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April 15¢
A SPEED MAGAZINE
PERALTA PAY-OFF
by ROGER TORREY

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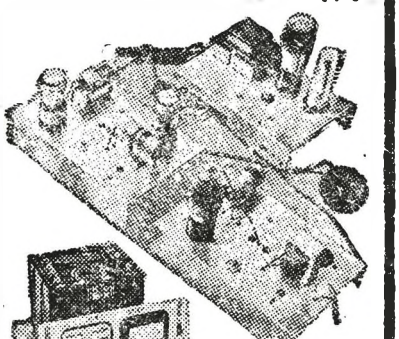

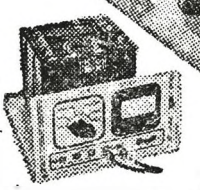

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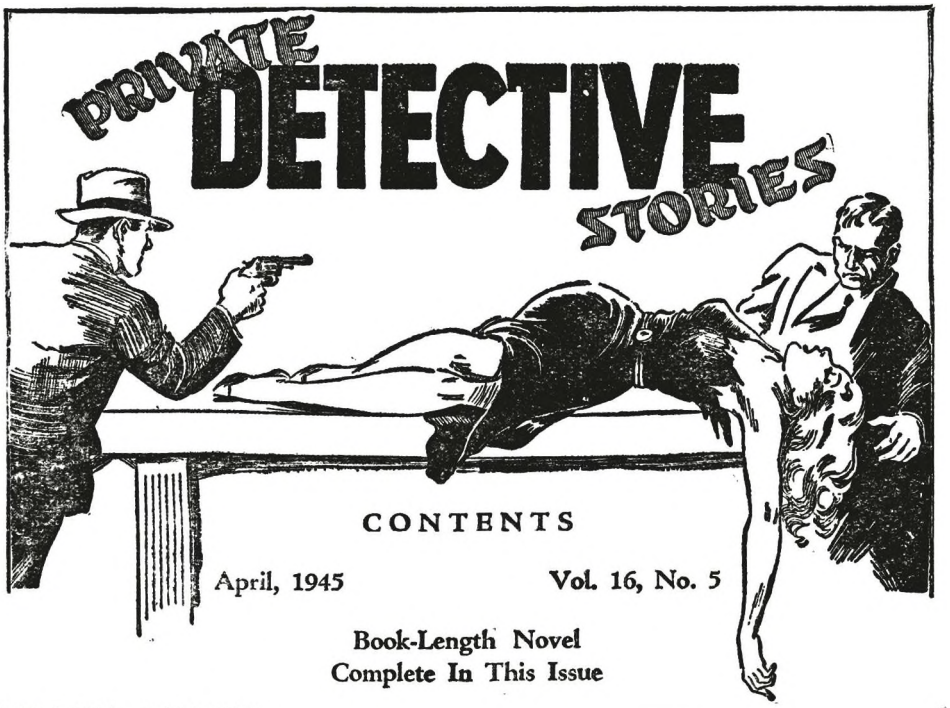


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April, 1945 Vol. 16, No. 5

**Book-Length Novel**
**Complete In This Issue**



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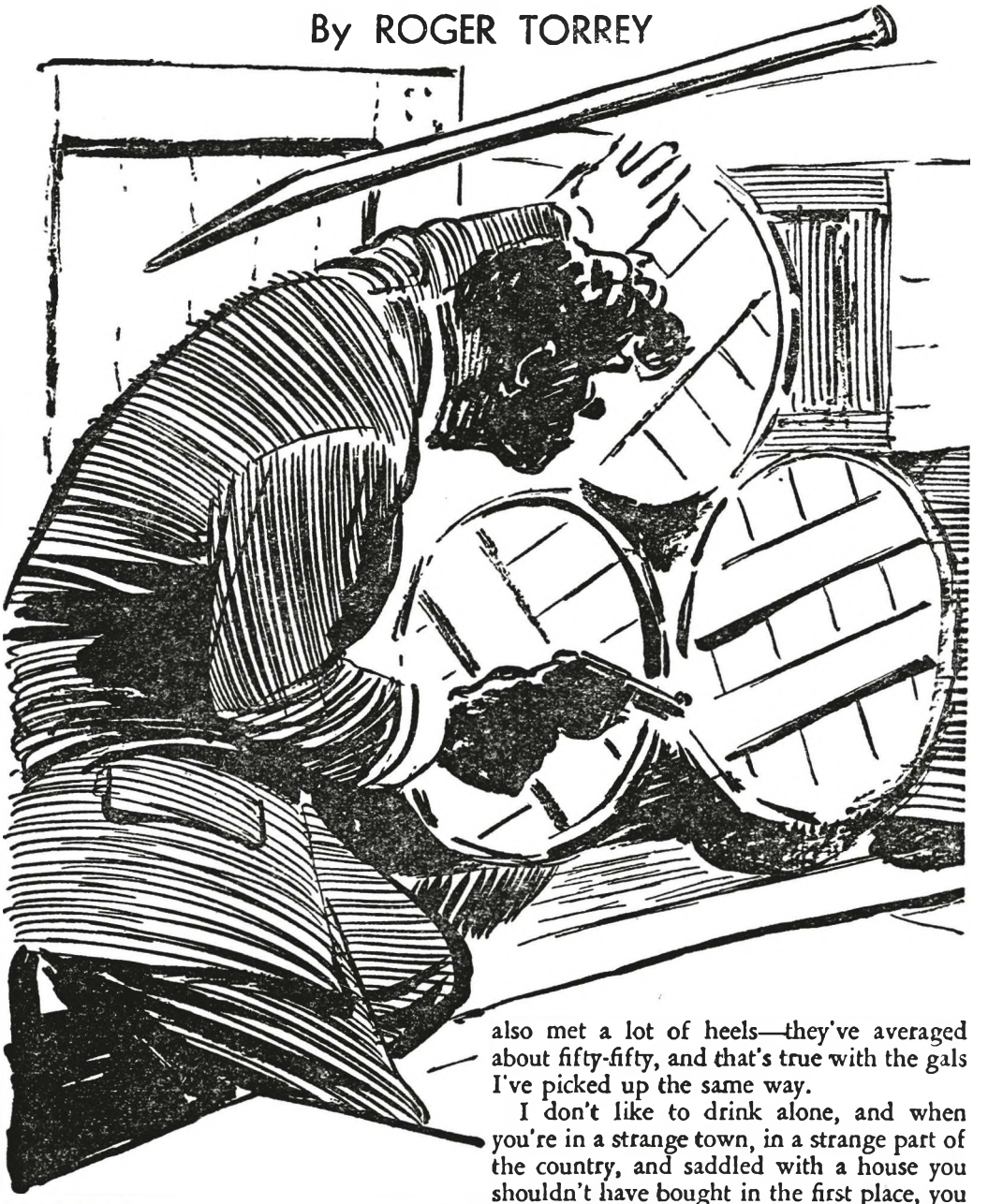
# A Complete Novelette

## By ROGER TORREY

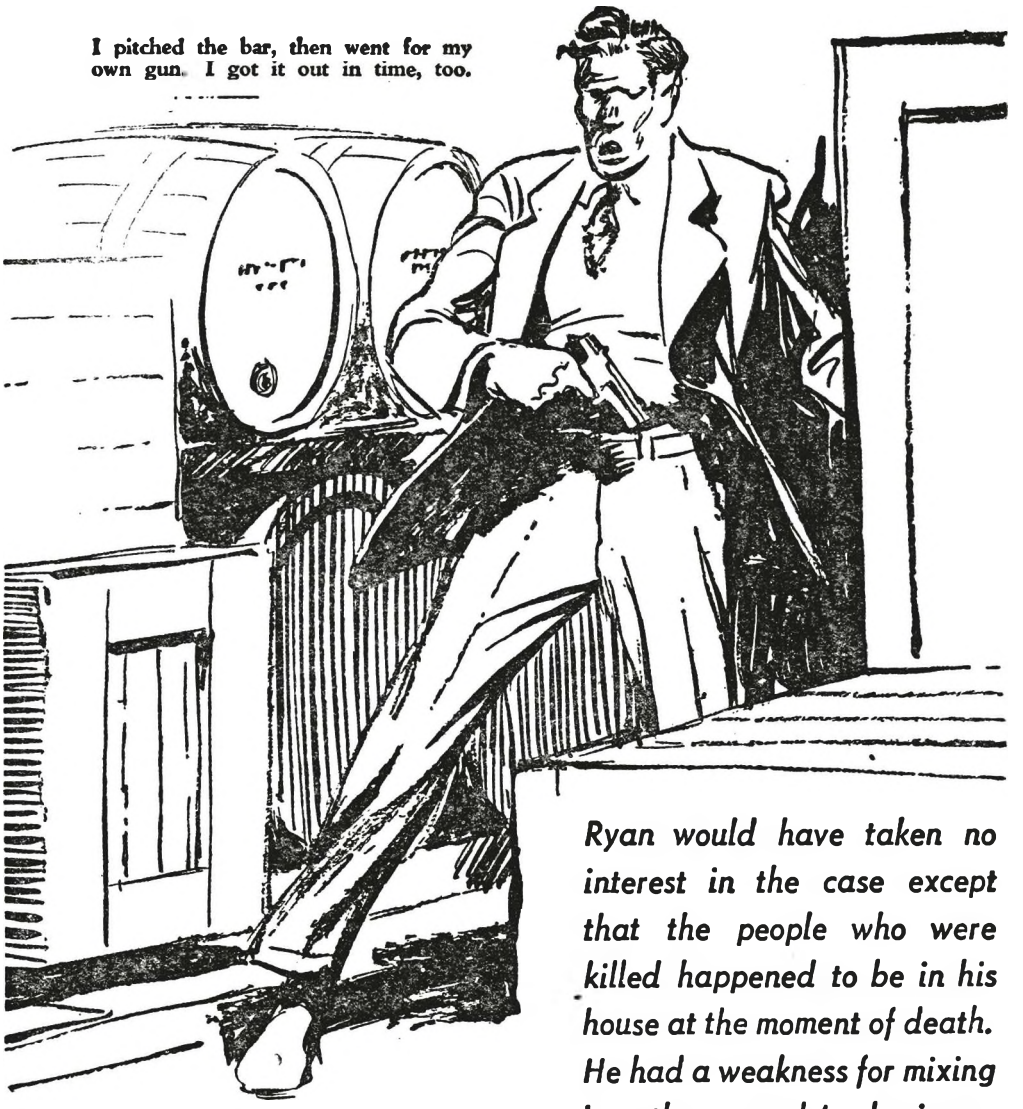


MAKING friends out of acquaintances met in bars is something a man shouldn't do, but I do it. I guess it's just a habit like taking the drink you're in the bar for. I've met a lot of good guys that way but I've also met a lot of heels—they've averaged about fifty-fifty, and that's true with the gals I've picked up the same way.

I don't like to drink alone, and when you're in a strange town, in a strange part of the country, and saddled with a house you shouldn't have bought in the first place, you spend more time than's good for you in such places as bars and cocktail lounges—this last being just a fancy name for the old-fashioned saloon that catered to the ladies' trade.

So I was in the Palace when I got talking with the two pilots.

One was Harry Connors and the other



I pitched the bar, then went for my own gun. I got it out in time, too.

*Ryan would have taken no interest in the case except that the people who were killed happened to be in his house at the moment of death. He had a weakness for mixing in other people's business, and it was a good thing he was also fast on the draw...*

was Joe Almon and they were both back from across. Both had been shot up, both had been sent back to the rehabilitation center here, and both had been released on indefinite leave until recalled to duty.

Both seemed like nice kids and neither of them knew any more about the town than I did.

I said: "Look, you guys! I've got a big house out by the river. I've got a maid and a gardener and both of them are eating their heads off with nothing to do but collect from me at the end of the week. Why not come out and stay with me—it's a place to go and you'd be company."

# Peralta Pay-Off

Connors said it would be an imposition and therefore out of the question. Almon said he thought it was a good idea. But from what already had been said I knew why the boys had different thoughts on the subject. Connors had money and lots of it, and Almon had had a bad streak of luck with the cards and the dice and was out of money until his pay caught up with him.

I let it go for then, knowing Almon would work on Connors and probably get him to see the light.

The two of them had been pals since they joined up—and I thought that Connors wouldn't let his pal go calling alone.

And I was right. When we left the bar we left for my place. The happy little home I'd paid two prices for—and was paying another two prices trying to keep up.

So there I was with two house guests—and very pleased about it all.

CONNORS was blond, tall and husky, and Almon was short and dark. They were about the same age, around twenty-three, and they had something beside age in common. Both of them could put down liquor like it was water—that trick could have been what brought them together in the first place.

And both of them could eat like pigs—but I've never seen a service man yet that couldn't.

It was this last trick that endeared them to Alice, the maid. She was a swell cook and she appreciated the boys appreciating her cooking. And so she went all out to please them and certainly did.

She said: "My goodness, Mr. John, them boys can tuck away more groceries than I can shake a stick at."

She'd done a noble job on shrimp Creole, which the boys and I had decided would go well with our drinking, and I told her so. With a compliment, she'd work twice as hard—I'd found that out.

And then she cocked her head and said: "I guess maybe there's a somebody at the front door."

The boys were there so I called to them to see who it was. I didn't think it would be anybody for me, anyway, and I wanted to plan the next day's meals with Alice. Then I heard a lot of commotion, with the boys calling somebody an old son-of-a-gun, and then Harry Connors called to me.

He said: "Hey, Ryan! Front and center! You've got company."

I went in and found one new man and three girls, one of whom I faintly remembered.

Connors said: "This is Felix Heinsolt. He used to be with the outfit, too. And this is Mary, and this is Louisa, and this is Betty May."

Betty May said: "Oh, I know Johnny. Don't you remember, Johnny?"

I said of course I remembered and tried to place her, and she gave me a lead.

She said: "You certainly got tight that night, Johnny. I didn't think we'd ever get you home in one piece."

It came back to me then about meeting her in some bar but she went farther.

"I thought I'd die when you tried to fight the cop. If he hadn't been a pretty good guy he'd have taken you in. Did you ever see him after that?"

I remembered then. This cop had put me in a taxi instead of taking me to the pokey, and I'd looked him up the next day and thanked him for the break.

I said: "Sure, the next day. You guys and girls all have a drink."

By that time I'd shaken hands with Felix Heinsolt and decided I didn't like him too well. He was in civies and he explained this in a hurry.

He said: "I was with the boys but when I got back they gave me a medical discharge. I was in the Palace, talking with the girls, and the bartender said that Harry and Joe had gone home with you, Mr. Ryan. And Betty May knew where you lived, so here we are."

I could see it was going to be a party and that was fine with me. So I got Edgar, the gardener, in from out in back where he lived, and started him mixing drinks. He could do that better than gardening, for that matter. A tray of drinks isn't as heavy as a rake or a shovel—and Edgar couldn't be called a hard worker even in fun.

So the party started out full blast, with Betty May holding onto me like a barnacle to a ship. And with Mary going for Harry

Connors and with Louisa picking on Joe Almon.

That left the new man, Felix Heinsolt out in the cold but he didn't seem to mind a bit.

He just concentrated on his drinking.

MY HOUSE is on a river and the river isn't such a much. There's little current and a muddy bottom, and so it's really dirty. But we went swimming at three in the morning, just the same, with the boys and girls all wearing my shorts, and with Mary and Louisa just about bursting out of them.

Two husky girls.

Betty May looked much better, though nobody with eyes would call her thin.

And the swimming tended to sober the party up, so that at daylight Felix Heinsolt took Louisa home. She had a job somewhere in town and she claimed she'd never make it if she took even one more drink. Felix had an appointment with somebody about a job, so he was elected escort.

Then we parked the other two girls in a spare bedroom and the boys and I took a couple of nightcaps and corked off. I was still asleep when the cops came knocking at the door, scaring Alice half out of her mind.

She woke me, and she was rolling her eyes like they were on ball bearings. She said: "Mr. John, it's the law. It's the Chief, hisself. He wants to talk to you right now."

I said: "What have you been doing, Alice?"

"'Fore the Lord, Mr. John, just nothing. Just nothing at all."

"All right. Then what's Edgar been doing?'

"That boy, when you let him go home last night, he go to bed. He was sneaking one out of the bottle now and then, he tell me, and he just go back to his room just drunker than a fool."

I remembered faintly that I'd told Edgar he could have a short one now and then, so this checked. I chased Alice out and put on a dressing robe and decided against waking the boys. I've got two double beds in this bedroom, and both of them were in the other, snoring away to beat the band.

And then went down to talk to the Chief. I'd worked with him on a couple of cases—showing him up on one and taking it on the chin on another, so I wasn't fretting much about him getting tough with me.

This even if the local police rarely see eye to eye with a guy that's carrying a private license.

## CHAPTER II

### Party Kill?

THE old boy and the uniformed man that drives for him were in the front room, looking around with interest at the signs of the party of the night before. Alice apparently had decided to clean the kitchen first, and so there were plenty of signs, too.

There were dirty glasses on the floor and on every stand and table. Some broken glass as well, and I remembered that Harry Connors had tried to do a parlor trick—balancing a full highball glass on his tipped back forehead, and that the trick hadn't worked out very well. And that Harry had tried it half a dozen times, before deciding he was too tight to make it.

Every ash tray in the place was overflowing and there were empty whiskey bottles in the fireplace. That had been my idea—I'd been too wobbly to go outside and put 'em in the trashcan.

The floor was sticky with spilled drinks, and the ants had come in from under the front door to benefit by this.

I said: "Hiya, Chief!" and then called: "Alice!"

She came from the kitchen and I said: "Find me a drink for my hangover, will you, Alice? Make it with power—I need it."

She rolled her eyes at the chief and went out without even answering me. But there's no law against taking a drink in your own house, whether the Chief of Police is visiting you or not, so I knew I'd get my pick-up if there was a drink left in the place.

The chief said: "You must have really pitched a beaut last night, eh, Ryan?" and his driver grinned like it was a heavy joke.

I said: "From all I can remember, a good time was had by all. My head feels like it's blowing up."

"You say by all. Who all d'ya mean?"

I counted 'em off for him. "There were two boys from the Army Air Corps. They're visiting me—they're asleep yet. There was a boy who'd been discharged from the same outfit—a kid named Felix Heinsolt. A medical discharge—he made too many trips and didn't work out of his combat fatigue, or so I understand."

"What about women?"

**Somebody had liked her well enough to cut her throat, and that didn't make a hangover any easier to take.**

"Three of them. And I can't tell you their last names because I don't know 'em. One named Mary, one named Louisa, and one named Betty May."

"Where'd you pick the girls up?"

"Heinsolt brought them out. Are you trying to stick me on a morals charge, Chief? Because, if you are, you'll find Mary and Betty May, in my spare bedroom by themselves, and the two boys in my own bedroom. And you know I haven't neighbors near enough here to be bothered by the noise we made."

"What about this other girl? This Louisa?"

"Heinsolt took her home about six or six-thirty, I'd say. It was just at daylight, if that helps."

Alice came in with a drink then for me,

and she'd made it in a zombie glass instead of a regulation highball one.

The first holds around fourteen ounces and the second either four or five, so I could see that Alice appreciated my need.

The chief waited until she'd left, then came at me again. "How drunk was this girl when he took her home?"

I waved around the room and said: "Figure it for yourself. She was taking her share."

"And Heinsolt?"

"About the same. The girl had to go to work this morning and Heinsolt had to see about going to work."

"And the rest of you?"

"Plenty loaded, Chief. But we weren't off the premises at any time, so I can't see where anybody was hurt."

He said: "You haven't seen Louisa this morning, Ryan. She was plenty hurt, unless having your throat cut from ear to ear is any easy way out."

That didn't make my hangover any easier to take.

The girl had been a nice big wench and I'd liked her fine.

I WENT down with the chief and left the boys and Mary and Betty May taking something for what ailed them. Bromo for Mary, a prairie oyster for Betty May, and whiskey for the boys. The boys looked fresh as daisies but the girls looked like the latter end of a misspent life.

The chief had questioned both girls about Louisa, but neither could tell him much about her. They'd met her like I had, on a party, and while they knew where she lived and worked, and the bars that got most of her patronage, that was about all they did know.

They couldn't even get together on where she'd originally came from, with Betty May holding out for Boston and Mary insisting she was from Hartford.

On the way to town the chief told me they'd picked up Heinsolt for questioning, but that they were going to let him go that morning.

He said: "The guy's story checks with yours. He says he took the girl to the rooming house where she stays and said good-by to her at the door—that he didn't even go in with her. And that checks, too. The landlady had a toothache that kept her up all night, and she was looking out the window and backs up the lad's story. And he claims she wasn't his girl and the landlady says that this morning was the first time she ever laid eyes on him. We haven't a reason to hold him."

"Where was she killed?"

"Her own room. This landlady went in to wake her up in time to go to work and found her. The old sister fainted, but as soon as she snapped out of it she called in. I didn't blame her much for fainting—you'll see for yourself."

And I saw for myself.

The girl was on the bed and as near as I could remember, she was wearing the same clothes as she was on the party. Neat but nothing expensive. Her head was about half off and she'd been a big healthy girl with lots of blood to lose—and she'd lost it.

She was covered with it to the waist, and the bed itself was soaked. Brown and gummy and with a sickening smell.

There was a bruise on her mouth and I didn't need the chief's explanation to know what had caused it.

He said: "The guy held her down with a hand over her mouth and used the knife with the other. He must have been husky, too. The girl would certainly be trying to fight him away."

"She wasn't in the best shape to put up a battle, Chief. Not when I saw her last. Where'd she work?"

"At the Tavern . . . you know it."

I said I knew it. A place that sold beer and wine and no hard liquor—really a restaurant, even if not a good one.

"She was supposed to go on shift at ten this morning, and the landlady was calling her at a little after nine."

"How'd you know she'd had Heinsolt bring her home?"

"She had his name and address in her purse. It was written on the back of a letter she only got yesterday, so he seemed a good man to look up."

"Was he asleep?"

"Dead to the world. We just about had to break down the door to wake him."

I SAID: "You shouldn't have much trouble with this one, Chief. It might be somebody here in the house that she'd played around with. If not, you should be able to find who her boy friends were by asking at the Tavern. The other girls there should know."

"You don't know these girls, Ryan," he said gloomily. "It's a different man every night for most of them. They get acquainted with a guy while they're on the job, and the guy meets 'em after work, at some bar. They're down here for a good time and do just enough work to keep themselves going. In the last month I bet she's dated twenty men."

"She seemed all right last night."

"Was she going for this Heinsolt?"

"She was not. She was making a play for one of the boys at my place. The one named Joe Almon."

"Could he have followed her this morning?"

"Lord, no. I was sleeping in the same room with him and his partner was in bed with him."

"How'd the girl and Heinsolt get to town. Did they have a car?"

That was something I hadn't thought of. I hadn't seen one parked in my driveway, though, so I'd supposed they'd come out in a cab.

I said: "That's something you can ask the guy before you turn him loose. And the girls at my house would know how they got there."

And that was about the size of it. I went down to the station with the chief, while he released young Heinsolt, and I took the guy back with me to the house.

He needed a job and the money it would bring, there was no question of that. I knew that by looking at his clothes. But he was in no shape to job-hunt that day —the guy needed a drink more than anything else in the world.

I hadn't known it but the chief had taken him up, too, and shown him what was left of Louisa. And between that and his hangover he was in pretty poor shape.

"They were both high when they left, and that was the last I saw of them."

THE party had started again, even if everybody there at the house was crying in their drinks. Or maybe it should be called a wake. They'd drafted Edgar again as barman, because Alice was already deep in her cooking, and even Edgar was feeling bad about the thing.

He'd keep saying: "That poor little girl! That poor little thing!" everytime that he brought in another round of drinks, and he was bringing them in so fast he was talking himself hoarse.

Everybody gathered around Felix Heinsolt and myself to get details on the business, and what we had to tell them didn't slow up the drinking one bit. About all Felix could talk about was how Louisa had been butchered and about all I could talk about was how lucky he'd been that the landlady at her place had happened to be up with a toothache.

About then we ran out of liquor and Joe Almon volunteered to walk to the nearest phone, call a cab from there, and go into town and replenish the stock.

And when I tried to pay him for it, Harry Connors got indignant and said it was bad enough to impose on my hospitality, without making me pay for the liquor they were drinking.

He was back at the house in less than an hour with it.

The next one to leave was Felix Heinsolt and I didn't like the way he did it. He took me to the side and told me he had a date, but that he'd rather I didn't say anything about it.

I said: "Say anything about it to who? Harry? Or the girls?"

"Well, to anybody," he said.

"You mean the cops?"

"Well, yes."

I said: "Laddy boy, it's your neck you're trifling with, but I'll give you a piece of advice for free. After all, the chief knows, or thinks he knows, that you were coming out here with me, and thinks he knows where he can put his finger on you if he wants you. It's just to stick around. The cops don't like any kind of a killer, anyway, and when it's a girl that's got it, they go a little rabid. Get the thought?"

"It's really a date, Ryan."

"It's you for it, laddy boy."

"It's the kind of date I can't tell you about. I'm sorry."

I told him that was the hell of it—that

he was liable to be plenty sorry if the chief thought he was cutting any corners. He'd better watch himself.

But he left, anyway, and the rest of us kept on with the brawl. The girls didn't go home until the next morning, but they behaved like little ladies—even if drunken little ladies—so I couldn't see what harm they did.

## CHAPTER III

### Missing and Maimed

THE boys slept most of the day, but after they finally did get up—and after they'd eaten a whale of a breakfast that Alice made for them—we three decided to go downtown and see what was doing.

And by that time I was both envious and jealous of them. Both of them would get just pie-eyed the night before and would wake up in the morning as happy as larks. With a couple of drinks under their belts they wouldn't show a sign of wear and tear.

Even in my best days I couldn't do that, and the way the boys were practically forcing me to hit it up with them, I was feeling years older every day. But it wouldn't have been decent to refuse to drink with guests so I tried to bear up with it.

I didn't blame the boys. They were trying to forget a lot of things they'd seen and would see again when they were called back on duty.

We were all in the Palace Bar when Connors said: "Jiggers! The cops!"

Of course grinning about it.

It was the chief and his driver again. And the chief didn't act happy about us at all.

He said: "I was just out to your place, Ryan. Your maid told me you were in town."

"It was getting monotonous out there, Chief."

He looked as though he didn't believe that and said from the party, or parties, that had been going on, he wouldn't think we'd had a dull moment.

I told him we'd also just about run out of drinking liquor and had to get a new supply laid in.

That was better—he looked as though that was a better story.

He said: "Where's young Heinsolt, Ryan?"

"He left last night, about eight."

"Where did he go?"

"That I don't know."

"I don't like that. I supposed he'd stay on with you."

"I told him it was a fool move."

He repeated: "I don't like that."

And then asked Connors and Almon if they had any idea where their friend had been heading for the night before. Connors didn't have any idea at all, but Almon thought he might have been going to see the man about the same job he'd been talking about.

He said: "He needs it, Chief. When he's got money he throws it around, so he never has any to throw, if you know what I mean. And I don't think he's worked since he was discharged. I guess a man can live on a pension, but it's not the kind of living Heinsolt cares for."

THE chief snorted and told us that if we saw him to tell him to get in touch with him at the station. And I asked if there was anything new in the business and he just the same as told me to tend my own affairs.

Then he said: "And the girls?"

"Left this morning."

"What time?"

"About eight. Nothing's happened to one of them, has it?"

"What makes you think that anything would?"

Both the boys laughed and Connors said: "If they try to take drink for drink with us, the way they've been doing, something will happen to them. They'll go to a sanitarium."

The chief said he wasn't joking—or that if he was, he was kidding on the square.

I said: "As far as we know, Chief, there's no reason why anything should happen to them. But then, none of us knew any reason for anything happening to that other poor girl."

He took me over to the side then. He said: "I'm getting along a little on that, Ryan. We think she was killed by a dark man, somewhere in his early thirties, and dressed in rough clothes. A laborer's clothes. It's this much to go on. We checked everybody in that rooming house and two people saw a man answering that description in the halls that morning. He doesn't live there, we know that."

"You could pick up two hundred men in this town that would fill that bill. There's extra work at the Port, for one. The crops are starting to come in for another. It could be a seaman, for that matter. There are plenty of boats docking here these days."

"That's the hell of it. But both these people think they could identify the man, if we pick him up."

"That big 'if' again."

He growled: "Dammit, Ryan, I'm doing my best. I don't like a girl-killer any more than you. I didn't know this girl or anything like that, but I'm after her killer just as hard as if the girl had been a pal of my own daughter's."

I thought he didn't have a Chinaman's chance of picking up the killer with a description as vague as the one he'd given me, but I kept my mouth shut about it. He was sore enough then.

And then he gave me something else to think about. He said: "I'm a little worried about the two that are left. Maybe this killer will think they know something and take them in turn."

"They don't know anything, Chief. I'm sure of that."

He said: "I'm not!" and left—and left me wondering what he'd found out that he was so proud of.

Because he was certainly keeping something to himself.

Right after that the boys and I collected more hootch and headed for home again.

HEINSOLT showed up at two that morning—the first morning we'd decided to go to bed early and get a bit of rest. We were taking the last nightcap when he gave us the rap on the door—and for a moment, after I'd let him in, I didn't know him.

Both eyes were black, one closed all the way, and his face looked like he'd coasted down a hill on it. Cut all to pieces. He was bent over, holding one arm around his ribs and the other around his belly, and he'd been hit on the Adam's apple so hard he could barely whisper.

His clothes looked like somebody had tried to tear them off him. Both knees out of his pants—one coat sleeve almost missing, and the outfit ripped all over in a general way. And he'd been rolling in the mud with it, too.

I said: "My Lord, man! What hit you? A truck?"

Connors got to first principles fast. He said: "Sit down, Felix. Here's a drink. Tell us who did it and we'll take him apart for you."

And explained to me: "The guy's in no shape to do battle. That's why they gave him a discharge."

Felix took the drink and whispered: "It's a private matter, Harry. I'll be all right."

I'd probably seen more rough and tumble stuff than either of the boys and I wasn't so sure. That arm around his ribs meant some of them were kicked in, I thought. And the way he wheezed meant the same thing. And if a guy gets booted in the mid-section a few times it can cause him a lot of damage.

The doctors call it internal injuries.

As far as his face was concerned, I wasn't worried about that. His nose was broken if the way it was swollen indicated anything, but it could be set and probably would come out with nothing more than a hump on it. He'd lost some teeth but he could get more from a dentist.

I said: "Get the clothes off him, boys. If it's what I think, somebody will have to go for a doctor."

Almon said he knew something about first aid, but the minute they got him stripped to the waist I knew the guy needed more than that.

