunting, musical clues. This might be another—why not? The theme song of his revenge, the piece called "Consolation," had been written by Felix Mendelsohn.

"I'm your man," said Ricco Maguire. "Why?"

The toothless one eyed him with marked disfavor. "Mendelsohn, hah! With a nose like that?"

Ricco shoved the shield under the old man's chin, and he looked very unhappy.

"Why," gritted Ricco Maguire, "are you looking for a man named Mendelsohn? Quick!"

The ancient sighed, relieved. Oh. When the girl—we boys call her our girl—when she went out with some old fellow, she said to him, 'If you want to leave word for anyone, Ike here is the man to leave it with.'

"The man with her made some waves with his hands. He was a dummy. Such faces he made at her. Then she turned to me and said, 'He tells me the only one who will ever want to see him is Mr. Mendelsohn, but he guesses he's going to be too late, as usual.' She gave me a quarter and said, 'The poor man. If his friend comes, tell him he's sick.' Then she put him in a taxi."

Ricco looked down the dirty street hopelessly. He said tightly, "Know where they went?"

Toothless raised mangy brows. "Naw. How'd I know?"

Then, as Ricco started for the car:

"But your pal, I can tell you about him. He lives on the corner of Barrow and Hudson, over my boy's delicatessen."

The motor roared into sudden life.

"She calls us her kids," shouted the ancient. "She's goin' to buy me 'The Count of Monte Cristo.'"

"I hope so," said Ricco Maguire. But he was a block away by that time.

THE bell button gave suddenly when he pressed, standing at the door of the apartment above the delicatessen. The bell made no sound within. He tried the lock, and the latch clicked under his hand. He stepped over the threshold.

Inside, silence pressed like a vast blanket, of doom. And from its depths, a stirring, the sense that in the black was breathing and the pad of groping steps. Steps that came on steadily, searching.

The butt of the Police Positive was cold to his fingers. He froze, felt the wall, pressed the strap of his shoulder holster. He began to wonder whether Bellamy's ways were not, after all, the better. To go in there might be throwing live flesh after dead. Still Gannon, at the station, would give Ricco a half hour. If the girl was inside, alive, alone with the wax doll killer, Bellamy's siren-screaming charge would seal her death warrant. Bellamy wouldn't risk losing the wax doll killer, not to save Doc Bleakney's girl.

The steps came down from above, hesitated by the door, moved closer. They came so near that Ricco pulled the gun close to his side lest it touch the thing he could not see. But the steps came on. Something brushed by him; he felt the swish of it. And as he set himself to leap it moved into the thin beam of light that came through the door.

"I'm so terribly sorry," said a sick-eyed girl. "I—please throw your gun on the floor."

Ricco Maguire sucked in his breath, bemused. For the girl, apparently, had no arms. Only writhing hands, which sprang, flipper-fashion, from her rounded shoulders. It was, he told himself, the damnable darkness. And after the first long stare the girl was looking, not at him, but at the moving fingers near her shoulder.

"You will," repeated the girl, in a dead,

flat voice, "throw your gun on the floor. You will remove the second gun from your shoulder holster. You will kick it across the carpet. You will"—still staring at the hands, never at him, the girl's face blanched—"you will do this at once or my brains will splatter your fine clothes."

Then Ricco saw the two little eyes that peered beadily over the girl's shoulder. And the white of her half-inclined head, watching the brown flipper-hand at her right shoulder. In that hand showed the glint of a gun, pressed to her temple.

Ricco dropped the guns as directed. "You're Doc Bleakney's girl, I judge," he said. "Tell that zombie to step out from behind you. He ought to feel safe enough now, with your own hands tied behind your back."

The girl nodded bitterly. "You and I are going to catch hell, Ricco Maguire," she said. "There's no chance for us. I know. I'm Pat Bellamy's daughter."

Something like a chuckle came from behind the girl. The hands gyrated, half covering her face. She stammered, a little breathlessly:

"He says, 'Salute!' He didn't think the police had anyone who could read his message. He congratulates you. He found pleasure in the little game. But he's bored by it now. He says you can go or stay, unharmed. But—but if you go, when the door closes behind you—I'll die. That's what he says."

Ricco could see ankles, skinny as sticks, braced behind Helen Bellamy's silk legs.

The hands moved jerkily. Helen caught her breath.

"He says, if you stay for the—the finale—I will live, and live, and live. . . . Oh, I don't know what he means. . . . He's saying it over and over with his fingers and shaking from laughter. I—"

The hands moved peremptorily, guns shining as it spun with the dumb message. She stepped fearfully backward, into the deeper gloom.

