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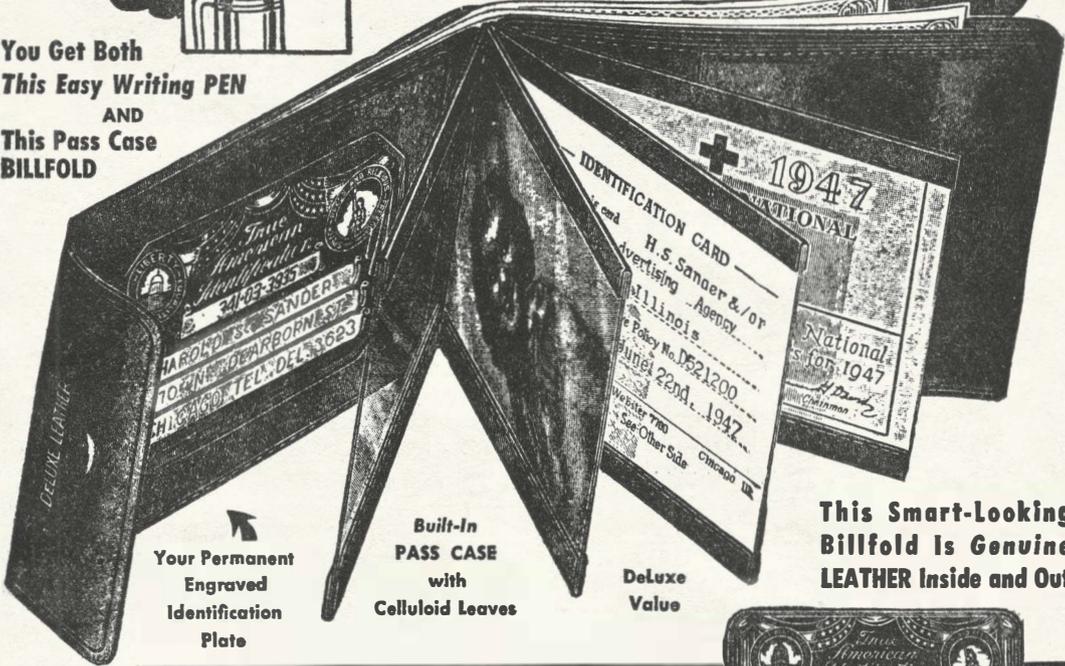


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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXIII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

July, 1947

Complete Mystery Novel



Aftermath of Murder

by Norman A. Daniels

An irresistible avarice drives Johnny Stafford to grim deeds of violence as the many-taloned claws of desperation weave an evil and sinister web of crime and intrigue that enmeshes him in guilt! 11

TWO FULL-LENGTH NOVELETS

- DEATH WATCH.....*Arthur Leo Zagat* 50
Don Lanham and Judith Moore put up a fight to the finish to smash an ingenious and baffling criminal frame-up wide open!
- YOU WAKE UP DEAD!.....*Robert Sidney Bowen* 70
When bootblack Tony is polished off while on an errand, Chet Lacey sets out to avenge him—and bucks a murderous racket!

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A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet

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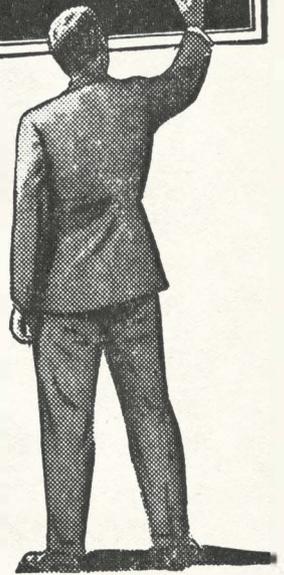
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LOCATION FOR MURDER

By

EDWARD CHURCHILL

This breath-taking yarn opens during a storm off the coast of a little Spanish island which a movie company has hired for an opus of sarongs and the South Seas. The island is owned by one Hugh Mariot, a domineering, brutal British expatriate, who has gone there ostensibly to cultivate sponges. It is now peopled by superstitious natives who must be handled carefully. Should they ever run amok—

Erik Frayne—fiftyish, spoiled, egocentric—is the director of the picture. He is in love with Eva Lance, the heroine. She has grown tired of their December-May romance and now adores Duke Wear, diver and stunt man. Hans Cravath, husky and athletic leading man, wants to be Eva's hero in real as well as in "reel" life. Red Murphy is the property man.

A Portent of Trouble

Despite a raging storm, Frayne insists that Wear put on his diving suit and pose for some underwater shots. Wear is to "double," of course, for Cravath. Murphy has arranged the flora and fauna of the sea bottom, including several imported lobsters.

There are four boats in the take, as well as a diving bell. Terry Danson, press agent, through whose eyes we see the story, begins to fear trouble. Antoine Christophe, leader

of the natives, objects to the scene being made at this time. There is, he says, a portent from his native deity—Damballo Wedo.

Spurred on by Eva Lance, Wear refuses to make the scene. Frayne takes his wrath out on Antoine Christophe by knocking the native down, thereby alienating the islanders. The owner of the island predicts that dire mishaps are sure to follow.

In spite of this, Frayne finally shames Wear into taking the plunge. Danson, in the diving bell, sees Wear under water in his diving suit, notices the menacing, dangerous barracuda in the water.

Then—disaster strikes! Wear fails to come to the surface. The pipe supplying him with air has been mysteriously cut. It may be accident—but the chances are it's deliberate murder! For, many people wanted Wear out of the way—and then, there's the matter of the sunken treasure ship, which has aroused greed and rivalry!

That's the intriguing start of **LOCATION FOR MURDER**—a novel that will make you grip the sides of your chair tightly as you follow Terry Danson on a crime trail beset with conflicting clues. Ever-mounting in interest, **LOCATION FOR MURDER** will hold you breathless with its clever twists and turns of plot, and the startling conclusion will amaze you! Look forward to a real fiction treat.

Murderer Wanted!

Also in the next issue—**KILLIGEE SWAMP**, an outstanding mystery novelet by Joel Townsley Rogers.

We dare you—yes, actually dare you to solve the mystery in this yarn before reaching the finish! It moves along with the smoothness and inevitability of an ancient Greek tragedy—at the same time with the smoothness of Charlie Druckett's leaf-green sports convertible as it hums merrily along the roads of the dear old Sunny South.

(Continued on page 8)

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

It is a swell car—brand new. It is a beautiful day. Charlie Druckett seems to be in excellent spirits, with everything in the world to live for. Only it seems Druckett has everything to die for—or has he? He seems to desire death. Charlie Druckett doesn't want to commit suicide. He wants to be murdered! The situation seems a bit paradoxical, to say the least.

Druckett ignores those two intelligent-looking young students who want to thumb a ride. They certainly would have made interesting companions. More than that, there is the cute number in the form-fitting sweater and the nifty tan slacks—that's right, the one who is just putting on the lipstick. Druckett has an eye for curves in the right places too—and we don't mean in the road. Yes—he ignores her completely!

And what does he pick up—but that filthy tramp! Druckett tells this refugee from a chain-gang all about that four hundred dollars cash he has in his pocket. Also the stuff in the car is worth a couple of grand at least. Isn't that practically telling the tramp to "come and get it"? You see, Charlie Druckett needs a body. That body is to be hidden in the muck and mire and quicksand of dismal Killigee Swamp that Druckett knows so well.

And that's all I'll tell you about this one! But you may confidently look forward to a real eye-opener among psychological mystery yarns. Get aboard the bandwagon!

A Baffling Crime Frame

Another smashing novelet in next issue is **TWICE MURDERED**, by Wayland Rice.

There is plenty of action in this stirring tale which concerns a murder frame involving Larry Langan and his wife Ruth. Things certainly look bad for the Langans!

While Larry is seeking a job, Ruth decides to help keep the pot boiling by taking a secretarial chore for the brokerage firm of Geary and Whipple. Larry doesn't mind too much, except that Frank Geary once courted Ruth. Larry is afraid her boss still is "that way" about her.

He is particularly afraid one night when he arrives home at ten o'clock. Ruth isn't there. He calls up the office, and is answered by someone claiming to be the cleaning-woman, who tells Larry that Ruth has gone to Geary's home to finish up some work. She left an hour or so previous to the telephone call.

Larry makes a beeline for Geary's residence. There has been a terrific struggle there—only it isn't Ruth who is the victim of foul play! Geary is dead—stabbed through the chest with a bone-handled knife. Larry recognizes the knife as being his own. He bought it in a curio shop in Tokyo.

Naturally Larry jumps to one conclusion. Ruth, resenting Geary's advances, has killed her boss. To protect her, Larry plants his own fingerprints on the knife, as well as other damning evidence that will shift the crime onto his own shoulders.

Police Lieutenant Matthew Sullivan thanks Larry for his noble confession of the crime. But it won't do. The police have already been there and taken note of the evidence. The reason Larry could not find Ruth is that his wife has already been incarcerated in jail, charged with Geary's murder!

Reporter Pete Devaney claims to have heard Larry's confession and offers to help him. He wants to have his paper print an interview with Larry, which will contain a sympathy slant. Attorney Will Sutton offers his services free of charge.

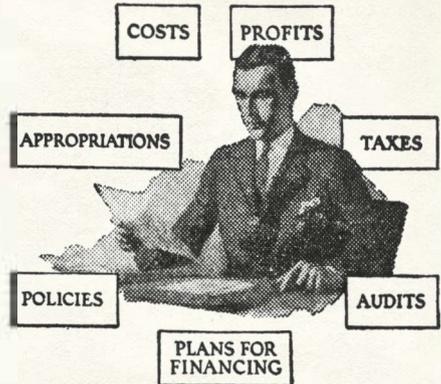
In sheer desperation, Larry agrees to anything, for it seems Ruth has become convinced that Larry actually did commit the crime. In a poignant scene between husband and wife, Ruth's pitiful plea is that she "doesn't know" whether she did the deed or not. **TWICE MURDERED** is a distinctly different "whodunit" that you're sure to enjoy!

In addition to these featured headliners, there will be our usual star-studded collection of short stories to round out an up-to-the-minute issue. Be on hand for some swell reading!

LETTERS FROM READERS

FROM the vast quantity of mail that pours into this office, we try to select for quotation those letters which have an unusual point of view. We have a lot of correspondence from the readers of **POPULAR DETECTIVE** piled up on our desk. Our red-headed and snub-nosed secretary, Nasturtium McGonigle, is busy all day long opening 'em up. So if we haven't got around to printing yours yet—be of good cheer. We may, in time. Keep on sending 'em in. You can say quite a lot on a postcard if you set your mind to it.

(Continued on page 112)



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WHEW! THAT'S "PLATINUM ROW". I'D BETTER CLEAN UP FIRST

THANKS FOR THE RAZOR, JOE. THIS BLADE'S A HONEY!

THIN GILLETTES ARE ALWAYS LIKE THAT... PLENTY KEEN AND LONG-LASTING

... AND TODAY, AT LONG LAST, WE FOUND THE MISSING HEIR. HIS NAME ...

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LARRY RICHMOND!

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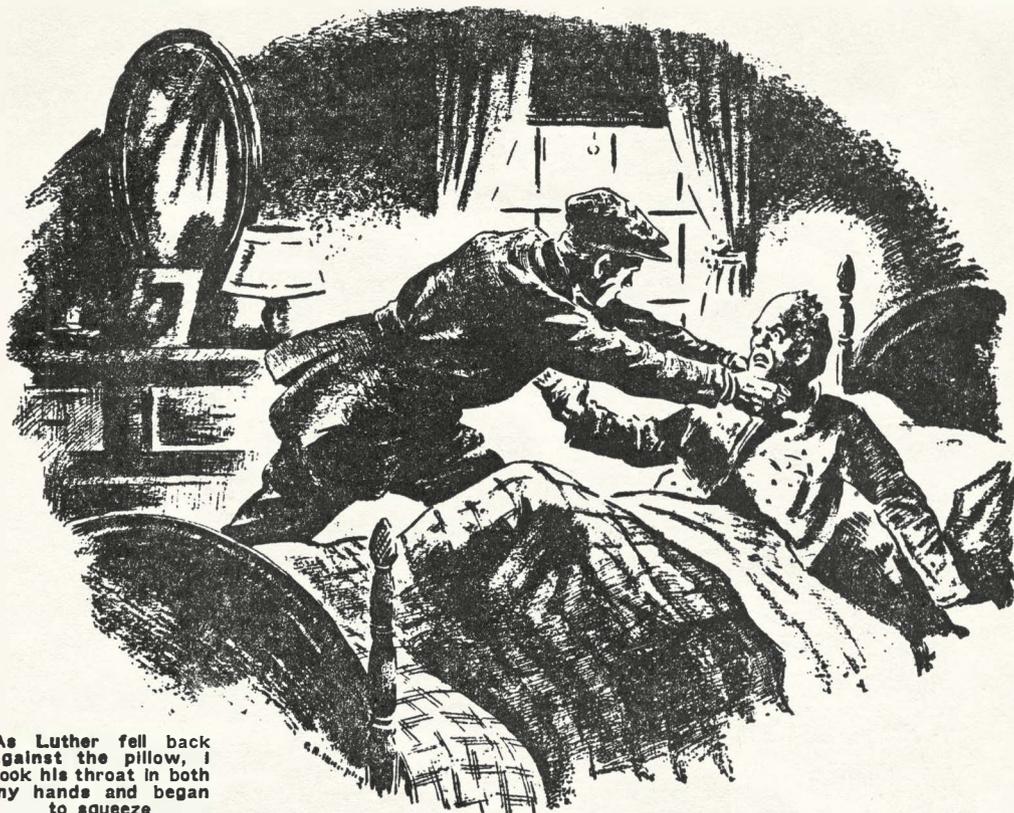
THIS ALL SEEMS LIKE A WONDERFUL DREAM, MISS MORRIS

GWEN TO YOU ... AFTER ALL, WE'RE FOSTER-COUSINS

HE'S SO HANDSOME

EXTRA! THIN GILLETTE SHAVE SCORES AGAIN!

THIN GILLETTES ALWAYS GIVE YOU SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES THAT MAKE YOU LOOK IN THE PINK AND FEEL THAT WAY, TOO. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A T... PROTECT YOU FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES



As Luther fell back against the pillow, I took his throat in both my hands and began to squeeze

AFTERMATH OF MURDER

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

An irresistible avarice drives Johnny Stafford to deeds of violence as the many-taloned claws of desperation weave an evil web of crime and intrigue that enmeshes him in guilt!

CHAPTER I

Johnny in Trouble

I HAD another double scotch but it didn't do me any good. I kept looking in the broad mirror behind the bar. It reflected the crowded dance floor and, beyond it, the entrance. The rumba orchestra was hot. Its leader, brandishing a couple of gourds, was dressed in a gray business suit and looked as if he didn't belong there at all. The rest of the dark-skinned boys

wore white coats with pink sashes.

But I wasn't watching the dancing couples or the orchestra. They were just incidental. I kept my eyes on the entrance to the place because that was where trouble would come. I was sliding the scotch down my throat when I saw one of the headwaiters suddenly give a funny jump. It was funny because a man doesn't jump that high even when he's scared to death. Besides, this headwaiter didn't come down again. That was the outstanding part.

A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL

I called for another double scotch and, as an afterthought, a shot of rye too. I pushed the rye to my left. All the time I never took my eyes off the mirror. I saw him coming then, after he had put down the headwaiter. He was big enough, but that wasn't the part that scared me. It was his face. Absolutely dead pan with a twisted nose and an ear that had turned to cabbage long ago. I didn't blame the headwaiter for trying to block him—if he didn't know who he was. If he did know, then the headwaiter was wacky.

The man wore a suit that looked as if it had been lovingly created by some Scot, out of old kilts. The plaid was so loud it rumbled. His tie was out of this world—and that was where it belonged. It was a deadly pink. I never did notice the color of his shirt because that tie obscured everything else, like a sunset over the Hudson.

He walked with little mincing steps like a dancing-school teacher. Nobody tried to stop him. They'd seen what happened to the foolish headwaiter. He didn't belong here. That made no difference. He belonged wherever he wanted to go—and knew it.

He ranged himself alongside the bar at my left. He needed no invitation, picked up the rye and bolted it. Then he turned toward me and shook his head.

"You shouldn't oughta ducked, Sweets. Sammy was sore. See my chin? Sammy done that. He kicked me. You shouldn't oughta done it, Sweets."

"Rats!" I snarled at him.

BUSTED NOSE snapped his fingers once, and the barkeep poured him another drink—fast. He tossed it down and slid the glass back for another.

"Sammy says you should come see him right away, Sweets. You and me will go, huh?"

"I can't go to see Sammy now," I told him. "I'll see him tomorrow."

"Sammy says right away, Sweets. It would be kinda bad if I busted that pretty puss of yours."

I signaled the waiter for a check. You can't argue with a guy who has a lot of muscle. And a gun packed under his arm. And you just don't argue with Sammy Noe when he sends orders. It isn't conducive to longevity

or good health.

I scrawled my name on the check, fished around in my pocket and gave the barkeep my last half buck.

Broken Nose took my arm and we walked out like a couple of freaks.

"You shouldn'a done that to me," he repeated. "Last night Sammy says he wants to see you. Okay. So I tell you and what happens? When I ain't lookin' you blow. That ain't nice to do to me. It's almost like a doublecross. Know what I mean?"

"Shut up," I said savagely. "Being seen with you is disgrace enough. We're going to Sammy. Isn't that enough?"

"Yeah. But don't blow again when I ain't looking."

There was no dark sedan parked at the curb, according to old gangster rules. We walked. And not to a flashy gambling house, though Sammy Noe had several. We went to a modern thirty-story office building on East Forty-Eighth Street. We rode up in an elevator just like the customers who were calling on doctors, dentists and lawyers. No different.

The door of Sammy Noe's office simply carried his name and below it REAL ESTATE. Nobody cared that Sammy Noe's real estate endeavors consisted only of eleven or twelve gambling places that ranged from the ultra-ultra to some cheap dive with spittoons on the floor. They were all money makers and Sammy's business was making money.

Nobody ever inquired if he had any lots for sale. His lots measured six feet long, about three wide and they went down deep. People just didn't crave that kind of lots.

There was a startling blonde at the switchboard. She merely looked up, and then down again at a magazine, as I passed by. My busted-nose escort stopped in front of a plain door. He knocked and we entered. I was wishing the palms of my hands wouldn't get so clammy.

Sammy Noe was the only person in the office. Broken Nose frisked me, but I wasn't packing a gun.

It was a square office with two very high windows behind the desk. They were draped with crimson velvet. The rug on the floor was reddish and thick. In one corner was a bar with an enclosed



I walked over to the table, got Dad's gun which he kept there in a drawer, and walked back toward him

radio that played softly. Some expensive oils hung on the walls. Plenty of quality stuff here. The outstanding piece of furniture was the desk. It was round, with a niche cut for Sammy's fat little legs. The wood was ebony black and shiny.

Behind it, wedged into that niche, sat Sammy Noe. His last name was a contraction of something or other, and he was an Armenian. He had a brownish complexion, and everything else about him was brown—suit, shirt, tie and shoes. A vision in brown.

He was no more than five feet four, with one of those big heads that never match a small body. He'd put on some weight in recent years, but he was still fast.

He was smiling now. He glanced at Broken Nose who had parked himself in a straight-backed chair and tilted it back against the wall. His coat hung open, revealing the butt of a shoulder-holstered gun.

"Well, well, Johnny Stafford," Sammy said. "I'm glad you came to see me."

"You know I was dragged here by the ear." I gave him my best sneer. "You also know I can't raise the money I owe you."

"Now, now, Johnny," Sam said. "Who mentioned anything about money? But—you bring the subject up, we'll talk about it."

"I've spoken my piece," I snapped. "I'm broke. I'm always broke."

"But you hang around the classy bars. You drink all you want. You live in a good hotel. That takes dough, Johnny."

"My room at the Mallaquoi costs eighteen dollars a week. Sure, I drink all I want. And I sign the checks which are sent to my father. He pays them. That's all he does. If I eat, I get the cash some place else. The same goes for clothes."

"I don't believe it," Sam said.

AID came from an unexpected quarter. "It ain't all lies, Sammy," Broken-nose said. "I checked on his hotel. His room ain't no bigger'n a cubby-hole. Then I asked about him in the fancy bars. It's true. He signs the tab and his old man sends a check to cover."

Sammy leaned back, clasping pudgy hands over his bulge, and shook his big head from side to side.

"It's still screwy."

"Look," I said, desperately. "Seven months ago my father put me out of the house. You know him—he was raised in a brass foundry. He'd rather go in there with the hunkies and swing a ladle of red hot brass, than eat. He's tough. He claims any man is entitled to his liquor and a place to sleep. So he arranged to foot those bills. But if I eat, I get the money myself."

"By chiseling on the bar tabs, Johnny?"

I shrugged. "Why not? That's how I accumulated enough to play your wheels."

"And you lost — eighteen grand," Sammy said sympathetically. "That's a lot of money. But I figured you, being a rich man's son, could get the dough. You going to pay me, Johnny?"

"How can I?" I spread my hands. "My father wouldn't give me a dime. He's sore because I've refused to go into his dirty, hot foundries, and pour metal."

"Your old man is worth maybe five or six million, huh?"

"Something like that," I told him. "It wouldn't do you any good."

"I don't know," Sammy said reflectively. "Either I get my money or I take it out of your hide, and if I take out eighteen thousand dollars worth, there won't be much left of you, Johnny. See what I mean?"

I nodded. I saw all right. I'd seen that for days.

"I don't want to get tough," Sammy went on. "I'll give you two days. And even if you pay me some on account, that's okay, but it better not be less than five grand."

"I can't," I told him. "Sammy, I couldn't raise five hundred dollars."

"It's too bad. Johnny, you're a nice looking guy. I wish I had your looks. If you don't come across, I'll go see your old man myself. If he reneges—I'll send Cookie to collect from you personally."

Cookie, of the broken nose, stirred restlessly. I felt a shiver run down my back.

"I'll do what I can," I told Sammy. "Let me talk to Dad first. Give me a break."

"Sure." Sammy walked over to the bar and poured two drinks. He slid one across the desk toward me and

lifted his own, chin high. "Forty-eight hours you get. Happy days, Johnny."

The brandy stung like fire. I put the glass down, looked at Cookie and decided to get out of there.

CHAPTER II

A Way Out



MY HOME, my real home, that is, was on upper Fifth Avenue. One of those private four-story houses assessed at about two hundred thousand. It had a wrought iron gate, to which a key was necessary and I didn't have one. Dad had taken mine away.

It was an odd set-up. There was no animosity between us, but I stopped being his son the day I walked out of that foundry. I wondered if he'd listen to reason. He wasn't much of a listener.

At sixty he looked forty-five and, as a rule, he could be found at home almost any night.

Barclay opened the door for me. He had orders not to let me in if I was good and plastered. Apparently I passed his inspection for he stepped aside.

Dad was upstairs in his study. He spent most of his time there reading trade journals and growling about labor troubles, although he had less fuss with his men than any other manufacturer I'd ever run across.

The door was open and I walked in, jauntily. Dad looked up.

"Well! The Black Sheep must be in a lot of trouble to come back home."

I sat down. "No trouble, Dad. Nothing I can't handle anyway. I just wanted to see you."

He nodded. "No need to ask how you've been feeling. High, I'd say, from the size of the barroom checks I pay for. Fact is, Johnny, I'm glad you came. I was going to send for you."

I wondered if Sammy Noe had already put in his bid. I braced myself for fireworks. All Dad ever heard about me was the bad news.

"Johnny, I been a little rough on you, I guess," he said. "You can't blame me. I expected you to follow my line, but it doesn't appeal to you. Too much dirt

and heat. However, I've got something else lined up."

I hoped that shudder I gave wasn't visible. Whenever Dad talked like this, he had a pipe dream that only meant I'd be worse off than ever.

He seemed enthusiastic. "How'd you like to own a detective agency?"

"A—what? Detective agency?"

Dad grinned. "There's a going agency for sale. Big stuff too. It should be exciting and your biggest alibi for not wanting to enter brass work was because it lacked excitement. So you can't use that stall on this job, Johnny, my boy."

I pretended interest. "Tell me more."

"I looked the place over today. There are four detectives. Operatives, I think you call them. They'll work for you. And there are two girls in the office. Not bad lookers. How about it?"

I let my brain turn over slowly. If Dad bought this agency, he'd also have to provide enough operating capital to run it. Five thousand at least. If I got that—or maybe seven—I could quiet Sammy Noe temporarily. It might work.

"I'm interested," I admitted slowly. "Possibly a detective agency will tame me down."

He snickered. "All right, I'll buy the business for you as soon as you prove you have a knack for that sort of thing."

"Prove it?" I asked. The hitch was coming.

"Well, I'm not sinking twenty thousand dollars into something you can't handle, Johnny."

"Just how do I prove I'll be a good sleuth?"

"It's simple. You know Luther Arnold."

I knew Luther Arnold. I knew him for a gnarled, wrinkled old scrooge without a friend except for Dad, and a niece. She was a hot looking number. Wherever she went, he tagged along.

I told Dad I knew him.

Dad chuckled. "He's not such a bad old goat, Johnny. A little tight, perhaps. Well, Luther trusts you because you're my son. He needs a bodyguard."

"I know just the man," I said, thinking of Cookie with the broken-nose.

"No, it must be you. I told him you'd do it."

"Oh, rats, Dad," I said. "I don't know how to handle things like that. Just set me up in that detective agency and I'll assign a couple of men to take care

of Luther."

Dad smiled. "Johnny, you'll do this because I promised you would. If you don't, there'll be no detective agency, no more liquor and no more hotel bills paid. Take it or leave it."

I TOOK it. What else could I do? There was Sammy Noe.

Dad gave me some orders. "Naturally, you can't carry a gun until you get your license. All you have to do is go to him, stick by him and do exactly as he says. He wants you right away."

"I was afraid of that," I groaned. "Okay, Dad, I'll go over. How about fifty for expenses?"

Dad peeled off a bill. "Twenty will be enough. Now show me what you can do. If Luther is satisfied, I'll install you in that office."

He picked up the latest issue of *The Foundry* and buried his nose in it and I walked down the steps.

Luther lived two miles away, across town. I took a cab.

I began thinking about the whole thing. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad. Perhaps I could chisel on Dad for expenses. Sammy Noe was going to be satisfied.

Luther Arnold lived in a four-story brick house in a cheaper section of town and he rented out the three upper floors. The bell pull was rusty. I doubt if Luther ever had a friend call except Dad.

He answered the door himself, more dried up than I ever recalled. He was about five feet and his nose was long, skinny. He had watery eyes, set way back in their sockets. His chin was pointed and he owned four or five teeth in the front of his mouth.

"Well?" he demanded irritably.

"I'm Johnny Stafford," I said. "Remember me?"

"Come in. Come in." He closed the door quickly behind me. Then clutched at my wrist.

"Before we talk, I want you to know this. Don't make eyes at Ivy or out you go."

"Ivy?" I frowned.

"My niece. Your job is to protect me and run my errands. If she talks to you, don't answer any more than you have to. I've warned her too."

"What sort of trouble do you expect?" I asked.

"Trouble? What trouble?"

He wasn't fooling me any. There was plenty of fear in those watery eyes.

"When a man hires a bodyguard, he expects something to happen. Or is it my good looks you like?"

"That's another thing. I told Connie you'd be too fresh, but he said he knew his own son and I could handle you. No wise cracks and we'll get along. Come in here."

Luther had a roll-top desk piled with yellow papers in one corner of his living room. The edges of the drawers were deeply scarred where cigarette butts had burned them. The thin rug below the desk looked like it had endured a dozen bad fires.

Luther took a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened the long middle drawer. He removed a very large envelope made of reddish-brown heavy paper. I was interested in the contents of that middle drawer. It seemed to be full of bonds.

While I watched, Luther picked up a stick of sealing wax and sealed the envelope in four places. Then he picked up a signet ring. He used this to press down the warm soft sealing wax.

Finished, he handed me the fat envelope.

"Hold that. I'm going to telephone your father."

He untangled the telephone wire from around a ten-cent store inkstand, dialed and waited. Dad was a trifle slow answering the phone.

"Connie, he's here," Luther said. "Your kid. Since he's your son, I'll trust him. I'm sending him over with a brown envelope full of valuable papers. I want you to lock them in your safe for me. I'll be over in an hour or so and explain further. 'By."

He turned to me. "You heard what I said. Take that envelope straight to your father. Wait there for me. I'll pay fifty dollars a week. Forty more than you're worth. That's all."

I was hoping for a look at Ivy before leaving the house and I wasn't disappointed. I found her waiting in the dark, narrow hall near the door.

"Nix," I told her. "I got orders."

She dimpled. "You're cute."

SHE was sitting in one of those old-fashioned straight-backed chairs with a leg curled under her. There was

absolutely nothing wrong with her legs.

"Look," I resorted to whispering. "I work here. I'm an employee. I was told not to talk to you. Now will you get out of my life?"

"You're still cute. Much cuter than I expected. I only saw you from a distance before, Johnny. Let's meet somewhere outside."

I shook my head. "If you gave him the slip, he'd know why. Be good and let me alone."

"What's my uncle hired you for?"

"I'm a watchdog. I tag along behind him and when he yanks the leash, I jump. Your uncle is getting senile. He's afraid of somebody and I'm supposed to be around to absorb any punches passed his way. So long, Ivy."

She dimpled again. "I still think you're awfully cute."

I went out, glad to breathe fresh air again. The big envelope was beginning to intrigue me. Of course it contained something valuable, maybe real estate documents. He owned enough tenement houses to necessitate a wad of papers this thick.

I passed a drug store window around the corner. I stopped and studied that envelope intently. It was made of heavy paper, badly creased in spots. Especially one spot. I ran my thumb nail along the crack and felt the worn, creased paper give a little.

Nobody seemed to be watching. I used my thumbnail again. Hard this time, and it went all the way through. I bent the envelope a trifle to open the crack. Then I hastily tucked the thing under my arm again and gave a quick look in at least six directions.

What I'd seen through the tiny crack in the envelope was the figure "50." This envelope was crammed full of bills of large denomination.

The situation called for a drink and I turned into the nearest bar. I had two drinks, ordered a third and took it over to a booth. I sat down. The booth was secluded.

I placed the envelope on the table in front of me and had a terrific battle with my conscience. I won. I picked up a knife, ran it under the flap, sending the sealing wax flying all over the table, and peered inside.

A rough guess told me there must be a hundred thousand dollars in that envelope. I proceeded to clean the bits of



The two men moved up beside me, one of them with a gun, and forced me to get into the car

wax off the table, wrapped them in a paper napkin and put the whole thing into my pocket.

I sat there, sipping the scotch and thinking. I had an out. With a sum like this I could pay Sammy Noe back, slowly, and in such a way that he'd think Dad was loosening up. With the rest I could have a nice little nest egg.

How to do it? That was the easiest part of all—except for one thing.

Luther Arnold had to die!

CHAPTER III

The Business of Murder



TILL, I could dispose of that gruesome idea for the moment and find out if I really could get away with it. I tucked the envelope under my arm and left the tap room. Nobody saw me leave.

I walked back toward Luther Arnold's house and I was just in time to see him and Ivy come out. I ducked for cover until they passed by. No taxis for Luther. It might have cost him forty cents to reach Dad's house. I began thinking that Luther wasn't fit to live.

They passed me, not more than twenty feet from the doorway into which I'd ducked. The old scrooge had Ivy's left arm tightly gripped. I waited five minutes, then walked swiftly to the house.

I didn't try to get in the front door because I remembered a window in the dining room had been open. The breeze from it had reached the hallway where Ivy sat and had gently played around the blond wisps of hair about her forehead.

Yes, the window was open. I climbed through. The lights were out. I made my way carefully through the house and reached the living room and his desk. I drew down the shades and turned on the small desk light.

Then I examined the half dozen envelopes on top of the desk. They were all equally as worn as the one Luther had filled with currency and entrusted to me. I selected one of them.

The wide middle drawer was fastened, but the lock was ancient. With a flat letter opener, carefully manipulated so

there would be no tell-tale scratches, I got the drawer open. The bonds were still there. Apparently Luther was cashing them in. He must be in a lot of trouble to be doing a thing like this.

I filled the envelope with these bonds, closed the drawer and slipped the bolt back into its recess without any trouble. This done, I tackled another simple part of the job. On the top of the desk was the sealing wax and the old signet ring, just as Luther had dropped them.

I melted some of the wax and let it fall on the flap, almost exactly matching the four spots which had sealed the original envelope. I blew out the match and put it into my pocket along with the chips of sealing wax from the original envelope.

I picked up the signet ring, stamped its impression on the soft wax and sat back to admire my work. It was neat. I smiled. My throat was dry again. I needed a drink.

Five minutes later, I was walking down the street once more. Behind me, there wasn't a trace of my visit. No fingerprints. I'd been careful.

It was nine thirty-five. Luther was at Dad's, probably having a litter of pups waiting for me to show up. By the time he got back home, he'd be ready for bed. I'd heard he never stayed up beyond ten o'clock.

I turned the corner and spotted the same bar. I glanced inside. The bartender was still rolling dice. There was one new customer. The waiter still dozed. I glanced at my watch. I'd been gone from this tap room no more than twelve minutes.

I stepped in, taking a terrific chance, I knew. I skirted the empty tables, keeping close to the booths which were on the dark side of the room.

My booth was exactly as I'd left it. My glass still on the table. I threw my hat and both envelopes on the padded seat, picked up my glass and walked over to the bar.

"How about some service?" I asked.

My waiter came to life, all apologies. He waved me back to the booth and went for my second drink. I swallowed this in a gulp. I weighed the idea of tipping him. I left a dime. That was so small the waiter would never forget me.

With one of the envelopes beneath my coat, the other one under my arm, I walked out and headed for a busy subway station nearby. I ducked down the

stairway, paid my way through the turnstile and put the envelope full of currency in one of those steel lockers where you slip a dime into the slot and get the key to the steel door.

After waiting until a train pulled in, I joined the crowd and exited again. Now I really began to hurry.

DAD himself came to the door when I rang. He heaved a big sigh of relief as I walked in.

"Luther is frantic," he said. "What happened? You were supposed to get here before he arrived."

I smiled pleasantly. "I stopped for a couple of drinks, Dad. I wanted a quiet place to sit and think. About your proposition. And the more I thought about it, the better I like the idea."

"Fine. But Luther is ready to fire you on the spot. Remember, if you don't make good with him, there'll be no agency. We'll go into that later. Come on. Luther is in a rush. His niece is grabbing the ten-fifty for Chicago and he's taking her to the train."

Luther's peaked face was tighter than a snare drum. His eyes darted toward the envelope under my arm. He jumped up and seized the envelope. He examined the seals carefully, then handed the envelope to Dad.

"Put it in your safe. I want to see it go in. Does Johnny know the combination?"

"No," Dad said dryly. "He doesn't. Your envelope will be quite safe. How long will I have it, Luther?"

"Maybe two or three days. It contains negotiable stuff I don't want around my house."

I could have kissed him for that. Negotiable stuff covered a wide range, from bonds to currency.

Dad locked the envelope in his big wall safe. Luther walked over to Ivy and took her wrist. He all but dragged her toward the door.

"I'll want no further part of you, Johnny. You showed you can't be trusted."

"You got your envelope, didn't you?" I was getting sore at him.

"Yes, after you carried it into cheap barrooms where it might have been stolen. I'm sorry, Connie. I can't use your son. I didn't think he'd be any good. Come on, Ivy. If we don't hurry, we'll have to take a cab."

Ivy only had time to droop one languorous eyelid in a deliberate wink. I disregarded that because Dad was eyeing me closely too.

After they were gone, I followed him into the living room. He mixed himself a drink and sat down.

"Johnny, no matter what you do, you're a bust," he said. "Even such a simple task as carrying an envelope ten blocks across town becomes impossible because of the hazards of barrooms. I think you're beyond redemption. My offer to set you up in business is withdrawn."

I thought that hanging on a hundred thousand dollars in beautiful cash wasn't going to be so tough to take.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I merely wanted to think over your proposition. Anyway, I don't understand Luther. He's cracked."

Dad talked around the edge of his glass. "Luther is one of the shrewdest men I've ever known. What he did tonight may have seemed silly, but Luther had his reasons. I will admit that I was relieved to see you and the envelope. I thought you might have run out on us."

"Dad!" I said. My reproach impressed him.

"I'm sorry, son. I shouldn't have said that. Well—the same arrangement holds. I'll pay your liquor and hotel bills. Find your own job and don't come running to me when you're in trouble. Good night."

I didn't move.

"Dad, one favor. Can I take the car tonight?"

"No," he said. "Why? What's on?"

"I was going to take what's left of the twenty you gave me and try to run it up a little. To tide me until I land something. Because I am going to work, believe it or not."

"All right, take the car. One little thing though—if the car isn't in the garage tomorrow morning, your liquor bills and hotel bills won't be paid from then on."

"Thanks, Dad," I said slowly. "I wish this had turned out differently. Maybe—if I prove myself in some other way—you'll reopen that offer about the detective agency."

"Maybe," he said, without enthusiasm.

I left him and went to the garage where he kept his car. My reputation there was good. All they had to do was

phone Dad and ask him twice if it was okay for me to take the car out.

I drove the Packard across town to a dark side street where I parked, leaned back and did some careful planning. Then I drove to my own hotel, parked the car and went to my tiny room.

A half hour later—it was exactly eleven-thirty then—I emerged.

New York was bustling with activity. Taxis swarmed along the streets. The theatre crowds were getting out and the area around my midtown hotel was jammed.

I made an impression. My tuxedo was the work of an expensive tailor. A black, soft hat slanted at just the proper jaunty angle. A dark topcoat fitted me snugly and my white scarf was carelessly arranged around the collar of my coat. I wore gray suede gloves and black shoes that shone like a brand new eight-ball.

I was all that a well-dressed murderer should be. Now I was ready to call on my victim.

CHAPTER IV

Witness



FIRST, I drove past Luther's house to make sure it was dark. It wasn't. A light shone in his living room study. That worried me. The only thing about it was the fact that I knew Luther was home.

It would be an hour or so before I returned. He was bound to be in bed by that time. The bad feature lay in the fact that he might discover his bonds were missing. I'd have to make sure about that before I tackled him.

I drove the car toward Long Island, but stopped at one of the fashionable bars. I had a pint of brandy with me and guzzled about a third of it, leaving the bottle in the car.

At the bar I acted like a man who'd already had one too many, but I downed four more. Dad's charge account was in effect here. I signed the tab. That would be good evidence later on.

I reeled out of the place. There was a cop on the corner. I steadied myself

because I was far from drunk, walked to my car down the street. I got into it and pulled away from the curb.

At twelve-fifteen I had crossed the river and was in the suburbs. A highway stretched out before me. I rolled down the window to sniff the air and cleanse my brain of those scotches and brandy.

I knew this highway like a book. The gambling place Dad had thought I was bound for, was about four miles ahead. I saw headlights coming toward me. There wasn't much traffic.

I took a good firm grip on the wheel and started weaving the car. As the headlights drew closer, I deliberately sneaked over on the wrong lane and drove straight at the twin lights. I saw the other car begin to act skittish. It flashed past me on the lane I should have been occupying. The brake lights winked madly. I veered crazily until I was out of sight. Then other cars passed me and I made them scamper out of the way.

It was easy—and fun. I laughed when I thought how those other drivers must have sweated. Another car was coming. I repeated the performance and made very certain I knew just where, on this highway, I sent that other car screeching out of my path.

This done, I pulled off the road, waited five minutes and turned back to town. On the way I saw two motorcycle cops roaring after the crazy drunken driver who'd nearly smashed up four or five cars. Things were working beautifully.

At one on the dot, I pulled the car behind an abandoned ice manufacturing plant, removed my topcoat and tuxedo jacket. Under the topcoat, I also wore a dark brown sport jacket. I removed the bow tie and put on a dark blue four-in-hand and a cap. I took two long pulls at the bottle of brandy—just for moral effect. I got out, locked up the car and hurried for the subway station, a dozen blocks away.

I glanced in a chewing gum machine mirror on the platform. I certainly didn't look like the faultlessly dressed man in evening clothes who had left a classy bar, half drunk.

My trip was uneventful. I did nothing to make myself inconspicuous on the theory that efforts in this direction only served to make a man more con-

spicuous than ever.

There was really nothing to it. Yet, when I was crouched below the dining room window of Luther's house, I could feel my heart pounding hard. I hoisted myself up. The window was still unlocked. Raising it noiselessly, I crawled through, and listened. I didn't hear a single sound.

I tiptoed into the living room and got to the desk. I risked lighting a pocket lighter. The drawer was still closed. Nothing on top of the desk had been moved an inch. I breathed easier because I was sure that Luther hadn't discovered his bonds were missing.

