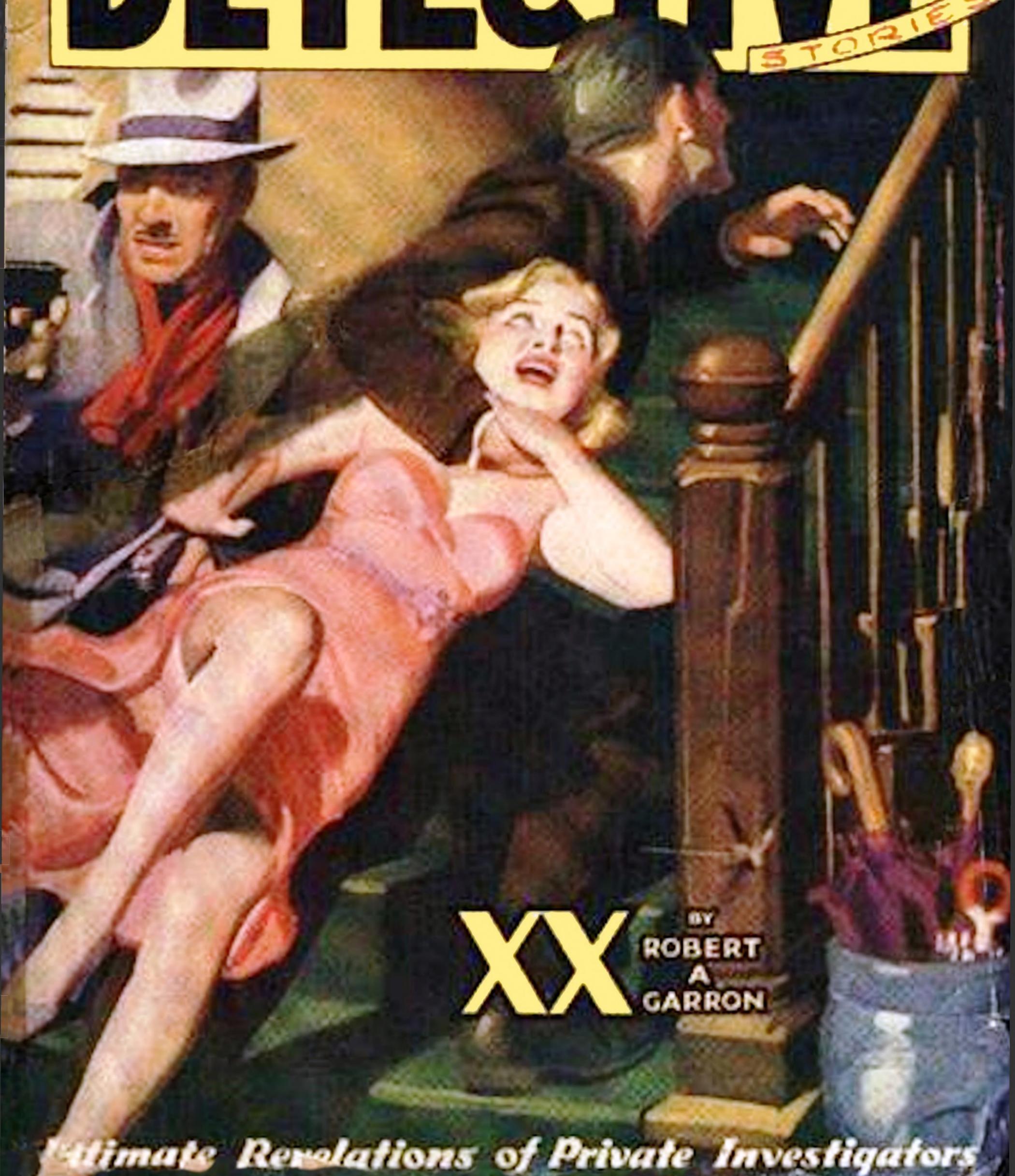


January 15¢

PRIVATE

DETECTIVE

STORIES



XX

BY
ROBERT
A.
GARRON

Intimate Revelations of Private Investigators

MISSING

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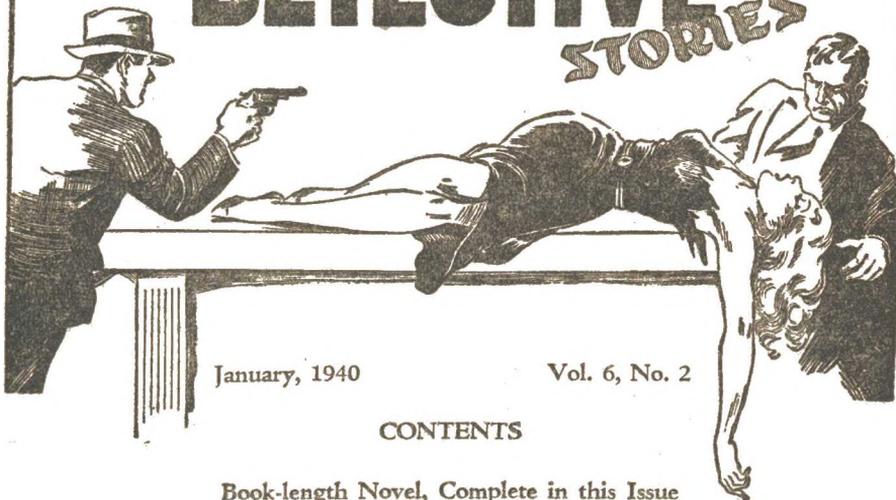
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PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES



January, 1940

Vol. 6, No. 2

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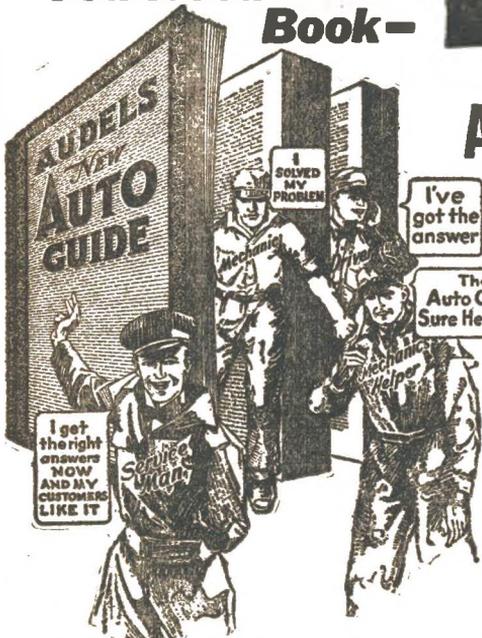
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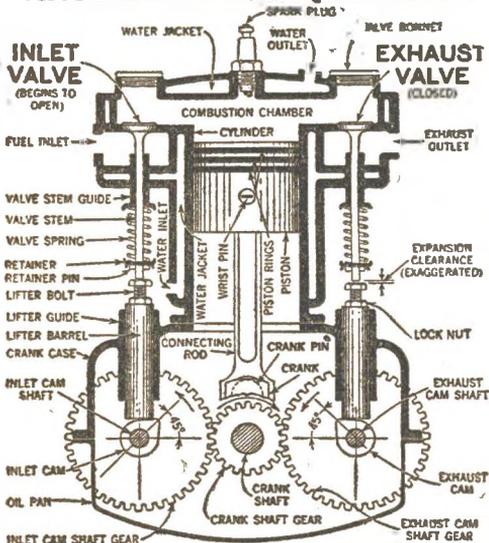
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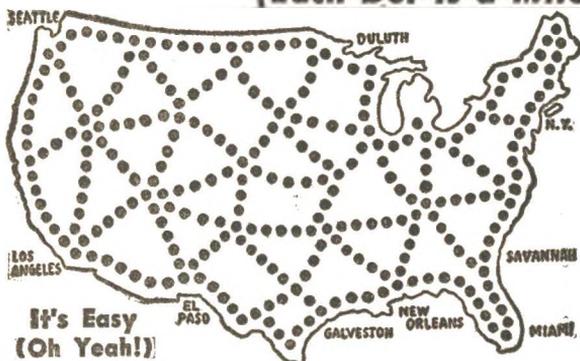


SPECIMEN ILLUSTRATION—INSIDE VIEW OF MOTOR

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(Each Dot is a Mile)



Think You
Can Count Em?

So, you think anybody can do it, huh! Well JUST TRY IT. It starts out nice and easy like there's nothing to it, but I'll bet before you're through, you'll be seeing dots hopping all over where there ain't no dots, and big black jumping dots will probably chase you all over the ceiling after you go to bed tonight. You'll probably forget how many dots you've counted just about when you think you've got it finished too—so, you'll have to start all over again, and that'll be just dandy. But, if you should be interested enough to try, you might WIN FIFTY DOLLARS cash, and I suppose

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But Constipation caused by lack of proper exercise can be overcome. It is the result of carelessness—many of us simply let our bodies "go to seed." First we begin to notice "a little heaviness around the waist."

We do nothing about it. Suddenly we find we are **F A T!** Just carelessness! Then we may begin to get nervous. Short-winded, Peppless. Begin to look old, feel old. Yet are NOT old in years! Even our hair gets lifeless, caked with dandruff. It starts to fall out and—another shock!—DOES NOT COME BACK IN!

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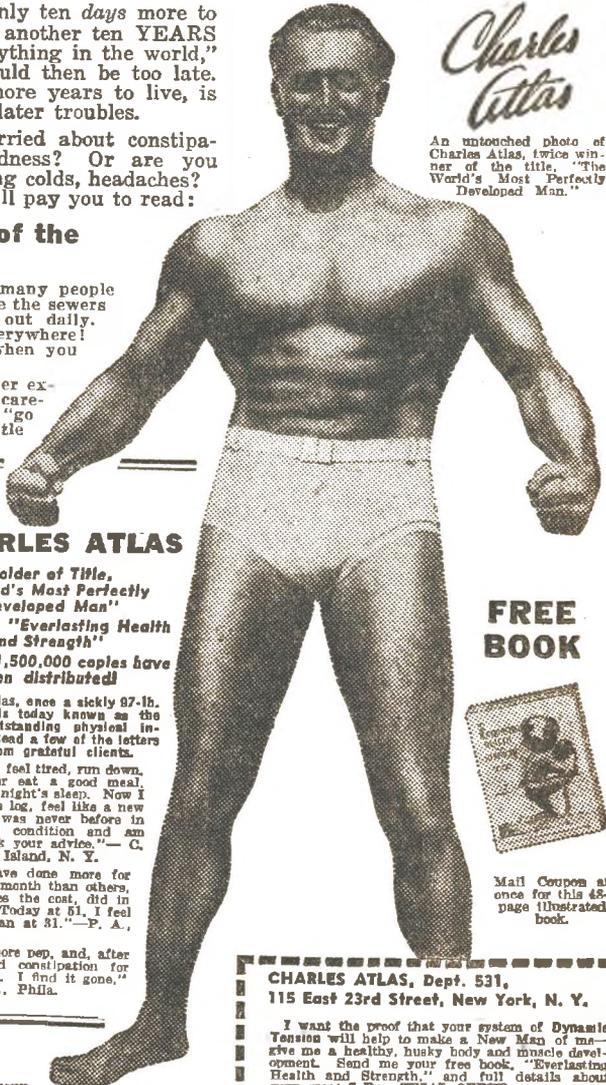
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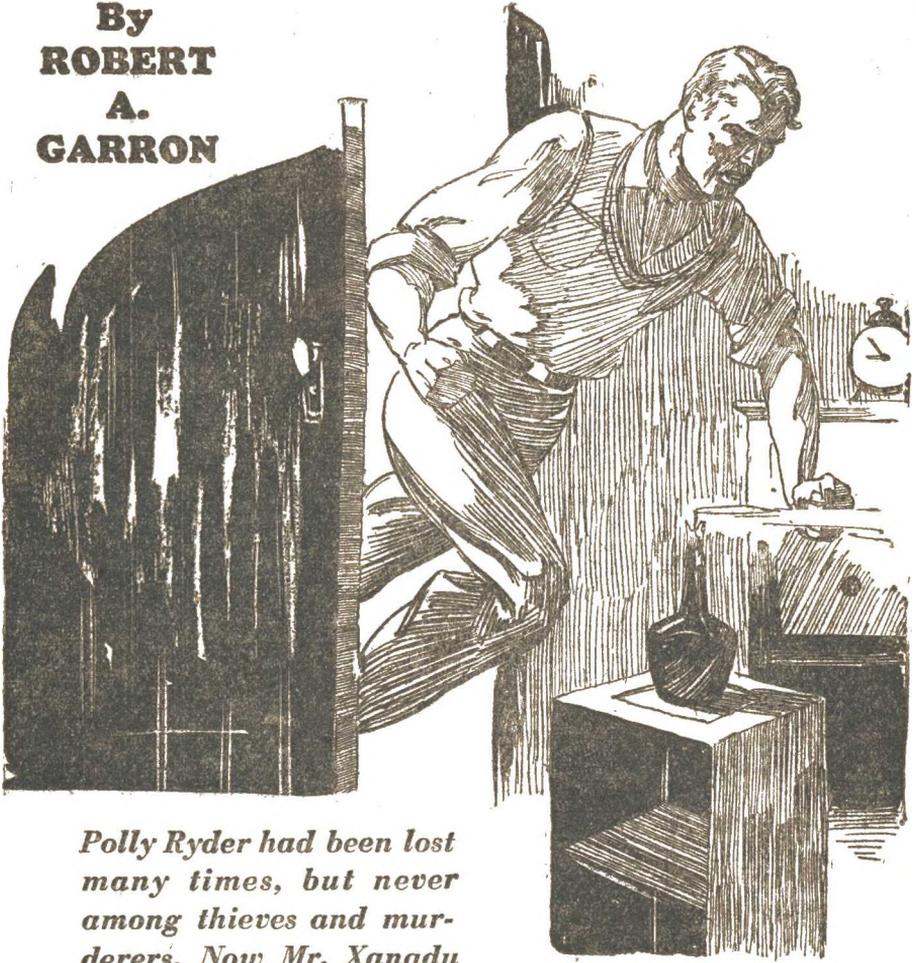
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By
**ROBERT
A.
GARRON**



Polly Ryder had been lost many times, but never among thieves and murderers. Now Mr. Xanadu Xenophon—or whoever had put the initials XX on the mail box—had swiped her car and money, and she was in a spot. Her companions were bad eggs, liable to break any minute!



HE shiny tan convertible crawled on the undulating road, and the girl kept looking to the right and listening. On both sides were thick woods of scrub oak, pine, ironwood, maple, and the like. Mixed. Fences of rotten posts and

rusty barbed wire bounded the road. The ribboning road was thickly overgrown with grass, and sometimes the single set of wheelmarks which Pauline was following vanished altogether, so that it was like driving through a trackless field. Somewhere off to the right was the narrow, swift

When Arnie burst in, Flies tried to do several things at once, including going for his gun.



XX

FEATURE NOVEL

Fool River, and she kept looking for sight or sound of it, or a way to get through the woods. There was no stir in the foliage of the forest; the sky, when it showed in patches through the trees, was a clear, baked blue.

It was early afternoon, and the temperature was at eighty.

It didn't matter that she was lost; she had been lost several times since she started out, and she had learned that all roads had to lead somewhere. Since stopping for a drink at Olds, a village consisting of a store, a filling station, a bar, and at least three houses, she had seen no one. There were no highway markers,

but she supposed that she was still in the state of Wisconsin.

Her mother's attorney, Mr. Dalby, had gone beyond remonstrating with her and recounted a number of cases having to do with persons who traveled alone. Robbery, assault, murder. When things like that happened, they happened without warning, and he had urged her to advertise for a companion, female, preferably built like a brick incinerator. Because Pauline Ryder looked even younger than her wide-eyed twenty-two years, and no matter how she dressed she could not conceal the fact that her body was fashioned after Eve's. Being headstrong, too, she had sold everything but the jewelry after her mother's death, bought the new car, and was going to California by easy stages, all by her lonesome. She had written a friend at Laguna Beach that she would be there "sometime this year." For all the money the Ryders had, this was the first time Pauline had been farther west than Philadelphia.

Through a break in the fence on the right she eased the car between trees on hard ground, and after winding for something like a quarter of a mile, braked to a stop in a clearing. Good. There would be no trouble getting back to the road unless she backed into the river in turning around. And she could handle the car with the same deftness with which she used her compact.

She got out of the car, stretched her legs; and cruel, unwinking human eyes watched her from the woods. She did not feel stared at. No telepathy nor intuition warned her, but she would have been no better off anyhow.

So this was the Fool River, or so the bartender in Olds had informed her. It was a broad, deep brook, really; the current was rapid, and she could see the bottom through the remarkably clear apple-green water. Plenty deep enough for diving.

She opened the rumble-seat, un-snapped a suitcase and pulled a towel out. For a second she debated about the bathing suit, deciding that it would be absurd in this wilderness. There are some forests left, and this was one of them. She was alone, and only the millionth chance would bring anyone to this spot. About a mile back she had passed that curious, melancholy mailbox painted cryptically in red with the two "X's", but several bends in the river would prevent. Mr. Xanadu Xenophon, or whoever he was, from seeing her. Furthermore, she liked nothing better than to swim in the altogether.

THE stir of air coming off the water was cool, the only cool air in the United States at the moment. She even felt a little thrill of goose-flesh when she had peeled her blouse off her back and drew her linen skirt over her head. Presently she stood enjoying the sensation of grass against bare feet, and touched her flimsy underthings tentatively. With an unaccountable qualm which later she did not regret, she decided to stop at this point. Standing on a flat shelf of granite over the water, she dropped towel, soap and sandals to the edge of the brook. Slimly healthy, she took a dancing little run for a strong, flat dive to clear the submerged rocks along shore, turning in the air to enter the crystal water faultlessly against the current.

Promptly the owner of the sunken, bright eyes issued from his place of concealment and advanced at a crouching run as smoothly and soundlessly as a rubber ball.

Because of the current, Polly came to the surface at about the same point where she had touched the water, bouncing herself, shoulders and bosom out of the water with a powerful breast-stroke. It wasn't cold, but the contrast with the steaming air made her gasp. She was not a champion swimmer, but she could swim well, and made up the distance the current had taken her downstream with a few long, luxurious crawl-strokes.

Even the noise she made, and the tumble of water along the rocky banks, was refreshing. She sported, turning over on her back to get her hair out of her eyes by ducking her head, turning over again and making a laughing sound when she breathed. She went to the bottom, using her long legs frogwise, and caught hold of a boulder. Just to see what cigarettes had done to her lungs, she hung on, stretched at full length with her feet together and letting her body trail with slow-motion sensuousness in the current. In a little over a minute her lungs began to buck for air, and cold, stealthy hands closed tighter and tighter over her heart. A weakness like hunger, hypnotically delicious, started at the pit of her stomach and spread like the effect of a drug. Her legs trembled; with wild suddenness, frightened by the deepening ruddy twilight, she shot herself to the surface.

Her heart pounded, and she couldn't get enough air when she filled her lungs to the limit. Certainly

she hadn't stayed under for two minutes. Using only as much effort as was necessary, she swung toward the left bank where the current was slower, and was breathing at a normal rate when she reached the rocky bank under the ledge.

It wasn't intuition that warned her this time, either. This wasn't the first time that a bath had been taken here; on a ledge channeled out of the rock by the stream was someone else's bar of soap.

THE outcrop of granite from which she had jumped was out of reach over her head. She couldn't see her car, and there was no hurry until someone dived into her privacy or came down the eccentric flight of natural steps in the eroded rock to the midget beach. But on general principles she went to work on herself with dispatch.

First she shampooed the travel-grime out of her black hair, rinsed and repeated. Eyes shut tight, she soaped her face and went on down to her toes with catlike, meticulous thoroughness. She did her toes one at a time, heels, everything with accustomed minuteness. Groping for the towel after she had rinsed, she blotted her eyes first and then her hair, and stood fresh and fragrant on a piece of sidewalk-level gray granite.

She dried swiftly, and even in the hot smash of sunlight she felt cool for the time being. In the same suitcase from which she had taken the towel there was a box of spicy bath powder and a puff. With her sandals on, she picked her way up to the clearing where she had parked the car, without any thought of what a

feast she was to the eye. She couldn't take a step, couldn't breathe without being provocative; firmly rounded as she was, and boyish in the modeling of her figure. Back in the clearing she inhaled, expelled the breath slowly. She wet her lips; half naked and immobile, she looked down as though she had never seen herself before, and fought back an impulse to burst out laughing. It took a few seconds for the calamity to register, but she didn't have to look again. Her car was gone. Mr. Xanadu Xenophon had happened by and stolen her car.

CHAPTER II

Three Men—and a Corpse



HE had left her clothes in a little heap on the ground, intending to make a complete change. The clothes were gone, too. Out of habit she had locked the car all around and hidden the keys in the toe of one of her shoes. So all the while the thief had been watching her. She lifted her head, smiled, and burst out laughing. As suddenly as she had begun, she stopped, because she was only kidding herself.

"Oh, my God," she said, because this was disaster, and old Mr. Dalby was right.

The car and its contents—everything was gone.

She crouched, and rose with the yellow grosgrain ribbon which had been tied around her hair and which had been with her clothes. The thief had dropped it, but she didn't need it as proof that this was the place, and that she was in one hell of a predicament. Before she got terrified, she

went to a rock and sat down to finish her bath, as though nothing had happened. But the panic kept returning like a series of ambushes from which she escaped at the last minute.

The rock on which she sat was in the shade of an elm, and she pretended that the car was still there. With her head bent, she dried her hair with her fingers, playing with it, stroking it, rolling strands between her palms. It came out curly as it always did, in molded shadows that enhanced the carved-ivory cameo of her face.

There was not a damned thing she could do.

In the car was everything she possessed. There was her complete wardrobe. There was the rust-colored pigskin case containing her mother's jewelry and her own and the sheaf of gorgeously engraved stock certificates. There was her purse; it contained about a thousand dollars in cash, a book of traveler's checks, and a draft for the full amount of the bank deposits in Manhattan. What her journey amounted to, in short, was sending banknotes through the mail in a thin envelope.

Of course, she could report the theft of the car. That was what had made her laugh, because she didn't remember the license number. And report the theft where? As far as she knew, and she was correct, it would be miles and miles of hiking to the nearest phone. She couldn't take a chance on the next town being closer than the last one, Olds, and would have to backtrack. In the hot sun. With nothing to wear but the towel and the sandals.

The first pair of eyes which had watched her were a deep, glistening

brown that was almost black, like inky coffee. Those regarding her now were a pale, cold neutral, the particular hue of gray, green, or blue being determined by the light. Where the first watcher's expression had been gloating and covetous, this second watcher's face was unreadable. And his hands were busy with the precision and detachment of a man working at a desk.

Polly fitted her curls into place, raised her head for an instant, sat with utter immobility. Only a dozen feet away from her, on a fallen tree, sat a young man with crossed legs and a notebook on his knee. She came to her feet fast, with a bounce. For a frantic moment she acted like any girl as surprised as she was. Her feet performed a few running steps without her moving from the spot. She danced with outraged modesty; with bent knees together she tried to make herself small, holding the ineffectual towel to her breast. It was only a regulation towel, not a bath sheet. She straightened up, her deep blue eyes bright with challenge.

"Oh," said the stranger, his eye continuously interested. He clapped the notebook shut and slipped it with the pencil into the breast pocket of a gabardine sport shirt. Conversationally he asked, "Didn't you know I was here?"

"Where's my car?" Polly demanded.

"Your car?" he asked with the blankness of an idiot. "Did you have a car?"

SHE stared at him, continuing to make the fullest use of the towel, an exceptional example of what nature could do in female anatomy to

hypnotize the masculine eye. Her heart was beating fast, but she said calmly, "All right; you've stolen my car and my clothes. Don't be bashful; if there's anything else you want, just ask for it."

If he took one step toward her she wouldn't be sticking around very long. A glance convinced her that she couldn't escape from him through the dense woods, and she tensed her legs in expectation of whirling around and going back fast into the river. But he kept his distance.

"I've got what I wanted." He tapped the black leather notebook in his pocket. Maybe the drawing is lousy, but old man opportunity keeps himself pretty scarce. The way you were sitting there, with your head down and your arms up doing your hair. . . ."

"I was crying." Her eyes were still unnaturally bright.

"Incidentally, I didn't steal your car." He was laconic, getting across to her the idea that she needn't be afraid of him.

"Then you know who did," she said.

"I think I know who did," he agreed. "By the way, my name is Arnold Slaughter."

She heard herself saying in the same matter-of-fact way, "Mine is Pauline Ryder."

"Were you traveling alone?" he asked.

"You don't see anyone else, do you?" she said. Then, when he stared at her in silence, "What's the head-shake for?"

"I was just wondering how anyone could be the damned fool that you are," he said lazily. "Well, let's

get going. Unless you want to monkey around with sunstroke. Your shoulders are getting pink already."

"Get going where?"

"Down the river to the Double-X lodge."

"Is that where the car is?"

"I imagine so. Only two persons besides myself could have stolen it, and that's where they are. You won't like either one of them very much."

"Oh, I'm sure I will," she said sarcastically.

"I'd better carry you," he suggested.

"I'm not crippled," she refused.

"You will be," he assured her cryptically, and approached tentatively. She backed away. "All right," he said, halting. "You come to me. It's quite a walk."

"No. You go ahead and I'll follow you." A deer-fly settled on her shoulder and bit savagely with the contact. She slapped, caught up the towel again.

"It's up to you," said Slaughter with a shrug. He turned his back and headed into the woods.

For a moment she hesitated, then followed with strides as long as his. Within fifty yards she learned that it was going to be quite a walk indeed. She plucked an ugly brown crablike wood-tick from her thigh, and another from the back of her neck. There were deer-flies which hummed around her head, and when she batted them they felt as fat as June peas in the air. Mosquitoes. But the undergrowth was the worst. Her ankles and calves got scratched, and then they went through a thicket of prickly ash. The thorns raked her legs and torso up to the breast, drawing blood and tearing her un-

derthings which were still damp. When she got through that ordeal, she stopped. There was more of the same ahead, plus the likelihood of poison ivy.

"Mr. Slaughter!" she called in an uneven, forlorn voice, and he looked back at her for the first time.

"Change your mind?" he asked. Her silence was affirmative, and she didn't move when he returned to her. With the indifference of an automaton he fitted an arm around her back, caught her under the knees with the other and swung her into the air. She went rigid with the contact, then relaxed when she found that he was doing nothing but carry her.

"A hundred and sixteen pounds," he guessed, looking straight ahead as he picked a tortuous way through the woods.

"A hundred eighteen."

HE DIDN'T look down, and she inspected his face covertly. With eyes like his he was a dangerous man, she decided. He was only three or four inches taller than she was, but she was a tall girl. His tan was darker than his reddish brown hair. His face was lean, with flat cheeks; under the straight eyebrows, close under, his eyes looked inhumanly calculating. His mouth was straight, and he looked as though he hadn't smiled in a long time. There was something wrong with him, not physically, because he had the tough musculature of a man who made a point of getting plenty of exercise. The slightest downward curve of his mouth would have made him look morose. Either he was angry about something, or he was getting very little sleep at night. The muscles of



She was a prisoner; there wasn't much she could do about it. She might as well relax.

his arms were hard, and he carried her effortlessly.

"What do you do?" she asked. "For a living?"

"Commit crimes," he said casually.

"What sort of crimes?" Her heart beat still faster than normal, and apprehension kept her breathing short and soft and swift. For example, he could decide unexpectedly to stop playing big brother and she would be a goner. She could put up a good fight and scratch him and scream, but there would be only one

conclusion. She stopped thinking about it, for fear the thought would be transferred to his mind.

"Nothing spectacular," he said. "Uttering queer, for the time being."

"Doing what?"

"Uttering queer. Counterfeit money. Uttering just means passing. We've got a ten spot that's so good you can pass it in banks."

"Then all three of you are crooked."

"All three of us," he confirmed unemotionally. "You certainly stuck your nose into something, Polly. Sam

and Flies, they're the other two, are pretty ugly customers. It doesn't look to me as though you're going to get your car back, either."

"Well, that's just dandy."

"The lodge is the last place in the world I'd take you, but obviously there isn't any choice. You'll be a prisoner, you understand."

"I think you're lying. You don't act like a criminal to me," she said critically.

"I might be biding my time," he suggested. "Lulling you into false security, and go nasty on you all at once. Like this, for example. . . ."

He dropped her legs to the ground and put both arms around her, kissed her squarely on the mouth. She didn't attempt to escape his lips, didn't resist. Her lips were cool and unresponsive and she kept her eyes open wide. It wasn't any fun. His hands relaxed against the smooth skin of her back and she stepped out of his embrace. Her lips smiled with scorn, and her eyes shifted from one to the other of his.

"I beg your pardon," he said softly and slowly. "Shall we get under way again?"

"What did you do it for?" she asked, as he picked her up again.

"Because if I hadn't, I'd wake up nights asking myself why the hell I didn't."

THERE was no more conversation until they reached the isolated cabin on Fool River. His cradling arms were steady. And she smiled, because she could feel the beat of his heart gradually accelerating while the rate of his breathing did not. It was small-boyish, pretending that he was so strong that she was no bur-

den. They issued from the woods into a neat yard around the cabin.

The structure was built to withstand a lot of weather, and consisted of three rooms beside the all-purpose kitchen. It was a one-story affair, not constructed from blueprints; built from year to year, no two rooms were on the same level.

The yard was nearly square in shape, and up to the first trees of the forest was as well kept as though the gang employed a conscientious gardener. The flower-beds hugging the cabin had been laid out by a man who knew his business. The lawn was freshly mowed and green. Except for certain things, there couldn't have been a setting more inviting as a vacation spot. Polly expected to be set down and told that she was only the victim of a practical joke; she squirmed, and Slaughter's arms tightened.

The tan convertible, her car, was parked close to the lodge. Another machine was in a flimsy garage made of boards laid over rafters nailed to the trees just within the woods. In back of this machine stood a motorcycle.

One of her suitcases was open on the grass, and a small bald man was prowling through it. Some of her underthings were scattered on the lawn.

In the middle of the lawn was a rose-bed. A bony, cadaverous individual was digging there with a spade, and sweat plastered his blue cotton shirt to his back. He had dug pretty deep, and was visible only to the belt. Rich black earth was piled up on the side of the trench toward the lodge, and at the head of the trench was a mound of gravel and

stones which had assured drainage for the plants. Ranged along the ground were five flourishing rose-bushes in flower, each with the roots held in a solid block of earth. Sprawled at full length on the grass alongside was a dead man. What the gardener was doing was digging a grave. The corpse was young, in the neighborhood of thirty, and was dressed in breeches and an olive-suede jacket. He was the motorcyclist. The leather jacket was splotted as though someone had thrown a can of paint at him. He had been shot in the throat, and he had bled profusely. Over his head hung a shifting shadow that was a swarm of flies.

CHAPTER III

"Who Rides A Tiger. . . ."



TUNNED after one look, Polly heard Slaughter making introductions. The man rummaging in the suitcase rose and came down the gentle slope, and the gravedigger climbed out of the trench.

The small bald man was the one who had stolen the car, and Slaughter said, "That's Alban Lampland, and his nickname is Flies. This other guy is Samuel Halperin, the worst damned hypocrite you'll ever meet. The dead man is Donald McCann, a federal agent who dropped in here this morning. Flies got him with a forty-five from the kitchen window."

"Shut up!" Flies snarled. "What the hell's the idea of throwing names around?"

"I didn't hear McCann denying you bumped him off."

Little Lampland doubled his fists

with rage and banged them to rest on his hips. "You wouldn't believe he was federal. No! Hell, one look at that long puss of Sam's, and he was ready to hop back onto his bike. Sonny, don't you know that Sam here is an old timer? He's been in the best stirs in the country for shoving it and making it."

"All right; I don't doubt it," said Arnie peacably. "One side, will you?"

"Where you going?"

"Giving her my room," said Arnie. "Out of the way."

"Wait a minute," Flies ordered. "I'm taking care of the dame, see? I found her first."

"And you left her."

"I was just going back after her."

"Only I happened along in the meantime. Too bad, Flies."

"He's right," Sam chimed in dolorously. "Legally, you haven't got a leg to stand on."

Arnie left Sam and Flies quarreling, and marched into the cabin with his burden, through the kitchen and into a small room containing a cot, a chair, and a bureau. He set her down and said, "You'll be staying here for a while. I wouldn't know just how long. Just a minute and I'll bring your stuff in."

Shutting the door as he went out he returned to the yard and bent over the opened suitcase. He tossed back in the articles which Flies had been examining and shut the case, went to the rumble for more luggage. Sam was in the act of rolling the dead body into the grave.

"Get the hell away from that car," Flies called to Arnie.

"The luggage belongs to the girl, and the girl is mine," said Arnie.

"All right, but leave the two little ones. That red box and her purse. The dame's rich; she's carrying enough dough on her to start a bank, one hell of a wad and jewelry besides."

"That's good news."

"For me it is," Flies gloated. "You found the dame so she's yours, eh? All right, I found the dough. No divvy."

"How much is there?" Arnie asked.

"You don't never need to know, Sonny, but I'm telling you no one ever paid a higher price for a dame."

"I would get tangled up with a runt-minded old maggot like you," Arnie observed. Sam pitched the first shovelful of loam into McCann's face, and Flies came scampering up to the car when Arnie picked up the pigskin box from the running board for a look at its contents. It was grabbed from his hands.

"I told you to leave it alone!" Flies yelled, and made a threatening gesture.

"No harm in looking," said Arnie placatingly, but as though to antagonize Lampland further, he picked up the flat, black leather purse.

