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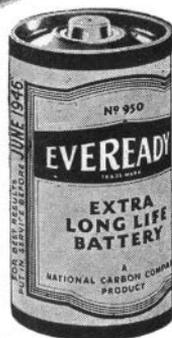


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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXX, No. 1

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

December, 1945

Featured Mystery Novelet



THE CAPTAIN DIED IN SILK

By JACK HOPPER

Murder is a grim and serious business at any time—but when it suddenly breaks out among the crewmen of an American bomber, it can skirt the rim of treason!.....

Another Complete Novelet

KEYS TO THE KILLER Wayland Rice 52

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Where readers and the editor meet

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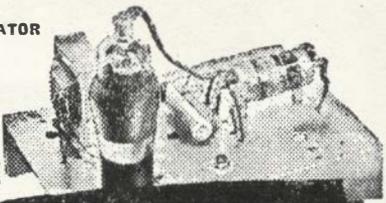
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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE Philippine Islands were retaken from the Japanese—that's a very old story to us now. But the exploits of the undercover men and the guerrilla fighters who laid the groundwork for that victory is a saga of heroism, ingenuity and self-sacrifice that will never grow old!

It's that unforgettable story of undercover, devil-be-darned heroes who were landed on hostile shores to pave the way for MacArthur's conquering armies—that's told in **MISSION OF DEATH**, the smash novelet heading the list of exciting yarns in our next issue.

Secret agent Archie McCann knew he was slated for no picnic when he heard the details of the mission to which he was being assigned. For over three months the Allied Command had tried, without success, to establish contact with the Filipino guerrillas on Mindanao. Three native scouts who had been sent out for that purpose had been killed by the Japanese, and now the body of Maru, a fourth scout, had been dumped on the airfield at Morotai.

A Dread Warning

The warning was plain—the unfortunate Maru, though still alive, had been robbed of his tongue, his ears, his eyes, and his fingers. He'd never tell what he had learned!

But it was Archie McCann's job to get to this mutilated Maru before he died and get him to tell. How? Well, that was up to McCann.

Flown to the small island of Morotai, McCann met the dying scout. But Maru couldn't talk. He had no tongue. He couldn't see or hear. And all efforts to get a pencil into his fingerless hands had been a failure.

But McCann, with the aid of a native head man, succeeded in getting into communication with Maru, where others had failed.

He placed a drum on the scout's chest. He then had the native head man beat out "drum talk." Though Maru could not hear, he nevertheless could feel the drum's vibrations and, before he died, he himself beat out answers to the questions McCann had come to ask.

From them, McCann learned that every new leader who had appeared among the guerrillas

had quickly, suddenly disappeared. The latest leaders, Rizal of the Filipinos and Sapin, the Malayan, were now known to be prisoners of the Japanese.

Having himself put ashore from a submarine on Mindanao one dark, moonless night, Archie McCann headed into the jungle. His plans were—first, to establish contact with the guerrillas and, then, find out where the Japanese secured their information as to the whereabouts of the leaders. It was his duty, McCann knew, to uncover the spies within the ranks of the guerrillas, and to take the necessary steps to eliminate them.

The Marine from Brooklyn

In the jungle, McCann had the good fortune to meet Johnnie Smith—a marine from Brooklyn who had escaped from Luzon when that island had fallen and who was now fighting with the guerrillas. Together, McCann and Smith planned to win Rizal's release from the Japanese.

But like the well laid plans of mice and men—it was the Brooklyn marine and Archie McCann who wound up in enemy hands. Then, of all things, they were served tea!

"Nipponese serve tea to honored guests," said the Japanese officer who confronted them. "Then if honored guests give correct advice as to certain information, then honored guests have more tea. On contrary, if honored guests refuse information, then . . ."

The grinning Nipponese officer didn't have to finish. The Brooklyn marine and Archie McCann knew what was awaiting them if they didn't talk.

But that's only the beginning of **MISSION OF DEATH**, the tense, pulse-throbbing novelet by M. D. Orr. It goes on to a catch-as-catch-can climax of fast-action adventure you'll be a long time forgetting.

Murder Through Magic

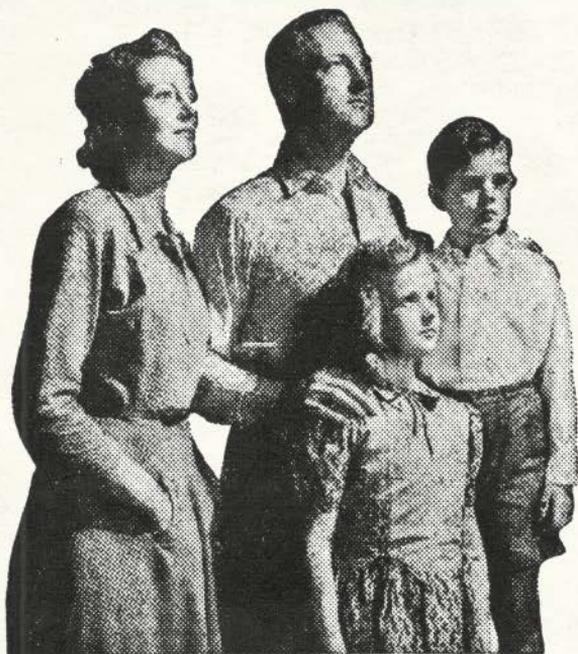
Also in the next issue is a baffling crime novelet, **MURDER THROUGH MAGIC**, by Curtiss T. Gardner.

Old millionaire Dirk Holland's stinginess was well known to his few friends, but what

(Continued on page 8)



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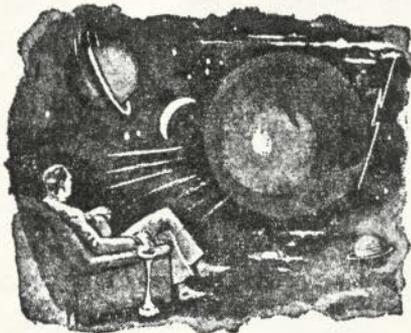
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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

was surprising to them was the ease with which he parted with his money when anyone came along with a fraudulent investing scheme. It was a new swindle coming up that sent Polly, old Holland's stepdaughter, calling on Detective Charles Mallory.

"Dad's taken up with a man who claims he can produce metal from ordinary firewood," the girl told the detective. "He wants Dad to put up a lot of money to commercialize the process."

It was to be Mallory's job to expose the process as trickery and Mallory was just the man to do it, for he was an amateur magician as well as a private detective!

That afternoon, Mallory went to what was supposed to be a demonstration of the metal-converting process. With him he took Bennie, a man who, in happier days, had been a celebrated stage magician. If Mallory couldn't recognize the trickery involved in the demonstration, Bennie certainly would.

A stack of logs was miraculously turned into metal that afternoon—but Bennie wasn't around when it was over to give a report. Bennie had neatly been put out of the way by a skull-crushing blow on the head.

There was no hocus-pocus either about the trouble Detective Mallory faced after that. It came thicker and faster than any one man could handle unless he was a magician. And Mallory had to prove himself just that—or wind up a corpse!

MURDER THROUGH MAGIC, by Curtiss T. Gardner, is a thriller that will surprise and amaze you! **MISSION OF DEATH**, by M. D. Orr, and **MURDER THROUGH MAGIC**, by Curtiss T. Gardner, are as grand a combination as have ever graced the pages of this magazine. And—many other crime and mystery stories round out our next exciting issue!

Be on hand for some real fiction treats!

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

OUR mailbag has contributions from the four corners of the country this month, and it's with pleasure that we acknowledge them. You don't need paper and an envelope to write in and have your say, folks. Just scratch us a few lines on a penny postcard, and, frankly, the gripes are as welcome as the congrats.

So don't sit mumbling in your beard if you don't like a story, get it off your chest. We'll slap it right here in this column along with

(Concluded on page 80)

The December issue of the new pocket-size **MYSTERY BOOK Magazine** features the newest mystery novel by Brett Halliday, also George Harmon Coxe, Will Cuppy and others. Get it today, 25c at all newsstands.

(Adv.)

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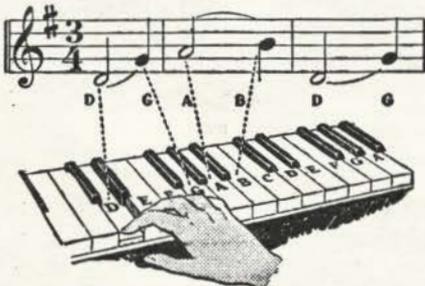


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"Don't!" Milgram screamed. "Don't jump! Your parachute's empty!"

THE CAPTAIN DIED IN SILK

By JACK HOPPER

*Murder is a grim and serious business at any time—
but when it suddenly breaks out among the crewmen
of an American bomber, it can skirt the rim of treason!*

CHAPTER I

The Delivery Boys

B-SEVENTEENS were taking off from Friars' Crossing for a raid on Germany. The English spring morning was clear, though the sun itself had not yet risen on the rolling countryside.

Wind favored the use of No. 2 runway. The traffic control car at one end periodically flashed the green light sending another

silver Fort roaring along the strip, finally to rise into the cloud-dappled sky, where it took up a broad lazy circle toward the rendezvous.

Behind the line marked by the traffic control car, which was a yellow-painted jeep with a plexiglas superstructure, other 17s were awaiting their turn to take off.

Operations were proceeding in routine manner. Major Wallace, Operations Officer, watched from the control room atop the square, two-storied tower of the dull green

AN EXCITING COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVELET

operations building at one side of the flying field. There were long windows all around the room.

Two soldiers were marking numbers on a blackboard. A third soldier was looking out a window, keeping tabs on the planes taking off. Against one wall, in its center, were a radio receiver and transmitter. The soldier operator, chewing gum, now touched one dial and now another.

Through the loud speaker, came a voice calling in tones that were unmistakably urgent.

"Delivery Boys to tower! Delivery Boys to tower! Over."

The radio operator adjusted his dials. Static noises subsided to sizzlings and groanings.

"Tower to Delivery Boys. Tower to Delivery Boys," he intoned into the microphone. "Go ahead. Over."

Major Wallace had turned and was watching. He knew that the B-17 named The Delivery Boys was one of those upstairs circling for the rendezvous.

"Delivery Boys to tower. Delivery Boys to tower. Our Number Four engine is on fire. Number Three is beginning to miss. Request permission to land. Better make it snappy! This crate is acting funny. Over."

The control room crew looked at one another.

Major Wallace jerked back to his window and his eyes searched upward.

"Ask him his location," he shot at the radio operator.

"Never mind," he countermanded almost at once. "I see him."

About a half dozen miles from the field, over near the village of Friars' Crossing but not quite in the way of the sun, the major could see a plane whose silver wing was trailing black smoke. The Delivery Boys had about three thousand feet of altitude and was banking to get on line with the runways.

It was a time for action. The post-mortem could come later. What was important now was to get The Delivery Boys down in a hurry.

A squeamish bit of business, thought Major Wallace, frowning, remembering the pack of B-17s on the field waiting to take off. A misplaced landing by a plane out of control could do a lot of damage. And there was no telling when The Delivery Boys, with two engines on the blink, might go out of control.

THE major's first thought had to be of the greatest number of planes.

"To all planes on the field. To all planes on the field," the radio operator was droning. "Clear all runways and taxiways. Take your planes to the nearest hardstands. Planes now on hardstands will remain in place. Over."

"Tell the Emergency Rescue Squad to

stand by Number Five runway," snapped the major.

One of the blackboard soldiers jumped to a phone on a desk.

"Tell her to come in on Number Five," the major said to the man at the radio.

"Tower to Delivery Boys. Tower to Delivery Boys," the radio operator called.

"Delivery Boys to tower," came back from the plane. "Go ahead."

"Tower to Delivery Boys. Come in on Number Five. Have crew take crash positions if they have not already done so. Over."

"Delivery Boys to tower. Roger." There was a shade of relief in the pilot's voice.

Major Wallace was pushing his lips together. Number Five runway was almost cross wind, but it was better than taking the chance of smashing up the half dozen or so planes next to Number Two runway.

Down on the field, B-17s, like great bumbling, shining moths, were turning and taxiing away from the runways to the safety of the hardstands around the perimeter of the field.

In the air, flashing against the morning sky, were a dozen planes at various altitudes and distances. One, with a steady streamer of black smoke standing straight out behind, was pointing for the field, dropping lower and lower. Every pair of eyes in the control room watched The Delivery Boys as it came on.

Then, from the loud speaker, cracked the voice of the plane's pilot.

"Delivery Boys to tower! Delivery Boys to tower!"

"Tower to Delivery Boys. Go ahead."

"Delivery Boys to tower. Ship is almost completely out of control. Afraid we can't make it. Am going to order crew to abandon ship."

FIRST Lieutenant John Thomas Milgram wondered what the Old Man wanted now as he replaced the receiver to the telephone on his desk.

Sighing, he staggered to his feet with all the grace of a baby elephant.

The comparison was not unapt. Above the rolling folds of his battle jacket, whose cloth could have made blouses for at least two ordinary men, Jack Milgram's face shone like a flesh-pink watermelon with dewlaps. His blue eyes held a child's innocent look and his soft, mobile mouth plainly said its owner could be easily hurt.

A snare only for the unwary and black-hearted was Jack's appearance. Few, if any, better men ever chased a clue or tricked a talkative suspect than John Milgram, formerly of the Homicide Bureau, New York Police Department.

The Monday morning after the Japs hit Pearl Harbor, Jack had lumbered down to



Milgram saw a figure in uniform disappearing toward the end of the car

the Army Building on Whitehall Street, his heart intent on flying a fighter plane.

"Too old," said the Air Forces, also eying his ample dimensions with sarcasm.

"At thirty-one!" Jack had gasped.

"Besides, there isn't a fighter plane you'd fit into. And you've got too much weight for a bomber."

"That I could take off," asserted Jack, not without an inward groan at the thought.

Nobody will ever know the torture Jack Milgram went through in the next two weeks but when he again presented himself to the Air Forces, he was just a feather under the weight limit and was accepted.

He went to Miami Beach for the training to become an Air Forces officer. Then because of his detective background, he was sent to the AAF Intelligence School. After that, he began to fatten up and feed normal again. He asked for overseas service and, to his intense delight, soon found himself in England with the Eighth Air Force.

Now Milgram worked himself past the table desk of his assistant and only other member of the Office of S-2, Corporal Radtke.

"Wonder if the Old Man wants my report on The Delivery Boys crash?" mumbled the lieutenant. "Haven't had time to—"

"Your hair, sir!" Corporal Radtke interrupted nervously.

Corporal Radtke was dark, eager and little, which last was convenient, otherwise he and Milgram would never have fitted with any comfort into their tiny, boxlike office in a corner of Headquarters Building.

Milgram put two chubby hands to his taffy-colored hair, which he constantly disarranged by pushing it around in the depths of concentration. Usually it looked like a pile of brushwood atop his bland face. Now he gave it a push and a pat, which served to flatten it somewhat but failed to improve its order.

"Better, corporal?"

Radtke only stared solemnly.

Milgram was pleased with Corporal Radtke. Shortly after his arrival at Friars' Crossing, Milgram had happened across him one day and had demanded, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm the chaplain's assistant," Radtke had replied with some defiance.

"Ho! Ho!" Milgram's belly had rolled. "Radtke, you rascal! Does the chaplain know you were the best stool pigeon in little old Manhattan?"

"Shut up!" Radtke had chattered at him in rage. "You! I gotta right to serve my country!"

Milgram had become thoughtful.

"So you have, Radtke," he had admitted. "But I think you would make a better assistant to me than to the chaplain. How about it?"

"Well—" the little corporal had begun

doubtfully. And that had settled it.

So the "firm" of Milgram and Radtke set up an S-2 shop for the 2906th Bombardment Group, Heavy.

"Just like a branch of the old Homicide Bureau," Milgram had chuckled.

"Yeah, except that we ain't got no murders—thank God!" Radtke grinned.

That was before The Delivery Boys' crash.

FRIARS' CROSSING, home station of the 2906th Bomb Group, Heavy, was an old RAF field, now rented by the Americans. Its buildings were one-storied, cement construction, dingy and draughty inside.

Milgram waddled down the long, transverse hall of Headquarters. Doors opened on offices along either side and at the end was the office of the commanding officer. Milgram knocked once.

"Come in," answered a slow, heavy voice from the other side. "Oh—Milgram! Close the door."

Across the room, Colonel Dockerty, commanding officer of the field, sat at his "desk," a home-made unpainted folding table, Royal Air Force issue by the grace of "reciprocal aid," otherwise known as reverse lend-lease.

The colonel was a lean, hardlooking man, black hair graying and tanned face wrinkling, despite the fact that his years were even less than Milgram's. Above the left pocket of his battle jacket rode the wings of a command pilot.

"Sit down, Jack."

Milgram lowered himself gingerly upon a chair, kitchen-type, beside the CO's desk.

"Milgram, about The Delivery Boys' crash this morning, they've just found the navigator's body."

"Killed! I'm sorry to hear it, sir. The rest of the crew parachuted down safely."

"Yes, I know."

The Old Man sat back in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together thoughtfully.

"What happened?" Milgram asked. "Didn't Smiley's parachute open?" Smiley had been the navigator of The Delivery Boys.

"Lieutenant Smiley never had a chance." Col. Dockerty was grim. "His chute was empty."

"Empty, sir?" Milgram failed to grasp it for a moment.

"Yes, empty. The silk had been cut out and the cover stuffed with waste rags. The kind the ground crews use."

Jack Milgram's big, shining face took on a look of astonished horror.

"Who would do such a thing?" burst from him.

The colonel shook his head wearily.

"I don't know. That's what I want you to find out. Lieutenant Smiley was murdered, intentionally or otherwise. He wouldn't have filled his own chute with rags and then jumped with it."

CHAPTER II

The Extra Parachute

BACK in his office, Milgram was briefing Corporal Radtke on the empty parachute that had been the cause of Lieutenant Smiley's death. Puffing, he handed a list of names across the desk to the corporal.

"There's the crew of The Delivery Boys. Nine of 'em. Lieutenant Smiley was the tenth."

Radtke ran a ferretlike eye down the list.

Pilot—Major "Spike" Harrison

Co-pilot—Sam Weatherly

Bombardier—1st Lieut. George Ederle

Radio Operator—Staff Sergeant Mike Murphy

Crew Chief—Master Sergeant H. H. Michaelson

Assistant Crew Chief—Technical Sergeant Henry Deiklemann

Waist Gunner—Sergeant John R. Blower

Waist Gunner—Sergeant A. M. Surdez

Tail Gunner—Sergeant Guiseppe Almonti

"The suspects, huh?" Radtke knitted his beetling black eyebrows.

"Could be," Milgram replied soberly, "but I hate to think so. A bunch of guys that practically lived together in the same ship, taking it over Germany nearly every day through flak and—" He shook his head and his dewlaps quivered.

"They ain't the only guys that could have fixed this navigator's wagon," reminded Radtke. "A lot of GIs fool with parachutes on this field."

"Whoever did it ought to be lined up against a wall and shot!" Milgram said grimly. "Now listen, Sim. All those fellows are coming in this afternoon at three o'clock. It's nearly that now. Major Harrison, the pilot, will be the first. The others will show up fifteen minutes apart. While I'm talking to them, I want you to pay attention. But not so's they'll catch on."

"On, sure," Corporal Simeon Radtke interrupted. "I'm busy doin' somethin' else."

Promptly at three o'clock Major Spike Harrison slipped through the door, taking off his limp cap and revealing a crop of stiff, fiery red hair. The pilot was a medium-size man about 25 years old. What there was of him was mostly bones. Faded freckles sprinkled his skin.

His green eyes were alert, his wide mouth was sober.

Milgram indicated the chair which occupied the middle of the floor between his desk

and Radtke's. With the major seated in it, facing the S-2 officer, the small room was actually crowded.

"I'm investigating the crash of your plane this morning," said Milgram, "and the death of Lieutenant Smiley," he added, watching Harrison's face.

The major nodded, turning his cap in his hands.

"Tell me just what happened," Milgram asked.

Spike Harrison swallowed visibly, obviously collecting his thoughts.

"We took off at ought six four six hours. Everything seemed okay. I had the controls and was climbing for altitude. We had about seven thousand feet and were about fifteen miles from the field when my copilot—that's Sam Weatherly—drew my attention to the Number Four engine. It was on fire. A moment later, it conked out.

"I was compensating for it when Number three weakened and died, too. I got permission to come in and was on my way when the controls began going haywire. I figured we were in for a dive so I ordered the crew to abandon ship. The plane was starting to spiral when I got out myself. And I had a helluva time getting out, I don't mind saying!"

The major grinned a little, looking at Milgram. Spike Harrison had a good, wholesome face.

"Did you see Lieutenant Smiley leave the plane?"

"I'm afraid I wasn't paying much attention to anything but the ship," replied Spike. "Smiley was in the nose. He would have come forward and gone through the escape hatch under my feet."

"Do you know why Smiley was killed?"

Harrison threw a puzzled look at Milgram.

"Chute didn't open, I heard."

Milgram was silent for a moment, gazing at the untidy papers on his desk. Col. Dockerty had told him to try to keep secret the fact that Smiley's parachute had been robbed of its silk.

"What was the relationship between Lieutenant Smiley and the crew, major?"

A trapped expression flitted across Harrison's face so quickly that Milgram wondered if he had read it aright.

"Relationship? Why, friendly, of course. All of my crew get along. Oh, they have their differences now and then, but what air crew doesn't?"

"Did Smiley have any enemies that you know of?"

"No. Smiley was a good Joe. The boys liked him and I never heard of him getting into trouble with anyone."

THE copilot, Captain Sam Weatherly, was a tall, slender blond lad with big brown eyes that carried a remote expression.

He corroborated the pilot's story of events before the crash, added nothing more of apparent value except when asked the question as to possible enemies of Lieutenant Smiley.

"Don't know if he had any or not." Weatherly spoke with a drawling voice. "I know I didn't care for him, but I'd hardly call myself an enemy of Ed's."

After the Captain's departure, Milgram looked at his corporal. Radtke shook his head.

"Don't like him, chief. Can't put the finger on it, but there's somethin' phoney somewhere."

First Lieutenant George Ederle, bombardier of the ill-fated Delivery Boys, bounced into the office with vitality and curiosity. He was little and lean. His hair was mouse-colored.

"Sorry I'm late, Jack, old boy." Milgram's watch said 3:40. "On the way over, I ran into Grace Matheson, that luscious Red Cross gal that came in this week. Is she smooth? Met her yet?"

Milgram ignored the question. He had five minutes for Ederle and he didn't want to go off schedule. The pilot and copilot had given him enough information on what had happened on the plane.

To save time, he made a direct approach to the bombardier.

"How well did you know Ed Smiley, George?"

Ederle frowned and then grinned slightly. "Well enough. He married my girl."

Milgram leaned forward, his blue-green eyes glinting.

"Hurt much?"

Ederle shrugged.

"She was a nice girl. That was when Ed and I were flying cadets at San Antone, about two years ago. I got washed out and they made a bombardier out of me. He got washed out, too, later. They made him a navigator."

"Have you and Ed always served together?"

"No. I was washed out before he was." Lieut. Ederle looked away. "That's how I lost out on Ella, I guess. Funny, I introduced Ed to her. After I moved on to navigator's school, Ed said he'd look after Ella for me."

"He did," Ederle added cynically. "They were married before Ed washed out."

"She's free now," Milgram said gently, his guileless eyes steady on Ederle's face.

"You could—ah—"

Ederle finished for him.

"Marry her now? It hadn't occurred to me, Jack. After all, well, the accident happened only this morning." He took a deep breath. "Maybe I would, at that." His face turned grim. "Ed wasn't exactly on the level with Ella."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, you know. Other women. Plenty. It sure surprised me when I joined the outfit from school and found Ed was our navigator. You know," he looked up at Milgram, "I jumped with Ed's parachute this morning."

"What?" Milgram's jaw and dewlaps dropped. Radtke coughed.

"Yeah. Funny, isn't it? Ed and I were in the nose. When the pilot gave the order to prepare for a crash landing, I started looking for my chute. Then I remembered I had taken it over to the parachute shop to be re-packed."

Ederle shook his head slowly.

"Boy, was I in a sweat! I didn't have a chute! Then Ed says, 'Here, take mine.'"

"What're you going to do?" I asked him.

"There's an extra one in the bomb bay. I saw it when we came through," he says.

"By that time, I knew we were going to have to hit the silk so I didn't argue. The last I saw Ed he was crawling out of the nose to get to the bomb bay."

Ederle was silent for a moment.

"I heard the chute didn't open," he said finally. He sighed and then looked baffled. "You know," he half whispered, "it could have been me instead of Ed."

CHAPTER III

The Chief Had a Girl



OUR o'clock—the bombardier had taken up the next man's fifteen minutes.

Milgram stared down at his chubby fingers drubbing the papers littered on his desk.

"Major Harrison—pilot—no motive," Radtke was checking them off.

"Captain Weatherly—copilot—no motive, but I think there's somethin' about that guy that oughta be looked into.

"Lieutenant Ederle—bombardier—he's got a motive all right. The murdered guy married his girl friend—and he still loves her. He thinks the guy gave her a raw deal, too."

Milgram spread his hands.

"But Smiley gave Ederle his parachute," he insisted. "That sounds like an unfortunate chain of circumstances and an accident—not murder."

"Yeah. But who cut the silk out of the empty parachute? Who left it in the bomb bay where anyone could see it? Anyways we got some more guys to talk to, ain't we?"

"The rest of The Delivery Boys' crew, Slim, the radio operator is waiting outside. Ask him to come in."

The radio operator, Staff Sergeant Michael Murphy, was a short, stocky, black-haired Irishman, close to the age limit of 38 years. He was wary and obviously intended to give up no more information in the investigation than he had to.

No, he hadn't seen the extra parachute in the bomb bay and didn't know how it might have come there. No, he knew nothing about Lieutenant Smiley personally. Officers were out of his line. He did what he was told and that was the end of it as far as he was concerned.

How did the enlisted crew get along with Lieutenant Smiley? Murphy shrugged his thick, sloping shoulders. All right, he guessed, same as men get along with any officer.

"Bet he's an East Side boy," Radtke said in admiration after the staff sergeant's departure. "He knows how to keep his mouth shut."

The Delivery Boys' crew chief next took the chair between the two desks.

Master Sergeant H. H. Michaelson was a big, brawny man in coveralls. His coarse, straight black hair, high and prominent cheek bones, recessed black eyes and dark skin suggested Indian blood.

"Sergeant," Milgram said, "you're closer to the EM's than anyone else in the crew. How did you feel about Lieutenant Smiley?"

"He was okay, Lieutenant."

Milgram was quick to catch the emphasis on the "he."

"The way you say that, sergeant, makes me wonder if everything was right with the crew of The Delivery Boys?"

Michaelson shot a direct, truculent look at the Group S-2.

"The pilot is responsible for the morale of his ship. Talk to Harrison."

Milgram studied the soldier in front of him.

"You're a college man, aren't you, sergeant?"

"I am," shortly.

"How come you didn't try for a commission?"

"I did."

"Officers' Candidate School?"

"No. I was a flying cadet. Washed out."

"How is it they didn't turn you into a bombardier or a navigator?"

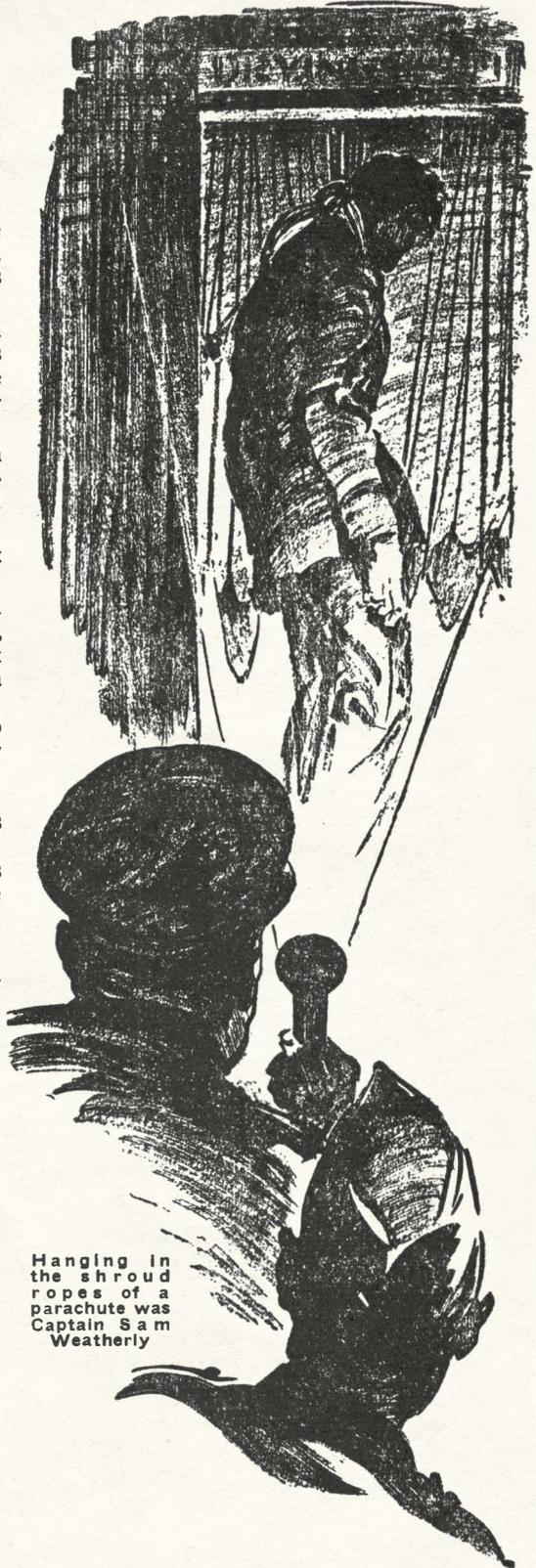
"I thought I'd like it better in the ranks."

