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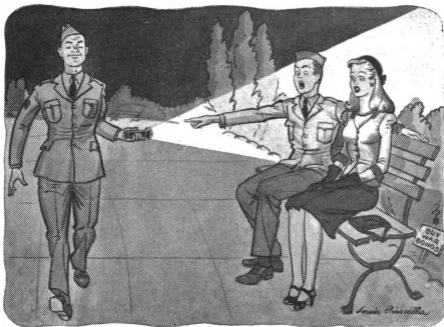
FOUR SLY MEN

A Baffling Mystery Novel
By J. LANE LINKLATER

**TAKE ME
FOR
MURDER**

An Exciting Novelet
By JOHN L. BENTON

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O. E. BROOKS,
Inventor

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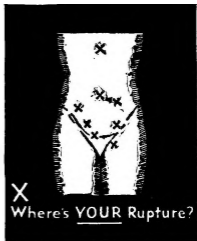
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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXVII, No. 1

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

June, 1944



A Baffling Mystery Novel

FOUR SLY MEN

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Radio Engineer Tobias Tyler suddenly tunes in on death and discord when a startling conspiracy of grim murder and puzzling intrigue stalks a mysterious mansion in the wilderness! 11

An Exciting Complete Novelet

TAKE ME FOR MURDER John L. Benton 36

Joe Casey tangles with waterfront rats as he battles to smash a payroll heist gang!

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Death is dished up at the Golden Harvest Night Club

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Willie Klump, the Hawkeye Hawkshaw, almost goes haywire

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

THINGS are still mighty chaotic in Dr. Zeng's bailiwick out on the West Coast. Dr. Zeng Tse-Lin, that renowned Chinese physician and philosopher who maintains the Mandarin Emporium as a respectable mercantile front to cover his activities as an investigator of various crimes, is really a white American who was born in China of wealthy American missionaries under the name of Robert Charles Lang.

But all that is past history. Dr. Zeng, known only to a chosen few as a white man, lives as an Oriental in his house of a Thousand Beatitudes above the Mandarin Emporium and collaborates with his close friend, Captain Brian Carter of the San Francisco police, in tracking down wily perpetrators of deadly crimes.

He almost meets his match this time when three Mexican emissaries to the United States are mysteriously murdered by the Nazi-spawned sinister Gray Condors.

This crime threatens international complications between the United States and Mexico, and Dr. Zeng, aided by Captain Carter and his own huge Chinese servant and bodyguard, Lai Hu Chow, has to work rapidly to solve the case and bring the killers to summary justice.

The Finger of Guilt

Any one of several men who identified the bodies in the morgue could have been guilty. And Dr. Zeng nearly loses his life proving which one it was. Not only this, Zeng makes use of a couple of clever scientific gadgets to point the finger in the right direction.

Lai Hu Chow's new artificial leg comes in quite handily, too. Chow, as you may remember, lost one leg in trying to prevent the killing of Dr. Zeng's parents by bandits years ago in China, and now he wears—as the need requires—an assortment of artificial legs created for him by Dr. Zeng. Each leg, and he has dozens, has a special

purpose, or carries a special bit of equipment.

You are going to find this exploit of the famous doctor one of the best novels that Author Walt Bruce has written for us. **CORPSE CARGO**, the newest Dr. Zeng thriller, is a **MUST** for your reading list. Coming in the next issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE!**

Key to Murder

Let's make it our Official Business now to consider the complete novelet which accompanies **CORPSE CARGO**. Here we have a rather unique criminal case. Practically all the action of the story takes place in and around and about the private home of Charles Mallory. **KEY TO MURDER** is an excellent title for this fast-moving novelet by Curtiss T. Gardner.

Mallory, trying hard to get into the Armed Service, was an amateur magician and an inventor of gadgets. He had no intention of poking his nose into other people's affairs. He definitely was not a snooping detective. But when other folks began poking long noses in through his windows and meddling emphatically in his personal business, he was forced to get busy. And thus Charles Mallory became, by force of circumstances, a vigorous private detective.

The amazing affair that he unearthed, coupled with a few choice murders, makes **KEY TO MURDER** one of the most entertaining and suspenseful novelets we have printed in many a day. And Mallory proved to be so good at the job that it looks as though he will wind up in Army Intelligence as a G-2 operative.

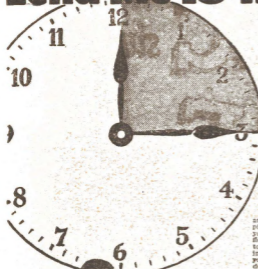
Among the other fast-moving stories coming next issue will be another delirious yarn about Willie Klump, the super-snoop. The president (and sole operative) of the Hawkeye Detective Agency gets into a veritable spaghetti entanglement in a hilarious adventure which Author Joe Archibald

(Concluded on page 81)



Lend Me 15 Minutes a Day

*...I'll prove
can make you
15 minutes*



I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLES to your biceps—*YIP*, on each arm—in double-quick time! I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbones, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body as full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

HERE'S WHAT ONLY 15 MINUTES A DAY CAN DO FOR YOU

Are you ALL MAN—bush-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wilecats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such

wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

I WAS A 97-lb. WEAKLING

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And it all comes! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is "Dynamic Tension," the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that "Dynamic Tension" can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-plate of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after first condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

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Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT. That name is Charles Atlas! In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his capable hands!

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—B. L. Orson

"Your book opened my eyes . . . 1 1/2" gain on my biceps, and 1" more on my chest. —F. Panza.

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Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what "Dynamic Tension" can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can do for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows—sneak-in, sneak-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then mail—get the coupon into the mail to me as fast as you can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77F, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

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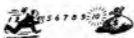
about **E**



E IS A VERY important letter in this war.

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That's why you should hang on to every Bond you buy. You can, of course, cash in your Bonds any time after you've held them for 90 days. You get all your money back, and, after one year, all your money plus interest,

But when you cash in a Bond, you end its life before its full job is done. You don't give it its chance to help you and the country in the years that lie ahead. You kill off its \$4-for-every-\$3 earning power.

{All of which it's good to remember when you



might be tempted to cash in some of your War Bonds. They are yours, to do what you want with.

But . . . it's ABC sense that . . .

They'll do the best job for you and for America if you let them reach the full flower of maturity!

WAR BONDS to Have and to Hold

The Treasury Department acknowledges with appreciation the publication of this message by

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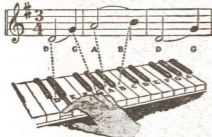
BEST METHOD BY FAR

"Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best."

—A. O., Minn.
*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional artists.

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From the above diagram you can see for yourself how easy it is to learn by this Print and Picture method. You simply look at the music and diagram and see which notes to strike. In a few minutes you find yourself playing the famous "Merry Widow" Waltz."



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"H. C. S.,
California

You, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument —quickly, easily—right in your own home!

A Sound Method

YOU SAY you'd love to learn music but can't afford a private teacher? Then listen to this . . . You can now learn to play your favorite instrument—as thousands of others have—for **LESS THAN SEVEN CENTS A DAY!** And that small sum covers everything—including sheet music! It doesn't take long, either. You can learn to play quicker than you ever dreamed possible!

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sons not only tell you what to do, in the printed instructions. They actually show you—with large, clear pictures—what positions to take—every move to make. You read how to play a tune—you see

how to play it—then you play it and hear how it goes. A teacher at your side couldn't make it more clear.

Print and Picture Sample—FREE

If you're really interested in learning music quickly and easily—and with little expense, send for our Free Booklet and Free Print and Picture Sample today. Don't wait. Fill in the coupon now—checking your favorite instrument. U. S. School of Music, 2946 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y. Forty-sixth year. (Est. 1898.)

NOTICE

Please don't confuse the U. S. School of Music method with any system of teaching music "by ear" or by trick charts. Our method teaches you to play by actual notes—*not* by any trick or number system.

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The Mechanism of Mind



WHY YOU ARE AS YOU ARE—

and What You Can Do About It!

DID you ever stop to think *why* you do the things you do? Have you often—when alone—censored yourself for impulsive urges, for things said or done that did not truly represent *your real thoughts*, and which placed you at a disadvantage? Most persons are *creatures of sensation*—they react to instinctive, impelling influences which surge up within them and which they do not understand—or *know how to control*. Just as simple living things involuntarily withdraw from irritations, so likewise thousands of men and women are content to be motivated by their undirected thoughts which haphazardly rise up in their consciousness. *Today you must sell yourself* to others—bring forth your best abilities, manifest your personality, if you wish to hold a position,

make friends, or impress others with your capabilities. You must learn how to draw upon your latent talents and powers, not be bent like a reed in the wind. There are simple, natural laws and principles which—if you understand them—make all this possible.

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THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC), SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.



The knife in the storekeeper's back was buried almost to the hilt

FOUR SLY MEN

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Radio Engineer Tobias Tyler suddenly tunes in on death and discord when a startling conspiracy of grim murder and puzzling intrigue stalks a mysterious mansion in the wilderness!

CHAPTER I

STRANGE WELCOME

TOBIAS TYLER, a tall, gangly man of thirty-five who looked younger, craned his neck to gaze at the wilderness as the sound split the silence.

"What was that, Mr. Shorb?" he said.

"Rifle shots," said Shorb.

Shorb had been busy poking under the

hood of the 1931 Ford, but he looked up, and both stared across the wooded canyon.

"Maybe someone shooting deer," suggested Tobias Tyler. "Or do they have deer around here?"

Shorb pushed his battered old slouch hat back over his bald head. "Not many. And this ain't the season. Anyhow, nobody hit us."

"Is it much farther to the house?" asked Tyler.

A BAFFLING COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL

"Less than two miles," Shorb said, and returned to his tinkering.

Although Tobias occasionally lent a hand, it was half an hour before Shorb was satisfied the aged engine would hold out. They started to get back in the car, then halted.

"What was that?" Tobias said.

"Another rifle shot." Shorb stuck a thick finger toward the woods. "Out there somewhere. Queer! Well, let's go."

Bumping over the rutted road that wound through foothills, Tobias Tyler gazed gloomily ahead.

"Funny old man Axton didn't have someone meet you with a car at Tecula," Shorb said suddenly. "He's got a flock of cars and usually has someone meet visitors."

"I'm no visitor." Tobias chuckled. "Just a working man. He wants me to do some work for him. I'm supposed to be good with radios, and it seems he has a private station."

"Well, the old coot's got nine million bucks, so he can afford it," Shorb said.

Tyler was thoughtfully silent. He tamped tobacco in his thin-bowled pipe, stuck the pipe in his mouth and clamped his teeth on it. It was easy for him to look thoughtful; rather dreamily thoughtful, as if most of the things people made a great fuss about weren't really important.

His way, his movements, were distinctly casual. Once, someone had taken a picture of him and drawn a beard around his face in an effort to prove he looked like Abraham Lincoln. Some agreed, but his mother—with due respect for Lincoln—indignantly insisted that her Tobias was handsomer.

TOBIAS had paid little attention to the controversy,

Tobias paid little attention to *any* controversy.

Just now it occurred to him that he didn't know what he was headed for. This wealthy man, Sam Axton, living out in this remote spot, had sent for him to come and do some special work on his private broadcasting station. That was queer in itself, under present conditions.

He knew nothing about Sam Axton.

"Funny about them rifle shots," Shorb was muttering. "Sam Axton hates shooting. Never has allowed it around the place."

Tobias was not bothered about the shooting.

"Axton has a big place?" he asked.

"A wallop of a place," said Shorb. "Old man Axton's daddy got it back in the Eighteen-sixties. It was just a cattle ranch then. There's still cattle, but a lot of other things, too. And some of it—like this part here—is just wild."

"Quite an establishment," murmured Tobias.

"Sure is. And about in the middle of the place is the old house. That's quite a layout, too. One of them old Spanish-style things."

"A large number of people working on the place?"

"Yes, sir. There's a general superintendent, and assistants, and a lot of working people. Mostly Mexicans."

"How about Axton himself?"

Shorb hesitated. "Well, he's a good customer of mine. I run the only store at Tecula, the nearest town—only seven miles. So I get quite a shake of business from him. All I can say is Sam Axton's kind've hard and nervous and looks like he never had a good time."

In a little while they emerged suddenly into a great clearing, in the middle of which was a huge two-story adobe house.

"It's something like a stockade," Shorb explained. "The front here is straight and square. In the middle there's a big *patio*. The house is built around the *patio*, but you can get into it from the back without going through the house."

He stopped the car. Tobias Tyler got out, reached for a small handbag, a suitcase and a tool kit. He gave Shorb a five-dollar bill.

"Thanks," said Shorb. "Mighty nice of you. Specially since I had to come out here anyway. Some stuff to deliver. I'll leave it and be on my way. Good luck!"

Shorb rattled around the side of the house. Dubiously, Tobias approached the heavy oak door and lifted a big metal door-knocker.

The Mexican woman, dressed in black, who opened the door, surveyed him with a curious gravity.

"I'm Tobias Tyler," he said. "Mr. Axton is expecting me."

"Come in, sir," the woman said in precise English.

Tyler stepped into a reception room, lavishly carpeted and equipped with elaborately carved chairs. There was a gloomy absence of light.

"Please sit down," the woman said.

He dropped his things, sank into a chair, and the servant vanished. Tobias Tyler, usually impervious to his surroundings, shivered a little.

"Queer place," he muttered.

Presently a door across the room opened and a man approached. He was about forty, short, and dressed smartly in a brown business suit. His straight, colorless hair was carefully smoothed back. His face was white, but placid. It was a face that might have belonged to a bookkeeper, but the small dark eyes were alert.

Tyler got up. "Mr. Axton?" he said.

"No. Mr. Axton is not available just now. I'm his secretary, Mead."

"Well, I'm Tobias Tyler. Mr. Axton is expecting me. When can I see him? I'd like to get to work."

"Just a moment, Mr. Tyler. How long have you been on the place?"

Tyler stared. "I just got here."

Mead smiled faintly. "I know. You haven't been in the house five minutes. But I mean in the vicinity—within, let us say, five miles?"

"Good gosh, I don't know. Shorb drove me here after I left the bus at Tecula." He peered down at Mead. "I don't like this. If I can't talk to Axton, I'll be on my way." He picked up his things. "I'll ride back with Shorb."

Mead raised a hand. "No use. Shorb won't be leaving, either—until the police give him permission."

"Police?"

"Mr. Axton is dead," Mead said. "He was murdered within the last hour."

MEAD did not look at Tyler. He was busy inspecting a fingernail.

Tobias Tyler sat down again. The news of a murder barely scratched the surface of his consciousness. People got murdered, he knew, but it had nothing to do with him. Axton was no part of his life. He had been hired to work for Axton. Now Axton was dead, so the job was over.

Tyler got up again.

"Well, if Axton's dead," he said, "there's no use my staying. If Shorb can't drive me back, perhaps there's another car—"

"No," said Mead. The late Sam Axton's secretary had a small hard voice. "The police are not here yet. I've sent for them. Meantime, no one will be permitted to leave. Mr. Axton has always had a few men around—guards, you might call them—and I've instructed them to scatter over the place and see that no one leaves."

Tyler blinked. "How long do you expect to detain me?"

"I have no idea. The police will attend to that. Possibly a few hours, but it might be a day or two."

"See here," said Tyler. "I don't like this room—too dark. And I don't like this chair—too hard. If I'm to stay, can't I do it in comfort?"

"Certainly," Mead said sharply. "Of course I knew you were coming. A room has already been assigned to you." He walked to a table, picked up a small brass bell. He shook a tinkle out of it. Presently another Mexican woman, this one short and plump, appeared.

"Maria," Mead instructed, "take this gentleman to his room."

"Si, senor," she said.

She would have carried Tobias' things if he had let her. But Tobias Tyler had never

got the hang of having other people wait on him, especially women.

She led him through a long room, and out to the *patio*.

Tyler stopped suddenly. The place took his breath away. It was like no other *patio* he had ever seen—an open space a hundred feet long and forty wide, entirely surrounded by the walls of the house except for a wide exit at the far end.

These inside walls had balconies all the way around the *patio*, one downstairs and one up.

In the *patio* itself was a wild medley of tropic foliage, topped by occasional palms; a pool, three small fountains, and narrow winding walks.

Maria labored up to the second floor balcony. Tobias followed. They walked the full length of the balcony, where Maria pushed open the door of a room and went in, Tobias just behind her.

"It's dark in here," he said.

Maria felt against the wall and switched on an electric light. Presently she shook her head.

"You be careful," she said.

He grinned. "Why?"

Maria shrugged and went out. Tobias Tyler smiled a little. Maria, he thought, liked him a little. He sat down on the bed. Well, this was a strange business, especially for him. He was a little dazed. Certainly he should get away as soon as possible, get back to his work. He didn't belong in a mess like this. As soon as he could persuade the police to let him go, he would leave.

There were three sharp taps on his door. He stared at it, started to get up, but the door opened. A girl came in and quickly closed the door behind her.

"Pardon me for walking in on you," she said. "I couldn't wait out there—might be seen."

CHAPTER II

SURPRISE VISITOR



TOBIAS TYLER lumbered to his feet. The girl who had entered looked to be in the early twenties, but something in her eyes suggested several years more. She was trim and smart in the blue suit which defined her slender figure. Her hair was gold. Agitation had deepened the blue of her eyes.

Tyler grinned awkwardly.

"My mother always told me the women would come to me, if I waited long enough," he said. "I never believed her, but now I see she was right."



Tyler rammed a blow at the downcoming arm, and the knife clattered to the floor



Lips taped and limbs bound,
Susan was too helpless
to struggle

"Please," said the girl. "This is serious." She reached over and switched off the light. "Do you mind? I might be seen."

"Okay. Guess I get frivolous at the wrong times. What can I do for you?"

She sat down. "I'm Susan Burnett. You don't know me, but I know you. That is, I know you're Tobias Tyler."

"How do you know?"

"I am—or was—Mr. Axton's stenographer and office assistant, working mostly under Mr. Mead's direction. I typed the letters Mr. Axton dictated, checking up on you. So I feel that I know you. And from the correspondence I handled I also feel that I can trust you."

"Nice of you," said Tyler, and when he saw her lips twisting, he added quickly: "Sorry. Didn't mean to be facetious."

Susan Burnett's eyes searched his face anxiously. She said:

"I was in the office when you came. From what I heard you say I assume you want to get away as soon as you can."

"Certainly."

"That's why I wanted to see you at once. Please stay as long as possible."

Tobias Tyler twined his long fingers. "You're afraid of something?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I don't know exactly. Mr. Axton was murdered—"

"I know. But surely that won't affect you. The police will be here shortly and take over, probably apprehend the murderer, and that will be that."

She shook her head.

"I'm not so sure."

"Well, who do you think killed Axton?"

"I really don't know."

Tyler stared at her steadily.

"There must be quite a number of people here," he said. "Surely there must be someone you know you can trust without asking me, a stranger?"

She was silent a moment. "There are a number of the servants who are very good. But no one on whom I can completely rely, for both good intentions and good judgment." Susan's voice throbbed a little. "I know I'm imposing on you—but I need you."

Tyler waved a careless hand. "That's okay. I'll stay." He took out his pipe, fumbled with the bowl. "You are related to the Axtons?"

"No."

"Then why can't you leave here as soon as the police are through?"

"I came here to work nearly a year ago. It's a hard place, and Mr. Axton was afraid I'd quit. He made me a proposition, that I was to draw a good monthly salary, with a bonus of a thousand dollars at the end of a year." She spread her hands. "The year will be up in two weeks, and I suppose

I'll get the bonus if I stay, even with Mr. Axton dead. And—I need that extra thousand."

"You think you're in some danger?" Tyler asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps."

"Do you know anything about the shooting?"

"Shooting? Mr. Axton wasn't shot. He was stabbed in the back with a knife."

Tyler walked to the window looking out over the patio. It was difficult to believe that this was a private home. It seemed more like some old-style South American hostelry. Standing at this window, he could see the balcony doors and windows of a dozen rooms on the other side of the patio.

He turned abruptly. "I should know where your room is."

She came and stood beside him. "It's on the other side of the patio. The third room from the rear. I think I'd better get back to it right now. Someone might come looking for me."

From his open door Tyler watched her slip along the balcony to where an outdoor stairway ran down to the patio. She crossed to another stairway which took her to the balcony on the other side. With a swift glance at him, she vanished into her own room.

TOBIAS TYLER shut his door and frowned. He was getting into a complicated mess. Then he shrugged and turned to his windows, peering through the curtains. It was late afternoon now. The sun no longer penetrated into the patio and it was a gloomy mass of shadows.

He was getting hungry. What did people do about eating in a place like this? There must be food. Well, he wasn't a prisoner; not yet, anyway. So he resolutely emerged from his room descended from the balcony and entered the house.

He was in that long room. And almost at once a man entered it from a door to his left.

"Hello," said the man, in a deep voice.

He was a huge fellow, tall and broad and full of girth. On his meaty face was a grin. His teeth were large and not too white, his eyes small and sharp.

Tobias introduced himself. "I was looking for food," he explained.

"Don't blame you," said the bearlike man. "I'm Woodwine, the superintendent here. I'm hungry, too, so we'll eat. Don't know what's got into these people. The old man gets killed and they forget that the living want to eat. Come on."

He led the way. There was a door near Tyler, but he hadn't seen it. It appeared that all the doors in the house, while not deliberately concealed, were so placed as

to be unnoticeable in the shadows. They entered another long room in the center of which was a large table. The table was set, but no one was there.

Woodwine picked up a small bell and shook it vigorously. When a Mexican woman came in, Woodwine shouted at her to bring food.

Tyler watched the superintendent thoughtfully as Woodwine turned to him with his perpetual grin.

"I guess service won't be so good around here for a day or two." He lifted a big shoulder. "Oh, well, the police should be here soon. Maybe they'll get things straightened out."

"There don't seem to be many people around the house," Tyler said affably.

"Servants are in the back. Most of the people out working will be quitting about now. They live in their own quarters, scattered about the estate."

"Nobody seems to know who killed Axton," Tyler suggested.

Woodwine stared at him. "I guess nobody knows yet. I was out all afternoon, busy. Mead sent word out to me about what happened. Seems the old man was in his office, alone. Mead went in to ask him something and there was Axton with a knife in his back. Mead just locked the windows and the door and left him there."

"The police have some distance to come?"

"Yes. They'll drive up. There's a landing field on the place but they wouldn't know about that."

"Hasn't Axton any relatives?"

Woodwine nodded heavily. "A son. Name's Leroy. Leroy Axton. Quite a lad. Lives in Beverly Hills and has a good time. Mead has no doubt notified him." For a moment, the grin died from Woodwine's face. "Mead is a fool. He—"

Just at that moment, Mead came in.

"Hello, Mead," Woodwine said affably, grinning again. "How goes it?"

Mead nodded briskly. "Police just got here. They'll want to see you soon."

"I'll be here," said Woodwine.

Mead turned and walked out again. It occurred to Tyler that Woodwine looked like a great disgruntled boar when the grin left his face. Certainly he was a thorough-going hypocrite.

The Mexican woman came in with steaming dishes—roast beef, boiled potatoes, cabbage, brown gravy.

Woodwine fell to as if he had quite forgotten that Tobias Tyler was there.

Tyler looked up presently and said:

"Do you live here in the house, Mr. Woodwine?"

Woodwine gulped. "No. I've got a cottage about half a mile from the house. More freedom that way."

"How about your foremen?"

"They have cottages, too. Married men."

Tyler got up.

"I don't like waiting," he complained. "I want to see the police."

He walked out to the adjoining room, feeling lost, because of the arrangement of the rooms, and the dim light in all of them. But in a few moments he found himself in a sort of waiting room. Through a slightly open door he could see a brilliant light which was startling in its contrast to the darkness everywhere else. He could hear voices.

HE HESITATED, then pushed open the door and walked in.

Mead was sitting in a corner, and several other men were there. They turned to look at him sharply, but Tyler ignored them to survey the man in a chair facing him. Here was the dead Mr. Axton, and this was what Tobias wanted to see.

One of the men told Tobias Tyler he was Captain of Detectives Tanner. Tyler nodded, still looking at the dead man.

Axton was sitting at a small table in a high-backed chair. He was leaning forward, having struck the edge of the table when he had pitched forward. Tyler could see the haft of a long knife over the dead man's shoulder. The blade was buried under his shoulder-blade.

Axton's face had a sharp nose, and around his eyes were lines of excessive worry, perhaps fear.

"Who is this man?" Captain Tanner asked Mead irritably.

"Tobias Tyler," Mead said. "Radio expert. Mr. Axton sent for him. He arrived shortly after I discovered the body."

"With Mr. Shorb," put in Tyler. "I believe he runs a store over at Tecula. I hired him to drive me out here."

"Where is Shorb?" Tanner suddenly asked Mead.

"He is being detained," said Mead, "in a small room adjoining the kitchen."

Tanner glared at Tobias Tyler. "You know anything about this?"

"Not much." Tobias then told him about the shots he and Shorb had heard.

"I don't know if those shots mean anything," he added. "Just thought you ought to know."

Tanner blinked reflectively. He turned to Mead again.

"Is this fellow quartered on the place?"

"I just gave him a room upstairs," said Mead.

"Get up to your room," Tanner snapped at Tyler. "Stay there until you're sent for."

Tobias smiled gloomily. "Thanks," he said, and walked out.

CHAPTER III

NO ALIBI



WOODWINE was still gorging himself when Tobias Tyler returned to the dining room. Woodwine grinned up at him.

"Better eat while you can," he said.

"No appetite," said Tyler. "I was wondering about the knife in Axton's back."

"Oh, must be a thousand knives around the place," said Woodwine. "Everybody has knives. Especially the Mexicans."

"You don't appear to be worried about your job," ventured Tyler.

"Why should I be? This place was incorporated. Of course, old Sam Axton owned ninety-seven shares out of the hundred, and the other three owners were dummies, but my contract is with the corporation, so I stay on and draw my pay."

Tyler gazed moodily at Woodwine. The fellow was no great help. Abruptly, he turned and walked out. He had been told to return to his room, and he could think of nothing better to do.

It was evening now, and a sullen gloom hung over the patio. No light shone through any of the windows as he ascended the stairs to the second floor balcony. And as Tobias strolled along the balcony toward his room in some unaccountable way he felt that he was involved in this murder.

It sounded absurd, but there it was. Of course he knew no more about the death of Sam Axton than if he had been in China. Besides, he had an alibi. At the time of the murder he had been on his way to the house with Shorb.

Tyler entered his room, switched on the light and drew the curtains. He thought he would lie down. He started toward the bed, then stopped abruptly, before he had even removed his hat.

Well, the little storekeeper from Tecula, Martin Shorb was not going to be anybody's alibi. He was lying beside the bed, face down, his toes grotesquely boring into the rug. The knife in his back was buried almost to the hilt.

Tobias Tyler stared at the knife. The haft was a sort of yellow bone, carved in what Tyler took to be an Aztec design. It was not modern-fashioned, that knife.

The murder of Sam Axton had left him cold, annoyed by its unpleasantness. But the blood still wet in Martin Shorb's colored shirt angered him. He had liked the man.

Tyler peered about the room. It didn't

look any different. The bed, the two chairs, the dresser, the writing table. It was old-fashioned stuff, sturdy, and the woodwork had curlicues and designs with which he was not familiar.

Tyler switched out his light, opened the door and emerged on the dark balcony. It was now almost pitch-dark. He heard light footsteps, vaguely, and after he had gone about a dozen yards he collided with a human form.

"Sorry," a voice muttered. "Couldn't see you in this darkness."

It was a strange voice to Tyler.

"Okay," he said politely.

As the man opened the door nearest at hand, stepped into a room and switched on a light, Tyler got a glimpse of him. A young man, dark, with rather pleasant features, a bit undersized. Dressed roughly, as if he had just come in from the fields, he yet gave the impression of being a man of education and intelligence.

"That one's badly worried," Tyler told himself.

He went on rapidly.

Downstairs, he made for Sam Axton's office. Except that Mead was now absent, the same people were there.

CAPTAIN TANNER swung toward him threateningly.

"I thought I told you to go to your room."

"You did," Tyler said mildly. "But I've something to report."

"You can do it later. I've got work to do."

"You've got more work to do than you figured," Tobias told him pleasantly. "Sorry, but there's another dead man."

"What's that?"

"Another dead man. Knife in back, all same this one."

Tanner frowned. "Who?"

"My friend Shorb. The storekeeper from Tecula."

"Where is he?"

"In my room."

The door opened. Mead stepped in and sat down.

"This fellow tells me there's another corpse," Tanner said to Mead. "In his room. Shorb."

"Shorb!" the secretary exclaimed. "Shorb dead! I don't understand."

"Neither does Shorb," remarked Tanner. "You know Shorb?"

"Oh, very well. Mr. Axton bought stuff from him frequently. A very worthy man."

"Yeah. But he's not worth much now. Where does he fit into this thing, anyway?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Mead.

"However, I still hold to my original notion. Tony Trujillo is the man to inquire about."

For a moment, Tanner was silent. Tyler gazed at Mead. So Mead had a theory

which he had communicated to the police—something involving a Tony Trujillo.

Tanner turned to one of his men.

"Joe, get someone to go with you and pick up this Tony whasinsname. I'm going to look at the latest stiff."

Captain Tanner went to Tobias Tyler's room to look at Martin Shorb. He took Tyler with him. His broad, angular face was set grimly and he prowled cautiously about the room.