Flies made a grab for it, and Arnie gave him a powerful push in the chest that sent him staggering backward almost to a fall. Promptly Flies pawed at his chest and from an armpit holster yanked out a heavy automatic. The blue steel had a particularly ugly, steady shine in the sunlight. From the grave-side Sam droned, "I wouldn't advise it, Flies. I wouldn't advise it!"

Eyes fixed unwinkingly on Arnie, Lampland snapped, "None of your horning in, either!"

"You can take care of the dough in here," said Arnie. "I don't want it. All I'm taking is the odds and ends." Gingerly, watching the automatic, he removed a wallet from the purse and tossed it on the grass. Then he turned his back and all but flinched at the snick of the safety being snapped back on.

"She won't need lipstick and stuff," Flies said ominously. "She won't be going anywhere."

Arnie carried the luggage to his room, making two trips. With the second trip he found Polly still standing in a corner, frightened stiff. She had overheard the conversation in the yard.

The shade was drawn, and in the comparative twilight her white skin seemed translucent.

"Better get dressed," Arnie advised, and went out.

NO MISTAKING it at all. She was a prisoner, and she could expect everything, molestation and shame and all of it before they disposed of her as they chose. She was not afraid of Halperin; instinctively she knew that he wouldn't bother her. Young Arnie Slaughter she did not trust, simply because he had been so painstaking about persuading her to trust him. He was the subtlest of the three. As he had said, he was biding his time. What he could have by force he didn't want, but as her protector he could eventually exercise obvious rights and privileges. She was goods of commerce, valuable merchandise, and, like a coin on the sidewalk, was a case of "finders keepers".

Of the bald-headed, gnomelike, obscene Lampland she was terrified.

When he looked at her, there was only one thing in his eyes. That was unmistakable.

And no matter who had committed the murder, they were all in it together. The cheapness in which they held human life was indicative of what dangerous men they were. Arnie's offhandedness in pointing out the corpse to her was typical of a cruel mind.

They were criminals, and she had stumbled into their headquarters. Since she knew who they were and could reveal their hideout, they were not going to let her go. That was absolutely certain. If it became necessary, they would have no compunction about dealing with her as they had with McCann. Of all the damned-fool things she had ever done. . . . Just because she was independent and wanted to see the country, and wanted no more of New York. Just because it was a hot day, and there was a clean, cool river to swim in.

She dressed, and couldn't keep her legs from trembling as she drew her stockings on. Her undies had dried on her. She worked on a slip over her head. Then a fine woolen skirt, pleated and full, and a sheer lawn blouse. The lipstick she applied was scarlet and shiny, and she powdered her cheeks and nose meticulously as though she had an engagement to keep. The trembling of her legs was vaguely nauseating.

At the window she raised the shade soundlessly. The window was open, and screened. She unhooked the screen and pushed it out, hung a leg over the sill and listened. From the rosebed came the regular thump of spadefuls of earth being thrown

in. There was the scratch of a match. Sound carried.

Her skirt pulled up as she swung the other leg over, and she scratched tender skin on the rough wood as she escaped outside. The ground was only a little below the floor level. She let the screen back into position.

The skirt's fullness allowed unhampered running, and her shapely long legs were good for something besides looking at. She was speeding into the trees before Flies yelled, "Hey!"

She ducked a glance over her shoulder at the masculine feet pounding after her. Sam was replacing a rosebush. Flies was preparing to fire a shot after her, and Arnie was only thirty feet or so behind. She went flying through the aisles of the woods in blind panic, not looking behind again. She stumbled, recovered, stumbled again and dodged to the right to make the river. She was in sight of it when those familiar, sinewy brown arms snaked tight around her waist. Their legs entangled, and they hurtled to the ground together.

SHE almost tore free in sheer desperation, getting him with her knee and punching him in the face with a most unfeminine uppercut. She regained her feet, but he caught one of her ankles in a grip that was as unbreakable as a handcuff. When she went flat, he got the other ankle, and she couldn't kick free. Twisting her ankles he forced her to turn over, and hauled her back to him. A look at his face, with the eyes very bright, gave her the pleasure of knowing that she had hurt him. He looked sick. When he got over that, he would get angry, and then he would

go to town on her. She pulled her skirt down over the marvelous Ryder legs. As luck would have it she was sitting on nettles, which was a good start toward losing her mind.

"Why can't you do anything without being a damned fool?" Arnie asked, as though he really wanted to know.

"Will you let go of my ankles, please?" she asked.

Both rose, and he said, "You can't follow the river very far, and you'd be lost inside of five minutes in the woods. You're an intelligent girl. Why don't you use your head?"

"What was the point in stealing my car? Did they have to do that?"

"The other car is hot and it's being looked for in five states. We were planning to hole up here until the heat died down, but we won't have to now, thank God." He stared at her. "What did you say your destination was?"

"I was on my way to California." She squirmed, scratching herself abstractedly.

"For a girl as wealthy as you are, you don't act as though you had much sense. I think your money and jewelry is gone for good."

"All right; I guess it wasn't a very good idea. May I have a cigarette?"

He lighted one for her, had one himself and inquired, "You wouldn't have another ignition key stowed away somewhere, would you?"

"What would you do if I had?"

"You and I would part company with those two old criminals and this murder-hole as quick as scat. And I mean scat." He talked in a low voice on the chance that Flies might have sneaked after them into the woods.

If the expression on her face was haunted and hunted, his was the same for the moment. "Come on," he urged. "Have you got a key or haven't you? Or are you going to be selfish and keep it to yourself? Were you just going to hide out in the bushes until you got a chance to sneak back and get the car tonight?"

"I had an extra key, but Flies got it. It was in my handbag. I looked and it was gone." She kept her own voice low, too, as though they were engaged in a dangerous conspiracy. She asked, "Aren't you just as guilty as he is, of the murder?"

"Just as guilty." He nodded. "I'd be an accessory."

"And you've committed other crimes?"

"Yes. Plenty."

"Have you ever killed anyone?"

Arnie held up two fingers, and smiled mirthlessly with one side of his mouth only. "For example," he said, "I'm breaking the law right now." From his hip pocket he pulled a thick wad of bills, ten being the highest denomination. About three hundred dollars. He showed her one of the tens, and she examined it without finding anything wrong with it. He assured her that it was really a marvelous job, the best ten ever made. Down in one corner was a fault that needed a hawk's eye to discern, and that was the only real error by which the experts could tell that the note was counterfeit. The plates were Halperin's work, his masterpiece.

"You're absolutely incredible," Polly told him. "You don't have to be crooked, do you? What do you do it for?"

"You've heard that old saying,



the federal man, he came down and put the motorcycle out of commission. You can see how much he trusts Sam and me."

"Why doesn't he trust you?"

"Because they don't know any-

She was almost to the river when he snagged her legs.

'He who rides a tiger cannot dismount.' That's me. I can't get out of this trap any more than you can."

"Why can't you?"

"Because Flies has the keys to both cars. And as soon as he shot

thing about me except that I was in the market for a pretty big chunk of queer. It was one of those blindfold stunts. I was to get into a car parked in a certain street in Milwaukee. I paid the price agreed on over the phone, got the bundle of counterfeit in exchange, and then got a little ride while they chewed the fat and made sure that I was all right, not a dick. But they were passing the stuff themselves as well as selling it, and that car of theirs was spotted. Some bar-keep got the license number and a good description of it. He'd accepted the ten knowing it was phony, let Flies finish his drink and then looked out the window and got an eyeful when the customer went. It was in the papers. Well, some dicks just happened to be cruising down the street that night, and when they ordered us to pull over, we practically had to drive through somebody's front door and out the back to get away. So Flies has been kind of wondering whether little Arnie tipped the cops off. He doesn't believe in coincidences."

"Then we'll just have to get the keys."

"That's one job that I don't like to tackle."

"Are you afraid of him?" she asked.

"I'm afraid of both of them, but mostly of Flies. He's a killer. And that belfry-bat pal of his has killed a couple of men in his time, too. Well, let's be getting back. There's a pretty good liquor supply in the kitchen, and I could certainly use a drink."

When they reached the yard, the five rosebushes were back in place, and the black loam looked undis-

turbed. Halperin was a first-rate gardener.

CHAPTER IV

Flies Is Smarter



YOU took your sweet time about it," Flies observed as they entered the kitchen, leaning at Polly. He and Sam were sitting at a square, unpainted table, and both were shuffling a deck of cards. "Come on. Let's have a game of bridge."

Polly went on through into her room and shut the door.

"Not having any," said Arnie. He chipped a slab of ice from the hunk in the icebox—someone went to Olds every morning and brought back fifty pounds—sliced a lemon and proceeded methodically to concoct two Collinses.

"I said we were playing bridge," Flies told him. His lips shut tight, and his breathing was audible through his nose.

Thoughtfully Arnie finished making the drinks and stood looking at Flies, making ice clink in the glasses. He asked, "Isn't it about time we were clearing out of here, now that we've got another car?"

"Manna from heaven," said Sam lugubriously. "I've always wanted to see the west coast."

He had risen and gone to Polly's door. Without knocking he opened it to make sure that she wasn't going out the window again. All she was doing was changing her stockings, snagged in her flight through the woods. She was snapping the last garter, and it was just that flash of white before she let the skirt fall and

stepped back into her slippers. The way Flies licked his small mouth was feline with anticipation. His beady brown eyes were merry as they looked at her legs and ascended. With his small stature, flabby years and completely bald dome it was an under statement to call him repulsive. Polly returned to the kitchen walking steadily, though the muscles of her legs were in agony from the furious run through the woods. She saw that Arnie was watching Flies, and not her. Sam had returned to his chair.

When she received her drink, Arnie said, "Mr. Lampland requests our presence at bridge, and would just as soon shoot us both through the stomach to wipe out the insult if we decline."

"Wise guy. Just keep talking," said Flies.

Arnie gave him the same smile he had showed Polly, with just one side of his mouth as though he was too tired to smile very hard. After Polly sat down, he took a chair lazily. He won the cut for deal.

Through the open door she could see her car shining in the sunlight, and longing to be in it and on her way was strong enough to make her cry. The bitter part of it was that she would not be missed for a while. The gang could keep her here practically as long as they liked without anyone coming along to look for her. She had plenty of opportunity to study her three captors during the game, and the more she saw Arnie's manner and method of performing the slightest act, the more inexplicable he became. She had heard of cultured criminals but didn't believe they existed. Here was one. Their

glances met occasionally, and each time his remarkable, light, appraising eyes filled her with panic. He was the most dangerous man of the three, but she was throwing her lot in with him because they had one major interest in common. Both of them wanted to get away.

LOOKING at his cards, he said casually, "A little while ago, Flies, I mentioned clearing out of here. I've never done time, and I don't want to start out with the whole book."

"No one's throwing the book at you," said Flies. "Two spades."

"With the heat we're drawing, it's insane to hang around here." Arnie talked slower and slower as though he were explaining something to an idiot. "How long do you think it will take the F.B.I. to come nosing around when their man doesn't report? And Polly Ryder here. A girl as wealthy as she is doesn't disappear off the map. Her father and mother will have the country swarming with police and private dicks. They'll give out descriptions of her car and the license number, and it'll be hotter than that old lemon-squeezer of yours. In twenty-four hours that car won't be any good to us."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Sam uttered gloomily. "Pass."

"The motorcycle is covered up with a slide down below in the gravel-pit," said Flies, "and nobody is going to find it nor that smart G-man without a lot of looking."

"I wonder how he got the idea of dropping in," Arnie hinted. "Those fellows don't go riding around the

country on bikes unless it's part of their work."

"Just dumb luck that he turned in here, is all," Flies said. "All he wanted was a drink, and it just happened Sam was out in the yard instead of me. Or you. And the way Polly's folks let her travel around alone, they won't be talking to the cops right away. We're waiting till we get the Chicago papers in the morning, and maybe longer than that. Stop squawking about it now, you two, and play bridge."

"Oh, you nasty little bridge fanatic, you," Arnie said coldly, with Flies glaring at him. "Four hearts."

He got it for that, and made the contract. He played good bridge, mechanically, seldom delaying in a choice of play. He had no mannerisms like snapping the cards and his method of shuffling was ordinary and efficient. He didn't use cliches nor post-mortem, and on the whole acted like a man who had learned the game well and decided that it was a waste of time.

It was the most horrible game of bridge Polly had ever played, and a couple of times she barely skirted hysteria by an effort of will. Because she couldn't concentrate, she made boners which Flies and Sam pounced on. Arnie said, "It isn't important; it's just a game."

But to them it was as serious as laying the ground-work for unloading a batch of queer in the cities.

Playing bridge with three murderers. She flushed and paled in turn, and couldn't relax. Her heart still beat with apprehension at the same quick, light rate, and her skin felt raw, as though she had been lightly sandpapered all over. The game

went on as though it would never end, making the drinks being the dummy's job, and she and Arnie won consistently. They were nine thousand points ahead, and the air was cooling with sundown when Flies slapped his cards down at the end of the robber and said angrily, "The hell with it! The cards ain't running right."

THE only traffic on the road all day had been her car and the motorcycle. The light outside was failing fast, and there was a stronger whine in the air as it became thick as a carpet with mosquitoes.

Only one trip a day was made to Olds for ice and other stuff. Dinner consisted of sandwiches, radishes and onions, potato salad and coffee; she was surprised that she could eat ravenously. After dinner, Sam got a board-bound Bible from his room and came to read it at the kitchen table. The lodge was not wired, and he read by the light of kerosene lamp, the only one on the premises. In the other rooms were only thick plumber's candles sitting in saucers.

Sam read with his lips and was sometimes audible, and the effect was that of a person gently snoring. For a while Flies watched and listened contemptuously. Finally he asked, "What do you read that junk for, Sam? Think it's going to make any difference this late in the game?"

"Try reading it sometime," Sam advised sorrowfully. "You'd be surprised."

"If you want anything, I'll be down in the car listening to the radio." But he didn't leave at once. He muttered something about cigarettes and walked into another room

opening on the kitchen. He lit the candle in there, and pulled open the drawer of a chiffonier. With his back to the kitchen, where Polly was watching him, his gnome's body and bald melon of head became outlined in yellow light, bringing out his eeriness and the sinister mischief in him. In a nightmare he would be a figure which would awaken the sleeper, since the subconscious mind wouldn't explore it unless the dreamer was on the road to madness. She believed that Flies was insane; certainly he wasn't normal, and she felt as she would in the neighborhood of an enormous spider. Magnify the eyes of a tarantula to human size, and you had Lampland's.

He got his cigarettes out of the drawer, and then did something which was not particularly curious but was not necessary. It was just one of those things which was off-center. He turned around, then faced back as though he had forgotten something. He stuck a hand into his jeans and pulled out a fistful of small change, which he poured into a can in the drawer with a slithery clatter. Having already blown the candle out he shut the drawer again and drew the door of the room shut when he returned to the kitchen. He looked at Polly, favoring no item of anatomy more than another, glanced at Sam and Arnie and slowly walked out of the room.

Not long after the screen door slammed, subdued music came drifting up to the lodge from the car parked in the makeshift garage.

Polly looked at Arnie as though she were saying, *Can't you do something about this? He's down there in the car alone.* She implied another

question, *Am I worth anything to you?* Because there were only two things in sight. Either she would be a prisoner indefinitely, or she would be dead. Flies wasn't going to tell her, "No blabbing now, girlie, and we'll let you go. Promise?" Not much. If she were merely female, she would be already buried in another flower-bed. But she happened to be quite beautiful; moreover, she was something that a customer like Flies would keep around for his sadism to feed on. She had everything that he had not. As far as wealth was concerned, she was wiped out, but she had had it. A good-looking girl, one with legs and so on, was one thing. But if she were wealthy and was an old-line American and could move in top-drawer society she was a snob in Flies' catalogue, and therefore she was something to destroy if he got the opportunity. Insane or not, he was afraid of Arnie.

She was going to be the cause of another murder and there was nothing she could do about it.

There was going to be a showdown, and Arnie acted as though he wanted to precipitate it. He could have let Flies win several hands in the bridge game but outplayed him. In conversation he made Flies a target of ambiguous remarks which could be taken as insults, or not. Lampland's main weakness was hate, and several times because of Arnie she had seen that hatred rise to incandescence and brought into control shiveringly close to the explosion point. As property she was temporarily in Arnie's custody, but he would cease to be custodian as soon as Flies got behind him and socked a bullet through the back of his head.

Invariably a .45 slug stopped a man; only Flies was armed.

"Going out for a walk," Arnie said. "Coming along?"

She shook her head. "Will you leave me a couple of cigarettes?"

THERE were five left in the pack he gave her, and he went out into the black night tearing the cellophane from a fresh package. The screen door slammed again. He lit a cigarette, a perfect target from the car, then stepped to the ground from the small porch. The darkness of the night was a wall, and within five steps he was gone behind it. The coal of his cigarette should have been visible, but he must have cupped it in his hand.

Polly made herself a drink for something to do. Her nervous tension was too high for her to squeeze lemons or do any fiddle-faddling. She dumped a hunk of ice, bourbon, and soda into a glass and asked as a genuflective afterthought, "Shall I make you a drink, Mr. Halperin?"

Sam sat with his legs crossed and looked like a dummy. He had not moved any more than a casting would in a mold. His legs were crossed, and the Bible, and his hands and himself were propped so that he wouldn't fall off the chair unless he started cracking safes in his sleep.

"Mr. Halperin," she said conversationally. No, he wasn't faking; he was asleep; his long face was asag, and a look like that couldn't be counterfeited. The fascinating frying sound issuing from his leathery lips was really a snore. He read the Bible for the same reason some people read magazines in bed. She looked at his earth-stained knees, noted his

old lips; the wrinkles looked as though he had sucked on the blade of a sharp knife in a contest for the greatest number of thin scars. Some object made his right pants-pocket baggy. Then she thought of Flies dumping the chickenfeed into the can in his drawer.

That was an absent-minded thing to do, and Flies wasn't absent-minded. A whim is always interesting, and often suspicious when it suggests camouflage.

Arnie was afraid of Flies. Flies was afraid of Arnie. Flies had the keys to the car. Arnie might waylay Flies and slug him, so Flies hid the keys among the silver in the tin can. In her convertible was the best radio on the market, but he had gone down to the other machine, the "hot" one.

Her shoes were high-heeled. On the balls of her feet, after setting the drink down, she moved backward until her shoulders and hips touched Lampland's door.

From the car two hundred feet away came a rustle of radio-audience laughter, the announcer's voice, more music.

She bore down on the doorknob as she turned it so that it wouldn't rattle, and she breathed through her parted lips as she backed into Lampland's room and closed the door just as soundlessly. There was no light in the room at all, but she could remember the location of the chiffonier.

On tiptoe she started for it with arms outstretched, fingers spread wide. Unavoidably she rustled, rhythmically, and though it was as soft as a breath on a single leaf, it sounded loud to her. She didn't reach the chiffonier.

A SEARCHING, fumbling thing, like a bat that had blundered into her, struck her hip. Then the air was full of grabbing hands. There wasn't any time to think. She turned around in a fingersnap of motion in an effort to twist free, but the arms that snaked around her waist

As the match flared,
she saw it was Flies.
This time he had
her . . .



were as quick as living rope. At the split-second as she was going to scream, a calloused hand was clapped over her mouth and bent her head back until she thought her neck was going to break. She grabbed for the man's hair, a very effective female strategem when it works, and only grazed a bald skull with her knuckles.

It was Flies Lampland; he had gone down to the car, turned the radio on and come back at once to sneak through his window and wait for her. Cunning. That absent-mindedness with the coins was a trap. He had made sure that she was looking on, and had lured Arnie out of the lodge. Out in the kitchen Sam was as sound asleep as an old board covered with moss.

Frantically she tried to get him with her knees as she had Arnie, but he was as hard to kick as a cat. She beat his chest with her fists as one woman does in trying to hurt another, and the sinewy little old man bore her steadily backward, chuckling in his throat. Then instead of trying to get away from him she got a good grip on both of his shoulders, hung on and doubled her knees up. Both legs off the floor. There was plenty of freedom in the flared skirt, and she simply scissored both legs around his waist and used the powerful muscles that gals have in their thighs, risking a cracked head if her weight tumbled them both to the floor.

Her change of tactics surprised the old gnome in grotesque effectiveness. His breath left his lungs entirely with a weird honk, and for a few seconds he swayed precariously with shocked bafflement, then fought like a maniac to get rid of her before

it was too late. Agony exploded in her breast from a blow, but she squeezed tighter and tighter until fire was running through her veins from her ankles up into her hips. He tore at her legs, driving his fist into the pit of her stomach to spring that nutcracker grip open. Lurching in the darkness he bumped into the wall and rebounded. In a last convulsion of dismay he simply let go and with all his remaining might tried to twist free from the embrace of those inescapable legs. Her body was swung to the right, and in the desperate return swing, as he staggered, her head banged into the chiffonier. The world ended with a flickering splash of blinding white light, and then she was borne through the blackness with increasing sickening velocity.

CHAPTER V

Almost Murder



OUTSIDE in the night Arnie detoured. Strolling for a few steps until he knew that no light from the lodge reached him, he drew on his cigarette ostentatiously. Then he concealed the coal of the butt in his palm, so that it might look to Flies down in the car as though he had turned his back and was going around the lodge to the river.

Heading away from the car at right angles from that point, he went down the slope past the rose-bed at a run into the woods. Behind a tree he carefully put down the cigarette on moss and extinguished it with his foot. There were stars, no moon; foliage could be seen against the sky, but shapes on the ground were indis-

tinguishable from the night. Prowling under these conditions tricked the senses, requiring alert balance. The very ground was insubstantial, as though it were only more thick shadow into which he might plunge to an unknown bottom at the next step.

Hands extended, he felt his way from tree to tree, stopping for a long moment once when his toe kicked a stone which had sprouted between steps like a mushroom. Bending from the hips, against the risk of a tendon cracking, he plucked the stone and hefted it. It had a cozy feel in his grip and was just the right shape for cracking nuts with hard shells. Along with it he went, the sound of the radio determining his course. At length his fingertips touched the travel-grime of the car's trunk compartment.

At a crouch he stole around the car to the driver's door. There, in swift, fluid motion he came up; elbow first, his arm went through the open window and backhand, with purposeful brutality, he bashed with the stone at the place where he imagined Lampland's head to be. The stone thumped hard against the cushions, nearly throwing his arm out of joint. He flinched in expectation of the shot which would now come from the back seat. Nothing.

"You here, Flies?" he inquired with innocent casualness.

Tossing the stone aside he reached in and switched the lights of the instrument board on. There was no one in the car, and there was no smell of cigarette smoke. Flies was a chain smoker; he had been down here no longer than it took to switch the radio on and regulate it for volume.

He listened for any sound to indicate that Flies was hanging around and grinning at him in the darkness. After one look back at the lighted cabin he bolted. An idea was cold in his mind, and he scaled the slope just as fast as fright could travel. But when he reached the door, he entered at his usual rate of leisure, his breathing controlled in spite of the huge drumming of his heart. Easing the door shut behind him he regarded the sleeping form of Sam the engraver. He passed through the kitchen with long strides, not lifting his shoes more than enough to graze the floor and walking on the sides of the soles.

AFTER a glance into her room he left the door open and cut back to Lampland's. With scarcely any interruption in his progress he opened that door and kept right on going.

The candle on the chiffonier was burning, and the draft of his entrance spread the flame into an orchid petal of light. Pauline was lying on Lampland's bunk, unconscious, with her hair disarranged. There was lipstick on his thin, feline mouth. He was breathing hard with excitement, big-eyed, trembling with haste. The shaking of his hands was like palsy, since they were occupied with stripping her with the utmost dispatch. Hands inserted at the neck, he had already ripped her blouse down to the waist. Upon Arnie's entrance he had a good grip on the ruined blouse and slip.

With a little moan of alarm he ducked; a fist emerged from the thunderbolt that had entered the room, and skinned his bald pate.

Flies was doing everything at

once. He was pulling his gun out and trying to scuttle to safety in several directions at the same time. When he sprang from the bunk he fell, and the automatic went off in his hand without aim. Out in the kitchen the chair, Bible and Sam went to the floor with a crash at the stunning bellow of the shot. Arnie tried to boot Flies in the face, but the eggplant head rolled aside.

For a moment he thought he had broken his ankle, because the heavy automatic got in the way of the kick, was clubbed out of Flies' grip and went bounding out into the kitchen.

Flies let out a yell of pain at his mashed fingers, but he was on his feet faster than seemed possible and scrambled after the automatic. Sam had it, and it looked as big as a cannon with the lamplight on it.

"Stop right where you are," Sam ordered irritably. "That means you, Arnie. Lay off him," Arnie was in the act of getting an armlock around Flies' neck to see how far it would stretch. Flies scuttled out into the kitchen, and Sam had a view of Polly outstretched on the bunk with her clothes torn. The breasts scarcely stirred with her breathing, her skirt was any which way, and Sam jumped to a conclusion.

"Now what do you want to molest that girl for, Flies?" he asked complainingly. "Dog-gone, she's Arnie's girl and you got no claim on her. Of all the damfoolishness, making a shooting matter out of it."

"Give me that there," Flies ordered. He looked at Arnie, and his eyes were popping with rage.

"I'll give you a slug right through your gozle if you don't calm down," he warned placidly. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, taking a crack

at Arnie's girl and raising all this rumpus? Hey?"

"She come prowling in my room of her own free will. If she wants to do that, she takes the consequences," Flies raged. "You going to give me that, Sam?"

"When I get damn good and ready," Sam rejoined. "How about you, Arnie? You gonna be holding a grudge now, or you letting bygones be bygones?"

THE gun had been fired at close range; Arnie's ears were ringing so that he heard through a fog, part of which was still murderous, reckless rage. He said, "That all depends."

"Nope; it's gotta be yes or no," Sam insisted. He chortled unpleasantly. "Damned if I don't think it might be better if I plugged the both of you right now and settled things; then neither of you'd have the gal. I'm sick and tired of y' damn wrangling and getting my chairs shot out from under me."

"The safety wasn't on. She went off by accident," Flies said sullenly. Then he relaxed with an effort and gave Arnie a ghoulish grin which was meant to be pleasant. "Call it quits, eh? Pal? I didn't hurt her any. We just bumped in the dark and had a tussle, and she banged her head on the chiffonier."

"Is that all?" Arnie asked sarcastically, eyeing the lipstick smeared on Flies' face.

"So help me. She didn't have any business in my room. I didn't ask her to come in and I didn't sap her. Ask her. She sneaked in all by her lonely while Sam was asleep, and I just happened to be there."

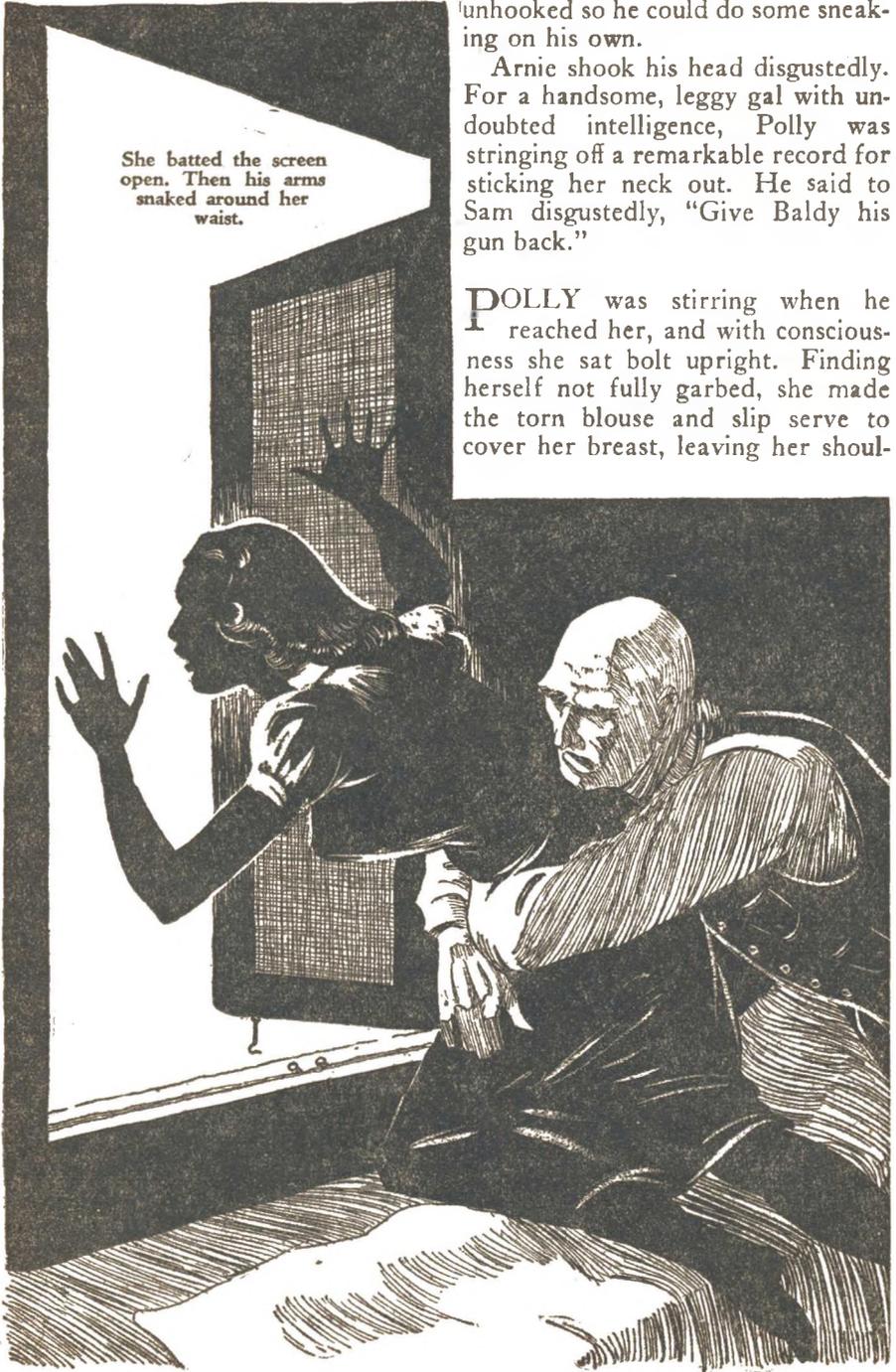
Having left the window screen

She batted the screen open. Then his arms snaked around her waist.

unhooked so he could do some sneaking on his own.

Arnie shook his head disgustedly. For a handsome, leggy gal with undoubted intelligence, Polly was stringing off a remarkable record for sticking her neck out. He said to Sam disgustedly, "Give Baldy his gun back."

POLLY was stirring when he reached her, and with consciousness she sat bolt upright. Finding herself not fully garbed, she made the torn blouse and slip serve to cover her breast, leaving her shoul-



ders bare and white as whipping-cream. She had the finest-textured, whitest skin that Arnie had ever seen, like living nacre. As she rose to her feet, scared and tight-lipped, he leaned over the bunk and pointedly pushed out the screen, brought it home with a slam and hooked it.

"Your room," he said, as she stood undecided as to what was going to happen to her next. He took her arm where it was round and went into her room with her, with Flies in grinning possession of his gun again, and Sam returning sepulchrally to his Bible to read himself asleep again.

In her room with the door closed Arnie asked, "Are you all right? Really, I mean, did he hurt you?"

"I've got a headache," she said dismally. "I'm sorry. It's all my fault." In a low voice she told him about the keys and her figuring that Flies had hidden them for fear of Arnie's slugging him.

"Don't fall for any more of those tricks," said Arnie after a moment's consideration of the possibilities. "Wait a minute and I'll get you a drink."

He went out and made a stiff one. When he brought it to her she opened the door only enough to take it. From one of her suitcases she had taken out a silk robe, but it was so warm that she didn't put it on. Keeping it handy she sat on the edge of the bunk smoking and drinking automatically. Drink, drag on cigarette. Step on butt on floor, light new one.

There was an alarm clock in Flies' room which she hadn't heard ticking until now. It was a loud tick like a stick in the hands of a tireless small boy striking the pickets of an endless

fence, senselessly. The door opened and she grabbed for the robe. But only a hand appeared, tossed a new pack of cigarettes in, and the door closed. Another smoke. She brushed ashes from her knees. By this time, she reflected, she should have been in the Twin Cities.

It certainly had been one hell of a day on clothes.

CHAPTER VI

Use for a Gun



HERE was an old man riding a bicycle. He was dressed in a poorly-fitting messenger's uniform, which was quaint, because she had always thought that all messengers were boys. His eyes were bright brown and were round as a bird's, and he had a sweet, small mouth which inquired, "Miss Pauline Ryder?"

At her nod he handed her an envelope with a window in it showing her name and address on the message enclosed. She reached for it, and felt it between her fingers, but her hand was empty when she was in the act of tearing the envelope open. The old man smiled, still tendering the telegram. Again she took it, and had it, but it was gone when she started to open it, never having left the messenger's hand. He wasn't holding on tightly either; the paper didn't slip between her fingers. When analyzed, the thing was merely irritating because it wasn't subject to logic. But in a nightmare the ingredients were just right for horror, and Polly woke up.

Confused for a moment, she figured out where she was, and promptly forgot the dream except

that it had something to do with an important wire. Fear of the unknown wore off, but she couldn't get back to sleep in spite of the authority in the drink Arnie had made her. She didn't remember actually getting into bed, but she was lying within the fold of a single sheet which was unironed but clean. She had her robe belted on. Feeling about on the floor alongside the bunk she touched her empty glass, found the pack of cigarettes and a paper of matches.

In the bright, hissing glare of the matchhead was Flies, taking another step toward her on tiptoe. He was fully dressed, and his eyes were wide open but unfocused.