The brandy was buzzing through my veins. I felt a glow of vast superiority. There was no fog. My mind was perfectly clear. I knew what I was doing. If there had been any other way out, I would gladly have taken it. It was my life or Luther Arnold's.

If I didn't pay off Sammy Moe, I'd wind up in a ditch with my head or my neck broken. So, Luther had to die.

I EXAMINED my gloved hands. No guns or knives for me. Such things leave clues and can be traced, but a human hand, well gloved, leaves no clue at all. I was ready for the big-time act.

I tiptoed into Luther's room.

Luther's bed was against the far wall. I moved toward it. He was sleeping noisily. From here on, I must work fast before some of the terror within me boiled over. I couldn't stop now. Nothing must make me stop.

I bent over Luther and tapped his beak of a nose smartly enough to awaken him. He sat up, muttering. He saw me vaguely and his bleat of terror never amounted to much. I slugged him on the point of his jaw. He fell back against the pillows. I fastened both hands around his throat and squeezed until Luther Arnold was dead.

I sighed. I actually felt sorry for him. I wondered, idly, if he had any more cash around the place and decided to have a quick look. I wanted this to seem like the work of a burglar.

I was straightening up when something chopped hard across the back of my neck and knocked my hat off. Before I could twist around, a second blow sent me falling on top of the bed. A third—and I almost passed out.

My brain fought to retain conscious-

ness and I was winning—if I didn't have to absorb another of those blows. I was dimly conscious of someone standing above me. In the darkness, and in my temporary state of half consciousness, I hadn't the faintest idea who it was.

But far back in my brain something started whispering that this was the finish. I'd been caught. The whispers grew to shouts and screams until my head threatened to burst.

I raised a hand and brought it around to the back of my neck. There was blood there. I tried to get up, slipped and fell clumsily to the floor. I stayed there a few moments. Finally, I managed to sit up. I was staring at Luther's left hand. It stuck out of the covers, the fingers drooping like the petals of a withered rose. Withered and sere and—dead.

I arose, somehow, without touching anything. I stood there swaying. My hat was on the floor. I picked it up mechanically. Nobody else was in the room—except a dead man. I moved cautiously toward the door. The house was quiet.

Yet some other person had been there. I thought there was a vague scent of perfume in the air, but that could have been remnants of Ivy's presence. She was always well loaded down with some heavy scent.

But Ivy was on a train for Chicago. I found no one, nor any traces of an intruder. Still, those lacerations and lumps on the back of my head were not caused by the elements of a dream. They were hard, cold and painful reality.

Someone had seen me kill Luther. My only out was for an alibi that would place me somewhere else, so that it would be impossible to construe me as the killer. In that alibi lay everything. Now I was going to have to alter it somehow, to account for those cuts on my head.

I'd have to go through some agony before it was done with.

I couldn't afford to waste any more time. I departed through the same window after leaving some traces of burglary. I went back to the spot where I'd left Dad's car. I unlocked the door, got in and drove back to the highway—the exact spot where I'd all but driven that last car off the road. On the way I threw the sport jacket and tie into the river.

I knew what I had to do and I set my jaws grimly. I rolled her up to fifty-two, drew my left arm over my face, knocked my hat off and gave the wheel a hard twist.

The car veered off the road. There was a tremendous crash as it hit the highway fence. It went straight through, with a good-sized chunk of the white painted wood hanging onto one fender tenaciously. There were small trees and shrubs ahead of me. The car lights brought them into bold relief. And a big tree, with a stout trunk. I was aiming for it and the car was no longer under my control. I braced myself and knew that I was facing death. My teeth chattered.

It wasn't worth all this. Not a hundred thousand dollars. But there was more than money at stake now. My life hung in the balance. If I could have drawn back, I'd never have done so.

I felt the radiator plow into the tree and curve around it. Something hit me in the stomach. I retched. Blood coursed down my forehead, and that was—that.

CHAPTER V

One Pointed Question



HANDS hauled me out of the car. I was only vaguely conscious of things. I remember wincing as a suturing needle bit through my flesh. All I hoped for, mentally, was that they wouldn't give me ether and I'd talk under its influence.

Apparently I didn't, for about dawn, a uniformed policeman walked into the hospital room. He sat down, eyeing me silently for a moment or two. I held my breath, but I experienced some relief. If the witness who saw me murder Luther had gone to the cops, no uniformed patrolman would have come for me, but a homicide detective. Such as Ray Delmar. Lieutenant Delmar, whom I'd known for years. This was just a harness bull on a routine job.

"Buddy, you're a lucky guy," he said. "They say you chased cars all over that road before you went through the fence.

Mighty good thing for you nobody else was hurt."

I groaned and moved a little. "I guess I was pretty drunk, officer."

"You were soused. Well, I'm arresting you for the police of the township where the accident happened. The docs say you can leave. Get dressed."

"Where are we going?" I asked him.

"To Headquarters, where you'll be locked up until they send somebody from Long Island for you. Come on, no stalling now."

I didn't say so, but I was glad to go. Absolutely tickled to face a charge of drunken driving. The murder witness hadn't talked yet. I wondered why.

A half hour later, I was searched and escorted to a cell. The wooden pallet wasn't very comfortable, but I didn't mind. Except for the unlucky break in having someone see me commit the crime, things had worked out perfectly. I'd come through the simulated accident with a fairly whole skin. I ached in a dozen spots. My head was bandaged and one hand was badly bruised. Otherwise, I remained quite intact. I knew only one thing. It had come to me when I saw that tree trunk looming up. When death came for me, it had to come fast. I wouldn't be able to stand a slow death.

Someone stood before the cell door. I looked up and stifled a gasp. It was Lieutenant Ray Delmar, looking too serious. Maybe he knew about Luther's death. Maybe all this was just stage props and I was going to be taken out and worked over.

Delmar was taller than I by about five inches, which brought him to a couple of inches over six feet. He was brawny, but not fat. He had the coldest eyes I'd ever seen in a man. Even when we were kids, chasing girls, those eyes had been cold and grim. That was the reason why I had been able to take over his girls so easily.

"Hello, Johnny," he said. "I figured some day I'd see you in one of these cells."

I massaged my bandaged head gently. "Don't rub it in, Ray. Look, I didn't hurt anyone?"

"Only yourself. You've gone pretty well to pot. If you want some advice, cop a plea. Tell them you were drunk. Let them suspend your license and fine you. Maybe hand you a few days in the clink. But don't try to fight it. Those

boys in the hill country get mighty tough with a man who tries to make them out as a pack of liars."

"Thanks, Ray," I said. "I've already made up my mind to take my medicine. Perhaps I've even learned a lesson."

"You?" He grimaced. "The devil you did. Incidentally, I telephoned your father. He says you can sizzle before he'll help you. Got any other friends?"

"Only one. What did you think?"

"Who? Oh—I get it. You mean me. Well, I suppose I can afford it. I'll put a hundred in your envelope of possessions. Pay your fine with that—and whatever you have yourself. I expect to be paid back, Johnny. A detective lieutenant isn't rich."

"I'll double it, Ray. That's a promise. In a couple of weeks you'll get it all. And thanks."

"Don't thank me." He turned away. "I can't figure out why I bother with a guy like you. See you around, Johnny."

He went away and the last doubts I had left me. The murder witness had not talked. I wondered why, naturally, but for the moment I was content to let things ride.

They took me in a police car back to Long Island. That morning I faced a judge, acted like a school kid who'd heaved a spit ball and thanked the judge when he fined me a hundred and costs. I paid up—leaving me nine dollars and some silver. It was enough. I knew where a hundred grand grew in a nice steel locker.

I DIDN'T make a beeline for it, although I realized I couldn't delay too long. They open those lockers after a certain time limit and I didn't want the stuff around. I returned to town, went to my hotel and cleaned up. I felt

better after that. I began wondering, through the haze of smoke from my tenth chain-smoked cigarette, if the murder witness hadn't talked because he guessed I had that money and was waiting for me to go get it.

I was glad I thought of that. I left the hotel, bought a newspaper and felt a little disappointed when there was no item on the first page about Luther's murder. I did locate it on the third page. Just a flash story because Luther's body hadn't been found until shortly before press time. The police, it stated, were convinced that it was the work of a burglar who had first tried to torture Luther into revealing where he had hidden his money.

I ordered another cup of coffee at the drug store fountain and read the article again. Then I turned to another page. I kept glancing up in the mirror behind the fountain, but no one seemed to be watching me. I tried a few tricks I'd seen in the movies and read about. I entered a busy department store through one door and emerged through another. I took a subway uptown, transferred to a downtown express and this time I rode to the station where I'd locked up that fat envelope.

I didn't go directly to the locker, but entered the john instead. I stayed there long enough so that if I was being tailed, my shadow would have been bound to enter also and find out what delayed me. Nobody who looked suspicious came in.

I walked to the locker, quite casually dug my bunch of keys out of my pocket and selected the proper one. I removed it from the key ring and I had it aimed at the lock when I paused and found my throat gone suddenly dry.

Ray Delmar had put money in my en-
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TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER
★

velope of possessions. Had he seen this key? I'd taken the precaution of putting it on the ring with others, but these keys were shiny, small and distinctive. I'd been a fool for not having left it in my hotel room.

That was my first mistake. Maybe it meant nothing. I'd soon know. I took a long breath, opened the locker door and saw that envelope propped inside exactly as I had left it. Nobody tapped me on the shoulder or shoved a gun against my ribs. I was safe.

I took a taxi back to my hotel. There was no use exposing myself to any danger. In my room, with the door locked and the curtain drawn, I spilled the contents of the envelope on the bed. I ran my fingers through the bills for fully five minutes before I stacked them and went to work at the glory of counting them.

My disappointment wasn't more than eight thousand. There was ninety-two thousand dollars in old bills, most of them twenties and fifties. A fortune. To me that money meant a settlement with Sammy Noe. A chance to rehabilitate myself, even in my father's eyes. Because I'd made up my mind that killing Luther and stealing his money was my first and absolutely my last crime. There was no need to commit any more. I was on top of the world.

I sliced the envelope into ribbons and flushed them down the toilet. The cash was another problem. I couldn't keep such an amount in my pockets or my room. I didn't dare risk renting a safe deposit vault.

Working fast, I counted six thousand out of it—in fifties—and put that under my pillow. I had to see Sammy Noe and pay up tonight. The other grand would tide me over for a few days. The remainder I wrapped into a neat bundle, addressed it to Nicholas Blake, care of General Delivery at the Church Street Annex.

Carrying this package, I walked four blocks to a branch post office, had the package registered and shipped off. I felt better after that. I could claim it any time before ten days were up. Meanwhile, it was safe as if the door of the Chase National had closed on it.

I went back to the hotel, intending to freshen up and go see Sammy Noe. As I crossed the lobby, someone got out of one of the chairs and called my name.

It was Lieutenant Delmar. I stood there, watching him approach, waiting for the first move toward the pocket where he carried his cuffs. If that happened, I meant to blow through that lobby like a bomb.

"How'd you make out, Johnny?" he asked me and thrust a pack of cigarettes in my direction. I took one.

"A hundred and costs, like you said. I'll never forget that loan, Ray. You'll get it back as soon as I can wangle it out of Dad."

DELMAR shrugged. "Let's go up to your room. When I talked to your father, he acted as if he'd curse the day he ever saw you again."

"Dad gets over these things," I said lightly. "Furthermore, he wanted to set me up in business yesterday. I think I'll take his proposition. If I do, bet on it, I'll reform. I've been something of a heel, I suppose. Never hurt anyone, but I never filled the spot I was created for either. Whatever that spot is."

I unlocked my door, glad now that I'd disposed of that surplus money. Ray sat down and lit another cigarette off the butt of the first one. He looked at me with those cold eyes of his.

"Why did you kill Luther Arnold, Johnny?" he asked me.

Just like that!

I didn't jump more than eight feet.

"Wh-what?" I shouted.

Delmar laughed. "Okay, Johnny. Call it a shot in the dark, but you were seen avidly reading the account of Luther's death in the newspapers. As a matter of fact, I know it couldn't have been you."

I felt my heart begin beating again. "Look, Ray, a joke is a joke, but you can go too far. I'm interested in the murder of Luther Arnold for personal reasons."

Delmar grinned like an imp. Or a devil. Suddenly I hated those chilly blue eyes of his.

"Johnny, we know about the time when Luther died. At the same time he breathed his last, you were lying amidst the wreck of your father's car. Just prior to that, you drove four or five cars off the road before you plowed through the fence. Some highway cops were looking for you, but missed the hole in the fence because it was so dark.

You're in the clear. Now, why are you interested in his death?"

I put on my best put-out expression. "I ought to heave you out of here, Ray. Maybe I will—if you laugh at what I'm going to tell you now. Believe me, I'm serious. I've never been so serious in all my life. I'm going to find out who killed him."

"Pipe dreams," Delmar said cozily. "There isn't a clue trained eyes can recognize. What can you do?"

"I don't know, but I intend to make a stab at it. Yesterday Luther hired me as a bodyguard—whoa—if you start laughing, I'll stop talking."

Delmar stifled the roar of derision.

I went on, "Dad said if I guarded him and made good, he'd buy me a detective agency that happens to be for sale. Well, I went to Luther. He assigned me to carry an envelope to Dad's house.

lived. On Eighth Avenue. I think the sign said Peterson's, but I can't swear to it. I'd know the place again though. Especially the rotten service."

"Okay, skip it." Delmar drove the rest of the way in silence. I was riding high. There wasn't a clue. Delmar had said so and if he didn't see any, there were none. Yet I wanted to find out a little more about it. There was no harm in asking, especially since I'd admitted being interested in the affair.

"Who do you think killed him, Ray? He was a mean old cuss and probably had a lot of enemies."

"Could be somebody like that," Ray admitted. "Still, it looks like the work of a burglar who woke Luther up, got scared and slugged him. Then he got more scared and knocked him off. The place was torn up a little. Guys like Luther always have a rep for keeping a

Coming Next Issue: THE COP ON THE CORNER, the Story of a Murder Not As Simple to Solve As It Looked—By DAVID GOODIS

I stopped off for a drink. When I got to the house, Luther was already there, fit to be tied because I was late and he canned me on the spot. It seems that envelope was full of something valuable."

Delmar frowned. "So that's where all his dough went. I'm going over to see your father right now. Want to come along? Maybe I can put in a good word."

I accepted that invitation eagerly and we resumed talking after Delmar and I were in the police cruiser he drove.

"Luther had been cashing in all his holdings," he explained. "First, his real estate. He bought bonds with the money he got. Then he started cashing in the bonds—or at least they're missing. Perhaps he was afraid to have them around the house, didn't trust bank vaults and turned them over to your father for safe-keeping. I wonder why he wanted a guard?"

I shrugged. "We never got that far in discussing my duties."

"Look, Johnny. I don't mean anything personal in this, but what bar did you tarry at, with the envelope in your possession?"

"I'm not sure." I looked puzzled. "It's around the corner from where Luther

lot of loose coin around the house. He was a smart guy though. In a way. Then again, not so smart."

"Can you explain? Without breaking departmental rules."

"Sure. As one detective to another, though he still be in embryo. The front door had been unlocked with a key and hadn't been closed tightly after the killer left. He didn't even try to check on other means of entry because a rear window was wide open."

"Maybe his niece could furnish some sort of a lead," I ventured. "She left for Chicago yesterday, but you could locate her. Anyway, when she reads about the murder, she is bound to come back."

Delmar nodded. "I heard about her. What's she like?"

"Name is Ivy. Blonde and cute. Sexy enough looking for a night club line. Nice legs, turned up nose and plenty ardent. I think Luther held her down too much for her own good."

"Whew!" Delmar grinned. "Sounds like somebody I'd like to know better. I'll check on her."

He pulled to the curb in front of Dad's house. Barclay, the butler, let us in. His face was more like frozen ice than ever. Man, how he hated me.

CHAPTER VI

A Killer Starts Looking

DAD shook hands with Delmar and backed up my story of having worked for Luther for the astounding period of about an hour.

"We're interested in that envelope," Delmar said. "Can I have a look at it?"

Dad nodded. "I already phoned Headquarters about it. They said they'd send out the man assigned to the case. Meaning you, I suppose. I'll get it."

Delmar studied the exterior of the big envelope for a moment or two. Dad seemed to get the wrong impression.

"Johnny didn't tamper with it, Lieutenant. You can see it's sealed thoroughly. Luther looked it over when Johnny delivered it here. He said it had not been opened."

"I never insinuated that it had, Mr. Stafford," Delmar said. "Oh, I'm beginning to see. You think Johnny was mixed up in it. No, I assure you he was not. At the time Luther died, Johnny nearly broke his own neck driving your car off a highway."

Dad advanced toward me. "Blast you! Cars are hard to get. I—oh, forget it. I should have known better than to let you take it. Drunk, I suppose?"

"Plastered," Delmar said pleasantly. "A very good drunk, Mr. Stafford. Because if Johnny hadn't been alibied so completely, we'd have locked him up in connection with the murder. Soon as we found out he was acting as Luther's guard, that is. We don't have to do that now. He's in the clear."

"I was worried about it," Dad said slowly. "More than you'd think. And I admit it right in front of my son because I'm convinced he borders very closely upon what is commonly known as a rat."

Delmar looked up, surprised. I could feel my face flushing.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Stafford, Johnny's not as bad as that. Just a little wild and he gets that from you. I went to school with him. He was one of my best pals. I'll admit he hasn't amounted to much, but look at me. What's a de-

TECTIVE-lieutenant? I have a devil of a time trying to make ends meet."

Dad went over to the sideboard and fixed three drinks. He put them on a tray and served me the first one. He looked a bit sheepish.

"I'm sorry, son," he said.

I just shrugged. I wasn't going to let him get off quite so easily. He could bawl me out in private all he liked and I'd take it without a word. But Ray was a friend of mine. I was highly embarrassed.

Delmar methodically cut through the envelope flap, without touching the seals. He trusted me like a stray lamb trusts a wolf. I knew he'd check on the seals. He shook the contents of the envelope onto Dad's desk. The bonds fell into a haphazard pile.

Dad put his drink down and whistled. "Say, there's a couple of hundred thousand dollars in easily negotiable stuff here."

I put my oar in, needling Dad a little. "And I was lugging that around under my arm. Huh, they ought to tell me these things so I could take a nice long train trip, cash in and live happily ever afterwards. I thought there was something like this in the envelope. Luther acted like it was a million dollars."

Delmar put the bonds back. "I'll give you a receipt for these, Mr. Stafford, and appropriate them as evidence. To what, I don't know—yet. It's just clear that Luther was afraid of someone. He cashed in everything he owned. His hiring Johnny as a guard proves it too. And while we're on the subject, Johnny might do well as a private detective. You never can tell."

Delmar excused himself and went off. I tested Dad's present disposition by mixing myself another drink. He never permitted me more than one. This time he made no objections.

"Johnny, a man always makes mistakes," he said. "God knows I've made them. I might be wrong in your case. Do you still want that detective agency?"

I nodded. "Naturally. It's the first thing that ever came along which interested me."

"Then you shall have it. With one provision. I promised you first that it was yours if you made good with Luther. You fell on your face. Now, go out and find who killed Luther. Bring him in.

Or put the police on his track and—that agency is yours.”

A very small bottom fell out of my plans. I'd hoped to gouge five thousand out of him and use it to pay off Sammy Noe. It really didn't make much difference. Not when I had all that dough tucked away.

AND the idea of me working might and main to uncover Luther's murderer was something for the book. The killer looking for himself. It was so ideal a proposition that I had to restrain myself from cheering. With Dad's backing and Ray's assistance, I could make certain no trail even started in my direction. I might even, I reflected hopefully, discover someone to take the rap. That would be a deal.

I stood up. "Dad, I'll take that offer and I'll do my best to make good at it. I'm sorry about the car. I got stinking drunk last night because I felt bad about losing out on the detective agency."

Dad grimaced. "It was partly my fault, I suppose. Where did you raise enough money to pay your fine?"

"Lieutenant Delmar lent me a hundred. Dad, you're all wrong about me. Ray is a detective. One of the best on the force and he has faith in me."

"He doesn't happen to know you as well as I do." Dad took five twenties out of his wallet. "Give this back to Lieutenant Delmar. And get to work. Produce results and you won't be sorry." He gave me a queer look. "Son, you can do this if you really try. Concentrate hard. Keep in mind the fact that you're my son. And your mother's. You come of good, wholesome stock. You flew off on a tangent somehow. Maybe it was my doings. I didn't give you the attention a boy deserves. But accomplish this job, do it right and you'll see what I mean."

I shook hands with him. I guess it was the first time in my life I'd ever done that. Dad wasn't a bad egg, I reflected. Just a trifle stupid about life in general. Too tied up with metals and gates and cores and molds. Maybe I could even make something out of him. A good pal, for instance.

"I may not bring him in, but I'll give him a run for it," I promised. "And I won't tap you for any dough either, unless I need it for expenses."

He grinned. "I've never known you

not to need expense money. Good luck, son."

I went out, not even affected by the butler's glare. I was riding high. The two scotches sat easily in my stomach and tantalized my brain just enough so that I was smart. I suddenly knew how to pay Sammy Noe back and never have to explain where I'd dug up five thousand in cash.

Sammy Noe's most exclusive club was on the third floor of a building close to the middle of Manhattan. There was a fancy night club on the first floor which masked the reason why so many people entered and left. The gambling place and the night club used the same entrance, but if you wanted to go to the third floor, you merely passed up the club, kept on walking and entered a private elevator with rich mahogany panelling and a thick, soft rug.

There were even plush benches in the elevator and you had to be known before the operator would take you up. He nodded to me and began the brief trip. The elevator doors opened onto what looked like the living room of a wealthy man's home. High windows, expansively framed with heavy hangings, comfortable chairs in the modern trend, a man in a butler's uniform and a Capehart playing softly.

I wasn't deceived. I followed the butler to a closed door. He unlocked it with a key. Instantly, the sounds of excited talking, the drone of croupier's voices and the click of the little ivory balls issued forth. The door closed behind me and I was in another world.

One in which Lady Luck was the ruling goddess. Her subjects—suckers all!

I mingled with the crowd around one table and lost twenty dollars faster than I could bat an eyelash. At another I won a little and kept circulating around until I found the man I wanted.

He was a plump, red-cheeked little guy with his pockets full of blue chips and his brain full of alcohol. He made frequent visits to the bar, where everything was on the house. Sammy Noe was smart. He realized that an alcohol-inflamed mind was more apt to encourage risks than a sober one.

"Friend," I said softly in his ear. "You've been very lucky."

He gave me a chilly eye. "Any of your business, friend?"

"Yes. It so happens it is. I work

here." I took his arm. "For your own good just step over to that lounge in a quiet corner."

HE SHOOK off my grasp. "Hey, what is this?"

"I merely wish to save you a bad headache—or perhaps a beating up. I want to cash your chips for you."

He followed me, half willingly then. We sat down and I offered him a cigarette.

He puffed twice and then blurted, "I think you're some kind of a slick crook. There's a cashier in that cage who turns chips into folding money."

I nodded. "And smooth operators circulating among the guests too. Finger men who will later on point you out. They watch the cashier. A man who turns in a lot of chips is held up as soon as he leaves this place. There have been three instances of that lately and we're trying to break it up."

"Oh," he said, mollified, "I see. How?"

"I'll buy your chips. Right here, where no one will notice us. Fair enough?"

"I've got six thousand dollars worth," he confided.

"I'll take five. You cash in the rest just as usual. Then no suspicions will be aroused." I took out my six thousand dollars and calmly counted off five thousand.

The little guy examined the bills for a moment. Then he began counting his chips. Twenty minutes later I was at the cashier's cage, being paid off.

"You were lucky tonight, Mr. Stafford." The cashier smiled.

"Yeah," I said. "It's about time and don't look too grieved. Sammy isn't going bankrupt. I owe him a lot more than this and I'm going to pay him off as soon as I can get to him."

I put the money into my pocket, hung around a little longer and had a couple of free drinks. I was almost ready to leave when I saw someone I knew. It gave me something of a jolt.

Ivy Arnold walked in. If she was in mourning for her uncle, it was a brand new fashion. Her evening gown was a violent blue, cut low and calculated to arouse attention by its close fit. It aroused plenty, but in me only subconsciously.

Ivy was supposed to be in Chicago. Of course she might have flown back in answer to an urgent request from the

police, but what was she doing here? And being escorted by a pair of Sammy Noe's smoothest mugs?

I ducked out of sight and she didn't see me. I'd rather she didn't because a strange, black suspicion was taking shape in my mind. I was back in Luther Arnold's bedroom. I was being hit by someone who had witnessed the murder. Hit three times with some sort of a sap. Hard enough to crack my skull and half knock me out. But three blows! A sap, handled right, puts a man under with one blow.

Unless—and the idea buzzed furiously—it was wielded by someone who didn't possess the necessary strength to make a single blow effective.

Like a woman!

I watched her for a little while. She had three drinks, fast, as if she was nervous about something. Then she and her two companions went to a gambling table. In ten minutes she won a sizeable sum and suddenly became the life of the party. She had a rather shrill laugh and it rang out twice a minute.

She acted just like some hick in town for a killing and making it. Yet the way she handled the chips and laid down her bets told me she was no amateur at this. And why Sammy's two professionals as her escort?

I was afraid of being seen. If Ivy was the person who saw me throttle Luther, I'd much rather meet her in private where she could scream if she liked. She might be figuring on blackmail although that was practically ruled out. Luther had been her uncle. She was his heir, presumably, so why should blackmail interest her?

Still, she hadn't gone to the cops or Ray Delmar would have strong-armed me long ago. I wanted another drink badly, but I didn't go to the bar. Ivy visited it too often. Later, I could meet her—accidentally—and if she had anything to say, I'd be able to handle the situation with whatever strategy it called for.

I left the room, passed through the sedate front for the place and rode the elevator down. I didn't taxi to Sammy's offices. I walked because I wanted to think. Ivy, with Sammy's boys, indicated she might be working for him. An odd set-up for a girl, just bereaved of her closest relative. The closest I knew of, anyhow.

AND the way she'd played those wheels. Like a shill! Sammy used them to encourage other players when the evening became slow. Usually, he'd have a couple on tap. If the play wasn't very heavy, someone would phone him. He'd summon his shill and send her out. She'd win, have a gay old time and the other players would decide this was an unlucky evening for the house.

I reached Sammy's offices. Cookie was lounging behind the switchboard. He gave me a casual wave, tapped a button some place and I was instantly admitted to Sammy's private office.

I dropped five thousand on his desk.

"There it is. At least you can't say I didn't keep my promise. That's all I could raise—safely."

Sammy thumbed through the money without looking up.

"What do you mean, safely?" he asked in a voice that purred.

"I put the elbow on my father for five hundred and I ran it up at one of our fashionable gambling houses. I figured five grand was about the limit they'd let me get away with before sending some stooge to stop me as I left the place and take it all away from me."

Sammy sucked his lower lip and leaned back. "You won this in one of my places? Which one?"

I told him. He reached for his telephone and talked with the cashier. Whatever he learned, seemed to satisfy him.

"All right, Johnny. You seem to have won it fairly and I've no objections even if it's taking it out of one pocket and putting it into the other. You know, Cookie won't like this."

"What do I care what Cookie likes or

doesn't like?"

"He was sort of figuring a neat way to take it out of your hide. He'll be disappointed. I want five grand more in no longer than three days. Win it at one of my places if you like, but don't squawk if you lose. And no more on the cuff, you hear?"

"You're a good influence, Sammy," I said casually. "You know how to cure a man of gambling. Good night."

I walked out. Cookie gave me a cursory glance, but didn't open his trap. I hit the sidewalk and walked some more. Ivy and Sammy! What a combination, if it was true. The way Sammy checked up on me to find out if I'd really won that cash at his place! Why should he even suspect I hadn't? Because Ivy told him I strangled her uncle? Was Sammy getting set to pull a stiff blackmail stunt?

Well, I was supposed to be acting like a detective. In the morning I really meant to start investigating. I had to find out who saw me kill the old scrooge. I had to know why I hadn't been reported to the police.

And Ivy looked like the top candidate for my attentions.

The hotel lobby was practically deserted when I walked through. I was in a hurry. I needed a drink and most of the bars were closed. I let myself in, left the door open and sped toward my dresser. There was a bottle in the top drawer.

I came to a slow stop. There was something in the air—a scent. A heavy, cloying odor like gaudy, but expensive perfume. I went back to the door, snapped on the light and closed the door. I looked around. Everything seemed to be the same except that the curtain was

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights,

swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

all the way down. I hadn't left it that way.

I opened the drawers of my dresser. Nothing seemed to be disturbed, but it was. Somebody had lifted out a pile of handkerchiefs, for instance, and then replaced them with the bottom ones on top. I knew because I kept the oldest ones on the bottom—always. It was a habit of mine that I never broke.

The bed was disturbed slightly too. The hotel maid used box corners on the sheets and whoever had taken the bed apart and put it together again, simply let the sheets hang loosely.

I got the bottle out of the bottom drawer. Thank heaven, that hadn't been filched. I sniffed of the mellow scotch, walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. I tilted the bottle to my lips and started drinking. Just like any cheap, lonesome drunk.

CHAPTER VII

Lady About to Die



NEXT morning I had a hangover and a driving ambition. The hangover wasn't unusual, but the ambition was and mixed together they turned out a violent potion. The one made me want to stay in bed; the other forced me to get up two hours earlier than

I'd done in weeks. Maybe months. I showered and felt a little better. A drink helped too—and I was ready to start buzzing around like a private sleuth. A detective with the greatest assignment in history. To find out who had seen me kill Luther.

Until I knew, I lived on the brink of disaster.

I took the subway to 125th Street and walked over to the station on stilts at which New York Central trains stopped on their way in and out of the city. I knew the train which Ivy was supposed to have taken to Chicago.

I buzzed around like a private eye and did pretty good at it. I found a porter who had been on duty when Ivy's train made its last stop before the long haul upstate. I let him see the edge of a five dollar bill.

He eyed it for a moment. "Yes, sir, I was helpin' a lady onto that train and there was another lady comin' off."

"They don't get off at this station very often, do they?"

"Ain't 'sposed to get off here a-tall, mister. Jes' get on is all."

"What did this lady look like? The one who got off?"

"I didn't 'specially pay much attention. She was about so high." He measured approximately five feet five. "Looked like a real live doll walkin', she did. She had on one of them suits. Real class. Green, I think it was. And a green hat with a feather stuck in it. Green shoes too. Boy, she sure liked green."

I gave him the five spot. "And you didn't pay any special attention, eh?"

He grinned broadly. "Mister, you see 'em like her and you look."

I walked away. So Ivy had tricked the old boy. She'd let him put her on that train and then promptly disembarked at 125th Street. So much for that. I took a cab to Dad's office building. His foundry was in Pennsylvania. He shared his time, about equally, between the office and the plant, but I knew desk work was tying him down lately and he'd be apt to be there.

I had to wait, like any salesman wanting an interview. Finally, I was escorted to his office. He sat behind the big desk, frowning heavily. I pulled up a chair.

"I've been working," I confided seriously.

He glanced at his watch. "It's ten-thirty. I don't believe you."

I grinned back. "But it's the truth. Dad, I'm going to find out the truth about Luther's murder. And I think I'm on a track that may show profits. I need information. Imagine that? No money, just nice easy information."

"About what?"

"Luther, mainly. By now, things must have opened up a little. Who gets his money? Ivy?"

Dad shook his head. "She doesn't get a dime. The fact is, I'm Luther's heir."

"You?" I gaped at him in surprise.

This threw my ideas into the rubbish can. I'd figured that Ivy had seen me strangle the old gent, tried to knock me out and changed her mind because I was really doing her a favor. But if she didn't get any of his money, that motive was out.

"Me," Dad said quietly. "I'm also the executor. Johnny, have you run across any reason why Luther was so afraid? Why he was turning his assets into cash? Even taking a beating on some of them as a sacrifice for speed?"

"No, not yet. I was working on the Ivy angle. Dad, she did not go to Chicago. After Luther put her on the train, she got off at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. Last night she was out having a gay old time."

Dad mulled that over for a moment. "You're showing a lot more ability than I thought you had. But Ivy is out of it. She had no reason to kill Luther. I imagine he told her she wouldn't get rich at his death."

"It does sort of—break things up. Dad, can you arrange for me to get into Luther's house?"

"The police have been all over it. What do you expect to find that they missed?"

"I don't know, Dad. Maybe nothing. But they look at things with too experienced eyes. Maybe a couple of amateur eyes like mine would spot something they missed. It's worth the chance."

HE OPENED a drawer in his desk and took out a key.

"This opens the front door. His lawyer turned it over to me about an hour ago. I want it back as soon as you have finished with it."

"I'll leave it at the house," I said. "With Barclay. Thanks, Dad. I'll make you give me that agency yet. And do you know, I like this sort of work. It fascinates me."

Dad just nodded and I knew my interview with him was over. He seemed so curt of late. As if he could hardly stand the sight of me. I got out of there with the uncomfortable feeling I wasn't wanted.

But I had the key and it let me into Luther's house. I didn't exactly know what I wanted there, but a detective should be able to look around the scene of the crime. I smiled at the idea. What I wanted to find were clues—pointing to whoever had witnessed the murder. Yeah, I knew who did it. I doubted that any detective ever knew so much about a job he was investigating.

I visited the bedroom where Luther had been strangled. It didn't bother me any. Sunlight streamed through the win-

dows. The bed was still unmade, left that way after they'd hauled him out it.

I went to his study. The corner of the living room he'd turned into an office. The desk had been ransacked thoroughly. I checked through it again, finding nothing. I sat back and began to daydream.

Ivy was either the person who'd seen me kill Luther, or she was mixed up with someone who had. There was something wrong with little Ivy, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Why hadn't she gone to Chicago? Why deceive Luther? Or had he been deceived? Was she a part of whatever mysterious scheme he had been cooking up? I had to know. I had to either pin Ivy down as the witness or absolve her.

A bookcase attracted my attention and I went over to it. Apparently, the police had glanced at the books but paid little attention to them. I saw why. There was a thirty-year-old set of De Maupassant, one of Poe and a cloth bound, green set setting itself forth as the greatest wit and humor in the world. All stuff in vogue when Luther had been a young man and susceptible to the high pressure talk of book salesmen.

I did see a huge old-fashioned Bible though. I removed it, carried it to a chair and sat down to study the thing. It had brass hinges, of all things. I ran through the pages. The inscription on the fly leaf indicated this must have been the property of Luther's parents.

I came to the page recording births, deaths and marriages. A real old-fashioned book. There was no space for divorces. Then I uttered one sharp, solid curse.

In the section for recording births, only that of Luther was noted. He had been an only child. How come then, he had a niece? Nieces were the offspring of brothers or sisters.

Luther wasn't an uncle. Ivy wasn't a niece. Not his niece anyhow. I suddenly realized just what a sinful old turnip he really had been.

I replaced the Bible quickly and walked down the long hall to the room I knew was Ivy's. The door wasn't locked. Here too, the police had nosed around. I stood, just within the door, sniffing of the the air. It was heavy with perfume. That same perfume I'd smelled in my hotel room. Ivy had been there.

I looked around a bit, no longer inter-

Necessary Murder

ested. I thought I knew the background behind Luther and Ivy. She'd been living there, posing as his niece. There was no other answer.

That was why he'd been so jealous and never let her out of his sight.

Perhaps she had to get away from him now and then and cooked up a story of having a dear old mother in Chicago. Anything would have deceived the old fool. But not me. I was getting smarter by the minute.

Ivy and Luther! Easily explained now.

Ivy and Sammy Noe! Not quite so easily explained. What was her connection with him? Slowly, it began to come to me. Very slowly, but the facts were there.

LUTHER had been afraid. Of something mighty real. What could give Luther such terror that he'd convert his assets? The potential loss of money! Through blackmail! Ivy had grown tired of the whole thing and wanted a profitable way out. She'd gone to Sammy and made the arrangements. Luther knew it, knew he was ready to be put in a sack and neatly tied up. So he'd started turning everything into cash for a getaway. That was just like him. A proud, haughty old duffer who'd never be able to stand the publicity that his connection with Ivy would have given him.

And Ivy was the little girl who'd watched me kill Luther. She'd fled because, with his death, the whole thing might come out and she'd take the brunt of it then.

She'd also guessed that I didn't kill Luther because I disliked him. I hadn't, especially. She knew I'd been after something and I'd gotten it. That was why she had searched my room, looking for whatever loot I'd taken from Luther.

It was all so simple when I worked it out. Ivy had to be the witness. Sooner or later, Sammy Noe would send around one of his boys with a broad hint that I'd better kick in. Sooner or later, I'd do that too, or find myself handcuffed to Ray Delmar. I didn't like either proposition.

There was a way out and I contemplated it with a smile of anticipation. Without Ivy's testimony, Sammy was licked. He'd drop the whole thing, and I'd be all set.

And so—Ivy had to die!



SI WAS leaving Luther's place in a hurry, someone called out my name. It brought me to a stop. I knew the voice and it chilled me to my toes.

Lieutenant Ray Delmar of Homicide, called again. I turned around, forcing a smile to my lips. He walked up rapidly. What was he doing in this neighborhood? Ever since he'd made that crack about me killing Luther, I'd been wary of him. Was I under observation? Had something slipped somewhere?

He stuck a cigarette between his lips. "Well, what did the amateur sleuth find out at the scene of the crime?"

"How did you know I was here?"

"I talked to your father on the phone and he told me you'd borrowed the key. So I ambled around to see if you found anything."

"I'm not ready to talk yet," I said. "Ray, are you making any headway on it?"

"I should answer that after the rebuff you just gave me? Not ready to talk. My boy, even a private eye doesn't conflict with the regular cops. It's a matter of license."

"Stop horsing," I said. "You know my future depends on finding out who killed Luther."

"Yeah." The cigarette bobbed up and down. "I guess it does."

I didn't like the inflections in his voice.

Delmar went on. "Fact is, Johnny, we don't know a blamed thing. Working on it, yes. With a couple of angles that show a little promise. But these things have a habit of blowing up in your face. You know—running down clues and bits of information—and then finding out they didn't mean a thing. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Do you still stick to the theory that he was killed by a burglar? You did mention that."

"It remains a possibility, Johnny. A strong one. The burglar was frightened off somehow. The unlocked front door

gave us a time of it. That indicated the killer had a key. But we found traces of someone climbing through a rear window too. So maybe Luther left his front door unlocked by mistake."

I was feeling a lot better by that time. "You follow your theories, Lieutenant, and I'll take my own route. Maybe we'll meet. If we don't, and I get facts, you'll be the first to know about them."

Delmar gave me a cold eye. "You really have something, Johnny. I can tell. Okay by me. Just don't ball the whole thing up so it can't be unscrambled. I'm for you getting that agency too. I figure if you get on the other side of life, you'll see what you've been steeped in so long. You won't like the picture, old boy. Not one little bit."

"I know," I told him. "Maybe that's why I'm so anxious to puzzle this out and get on my way to better things. My trouble is that I'm a rich man's son."

"Uh-uh." He shook his head. "Your trouble is weakness. So long, Johnny. I'll be around when you want me."

I watched him walk away. He hadn't even asked me to have a drink with him. That wasn't like Ray. I began to get worried all over again.

For the rest of the day I ran up more blind alleys than they have in Greenwich Village. Mostly, they concerned Ivy. I tried to get a line on her. Find out where she came from and where she'd lived before going to live in Luther's house. I got exactly nowhere. Ivy was an unknown quantity and a girl with what she had never is unknown unless she makes it a deliberate point to be.

I drank my dinner. Food didn't appeal to me. I knew I had a job to do. A nasty job, but as necessary to my existence as breathing.

I didn't know where Ivy lived in town, but I knew how to find out. I spent the next two hours watching Sammy Noe's best gambling place. If she worked for him as a shill, she'd show up sooner or later. She did, shortly after eleven. Two of Sammy's smoothest boys were with her.

I reflected that I was certainly in training for my detective agency. I didn't especially like the job either. It was raw, drizzly, and the shallow doorway I'd selected to watch from seemed to catch most of the wind and the drizzle like a pocket. I shivered and pondered the idea of ducking around the corner

for a couple stiff ones. No, that wouldn't do. If I was working for someone else, I might take such a chance, but this job concerned my own welfare. I stuck it out.

AT TWELVE-TEN Ivy emerged. I saw her in the lobby shared by the night club and the gambling house. By the time she reached the sidewalk I was in a cab, with the driver properly bribed and under the impression that I was a private detective on a fancy divorce case.

It was simple trailing her. Sammy's two boys got out first, a block from the business building where he maintained his offices. Ivy rode her cab to a midtown hotel on a side street. A large and busy place. I told my driver to pull up fast, right behind her.