I said: "Let's get him over on the couch. If the doctor don't want him to go to the hospital, we can move him to the spare room afterward. He's got two broken ribs on one side and three on the other. And that belly of his is black and blue."

It was a warm night but I got the poor guy covered, regardless. Broken ribs run into pneumonia too many times, and keeping him warm would help the shock the beating certainly had given him. Almon started for the doctor and Connors and I stayed and played nurse, with Connors arguing that whiskey was the best thing in the world to give him and me arguing the opposite.

He got no whiskey—he'd had one stiff drink and I thought that was plenty until the doctor got there.

But that didn't keep Connors and me from taking a couple.

THE doctor was tall, raw-boned, and had the manners of a pig. He was snarling at Almon as he came in the door.

He was saying: "Wake a busy man up at this hour of night, to look at a guy that gets hurt on what must be a drunken party."

I said: "He's over here, Doctor, and he wasn't on this party."

Then the guy got a look at Heinsolt and cut his big mouth then and there. He stripped him and found a few more bruises that we'd overlooked—he'd been kicked in foul territory a couple of times—and he went into action like any doctor would, in a case like that.

I got him hot water and he washed him up and plastered him up and ended by winding about a hundred yards of tape around the poor guy's chest. He also said that he wouldn't advise moving him until the morning, if then, and that he'd be out at that time.

And then he gave us the popper. He said: "Of course I'll have to report this to the police, at once. That's the law."

I said nothing but Connors did. Just: "I thought that was in case of gunshot wounds or things like that."

The medico said severely: "This man has been beaten within an inch of his life. In fact, if internal injuries develop, and there's a very good possibility of just that, I may not be able to save him. The police will naturally be interested in such a matter."

I said: "It didn't happen here, Doctor. As I don't doubt Captain Almon told you, he staggered up to the door with just strength enough left to knock."

"I'm not doubting the captain's word. The police will undoubtedly find where this beating took place."

"You've got more faith in them than I have, Doctor."

He snorted at me for that one. "The man is unconscious now, from the sedative I gave him, naturally. But when he regains consciousness he certainly will be able to tell the officers how this happened."

"He said it was a private matter, Doctor. We gave him a drink and then put him on the couch, and then he passed out."

"Coma, naturally. I wouldn't be surprised if he has a concussion, as well as his other injuries."

I'd thought right along that Heinsolt had been playing possum, just so he wouldn't have to answer any questions Connors and I might have asked him, but I didn't offer the theory.

The doctor looked around, sneered at the evidence of our night's drinking, and then left, and I decided that his bedside manners were something atrocious.

But then, maybe some of the customers like their doctors rough and tough.

Almon said: "I had a hell of a time getting the guy out of bed. I guess he thinks we should bury our own dead."

I said: "I'll get something to cover him up properly and then let's call it a night. Hell, the night's over—it's after five."

Both boys then suggested we sit up and wait for the doctor to come back, at ten the next morning, but I vetoed that.

It had been a hard day for me and I had a notion the next day would be harder. I wasn't looking forward to talking with the chief one bit.

## CHAPTER IV

### No Story

THE cops woke me before I'd been in bed more than an hour, but it was just two of the boys in a squad car. Just checking on what the doctor had told them. They were both nice guys and I didn't have any trouble with

The landlady saw her and fainted, so there was some time gone there.

them at all, though I had to wake the boys and have them verify the facts.

I finished with: "The chief won't like this much, I'm afraid. He's been trying to find this fellow all day long. Or at least from afternoon on."

One of the boys was quiet and let the other do all the talking. The loud one said: "What did he want with him? The guy hot?"

I said I didn't know that—that the chief had questioned Heinsolt once because he'd taken a girl named Louisa home from this very house, but that he'd turned him loose. With apparently a clear bill of health.

The loud one said thoughtfully: "That would be Louisa Collins, Jack. The one that got her throat slit."

Jack said: "Yeah!"

And that was all Jack did say until they left a few minutes later. He took a drink with us—they both did—but Jack just hoisted his glass in salute, bowed, and took it down.

One of the silent kind who're supposed to be deep thinkers but who usually keep their mouths shut because they can't think of anything to say that makes sense.

The next thing that woke me was Alice, singing *Happy Days Are Here Again,* out in the kitchen, and I decided she had poor taste in songs.

Of course she probably didn't know we had a half-dead man parked on the front room couch at that time.

Then I decided I'd make a better impression as a householder if I had her clean up the front room a bit, before the doctor got there, and went down to suggest it to her.

She was making coffee so I had a couple of cups of that and by that time the boys were up and with us. Alice tip-toed around the front room, trying not to waken Felix Heinsolt, but the shot in the arm the doctor had given him had him sleeping like a log. She could have torn down the house and he wouldn't have known it.

The next was the chief and his driver—I'll always think the guy had never learned to drive a car, and right after them the doctor. And the doctor raised hell with the chief, because the chief suggested he try to wake Heinsolt up.

He said: "Sleep is the best medicine for the man at this time. I wouldn't care to take the responsibility of arousing him, sir. If the man isn't in better condition than last night I intend to take him to the hospital, and I'll assure you, sir, that once there he won't be questioned until he's strong enough to stand it."

The chief said, and he wasn't trying to be funny: "Well, you're the doctor, I guess."

The doctor assured him icily that he was just that and that the injured man was under his care. By that time even Alice, who was standing in the kitchen doorway, was snickering, and the rest of us were laughing out loud.

The chief said he'd be keeping in touch with us and left, with even his driver grinning, and the doctor showed he wasn't such a bad egg after all.

He said: "I never lose an opportunity to put an officer in his place. Servants of the people, bah! Give most of them a badge and they think they own the people, not work for them. They even gave me a ticket once, damn 'em."

"What did you do with it, Doctor," Almon asked.

The doctor glared and said: "Why, tore it up, of course."

He left in turn, after telling us to let him know immediately when Heinsolt woke up, and after cautioning us not to make any noise that would disturb him. He'd given the poor guy enough morphine the night before to knock out an elephant though, so all we did was go out to the sun porch.

And Heinsolt didn't come back to life until after four that afternoon.

THE chief was up again that afternoon and this time he meant business. The doctor had a stethoscope on Heinsolt's chest when the chief walked in, but in spite of him looking up and frowning, the chief came in anyway.

He said to me: "I warned you, Ryan. I warned you."

The doctor said: "Quiet please."

The chief made an impatient gesture. "Quiet, hell! What time did that man get here last night? Be right on this now."

"At two, Chief. We were going to bed early and were taking the last drink. That's how I'm so sure."

He looked at Connors and Almon and they both nodded.

He looked regretful then and said, as if to himself: "Then he's out, dammit."

The doctor said: "I'll have to ask you to be more quiet, sir. I cannot work on this man in the midst of confusion and din."

"I'm working, too, Doctor," the chief said. "I've got a murder on my hands."

Both Connors and Almon said: "Murder!" as though they didn't believe it, but I believed it, all right. That crack of his about warning me—the first thing he'd said when he came in, meant murder to me.

I said: "Which one of the girls, Chief?"

He was excited or he wouldn't have tried as stupid a trick on me as he did then. He said: "How'd you know it was one of the girls, Ryan?"

"You warned me that you thought they'd be in danger. You didn't warn me about anyone else."

"I guess that's right."

"Which girl?"

"Mary Ogden."

I locked at Harry Connors and saw him flinch as though he'd been hit. I guess he really had liked the kid.

I asked: "How?"

"Same way. A knife and in the throat."

"When?"

"The doctor thinks about six this morning."

The doctor working on Heinsolt looked up again and said: "It couldn't have been this man, sir. I worked on him last night, before five, and I can swear he was in no condition to commit murder. He was under a heavy opiate, for one thing. And for another, he was in no physical shape to leave this house. In fact, I'd have had him removed to a hospital at that time, if I hadn't believed him in no shape to stand the ambulance ride."

I asked: "It happen like the other? She live alone?"

"In a small cottage. With her mother."

"Did her mother hear anything?"

"She saw the man that did it, but didn't realize there was anything wrong. They had separate bedrooms, the mother's in front, and she happened to hear a noise and looked out her open window. She saw a man getting into a car parked just down the street, but she thought nothing of it and went back to sleep. But the people living where the car was parked tell me they had no company last night or this morning and didn't hear a thing. The girl's mother admits she didn't even pay enough attention to it to note the time."

"And after her daughter's girl friend had just been killed?"

The chief said, with disgust: "She isn't too bright, Ryan. And she was sleepy. She admitted she'd gone to bed more than half tanked up."

"You'd better put a police guard on the third girl, Chief. Or she'll be next."

"I've got one on her now. Only she doesn't know it. What I want to know is why these girls that are being murdered, are the ones that have been to parties in your house? Tell me that."

I said I'd be glad to if I knew the reason. He stared over at Heinsolt, who was awake but woozy, and said he'd damned soon find out how the guy'd been hurt, anyway.

And the doctor said: "You can talk with him, sir, but not for long. The man's in no shape to stand prolonged questioning. I mean it, sir."

"I just want to know where he got the beating and who gave it to him. That's all. Two simple questions."

HEINSOLT was conscious enough to understand what was going on, at least. And his voice had come back enough that he could croak instead of whisper.

He said: "It was three strangers, Chief. I was taking a shortcut through an alley and they followed me and tried to roll me. I fought back and they gave me the boots."

"How'd you get out here? This is two miles or more from the center of town."

"Walked."

"In your shape?"

"I made it, Chief."

"Identify the men?"

"It was dark—I couldn't see them hardly at all."

"That's all you can tell me?"

"That's all."

The doctor said: "I think that will be about all he can stand for now, sir. Undoubtedly, walking that distance complicated his injuries."

"I don't see how he did it."

"Nor I, sir."

Heinsolt's face was black and green and purple, that is, the part that wasn't covered with tape, but he managed to grin and show where he'd lost a couple of front teeth.

He said: "I'm a tough baby, even if they did heave me out of the Army because I couldn't take it."

I looked at Connors and saw him shake his head at Almon. They knew and I knew that Heinsolt was lying in what was left of his teeth. But it was also Heinsolt's business if he wanted to keep it that way—certainly not ours. If he wanted to take a beating like that and keep quiet about it it was his privilege, or so we thought.

I HAD ideas and they weren't flattering to the lad. I'd decided he'd mixed up with some tough bunch and that he'd got out of line and they'd caught up with him and worked him over. I knew he'd been out of money—that he was a little bitter about getting a medical discharge—

and the thought was a logical one. But at the same time he'd been a guest in my house, was a guest at the time, and I wasn't going to pop off to the Chief of Police with a theory that had no backing.

He'd insisted on leaving the party two evenings before then, even though he knew it would cause him trouble with the cops. I didn't like that, and it checked in with my notion about being mixed up on some crooked deal. The cops had been looking for him the day before—the day he got his beating, and they hadn't found him. That could mean he was hiding out—and the average good citizen don't have to stash himself away like that.

But I figured I'd protect him as much as I could, as long as he was in my house—and this though I'd never liked the guy very much.

I'd liked both the other boys the minute I saw them, but Heinsolt had grated on me in some way.

The chief told Heinsolt to keep in touch with him and then the doctor had his say.

It was: "Stay right here on your back, young man. I'll stop every day and see how you're getting along. I realize you're in pain and I'm leaving sedatives for you to take when it becomes too much for you, but if the pain increases suddenly, you are to call me at once. Do you understand?"

He said: "Yes, Doctor. You think maybe they kicked my guts loose. That it?"

"That's a way of putting it, I suppose."

"Okay."

The doctor started for his car and I followed him to it. I said: "How is he, actually?"

"It's too soon to tell, sir. He seems to be progressing all right, however. It sometimes takes a week or more for internal injuries to develop, you understand."

"We'll take care of him."

"I could send a nurse, I suppose, but they're hard to find these days. Those that are left are working night and day."

"Sure. We'll look after him."

He got in his car and I added: "And Doctor! His friend, Captain Connors, is standing good for his bill."

He again proved he was a pretty good guy. He said indignantly: "In a case like this there'll be no bill. A doctor has a certain amount of charity work, sir—and a returned veteran is certainly entitled to his share of it. And any man with the courage this boy has shown is doubly entitled to it. Good day, sir."

And off he went in a cloud of dust—I live on an unpaved street.

## CHAPTER V

### Killer's End

ALICE was alone with Heinsolt when he got it. The boys and I had gone out to the beach, to see if we could get any fish from the surf, knowing that Alice would look after the guy as well or better than we could, and when we got back it was all over, with the house full of cops and Alice having hysterics in the kitchen.

At that, she'd kept her head long enough to run for a phone and call the cops, but when she got back and got thinking it over it got her down.

The killer had had an easy time of it. He'd just walked in the door without knocking, gone over to Heinsolt, and went to work with his knife. Heinsolt, poor guy, had been asleep, and probably never knew he even was in danger.

Alice saw it all. She'd heard the front screen slam as the killer let it go behind him, and she'd got to the kitchen door in time to see the guy do the job. She'd ducked back out of sight then, which was probably lucky for her, and had hidden in the downstairs bathroom.

It was the one room she knew she could lock.

And she could and did give the chief the first really honest description of the man, although he had to wait until I got damned near a quart of whiskey down her to get her out of the shape she was in.

She said: "He's a middle size man, mista officer. Maybe as big as the captain."

Here she pointed to Almon, who probably went around a hundred and sixty.

"He was black, 'most as black as me. Only not a colored man, mista officer. But not a white man, neither. He had a knife,

He could just whisper, and the way he was bent over, I knew at least one of his ribs was broken.

I swear, as long as the big carving knife and it was as sharp as a razor."

The chief asked her just how long the knife really was, at this point, and she made motions with her hands that indicated a blade probably six inches long. But she insisted it was a sharp as a razor and nobody argued the point. Heinsolt's throat proved that. There was no sign of torn tissue and that always goes with a dull blade. Instead the edges of the wound were cut as clean as a restaurant cook takes off a slab of beef from a roast.

She said: "And he was a dirty man, mista officer. He had whiskers clean up to here."

Here she held both palms well up on her cheekbones.

"And I could see the dirt right under them whiskers, and his teeth, they was sort of yellow. He was grinning when he cut poor Mr. Felix's throat—yassuh, that man was acting like he was having fun."

"How was he dressed, Alice?" I asked.

"Like in clothes no decent colored man'd get into. Dirty. Dirty shirt, dirty pants, and he didn't wear no coat. He had an ol' black hat on, if you calls a thing like that a hat."

"What color pants and shirt?"

"Blue pants and sort of greenish shirt."

"See his eyes?"

"Yassuh, Mr. John. He cock-eyed. Them eyes of his they didn't match up."

"What color whiskers? Black, too?"

"Black as me, Mr. John—black as me."

As Alice is as black as anybody could be this was good enough.

I said: "Well, you've got something there, anyway, Chief. He may change his clothes and probably will. He'll probably go home and dress up in something from the better stores. And he'll lose the whiskers. But how in the hell he can change his cock-eyes, I don't know."

"Unless he was faking it."

"Why would he fake it? He thought he was alone with Heinsolt. If he'd thought Alice was seeing him in action, he'd have done for her, too."

THE chief admitted that a man that had used a knife on three people, certainly wouldn't be likely to stop at a fourth. Then he took Alice over the whole thing again, and got just slightly exaggerated answers, which was something he could expect. The longer she thought about it and the more times she told about it, the better the story would be.

Then he brought out the point I couldn't understand again. He said: "All right, here's another guest of yours killed, Ryan. What's the reason. I appreciate that you and Captain Connors and Captain Almon have perfect alibis for this, as well as for the other two murders. But there's reason behind all this—this killer can't just be trying to wipe out everybody that comes to your house. He must have been watching and seen the three of you start out. Then ducked in and done the job. I don't understand why he didn't see the maid."

Alice said: "I wasn't out this house, mista officer, from the time I come to work this morning, 'til the time that man leaves. Mr. John, he tell me to look aftuh that po' man just like he belong to me and I was doing jes' that."

I said: "That explains it, Chief. He didn't start casing the place until after she'd come to work. He wouldn't see her unless she was out in the yard for some reason—or unless he came up and peeked through a window. And he'd be taking more of a chance doing the peeping business than he would just walking in. Somebody going by in a car would get suspicious if they saw a Peeping Tom in action, where they wouldn't think anything at all of a man walking in through a door."

"Neither you nor the boy wear the kind of clothes this man was wearing. He'd stick out in this neighborhood like a sore thumb."

"Nuts! Anybody would think he was doing some sort of work around the place."

"Did Heinsolt have any money?"

"He didn't have when you had him down to the station for questioning, did he? There was none in his clothes, when he came back after the beating."

That about ended it. The Coroner came and took a look and they took the body away in the hearse they use as a dead wagon in this town. And then the chief and his crew left, after again assuring me he had

a police guard on Betty May, although she didn't know it.

And while I'd never particularly liked the guy, I started feeling like a murderer myself, for going away and leaving him with just Alice to look after him.

But then I had no reason to expect anything like that. I'd suspected him of being mixed up with a gang of toughies, but this certainly wasn't any of their work if it was. I put the beating he'd taken down to them and that was all.

This killer was the same who'd killed the girls. It was all too much for me—and I gathered too much for the chief.

I DON'T usually carry to gun unless I'm on a job that demands one, but I started doing just that. The boys couldn't. They were on leave and the Army don't believe in side arms unless the soldier's on active duty.

However, I noticed that they seemed to stick even closer together, and that they both had taken to watching over their shoulders.

And I got a surprise there, at that. I'd have thought Connors would have taken the mess easier than Almon, but it was the other way round. I'd picked Connors as the cooler of the two, but he was as fidgety as a cat and Almon took it pretty well in his stride.

Jose Ortega

I thought it went to prove I was again wrong on snap judgment, but I wasn't so sure about it when I shot the killer.

And this happened the following night.

In the first place, Edgar quit for the duration. The duration of the trouble, that is.

He said: "Mr. John, I is willing to work for you and you knows I work hard."

If he'd been under oath, right then, I could have had him charged for perjury.

He went on with: "But I just can't stand this here killing people around this place. As soon as them policemen catch the man that's doing all this, then I comes back to work. Until then I'm a-going out to the Port and get me a job doing hard labor."

That was all right. He was doing a dollar and a half's worth of work a day and getting paid five dollars for it, so I thought I could well afford his loss.

Then Alice refused to go home at night, as she'd been doing. Her argument was that this man she'd seen kill poor Heinsolt, would do the same for her, just as soon as he found out she'd seen the murder committed.

A pretty good argument, too. The cops had kept the fact that she was a witness out of the papers, but they talk and she talked, and there was a very good chance of the gossip getting back to the killer.

She said: "I jus' won't do it, Mr. John. That man he laying for me sure as you're born. Now with Edgar quitting and all I could stay the nights in his room and he couldn't get at me."

"How d'ya figure that, Alice?"

She laughed merrily. "Mr. John, d'ya think that man fool enough to monkey around with your folks? What with you being a sort of policeman? I'd be as safe there as if I was in God's own pocket."

It was a nice compliment, even if not merited.

I said: "What about Heinsolt? *He* wasn't safe."

"He wasn't working for you, Mr. John. That's what makes the difference."

I told her to go ahead and take Edgar's room if that's the way she felt about it. And

the first night in her new room the killer made a try for her and missed.

And I didn't.

THE whole thing was an accident on my part. There was a full moon, and Joe Almon, who was as full, went out wandering around the lawn and decided this moon was a sight that Connors and I should see. We weren't particularly interested, but to humor him we joined him. And while I stood there looking at the moon and slapping mosquitoes right and left, I happened to look down the grounds by the servant's little house.

Just as I did I saw the shadow of something move at the side of the place, and I yanked out the gun and headed that way as fast as I could go. It wasn't more than fifty yards away, so I got there in a hell of a hurry.

And the funny thing was I didn't expect trouble. I thought I was up against a man who depended on a knife, and in that moonlight I knew I could cut down any knife man in the world before he could get to me. I didn't even think of the man possibly having a gun as well as a blade.

So when he turned loose at me when I was maybe twenty yards from him it really stopped me in my tracks.

He shot once and before I could come to a stop, again. But he must have been rattled or a poor pistol shooter because he missed me both times. And I saw him as a hazy blur against some ornamental shrubbery I'd paid extra for.

I've shot the gun I use a lot and in time you get used to the feel of it in your hand. If it fits, and I've seen to it that mine does, it lines up naturally. You can't do the accurate shooting with it as you can when you can see the sights, but it's surprising how well you can do at night.

I shot the guy three times and the last two caught him going down. I could see that dim blur go to the ground with the first one, but I let the other two go as a safety measure. And another thing. I knew who I was shooting at and I thought I might as well save the State the expense of a murder trial.

I went up to him easy, in case he still had enough left in him to still shoot, and I heard both the boys dashing up behind me.

And Almon was shouting: "Make sure you got him, Ryan! The guy might shoot again."

Connors was bawling: "Hey! Save him! He can tell us what it's all about."

CONNORS could have saved his breath as we found out when we looked the guy over. One slug had torn his throat out—that was probably my first. A man has a tendency to shoot high in the moonlight because of the reflection on the gun barrel. Another one was through his wishbone—as near center as it possibly could be, and the third was quartering through him, breaking one arm, going clear through his body, and lodging in the other arm. I'd tunneled him front and back and from side to side, so he must have twisted as he went down.

I could hear Alice praying at the top of her voice, which surprised me. I'd have expected her to have been screaming, if she hadn't been too scared to make a sound. I called out and told her everything was under control and to go back to sleep, and she called back and told me she'd never sleep another wink in all her born days. Then I asked one of the boys to go back to the house for a flashlight, so that we could see just what we'd got.

It was shadowy under those bushes, and I didn't want to move the man out in the open until the chief saw the scene of action as it was.

We could see that the guy resembled the description Alice had given of Heinsolt's killer in a general way, but we couldn't be sure without more light.

Then Connors brought the light and we saw that we'd been right without a doubt. There was no way, of course, of telling whether he'd been cock-eyed, but he fitted everything but that.

And then we heard the police sirens coming up from town.

My place is well away from neighbors, and the few I have don't seem to mind what I do or have done, but a shooting match was a little too much for them I guess.

Anyway, one or more of them had call the cops.

## CHAPTER VI

### An "Aye" for F.B.I.

THE chief didn't know whether to be happy or sore. And I could understand why he felt undecided. Here was his killer handed to him all wrapped up and deader than mutton. And also, here was the answer to all the mystery, in no shape to talk about it.

And also, here was a citizen, even if he was a private cop, catching his man for him.

He said: "You didn't have to kill him, Ryan."

By that time we were back in the house and having a drink which Alice had served. She'd said she'd never sleep again and she was proving it by acting as barmaid for us.

I said: "Of course I didn't. I could have let him go ahead and butcher my maid. Oh I could have stood there in the bright moonlight and let him keep on shooting at me."

"You could have shot to cripple him."

I laughed and told him a crippled man could still shoot back and probably would. And he admitted he'd have done as I had.

Alice, who was passing the tray around again, said: "Mr. John, he saved my life, that's what he done. I'm going to work for Mr. John for free, the rest of my born days."

I told her I'd remember that next pay day and she looked depressed instead of excited.

I said: "What the hell, Chief! You got your man signed, sealed, and delivered. You still can find out what it's all about. Any guy as handy as that one was with a knife, will have a record. Print him. Take a picture of him. Send them to Washington, and they'll do the rest. If he hasn't got a record in this country he's got one in some other one, and the cops in all countries work together in a case like this. That is, except those countries we're battling."

The police doctor came in then, laughing. He said: "The damnedest thing! You know how that guy was dressed? Practically in rags? Well, he's got on silk underwear. Believe me! Silk underwear! Shorts and shirt. And socks to boot. And by golly they're purple."

I asked: "The socks?"

"All of it. The whole rig."

I said to the chief: "That gives you a cinch. All you've got to do is ask for the record on Silk Pants Louie, or Joe, or Harry. The Silk Pants part will identify him."

It wasn't much of a joke but it was worth another drink.

THE man's name was Jose Ortega—he was a Cuban, and he'd been picked up by the Immigration men half a dozen times for illegal entry into the country. Each time he'd been deported and each time he'd sneaked back in some fashion.

This, the chief got from Washington. They also told him they'd check with Cuba and find what he'd done over there. I had a notion it was plenty. But it still didn't tell us the reason why he'd killed the two girls and Heinsolt, though in a couple of days I got an answer to the last.

The boys had gone to town for some reason and Alice and I were holding the fort alone. Edgar was coming back to work the following week, so he said, and I'd been trying to decide whether to take him back or not. Somebody came to the door and asked if I was Mr. Ryan, and I assured him I was.

And then he palmed a gold badge and showed me a wallet with some other identification. His name was Watson and he was F.B.I. A nice-looking guy, probably in his early thirties, and looking more like a bank teller than a law officer.

He said: "I've been talking with the Chief of Police, Mr. Ryan, and he's suggested you could give us even more help than you already have. That is, if you're willing."

I said I was willing enough but that I didn't know how I'd helped them any.

And when he said: "On the Heinsolt matter." I still didn't know what he was talking about.

I said: "I don't get it. I killed that Ortega guy to keep him from cutting up my maid. She's a good girl and a swell cook, and I'd hate to see her with her throat cut. As far as Heinsolt was concerned, he just happened to stagger in here after he was beaten up. He was friends of the two boys that are staying with me during their leave, that's all. I suppose he thought they could give him a hand. Why Ortega came here and

killed Felix Heinsolt is something I don't know."

He said: "Heinsolt is one of us, Mr. Ryan. He was working undercover here. In some way Ortega found this out; it's the only answer. The beating Heinsolt took was probably given by others in the same crew."

I asked him where the two girls entered into the picture and he said, patiently, that that was what he wanted to find out. That they must have known something that was dangerous to Ortega and his crew. And that he wanted to know what that something was.

I put my neck out then for fair. I said: "Of course I'll help in any way I can. Heinsolt was a bare acquaintance, but he was killed in my house. I see now I should have tried to cripple Ortega intsead of laying him out."

"Nobody would expect that, Mr. Ryan. The chief explained the situation carefully and you took the only course open to you. Ortega was a dangerous man. It would be better, I think, if I tell you what we know, as well as what we suspect."

I admitted I'd probably do better if I had an idea of what it was all about, got Alice to bring us a drink, and then he started.

ORTEGA was a member of the crew of the Cuban ship *Peralta.* It worked strictly on charter, was a converted schooner, and there's plenty of them running in Caribbean waters these days, and was pretty much of a scow. Six men, a mate, and a captain in the crew. It took any cargo it could get and was strictly a tramp ship, working out of any port where it could pick up a load. Watson said: "At present, Mr. Ryan, it's here—has been here for six weeks or more. Presumably waiting for cargo, you understand. We are absolutely certain of what it landed, however. Three men wanted badly by the Cuban police. Two Nazi agents, who we have in custody, though we are not advertising the fact. And one professional smuggler that we'd like to lay our hands on. He's supplied the black market with a lot of silk stockings, that we know. South America still has a stock of things like that. He's brought more or less art treasure in also—we have no way of knowing how much. These things have drifted up from South America you see, and the *Peralta* brings them on their final lap."

"Who'd buy stuff like that in war time?"

Watson laughed, but not as though he'd heard anything funny. He said: "There are still a lot of Nazi sympathizers in this country, Mr. Ryan. Far too many of them. Many of them with money. And there are far too many people who are indifferent. Who think the war is won and buy what they want, regardless of where it comes from. Many of the ranking Nazis are converting stolen assets into cash, thinking money will buy them refuge when Germany goes down."

I said I wouldn't know about that—that my business had always been straight cops-and-robber stuff.

He said: "This is what you can do to help, possibly. The *Peralta* is owned by the captain entirely now. Ortega had a half interest in it, we understand, but with his death it went to his partner, the captain. A Manuel Gomez, and a man as dangerous in his way as was Ortega. Now they have an agent here, who we don't know. We think Heinsolt found out and was killed before he could pass the information on. We think that in some way the two girls knew this man. It's the best explanation for their murders, you see. In all probability the girls didn't realize they had dangerous knowledge—they probably stumbled onto it and didn't know what they'd heard. But Ortega and his crew, and their local agent took no chances and killed them before they had a chance to innocently cause trouble."

I said: "I get the thought. The idea is it centers around my place in some way."

HE NODDED and said that was it exactly. And that he hoped I wouldn't misunderstand. He said: "You've been thoroughly checked, Mr. Ryan. We know that you haven't been here long enough possibly to be the contact man for the *Peralta.* We've been watching that ship for some time and we know the day you came to town and the day you bought this property. Your Northern record has been as thoroughly looked into as well. We want you to go along exactly as you've been doing. This is a vacation place for you; that's why you bought it."

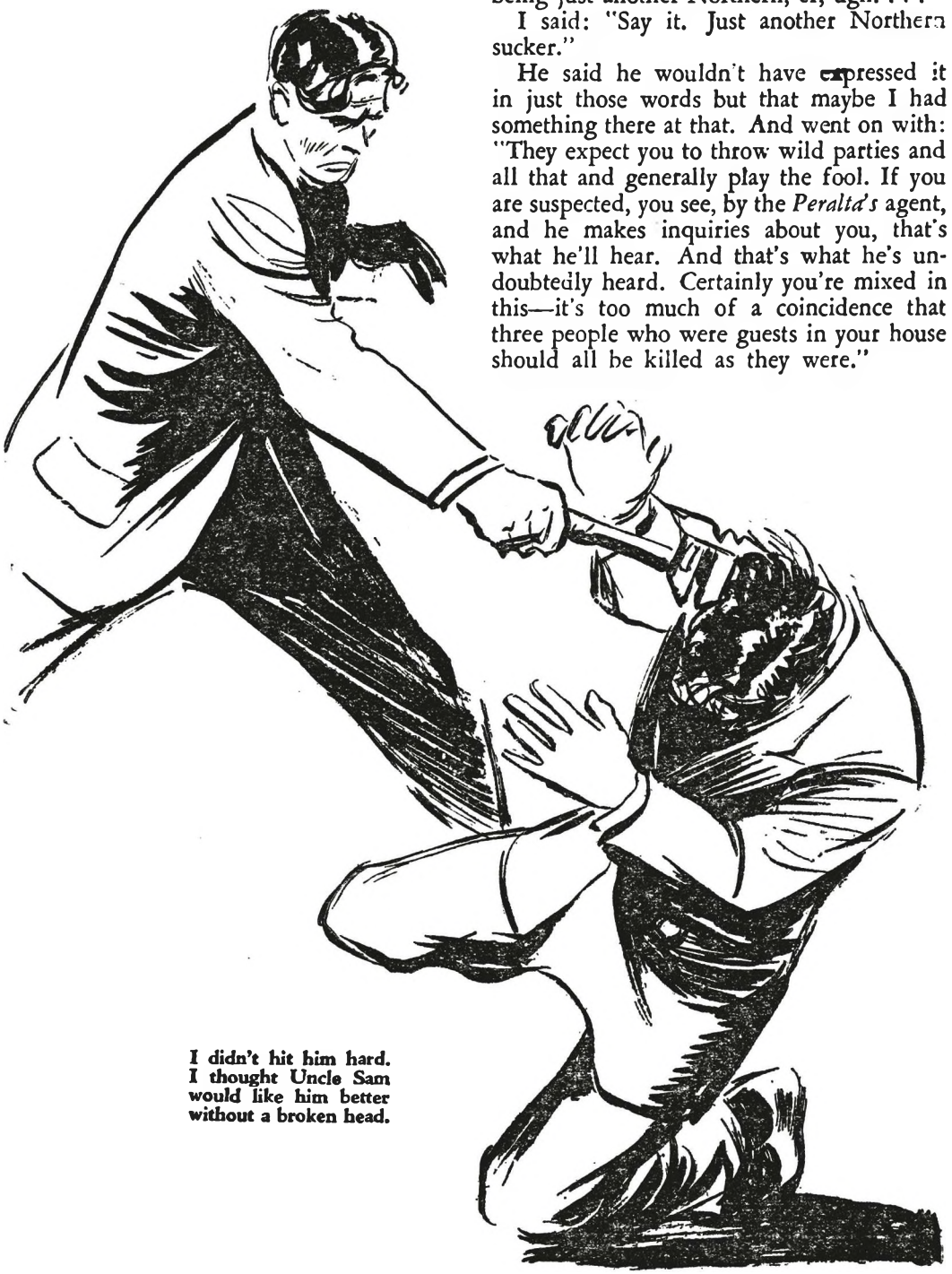
I said, and bitterly: "It's about broken

my back. I paid too much for it and it's costing me a fortune to keep it running. I come down here for a month, to play around, and I have to go North and work six to pay for that one. I call it the Poorhouse when I don't want to swear in front of people."