"Where do you get, Captain?" Tyler asked presently.

"The guy couldn't have stuck that knife in his back himself," Tanner snarled, "so he was murdered." He whirled and gazed at Tyler morosely. "You know more about this than you're telling."

"I know nothing."

"So say you. Well, let's get out of here. In a few minutes my men will be up here to take care of the technical stuff. Then we'll cart the stiff downstairs. After that, you can reoccupy your room—if you want to."

"I'm not anxious. May I wander around the house?"

"If you don't try sneaking off."

They went back downstairs. Tanner went in, leaving Tyler in the warm and dreary darkness of the patio. For some time he could see nothing. Presently he saw a brief flash of light, on the south side of the upper balcony. He saw a shadow move as the door of Susan Burnett's room opened to admit someone, then closed again.

Tyler quietly ascended the stairs on the south side and walked along the balcony, stopping near Susan's door. He stood against the wall and waited. In about ten minutes the door opened again. Someone stepped out, the door closed, and Tobias Tyler recognized the young man with whom he had collided—the fellow who had the room opposite here.

Tyler flattened himself against the wall. The young man brushed past him noiselessly, and quickly vanished.

Tobias Tyler stepped quickly to the door of Susan's room. He hesitated a moment, then grasped the door-knob and pushed.

"Pardon my haste," he said quietly, "but this is not a conventional situation."

Susan was sitting at a small table, wearing a lounging robe. Her face was a pale mask, but her eyes were very bright.

"That's all right," she said. "I am not a conventional woman."

Tyler slumped in a deep chair. He studied her for a moment.

"Glad of that. I thought you might be willing to help me out on a few points."

"Since you're being good enough to help me," said Susan, "I don't see how I could refuse."

"Let me indulge in a little personal analy-

sis," Tyler said. "I am not a good man for this job, Susan. I am not a practical man."

Susan smiled, though the tense worry was in her eyes. "You look quite intelligent."

"Thanks. But that doesn't make me practical. Now, I always liked to study. At school and college I studied the sciences. That meant starting with facts—rock-bottom facts. But always I'd leave them and find myself probing the mysteries of life beyond the facts. You follow me?"

"I think so. You'd go philosophical on yourself." Susan regarded him gravely. "You're telling me this for a reason?"

"Yes. The only thing I've found to make me tie the theoretical and the practical in together, so far, has been radio. . . . Now, this business of murder. It has been fantastic, unreal—at least to me. Even the setting here—this incredible old house, that ghostly patio—tends to push the reality away."

"But not the danger," Susan suggested.

"No. That's real enough. But what I want of you is to help me forget everything but the plain facts of murder."

"How?"

Tyler thought a moment. "I'll ask a few questions. Now, Sam Axton was murdered. Martin Shorb was murdered. They were—"

"What!" Susan's tone was startled. "Shorb!"

Tyler nodded. Of course, she hadn't heard of that. He told her about it.

"I'm sorry," she murmured.

"Can you see any connection between Axton's murder and Shorb's?" Tyler asked.

"None at all."

"You are still unwilling to suggest anyone as Axton's murderer?"

"I—I just don't know."

"Axton was not liked by his associates?"

"So far as I know, Mr. Axton did nothing bad, but he was perpetually ill-tempered and suspicious. He was most unpleasant to be around."

"As if he had some secret worry?"

"Yes, that was it."

"But you don't know what that worry was?"

"No."

Tyler wagged his head. "Not much help yet. Well, Axton was killed late this afternoon, perhaps around four o'clock. Do you know who was in the house at that time?"

SUSAN played with her fingers nervously. "I was in the house, in the small office room just off Mr. Axton's office. I was there all afternoon, working on some papers. The door between that room and Mr. Axton's was closed. I knew nothing of the murder until Mr. Mead came in and told me."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing. There may have been a murmur of voices during the afternoon, but I was too busy to notice."

"Who else was in the house?"

"I really don't know. Not many, I think. There were a few servants, probably, Mexican women, who ordinarily would not get near Mr. Axton's office in the daytime."

"How about Mead?"

"I have no way of knowing about him. He's usually around the house, either in Mr. Axton's office or mine, or in one of the other rooms where he works. I believe I heard him say he was out part of the time this afternoon, looking into something in one of the groves."

"How about the superintendent, Woodwine?"

"Well, Woodwine usually came in late in the afternoon to report to Mr. Axton."

"But Woodwine didn't come in *this* afternoon?"

"I didn't see him."

"How about Tony Trujillo?"

Susan hesitated. "Who told you about Tony?"

"Mead told the police that Tony was the boy to watch."

"I'm sorry Mr. Mead said that," Susan said. "I don't believe Tony would— Well, I don't know. I guess my sympathies are with Tony."

[Turn page]

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles and move your head from side to side?



ANSWER: The circles spin like a wheel.



"Why?"

Susan flipped the slipping edge of her robe over her knee.

"There's a story back of it," she said. "This place belonged to Tony's grandfather, about eighty years ago. At that time, Mr. Axton's father was a merchant in the old boom town of Tecula. Tony's grandfather started to build a big new house—this house. When it was half-finished, he ran out of money. He borrowed a few thousand dollars from Mr. Axton's father, giving a mortgage. He was never able to pay back the money."

"So Axton's father took over?"

"Yes. And when he died, Mr. Axton inherited it. Tony Trujillo's grandfather died in poverty. So did his father."

"And where does Tony hang out?"

"Close to here. The mortgage did not include a small piece of property. It's a sliver of land a few hundred feet across and penetrates into the Axton estate so that its point reaches within a quarter of a mile of here. Tony lives there. The land isn't worth much."

CHAPTER IV SUSPECT LIST



AFTER Susan finished her story, Tobias Tyler was deeply thoughtful.

"So Tony may have done it!" he finally said. "Motive, revenge. I understand people like Tony are proud and nurse their resentments a long time."

"Oh, I hope it wasn't Tony!" cried Susan.

Tyler eyed her closely. "I'd like to see him," he said. "No doubt I shall."

He nursed the bowl of his pipe in his hand. He stared down at it, spoke to Susan without looking up. "By the way, when I came out of my room not long ago, I bumped into a young chap on the balcony. He occupies the room directly opposite yours, on the north balcony. Who is he?"

Tyler looked up quickly as he shot the question at her.

For a brief moment, panic flared in Susan's eyes. Then she smiled.

"Oh, yes," she said. "That's Hugh Hollend."

"Hugh Hollend? What does he do around here?"

"Hugh is a sort of general assistant."

"You know him quite well?"

Susan inclined her head. "Oh, so-so. I see him about the place sometimes, or at dinner. That's about all."

She was being casual about it, and obvi-

ously she had no intention of mentioning the young man's furtive visit.

Tyler got up and strolled to the door.

"Where is Axton's private radio station?" he asked.

"In a small building about half a mile from the house."

"How about a key to it?"

"There are two keys," Susan said dubiously. "Mr. Axton was very careful about those keys. He kept one of them on his person, always." She hesitated. "He entrusted the other one to me."

Tyler smiled. "Good. Let me have it!"

For a little while, Susan was motionless. Then she shrugged, got up and searched in the inner recesses of a book shelf. She found a key and gave it to him, silently.

It seemed to Tyler, as he walked back along the balcony, that the *patio* was blacker than ever. He felt his way down the stairs and stood for a while on the flagged space.

Well, so far the most likely suspect was this Mexican, Tony Trujillo. But Susan hoped it wasn't Tony. So did Tyler, though he realized that he was merely reflecting Susan's feelings, disregarding the facts. But instinctively he sympathized with people who had been dispossessed, especially if they had pride.

And certainly Susan wasn't telling him all she knew. She was holding something back about Hugh Hollend. And she was probably keeping quiet about some phase of her relationship with the late Sam Axton. Why? It might be on account of a promise she had made to Axton.

Tobias wandered into the house. Woodwine was still sitting at the dining-room table. Another man was with him.

"How about some coffee?" Tyler asked.

Woodwine picked up the bell, tinkled it violently, and the plump Maria came in.

"A pot of coffee," Woodwine said. Maria bobbed and went out, and Woodwine said to Tyler:

"This is Doc Gould, Mr. Tyler."

The two men exchanged polite words and shook hands gravely. Doc Gould was short and bulky, with a bald head, plump face and bland blue eyes. He looked a little like a cherub who had spent a lifetime eating too much. He was dressed in somber black.

"You're a physician?" inquired Tobias.

"Of a kind, sir," said Doc Gould, mildly.

"You do not practice medicine?"

"Indeed, no. I minister to the mind. Not according to any accepted formula, sir. In my own way."

Woodwine laughed heartily as he watched the puzzled look on Tyler's face.

"It's like this," he said. "Doc used to be a psychiatrist, but he had a little difficulty."

"No real difficulty, sir," objected Doc Gould with restrained indignation. "I

merely found it impossible to follow the rules as laid down by the association, so I withdrew and opened my own office. My specialty has been to bring order to disturbed minds. A most worthy labor, I think."

"Pays good, too, eh, Doc?" put in Woodwine, chuckling.

"Mr. Axton was a patient of yours?" Tyler asked.

"To be sure," said Doc Gould. "Mr. Axton was a highly nervous subject. He often found his mind beset by problems upon which he needed help. He would then send for me. I would come and stay a few hours—sometimes a few days." He nodded his head dolefully. "This time I came too late."

"Mr. Axton sent for you?"

"I got a letter from him yesterday, but could not come until today."

Maria came in with a large pot of coffee, and Doc Gould looked up at her.

"My dear," he said, "I recall with pleasure the tortillas you made the last time I was here. Do you happen to have any on hand?"

MARIA bobbed, and went out.

"You live in Los Angeles, Doctor?" Tyler persisted.

"No, sir. San Diego. I found Los Angeles too mundane. I find San Diego spiritually salubrious."

"Also," put in Woodwine, grinning, "it's close to Mexico, just in case of trouble, eh, Doc?"

Doc Gould breathed heavily, but that was the only sign of anger he gave.

"You've been serving Mr. Axton for some time?" Tyler said.

"Three years."

Tobias peered at him keenly. "Then I think you might be most valuable to the police."

Doc Gould frowned. "I should be glad to be of value, but I don't know how."

"The question of motive," suggested Tyler. "Why was Axton killed. With your intimate knowledge of the inside of Axton's mind you might be able to tell."

"Sorry. I can think of nothing—yet."

Woodwine had opened his mouth to speak when a young man loped in. He was tall and blond, and the smile on his white face was without meaning as he sat down at the table and looked around.

"Hello, Woodwine—hello, Doc," he said. He looked at Tobias. "I don't know you." "This is Mr. Tyler, Leroy," Woodwine said. "Your father sent for him—something about the radio. He got here after your father was gone."

"Ah, yes." There was something insipid about Leroy Axton's small mouth, but Tyler noticed an evasive slyness in his eyes.

Young Axton spied the coffee pot.

"I can use some of this. Just got here. The police said they'd speak to me later. Rotten luck, this. Well, poor old Dad is through worrying."

Leroy poured coffee into a cup.

"You live in Beverly Hills, Mr. Axton?" Tyler asked politely.

"Yes. Close to Hollywood, you know. Life is riotous there. I like riotous living."

"But your father didn't?"

"Dad?" Leroy laughed. "Lord, no! I've lived in Beverly Hills ever since I got out of college—five years." He sighed. "I'm afraid Dad couldn't stand me around. I made him nervous. And, to be frank, I couldn't stand this place here—too ghostly."

"Any idea who killed your father?"

Leroy shrugged. "Not the faintest."

"I suppose you'll take over here now."

"Well, I'm the only heir." His eyes glistened. "Maybe the police will suspect me, eh? Makes me a millionaire!"

"The police will be interested," Tobias conceded. "You have an alibi?"

"I don't know. I'd have to check back. I was in Beverly Hills, but I have a plane. It's less than a hundred miles. It doesn't take long to fly that far."

Tobias Tyler's gaze wandered to Woodwine, and to Doc Gould. If he had been making a list of suspects, he thought, he certainly would include them. For that matter, he would also put down Mead, the secretary.

And how about Hugh Hollend who seemed to be Susan Burnett's special interest?

Then there was the young Mexican, Tony Trujillo.

How about Susan herself?

Tyler abruptly got up and smiled amiably. "See you all later," he said.

He found his way to the office again. Captain Tanner was talking to Mead. Tanner frowned at him. "I'm busy."

"It's important."

Reluctantly, Tanner dismissed Mead.

"I've already been introduced to you as a radio expert," Tyler said. "I've been wondering if my presence here might not have a bearing on Axton's murder."

"How?"

"Axton had a private broadcasting station—was what is known in the trade as a radio 'ham'. He was interested in finding someone capable of working with him, and wrote careful letters to certain companies, asking them to recommend someone. Now, as you know, with a war on, it's strictly forbidden to operate a private station."

TANNER squinted hard.

"That's right!"

"So why didn't he just close up his station for the duration?"

"Fifth-column stuff, huh?"

Tyler shook his head. "I think not. But it's possible Axton wanted to use his station for other private purposes. A man like Axton is likely to be stubborn. He thinks regulations are all right for other people, but *he* is above them. Especially if he's got millions of dollars, he expects to get away with anything!"

Tanner looked doubtful. "How come you agreed to work for him?"

"I've been doing special Government work. There was a lull—I had a couple of weeks to wait for material—and about that time a Los Angeles radio company got a letter from Axton, thought it queer, and turned it over to the Bureau." Tobias smiled. "So they asked me to take it on."

"You've got credentials?"

"No, but you can check my yarn. What I want now is a look at Axton's radio plant."

"It's an idea," Tanner said, "but I'm too busy right now to go with you."

"You don't need to bother. I can do it myself."

"That would be just lovely." The grin on Tanner's face was intended to be withering. "Listen. You could be a Government man and *still* mixed up in something dirty! No, son. It's getting late. We'll get around to your angle in the morning."

Tobias Tyler smiled, and backed out.

CHAPTER V A MEXICAN'S PRIDE



UT in the tropic gloom of the patio, Tyler paused to reflect. That radio might be important, and he would like to see it right away. Anything could happen before morning. Tanner was placidly assuming that all the murder had been done that was to be done, but Tobias Tyler sensed a vague but oppressive threat of more to come.

There were too many loose knives about.

After a few moments, Tyler ascended to the second-floor balcony. He stopped at the door of the nervous young man, Hugh Hollend.

He wanted someone with him, as a precaution, when he entered that radio building. Hollend should do. He was an employe of the estate. Besides, Tyler figured it would give him a chance to look over the young fellow.

Tyler tapped on the door, and presently it was opened cautiously.

"I'd like to talk with you, Hollend," Tyler said.

Hollend let him in and quickly closed the

door. The room was neat and attractive, but there was nothing intimate in it—no photographs, nothing to indicate Hollend's connections.

Tobias Tyler explained about the radio house.

"I want to take a look at it. I'd like you to be with me."

Hollend was clearly worried. His dark eyes were bright against the pallor of his face.

"I—I don't know if I should," he objected.

"I'll see that you're protected."

"Well, okay."

Hollend led the way down the back stairs. Here there was an opening from the patio to a space at the back of the house. To the right were the dim outlines of garages. Hollend set off to the left. A pathway ran through a grove of trees, and presently they came up against a small, sturdy, square brick building.

Silently, Tyler inserted the key he had obtained from Susan.

Inside, he located a light switch and surveyed the room.

"A ham's paradise!" he muttered. "A dream place! Axton had the finest equipment available."

"All I can see," said Hollend, "is a mess of dials and tubes and dewjiggers."

The radio equipment was set up close to the far wall. Nearby were a couple of flat desks, and a table. Along one wall was a book-filled case, and a filing cabinet. The walls were bare except for three small tapestries, one on each of three walls.

Hollend sat down and watched as Tyler roamed about, poking into everything. Presently he came to the broadcasting set-up, scrutinized it closely.

He proceeded to the desks and opened the drawers. In one of them he found a loose-leaf book, which he examined.

"What's that?" Hollend said curiously.

"Just Axton's private log," Tyler said.

"Every amateur is required by law to keep one, with a full record of all calls."

"Can you get anything out of it?"

"Not much. It might tell us something if we had time to trace the calls down. Of course, there are names and numbers of other stations he talked with, but it's probably incomplete."

Hugh Hollend got up and approached the set. He peered at it with a worried frown.

"Nothing out of the way, eh?"

Tyler smiled faintly. "There's one queer item. See those things there?"

His forefinger indicated an oblong cardboard box. Inside the box were set five small square boxes, and in each was a whitish slab, almost transparent, about one-inch square, and waferlike.

"What are they?" queried Hollend.

"They're common enough," Tyler said. "Just frequency crystals. The curious thing is why should Axton have so many?"

"That's not usual?"

"No. One extra would be plenty. There's room in that long box for six, so one of them is already in use. They look exactly the same, but I was just taking a good look at them and I think they've been ground to slightly different thicknesses."

"What's the idea of that?" Hollend said.

"Obviously Axton figured on operating on different frequencies, and the only reason that I can think of for that was that he wasn't supposed to be operating at all. He may have thought that in that way he might elude detection by the Government's monitors. However, it was too much of a technical problem for him, so he sent for me." Tyler wagged his head sadly. "If that was his idea, it was cockeyed. But it's just about what a man of his type would do."

"Why would he want to keep on operating his set against the law?" Hollend said.

"That's the big point," Tyler muttered. "I don't know."

"You think this radio thing had anything to do with his murder?"

"On a guess, I'd say it did. Maybe it was just a side issue, but there must be some connection." Tyler eyed the young man shrewdly. "So you don't know anything about this radio business?"

Hollend looked startled. "Me! Good gosh, no!"

"What kind of work do you do here on the estate, Hollend?" Tyler asked politely.

"General assistant to Mr. Axton. Not much more than a messenger boy, really. And I had a number of odd jobs to do."

"How long have you been working here?"

Hollend's nervousness was coming back. "Oh, about six months."

TYLER put a hand on his shoulder and grinned.

"Don't worry. Just friendly curiosity. By the way, is there anyone else on the place who knows about the operation of a station like this?"

"I don't know of anyone, except Mead," Hollend said. "He was Axton's right-hand man. I don't think Mead came here much. The old man didn't let anyone, usually. But from hearing Mead talk, I think he knew a good deal about radio work."

Tobias Tyler strolled slowly around the room, looking down at the floor. At one point he stopped. The carpet against the wall was clouded with dust—plaster dust apparently. It was just under one of the tapestries.

Tyler had noticed it before, but decided to say nothing about it. He was still a little uncertain about Hugh Hollend.

As they went out, Hollend muttered:

"Guess I'll go back up to my room."

Tyler took his arm. "Better come along with me," he said genially. "I may need you."

As they entered the *patio*, loud and angry voices came to them, apparently from the large reception room. Tyler hurried. There were several people in the room. In the middle of the floor were Captain Tanner and a tall Mexican.

"Don't you hold out on me, Tony!" Tanner was yelling at the Mexican. "You're not telling everything!"

"You wouldn't understand, anyway," the Mexican said quietly.

Tyler and Hollend kept back against the wall. Tyler watched with keen interest. So this was Tony Trujillo! Somehow, he had expected him to be a younger man. This fellow was at least thirty-five, straight as an arrow, with keen, prideful black eyes. And obviously Tanner's roaring voice had made no impression at all on him.

"You don't seem to realize the spot you're in," blurted Tanner. "We know you been pestering old man Axton for a long time—busting in on him when he didn't want you. And you've been seen loitering about the house lately."

Tony smiled slowly. "What else do you know?"

"That's enough," Tanner grunted.

"Just what do you want me to tell you?"

"You might start in by telling me what you were trying to get out of Axton."

For a moment, Tony was thoughtfully silent. Then he said, "I still doubt if you'll understand. But I don't mind telling you I was trying to get a paper."

"What kind of paper?" spluttered Tanner.

"A legal document." Tony Trujillo seemed to draw himself up a little higher. "A document," he added, "signed by President Abraham Lincoln!"

"You must be bugs," Tanner said disgustfully.

"That would be your reaction, no doubt," Tony said in his careful English. He smiled tolerantly. "You may have learned that many years ago this place belonged to my grandfather. His rights to the property were rooted in an old Spanish grant. The time came when he wanted to borrow money on it. He gave a mortgage to Mr. Axton's father. This was shortly after California became part of the United States. Therefore, to clear all dispute as to his ownership, my grandfather applied to the Land Commission for a patent on the property. The patent was granted. As was customary, it was signed by the President of the United States!"

Tanner made a grimace. "And Lincoln

was President in them days. But why do you want this document?"

"This is the part you won't understand," Tony said gravely. "I should explain that my grandfather lost everything to Mr. Axton's father."

"And you was sore about it!" charged Tanner.

Tony shook his head. "Perhaps there has been some feeling, but that is beside the point, sir. Since those days, the members of my family have scattered. I remain here because I have a small piece of land." He shrugged. "I do not care about the money."

Tyler nudged Hollend.

"That's a Tony Trujillo for you!" he said in an undertone. "Never mind the money, but there's no end to his pride!"

"I don't get you," scowled Tanner.

"I knew you wouldn't," Tony said calmly. "I want that paper simply because the name of Abraham Lincoln is signed to it! Signed with his own handwriting, sir! There is the name of Lincoln, on the same paper with the name of Trujillo!"

"Good boy!" Tobias Tyler said aloud.

CAPTAIN TANNER turned and frowned at him. Then he turned back to Tony. "So you were willing to kill him for that!"

Tony's eyes grew very black. "I did not kill anyone. I am only explaining what I was trying to get from Mr. Axton. A long time ago he promised it to me, but he kept putting me off. I could not understand it. It was of no use to him."

"Lincoln's autograph would be worth something," cut in Tanner.

"It might be," agreed Tony. "I have no idea what its money value was. That did not interest me."

Tyler pushed away from the wall and approached them. "About this document—this patent," he said pleasantly. "Did you ever see it, Tony?"

"No. But my father did."

"Your father's name was Tony?"

"No, sir. My father's name was Diego. My grandfather's name was Manuel."

"Then your father was alive at the time the patent was issued?"

"Yes, sir. He was a young man. He was married then. His wife died, but he married again many years later. He was quite old when I was born. When he died, I was still a young child." Tony's eyes were brooding. "It was on his death-bed that he told me about the patent, and suggested that I get it for myself some day."

"What the devil is this, anyway?" Tanner put in irritably.

"I thought it might be of value to get something of the background," Tobias said casually

"Background!" snorted Tanner. "Eighty-year-old-stuff! Rats!"

Tyler grinned into Tanner's flushed face. "If you want me," he said, "I'll be around. Good-night."

He took Hugh Hollend by the arm, and started to march out. But he stopped with one foot out in the *patio*. Someone had hurried into the reception room from another door.

"We found another stiff out in the brush!" Tyler heard an excited voice say to Tanner.

CHAPTER VI

CORPSE OF MYSTERY



CAPTAIN TANNER and his men stared down at the body lying on the ground just outside the front of the house. A light suspended from a chain over the front door shed an eerie glow over its drab and dreary length.

Captain Tanner added the light of a powerful flash. The dead man was short, rather plump, less

than middle-aged. Under the dirt and muck that covered him, it could be seen that the cut of his brown suit was expensive.

Mr. Tanner got up, reared back on his heels and employed all the profanity he could muster in addressing his helpers. He especially resented the fact that the body had not been left where found. It appeared, however, that it had been discovered by a couple of the estate's employes, not detectives. In their excitement they had simply carried the corpse all the way to the house.

Tobias Tyler leaning angularly behind Tanner, remarked:

"An unpleasant character, Captain."

"Yeah?" grunted Tanner. "What do you know about him?"

"Only what I can see. A selfish face. A criminal face."

"Where was he?" Tanner asked the crowd.

A man stepped forward. "In a thick clump of brush a couple of miles northwest of the house."

"But on the estate, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

Tanner turned the corpse over on his face. The back was a ghastly mess.

"Blasted in the back," muttered Tanner. "Pretty close range, too. One shot was enough to ruin him." He straightened, and glared at Tyler. "So this was the shot you claim you heard!"

"Probably," Tyler admitted.

"You just heard it, huh? You didn't fire it, huh?"

"I just heard it."

"Sure. But you could've done it." Cunningham crept into Tanner's grin. "You was the only one who knew about it."

"Shorb was with me."

"Shorb is dead! Killed in your room!"

"You have a neat theory there, Captain," Tyler drawled.

"That's what I thought. Shorb was with you. If you killed this guy, Shorb would be a witness. Naturally, you'd want to get rid of him!"

"Oh, naturally."

"Well, what's against the idea?" Tanner demanded angrily.

"Not a thing," said Tyler. He sighed. "However, if I killed him, I'd like to know who he is."

"You wouldn't tell us, would you?"

"No. I'd suggest you ask the others."

Practically everybody in the house had come out and grouped about—young Leroy Axton, Woodwine, Doc Gould, Mead. Hugh Hollend was standing close to Tyler. Tony Trujillo was there, one of Tanner's men close to him.

"Any of you guys know this stiff?" Tanner said.

They took a look, one at a time. Hugh Hollend was first. Tyler noticed that he was visibly shaken, but he shook his head.

One after the other, they gave a negative answer. No one, it appeared, knew the dead man.

Tanner knelt down and poked fingers into pockets. He found little except a registration card. Tyler read the card over Tanner's shoulder:

LARRY JASPER
1362 Karn Avenue
HOLLYWOOD

Tanner looked up angrily. "You here again?"

Tyler smiled. "I haven't been away. Sure, the fellow had to have a registration card. He can't be over forty. But it's a queer there's nothing else. He'd certainly have some money, perhaps a few papers, and keys. Apparently the killer frisked him thoroughly. Left only that registration. That means the killer wanted him to be identified."

"Larry Jasper," repeated Tanner, moodily. "I've heard the name. Small-time crook, I think."

"I wouldn't doubt it," approved Tyler. He poked Hollend. "Let's leave this problem to the experts."

As they walked away, Tanner mumbled something to one of his men.

In the patio, Tyler and Hollend stopped. "You'd better go to your room, Hollend," Tyler said. "I think Tanner assigned a man to watch us. They'll be less suspicious of you if you don't wander around."

"Suspicious?" stammered Hugh.

"Yes." Tobias smiled. "You did know that dead man, didn't you?"

Hollend hesitated for some time. Then he said, "Yes."

He hurried up the stairs to the balcony.

TOBIAS TYLER sat down on a rail on the edge of the patio, in the deep shade of a palm. On the balconies above and below, no lights were on. A half-moon managed to push some of its hazy light into the patio, but nothing was clear to the vision.

Three men had been killed, Tyler reflected moodily, but something more was coming. Of that he was sure. The murders of Shorb and the crook from Hollywood were probably incidental, but the killing of Sam Axton could only be part of a plan not yet completed.

Behind Tyler, a window swung gently inward.

Abruptly he walked past the window, sped silently along the full length of the patio, crossed the rear section and mounted the stairway, stopping finally at Susan Burnett's door.

He tapped gently.

Susan was locked in. He could hear a key turn and a bolt slide. Susan let him in. He turned a chair and sat on it, leaning on its back.

"You should be in bed," he said.

Susan's eyes burned. "Impossible. What's going on?"

He told her about the dead man.

Her voice shook. "Another? Who was he?"

Watching her closely, Tobias said:

"His name was Larry Jasper!"

Her white teeth suddenly clamped on her under lip. Then she forced herself to relax, and smiled.

"The name is strange," she said.

"Hollend knew him," Tyler said calmly.

"Hugh—you mean—he admitted—"

"He told me he knew Larry Jasper," Tobias said. "He didn't tell anyone else. I'll keep it to myself." He peered at her thoughtfully. "So, of course, you know, too."

"Why should I know a man just because Hugh Hollend knows him?" Susan said.

"I don't know why," conceded Tobias.

"But I know you do." She looked away. "Well, yes. I do know who he is—or was. But I haven't any idea what he was doing around here. I didn't know he was anywhere near here."

"You wouldn't want to tell me, would you?" Tyler asked. "I mean, about you and Hugh Hollend—and perhaps Larry Jasper?" She turned her head. "I—I'd rather not. Anyhow, I really can't see what that has to do with the murder of Mr. Axton."

"Okay. You seem to be in a spot."

"Perhaps I am."

"I mean more than you think," Tobias said seriously. "Not just about Hugh. Now, you were Axton's office helper. It can be assumed that you knew more about his private affairs than anybody else."

"Not so much. He was secretive."

"True. But it looks as if the murderer was definitely after something—something he had to kill Axton to get at." Tyler tapped the back of his chair with his fingertips. "Now, you say you don't know why Larry Jasper was on the Axton estate. I think it's easy to guess that."

"How?"

"When Shorb and I were within a couple of miles of the house, we heard shots," Tyler said. "We had stopped to fix the car. Can you make anything out of that?"

"No."

"Well, remember, Jasper is a known crook. I think it's a reasonable theory that the murderer hired Jasper to come along with him. The killer knew that Sam Axton forbade all shooting. He knew that shooting would draw attention to that spot, and away from the house. It is possible, for instance, that Woodwine or someone would be due to go in and see Axton about that time, but would be delayed by the shooting."

"Leaving the way clear?"

"Yes. Only you, and perhaps Mead, were ordinarily near his office. And you wouldn't enter his office unless he rang for you, would you?"