As she walked toward the entrance, I darted after her. I put a worried expression on my face. She gave a nervous start when I grasped her arm and came to an abrupt halt.

"Ivy," I panted like a man who'd been running, "I spotted you in a cab as you turned the corner. I wanted to see you again."

"Well, Johnny Stafford." She began to giggle and I saw that she'd had too much to drink. That was fine. It suited a plan I'd concocted. Maybe I could pull it off now.

"Look," I said. "Suppose we talk over old times. Yep, we've known one another for at least three days now."

She nodded, simpering again. Boy, she'd hit that bar about five times too often.

"It may be dry talking." I gave her a tiny lead to see how she'd react. "We have things to talk about, Ivy. They may be mutually worthwhile. Know what I mean?"

"Sure, Johnny. My room is Twelve-O-Seven. I like brandy best."

I squeezed her arm and grinned cozily. I watched her walk through the lobby straight to the elevators. I doubted she was wise. If she had been, she would have phoned Sammy Noe at the first telephone and there were plenty of them in the lobby.

I went around the corner, bought a bottle of brandy and hurried back to the hotel. But I didn't use the main entrance. There was a narrow delivery alley and I went down that. It was easy to locate the side door and it wasn't

locked. I stepped into what seemed to be a basement and I got the odor of cooking. Bad food, with too much grease.

Then I saw that I was in the room service department. Portable tables were stacked near a bank of two elevators. A waiter in a white coat bustled out of the kitchen, carrying one of those tables. He got into one elevator, consulted the check card in his hand and closed the doors. It was self-service here. That suited me fine.

I slipped around to the other elevator, stepped in and closed the door. In a moment I was ascending the building to the twelfth floor. Halfway up, I stopped, uncorked the brandy and took three husky swallows of it. I felt a little better after that.

Ivy let me in at the first gentle knock. There was one thing about Ivy. She was primitive to an extreme. She'd changed to something that clung nice and close. She took the bottle from my hand and laid it on a table.

She started humming and moved back with a broad smile.

"I'll get a couple of glasses, Johnny. Gee, I'm glad you found me."

We talked about Luther for a little while and she kept up the illusion that he had been her uncle, that she'd been under his thumb and she didn't give a rap if he was dead. All the while she kept consuming brandy—neat.

My own brain was starting to spin. I couldn't wait much longer. I leaned forward a bit.

"Ivy, how much did you and Sam Noe intend to gouge out of Luther?"

"Who is Sammy Noe?" she pouted. "Come on, Johnny, what do we care about anybody with a name like that?"

"Yeah," I agreed. "What do we care?"

I walked over and sat down on the divan beside her. It was going to be very easy. I passed one arm around her shoulder and leaned closer.

"You made a mistake, Ivy," I said softly. "A bad mistake. You should have bore down on that sap when you slugged me. Because I'm no fool. I know you never were Luther's niece. He didn't have any. I know you got off the train at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street and you came back to rig a black-mail scheme against Luther with Sammy Noe's help. But I got there first. Now you intend to take me. It can't be done, Ivy."

HER eyes were great, round circles. Her full lips were parted and I noticed that she had pointed, very white teeth. A predatory creature, this Ivy.

"What are you talking about, Johnny?" she asked.

"Stop clowning," I said. "You know who killed Luther and you didn't talk because you intend making me pay through the nose."

She tried to move away from me. My arm tightened and held her there.

"Johnny—you—killed—him?"

"Such a silly question from a foolish girl."

"You—killed him? Johnny, I . . . Johnny, what are you going to do?"

"What do you think?" I asked coldly. I was glad the brandy burned in my veins again.

She started to struggle, but that got her nowhere and she realized it. Suddenly she went limp. Her small, pointed teeth flashed again. She said exactly what a girl of her type would say at a moment like this.

The name she called me wasn't meant as a compliment.

That did it. That was the spark I needed. I clapped a hand over her mouth and carried her into the bedroom. I dropped her on the bed, seized a pillow and covered her face with it. Then I knelt on her, pinning her down, preventing her from struggling so much that there'd be bruises.

She couldn't make a sound beneath the pressure of the pillow. I held it there until she started growing limp. Then I raised it quickly. Her face was mottled. Her mouth was open and she had enough life left in her to attempt a breath. I clamped the pillow down again.

It was easy now because she didn't move. The worst part of it was over. I pulled the bed covers down beneath her and tucked her under them. Then I crumpled up the top center of the sheet, held the pillow down and got a match out of my pocket. I had to use my knee on the pillow now, for I needed both hands. I lighted the match, held it to the sheet and when it was burning slightly and smoking good, I removed the pillow and thrust the burning sheet under her nose.

She wasn't dead. I was certain of that. Like any suffocating person she sucked in lungfuls of air—smoke-filled air. She coughed just a little. I promptly

smashed the pillow down over her head again and slapped out the burning sheet.

She was dead four or five minutes later. Dead, with smoke in her lungs for the medical examiner to find when he did an autopsy. I knew about cases where a murder by fire was simulated to resemble an accident, but when the victim was found to have no smoke in the lungs, the accident theory went out of the window.

I was working fast now. I propped her up against the pillow, pulled the covers around her just as if she'd crawled into bed herself. I pushed the night table closer, adjusted the lamp so it would seem as if she'd been reading.

Then I got a newspaper I'd seen carelessly thrown on a chair in the living room. I put this on the floor beside the bed. I opened her purse, removed cigarettes and matches. I took one cigarette and laid it beside the pack on the table.

Next, I went around the apartment wiping away any traces of prints. I washed both glasses from which we'd been drinking and put them back in a drawer where there were others. I put out the living room lights, walked back into the bedroom and picked up the cigarette. I lighted it, threw the match on the floor close by the bed.

I stood there, looking at her. The bottle of brandy was under my arm.

"Poor kid," I said in a whisper. "But it was you or me."

Her under lip sagged and those pointed teeth were showing again. I uncorked the bottle and took a very long drink. Then I bent over her and rubbed the tip of the cigarette against her heavily made-up lips. This created a nice red circle around the cigarette.

Her left arm hung off the bed limply. I raised it, put the brightly burning cigarette between her fingers and lowered the arm until it rested, cigarette and all, against the bedclothes. The burning tip started making a brown mark on the sheet. That wasn't fast enough or sure enough. I lighted a match and applied it.

The sheet started to burn. It was laundry worn and thin. It would burn fast. I got out of there, closing the main door behind me. I heard the spring lock snap.

The restaurant elevator was still on the floor. Room service at this hour of the morning was bound to be slow. I rode down, walked through the empty room and reached the side exit.

Exactly fourteen minutes later I was walking into Lieutenant Delmar's office at Police Headquarters. The bottle of brandy was reposing in some sewer along Sixth Avenue. Minus a couple of more drinks.

CHAPTER IX

My Mistake



RAY DELMAR gave a start, as if he were surprised to see me.

"I thought you might be here," I said. "You never did go home much while you were busy on a job. What luck, Ray?"

He grinned wryly. "Johnny, we're right behind the eight ball

on this. No progress. None! How's it with you?"

I grinned expansively. "Ray, I know what it's all about. I know who killed Luther and why."

He bent over, resting both elbows on his knees. "Let's have it, Johnny."

"Ivy wasn't Luther's niece. I can prove that by Luther's family Bible. I'll show it to you tomorrow. She was his sweetie-pie. Okay. Think back on what Luther looked like and how he acted. Could a girl like Ivy stand that forever? My guess is that she decided to break it off, but profitably. She and Sammy Noe, the gambler, are thick. She went to him with a proposition. Sammy would demand blackmail."

Ray raised and lowered his head very slowly. "I get it. Luther was cashing in because he either knew what was to happen or he sensed it. He wanted to get out before they tackled him because if he didn't, they'd have him over a barrel. Go ahead."

"Ivy didn't go to Chicago. I told you that before. Instead, she went to Sammy. That night, after Luther was asleep, Sammy or his boys paid Luther a little visit. But Luther had sold everything he owned, put the money into bonds and succeeded in getting this into Dad's hands. He was safe. He told them to go jump in the Hudson. Instead, they got sore and let him have it."

Ray looked doubtful. "It sounds okay, Johnny, except for one thing.

Sammy, or whoever came to see Luther, wouldn't know he converted his stuff and intended to run out the next day. So why kill him? Blackmailers would starve to death if they did that."

I assumed an attitude of tolerant patience. "Ray, don't you see? Ivy knew he was turning everything he owned into cash or bonds. She told Sammy. His boys expected to take every dime Luther had in the house. What Ivy didn't know or tell Sammy, was the fact that Luther had sent his negotiable stuff to Dad, via me."

Ray sighed. "If you were willing to work up, I might get you a job on the force, Johnny. Except for your personal record, which wouldn't go at all. Where is Ivy? Do you know?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, but I saw her last night in one of Sammy's places acting as a shill. She'll be around."

"I'll send out an alarm for her," he said. "Nice work, Johnny, and I appreciate what you have done. If your old man doesn't give you that agency now, he's a bigger fool than I thought. Frankly, I was at work on a theory something like this, but I didn't get as far as you did."

"How far did you get?" I asked him pleasantly.

"I checked on Ivy, naturally. She used to work in a chorus, cheap East Side joint. Smart girl though. She did go away that night she was supposed to visit Chicago. I imagine she told Luther her people lived in Chicago, but they didn't. They lived in a little town about sixty miles deep in Jersey. That's where she went that night."

I could feel the blood draining out of my face and fought to stop that.

"Why—why did she go—there?" I asked because I had to say something.

"For an alibi, of course. It's clear enough now. She knew they were going to tackle Luther and she didn't want to be around if things went sour. I—Johnny, don't you feel good?"

I shook my head weakly. "I need a drink. Got one, Ray? I haven't slept in days, I think. I've worked hard trying to prove all this."

Ray opened a drawer in his desk and took out a bottle. "You rate a drink. Have all you like."

I really punished that bottle and some of the color came back to my cheeks.

I got up, fumbling with my hat.

"I'd better get some sleep before I pass out altogether. Detective work is hard on the nerves."

He slapped my shoulder. "And on the feet. Mostly the feet. You'll find out."

I left Police Headquarters and looked vainly for an open bar. They were all closed. It was very late. I hailed a taxi and had myself driven to my hotel.

Somehow I got ready for bed. My room bottle didn't contain much, but it served. Once again I sat on the edge of the bed drinking from the bottle. I didn't care if I did act like a common drunk now.

I'D KILLED Ivy and she couldn't possibly have been the person who saw me kill Luther. I'd made a mistake and she paid for it with her life. Killing Luther had brought me no remorse. But Ivy—was different!

I shuddered and went to bed. I didn't sleep. I cursed the fact that there was no more liquor. I could have guzzled myself into a coma. Even that was denied me now.

At dawn, I sat on the edge of the bed, sober now and the headache I had didn't help matters much. I took a cold shower and felt worse. The hands of my alarm clock seemed to crawl. It was still three hours before I could buy a drink.

Ivy was dead! That repeated itself over and over again in my brain. She was dead and there had been no reason for killing her. Bad enough, but—I was right back where I started from. I was a bust as a detective, bringing in the wrong culprit and administering my own brand of justice before knowing whether or not she was guilty.

Now I had the whole thing to go over again and I didn't know where to start. I was in as bad a jam as ever. Someone still lived who saw me kill Luther. I tried to reason it out.

Delmar believed Ivy had gone away to fashion an alibi. If he was right, then Sammy Noe was the man I was after. I groaned. Getting at Sammy wasn't easy. It couldn't be done with finesse or tact with which I dispatched Ivy and Luther. Yet it had to be done, somehow.

It came to me then, in dribbles, but I was rather proud of the fact that I could think of a solution. Sammy would find out I was working on the case. If he

was arrested, he'd come clean to save his own neck.

But Sammy didn't know about the accident which I'd faked—and my perfect alibi. He'd accuse me of killing Luther and they'd laugh at him. They'd think he was sore and trying to get even. Or transfer the blame from himself to me. That was it! Bring the guilt right up to Sammy's doorstep and let it lie there until Delmar got on the job. I might have to withstand some rough going when Sammy talked, but I could weather it.

I didn't know how I was going to accomplish this, but I knew I must. This time there would be no mistake. Even Delmar was sure that Sammy was behind it and loaded down with guilt. It was my job to prove it.

There was nothing in the morning papers about Ivy's death. Perhaps they classified it as just one of those things that always happened. I felt better after I had a couple of drinks for breakfast. So good, in fact, that I also drank a cup of coffee and nibbled on some toast. The game wasn't over yet. I'd fumbled, but I was still in there and the last touchdown was what counted.

I walked out of the hotel breakfast shop and headed toward the elevators. It was Cookie who stopped me. He'd been sitting in a chair, probably waiting for me to come down. He seemed surprised I was already up.

"Nice to see you again, Sweets," he greeted me. "Sammy would think it was nice too."

I shrugged. "Sammy knows I'll try to raise some more money as soon as possible. Tell him that for me—and for him to go fly a kite if he doesn't like it."

Cookie broke into one of his wide

smiles. "You shouldn'ta said that. Sammy don't like to hear things like that. It'll get you in bad. Anyway, I just got a message. Sammy says you show up tonight at seven o'clock with five grand or he sends the boys out looking for you. That would be too bad, Sweets. The boys don't like to be bothered with little things like that."

I wanted to get rid of him. If Delmar showed, he'd wonder, and it was dangerous if it became known that I needed money so desperately.

"Tell Sammy I'll be at his office before then. I'll have the money, or as much as I can get."

"Better have five grand on account of Sammy don't like fooling around with small change. Be seeing you, Sweets."

He ambled off and I sighed with relief. Well, there was only one thing to do. Keep Sammy's mouth shut. I had to go after that package I'd mailed. I didn't mind. I wanted to feel those bills slide through my fingers again. I'd worked hard and risked a lot to get them. I deserved the pleasure of at least counting them again.

It was shortly before noon when I walked into the Post Office Annex, went up to the general delivery window and asked for a package in the name of Nicholas Blake. I didn't even worry whether it would be there or not. That's the faith I had in Uncle Sam. It was handed to me, eighty-six thousand dollars. I carried it over to a desk in a far corner, beside a window. Nobody was using that desk just then.

I CUT the cord with my penknife, undid the paper wrapper and took a quick peek. It was all there. I was more than a little proud of the way I'd

[Turn page]

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3 And TUNE IN: 2 NETWORK SHOWS! "The Adventures of Sam Spade" Sun. evenings, CBS Network; "King Cole Trio Time" Sat. afternoons, NBC Network.

kept the money hidden. It only cost me twenty-nine cents in postage to do it.

I was wrapping the package securely when I glanced out of the window and my fingers began to fumble. There was a car parked outside on a side street, and in the back seat sat Cookie. I moved away from the window. There was another one of Sammy's men on the Post Office steps. Still another parked on the sidewalk at the corner, covering the other exit.

I knew the truth then. Sammy had learned of Ivy's death and guessed the whole story. Possibly he'd even checked further with his gambling house and knew I had not won that money there. Now he had forced me to get this money while I was trailed. They meant to take it away from me.

Somewhat frantically, I tried to think of a way out. There was none. If I continued to stall, they'd come in after me. If I ran for it and made a real break, they'd shoot. Sammy's boys were like that. I had to think of something quick.

I put aside the ideas of escape. I concentrated on some method of saving at least part of this money I'd sacrificed so much to possess. A porter ambled up to the desk, pushing a large tin refuse can on a truck. He emptied the basket at my feet.

I waited until he had gone away. Then I quickly divided the money into two piles and stuffed one into my pocket. The other I re-wrapped in the paper I'd used to mail it in. I carelessly dropped this package into the waste can. It wouldn't be emptied again for several hours. With luck I'd get back and retrieve it.

I thought of something else too. The really definite culmination of all the superior planning I'd done thus far. I took a piece of paper from my pocket and hastily copied down the numbers of about eighty of the bills I knew Sammy would get away from me. This list I folded up carefully and shoved it into my shoe.

I was ready to face them now. Maybe Sammy would get half of my money, but he'd pay dearly for it. With his stinking life, I hoped.

The moment I walked out of the Post Office, the man on the steps fell in behind me and the one on the corner started moving toward the car. The car door opened and Cookie looked out.

"Sweets, come in and have a little ride," he said.

"No, thanks," I told him.

The two men moved up beside me. One of them had a gun.

"Get in," one of them said around the corner of his mouth.

I hesitated a moment, just for the effect. Then I got in beside Cookie. One of the men on the sidewalk joined the driver. The other watched us drive off. Cookie was beaming expansively.

"Been writing love letters, maybe?" he queried.

"Yeah, reading my mail and throwing it in the basket. It's mostly bills. Look, I thought I had until tonight to see Sammy. I can't pay him now."

"You know," Cookie vouchsafed, "I thought the same thing, but Sammy thinks different. He wants I should frisk you. Do you mind? Because I don't give a hoot if you do mind."

I had to put on some sort of an act. I reached for the car door. Cookie knocked my hand away with a short chopping blow to my wrist. It hurt like the devil. Cookie really knew how to hurt a man. He pulled me back, shoved me against the seat and without further ado, started going through my pockets. He came upon the wad of bills and his eyes flicked wide open. I didn't think they had muscular power enough to do that.

"Sammy was right," he grunted in a surprised voice. "Y'know that little guy should tell fortunes. Where'd you get this moolah, Sweets?"

"It seems to me," I said sullenly, "that the way you just got it doesn't give you any reason to ask where it came from originally. Maybe I earned it. Maybe my father gave it to me. Listen, that money is mine. Take out what I owe Sammy and give the rest back."

I reached for the money as I spoke and Cookie raised it above his head and away from me.

"Nix, Sweets. Sammy says to bring in all you got. You want any of this back, go see Sammy. Yeah, he's a good guy. He'll see you any time. You wanta get out here, maybe?"

The car slid to the curb along a busy thoroughfare. I got out, growling and muttering. Cookie slammed the door, grinned at me and the car pulled away.

After it turned the corner, I grinned too. Blast Sammy! He'd soon find out

what happened when he played against somebody with brains.

CHAPTER X

Jump Johnny!



GOING back to the Post Office, I went in, taking care this time that I wasn't tailed. There were two people at that same desk. The basket was about a quarter full. If the money was there, it was buried. I picked up a money order blank, wrote some-

thing on it, wrinkled it up and threw it into the basket.

Then I hesitated, laid the pen down and bent over the basket as if I was searching for that blank again. My fingers slid through the other papers and closed around the more substantial wrappings of my package. In a moment it was under my arm and I walked briskly out of the place.

I stopped at my hotel first and in a quiet corner extracted enough cash to carry me. I went upstairs, packed one of my two bags—the smaller one—and went out again. A few minutes later I was checked in at the Royalton under the name of Mark Grant.

The remainder of the cash was now enclosed in a stout envelope. I asked for the use of a safe deposit box, got one and locked the money in it. I hid the key in the room assigned to me. Now let them try to find it.

Half an hour later, I was inside Luther's home again. I hadn't given Dad back the key, just on a hunch I might need it once more. I went to the rickety, ancient typewriter on the small table beside Luther's desk, slipped a piece of his stationery into the machine and then calmly typed out the numbers of part of the currency Sammy hijacked from me.

I left room enough to title the column of figures. I wrote:

Numbers of bills to be traced if possible. Blackmail money, paid under duress. Only one-third of bills recorded here.

That done, I wiped the paper carefully, carried it over to the bookcase and

inserted it into the Bible. I wiped the typewriter thoroughly, let myself out and went back to my hotel.

An hour afterwards, I phoned Lieutenant Delmar.

"You wanted to see that family Bible, Ray. I'm ready to go there with you."

"I want to see it more than ever," Delmar said. "Can I pick you up?"

"At my hotel," I said. "I took your advice and slept most of the day. I'll be in the lobby."

He arrived soon afterwards. On the way he told me about Ivy's death.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "I did a complete investigation. I was positive she'd been murdered. But maybe I was wrong. She came in alone and went directly to her room. The desk clerk, two bellhops and the elevator boy swear she was potted. About an hour after she went to her room, somebody smelled smoke. They put the fire out easily enough, but Ivy was a goner. Burned pretty badly."

"Perhaps it was murder," I said with daring bravado.

"I doubt it," Delmar replied. "The autopsy showed plenty of smoke in her lungs. Usually when a killer knocks somebody off, he makes sure the victim is dead before setting the body on fire. Then there is never any smoke in the lungs. Finding it knocked all my theories into a nice cocked hat. Just by coincidence, Ivy died at a time when we needed her badly."

"I may do a little work on that angle," I confided. "Nothing new on Luther's death?"

Delmar shook his head. "We're pretty certain someone like Sammy Noe did it. Blackmail was the original idea and the murderer got sore when Luther wouldn't kick in. Or he figured Luther had been cashing his holdings and should have a lot of money around. Maybe he did. Those bonds he left with your father didn't account for all the money he got from his holdings."

"I'm sticking with my first theory," I said. "Someone like Sammy Noe. Most likely him because he and Ivy were so closely associated."

We entered the house with a key Delmar had. I told him I'd left mine at Dad's house. I got the Bible out of the bookcase and handed it to Delmar. He found the page. And he noticed the edge of the typed list of numbers sticking

out just far enough to attract attention. He glanced at it and whistled.

"Something you missed, Johnny. Look! Luther listed the numbers of currency he apparently paid or was going to pay as blackmail. I'm going to see Sammy Noe."

"Rats!" I said fervently. "I had that right in my lap. With a discovery like this I could face Dad and demand that detective agency."

"We'll share the discovery," Delmar said. "Go tell your father that. I'm looking for Sammy right now. First, I need a search warrant. Excuse me—I'll be busy for awhile."

HE PRACTICALLY fled from the house, forgetting me entirely. I chuckled. The thing was done with at last. Sammy would protest and accuse. It wouldn't do him any good. Even Cookie and the men with him were apt not to back up Sammy's claims because they'd kidnaped a man and robbed him. If I was convicted and Sammy cleared, Cookie and his boy friends would face a nice long prison term. It was working better than I'd hoped for.

I looked at my watch. Five-twenty. Dad would be home. I wanted to gloat a little. I went there.

Barclay opened the door and stood stiff as a broom while I passed him. His face was as expressive as a wooden Indian. I marched into Dad's study. He sat beside the cold fireplace and I thought I saw a dozen new wrinkles of worry or age around his forehead and eyes. He looked at me listlessly.

"Dad," I said with reasonable pride, "I've done it."

"Done what, son?"

"Delmar and I found out who killed Luther. Delmar is getting ready to make the pinch now. Dad, you owe me one detective agency."

"Tell me about it," he urged, without much enthusiasm.

"It's Sammy Noe, the gambler. He and Ivy were together. Incidentally, Ivy was burned to death last night. Delmar says she was drunk and fell asleep with a lighted cigarette in her hand."

"I read about her death. It was listed as accidental. Go on, Johnny."

"Well, Ivy set the stage for blackmail. Luther sold everything he owned because he knew this was coming. Ivy wasn't his niece. Old Luther seemed to

have more life in him than we suspected. Sammy, or his men, went to see Luther that night, either to shake him down or burglarize the place. Maybe both. Luther woke up and they let him have it. Why not? Ivy had told them Luther must have a lot of money around.

"Only Luther, shy as usual, took one precaution. He wrote down the numbers of some of the bills he was going to use as pay-off dough. Delmar is going to search Sammy's place. If he finds those bills, that's proof enough."

Dad sighed deeply and looked at me with steady eyes.

"Son, I should be proud of you. You helped solve a very difficult case. But I'm not proud. I'm so thoroughly ashamed I can't go on. You murdered both Luther and that girl who lived with him. I don't know how you arranged her death, but I know about Luther's murder."

"Dad!" I couldn't move an inch. "Dad, what are you saying? That I killed Luther?"

"Can it, son. I was there. I saw you kill him."

My knees bent a little. I seemed to suddenly weigh eight tons. I tried to talk, but my tongue wouldn't work. I wanted a drink—wanted it bad. I tottered over to the sideboard and poured a stiff one. I swallowed it. Dad didn't move, but as I put the glass down, he spoke again.

"Luther didn't trust you and how right he was. The blackmail scheme happens to be authentic. Yes, it was Sammy Noe behind it—and that girl, Ivy. Luther was scared stiff. He gave me a key to the house and asked me to drop around, just to make sure things were all right. I let myself in. I went to his room and you were just straightening up. Your filthy hands were still curled in the grip you'd had on his throat."

"Then it was—you—who—slugged me?" I managed to say.

"I wanted to kill you. But I couldn't. I tried three times and each time I checked the blow. I was carrying a sap, just in case. I couldn't break your rotten skull open because you were my son. My flesh. The only thing I had left to remember your mother by. I'm glad she's dead. I'm happier about that than anything else that ever occurred to me.

"You didn't stop with Luther. You killed the girl too. I suspect you be-

lieved she was the person who saw you commit murder. If I'd known, I would have prevented you from getting to her. Because once a man kills, he can't be stopped. He has to go on killing and killing, because every time he turns around, there is someone else who may know something. So he kills again. I realized you'd suspect Sammy Noe of knowing too much, but I wasn't afraid there. Sammy can take care of himself. But now you're framing him, somehow, and I won't stand for that."

I got another drink. I even considered draining the whole bottle. What a fool I'd been not to have recognized the symptoms.

Dad knew all the time.

HE DIDN'T give me a chance to speak.

"I thought you might discover some spark of manhood or conscience. I hoped—and prayed—you'd come to me and admit the whole thing. I was so sure you'd see the truth before you got finished. If you had come to me, I'd have backed you up with everything I own. As it is now, I won't help you one bit."

I had walked feebly over to the table to put my glass on it. But really it was to get Dad's gun which he kept in the drawer. I yanked it out and walked back, the gun steady.

"Dad, you just said that a killer can't stop. It's true. It doesn't make any difference if the person he kills is his own father. No difference. I've got to kill you now. I've got to."

My voice was getting higher and higher. I knew that, but I couldn't prevent it. The gun started to shake.

"If you think killing me will get you out of it, go ahead and shoot," Dad said. "I won't try to stop you. Not unless you miss. Better not miss, son. I'm warning you."

I had his forehead squarely in the sights. My finger was against the trigger, tight. Then I let go of the gun. I closed my eyes and sobbed once or twice. I couldn't kill him. I supposed that was the difference between having brains and being a dope. Cookie now, could have blasted away cheerfully.

"You haven't even the nerve for that," Dad said. "You think you're pretty smart. What's clever about killing an old and half dead man? Or a drunken girl? Johnny—stop that miserable bawl-

ing and look at me. There's an out for you."

"How, Dad?" I cried. "I'll do anything."

Dad was looking over my shoulder. "It's all right, Barclay. Thanks, anyhow."

I swiveled around. Barclay, holding a pair of heavy fireplace tongs, backed slowly out of the room. I turned back to Dad.

"The way out," I implored.

He reached for a cigar, put it between his teeth, but forgot to light it.

"Johnny, I'm giving you an out because some of this may have been my fault. I should have known you better than to expose you to money. There was money back of it."

I mumbled something about switching envelopes.

"Well, you have brains at any rate. Too bad you never learned how to use them profitably. As I mentioned, I may owe you this one chance. You said you'd do anything?"

"Anything," I implored. "Hurry, Dad. Barclay heard us. He may phone the cops. Or Delmar might be wise by now. Please, Dad. I'm your son. I've learned my lesson. I'll do anything you say."

"Let's see if you will." He looked at me squarely. "This is a four-story house, son. It's very high. The roof is flat. The courtyard back of the house has a concrete base. The parapets on the roof can be climbed easily. That's your out—if you have the nerve."

I sucked in a quick breath, just like when I was a scared kid. He didn't take his eyes off me. I turned around slowly and walked out of the room. I climbed the stairs.

I reached the fourth floor and headed for the roof door. Someone stood beside it, holding the door open. It was Barclay. For the first time in his life, his face unbent. It looked sorry. Sorry for me. And he unbent his spine too. He bowed. Barclay had never done that before to me.

I passed by him, climbed the final steps and felt like a man mounting the gallows. Yet I knew Dad was right. I had to go this way. It was better than the slow mechanizations of the law. A horrible cell, the pomp and ceremony. I couldn't stand that. I could die clean this way.

I walked across the rooftop to the

edge. I bent over the low parapet and looked down. Suddenly I was in an auto again. It was out of control and a tree was looming up. Death was looking up. I covered my face with an arm and jumped back. I'd faced death that time because it had been too late to turn back. Now I couldn't. I couldn't jump. I couldn't let myself hurtle down and hit the cement pavement. I didn't have the nerve. I could kill—twice. And plot more killings perhaps, but I couldn't kill myself.

"Go ahead and jump, Johnny." A voice came out of the darkness.

Lieutenant Ray Delmar sat across the roof, on the further parapet. I could see his silhouette and the fiery tip of his cigarette. I spread my hands in a hopeless gesture.

"Go on, Johnny. All it takes is the one last summoning of nerve. One little

jump. Once you're over—so is your life. You can't come back. Jump, Johnny. It's easiest that way."

I pivoted and ran back to the edge of the roof. I looked again and drew away. Delmar's cigarette glowed. He hadn't moved an inch. I lowered my head and slowly walked in his direction.

He arose and came to meet me. He took my arm. Why bother with handcuffs with a coward like me.

"I knew you couldn't do it, Johnny. Your kind never can. Too bad. It would have been easier on your dad. Let's go, eh?"

Downstairs we passed the living room. Dad sat there, all hunched up and looking a million years old. He didn't raise his eyes.

Barclay was at the door. He opened it, just as formally as ever.

Barclay didn't bow this time!



Death Stalks Voodoo Island!

IT HAPPENED during the filming of a Caribbean opus. Erik Frayne, the director of the picture, was intolerant, demanding and jealous—that's why he ordered Duke Wear, diver and stunt man, to go below water despite a raging storm. Both Frayne and Wear loved Eva Lance, the picture's heroine.

"I'm not diving," said Wear. "It would be suicide."

"Look here," said Frayne, "we've got a picture to make. Don't show your yellow streak!"

Challenged, Wear put on his diving suit and went under water. He never came up again. His lines were cut.

Was it a shark? A barracuda? Or was Wear doomed because of the curse the natives put on the island?

Terry Danson investigated—and found that the lines were cut by a knife! It was no accident—it was murder! And that was only the start of the mysterious happenings in **LOCATION FOR MURDER**, the exciting complete crime novel by Edward Churchill, coming next issue!

Look forward to this grand reading treat—it's a novel that will keep you guessing from start to finish!



"Talk, or I'll put a bullet through you!" Quinn cried

A Man's Best Friend is An Alibi

By JACK KOFOED

Detective McGarry tackles the tough case of a two hundred grand gem robbery, and handles it with silk-glove subtlety!

EVEN a detective has to take time out for fun once in awhile. I was watching the show at Kitty Davis' theatre restaurant when the desk sergeant called, and told me Miss Helen Bannister's house had been robbed. So, I said okay, plenty of houses are burglarized, and why bust up a pleasant evening for me on that account? But, when O'Toole told me the loot amounted to a couple hundred grand, including jewelry and several oil paintings, I knew there wasn't anything to do but go to work.

"This job has all the earmarks of Billy

Quinn, from what I've been told," said Sergeant O'Toole.

It's true that stickup artists, second-story workers and gunmen all have techniques as distinctive as their finger prints. If you have made a study of them, you know that a certain robbery wasn't engineered by Mickey, the Mope, because it has all the earmarks of Household Harris.

"Tell me more," I said.

"Well," the sergeant went on, "Miss Bannister is a cool tomato, and since she's got more sugar than the Duponts and Rockefellers put together, and is in-

sured, to boot, she kept her eyes open. There were two people on the job, a man and a woman, who wore raincoats, masks and gloves. That's why she couldn't identify them."

"That helps," I said.

"You want we should call in Charlie Chan or Hercule Poirot?" asked O'Toole, making Hercule's name sound like Poy-rot. "The man brought a white bed sheet with him. He spread it on the floor, and piled everything in it, while the woman kept Miss Bannister covered."

"A dame with all her dough ought to have servants by the dozen," I said. "Where were they?"

"It was the butler's night off. The personal maid is in St. Francis Hospital, getting her appendix clipped. And, whenever Miss Bannister stays home of an evening, the chauffeur can go where he pleases. There's another angle beside the bed sheet that makes this look like a Quinn deal. Billy always cased a joint so well that he never went in until he knew the coast was clear."

"What about the woman?"

"Ha!" said O'Toole. "Now you're gettin' hot. Quinn's girl is a nightclub judy named Jenni Gerald. She works at the *Cockatoo Club* doin' one of those screwy dances in nothin' but a G-string and gold paint. The woman who held the gun on Miss Bannister didn't wear stockings, and seemed to have streaks of gold paint on her legs!"

"Well, it's a shame that wealthy witch of a Bannister has so much dough," I said. "She ought to be working for John Edgar Hoover. It looks like you've got the case solved already."

"We sure have!" O'Toole chuckled. "For a wise dipsy this Quinn certainly tipped his hand. The boys are looking for him, and if he takes off he won't get as far as West Palm Beach. All the roads are covered. But, I think Billy is too smart to lam. How about runnin' up to the *Cockatoo Club*? Jenni will probably think it's safer to stick around old familiar places, and you can put the finger on her."

DETECTIVE McGARRY shook his head doubtfully. "It's outside our jurisdiction."

"Don't let that worry you, Mr. McGarry. I've talked with the Broward County boys and they'll shut their eyes."

"You think of everything," I said.

O'Toole seemed to believe the case was open and shut, but O'Toole had been wrong before, and might be again. I knew Billy Quinn. He had been a bad hombre before, and they called him "the bed sheet burglar," but since coming to Miami Beach he had been strictly on the level.

Of course, you never know what a guy will do, and he might be mixed up in the case. But, Jenni didn't fit into the picture at all. I couldn't imagine her handling a gun, and there were several other reasons why I'd ordinarily write her out of the picture.

She and I were on pretty good terms, because I had gotten her out of a couple of minor jams. As a matter of fact, I had talked with Jenni at the club the night before.

On the way out, Danny Davis asked where I was going.

"To the *Cockatoo*," I said.

"You're crazy," he answered. "They make their roulette wheels do hootchy kootchies, if you bet more than a saw-buck."

"I'm not gambling. I want to see Jenni Gerald."

Davis laughed. "You're sillier than I thought," he said. "That gold paint dance is the worst night club act in the business. And, if Billy Quinn hears you're making up to his girl, I'll have to spend a hundred bucks buyin' flowers for your funeral."

"Bushwah!" I said.

On the way up I kept kicking that Quinn-Gerald idea around in my mind, and it still didn't make sense somehow or other.

The *Cockatoo Club* was in Broward County, in a secluded section, set back from the road.

There were no other buildings in sight, only vacant lots, riotous and untidy with palmetto scrub.

The doorman grinned at me. He was a big fellow, with shoulders like Strangler Lewis.

"If you like our show, Mr. McGarry," he said, "you must be easy to please."

I went in. Luchetti, who owned the place, was sitting in a corner. The lights were low and layers of smoke made breathing difficult at first. It was difficult, even, to catch the expression on Luchetti's face. But, then, there seldom was much expression.

"Has Jenni been around all evening?" I asked.

"Look, McGarry!" Luchetti said. "You ain't got no jurisdiction up here. Why do you have to bother me? Sure, Jenni's been around all night. Why wouldn't she be? She works here."

"So do you," I said. "Has Quinn been here?"

Luchetti's lips tightened. He did not answer.

"Look, pal," I said, "I don't ask questions just to hear my own voice. There's been a robbery—a great, big, fat, juicy robbery—and we have an idea Bill and Jenni engineered it. Since one of these characters works for you, and the other one hangs around here quite a lot, it wouldn't be hard to pull you in as an accessory before or after the fact if you decided not to be cooperative."

"Easier than proving it," said Luchetti, with acid in his voice.

"Maybe not. I've got a couple of ideas about that."

The orchestra burst into full voice, and a spotlight focused on the dance floor. Curtains to the left of the podium parted, and a woman danced out. From hair to heels she was covered with gold paint. Tiny slivers of it scaled off legs and body, leaving a glittering trail behind. She wore a gold mask, and a wig the color of the sun. A flutter of applause, not very loud, came from the audience.

I had seen Jenni dance before, and she really wasn't much of an act. But, now, I had an idea there was something wrong, like a photograph slightly out of focus. I could feel this, but did not know exactly what was wrong. Jenni was murdering that routine of hers. I knew that, when the girl was worried, she hit the bottle like Joe Louis hit Tami Mauriello—and from what was going on it looked as though she was worrying plenty.

What was the answer? I had been around nightclubs long enough to know putting on and taking off that paint was a long and involved job. If Jenni had appeared in two shows at the *Cockatoo Club*, she couldn't have been the woman who held the gun on Miss Helen Bannister. On the other hand, she wasn't the kind of judy to stand for Billy Quinn ringing in another woman on the scenario. Jenni was possessive—possessive enough to knock out a mouthful of teeth

for any woman who tried to horn in on her man.

Then, suddenly, the solution came to me. Last night, when I was talking with Miss Gerald, she had suddenly thrust out a slim leg, and kicked off her slipper.

"Look at that corn," she said. "It hurts like the devil. I couldn't paint over it, and did you notice how I limped around the floor?"

WELL, I'll admit I didn't care anything about her corn, and didn't think anything about it then. But I did now. The woman, who was dancing, had all but the soles of her feet painted, and she didn't limp. You can't cure a bad corn overnight—and that meant the dancer we were watching was not Jenni Gerald! Nobody could tell the difference between two women of the same build, when they were lathered with paint, and wore masks and wigs.

"A girl's best friend is an alibi," I said. "This one is the cutest I've ever seen."

"What's the gag?" asked Luchetti.

"You'll die laughing, when I tell you. But, first I'm going back to Jenni's dressing room, and wait for her."

"I don't like that, McGarry," Rocco Luchetti said.

"Moral scruples?"

"Tush for that! I run a gambling house. If my customers see a cop moochin' around, it's gonna scare 'em off. Stay here and have a drink. Jenni'll be through in a minute."

I went through the curtains at the left of the podium, and into a dusty little hallway, illuminated by a single, unshaded electric bulb. Three doors, obviously leading to performers' dressing rooms, fronted on the hall. A card tacked on one of them bore Jenni's name. I went in.

The room was small. Opposite the door stood a dressing table, cluttered with the usual rouge, powder and unguents to be found on any theatrical dressing table in the world. There were no clothes—no dresses, slips, girdles, brassieres, stockings, panties, slippers.

I opened a closet. Nothing in there, either. There were slivers of gold paint but none of the mess there would have been if the woman had put it on and removed it in this room.

I went into the hall. There was a gilt trail from the back door to the dress-

ing room, and from the dressing room to the entrance to the floor. I went there, and looked. The music had ended on a high pitched blare of trumpets. The floor was beginning to fill with dancers. There was no sign of the girl in the gold paint.

I heard the sudden roar of a motor in the driveway behind the club. I ran to the door. A car, without lights, raced away, and disappeared into the night. Whoever had impersonated Jenni must have gone through the other hallway.

When I returned to the big room, Luchetti was still at the table, smoking a fresh cigar.

"Why did your dancer take it on the lam?" I asked.

Rocco shrugged. "Maybe Jenni don't like cops better than I do," he said. "There ain't nothin' in her contract that says she has to stick around, talkin' with them."

"Okay, okay," I said. "But you're not playin' it smart."

"How?"

"Such as pretending you don't know that dame isn't Jenni."

"All right, so I knew it," said Luchetti. "But why should I tell you? I don't like cops. They get in my hair. They give me indigestion. If Jenni wanted the night off, is there any law says I can't hire somebody to fill in?"

"No, but the whole deal might seem funny if you told it to the judge. You give Jenni a perfect alibi, and at the same time a man and woman hold up Miss Helen Bannister, and get away with two hundred grand worth of stuff."

Luchetti licked his lips.

"That much, hey?"

"Yes, that much. Where does Jenni live?"

"She's got a little beach house near Waverly Road."

"Stick around, Rocco," I said. "I'm going to make a couple of 'phone calls, and then we're going to Jenni's house."

"Suppose I don't want to."

I doubled my fist. It was big as a ham. They called me the Johnny Broderick of Miami Beach, and Luchetti knew it.

"You can walk, or you can go in a stretcher," I told him, "and I don't care which way you choose."

Luchetti looked at my fist, and then into my eyes. "I'm a reasonable man," he said. "I'll walk."

So while he relighted his cigar, I went

into a telephone booth. My idea was beginning to develop. I called O'Toole.

"Would it be possible to get Miss Helen Bannister up here? She might be able to recognize Jenni's voice." I told him where Jenni's house was.

"Why not?" the sergeant asked. "Who wouldn't—with two hundred grand on the loose, even if it was insured? I'll have her up in half an hour."