He laughed and said: "That's just it. These people down here think of you as being just another Northern, er, ugh. . . . "

I said: "Say it. Just another Northern sucker."

He said he wouldn't have expressed it in just those words but that maybe I had something there at that. And went on with: "They expect you to throw wild parties and all that and generally play the fool. If you are suspected, you see, by the *Peralta's* agent, and he makes inquiries about you, that's what he'll hear. And that's what he's undoubtedly heard. Certainly you're mixed in this—it's too much of a coincidence that three people who were guests in your house should all be killed as they were."



**I didn't hit him hard. I thought Uncle Sam would like him better without a broken head.**

I said: "It might be a good idea if I got the boys out then. They might be next on the list."

"That wouldn't be in character, Mr. Ryan. Now would it? They're your guests because you like to have drinking companions, don't you see. If they were in real danger I believe they would already have been taken out of the way."

I said I saw what he meant and that I'd do the best I could. So we had another drink and chatted about how nice it would be after the war and about the local fishing, and he left.

That was probably about an hour before the boys came back, loaded down with a fresh assortment of case goods.

## CHAPTER VII

### Right Off the Boat

ATSON had suggested going on with the partying and we certainly made good on the suggestion. For a week I held open house, but also, during that week I cut down on the liquor for myself. I told Alice, who was doing practically nothing but act as barmaid by then, to cut down on the amount of power she put in my glasses, and I did my best to keep sober and with an eye on what went on.

It was a fair try at that, I'll always think I almost never got real honest-to-goodness drunk before three in the morning, where before I'd reach that stage around eleven.

And I learned exactly nothing, until I got a break in the Palace bar. The same bar where I'd met the boys in the first place.

There was a husky, weatherbeaten-looking guy sitting next to Almon, who in turn was sitting next Connors, who in turn was sitting next me. Almon, who was feeling his liquor more than usual at that hour of the day, happened to jostle this guy's arm, so that the guy spilled about half his glass of beer. It went on the bar instead of on the guy's clothes, so there was no harm done, but Almon apologized all over the place and insisted on buying the guy another glass of beer.

That started it. Inside of half an hour they were as chummy as two kittens, and Almon was buying the guy and the man with him drinks, while they were buying them for us.

Connors didn't like it much, either. He said to me, of course very low: "A couple of Spics; listen to 'em talk."

Personally I've got nothing against decent people of any nationality, with the exception of course, of Germans and Japs.

By and by they introduced themselves. The "My name's Almon" and holding out the hand stuff.

And it turned out that the guy he was talking with and drinking with was none other than Manuel Gomez, the skipper of the *Peralta*. The other one was his mate, Andre Lamonte. This last I took to be French, while Gomez was Spanish. That the *Peralta* ran under Cuban registry didn't mean a thing—there are plenty of American boats registered under the flag of Panama, if it comes to the question.

Then Connors and I met them in turn and it was Captain Almon and Captain Connors and Captain Gomez all over the place.

Gomez said how sorry that his captain just meant being captain of a ship, instead of captain in our so glorious Air Force. Almon, not to be bested, said that his lifelong ambition had always been the command of a seagoing vessel. The two of them were like brothers by then.

It was a break that happens once in a lifetime and I took full advantage of it. I whispered to Connors: "I suppose I've got to do it. They're pals of Almon's, and he'd feel hurt if I didn't."

Connors said: "Well, go ahead."

So I leaned across to Almon and made the bid as nicely as I could. I said: "Captain, I've a house out along the river and a party scheduled for this evening. There are some girls coming, of course, and I'm sure you'll enjoy coming along with us as I'd enjoy having you. Of course the invitation is for you, also, Mr. Lamonte."

The captain said he'd be delighted to attend a party with his three good friends, and Lamonte, who was as drunk as seven hundred dollars by that time, almost fell off his bar stool while telling me we should

have no stiffness between good friends and to "Call me Andre."

SO OUT we started, getting a couple of the biggest tramps we could think of for the captain and Andre. We also stopped and left word with several other people—a couple of busy business men from the North, who were trying to drink the South into a drought, and a couple of Southern ladies who'd go any place for free drinks. As far as the other girls were concerned it was a cinch. I left word with Betty May and with the dancing girl, and I knew they'd do the rest.

Captain Gomez

The party would start in a straggling way—they always did—but I knew that by midnight we'd be going.

And by midnight Captain Manuel Gomez was doing just that. He had something—maybe his weird use of the English language—that got women, and the son-of-a-gun was surrounded with them from nine o'clock on. He and Almon were in the thick of them until about midnight, and then Gomez just passed out like a light. One minute he was sitting there captivating the gals with his manly charm, and the next he was flat on his face on the floor, where he'd fallen out of his chair.

Almon insisted on helping him upstairs, where he could take a couple of hours' nap, and Almon was in little better shape himself.

I'd done the best I could, all evening, with "Call me Andre," but as the guy insisted on putting one arm around me and hugging me as though we were going to be married, it was pretty sticky.

And Connors just sat back and laughed at me, though of course in a polite way when Andre was looking.

When Andre wasn't, the laugh wasn't in the least polite, believe me.

I liked Almon and had since I'd first met him, but I'd have sold him down the river right then just like Old Uncle Tom. He'd helped me, without knowing it, when he'd got mixed up with Gomez and Lamonte, but he'd spoiled the pitch by sticking too close to the guy after getting acquainted.

And there wasn't a way in the world that I could get 'em apart. If I'd taken Almon apart and told him I wanted him to give Gomez a chance to circulate, I'd have had to tell him the reason for it.

Which I couldn't do. The guys were just pals, that's all, and the only hope I had was that Gomez was having a good enough time to come back for more.

Almon was like that, anyway. Going all out for somebody—though usually it was some wench.

Almon didn't come back after taking Gomez up for his nap, and Connors went up after him and came back alone.

He said: "They're both passed out."

It gave us two spare women, but a couple of other guys I'd met in bars drifted out for a drink and that took care of the surplus nicely.

And then, all of a sudden, I caught wise.

THE brawl lasted until noon the next day, at which time the Captain announced he had to get back to his ship, which was supposed to leave port the following week.

Both he and Lamonte were coming back that night to brawl some more, and we were invited to the boat for the following night's party.

I mean all of us—my whole crowd. And I thought I'd like to see the boat at that, because Andre had assured me it was 'Ver' nice. Cushions in the main cabin, even, mon cher'.

So I looked ahead to the party on the

boat, almost as much as I looked ahead to getting in touch with Watson.

I didn't look ahead to my own party that night at all. I was getting plenty tired of parties by that time.

Once in a while is all right, but when you're putting them on as part of a job they get too strenuous.

At that it wasn't so bad. Neither the Captain or Joe Almon passed out and the girl got stiff enough to do a moonlight dance, with her girl friend too stiff to stop her.

It was right after that the fight between the two women started. The Captain switched allegiance from the bum he was supposed to escort, to the dancing gal, and his bum got sore about it and started calling names. So the dancing girl slapped her face in return. The dancer then kicked the bum in the kneecap, but the bum had both hands in the dancer's hair by that time so the result wasn't what might have been expected.

The pay-off was when the Captain tried to separate the two of them and the dancer, who I will say was handy with her feet, kicked *him* on the kneecap at the same time the bum was hitting him in the face with the high-heeled shoe she slipped off.

The funny part of it was that he was so drunk he didn't care—I'd have boomed them both if they'd teamed on me that way.

And that night I found out that the Captain was shipping a load of machinery, labeled for Havana.

I was still looking ahead to the party on the boat, but I'd got in touch with Watson and already had my fun with him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Contraband, then Some!

IN THE first place, the boat was bigger than I thought it would be. It must have been two hundred feet, maybe longer. It had four masts, with motor winches operating the sails on all of them, something Andre seemed very proud of, and two big Diesels for auxiliary power. I don't know any more about boats than a cat does about Heaven, but according to Andre, the *Peralta* was something to write home about. He claimed he could work her with a skeleton crew the way she was rigged, and even I could see some reason in saving wages, by modernizing the thing.

There was nothing fancy about it but it looked as though it could do the work it was built for. The party was in the main room of the thing—Andre told me the proper name for it but I'd forgotten it five minutes after he told me. It was probably thirty feet long and twenty wide and was furnished comfortably if not neatly. In fact the place was a mess.

Captain Gomez explained that by admitting he was running short-handed on his crew—and that nobody could be spared from other and more necessary work just to police up the joint.

He had liquor though, and the kind of stuff you can't get in the liquor stores any more. Cognac, both Martel's and Hennessey's. Benedictine. Chartreuse. Barreled rum, very old and smooth as silk. Good Scotch. And all the fancy mixing stuff that high-class bars used to handle.

An old-time bar man would think he was in Heaven if he saw the bar that was fitted at the end of this room. And he'd have thought he was in the other place if he'd seen the dirty glasses we were supposed to drink this good liquor from. And the bar, still all sticky from the last party Gomez had thrown.

He just waved a hand at the assortment and said: "Each person their own bartender. Me, I am too busy drinking to mix the drink for anybody. Also is Andre. Also is the crew—they are on shares, you see, and so are partly owners of this bar."

I thought a swell way to run a business. There were six in the crew and apparently they all had a say in the way Gomez, who owned it, ran the *Peralta*.

But it was Gomez's business, not mine, and if that's the way he wanted it he had it.

IT STARTED like my parties do—everybody came straggling aboard when they got around to it. My bunch came fairly well grouped, but the Captain's friends, and he had about twenty of them before nine, came in ones and two and threes.

The boat itself was at a dock, with it's own loading cranes working the cargo. The guy, at that, must have had a competent engineer.

The boys and I worked over the bar supply for awhile—Andre sticking closer to me than a brother, and then I swung the conversation around to engines.

Another thing I know nothing about, but I had to get rid of that Frenchman for awhile and that was the only stall I could think of. He tried to tell me how Diesel engines operated and I played dumber about it than I even am—and that's plenty. What finally got him though was when he told me they had no spark plugs and I told him that he was kidding—that no motor could run without them. That I'd believe some of the things he'd told me but that a whopper like that was carrying things too far.

He said: "I show you! Dammit, I show you! If you find a spark plug on these Diesels I will eat it."

Of course Harry Connors and Joe Almon were there and I got them to witness the bet.

They were both catching up on their drinking and that left Andre and I to go alone, to settle it.

Which is what I'd wanted.

I don't know whether all converted schooners are like the *Peralta,* but the engine room isn't in the middle of the boat, where I'd think would be the logical place for it. It's farther back, or aft, as we old salts say. And in the *Peralta,* there was a passageway leading from the engine room into the holds, up ahead. Or up forward, as we mariners express it.

And I wanted to get in those holds and I couldn't do it with Andre watching me like a hawk—even if brotherly love was behind the watching.

Which was something I'd begun to doubt.

So down to the engine room we went, and once there, Andre proceeded to point out to me there were no spark plugs on the Diesels. He was actually pointing with his hands, too, when I hit him with the wrench I'd picked up from a sort of work bench that ran along the wall.

I didn't hit him hard, though. I didn't think Uncle would want him with a broken head. He turned his head to see if I was looking at where he was pointing, and I swung the wrench and caught him across the jaw. It broke it, naturally, and I don't suppose it helped his lower teeth any, but I didn't think Uncle would mind him a little bruised up.

I took him into the first hold with me, and I will say those boys knew their business. There wasn't a crack or cranny I could hide him in. The place was full of crates—big ones—and they were fitted together like a Chinese block puzzle. I knew I couldn't take him back to the engine room, because if somebody came hunting us—and Connors and Almon knew we'd been going there, he'd have been found.

So I kept on going into the next hold and got the break I needed. It wasn't fully loaded and the crates weren't snuggled down as they were in the first one. This was the place where they must have been working that day, I thought, and I lugged the guy over behind one where there wasn't a chance of him being seen in the shadow. All the light there was, anyway, was a little twenty-five watt bulb, hanging on an extension cord that was looped on the ceiling—though I don't doubt they used work lights when actually loading.

Then I went back to the engine room and got a pinch bar and really went to work. I figured I had at least an hour before anybody would bother to look for me—and I didn't intend to waste one shining second of it.

THE first crate held a Pontiac—I was lucky and opened it at the head end. The second a Plymouth. The third a Buick and the fourth a Ford. I could see the boys hadn't worried about which brand car they carried to Cuba. And by that time I'd put in forty-five minutes of the hour I'd given myself and decided to play it safe and go up and join the party.

And so I went back to the engine room just in time to meet Captain Gomez face to face. Right in the alley that ran by one of the engines. And he had a gun in his hand and mine was tucked in the waistband of my pants—I hadn't worn a holster because the bulge will always show, whereas if you wear it in your pants and keep your coat buttoned it never does.

Of course the coat's got to be loose fitting.

I had the pinch bar I'd been working with

and he spotted it right off the bat. And made the mistake of talking about what I'd been doing, when he knew damned well exactly what I'd been doing.

"My good friend," he said. "You have been doing the investigating, not so?"

I said: "Sure."

"You are from your government, perhaps?"

"I am not. I'm a private operator."

"I do not understand that."

"A private cop. I can do things the government aren't allowed to do."

With that I heaved the pinch bar at his head, and as he wasn't more than fifteen feet away, he did what anybody else would do. He ducked. And when I pitched the bar I went for my own gun, and I don't think Billy the Kid or Tom Threepersons ever got one out faster. I know that by the time the pinch bar hit one of the engines, with a clang, Betsy was out and at full cock.

I didn't even have to say a word and I wasn't trying to. I was taking up the slack on the trigger. And the yellow ——— dropped his own gun before he even straightened up from the stooping position his ducking the bar had put him in.

He said: "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

I said: "Back away from that gun."

He backed and I picked it up. And then I said: "Turn around," and he did that, too.

I was wearing crepe-soled shoes and I don't think he heard me step up behind him.

And I'm sure he didn't expect me to belt him along the side of the neck with Betsy's barrel. I doubt, for that matter, if he even knew a solid blow there will put a man out as fast as a clip on the jaw.

But I'll guarantee he knows it now.

## CHAPTER IX

### Down to Writing

IT WAS working out better than I'd expected. Or rather, hoped. I had two of them—the two I wanted. I wasn't worrying about the crew, because even before I'd gone downstairs they all were too drunk to know right from left.

What I was worrying about was Connors and Almon, and that I had to take care of next.

So I went up to the deck and from there to the dock where I met Watson and some man he introduced as Bellows.

I said: "You were right, Mr. Watson. The four crates I opened held four cars. If there's an honest title to a car in those holds, I'll eat my shirt."

Watson said: "We were getting worried, Mr. Ryan. You're half an hour late."

"I was busy," I said. "I had to check to see if you were right on the cargo. And I had to sock the mate with a spanner to get him out of my hair. And then the Captain came checking up, with a gun in his hand, and I either had to kill him or capture him."

Watson said: "Either would do."

"Well, I captured him. It wasn't hard to do. And he'll talk."

Watson looked doubtful and said he had some doubt on that. I said I had none at all, and that I doubted he'd even show many marks. And then he lost his doubtful look and grinned.

He said: "That's why I came to you, Ryan. We're handicapped. Our rules and regulations won't let us give the works to anybody like that. Particularly with somebody from a country we're as friendly with as Cuba."

"Nuts! This guy's as Spanish as an olive."

"Yet he's under Cuban protection. He can and would claim protection from his consul, and with relations between the countries being as they are, we'd probably never make a case against him stick."

I said: "Hell, man, I'm not official. I'm working all for myself. Let him complain about me and see what it gets him."

"What about the mate? Will he sing, too?"

"He would if he could. He's Vichy France. But I busted his jaw when I hit him with the wrench and he'll have to be patched up before he can even say daddy."

Watson said: "He can sign his name, can't he? He can witness the Captain's statement, can't he?"

I said: "You should tell me my business! I thought of that just as soon as I saw I'd hit him a little bit too hard. Just stick

around a while longer and I'll bring 'em all to you, though it will have to be one at a time."

I HAD to hear some confirmation before I could pick up the third man I wanted, so I went back down in the hold. I'd closed the doors between the two holds and between the first one and the engine room, and so I wasn't worrying any about my two boys making noise when they woke up.

And I'd timed it right—the two of them were just starting to kick around. And loudly.

I'd picked up a blow torch in the engine room as I went through and I got this going before I said a word to them. They quit trying to get out of the electrician's tape I'd done them up in and watched this with great interest, too.

I said: "You can make all the noise you want, boys. The party's going strong and I doubt if anybody could hear you if the hatch was open. And then some friends of mine are stationed along the dock, so I doubt if a noise would bring you anything, anyway."

"Why is it the blow torch?" Gomez asked curiously.

"It makes it cosier," I said. "Just the three of us and the blow torch. We can have a nice long talk."

"Your government will not countenance this, my friend."

"It won't be asked to, Captain. As I told you I'm an independent. And after your signed statement comes out in court, your government will probably give me a medal for putting you out of the way for a while."

"I have signed no statement."

"I'm a mind reader, mister. I can see now where you will."

I'd tied him up with wrists, together behind his back, and with his ankles fixed the same way. I rolled him on his face, with him kicking about it but only verbally, and got a loop of the tape started between the wrist and the ankle tie. I'd have rather had rope or wire, but the tape they use on boats is heavier than average for some reason, and I thought it would hold okay. I yanked his feet back then and caught the slack with the tape, and by the time I'd done the same trick a couple more times I had him in as good an Indian tie as anybody could want.

And then I rolled him on his side, so that I could get to work on him.

About then I happened to look at Andre and I could have laughed. He'd bled all over his shirt and coat, anyway, and his broken jaw was sagging then. He could close it but it would be plenty painful. And he was just wild-eyed.

I said: "Now I'm going to begin. You two ——— are partly responsible for having two girls I knew butchered. The same for a Federal man that was my guest. You tried to kill the colored girl that works for me. So boys, this is going to be a lot of fun for me."

Gomez managed to say: "That was Ortega!" but his voice was scared almost out of him.

I said: "No difference. One and the same. You were working together. He was lucky and died fast."

Then I picked up the torch and pulled one of Gomez's pants legs up so his shin was exposed.

He got sick to his stomach then and I didn't blame him. I felt that way myself. I could no more have gone through with torturing him like that than I could grow wings like a bird and fly—but he didn't know that.

I'D MADE the preparations very deliberately for this reason. The guy had turned yellow when he had a gun in his hand and better than an even break with it, and I was betting he'd crack all the faster if he had had time to think about it.

And he cracked.

He almost screamed: "I will tell! I will tell all!"

I said: "Tell, hell! You'll write it out in your own handwriting."

"I will do anything you say."

"I swung on Lamonte fast, while seeing his boss bust up was the only thing he could think of. I said: "And you, you Vichy ———! You'll sign the same statement!"

He nodded so violently his broken jaw

wobbled. I had the sign on him even more than on Gomez—he'd taken more punishment with the spanner than Gomez had with the gun barrel.

I united Gomez's hands and gave him my notebook and pen, then told him what to write. I said: "I want you to put in that you're guilty of smuggling people into this country as well as various other things. List some of them—don't try to pass anything up that's got a heavy duty on it. I want you to put in who your agent here is—the same one that made arrangements for these cars. That will be Almon, of course."

He said: "But should I not put in the other, Connors?"

I said: "Why, certainly!" and decided I was as big a fool as people have sometimes claimed I was. I'd been thinking Connors was in the clear on the mess.

I said: "Put in the crew and their share in the business. I want it all. And I want it right. Put it in your own words but get at it right now. I'm tired of this stalling around."

He said: "Yes, yes, yes!" and started in, and his hand was so shaky he dropped the pen three times while filling the first page of the notebook.

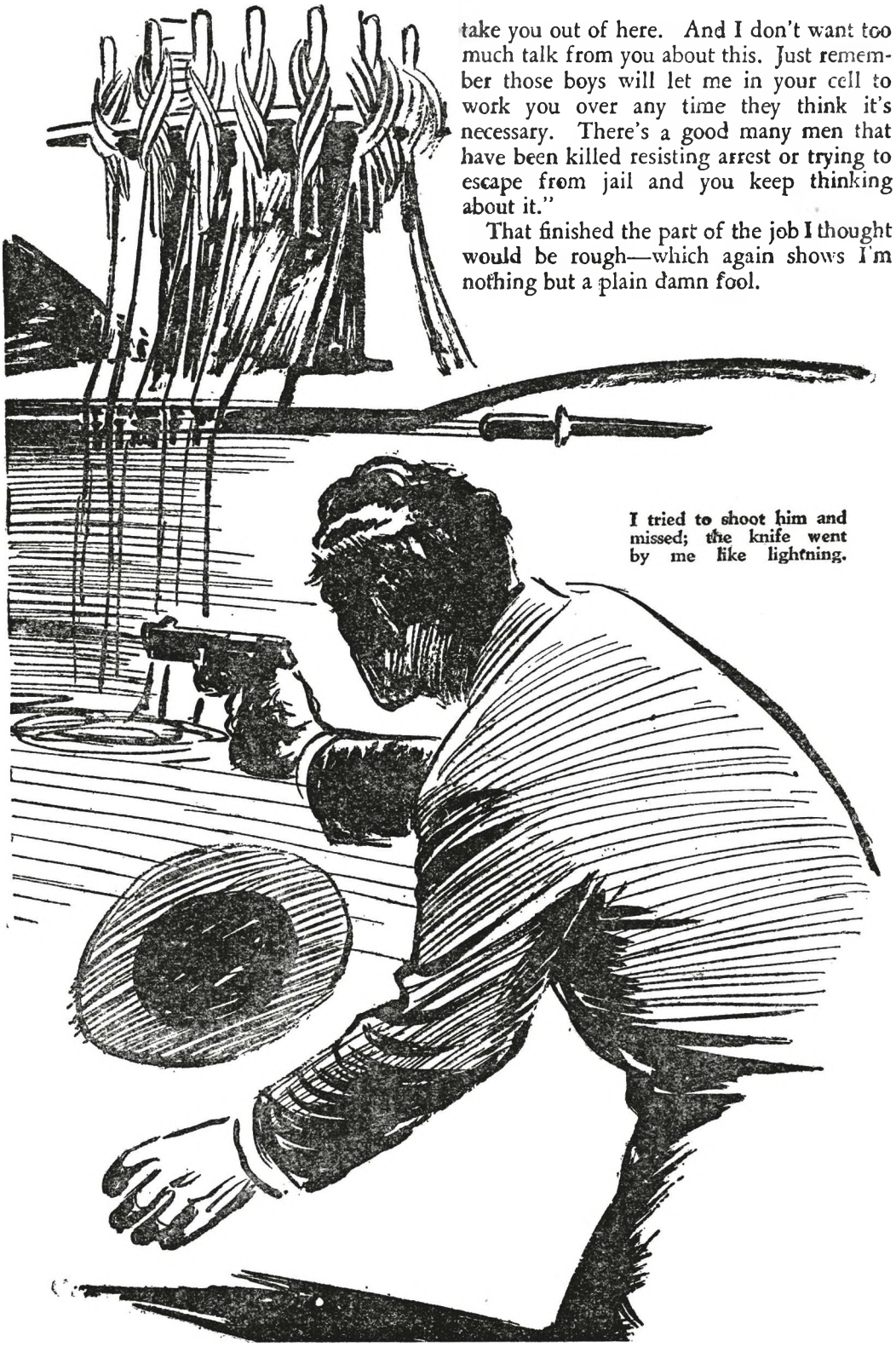
I'd take each page from him and check it as he finished it, and it took him half an hour to get through with the job.

Then I taped his wrists again and untaped Lamonte's so he could also sign—and he did it without the faintest notion of what Gomez had written. I put the tape back on, after he'd put down his John Henry, and then I told them what was going to happen.

"In a few minutes the Federal men will

take you out of here. And I don't want too much talk from you about this. Just remember those boys will let me in your cell to work you over any time they think it's necessary. There's a good many men that have been killed resisting arrest or trying to escape from jail and you keep thinking about it."

That finished the part of the job I thought would be rough—which again shows I'm nothing but a plain damn fool.



I tried to shoot him and missed; the knife went by me like lightning.

## CHAPTER X

### One Man Round-Up

OTH Almon and Connors were going strong, with Connors cognac and Almon drinking twelve-year-old Irish whiskey that came bottled in a stone crock. And I picked Almon first —him being the only one of the two I'd suspected.

I edged up to him—he had a girl on each side of him—and tried to sound mysterious.

I said: "Listen, Joe! Give me a hand, will you?"

He said: "You know I will, Johnny."

"I can't tell you about it in here. I can't take a chance on anybody hearing it."

He suggested what I wanted himself. He said: "Le's go outside. I can stand some air m'self."

So out we went. And once outside I let him have it straight. I said: "I've got Gomez and Lamonte already. Now I want you."

He still tried to bluff it out. He said: "Why, what for?"

"Let's just say smuggling for now, Joe. The murder charges will follow later."

I hadn't noticed it but he'd taken his stone crock of Irish whiskey out with him. He swung at me with this, and if he hadn't been so drunk he'd have smashed my head down between my shoulders. But his timing and distance were wrong and I managed to step back and away from it.

He'd swung the crock over his shoulder and he'd swung it so hard he almost went on his face when he missed, and I clipped him alongside the ear with Betsy just as he got himself straightened up and ready for another try. And I got him off the gangplank and into Watson's arms with a fireman's carry.

They met me on the dock. I said: "I've got the dope from Gomez all straight. Take this guy and I'll give you Gomez's statement.

They did and I did and then I went back for Connors.

And Connors tried to turn cagey on me. I said, in the same mysterious way: "Joe sent me in after you, Harry. We've got to have help and right now. I know I can depend on you to keep quiet about it."

He wasn't as drunk as Almon and he was smarter. He said: "What's wrong?"

I said: "It's that screwy toad of a Gomez. I was down in the engine room with Lamonte and he came in and blew his top. I had to hit him with a spanner when he pulled a gun on us, and I hit him too hard."

It was a good story at that.

Connors said: "Why, sure, I'll help. What'll we do with the ———? Throw him over the side? It would be the easiest way to get rid of the ———."

He started out with me and I didn't take any chances with him at all. Not after the trick that Almon had tried to pull. I lagged back a step just as we went out the door and I pulled the same trick on him that I did on Gomez when we weren't five feet from it. Smacking him alongside the neck with the gun barrel.

I had to catch him when he went down—he'd have made enough noise in falling to maybe bring out part of the crew.

And he was a heavier man than Almon and I had a hell of a time getting him up on my back to take him across the gangplank and to Watson.

I got the next man—one of the crew—the easy way. He was so drunk he could barely stagger, anyway.

I said: "The Captain wants you outside for a minute."

He said: "Whatthehellfor?"

I could barely understand him. I said: "How in hell do *I* know what he wants you for? I don't run this boat."

He went out with me and outside the door I jammed Betsy in his side. I said: "Over the gangplank, laddy boy. That's a gun."

He went without a word—but when I went back for the next man I caught the hell.

TWO of the five men left were together and the other three were bunched. And one of the last set had a mean drunk on and decided I was the lad he was personally going to pick.

He called out: "What you do? You take mate. The Captain go and he do not come back. You take two soldiers away and they

do not come back. You take Carlos and he not come back. What you do? Hey!"

I could see my dream of taking them out one by one had gone sour. I took Betsy out from under my coat and said: "And I'm going to take you, pally, and you're not coming back. That's for all you boys."

The tough boy had a knife in a sheath hung between his shoulder-blades. It's a good trick properly worked. You can hunch your shoulders and the haft will slide up above your coat collar. And he worked the trick very properly, too. He put his hand up as though he was scratching his ear, and then zingo, he had it and was throwing his arm back so he could get some speed in the toss he was going to make.

And I tried to shoot him in the kneecap and missed, and the knife went by my ear like a flash of lightning. The gun roaring at him probably threw him off his aim.

I didn't miss him the next time, although I caught him low and broke his shin bone all to pieces. He spun as his leg went out from under him, and one of his pals caught him before he went to the floor.

I said: "That's right—you'll have to carry him. Move now! Fast!"

The party had gone completely to hell by that time. A couple of the girls and one great big fat guy had fainted. The girls were screaming and the men were shouting.

I said: "Sorry, everybody, but this is a pinch. Keep out of it."

I had two of the crew hold the one with the bad leg between them, and I made the son of a so-and-so hop on his good leg out of the place. The other two flanked them—and there was no fight in any of them. Watson and Bellows were just starting up the gangplank when my procession was starting down it, and Watson was actually excited—something I never thought I'd see. He turned my captives over to half a dozen guys that apparently came out of nowhere—I learned afterward that they were Sheriff's office men, and then turned on me.

He said: "I was going in after you, Ryan, rules or no rules."

I said: "Easy does it! Want to go in with me after Gomez and Lamonte?"

He said: "I will. You've done enough."

I said: "Oh nuts! I've got those guys in such shape they'l crawl out of there on their hands and knees if I tell them to."

