

June 15¢

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## The ENGLISH KNIFE

by Robert A. Sarron



# Don't Look Now!

but if you want to see a real

# HE-MAN BODY...



**W**HAT do people say when they see you on the beach? Then you show what you REALLY are—a HE-MAN or a weakling! Do girls' eyes give you the silent "ha-ha"? Or can you FEEL their admiring glances?

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*Charles Atlas*

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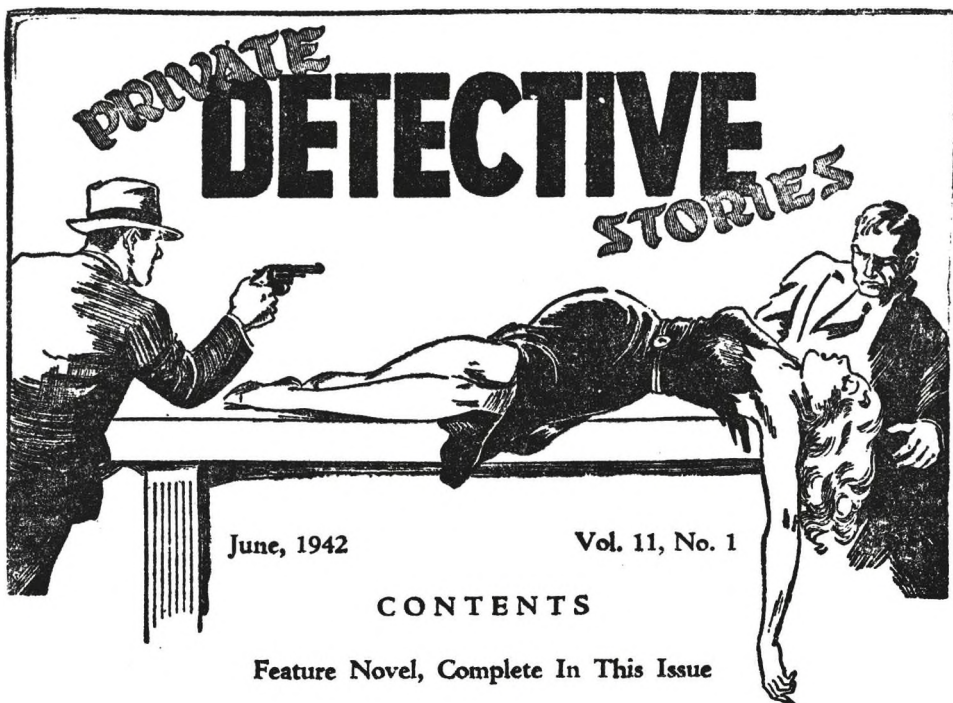


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June, 1942

Vol. 11, No. 1

CONTENTS

Feature Novel, Complete In This Issue

<b>THE ENGLISH KNIFE</b> .....	6
<i>It was grim Nazi humor that gave the detective his chance—a chance to save his own sweetheart as well as dozens of other victims of the Axis.</i>	
by Robert A. Garron	
Novelettes and Short Stories	
<b>THE CASE OF THE HIDDEN BRIDE</b> .....	52
<i>Anything from a bottle of wine to a pretty girl may wear a phony label, and Honest John had learned long ago to take nothing at its face value!</i>	
by E. Hoffmann Price	
<b>NOT QUITE DEAD</b> .....	68
<i>They'd invited Doyle to be present at the killing of a glamour-girl, which gave him a chance to demonstrate why he was called "Grave Digger."</i>	
by Laurence Donovan	
<b>DEATH'S CALLING CARD</b> .....	84
<i>The killer had planned everything perfectly, and death put the end to an unsanctified love. But, as in all "perfect crimes," there were a few loose threads . . .</i>	
by Randolph Barr	
<b>EXIT DYING</b> .....	95
<i>Who would murder a few harmless pigeons? Or could it be that pigeons were less harmless than they seemed? And what was the red-head's part in it all?</i>	
by Frank Decker	
<b>ONE PART OF REVENGE</b> .....	106
<i>The detective was sure the girl was guilty, yet, strangely, he wanted to do all he could to save her! Not just that she was lovely to look at, but . . .</i>	
by Ralph Carle	

*The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.*

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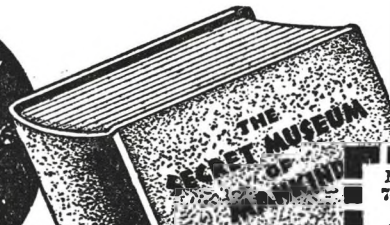
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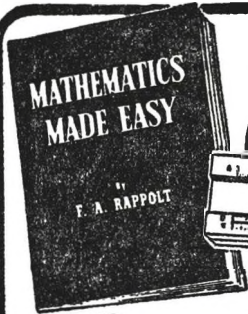
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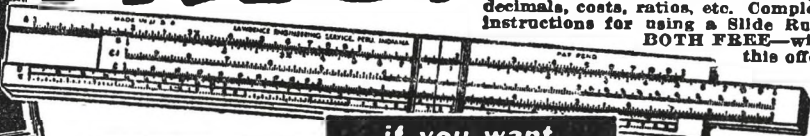
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## Featured Novel—Complete In This Issue

By **ROBERT A. GARRON**



**I**T SEEMS that there were a couple of bluejackets. . . . Those two were practically ubiquitous that night, for everywhere that Andy Gouge took Gail Humphrey, the gobs were sure to be. It should

have seemed fairly peculiar to him after a time, for he was a man of lively suspicions, and he was a private investigator by calling, to boot. What was more, there was something vaguely familiar about one of the gobs.



*Perhaps it was because of a girl that the detective agreed to go halfway around the world for an old lady. But it was grim Nazi humor that gave him his chance to save not only his sweetheart but dozens of other victims*



# The English Knife

They were down on Greenwich, and it was going on eleven o'clock. The place they had just come out of was called The Mighty Nice Tap

Room. The night was Springlike. There hadn't been a trace of snow yet this Winter.

"Oh, I forgot my purse," Gail said irritably.

"I'll get it," Andy offered, likewise irritated.

"No, I will," she insisted, and popped back into the bar.

He started to follow, but his way was blocked by that pair of gobs. Being moderately skizzled, the only thing he thought of at first was that bluejackets certainly wore funny



The Nazi stalked down the narrow deck and hit Gouge over the head.



pants. They were tight in the rear, floppy in the legs, and the legs were creased inwards at the sides.

"Quit shoving," said the one named Hans Maxl, giving Andy a brisk shove. He had a strong accent.

Heinz Roettger was the other one, bigger, and extremely fair in complexion.

He asked, "Oh, you want to make something of it?"

And when Gouge gestured with his arms to keep his balance, Roettger expertly hung a hard, knotty fist on his jaw. There was a camera hung from Gouge's shoulder. Maxl grabbed it, and with a violent jerk snapped the strap supporting it.

So mad that he couldn't speak nor spit, the detective hauled off and swung a haymaker into Maxl's teeth, and the man pitched to the walk, his face foolish with surprise. But there were two of them, and while he was trading blows with Roettger, who evidently had been in the ring from the way he sparred, Maxl was getting up. Andy knew that he was getting sandwiched, and tried to get his back to the wall. He fainted, and then it was as though Roettger deliberately let him get inside. For he pinked the gob's nose, and then crossed over with his left. Roettger ducked, but the piston-quick blow caught him on the cheekbone so hard that Andy all but broke his hand.

He never found out what happened, but it was very simple. At a safe distance behind him, Maxl swung the heavy camera on the end of the straps and brought it down on his skull.

When he opened his eyes he found, after staring dazedly around,

that he was in the gutter behind a parked car. There was his cigarette, broken in two and still burning, so things had really happened fast. Only now, the photogenic Gail stepped from the Mighty Nice, looking around for him perplexedly. Her figure was the kind called boyish, except for her breast, and no lad ever had legs like hers.

Sighting Andy, she approached and stood on the curb. Looking down interestedly, she asked, "Sloppy?"

Gouge got to his feet with caution, groaning involuntarily. Then a police car backed around the corner into Greenwich; a cop got out and asked, "Well, what were you doing, mister?"

"What was I doing?" Gouge asked blankly. He felt terrible, and could manage only small breaths.

"Them gobs said you started it," said the cop. "You bumped them when they were coming out of the bar. What did you do, swing at 'em before you looked?"

"What is all this?" Gail asked impatiently.

"As Shakespeare puts it," Gouge explained owlishly, "I was set upon. There were at least six of them."

"Say-y," said the cop, "let's see you walk."

"I can walk, all right," he insisted. Then he remembered. "Hell, my camera's gone."

"They didn't have no camera," the cop observed.

They looked around, all of them except Gouge, the detective, who was afraid that he would fall over if he bent down. The cops acted a bit troubled, as if they believed that the service men had waylaid a civil-



ian and given him a shellacking just for the hell of it. The camera was a Leica; it had been taken apart, and was lying on the running board of the parked car. The film had been removed, Gouge found, and the winding spool replaced. For he automatically tested the camera to see whether it had been damaged in the melee. When the takeup spool didn't turn, he took off the lid to see why, and the film cartridge was gone.

It didn't look to the cops as though a man escorting a girl like the beautiful Gail would be going around looking for trouble with the Navy, so the cop only warned him, "Don't *never* take a poke at a blue-jacket; they got lots of friends."

Gouge moved slowly and morosely down the street with Gail, thinking bitter thoughts, and hardly aware of her presence beside him.

AT ABINGDON SQUARE they got a cruising hack, and started across town for an address off Tompkins Square, on Tenth.

"Wither away?" she asked.

"That's my doctor's address," he explained.

"What's the matter with you?"

"That's what I'm going to find out." For, the way he felt, he was perfectly certain that they had put the boots to him when he was down and out cold. He had broken bones.

"You're really not just loopy? Feel sick?"

"I can drink you under the table any time."

"We'll start from scratch some night and find out. But what really happened back there?"

"Two sailors in uniform bumped

me when I was following you into the bar, and climbed me. And it was dirty fighting, some of it. They just jumped me, that's all."

Her reaction was typical. "And things like that will happen to you all your life unless you get out of this business you're in. There'll always be trouble, and I don't think I want any part of it."

"So that's the thanks I get for doing you a favor," he said bitterly. "Just because I happened to have a camera. If I hadn't been hopping around the waterfront taking pictures for you, this wouldn't have happened."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked dangerously.

"In the first place, those guys weren't bluejackets—not ours, anyhow. They were just masquerading. In the second place, they sneaked the film out of the camera."

"But that was a blank film, wasn't it? I've got the exposed cartridge here in my purse." She opened the purse to make sure the cartridge was there. It was.

Those sailor lads were smart. They knew how to open the camera in a jiffy and how to extract the film when they saw the cops coming along, but they didn't have time to find out whether it was a brand new cartridge, or not.

Gail said, puzzled, "I don't remember that we took any shots in particular."

"Only of the *Hansel A. T. Eeuwens*," said Gouge in the same peculiar, cautious voice which he'd been using.

"But that was merely an odd-looking boat," she said.

"The very oddest."



"What could we have got? There were only those Lascar sailors running around barefoot."

"Plus the Dutchmen," added Gouge in his dry, sour voice.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded impatiently.

"Who, me?" he asked blankly. He didn't want to talk, and then he did, bewildered and frantic like a hurt animal that snaps and worries at its own wounds. She had the damndest hair, fitting her mischievous head in exact, sculptured curls, and the color as red as strong tea. She gave him a little smile, and then looked straight ahead, thinking.

The ship which they were talking about was a Dutchman. The *Eeuwens* was a squat, low-lying, broad-beamed tub built for traffic in the Indian Ocean, where there are no ports without romantic names. She was an exotic ship, and looking long at her a man could imagine that he smelled the toil and riches and mystery of the Orient. With the Great War on, she had methodically tubbed her way to the port of New York with a load of refugees and a mixed cargo of hardwoods, brass stuff, and carvings from Java, spices, bolts of silk, and batiked cotton dress goods. Her crew were mostly Lascars, men with polished mahogany skins who, even in the comparative cold, traveled around the clean decks barefoot.

The officials, naturally, and the law had been able to get aboard her, but newspaper gals like Gail and private investigators like Andy Gouge didn't get a chance to talk to anybody. The Lascars didn't speak English.

There was nothing suspicious

about the vessel. In fact, anyone who had a camera could take pictures of her, and she had appeared in the papers already. Her mission was valuable; the hardheaded Dutch had taken her off her run in the nick of time, to bring stranded Americans home. However, two of her passengers had been murdered in similar circumstances after coming ashore.

They were a handsome, tanned girl named Peril Humboldt, and a lean, yellow-skinned man calling himself Hubert Marquarrd. Both had been stabbed—it might have been said with the same knife, though that was impossible. The man was found in the street, apparently thrown dead from his hack. The knife with which he had been stabbed was carefully wiped on his clothing.

In the other case, the hack driver had heard the door open, and had seen the girl pitching out. She had been stabbed through the breast, and the knife wiped on her skirt. The drivers had been questioned, and it was revealed that both passengers had given the name of the same hotel in midtown. Easily that could have been a coincidence.

Being an incurable romantic, Gail put it this way, "They were in cahoots. Spies. They found something out, and they were going to meet at the hotel. Someone on the ship had them followed and murdered because the jig was up."

"What jig?" he wanted to know naturally.

"Well, the cops didn't find out anything at all about Humboldt nor Marquarrd. They're just a pair of names. They could be a couple o' American spies who—"



"They could be a couple of Nazis just as well," he pointed out. "Anyhow, the cops are 'way ahead of you. Don't you think they've been on that ship asking questions?"

Gail was after a human interest yarn for her sheet but had bad luck. Someone else had got to the important passengers first, and her column was killed. Then she set about getting an interview with the captain. Thinking pretty well of herself, she was pretty sure she could turn on the old paradise and get what she wanted. No one had succeeded there, and she couldn't, either. The captain would not be guzzled, and he kept to his cabin. The only result was that Gail had a spool of film, pretty good shots if they were Gouge's usual expert stuff, to illustrate a nonexistent article.

But she would get next to the captain sooner or later. Oh, she would see the captain, yes, indeed. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### The Elk's Tooth



HE hack pulled up in front of Doc Clarence Gramm's, and they mounted the high stoop off Tompkins Square. They went down a tiled hall, and into a back room, where Gramm was having quite a few grams of bourbon in a glass, with ice, while he read Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." His nurse and receptionist were gone, and he was all alone. He looked up, closed the book, and asked, "What the hell happened to you, Andy?" He got to his feet, paying no attention to Gail.

"A couple of guys," said Gouge.

Gramm and Gail helped him to get off his jacket and shirt, stripping him to the waist. Then Gramm prodded and felt and swore sympathetically; the detective had three broken ribs on the left side, low, and one was cracked on the right.

"You're lucky," Gramm remarked.

"Lucky?" Gail asked. She was sitting on the desk, watching. The film cartridge was in her right palm and she was playing with it.

"Nice, neat breaks," said Gramm.

"No splinters to puncture the lungs."

"Dandy," Gouge whispered.

Gail swung a silken leg, eyeing Andy's bare torso appraisingly. He was deep in the chest and had broad, neat shoulders. And still he wasn't one of these beefy lads; he was built wildcat style. Gramm had him collapse his lungs and hold it, after painting the flesh with benzoin, and then expertly wound him as tight as a mummy with broad surgical tape. Involuntarily Gouge sounded off with dismal, dungeon sounds.

"Well, that's about all we can do with these things," said Gramm cheerfully. "You'll be out of circulation for a couple of weeks. Take it easy. You won't be doing any heavy lifting for a long while. Coughing or sneezing will be hell, so don't catch cold. And no drinking."

"Thanks," said Gouge.

THEY hailed a hack on Avenue A, and Gouge got in with the funny feeling that the lower part of his body wasn't part of him any more; in effect, he was wearing a tight corset, and he couldn't draw a decent breath. Later on it would be worse, but he didn't know how much worse. He was deceived, because the

beating which he had received didn't really hurt, yet. Broken ribs don't hurt much, especially when a man has something of an edge on.

They went to the news building first, and Gail dropped off. She said, "I'll get some enlargements from this film. See you later."

"So long," said Gouge flatly. He looked after her, and then gave the driver his address on Eleventh Street, near Sheridan. He paid off, went down a couple of steps, gingerly, along a hall and into a ground floor studio apartment. It just happened that he hadn't been sleeping here for three days, and when he looked around at the vandalism he felt sick. Everything was torn apart. The cushions in the sofa were slashed in two; the drawers had been pulled out of the chests, and the contents dumped on the rugs. He took a look at the bathroom and saw what had been done to the medicine chest, and then he angled to the telephone and talked to the superintendent.

While he waited, he just stared around curiously, wondering. He had left a back window open, but he didn't see any markings that meant anything. However, a few kids playing on the roof of the one-story chow-mein place behind the garden might have sneaked through. There was such a mess that it had to be kids looking for pennies, nickels, and dimes. Gouge swore. The kids had smashed an earthenware crock of after-shaving lotion, the which was no longer obtainable. Gail had given him that.

Then he noticed that a lock was unscrewed from the garden door, and that all the light bulbs had been

removed from their sockets. Kids wouldn't do that, and throw the bulbs around. They'd *break* the bulbs. Someone had broken into his place to hunt for something in particular.

Mrs. Noring knocked on the garden door and distracted him. She was a calm, dark woman, the super's wife, mild, and she went efficiently through the apartment, cleaning it up. The detective walked back and forth, until he collided with Mrs. Noring. The vacuum cleaner struck his ankle; he jumped. The lady apologized with a startled smile, but Gouge didn't see her. Something had gone bounding across the rug, and he was scrambling after it on all fours, no matter how much his ribs hurt. He caught it on the bounce and stood up with it after a glance, thrusting it into his pocket. Mrs. Noring gave him a curious look, and then went ahead with cleaning up the apartment, without asking any questions.

She packed everything back into the drawers neatly, cleaned the rugs, and cleaned the bathroom. She finished, and smiled at him, as though she knew that a man couldn't do a job like that. Or else she was amused about his supply of linen. He gave her a pack of cigarettes with a bill folded up and stuck under the cellophane.

When she had gone through the garden door, he pulled his fist from his pocket and opened it, and stood there looking. He looked at the object in the palm of his hand, and he was quite surprised. He was considerably surprised.

It was an elk's tooth; he stuck it back in his pocket and then walked



stiffly around his own house. His ribs were hurting like the devil now. He was exasperated because he couldn't take in a deep breath, and he couldn't sit down comfortably. And he couldn't lie down. And if he did, it was a hell of a job getting up again. He tried it.

Swearing under his breath, and all alone, he went to the kitchen and mixed himself a stiff drink. He drank it, made another, and returned to the studio and sat on the bed.