"Have they collared Quinn yet?"

"No, but it's a cinch it won't be long."

"Right," I said, and went back to Rocco Luchetti.

"Let's go," I said.

He rose. I patted his pockets and under his left arm pit, and brought out a regulation police pistol. It could be that Billy Quinn would get excited, and go gunning for me, and I didn't want to take the chance of Luchetti pouring one in from behind. Not that I thought he would, but there is no sense taking unnecessary chances.

JENNI'S home was only half a mile from the club. We drove over in my car. It was one of those little three-room places, a living room, with a Murphy bed in the closet, combination kitchen and dinette and a bath. There were Venetian blinds on the window, but they were turned so you could look right in.

The living room was ablaze with lights. Jenni and Billy Quinn were in there, each with a highball and cigarette. The scene was charmingly domestic and peaceful.

"They don't look like a couple who stuck up a dame for a fortune, do they?" I asked.

Luchetti snorted.

"No wonder you cops are outguessed all the time," he said.

Well, I thought, maybe my hunch is right, but it isn't insured. Quinn is smart, but he's the excitable kind, and you never know how such a fellow will react. So, when we walked up on the porch, and rang the bell, I had a hand on my gun, and stood to the right of the door.

All that caution turned out to be needless. Jenni opened up.

"Hello, Mac," she said. "It's McGarry," she called over her shoulder, "and that Luchetti character."

We went in. Quinn rose. He was tall and broad shouldered, and the Miami sun had erased all traces of prison pallor. His

record said he was thirty-eight years old, but he didn't look it. Billy was in strong contrast with Jenni Gerald, who was pert and blond.

"Have a drink," he suggested. "This must be a pleasure trip. You couldn't be having business with me."

"No liquor at the moment, and pardon me," I said, and gave him a quick frisking. He didn't have a gun. "We're going to have a party. Miss Helen Bannister is on her way."

"Should I be happy?" Quinn asked.

"It's nice that you brought Rocco for her," Jenni broke in. "But, he should have brought champagne. He can afford to. The Bannister dame dropped ten grand playing roulette in the *Cockatoo* last week."

"Shut up!" said Luchetti, his little mule's eyes glistening with anger he could not conceal.

"Sit down folks," I suggested. "There are a couple of questions I'd like to ask before the lady arrives, which probably won't be for another ten minutes or so."

"Shoot," said Quinn. "I've got more answers than a quiz program."

"Jenni first. Why did you take the night off from the club?"

Miss Gerald kicked off her slipper, and held out a shapely leg. "My corn is torturing me," she said. "But, I've had trouble with that before, and had to go through with the act. I said I'd dance, but Rocco wouldn't listen to it. Why? Is there a law that says I will be tossed into the clink unless I prance around the floor?"

"Not that I know of. Who filled in for you?"

"Who would? You don't think Luchetti would shell out any dough for that, do you?"

"I wouldn't know. Where have you been tonight?"

"Right here. Billy came at six o'clock. We had dinner that I cooked with my own little hands, and then played gin rummy."

I looked in the kitchen. There were the remains of two steaks, and a stack of dirty pans and dishes.

"Lay it on the line," said Quinn. "What's biting you, anyway, McGarry? It must be pretty important."

"Nothing more than a two hundred thousand dollar robbery," I said. "The boys at Headquarters sort of thought it had your earmarks."

Quinn laughed.

"You ought to know better, McGarry," he said. "I've had enough of jail houses. You've been keeping close tabs on me. Have I been out of line once? You know I haven't. Besides, I haven't been out of this place since six o'clock."

"That's right," said Jenni.

"Pull up your skirt," I said to the dancer.

"Hey," Billy broke in. "She's my girl. You can't talk to her like that. What's the big idea, anyway?"

Jenni paid no attention to him, and pulled the skirt up past her knees. I skinned the stockings down to the ankles. There was no sign of gold paint on her legs.

"Okay," I said, looking at Quinn. "I didn't come here for a sight of Jenni's gams. They're on view at the *Cockatoo* every night—except tonight. That might be considered a coincidence by some people, considering that this was the evening on which Miss Helen Bannister was robbed."

A CAR ground to a stop outside. "There's the lady now," I said. "She may be able to throw a little light on one or two things that seem dim to me now."

O'Toole came in with Miss Bannister. She was one of those girls who had been gorgeous five or six years ago, but too many cocktail parties and too much hanging over roulette tables hadn't done her any good. She was getting a little broad in places where she shouldn't be broad and crowsfeet were edging in around her eyes. But, all things considered, Miss Bannister was still a pretty good-looking dish.

"Just what is it you want of me, Mr. McGarry?" she asked. "I've gone through a rather hectic experience, and I am tired emotionally as well as physically."

"This shouldn't take long," I said. "Do you know everyone?"

"I know Mr. Luchetti, of course," the lady answered, "because I have been to his club, and I recognize Miss Gerald, because I have seen her dance. As for the other gentleman here, I'm not quite sure. There seems to be something vaguely familiar about him."

"His voice, for instance," I suggested. "Say something, Billy."

"Tush to you, McGarry," said Quinn.

"You aren't trying to frame me by any chance, are you?"

"If he does, it couldn't happen to a nicer guy," Luchetti broke in. "I hope they pin it on you, and then throw the book right in your face, you big bum!"

Quinn came to his feet, glaring, but I shoved him back.

"Forget it," I said, "you'll have plenty of chance to talk later. Do you think Quinn and Jenni Gerald are the people who held you up, Miss Bannister?"

"They could be," she admitted, seeming a little bewildered. "But I can't be sure. I told Sergeant O'Toole they wore raincoats and masks."

"But, you're sure the woman had gold paint on her bare legs."

"Yes, I'm sure of that."

"And, the man was about Quinn's size?"

"Y-yes."

"So is Luchetti," I reminded her.

The owner of the *Cockatoo Club* looked up at me, but did not move. The corners of his mouth were downdrawn, and his eyes narrowed.

"You said once tonight that a guy's best friend was an alibi," Rocco said. "If that's so, I've got a million friends. A hundred guys will swear I wasn't outside my joint. You're just doing a lot of guessing, and it isn't good guessing, either."

I passed that by. "Then you can't identify either of these people, Miss Bannister?"

"Not positively."

"But, you are sure the girl had gold paint on her bare legs, and the man used a bed sheet to wrap up the loot?"

Miss Bannister seemed angry.

"I don't quite like the way you are talking, Mr. McGarry," she said. "It seems to me I have cooperated to the best of my ability, and that I was more observant than most women would have been under similar circumstances."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Sometimes I let my enthusiasm for a case run away with me. Now, Rocco, there's a question I want to ask you. You were going to tell me that the girl I thought was Jenni really wasn't Jenni at all, weren't you?"

"Sure, why not?"

"And, you were going to tell me, because you wanted it to seem that Miss Gerald had tried to fix up an alibi for herself."

"What of it? If I cover up people in a jam, I can get in a jam myself."

"But, at the time I came in, you couldn't have known of the Bannister robbery, could you?"

Billy Quinn rose, and walked to the table where the bottle of Scotch rested. He yanked open the drawer, and his hand came out with a .45 in it.

"That rat is trying to fit Jenni and me into a deal we didn't handle," he said. "Okay, O'Toole. Don't let your trigger finger get itchy. I'm just as good a shot as I ever was. Now, spill it, Luchetti. It better be good, because I'm a three time loser, and the next jolt would be for life. I'm too young for that."

Rocco's lips curled.

"You're crazy," he said. "I'm not tryin' to frame you or anybody else. I'm just tryin' to tell these flatfeet I didn't have anything to do with stealing Miss Bannister's gimmicks."

"Talk," said Quinn, "or I'll put a bullet through you!"

MISS BANNISTER seemed paralyzed with fear. She looked at the gun, and her voice quivered when she said: "I'm—I'm sure you had nothing to do with it, Mr. Quinn."

He paid no attention to her.

"Rocco," he went on, "you told Jenni to take the night off, and then got somebody to fill in for her so it would look as if she fixed up an alibi for herself. Then you hired a couple of goons to pull the job, and made it look like one of mine."

"Wait a minute, Billy," I said. "Put the gun down, and stop being dramatic. If it'll cool you off, I'll tell you that you're partly right about the setup, but I know you and your girl friend didn't have a thing to do with the robbery."

"Thank God!" Jenni exclaimed.

Quinn laid his gun on the table.

"You're on the level, McGarry," he said. "I'll take your word for it."

"Swell," I said. "But you're wrong about one thing. Luchetti didn't pull the robbery, because he never left the club. He didn't hire anybody to do it, either."

"Thanks for nothin'," said Rocco.

Sergeant O'Toole took off his cap, and scratched his head. His big florid face was a map of complete puzzlement.

"Well, Mr. McGarry, if you're right,

this case has blown right up in our faces," he said. "Two hundred grand gone, and nobody to pinch. That makes us look pretty bad."

"It could be worse," I told him. "Yet you're wrong about not having anybody to collar. We have two—Rocco Luchetti and Miss Helen Bannister! They ought to fill the bill all right."

They looked at me as though I were crazy. Miss Bannister sat stiffly in her chair for a moment, and then sank back, and began to cry. Luchetti half rose, but when I doubled my fists he relaxed against the cushion. But his swarthy skin was paler than I had ever seen it.

Jenni came over, and took my hand. Her eyes were wide as a little girl's.

"I love Billy," she said. "He's on the level now. It would have killed me, if anything had happened to him. Tell us what it's all about, Mac. I haven't the faintest idea."

"You can get me a drink now, Quinn," I said, and Billy went to the table, and poured out a double shot. "I knew your work from the old days. I tabbed this as a frameup the minute I heard the details. It was too pat. The bed sheet, the girl with gold paint on her legs, and the lovely setup of all the servants being away at the same time. For one thing, I've seen Jenni often enough to know she's finicky about getting every spot of paint off, and never goes anywhere without stockings. Remember how I peeled them off to have a look at her legs a few minutes ago?"

Quinn started to growl again.

"So, it seemed pretty clear," I went on, "that the person who was engineering the frame knew how Quinn operated when he was a bad boy. There was only one off-color character in these parts who knew Billy well in those days. That was Rocco Luchetti."

"That don't prove nothing," Luchetti began, but I paid no attention to him.

"Then, I knew Miss Bannister had lost a lot of money, and hadn't paid some of her I. O. U.'s. It was also common knowledge that Rocco hated Quinn, and was burned up because Jenni wouldn't ditch her boy friend and come with him. So, it seemed pretty reasonable that Luchetti proposed the fake robbery to Miss Bannister so she could get the insurance, and by doing it his way, he could revenge himself on Billy at the same time. Isn't that about the

way it was, Miss Bannister?"

"Yes," she sobbed.

"That's great police work," Sergeant O'Toole beamed, slipping handcuffs on Rocco's wrists. "You're better than any of those detective story boys I ever read about. But, I still don't see how you tied Miss Bannister in so well."

I gave him the sort of lofty smile Sherlock Holmes must have reserved for Dr. Watson.

"It's elemental," I said. "Miss Bannister couldn't have known about the bedsheet and gold paint, unless somebody had tipped her off to tell about them. Besides, the butler was given the evening off to get him out of the way. His usual night is Tuesday. So, Miss Bannister must have hidden the jewels, and then 'phoned the police that she had been robbed of valuable stuff."

O'Toole shook his head in speechless admiration. "Mr. McGarry," he said, "I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. If it takes that much thinkin' to be a great detective, I'll never make it."

"Thanks," I said. "Take them to the car. I'll be along in a minute or two."

When they had gone, Jenni looked at me. She was smart.

"Mac," she said, "you've done us a great favor, and we'll never forget it. But, being a woman, I'm curious. Everything you said made sense. Ellery Queen couldn't have figured it out better. But, I still don't see how you got so suspicious of Miss Bannister at the start."

I guess I blushed. If I didn't, I should have.

"I'll give you the answer, because I know you'll keep it to yourselves," I said. "If you don't, I can make you both very unhappy. An investigator for an insurance company tipped me off that the lady wasn't really as rich as everybody thought, and had hocked some of her possessions. So, when I heard of the robbery, I knew it was a phony."

"Then you had the dope all the time," said Jenni reproachfully. "Why didn't you collar the lady right away. She was so scared she would have squealed on Rocco right away."

"Because," I said, "Sergeant O'Toole isn't the only guy at Headquarters who didn't believe I was a great detective. I'll bet you they all will from here on out!"



Straightening up, I swung Garder's automatic

An Exciting Novelet

DEATH

CHAPTER I

Fugitive Student

IN A high-school instructor's salary, taxis are a luxury. This afternoon, however, I was in a hurry and hailed one. As a direct result of the time thus saved I was to kill a man and come within a second of dying myself with a bullet in my brain.

The driver had the radio on. It was exquisite torture to my already jumping nerves and so I asked him to silence it. He reached for the dial but before he had time to turn it, a breathless voice

said: "We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin."

"Hold it! Let's hear this."

"The body of Rand Harlow," the voice continued, "sixty-three year old bachelor, well known in Southport financial circles, was found at about one-thirty today in a room in the National Hotel, on the outskirts of the city. Mr. Harlow had been strangled. Chief of Detectives Joseph Martin reveals that the killer is known. An early arrest is expected. We return you now to Lola Lee—"

The radio clicked off.

"That 'killer is known' line gives me

Don Lanham and Judith Moore Put Up a Fight to



toward the other man and managed to squeeze the trigger

WATCH

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

a swift pain," the cabby growled. "The cops always pull that bluff."

I could have told him it was not a bluff—that barely ten minutes ago the killer had just avoided capture by an escape that still had me trembling.

Twenty minutes ago, William Moore had stood before me in my just-emptied classroom, long-limbed, lean in plaid flannel shirt and Navy peacoat, tiny muscles knotting his jaw as he waited for me to speak.

A long slant of sunlight from the open window had struck into brightness on his lapel the gold button that was the

symbol of the covert conflict between us. I bitterly envied Moore his right to wear that button, a right that had been denied me by the injury to my knee. He resented my soft years as a civilian, resented me as the personification of the puling discipline which, at twenty, he must share if he were to make up for the years of education he had lost.

Fumbling with some papers on my desk, I wondered if this was to be the crisis of that unacknowledged antagonism.

"I don't understand you, Moore," I said. "I asked you to stay after class

the Finish to Smash a Murder Frame Wide Open!

so that we might talk over why your work has slumped so badly. Yet you would have walked out with the others, just now, if I had not called you back. Do you mind telling me why?"

He merely looked at me, bony face expressionless, somber gray eyes fixed on my face.

In spite of his sullen defiance, there was something boyish about him that tempered my irritation.

"Look," I tried again. "All I want is to help you."

"You can't help me."

It was a desolate, lonely cry that had been wrested from him.

"Why not give me the chance?" I asked, smiling. "I have helped lots worse cases through advanced algebra."

"Algebra! Why, I could lick that stuff without half trying if only—" He broke off, lips tight and stubborn again.

"If only what, Moore?"

HE wasn't listening to me. Head canted, he suddenly was like some wild creature scenting danger. What had alarmed him? Those footfalls in the hall?

Moore whirled, was at the nearest window, and in a single lithe leap, had vaulted to its sill and vanished. Four stories up!

For a ghastly instant I awaited the thud of his body on concrete below, heard instead a thrashing of ivy outside that window. It came to me that he had gone not down but sideways—along the ledge that runs beneath these fourth-floor windows.

The hall door opened. The man who came in was middle-aged, sharp-featured but ordinary in his gray suit. He kept his hat on his head and, after a single quick glance around the room, strode to another door in the wall behind me and jerked it open.

He glimpsed the supply closet's cluttered shelves, turned to me. "Where is William Moore?"

I resented the fellow's manner. "Obviously not in this room. Class was dismissed some time ago."

"I know. The kids coming out said you were keeping Moore in."

"Most interesting," I observed coldly. "Would you mind very much telling me who you are?"

"Not at all." My sarcasm seemed lost on him. "Name's John Garder." He

turned the flap of his coat and uncovered a badge pinned to the cloth beneath. "City Police. Now suppose you tell me how long ago this Moore left here and where did he go."

What had made me answer him as I did? The antagonism his brusqueness had aroused? Instinctive aversion to being an informer, common to most Americans? Most of all, perhaps, the boy's cry for help, still fresh in my ears? Whatever the reason, I had unthinkingly responded with a half truth that had all the effect of a lie.

"I kept him only a minute or two and I did not ask him where he was going. Why? What do you want him for?"

The detective pulled the hall door open, paused, smiled thinly.

"Murder," he said. "The murder of a helpless old man."

The door closed behind him, before I had been quite sure I heard him right. . . .

"I feel kind of bad," the cabby mumbled. "I've rode this Harlow around town plenty. Nice old guy. Good tipper, but always in a sweat to get where he was going. Every time I'd get stuck in traffic he'd pull out this gold watch he had, half as big as my fist it was, an' tell me how many minutes we was losin'. Wonder how he come to be in that National Hotel. I know the joint. It's a dive way out there near the city dump."

I had hobbled to the door and pulled it open, but by that time Garder had reached the staircase and disappeared. Realizing that if I left the room unguarded, Moore could come back through it and escape in the other direction, I snatched up from my desk a brass-bound ruler to use as a weapon, went on to the window and leaned out.

I looked to the right. I saw the ivy that frothed greenly up over the foot-wide stone ledge and streamed up the wall. Only the ivy. Not William Moore.

Horrified, I looked down and down to the gray stone courtyard. Nothing down there either, no sprawled body. But up here, six feet away along the narrow ledge, was another open window. Of course. While I had held up the detective, the youth had clambered along the ledge, climbed in through that window and gotten away. This was now clear. And it was also clear that I, Donald Lanham, mathematics instructor at Southport High School, was accessory after the fact to a murder.

I had violated my oath as a public servant, my duty as a citizen. No one need ever know this, but I could not live with myself until I atoned. But how? What could I do that the police could not do better? Well, there was one thing. The youth's family hardly would cooperate in the hunt for him, but if I went to them as his teacher, ostensibly concerned with the slump in his work and wondering, say, if it were not due to his after-school habits or companions, they might let slip some hint that would set me on his trail.

This I had determined to do. Returning to my desk, I had taken a record card out of the file in the top left-hand drawer, had read the heading:

Name: Moore, William (veteran)
Parent or Guardian: Moore, Judith (sister)
Home Address: 417 Sande Street
Telephone: None
 (In emergency only, call neighbor, Fair 196)

"Here's your Sande Street, mister," the cab driver once more broke in on my recollections. "What was that number you said?"

"Four-seventeen. I'll get off here."

THE meter read eighty-five cents. I gave him a dollar, climbed out, and started down the block of four-story brick flats, drearily alike as so many fence palings. A pack of urchins played stick ball in the asphalted gutter, a half-dozen slatternly women tended baby carriages and down at the far corner a man read a newspaper behind the wheel of his parked sedan. Another man, thin, narrow-faced, lounged against the doorpost of Number Four-Seventeen.

He turned and peered at me as, in the vestibule, I found and pressed the push-button under the letterbox slit that held the name MOORE. The doorlatch clicked and I went through into a dim hallway. Somewhere above I heard a door open. Nerving myself for the role I had to play, I started climbing the carpeted stairs.

One of two doors on the third floor landing was open and a slender girl in brown skirt and frilly white blouse peered expectantly out from it. She seemed much younger than the record card's "parent or guardian" had led me subconsciously to expect.

"Miss Moore?" I asked. "Miss Judith Moore?"

"Yes." Tawny ringlets clustered about her face, the brow broad, the chin firm and capable. "I am Judith Moore. And you are Mr. Donald Lanham, Bill's teacher. He's shown me your picture in the school magazine." She smiled warmly but I had a vague impression that she was not quite glad to see me. "Do come in."

I went past her into a sun-filled living room whose worn furniture reminded me of my grandfather's parlor. My eye was caught by three framed photographs on the black onyx mantel, one of young Moore in petty-officer's uniform, the others faded portraits of a mustached man and a sweet-faced woman.

"Our father and mother," Judith Moore explained. "They died together in an auto accident when Bill was six and I nine. We were brought up by an aunt but she also passed away, so there's just the two of us now."

Perhaps it was natural for her to tell me all this, but I felt somehow that she was pleading with me. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Lanham? You must be tired after climbing all those stairs."

"Thank you." She has already noticed my infirmity, I thought wryly as I took the high-backed chair she indicated. She seated herself and waited for me to speak.

I fiddled with my Homburg hat. "Your brother's marks have fallen off badly, Miss Moore, after a good start. He seems to have lost interest. I came here in the hope that you might help me find out just what his difficulty is."

The girl's hand pleaded a fold in her skirt. "No," she said quietly. "That is not why you came." My hat slipped from startled fingers, fell to the tiles. "Bill is in trouble."

"What—what makes you say that?"

"First there was the man who came here a little while ago, looking for him. I told him Bill was in school. Now you come here. And this morn—" She pulled that back with a little gasp, went on hastily. "Please be honest with me. What has my brother done?"

Murder, I reminded myself. Aloud I said:

"What happened this morning?"

"This morning?" Her lips had paled. "Whatever do you mean?"

"You know precisely what I mean. I caught that slip of the tongue." I rose. "You asked me to be honest with you."

Why don't you return the favor?" Suddenly I detested myself for the part I was playing but I blundered on. "I would like to help you, but I cannot unless you are frank with me."

"I do need help." She ran her hand over her hair. "But—can I trust you, Mr. Lanham?"

"Yes, Judith, you can trust me." I meant it. Heaven help me, in that moment I meant it sincerely. "Tell me what has you so upset."

She hesitated. "It's really a long story and— Oh! There's the downstairs bell." I heard it too, somewhere in the rear of the flat. "It isn't Bill." A frightened question had come into her eyes. "He'd use his key."

The distant ringing came again, longer and more imperative. "I suppose I'd better answer it?"

"Yes," I agreed, regretfully. "You better had." I watched her vanish into a dark doorway at right angles to the entrance from the outer hall. The bell stopped ringing. I remembered my hat, stooped to pick it up from the tiled hearth, steadying myself against the painted iron plate that covered the space under the mantel. And then a most curious thing happened.

The plate grated inward at one side, disturbed by the pressure of my hand. A runnel of powdered mortar sifted out, at the corner, onto the tiles. Abashed, I reached down to scrape it back, felt grit-covered metal, caught a golden glint. On impulse I slipped fingers farther into the aperture and scabbled the metal object out.

It was a watch, a huge, old-fashioned "hunting case" watch such as my grandfather used to wear on a heavy gold chain across his vest.

Straightening up, I inadvertently pressed the stem and the lid flicked open. Letters were engraved on the polished inner surface.

I stared at the spidery, cursive script, chill prickles scampering along my spine.

ELIHU UNIVERSITY
Trustees Award
for
General Excellence
to
RAND HARLOW
Class of 1886

There was a sharp rap on the hall door.



TARTLED, I clicked the watch's lid shut, dropped it in the side pocket of my coat. The rap repeated, sharp, insistent. Where was the girl? Now an impatient hand was rattling its knob. Still no Judith.

It was nonsensical for me to stand goggling at that door. What was I frightened of?

I pulled the door open—took a step backward, throat parching. John Garder came in, smiling thinly.

"Yeah," he purred. "I figured you were the little guy with the game leg Jim Corbin said rang the Moore bell."

"Corbin?" I repeated.

"Our man downstairs." The man who had lounged against the doorpost. I should have known they would not leave this house unwatched. "Just what are you doing here, professor?"

"Not professor. Plain Mr. Lanham. I—I came to have a talk with young Moore's sister about his marks."

"Sure." The detective seemed amused. "You came here to talk about his marks right after I'd told you he's wanted for murder. Or was it to bring his sister a message from him, maybe? Like where he's hiding out."

I licked dry lips. "Moore gave me no message for his sister or anyone else."

I did not expect to be believed, nor was I. "Look, mister. In this state helping a killer makes you an accomplice. It puts the noose around your neck too." Garder put a friendly hand on my arm. "Don't let him make a sucker out of you. I'm willing to forget what you done so far if you'll tell me where he is."

I gulped. "I don't know."

"Okay!" His bruising fingers tightened on my biceps. "I gave you your chance." His voice chilled. "Now come with me for a little talk with the chief."

And the murdered man's watch was in my pocket!

"Wait!" If I told Garder exactly what had happened in school and why I was here, he might decide he would be wasting his time with me. "Listen."

"Decided to be sensible, eh. Okay. Where's Moore?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Then anything else you got to say, you'll say it to Chief Martin. We'll take the sister along too. Where is she?"

"Somewhere in back, there. When we heard you ring, she went back there to tick the latch for you."

"Oh, yeah?" The detective's eyes narrowed. "Nobody ticked for me, mister. A fat dame came along and let me in with her key."

No wonder Judith Moore had not appeared. It was she, not her brother, who was using me as a cat's-paw. She had guessed who was ringing and had fled, leaving me to deal with the police.

"Okay," Garder said. "Let's go look. You first, mister, and don't try any funny business."

The long hallway was dim as I hobbled toward the rear of the flat, but not as dark as it had seemed from the living room's brightness. I went past an open door that breathed the powdery perfume of feminine cosmetics, started to pass another.

"Hold it!" Garder snapped. I halted. He was staring into a bedroom, a thoroughly masculine room.

The bed was neatly made, books on a table near the window that held a student lamp were in apple-pie order, but the top drawer of the dresser was pulled half out and one scarlet suspender-strap trailed limply over its edge.

"Looks like somebody was hunting for something in a tearing hurry," Garder muttered. "Okay, get going. Let's see what else."

Ten feet farther on, the passage ended in a wood-paneled dining room. Straight ahead a wide window framed backyard clothespoles and in the wall to my right a swinging door was tight shut. I started toward it, was halted by the detective.

"Just a minute. Didn't you say you were both in the parlor when I rang?"

"I did. We were."

"How'd you hear a bell in the kitchen from that far away, with this door closed?"

"I can't guess."

"You been telling me plenty that don't make sense." His hand came out from under the flap of his coat and there was an automatic in it, flat, ugly. "If this is a trap, mister, you get the first slug in your backbone. Go on to that door but

don't open it till I give you the word."

I REACHED the door and laid my hand on its glass push-plate. The detective shouldered the wall beside me.

"Set," he murmured. "Shove."

Skin crawling, breath suspended, I pressed inward. The slit widened. I saw a gas range against the opposite wall, then a sink came into view and an enamel-topped kitchen table in the center of the linoleumed floor.

"No one in there."

"Open it all the way. Way back against the wall."

"This is as far as it will go." My scalp tightened. "Something's holding it. Something soft. Alive!"

"Uh-huh," Garder grunted, jabbed his gun at the door. "Come out of there!" he ordered, hoarsely. "Come out or you get a slug right through the wood!"

The only response was a queer, muffled thump on the floor. I looked down.

"Okay," the detective growled, "Here it comes."

"No!" I yelled. "Don't shoot. Look!" I pointed down at the high-heeled shoes visible just beyond the bottom corner of the door.

I went around the door, went down to my knees beside Judith who was propped there against the wall, blindfolded with a dish towel and gagged with another, strips torn from still a third binding her ankles.

"I'll be doggoned," the detective grunted, above me, but I was jerking the blindfold from her eyes, pulling down with trembling fingers the muffling cloth from over her mouth.

"Are you hurt, Judith?" I asked.

She shook her head but winced. Her arms were pulled behind her, obviously bound that way. "You are," I insisted, lifting her away from the wall to get at her wrists.

"I—I don't think so," she said, thickly. "The only place I hurt is the back of my neck where he hit me."

I saw the bruise under the tawny tresses at the base of her skull.

"Who hit you?" Garder demanded.

"I don't know. I didn't see." The girl shuddered. "You're the man who was here before, looking for Bill."

"Right," he acknowledged.

"Mr. Garder is a police detective, Judith," I put in, as I worked at the knot that held her wrists. "Tell him

what happened here."

"I'll try to." There was dazed bewilderment in her tone. "It all happened so fast and just a sudden, awful feeling that someone was behind me. Before I could turn this blow fell against the back of my neck and I blanked out."

Her hands came free. She rubbed that angry bruise. "I don't know how much later it was that I came to, all tied up and blindfolded. Right after that I heard someone coming, stealthily. The footsteps went on past me, across the linoleum and then I heard someone whispering, and the door opened again and thumped my side. I held still, scared to death—"

"How long after?" Garder interrupted. "How long after that other guy went through here?"

"Not more than half a minute."

The intruder must have been in the

It was me who started but he was watching Judith.

"A watch?" She was either a supreme actress or it meant nothing to her. "Oh, I see now. You suspect my brother of stealing someone's watch."

"Not exactly."

"Then what?" she blazed. "Why all these insinuations? It seems to me you should be doing something about catching the thug who attacked me in my own home instead of persecuting me and my brother. I ought to report you to your chief."

"You'll have a chance to do that," John Garder sighed, holstering his gun. "I'm taking you to him. Let's get going."

THAT was that. The only hope I had left of extricating myself from my predicament was the meager one that I might somehow get rid en route of the

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flat all the time we were talking in the living room. He had heard us start down the passage and darted away right ahead of us.

"He had plenty of time to get what he was after," the detective mused. "And he's safe now. Through there." He jerked his head at the open window that framed the iron bars of a fire escape railing. "The way he came in. Over the roofs from most anywhere in the whole square block." His brooding gaze followed Judith as I helped her to her feet. "We've got a man down in the backyard. We figured the big jumps between the buildings would stop anyone from coming over the roofs, but we forgot they wouldn't be likely to stop a sailor."

"A sailor!" the girl exclaimed. "You mean you think it was—"

"Your brother," Garder finished as she caught herself. "Right. That's why he knocked you out with a rabbit punch that wouldn't hurt you too bad. That's why he hopped you from behind and then blindfolded you, so you wouldn't know it was him. He took a big chance coming here, but he had to. There was something here he had to get."

"Something?"

"Yeah. What do you think it was, Miss Moore?" He seemed to crouch, catlike. "Do you think it was, maybe—a watch?"

thing that tied me and Judith Moore to murder.

"What are you chuckling about," the detective demanded. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing," I replied wryly. "Just a thought that crossed my mind." The ironic meditation that from a single, impulsive lie I had come, in an hour, to thinking like a criminal. But, as my students would have put it, I didn't know the half of it yet.

I waited with Judith on the sidewalk while a few paces away Garder held a whispered conference with the narrow-faced plainclothesman, Corbin. A gray club coupe, distinguishable in no way as a police car, stood at the curb. The scene had not changed. The peddler still watched from his cart at one end of the block and the black sedan still was parked at the other, its driver apparently dozing. He and the peddler also were detectives, I decided.

Corbin nodded. Garder came to us, pulled open the car door.

"Okay, climb in. You first, Mr. Lanham. I want you next to me."

That effectively disposed of my plan to throw the watch over the side when some emergency of driving distracted his attention. He closed the door on Judith, went around to take his own place behind the wheel. We started off.

CHAPTER III

Black Sedan

NO ONE spoke. I was too weary to talk. But I did observe, in the rear-view mirror, that the black sedan also was in motion and that it obviously was trailing us. Garder was taking no chances.

I wondered, dully, how he had gotten word to its driver to

follow us. It seemed a little odd, too, that the sedan should stay so far behind.

The coupe's jump seat was narrow and I was fairly close against Judith and this was, for some reason, oddly disturbing. We jounced over some car tracks. Her hand slipped from her lap, fell against mine. She did not withdraw it and I discovered that my fingers somehow had closed over it. I am, perhaps, over-conscious of my infirmity. At any rate, this was a new sensation and, I had to admit, a definitely pleasant one.

We turned another corner, into an unpaved road that ran between vacant lots. Far behind, I glimpsed the black sedan. We were running now between a high gray embankment and a flat marsh that extended to the horizon. There was no evidence that any other car ever traveled this lonely road.

My thoughts were as desolate as the landscape. Since Bill, it had come to me, had searched for the watch in his bedroom he did not know it was hidden in the mantel. That must have been done by Judith. Did she know its connection with murder? I did not want to believe that she did. There was no reason why she should. Had she heard that brief news flash?

"Judith," I broke the long silence. "I do not remember seeing a radio anywhere in your flat."

She stared bemusedly at me. "Radio? Oh! We haven't got one. On account of Aunt Emily."

"Aunt Emily?"

"Father's sister, who brought us up. She never had money enough for one but she pretended she couldn't abide them. So even after I started working I didn't buy one. And after she passed away it was wartime and there weren't

any decent ones to be had."

"I see." I saw a great deal more than she knew she had shown me. I saw a devoted gentlewoman bringing up her orphaned niece and nephew on a pittance and concealing from them her poverty. I saw the girl realizing the true state of affairs but denying her knowledge lest she hurt the older woman's pathetic pride.

It was a sad, familiar pattern.

"Some idiot's in a devil of a rush," Garder muttered. "Listen to him come!" I suddenly was aware of the sound that reached out to us from behind, the thrum of a speeding car.

I saw the black sedan hurtle into sight around the curve back there. It overtook us, was edging toward us, was crowding us into the ditch. Garder braked. The sedan rocked to a halt an instant later, but the detective already had his automatic out.

"Up!" Garder barked at the sedan's swart-faced driver. "Get 'em up fast."

The fellow's hand went up past his head.

"What's the big idea?" he whined through the open window. "This ain't no stickup. I just wanted to ast yuh was this the way to—"

Something popped flatly as orange-red flame lanced slantingly down through his window. Garder's gun dropped and the detective folded down over his wheel, shuddered and was still.

"Bull's-eye!" the black car's driver observed, lowered a revolver into sight. "How was that fer shootin'?" His teeth showed in a thick-lipped grin. "I had to grab Betsey off th' ceilin', where I had her taped."

I was speechless, it was Judith who lashed out at him. "You shot him down like a dog!"

"That's right, sister." The grin left his face and his eyes were diamond-hard as they moved to me. "An' if yuh don't want the same dose, pal, yuh'll toss over that watch. The one in yer pocket."

I stared at him. "How did you know?"

"I know." He shrugged to the rear end of his seat and his gun jabbed at me, ominously. "Yuh gonna give it to me or do I take it off yer corpse?"

"Oh, I'll give it to you and good riddance." I fumbled a hand into my coat pocket. I stiffened. "It isn't there," I gasped. "It's gone!" The revolver jerked up. "Wait!" I croaked. "It

dropped out when I got in. I remember hearing something thump. Let me look." I slipped down to the floorboards before the thug could object, pushed head and shoulders beside the front seat below Garder's lifeless body. "I see it! I've got it!"

"Let's have it then."

THE corpse screened me but glancing up between a dead leg and a dangling arm, I saw that the killer had leaned out, ready to reach for the watch. I pulled back to my haunches, in the same movement brought up my hand, Garder's automatic clutched in it, and somehow squeezed the trigger.

He was too close, too broad a target for even a tyro to miss. The bullet jolted into his chest, straightened him up. I pumped another, heard it chug into him. Slowly, so slowly my brain had time to photograph for future nightmares the stunned surprise on his face, he slid down below the car window sill.

The automatic dropped from my nerveless hands. A cold shudder ran through me and nausea twisted at my stomach. "I—I had to," came from between my chattering teeth. "I had to k-kill him b-before he killed us. We saw him shoot Garder down like a dog and he dared not let us live to tell about it. You see that, Judith?"

"Yes, Don. I see it." Her voice was suddenly shrill-edged. "I can't bear to look. Let's get out!"

The car door opened and I heard her scramble out.

"Judith!" I squirmed to my feet, was after her as she went around in back of the car and caught her. "Judith."

"Oh, Don!" She was ghastly pale, her eyes great, dark pits. "Don."

Her need calmed me. "It's all over now, Judith." Somehow I had my arm around her, was drawing her to me. "All over." I held her close, as I had never held any woman before. "There's nothing to be afraid of any more."

"Safe," she sighed, her head on my shoulder. As I held her, I was thinking of the implication of what had just happened. The only way the thug could have known I had the watch in my pocket was from her brother. He had heard me in the living room, had watched me find it, slip it into my pocket. He had heard Garder say that he was taking me to Chief Martin, had

slipped out and gotten word of this to the man who waited for him in the black sedan.

It was Judith's brother who had sent the killer after us. After her.

She drew gently away from me. "What do we do now, Don?"

"Do? What else but find a phone and report this to the—" I caught back the word "police." What they would find here would look as if Garder had been killed in an attempt to rescue us from him. That would make us, in the eyes of the law, as guilty of his death as the actual slayer. True, the thug was himself dead but the bullets in his body were from the detective's automatic. Garder's first shot might not have been instantly fatal, the sedan's driver might have fired his own gun simultaneously with Garder's second. Difficult to believe but not as incredible as that I had snatched up the detective's automatic as he fell and killed his slayer with it.

The actual story would involve telling them about the demand for the watch and that would implicate Judith in Harlow's murder. Or would it? I must know.

"What is it, Don?" she was asking. "Why are you looking at me so queerly?"

My hand dipped into my pocket. "Look, Judith. This is what that fellow wanted from me." I brought out the ancient timepiece. "Did you ever see it before?"

"Yes." A tiny muscle twitched in her cheek. "Often. When I was a little girl and mother would take me to see Uncle Rand, he would let me play with it."

"Rand Harlow is your uncle?"

"Mother's really. My granduncle. I—I haven't seen him since she died."

"But it is not as long as that since you last saw this watch, is it? You are not surprised that I have it. When that thug demanded it from me, you guessed that I had found it where you hid it this morning. Right?"

"Yes." I could barely hear her. "I found it on Bill's dresser this morning. Why did that man want it, Don? Why did he want it desperately enough to kill for it?"

"I cannot imagine. But you know why you hid it. Why did you?"

"I was afraid that Bill—" Her head dropped and her hands twisted.

"That Bill had done what, Judith?"

"I didn't know." She lifted her face. "Please believe me, Don. I didn't know and I don't know now." I did believe her. "Bill is so bitter against Uncle Rand," she went on. "Even as a youngster when he found out how poor Aunt Emily was, what a struggle she was having bringing us up, he hated Uncle Rand because rich as he was, he never gave Aunt Emily any help. When I wrote him that Aunt Emily had died, worn out at last, Bill wrote back that Uncle Rand had killed her. And when I lost my job, last week, he said he was going to—to the old buzzard, he called him, and make him understand that he owed something to his only relatives."

"Did he?"

JUDITH shook her head. "He tried to, but Uncle Rand wouldn't see him. He was terribly upset over that, and so—so when I found Bill had the watch which Uncle prized, I didn't know what to think, Don. I—I was waiting for him to come home. When that detective came instead, looking for him,—that's when I hid it."

Her hand went out to me. "What's Bill done, Don?"

"I don't know, Judith." This was literally true. "What I do know is that because we haven't been frank with the police, two men are dead, one of them a detective who was only doing his duty. We are going to stop that sort of thing, right now. We are going to make a clean breast of everything and take the consequences if there are to be any."

"Whatever you think best, Don," she agreed meekly.

"All right. The Boulevard is about two miles from here. We can find a telephone there. But we are not going to take this watch with us." I got a clean handkerchief out, wrapped it around the timepiece. "It has caused too much trouble already. Please bury it somewhere in those ashes and mark the place so that you can find it again easily."

"Yes, Don."

She took it from me and went off. I returned to the cars and made sure that both men really were beyond help. That was why I had asked Judith to hide the watch instead of doing it myself, to spare her the distress of watching me fumble with their bodies.

I am no physician but I did not need to be one to know that there was no life left in either.

CHAPTER IV

Evil Fat Man



JUDITH rejoined me and we started off. Her arm in mine, we went along the meandering road. For a long time neither of us spoke, not, in fact, till we had neared the Boulevard. "Don, you said before that we haven't been frank with the police," Ju-

dith said. "That means you too."

"Yes, it does." I had to tell her then about the incident in my classroom and so, inevitably, about the news flash. She took it better than I expected, just tightening her hold on my arm.

"Bill did not kill Uncle Rand," she said, very quietly.

"I certainly hope not."

"I'm sure of it, Don. Not only because I know my brother could not do a thing like that, even in anger, but because it stands to reason that he wouldn't have left uncle's watch lying around for anyone to find."

"But he did sneak back for it, didn't he? Perhaps— Oh!" I broke off. "That's why Garder was driving us this way. I wondered."

The curve around which we had been plodding ended at the edge of the Boulevard and there, directly across the wide highway, was a three-storied, drab structure with a gabled roof and a sagging porch. Weatherbeaten lettering proclaimed that it was the Atlantic Hotel!

There was a parking lot beside it, but no other building as far as I could see in either direction. We went up on the porch and through open double doors into the rancid aroma of stale beer. A few disconsolate club chairs and a long wooden settee stood around on the bare gray floor of the lobby.