They did walk out under their own power at that. And they sounded like a funeral march going down the plank to where Watson and Bellows waited for them. You could really hear their feet come down on it.

This because the party had broken up and gone home. It was one time I really did a wholesale job of bouncing people out of a joint.

WATSON was very happy about the whole thing and insisted on telling me just how he felt about the thing. This about a week later, when he came out to the house.

He said: "I've fixed it so you'll have no trouble over your part of it, Ryan. You can depend on that."

I said: "Why should I have trouble?"

He looked faintly shocked. "It was entirely illegal, of course."

"It worked, didn't it."

"Well, yes, and it's about the only way we could have worked it. I had no authority to board that vessel and make arrests. I had no authority to search that ship. I had no authority to take Gomez in for questioning."

"You could have got the Coast Guard in on the thing. They could have boarded the boat."

He was definitely shocked on that one. "Not on a Cuban boat—not with what evidence we had. We had no real evidence."

"That's true enough, I guess. But what I can't understand is how two Army men could get in a mess like that. I'll never understand it."

He stared at me and asked me if I didn't read the papers, and I told him I was down there for a rest and got my news over the radio and only that way.

He said: "Both men, both Connors and Almon were dishonorably discharged from the Army Air Corps more than two years ago. They were professional gamblers, young as they were, and they joined the Army just to fleece their buddies."

"How'd they get to be captains? They check 'em close before they hand out commissions."

"They called themselves that, is all. They

(*Continued on page* 87)

# FEATHERS

ONCE each year the little town of Hampton celebrated old Home Town Day, and everybody attended. That was by wish of Cyrus Everett, the home-town boy who had made good. He was president of a five-hundred-million-dollar corporation, and, at fifty-five, he was still inexhaustibly vital. If he had done all that he had done by fifty-five, what mightn't he do by seventy-five?

Cyrus Everett had never forgotten Hampton. He had donated a library, with five thousand books, instituted a nursery service, given four scholarships for free university tuition to bright young men and women. He came up for about ten days every fall, after the deer season opened, and while the bass and pickerel were still within the law. He had built that hunting lodge on Lake Divide. He came up with his daughter, Dolly, and the son-in-law he had acquired against his will—Jason Clark, who held a minor post in the five-hundred-million-dollar corporation.

Jason Clark wasn't much good, in the

*Cy Everett looked upon himself as a man who'd "made good in the game of life", and he could not stop bragging about it. And that, primarily, was why Cy's "game of life" came to an abrupt end!*

By CLIVE TRENT

At sight of the murdered man, the arrow in his heart, Jason uttered a cry of horror.

estimation of Hampton. Sheriff Sam Small had sized him up that way, and all the folks agreed. Why not? Well, the way he talked to the girl clerk in the general store. The way he draped himself across the bar of Ye Olde Countrie Tavern. The way he staggered out to his car. And then that crack-up that night, when he was driving back to the hunting-lodge, so loaded that a crash was inevitable.

Minnie Barron's leg would never be straight again, nor as long as its fellow, but Cyrus Everett had paid to avoid a lawsuit and a scandal. Sheriff Small had been one of the witnesses to the settlement. Five thousand, which meant a mighty lot in Hampton. The check, passed across the table to Minnie's father. Cy Everett, looking as if he'd done a splendid deed, instead of compounding for a bad one. Sheriff Small was a tolerant man, but he had a momentary feeling of revulsion against Cy at that moment. He didn't use the word "smug," but that was the way he felt about him.

But later Sam Small said to his wife: "I cal'late Cy Everett has earned his dough. Ain't his fault if his daughter married a no-account loafer. And he roots for his

home town, instead of being ashamed he came out of the sticks.

"Maybe some of us fellows would rather live out our lives in obscurity, instead of all this back-slapping on Old Home Town Day. But heck, Luelly, it only happens once a year. Me, I can take it, hearing how me and old spaniel Coughdrop pulled Cy out of the crick when he was drowning. I'm wondering how Nat Dawson likes it. Cy never lets Nat forget that they were boys together."

NAT DAWSON was reminded of it once a year, on Old Home Town Day. Nat was a small local farmer, who grazed some dozen cows, and sold his milk to the wagon that came along every morning. He raised a few Speckled Sussex fowls, for the eggs. His wife was dead. His son was dead. He would have been quite alone, except that lame Minnie Barron helped with the milking, and cooked his supper, coming over from the adjacent farm.

Cy Everett, when he occupied the hunting-lodge, monopolized Nat's services, paying a dollar an hour, which is good money in Hampton. Nat knew where the bass were to be found in late October, and just where the deer yarded.

Nat had a hobby—rods, rifles, bows and arrows. He could tell you how the match-lock had a fixed cock to hold the match, which was brought down to the priming by the trigger. Or about the wheel-lock, with its wheel of fluted steel protruding into the priming-pan. The flintlock—and he possessed an old Brown Bess, a British army rifle of Revolutionary times, with a browned barrel. It had come to him from his great-great-grandfather, who had taken it from an English soldier.

Nat's fishing-rods might have reached big sums, if he had ever thought of selling them.

He got his bamboo from a Chinese in Boston, and he cut and glued until he had a supple spring at his command. If Sheriff Small had been a Freudian, he might have put it like this: "Nat's obsession is the spring, the thrust, and the recoil. That's the way Nat sees life."

What Sheriff Small said to his wife was: "I wonder sometimes, supposing Nat had had Cy Everett's job, and Cy had stayed in Nat's. Cy would be shooting off his mouth in Hampton, and Nat would be president of the corporation. Chief difference is, we wouldn't have any Old Home Town Day. Heck, Luelly, it's coming next week! I don't like all that loose-mouthed blab about being boys together. What if we was? Most men have got a kind of reticencies about the time they were boys; they don't want it rubbed in their noses."

OLD HOME TOWN DAY was uproarious that year. Cy Everett was at his best. He was democratic. He slapped everyone on the back, and forgot he was a millionaire. There was a lot of stiffening in the punch at the dinner at Ye Olde Countrie Tavern. There was such an uproar that it was difficult for Cy to obtain a hearing.

He got it at last, and said: "You know, boys, as an Old Home Town boy who's made good, I'm thinking all the time about the boys who didn't make good. Maybe they might have done as well as I did, but they missed out. I'm mentioning Sheriff Small, loyally serving his home town in his limited capacity. I'm thinking of Nat Dawson. I'm thinking of the time he punched me on the nose for carrying Mattie Brewster's schoolbooks. I look back through the arch of time, and I see those happy days of adolescence.

"I'm speaking of my dear and life-long friend, Nat Dawson, who wasn't so lucky as myself in the game of life. I'm thinking of his son, whom I was instrumental, with my influence, in getting through West Point. He was one of the first heroes to fall in this world-conflict, and Hampton honors his memory."

Cy Everett wasn't satisfied with that. He thought a little facetiousness was next in order. "Nat punched me on the nose for carrying Mattie Brewster's schoolbooks, and she's been my wife for eight and twenty years," he said. Loud laughter followed that statement. Only Cy's daughter, Dolly, sitting beside her husband, Jason Clark, looked annoyed. Mrs. Cy Everett wasn't there. She never came back for Old Home Town Day.

Nat Dawson, sitting next to Cy, grew red. Cy clapped him on the shoulder.

"Now, boys," he said, feeling his liquor a little. "I've mentioned Nat as the type of Home Town boy who might have got somewhere if he'd chose to be persistent. But Nat knew what he wanted most. It was to be a sportsman. And Nat and me are going fishing with some of Nat's rods, and I'm going to try out Nat's longbow, and see if I can't get me a deer."

THREE years before, when Nat made his longbow, out of Oregon yew, everybody laughed. Nat was one of the first local enthusiasts. Now the bow had become a craze, and the legislature had passed an act permitting longbow shooting that season. Still, it was typical of Nat, spending his time making arrows, when he might have been building up his dairy business.

"Oregon yew, Sheriff," expounded Nat. "Yew in a horn casing. That comes from the Turks and Mongols, and makes for power. A six-foot English bow, in a horn casing. Try to bend her."

Sheriff Small tugged at the string, and drew it back three or four inches.

"Don't get scared, sheriff," grinned Nat. "You won't break her. This is an eighty-pound bow, and the old English archers drew to the ear."

"How far will she shoot?" asked Sam.

"If you could give me a knight in armor at two hundred yards, and a cloth-yard arrow, I'd go right through him. The world record is 482 yards, in London, back about 1800, and it was made by a Turk, with a horn-cased bow like mine. But a feller's got to stop being scared of his string. You can't break a hemp string, properly made. Hell, hemp's what they us for hanging!"

"You got a lot of arrows here," said the sheriff.

"Yeah, I got an order for six dozen, from the Sportsmen's Supply. Trouble is, they have to be standardized at 28 inches, at least, the kind I'm making. That's all right for a light bow like Cy Everett has brought along, but a six-foot needs the cloth-yard arrow. See these? Simple enough to make—shaft, tip, and feathers." Nat indicated a bundle.

"Yeah, standardized all right," said Sam. "You couldn't hardly tell that bunch from Cy Everett's."

IT WAS Tom Barron, Minnie's father, taking a short cut through the woods, who found Cy Everett's body pinned to the ground, with an arrow through it. The barb had pierced the heart, and it had to be left like that until Police Chief Soames, of Campbell City, arrived, with his print man and photographer, and two officers.

Cy Everett had been casting for bass at Carron's Crossing, a clearing in the woods, which gave a fisherman free play for his rod and line. The medic from Campbell City estimated that he had been shot at about three in the afternoon.

Tom Barron had run to Sam Small's house, and the sheriff hiked back through the woods with him. He looked at the body, and began casting around like a hound picking up a trail, making wide circles about the clearing, and back to where the woods began. "Okay, Tom," he said at length. "Seen anything anywhere of Jason Clark?"

"Yeah, Jason's fishing the crick about half-a-mile downstream. Him and Cy Everett had a falling out last night."

"How come?" asked Sam.

"It was after they got home from the party. They'd both drunk more than they oughter. Cy threatened to cut Jason out of his will. Told his darter she'd taken up with a no-good skunk, and he was tired of supporting him. Cy sure had a good vocabulary when he was peeved. Jason must have taken the bow and plugged the old man out of the scrub."

"Suppose you find Jason and his wife, and notify them. And keep your suspicions to yourself. I'll stay here till you get back. And then I'm going to deputize you, in the name of the law, to stay by that body, and see nobody touches it, nor makes footprints, till I can get Chief Soames from Campbell City. He's a pig-headed fool, but he's the person responsible for making the arrest. Me, I'm only the sheriff, and responsible for preventing breaches of the peace."

"Ain't this crime of Jason's what you'd call breaching the peace?" asked Tom.

"Maybe so, but I don't aim at any conflict of authority," answered Sam.

While Tom was gone, the sheriff continued his trail-casting proceedings, measuring the distances to the circumference of the clearing, and looking for footprints. However, the grass had been so trodden down by fishermen that the sheriff gave up that part of his investigation as completely useless.

AT THE sight of the murdered man, Jason Clark uttered a cry of horror, and acted as if he would have fallen, if Tom Barron hadn't held him up.

"I swear I know nothing about this," he chattered. "We had some words last night, and he went fishing this morning without speaking to me. It looks bad for me—I know it looks bad, but I swear—"

"Where's Cy Everett's bow?" asked Sam.

"I suppose it's where he put it, in a corner of the living room. I haven't been back since I started out this morning."

"Catch anything?"

"No. I didn't fish very long. I was too disturbed by the trouble with my father-in-law. Am I under suspicion?"

"Well, now, everybody's under suspicion till the guilty person is found," answered the sheriff. "I'm going to call up Chief Soames at Campbell City from your house. And then I'll have to set with you, and see nothing's touched—I mean, the bow and arrows. You stay here like I told you, Tom," he added.

On the way to the camp Jason continued his voluble protestations of innocence. Sam was gently reassuring. "If your conscience is clear, you've got nothing to worry about," he told him. "There's other bow-shooters in Hampton. Maybe somebody had a grudge against Cy Everett?"

"I can't think of anybody. There's only Nat Dawson, and my father-in-law was his best friend."

A car came grinding up to the house, and Dolly Clark jumped out. A glance at her face showed that she knew about the tragedy. As a matter of fact, it had already become common property.

"This is terrible," she cried hysterically. "I want you to take me to my father's body at once. Where is he?"

"How d'you know?" asked Sam.

"They told me at the store. I drove back, expecting to meet Jason here. Why is he with you? He's not—not under suspicion?"

"Take it as easy as you can, Mrs. Clark," said Sam. "I'll have to ask you both to come inside, while I call up Chief Soames,

With a yell of rage Sam leaped after the fleeing figure in the underbrush.

and to stay with me till he comes. It will make it easier for you if you can show you hadn't any chance to touch the bow and arrows, nor to wipe off fingerprints."

IT WAS still a little before sunset when Chief Soames arrived, with his print man, photographer, and two officers of his uniformed force. Soames hadn't come direct.

He had made inquiries in Hampton, and gone directly to where the murdered man was lying, guarded by Tom Barron, and surrounded by a large and awe-struck crowd.

In the meanwhile the sheriff had had two hysterical persons on his hands, the woman passing from outcries to fainting, and back again, while Jason reiterated his protestations of innocence. It was the worst two and a half hours of Sheriff Small's career, and the entrance of Chief Soames was an immense relief to him.

He'd had two or three run-ins with Soames in the past, and the feeling between the two men, though not embittered, was not exactly cordial. Sheriff Small resented the passage of recent legislation sharply restricting the scope of a sheriff's duties, while Soames half-consciously resented Sam's powers of observation, which had made him look rather foolish on the occasions referred to.

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Clark," said Sam. "They're feeling the shock of this pretty bad, of course. I've been keeping them under observation, so as to be sure the bow wasn't touched."

"That the bow Mr. Everett was killed with?" inquired Chief Soames.

"Now that's a hard one to answer," said Sam Small. "There's three or four other bow-and-arrow hunters around these parts."

"Yes, there's Nat Dawson, who was Cy Everett's best friend. Mr. Clark, you and your father-in-law had some trouble last night?"

That sounded like Minnie Barron. She was a good girl, but not too bright. It was just like her to have chattered. Sam had to hand it to Soames, he'd been mighty active in the hour or so that he had been in Hampton.

"Let me explain about it," said Jason Clark.

"Yeah, go ahead," said Soames, with a nod to the print man and the photographer. The latter took some shots; then the former removed the bow from where it stood in the corner, holding it gingerly by the tips.

It wasn't a six-foot bow like Nat's. It stood about five feet four inches. The print man picked up the sheaf of arrows beside it.

"MY father-in-law and I didn't agree very well. We'd had trouble about this annual trip of his. He wanted my wife to accompany him, without me. I knew what was in his mind. When he got her up here, he was going to tell her she must divorce me. I said she shouldn't come without me."

"Yeah," said Soames sympathetically. If the fool wanted to blacken the case against him, the police chief was more than willing.

"We had a fight after the party in the town hall. He threatened to cut me out of his will."

"That wasn't right," said Soames. Sam listened incredulously. Couldn't Soames see that this was an innocent man talking? Jason was depicting the blackest motives for the crime.

"He went out this morning without saying a word to anybody," said Jason. "I knew he'd gone fishing at Carron's Crossing, and I selected a place half-a-mile away from him, so that there would be no encounter. I knew nothing about the murder till Tom Barron told me."

"Where were you all day?" Soames snapped at Dolly.

"Why, I—I was so upset by the quarrel that I stayed in bed most of the morning."

"Didn't get up to cook your dad's breakfast?"

"No, I didn't feel the obligation. I considered he had been wholly unjustified in picking on my husband. I stayed in bed till he and Jason had both gone out."

"Then you got your own breakfast, fussed around a bit, and then—what then?"

"I drove into town to make my purchases

at the store. And that's where I heard that my father had been murdered."

"Your husband didn't return before you drove to the store?"

"Certainly not. Are you accusing him of being my father's murderer?"

"No, Ma'am. But the coroner might think different. Who do you think killed Mr. Everett?"

"How should I know? It might have been an accident. Mr. Dawson might have taken him for a deer."

"Yeah. Well, I'm taking you and your husband into Campbell City, and you'll be able to tell the coroner all about it at the inquest tomorrow morning."

"You can't do this! It's absurd! I want to see my father's body—"

"It's on the way to Campbell City," said Soames. "You'll see him tomorrow."

Sam Small waited while the officers escorted the wildly protesting woman and her husband out to the police car. Then he asked Soames: "You sure you've got the right parties?"

"Who else could it be, excepting Dawson, who was Cy Everett's best friend?"

"I'm not making the arrest," said Sam. "I'm only supposed to prevent breaches of the peace."

"I'm going to see this Dawson, and we'll have prints made of his bow and arrows. Now just what's in your mind, Small?"

"The only thing in my mind is that Jason Clark didn't kill his father-in-law."

"Who did?" snarled Soames.

"That's not for me to say. This new act of the legislature has deprived the sheriffs of most of their ancient functions. I just think Jason ain't the feller you're looking for. Nor Dolly Clark."

"Well," said Soames, "I never expect much cooperation from rural sheriffs. You are all sore because the law has placed the examination of evidence in the hands of trained experts. And you're so smart, you can't see the wood for the trees.

"Clark and his father-in-law had a quarrel, and the old man threatened to disinherit his son-in-law. Talked of changing his will. Isn't that reason and motive?"

"Might be," said Sam. "And, again, there might be other factors in the case. But don't argue with me, Mr. Soames. I'm only a rural sheriff."

SHERIFF SMALL went home, and sat down to a good meal. Mrs. Small was an excellent cook, and Sam wasn't hard to satisfy. He made his wife to some extent his confidant. Now, loading a knifeful of peas, he paused with it on its way to his mouth.

"Soames took Jason and his wife into Campbell City on the charge of murder," he observed.

"What, both of them? That poor woman —what she's had to endure from that horrible man! Does he really think she was an accomplice?"

"Accomplice? Why, my dear, there ain't no accomplicing. Jason is as innocent as you and me."

"What? It wasn't Jason Clark? Who was it, then? It couldn't have been Nat Dawson. And those other two men with bows, up at Longmere Lake, eight miles away— it couldn't have been them. Who do you think it was?"

"Now that's what I ain't allowed to tell you, Ma'am, Mrs. Small. You see, Luelly, according to the English common law, libel is a breach of the peace. And my job is to prevent breaches of the peace. So I ain't allowed to nominate the guilty party until twelve good men and women and true have pronounced him so."

"Sam, if it wasn't Jason, was it his wife?"

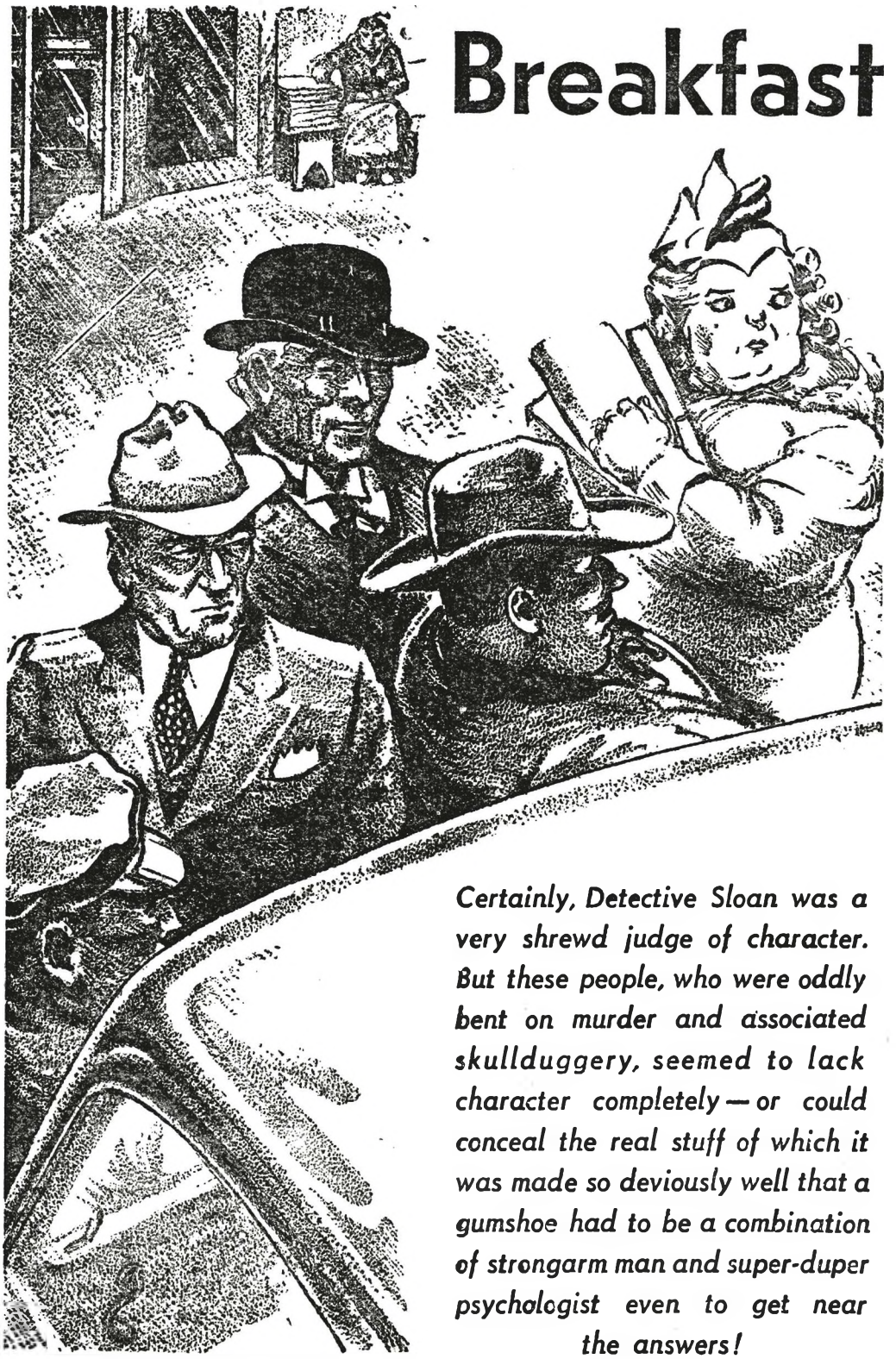
"Nope, nothing like that. It was a man. I'll take another helping of your stew, Mrs. Small. You see, the trouble with Soames is that he hasn't got the faculty of observation. If some of them police officers would only learn to use their eyes, they'd solve more problems than the police manual ever thought of."

"Sam, Cy Everett got poor Billy Dawson into West Point. Nat Dawson couldn't have killed Cy. Who was it? I've got to know."

"I'll take a section of that pie, Luelly. Nope, I can't say a word till tomorrow. And now I think I'll take a stroll. I've got to mull over this murder business. I don't want to crack down too hard on Soames, and destroy his reputation. But a feller

(*Continued on page* 88)

# Breakfast



*Certainly, Detective Sloan was a very shrewd judge of character. But these people, who were oddly bent on murder and associated skullduggery, seemed to lack character completely — or could conceal the real stuff of which it was made so deviously well that a gumshoe had to be a combination of strongarm man and super-duper psychologist even to get near the answers!*

# In Bed

## By WALLACE KAYTON


The tall man nearly butted the hurrying fat woman off her feet. He bowed in apology.

ALMOST precisely at 2:30 the mayor's shiny, black limousine came to a stop before the black and chromium portals of the new Alamo Building. Four men could be seen in the tonneau, busily engaged in shaking hands as if they didn't expect to see each other for years and years. The uniformed doorman sprang to open the door of the big car.

Mom, the old dame who peddled newspapers, explained proudly to a customer, "It's the mayor, the one with the red face, and the D.A., he's the one with the silver hair, and Hannegan is the one with the pickle-weaned face." She made change for the customer. "Hannegan hates it," she chuckled. "He's a city dick."

The fourth man, the one she hadn't named, literally plunged out of the door onto the sidewalk. He was immensely tall, and immensely thin, so tall that even though he stooped, his head failed to clear the car door and his gray hat skittered onto the sidewalk. He stooped to seize it and nearly butted a hurrying fat woman off her feet. He bowed low in apology—and almost fell on his face.

The customer said, "Who in Heaven's name is that scarecrow?"

"That," said Mom proudly, complacently, "is the lad they threw the luncheon for. It was the Kiwanis Club that did it, and the mayor and the D.A. made speeches, thanking him for breaking up the old Nicoletti gang before they could get set to ruin our fair city!"

The lad-they-threw-the-luncheon-for had recovered his hat and jammed it on his head —backward. The brim was down in back, up in front. He barged across the sidewalk toward the Alamo Building, dragging a herringbone topcoat by the collar. His tie was askew, the vest that covered his skinny chest

was open, as was the suit coat that flopped about him like the clothing on a scarecrow. His eyes were slightly glazed, and he walked with the high-lifted, careful steps of the drunk trying to appear nonchalant.

Mom shoved two newspapers beneath his arm. She said, "Don't bow, honey, you'll fall down."

The man straightened gravely and disappeared into the revolving door.

The customer took his change. "Must have been some luncheon." He grinned. "Does he always drink it instead of eating it?" He looked a little startled as the tall, disheveled man shot out on the sidewalk, stood there a moment swaying, set his jaw, clamped his hat down on his head, and plunged back into the doors.

Mom explained that, when her friend had been drinking, he always had trouble with the revolving-door mystery, though there wasn't *ever, ever* a crime he couldn't solve.

"What's his name?" asked the customer.

"Sloan," replied Mom, "Timothy Tappan Sloan, though his friends, including me, always call him Tim. Poipah! Poipah! Read all about it! Seventeen more Jap ships sunk! Poipah!"

INSIDE the lobby, safe from the whirling arms of the revolving door, Mr. Timothy Tappan Sloan peered about owlishly. On the third try he located the cigar-stand, wobbled toward it, with a fatuous smile for the hard-faced blonde presiding.

Five feet of little man in a Shepherd's plaid suit and a loudly checked topcoat was arguing with the blonde. "Camels, three packs!" she sneered. "Why, *that,* Little-bit, is a postwar project!"

Tim drew up to the counter, wrinkled his nostrils. Accusingly, he said, "Something stinks!"

The blonde touched her perfect coiffure and giggled. "Not me, Mr. Sloan, him." She thumbed a red nail at the little man. "You're drunk again, aren't you?"

The little man turned a weather-beaten face, a crooked nose, a mouth full of gold teeth, and a pair of light blue eyes up at Tim Sloan. Sloan frowned down at him. "You palsy," he said gruffly, "smell like an upstairs hotel."

The little man scurried away toward the elevator without answering. "Yes," said Tim Sloan to the blonde, "I am slightly on the drunken side. My usual, please."

She tossed a bag of Bull Durham onto the counter, rang up his money. Turning, she saw he was fumbling at the strings of the sack. She sighed. She opened her purse and tossed him a ready-made cigarette. He grinned, and his fingers quit fumbling. She snapped, "If I thought that was an act—!"

Mr. Sloan inhaled expansively. "Blondie," he said, emiting a great cloud of smoke, "you have just cigaretted the greatest detective since Oliver Holmes. The mayor said so. The D.A. said so. Even Hannegan said so." He launched into details of the luncheon extended him by the Kiwanis Club.

THE frosted glass door numbered 1414 also bore the neat legend, TIMOTHY TAPPAN SLOAN, and in smaller, more sedate letters, *Private Investigations.* Inside, in direct line with the door, a stenographer's desk stood against the farther wall. It was hard to tell that it was a steno's desk, for its upper surface was entirely covered with a huge service flag bearing a solitary star.

This was Mr. Sloan's sentimental tribute to his erstwhile secretary and companion in arms of many years' standing, Emma Hohenberger. The army would not take Mr. Sloan. In his vicarious career as a hunter of men, his thin, lanky, beanpole of a body had absorbed too much lead from gangster guns. But the army would and did take Emma Hohenberger. At least the WACs took her. And since her departure, Tim Sloan had covered her old desk with this gigantic service flag as a tribute to her going.

To the left was another frosted glass door marked "Private." This guarded Sloan's *sanctum sanctorum,* his private office. To one side of the door was yet another desk, a newer desk than Emma's. Here presided McFarley, the lad who tried so bitterly, and unsuccessfully, to take Emma Hohenberger's place.

McFarley might have been sixteen, or thrity-six. It was hard to tell from his wrinkled, prune-like face. His complexion was dark, but his hair possessed that shining, iridescent gleam of a small infant's, and a

starched lock of it thrust itself inevitably ceilingward from the very middle of his head. Like a kewpie doll. His ears looked as if they had been stuck on strictly as an afterthought, and the angle of their sticking gave McFarley the appearance of a junior loving cup. Something like a consolation prize cup in a Grade D golf tournament. His myopic eyes peered at the world through thick-lensed spectacles.

McFarley sat listlessly turning the pages of a glamorous magazine he had stolen from Sloan's bottom desk drawer. It was entitled, "Famous Models". He did not hear the door open, did not hear the door close. He wrinkled his nose and sniffed. A strange odor filled the office, a saccharine, cloying odor. He looked up in disbelief that anything in the world could smell like that.

The little man in the Shepherd's plaid suit parted his gold teeth in an ingratiating smile. He said, "Mr. Sloan in?"

McFarley said Mr. Sloan was at a luncheon tendered him by the Kiwanis Club. He said it importantly; he was proud of his boss and a little prouder of the luncheon. He went on to say he was McFarley, and could he do anything for the little man?

"Maybe. Has Bettina been in yet?"

McFarley denied it. He even denied that he knew who or what Bettina was. The little man drew an envelope from his pocket. He also fumbled a ragged dollar bill from the fob pocket in his pants.

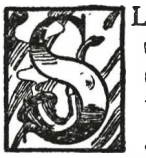
"If she ain't been in, she will be." He winked portentuously. "Look, bud, when Bettina comes, slip her the note, will you, hunh, bud? And this is your'n."

He laid the note and the dollar bill on McFarey's desk, turned and took his perfume out of the office. But not all of it. McFarley grimaced, opened a window. Back at his desk he thrust the dollar bill into a coin purse, put the coin purse in his pocket. He picked up the envelope and held it toward the light. For a moment he chewed his lower lip, scratched his ear in deep reflection.

A few seconds later he had the hot water turned on in the lavatory. A cloud of steam arose from it. Gingerly he held the envelope toward the steam. McFarley's bump of curiosity practically comprised his entire head.

## CHAPTER II

### Bettina the Beautiful



SLOAN got out of the elevator at the fourteenth floor. The little man in the plaid suit was waiting to get on. The car was going up, the operator said so and closed the door in the little man's face. Sloan hesitated, crinkled his nose, glared down at the little man. The little man threw back his head and glared up at Sloan.