"That's right. But about Shorb—"

"When we arrived, Shorb went back to deliver some stuff. Of course, he was detained. Undoubtedly, then he mentioned hearing the shots. The murderer learned of it and perhaps suspected that Shorb saw something as well as heard the shots, and killed him as soon as possible."

"But why in your room?"

"Shorb would have wanted to consult me. The murderer followed him."

"That all sounds likely," Susan mused. She looked up anxiously. "But that makes you dangerous to the murderer, too!"

Tobias Tyler grinned. "Quite right."

"The servants," Susan said thoughtfully, "are all Mexicans. I don't believe any of them would—"

"Not the servants," agreed Tyler. "If there had been just one murder, it might be reasonable to suspect someone working here. But it isn't likely to suppose a servant would have killed all three. Unless the murderer came here, committed the murders, and then vanished—which isn't likely—it seems certain that he is one of several people right here in the house."

Susan leaned forward earnestly.

"Who are your suspects?"

"Practically all of us," Tyler chuckled.

"I eliminate myself. But there's Leroy Axton, Doc Gould, Mead, and Woodwine. And I don't like any of them. Then there's Hugh, but I do like him."

"Not Hugh!" Susan's voice broke a little. "Captain Tanner seems suspicious, mostly, of me and Tony Trujillo. Well, I'm for Tony!"

"So am I."

"Then there's yourself," suggested Tyler. She gaped. "Me?"

"Yes. But we won't discuss you." Tyler got up and wandered to the door. He added: "Better keep yourself locked in, lady."

"I intend to." She caught his arm. "Please do something for me. It's important."

"Name it."

"Go to Leroy Axton as soon as you can. Tell him, privately, to get in touch with me the first thing in the morning. Tell him it's urgent!"

Tyler stared at her. Then he grinned. "I don't like that," he said, and closed the door.

Leroy Axton, Doc Gould, Mead, Woodwine. Those four names churned about in Tobias Tyler's mind as he felt his way along the balcony and down the stairs to the patio. One of those four, he believed, was a murderer. But which one?

Which of them had something to gain by Axton's death? Perhaps all of them. Young Leroy Axton, more than any.

TOBIAS entered the house, made toward the reception room, stopped suddenly.

Off to the right was a room he had not noticed before, due to the peculiar lighting. A room about twenty feet square, a sort of small club room, with tables and comfortable chairs.

And there they were, the four of them. Leroy Axton, Doc Gould, Mead, Woodwine. One of those four had a busy mind, thinking of what he had already done, and of what he was still to do.

Woodwine looked up and saw Tyler. His mild blue eyes lighted up.

"Come in, young man," he called "We need a cheering influence here."

The others merely murmured as Tyler went in and sat down near Leroy Axton. He spent a few quick moments studying each of them.

Leroy Axton. The thin vapid face, topped by slick blond hair, still carried the meaningless smile. Totally selfish, not too bright, yet crafty.

Doc Gould. His plump face was as placid as ever. His bald head glistened in the misty light from overhead. His pink-tipped fingers were deftly dealing cards in a game of solitaire. A somewhat pious old fraud.

Mead. His eye was cold and bright. His

thin, sharp features were set in tense control. The late Sam Axton's secretary sat forward on the edge of his chair as if he expected something to happen any minute. Mead, Tyler thought, experienced no emotion that could not be set down on an adding machine.

Woodwine. A big, porcine animal. If he had any regrets, or fears, or feelings, the superintendent had lost them all in his own comfort as he sprawled in a huge leather chair.

An unpleasant lot, these four—and each cunning in his own way.

CHAPTER VII

SEE NOTHING, KNOW NOTHING



DOC GOULD went on dealing his cards, and the other three men did nothing, yet Tobias Tyler felt that something was going on. He swung about on the arm of his chair so that he could talk to Leroy Axton in an undertone, out of hearing of the others. Miss Burnett," he whispered, "wants to see you privately."

Leroy Axton moved one eyebrow upward. "When?"

"First thing in the morning. Says it's important."

The young man leered at him. "You're kidding me," he said.

"I'm telling you what she said," Tyler said brusquely.

Axton merely widened his fatuous smile. To Tyler's amazement it was clear that Leroy didn't believe him!

"I'm telling you the truth," Tyler said. "You'd better be there."

He turned toward Woodwine.

"Any ideas about all this, Mr. Woodwine?"

Woodwine looked surprised, then indifferent.

"Ideas? If I had any, I wouldn't talk about 'em."

Tyler looked at Doc Gould. "How about you, sir?"

Doc Gould laughed. "Thanks for asking. To be truthful, I've been thinking about it."

"Mind talking?"

"Not at all—up to a point." Doc Gould swept the cards together, shuffled as he talked. "As you know, I was Mr. Axton's mental physician. That gave me an insight into what troubled his mind. I've been trying to recall those troubles. One thing he said may have a bearing."

"What was that?"

Doc Gould's rubicund cheeks spread in a smile.

"It seemed that he had someone working for him of whom he was afraid. This person, he told me, had been involved in some criminal activity before, but had begged for a chance to work here, promising to go straight. Mr. Axton gave him the chance, believing him to have reformed." Doc Gould's smile saddened. "Lately, however, there had been some doubt in his mind."

"You mean Axton feared that the man he spoke of had maintained his crooked connections and might do him harm?"

"Exactly," said Doc Gould, in a tone of regret.

Tyler glanced rapidly at the others. They were watching Doc Gould narrowly. "Did he tell you the man's name?" Tyler asked.

Doc Gould resumed shuffling the cards. Then he pursed his lips and said, "No."

"Surely," Tyler went on, "someone here must have suggested to Mr. Axton that he could not trust the man?"

"That is quite possible."

"Do you have any idea who excited the suspicion in Mr. Axton's mind?"

"None at all."

Calmly, Doc Gould started another game of solitaire. Tobias Tyler turned his head and looked into the icy eyes of Mead.

"How about you, Mr. Mead?"

Mead smiled frostily. "I would not care to discuss evidence," he said. "I have only suspicions."

"What are they?"

Mead cocked his head. "Tony Trujillo is my choice. However, it is possible he was working with someone else. Someone from outside. For instance, you!"

Tyler smiled, got up, and walked out of the room into the reception room.

As usual, the reaches of this great room seemed shrouded in a doleful darkness. Tyler walked about, quietly, and presently found a position near a window. He was some distance now from those four, but he could watch the exit, in case any of them should leave.

In a little while there was a stir near him. He turned and made out the large form of one of Captain Tanner's men. He chuckled.

"Still watching me?"

"How did you know?" the man grumbled good-naturedly. "I guess I ain't so hot as a shadow—not my line, anyhow. You ain't so easy to keep track of, either. I lost you a while back."

"Sorry. Had to make a little visit. What time is it?"

The officer turned up his wrist. "Twenty to twelve." He peered toward the lighted room. "I'm supposed to keep an eye on them guys, too. That's okay as long as they stay together."

"Where's Tanner and his other bloodhounds?" asked Tyler.

"In the old man's office, kind of going over stuff there. They ought to quit for the night pretty soon."

"They'll sleep here in the house?"

"Sure. A couple others will stay up and around—well, dum it, there goes one of them birds now!"

MEAD was just emerging from the lighted room. He hesitated on the threshold, turned toward the patio, and vanished.

Tyler and the officer remained still, and watched.

In the next five minutes, the other three came out, singly, and disappeared.

"Where the devil are they headed for?" the officer said petulantly.

Tyler laughed softly. "No doubt about that. I imagine each is going to his own room."

"I can't keep track of 'em that way."

"That leaves me," Tyler pointed out generally. "And I think I'll desert you, too. If you want to take a look at me from time to time, I expect to be in my room—or not far away."

"I'll be checking on that," growled the officer.

Tobias Tyler moved rapidly out to the patio and up to the second-floor balcony. He did intend to go to his room, but first he felt that he should see Hugh Hollend.

Hollend was in his room. His hair was disheveled, his shirt rumpled. Ash-trays were crowded with stubs.

"Nervous, aren't you?" prompted Tyler.

"So I'm nervous," Hugh Hollend snapped.

"Take it easy. I'm for you. But I want you to come clean with me."

"Come clean? But I've done nothing!"

"I don't say you have—not here. But you and Susan are holding out on me. That won't do. Susan asked me to help, and that entitles me to the facts." Tyler gazed at the young man somberly. "The reason Susan holds out is on account of you, of course."

"I—I don't know what—"

"Yes, you do." Tyler kept his voice low and urgent. "I'll tell you what I know already, what I can easily figure for myself. Before you came here, you were mixed up in some dirty business. That fellow Jasper was in the same deal."

Hollend's mouth was open. "Did—did Mead tell you that?"

"No. Did you ever tell Mead about it?"

"No. But I thought he might have found out. I told Mr. Axton, just to be on the level with him, and maybe Mead heard."

"Perhaps so—or perhaps not. Now, how about you and Susan?"

Hugh was sinking listlessly into a chair. "Susan is my sister."

"I assumed a relationship. What else?"

"Well, I—I got into a jam." Hollend squirmed. "No use telling you the details. I'd got to chasing around with Larry Jasper. Well, I had a couple of thousand dollars of another man's money, the man I was working for. The money disappeared. He was a tough man and I'd have been sent up, if I hadn't run away. Susan had a job here with Axton. She got him to give me a chance. Also, on her contract she had a thousand-dollar bonus coming at the end of her year. Her idea was that, with the thousand, we could make enough between us to pay off the two thousand and enough extra so that the man I was working for could be induced not to prosecute."

"How about your Army status?"

"I registered over here at Tecula, under the name I am using. I've been worried sick for fear they'd check up on me. I haven't been called—minor physical defects. I was hoping I could get this trouble cleaned up soon as I could apply for enlistment in the Navy."

"Boy," Tyler said, "you've got a swell sister."

"Don't I know it!"

Tyler sighed. "But you're in a worse spot than ever, my friend. You're a fugitive. Investigation will show you have a spotty record. Now a dead man is found on this estate. His registration card shows him to be Larry Jasper, a crook. The fact that the card was left on him shows that the killer wanted him identified. The police will look into it, you will be identified, and it will be shown that you and Jasper were pals."

"But I don't know a thing about it!" Hollend cried.

Tyler inclined his head. "Perhaps not. But you'd better stay away from Susan. You might involve her."

Hugh Hollend nodded unhappily. "I know. But I guess I'll be seeing her pretty soon, anyway."

Tyler had turned toward the door. He turned back.

"How's that?" he said.

"Got a note from her." Hollend fished in his shirt pocket, found a slip of paper. "She'll be around to see me. I don't know why."

Tyler reached out and took the paper. He read:

Please stay in your room between midnight and one o'clock, and I'll come in and see you. Destroy this note.

SUSAN.

"It says to destroy it," Tyler said sharply. "Why haven't you done it?"

Hollend's hands flapped helplessly. "Sorry. I guess I just don't know where I'm at. I stuck it in my pocket without thinking."

METHODICALLY, he tore the paper in tiny pieces.

"Where did you get it?" Tyler asked abruptly.

"Found it under my door, just after I left you. Susan must have put it there. Or maybe she had one of the servants do it."

Tyler stared at him. He had an exasperating feeling that something—some stray thought, an idea that could have put him straight—was eluding him. It came to him abruptly that he shouldn't have let Hugh Hollend tear up that note.

He went out.

Outside his own room, he stopped and leaned against the railing. His gaze roamed the length and breadth of the patio. In the obscure light, it seemed vast, and nothing was clear. A heady tropic odor made him feel slightly ill.

Only one light was visible. It was below, far to his right, just outside the entrance into the front part of the house.

No movement anywhere caught his eye. The stillness was deadly, yet it seemed to be shouting a thunderous message at him.

way, found the switch, turned it. Off, on, off, on. No light came.

He moved to the door, flung it open.

Silence. Over the length and breadth of the patio, nothing but weird night-shrouded silence, and darkness.

Perhaps, he thought, it was only his room light that had gone out—a bulb burned out, a fuse blown. Then he noticed that the light he had observed just outside the house entrance toward the front was out, too.

A door banged back of him. He stood still. In a moment, Hugh Hollend appeared, hurrying. He stopped.

"What's the trouble?" Tyler asked.

"The lights," Hollend said tensely. "Must be something wrong at the powerhouse."

"There's a private powerhouse, of course," said Tyler. "Where is it?"

"Not far. Just east of the house. I'll have to go. We have a mechanic whose job it is, but he's away just now. I'm supposed to keep an eye on the powerhouse—one of my odd jobs."

Holland stumbled on. Tyler hesitated, then followed. As they reached the patio a

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Tobias Tyler turned and let himself into his room. He snapped on the light switch, half-expecting to find something tragic.

But there was nothing. Everything was in order. Nothing was different from when he had first seen it, except a bare space on the floor. That space had been covered by the rug upon which the dead Martin Shorb had been resting. The police had removed it.

Tyler sank into a chair. The feeling was urgent in him that he should be doing something, but he didn't know what.

And something was *being* done. At this moment! One of those four sly men was busy. But Tyler could find no trace of what it was in his mind, and angrily he sat and cursed his futility.

Mostly, he thought of young Leroy Axton. Why had Leroy been skeptical when told that Susan wanted to see him in the morning?

Why had Susan left that note for Hugh? Questions pelted themselves at him, and he knew there was a simple answer to them, but it played hide and seek with him.

Then, with shocking abruptness, he was in darkness.

The light had gone out. Tyler looked up through the impenetrable gloom toward the sheltered globe against the wall, but he could see nothing. He sprang up, felt his

burly form loomed ahead of them. It was Captain Tanner, cursing bitterly.

"Something wrong at the powerhouse," Hollend explained. "I'm just going."

"Okay," Turner exploded. "I'll go with you."

As Hollend and Tanner vanished, Tyler hesitated again, then decided not to go with them. Probably something was wrong at the powerhouse, but he doubted if it would do any good to go there now.

He wondered where young Leroy Axton was.

And he cursed his own indecision. He should be doing something now, now, *now!*

He glanced up in the direction of Susan Burnett's room. He couldn't see her door. The darkness too deep. Well, she would be all right, behind her locked door.

"How about that radio building?"

Tobias Tyler moved suddenly, swiftly. He strode along the patio's inner walk, through the rear exit, and across the open space at the back toward a grove of trees.

He was thinking that it was queer that when the lights went out neither Leroy Axton, nor Doc Gould, nor Mead, had emerged from their rooms. Surely not all of them had gone to bed.

But even as he sped on, something close to a certainty in his mind told him that he was going in the wrong direction.

CHAPTER VIII
MENACE IN THE DARK



SUSAN BURNETT lay back in her chair, turning the pages of a book which her nerves would not let her read. Just back of her elbow, a small electric desk-light glared at the pages.

She knew she should go to bed, but she didn't dare. She thought it might help if she dressed and went downstairs to talk to someone. But she didn't

dare do that, either.

Just beyond the light was a tiny black-etched clock. She watched it as the hands registered midnight, and slowly pushed on.

She returned to the book, flipped the pages. In a little while, her weariness shut the door on her nerves and she began to doze. She didn't know how long her eyes had been closed—perhaps only a few moments—when she awoke suddenly. At first she didn't know what was wrong. Then she realized that the desk light had gone out.

No noise came to her but the gentle but wilful clicking of the little clock. She clicked the light off and on. No light came.

She got up, pushed through the darkness to the wall, turned the main light switch. No light came.

She returned to her chair. Her heart pounded hard.

For some time she sat and did not move.

A slight jangling sound stiffened her. Someone was gently rattling her door-knob. She got to her feet, slipped rapidly to the door, stood listening.

"Susan—Susan!" a muffled voice came to her. "It's Hugh! Open up—quickly!"

Hastily she turned the key and shot back the bolt. The door was pushed in. Susan stepped back. Instantly a man was closing in on her, and a hot twitching hand was pressed over her face.

She tried to cry out, but no sound got past her lips. She struggled, but felt herself growing rapidly weak. To the frantic pressure of the man's hands was added the sickening odor of chloroform. She strained with her vanishing consciousness, but lost. . . .

When she opened her eyes, she knew she was a prisoner. Her legs were tied, her left arm bound to her body, her mouth ruthlessly taped and she lay on her bed, where someone had placed her. Only her right arm was free.

A chair had been drawn up close to the bed. On the chair a small flashlight rested, its beams glaring directly at her face. Otherwise, the room was black dark, and no one was visible.

Then a man spoke from the darkness, in the same muffled tones, as if he had fastened some fabric over his mouth:

"Your right hand is free, Susan, but don't try to use it—until I tell you."

Susan moved the fingers of her right hand.

"I had to close your mouth, Susan, so you couldn't yell," the man went on. He chuckled. "I left your right hand free, so you could write the answer to what I want to know. There's paper and a pencil there on the bed beside you."

By moving her chin down, Susan could see the pad of paper and the pencil.

"And you must not fail to answer," the man added in his blurred, dead-calm voice. "Your refusal can have only one result."

Something shot through the air, gleamed like twisted lightning, and stuck upright in the foot of the bed. A long-bladed knife.

Susan shuddered.

"You understand? That knife will be buried deep in your back within fifteen minutes—if you don't answer!"

Susan understood. But she knew, also, that the knife would be her reward even if she did answer! This man would not take the chance of leaving her alive to talk.

"I think you already know what I want," the man continued. "I believe Axton left certain documents in a concealed place. Either you have them or you know where they are!"

Susan waited a moment, then reached down, took the pencil and scrawled:

I don't know.

She waited for the man to come and get it. But he intended to keep out of the light.

"Throw it to me," he said querulously.

She picked up the pad and flipped it in the direction of the voice.

There was a moment of silence. The man, obviously, was reading what she had written.

Then he muttered angrily: "That's a lie!" But in a moment said more calmly: "I said I'd give you fifteen minutes. That will allow me to explain why it is important to me to get these documents. It is perhaps necessary that I explain, so that you may be sure of what documents I want, so that there will be no mistake."

HE COUGHED a little, as if he were having trouble talking through the obstruction over his mouth.

"Some time ago," he went on, "I was living in Beverly Hills. At an affair at my house one evening, a good deal of liquor was flowing. A woman was killed. I managed to fix it so that her husband, who had been drinking heavily, thought he had killed her, and he escaped, and disappeared.

"Axton heard of this. At first he had had almost perfect confidence in me, but in that queer way some people have, he had become suspicious. He put a good private detective on the case. This detective reported to him that the missing husband did not kill the woman, but that I did! He turned evidence over to Axton. This evidence might not have been sufficient to clear the husband, nor to convict me, but it certainly would have convinced the husband if it were shown to him.

"So Axton devoted himself to locating that husband. He had little to go on, and, of course, he was doing it with great secrecy. However, he knew that the missing man was fanatically interested in amateur radio work. So Axton, who himself had a fine station, used it to keep in touch with amateurs all over the country, in a desperate effort to track down his man. I believe he was even ready to bribe a few of the amateurs in different sections to keep going in spite of regulations against it."

Now the man seemed to be laughing to himself, but in a little while he continued: "His idea was that if he could get his evidence to the dead woman's husband, he would not take legal action—he would take direct action. In short, the fellow would kill me! And I think Axton was right. I admit I'm afraid of that man. My fear makes me a little crazy, no doubt.

"But Axton was crazy, too. You can see that, Susan. Otherwise, he would have seen the folly of operating his radio under present conditions. Fear made him crazy, too. He was afraid of me! But he was also afraid to kill me—directly." The man laughed again. "That was one thing I was not afraid of—to kill! I am afraid of getting killed, but I am not afraid of killing others. You can see that, Susan!"

Susan lay still, except for a spasmodic movement of the fingers of her right hand. Her eyes ached with the effort of trying to penetrate the darkness beyond the light.

"Now you know what I want," the voice went on. "Axton had the evidence on the killing of that woman. Ah, yes. And there was something else—another document, which I knew about. That document is important. It is doubtless with that other stuff. I must have it!"

Susan closed her eyes. Yes, she knew. She didn't know much about these things, but she knew where they were.

Well, why not tell this fiend how he could find them? After all, she doubted if concealing them from him would do anyone any good who was worth the sacrifice.

But then she remembered a promise to Axton. He had never been a pleasant man, Axton, but at least he had been good to her, and to Hugh. Besides, revealing the infor-

mation would not save her. She was sure of that. The knife glistening there at the foot of the bed was meant for her, even if she did tell.

There was a movement beyond the light. The man had flipped the writing pad at her and it landed on the bed.

"Write!" his voice came harshly. "Tell me what you know!"

Susan raised her hand to stroke her moist brow.

"Stop!" barked the man, and her hand remained in mid-air.

"Keep your hand away from your face!" he went on. "You couldn't tear that tape away from your mouth before I could finish you! Write!"

Slowly, Susan dropped her hand to the bed, and drew the pad toward her. She printed in large letters:

NO

Her fingers trembled, but she managed a gesture of disdain as she flung the pad back at him.

She heard him pick the pad up, listened desperately as he read it. She knew he must be holding it close to his face, so that he could decipher it in the darkness, and she had a wild impulse to tear at her bonds in a frantic effort to get free.

But that was hopeless. Already, the man was muttering in rage. And then he was quiet again. She couldn't see him, even now, but she was sure his eyes were fixed on her in frenzied purpose.

Then he spoke again, almost politely.

"I have no more time. You might have saved yourself. But now I must dispose of you and look for what I want. It is even possible it is right here in this room!"

An icy sweat broke out all over Susan's body. Her limbs were rigid with stark fear.

Her eyes wide, she watched intently. In a moment she could feel rather than see a movement back in the darkness. A hand reached out and grasped the haft of the knife still thrust into the foot of the bed. Another hand reached over the chair and snapped out the flashlight.

FOR one wild weak moment, she regretted her defiance.

But now no avenue of escape lay open to her. Her moment had gone. She tried with all her power to scream, but the effort only choked her. She could see nothing in the blackness. She could hear nothing but the faintest rustle. A man's body drifted stealthily toward her, loomed over her, until it seemed that its mere shadow would stifle her. . . .

Tobias Tyler stood in the radio building and frowned uneasily at a hole in the plas-

tered wall about five feet above the floor. The sprinkle of powdered plaster on the floor had indicated that aperture. The hole had been covered by the tapestry, now removed.

The mouth of the hole was about six inches deep by ten long. Its edges were rough, unfinished. A crude job.

Tyler had put his hand in it and had found nothing.

Obviously, old Sam Axton had tried to make a secret cache, but had lacked the skill to finish it. Perhaps he had depended on Tyler to do that for him.

No, there was nothing in that hole. And there was nothing in this place of any help at all. Again, Tobias Tyler felt that he was wasting his time.

Suddenly, the chain of his thought slipped into a different groove, and there was a meshing of ideas. How about that note Hugh Holland had from Susan, telling him that Susan would call on him between midnight and one?

How about Leroy Axton's queer response to the news that Susan wanted to see him in the morning?

How about the rather strange fact that all four of those men—Leroy Axton, Mead, Doc Gould and Woodwine—had left that room a few minutes before midnight, all within a minute or two of each other?

And how about the lights going out?

After all, the murderer could easily have imitated Susan's handwriting.

Could it be that all of them had had notes, ostensibly from Susan, telling each of them that she would visit him in his room in that hour after midnight?

That is, all of them—except one!

That would have kept all except the murderer in their rooms. It would enable the murderer to proceed unhampered, unwatched by any of the others. And it would give the murderer just as much of an alibi as any of them.

The murderer could have jimmied up something at the powerhouse.

But why would he want to make the way clear for the hour after midnight? To commit another murder?

Tobias swung on his heel and strode rapidly out into the night.

Abruptly, light had flashed through his mind and the truth stood out as clear as the lines of a hill under a stroke of lightning.

His long legs took him at breakneck speed through the trees and the open yard and into the patio. He leaped up the stairs and sped the short distance along the upper balcony and stopped against the window of a room.

For an indecisive moment, he stood motionless.

He stared at the door, but it told him

nothing. He stared at the window, but it was effectively curtained. Everything seemed dark, and quiet. Perhaps, after all, he had misread the signs.

No, he could see no light showing through that curtained window. Then, as he stared, it seemed to him there was a light showing through, a very faint light, a sort of distant light. It took him a little while to puzzle it out.

It must be just a small light turned away from the window.

Well, there was nothing wrong with that. So perhaps Susan was in no danger. Perhaps no one had come to murder her. Or perhaps the murderer had not yet arrived, and the best thing he could do was to flatten himself against the wall and wait.

But then, as he stood and stared, that feeble light faded and was gone.

That was all. The light was gone! He could see nothing more, and no noise touched his hearing. Yet, somehow, the sudden change from meager light to utter darkness spurred him.

He did not even try the door. He knew it would be locked and bolted.

CHAPTER IX

CHANGE ALL AROUND



RIMLY, Tobias Tyler cursed the darkness. He strained his eyes to search for something loose, something he could seize quickly. Just back of him, along a wide rail, was a row of flower boxes. One of them was short, about a foot long. He budged it—heavy with packed dirt.

That should do. He lifted it, measured its weight. It would go through into the room, but was too heavy to go far.

He heaved it against the window. Glass and framework smashed. The hole it made was large, although he couldn't see the jagged edges.

He hurled himself through broken glass and torn curtains.

As Tyler landed in the middle of the room it seemed to him there was some movement beyond, toward the bed. But now it was dark and quiet.

Something rustled behind him. He swung about. A human form was lunging at him. He sidestepped. The man crashed against his side and spun him about. And something sharp tore into his arm.

From over on the bed came a brief painful gasp.

Then again there was no sound, except

breath whistling angrily through a man's throat. Tyler could see an indistinguishable blob, and he knew it was the man with the knife.

The man came at him again, his arm raised. Tyler rammed a fist at him and the blow landed on the down-coming arm. The man backed away, but the knife clattered across the floor.

The knife! Tobias Tyler wanted it. He retreated warily, felt around with his foot, and presently struck metal. He had to bend over and turn a little to pick it up. And the man was on the move again, rushing him.

Tyler had time to turn and face him, that was all. As he did, he swung the knife in front of him.

The man hit the knife with his midriff. Tyler could feel the knife shudder queerly. He shuddered with it. The man groaned and gasped, and something rattled in his wind-pipe. Then Tyler felt the knife being pulled away from him, but it was only the man falling down, the knife still in him.

Tyler groped in his pocket for a match. But he didn't need it. Evidently they had fixed things up at the powerhouse. The light on the bed-table blinked on.

The man was on the floor and he was dead. Tyler could see that. And there was Susan on the bed, her right clothes torn and disarranged.

He saw the terror in her eyes as carefully he removed the tape from her lips and the bonds from her limbs, and worked her a little until the blood flow became normal again.

Susan smiled weakly. "Thanks. Talk about being just in time!"

Tyler nodded. "I'll have to get the police," he said. "But first I want something. Evidently Axton was intent on hiding something. He had a place partly prepared in his radio house. Do you know about that?"

"Yes. Mr. Axton couldn't trust anyone, but he did have a little confidence in me. Not many days ago he told me he had some papers to conceal, but he hadn't the place ready. He wasn't good at mechanical work, anyway. I guess he was afraid those papers would be stolen."

"Ah! Where are they?"

She pointed to the foot of the bed. "Sewed into the mattress."

"Can you cut 'em out while I go get the police?"

"Yes," she said, but gazed dubiously at the dead man.

Tyler noticed. "Can you stand it, for a minute or two?"

She smiled feebly. "Of course."

Tyler hurried down to the *patio* and into the house. He found Captain Tanner and Hugh Hollend just returning from the powerhouse.

"Something for you, Captain," Tyler said. Hollend stared, worried. "Is it about Susan? You know I was supposed to wait for her."

"She's all right. But the murderer is in her room. He's dead!"

It was Tanner's turn to gape. "Who killed him?"

"I guess I did," Tobias Tyler said. "I thought you'd rather have him that way."

"You think you're funny," snarled Tanner.

Tyler didn't think he was funny and he didn't feel that way. He was sick inside. They hurried up the balcony and along to Susan's room. Susan was just pulling something out of the mattress. She held it so that Tanner didn't see it.

Tanner scowled down at the dead man, at the knife in his middle, at the blood-soaked shirt.

"Oh, good Lord!" Hollend said, and hurried to his sister. "You okay, Sis?"

SUSAN smiled. She watched warily as Tanner knelt by the corpse. Quietly, Tyler slipped over to her and she handed him a sealed packet.

He stepped around the foot of the bed and found a chair in the corner. Unobtrusively, he broke the seal of the packet, opened it. This was not strictly legal, he reflected, but no one could do anything to him for it. He poured over the contents for some minutes, and looked up only when he heard Tanner's voice again.

Tanner was staring down at the dead man, still incredulous.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" he blurted. "I still don't believe it! Doc Gould a murderer!"

But Doc Gould's face, rotund and angelic in its pallor, smiled up at him, a cold fixed smile, a dead smile. As if Doc Gould himself didn't mind admitting it, and was even a little proud of it.

"It couldn't have been anyone else!" Tobias Tyler said quietly. "No one knew Axton's secret troubles like he did. No one knew—"

"You," said Tanner, glaring at Tyler, "are not out of the woods yourself, my friend. I have no proof that Doc Gould killed anyone. Now, look at it like this. Sam Axton is killed. A guy named Shorb is killed. Another bird named Jasper is bumped off. And now Doc Gould is knifed!"