A wide staircase rose along the left hand wall and a dirt-streaked pendulum clock on a pillar said it was eleven minutes to five. Under the slant of the stairs was a battered counter from behind which the only occupant of the

room, a stoop-shouldered small man in a gray alpaca office coat, peered questioningly at us.

I wondered, as we went across to that counter, what Rand Harlow could possibly have been doing in this "dive," as the cab driver so aptly had described it.

"No room," the clerk said before I could say anything. "We're full up."

"We do not wish a room," I told him. "We would like to speak with Mr. Martin, the detective in charge of investigating the death of Rand Harlow. Kindly tell him that Miss Moore and Mr. Lanham have some important information for him."

"Oh." The idea penetrated. "About the killing?"

"Precisely."

He licked wet lips. "Mr. Jones!" he called.

"Okay, Jenkins." A second man appeared through an open door in the partition behind him. "I heard." He was tall, wiry, his hard-muscled face the same still mask that Garder and Corbin had worn. Cold eyes examined me, flicked to Judith, came back to me. "Step in here please and I'll go call the chief."

I moved aside to let Judith precede me, followed her into a small room. The door clicked shut behind us. Judith stopped short. She looked around.

"Don!" she whispered. "This place scares me."

"Scares you?" A heavy desk against the inn's rear wall was of polished mahogany and its top held a blotter pad with corners of pink onyx, an ash tray and combination fountain-pen holder and clock of the same finely grained stone. Light from a fluorescent fixture in the ceiling glowed softly on low, deep-seated arm chairs upholstered in red leather, as was a couch against the inner wall, and maroon broadloom covered the floor. "It is certainly amazingly luxurious, especially by contrast with that down-at-heels lobby, but—uh-huh! I see what you mean."

Except for the door behind us and another opposite, the walls were unbroken.

"There's no window," Judith breathed, white-lipped. "It's like a cell. I—I feel stifled, Don." She twisted, snatched at the doorknob, turned it—stiffened.

"Locked," I said for her. "Jones locked it!" But she had darted across

to the other door so fast that by the time I had hobbled to her she already had tried it and was turning to face me, her back against it.

"You didn't expect that detective to leave us unguarded?" I managed to say nonchalantly.

"What's that, Don?" She pointed to a three-inch square of blue paper on the floor beside the desk. Judith snatched it up, glanced at it. I heard her gasp. Then she held it out to me. "Look!"

A long number was stamped at the top of the bit of paper, in red. Beneath this was printed, SOUTHPORT CLEANERS & DYERS—Store Number Three. On dotted lines still farther down were scrawled in pencil: "Dress—No belt," and "75c" and "Moore—417 Sande."

"It's for the dress I asked Bill to leave at the cleaners on his way to school," Judith said. "He was here, in this room, some time this afternoon."

"Less than half an hour ago," said a soft, lisping voice. "It was rather—untidy—of us not to notice that slip drop from his pocket when we searched him."

JONES shut the door from the lobby as soundlessly as it had opened. But it was not he who had spoken. The fat man who had, and who now padded toward us would have been dubbed by my irreverent students, "Mr. Five-By-Five." He appeared almost as broad as he was tall, which was about up to my shoulder. His enormous pink visage had two tiny blue eyes, a miniature nose and a small, rosebud mouth.

"Please make yourself comfortable, Miss Moore." He waved an amorphous hand at one of the red leather chairs, "and Mr.—er—"

"Lanham," Jones said.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Lanham. Will you sit down?" Neither of us moved. "No? Well, you will pardon me if I do. I had a rather trying day."

The fat man turned the desk's matching swivel chair to face us, wedged himself into it. Jones came over to me. His hands, spread, thrust under my armpits, ran down my sides, slapped my pockets. It was done so unexpectedly, so deftly, that before I quite realized I was being searched, he was grunting, "Not on him, chief. He's clean."

He started toward Judith. My hands

fisted, I moved to stop him.

"No, George!" the fat man said. "There's no need of that, I am sure." He tented pudgy fingers, gazed benignly at her. "Miss Moore will give me her uncle's watch without that."

"I haven't got it, Mr. Martin. I hid it!" Judith pulled in breath, her pupils dilating. "He'd have no reason to think either of us had that watch, and he wouldn't ask for it first thing. You're not Mr. Martin. You're not—either of you—police. Who are you?"

The fat man drooped lids over those china-blue eyes of his.

"My name is Barker, Miss Moore. Stanley Barker." He seemed more amused than taken aback. "Chief of Detectives Martin and his cohorts finished their business here at about four and left, taking with them the late, unlamented Rand Harlow in a wicker basket."

"There are no police in this hotel to interfere with our little tete-a-tete." He smiled blandly. "And so, my dear, you would be very wise to give me your uncle's watch without any further argument."

"I tell you I haven't—Bill!" Judith's hand went up appealingly. "It's after five now and you said he was here only a half-hour ago. Where is he?"

"Safe. Whether he remains so rests with you. Unless you tell me where that watch is, I shall turn your brother over to be tried and hanged for murder."

Her face hardened, was as impassive as her brother's had been, standing before my desk.

"Mr. Barker," she said, tonelessly. "Bill did not kill Uncle Rand."

"Perhaps not." Barker shrugged. "But the police believe that he did. A young man was seen to enter Harlow's room last night. Sounds of a quarrel were heard. The young man left hurriedly. The management became alarmed about noon today and entered with a master key to find him fully dressed, strangled to death. When the police searched that room, they found there a high school algebra textbook with your brother's name and address on its fly leaf, and in the dead man's wallet they found a threatening letter, signed, 'Your unloving grandnephew, William Moore.'"

"Threatening?"

The fat-drowned eyes veiled themselves again. "Let me see. I think I can recall a significant passage. Ah yes.

"This is the last time I am asking you politely to see me and talk this over. If you give me the brush-off again—remember I've just come back from a place where guys know how to be really tough.' That's the case against your brother, Miss Moore."

"A flimsy case that can be upset by just one person who saw Uncle Rand alive after Bill left. One of the other hotel guests, for instance."

"Quite so. But beside Rand Harlow, the only other guests last night were Mr. Jones and myself." Why then had the clerk told me the place was full? "Besides us and your brother, the only persons in the house were Jenkins and the porter who also acts as bellboy and chambermaid. We have all made statements to the police and we all are prepared to identify William Moore as the young man who was here last night."

Barker paused, smiled. "Your brother will hang, my dear, if he is caught. I can save him from being caught. My price is Harlow's watch. It seems very little to pay for a young man's life."

Judith was haggard. "Yes," she agreed. "Very little. But still too much to pay for a life spent hiding from the law, a life of exile and eternal fear. I don't believe Bill is a murderer. I won't tell you where that watch is hidden."

"I think you will." The enormous body heaved, was up out of the chair. "There is no one to interfere in this hotel." He moved ponderously toward Judith as, eyes wide now with terror, she backed from him. "I intend to have that watch, Miss Moore." The wall stopped her. "Where is it?"

SHE slid along the wall and Barker prowled after her, a tiny bubble of spittle at the corner of his rosebud mouth. She reached a corner of the wall, and was penned in it. His huge arms came up to reach for her.

Somehow I was there, left hand seizing a monstrous shoulder, my right fist for his pink expanse of cheek.

The blow fell short because an iron arm, suddenly across my throat from behind, had jerked me backward. Fingers clamped my left wrist, forced my hand down and up again behind my back. Strengthless in Jones' chancery, half-throttled, I saw that I had pulled the fat man momentarily off balance. In that instant Judith had slipped by him, was

darting across the room.

She reached the desk, snatched something from it, whirled and hurled it. The onyx clock ploughed into Barker's paunch with a sickening chunk. He doubled up, eyes glazed, and kept on going down, to land, a grotesque, still heap, on the floor.

Jones thrust me from him. Gasping for breath, fighting for balance, I heard:

"Okay, you witch," he growled. "Now you get what's coming to you." I got feet under me in time to see his gun appear and arc up, to pointblank aim at Judith. I grabbed the weapon in both hands, forced it down, held it.

Blows pounded my skull, pounded darkness into it. The revolver was wrested from my grip and despair followed me down, down into oblivion.

CHAPTER V

Fortress in the Cellar



CAME up out of nothingness, through weltering dark, to awareness of pain, to recollection of dread and terror, violence and despair. A sob came from the pale blur that hovered over me, that cleared and became—Judith's face!

She knelt beside me on the heaving floor and just beyond her lay Jones, prostrate, motionless.

"Jud'th," I said. "You all right? He didn't—"

"Shoot me? No. You kept him busy long enough for me to pick up the clock again, run around behind him and stun him. Stand up, Don." Her arm slid under my shoulders, tried to lift me. "We must get out of here before they come to."

Somehow, with her help, I was on my feet, my head spinning. I stumbled beside her toward a black oblong in the wall beyond the still mound, Barker, who was breathing stertorously, his eyelids beginning to quiver. That rectangle was the door opposite to that by which we had entered, and it was open.

"How?"

Judith understood. "Barker's keys. I searched his pockets for them."

She shuddered. "I was afraid to try

the lobby. That clerk is out there, and maybe others."

We went through on to hollow-sounding wood and I was feeling much stronger by now. A brick wall was straight ahead and wooden steps went down from the landing to the left. The light faded and shadow swallowed us as Judith shoved the door shut. I heard keys clink and the thud of a bolt shot home.

"Locked," she whispered, somewhere in the dark. "Let's go."

"Careful." My fingertips found a handrail. "Where are you?" My other hand reached out, found her cold fingers.

"Come on." My foot found the landing's edge and we started down, step by groping step. "I hope this isn't the only way out of the cellar."

"It can't be. It mustn't— Judith's hand tightened on mine, pulled me to a stop. "Listen," she breathed.

I strained to hear. Nothing— Yes! Somewhere in the tar-barrel murk below there was a sound. A muffled thump, oddly familiar. It came again. Where had I heard exactly that sound before? Again. I remembered.

"That's the way you tied feet sounded behind the kitchen door. Someone is tied up down there, as you were."

"Someone? Bill!" Her hand jerked from mine and she was gone. "Look out!" I called, as loudly as I dared, but the only response was her heel-clicks on wood, then on stone or concrete. I heard her thud into something, whimper. I heard her call, low-voiced, cautious:

"Bill. Where are you, Bill?"

The thumps came faster. I stepped off the last tread onto the hardness of concrete, hesitated.

"Bill. It's Judith, Bill." I couldn't tell where in this blind nothingness her voice came from. "Where are you, Bill?"

If I only had a flashlight or matches, even! But I do not smoke. Was there a switch down here at the bottom of the stairs? My fingers found the wall, trailed harsh brick, touched corrugated metal, followed the cable to a small metal cylinder, a tiny lever projecting from it.

I thumbed the lever. *Click!*

Grimy light spilled down from a bulb overhead, and from other bulbs further on. I blinked at what they revealed. No wonder sound was muffled here. In-

stead of cavernous space I saw wooden cases piled up to a beamed, low ceiling, case after case in long tiers that left an aisle along the nearer wall, other aisles opening into it.

From some far distance a siren wailed, muted. A motorcycle policeman trailing some speeder on the Boulevard, I thought. If only I could get our cry for help out to him.

"Don!" I heard Judith exclaim from somewhere nearby. "I've found Bill. Here he is."

"Quiet!" I warned, hobbling down the transverse corridor. "Want them to hear us?" I saw her, kneeling at the end of a side passage, beside a recumbent form, bound and gagged as she had been. Bill's gray eyes widened with surprise as I came up and his excited sister got his gag loose.

"Knife," he sputtered. "In my pants pocket." Then: "How the devil did you two find me?"

"We'll talk later," I snapped. "Our business now is to get away before those two thugs up there recover consciousness. Find that knife and cut your brother's lashings, Judith, while I hunt for an exit."

I hastened back to the aisle along the wall, turned in what I estimated was the direction of the building's rear. An end case in one of the tiers I passed was broken open to reveal long, flat packages wrapped in salmon paper. Bolts of cloth! Cloth, hundreds of cases of it, in the basement of a lonely inn far out on the outskirts of the city. Why?

And I remembered, answering myself, a newspaper headline read—yesterday? Last Sunday? Whenever I had read it, I could see it clearly:

CITY CENTER OF TEXTILE
BLACK MARKET:

Huge Profits Bring Back Prohibition
Lawlessness, OPA Enforcement
Agent Warns

I went past the last pile of cases and there, right ahead of me, black against the gray cellar masonry, was the door I hunted, an iron door fitted closely in an iron frame. But the elation that had flared up in me died away. Fastening that door to its frame was a thick-shanked, heavy padlock.

Of course. There was a fortune in cloth here, at black market prices. It had to be protected against theft.

THE key to that padlock would not be among those Judith had taken from Barker. It had no key. It had only a combination dial.

Above me, in the hotel lobby, there was a sudden trampling of feet. Barker and Jones had revived. They were getting help to make sure of overwhelming us when they came down here. They could take their time. We were trapped.

Judith and her brother joined me. I gestured at the door and its lock, unable to speak.

"Yeah," Bill Moore grinned. "I saw them lock it when they brought me in through here." The sullen brooding was gone. He was more alive, more vibrant than I had ever known him to be. "Okay. Let's get busy."

"Busy? Doing what?"

"Fixing a fort out of these boxes. They're as good as sandbags any day." He was back at the nearest tier, shoulder braced against the top one of the three huge cases that piled atop one another forming its vertical end row. "Come on, give a hand shoving this stack around!"

I saw what he had in mind. Doing this would form a barricade behind which we would be safe for a while at least.

"Hurry up! We haven't got all night, you know."

Judith and I added our small strength to his. It was enough. The stack grated around, heave by heave, till he panted.

"Avast!" he panted, at last. "We've got to leave ourselves room to squeeze in."

Except for the narrow slit between wood and stone through which we had done this, we now were surrounded on two sides by the foundation walls in one of which was the door, on the other two by three-foot thick, bolt-filled cases that would stop anything less than artillery.

"If we only had a gun," I said wistfully.

"We have, Don." Judith held a revolver up to my startled gaze. "Jones's. I stuck it in my skirt pocket while I was trying to get you to come to."

"Good for you, sis!" Bill took it from her. "They can come now. We're all set."

Set for how long, I asked myself drearily. We had only one gun, six cartridges at the most, against many

ruthless killers. There were no neighbors to hear the shots and interfere. We were set— Yes! Set for death.

"I don't hear anything," Judith whispered from where she peered out over her brother's shoulder. "I don't hear them." Neither did I. There no longer were any thuds on the ceiling, any sound of movement anywhere. "Why don't they come?" the girl quavered. "What are they up to?"

"Easy, sis." Moore reached back, patted his sister on the shoulder. "Easy does it. They're playing the same game the Japs used to, laying quiet till we get good and jittery. Then they'll come at us screaming. The way to beat that game is to keep your mind on something else." His cool, confident tone eased me somewhat. "How did you two ever get here together? Did you go to school looking for me, Judy?"

"No, Bill. Mr. Lanham came to the flat."

"That was after that incident in the classroom, Moore," I explained.

"Oh, yeah. That reminds me, Mr. Lanham. I ought to thank you for covering me up the way you did, even if it did get me in a jam."

"Got you in a jam," I snorted. "How do you make that out?"

"Why, after I heard you tell that dick I'd scrambled, I couldn't show you up as a liar by coming back in, could I? The reason I forgot you'd asked me to stay after class was because I'd made up my mind to go to the cops and tell 'em everything that happened here last night."

Judith's eyes sought mine, appalled. "He did kill the old man after all!" they seemed to say.

"Who I thought it was I heard in the hall," her brother was saying, "was one of Uncle Rand's goons. I'd spotted him hanging around outside the school lunch hour. I ducked him, but I was scared plenty."

"Well, after I heard you pull that phony on the dick, I slid out through the next room and beat it downstairs figuring I'd wait outside for him. I get out on the sidewalk and who steps up alongside of me but this Jones again. He's got a gun in his pocket which he jams against my side and marches me into this black sedan that's standing at the curb.

"The guy behind the wheel starts it

moving as soon as we're in, and Jones bats me across the mouth with the back of his hand when I start asking him what the big idea was. We come out here, not by the Boulevard but by some other road and they take me through some bushes out back and in through this cellar and upstairs to that office there. This fat buzzard, Barker, is in there.

"Your uncle wants his watch back," he says."

BILL'S face was grim as he continued:

"I haven't got it," I tell him. "I left it on the dresser in my room home." "Search him," Barker says. They go through me but of course they find nothing. "Okay," Barker says. "Tie him down in the cellar while you two go and find out if he's telling the truth."

"When I try to protest, all that brings me is another crack in the puss."

"You didn't know!" Judith broke in, suddenly radiant. "You didn't do it!"

He jerked around at that, stared at her. "Didn't do what?"

"Kill Uncle Rand. He was found dead in a room upstairs. Murdered."

"Murdered!" Bill looked stunned. "Why, he was all right when I left him last night. Is that what that dick wanted me for? As a witness?"

"Not exactly," I put in, forestalling his sister. I was not as sure as she that he was wholly innocent. "You did see Harlow last night, obviously, here. How did you come here, of all places, to see him?"

Moore didn't answer that.

"We're forgetting about watching for those goons," he muttered, staring through his lookout slit. I waited for him to go on but he remained silent, half-crouched, the knuckles of his fist white with its pressure on the gun butt.

For a long minute we hung there, listening tensely. The hush somehow was more ominous, more sinister, than any imminent threat of attack could have been.

"I remember," Judith exclaimed. "That call for you on Mrs. Perskin's phone last night. You wouldn't tell me who it was from, Bill. You just grabbed up your pea coat and went out. It was Uncle Rand, wasn't it, telling you to meet him here?"

"Sure," her brother grunted. But he

did not go on.

Judith touched his shoulder. "Look, Bill," she said gently. "I've told Don about Aunt Emily and everything. He's our friend. You can talk to him as you would to me."

"Okay, if you say so, sis. I'll spill it all."

Harlow, he went on, had said over the phone that he had been thinking matters over and had decided that blood was after all thicker than water. If Bill would come to him at the Atlantic Hotel, he might have an interesting proposition for his nephew. No one must know about this though, not even Judith.

Arriving here, young Moore had been ushered into the strangely luxurious office and had been surprised to find there not only his granduncle but three others; Barker, Jones and another man named Halsey who from his description apparently was the driver of the black sedan, the man I had killed.

"The layout didn't look right to me," Bill observed. "I remembered what Aunt Emily once told us about Uncle Rand having made his money out of bootlegging in the old prohibition days, so I wasn't surprised at what his proposition turned out to be."

It was that the young man should join the gang in their black market operations. "I thought of how my buddies are being rooked for their civvies so these buzzards could cash in and I got kind of sick to my stomach. I didn't sound off though. I was scared, mighty scared! Nobody knew I was there and they'd told me plenty more than was healthy for me to know, so all I said was I'd like a chance to think it over."

Breath whistled from between his teeth. "Sure felt good when Uncle Rand said all right, I could let him know tomorrow night—today, that is. I get another scare though, when he calls me back.

"Just a minute, young man," he says. 'Whether or not you decide to come in with me I want you to have something that will remind you that time is money.' He unhooks this watch from his vest chain and hands it to me. Then he says something else queer: 'But there is one adage you might do well to ignore. The one that says never look a gift horse in the mouth.'

"I don't stop to ask him what he means," the youth ended. 'I just get

away as fast as I can. I'm so jittery I don't even wait outside for the bus but start walking down the Boulevard towards town. When it comes along, I get on and come home. But I wish I knew what that monkey business with the watch was all about."

"I think I know," Judith answered. "It explains why he asked you out here in the first place, and—" but she was cut off by her brother's abrupt whisper:

"Cut it! Here they come!"

He tensed, his gun hand lifting, and I heard the stealthy scrape of feet on the cellar stairs. They came off the wooden steps, and whispered toward us, slowly, hesitantly on concrete. Queer. There seemed to be only one pair of them.

"Trouble with this position," Bill muttered, "there's no field of fire. I can't see—" His gun clicked sharply. "That's near enough!" he called. "Stop there!"

"Shhh," a hiss silenced him. "They'll hear us! This is the clerk. Jenkins." Even in his whisper I could detect the extent of his terror. "I want to get out of here."

"In a pig's eye you do!" Bill scoffed. "What's the trick?"

"No trick. I swear. I want to get away from those terrible men. Listen: the combination of that padlock is two—Start at two, turn right to four, left full circle and stop at eleven."

MOOORE glanced back at me, eyebrows raised quizzically.

"I'll try it," I whispered. The dial shook under my fingers. Two. Counter-clockwise to four. Clockwise a full turn. Eleven. And the shank clicked free!

"That did it," I muttered, pulling the lock out of the hasp. "He didn't lie."

"But I still don't trust him. Don't open that door yet. Maybe they're laying for us outside. We can't have this light behind us— Hey you! Jenkins!"

"Yes?"

"Go back and turn off that switch. After the light goes off, stay there till you count a hundred or you'll get a lead slug in your brain. We'll leave the door open for you."

"All right—all right." Feet pattered away.

"He's frightened," Judith whispered. "The poor little man is really terrified, Bill. I'm sure he's not playing a trick on us."

"We'll soon find out."

Sudden darkness enveloped the cellar. "Get that door open, Mr. Lanham." Hinges grated and cold air gushed in. It was full dark outside.

"Hold it," Bill pushed past me. "Wait here a second, you two, till I see." He went up steps, stooped, blackly silhouetted against night sky. "Okay," his murmur drifted down to me. "Coast seems clear. Come ahead but keep low."

I took Judith's arm. Stone treads were under our feet, then cinders crunched. Yellow luminance from windows above us spread across the parking lot at the rear of the hotel, just touched the vague bulk of standing autos. Bill materialized beside us.

"Let's go. If we can make the Boulevard we'll be okay!"

White light leaped at us from between two cars, blinded us.

"Drop it!" a gruff voice ordered. "Drop that gat and hoist them, fast!"

Behind us, the cellar door clanged shut.

CHAPTER VI

The Wind-Up



THE blue-nosed revolver beside the small sun from which that white light flared held us motionless.

"You rats should have figured we'd be covering the back," grated the vague silhouetted figure with the gun. Other forms closed in on us from

around the corner of the building. A window grated open, high above us.

"What's going on down there?" someone called down.

"I've got 'em, Chief," our captor replied. "They come up out of the cellar." Guns glinted in the hands of the men who surrounded us. Brass buttons glinted.

"Police!" Judith sobbed. "Oh, thank heaven, they're police!"

"Bring them into the lobby," the voice from above called down. "I'll meet you down there."

The lobby was now crowded with burly, iron-jawed men, some in civilian dress, others in uniform, but all grim-faced. A policeman's fingers dug fierce-

ly into my biceps and William Moore was held as ungently by another, while Judith was watched warily by a squat and alert-eyed detective.

"The mistake you made," Chief of Detectives Joseph Martin said to me, "was to forget no one ever walks along that road past the ash dump." He stood straddle-legged before us, gray haired, leather-visaged, thin lipped. "Or hardly anyone. After the first of the afternoon dump trucks came to that mess you left back there, and it was easy enough to follow your footprints."

A small sound in Judith's throat pulled my eyes to her face and then in the direction she was looking, toward the hotel desk. Barker and Jones were leaning against it and beside them, gray and insignificant, was Jenkins. Anger pounded at my skull, thickened my throat and I could not restrain a bitter taunt.

"The mistake *you* made, Jenkins, was to expect the police to shoot us down first as we came up out of the cellar and ask questions afterward."

"Shut up!" growled the policeman holding me.

"Go on, Mr. Lanham," Martin said, softly. "Tell me what you're driving at."

"What I'm driving at is that while you were searching for us upstairs, leaving this lobby empty, that fellow, Jenkins, slipped down to the basement and told us how to get out, hoping that as we came up the steps we would be silenced by bullets."

"Bosh!" This came from Sutton, the detective who had been waiting out there. "Nobody went down in the cellar. Nobody could have gone through that door there without my seeing him."

"Granted. But he didn't go that way. He came down to us through—" My pointing finger hung, startled, in midair. There was no door for it to point at—no sign of any opening in the partition behind the counter!

"Go on," Martin said again. "Through where?"

"That's why you didn't search the cellar first." And why it had been so long before anyone had come after us. I could guess now exactly what had happened. "Those three were all in the lobby here when you arrived, weren't they?"

"Yes."

Of course! Jenkins had heard the police sirens, had dragged the other two

out of the office before they had arrived. "Barker and Jones were unconscious or perhaps just coming to. They told you that they had found us hiding somewhere in the hotel, had tussled with us and lost. Right?"

"Right," the detective agreed. "They insisted you had stolen a car and escaped but I knew you couldn't get past the road blocks we've had set up ever since noon to trap Moore so I figured you still were somewhere in the joint. We would have looked in the cellar immediately if they hadn't told us the only entrance was from outside and that door was locked tight."

"Yes. They had to keep you out of there at all costs, for more reasons than one. But they knew you would eventually insist on going down there so they watched their chance to send Jenkins down to us, through—Mr. Martin—through a concealed door in that partition."

Martin turned to the little gray man, eyes slitted. "Okay, Jenkins. Get it open."

The fellow's legs seemed rubber under him as he tottered around the end of the counter, pawed at the partition. I couldn't quite see what he did but abruptly there was a vertical slit in the wood and then the door had opened and we were looking through into the luxuriously appointed, windowless room. "Look at that, George!" Barker exclaimed. "Imagine our living here all this time and never knowing about that hidden room."

"My stars!" Jones picked up the cue. "I never would have thought it."

"You can dispense with that," I told them, wearily. "Miss Moore and I will testify that you were in there with us."

"And so will I," Bill Moore added. "This afternoon and last night both. And what's more, your fingerprints must be all over the place. You can't get away with it. You're tied up to the racket, but good."

"Tied up to what racket?" Moore demanded. "What's this now?"

"They are textile black marketeers," I answered him. "That inner door you see leads to the basement, which is chock full of illicit fabrics."

BARKER came a step forward, pudgy hands spread wide.

"I must admit he is right." His soft,

lisping accents had not lost their sinister quality for me. "That is why we did not tell you about that room when you were here before, Mr. Martin. There was no point in doing so. It had nothing to do with Harlow's death."

"That wasn't smart," the detective chided him. "It wasn't even legal. You were risking a charge of concealing evidence." He looked around. "Fallon, you and Sherry better look over that office, just to keep the record straight." The two plainclothesmen he addressed moved to obey and Martin turned back to Bill. "So you admit you were here last night, do you?"

"Sure, I was here. What of it?"

"Why did you kill your uncle?"

"Me kill—" The youth's jaw dropped.

"There are the murderers!" Judith broke in. Her hand pointed at Barker and Jones. "Those two." Tawny hair disheveled, face grimy with cellar dust, she was still magnificent. "They killed Uncle Rand and fixed things so Bill would be blamed for it, and I can prove it."

"She is insane," Barker observed, coolly, almost compassionately. "The poor girl has gone mad."

I almost believed that myself, for Judith had clawed open the buttons of her waist and was thrusting her hand in under the pale blue, lacy underthings thus revealed.

"Maybe my uncle was insane too, Mr. Barker," she flung at him, "when he suspected that you meant to kill him and gave Bill a message accusing you. You found that out too late, didn't you? That's why you've been so desperate to get hold of this watch, where Uncle Rand hid it."

She had brought it out from somewhere in the frilly, intimate regions where she had delved.

"I didn't hide it in the ashes, Don," she told me. "There was nothing to mark the place with and I was afraid I would forget where it was."

"Let me have that," Chief Martin demanded. He took it, clicked the lid open and read the inscription. "Yes," he sighed. "This is Harlow's all right. We wondered why we couldn't find a watch in the room where he died. "How did you get it?"

While she told him the whole sordid story, helped out by Bill and me for our parts, he was busy working at the watch.

Finally he grunted, started unscrewing the back.

"It was only after Bill told us what Uncle Rand had said, when he gave it to him, that I guessed what it was all about," the girl explained. "'Look a gift horse in the mouth,' he said. This was the gift and he meant that Bill should look in it."

The back cover came off in Martin's hand. There he found a folded tissue paper. Jones started for it but a policeman shoved him back.

Martin scanned the almost microscopic handwriting with which the tissue was covered, looked up, his face masklike.

"This is a list of about fifty names and addresses, Miss Moore, with numbers after them. See." He held it up so that we all could see. "It hasn't a thing to do with the murder."

All the animation, the triumph, drained out of Judith and her face was suddenly haggard.

"I'm sorry." The detective seemed genuinely so. "It still looks like your brother clouted his uncle over the head and then choked him to death. There is too much testimony that puts William Moore in that room up there. Not only the testimony of the four men, these three and the fellow who was killed in the road, which might be discredited now they are revealed as black marketers, but that of the book we found under the bed up there."

"What book?" Bill asked.

Martin's eyes moved to him. "Your algebra textbook, with your name in it. I suppose you will claim that was put there as part of the frame."

"Sure, I do. I took it along last night to study on the way here. I put it on the desk in there and forgot it when I left."

The detective shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't wash. It's plausible, but so is the story that you left it upstairs. You might be telling the truth. I don't know. All I know is that book's going to hang you."

Judith moaned. "Don! You said you wanted to help us. Can't you think of something?"

"Gosh, Mr. Lanham," her brother added his plea to hers. "If you only could."

Grimy light fell across his bony, angular face, glinted on the golden button

in his lapel. I looked back from him to Judith, remembered how her hand had closed trustingly on mine, recalled how I had held her to me back there on the desolate road and how the road had no longer been desolate. I turned to Martin.

"May I see that list, please?"

"You can look at it," he said, "but in my hands."

I READ the names: The Acme Dress Company. The Superior Shirt Company. Women's Fripperies, Inc.

"You said this had nothing to do with the murder, Mr. Martin. It has everything to do with it. It's the motive."

"How do you mean?"

"That's a list of manufacturers who are desperately in need of textiles and will pay almost anything to obtain them." I glanced at Barker. "They are Harlow's customers, aren't they? The ones to whom he sold the merchandise you have stored down in the basement. He handled that part of the operation and kept the list secret from you." I was guessing wildly, but this was the way it had to be. "He did the collecting too, and kept the lion's share for himself. You might have gone out and found other customers yourselves, but with the Federal operatives hot on your trail you didn't dare. So you killed Harlow for that list, and found that he didn't have it."

"You guessed what he had done with it, that he had suspected what you were up to and gotten Bill out here and given him the list hidden in the watch. 'Time is money.' You'd heard him say that and now you guessed what he meant and went all out, to the point of murder, to get the watch back, but it was too late."

Barker did not answer. He did not have to. The sick look in his tiny eyes gave him away. I turned back to Martin.

"That's the answer. They killed Rand Harlow for that list."

"Maybe." He was obdurate. "But you haven't proved it. It still looks like Moore."

"Good grief, man!" I exclaimed. "I wasn't here when they did it. I can't produce an eyewitness!"

"Hey, Chief," someone called from the office, one of the men Martin had sent in there. "We've got something." He appeared in the doorway. "There's some dried blood on one foot of this swivel chair in here, way underneath, and a

couple of gray hairs are stuck to it. I'll lay ten to one they match up with Harlow's."

"So will I." Martin wheeled, strode to Barker, crowded him against the counter. "You told us Harlow went upstairs about ten o'clock, as well as he'd ever been. You and Jones and Jenkins swore to that, didn't you?"

"Y-Yes."

"You lied. You hopped Harlow in there after young Moore left. He slipped, or was tripped, and gashed his head against that chair leg. Maybe you finished him in there or maybe you carried him upstairs and finished him off there. Which was it?"

"Neither." Barker licked his lips. "I don't know anything about it." But Martin had whirled to Jenkins.

"You! Which was it?"

The little gray man's chin quivered, his lips were the color of his hair.

"I-I—" His terror was not pretended now. It was very real. "I don't know."

"You better know. You better remember, and fast. You swore with the others

that you saw Harlow walk up there under his own power. That makes you as guilty as they are, even if you were out here in the lobby while they killed him." The detective's finger jabbed the scrawny breastbone. "You'll hang with them unless you come over on the side of the law. You'll hang, Jenkins, hang by the neck till you're dead. Is that the way you want it?"

The bony jaw wagged as if it belonged to a mechanical statuette, the springs gone awry. "No!" Jenkins squealed. "No, I'll talk. I'll tell you how it was."

He did. His evidence was to hang Jones and Barker, gain him commutation to a ten-year sentence. But that was to come months later. By that time Bill Moore had graduated with honors, was doing well as a freshman in State U. He insists that this is because he gets help with his math from his brother-in-law.

Yes, Bill can have his discharge button. I've got his sister. Judith is my wife.



"Suppose You Could Bump Somebody Off—and Make Sure the Body Never Would Be Found? Would You Do It?"

CHARLIE DRUCKETT'S convincing voice purred on as he lodged the idea in the mind of the tramp he had picked up on the road and invited for a ride in his classy sports convertible.

"You mean, no body ever found?" the tramp responded. "Naturally, that's okay! They can't do nothin' to you unless they've got the corpus dixie—that's what they call the body. Okay! If it can be done like you say, with no comeback—brother, you've made a sale!"

Charlie Druckett drove on with a big grin on his face. He had this lug where he wanted him. His plans would go through!

For one of the year's most unusual mystery novelets—read *KILLIGEE SWAMP* by JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS, in our next issue. It's a yarn that moves with speed and inevitability toward a surprising, shocking conclusion that will take your breath away!

You Wake Up Dead!

A Chet Lacey Novelet

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



I put my eye back to the knot-hole and saw

CHAPTER I

Tony Pays the Price

SOMETIMES the case is so simple to figure out, that I almost blush when I take the client's money. And then there are times when it develops into a real dipperoo, and I want to kick myself for not having quoted the check-signer three times the regular tariff. Like a little affair that I, Chet Lacey, Private Investigator, handled a short while back.

I was in my office debating whether to kill the afternoon at the ball park, when

in walked Tony with his shoe shine box slung over his shoulder.

"I come up to give you this for a dame," he said, and tossed a sealed envelope on my desk. It was pretty well smudged up from his fingers, but across the face was my name in a very neat and precise hand.

"A lady, Tony," I echoed.

"A looker, Mr. Lacey. Young, and with all the you know whats. I'm in the lobby, and she says there's a buck for me if I bring this up."

"Didn't she have two legs?" I said. "Didn't she know we have elevators in

When bootblack Tony gets polished off while on an errand, a private eye sets out to avenge him—and suddenly finds himself square in the middle of a murderous racket!



Dixon staring at the man with the gun

this building?"

"Did she have legs?" He grinned. "You shoulda seen! But maybe she was in a hurry."

I tossed him two bits. "Thanks, Tony."

He caught the coin and went out. I slit open the envelope and pulled out the three things inside. One was a short note in the same neat handwriting. It read:

Please call at 1245 Vander Avenue at eight o'clock tonight.

That was all. But the two other things

I'd pulled out were more explicit. They were two one-hundred-dollar bills. I placed the letter and the two bills side by side on the desk blotter, and sat staring at them for several minutes. No brilliant lights dawned in the Lacey brain. I mean, I'm always glad to call on a good looking lady for two hundred dollars. And sometimes even for free! However, in view of the fact there are plenty of racketeers hereabouts who would like to see Chet Lacey go to his final resting place, I always like to know a bit more about my blind dates.

So I got on the wire and found out

that there was an unlisted number at that address under the name of George Hobson Harris. And another call got me the information that Harris was a retired merchant who lived alone with his adopted daughter, Mary Ellen. But a phone call to the address given got me no answer at all.

WELL, that was that. And as the date wasn't until evening, I decided to go to the ball game, instead.

So I closed up shop, took the elevator to the lobby level, and stopped at the stand to buy a deck of Luckies. Just as I was getting my change, two shots sounded out on the street. A car back-firing to most everybody in the lobby, but I've heard too many of each not to know the difference.

It had been shots, all right, and both bullets had found their mark in little Tony's chest. He was a pathetic little heap slumped there against the building wall. Bystanders stood rooted in their tracks, just gaping at the poor kid.

I yelled for somebody to get a doctor, and bent down over Tony. One look told me that all the doctors in the world wouldn't be able to help him. Then words dribbled off his lips so softly I almost missed them.

"Funny thing, Mr. Lacey! An old geezer—asks me—what did the dame—give me. Then a—a guy—I seen the—guy and—gee, Mr. Lacey . . . It's getting dark! It's—"

Little Tony tried desperately to force out more words, but the Dark Angel wouldn't let him. A violent shudder ran through him, and he died.

"What's going on here?"

It was the cop on the beat. I stood up. The cop saw who I was and blinked.

"What gives, Lacey?" he grunted. "Hey, it's little Tony! And he's been shot!"

I nodded, and let it go at that. I felt sure that Tony had not been the intended target for the unknown killer's slugs. The old geezer undoubtedly.

"How'd it happen, Lacey?"

The cop's question dragged me away from my rambling thoughts. I told him all I knew about it, minus Tony's whispered words. Right after that, about twenty people who had been standing around, told their stories. Twenty different ones, of course. And not one had seen where the shots had come from.

All this told the cop nothing, and me less. So when I heard the ambulance clanging down the street, I went back up to my office. I did some checking and found out that Tony had lived with his widowed mother. I wrapped the two one-hundred-dollar bills in a plain sheet of paper, stuck them in an envelope and addressed it to his mother. I stuck a stamp on and dropped it down the floor mail chute. But that did not help me feel any better. Nor did a stiff drink. . . .

It lacked but a couple of minutes to eight-thirty that evening when I parked my car several houses down from 1245 Vander Avenue.

Naturally, I had skipped the trip to the ball park, and spent the afternoon checking on George Hobson Harris, and his adopted daughter, Mary Ellen. They lived comfortably, and quietly. A trip south in the winter, and a cottage on a lake in the summer. As interesting as last week's ball scores, if you get what I mean.

The house was just like many others. The grounds were spacious, well kept, with a lot of trimmed shrubs. But not a light showed when I went up the long walk to the door. I rang the bell three times, and drew three blanks.

But I refused to give up. With Lacey stubbornness, I jabbed the bell, stuck a pin in to keep it jabbed, and rested myself against the door jamb. A minute or so passed, and then a light was switched on inside.

The door opened and there stood Mary Ellen, I presumed. She was about twenty or twenty-one, with reddish gold hair—copperish you'd call it—the face of an angel, and a figure right out of *Esquire*.

I pulled out the pin and tipped my hat. "Mr. Lacey calling," I said, with my best smile.

"Yes?"

"You sent me a note to call this evening," I reminded her. "Here I am."

She shook her head.

"There must be some mistake," she said.

IMIMPULSIVELY I glanced at the house number beside the door. It checked. When I looked again at her I knew she was lying. Her eyes told me so. Also, the way she was tempted to slam the door in my face.

"There is no mistake, Miss Harris," I said. "May I come in? I want to talk

to you."

The door slamming urge almost won, but not quite.

"I don't see why," she said. "I have nothing to talk to you about, Mr. Lacey."

That riled me, and I went whole hog.

"On the contrary, you have!" I snapped. "About a murder. Whom do you want to talk to, me or the police?"

One hand flew to her mouth, and her eyes opened wide.

"Murder?" It was weak, and strangled like.

"A little shoe-shine kid, named Tony," I told her. "The kid you paid a dollar to deliver your note, and money, to me. Make up your mind!"

Fear won. She swung the door wide open.

"Come in, please," she said in a strangled voice.

CHAPTER II

Glamour Girl



WENT in, but I didn't miss how she shot a frantic, fearful look out into the night before she closed the door. And put on the chain.

Hat in hand I followed her into a very nice living room, where she snapped on the lights. Harris, I

had learned, owned a department store in Denver, and had certainly done all right by himself.

But what surprised me more was the sudden change in Mary Ellen when she switched on the lights. The gnawing fear vanished, and the come-hither, glamour gal took over. Color came back in her cheeks.

"A drink, Mr. Lacey? Scotch or rye?"

Just like that. I nodded and selected scotch. She gave me a slow little smile and went into the next room, which was the dining room.

I lost sight of her around the corner of the door, but I heard the clink of glasses, and the sound of ice cubes! Ice cubes in the dining room? Anyway, she came back with the drinks, gave me mine, and settled herself in an easy chair not too far away.

I had a sudden desire to toss mine

right into her beautiful face. I was thinking of little Tony, you see. But I didn't. I took a long pull, and waited.

"You spoke about a murder, Mr. Lacey?"

I nodded and gave her a thumbnail sketch of little Tony's finish. She went white, and there were real tears in her eyes. And, also, stark fear.

"Oh, how awful!" she whispered.

"Where is your father, Miss Harris?" I countered.

She almost dropped her drink.

"My father?"

"He was talking to Tony at the time," I said. "I think the bullets were meant for him. Why?"

She didn't answer right away. She had to stick the pieces back together, and have a good long drink.

"But—but that's impossible!" she finally said. "My father left yesterday on a business trip to Chicago. You're mistaken, Mr. Lacey. You really are."