**I**T'S an alert man who knows when his pockets have been rifled. But there was a smudge on his neatly folded handkerchief—from a sailor's dirty thumb. And

"Drunk again?" she asked.  
But he had some broken ribs from that beating.



come to think of it, his key-case had been open. He always kept it zippered shut so the key points wouldn't wear holes in his pockets. The handkerchief in his breast pocket was disarranged, having been yanked out and jammed back in. And after the two bluejackets had searched him thoroughly they had booted him in the ribs just for fun.

The elk's tooth? He was mystified completely. Standing, he dropped the thing carefully along his trouser leg, and it fell into the cuff. That's where it had been, he wouldn't know how long. It could have been there for days, and wouldn't fall out unless he sprinted or stood on his head. For he figured that, when he took his pants off at night, he would either drape them over the back of an easy chair or fold them over a hanger; in either case the ornament would remain lodged in the cuff.

Everything that had happened to him lately fitted together in a neat pattern, and it was only by accident that he began to figure it out after his fourth drink. This wasn't unusual in his experience—the chance; without luck occasionally, many a detective would be hunting another job, or specifically dead.

It was while he was getting ready for bed:

It was his custom to empty his pockets of knick-knacks and heap them together on his pocket handkerchief, making a pile on the corner of a night table. So he jumbled together some loose coins, pigskin purse, a pocket knife he had carried for years, the elk's tooth, a tube of pomade, silver lighter, and a pen and pencil.

Hating the Nazis and thinking of German steel, he picked up the knife and examined it closely. It was beautifully made of bright steel. There were several blades; one was as delicate as a surgeon's scalpel, and the largest was over three inches long. The thing was sided with horn as usual; it was long and lean and slim, put together as compactly as a panatela. It was a damned good knife, and it had cost him plenty of dough as such things run. Nevertheless, he started to peg it into the wastebasket, because it was made in Germany, and right now he couldn't think of anything he hated more than Germans.

"What a damned fool," he said aloud, checking himself. It was like not listening to Beethoven just because America was at war with Germany.

**H**E SNAPPED a blade out, and handled it carefully because it was razor-sharp, literally sharp enough to shave with. On the shank of the blade, the butt, was stamped an emblem and the name of the maker. The emblem was a pair of knives which with their guards formed an "H"; the rest of it was "Richard Harkenfield. Sheffield. England."

He had always taken it for granted that the knife was made in Germany, but it was an English knife after all. This was an object which the Germans didn't necessarily make the best of; it was of the finest steel; the blades kept an edge a long while. The knife had come in a little walnut box along with a hone labeled Arkansas Pike. It looked a little silly, sending Arkansas stone,



and perhaps the steel, too, to England, to be shaped and fabricated and then "imported" at premium prices. Anyhow, it was a dandy knife, and he had taken care of it; when it got so dull that he couldn't slice a radish in two with the knife's own weight, he honed it again. And he used oil.

He was a sucker for gadgets, and had his apartment full of junk like electric coffee-grinders, a colossal radio, a spinning shower-head, a switch on the mailbox for ringing the bell when letters were dropped, a fine camera, a fancy orange-juicer, a pedometer, stopwatch, watch-pocket pistol, and the like. In spite of the fact that he was always broke, he had in mind to erect a wind-generator, so that he could obtain his own juice from the elements, and tell the consolidated power company to go to hell.

Then he picked up the elk's tooth, just to see whether the gold collar was stamped 14k or what. It was 14k. At the same time, he observed that the animal's tooth was neatly divided. The pearly tusk had been sawed in two, and was held together only by the metal collar. Gouge tried the point of one of the blades in the crack, and it spread a little. Then he found that the collar unscrewed.

Obviously the piece had come off of someone's watchchain, because there was a broken link of the coppery gold. The halves of the tooth had been hollowed out into shells of enamel, and in this pod was contained a diamond. It was a yellow stone, and he thought it must weigh all of nine or ten carats; in actuality it weighed fourteen plus. It was a

whopper. He played with it for a while, rolling its brilliant, cold fire in the palm of his hand, then wrapped it in its scrap of tissue and replaced it in the hollowed tooth, fitted the halves together and screwed the collar tight. His hand closed around the object in a fist as his bell rang.

After a thoughtful glance at the time, he pushed the buzzer, and listened to the footsteps advance steadily down the hall. He asked who it was through the door.

"Donald Hardesty."

Promptly he opened up and admitted his present employer, one of the lankiest, gloomiest guys he had ever met, and just about his own age.

"Your light was on," said Hardesty, "so I thought I'd drop in. How are things going?"

Gouge hesitated only an instant, and then guessed, "I think that I've got the answer."

"You mean that the old harri-dan—" referring to his crackpot aunt, Belle Hardesty, a withered maiden—"wasn't just hoarding? What was she doing with all that money?"

"See whether your guess is as good as mine."

Gouge proffered the elk's tooth. Hardesty frowned at it in the palm of his hand. He examined it, shook it, and twirled it in his fingers with distaste. He even smelled it. Then he looked at the detective silently, his eyes inquiring whether it was some sort of trick, and a cheap one at that.

"What's the idea of it? I'd just as soon pickle my tonsils in a bottle and carry them around in my

vest pocket," he said with distaste.

The detective unscrewed the tooth and dumped the diamond into Hardesty's hand, took it back, and said, "Cute, isn't it? That doesn't mean anything to me but smuggling. A man was wearing that on his watch-chain, and I got it. Your aunt has been investing her money in smuggled stones."

"Where? Here?"

"She's been buying diamonds from someone off the *Eeuwens*, that funny Dutch ship that came in with the refugees."

Hardesty cursed unhurriedly, and then said of his Aunt Belle, "The crazy old witch. It isn't the money that matters, all around; you know that; I have plenty of money of my own."

"You don't have to tell me that," Gouge put in.

"I just don't like to see American cash going abroad. A million American dollars would make a lot of Germans, Japs, and Dagoes happy. . . . Mind if I have a drink?"

Hardesty saw a bottle, poured some Bourbon into a glass, drank it, and then drank a glass of cold water. While he was busy, he said, sadly, "You know what?"

"No, what?"

"What do you think about robbing houses?"

"If you do it, you get caught at it."

"Oh, yes!" Hardesty looked at the pictures on Gouge's walls. "I want you to rob a house for me."

"No," said Gouge. "Not a chance."

"You agreed to," said Hardesty. "Didn't you?"

Gouge shook his head.

"All right, you didn't. But you have to rob a house."

"I am supposed to rob a house," said Gouge, and he was worried, because he couldn't do it. He wasn't really worried.

"The house belongs to me, even if my Aunt Belle lives there," said Hardesty. "It's not a house, anyhow. She sold it. It's a hotel. But I own the two floors she's living on."

"You own two floors of a hotel," said Gouge. "You want me to rob some property that you own."

"That's about the idea."

"Why don't you rob the joint yourself?"

Hardesty was as sorrowful as though he had just fallen into a vat of bitter molasses. He confessed, "I'm frightened to death of the crazy old witch."

"How do you want it robbed?" Gouge asked. "Do you want it stripped down to the rugs, or do you want something in particular?"

### CHAPTER III

#### Foreign Correspondent



WANT you to open a safe, wall safe," said Hardesty. "It's behind a picture, a water-color; it's located in a place just about there." He pointed to a print hanging on Gouge's wall. "The room is in back, and the safe is just to the right of the door to the bathroom." He described it in more detail, and gave the detective his card, with the combination of the safe neatly numbered on it. He even signed his name to the card, in case the detective got caught.

"Mister," said Gouge, "you're



sticking your neck way out. If I wanted to doublecross you, you could get into a hell of a jam. Even if you do own the place, you can't go around robbing it."

Hardesty said patiently and sadly looking as always as though he'd lost his best friend, "I want to make it plain that I'm not setting a trap for you. This is on the, uh, up and up. If you get caught, I take the blame. The, uh, rap."

"You're kidding me," said Gouge. "If I did it, I'd just be an accessory. The judge would slap the same sentence on both of us—maybe about ten years, if I don't carry a gun."

"That's the combination, anyhow," said Hardesty wearily. "This is pretty good liquor." He poured himself another slug, and guzzled it down like water.

Gouge realized that Hardesty was drunk. Getting skizzled looked like a pretty good idea, so Gouge joined him at the bottle.

"You think it's diamonds?" Hardesty asked vaguely.

"It's a hunch. Any hunch I ever get is sure-fire until it goes wrong."

Hardesty raised a somber eyebrow and stared at him.

Gouge explained; now, he was absolutely positive about what had been going on. He said, "If you saw the mess this place was in when I got here tonight, you'd break the lease."

"I would?"

"It was in a hell of a state."

"It was?" Hardesty asked, with somber Irish surprise.

"Say, are you listening to me?" Gouge demanded.

"I beg your pardon." Hardesty burped and poured himself some



The hack driver turned and saw her pitching out his door.

more bourbon. His brown eyes were bright with grief. "I was just thinking that it's a blasted shame to lose a million dollars, more or less, when you've been looking forward for years to spending it. What were you saying?"

"I got beaten up by a couple of sailors tonight," said the detective, "and, when I got in here, some burglars had been through the place."

"Burglars. Don't forget my aunt's safe," Hardesty reminded him with dreamy gloom.

"Of all the brooding Irishmen I ever met!" said Gouge impatiently. "Let me tell this!"

"I'll listen," Hardesty agreed, after weighing things.

"Here it is": Gouge then told briefly about his getting beaten up.

His pockets had been searched. When he got home, his rooms had been ransacked. The locks had been unscrewed from the doors, the light-bulbs removed from the sockets—the place had been frisked by professionals. They had been thorough, because they had been looking for a small object. And that object was the yellow diamond.

"Indeed," said Hardesty, looking around glazedly. Then after nearly five minutes of screwing his face up into an appearance of deep thought, he said with drunken clairvoyance. "I have a hunch, too. You're right; hunches are good until they're bad. I don't think you'll find anything valuable in my aunt's safe."

"I didn't say anything about breaking safes," said Gouge. "It might be interesting, I must admit. Ever open a safe yourself?"

"My aunt's," said Hardesty. "When I was a kid, I got the safe open one time by accident. Maybe it was open all the time. I don't know. Then she had the combination changed, and I overheard it, and opened the safe again to see if it worked. There wasn't anything inside but money, securities, papers, jewels, and those things. The usual things."

"The things people put in safes," Gouge suggested.

"Exactly," said Hardesty, with sad admiration. "There was nothing in the safe but valuables. I was disappointed. Don't know what I expected; maybe a couple of leprechauns."

Gouge thought about leprechauns while he was letting the beautiful bourbon trickle down on both sides of his tongue. He thought of other

critters, like pixies, little people, things that go bump in the dark.

ABOUT three o'clock in the morning, two hours later, he opened his eyes. He was confused. Now that he was in bed—he almost said it aloud: "How the hell did I get in bed?"

Then he smelled smoke. Fresh cigarette smoke. He could see the coal of the cigarette that someone was smoking in the darkness. There was some perfume, too. She was sitting over there in the big chair; she could smoke cigarettes all night; she was one of those gals who didn't need sleep. There wasn't a doubt in the world that it was Gail Humphrey, because she was the only person who had a key to his apartment.

"Drunk?" she asked.

He said, "Hello."

"I've been trying to wake you up," she said.

That was why the smell of perfume was so close to him.

"Where's Hardesty?"

"You're dreaming."

She turned a light on, and watched him try to get out of bed. He was in pajamas, and lying on his back. He turned to the right and hiked his feet into the air, then relaxed, realizing that he ached all over. He tried it to the left and failed, and then turned himself into a log and rolled. Suffering horribly, he crabbed over the edge of the bed and got to his feet.

Gail said critically, "That's the damndest performance I ever saw." She wasn't cruel. Just commenting. But there was something funny about her voice. "I brought you the pictures."



"Anything in them?" he asked, finding his slippers.

"No, nothing that I could find." She gave him the film in a can, and an envelope containing the enlargements. "They're a dandy set of pictures, though. Why don't you quit your game, and go into photography?"

"Me pore old gray-haired mother would starve," he said sepulchrally, "and me sisters would have to quit school and go to work in restaurants." He stared at her. "What goes on?"

"I'm leaving in a couple of hours, Andy. All packed."

"Leaving for where?"

"Leopoldville, just between you and me."

"Are you kidding me?"

"The rag I work for has recognized my talents. It seems I have a swell radio voice, too. I'm going by ship to Leopoldville, Belgian Congo. From there I'm supposed to get a plane to the Near East. Cairo first, because they think things are going to pop there. You're looking at a brand new foreign correspondent."

"Like hell I am."

"You are, pet. This has been cooking for weeks. It went through last month, but I just got passage on a boat tonight when I went down to the office."

"You're a liar," he said indignantly. "There aren't any boats leaving at this time of night."

"One just went. The *Eeuwens*. There's another one going down to Brazil, and I change boats there. We are sneaking out in the dark to get past the submarines. I'm lucky, awfully lucky."

"Of course, you wouldn't tell me anything about this," he said. "Goose-chasing around the harbor, taking pictures for you!"

"I thought I'd keep it a secret up to the end," she said, "so that it would give you a real wallop, if any. Now, are you going to get out of that insane game you're in?"

It was an ultimatum.

Gouge used a strong accent and said, "You talk shoost like crazy all the time."

"I'll take that for an answer," she said. She smiled at him, and her lips were moist.

"A fine thing," he said sarcastically, "you talking about crazy games! What kind of game are you in? Anyhow?"

"Maybe I do in self-defense," she suggested.

They kept smiling, and went on wrangling, playing a cutthroat word game that never got them anywhere. Gouge caught his second thirst, and she matched him at the pace he set. The more inebriated he got, he found, the less he minded any discomfort under his bandages.

IT WAS as though there were two of him, and one of him was standing aloof with chin in hand, following what was going on. For in her smooth way she had gone over to sit beside him, and he made things snug by circling his arm around her. She was slim in the waist, flat and firmly contoured. Firmness was the word for her, in the way she was made and the way her mind worked. Oh, she was a lass, all right, the lassiest girl he had ever known.

It was funny how he took her for granted; it just happened that she

belonged to him, and he couldn't conceive of her falling to the covetousness of some other guy. She was like a valuable stamp collection that an owner keeps in a drawer. The collection might not be looked at for months, but, when it is stolen, the collector properly goes bats with grief and rage.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that I never told you how neat your knees are. The legs go without saying."

"It happens that you have told me," she said. "But I'm always on pins and needles waiting to hear you say it again."

"Oh, sure," he said, speaking very distinctly, and feeling very smug about knowing that he was pce-lastered and still could pronounce words syllable by syllable. "But what a dandy pair of gams. Of course, no one else ever told you that."

She uttered a low, silvery, laughing sound, not answering.

Her skirt just happened to be above her knees, or he wouldn't have noticed them and commented on them in the first place. He touched the silken contour idly with a forefinger.

"Hm," she said. "I suppose they are fairly good legs, at that. You know, when I was younger, I used to look at myself in the mirror and worry. It was my Dad's fault; he used to call me 'Skinny'."

"Skinny," said Gouge.

Gail got up and went to a pier glass; with her straight legs together she lifted her dress matter-of-factly and looked at her reflection. No doubt about it, the legs were absolutely dandy, with curves like magic.

"It's wonderful," he observed owlishly, with the distinctness of the

very drunk, "how the gals keep their stocking seams straight."

"Why?" She smiled at him like a witch.

"The seams are so damned long. You'd think they'd get all pulled around."

FROM here on things got tangled in his mind, and dream meshed with reality, and vice versa. Only the ghost in the corner, Gouge II, his subconscious, or whatever, would know. Because he was all wound up to pass out again. Either he saw or dreamed things, but the things he dreamed were remarkably realistic. And more than that he dreamed conversations. Which some people do.

"You really think that I'm all right?" she asked.

"If I had a brand new thousand-dollar bill, I wouldn't see any point in trading it for another one," he said. "I'd be just where I was. There wouldn't be any profit."

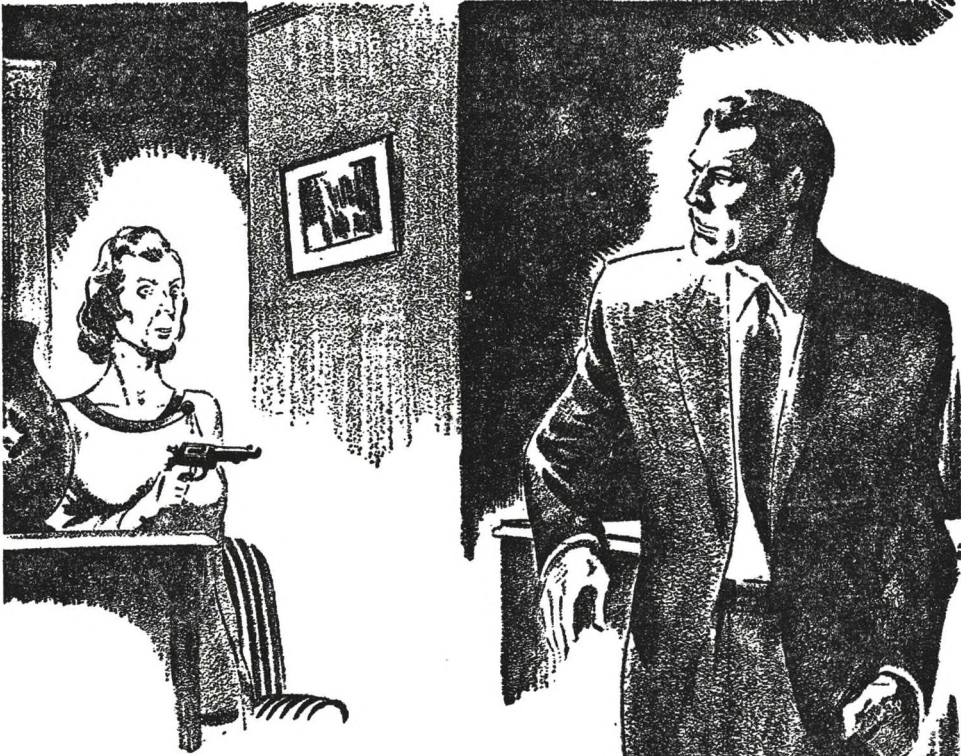
There was mischief in the expression of her lips. She said, "Oh. You're thinking of profit? You want an advantage."

"I wouldn't think much of anyone who wasn't interested in getting ahead."

She clashed with him for the last time: "The thing about girls is that they can say Yes or No. I don't like the business you're in, and I can't understand why you stay in it. So I say No. I say it, no matter how much I like you."

He didn't say how much he didn't like the business that she was in. He hated that, too, because once he had been given a very bad write-up about a perfectly honest deal. Reporters . . .





"A burglar, I presume," she said in a voice like pulling nails.

THE telephone awakened him this time. He had passed out again, and found himself lying on his back. After the seventh ring he groaned himself erect and answered. It was Don Hardesty, and his voice was gloomy.