"So far as the Axton murder is concerned, Shorb was your only alibi, and he ain't here. So far as the Shorb murder is concerned, you never did have any alibi. He was killed in your room. So far as the Jasper murder is concerned, you have no more alibi than anyone else, and you admit you were nearby when he was killed. And so far as the Doc

Gould murder is concerned, you admit killing him!" Tanner scowled across at Susan. "You and the girl could easy be in this thing together!"

"I'll concede you're a fool, sir," Tobias Tyler said. "It isn't necessary for you to keep on trying to prove it. It's pretty silly of you to talk of my killing four people, none of whom I had ever seen before. Miss Burnett can tell a straight story of what happened in here, and in conjunction with other evidence I think it will make everything clear enough—even to the reason for Doc Gould killing Jasper. He was afraid of what Jasper threatened to tell, quite likely.

"It's a question of motive. I'll tell you about that. I have some papers here. These papers were placed in Miss Burnett's care, and I believe she intended to hand them to Leroy Axton in the morning. These papers—all but one of them—show that Doc Gould was in difficulty a few years ago, and Sam Axton had made a point of finding out about it. It appears that Axton wanted to get hold of a fugitive man, the husband of a woman who was murdered, for the purpose of inciting him to kill Doc Gould, who really killed the woman.

"Now, why did Axton go to all that expense instead of turning the evidence over to the police? First, the evidence would be enough to convince the woman's husband, but not enough to convince the law. Second, and more important, if Axton had gone to the law with it, Doc Gould would have come down on him!"

Tanner pinched his chin in a gesture of skepticism.

"You mean Axton was afraid of Doc Gould because the doc had something on him?"

"Right," Tyler said. "There's a paper here, one that had nothing to do with Doc Gould, although certainly he had learned of it. Doc Gould was Axton's mental physician, and undoubtedly Axton told him about this, and other things, before becoming suspicious of him."

"What's this paper?" growled Tanner.

"This," said Tobias, "is the document that Tony Trujillo was so anxious to get because it was signed by Abraham Lincoln!"

"What!"

"It's the patent which was supposed to secure the rights of Tony's grandfather in this estate. It was on the basis of this that Tony's grandfather borrowed money from Sam Axton's father." Tyler smiled genially. "You'll remember that Sam Axton had promised to give this paper to Tony, but later backed out. It occurred to me there must have been a reason, a quite important one, for his backing out."

"I still don't see it."

"Remember, this was about eighty years

ago," Tyler went on patiently. "It is quite possible that Tony's grandfather was not able to write in English—if at all—and that his son, Tony's father, handled the documents for him. The grandfather's name was Manuel, the father's name was Diego." Tobias tapped the paper with his fingertip. "There was evidently some mistake. At any rate, this patent was made out in favor of Diego, not Manuel."

"You mean nobody knew about that before?"

"It's quite possible Tony's father, Diego, did, but said nothing at the time for fear of embarrassing his father. Remember, Tony's father mentioned this thing to Tony, before he died. Even so, Tony knew nothing of the error. He was only interested in family pride—the name of Lincoln and the name of Trujillo on the same paper!"

TANNER tried to digest it.

"So this makes a difference, huh?" he demanded.

"All the difference in the world! It means that when old Manuel Trujillo assigned this property to Sam Axton's father, he had no right to, since it belonged technically to his son, Diego. Obviously, someone slipped up. And, of course, that is the reason Sam Axton changed his mind about giving the paper to Tony. He had dug it up and discovered the error."

"Yeah," Tanner gulped, light beginning to seep into his mind. "It makes a question who this whole outfit really belongs to!"

"Certainly. The fact is that probably Tony Trujillo has the best claim on the estate!"

"That's just marvelous!" exclaimed Susan.

"And now you can see Doc Gould's motive," Tobias Tyler continued. "He knew all about this and was blackmailing Axton. But Axton also had something on Doc Gould, and that cramped the Doc's style. By killing Axton, and seizing these papers, he could do two things. He could clear up that old trouble, and he could do a better job of blackmailing."

"A better job, huh?" said Tanner.

"Yes. With Sam Axton dead, Leroy would come into the estate. Doc Gould would have this Lincoln-signed paper, and he could go right on blackmailing Leroy. And Leroy would be easier pickings than old Sam Axton had been. Doc Gould could live in high style the rest of his life!"

Tanner seemed convinced at last.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he said.

"Sorry," cut in Susan, sitting straight on the bed. "But I feel quite sick."

They got another room for her, down on the ground floor. Tyler and Susan's brother went in with her to make her comfortable.

In a little while she laughed. "I'm all right now."

Hugh grinned. "Okay, Sis. See you later."

He went out, but Tyler lingered. Susan was stretched out on the bed, and he sat beside her. She looked up at him curiously.

"I'll be all right now, if you want to run along," she said. "Oh, I forgot to thank you, and I do thank you. You've been wonderful!"

"Whoof," said Tobias Tyler. "I was pretty dumb most of the time. I was just wondering if you could overlook it, in view of my very deep personal attachment for you."

Susan looked a trifle indignant.

"Murder is not funny," she said with dignity. "And neither is love." She smiled again and her fingers reached up and found his ear. "But you are, darling!"



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him, something crashed against his head

for MURDER By JOHN L. BENTON

tunity to buy a five-grand reward for five hundred dollars, and at the same time solve the mystery of a week-old seventy-grand pay-roll robbery and murder.

As Casey heard the splintering crash of storm-tossed fishing boats being wrecked somewhere on the bay inlet ahead, he was thinking that the riot in his brain matched the storm. Just why, he wondered, had he let himself in for a thing like this? Coming out here with five Cs, virtually his total capital, to answer a call that bordered on the fantastic?

If any other person than little Mary Sharkey had phoned that incredible message to him he would have ignored it. Now here he was, within sight of the dimmed-out lights of Mom Carter's Fishing Station where Mary Sharkey was supposed to be waiting for him—to deliver to him seventy grand of the stolen Wyrick pay-roll. It had been missing since the mysterious armored car holdup, when two of the thieves had died with police slugs in their stomachs, and a guard had been killed.

How or why she happened to have, or to

He Battles to Smash a Payroll Heist Gang!

know the whereabouts of the pay-roll cash, Mary had refused to tell over the phone. And he had taken her at her word, knowing her and knowing Mom Carter who was like a mother to the girl.

"Yeah," he muttered, "and the crazy, loyal little greaseball has been as much a son to Mom Carter as Jimmy Carter himself. If Mary'd ever had her mind on anything but what makes motors tick, I'd say this whole thing is a ribbing because I'm shoving off in the Navy next week."

WHAT Mary had briefly told him over the phone had not sounded like a ribbing, though, and there were three good reasons why Joe Casey was out here in the storm with five Cs in his pocket, as he had been requested.

It could be that little Mary Sharkey had embarked upon some crazy scheme to save Mom Carter from serious trouble. Also, a chance to buy five grand for five hundred cash was a big temptation. It would fix up Joe Casey's sister and her kids fairly well for the duration. Besides, if he *should* solve that pay-roll robbery he wouldn't have to worry about his reputation as a private de-

the eternal, if she *has* had the luck to run onto that Wyrick pay-roll money, couldn't she just as well turn it all in and claim the whole reward?

"Anyhow, one thing is certain. Mary's no juke-box girl or gold-digger, and if she has run across anything, it's on the up and up. Umm—dangerous, though."

He was thinking of those two mobsters and the armored car guard who had been killed, and the driver who had got away with the pay-roll cash without having been wounded or having his light truck identified. He had stayed in the car.

Halfway from his car to Mom's dimly-lighted place, Casey suddenly eased to one side, off the concrete. A car slithered along, running on its parking lights only. Casey was still some distance behind it, shielding himself from the driving rain and the smashing storm wind when he saw the car stop down the highway near Mom's Place.

At the same time, Casey heard the juke-box in Mom's Place, and grinned a little wryly. After all, he knew most of the fishermen who came to Mom's, and maybe one of the gang had talked Mary or Mom into pulling some sort of ribbing party on him

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tective after he came back from helping Uncle Sam clean up the war mess.

Still and all, the whole thing did sound fantastic. It had, ever since Joe Casey had received the phone message less than an hour before. Mary Sharkey had put it straight to him, and he had had a mental picture of her small, intense face and slender figure while she had talked.

Little Mary, with black grease smudged across her cheeks, in ragged overalls, and with the inevitable wrenches protruding from her hip pockets. That was the way he had always seen her during the three years he had fished from Mom's Place. She worked with Mom's Jimmy, helping care for the rental motors and the boats, the small launches and the whole fishing station set-up.

Now that the winter storms were raging, though, Mary Sharkey had become another kind of mechanic, showing some of the best of the male help at the Wyrick Plane Parts Plant what made drill presses and lathes click the fastest. Though she did still work at Mom's Place on week-ends.

Rain and sand rasped the skin from Casey's hard jaws as he plodded down the side of the highway.

"Why the devil did Mary have to ask me to leave my car half a mile away and walk up the inlet?" he growled. "And why, by

before he took the final plunge from civilian life.

And that, he realized, was what he would like to believe.

"Otherwise," he muttered, "this idea of Mary needing five hundred so immediately and desperately that she's willing to sell what she knows about the Wyrick seventy grand has something rotten about it. And yet I'm sap enough to be walking right into it."

In only moments more, Joe Casey knew, with a shock, that he was not on his way to some friendly surprise party. He knew it at the instant he saw a man step from the car that had stopped near Mom's Place.

There came the unmistakable crackling of a light machine-gun a short distance from the car, plain above the smashing of the high, tidal swells along the inlet embankment. The man screamed once, then the dark bulk of his body pitched off the shoulder of the highway.

INSTINCTIVELY Casey grabbed for his own holstered automatic. But before he had it out, he knew that the bluish death streaks he had seen afforded no target now. Moreover, his automatic would be a poor match for what undoubtedly had been a light chopper.

Juke-box music still came from Mom's

CHAPTER II

KILLERS' RENDEZVOUS

Place. And because of it, and the storm, it was quite likely that the murder shots had not been heard by anyone in the small fishing station.

In that darkness, there was no picking out the killer. Casey crouched and waited for a few minutes. Slowly then he edged nearer the parked car and the dead man he was convinced lay beside it. If that machine-gun killer was bent on a hold-up he would make quick work of robbing the body.

Casey's hand tensed on his .38. Dimly he could make out where the dead man must be lying beside his car. If only the killer would become visible for just a few seconds!

Casey crept closer. The tulle grass which grew high along here was being flattened by the storm wind. Yet the killer could have been hidden in it, or in the dark short road that ran into a parking space at Mom's Place.

When Casey was within twenty feet of the death car he could just make out the dead man on the highway shoulder. Still no shadow appeared, though Casey strained his eyes to peer through the stormy dark in all directions.

Mom's Place was virtually at land's end. A few summer cottages in the marshy lowlands now were entirely surrounded by the tidal flood. Casey thought he saw a light wink in one of the flooded cottages, but could not be sure.

Then a drifting cruiser smashed suddenly into the cottage where the light might have been. Taking advantage of the splintering collision, Casey ran a few steps, crouching. Then he heard voices—the voices of hidden men who must subconsciously have talked louder when that boat smashed into the cottage. Casey knew then there was more than one killer.

"You sure, Kirk?" drifted to his ears. "You certain that was the dick she called?"

"Of course, I'm sure," came the sharp answer. "There wouldn't be any other mug driving down here in this lather. Step on it—but play it easy. That dame with Lugoni can spot the kid."

Casey felt sick inside. In a hot rage he aimed his .38 impulsively. But he had the good sense not to shoot as full realization started a cold sweat. Mary Sharkey's call to him was known!

But could Mary be "the kid" some dame could spot?

Casey reached the corpse quickly then. The next moment he was swearing silently. The dead man was a State policeman in uniform. And perhaps he would not be dead if he had not arrived at Mom's Place driving a civilian's car.

Casey knew the truth then. Those chopper shots had been meant to find a home in Joe Casey's body!



JOE CASEY saw the door of Mom's Place open and close. The brief space of dim light picked out two men who had entered from the outside. Casey's lips tightened grimly, and his jaw became granite-hard.

He knew what was facing him now; also what he meant to do without waste of time.

The words of one of those killers rang in his ears:

"You sure it was the dick, Kirk?"

"Curse 'em!" muttered Casey. "They were expecting me, and believe they've killed me. Now who have they got on the spot? Mary?"

Casey realized that he might be barging into more than one man could handle, but there was no time now to go back for help. The nearest phone, except the one here at Mom's, must be four or five miles back. While he was reaching it, anything could happen. Another murder—maybe more. Killers had a fine set-up here, with the storm virtually isolating the inlet fishing station.

In the face of such possibilities, Casey all but forgot his own reason for being here. Running forward silently toward the nearest window of Mom's Place, thoughts were speeding through his mind lightning fast.

"Mary has to have five Cs, so this whole thing already has or is likely to involve Mom Carter," he thought grimly. "I'll stake my life on little Mary being straight and decent—so that means she's somehow got mixed up with Brooklyn punks since she's been working at the Wyrick plant. What's more, Mary's just the type to go all out to help anybody she likes out of a jam."

But Mary had made the amazing statement that she would wait for him at Mom's Place, to tell him the whereabouts of the seventy-grand pay-roll, and she'd said she wanted him to return the money and claim the reward, though he had to bring five hundred cash to make the deal.

That sounded as if Mary did know about the stolen pay-roll, but didn't dare claim the five thousand reward.

"And she does want immediate cash," he thought. "It doesn't make sense unless . . . Could Mary have been tricked into driving a murder car?"

He tried to remember all he had heard about the driver of that light truck who had got away. Apparently no one had seen the driver, and the pay-roll cash had been

tossed into the truck by the two mobsters who had been killed before they could get away. Could that possibly mean—Mary?

Reaching a window of Mom's Place, Casey swore at the effectiveness of the black shades. He could hear voices inside, but only a small slice of the room was visible. He swore some more at the juke-box. He couldn't hear a word over its noise.

A girl, one of the toughest he had ever seen here, was drinking beer at the one little table he could see. She had pinched features, a thin nose, and tight lips which spelled gold-digger to Casey.

Suddenly she pounded on the table. Another bottle of beer appeared, then Casey saw Mary Sharkey's small, taut face as she served the beer. Mary moved stiffly, her head half-turned, listening.

The thin-nosed girl said something, and laughed. Casey saw Mary's strained smile, and again saw her eyes turn furtively toward the door at the other end of the shack.

The juke-box music stopped suddenly. "Expectin' your sweetie or somebody, dearie?" the thin-nosed girl sneered at Mary. "Better wash your dirty face if you are."

Evidently Mary had been helping secure some of the boats not yet put up. As usual she wore ragged overalls and as usual her face was smudged by grease. Now it also was reddened by the wind. And even at this distance, Casey was sure he saw desperation in Mary Sharkey's eyes.

He recalled what she had said over the phone.

"I must have the five hundred by midnight, Mr. Casey. I can hand over the whole Wyrick pay-roll without leaving the place, but don't ask me to explain until you get here."

ANYWAY, Joe Casey had asked one question.

"Tell me, Mary—is this five hundred for someone else or for you?"

"It's for me, Mr. Casey," Mary had said promptly. "That's all I want of the reward, because I must have five hundred by midnight."

Crouching there watching Mary's small, desperate face, he was remembering the earnestness of her voice. There had been something like desperation in it also.

Casey tried to get a glimpse of more of the room inside, but could not. Nor was he able to tell from the loud tones of drinking customers whether there were three or four men in there. Then the juke-box was going again.

Joe Casey realized one thing acutely now. Mary Sharkey must have had pressing reason for insisting that he handle the return of the Wyrick pay-roll alone. Certainly, at

the time she had called, she could not have known that Mom's Place was about to be visited by what Casey believed to be members of the city's worst mob of killers.

Casey had been certain of that from the moment he had heard Lugoni's name mentioned. Joe Casey and a few million other citizens knew Lugoni as one of the slickest racketeers who ever avoided the hot seat. The girl at the table with him must be the dame to whom the killers outside had referred.

Trying to get a better view of the interior of the shack, Casey was standing on a platform that ran all the way around the building that was set upon pilings. Right now the whole fishing station quivered with the impact of the thunderous swells of the storm tide.

Just one motored fishing cruiser was still moored close by, held by stern and bow anchors. That sturdy, sea-going craft was Mom Carter's own chartered boat. It pitched and swung, its night riding lights tossing on the stormy inlet.

From somewhere up one of the channel creeks came the clanking sounds of a small oil tanker moving on the high tide. Such small tankers, safe from Nazi subs, maintained a diminished oil supply from New Jersey plants to storage tanks at several points close to Jamaica and Hempstead Bays.

Across the heaving inlet, Casey could dimly see the illumination of Oceanside, Long Beach and the Lido. There would be plenty of help there from the police, but as far as Joe Casey was concerned right now those towns might as well have been across the Atlantic.

Wind and tossing waves were carrying drifting boats and other wreckage ahead of the storm, and Casey could plainly see there was no hope of help from any passing boat. Nor was there a chance in a thousand of any car coming down the highway from Valley Stream and Jamaica in this storm.

Casey shook his head in the dark.

"Nope," he thought. "Looks like one private dick who started out to buy a five-grand reward with five C notes has to play a lone hand and take his chances, or walk out on the party. And that would be leaving a little girl and Mom Carter to face what may add up to more murder at any minute."

Joe Casey shifted his .38 to his side coat pocket, gave one more glance at the thin-nosed girl at the corner table inside, then walked to the door. He turned the door-knob quietly, then stomped sand and mud from his shoes as he walked in out of a wind that threatened to tear the door from his grip.

Two men turned from the little bar a few feet away. The writhing of their hard

mouths in curses unheard above the jangling juke-box, the sudden movement of one man's hand inside his dripping coat and the narrowed but startled eyes turned upon Casey told him these were the killers of the state policeman lying stark and cold out in the storm.

Casey read one man's lips as he said:

"So you balled it, Kirk!"

The man called Kirk, with his big white face, looked like a human grubworm. The other man, gunman and racketeer apparently, whose hand was inside his coat was smaller and dark.

Casey's finger had tightened on his .38 and the pocket of his coat was in line. Then he saw the enormous Lugoni over by the lighted juke-box, and caught the wordless order that must have passed from the fat, triple-chinned mobster to his thin-nosed girl companion.

THE moment Casey had kicked the door shut death hung suspended on the smoke-laden air of the little room, he knew that taking one of those killers now might convert the small room into a shambles. The smart, fat Lugoni knew that also—and did not want it.

The juke-box cut off as if the music had been sliced.

The grubby-faced Kirk caught the arm of the small, dark killer. Lugoni spoke into the sudden, thick silence.

"Now we're all cosy, seein' you made it, Casey!" he said heartily. "That's smart, Kirk. Keep a grip on Savola and a slug out of his tummy. Trouble is you boys don't trust nobody. Casey, we'll have us a beer and talk things over. The little dame's been on edge waitin' for you to show up."

Mary stood at the end of the little bar, close to Mom Carter. Mary's eyes were filled with horror, and she was staring at Casey as if he were some loathsome animal. It was plain enough that suddenly she distrusted him.

Lugoni moved lightly for his huge figure. He carefully circled the table at which the thin-nosed girl was sitting. Casey could see her hand below the edge of the table where it was concealed from Mary Sharkey and Mom Carter.

The automatic in the girl's hand was small, but deadly, and the murder in her eyes turned them to bright, sparkling points.

The weapon was held steadily upon Kirk and the other man at the little bar, and could have swung to Casey without moving more than an inch.

But the thin-nosed little gun moll held her beer glass with her other hand and kept on drinking from it as if nothing out of the ordinary might be happening.

CHAPTER III

SEVENTY GRAND CALLS



MOM CARTER was plump. Her eyes were blue and kindly. She was nearly always smiling. Looking now at her motherly face, Joe Casey became aware that Mom Carter had no knowledge whatever of what had brought these killers to her fishing station, nor why Joe Casey himself should appear on such a night.

Mom wiped her damp hands and smiled at Casey.

"Joe—my boy Joe!" cried Mom Carter. "Who would be expectin' you on a terrible night like this? Jimmy come with you, Joe?"

Joe Casey had never been so much puzzled to supply the right answers. He had given some thought to Jimmy Carter in connection with Mary Sharkey's wild phony message, but he didn't know what to say to Mom Carter.

Motherly Mom patted Casey's shoulder and helped him out by prattling on without waiting for an answer.

"Mary said you'd find Jimmy a regular place if he could do them valve jobs for your friend, Joe, an' I do so hope Jimmy makes good," she said worriedly. "He gets bored an' lonesome here at the station in the winter."

Casey's eyes met Mary Sharkey's briefly. He read there that Mary was trying desperately to let him know that Jimmy Carter was supposed to be doing some car work for him or a friend. But there also was frantic question and doubting contempt in the small girl's blue eyes. What Lugoni said was responsible for that, and Casey had a sudden idea that Lugoni had intended to do just that. He had wanted to make it appear that Casey had some understanding with him.

It was clear now that not only Kirk and the other killer at the little bar somehow had known of Mary Sharkey's phone message to him but that Lugoni also knew. How much they knew of it, little or all, Casey could only guess. He was sure that Mom Carter's phone line had been tapped.

He gave Mom's shoulder a friendly pat. "Jimmy's making out okay on that job," he lied, then added, "Only Jackson wanted his car rushed, and Jimmy's workin' overtime tonight. Anyway, Mom, I had a call down this way and just thought I'd drop in."

He said that casually, and deliberately, in spite of the fact that Lugoni had, in his

smart, smiling manner, put it across that his coming had been expected and that it was known Mary Sharkey had called him.

Eyeing the deadly blue gun held just below the edge of the table by the murderous, black-eyed doll, Casey wondered if Mary had some move in mind to relieve the tense situation. But the deep worry in her blue eyes and her way of watching every move made by Mom Carter seemed to convey that the one thought in Mary's mind was to make a desperate effort to keep Mom from suspecting that the men in this room were killers.

However, from what had just been said about Jimmy Carter, Casey thought he had some more of the picture. Jimmy was missing. Mary had accounted for that to Mom Carter by telling her that Jimmy was doing some motor work for Joe Casey and a mythical friend.

Did that mean that Jimmy Carter had been the driver of that pay-roll murder car? Was Mary trying to cover up for him? Was that why she needed five Cs suddenly, and had said she could deliver the stolen seventy grand?

Casey realized he had been dealt into a little game of murder with the stake at seventy grand, and that he did not hold even a pair of deuces against four ace killers. His only chance, for the moment, was the possibility that Kirk and Savola, were not playing along with Lugoni. They could have had a hand in the Wyrick hold-up, or they may have learned about it afterward. Casey got his hunch that two factions were at work here because from the four words he had heard Kirk and Savola exchange outside it appeared that they did not trust Lugoni and his thin-nosed gun moll.

"I'll have a beer, Mom," said Casey, walking to the bar alongside Lugoni. He added softly to Lugoni: "I'd have the girl friend quit playing, Lugoni. You don't want things to bust loose here."

Lugoni's fat smile was still working. He popped a few kernels of popcorn between his thick lips, washed them down with beer, his small eyes studying Casey.

"We holed up here out of the storm, but it's likely to last all night," he said suddenly. "Whassay we chance it on drivin' back into town? Now that your girl knows where Jimmy is, she might like to come along. How about it?"

CASEY'S gray eyes flicked over to the thin-nosed girl. She was leaning forward, the blue gun still in her hand under the table.

Mom Carter was staring from Casey to Lugoni, evidently puzzled by what Lugoni had just said about a girl and Jimmy.

Casey was thinking swiftly. Could he chance starting out with Lugoni, his gun moll and Mary Sharkey? That sounded plenty like a one-way ride. And yet there was Mom Carter to consider. And if Mary wanted to get out of the station, here might be the chance she was looking for.

Kirk and Savola were muttering together in low tones, glaring balefully at Lugoni, but keeping a watchful eye upon the cool little gun moll.

Bustling Mom Carter was carrying another bottle of beer toward the table where Lugoni's companion had pounded for service.

"It might be a good idea to go in to town, Lugoni," Casey said deliberately. "As for Jimmy Carter, he had a heavy date later, so just where he will be is hard to say."

For the first time the thin-nosed gun moll broke her cold silence.

"Listen, punk! What's all the stallin' about? Lugoni, you said when Casey got here we'd have a direct line on Jimmy, and ever since that rat run out with the—"

Mary Sharkey may have seen the gun moll's weapon under the table, or she may not have seen it. It made no difference, as on the moment Mary's oval face became as hard and as murderous as that of the gun moll. Apparently, also, the thin-nosed girl was not thinking of Mary Sharkey. She was intent on keeping Kirk and Savola covered with her gun.

With a screamed imprecation, little Mary leaped for the girl, a flying figure of fury, striking Mom Carter to one side with her shoulder as she dived for the gun moll's table.

Mom cried out and staggered, then the tray with the beer bottle upon it was being wrenched from her hands and hurled straight into the face of the thin-nosed gun girl.

Lugoni swore deeply and Casey wanted desperately to jam his .38 into the racketeer's fat side. But with a sick sensation he realized there were too many guns for one dick to cope with. The gun moll's weapon exploded and Mom Carter screamed.

"Joe!" Mary Sharkey called to him. "Get Mom out!"

Mary's voice rang out high and clear but she did not pause in her attack. She had followed through with the beer tray and then with the table itself. A string of gutter language poured from the gun moll's mouth as she was jammed to the floor, with Mary Sharkey slamming her own weight and that of the table upon her.

Joe Casey groaned. There would be the gunplay he had feared in Mom's place now.

Mom Carter's usually smiling face twisted with pain. There was a ghastly streak of

red along the edge of her gray hair where a slug from the gun moll's weapon must have hit.

Casey himself had no time for getting Mom Carter out now.

The grubby-faced Kirk spat out curses, filling his hand with a rod.

"No—no!" shouted Lugoni as Kirk's rod whipped up.

Casey was quick, jerking his own .38 around and slamming a slug at Kirk. But he felt fat Lugoni tumble back against him, falling. Then something struck his head with such force that he felt as if the roof had crashed upon his head.

But when he hit the floor, with Lugoni lying partly across him he was aware that the warm liquid bathing one of his hands came from Lugoni's throat. The same slug that had scored his own skull and dropped him to the floor had neatly cut through Lugoni's jugular.

Kirk was cursing over a limp arm, but came down upon Casey with his knees, hammering his face with the butt of his rod. Casey, half stunned and nearly out, saw Savola trap Mary Sharkey, gripping her arms from behind and twisting until Mary's smudged face turned gray with agony.

Still cursing, Kirk sat up, but his rod prodded into Casey's neck now. Lugoni was finished, his huge head a welter of blood.

KIRK was just reeling to his feet when abruptly the whole fishing station jolted and rocked on its piling. One whole end of the building crashed inward. The long prow of Mom Carter's fishing boat appeared in the hole. The boat had ripped loose from its anchorage in the storm and banged into the house.

The boat's motor was running wild, its exhaust pouring gas fumes into the room. Yet Casey saw no sign of anyone aboard the boat.

"Where's Jimmy Carter?" Kirk demanded of Casey. "Either you or that young wildcat will talk, and fast, or we'll set this shack on fire with the old woman in it!"

"Yeah, sister!" ground out Savola, twisting Mary's arms until they cracked. "Where's Jimmy Carter hiding out? You know. We traced the truck and it's in the hole of a creek. You want Mom Carter burned, sister? Alive?"

Little beads of sweat were on Mary Sharkey's face. Yet in spite of the pain of torture, and the black oily smudge off a boat engine, a thought sped through Casey's mind that he never had seen a more calm or beautiful face.

Mary spoke tightly against the agony of her twisted arms, but clearly.

"Finding Jimmy Carter will never get

you anything," she said. "I was the driver of that hold-up truck, and if you hadn't killed Lugoni, he would tell you I was. I'm the only one who knows where the seventy grand is hidden, and I've already called the State Police and confessed. They'll be here any time now."

Savola tore everything then when he slapped Mary Sharkey viciously across her whitened lips, cutting them. The girl's words and Savola's brutal slap caused Kirk to turn slightly, watching, his rod slipping a little along Casey's neck.

It was for Mary Sharkey that Casey hit Kirk then. And he seemed to bring that punch from nowhere. His knuckles traveled perhaps eight inches. Nevertheless, Kirk's jaw cracked like a dry stick, above the muttering roar of the storm rocking the fishing station.

As Savola yelled an oath, Casey was rolling, grabbing Kirk's rod. But the raging Savola, with Kirk laid out cold, swung Mary Sharkey in front of him as a shield and started to bring up his own rod slowly and with careful aim.

CHAPTER IV

A GUN MOLL'S HATE



Casey was compelled to take a long chance. Savola's body and head were protected by Mary Sharkey's body, but Casey pounded a slug into the exposed part of one of Savola's legs.

Savola's gun chewed splinters off the floor alongside Casey. Casey felt the thugging of lead into the flesh of one hip,

but managed to drop behind one of the metal-topped tables.

The northeaster had increased until the slapping tidal waves were breaking through the wall and crossing the floor where the fishing cruiser had driven through. The dimmed lights flickered, which probably accounted for Joe Casey being alive.

As Savola fired again, Mary Sharkey seemed to come to sudden and amazing life in his arms. The girl who had declared herself to be the driver of the pay-roll murder car, who had said the State Police had been called, was abruptly slamming hard fists into Savola's face, driving him back.