"Where's he stopping in Chicago?" I wanted to know.

She came right back quick with the hotel name. I filed it away, and took another sip. I was beginning to catch a hint of something familiar.

"Well, what did you want to see me about?" I suddenly asked. "And why couldn't you have come right to my office?"

Fear shook the glamour girl. She leaned forward and put her glass on the coffee table.

"I—I just don't know how to explain, Mr. Lacey," she said slowly. "I think my life is in danger."

I asked her why.

"I don't know why," she said. "No earthly reason at all. Well, I received a couple of strange phone calls last week. And I'm quite sure somebody is following me wherever I go."

She shot uneasy glances at the three windows in the room—all in back of me, I suddenly realized.

Then she gave me a long, searching look.

"Are you sure it was my father talking to that shoe-shine boy?" she suddenly asked.

"That's what Tony told me," I replied. "Now tell me why you really wanted to see me."

She looked at me and smiled coyly. And got zero in response.

"It's—it's not important, now," she

said. "Let's forget the whole thing, if you don't mind?"

"I do mind!" I told her bluntly. "Tony was a friend of mine. And whoever killed Tony is going to get his."

Was I kidding? Not at all. And she knew it. But the fear was still very strong.

"But I don't know anything about the murder!" she cried. "Believe me, I don't!"

I WAS getting fed up. I wanted action even if I had to slap her pretty puss to get it.

"Take your choice," I said. "Tell me why you sent me that note, or tell the cops after I turn it over to them."

That did it. The magic name, cops. Her pretty face jitterbugged a little.

"There was a man when we lived in Denver," she said. "I was just a silly kid, and— Well, my father finally got rid of him. A few days ago he phoned me. He wanted money, or he said he'd make trouble."

She stopped and raised appealing eyes.

"Father is not in good health, Mr. Lacey," she said. "I'm afraid this thing would be too much for him. I wanted you to see this man, and get him to go away. I have a little money, but not as much as he wants. But I thought you could make him understand."

The old familiar hunch grew stronger. "Why did you try to give me the brush-off at the door?"

I could tell that she didn't want to answer that one.

"He phoned me early this evening," she said. "He knew that I had gone to you. He must have followed me, and little Tony. He was very angry. He said that I must have the money by tomorrow morning or he'd kill me. Mr. Lacey, I'm terribly frightened."

"What's his name?" I asked.

She was just a wee bit too slow in answering.

"I knew him as Carl Vance," she said. "He's tall, and dark. And I suppose good looking. I think he's staying at the Wallace Hotel. While he was talking to me this evening, I heard an operator's voice say it was the Wallace Hotel."

"Is he to phone you in the morning?" I asked.

"He said he'd phone me," she replied. "But please, Mr. Lacey! My life's in danger for telling you this!"

"Tony's life is no more!" I rapped right back at her. "You haven't the amount he wants?"

"No," she said. "He wants ten thousand dollars."

I stood up, and reached for my hat.

"When Vance phones, make a date to meet him some place," I said. "Then phone me. I'll take it from there."

Anger flushed her face, and I was a bit surprised.

"You will not!" she said. "Please! Please go away. I . . . I don't want to hire you any longer. Keep the money, but please go away!"

Maybe I should have stuck around, but I didn't. I wanted out.

"All right," I said, and let her lead me to the front door. "But if you're a smart girl, phone me in the morning. After Vance calls. We don't like murder in this town. Especially little kids. Good night!"

She didn't bother to reply. She was too busy slamming the door and slapping all locks into place. I grinned a little and went walking down to my car. It was very, very lax of me because the evening suddenly exploded between my ears, and the ever alert Lacey went sailing off into a great big black nothing!

When I woke up I was very sorry that I had. I had a million stabbing pains in my head. Through the pain haze, I made out two big guys, one with brown hair, and not much of it, dressed in costly clothes. The other lad had a face like a cow-catcher.

I focused on him because he was pouring a drink. He brought it over to me and I downed it. Then I realized that I was sitting in a chair. Not tied up, but my gun was gone. The room was cheaply furnished, on the ground floor, and a single window looked out into total darkness.

"Feel like talking, Lacey?" the well dressed man said.

"About what?" I wanted to know. "Also, who are you two?"

Brown Hair chuckled, and Cow-Catcher Face smirked.

"Just a couple of fellows," Brown Hair told me. "Where is he? Where'd the Harris dame say he was?"

"What Harris dame?" I countered.

VERY foolish of me! Cow-Catcher face's hand came out like a bull whip, and I almost went spinning off

my chair. "We ain't got time, Lacey!" he snarled. "Speak up!"

I ignored him and looked at Brown Hair, the boss.

"You can slug me all night, but it still won't get you a thing," I said. "Suppose you give me a hint what I should know?"

A grunt from him stopped Cow-Catcher Face's hand from whipping out again.

"A guy named Dixon," he said. "That mean anything?"

I shook my head.

"We want to talk to him," he said. "The Harris dame knows where he is. So do you."

I shook my head again, and he sighed. "Okay, Jack."

I wasn't set to stop what he gave. When the explosions died away, and the colored lights faded out, there he stood before me holding out another drink. Learning fast, I took that drink and downed it, too. Things weren't making sense. Yet, I wasn't going to let them continue to pound the tar out of me all night. A fellow's constitution can stand just so much.

"Look," I said to Brown Hair through split lips. "The Harris kid wants to find a guy named Carl Vance. She didn't mention the name of Dixon at all. If you want to know so bad, why don't you ask her?"

Jack, the Cow-Catcher faced boy, made sounds in his throat. Brown Hair just sat there staring at me. But he made no move toward me.

"Why did she want you to find this guy—er, Vance?" he asked me.

The truth was better than getting my head knocked off. The old neck cords might snap the next time.

"An old flame that won't snuff himself out," I said slowly. "He must have something on her because he wants dough. She wanted me to persuade him to leave town. She was crazy!"

"She say what he looked like? And where he hung out?"

I gave him her description, but said she didn't know where the lad was hanging out. Brown Hair looked at me some more, and then gave a slow shake of his head.

"I've heard some about you, Lacey," he said. "You're not such a dumb bunny. Too bad. I was sort of hoping you could help."

I decided to take a chance.

"Maybe I could, if you'd give me some more of the picture," I said.

He smiled, and shook his head.

"Nope," he said. "This is a private deal. Give him another drink, Jack."

I tried to think fast while Cow-Catcher Face poured the drink.

"You thought I was this Dixon?" I asked Brown Hair. "In front of her house, I mean?"

"It was dark when we saw you go in," he said with a shrug. "I wasn't sure, and I like to be sure. Sorry, Lacey. You can get yourself another gun. But don't look for anybody, see? We won't be around long. Okay, have your night-cap."

I took the drink. I was sore enough to try a parting crack.

"How did you two leave all the boys in Leavenworth?" I asked with a grin.

His slight start, and the flash in his eyes, told me what I had been figuring was true.

The pair hadn't been out of prison a month. To me the little tell-tale signs stood out like lumps.

"Jack," Brown Hair suddenly said softly. "This dumb gum-shoe wants a nice long walk back home. Know what I mean?"

CHAPTER III

Turnabout



COW-CATCHER Face said something but I didn't wait to hear. I was swinging my right fist, and every ounce of my beef behind it. He must have expected something because he jerked his head and took my fist on his shoulder. I spun him all the way around, but

the trouble was he had his gun in his hand. He swung it against the side of my head. For a brief instant I had the sickening feeling that my skull was caving in. Then I didn't have any feeling at all. I was riding in darkness again!

A rhythmic throbbing in my right shoulder, that spent itself throughout my entire body, was what eventually pulled me back to consciousness again.

I didn't so much as twitch a muscle

until the black fog went away, and all of my senses started functioning. I was on the front seat of a car in motion. My right shoulder was jammed against the inside door handle. I couldn't see who was driving. But I could make a pretty good guess.

Well, I slowly opened the off eye and took a peek ahead. It was still dark, but I was able to note that we were on a road at the edge of town. The car was a coupé, and yours truly and the driver were the only ones in it.

I wished that I had some of the strength that had been belted out of me during the last few hours.

At the end of the next couple of miles, the car suddenly swerved off onto a narrow dirt road that ran around behind a couple of hills. There the guy at the wheel stopped it, but left the engine turning over. Then the car driver climbed out. In the glow of the headlights I saw that it was Jack, of the cow-catcher face.

He came around on my side and yanked open the door. I let my weight fall as the door support was pulled away. He grunted and grabbed me with both hands. That was good! That was wonderful! The opportunity presented itself, and, brother, I took full advantage of it. I hit him on the chin with everything I had.

He was a tough egg, but he wasn't made of iron. He let go of me and went down on one knee choking for breath. I set myself and gave him the *coup de grace*.

Even then he didn't pass out cold. But I had time to relieve him of two guns, his and mine, and to drag him over and prop him against a tree, and lash his arms with his own belt, and his ankles with my belt. Then I proceeded to drive the cobwebs from his brain by slapping his face.

"Hey, hey! Don't! Stop it, or I'll kill you! So help me, I will!"

I wanted to laugh. I stopped slapping him, took my gun and jabbed the muzzle hard against his big nose.

"Remember me, ape?" I said. "Look who's turn it is, now!"

And just so's he'd understand, I gun-whipped him once just hard enough to get a little scream out of him.

"Don't!" he moaned. "It wasn't my fault, Lacey. Give a guy a break. I had to do what Sampson wanted, see? Lacey,

that's true!"

I slashed his big face again. There's only one thing mugs like Jack thoroughly understand. Pain. So I was just making sure he'd understand.

"Start telling me the whole story, Jack," I said. "Hurry up!"

He looked at me out of the one eye he could open.

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

I hefted my gun.

"No!" he gurgled. "Wait! What story?"

"You and your pal," I said. "A guy called, Dixon. And the Harris dame. What's it all about? Quick!"

"I don't know about the dame!" he babbled, his one good eye fixed on my gun. "Only that the boss, Sampson, said she was Dixon's frill. The three of us did a job a year ago. A jerk-water bank in another state. We got caught, but not together. But Dixon had hidden the dough. Sampson and me didn't get a dime of it, and Sampson had planned it all, see?"

HE PAUSED, and gasped for breath, but I didn't let him gasp for it very long.

"So?" I said, and tapped his mashed nose with my gun.

"They didn't have much on Sampson and me," he went on. "We got only a year apiece. But we heard Dixon got five. When we got out we heard he'd gone over the wall, so we started looking for Dixon. We tailed him to this town through the dame. That's all I know, so help me!"

"What does this Dixon look like?" I asked.

"Kind of small, but not too thin," he told me. "Light hair, but maybe it's different now. Not bad looking. A diller with the dames. Dixon ain't going to like it when Sampson catches up with him."

"If he does," I said.

I was thinking of Mary Ellen Harris, the little liar. What a nice blind alley she'd tried to send me up—with a phony name, a phony description, and a phony address. But why? I had a hunch I knew the answer to that one. And also that I could guess pretty close to some other items.

I squatted there for a couple of moments staring at the ape's mussed up

face. I decided that he had helped me about all he could. Also, I wasn't feeling what you would call in tip-top shape, and though the whole crazy picture was still pretty dim, I was beginning to get an idea, and there were things to do.

So I jabbed the lug's nose for his attention. And removed my belt from around his ankles.

"When you feel like it, start walking," I said, and pointed in the direction of the hinterlands. "But that way, and not back to town. Unless you really want to catch something. Okay. Happy dreams!"

To show him what I meant, I really laid the barrel of my gun across his thick skull. He sighed softly and went to sleep. I went over to the car and turned it around.

The ride back to town was tough on me, and it took a lot just to keep the four wheels on the right side of the road. I think I've got as tough a head as the next man, but my poor old noggin had really taken a kicking around, and it felt four times its normal size, and fourteen times heavier than if it was made of lead.

But that is not the reason I drove straight to my three rooms and bath, instead of to the Harris dame's house to pick up my own car. I could get the car some other time. And the way I figured out things I could talk with the Harris kid some other time, too.

The last time I'd seen her she had been a very scared lady. Very scared for her ivory throat, and arms. But if my reasoning was right, she really didn't have anything to be scared about, yet.

The pen-escaped Dixon wanted her alive, not dead. In my book she was his meal ticket. And Brown Hair wanted her alive, too—to lead him to Dixon. And my little experience with him proved something else. That he wasn't making himself known to her because he feared that so doing would also make himself known to Dixon.

In other words, Dixon didn't yet know that his pals in crime were breathing down his neck. So I knew the Harris dame was safe from harm, for the time being, anyway.

The first thing I did when I reached my place was to strip and take a needle point shower. And the next was to doctor up my punching-bag face, and head. Then I dressed, had a drink and a ses-

sion with the long distance phone operator. It took me twenty minutes to find out that none of the big hotels in Chicago had Harris registered there, or had made reservations for him. Of course, that was no surprise to me, but I verified it because I always like to be sure.

Another fifteen minutes on the phone gained for me one of those little breaks you often hope for, but seldom get. I mean, the Caldwell Hotel way over on the west side of town had a Mr. George Hobson Harris registered there. He had checked in yesterday, but when I had them ring his room there was no answer. I thanked the switchboard cutie, left no message, and hung up.

I had my drink before the ice melted, and then made a couple of more calls that added just a little bit more to the pile of knowledge I was building up. That left one thing more to do. The toughest thing of all. When I went outside and flagged a cab, I breathed a fervent prayer to the gods who have charge of all good things for Lacey.

NINE of the more crummy dives I visited in vain. In the tenth I found him. "Winks" Carey is his name, so called because his left eyelid flutters almost constantly. And so does his warped little brain a whole lot of the time. He saw me come in and tried to duck, but I caught him, shoved him in a chair and ordered a glass of the establishment's bitter beer for each of us. I let mine stand, my stomach being allergic to the hops that kind of stuff was made out of, and waited until he had gulped his down. I shoved mine at him and leaned my arms on the butt scarred little table.

"Who's new in town, Winks?" I asked. "Anybody special?"

He looked blank, and shrugged.

"Nobody I know about, Lacey," he said in a low whining voice.

I sat and stared at him. Grinning a little, he tried to look away, but he couldn't make it. Winks Carey had more than once been sixty per cent of a case I was working on. I mean, in story books, and in the movies, the detective solves it all with his own brains alone. With maybe a crystal ball tossed in for good measure. But in real life, it's different.

When you don't know something, and want to find it out, you go to guys who

Fugitive Father

can help you find out. To the under-crust floaters like Winks Carey. Guys who see all of the seamy side of life, and know just about all, too.

Every smart detective, private or police, has one or two such guys on tap to tell him things when he wants to know things. And they stay on tap because if they don't that particular gum-shoe can send them away for a long, long time, and sometimes even to the chair. Winks was one of the lads I kept on tap, and I had enough on him to ship him away for half a dozen normal lifetimes! Not sporting? Whoever said murder was sporting?

"Think some more, Winks," I said quietly, and watched him slop some beer as he lifted the glass to his weasel-like lips. "Nobody new in town, huh?"

He pulled the usual squirming act, but I just held him pinned with my eyes. As usual, he wilted.

"Well, there's a couple of mugs, Lacey," he said. "But—"

"Skip it!" I stopped him. "Maybe I would. I'm thinking of a very big guy with brown hair, but not much of it. His pal is an ape. They both have been in stir, and are in town looking for somebody. Well?"

Winks tried to avoid my eyes so's I couldn't see how scared he suddenly was. He wanted very much to duck answering but I wouldn't let him get off that easy.

"Your nose would stay clean," I said softly. "This would be just for myself. Okay, let's have it!"

"One is Chuck Sampson," he said in a low voice, while his nervous rat eyes darted all over the place. "Knew him a bit out on the Coast. A bad character, Lacey. He calls his pal Jack, but I never seen him before. Hit town yesterday. But I don't know where they're laying up, honest."

I nodded, and then let my face get really hard.

"I want to know where the guy they're looking for is laying up," I said evenly. "Good looking fellow, named Dixon. Would you know, Winks?"

The way his whole face suddenly seemed to flutter was answer enough for me. But I let him try to pass me the lie.

"They looking for somebody, Lacey?" he asked me. "I didn't hear anything about that."



RAISING my hand, I started to signal the waiter for more beer, but checked it. Time was a-fleeting, and I couldn't waste a minute of it. As a matter of fact, it was quite possible that I was already much, much too late. I reached over and closed my right

hand about one of Winks' skinny wrists. And gave him just enough to hurt a little.

"Maybe I've used you all I can, Carey," I said with a grin. "Maybe I should get me another boy, and let the cops have you. Guys who lose their memory I just can't bother having around. Know what I mean, Winks?"

He knew well enough, and his whole face looked like it was going to fall off if he didn't cry, or something. I tightened my grip, and he managed to pull himself together.

"Sampson wants to know, too," he said in a trembling whisper. "But I don't rat on nobody. I don't rat, see? If I told you, Sampson would con I did, and I'd be a dead duck."

My urge was to shoot up my hand and bat his head out from between his pointed ears. But pain really doesn't mean much to scum like Winks Carey. They're so hopped up most of the time they only feel half of it. Also, they pass out too quickly. Fear is the only thing they really understand. So I went right to work to make Winks understand, fast.

"Okay, have it your way," I said. "But the boys in blue are going to love having you, Winks. All the things you can tell them, that they want to know. And they'll be so grateful, too. The nicest cell they have, and all your meals in your room, too. Almost like a hotel. Of course, they can't give you your daily snow, but after a few days without it, you'll maybe be cured."

"Lacey, for Pete's sake!"

Winks' voice was like a whimpering weasel. The very thought of a day without his "pep" shots ripped the nerve right out of him. He clawed at my

hand, and the tears started to ooze out of his slitted eyes. I just shook my head once, to let him know.

"I heard it was a place out on Dunbar," he croaked between the tear drops. "On the lake. There's an old shack on the south point. But, I just heard, see? I ain't sure. I'd like to help you, straight, Lacey."

I let go of his wrist, and he shut up. I slipped my hand in my pocket, took out a ten and put it on the table.

"Thanks, Winks," I said. "Nobody will ever know, because this one is personal. Very personal. Go buy yourself a ton of the stuff, and stay mum to everybody. Catch?"

He nodded, and clawed the bill into his fist. As I got up I thought I saw a funny look in his eyes, but I was too busy with other thoughts to pay much attention to it. I just signaled the sleazy waiter that Winks wanted more slops, and walked out of the place.

Once out in the open air I breathed deep, because it had been stuffy inside. With the address of this Dixon's hide-out I was all set in a way. But not all the way. I mean, the picture I had maybe wasn't the true picture. I didn't have proof that Dixon was Tony's killer. Not that I really needed proof. I could probably get it once I had him on the floor and was slapping him with my gun barrel.

However, there was not only the matter of revenge for Tony, there was also the item of cash for Chet Lacey. Sentiment is fine, and I think I have as much of it as the next man. But it takes cash to pay bills. And I've got lots of bills.

So I fought off the natural urge to barge straight out to that lakeside spot with the safety catch off my gun, and instead flagged a cab and took it to a Drive-Ur-Self place where I'm known. I got a car there, and drove it around to the Caldwell Hotel. All the time I was sweating blood, and cursing myself for bothering to gather up all the slack in the case. Still it had to be done. I mean, maybe after it was all over the cops would ask questions, and I wanted to be sure to have all the answers.

Well, I parked the car and went into the hotel, and over to the desk. The man behind it spun the register book around, but I shook my head.

"Mr. George Hobson Harris," I said. "What room, please?"

THE lad opened his mouth, and then shut it quickly.

"Mr. Harris isn't in, sir," he said. "Here! Stop it!"

The last was because I was spinning back the pages. I spotted Harris' name, and room. It was Four-Seventeen. I closed the book, and gave him an apologetic grin.

"Sorry, just a bad habit," I said. "When do you expect Mr. Harris in? It's important."

"Why . . . why, I couldn't say, sir," was the reply I got.

I shrugged, and started to turn away. Then I decided, why bother sneaking out and around to the delivery entrance, and up the service elevator? There was an easier way. I looked at the clerk, and gave him a worried frown.

"That's not good," I said. "His daughter has had a bad accident, and I'm trying to get in touch with him. Oh well!"

"Just a minute, sir!" the clerk cut me off. "I'll—I'll call his room. It's possible I didn't see Mr. Harris come in."

"Yes, could be," I murmured, and lighted a cigarette while he used the phone.

When he hung up his face looked just a little bit silly.

"Mr. Harris says come right up, sir," he said. "I'm sorry, I really thought he was out."

"I know," I said, going away. "One of those things."

If he called out the room number, I didn't hear. I rode the elevator up to four, and walked along the badly lighted hallway to Four-Seventeen, and rapped on the door. I had to wait about five seconds before it came to me muffled.

"Come in!"

I went in, and I wanted to laugh, almost. George Hobson Harris kicked the door shut behind me, and there he stood with a cannon in his hand, and a half a dozen different expressions on his face. It was really quite a gun. So big he almost had to hold it with both hands. If it went off it would blow out the wall!

"Who are you? What about my daughter? Is she ill?"

"No, she isn't, Harris," I said, moving only my mouth muscles. "My guess is that she's all right. At the house not answering the phone, or the door bell. I want to talk to you."

"But the clerk downstairs said she

had an accident."

It was almost pitiful. He didn't even see my hand cut down edgewise. The only thing he knew was that his cannon was suddenly on the rug with my foot on it, and he was shaking hands with thin air.

"Oh! So you're a friend of that devil?"

"Shut up, and relax, Harris!" I snapped at him. "I'm trying to help you out of a mess. Sit down. Got a drink around here?"

"A—a drink?"

"Then just sit down," I said a little more gently, and pushed him into a chair.

I waited a few seconds for him to try and pull himself together a little. At least Mary Ellen hadn't lied about one thing. The old boy really didn't look in good health. The company that carried his insurance wasn't going to have very long before they'd have to pay up. I really felt sorry for the old geezer, but business is business with me. I picked up his cannon and took another chair.

"Now, tell me," I began on him, "when did you find out that a fellow named Dixon, had been secretly married to your daughter before he went to prison?"

His watery eyes almost flew out of their sockets he was that surprised. So, that was that. My guess, plus a couple of Denver phone calls, was correct. I leaned forward and touched him lightly on the knee.

"Your daughter hired me to straighten out a mess for her, Mr. Harris," I said. "And then changed her mind. In between, though, a little shoe-shine boy was murdered. He was a friend of mine. So, right now—I'm working for nothing. Do you want to tell me your side of it, or shall I go on working for nothing?"

I had given it to him straight so that he wouldn't make any wrong guesses. He didn't. Whatever emotions he was experiencing faded away, and the well known glint of a shrewd businessman came into his eyes. He fixed those eyes on mine.

"How much?" he asked. Then, "Your name's Lacey, isn't it?"

I NODDED, and asked him how he guessed. His answer was what I'd figured for myself.

"I accidentally saw your name and phone number on the phone pad in my daughter's room," he told me. "I looked it up, and it said in the book that you were a private detective."

He stopped, and his eyes seemed to get a little shrewder.

"You haven't answered me, Mr. Lacey," he said. "How much?"

"Five thousand dollars," I replied right back, and didn't bat an eye.

And, neither did he.

"For exactly what, Mr. Lacey?" he wanted to know.

I got sore for an instant. He was in no spot to demand the particulars. On the contrary, he should be on his knees, and maybe reaching for my hand to kiss. But I curbed the anger, because he was still only a prospective client.

"Remove Dixon," I said bluntly. "So that neither you, nor your daughter, will be bothered by him again. Also, the newspapers won't get the true story."

He winced when I spoke the last, because he knew exactly what I was thinking about. He had one choice, and he made it.

"All right, five thousand dollars," he said. "Now, what are you going to do?"

"That's my business," I said with a shake of my head. "But before I do anything, I'm going to listen to your part of the story. Don't leave out anything, Mr. Harris. I still haven't cashed your check!"

He blinked for a second, puzzled. Then the light dawned. I could see it in his eyes, as he began his tale. It was rather lengthy, and I had to pump with a lot of questions before I got it all. To give you the high points, his story was this.

He and his wife had adopted Mary Ellen when she was six. His wife had died when the kid was thirteen. He had carried on, and Mary Ellen had grown into a very pretty, very wild, but very affectionate young lady. He'd never stopped loving her as his very own daughter, and so forth.

A little over a year ago Mary Ellen had started to slump. She wasn't her old chipper self, and so forth. He couldn't figure it, much less understand why she begged him to sell his business, and the two of them move away. Anyway, he had given in and the pair of them came to our fair town.

Everything seemed fine until two days ago. Bingo! Something was wrong with Mary Ellen. She was on the skids again, but she insisted everything was fine. Then he had found a letter in her room. From a guy named, Dixon. It mentioned how this Dixon had married Mary Ellen, and that she had run out on him. He was very sad, and needed a few thousand to make him feel less sad. If not, he'd just have to come out into the open, and claim his secret bride.

Well, Harris was shocked, and all that sort of thing. But, as usual, instead of confronting Mary Ellen with the letter, and getting all the low-down, he decided to tie it all up, himself. He wrote to Dixon at the General Delivery address given and made an appointment to meet him in the Caldwell. Then he told dear Mary Ellen that he was taking a business trip to Chicago.

He met Dixon the next morning after he had supposedly left for Chicago. He was shown marriage proof, and was quoted a big price to pay for that proof. He said he would consider it, and told Dixon to meet him at the Caldwell later in the day.

That noon he had seen Mary Ellen go into the lobby of my office building and give something to Tony. Remembering the name and address he'd seen on her phone pad he had checked with the phone book right then and there. Instead of going on up to my place he had waited for Tony to come down. And had talked to him.

He had heard the shots, and seen Tony slump. A sudden touch of stark fear had sent him scurrying. He had been sure that the shots had been for him. But he couldn't understand why. And the thing suddenly becoming too much for him, he had beat it back to the Caldwell and holed up, leaving word at the desk that he wasn't in. Dixon, of course, wouldn't have stopped at the desk because he knew his room number. When I came up he had thought it was Dixon pulling a fast one. And he had taken from his bag the old cannon he had neglected to take out before Dixon's first visit.

"I know I shouldn't have run like a rabbit when that little fellow was shot," he finished up. "But . . . Well, I'm not used to that sort of thing, and I'm afraid I simply acted on impulse. But . . . but . . .?"

"But, what?" I helped him as he stumbled.

"I didn't see him, Mr. Lacey, but I'm sure it was Dixon who tried to shoot me. But why? I simply can't understand why he would want to kill me. I—I would have paid him, even if it took my last cent. And another thing. Why did Mary Ellen hire you, and then not want to hire you? Frankly, sir, I'm terribly confused!"

CHAPTER V

Bullets for a Pay-Off



GEORGE HOBSON HARRIS was a whole lot more than just terribly confused. He was trying to play in the wrong league. You don't handle blackmail, and murder, like you handle men's shirts, ladies' underthings, and so forth!

"Dixon suddenly got bright," I told him bluntly. "He tried to nail you, and missed. So he threatened your daughter, just in case she had gone for help. Which was me. Next time he didn't plan to miss you. And I think he's found out something else, too. So he's taking his time about getting in touch with you again."

"What has he found out?"

It was obvious he didn't know about Sampson, so I didn't take time to enlighten him. I just stood up, and straightened my tie.

"Maybe I'll get it in Dixon's own words," I told him. "I'm going to pay a call on him, now. You stay here, and remain out to everybody. I'll phone you, and you'll be able to recognize my voice."

"No, Mr. Lacey! Please!"

I looked at him sharply. Harris and his adopted daughter could sure show terror! He came over to me and clutched at my sleeve.

"Please, I'll go with you!" he said. "I'm—I'm an old man, Mr. Lacey. I can't stand much of this sort of thing. And, I've had too much as it is. Anyway, I can't stay here. He—he might come through the window, or something. Besides, I want to see what you do to him."

I started to shake my head, and then suddenly changed my mind. After all, there was no guarantee that Dixon was going to be at that lake cottage when I got there.

Maybe my hunches were all wrong and Dixon was really going to come after the old geezer. Then too, there was the matter of a five-thousand-dollar check I was to get when I had delivered the goods. Yes, I thought, it might be a good idea to keep Harris with me, so that his writing hand wouldn't get hurt.

"All right," I said, and gave him a hard look. "But, you're to do just as I say, when I say it. Understand?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Lacey. And, thank you."

There are three or four ways to get out to that lake, so I drove out the one that would take me close to the south point. I knew the location of the shack Winks Carey mentioned, and knew that any one in it had a command view of all approaches, including the one by water.

It was a fairly well built affair originally put up for the use of transient campers. But during the war the city fathers had ruled the lake an emergency water supply and had guards around it right up to VJ Day. Turning it back to the enjoyment of the taxpayers was just another of those things the big shots hadn't got around to doing, yet. So everybody was still steering clear of it, except for guys like Dixon. For him, it was just what the doctor ordered. Peaceful, and quiet, and nobody around to bother him. At least, not yet!

A half mile along the turn off road I eased the car around behind some bushes, and killed the ignition, and lights.

"Here's what you do, Harris," I said, and meant it. "Park right here until I get back. Don't move, don't let out a peep, no matter what you see, or hear. Do any different, and you stand a fair chance to wake up dead. Do I make myself clear?"

Extra rough words, of course, but I wanted to plug all holes I could. I still wasn't too sure of my plans, but I didn't want to risk Harris going haywire on impulse, and perhaps messing up the parade. He vowed that he understood, and wouldn't move, or speak, no matter what. I said that was fine, and got out of the car.

Using a small pocket flashlight, I held

it on the tire marks leading off the road while I scuffed them up. Then I trained the light on the bushes, and made sure that the car couldn't be seen behind them. Then I snapped off the light and started my little journey.

It wasn't very far from midnight when I was crouched down on the lake shore and squinting up through some bushes at the old camping shack. A half moon helped some, but not too much. I could see the shack all right, but there were so many shadows around it I couldn't tell whether one of them might not be Dixon standing guard outside. If he *had* learned that Sampson was after him, he might be standing guard outside at that.

Anyway, I hugged my position for ten minutes or more, straining eyes and ears hard. My imagination went on a holiday, so of course I saw and heard all kinds of things that just weren't so. But after ten minutes I started to slowly circle the place just to make sure. I mean, if Dixon wasn't inside or out, then I'd go inside and wait. That would help my little plan of action a whole lot.

HOWEVER, when I had inched around to the other side of the shack the old eyes spotted the faint pin point of light. I studied it for a moment, and realized that it was coming through a knothole in one of the boards. But it was from some kind of a light inside, and that meant that somebody was inside, too. It was hard not to toss caution to the winds, but I won out over myself and crawled on my hands and knees slower than I've ever traveled in my life.

A lucky break put a bush close to that side of the shack, I eased most of me behind it, and then put my eye to the knothole. It was right in line with a table. There was a lighted candle, and a gun on the table.

Seated at the table, writing a letter it looked like, was a lad who had been good looking once. He didn't look that way now. He needed a hair cut, even though he was more or less fresh out of prison. He had a scraggly black beard, and had that prison look, plus the escaped con look, that can spoil any pretty face. It was Dixon, all right, because he fit the description Harris had given to me.

Fair enough. But now the hard part.

I think I could have nailed him right through the knothole, but I've never bushwhacked anybody in my life. And I didn't want to begin even on a rat such as he. No, I had to get inside, and give him a fair chance to use his gun there on the table. The back door seemed the best bet. If the back door was unlocked, which I didn't think it was.

And then, suddenly, came a sound!

Maybe not a sound. Maybe just my sixth sense on the alert. Anyway, it was something, and self-preservation made me jerk back from the knothole. I crouched motionless, and heard nothing but my pounding pumper. And then I did hear something. A partly muffled voice that was like a fire alarm bell going off in my head.

"Don't grab for it, Dixon! You'd lose!"

In nothing flat I had my eye back to the knothole. Dixon was still at the table, but he wasn't writing any more. He had dropped his pencil, and his hand was frozen in midair about six inches from the butt of the gun on the table. His face was twisted in fear, and rage, and he was staring glitter-eyed at something to my right. Something I couldn't see. Then the something spoke again. The familiar voice of the great big guy named Sampson.

"Surprised, aren't you, Dixon? Didn't think I knew about you and the Harris dame, did you? No! You wouldn't look up your old pals, would you?"

As Sampson spoke he moved into my vision and sat down at the other end of the table. He was smiling, but he wore the cruelest expression I ever want to see. He didn't even pick up Dixon's gun, or knock it onto the floor. He just pointed his own at Dixon and grinned. Dixon tried to grin back, but it was horrible. He almost frothed at the mouth he was in such a hurry to get the words out.

"You got me wrong, Chuck!" he said. "I'm hot, see? I couldn't look you up. Not so soon, anyway. You got me wrong, pal."

"Not any more, I haven't," the big guy whipped at him. "Not any more. Where's the dough, Dixon? Come on! Where's the dough?"

Dixon licked his lips, and started slobbering at the corners of his mouth. He even lifted his frozen hand a fraction, as though to ward off the bullet when

Sampson pulled the trigger.

"Wait, Chuck, wait a minute!" he panted. "I was keeping it for all of us, see? But I had to let it go to the guy outside who helped me with the crush-out. That's the truth. I got five years, see? I couldn't take five years, even for the measly six thousand we picked up from that job. Believe me, Chuck! Look, did I ever rat on you, pal?"

Sampson's voice was so soft, so deadly soft that I almost didn't catch it.

"So you haven't got the dough, Dixon? Jack, and I, do a year for nothing? For nothing!"

"Chuck! Wait, Chuck! I can pay it. Let me tell you! So help me, I can pay you. The whole thing, if you'll only listen. Give me a break, Chuck."

"A slug in your dirty pan, I'll give you!" Sampson said softly. "But, I'll wait a bit. Go ahead. Spill it, and make it good."

Dixon started to talk, but I only half listened. I was in a spot. I might get Dixon through the knothole, but I wouldn't be able to get Sampson, too. No, not even if I shoved aside my principles about bushwhacking people. And with just Dixon dead, it wouldn't be enough. Not now. He was spilling out to Sampson all about Mary Ellen, and how things were going to be, if he just worked it right.

YES, I was in a spot, and I promised myself I'd do all sorts of things when I got my hands on that little snake, Winks Carey, if I ever did. It wasn't even a bet that he'd tried to cover himself by also telling Sampson what he'd told me. And I mentally kicked myself hard for wasting that time going to the Caldwell. I should have come right out here, and gone to the Caldwell later—to make my deal with Harris.

But, I hadn't. I was there at the knothole watching two rats, instead of one. It was the kind of a spot I didn't like. And then, suddenly, when the Lacey brain clicked as it often does in such situations, I decided it was maybe the kind of spot I like, after all. Why waste my bullets? Bullets that the cops might just accidentally trace, and start asking embarrassing questions. Much better another way, if it would only work. And it had to work!

Reaching down with my left hand I fumbled around until I felt a good sized

stick. A stone might have been even better, but there was only a good sized stick, so it had to do. Bracing myself I drew the stick back and threw it hard so that it banged up against the shack boards about ten feet to my left. The action almost pulled my eye from the knothole, but not quite. I saw what happened.

The instant of the bang Sampson jerked his head around that way. So did Dixon, but he cut it short, and in a flash movement dropped his hand to his gun, jerked it up and pulled the trigger. The slug hit Sampson in the chest, and I thought he would topple. He didn't. He blinked as he fired his own gun.

"Punk!"

That was all I heard him say. Dixon was shooting again. Wild and like crazy. I saw Sampson's body jerk four times, and blood was gushing from where one of Dixon's bullets got him in the neck. But he didn't go over.

A twisted smile on his lips, he fired twice more, and at point blank range. Dixon's body slumped to the floor, and an instant after that Sampson's gun slid from his fingers. And with that twisted grin still on his face he went crashing down, too, bringing table and candle down on top of him.

Fifteen minutes later I snapped on my flash beam, and saw Harris cringing and glassy-eyed in my rented car. I got in behind the wheel and booted the car into life. I snapped on the headlights and toiled out from behind the bushes onto the turn off road. It was not until then Harris could find his tongue.

"Did—did I hear shots? Did—did you shoot him?"

"No," I said. "But Dixon is still very

dead. You haven't anything to worry about now. Except writing a check."

He didn't reply, so I slipped some crumpled papers from my pocket and let him have a quick look by the light of the dash.

"These when you've written that check," I said bluntly. "I took them off Dixon. The proof he showed you that he was Mary Ellen's husband. I should charge you extra, but I'm not that kind of a guy."

"I—I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Lacey," he finally came forth. "It's—it's like a terrible, a frightful nightmare. I'm still all confused. Particularly as to why he tried to kill me? I just can't—"

"Your will!" I cut in wearily. "Left everything to Mary Ellen, haven't you?"

"Why yes! Yes, I have. But I—good grief!"

"Exactly," I said. "After seeing you he got even a better idea. Without you around he'd get *all* of it in big chunks from Mary Ellen. Just as simple as a little murder, for a guy like him. And he almost got away with it, too. You must have moved a little at the wrong time."

Harris shivered violently, and made rattling sounds in his throat.

"Incredible!" he finally managed. "Like an incredible dream. Drive me to my home, will you please, Mr. Lacey? My poor little Mary Ellen! I must see her at once."

"And to write that check," I finished when he left it hanging.

"Yes, yes, of course! Your check!"

I didn't get sore at the reduced eagerness in his voice. I just drove the rented car along the road back to town!



Chet Lacey takes the case of a lovely suspected murderess, and makes photographs point the clues in *MURDER MUSTN'T MISS*, another swift-moving mystery by *ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN* next issue!



Nicolai's knife arm flailed savagely

D. P. FROM BROOKLYN

By O. B. MYERS

When Major Parke runs into a fellow named Joe and makes a deal, he takes a hand in a complicated game of wits!

I HAVE often heard people say that they had experienced the sensation of being followed, as if some sixth sense warned them of the presence of a shadow on their trail. I do not believe in any such sixth sense. When I have been tailed—which has happened more than once—I either discovered it through the shadow making himself too obvious, or I never knew a thing about it until later.

Yet as I changed from a local to an express at Fourteenth Street, and permitted myself to be swept into the uptown train like a drop in a human flood, and there jammed tightly in the aisle, I had something distinctly resembling that sensation, only in reverse, as it were. Rather than a feeling that I was being followed, I felt that I was being avoided—that there was someone near me who was trying to keep me from fol-

lowing him.

This was absurd, I told myself—sheer imagination. And yet the feeling persisted. I lowered the corner of my newspaper and let my eyes wander through the forest of heads and shoulders that surrounded me. Tall men, short men, tired men, women with hats and without hats, sweaty faces, solemn faces, gay faces—everything but a face familiar to me.

My eye was caught by a purple shirt—a loud, irascible purple that should never have been allowed to emerge from the vat. I seemed to have a vague recollection of noticing that purple shirt on the local, or perhaps it had been on the platform before boarding the express. I looked again.

The man stood in the vestibule of the car, packed tight in the crowd. His body was fixed at right angles to my gaze, perhaps six feet away, but his head was turned in the opposite direction, so that I could not see his face. Purposely? I waited, watching. The train screeched around a curve. Purple shirt, with the other riders, swayed left, then swayed back again. But his head did not turn. He was apparently staring resolutely into the blank wall of the vestibule.

I could see his shoulder, narrow and bony under the shirt. His hair, black and shining, needed trimming. I got an imperfect glimpse of the line of his jaw below the ear. Sometimes you recognize an intimate friend more quickly from the back than from the front, but in this case the rule did not hold.

Doubtless he was not an intimate friend at all—perhaps a complete stranger. Yet there was just a suggestion of familiarity there that tickled my memory, kept me watching. Perhaps some ex-G.I., I thought, into whom I had bumped occasionally in the course of a couple of years in Europe, and who was now bashful about speaking to a former officer.

I raised my newspaper and read a couple of paragraphs. When I glanced toward the vestibule again, I thought that head was just turning away. Had he been looking at me? My curiosity was piqued. I determined to get a look at his face.

THE train ground to a halt at Grand Central and the doors slid open. A river of bodies flowed out onto the

crowded platform, carrying with it purple shirt, still firmly facing away from me. The vagaries of the jostling mob left me a dozen feet behind him on the platform. With hundreds of others he was making for the stairs. If he turned to look behind him, he did it so quickly that I did not catch him. I tried to shorten the distance between us, but everybody else was in a hurry, too, and resented with their elbows any attempt to push ahead. I lost ground instead of gaining it.

At the head of a long flight of crowded steps I almost lost him. Instead of turning left toward the station, he turned right in an arcade toward Lexington Avenue.

As I rounded after him, now bucking an incoming flow of commuters from the east, he turned his head. Not completely, but just enough for me to catch his profile in the mirrors behind a milk bar on the right. I got a brief glimpse, enough to convince me that I had known this man before, but still not enough to tell me who he was.