He said, "I've been sitting here in a bar. Do you want to call it off, or what? Time's a wasting."

"What time is it?"

"Three-two, A.M.," Hardesty reported, sounding like an owl that had just clutched a mouse off the ground and eaten it. "Around this time, my aunt always sleeps like a corpse. I'm worried. Think it over, and give me a jingle in the morning anyhow, no matter what you decide."

"All right," Gouge agreed.

Stiffly he stood up, and, when he turned, he could feel bones rubbing against broken bones. There wasn't much pain, but it sickened him to feel and hear the *thunk* of the bones engaging.

At the same time, he remembered Gail. She had gone, but she had left souvenirs. There was a perfect imprint of her lips on the sheet, besides lipstick on himself, though he didn't recall kissing her. When he had finished dressing, he went to the bottle. "This won't do," he swore, taking a slug. And on his way out

he found that she had left her hat, an expensive little pillbox which he had once told her was flattering. She had left it on purpose, hanging from the doorknob.

He had as much use for the hat as for a gallon of perfume, and he wondered what she meant by it. Souvenir. Something to remember her by, because he liked it. Also, she was gone, and it looked as though she thought she wasn't coming back.

Placing the hat carefully on a cushion, he went to the phone and called her newspaper.

"She's not here," was the answer.

"Can I get her in the morning?"

"You might try it, but I don't think she'll be around."

"Would she be taking a boat ride to Africa?"

"Sorry, brother," said the man, and hung up.

Gouge stood for awhile, thinking.

"Well, just a little one," he decided, aloud, and had a three-ounce glass of whiskey.

**H**E TOOK a taxi to the Drury Hotel, where the whole thing had started. He had a room here, and there was nothing to draw attention to him, in arriving or departing at any hour. The doorman recognized him, admitted him, and he took the elevator to the fifth floor, where he had his one room next to Mrs. Hardesty's suite. It had all worked out very nicely, and there hadn't been much real work for him to do. Don Hardesty had given him the layout of the building, and had phoned him the moment that room was vacant, so that he could get it.

Poking the key quietly into the lock, he entered and turned on a

table lamp. The place was neat, the bed made. The only thing wrong with a hotel room, he thought, was that it was the same every time you looked at it. It was monotonous. It took a little litter to make a place comfortable.

All the rooms in the hotel connected with each other, so that it was possible to rent a single room or five, or a whole floor. Gouge had two interior doors. The keyhole of one was stuffed, but the one opening into Belle's was open and interesting.

He sat down, and smoked a cigarette while he listened. From somewhere near came the faint whine of generators, and there were few other sounds to be heard.

He dropped ashes onto the rug, and ground them into the nap, scowling. All of it had started here.

## CHAPTER IV

### Brazilian Interlude



**A**BOUT ten days previously, Donald Hardesty had come to his apartment, Gouge's, and made a deal. Everything was explained to the detective's satisfaction. Belle Hardesty was rich, but cracked; she had been drawing money out of the bank in huge amounts, through her personal maid, Kath Dietrich. A friend in the bank informed Don, and, gloomily, he smelled that something was wrong.

She had a lot of cash, and she drew out most of it. Don guessed that it was about a million dollars, and he wanted to know what was being done with it.



The detective had looked over the proposition, and had taken this room. He had obtained a key for the lock for the bathroom between his place and the old lady's nest of rooms, and simply drew up a chair and sat down with liquor and cigarettes and his eye to the keyhole. It looked as though that would be all there was to it—waiting. It was determined that there were regular comings and goings, and all he had to do was look, listen, and find out what the visits meant.

The old lady was icy and frail and wrinkled, and somewhat resembled a tall Chinese. Her rooms, what he could see of them, were baroquely furnished in Oriental blues and reds. Not the least opulent of the furnishings was the Dietrich lass, who was upholstered valkyrie style. She was tall and shapely, with a Bali-style figure and shining yellow hair, and a perfect mouth, but she was an automaton in the way she worked, and Gouge didn't like her blue eyes. Apparently, she never smiled. There was no softness in her. She could throw furniture around with wild abandon.

By hanging around the lobby, and screwing his eye to the keyhole, he found out these things:

Belle never left her suite, because she was afraid of dying in unfamiliar surroundings. So he had been told, but he found out for himself.

**S**HE had a regular visitor, whom he had seen just once through the keyhole. All of the man, that is, except the head. His angle of observation was such that he could see just up to the shoulders of a powerfully-built man. This fellow was

dressed in a rumpled dark suit and an open shirt, but his shoes were shined. When he was admitted, he gave his name, but all the conversation was a mumble from Gouge's room. At the keyhole, he had to look through the bathroom, the maid's room, and the living room.

But he had good eyes, and he saw the man do something rather peculiar. The visitor unbuttoned his shirt, apparently for no reason but to exhibit an emblem tattooed on his thick chest. The emblem was a perfect square in broad, slate-green lines. The square was divided across and across, like a four-paneled window. Belle Hardesty nodded, and the man buttoned up his shirt again. He was proving his identity, nothing else, as far as Gouge could make out.

Then the maid, Kath Dietrich, looked in Gouge's direction, and he drew his head back involuntarily, though it was impossible for her to see him through the keyhole. It couldn't be done. She entered the bathroom and closed the door. Gouge fumed, but watched her take off her stockings, with runs in them. She had interesting feet, not big, but the toes were long.

Kath opened a bottle of red lacquer, and, sitting comfortably on a hamper, painted her toenails carefully. When she was through, she wiggled her toes, filled the washbowl with cold water, and dunked her feet in the bowl. She was quite deliberate about it, as though she knew that someone was watching her.

It was pleasant to look at her smooth, shaved legs, and he observed that she was wearing black lace underthings which were snug

and brief and probably expensive. The lace around the edges was as light as feathers.

The detective stared, and, suddenly, in a hurry, he got off his chair, and went to the switch on tiptoe to turn off the light. She was going to turn her light off, and his would have showed through the keyhole and under the crack of the door.

Down in the lobby, he had not succeeded in identifying the man who called on Belle Hardesty at that particular time in the evening. He looked for rumpled clothes, and open shirts; once he got knocked down, charging into an elevator.

A big, blonde man.

"I beg your pardon," said the man.

"I beg your pardon," said Gouge, staggering. And then the elevator went up, while he got off the floor and brushed himself. It was almost as though the man had done it on purpose, but that was what anyone would think when he was knocked down.

**N**OW it was tonight. "For Heaven's sake," Gouge whispered, remembering. The man he had bumped into had been wearing a big elk's tooth on a heavy gold watchchain. It was the only possibility. He had it in his pocket—the hollowed elk's tooth with the diamond inside. In the collision it must have been torn from the chain and freakishly dropped into his trouser cuff.

There had been no sound from Belle's. Shrugging, Gouge opened the connecting door and entered the Hardesty bathroom. Taking care not to grit his shoes on the tiles, he

slipped through Kath's room, the most jittery part of his journey. He could smell her perfume in the warm darkness, and imagine he heard her soft breathing.

Having the layout of the rooms in mind, he proceeded purposefully but with care not to bump the furniture, whose shapes he could just make out.

When he reached the safe, he unhung the picture which covered it; he used a buglight, and read off the combination which Hardesty had written on the card.

There was nothing to it. The combination worked, and the door opened as smoothly as a knife cutting jelly. He poked the little shaft of light into the interior.

The safe wouldn't accommodate much, and nothing was inside except for a stuffed, ancient red wallet held by a thick rubber band. He opened it, and it was full of sweepstakes tickets that hadn't won, some beautiful, worthless certificates for stock in nonexistent gold mines, and such. But cleverly mixed in with this paper was a selection of railway and oil stocks, as sound as the U. S. government.

The safe had been looted. The person who had done it, had taken everything of apparent value, left this wallet as junk. Gouge put it back, closed the door, and then listened with a growing, uneasy suspicion.

What he thought he heard was the *shh-shh* of a drawer opening and closing; then he heard the sound of silk. Silk purring against legs. He couldn't tell where the sound came from, whether from Belle Hardesty's bedroom or Kath Die-

trich's. If either one of them had awakened and gone to the bathroom for a drink of water, his escape was cut off. It had to occur to him here that, when he was a few years younger, he had known a girl, a very peculiar gal, who liked to wrestle with him, and canoe, skate, ski, and especially swim. Had an athletic body like Kath's, and he was in for a tough fight if he bumped into her.

THE lights popped on just as he reached the entrance door, and in her bedroom stood the rangy figure of Belle Hardesty, enveloped grotesquely in grass-green pajamas which exposed her skinny shanks. In her fist was an old, long-barreled pistol, and she held it as though she knew how to use it.

"A burglar, I presume," said she in a voice like pulling nails.

"It's a fact which I cannot deny," he admitted.

"All I could wish is that you were someone else," she said, her old, pale eyes bright with hate. "For a burglar you take plenty of chances, but you got that safe open fast."

"Didn't know I made so much noise," he remarked. She hadn't asked him to raise his hands, but simply kept keen eyes on him. She said, "You didn't make any noise. But, young man, I have a very peculiar nose; the smell of tobacco smoke irritates me, and you smell of cigarettes. The first time, we even saw it."

"The first time?" he asked blankly.

"When you rented that abominable room off the bathroom. My maid Kath saw a trickle of smoke coming through the keyhole. All



In due course, Kath looted the safe.

that could mean would be that you were right at the hole, peeping."

"Never occurred to me," he confessed.

"And it probably didn't occur to you," she guessed, "as to why you never saw anyone through the keyhole after that except Kath. It looked pretty obvious to me, but I guess men are all alike—Kath keeping in sight all the time and keeping your interest. Showing off her legs, lifting her skirts, doing things in her room, and even taking a shower, to keep you in your room, just in case."

"I missed the shower," he said regretfully. That must have been the time he was down in the lobby and bumped into the man.

"Detective?" she asked.

He nodded. "Let's get together on this. It sort of happens that I'm working for your nephew Don."



"I could have guessed as much. What else?"

"You've been buying diamonds."

After a silence she said, "I don't know how anyone could have found that out, unless he was told." She was silent again, staring at him, and then said acidly, "Kath Dietrich has a beautiful figure, doesn't she? You must have seen enough of her. Healthy in the chest, first-class hips, and handsome legs."

"Yes," he admitted, "she is an eye-ful, but she looks strong enough to knock a man cold." Automatically he turned around. The lights illuminated Kath's room. It was neat, as usual; the bed was made. But no maid.

"She's gone," said Belle. "So are the diamonds."

She put the gun aside on a table and cocked her head at him, and she looked so crazy and intelligent and hopelessly wistful, altogether, that he couldn't help liking her as one of the few real characters he'd ever met.

He looked at the gun and asked, "Do you mind if I stick a hand in my pocket?"

"Go ahead."

He produced the elk's tooth, and she recognized it, telling him that it had been worn by Heinz Roettger, the master of the *Eeuwens*. But she didn't know that it was hollow. When Gouge unscrewed it and rolled the 14-carat yellow diamond in his palm, she took a deep breath while she stared.

"Let me see that," she said. She took it, possessing it. He told her about getting beaten up, and the ransacking of his apartment for the stone, even to unscrewing light bulbs.

"You know something about diamonds," he suggested.

Reluctantly she said, "I always loved diamonds, but I guess I'm just an old fool. Yes, I know precious stones."

"What's this stone worth?"

She gave it back to him and said, "In New York, for a perfect blue-white stone, one carat even, you'd probably pay \$850. That stone is perfect and weighs at least thirteen carats. Some people think that yellow means cowardice, but others believe that yellow means good luck. You could get almost anything you asked for that stone, any sum from a hundred thousand to, say, five or six hundred thousand. Perhaps more. That's a diamond! I suppose I should have tried to buy it from you for a song."

They grinned at each other, understanding.

"Well," he suggested, "my job's done, I guess. If it's all right with you, I'll go home to bed."

"You're job's just started," she said, "if you want to work for me. I want those diamonds back, or else the money I paid for them."

SHE explained, and was candid about her being a fool, and Gouge thought it must be wonderful to have so much money so that such a colossal mistake could be made.

In brief: Belle Hardesty was rich, but "them as has, gets." She wanted more. Money didn't look safe in wartime, but diamonds did, and she loved them anyhow.

Her maid was German. Kath.

The maid, Kath Dietrich, negotiated, efficiently arranging the sale of the stones, and they were a bargain.

They were almost too much of a bargain, but the Germans were desperate for American dollars, the only sound currency left in the world.

"I trusted her. I trusted Kathy," Belle said in her rusty voice.

"What happened?"

"Kath made the arrangements. I don't know what she did, besides what she did here. She derided Hitler, and derided his moustache, and said she'd like to have it as a souvenir. She was very plausible.

"I sent Kath to the bank for some money," Belle said. "I've been buying diamonds as an investment. Good ones."

The man who was to bring her the diamonds in parcels was to identify himself by a tattoo on his chest, the design a plain square divided into four. Only tonight did it occur to her that the tattoo was a swastika with the arms joined. Captain Roettger was a Nazi, not a Dutchman, and he couldn't go around with his shirt open and that wrong-Adolf symbol on his wishbone.

They were smuggled stones, making her liable to heavy penalties. If she had known what they really were, she wouldn't have touched the deal at all, naturally. The gems were simply German loot from Belgium and Holland.

Kath and Roettger were in cahoots. After the final transaction this night, the leather bag of stones had been tucked to bed in the safe, and later the two women retired. In due course Kath had arisen, looted the safe, having learned the combination from stealthily watching Belle, and fled, probably joining Roettger. Probably the *Eeuwens* waited only for her arrival before sailing.

IT LEFT Belle in a predicament that was a nifty. She had just tossed away about a million dollars, her maid having stolen a bag of baubles worth more than that. And she couldn't go to the police about it for obvious reasons. Roettger had the diamonds to sell all over again, plus a cool million for paying German agents and similar purposes.

"There's not a thing in the world for me to do," Gouge protested. "The ship has sailed."

"Get passage on another boat and chase it."

"Where? Into the Indian Ocean?"

"Not that far. Just South America."

"Oh, you know where it's going."

"No, but I have a good hunch. Roettger and I did a lot of talking, because I like to see how a man's mind works. I never did really trust him, but he was too smooth for me. He speaks perfect English, and he doesn't show any Prussian nastiness or arrogance or any sign of brutality at all. I thought Kath was Dutch, too."

"How did he get the diamonds off the boat?"

"He wasn't under suspicion in the first place; there were no reports on him, to watch for him in particular. The Customs men wouldn't be too suspicious of the captain himself, and a Dutchman bringing refugees, besides. Once he came here eating a box of popcorn, and in the bottom fourth of the box it was all diamonds wrapped in tissue. He never got stopped, carrying them in a trick matchbox, in a wadded handkerchief, in a cigarette holder, and even loose in his pockets."

It was the guy who was trying to get caught, Gouge reflected, who got by with murder. Take the bird who violates all the traffic regulations he can think of some night, to see whether the cops are on the job, and he seldom if ever gets a ticket.

Belle said, "He told me that he would be in Paramaribo, in Surinam, for about two weeks until he got directions from his government."

"And no one ever asked how that slow tub got here without being bothered by a submarine," Gouge remarked.

"But I think he's really going to be in Recife, in Brazil," said Belle. "Why?"

"I told you that he spoke perfect English, but he made a slip. I wanted to cash some certificates for more diamonds, but the transaction would take several days. He couldn't wait. He said, 'We have Recife'—for received—'instructions to sail, and must do it while the weather is right. Terribly sorry.'"

"Well, I might as well throw good money after bad; I have plenty left. How about your going down to Brazil for a vacation?"

"I don't know about that Recife angle," he said dubiously.

"It's my worry. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't. But you look young and husky to me—why aren't you in a uniform?"

He shrugged. "Dependents."

"Not married?"

"No. When things get tougher they'll take me anyhow. It'll be another experience I haven't had."

"Then it's a deal."

"If you want to throw your money away, ycs."

"If Donald hired you, he must

have investigated you pretty thoroughly. I'm satisfied. And by the way, tell him to call on me once in awhile. He acts as though I were a leper."

## CHAPTER V

### Like a Motion Picture



GOUGE was glad to get home, realizing that only a feat of will power was maintaining his mental and physical equilibrium. Late in the morning when he was awake again, he didn't know whether he was ever going to get up. His backbone felt as though it had been stretched out fourteen feet and snapped back together again. By careful maneuvering he got to his feet, and then the fun began.

What he had wasn't exactly a hangover, but he could progress only with an oopsy-daisy walk, and by supporting himself by pieces of furniture and the wall as he adjourned to the bathroom. No headache. But gooseflesh first made his scalp and back seem cold, and then his legs, and chiefly his ankles, stung with a film of sweat like the pricking of countless needles. He drank a long glass of cold water and promptly vomited. It was horrible. His ribs rattled like castanets, he swore afterward, and his bloody eyes bugged out of his head.

Hurriedly he repaired to the kitchen, hunted, and found a bottle of gin. He gulped down a three-ounce glass and chased it with a bottle of beer, drinking from the neck.

For a week he hung around home, chainsmoking and drinking steadily.



It was the only way he could stand being alive.

He looked at the ship pictures, and in one of them was Roettger leaning over the rail. His shirt was open, and the modified swastika was plain on his chest in the enlargement.

Don Hardesty called.

"It's all fixed," he said sourly. "You leave on the S.S. *Bongolong* tonight."

"It's about time," Gouge growled. "Where is it? . . . What time does she leave? . . . What sort of boat is it?"

"Personally, I wouldn't like to



She slapped him across the face with a force that staggered him.

travel on her, but she's the only kind of junk you get these days." He said dourly, "Take it or leave it. I guarantee that you'll find her about as surprising as a cross between an Eskimo and an Egyptian."

The detective gave him the yel-

low diamond. "I'll need some money. Take this diamond for security, and keep sending money every week to my mother and sisters. Maybe I won't come back."

"I don't want the diamond, friend."

"Well, I'm not damned fool enough to take it along with me."

But he packed a number of things which were unnecessary, the way all travelers do. He took along a bunch of his gadgets, chiefly his camera and equipment. He bought a heavy wooden tripod of some wood that had a grain as dense as metal, film, and other material he lacked. He thought that, after all, he might as well take some pictures on the trip.

He was in for a series of surprises. And shocks.

In the first place, there was absolutely no adventure, no excitement, about his going aboard the *Bongolong*. It was just a boat. There were people, moving in no particular hurry. No raised voices. Just the usual lights. Nothing at all unusual. It was like taking the ferry to Staten Island, except that he had a room to himself.

And in the room he had one case of CC and one case of gin, which he figured would last him back and forth. He planned to keep himself moderately anesthetized on the round trip.

The ship smelled, and, before it was finally sunk, he was wishing that it would run aground. It was full of noises. The service was sloppy. The food was terrible, greasy and choking. A thirsty Italian stole two bottles of his liquor.