Casey had a clear shot then. But the .38 he had taken off Kirk jammed when he pulled the trigger. Nevertheless, a gun did explode—the gun moll's rod.

With a look of surprise on his small, dark face Savola slipped to the floor. Casey turned, getting around the table.

"Hold it, mug, or I'll burn you!" the thin-nosed girl cracked out shrilly. "An' you, Baby, I'm fixing your face so you'll want a burn! What was that crack about you drivin' the hold-up truck? Say—what is this? So that's why—"

Mary Sharkey stood in front of the dead-ly blue gun that still smoked in the hand of the furious moll. The gun girl's was already fixed. Mary Sharkey had done a wonderful job of giving a violent facial to the girl friend of the late Lugoni.

Casey did not move for a moment. He had just discovered that the slug gouge in his leg was more than he had thought. The bone grated, and he knew that he would not be walking away from Mom's Place whatever happened.

Mary Sharkey faced the other girl for half a minute.

"Yes," she said then, "and that's why I didn't fall for your line, Trix. That was your mistake when you and Lugoni were working me to find out the time of the delivery of the Wyrick pay-roll. Now, will you let me take care of Mom Carter? She's hurt."

"Get back!" snarled the gun moll. "Yeah, all you wanted was to get the mob in on that pay-roll hold-up, an' you worked it swell! Okay, Babe! Where's the dough? And I ain't askin' twice!"

The phone rang shrilly, and the gun girl Mary had called Trix pushed her gun into Mary's side. "Walk over an' answer it, an' make it right!" the girl ordered, and slanted her black, murderous eyes upon Casey at the same time. "And you'll get it good, Mister, if you make a move!"

Mary Sharkey moved over to the phone and took off the receiver.

"Hello," she said. "This is Mom's Place."

The smart gun girl slapped her to one side, taking the phone, but keeping the gun in place.

"You want Sergeant Troll of the State Police, you say?" she said. "Why, sure. He was here, but he ain't here now. Who? Mary Sharkey? She went away with him—yes. You want to talk to Mom Carter? I'll call her."

The gun girl whirled from the phone, leaving the receiver off.

"Okay, you two! That spills it! There was a Sergeant Troll started to arrest Mary Sharkey! Maybe he had an accident or something, but in about one minute they'll be sending some more cops, I'll bet! Now where's that dough? An' there'll be no other time!"

Casey cursed wildly at what happened then. Never before had he believed the stories he had heard of the brutality of girls who take the mob route. He did now. He had to.

THE gun girl slapped her gun suddenly across Mary's face, knocking her to her knees. Before Mary could recover, the gun girl was kneeling, the rod pushed against Mom Carter's gray hair.

"I'm guessin' maybe you think a lot of the old lady, an' that's why you went off your nut," said Trix with deadly coldness. "The dough, and now, or you're about to see the old woman's brains blown out of her ears."

"And if I tell you, you'll do the same thing," said Mary Sharkey, her voice quivering for the first time. "Look, Trix, I don't matter. Sure, I'll spill about the pay-roll dough. But I've got to know Mom won't be hurt. Seventy thousand is a lot of money, Trix. You can get away—"

"Can it, Sob Sister!" cut in the gun girl. "Where's the dough or do I push a slug into the old woman's conk?"

Casey had to do what he did. It was the only way. Perhaps Mary could not see the viciousness of the gun girl, the venomous desire to kill in her black eyes.

"Tell her, Mary," he said. "Seventy grand is a lot of dough, an awful lot, Trix, and there's nothing to stop you getting away with it now. But when you left that phone open you as good as called the State cops. You haven't killed anyone that counts, yet, but if you shoot Mom Carter and they get you you'll burn!"

"I'm telling you, Trix," Mary interrupted. "and so help me if you take the money and try to kill Mom. . . . Try the juke-box, Trix. Open the back."

The gun girl swore sarcastically. "And it was there all the time them dumb mugs was stallin' around!"

She kept Mary under the gun as she reached the big juke-box. It was then that Casey saw what seemed the slimmest kind of a chance. The juke-box was set in the middle of the floor. A six-foot length of cable extended to it from the wall.

Just above the cable, along the wall of the roughly-built fishing station, ran a thinner pair of light wires. Casey figured that no matter how it came out, the results would be the same if the murderous Trix ever got her hands on seventy grand.

"She'll figure if she leaves us all dead, the police will figure it was a mob raid and gun battle, but they'll not connect her with it," thought Casey. "We would be the only witnesses."

He watched the gun girl fairly tear off the back of the big juke-box, praying that there might be one or two seconds when the sight of the money would make her forget that deadly gun.

Then Trix was backing away from the juke-box. She laughed harshly.

"Okay, Babe, you haul it out!" she commanded. "I might not feel just right with

that much dough and a gun all at the same time!"

Mary Sharkey was kneeling, pulling a canvas sack from the lower part of the juke-box. Casey rolled, his broken leg grating, his stomach shrieking as he expected any second the gun girl would turn and see him.

He gripped the thin light wires over their insulation, set himself against a shock and jerked with all of his strength. Casey felt as if he had been slugged in the jaw as the electrical jolt threw him back. But the place gave off a lightning flash and the darkness became opaque.

"Roll, Mary!" he yelled. "Duck fast!"

The blue gun cracked and cracked again. The screamed gutter language of the gun moll was a lesson in profanity to Casey who had thought he had heard everything.

Then there was utter silence. Casey dared not move, hampered by his leg. He couldn't even tell if Mary had escaped the gun girl's slugs, and could only guess what might happen next.

Then he knew that Mary had escaped temporarily, for he heard the gun girl's oaths dying out. She was moving about slowly, cautiously, feeling her way. A metal table went over.

It had been some little time since Casey had been conscious of the force of the storm outside, or of the motor still running in the fishing cruiser jammed through the end of the building. Now he thought he heard something scrape across the prow of the boat inside the room.

Then another deadly fear possessed Joe Casey. He believed Mary had got away for the moment, but Mom Carter was lying unconscious on the floor, still in dire danger. The thought sent him slithering along the floor, dragging his cracked leg.

IF THE gun girl heard him, it probably would be the finish for him. But he was sure the gun girl was hunting Mom Carter in the darkness, and she was much less familiar with the place than himself.

Casey was crouched close to Mom Carter's still body when he felt the touch of a moving girl. In his heart as he swung what he hoped would be a knockout blow was a prayer that he was making no mistake, that it would not be Mary he hit.

When the girl fell and lay quiet, Casey had to force himself to make sure. Then he breathed easier. The unconscious girl was not Mary. This one wore a skirt, not overalls. Groping about, Casey found her gun.

"Mary!" Casey called out cautiously. "I have her. It's all right."

Joe Casey never had imagined that the presence of the tomboyish, mechanically-minded Mary Sharkey could bring to him so much of the feminine touch. But he realized

it when Mary's warm hand gripped his fingers in the darkness.

Casey was listening intently. But in the skeltering smash of the storm hitting the fishing station shack, it was almost impossible to distinguish other sounds. If further danger threatened them, he could know nothing of it from what he heard.

"Mom's breathing, Joe," whispered Mary. "If we can only bring her around!"

Casey found that, by some miracle, his small flask of whiskey was whole. He started forcing some between Mom Carter's lips in the darkness, telling Mary to rub her wrists. And Casey started talking, his mind upon the imminence of the arrival of State Police.

"Mary, what is all this bluff about you driving the murder car and having confessed to the police?" he demanded. "Where does it fit in with you wanting five hundred cash, then wanting me to return seventy grand for a five-thousand-dollar reward? Jimmy, isn't it?"

"No," persisted Mary stubbornly. "I was telling the truth. I drove the pay-roll murder truck. I thought I could get away with five hundred and some day pay it back. I called you, because you're Mom's friend, and—"

A boat hooted hoarsely in the storm. One of the oil tankers was driving out on the storm tide. But the hooting of the whistle was unusual, and Joe Casey knew his boats.

Then the truth about what Mary had been saying came to him like a flash.

"Mary, it couldn't be that Jimmy got mixed up in that pay-roll robbery and murder, and you need five hundred to get him out of the way?" demanded Casey. "I remember the driver of the hold-up truck was described as a youngster wearing a cap. Did that give you the idea?"

The oil tanker continued hooting. Mary uttered a low sob. Casey put an arm about her.

"Mom must never know about Jimmy," she said. "Yes, that's it. Jimmy can get away and start over again. If he's taken for the pay-roll murder, it will kill Mom. And, Joe, Jimmy didn't know he was driving his truck to a hold-up."

"Jimmy's truck, Mary?"

"That's right, Joe. Mom didn't know he'd bought it. He was getting odd hauling. One night he helped fix Lugoni's motor on the road. Lugoni hired him for some small jobs after that, or so Jimmy thought."

"And then—"

"Then the night of the robbery, because Jimmy had been kidded along by this Trix, one of Lugoni's girls, Jimmy was called to take two men out on a little repair job, he was told. Joe, Jimmy never lied to me, and he didn't know that Lugoni's mob had an-

other car planted to wreck the armored truck, and that his truck was to be used as a getaway car. I think they would have got rid of Jimmy after that."

"If you're telling the truth, there isn't a doubt of it," said Casey. "But that whole story would sound fishy to the police. Especially, after Jimmy ran off with the pay-roll and now you have it."

"That's just it," said Mary earnestly. "Can't you see how scared Jimmy had to be when the hold-up happened? Why, he drove straight for home and Mom Carter. Luckily I came onto him, and when he told the story, the first thing I thought of was to sink the truck in the bay."

"Not a bad thought," admitted Casey. "But, Mary, why take this on your own shoulders? Good grief, girl! State Police are sure to come after you and one trooper was knocked off by Kirk and Savola. Suppose Jimmy has this five hundred and gets away. You'll never get away from the cops, and they'll give you years!"

CHAPTER V

VANISHING DOUGH



VEN as Casey talked, he felt that Mary Sharkey had made a fool of herself. Yet what a loving, loyal fool to try and save Jimmy, and save Mom Carter from grief.

"Mom's waking up a little, Joe," Mary said suddenly. "Talk easy. I wasn't so foolish. I had it all figured out. That's the only reason I was able to

talk Jimmy into trying to get away for a while for Mom's sake. For you see, Joe, after Jimmy was safe and the money returned, I have a whole family who could tell exactly where I was at the time of the pay-roll robbery in Brooklyn. That's the only reason Jimmy would try to get away, because all the papers were sure the driver of the hold-up truck would be executed for the murder of the guard, if he was caught."

Joe Casey could understand. Mary Sharkey and Jimmy Carter had been acting exactly as two frightened kids would be expected to act, with the threat of a murder charge hanging over Jimmy. But Casey was breathing easier. It might be tough establishing Jimmy's unsuspecting part in the hold-up, but Casey thought grimly of the unconscious Trix and of the mobster Kirk whose jaw he had broken.

He could think of several ways they might be made to sing. He tried to think of how the killing of Lugoni here, along with Savola, might help Jimmy's story. But the

presence of the seventy grand would be among the biggest factors, and the district attorney probably would be out for blood.

"But where is Jimmy?" said Casey suddenly, then added inconsequentially, just why, he didn't know: "Listen! That tank-er's stopped hooting. It's gone. . . . Okay—we have to do some fast thinking before the police get here. One bad feature is the killing of that State trooper. Mary, Lugoni and these others were on the lookout for Jimmy. They undoubtedly have been tapped in steadily on Mom Carter's phone. They heard your call to me about the reward money. Kirk and Savola may or may not have been in on the original hold-up, but there was the usual mob doublecross coming up at the last. Lugoni and the gun moll were keeping an eye on Kirk and Savola. If they had got to that reward money, it would have been dog eat dog."

Casey heard the sudden thin wail of a police siren up the highway.

"The phone, Mary," he said quickly. "Put it back in place. And get that pay-roll money and beat it out of here fast. I'll think up something. . . . But, Mary, I forgot. You haven't told me where Jimmy is hiding?"

Mary was moving in the darkness.

"Jimmy's on the cruiser," she said. "I don't know why he smashed it into the shack, but I must get to him. I'll bet he wanted to help stop the fighting and got hurt when the boat smashed."

In only moments Mary was back again.

"Joe! Joe!" she called in the darkness. "Jimmy's gone! He was on the boat. I saw him for just a minute and he told me. He had been knocked out. Then suddenly when the lights went out, he climbed out and now he's really gone!"

Casey swore. "The blind little dumbhead! But, Mary, get that pay-roll money before those coppers arrive. Seventy grand is something to deal with these days. I'll connect up the phone."

Casey was dragging himself slowly and painfully across the floor toward the disconnected phone.

"Joe!" Mary cried. "The money's gone! I've looked everywhere! Could Jimmy. . . . No, Joe! Jimmy wouldn't really steal it!"

The police siren wailed closer. Casey held a lantern Mary lighted. There was no trace of the seventy grand. Evidently scared Jimmy Carter, after all the shooting, had lammed out with all of the money.

"Jimmy! How could he do it?"

Mary Sharkey was sobbing wildly. Casey realized that all of the girl's well-intentioned but misguided sacrifice appeared to have been thrown away. He had to think now how best to get Mary out of all this.

Once in the hands of the police, her position would be made worse by the car-

nage created by gunmen inside the fishing station. He had an idea.

"Look, Mary!" he said. "Could you possibly get the fishing boat out of the wreck-age and handle it in the storm? I'll do all that can be done for Mom."

"I could handle the boat, but I won't," declared Mary stubbornly. "I have to know Mom is all right. I'll get a light fixed up."

The left-handed girl had the electrical lights going within two minutes. The police car had stopped outside on the highway. Casey realized the new arrivals must have come upon the body of the State trooper.

That would add up to less chance for Mary.

Mary was doing everything possible for Mom Carter. Mom remained unconscious. Casey, handicapped by his broken leg, could do little, except to make sure that Kirk, the living mobster, and Trix, the gun girl, were secure.

He wondered how Jimmy would make his getaway? Then he remembered the hooting of the oil tanker. Jimmy Carter was an expert with boats. He could have reached that tanker in a rowboat, in spite of the storm, with all of the seventy grand.

Casey glanced at the intense face and the troubled blue eyes of Mary Sharkey. Funny, he thought, how you could watch a girl like her for three years, and never see her vivid beauty, and something more—the kind of loyalty seldom found in a woman or man.

"Smart, too," muttered Casey. "Anyway, if it comes to a showdown, Mom Carter will have to know about Jimmy. I hadn't believed he could be that kind of a rat."

The police had not yet come on, and Casey wondered. Little could be done to save Mary from the disgrace of arrest, even if she had a dozen alibis. Not after the seventy grand had disappeared and she had claimed over the phone to have been in the hold-up.

The platform outside shook under the hard tread of men.

Captain Cooley, long known to Joe Casey, walked in, followed by four other State policemen with drawn guns. Captain Cooley halted, took in the bodies of Lugoni and Savola, and the now bound Kirk and the gun girl Trix.

He glanced at Mary who was still bathing Mom Carter's wounded head. Then he looked at Casey, scrooched on the floor, trying to fight the pain of his fractured leg.

Captain Cooley whistled, but his eyes were hard and cold. He was thinking of what they had found out on the highway.

"Well, Casey?" The tone was like flint. "Perhaps you know which one of these mugs knocked over Sergeant Troll? Or could it be this Mary Sharkey who admits she drove the murder car in that Wyrick hold-up? And these others?"

"Savola and Kirk, or perhaps both got Sergeant Troll," stated Casey. His mind was made up now. Little Mary Sharkey was going to be saved if he could possibly do it. "Savola and Kirk, and Lugoni with his moll were after the Wyrick pay-roll money that Jimmy Carter took away after the hold-up in Brooklyn."

Mary was on her feet, her eyes blazing. "Joe Casey!" she cried. "I hate you! That isn't true! Jimmy wasn't there! I drove that truck!"

"Pass it up, Captain Cooley," cut in Casey. "Mary is only doing this because she is trying to protect Mom Carter here, and Jimmy."

"I'm afraid Mary Sharkey will be away a long time, whether she helped with the pay-roll hold-up or pulled this other stuff to help a real killer get away," snapped Captain Cooley. "All right, let's have the rest of what happened here."

Casey outlined it briefly. Captain Cooley did not change his mind.

"Mary Sharkey will have to come along," he said. "Now how about that pay-roll dough? We were given to understand it would be returned."

There was a sudden interruption. A man appeared upon the prow of the wrecked fishing cruiser that was sticking into the room.

He was helping a frail woman who was carrying a baby and holding the hand of a small child.

"Just a minute, Mister!" this new arrival interrupted. "You're making a mistake thinking Mary Sharkey ever did anything wrong. Anyway, the night the Wyrick pay-roll was stolen, Mary stayed up all night nursing our sick baby. You don't have to take our word for it. Dr. Lane of Island Park, was there half of the night."

"And who are you?" demanded Captain Cooley.

"Name's Anderson," said the man. "It happens me and the missus, and both the kids would be dead right now if Jimmy Carter hadn't risked his life getting to us tonight. A drifting cruiser smashed into our flooded cottage. We were about gone when Jimmy got his fishing boat across and took us off. Look, Mister, I ain't believin' Jimmy Carter helped in any robbery or murder."

CAPTAIN COOLEY looked at Mary Sharkey, his eyes a little more kindly.

"Really smart girl, huh?" he commented. "Have yourself an airtight alibi to help Jimmy Carter get away. Well, aiding a fugitive wanted for murder is just as serious."

The phone bell pealed suddenly. Stepping over the body of Lugoni, Captain Cooley took it.

"What?" he said. "What the devil? Say that again!"

He listened for some little time. When he replaced the receiver he wore a hard grin. He glanced at the bodies on the floor. The gun girl woke up and started a real line of gutter language.

CAPTAIN COOLEY walked over and slapped her head to one side.

"Listen, Baby!" he said harshly. "What was Jimmy Carter supposed to be hauling for Lugoni the night of the Wyrick hold-up? You'd better think fast and talk straight if you want us to give you a hand. You can do twenty to life, or you might get off with maybe a two-year rap for the shooting you've done tonight. Talk right, and perhaps we'll go to bat for you for bumping off this killer who got one of our men! What's the answer, Baby, and now?"

The murderous black eyes of the gun girl traveled about the room. They lingered upon Mary Sharkey, hating her the most. But Trix was not dumb.

"Okay, Copper, if it's that way," she said coolly. "Jimmy Carter was called by Lugoni in a hurry to go with a couple of men after his car. Lugoni told Jimmy his motor had conked out, and Jimmy had been working on some of his other cars after helping him out on the road one day. Well, Lugoni figured the old truck would be a good getaway car, and another car was used in the hold-up. But the two dumb mugs with the dough dumped it in the truck, and then the cops got 'em. That's—"

"Enough for the present," said Captain Cooley.

The captain's eyes were kindly as he looked at Mary Sharkey.

"Jimmy has arrived at Hempstead Precinct with all of the Wyrick seventy grand," he said. "He hasn't talked much, except to say you had talked him into getting away, knowing you had an alibi. Well, this Jimmy is the kind of a guy who doesn't seem to want someone else to take the rap for him. He wants Mary Sharkey to look after his mother, and try to tell her how it is."

Mary rubbed some tears across her greasy, dirty face. Her blue eyes were like stars.

Joe Casey almost forgot the ache of his broken leg. He thought of the month or so it might be before he could qualify for the Navy hitch.

Mom Carter was awake now, blinking her mild eyes in wonder. Joe Casey spoke quickly.

"It was a fine thing Jimmy did, saving these folks tonight, Captain Cooley."

Immediate aliveness came to Mom Carter's eyes. "My Jimmy save somebody in the storm?" she said, with pride in her tone.

Mary told her. And while she was telling it, Joe Casey mapped out his immediate future until he would be fit for service. As far as his broken leg would permit, he intended to help Mary look after Mom Carter.

He wondered how Mary would look with a clean face and in a dress where she wouldn't have wrenches sticking out of all of the pockets?

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The tragedy was no part of his job. McCann signaled a native

Pattern for Killing

By M. D. ORR

*Introducing Archie McCann, the shiftless anthropologist,
in the first of a new series of tropical crime stories!*

ARCHIBALD SLYVESTER BREWSTER McCANN blinked and opened one eye as the first rays of the sun slanted through the netting and extended exploring rays toward his face.

The sea breeze sighed in the coconut palms fringing Tambu. There was peace, quiet.

The Japs were far away, shoved back

over the Sepik River by MacArthur's push from Port Moresby.

McCann, anthropologist to his friends, beachcomber to his critics, wiggled the large bare feet which stuck out six inches beyond the end of his bunk, sighed, and closed his eyes again.

Then he leaped straight up in the air. The heavy roar of a shotgun smashed into the quiet. As its echoes rolled back from

the jungle a flock of macaws fled screaming overhead. Bedlam at once broke out where there had been peace.

McCann's first thought as he clawed trousers on his long and skinny shanks, was of the Japs. But the excited jabbering of natives, streaming past his door, dispelled that theory. In a moment, he was outside, blinking in the intense blue and gold morning of the tropics.

An awe-struck crowd was gathered about the house of Cavi, peeping in, but not daring to enter.

From within, came the heartbroken cries of a woman.

McCann pushed through the door. Cavi's wife sat on the floor, inside, rocking herself back and forth and moaning. Cavi was sprawled in a bunk, his head a bloody pulp. On the dirt floor, lay the discharged shotgun. The smell of cordite was strong in the air.

McCann backed out again. He was no policeman, and a killing was not part of his job. He signaled a native.

"You fella run quick fetch Massa French," he ordered.

He watched the boy turn and race off. Then, cautioning the crowd not to enter the house and to touch nothing, he made his way back to his own house, blinking thoughtfully.

MCCANN was six feet three inches tall and thin as a rail. He was put together so loosely that anyone observing him drape himself over a chair would be convinced he had no bones. He was also the possessor of an ear-to-ear grin and a case of hookworm—his own fault—since he insisted upon going barefoot like the natives.

All of which had nothing to do with McCann's real ability as an anthropologist and undercover agent for British Intelligence. He was an American who had graduated from medical school, taken a post-graduate course at Edinburgh, qualified as a lawyer, served as assistant district attorney in New York, and then gone to the Bismark Archipelago to study breeds and types of natives.

He had built himself a house in the native village of Tambu, won the confidence of its people—and the alarm of James Holcomb, Allied Military Governor, who feared he was "going native." But McCann had just laughed at Holcomb, and continued to walk barefooted, despite the hookworm. He was the natives' "good fella marster," who doctored them when they were ill, counseled them when they were in trouble, and listened to their gossip with a retentive memory.

And now Cavi had been murdered!

Head bowed in thought, McCann made his way back to his own house and stretched

out on his own bunk. This killing of Cavi didn't make sense to him—at least, not according to his ideas of native behavior. Puzzling it over, he dozed off. The next thing he knew someone was slapping the soles of his bare protruding feet.

McCann blinked owlishly at Jason French, the AMG Chief of Police for the Port Moresby area. Behind him were the grinning faces of French's native police boys. "Well, you made it fast," McCann said, levering his bony limbs out of the bunk.

"I came here even before looking at the corpse," French said. "They tell me you found the body."

"I don't know. There was a crowd at the hut already, but they were just peeping in from outside. I heard the shotgun go off, though. It wasn't more than three or four minutes before I got there."

"Well, let's take a look," French said impatiently.

The police chief knew the country well. His father had been local governor of New Guinea, and he had grown up in New Guinea. But his viewpoint was the exact opposite of McCann's. He had been thoroughly indoctrinated with the white man's concept of "ruling" the natives.

The crowd was still gossiping around the door of Cavi's shack. Two police boys quickly took charge, keeping the natives back. French and McCann entered the one-room house.

They found Cavi's wife continuing to rock herself and moan. The body was untouched. French spoke to her in *bêche-demer*. Her name was Goma.

"What name fella killum this fella man?"

She took her hands from her face and gazed up with swollen, tear-filled eyes. There were discolored bruises and bumps on her face.

"No fella killem," she whimpered. "One bad fella spirit, he killem."

"Come, come now!" French snapped. "You no talk like one fella fool. You talk truth, Goma. What name fella killem?"

"No fella killem," the woman insisted. "One bad fella spirit he killem."

French spread his hands helplessly.

"There, you see?" he complained to McCann. "That's the sort of thing we have to put up with."

He strode to the door.

"Hey, you boys," he called to the lingering natives. "Any one been in here since you found Cavi?"

"No fella man come inside house," a native said. "Me stay long house all time."

FRENCH turned back to McCann. "What about those bruises on her face?" he asked.

"Well," McCann admitted, "Cavi's been

on a drunken spree. He beat her up day before yesterday."

"I know," French snapped. "She came to our office, and we brought him in, but she wouldn't make a complaint so we had to let him go. They went home together."

"And he gave her another beating last night," McCann murmured. He sighed. "I'll talk to her."

"All right, Missie," he began soothingly. "You savvy me?"

Goma squinted up at him through puffed eyelids.

"Me savvy. You good fella massa."

"You tell massa how come all this?"

She agreed readily. Her husband had come home, drunk, with a shotgun and had beaten her. Then he had told her to get his dinner. Then he had sat at the table, holding the gun in his lap while he ate. After finishing his dinner, he had told her he was going to kill her in the morning, put the gun on the table, and had made her lie down on the floor across the room from the bunk.

Goma said he went to sleep immediately, but she stayed awake for hours, because of the pain from the beating. Finally she had slept, only to be awakened by a terrific noise. The sun was just rising. She jumped up and found Cavi, still in his bunk, kicking in his final death throes. No one else was in sight.

"Goma's an awful liar," French said. "McCann, did you see anyone running from the house when you came out?"

"No, I didn't."

"And neither did the natives." He surveyed the room. "Look there."

The shotgun was still lying on the floor close to the center of the room.

"Look at the position of the gun," French declared. "And those marks in the earth. She threw the gun there after she shot him."

"That's not evidence," McCann said mildly.

"Evidence! What kind of evidence do you need? Motive is the strongest evidence here. She was scared to death he'd kill her in the morning, so she blew open his skull. It's obvious enough even for an anthropologist, I should think."

McCann ignored the sarcasm, turning to the woman again.

"You sure you no kill Cavi?"

"Me no kill Cavi, massa. Me think spirit fella he do."

"She's lying," French said in weary tones. "Notice this." He pointed to a funnel-shaped dark spot on the edge of the table nearest the sleeping bunk. "Here's where she rested the gun on the table to get a bead on him while he was sleeping. It's pointed right at his head."

McCann peered at the mark on the table.

It was unquestionably a powder burn, and even showed grooves where the pellets had scored the wood.

"I didn't know Cavi had a gun," McCann said.

"Well, I got the dope on that," French said. "Cavi worked for Hiram Streeter, and this morning Streeter reported one of his guns is missing. That's Streeter's gun. He told me Cavi was the only one who could have taken it from the plantation."

"She didn't sound as if she were lying," McCann mused.

"Wait till you've lived here as long as I have," French said disgustedly, bending to pick up the gun. "You'll change your mind about these fuzzle-wuzzies telling the truth."

He began wiping the gun vigorously with a piece of cloth.

"Policeman wipes fingerprints from murder weapon," McCann murmured.

"Fingerprints!" French snorted. "This isn't a city crime, McCann, with a dozen suspects. It's an open and shut case. Goma was scared he'd kill her, so she beat him to it. Can't blame her, I guess, but judging her isn't my job. Look at the grease and muck all over this gun. I'm not going to take it home with me like that."

THE anthropologist shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"You're the cop," McCann said. "But I should think you'd be just a little curious about whether or not her fingerprints were on the gun."

"You've been reading too many detective stories," French growled. He handed the gun to McCann. "Here, hold it while I look at Cavi and the bunk."

McCann stepped outside and examined the weapon in the bright light. It was an American twelve-gauge single barrel shotgun, with the exploded cartridge still in the breech. Greasy food was plastered all over the butt, trigger and guard, an eloquent commentary on Cavi's eating habits.

At least, the woman had not lied when she said Cavi had eaten with the gun in his lap.

While French and the police boys were making arrangements for the burial of Cavi, McCann talked to the other villagers who still lingered near the house.

McCann's interest in Cavi had never been acute, but now he learned some facts about Cavi. In spite of Cavi's evil habits he always had provided Goma with plenty of the best food in the village. Despite this, he had beaten her regularly each week, after receiving his pay from the plantation.

French found McCann standing under a palm tree near his house.

"Well, we've done everything that can be

done," the police chief said. "I told Goma, Cavi's wife, she'd have to go to jail. She took it pretty hard."

"I don't think she killed Cavi," McCann said quietly.

"Well, I'll be a mule's mother-in-law!" snorted French in disgust. "What makes you think she didn't do it?"

"It doesn't fit the behavior pattern," McCann replied.

"What is this—anthropology?" French sneered. "What behavior pattern?"

"Jason," said the anthropologist, "you've lived in this country all your life. What is the most important thing in a native's life?"

"The most important single thing?"

French scratched his head. "Food, I guess."

"Right. Food. Food is always scarce. It is the great item of concern among the natives. The greatest gift one native can give another is food. 'Backem'—the gift of food is a powerful religious ritual. The one who receives backem must make a return of comparable or higher value."

"All right, all right!" French snapped. "I know that. What's food got to do with this murder? They had plenty of food."

"That's the point exactly," McCann said. "Cavi, for all his faults, was a good provider. He supplied his wife with an abundance of food. No native woman in her right mind is going to kill that kind of a husband."