Ricco drew a deep breath. Never, he thought, could a man be made more ridiculous. For Bellamy's kid to be watching him, Ricco Pasquale Maguire, helpless, like a schoolboy. *Sapristi*, but if he could—

As Helen stepped out of his vision, her eyes widened, left the hands. If the kid got crazy, made a break, with that devil—

"Your dad's on the way," he called to her. And to the shadow behind, "I can't—seem to find you."

It was the glint of the gun he sought. That and the white of the girl's face. If the gun were away from Helen's head he'd jump. The only way. Ricco could imagine the torture threatened by that "live, and live and live."

He stepped into the dark. The white was ahead. And the gun was low, no longer near the girl. Ricco felt his back muscles creep. He said, "Are you there?" walking up carelessly. "I can't find you in the dark, but I'll be along, soon as I—"

He dove, hands outstretched and taloned for the gun.

Even as he left his feet, Helen screamed. In that slice of a second, Ricco knew. The white was not Helen's face. The scream had been far to the side. And the gun—there was no gun! He sensed it as the shadow he sprang for left its feet as he leaped, as it came hurtling to meet his dive. Knew it as glass cracked and smashed against his head, and he fell stunned beneath the shattered wall mirror. Not until then did he see the real gun. It was waving crazily above him. He gave a sick lurch at it, heard, from a vast distance, his own voice yelling. Then there was nothing but the shock of steel against his head, and then—nothing at all.

He opened his eyes into tomb-like darkness, peopled with little rustlings and the sound of shuffling steps. As, by degrees, his faculties returned, he perceived that he was seated, bound hand and foot to a chair.

Only a half hour he had before Pat Bellamy would pound at the door, make the

noise that would fire a gun against his daughter's head.

"Damn you," yelled Ricco Maguire, "where's Helen Bellamy?"

There was a silence for a moment. Then, from some distance there was the sound of chuckling, long-drawn paroxysms. No man, he felt, had ever laughed like that, yet the chuckling came from a man's throat. The back of Ricco's neck bristled.

The steps had paused at his cry. He heard the snap of a switch, and the light came on. And Ricco Maguire saw her.

She was writhing, helpless in a chair not an arm's length away. Tight-lashed cords held her down. Over her entire visage, adhesive tape had been wound. Holes had been cut in the tape; through them he could see her eyes roll sidewise. There was, doubtless, a slit through which she could breathe, for her chest rose and fell and strained against the rope.

But it was not these things that made Ricco Maguire's flesh creep. It was the fact that in that swathed, mummy-like face there was no mouth, no lips—yet from it a human tongue hung. On either side of it, like malformed jawbones, steel clamps savagely pinched and held the tongue, so that it could not be withdrawn into the slit in the tape through which it protruded.

It looked like a creature without a face, an obscene freak of nature sculptured by one to whom horror was a thing to laugh at.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Beast That Needed Blood

THE eyes, Ricco saw, were straining around to his, scared, questioning.

He said, "Steady, Helen." The eyes widened and clouded with moisture.

Ricco Maguire looked for a clock. If Bellamy broke in now he'd sign his daughter's death warrant.

How much of that half hour still remained?

He saw that they were in a shabby, ill-tended room. Evidently a combined eating and sleeping place. A gas range, flaked with rust, stood behind the girl, and a couch, wadded with bedraggled bedding, lay against the wall. They were alone.

Then he heard the voice. From the adjacent room it came. Throaty, sonorous, half intelligible—like the voice of an actor heard from the lobby of a playhouse, when the meaning of the words is incomprehensible, and only the sound of the phrases is heard. This was like that; yet in some macabre way it was not.

This voice was loud. And the other room was close by. There was no reason why Ricco could not have understood that voice—the phrases being in English—if it had been speaking human words!

At first the voice spoke alone. Nothing answered but the sound of Helen's muffled breathing. As the voice reached a higher pitch, impatient, cajoling, little scurrying sounds answered it, and the sound of frantic animal twitterings. Then the voice laughed and Ricco, jerking his head sharply, saw the shadow that darkened across the threshold.

The wax doll murderer blinked owlishly in at them, one bony hand half raised, the other bearing a wire basket—heavy, from the way the weight of it slanted his body sidewise. He was fifty—or eighty; he should have been screamingly funny—but he wasn't.

Dripping wet, he might tilt a hundred pounds. His head would have been a skull, if skin were not over the bone. His neck disappeared under the jut of his jaw until it seemed there could be no room for a throat. And billowing loosely around him, flopping before and behind, hung a faded opera costume. It was the motley of Pagliacci! Pagliacci, the clown!

He set the cage on the stove and inspected his two prisoners, little eyes darting suspiciously over their bonds. Then, clucking with satisfaction, he stood arms

akimbo, in front of Ricco's chair and spoke.