She pawed at the window, and the shade went up with a sound as sharp as a shot when the stick hit the top of the sash. All it took was a tug to spring the hook out of the eyelet screw; she batted the screen outward, but wasn't even halfway through before Flies got hold of her. His hands caught her around the waist. This time he had her. She was flung down hard, and he had big, strong hands for a little old man. They were around her throat with a snap of suddenness. Her terror was so great that she hadn't been able to scream; that first raw exhalation was only a monosyllabic stage-whisper. She convulsed, arching her body and kicking, squirming until her throat felt torn. She clawed at the hands and at the invisible face. Startlingly Flies yelped and let go.

IT SOUNDED as though there was at least a squad of soldiers in the room, from the scuffling of feet and the thumps of blows landing, and cursing. Polly pulled her robe about her, and in her sandals

circled to the chest of drawers. As she lit the candle, a weight of some hundred and sixty-odd pounds hit the floor.

The weight was Arnie Slaughter. In Lampland's fist was the automatic, with which he had just clubbed Arnie's head. Flies looked scared. He backed away as Arnie got his legs under himself, with a gash over his eyebrow that started oozing blood.

"Don't get excited, now," Flies said anxiously. "Hang onto yourself, Arnie." Then he said something so absurd that Polly and Arnie just stood staring at him. "I was walking in my sleep."

"You were walking in your sleep?" Arnie inquired at last with a respectful glance at the gun. "Like hell you were."

"I said I wasn't going to bother your girl," Flies said, and he sounded angry. "Damn it! I was walking in my sleep!"

With a trace of hysteria Polly said, "He's persistent, isn't he?"

The door behind Flies opened, and he jumped aside, ready to aim with the automatic wherever he had to. In came Sam, barefoot. He had taken the time to belt on a pair of pants and fix a couple of buttons of an old shirt which he hadn't bothered to tuck in.

"What in the hail is going on now?" he inquired exasperatedly. "Flies, what's the matter with you? Damn it, I'm an old man, and you've got to quit breaking up my sleep. I got to have it!"

"He says he was somnambulating," Polly said, and giggled with relief.

"You don't watch out," Sam told Flies, "and I'm gonna get damned

sore. Quit pesterin' her, d'you hear?"

For an answer Flies backed into the kitchen and yanked the door shut with a terrific slam. Sam reopened it and thumped out on his bony heels, muttering gloomy curses into his beard.

"I'll be a son of a gun," Arnie said to Pauline, "if I don't think he was telling the truth. That is, up to the time he found out where he was and decided he might as well grab opportunity by the tail."

"You certainly arrived in a hurry," she said breathlessly. Wrapped up in the sheet on the bunk, which was more revealing the more she tried to cover herself, she watched him with large eyes. He returned her look with interest.

"I was sitting under your window, just on the off-chance that he'd try something again." He chuckled, patting his gashed forehead with a handkerchief. "When that shade went up, I was positive that he'd tracked me and shot, and I wasn't here any more. It was so damned dark."

He assured her that the wound wasn't serious, went to the kitchen and came back with a chair. Planting this in front of the door with the back to the bunk, he knotted the ends of a necktie together and hung it on the doorknob. Before he blew the candle out he gave her a look that was longer than necessary. Since life had gone completely crazy she had an impulse to ask, "Aren't you going to kiss me good night?" That would have made her the kind of a girl he was used to, no doubt. Then it was pitch dark again, and merely because she had thought of that kiss her face went hot. She jumped when

he said laconically in the blackness, "Better hook the screen again."

She obeyed in silence. Arnie sat in the chair on his coccyx, hooked his feet through the necktie slung from the doorknob, and balanced his cranium on the back of the chair. No one could enter the room now without destroying his balance and giving him a fall that insurance companies pay money on. Polly heard a long sigh of comfort, and stared in the direction where her frightening champion was last seen. He had been getting only two and three hours of sleep a night, because living with Flies was as interesting as poison ivy. She stared for a long while, until she was absolutely certain that he was asleep.

He didn't snore nor babble.



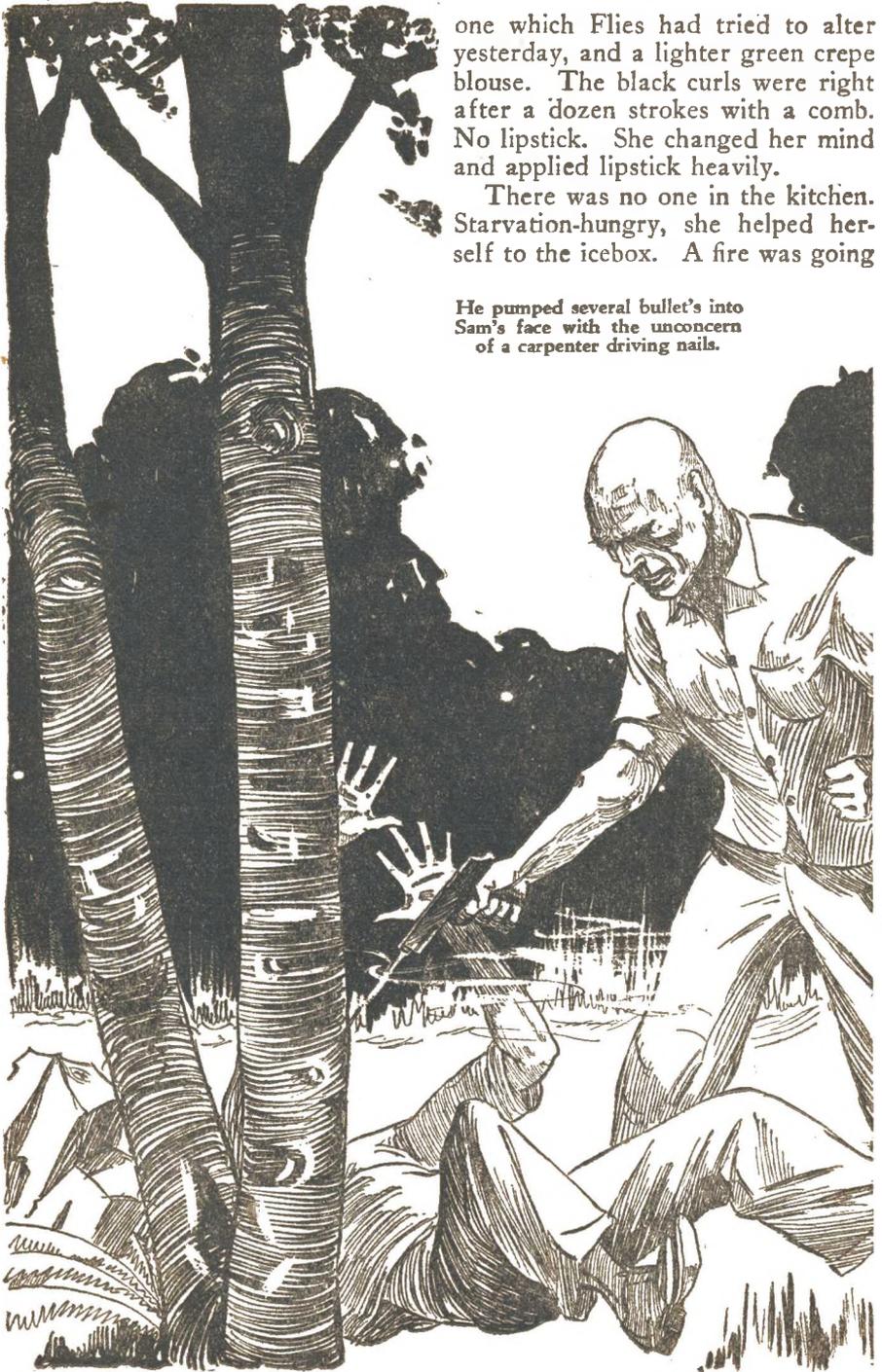
WHEN she awakened, the shade above her hung still and glowing like a sheet of hot metal. It was going to be another day like yesterday. Arnie was gone, and the chair was beside the door with its back to the wall as though someone had been sitting there in contemplation. At the moment of awakening she was lying prone, her arms above her mussed hair and one knee up and resting against the wall. She was garbed as was Eve. Last night when she had taken off the robe and gone back to bed she had hung it over the head of the bunk. It must have fallen to the floor, because it was at the foot of the bunk now and was neatly folded.

When she was awake, she was wide awake. Without any delay she poured herself into clothes, choosing a smoky-green skirt styled like the

one which Flies had tried to alter yesterday, and a lighter green crepe blouse. The black curls were right after a dozen strokes with a comb. No lipstick. She changed her mind and applied lipstick heavily.

There was no one in the kitchen. Starvation-hungry, she helped herself to the icebox. A fire was going

He pumped several bullet's into Sam's face with the unconcern of a carpenter driving nails.



in the stove and the room was as hot as a corner of hell. While eggs were frying, she stood on the porch. The light sound of the screen door closing made Arnie turn around. He was sitting on the lawn under the only tree in the yard with his arms locked around his knees. On the running-board of her car sat Sam and Flies, too much absorbed in reading the Chicago paper they had gotten from the mailbox to look up. Sheets of the paper lay on the grass. They were going through the news and through the advertisements as though there were a ransom-reward offered for finding a backward "s."

Polly went back in. She had her breakfast in solitude in her room on a heavy plate of restaurant crockery. There was bitter black coffee, of which she could stand only half a cup, and someone had left three slices of crisp toast in the warming compartment over the stove-plates. As the others apparently washed utensils immediately upon using them, she cleaned up and put things away. With a cigarette lighted, she stepped out on the porch and watched the three men.

The newspaper was finished, and Sam was hiking back and forth in an arc in front of Flies, something like the male spider courting the black widow. Polly took the step down to the grass, and after a moment of debate went down to the tree where Arnie was sitting and stood there. He gave her only the briefest glance.

SOMETHING was wrong. Sam was wagging his hands and sticking his neck out belligerently, a gawky figure of a worried man who didn't know what to do with himself.

"Gimme the keys!" he demanded. "I ain't staying around here any longer. I'll take the plates off the car, and if anybody stops me I can say they was stolen."

"We're staying here," Flies said. "Go away; I'm thinking about something." He stared up the slope at Polly.

Sam's sorrowful voice was a growl with frustration. "Gimme the keys to that hot car," he demanded. "That's good enough for me. There is a dead man under them rose-bushes, and they'll find him. They'll find him! They don't put me back in stir. No, sir!" He made his voice calmer, pleading. "Flies, we're just looking for trouble, staying here at the lodge. Boy, that was a G-man you shot, and they'll be looking for him. And this girl's folks will be raising a rumpus."

"If she's got any folks," Flies remarked.

"My stars," Sam wailed, "you said we were only going to wait until we went through the Chicago paper. There ain't anything in it. We got this new car. What are we waiting for?"

"I like it here. We've got plenty of dough now. The gal's. We can just bury that suitcase full of sawbucks in the ground and forget about it. Don't be a gunsel, Sam. We had this place three years, and you know damn well y'never change hideouts. It's bad luck."

Sam glared at him for a moment and screeched in a startling, warbling voice, "I'm getting outa here!"

And he took a peculiar, hopping step toward Flies.

"You bet your sweet life you're getting out of here," said Flies. He got up from the running-board and

stuck his gun at lanky old Halperin. "You're going away where you never been before."

The man was insane, really insane, Polly thought; then her heart became a lump of pain with the rapidity of the beat. There was going to be a murder, and it couldn't be stopped. She wanted to scream, or run away with all her might, with her hands covering her ears, but she couldn't move. All along Arnie had suggested that he wanted things precipitated, and now he went the whole distance.

CHAPTER VII

Cold-Blooded Murder



HE GOT to his feet with a real grin on his face for the first time. He said with resonant distinctness, "I'm getting out of here myself."

Purposefully he stalked down the slope.

Flies let him get as close as Sam, and then Arnie stopped for a confabulation. Sam looked at Arnie in bewilderment, but Arnie never took his eyes off the man with the gun.

"Get around a little to your left," he told Sam. "I'm tired of taking orders from a screwball, and it's a cinch he won't get both of us."

"That's what you think," said Flies. He wore a happy leer, and his gaze shifted from Arnie to Sam in jerks. He held the automatic in a loose grip, pointed toward the ground between the two men. Arnie stood still, knowing how handy Flies was with the weapon as he remembered the long shot with which he had dropped the federal agent from

all the way up there at the kitchen window.

"Now, Flies, I'm agin murder," Sam said sonorously. "I'm agin it! It says so in the Bible: 'Thou shalt not kill.' So gimme them keys!"

"Why, you sanctimonious old buzzard!" Flies sneered. "D'you think I'm going to let you get caught so you can put the finger on me?" Like that. He was going to hog everything, all the cash, all the girl. After he had what he wanted of Polly he was leaving the Double-X, but he was leaving alone.

By the tree Polly stood motionless with horror at his brutality. For sunlight winked on the automatic as with a flirt of his wrist he snapped a shot at Sam Halperin. With his nerves keyed up to the snapping point, Sam yelled simultaneously and dropped to his hands and knees as he turned completely around. The boom of the shot was thrown back from the forest, and there was Sam a dozen strides on his way as he broke for the woods. Gangling in build, he ran with fantastic rabbit-like hops and zigzag contortions of his creaky old hips. He was making it a target as hard to hit now as a scared mudhen.

Arnie stood completely still, and Flies planted him that way by briefly showing him the black hole of the gun's muzzle. It may have been that a distant target was more attractive than a near one. More probably it was because Polly was in the line of fire at the moment if he socked a bullet through Arnie. Anyhow he took a few skipping, pansyish steps out of Arnie's reach before he turned and snapped another shot at Halperin. Sam's shoulders twisted and he leaped into the air, hitting the

turf all atumble, only an average broadjump from the first trees. He rolled over and over and flopped.

Arnie remained standing as though he had grown roots, because the automatic swung back instantly to freeze him very definitely *in situ*. Sam lay asprawl with his eyes closed, blood staining his left shoulder. Flies reached him to check up on his marksmanship, and Sam was faking. His lanky frame exploded into a convulsion of motion on the ground, but it was futile. Flies had taken the precaution of keeping out of reach, merely toeing Sam so that the grabbing hands missed completely.

Thereupon Flies pumped three shots into Sam's face with the unconcern of a carpenter driving nails.

Doing his job of murder, he did not see Arnie gesture frantically to Polly to show her heels to the place while she had the chance, but as she stood numb the chance was gone like the ball changing holes in a slowing roulette wheel.

THE number that came up was Arnie's. What he did wasn't foolhardy, because it was simply the only thing he could do. He got his legs under himself, and in the hot sunlight Polly's body was stinging-cool with gooseflesh as she watched. He ran with headlong, wild velocity, passing over the ground like a swift shadow of cloud as he threw everything he had into that beeline of insanity. It was impossible for him to get there in time, marvelously fleet as he was.

Flies kicked Sam and turned around; the automatic roared as Arnie cast his weight at full speed upon him. They hurtled to the ground with Arnie on top, but he lost

the advantage with the first bounce, and the combat became a hideous, scrambling affair as torturing to watch as two tomcats tied together by the tails and hung over a clothes-line.

Polly's legs were shaking and refused to support her any longer, as though she had been hamstrung, and she sat down on the grass.

In the melee she was watching, someone's fist was pumping with the regularity of the piston-unit of a destructive piece of machinery. Out of the violence came a high, thin shriek like a length of silk being torn.

"Don't! Stop it!" Polly cried, nearly screaming herself. "Arnie! Stop it!"

He interrupted his exercise and stared dazedly at her; sitting astride Flies he looked at his fist, and it trembled as he opened it. He rose unsteadily; at his feet lay the spider-bodied murderer with a face churned to unrecognizable pulp.

There were marks of battle on Arnie, chiefest of which was a seared stripe that ran from his cheek up into his scalp. Powder burn; the single shot that Flies had been able to fire came that close. His knuckles were split open.

Getting fishline from the lodge, he took dozens of figure-8 turns around Flies' wrists behind him, and securely knotted the crossed line between the wrists. He dragged the body to the tree and drew the legs around the trunk scissors-fashion, linking the bony ankles with the fishline as he had the wrists. Flies couldn't free himself from the braided silk line any more than he could from aerial wire twisted with pliers by a mechanic. Flies was conscious now. He spat blood on the grass. A whin-

ing, maniacal animal sound issued from his throat, and his round brown eyes popped with frustrated malevolence.

"You're in the shade of the tree," said Arnie. "You won't get sunstroke before the sheriff gets here."

"I knew it. A lousy dick," Flies responded through puffed lips, and launched a stream of language that made Polly cringe.

After loading her luggage back into the car Arnie had cleaned



He ran with headlong, wild velocity, while she watched.

up. He was at the wheel. The tan convertible was winding through the woods toward the road, and Flies' raving couldn't be heard any more.

"You're really a detective?" Polly asked, her eyes searching Arnie's face. "You could have told me, sort of."

"Would you have believed me?" he countered.

"Are you with the police? I mean, with the F.B.I.?"

"No. Private investigator." He sounded morose.

"Then what did you tell me you've committed crimes for? That you've killed men and all that?"

"Shot two men in line of work," he explained. "That was all right, because they were wanted criminals. But I don't like it anyhow. As far as crimes are concerned, they're crimes in some jurisdictions and they aren't in others. I passed counterfeit money in order to get in with Sam and Flies. That might be called instigating crime, and I could get sent to the pen for it. We'll find out."

"Why did you take such a risk?"

"Business is rotten. I got wind of a reward being offered, and it just happened I got an earful of those two counterfeiters in a bar. Maybe I stuck my neck out; those phony ten dollar bills they were printing are almost perfect, and what the government wants most are the plates Sam made. Well, I haven't been able to find the plates, so it looks as though I've wasted a month's time." He added, "I guess we'll find the sheriff guzzling beer in the Olds Bar, as usual."

They reached the grassy road.

Polly asked suddenly, "Doesn't 'X' stand for ten?"

"It also stands for the spot where the—" Arnie said, broke off and yanked on the brake. He got out and went to the mailbox, opened it. After prowling for a moment, he took keys from his pocket and used one as a lever, prying up the false galvanized bottom inside the box on which was painted the two red "X's". He returned to the car unwrapping two oblong steel plates wrapped in oiled silk. On them were

engraved the face and reverse of the ten dollar bill.

"So that's that," he remarked, and they drove on for a while without conversation. It was impossible to drive fast, but Arnie was taking his time anyhow.

Polly asked, "May I see your notebook?"

HE FISHED the black leather book from his breast pocket, and she went through the pages. There were sketches of Sam and Flies done in vigorous lines, not amateurish work at all. Arnie could draw, and he was quick. Of Polly there were five sketches, including one of her asleep in the lodge, and they were unmistakably Polly. He had overlooked clothing the picture, and she flushed, then smiled and handed back the book.

"Lousy, aren't they?" he asked.

"Do you make much detecting?" she asked in return.

"I just told you I was broke. I invested every cent I had in those phony tens."

"But you must like the work."

"I hate it."

"Then you're a jackass, when you can draw like that."

"Yah," he jeered.

"You can draw like everything," she said comfortably. "I'll be seeing you in the magazines."

He made a skeptical sound of comment, and a mile later remarked, "I wish you weren't going to California."

"Why?"

"I don't know," he said, with red coming into his face. "I just wish you weren't going."

"Have you ever been in California?" she asked.

"No."

"Neither have I."

Silence again, and he looked troubled and unhappy. She looked steadily at him, and he was the right kind. She had all the money she'd ever need, but he had something else. Anyone who could draw like Arnie was going to be famous if she had to spend every cent she owned to get him there.

A mile out of Olds there was a big oak overhanging the road, and she ordered, "Pull up here."

He obeyed, and looked at her in a puzzled way.

"Well?" she asked impatiently, making her lips moist. "Do I have to hire you to be my chauffeur for the rest of the way or something like that?"

He didn't wait very long.

If you liked this story, look for

“MONEY CLIP”

by the same author:

... in next month's issue!

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Private Detective Stories, published monthly at New York, N.Y., for October 1, 1939.

State of New York)
County of New York) ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Frank Armer, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of Private Detective Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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FRANK ARMER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September 1939.

[SEAL]

Alfred R. Yaffe.

(My commission expires March 31, 1940.)

H O T E L

He wasn't bad or vicious, just weak and soft. But when he transferred his attentions from the daughter to the mother, he was signing his own death warrant — though he didn't know it!



HELP

By
**ROGER
TORREY**



HE girl had her hand raised to knock again, when I opened the door. I happened to be right by it and it must have startled her to have had it opened so fast. She said:

"Let me in! Quick!"

I stood back and let her in.

She was pretty and she had a good-looking mink coat and the combination is unusual. Most of the

women who can afford to wear mink have faces a little the worse for wear. By the time the good provider can provide four thousand dollar fur coats, the little helpmate has gone through the mill and shows it.

This one was a doll. Very small—it would only take about two-thirds as many mink to make a coat for her as it would for the rank and file. Very blonde. The coat had a high collar that framed her light hair

She went down those back stairs so fast that her coat swung out in the breeze she made.



and made her like something out of a picture. She had very blue eyes and now she had an appealing, apologetic smile to go with them. She said however:

"Will I pass?"

I knew I'd been staring and that staring isn't considered good manners but I didn't give a damn. I was in a dump of a hotel—one of the kind where they ring a bell at four o'clock and everybody goes to his own room. The kind where if they page Mr. Smith, half the customers answer the call. It wasn't even too clean. When a good looking girl calls on you in a rat hole like that, you can usually toss your manners out of the window because they'll not be recognized or appreciated. I said:

"Honey, you can pass anywhere. Any place. Tell 'em just to ask old pappy and he'll give you a clearance."

"You're John Allen," she said, not making a question of it. "I want to talk with you."

"The floor's yours. What were you in such a rush for?"

"I . . . I didn't want to be seen. Not here. And not with you."

I didn't blame her. The dump called for the crack. She went on with, "Where can we talk?"

"Why not here?"

She said doubtfully, "Well-l-l . . ."

"You're already here," I told her, "and you take the same risk being seen after you do your talking as if you went out now. What d'ya want to talk about?"

WE WERE still standing by the door but it was closed. And then somebody shot three times, spacing them out. Just *BANG—BANG—BANG*. They sounded as

though they were fired in the lobby one floor down and the spacing showed they were aimed. The girl whirled, saying, "Oh my God!" and grabbed for the door.

The last I saw of her she was going toward the back stairs and doing it so fast her coat was swinging out behind her from the breeze she was making. I started downstairs for the lobby, wondering just how she knew my name.

It just happened that I wasn't supposed to be in Clarkstown and that I was registered in the dive as James Alcott. I was using a name with the same initials as my own because my luggage was marked with a big J. A.

THE dead man was a slim young fellow and he hadn't been much over twenty-five or six. Very dark. You had a feeling he'd been a honey of a dancer and that he'd specialized in rhumbas and tangoes. All three shots had hit him—two in the chest and one through the throat. A cop with a seedy looking blue uniform was already there when I went down the stairs, and the clerk was at the switchboard calling the station and so excited about it he could hardly speak. There'd been at least a dozen men sitting around the lobby when I first went through there an hour before, but now there were only two left.

In that kind of a hotel the customers usually just as soon not talk to police—the police ask too many questions.

And then it takes time to get on the stand and tell the jury about the murder you saw committed. A lot of the guys couldn't spare it from the crap and poker games they were either running or bucking.

I walked over toward the cop and the man on the floor and the cop said, "Now stand right there. Don't move him."

"What in the hell would I want to move him for?" I asked. "He's dead, ain't he?"

The cop said the man was dead and asked me who he was. I didn't know and said so. I started past him and out the door, and he swiveled around and said:

"Hey! You stay right here. They'll want to ask you questions."

The clerk had gotten his call through by then. He said timidly, "Ugh, Charley! Mr. Alcott just checked in from out of town. He's a stranger here—he was up in his room until right now."

It didn't make any difference to Charley whether I'd just checked in or not. In fact, it didn't make any difference to Charley if I was the Prince of Wales. Charley said so, firmly. I wanted to know if I was supposed to send out for meals and got told to shut up—so I bought a newspaper and picked the easiest looking chair and waited for a cop that would have some brains.

Clarkstown was small and there probably weren't over twenty men on the force—but, even at that, percentage would carry me through I thought. Out of twenty there was bound to be one smart one.



HERE were two smart ones and they both came. The chief came, too, but he was as dopey as the patrolman Charley. The chief was named Nolan and he ran a marble cutting outfit—tombstones made to measure and that sort of stuff. He might have been a honey

with a hammer and chisel and his "Rest in Peace" work on the stones might have been top order—but he was a lousy peace officer. He came in, followed by two men and the first thing he did was bawl at Charley: "Who done it?"

Charley said he didn't know. The chief turned and glared at the clerk, as though he thought the clerk had the gunner in a hip pocket, and the clerk swallowed and pointed up the stairs and said:

"He . . . he went that way. He stood there and shot and then went up the stairs."

One of the two men with the chief said, "Charley! Get around to the back. He's been gone a long time it's a cinch, but you never know."

Charley dashed toward the back, glad to be doing something, and the guy that had told him the something said, "Gotta tell 'em everything," in a disgusted voice.

He was tall and thin and he had a nose on him like an eagle. It stuck out in front of his face like the bow of a boat. Outside of that he was white headed, about fifty, and looked like he knew all the answers. He took over then. He asked us all:

"Did you see it?"

Nobody had. One man had been looking at the magazines in a rack. The other had been turned the other way and, by the time he'd switched around, the shooter was gone. They both were lying of course—the shots had been spaced and aimed and that took time—time enough for anybody in that small lobby to get a good look at the man with the gun.

Of course I was upstairs and so was out of it.

The clerk claimed he'd never seen the shooter in his life—that the man

was a perfect stranger. He gave a vague description of somebody that might have been the next five men you'd meet on the street. Somebody not old or not young. His hair wasn't black, he didn't think, nor it wasn't light. He didn't exactly know how the man was dressed except he thought he was wearing a coat and pants.

The smart cop listened to this rigamarole and said wearily, "I get it. Why don't you just come out and say you were so damned scared you were blind. I know you were and you know you were, so why keep quiet about it. Just one thing—would you know the guy if you saw him again?"

The clerk said he didn't think so.

I BUTTED in then and asked, "Would it be all right if I went to the men's room? The cop that was here first made me stay here—he wouldn't let me go out."

The smart one said, "Let's talk it over, first. Just who are you? What are you doing in town? How'd you happen to pick this certain hotel? Where d'ya come from?"

I gave him the eye and he followed me over to the side. I said, "I didn't want to crack in front of the others. That means *all* the others. I'm John Allen and I work for the George Hyland Agency in the city. It doesn't make any never minds what I'm up here working on or why I picked this one hotel. The case has nothing to do with this shooting."

He looked at my identification and said, "I'm sort of a stranger here myself. But it seems damned funny to me that there's a shooting in the lobby of the hotel you just checked in—not an hour after you're in town. That is, when you think that there

hasn't been another killing in town since last November. That was when some old sister got mad at her old man and stuck him with the family butcher knife."

I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it. I heard the shots but that's all. If I can help you, tell me how."

He said grudgingly, "Okay, run along. I can always find you."

"I'm registered as James Alcott."

"I'll find you," he said.

So I headed back for the men's room—it was just off the first landing on the stairs.

There was a big guy washing his hands there. A very big guy. Shoulders out like walking beams and a way of walking that meant he'd put in a hitch in one of our country's armed forces. He grinned up at me and reached for a towel and said:

"Excitement, eh! A regular shooting! This is something new for Clarkstown—they go to bed in this town at nine o'clock."

"All of them?" I asked

"Well, the good citizens, anyway," he said, grinning. "Our night life is confined, you might say. We maybe have a few places where joy is king—but not many."

I said something about it looking to be a good little town and he asked me who the dead man was. I didn't know. He wandered downstairs and I washed my hands and wandered out after him and telephoned my client.

MR. ARTHUR HOPKINS met me at the Elite Cafe, which was supposed to be the best restaurant in town. It might have been, but that still didn't make it good.

He slid down opposite me in the booth and said:

"I'm glad to see you, Allen. You're sure nobody knows what you are here for?"

I said, "Hell! Nobody even knows who I am—much less what I'm here for."

I was leaving out the gal in the mink coat—I didn't want to mention her until I had an idea of how she fitted in. Hopkins said:

"Well, it's like I told you. I want you to find out who my wife is playing around with. I want definite, concrete evidence that will stand up in court. I will sue for divorce immediately upon obtaining it."

"Will she put in a counter suit?" I asked, noticing how he was eyeing the waitress at our station. "You want to make damn sure she can't come out with something on her own hook, you know. It's the old people who live in glass houses idea," I explained further.

It was wasted. He swelled up like a poisoned pup and said he was, and always had been, innocent of any wrong doing. In either thought or deed. Then he asked me how I was going to work and I told him that would depend on how things shaped up. That if he meant how was I going to frame his wife, the answer was I wasn't. That we'd gone all through that at the city office and no dice. That if his wife was cheating on him and I could get proof, okay. If not, okay also. That we'd still mail him the bill for the work. He said he was confident his wife was unfaithful and I said that such things could be in this wicked world and often were.

Then he stood up to leave. And my girl in the mink coat came rushing

up to him and said, "Oh, Daddy! I was looking for you—I saw the car parked out in front."

Then she stood, expectantly, waiting for him to introduce me.

He did. It was his little daughter—little Lola. She was his baby, he said, just before he left with her—and I sat there after they were gone, wishing she were mine.

I've always wanted one just like her—ever since I was just a little boy.

I WENT to a show and stalled around, looking the town over and it was a little after ten before I got back to the hotel. The eagle beaked cop was in the lobby, looking as though he wasn't happy there, but he brightened up and met me half-way to the desk. He said:

"Hagh, Allen, I want to talk to you."

"Go ahead," I said, getting my key from the desk and leading the way to a couple of chairs. "Got your killer yet?"

He said he hadn't. He had cold gray eyes that would have fitted well on a shark, and he turned these on me and said:

"But we found out a few things. Your agency sort of makes a specialty on obtaining divorce evidence. That right?"

"Could be."

"And, what I hear, they ain't above making it up. That's cold."

"Here's something else as cold," I told him. "I'm not manufacturing any divorce evidence. Now or ever. I won't say I'm above it, but the law looks at such tricks in such a mean way. They charge you with everything from perjury on down to contempt of court. It ends up with you

in jail wondering why you did it. I'm not taking any, Mister."

He looked skeptical. "You had dinner with Arthur Hopkins tonight."

"What of it?"

"You working for him?"

I said, "Now look! I like to be nice. I *try* to be nice. But don't expect me to talk about our clients—I don't have to. That's been fought out in too many courts, Mister."

"I wouldn't take that tone with me, if I was you, Allen," he told me curtly.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because the guy that was shot to death here this evening was a bird named Eddie Lane. Because Eddie and Mrs. Hopkins made a habit of meeting in this dump. Can you figure anything about that?"

I could figure a lot of things but I didn't know whether any of the answers I was getting was right. I said:

"Does Hopkins have an alibi? Did you check him for where he was before he met me?"

"He was in his office, damn it. We checked plenty—there's no mistake. We didn't talk to him about it, even."

"Why not?"

He grinned. "Everybody in town knew the old lady was stepping out with this Eddie. Except the old boy himself. This Eddie was an entertainer at The Pines—a roadhouse out of town about four miles. What did you know about him?"

"Nothing. I came to town knowing nothing about the set-up."

Then he handed me another one. He said, "Then what's Lola Hopkins doing up in your room right now? I came in just as she left the desk and headed upstairs. The clerk

didn't want to admit it but I saw her and had him dead to rights."

"It's the first I knew it," I said. "And I just met the girl tonight, in case you're interested. Her daddy introduced her."

This was just fishing around to see if he knew the girl had called on me before—at the time of the murder. Apparently he didn't. He said:

"Yeah! I heard that, too."

"What the hell—did you have somebody tagging me?"

He laughed and said, "Hell no! The girl that waited on you runs around with our radio operator. She tells him everything."

I said, "I wish she'd tell *me* something. That's what I'd like to know—everything."



MY CASE was blown to hell but I thought I'd stick around a couple days as sort of a vacation. And then tell old Hopkins that I'd found his wife had been out with this bird Eddie Lane a few times but that there was no way of getting divorce evidence from the fact. That the man was dead and the affair old. I had no doubt but that if the lady was cheating, she'd soon find another object for her affections, but that wasn't my business.

The murder was no affair of mine.

The girl in the room was, so I went to tend to it.

She was sitting in my one chair and she'd thrown her pretty coat on the bed. I said hello and how are you and picked it up and hung it in the closet, saying:

"It's too pretty to be thrown around."

She shrugged and said, "It doesn't

matter. I happened to be in the next room to dad when he telephoned your office this morning to see if you'd left. They told him you had and where you'd be and what name you'd be under. I heard him repeat them—that's how I knew where you were and how to find you."

I said, "Why find me?" and dug up a bottle I had in case I ran into a covey of snakes. "Will you have a drink, Miss Hopkins?"

She said she would and that the name was Lola. She didn't look as young and innocent with the coat off. Probably twenty-two. Her eyes were soft and deep and appealing but they were smart eyes. She took her drink and said:

"Of course you know, by this time, about Eddie Lane and mother?"

I said I'd heard something. She said, "Everybody in town except dad has heard about it. They're both that way if you want to know—he plays around and she plays around. He wants to divorce her so he can marry a girl friend of mine."

"That's interesting," I said.

She shrugged. "It's their own life and let 'em spend it any way or where they want. I don't care where they sleep—to make myself plain. Do I?"

I said, "Very."

"I want you to work for me. That's why I came this afternoon. There's a sergeant on the police force that came from the city, but he's the only one in town I know smart enough to help me. And he's crooked."

"A big nosed guy."