French's eyes opened a little.

"But he beat the tar out of her every week."

McCann shrugged.

"Every native beats his wife. That also is an accepted behavior pattern. Beating never leads to disruption of the family unit. But failure to provide food does, because it is much more serious."

French looked baffled. He opened his mouth, closed it again, then shut his teeth with a click.

"Listen," he said. "I've got a perfectly good suspect for this killing and I'm holding on to her. You bring me a better one and I'll gladly make a substitution."

With that he turned and strode away. McCann looked after him somberly.

"I may have to do that," McCann murmured.

McCANN was no detective, but his fingers were clutching at the coattails of an idea. To McCann the most important factor in any mystery was the behavior pattern of the people involved. Western standards could not be applied to New Guinea natives. And despite circumstantial evidence against Cavi's wife, there was a still unknown ingredient here.

"It may be none of my business," he muttered, "but I'll be darned if this isn't a puz-

zle in anthropology more than crime. I'll just naturally have to show that Jason French a thing or two!"

Toward dusk, he drifted back to Cavi's house. He saw that it had been thoroughly ransacked. Several rats scurried for their holes.

He examined the spot where the gun had been found and noted that it was not directly between the table and the wife's bed. The marks on the earth, however, were in a direct line with the place where Goma had slept. The scratches were about eighteen inches in length.

He also found crumbs from Cavi's last meal. Luckily the rats had not time to get them and he examined these fragments carefully.

Then, sitting down on a block of wood, he tried to reconstruct the scene in his mind.

A big snake came out of hiding and glided across the floor. It paused in front of a rat hole, beady eyes alert. Suddenly it raised its head as a rat came out of the hole. The snake struck like lightning, but missed. Terrorized, the rat bounded into the air when the snake struck again, wildly. The rat scrambled up the table leg.

McCann picked up a chunk of wood and threw it at the rat, which scampered back to the ground. The wood skidded across the table, hit the wall and bounced back, to clip the snake.

"Boomerang," McCann thought. "I nearly got two birds with one stone." He killed the stunned snake.

He didn't sleep well that night. He tossed and twisted, while the few facts he had in his mind refused to fit together.

In the morning, McCann walked down to the hut where he found the government official holding hearings. Holcomb signaled McCann to take a seat.

McCann eased his long frame into, over and around a big bamboo chair. He wound one leg around the other and hooked his toe behind a brace on the chair leg. Placing both arms behind his head he brought his hands forward in front and interlocked the fingers.

The *kiap* watched him in admiring amazement. He wondered if all anthropologists were like McCann.

When the last complaint had been heard, Holcomb came down from the rostrum.

"Glad to see you, McCann," he greeted. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to borrow the shotgun the police are holding as evidence in the Cavi case," McCann said.

Holcomb smiled.

"I can't do that," he said. "That's police evidence."

"I know it's irregular," McCann said, "but I must, to satisfy myself about certain

things in this case. I need that gun for a short time—if I can get it.”

“I’d do anything I can for you,” Holcomb said, “but you’re asking one thing I can’t do. Sorry, McCann. You can have one of my guns.”

“No, one of your guns won’t do,” McCann said. “Do something else for me, then. Hold off the hearing for just one more day, will you?”

“I guess I can do that,” Holcomb agreed. “That is, if you can get evidence to bear on the case.”

“If I can’t get the evidence by tomorrow, you can go ahead.”

“Very well, then,” Holcomb replied. “I shall expect you sometime tomorrow.”

THE military governor shook hands with McCann who hurried out of the hut and headed for the Streeter plantation. He found Streeter in his office.

“I got myself tangled up in this Cavi killing case,” McCann explained to Streeter. “I’d like to talk to you about it, if you have the time.”

“Sure I have the time. Sit down and have a cigarette?”

“Thanks.” McCann lighted up and said, “To explain briefly, I cannot see why Cavi’s wife would go to such a length as to murder him for beating her up.” McCann outlined his theory as opposed to the police theory.

“Maybe you’ve got something there, McCann,” admitted Streeter. “If I can help, just say the word.”

“I’d like to ask a few questions, if I may? How did Cavi come to get the gun?”

“He took it without asking. I wouldn’t have let him take it off the plantation even if he had asked.”

“Was he in the habit of using the gun?”

“Not that gun. That gun was mine. I had it made specially for me. It is a choke bore, and has a hair trigger.”

“Hair trigger, eh!” McCann nodded. “How much pressure would be required to release the firing pin?”

“Not much. Just about the weight of my finger.”

McCann scratched his head thoughtfully. He stood up and walked slowly back and forth across the floor of the office.

“Did Cavi get drunk very often,” he asked finally.

“He never was drunk when he was working. He did get gloriously drunk whenever he got paid and was away from the plantation.”

“Did he have any person who might have wanted to get even with him for something?”

“No, I don’t believe he had any real enemies.”

“Do you know his wife?” [Turn page]

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"No, I never saw her. I do know that he took home a lot of special food we have here at the plantation."

"Did Cavi have any other woman on his string?"

"No. Of that I'm sure."

McCann scratched his head again.

"Well, I guess that is all this time. Mr. Streeter," announced McCann. "Thanks a lot."

McCann went back to Cavi's house. He entered and carefully scrutinized the place once more. As he came to the spot where the gun had been found, he stopped.

He stooped down and sighted across the table. The top of the table was on an exact plane with the sleeping bunk where Cavi had been shot. He looked at the table-top again, noticing several scratches running back toward him from the center of the table. He glanced back toward the bed on the floor where Cavi's wife had slept, his eyes following the bamboo post, which acted as a support for the wall of the house, upward from the ground.

His gaze stopped abruptly. He stepped forward and examined the post minutely, then straightened up to his full height, a look of triumph on his face. Going over, he again sat down on the block of wood at the end of the house where he had been when he saw the rat.

"I knew she didn't kill him," he said half-aloud.

LEAVING at once, McCann covered the distance to the house of the *kiap* faster than he had ever made it. He walked right into the *kiap's* private office.

"Can you get away for an hour or so," he asked Holcomb casually.

"What's up?" questioned Holcomb.

"I told you that I'd have the proof that Cavi's wife didn't kill him," explained McCann. "I believe I've got it. I want you to bring along the gun that killed him. You keep it in your possession. I'll be back in fifteen minutes. I want you to go with me. I think that I can prove how he was killed."

"Are you spoofing me?" asked Holcomb. He hesitated several seconds. Finally he decided. "I'll go, but your evidence had better be good."

"It will be," McCann promised. "Now wait here for me." And he left hurriedly.

McCann went to a pet shop operated by a Chinaman.

"I would like to rent a white rat," he told the Chinaman.

"Okay, Massa McCann," inquired the Chinaman. "You no ketchem buy?"

"No catchem buy, Wun, just rent," explained McCann.

"Hokay. Here is," and the Chinaman gave McCann a large tame white rat.

McCann returned to the *kiap's* house and found him ready.

"We're going over to Cavi's house," McCann announced briefly.

"You seem mighty sure of yourself," laughed Holcomb.

"I am never sure of anything," McCann grinned.

"You'll be sorry if I walk all the way over to Cavi's house on a wild-goose chase," Holcomb heckled him.

"We've got to get there just before dark," McCann told Holcomb. "So make it snappy."

They arrived at Cavi's house just as the sun was about to sink behind the tops of the hills in the west. They went into the house. McCann told Holcomb to sit on the block of wood at the end of the house.

TAKING the shotgun which Holcomb had brought along, McCann opened it and inserted a shell. He next placed it on the table with the muzzle pointed directly toward the head of the sleeping bunk. Getting down on his knees, McCann lined it up directly with the scratches on the top of the table and the bamboo post beside Cavi's wife's bed.

Holcomb watched with interest. Next McCann took from his pocket several crackers and crushed them in his hands, sprinkling crumbs inside the trigger guard in front of the trigger. He next released the safety.

"Now," he began, "supposing Cavi is in the bunk," and he placed his hat in the approximate position where Cavi's head had been. "This is Cavi's head. Let's suppose that the gun went off. Cavi would be killed. Isn't that so, Mr. Holcomb?"

"Sure," agreed Holcomb, "but how in the devil is it going to go off if someone doesn't pull the trigger?"

"That's the question," admitted McCann. "Now we'll both sit here quietly, without moving. Sit perfectly quiet. Don't talk. Just keep still. I don't know how long we will have to wait. I'm just hoping I can prove my theory."

"This is the craziest darn foolery, I've ever witnessed," snorted Holcomb disgustedly. "How you expect this to prove she didn't kill him is more than I can guess!"

"Let's keep quiet," McCann smiled soothingly.

Holcomb gave McCann a look of irritated disgust and settled back against the wall. They remained immovable for nearly twenty minutes. McCann could sense that Holcomb was becoming extremely irritated and tired. Finally McCann saw what he was looking for. He quietly nudged Holcomb and directed his attention to a large rat coming across the earthen floor.

It seemed ages to McCann before the rat decided to go toward the table. But

finally it leaped to the table-top and commenced hunting around for food. It smelled the crackers McCann had dropped in front of the trigger and went over and sat on the gun. It daintily picked the pieces out of the trigger guard and ate them.

Finally, there seemed to be a piece of cracker which it couldn't reach and he shoved his nose down into the space between the trigger and the guard in order to get it.

A terrific explosion shook the place. Holcomb nearly was rocked off his seat. Both men jumped to their feet.

"See the hat," yelled McCann in triumph. "The hat's shot to smithereens!"

"Well, I'll be blowed!" exclaimed Holcomb in astonishment as he examined the hat.

"And look, Holcomb!" McCann was pointing to the gun. It rested within a few inches of the exact spot on the floor where it had been found after Cavi's death.

"Incredible!" ejaculated Holcomb, hardly believing his eyes. "How did it get there?"

"Come here," directed McCann, and led Holcomb to the bamboo post. He placed the top of the bull plate of the gun in an indentation in the post. There was a similar indentation on the post just about an inch above it.

"When the recoil sent the gun back, it hit this post and bounded back to the floor," explained McCann. "See the marks on the ground where it slid."

"Well, I can hardly believe it," was all Holcomb could say.

"And here on the table are the marks showing how the gun recoiled," McCann continued. "You will notice that there are scratches going backward directly toward the post."

Just then the white rat decided it had

been in McCann's pocket long enough and climbed out.

"What's this?" questioned Holcomb.

"Just my ace," laughed McCann. "You see if our rat hadn't showed up, I was going to demonstrate, perhaps not quite as effectively, with this tame one I borrowed from Wun Lea."

"How in the name of tunket did you ever manage to resurrect such an unheard of solution as this," marveled Holcomb.

"It was very simple when it broke," began McCann. "The first thing that got me on the right track was when I threw a chunk of wood at another rat on the table. I missed the rat, and the chunk of wood hit the other wall, bounded back and hit a snake that had been chasing the rat."

"That gave me the theory of the gun bounding back to the center of the floor. Next I saw that there was a lot of grease and crumbs on the trigger and the trigger guard, while I was looking for fingerprints on the gun."

"It seemed only probable the gun would have to be lying flat on the table in order to hit a person lying in the sleeping bunk, and the indentation on the bamboo post was caused by the kick of the shotgun. I felt sure of the solution when I learned the gun had a hair trigger."

"You see it was quite simple. The chunk of wood bounding back gave me the idea, for the gun must have bounced, also. The rat on the table and the crumbs and the grease and crumbs on the trigger assembly of the gun dovetailed together with a hair-triggered gun to make my solution possible."

"What was it you said you called the work you are doing?" asked Holcomb with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Anthropology," answered McCann with his famous smile engulfing his face.

Further exploits of Archie McCann in WHITE PALMS IN THE SOUTH SEAS, another story by M. D. ORR, next issue!

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(Adv.)



Streger's hat blew off—
to the accompaniment
of a shot

YOU CAN'T BEAT THE DUTCH

By FRANK JOHNSON

Bill Kenyon, International Underground Agent, knows more than one way to deal with Nazi butchers—and he springs a big surprise on Colonel Streger!

AT FIRST sight it would have been difficult to discover that war had come to Vledder. The medium-sized Netherlands city appeared to be just as serene and peaceful as it had always been. But a closer inspection of the citizens would have revealed faces, wan, stern, and dour. And then listening ears heard the

ominous sound of marching feet, startled eyes saw the cobra-like men.

Nazi patrols parading through the streets, Nazi officers strutting about the city. The largest mansion in all Vledder converted into German headquarters.

The invader had come to Vledder!

Yet the citizens of Vledder were really

more fortunate than those who still managed to survive in the other cities of Holland.

True, there was the same lack of food, clothing and amusements, but executions were rarer, and very few hostages had been seized.

Yet on the surface the city seemed wholly cowed. No trouble ever arose—violence, that is. The Germans were treated with the same glacial disdain as they were all over Holland. But most of the German troops were satisfied with conditions. It gave them a grand loaf, for curfews were obeyed to the letter.

Was there a Hollander who did not know the reason for this? Vledder was the source of practically all the Underground information rolling like a menacing wave through Holland! Here, in Vledder, a high-powered receiving set obtained news from England and the United States. Here, the largest and the most popular of the Underground newspapers rolled off the presses. Important work such as this had to be well guarded, constant vigilance maintained. The citizens did their share by meekly, unprotestingly, obeying every edict.

Perhaps Schumm had something to do with all this simulated peacefulness, too. Major Schumm was not a proclaimed Nazi, although he stood willing and ready to carry out any orders if it meant wholesale executions. He hoped no such orders would come through, however. For Major Schumm was old, gray-haired, and overly fat. He liked his steins of good beer, the thick steaks and the fresh vegetables which Dutch industry provided for his every meal. He even liked the Hollanders—almost.

Major Schumm was sitting behind his desk in the big room of this huge, century-old house, appropriated for German headquarters. Schumm had squeezed himself into the chair somehow, and usually stayed there. Getting up and sitting down involved a trifle too much effort for his paunchy person. Schumm was safe here, too—or he thought so, at least. He had helped to shape the Nazi party from its infancy, donated money, time and effort. And his conviction that the party would rise to power had eventually become a reality. Major Schumm was immediately installed as the governor of Vledder, chiefly to get him out of the way. For he certainly did not possess the bold ruthlessness required of Nazi party members.

MAJOR SCHUMM always performed one ritual the moment he sat down. Each morning, on his desk, was spread the latest edition of the *Underground News*. It was a daily paper, rarely missing any editions. And its tone was not conciliatory.

Major Schumm was reading a boxed item on the front page:

It is reliably reported that Hans Gruther, the renegade youth who joined the Nazi party, was killed on the Russian front. We congratulate Hans on having died so soon and saving us the trouble of having to kill him when he returned.

Schumm roared with laughter at the sally, turned pages and scowled a bit, as he read other items which were right off the war-griddle news. In fact, Major Schumm kept up with the world and the war much better through this illicit newspaper than through any of the propagandized party organs.

An orderly stepped in and *heeled* obediently. Schumm had long since stopped *heiling* back unless his visitor was some important man passing through the city. It required too much effort to lift his flabby hand five hundred times a day.

"Major—we have word that Colonel Streger is on his way here. It is best you get rid of the morning petition group before he arrives."

"Streger, eh?" Schumm rubbed his fat chin. "Bad—very bad. Streger is a known butcher. That is—he orders too many executions. Necessary ones, of course."

"The petition group, Major." The orderly reminded again.

"Oh, yes. Well, send them in. We've kept this town under control by letting them send us groups to ask favors. Of course, we never grant them, but the stupid Dutch have the idea they still govern. Send them in. I'll get rid of them before Colonel Streger arrives."

Two minutes later, some twenty men filed into the big office and promptly surrounded Major Schumm's desk so that he seemed to be dangerously ringed in by them. At first Major Schumm had been afraid when this had happened, but his fears had proved to be groundless. They were just a score of stupid Dutchmen. No wonder the country had fallen so quickly.

"Well?" Schumm asked almost pleasantly—for a Nazi.

The spokesman was about thirty, a lean man with sharp, blue eyes and a chin that jutted out too boldly. His Dutch name was a common one—Hans Meer. His American name Bill Kenyon.

There was something decided peculiar about Bill Kenyon, something which even his Dutch colleagues did not know. In less than two years Bill Kenyon had made his way from conquered country to conquered country, compiling valuable information and data for the Allies to use in helping to restore law and order and freedom after the war to these invaded and helpless lands. His job was to work with and through the Underground wherever he found it. He had unlimited funds and was responsible only to

the President of the United States for what he did.

Two years before he had been the head of a famous detective agency. Now he was an insignificant American, toiling away in Nazi-oppressed Europe—a tireless mole who worked to prepare the way for the coming of AMG. He had no official standing, his very existence would have been denied by his government, and he risked his life every minute of every day.

How he could even hope to remain undetected by the Nazis, much less do any worthwhile work, was due to the fact that he was famous for disguise and characterization. And his mastery of the major languages of Europe permitted him to pass for a native-born citizen of any country in which he tarried to operate.

He had been thoroughly familiar with Europe before the war, and he had many friends scattered about the Continent who had known him in early days. But nobody knew the real reason for his present work save the one man who had sent him on this dangerous mission.

Bill Kenyon had been in Holland six months. He had been in Vledder long enough to have become one of the most staid and solid burghers—*Meinherr* Hans Meer.

Now he cleared his throat and spoke with the profound gravity of a stolid Dutchman.

"This morning, Excellency, it is about the quality of the bread." He spoke the words with quiet bitterness. "It has been black lately—very black, and it tastes like sawdust. We demand something be done about this condition. The bread is not fit for pigs to eat!"

Schumm cleared his throat, tried to think of a way out of that one. Usually he found something to placate the group, and they, in turn, would once more restore the entire population to peaceful contentment.

"Well," Schumm started to say, "I do not believe your complaint is justified. The darkness and taste of the bread is due to vitamin products which—"

THE roar of powerful motors outside the house interrupted his dietetic observations. Black-clad Elite troops bustled into the place and took up strategic posts. Others lined themselves around the house. A junior officer of the Elite Guard, had opened the big door of the mansion and was shouting for all to come to attention.

The man who entered was very tall, and his Nazi uniform was expensively tailored. His saucerlike eyes seemed to shoot in all directions, while his thin lips affirmed the sadistic cruelty of their owner. Manicured hands, long and slender, moved restlessly.

Major Schumm succeeded in removing himself from the chair and raised his hand

in formal salute. The tall man walked into the office and glanced carelessly at the group of townspeople who were shifting their feet, and appraising him out of the corners of their eyes.

"I am Colonel Streger," the newcomer announced in a loud voice. "Major—you are relieved of your position here. I am now in command. Who are these louts?"

Major Schumm gulped. "They are a group who helps me govern the city, Colonel." He winked deliberately for Streger's benefit. "I will get rid of them."

Turning to the group, he said, in the most imperious manner he could muster, "My answer to your request is a flat, No! Now get out of here."

The twenty men started to file out. Colonel Streger barked an order and the Elite Guards chuckled and went to work. Never did a band of Vledder citizens leave headquarters so fast. Knocked down, buffeted, some were badly pummeled, one or two all but unconscious.

When they were well away from the big house, Bill Kenyon stopped the band and examined the injured men.

"Listen, all of you," he said grimly. "We're in for bad times. Colonel Streger is a fanatic. A man who hangs people simply because he likes to sign death warrants. With Major Schumm here—lazy, fat Major Schumm—we've had a regular holiday. He saw nothing because he didn't want to. His men soon took advantage of him. The city quieted down and has, I'm sure, a reputation for being thoroughly subdued. But now we've a problem to solve."

A burly man, typically stolid Dutch, wagged his head back and forth.

"Streger will undo all the good we have worked so hard to win."

"Van Waldeck is right," Kenyon declared. "We want this city to remain peaceable. If the Nazis begin watching us too closely, they'll find that big receiving set from which we get our news broadcasts. They'll hunt down our presses and composing rooms. Our channels of distribution for the paper. We must, at all costs, keep the *Underground News* going. It's the most essential weapon of morale we have!"

"Do you think, Ken," asked Van Waldeck in a worried voice, "that Streger was sent here because the Nazis suspect our city harbors the *Underground News*?"

"Perhaps. It seems so, because Major Schumm was doing a very good job so far as his superiors knew. He never had the slightest trouble with us."

An old man, his head still bleeding from a vicious blow, hobbled forward.

"Does the American believe we can no longer even supply Major Schumm with his copies of our newspaper?"

Kenyon smiled crookedly.

"Colonel Streger will get his copies, just as the major did. But, gentlemen, we must get rid of Streger. We must return Major Schumm to govern us. I know that sounds strange, but if the Nazis must rule here, then Schumm is the man for us. And so, we shall proceed to make the colonel's life so disagreeable that he will leave of his own free will! We dare not kill him, because we must not have a ruthless investigation. God knows we will suffer before Streger goes, but then doesn't all Holland suffer? Come, let us separate and go home for the present. I have a plan.

Meanwhile, at headquarters, Colonel Streger was sitting on the edge of Schumm's desk, slipping at his highly-polished boot with a pair of gloves.

"You're an old fool, Major," he said unpleasantly. "I think these Dutch have been taking advantage of you. Allowing a representative group to visit your office! If they come to see me, I will have them shot."

Major Schumm felt like a man suddenly booted out of a job he had considered very permanent. He rubbed his fat nose.

"Naturally, I am under your orders, Colonel. However, please take my advice. Do not get the people aroused. They are docile, dumb animals now, and they will remain so if properly handled. Not one bit of Underground work goes on here. Not one bit."

Colonel Streger threw back his head and laughed.

"Major, you've become acclimated too well. No Underground work, you say. What if I tell you my mission here is to uncover the printing plant and the men who operate the *Underground News*?"

"Himmel!" Major Schumm almost rose without difficulty from his chair that time. "You must be mistaken. They present me with a copy of the *News*, which comes from elsewhere, thus keeping me informed of—"

"They . . . what?" Streger roared.

Schumm gulped.

"Yes, yes. Every morning I find a copy on my desk. It is a daily paper, you know. You will find one on your desk also, Colonel. Don't ask me how it gets there. I have tried to find out, but it is impossible."

Colonel Streger drew himself very erect. "You will report to the General at Amsterdam. I will file a complete report of your incompetence. Go now—as quickly as possible. I have work to do."

STREGER certainly had work. First of all, he ordered two hundred of the most prominent Vledder citizens arrested as hostages. Then he inflicted a curfew, two hours earlier than Major Schumm's. Anyone caught on the streets was to be shot on sight.

At dinner time, he and his staff swaggered into the biggest restaurant in town. Instantly, every Hollander arose, paid his check and went out, leaving Streger to dine in solitary state.

That night, posters were slapped on buildings stating it was a crime for any Dutchman to leave a restaurant until fifteen minutes after the arrival of German officers.

The next morning, Colonel Streger swaggered from his living quarters on the second floor. Six men guarded the office, and there were strong patrols outside. Streger entered the office, sat down, and then—let out a cry of rage.

Spread on his desk was a fresh copy of the *Underground News*. That was bad enough, but what he read made him turn lobster red. The most important item on the page concerned Streger, and it went into the deepest detail of all his accomplishments.

It described the bloody trail that followed him all over Europe. It related how he had been a convict, under a thirty-year sentence for armed robbery, until the Nazis took power, freed him, and made him an officer. It indicated other crimes which Streger had been so sure were completely, irrevocably concealed. Hadn't he burned the records himself?

Streger wasted a futile hour trying to find out how that newspaper had been smuggled into his office. He discovered nothing. No cleaning people had been there. In fact, not even a fly had entered the room. Windows were securely locked, heavy guards all about.

"If Major Schumm's men had been on guard, I would think little of it," he roared at the Elite troops who were part of his entourage, "but you are my men. If this happens again, believe me, heads will roll. Prepare a bulletin offering fifty thousand guilders' reward for information about the newspaper. Indicate I shall pay this money out of my own pocket."

Streger busied himself with routine official matters, but his heart wasn't in it. If these Dutchmen could smuggle a newspaper through his usually alert guards, they might also smuggle a bomb. By lunch time Streger was in a highly uncomfortable, nervous state. But reinforced by his staff, they marched together to the same restaurant.

This time not a Dutchman stirred, and Streger smiled in approval. They were all alike, these conquered people. Toughness cowed them. With satisfaction, he seated himself at a table. Suddenly he noticed that on every Hollander's table lay a watch, and each man kept glancing at it. Precisely fifteen minutes after Streger entered, every Hollander arose and walked out. Streger didn't taste his food that noon.

When he returned to his office, twenty men were crowding the corridor outside and the Elite Guards were vainly trying to make them leave. The moment Streger entered, they pressed him into his office and crowded around the desk until Streger yelled for order.

Bill Kenyon, the American who had lived long enough in Holland to pose as a Dutchman without arousing the slightest suspicion, worked his way through the group.

"Excellency," he bowed ceremoniously, "we have come with our usual daily complaint. Major Schumm consented to see us. You surely can do no less, Colonel. We want something done about the bread that is being doled out to us."

Colonel Streger yelled for his guards. There were enough this time to make an impression.

"Very well," he roared, "I will do something about your bread. Not fit to eat, is it? Well—you won't have to eat as much. From today on, the rations are cut in half. If there is another exhibition like this, there will be no bread at all. Two of you are under arrest. The first two my men seize. They will be shot tomorrow."

"At dawn?" Kenyon asked blandly as the guards seized two of his companions.

Streger bit his lip.

"No, not at dawn. Late in the afternoon so that everyone will see them executed. They will be hanged, not shot. Get out of here. . . ."

Streger yanked a gun from a drawer and leveled it. The Dutchmen turned and silently filed out, shielding their heads against the blows rained down by the Elite Guards. The two men were held prisoners but there was no attempt made to rescue them. The Hollanders appeared thoroughly whipped in spirit.

That night at dinner the colonel experienced a repetition of lunch. Fifteen minutes after he appeared, every diner walked out. On the streets, German patrols found themselves shunned as lepers. Somebody slashed Colonel Streger's tires into ribbons, someone else cut military communication lines. Streger fumed, yelled orders, paced the floor of his office, but the culprits were not found.

ON THE following morning Colonel Streger was feeling better. Before sundown he'd teach these fools of Hollanders that the Germans were the master race and were to be obeyed in every matter. Two men were going to die. He determined to have the gallows erected early so the populace could study their grim deathliness before they claimed a pair of victims.

Streger was told by the guards that his office had been scrupulously watched. There would be no newspaper this morning,

Streger mused as he entered the room. Before he was around the corner of his desk, he was roaring in rage.

The usual newspaper was there and it carried a medium-sized item about him. It even ran his picture and beside it a photograph of his poster personally offering fifty thousand guilders for the arrest of the men who ran the newspaper.

Without lifting the sheet, Streger read on till he reached the caption in big letters below his picture and the poster.

FROM WHOM DID YOU STEAL THE
FIFTY THOUSAND GUILDERS,
COLONEL?

Infuriated, Streger grabbed the paper to crumple it, but was immediately diverted by something underneath it. Three objects lay beneath the sheets. A single bullet, highly polished and with his name scratched on the brass shell; a slender knife, sharpened to razor keenness, and a length of rope fashioned into a noose.

Colonel Streger needed no caption to tell him what these objects meant. For the first time in his corrupt life, Streger was afraid.

And then he was angry. He ordered another poster plastered to the walls. Another thousand guilders was offered for the men who smuggled that newspaper onto his desk each night.

The three death warnings he stowed into a desk drawer. He didn't want anyone to see them.

At mid-morning, there was an unholy commotion outside his door. His guards were pushing six men out of the house and Streger became curious. He ordered the men into the office. Again, they were crowding about his desk, almost suffocating him.

Just as before Kenyon was the spokesman. Somehow, Streger had an idea this keen-eyed man was to be much more feared than regarded with contempt. That stolid face was too expressionless.

"We only wish to offer our apologies for what happened, Excellency," Kenyon was saying. "We were accustomed to Major Schumm's easy way of ruling us, but now we have met a man who governs with an iron fist."

"So," Streger gloated, "you come crawling to me. Why? Because you want me to pardon those two I have sentenced to death? I will not do it. And let me tell you, if anything happens I'll take six of you next time, and use a unique gallows which was perfected in Poland. A very amusing gallows—for those who watch the condemned die on it. That is all I have to say. Get out!"

But Kenyon thrust in one more question. "Excellency, we only seek to cooperate. It is much easier to govern a people who are willing to obey orders. Do you forbid us to

come here again? Even if we get certain information for which—"

Streger knew what he meant.

"When anyone has important information, he shall be permitted to see me. Otherwise, your coming here will result in some bayonet practice for my men. The interview is concluded."

Immediately the door closed. Streger hastily opened his desk drawer, assured himself that the bullet, knife and rope were intact. Relieved, he went back to work, issued orders to the Gestapo on the prowl for clues to the Underground printing establishment.

At noon he went to lunch and cursed the Hollanders who walked out. He swore they entered the restaurant only to show their contempt for him. But there were ways to show them he could hate, too. It was about time to adopt some of those methods.

Impressively, Colonel Streger walked down the outside steps of the restaurant, turned into the street, and looked at window displays. Meager little things offered for sale. His lips curled.

This was how the entire world should be. Everyone dependent on the generosity of the Reich, with that largesse just enough to keep them alive and working.

Streger's mind was warming to those beautiful ideals when his hat blew off—to the accompaniment of a shot.