Michaelson gave Milgram a square, defiant look. "I had enough of officers at San Antonio. In fact, I had enough of the Army."

AFTER the crew chief had left the room, Radtke grinned at Milgram.

"Nice guy, in an unpleasant sort of way. He's carrying a grudge, a big one."

Milgram pushed his thick fingers through his taffy-colored hair.



Hanging in the shroud ropes of a parachute was Captain Sam Weatherly

"Something's bothering him all right. Whom do you think he's mad at?"

"I'd say he don't like nobody—and maybe he likes Major Harrison least of all."

"He's a big bruiser," frowned Milgram. "He looks capable of a lot of hating—and doing something about it."

The next crew member to come into the room was the assistant crew chief, who also manned the top turret gun in time of need. Technical Sergeant Henry Deiklemann, being fair, blue-eyed, blond and square-headed, looked his Teutonic descent. He was affable and willing.

"Yes, sir," he began volubly, "Sergeant Michaelson is a pretty tough man to get along with. He's very short with the men." Technical Sergeant Deiklemann smiled nervously. "They're afraid of him."

"How did he and Lieutenant Smiley get along?"

"The chief was surly to all the officers. I don't know why they took it, except that Mike—we all call him Mike—was a real crew chief. He knew everything about the engines inside and out."

"What was the trouble?" asked Milgram. "You had two engines fail today. Wasn't Michaelson on the job?"

Sergeant Deiklemann shook his head emphatically.

"I don't know what happened today, sir. I tested the engines preflight myself this morning. They turned over okay then."

"How do Major Harrison and Sergeant Michaelson get along, Sergeant?"

"Oh, the major goes out of his way to be nice to him. But Michaelson always acts like he's got less use for the major even than he's got for a Jerry."

"Interestin'!" exclaimed Radtke, his ferret eyes gleaming. Milgram and he were alone again. "Maybe somebody fixed the engines and tried to kill the whole crew!"

"That wouldn't be the crew chief, as rough as he sounds," Milgram returned. "He wouldn't sabotage his own plane and then go up in it—no more than Lieutenant Smiley would cut the silk out of his own parachute and then jump with it."

"Yeah, but Smiley didn't jump with his own chute, remember? He gave his chute to Lieutenant Ederle."

Radtke, nothing in this makes sense! The guy who was killed saves the life of the guy who had a good reason to kill him. The crew chief hates the pilot and the pilot loves the crew chief. The Delivery Boys completes I don't know how many successful missions without mechanical failure and today not one engine conks out, but two!"

Radtke grinned.

"You make me homesick, chief, it's so much like old times! You remember those murders in the midtown hotels. You was stuck then an' if it hadn't been for me—"

"Go get the next man in here," Milgram interrupted.

SERGEANT John R. Blower entered and quietly seated himself. Under thirty, he had a rotund stomach and a balding head, gave the impression that here in coveralls was a minor clerk of a large corporation or an office manager of a small, undernourished business.

He agreed that the crew chief, Sergeant Michaelson, was difficult to get along with. Yes, he had sensed that the crew chief maybe even hated the pilot. Sergeant Blower had liked Lieutenant Smiley and thought everybody else liked him, too.

No, he had not seen the extra parachute in the bomb bay.

"Zero on that one," Milgram sighed, after Blower had taken a quiet and respectful departure.

"He's the usual bystander," said Radtke, "who sees nothin', hears nothin' an' knows nothin', 'cept what everybody else sees, hears an' knows."

"Let's talk to the other waist gunner."

The crewman was in clean Class As. The other enlisted men had been in their working coveralls. It was obvious that this man had taken pains in dressing up to come to Headquarters. "Sergeant A. M. Surdez," said the crew list.

Radtke put him down as a Latin from Manhattan. His coal black hair, worn in pompadour style, was long and shiny with oil.

He was fidgety. His eyes snapped. Questions excited him.

"How bad today has been, Lieutenant! The Delivery Boys smashed into junk! Lieutenant Smiley dead! I'm sorry to see it."

"We're all sorry, Sergeant," Milgram agreed. "Did you notice anything unusual in the behavior of anyone in the plane this morning?"

"Unusual? No. Everything was the same as usual—except when the engines went out."

"Did you see Lieutenant Smiley, or Lieutenant Ederle, the bombardier, after the take-off?"

"No, sir. My station is in the waist with Sergeant Blower. When we boarded the airplane, I saw Lieutenant Smiley and Lieutenant Ederle come through the waist and go forward. I guess they were going to their stations. They seemed okay then."

"Did everybody seem to like Lieutenant Smiley?"

"Oh, yes. He was a good fellow. The girls, they liked him, too," Surdez grinned a little, knowingly.

"Maybe somebody didn't like that. And they cut the silk out of his parachute."

Milgram continued to look bland and easy-going.

CHAPTER IV

Silk for the Ladies

But Radtke was showing excitement in his eyes and thin face.

"Did somebody cut the silk out of his parachute, Sergeant?"

Surdez looked puzzled for an instant.

"That's what the story is, sir. It's all over the field. I heard it just before I came over here."

WHEN the door closed behind Sergeant Surdez, Radtke cried out exultingly.

"That was a slip! How did he know the silk was cut out of Smiley's chute? That's supposed to be a secret, ain't it?"

"Don't go building any hopes on that," Milgram replied dryly. "Smiley was found by a GI searching party and I've never yet known a bunch of GIs to keep a secret for long. Let's have the next man."

"I was tail gunner of The Delivery Boys," Sergeant Guiseppe Almonti began, grinning amiably. "I was lucky to get out."

Sergeant Almonti was very young—not more than 19 years old, Milgram judged. He was good looking and pleasant. Curly dark hair set above a smooth, friendly face, in which shining white teeth often were revealed by a wide smile."

"Do I know how Lieutenant Smiley got killed?" he echoed the question. "Sure. Some dirty rat cut the silk out of his parachute."

Milgram glanced at Radtke, who was scowling.

"How did you know the silk was cut out of his parachute, Sergeant?"

"Everybody knows it, I guess. I heard it over the Red Cross hut."

"Got any idea as to who might have done it?"

Sergeant Almonti shook his head reluctantly.

"Did Lieutenant Smiley have any enemies?" Milgram's questions bored in smoothly and steadily. "Come on, Sergeant, tell me! I can see you've got something on your mind."

Reluctantly the young tail gunner finally spoke.

"I think the crew chief—Sergeant Michaelson—had it in for him, sir. The chief had a girl—a limey, sir—over to Friars' Crossing. We all knew he was pretty fond of her. Then one night they happened to run into Lieutenant Smiley in a pub there and Michaelson introduces him to his girl."

Almonti shrugged.

"I guess she liked the lieutenant better, sir. Smiley took up with her and she gave the chief the brush-off."

"Sergeant Michaelson took it hard?"

"I guess he must of, Lieutenant." Almonti grinned a little. "He was mighty rough on the boys for a while. But he wouldn't cut the silk out of a man's chute, sir! Not over one of these limey women."



JACK MILGRAM was in the CO's office early the next morning to report his findings.

"It's a puzzling case, sir!" he said. "Maybe it's murder and maybe it isn't! As I told you, Ederle, the bombardier, and Michaelson, the crew chief, are the only ones in the crew with any possible motives. The motives

of both have to do with women—which is not so unusual.

"But Smiley gave Ederle his parachute!" Milgram pushed fat fingers through his hair. "And nobody knows anything about the extra chute Smiley told Ederle he saw in the bomb bay."

Colonel Dockerty looked thoughtful.

"Could have been an accident, Jack," he admitted. "I've heard of soldiers robbing parachutes of their silk before. It's good trading material over here with the girls.

"What woman wouldn't sell her soul for a bit of real silk to make a dress or a blouse or—ahem—you-know-whats."

The Old Man shook his head. "But don't those soldiers realize they might be condemning a man to death when they rob silk from a parachute!" Milgram exclaimed indignantly.

"I guess there are a few people who just don't care, Jack. Putting a man in the army, even in time of war, doesn't necessarily change his character, you know.

"As a matter of fact, there have been very few cases of vandalism and this is the first time I've ever heard of a fatality resulting from it. Usually the vandal steals cover and all."

"In cases where the silk is removed and the cover built with rags, to look untouched, the deception is usually discovered during chute inspection. Air crew members have their own chutes, too, remember. And it's generally pretty difficult for anyone to get to them."

Colonel Dockerty shook his head.

"Jack, I think that empty parachute was placed in The Delivery Boys intentionally. I know it doesn't make sense, with the man who was killed by it giving his own chute to another man. But maybe Ederle was the one for whom that empty parachute was intended!"

Milgram laid a knife on Dockerty's table. It was an ordinary pocket knife—GI issue—to be found in the coverall pocket of practically every man on a flying field.

"Here's the knife that cut the silk out of

that parachute," he said. "I'll wager my next box from home on it."

COLONEL DOCKERTY stared at it.

"Where did you find it?"

"In a pocket of a pair of coveralls belonging to Captain Weatherly, copilot of The Delivery Boys."

"Weatherly!" the commanding officer exclaimed. "Are you sure, Milgram?"

"I know they were his coveralls. They have his name marked on 'em. If you look at it closely, sir, you can see some silk threads caught between the blades.

"I compared them with the ends of the strands left in the parachute cover Smiley wore. To me, they match. But I'm sending the knife and some strands from the chute cover to London to make sure."

Colonel Dockerty's gaze was troubled.

"Have you talked with Sam Weatherly?" he asked.

"No, sir. I'd rather not, for the time being. If he had anything to do with that parachute, I think it would be better if he didn't know for a while about my finding this knife."

The CO nodded.

"How did you happen to find it?" he asked.

"Plain old snooping around, Colonel. Used to be my steady racket before I came into the army. It isn't a very hard thing to do here, you know. We all live in as much privacy as a bunch of ants in an ant hill."

"Sam Weatherly!" the Old Man said. "It doesn't seem possible! What're you going to do now, lieutenant?"

"With your permission, sir, I'm going to spend a little time in town looking the gals over. I want to see if maybe there isn't one who's got herself a new dress or blouse lately. Something made out of silk, parachute silk."

"Maybe if there is one," the CO smiled, "she used the silk to make what-you-call-'ems. How will you find that out?"

THERE were, in the village of Friars' Crossing, three or four public houses, of which the Dog and Partridge was the most patronized by the Americans. Compared with American bars and cocktail lounges, the Dog and Partridge was a shabby spot. Like all pubs in the ancient English towns, it had age.

It had probably served men who had worn blue jackets and trembled to the flashes of the naval guns of John Paul Jones, served other men who had donned red coats to fight Andy Jackson at New Orleans.

Jack Milgram leaned back on an elbow against the dull and scarred bar, amiably watching the best in night life Friars' Crossing could show. Two young flyers were shooting the breeze at the middle of the bar, and at the opposite end, a pair of glum, elderly Englishmen were nursing their mild-

and-bitters. All in all, it was quiet.

"Scotch and soda, please," said Milgram to the hatchet-faced barmaid.

She looked at him reproachfully.

"Why you know, sir," she told him in Cockney accents, "the Scotch is always finished by this time o' night. Only one bottle a night we puts out."

Milgram glanced at his wrist watch.

"Nine o'clock! It is late," he agreed. The closing hour of the pub, he knew, was ten o'clock. "What is it then?" he said resignedly. "Mild and bitters?"

"That's all we have, sir."

Working a great brass pump handle behind the bar, the woman drew the beer. Milgram's nose, fleshy and big to suit his face, delicately wrinkled in distaste. Not in a thousand years could he make himself like English beer. It was flat, muddy and always warm.

Along the wall opposite the bar was a row of booths. Apparently the villagers and the Americans had arrived at a silent understanding regarding them, for the booths were always filled with Americans while the villagers sat at the battered tables in the area between the bar and the booths.

Whatever girls were in the room were in the company of Americans. Generally these girls looked at their countrymen and women as if they weren't there. But sometimes looks met and held, and into the girls' eyes would come the hardness of defiance, which the older villagers, male and female, ignored and went on calmly smoking and handling their beer.

The street door opened and a pretty girl entered, followed immediately by an American officer. When he saw who the officer was, Milgram felt his blood begin to tingle.

CHAPTER V

Next to the Skin



HE LET them get settled in a booth and place their order. Then, carrying his glass of beer, he crossed to their booth.

"Hi, Sam!" he greeted. Captain Sam Weatherly, copilot of the late B-17, The Delivery Boys, got to his feet hastily. He was embarrassed.

"Jack!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't know you were a pub crawler. I thought you were a permanent member of the poker club back at camp."

Milgram set down his glass on the table and his cap on the bench. Weatherly and the girl occupied the other side of the booth.

"Oh, I get out once in a while," the lieutenant said easily. "When I need a change of luck at the cards," he laughed. He was staring at the girl who not only was bearing up under it but was meeting his gaze.

Weatherly's big brown eyes looked dubiously from one to the other.

"Jack," he said, "I want you to meet Miss Compton. Beryl, this is Lieutenant Milgram."

Milgram grinned his acknowledgment of the introduction and at once sat down. Weatherly had to follow suit. It was plain he had not intended to ask Milgram to join the party.

Beryl Compton impressed Milgram. English country girls generally ran to buxomness. But here was a girl who would have drawn glances of admiration not only in the lobbies of London's fashionable West End hotels, but New York itself.

She had slipped out of her white coat and, even though she was seated, it was obvious that her figure was close to something dreamed up by Varga. Her plain black dress smoothly and faithfully followed every line and curve.

Her hair was nearly as black as her dress. It fell, smooth and shining to her shoulders, where it turned up in a foam of curls. Her eyes were a deep, quizzical blue, in a heart-shaped face, whose delicately tinted clear skin lived up completely to the flawless complexions advertised the world over as the natural birthright of English women.

A barmaid brought two mild-and-bitters. "Have one, Jack?" Weatherly asked.

Milgram lifted his glass to show that it was hardly touched.

"Cheers!" said Beryl Compton, raising her glass and looking at Milgram.

"Three cheers!" returned Milgram agreeably.

Suddenly his glass slipped from his fingers, landed on the table and started pouring its contents across the top into Miss Compton's lap. Weatherly jumped to his feet with a smothered exclamation of consternation. Beryl Compton tried to wriggle out of the path of the cascading stream.

The table was movable and instantly Milgram pushed it away from her, blocking the booth's entrance. Uttering apologies, his handkerchief in his hand, he hit the floor on his knees with surprising agility for his bulk. He began brushing Beryl's beer-moistened lap with the handkerchief.

No one later could exactly recount what happened then. There was a smack of flesh meeting flesh with considerable force. Beryl stood up abruptly, her face reddening and her eyes glinting angrily at Milgram, who was lumbering to his feet.

"Take me out o' here!" Beryl shouted at the astonished Captain Weatherly. "I never was so insulted in all my life!"

The copilot looked bewilderedly from her to Milgram. Jack put up a pudgy hand which seemed to say that all this was much ado about nothing.

Beryl Compton, lugging her coat after her, pushed past the captain and headed for the door. Giving up the mystery as too much for him, Weatherly followed her.

The next morning, Milgram reported on the incident to Colonel Dockerty.

"Good heavens, man!" the CO exclaimed, staring at the black and blue hammock beneath Milgram's left eye. "No wonder she socked you!"

In spite of himself, he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Boy," he shook his head and said fervently, "you sure had your nerve with you! Tell me," he lifted his eyebrows archly, "were they silk?"

Milgram blushed. His face gleamed like a sunrise.

"For my money, they were, sir."

"Parachute silk?"

Milgram looked reproachfully at his commanding officer.

"How could I tell that, sir? After all, my experience in such things is—ah—rather limited. But I had a hunch last night and I couldn't help playing it."

"Hm-m-!" said the colonel. "An irresistible impulse, huh? You say she is beautiful?"

[Turn page]

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"A knockout! I can't say that I blame Crew Chief Michaelson for feeling sore when Lieutenant Smiley lifted that babe off him."

"Is she the girl? How do you know that?"

"Capt. Weatherly came to my quarters last night after he saw her home. He wanted to know what I was trying to do in the pub."

"Did you tell him?"

"Sure. I told him it was an accident, that I was only trying to mop up the beer I so clumsily spilled on her."

COLONEL DOCKERTY sighed.

"It'll take England a hundred years to get over the American 'invasion!'" he said. "Especially the English women."

"What is Weatherly's relationship with that woman?" the colonel went on to ask.

"None—he says."

"Then what was he doing out with her?"

Colonel Dockerty puzzled.

"Weatherly says he called on the girl merely to offer his condolences on the death of Smiley and to see if there was anything he could do for her."

The CO nodded.

"According to Weatherly," Milgram went on, "Lieutenant Smiley was pretty fond of the girl."

"I didn't realize Lieutenant Smiley was such a lady's man!" mused the colonel.

"He took the bombardier's girl away from him at San Antone," reminded Milgram.

"If Captain Weatherly went to console Miss Compton, he picked an odd place to do it—the Dog and Partridge."

"He says that was her idea, sir. He called at her home and she suggested that they take a walk over to the Dog and Partridge."

"Believe it?"

Milgram shrugged.

"Did Captain Weatherly have anything else to say?"

"No—except how much he'd like to go back to America."

"Who wouldn't?" the CO snorted.

Milgram handed over a 66-2 and a Form 20. The one was the personnel record of an officer, the other a similar record for an enlisted man. Colonel Dockerty looked at them on his table.

"I examined the personnel records of the crew of The Delivery Boys. Nothing of special interest in any except those two."

"Major Harrison and Sergeant Michaelson."

"Yes, the pilot and the crew chief of The Delivery Boys. Notice any coincidences in their histories, colonel?"

"I see they both come from the same town."

"That's right, sir. Wouldn't think much

of it if the town happened to be New York, Chicago or some other big city. But Pittsfield, Iowa is a whistle stop. Kind of unusual, to my way of thinking, to get two guys from the same small burg in the same outfit.

"Another thing," Milgram went on. "Take a look at their full names. 'James Charles Harrison' and 'Herbert Harrison Michaelson'."

"Do you think they're related?"

Milgram pushed a hand through his hair.

"Michaelson doesn't act much like it. From what I hear, he hates Spike's—I mean Major Harrison, sir—insides."

"And how does Spike feel toward Michaelson?"

"Goes out of his way to be nice to him. Thinks he's the greatest crew chief in the Air Corps."

"You got me, Jack," Colonel Dockerty said, shaking his head. "All this is too deep for me. I'm just a plain ol' flyer tryin' to fight this war. What is your next move?"

Milgram tenderly felt his black eye.

"I'm going over to the village this afternoon—to apologize to Miss Compton, sir."

The colonel smiled.

"Better be careful," he warned.

"I gotta know if they're made out of parachute silk," said Lieutenant Milgram doggedly, "—or just plain silk."

CHAPTER VI

The Last Train from London



AMONG his varied duties as assistant to the Group S-2, Corporal Radtke was driver of the perpetually mud covered jeep assigned to the Intelligence Officer. Now, with Milgram's bulk jouncing on the seat beside him, Radtke was piloting the vehicle along the winding road of Friars' Crossing's

bustling main street.

The day was one of those gorgeous ones that come two or three times in an English spring. The sunshine was golden, the air balmy, the sky blue, with high small clouds. The inhabitants of Friars' Crossing were taking advantage of it. The streets were alive with people.

Milgram stole another sideways glance at Radtke. Something was bothering the corporal. Finally the little man yielded it up.

"The knife you gave me to send to London, didn't go," he muttere, staring straight ahead and clenching the wheel.

"Why didn't it?"

"Because somebody lifted it, that's why."

"You mean it was stolen?" Milgram twisted his head to scrutinize his corporal.

"Sure it was stolen. I had it on my desk in the office an' I went across the hall t' borrow an envelope to send it away in an' when I got back it was gone."

Milgram pursed his lips and looked serious.

"Who was around?"

"Nobody—in the office," Radtke answered. "There was some GIs in the hall. No officers."

"Any of the men we had in for questioning yesterday?"

"Nope." Radtke shook his head. "I don't think so. But I didn't pay too much attention to 'em," he confessed. "My mind was on gettin' that envelope."

"How many times have I told you to keep a supply of stationery and things in the office!" Milgram began angrily. Radtke set his jaw, expecting further censure. When it did not come, he stole a look at his boss.

Milgram was staring at an approaching trio on the sidewalk. The girl, in the center, a youngster, was flanked on either side by an attentive soldier. Radtke saw nothing unusual about them, except perhaps that the girl was prettier than most.

"Silk!" Milgram exclaimed. "No doubt about it! And I'll bet a box from home it's parachute silk."

"You recognize the guys, chief?" Radtke chimed in excitedly. "Two of our crew from The Delivery Boys—Sergeant Surdez, one of the waist gunners, and Sergeant Almonti, the tail gunner. I had both those 'Latins from Manhattan' pegged for snakes."

"Turn around, Radtke. Go back to the turn and come up the street again. I want to talk to that girl."

AGAIN the trio were approaching the jeep. Radtke eased along the high curb and stopped.

"Oh, Miss Compton!" Milgram called out when the three came abreast of the jeep. "Could I speak to you a moment, please?"

At Milgram's voice, Sergeants Surdez and Almonti stopped and waited. The girl, standing with them, curiously eyed the bulky lieutenant's ungraceful dismounting from the jeep.

"You are Miss Compton, aren't you?" Milgram asked as he joined them. The two sergeants saluted. The girl was smiling but a slight frown drew her shapely eyebrows.

"Yes. I'm Doreen Compton."

"I met your sister last night. I—"

Doreen Compton giggled, staring at Milgram's shiner.

"You were the one!" Her giggling burst into frank laughter.

Milgram flushed.

Doreen Compton, like her elder sister, was something for a Yank not to write home about. She was a younger, fresher edition

of Beryl. Doreen had the same black hair and glossy ringlets. Her eyes were the same challenging blue only more impudent, if possible, than her sister's.

Doreen's tweed skirt was short, showing long slim legs. Her tweed jacket was open, revealing a low cut white blouse of silk, which covered but outlined intriguingly her young bust.

"I—ah—" began Milgram, appreciating her figure, "I was heading for your house. I wonder if you could go along with me? I want to see your sister about last night."

"Beryl isn't to home," Doreen Compton grinned. "She went over to London today."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear it! Will she be gone long?"

"She'll be along tonight. It's the last train from London she usually catches. I doubt she'll be happy to see you," added Doreen, amused. "She says you insulted her last night in the Dog and Partridge."

Milgram cleared his throat several times and looked severely at Sergeants Surdez and Almonti. Then he stepped forward and boldly took Doreen's arm.

"What about my running you home?" he smiled down at her. "You don't mind sparing her, do you, fellows?" he said to the sergeants.

Neither soldier looked too pleased. Enjoying herself, the girl was watching them.

"Oh, we only met down the road away." She took the matter into her own hands. "I guess I know you as well as them," she smiled up at Milgram. "Maybe better," she added archly, "through my sister. Come on! I've never had a ride in a jeep."

SHE sat in the back seat, hugging her long legs.

"I'm going to get me an American officer," she said as Radtke drove off. "That's why I left those sergeants. Officers won't go with you if they see you with soldiers."

"Your sister used to know an enlisted man pretty well," Milgram said. "Sergeant Michaelson. Did you know him?"

"Sure. Big fellow, but too grim for my taste—and Beryl's, too. He was that struck on her, though! Wanted to marry her and take her to the States after the war."

"That's what I want to do," Doreen stated frankly, "marry a rich American officer and go to the States after the war."

Milgram snorted.

"Doesn't every English girl?"

"A lot of 'em do. The old folks are in a stew about it."

She smiled at Milgram coyly.

"I'll get my man. I'm pretty, aren't I, Yank?"

Milgram shuddered.

"How come your sister didn't take up Sergeant Michaelson's offer, if she's so anxious to get to the States?"

"Because she got a better offer, of course. He was handsome and nice and I'll bet he was awful rich! He was killed yesterday in that plane crash you spoke of. His name was Lieutenant Smiley. Did you know him?"

This piece of information sat upon Milgram unpleasantly. The thought of Smiley, already married to one woman, whom he had stolen from another man, promising marriage to a second woman he had also stolen, sickened him.

Milgram's gaze settled upon the girl's blouse.

"Pretty blouse you're wearing."

"Do you like it?" Pleased, she sat up to show it off, and lifted her chest to give piquancy to the sight. "I made it myself."

"It's silk, isn't it? It looks like parachute silk."

"That's what it is, silly! Only Americans can afford to put such good material in parachutes."

"Where did you get any parachute silk?"

CHAPTER VII

The Corpse Wore Black



BERYL found it."

"Found it!" Milgram exclaimed.

"The day before Lieutenant Smiley was killed, she was walking in the woods near the flying field. She saw a man—"

"Wait a minute," Milgram interrupted. "What was she doing in the woods near the flying field?"

"Why, silly, she'd gone over to meet Ed Smiley! There's a path through those woods that's the quickest way to town from the flying field. Didn't you know?"

"I'm learning things," said Milgram non-committally. "Did your sister usually meet Lieutenant Smiley in those woods?"

"Oh, no. But sometimes when he was coming back from a mission in the afternoon Beryl would walk over towards the field.

"It was on the way back," Doreen continued, "when she saw the man. He was off the path in some trees. It seems he was trying to burn something. When he heard Beryl coming, why he just ran away. He was one of your men.

"Beryl thought she'd have a look at whatever was burning." Doreen fingered her blouse. "This was it—parachute silk."

"Does your sister know who the man was who was burning the silk?"

"Beryl didn't say."

"What time does the last train from London get here?"

Doreen pouted

"Why worry about that? Beryl's already got a new man, a captain—and a pilot, too! She was out with him last night."

"Yes, I know. Captain Weatherly." Milgram touched his black eye and grinned. "I met your sister with him last night, remember?"

"I don't see why she gets all the men! Just because she's old."

Milgram patted her knee.

"Before this war is over, you'll have a hundred proposals—or I don't know my countrymen."

The girl's eyes brightened.

"You think so?"

"Honey," Milgram said hastily, "I'd certainly go for you myself—if I didn't have a wife in Brooklyn." Doreen didn't see his crossed fingers.

"Let's go back," said Doreen, pulling her skirt down over her knees. It was evident that much of her interest in the ride had evaporated.

The last train from London, due in Friars' Crossing at 8:00 P.M., was hours late. Since before eight, Milgram had alternately tramped up and down the dirty wooden platform of the old railroad station or sat with Radtke on a hard bench.

Now it was past midnight and black as the inside of a coal bin. No light showed anywhere and the only evidence that here was a village was the darker masses of buildings and cottages against the night sky.

At last a piping whistle came out of the distance.

Radtke got to his feet.

"I been sittin' on that bench so long I can't stand up," he complained.

THE train now was approaching with sound. A dim yellow headlight showed through the blackness.

"Maybe the trains back home are a little late now and then, too, these days," said Milgram.

"Nah!" Radtke dismissed such heresy.

The London train rumbled to a stop. It was a dark, dreary-looking train, from which nobody apparently was getting off.

"She ain't on it," Radtke said.

Milgram padded over to the nearest conductor.

"I expected someone on this train," he said. "A pretty girl, with long, curly black hair and blue eyes."

The conductor thought a moment.

"Seems to me I did see someone like that get aboard at Waterloo Station. Think she was in the next car ahead. Hey, Jock. You got a lady passenger asleep in your car that's supposed to get off at this station?"

The second conductor came to with a jerk.

"Bless me! Didn't she get off? She and the soldier were the only ones left in the car. Both were for this same station, they was."

"Hold the train a minute," Milgram asked. "I'll look for her."

The sound of a compartment door opening at the far end of the car caught Milgram's attention. Through the gloom he faintly made out a figure in uniform, which disappeared toward the end of the car.

"There, sir," said the conductor, stopping. "She's asleep!"

Beryl Compton was leaning in the corner made by the high back of the seat and the side of the compartment.

Milgram opened the compartment door.

"Miss Compton," he called.

He reached down to take hold of her shoulder and shake her gently. She was wearing the same black dress and the white short coat she had been wearing on the preceding night.

"She is beautiful!" Milgram said to himself. He lifted his eyes self-consciously from the lovely white bosom partially showing beneath the square neckline of her dress.

He felt her weight sliding forward out of his fingers and moved fast to catch her before she toppled to the floor. He gazed at the dark red stain which ran down the back of her coat. He saw the haft of the knife in her back.

"She's dead," he said.

With amazing agility, he hurtled out of the compartment, hurried along the corridor and out on the vestibule.

"Radtke!" he called. "That soldier who just got out of the car, where'd he go?"

Radtke, who had been talking with the other conductor, looked up at him.

"Was that a soldier? He went off over there by the station," Radtke pointed.

"See if you can find him," Milgram ordered.

Colonel Dockerty sat down.