"Very. He's here because he can about run the police force from behind the chief."

"I had that figured. All right, he

won't do because he's crooked. You don't know whether I am or not but you'll take a chance on me."

She said, "We'll get along," and gave me a long low look that meant a lot more than the words. I said: "Who am I supposed to kill, honey? Just show him to me."

She didn't laugh. She said, very seriously, "He's dead now. He's the man who was killed this afternoon. But I'm afraid there's another one."

"Another one what?"

SHE came over next to me where I was sitting on the bed and said, "I guess maybe I'd better begin at the beginning. Last year I went to the city and met Eddie Lane there. He followed me back here. We went away for several trips together, if you want to know the truth."

"Part of it won't help me," I said, losing my idea of what an innocent kid she was. "If I'm going to help, I've got to know the score."

"Well, we broke up. I'd been giving Eddie money—he wasn't working. He didn't want to take it and as soon as he got this job at 'The Pines' he stopped. Then mother fell for him, and *they* ran around together."

"Swell kid," I said.

She shrugged. "Eddie wasn't bad. He wasn't the type that would resort to blackmail—I know that. He was weak, soft, but he wasn't that sort."

"Well, then what?"

"Then mother fell for Eddie, hard, and then I started getting touched for money. As long as I had some it was all right—but I haven't much left. Enough to pay you is about all."

"Pay me for what?"

She said, "Don't be stupid. I

should think you'd understand by this time. Naturally, I wrote Eddie notes and letters. A few, not many. In some of them I mentioned things I shouldn't. Now I get telephone calls for money—I mail it to J. S. Osborne, General Delivery."

"I could catch the guy there, when he picks it up."

"Certainly you could," she said. "So could this cop. All it would mean he'd be after money from me besides. Can't you see that wouldn't get my letters back? I'm engaged to marry a boy in the city, and his people are old-fashioned. They wouldn't stand for the scandal that would break if the letters came out."

"Who'd kill Eddie?"

She shrugged again. "Probably dad, if he'd known. I wouldn't—I don't think he was back of it. I talked to him about it and he said the letters were stolen. Do you want to find them for me?"

I said, "Sure. It's a job."

"Then I'll go," she said.

"Then you'll meet the tough cop in the lobby," I told her. "He's staking the place, just on general principles."

"I can go out the back."

"He'll have that watched, too."

She stared at me, then at the bottle. She laughed and said, "I certainly can't stay here."

"Why not?" I asked. "Then, after while, I'll go down and scout around and see if it's all clear. Then you and I can go some place. Didn't Eddie live out at 'The Pines'?"

"Why yes."

"Then we'll go there. But after awhile."

She held out her glass to have more filling put in it. She didn't want to leave and I knew it.

I knew the tough cop had just been down there waiting for me and that the place wasn't staked. But, after all, I was lonesome and there's no fun in drinking alone. And then, if I was right, the gal would come in handy later.

A single man going into a road-house is out of place. Or a couple if they go there too early; I explained this to Lola.

After a couple of drinks she said she thought I had something there.

I DON'T know why they called it "The Pines." It was set out in the middle of ten thousand acres of sage brush and there wasn't a pine tree in miles. Just a big shack that could have been turned into a barn—and should have been.

We went in and sat in a booth and ordered drinks and I said, "Now if I'm right, we'll get the letters and the cops will get the guy. Don't expect me to do any Desperate Desmond stuff though—as soon as I get the stuff, the guy goes to the cops. I don't want any part of him."

She stared at me. She'd had quite a lot to drink but not too much to understand what I was saying or what was going on. She'd certainly understood everything up to that point and no mistake. She said:

"Then it will come out about the letters."

I said, "He'll be too busy facing a murder rap to bother about letters. It's this way, baby. He was shaking you down, and Eddieed buck on it. I figure Eddie followed you to my hotel and the guy followed Eddie. If nobody was following you, why were you in such a hurry to get in my room this evening?"

She hung her head and admitted,



"He wasn't the type to resort to blackmail," she said.

"Eddie was following me. He'd talk to me and tell me the only reason he played around with mother was to be near me. He said he was crazy about me; that he'd do anything for me."

I thought Eddie had died for her but I didn't say it. She kept looking curiously around the room and finally said:

"I was looking for Eddie's friend, Mike Reynolds. But then, he's probably not working tonight because of

Eddie. He's a sort of Master of Ceremonies here."

"A big guy? Heavy shoulders? Sort of blonde?"

"Why yes."

"Does he live at my hotel?"

"He lives upstairs here—he has the room next to Eddie's. I—I was up there with Eddie."

"Never with this guy?"

She said, "Of course not," and lied by the clock. She'd kept her eyes too wide and honest when she said it. I said:

"What room's he got?"

"Why, four."

I'd spotted the stairs. I said, "Okay, kid, I'll get your letters. Right now. If this Mike should come in, scream or something so I'll know it."

"I can't do that here," she said.

I said, "Then faint or something," and eased over toward the stairs. If the letters weren't upstairs, I was nothing out—and if they were, I was set.

The door on number four came open with the third key I tried.

AND Mike came in while I was going through his suitcase. Holding a gun and pointing the gun at me. He said:

"Hagh! My friend! I thought you caught wise there in the hotel."

I said, "Sure, but I didn't figure it out until two hours afterward. I had something on my mind right then."

He said, "Yeah! I had the same thing on my mind ever since I saw her. She's too much mama for a guy like Eddie was."

"You mean mama or daughter?"

He laughed and said, "Both of 'em, for that matter."

I looked down in the suitcase and saw the letters right under my hand. So did he. He raised his gun, wetting his lips and getting ready to pull the trigger, and I yanked on the end of the throw rug he was standing on and down he came. I was sitting on the floor and the rug was right handy for me. By the time he landed I had my own gun out and ready and he saw I had the edge and let go of his. Then I grabbed the letters and swiped the big bird across the chin with my gun and went downstairs.

And Lola and I left there in a hurry.

SHE went with me to the station—and the tough boy with the eagle beak was right on hand there. He gave me a hard look and just the opposite sort to Lola, and I said:

"Well, Sarge, we came down to tell you who your killer is. Miss Hopkins and I happened to be out at 'The Pines' and I saw the guy and that reminded me."

"Of what?" he asked, leering at Lola.

"Well, you remember the clerk said the killer ran upstairs? It just happened that I opened my door when I heard the shots and nobody came up them."

"Well?"

"You remembered when I asked you if I could go to the little boy's room? Well, when I went in there, a man was already there washing his hands. A guy named Mike Reynolds. Miss Hopkins told me his name, and that he was a friend of the dead man's."

This hook nosed bird was smart enough to get it. If the fellow ran up the stairs, and I didn't see him, he had to go into the washroom. It was the only place. The sergeant called a flock of cops and sent 'em out after Reynolds, then said to me:

"I'll follow 'em in a minute. You want to go with me?"

I looked at Lola and she shook her head. I said, "No."

The sergeant said, "Just one thing. It's a cinch that clerk recognized Reynolds. So did the other two men in the lobby. Why didn't they crack about it?"

"That's the answer," I said. "If you'll check it up, you'll find the clerk and Reynolds were good friends or something. Those other bums wouldn't turn anybody over to

the cops—they'd be afraid somebody'd stool on them in turn. The clerk has to know Reynolds; it's the only answer."

Lola nudged me and said, "They are pals. That's how I met the clerk; Mike introduced me. We went there once for—for a drink. That's how come the clerk gave me a pass key for your room."

The sergeant said, "What's that, Miss Hopkins?"

"You wouldn't understand," said Lola.

He smirked and said he understood a lot more than most people thought he did.

And Lola blushed.

WE WENT back to the hotel—we had a couple of drinks in the bottle and that was an excuse. After all, we couldn't very well wander around the streets all night. I stopped and wired the office that I wouldn't be in for a couple of days because of running into complications and Lola was riding me about it all the way home. She said:

"So you figure I'm a complication, am I?"

"You are," I said. "This Reynolds stole the letters from Eddie. And don't tell me it was money he was blackmailing you for?"

She got red in the face. She said, "Well, no. But I couldn't stand him.

I had to do something; I couldn't go on meeting him."

I said, "Now we make sense at last. Eddie was nuts about you. So was this Mike. Eddie went in the hotel after you and Mike saw him. Eddie just wanted to tell you that he didn't know anything about the letters—you hadn't told him Mike had them, had you?"

"Well, no."

"That's it then. Mike saw Eddie and thought you were meeting him there, like you'd met him. So he lost his head and blasted him out. His friend the clerk didn't give him away and none of the hustlers sitting around there thought it was any of their business. So now you're out of the mess."

"And am I glad?" she said, moving in on me. "I'm happy now—no more troubles. And I'll see you, Johnny, when I go to the city."

"You'd better," I told her, putting an arm around her.

She said dreamily, "You know when I heard dad talking about you on the phone I had the strangest feeling. That's why I came to see you. I just had a feeling you'd help me or I certainly wouldn't have come to the hotel like this."

I said, "I'm a big help in hotels, baby. You know you can depend on me."

She said, "I *should* know it, silly."

... *Roger Torrey offers you an*

"APPOINTMENT WITH MURDER"

—*Next Month*

Everything seemed to be working for Walters. Even the rain was a break in building up his alibi. The one unfortunate circumstance was that Myra's new boy-friend was a detective. Even then, Walters thought he could get away with it!



IT WAS still raining hard when Walters ground his smart Packard coupé to a halt a block away from Myra's house. He was glad of the rain; it would help his alibi.

Walters was wearing his golf clothes to keep this date with murder and, as he sloshed through the rain toward the small apartment house set on a street in the Fashionable Fifties, he was thinking how glad he was that he had decided to get out on the golf course earlier in the afternoon while he plotted Myra's death.

Then, it had come to him. He had dismissed the caddy at the third hole and, standing in the shelter, had said he would play the round when the rain stopped. He knew it wasn't going to stop for some time; the leaden sky was enough to show that.

And, he remembered, Myra usu-

ally spent her afternoons home. Or so she said.

Walters wasn't so sure now. Of course, she didn't know that he had seen her yesterday afternoon with that good-looking stranger. They had been sitting far back in a booth at Le Coq D' Or.

He had dropped in for a cocktail. And when he saw them, he had shifted quickly to a part of the bar where they wouldn't see him when they came out.

His first impulse, as jealousy pounded through his veins, and thumped maddeningly at his brain, had been to confront Myra. Until eight weeks ago, he had believed himself to be the only man in her life. And then she had started to keep these mysterious appointments, not the usual ones with the hairdresser; those, she told him about. After that, there had been week-ends out of town.

FOOL-PROOF

By
**GEORGE
SHUTE**



She fought furiously as he tightened his grip.

He had wanted to follow her, end the torture. He shuddered as he recalled the agony of waiting for her return, his mind tormented with pictures of Myra in another man's arms.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. He told her of his fears. She only laughed and drew him into her arms, rested his head against the softness of her bosom.

But the fear hadn't gone away. He seemed to feel his mind slipping away from him, one tormenting inch after another. And he said, "Myra, if I ever catch you cheating, I'll kill you."

She had looked at him strangely. And said nothing. Just as had happened last night when he had asked what she had done in the afternoon. "Oh," she said, "I spent most of it at the hairdresser's."

Then, he wanted to kill her. But, cunningly, he knew that if he were caught, he too, would be killed.

So he had gone home; to drink and to brood. To think of some way to kill the woman he loved without getting caught.

THAT picture of Myra burned in his brain, and the stranger had helped. She had looked divine. It had been a warm day and she had worn a light print dress that brought out every tantalizing line of her body. And when she walked, the dress clung to her, revealing soft, provocative curves that pressed delicately against the tenuous material.

When she and the stranger passed him, without noticing, he had seen in the mirror, silhouetted through the bright sunlight her perfectly-molded thighs and slim legs, with slender ankles. She had looked like

a goddess as the sunbeams danced on her golden hair.

He loved that hair, thick golden yellow locks with little ringlets just made for his fingers. He had never minded the time she spent at the hairdresser's.

Now, as he stepped into the self-service elevator, unobserved, he was surprised to find that he didn't feel the least bit excited. It was as though his heart had been turned to flint. And in his mind was the one thought that if he couldn't have her wholly, no one else could have her.

He could feel the pressure of the gun in his pocket as he slipped the key into the door. He didn't intend to use it. Not unless that stranger was there. Then, to hell with everything, he'd let them both have it and come what may.

Suddenly, a shiver of apprehension went through him. Suppose she weren't home? Then, this miraculous opportunity would have been wasted. And he would have to face more hours of agonized waiting as he plotted the perfect crime!

But she was home, lying on the chaise longue, attired in a diaphanous negligee. The negligee he had bought for her at a smart shop. It brought out every enticing line of her body.

She just smiled as he came in. "Why, Bill," she said, "I didn't expect you this afternoon."

He couldn't resist it. He said, "You weren't expecting someone else, were you?"

She just looked at him and smiled that maddening smile.

Walters said, "I was rained out on the golf course. So I thought I'd drop in for a drink and chat with you."

She shook her head, the golden curls dancing in the reflected light, and said, "Well, you might be good enough to mix us a couple of Scotches then."

He walked moodily over to the bar, wondering when to do this murder. There was a picture in his mind of fingerprints. He smiled to himself as he thought how silly he would look putting on his gloves. Of course, she would ask him about them.

He mixed the drinks and handed her one. As she took the glass in her long, lacquered fingers, he thought idly that poison would have been a good way out, too.

They sipped slowly, speaking little. He was thinking how beautiful she was, how desirable, sitting across from him, her legs crossed, revealing tempting expanses of white flesh. The sight of it caused the blood to rush hotly through his veins and he sat alongside her.

She moved over, slightly. It infuriated him but he reached out and took her fingers. Her blue eyes were trained steadily on him as he suddenly pulled her closer, felt the pressure of her soft flesh, pulled her tighter still until he could feel her heart throbbing. His pulses were pounding madly as his fevered lips sought hers. . . .

AFTER a little while, he said, "Have you been home all afternoon?"

Her fingers were warm in his hand. She said, "No, I've been to the hair . . ."

Suddenly, the fingers stiffened. He knew then she was going to say she had been to the hairdresser's. But she had told him last night she went yesterday!

Walters saw red as she said, "I've . . . I've been home . . . yes."

The fingers of his pocketed hands pressed into the gloves, one in each pocket. A few seconds passed and then his gloved hands, emerged. He smashed his fist full across her mouth. "You're a liar," he screamed. "You were out with him. I saw you yesterday. In *Le Coq D' Or*."

She recoiled in horror, fear blanching her face. She started to speak but couldn't. His fingers were pressing against her throat. Her eyes protruded as she gasped for breath.

"So I've caught you at last!" Walters grated. "I told you I'd kill you. And now I'm going to."

Myra fought furiously as he tightened his grip. In the struggle, her negligee slipped from her shoulders, leaving her almost nude. She tried to kick Walters, break his deadly grip. He grinned insanely, applied more pressure.

And in a moment she was still.

Walters rose. His eye fell on his whiskey glass. He drained the contents and carefully wiped the glass with a handkerchief. Then, he went to the portable bar and wiped the decanter from which he had poured the whiskey.

Now that it was over, he felt strangely calm. Murder was easy after all.

She was lying very still as he looked at her for the last time. Then, for an instant, he felt a tinge of remorse. Not conscience. His remorse was sensual. Her negligee was off, revealing her satiny shoulders. Her face was beginning to purple and on her throat dark bruises showed. Her golden hair tumbled carelessly about her head. It struck him as odd that

it looked more alive than she did. And then he remembered she was dead.

Carefully, he let himself out. It was still raining. Hard. He started his car and then looked at his watch. Less than an hour since the rain started. He had a perfect alibi if he could get back to the golf club unnoticed.

It was easy. No one saw him park his car. No one saw him slip back to the shelter by the third hole, where he had left his clubs. He slung them over his shoulder and trudged through the rain.

Inside the club, everybody thought he had been caught in the storm. He posted his card and went to the bar, had a couple of Scotches. He found himself humming a song as he stood there. Then, he went out to the caddy master. It would be best to have an alibi.

The boy was still there. "Guess there's no golf today, huh, Mr. Walters," he said. "It's sure a corker of a storm. You gave up, huh?"

Walters tipped him generously. "For today, anyway. Maybe we'll go out tomorrow."

That boy would come in handy, just in case. Walters expected to be questioned. Lots of people knew about him and Myra. But no one knew about the other man. Well, bring on the cops.

BACK in his apartment, Walters took off his wet golf togs. A gleam of gold caught his eyes. He stood there shaking. It was a strand of Myra's hair. On his coat! For a moment, fear shook him like a sapling in a breeze. Then, he recovered himself. Everything had been all right so far.

Carefully, he went over the coat, examined it minutely, removed every strand of yellow hair he could find. After that, he called Floto, the Filipino boy. "Have this sponged and pressed, Floto," he said, "and get it back here as soon as possible. I want to wear it tomorrow."

Walters mixed himself a drink. He felt proud. He had committed the perfect crime. And they said it couldn't be done. There was just one more thing. And that was to be ready for the police when they questioned him.

Idly, he wondered when the body would be discovered. The maid, who came in every day to clean Myra's apartment, would find it.

HE WAS right. The papers, next day, carried the story. There was no mention of Walters or the stranger. But Walters knew he'd be brought into it. Everybody knew about him and Myra. Yet, he didn't care.

He felt a shiver of apprehension run through him, though, when his secretary came in the afternoon following the morning the body was found and said, "There's a man here from the police, Mr. Walters."

Walters stiffened, forced a smile. "Send him in."

Then, his eyes almost popped out of his head. *It was him!* That good-looking stranger he had seen with Myra!

The man looked at him swiftly, but Walters carefully concealed his emotion, managed to say, "What can I do for you?"

The stranger's voice was low, cold. "I'm Bryant of the police department. I'd like to talk to you about Myra Ainslee."

Walters decided to bluff it out. "What about her?"

The detective looked at him. "I suppose you don't know she's dead?"

"Dead?" Walters tried to act surprised. He felt the attempt was a failure and wished that Bryant's eyes wouldn't stare so fixedly. "What . . ."

He listened as Bryant spoke. "The body was found by her maid this



"What's the matter, honey?" She was trembling with fear.

morning. She had been murdered. Strangled. I thought you might know something about it."

Walters pondered a moment, and reached for a cigar. "It's news to

me," he said. "I'm terribly shocked. I knew Myra very well." He wondered if the detective knew. Then, as if the policeman had read his thoughts, he heard:

"Cut it out, Walters. I know how well you knew her."

Bryant's eyes were boring into Walters'. "I don't think you know this. But I'm going to tell you. Myra and I were in love with each other. I met her eight weeks ago and we fell like a ton of bricks. We were going to be married. She was going to tell you that today."

His voice was cold, harsh. "And now she's dead. I don't know who killed her, Walters. But if it was you, I'm going to get you. Legally."

Walters sat transfixed. His mind was churning with the phrases Bryant had just uttered. But his thinking, he realized, was clear as a bell. "When did it happen?"

Bryant told him. Walters forced a smile. "Then you'll have to look elsewhere for your murderer. I was played golf at my club."

Bryant continued to stare. Walters fidgeted uncomfortably for a moment. Then, Bryant rose, "We'll check on that," he said, "and then I'll be back."

Walters' hands were shaking as he poured himself a stiff drink. The liquor calmed him. "I've got nothing to fear," he thought, "they couldn't have found a fingerprint or they'd have pinched me."

He felt a little worried, but decided the smartest plan would be to stick around until the market closed. Then go to the club, do some drinking and forget. Yes, that was it. Get plenty plastered. Then everybody would think he was sorrowing for Myra. He decided to see that she got a swell funeral.

So she had fallen for a detective had she? Well, he'd forget that. He had had his revenge. He poured another drink, another stiff one. The

little tramp! Try to put one over on Bill Walters, would she?

At the club, he met Sam Tilden. "How about a little party tonight, Bill?" Sam asked.

Walters was going to say no. Everybody knew about him and Myra. Maybe it would be bad. But the drinks were going to his head. He felt excited, exhilarated. "Why not?" he thought, "why not?"

There were two of them. Out-of-work show girls. Pretty, too. A blonde and a redhead. Walters paired off with the blonde.

She was lithe and sinewy, with a figure like Myra's. Damn it, he couldn't get Myra out of his mind. Even the blonde's hair reminded him of Myra. Her name was Dora. Not so dumb Dora, either. If he knew blondes.

And he was sure he knew them. They were sitting on a divan in a room of the apartment. It was a nice apartment for two out-of-work show girls. But Tilden had explained, "The boys sometimes make contributions."

Walters was feeling his liquor as he sat close to her. She had put on a negligee. It was thin, gossamer, outlining tantalizing curves. Her skin was smooth and soft.

And in a moment, she was in his arms. Her lips were moist and sweet, soft as down and he was kissing her madly. He could feel her breath hotly on him as he held her tighter, then tighter still as she cried out in pain.

His fingers caressed her golden hair, passed over her face, touched her soft throat.

Suddenly, Walters jumped up, trembling. He had been about to close his fingers on that soft throat,

press hard until he could feel the girl struggle!

Dora looked at him, startled. He was quivering with fear.

"What's the matter, honey?" Her breasts were rising and falling; the negligee had slipped from her shoulders.

"Nothing," Walters gasped. "I don't feel well. I'm going out for some air."

He started to leave the room, then, remembering, he threw a handful of bills on a dresser. Fear was surging within him. He wanted to go home, hide . . . sleep . . . do anything. . . .

For in that moment of madness, he had seen Myra's face, clear as a well-defined picture, before him. Those blue eyes protruding. And hands were on her neck. His hands!

HE SHOOK violently in the taxi. He had almost committed another murder. Was he going mad? Or was he mad already?

He fumbled with the key as he reached his apartment. His fingers were shaking horribly. Then he remembered Floto was inside. He pressed the bell.

The Filipino's eyes were wide with amazement as he looked at Walters' white face. But he said, "Man waiting in library. He from police."

Greater panic struck Walters. He had a wild desire to turn and flee. But then, he realized, he would surely be thought guilty.

He went into the library. Bryant was sitting there. Walters' eyes froze

on the suit Bryant had in his hands. A golfing outfit.

Walters sought to control his emotions. "Yes?" he said thickly. "What now?"

Bryant rose. "I told you I'd get you, Walters." His voice was cold. "Well, I did. This will convict you."

Walters stared. Bryant was holding a strand of hair between his fingers. "This hair came from your golfing outfit. It checks with Myra Ainslee's hair."

Walters laughed wildly and for a moment, he felt a sense of relief, as though a great weight had been lifted from his mind. These stupid cops! He, Walters, had the answer.

"Sure," he said, evenly. "It's hair. But there are plenty of other blondes, too." He laughed. "I just left one, copper. So if you want some more blonde evidence look at *this* suit."

Bryant looked at him, his eyes burning into Walters'.

Walters shifted uncomfortably. Suddenly, there was a gun in Bryant's hand and he was coming toward him. Walters stepped back. "You can't," he cried. "You can't do that. I'm innocent."

Coldly, Bryant said, "I'm not going to deprive the State of the pleasure. What you never knew was that Myra's hair was dyed with a rare chemical. That's why she always went to the same hairdresser. And she was strangled within an hour of leaving that hairdresser!"

Walters fainted. He never even heard Bryant say, "That's where you made your mistake, sucker!"



They wanted Humphrey to be tough, but when he got too tough, they took his badge and his gun away from him. He didn't mind that so much as he minded the girl who wanted to kill him!



NYBODY is liable to get a bit mouthy—especially on eight straight double shots of rye. For the last twenty minutes I had been standing there at the bar, and all I could see in the mirror was the memory of the commissioner's florid face, brick red, his beetling brows, and the ends of his mustache bristling as if they were antennae on a red ant. I didn't hear the music from the novichord in the rear, I didn't hear the race results coming over the little radio on the backbar, all I heard were the flat, level, deadly words of the commissioner.

"—and so we've decided you've gone too far, Humphrey. You're drunk on power, you've been a legalized gunman, hiding behind a badge. Smith and Wesson Humphrey, that's you!"

And I remember getting mad and slapping the desk and raging, "You damned political policemen! No wonder the town has gone nuts, crook crazy. Crooks only understand one language, the clenched fist, the black-jack, and the blazing gun. Sure, I gunned me two men in the last week! Crooks, both of them! I gunned them before they could gun me! How many killers has the police department picked up in the last six days; answer me that?"

He was so mad he shook all over,

like a bowl of jelly! "That's neither here nor there," he roared. "The point is you kill promiscuously in a city where every man is entitled to a trial for his offenses! We're sick of it, the public is sick of it, and we're putting a stop to it!"

"And Smallwood," I sneered, "he's sick of it too? Is that it? It was Smallwood's men I ironed out, it's Smallwood's votes that got your appointment. But if this is what you want, hell!" I remember my badge clanged across his desk and hit him right in the fat belly. He didn't even look at it. I tried to keep my voice down, but that red-veined, bulbous nose, that mean little mouth, those accusing, fanatical eyes, got to me!

"For fourteen years in this town I've worked with the coppers, as a private operative," I roared. "Me, I'm Smith and Wesson Humphrey, I never handled crooks with kid gloves and I'm too old to start! You suckers fell for Smallwood's line of talk, how he was all for cleanup, and putting the town back on the map and—"

"Smallwood's the biggest trucker in town," snapped Commissioner Heinz. "He's a business man, a big business man!"

"That used to be a bootlegger, and never quit being a crook. He's laughing at you now, Heinz; laughing, do you hear? You're a good example! You, in the wholesale

By WALLACE KAYTON

CRISS CROSS CRISS



"I see it's no use to talk sense to you," she grated.

grocery business and getting an appointment as police commissioner! Even the mayor's a printer, not a politician! And because Smallwood backed you and your lousy reform ticket, you're running the town! No wonder the crooks are flocking in! No wonder every train and every

bus and every airplane brings them back. They know things are good now, they know Mr. Ex-bootlegger Smallwood is running things!"

WELL, that was only part of it, but it's enough to show how the wind was blowing. I didn't say too

much. If anything, I didn't say enough! The upshot of the matter was that I walked out of there a very, very private citizen instead of a private cop. Me, Smith and Wesson Humphrey, with my badge lifted and a warning from the police commissioner to lay off the crooks that were flocking into town *and* my gun permit gone! And me warning him right back that I'd made our city unhealthy for those same crooks in the first place. When they came back grinning it was like thumbing their noses at me, and no man could waggle five fingers attached to a nose in my face without getting asked about it!

Half an hour later I was at the Golden Pheasant, and I'd finished my eight ryes. Danny McPherson, of the *Daily News* was at my left elbow, and Tommy Swanson, a guy I'd known around town for a long while, at my right. Tommy kept tugging at my elbow, but with the rye in me, I couldn't keep still. Even when a barman told me I was wanted on the phone at the rear, Tommy Swanson came pegging along, saying, "Look, Humphrey, don't go popping off your mouth to McPherson. He'll print it and where'll you be?"

I snarled, "Nuts!" And went into the telephone booth. When I came out, I was thinking pretty hard, pretty hard. Swanson said, "Looke. Smallwood's daughter, talking to McPherson."

She was sliding up on a barstool when I looked, one sleek, round hip slipping across the red leather, one trim silken ankle still on the floor, the other hoisting the hem of her skirt as her heel fumbled for a stool rung. It was worth looking at—that babe had legs!—and I was thinking

so hard I scarcely noticed! Me, that hasn't missed a sight like that for forty-four years. Going by, McPherson said, "Hey, Humphrey," and I glared at him.

He said, "This is Mona Smallwood." I didn't even stop going. I'd heard of her, sure. Even if she looked like an end girl in a pony line, Mona Smallwood was a lawyer, a female lawyer, and, rumor had it, a good one. She'd been down to the state capital for the past few years, making a name for herself.

She drawled, "So this is the great gunman who just had his wings clipped."

Now that got me. I couldn't overlook that. I looked her right in the eye and said, "And you're another one of the crooks and shysters flocking back to the gravy train, now that your poppa has got his own ticket installed. Just another cheap shyster!"

Which was when I popped off too much. She had a Martini in front of her. In a split second I had the Martini. Not in front of me but *on* the front of me. I caught a flash of silk stockings and well turned legs and felt her fingers slapping my cheek. I saw red. I doubled up a fist and would have busted her if Tommy Swanson hadn't hung on!

She raged, "Let him loose, damn him! Let him loose! I never saw a killer I was afraid of!"

And I managed, "When they act like a man, I treat 'em like a man! If you want to know how I feel about this, ask McPherson! I just talked to him and it's for publication! And as for you, shyster, I'll see you some more! And don't forget, when a dame acts like a man to me, she gets treated like a man by me!"

I reckon I cut a pretty sorry figure going out of there. I hailed a cab and snarled at Tommy Swanson and left him standing on the curb looking like a wistful kid or something, and fingering the wisp of his mustache.

HARBISON was a fat man. I mean fat, plenty fat, like someone had taken a mattress and tied a cord around the middle and stuck a pint size pillow on the top end for a head. That little head was hairless, and head and face combined were that mottled grayish color of butcher's paper, except for the nose button. The nose was red. I sat there with a slug of Irish whiskey in my fist and wondered how many gallons of the stuff he had to drink to get such a cherry proboscis. But just the same, whether he looked funny or not, his proposition was okeoke.

He said, shrugging his fat shoulders and waving his gray hands, "I've been around, I know how it is, even if I've never dabbled in politics. When they took your badge they canceled your gun permit, automatically. So, what's going to happen? You, personally have been able to keep a lot of crooks out of our town by warning them. Now that they've pulled your fangs the crooks are coming back. You'll get yourself gunned, won't you?"

I growled, "Very likely." To be truthful, I was thinking of Mona Smallwood. To hell with the crooks. I could still smell that Martini on the front of my coat.

"Among my other interests," said rolypoly softly, "I own the Harbison Protective Association."

I nodded, knowing it. A bunch of uniformed guys that went around

at night feeling doors and peering in alleys. He went on, beaming at me, his fat little fingers making a steeple on top of his fat little belly, looking like a cherub. "Here's how we work. The boys come to work at a certain time, my manager checks a gun to them, they do their job, and the gun is returned when their shift is over. In other words, because of my reputation—well, I should say my father's reputation, him having started the association years ago—I have a blanket gun permit for my employees. Does that mean anything to you?"

Did it? The way things were it might have meant my life, that's all. It might have meant me staying out of jail for carrying concealed weapons!

I said, "Okay. But I don't get it. Why should you fix it so I can carry a gun?"

He actually giggled. "To make Herman Smallwood sore! Herman and I—well, we don't get along. I know his past record, and I figure his swinging to the reform ticket and getting it put in power is just the beginning. He's got damn fools in office that he can twist around his finger. They're honest enough, but politically ignorant. Why, Herman Smallwood will have all the city contracts, he'll control everything, with the help of the crooks he's importing. You told Commissioner Heinz you meant to keep on fighting, regardless, so I'm going to give you something to fight with. That's all, knowing any enemy of Smallwood is a friend of mine."

So I managed, "And how did you know what I told Heinz?"

Again that giggle from his little mouth. "I'm wired in! I hear

things." And I remembered the guy with the glasses, Heinz' secretary, that heard a lot of it. After all, what did I care? This fat lad was showing me a way I could legally carry a gun to keep from getting ironed out myself, and what he said next cinched things. He glowed, he positively glowed, he dropped his voice, he said, "Monk Sanders is already in town."

And me, I snapped, "Sign me up! I'll take a gun! If Smallwood's re-imported that rat, count me in. Monk Sanders!" An old playmate of mine, see? Dope, and white slavery, and legalized vice, and every nasty thing a man could think of! I'd run the Sanders rat out of town a few years ago, warned him not to come back. His being back meant one thing. It meant the news was out that Heinz was lifting my badge and gun long before he did the actual lifting. So once more I said, "Sign me up, Harbison. I want a legal gun. For an illegal rat!"

WHICH was how I met Helen! For Helen—last name Connelly—was Harbison's confidential secretary. It was Helen who opened the door to a strong room and gave me my pick of legal guns, who checked the number, who made out the forms for me to sign. Helen was tall and willowy, with hair the color of burnt corn, and deep blue eyes and a red mouth. Helen had everything it takes! And so, when Harbison left us alone for a minute or two, I strutted my stuff. I made a dinner date, I even squeezed her hand and was rewarded by the cool pressure of her own fingers in answer. Sort of incidental, I know, but it cheered me up, immensely.

"Harbison," I told him, leaving, "I'm much obliged to you. But I've got a little warning for you, as well. You admit yourself that you and Smallwood don't click. My borrowing a legal gun from you doesn't make me your man. In other words—much obliged, but don't expect me to pull any chestnuts out of Smallwood's fire for you. Catch on?"

That fat windbag giggled like a girl. He said, "I'm the kind of fellow who'll get enough satisfaction just knowing I helped you block Smallwood. For I know you, Humphrey, I know your reputation and your ability. You're not a man to take a lot of nonsense lying down."

So we shook hands, his feeling like a stuffed glove, and I stuck out my chest, winked at Helen, who made a moue at me, and swaggered out.

Right into Monk Sanders, as bold as brass, sitting in a bright red roadster at the curb. He grinned that dried up monkey grin of his, raised his hand in a half salute. I mean I crossed that sidewalk fast!

"Hello, Humphrey," he said.

I snarled, "Look, Sanders. I told you to stay out of this town, I told you just what I'd do if you ever came back! And by the eternal—" I reached in and grabbed the louse by the shirt front, and I'll swear he never lost his grin! He came out of that roadster, and just as I went to sock him, a hand fell on my shoulder.

McCarty, a local dick who hates my guts, growled, "Brawling, hanh? I'll have to take you down, Humphrey! What you doing?"

Sanders, still grinning, said, "Assault, Officer, but purely personal! I won't file a charge."