It was going to be a dull voyage, because most of the passengers were

religious men. He had other ideas and he was astonished. There were no women. There was not one girl, and he realized that he had been thinking of Gail all the time.

He tried to scrape up conversations with the missionaries now and then, but they were an uncommunicative lot.

"Must think I'm a hopeless case," he grumbled.

THEN one morning at dawn he did not get out of his narrow, uncomfortable bed. He was blown out of it.

He scrambled up from the floor and went to the port to see what was cooking. Plenty. The ship was so full of noise that it must have been coming apart. He heard some distant yelling, but no screaming. "That's right," he told himself. "There aren't any women on board."

He looked through the porthole, and in the faint haze, a long jagged splinter resting on the smooth water, lay a black German ship which was lobbing shells at the *Bongolong*. The *Bongolong* was just a sitting duck, unarmed. The shelling was done without warning nor inquiry, and continued for about ten minutes.

The ship was wrenched by a terrific explosion, and there was a farrago of sounds, of tortured metal, wood blown to slivers, banging and falling objects. Every time a shell hit, Gouge ducked involuntarily. He decided that he might as well dress, whether he had to swim for it or not, figuring that he could keep afloat in salt water. He was on deck when the firing stopped.

There was plenty of light now, and a lot of wreckage. A shell had

smacked through one of the *Bongolong's* tilted funnels; the aerial had been carried away; lifeboats were smashed, and there were holes in the ship's side as though her skin were made of tinfoil, with ragged pieces of metal sticking out.

There was hardly any excitement, and Gouge felt that most of the men were simply standing with the hopeless, dull anger that bothered him.

"So it ends like this," he said.

The man next to him, garbed in black, one of the missionaries, cursed with such unexpected talent that Gouge looked at him.

A motorboat came from the German ship, the *Doremio*, and the ship itself approached slowly with guns ready. Then more boats came, and the detective looked at the first gang of Nazis he had seen to date. He didn't like them. They were cocksure, arrogant, sneering, unnecessarily rough. Mostly they were blondes with blue eyes, young, husky fellows. It didn't matter whether they were really brutal or just looked that way.

With characteristic efficiency, the Germans unloaded the one hundred and twelve prisoner-passengers from the *Bongolong*, and transferred them to the *Doremio*. The Nazis then methodically ferried in the small boats, taking off baggage, provisions, and liquor as the *Bongolong's* hold slowly filled. When the sun was at its hottest, after two P. M., with the sky faintly overcast, three Germans went back to the hulk of the *Bongolong* and planted three time bombs aboard. The bombs exploded. The *Bongolong* turned over on her side, then righted as she slowly plunged. Her nose went down; in

ten minutes, her stern was sticking straight up in the air and looked as small and melancholy as a buoy.

Before it was gone, Gouge's shoulder was tapped, and he turned around. He stared into the pleasant face of Captain Heinz Roettger. He didn't recognize the German at once, not until the captain said, "You're the detective, aren't you? What a coincidence. What a long arm coincidence has."

"Well, well," said Gouge softly. "I had almost convinced myself that I was going to meet you in Recife."

The German narrowed his eyes. "What would make you think so?"

"I won't take the credit. Belle Hardesty figured it out."

"Oh, yes; I made a slip of the tongue. Come along with me."

Roettger swung around casually and started walking. This would have been a good time to slug the captain at the base of the neck, but Gouge looked behind first, and saw the last of the *Bongolong*. Also, he saw that a man was following him. It was a grim German in uniform, Hans Maxl.

THEY entered the captain's cabin, and the quarters were sumptuous, probably furnished with the loot of sinkings. There was a thick rug on the floor, a huge lounge in dull green leather, articles in sterling, opulent furniture.

Gouge said, "It looks more like a motion picture from Hollywood than reality."

"It's reality. Now, I want that yellow diamond back. You have it in your luggage. Tell me where it is and I promise you that you'll be much better off."



"Better off than how? Never mind. The diamond is back in New York."

"I don't think it is. Now. You are the only kind of man I have any use for; you don't trust anybody. You'd take that diamond along with you, and therefore you have it."

"Taking everything into consideration, Roettger, I certainly wouldn't trust you."

Without the briefest pause, the captain pumped a fist into Gouge's face, with an unexpectedness and violence. His pleasant expression didn't alter, as though it were the work of a plastic surgeon and he was unable to show anything but amiability. He regarded Gouge's painful efforts to get up from the floor, and apparently thought it was a show of cowardice, that Gouge was putting it on. He hadn't been hurt that much by one jolt. He didn't know about his ribs, and Gouge didn't tell him.

"You may go, Hans," said Roettger. The smaller man left the cabin obediently, and Roettger sat on a mahogany desk watching until Gouge managed laboriously to get to his feet. He remarked, "For a passenger on a ship which we sank so early in the morning, you are carefully dressed. I think that you are that kind of man. On a sinking ship you would take your time, putting your clothes on, to conceal something, gambling on our picking you up."

"I haven't got the diamond."

"You haven't the diamond," Heinz corrected him, rounding one blue eye superciliously. He turned his head slightly and called to a closed door, "Kath!"

"What happened to the *Eeuwens*?" Gouge asked.

"That tub," said Heinz. "I was glad to get off her; I suppose I should be indebted to you."

"I don't get it."

"You were investigating the Humboldt and Marquarrd murders, weren't you? Yes, those two spies," as Gouge looked blank. "A couple of trustworthy Lascars eliminated them; they're very proficient with the knife. But I must say some of your American and English agents are very ingenious. Every time something goes wrong with the New Order, we find a grinning Englishman or American back of it." Heinz talked freely, utterly safe, unhurried. "Those two spies got word to Washington somehow, and there was going to be a reception committee for me and Hans in Recife. The rendezvous was made, and we changed ships. Did you know about Recife, really?" That slip seemed to vex him.

## CHAPTER VI

### "Missionaries"



HE door opened, and Kath Dietrich entered. She was an automaton, mostly silent, never smiling. He wondered what her face would be like if she ever smiled. It was likely that she had teeth as bright as the ivory on a brand new baby grand.

Heinz said something to her in German, and she nodded. Gouge didn't know that ridiculous language, and he worried as she stepped toward him. She was feline and stalking in her movements.

"What's this, Heinz?" he asked. She was so close that involuntarily

he backed away. One step, then another.

"You are going to be searched," Heinz informed him. "La Dietrich is excellent; she never misses anything."

"I told you that I haven't got the diamond."

"We'll find out whether you haven't it." Heinz was enjoying the situation, and he sat on the edge of the desk and swung his legs.

La Dietrich was wearing gray gabardine slacks and a sleeveless pullover sweater, tightly knitted, of the same color. She had hopped out of bed at Heinz' call, and taken time only to comb her hair.

She laid her hands on Gouge, and he pushed her away.

Promptly she smacked him across the face with a slap that staggered him. He was right; she was a strong girl.

"Very farcical, isn't it?" Heinz asked. "What's the expression—ah—you'd better fork up the stone."

"You're wasting your time," said Gouge, raging. The girl gave him a complete frisking, as thorough as a cop's, assembling all the objects in his pockets in a pile on the desk. No stone.

"Take off your clothes," she ordered, in a strong accent. Once upon a time he thought that that accent was engaging in a handsome woman, but now he hated it.

"Like fun," said Gouge.

"Eh?" She frowned, not understanding him.

Roettger gestured, and she proceeded to jerk Gouge's coat open and strip it off with a downward yank.

"Toity-tree poiple boids, sitting

on the coib, choiping and a-boiping, and eating doity woims," Gouge chanted.

"What was that again?" Heinz asked dangerously. He got off the desk, and stuck his thick neck out as he approached.

"Nothing," said Andy. "Just swearing in Brooklynese."

"It sounded to me as though you said I would eat dirty worms," said Heinz.

"Purple birds," Andy said, "do."

"And am I a purple bird?"

"A blackbird." Gouge smiled blandly. The captain thought for an instant, nodded as though satisfied, connecting black with the swastika somehow, and returned to the desk to watch. The detective kept talking, ignoring his humiliation, though he was red-faced and getting a trifle moist.

KATH had finished with his coat, making sure that there was nothing in the lining. She even examined the buttons. Then she took to his pants; when Gouge jumped, the captain burst out laughing. Then he went behind the desk, sat down, opened a drawer, and produced a leather case. He opened the case, and fitted the parts of a flute together. As though he were all alone, he placed his lips to the embouchure, the lateral hole, and commenced tootling.

"It isn't. This isn't happening to me," said Gouge, and louder, "They took down his britches and looked through the stitches and didn't find nothing at all."

Roettger took his wet lips from the flute, then applied them again and watched while he whistled off the

polka and fugue from Weinberger's "Schwanda." *Der dudelsakspfeifer*.

He mentioned his britches because they were now off.

"I just love to get unbuttoned," said Gouge.

Kath went through his pants while he seethed, then jerked off his tie and unbuttoned his shirt with the clever, rapid fingers of a dressmaker. He felt like a fool. He was tempted to slug her over the back of the neck, but he knew it would be a mistake, because there was a fat pistol handy on the desk near Roettger's elbow.

His shirt off, then his shorts, shoes, and socks. And of course, no diamond was found. She didn't neglect any hiding place. She searched methodically, and then looked at Roettger.

"You know," said Gouge, "I'm thinking of writing an article. I think I'll call it 'The German Language, or, Why People Speak English.' For example, take '*Konstantinopilitanischerdudelsakspfeifermachengeselle*'."

That was one of the few German words he knew, and it was a patched-together word, at that. As far as he knew, it meant, "The apprentice, or son, of a bagpipe-maker from Constantinople." The next thing Gouge knew, he was lying on his back and just coming to. As though he were performing for an audience in peacetime, Heinz fluted away industriously until Andy got back to his feet.

He ordered, "Put your clothes on and get out." It was taken for granted that in English the equivalent of the fancy word Gouge used was son of a so-and-so, and Roettger was terribly fast with his fists. Gouge hadn't seen the blow start.

When he went out, Maxl took him over, and he was dumped with the other prisoners into the *Doremio's* Hold No. 2. That was that! Detective? Phooie! America was gone. He was now a prisoner of war, and with the others could look forward to nothing but confinement in a concentration camp in Germany, or death. The hold, in fact, along with the coming degradation of body and soul, was such a camp.

ALTOGETHER there were a hundred and twelve male whites, quite a number more than had been on the *Bongolong*, indicating that the *Doremio* was cruising with the survivors of another ship sunk by the Nazis. There was one child, the saddest youngster Gouge had ever seen, with his Dutch father, Van Pool. The boy never cried, and until Gouge took a hand later on he merely stayed solemn and sad, and silent. Gouge noticed them early, because Van Pool, a balding wraith of a man, kept staring as though they had met before. Therefore he went over to where they were sitting on the deck.

"Yes, I think you are the same man," said Van Pool. "I was a waiter at the New York Fair. You used to come into our bar with a very beautiful girl, a girl with remarkable hair that was just as red as stong tea."

"I remember you now," said Gouge, "drunk as I was most of the time. I certainly would give something for a drink now." He felt really bad, woozy from a hangover and getting pushed around.

"It's a small world," Van Pool offered.





"You can have a good time aboard a prison ship," he suggested, "if you like me well enough. . . ."

"Too damned small for comfort," he agreed, staring around at the cramped, impossible quarters.

Van Pool absently pushed a matchbox toward his little boy, Pieter, who picked it up, turned it over in his lean hands, and held it

to his ear to listen. He put it down after a moment and pushed it back to his father, saying, "Thank you."

The detective grinned, puzzled. "What's that?"

Van Pool explained wryly, "A cockroach, the biggest one you ever saw. It's a sort of a—a pet. You know. Keep the kid interested, because there's not a damned thing to do here. The only trouble is, he can't see it move around. Only hear it."

"I get the idea," said Gouge.

His mind was working but he wasn't in the groove yet. It would take a while for him to discover that that roach was probably the most valuable one in the world, millions in cash and more.

The *Bongolong* was looted. Around 2 p. m. that day, after she was blown up, the *Doremio* got her screws really going and commenced racing.

"I heard a couple of those rats talking," said Van Pool, "and we're either meeting a submarine to provision her, or another raider. It's going to be smack on the Equator, or close, and I can tell you it will be hotter than the bedbolts of hell."

"Just the kind of weather for Tom Collinses," Gouge observed. "By the way, do the skunks feed us?"

He asked, because young Pieter looked thin and ill. Like his father. The kid leaned over and went to sleep with his head in his dad's lap, and even the rumbling of hunger in Van Pool's stomach didn't wake him.

"You must have heard the crack about the American who got a post-card through from Germany. 'There

are five Americans in the concentration camp here. The food is first-class, and they treat us exceptionally well. Tell this to all my family. Also tell it to Sweeney.'

"You'll get a ration of swill at eating time, Andy, or you might choose not to eat. I sometimes wonder if I'm mad. I think my wife is mad already."

"Your wife?"

"Why, yes. She's in the cabins with the others."

"You mean there are women on board?"

"Sure. Five to a dozen in each small passenger cabin. I think there are sixty or seventy women."

Gouge was silent, and then with a far-away look he said, "I'll be damned." His feeling of hatred was so strong that he couldn't have evidenced it better if he had cried tears.

**F**EEDING time came around, and the so-called aliment was unmistakably swill, with a sour, haunting odor. Garbage. The junk was a mud, a thin mud, of rice and small pieces of fiber which once were meat, a strange cold paste made from flour, some leathery bread fuzzy with green mold, without butter, some pinkish water called tea, and some unknown stuff that looked and smelled like shredded, gluey leather, from shoes worn a long while.

"What is this!" Gouge exclaimed softly, stiff-lipped with rage as he watched the kid try to eat.

"There aren't any nouns I know of that are strong enough," Van Pool said. "It's no use thinking of getting even. It can't be done. You say 'goners,' don't you? We're goners now. We go to concentra-

tion camps in Germany, or either the British or Americans sink us. It's the same thing when you're dead."

"Is this the regular diet?"

"For us. The Germans eat ham and eggs, pork, potato salad, beef, oranges, hot rolls; they drink good coffee and tea and lemonade. They have a lot of canned goods, a lot of soups. I guess they have a ton of hams. And they smoke Havana cigars and Virginia cigarettes from the English boat."

Involuntarily Gouge stuck his hand into his pocket for a cigarette, but his pockets were empty. Ahead was a horrible prospect of no cigarettes and no liquor.

"The only guy I ever knew, who took the cure of his own free will, in a sanitorium, was a reporter named Sam Fagg. The cure didn't work. He knew what he liked, and if he couldn't get it, he didn't see any point in living. So now I take the cure. Liquid all around. Me."

Van Pool had his head bowed. He was gently brushing down his son's curly yellow hair, and worrying.

**G**OUGE was observant, and he noticed that the bunch of priests or missionaries, or whatever they were, the men in black, had grouped closely together. They stayed close, and didn't make friends, just talking among themselves. The day after the sinking of the *Bongolong* was pleasant, and he was impatient to get out of the hold. It was early in the morning, and in the dull light the missionaries were sprawled, some of them sleeping on mattresses, others awake, blinking, yawning; one of them was working his hands as though they had gone asleep. Long,

clever hands. Gouge watched casually, thinking hard, and finally ticked off something in his mind. He got up and walked over to the missionary, skirting mattresses and sleeping bodies.

"Hello, Ardath," he said to the missionary.

"I beg your pardon," said the missionary, coldly. Hostile.

"My friend Van Pool says it's a small world," Gouge remarked nonchalantly. He nodded toward the father and sleeping boy. "It certainly is. You are Ardath the Magician. My girl and I saw you once on the stage, and we saw you working a couple of times in the Unicorn Room. You're Ardath," he said confidently. "How come you've turned missionary?"

"Will you kindly shut your damned loud mouth?" Ardath asked pleasantly, smiling and soft. After a length of time he traveled his eyes to the Nazi guard, then looked grimly at Gouge. The Nazi was sitting at the foot of the lone companionway serving the hold. The German was wide-awake and quickly watchful, as though hopped up on a couple of tablets of benzedrine; besides, he was wearing a highly authoritative revolver, and two hand grenades, of the kind thrown with sticks like clumsy lollipops, at his belt. His eyes didn't miss anything.

"The man sitting at the foot of the companionway is nothing but a dirty such and so," said Gouge in a clear voice.

"Are you out of your mind?" Ardath asked anxiously.

"None of them understand English except the captain and perhaps his mate, whose name is spelled em-



ay-ex-ell," Gouge explained, and he chuckled. He didn't dare pronounce Maxl's name, because the guard might have caught on.

"All right, I'm Ardath," he said with cold, still fury. His face was something to watch. "So what now?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing." Gouge chortled happily under his breath. "I just think it's funny. Oh, boy! What denomination are you supposed to be with, of, in, by, at, or from?"

"Are you going to keep your mouth shut, or do I have to tear your throat off?" Ardath asked very quietly.

Some more "missionaries" inched closer, getting ugly.

"Don't get excited," Gouge told them. "I tell you, they don't understand English. See what happens now."

He got to his feet leisurely, stretched. Raising his voice and speaking through a yawn he said, "The guy with the gun and the hand-bombs is nothing but a trained. . . . All he is is a monkey. Make him a squirrel. I'd like to spit in his eye, and with lead. Bullet lead. Do you know what I think of those mental cripples? Take that fellow in back of me for example. You could chop him up fine, cook him in patties, well seasoned, and not even a starving cannibal would touch him, even with creamed potatoes on the side."

The missionaries held their breath, then relaxed. The Nazi guard had certainly heard, and was watching closely.

"Okay, you've made your point," said Ardath. "The guy doesn't understand a word. What do you want?"

"For one thing, I'd like to know what this shebang of yours really is. And I wouldn't mind swimming for it in the least if I ever catch sight of land."

"Here it is, in plain English. . . ."

THE Nazis didn't know what they had bagged. In the first place, they were dismayed because such a large group of their captives were what they supposed were men of God.

In reality, this group was an out and out gang of spies. They were all American agents, hiding under the cloth.

They were over-age men, several of whom had seen action in the last war, and who couldn't get into this one. They were too old, or had physical defects, but to Gouge they looked like a lean, tough, typically American lot. They organized, and it was their idea that they could set up a system of espionage and help the U. S. whether they were wanted or not.

They were all shrewd, brainy men, clerks, brokers, salesmen, two farmers, businessmen.

One was a millionaire and doing the financing; his worry was that some German might recognize him from his occasional published pictures. As holy men they were certainly due for sitting out the war in a concentration camp. As spies they could expect death, but first would come such typical Prussian torture that before they died their minds and bodies would be wrecked. It was a grim joke, or would be until the Nazis found out.

When they did find out, then it would not be so funny.

## CHAPTER VII

## The Cliptical Sort



EXT morning Ardath woke Gouge up and said, "You're elected."

"What was the vote?" Gouge asked.