"Good God!" he said.

"We know Miss Compton was killed between Honestead and Friars' Crossing," Milgram went on. "Honestead is a twenty minute run from Friars' Crossing.

"The conductor remembers positively that Miss Compton was alive when the train pulled into Honestead. She was alone in the car at that time. A man in uniform got on at Honestead. The conductor isn't sure whether he was an officer or an enlisted man. But he recognized the uniform as ours."

"He could easily have got over to Honestead from here and caught that train back." Colonel Dockerty was thinking aloud.

"Exactly," Milgram agreed.

"You should have come back here at once and taken a check to see who was missing from quarters."

"I thought of that," Milgram replied. "I sent Corporal Radtke back with the jeep. I gave him instructions to tell the Officer of the Day to have all the officers' and men's barracks checked.

"But I knew that would take time," Milgram continued. "I'm especially interested in knowing who of The Delivery Boys' crew was not in their beds. I asked Radtke to check on that himself. He should be here with the report any minute."

Milgram walked to one of the chairs that stood against the far wall. On it was a pile of cloth. He lifted one piece and it turned out to be a woman's slip.

"I talked Mrs. Compton out of these," he said. "They are the garments made by the Compton girls out of the parachute silk Beryl found in the woods."

He gathered them up one by one, another slip, two blouses, several pairs of more intimate things.

"There's something funny about this silk," he observed.

"What?" Dockerty wanted to know.

"I don't exactly know, sir," he confessed. "But something's been done to this stuff, either by the Comptons or someone else. It's off-color."

Corporal Radtke entered the room. He looked scared of the colonel.

"What did you find, Radtke?" Milgram asked. "Any of them missing?"

"Yes, sir. Six of them. Only three were in bed."

Milgram shoved at his hair with both hands.

"Ye gods! Six! Who are they?"

"Of the officers, sir, Major Harrison, Captain Weatherly and Lieutenant Ederle."

"That," commented Milgram ironically to the CO, "is all the officers left of The Delivery Boys! The pilot, the co-pilot and the bombardier.

"What about the enlisted men?" he turned back to Radtke.

CHAPTER VIII

Hung in Silk



"HIS," said Colonel Dockerty, striding up and down his office, "is a helluva mess! The constable, police chief or whatever of Friars' Crossing, insists she was murdered by one of our men."

"He's probably right," Milgram told him.

It was after two o'clock in the morning. Dockerty had just finished a telephone conversation with the police head of Friars' Crossing.

"The knife which killed her was one of ours," said Milgram. "I think it is the same one which was used to cut the silk out of that parachute—the same one I found in the pocket of Captain Weatherly's coveralls."

"Crew Chief Michaelson, Sergeants Surdez and Almonti are missing. Sergeants Murphy, Dieklemann and Blower were in their huts asleep."

"I can tell you where one of them is," Colonel Dockerty said. "I gave Lieutenant Ederle a pass to go to London today."

"London!" exclaimed Milgram. "That's where Beryl Compton was today!"

The colonel shook his head.

"I wouldn't know. Ederle said he wanted to get permission at Headquarters to talk to Mrs. Smiley over the Trans-Atlantic telephone."

"I think I can tell you where the rest of them are," Radtke broke in.

"Shoot," ordered Milgram.

"I think they're in the parachute shop."

"Parachute shop!" burst out of the colonel and Milgram together.

THE parachute building at Friars' Crossing was a long, low hut with a square tower at one end. Open chutes, to dry in the warmth, were hung from the ceiling of this tower.

Inside the building was a lengthy room down whose middle was a long table on which parachutes were laid out for packing. Beyond were two small rooms, furnished with sewing machines and other equipment needed for repair. The last room was a large one, used for the storage of the chutes.

Colonel Dockerty, Lieutenant Milgram and Corporal Radtke approached the building, guided by the flashlight in Radtke's hand. They stepped inside and stood still. The beams of Radtke's light slashed through the darkness to show the rising columns of parachutes in the bins.

Radtke cut off the light. There was a crack of light under the closed door to the next room. Faintly they heard a murmur of voices. Colonel Dockerty hesitated a moment and in the silence they could hear the careful opening and closing of a door.

"They're leaving," Dockerty whispered. "I'm going after them. Go through this building and see what you find."

The post commander went out the storage room door.

Milgram opened the door to the next room and entered, followed by Radtke with his light. It was a repair room. Two chairs had been pulled away from sewing machines and now were facing each other.

The next room, a repair room, too, showed nothing. After it, came the packing room. They walked the length of it and opened the door to the tower room.

At first the flashlight showed nothing but the limp, ghostly shapes of parachutes hanging down from the high ceiling.

"Give me the light," Milgram said in a curious, urgent voice. Radtke surrendered the

flashlight to him wonderingly.

Milgram walked through the parachutes, pushing them aside to make way for his bulk. Then Radtke saw what had caught his chief's notice and his eyes bulged.

Hanging by the neck in the shroud ropes of a parachute, was Captain Sam Weatherly, co-pilot of The Delivery Boys.

CHAPTER IX

His Brother's Keeper



MILGRAM found the commanding officer in his office. With him were Major Spike Harrison and Sergeant H. H. Michaelson.

"It was these two we heard in the parachute shop, Milgram," said the colonel. "They're brothers."

Major Harrison spoke up. His red hair glinted in the light from the unshaded bulb in the ceiling. His green eyes were steady on Milgram.

"We're half brothers," he corrected. "I guess we should have said something about this before."

Milgram's fleshy features were expressionless but his eyes bored into the pilot's face.

"Why, major," he asked, "were you in the parachute shop tonight?"

Harrison donned dignity like a garment.

"I like to talk with Harry alone sometimes. There isn't much privacy in the barracks, or the officers' quarters either."

"Why pick out the parachute shop—at this hour of the morning?"

Up to this moment, Master Sergeant Michaelson had remained silent.

"I'm responsible, lieutenant," he now said. "Spike here, wouldn't care if the whole army knew I was his relative. But I'm more particular."

Milgram saw the major wince.

"What's wrong with the parachute shop?" the sergeant demanded. "It's warm. And as long as I've got to talk to him, I might as well be comfortable. Whose business is it anyhow?"

"Captain Weatherly is down there now, dead." Milgram studied them both. "In the tower, with the hanging parachutes. He's hanging, too, with shroud lines twisted around his neck."

"Suicide?" cried Colonel Dockerty, rising out of his chair.

Milgram shook his head.

"Murder. He put up a struggle. Corporal Radtke is down there with the body now."

"My God!" breathed Colonel Dockerty,

sitting down heavily.

"I think it's time for you half brothers," said Milgram grimly, "to start talking."

"I'll swear I didn't know anyone was in the building besides ourselves!" said Major Harrison. "Did you hear anything, Harry?"

SERGEANT MICHAELSON moistened his lips.

"No," he said, in a hoarse whisper. Major Harrison addressed himself to Colonel Dockerty and Milgram.

"Our father married twice. Harry's the older. His mother was divorced from my father. Later she died and Harry came back to live with us. Harry's always hated me. I guess because his father married my mother. I've always felt badly about it."

"Yeah," the sergeant contributed cynically, "I can't keep him away from me."

"When the war came," Harrison said, "he volunteered for flying first. We didn't hear from Harry for a long time. I had heard indirectly that he had refused to take any course that would qualify him as a rated officer—navigator or bombardier."

"I thought I might run into you," the crew chief giped. "Enlisted men don't have to associate with officers."

The major ignored the interruption.

"I was already over here in England. One day I heard about a crew chief that had just come across with a bunch of replacements. I went over to the Replacement Center and it was Harry. I had never known that Michaelson was his mother's maiden name. He had somehow convinced the army that he should be known by it. I requested him for crew chief of my plane."

The crew chief shrugged.

"An enlisted man hasn't a chance."

"What was the special purpose of your meeting tonight?" Milgram asked.

It was the crew chief who answered.

"Not only does he spoil my life but he wants to run it, too!"

"Sir," Spike Harrison appealed, "I never wanted these secret meetings, but it was the only way Harry would let me talk with him at all."

"I understand," Colonel Dockerty nodded.

"We still haven't got to the subject of this evening's meeting," Milgram invited.

"It was a girl," the sergeant said. "What else does the Army usually talk about?"

"Beryl Compton?" Milgram asked.

"Yes," the major cut in unhappily. "He wants to marry her. And you know what she is. She's an English—"

The sergeant started toward his half brother, cocking a big fist.

"I told you not to say that about her again!" he shouted.

Milgram's calm voice cut through the tension.

"Beryl Compton was murdered tonight on

the last train from London."

Sergeant Michaelson stared at Milgram with widening eyes. Major Harrison looked beaten.

A moment later, Corporal Radtke entered. "Sergeants Surdez and Almonti are in their bunks now and asleep."

ALTHOUGH it was not quite eight o'clock, Milgram found Colonel Dockerty in his office. His lean, leathery face was drawn and his eyes were red-dimmed. "Hello!" he greeted Milgram. "I thought you'd be sleeping."

"I've been up for some time," Milgram told him. "Been to Friars' Crossing already. I did a powerful lot of thinking before the dawn slipped over merry old England this morning."

Dockerty sat back.

"What do you think? All I get is a headache!"

"Maybe that's all I'll get, too," Milgram nodded, "but I've got a few ideas."

"Such as?"

"I'd rather not say 'em right now, sir—if it's all right with you. So far they're half hunch. I'd like to go to London today, sir."

"London? Did Lieutenant Ederle get back?" asked Dockerty.

"This morning."

"Did he complete his Trans-Atlantic call to Mrs. Smiley?"

"I don't know, sir. I haven't talked with him. I was in Friars' Crossing to check on Sergeant Almonti's story that he was out last night with Beryl Compton's sister. I remembered myself that Doreen wasn't home when we brought Beryl's body there from the train.

"This morning," Milgram continued, "Doreen didn't want to say where she was last night but she finally admitted she was with Almonti—which seems to put him in the clear. He and Doreen were spooning in the woods."

"Hm-m-m," mused the colonel. "Your man Radtke—didn't he say last night that he had seen in the parachute shop those crew members of The Delivery Boys who weren't in their bunks?"

"Not quite," Milgram answered. "I questioned Radtke on that. He didn't actually see them all there. He was going by the building on his way here to report the results of his check, and he noticed a chink of light at the bottom of one of the windows.

"He thought it was strange and peeked in. He saw Major Harrison and Sergeant Michaelson in the repair room. He swears when he was leaving the building he saw another form, and maybe two, slip out."

COLONEL DOCKERTY winced.

"Radtke wasn't far wrong at that. What about Sergeant Surdez?"

"I questioned him this morning, too. He had been shooting craps in another squadron. And he had been, too, because I went over to the squadron this morning. The boys there said he was in the game all right.

"Of course he might have drifted in and out of it. Nobody could say for sure. But he was there when the game broke up, which was after Captain Weatherly was murdered."

The colonel shook his head.

"My God, Jack! Is there any answer to all this?" He looked squarely at his S-2.

"I hope to have some answers when I get back from London tonight."

"What's going to help you in London?"

"I want to make a Trans-Atlantic telephone call myself. And I'm taking along the garments the Compton sisters made out of the parachute silk. I'm also taking the knife that killed Beryl Compton."

"What are you going to do with them in London?"

"A little analyzing, I hope. I don't have any equipment here. If our headquarters in London doesn't have it, I'll pay a call on Scotland Yard. I think they'll cooperate with an old member of the New York Police Department."

"Good luck," Dockerty told him fervently. "And hurry back. I'll go crazy if we don't find out soon who or what is responsible for these terrible crimes!"

CHAPTER X

To Catch a Murderer



IT WAS late when Milgram returned from London. He went directly to Colonel Dockerty's quarters. The CO evidently had been awake. He sat up in his cot as Milgram entered and turned on the light.

Colonel Dockerty saw that Milgram was tired. There were dark lines in his broad face on either

side of his nose. His black eye appeared like a black patch in the orange-like light of the room.

"Colonel," he asked, "is there a mission planned for tomorrow morning?"

"Yes," Dockerty replied, puzzled at the question, "if the weather holds good."

"Listen, sir," Milgram spoke rapidly. "Give Major Harrison a plane. I want them all to go: Lieutenant Ederle; Sergeant Murphy, the radio operator; the crew chief, Sergeant Michaelson; Sergeant Deiklemann, the assistant crew chief; Waist Gunners Blower and Surdez and Tail Gunner Sergeant Almonti. I'm going along too."

The Old Man frowned doubtfully.

"I hadn't planned on putting that crew in the air just yet," he said. "I thought I'd break the crew up."

"They must take one more trip over Germany together," Milgram insisted. "Another copilot and navigator will have to be detailed for the trip."

"Why do you want this done?" Colonel Dockerty asked.

"Because I think it's the quickest—and maybe only way we can catch the murderer."

"You have to take an airplane on a combat mission to catch a murderer!"

"I think it's the only way we can get him for sure," Milgram repeated firmly.

"Do you think it's one of The Delivery Boys' crew?"

Milgram nodded.

"Which—" began the colonel.

"I'd rather not say, now," Milgram cut in. "To be perfectly honest, colonel, I don't know. But I'll bet my next box from home that he's one of The Delivery Boys."

Dockerty was thoughtful for a moment. As commanding officer, it was his policy to let the officers in charge of divisions and activities work out solutions to their problems without interference from him. But Milgram was asking him to take a most dangerous risk. The lives of eleven men and a costly airplane were involved.

Yet it was also his duty as commanding officer of the field to get at the bottom, discover and punish perpetrators of crime in his command.

He studied Milgram. He had always liked the big, corpulent Intelligence Officer, who, for all his mild and cherubic appearance, had competence and sound thinking ability in him.

Milgram's inconsequential phrase, "bet a box from home" came back to the colonel. He knew, as did the other officers of the Group, that the fleshy S-2 lived in anticipation of the boxes from home, which always contained food, delicacies that brought joy to Milgram's heart.

"Okay," he said. "I'll issue the necessary orders."

THE dawn was much like the one on which The Delivery Boys had made its last flight five days before. There were Flying Forts already in the air. The field seemed alive with them as the great silver planes rolled out of their hard-stands and bumbled along the taxiways to the take-off position.

Milgram stood beside a B-17 with Captain Jerry Hulsinger, who had awakened before dawn to find himself detailed as co-pilot.

"This is the old Delivery Boys' crew, isn't it?" he asked.

"All of them except the navigator," Milgram replied cheerfully.

Excitement was seething inside Milgram's bulky frame. He was going on a real com-

bat mission over Germany! He had never before been able to wangle permission to go along on a combat mission.

"Man," Colonel Dockerty had told him a dozen times, "they'd have to reduce the bomb load to carry you!"

Now he was actually going! Although he was fully aware of his grim purpose aboard, he could not manage to keep down his elation.

"Brooklyn's Dodgers," Hulsinger, a stocky, blue-eyed youngster, was reading from the high up nose of the plane. "Pretty good name," he grinned. "Hope it means something if the flak is heavy today."

"You're flying the ship," Milgram said.

"That's what the Old Man told me. Major Harrison will do the co-piloting."

"That's right," Milgram agreed. "And when I yell, give me a good, steep bank to the left."

"Yeah, I gotcha—a steep bank to the left. But what the deuce for—"

"There's a reason," Milgram cut in.

Captain Hulsinger shrugged. "If that's the Old Man's orders, a steep bank to the left she'll be. But hold on," he warned, "'cause I'll make it really steep, what I mean."

The slide window in the pilot's compartment above the nose was shoved back and Major Harrison's face appeared.

"Better get aboard, you fellows!" he shouted above the noise of the warming engines.

The B-17 horde, Berlin bound, was on its way. Squadron after squadron caught the early sunlight in flashes on their graceful silver bodies. England, a neat patchwork quilt in varying shades of green, spread out far below.

For the tenth time at least, Milgram checked the men in their places aboard. He sat on a stool in the radio operator's compartment. With him in the compartment was Staff Sergeant Mike Murphy, head harness over his black hair, sitting at his little shelf table and concentrating on the radio boxes before him.

Forward, beyond the bomb bay, Major Spike Harrison and Captain Hulsinger shared the side by side seats in the pilots' compartment. Beyond them, in the nose, were Lieutenant George Ederle, the bombardier, and Lieutenant Spivak, the navigator detailed by Colonel Dockerty for the trip.

Milgram's checking now went rearward. Just outside the radio compartment, Master Sergeant H. H. Michaelson, crew chief, stood scowling at the pillar supporting the top turret machine gun.

A few feet from him, the two waist gunners, Sergeant John R. Blower and Sergeant A. M. Surdez, were beside their guns, their attention fastened to the aerial world out-

side their windows, which were on opposite sides of the plane.

Through the open door of the radio compartment, Milgram, by squinting his eyes, could make out far back in the ship, the neat shoulders of Sergeant Guiseppe Almonti as he sat behind his gun looking back at the coast of England receding in the distance.

Technical Sergeant Henry Deiklemann, the assistant crew chief, Milgram knew, was curled around the gun in the globular plexiglas turret under the airplane.

All present or accounted for were the men left of the crew of The Delivery Boys.

AN order from the pilot came over the intercommunications system. Sergeant Murphy, who had received it through his headset, donned his oxygen mask and motioned for Lieutenant Milgram to do likewise.

Brooklyn's Dodgers was going up. The mask was a novelty to Milgram. Looking at Murphy and at the three men visible beyond the door, he thought back to stories he used to read about strange men from Mars.

Far below them, France was slipping by, another patchwork quilt in greens, but the patches more ragged and less geometrical than England's.

Sergeant Murphy gesticulated downward with pointing finger. Then he swung his fists as if shadow boxing. Knowing that he meant there was fighting below, Milgram put a knee on his stool and rose up to peer out of the small window in the upper skin of the compartment.

He saw only a tiny cloud of blackish smoke billowing upward from a village so far down that it looked like a collection of toy buildings.

Next, Murphy thumbed his nose downward and Milgram took that to mean that they had crossed into Germany. Tingling sensations rippled down Milgram's arms and he could feel cold perspiration beginning to roll down from his armpits. Above and below he could see other B-17s, all steady on their course.

Suddenly Mike Murphy's face paled and tightened.

"Here they come!" he shouted. "Messerschmitts!"

At the same time, Milgram sensed more than he felt the airplane quivering under many series of tiny, rapid reverberations. Dull pounding noises added themselves to the roar of the engines. Everything seemed to take on a dreamlike quality.

Astonished, Milgram realized that the reverberations and the pounding noises were caused by the firing of their own machine guns. He saw a dark shape zoom past the little window above Murphy's head and realized long after it was gone that it was a Messerschmitt 109.

The door to the bomb bay was open, as

was the door to the pilots' compartment beyond. Looking at the projectiles, one neatly above the other in the bomb racks, Milgram felt an involuntary shudder.

What would a hit among them do to the Brooklyn's Dodgers? Beyond the bomb bay, the backs of the heads of Major Harrison and Captain Hulsinger were steady. They were attending to their business.

Milgram's face twisted among its fleshy jowls in the opposite direction. The crew chief, Michaelson, looked in a fury tending his gun. Continually swiveling and raising and lowering it, he ripped out bursts of shots at passing and repassing attackers.

Sergeant Blower was a second fury at his gun. Sergeant Surdez—Milgram's heart suddenly seemed to be trying to force its way up to his throat. Surdez was not at his gun!

Milgram rose from his stool. At that instant, the plane lurched violently, almost pitching him through the doorway and out into the waist. He caught sight of Surdez tugging desperately at the handle of the little door which would open up to let him out of the plane.

Milgram twisted his head in the direction of the pilot's compartment and tugged his oxygen mask clear of his mouth.

"Bank! Bank!" he yelled. Sergeant Murphy's frightened eyes stared at him.

Milgram had not foreseen this din of combat and he knew with sinking heart that Captain Hulsinger had not heard him. He had calculated that the murderer might try a quick dash to the hatch of the plane and parachute out of it.

If the pilot suddenly banked steeply to the left, the would-be escaper would have been thrown off balance and back from the door. Milgram then had figured that he would have him before he could recover.

Surdez was still trying to get the door open. He saw Milgram's huge form plunging toward him, half upright, half scrambling on hands and knees, as the plane rolled and turned in evasive action to avoid the German fighters.

All crew members were armed with .45 caliber pistols. Surdez now drew his from the holster at his side. Hardly more than a yard away, Milgram sat down hard and abruptly in involuntary response to a lurch of the plane. He looked steadily into the little round mouth of Surdez's .45.

Now that he had halted Milgram's advance, Surdez worked again with the door. Neither Michaelson or Blower, their whole attention riveted on darting, zooming Me-109s, were aware of what was taking place within a few feet of them.

Finally Surdez had the door free. With one knee, he kept his weight against it until he should be ready to leave. His free hand fumbled across his chest for the handle of the rip cord of his parachute.

Milgram tore off his oxygen mask.

"Don't!" he screamed. "It's empty! Nothing in it but rags—like the other one!"

For a couple of seconds, Surdez wavered. Even though he was sure Milgram was lying, the very flicker of the thought of plunging downward thousands of feet with rags twisting out of the parachute pack instead of life-saving silk, made him hesitate.

Involuntarily his eyes lowered to the humped pack against his chest to check and be sure, and before they flicked up again, Milgram's tremendous bulk was on top of him.

CHAPTER XI

Written in Silk



RIARS' Crossings' brood of B-17s had come home—all except the half dozen that had paid the price of the raid. And then there were some that had just made it, limping in, flak torn, motors coughing.

Brooklyn's Dodgers was one of these.

But the strain of the trip was not on Lieutenant John T. Milgram, sitting at one end of Colonel Dockerty's table. Milgram looked as happy as a reelected politician. If pressed, he might have been hard put to tell which he was the happier about, the solving of The Delivery Boys' murders—or finding himself safely back in England!

Corporal Radtke sat close by the other end of the table, and from time to time cast covert glances at Milgram as if he didn't quite believe all that had happened.

Colonel Dockerty was laughing.

"It must have been funny, Jack! I'd have given a month's pay to have been on that plane and seen you sitting on Surdez all the way to Berlin and back, with ack-ack and Me-109s all over the place!"

Milgram grinned, too.

"It wasn't funny at the time," he admitted. "I'd have been more scared than I was if I hadn't been so busy holding Surdez down."

"He was pretty clever," Colonel Dockerty said. "These Germans are smart."

"He got his instructions on what to do and how from the Germans all right," Milgram agreed. "But Surdez himself is French, remember. It was a good thing I had the hunch to call my old shop yesterday. That's the best police force in the world, sir," said Milgram proudly. "Little old New York's."

"I telephoned them as soon as I got permission in London. When they called me back yesterday evening, they had the dope on

everybody. I had asked them to dig up all the facts they could on the past lives of everyone of The Delivery Boys' crew.

"The service records we have in Personnel here weren't enough for me. They have on them just about what a man wants to say about his past life. Look at the case of Major Harrison and Sergeant Michaelson, who turned out to be half brothers."

Colonel Dockerty nodded.

"It was when they told me about Surdez," Milgram continued, "that I really began to get the idea that the peculiar happenings to the crew of The Delivery Boys might be tied up with espionage.

"And when I went over to Scotland Yard, after I heard from New York, and the Scotland Yard people told me that their analysis of the silk showed that Beryl Compton had been wearing around the locations of many of our flying fields sketched with some sort of invisible ink on the seat of her new silk panties, I knew for sure then what I was after. But I didn't know whom."

"Was there military information on the other garments, too?" the colonel wanted to know.

MILGRAM nodded. "Yes sir. They were covered with it. All Air Force data—types of planes, caliber and number of guns and so forth. Stuff that Surdez, or almost anybody here, for that matter, would know or could easily find out about.

"My job then was to find the spy—or traitor. Since I understood what was behind everything, I knew I'd catch him sooner or later. But I wanted to catch him sooner.

"I was afraid of what other murders he might commit, or that he might escape and get to Germany with information. But I wondered how I could find out who he was right quick.

"I suspected Surdez but I had no proof that he was the one. A charge of being a traitor is a serious thing and I knew I couldn't make it against Surdez on what the New York Police Department told me about him.

"He was born in America of French parents who returned to France with him when he was about six years old. He remained in France until after the Germans overran the country and established the Vichy Government.

"He turned up in America about a year ago with the story that he had escaped from France, got to England and persuaded that government to send him to America. He enlisted in the Air Forces and eventually arrived here.

"I remembered," Milgram said, "that all Frenchmen were not loyal to France and

that many had sold out to the Germans. I considered Surdez more French than American, and that's when I began to wonder about the espionage angle.

"But there was nothing really against Surdez. As a matter of fact," Milgram gave the CO a wise look, "there are a couple more of The Delivery Boys who have items against them in civilian life which don't appear on their army service records, and which wouldn't look too good if they did."

Dockerty nodded.

"It was on the train back," Milgram continued, "that the significance of the parachute hit me all of a sudden. What could be simpler for a spy who was a member of an air crew making missions over Germany than to collect his information on a parachute and jump with it some time over Germany?"

"If that was the plan of one of the crew members of The Delivery Boys, then I figured maybe he was getting nervous on account of being grounded without knowing when the crew would be assigned another airplane.

"I calculated to make him more nervous because, after you agreed to send The Delivery Boys' crew on the mission today, I told Corporal Radtke to circulate a rumor that there was a spy in camp and that the English were coming to get him."

Radtke nodded agreement, his ferretlike eyes on Milgram's broad face.

"And it worked," Colonel Dockerty commented.

"Well," Milgram said modestly, "I figured that if I was right in my deductions, the spy would grab the chance today to take off for Germany."

"But the death of Lieutenant Smiley?" Dockerty frowned. "I don't get the empty parachute business."

"Surdez confessed," replied Milgram. "He spilled his insides when he knew we had him. It was an accident that gave Lieutenant Smiley that empty parachute. Surdez had cut the silk out of it and tried to burn it because he thought someone was wise to what he was doing.

"And someone was, at that," Milgram added soberly. "Surdez thought Captain Weatherly was. You see, Weatherly borrowed his pocketknife one day on the line. It was just after Surdez had cut the silk out of his parachute.

"Surdez had been working late at night in the parachute shop writing his stuff into the silk. He had to work in the shop because he needed the packing table to fold and unpack the chute. A couple of times he had heard noises in the shop. It was probably Major Harrison and Sergeant Michaelson he heard

in the repair room during one of their secret conferences.

"But when Captain Weatherly borrowed the knife, Surdez became afraid that maybe it was the captain he had heard in the shop and that Weatherly was collecting the knife for evidence.

"Surdez was sure of it when he discovered the captain that night in the tower drying room. Surdez had been marking the parachute he wore today. There was a struggle, during which he managed to strangle Weatherly."

LIEUTENANT Milgram was sober.

"Unknown to us Captain Weatherly had been doing a little detective work on his own. We found out when the chaplain went through his effects before sending them home. Weatherly actually suspected Surdez of espionage and the murders.

"The chaplain found the notes in Weatherly's diary, which he always kept locked in his trunk locker." Milgram shook his head. "Weatherly was a peculiar duck. If he had only told us of his suspicions!"

"Maybe he wasn't sure, either," Colonel Dockerty offered.

"That was it, sir. He said in his diary that it would be too terrible to accuse a man who might be innocent."

"How did Surdez get the knife back?" Colonel Dockerty now wanted to know. "I assume it was he who killed Miss Compton?"

"Correct. He saw it on Radtke's desk in my office and just took it. He murdered Beryl Compton because he feared she had recognized him the day he was burning the silk in the woods. He boarded that last train from London one station up the line and escaped when the train arrived at Friars' Crossing."

"But still I don't understand why Lieuten-

ant Smiley got that empty parachute," persisted the commanding officer.

"Surdez had to get rid of the parachute pack, too, as well as the silk. He had drawn another chute from Supply but he filled up the pack of his first one with rags so it would look normal until he had a chance to get rid of it.

"He saw his opportunity with The Delivery Boys going out on a mission. He put the pack with the bombs in the bomb bay. Naturally, when the bomb bay doors opened and the bombs dropped out, the chute pack would go out with them.

"Only The Delivery Boys had an accident that day, which can happen to any plane any time. Smiley just played in tough luck.

"Going back to Surdez' attempt to burn the silk of his parachute," Milgram concluded, "he figured he'd be safe for awhile if he got rid of it, even if Captain Weatherly did suspect something.

"There was still more information he was supposed to get. The night he killed Weatherly, he had just obtained it and was marking his new chute so that he could get away at the first opportunity."

The Colonel was silent for awhile.

"Everything clear to you now, sir?" Milgram finally asked.

"Yes—thanks to you," the Old Man said, rising to his feet. "Milgram, I'm going to put you in for the Air Medal. Catching a spy and murderer and sitting on him during aerial combat deserves one, in my opinion."

John T. Milgram's fat face turned red and white in succession. He began pushing his hair with his thick hands. His soul looked out of his blue eyes, one of which was still faintly draped in purple. This was beyond his greatest dreams.

"Me, sir?" he managed at last to croak.



COMING NEXT ISSUE

MISSION OF DEATH

**A Complete Crime Action Novelet Featuring
Secret Agent Archie McCann**

By M. D. ORR

TEN YEARS FOR BUTCH

By CHARLES S. STRONG

It Takes More Than a Slick Trick to Fool a G-Man!

THE TELEPHONE rang on F.B.I. Agent Garry Lord's desk. The tall, lean and rangy-looking G-man scooped up the instrument.