There weren't any words. Ricco shrugged impotently. A madman, talking to a damned blind fool.

The murderer in a clown's costume wagged his head. Hopped to a chair, repeated a query slowly, a dozen times. No malice here, only an infinite hunger to be understood.

"Oo owe usich?" it sounded like.

Ricco listened, closed his eyes to shut out the face. It was hard to think, staring at it. The singsong voice repeated it, interminably.

Out of the rhythm, which was language and yet was not, the speech patterns came clearer to Ricco. It was only the vowel sounds he heard. The hard consonants were lacking in that strange speech. He listened, supplied consonants in his mind.

"Oh, sure, I know music," said Ricco Maguire. "If you'll take off these damned cords, I'll—"

The creature chirped in satisfaction, darted back into the other room and emerged dragging a massive phonograph. Leaned solicitously over it, making minute adjustments. Selected a twelve-inch record, primed an adjuster, evidently a repeating mechanism, and plugged in a cord which took the place of the ordinary hand winder.

Helen Bellamy's head had fallen forward. Outward life seemed to have left her, but when Ricco called sharply to her he saw her eyes follow him, numbly. There was good stuff in that girl. But good blood can flow as freely as bad, under the touch of steel.

The wax doll killer fumbled beneath his robes, drew out something that glinted metallically in the gloom. A pair of scissors.

"Listen," Ricco said quietly, "in ten minutes this room will be full of coppers. Understand—they're speeding for this house now. For every deviltry you do that girl they'll do it to you three times over. I'm offering you a chance to live, man. Those boys of mine are going to make you wish you were dead."

Ricco could translate readily now. The garbled jargon the killer costumed as a clown was shouting back at him!

"I died many years ago." The tongueless clown continued his preparations.

On the wire basket was a lock. This he unfastened. As he did so, the frantic twittering, which had died down, broke out afresh. And the lid of the basket jerked up and down, and shook to the scurrying of little, rasping feet.

Dispassionately he fastened a piece of twine to the handle of the basket, fingers gingerly wary of the unseen contents. Then, holding the rest of the twine in his hand he sidled away from it, playing out the cord, until he had reached Helen Bellamy's side.

Ricco could see the girl flinch, saw her brace stiffly against the chair, her swathed face held proudly posed, waiting. But her eyes, dry and feverish, couldn't mask her panic.

Impotent, Ricco watched.

The creature moved between Ricco and the girl. Ricco heard a snip of the scissors and a choked scream. And when the creature stepped back again, Ricco saw that a little drop of blood hung on the end of the girl's protruding tongue.

Blood! It seemed to charge the room with some elixir. From the basket came a craving, twittering sound as old as the first mammal—who ate lest he himself might die.

The vowelish voice said:

"Three there were. Now only one. You know what they did to me?"

Ricco nodded. "But this girl was not to blame. The others—yes. This girl—surely you won't make her suffer for what they—"

"Yes." The creature preened himself complacently.

He went to the phonograph, started the record. "After the aria," he said, "you'll see I kept my promise. About her living and living. I'll die—after I pull the string and take a little powder. The little beasts in the basket are so hungry, you see. But never fear, they can't kill her. All they can

eat is her little pink tongue. Like the one her lover stole from me."

Then Ricco understood. He screamed incoherent things in two languages at the man without a tongue. The madman postured, beat his thin breast and protested, justified himself, and into the clamor slid the music of a world-famous orchestra.

He gave one great cry:

"Silence! The *maestro*—it is his cue!"

And shattering the horror came the aria from "Pagliacci."

"Laugh, poor clown, while your heart is breaking. . . ."

There weren't any words. A mad gentleman, telling of the ghastly surgical blunder that had taken away his hope, his future.

There were not any words, yet he sustained the tremendous, mighty climax of the music rising on the point of his toes, finished with the dying chord. Postured in a vague, blurred bow, stumbled, clutched at his throat—and fell dead across the stove.

BUT in his death the wax doll killer's pledge of life to his victims was horribly and unwittingly violated. As he staggered his arms had jerked the cord; the netting over the basket came free. And from it eyes gleamed and tiny clawed feet scurried across the floor.

This much the mad clown had promised.

But besides, the man without a tongue, in falling, had caught a sleeve on the stove. Not much, but enough to turn a gas jet full around. The cloying, deadly sweetness of gas came to Ricco's nostrils.

"Helen," implored Ricco, "for the love of God, girl, don't faint!"

At his shout she stirred.

"I'm coming over there, but it'll take awhile," he encouraged. "Breathe easy, and keep your head moving!"

It was then he saw the thing that squeaked and crawled upon her lap.