"No kidding. You know Roettger, and we have to get someone to negotiate on how we're treated. We've got to have food that we can hold in our stomachs. Especially that little kid of Van Pool's. Look how skinny he is."

"All right," said Gouge.

He got dressed, and in the dim light walked to the companionway. There was a new guard there, armed like the other guards with pistol and two hand grenades.

The detective pointed back to the missionaries, tapped himself on the chest, and then thumbed in the direction of upstairs. "I want to talk to the captain. You know, Roettger."

The German scowled, then shouted, "Hermann!"

Another guard came down the steps, and the two exchanged a brief conversation. The second man beckoned and said politely, "*Bitte, mitkommen.*"

He made the detective mount the stairs first.

On deck, Gouge received the shock of his life. Fatigue had made him sleep late. Others had gotten up before him, and he saw a long line of people sitting against the ship's wall, men and women. He blinked his eyes, weaving with the motion of the boat. The Germans were allowing husbands and wives to meet for a couple of hours each

morning. Canvas was stretched to shade the deck from the sun, but even in the golden sunlight he recognized Gail Humphrey, sitting near his end of the line.

Almost at the same instant she raised her head, saw him, and her lips parted. She uttered a cry, got up swiftly and came running to him. Gouge met her halfway, and they embraced so hard that they expelled all the breath from their lungs, and his ribs were no better for it.

The Nazi, a man named Vogt, whom the men called "Pig-eye" because of the appearance and arrangement of his orbs, stalked down the narrow deck with his pistol in his hand and tapped Gouge over the head with it. The result was blinding pain, but Gouge didn't fall. He and Gail separated. He noticed that her eyes were strange, and that they were shadowed. In the hollows under her eyes the lavender skin glistened. There was no lipstick on her lips. They were pink and fresh, but she looked stunned.

Pig-eye gave her a shove, and obediently she turned her back and found her place on the deck, where she sat down.

It was a short walk to the captain's quarters. Gouge entered with the guard behind him; there was a gun in his back; Roettger was playing exercises on his flute.

While the detective waited, he looked around the big cabin, and he sighted his own camera, a Leica with oversize chambers holding spools of film 33 feet long, mounted on a tripod, and leaning in a corner with some other stuff. Heinz whipped the air with the flute to force out the saliva, laid the instrument on the

desk, and turned around scowling.

He spoke first and said, "I've been curious about those priests, or whatever they are." He stared at Pig-eye Vogt and ordered brusquely, "Get out."

"I am interested in religion," said Heinz, "as a study. What are those men?"

"They're of the Cliptical Sort," said Gouge, giving the first name that came to his mind.

"You mean sect, not sort," Heinz suggested, suspicious.

"No. The Cliptical Sort," Gouge repeated, wondering what possessed him to pull off a name like that.

"I never heard of them."

"Perhaps there are other things you haven't heard of."

"I don't like your manner, Gouge."

"I don't like going to a concentration camp in Germany."

"Ah, but you have them in America. I know exactly how German Nazis are treated in them, and you will receive the same treatment, as on this ship."

"Somebody has been telling you whoppers," Gouge said. "Incidentally, you have my girl with the prisoners; I'd like to talk to her now and then without one of your monkeys bopping me over the head with his pistol barrel."

"Did that happen? Well, I see no reason why you shouldn't see her at visiting time with the others."





THEY talked awhile about treatment of the prisoners, and Heinz readily agreed to improvements. The little boy, he said, would receive proper nourishment, which meant that the men would fare mostly on promises.

"Which reminds me," said Gouge. "I'd like to have my knife back."

"Out of the question," Heinz said curtly. "Obviously."

"What do you want with a fine English knife? I thought you fellows hated everything about England."

"Aside from the fact that it is a knife and a dangerous weapon, it is not English. It is German. The stupid English don't know how to make things the way we do in Germany," Heinz sneered confidently.

Gouge sneered back. "I suppose it was a German car that made the world's record at Bonneville in 1939.

Why don't you take a look at the knife and find out for yourself?"

Roettger produced the knife and snapped open the large blade. Without emotion he read, "Richard Harkenfield. Sheffield, England." He shut the blade, and after a time asked, "What do you want with the knife?"

"For one thing, I'd like to trim



Deliberately, Gouge shot down the captain.

my nails. More important, that Van Pool kid is going to die on you unless you can make him perk up. I'm going to make a toy for him, so I want a piece of wood."

"No wood to spare."

"I don't want a plank. Would you rather I cut some chips out of the deck?"

"I can't give you any more wood than there is in a cigar box."

"I don't want even that much. All I need is a short section of bamboo, if you've got that. Even half a section."

Roettger pondered, then smiled and unlatched a drawer. Out of it he took a pipe with a rattan stem. He said, "You may cut this up."

"How about cigarettes?"

"Cigarettes are a dollar a pack," said Heinz, knowing perfectly well that the prisoners had been relieved of all their cash. He gave the closed knife to Gouge with a toss and warned, "You may use the knife during the day, but it must be returned at night. It is forbidden to lose it. Understand? Don't 'lose' it."

"It might get stolen."

"Don't let that happen," Roettger warned.

ANDY left the cabin with the knife and pipe in his pocket. Now that he had permission he wanted to talk with Gail again, but visiting time was over. He was returned to Hatch 2, and he sought out Ardath immediately.

"The captain is suspicious of you fellows," he reported. "He asked me who you were, and I said you were the Cleftical Sort. It popped out before I could think of anything. I said 'sort' instead of 'sect,' and I

had to stick to it." If Roettger learned that all these men were American volunteer agents, there would be hell to pay. For them."

"That might be a good enough name," Ardath mused. "I'll just pass the word along. What made you think of it?"

"I guess I was thinking that I'd sort of like to clip the captain in the teeth," Gouge confessed. "Cleftical Sort. Cripes!"

It was a good thing that Ardath spoke to his men immediately. They assembled, knelt as though praying, and the magician announced in a mumbling, trancelike, clerical tone, "Our friend the dick did us the favor we needed. The captain was suspicious of us right away. He didn't like our looks. We're the Cleftical Sort; there's no way of checking up on a sect with a name like that, because it doesn't exist. Everyone got it?" The word passed through the group, and they decided that they were an original branch of Protestantism. They had broken up the assembly when a guard came down the companionway and selected three of them at random. The captain wanted to talk to them. He talked to them one at a time, and they told the same story.

They were safe.

THE ship was very fast. While she was cutting a beeline through a calm sea to make her rendezvous, Gouge went to work on the pipe.

He jerked the stem out, explaining to the man sitting next to him that there wasn't going to be any tobacco to smoke, anyhow, and cut off a length of rattan. The pipe stank of strong tobacco, and he cleaned the

piece he was using before he split it into splinters.

Then he shaved down the best ones to toothpick size and made them smooth. Some men came over to sit on his mattress to brood and watch him. They had nothing to do but think and stare while they were confined below.

The detective scraped each splinter of wood smooth with the English knife, and industriously finished the small sticks in two different lengths. He was clever with his hands, and he did a good, fast job. When he was through he asked, "Is there any chance of getting hold of some thread?"

"I'll get some," a stranger volunteered, and he returned, dubiously, with a silk handkerchief.

The detective had to take the handkerchief apart, pulling out threads carefully. Then he stuffed the whole works in his pocket, because it was mealtime again.

They were fed with the same swill of rice and dinky pieces of meat, and the other junk. But Gouge observed that young Van Pool got a special meal. His face was brighter, and he played with an orange for awhile before he skinned it and ate it. He offered sections to his father, who laughed indulgently and refused. But when the orange was eaten, there was nothing left. The peel had been divided carefully, distributed and eaten. Gouge thought that Pieter must have gotten such an excellent meal because Roettger was worried about what might happen if the kid died.

After the atrocious meal, Gouge took the stuff from his pocket and continued his work. There wasn't

much left to do but put the thing together, and he worked rapidly, with a prisoner coming over to sit down on his mattress occasionally, to see how he was passing the time.

It was terribly hot, and most of the men had their shirts off, and a lot were in their shorts alone. The smell of sweat was strong in the air, but they couldn't take baths because there wasn't any water. And very little soap.

Patiently Gouge finished his toy. When he was done, he had a miniature cage, with the bars set close-together, oblong, about the size of a box of animal crackers. He had knotted all the rattan toothpicks together with silk thread from the kerchief. The cage was complete with a hinged door and latch, and he mounted it on a rectangle of wood which someone found in the hold. It was a neat job. The ends of the little sticks stuck out, necessitated by the binding, but it was a firm cage, and admired.

"That's a nice piece of work," said Ardath, "but what's it for?"

"Come along and look." Gouge went over to Van Pool and got the matchbox from him. He opened the trap of the cage, put the matchbox against it, and slid open the drawer of the box. Out scuttled the roach and banged into the cage. Gouge pressed a peg home, imprisoning the giant roach, and presented the cage to Van Pool's young Pieter.

The kid was fascinated at the roach's antics; he found some bread-crumbs, and trickled them into the cage, but the insect ignored the food.

Solemnly the men christened it Pedro, and it kept their interest in life going for a couple of days.

It would scuttle madly around the cage at unbelievable speed, and try to squeeze through the bars. It was wildly active, but it wouldn't eat. Then Gouge remembered a news yarn about sailors arriving in port with their fingernails gnawed off. He tried a couple of nail parings. Pedro ignored them, but when no one was looking the parings disappeared. They found that if they covered the cage with the remnants of the handkerchief, Pedro, being a nocturnal creature, would eat his meal of nail cuttings without delay. Even the Nazi guard came over to have a look, and was fascinated like the boy.

Oddly, it was the boy who wearied of the novelty first, and the roach became a sort of mascot for the men, who kept it fed and husky with pieces of paper, fingernails, and crumbs of food. It was a sort of symbol of the lust for life, no matter what the conditions were, or how odd the meals.

Because the conditions were scandalous. Whenever Gouge went to negotiate with the captain, he invariably received polite promises in full, and Roettger kept his word with a minimum of deeds. The women fared well comparatively in their cabins, but a lot of the men got dysentery, constipation, diarrhea, and skin infections.

Also, they had no latrine, and had to make one out of planks and tools which Gouge wangled from the captain.

They were on a perilous journey, but they forgot all about danger because of the utter, crushing boredom of sitting day after day with nothing to do, nothing to think about but the same things. Of course, there

were scattered times, while they raced toward the rendezvous, when life seemed normal. After all, they were grown men, and all had experienced hardship with which they could compare this. Once in awhile they forgot where they were and had real fun, and they had some weird and dangerous entertainment, risking their lives for emotional release.

Gouge saw Gail Humphrey every day for two hours. He sat on the deck with his arm around her, and they leaned against the rail with the others in line. It cheered up the other men and women, because Gail and Andy were the youngest couple on board. They smiled, and sneaked looks of wishfulness, but soon left the detective and his gal alone; no one with an affair on his hands wants any observers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Second Toy



IN THIS morning a heavy rain hit, lasting quite a long while, and even swept under and through the canvas awnings. The gathering place was a sort of narrow promenade, with a cabin door at one end making it a blind alley. Nearly all of the husbands and wives went for shelter or something better. The wives returned to their cabins, and most of the men went to take advantage of the rain. Fresh water was very scarce, and all the men joyfully soaped themselves, recklessly squandering the niggardly soap ration, stripping their bodies in the pounding rain.

But The Gouge remained with La



Humphrey in the wetness, because they liked to get soaked in rain, and they were as alone as they could be on the *Doremio* now. They got soaked, and she laughed at herself and her ruined dress. The silk stuck to her as though it were glued on, and made her contours more pronounced, bringing out interesting details.

"I never did like this suit, anyhow," Andy said.

"I haven't got much use for this dress, either."

"But you're in it."

"I'll have a fine time getting out of it."

"Do you want to go?"

"No. Do you?"

"Mh-mh."

And so on. Mush.

But it was fun. Her warmth was in his arms, and it didn't matter whether the Nazi guard was staring or looking away. He looked at the curves of her legs, the compactness of her hips, and honestly longed for dry land, and peace.

"Say Yes or No," he said. "I want to kiss you. Maybe we'll never get another chance."

He was so meek about it that she laughed. She was normal, and civilization still existed.

"Look," she said. "I'm through. We're both damned fools, and I got you into this. What do you say that both of us quit our jobs, I mean the ones we had. Then you get a wonderful job in a place like Milwaukee, tending furnaces, and I'll just be a housewife."

"Okay with me. Is a bungalow big enough?"

"Any old shack with you, darling. One room. You could collect waste

paper and sell it, and buy a stove, and I'll practically cook meals for you."

They were reminded of food, and weren't happy any more.

He murmured, "I want to get out of here. I want to get back to New York. With you."

"Yah," she said sarcastically in her old manner. "Rover boy. We're goners and you know it."

He took his arm away from her and said, "I've been trying to think of something. I had it and lost it."

"What could it be?" she asked cheerfully, mocking.

"Mutiny," he said. "There have been a lot of mutinies, and a lot of them were successful. This isn't exactly a mutiny, and we haven't got any weapons, but . . ."

**S**UDDENLY he patted her hand and got up and kissed her as she rose. He kissed her hard, and then strode down the promenade and joined the men who were washing themselves in the rain.

The rain kept pouring, but the *Doremio* was running through easy swells, and in no trouble. She slowed a little.

When he was in dry clothes and the rain had stopped, he used his privilege by calling on the captain. Andy said, "Look, Heinz. I want a piece of bamboo, a pretty good length."

"What for?"

"The kid isn't interested in the roach in the cage any more. I'm going to make him another toy."

Roettger went to the speaking tube, spoke in German, and in a minute or less a man wearing an apron entered the cabin. He was carrying

a bamboo stick about four feet long, which was split. It had been used to stir up the German crew's laundry down below.

"You're a damned nuisance," Heinz said, swearing with irritation. He picked up his flute as Gouge left.

THE detective went to work on the stick of bamboo, and slivered it into slim lengths, shaping and scraping each one until they were all as smooth as ivory. The thing he had in mind was a model airplane for Pieter, the sad little boy. While he was at this job, a man named Hepburn got up leisurely and strolled to the companionway. Pig-eye Vogt was on duty there at the foot of the ladder, and barred his way.

"Get out of my way," said Hepburn pleasantly, being a quiet man. "I'm going to see the captain. You skunk Nazis can't fool anybody; there's plenty of tobacco on board; I can smell the smoke. I'm going to have a cigarette or know the reason why. Out of the way!"

"*Maul halten!*" Vogt exclaimed, and pointed, ordering Hepburn back to his position. He shoved.

"I've been wanting to do this for a long time," Hepburn remarked moderately, calling the German an unspeakable name without raising his voice. In conclusion, he delivered a sudden, wild and lucky punch into the German's face.

It was a sockdolager, catching the surprised Vogt in the teeth. It was even funny: Vogt went flat on his back and got a nasty crack on the skull from a metal fitting; Hepburn promptly jumped on his stomach, landing hard by jamming down his heels and knocking the Nazi's

wind out. The German gasped, "Awhoosh!" with a Scotch accent, and the impact of Hepburn's weight made him spit out broken teeth and blood. The teeth hopped along the deck like popcorn, and someone laughed crazily.

But Vogt hadn't been knocked out. His pistol was in his hand, and he fired upward. The shot sounded as loud in the hold as the big shells that had sunk the *Bongolong*. Hepburn took one step, bent his knees like a man landing after a pole vault, and pitched headlong, dead, to the deck.

Vogt promptly got up, clearing his mouth of chips of enamel and running gore, and swinging his gun in an arc. Three more Germans came bolting down the companionway in a sort of plunging goosetep. Vogt's front teeth were gone, and he lisped when he talked to the others. It was ridiculous, but no one laughed now, and no one moved. All the prisoners remained frozen in position, watching, while Vogt was relieved and Hepburn was carried up on deck and tossed as he was into the ocean.

Then the men resumed their task of resisting misery and boredom, as though murder was as commonplace as taxes or the swill they got at mealtime.

GOUGE worked steadily on the model plane, and even got a spool of fine linen line from Roettger for tying the pieces of bamboo together. When the job was done, it was a curious thing. It was a large model. It was a low-winged monoplane with the wings dropped, high-wheeled to accommodate a long propeller.

By this time Vogt was back on duty, still without any replacements for his front teeth. He was hilarious to listen to, when he talked to others of the crew, lisping in German sounding worse than in French. Vogt seized the plane model and took it to the captain. The model was novel, and the captain had it taken down in drawings in detail. Then he returned it in person.

"Very ingenious," he remarked, "but probably it won't fly. How are you going to cover it?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll tear up a shirt. But I haven't carved a propeller yet. How about that?"

"I think silk might work," said Heinz absently, thinking. "I'll get some for you." He turned his back, passed the guard and went up the companionway.

OUT of sheer desperation the Cliptical Sort held a mock prayer service. Ardath was the monitor, and everyone in the hold listened. The Sort were closely grouped, and Ardath kept his hands raised benignantly.

As though praying, he said, "Holy Smokes, isn't this a hell of a fix to be in!"

In effect, the men answered, "Yea, bo! A hell of a fix!"

Ardath said, "Daniel in the lion's den!"

"Yo ho, Daniel!"

"This vessel is buggy, as buggy as the old George."

"It certainly is buggy!"

"I'd recommend shoving cactus down their throats."

"Cactus!" And a man from Arizona hollered, "Make it saguaro! Yay, saguaro!"

"Right now," Ardath bellowed, "I could eat a lard sandwich. I'm starving, boys!"

"Lard, lard, lard!" the Clipticals yelled.

They went on like that, scaring the rest of the prisoners, but the German guard didn't catch on. He just stared.

ROETTGER sent down, by Vogt, some silk and a tube of glue in a paper bag. The silk was for covering the wings and fuselage of the model.

Gouge was shocked, because he recognized the silk. It was from underthings which he had bought for Gail Humphrey. Her initials were embroidered on the hem. Lingerie. He wasn't going to use it, and for a while he left it folded neatly.

Along with the perfumed things came his camera tripod. This was the "wood" for his propeller. Some more of Roettger's humor.

The tripod was made of a heavy, tough, close-grained wood, and it would have been nasty to carve if he hadn't had a tool as handy as the English knife.

The skeleton of the plane was complete, and he oiled a button on the nose of the fuselage so that the propeller would spin. Now he lacked rubber binders for motive power, and he got only a few from the captain. Not enough. So they pulled the rubber out of a couple of pairs of new suspenders, and garters, that the men were wearing. It wasn't important to a man on the *Doremio* if his socks or pants stayed up or not.

Gouge covered the framework with the silk from Gail's underthings, and neatly glued it tight. He

wound the propeller up to give the big model a trial flight, but it never took off. The propeller snapped in two at the hub, where he had drilled a large hole to accommodate the peg to which the rubbers were hitched.

He tossed the pieces to Ardath, who turned them over in his hands and remarked, "You made it too thin, didn't you?"