I yelled, "Keep your hands off me, you big clown, or—"

McCarty grinned, just like Monk Sanders, "Shut up! You're no private dick anymore. What's this? A gun, hanh? Packing a rod!"

"A gun," I admitted, "and a legal gun at that. Lookee here, McCarty." And I showed him Harbison's employment card. That knocked him back on his heels. He did everything but taste it. He smelled it, he ran his finger across the signature, he held it to the light.

"A nightwatchman," he finally gloated, handing it back, "just your damn speed. Go on now, before I pinch you for starting a fight. You too," he waved at Monk Sanders, "get that firewagon away from the curb. Scram, now."

Like he was talking to a couple of small boys. Now, frankly, I drew back my right to bust him, for I never liked McCarty any more than he liked me. And all at once a horn blew like the dickens, and someone yelled, "Hump! Hey, Hump!"

Just in time too. I growled, "Another time, McCarty, I'll be looking forward to it."

And he just slapped his blackjack in his hand and grinned and said, "I'll be around, night watchman." So I went over and got in the car with Tommy Swanson, not even wondering howcome he knew where I was, howcome he happened by when he did.

BY NOW, you can imagine, I was plenty burned up, so burned up he could have driven me straight up the City Hall steps and I'd have thought we were just hitting a bumpy street. He didn't say much and I didn't either. Tommy was always an understanding guy. All I could think of was Smallwood and Monk

Sanders, and Heinz, and the rest of the crooks, damn them, and the legal gun under my arm felt plenty good. First thing I knew I was following Tommy Swanson out of his car and through the lobby of the hotel where he lived, into the elevator and up to his room.

Outside the door he snapped his fingers, said, "Hey, I forgot. I got to go back down a minute, Hump. Go on in, there's rye in there and plenty of ice. Be back after awhile." So he scrambled, and I opened the door. As a matter of fact, I remember the door was standing open a half inch or so, and I only pushed it. I stepped in, noiselessly, and leaned there pop eyed for a minute—maybe longer.

Counsellor Smallwood was there, Lawyer Mona Smallwood. Me being a crusty old bachelor of forty-four and not understanding woman's clothes any too good, this is hard to explain. Afterward, thinking about it calmly, I figured she must have been fixing the string on her brassiere or something, and she was wearing one of those dresses that dames put on over their heads. In other words, what with the neck being tight, and the only—well you might say entrance—being the bottom—the bottom of the dress was well up over her shoulders and her round white arms were fumbling around at the back.

Never in my life did I see such legs! All shadowy silk, the backs of her knees flat and svelte, silk running high up her thighs, then white skin taking on till another bunch of silk—a small bunch interfered.

I guess I gasped. She saw me in the mirror and she gasped, too. She dropped everything, she grabbed at

the high skirt, she wiggled a little and did sort of a hula right there, and then she grabbed the Gideon Bible on the dresser and smacked me right between the eyes with it.

Maybe that was the payoff for all the tough luck things that had happened to me that day. I said, "You're acting like a man again and I'm going to treat you like a man!" She met me halfway, raging and kicking, red faced and able. I didn't treat her like a man. I treated her like a kid.

It took a little time but after awhile I was on the edge of the bed with her across my knees whaling away where it would do the most good. She was trying to claw at me, and those pretty silk legs, topped by that white skin, were kicking and flailing, but me, I'm pretty strong. And after awhile I realized that she wasn't fighting so much, and there wasn't so much pleasure in it. So I quit.

She slid off my knees and lay very still on the floor. I began to get scared. I picked her up and put her head on a pillow. She lay there with her eyes closed, and her skirt high up on her legs, and her pretty bosom rising and falling, and her lips, moist and red, parted just a bit. So I leaned over and kissed her. She didn't move, though I thought her eyelids fluttered. I beat it into the bathroom to get a towel, turning on the water in the basin and letting it run cold.

I came out of the bathroom just in time to see the door swinging shut. Counsellor Mona Smallwood was gone. I slammed the towel back into the bathroom so hard that it sounded like a shot.

Now what, I asked myself, was Mona Smallwood doing in Tommy

Swanson's room? And, as if in answer, there was her purse. I picked it up, opened it. The first thing I saw was a .25 automatic, with a pearl handle, like a dame would carry. And there was a letter there, too, addressed to the Smallwood babe. Me, I'm a nosy guy. I pulled the letter out. The door flew open. Mona Smallwood flew in. Without so much as looking at me she ran across the room, snatched up the purse, turned and ran out again. She didn't speak. Neither did I. So as soon as she slammed the door, nosy Humphrey opened the letter. All of it wasn't important. But some of it was, damned important.

"One by one they've been drifting back," read one paragraph, "which can mean only one thing. S.W.H. has done more to keep the town free from the old crooks than the police force itself. The crooks come back. Answer—S.W.H. has been bought, he's laying off."

BURNED up! Me, I was S.W.H. And he claimed I'd been bought! Wonder what he thought about the precious pair I'd burned, whose deaths caused me to get my private badge and my gun permit lifted! I glanced down at the bottom of the letter. It was signed "*Dad.*" Smallwood, the ex-bootlegger!

Knuckles sounded on the door, crisp and loud. Tommy Swanson's voice called, "Hump, let me in, it's Tommy." I opened the door. Tommy was there. But so was Mona Smallwood! Tommy Swanson was scared. "Hump," he said, "I'm sorry you two don't get along. She wanted to talk to you and this was the only way I knew to get you together, after what happened in the bar. She—

well, Mona and I are going to get married. Will you talk to her, for my sake?"

I stepped aside. Right across the room she sailed, her sleek hips swinging, walking so hardheeled that I could see the vibration of her breast beneath her dress. She picked up her purse. I said, "The gun's still there, Counsellor. Here's the letter."

She snatched it out of my hand and I thought I was going to have it all to do over again. The spanking I mean. "Interesting letter," I said. "Only your bootlegging old man is wrong. Nobody got to me. I'm still the crooks' Nemesis. That's why your old man hates me. He's a crook himself."

She opened her bag and took out the little .25 and pointed it right at my guts. She was white now, the rouge spots standing out like spots of red on clown white. "I was going to talk sense to you," she grated, "but I see there's no use. There's no use trying to tell you that my father is on the level now, that since my mother's death, four years ago, he's been absolutely straight. You can't understand that, can you?"

I said, "Nope, I can't. I can't understand it at all. Once a crook always a crook, Counsellor. Who put Heinz, the present commissioner in? Smallwood. Who lifted my license? Heinz, a Smallwood man. Who'd Monk Sanders work for? Smallwood. In the old days. Don't ask me to believe too much, and don't shoot me with that pea shooter, or I'll spank you again."

And the white turned to red. All but her trigger knuckle. It grew even whiter than her face, and I tell you, for a minute I thought I'd said too much. I was pretty close to death

right then, and I knew it. Even a .25 is nasty.

She said, "Tommy Swanson tried to tell me you were straight, that you wouldn't or couldn't be bought. You are blustering because Heinz pulled your license, but you framed that yourself, Humphrey. You wanted an out. You've been bought, damn you! But that's neither here nor there, I don't give a damn about your dirty political deals. Your thirty pieces of silver! I want to know where my dad is! Tell me that and we'll call it all off. You're tough, your gang is strong, we won't try to buck you, we'll step aside. My dad thought he could help keep this town clean, he quit crookedness, because he promised my mom. Now we're through. We realize it. But I want to know where he is. What have you done with him?"

We stood looking at each other over that little .25 for a full minute. I could hear Tommy Swanson breathing hard behind me, shuffling his feet. I took the easiest way out. Never argue with the crazy person who has a gun! Never.

I said, "Okay. I can't tell you. I'll find out, and you have my word for it, I'll see he comes back to you. Your dad."

She sneered, "Your word! To hell with your word! I'll give you until tonight, and that's all. Then I'm going to hunt you up and burn you! Now get out!"

Whew!

SO downstairs I bought the *Daily News*, and went into a barroom to look it over, more puzzled than I'd ever been. Could the babe have been telling the truth? Was it true that Smallwood, on his wife's death

had tried to go straight, that he'd backed this local reform administration with all his heart? If that was so, why had Heinz, a reform commissioner, pulled my gun and star?

I opened the *Daily News* to Danny McPherson's Crime Column. And there, in detail, were the threats I'd made at the bar! How I'd popped off to McPherson that with or without a license I meant to stand by my threats, that I'd personally warned a half hundred petty and big crooks to stay out of my sight, and if they crossed my range, I was going after them, to make my words good! Boy, I read that with a red face. Me, popping off! And beneath it was McPherson's comment, to the effect that I was two up, having knocked off a couple of the boys in the last week. He didn't say they'd pushed me to it, just said the score was two to nothing, favor of Humphrey!

And there was a statement by Commissioner Heinz saying, sanctimoniously, that I wasn't a judge of a man's morals, that he'd pulled my fangs, and the city would be a lot safer for poor, paroled ex-criminals trying to start life all over again! The column had tried to get in touch with Mr. Russell Smallwood, to see what he had to say about giving criminals another chance instead of shooting them on sight, but Mr. Smallwood's butler informed him that Mr. Smallwood had been out of town for two days.

Now where was Smallwood? His daughter thought I knew. And to keep a fanatic from filling me full of .25 slugs I'd told her, sure, I'd get in touch with her father. She'd looked pretty white around the mouth, pretty desperate. What had she said? That she and her father would

pull out of politics, they'd call it quits, if I'd only dig the old gent up. Now did that mean she knew something—that her father wasn't just out of town—that he'd been taken out of circulation?

To hell with it. I had all I wanted. I had a gun beneath my arm, I had a way to protect myself from any crooks that had come back when they lifted the lid off the sugar bowl! If anybody took a shot at me, I had a legal way of answering at least. I didn't have the .25 pointed at my belly, and that was some comfort at least. And I did have a swell date with Helen Connelly that night. So I went home to dress.

ME, Humphrey, a few weeks ago I got tired of living in a hotel. So I'd rented me a cottage out on the outskirts of town and moved in. Not that I batched, outside of cooking my own breakfast, but I liked having a front porch to sit on and a few rooms to move around in.

Well, I heaved the old jalopy into the garage and went in the house and shaved. I stepped under the shower and was singing at the top of my voice when the doorbell rang. So out I stepped, and into my shorts, and through the front room, and stuck my head around the front door and looked right into the muzzle of McCarty, the city detective's gun.

He said, "Back up, Humphrey, back up, and do it easy. Come on in, Miss Smallwood, he's home."

A guy caught in his shorts is at a disadvantage before a pretty woman, specially when the woman glares at him like he was something that just crawled out of the wall. McCarty grinned, said, "Getting a paunch, Humphrey. Where's Smallwood?"

I kept standing behind a little chair that was no protection at all, trying to make it all cover me. With as much dignity as I could muster, I said, "I don't know where he is. Why?"

Just then a uniformed copper walked in the back door looking a little white around the gills. He glared at me, curled his lips, and said, to McCarty, "He's there—stuck down in a trunk. Guess Humphrey didn't have time to bury him yet, or get rid of him!"

McCarty looked grim. He nodded like he'd expected it. Mona Smallwood didn't say a thing, she just bit her lips and glared at me. I couldn't say anything. My mouth was too wide open. McCarty prodded me ahead of him in my bare feet and my purple shorts, out the back door and to the garage, where another copper stood glaring.

He said, "In the trunk, McCarty," and turned his flashlight on a trunk of mine that had stood in the corner ever since I moved here! The lid of the trunk was up. Doubled up into a figure S was—yeah, Smallwood.

McCarty said, "All right, Humphrey, the doc can tell how long he was there. How come, and why?" He leaned over the dead man. "Mmmmm. Big hole through his head, went in from the back. Big hole. Must have been a forty-four or a forty-five. Where's that rod again, Humphrey? In the house? We got a tip that—hey! Grab her, somebody!"

And damn my soul, Mona Smallwood had that little gun in her hand, and for the second time it was pointing right at me! I didn't wait! I jumped into the darkness and the

gun went spat-spat-spat and little lead bees hustled me along. I hit the back door of my house, heard coppers pattering along behind me, heard them yelling for me to stop, and went through the house like a cyclone. I skidded off the front porch, slamming the front door behind me, scrambled down the sidewalk and slammed into the department car sitting at the curb. The keys were still in, thank God, and a second later I was long gone, McCarty and his cops cutting loose and blasting plenty after me.

IN twenty-three years of detective work I've been in some tight places. I've been left in a burning house with my hands tied, I've been tossed out of two boats. But this present situation was—well, I was a little more helpless than usual. Ever try driving a stolen police car around town, clad in a pair of shorts, while every citizen is trying to spot you, and you know in your heart you're framed for murder?

For by that time I was confident of what had happened. Harbison. It added up to the fat man. He even admitted to me that he had hated Smallwood's guts! Harbison, who dabbled in everything, who'd provided me with a legal gun. And—without ever listening to the short wave radio—a gun that was already a murder gun when he gave it to me!

I knew they'd check ballistics, I knew the rod hanging in a holster on the back of a chair at my cottage, the rod McCarty no doubt had by now, was the rod that killed Smallwood. It had to be. Otherwise there was no use of someone calling up and tipping the cops that Small-

wood's body was in a trunk in my garage!

Then the thing to do was to see Harbison. How? Me, in a pair of shorts, being looked for by the cops for murder!

Harbison would be watching his step, he'd not be accessible. What else? Helen Connelly?

So I drove, keeping to the side streets, even driving out and parking for a while in Olmos Basin, where the cops are used to seeing parked cars. And I figured. And I finally decided there were more ways of killing a cat than choking it with butter! As soon as it got good and dark, I drove the hack out of there and parked it in the courtyard right behind the A & S Laundry and Cleaners. And I busted open the back door of that joint, me, Smith and Wesson Humphrey.

I'll bet you I looked plenty funny when I left there. I had a shirt and socks and a suit of clothes, that fitted me after a fashion. But there weren't any shoes there—except a pair of overshoes some employee used when working in the wet. Oh yeah, and there were about five bucks worth of change in the cash register.

I left the police car right where it was, walked two blocks down the street and told Mr. Simons, the clothing gentleman whose joint was still open, that I was winning a bet. For four bucks I got a sloppy pair of shoes and a hat. So I walked clear out to the 600 block on East Woodlawn and rang the doorbell.

HELLEN CONNELLY was a damned sight better to look at in a negligee than in street clothes. She stood there in the doorway, the light shining behind her and outlin-

ing her swell looking figure, and she said, "You got a nerve coming out here after standing me up!"

I said, "Aw, baby, it couldn't be helped. I'm here now. Can I come in?"

She guessed I could, and I gave her a song and dance, wondering if she'd heard on the radio that I was a greatly wanted man. She even excused herself and went to the kitchen and fixed us a drink, but I stayed right on her tail, being at the point now where I didn't trust anyone at all. Not me!

So, smiling my best, I said, "Honey, how long you worked for Harbison?"

She guessed it was about two years, and made a face.

I said, "Sure nice of him to fix it so I could have a gun, wasn't it? What do you do with those cards, those cards a guy signs when he takes the gun out on his beat, or his run, or whatever it is?"

She said she filed them, filed them at the office. Now that she was at home and under a different light, I could see she wasn't as soft and wide eyed as she'd appeared before. And she was nervous about something, too, kept biting at her nails, and crossing and recrossing her legs.

So I leaned over and tapped her on the knee, and said, hard like myself, "The one I signed, you filed that too, babe?" She nodded. I stood up. "Let's you and I go down there and get it. Now."

"I thought we had a date," she pouted. "I'm around that old office all the time, eight hours a day. I get sick of it. Really, I'll get it for you tomorrow, though what you'd want with it I don't know." She smiled, and got up and tuned the

radio to dance music. Then she was standing right in front of me, again with the light shining through that negligee, and she was swaying a little and holding out her arms. Dance! She wanted to dance, when the cops were looking for me for a murder I didn't do!

I got up. Not to dance. I got up to grab her and tell her to put some clothes on and let's get going. But I didn't grab her. She grabbed me. She put her arms around my neck and she sort of veiled her eyes, and she pressed herself against me—just that thin negligee between us. And she whispered, "Humphrey!"

I kissed her. Maybe there's a time and a place for everything, but when a swell looking dame like Helen Connelly does what she was doing, a man, well a man does exactly what I did. I forgot about time, and murder, and frames, and double-crosses—and devoted my time to kissing hell out of her.



AFTER a long while a shrill voice said, "Very pretty, Humphrey. Let loose of her easy, please."

I let loose of her, feeling like a worse fool than I looked. She stepped back, and pulled the negligee back over her shoulders, and sort of wiggled down into it again, sneered at me, and turned to grin at fatty Harbison, who stood there, his butcher's paper face wreathed in smiles, a big rod in his hand.

He said, "Humphrey, the killer. The man who killed Smallwood." And he began to chuckle. Everything about him shook with laughter except that gun! It kept pointing right between my eyes, and from the way

he held it, I figured he knew how to use it.

The babe said, "Gees, Harby honey, I thought you'd never come. The guy wanted to go down to the office and get the card he signed."

Harbison giggled some more. He said, "Humphrey, as soon as you signed that thing, it was torn up and sent back to the city—via the sewer. No sir, that gun that killed Smallwood, you can bet your life it wasn't even registered to me. It was a hot gun, fellow. You're stuck."

Sure, his word was as good as mine. The babe was with him. They'd both swear I'd never come to the office, never signed up for that legal gun! Legal gun hell! Hot gun!

The babe smirked and said, "What do you do with him, Harby? Turn him over to the police?"

Now the fat man's laughter stopped altogether, his eyes damned near disappeared. He said, "Face the other way, Humphrey. I need a little time to think."

What else could I do? I couldn't even dodge the blow he slammed into me. All I could do was point myself toward the divan so I'd light easy.

I GUESS it was the sound of the voices that woke me up, brought me back to consciousness. I lay there gagged on a bed, with my ankles tied and my wrists tied, and I tell you, the sweat started popping out on my forehead at the voices that floated in to me.

Mona Smallwood was saying, and there was death in her voice, "Sure, I'll agree. I know if he went to trial, he'd stand a pretty good chance of beating it, getting off with life, anyway. He's got to die, and he's got

to die hard. You give him to me, and I'll sign anything you want me to sign."

Harbison's voice answered, "You know all I want is a bill of sale on the trucking concern your poppa left you. You're a lawyer; you got a career; you don't want no trucks, do you?"

She said levelly, "I want Humphrey, I want him with a knife in my hand. And fifteen minutes alone with him."

My God, I began to twist and turn and sweat and curse. They kept on talking it seemed for hours, and I couldn't get loose. The bonds held tight and fast. I felt like a guy sitting on a powder keg while a fuse was eating its hot way toward him, getting ready to blow him sky high to hell and back. For that Mona Smallwood was bad, I knew it! She had one of those unreasoning tempers that asked no questions whatsoever. If they gave her a knife and let her loose on me—*whew!*

The door finally opened, and there stood fatty Harbison, beaming over his shoulder. He said, "This way, Miss Smallwood."

She loomed there in the door like an avenging fury, and the light from behind her gleamed on the long butcher knife in her hand. She said, "Thanks," and, by the Eternal, there was death in her voice. She said,

"Just leave me alone with him for a few minutes, that's all I ask!"

And she flipped on the light in the bedroom, closed the door and locked it. My eyes must have been the size of dollars as she darted across the room, grabbed me and jerked me off the bed. I thumped onto the floor. And she did a hell of a thing then.

She sat right astraddle of me and

grabbed my bound feet and began thumping them up and down on the floor. "You louse," she squealed, "you murderer!"

I felt the knife then, felt it biting cruelly across my ankles, my calves. And while I was sweating and straining there in the darkness, a funny thing happened! The gag virtually leaped from my sore mouth, her soft, pliant body rolled quickly aside, her voice whispered in my ear, "Yell, damn you, yell! *We've got to make this look good!*"

And the knife, instead of cutting my ankles, cut the bonds from them! Me, old dumb Smith and Wesson, I quit shaking and caught on! I didn't yell. But I nearly knocked the walls out groaning. My moans rattled the windows! For a wave of elation and thankfulness swept over me. The daughter of the man I was accused of killing was pulling an act! She hadn't come to cut me to bits, to trade her trucking business for my flesh and blood! Not her! She'd found a flaw, she *knew* that I hadn't killed her dad, and she'd figured Harbison the same way I'd figured him! And she'd come, not only to help me out, but to get Harbison, some way, any way, like the rolypoly had gotten her father!

Over and over I kicked the floor. She cut the bonds from my wrists. "Damn you, damn you," she yelled, making it sound good to the pair of listeners in the next room, "I'm going to flay you alive! Take that! And that!"

And at each *that* we both thumped the floor, and she'd scream.

She sprang away from me then, grabbed the covers, the pillows on the bed, made a huddled, crumpled roll of them, in vague imitation of a

human form. Me, I grabbed a chair and hustled to the far side of the door. I heard cloth ripping and she was hammering on the locked door, quavering, "Let me out, Harbison, let me out. We're all even. You got your bill of sale and I got my man!"

The lock clicked, the door swung open. I couldn't see the fat killer, but he was there, and he had a gun, for Mona's eyes seemed to widen, she swayed backward into the room. She'd torn her dress to make it look good, she'd streaked the inner slopes of her pointed breasts with blood. Back she came, and back, luring him in.

"So you fell for it, too," giggled Harbison. "The Smallwoods, a family of fools! Your dad's gone, Humphrey's gone, and in a few minutes—when I'm through with you—you will go the same way!"

"You mean, you mean," she faltered, playing her role, "you mean you killed my father?"

"To be sure, to be sure," came the fat man's voice. "What else could I do? I'd sent word around that our town was open again. Smallwood had to be stopped and Humphrey had to be stopped. So—now we have this." He giggled again. He giggled so hard everything shook but the gun. She had guts, plenty of guts. She went backward step by step, saying, "Damn you, damn you, come in and get me!"

And he made a mistake. He came in. I laid the chair over his head. He thudded like a mattress to the floor. I jumped through the door to collar little Helen, and she was snatching a gun off the table. The gun said *boom!* And me, Humphrey, I felt a piece of hot wire being laid across my skull, and the floor flew up and

hit me in the face. And I managed to get to my knees for a second, and they tell me I giggled.

So I opened my eyes, and looked up into the eyes of Mona Smallwood. The softness beneath my left ear was her. She said, "It's all right now, Hump. McCarty came with me. He was outside at the window listening to it all. He grabbed the girl when she came out. It's okay, you're only creased."

And I managed to sit up and glare back at McCarty. He said, "Damned near got you, didn't they? Mister, you owe me a drink, me and Monk Sanders."

Monk Sanders, the dirty crook!

He said, "The one thing Harbison overlooked was the element of luck. He gave you a card showing you were employed by him. You came downstairs and ran into Monk Sanders and wanted to smack him around. I came along and you showed me the card. So out at your house, when I called Harbison and he told me you hadn't even been near his office today, I knew he lied. But the babe here thought of the play. We tailed Harbison to the house here after we lost you. You see, she knew he and her old man had had words about something. And she figured you and Harbison were in the kill together. This was how we found out."

So after awhile I got up. And when they asked me where I was going, I said, "I'm going to find that Monk Sanders."

McCarty said, "Look, Humphrey, you hadn't ought to go hunting trouble."

And I said, "Trouble? With Monk? I'm going to buy him the best quart of liquor in town!"

KILLER in MAKE-UP



UTTERLY discouraged, Dunning sat down on the park bench. He dropped the much folded "Help Wanted" column of his paper beside him wearily. With the slack summer season not yet over, and with the almost complete closing down of the Federal Theater Project, there didn't seem to be much hope for an out-of-work actor. He crossed one leg over the other and was eyeing the paper-thin spot in the sole of his right shoe when a shadow fell across his bench.

He looked up at a heavy-set, red-faced man who was staring down at him. "You Chet Dunning?"

"Yes."

The man opened one hand significantly and Dunning caught the glint of metal, something that looked like a badge. The man's hand closed on it quickly.

"You're wanted downtown. Come with me." The man was stern, almost scowling.

"Who wants me? What are you talking about?"

"I'm from headquarters. There's a pick-up out for you." The man's voice was gruff and not too patient.

"There's some mistake. I've done nothing," Dunning remonstrated.

"Tell them that at headquarters. All I know is that we've been on the

look-out for you all morning. Get started."

Dunning got to his feet languishly. He shrugged. He'd done nothing to interest the police and he'd be out soon enough. At least, it was something to take his mind off his own straits for a while. It'd break up the monotony that had been making his days so deadly for months now.

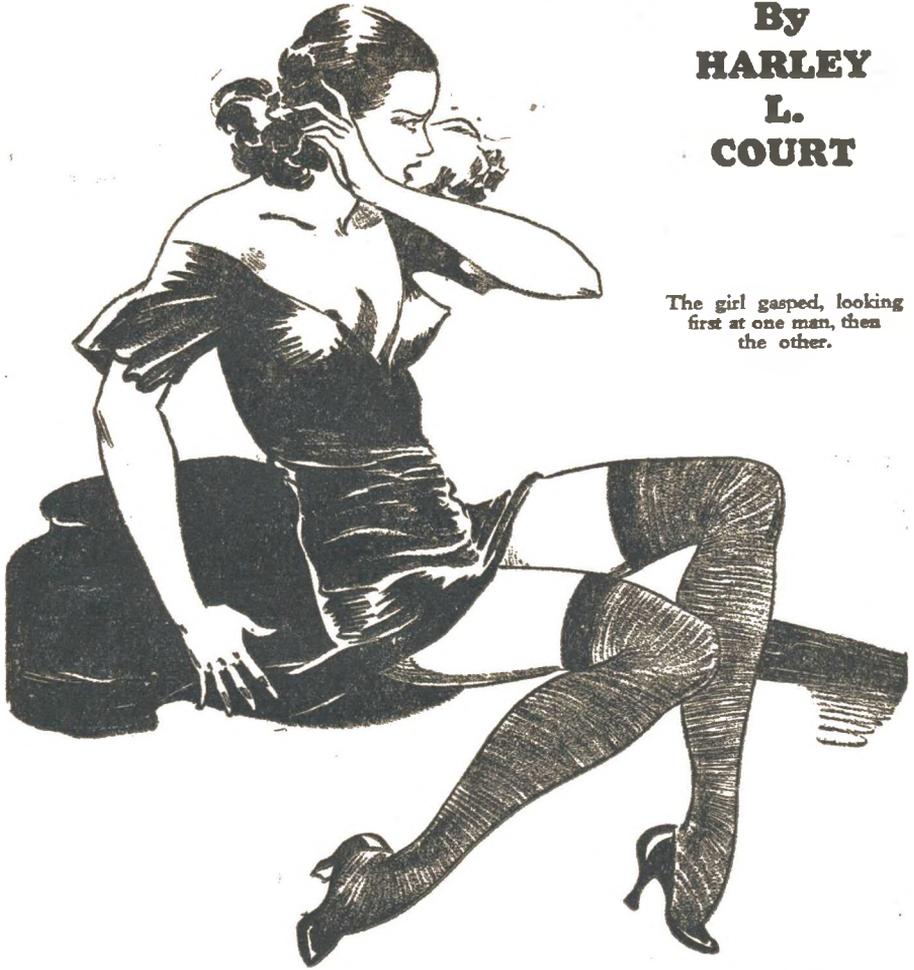
BUT the matter became a little more serious when they threw him into a cell without even telling him what he'd been arrested for and even refused him the telephone calls he'd always understood were his legal right.

Before the night was over—knowing no more than he had before—he was frankly worried. Worried enough so that he found it impossible to sleep.

By morning the whole thing was assuming the aspects of a nightmare. Two uniformed policemen, heavy-jowled men who wouldn't answer his imploring questions, had led him from his cell. He'd been herded in with a lot of other prisoners and had learned they were all, he among them, awaiting the line-up.

He'd seen things like it in the movies, but he hadn't imagined how ghastly it could be. The brilliant, glaring lights blinded him. Beyond them were faces that were just blurs

By
HARLEY
L.
COURT



The girl gasped, looking first at one man, then the other.

against blackness. He tried to stare them down, but the very effort to distinguish features gave him a headache, made him feel sick. His brain felt numbed as he heard that voice

from behind the lights: "That's the man. I'm sure of it. He killed my brother! I'd know him anywhere by his red hair!"

Dunning wanted to shout a denial,

Dunning was being framed and he resented it. But he didn't mind so much when he learned that it was a deep seated scheme by which he could further the ends of justice. The racketeer's girl helped make it pleasant, too!

but the man beside him whispered out of the corner of his mouth: "Take it easy, kid. You'll get your chance to talk later."

"I'm being framed!" Dunning wanted to protest, but somehow the sullen, defiant silence of the other men in the line-up stiffened him to silence.

There was a long, nondescript row of them, on that narrow, raised platform. Dunning could hear the voice of the plainclothesman who had brought him in. "You're sure that's the man?"

Again his accuser's harsh voice sounded: "No doubt about it. He's the man who shot my brother!"

And once more the cauliflower-eared prisoner beside him cautioned Dunning: "Hold it buddy. Do your talking before a judge and jury!"

Yesterday on the park bench Dunning had been thoroughly wretched. Now there was bitterness in his heart, too. Why should they want to frame him whose only crime was being out of a job? His very helplessness was wormwood in his soul.

TWO uniformed policemen stepped up to the platform and grabbed his arm. He barely heard the cauliflower-eared man's, "Keep your chin up, kid!" as they hustled him off.

He hardly noticed where they were taking him. It was a time for fast and concentrated thinking, but his mind was in a turmoil.

They came to a door which opened from within. "Okay," one of the policemen said, and Dunning stepped in.

His eyes widened. He'd expected to be put back in his cell, but this was an office—a large office, though,

as far as he could see, there was only one man in it.

The man sat behind a massive desk, and he beckoned Dunning to come closer. He was gray-haired and impressive, dressed in blue serge. There was gold braid on his sleeves and there were three gold stars on his collar.

"There's some mistake," Dunning blurted. "I—"

The man raised a large hand. "There's no mistake. Sit down."

Dazed, Dunning took a seat beside the desk. "I tell you—" he began.

"Let me tell you," the gray-haired man interrupted. "In the first place, I know all about you. You're Chet Dunning, an actor out of work. I have your complete record from government files, from the application you filled out when you applied with the Federal Theater."

"Then if you know all about me, what's the idea of dragging me down here?"

The gray-haired man shoved a box of cigars toward Dunning. "It's a long complicated story—I'm a gambler on long shots—but first, tell me, did you recognize the man with the cauliflower ears who stood beside you in the line-up?"

"No."

"I thought you might have seen his picture in the papers. He's Bo Rosasco."

"You mean Rosasco, the gangster?" Dunning asked.

"That's the man. For years we've been trying to get the goods on him. But we've never been able to make anything stick. He's smart and he's tricky. And he knows every detective in town by sight."

"What does that make me?" Dunning was still hot under the collar from all that had gone before.

THE man behind the desk smiled. "I know how you feel. We owe you an apology. But there didn't seem to be any better way to accomplish our ends. Listen to what I have to say before you go off half-cocked. The department's asking your help. There may be a good piece of money in it for you. At least, we're offering you a job that will give you a chance to hold your head up, a chance to do something worthwhile for the city."

Dunning leaned forward. The cigar was the best he had smoked in months.

"As I said, Dunning," the gray-haired man went on, "I've looked into your record. I think you can be trusted. I think you've got brains and nerve. I think you've got guts. We need a man like you who can get close to Bo Rosasco. He knows all our regular men and they can't get near him. But a stranger like you might do it. We framed you and put you in the line-up next to him as a preliminary step. He knows you now—knows you from his own side of the fence." The police official leaned back. "From what I've said so far is there any use of my going on talking?"

Dunning flushed. "Of course," he said. "There's very little I wouldn't do for a job that would make me feel I wasn't a totally useless member of society."

"Then listen. Rosasco has four men close to him in his gang. We want you to make yourself the fifth. And we've doped the play that ought to get you off to a head start." He

leaned over and took a small, nickel-plated revolver from a far drawer of his desk. "Take this. It's loaded with blanks. Put it in your pocket. In a few minutes I'm going to have you tossed into a cell with Bo Rosasco. A little while later a guard will come by.

"You point the gun at him and make him open the cell door. You and Rosasco break out. There'll be a little shooting, but my men'll have blanks like you.

"Once you've escaped, you'll be in thick with Rosasco. After that, you'll be on your own. It'll be dangerous, but everything in your record shows that that won't stop you. Stick to Rosasco until you get the evidence that'll put him away for keeps in the chair."

Dunning nodded. Already there was a new light in his eyes. His shoulders were squared, his whole manner subtly changed for the better. He slipped the gun into a pocket and stood up.

The officer pressed a buzzer. Two policemen came in and led Dunning away.

The way led down a dark, forbidding corridor to a block of cells in the rear. One policeman unlocked a cell door, pushed Dunning inside, and he heard the clang of the locking mechanism behind him.

It took a moment for Dunning's eyes to accustom themselves to the gloom of the cell. Then he saw the man hunched on the bench in a corner. It was Bo Rosasco.

Rosasco stared at him. "Murder rap, eh?"

Dunning sneered. "They'll never fry me! I'll blast my way out of this lousy can—"

"Take it easy," Rosasco whispered.

Dunning heard the slowly approaching footsteps of a guard. He drew back in deeper shadow beside the barred door, every muscle tense and alert.

Rosasco reached his side in a movement so stealthy that Dunning hardly knew the man had moved. "How you going to work it?"

"Like this!" Dunning hissed. The guard had come abreast of the door, and suddenly Dunning stuck the revolver he had been given between the bars. "Open up, punk, and make it snappy!" he grated.