He never moved so fast in his life—and he never found a doorway so confoundedly small. Guards rushed from all directions. Everybody on the street was rounded up, searched, but no trace of a gun could be found. A number of hostages were taken on general principles. Colonel Streger, completely unnerved, returned to his office under heavy guard.

The colonel had the jitters. Not in all his travels had he been pushed so near the brink of death! He might as well have been on the Russian or African front. He examined his high-crowned uniformed hat, shuddered at the hole through it. Then Streger's eyes opened very wide.

There, on his desk, was another newspaper, weighted down with the shiny brass cartridge—this time lacking its steel pellet. The empty cartridge was blackened from exploding powder.

STREGER flung open the drawer of his desk. The bullet, knife and rope were missing! He remembered the newspaper. It was a copy of the same edition, except for one minor change on the front page.

His picture was still there, a reproduction of the poster offering a fifty-thousand-guilder reward and also a picture of the new poster offering an additional thousand guilders for the man who brought the newspaper each day.

But below this picture was a fresh caption.

WHERE DID YOU STEAL THE FIFTY-ONE THOUSAND GUILDERS, COLONEL?

This time Streger did not call his guards. He was too completely shaken. Cautiously, he arose and examined every inch of the room. There was not a single way by which a spy could enter. Stepping into the corridor, he eyed his guards. One of them must be the culprit. Perhaps he'd sold out for money, or thrown over his belief in the Nazi party.

"If I only knew," Streger muttered. Then he spoke aloud. "The execution of the two men will be carried out as prescribed. See that it is performed to the letter!"

In his office again, he fell to wondering when the knife would be used—or the rope. He tried to work, to busy himself, but the memory of the shooting made him shiver uncontrollably. He could see knives and ropes dancing before his eyes.

Suddenly he recalled the level-eyed spokesman for the petitioners. There was the man, that was he! With a shout, Streger summoned an orderly to bring him the name of that Dutch spokesman.

Streger snapped commands to a strapping lieutenant with eyes as hard as diamonds.

"Mueller! This Hans Meer who is always one of the group who visit me. He is to be found and arrested at once. If he is hiding somewhere, burn the house down. Burn it down, anyway. But don't kill him. I'll take care of that. He knows much. He will talk. I know ways. Bring him—at once."

It was not long before the crime of arson was committed in one of the poorer sections of Vledder. The Gestapo and Elite Guards searched up and down the city, roughly questioned neighbors, but none knew the whereabouts of Hans Meer.

Admitting defeat, the diamond-eyed lieutenant returned to headquarters. Colonel Streger was not about so Lieutenant Mueller made himself busy in the private office. His sharp eyes began to inspect the walls carefully.

When Streger returned, he found the man he knew as Hans Meer sitting forlornly on a bench outside the office. Four guards were standing solidly around him.

Hans Meer looked up and said, meekly, "I was told you wished to see me, Excellency."

Streger glanced at the guards. "Was this man in my office, even for a second?"

"No, Herr Colonel," a non-com replied quickly. "We recognized him as the man you ordered arrested. He has been guarded from the moment he entered. The Herr Lieutenant is waiting inside, however. We

called to him, but it seems he has fallen asleep."

"Everyone is asleep," Streger yowled. "You—Meer, come with me!"

Kenyon shuffled after Streger and entered the office. Streger slammed the door, walked over to the chair where his lieutenant was sprawled out, and savagely kicked his ankles. The lieutenant's response was somewhat unique. He simply slid out of the chair and dropped to the floor.

Then Colonel Streger saw. The lieutenant's back—it was smeared with blood.

Automatically, he glanced over at his desk. There, in the center of the blotter, lay the knife. It was still wet with blood.

Colonel Streger blanched as he faced Kenyon. "What do you know about this, you sniveling pig?"

"I know nothing, Excellency," came the stolid reply. "Nothing at all. I was not here when the lieutenant arrived, but I heard he was looking for me. I came here because I wanted to see you, anyway."

"You—you murdered him!" Streger accused, his voice choking with anger.

"But, Excellency, I was not in this room. Not for one second," protested the pseudo-Dutchman. "Ask the guards."

"And I suppose you also know nothing about the shot fired at me this noon?"

"Shot—fired at you?" repeated Kenyon stupidly. "No, Excellency, I would not kill you. There would be reprisals. Many innocent people would suffer. That is why I willingly came here. You will please not hang the two men this afternoon."

"And why shouldn't I?" demanded Streger. He didn't dare look down at the dead lieutenant. He might betray himself with an involuntary shudder.

"If the Colonel will not become angry, I shall talk. Let me point out, Excellency, that you have four hundred men in this city. Yet there are seven thousand Dutchmen of fighting age here, too. Seven thousand can wipe out four hundred of your best troops if they do not care how many die in the act. Machine-guns cannot stop that many, and they are prepared to sacrifice their lives."

"What do I care for their lives?" Streger roared. "Or yours, either. Because there will now be three hangings this afternoon! You'll stretch the third r . . . rope."

INSTANTLY Streger was reminded of the one meant for his neck. He thrust the thought out of his mind by shifting his attention to estimating just how much torture Hans Meer could stand. He looked like a sturdy fellow. Streger began to feel better. "You will tell me the names of the ring-leaders and also the location of the printing press and how your *verdammt* newspaper gets on my desk each morning. Unless you

talk, we shall have a little session in the cellar. You won't enjoy it, I promise."

"There are no ringleaders, Excellency." Kenyon maintained his pose of a stolid Dutchman perfectly. "Unless you would call every man in the city a ringleader of his own soul and courage. I suggest that you—"

Streger let go with a terrific and unexpected punch. It hit the disguised detective flush on the jaw. Reeling across the office, Kenyon fell heavily beside Streger's desk.

The colonel kicked him savagely a couple of times, walked to the door—and encountered another bedlam. Again the corridor was filled with Dutchmen who shielded themselves against the blows of the guards, but stubbornly refused to leave.

Colonel Streger shouted to quiet the surging men. Finally order was restored. Streger commanded them to leave and indicated that he would hang a round score of Dutchmen in the morning. Seventeen more hostages would be selected to hang with the pair already sentenced, plus the new victim still in his office.

"Drag the carrion out," he stormed at two soldiers. "If Meer wakes up, use your rifle butts, but don't kill him. Not now."

Roughly seizing the limp figure by the heels, the soldiers heaved Bill Kenyon out. Suddenly the crowd closed in again, set up a frantic din. In what seemed an infinitesimal moment the soldiers discovered they no longer had a prisoner. In fact, they didn't see him anywhere! They shouted for the colonel.

Streger ordered all doors closed and guarded. He lined the men up, stalked in front of the single rank, but Hans Meer wasn't among them. It seemed incredible that he had escaped and yet he was gone—snatched from under Streger's very nose!

Streger had the dead lieutenant removed from his office, ordered all the men held, and then sat down behind his desk. Try as he might he could not quiet his pounding heart, that seemed to sense its own impending death. Visions of the bullet, the knife and the rope kept flashing through his mind.

Then he thought of his promise to locate the newspaper printing plant and destroy it within twenty-four hours. That time had long since passed. So far, he hadn't even penetrated a glimmer of the truth. In fact, everything was plunged into an ever deepening mystery.

He recalled what that Dutchman, Hans Meer, had said. It was true—the city had been so calm that troops had been withdrawn weeks ago. Colonel Streger didn't have enough men to back up his bluff.

"They wish to scare me. Me!" He pounded his chest in solitary state. "They do not know me very well."

Using his telephone, he called a base three

hundred miles away, demanding that a thousand men be dispatched to the city at once. They would arrive late the next morning, he was informed. Streger replaced the receiver with a grunt of satisfaction.

He summoned an orderly and issued commands that the execution be postponed until the next day. Then there would really be a spectacle! In a way, Streger reasoned, he was grateful to the idiotic Dutchman who had warned him of trouble.

That night, Streger had trouble getting to sleep. He tossed and rolled, arranged the bed-clothes this way and that, but with no effect. Only the knowledge that he was supremely well guarded finally allowed him to doze off. It was not long before something awakened him. A serpent was coiling around his throat. He raised his hands to claw at it. He tried to scream, but the coil became tighter. Through sleep-dazed eyes he finally made out a shadowy form hovering above him. It was Hans Meer! The pseudo-Dutchman was speaking in a low voice.

"The thousand additional troops will be much too late, Herr Colonel. Before they arrive, you will be dead. I could kill you now. Perhaps I will. It all depends. Let me loosen the noose a bit. If you call out, it will tighten again and you will die. Is that understood?"

Streger could only nod, for fright had imprisoned his voice. The rope loosened and Hans Meer was speaking again.

"You have only one chance to live, Herr Colonel. You will cancel the request for more troops. You will notify your superiors that you have searched the city and the *Underground News* does not originate here. Then you will ask for an assignment to another place, where there is more doing.

"I understand you Germans are very busy these days in Russia. Why not go there if you enjoy spilling blood? That is all, Herr Colonel. You can't escape us. You should know that if I died, others would only take my place. You can't lick us. Nobody ever beat the Dutch."

Streger was contorted with terror.

He gasped agreement. He would do exactly what was desired.

"Very good, Colonel," Hans Meer said. "Now go back to sleep."

A fist collided with Streger's jaw, the blow was repeated. It took the combined efforts of two orderlies and a surgeon to wake the colonel the next day. When he was able to stand erect, one look in the mirror convinced him that the events of last night had not been a dream.

Frantic, Colonel Streger ordered another search of the premises. Nothing, no one suspicious could be produced. Streger found himself sitting alone in his office again. There was little time left. They

could get him when they wished. He knew that now. Perhaps it was better to withdraw—smoothly, of course. He picked up the telephone, called his commanding officer.

"Streger speaking, Excellency. I have to report that conditions in this city are very peaceful. I have searched high and low for the printing presses, the cameras and photography rooms used by the *Underground News*. I have—"

"You are an imbecile," Streger's superior yelled. "A rank idiot! The printing presses, the composing rooms and a large supply of the newspaper were located last night in a town thirty miles from Vledder. And who do you think found it? Major Schumm. Colonel—you will report back here at once and prepare yourself for active duty. You are slipping."

STREGER hung up slowly, shivered. He reached for his hat, saw the bullet-hole and gave a yelp. He was running by the time he reached his car. He was still shivering as he drove through the streets with a strong motorcycle escort. . . .

That afternoon Major Schumm returned and slid down with obvious satisfaction in his old chair. In a few moments, there was a deputation clamoring to see him. He admitted them as usual. They demanded the release of their fellows.

With one sweep of his pen the major ordered the hostages released and the executions halted.

Schumm felt good enough to have even ordered cigarettes distributed to these men. He stopped just short of that, however. There might be recriminations at headquarters, and he'd had a narrow escape as it was.

As Schumm dismissed the group, he didn't notice that twenty men had entered and twenty-one walked out. Hans Meer was now among them, a most amazing business that Colonel Streger would have given much to understand. Major Schumm, however, knew nothing about the colonel's nocturnal visitation and cared less about counting Dutchmen. Outside, the burghers separated like orderly citizens, and Bill Kenyon walked on with his friend and ally.

Van Waldeck shook his head solemnly.

"I did not think it possible that such a man as Streger could be scared. But you were right about him."

"Men like Streger usually break when the pressure gets great enough," Kenyon answered. "Our main trouble was lack of time. But the necessary killing of Lieutenant Mueller hastened matters. We clinched things, of course, by having Major Schumm tipped off to find that old printing plant. It was hard to give up that press and the type. Yet that was what finished Streger off. It

brought Major Schumm back, as we knew it would."

"Yes," Van Waldeck agreed, chuckling a bit grimly. "Now we can settle down and produce the paper again. Streger's men never even came close to our hiding place, but I was afraid he would find that secret room just off his own office."

Kenyon nodded. "That gimlet-eyed Lieutenant Mueller did find it, with my relief man in it—much to his misfortune."

"The fortunes of war," said Van Waldeck stoically. "Mueller will shoot down no more old women and burn no more houses. And we were fortunate that Streger did not find the secret panel."

Kenyon chuckled softly.

"He certainly looked for it, but Streger didn't know that mansion was more than a century old and that it had been used as a hiding-place during many wars. In the first World War, soldiers were secreted in the room for days at a time."

"I know," Van Waldeck declared. "It has a very cleverly constructed door. But we were afraid you had been badly injured yesterday. Van Dopper, who was in the secret room and provided with the editions we printed ahead, said you were unconscious when he hauled you into the room and then took your place. That was a good one. Streger was certainly puzzled."

"Anyway, it worked, although last night on my way to Streger's bedroom I was as jittery as he'd been. Now let's forget it all. We have peace and quiet here once more. Schumm won't bother us. He'll look forward to his newspaper each morning and the agent who occupies that secret room will furnish it, and as a reward, overhear whatever goes on. Then a deputation will call on the major, our agent will slip out through the secret panel as we close around the major and another loyal Dutchman will enter the room for his turn as watchman. I warned Colonel Streger that you can't beat the Dutch."

"Or—the Americans," Van Waldeck added judiciously.

Bill Kenyon smiled. His blue eyes assumed a far-away look.

"The foe cannot beat the Four Freedoms, my friend," he added fervently. "No nation will remain conquered when it is the will of the people to be free. And that day is rapidly approaching for all of Europe. Come, we must prepare a special editorial for the next edition of the *Underground News*."

"You mean you must," corrected Van Waldeck. "And tomorrow, my dear friend, what do you do?"

"Who knows?" replied the minister-detective without portfolio. "Tomorrow I may be—in Berlin."

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Lorraine reached into the cigar box and drew out an automatic

Murder on the Menu

By MICHAEL O'BRIEN

When death is dished up at the Golden Harvest, a drummer and a cigarette girl make solid with the sleuth stuff!

I'M beating the skins in the band at the Golden Harvest when we get a nice murder dished up with the floor show.

Jerry Kent has a good band—a small, but solid outfit and we are doing all right.

Bob Martin is my name, and I never did believe in hiding my light under a bushel, unless it was a bushel of good press notices.

"If you didn't like yourself so much maybe I'd marry you," Lorraine Doyle told me more than once. "But I'd hate to realize

I had a rival for your affections every time I saw you looking in the mirror."

Straight from the shoulder, and not pulling any punches. But when Lorraine spoke her mind I usually took it and liked it. She is the cigarette girl at the club. Blond and luscious—and when she goes out among the tables selling cigars and cigarettes in one of those cute costumes of hers she's a dish, but definitely.

As I said before, I'm the drummer in the

band, and we guys who sit up there on the platform night after night doing a hot number with plenty of jive and then another that's sweet and slow, see a lot. In a place like the Golden Harvest you get to know the regular patrons; by sight at least.

Sometimes I burn a little when I see some local yokel try and make a pass at Loraine, even though I know I don't need to worry. She can freeze a guy with a look.

But never mind my raving about the wren. Let's get to the murder—though I can do without homicide any time. It's a Saturday night and the club is packing them in. It's after midnight and the crowd from the theaters is drifting in strong.

"Looks like it's going to be one of those nights, boys," says Jerry Kent while we're resting between numbers. "I've got a feeling something will happen soon."

Jerry is no long-hair waving a baton at us. He plays piano with the band most every night, though we have a substitute ivory tickler when the boss feels like taking a little time out. Kent got started the hard way, and he can play every instrument in the band. He still gets a kick out of working up the arrangements on the new numbers.

It is almost time for the floor show. It is due to go on after we finish the next number. Jerry Kent tells us what we are going to play and pounds off with his foot on the floor. We get playing and couples drift out onto the floor.

I'm beating out the rhythm, with Copper on the bass and Jerry at the piano keeping right with me. We're doing a nice job with "Speak Low" but I've got a feeling there is something wrong in the club.

IT'S strange about playing in a place like that. You can tell when it is an off night, or when the patrons in the place just aren't enjoying themselves. And when they are. But the way I am feeling now is different. Just a little creepy—like an elephant is dancing on my grave.

"Help! Murder!"

Some dame lets out the howl and then she screams good and loud. We don't stop playing because we knew that might cause a real panic in the place. I see Lang Marshall, the owner of the Golden Harvest, heading over to a table in one corner of the room.

There is a tall brunette in one of those strapless evening gowns that look like they are held on by sheer will-power, standing beside the table and she is doing the screaming. The gray-haired guy who has been sitting at the table with her is lumped back in his chair—and I get the idea he is good and dead.

Marshall is a cool number and he gets the brunette quieted down and the gray-haired

guy carried away in a few seconds. Well, maybe it was longer than that, but it didn't seem so. The crowd gets over their excitement quickly and most of those on the floor keep right on dancing.

"Repeat on the chorus and out," says Jerry Kent.

We play the chorus over and then finish the number. I see Loraine wandering over near the band platform. I can hear her saying: "Cigarettes, cigars, cigarettes."

Larry Kent quietly leaves the bandstand and the rest of us follow him. We have a fifteen-minute wait before the floor show.

"Wonder what happened to that old guy," says Jerry as I catch up with him. "Maybe he dropped dead."

"You find out," I tell him, as I get the high-sign from Loraine that she wants to see me. "I'm going to talk to Loraine."

I leave Jerry and follow Loraine out into the private corridor that leads to Lang Marshall's office and we are alone there.

"Bob!" says Loraine. "That man was murdered! Someone stuck a knife in his back. I—I saw it."

"You saw who did it, Loraine?" I ask. "That what you mean?"

"No." Loraine shakes her pretty head. "I just saw the knife in his back—and Mr. Hamilton was such a nice man. It's no wonder his niece screamed when she saw what had happened."

"Who was this Hamilton guy?" I ask. "Seems to me I've seen him around the club a lot, and always with that same dame."

"I don't know much about him," says Loraine. "I only knew him by name. But I think he must have been quite rich. He often gave me five-dollar tips. He usually came to the club one or two nights a week and always brought Norma Hamilton with him. She seemed very fond of her uncle."

A dark-haired guy steps into the corridor. He has a hard face, and I don't remember ever having seen him before. Loraine and I stop talking and just stand there looking at the stranger.

"I'm Corrigan, Police Headquarters," he says. "What do you two know about the murder?"

It wasn't what he says, but the way he says it that I don't like. There's a nasty note in his voice, and he keeps looking at us like he suspected we did the killing.

"We don't know anything about it," I say. "I was up on the band platform when it happened and Miss Doyle was selling cigarettes."

"Oh, sure," says this Corrigan. "Nobody ever does know anything when things happen in a joint like this."

He walks on back along the corridor without paying any more attention to us. He draws open the door of Lang Marshall's

private office and steps inside, closing the door behind him. Loraine looks at me and frowns. Lang Marshall doesn't like anyone, even a detective, barging into his office when he isn't there.

"The boss isn't going to be pleased," says Loraine. "But I guess that's his business."

Marshall strolls in from the outer entrance to the corridor. He doesn't look the least bit ruffled. I've never seen him when he did. He's a character. I'd heard he had been running night clubs ever since the days when the speakeasies were going full blast and always doing all right for Lang Marshall. He is good looking in a hard sort of way and might have been any age from thirty to close to fifty.

"Better get back on the floor, Loraine," he says. "And the band is getting ready for the floor show, Bob."

"Okay, Boss," I say. "A guy named Corrigan just went into your private office. Said he was from Headquarters."

MARSHALL scowls and heads for his office in a hurry. He flings open the door and just stands there for a moment, staring in. I can tell he doesn't like what he sees, though his expression doesn't change to any great extent.

He glances back at us and motions for us to join him at the door. We walk down the corridor and stop where we can look into the office. Corrigan is seated in a chair at Marshall's desk. He doesn't make a pretty corpse.

"Another murder!" gasps Loraine.

"That's right," Marshall says softly. "I wanted you two with me as witnesses. You know this man was alive when he came into my office and I didn't see him until after he was dead. Someone might get the idea that I killed him."

"Not unless you're a magician, you didn't do it," I say. "The police still around, Boss?"

"Of course," says Marshall. "Go and find them and bring them here, Loraine. Hurry!"

Loraine turns and runs back down the corridor. I glance at my wrist-watch. The floor show is due to start in five minutes and I know I'd better get back with the band.

I look at the dead man. Corrigan hasn't been shot and there's no knife sticking in him that I can see. I wonder how he was killed. "I've got to get back with the band, Boss," I say.

"Go ahead, Bob," says Marshall, as he steps into the office. "But remember we all found the body together."

"Sure."

I beat it back to the stand. All the rest

of the boys are in their places. Jerry Kent gives me a look as I hastily seat myself at the drums. He doesn't like guys showing up at the last minute.

"The boss just found another stiff in his office," I say. "Guy named Corrigan—said he was from Police Headquarters."

"The police will take care of the investigation," says Kent. "We've got our own jobs to do here."

The master of ceremonies steps out on the floor with a portable mike in his hands and starts giving the cash customers the old buildup for the floor show. He finishes his spiel and Kent gives us the "One and—" and we go into the opening number.

I am beating it out pretty mechanically. I keep thinking about that guy Corrigan being murdered in Marshall's office the way he was. Far as I knew there had been no one in the office when he went in there and yet when Marshall opens the door a few minutes later he finds Corrigan dead.

If anyone had come out of the office after Corrigan went in, Loraine and I would have seen them. Unless . . . There had been just a few seconds there in the corridor when both Loraine and I were looking at Lang Marshall. Somebody might have stepped out of the office then, but if they did, then surely the boss must have seen them.

The floor show runs the same length of time as usual, and seemed to be going over big with the crowd in the club. But to me it seems hours before it's over. As soon as it's finished one of the waiters comes over and speaks to Jerry Kent. He listens and nods.

"The boss wants to see you, Bob," Kent says. "Marty will sit in for you on the drums while we play the next number."

Marty plays steel guitar but he can handle the drums, too. He's just fair when it comes to beating the skins. Nothing flashy like I am, but good enough to get by.

I leave the stand and the waiter leads me around the room to where Lang Marshall is sitting alone at a table. I notice that Loraine is wandering around, selling cigarettes.

"If there's trouble, buy a cigar from me, Bob," she says in a low tone as I pass close to her. "Remember!"

"Sure," I say, though I don't get what she means by buying a cigar. I always smoke cigarettes. "I'll do that, honey."

WHEN I reach Marshall's table he motions me to sit down. There is a big mirror behind us that reflects a good bit of the room.

"I want to talk to you, Bob," says Marshall when I am seated at the table. "That guy Corrigan who was found dead in my office wasn't a detective. That stuff he gave

you about being from Headquarters was just a bluff."

"Oh, I see," I don't see, but I am hoping Marshall will tell me more of it. "How did he die?"

"He was poisoned," says Marshall. "There's one strange angle to the whole thing. The police are certain now that it was Corrigan who stabbed Thomas Hamilton in the back out here earlier tonight."

"What makes them so sure of that?"

"They found Corrigan's fingerprints on the knife," Marshall frowns. "Having Hamilton killed the way he was makes it tough for me."

"Sure," I say. "Bad publicity for the club, having two guys murdered here."

"Worse than that," says Lang Marshall. "Hamilton was my silent partner. He was a broker in Wall Street, but he had invested a lot of cash in the Golden Harvest. He didn't want anyone to know he was connected with the club though."

"That does put you on a spot," I tell him. "Listen, Boss. I've been hearing things lately."

"About what?" Marshall looks at me poker-faced and hard-eyed.

If I had been smart I would have laughed it off—but not me. I think I'm a smart guy, so I have to stick my neck out.

"I heard the club has been using a lot of Black Market liquor," I say. "Maybe your partner Hamilton didn't like that."

Marshall just sits there looking at me for a moment, then he nods.

"You're right, Bob," he says. "Hamilton didn't like it, not at all. He ordered me to close up the club, and was going to report me to the authorities."

"So you had Corrigan kill him?" I ask.

I don't like the way Marshall is talking so freely. It don't look good for me. I get the idea he don't expect me to be around long enough to do any blabbing.

"If Hamilton was putting up the dough," I say, "wasn't that killing the goose that laid the golden eggs?"

"I didn't need Hamilton's money," says Marshall. "I've made enough dough out of this place to keep going alone and I will."

I see Loraine drifting over toward us.

"You and Loraine were alone in the corridor outside my office," says Lang Marshall. "You two might have found some way to poison Corrigan."

"Oh, sure," I say. "Just grabbed him and poured the stuff down his throat, I suppose. And why would we kill a guy we thought was from Police Headquarters?"

"The three of you were working together," says Marshall, and he sounds like he believed it. "You'd been blackmailing Hamilton and when he decided to turn you over to the police Corrigan killed him."

Loraine comes closer and I motion her over to our table. "I'll have a cigar, Loraine," I say, giving her the tip-off something is wrong. "Let's have one."

"Never mind that," Marshall says sharply. "Beat it, Loraine. I've got something important to talk over with Bob."

Loraine shrugs her pretty shoulders and walks away, stepping back behind Marshall and between our table and the mirror on the wall.

"And you think you're going to get away with that bunch of lies you made up about us?" I ask Marshall. "Why, you—"

I call him a lot of things that are not pretty and he goes into a wild rage.

He leaps to his feet, draws an automatic and aims it at me. I don't have any gun so I just sit there gripping the arms of my chair.

Loraine reaches into the cigar box and draws out an automatic. When I see the gun I know why she had wanted me to take a cigar. Marshall doesn't even notice her as she edges around behind him.

"Drop that gun, Mr. Marshall," she says, sticking the muzzle of the automatic in her hand against his back. "Drop it or I'll shoot!"

Marshall hesitates, and that is his mistake. Some of the detectives working on the case reach him in nothing flat just as I leap up to take a sock at him. One of them grabs the gun out of his hands. By the time they get through with him he talks and admits everything.

CORRIGAN was just a cheap killer who hadn't even shown enough brains to keep his fingerprints off the knife he used to kill Hamilton. Marshall had left five thousand in cash in a drawer of his desk to pay off Corrigan for the killing. That's why Corrigan had gone into the office alone, after giving us the stall about his being from Police Headquarters.

Marshall had a poison needle all rigged up so that Corrigan got it stuck in his finger when he opened the little box in which he had been told he would find the money.

Loraine had a hunch the boss had a hand in the dirty work, so she had the gun ready in the cigar box.

Another crowd buys the club. The Golden Harvest is still doing a good business with good liquor—as much as it is possible to get—and Jerry Kent and the band are still there.

We have a new cigarette girl though. I finally realize I am not the bright boy I thought I was, and admit it to Loraine. I don't want my wife to work while I'm making good dough beating the skins, so she is home waiting for me now.



Willie went after the feline, and his head hit a knob on the bedpost

Skip Tracer Bullets

By JOE ARCHIBALD

The cops won't listen to reason when Willie Klump, the Hawkeye Hawkshaw, tries committing suicide to save his life!

WILLIE KLUMP had never felt more lowdown, not even on the day he went down a thousand feet in a coal mine. With Willie, business was not speaking. In three months, the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency had made twenty-five fish, and that for watching the take at a society wedding.

His room rent was overdue. The public utilities had isolated his two-by-four office from the outside world. His office at the mo-

ment had a notice of eviction under the door.

Willie sat with Gertie Mudgett in a small eatery on Fifty-eighth. Willie was groaning and speaking of diving into the East River.

"Look, I got to have them bonds I bought, Gertie," Willie said. "I will lose a little by cashin' them but—"

"You will not git the bonds," Gertie said flatly. "They are for your future, Willie. Not that you should live so long. Oh, I been tellin' you a long time to git into an illigiti-

mate business and stop playin' cops and robbers.

"Look at you, Willie. You are crumbier than a breakfast crumb bun. Look at your face. By the stain on your chin I know what you had for breakfast this mornin'."

"What?" Willie asked.

"Eggs."

"Ha, you are so smart. I did not. I had them yesterday mornin'."

"Water is still free," Gertie sniffed. "Keep what chin you got up, Willie. Stop talkin' about endin' it all. Look, I got t' go an' git me a manicure. Call me tomorrer or sometime, Willie. Not t'night. Aloysius Kelly is takin' me to a ball in Brooklyn. The Riveters' Rodeo, it is called."

"What is the use," Willie moaned.

Two hours later, Willie was in his room, and the greasy hamburger he had eaten for supper was doing things to his alimentary canal. It was dark, and Willie did not bother to turn on the light when he lifted the bi-carb out of his medicine cabinet.

Only after Willie drank it did he find out it was not bi-carb, but a concoction labeled Rough on Rodents. Willie called an ambulance, then had a kind of fit. When he could use his noggin again, they were working on him with a stomach pump. Later, Gertie Mudgett and a cop called at his bedside.

"It is a lie," Willie said. "I was not bumpin' myself off. It was an accident. Gertie, don't you look at me like that. You got to lend me twenty-five so I can git out of here."

"Oh, yeah?" a cop said. "Listen, junior. You kin git locked up for committin' suicide."

"That sounds a little silly," Willie replied in a voice as weak as beanery coffee. "Imagine an undertaker havin' to go to a klink to spring a corpse. Anyway, I did not do it on purpose. It was dark an'—"

Gertie dried her eyes.

"Ain't it awful?" she asked the cop.

"I said—" Willie repeated. "I—oh, what is the use?"

Willie, having been given a clean bill of health, along with a warning, entered his office the next morning. He took half a loaf of stale bread out of a desk drawer and sliced it. He took a little jar of second-hand coffee grounds and dropped them in a small pot.