The elevator returned, the door slid open, the operator admitted graciously that he was, indeed, descending. The little man moved into the car.

Sloan growled, "Stinker!"

The little man scowled. He growled, "Stinko!" The car took him away. Sloan dragged his topcoat toward 1414, trying to whistle blithely and making a poor job of it.

He opened the door and entered. McFarley was emerging from the lavatory. Guiltily he thrust the note into his pocket, flashed a smile at Sloan. "No mail, no clients, no calls." He said it automatically as if he was very accustomed to saying it. He was.

Sloan said, "McFarley, you are a jinx. Ever since I gave you this job, out of the goodness of my heart, this office has been Snafu." He sighed. "I wish—!"

"Yah," sneered McFarley, angered, "you wish that Hohenberger dame was back. What can a dame do that I can't do better?" Sloan snickered. "Well, you know what I mean," added McFarley lamely. And to change the subject, "Was the luncheon okay?"

"Swell," admitted Sloan. He put his arm around the smaller man's shoulders. "McFarley, we are in the bucks. I collected fifteen grand reward money—certified check—and have already deposited it in the bank."

"All of it?" asked McFarley anxiously.

"Well," admitted Sloan, as if hating to do it, "not all of it. How much, McFarley?"

McFarley found a battered notebook in his pocket. Rapidly he read off the items.

"Back salary, 35 bucks. Cab fare, 3.45. Papers, 1.30. Whiskey, 16.00 Bromo seltzer, 89 cents. Stamps, 18 cents. Grand total, 56.62. Plus ten per cent makes 62.50."

"Ten percent!" The words seemed to hurt Sloan.

"That's what you promised for carrying you," said McFarley, doggedly. He saw the words foaming on Tim Sloan's lips. "And if you make a crack about Emma Hohenberger never charging you nothing, it'll be ten percent more!"

Sloan glared. He hissed, "Scrooge! Simon Legree! Shylock!" But he counted the money from a huge roll and gave it to the little man. McFarley counted it twice, tucked it away in his change purse, and buried the purse deep in his pocket.

Sloan headed toward his private office, still dragging his coat. At the door he turned. "I am going to lie down and get some sleep, McFarley. I do not want to be disturbed under any circumstances. I must be in fine fettle by five o'clock. And you know why!" He smiled, beatifically, closed the door.

"Yah," sneered McFarley, "I know why."

Tim Sloan had a train to meet at five o'clock. Emma Hohenberger, WAC sergeant, and Sloan's former secretary, was coming in on that train. Emma was coming back from overseas! Emma had a fourteen-day leave, and naturally she expected to spend it with Tim Sloan.

Inside his office Mr. Sloan hung his coat on a halltree—at the third attempt. He removed his hat, his suit coat, his vest. He took off his tie, his shirt, his undershirt, his shoes, and his socks. A plain door to what had once been a mop closet disclosed a shiny and inviting shower bath. He was still attempting to whistle as he adjusted the water, still not having much luck.

Back in his desk he found an enormous bath towel, a trifle on the used side. He found the soap in the wastebasket. At the entrance to the shower he hesitated, wondering what he had forgotten. He leaped back hurriedly, and sheepishly removed his trousers and shorts. A moment later the water sprayed over him. He threw back his head and opened his mouth.

In the outer office McFarley frowned. He hoped nobody would choose this moment to come in. Sloan sang not well, but loud. He was roaring:

"When the Fuehrer says, we are the master race,
We *pluuuu, pluuuu,* right in the Fuehrer's face!"

The *pluuuu,* McFarley thought, was a pretty inelegant sound. But after a short while the noise ceased.

Sloan was stepping into a pair of clean shorts he had extracted from a filing cabinet. Clad in the shorts he opened the lowest drawer of his desk and extracted a brown bottle marked, "Mouthwash." He drank copiously. He gulped, shook his head. Shortly a look of serenity spread over his features. He drank again and did not gulp, or duck, or shake his head. He started to put the bottle back, thought better of it and went over to a battered, leather couch.

A few moments later, Timothy Tappan Sloan was snoring. His bottle was clutched, cradled, to his skinny chest. His breath smelled strongly of gin.

WHEN the door opened and the woman stood there, half in, half out of the office, McFarley caught his breath as sharply and as sibilantly as a hari-kari-bent Jap. The vagrant thought came to him that a man was a fool to waste two-bits on a model magazine when he could look at babes like this for nothing.

She was all of six feet tall, and the length of well-turned, silken legs revealed by her short skirt was amazing. Manlike, McFarley had started at the bottom. The waist was unbelievably slender, and the fact that her arms were akimbo, her hands on her curving hips, spread the expensive fur jacket wide. The entire dress was made of that shimmering, high-lighting material that screamed aloud for attention to its wearer's numerous charms.

Vaguely, in the seconds that followed, McFarley wondered how she got into the dress at all. McFarley liked women. All his life he had noted with great satisfaction any feminine figure that had curves where

curves should be and depressions where depressions belonged. But never in all his years had he cast his eyes on so much woman so beautifully constructed. He finally got around to her face when she spoke. She had one of those husky, haunting voices that bring goose pimples to a man.

She said, "Caleb, darling, really this is the only way. Don't be surly, dear. Come on in, now!"

If McFarley had been poetic, he would have thought of Helen of Troy and the face that launched a thousand ships, or of Deirdre, or Dido, or Sappho. Instead, he thought of a composite picture of Hedy Lamar and Joan Bennett with maybe a touch of Dietrich for good measure. Caleb, darling, came in.

Caleb wore a captain's uniform, and his left breast was literally covered with ribbons and a pair of gold pilot's wings. Caleb was sore and it showed on his sunburned face. He wasn't quite as tall as the Big Angel, but his anger seemed to make him tower above her.

"Damn it, Bettina, I tell you I know all about these private keyhole peepers. He can't do anything. He'll take your dough and pretend he's doing something and that's that. We'll have more luck looking for him ourselves. Come on, let's go!"

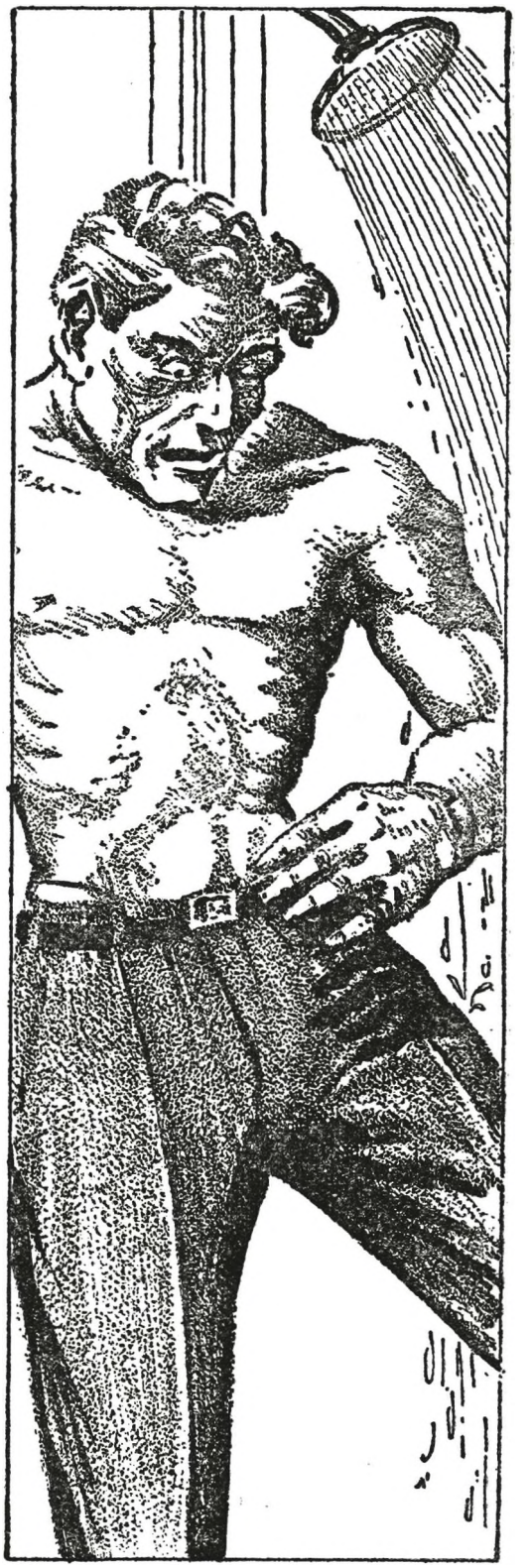
She flashed a smile at McFarley that nearly knocked him out of his chair. She patted the hand that Caleb had laid on her arm. "Now, now," she soothed. "This man, Sloan, is different. I've read all about him in the papers. It's worth a trial." She laughed, and the laugh was deep and beautiful. "Considering the kind of fellow Dick is, maybe it's a keyhole peeper we'll need. Come darling."

He slammed the door with his heel.

To McFarley, she said, "Is Mr. Sloan in, darling?"

McFarley gulped, rose so fast he tipped over his chair. He answered, "Mr. Sloan? Oh. Yeah, he's—no—I mean—"

The captain sighed. He came over and sat on the corner of McFarley's desk. Almost bitterly, he said, "Easy does it, Jack-



He leaped back hurriedly as the water sprayed over him.

son. She affects all males like that at first sight. Just stop and consider. There's only two answers. The question was: is Sloan in? Now he either is in or he isn't in. Which is it?"

McFarley explained. He explained so strenuously that he was all out of breath when he finished. The captain arose.

"You got it, Bettina. So that's that. Mr. Sloan is indisposed. He is going to do no work for two weeks because the lady he loves is coming in town for that length of time. Let's go hunt Dick ourselves." He seemed a little relieved.

McFarley's fingers were on the letter the little man in the plaid suit had left. *Bettina.* This was Bettina.

Bettina's brows were pulled down in thought. She nodded toward the door marked *Private.*

"Is he in there, darling?"

"Well," admitted McFarley, "he—hey! You can't do that!" But she was doing it. She sailed across the office and opened the door. She closed the door behind her.

## CHAPTER III

### Big Poison

MR. SLOAN does not remember exactly what he was dreaming of. He felt soft, feminine fingers on his shoulder, and murmured, "Emma! Emma!"

"Please wake up, darling," breathed a voice, very close to his ear. "It isn't Emma. Please wake up."

He opened his eyes. Quickly he closed them again. If this was a dream, he wanted to hold it. The fingers kept on prodding his thin shoulder. He opened his eyes again. He sat up very straight on the edge of the couch and the dream sat down beside him —very close.

Thickly, he said, "What do you want?"

"I'm Bettina Tanto," the oversized dream said in husky contralto. "I'm sort of jammed up and I've read about you in the papers—"

Mr. Sloan's roaving eyes found his own bare feet, his own skinny shanks, with horror. He leaped for the shower, yelping, "McFarley, McFarley!" As the shower door slammed, the office door opened and a white-faced McFarley and a curious Caleb entered on the run.

Bettina Tanto was laughing. She was laughing so hard that she trembled all over. McFarley was fascinated by the trembling. It was the captain who asked pointedly what was the matter and where was the great detective.

Bettina Tanto arose and shook down her short skirt. To the captain, she said, "Come, darling, we'll wait in the anteroom." And to McFarley, she said, winking, "He's in there. Better hand him some clothes, dear, he's slightly on the nudish side."

She was still laughing when she went out. Caleb sat down on the leather couch and lit a cigarette while McFarley padded about the office getting apparel from various, unsuspected places and handing it through the shower room door.

Presently Tim Sloan emerged, fully, if erratically dressed. He glared from Caleb, the captain, to McFarley, his hired help. He started an oration. Caleb grinned. He said, "I can imagine. Here, you need this. I already had one."

Sloan took the brown bottle and drank deeply, corked it, put it back in his desk.

"That was a woman," he accused Caleb.

"And what a woman," came back Caleb bitterly. "Look, Dick Tracy, this wasn't at all my idea, but you can't stop a dame like Bettina. My name is Haynes, Captain Caleb Haynes."

Sloan shook hands with him. The gin had helped.

"Big Poison," grinned Haynes, "thinks we need a detective. I'll call her in—or you do it, Jackson." He nodded at McFarley who started for the door.

Sloan yelped, "Wait a minute! The shrimp should have told you I wasn't taking nothing. Not for the next couple of weeks at least."

"He did," admitted Haynes, gloomily. "Call her in, Jackson."

McFarley closed the door behind him. Bettina Tanto was looking at the model magazine with a critical eye. She said, "Is he—"

McFarley said, "Sssssh! Here!" He thrust

the crinkled envelope toward her. She raised her brows.

"A little guy," whispered McFarley. "A little guy like me, only with gold teeth and loud clothes and a hell of a smell, like he was drenched with toilet water. He left it for Bettina."

BETTINA showed him how a beautiful woman's face can alter when rage sweeps over her. She said something about damned fools and spoke feelingly of the little man's ancestry. She opened the envelope, scanned the sheet of paper and her face cleared. She tucked it away in her purse, leaned and pinched McFarley's flaming cheek.

"This is just between us, isn't it, darling? Our secret?"

Dumbly McFarley nodded. She told him it was a personal favor and she'd explain later. She took his pencil and wrote something at the top of the steno's pad that lay on his desk. She tapped the writing meaningly and said she'd tell McFarley all about it soon, she'd really show him how a girl could appreciate favors.

Still dumbly he watched her go through the door. But he snapped out of it quickly; he had duties to perform. The bottom drawer of his desk gave forth a set of headphones, which he donned. He snapped a switch and the voice of Tim Sloan came to him.

His pencil raced across the notebook in little hentracks and curleycues. McFarley was really a master at shorthand. His eyes found the notation the woman had made at the top of the page and his heart skipped fully half a dozen beats. It said, "T-9292." Good Lord, he had her phone number!

Sloan, trying not to flush when he looked at the Big Dream, said, "So that's the way it is. There's plenty of other agencies. There's the Acme, the Sullivan, the Alamo. I'm just not taking anything for a couple of weeks."

Bettina Tanto opened her bag, laid a thick wallet on his desk. "If it's a matter of money, darling? There's plenty there."

Sloan couldn't resist the opportunity to strut. He dragged the huge wad of bills from his own pocket and tossed them carelessly on the desk. "And there's plenty *there,* sister. I collected fifteen grand reward money today. Nope, it's just that I haven't seen Emma for a couple of years and she's coming in at—Captain, what time is it now?"

Captain Haynes did tricks with his left wrist. He unbuckled a buckle, pulled back a moulded leather cover that protected the face of his watch and said it was damned near 1600. The watch fascinated Sloan. He said, "Hunh? I didn't get it?"

Bettina Tanta pouted and said, "This Emma must be *something.* You won't even listen to my troubles. You going to spend two weeks on a honeymoon?"

Sloan laughed, thinking of two weeks on a honeymoon with Emma Hohenberger. Emma was short and stocky, broad-hipped and deep-chested and efficient. She was the sort of dame who, in civilian life, wore wool hose and flat-heeled shoes. The image of her danced before him and almost inadvertently he compared her to the Big Dream, much to Emma's disadvantage. Emma's hair was mousy, her complexion on the off side. Her lips disdained lipstick and her eyes were aided by horn-rimmed glasses.

"Listen, sister," he said earnestly, "I doubt if Emma ever had a date in her life." He described her, with gestures. But his eyes warmed, and loyalty crept into his voice. "Emma and I together sort of went through hell in this town, sister. I owe her more than I could ever pay her in dough, understand? Now she's been over in Burma and China and India for a long time and she deserves more than I can do for her. I'm going to see she has a swell apartment and that she has breakfast in bed. For some reason she thinks I'm a right guy, so I'm going to spend every minute of two weeks making her relax utterly, making her forget the war and everything connected with it!"

He felt righteous and noble after his speech.

The captain unbuckled his watch again. It looked like a hell of a lot of trouble to Tim Sloan. Bettina was lost in thought. Tim said, "Captain, what the hell kind of watch is that that you have to wrap up everytime you use it?"

HAYNES grinned. "Brother, you spoke of Emma being from India and Burma. That's where I'm home from. That's *monsoon* country, and the ordinary watch clogs up in no time at all. So some of the smart Indians devised a cover like this to buckle over the face to protect the watch and keep out part of the moisture at least. *Malim?*"

Sloan didn't know that *malim* was Urdu for *understand* but after careful examination of the watch he said, "Croton. Damned fine watch!" and admitted yes, that he understood. The captain stood up.

"Let's go, Bettina. Hell, we'll find him in some of the joints somewhere. Mr. Sloan don't want to look for him."

The Big Dream was tapping her eyes cautiously with a very small handkerchief. Sloan didn't like that. The words slipped out.

"Look for who? Who wouldn't I want to look for?"

"My husband," said Bettina, catching her breath. She added, "He's got a sure-enough brewery."

Sloan shuddered. "I don't like beer. Bloats me. What do you want to find him for? Dames like you—?" He made a gesture that meant dames like her didn't want husbands hanging around.

"I want to tell him he's got a brewery." She was leaning forward now, on the edge of her chair. Her lips were red and moist, slightly parted, her eyes wide, so that the long lashes cast blue shadows on her olive cheekbones.

"You mean your old gent has got a brewery that he doesn't know anything about?" She looked appealingly at Haynes. Once more he went through the ritual of looking at his watch, sighed and began to talk.

"Her husband, Dick Cameron, is a good buddy of mine." He saw the frown on Tim's face. "Bettina Tanto is her professional name, she's a model. His folks didn't like it very much when he married her—they're sort of bigshotty up in Kaysee.

"I'm from up there. We came home on leave together and Dick came here to see Big Poison. Now, four days ago his papa died in Kaysee. They tried to locate him and couldn't. So what? They open the will and find that papa left Dick the Midwest Brewery. That's all there is, except that I came down to dig him out of some dive, and hell, I can't even find him myself."

"How come he wasn't right along with you, sister?"

"He's jealous," she said, as if that explained practically everything. "Me, I'm no Alice-sit-by-the-fire. He's been away more than two years. He didn't like some of my friends when he came back, so we sort of fussed."

"Dick's mighty high-tempered," said Haynes gloomily. "And a hell of a two-fisted drinker."

Sloan stared at Haynes. Sloan would never have achieved the success he had achieved, as a detective without being a shrewd judge of character. Haynes was probably no more than twenty-two or twenty-three at the most. But he had a thousand wrinkles around his eyes, his lips, when not in speech, were drawn back tightly across his teeth. His hands were constantly in motion.

Irrelevantly, Sloan said, "You chalk up a score over there, Captain?"

"A score?" Haynes grinned tightly. "Twelve in the air, and only God knows how many on the ground. Do you want to hear the rest of this or am I boring you?"

SLOAN thought the captain's troubles was that he'd seen too much death and dying, too many corpses for his years. He took the brown bottle out of the desk and noted regretfully that there wasn't a quarter inch left in the bottom.

Sloan asked, "Where did you two live before the bust-up?" He was thinking that now that Dick had a whole brewery, she wasn't so sore at him.

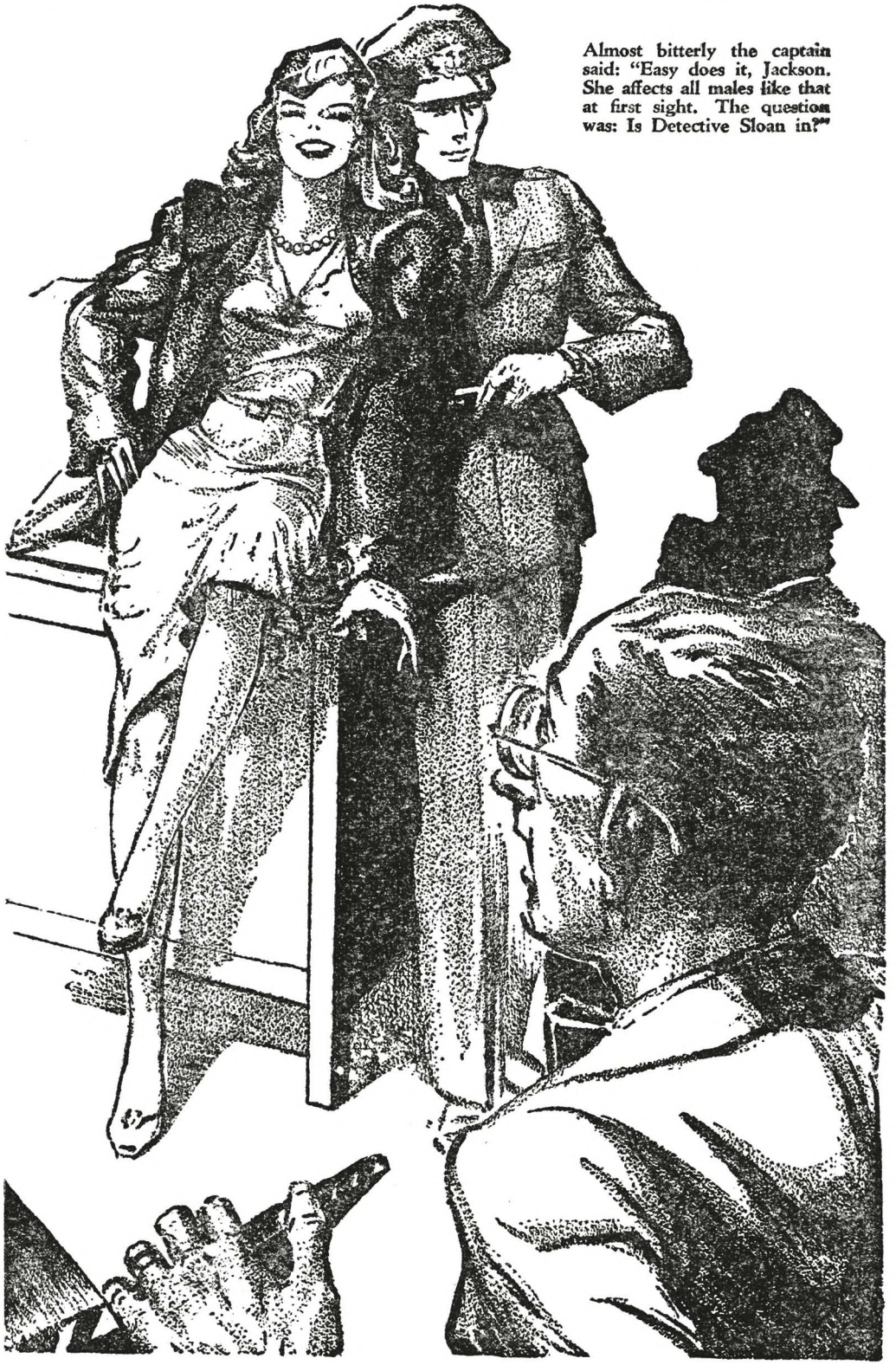
"One hundred and twenty-five Agarita," she answered his *where*. "But he came back a couple of nights ago. We—well, we had another argument. I don't know where he went, Mr. Sloan."

"There's no strings to this brewery?" Sloan asked.

Haynes shook his head.

"How big is it; what's it worth?"

"You mean," said Bettina in surprise,



Almost bitterly the captain said: "Easy does it, Jackson. She affects all males like that at first sight. The question was: Is Detective Sloan in?"

"you never drank any Federal, or any Strauss Stout, or any Albermarle Ale? You mean—"

"Beer bloats me," said Sloan with dignity. "Tell you what, we're right back where we started from. If there's any advice I can give you, okedoke, but I don't want this. Hell, hunting for another soldier in San Antonio would be like searching for a certain bean out of a two bushel sack."

Bluntly, Bettina said, "Have you got a drink, Mr. Sloan?" He said he didn't have a drink. "Okay, you offered some advice. Let's go where we can get a drink and I'll take that offer."

Captain Haynes did more tricks with his fancy watch. Tim also needed a drink. He figured there was plenty of time to catch a couple of fast ones before meeting Emma's train.

Ready to go, he spoke, in the anteroom to McFarley, who had put the notebook away after taking a transcription of all that had occurred in Sloan's private office. "We're going to the Roney-Plaza, McFarley. Stay till I get back. Emma will want to see the layout."

McFarley said, "You just come from the Roney-Plaza. You et lunch there."

"Not et—eat—I mean ate. I'll be at the grill should you need me." Going out, Bettina smiled at McFarley, smiled and winked.

McFarley winked back.

The elevator lowered them luxuriously to the lobby, Bettina clinging possessively to Sloan's arm. They passed close by the cigar-stand. Sloan's nostrils wrinkled in distaste.

The little man in the Shepherd's plaid suit and checked topcoat was trying to argue the blonde out of Camels. He didn't turn his head as the three of them left the building and hailed a cab.

"Look," said Haynes, "I've got about eight guys to call who may know where Dick is. Suppose I pick you up at the grill a little later?"

With Mr. Timothy Sloan, that was a very good idea, indeed.

An hour or two alone with Bettina would suit him just fine.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Little Stinker

THE grill room of the Roney-Plaza was a very elegant place. A deep red curtain cut off a foyer full of potted ferns from the grill proper. Pulling back the curtain, customers saw a long, dimly lit bar extending along the wall to the left. Tables filled the center of the room, white napery punctuated with a bit of gleaming silver, dim lights pandering down from overhead. The payoff was in the booths to the right. Each booth was curtained, but outside the curtain of each was a batwing door, just like the doors of the old time saloons. Each booth had a little neon sign, reading, "Last Chance," "Klondike," "Silver Dollar," "Acey-Deucy," and the like.

Sloan assisted Bettina down the three steps from the foyer to the grill proper as if she were something fragile. She looked about and approved of the Roney-Plaza grill. A red lighted music box was tossing off "I'll Get Along" with restrained gusto.

"Music!" she squealed. "We'll sit in one of those booths and play and play—music, of course—and have a couple of drinks and I'll cry on your shoulder."

Tim Sloan thought this, too, was a very delicious idea, and swaggered to the cashier's, where he purchased a hatful of nickels. "Acey-Deucy" was empty, thank God. He pulled out a batwing door, held the long curtain aside, and Bettina Tanto slid into the booth. He removed his hat and topcoat, hung them outside on the proper hooks, and followed her in. She rang for the waiter while he helped her with her coat.

The waiter was named Mendiola; Sloan knew him. Bettina said, "Don't think I'm piggish, please, Mr. Sloan. I'm a big girl." She ordered a double shot of rye and a small beer chaser. Mr. Sloan said he was a big man and ordered the same. He put the hatful of nickels on the table before her. She covered his hand with hers.

"Wait," she said to Mendiola. And to Tim, "Really, I don't know what you'll

think of me, but I have to have lots and *lots* of liquor before I feel it. Can I keep the boilermakers coming, just till I begin to get a bang?" She looked like a little girl asking for candy. A six-foot little girl with the face of Lilith. She added, "Oh, I don't expect *you* to keep up, darling. I'm just not —not human!"

Mr. Sloan threw out his chest and said never had he seen a woman who could drink liquor like Tim Sloan. Magnanimously he ordered Mendiolt to bring a fifth of rye and half a dozen bottles of beer. Mendiola departed, awed, and Bettina beamed at Sloan. She put a couple of nickles in the box against the wall at her left. She played "Don't Fence Me In" and "I'll Walk Alone."

Sloan was startled at the size of the drinks as she fixed them. She tossed hers off in one gulp, chasing it with foaming brew. He did the same. After he got his breath, he said, "Now tell me all about it, sister."

She was pouring another drink. Absently, she said, "All about what? Oh, *that*. Caleb told you all about that in your office." She put the glass in his hand and Tim shuddered. The luncheon given in his honor had been very, very liquid. The gin he had drunk from the brown bottle at the office was stubborn, misanthropic, ungregarious stuff. It failed to mix. Now the rye—and the beer.

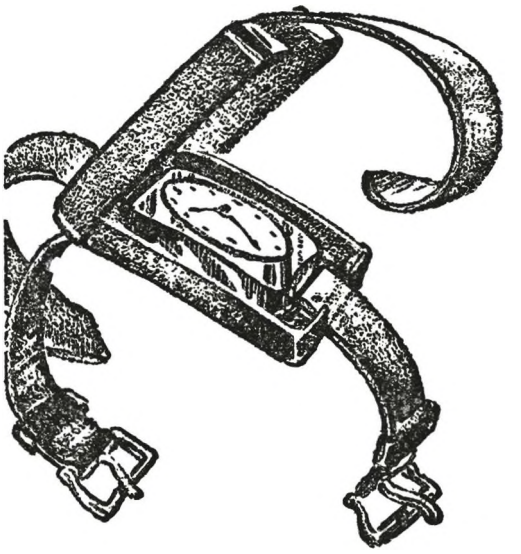
"You wanted some advice," he persisted stubbornly.

"Bottoms up," she retorted, and there was nothing left to do.

THREE drinks later they slowed down. He hoped, bitterly, that she was getting the buzz she expected.

Gloomily, she said, "I don't know what I'm going to do about Caleb?" He located her spinning face, slowed it down with his hand. "He's in love with me," she went on, "and Dick's so jealous. Now Caleb is getting difficult to handle."

He told her to hell with Dick and Caleb, and kissed her full on the mouth. It took quite a while, for Sloan was thorough, and the cooperation was splendid. He was still trying dizzily to get his breath when she shoved the glass in his hand.



That watch fascinated Sloan.

"We both ought to need *this* after *that*," she said hoarsely.

It seemed like a good idea, only the booth started whirling around and around. She played "Always" on the jukebox and it struck both of them as a very sad number. They had another boilermaker and she repeated with "I'll Walk Alone." That was even sadder than "Always." Tim laid his arms on the table and his head on his arms so she wouldn't see him crying.

She crawled over him and went to the little girls' room. After a while she came back, kissing him on his bald spot in passing.

From then on it was sort of vague. The music kept playing and the booth kept spinning and Bettina kept wondering what she was going to do with Caleb Haynes. She got him up for another drink, or it might have been two, but he'd resume his tear-hiding position each time. She tried to comfort him and he decided he liked her arm around his shoulder and had a hell of a time locating her mouth to kiss her again.

Mendiola stuck his head in to tell Sloan he had a dame on the phone wanting to talk with him. Sloan managed to tell Mendiola he already had a dame and to hell with the one on the phone.

He was vaguely conscious of Captain Haynes coming into the booth and saying

something about passing out. Just for that he shook himself awake and had a drink of greeting with the captain and Bettina. Then he lay down again. Haynes said something about meeting a train, and it didn't ring a bell, so Sloan didn't answer.

Now he was in a boat that spun and spun and spun every time a wave hit it. Then the boat hit a reef or a rock or something and a heavy something else fell on his head. He pushed it away and giggled a little. The heavy something else had hair on it. Like a human head. After a little while he thought the curtain pulled back, but he wasn't certain. He smelled something pretty violently *Jockey Club,* but it was too much trouble to even say *Phew.*

AT EXACTLY five P.M. Sgt. Emma Hohenberger got off the train with a neat handbag in her capable hand. She stood in the swirling mob on the platform, peering up and down. She looked fine, and knew it. She wondered if Tim Sloan would recognize her. After all she'd taken twenty pounds off her hips, her complexion had cleared, and she used her glasses only when she worked.