The guard went white. His fingers were trembling as he turned a key in the lock. The door opened. Step on it if you want out!" Dunning snarled at the cauliflower-eared racketeer.



TOGETHER they slid from the cell. They turned down the corridor and the guard's hand streaked for his holstered gun. Without a word Dunning whirled and his gun belched flame a second before the guard's. The uniformed man crumpled in a heap on the stone floor.

Side by side, Dunning and Rosasco streaked for freedom. Another blue uniform appeared down a side corridor. Still on the run, Dunning fired. The man pitched forward.

Then they were through a waiting room to a door that led to the street in a pandemonium of shouts and shots, flame and smoke.

Out in the night Rosasco took the lead. "We're in luck, kid!" he yelled and threw himself into a passing cab.

Dunning was right behind him, revolver in hand. Dunning brought up the gun but Rosasco slapped his hand down. "Hymie's one of my boys," he explained. "Step on it, Hymie!"

The cab, which had barely slackened speed, roared down the street, turned corners on two wheels. Scant minutes later there was no sign of pursuit.

"Where we going?" Dunning yelled over the howl of the motor.

"A place of mine out on the highway. I'm Bo Rosasco!" There was a swagger in his manner of saying it.

"You're Rosasco?" Dunning simulated awe, mixed with incredulity.

Rosasco had a thumb in an armhole of his vest. "Yeah. Sorry you teamed up with me?"

Dunning grinned. "Best break I ever had!"

Twenty minutes later the cab slowed to a stop on the gravel driveway of a garish, much-lighted roadhouse. Rosasco leaped out. "Better get the hack away from here, Hymie," he said. He turned to Dunning. "Come upstairs. I want to talk to you."

They went in through the rear, climbed a flight of thickly-carpeted stairs. Rosasco pulled open the door of a richly appointed office. A girl sat at the desk.

CHET DUNNING stared, unable to suppress the admiration that leaped into his eyes. For all of the obvious hardness of her features, she was strikingly beautiful. Her hair was jet black and drawn back tightly to frame to best advantage the piquancy of her over-rouged

face. Her scarlet dress was cut daringly low at the breast, accentuating the whiteness of her skin.

She smiled at Rosasco and then her glance shifted to Dunning's red head. Her eyebrows lifted and a glow of interest animated her features. The gangster glared at her: "Scram, Babe!"

The girl got up languidly, turned her heavy-lidded gaze on Dunning for one electric minute, then walked out sinuously, conscious of the eyes of both men on her lithe swaying hips.

Rosasco said: "Sit down." He himself dropped into the chair behind the desk. For a full minute he subjected Dunning to a searching scrutiny. "What's your racket—your line?" he demanded suddenly. "What do you do when you work?"

"I'm an actor, a character actor."

Rosasco seemed lost in thought. "I'd like to help you, kid. You certainly gave me a lift." He cast another long side-wise glance at Dunning. "Suppose you could make up to look like somebody else? You know you and me are about the same general build."

Dunning nodded.

Rosasco leaned across the desk, playing with the heavy paper-weight in his hand. He said suddenly: "Sorry, buddy!" and brought the full weight of it down on Chet Dunning's skull. Dunning slumped back in the chair, unconscious. . . .

DUNNING knew he was awake from the fierce throbbing in his head. Droning voices were becoming clearer. He made listless efforts to move and discovered that his wrists and ankles were tied.

He strained his ears to listen. Bo Rosasco's voice was the first to penetrate his mental fog. "Did you bring the make-up kit?"

"Sure, boss."

Dunning opened his eyes an infinitesimal crack. With Rosasco was a man with a face tough enough to frighten children. The man held out a box. "What now, boss?"

Rosasco grinned. "I'm fixing me an alibi. That punk on the floor's covering me up while I do a little business with Snapper Collins."

"What?"

"You heard me! I'm taking a couple of the boys over to Snapper's place tonight. We're cleaning him out. This town ain't big enough for both Snapper and me!"

"But, boss," the gorilla asked nervously, "supposing you get Snapper and get away with it? All you have to do is show yourself with the boys when the shooting starts, and the cops'll get you if the Snapper's mob doesn't. Even you could not go up against a rap like that!"

Rosasco laughed. "That's where this mug comes in. All the time I'm down at Snapper's joint, there'll be a hundred people ready to swear I'm right here."

"I don't get it, boss."

Rosasco was very patient. "This guy's a ham actor. We'll get him made up to look like me. Your job'll be to take him down to the main dining room. Keep him covered so he can't bleat, but be sure everybody sees him. I won't be gone more than an hour at the most. When I come back, I'll switch places with this lug, and nobody'll know I've been out."

"But what if he squeals?"

Rosasco laughed unpleasantly. "In the first place, he won't go to the cops because he's got a murder rap hanging over him. In the second place, I'm not taking any chances anyway. He's red-hot, and I don't want him hanging around."

Cold shivers ran down Dunning's spine. He knew what that meant. He groaned, rolled a little, opened his eyes. Tied as he was, he'd have to leave the next play to Rosasco.

The racketeer bent over and jerked him upright. "Snap out of it!" he ordered.

Chet Dunning swayed dizzily. "Wha-what's the idea? What happened?"

"You fell and hurt yourself. That's all." Rosasco drew a long-bladed knife from a desk drawer. He slashed the cords binding Dunning.

Dunning sank limply into a chair, rubbing his chafed wrists.

Rosasco spread the make-up kit on the desk before him. "Now, listen, fellow!" he began. "You're on a spot. The only guy who can get you off it is me."

Dunning looked puzzled. "I'm not sure I understand."

"Here's the idea," the racketeer went on. "And do what I tell you, and you'll be okay. Cross me and—" He slashed at his neck with a forefinger.

Dunning shuddered.

"It ain't hard, what you're going to do. Just take this stuff in the case here and make yourself up to look like me."

"Right now? Here?"

"Yeah."

A thrill went through Dunning as he studied the completeness of the outfit the gangster had provided. It

had been a long time since he'd seen a set of wigs like these. The jars of cold cream and grease paint, all the other accoutrements, were there to satisfy his professional soul.

WITH Rosasco watching his every move, he set to work. Every scar, even the building up of the cauliflowered ears, he handled rapidly with deft fingers. Finished, he selected a shiny black wig and fitted it over his short red hair.

He swung around.

Rosasco was beaming. He turned to the gorilla. "Get a tux out of my apartment. It ought to fit him like his own skin."

The man went out as the telephone rang. Rosasco picked it up. "Hello. Yeah! I'll be down in a minute."

He hung up. "Listen, buddy! I'm going downstairs for a couple of minutes. I'm locking you in here. Sit tight and don't try anything." The key clicked in the lock behind him.

Dunning's mind raced, but until he knew more of the racketeer's plan, there was nothing he could do.

There was a sound outside the door. Dunning could hear the key turning in the lock. He sat up.

It was the girl in the scarlet evening dress. She swaggered in, curves dancing with her movements. "Hello, Bo, honey! Who was the red-headed lug?"

She draped herself on the arm of Dunning's chair. Dunning watched, fascinated, as the slinky material of the dress climbed over her knees, disclosing chiffon-enclosed legs that were sheer, rounded perfection. She caught Dunning's hand and pulled him toward her.

And at that instant Bo Rosasco walked in.

His eyes widened and his lips drew back in a snarl. "So that's it, Babe! The minute I step out—"

The girl was on her feet, pale-faced. "You!" she gasped. She turned back and forth, looking at one man, then the other. "I thought—"

The humor of it got the racketeer, but he stifled his guffaw. His voice was still harsh. "Never mind what you thought! Get out!"

Bewildered, the girl left.

Rosasco grinned. "I guess you're pretty good, kid. If you can fool my own girl, it ought to be a cinch with a lot of strangers."

Dunning kept silent. But a sudden, desperate plan was turning over in his mind. It was a long shot, at best—but it was still a chance!

Again the door opened. This time it was Rosasco's lieutenant with the dinner suit. "Here you are, boss." He started to hand it to the racketeer.

Dunning interrupted—and his voice was a perfect simulation of Rosasco's harsh voice. "What the hell's the idea? Give it here. Can't you tell who's who around here?"

Rosasco's features registered amazement. He swung on Dunning. "What kind of a fast one are you trying to pull?" His stubby fingers snatched out and tore the glossy, black wig from Dunning's red head. He waved it at his gorilla. "You mean you can't tell this ham actor from me?"

The gorilla scratched his head. "Hell, boss, how was I to know? He even talks like you."

Rosasco sat back. "Well, don't make the same mistake twice. The

next time you don't know, grab at his wig. That'll tell you."

He shoved the tuxedo at Dunning. "Get into your harness, bud."

MEEKLY Dunning got dressed, **VI** readjusted the wig. Then at Rosasco's command he followed the gorilla from the office. Side by side they walked down a long hall. All the way the gangster's right hand was in his pocket. Dunning didn't need to ask the meaning of the bulge there.

At the foot of a broad staircase they came into the roadhouse's main dining room. The place was crowded. But as Dunning and his companion came in, a sudden hush came over both diners and dancers.

He could see people point him out, hear the buzz of their whispers.

Dunning's guide led him to a central table. He leaned forward. "The boss wants people to see you," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "Don't be hiding your face."

Dunning grimaced.

His companion nudged him. "Make a splurge, mug. Set 'em up for the house!"

Dunning shrugged. "Okay!" He got to his feet, and before his guard could protest, he'd stepped onto the orchestra dais. The music stopped with a roll of drums. Dunning raised a hand. "I'm buying a round on the house, folks," he announced. "Today's my birthday and I'm ordering champagne to be sent to each table."

He bowed in answer to their applause. Then he started back to his table. On the way he jostled a waiter and took a long gamble. Dunning had figured it all out before. It seemed reasonable in a place like this that every employee would be a gun-

man. His whole scheme depended on the rightness of that theory.

He spoke to the waiter out of the side of his mouth: "Slip me your rod, guy."

"Sure, boss." Under cover of the napkin on his arm he slipped something cold, metallic, deadly, to the actor. Dunning took it without breaking his stride. His plan was working!

Dunning slipped back into his chair.

Rosasco's lieutenant was furious. "Who told you you could leave the table?"

Dunning didn't answer.



IT WAS almost an hour later that he saw a splash of vivid scarlet in the crowd on the dance floor. He recognized Rosasco's Babe. She came up to their table and leaned over.

"The boss is back!" she hissed. "He got Snapper Collins and he's waiting outside in his car. He wants this lug taken upstairs. Then he'll slip in here for awhile."

The gorilla got up. "Come on," he growled.

Dunning sat still for another minute, studying the sensuous curves of her body. Despite her blatant hardness, she stirred his blood. She was all animal, but nevertheless tremendously alluring. Her gaze fell away from the intensity of his eyes.

Dunning grinned and followed his guide out of the dining room. At the head of the stairs he unlocked the office and shoved Dunning in.

The actor stood just inside the door and listened to the gorilla's retreating footsteps. His hour had come!

He stepped rapidly back to the mahogany desk. The make-up kit was still there. He took out a bottle of black dye, ripped the wig from his head, and swiftly worked the black liquid into his flaming red hair. In three minutes his own hair was as black as the wig he had discarded.

Then with the contents of a pomade jar he slicked his dyed hair down to the smoothness of patent leather. He looked into the mirror and grinned, patting the hard outline of the automatic in his pocket.

The door opened and he started up. Bo Rosasco had come back.

He grinned. "You put it over, kid," he said. "Too bad you're in my way now." He came closer. "Some of my boys are waiting downstairs to take you for a little ride in the country."

Dunning's hand came out of his pocket, pointing the automatic. "Easy, Bo!" he cautioned. "You talk too big!"

The racketeer turned pale.

"Sit down and keep your hands in sight," Dunning ordered.

Shaking, Rosasco complied.

"One peep out of you, and it'll be your last!"

Rosasco compressed his lips tightly. It was a matter of minutes for Dunning to tie him with the same ropes that had bound his own wrists and ankles.

DUNNING'S hands rummaged in the make-up box. They came out with a flaming red wig. He smeared its inside with cement, and pressed it down over the cauliflower-eared racketeer's patent-leather hair. Then, grinning sardonically, Dunning brought out the wig he had worn while impersonating Rosasco.

He fitted it carefully over the red one.

Rosasco twisted against the ropes that bound him. "What you trying to do, wise guy? You know that I bumped off three guys tonight?"

"And three's enough," Dunning snapped.

He went to the door, thrust out his head. "Come here!" he yelled.

The gorilla who had been his guard rushed into the office, followed by two others. He stopped short and stood stockstill, staring from Dunning to the bound figure in the chair. There was a puzzled look on his face.

Dunning spoke—in the racketeer's tones. "Okay, boys. Take him out. Don't bring him back!"

Rosasco swore. "You damned fool! Can't you see it's a gag? *He's* the actor. I'm your boss!"

Dunning whirled on him. "You think you can get away with that, you cheap, lousy ham? Look at your hair!"

It was the moment for which Dunning had prayed. And it worked! Rosasco's chief lieutenant remembered the racketeer's own test. He leaped at the bound man, snatched at his head. The black wig came off in his hands, and the red one stuck!

Dunning grinned behind his make-up.

"Okay, boss!" the gorilla said. "That proves it. We'll gag this mug before he talks our arms off. Then we'll handle him out where the Thebes Road crosses the main highway. The cops won't find him in the ditch out there until we've been a long time back here."

DUNNING waited until they had been gone a full three minutes. Then, very quietly, he lifted the telephone and called police headquarters. ". . . you may be too late to save Rosasco, but, get out there, and you'll get the men who bumped him. It'll break up the mob." He hung up.

The door opened and a flash of scarlet attracted his eye. Once more his glance traveled the sleek length of her shapely figure. She was a honey—no mistake. "Hello, Babe!" he whispered softly.

She came up to him, slid an arm around his neck, sat down on his knee. "What's been going on around here, Bo?" she asked curiously.

He drew her against his chest, felt the rise and fall of her breast. "Nothing—compared to what's going on now," he answered.



DON JUAN,



AN RIZOV, hairdresser to the fashionable and rich, allowed his fingers to touch the girl's throat caressingly before he stepped back to view the coiffure he had done. He thought dispassionately that even after her murder, the effects of his artistry would remain unmarred.

For Sylvia Colin was being dressed for death. She didn't know it; wouldn't know it until the time came . . . until her lovely features were contorted in final agony. But she had to die.

Jan had twirled and smoothed and set the golden red hair of the actress, and even as he worked, he had paused now and then to caress her, to lean close until his breath stirred the little hairs at the nape of her neck. Sylvia shivered and stirred, but only murmured, "Jan—don't—please—"

But her eyes as she looked up at him were languorous and inviting and he concluded that what she really meant was, "Not now. . . ."

"You never were more beautiful than now, darling," he murmured.

Sylvia Colin's provocative lips curled into a scornful smile. "You may as well not use those words with me, Jan. You don't have to. And remember I expect an answer tonight. You can't stall me as you did others."

The others. . . . There were many others—or had been. His smooth words, the name Jan Rizov, the fake title lettered on his door—all were a part of the stock in trade of this well known hairdresser to movie stars and fashionable women. He had made a modest fortune with his tricks . . . and now it might look as if he was going to lose one.

"You'll have an answer," he said, "though I doubt if I can raise fifty grand in cash." As he looked down at the girl, his cold intent to murder could not prevent his eyes from dwelling on the curved enticement of her figure, the shapeliness of her crossed knees. "I'll talk to Carlton at the party tonight. I wouldn't let you down. You know that."

Sylvia smiled faintly. "I know you wouldn't," she whispered. "Not the way you did Sandra and Leona and Ann. . . . I don't think you'll let me down. How about tonight? Do you expect me to go with you to the Purple Goose?"

Jan, patting a wisp of hair into place, frowned. "I think it might be best if Carlton thinks everything is all right between us," he said. "I'll call for you at ten to help you dress, darling. You should wear the silver veil thus"—he drew it down to the tip of her nose—"for the best effect. It's the best I've done, don't you think?"

He caught the veil up on the small

He knew how to make women beautiful, for he was an artist. Their hair, their costumes—in every detail, they were perfection itself before he killed them!

Murderer

By FRANK FOX



It was as if those hands of his had a life of their own as they reached for her.

hat and stepped back with ironical delight in his eyes. "Perfect," he grinned. "I could have achieved it with no one but you."

Sylvia sighed wearily. "You don't need to go on with what you've told dozens of other girls."

Jan shrugged. His line, like his fake title and name, were part of his stock in trade. He added: "But it's true. Only you have hair of the tex-

ture to be made into a thing of art, like this. With my hairdress and the Silver Sheath gown you will be stunning tonight. Already Carlton thinks much of you. . . ."

"You're a devil, aren't you, Jan?" But Sylvia Colin's eyes were thoughtful.

Jan said, "I mean only to be kind. You will attend the preview at the Chinese after dinner and should be

home by nine. I'll be waiting at your place."

"I'll be there." Sylvia smiled. "No delay tonight. I won't keep you waiting, for this will be the last time you'll dress me. And remember—fifty thousand, cash, and no-strings. In case you forget, there are the letters and other things."

Jan let his cool gaze flick over the curved shapeliness of her form. "You know it will nearly ruin me—but I see no other way out."

It would be her own fault, he was thinking. After all, they had been enjoying each other's company . . . a lot . . . and if she had not been so greedy and demanding, it might have continued. Now—but he was already thinking of his own future, and the publicity that would come to him if blood did not mar the artistry of the gown she wore tonight. He had created the gown to go with the coiffure, and a dead girl in the public eye was a better model than many. Already he was thinking up a new effect for his latest flame, Dora Traume.

LOIS, Jan's wife, was one of his other problems. Two years ago an automobile crash had scarred her pretty face, and there were too many beautiful women for Jan to be in love with an ugly one—even his wife.

But tonight he had a purpose in being tender. He leaned over her shoulder and murmured, "It is only you, my dear, who have the hair of such texture. Only you could allow me to achieve an effect like this." He patted her hair, clasped on a little gold pin and drew down the veil. "With the silver veil thus, to the tip of the nose, and the Silver

Sheath gown you will be a sensation at the Purple Goose tonight."

Lois turned, pressing herself close. There was a tremor of delight in her voice. "Oh, my darling—you mean I am to go out with you?"

Life had seemed so hopeless to her these past two years. Now—

"Do you think," she whispered, "that you—you might really learn to love me again? . . ."

"My dear . . ." breathed Jan fervently. He drew her yielding, supple slenderness into his arms and bent his mouth to the eagerly offered red lips, which parted, trembling and moist, to his kiss.

Jan was especially pleased because he was remaining so calm. It required unshaken nerves, cool premeditated action for the commission of a perfect crime. He inhaled the fragrance from his wife's red gold hair and sighed with self-satisfaction.

Presently Lois said happily, "You don't know what it means to me, Jan—to know that you really love me once more!"

Jan regarded her with a calm smile, detachedly considering the scar which ran down across her temple and distorted one eye in a way no plastic surgeon could remedy. The silver veil he had fashioned, however—identical to the one had made for Sylvia Colin—made the scar invisible unless one looked too closely.

"Of course," he murmured, "of course I love you. Forgive me if I have seemed to be neglectful, my sweet, while I attended to the vanities of silly women who really meant nothing to me except money."

Lois pressed herself close, filled

with the joy which his unexpected solicitude had given her. "I love you so much," she said tenderly. "You are so good!"

Even this remark did not embarrass Jan and she did not notice the thin curling of his lips. He glanced at his watch suddenly and exclaimed:

"Your slippers! The most important part—and I almost forgot them. I'll go back to the shop for them at once. It is now eight-thirty and I'll be home shortly after ten. Don't touch your hair, but put on the gown. I'll fix the veil and then we'll go to the party."

AT EIGHT-FORTY Jan Rizov stepped from his car and looked up and down the street as he drew on a pair of cotton gloves. Sylvia Colin's bungalow was set apart by several blocks from other houses. Two windows were lighted.

Sylvia's little brunette maid Mary opened the door for him and smiled. "Oh, Mr. Rizov," she simpered, "you always come early, don't you? Miss Colin said she would be here about nine."

Jan closed the door and glanced about. "You're all alone?" Best to take no chance of making an error. Check everything. . . .

"Alone," she whispered. "Except for you." She leaned against him, lifting her mouth expectantly, and Jan kissed her. She melted against him and her arms went around his neck. Jan held her off, smiling a hard smile at the way her eyes were half closed, her cheeks flushed, her breath coming fast. With her, it would be easy to make this seem the work of some brutal invader. He hooked his fingers in the neck of her dress and ripped downward.

"Oh!" She gasped, her eyes dropping to where flashes of pale flesh and pink underthings were revealed by the torn dress. "Oh—you mustn't. . . . You've torn my clothes!"

But again she surged against him, all her attitude expressing the fervor of her emotion and her indifference to such a small matter as a torn dress.

The next instant ecstasy gave place to terror and her eyes were staring wide, for she felt Jan's gloved hands at her throat. The scream was choked off and her throat seemed to be crushed in. She began to fight with all her strength as her head was forced back.

Avoiding her thrashing knees and disregarding the frenzied clutching of her hands, Jan dragged her along the hallway and stopped before a closet. When her feet had ceased their spasmodic tapping against the floor, he dropped her, took a heavy vase from its stand and brought it down across the back of her head. Calmly, as though he were stepping on a roach instead of cracking a girl's skull.

He returned the vase, shoved the maid into the closet and closed the door. He pulled a small rug over the spot of blood on the floor, then hurried to look out the front door. The lights of a car were topping the hill, and he reflected that he had worked none too fast.

AS HE had expected, Sylvia was alone. When she came in, Jan sat idly thumbing through a magazine in the living room. He glanced up lazily and, letting his eyes trace over her with ardor that wasn't entirely feigned, he said, "I sent Mary

out for a little while so we could be alone. . . . Shall we get on with it?"

There seemed to be scorn in the actress' usually warm and provocative smile, but she said indifferently, "I suppose you must help me dress. Come on!"

Jan followed her upstairs while his blood heated. The faint contempt in her voice only aroused him more, and for the first time this evening, his controlled calm came near to deserting him.

Sylvia retired behind a screen and presently reappeared wearing a tailored satin evening slip. "Well?" she asked. Her eyes didn't meet his, but from the flush that colored her cheeks faintly, Jan judged that she too was feeling something of his own emotion.

"Our last evening," she said musingly, and made no objection when he put his arms around her. For a moment, Jan almost forgot his murderous intent . . . but only for a little. Personal sentiment, and the ardor that she could so easily arouse in him, must not mar this night's plans. Fifty thousand dollars—and the danger of what she knew about him and could do. . . .

Sylvia closed her eyes, tilted back her head, and Jan took the proffered throat not with his lips but with cruelly constricting hands.

He had concealed the cotton gloves in his pockets until he put his arms around her, and then she had been too close to notice. Now, however, despite the painfulness of being choked, she found a fleeting instant's wonderment at the odd feeling of the gloves against her skin.

In the same instant, however, she writhed and bucked violently and

with a strong push into his face, tore loose. "You can't do it, Joe!" she gasped. "You can't get away with it, you lousy crook. You'll pay—"

But it was she who paid. The side of Jan's hand struck the front of her throat and pain knifed into her lungs. She couldn't scream, couldn't say a word, and all at once she couldn't breathe. She never could after that. . . . Those hands of his, tightening, choking. . . .

When she was quite still, Jan lowered her to the floor and stood there listening. No sound. His face was set like stone when he switched on the light, for her mention of the name "Joe" had brought back all the urge to murder.

He had come here to dress her in the Silver Sheath gown and hat with the silver veil, and now after she was dead he went through with his task. After which he stepped back and surveyed the body on the floor and wished only that when the tabloids ran the picture of her they could give Jan Rizov credit for the gown and coiffure. Anyway, it would make a beautiful picture. The gown was a knockout, and there was no blood to spoil it.

He left the body lying there and with a duplicate key he carried, he opened a trunk and after a couple of minutes found a package of letters which he examined briefly before slipping into his pocket.

NEXT he found some newspaper clippings, with their pictures and stories from ten years back. These he crumpled and flushed down the bathroom drain. Sylvia Colin's evidence against a certain Joe Stevens, confidence man and escaped convict, was thus disposed of.

Still calm, smiling now that everything had gone so well, Jan took what jewelry he could find in the room; he took the rings from Sylvia's fingers, ripped the necklace from her throat.

Knowing that there wasn't a chance in a thousand that the body would be discovered before morning, he reset Sylvia's wristwatch to five minutes past two, then struck her wrist against the edge of a chair, breaking the watch.

Taking his time and thinking out every detail he took up a heavy-back hairbrush and hit the girl's knuckles, cutting and bruising them as if she had defended herself. Next he broke two diamonds off the end of her necklace and went outside.

He found an open window and with the pressure of his arm broke it inward, making space large enough for a man's body. He dropped the end of the broken necklace beneath the window as though it had been lost in haste.

He thought about the lights, decided to leave them burning, and buried all the jewelry a hundred yards up the stony hillside, beneath a loose rock. There were dozens of such rocks about.

He got into his car and drove away.



LOIS was as eager as a child as her husband escorted her to the Purple Goose night club and up to the mezzanine booth. He had been especially attentive, adjusting her veil, applying lipstick and rouge and using a dark pencil to give her face new lines. The veil, drawn to the tip of her nose, concealed the scarred temple and eye.

"Up the stairs to the left, darling." He turned to the waiter. He said with a wink, "Miss Colin is not feeling well, Tony. Bring the usual and an extra bottle of champagne. Has the Carlton party arrived yet?"

"Mr. Carlton's table is reserved for ten-thirty, sir." The waiter's hand closed over crisp folding money and he smiled. "I suppose you and Miss Colin will be joining them later?"

"Perhaps," Jan said, "if Miss Colin feels better. Meantime, we would not like to be disturbed."

Their booth had a curtained doorway, yet they were afforded a view of the night's merriment getting underway. Thrill seekers, Jan knew, were here to see the celebrities who would be in Carlton's party. That table alone seemed vacant.

While Lois looked out at the crowd with the joy and wonderment of a child, Jan saw with satisfaction that several acquaintances had noticed them. He had placed his wife so that her face was shadowed, but the striking silver gown and the reddish hair beneath her hat were visible to all.

When the waiter brought the champagne, Jan said in an undertone, "That will be all, Tony. Don't mention to the Carlton party that we're here, please." He glanced suggestively at his wife, who was intent on the scene below, and Tony smiled knowingly to show that he understood that Jan would rather be alone with Miss Colin.

Nevertheless, a few minutes after the Carlton party had arrived hilariously, something happened to spoil his plans. With every air of being solicitous of his wife's enjoyment, Jan had refilled her glass repeatedly,

until now her face was flushed with excitement. It was while Lois was draining her third glass that Liane Price, one of the actresses in Dick Carlton's party, espied Jan.

She gave a drunken whoop of recognition. "Look, Dick—there's Jan Rizov and—"

"Hell! I'm in for it now," Jan said quickly, harshly, to cover the name he knew had been coupled with his own by Liane. "Wave to them, darling."

BUT now Dick Carlton was standing up, beckoning imperiously through the haze of smoke, and all eyes of the party were turned on Jan's booth. Jan rose and smiled, then pulled the curtain of the booth.

"Sorry, darling, but you see how it is. I'll have to join them. Can't get out of it." His voice was hard, impatient with this upset in the smooth course of events. Nothing must happen now to trip him up.

"Oh!" Lois rose eagerly. "It will be fun." Her face was alight.

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to go alone. I'll send you home in the car. This is business, you see. There are important clients of mine there and I wouldn't want them to—"

Lois' face burned. "You mean," she faltered, "you wouldn't want them to see me. You—you're ashamed of me."

"Yes, yes." Jan's need to hurry made his voice unnecessarily brutal. "You'll have to drive the car, and I'll get away as soon as possible and follow you home. I'm sorry, but you have to understand."

"I understand," his wife said dully.

He guided her down the stairs and winked at Tony in passing, giv-

ing the appearance of supporting the girl with his arm. Tony nodded, understanding that Miss Colin was feeling more than slightly drunk. Lois was, in fact, giddy, and by the time she was seated in the car, alcohol was doing strange things to her emotions. Her husband was ashamed of her. She wasn't wanted. He had built up her happiness tonight and then cast her down, and the sense of frustration and hopelessness which overcame her instilled in her an abandon that she had never known before. She hardly heard Jan say, "Drive carefully and slowly, my dear."

He returned then to the Carlton party and good-naturedly took the jibes about his girl walking out on him. He admitted that Sylvia Colin seemed to have another engagement, but added that she had given the excuse that she hadn't felt well and was going home. "Pretty thin," he commented ruefully.

"Too bad," Carlton said comfortably. He had his own eye on Sylvia. "And too bad, too, that we didn't think to bring Dora Traume along."

Jan smiled, but only he knew the reason. They had seen him return five minutes after leaving the booth with the girl they thought was Sylvia. These people and others in the restaurant, including the waiter, would swear they had seen Sylvia walk out on him. And from now on for a while he would be under their observation. His alibi would be perfect.

The party went on and on. But they didn't remain long at the Purple Goose. They traveled. And it was in the small hours when he left the party to go home.

HE HAD watched his liquor carefully, while pretending to be drunk, and he was nearly cold sober when he let himself into his own bungalow.

He grew entirely sober in a flash when he found his car in the middle of his lawn, one fender crumpled against a tree.

His nerves were getting raw anyway. About now someone might be discovering the bodies in Colin's bungalow, and the papers would be flashing the news soon. Enough hours had passed, fortunately, so that nobody would be able to set the exact time of death, and all had gone well, so far. Yet he couldn't help this nervous reaction. He strode into his living-room.

His wife leaned back on the divan, the silver gown frightfully disarranged, the hat off and her reddish hair mussed. Her eyes were bright from drink, and maybe from the attentions being given her most ardently by a blond youth bending over her, pressing his mouth into the hollow of her throat.

Her arms came up to encircle his neck. Neither of them saw Jan until he picked up a heavy flower vase and struck the youth over the back of the head.

The boy slumped to the floor with a groan and Jan turned on his wife. Far from shrinking, she staggered to her feet and cried shrilly, "You were ashamed of me, were you? Sent me home, eh? I showed you—I waited an hour—you didn't come—I went back to the Purple Goose and you weren't there. I—"

Jan caught her arm. "You fool!" he raged. "You went back to the Purple Goose? Where then? Where'd you go?" He was growing

cold all over, but he must know the worst. He must know!

"Quit—you're hurting me!" His wife leered drunkenly, and the face close to his own instilled him with murderous fury.

"Where were you? Tell me!"

"Let me go! The waiter there, Tony, looked at me like I was a ghost and said you'd gone with the party. I tried the Red Dog, the Coconut Grove, and you weren't there . . . so I had some more drinks and I had a good time. I showed you!"

Jan seethed, but his voice was cold and hard. "Go on—where else?"

When she didn't answer, he crashed his fist into her mouth. As the blood spurted from her lips, she said brokenly, after a burst of insane laughter, "You didn't want me, did you? Well, I found someone who did! I got arrested at the Red Dog—there was a fight—this boy brought me home—a policeman tore my dress but this boy got me out of it and brought me home and—"

Oh, God, oh, God, thought Jan! Worse and worse. . . . His careful plans were wrecked now, and all he could think of was revenge on this woman before him. His fingers gripped and sank into her throat. Lois writhed and struggled furiously, but he held her against the sofa, his fingers biting in. . . . She was dying now, as those others had died. Dying as she deserved.

EVEN as he was killing her, his brain was racing. He must get away, fast, change his name again. Draw money from the bank—no—he couldn't wait to do that.

Suddenly a rough hand grabbed his shoulders, pulled him from his

wife's weakly writhing form. Hard knuckles pounded into his face. When he came out of the fog he was handcuffed. A man in uniform was speaking kindly to Lois:

"Don't worry about it, Mrs. Rizov. You'll be all right. He wasn't worth it, anyway. If it hadn't been for you, he'd have got away with two murders. When we checked on your dress and talked to Carlton, we knew where to look. And besides that, a messenger boy with a telegram discovered Sylvia Colin's body at one-thirty and her watch had

stopped at two. It's lucky we got here in time to keep it from being three murders!"

Jan's mind was in a stupor. Everything from start to finish had gone wrong! One more thing was wrong, and the cop told him: "Over a year now we've known who you were, Joe Stevens . . . but the chief said as long as you were going straight, give you a chance. He didn't want to ruin your life . . . and now look at the lives you ruined with the chance he gave you!"

Jan's face was a stupid blank.

DEATH COMES DISGUISED

By C. A. M. DONNE



ERIC NORTH, private detective, strolled savagely through the winter gale that howled along Park Row, rattling tinny signs and making even the gaunt steel of the "el" framework shiver. A bad night for sailors, North was thinking—and, if the sly promise of Moy Ling and the eager premonition in his own bones did not lie, a worse night for Pete

Galín, slaver of souls. But a fine night, a damnably fine night, for North and all the millions of honest men and women in New York City.

The wind tore at the heavy wool of his overcoat, whipping it around his long limbs and moulding it to the wide sweep of his muscular shoulders. The wind slapped down the brim of his black soft hat, all but hiding his aquiline face, with the gray eyes that glittered like sharp points

*Those gunmen served a Slaver of Souls but
arrayed against them was a man who lit
joss sticks to the Gods and shot fast and true
when the time came!*



Shadowy figures emerged from the darkness and the place became a scene of desperate battle.

of ice. He was glad to see the littered windows of Moy Ling's Chinese pawnshop casting a pale of radiance over the snowy sidewalk half a block ahead. Even the homeless derelicts of the Bowery managed to hide themselves on such a night as this, and the street appeared deserted.