It was a rat. A rat so emaciated he hardly knew what it was, a living skeleton, so enfeebled that it crept uncertainly on tot-

tering gray sticks of legs. It looked like some gaunt, plucked bird. Yet there was some life in it; with its fellows it groped towards the scent of the life-fluid its empty veins craved, the blood that dripped from the wounded tongue. So near. . . .

If Bellamy didn't come soon. Bellamy *had* to come—

Ricco scraped the chair forward, his head spinning. The gray skeletons scurried, a-twitter, before him. On the floor beneath the girl they fought for the drops that had come from her lacerated tongue. And above it, on her dress, a trail of it led to the swathed face with the protruding tongue. After a minute three of them were squeaking and fighting on the trail.

His chair was next to hers. How long it had taken, he could not know. Consciousness was ebbing and returning in dark, circling mists. He struggled through a black wave, gasped:

"I'm going to fall across your chair. Hold your head over me! And fight it off now, or—"

He wrenched himself forward, and to the side, felt the chair teeter and carry him down.

Thank God he had judged the distance! His chair, holding him immovable, was aslant over Helen's lap.

The blood dripped slowly from the nip the scissors had made in Helen's tongue. It fell on his arm. She was sluggish; he yelled savagely before she comprehended what he was saying. Then, at last, she moved her head; he could feel the warm drops on his bound wrists. Only a minute he dared stay.

Short as it was, that minute was going to be too long. Leaden, sleepy numbness pressed down on back and shoulders. He could not move the chair. A little it gave, no more.

"Can—you—tip it—"

He could feel Helen's body stiffen against his head. Helping him. Two half-conscious automatons, straining against a weight a

child could topple. And then he fell.

On the floor the gas was not as overpowering. He was conscious of a light rasping weight on his hand; something slid away, piping shrilly. A foot from him, tiny eyes, wary, predatory, wavered between two trails—and passed out of his vision.

The bolder, more active fellows had clung to Helen's garments. The weaklings, worsted in the fight, and too far gone to jump upward, were on the floor. Could they scent the blood on his wrists? Life for all of them depended on it.

Helen's head was moving, but jerkily, more slowly. One, the largest of the rats, had reached her shoulder. Beneath her, holding still, Ricco felt the first nibble at his wrists. And with it came the mental flash that the girl's head, stricken eyes glassy, had fallen forward. . . .

Ricco lost the count of time. Nothing remained but the black waves and the faint pinprick of claws that kicked and fought and ran over his bound hands.

He flung himself athwart the chair, getting all the traction of his back and legs against the lever of the wood. Strained until his own blood ran with the girl's over his lacerated wrists. And—after he couldn't feel it—saw his arms break free.

* * *

Bellamy saw them a block away, and his bellow dwarfed the siren. The two heads that propped grotesquely out of a smashed window. Ricco Maguire and the swathed mummy face, tongue sticking out at the crowd that gaped below.

"Them two'll pull through," hazarded the intern as the stretchers got shoved in the ambulance. "Kind of sacrilegious, that damned music playing in there where that guy died."

It wailed above him, long after Ricco Maguire and Helen Bellamy were revived at the hospital. Music which seemed to search for a tongue to frame the words: poor Pagliacci. ■ ■ ■

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 8)

Justice John T. McCormick, of Westchester County, New York. Recently returned to the bench after an illness, McCormick was congratulating himself on living in one of earth's most civilized communities. Good hospitals—clean justice—low crime rate. The very next prisoner brought before him was William MacLeod, competent resident physician who had been the judge's own doctor during his illness.

McCormick, startled, read the charge against MacLeod—practicing medicine without a license. The charges stuck. He had to send the man who had tricked him—and cured him—to jail.

As you see by this, he who lives by the sword, frequently ends up *en brochette*. Once riding on the carousel of crime, not even death could stop the machinery for the late and unlamented Mr. Turpin:

Dear Editor:

Dick Turpin, eighteenth-century British highwayman, managed to elude capture by authorities for six years, by one of the simplest devices ever employed by a fugitive.

He put round shoes on his own, and his men's, horses. Thus, police, finding the hoof-prints, were at a loss as to which direction to follow.

Even a double road comes to an end. Turpin's ended on the gallows, April 7, 1739. A robber in life, he became fair robbers' loot in death. Medical students stole his body. It wasn't the end. A mob of Turpin's admirers stole the stolen cadaver once more, and to end the restless career of the only thief this earth ever knew who'd ridden in all directions, buried it in quicklime to insure its final peace.

Just goes to show that music, like murder, will out—even to the last, dire extremity of a swan song in swing time.

Dear Editor:

Years and years ago, they called it jazz, and later, they called it swing. All through the decades, plenty of people prophesied that modern popular music would lead youth into trouble. In the case of Kenneth Neu, young New Orleans musician, they were right.