"What else am I going to do?" he replied irritably. "Look how heavy the wood is. The plane would just nose-dive before it ever took off, with any more weight in front."

Ardath looked at him, frowning, idly tapping the halves of the propeller together like a man playing bones, they had a faintly musical ring.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Start making another one," Gouge snapped, and he proceeded to measure off another length of the tripod at once.

The men were disappointed in the failure, and drifted away, while Ardath went over to the little boy to amuse him with simple magician's tricks, making objects appear and disappear.

The second propeller was a beauty, smooth, and with long, thin, tapered blades, but it shared the fate of the first. He shrugged, and began all over again.

The third one snapped before he ever got it mounted, when he was driving the peg into the shaft hole. Then he quit for a while. His hands were cut in a dozen places, careful as he was, and his fingers had to be worked and limbered up before he could use them, every morning; that was mighty tough wood to cut.

"Better wait till after visiting hours," Ardath suggested. "Just in case anything goes wrong."

"All right with me. Everything look all set to you?"

"Every Cliptical has but one life to give for his country," said Ardath. "Every one of us knows his job. We know where all the crew are at a given time. Better kiss your girl good-bye, though."

"I'll do that little thing."

## CHAPTER IX

### Simple Magic



AS USUAL, a vacant place was left for him beside Gail on deck, and he pretended that this day was just like any other. He put his arm around her and she asked, "Flown the plane yet?"

"No. Broke another propeller for one thing. But it's never going to fly anyhow."

"Why not, chum?"

When she used that term, she was in good spirits, or had something on her mind.

"Ah, those rubber bands would never take the strain. I don't dare make enough turns even to pull the ship more than a yard forward. Old rubber and not enough of it. Broke the propellers on purpose, by cutting a notch almost all the way through at the hub, where the hole is."

"I think I begin to see a light."

"It kept Pieter's interest up, anyhow. He was always looking forward to the next time."

"'Kept'? You aren't going to try it again, then."

"The gag's worn out, and he's not



dumb for a little lad. It gripes me a little about the guard down there, though. He knew the thing would never fly, and just about gave the show away by sneering all the time."

They were silent for a while, communicating merely in physical contact. He couldn't help thinking of long hours alone with her in New York, and all the fun they had had together. Even the quarrels and feuding were something pleasant to remember. They had played dirty tricks on each other, and they were wonderful in retrospect. Once he took her for a ride on a cold winter night, and forgot to buy gasoline. They got stranded in the country, and she turned on enough rage to make a nun jump out of her habit. But there was no point in freezing to death, so he buttoned her up in his big overcoat, with himself an occupant, too, for warmth, and lo and behold they survived till morning when a farmer came by.

She said, "That Dietrich tramp, the one who sold the diamonds, likes to tease me. She tells me that we're going to Germany and get interned."

"I've heard the same thing."

"We're meeting another ship, and we'll go to Germany. Some of us will be kept there, and they'll let some of us go. I'm going to stay in Germany."

A needle of pain pricked his heart. "What for?"

"I'm good looking," she said with her old sarcasm. "The captain took a fancy to me, and is sending me to a friend of his who can pull strings in the Nazi Party. He wants to get promoted. Sending me just like a bundle, tied with cord! I wanted to tell you that he had me in his cabin.

He made some promises but I don't believe them—I don't know—just because he sent Dietrich for me. If you get the idea," she finished faintly.

"He sent down your underthings," he said, "as covering for the model plane." His voice was slow. He looked at her, and she turned up her face for a moment, and nodded.

FOR a minute he couldn't think, he was in such a rage over another man's handling her. But in a normal voice he assured her, "It's all right between you and me. But I'd just like to hit him a few times, tear his eyes out, stick toothpicks under his nails, and random little pleasures like that."

He squeezed her gently, and she responded, and suddenly the visiting time was up.

Hurriedly he said, "Let me see that birthmark on your leg just once more if you want to."

As they all got up from the deck she managed to show him the freckle high up on the roundness of her leg, pulling her skirt up as though by accident.

"So long, keed, and thanks," he said.

"So long, chum." She gave him a brilliant smile.

THE men were herded down in the hold again, and Ardath casually joined Gouge. He asked how the ribs were, and Gouge guessed that they were all right; he had peeled the bandages off long ago.

"Better let me do this," said Ardath, making it an order. "The hand is quicker than the eye, and

I've had some practice at it."

"All right," Gouge agreed. "It's the only chance."

He looked around, and the Clipticals looked to him like a hard and sinewy bunch. No wonder the German captain had been suspicious. They were trained, lean fellows with pleasantly cold eyes, and a few had suspicious scars, as though they had been in action. They weren't up to their peak, only because of the rotten food. All of them volunteer agents. A juicy bag for the Germans, if the rats only knew. They would know pretty soon.

Ardath manufactured a sneeze and said, "Excuse me!"

He kept his back turned, but five men in the Cliptical group said or growled here and there, "Bless you!"

Ardath was the best man for the job. He had been a magician by profession, and had worked in places where he had to be good. He knew how to act. He had worked on the stage and in fancy night clubs, and was a master at his work. But everyone in the hold had an inkling of something about to happen, and there was such a rigidity of waitfulness in the air that even Pigeye Vogt sensed it. The Nazi guard got ready, alert.

He didn't really believe that anything was going to happen again; he just rested his hand on the pistol at his belt.

Ardath ducked under some laundry hanging from lines they had strung, and got the cockroach cage from a man who was watching it. Then he returned and headed for the foot of the companionway and Vogt, who narrowed his blue eyes.

Smiling pleasantly, the magician showed Vogt the small rattan cage in the palm of his hand, turned his hand over, and the cage was gone. The Nazi looked Ardath over blankly, expecting to see the cage bulging somewhere, in Ardath's clothing. In the meanwhile, the magician stabbed Vogt with all his might in the chest.

Vogt looked down, and his knees buckled in surrender to death when Ardath caught him.

**E**VERYTHING was timed very nicely. They knew when a man was supposed to stick his head down the companionway and see whether everything was all right.

A couple of them picked up Vogt to carry him, while several were taking down drying laundry hanging from lines across the hold. They took Vogt's gun and his pair of grenades away, and then buried him under the heap of laundry.

They were using the wooden knives, six of them, the halves of the propeller blades for the model plane. Gouge had sharpened them to a point, and they could be used like knives. The wood was close-grained and extremely tough, like bamboo; it wouldn't snap; at the last point of tension it would splinter, but it would have to bend pretty far first. So there were six knives, in effect, pointed and deadly, and the hubs and shanks that Gouge had carved made a solid handle. The knives had a good grip.

Gouge climbed the companionway and stuck his head out into the salt air. Hans Maxl was walking by. Gouge climbed out on the hardwood deck first, then whispered down to

Ardath, "Mattress." He looked all around, and no one seemed to be noticing, so he got behind the German and said, softly, "Maxl."

The German turned around mechanically. Gouge had one of the wooden knives in his sleeve, and he pushed it hard between Maxl's ribs. The man was dead right then. Gouge looked around quickly, but there wasn't any time to waste. He threw Maxl down the companionway onto the mattress. There was a thump, and the Clipticals carried the body away to hide with Vogt's.

"Come on down here, you fool!" Ardath said.

Gouge dropped down the companionway just in time. He told Ardath, "I think we're crazy. This won't work. There are too many of them up there."

A German came down the stairs with a tray of good food for the little boy, Van Pool, and a Cliptical hit him over the head with all his might.

The grim men went upstairs then, having six hand grenades and three heavy pistols. They pulled the pins off the grenades, which would go off if they were dropped. There wasn't much shooting. If a Nazi took a shot, a grenade would go off.

The Clipticals filtered through the ship, all soldiers, and taking over. The whole crew of the *Bongolong* was in on the deal, and started grabbing jobs as wheelmen and even nasty jobs in the engine room. Gouge called on the captain, who was playing the flute. He jerked the flute out of his hands while Heinz watched with wide eyes, and threw it aside onto a couch. The detective hit him with all his strength, but the

German captain didn't fall, even though Gouge felt that his ribs were torn loose.

Ardath came in behind him, and jumped so desperately that he went flat on the deck. The shots missed him. Firing was going on all over the ship. Gouge shot deliberately at Roettger, because he had nothing else to do, and the captain fell.

THEY had the ship. They were plowing northward toward Florida when they got the word. One of the Clipticals said, "I've been working the key. They thought we were kidding them, but an Australian cruiser is coming up. I wouldn't be surprised if they shoot first."

So they ran with all flags flying, with the white flag of truce, the American, British, Brazilian, Chinese, Panamanian, Honduras, and other flags.

There was a radio man among the Clipticals, and he got an answer, a repeat.

He reported to Ardath, "There's an Australian cruiser meeting us. They were suspicious at first. But they answered. He must have been American. He said he was all ready to start firing."

"Damn it," said Gouge, "they must think there are two of us, and they'll sink one."

But they were going to make it. Everything was all fixed with fate now. He and Ardath had ransacked the captain's quarters, and had found the box containing the diamonds and the U. S. currency, and Gouge had his girl back.

The two stood in the wind of the ship's making, forward, and the  
(Concluded on page 125)

# The CASE of



*He was on the case merely to find out where bad wine was being sold to the public under phony labels. But a pretty girl's legs always interested Honest John more than liquor, and he discovered that people can wear phony labels too—especially killers*



**H**ONEST JOHN CARMODY looked as if he couldn't tell Benedictine from sheep dip when he cocked a big hoof on the brass rail of the Sequoia Club and sized up the bottles. He had a round red face that did not look any too bright, and while blue serge is somewhat slenderizing, he still seemed almost as broad as the bar was long, though he was beefy, rather than fat. He pointed a stumpy finger at a bottle labeled *Imperial Amontillado*, and asked the proprietor, "Listen, is that Amonta-dillo any good? I once read something a fellow named Poe wrote about a cask of it."

Ion Katras didn't even smile at the muffed pronunciation. Certainly he did not suspect that Honest John was an investigator retained by the State Board of Equalization to check up on joints suspected of refilling bottles, selling liquor to minors, or doing business after two A.M. "That," said Mr. Katras, without a shade of



# the HIDDEN BRIDE

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

accent, "is sixty-year-old Amontillado, imported from Spain, sir."

"I usta know a Spanish dame." Honest John sighed reminiscently. "Gimme a shot."

Ion Katras set out a glass a little larger than a brandy pony, and filled it with the straw colored wine. When

he rang up half a dollar, Honest John squawked, "Hell, I don't want the bottle, I only wanted a drink."

The thrown suitcase struck the bandaged head and at the same time deflected the automatic.



The proprietor explained, "It cost \$5.50 a fifth, before the war."

John Carmody sniffed at the glass, tasted, then flung it down the hatch. "Good, but not much kick. Poe was nuts, I guess."

The bottle had been refilled with three-year-old California sherry, overpriced at forty cents a quart. Only an occasional customer knew the difference, and that one could always get his money back if he howled. But this time the joke was on Mr. Katras, though he would not learn the difference between a chump and a dick until he was caught in the act of refilling the bottle; that would come later.

On his way out, Honest John saw the blonde in the booth, over in the shadowy far corner. His first impression was, "What legs! And the rest is worth taking home." She wore python shoes, and on the table was a python bag which lay open; she was retouching her make-up, and so she did not catch his eye when he paused to look her over, his glance lingering on the shapely curves that rounded her knit dress, the fine sweep of throat and cheek, the gleaming hair that was topped by a fantastic little hat which seemed to have been made up of breast feathers of a pheasant.

He knew the girl: Annette Gaynor, the contractor's daughter. Honest John decided not to go to her table. He went out, muttering, "What the hell's the use, I'm tired of meeting her boy friends."

Annette's old man had plenty of dough. A plug ugly with a bald spot didn't have a Chinaman's chance, Honest John had figured the first time he met her, and he'd played it

that way. Annette was one of the two-three girls who had made him wish he were young, handsome, and not an ex-cop, so he avoided her.

The Sequoia Club was on a steep hilltop behind San Carlos, half an hour's drive from San Francisco. Bridge playing dames met there for cocktails; later, the dancing and necking crowd came up. But at this off hour, Ion Katras tended his own bar.

Carmody's car was the only one parked on the flat space between the club and the steep road. He did not see anything pointed out until he reached the first turn; then he pulled up, and nosed his bus into the turn-out space.

Where was Annette's car? How had she gotten up to the isolated club? Far below, the lights of San Carlos twinkled; commuters were bellying up to their roast beef. He wondered if Katras had brought Annette to the club. She was free, blonde, and twenty-one, and it was nobody's business, but Honest John didn't like it. So he began to hoof it up the graveled road for a quiet look. Maybe Annette was too trusting.

AS HE puffed his way up the steep grade, Honest John grumbled, "If that slick — hadn't sold me chain-store sherry out of an Amontillado bottle, I wouldn't snoop, but a gent that flim-flams his customers ain't a gent."

His hunch was better than his logic. He was not more than half-way across the vacant parking space when he heard Annette cry, "Ion, don't be silly—keep your hands at home! I don't care what I said last year, this is—ooooh—"

Her scream told him that she was angry, not frightened. But her voice changed by the time he barged into the cocktail lounge. Katras had her in both arms. Her hat was dangling, her hair was mussed, and the front of her dress had lost several buttons.

Annette side-stepped to put a table between herself and Katras, who gasped, "Don't carry on that way—just listen to me—you can't dispose of me this way—not after—"

He made a dive for her, and Honest John headed for him. It was a nice piece of blocking, and with it came a fist that lifted Katras off his feet. Honest John caught him with one hand, and socked him a second, which ended the show, and gave Annette a chance to hide a number of enticing spots.

Honest John took her arm. "Where's your car keys, you're shaking all over."

"Please get me out of here before he comes to!" She went with him to the door, clinging to his arm, and he could feel the tremor of her body. "I'm waiting for someone, and I won't wait here."

"And you can't be sitting out in the chaparral—" He gestured toward the scrubby growth that matted the hillsides. "I'm parked down that way."

Before they reached his sedan, he learned that Annette had not noticed him come in, that she had not heard him order wine. When she saw his curious look, she explained, "I was thinking . . . about things."

Without any conscious design, he opened the rear door of the car, and as he followed her in, he said, "If he's making a pest of himself, I can cure him."

He meant that as an under-cover investigator, he could nail Katras for pawing a customer. Annette twisted about, and clung to him for a moment, and said, "Please don't, I do appreciate your intentions, but just let it pass, don't say anything."

She draped herself over him, he knew, only because she was frightened and worried, and because he was an overgrown ox with an honest mug that made people trust him; but that knowledge did not keep his blood pressure down, not with the pressure Annette unintentionally applied with her shapely curves. He stroked her sleek hair and said, "Don't worry, honey, I got ways of settling him without embarrassing you a bit."

"You've been awfully nice to me."

Then she looked up, and impulsively kissed him. Though it was trademarked "Gratitude," Honest John decided to ignore the difference. His arms tightened about her, and he kissed her, whole heartedly, full on the mouth; he blurted out, "Maybe I'm a sap, but this is something I've been thinking about ever since I met you, two-three years ago."

When she finally did protest, faintly, he let her go and said, "Oh, hell! This hasn't helped a bit." He struck light to a cigar, and slid well away. "Me, ex-cop."

"I hope that's not why you've avoided me. It's—well, I'm engaged to Cyril Bardwell—that's what I was explaining to Ion Katras."

"You used to like Katras?"

"But not any more." A car was whining up the steep grade. Annette made for the door. "That's Cyril

now, coming to pick me up. He had some business in Hidden Valley, about a subdivision he and dad are building up. I'll go back, I didn't want him to know—"

"Huh! He'll see your dress—"

"He won't. I left my coat at the club. I'll get it, you needn't go with me, Ion has cooled down, he's just impulsive."

"Can't wear your coat all evening."

"I'll be going home to change, then we're going to dad's place in Carmel—" She paused at the running board. "Why don't you drive out and join us?"

"Uh . . ."

"Oh, you've thought I was snooty, I'm not. I'd love to have you."

Before he could say more than "Okay," she was hurrying up the grade.

In a moment, he recognized Cyril Bardwell's long, cream-colored convertible as it swept around the curve. Against his better judgment, Honest John decided that he'd go to Carmel, to old man Gaynor's lodge. It was nice just looking at Annette, and her father was a swell fellow.

**T**WO hours later, Honest John was thinking of all this as he booted his bus down the Monterey Highway. He was a chump for going; Annette was just trying to be nice. And then he found something else to think about.

A car was helling down the pike, and weaving all over the road. Honest John swung to the shoulder, which luckily was wide and firm. A cream colored convertible howled past, barely avoiding a sideswipe. Honest John choked and stopped

cursing when he caught that one glimpse of the open car.

A girl was standing up, struggling with a man who tried to hold her with one arm while he drove with the other. No wonder he was weaving all over the road! Honest John slumped back against the cushions, and broke out in a sweat. "Jeez, I would have to think it was Annette, in Bardwell's Packard!"

The tail-lights were blotted by the curve.

Then he heard the crash, and groaned, "Whoever it is, they're cold meat."

He tooled his bus around the turn. Ahead was a straight-away, the approach to a bridge that crossed a deep arroyo, dry at this season. The angle of the headlights that reached up from the gloom told him that the convertible had landed in a heap. The engine was silent. He slid to a stop, and scrabbled down the grade, loose rocks bouncing ahead of him.

A man was moaning. The woman made no sound. When he reached the wreck, he saw why. Annette, head and face all battered, lay among pieces of splinter-proof glass. She must have been hurled through the windshield. Her white satin evening gown was torn and blood clotted as her hair. Her lovely legs showed not a twitch of life as she lay in the headlight glow.

The man was sprawled nearby. It was Cyril Bardwell, who was mumbling, "Where's Annette?"

Honest John stood there for a second, too shocked to approach and see how serious Bardwell's injuries were. The light reflected from the concrete abutment showed more than the man's torn face and hands;





He cried: "No! You can't dispose of me this way! Not after . . .!"

it exposed the cause of the crack-up. The front tire had been cut, as with a knife, a clean, sharp slash. This was murder, and he wondered if Ion Katras had planned such a vengeance.

"Where's Annette?" Bardwell repeated.

Honest John already knew the an-

swer, but he knelt beside the battered girl, felt her wrist, laid his ear against the swell of her bodice. "She's gone. Let me give you a hand."

Bardwell's leg doubled up, and he collapsed. Game leg, and perhaps internal injuries. Honest John said, "I'd hurt you some more if I tried to

move you. Need an ambulance. Wait, I'll be back with help."

He had barely reached his car when a highway patrol came up with red lights blazing. They had seen the crazy headlights in the arroyo, and had looped back to investigate. Honest John hailed the cops, and told them that he had heard the crack-up, and had been on the point of going for help. While one cop raced to the nearest phone, the other asked John, "You know them?"