North's eyes glinted with interest, seeing a taxi swing to the curb in front of the patch of light, and the slim figure of a girl alight. She wore a frail jacket, fur-trimmed, altogether inadequate for the weather, and the wind pressed the long skirt of an evening gown tightly against slim legs. Yellow hair, cropped in close curls, danced around her cheeks beneath a precariously perched little hat.

She turned her face in his direction briefly, and the blue-white glow of a street lamp touched features that were extraordinarily pretty. North felt his pulse leap; he was almost certain he had seen that face before, somewhere, under circumstances that had been exciting—or reprehensible. It might pay him to discover why she was visiting Moy Ling just as that kindly, villainous character was about to do the terrible Pete Galin an ill turn.

Many persons, inside the law and outside, visited Moy Ling at unconventional hours, but few of them were young girls with legs shapely enough to take the edge off the biting wind. For instance, there was the shabby man just now slinking toward the doorway through which the girl had disappeared, huddling close to the building walls. A poor devil wanting to sell something he had found or stolen, or maybe, even, come by honestly.

Then the rays of the street lamp struck *his* face, and North stiffened and felt the hot sting of hatred in his blood. The thin, wolfish face below the peaked cap was that of Nick Grosso, drug-soaked torpedo, who dressed like a down-and-outer even though he was reputedly paid thousands of dollars for doing important jobs of murder for Galin.

At the pawnshop entrance, Grosso paused and glanced up and down the street. North could tell by the jerk of the man's thin shoulders that he had been seen and recognized. North swore as Grosso changed his mind about entering and came slouching along the street, pretending he was bound for the cheap saloon on the corner. The detective's gloved fists hardened in his coat pockets, aching to hammer the killer's receding chin. Instead, North kept his head down, pretending not to notice the other.

For Moy Ling had whined into North's telephone fifteen minutes ago: "I have something that may lead you to the man you want most, if you hurry. But you must be careful not to let that man suspect. No one must know I called you."

Moy Ling, rugged individualist of the half-world, who dealt sometimes with thieves and sometimes with the cops, fearing neither, usually knew what he was talking about. If Grosso should be snatched off the street in this vicinity and turned over to one of North's friends at Police Headquarters, Galin would surely become suspicious.

The detective thumbed the old-fashioned latch of the pawnshop and stepped into its crowded, dim-lighted interior, glad of its warmth. He let his eyes rove among the dusty showcases and high shelves, surprised that

the girl was not in sight. He moved toward the rear, where a brighter light burned in Moy Ling's cubby-hole of an office.

NORTH had to step entirely into the office before he saw Moy Ling, and then he had to look twice before he was sure it was Moy. The Chinese pawnbroker sat at his battered rolltop desk, his skinny old body leaning forward, his skull-like head, with its sparse gray hair, lying in a litter of papers. His head had been battered, and he was dead.

The edge of a crumpled bit of blue paper projected between the clenched fingers of one hand. North withdrew it gently. It was a pawn ticket, made out so recently that a blot of ink in one corner was still damp. The customer who had made it out had signed herself "Gwen Walling" and had given the swank Rich Plaza Hotel as her address.

In the proper spaces left for notations describing the article pledged and the amount loaned, the pawnbroker's crabbed hand had written: "Necklace — 40 matched pearls—\$5,000."

North became aware of a steady draft behind him, and, turning, saw that the rear door was ajar, twenty feet back in the gloom. He switched on hanging lights and heard a frightened gasp from the shadow of a big packing case. A second later he had grasped the arm of the girl in the fur-trimmed jacket and dragged her, struggling and whimpering, into the light. He pried open the curled fingers of her left hand and took from her a string of shimmering gray baubles.

"So!" he said. "As soon as he produced the money, you hit him on

the head and thought you could get away with both the pearls and the cash!" His eyes followed the course of a spatter of blood along her right sleeve.

She shook her golden head violently, her blue eyes alive with terror. "No," she stammered. "It—I—there was someone—"

The soft curves of her bosom were broken by a bulky object beneath the close-fitting gown. Still imprisoning her wrists with one hand, he reached swiftly into the bodice. His chilled knuckles tingled against her skin as his fingers closed on a flat package. He drew forth a taped sheaf of banknotes.

He said: "It'll take some fast talking to beat the electric chair this time, Gwen."

She drew a long, shuddering breath. "Please believe me! I—I brought those pearls here for—for someone else. I can't tell you who. Moy Ling was expecting me. He got the money out of a safe and gave me a slip of paper to fill out.

"All at once a man ran into the office. He hit me with his fist and knocked me down. He started hitting Moy Ling with the butt of a revolver. His back was toward me, and I couldn't see his face. I managed to get up and grab the pearls and the money and run back here. He followed, but it was dark, and he didn't see me hide. He thought I'd run out the door."

"What did he look like?"

She shook her head piteously. "I couldn't be sure. He wore a cap. I don't think he was dressed very well."

North's smile was mirthless. "It's one for the book," he told her. "You'll have a hard time making

the district attorney see the point, though. Things like that don't happen very often outside of stories."

"You've got to take my word for it!" she cried. "You'll spoil everything if you turn me over to the police."

"I haven't any choice," he said.

IT WASN'T easy to say. This girl who called herself Gwen Walling was not like any criminal he had ever encountered. She was more like a frightened, innocent child, caught up in some intrigue beyond her understanding. She was not older than nineteen or twenty, he guessed, and if there were anything evil in her life, it had left no mark upon her face.

He was holding her by the shoulders, facing her. He had dropped the pearls and the money into his overcoat pocket. He saw the tremor of her lips, and felt acutely sorry for her.

"Maybe," he said gently, "you'd better tell me everything."

Tears welled suddenly into her eyes and overflowed. She gave a little sob and swayed toward him, hiding her face against the shoulder of his overcoat. North's arms crept around her and tightened, and he was surprised at the pleasant sensations that rippled through him.

Her shapely body moved with her sobs. His arms drew her closer automatically. His blood was hot and racing in his veins, and he had practically forgotten that circumstances had all but convicted her of murder and robbery.

He muttered: "Poor kid!" He got his fingers under her chin and tilted her head back. He lowered his lips to her rosebud mouth and felt floods

of emotion arising within him. His heart pounded, his breathing became faster and he felt her breath warm on his face.

Her hands moved up across his chest. He thought she was going to put her arms around his neck. He was not thinking of his friend Moy Ling, dead in his cluttered little office, nor even of his hatred for Pete Galin, the soul-slaver. He was thinking of a place where he could be alone with Gwen Walling, where he could question her at leisure, after he had kissed her some more. . . .

She squirmed with unexpected suddenness and strength. Her hands flattened against his chest and pushed hard. North took a step backward, utterly surprised. The edge of a packing case caught him behind the knees. He tripped and fell on his back, sprawling, swearing stupidly. He saw her whirl, gather up her skirt and run toward the front of the shop, her slim legs flashing.

When he got to his feet and into the shop, the girl was already in the street. An expensive chauffeur-driven limousine had stopped in front of the shop. The door opened and a plump man in evening clothes with a bland, moon-shaped face stepped on the running board and leaned far out. The man's pudgy arm encircled the girl and lifted her into the car. The sixteen cylinders of the motor coughed with cold under the chauffeur's throttling, and the car slid away, gathering speed.

North swore again. He knew the plump Chinese who had either kidnaped or rescued the girl. He was John Lee, the honey-tongued overlord of all the gambling in Chinatown. He was a millionaire, a power among his own people, an outlaw—

and a gentleman. A very dangerous gentleman, sometimes. . . .



RIC NORTH hurried through the howling gale to the corner saloon, locking the pawnshop door behind him. He phoned the Rich Plaza Hotel first of all, and learned that no person named Gwen Walling was registered there or had been lately. Then he phoned Police Headquarters and talked with a detective inspector he knew, telling him of Moy Ling's murder. He said: "Nick Grosso was hanging around. A blond girl ran out of the place and got away. I'll get in touch with you inside of an hour and go over everything."

He did not mention the name the girl had given, the pawn ticket or the pearls. He had an idea about the pearls, though. There had been a paragraph in a newspaper that day, stating that Aida Reveille—le Comtesse Reveille, the sensational papers called her, taking her at her own evaluation—had reported to police the disappearance of a necklace of forty matched pearls valued at \$80,000.

Aida Reveille, an exotic adventuress whose hair and eyes were black as Pete Galin's heart, was that arch-criminal's newest mistress. For weeks the gossip columnists had been writing about them and the tabloids had been running pictures of them.

Walking along Park Row toward Pell Street, that narrow alley of glamor just off the human garbage heap of the lower Bowery, North clamped his lean jaw and thought about Pete Galin and his hell-inspired followers. His blood boiled

and hot mists of fury gathered in his brain.

There was a personal reason behind his hatred.

Within the space of two years Pete Galin, long a petty racketeer, had become the biggest of the underworld big shots. Starting with a gambling joint and a furtive trade in heroin, he had risen to control practically all gambling, all dope distribution and all vice and white slavery in the world's greatest metropolis.

He had risen, literally, on the souls of men and women. He had grown powerful not through crude gang terrorism, but through enslaving those whose influence counted in the highest circles. The daughter of a powerful politician, the son of a multimillionaire, the wife of a man who was in a position to demand high favors of the governor—they were the kind of persons on whom his incredible empire had been erected.

Let one of these enter one of Galin's gilded gambling dens, for instance, and the most eloquent persuasions were used to plunge him into debt. Let one of them yield to the suggestion that he try the opium pipe or the needle "just for a lark," and he would discover how insidious the tentacles of dope could be. Let a man or woman be tricked into a compromising situation, and the all-seeing properties of the lenses of the criminal's blackmail cameras would shortly be made evident.

Sometimes the victims would try to buy themselves free by the commission of crimes, suggested by Galin—but the threat of prison dangled over their heads after that, and the last hope was gone.

Oh, it was a malicious, satanic system—and it worked.

ERIC NORTH knew better than most people how well it worked. He'd had a kid sister who had married a senator. Once she had gone with a group of thrill-seeking society people to gamble at Galin's most elegant establishment on Park Avenue. They had all been drinking, and somehow she became separated from her party. It was a week before she returned home.

She would never tell what had happened to her. Certainly she had been given dope—the marks of it were evident upon her face. North could only guess at what else had happened.

She killed herself with poison. A few days later, presented with certain ugly blackmail material, and told that it would be made public unless he performed some official act that would add to Galin's advantage over the law, her senator husband had put a bullet into his brain.

North had quit his job as investigator for an insurance company that day. He had announced publicly that henceforth he would devote his life to a single specific task — that of bringing the soul-slaver to justice. The newspapers had printed the story. The underworld had laughed.

H. Preston Barrington, publisher of the crusading *Examiner*, had promised to co-operate, and scarcely a day passed that his newspaper did not reveal some new outrage for which Galin was responsible. But the wily fiend had only gone ahead with his plans, secure in the knowledge that, whatever Barrington and North might say about him, they had never been able to present proof that

would stand up in court. The Galin strangle-hold on society was tightening; the Galin territory was widening.

Moy Ling had promised North what might have been his first important lead. And Moy Ling had been murdered. . . .

Pell Street was bright and crowded. It was not yet ten o'clock, and the twisting streets of Chinatown broke the force of the wind, and the tiny restaurants with their flashing signs outside and shaded lamps within were doing a good business.

North paused before a restaurant almost in the middle of the short thoroughfare. It was one of the entrances to the elaborate stronghold of John Lee, the gambler. In the upper floors of the restaurant were secret panels. Beyond them were dark passages, silent elevators, other panels. Guides escorted approved clients to ornate gambling rooms, and to other rooms where exotic girls with painted fingernails played quaint stringed instruments and sang and displayed their skill in the art of love. Somewhere among the rooms was John Lee's secret apartment.

A man bumped heavily into the detective and did not apologize. He was young, medium-sized and heavy-set. He was pointing out something to another man in an automobile at the curb and crying: "There she is!"

North's first sensation was surprise that he should encounter Hal Barrington, son of the publisher of the powerful *Examiner*, in this neighborhood. For while Hal Barrington was not of the same stuff as his two-fisted father—was more of the playboy and the idler, waiting to inherit unearned millions—he didn't belong in Chinatown. He be-

longed in the exclusive night clubs of the uptown district, of which the Chinatown clubs were only a tawdry imitation.

BUT North had no time to reflect on this, beyond recognizing a vague inner prompting that there was *something else* to be remembered about young Barrington. For he looked, naturally enough, where the youth was pointing, and saw Gwen Walling just emerging from a dingy curio shop.

North swung toward her. She saw him coming and fled. He started to run, crying: "Wait — it's all right!" She swerved into a narrow alley between buildings, like a hunted animal seeking the nearest shelter. He raced after her and caught her in a tiny paved backyard. She squirmed and struggled in his arms, lithe and strong, and again he was conscious of her perfect curves. Her ridiculous hat fell off and her golden curls brushed across his face, filling his nostrils with a subtle fragrance.

Then shadowy figures leaped out of the darkness, grasping his arms and shoulders. Something struck the back of his head a dull, stunning blow. He felt himself falling and released the girl. His head struck the brick pavement of the yard. He fought doggedly against insensibility, hearing scuffling footsteps getting farther and farther away. In no time, it seemed, the court was silent and deserted, except for himself. . . .

Eventually he managed to get back on his feet. This lone hand-against-the-underworld was too much for him, he thought, putting a hand to his aching head. He'd go to Police Headquarters and ask them to put

out the famous dragnet. He'd have every cop in town, every detective and every prowler car, hunting for the Walling girl, Nick Grosso, the Reveille woman—and for Hal Barrington!

For North remembered now that *something else* about the publisher's son. It was a candid camera shot, gleefully printed in a tabloid, headed "Le Comtesse and Crusader." It showed young Barrington and Ada Reveille laughing together over champagne glasses in a Harlem hot spot.

Hal Barrington was no crusader, of course; that was a jibe at the old man, who was spending money freely in an attempt to expose the machinations of Galin. It was the more notable because everybody who read the papers knew that Ada was supposed to be Galin's sweetheart.

Put all the pieces of the puzzle together: Reveille's \$80,000 necklace reported stolen; the Walling girl trying to pawn it; death striking the pawnbroker who had apparently tried to put the finger on Galin; Hal Barrington pointing the girl out in Chinatown; thugs lurking to slug any outsider who tried to capture her. You got—what?

North didn't know, exactly. But he hoped he'd get a picture of Pete Galin engaged directly in some criminal act, for which he could be sent to Sing Sing for life, if not to the electric chair. It was all there was left to hope for out of that jumbled evening, which had begun so auspiciously with the shrewd Moy Ling's promise of vital information, and had produced, so far, only murder and a muddle.

He snarled at a Chinatown cabbie: "Police Headquarters, and don't

slow up for ice or traffic signals or anything!"

THE cab rolled into Mott Street, trapped despite North's order in the slow streams of one-way traffic that threaded the district. It swung free at Park Row and turned sharply right, racing toward the State Building and Lafayette Street. It made good time past the Tombs and came within sight of the Grecian dome of Police Headquarters in Center Street. Then the driver cursed and trod on the brakes, and the tires shrieked on the bricks and the cab lurched sidewise.

Half a block ahead of them hell was popping. A sleek sedan had pulled alongside another taxi, which had been speeding toward Headquarters but had not passed. Slivers of blue-white flame were streaking from the windows of the sedan into the taxi, and the chattering *boom-boom* of a submachine gun filled the air.

It lasted only about fifteen seconds. The taxi staggered crazily and piled up on a hydrant with a crunching of metal and a jingling of glass. The engine of the sedan roared and it fled up the deserted street like an ominous shadow. Its tires wailed as it rounded a corner, heading toward Broadway, and then everything was quiet.

North darted to the side of the wrecked cab. A street lamp glimmered just above it, and the light showed him the body of the driver, draped over the wheel. He had been a young fellow, quite decent-looking. Now his cheek glistened with blood from three or four big holes in his temple and skull.

The machine-gun slugs had dotted

a line the length of the cab's body, just above the level of the seats, and had swept another hail at about the height of the head of a person sitting inside. It was inconceivable that anyone within could have escaped death.

The detective yanked open the door and the head and shoulders of a heavy-set young man sagged out. The upturned face was a mass of gore, with both eyes burst in their sockets and half the nose shot away. Yet North knew the man. He was—or had been—Hal Barrington.

Something moved beyond the body. A girl's head lifted and looked at North with wide, terror-filled eyes. Her golden curls trembled around her cheeks. Her mouth quivered, as though she wanted to cry.

She said: "Please take me away, quick. Not to the police—it would mean death for me—but somewhere safe, where we can talk!"



ORTH hesitated. He knew the proper place for talking about this business was at Headquarters, in the rooms of the Homicide Squad, and he ran the risk of losing her as long as he kept her away from there. Moreover, his friends on the force wouldn't thank him for removing a principal witness from the scene of a crime as important as this. But, because she was so frightened and earnest—and perhaps partly because he remembered how tempting she had been when he had held her in his arms—he felt himself giving in to her.

"But—you must be hurt!" he protested. "All those bullets—"

The curls danced as she shook her

head. "No. I saw the guns before they began to shoot. I dropped to the floor and tried to pull Hal down. He wasn't fast enough. The bullets all passed over me."

"You've got plenty of luck," he said, "but don't crowd it." He signaled to his own taxi, which pulled abreast of them. He helped Gwen Walling from the twisted car into the other machine. They were a block away when the first sirens began to sound.

North took the girl to his Gramercy Park apartment, a few blocks away. In the comfortable, warm living room he took her jacket, waved her toward the sofa and poured whiskey and soda into glasses.

He said, a little gruffly, because he was sore at himself for being so soft with her: "Start talking. When you are through, I'll ask questions. There is a chance in a million I can help you, if you're really square."

He was amazed at her composure. Apart from the loss of her hat and the windblown look of her curls, she showed no signs of what she had been through. The green evening gown fitted her supple body like a sheath, and her figure was something to dream about. She was one of the prettiest girls the detective had ever seen, and the impression returned that he had seen her before. But how could he have forgotten?

She took a deep breath that lifted her rounded breasts entrancingly. She began abruptly: "I've known Hal Barrington slightly for a month or two. He came to me today with a pearl necklace and asked me, as a special favor, to take it to Moy Ling's pawnshop and get \$5,000 for it. He said he was in debt and that he needed the money. He'd made all

arrangements with Moy Ling by telephone, he said, but didn't want to be seen going there because of his father's position.

"I agreed, and when I got to Moy Ling's, he seemed to know what it was all about. He got the money and gave me the ticket to fill out. He kept watching the front of the shop, as though he expected someone. And all at once that man charged in from the back, as I told you. You came in right after that."

He shook his head impatiently. "You haven't told enough. You gave a false name to Moy Ling, and a phony address. If you're a crook—"

"A crook!" She sat up, hurt and indignant. "You have no right to say that!"

"No? After finding you with a newly-murdered man, with five thousand dollars of his money in your—your waist? After seeing you in a taxi riddled by gunmen who gave you a chance to duck and shot high enough to miss you—"

HE STOPPED talking, because she had begun to weep. He wished she wouldn't; he was tough enough in a lot of ways, but not tough enough to bully a girl who had been reduced to tears. He put out his hands clumsily and grasped her shoulders again.

The magic of that other enchanted moment in the pawnshop came over him. She was so sweet, so utterly desirable, he couldn't help drawing her against him, holding her as he would hold a frightened child.

He kissed her, and the thrill of it was intoxicating as old brandy. A surge of ardor overwhelmed him.

"You're wonderful!" he gasped.

Her words fell on his ear like a

drowsy whisper. "You're so strong. I need someone strong. . . ."

This time there was no trickery in her, no attempt to flee from him. She snuggled fervently, returning his kisses, tightening her smooth arms around his shoulders. Her yielding was swift and almost eager. Roseate mists of ecstasy seemed to swirl about them, blotting out all that was unlovely. . . .

He promised, minutes later: "I'll get you out of this mess, Gwen, if it's the last thing I ever do in the world!"

She stirred comfortably in his arms. She murmured: "Not Gwen. My real name is Jeanette Younge. And I'm not an awfully good girl, Eric; I'm a hostess in a gambling place. I work for a man named Galin—"

He started, his eyes hardening. "I knew I had seen you—"

She shook her golden head. "Not there. We sat in the same courtroom one day. A man named Vincent Younge was on trial for embezzlement."

"You're Jeanette Younge, his daughter!"

He remembered now, so vividly he wondered how he could ever have forgotten. Younge, president of the Excelsior Bank, had used the bank's funds to pay for personal things, which never were revealed. He had been sent to Sing Sing for a long term, and he had died there. The insurance firm which then employed North had been responsible for the bank's loss.

"I knew what no one else knew," she whispered. "I knew that Dad had taken the money to pay Pete Galin, who was blackmailing him. The documents on which the blackmail was

based were forged, but the scandal would have ruined him, anyway.

"After he was sentenced, I got a job at Galin's. I thought I might learn something that could ruin him. I wanted to ruin him because I knew how heartless and scheming he was. It was as though he had murdered Dad. You can't imagine how I hate him—"

North's teeth came together with a click. "Yes, I can. I had a sister—"

He did not finish, because the buzzer announced a caller. He arose, frowning, and the girl smoothed her skirts over her legs and patted her curls into a semblance of order.

"Cops," he said. "They'll want to question me about that business at Moy Ling's. They don't know you were there, and I won't tell them."

HE OPENED the door. He stared into black, slant eyes, and into the muzzles of snub-nosed automatics. Three dapper young Chinese waved him back into the apartment and followed him. Gwen—or Jeanette Younge—turned pale when she saw them.

One of the gunmen addressed Eric North politely. "You have some pearls. Be so kind as to give them to me, please."

North swore inwardly. The barrels of two guns were lined steadily on his stomach, and he dared not make a move toward the automatic holstered at his left shoulder. It would be foolhardy to try to bluff these grim youngsters, he decided. He nodded toward his overcoat, which he had tossed on a chair.

The Chinese found the pearls and the package of banknotes. He put both in his pocket. He said: "You

come with us — you and the lady. Walk ahead, down to the car, and be so kind as not to try to get away. I would regret hugely to kill you.”

They were all very polite. One of them held North's coat for him, and another helped Jeanette into her jacket. They were also very careful to give North no opportunity to reach for his pistol.

They went down in the automatic elevator and through the deserted lobby of the apartment building. A fourth Chinese was at the wheel of a sedan in the street. All of them got in and the car started downtown, toward the Bowery and the Chinese quarter.

An ugly suspicion flashed into Eric North's mind. Supposing John Lee, whose gambling and other concessions in Chinatown were worth millions, had joined forces with Pete Galin, who controlled similar rackets in the rest of New York? Supposing Jeanette Younge was working for Galin, not against him?

That could easily be the case, even though she were the daughter of one of Galin's victims. For most of the men and women who worked for Galin hated him, and yet were utterly in his power.

Probably, North told himself bitterly, he'd been the biggest kind of damned fool. Probably he'd pay with his life for his idiocy. And it would damned well serve him right. . . .



HEY entered a dingy house in Bayard Street. They passed through secret doors into adjoining buildings, and through long dark passages. They climbed stairways and finally crowded into a tiny elevator that lifted them noise-

lessly into an amber-lighted hallway. North and the girl were thrust through a doorway into an exotic room containing a huge teakwood desk, behind which sat the plump, blandly smiling John Lee. The Chinatown overlord wore a yellow silk kimono over his evening clothes.

But what shocked North beyond description was the sight of the half-naked figure of a man trussed to a wooden frame at one side of the room. The man was alive and groaning, sobbing and cursing, and the torture he had suffered was incredible.

The framework to which he was bound was ingeniously fitted with great wooden screws that clamped over each of his joints — fingers, wrists, elbows, shoulders, ankles and knees. Each screw could be tightened by a broad handle, and each *had* been tightened until bones had crushed and splintered. A knee was a pulpy shape, an ankle was flattened oddly. The man could not move without adding to his agony.

The man was Nick Grosso, and when he saw North he begged: “Shoot me, Shamus! Cripes—I can't stand it!”

Jeanette gave a little whimper and fainted. One of the Chinese gunmen caught her and lowered her to a low pile of mats, and North was glad she was spared further horror.

The detective felt sick. He glared at John Lee. He rasped: “My God—you can't get away with this! Take him out of that and call a doctor!”

Lee shrugged, unperturbed. He murmured: “You are not stern enough for your work. This man has killed many, and deserves death, yet you shudder when he is treated roughly. We Chinese are sensible;

we are not afraid to treat a cruel man cruelly." He turned toward Grosso, commanding sharply: "Tell your story! Tell it quickly, as you told it to me, or I will tighten the screws!"

Grosso took a deep, shivering breath and yelped with sudden pain. He said swiftly, as though repeating a familiar ritual:

"Old man Barrington was making things too hot for Galin, an' we had to stop him. We got Barrington's kid gambling an' spending dough faster than he could get it, an' pretty soon, when he was in deep enough, Galin says to the kid: 'Barrington, I gotta have five grand right away.' The kid was scared to go to his old man—he'd of caught hell—an' he said he couldn't raise the dough. So the boss says: 'Take this necklace to Moy Ling's hock shop an' get five grand on it an' bring it back to me.' An' Galin called Moy an' warned him to go through with the deal.

"The necklace was Aida Reveille's an' she'd reported it stolen, fixing up the plant. After the kid hocked it, we were gonna accuse him of swiping it, an' tell his old man he'd go to prison if the *Examiner* kept throwing dirt in our faces.

"The kid must of smelled a rat. Instead of hocking the pearls, he kidded one of the hostesses at Galin's place into doing it. I sneaked into Moy's by the back door, right after I seen you, North, an' seen what was coming off. I figured there was a double-cross, an' maybe Moy was mixed up in it, because you were on your way to the hock shop. So I killed Moy.

"But the dame snatched the pearls an' ran, an' you came in, North, an' I had to duck. I hung around China-

town with some of the boys an' seen the dame with John Lee, an' waited till she came out. Young Barrington was hanging around, waiting for her to get the five grand, an' we told Barrington to take her back to Pete Galin's joint in a taxi. Then you tried to grab her, an' we had to slug you.

"Some of the boys followed Barrington an' the dame to see that they didn't try to get loose, an' caught 'em heading for the cops. Then they had to kill Barrington. They thought the dame was dead, too, but I guess she got away.

"An' then some Chinks grabbed me an' brought me here, an' so help me, that's all I know!"

HE LAPSED into silence, breathing heavily, closing his eyes. In a moment he began to moan again, rhythmically, dreadfully.

John Lee waved an arm, and the three gunmen vanished. He gazed serenely at the ceiling and said dreamily:

"Galín has been trying to invade Chinatown. He wishes to control our fan tan rooms and the opium traffic and the houses of pleasure and song. We Chinese do not want him, because he is not an honest man.

"The Chinese waiters in Galin's gambling places are my men. They overheard the details of the plot to trap young Barrington. I instructed Moy Ling to tell you, hoping that you would be able to kill Galin or send him to prison. But my friend Moy was killed, unfortunately, before he could tell you his story.

"So I sent my men to trace you and get the necklace from you, having learned from Miss Younge you

had taken it. I sent a message earlier to Aida Revville, telling her that if she would bring Galin here, she could have the necklace back. They arrived ahead of you. I have just signaled to have them admitted here."

"You fool! Galin will bring an army of gunmen with him!"

"So I hoped," John Lee admitted. "We are ready."

"A trap?"

The Oriental shook his head. "A gamble. I have paid my respects to the gods of chance, and it may be they will favor me, even against odds. I believe you have a weapon."

North scowled. "Yes, but damn it, I can't—"

He heard the soft clatter of the elevator.

She whom the sensational papers called le comtesse entered first, lovingly in an ermine wrap that swirled sinuously about her seductive curves. Her hands were tucked in a tiny ermine muff. Her smooth black hair glistened and her black eyes glittered like a snake's. She smiled, though, with her scarlet-enamel mouth.

Behind her came Galin, muffled from ankles to chin in a black coat. His face was broad and swart and ugly. Wispy dark hair was plastered greasily over his scalp, and his eyes were expressionless pools of muddy brown, surrounded by unhealthy wrinkles.

"Hands up!" the detective said. "I've got you for keeps this time, Galin! I've got the whole story from Grosso."

Galín jumped and glowered at North. He looked toward the tortured figure of Grosso and made a sound like a small dog growling. He grated: "You damned rat!" He

sidled toward the moaning wretch.

North's gun followed him. North warned: "Back up, louse!"

"Get him, Aida!" Galin cried.

The *pop* of a silenced pistol came from the white muff in which the adventuress' hands were tucked. Eric North felt a stinging blow at his right shoulder. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Galín was within four feet of him. The arch-criminal's foot lashed out, and the toe of the polished shoe drove cruelly into North's groin, paralyzing him with agony. Galín yanked a pistol from his pocket.

Galín said to Aida: "Your rod is quieter, baby. Take Nick first."

Her rouged lips still smiled. She took the little pistol, with its fat tube screwed to the muzzle, from her muff. She aimed at the man in the rack. Grosso waited, seeming almost eager for the bullet. When it bored a neat hole in his temple, he relaxed with a loose grin.

"Now we'll have the pearls," Pete Galín said. "Hand 'em over, John."

John Lee, not speaking or changing expression, stretched out a plump hand and flicked a bit of silk from the corner of his desk. Strands of matched pearls, glowing with misty brilliance, lay beneath it.

"And now for the pay-off!" Pete Galín's thick lips leered. "You dumb clucks! Did you think I'd walk into a trap? I got men in the restaurant and gambling rooms pulling a stick-up, taking over the joint. I'm going to boss Chinatown along with the rest of the town. North, I'm going to shoot you deader than hell!"

NORTH look'd at the pistol in the soul-slaver's hand. He wasn't afraid—the crimson flames of

fury and hatred, burning through his brain and body, swept away all fear. He'd lost the most important battle of his life—not only for himself, but for his kid sister, and the golden-haired Jeanette Younge, and for the host of others who marched in a reproachful procession through his mind, like a parade of ghosts. He didn't want to live, having lost.

But he wanted to die fighting. . . .

Things happened all at once. Pete Galin's trigger finger tightened and North lunged low into the roar and flame of the shot. Something scraped his wounded shoulder, feeling like the caress of a white-hot iron. Up from the heap of mats darted Jeanette, a lithe figure in green, one bare arm upraised to hurl the brass bowl of an incense burner.

What with the pain of his wound and the blinding mists of fury, it was never quite clear to North exactly how it happened. He was grappling with Galin, half fainting with the blows Galin's fist dealt his shoulder. They fell to the floor together, and Galin's cheek was covered with blood from a wound where, presumably, the brass bowl had struck him.

Three times, as they rolled over and over, the pistol thundered, and twice burning powder scorched Eric North's face. The third time Galin went limp. North suspected a trick until his vision cleared, and he could see where the bullet had punched into the killer's head, beneath the chin, and had emerged messily at the top of his nearly bald skull.

Aida Reveille was fighting like a wildcat screaming imprecations. Jeanette clung to her, no match for her crazed strength. The clothing of both girls was torn, exposing glistening curves of flesh. Then John

Lee put his hand on Aida's shoulder, and she collapsed all at once.

She who liked to be called *le comtesse* cried miserably: "Give me a break, guys! I'll turn State's evidence. I'll tell all I know. I'll do anything to keep out of the chair!"

North groped his way to Jeanette. Her arms encircled him.

"We got him together," he mumbled. "I couldn't have done it alone."

He wanted to go on to say that she could help him in other things—that she'd done something to him, and now he couldn't go on without her. But John Lee was speaking gravely, silkily.

"The gods are kind to those who respect them. I was sure they would be on the side of one as devoted to them as I have been. Tonight I shall light many joss sticks and burn much paper money."

"You've still got a holdup downstairs," North reminded him.

John Lee smiled. "Even with the gods on my side, I have made preparations of my own. There is no holdup, as you shall see."

Nor was there any. As North passed through the gaming rooms with Jeanette, all the games were going on as usual, and none of the Oriental players looked as though anything extraordinary had happened. But a wet, stained knife lay beneath a table, and there were bullet holes in a wall, and an attendant was busy scrubbing dark stains from the floor.

He shivered. Better to forget those things, because there would be no bodies for the police to find, no evidence, nothing to prove what had happened. And the world would be a better place without the gunmen who had served the dreadful slaver of souls.

BODYGUARD TO DEATH

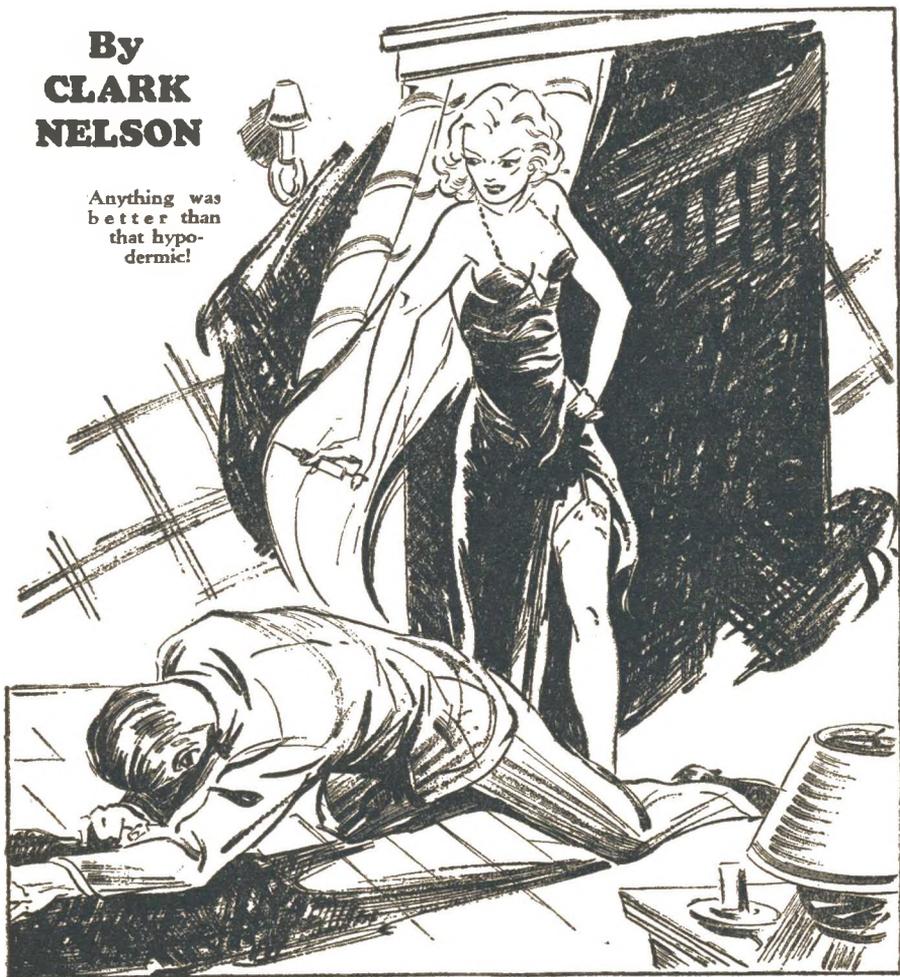


JOHN CARR, owner of the Carr Detective Agency, tilted his hat forward on his head, lifted his heels to the top of his scarred old desk, and smoothed out the *Times-Herald* extra on his lap.