There was now no question about his haste. Emerging onto the avenue, he disregarded traffic lights entirely, darting across between trucks and taxicabs, almost running. I followed at risk of life and limb. He was striding rapidly down the side street toward Third Avenue. There were not many people here. I broke into a trot. But before I had halved the distance, a hand seized my sleeve.

I turned my head impatiently to see a pair of flashing dark eyes, level with my own, in a big homely face that was split by a grin as wide as the Brooklyn Bridge.

"Joe!" I cried, halting abruptly.

He seemed less surprised than I.

"Major!" he grinned, pumping my hand. He pronounced it with a long A, and the J in a French—"Mah-gshore," with the stress on the last syllable. "It is big pleasure to see you again."

"Pleasure is right! But look—I was just chasing somebody. See that purple shirt, down the street there?"

Joe flicked a careless glance toward the corner, where the shirt was just disappearing.

"It is only Nicolai. Do not distress yourself, Major."

"Nicolai?" I repeated. Then suddenly I remembered. "O-o-oh, yes—Nick!

The Hungarian boy, in the motor pool. The Pfc. who always went A.W.O.L. with a jeep and always got caught. But that's funny. Why did he run away from me like that?"

Joe smiled steadily. "It is not you he runs away from, Major. It is perhaps that he has seen me, in the same train."

I began to get the feeling that there was something here beneath the surface, but dunked my curiosity. The purple shirt had vanished. I shrugged and turned to Joe.

"You scoundrel! Long time since I fired you, eh? I guess this calls for a drink." I looked around. "Let's go over to the Commodore."

"Ah, no, Major," he protested, still smiling. "The drink, yes. But at the Commodore, no! Please, at the Commodore, I am not—er—comfortable. Come. On Third Avenue we find a good place."

Under the clatter of the El conversation was impossible. My mind reverted to an airfield in Germany in the spring of '45. It was April when the Fighter Group moved up to Langensalza, and we found the usual pretty mess. The Germans were smart at demolition—everything was standing, but nothing worked.

My first job was to get water in the pipes, heat in the stoves, and electricity in the wires. With my G.I.'s up to their necks repairing airplanes, trucks, guns, jeeps, radios, and ground equipment, the only answer was local civilian labor, but here the language difficulty was terrific.

We gave preference to displaced persons over Germans, but the D.P.'s were mingled French, Russians, Dutch, Italians, Belgians, and Slavs. All eager to work, but it always seemed to turn out that the ones who spoke enough English to understand an order knew nothing about wiring or plumbing or generators or carpentry.

It was, I think, the second morning when Steve Hatcher, my quartermaster officer, came into my doorless, windowless office.

"There's a D.P. out here, Major Parke," he told me. "His papers say he's French, but he speaks English. Says he used to live in Brooklyn. Speaks German, too, and several other languages. Claims to know this neighborhood pretty well. He might make a good civilian straw boss."

I was scratching my head over a 4-1

report, wondering where the next day's 40,000 gallons of 100-octane fuel were coming from.

"Hire him, if you want," I replied, hardly looking up. "At least he can interpret, can't he? What's his name?"

Steve grinned. "There's a mouthful of consonants on his papers. He says call him Joe."

JOE turned out to be a diamond in the rough—but I mean rough. He took the whole civilian labor problem under his wing, and ran it like an autocrat. Before noon that day he had set up what amounted to an employment office in the guard building by the gate; a long line waited patiently outside.

Inside, behind a bigger desk than I had myself, sat Joe, already wearing a salvaged American overseas cap. He disposed of applicants with the finished air of personnel manager of a larger corporation. He examined their papers, asked a few questions in one language or another, and made his decision.

Either he turned the worker over to an assistant—oh, yes, he had two assistants before the end of his first day, and later on many more—or he pointed sternly to the door.

"*Heraus!*" He said it like a king dismissing a vassal, and he brooked no pleas or arguments in protest.

What's more, he saw that his workers produced results. Within a few days bulbs lighted when you turned the switch, water came out of the spigots, hangar doors were repaired, machinery hummed in the shops, furniture appeared in the officers' quarters. He knew one German from another. He located the man who had been chief engineer on the field for five years previous, brought him out, and put him to work repairing the same steam plant he had just sabotaged.

Joe was a man of connections. He had a friend, or at least he knew someone, everywhere. His contacts were scattered across the breadth of Europe, dotted throughout that vast, underground net that invisibly enmeshes the lower levels of continental society, and sometimes the higher levels, too. A truck driver here, a *Maquisard* in Lyons, a minor official in a German freight yard, a black market *parfumeur* in Paris. His circle of friends was truly cosmopolitan.

But they were his friends only so long

as he found friendship advantageous. Each contact was carefully weighed in his mind, and had its price. This one was worth a carton of cigarettes—that one would not be deceived for less than a dozen cartons, with a forged trip ticket thrown in. The woman who hid and fed him, when he escaped from Buchenwald, he would double-cross in a flash—but only if he gained enough to repay the loss of her future usefulness.

By means of favors he was continually making new connections. He lost old ones wholly without rancor, or meanness. Each was purely a business relationship, and seemed to be accepted as such even by those he bilked.

Joe knew how to accomplish things that rated as impossible. With the local industry practically at a standstill, he got my battle jacket dyed for me somewhere in town, for a price of ten marks and a pack of cigarettes. When I gave him the ten marks and two packs of cigarettes, he accepted them with a satisfied smile.

"Thank you, Major, sir."

"Thank you, Joe. . . . But listen." I stopped him as he turned away. "Those cigarettes are for you, personally. Not to sell, or exchange—especially to Germans. You know the regulations."

"Oh, yes, Major. I understand."

He did understand, too. Perfectly. But it made no difference.

Steve Hatcher walked in one morning.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to fire Joe, Major," he said.

"Fire Joe! Good God, what will we do without him?"

"I don't know," grumbled Steve, and went on to tell me what he had discovered. Joe had set up an elaborate system of bribery and illicit trade in American merchandise. From each civilian he hired, he demanded either two cakes of soap or a package of cigarettes. When they asked where these were to be obtained, he suggested bartering with the souvenir-hungry soldiers; cameras, pistols, music-boxes, sheets, trinkets, anything. It was up to them.

Thus Joe himself, without dealing directly with a G.I., was amassing a store of PX rations which would buy him a hundred new connections. The only flaw was that everyone knew about it—the hundred-odd civilians he had already hired, plus the majority of the G.I.'s.

I pointed out this last fact to Joe,

when I had called him into the office, and then told him abruptly:

"You're fired."

"Yes, sir," he said, so unperturbed that I was afraid he did not understand what I meant.

"You're through—finished! *C'est votre congé*. I'm sorry to see you go, but I absolutely have to do it."

"Yes, Major, I understand. Also I am sorry. *Au revoir, alors*."

THAT was the last I had seen of Joe for more than a year, and it was in my mind as we entered a dingy bar in the middle of the block and put our feet on the brass rail. The bartender nodded as he set out a bottle of rye and two glasses. I lifted mine.

"Well, Joe—*Tervis!*"

Joe's eye gleamed. "*Votre santé!*" he replied.

"Look, Joe. Did you say you were in that same train?" I asked, refilling the glasses. "Did you see me?"

Joe nodded. "Then why didn't you speak to me?" I demanded.

"I also was watching Nicolai." Joe's eyes avoided mine. "And besides, if we speak, Major, I was afraid I would ask you a favor—something I do not wish to do."

I could not help being intrigued by this approach. I added some water to the rye, which had apparently been distilled from incendiary grenades soaked in hydraulic fluid.

"Well, maybe I owe you one, Joe. What is it?"

"No, no, you owe me nothing at all. Because you fired me, you think? That was absolutely correct, and the best favor you could do me, Major. I went then to Wiesbaden, in June, where I was employed by Military Government. I make many friends there in Wiesbaden."

I grinned. "I can imagine. Many marks, too, eh? And you must have gotten your passport straightened out, too, or you wouldn't be here now. Was that difficult?"

He demonstrated the difficulty by giving me a brief sketch of his early life, part of which I had heard before.

Born in Paris of a Spanish father and an Italian mother, he had spent most of his boyhood in mangy circuses which travelled the Balkans and eastern Germany. He had reached Brooklyn as a stowaway at the age of nineteen, and had

lived for eleven years in what he described as the Paradise of cities.

In 1939 something had caused him to ship as a deckhand on a tramp freighter. He was not very clear about the cause, probably the defection of some influential friend. He jumped ship in Hamburg, and in the fall the war caught him in Germany.

He had taken out his first papers in Brooklyn, but had never gotten around to completing his American citizenship, and anyway he had not all his papers with him. Doubtless his departure had been abrupt. The Nazis promptly clapped him into a labor battalion. The war years in Germany must have been a see-saw of affluence and despair.

At one time he was in the concentration camp at Buchenwald, but talked his way out through some miracle of bribery, lies, intimidations, and profitable confusions. For such a man the straightening out of a passport that had never existed was a simple feat.

I returned to the subject of the favor he had been thinking of asking me, but again he refused to name it.

"All right, Joe." I imitated his shrug. "I wouldn't have done it for you anyway." I lifted my glass. "*Derrière la cravate!*"

He responded with, "*Skol!*" and we drank.

There was a certain gleam in his eye as he set down the glass. This was the sort of fencing at which he was expert. It seemed advisable to outline my defenses.

"You understand, Joe, I'm a respectable, married civilian now. I'm no longer a group commander careening across a conquered country, with power to seize anything and anybody I choose, making and enforcing my own rules. 'To the victor belong the spoils' was rule enough in Germany last spring, but it doesn't work for five minutes here in New York. No, I'm supposed to be settled down now. I've got a wife and family, an apartment, and a job. My wife and daughter happen to be in the White Mountains on vacation at the moment, but I'm still a married man. You understand, Joe?"

He nodded in agreement, and looked into his glass.

"You have also a car, Mah-gshore?"

"Yes," I admitted. "A Packard convertible coupe. It's eight years old, but

it hasn't been driven much, and still looks good."

"Ah-h!" He did not raise his eyes. "It looks good?"

I swished the ice in my glass. "You need a car, Joe?"

He threw up both hands in denial. "But, Major, you find it impossible to grant my favor, in any event, no?"

I chuckled. "That's what I said." I added more water to my rye, and emptied the glass slowly down my throat. Then I heard myself ask, "What night do you need the car, Joe?"

His mobile features expressed astonishment. "But how do you know it is at night that I need a car?"

I grinned at him. "The kind of escapades you get mixed up in always require darkness, don't they?"

HE CHUCKLED appreciatively. "Perhaps, Major. Well, it is tomorrow night that I require the favor you will not grant."

I said nothing while he measured out two more slugs of liquor and dumped them into our glasses. I added still more water.

"*Salud!*"

"*A la votre!*"

I made interlocking rings of moisture on the bar with my glass. Regardless of Joe's disclaimer, my conscience still pricked me when I remembered firing him.

"Is Nicolai in on this?" I asked suddenly.

Joe's face darkened. "He tries to beat me to it."

"That settles it," I declared. "I never did like that bird. As I say, my family's away. I have nothing to do tomorrow evening."

Joe pulled me toward the end of the bar, out of earshot of our neighbors. There he began pouring into my ear a long, complicated tale of a poor widow who had once befriended him, who had suffered indescribable hardships at the hands of the Nazis, and escaping to America, had contrived to hang on to only a few trinkets.

I interrupted him. "Why tell me all this bilge, Joe? It's nothing but a fancy lie. Don't waste time embroidering it."

His eye gleamed with delight. "You are right, Major. But you are a respectable man now. I must tell you a respectable story."

"Why tell me anything? Just the time, and the place."

He nodded thoughtfully. "It is better that way perhaps. Then you will be involved in nothing that is distasteful to you."

He gave me an address on Schermerhorn Street, in Brooklyn. I agreed to meet him there at ten o'clock. We walked arm in arm to the subway entrance, where he bid me *au revoir* French fashion, with both hands about my shoulders. Not until I unlocked the door of my apartment uptown, later, did I discover that my watch was gone.

It was so typical of Joe that I could only grin ruefully. He wouldn't borrow twenty bucks, but he would lift your watch without a qualm. The loss, fortunately, hurt nothing but my pocket-book. I used a wrist watch in the army, but disliking them on civilians, I had paid thirty-odd dollars for this one on my return from Europe, and could easily replace it. It would hardly pawn for more than ten. But then it occurred to me that it was not the dollar value that Joe was interested in. This was his method of insuring that I would show up the next evening.

I allowed ample time to drive across the bridge and into downtown Brooklyn, so I arrived in Schermerhorn Street a few minutes before ten. This had once been a high-class residential section, but had long since deteriorated, the brownstone fronts in the middle of the block into shoddy rooming houses, at the corners into candy stores, bars, or plumbers' shops.

The number he had given me, a two-story building, had once been a stable, housing no doubt the steeds and private carriages of some distinguished family of the gaslight era. Now the big double doors on the street were closed and blank. Upstairs, in two front windows, light filtered weakly through dingy curtains. I parked on the opposite side and waited.

A couple of times I saw the curtains drawn back, and vague, unrecognizable silhouettes in the windows. Then Joe's voice called softly across the street, in his inimitable accent.

"*Mah-gshore!*"

With neither greeting nor explanation, he led me directly into a small door at the side of the large one, along a passage, and up a narrow flight of stairs

where the aroma of garlic was almost strong enough to stumble over. At the top he pushed open a door, and a moment later I was standing in the front room while Joe performed introductions in a language I did not even recognize.

"They are very pleased to meet you," interpolated Joe in English, and then plunged back into that strange tongue.

An old man sat without speaking in a Morris chair with broken slats. Stringy gray hair fell over his ears, and the backs of his hands were blotched brown and yellow. His nose, once prominently hooked, had been smashed at the bridge, and on either side of this disfigurement two stony gray eyes, deep in their sockets, were opaque and mysterious. He watched me unblinkingly.

In the middle of the room stood a round table covered by a dirty cloth. The girl leaning indolently against it was all soft curves, which her short-sleeved sweater did little to conceal. Though not young, she gave an impression of being intensely alive. Her hair was a violent blue-black, and her full lips made a scarlet slash in her alabaster complexion.

Above high Slavic cheekbones her eyes were large, dark and liquid. She used them with deliberate effect, looking first at Joe and then at me without turning her head, letting her glance slide into the corners under the long, lowered lashes.

JOE was talking nineteen to the dozen, in what he told me later was Magyar, obviously trying with all of his voluble persuasiveness to sell the old man a proposition. Suddenly I realized that I was understanding part of what he said. He had switched to French without pausing for breath, to address the girl.

It was fast, idiomatic French, but I gathered that his argument was that they would do better to deal through legitimate channels, with a man like "*le Mah-gshore*"—a man who owned a car—than to listen to that thief Nicolai. That crook, that *maquereau!*

The girl nodded, and with another sloe-eyed glance in my direction spoke at length to the old man in Magyar. Joe added his eloquence, with gestures; I felt somewhat like a fish in an aquarium. Then, for the first time, the man in the chair uttered two brief words. Fishing

deep in an inner pocket, he handed the girl some keys. She disappeared toward the back of the apartment.

When she returned she was carrying a book large enough to be a family Bible, with ornate, gilt-embossed covers. Joe took it from her hands and opened it on the table. I saw that it was a stamp album. The stamps were neatly arranged, twelve or fifteen to a page, and there must have been over a hundred pages.

Joe explained: "The collection was made by Eiliger. He was for two years property custodian at Buchenwald. It was his hobby. Naturally he used his position to obtain the best specimens. You can imagine what happened to the unfortunate prisoner who could not produce stamps! Eiliger is dead now, of course, and so are most of his victims. The album has come here, er—indirectly."

I repressed a smile. "Indirectly" can be a large word.

I was surprised to hear the girl speak in English, with a thick, slurring accent.

"It is worth great money, *M'sieu?*"

I opened my mouth to say that I knew little or nothing about stamps, but felt Joe's elbow nudging me in the ribs.

"I cannot say," I told her, "without examining it in detail, and perhaps consulting, er—other experts."

"The Major wishes to take it with him," said Joe quickly. He closed the book and placed it in my hands. Seizing the girl's hand, he bent over it with surprising grace.

"Tanya—à *bientôt, mon petit chou.*" He bowed stiffly toward the chair, and picked up his hat. The old man's eyes, riveted to the book under my arm, never left it until the door closed behind us.

Seated in the car, I asked:

"Well, where now?"

"Grand Central," replied Joe promptly. "There is a train at twelve, I think, for Chicago."

"Why Chicago?" I asked.

"I know a man there. A what do you call him? A fence? He will give more than these thieves in New York."

I took my foot off the starter. "Now listen, Joe. You used me as a front to get your hands on this album. If you think you're going to make me an accessory to disposing of stolen goods, you're crazy as a bedbug."

"But, Major—" he began.

"But, Major, nothing! Besides, what's

the matter with all those beautiful arguments you were presenting upstairs for handling it legitimately?" I reeled them all off for his benefit; there was no risk; stamps could not be identified individually; a fence would pay only a fraction of the real value; it was smart to be honest.

I could see Joe's face by a street lamp. He was dumbfounded. The legitimate method had obviously never occurred to him as a possibility. All his palaver had been merely bluff, designed to get his hands on the swag.

"You mean—I should take it to a real dealer?"

"No. I will take it to a dealer. Leave that to me."

I started the engine and drove toward the bridge plaza. When we were stopped by a red light I asked:

"By the way, what was Nicolai's angle in this transaction?"

Joe put infinite scorn and disgust into his answer.

"Pah! A thief—a small pickpocket! He knows of the stamps, and wishes only to rob the poor old gentleman."

I chuckled. "Whereas you wished to make him rich, eh?"

Joe sighed. "You are a hard man, *Mah-gshore.*"

The following morning I took the album to a shop on Madison Avenue. The proprietor, an elderly man with a goatee and spectacles, turned the pages slowly, and I saw his eye light with interest.

"This is not stolen property, is it, my friend?" he asked.

I LAUGHED shortly.

"Everything you see there has been stolen so often that the devil himself has forgotten the original owners," I replied, and gave him a brief history of the collection.

"I see. It is true that, except in rare instances, there is nothing about a stamp to identify its rightful owner. And I suppose, if this were turned in to the Government as enemy property—"

I snorted. "If it were turned in to the Government, eighteen minor bureaucrats would write letters to each other for three years, deciding that they didn't know what to do with it, and in the end nobody would benefit, not even the Government."

He nodded. "Give me a couple of days, to make an inventory."

I dropped in again on Thursday afternoon.

"You have some very unusual items here," he said. "I can sell them for you separately, on commission, or I will pay a lump sum for the collection. The lump sum would probably net you a little less, you understand."

I nodded. "How much?"

I was surprised when he said, "Six thousand dollars."

I indicated that the figure was acceptable.

"If you will come in tomorrow morning, after the banks open, I will have a certified check for you, Mr. Boyer."

Joe had been calling me up every day at the office. He was not one to lose contact with a business deal. When I told him that I had closed the sale, he was momentarily perturbed.

"A check, Major? But I can do nothing with a check!"

"No bank account, eh Joe? All right, I'll get it turned into cash at my bank. Come to my apartment this evening."

When I handed Joe the thick envelope, he sat down, ripped it open, and very carefully counted the wad of bills out into three piles. The first third he folded and slipped into his pants pocket. The second he returned to the envelope which went into his inside coat pocket. The last pile he pushed toward me. I shook my head.

"No, Joe. For me this was just an adventure with a friend. Some day I may ask a favor of you. Let's leave it that way."

I could tell by his look that he regarded me as insane. However, he shrugged and reached for the money.

"Wait a minute, Joe." I lifted two twenties off the top. "For my watch."

The scoundrel did not even blush.

"Ah, yes—your watch," he murmured evenly, and added the last pile to the contents of the envelope in his inner pocket. I showed my curiosity.

"Why the three-way split?" I asked. "Do you mean to tell me that you're actually going back to Schermerhorn Street?"

"But certainly, Major! Viktor should be very happy. Two thousand dollars is certainly more than he expected to receive."

I smiled skeptically. "This I want to see."

"You do not believe me, Major?" Joe

actually looked hurt. "Then come with me. I go there right now. Come! Tanya will be pleased. She thinks you are very charming."

"Tell her to think that about somebody else, will you?"

We walked to the garage and got out the car. Driving leisurely, it was nearly ten when I parked on Schermerhorn Street. Joe pushed open the door, but then suddenly halted in front of me.

"Go ahead, Joe. What's the matter?" "The police!" he snarled.

Under the street lamp I saw a cop sauntering toward us.

"So what?" I said. "Go ahead! What have you got to worry about? You're engaged in a legitimate business deal, aren't you?"

Joe conquered his inborn aversion to the uniformed law, grinned, and stepped out.

"You are right, Major."

As we crossed the sidewalk the policeman passed within an arm's length. I saw that he looked us over sharply.

We mounted the flight of narrow stairs by the dim light of the single bulb on the landing. Joe knocked at the door. There was no response. He knocked again.

The subdued murmur of distant traffic came up to us from the streets—nothing else. He rapped a third time, harder, and put his ear close to the panels. I could not hear a sound inside.

"Your friends are out?" I unconsciously lowered my voice.

"It is impossible," he hissed. "I told them I would come—and also Viktor is not well." I could see dark worry in his eyes. Suddenly he gripped my arm.

"Nicolai!" I heard him mutter, under his breath. Then quickly:

"Stay by the door, Major!" and he was gone down the stairs, three steps at a time.

WITH only a vague idea of what was going on, I stood waiting in the silent, gloomy little vestibule. Two minutes, perhaps three. Then I heard a sound behind the closed door. An indefinite kind of thud—a door closing, a piece of furniture moved, maybe a footstep. Thinking that Joe had found some other way in, in the absence of the tenants, and was now coming to admit me, I half turned. Abruptly the door flew open and a man rushed out headlong on-

to my chest.

I grabbed him, more to preserve my balance than with any thought of stopping him, and knew instantly that it was not Joe. Joe was heavy set, with big, solid shoulders while this man was short, slight, wiry. And neither was it the old man, Viktor. Under the feeble light this man's hair was black, curly, and glistened with grease. He smelled of sweat and strong black tobacco.

He tried to thrust me aside. Instinctively I hung onto him. Without raising his head he writhed and twisted, lithe as a pinned eel. I heard him curse in a savage whisper, in French. Together we reeled into the wall. I had hold of him by both elbows, as I had first seized him, but now he jerked one arm free. And under that dim bulb I now saw a glistening of another kind—the bright flash of steel. He had a knife in his hand.

I am no hero, but in war or in peace, I do not relish the thought of dying. And if there is one form of death I dislike most particularly, it is by a knife. The thought of cold steel in my quivering flesh causes my scalp to prickle and the blood to run cold in my veins.

Had anyone informed me that a desperado with a knife in his hand was going to emerge from that door, I would have been downstairs and out in the street in a jiffy. But it was too late. I was already entangled. I could not step aside now and say, "I beg your pardon—go ahead." I could only strive to dodge that glinting steel.

My immediate reaction was to drop all other holds and to seize his right wrist with both hands. They tell me that in knife play this is a dangerous tactic for it gives your opponent free play with his other hand, knees, and feet, so that he may thus stun you, and then drive the knife home at will. But I was too firmly gripped by horror of that blade to remember tactics.

My man began to kick, and kick high. His second effort narrowly missed my abdomen. His third nearly cracked my shin and threw us both off balance. We fell together, sideways, locked in frantic struggle.

My head and shoulders went over the lip of the top step, so that I could get no firm purchase. I could not stop his rolling on top of me. His knife arm flailed savagely, while with his other fist he

beat at my face.

I clung to that wiry wrist with all the concentrated power in my body. He cocked his elbow, to sink his teeth in the back of my hand. I tore it away without loosing my grip. Our struggles were forcing us together over the head of the stairs. My head was lower than my feet.

My eyes were beginning to swim. I was gasping for breath. I could sense my antagonist gathering himself for a final effort. I gritted my teeth.

I heard Joe's voice. Because I was close to unconsciousness, it sounded a long way off. He cried, "*Maquereau!*" in a deep-throated growl, as he sprang. Whether he kicked or hit, I did not know. But the man on top of me was suddenly a limp bag of muscles in his clothes, and Joe was prying my fingers loose.

"Did he hurt you, Major? Did he hurt you?"

I shook my head while I fought for my breath.

"*Sale vache!*" spluttered Joe. "This Nicolai, he is not very good with the knife. Now if I had been the same, it would have been in your stomach before you could lift a hand."

"He's plenty good—for my money," I panted. "How about getting—the police?"

To my surprise, Joe assented readily. "You watch him now, Major?" he asked.

He kicked the prostrate Nicolai roughly in the body, to make sure that he was unconscious, and then ran down the stairs. In a minute he was back with the same uniformed patrolman we had seen on the sidewalk as we entered.

We all helped drag the unconscious man into the apartment, and Joe and the cop set about cutting the clothesline with which Nicolai had securely bound Tanya and the old man to two chairs in the kitchen. There was a burn on the old man's neck, just below the ear where the skin is tender, evidently from the pressure of a cigar butt.

JOE was magnificent. He talked steadily, explaining everything. Never have I seen a more beautiful example of a righteous citizen outraged by crude thievery. His novel position—being for once on the right side of the law—seemed to go to his head. He held forth at length, pointing out the jimmyed window in the kitchen, producing

the knife—at sight of which I shuddered—and magnanimously giving me all the credit for catching the escaping culprit.

Nicolai, with a splendid lump above his ear, was beginning to come around. He protested weakly at some of Joe's statements, but he didn't have a chance.

Everything was stacked against him. The cop twisted one of his wrists up between his shoulder blades and hauled him to his feet.

"This one will come along with me," he said gruffly. "I'll call in from the corner. There'll be detectives here in a little while, to ask more questions."

"That is fine, officer," smiled Joe, watching Nicolai being clattered rudely down the stairs. From the doorway he turned to me, beaming. "It is a fine thing to be an honest man, *n'est-ce pas?*"

I nodded at him, grinning.

Viktor, stretched in the Morris chair, was recovering his breath and his senses. He said something in Magyar as Joe closed the door. Joe reached in his inner pocket and brought out the brown manila envelope. Remembering what he had put into that envelope, I nudged him hastily and spoke in a whisper.

"Aren't you making a mistake, Joe?"

Joe smiled broadly, happily. "An honest man does not make such a mistake, *Mah-gshore.*"

Astonished, I watched in silence while the old man slowly and carefully counted through the wad of bills. He started counting them a second time. I began to think about getting out of there. For

one thing, Tanya was looking at me out of the corner of her eyes in a manner that suggested she considered I had saved her life, and that she was ready and willing to reward my gallantry.

I rose, straightened my clothing once more, and cleared my throat preparatory to saying my adieus. But at that moment a terrific argument broke out. The old man waved his hands, pointing at the pile of bills, and screamed in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. Joe, his face red, was protesting in angry shouts. The girl joined in, also attacking Joe. Their voices rose louder and louder.

They were yelling in Magyar, of which I understood not a word, but suddenly I guessed the cause of the commotion. Joe, over-reaching himself in his role of honest businessman, had turned over the envelope holding a two-thirds share. But he had forgotten the forty dollars which I had abstracted to cover my watch.

The bills therefore totalled an odd figure—\$3,960, to be exact. The old man, accustomed to being cheated, was demanding an explanation of that odd figure. How much had Joe received? And how much had he held out? And Joe was having a tough time explaining.

They had all three forgotten that I existed, and I did nothing to draw their attention to that fact. Sidling to the door, I eased through and closed it softly behind me. I could still hear their angry accusations and anguished retorts from the bottom of the stairs.



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I shot with the gun in my free hand, and I didn't miss

NO TRUCK WITH MURDER

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

It's when he's hired at fifty smackers per day to "do nothing" that Detective Clem Hardy really gets busy!

BACK home in Sandy Creek they used to say I should have been a detective, or maybe just a plain snoop, the way I was always minding other people's business. Secretly I agreed with them about the detective part of it—which is why I have my own detective agency now.

Clem Hardy is the name, and I'm old enough to know better and young enough to forget that I do know. I'm living in New York now, and that's where I have the agency, but I'm still a small town boy at heart.

My office is in one of those old buildings down on lower Fifth Avenue. As

places go, it doesn't go very far. It is tastefully furnished with an old desk, a few chairs, a filing cabinet and a couple of pictures I picked up in a second-hand store.

I was sitting at my desk one morning when the door opened and a heavy-set, dark haired man stepped in. He was dressed in a dark suit, and since it was summer I wasn't surprised to see he wasn't wearing a hat. I seldom wear one myself in warm weather.

"Mr. Hardy," he said in a deep voice. "My name is Creston, Blake Creston and I need the services of a private detective."

"That's interesting, Mr. Creston," I said, motioning to a chair in front of the desk. "Have a seat, and tell me about it."

Creston dropped into the chair. He took an expensive briar pipe from one pocket and a leather tobacco pouch from another.

"What do you charge for your services by the day, Mr. Hardy?" he asked.

"That depends on the case," I said. "Tell me what you have in mind and then we'll take up the subject of fees."

"I want to hire you to do nothing." Creston finished filling the pipe and lighted it. I noticed there was a scratch on the side of the bowl and decided he should have taken better care of his pipe. "Are you interested?"

"Just what do you mean by nothing?"

"Exactly what I say." Creston frowned. "I may need your services at any time, but I don't know exactly when. But meanwhile I want to be sure you'll be around. I'll pay whatever fee you charge by the day and hire you for a week, but during that time you must agree not to take any other cases."

I didn't happen to have any other cases at present. In fact, I had about decided a detective's life was not a happy one. All the same it struck me there was the strong scent of smoked salmon about Mr. Blake Creston's offer. I decided to see what he would do if I thought of a number from one to a hundred.

"I'll do it for fifty bucks a day," I said.

HE GLARED at me in surprise for a moment, then nodded.

"A bit steep," he said. "But I'll pay it. You see, I'm all right so long as

the nice weather we've been having continues but on the first rainy day that comes along I expect to be murdered."

"Open the door, Richard," I muttered. "That man's here again."

"I beg your pardon?" Creston gave me a look that meant you big heel.

"Just a slight lapse into jukebox jargon," I said. "But I thought you said you expected to be murdered when it rains."

"That is correct." Creston nodded. "My life is in danger."

He said it with all the breathless excitement of a man ordering a hamburger. Behind him, the door of my office opened silently—just wide enough for someone outside to thrust a hand holding a gun through the crack.

"It's raining," I said inanely. "Look behind you."

As I spoke the door silently closed again and the hand holding the gun disappeared. Creston looked at the closed door and then at me.

"The door opened and I saw a hand holding a gun that was aimed right at you," I said quickly. "Then the door closed again."

"Doubtlessly you and your boy friend Richard playing games," Creston said coldly. "I'm not so sure that you are the man I want for the job. It requires someone with brains, courage, and steady nerves."

"You haven't told me why you expect to be murdered," I said. "I'd like to know a little more about that."

"It's a long story." Creston glanced at his watch. "I have an appointment at ten this morning and it's nearly that now." He drew a wallet out of his pocket and pulled out a fifty-dollar bill. "Here's your fee for the first day. I'll get in touch with you by phone if I need you during the day, Mr. Hardy."

He dropped the bill on the desk. I made no attempt to pick it up. I had a hunch that if whoever had been holding the gun was still waiting outside I wouldn't even get a chance to earn the money.

"And I'm supposed to not take any other cases," I said dryly. "Can I go out for meals, or am I supposed to just wait for you to phone?"

"Well, I guess going out for meals will be all right," said Creston thoughtfully. He picked up a pencil on the desk and jotted down a phone number.

"But call me at this number after you get back from lunch today."

The odor of smoked salmon struck me as being at least a couple of weeks old now. Mr. Blake Creston hiring me to do nothing was still very fishy for his money.

As he rose to leave, I went to the door with him. I opened it and looked out. There was no one in sight. The corridor was deserted.

"Looking for Richard?" asked Creston with a nasty smile.

I didn't say anything. I stood watching as he walked along the hall and rang the bell for the elevator. It seemed a long time before the car finally stopped at the third floor. The door opened and Blake Creston got into the elevator.

When he was gone I breathed a sigh of relief and went back to my office. The fifty-dollar bill was still lying on the desk. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. My phone rang a few minutes later and I answered it.

"Hardy?" demanded a gruff masculine voice over the wire.

"That's right," I said. "Who is calling?"

"Never mind that. Drop the Creston job if you want to live."

The man on the wire hung up before I could say anything. I hadn't thought of any good answers to that one anyway. There was a knock on the closed door of the office. I began to suspect this was my busy day.

"Come in," I said.

The door opened and there she stood. She was slender and blond and made me think it certainly was a beautiful day. Her clothes were expensive but not flashy. She just stood there looking at me and then she smiled.

"You are Clem Hardy," she said. "The same Clem Hardy whom I used to know back in Sandy Creek. I thought—no, I hoped—you just might be when I found your name in the classified telephone book. Don't you remember Glenda Ware?"

"Glenda Ware," I said. "You mean the little blond kid who used to live in the house across from the post office?"

"That's right." She closed the door and moved over to a chair. "It has been a long time, hasn't it, Clem. Nearly ten years—before the War it was. I heard you started up your own detective agency after you got out of the Service."

"That's right." I walked over to my desk and sat down. "I heard that you were on the stage, Glenda."

I KEPT looking at her and thinking of the old home town. Ten years ago. She had been about fifteen and I had been in my early twenties. Now she was twenty-five and I was thirty-two. She had been just a pretty kid around town back then—now she was really something.

"I am on the stage, Clem," Glenda said. "Opening in a new show in the fall. We start rehearsals in a few weeks." She frowned. "But that isn't what I came to see you about. I'm frightened."

"Frightened?" I said. "Why?"

"Everywhere I've gone during the last week or so I've found a certain man is always hanging around. I think he is following me." Glenda smiled, but I could see she really was scared. "I guess I'm just silly. Blake said that I was—"

"Blake!" I interrupted. "You don't happen to mean Blake Creston?"

"That's right." Glenda looked at me in surprise. "Do you know him, too? He's the producer of the show. He told me I was silly when I thought of hiring a private detective. But I insisted that I was going to call on you and see if you weren't the Clem Hardy I knew back in Sandy Creek."

I was beginning to get it now. Creston had learned that Glenda was coming to see me, so he got to my office first. He had given me the story about his life being threatened and hired me on the understanding that I wouldn't take any other cases while working for him.

Now Glenda Ware shows up looking for a private detective to protect her. According to the deal I had made with Creston, I would have to refuse, if she wanted to hire me.

My mind was working like an announcer signing off a daytime radio serial: Who is the man who was following Glenda? Is Creston's life really in danger? What does the business about the hand holding the gun mean? Why doesn't Creston want Glenda to have a private detective protecting her? Tune in tomorrow for the next episode in this exciting drama.

"Suppose you tell me about it, Glen-

da," I said. "What does this man who has been following you look like?"

"He's tall and thin and has a kind of rat-like face," said Glenda. "He looks dangerous."

"You don't know his name?"

"No." She shook her head. "But I really am frightened, Clem." She looked at me appealingly. "Won't you investigate for me and try to find out who that man is and what he wants?"

"Have you reported him to the police?" I asked.

"I didn't want to do that. They might think that I imagined the whole thing." Glenda frowned. "Or that I was just looking for publicity. Don't forget I'm an actress."

"All right, Glenda," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

I picked up a pen and a piece of paper, wrote a short note and then took Creston's fifty-dollar bill out of my pocket and thrust it and the note into an envelope. At this point I stopped and cursed under my breath. Blake Creston had been careful not to give me his address. Then an idea struck me and I grinned.

"What's Blake Creston's address?" I asked.

Glenda knew it and gave it to me. It was one of the swank hotels around town. I addressed the envelope, found a stamp and put it on it. I thrust it into my pocket, intending to mail it when I got near a mail chute.

"I had another case that was supposed to take all of my time," I said. "But I just finished it." I looked at the girl sitting across the desk from me. "Any idea why the rat-faced man is following you around, Glenda?"

"No." Glenda shook her head. "That's what worries me, Clem." She frowned. "Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well, unless it has something to do with what I saw one night about a week ago. I live in a hotel and I was coming home late alone. Just as I got to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-fourth Street. I saw three men fighting. One of them was the rat-faced man."

"You recognize the other two?" I asked.

"No. It was dark down Forty-fourth Street and I couldn't see very clearly. There was a truck standing there at the curb."

"What sort of a truck?" I asked as she paused.

SHE frowned, endeavoring to remember just what it looked like.

"Just a small enclosed truck—like a laundry or any sort of delivery truck, I guess. I couldn't see if it had the name of any firm painted on it. Anyway, I saw the thin faced man hit one of the other men over the head with what looked like a gun. The man who had been hit, dropped. The other two picked him up and placed him in the back of the truck."

"Did they see you watching them?"

"Not until they drove away. I was standing right under a street light. I saw the rat-faced man stare at me as he sat beside the driver of the truck. They started to stop and then a policeman appeared and the truck drove on."

"So that's it!" I said. "All right, Glenda. You go back to your hotel." I asked the name of the hotel and she gave it to me. "I'll get in touch with you this evening. What night was it that you saw the three men?"

"Let's see. Why it was Friday night a week ago." She rose to her feet and I stood up. "I feel much better now that I've seen you Clem. Whatever you charge I'll pay you of course."

"Don't be silly." I smiled at her. "There'll be no fee for doing a favor for a home town gal. See you later."

I went to the door and opened it for her. There was no one in the hall. I walked with her to the elevator and waited until she got into the car.

When she was gone, I went back to my office. I got my automatic and thrust it into the shoulder holster that I was wearing strapped on beneath my coat. Then I locked the office and left. I headed for the Public Library and when I got there I started looking over the newspapers for Saturday, June 15th.

I found what I was looking for on Page Three of one of the morning papers. It was just a short item, but I had a hunch it was just what I was seeking. It read:

**BODY OF
HIT-AND-RUN VICTIM FOUND**

—

The body of a middle aged, gray-haired man, was found, early this morning, just beyond the West 75th Street entrance of Central Park at Fifth Avenue.

From papers and other identification in his pockets the dead man is believed to be Norton Keith, of Riverside Drive. Police believe Mr. Keith was the victim of a hit-and-run driver, though no witnesses have been found.

The body was taken to the Morgue to be held for further identification.

I made a few notes and then left the library. I spent a busy afternoon. First I got some lunch, and then I checked at Keith's address over on Riverside Drive. He had been a bachelor and the body had been identified by a brother who lived out of town. The brother had arranged for the burial of the dead man.

I was lucky in finding a chatty doorman at the apartment house on the Drive where Norton Keith had resided. He had lived quietly, but apparently had quite a bit of money.

"He was interested in the theatrical business," said the doorman. "I believe he supplied the financial backing for a

Just as I came walking along the street, I saw her hurry out of the hotel and Blake Creston was with her. There was a dark delivery truck standing at the curb a little distance down the street.

WHEN Creston and Glenda reached the truck, the back doors swung open. He pushed her toward the truck. A pair of hands reached out, grabbed her by the shoulders and pulled her in.

I reached the truck in nothing flat, my automatic in my hand. Before Creston knew what happened I had one arm around his throat and was pulling him back. The rat-faced man inside the truck dropped Glenda, so she sprawled on the floor with her legs still kicking.

The rat-faced man let go at me with an automatic. The bullet just missed my ear and I knew he was playing for keeps. I shot him with the gun in my free hand, and I didn't miss.

The trail of a missing husband leads to a helter-skelter murder chase in

WHEN A BODY MEETS A BODY

By JOE ARCHIBALD

A mirth-provoking yarn starring Willie Klump — coming next issue!

few shows. The last one was a flop, he told me. Opened and closed the same night."

"You know the name of the show?" I asked.

"Sure." The doorman nodded. "A turkey called 'Sinners In Mink.' I used to be in the business myself. Why a man like Blake Creston would produce anything like that is beyond me."

"Sometimes producers make mistakes," I said. "Yes, they certainly do."

I gave the doorman a buck tip, and he seemed glad to get it. Which was all right with me, for I never was a great hand at throwing my money around. After I left the apartment house I saw a mail-box on the corner, that reminded me of the note I had written Creston so I mailed it.

I went back to my office. Stayed there for awhile and finally found it was time for dinner. So I closed up and went out and got something to eat.

It had grown dark when I headed for the hotel where Glenda Ware lived.

By that time a patrolman came running up, and a crowd was gathering. Creston stopped struggling when I released him and covered him with my gun.

"What's going on here?" demanded the policeman.

"It's an attempted kidnaping, officer," I said. "These two men grabbed the girl and tried to take her away in the truck. When I interfered, the man inside the truck shot at me, so I shot him."