Neu was twenty-seven, talented, ambitious, totally amoral. To finance himself while waiting for his big chance, he killed and robbed Sheffield Clark. All through his days in jail, during his trial, Neu kept composing music. At last it seemed he would be convicted. When the judge pronounced sentence, Neu amazed the courtroom by bursting into ap-

(Continued on page 110)

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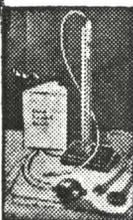


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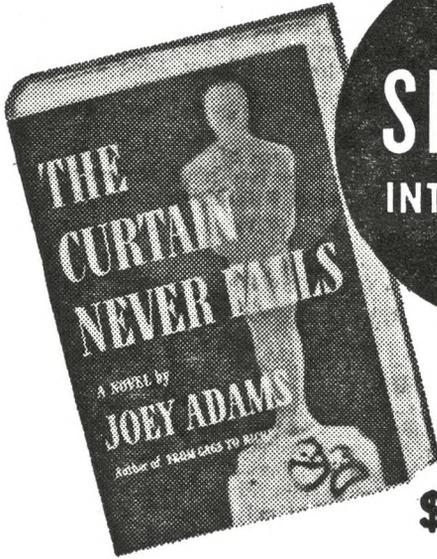
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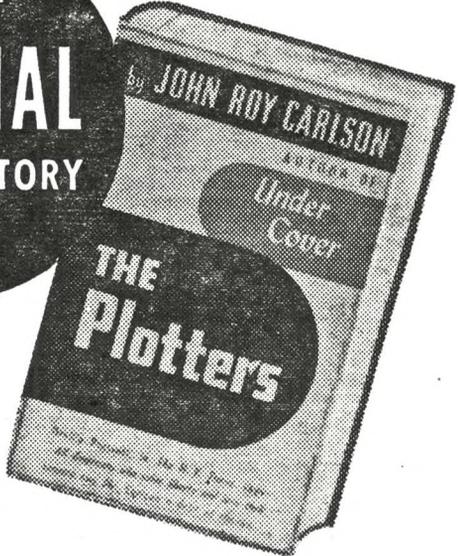


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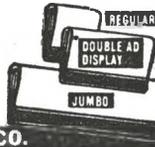
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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 108)

appropriate song—his latest composition. And on the scaffold where they hanged him, Neu spent his last drop of energy doing a Cleo dance to the same rhythm.

He called his song, "The Gallows Strut."
It was swing music.

It was the only one of his compositions whose reputation survived him. However, it never got published. Publishers didn't seem to have the stomach for it.

It gives one to reflect—and shudder—after reading of this case.

Dear Editor:

Time is a word with a lot of meanings—especially in penology. In Massachusetts, recently, a woman sentenced to two years for shoplifting, found herself serving overtime. She appealed to authorities in the reformatory where she was held, only to be brushed aside. She wrote to a group of Boston lawyers, who took the time to investigate her case.

Her sentence, apparently, had called for two years in prison, and three years probation afterward. A busy prison official hadn't had time to read the words carefully, had merely added two and three, and concluded he was supposed to hold her for five years instead of two.

It must have saved him all of five minutes.

And now, for a change, to something more cheerful.

Dear Editor:

They were a group of older men who called themselves The Seekers. Experienced observers, they found themselves worried over a new kind of prison problem—the eventual future of San Quentin Prison's youngest convicts. Without guidance, they felt, the imprisoned youths would be harder cases upon release than they had been when starting sentence. In spite of initial rebuffs, they persisted in their work. Their rewards came slowly with the years, in the form of good news from ex-convicts who had gone straight and lived good lives.

Just public-spirited men, worried about boys. Oddly enough, The Seekers, who accomplished such solid results, were not themselves pillars of society, or anything like it—they were the old-time lifers, convicts themselves at San Quentin.

Thanks for the expert evidence. And we'll be looking forward to more of them in the next issue.

The Editors

Answers to the Third Degree

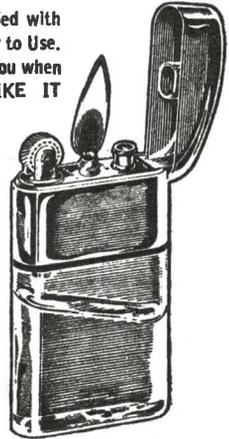
(Continued from page 75)