His eyes went at once to the sensational story that was the occasion for the paper's extra. "Star Gang Caught!" was the big headline. He went on into the body of the account. Shortly after noon today the police had announced the round-up of half a

By
**CLARK
NELSON**

Anything was
better than
that hypo-
dermic!



dozen local gangsters, believed to be the extortionists who had got nearly fifty thousand dollars from two prominent Broadway actresses and were alleged to be guilty of at least one cyanide killing—

His reading was interrupted by the unannounced entry of Jean Larkin, his good-looking office assistant. It was plain that she was deeply excited. Her eyes were flashing, her breath was coming more rapidly than normal so that her words issued

talk to you about a Star extortion letter!"

Slowly John removed his feet from the desk and tossed his hat aside. He pointed to the newspaper headlines. "I guess you and the fair Francine don't read the papers," he said softly.

"I see! But she says—"

"Okay! Okay! At least I guess I better give myself a look at those extremely valuable pins." Even if the actress's legs weren't worth quite

The detective agency was sunk! There could be no doubt of it. The Girl with the Million Dollar Legs had dropped dead in the arms of the head of the company in his own private office. And she'd been warned in advance! John Carr had one slim chance to save his business . . .

as if they were all connected, and her breast rose and fell agitatedly under her knitted dress.

"We've got a visitor," she fairly gasped. "It's Francine Delroy, the Girl with the Million Dollar Legs!"

Carr swiveled part way around in his chair. His eyes started up slowly from Jean's trim ankles, dwelled fondly on the shapely legs, passed up to the slender curve of her waist; then he sighed and lifted his gaze to her eyes. There was a grin on his homely face.

"Whose did you say were the million dollar gams?" he asked meaningfully.

Jean reddened slightly, and even the white flesh above her low neckline took on a delicate pink. "Miss Delroy," she went on, "wanted to

that much, any theatrical headliner in a private detective's office was likely to mean a healthy fee.

"I'll pray for your soul," Jean told him as she went out to usher in his prospective client.

CARR straightened his tie, smoothed his hair, and pulled his chair straighter to his desk. When Francine Delroy came in, he was busily going through a file of papers on his desk.

At Carr's gesture she took a chair at one side, and the detective gulped and wetted his lips. The actress certainly didn't intend to let any eye overlook those much advertised legs. Maybe she wasn't showing a full million bucks' worth, but she was showing at least half that. The

chiffon that covered them was so sheer that Carr had to look twice to be sure that she was wearing any hosiery at all!

"Why, Mr. Carr! I hardly expected you to be so young—and handsome!"

Carr winced. His plain features had never been among his prize possessions.

But he decided at once that he didn't care what Francine Delroy said, just so long as she would let him look at her.

Large violet eyes and a pink and white roundness to her face gave her an innocently, doll-like look. There was a naïveté even in the careless way she leaned forward, elbows on his desk, apparently unaware of how her expensively made frock dropped too low at the throat. . . .

Just looking at her sent a warm glow through Carr's body.

He grimaced. "Handsome!" But his fingers strayed to his tie. Maybe she liked the he-man, rugged type. He cleared his throat. "Now about this threatening letter—?"

A tiny frown appeared in the celebrated beauty's smooth white forehead. Her fingers went nervously to the hem of her dress and twitched it down to cover another hundredth of an inch of her glorious legs. "I'm really awfully frightened, Mr. Carr." She fumbled with the catch of her pocketbook.

"I received this letter through the mail. And they say they'll kill me if I go to the police. I went to my doctor, Dr. Eleanor Beck, the famous lady doctor, and she suggested I come to you." She put the letter before him on his desk.

As he picked it up, Carr noticed

the one p.m. postmark. He slid the single sheet from the envelope.

Francine Delroy:

Put ten thousand dollars in small, unmarked bills in a brown paper bag. Take the bag to the Grand Central Station at 5 p.m. and sit in the waiting room for exactly ten minutes. Then, leave the bag on your bench and go directly home.

If you fail, or if you go to the police, you will die at eight p.m.

The note was signed with the customary five-pointed star that had become known as the gang's signature.

Carr's eyes narrowed and little ridges stood out on his jaw. The letter was postmarked one p.m., yet according to the *Times-Herald*, the gang had been arrested shortly after noon! That was cutting things fine! In fact, it didn't seem reasonable, unless the Star gang had had some one mail it outside the six who had been caught.

The detective turned to his client. "The Star gang, Miss Delroy, was arrested early this afternoon. This note must be the work of some practical joker." He tried hard to keep his eyes from the enticing curves of her figure, so perfectly emphasized by the thin silk of her dress. "Under the circumstances, I think you may safely disregard it."

"Why, you darling!" With all the impulsiveness of her widely known temperament, Francine Delroy flashed to her feet, rounded the corner of Carr's desk, and threw both arms about his neck. Her warm, moist lips burned his cheek, and the heady perfume she wore was

like a sudden intoxicant in his nostrils.

INSTINCTIVELY, Carr's arm encircled her waist and drew her to him. His mouth sought the searing crimson of hers and found it.

For a minute she was stiff in his embrace; then suddenly she was returning his caresses as avidly as he gave them. Her arms about his neck were a steadily tightening noose. The beat of her breath against his cheek set him on fire. She moaned low in her throat.

Then abruptly she stiffened, became rigid in his arms. Her slender body seemed to be gripped by a spasm. Then just as suddenly she collapsed utterly in his arms.

He caught her shoulders as she slid toward the floor and eased her to the rug. A thousand ghastly thoughts rushed through him. Had the woman fainted? Was it a heart attack? Could she be dead?

Frantically, he knelt beside her, searching for her pulse with trembling fingers.

She lay on her side, one arm doubled beneath her. Her fall had disarranged her dress, baring those million dollar legs, but John Carr was in no mood just now for the enjoyment of feminine beauty.

His hand under Francine Delroy's breast could detect no vaguest sign of a heartbeat. Carr's lips were white and drawn.

A client dead in his private office! Dropped dead while she was in his arms! The Carr Agency was sunk! Jean Larkin would have to tell that he and the actress were alone in his private office. He envisioned the headlines.

His bleak eyes brightened with a spark of hope as an idea came to him. There was just the possibility that some one else had come into the reception room before Jean had admitted Miss Delroy. It didn't mean much, but it was something to start with.

He picked up the Star note again. "—you will die at eight p.m.—" Hell! It was only about four now. Carr's brain was whirling aimlessly like a whirligig. The Star gang were in jail. They had killed in one instance—Mavis Swan, another actress, with cyanide.

Swiftly he bent over the woman at his feet and sniffed at her parted lips. It was very faint, but the almond odor was there! Cold sweat broke out on the detective. The Girl with the Million Dollar Legs had been killed by an instantaneous poison while she was in his arms!

Trying to act calm, he went out into the outer office, closing the inner door behind him. "Tell me, Jean, have there been any other callers while Miss Delroy was here?"

JEAN LARKIN looked up from her typing. She must have seen something on his face, for her eyebrows lifted. "No." She set her lips and turned back to her work.

"You're sure?" With a long forefinger he wiped perspiration from his forehead.

A little white line showed around Jean's red lips. "Of course, I'm sure. And before you go back, you'd better wipe some of the lipstick off your face." She began pounding her typewriter keys furiously.

"Listen, Jean, never mind that now. I'll explain later." While he

talked, Carr was working with his pocket handkerchief. His manner was deadly serious. "I want you to think as carefully as you can. Tell me exactly what Miss Delroy said to you, word for word, when she came in." He was gripping her typewriter desk so tightly that his knuckles were white.

"Well, she asked if you were in. I told her to sit down for a minute, and she sat in that chair there." Jean pointed. "Before I had a chance to announce her, she told me she had been threatened by the Star gang and that Dr. Eleanor Beck, that woman doctor, had recommended you as a bodyguard. Then I came in to your office, and came right out and sent her in. Why? Is anything wrong?"

Carr answered heavily. "Yes. She's dead. She was poisoned with cyanide. She died in my office."

Jean gasped and consternation clouded her features for a minute, but she immediately regained her control. She tried to smile, but her effort was feeble.

"So what, John? We *are* in a jam? Where do we go from here?" As if the real meaning of what he had told her had just dawned on her, she displayed sudden fright. "But that's impossible! Cyanide acts instantaneously. No one could have—"

Carr seated himself wearily. "No. No one could have. Yet some one did. It looks like a Star job. Yet the Stars are supposed to be locked up. When the cops come, tell them all you know. We've got nothing to hide—but, wait! Already I've let five minutes pass without calling them. Another fifteen or twenty minutes can't make much difference.

And I've got a hunch! Suppose you stay right here at your desk and keep everybody out of my private office. Tell anybody that I'll be back inside half an hour. I'm going out for a few minutes. If anybody tries to force his way in, knock him cold!"

The girl's shoulders were quivering when he went out and it was obvious that she was trying to keep her eyes away from the door to the inner office.

CARR didn't wait for an elevator but took the stairs, four at a time, to the street. From his office it was only a block and a half down Lexington to the Parker Building. With only a glance at the bulletin board, he took an elevator to the sixth floor.

He didn't stop to knock when he reached the door he wanted, just turned the knob and strode in.

A cute blonde in nurse's white looked up from a closet at the side of the reception room. She frowned. "Dr. Beck isn't in at the moment but you may wait. I, myself, am leaving for the rest of the afternoon, but she'll be in any minute." She started to put on a wrap over her uniform.

Carr said: "Thanks." He picked up a magazine from a rack and sat down.

The girl cast a final look around and went out, before Carr had a chance to say anything that might detain her.

The detective waited until she'd had a chance to get to the elevators; then he was on his feet, headed for Dr. Beck's private office.

It was a large room that put his own place to shame. A glass-top

desk stood in the center of the floor. Cases of medical books lined the walls. From the window behind the desk Carr could see the bank building across the street. He strode across the heavily carpeted floor to the open door that led into an adjoining examination room.

There was an operating table, cabinets full of surgical implements, sterilizers, everything to make a doctor's office complete—even to an X-ray machine. The only window was curtained, and a white enameled table before it. Carr picked up the bottle and paper box on the table. The bottle's label said SALOL. The box contained empty gelatin capsules.

Disappointed in the fruitlessness of his hunch, Carr turned to go back to his own office, to call the police and let them handle the case. He was brought up short by the shrill ringing of the telephone in Dr. Beck's private office.

Impulsively, Carr hurried in. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, he thought, and picked up the instrument. "Dr. Beck's office," he began, when he recognized the voice on the other end of the line. It was Jean Larkin!

She was almost hysterical. "Is Mr. Carr there? Please, if he's there, let—"

Carr spoke hurriedly. "Listen, Jean, you're speaking to me now—"

"Then hurry back here! I thought I might find you there. There's another actress here, and she says she's got a threatening Star letter. I'm in your private office and she's out in the reception room. Hurry!"

"Steady, honey! Don't worry!"

And then Carr thought he saw the solution to the whole thing! It struck him with stunning force and his voice became hoarse and strained. "Listen, Jean! Do exactly what I say. Take that woman to the lady's room and make her throw up! Make her vomit! I don't care how you do it! But make her. Rush! Don't waste a second—"

Carr almost bit the end off his tongue when he realized the meaning of that small, cold, hard circle at the back of his neck. The steel prodded.

"Tell her it's all right; then hang up." The voice had a deadly huskiness.

"Okay, Jean. I'll be seeing you." He put the telephone down, yet did not dare to turn around or to reach for the gun under his left arm. He stood stock-still, half leaning on the glass-topped desk. The pressure eased up and he straightened up and turned slowly, careful to keep his hands in sight.

IT WAS his first meeting with Dr. Beck. She was a big woman, full-breasted, a little too stout. Though she wore no make-up, her mouth was very red and her eyes very dark. Her suit of clothes was plain and severely tailored, yet it couldn't hide the essential femininity of her. For all her size, she was a woman of very definite allure.

Carr remembered what he had heard of her. She was very much a woman's doctor, and she catered only to women of wealth and social position. Hers was a Park Avenue practice, not always highly ethical, but tremendously profitable.

She faced Carr now at a distance of about six feet. The business-like automatic in her hand covered Carr without wavering.

"Back into my examination room," she ordered. Even though she was a woman, the detective realized that she was no more to be trifled with than a man at this moment. Her every move was compounded of cold, deadly efficiency.

Step by step, Carr went backward, and step by step the doctor followed.

"On that table, please," she commanded. The table was the operating table!

With a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach, Carr obeyed. His eyes strayed for a second to the cases of scalpels, clips, scissors, forceps, and he shuddered.

Dr. Beck backed up to one cabinet and, reaching behind her, found a shiny hypodermic. She took up a tiny glass ampoule and came up slowly toward the table. A cruel smile twisted her lips and her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Lie perfectly still," she said. "You will find this less distasteful than a pistol shot might be." She broke the tip off the ampoule and filled the hypodermic.

While she worked, Carr slid his right hand nearer to his shoulder holster. Lying on his back as he was, he was bound to find any draw slow and clumsy, but he'd have to risk it.

The doctor's voice came again, almost emotionlessly. "Put your hand any nearer to that gun and I'll shoot!" Carr lay still.

Dr. Beck stood over him now, the automatic in her right hand pointed unwaveringly at his heart.

In her left hand she held the filled hypodermic.

Carr's eyes were held, fascinated, as he watched a tiny drop of yellow liquid seep from the glass barrel of the instrument to the hair-like point of the needle.

The doctor explained. "This drug will do weird things in your nerves. I'll be frank in telling you that it will reduce you to idiocy, but you'll have no worries, no disturbing thoughts. You'll be quite happy. First, I'd like to know, though, how you knew—"

Carr's voice was strained and shrill. "You can't get away with this! The police—"

"—are stupid." The automatic moved until it actually touched his temple. "Are you going to answer my question?"

FOR the second time there came the discordant note of the telephone bell in the other room. Involuntarily, Dr. Beck started and half turned. It was Carr's opportunity, and he made the most of it.

With a frantic chopping motion he struck at the wrist of her gunhand. There was a blast and hot flame kissed his lips. Glass crashed across the room. At the same moment Carr rolled and dropped to the floor across the table from the doctor. Almost as he landed he drove the wheeled table into her mid-section.

The gun went off again and once more glass crashed.

But the weight of the table had knocked the doctor's feet from under her. She went down in a flurry of skirts and plump legs.

Carr was over the table in a

bound. He dropped on the doctor with all his weight and felt flesh flatten under him.

She fought like a man. He could feel her muscles jerk and strain as she whipped her legs about wildly and tried, at the same time, to jam the gun against him.

Carr drove a hard right for her jaw, but her head moved before the blow and his fist slammed against the floor, shooting pain all the way to his shoulder.

Her knee came up while he was off balance and knocked him sprawling. She scrambled to her feet before he could get his face off the floor.

Her dress was ruined, torn from neck to waist. Her breasts heaved with each labored breath. But she still held the automatic and the hypodermic, which was miraculously unbroken!

Carr could see the gun leveling again, and he could read death in its muzzle. Twisting like a cat, he lunged for Dr. Beck's surprisingly trim ankles. He caught them and the gun exploded, almost together. He felt the slug sear his thigh as the doctor sat down with a thud. Her ripped skirt swirled high, whipping across his face and almost blinding him. He was aware that she was jabbing at him with the needle.

The detective tried to jerk backward but he was slow. He felt the bite of the needle in his left wrist. A wave of horror exploded in his brain, and he went temporarily mad. His right fist lashed out and caught the doctor squarely in the stomach. She gasped. He lashed out again, and the needle sailed from her hand

into a far corner. A third time he struck with all his strength.

The doctor's gun exploded again and she seemed to leap backward. She caromed off the operating table and went flat.

Carr scrambled to his feet, heedless of the pain in his thigh. Dr. Beck lay at his feet, her clothing torn and disordered. A slight movement of her breasts told him that she still breathed.

He stared at her dully, unimpressed by the magnificently Amazonian proportions of her figure. Only one thought obsessed his mind.

Poison! He'd been poisoned with a drug that would rob him of his mind! Already it was at work in his veins.

A wave of sickness swept over him and left him weak and shaken. He was aware of the trickle of blood down his leg from the wound in his thigh. Dizziness seized him and blackness came up around him. He groped for something to hang onto, but this blackness was engulfing, smothering him.

He heard a sound behind him and wondered dully what it was. He thought of lovely Jean Larkin and thought he saw her face, but he put that down to the mindlessness that was already overtaking him. He felt himself falling and could do nothing to catch himself. He let himself go into the blackness that reached out to receive him. . . .

VOICES came to John Carr's ears, the gruff voices of men and the softer voice of a woman. The woman's voice sounded like Jean Larkin. It was! She was kneeling beside him.

"I can't figure it." He knew that voice, too. It was Police Sergeant Pell's. "Looks as if John went haywire, busted in here, ripped off the doctor's clothes, and then knocked her cold."

Carr tried to sit up but Jean held him down. "Let me up," he grumbled. "Let me tell that dumb cop I don't go around tearing women's clothes off!"

Pell leaned over him. "I got a lot of time," he said. "What's your story?"

Carr's jaw felt stiff and heavy, but he tried. "You cops were all wet on the Star business," he blurted. "You know Francine Delroy was killed in my office after you made your arrests? That pretty well cleared the men you'd pinched."

He got more strength, looking into Jean's lovely eyes, resting his head luxuriously on the softness of her lap. "There was one thing that gave me ideas. You know the Delroy gal was killed hours before the time set? I tried to figure that out. And then I got it. She was sent to my office to scare other women who got Star notes. You remember Mavis Swan was killed when she went to the police.

"This one was killed to warn other victims that it wasn't safe to visit private detectives either.

"Francine Delroy got her note and came here to Dr. Beck for advice. Dr. Beck found out that Francine wasn't going to be a willing sucker. She wouldn't pay. So the doctor sent her to me, after giving

her a capsule to quiet her nerves.

"The capsule was filled with cyanide, but it was coated with salol to keep it from dissolving for an hour or so. The doctor had figured it pretty well. She calculated that the actress would be in my office when it dissolved. Then—blooey!"

He looked up suddenly at Jean and caught her wrist. "What about that other woman, honey? The one you phoned about?"

"I—I made her—regurgitate." Jean shuddered.

Carr felt a haze coming over his eyes. The drug was finally working on him, he thought.

Jean said: "I thought something was wrong when your voice changed over the phone. So as soon as I got rid of that woman, I called the police, and we came over here." She shuddered.

Sergeant Pell had been prowling around the room during the latter part of the conversation. "Say, John!" he called. "Know what this is? I just found it in the corner. It's a hypodermic full of some yellow stuff with the needle busted off short."

Carr drew a deep sigh. "Barrel full!" he whispered to himself. "Forget it, Pell. You'd better look after the doctor. I have a few things to take up with my secretary. I'll be down to Headquarters some time later."

The haze had cleared from his eyes and he knew that there was certainly no idiocy in wanting to be alone with Jean.



As told to
A. E. ULLMAN

The GIRL



NO ONE could have foreseen that the shooting of a middle-aged employe of the Boston & Main railroad was only a prelude to another murder that was to present a picture so horrible, so fantastic, so utterly unbelievable as to be without parallel in our criminal annals. And in the center of that picture there was posed a soft-eyed young woman whose charm and tender beauty halted the breath of all beholders.

The first murder occurred on July 12, 1923, in Lynn, Massachusetts. Arthur White, a railroad clerk, was shot to death on his way home. He had taken a short cut from the terminal, as was his wont, and had been waylaid by the killer. Four bullets spattered out his life's blood and his body was found shortly after dawn.

The number of shots fired, as well as the fact that there had been no robbery of the person, led the police to believe that it had not been a hold-up.

The puzzle was that Arthur White appeared to be one who could not have earned such an enemy. His quiet and uneventful life was an open book to his family and friends. A homebody, if there ever was one, his goings and comings were as regular as clockwork.

Well, then, was there some mad killer at large? That was the question the police asked themselves and

answered in the negative. Their one clue was a vague description of the assassin furnished by a woman. Aroused by the four shots, she had looked out of her window in time to see a man running from the spot where the body was found some hours later. The man was slender and of medium height, she said, and was bare-headed.

Detectives questioned the widow, to whom White had been married for thirty years, over and over again, hoping they might turn up some link of his past, some hint as to an enemy made and possibly forgotten. They were more direct with the son, Lawrence, upon his hurried arrival from Providence, Rhode Island. Their hints about his father stepping out, the probability of some shapely young cutie making him forget his fireside, only brought indignant denials from young White.

Viola White, the son's young wife, was hardly questioned by the police. She had arrived for a visit on the morning of the eighteenth, shortly after her father-in-law's body had been discovered. Their faces softened as they took in the wistful, gracefully slender figure in a rocker, lovely head bent over a tiny garment that was being sewed by her dainty hands. When Viola looked up at them appealingly, her long lashes fluttering over limpid blue eyes, her tender lips were so tremulous that she could hardly speak.

A Story of Fact in which the Names of

JEKYL-HYDE

She was sweet and demure and winsome—but, at the same time, she was a cold-blooded, ferocious killer. What strange inner urge propelled this mysterious dual-personality from one extreme to another?

After that the sleuths started the rounds of White's friends and fellow workers, their eyes peeled for that slender figure described by the woman eye witness. Probing and questioning, backtracking over years of his life, his daily movements for months checked, they were left in the air. As for women, that was out. The railroad clerk had no eye for them. It was a jest with the pretty stenographers in the railroad office that no flashing of eyes or fluttering of skirts above prettily rounded knees had evoked even so much as a stare from him. Well, it just looked plain screwy to the investigators.

MEANWHILE the dead man's estate had been settled. Mrs. White came into possession of sufficient money to pay off a mortgage on her modest home, and leave her something more than two thousand dollars in cash. This she deposited in a bank. She had some talk with her son about putting the money in business with him. Viola, it appeared, had some money coming through a lawyer from some relative which was to be added.

"It would make things so much safer for baby," Viola commented simply.

Lawrence looked appealingly at his mother and caught her pitying eye, but neither said a word.

Nevertheless, young Lawrence was in a contented frame of mind when he left his mother's home on the evening of August 12 to take in a motion picture, to which both mother and wife had declined an invitation. He returned some hours later to find both Mrs. White and Viola gone.

In amazement he hurried through the house, then dashed out into the street to look for them. After a while he returned to find a note he had at first overlooked in the living-room. All it stated was that they had gone to Boston, to visit a brother of his mother.

It sounded cuckoo to the dumb-founded Lawrence. He knew that his mother and uncle were not given to visiting one another. And, moreover, he had sat through dinner with the two women, and neither one had so much as hinted at this sudden trip. Why should mother and wife, to whom he was devoted, pull a fast

Persons and Places Have Been Disguised

one like that on him? It just didn't add up.

The police were interested in this unexpected development, but the young man could only exhibit the note. His mother and wife had simply decided to get away from the scene of the tragedy for a few days. Nevertheless, Lynn's detectives made a thorough job of it. They were not long in learning that Mrs. White had withdrawn two thousand dollars from the bank in the form of a cashier's check.

It was while they were thinking this over that the cashier's check was returned to the local bank, having been cashed by a bank in Boston. And it was then that the all-important clue turned up that was to crack one of the strangest cases that detectives ever coped with. For the endorsement on the check was a forgery!

Not a doubt of that was in their minds. One of the detectives had retained that note to her son in Mrs. White's handwriting, and the two signatures were totally dissimilar. At once a telegram was sent to the Widow White's brother in Boston. He answered that he had neither seen nor heard from her since the day of the tragedy.

WITH the passing of some days, and no word from his women folks, Lawrence White was almost a nervous wreck. He set out for Providence, R. I., just as a telegram came from Viola, only to miss him by an hour. So he arrived at his modest cottage to find his girl wife there, safe and sound, her face lighting with love at sight of him. Never was the young husband tired of looking at her fresh beauty, the grace of

her slender figure, the glow of her limpid blue eyes. Her brow unruffled, she was rocking and crooning to an *imaginary infant*.

"Baby must have some new things, Larry," she said, and looked up, her eyes starry.

He was used to these strange spells, had long humored her in the delusion. It was the one pathetic flaw in his otherwise happy life with his dear Viola.

A sweet and winsome wife, a church-goer, kind and generous to a fault, this split in her bright and gay personality occasionally manifested itself.

Lawrence was overjoyed to see her. He gathered Viola and her imaginary child, a large doll, in his warm embrace and kissed them both. He was incoherent at first, but presently begged her to put the baby to bed. Dutifully his little wife went into the nursery she had contrived in an alcove and put it in its crib.

Then she gaily tripped back into the room and flung herself on his lap. He clutched her tightly and for a time responded to her ardor. But questions kept popping in his head and he couldn't keep still. To the first she replied that she had returned home the day before. Why, hadn't he received her telegram? He told her he had not and then inquired as to the whereabouts of his mother.

Viola did not know, she sadly averred, kissing him between words. His mother had become so cranky and quarrelsome. She had parted from Mrs. White in Boston.

"But surely she told you where she was going?" Larry said.

"She wouldn't even speak to me

when we parted," pouted the little wife.

SUDDENLY she listened, then leaped from his lap and disappeared into the nursery. As she returned, she was cooing to the doll and fondling it. Then she held it down before her husband.

Lawrence nodded to her through his blinding tears and turned away. When he turned back to her, she was humming and gently rocking the doll to and fro. It would be useless to question her further. He must communicate with relatives, locate his mother.

In his communications he stated that Mrs. White had a considerable sum of money in her possession, some two thousand dollars of her own money, as well as a slightly larger sum Viola had received through a lawyer. As the detectives before him, he received a negative answer in each instance.

While waiting for these answers, Lawrence managed to interrogate his young wife further as to the happenings in Boston. She changed her story slightly, but he did not notice it. She had intrusted her own money to Mrs. White, she repeated, because, as he knew, they had agreed to put the money in his business. However, they had had a few sharp words about nothing in particular, and then her mother-in-law had changed her mind.

Mrs. White had given back half of her four thousand dollars to her, claiming the other for an indebtedness. She had been unable to reason with her about it, for the mother had gone into a fit during which she declared that she knew who had killed her husband. Then she had flung

herself off and disappeared in the throng about the station.

Promptly the detectives on the White murder case followed the lead Viola's story had provided. After quick and thorough investigation they could find no trail leading away from Boston. So they started on the back-trail to the Lynn home from which the two women had hurriedly departed. They were startled to find the widow's luggage there, packed and strapped as if ready for a long stay elsewhere. In a tin box were a number of valuable papers. Here was more mystery, and just as deep as the rest of the mystery surrounding the murder of Arthur White. Then up popped the climaxing clue, though they did not know it for the moment—a railroad pass! Mrs. White had not used the annual pass issued to her as the wife of a railroad employe. Decidedly, she had left in a hurry. And, to their minds, hers was a strange hurry.

Now and then their thoughts would revert to Viola White, only to be dismissed as they thought of that wistful little figure bending over a tiny garment. And then came a phone call from Dr. O. O. Scott, a psychiatrist, well-known to the police and the public. "In confidence, from a medical friend, I have learned that the young daughter-in-law in the White murder case suffers from delusions. This is a dangerous neurosis, my friends and you should look into it." Well, the detectives agreed to look into it. So now they started to follow the trail of the daughter-in-law. Before the day was over they had made another startling discovery.

Viola White, in every detail, answered the description of the young

woman who had cashed the cashier's check for \$2,000.

With that clue the man-hunters now became woman-hunters. They followed the tracks of Viola like so many bloodhounds. Before the day was done they had trailed her to Malvern, Mass., where she had remained some hours, and then onto Providence, Rhode Island. They even traced a taxi she had taken from the railroad station. She had stopped at a bank on her way home and deposited about nineteen hundred dollars. They were hot on Viola White's little French heels.

PRESENTLY they were facing Viola and Lawrence in the parlor of their modest home. After questioning them and listening to their stories, with never a hint of their own discoveries, they moved with dramatic suddenness and placed the two under arrest. In Lynn they were put through a mild third degree and questioned over and over, their stories repeated again and again. Young Lawrence was almost distracted by this, as well as worry over his mother, but he seemed to have no fear of his little wife being involved. If anything he appeared the more guilty of the two, or so the police interrogators thought.

She sat and looked at the detectives who were baiting her with questions. This had gone on hour after hour. Questions had been fired at her like slugs from a machine gun. She had no time to think, to study, to fend off. She was tired almost to the point of exhaustion. But she would not crack. They continued to pound, but it was like getting sparks from a flint. On the point of collapse themselves, one of them thought of

sending for the noted psychiatrist. Dr. Scott hurriedly joined them, talked alone with Viola White for some time, and then reentered the room where the detective waited. Viola left his side.

"It's true! I killed *both* of them!" Her first words were quiet enough, but the last held a despairing note.

They let her rest then, and gave her a stimulant. Some hours later she was unfolding the horrible story of the premeditated murders.

"I had to do it!" she shrieked time after time. "I had to!" It was her delusion that the elder Whites had robbed her of four thousand dollars just as it was her delusion that she was the mother of a child.

ACCORDING to her confession she had come to Lynn on the afternoon of July 11. Knowing of the short-cut home her father-in-law was in the habit of taking she waited for him along the way. Arthur White had derided her claim and made her furious. Whereupon she had drawn the small revolver she had purchased in a pawn shop and shot him four times. She had loitered about the post office and the railroad station until morning. From a lunch-room, where she had breakfasted and passed the time, she telephoned the elder Mrs. White at ten o'clock, an hour coinciding with the arrival of the train from her home city. Her mother-in-law had informed her of the discovery of the dead body and she had hastened to the other's side. It sounded like the appalling truth. But of that slender figure in masculine attire, for some reason, Viola said not a word.

She had stayed with Mrs. White,
(Continued on Page 124)



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THE GIRL JEKYL-HYDE

(Continued from Page 120)

she went on, to comfort her in her bereavement, and Larry had come on to lighten the burden. By the time the life insurance was paid and the estate settled, her mother-in-law was in a more settled frame of mind. Now her story was that she had quarreled with the older woman about four thousand dollars, which she claimed to have loaned her; the story of the money she claimed to have received from a lawyer, after they had started on their journey, was completely forgotten. Anyhow, the widow evaded the matter and suddenly decided on a hurried trip to Boston. In this Viola joined her.

Upon arriving at Boston they had rented a car to go driving in the country. It was on this ride that the second murder had taken place.

Viola had once more brought up the question of the money she claimed to have loaned the older woman. The latter ignored her, but she persisted. Mrs. White had at first become angry, and then furious. In the midst of the violent quarrel which followed the widow attacked her. Viola drew the pistol that had already caused the death of Arthur White and shot her. After which she had taken the dead woman's jewelry and her purse, with the \$2,000 check. Hiding the body in the woods, at a spot not far from Malden, she turned the hired car back and returned it to the owners. Then she calmly went to the bank, where she had earlier in the day cashed a small check, and cashed the one for two thousand dollars. Fol-

lowing that she had traveled back to Malden, and thence to Providence.

VIOLA was placed on trial in mid January of 1924. Great difficulty was found in selecting a jury to try the young and pretty defendant, and one panel of jurors was exhausted before the box was filled. The courtroom was jammed to suffocation and the sidewalk black with people outside. As able as were her counsel, it was soon evident that they had but one plea—insanity!

Various witnesses were brought forward to confirm this. Their stories were much the same. Viola had often talked to them about her baby, its ailments, its cute little ways, as if it really existed. Her husband testified about her watchful nights, her croonings, her patter about the non-existent infant.

Viola appeared indifferent to all this. But when her parents admitted that for years they had doubted the daughter's sanity, she flared up and would have none of it.

Finally the evidence was all in and the jury out. Though the defense had been handicapped by the death of Dr. O. O. Scott, the psychiatrist, whose finger first pointed to Viola, the betting odds were that the jury would be hung or the young murderess sent to an institute for the criminal insane. But the picture of inoffensive Arthur White, dead in the road, and the crumpled figure of his good wife in the woods, must have been before their eyes.

The verdict was: "Guilty of murder in the first degree!"

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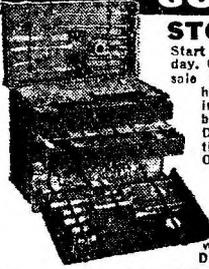
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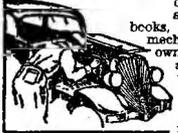
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