"Just got a tip from Atlanta," said a voice at the other end. "Butch Naylor is leaving there at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Thought you'd like to know."

"Thanks!" Lord said crisply.

He was definitely interested in "Butch" Naylor. He had been the man responsible for sending the burly bank robber to jail ten years ago for a job on the Hartsville National Bank of South Carolina. But Lord still had cause for dissatisfaction. The twenty-five thousand dollars Butch had stolen had never been recovered.

"What are you going to do about it?" Nick Rawlings, Garry Lord's partner asked him when Lord explained matters to him.

"That's easy," Lord told him, with a chuckle. "I'll be parked near the prison when Butch comes out. Then I'm going to follow him. He won't have any funds, and if he has hidden that twenty-five grand, he'll head right for it."

"Maybe he hasn't got it," Agent Rawlings pointed out. "He may have had a partner who has blown it in while Butch was in jail."

Lord weighed this possibility.

"I think he knows where it was hidden," he said then. "Harry Dillon was Butch's attorney. He pulled most of his tricks to keep Naylor out of Atlanta, and never got paid. Dillon never takes a case like that unless he knows where his fee is coming from. It might not be a bad idea to keep an eye on Dillon, too."

"Check!" agreed Rawlings. . . .

Before ten o'clock the next morning, Federal Agent Lord was in his car about half a block from the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. Exactly on the hour, the big heavy gates of the prison yard swung open. Uniformed guards escorted Butch Naylor to the road, bade him good-by, and turned back. Lord watched with interest as a car drove up alongside the ex-convict and the bank robber got into it.

Lord recognized the vehicle at once. It belonged to Attorney Harry Dillon. The G-man gave the car a good start, then followed in his own machine. Dillon's car rolled into metropolitan Atlanta and finally parked in front of the building in which the lawyer had his offices.

An unpleasant thought occurred to the F.B.I. man then. Suppose Dillon had been in possession of the money all this time. He, Lord, could hardly barge into the lawyer's office and demand that it be handed over to him, not without taking legal steps. If his hunch should be wrong, Dillon could make plenty of trouble for him.



Garry Lord went bouncing out

While he was considering this, Butch Naylor came out of the building alone and walked off down the street. Garry Lord was out of his car in a moment, and carefully shadowing the bank bandit. The man covered several blocks, then turned into the shabby doorway of the New Southern Hotel. Lord reflected that the "New" must refer to a period shortly after Appomattox.

FROM a vantage point behind a scrawny-looking potted palm on the front steps, Lord watched Naylor register and accept a key from the clerk.

"Probably going to hole-up until dark," Lord decided. "If this is going to be a night-owl job, I'd better get a little shut-eye myself."

The F.B.I. agent put in a call to the field office and had one of the other men relieve him at the New Southern. He had lunch,

then went home to rest through the afternoon. Even when asleep, his ear was keened for the sound of the telephone that would send him into action. But when he got up just before dinnertime, showered, and dressed, there still had been no phone call.

It was a little before eight when he relieved the man at the New Southern.

"Nothing stirring," reported the other G-man. "Good hunting."

Lord took up his own vigil. About an hour later, when darkness had fallen and lights were blinking in the stores and along the streets, the limousine belonging to Attorney Dillon pulled up to the door of the New Southern. The lawyer got out and went inside.

Lord hurried from his post and checked the rear of the big car. It was unoccupied. Taking a chance that Naylor would be the only one to accompany Dillon, and that the ex-con would ride in front, Agent Lord slipped into the tonneau, and crouched down on the floor beneath a heavy robe.

The running board creaked and the right side of the car sagged as a man climbed in. Then the left hand door opened and closed, and Attorney Dillon got behind the wheel.

The G-man could easily hear the conversation between the two in the front seat. It was obvious that they were in a state of armed neutrality.

"I've been a patient man, Naylor," Dillon said crisply, "but now I've got to have my money. I know it was hot when you were on trial, but ten years is plenty long enough for any money to cool off. They didn't get the numbers of the bills, did they?"

"Nothing like that," chuckled Naylor. "I was careful to take only old bills, and nothing that was done up in bundles. I mixed up the bills in three different cages. I even spent part of the money before that smart bank teller recognized me and pointed me out to the G-men. But the money had nothing to do with that."

Dillon breathed a sigh of relief.

Naylor gave him directions for finding a certain county road well north of Atlanta and close to the South Carolina boundary. Garry Lord was becoming cramped, but he was afraid to move for fear of betraying himself. Dillon drove on, out of town, and onto a State highway.

Finally the car turned off the highway, bumped over a rutted trail and jounced Garry Lord pretty thoroughly. After several miles of this, Dillon brought the limousine to a stop. The motor was turned off and the two men in the front seat climbed out.

Lord remained quiet until they had moved away from the car. He would be able to follow them by the sound of their steps as they moved through the dry leaves in the woods. He was about to snake his gun from

his holster and start his trailing when the back door of the car was suddenly pulled open and a flashlight beamed in his face.

"Well I'll be a monkey's uncle!" snapped Butch Naylor. "We've got company! That snooping G-man!" Naylor's gun was already in his hand, so the bank robber had the Federal agent cornered before Lord could bring up his own weapon. "What are you looking for now, copper? I served my stretch in Atlanta. I've paid my so-called debt to society. You've no right to hound me. I don't want to go back to that pen again!"

Garry Lord was at a stand-still. Naylor had taken the initiative away from him. And the leering face of Dillon peering over the bank robber's shoulder didn't make Lord any more comfortable.

"It's that missing money, Butch," Lord said coolly. "I've got a hunch that you mean to pick it up tonight. That's why I came along."

Naylor flashed a wink to Dillon, and laughed shortly.

"You're wasting your time, Fed," he said. "That money was gone long ago. Dillon and I came out here just for the ride. There's no law against a client going riding with his lawyer, is there? Dillon's using his A-card, and he's saved up plenty of gas while I've been the guest of Uncle Sam."

Lord realized that Naylor was doing a lot of unnecessary talking for some reason, but just why he was didn't occur to the Federal man until he felt the car lurch, then the opposite door opened. There was a swish as a heavy weapon thudded against the back of his skull. He fought for consciousness, and saw the mask of hate that was Naylor's face as he dropped to the floor.

Dazedly, before blackness closed down over him he heard Naylor say:

"Get that pick and shovel off the seat, and we'll get to work! By the time this copper comes to we can be back on the highway. When we dump him, they'll blame a hit and run driver. . . ."

When Garry Lord came back to consciousness the Dillon limousine was again in motion. Lord was gagged and his hands were tied behind him. Dillon and Naylor were talking in the front seat.

"We'd better get rid of that G-man," he heard the bank robber say. "I think there's a car behind us. We don't want anything to go wrong now."

"We'll dump him around the next turn," Dillon growled. "You climb over into the back seat, conk him again if you have to, and take off the bonds. That ought to fix everything."

Naylor scrambled into the tonneau, and began working on Lord's ropes. Before the G-man could restore circulation to his numbed arms and legs, the tonneau door

was swung open, the car lurched around a curve, and Garry Lord went bouncing out onto the pavement and rolled over onto the grassy shoulder of the road.

HE LAY THERE for only a few seconds.

The shock kept him from moving. But instants later another car braked to a stop almost beside him, and a man leaped out. Garry Lord recognized the familiar face of Nick Rawlings, his partner. Rawlings ran over and knelt beside him.

"Are you hurt bad, Garry?" he cried. "Did they get you? I'll kill the dogs!"

"I'm banged up all right," Garry Lord admitted. "But I'll pull through. My feelings are hurt more than anything else. How come you're here?"

"Remember that crack about keeping an eye on Dillon?" Rawlings asked. "Well, I did."

"Did you see what happened up that dirt road?" Lord asked excitedly.

"No," Rawlings confessed. "I missed that. I wasn't close enough to see them make the turn. I didn't realize they'd ducked me until I'd gone on for several miles. When I came back and found the turn-off, they were on their way back. They must have spotted me—got away from here in a hurry."

"Well, here's a fine kettle of fish," Lord said hopelessly. "I'm sure they dug up the money, but I couldn't swear to it. There was no record of the numbers on the bills, so we can't check that way. Looks as though they've outsmarted us."

Rawlings helped his partner into the Federal car, and they headed back for Atlanta. They had traveled for about an hour when Lord spotted the lights of an all-night gas station, open to accommodate the big six-wheeled freight trucks moving up and down the coast routes.

Lord nudged Rawlings.

"We're pretty low on gas," he said. "Dillon must have been in the same boat. Let's stop here and pop a few questions."

They turned in at the gas station. An attendant came over to them and Lord produced his identification.

"See anything of a big Packard with two men in it, about fifteen minutes ago?" he asked.

He described Dillon and Naylor. The attendant nodded his recognition.

"How did they pay you for their gas?" Lord asked them.

"With a ten-dollar bill," replied the attendant. "Want to take a look at it?"

"Sure thing," Lord declared.

The young fellow went into his glassed-in booth, rang up a "No Sale" on the cash register, and returned with a ten-dollar bill. Lord looked at it, then peeled another bill of similar denomination from his roll and handed it to the attendant.

"I'll keep this other one for evidence," he said. When they were gassed up and on the road again, Rawlings asked Lord:

"Find anything interesting?"

Lord extended the bill, and Rawlings read on the note:

FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF
HARTSVILLE
HARTSVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

"That's the bank all right," Rawlings agreed. "But how are you going to prove it's stolen money? There must be any amount of money from that bank circulating around here. The town's on this through highway. If we had any list of numbers of the stolen money it would be different."

Lord smiled knowingly. Something had occurred to him.

"I don't think that's going to be necessary," he said. "Times have changed since Butch Naylor went to jail."

Lord settled back in his seat and they drove on toward Atlanta.

"Where do we go from here?" Nick Rawlings asked Lord, when they reached the city limits.

"We'd better head for Dillon's house," Lord suggested. "Naylor has probably checked out of the New Southern by this time. It'll take Dillon a little longer to move."

"Dillon is just the kind of a lawyer who won't move," said Rawlings. "He'll get Naylor out of town, but he'll stick. He'll claim he found you in the back seat of his car and thought you were a crook, so he slugged you when you pulled a gun. Naylor threw you out of the car, and they believe no one saw him do it. A slick law shark could get away with it." Rawlings sighed. "Too bad we haven't got the numbers on those stolen bills."

Dillon lived in a swanky house in an exclusive suburb of Atlanta. Before they drove up to the house Lord mapped out a plan of action. When his partner understood it Lord left the car and walked the rest of the way.

There was a light in one of the rooms on the ground floor of the Dillon residence. Apparently this was the lawyer's library.

Garry Lord entered the house by the simple means of ringing the bell, then kicking open the door when Dillon came to answer it. The lawyer was surprised, but regained his usual suave demeanor almost at once.

"Have you a search warrant?" he demanded.

"I don't think I need one," Lord declared. "I've got a ten-dollar bill that was part of the loot from the Hartsville National Bank. I have a witness who is willing to swear that you and Butch Naylor gave it to

him. What have you got to say about that?"

Dillon backed into the library under the prodding of the G-man. He sat down in a leather chair behind his desk. Lord studied him in silence.

"I doubt very much whether your witness is reliable," Dillon finally said with a curious smile. "I know, and you know that no record was kept of the bills stolen from the Hartsville National Bank. Court records show that Butch Naylor spent more than a thousand dollars of the stolen money, but no one ever traced it."

"That was ten years ago!" Garry Lord said soberly.

HE LIGHTED a cigarette casually, then leaned back so that he could study Dillon more carefully. The lawyer squirmed a bit. "What does that have to do with it?" Dillon asked.

"A great deal," Lord pointed out. "You see, shortly after Nineteen-thirty-five the Federal Government retired all the bonds guaranteeing National Bank notes issued by banks like the Hartsville National. That meant that the notes themselves were withdrawn from circulation. Butch Naylor didn't know about it, because he was in Atlanta. You never thought of it. The only Hartsville National Bank Notes still in circulation are the stolen notes. And you spent one of them for gasoline tonight. Even

endorsed your license number on the coupons you gave up for the gas."

Lawyer Dillon flushed darkly. He could see that the game was up, but he still held one hole card.

"Get him, Butch!" he shouted, as he ducked down behind his desk.

Garry Lord whirled around in his chair and whipped up his gun. Butch Naylor was crouched in the doorway, gun in hand. Flashes of flame darted in the direction of the G-man, but Garry Lord had the heavy, upholstered chair he had been sitting in as a bulwark. Bullets flew for only a few seconds. Then Butch Naylor crumpled to the floor.

Then Dillon tried to enter the fight. "I'd give up, Dillon," a crisp voice said from the doorway.

Nick Rawlings was standing between the portieres with an automatic in his hand. Lawyer Dillon glanced at the blood-covered form of Butch Naylor, then lifted his hands to shoulder level.

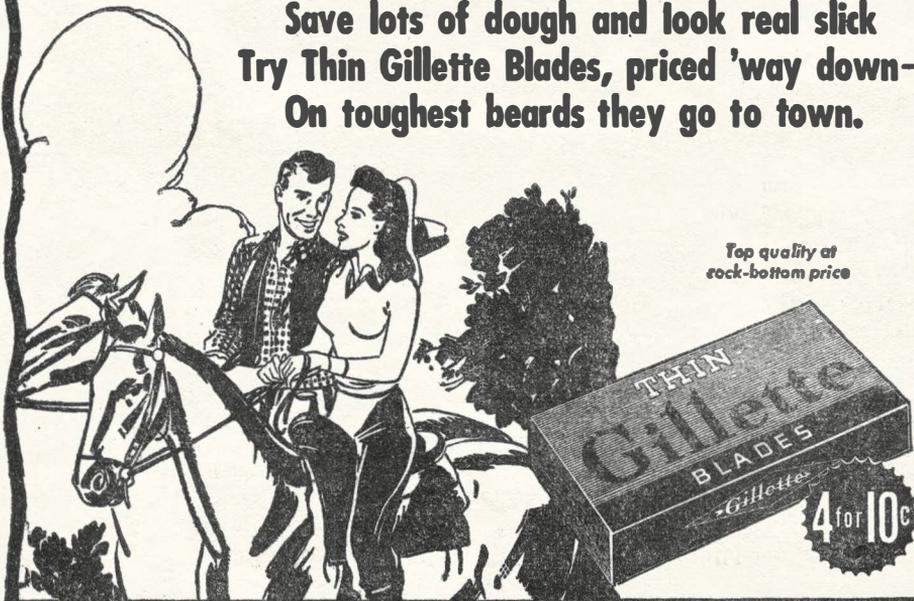
Under questioning from Rawlings and Lord the lawyer produced the balance of the money from his desk, and from the lining of the coat Butch Naylor was wearing.

As the excitement subsided Garry Lord righted the heavy chair, settled down in it, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Looks like Butch won't have to go back to Atlanta after all," he said.

Rawlings smiled.

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*Dr. Peter Frayne Suddenly Finds
Himself on the Spot!*



The sick man's heart
was slow but steady

MEDICAL MURDER

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

DOCTOR Peter Frayne's heart skipped a beat now and then. The Army told him he couldn't stand the strain of military life so Doctor Frayne kept his civilian practise—and as well as that of two other physicians who had entered the Armed Forces. He worked sixteen hours a day—when he wasn't rushed. He slept soundly in barber chairs. He hadn't been home to his apartment in days, napping at the office when he got a chance. Such a moment was the present one.

He was awakened by the clamor of his telephone, reached for it automatically and answered the call half in his sleep. But the

voice that reached him made Doctor Frayne snap wide awake.

"This is Jack Whiting, doctor. Yes, the Jack Whiting who refused to let you marry my niece and who even shipped her two thousand miles away so no common practitioner could marry her. Come up to my home. I need you."

"You don't need me," Dr. Frayne snapped. "I'd be glad to find you good and sick and I'd likewise be tempted to slip you a nice dose of some violent poison. Call someone else if you've got a tummyache."

"I've got more than an ache," Whiting retorted tartly. "I'm a very sick man. I've

tried every other doctor I know and can't get one. You're my last resort. Believe me, doctor, I'd never call you except for an emergency."

"Open the phone book," Frayne said acidly, "to the column listing doctors and start at the top. I'm not coming out."

"You're a doctor, aren't you?" Whiting snapped. "You took an oath to heal the sick. Well, I'm sick. I—" he groaned and in that sound Frayne recognized a man in agony.

"All right," Frayne said. "I'll be over, but to me you're just another patient. I'll not put up with any tantrums and I don't want Elaine's name mentioned, is that clear?"

"Come under—any—conditions only—hurry," Whiting gasped.

Doctor Frayne arose, dressed and picked up his bag. He hurried from the office to where his car was parked out front—by the grace of a big cop who appreciated the fact that doctors sometimes need their cars in a hurry. Frayne drove uptown, along the river road and mulled over the strange quirks of fate that made his bitterest enemy call on him for help.

Whiting had never approved of Doctor Frayne, stating outright that no general practitioner could make enough to keep his niece in hair curlers. She deserved a specialist at the very least. That was bad enough, but he'd managed to convince Elaine of the same thing and she'd gone away, more or less willingly. Frayne didn't care much any more except that he still resented Whiting and came very close to hating him.

The rich man lived in one of the big houses far uptown. It had a circular driveway and the estate would have made a pretty little public park. The house was all gables and porches and towers. Frayne rolled to a stop in front of the closed and locked driveway gate. He'd have to walk.

As he stepped from the car, an undersized, scrawny-looking man barged toward him, his head twisted over one shoulder as he tried to look behind him. He crashed head on into the doctor with enough force to throw Frayne off his feet and land him in the gutter. His medical bag went flying, hit the sidewalk and opened, spilling its contents in several directions.

The little man clucked sympathetically and started gathering Frayne's vials of medicine, stethoscope and instruments. He stuffed them back into the bag.

"Me," he smiled apologetically, "I'm just a big lunkhead never looking where I'm going. Sorry, Doc. You ain't hurt?"

"By no fault of yours I'm not," Frayne said testily. "Next time keep your eyes ahead of you."

"Sure, Doc," the little man snickered and walked away. Each step seemed a little faster than the one before, as if he were increas-

ingly eager to get away. He stepped up to a cheap, dirty-looking coupe and got in. A moment later he was driving away—without turning on any lights. But Frayne managed to spot the marker plate and memorized the numbers for a reason that was then very vague in his mind.

A FEW moments later he approached the door to Whiting's house and found it ajar. He heard Whiting's voice weakly calling to him. Frayne stepped up his pace and hurried down the big reception hall, in the direction of the voice. Whiting was lying on a couch in his study. His face was gray and pallid. His breathing seemed to come in great, painful spasms.

"Feels like my—gall bladder," he mumbled and Frayne saw that he was passing into the first stages of unconsciousness. "Had—trouble—before—"

Frayne made a swift, competent examination and guessed that Whiting was correct in his self-diagnosis. There was even slight jaundice present, which was one of the definite symptoms. Whiting was in the severest pain, but he fought unconsciousness as if he wanted to say something. His parched lips kept moving as Frayne prepared a hypo.

"—treatment—given—" Whiting managed to mutter between moans.

"Don't worry," Frayne placated him. "Not much to be done until the inflammation dies down and I can ease the pain. I'll stay right here with you, Whiting."

Frayne deftly rolled two small white pills into the palm of his hand, transferred them to a silver teaspoon and set up a small alcohol lamp. He dropped a little water into the spoon, held it over the flame and dissolved the tablets with the aid of heat. Next, he placed a hypodermic needle into the solution, drew it up into the instrument and then bent over Whiting. He dabbed the patient's arm with alcohol on a bit of cotton then hesitated. Whiting had a bad heart among several other things.

Frayne set the hypo down and used his stethoscope for a moment.

The sick man's heart was slow but steady. Frayne slid the needle home and shot half a grain of morphine into him. He had to be kept quiet and opiates were called for in this case.

He watched Whiting sink into deep sleep and his low moans ceased. That was better. Frayne sat down to wait. He'd have to call in a nurse. Obviously, the servant shortage had hit Whiting with a lot of force because there seemed to be no servants in the big house.

Half an hour went by. Whiting slept very heavily. Frayne sighed, thought about a dozen other patients who'd be expecting him and went toward the telephone in the hallway near the front door. As he reached for

the instrument, someone came up on the porch. The bell rang brassily.

Frayne winced as if he were the sick man who might be awakened by the clamor. He opened the door and his eyebrows shot upwards. A man of thirty or so, stood there staring back at him. A rather handsome man, expensively dressed with necktie and pocket handkerchief selected to match his suit.

"I'll be blowed," the man said.

"Come in, Mr. Robinson," Frayne invited. "Yes it's me, Dr. Frayne in the flesh. Your uncle is very ill. He managed to call me before the pain became too great. His gall bladder again I think. I told him—in the old days when we were halfway friendly, that he ought to do something about it, but he put it off. Too busy."

Marty Robinson paled. "Is he really going to—?"

"No," Frayne derided. "He'll be all right in a few hours. May have to undergo an operation—which I won't perform, incidentally. If he died on the table, they'd say I killed him."

"I guess they would," Robinson admitted. "You certainly have cause to hate him. I'd better look in on the old boy."

Robinson walked rapidly down the hall to the study, opened the door and whistled softly. Frayne was right behind him.

"He certainly looks all in, Doc. You sure he doesn't need hospitalization?"

"I wouldn't move him now," Frayne said. "It might be dangerous. See about getting him a nurse, will you—what's wrong?"

Robinson had walked over beside the couch and stood looking straight down at his uncle. He turned and his eyes were cold and very hard.

"I'm no doctor," he said, "but I think I know a dead man when I see one."

"You're crazy," Frayne half shouted and pushed Robinson aside. But the nephew wasn't out of his mind. Whiting was dead. Very, very dead. There wasn't a hint of a heartbeat.

Robinson ran out of the room. A moment later, Frayne heard him telephoning, heard him ask for the Homicide Bureau to have them send a man out. Frayne stepped into the hallway.

"Did you call the police because you think I killed him?" the doctor asked.

"Yes—if you want to know the truth," Robinson replied. "Uncle Jack wouldn't have called you, not even if he was dying and knew it. I think you finally got nerve enough to kill him. Anyway I intend to find out. If you're innocent, what are you worrying about?"

"I'm not worrying," Frayne snapped back. "You're just making a complete fool of yourself. But have it your way. I'll be glad to have the police clear me."

THE two men sat in the hallway, in stony silence opposite one another until they heard heavy feet move across the porch. Robinson jumped up and let in three men. Two were in uniform. One of these posted himself at the doorway. The third was six feet two or three and weighed in the neighborhood of a hundred and twenty. He was thin enough to see through. Frayne had often heard of him.

Detective Lieutenant McCauley was known to be one of the shrewdest and most relentless men on the force. Robinson talked so fast that at times he was hardly understandable, yet McCauley evidently got the gist of it all. He faced Frayne.

"Well, Doc, how about it? Did you hate Whiting enough to kill him?"

"No," Frayne replied. "Of course not. If I had, I'd have killed him long ago."

"Okay," McCauley grunted. "Both of you stay here. Murph, keep an eye on them."

McCauley entered the study, stayed there about two minutes and came out looking more grim than ever. He went straight to the telephone and called the morgue.

"The best way to start this case is find out what killed Whiting," he said. "Doc—did you administer treatment of any kind?"

"He was in pain," Frayne nodded. "I gave him a half a grain of morphine, the usual treatment in such a case."

"Okay," McCauley said, "we'll wait!"

While they waited—and it was no ten minute job to determine the cause of Whiting's death—Robinson gave McCauley the complete lowdown on why Doctor Frayne would have liked to murder Whiting.

"That's ancient history," Frayne finally put in. "I'm all over the girl now. Maybe Whiting was right, but I didn't kill him. His heart was none too good—everybody knew that. He couldn't stand the pain and—he just died, that's all."

It was within an hour or two of dawn when the morgue phoned McCauley and held an extended talk with him. McCauley grunted, made a few notes and finally hung up. He faced Doctor Frayne.

"Man alive, wouldn't I love to go to you for treatment. Listen, Doc, Mr. Whiting did die from heart trouble, but it was induced by an overdose of morphine. Too much for a man in his condition to stand. You knew his condition and you knew a stiff shot of the stuff would kill him."

Frayne gasped and jumped to his feet. "I gave him two quarter grain tablets by injection and no more. An amount like that wouldn't kill him no matter how poor his heart was."

McCauley cocked a doubtful eye at him, picked up his medical bag and opened it. Ferreting around the contents he brought out a thin vial labelled with the name of the narcotic.

"Did you use a fresh bottle on him, Doc?" he asked almost pleasantly.

"I don't know," Frayne said. "I was in too much of a hurry to pay any attention. There may be several vials in my bag."

"There is only one, Doc. Only one, and it has six pills missing. Just six and they add up to the dose that knocked off the old man. You had the motive, the poison and the opportunity. Some doctor you are. Why, before I'd ask your advice about a sliver in my finger, I'd—well, you know what I mean.

"Doc, I ought to pinch you for murder and maybe I will too. But the Medical Examiner tells me to go easy. He sympathizes with you because he's a physician too. He says it may have been a little mistake. Mistake my eye, but I won't put the cuffs on you right away. There is still some checking up to do so run along. And, Doc—don't try to leave town. You won't even reach the railroad station."

Frayne half stumbled out of the house, his mind a riot of confusing thoughts. They really had a case against him. He reached his car, sat down behind the wheel and forced himself to think.

Had he, absentmindedly, given Whiting too much morphine? He shook his head. It was impossible. Narcotics are dangerous things to deal with at their best. He recalled that Whiting had gasped something just before he passed out. Something about a treatment, but it didn't make sense.

Then Doctor Frayne had a real brainstorm. That vial had been a deliberate plant. Exactly six tablets were missing and there were no other vials of morphine in his bag—yet he normally carried two or three. Coincidence couldn't have been so accurate as to have exactly six tablets missing. In fact, coincidence had nothing to do with it unless it waltzed around in the shape of a wizened little guy who didn't look where he was going.

Frayne closed his eyes and very deliberately brought the marker number of the little man's car back. He fortunately hadn't forgotten despite all the confusion and menace. It gave him something to sink his teeth into.

That wry-necked chap had been a plant, a means to make certain his medicine kit carried only one vial of tablets with four missing. He'd give two—as he'd done several times before when Whiting's gall bladder acted up—but six would be missing. The murder dose!

FRAYNE now swung his car away from the curb and stopped at the nearest drug store. He called the motor vehicle department and very calmly stated that he was Detective Lieutenant McCauley of Homicide and he wanted the identity of the owner of those marker plates.

"George Allard," he repeated as he wrote the name down and followed it with the address. "Thanks, very much."

He went back to his car and drove to the address. It turned out to be a cheap hotel catering to men only, at a dollar a night. There was a sign, creaky and dirty, inviting inquiries about monthly rates which were supposed to be very special.

Frayne walked in. A desk clerk awoke and growled at him, but gave the number of Allard's room. Frayne walked up the three flights as the hotel sported no elevator at those prices. He reached the designated door and rapped on it. There was no answer. He tried again, then finally shook the knob hard to awaken Allard.

To his surprise, shaking the knob opened the door. He stepped in, fumbled for a light switch and snapped it on. Allard lay in bed, covered up to his neck. Frayne walked over and shook him. Still there was no response.

The doctor shook him hard the third time. Allard's mouth now dropped open and then stayed that way. Frayne gasped and peeled off the sheets. Allard was dead. One hand clutched a hypodermic needle. His other arm was studded with the multitudinous little holes an addict develops over a period of years.

Allard was palpably a drug addict. He was stone dead. Frayne glanced at the rickety night table. A vial lay upon it, the label indicating that it was morphine—the identical brand he always used.

Frayne picked up the vial, twisted the stopper and opened it. He sniffed of the contents and winced. Morphine never possessed the characteristic odor of cyanide. These tablets were a violent poison which would act almost instantaneously if administered by a hypo needle.

The doctor now heard the door creak, turned and saw a chunky man standing there. Frayne had been sniffing the end of the hypo he'd taken from Allard's dead fingers. He stood there now, frozen in amazement and terror. The stranger might as well have worn a sign stating he was a plainclothes man. He was exactly the type.

"This guy a patient of yours, Doc?" he asked. "I'm the law—hey, that guy is dead."

The detective was reaching for his gun when Dr. Frayne's medical bag hurtled upward and connected with his jaw. The blow didn't knock the big man out, but it did succeed in making him reel backward, off balance, while Frayne moved in very fast.

It seemed odd to hit a man, putting plenty of force behind it. Frayne was much more used to gentleness, but although he was a novice at this sort of thing, he was a muscular chap and packed a stiff punch when he had to. The detective passed out.

Frayne bit his lower lip and wondered just

what to do next. He went over to the bed, turned the dead man on his side and pillowed his head in one crooked arm. He closed the sagging mouth and the staring eyes. Allard looked as if he were peacefully asleep.

Then Frayne examined the detective after dragging him into the room and closing the door. He shot a little morphine into him to keep him quiet for a couple of hours. This done he picked the detective up, slung him over one shoulder and staggered down the steps.

The complete amateurishness and naiveté which Frayne displayed in a criminal matter like this, worked in his favor. A criminally inclined man would never have operated so openly and probably never would have got away with it. That is why Frayne did. The hotel clerk was fast asleep, while the street outside was perfectly empty. Frayne stuffed the detective into his car.