At five-ten she decided he wasn't coming, in person, but undoubtedly would send somebody. She began peering hopefully at all the people that passed in search of their own. At five-twenty her feelings were a little hurt. But one of Emma's marked characteristics was loyalty. Tim was probably busy. Maybe he had no one he could send. Maybe even now he was speeding in a cab for the station cursing the driver for not putting on more speed. She smiled to herself at the picture.

All the years she worked with Tim Sloan she had never expected much of him. She was a smart woman; she could see the faults so prominent in his make-up. He drank too much. He was too woman-crazy. He talked too much. But he was a damned fine detective, the best west of the Mississippi.

Emma Hohenberger had two fixations, had had them for years. The first was silken lingerie. A window full of thin, sleazy gadgets could fascinate her for a full hour. She bought lots of the stuff. Not that she ever wore it, oh, no! Not Emma Hohenberger. She simply wrapped it lovingly in tissue paper and put it away in the bottom drawer of her bureau.

Often she thought grimly how nice it would be to do Tim Sloan the same way. Just wrap him up and lay him away.

At five-thirty she was both hurt and angry. She called the office. McFarley said Timothy Tappan Sloan could be found in the grill of the Roney-Plaza, he reckoned and wanted to know who should he say called.

"Lydia Pinkham," snapped Emma, totally burned up.

The louse! The dog! The bum! He *knew* she was arriving at five. The least he could have done was meet her, to show a little appreciation of those months she'd spent fighting for guys like him. Well, not exactly fighting, but— She could picture him in the grill with some dime-a-dozen blonde, who'd be cooing and rolling her eyes, and wrapping him around her little finger. She'd show him! She called the grill and a guy with a Spanish accent returned to the phone to tell her Mr. Sloan was too busy to talk.

Which tore it. Twenty minutes later she went into the grill in person, with blood in her eyes. The place had been remodeled since she had left. She looked at the booths with dismay. After all, you couldn't go sticking your head into those practically private entrances looking for a guy. Not even for Tim Sloan.

SHE found a stool at the bar and ordered a cocktail. Finished, she sat contemplating the olive at the bottom of her glass. The odor hit her. She sniffed, she wrinkled her nose, looked about. Next her was a vacant stool. On the next stool sat a little man in a Shepherd's plaid suit, a loudly checked topcoat lying across his knees.

He caught her inquiring gaze, flashed a mouthful of gold teeth at her. The smell was coming from him! Dime-store perfume! The guy must have taken a bath in it! He slid off the stool and she saw, disinterestedly, that he was scarcely five feet in height. He put on his coat, ran his eyes over the room.

The little stinker started toward a waiter and Emma's heart leaped as she recognized

the guy. It was Mendiola, who'd worked in the old grill. The little man gave Mendiola a bill, Mendiola said something or other. The little man went along the line of booths, hesitated a moment before "Acey-Deucy" and went partially in. He was there only a moment. Then he hurried out the front door.

Emma looked at her watch. It was exactly 6:05. She caught Mendiola's eye and he hurried up to her, all grins. She shook hands with him, talked a couple of minutes, and trying to make it sound casual, said, "Seen Mr. Sloan this evening, Mendiola?"

Mendiola's smile faded. He looked a little on the furtive side. "At noon," he beamed, "upstairs the Kiwanis Club gave Mr. Sloan a luncheon. You knew about that?"

She didn't know about that, so she got the details. She wasn't to be sidetracked. "I mean this evening, down here?" she persisted.

Mendiola shook his head. He looked more furtive. The last time he'd stuck his head in the booth Mr. Tim Sloan was a very drunk man with a very beautiful woman — and Mr. Sloan had lipstick smeared all over his face.

"No," he lied like a gentleman, "the hasn't been down here, Miss Hohenberger." He scurried away while Emma glared after him. This was like that damned Tim. Friends, friends, everywhere! Willing to lie for him, and cover him up, willing to do anything for him.

She sighed and slid off the stool, turned her back to the bar. Suddenly, from somewhere near the back of the grill came a sharp noise, like a slightly muffled slap. It was followed at once by a woman's shrill scream. The scream was followed by two shots from a heavy gun.

The curtains and the batwings of "Acey-Deucy" flew open. Tim Sloan came plunging wildly out into the grill proper. A big gun still smoked in his hand. Emma plunged through the milling crowd toward him. Only subconsciously did she notice the woman with the torn dress coming out of the booth, the man crumpled over the table.

Sloan looked from the gun to the woman who was shaking him. He focused his glassy eyes on her with an effort, grinned vacuously.

"Welcome home, Emma," he mumbled, and collapsed on the floor.

## CHAPTER V

### The Watch Crystal

XCEPT for the waiters and a few customers who had been sitting close to "Acey-Deucy" and thus might possibly have heard something, Hannegan and his men cleared the grill completely. The batwing doors of "Acey-Deucy" were swung wide, the curtains pulled back. Mason, from the coroner's office, had already come and gone. Now the photographers were snapping angle shots and a couple of the boys from the morgue were waiting with their wicker basket.

Sloan sat at a table drinking black coffee. Emma sat beside him, trying to listen to his rather incoherent mumbling with one ear and to the frantic, sob-interspersed story of Bettina Tanto with the other.

Tim moved something at her. It was a key. He said, "Look, Emma, I got you an apartment. It's out on Woodlawn, 2035, and here's the key. I was going to see that —well," he looked foolishly like a little kid, "I was going to see that you even had breakfast in bed, and had a lot of those things you been missing." She took the key as he gulped. "Now it looks like I'm sort of jammed up."

"You didn't do it, you didn't do it," she said fiercely.

His voice was miserable. "I guess I did, Emma. Liquor finally threw me, didn't it?"

Hannegan snorted, "Damn it, Tim. Listen to this. You've got to say yes or no, at least."

Wearily, Tim looked up. "I've told you twice now, Hannegan. I don't know what the hell happened. I was passed out, with my head down on the table, and then all at once it happened. The gun went *boom-boom,* I found it smoking in my hand and jumped out of the booth. That's absolutely all I can tell you."

"What in the name of God did you want with a gun in a joint like this?"

"I'm not dressed without a gun." He tried to sound dignified. "I put on a holster like I would my vest. Let's go, damn it, Hannegan."

Patiently, Hannegan said, "Check me on this. You never saw this dame before. You never saw this captain before. They came up to your office and wanted you to hunt Miss Tanto's husband. You refused because Emma was going to be in town. But you did agree to have a couple of drinks with them. Whose idea was that?"

"Miss Tan—I mean Mrs. Cameron's."

"Okay. You pass out. The next thing you know—wait a minute. Do you remember Captain Haynes coming into the booth?"

Tim hesitated. "Just faintly. It seems he said something about my passing out, so I rose up and took a drink with him."

Bettina raised a tear-wet face. She said, "Then you laid your head down again and Caleb and I talked. Then the argument started and you woke up when he—!"

"I'll get to that, lady. Hold everything."

Tim said, "Maybe that's the way it happened. I don't know. They might have had a hell of an argument and I wouldn't know it."

Almost gently, Hannegan said, "Look, Tim, even Emma said there was a hell of a slapping sound, and the marks of the guy's fingers are still on her cheek. There was an argument, all right."

The marks were there, on Bettina's left cheek, the plain print of a man's hand, slammed viciously against soft flesh.

Tim stood up. "Please take me away, Hannegan. Lock me up, I got to think."

Hannegan shook his head and Tim remained standing. The city detective turned back to Bettina. "So we're up to there. You argued with Haynes because he was jealous of you and your husband. Hell, your old man had left you. Didn't Haynes have an open field?" It was brutal, in a way.

BETTINA said, "You don't seem to understand that I loved my husband even though we quarreled every time we were together." She dabbed at her eyes again with the small handkerchief. "I guess it was a showdown between Caleb and me. You see—he—well, he found Dick, right upstairs in this hotel. I think he knew where Dick was all the time!"

"Go on. Keep talking." A uniformed copper was taking it all down in workmanlike shorthand.

"He had a bruise on his right jaw and I asked him where he got it." Hannegan said, "Wait a minute," and went over to look at the dead man. The boys said they were through, so Hannegan nodded grumpily to the morgue men. They took the lid off the wicker basket.

"He's got a bruise," admitted Hannegan. "Keep right on."

"He admitted then that he'd seen Dick. Dick can verify this; he's right here in this hotel; He said that he'd told Dick he was in love with me and I was in love with him, and he and Dick had an awful fight right there in the room. Well, that made me mad. I'm not and never was in love with Caleb. He had no business telling Dick such lies. I told him so, too. He lost his temper and slapped me. That was when I screamed. Mr. Sloan—I didn't even know he had a gun!" She shuddered delicately. "Mr. Sloan rose up and pulled that gun out and shot poor Caleb three—no—twice, wasn't it?"

So that was that. Hannegan flipped his forefinger at the end of his nose. His mouth was morose. He liked Tim Sloan. And he liked Emma Hohenberger even more. Didn't seem right for Emma to come back from an overseas hitch and find Tim all jammed up. He sighed.

Tim said, "Let's go, Hannegan. Maybe she's right. You can get hold of this husband of hers, this Dick Cameron, and check up on the fight angle."

Hannegan answered, "That'd be damned tough to do. While you were all down here playing hotsy-totsy in the booth this Cameron decided he had a bellyful. They probably fought, for the room was pretty well torn up. Cameron took off from a twelfth-floor window without a parachute about ten minutes after six o'clock. He's sort of dead."

Bettina Tanto squealed and passed out on the table. Hannegan saw the pleading look in Tim's eyes and told one of the boys to take him down. Tim squeezed Emma's hand. "You didn't do it, you didn't do it!" she whispered. He shook his head in the negative.

When they had gone, Hannegan said, "There aren't words enough to tell you how I hate this, Emma. Tim and I sometimes squabbled, but we respected each other. The things a man'll do when he's drinking!"

Emma walked over to "Acey-Deucy" and looked inside. There were nickles all over the table, nickles all over the floor. She picked a napkin off the floor and looked at it curiously. When Hannegan wasn't looking, she stuck it in her pocket.

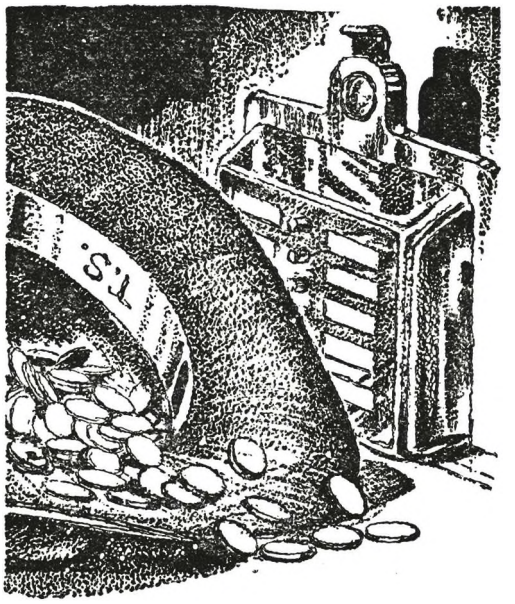
"Can we go up and look at her husband's room?"

Hannegan said sure, anything at all. They went up to 1234. The room looked pretty messy, all right. Hannegan, in answer to her question, said Cameron had registered night before last and as far as any of the help knew, had had no company. Unless you could call bellboys bringing more liquor company.

Over by the radiator glass twinkled and sparkled in the glow of the light. She went over to it, got down on her hands and knees. She began poking the slivers and shards about. Hannegan joined her. In a minute, he said, "Watch crystal. Came out of a watch and got stepped on." She stared at him intently. He shrugged. "Anything to oblige, Emma." From his pocket he took an envelope, and very cautiously raked all of the broken pieces possible into it. He went to the wall phone and called the morgue.

WHEN he came back, he said gently, "The crystal of Haynes' watch is missing, Emma. We can have this patched up and compared for size, but hell, honey, it's like she said. Haynes came up here and tried to tell the husband he ought to give up his wife. He—mmmmm!"

"I thought you'd get it," snapped Emma. "This brewery they've talked about must be worth jack. As soon as Haynes finds out that Cameron has all the jack, he makes a play for the wife. Only it backfired. Both gees end up dead, and the dame gets the brewery."



It was a hatful of nickels for the place's jukebox.

Hannegan shook his head. "You're snatching at straws, Emma. After Haynes went downstairs he argued with Bettina. Hell, you can see plain where he slapped her.

And upstairs Cameron was drunk enough to get the blues, so he did the Dutch, right out of the window."

They went down to the grill in silence and Hannegan bought them a drink. He said he had to go. Already the porters were cleaning "Acey-Deucy." Emma shoved the napkin she had found on the floor of the booth at him. She said, "Hannegan, be a nice guy and ask your chemist what this streak across the napkin is." There was a darker streak across the middle of the napkin. He didn't ask her why. "And be damned sure Tim gets a nitrate test," she called after him. He told her that was routine, and she said she'd be down to see Tim later.

She ordered another drink. Somebody said, "Gee, Miss Emma, I'm sorry I lied to you. I knew he was there all right, but I thought you'd get sore at him. If I'd told the truth maybe you could have—?" It was

Mendiola, tears in his brown eyes. She patted his arm and told him that was okay.

"You know," she said, "a little guy with a plaid suit and a checkered coat stuck his head in that booth a bit before it happened. See him?"

Mendiola hadn't seen him. She went on, "He had a mouth full of gold teeth and he smelled like toilet water and cheap perfume."

Mendiola laughed. "That was Petey Jarvis. He's a jockey, or used to be. Used to be a bellboy, too, right here in the hotel. I remember now his asking if Bettina was in here. He gave me a buck." He laughed some more. "He's crazy about her. Funniest thing I ever saw how little fellows fall for big dames like that!"

Emma finished her drink thoughtfully. She went back to the little girls' room and looked it over. That disappointed her. There was no window large enough for a midget to crawl out of, let alone a big woman like Bettina Tanto.

She went into a cut-rate drugstore and bought a large bottle of the cheapest and smelliest scent she could find. She went on rapidly toward the Alamo Building, tears in her eyes, but her chin set firmly.

WHEN Tim Sloan was not back from the station in triumph with Miss Emma Hohenberger at five-thirty, McFarley was a little hurt. At six o'clock he sent downstairs for a couple of sandwiches and a carton of coffee. At six-thirty he wanted to go home and was afraid he'd miss something. He turned off the lights and went into the private office and stretched out on the couch. His mind roved to Bettina Tanto and her tall, svelte beauty. A moment later he had Tim's criss-cross directory looking up the number, T-9292. The number was 1618 Bellaire. He put the book away again, turned out the lights, and composed himself for a short bit of shuteye. It was impossible.

Again he was seeing the wet red lips, the winking eye, hearing the words of gratitude she had expressed.

At first he wasn't sure, but it really sounded as if the outer door had been keyed open. He waited for Timothy Tappan Sloan's jovial voice and decided he'd imagined it. Then he heard the unmistakable noise of a desk drawer being slid protestingly from its grooves. And also, a crack of light appeared beneath the door.

McFarley lay very quiet. Sloan, he knew, had many, many enemies. In Sloan's desk he found the detective's spare gun, a snub-nosed .38 revolver. Trembling, breathing deeply, he put his hand on the doorknob, counted to ten to put his courage in gear, and hurled the door wide.

"S-t-stick 'em up!" he quavered to the woman sitting at his own desk, thumbing through his own notebook.

Emma Hohenberger looked up, startled. She grinned. She said, "For the love of Pete, manpower and womanpower must be all washed up in this country! You must be McFarley."

"I'm McFarley, Tim Sloan's pardner! What are you doing looking through my notebook?"

"I'm not taking shorthand lessons," she snapped. "Put that rod down. I'm Emma Hohenberger." When he stared at her goggle-eyed, she said, "Put it down. It's okay. I've had a key to this joint more years than you've been out of diapers."

"But I don't understand? Where's Tim? Didn't he—?"

"Meet me? No. Right now he's in the jailhouse with a murder charge hanging over him."

IMPATIENTLY she answered his questions as well as she could. She liked what this funny little fellow did next. He slapped the desk with his open hand. He blustered, "By God, I'll get him out or my name's not McFarley! Don't you imagine for a minute he shot that guy, not Tim Sloan. He might have been drunk but he wouldn't shoot an unarmed guy across the table from him."

She liked that plenty. "Well," she sighed, "at least two of us believe that. But we got to prove it to Hannegan and the rest.

What time did that precious pair come in here and did you make a transcript with the dictagraph?"

He took the notebook from her, flipped

the pages. He began reading in a loud-pitched voice, everything that had been said by Sloan, Bettina, and Caleb Haynes that afternoon. When he finished, he said, "See, *she* suggested getting a drink."

"Yeah," said Emma. "Read that part about that fellow's watch again."

He found it, and read, " 'That's *monsoon* country, and the ordinary watch cogs up in no time at all. So some of the smart Indians devised a cover like this to buckle over the face to protect the watch and keep out part of the moisture at least. *Malim?*' Sloan said, 'Croton. Damned fine watch.' "

Emma nodded. Just as Sloan had said, she was home from the CBI theater herself. She knew those watchbands. And she was familiar with the Croton watch. She sat so long that he thought she had gone to sleep and spoke to her sharply.

She said, "McFarley, know a little man named Petey Jarvis? He is about your height, wears loud clothes, has gold teeth and does himself with cheap perfume or toilet water."

"That must be the guy that left the—!"

She had to make him go on. He finished up, lamely, "So I didn't tell Tim about it. Heck, a buck is a buck."

She said, "I wish to God I knew what was in it!"

"I know. I was a little curious myself, so I steamed it open. Just had one word in it. It said, 'Okay'."

Emma grinned and said she felt like kissing him, and McFarley looked a little desperate.

"Okay," she grinned, "you want a little action? We got to get the boss man out of this jam some way or other. Now you got the dame's address, 125 West Agarita. You—"

"I don't think she lives there." Blushing fiercely, he showed Emma the phone number Bettina had given him. He told her about the other address, 1618 Bellaire. Emma thought a moment.

"She messed up the detail in one spot or the other," she admitted. "One of the two is phony. For the sake of your pride, McFarley, I hope the phone number is the spot. Now here's what I want you to do—if you're man enough."

He listened attentively. He put on his hat and his coat, took the cheap bottle of scent from Emma and scurried out the door.

## CHAPTER VI

### Nickel, Lead and Tin

TWENTY minutes later he made a deal with a bellboy he knew at the Honey-Plaza. It cost him twenty bucks, but it was worth it. He let himself into Room 1234 as Emma had instructed him to do, with the purchased passkey. The room had been cleaned up. He opened the cheap-smelling toilet water and the room smelled very bad, indeed, when McFarley oozed back into the hall.

Downstairs he returned the key and went outside for a cab. He hoped 125 West Agarita was the wrong spot. It was. The landlady said yes, indeed, Bettina Tanto used to live there, but she had been asked to move. What with running a decent, respectable house, they had to be particular. No, the woman most certainly didn't leave a forwarding message.

He had better luck at 1618 Bellaire. It was a cottage this time rather than an apartment, sitting well back in a big hedged yard.

Every light in the place was blazing and the radio was letting some brass-lunged orchestra pour out jive into the unoffending air.

He located Bettina, through a side window, in the living room. She was sprawled on a couch, very much *en negligee*. One long leg was cocked over the other raised knee, and the suspended foot kicked strident time in rhythm to the jive. A tabouret at her elbow held a fifth of rye and a bottle of beer. While McFarley looked, she took a deep drink—from each bottle, the beer coming last. She didn't even shudder. She rose up on her elbow and yelled, asking Baby when they were going to eat.

McFarley went to the back of the house to see who baby was. The little stinker, the little man whose name he now knew as Petey Jarvis, was standing at a stove vigorously stirring a skillet full of eggs. He wore a long tie-around apron that reached


**Sloan looked from the gun to the woman who was shaking him, focusing his glassy eyes.**

clear to the floor. He told Momma that Baby had it about ready and they'd eat in a minute.

McFarley went away from there fast. He was afraid he was going to be sick at his stomach.

Because Hannegan and the rest of the city coppers respect Tim Sloan and liked Emma Hohenberger, Emma was allowed to spend a long, long time with Sloan in the visitors' room. Over and over she made him repeat the story he had told Hannegan, all the details he remembered of what occurred in "Acey-Deucey" in the grill room.

"Look," she snapped. "There's got to be

something. Damn it, drunk or sober, you didn't kill that man." She bit her lip. "Did Bettina leave the booth where you were sitting at all?"

He said he remembered vaguely that she did, because she kissed him on the head when she came back. She winced a little at that. No, he had no idea how long she'd been gone. She thought again of those midget-sized windows in the restroom.

"Did anyone else besides the captain come in?"

Mendiola told him about a phone call that he didn't take. She winced again. No, he didn't remember anyone else. And no,

he didn't remember hearing the argument, the sound of the slap.

He said, "There's one funny thing that sticks in my memory, Emma, and it's just a drunk man's idea I guess. Listen, it was like I was on a boat, pitching and tossing, with my head down there, you understand? And then there was a *clunk* like the boat hit a rock and something fell down on me. I pushed it off, and so help me, whatever it was, it seemed like it had hair on it. Aw, to hell with it. It all came out of a whiskey bottle!"

After awhile, she said, "You know a little man named Petey Jarvis?" He said he didn't, so she described him. His eyes grew wide. She went on to tell him that Petey Jarvis had stuck his head in the booth, while she was sitting alone at the bar.

He arose, and took a half dozen steps before whirling back to her. "You're damned right I remember. I didn't raise my head, but that smell, that odor was there, thick enough to cut. Now you listen close. That little monkey has been haunting me since I came back from the Kiwanis luncheon."

When he had finished, Emma added her own details, including the note the guy had left with McFarley, and the single word it contained, "Okay."

"I don't get it," admitted Tim. "Surely a dame like that wouldn't mess around with a little squirt—"

She repeated Mendiola's shrewd observation about little men going for big women in a big way.

"But I don't get the tieup. What did he mean, *okay?* What was okay?"

"That's what I'm going to find out," she said, grimly, and got on her feet. "How many nickles were left when you passed out?"

He told her a hatful as far as he remembered.

He kissed her on the cheek, but he wouldn't look at her. He said, "Kid, I'm sorry. I hadn't planned anything but a couple of beautiful weeks you'd always remember. I messed up, so don't bother with me. I guess I shot the guy—I must have. Forget it, and have your two weeks of fun."

She just patted his cheek and went out of there. She didn't want him to see she was crying.

In the office Hannegan said, "We took a nitrate test, Emma." He looked up at her and nodded. "Plenty of powder in his hand. Sort of an odd thing, though. It was in his left hand and wrist instead of his right."

"His left? Listen, Hannegan, you know he carried the gun under his left arm. How in the name of—"

Hannegan looked gloomy. "A good prosecutor will find it duck soup, Emma. He pulled the gun. Haynes grabbed his hand. The gun flew toward his left, so he picked it up with the left hand and blasted away. Simple."

She breathed hard through her nose. "How about that napkin?"

"Yeah. Those black streaks in there tested out nickel, lead and tin. Where'd you get it and does it mean anything?"

She didn't answer for a full sixty seconds. Then she told him where she got it and said it might mean a lot.

McFARLEY was waiting at the office. He told her with a bit of a swagger that the phone number address was right and the one given Tim was a phoney. He told her about Baby cooking supper happily and merrily for Momma.

For a long while Emma paced the floor of Tim Sloan's office, her flat-heeled shoes scudding across the linoleum, her brow wrinkled.

She thought: *It was like the boat hit a reef, clunk! Then something fell down on my head. I pushed it off, and it had hair on it.*

She remembered the nickles scattered all over the floor. She remembered the metallic stains in the napkin. She remembered that Haynes' watch crystal was missing, and that a broken crystal was found on the floor of the room from which Dick Cameron leaped to his death. A Croton watch. Things began to fall into their proper places.

A portable typewriter sat in the corner, a new addition to the office equipment since she'd been away. She said, "Let's go. I'll

wag the mill, you wag Tim's bellygun. Can you use it if you have to?"

McFarley was a little green around the gills, but he thrust the gun in a hip pocket and said stoutly that damned right he could use it.

He was drunk enough to do the Dutch out the window.

## CHAPTER VII

### To Close a Mouth

EMMA, with the portable typewriter in one hand, thumbed the bell at 1618 Bellaire long and loud. The radio was still blasting jive. She thumbed it again and the door came open cautiously. Bettina's voice said, "Yes, what is it, please?"

Emma pushed against the door, found it had no chain. "Please, please," she panted, "let me in. There's a man after me." She pushed harder, and stumbled into the little hallway as Bettina gave ground. Emma gave her best impression of a very frightened woman who has been pursued by a maniac. She felt a little guilty as Bettina hustled her into the living room, switched off the radio and poured her a stiff drink.

She was still going into details when a slight commotion was heard toward the rear of the house. A little man backed into the room with his hands raised, another little man prodded him on—with a .22 target pistol. The man with his hands in the air was McFarley, the man with the pistol was Pete Jarvis.

Emma damned McFarley roundly—for getting caught.

"Lookit, Momma," crowed Jarvis, "what I found crawling in our back window."

"Watch him," yelped Bettina, "he's a maniac. He's—say, aren't you the punk that works for that dick, Tim Sloan?"

McFarley hung his head and admitted that he was. He said he was coming to see Bettina, having looked up her address in a criss-cross. Jarvis said that was a hell of a way to call on a dame. Emma sat with the portable on her lap.

She said, spitefully, "That's the man. I think we better call the police."

Jarvis looked at Bettina, who said, "Now look, lady, maybe we can thrash this out. You see, I know this punk and he's pretty much okay. No use to call the police. Maybe if he'd just sort of apologize—"

Jarvis had dropped nervously into a chair at mention of the magic word, police. The long barreled gun dangled over the padded arm. Emma stood up, clutching the typewriter to her. She said, "Well, I don't know."

She tossed the typewriter like a basketball. It hit Jarvis' wrist. He yowled and dropped the gun. Emma leaped. When she came up, she had the pistol, and McFarley had seized the opportunity to drag the bellygun from his hip pocket.

The tableau froze for a split second. "You see," said Emma, "we both work for that dick, Tim Sloan. We've got some funny ideas that we want to get straightened out. Hold them, McFarley."

She picked up the portable gingerly and sat it on the table. There was paper in the case. She was thankful the machine still worked.

"We'll just start with you, little bit," she said to Jarvis. "There's no use to stall around. You killed Dick Cameron up in 1234 at the Roney-Plaza today. Should I tell you how you did it, and all about it?"

Bettina said, "Dick committed suicide!"

Emma got up. She said, "You, McFarley, sit down and write what I tell you. I think he'll sign it."

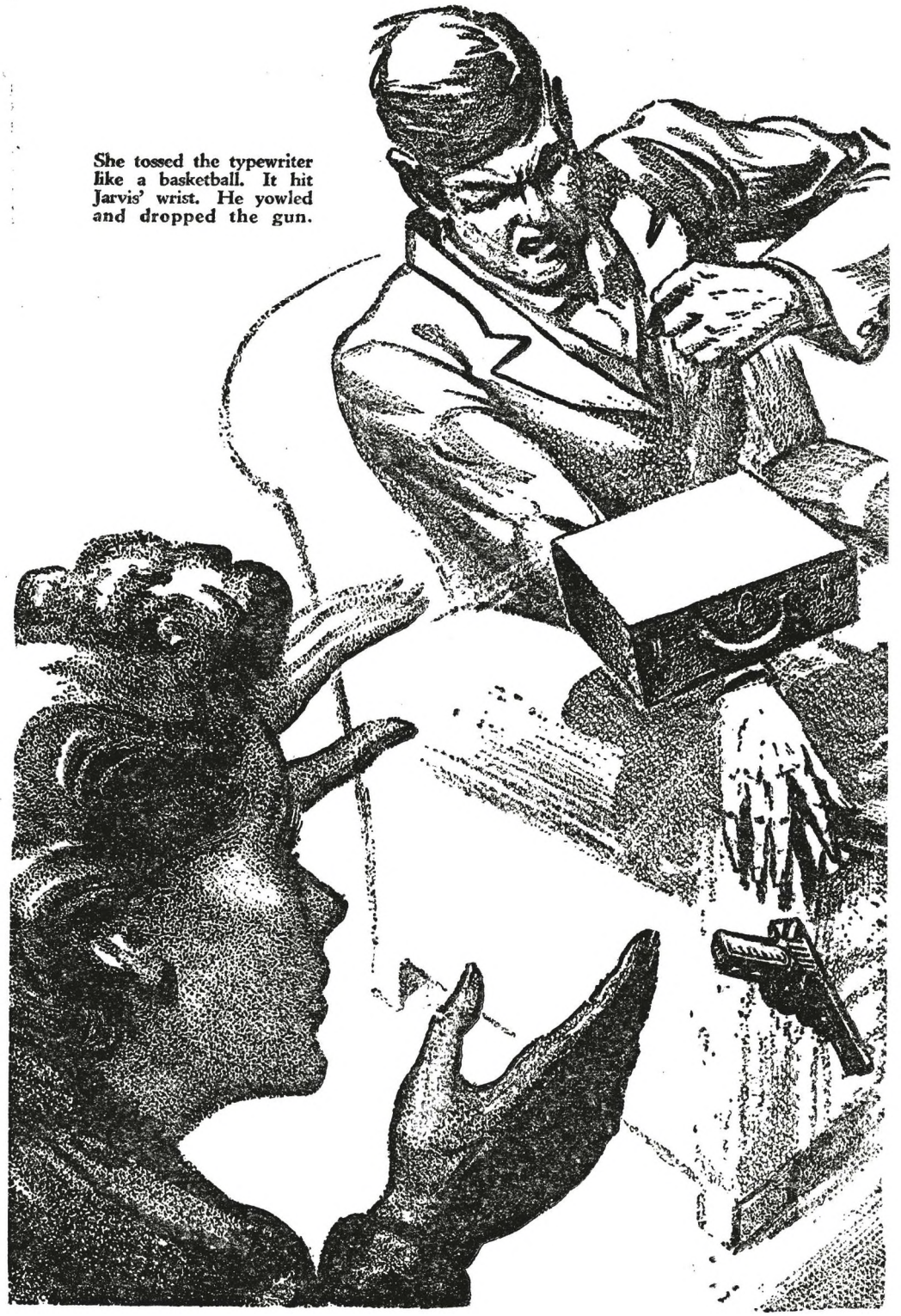
MCFARLEY sat down at the typewriter, laying his gun beside the little machine.