1. A "banner" is a report of a breach of prison rules.
2. If a detective friend of yours told you he was on the lookout for a "booster," you should know he was seeking a shoplifter.
3. If a convict acquaintance told you he was going to take a bush parole, he would mean he was planning to try to escape.
4. A "chiv man" is one who stabs with a knife.
5. If a prisoners referred to his "clinkers," he would be talking about his chains.
6. True. The underworld slang expression, "cop a heel," means to escape.
7. True. The person poisoned by atropine is likely to show symptoms of maniacal excitement, delirium, etc.
8. False. The victim of phosphorous poisoning should not be given fats and oils as an antidote.
9. True. It is possible to become addicted to chloroform.
10. If the chief of police sent you out to get a "digger," you should return with a pick-pocket.
11. In the language of the underworld, a "dock pirate" is one who steals from ships and wharves.
12. Yes, it would be logical to hunt for a dyno rouser around drunken men. A dyno rouser is one who robs drunks.
13. The prison slang term "to graduate" means that one has finished serving his prison sentence.
14. If your crook acquaintance said he'd been tagged with a "hummer," he would mean he had been falsely arrested.
15. In underworld slang, a "kid's pen" is a reformatory.
16. No. A bubble in a window glass is definitely not a frequent cause of fires. Hence, one who claims this as a cause of a fire of suspicious origin might well be suspected of arson.
17. True. Different kinds of ink are generally readily distinguishable by their varying compositions.
18. True. There is a special table designed to aid in the construction of torn paper.
19. A "lush worker" is a crook who steals from drunks.
20. A rusty is often in danger from members of the underworld, because a rusty is a stool pigeon. ■ ■ ■

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ence B. Boulton, 621; *Gold Bug, 1808; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4086; *Carso, 2075; *Bessie Casey, 771; *CIPHERMIT, 3742; *R. C. C., 717; Contortion, 46; *Floyd E. Cosa, 1826; *M. E. Cutcomb, 653; *Kay Dee, 826; H. R. Derr, 11; *Honey Dew, 236; *Gunga Din, 902; *Drol, 2285; *M. E., 3930; *Eve Eden, 1485; *Arty Ess, 4086; *Estece, 1990; *Evie, 538; *Femo, 878; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1052; *Gyrene, 511; *Henry J. Haewecker, 2070; *S. R. Hart, 907; Mrs. J. David Hawkins, 74; *Hayrake, 1566; *T. Hegarty, 3658; *Helcrypt, 109; *A. Henty, 1152; *Jack-Hi, 1274; *Jaybee, 1496; *Jjim, 133; *June, 667; *Kate, 3044; *Betty Kelly, 710; *S. A. L., 601; Peggy Lindemann, 12; *Marcia, 1300; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3466; *Frank Morris, 672; *Mossback, 2658; *Pablo, 346; *W. F. P., 3221; *B. E. R., 1344; *Rebbina, 149; *Ray F. Richer, 1602; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1599; *Alice Routh, 4015; *Rush, 486; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3182; *Kay Vee See, 1816; *L. Silverman, 299; *Sourdough, 348; *Sam Spiegel, 2888; *M. G. S., 2007; *Jack-Stay, 3920; *Valkyrie, 1321; *Arline F. Vaughn, 369; *Volund, 2073; *Arthur Whitfield, 546; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 589; *James H. Williams, 970; *Ike N. Wynne, 3638; *Doctor X, 4122; *Zizi, 661.

Ten Answers—Alchemurg, 98; Aralc, 70; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 488; *Engineer III, 1965; *Diana Forrest, 196; *Gus, 273; *Jayemen, 347; *J. E. L., 504; *Lucille E. Little, 2231; *M. J. Martinson, 116; *Lee A. Miller, 2002; *Gum Miner, 161; *H. F. Pool, 338; *C. Retherford, 305; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1753; Harold R. Smith, 80; *Miss Tick, 407; A. D. Walters, 40; *Leona Watts, 127; *Wes, 235.

Nine Answers—*Shadyside, 614; Yac, 9.

Eight Answers—Jaybar, 33; *Ray Boyd, 214.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB for SEPTEMBER, 1950