He drove straight to the office and marvelled a bit at fate being so kind to him. Once again he could work without being observed. Two minutes later the detective was sleeping it off on the cot in Frayne's office.

Frayne sat down at his desk. He needed time to think as well as peace and quiet to take this odd business apart to see what was behind it.

Permanent escape from the police, he knew, was quite impossible even if he desired it—which he didn't. Frayne had a profession and no urge to keep just one jump ahead of all the cops in the country. His act of escaping from that detective, who had obviously trailed him at Lieutenant McCauley's behest, had been purely defensive. Now he began to realize it may have been a mistake.

He pushed those thoughts out of his mind and concentrated on the two deaths. If an autopsy showed that Whiting had died of a large dose of morphine, then that was the truth.

Medical examiners and expert pathologists would have no reason to lie. But Frayne knew also that he hadn't given the man a lethal dose of the drug.

He ruminated on the addict, Allard, who had so very obviously taken a shot of cyanide for what he believed to be morphine.

The little man might have spotted Frayne, knew he was a physician and apt to be carrying morphine. These addicts had resorted to crazier stunts than that to get their supply. Who, then, had substituted cyanide for morphine? Why? To keep Allard's mouth shut forever? It seemed so.

Yet even in those determinations there was no clue to the death of Whiting: Marty Robinson had little chance of being Whiting's heir so why should he have committed the murder? And how? He hadn't been in the house when Frayne arrived.

UNRAVELING the tangle into which the whole question involved itself meant taking desperate chances. But Frayne figured few men had ever been quite as desperate as he was at that moment. He picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Martha," he said, into the mouthpiece, "don't ask questions. Just do as I say. You're my nurse and should take orders. Check your watch with mine. It's now four twenty-one. Right? Good!

"At precisely ten minutes to five telephone the home of Jack Whiting. Of course I'm going there and it's not about Elaine. Don't worry about that. Whiting is dead and I'm being blamed for his murder. Do exactly as I say. Then come down to the office. You'll find a detective sleeping off a morphine jag. Just make certain he's okay. When you phone, ask for Lieutenant McCauley and say this—"

Frayne hung up and now that he'd made up his mind as to what course should be followed, he worked fast. He phoned Whiting's house and Marty Robinson answered.

"I'm coming over," he told Robinson. "So is Lieutenant McCauley and we'll iron this thing out. See to it that you stay there, Marty."

He hung up before Robinson could object and then dialed Police Headquarters. McCauley was around and agreed to come over to Whiting's house at once. Frayne drove there, parked directly in front and walked up to the porch. Robinson let him in.

"You medical men are certainly callous," he said angrily. "Coming back here like this. Or is it just the act of a murderer who must return to the scene of his crime?"

"Neither, Marty," Frayne said pleasantly. "When McCauley gets here, I have a few questions to ask. You won't mind answering them?"

"Why should I?" Robinson countered. "I haven't done anything. I—here is Lieutenant McCauley now. He walks like an elephant."

McCauley entered and looked at Frayne with open questions in his eyes. Frayne lit a cigarette, found his hands were steady and liked that. Steady hands made a good surgeon and if they didn't shake under this ordeal, they never would.

"My intention," he said slowly, "is to clear myself of suspicion for this crime. I want Robinson to answer a few questions. After all, he is a relative of the dead man and he may also have a motive."

"Motive?" Robinson half screamed. "Listen, the old man didn't like me. He told me a thousand times that when he died, Elaine would get every dime. I think Doc Frayne has a line on her, has kept in touch with her and intends to marry her now that she gets all this money."

"Let's take first things first," Frayne said,

grateful that McCauley didn't butt in. "Even though your uncle didn't like you, he let you work for him. I know that. You handled a lot of his affairs. Real estate and things of such nature."

"What if I did?" Robinson objected.

"Look," McCauley broke in, "what's all this getting us? Frankly, Doc, I'm asking for a warrant for your arrest tomorrow when I talk to the D.A. I think you murdered Whiting. You—a doctor who is supposed to heal, not kill. Good gosh, I'd hate to have you treat me."

"You said that before." Frayne glanced at his watch. The phone rang precisely on time and Robinson answered it. He called McCauley to the instrument. The detective did a lot of listening and little talking, as usual.

"Doc," he said when he returned, "it seems there is a man named Allard living in some cheap hotel downtown who is very sick and keeps calling for you. I can't keep a doctor away from his patients, even if I think he murdered one of them. Are you going to answer the call? Some woman phoned—said she worked in the hotel."

"Allard?" Frayne frowned. "Allard? I have no patient by that name, but I'm the only Dr. Frayne in town so he must mean me. Yes, I'm going down."

"Then I'm coming along," McCauley said. "Just in case you once tried to marry this guy Allard's daughter. You know what I mean."

"I'm coming to," Robinson announced. "I—I've got to get out of this house. My nerves are shot."

They all got into Frayne's car while McCauley directed him how to reach the cheap little hotel. The desk clerk—who must have had a hard, laborious job by day, was still dozing. They went on by him. McCauley said the woman who phoned had given him the number of Allard's room.

They went in, turned on the lights and Frayne walked over to the bed. He felt Allard's pulse. There was none, of course, but death hadn't been present long enough to turn the man's face gray. He looked quite natural. Then Frayne used his stethoscope.

"He's been poisoned," he said. "He's pretty bad. Lieutenant, don't get the wrong impression as to what I'm going to do. This case needs some blood letting. I'm going to open a vein and bleed him. The poison has built up a critical pressure and it must be dropped."

Frayne opened his bag, took out a long scalpel and bent over the dead man. Finally he laid the scalpel down on the night table, straightened and sighed.

"All we can do now is wait. Stuffy in here. Let's go into the hall."

MCCAULEY seemed glad enough to leave the close, dismal little room. He'd been

standing near the door anyway, staring into the hall. Robinson came out last. All three smoked cigarettes for ten minutes. Finally Frayne went back, looked and let out a sharp cry.

"He's dead," he said. "The scalpel was driven straight into his heart."

McCauley hurried over to the bed and gave Frayne a fishy look. Robinson stood on tiptoe gazing over their shoulders.

"A good job of blood letting," he grimaced. "I don't even see any blood. You just drove that knife into his heart, Doc. Why? Was he somebody who knew too much?"

McCauley was jingling handcuffs. "Okay, Doc. This is the finish. If I let you go on treating people, the men at the morgue will have a breakdown from overwork. Let's go!"

"Wait a minute," Frayne commanded. "Robinson, you're a very neat man. A fussy dresser, but your pocket handkerchief looks like it had been carelessly rammed into your breast pocket. Not like you at all. Let me fix it."

He yanked the handkerchief out. There was an oily smear across it. Frayne called McCauley closer.

"You don't think I'm a good doctor, but I think I'm a pretty good detective. Robinson drove that scalpel into Allard's heart. I purposely left it on the table to give him the chance. I smeared it with surgical jelly. It's practically invisible.

"Allard was dead when we got here. The detective you assigned to watch me can prove it. He's at my office. Robinson hired Allard to knock me down, remove the morphine vials and replace them with one containing all but four tablets. I used two more on Whiting and the vial was a dead giveaway to the fact that I'd probably administered a lethal dose."

"But if Allard was dead, why should Robinson—?" McCauley started to say.

"Allard would have guessed the whole thing. He was a drug addict and readily amenable to stealing narcotics from my bag. Robinson came over here to pay him off, probably. He managed to slip some cyanide tablets into one of the morphine vials, knowing Allard would use them very soon.

"Robinson killed his uncle. How? By being present when he got an attack of gall bladder trouble. By generously trying to help the stricken man. Whiting must have thought he was taking pills I once prescribed for his condition, but he took four tablets of morphine. He phoned me before they became effective and he was conscious when I arrived too. Then I gave him two more tablets by hypo and there you have the lethal dose."

Robinson was very pale and shaken.

"It's a lie!" he almost screamed. "I had no reason and Frayne did. He wants to marry Elaine."

At the mention of Elaine's name, a hard smile came to Doctor Frayne's lips. He could very easily have married her, if she had had the courage to make up her own mind and accept the poor existence of a young physician. But Elaine had chosen the easier road.

Now Robinson, dirty little murderer that he was, hoped to make Frayne suffer once again for having placed confidence in the wrong woman. It was almost too much for Frayne to take. He wanted to crash his fist into the killer's teeth.

But that wasn't the way. Frayne had to remain calm—to spring his last trap.

"You have a reason and I'll lay odds it's somehow connected with the work you did for your uncle," Frayne said. "You could

have stolen money, couldn't replace it and knew Whiting would have you thrown into jail. As for Elaine—I forgot her long ago. I married Martha, my nurse. She phoned you, Lieutenant, and set the stage for this."

Robinson lost his head then and tried to bolt. McCauley stopped him with a wicked right hook.

He put handcuffs on the man and then looked at Frayne.

"Doc," he said, "I'm not sure about all this, but you must be right. Robinson is guilty and I'll prove it. Not bad detective work on your part—making him try to kill a dead man. Say, Doc—I get a pain in the calf of my left leg every time it looks like rain. Would you look at it if I came to your office? Would you, Doc?"



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Penny screamed, as her
uncle collapsed and
dropped on the floor



DEATH PLAYS SANTA CLAUS

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Lieutenant Mike O'Hara of homicide makes short work of a murder case—so that he can spend his Christmas at home!

DEEP disgust formed a picture in the face of Detective-lieutenant Mike O'Hara as he sat before his desk in the Homicide Squad's room at Police Headquarters. It was nine by the clock on Christmas Eve.

O'Hara had anticipated a Christmas Eve at home with his wife and their two young

children, for it was his regular time off duty. He had intended donning a Santa Claus costume and giving the kids the time of their young lives. A Christmas tree had been prepared, and a closet was filled with presents.

But lots had been drawn to decide which members of the Squad would spend Christmas Eve on duty and which would serve

through Christmas Day, and O'Hara had drawn a Christmas Eve position.

So had Detective Sergeant Ed Rassman, who was busy now with the radio in a corner of the room, and bringing in Christmas music. In deference to O'Hara's fit of gloom, he kept the radio turned low.

"So it's Christmas Eve," O'Hara growled. "When a man should be at home, if he's got kids. The only homicides we ever have on Christmas Eve are simple killings, the result of fights which are the result of too much Christmas firewater. There's never any question about 'em. No mysteries to solve. The patrolmen on the beats could handle 'em and make a report. Right?"

"Right!" Rassman agreed. "But you never can tell. And by workin' tonight, Mike, we get tomorrow off. We can eat Christmas dinner with our folks."

The telephone bell on O'Hara's desk gave three quick jangles, the alert signal. O'Hara's face grew stern, and he reached for the phone. Those three jerky rings meant business.

"O'Hara at this end!" the lieutenant barked into the mouthpiece.

"Maybe you'd better take that call, lieutenant," the telephone desk sergeant answered. "Sounds important."

"Switch 'em on."

The desk sergeant made the switchboard connection.

"Homicide Squad!" O'Hara barked. "Lieutenant O'Hara speaking."

A cultured, well-modulated masculine voice came to him over the wire.

"This is Dr. Morgan Stampf. I am at the residence of Cecil Fargall on Empire Boulevard. I regret to report that Mr. Fargall passed away a few minutes ago under circumstances that appear suspicious to me. Though I have been his personal physician for several years, I thought it best to notify the police and have an investigation made."

"Quite right, sir!" O'Hara replied. "We'll be right there." He cradled the phone and got out of his chair. "Punch the button, Ed," he ordered Rassman.

"We roll?" Rassman asked.

O'HARA nodded assent as he reached for his hat and overcoat. Rassman pressed a button and started things moving. The Homicide Squad was going out!

The speedy sedan with daring chauffeur would be waiting for them when they hurried into the basement garage of Headquarters. The police photographer and the fingerprint expert would follow in a car always ready and carrying their equipment, and two minor Squad men would be with them. "Doc" Layne, the medical examiner on duty, would be notified promptly and chase them to the address.

With its siren wailing a warning to traffic,

the sedan rushed and skidded through the streets, with red lights burning. It cut across a corner of the busy retail business district where throngs were making the usual last-minute purchases.

It turned into broad Empire Boulevard and sped along that toward an old residential part of the city where imposing mansions sat far back from the street in groves of trees, and expressed the grandeur of an earlier era.

About an inch of snow was on the ground, and fine snow was drifting through the air. Perfect Christmas Eve weather, O'Hara thought.

"And I should be home playing Santa Claus for my two kids," he growled at Rassman.

"If this turns out to be a twister case—" Rassman began.

To the sergeant, a "twister" case was one involving a mystery to be solved and calling for clever work on the part of the Squad, instead of routine stuff.

"Don't even think that!" O'Hara barked at him, as the police chauffeur, who was listening, grinned into the rear vision mirror. "A twister, with us opening it up, means we'd have to stay with it until the end. Then where'd our Christmas Day at home be? If it's a twister case, we've got to crack it wide open before morning, even if we have to beat the truth out of somebody. I'm going to spend Christmas at home! Let's hope this Cecil Fargall died of a heart attack caused by indigestion."

"I know, Mike, but there's small chance of that," Rassman warned. "Dr. Morgan Stampf is one wise medic, I've heard. He wouldn't have called us for an ordinary heart attack."

"Stampf is a fashionable society doctor," O'Hara explained. "I've met him a few times. He reminds me of a human icicle. But some doctors and surgeons get like that, seeing so much misery and pain. They harden themselves against it, same as we do."

"This Cecil Fargall has a lot of moola, huh?"

"According to common report, he has money stacked up in about a dozen banks," O'Hara replied. "He's about seventy. The family has been here since the town was only a wide place in the trail. Almost died out now. He has only one relative as far as I know—a niece named Penelope. Everybody calls her Penny. Sensible girl of about twenty-three."

Behind their sedan, a siren wailed and indicated that the second Squad car was on their heels. O'Hara relaxed in the seat, lit a cigarette and took a few puffs. The sedan was making good speed on the wide boulevard which traffic seemed to have deserted at that hour.

Finally, the car turned into a driveway and ran up to the front of a huge, old-fashioned

mansion and stopped. The second car was there by the time O'Hara and Rassman got out of the first. As O'Hara and the others started up the steps to the front porch, a third car whizzed up and skidded to a stop, and Doc Layne got out of it and hurried to them.

O'Hara called a couple of men to him.

"When this gets out, the news hawks will flock here," he said. "I don't want reporters messing around until I know what's what. You two stand guard and keep 'em out. I'll tell 'em everything later."

O'Hara went up to the front door with the others of the Homicide Squad behind him, but before he could ring, the door was opened by a tall, distinguished-appearing man in evening attire.

"I am Dr. Morgan Stampf," he announced. "Thank you for being so prompt. Please come in, and I'll give you the scant details, so you can get at your work."

Dr. Stampf ushered O'Hara and the others into an elegantly furnished anteroom and waved them toward chairs. He looked what O'Hara had called him—a human icicle.

"This is a tragic occurrence," Dr. Stampf said, when they were seated. "I have been Cecil Fargall's personal physician for years. He was a splendid cultured gentleman."

"I know all that, Dr. Stampf," O'Hara cut in. "Just tell us what's happened here, and please make it as short as possible. It's Christmas Eve, and we're short-handed."

"Very well. It was Mr. Fargall's custom to have a sort of private family party on Christmas Eve. He always had a tree with presents heaped beneath it, and his old houseman, Fred Denshaw, always put on a costume and false face and acted as Santa Claus. His guests this evening were only three—his niece and ward, Miss Penelope Fargall; Mr. Bob Blodger, her present romantic attachment; and myself."

"You've been here all evening?" O'Hara asked.

DR. STAMPF shook his head.

"Oh, no!" he said. "I had a call to make on a patient, and telephoned that I'd be in a little late to partake of Christmas cheer, and for them to go ahead with their Santa Claus show and not wait for me. I arrived only a few minutes before I called you."

"Where are the others?" O'Hara asked.

"In the living room. Mr. Fargall died in the library, where he had the Christmas tree. I left the body there and asked Miss Fargall and Mr. Blodger to retire to the living room and remain there."

"Just what happened?"

"When I came to the house and rang, the door was opened by Bob Blodger. He said Santa Claus had just done his stuff—Santa being Fred Denshaw, the old houseman—and

had gone to prepare the buffet lunch. In addition to Denshaw, there are only two servants, a cook and maid. Mr. Fargall felt that, in war time, he should get along with a small staff."

"After you came in?" O'Hara hinted.

"I removed my hat and overcoat and started for the library with Bob Blodger, saying I'd be glad to have a drink and toast myself before the fireplace. As we went along the hall, we heard Miss Fargall scream, and ran to her at once. Her uncle had collapsed and dropped upon the floor.

"I asked Blodger to aid me, and we put him upon a couch. I expected the usual heart attack. Mr. Fargall was past seventy and has had repeated attacks of acute indigestion."

"But it wasn't an ordinary heart attack?" O'Hara asked.

"In my judgment, no. Your medical examiner—Doctor Layne, here—can make his own investigation. I think he will detect at once a scent of bitter almonds."

"Prussic acid?" Doc Layne snapped.

Dr. Stampf nodded his head in assent.

They went into the library. Layne went to the couch and made an immediate examination. O'Hara looked around the room, while Rassman began his usual prowling. The photographer and fingerprint men stood aside, waiting to be called to do their work if they were needed.

There was the Christmas tree in a corner. Wrappings from packages were scattered around the room. Opened and unopened boxes of presents were on the tables and chairs. A portable bar had been set up in one corner, and beside it was a table covered with luncheon foods.

Doc Layne concluded his examination.

"Prussic acid, hydrocyanic, I'd say," he reported to O'Hara. "Every symptom. And no indication it was taken through the mouth."

"He didn't drink the stuff, you mean?" O'Hara asked.

Doc Layne shook his head negatively.

"How'd he get it, then?"

"I'll continue my examination," Layne said, giving O'Hara a level look.

"All right, Doc. Rassman, come with me. Dr. Stampf, we'll join the others, please. You other boys stay with Layne."

They went to the big living room. Penny Fargall and Bob Blodger were sitting on a divan. The girl was sobbing softly, and Blodger had an arm around her, trying to comfort her.

"Tell me exactly what happened," O'Hara instructed the girl.

"We had been having a happy time," she replied. "Dr. Stampf phoned and said he'd be delayed, so my uncle told Denshaw to get into his costume and play Santa Claus."

"Usual sort of costume?" O'Hara asked.

"The same one Denshaw has used for years. Red flannel trimmed with white, and he always wore a Santa Claus mask and heavy fur gloves. He came in and got the presents from beneath the tree and handed them to us and bowed, as always before. He left Dr. Stampf's gifts in a little pile under the tree. Then Uncle Cecil remarked about the buffet supper, which was a hint for Denshaw to retire, take off the costume, and make hot coffee. Uncle had told the cook and maid they could have the evening off. He always did that on Christmas Eve."

"What happened after the houseman left?" O'Hara asked.

"Uncle was laughing at a funny little toy I had bought him as a gift. Suddenly he dropped it, tried to get out of the chair and to his feet. A horrible expression came into his face, and he dropped to the floor."

"Who was with him at the time?"

"I was alone with him," Penny said. "The door bell had rung, and we guessed Dr. Stampf had arrived, and Bob hurried to let him in, knowing Denshaw was busy in the kitchen. I screamed when Uncle fell, and they came running."

"All that correct, Blodger?" O'Hara asked.

"Yes, sir."

O'Hara eyed him. Bob Blodger was about twenty-eight, the son of a good family. He had won a reputation in football in his college days. He had been in the Marines, had seen some hard fighting and had been invalided home. O'Hara knew young Blodger was working now for a bond company, though his family had plenty of money and he really did not have to work.

THAT Bob Blodger and Penny Fargall were in love with each other, there could be no doubt. The way they looked at each other, the way they acted told that. But O'Hara, who read the newspapers religiously, even to the want ads and society news, for professional reasons, had not noticed a report of an actual engagement.

Doc Layne came to the door and called O'Hara, and he excused himself and went to talk to the medical examiner.

"He got it in his right hand," Layne reported. "Must have been a hypo needle. There's a puncture, and burn."

"You mean somebody gave it to him?"

"We searched around, and didn't find any needle. Searched his clothing and all over the room."

"How long did it take the stuff to work, Doc?"

"Hard to say. It'd depend on the strength of the solution, the condition of the victim, and all that. It was a few minutes after nine when we got the call. I'd say he died about that time. Can't be sure, but it's close enough."

"Somebody must have jabbed him,"

O'Hara mused. "Far as we know now, Dr. Stampf wasn't here. According to all stories, he rang the door bell a moment before Fargall dropped. That leaves Penny Fargall and young Blodger—and the houseman. Umm! I've got an idea."

He hurried back to the living room and sat down, a picture of poise. He spoke in a voice which did not betray excitement.

"Miss Fargall, did anything unusual happen while the presents were being distributed? Did your uncle act normally?"

"Yes," she replied. "He was joking and laughing. He was always like a boy on Christmas Eve. It was one redeeming trait—" She stopped abruptly.

"Redeeming trait? Am I to gather that you didn't exactly like your uncle?"

"He was both my uncle and guardian," she replied. "He and a bank were to handle my fortune until I was twenty-five, which will be in seven months. We—we didn't see alike about some things."

"Romantic affairs, for instance?" O'Hara asked.

"Mr. Fargall didn't want Penny to marry me," Bob Blodger cut in. "Penny and I really love each other. I have plenty of money, and so has my family, thought not as much as Mr. Fargall, of course."

"What was his objection to you, Blodger?" O'Hara wanted to know. "I happen to know your fine family, and if you could support her, and she was in love with you, why should there be an objection?"

"My uncle was a tyrant," Penny Fargall broke in this time. "He was a man who wanted to order the lives of all around him. I never actually quarreled with him, but I did demand that he let me marry Bob. The other day, I threatened to marry Bob anyhow, without uncle's consent."

"Any idea why he didn't want you to marry Blodger?"

"He said he wanted me to marry an older man, an established man who had attained prominence. Such a man, he held, should always marry a young woman of good family and estate, so she could preside like a queen over his household, and give him strong, healthy children to carry on the line. That sort of thing was a mania with him."

"I see."

O'Hara got up and paced around the room for a moment, while the others watched. Doc Layne was standing in the doorway, and Dr. Stampf was sitting off to one side saying nothing. O'Hara stopped pacing and faced them.

"Mr. Fargall was murdered!" he snapped.

"Murdered?" Penny cried, as she gripped Bob Blodger's arm. "But—he just collapsed. Nobody touched him!"

"You said he was laughing and joking while the presents were being distributed. Think, now! Did anything at all unusual

happen?"

"It may not amount to much—" Blodger began.

"I'll decide that." O'Hara snapped at him. "What was it?"

"Well, when Santa Claus handed him one of the packages—the very last, if I'm not mistaken—Mr. Fargall cried 'Ouch!' and shook his right hand. An instant later, he said a pin in the ribbon around the package had stuck him."

"Santa Claus handed him the package?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Fargall unwrapped it, and Santa Claus—that is, Denshaw, left to get rid of his costume and make coffee. A little later, the door bell rang, and Penny asked me to answer it because Denshaw was busy. I let in Dr. Stampf, as you know."

"Where is Denshaw, the houseman, now?" O'Hara asked. "I think I'll have a little talk with him."

"Probably in the kitchen," Penny replied. "Straight back to the cross hall, then to the right. Denshaw's living room is just off the kitchen, too."

"Get him, Ed!" O'Hara snapped at Rassman.

AS RASSMAN hurried away, O'Hara looked at the others again.

"As I said," he told them, "Mr. Fargall was murdered. Prussic acid killed him. It was injected in the right hand. When he said a pin had stuck him, he got the poison."

"Then Denshaw did it!" Blodger cried. "But why should he?"

O'Hara signalled for him to be silent, and faced the girl again.

"Miss Fargall, how long have you lived here?" he asked.

"My mother, who was my last surviving relative except Uncle Cecil, died when I was ten. Uncle Cecil brought me here. Almost immediately, I was sent away to school, and that kept up until schooling was over. Then I had a debut, and since that have lived on here, with frequent trips abroad—before the war."

"How long has Fred Denshaw been houseman here?"

"He was here for some years before I came. He really was butler, when Uncle Cecil had a big house staff. He's been a sort of general handy man since Uncle cut down the staff because of the war. He thought it was the patriotic thing to do. My uncle had his faults, but he was a real patriotic American. I'll say that for him."

"Did he ever have any trouble with Denshaw?" O'Hara asked.

"I can answer that," Penny replied. "I've heard them several times recently when they seemed to be quarreling, and it surprised me that Uncle Cecil, so proud and arrogant, would tolerate it. I expected him to discharge Denshaw, but he didn't."

"Know what they were quarreling about?"

"No, sir. I didn't hear actual words, just their angry voices. And once I saw Denshaw come from the library, and his eyes were blazing and his fists were clenched."

Rassman came to the door, and called, and O'Hara hurried out to him. Rassman called to Doc Layne, too.

"I found the houseman, Denshaw," Rassman whispered. "He's on the floor in his own room—dead."

"Put the photographer in front of the library door," O'Hara snapped. "Put the fingerprint man on guard at this door. Call in one of the men outside—Carlson will do—and tell him to stand by here in the hall. Quick!"

Rassman hurried down the hall toward the door, barking orders.

"So we've got a twister, maybe," O'Hara said to Doc Layne.

The men were stationed quickly, then Rassman took O'Hara and Doc Layne down the hall, through the enormous kitchen and to be houseman's room.

Denshaw was stretched on the floor, face upward. On the floor beside him was a tumbled Santa Claus costume, as if he had just cast it off. Doc Layne made a swift examination.

"Same stuff," he reported. "Puncture, and burn in the left hand."

Layne went on with his examination while O'Hara and Rassman searched the room.

"So Fargall and this man had been quarrelin' about somethin'," Rassman summed up. "He jabs Fargall and kills him, then comes back to his own room and jabs himself."

"With what?" O'Hara said. "We haven't found a needle."

"This man got a heavy shot and died almost instantly," Layne reported.

"Would he have had time to dispose of a needle?"

"I'd say not. He probably dropped a second after he was jabbed. Somebody could have held him, jabbed, waited until the stuff did its work and then dropped him on the floor."

O'Hara looked at Rassman. "Ed, let's assume that Denshaw decided to kill his employer and then commit suicide. If so, why the trickery? Why didn't he just kill Fargall with a gun or some other weapon and then make away with himself? Why the jab in the hand while playing Santa Claus? And housemen, as a rule, don't go through life packing prussic acid and hypo needles. Prussic isn't easy to get."

"I've guessed it, Mike—somebody else killed them both," Rassman decided. "Tried to make it look like Denshaw had killed Fargall and then himself. It'd look good, specially since Fargall and Denshaw had been quarrelin' about somethin'."

"So it seems, Mike." O'Hara picked up the discarded Santa Claus costume. It was of ordinary red flannel, trimmed in white, and the mask had been tossed down near it. O'Hara sniffed at the costume, then held it for Rassman to sniff.

"Moth balls," Rassman said.

"Right! And why not? They've been using this costume each Christmas Eve, and packing it away meanwhile."

O'Hara went over to Denshaw's body, knelt beside it, bent forward and sniffed and sniffed. He motioned for Rassman to do the same.

"No moth ball smell," Rassman said.

"Right again," O'Hara declared. "Which means that poor Denshaw didn't have on that Santa Claus costume tonight. Somebody killed him in here as he was preparing to put the costume on. That somebody played Santa Claus in Denshaw's place—and killed Fargall."

"So it's a twister," Rassman said.

"And we're goin' to crack it quick," O'Hara declared. "I'm not going to spend Christmas Day away from my family working on a case. Get out your flashlight and come with me."

THEY went out the kitchen door and flashed their lights. There was an inch or more snow on the ground, and tracks were in the snow. They led around the side of the house and to the driveway. The tracks were all alike. Somebody had come around the house and entered, then had gone back the same way.

"Let's get inside," O'Hara said. "Things are commencing to shape up. We'll get some facts now, maybe. Keep your mouth shut about things."

They went back to the living room. Penny Fargall was sitting on the divan beside Bob Blodger again. Dr. Morgan Stampf was still in his chair, puffing languidly at a cigarette.

"The houseman, Denshaw, is dead," O'Hara announced bluntly. "In the same manner. The first reaction was that he killed Mr. Fargall because of their quarrel, and then committed suicide. But certain things now lead us to believe that somebody else killed them both."

"Killed them both?" Dr. Stampf cried. "Who could have done it? How—and why?"

"There is no indication of any stranger being in the house tonight, though such a thing is possible," O'Hara told them, standing beside Dr. Stampf's chair. "So . . . Well, look at it yourselves. Who had the opportunity? Miss Fargall did. Mr. Blodger did. Denshaw did, but he was a victim himself so is out of it."

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" Blodger began indignantly.

"Tut, tut!" O'Hara interrupted, shaking a finger at him. "To me, everybody is guilty

until proved innocent. By the way, do any of you happen to know who benefits by Mr. Fargall's will?"

"I can tell you something of that," Dr. Stampf replied. "Mr. Fargall made a new will about a year ago, and consulted me regarding one part of it. And he happened to tell me what he intended doing with his estate."

"What?"

"Large amounts for various charities, of course. A fortune for Penny, his only surviving relative. Denshaw was down for ten thousand dollars for long and faithful service."

"And you—?" O'Hara questioned.