Emma snapped, "What sort of watch do you wear, Jarvis?" He didn't answer, but she could see it gleaming on his wrist. "Take it off of him, McFarley, and don't get in line of fire."

McFarley took it off and handed it to Emma. She looked at it and smirked. "Brand new. This tears it, Goliath. A brand new, shiny Croton. Shockproof, shatterproof—and don't forget, brand new! Except for the crystal. Funny that this crystal should be of the unbreakable type, all pitted and scarred, like it had been around the world! Poor Haynes' crystal was unbreakable, wasn't it? So you had to use your own."

Jarvis' eyes were bugging out of his head. The sweat was beginning to pop out on his brow. Bettina, on the divan, glared at him.

"Okay, McFarley, write. Say: I fed Dick Cameron enough liquor in Room 1234 of the Roney-Plaza to make him dead to the



She tossed the typewriter like a basketball. It hit Jarvis' wrist. He yowled and dropped the gun.

world, for I had planned to do away with him. I knew Bettina was going to Sloan's office, so I left a note for her telling her he was ready for the kill." McFarley's fingers flew.

"At six minutes past five o'clock I asked the waiter, Mendiola, in the grill room, where Bettina was. He told me. Bettina gave me the crystal out of Captain Caleb Haynes' watch. I went upstairs to 1234 by the service stair and let myself in with a key I kept from the days I was working there as a bellboy. I fixed the room to look like there had been a fight. I tried to break the crystal Bettina had given me, and it would not break. My purpose was to plant the broken crystal so that Captain Haynes would appear to have caused Dick to commit suicide, to make it look as though they had fought. But the crystal wouldn't break. I was wearing the same make watch, so I transferred the crystals and broke my own there. Then, at about ten minutes after six, I pushed Cameron, still dead drunk, out the window."

The little man named Jarvis, cried, "It's a lie, I didn't do it. I—"

Emma grated, "Well, maybe it isn't altogether correct, but it's close enough. *She* was figuring on turning you in tomorrow anyway."

"Who?" He was wildeyed now.

"Bettina, you chump. Because she's got a big brewery now, big enough to cause the murders of two *good* men, you don't think she'll put up with a squirt like you, do you? She's used you. Already she's got the first part of her plant fixed. I don't know all the details, but—"

"Don't listen to her, Baby," advised Bettina. "She's trying to work a cover for that dick boy friend of hers. You're Emma, aren't you?"

Emma didn't bother to answer. "Bub," she went on, to Jarvis, "you still got friends at the hotel that'll do you a favor? Okay. Tell one of them to go up to 1234 and start sniffing. A party I know saw this dame—your supposed gal friend—key her way into 1234. She took a bottle of that cheap scent you used and dosed the whole room!"

"It's a dirty lie, sweetheart," snarled Bettina. Her hand was behind her, in the crack of the divan.

"Call up," said Emma, calmly enough. "McFarley, take him out with you to use the phone."

McFarley picked up the bellygun and followed Jarvis from the room. Bettina said, "You'll never get away with a frame-up like that. Looking for an out for your man!"

"Looking for an out," agreed Emma, "and making one if necessary. I'd frame you, too, damn you!"

JARVIS came back, hopping mad. "Damn it," he screeched at Bettina, "what are you trying to do to me? If I thought you had any screwy plans like—" He swallowed convulsively.

"You better beat her to the punch," Emma said, softly, "before she puts you in the hot seat. She'll do it; in your heart you know she'll do it!"

Jarvis snarled, "Sit down there, punk, and start writing. It's almost right, I gave him the old heave-ho, but the facts are not all there by any means, she ain't in it enough!"

Bettina screamed, "You killed him! You killed Dick! The only man I ever loved?" She sprang to her feet. A shiny little gun that had been in the divan was in her hand. "I loved him!" she raged. Her hand came up. She fired three fast shots at Petey Jarvis before Emma let loose with the target pistol.

The gun spun from Bettina's hand. A surprised look appeared on her face. She turned her magnificent head and saw the red worm of blood flowing down the olive smoothness of her upper arm. "You shot me," she said, wonderingly, and fainted dead away.

Emma said, "Okay, Jarvis. It's a damned good thing she's a poor shot. Figure it out. She didn't give a damn for Cameron; she had you kill him. She wanted to snuff you out so you couldn't talk. What do you think now?"

Bitterly, little Jarvis said, "Sit down there, guy. I'll talk and you write."

When Hannegan arrived a full hour later, Bettina Ta..to was sitting up on

the divan, bandages torn from a towel tied about her arm, a sullen look on her face. Petey Jarvis straddled a chair in the corner, tears pouring out of his eyes for his lost and faithless love. McFarley swaggered about the room with the bellygun very much in evidence.

Hannegan read Jarvis' confession, nodding grimly. Finished, he tucked it away in his pocket. "She talked to you about it yet?"

"Not yet, isn't that enough? Lord, Hannegan, it's all there. She liked Jarvis for some reason or other. Cameron came home on leave as she said and she ran him off. Haynes came saying Cameron now owned a brewery worth a lot of jack. She knew she could never patch it up with Cameron and the only way she could get her fists on that property was to get him killed. So she got him killed, and tried to spot Haynes for the fall guy, not as a direct murderer but as the cause of a suicide. It's all down in there."

Hannegan nodded. "Then Haynes didn't love her and her story was a phony. But how in the name of God did she persuade Tim to gun Haynes to get *him* out of the way?"

"My God," said Emma, "don't tell me you don't see that? She's a damned big strong girl, isn't she? Remember the lump on Haynes' jaw which she claimed was from fighting with her husband, Cameron? Remember the nickles and the metal on the napkin?

"Remember, Tim was passed out with his head on the table. All she had to do was wrap a stack of nickles in the napkin and slug Haynes in the jaw. Tim will tell you something with hair fell down on his head.

"That something with hair was Caleb Haynes' head! Ask Jarvis what shape Haynes was in when he stuck his head in the booth."

Jarvis blubbered, "She's right. Bettina had knocked him out. She was getting that damned watch crystal when I stuck in my head."

Emma got up, wearily. "The rest is very simple. She's got two unconscious men on her hands. She lifts Tim's gun and gets

She aimed to eat breakfast in bed for two weeks.

it ready. Follow this, Hannegan. She works fast now.

She takes her own right hand and slaps the hell out of her own left cheek. Remember, she's big, her hands are as large as a man's. She's sitting on Tim's left, so she grabs his left arm and hand, clamps his fingers about his gun, pushes Haynes over in the corner, and pulls Tim's fingers, which is on the trigger. The shots snap Tim out of it. He drops the gun, and being a gunman, grabs it with his right hand just before she pushes him out of the booth."

Bettina snarled. "You'll never be able to prove it."

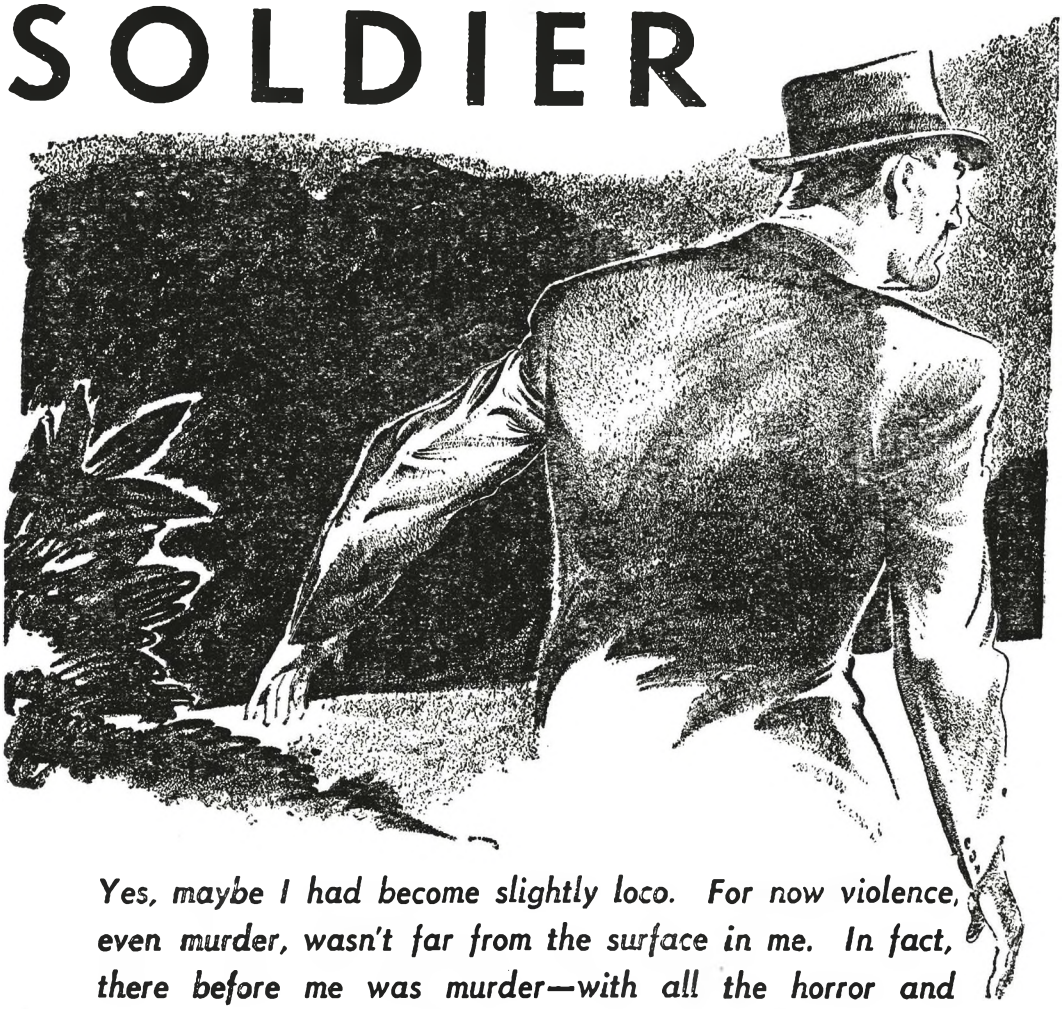
"With what Jarvis has said, we will. Another thing, Hannegan. Look at the bruised knuckles on her left hand." Bettina tried to hide them, but Hannegan had seen them. "Wallop somebody with a roll of nickles and it knocks the devil out of the guy—and also knocks the hell out of your rocking hand."

After awhile Hannegan grinned. "Well, guess you'll be going down to tell Tim all about it, Emma?"

Emma turned a key over and over in her blunt-fingered hand. "Nope," she said. "This is a key to 2035 Woodlawn, an apartment Tim rented for me. I'm going to get McFarley to take me home; I'm tired. You can tell Tim."

And at the door, on little McFarley's proud arm, she turned. "And tell that guy Sloan not to wake me up till breakfast is ready. I aim to eat it in bed—for the next two weeks at least."

# HOME-TOWN SOLDIER



*Yes, maybe I had become slightly loco. For now violence, even murder, wasn't far from the surface in me. In fact, there before me was murder—with all the horror and hatred and jealousy that had to accompany it so swiftly!*

IT WAS queer to be back in the home town after two years at war, queer to be back home in civvies, with nobody to shout orders at me. My throat swelled as I looked across the street at the old church, and saw the crowds parading, girls and fellows; all the old sights and the very smell of the town came back with a rush, and made Africa and Italy seem like a dream.

I hadn't written to Connie that I was coming—in fact, I hadn't written to her for months, though she knew I was getting my discharge. And there wasn't anybody else I was interested in writing to.

I walked out of the station and crossed Main Street. Nobody expected me, and so nobody recognized me. I saw some faces that I knew, but I was supposed to be thousands of miles away, so I got as far as the police station undetected.

I'd never get back my job on the Clifton police force—not with the discharge I had.

By LEW MERRILL

The apelike gunman covered me while the other asked: "How about a little ride, Hill?"

But I wanted to see the boys again, and get the news, chiefly about Connie Worth.

When I walked in, Sarge Devitt was sitting at the desk, munching an apple, and his eyes popped when he saw me.

"Danny Hill!" he shouted, stretching out a hand across the desk. "What in heck are you doing here? I thought you were in Europe!"

Bill Jepson and Nat Lake came in at that moment and began pumping my hand. "How long you been in Clifton, Danny?" asked Bill.

"Got in on the afternoon train," I said. "You sure are lucky to have got your

discharge. Wasn't wounded, were you? How in heck did you work it?"

"You can call it shell shock," I answered shortly, "though it's got another name now, which begins with 'psycho'."

I saw the sarge's eyebrows go up. "Yeah, I've heard about that. You sure are lucky, Danny," he said.

I NEVER felt such quick air-conditioning. The sarge was over-age, Bill Jepson had flat feet, and Nat some other trouble. They hadn't been through two years of hell like me. But there wasn't a word about hoping to see me back on the force.

They've stopped giving those "psycho" diagnoses now. I've known plenty of the finest guys invalided with battle fatigue, but the public didn't understand. They thought you were half a nut. I asked about some of the folks, sort of leading up to Connie. Of course, they knew we'd been engaged before I left.

I'd wanted her to marry me, if only for the allowance, and she said: "I will if you insist, Danny. But I'd rather work, and pray, and save for you. Whatever happens, Danny, I'll always be beside you."

That was the sort of girl she was. That's why I felt like a skunk, not meaning to see her now. Because everything was changed for me. I meant just to find out that she was okay, and then leave town for good.

The sarge said: "Your girl, Miss Worth —you haven't asked about her."

"She's all right, isn't she?"

"Sure, she's fine. You came back just in the nick of time, though, Danny. She's a fine girl. Plenty of fellows think so." Then he shot out what he had been leading up to: "Including Jes Miller."

I saw them grinning at me, and I didn't know how far they were kidding. That name was like a blow in the face to me. Jes Miller must have been all of fifty, but he'd often boasted he could win any woman he wanted. Jes was the big shot behind the crooked political organization. He owned the high-toned roadhouse on Aker's Bluff, about a mile out of town, and he had an office behind it where he did most of his business.

"I was up to his place last night on duty," said Nat. "Miss Worth was at a party that Jes was throwing. He's a bigger shot now than when you went away. You'd best watch your step, fella."

"Thanks for the advice," I answered. "I guess I'll be going."

They watched me out of the door without saying anything more. They were grinning at me, but in a bitter sort of way. I hadn't made the hit with them that I'd expected to. Maybe I shouldn't have told them what I had. I was sorry I'd dropped in, but I'd got to feeling so lonesome, and I'd got to thinking of the old times, when Connie and I used to meet most every night in a little place we knew, on the side of Aker's Bluff.

I HAD supper at a small restaurant in a back street. By the time I was through, it was beginning to get dark. I'd had to force the food down my dry throat. And I couldn't get that straight about Jes Miller and Connie.

He was the type a decent girl instinctively shies away from. Good-looking, in a coarse way, and with money to burn. What a gangster becomes when he goes high-class. I'd known a half-dozen scandals about him that he'd succeeded in hushing up. His wife was a little, dried-up woman, president of the Ladies' Aid. Nobody understood why she'd put up with him so many years. They lived in an average house on Warburton Street, and there were no children.

I couldn't get it through my head, about Connie going to one of Jes's parties. When a guy's been fighting for two years, the old world he knew seems terribly screwy. He can't digest things any more. My faith in Connie was gone. I wasn't going to see her again, and her life was her own; yet I felt the hate and jealousy leap out in me. I'd got to know.

If it was true that Connie was running around with Jes Miller, it was going to make a lot of difference to me, because then I'd know no woman in the world could be trusted.

Connie lived in a rooming house on Maple Street, but going there and looking

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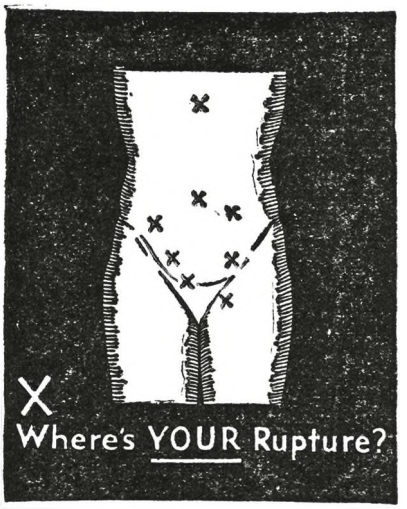


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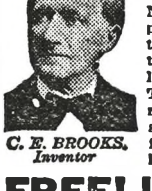

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up at the windows wouldn't do me any good. I must have been crazy, for I decided to go to Jes's house and ask him the truth. Violence, even murder, wasn't very far from the surface in me. You know how a fellow feels, when he's lived with violence for two years, and lost his old standards of thinking.

It was a dark old house, with a sort of smug look about it, and I rang the bell three times before the door opened, and Mrs. Miller stood there. I'd seen her twice before, when she came to the station to see the chief about hushing up something, and she hadn't changed a bit. She looked some years older than Jes. A little shriveled-up woman, with a glare in her eyes, as if she'd soured on the human race.

I said: "Mrs. Miller, I'm Dan Hill. I used to be on the force. Just returned, ma'am. And could I see Mr. Miller?"

"What d'you want to see him about?" she snapped.

I hesitated, but, as I said, I was screwy, and I blurted it out: "I want him to stop seeing my girl."

She cackled. "Who's your girl?" she asked.

"I'm not mentioning that."

"If you can turn that devil from his wicked ways, go ahead and try, young man. I've given him up long ago. If you want to see him, you'd better go to the roadhouse and inquire for him."

"That the best you can do for me?" I asked.

"If any girl's fool enough to fall for Jesse Miller, she deserves the worst," she snapped.

I said: "Okay. But I'm not a cop any more, and I don't give a damn for politics. Nobody can order me to do what I don't want to do any more. If your husband crosses my trail, I'll break things wide open, and, believe me, I know plenty."

She went into hysterics. "You get out of here!" she screamed. She clawed my shoulders, and, before I knew what I was doing, I found myself shoved out of the house and onto the sidewalk by this little slip of an old woman, in her queer dress with long skirts, looking like someone who had stepped out of the old family album.

The door slammed in my face, and I stood there a minute, thinking what a fool I'd made of myself. Then I turned to climb up Aker's Bluff.

IT'S a big wooded hill overlooking the river, with ravines running through it, and trees and underbrush everywhere. Jes Miller's roadhouse was going as strong as ever. I could see the glare of the lights as soon as I got out of town. When I reached the foot of the bluff, I could hear the orchestra overhead.

The open space in front of the roadhouse was thick with cars. I saw that the place was filled. People were dancing and eating in the big inside room, and the tables along the screened porch were packed, too. I didn't go inside. I wasn't there to raise hell, just to find if Connie was there or not.

Jes wasn't there, and Connie wasn't there. Difficult to pick out one girl in such a crowd? Not if you'd had her face in front of your eyes for two years, as clear as if you were holding up a photograph.

I remembered how she'd said she was going to work, and pray and save for me, and I knew, if I did find her with Jes, things were going to happen.

Well, she wasn't there, and I went around to the back, to Jes's office. He was supposed to do his road-house business there, but that was where he conducted his crooked work, and I knew he had a bodyguard. I was opposite the door when I saw a woman running away, and it was Connie.

She was running down the bluff, and I'd have known her even before she crossed the beam of light shining out from the roadhouse restaurant. She looked just the same as ever, as pretty as ever. The sight of her struck me dumb, and, before I'd made up my mind what to do, she'd disappeared in the brush on the side of the hill.

It was true, then! She'd been with Jes Miller; I'd never seen red in action—I'd always been too scared—but I saw red now. At least, there was murder in me when I whirled about and started on the run for Jes's office.

A car was drawn up in front of it, but it was empty. There was only a dim light inside the office. It was just light

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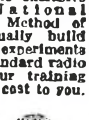

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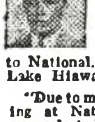

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enough for me to recognize Jes, squatting in a low chair. I thought he had passed out, or was asleep, for he wasn't moving. I tried the door, and it opened.

I was in the hall that ran between the office, at the end, and the restaurant at the other, from which came the sound of the orchestra, and the blend of voices. It was quite dark in the hall. I moved up to the office door, and then a man came out of the restaurant, wiping his mouth, and went out to the car. He didn't see me, standing in a little nook beside the office door. As he stepped into the light outside, I recognized Beecher, Jes's chauffeur and bodyguard.

Everybody in town knew Beecher. He looked like an ape, and he was a moron of low grade, but supposed to be devoted to Jes. He'd guarded him for years, when Jes was running bootleg liquor—as far back as those days. Jes had brought him to Clifton when he grew high-class, made the town his headquarters, and worked the politics racket.

He'd left his post for a minute to get himself a drink, and this was my chance. I don't know what I meant to do to Jes, but I didn't pack a rod. I'd always said I'd never touch firearms again, once I got my discharge.

I went in, and saw the floor was strewn with papers. I stood over Jes, and he never moved. He was asleep—he was dead-drunk, for there was an awful smell of liquor from him.

No, he was dead!

The little electric light on the table was just strong enough for me to see the livid fingerprint bruises, four on each side of his neck, and the two black spots in front that represented the thumbs. Jes had been choked to death, and he certainly must have been dead drunk at the time, or nobody could have throttled the life out of that gross carcase of his.

Something was resting lightly on Jes's coat. It looked like a bit of fluff from inside the cushion. I picked it up, and saw that I was holding an absurd little feather, dyed red and green. I whooshed it away, then caught it in the air and stuck it in my pocket.

I stood there, with the sweat streaming down my face. Connie had just come from the office, and yet, of course, Connie hadn't killed Jes Miller. It was incredible that those little hands of hers could have throttled the man to death, even if he was dead drunk. I knew she was innocent. But I'd got to work things so suspicion wouldn't be attached to her, in case her visit to Jes had been known.

I walked out of the door and through the hall entrance. Beecher was squatting on the running-board of the car, smoking a cigarette. He jumped up when he saw me.

"Hey, whatcher want? Whereya bin?" he shouted.

I broke into a trot. He hurled his great body at me, fists doubled. I fended off a blow with my right arm, and broke into a run. This was just what I wanted. The moron hesitated, and then ran back to see what had been happening.

I hurried around to the front of the restaurant. I'd had an idea, and it was justified. There was a cop on duty, and he was Bill Jepson.

He recognized me, and grinned sourly. "What's your hurry, Danny?" he called. But I went on down the hill. Now I'd done all that I needed to do. They wouldn't be able to prove anything on me, but Connie would be out of the picture, and I meant to lead the cops a dance for a few hours. I was pretty sure it was Beecher who had turned upon his master, and choked him, with those great hands of his, but I'd take the rap for the present, in order to draw off attention from Connie.

I was nearing the bottom of the hill when the hullabaloo broke out above, and I knew that Jes's body had been discovered.

I struck off the path through the scrub, and took a side road into town. Long before I was in Clifton police sirens were screaming, but, once in the streets, I guessed I was safe till morning. Clifton is a war factory town, and there are shifts coming and going all night long.

I strolled around for hours. I had several cups of coffee. After a long time, suddenly it was morning. Then it was daylight, and I bought a copy of a local paper from a newsstand. There it was on the front page, Jes Miller choked to death, and

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Connie was running wildly down the bluff. Then it was true she'd been with Jes Miller! I saw red.

Beecher and Danny Hill, returned soldier, wanted for questioning. Not a word about Connie.

I HAD to see Connie. I told myself I didn't want her to believe I'd murdered Jes, but it was something deeper than that. It was the need to see the girl I'd dreamed about for two years. I went into a drug-store pay-booth, and dialed her rooming-house.

I knew she was doing some kind of war work, and I didn't expect to get her at that time of the day, but the landlady told me she'd bring her to the phone. After a minute or two I heard her voice, and my heart jumped.

"Connie, this is Dan," I said. My heart was fluttering wildly.

"I recognize your voice, Dan," she answered coolly. She was always cool. "When did you get in?"

"Yesterday, Connie."

"How are you, Dan?" At first I'd known she was unfriendly, but now there was a little catch in her voice, such as I'd always remembered.

"I'm okay, Connie. You seen the morning paper?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Connie," I said, "I didn't kill Jes Miller."

"I know you didn't, Dan. Why don't you go to the police and tell them? They know you, and they're your friends."

I couldn't tell her why—because I wanted to lead them a long-enough dance to keep her name out of the business. I said: "This is my first day in my home town, and I don't aim to spend it in jail."

"What do you want me to do, Danny?" Again that catch in her voice. She knew, of course, that I was through with her, if only because I'd stopped writing to her. And maybe she was glad of it. But there was that little trembling undernote, and I could not answer her for the moment.

"What do you want me to do, Danny?" she repeated.

"I've got to see you, Connie, before I go to the police. It's very important. Can you meet me?"

"I go to work at noon. It's an eight-hour shift. You know, we're not allowed to take

a day off when we feel like it. We're fighting this war too."

"Will you meet me at nine?" I asked.

"Where, Danny?"

"You remember that spot in the ravine, on Aker's Bluff, where we used to meet?" I said.

She waited an instant, and then answered, "Yes, Danny," in a queer voice.

"Will you meet me there at nine tonight?"

"Yes, Danny."

"Here's anticipating," I said, and rang off.

MY HAVING been a cop had the disadvantage that half the police in Clifton would know my face at sight. And I had to keep from being picked up that day. I had to keep away from Main Street, and yet not walk where I'd be conspicuous. That included both country roads and the neighborhood of the war factories, where there were always cops on duty. And, of course, I couldn't get a room at a hotel. The only rest I could get was by going into small restaurants or drugstores, and ordering coffee.

The afternoon paper was more sensational than the morning one. It suggested that Jes Miller had been killed by a thug hired by his enemies of the former bootlegger. And I was supposed to be that thug —either me or Beecher. Maybe the two of us, it said. They'd have us both in their hands by nightfall. It looked to me as if they might.

But I'd got to see Connie first. I'd been relieved, in a way by her voice over the 'phone. But I had to know what she'd been to Jes Miller.

If Connie was like that, then all the screwy ideas I'd picked up in the army were correct, and coming back to the home town wasn't what we'd cracked it up to be.

I walked and walked, and once I thought I saw a cop looking at me suspiciously, but he was a strange cop, and green at that, and didn't make the pinch. Then at last the blessed darkness dropped, and I made my way toward the bluff, and knew that in an hour I'd be sitting beside Connie, and

I fended off a blow with my right arm and broke into a run, with purpose.

pretending to myself that the war hadn't happened.

I took a back road, and I wasn't far from the bottom of the bluff when a car with very brilliant headlights came toward me, almost blinding me. I stepped back out of its way, and it stopped beside me. Two men hopped out, and one of them was covering me with a gat.

"How about a little ride, Hill?" asked one of them. He was a short, swarthy little fellow whom I'd never seen before. The other was Jes Miller's gunman, Beecher, leering like the great ape he was. It was Beecher held the gat.

"If you'll call off this ape, I'll talk whatever you want to talk about," I said.

"Get inside," said the man. "Nobody's going to harm you, if you've got any sense."

I saw that Beecher was dumb enough to shoot without any further parley, so I got in beside the little man, with Beecher's gun from the back sticking into my ribs. The little man drove around the base of the

stuff, pulling up in a wild spot only a few hundred yards from where I'd made my rendezvous with Connie. The road was only a trail, and nobody was likely to pass that way in days.

"Go through him and tie him up," said the driver, and Beecher frisked me, found I hadn't a gun, and then fastened a rope tight about my chest, pinning my arms to my sides.

The little man said: "It's this way, Hill. Gottlieb hired you to blot out Jes Miller and get those papers he's been holding over us. You done a sweet job, fella, but Gottlieb slipped up. I've been combing the town for you all day, and now I've found you. Hand over those papers, and it's one grand for you."

He pulled out a wallet to show me, and flipped some bills. They were big ones. As he did so, I saw that he carried a rod in a holster, over his hip. That's amateur stuff, but I guessed he'd never used a rod in his life, just relied on morons like big Beecher.

I SAW what I was up against. I hadn't a doubt but that Beecher had sold out his boss to this fellow Gottlieb, whoever he was, but explaining wouldn't get me anywhere. I could still feel Beecher's rod prodding me in the back from time to time, but it was quite dark in the car, and by this time I'd worked my left arm loose without any difficulty. I reached forward—this was the hardest part, because I wasn't trained in sleight-of-hand—but I managed to yank the driver's rod out of the holster.

Then I had it in my right hand in a flash, and I dropped to the floor and had the fellow covered before the moron in the back seat could take it in.

I didn't say a word. There was light enough for the driver to see my gat. He gave a scared yelp, opened the door, and disappeared. I popped up. Beecher was staring after him, his gat dithering in his hand. I let him have it hard and heavy with the full force of the muzzle.

It caught him square on the forehead, and he dropped on the back seat without a sound. I slithered into the driver's seat and

drove until I saw a corner drug store at the edge of town.

SARGE DEVITT answered. I said: "This is Danny Hill, Sarge."

"Yeah? It's good to hear your voice, Danny," he answered. "Where are you calling from, and when'll you be able to be around?"

"I'm passing up the flowers of speech," I said. "How would you like to get hold of Jes Miller's murderer?"

"That would be my dearest dream, Danny," he stalled. I could hear murmurs in the station house, and of course I knew he was putting a tracer on me. "Are you bringing him in, or shall we come and get him?"

Maybe he thought me crazy. Maybe I'd acted crazy when I looked in the day before. Hell, he knew I'd been a cop myself and wasn't falling for kid stuff like that!

I said: "Lookit, Sarge. I've got Beecher, the killer. He's passed out in a sedan outside a drug store somewhere on the west side of the bluff. It wasn't here when I lived in this town, and I guess it's some kind of new development. You know the place?"

"Maybe I might try to find it," he answered. "Listen, Danny, we're shorthanded, and I may need you—"

I slammed down the receiver. The sarge was quick on the uptake, and I figured the police car would already be on its way. I darted out into the darkness. I was late already for Connie. Maybe she wouldn't wait. Fortunately it wasn't so far.

The place where we'd used to meet had been for convenience rather than romance, though there had been romance in plenty. It was just one of those ravines that ran through the bluff. You walked up it from the street, and you came to a kind of grassy seat under the trees. I knew the country well, and I struck out over the lots.

That was just as well, because I hadn't left the drug store more than two or three minutes when a car came roaring along the road, and only a police car would travel at that speed.

I reached the ravine, and I walked along it to the place I'd appointed, and there I saw her, sitting down, waiting for me.

I said: "It's good to see you, Connie. I'm sorry I had to be late."

She knew I wasn't going to take her in my arms, so I didn't have any trouble there. We looked at each other, and she said: "You've filled out, Danny, and I expect you're bronzed. Otherwise, you're just the same."