"The girl, yes. The guy, just by sight. They breezed past my old clunk, and then—whop! I was on my way to her old man's lodge in Carmel. Jeez, he'll go loco, his only daughter."

The cop said, "Damn' fool was rolling too fast," and turned to Bardwell; but the dead girl's fiancé just sat there, mumbling. Shock still kept him from knowing the score.

Honest John waited until the ambulance arrived, and the wrecker's spotlights played on the cream colored car. He had not said a word about that struggle, just before the crash.

Maybe Annette had taken a couple too many Martinis and had gotten light headed. Maybe the lovers had quarreled until, becoming hysterical, he had tried to calm her. With both hands on the wheel, Bardwell might have avoided a crack-up. It was all so screwy that Honest John dummied up.

The cops exchanged glances when they saw the slashed front tire. They weren't missing much. And then they found the lug wrench and the jack, which had apparently spilled out under the front seat. The wrench was bloody. One said, "No damn'

wonder, with them bleeding all over the place."

The ambulance was gone, and now the tow car unlimbered its crane. Honest John said, "Better pick up those pieces of busted windshield."

The cop asked, "You running this show? What for?"

"Just in case. There's no blood on the glass, which is funny. And you saw that slashed tire." He took out his wallet and flashed his credentials. "This isn't my business, but we're all on the same payroll."

The sergeant pushed back his cap and frowned. "Carmody? Oh, you're Honest John, who gets by looking dumb. Why should there be blood on the glass, hell, I've seen 'em dive through lots of windshields, sometimes they don't start bleeding till they're on the other side. Or didn't you ever hear of that?"

"Okay, okay. Only you did make a note of a slashed front tire, so why not go whole hog, old man Gaynor'll like to know who murdered his daughter and tried to finish his number one engineer. Be seeing you."

He did not tell the cops that he was going to have a word with Ion Katras, let them get that lead when Bardwell recovered enough to tell what had happened when he met Annette at the Sequoia.

AS HE drove back toward San Carlos, he pondered on the fact that the convertible had not smashed into any rocks on its way down the steep embankment. But for plain tough luck, Annette would have lived through the crash. It was almost a freak, the way she had plunged through the glass. Judging from tire

tracks, Bardwell had slowed down a lot before he swerved.

The whole thing was crazy, but a murder usually is.

Though the Sequoia Club was closed when he pulled up, just below the hilltop, there were lights in the second floor. Honest John scrambled up to the flat top of the one-story wing, and from there he got a look into the second floor lounge. This had been fixed up for living quarters, and it seemed that Katras was living well.

Since the club was on the highest hill for miles around, the shades were not drawn. Katras and his red-headed dame thought that only the moon could see. . . .

She was neatly draped over the lounge. Her acacia yellow dress was folded over the back of a chair, and didn't hide enough to count. Katras was coming up for air; that was plain from the way her arms slid away from his as he straightened.

"Sure I'd do you a favor," he was saying. "But look, Beatrice, this isn't the place for that kind of a game. Suppose Annette does catch them together up here, where do you come in?"

"I'll take care of that!" Beatrice wriggled herself upright, and hitched a shoulder strap into place. "Please, Ion, you won't lose out."

Katras was eager enough to please the girl, but scared of her plan for a badger game to put Cyril Bardwell behind the eight ball.

Katras tried to pry loose from Beatrice's fresh grip. He said, "I'd get my license revoked. The State Board—"

"Silly!" The redhead made the hold good, and squirmed closer, pull-

ing Katras into a clinch. "She'd not squawk, neither would he, they'd not want to discuss it, would they? Please, Ion—"

With a girl like that, Katras could not argue. He began kissing her, and Honest John knew that until the huddle broke, he'd learn nothing about the plot. So he crept away from the window, and slid to the ground. He went to the side entrance, which opened on the stairs that led to the second floor, and pushed the bell button. That buzz would gripe Katras, bring him downstairs on the run.

At the third long ring, a window rattled up, and Katras growled, "What do you want? The place is closed."

"Ain't two o'clock, what you closing for?"

"That's my business!"

"Are you Ion Katras?"

"Certainly I am. Now get out. Go home!"

Honest John chuckled. "Easy, easy, pal. Come on down, I want to talk to you about that sixty-year-old Amontillado. State Board, in case you're interested."

"State Board? You'd better be on the level, or I'll knock your head off! Go around to the bar entrance, I'll be down."

The redhead was not saying anything. Katras had sounded relieved at the mention of Amontillado. He must have had something serious on his mind to be so unconcerned about getting hooked for refilling bottles.

Lights snapped on. Katras opened the big oaken door, and said, "So it's you? Come in. What do you mean, Amontillado?"

His face was bruised from the two

blows that had knocked him out and put an end to pawing Annette. Honest John answered, "Sit down and let's talk about that sheep dip you sell to suckers for four-bits a shot. I'm an inspector."

"That's not sheep dip, that's imported!"

"The bottle was." Honest John seated himself at a table. "But the wine wasn't. And don't tell me your bartenders do the refilling. You'd not run the risk of them squawking when the Board raised hell."

Katras demanded, sarcastically, "You had witnesses, didn't you?"

Honest John leaned back and grinned. "Maybe you think I'm the only one that's cased this joint of yours. But the final play is up to me, when I seal the bottle and take it along, right now."

"Why didn't you take it then and there?"

"Because there was a girl in the booth. She might have been a bum witness." He winked. "You got to be careful of witnesses."

"Oh." The Greek brightened. "How much do you want?"

"You're not worrying about pawing that dame? That's funny."

Katras rubbed his jaw. "That was none of your business. She's a friend of mine, and she wouldn't appear against me, even if I was fool enough to get out of line. Let's talk about amontillado. How much?"

"Just this. You were sore because she broke up with you and fell for Cyril Bardwell. And while he was picking her up from here, you slashed the front tire of his bus, so he'd crack up, being a fast driver. Well, he did crack up, on the Monterey Road. Annette Gaynor's dead,

he'll pull through. You killed that dame, as sure as if you'd conked her with your own hands. And it's all up to me, buddy, I'm the only one that saw you muss her up."

The Greek turned pea green, and looked sick. "My God—I didn't—I wouldn't hurt Annette—I know I got out of line, but I wouldn't hurt her, nor Bardwell either. He didn't see she was mussed up, she put her coat on. She wouldn't want him to know, he was so damn' jealous."

"So you sliced the tire, not knowing she'd be with him tonight. You didn't figure you'd get her into a crackup with him, huh?"

Katras was stuttering; things looked bad for him. Honest John got up and stalked out, saying, "Think it over, buddy, you'll be hearing more of me."

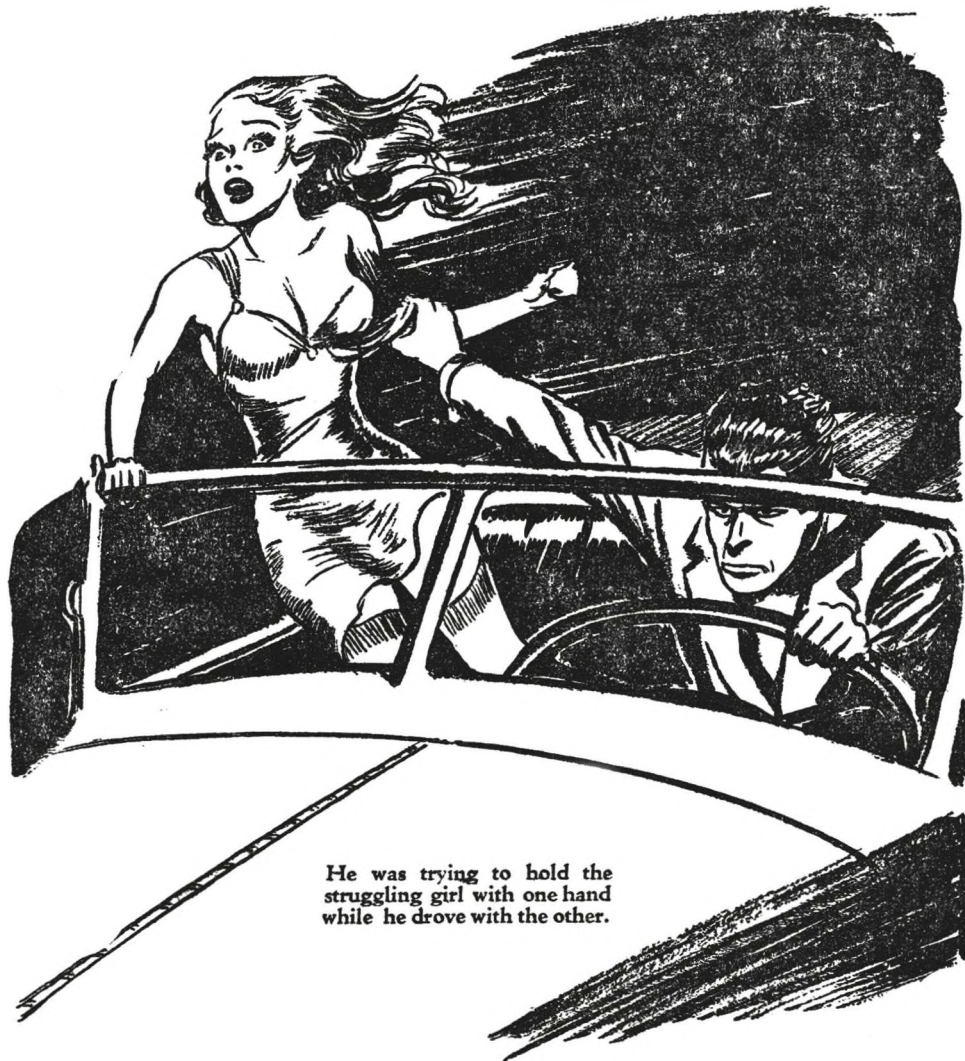
Since he had no proof, his only way was to leave the man sweating.

He was halfway across the parking space when an engine roared. A coupe darted for the downhill road. There was a girl at the wheel; moonlight made that clear enough, and Honest John was certain that she wore only a slip.

By the time he reached his own car, parked well down the grade, there was no chance of chasing her. She could hide out in any one of twenty cockeyed roads and drives that penetrated the wooded hills. The fugitive must be Beatrice, the redhead, scared out by that first quip about the State Board. Apparently she thought the place was being raided, and her conscience had done the rest.

When he reached San Carlos, he swung over to the curbing and tried to make sense of the tangle. He





He was trying to hold the struggling girl with one hand while he drove with the other.

had intended to pull Katras out of a hot clinch, throw a scare into him, fake a departure, and then return to find out what the Greek and the red-head would do and say. He had not anticipated her panic at the mention of the State Board.

However, he did have Katras sweating. And the next move would be in Monterey, where Cyril Bardwell was recovering from shock and bruises; where Annette awaited the

coroner, where a wrecked car awaited inspection by the cops. His best move seemed to tell the law just a little more; but for the time, he decided to say nothing about that glimpse of Annette, standing up in the speeding car. Meanwhile, he'd see what he could work out by himself.

Had Katras put some drug into her drink, a drug that put her into a frenzy, not long after she left the

Sequoia Club? In ignorance of her plans for the evening, he might have done just that.

THE following morning, he was in Monterey looking over the wrecked car. The highway cop who had taken over at the crash was in charge. Honest John said, "Let's fit the pieces of windshield together."

The cop didn't object, and he wasn't interested until the job was done. Then he saw that the fragments fitted perfectly. In the center of the rayed joints was a hole the size of a half dollar. "Say—that's funny!" He squatted on the greasy floor. "Something small and hard busted that glass."

Honest John nodded. "Smaller and harder than a girl's head, that's what I thought last night, when I cracked off about no blood on the glass. That dame didn't go through the windshield at all. That was faked."

"Huh?"

"Sure. You saw that slashed tire, and began thinking of murder, like I did, except you figured it was just spite work with a nasty ending. My angle is that that glass was busted, to make it look like she'd killed herself diving through the windshield, when it was really something else that finished her."

The cop jerked to his feet. "What do you know about this, mister?"

"I know the gal, the guy, and her dad. I know another guy that liked her, and was jealous. He could have slashed the rubber, then after the crackup, killed the dame. Me coming along scared him out of conking Bardwell. If you and me

saw the crackup so soon after it happened, why couldn't he have been prowling the highway, waiting for it."

"That's got more holes in it than that poor dame's head," the cop scoffed. "You might have been the guy yourself."

"Sure I could, only I wasn't jealous of Bardwell, and I can tell you who was. Ion Katras, at the Sequoia Club, in San Carlos. I saw her scratching him up, right after I inspected his place as a matter of State Board routine."

"If Katras has an alibi, your yarn is crazy!"

"Enough bartenders and customers will fix him up with an alibi, but are you chump enough to swallow that whole? What's a roadhouse alibi good for, anyway?"

Without waiting for further argument, Honest John went to the office, where he learned that his quip about no blood being on the windshield glass had gotten a rise. There was not a fragment of glass in any of the wounds and slashes in Annette's scalp; but there were microscopic bits of it on the lug wrench, and more than that, a wisp of blonde hair. When he learned all this, Honest John realized that the highway cop at the garage had been playing dumb, leading him on.

"Katras," he told himself, "is going to smell hell, right now."

And his next thought was that the Greek would not necessarily be the only one; he, Honest John, might get a whiff himself. Annette had invited him to Carmel, but she was beyond verifying that phase of his story. There was, however, just a chance that she had told Cyril Bard-

well of the last minute guest, and without explaining what had motivated her. The only thing to do was to see the young engineer and find out whether he had recovered from the shock.

AT THE hospital, Honest John found Bardwell with his head bandaged, only one eye being visible. Collodion and gauze pulled his mouth out of shape. No one would suspect him of being either dark or handsome, not with all that patchwork.

"They said you'd not mind seeing me, Mr. Bardwell."

"I don't feel any too chipper, Carmody. But if you know who had a hand in that terrible job, I want to know about it."

"So they told you it was a job, not an accident?"

The injured man grimaced behind his bandages. "Slashed tire. God, I can't imagine who would do that, we've not had any labor disputes, and neither I nor Annette's father have any personal enemies."

He went on that way for a few minutes, and without mentioning Katras. That seemed odd, and Honest John asked, "How about the fellow that runs the Sequoia Club? You edged him out of the picture."

Bardwell started. "I never thought of that. Too groggy, I guess."

"I know how it is," Honest John answered, sympathetically. "You were lucky, not seeing her."

Bardwell shuddered. "They wouldn't come right out and say she was dead, but I felt she must have been. I remembered what you'd said, I'd hoped you were wrong.

They all hedged when I asked them." He bowed, covered his face with a bandaged hand. "Oh, Lord, it was awful, that second in the air."

"How about Katras?" Honest John prompted after the moment it took him to shake the horrible picture from his own mind. "I may as well tell you, I busted into the lounge suddenly, that evening. Katras was pawing her, and I slugged him silly."

"The devil he was! The dirty ——!" Wrath shook his voice.

"She didn't tell me. When I came to pick her up, she was pacing up and down, rather agitated, pulling her coat about her. She didn't say much, and when I asked where Katras was, she said he'd gone upstairs." Bardwell became eager. "Can I depend on you as a witness? Katras has pull, you know."

"I won't scare out worth a damn," Honest John grimly answered. "He could have slashed that tire, he needn't have been upstairs, he knew you'd be dropping in to get her."

"Do the police know about that?"

"I just finished telling them. I hated to bring in that angle, people might not understand about her being there, alone, at that quiet hour when there's rarely a customer. Yeah, I know, you were making a business call in Hidden Valley, and left her there, the handiest place—well, I ended up by spilling that angle. But here's another thing I've not spilled."

"What?"

"You two passed me a-helling down the road. Annette was standing up, like she was trying to jump. My headlights made that plain, and there wasn't another cream-colored Packard convertible within miles. I

been wondering if he'd doped her, before she told him you'd be back so soon."

"By God, he might have!" Bardwell rose, winced, but kept his feet. "That dirty ——! That's right, Annette was acting funny, she began to scream and double up, she had awful cramps. I was scared silly, I was trying to hurry her to Monterey, to a doctor. I thought it was something she'd eaten. She'd only had that one drink, I never dreamed——"

He seated himself.

Honest John stroked his chin a moment, then said, "Katras, all right. And here's the payoff. Annette didn't dive through the windshield. The glass was knocked out, after the crash, with the lug wrench. And the lug wrench was what battered her over the head and killed her. I guess you'd gotten the same if I hadn't happened along. He must have been prowling, waiting for it to happen, hoping it'd happen in some place where there wasn't much traffic. Dashing on ahead, maybe figuring out you'd blow up on that bad curve, just before you got to the bridge. Then he heard the crash, and ran down to make sure, and seeing the lug wrench, he tried to improve on the job while you two were out cold."

Bardwell said not a word by way of breaking into Honest John's reconstruction. After a pause, he looked up, shaking his head. "No, God, no, Carmody! It couldn't have been Katras! He might have bashed my head in, but not Annette's. It doesn't make any sense, killing her. I'm sorry you told the police. After all, pawing a girl—— well, he's hot headed, impulsive——

but he wouldn't plot deliberate murder. I'd not have taken her up there if there'd been any hard feelings on my account. When Annette and I told him, months ago, how we felt about each other, he took it easy, and even opened champagne."

Honest John reached for his hat. "I hope I didn't talk out of turn. I'm sure sorry if I did. When'll you be out of this place?"

"I'm getting out if I have to walk out in these pajamas. My leg's a bit bad, but I can limp."

WHEN Honest John took the wheel of his car, he drove automatically. Bardwell's sudden change, from fury at Katras to assurance as to Katras' innocence, was puzzling. It seemed that, after a moment's reflection, the good-looking engineer had remembered some reason for protecting the Greek. What fear had caused this change of front?

There was no sense in quizzing Bardwell. The man would dummy up. The thing to do was to wait for him to leave the hospital; and in the meanwhile, be getting a good look at his apartment in San Francisco. Somewhere about the place there might be evidence pointing toward the reasons for his apparent fear of accusing Katras. And this was Honest John's plan when he passed the Del Monte, and swung around the curve toward Salinas and the big city.

"Something she ate," he muttered. "Never saw ptomaine freeze anyone's face in that awful grip Annette had. Never saw a drunk look that way."

He still saw the exposed teeth, the



pinched, sardonic smile; an absolutely impossible expression on the face of one knocked unconscious and then slugged to death. It was a strychnine grin, and he wondered if the MD's had noticed it. But then, they didn't know Annette's face as he did; she was just cold meat to them, a stiff didn't have any expression as far as a doctor was concerned. Strychnine grin, and strychnine cramps? He'd seen a woman who had taken a dose of the stuff, years ago, when he was a young cop.

But before he spilled enough to have the coroner demand an autopsy, Honest John wanted a further play at prodding Katras and Bardwell. Both were now worried; let them simmer, and someone's top would finally blow off. So, that night, he headed for Bardwell's apartment on Pine Street.