"Mr. Fargall's wife died of cancer. He spoke to me some years ago about leaving an amount to be used as a special fund for the study of cancer. I was to use the money to found a clinic and build a sanitarium, of which I was to be the supervising director. A splendid idea!"

"I agree with you," O'Hara said. "Have you had any recent disagreements with Mr. Fargall?"

"I? Only because he disregarded my instructions about his diet. He had grown subject to fits of irascibility and was rather difficult at times, as Penny can tell you."

"Disagree about anything else?"

Dr. Morgan Stampf hesitated a moment, puffed his cigarette, took it from his mouth.

"It must come out, I suppose," he replied. "Mr. Fargall had an idea—and he was a man always fixed in his ideas—that I could make myself famous as director of the cancer clinic. I suggested he found it at once and not wait until after his death and settlement of his estate. He disagreed with me on that. And there was another matter."

"What was it?" O'Hara asked.

"Well—he had ideas about family. He wanted his fortune to remain in the family to a degree, same as many men do. He wanted his niece to be connected in some manner with whatever his money accomplished. That is why he did not want her to marry Mr. Blodger. In fact, he desired a marriage between Penny and myself."

"What?" Penny and Blodger cried together.

Dr. Stampf smiled slightly. "Yes, Penny, I was the man he meant when he said he wanted you married to an older man with an established reputation. I have never married, you know. I told him the idea was ridiculous, and he grew angry. Not that any man in his right mind would refuse such a bride as you, my dear"—he bowed to Penny—"but my heart interest is elsewhere. I had a college sweetheart. We quarreled and she married another man. Two years ago, she became a widow. We have met and renewed our attachment."

"I understand," O'Hara broke in. "Let's

get back on the beam. You and Fargall fussed about it?"

"To such an extent that he told me, recently, that if I didn't agree to a marriage with Penny he would change his will and name another physician to head the clinic."

"Well, let's check on everything," O'Hara said. "You told me, Dr. Stampf, that you were late for the party here because you had to call on a patient."

"Yes. Henry Zeller, who lives in the Royal Arms apartment house a block down the street. He's rather old and getting almost helpless. Has a nurse continually."

"Did he have a bad attack tonight?"

"Oh, nothing like that!" Dr. Stampf replied. "The nurse wanted to get off to go to a Christmas Eve party. So I called and let her go, then I sat with Mr. Zeller and gave him a sedative that would put him to sleep for hours, so the nurse wouldn't have to hurry back. When he dozed off and I was sure he was all right, I hurried here."

"Remember what time you got here?"

"A little before nine."

"When did you go to visit Zeller?"

"About eight or a little before. The nurse possibly can verify the time."

O'HARA gave Rassman a direct look, and the detective sergeant slipped into the hall quickly. The Squad man, Carlson, appeared to take his place.

"Dr. Stampf, in fairness to you, I'm having your story checked," O'Hara told him. "If you people will excuse me for a few minutes, I'll attend to matters and then come back."

Doc Layne had made arrangements for the removal of the bodies. The police photographer had flashed bulbs and exposed films. The fingerprints man had searched everywhere for prints. Reporters had got word of Fargall's death and were waiting outside the front door, held there by O'Hara's guard.

O'Hara hurried back to the living room, got from Penny the name of her uncle's attorney, and went to the library to telephone him and apprise him of Fargall's death. Then he went out and faced the reporters.

"Bear with me a little longer, boys, and I'll give you the whole thing," he said. "It'll be a clean-up of the case, I hope. Mr. Fargall was murdered, and so was his old houseman, Fred Denshaw. That's all for now."

He got away from them, slammed the door shut in their faces, and went back along the hall, his head bent, thinking.

In the living room, he sat down on the end of a couch, lit a cigarette and glanced at the others.

"Miss Fargall, and you, Blodger, think carefully now before you answer. When did you see Denshaw last?"

"If he wasn't the Santa Claus, it was just a little before Santa Claus came to the library," Penny replied. "Uncle told him it

was time for Santa Claus to appear. Denshaw was putting food on the buffet table."

"This Santa Claus—did he resemble Denshaw?"

"Well, we supposed he was Denshaw," Penny said. "Seemed the same size."

"How about his voice?"

"He never spoke. Uncle never allowed that. Said it broke the illusion to have Santa Claus speak. He just gave us the presents and bowed."

"Notice his hands?"

"He was wearing big fur gloves," Bob Blodger put in.

"And very handy when it came to concealing a stubby hypo needle," O'Hara remarked. "Just before your uncle collapsed, Miss Fargall, did you touch him?"

"No. I was sitting on the couch in the corner. Bob was beside me. Uncle was in the big easy chair beside the reading desk."

"You touch him, Blodger, or shake hands with him?" O'Hara asked.

"No, sir. Are you intimating I killed him? And I wasn't out of the library, so I couldn't have killed Denshaw."

"Very cleverly put," O'Hara praised.

O'Hara turned to Dr. Stampf. "Since this tragedy has occurred, I suppose the will hasn't been changed, and you'll have the chance to go ahead with the clinic and sanitarium."

"I presume so," Stampf replied. "It will be a monument to Mr. Fargall."

"How long ago was it you told him you would not marry Miss Fargall, and he threatened to change the will and name another doctor?"

"Three days ago, I believe."

O'Hara got up and killed time pacing around the room. He was waiting for Rassman, who had gone to the Zeller apartment a block away. And finally Rassman returned and beckoned him, and O'Hara went into the hall. He listened to what Rassman had to say, then went back into the living room with Rassman beside him.

Rassman whispered to the Squad man, Carlson, as he entered, and Carlson drifted across the room and unobtrusively took up his position. O'Hara took the center of the floor.

"I think we have this thing solved," O'Hara said. "One of you now in this room killed both Mr. Fargall and Fred Denshaw."

Penny and Bob Blodger sat up straight and gave gasps of horror. Dr. Morgan Stampf brought out his cigarette case, carefully selected a cigarette, lit it with an expensive lighter, and returned lighter and case to his pockets. He fumbled for an instant in his waistcoat pocket, then settled back to smoke and listen.

"By the way, Dr. Stampf, you didn't see Denshaw this evening?" O'Hara asked.

"I didn't."

"Nor see the Santa Claus, whoever played the part?"

"I did not."

"When did you see the costume last?"

"Why, last Christmas Eve. I was a guest here at the usual party, and Denshaw played Santa Claus. I'll always remember it, because Denshaw got nervous and knocked over a table and smashed a vase, and was apologizing all over the place."

"I remember that, too," Penny put in.

"Dr. Stampf, you travel in fashionable society," O'Hara said, "and I presume you wear evening clothes a great deal?"

"Almost every evening," Stampf replied, smiling slightly. He also had a look of slight bewilderment in his face.

"You don't have to put up your evening clothes in moth balls then," O'Hara said, smiling also.

LIEUTENANT O'HARA puffed at his cigarette a few times, then extinguished it carefully in an ash tray and straightened.

"Well, I think we can consider this case closed, which will give me a chance to spend Christmas at home with my family," he said.

"Dr. Stamp, you went to Zeller's apartment a little before eight, as you said. Sergeant Rassman checked on that. The nurse had returned when Rassman was over at the apartment a few minutes ago. She says you came and she left immediately at about a quarter of eight."

"That's correct," Stamp replied. "I talked with Zeller for a time, and finally gave him a sedative, then came here."

"Isn't it true, Doctor, that you gave him a powerful sedative at once? He became unconscious immediately, and gave you an opportunity to leave, and Zeller couldn't tell afterward what time you had left. His apartment on the second floor is served with a private automatic elevator, and nobody saw you leave. You hurried back here, entered the rear of the house and accosted Denshaw in his room as he was preparing to put on the Santa Claus costume."

"I beg your pardon!" Dr. Stampf expressed indignation.

"Wait until I am done," O'Hara requested.

"You held Denshaw, who was not a strong man, jabbed him with a needle and killed him. You put on the costume and hurried to the library and played Santa Claus. You killed Mr. Fargall. Then you went back to Denshaw's room, took off the costume, hurried out of the house and around to the front door and rang the bell, getting here about the time Mr. Fargall dropped dead."

"Are you daring to intimate—"

"I'm not intimating. I'm accusing you, and arresting you, for the murders of Mr. Fargall and Fred Denshaw. And, knowing that the undertakers might discover the cause of death, you couldn't certify to a natural death from a heart attack, so you called the police. You probably thought Miss Fargall or Mr. Blodger would be suspected and blamed. You believed your alibi perfect."

"Why should I—have killed those two men?"

"To get the fat job of handling a fortune for a clinic and sanitarium, make yourself an international reputation possibly, and have plenty of money to marry your old college sweetheart. You knew Fargall would change his will."

"Preposterous!"

"Oh, let's end it!" O'Hara snapped. "The Santa Claus costume reeked with moth balls. Denshaw's clothes did not, so he didn't have the costume on over them. But your evening clothes, which you use continually and which are never packed away in moth balls, do. You put on that costume and played Santa Claus tonight and killed Fargall . . . Watch him, Carlson!"

O'Hara barked the last words at his Squad man. Dr. Stampf had lifted his left hand and taken the cigarette from his mouth. Then his right hand went up swiftly and slipped something between his lips. His teeth crunched a capsule.

"This will make three of us," Stampf said. "You guessed it right, Lieutenant O'Hara."

His head jerked up, he gasped, his eyes rolled, and he would have toppled from the chair if Carlson had not held the body back.

"I didn't even have time to tell him how he left his tracks plain in the snow," O'Hara said.

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The white-haired man whirled, and in an instant an automatic menaced Jerry

A Baffling Complete Crime Mystery Novelet

KEYS TO

CHAPTER I

Race for Vengeance

AARTHUR RIDGELY was nearing the close of his life, and knew it. Bald, with cheeks sunken and eyes turning that pale blue of advanced age, he looked like a mummy that could talk. For eight months he had been bedridden. Being a practical man, however, Arthur Ridgely was not afraid of what lay just ahead of him, but he was worried to a great extent about the future of his nephew who sat beside his bed.

Jerry Craig, at twenty-nine, showed none of the scars which he had received fighting in Africa, Italy, France and finally Belgium, where they had stopped him. He was tall enough, slender after the hard living of fifty-two months of active warfare, and while his eyes were blue, as were those of his uncle they were of a darker shade and were alive with alertness.

Ridgely sighed deeply. "So that's the story, Jerry," he said, as he finished what he had been saying to his nephew. "It was always my ambition to make good. I did, in a greater measure than I deserved. I've been

Ex-Soldier Jerry Craig Takes Up Arms to War



THE KILLER

By **WAYLAND RICE**

a bachelor all my life and you are my only living relative. I wanted to leave you a comfortable estate, to give you something to get a start on. I had to struggle for my beginning, and it wasn't pleasant."

"Forget it," Jerry said, and smiled. "I've always wished you'd spend all that dough you made on yourself. And have a good time. I'm not afraid of hard knocks."

"I know that." Ridgely nodded feebly. "The trouble is, I didn't spend the money on myself. It was taken from me. By the lowest breed of crook in existence. For twelve years, Jerry, I have been systematical-

ly blackmailed. Not of hundreds of dollars, but thousands. That's what makes me so blasted sore."

Jerry's eyes went hard. "Tell me more. Not why you were blackmailed. That doesn't make any difference to me. I know you couldn't have hurt anyone."

"But I'd rather tell you the whole story," Ridgely said. "If I'd challenged the blackmailer right off, perhaps I'd never have had to pay, but he worked on me. He knew every weakness I had. I paid, and then it was too late. Payment of blackmail is tantamount to admitting your guilt. Oh, I was guilty

Against a Sinister, Death-Dealing Blackmailer!

all right.

"It happened when I was a young squirt, like you. I had a job in a bank. The horses were running good. I picked up a lot of money that way. You know the rest. A race was fixed. I'd been tipped off and I planned to make a fortune in one neat swoop. I borrowed a lot of money from the bank. Sure, the race was fixed, only somebody forgot to tell the horse."

"And then?" Jerry asked.

"I was licked, and knew it. I went to the president of the bank, made a clean breast of the whole thing and sold every valuable I possessed. I got another job, scraped and scrimped and finally I was square with the bank. Funny thing though—by working so hard to make that money good, I also created a reputation for myself as a plugger. That reputation advanced me."

"And no one ever got wise?" Jerry inquired.

RIDGELEY shook his head.

"Not a soul," he said. "The first bank president was a good egg. He even recommended me for another job. Well, I rose by leaps and finally I became president of the bank here in town. Not long afterward I got my first letter. I was to pay up, or the whole thing would be exposed. How'd you like to have all your savings in a bank run by a man who'd once robbed another bank? I paid."

Jerry lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"Tell me," he said, "why are you relating this story now? I think I know, but I'd like confirmation."

Ridgely smiled. "I thought you'd take it that way. Jerry—find that blackmailer. Make him pay back what he took from me. I'm dying. Exposure means nothing to me now. But it will mean something to the blackmailer. You can send him to prison."

"Uh-huh," Jerry said. "But not in one solid piece. I'll take him apart first. Who is he?"

Ridgely coughed and seemed embarrassed.

"Frankly, I don't know. His only contacts were by typed letter and with each payment I had to return not only the letter, but the envelope it came in as well. Oh, he had me all right. He knew it, and so did I. My payments were addressed to a nice section of New York. The name was Mitchell Jordan, probably a fake."

"How many people knew about that little episode in your past?" Jerry asked.

"The bank president, of course," old Ridgely said wearily, "but he died years ago. At the time, it happened, he told me no one else knew the truth, that he'd fixed the accounts to balance until I paid up. I believe he did. He was that kind of man. He had a male secretary, Jerry. Fellow named Sam Drake, who also liked the horses. Perhaps Drake

knew about it. He struck me as being a nice sort, but I didn't know him too well. Maybe he found out about me."

"If there was nobody else, you can bet it must have been Drake," Jerry said positively. "Understand this, Uncle Arthur, I'm going to try to catch your blackmailer. It shouldn't be too hard with a name—even a false one—and an address to go by. But not because I want the money he took from you. I merely want to punch him till he's groggy, then show him up for what he is. There may be others who are suffering just as you did, because of his avariciousness."

"Fine," Ridgely said approvingly. "I'd die a lot happier if I knew he was sweating as he made me sweat. Expose him, Jerry, save the others who are under his thumb, if there are any other victims. Paste him one for me—smack on the nose. Then come home and tell me all about it. I'll be here. I refuse to die until I hear you tell me what happened."

Jerry got all the necessary facts, then went and packed. Within six hours he was on his way to New York and getting madder every time the wheels of his Pullman turned on the rails.

He checked in at a hotel where he always stayed on his visits to New York. His uncle could reach him there if he thought of any other leads.

Jerry Craig drank a cocktail, ate dinner, then began his manhunt. It was ludicrously simple. The address his uncle had given him was authentic, an apartment building of high type, and expensive. The river views from the front windows didn't come cheaply. Jerry set his jaws hard. This blackmailer had lived high on blood money. But now he was going to pay—and pay well.

Jerry didn't call the apartment. He stepped into the elevator, told the operator to let him off a floor far above the one he wanted, then walked down the steps. It didn't hurt to take precautions if things were wrong.

The apartment was one of the costly front ones, as Jerry had suspected. He aimed a finger at the bell, then hesitated. The door was ajar slightly. He pushed it wider, revealing a foyer of elaborate design and decoration.

Moving softly along this, he stopped dead. From one of the rooms just ahead he could hear a panting sound, almost like that of a hound ready to collapse of exhaustion. But not quite like that. He listened again, and realized the sound was being made by a human being. He knew it, for he had once starred in college track and he had puffed and wheezed like this many times himself.

He walked softly to the door. It was almost closed. He put the flat of his hand against it and pushed gently. As it swung open noiselessly, he first saw a pair of feet.

They were on the floor, but the toes were up. As the door opened further, he saw that the owner of those feet would never have any use for them again. The man was obviously dead.

OVER him stood another man, white-haired, husky and disheveled. He was the one who was doing the harsh breathing. Deliberately, then, Jerry walked into the room. The white-haired man whirled, and his hand streaked for a table upon which lay an automatic. He scooped it up, and in an instant the weapon menaced Jerry.

"Get over against that wall!" the white-haired man snapped. "Hurry it up! I'm in a killing mood—if you need more evidence of that then there it is right before your eyes."

Jerry raised his arms shoulder high and obeyed. He didn't know what this was all about, but a trickle of suspicion was forming at the back of his brain.

"You killed him?" he asked slowly.

"Who else?" the white-haired man snarled. "You're probably a member of his gang. I suppose he had a gang. Well, they can't make me pay for murder more than once." He took a step forward.

"Just a moment," Jerry said quickly. "I don't even know this fellow on the floor. But if his name should be Mitchell Jordan, you probably have just saved me from doing the same thing you did."

"Meaning just what?" the white-haired man asked bluntly. "The dead man is Mitchell Jordan, all right—but get this! I'm not going to be tricked. I no longer care what happens to me."

Jerry nodded. "So he blackmailed you too. He did the same thing to my uncle. Bled him for years. I came here to get as much of the money as possible from him and whack him a few healthy pokes on the nose. Put that gun down. There's no need for it—with me. In fact, I'd like to shake hands."

The white-haired man slowly lowered the weapon, and finally stuffed it into his pocket.

"I killed him," he said bleakly. "I shouldn't have done that, but he drew a gun on me and I went mad. I tricked him, then I pounced on him and fastened my hands around his throat. I scarcely remember what happened after that until—until he was as he is now."

Jerry moved forward. "Better sit down," he advised. "The going may be tough from now on. We've got to do some thinking. First of all—this man really was Mitchell Jordan?"

"Yes—yes, Mitchell Jordan. My name's Alan Stevens. You might as well know it now, because the police will, soon enough. And you'll read it plenty when the newspapers get hold of this, and when I'm—electrocuted."

Jerry winced. Probably if he had reached Mitchell Jordan first, he would have killed the man. Then he would have needed help. So far as Jerry was concerned, the death of this blackmailer was not to be construed as murder.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "if there isn't some way out of it."

"How?" Stevens half arose in his eagerness. "If you have any ideas at all, tell me!"

"Just what happened?" Jerry asked. "Begin from the beginning."

Stevens shuddered, but answered after a moment, hastily, as though he wanted to get it all out at once.

"Jordan bled me for years. I couldn't pay up any longer. He sent for me, let me in and told me if I didn't pay, he'd see that headlines were run about me. It would have been—rather awful. I'm not telling what I did, those years ago. It doesn't make any difference, except that it was not murder."

"So Jordan threatened you," Jerry said.

"He produced the evidence he had against me. Certain papers. Got them from the wall-safe over there. He flaunted them before my eyes, let me see exactly what the publicizing of them would do to me. I made a grab for the papers and tore them out of his hand. We fought, and I managed to knock him down. I went over to the fireplace, set the evidence on fire, and was watching it burn when he sneaked over to his desk and got that gun."

"Burning those papers helped you in one way and harmed you in another," Jerry said. "They were proof he'd been blackmailing you. Now there is no proof."

Stevens paled. "I—never thought of that," he muttered. "I suppose I did no thinking at all. When he had the gun on me I told him I'd pay. He was saying something about photostatic copies when I watched my chance as his head was turned, and jumped him. The gun fell on the table. I got my hands around his throat and kept them there . . . What in the world can I do now?"

JERRY stared at the corpse. He felt no aversion toward it, for this was one man he was satisfied to see dead. Anyway, he had seen death in far more gruesome forms than this.

"I want to help you," he said suddenly.

"We're in this together, because I might have killed him if you hadn't won the race for—shall we say, vengeance?"

"Thanks," Stevens mumbled half-heartedly. "But how in the world can you help me?"

"I take it no one saw you enter," Jerry said hastily. "I hope not. I'll accept my own chances so far as I'm concerned. Now we'll get Jordan's body out of here somehow. We'll lay him in a dark alley somewhere and set the stage so it will look as if he had been the victim of a stick-up. Naturally no one

knows the hold Jordan had on you, I suppose. So why should you be suspected of killing him? But we have to work fast."

Stevens jumped up. "It's an idea!" he exclaimed. "It may work, and if it does I'll be everlastingly grateful to you. Mind shaking hands with a killer?"

Jerry offered his hand. "I've killed, too. Nazis. And the difference between them and this blackmailer isn't much. My name is Jerry Craig. My uncle is Arthur Ridgely. I suppose you'll want to know . . . Now see if you can find a blanket. I'll start scouting for a back way out of here. Have you a car?"

Stevens nodded. "It's parked on the side street, near the service entrance of this building. I'll get a blanket."

Jerry returned in ten minutes, satisfied that they could get away with it. He helped roll Jordan's corpse in the blanket, but first he tore the man's clothing until it would appear that he had put up a terrific battle for his life. Then Jerry deliberately robbed the body.

"Just to keep our consciences clear," he told Stevens, "we'll put the money in an envelope and mail it, anonymously, to the Red Cross. All set now? You go ahead and make certain the coast is clear. There's a self-operated service elevator at the rear. We'll use that. Watch the passenger elevator floor indicators so a car won't stop just as we're going by."

CHAPTER II

Telephone Call

IN FIVE minutes the body was stowed on the floor of the sedan, belonging to the man who had told Jerry Craig his name was Alan Stevens. Jerry climbed in and sat beside Stevens. They headed downtown, their hearts racing as fast as the motor of the car. Jerry lit a cigarette, found that his hands weren't shaking at all, and passed another cigarette to Stevens.

"We'll get you out of this," he said, confidently. "Though of course, you must realize that by doing this, we're closing the door on any possibility of proving you had a right to kill Jordan."

"I know," Stevens said. "I was trapped anyway. All I feel badly about is involving you. But if they get me, the stiffest third degree in the world won't make me divulge your name."

They found a dark and desolate side street, off which were plenty of dismal alleyways. Jerry told Stevens to pull up at the mouth of one. He got from the car, looked around, and then quickly carried the body deep into the alley. He removed the blanket, cast a final look at the dead man and hurried back to the car.

As he settled himself in the seat, he noticed a flashlight's beam in an alley across the

street. The light reflected briefly against a wall and revealed a patrolman making a routine check.

"Let's get out of here!" Jerry said, sharply. "That's a cop! He'll find that body soon . . . Listen I've got some things to do before they identify Jordan. Take me back to his apartment."

"But isn't that dangerous?" Stevens asked, surprised.

"Sure it is," Jerry agreed, "but I've got to try and find other incriminating documents. Especially those concerning my uncle. They must be destroyed. Otherwise a lot of people are going to suffer even more than they did under Jordan's merciless treatment."

Stevens pulled away and headed back.

"I thought I was pretty smart," he said tightly. "Maybe I was. You see, before I killed him, I had an vague idea of returning and stealing the evidence against me. That's why I made Jordan produce it. I hadn't thought then that I'd have the remotest chance of getting my hands on it and destroying it. But I did know he'd have to open the safe and I was able to watch him manipulate the dial. I'm sure I remember the numbers. Hold the wheel a moment while I write them down for you."

"If you can help me to open that safe," Jerry said feverently, "we're square on all counts."

Steven's fingered his note-book and pencil thoughtfully for some moments, then shook his head, with a heavy sigh, and put them away.

"I can't seem to remember all the numbers," he mumbled. "Maybe I could if I looked at the safe. I'm going back with you."

"That's foolish," Jerry warned, but Stevens shrugged.

"Why should I ask you to take all the risk alone?" he asked. "After what you've already done for me. But I did think of one pertinent thing. Suppose the police do trace me? I may need an alibi. So what do you think of my stopping at my home first, phoning a friend of mine about some business we have and casually mentioning the time. That will prove I was in my own house about the time all this took place."

Jerry laughed wryly. "I wish I could do the same thing."

Stevens soon stopped in front of his house, a big place, in a suburban section of Long Island. Jerry could see that it was the home of a wealthy man. There was a spacious yard, luxuriously landscaped, with the house set well back.

Stevens let himself in, while Jerry stayed in the car. Stevens came out in a few minutes, gratified with the results of his establishing an alibi.

They drove on to Jordan's apartment building then, and entered it by means of the

service elevator by which they had left. Jerry had taken Jordan's keys, so when they arrived before the door of Jordan's apartment he shifted, to his left arm, the blanket in which the corpse had been wrapped, opened the door, and they went inside.

Everything was just as they had left it.

Stevens put the blanket back where he had found it and then returned to Jerry in the living room.

There he revealed a wall-safe behind an oil painting that swung away from the wall. He studied the dial a moment or so, then went to work. His first two attempts were failures and Jerry's hopes sank. But at the third try he heard tumblers click and the safe door swung open.

STEVENS thrust a hand inside and pulled out some envelopes. He handed them to Jerry who quickly thumbed through the half-dozen. One bore the name of his uncle. The other bore names of strangers, but he noted them well. He ripped open his uncle's envelope, glanced at the papers inside it and nodded happily.

"This is it!" he declared. "Thanks to you I've removed this threat anyhow. And we have some case histories on five other people."

"I suggest we burn the lot without opening them," Stevens said. "The less we know, the better. Anyway, I killed Jordan, and you helped me get rid of his body purely to help me and your uncle. Now we should help those other unfortunates if possible. I say, burn this stuff."

Jerry passed over the envelopes. Stevens tore them into strips, piled them over the dead ashes of his own past now lying in the fireplace grate. Then he applied a match and both men stood there watching the paper burn.

"Steven's," Jerry said then, as he drew a long, satisfied breath, "you'd better get back home. I'll stay until this fire is out, make dust of the ashes and dump them into the ash receiver. Then I'll get busy with a cloth to remove finger-prints. I'll be safe—don't worry."

Stevens offered his hand again. "Thanks for everything," he said. "Especially for the faith you had in me. If there is anything I can do for you, just let me know."

"You did enough when you opened that safe," Jerry answered. "Just start praying now—for both of us—that the luck we've had so far will hold."

After Stevens was gone, Jerry went about his bits of business. It didn't take long. He wiped the wall-safe door carefully, polished the surfaces of furniture and the door knobs. Finally he decided he was finished. Being careful not to leave his own fingerprints about, he held a handkerchief in his hand and reached for the front door knob. At that

instant the door buzzer let loose, and Jerry shuddered as much as the buzzer.

He didn't know what to do. If he didn't answer, someone might become suspicious. If he did, and met some friend of Jordan's, the whole thing might be up. He stepped back softly and waited.

The buzzer sounded again. He made no further move. Then something rustled near the floor and he saw an envelope shoved beneath the door.

He picked it up, ripped the flap and stared at several hundred dollars in small bills. There was also a brief note that read:

Jordan, this is all I could scrape up. It will have to do.

The note was signed "Blakely," one of the names Jerry had noted on the burned "Evidence." Just another payment of blackmail.

Jerry put it into his pocket. Some day he would return the money and explain that no more payments would have to be made. Right now he had to concentrate on getting out of here.

He heard no sound in the hall, after listening keenly, so opened the door. A girl stood there. A decidedly pretty girl with a funny hat cocked over one eye. Both her eyes were amazingly blue, and she was trim and young. Her lips were meant only for smiling and kissing, but at this moment they were parted in surprise.

"I—I heard you pick it up," she said hesitantly. "I wanted to be sure you got it. I . . . You don't look at all like the man I expected was doing this terrible thing. You're as low as a man can be!"

She turned and started walking away. Her steps became faster until she ran. Jerry just stood there, staring at her, and knowing that he was now so badly involved that he would have a hard time getting away with anything. That girl had taken a good look at him. When Jordan's death was reported, she might go to the police and describe the man she thought was Jordan. Jerry took another long breath, closed the door, and got out of the place via the service elevator.

He went at once to his hotel, and there decided not to leave for home at once. He wanted to see how this mess was going to develop. He felt genuinely sorry for Stevens. The man had killed in self-defense, and anyway his victim hadn't been worthy of the privilege of life. But if the police closed in, Stevens would have to come forward and accept his share of the blame. From the way the man had acted, Jerry felt sure he would.

Oddly enough, Jerry soon fell asleep, his last thoughts concerned with that pretty girl who had visited Jordan's apartment to pay blackmail. He wondered what she could have done to deserve being bled white. He grinned in the darkness. Of course she was merely an emissary for someone else, just as he had been for his uncle. . . .

HE WAS awakened a little before noon by the jangling of his telephone. Vaguely, he thought it had been ringing for hours. He barked a sleepy "Hello," and then his eyes opened wide. It was his uncle on the other end of the wire.

"Jerry, what in the world happened? I saw in the morning papers that Jordan's body had been found."

"Whoa!" Jerry cautioned. "Let's not talk about it now. I'll explain the whole thing when I see you. Not as bad as you think, but you will not have to pay him any more."

"The devil with that!" his uncle broke in. "The papers said an arrest would be made in a couple of hours. I thought maybe they had already arrested you for killing Jordan. I stewed over it. My brain is getting as weak as my body, I guess. I became positive you had been thrown in jail for murder, and decided I must do something. So I telephoned Police Headquarters, and asked if I could talk to you."

Jerry groaned. "I hope you hung up fast."

"I told you my brain was getting weak," his uncle replied. "But I didn't know—then—how weak. So when someone asked me who you were, I—I'm afraid I connected you with the Jordan murder. Then a detective-sergeant named Walsh got on the wire and said you had been arrested, but he'd do all he could for you. He asked me some questions and I—I told him I'd tried to phone your hotel earlier, but had got no answer and had become so worried I didn't know what to do but call Headquarters."