After breakfast, he tried to get organized. He read the newspaper, saw a few sticks on page three that intrigued him. Willie Klump immediately got to work. He roughed out a stick or two himself to go in the personal column of the *Globe*. It said:

HAWKEYE DETECTIVE AGENCY

Skip Tracing a Specialty

LET US DIG UP YOUR DEAD BEETS

Wm. KLUMP, Pres. Tel. ---

Willie took the paid ad to the newspaper, and the bite whittled him down to just three dollars and seven cents. He went back to the office and pressed a pair of blue serge trousers by moistening them a little and then turning the desk upside-down upon them.

Then Willie took an inventory of his office and found the betsy he had purchased a month ago in a second-hand shop on Third Avenue. There was a metal ring in the heel of the handle with which it could be hung up on the wall.

Willie guessed the persuader was not too modern. But it had a cylinder filled with slugs. He had three pads of paper, two pencils he had sharpened with his teeth, an old wire wastebasket and a desk and chair.

"Nobody ever said anythin' truer," Willie sighed. "Crime don't pay."

THE *Globe* came out at two o'clock. At four-thirty, someone knocked on the door of the Hawkeye Detective Agency.

"Come right in," Willie said. A female character, wearing an ensemble that was considered daring in 1924, flounced into the office. Her eyes were as stormy as a broody hen's, and her three chins were thrust out. "A fine thing! You put in an ad an' then nobody can git you on the phone!" the caller said.

"I—er—must have been out trailing a felon," Willie said.

"By your looks, you don't look like you could find one if it was on your finger, Buster," the client sniffed. "Maybe I got the wrong place. If you are a detective, I'm Veronica with one of me eyes covered."

"Sit down," Willie said. "It is the secret of my success. If you set a mouse trap, would you bait it with catnip? When you don't look like what people think you are—let's git down to business."

"The name is Mrs. Clarimonde Fuddy. If you laugh, I'll hand you one. I got a roomin' house on Forty-sixth. Two jerks run out on me. I want 'em skip-traced. You git ten percent of what I git out of 'em if you catch 'em," Mrs. Fuddy said and took a cough drop. She sneezed.

"Gesundheit," Willie said.

"Gittin' a cold, it looks like. I'll take me a snifter when I git home," Mrs. Fuddy concluded.

"I'll go with you," Willie said. "We generally find things they left behind that lead us where they went."

"Only one of 'em took his things. The other left mos' of his. Left the rooms in a mess, too," Mrs. Fuddy said. "Well, shake a leg. I got a roast in the oven."

Willie went over to Mrs. Fuddy's rooming house and was shown into a big double room on the first floor back. The mattress was pulled off the bed and had been cut with a

knife. A board had been ripped up in the little kitchenette.

"I called this an apartment," Mrs. Fuddy explained. "With a kitchenette. I made them two sign a lease. They jumped it. Their names were Agnew Smew and Newton Huff. Well, start detectin', Klump."

"Wait," Willie said. "Is this a closet here? The door is locked. Why would they leave it locked if they didn't have somethin' in it they wanted to come back for? It is funny."

Mrs. Fuddy thought so too, and she selected a key from a bunch that dangled from her waist. She inserted the key into the lock and opened the door.

Mrs. Fuddy let out a squeal and swooned. Willie looked into the closet. A corpse stared him right in the eye, and Willie's old hat popped off his pate and then settled back in place again. Willie saw that someone had bashed the victim over the noggin with something very much heavier than a box of kleenex.

"A murder!" Willie yelled. "Bein' a skip tracer is payin' off already. I must call the cops." He spun around and tripped over Mrs. Fuddy. The landlady was straightening her transformation and reached for her uppers.

"It—it was Huff," she gulped out. "S-Smew must of kilt him. It is awful!"

"It isn't no laughin' matter," Willie said and ran out and called the cops.

Satchelfoot Kelly was in charge of the gendarmes that took over Mrs. Fuddy's roost. If there was anything in the world Willie was more allergic to than Kelly, then chemists and doctors had not discovered it. Aloysius Kelly was connected with the D.A.'s office and he had a pair of pedal extremities which when placed both together on a man-hole cover hid it from view.

"Awright, Willie," Kelly yowled. "How's it happen you happened to be just where a murder was?"

"Such grammar. Tsk-tsk," Willie said. "I happen to be a skip tracer and come here with Mrs. Fuddy's permission to help trace down a couple of leash breakers. One I don't have to chase far, as he is in the closet and not hunting moths.

"It looks like his roommate liquidated him. The culprit we want is named Agnew Smew. So far I have solved half the case for you, Satchelfoot, and wish you would remember if it gits you a raise."

"Yeah? If you don't mind, will you let me see the corpse, fishhead?"

"He has all the time in the world," Willie said. "In the closet, Kelly. It's amazing to see you at work. As you find the clues, I will write them down for you."

"Willie, some day I will hit you so hard in the nose, you will have to back up ever after t' smell a rosa."

"Listen, Buster," Mrs. Fuddy sniffed. "I kin git corn on the radio any hour. Will you start examinin' the corpse an' then git it out of here? If my roomers see it—"

SATCHELFOOT went to work. Mrs. Fuddy minced out and collided with the appraiser of the defunct, who was on his way in.

"How many more of you is expected?" Mrs. Fuddy yipped. "Is LaGuardia comin', too?"

Aloysius Kelly found no clues. He did not mind very much, as already the name of the assassin was known. All he had to do was dig up Agnew Smew. When Mrs. Fuddy came back, he got Agnew's description.

The landlady said Agnew worked in an automat and that Huff had been a faithful employee of Rubb & Shine, jewelers, on lower Broadway.

"Huff," Satchelfoot said and kept scratching his head. "Huff, Huff. It's familiar somehow. I've heard it—"

"You saw Snow White," Willie prompted. "Remember? The wolf says he would puff and he'd huff—"

"Shut that goon up," the medical examiner yelled to Kelly.

"I'll do more than that in a minute, Doc," Satchelfoot griped. "I'll give you two corpses to tidy up and we'll split the extra take. Willie, you sit there and don't move."

"Been dead about seventeen hours," the examiner told Kelly. "Skull bashed in. You can wrap him up."

"Ugh!" Willie shivered. "You'd think you fellers was pokin' at a deceased alley cat."

"Come on, guys, we'll git Smew," Kelly said. "This is about as easy as anythin' we ever tackled."

William Klump tarried after the remains of Huff and the live cops made their exits.

"Did Smew look like a homicided maniac, Mrs. Fuddy?"

"If that is what a drip is, he did," Mrs. Fuddy sniffed. "Tried to pay me one month with a book. Said it was the first one out and was worth a hundred dollars. He collected them."

"Huh," Willie said. "I had an uncle oncet used to collect cigar boxes. Now about an advance before we apprehend Agnew Smew. It is customary—"

"Look, Klump. Do I look like a pushover?" Mrs. Fuddy yipped. "Huff can't ever appear in court. Agnew Smew will, but he won't never use that old easy chair over there in the corner ag'in. He'll use one that has got wires leadin' to it an' b-z-z-z-z-z-z-z, no more Smew. Beat it."

Willie was indignant. He was going to threaten to sue Mrs. Fuddy when a black cat jumped up on the window-sill and spat at him. It had a ragged ear and a little

leather collar around its neck.

"Belonged to Huff," Mrs. Fuddy said. "Take it home, an' we'll call it square, Klump."

Willie was a little scratched up by the time he reached his office. He was more discouraged than ever. There was going to be no fee. Satchelfoot Kelly would ferret out Smew and never mention any help the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency might have given him.

"What's the use?" Willie groaned. "I am a failure. What's the use? I—"

An "el" train rattled by and shook the walls of Willie's office. A nail slipped out of the plaster, and the betsy Willie had hung up dropped down and hit on top of an old file cabinet. The betsy went off, and something grazed Willie's coco and chugged into the opposite wall.

Once again Willie was in a hospital emergency ward. He had a horrible headache, and there was a cop sitting beside his bed. Gertie Mudgett came rushing in.

"It's the same creep again," the cop said. "This time he tried to shoot himself with a pistol that was at Bull Run. We'll lock him up an' let a dome expert examine him for squirrels, sister."

"Willie, why did you do it?" Gertie gulped out. "Why don't you stop tryin' to commit su—"

"Look, I tell you it was an accident. Let me outa here," Willie howled. "I was just standin' there—"

"I know the routine, pal," the cop said. "You was lookin' in the barrel to see if it was loaded. You're goin' upstairs where they fit you with nice indoor sport jackets."

"It'll be the best, Willie," Gertie said. "You been awfully suppressed lately."

William Klump went up in the elevator and was examined for loose ends above his ears. Willie balked at the ignominious proceedings and said he would sue. Six hours later they let Willie go.

"He is only an eccentric," the doctors told Gertie.

"Is that good?" Willie's torch asked.

THE papers divulged startling news anent the slaying of Newton Huff the next A.M. Willie absorbed the latest developments in the case while eating cold toast and washing it down with lemon soda.

Huff had been in the news twice before. Once he had risked his life preventing a hold-up in the jewelry store downtown. A rough person had grabbed some dazzling dornicks and had tried to back out of the establishment with the help of a roscoe. Newton Huff had tackled low.

Then there was the time when Huff had not been such a hero. He had been totting a diamond necklace worth 50 gees to a rich

client uptown, but had never reached his destination. Some unlawful citizen had way-laid Huff, according to Huff. The lights had gone out all over the world, and when they came on again, he had had no necklace and almost no brains.

"Huh," Willie said. "What do you know?" He read the rest of it. Insurance detectives had suspected Newton Huff of skullduggery, but the biggies at Rubb & Shine had stood adamant when anyone dared to accuse Huff of faking the hold-up.

Why, they told the cops, Huff had risked his life once before to save the company's doodads. Three years after the slugging of Huff, the cops and insurance dicks considered the case closed. None of the stuff had appeared in the dens of the fences. Huff still lived in a scratch house and had only two suits to his name.

"Yeah," Willie said. "I wonder—and I don't see where Kelly has nabbed Agnew Smew yet. I will do some skip tracing."

Willie put another ad in the paper. It read:

Looking for person who could swap used piccolo or portable radio for first edition of Jane Eyre. Klump 246½ W. East Forty-ninth.

The landlady was waiting for Willie when he got to his rooming house.

"Look, you got to tell that Mudgett to lay off, Klump. Every hour she calls up. 'Has he done it yet?' she says. I'll be glad when I throw you out, Klump."

"She thinks I tried to commit suicide twice, is all," Willie sighed.

The first two citizens to answer Willie's ad were not upset a bit when Willie let the black cat out of the closet. So he gave them the brush-off. The third customer was an odd-looking character wearing funny-looking shoes and heavy-lensed cheaters.

He had a mop of black hair under his silly hat and carried a piccolo. He said his name was Egbert Oakley, and he wanted a look at Jane Eyre. Then Willie let the cat out, and Egbert tried to Rommel faster than Dagwood going for his bus, but Willie nailed him and took off the citizen's wig and cheaters.

"Agnew Smew!" the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency whooped. "Got Addler Elevation shoes on, I see. Couldn't resist a first edition. Why did you knock off Huff?"

"I didn't, pal. Honest," Smew gurgled. "When I got in from welding school, there he was, sittin' in the closet. First one they would suspect would be me. Me an' Huff had an awful fight the day before."

"I lammed because I was scairt. I figured to change my looks, raise some more dough an' leave town. A first edition of Jane Eyre

would git me to Alaska. Look, let me go as—

"No," Willie sniffed. "How would a murderer git in Mrs. Fuddy's without a key? Talk fast."

"Yeah. Couple of nights before I lit out, I stopped in at a gin mill on my way home. A block away from Mrs. Fuddy's. A swell-lookin' number ogled me, an' we sit down an' have some snorts. I must of passed out. The next mornin' I find I have no key ring. I figger I lost it somewheres."

"H-m-m," Willie mused. "The pigeon could have been a stooge for the real culprit, Smew. They cased Mrs. Fuddy's pueblo and found you wouldn't be home the night Huff was erased."

"I got to turn you in, Smew, as you might be in on it, an' it'll put the real culprit off his guard, you bein' in jail an' gittin' groomed for the state roastisserie. I'll call the cops."

"Awright," Agnew Smew sighed. "They'd got me later or sooner, Klump."

It was not long afterward that Satchelfoot Kelly and three husky policemen arrived at Willie's place.

"Somebody has to uphold the law," Willie sniffed at his aversion. "I skip-traced him, Kelly. Don't forget what I done so far."

"Who? Me?" Satchelfoot grinned. "Why, Willie! Perish the thought. Come on, Smew. You found out Huff had that necklace stowed away. Huff maybe talked in his sleep. You bopped him for keeps and most likely you got the hot pebbles stashed yourself. We'll make you talk, though, you poor man's Peter Lorry."

"I'm innoerent," Smew gulped.

"So is Shicklegoober," Satchelfoot scoffed. "Willie, the next time, try gas."

"It is a lie," Willie yipped. "They was accid—"

Satchelfoot took his prisoner away, and Willie slumped down on his bed and wondered if the pate probers shouldn't have kept him longer in the squrrrel pen.

After a while, he took paper and pencil and jotted down notes so that he could think in the morning of what he had thought about the night before.

Willie's memory was as short as the distance between Siamese twins. Willie sneezed. His eyes began to drool. That Mrs. Fuddy—she'd carried more sniffle germs than a flat-top carries dive bombers.

No. 1—Could be Huff really had had the hot ice. But did Smew know it? Suppose the swag was still in Mrs. Fuddy's scratch house? Sounds like a B pitcher.

No. 2—Did a babe knock off Huff? Maybe I will go and make a deal with Mrs. Fuddy. I got to move anyway. Looks like Huff did have a confederate, maybe, that time he was boffed. It is a tough case. But Kelly will make Smew confess. What is the use?

[Turn page]



You may be sitting pretty
now... but...

AFTER WAR, WHAT?

You are probably sitting pretty now. Almost anyone can get a fair job with good money.

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TWO days later, Satchelfoot Kelly was still trying to make Agnew Smew confess. Agnew refused to go sissy under the third degree. Satchelfoot, as desperate as a Nazi in Russia, called Willie downtown to reason with Smew.

Willie arrived with a terrible case of laryngitis, and Kelly had him tossed out. So William Klump went up to see Mrs. Fuddy.

"You owe me somethin' for takin' up my time," he told the landlady. "How's about lettin' me have the late Huff's boudoir for a week to settle everythin'."

"All right, Klump," Mrs. Fuddy said. "I see I give you my cold. You got a voice like a zombie. How about a snort of fire water?"

"Huh!" Willie said later when he took possession of the room. "Looks like you been huntin' for treasure, too, Mrs. Fuddy."

"You have to clean up after a corpse, don't you?" the old babe alibied. "Anyway, there ain't nothin' hid in here. That why you want the room?"

Less than two hours after Willie unpacked his straw suitcase, Satchelfoot Kelly arrived. "Oh, so you are lookin' for the ice, too, hah?" Kelly snapped. "Rented the room. Well—"

"I got a due bill," Willie sniffed. "I took it for a week to unhaunt it for Mrs. Fuddy. So you flatfoot want to look around, too, huh? It has been explored by everybody so far but Admiral Byrd."

"An' you didn't even mention my name in the papers as havin' been the citizen who really traced Smew. Satchelfoot, you are a bigger doublecrosser than Peer Laval. I demand that you leave my room this instant!"

Mrs. Fuddy yanked at Satchelfoot's sleeve.

"Look, Buster. Do I look like a dope? I been lookin' for two days for the rocks. Now scram!"

"We'll be watchin' you close, Willie Klump," Satchelfoot yelled as he withdrew. "Look out for the zany, Mrs. Fuddy. Maybe he just hired the room to knock hisself off in."

"I am goin' to kill you some day, Kelly," Willie said in a voice that sounded like a swinging gate with rusty hinges.

That afternoon Willie Klump entered Mrs. Fuddy's after having been out buying milk and meat scraps for Huff's cat. He met one of the roomers coming out. She wore a dark tailored suit and flat-heeled shoes, tortoise shell cheaters and no make-up.

"Mr. Klump, I believe?" the plain Jane asked with her nose way up.

"At your service," Willie said.

"If that cat howls out in back again tonight, I will speak to Mrs. Fuddy, you understand? I must have my sleep."

"I'll buy the tabby a muzzle," Willie said. "You could use one too—er—come back sober, huh?"

"Rif raff!" the doll flung after him.

William Klump sat down in the room where it had all started and wondered about the late Newton Huff. It looked as if the deceased had made heroics pay dividends. Huff, Willie figured, had known his employers would never suspect an employee of any crime when that employee had once risked his life in saving the Rubb & Shine merchandise.

Huff had been as patient as a cat outside a rathole, too, had waited until the heat was off. Willie got up and searched the room, too, but found nothing save three mice and a cockroach that showed fight, it was that big.

"We are all stalemates," Willie sighed.

Willie Klump left Mrs. Fuddy's early the next A.M. On his way to a ten-cent breakfast, he spotted a fat wallet on the sidewalk. Willie emulated a F-40 and dived. The wallet jumped like a scared flea, and then a lot of gamins came out of an alley and laughed at Willie.

"April fool!" they harmonized. Willie tried to reprimand the little squirts, but his voice was like an old violin string that had not seen rosin in five years. Willie got up, peeled a little patch of skin off his chin, and forgot breakfast.

"The First of April, huh?" he squeaked. "I better go to my room an' stay there. Anythin' could happen to me an' generally has."

It was an hour after lunchtime, and Willie was in his room striving to reconstruct a crime. Suddenly he saw the late Huff's black liver punisher chewing at one of his slippers. Willie went after the feline and tripped over a tear in the old carpeting on the floor.

His head hit a brass knob on one of the posts of the iron bedstead, and Willie did not remember anything for some time afterward. When he got to his hands and knees and started shaking the butterflies out of his ears, he saw the brass knob on the floor.

Something had rolled out of it, some crumpled-up tissue paper and a bluish-white object that sent off little rays of light. Willie picked it up, and his ticker skipped three beats.

He snatched up the brass knob, poked into it with a long index finger and pulled out more diamonds and more tissue paper. William Klump, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, had found the treasure!

WILLIE sat on the floor like a sultan for almost an hour gazing at the glittering gewgaws. So Huff had gone illigit! Smew had been hep and had tried to make Huff cough up part of the booty?

Willie grinned and felt sorry for Satchelfoot Kelly. Willie would take the rocks down to the underwriters and get his reward. Poor Kelly!

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"That cat will eat sirloins from now on," Willie said as he put the stones in a handkerchief and placed them in his pocket. "April first, huh? It was not kiddin' me." Willie locked his door and went out. In the dark hallway something happened. Something pressed against his spine and a feminine voice spoke.

"Just go along, sweetheart, an' do like I say. There is a betsy in this muff I carry. I could knock you off here and get that ice, but I got orders not to leave no more corpses around this joint. It'll tell the cops Smew shouldn't take the rap. Keep walkin'!"

Willie knew he couldn't scream for help if he dared to. He marched out of Mrs. Fuddy's rooming house and across the street to where a taxi stood. He got into the swindle chariot, and the doll stuck close to his side.

It was the flat-heeled number with the tortoise shells. The menace gave the taxi driver an address and then whispered at Willie.

"I had the next room to yours, chump," the pigeon said. "You beat me to that one by an hour. I could see through a keyhole." "An' you saw me in my long red flannels then," Willie squeaked. "The shame of it. Stop pressin' that cannon so hard against my ribs, huh?"

"Button your lip," the doll said, and by her voice, Willie knew she must have thrown her Mother Goose away at the age of four and asked for "Murders in the Rue Morgue." He could get into the worst messes. Willie

[Turn page]

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had a horrible hunch that the cops would know he had not committed suicide this time.

William Klump was taken up to the top floor of a big apartment building uptown and ushered into a room where a very oily-looking character was reading a racing form.

"I got the stuff, sugar," the babe said. "This goon is packing the ice. Frisk him before I put up the roscoe."

"No kiddin', baby?" The dishonest character wearing the plaid double-breasted frisked Willie and took over the kohinoors. He opened up the hanky and feasted his close-set peepers on the tickets to the gravy train Pullman. Then he grinned.

"Get those rags off, sugar. We're goin' t' celebrate. About this punk though—"

"What you think, Georgie?"

"Yeah. Listen, you Keystone cop," the rough boy said to Willie. "It is a shame, but you got to go."

"We could talk it over," Willie said desperately, his voice carrying only a foot away from his molars.

"Look, baby," the crook said. "I got to go downtown and git them things out of the shop. You got to buy a few things maybe for the trip we're takin'. Then we come back and knock this punk off. We'll lock him in the next room an' take the key. He can't holler. It's only twenty-one stories straight down. Okay?"

"Yeah, sugar," the dishonest pigeon said. "Y' see, pal," the crook told Willie. "Huff waited a long time before he started disposin' of the rocks one by one. I'm a fence, pal. Huff only brought one every t'ree months, an' I was a li'l impatient with him."

"Figurin' where he got the stuff in the first place, I knew there was some bigger ones somewheres. There's more profit git-tin' things for nothin' an' sellin' 'em. Well, git in that room there, punk!"

Willie got in. A key was turned in a lock and then removed. He sat down in a little room that had one window and tried to stop his knees from knocking. He could hear the dishonest couple out there.

"I ain't packin' this stuff wit' me," he heard Georgie say. "The cops have been watchin' me. I'll put 'em in the false bottom of your fitted case, baby."

"Yeah."

FINALLY the crooks went out. Willie went to the window and looked down. He shivered. He tried to yell, but his voice was practically null and void. The things that happened to him—laryngitis and April Fool's day!

He could throw a message asking for the cops down into the street, but the citizens would be on their guards for gags. Anyway the S.O.S. might never land where it could

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his way back to the window. A great disappointed roar came up from the street. "The goods," Willie choked out.

He nearly slipped when he got to the open window. His hat fell off and spiraled down. Willie was glad he was not in it. He wondered if his head was, as there seemed no weight above his collarbones.

He finally fell into the room just as the door was smashed in. Cops came at Willie, but Willie saw a familiar male face in the next room. He saw a swell-looking tomato grabbing a fitted bag. Willie poked a cop in the nose and knocked another kicking as he made for the pair of criminals.

William Klump went in low and got the babe around the ankles just as she was hopping out into the hall. The doll screamed when she flattened out, but quickly turned over on her angel bones and fired a roscoe.

The slug wipped a mole off Willie's cheek and took a gendarme's cap off. Georgie the Fence snatched up the doll's fitted bag and kicked Willie in the chin.

"Do somethin'," Willie yipped at the cops, but forgot his rusty pipes. Georgie the Fence was hiking to the self-service elevator with the bag holding the ice, shooting at cops as he went.

"Wait for me, you doublecrosser!" the dame howled. Willie got into the elevator with one cop just before Georgie could shut the door. In some strange manner, the door clicked shut, and the lift started down. It

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was a terrible rhubarb all the way to the basement.

When the elevator door opened, Willie and a cop crawled out. Then they got up, after collecting their marbles, and removed Georgie the Fence and another cop.

"This is murder, not a suicide attempt," the gendarme told Willie. "Now tell me—"

GEORGIE THE FENCE was half-nude. He had a lump over each eye and a big one on top of his noggin. He had left three teeth in the elevator.

Willie and a gendarme pulled him off the prone figure of another policeman and then rested. More cops and tenants of the building started to spill into the basement. A fireman wearing a chief's cap and carrying an axe came with them.

"Awright," the cops said to Willie. "What you got to say? Attempted suicide, creatin' a riot. Damage to public property. Assault an'—"

"Break open that fitted bag there." Willie said it three times before they finally understood him. "It is fixed with a false bottom and has stolen diamonds in it. This big crook here gittin' first aid is a fence named Georgie.

"That dame up there was a confederate, an' I bet she's lammed. I only faked I was committin' Harry Kary to stop from bein' murdered. Call Detective Aloysius Kelly, huh?"

"Yeah," a cop said. "Lookit the stones. One of 'em is as big as a tokay grape. Georgie, you say, pal? That must be Georgie Link. We changed his face so much on the way down, it is hard to tell—yeah, I can tell by that ring on his fat finger."

An hour later, Willie Klump was in the D.A.'s office, looking like a third-rate pug who had just pleased a crowd for fifteen rounds. Georgie Link looked even worse. Satchelfoot Kelly had no bruises, but he looked much more in need of vitamin B-1 than Willie.

"That was how it all was," Willie said. "All because I started bein' a skip tracer and was hired by Mrs. Fuddy. Georgie got his tomater to steal Smew's keys. He went in and demanded that Huff fork over the rest of the diamonds, and Huff said no and got caved in an' put in the closet.

"That same pistol-packin' mama fixed

[Turn page]



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herself up an' hired a room at Mrs. Fuddy's. She spotted me holdin' the diamonds I found in the brass knob on the bed. Sounds like a B pitcher, huh?"

"If I caught somebody startin' a fire in the basement of the city hall, it would turn out t' be the mayor who was experimentin' with a civil defense stirrup pump," Satchelfoot groaned.

"Nobody can figure it all out. He gits a black cat belongin' t' Huff. It trips Smew up. It shows him where the diamonds was? Does that make sense?"

"It is what you git for hoggin' all the credit, Satchelfoot," Willie squeaked. "If you boys downtown would corporate with me—"

"Committin' suicide or tryin' to for the third time," Kelly griped. "To call the cops. I—who has a aspirin and a pint?"

The D.A. shook hands with Willie and told him he would get ten percent of the value of the diamonds from the insurance company. Photographers came in and took Willie's picture. Then Gertrude Mudgett came in, holding Willie's funny-looking felt hat. Willie had his back turned, and Gertie did not notice him there.

"This time he did it!" Gertie yipped. "I been watchin' the morgues an' police stations. He left his roomin' house two days ago. I found this hat in a presink uptown. It is wet. Oh, he drowned himself. Please drag the river—"

"Why, hello Gertie," Willie said, turning around. "It would have been in the papers in a couple hours about me. How I tried t' commit suicide to save my life. Sounds silly, huh?"

Gertie Mudgett slammed the hat on the floor.

"You big mushhead," she yelled. "Humillatin' me in front of all these—I am through with you, William Klump. Don't you never—"

"That reward'll come to about thirty-five hundred dollars, Klump," the D.A. said. "All right, lock up Link and let Smew out."

"Wha-a-a-a? Why, Willie, you know I was just upset thinkin' you was a corpse an' all," Gertie said and threw her arms around the skip tracer. "Tell me about it."

"You'll have to make an appointment at my office," Willie said. "An' please don't ask for my autograph. What we go through, me an' Sinatra."

The D.A. almost had to lock Gertie up.

Next Issue

MEAT BRAWL
Another Willie Klump Howler

By **JOE ARCHIBALD**

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(Concluded from page 6)

has called MEAT BRAWL. Between Gertie Mudgett, Satchelfoot Kelly and his own amazing sleuthing, Willie Klump once more emerges with the solution to another criminal case which baffles everybody and lays us readers in the aisles.

Word from Readers

Before we adjourn this session let's consider a report or two from our readers. The first comment seems to be about our February issue:

I am a regular reader of POPULAR DETECTIVE, and I think the February number is the best one yet. "The Bird Master" is the best story I've read in a long time. Please have more Mickie O'Day stories.—Grady McCarty, Manatee, Florida.

Thanks, Grady, and I know that Author Burks will be pleased to know that you liked his yarn. However, I'm afraid there won't be any more such stories until Major Arthur J. Burks of the U. S. Marine Corps finishes with another little chore he is doing right now. Here's a flash from the geographical center of the United States:

I read all of the Thrilling Group of detective magazines, but I find that the short stories of POPULAR DETECTIVE are generally the best. Some of the book-length novels are so obviously word-padded that the interest strays.

I'd like to see more short-shorts in which the killer commits the perfect murder except for one error. When we peak our magazines on to the boys in the Service I notice they prefer the copies which contain these "perfect murder" short-shorts.—Mrs. Frances Hill, Topeka, Kansas.

This is indeed news, Mrs. Hill, as so many readers have told us they are tired of that familiar pattern of the perfect crime save for the one fatal error. Nevertheless, this type of story, when well done, certainly has its merits.

Tastes differ, but we'll do our best to satisfy all parties. And thanks for your nice words about POPULAR DETECTIVE. We hope the authors of any draggy long stories take note of your letter. Incidentally, we'd like to know the names of the stories that seemed padded to you—because most of our readers agree that our novels are mighty fast-moving, thrill-packed yarns!

Now if any of you other readers who haven't yet written in to comment would care to do so, why don't you sit right down and make a report of your opinion? Be assured that your editor reads every letter or postcard that comes in, and we certainly do appreciate your comments even though we do not begin to print a tenth of them in this department.

When you feel the urge, write it down, and please address your communications to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thank you! Until next issue—good reading to you!
—THE EDITOR.

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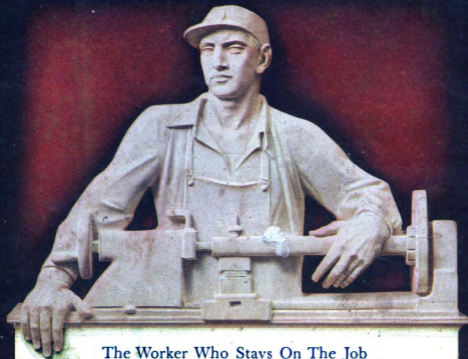


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