Current Grand Total: 913,904 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3456; *Case Ace, 1334; *Alchemurg, 110; *Alphamega, 625; *Amoroj, 637; *Anidem, 473; Carl Ardra, 60; *Attempt, 939; *See Bee Bee, 2882; *S. H. Berwald, 1139; *Alpha Bet, 1954; *Florence B. Boulton, 633; *Gold Bug, 1819; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4109; *Carso, 2086; *Bessie Casey, 782; *CIPHERMIT, 3784; *R. C. C., 729; *Floyd E. Cosa, 1838; *M. E. Cutcomb, 665; *Kay Dee, 838; H. R. Derr, 23; *Honey Dew, 247; *M. E., 3941; *Drol, 2297; *Gunga Din, 913; Mr. E., 77; *Eve Eden, 1477; *Engineer III, 1977; *Arty Ess, 4097; *Estece, 2002; *Evie, 549; *Femo, 889; *Diana Forrest, 208; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1064; *Gus, 284; *Gyrene, 523; *Henry J. Haewecker, 2081; *S. R. Hart, 919; *Hayrake, 1578; *T. Hegarty, 3670; *Helcrypt, 120; *Henty, 1164; *Jack-Hi, 1286; *H. H., 2140; *Jaybee, 1508; *Jjim, 144; *June, 679; *Kate, 3055; *Betty Kelly, 722; *S. A. L., 612; Sport La, 80; *J. E. L., 515; *F. Llewra, 654; *Marcia, 1312; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3457; *Lee A. Miller, 2014; *Gum Miner, 172; *Frank Morris, 684; *Mossback, 2670; Mousie, 86; *John T. Hoylan, 396; Les Noyse, 35; *Pablo, 358; *W. F. P., 3243; *B. E. R., 1356; *Ray F. Richer, 1613; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1611; *Alice Routh, 4027; *Rush, 498; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3193; *Kay Vee See, 1828; *H. R. Shrewsbury, 1764; *L. Silverman, 311; *Logan Simard, 1239; Harold R. Smith, 92; *Sourdough, 360; *Sam Spiegel, 2879; *M. G. S., 2018; *Jack-Stay, 3932; Geraldine Taber, 43; *Miss Tick, 419; *Tot, 811; *N. Dak. Ump, 633; *Valkyrie, 1333; *Arline F. Vaughn, 380; *Vivit, 179; *Volund, 2085; *Leona Watts, 139; *Arthur Whitfield, 558; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 581; *James H. Williams, 982; *Ike N. Wynne, 3649; *Doctor X, 4144; Yac, 21; *Zizi, 673.

Ten Answers—Aralc, 80; Phil Baker, 10; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 498; *Deedee (II), 10; *Marguerite Gleason, 634; *Jayemen, 358; *Lucille E. Little, 2241; *H. F. Pool, 349; *C. Retherford, 315; *U. Solv'm, 561; A. D. Walters, 60.

Nine Answers—A. E. Cusick, 69; *Shadyside, 623.

Eight Answers—Jaybar, 41.

Corrections—Les Noyse, 11 answers for July, 1950; *N. Dak. Ump, 10 for Jan. and 9 for July, 1950; and *W. F. P., 11 answers for Nov., 1949, not previously credited.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB for NOV., 1950

Current Grand Total: 915,150 Answers

Eleven Answers—*Aachen, 3487; *Case Ace, 1346; *Alphamega, 636; *Amoroj, 649; *Anidem, 484; Carl

Solving Cipher Secrets

Ardra, 72; *Attempt, 951; *S. H. Berwald, 1150; *Alpha Bet, 1965; *Florence B. Boulton, 645; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4121; *Carso, 2097; *Bessie Casey, 793; *CIPHERMIT, 3765; *R. C. C., 740; *Floyd E. Coss, 1849; *M. E. Cutcomb, 677; *Kay Dee, 850; H. R. Derr, 34; *Gunga Din, 924; *Drol, 2309; *M. E., 3952; Mr. E., 88; *Eve Eden, 1488; *Engineer III, 1989; *Arty Ess, 4108; *Estece, 2014; *Evis, 560; *Femo, 900; *Diana Forrest, 220; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1075; *Gus, 295; *Gyrene, 535; *Henry J. Haewcker, 2092; *Hayrake, 1590; *T. Hegarty, 3682; *Helcrypt, 132; *Henty, 1176; *Jack-Hi, 1297; *Invictus, 550; *Jaybee, 1520; *Jayem, 3185; *Jayemen, 369; *June, 690; *Kate, 3066; *Betty Kelly, 734; *S. A. L., 624; *J. E. L., 526; *F. Llewra, 665; *Florence Mack, 397; *Marcia, 1324; *M. J. Martinson, 127; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3468; *Lee A. Miller, 2025; *Gum Miner, 184; *Frank Morris, 696; *Mosback, 2631; *Mousie, 97; *John T. Moylan, 407; *Les Noyse, 47; *Pablo, 369; *W. F. P., 3254; *B. E. R., 1368; *C. Retherford, 326; *Ray F. Richer, 1624; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1623; *Alice Routh, 4038; *Rush, 509; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3204; *Kay Vee See, 1840; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1775; *L. Silverman, 322; *Logan Simard, 1250; *Harold R. Smith, 104; *Sourdough, 372; *Sam Spiegel, 2890; *M. G. S., 2029; *Statist, 542; *Jack-Stay, 3944; *Miss Tick, 431; *Tot, 322; *Ty N. Twist, 934; *N. Dak. Unip., 844; *Valkyrie, 1345; *Arlene F. Vaughn, 391; *Volund, 2097; *Leona Watts, 151; *Wes, 247; *Arthur Whitfield, 570; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 593; *James H. Williams, 994; *Ike N. Wynne, 3660; *Doctor X, 4156; *Zizi, 685.