"He can trace your call to this hotel," Jerry said. It was long distance and recorded. He's probably on his way here right now and I'm in no position to tangle with the law at this moment. I'll try to keep you advised. Thanks for calling me."

Jerry hung up and reached for his clothes with the other hand. In two minutes he was dressed, after a fashion. He jammed a toothbrush and tube of paste into his pocket, seized his hat, and raced out of the room. He was halfway down the corridor when he saw that all the elevators were starting up at the same time.

That would be the police, making sure he wouldn't be going down one while they went up another. They would have men posted downstairs. If they didn't find him in his room, an alarm would be given. He had to figure out some way so that no such alarm would be sent the man or men downstairs, at least until he had a chance to escape.

Jerry picked up a heavy ash receiver that stood near the elevators. He ran with it to the service stairway, balanced it on the edge of the steps and waited until he heard the elevator doors open. Then he shoved the ash receiver and before it bounced off the first step he was in the hall, slumped against the wall.

Four men came out of the elevators, which remained on the floor. A burly, thick-necked man seemed to be in charge. Jerry straightened up when he saw the man, and rubbed his shoulder.

"A young fellow came barging down the hall!" he shouted above the racket made by the tumbling ash receiver. "He sent me sprawling and went down the steps there. I don't know what was wrong, but he was wild-eyed!"

The four men barged past Jerry and rushed down the steps. Jerry walked over to the nearest elevator, stepped close to the operator, and jabbed him in the back with his thumb.

"If you don't want to get shot, pal, take me down—express."

The lift dropped. At the bottom, Jerry stepped out casually. He had warned the operator to go right up again, and the elevator doors closed behind him. Jerry walked with a slowness he thought bordered on a crawl. A man posted at the door glanced at him, but made no move to stop him. Other people were going in and out of the revolving doors.

Jerry reached the street, ambled a bit, and then started running. He ran as fast as he could, cut across town and popped into a small movie house. He sat down and gave a convulsive jump until he realized the gunshots he had heard were on the screen.

He stayed there, trying to figure out his next move. Obviously, he had to reach Stevens and explain what happened, and counsel with him.

Then they could make up their minds what to do now.

CHAPTER III

The Key



TWO hours went by. Jerry Craig wished it was night outside, but he couldn't risk staying in the theatre any longer. The police were bound to look through these nearby movie houses. He left, blinked in the light as he reached the foyer, and saw a taxi just pulling up, to let out a fare.

Yanking his hat brim low, Jerry walked unhurriedly across the sidewalk and got into the cab before it could pull away.

He gave the address of a corner near Alan Stevens' home. He had remembered it from glancing at a street sign, when he had been there before. Fortunately he had money—plenty, if he wanted to use the blackmail cash, which that girl had brought.

Even in his stress, thoughts of her bobbed into his mind again.

It was more than half an hour later when he walked up the path to Stevens' big house and rang the bell. A servant answered, a girl who for some reason that Jerry couldn't fathom, at once grew wide-eyed. He asked for Stevens, and she led him into the study.

Some minutes passed while he waited there, but no one put in an appearance. Finally the girl popped her head through the door and said that Mr. Stevens would be delayed a few more minutes. Jerry began to feel uneasy. Why, he didn't know. Of all places, this should be a safe spot for him to hide in. Stevens had as much to lose as he did, or more.

Finally a tall, slim black-haired man entered the room. He seemed wary and half-frightened. Jerry looked at him blankly.

"You wanted to see me?" the man asked.

"No," Jerry said. "I asked for Alan Stevens."

"I am Alan Stevens," the man said slowly. "Is this some kind of a joke?"

"You can't be!" Jerry blurted. "Stevens is older, has white hair. You're not Stevens and if this is a gag I don't appreciate it!"

"I assure you," the man said, "that I am Alan Stevens. And I know who you are. Your name is Craig, and you are wanted for murder. A full description of you came over the radio just a short time ago."

"They are here!" the maid yelled from the hall.

Jerry hopped up, took one hasty look out a front window and saw the burly detective he had eluded in the hotel, running toward the house.

Jerry looked directly at Stevens. "You're really Alan Stevens?" he demanded.

"Of course I am," Stevens replied.

"Thanks," Jerry said. "Not for calling the cops though. Now excuse me."

He raced through the house. Nobody tried to stop him. By the time the breathless maid and the astounded Alan Stevens told Sergeant Walsh what had happened, Jerry was tearing across yards and heading in any direction at all, so long as it was not toward the police car.

Jerry realized, even as he raced on, that he was far out of the city, and he wondered whether that was good or bad. His description had been broadcast, probably even his clothing, and he couldn't hide in a crowd swarming along the streets out here, or in a movie theatre.

But he had to get out of sight and fast. Within minutes that big detective would have the area alive with police.

The further Jerry got from Stevens' home, the more the houses changed. Soon he had reached a section that looked like a summer colony. Many of the small homes

appeared to be vacant, then he saw a row of them with drawn shades pulled and boarded-up doors.

He crashed into one of the houses by breaking a window. He had a place to rest, at least, and was safe for a time unless the police began a house to house search.

He dropped down on a davenport, realizing that he was in a worse jam than ever before. That white-haired man, self-confessed killer of Jordan, had taken him in beautifully. Worked a neat shell game on him and left him holding a nice empty bag.

The fellow had said he was Alan Stevens, had even gone so far as to pretend to enter the house of the real Stevens to make a phone call and establish an alibi. By now he would have disappeared completely. Not a soul would believe Jerry Craig's story. He was as good as convicted of murder right now.

To get away from these dire thoughts he turned his mind to that girl who had left the money with the note signed "Blakely" for Jordan. He found a telephone book. There was only one Blakely that appeared to have any possibilities. That was a man whose address was in a good section of the town. Suddenly Jerry made up his mind to visit this man. If he should turn out to be the right Blakely, which Jerry believed he would, it might be possible to get some important information from him. But even if he did not, he might see the girl. He smiled wryly. This was certainly about the worst possible time in his history to want to meet a girl.

Yet when dark fell he left his borrowed house and made his way cautiously back to town. He felt safer in crowds. The confusion was comforting and akin to his own confused brain.

Blakely lived in an apartment house with a self-service elevator, for which Jerry was grateful. He soon pushed the bell of the Blakely apartment and waited, hardly daring to breathe. The door opened and he faced the girl again.

"I—" Jerry began.

The door started to close. Jerry leaned against it with one shoulder.

"Now look!" he begged. "I'm not what they say. I didn't kill anyone. I'm not a blackmailer. In fact, I came here to return the money and that letter before the police got it and did some checking on the sender. Let me in—please. Every cop in town is after me."

She stepped back, still not saying a word. An elderly man hurried toward them. By appearance he was the girl's father. Jerry faced him.

"I've got to talk fast," he said, "before you people decide not to listen. My name is Jerry Craig. I came to see this man Jordan because he was blackmailing an uncle of mine. Jordan was dead when I arrived.

His killer was there in the apartment. He told me his name and address—both wrong—but by so doing and adding his own hard luck blackmail story he contrived to get me to help him remove the corpse. I believed he was in the same predicament as my uncle—as you, Mr. Blakely. I wanted to help him.”

Blakely took the envelope from his daughter, glanced inside it, then studied Jerry again.

“Gloria,” he finally said, “I believe this young man is telling the truth. There is a ring of authenticity to what he says.”

“I’d like to believe him,” Gloria said, and attempted a wan smile. “But it’s so fantastic. He isn’t Jordan, Dad?”

“Of course not,” Blakely replied. “Jordan was a much older man, and I’d known him for years. When I was ordered to pay up direct, not simply leave the money in some odd spot for the blackmailer to pick up, I was astounded when I discovered Jordan was the miscreant.”

“Did Jordan admit being the blackmailer?” Jerry asked quickly.

“Well, he certainly never denied it. If I was late, he phoned me and gave some mighty sharp orders. He was wealthy, and never worked. Of course he was the blackmailer.”

“Why did you ask that question?” Gloria was looking straight at Jerry now.

“I’m not sure,” Jerry admitted. “I’ve got a crazy idea whirling around in my head. Probably doesn’t amount to much. But I can’t stay here. Miss Blakely, did anybody see you enter or leave that building where Jordan lived?”

“Yes—two or three people I knew,” Gloria said. “Mr. Craig, I want you to know that Dad paid this blackmailer, not because of something he did himself, but because someone he loved . . . Well, it’s a long story. Dad felt responsible.”

“I don’t want to hear it,” Jerry said. “Thanks for believing in me.”

The doorbell rang. Jerry gave a startled jump. Gloria called out, asking who it was. The answering voice made Jerry’s hair stand on end. The police! Gloria looked around quickly, opened a hall closet door, pushed Jerry inside, and opened the front door.

“I’m Detective-sergeant Walsh,” a heavy voice said.

“Come in, Sergeant,” Gloria invited. “This way—to the study. What in the world does a policeman want with me or Dad?”

Jerry listened until the footsteps died out. He opened the door a crack, peered out, then beat a hasty retreat.

On the street he was again puzzled as to where to turn. Every door was closed to him, every corner was a trap, every blue uniform a menace. For a while he thought that out of each six persons in New York, at least four were policemen. Bluecoats

seemed to be everywhere, but he got past them by resisting every impulse to run for it even when they glanced his way.

To appear nonchalant as he forced himself to saunter along, he thrust both hands into his trouser pockets—and encountered a key. The key to Jordan’s apartment! A swift idea leaped into Jerry Craig’s mind. The police would have searched Jordan’s place by now. They would hardly return, or expect Craig to be there. At least he might find a refuge for a few hours.

He went there as directly as possible. The police had been there all right. He saw that at a glance. But they hadn’t disturbed things much, and they had not thought it worth while to leave a man on guard outside the door.

JERRY sat down behind the dead blackmailer’s desk and opened the drawers. For an hour he studied check-books, old bills, and records of securities. At the end of that hour he knew that Jordan had been putting on a big front, but had really been on the verge of bankruptcy. Only a few deposits had been made in months, and these had not been large. Barely enough to keep body and soul and this expensive apartment together.

He wandered into the bedroom and looked around. There was a bottle of sleeping pills on the night table. About twenty pills had been taken from the bottle and were strewn across the table. A fountain pen, its top removed, also was lying there.

Frowning a little, Jerry went over to a small writing table against the opposite wall. On it was a blotter pad—nothing else. He lifted the pad. There was a letter beneath it. Or part of a letter. It read:

To Whom It May Concern: Because of circumstances beyond my control and which I shall outline, I am forced to—

It ended there.

Jerry kept the letter, then searched the apartment inch by inch. In a closet behind the regular closet, and which he found by searching for a hidden spring, having noticed—as the police had not—the shallowness of the regular closet, he found a small trunk. Forcing it open he discovered a leather kit holding a crude set of burglar tools. The tips of some instruments bore fresh scratches, as if they had been used recently. And there was also an ordinary front door key in the kit.

Jerry appropriated the whole business, putting the key into his pocket. Now he had to take further risks. The killer had pretended to enter Stevens’ home, but obviously he had merely approached the porch and in the darkness gone elsewhere. He had said he wanted

to make a phone call to establish an alibi. That might have been the truth, but perhaps not the whole reason for leaving Jerry to wait.

However, the house to which he had really gone must be close to Stevens. Jerry promptly decided that he must find that house.

First though, he opened the wall-safe, remembering the combination which wasn't at all difficult. The fake Stevens must have lied about that too. For some reason he had wanted to come back to this apartment. Why?

Jerry got the safe door open. Now he saw what the false Stevens' head and shoulders had blocked before. The safe was crammed with papers. How then, had the man so quickly and easily removed those five envelopes without also removing a lot of other papers?

For the first time Jerry felt a faint surge of hope, at an idea that was vaguely forming in his mind. But he needed more than hope. He needed proof.

He recalled the names of the blackmail victims on those envelopes which he and the false Stevens had burned. They had been firmly impressed on his mind. Hastily going through a phone book, he was able to pick out two of the five. He phoned one man and asked for him by the name he remembered.

"I'm sorry," a woman's voice told him, "but Mr. Jules Carson died two years ago. Is there something I can do?"

"No." Jerry smiled grimly. "Thanks very much."

He phoned the other name and received a similar report. This person had been dead for seven months. The odds were that the other three men whose dossiers had been destroyed were also dead. It was the one clue Jerry needed.

He had to take chances now, so he boldly hailed a taxicab, gave Stevens' address and thought coolly about the whole affair during the rather long ride. He paid off the driver, approached the house with care and noticed that a fairly tall fence ran the full length of the west side of the yard.

The killer hadn't climbed that or Jerry would have heard him. That left the east side to examine—and there was no fence. Jerry cut across the yard, trying his best to make no noise. He tiptoed onto the porch of the house next door, and tried the key he found in Jordan's kit. It did not fit.

He tried it on four other houses, and the hope he'd begun to feel faded away, leaving deep despair. Then he went back to the Stevens house, made his way all around it and came out in the back yard of a house directly behind it. Again hope swelled.

He circled this house, tried the key—and it fitted the front door lock! He opened the front door softly, peered into a well-fur-

nished house and listened. There were lights on, so someone must be at home. He stepped in, closed the door and tiptoed down the hall.

CHAPTER IV

Murderer's Trick



UPSTAIRS, someone walked heavily across the floor. It was quite late now. Probably somebody was getting ready for bed. Jerry went on with what occupied him downstairs. He examined two rooms, but it was the third one down the hall that intrigued him. It was fitted up as an office, with steel filing cabinets, a large desk

and leather furniture.

He moved up to the filing cabinet. The top drawer showed signs of having been pried open. Jerry opened Jordan's kit of tools, and saw at once that some of them obviously had made these marks. Some of the green enamel on the filing case still adhered to a chisel.

Jerry closed the door and attacked those cabinets, concentrating on the second one. It opened with a loud snap as he sprung the lock. He held his breath, but nobody came rushing down the steps. Inside the case were many files. His jaw dropped as he saw the meaning of them. This was the blackmailer's headquarters. It had never been in Jordan's apartment.

Jerry hastily removed the files, made a neat stack of them, and, flipping through several, found one marked with Blakely's name. He didn't bother to read it, but shoved the papers into his pocket.

Next he ransacked an unlocked cabinet, and found only papers that had no bearing on blackmail. He transferred these to the cabinet he had unlocked, closed it, and managed to snap the lock back. The metal was springy and responded readily to the urgings of the chisel. Then he hid the tools.

Deliberately, then, he picked up a vase from a decorative table and hurled the big ornament at the wall. It made a terrific crash. Feet raced down the staircase, the door was thrown open and two men rushed toward him. One was reaching toward his hip pocket, but he didn't draw a gun. Jerry made no move, offered no sign of resistance.

"Well, what do you know?" one of these strangers marveled. "The lug who's wanted for murder, as sure as guns! Answers the description perfectly. Call the cops! We ought to get a medal for this."

"Now, listen to reason, fellows," Jerry be-

gan, but one of them slapped him across the mouth.

Both seized him and pushed him to another room. Jerry dropped into a chair and stayed there until Sergeant Walsh put in an appearance.

He made good time. Within twenty minutes he was putting handcuffs on Jerry Craig's wrists.

"Thanks, boys," Walsh told the two men. "This fellow is plenty slippery. You saved me a lot of work."

Jerry looked down at the handcuffs and frowned, knowing that if he failed now, it was all over.

Walsh made a phone call, but Jerry couldn't hear what he said. Then Walsh came back.

"Sergeant," Jerry said, "don't you think you ought also to thank the owner of this house? Not just a couple of stooges who work for him?"

Walsh grimaced. "What's the difference? I'm not bothering a man as important as Mr. Drake."

"Hello, Sergeant Walsh," said a voice from the doorway, and the white-haired killer, clad in a dark blue lounging robe, walked into the room. He gave Jerry a cursory glance. "Is this the man you are after?"

"I'll say he is!" Walsh chuckled. "A lucky break that I got him. What was he trying to do—rob the place?"

"Hello, Mr. Stevens, alias Sam Drake." Jerry looked straight at the white-haired man. "You look refreshed and happy. Much happier than a murderer should look. You killed Jordan—and not because he was blackmailing you either. You're the blackmailer, and you forced Jordan to act as your stooge and agent after you'd bled him dry. You paid him to maintain that nice apartment and keep living as he always had. He made an excellent front and he couldn't talk without involving himself."

Sam Drake blinked, then laughed.

"Do you know what he's talking about, Sergeant?" he asked blandly. "Do I construe it correctly to mean he is accusing me of killing Jordan and being a blackmailer?"

"He's crazy," Walsh growled sarcastically. "I'm sorry to bother you like this, Mr. Drake, but we want to make one more identification. Then we'll leave. Imagine—saying you're a blackmailer! Why, I don't know another man who tries so hard to help first offenders we haul in as you do."

"Sergeant," Jerry said, "make Drake open those steel cabinets in his study and show you what's inside then. I'm betting they're crammed full of blackmail evidence."

Drake shrugged. "I'll open them, naturally. I'm afraid, my boy, that you're trying foolish and desperate measures to get out of this. Why, I never even knew this Jordan who was killed."

THEY all marched to the study and Drake unlocked the cabinets. Walsh examined some of the papers, then walked over to Jerry.

"One more crazy crack like that and I'll stop trying to be helpful," he growled.

"Since when did you start?" Jerry demanded. He was getting sorer by the minute. "Drake removed those papers. But I know one thing he didn't remove. I cleaned up Jordan's apartment to make sure Drake's prints weren't around, when he said he was Stevens. I did a good job too, and, incidentally, made a stronger case against myself. But Drake forgot something. It's—"

At that moment Gloria Blakely walked into the room. She saw Jerry and had started toward him impulsively when Walsh confronted her.

"Take a good look at this man," Walsh said. "Is he the one you saw in Jordan's apartment?"

Gloria hesitated. "Go ahead, Miss Blakely," Jerry said, "tell him the truth. I admit she saw me in Jordan's apartment, Sergeant."

"He is the man," Gloria said.

Walsh nodded. "Okay. That's all we needed to know. Come on, you. We're going to Headquarters."

Jerry didn't get up. "Sarge," he said, "before you make an utter fool out of yourself, take a look in that waste-basket over there. I removed the blackmail files, substituted some other papers and Drake substituted still others, thinking he was hiding the evidence with which he has bled so many men for so many years. Go on—look."

Walsh hesitated a moment, but finally stalked over and pumped the waste-basket upside down. Wedged in the bottom, and covered with scrap paper, were the files. He glanced at several and whistled sharply.

"An obvious plant!" Drake declared. "He hid them so they wouldn't be found on his person."

"And, Sarge," Jerry cut in, ignoring the man, "send a couple of men to Jordan's apartment. Drake killed Jordan. I came in right after he'd finished the murder. Drake is a fast thinker. He pretended he was Jordan's blackmail victim. In reality, he'd come to kill Jordan because Jordan had reneged. Jordan had also broken into this house and removed some of the blackmail files. He had already burned them when Drake came to see him. Jordan was at the end of his rope. He intended to commit suicide. There was a note, and some sleeping pills in his bedroom. Drake saved him that trouble."

Drake was so furious now he was red in the face.

Sergeant," he exploded, "I demand you

take this man out of here! He's mad—perhaps dangerous!"

"Yeah." Walsh seemed slightly doubtful now. He asked Jerry: "Why did you want me to send some boys to Jordan's apartment?"

"I fell in with Drake's plans," Jerry swiftly explained. "I was sorry for him and helped him remove the body. That was a mistake, and I admit it—not only because I made myself an accessory after the fact, for which I am now willing to pay, but because it gave Drake a chance to make me his unwitting tool. But first he had to convince me that Jordan was a blackmailer, and that he was Alan Stevens."

"He had me wait in front of Stevens' house—it's just back of this one—on a flimsy excuse. He pretended to enter Stevens' house, but actually ran back to this one where he snatched up some worthless blackmail papers—worthless because the men they implicated were dead—and stuffed them in his pockets. When we went back to Jordan's house he opened the safe and handed over to me the papers which had been in his pocket, but which I believed came out of the safe. Naturally I never suspected Drake, believing Jordan was the blackmailer. Why, he even sacrificed his evidence against my uncle, hoping I'd go home and forget the whole thing, I suppose."

"Yes, yes," Walsh said. "It's crazy, but logical too. Now will you answer my question? Why did you want me to send some men to Jordan's apartment? And what did you mean, he forgot something?"

"Oh, yes." Jerry had his eyes on Drake. "You see, when Drake and I returned, he went through his act and left before me. I wiped fingerprints off things. But in opening the safe Drake put his whole hand against the inside of the door. I saw the marks. They're as plain as anything you ever saw!"

Drake whirled, yelled something to his two men and for two or three minutes the house was a confused mass of fighting and yelling men. When it was over, Jerry was straddling Drake and had his cuffed hands lifted to bang the steel links across the white-haired killer's face if he moved again.

Walsh, puffing hard, was busy affixing handcuffs to the other pair of crooks. Three patrolmen who had been posted outside had

arrived in time to settle the fight.

WALSH took the cuffs off Jerry Craig, who went over to stand protectively beside Gloria.

"I found a key to Drake's house among Jordan's possessions," he went on to explain further. "I had to find the door which it fitted and the instant I saw the name plate I knew I was right. This monkey had blackmailed my uncle. He was the only man who could have had the evidence on him because he once worked with my uncle in a certain bank. When he retired to engage in the more profitable business of blackmailing my uncle was a natural as a victim. Uncle Arthur had told me to look for a man named Sam Drake, but I was kept so darned busy I didn't get around to it until almost too late—for me."

"I'm sorry I mistrusted you at first," Gloria whispered.

"Who could blame you?" Jerry parried.

"Listen to Drake cuss! This is no place for a nice girl like you, but we'll have to stay. I'm hoping Walsh will let me free, because under the circumstances—me running down the killer and all—maybe something can be done about that accessory business. Drake and his boys have just about admitted the whole thing. But Walsh may be a bit sore at me too."

"Because you got away from him so often?" Gloria said, smiling.

"Well—no. But when he sends men to try and find those fingerprints on the inside of the safe, I doubt they'll find anything. I made that up to shatter Drake's nerve. He was badly scared and that tipped the scales. Sort of made up for Drake's trick on me. Why, he turned me into murder's right-hand man, making me help him like that. And Miss Blakely—er—Gloria, I've got Drake's file on your father or whoever it was your father paid off to protect."

"It was my father's brother, my uncle," Gloria whispered. "He—"

"Easy," Jerry warned. "Your dad might not like it. Listen—when we're free to go, we'll celebrate by lighting a couple of cigarettes from the flames of those papers."

She smiled at him. Neither of them heard Drake, who was roaring again—at one of his men who was talking fast and furiously about the murder of a man named Jordan.

NEXT ISSUE

MURDER THROUGH MAGIC

A Baffling Complete Mystery Novolet

By **CURTISS T. GARDNER**



The blonde handed Willie a terrific buffet on the noggin before the cops rescued him

NURSERY CRIME

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When Willie Klump plays chauffeur to a perambulator, it leads him onto the trail of some plenty tough babies!

ALOYSIUS "Satchelfoot" Kelly, so named because of the fact that either one of his shoes could serve as a lady's overnight bag very nicely, stood near a defunct citizen in a vacant lot near the Bronx River Road and sniffed at the ozone of late afternoon. Never had Satchelfoot enjoyed a more delectable aroma at the scene of a crime.

"He must of kept his hankies in a sachet bag," a cop said. "But he is a very ugly-passed gee to be so fastidious, Kelly."

"It is like finding a wolf wearin' mascara," Satchelfoot opined and was glad to see the morgue's briefing expert arrive in a jalopy. "But I ain't so dumb I don't smell a rat who got mixed up in that perfume racket. Name on his draft registration is Oglethorpe Gritz. I hope he's been mugged."

The corpse man went over the deceased more than thoroughly. He announced that the loser had been sent on his way with a shiv which had slid between two ribs in the worst place possible.

"Dumped from a car it looks like," the medical examiner said. "No dirt on his shoes. The assassin apparently had no more use for the shiv and left it in the wound. Of course he wore gloves. Gettin' smart not usin' guns. It is the ballistics they are gittin' afraid of nowadays. Been dead about twelve hours, because rigor mortis has set in."

The M.D. removed the liquidator and carefully wrapped it up in the corpse's nose doily. Satchelfoot Kelly examined the murder knife closely. It had a bone handle and a blade about five inches long.

"It didn' come from no boy scout," he deduced. "It is jus' too small to have belonged to a Commando, too. I never saw one like it. What breaks. Tires is so smooth these days, they don't leave treads so's you can take a mirage."

"Moulage," a cop corrected.

Satchelfoot reddened. "Shut up!" he snapped.

Kelly could not help but discover one clue. When the late Oglethorpe Gritz had made contact with the hard ground, a little bottle of perfume had smashed and had saturated part of his torso with its out-of-this-world nose delight.

"Sure, it is a sample of that stuff that has been drivin' us nuts for weeks," Satchelfoot yelped. "Kennel Number Seven. Eighty bucks an ounce it costs, when it ain't cut. A hundred when it is."

"Chinnell," a cop prompted.

SATCHELFOOT scowled. "Like I said," he snapped out tartly. "Oncet these punks cut booze. They make three bottles out of one with the help of cold tea or iodine. Now it is this sweet dew. So we got a lead but no clues with it. Hm-m-m-m-m, you know somethin', boys? I'm not so dumb I'd cut off a foot to spite a bunion, and although a certain zany I know gives me nothin' but cramps when I think of him, he is just lucky enough accidentally to solve this crime."

"Willie Klump?" a cop asked. "The crumb has not done bad at other times."

"Go over to that house, Mike, and call Willie," Satchelfoot said. "Tell the operator to ring extra hard as Willie will most likely be sleeping. Tell him to hurry. This cadaver ain't goin' to stay in a state of preserve too long. Even the perfume won't help if he don't shake a leg."

William J. Klump, president of the Hawk-eye Detective agency, was just making himself a fried egg on a hot plate when his phone rang. Willie grimaced with displeasure.

Willie Klump certainly did not look like a detective. Cigars nauseated him, and the top of his pate had never been fashioned for his derby hat. His feet were not flat. Even though he did wear broad-toed shoes. At the

moment he was shod in two-toned sport kicks that curled up at the toes. His shiny blue serge suit was strictly cross-road cut.

"Hello," Willie said. "This is the Hawk-eye Agency."

"That's enough," the cop said. "Say, Hockshaw. I'm callin' for Satchelfoot Kelly."

"I hope what happened to him is not just trivial," Willie said. "Have you notified his nearest of kin?"

"Nothin' happened to him," the cop snapped. "We have got a murder, Willie. Kelly says it is about time we give you a break and not just in an arm or leg. Come on down and help us find out who killed this Gritz, Willie."

"Why, I'd love to," Willie said, all agog. "Who killed Hominy?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, ha-ha! Klump, you are a card. Well, hurry up. This won't keep."

"So Satchelfoot is stuck again," Willie said as he hurried with his fried egg. "He would not let me in on nothin' light unless it was a dynamite factory on fire. I ought to garnish his pay."

Almost a hour later, Willie Klump looked at the corpse of Oglethorpe Gritz and chewed his fingernails.

"Stabbed," Willie said. "What with?"

"A grapefruit, mental midget," Satchelfoot said. "Don't you see nothin' at all?"

"Somebody smells good," Willie said. "The rye they serve up nowadays must be made out of wild flowers."

"The gee got a bottle of perfume busted on him," Kelly snapped. "It is that what-you-call it Number Seven."

"Oh," Willie said. "He was mixed up in that perfume business. How many quarts of that golden dew was hi-jacked?"

"Only about a hundred grand worth," Satchelfoot replied. "Awright, Willie, we'd like you to work with us on this case as the D.A. says we got to clean this racket up before the papers start ridin' him into a war-plant. So we are askin' everybody, even you, to incorporate with us as part of the war effort."

"I'll do my best," Willie said.

"Now I was afraid of that," Kelly sniffed. "Just do your worst like always and you'll solve everythin'."

"You are as unfunny as a German prison camp," Willie countered. "Maybe I could see the knife, huh?"

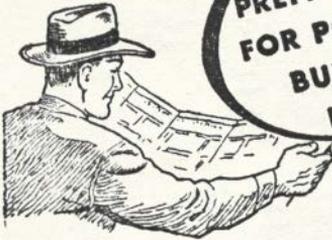
"Here," a cop said. "Don't put no prints on it. Don't spit on it and try to wipe it off, either."

William Klump examined the weapon. Absent-mindedly he dropped it in his pocket. Satchelfoot grabbed him.

"You don't get away with that one, Willie. You think we're stupid?"

"I won't say it," Willie said. "Don't tempt me like that. Up to now, this is a perfect crime. If it was up to you, Kelly, it would

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stay that way. You have got a corpse who broke his bottle of hot honey dew. If he ain't got no prints on file, what is it to you? Of course he wore gloves. You don't know what the auto that dumped him here looks like. No wonder you appealed to me for help, Satchelfoot. If you had no teeth and somebody gave you a box of peanut brittle, you would call up Willie and tell him you had a present for him, wouldn't you?"

GROANING, Satchelfoot mopped his brow.

"Now what the devil has peanut brittle got to do with this?" he asked. "We all make mistakes, boys. But you'll see, he'll trip over the murderer while looking for his old Sunday school attendance pin. I ain't leavin' out an angle on this one."