"That's right," said an old lady who had been walking along the street. "I saw the whole thing, and it happened just like the young man says."

By that time there were more police around. I talked fast and to the point and they believed me, even though Creston did claim I was a liar.

When we got everything ironed out at the nearest precinct station, it was just the way I had figured. Creston and the rat-faced man had decided to bump off Keith. Creston had borrowed ten

grand from Keith, and deliberately put on a show he knew would fail so he wouldn't have to pay back the money. Keith found that out and when he threatened to go to the District Attorney, Creston and Joe Dover, the rat-faced man decided to get rid of him.

Glenda had seen them grab Keith, that night, and put him in the truck. They had made it look like Keith was killed by a hit-and-run driver but Glenda had witnessed what really happened. So Creston and Dover figured she had better die, too. Dover was following her around looking for a chance to make her death look like an accident.

When she told Creston about it and said she was going to get me to investigate, he got to my office first. He pulled

the stuff about hiring me to do nothing and about his dread of being murdered just to keep me off the case.

It was Dover who opened the door of my office and thrust the gun in to make it look like Creston really was in danger. Dover was just wounded in the shoulder and when he found out what he was in for, he talked plenty.

"I think you're wonderful," Glenda told me, when it was all over.

"So do I," I said. "I mean I think the same thing about you."

Funny, I still think the same thing about her, and we've been married for three years now. We always go back to Sandy Creek for vacations. Just a couple of small town people at heart—that's us!



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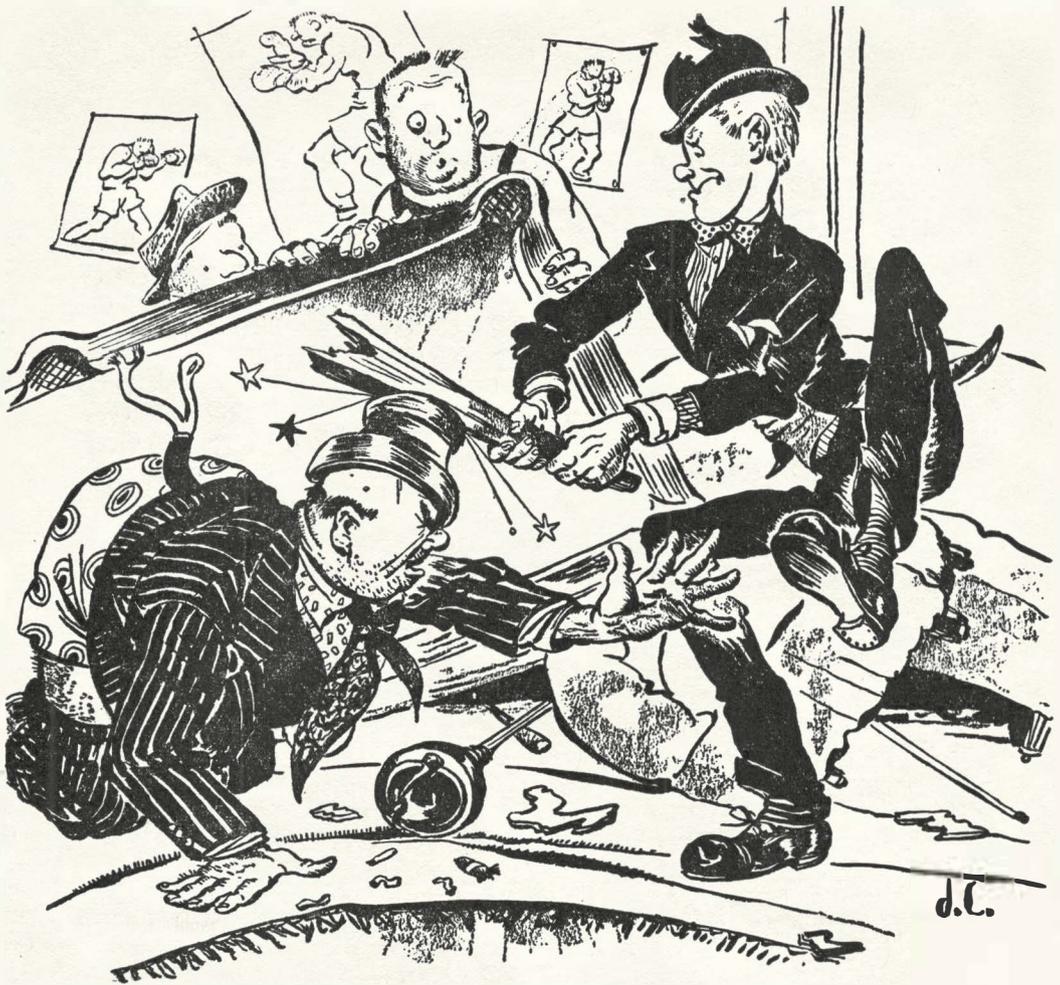
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Willie picked up the leg of the pool table and whanged the cuspidor more firmly in place on Boom Boom's head

KILROY RIDES AGAIN

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When private gumshoe Willie Klump takes the trail of black marketeer "Boom Boom" Tortoni, it's all one boom-boomerang!

IT happened that Gertrude Mudgett, early in the spring, quit her job at the beauty parlor over on Fifty-Ninth Street, and decided to take a week off before she went back on a payroll. The first idle Monday bored William Klump's fiancée so she came down to the Hawkeye Detective Agency to hire out to Willie for a day or two.

Gertrude found Willie in high dudgeon over a message that had been slipped

under his door while he was out purchasing a pair of cinnamon buns.

"Some joker!" Willie sniffed, handing her the note. "Kilroy was here!"

"Look, stupid," Gertrude said. "There are characters named Kilroy. Maybe you let a big case slip through your clumsy lunchhooks. Here, there's a phone number on the message. Gimme that phone."

"Awright, be a sucker."

Gertrude dialed a number. "Hello, is

Kilroy there? This is the Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., Mr. Klump's secretary speakin'."

Willie sat back in his chair and waited for Gertie to burn.

"Huh? You don't, huh? It is, huh? You waited three hours for the jerk—Mr. Klump to call, huh? Don't blame you. G'by." Gertie hung up and the atoms between her eyes and Willie's began to split.

"Look, lemonhead, that was a guy named Kilroy who wanted a big weddin' cased so crooks wouldn't swipe the bride's take. A hun'ed bucks I could of put away for you. Why do I bother with such a sap!"

"It is my luck he'd have that name, Gert," Willie complained.

"Opportchunity only knocks oncet, Willie. You got to grab what it's sellin' at the door quick. You'll never amount to nothin'."

"If you think you are so smart, I'll give you a job to do, Gert. I have an account here at present to collect for a client which has been in the hands of everybody else in the county. It is for a second-hand car that wouldn't run and it was priced at seven hundred cabbage leaves. The debtor is one Luther M. Rossi. We git fifteen percent and hospital bills."

"Gimme it," Gertie snapped.

"Even to you I hate to give it," Willie sighed. "The last collector got his clavicle broke."

"Over a hun'ed dollars cut and you sit there on your rompers," Gertie yowled.

Fifteen minutes later Gertie was gone. An hour later she came into the Hawkeye Detective Agency and shoved a wad of C notes in Willie's face.

"It was a pushover," Gertie said.

WILLIE was inarticulate until the phone rang. He answered it and a very scholarly voice purred in his ear. "This is Mr. Josiah Smeckenberg, of the firm of Tattersall, Tattersall and Smeckenberg. Will you be in your office at three this afternoon, Mr. Klump?"

Willie's ears tingled. "I will, Mr. Speckleberg."

"Who was it, Willie?"

"Lawyers. I bet somebody left me somethin'."

Gertrude Mudgett swallowed hard. "Well, ha, I'd better be goin' along,

Willie. Glad I could help you. See you tonight, maybe."

"That's funny," Willie said, when the door slammed behind Gertrude.

Promptly at three P.M. a skinny little citizen of approximately sixty years, wearing a ribbon on his spectacles, minced in to the Hawkeye Detective Agency. Willie brushed off a chair and slid it under the visitor's striped seat.

"My client is one Luther Rossi, Mr. Klump. You have an ops named Miss Mudgett working for you?"

"Ops? For a minute I thought you said ox, Mr. Speckleberg. Ha!"

"It couldn't of done no worse damage to my client if it had been, Mr. Klump. Do you care to settle out of court to the tune of say—er—two hundred dollars? After all that is quite reasonable for a broken arm, three front teeth, and a possible brain concussion."

"I git it," Willie moaned. "I should of known, Mr. Speckleberg. I better insult a lawyer and then call you, huh?"

"Do that, Mr. Klump. And good day to you."

"Where is it?" Willie wanted to know. "A pushover is right. I bet she pushed him right over the Palisades or off'n a roof."

That night Willie had dinner with Gertie in an automat.

"I saw a lawyer this aft," the president of the Hawkeye said. "I settled for two hun'ed bucks. I lose ninety-five on the deal which you should draw out of my savin's thing in the A.M. or they will slap a detachment on me."

"Oh, stop gripin'," Gertie snapped. "Nobody can call me a bag and git away with it. Let them detach you as what you got in your office ain't worth eleven bucks. Anyway I got a pleasant surprise for you, Willie."

"Yeah?" Willie dared not guess, but he hoped Gertie had accepted a job with UNRA somewhere behind the iron curtain.

"I met a dame at the beauty parlor a couple weeks ago," Gertie said. "She says how she wanted to do somethin' nice for me after how I give her such treatments. She called me up and says how would I like to git a boy friend and join her and her sweetie for a night at the *Cocabanana* as their guests. It is tomorrow night, Willie."

"As long as it ain't formal," Willie grunted.

"All's you got to do is not wear your tan shoes, Willie," Gertie said. "It is a good thing I know the right people."

"I suppose I should git my suit pressed," Willie sighed.

At eight thirty the following night, Willie and Gert met a blond number dripping with jewelry and silver fox furs named Raven DeHaven, and a flashy cosmopolitan admitting to the label, Reno Pitz.

"Well, you ast for it an' here we are, dearie," Gertie said to the blonde. "It is a swell lookin' joint."

"We are close friends of the owner," Pitz said. "Maybe we'll leave you meet him. Come on, baby, and if they didn't give us a table close to dance floor, I'll bust the place up."

Willie did not think that the gee would have to try too hard. He wished he felt more in a festive mood.

"Reno ain't just whistlin' Dixie," Raven said to Gertie. She held up two fingers glued tightly together. "Him and Boom Boom Tortoni are like that."

Willie crossed two fingers. "Boom Boom? Seems I have heard the name before. He wa'n't in no racket once?"

"Maybe you think these bistros are run by Gideon Bible distributors," the blonde tossed over her shoulder.

"Don't mind him, dearie," Gertie said. "He ain't exactly night club broke."

"I certainly would be if I had to pay a check here," Willie snapped.

THE party of four sat down. Pitz ordered drinks. They were brought in due time and consumed. Pitz ordered another round. Willie's second cocktail put him more in the mood and he leaned close to Raven DeHaven.

"Where you been all my life, huh?" He let out a yelp when Gertie's heel came down on his toe.

"Don't mind him, Mr. Pitz," Gertie said to the host. "It is his cute appendix."

"He should git operated on," the blonde said.

"He will be," Gertie snapped, "if he don't—ha, le's have some music which is not an organ recital."

"I ought to go see Boom Boom," Pitz said. "Excuse me."

"And remind him what he said he would do for our friends, sugar," Raven said.

When Pitz left the table the blonde

nodded. "Nothin's too good for pals of me and Reno. How'd you like six pairs of real silk stockin's, Gertie. No piffin' nylons. I said real silk."

"They are extink," Gertie sniffed.

"Yeah? Boom Boom can get anythin'. He made a deal with some Japs."

"That's bein' fraternal with the enemy," Willie said. "I will have no part of it."

"The war's over, remember?" Gertie yelled. "Real silk stockin's, Raven. For them I would murder Willie."

A few minutes later, Reno Pitz appeared, and with him was a very bulky character clad in a dark blue suit with wide pin-stripes. His face was as dark and oily as an olive and his mammoth noggin was mostly devoid of hair.

"Boom Boom," Pitz said. "Meet Miss Mudgett—and Mr. Klump who are my guests."

"Glad to know yuh," Boom Boom trumpeted and picked up Gert's hand. Willie thought he heard bones crack. It was Boom Boom who examined his fingers. "You ain't Gertie the Riveter by any chancet, babe?" he asked Willie's fraulein. "How y', Klump?"

"In the pink like Gromyko," Willie quipped. "It is a nice joint you got here."

"We like it." Boom Boom took a gander at his Gruen. "Say, I gotta scram, Pitzy."

"Er, about those articles of merchandise, Boom Boom," Pitz said. "My pals here want some."

"Oh, yeah. Come up and see me about ten, huh?"

"Okay, Boom Boom."

"See what I mean, dearie?" the blond dish said to Gertie. "We're in. Your gams will be wrapped up in real silk tomorrer."

"Let's shake some gams, Babe," Pitz said.

"How's about it for us, Gertie?" Willie echoed.

"I was afraid you'd ast me that," Gertie Mudgett replied. "Well, I brought bandaids with me."

The dance floor was jammed. Willie always did wonder about the social life of the sardine.

"You can't even feel no floor under us," Willie said.

"Why beef? You never use one anyway. Think of it, Willie. Real silk stockin's."

"They must be illegal," Willie said sharply. "I wish you'd refuse them."

"Why, of course," Gertie said. "I'd also pass up a diamond tirara if I saw it on the sidewalk, you jerk. Look, I got enough, as there is no longer no feelin' in my dogs."

They went back to the table and soon Pitz and the blonde joined them. Pitz ordered more liquid exhilaration. Willie imbibed and his resentment against black markets thinned out. After the floor show, he looked at his watch.

"It is close to ten," he said to Pitz. He winked at Gertie.

"Let's go and look up Boom Boom," Pitz said.

Willie followed Pitz to a stairway hidden by wine-colored velvet drapes. They went up one flight and came to a door marked MANAGER. *Keep out.* Pitz ignored the *verboden* sign and pushed the door open. Three dapper citizens in tucks cautioned Pitz. Willie could see Boom Boom poring over some papers at a desk. His back was to the private detective.

"Look," Pitz said. "Boom Boom said—"

"Listen, Pitz, you know how the boss is," a hireling apologized. "Especially when some deal shows a loss. Come back about an hour, huh?"

"We better, Klump," Pitz said.

"Yeah, I wouldn't want to upset nothin'," Willie said.

SO THEY went back and joined the ladies. Pitz said they had to wait.

"Stallin', huh?" Gertie Mudgett snapped. "We got a snow job, Willie. I bet he couldn't git us a pound of horse meat."

"Look here," Pitz bridled. "You can't talk about Boom Boom like that!"

"Listen, you finger-wave mechanic," the blonde said. "Ain't that a nice way to talk after I bring you here to lap up Boom Boom's gin on Pitz. I ought to slap you one!"

"Yeah," Willie sniffed. "I am surprised at you, Gertie. Huh, what am I sayin'?"

"So you're takin' their part, huh?" Gertie Mudgett yelped. "Why, you lemm-headed—!"

She got up, bag and all, and Willie watched her disappear in the general direction of the powder room.

"She burns faster'n cigarette paper,"

Willie apologized. "You got to know her. Well, she'll come back."

The lights dimmed and a gravelly-voiced redhead, low-cut strapless gown and all, slunk up to the mike. Willie and Reno Pitz immediately forgot Gertie. The blonde kept watching Pitz and weighed the idea of reducing and getting a henna rinse or two.

"Wow!" Willie said and nudged Pitz. "You know her telephone number?"

"If I did, you'd never git it, pal." Pitz grinned and then grunted when the blonde whacked him in the sacroiliac with a sharp elbow.

The lights went on and the redhead retired. Gertrude Mudgett did not come back.

"Looks like you lost your girl," Raven DeHaven said. "Where'll you git another, Klump?"

"Huh?" Willie thought there was some dirt behind the crack but he also thought it would be silly to tell the doll off in view of the bill that had been run up here in Boom Boom's. Ten or fifteen minutes later, Boom Boom showed.

"Hiya! Havin' fun, pals? Say, about them stockin's. I'll have 'em tomorrer. Where's your babe, Klump?"

"Blowed a fuse," Willie sniffed. "It serves her right. She won't git no silk stockin's."

"Gimme the check," Pitz said to the waiter, and Boom Boom laughed.

"Don't be like that, Pitz. Forget it. It is on the house, pal."

"See what I mean?" the blonde whispered into Willie Klump's ear. "So Boom Boom is a phony, huh?"

"Gert is awful suspicious," Willie said. "Well, I am sure much obliged to you an' Pitz."

"You have no idea how good it was to have you here, Mr. Klump," Raven DeHaven gushed, and pinched Willie's ear. "We must see you again some time."

About twelve hours later, the phone in Willie's office startled him out of a siesta.

"Must be Gertie," he mumbled. "Might as well git it over with—h'lo!"

"This is Kelly, Willie. We want you should come down to Headquarters quick!"

"Me? Looks like you're stuck with somethin', huh?" Willie Klump grinned. "I'll come right down and see what I can do, Satchelfoot!"

"You better, meathead!"

Willie walked into the D.A.'s office a half hour later and he was quite surprised to see "Boom Boom" Tortoni sitting there manicuring his nails. Satchelfoot Kelly and two other cops looked quite accusingly at Willie.

"Awright," Willie said. "Somebody say somethin'!"

"Sure, Willie," Satchelfoot yelled. "It is only we found a corpse in an excavation in the middle of Amsterdam Avenue uptown and it was no prehistorical man. The stiff was once known as Louie Klepperhofer. I'll make it short and simple so's you can understand it, Willie. Six months ago the cops raided one of Boom Boom's bistros and found a roulette wheel as on the level as a hillside, and he blamed Louie for tippin' off the cops, and Boom Boom said, in front of witnesses, Louie should better leave this part of town and not ever come back or something might happen to cost his insurance company dough."

"He come back, huh?" Willie said.

"Yeah. And opened a joint three blocks away from Boom Boom's *Cocabanana*. His joint was cuttin' in on Boom Boom, Willie. So when we find Louie a la rigorous mortice, we think right away of Boom and his baboons," Satchelfoot snapped.

"What do you want me to do?" Willie asked. "I wa'n't even at the scene of the crime."

SATCHELFOOT KELLY got hold of Willie's lapel and nearly jerked the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency off his feet.

"All we want is fer you to tell us how much Boom Boom paid you for goin' his alibi where he was around ten p. m. last night."

"Me?" Willie yelled. "Why this is slander!"

"Louie's watch was stopped one minute after ten," Kelly said. "Boom Boom here says you can prove where he was at that time. Let's hear you, Willie!"

"Tell these coppers, Klump." Boom Boom kept filing his nails.

"Why, er, he was in the *Cocabanana*," Willie said. "I saw him with my own eyes. But if you think Boom Boom paid me, you're dotty!"

The D.A. pawed at his face. "A new angle," he snapped. "They get a private dick to—"

"They didn't get me to do nothin'," Willie yelled. "I was there with my girl and two friends. Me and Pitz went up to see Boom Boom about some silk stockin's. Boom Boom was busy at his desk."

"Patternizing black markets, too," Satchelfoot sniffed. "Willie, I always said you was weak and would sometime git tempted by easy money. So you saw Boom Boom there at ten p. m."

"Yeah," Willie said. "Could I help it?"

"Look, boys," Boom Boom said, getting to his feet. "I got business t' attend to. I'm sorry I can't confess I rubbed out Louie."

"Beat it, Boom Boom," the D.A. said.

The *Cocabanana* boniface thanked the policemen for their courtesy, promised to buy fifty tickets to the next police benefit, and made his exit.

Satchelfoot went into something close to a tantrum. "You all saw that forgit-me-not Boom Boom had in his lapel. He always wears one and we found a wilted one on the edge of the excavation. I know he knocked off Louie Klepperhofer."

"You have got to have more than that to go on," the D.A. sighed. "Anyway his alibi is airtight and sworn to by a private detective."

"Somethin' tells me you was used for a stooge, Willie," Kelly howled. "Only you would be dumb enough."

"If he was there when I said he was, he had to be," Willie yelled back. "Because I saw him with my own eyes!"

"There are almos' eight million people in this city, D.A.," Satchelfoot gulped. "Out of them all it has to be this chowderhead goin' Boom Boom's alibi. If anybody ever gits behind the iron curtain in Russia, the first gee they will see breakin' open a tin of caviar will be Willie. This ain't coincidents, I won't make myself believe it."

"I wisht I could help you," Willie said.

"Git out of here," Kelly yelled. "Don't never come back."

"Nobody ast to come here," Willie said in a huff. He went out, his mind in a worse mess than Fibber McGee's closet. He went to his office and sat down and tried to reason it all out. Well, he saw Boom Boom. Period. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. A wild look came into his big bovine eyes.

He had one of his rare thoughts.

"Or did I see Boom Boom? Maybe I purged myself!"

He grabbed up a sheet of paper and took a pencil from his vest pocket. He wrote fast.

No. 1. When we went into Boom Boom's office, his back was to me. I saw his pin-striped suit, his neck, and the back of his bald noggin. But did I see his face? I did not! But it was Boom Boom. Or was it? You can't be sure, Willie Klump!

No. 2. Why was Gertie invited to such a swell joint by such a swell dish? Because I was her finance? Is Kelly right for once in his dumb life? It is silly.

Willie, still in a quandary, dropped his pencil and began to dig at his scalp. He wished Gertie would call up. Maybe she'd cool off before sundown. It was unbelievable, he thought. Him, Willie Klump, a detective, backing up Boom Boom's alibi. If they proved Boom Boom did erase Louie, then he could be part of a double feature at the state rotisserie as well as not. Willie began to sweat.

WHEN he got to his rooming house he decided to call Gertie and smooth out the latest rough spot. But his stubbornness prevailed as he lifted the receiver off the hook. "No, she can call me," Willie muttered. "I got some pride!"

At seven o'clock the next morning, Willie was roused out of a terrible dream. He was just getting the top of his head shaved and a sin buster was comforting him when he jumped out of bed.

"Telephone, Klump!" the landlady was yelling.

"Thanks for the reprieve," Willie gulped, and got hurriedly into his pants. He went out into the hall and picked up the dangling receiver. "H'lo Gert. I wondered how long it'd be before you'd call."

"This is not Gertie, Mr. Klump. This is Missus Hoolihan, her landlady. Somethin' awful must of happened. She ain't slept in her bed fer two nights. First I thought, her bein' on her vacation, she went outa town, but she ain't packed nothin'. Oh, do somethin', Mr. Klump."

"Huh?" Willie said. "I'll start right away." He went back to his own room and sat down. "Maybe she took sleepin' pills somewheres," he moaned. "Oh, I'm

an awful heel. No, she wouldn't end it all as that would make things too easy for me. What am I sayin'? I bet she's visitin' somebody over in Jersey or somewheres. I won't worry. It is just a molehill I'm runnin' up into a mountain."

When he got to his office, Willie looked through the papers on his desk. He took a gander at the message about Kilroy being there and his thoughts jumped backward.

"Yeah, Gertie said opportunity knocks only once and to grab what it is sellin' before there's a shortage—er—I wonder if Gert—" He got up and walked up and down and tried to talk himself out of doing something he was about ready to do.

"Well, what can I lose?" Willie said. "I will make out I come for the silk stockin's."

It was around four in the afternoon when William Klump pranced into the *Cocabanana* and asked to see Boom Boom Tortoni.

"He expectin' you?"

Willie winked. "It is about real silk stockings."

"Go on upstairs to his office."

"I know," Willie said. He went up the stairs and was met by two of Boom Boom's serfs. The face of the husky one made Willie's blood run cold. He had one eye half closed and its immediate vicinity gave out all colors of the spectrum. His two upper front teeth were missing and there was a scratch on his face beginning at his left ear and running all the way to one corner of his stream-lined mustache.

"You had an accident?" Willie asked solicitously. "How far did the airplane fall?"

"My wife, punk. What you think?"

Willie did not dare say. He was flirting with a possibility that scared him. "Like to see Boom Boom," he said.

They opened the door and admitted William Klump to Boom Boom's private office. Boom Boom grinned expansively and got up and reached for Willie's hand.

"Glad to see you, pal. I got half a dozen pairs of silk stockings for your babe, Klump."

"I wisht I knew where she was," Willie sighed. "I'd arrange a match between her and that doll what messed up one of your boys. Mike Jacobs

would draw a hun'ed dollars tops."

"Ha-ha," Boom Boom laughed. "Looks like Frankie didn't brush all the blond hairs offen his coat, huh, Klump? They got any idea yet who rubbed out Louie?"

"Yeah, but they won't git to prove it, looks like," Willie said, and it suddenly occurred to him that there was more than one fat oily gee with a bald head in New York, and that you could maybe purchase two suits that looked alike even during the shortage of burlap. "You sure got a swell alibi, Boom Boom."

"You should know, pal." The big guy grinned. "Well, there's the stockin's in that package on the table. Wish I could give you more time."

Willie Klump knew he had been played for a sucker and the grin on Boom Boom's face convinced him that Boom Boom knew that he knew it. Willie lost his temper and obeyed an unhealthy impulse.

"Awright, you fat tub of lard. Go ahead and think I am as dumb as I look! I knew what happened to Gertie the other night, Boom Boom, and don't you think I don't know Gertie, when she is promised a thing, don't fool around. She went up to git them stockin's after me and Pitzzy came down. She saw you wasn't Boom Boom and set up a howl, and your muggs figured she'd add up two and two with the cops the next day after Louie was dead. So they grabbed her."

FOR a moment there was an ominous silence.

"Well, well," Boom Boom said, and pressed a button. He also, unlimbered his Betsy from under his left armpit. "I wondered when you'd start givin' us trouble, too. Too bad, pal, as I need that alibi. I don't want to be interduced by no toastmaster up in the big house. Awright, boys! We're takin' him with us. Now we got to mix up two more pails of concrete."

"Can do, Boom Boom. Me and Frankie has paid our union dues. You want we should take him out hot or cold, Boom Boom?"

"Hot. Then maybe we can get that babe of his."

"You got an alibi for the rubout but you better git one for kidnagin', too," Willie gulped out. "The cops'll be lookin' for me as I told 'em I was comin'

here."

Boom Boom laughed. "Don't kid me. They hate you, Klump, for what you did for me."

"Yeah," Willie said. "But nobody can blame me for tryin'. I wish Kilroy was here instead of me."

"Not bad!" Boom Boom said gleefully. "Chipso, you got the boiler in back of the joint?"

"Yeah, you want I should starch this punk, Boss?"

"What'll it be, Klump?"

"I'll go quiet," Willie gulped.

With the business end of a Roscoe caressing his brisket, William Klump was taken out the back way of the *Cocabanana* and thrust rudely into a big sedan. Ten minutes later he was pushed out of the jalopy and into another back door.

"I—I guess the only time you gees will ever go into a place that is legit, by the front, will be a undertakin' parlor," Willie sniffed. He got kicked in the posterior for his observation and began to climb a flight of very dark stairs.

Finally he was shoved into a chair in quite a good-sized room. There was an old pool table in one corner. Pictures of pugs and sporting celebrities hung on the wall. An old sign leaning against a radiator said,

PANTHER A. C.

"Where's Gertie?" Willie asked, and heard sounds in another room. Boom Boom sighed deeply, switched his stogie from left to right.

"That's our trouble, Klump. We got her in there and tied her up. She got loose and barricaded the door wit' an old iron safe that took four men to move in there. There is a closet filled wit' baseball bats and balls the Panthers useta have, also regulation horseshoes. Lookit Frankie's puss, Klump. We got her in there and don't dare git her out."

Willie Klump, despite his unstable position in the scheme of things, had to laugh.

"You should of ast me about her first," he said. "Once she broke that machine at Coney Island where you try and ring a bell with a mallet."

"She'll come out and git liquidated now," Chipso said. "When we start torturin' you, Klump."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Willie said. "She is sore at me."

"I am glad there ith no winder in that room," Frankie said, missing his two front teeth badly. "She ith my meat when she cometh out, Boom Boom. I think I'll fix her in the ment and drown her alive."

Boom Boom yawned. "Let's not hurry this thing, guys," he said. "We got lotsa time. If we knock off Klump, how could we use him for an alibi this time? We can't leave no clues. What you got on your mind, Chipso?"

"I was thinkin' of cuttin' off one of this flatfoot's ears and tossin' it over the transom, Boom Boom. That would start her softenin' up maybe. Or lightin' matches under the jerk's bare feet. Better we don't leave no bloodstains aroun'. How's about breakin' both his legs with a sledgehammer?"

"I thought all such fiends was under contracts in Hollywood," Willie choked out.

"Karloff couldn't carry Frankie's suitcase," Boom Boom grinned. "Say, that babe is awful quiet in there."

"The air is gittin' her," Chipso said. "Say, we been awful dumb! Alls we got to do is git four of them cyanide bombs which is used to exterminate termites, mice, etcetera, and let them sizzle under the door, Boom Boom."

"You still don't know Gertie," Willie said, wondering how he was going to walk away from this one.

WILLIE wished he was not so squeamish about guns and would think to carry one once in a while. These vicious characters would think of something yet that would even stymie Gertrude Mudgett. He had to stall.

"You knocked off Louie Klepperhofer, Boom Boom. You dressed up a punk that was built like you and had a bald head."

"Yeah," Boom Boom said. "Only I gotta use a different Betsy on you as I am wise to them police ballistics. Can't let 'em take the same kind of slug outa you that they took out of Louie."

"Get up on the chair and take a peek through that transom, Chipso," Boom Boom said. "See what the bag is up to."

"If she heard you call her that," Willie said, "I feel sorry for you somehow."

Chipso got up on the chair. Bong!

Chipso stiffened, spun around three times and crash landed at Boom Boom's feet. Pieces of glass showered Boom Boom and Frankie. A regulation baseball bounced around and Willie tried to pick it up. Boom Boom stepped on his hand and Willie let out a pained yelp.

"What'll we do, Boom Boom?" Chipso said when he sat up and got his eyes uncrossed. "This don't make no sense."

"Thath right, Boom Boom," Frankie lisped. "Have we got that babe or hath she goth uth? We juth can't thit here."

"We are stale mates," Willie said. "Like we was celebratin' our gold weddin' anniversary."

"Awright," Boom Boom said, plucking a piece of glass out of his collar. "We'll rub out Klump anyways. Then we'll run a rubber tube out of the old gas range and—"

"Who'll volunteer to plug up the transom?" Chipso gulped. "She ain't thrown only one baseball bat at us so far. There is a dozen in there."

"We'll think of that later," Boom Boom said. "Let's not make no noise, boys. Frankie, you and Chipso toss up a coin and see who bashes in Klump's noggin."

"So long, Gertie," Willie called out.

"Thanks for tryin' anyways, Willie!" Gertie replied, and her voice sounded quite dry to Willie. "I'm gettin' weaker, Willie, as I ain't et since I got in here."

"That's it, Boom Boom!" Chipso enthused. "We starve the babe into admission."

"You are beasts," Willie said. "The Natsies they stretched at Noonanburg was choir leaders compared to you!"

"Where's an empty bottle?" Chipso wanted to know after Frankie had won the toss.

"A full one carries more boot," Boom Boom said. "Not the scotch, though, as it is scarce."

"This is where too much grog goes to my dome," Willie gulped. "I wisht Satchelfoot Kelly was psychick."

"Did you hear somethin'?" Boom Boom suddenly asked.

"Huh?" Chipso put down the bottle.

"A hiss'n' sound, guys."

"Hithin'?" Frankie asked.

Willie listened intently. There was a sound coming from somewhere that reminded him of a leaky auto tire.

"It is nothin'," Boom Boom said.

"Awright, Chipso, le's git this over with, huh?"

"It'll be a pleasure, Boom Boom." Chipso walked toward Willie. Frankie held a Roscoe close to the private detective's shorts. "Don't meth it up now, Chiptho!"

"One—two—th—!"

Kerwho-o-o-o-o-o-om!

The world fell apart. Willie, as he went over backwards in his chair guessed somebody had swiped the atom bomb secret and had hit first.

"It was them Russians," he choked out as the plaster from the ceiling thumped down on his pate. "Why doesn't the U. N. stop 'em?"

He was amazed to find himself holding on to his marbles. There was a derby hat in his lap and in that was a frazzled cigar. Close to Willie was Frankie with part of the old pool table holding him down. Chipso was walking around in a tight circle with nothing on but striped underpants and part of an undershirt. Chipso held a gun in one hand and Willie got up, staggered over to Chipso and took it away from the crook. Then he saw Boom Boom.

THE *Cocabanana* maestro was on all fours trying to get his fat noggin out of an outsized spittoon. His galluses had busted and his striped trousers were at half-mast. Willie picked up the leg of the pool table and whanged the cuspidor more firmly in place on Boom Boom's head.

"They will have to git a weldin' outfit to git that off," Willie said. "Gert! Ger-r-r-rtie!"

"In here, Willie," came a muffled voice.

Willie saw that the door between the rooms had been wiped clean. He crawled over a heavy iron safe and waded through wreckage and something grabbed him by the leg. It was Gertie Mudgett. Willie helped her out of the debris and brushed her off the best he could.

"I found dynamite, Willie—gulp—and a fuse. These crooks put their safe crackin' tools in the closet where I hid durin' the explosion." Gertie shuddered. "It's a miracle I wa'n't kilt, but sein' as we both was goin' to die anyways, well—I bet that explosion was

[Turn page]

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heard in Hoboken, Willie. This is a heckuva way to git silk stockin's. They ain't worth it. Wait'll I see if I broke anythin'."

Willie swung his head around when a dozen cops rushed in. He heard sirens screaming.

"Put 'em up!" one of the Finest yelled. "Don't make a move or we'll mow y' down!"

"All the crooks are out in that room," Willie howled. "Be sure an' git all the artillery as one of the Roscoes shot Louie Klepperhofer. I am William Klump, private detective. Tell them who you are, Gert."

"Ba-a-a-a-a!" Gertie bleated, and lowered her head. "I am a goat on Bikinini. Here I come a-loopin'!"

"Well, she is a reactionary right now," Willie said. "If you went through what she—let me sit down, huh?"

Down at the D.A.'s office sometime later, Willie admitted to Satchelfoot that Boom Boom had used him for an alibi.

"They should of knowed better to promise Gert somethin' an' then try and stall her off. Pitzzy and the blond were pals of Boom Boom's and the blond got Gertie to bring me to the Cocabanana so's I could be a Patsy. Imagine them crooks puttin' Gertie where they did, Kelly? They could lock a airdale in a meat store and leave the ice box door open. They always slip up somewheres, huh?"

"Ten sticks of dynamite!" Satchelfoot groaned. "And she survived, Willie. It don't look like it'll take much to support her."

"Guess not, Satchelfoot. So Boom Boom dressed up another punk in a



suit like his and—”

“You told us all that, Klump,” the D. A. said. “How you feelin’, Miss Mudgett?”

“My head aches a li'l, D. A. It is my sinus trouble, I guess,” Gertie complained. “Look, Willie, let’s get out of here, if they got everythin’. We can make the last show at Looey’s *Lexin’-ton.*”

Satchelfoot sighed. “I bet Ripley’d pay me plenty if I dared tell him this one, D. A. You should put her on the payroll. She is better than a prowl car. If a atom bomb ever hits the U. S., she will be the sole survivor.”

“Come on,” Gertie said to Willie. “They want to take our pitchers. And when they do, put your arm around me like you was perfectin’ me.”

“It don’t make no sense, Gertie.” Willie sniffed. “But I’ll do it anyway. It is silly.”

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 9)

We can't seem to make up our mind whether the following epistle, from Florida's sunny shores, is a knock or a boost. Anyway, the writer has a way of speaking his mind. All in all, however, we think it's a clever letter. Here goes:

I notice that your readers, when they write in, complain of all sorts of things. Some don't like the pictures, some don't like the heroes. I was surprised in a recent issue, to note that one particular reader objected to the heroines. As you probably are aware, it takes all kinds of people to make a world. On the whole, I like your stories a lot. It is good, clean fiction and helps pass the time pleasantly. That's what we buy magazines for—isn't it? So what is my gripe? I don't like the modern tendency in many of our magazines and newspapers to use what is known in the printing trade as "pepper," sometimes known as "leaders." I admit they can be very effective at times. Most authors however, use them to the point of boredom and about the most picayune things. Such as: He . . . ate . . . a . . . piece . . . of . . . pie! What's the idea?

—*Joe Newman, Hollywood, Fla.*

All right Joe—I'll bite. What is the idea? We feel just as badly about it as you do.

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We don't encourage "ellipses" as they are also known, in POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine. We think they should only be used for a break in time, or a complete change of scene. Let's save the pepper for the Chili con Carne! Thanks for calling the matter to our attention. If we offend again, be sure to let us know.

Here's praise for one of our authors. We think it's well deserved, too. We've passed the original over to Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Kofoed.

Glad to see our old friend Baldy Simmons has moved over to POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine. Always thought the ubiquitous Baldy confined his many activities to the sports field. I know author Jack Kofoed is wise to everything about all branches of sports as his factual articles, as well as his fiction, has proven. However, if Baldy wishes to weasel into the de-teck-a-tiff racket, it is okay with me. Mister Simmons is tops with me, no matter what role he plays.

—Wallace Ivins, Chicago, Ill.

That's okay with us too, Wallace. Baldy is an old friend of ours too. Always found him interesting and entertaining. Stick around—maybe he'll be back again some day. Nasturtium, put the "Welcome" mat out for Baldy Simmons!

The bouquets outnumber the brickbats this time, for which we are truly grateful. Here's one from a gentleman, who, from his knowledge of our authors, has evidently been reading our stories for some time:

I like most of your stories in POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine. Some, of course, are better than others. That can't be helped. My favorite authors are: Joe Archibald, Edward Churchill, Allan K. Echols, Roger Fuller, Jack Kofoed, Samuel Mines and Jean Francis Webb. Hope you noticed the order in which I placed them. Keep up the good work.

—Tom D'Arclay, St. Louis, Mo.

Yes Tom, we noticed the order in which you placed your authors—in alphabetical order, so that nobody would take precedence. Thanks to you, Tom, and to all our other kind friends who have written in. Please address all your letters and postcards to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

Happy reading to everybody. See you next issue!

—THE EDITOR.

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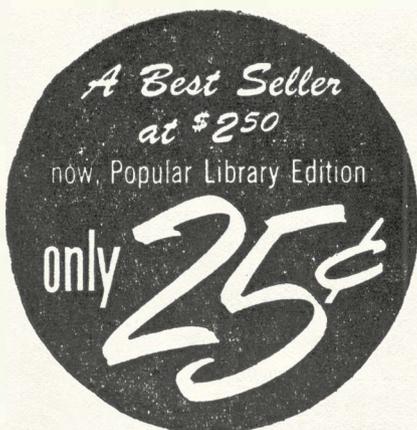
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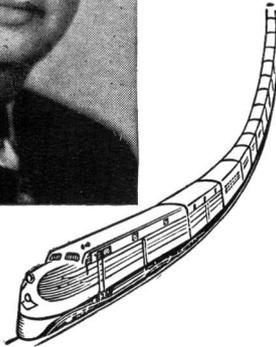
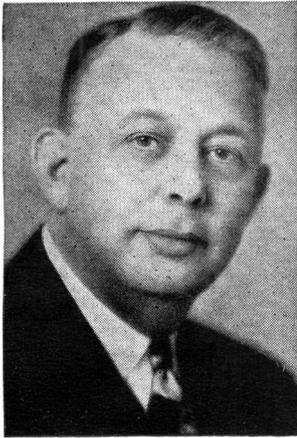
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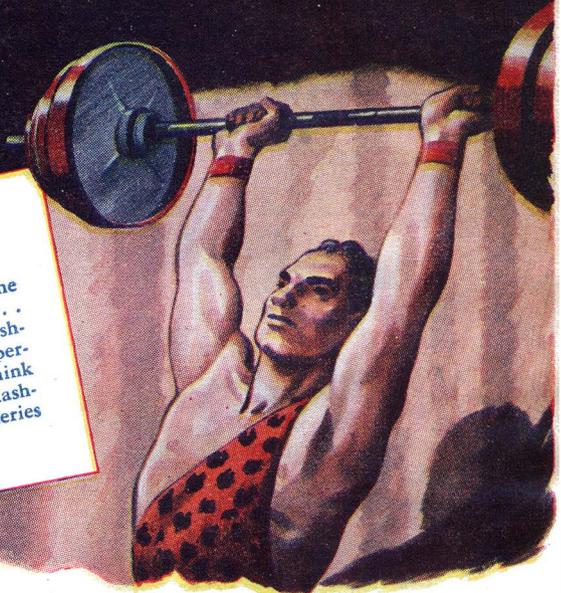
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