Ten Answers—Aralc, 100; Phil Baker, 20; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 508; A. E. Cusick, 79; Deedee, 20; Peter Descoteaux, 10; Mrs. Peter Descoteaux, 10; Doc V., 27; George Hein, Jr., 51; *Lucille E. Little, 2251; A. D. Walters, 61.

Nine Answers—Shadyside, 632; *Virsat, 188.

Eight Answers—Jaybar, 49; *H. F. Pool, 358.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB FOR FEB., 1951

Current Grand Total: 916,362 Answers

Eleven Answers—Aachen, 3478; *Alphamega, 647; *Amoroj, 661; *Anidem, 496; Carl Ardra, 84; *Attempt, 963; *W. C. Babcock, 758; *Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 340; *See Bee Bee, 2293; *S. H. Berwald, 1161; *Bessie Casey, 804; *Florence B. Boulton, 657; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 4133; *Crypt-I-Cal, 12; *Carso, 2108; *M. E., 3963; *CIPHERMIT, 3778; *R. C. C., 751; *Floyd E. Coss, 1861; *M. E. Cutcomb, 689; *Kay Dee, 862; H. R. Derr, 45; *Gunga Din, 935; *Drol, 2321; *M. E., 3963; *Eve Eden, 1500; *Arty Ess, 4119; *Estece, 2025; *Evis, 571; *Femo, 911; *Diana Forrest, 231; *LeRoy A. Guidry, 1087; *Gus, 306; *Gyrene, 547; *Henry J. Haewcker, 2103; *Hayrake, 1602; *T. Hegarty, 3694; *Helcrypt, 144; *Henty, 1183; *Jack-Hi, 1308; *Jaybee, 1532; *Jayemen, 381; *June, 701; *Kate, 3078; *Betty Kelly, 746; *Kara, 131; *S. A. L., 636; *F. Llewra, 676; *Marcia, 1336; *Theodore W. Midlam, 3479; *Lee A. Miller, 2036; *Gum Miner, 190; *Frank Morris, 707; *Mosback, 2693; *Nomus, 12; *Les Noyse, 59; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1635; *Ray F. Richer, 1635; *Reb-lina, 161; *B. E. R., 1379; *W. F. P., 3265; *Pablo, 381; *Ty Roe, 1571; *Alice Routh, 4049; *Rush, 520; *Carrie Schroeder, 12; *Ed. Schroeder, 12; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 3215; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1786; *L. Silverman, 333; *Logan Simard, 1261; *Harold R. Smith, 116; *Sourdough, 384; *Sam Spiegel, 2902; *M. G. S., 2041; *Jack-Stay, 3956; *Miss Tick, 443; *Valkyrie, 1356; *Volund, 2108; *Leona Watts, 163; *Arthur Whitfield, 582; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 606; *James H. Williams, 1006; *Ike N. Wynne, 3671; *Doctor X, 4188; *Zizi, 696.

Ten Answers—Aralc, 100; Phil Baker, 30; *Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 518; Manus W. Conway, 10; A. E. Cusick, 80; Doc V., 37; *Engineer III, 2000; George Hein, Jr., 62; *J. E. L., 536; *Lucille E. Little, 2261; *Mousie, 108; *H. F. Pool, 368; *C. Retherford, 336; *U. Solv'ra, 671; *Nick Spar, 3402; *N. Dak. Unip., 854; A. D. Walters, 72; *Wes, 257.

Nine Answers—Jaybar, 58

Seven Answers—Jayeff, 7

Six Answers—Shadyside, 638

Correction—P. M. Floyd, Jr., 10 Answers for Nov., 1950, not previously credited.

All answers to current ciphers will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club*. Address: M. E. Ohaver, *New Detective Magazine*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

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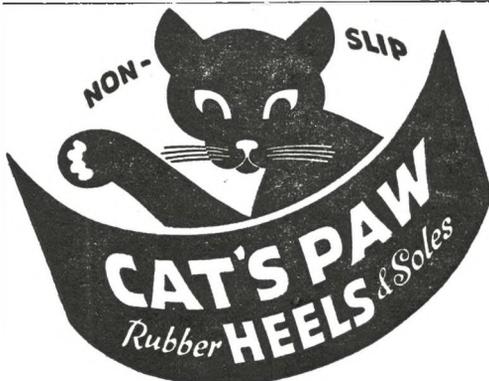
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