"You better have the stiff removed, Kelly," Willie advised. "This is not January. I'll reconstruct this case in my mind and let you know if I get an idea."

"Kelly, you must be crooked," a cop said.

Willie took leave of the men from Headquarters and reached his office when it was really time for him to be leaving it. He found that he had forgotten to turn off the juice that fed the hot plate and the heat from it was beginning to burn the varnish off the side of his desk.

"Oh, gosh," Willie gulped. "What a bill I'll get this month."

He sat down and put his feet up on the desk and began to think about the perfume racket that had been driving the John Laws to distraction and beyond for weeks and weeks. It seemed that some unpatriotic citizens had intercepted a shipment of Chinnell Number Seven on its way to a Fifth Avenue department store's warehouse and the stuff was more precious than the contents of Fort Knox. Lately, the exquisite aroma of the rare blossom squeezings had been sniffed in many places around town and it was more than rumored that the hot delightful dew was being peddled by black marketeers. The cops had picked up a doll who had been in possession of a little bottle of the perfume and they had taken it to a perfume expert who was very sure the Chinnell Number Seven was not at full strength.

"Cuttin' the stuff," Willie mused. "What they won't think of next—er—what is the smell? Did I catch it from the corpse? Why, oh! I forgot to turn off that hot plate ag'in. I wish I didn't forget so easy. That reminds me, I forgot to call Gertie an' she said she had some news for me." Willie picked up the phone and dialed a number. "Hello, Gert," he said, a few minutes later. "I was so busy—I—that is—"

"If they had television on these phones, I would punch you right in the eye, "Gertie

Mudgett snapped. "But I don't feel like fightin' today, Willie, as I have a surprise. We will eat in the same place, huh? About a half hour?"

"I'll be there," Willie said. "I bet you up and joined the Wacs, huh?"

"Don't be silly," Gertie said. "And don't try to grill me, Willie Klump. G'by."

"That was silly," Willie admitted. "If she joined anythin' it would be the Spars. When I marry her, it'll be like I've hired out as a sparrin' partner for Joe Looie. What is burnin'? Oh, Godfrey, I forgot again. The telephone book is on fire. The whole side of the desk."

This time Willie Klump turned off the hot plate, locked his office and went to meet his pinup. Gertie Mudgett made William squirm until after the main dish, meat loaf du jour.

"Now I'll tell you, Willie," she said. "I have quit my job."

Willie choked on the entree. Outside somebody yelled, "Whoa-a-a!" as he stopped an ice wagon. Gertie Mudgett had to slam Willie on the back with her reticule.

"The-that was horse meat and that proved it," Willie griped, his round face gradually changing from an egg-plate purple to somewhere near its normal color. "I want the manager right away."

"I wouldn't mind havin' him myself, Willie," Gertie snickered. "If that is him wearin' the carnation. Oh, horse meat won't kill

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you, Willie. We got to make sacrifices."

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"I got a new job," Gertie said, and Willie waved the manager away. "Why didn't I think of it before, huh? With so many women workin' in war plants and things, I says to myself why not open a day nursery and charge so much a day to take care of the poor li'l kids."

"A baby garage, huh?" Willie said. "Not bad, Gertie. Storage and refuelin'. Washin' and polishin', ha! How much a sprout, Gert?"

GERTIE didn't like that at all.

"I wish you'd stop bein' so crude, Willie Klump," she snapped. "If you are a man who is cruel to children and jokes over them, then I am glad I found out in time. You forget you was one oncet—not that everybody shouldn't of, even your mother. I do not know of nothin' lower than anybody who would beat up kids."

"I only said—"

"I ain't deaf. I know what you said. Satchelfoot Kelly loves children."

"Awright," Willie shoved in edgewise. "Go ahead an' marry the fathead. I only said—"

"So I'm gettin' the old heave-ho, am I?" Gertie Mudgett screeched. "Any excuse to get rid of me you jump for, don't you? Well, I can take a hint. Nobody has to hit me with an axe. Here I give up the best years of my life to a jilt."

"Look, let's start over," Willie argued frantically. "I only said—"

The citizen wearing the carnation tapped Willie on a padded shoulder. "Look, chum, we can't have this, you know. Git her out of here."

"You and how many marines from Okinawa?" Gertie inquired. "If that cluck I am with just dasts to get out of his chair, I'll slap him with a blue plate. I'll leave like a lady should and I'll never patternize this dump again."

"Wait, Gertie!" Willie cried. "I only said—"

"I hope that horse you et died from arsenic of lead," Gertie yelled. Then she stamped out.

"And you wasn't drafted," the head waiter said to Willie. "Pal, you sure got an awful break."

"Nobody ast you," Willie flared up. "You should serve a piece of harness with that meat loaf and stop foolin' people."

Willie paid the tariff begrudgingly, and made his own exit.

When he reached his hall room, Willie

cleaned out the pockets of his blue serge preparatory to pressing it with an electric iron. In the pocket of his coat he found a string of licorice he had forgotten and was about to sink his teeth in it when he noticed something sticking to the stuff.

"That's funny," Willie muttered. "I could swear they was fish scales but I ain't been fishin'. They look like 'em. They are fish scales. And off a big fish like a red snapper. Two of 'em. Now I got to think."

Willie wrote down his thoughts as they occurred as once fugitives from their cells they were as elusive as eels swimming in quicksilver.

"No, one," he muttered, as his pencil scraped along. "Fish scales are scraped off at the fish market or wherever fish has to be cooked. It takes a good sharp knife. I got it! The knife I dropped into my pocket. The knife was stickin' in Oglethorpe Gritz. The scales fell inside where the blade goes and fell loose when they got dried up enough. Oh, I got to call Satchelfoot fast."

Willie went downstairs to the pay phone. After dialing four numbers he finally located Satchelfoot in a tavern on East Fiftieth Street.

"Kelly," he said very excitedly. "I got a clue and it sounds fishy but it ain't. That
[Turn page]

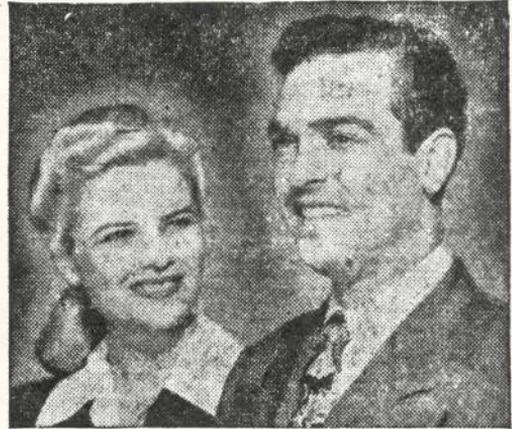
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knife was used by somebody who worked around fish. You take it from there."

"Huh?"

"I found two big dried fish scales in my pocket and I ain't been fishin' for six years," Willie said. "Did you ever hear of a crazier clue?"

"Not even from you," Satchelfoot yelped. "Now hang up and don't bother me no more. You try and rib me onct more and I'll come up there and leave some knuckles in your teeth."

"All right for you," Willie said in a very hurt voice. "But a good cop don't pass up the itty bittiest clue. I'm quittin' the case."

"Oh, Willie! Won't you reconsider? We are desperate. Ha!" Satchelfoot hung up.

It was late the next afternoon when Kelly walked into the Hawkeye Detective Agency. Satchelfoot's grin was a yard wide.

"I knew it," he said. "I guess I ain't smart. You sure thought I wasn't takin' your tip serious, Willie, didn't you? Well, we got a citizen for the murder of Gritz and he'll never get no jury to believe we made a mistake. You remember a punk named Fins Feeney?"

"Sounds familiar," Willie said. "I forget so many people. Fins Feeney, huh?"

"He was jugged for dealin' in black market fish and lobsters," Kelly said. "Imagine Fins graduating from the smell of a fish market to the aroma of Kennel Number Seven. It is quite a difference in perfumes. Well, we nailed Fins and it looks like you provided the scales for justice, Willie. Was that bad?"

WILLIE KLUMP was interested, now.

"Tell me more," he said.

"We found Fins Feeney's jalopy in a garage a block from where he lived. There was a knife just like the one we got out of Gritz, along with some other stuff in the baggage compartment. All good carpenters and butchers have two hammers and two knives. Fins admits he knew Oglethorpe Gritz but won't confess. He can't alibi, though. His jalopy has four tires smoother than a book salesman's line. We grabbed a redhead with Fins who got scairt out 'of her two-way stretch when we called Fins the slayer. She began singin' about Gritz and admitted Fins stole her from the deceased. What's more, Fins has a bottle of stuff in his pocket and what do you think? It was a bottle of lemon oil he got from a drugstore and it is what the crooks are usin', I bet, to cut the perfume."

"Why it sounds like a radio program," Willie said. "Are you sure, Satchelfoot?"

"Why can't the punk give an alibi?" Kelly sniffed.

"You still can't find out how the crooks are peddlin' the nose enjoyer," Willie pointed out. "Wasn't Fins Feeney picked up on the street one night a month ago and took to Bellevue for a noggin test? Seems he was slugged with a billy stick one night he was trying to climb a cop's frame."

"Why that rat!" Kelly said. "I get it. Fins will try and prove he didn't remember where he was and beat the rap. Usin' that magnesia gag. I'll tip the D.A. off. Thanks, Willie. We'll beat him to the punch."

"I hope I'll get a mention in the newspapers, Satchelfoot."

"I'll try and think of it, Willie. I knew you would do somethin' accidental. I got to run."

Willie mulled things over. It seemed possible that Satchelfoot had nailed an assassin who might turn out to be the one to upset the whole perfume racket. The mate to the shiv found protruding from Gritz's ribs had been in Fins Feeney's car. Fins had matriculated at the Fulton fish market. Fins owned a car with no-tread shoes. Well, Satchelfoot had to hit something on the nose once in his life. Stranger things than sending a killer to the state rotisserie with a pair of fish scales had happened to Willie.

"Far as I'm concerned, the case hasn't nothin' to do with me," Willie said ruefully. "I could solve it just as easy if I was sittin' on a Alp in Switzerland. I wonder if Gertie is still sore at me."

Willie had no sooner asked himself the question when the phone rang.

"Hawkeye Detective Agency," he called into the phone. "Shadowin' done. Skip tracin' and missin' persons a specialty."

"Oh, stop that, Willie." It was Gertie Mudgett. "I am sorry about what happened, but you got to show me you are not a philander. If you wish to make up, hurry over here right away."

"Huh?"

"You heard me, Willie. I have eight babies I am takin' care of and one is—you come over quick!"

Willie promptly hurried to Gertie's rooming house. He found she had hired an extra room from her landlady and had furnished it with cribs and a playpen. She even had a sandbox. One of the little sprouts was exercising his pipes and would not be quieted.

"Ain't they cute, Willie?" she said. "I get a dollar a day for each one, besides their board. This one who is actin' up is li'l Horace. He is a twin to Herman who is chewin' on the bacon rind in the sandbox."

"How do you tell 'em apart, Gert?"

"I put my finger in Herman's mouth," Gertie said. "If he bites me I know it is Horace. Now, Willie, you got to take Horace out in his go-cart as that is what

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he wants. Could I leave the others all alone? A course not. That blue buggy in the hall is one I bought yesterday. Now, you get goin', Willie, as you might as well learn now how to take care of children."

Willie looked distressed.

"Look, Gert, anythin' but this. S'posin' he wants his bottle and I ain't near a tavern? I mean I don't want to be a father yet. Everybody'll laugh at me!"

"That should be a surprise?" Gertie countered acidly. "Here, he is all wrapped up. You do like I ask you or you will be sorry, Willie Klump. You see Horace don't fall out and you ride him until he goes to sleep.

"Me, a detective!" Willie gripped. "I'll lose face in the profession."

"Would that be bad? You could use a good one. I'll give you just five minutes to make up your mind."

THREE minutes later, Willie Klump was pushing a baby carriage west along East Sixty-Fourth Street. Horace was still yelling himself into laryngitis. Once when Willie leaned over him to quiet him, the year-old whanged the detective with his bottle. Fighting down an urge to commit infanticide, Willie began talking goo-goo to the sprout. Four females gathered about to chuck the baby under the chin and to glare at Willie.

"I bet you slapped him," one of them said. "You should be ashamed. No baby cries like that naturally."

"Now, look," Willie bridled. "I can stand just so much, you cacklin' hens. The kid is scairt to death as none of you are Grables. This is a fine thing! Come on, Horace. We'll lam outa here."

"I bet he kidnaped him," a woman sniffed. "A baby as pretty as that couldn't have a father like him."

"It's awful!" Willie groaned and pushed the baby carriage up to a cigar store where several citizens were lining up for cigarettes. Willie felt like some gum and hurried inside. Five minutes later he emerged and began pushing the go-cart down the street. Five blocks away, the baby set up a terrific howl and Willie quickly stopped and looked things over.

"Somethin' is wrong," Willie said. "I could of swore Horace had a blue bonnet. This one has a pink one on. This blanket is pink. Let's see. Pink is for girls . . . There now, stop yelpin', that's a good li'l feller—I mean girl . . . What am I sayin'? Why, I bet a pin is sticking in you somewhere's and you just wait until Uncle Willie gets the mean old thing, huh? Let me see where it is, now."

Willie lifted the baby out with one arm

and examined its apparel for signs of an open safety pin but found nothing amiss. When he started rearranging the blankets, his knees suddenly turned to junket. From some distance away came disturbing sounds. The shrill voice of a distracted mother knifed through traffic sounds.

"G-got the wrong buggy," Willie yipped. "This ain't Horace. I'll get killed if I don't return the kid. I got t' act quick!"

He deposited the little sprout as gently as he had time for, pulled the blankets up and then began wheeling west once more. A block away he met four cops, a dozen outraged citizens and a thin blonde doll who immediately tried to tear Willie limb from limb.

"Get her off," Willie howled. "It was just a switch in buggies. They both look alike, and I got an awful memory. Ha-a-ah! I didn't do nothin'. Let me explain!"

The blonde handed Willie a terrific buffet on the noggin before the cops rescued him. Citizens helped pick up the contents of the reticule while the gendarmes calmed the blonde down.

"It was a natural mistake," Willie explained. "I never was a father before and it is the first time I met Horace. I mean, where is Horace?"

"A cop has the other baby buggy," a bystander said. "Brother, you got into a mess, huh?"

"Yeah," Willie said. "I guess it ain't the first one. Well, hand me my ration book. I keep losin' it. It is in the gutter there."

A few minutes later, Willie retrieved Horace who was smiling quite happily.

"You already are takin' after Gertie, ain't you?" Willie snapped. "When there is a brawl she is quite content. Well, I am gettin' you back to that joint faster'n you ever went in your life. Hang on, pal, especially when I make the corners."

Horace was chuckling and cooing when Willie handed him over to Gertie. Gertie kissed Willie. "Oh, I was wrong about you, Sugar, a'l the time," she said. "You are a natural with babies, Willie. I am so happy."

"I can't stop," Willie said. "I—I—I have wasted too much time from business already. Stop that sprout from climbin' up my leg, Gert. Peel him off. I'm sure glad he is only gummin' me. There is another babe I must hunt up."

"You look and act funny, Willie," Gertie said. "I got some paregoric here which might help you."

"It's because I got to be a papa today, Gertie. That's all. You don't know what it did for me and what it might do to me yet. I'll explain some other time. G'by."

Willie looked as if he had battled with malaria for at least six weeks when he got

[Turn page]

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to his room. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had let a very dishonest character slip through his fingers.

WILLIE groaned and reached into his pocket for some aspirin. He took out a ration book loaded with blue points and suddenly wondered why, because there already was one reposing on his dresser.

"Huh," he gulped. "It must of belonged to the babe. When she lammed me with the handbag, she dropped the book. Her name is right here in it. Electra Duval. Oh, do I feel sorry for Satchelfoot Kelly." Here is her address too. Apartment Seven-F, Folyer Arms, West Eighty-Ninth Street." Willie mopped his brow. "It is a good thing I do light house-keepin' here and at my office. Then again, if I hadn't applied for a ration book, this mixup couldn't have happened."

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency made his plans. He wrote them in a notebook, telling himself that there was no use in just clipping off the tentacles of an octopus if you couldn't get a good clout at the beast's noggin. He also admitted that if it had not been for Gertie Mudgett going into a new enterprise, William Klump would not have found himself ready for a cut in a very sensational expose.

"Looks like everythin' is put on the earth for a good reason," he concluded. "Even Gertie."

Willie slept fitfully that night. He was on his way to the office in the morning when he crossed Satchelfoot Kelly's path.

"Good mornin', Willie," Kelly said not too warmly. "You seen a client lately? Even a Spanish-American War vet who asked you to pick up a cent for him?"

"That wasn't funny, Satchelfoot. You got Fins Feeny to confess?"

"He thinks he's smarter'n us cops," Kelly snapped. "He's goin' to prove, he says, he has had relapses of memory since the time the cop boffed him. He keeps insistin' he goes from one to three days at a time not knowin' who he is and where he was and what he done. Even if he knocked off Gritz, he figgers that is a defense we can't get through. But we'll get a couple of pate probers who are tops and knock his case right into the Hudson."

"I wish you much luck," Willie said.

It was that afternoon at three o'clock that Willie went up to West Eighty-Ninth St. with a ration book and knocked on the door of an apartment marked 7-F. The blonde opened the door a crack and peered out at the private detective. First her eyes resembled a startled puma's and Willie felt the urge to run. When they dropped to what Willie clutched in his fist, they quickly changed expression to eagerness.

"Oh, it is you," she said. "Come on in. "I hope you don't mind my costume."

Willie did not mind at all and just prevented himself from asking what costume the blonde was referring to in the nick of time. She wore a housecoat that appeared to have been put on with an airbrush. Her toenails were painted a very lurid shade of purplish-red. The paint matched the stuff that was on her lips.

"I am sure sorry what happened yesterday aft," Willie said, tingling all over. "I didn't have no exterior motives as the go-cart looked like yourn. Say, you dropped this."

"Oh, I am so thankful, Mr.—"

"Klump!"

"Oh, there goes that man in the apartment upstairs dropping his shoes again. Now, what did you say your name was?"

Willie shook his head. "No, that was me. I said my name was Klump."

"I was just makin' some drinks," Electra Duval said. "Would you care for a snifter?"

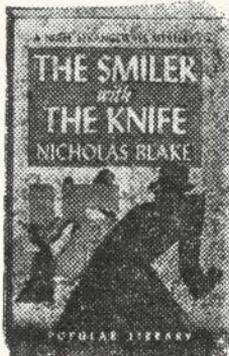
"Why-er-I am not a drinkin' man outside of a beer or two. So I will get along. Kind of warm in here, ain't it?"

There was a smell in the place that made

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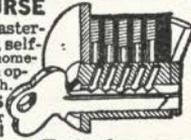
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Willie dizzy and caused his spine to jell. Certain curves the like of which he had never seen at the stadium contributed much to his whooziness. "I—I'll be goin', Miss. I don't see the other—babe. The li'l one you was pushin'?"

"My maid has taken her out today," Electra said. "Thanks again, pal."

"Good afternoon," Willie said.

He hurried out of the apartment building, walked up to Ninetieth Street, cut back and took a seat in a small tavern across from the Folyer Arms Apartments. Willie toyed with three beers up to six o'clock. He was incurring much displeasure on the part of the proprietor of the bistro when Electra Duval emerged from the apartment house, draped on the arm of a very beefy character.

Both got into a smart looking jalopy and drove away.

"That gee looked familiar," Willie muttered.

BUT the barman still wasn't feeling any friendlier.

"You won't, froghead, if you don't spend a little more dough here," the tough boy told Klump, and Willie hurried out. He ankleed across the street and went into the Folyer Arms and inquired as to the identity of Electra Duval's torch.

"You mean Big John Pesky who just went out with the blonde?" an elderly clerk said. "Yeah. He's rollin' in dough on account of the war I guess. It is a crime us white collar men has got to slave for our rocks."

"It is an outrage, ain't it?" Willie remarked and left the place, his legs misbehaving. "Big John" Pesky! Rumors downtown had it that Big John was the slickest crook operating along the Atlantic seaboard. Big John was so smart he had never been invited downtown to answer even one little bitty question by the D.A. The cops were sure Pesky had run a gamut of crime from snitching apples to cold-blooded assassination but had no more on him than there were peaches on a pecan tree. Big John owned seven hot spots and a couple of politicians.

Willie walked south, a little uncertain. He happened to pass a second-hand store on Third Avenue an hour later and wondered if he could buy a roscoe, even one that would not shoot. Something different however, caught his eye and he walked into the odds and ends emporium and inquired about the grenade that was displayed in the window alongside a German helmet and a bayonet two feet long.

"It's dead as a mackerel," the proprietor assured Willie after producing the grenade. "Bought it off a G.I. for a buck. I'll sell it for three."

"No ceiling on weapons?" Willie asked. "It is robbery."

"Who ast you to take it, truffle-ears?"

"Here is the three bucks," Willie said.

He left the store with the hand grenade in his pocket and felt much better when he entered a drug-store to look up an address. He dialed four numbers before he finally got a lead to Big John's boudoir.

"Most generally you can find Mr. Pesky in his apartment over the Purple Heartbeat on East Forty-Sixth," a rough voice said to Willie. "Who's callin'?"

"Guess who," Willie said, and hung up.

Willie soon found out that Pesky's bistro tagged The Purple Heartbeat was in the basement of a very high apartment hotel and he also noticed that there were several baby carriages just inside the lobby of the pueblo.

"Might mean nothin'," Willie muttered.

"War brides have got to live somewheres, even if they have babies. It is a good thing some landlords allow people to have them." He paused near one carriage and lifted a pink blanket. "Blue go-cart," Willie said. "Seems familiar."

He picked something up gingerly and saw that it was a doll's hankie. The initials E. D. were embroidered in one corner.

"It is a cinch Elsie Dinsmore didn't drop it," Willie said.

"Okay, pal," a voice said. Willie swiveled and looked into a pair of greenish eyes. "Lookin' for more blue points?"

"Why, no," Willie choked out.

Electra Duval prodded Willie with a little fur muff and inside the muff was a gun.

"Let's go up and see a friend of mine, Buster," she said in clipped tones. "So you wasn't as dumb as you looked. I'd never have believed it."

"It is why I'm successful as a detective."

"Well, well. Come on, start walkin', coper. One move I don't like and you'll leave this joint in three baby carriages. I think you know what I mean!"

"Yeah," Willie said.

A few minutes later he entered an apartment and Electra Duval introduced him to Big John Pesky. Big John had a mean beefy face and two little eyes set too close together. On the table in front of Big John were a dozen little bottles that looked sickeningly familiar to Willie Klump.

"He was friskin' a brat buggy," the doll said as cold as the stratosphere. "He's the punk I told you about, boss."

"Ah-h, rats!" Big John said. "Now we got to get rid of another body."

"I could walk right out," Willie said. "I could save you the trouble."

"He's wise," Electra snapped.

"Call Eggsy and Blades in here," Big John said.

Blades! Willie's gastronomic assembly curled up into a big knot.

[Turn page]

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"You frisk him, Babe?" Pesky snarled.
 "Sure. He's only a private dick. No roscoe."

EGGSY and Blades came in from the next room. They smelled out of Willie's world. Willie knew the stuff was being cut in there. He also was certain that Eggsy had never served anywhere as an altar boy. He looked like the worst character out of the Dick Tracy comics. Blades was a husky gee. He was pairing his nails with a shiv and Willie buckled at the knees.

"Get rid of this mug, boys," Big John said. "Same as usual. No shootin', understand? Take him out and call me back in a half hour."

"Okay," Eggsy said. "Let's go copper." Willie Kump was indignant. He took the grenade from his pocket and held it up toward the ceiling. "Oh, yeah? Well, you should hire smarter perfume peddlers, Pesky. I guess she thought I was just carryin' a alligator pear or somethin', huh? I will blow you all to smithereens."

Big John Pesky laughed. "It's a dud, boys. No pin in it. Some G.I. he knows brought him a souvenir. They never let them things in if they're dangerous. He's tryin' to pull a fast one. Awright, take him out."

Blades took a small whetstone out of his vest pocket, spat on it, and began putting more edge on the shiv. Willie Klump, beads of sweat rolling off him and making little splatting sounds as they hit the floor, knew he had nothing to lose by trying to conk Big John with the grenade before he was erased. He let it go and Big John ducked.

Bo-o-o-o-o-o-om!

Willie left the floor. Two great planks hit him on either side of his head before he hit the ceiling. He had the sensation of flying through a pea soup fog. Willie kept yelling for the pilot to get things fixed before they all cracked up.

"Get on the beam," Willie heard a voice saying. It sounded like his own. "Where did you learn to fly? In a haybarn? Well, I'm hittin' the silk. Ge-e-e-ronimo-o-o-o-o!"

Willie started dropping and he wondered if he shouldn't have tried for Mars instead of the world he had left. Finally he hit and a great rush of sound struck him full in the face. A lot of plaster from the ceiling followed and he took some of it in. There were voices.

"Stretcher bearer!" Willie called out.

Then he began to see again. A shapely gam protruded from a heap of rubble. Big John's head appeared when a big chunk of stucco shifted and Willie instinctively tapped it with a piece of timber.

"What you doin', hittin' an injured man?"

somebody protested. Willie was dragged to his feet.

"I didn't know it was loaded," Willie gurgled. "Perfume everywhere! Smell it? This is Big John Pesky and his pals who cut rare perfume here and had it peddled to clients via baby buggies pushed by swell dames. Look for a knife, boys, and give me a acedative."

William Klump was the only survivor of the blast who was able to leave under his own power. Big John and Electra and Eggsey and Blades had to stop at the hospital en route to the D.A.'s office. Big John, told that he could not live until sunrise, called for a padre and then confessed to every unlawful deed he had committed as far back as his romper days. Twelve hours later, every crook mixed up with the perfume racket were in the hoosegow.

"Imagine it," Willie said. "You should never play with even a jelly bean pistol as it is not safe. I'd stop chewin' the barrel of that Betsy if I was you, Satchelfoot, even if you are so disappointed in things. Ha, I meet a babe pushin' a baby tumbrel, and we get the buggies mixed up. I look to see if a pin is jabbing the sprout, and there is a lot of that stuff Kelly calls Kennel Number Seven. I almost lost track of the babe but her blue points saved me. Like Pesky said, Blades snatched one of Fins Feeney's old fish trimmers to rub out Gritz who was threatenin' to quit the racket. You was almost right this time, Satchelfoot, as Fins was mixed up with Big John and the rest of the cut-ups."

"I'd just go on home, if I were you, Kelly," the D.A. said. "You stay there until you are yourself again."

"Will that help?" Willie scoffed. He tried to work on too small a scale, Mr. D.A. He ought to have knowed help from me looked fishy. Well, I must go and call Gertie. I got a bottle of perfume for her and it ain't cut. Br-r-r-r! To think how near I was to gettin' cut, too. Tell them where to send me my fee, D.A. Good evenin'."

The D.A. tried to light a cigar when Willie had gone. He finally found out he had his fountain pen in his mouth. He looked at Satchelfoot Kelly who had a match in his mouth and was trying to scratch a cigarette against the top of a desk.

"Let's go over to Mike's place, Kelly," the D.A. said. "We both need it."

•
NEXT ISSUE

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Another Willie Klump Howler

By JOE ARCHIBALD

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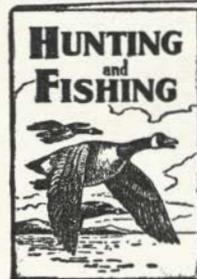
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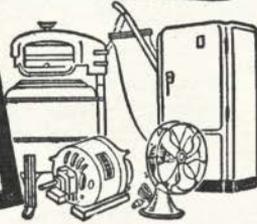
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(Concluded from page 8)

the bouquets, of which the following happens to be one.

I just finished reading your wonderful magazine, and it's the best detective magazine on sale! I especially enjoyed DEATH IN MASQUERADE by J. S. Endicott.—R. W. Gibbons, Hamburg, N. Y.

But here's a brickbat:

Your last issue was pretty good, but I felt cheated when I read GOOD CIGAR by Paul Annixter. The trick of the man proving he couldn't have committed the crime because if he had the long ash on his cigar would have been broken is so old it creaks.—Jimmy Dolan, Tucson, Ariz.

That just goes to show once more that people are different. We thought GOOD CIGAR was an original and interesting little yarn, Jimmy, and many of our readers thought the same.

You ask for suggestions, so here goes. How about publishing stories about just everyday people who get involved in crime—like a butcher or maybe the girl who sells tickets at the movies, or a fireman? I liked MURDER NIGHTMARE, by Norman A. Daniels, in the last issue. It sure was an exciting mystery.—Mrs. Rita Vaughn Elders, Ocala, Florida.

Your thought is a good one, Mrs. Elders. Incidentally, we've had many stories with real, human, everyday characters like those you mention and we'll try to print more of them in future issues. We're always on the lookout for good yarns of this nature.

And to wind up things, here's a brief note from the great northwest.

Give us more stories like CRIME AT CAPE-TOWN, by Charles S. Strong.—Felix Verneaux, Bremerton, Wash.

That is all for now—but we'll quote from many more letters in coming issues. Meanwhile, we're grateful to the hundreds of readers who have written us—and we hope many others will get the habit of dropping us a line. Get your letters and postcards in soon, everybody! Address—The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. So long—and thanks!

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