Well, it was up to me to begin, but it was Connie who began: "I expect you've been hearing things since you got back yesterday. Your voice sounded strange, Danny. You asked me to meet you here, and I've come. That's all. What do you want to know?"

That was all. No asking me why things had reached the pass they had. Just quietly accepting that we were through with each other.

I said: "Do you believe I murdered Jes Miller?"

"Of course not, Danny. That's why I came tonight, to tell you I believed in you. But you ought to have gone to the police, like I told you to."

"I couldn't have killed Jes," I said, and waited, sort of breathless. If she rose to that—why, the whole crooked line of our relationship would be straightened out. I could talk straight to her then. But she didn't answer, only sat looking at me, so kind, so wise and understanding. And yet she didn't understand.

Suddenly I remembered something. I pulled it out of my pocket. "I found this on Jes' body," I said, handing her the feather.

She took it, and without looking at me, said, "You mean you were there—after he was dead?"

"Yes," I said. "So were you. I saw you leaving the office. We don't have to play games with each other, Connie, knowing that neither of us could have choked Jes Miller to death. Besides, I've got the killer."

"What?"

"Beecher." I explained very briefly about Beecher and the little guy in the car. "I guess the police have got him in the can by now," I said.

SHE was looking at that ridiculous feather, and I saw that she was crying. She looked at me, not trying to hide the fact. "How did you happen to go to his office last night, just after he'd been murdered?" she asked.

"I went to look for you," I said. "I'd heard you'd been on a party with Jes Miller at his restaurant the night before. I didn't like it, and I meant to tell Jes so. I saw you leaving his office, and I went in, and found him dead."

"Why didn't you go to the police at once?" she asked. "Did you suppose I killed him?"

"No," I said. "Heck, what's it matter? All returned G. I.'s are screwy. And I've put the killer in their hands. Beecher sold out his boss. All that don't matter. I just wanted to find out that you—that you—didn't—didn't—"

I couldn't go on. Connie was turning the feather over and over in her hands, and the tears were still streaming down her cheeks. She wouldn't speak until she had grown composed. Then she said:

"Jes Miller was practically the town government, because he owned the machine. He was head of a committee for the re-employment of returned soldiers. He was a crook, but he wasn't all bad—nobody is. I believe he was really sincere and interested in the work.

"I went to him and asked him if he would get you a permanent civil service job. I knew the sort of man he was, but Jes saw dozens of presentable girls, like myself, every day. I didn't think I was taking any chances with my reputation."

"What made you think I mightn't want to go back on the police force?" I asked.

"Let me finish, Danny. I was interested in you, as an old friend, even though—even though—well, we found we might have made a mistake. Jes Miller was sympathetic. When he invited me to join a party at his restaurant, I accepted. He told me to come and see him the next evening. Well, his office isn't exactly a love-nest, Danny. Just a few steps from the restaurant. I went, and found he had been murdered. Somebody had told me you had come home.

"I was scared to death. My first thought

**I saw Sergeant Devitt and Nat Lake, and I knew I'd been trapped — and that Connie had trapped me.**

was to run away, and my second that it couldn't have been you. Why should you have killed Jes Miller when we—we've decided that we made a mistake?"

I thought I heard footsteps on the gravel of the gorge. Connie got up. "You ought to have gone to the police, Danny," she said again. And then I saw Sergeant Devitt, with Nat Lake, and knew I'd been trapped, and that Connie had trapped me. I could read that in her eyes.

The sarge said: "We've got Beecher. But I'm surprised at you, an old policeman, playing those kid's tricks, Danny. Take him down to the car, Nat."

I said to Connie: "You worked it, eh?" I knew now that the G. I. isn't a screwball. He just learns life in the raw, instead of going on believing fairy tales. I went with Nat. I knew he had a gat, but I knew he wasn't going to use it unless he had to. And he knew I wasn't going to make any trouble. I was just wondering how a girl like Connie could have been such a crook. I'd seen it in Italy and France, but those were foreign women. I'd thought American girls were different. I knew better now.

NAT LAKE took the wheel, and I sat beside him, while Sergeant Devitt and Connie had the back seat. I wasn't worrying about myself. When the time came, I'd prove to the world that I couldn't have made those eight bruises around Jes Miller's neck, and the two in front, on either side of the windpipe. I wasn't worrying about myself. And I wasn't worrying about Connie any more.

Maybe it was true what she'd told me about why she went to see Jes, and maybe it was hokum. That didn't disturb me. I'd made my little play, and she'd turned me in as a reward. All that was through. When we got into Clifton I said to Nate:

"You're taking the long way around, ain't you?"

He didn't answer me. He drove along Warburton Street, and when he stopped I recognized Jes Miller's house. Nat and Sarge Devitt got out and rang the bell. They left me in the car, with Connie in the back seat. Nothing to stop me from stepping on the gas and driving hell for leather. I had no reason to run, and they knew it. Only I didn't know they knew.

I heard them ringing and ringing, and at last the door opened, and Mrs. Miller stood on the threshold, in her absurd long skirt. I opened the door of the car and joined the party on the doorstep. Connie got out and followed me.

Sarge Devitt said: "I'm arresting you, Mrs. Miller, for the murder of your husband. Now take it easy."

The little wizened woman took it like he said. "How did you find that out?" she asked.

"You dropped this feather from your hat," said Sarge. "It had been quite conspicuous at the last Ladies' Aid meeting."

So then I knew that Connie hadn't sold me out. She'd known I wasn't the killer,

but, because I wouldn't go to the police, she'd arranged for them to take me in. She hadn't known who the killer was till I showed her the feather. But then she recognized it. Connie was a member of the Ladies' Aid. And she was a better dick than I was.

MRS. MILLER said calmly: "Yes, I killed him, but I didn't mean to. I knew he had another young girl coming to see him, and I'd had enough of it. Twenty-three years—isn't that enough for anybody? I went in there to save her, and I saw him sitting in his chair, dead drunk.

"If he'd stayed drunk, I'd have left him alone. But he opened his eyes and leered at me, and I couldn't stand the sight of the ——— any longer. I didn't mean to choke him to death, but it seems I did."

I was remembering then how Mrs. Miller had put me out of her house with one movement of her wrists. Her wrists and fingers must have been made of steel. Dish-washing, maybe. Or the washing-machine.

"Jes wasn't good enough to go on living, and I wanted to save that girl from him. I didn't know who she was, but I knew he was crazy about a new girl, and I thought it was time the ——— died. I didn't plan to kill him, you understand, but I choked him too hard."

"How about those papers, Mrs. Miller?"

"I got the key of his safe, when he was drunk. I thought maybe I'd find enough evidence there that would give me a divorce. I've got them all upstairs—I haven't looked at them yet—I was waiting till after the funeral tomorrow—"

"Well, all that will come out in due course, Mrs. Miller," said the sarge. "I've got to take you in, you understand."

"Jail will be heaven after the hell I've lived in for three and twenty years," she answered.

She stepped into the car, and Sarge Devitt drove her away, with Nat Lake, and they left Connie and me standing in front of the Miller house. Nobody seemed to care what happened to us.

CONNIE said, "What next, soldier?"

I said: "We seem to be out of the

picture. You've told me everything that I wanted to know, Connie. I'm quitting Clifton, and I'm saying good-by."

"You're the same big fool you always were, Danny," said Connie. "I've been saving up for two years, like I said I would, and I've got that thousand dollars we always talked about. How much have you saved out of your pay?"

I grinned. "How much does a dogface save?" I asked.

"Nix," she answered. "I knew all about that. Of course, if you really feel we made a mistake, it's okay by me, but I don't believe it."

I said, "All right, if you want a showdown, you can have one. Suppose I had my own personal reasons for stopping writing to you."

"Suppose I knew," she countered. "I said you were the same big fool as always, Danny. Don't you think that nurse of yours in Italy wrote me about you, when you yourself stopped writing? Don't you suppose all the boys at police headquarters knew about you? Don't you suppose they wanted to give you a hero's welcome, if you hadn't sneaked into Clifton the way you did, instead of coming with a brass band?"

I saw then that she was wise to me. But she'd made the play. So I hadn't anything to do but follow. I said:

"Most girls wouldn't like being tied up to a guy with a branch instead of a limb."

"Danny, you musn't make me cry again," she said.

"So they told you I'd got a prosthetic arm instead of the one I was born with?"

"Everybody knows that, Danny, including Sergeant Devitt. And they all love you. And they know you couldn't have choked Jes Miller to death with only one good hand. That's why I was trying to get a job for you. But Uncle Sam will give you one. He won't let any of his boys down."

Connie was crying now, and I had my good right arm about her.

"I thought I couldn't come back to you as a cripple," I said. "A girl needs a husband with two arms and two legs. Yeah, a shell took off my left arm in Italy, and that's why I'm discharged. So I was planning to get the hell out of all the life I'd known."

"You always were a fool, Danny," sobbed Connie.

"The only way it helped," I said, "I was able to slip out of the knot that Beecher tied. You see, I ain't got my prosthetic arm yet. I've got a kind of stump. They're going to fit me later. I've got tin fingers, but they don't work very well. I couldn't have used them on Jes Miller's throat. That's why I wasn't worrying—except for you—"

"Danny, when we went driving, it was only your right arm that counted, wasn't it?" Connie asked.

# PERALTA PAY-OFF

(*Continued from page* 35)

were buck privates when they were kicked out. They worked it here with forged credentials. You will notice they never went near the rehabilitation center. The average M. P. won't stop an officer with that much rank, not when he's wearing a double row of combat ribbons. They figured on that."

"Why did Heinsolt claim he knew them. And why didn't they catch wise that he was wise to their being phony?"

Watson said: "Heinsolt was one of the best men we've ever had. He used psychology as it should be used. He went up to them and claimed he remembered them, that he'd been in their outfit. Of course, they knew he was lying. But they figured the guy was down and out and was trying to play them for suckers, so they rode along with the play."

"Why did they have the girls killed? What did the girls know?

"THEY deny having anything to do with that, though of course we know better. Probably when they'd been drinking and, shall we say overly friendly with the girls, they'd let something slip. It's the only logical conclusion. Ortega was the killer of the crowd and they fed him to you when he got dangerous. It was only a matter of time before he'd have been picked up on your maid's description, and he'd have probably broken under questioning. You understand they are not admitting a thing—we have to guess at part of their reasons for doing things. Both of them had connections with the hot-car market and so got the cars the *Peralta* had in her holds very reasonably priced. And through these same connections they had no trouble in meeting the *Peralta* offshore, when she came in, and relay contraband to safe landing places. Men or goods, it made no difference. They brought them in past our patrols. And hid the men and fenced the contraband when ashore. The two were the brains of the crowd."

I said I was certainly glad to hear the

boys weren't Army men and that I'd really liked them both. Which probably was their stock in trade. And Watson agreed with the last.

He said: "And now, Ryan, I suppose you will sit back and enjoy a well earned rest. And you really earned it, fella. I'll even make that official."

And did that hit a sore spot.

I said: "I go North in two days to go back to work. How in the hell can I pay Alice and Edgar even, much less the payments on this white elephant, if I sit here and enjoy a well earned rest? You tell me that."

He said the man that had the answer to that one would own the world in a year and a half.

# FEATHERS

(*Continued from page* 43)

ought to learn to use his eyes. It's too bad the legislature passed that fool act, depriving sheriffs of their ancient duties."

SAM strolled out in the bright moonlight, taking the road into town, which ran past Nat Dawson's house. Just as he approached it, Minnie Barron opened the door and limped out. She had finished the day's work for Nat, and was on her way home to her father's house. Sam nodded.

"Nice night, Miss Minnie," he said.

"You want to see Mr. Dawson?"

"Yeah, but you don't need to introduce me. I'll just go in."

He pushed open the door. Nat was sitting in an easy chair, tying a fly. "Hello, Nat!" he said.

"Why, hello, Sam! Say, that's too bad about Jason and his wife, ain't it!"

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "You trying out this Summer time on your hens, Nat? I saw what looked like an electric light in your henhouse."

"I'm giving it a test. If my hens don't give me any more eggs, I'll drop it. You think Jason really killed Cy Everett, Sam?"

"We'll know tomorrow. You had a subpoena from Soames to attend the inquest?"

"Yeah. Well, nobody could go wrong on saying it was Jason, after that fight they had."

"What d'you do with your roosters, Nat?"

"Roosters? Put them in the pot, when they're big enough. That's simple."

"How do you tell them? I mean, how soon?"

"Easy. Roosters' tail feathers take a form like a bow, or sickle. Soon as you see that, you know you've got a rooster. Hen's tails are straight."

"How come you didn't go fishing with Cy today?" asked Sam. "You're luck to avoid suspicion. Though, of course, you might have saved him."

"Too much grief at Cy's camp. Minnie said the old man and Jason had a reg'lar set-to last night, shouting and yelling at each other. Almost came to a fist fight. And Dolly Clark yelling at her father. I figured Cy wouldn't be the best fishing company today. Maybe he allowed he wouldn't be good company himself. I'd have liked to saved Cy from that murderer. You agree it was Jason?"

"I've got two eyes," said the sheriff. "I dunno why other humans can't see things the way I can. But tell me, Nat, between ourselves, what in hell did you want to murder your best friend for?"

"Why is it the blow torch?" Gomez asked.

"Me murder Cy Everett? You mean you are accusing me?" bawled Nat.

"Of course—of course, Nat. It will all come out tomorrow at the inquest, but I was just curious as to your motive."

Nat shouted: "You're crazy! You're charging me with murdering my best friend in the world. Who's going to believe that, after him and his son-in-law having that set-to last night, and Minnie's hearing that the

old man threatened to cut him out of his will?"

"That might have been the incentive, Nat. But I ain't on the jury. I was just asking you what for you had to kill Cy Everett."

NAT burst out laughing. "Well, where's your evidence?" he asked. "Cy was killed with an arrow, shot from a bow, and all them arrows are made to a standard pattern. What else have you got?"

"It's this way, Nat. What interested me first was how that arrow passed through Cy's body, and pinned him to the ground. Where he was standing was a hundred and fifty-seven yards from the edge of the scrub, where the arrow came from. Only a bow like yours could have shot an arrow hard enough to have that effect at such a distance.

"Yeah, Nat, I figure that the feller who shot that arrow was standing about a hundred and sixty yards away. He was a damn' good shot, and he used a damn' strong bow, to have killed Cy with one of them standard 28-inch arrows. He had a good, strong cord, too—the kind they use for hanging, Nat."

Nat shouted: "I sure get you, Sam. You are going to tell that to the coroner, and try to frame me. But supposing it's all a lie? Supposing Jason Clark just walked up to within a dozen yards of Cy, and nailed him. Who's to say that ain't what happened? You think you can put that dream of yours across?"

"Maybe not," admitted Sam. "I was just trying to figure out why you were crazy enough to do it."

"You can get the hell out of here, and do your figuring somewheres else!"

"Sure, Nat. I don't want to intrude," said Sam. "I was only thinking, you being well liked in this community, we might have got you off with twenty years. I guess it's just the way you happen to feel about it. If you think you can beat the law, that's your right.

"But, touching on them hens of yours, I'm interested in the idea that a coupla hours of electric light can fool them into believing that they've entered for the egg-laying marathon, instead of going to roost.

And I'm specially interested in the way you tell the young roosters from the hens, by them bow-shaped tail-feathers. Hope you didn't make no miscalculation there, Nat, like you did about the shooting.

"Sure you're right. No jury is going to listen to too much theorizing about archery, when Jason and Cy Everett had that run-in. Maybe you're clever in trying to put the guilt on an innocent man. But I'm inclined to think you made a mistake about them roosters."

THE charge of buckshot spattered against the tree in front of Sam, and it was luck, not judgment, made him leap back instead of the forward, when the second barrel sent the twigs in front of him flying. But then Sam knew that that was all. There are only two barrels to a duck-gun.

He leaped after the flying figure in the underbrush, grabbed it, and got the gun—which was no use to him. Minnie Barron beat at him with her fists, and for a half a minute was like a wildcat. Then she broke down.

"So you was listening," commented the sheriff. "I don't exactly blame you. But why didn't you get one of Nat's small, light bows, to do your dirty work with? I guess you never fired one. What you got to say, Minnie? Aiming and discharging a duck-gun at me is a breach of the peace, and I ought to run you in."

"I—ain't—saying nothing," panted the girl.

Sheriff Sam held her by the wrists, surveying her with pity. The ground was level, but she was standing awry on account of her crippled leg. He said:

"I sort of got it, but I wasn't quite sure about the motive. You worked on Nat to kill Cy Everett, because he only gave you five thousand dollars after Jason crippled you with his car. Now ain't that like a woman! Why didn't you get Nat to lay for Jason?"

Minnie closed her lips tight. Sam went on:

"That's motive. Of course, I've got Nat nailed as tight as he nailed Cy to the ground. I dunno as I'll need to bring you in tomorrow, Minnie."

"You can't prove nothing," the girl mumbled. "It ain't no use telling you that Nat's innocent. But I was listening, and you can't prove a thing. I ain't fool enough to suppose a jury is going to send Nat to the chair, because of an argument how far an arrow can be shot from a bow."

"Then what for did you want to kill me, Minnie?" asked the sheriff mildly. "Got scared, I guess? Acted on that impulse, huh? Well, tell Nat I'll still try to get him off with twenty years, if he comes through with the truth tomorrow.

"You're the one ought to burn, Minnie. But what Jason did to you soured you on life, I reckon. Here's your gun. Now run home, like a good girl, and I'll forget this meet-up here. After all, Nat's the killer. And tell him to come clean."

The sheriff watched the girl slink away along the road, shaking his head sorrowfully. Maybe, if Cy had come across with twenty thousand, instead of five, he'd have been alive at that moment. He didn't like Jason Clark, but Jason was most certainly innocent.

He circled through the woods, until he was at the rear of Nat's house. The electric light in the chicken-house was off. Very softly, Sam stole up to the coop, and opened the door. He felt up to one of the perches, where a number of feathered shapes were huddled together. The tail was straight, and so was the next. But the third tail curved like a bow, in soft and circling feathers.

Sam lifted the young rooster down from his perch with hardly a protest on the part of the sleepy bird. Putting it under his coat, Sam Small started for home.

When he opened the door, his wife came running into the hall, sobbing. "Sam, I've been so afraid for you," she wept. "I heard two shots, and was afraid that someone had killed you."

"Yeah, I heard them, too," said Sam. "One of those hunters jacking deer contrary to the law, I guess. Game warden's kind of easy. This bow and arrow law has messed things up. Now stop it, hon. Here's the old man, alive."

"I was afraid that you'd gone to arrest Nat Dawson, and that he'd killed you. You

don't really believe that it was Nat, do you?"

"Shucks, Ma'am, Mrs. Small, I told you I ain't allowed to answer your speculations," said Sam. "And ain't I told you sheriffs don't make arrests no more, under the new law, except for breaches of the peace? Speaking of which, you're breaching the peace of the Small home right now, with all them tears."

"It's all been so dreadful," said Mrs. Small.

"Well, it ain't been just what I'd call a perfect day," said Sam. "We've all had to take it, even me. Yes, Ma'am, I was looking for your support. Would you believe it, I misstepped in the woods, and sat down on about half-a-dozen buckshots that was lying around, and I can't see where they lodged, to dig them out?"

"Sam, what's that bird under your coat?"

"That? Why, that's just a rooster, Ma'am. I sort of found him after sitting down on them buckshots."

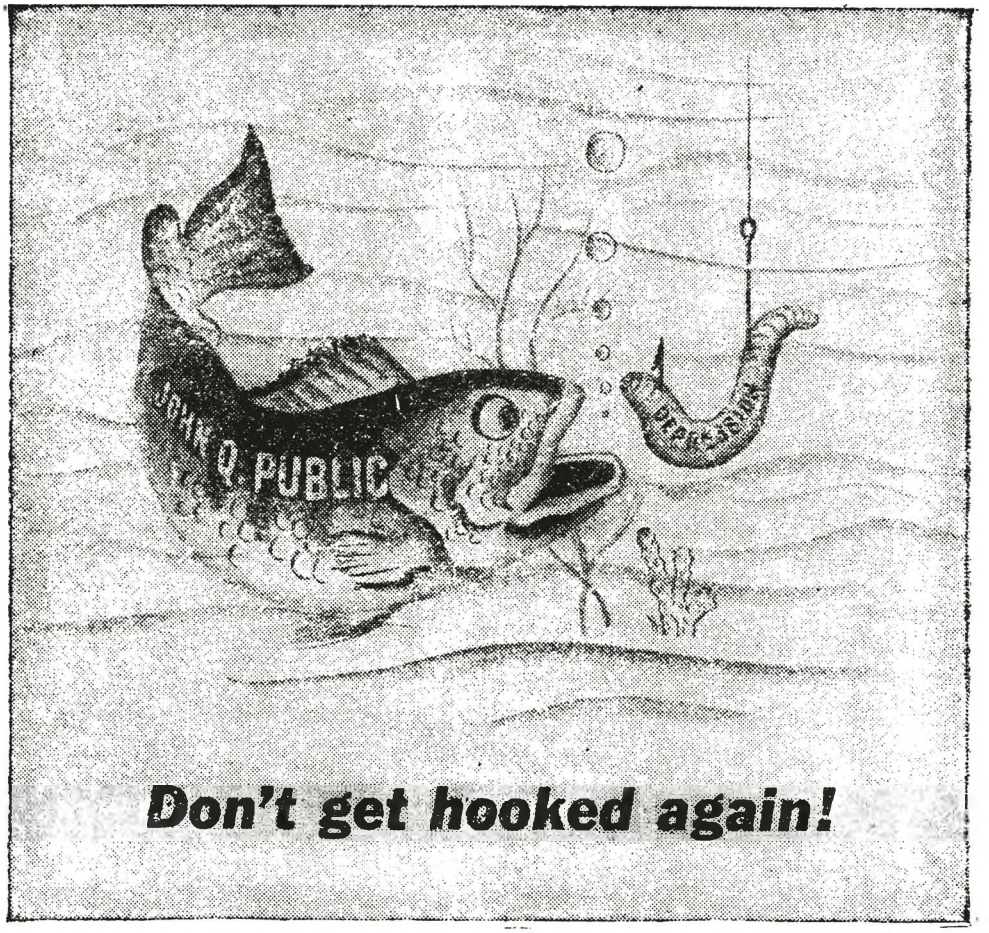
THE coroner's court in Campbell City was packed, for the murder of Cy Everett was the biggest criminal event of many years. Feeling ran high against Jason Clark. The weekly town newspaper, which happened to have been published that morning, had given sensational details of the quarrel and the crime.

The coroner, a paunchy, middle-aged lawyer, presided over the deliberations of eight male and four women jurors. In deference to the susceptibilities of the latter, a screen had been drawn around the corpse, with the arrow still embedded in the body, but in theory every one of the twelve was supposed to have seen it.

Chief Soames might not be much at detection, but he knew his law, and gave a very succinct account of his summons to the scene of the crime. "I'll ask your honor to call Minnie Barron," he said.

His honor called Minnie, and she limped to the witness stand.

"You were working in the Everett camp the night before the murder?" asked the coroner. "Please describe the quarrel al-

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leged to have occurred between the deceased man and his son-in-law."

Jason Clark, standing between two policemen, clenched his fists nervously. Dolly was still in her cell, under the attention of a matron.

"Well, it broke out all of a sudden, after they got back from Old Home Town Day," said Minnie. "They'd had some more drinks, and suddenly Mr. Everett shouted that Mr. Clark was a skunk, and he was cutting him out of his will, and his daughter too, unless she divorced him."

"What happened next?"

"Mr. Clark said he'd kill him for that—"

"She's lying!" shouted Jason.

"Order in this court! Go on, Miss Barron."

"Then Mrs. Clark started screaming. It was quite a riot. I was afraid they'd come to blows any minute. I skipped out."

"You didn't hear the end of it?"

"Last thing I heard was Mr. Clark shouting that he'd kill Mr. Everett."

"How about those bows, Chief?" the coroner asked of Soames.

"We've got no prints from them, nor from the arrows. The murder was evidently cunningly designed, and the bows and arrows were wiped clean. The fact remains that the dead man was killed by an arrow, shot from a bow. There were only two toxicologists—"

"Toxophilitus," corrected his honor, who was a Harvard man. "Or let's say archers."

"In the immediate vicinity. One was Jason Clark, the other Mr. Nathaniel Dawson, whom I shall ask your honor to swear."

"Nathaniel Dawson to the stand," said his honor. "You are a toxophilite, I understand, and a manufacturer of bows and arrows?"

"Of arrows only, for commercial purposes, your honor."

"Is there any way in which the arrow that killed the deceased could be identified?"

"There is no way I know of. You see, your honor, hunting bows and arrows are made to standard patterns. The arrows I make are 28-inch shafts, and they have to

conform to specifications. Shaft, tip, and feathers."

"You manufacture according to specifications?"

"That's right, your honor. In my opinion, that arrow might have been shot from any bow."

"You cut your wood to measurement, put on the tip—"

"Standard tips, your honor. They come wholesale."

"And the feathers?"

"Well, that's quite an art. We use three feathers, to steady the shaft in flight."

"Where do you get them?"

"Chicken or goose feathers, in general. The art is in the shaping of them, rather than in the material."

"Now I want to put this question to you, Mr. Dawson, of course without implications. Could this arrow that killed the deceased have been shot from your own bow?"

"Yeah, it might," said Nat. "Sure it might. But it wasn't."

"You're lying," called Sam Small. "I'm tired of all this humbug. Here's the feller who killed Cy Everett. And I want to be sworn!"

SAM was sworn, after the coroner's gavel had hammered violently, and more or less ineffectually, for order. Nobody in the court liked Sam. This hick sheriff was trying to interfere with the process of justice. But still, even under the new law, a sheriff was a sheriff.

The coroner was caustic in his interrogations as to Sam's movements on the day of the murder. Sam let him tire himself out.

"And now, on what grounds do you bring this charge against the witness?" he demanded.

"Well, your honor, I've done quite a lot of figuring as to motive," answered Sam. "And I worked it out this way. Cy Everett used to come up once a year to Old Home Town Day, and shoot off his mouth about his boyhood friends—"

"And characterize his boyhood friends," said the coroner to the court stenographer.

"And he used Nat Dawson as his punching-bag. And Nat got tired of it. You see, your honor, Cy was bragging about having taken Nat's girl away from him, and married her, twenty-eight years ago.

"And then Cy got Nat's son into West Point, and the boy was killed in Papua, right at the start of the war. And Cy hadn't the sense to let up and let Nat live with his dead. He bragged about that at Old Home Town Day.

"And then Cy talked about going hunting with Nat's bow, and using his fishing-rod, and I guess that's where Nat broke. So he stalked Cy from a hundred and fifty-nine yards, and put an arrow through him."

"Order!" The gavel rapped. "Sheriff, you will confine yourself to the evidence, and not draw deductions from it. What's that in your pocket?"

"This? Why, this is one of Nat's roosters. I picked him up last night, thinking he might be evidence, and not deductions—

"You see, your honor, this rooster is a Speckled Sussex, which you don't often see, them being a kind of fancy breed. And that arrow in the corpse has Speckled Sussex tail feathers. You ain't likely to find another arrow anywhere in the country with Speckled Sussex feathers in it. So it ain't hard to judge who made that arrow. That's the trouble, your honor: folks don't learn to use their eyes."

## CROOKS WHO REACHED RIPE OLD AGE

IN THE lurid annals of crookdom, no name was more representative of high-class swindling than that of the notorious "Yellow Kid" Weil. From young manhood onward, Weil was the very epitome of bunco-men and swindlers, operating not only in Chicago but all over the United States—and in Europe as well. He was smooth and suave and nobody has ever succeeded in counting up the total amount of money Weil obtained by illegal means throughout his crooked career.

Arrests and convictions never seemed to bother Weil very much; he always returned to his bunco schemes as soon as he regained his freedom. Perhaps the most amazing feature of his career, however, is that age did not dull his criminal activities—for he was known as a swindler when he was past seventy years of age!

Weil, however, was not only the man who operated on the wrong side of the law at a period of life when the average man has long since retired to carpet slippers in a chimney corner. There was a noted diamond thief called "The Plunger" who was sixty-three when he was arrested and sentenced for theft. The sentence, incidentally, was a fifteen-year stretch—which, it must be admitted, is a pretty tough rap for a man in his sixties.

ANOTHER ill-famed gem thief named Fisher could boast of a nefarious record that was even more astonishing than Weil's or the Plunger's. Fisher was actually enjoying his eighty-third birthday when police apprehended him for robbery!

Fantastic as this may seem, there was one other American criminal whose lawless career extended over an even greater number of years. Steve Dutton was one hundred and three years old when he died recently—and at the ripe age of a hundred he had been arrested on suspicion of stealing a three-ton piece of machinery! Dutton, for all his longevity, did not spend all his many years as a free man, for it is reported that by the time he was seventy he had served nearly twenty-five years behind bars!


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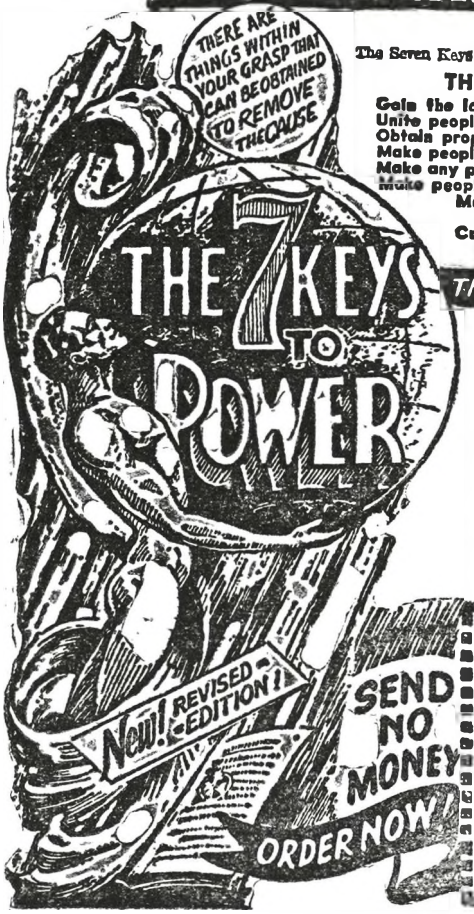


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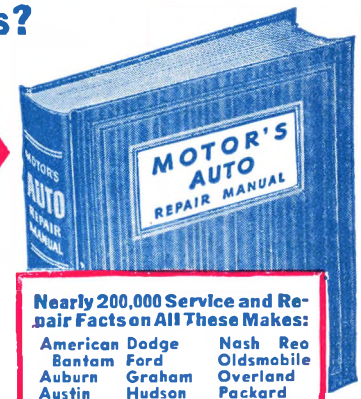



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