The Chinaman at the elevator took him to the fifth floor; Honest John hoofed it to the sixth, found Bardwell's door, and saw that prowling would be easy. He went up the stairs to the roof, replaced the trap, and then crossed to the fire escape, which was on the alley side of the building.

His approach was right. In a moment, he was on the landing, and at one of Bardwell's windows. He took a thin jimmy of alloy steel and started to pry the window. Then he heard voices in the adjoining room; a man and a woman were both trying to talk at once. A thread of light reached across the Chinese carpet. A door, barely ajar, played tricks with the dialog. Though he could not hear them clearly enough to count, they would hear the snap of the window lock.

Impatiently, he waited. Across the alley, someone switched on a light. A shade rolled up. He wedged himself against the grille, hoping that no one in the adjacent building would see him. Then a street car came clanging up the cross street. Honest John put pressure on the jimmy, and with the metallic clatter at the corner, the snapping lock was just another little sound.

He eased the sash upward, slowly, soundlessly; he hurdled a hot radiator, crept over the thick carpet, and past a chesterfield. Bardwell was saying, "You got my letter? I did not write you about the accident."

"But you did, darling. I've got it here."

And that exchange was what made Honest John abandon stealth. He bounded toward the bedroom door. This was better than he had hoped!

His eagerness proved a snag. Street reflection had spotted the furniture, but not the suitcase in the middle of the room. He took a header, and the floor shook from the impact. Bardwell cursed, jerked the door open; the girl screamed, "It's a burglar!"

**B**ARDWELL moved fast. Before Honest John could bolt for the hall door, the engineer was at the threshold of the bedroom, and cutting loose with a pistol. Honest John, though clear of the broad path of light, was in a tight corner. He yelled, "Cut it out, you fool, it's me! Carmody!"

But Bardwell was frightened, shooting first, questioning later. Slugs thumped into the thick carpet. Honest John snatched the light suitcase and heaved it. The missile

smacked the bandaged face and at the same time deflected the automatic. He followed up, lunging from a crouch; he connected and snatched Bardwell's wrist before the gun could get back in line.

In the full light, the engineer recognized the intruder, and gasped, "I thought it was Katras—what the hell you doing here?"

That was hard to answer without tipping off his hand; but what kept Honest John silent for a moment was the girl who stood there, wide eyed and mouth open, trying to scream again. She wore a lacy slip, and she had beautiful legs. One hand was still at her bosom as though reaching for something hidden: that letter Honest John guessed but he said, "Here we go, Beatrice!"

This was the redhead, the girl who had been trying to persuade Katras into a badger game to hook Bardwell. The engineer's face changed as much as his bandages permitted. He stepped forward and demanded, "What's the idea, Carmody? You're lucky I didn't kill you for a burgler."

"Tell you in a minute." He saw that Beatrice was scared and red; he pocketed Bardwell's automatic, and at the same time, snagged the redhead's slip. She screeched as the lace and silk tore. Then Bardwell bounded in to floor him. Honest John sidestepped, pulled with the punch, and knocked the engineer back across the bed.

"Hold it, both of you!" Honest John opened his big fist. "Let's look at this letter the gal says she got, and you say you didn't write."

It was addressed to Mrs. Cyril Bardwell, in Fresno, a little over

three hours drive from San Francisco. "What the hell you doing with this?"

"I'm Mrs. Bardwell, why shouldn't I have it?"

The engineer was sitting up, sputtering. Honest John glanced at the postmark; the letter had been mailed several hours before the fatal crash on the Monterey Highway. "And this tells about the accident, huh? Explaining how he and the boss's daughter got cracked up on the way to the old man's lodge in Carmel?"

"That's exactly what it says, and what of it? He had to be nice to his employer's daughter, didn't he?"

"So you had to be nice to Ion Katras, I guess. I saw all that show, upstairs. I saw you dive for your car to hightail back to Fresno, in time to get this letter this morning. And the letter brings you back."

Beatrice Bardwell choked, sank back into a chair. And then the cops arrived. Someone had reported the gun play. As they barged in, a hatchet-faced woman with white hair trailed after. "What's the idea?" the prowl car men demanded. "Who got shot?"

"I thought it was a burgler," Bardwell began.

Honest John cut in, "While you're here, pinch this guy for the murder of Annette Gaynor. In a faked auto crack-up. He wrote about the accident before it happened. That's what brought his wife up here."

"I didn't write it!"

The white-haired woman stepped up and said, "Why, that's the very letter you left on your dresser, and when I came in to clean up and saw it was to your wife, I went and

mailed it. While you were running around with another woman."

**H**ONEST JOHN handed the letter to the cops, then he said, "Beatrice Bardwell was worried about the way her husband was playing up to old man Gaynor's daughter, getting engaged to the girl, trying to fix it up so he'd become a partner in the construction company. That's all plain now, from what I saw last night, up in the Sequoia Club. She came in from Fresno to put the heat on Ion Katras, figuring that Katras, who liked Annette, would just break the engagement and shut up. She don't want to crab the good job."

Beatrice said, "That's right. And later, he could send for me, and pretend we'd been married after he broke up with Annette Gaynor."

One of the cops asked, "How'd you start doping this out, Carmody?"

"Simple. Him and Annette were grappling in his car, he said she had cramps, I suspected strychnine. Also, she'd been beaten to death with a lug wrench, which would throw suspicion away from the poison angle. Finally, when I told him Ion Katras must have slashed the tire that supposedly caused the crash, he was all ready to hang it on the Greek, but when I spilled about the girl having been slugged to death with a wrench, he tried to cover Katras, because he didn't want the Greek proving an alibi. Once Katras proved he wasn't there, after the crash, to conk Annette, he'd probably get clear on the tire-slashing business. But ask the cops in Monterey; they got everything except that one point I was

looking for—a bottle of strychnine around this house, which would settle Annette no matter how the crash worked out."

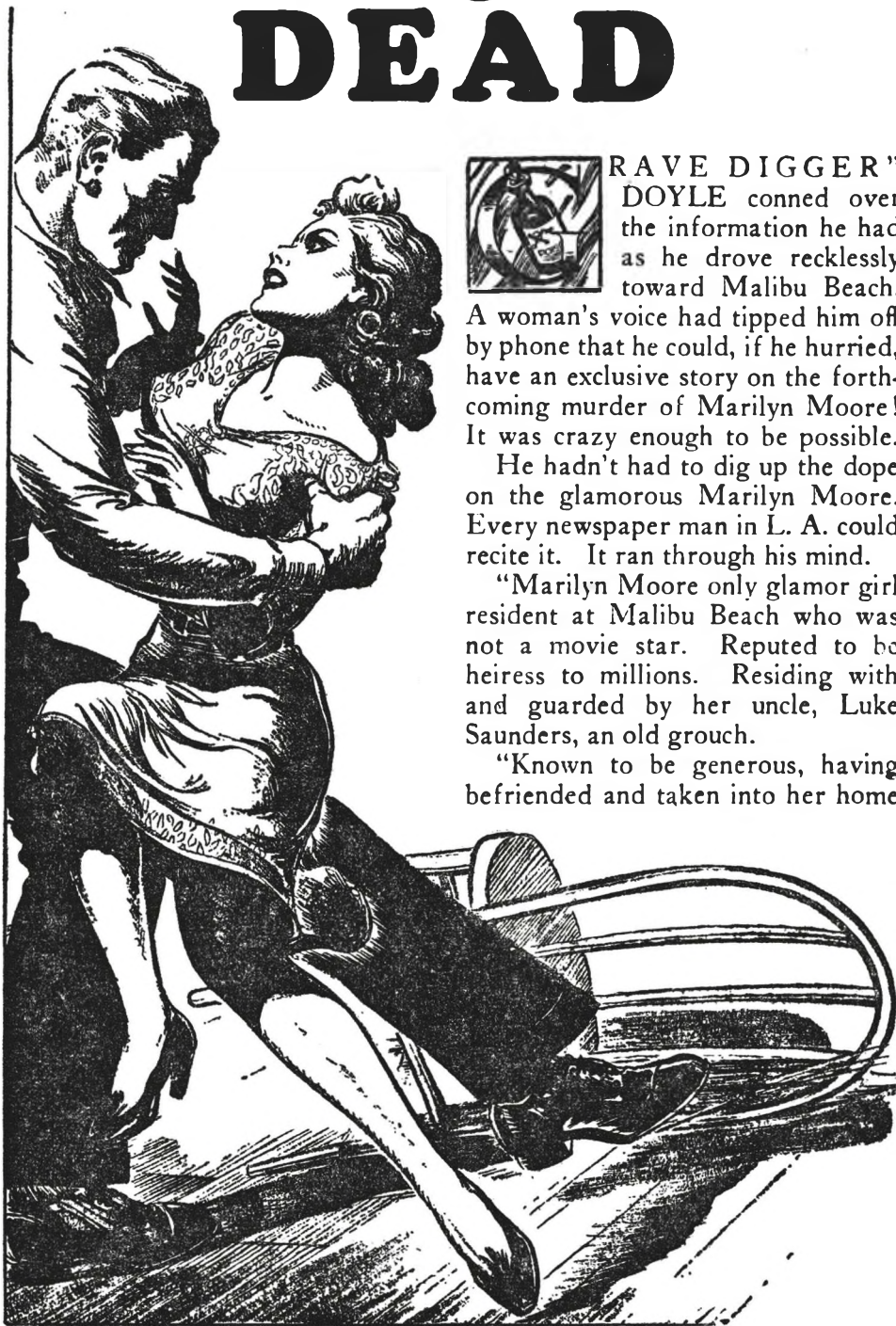
And that was the way it did shape up. There was a poison bottle in the apartment, and strychnine revealed by the autopsy. The letter, mailed before the accident, told how Bardwell had escaped with sprains, and cuts in his scalp, while "poor Annette's" skull had been fractured by the dive through the windshield.

Later, Honest John gave the D.A. his closing lines: "I was starting out on a hunch, but the more I saw of it, the less I thought Ion Katras did the job. He'd have conked Bardwell, not Annette. But Bardwell had a squawking wife, so he had to get rid of Annette. With a slashed tire making it look like sabotage, old man Gaynor wouldn't fire the dead daughter's fiance for crazy driving. And the good job would be cinched. He'd have gotten away with it, hands down, if Annette hadn't invited me to Carmel, and I hadn't seen her throwing a fit, in that car."

Then he drove down the Peninsula, and found Ion Katras at the club. He said to the worried Greek, "Look here, pal. I just turned up the guy that killed Annette. Neither one of us mugs had a chance with her."

The Greek smiled somberly. "I got sore when she told me she and Bardwell had been married secretly, in Reno. I knew that secret stuff meant trouble. I tried to tell her, but she wouldn't listen, and then I got light headed. All right, here we are again, from the case of the extra bride we get to that case of Amontillado."

# NOT QUITE DEAD



## RAVE DIGGER"

DOYLE conned over the information he had as he drove recklessly toward Malibu Beach.

A woman's voice had tipped him off by phone that he could, if he hurried, have an exclusive story on the forthcoming murder of Marilyn Moore! It was crazy enough to be possible.

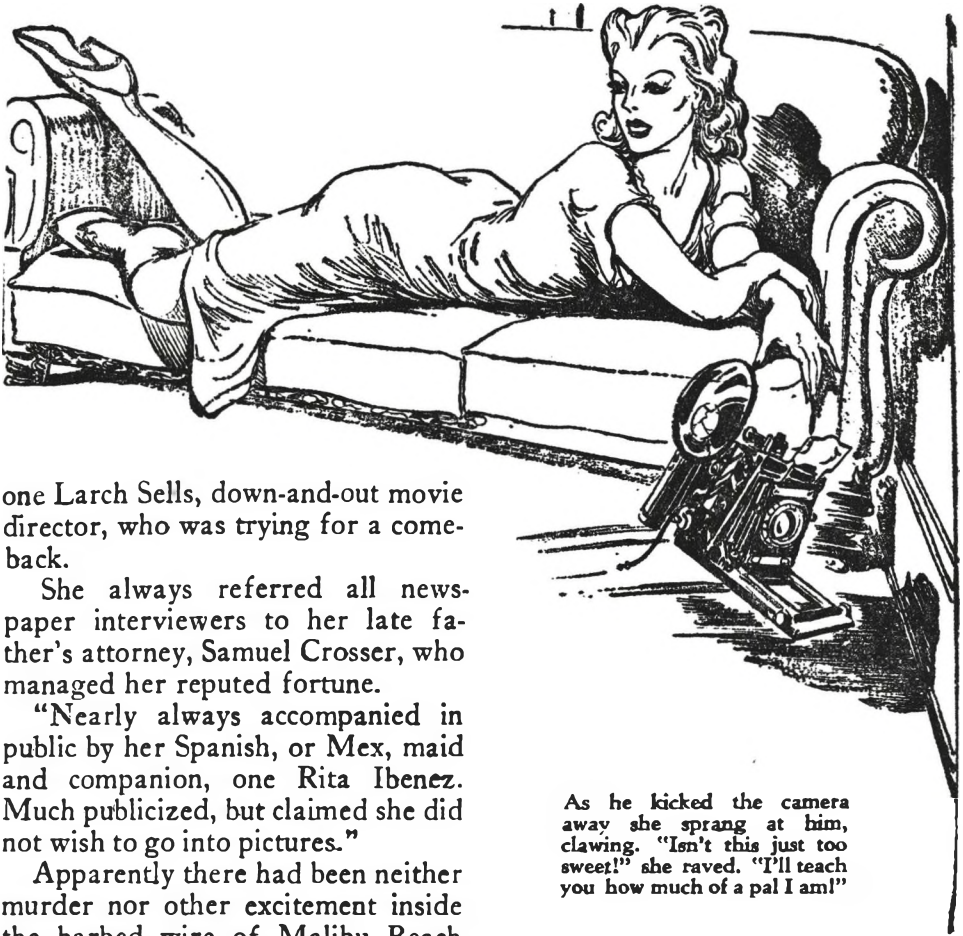
He hadn't had to dig up the dope on the glamorous Marilyn Moore. Every newspaper man in L. A. could recite it. It ran through his mind.

"Marilyn Moore only glamor girl resident at Malibu Beach who was not a movie star. Reputed to be heiress to millions. Residing with and guarded by her uncle, Luke Saunders, an old grouch.

"Known to be generous, having befriended and taken into her home



## By LAURENCE DONOVAN



one Larch Sells, down-and-out movie director, who was trying for a comeback.

She always referred all newspaper interviewers to her late father's attorney, Samuel Crosser, who managed her reputed fortune.

"Nearly always accompanied in public by her Spanish, or Mex, maid and companion, one Rita Ibenex. Much publicized, but claimed she did not wish to go into pictures."

Apparently there had been neither murder nor other excitement inside the barbed wire of Malibu Beach when "Grave Digger" Doyle climbed from his car.

"And if Marilyn Moore's to be murdered, why in all hell should I be picked for an exclusive?" murmured Doyle, as he arrived at the elaborate, fifty-grand Marilyn Moore cottage.

As he kicked the camera away she sprang at him, clawing. "Isn't this just too sweet!" she raved. "I'll teach you how much of a pal I am!"

**F**IVE minutes later he decided it was worth being kidded just to be here. The personal murder tip-off was screwy, but the ride paid off in just a view of this number with the baby blue eyes, the baby innocent

*As a reporter, he had got so many scoops on murders that they called him "Grave Digger". And now he'd been invited to be present at the killing of a glamor-girl. It was up to Doyle to show them what his nickname really meant!*

mouth, and everything but a baby's brand of class-A knees.

She had a way of cocking her smoothly platinumed head to one side that did things to her shoulders and brought out her tightly bound breast that wasn't the least bit babyish either. She knew it, too, just as well as she knew her baby blue stare would knock them dead on glamor row."

But all that didn't keep the Grave Digger from shooting his direct question at point-blank range, even as he memorized all of her luscious details for future meditation on the lonely ghost watch.

"Who wants to murder you, honey, and why?"

That got her, but not the way the Grave Digger hoped or expected.

"It's short acquaintance, let's see—" She glanced at a studded wrist-watch as expensive as a mink coat. "Only two and one-half minutes. You call me honey as if you'd trotted me on your knees for years, and you expect me to answer an extremely personal question. Might I inquire in turn, *Mister Doyle*, who put you up to this, and why? And by the way, what is your business?"

THE heavy knife thucked across the room from one of the open French windows that were really doors. The Grave Digger's only warning was a gleaming flash that threw him forward instinctively. His weight knocked the girl aside, but the burning agony in his shoulder came from the point of the knife going all the way to the bone.

He whirled toward the window, again by instinct. The second thrown knife whizzed by his head. The girl

uttered a stifled and choking scream behind him and he heard her soft body fall.

He was in the open window with one jump, outside with another, and in spite of the pain in his shoulder he had the police automatic from its holster and had blasted three shots at the shadowy figure before it ducked around the corner of the Malibu Beach cottage.

He tripped and fell over an invisible wire rack placed for some climbing nasturtiums. When he got up, clawing and cursing, getting his gun out of the sand, a car was already thrumming away along the Roosevelt Road, going fast toward Santa Monica.

The knife in his shoulder hurt the raw flesh. He jerked it out with an oath, careless of possible fingerprints and jammed it, blade first, into his side pocket.

Men's voices were shouting questions from a couple of cottages. From the upper floor of the glamor girl's own shack a man called out.

"Marilyn? You down there? What was that—that reporter? Marilyn! This is Larch! Do you hear me?"

YOU didn't cover police for ten years in tough L. A. and its movie starlit environs without learning your way around. You didn't rate the name Grave Digger Doyle without having earned it.

Digger Doyle had a rep for coming in first with a murder story, if he had to commit assault and battery along the way. But this was a bad spot! Not a murder to be taken lightly.

Marilyn Moore, heiress and new

kind of glamor girl in this winter of wartime jitters, might be a nice exclusive yarn as a Homicide case. But this was a little too damn exclusive.

"That was Larch Sells, the busted movie director, who called, and he knew I'm a reporter," muttered Digger. "Her camera-smashing, news-hating uncle, Luke Saunders, is somewhere about."

Digger Doyle was back inside the French window. He had one sickening flash of the lovely Marilyn lying upon a hand-woven grass rug. He was looking at her shapely class-A knees where her flimsy skirt had hiked up when the whole house blacked out.

"That second knife got her," groaned Digger.

Rita Ibenez, the Mex maid, had admitted Digger to the house. The maid called out shrilly as the lights went blotto.

"Mari-leen? Where are you, dar-leeng? What ees eet happen?"

A chair was overturned in a nearby room. A man cursed loudly.

"Damn the lights! Rita! Find a fuse! Did Marilyn go out with that scandal-hunting newspaper man?"

Digger had seen and heard this Uncle Luke Saunders at some of the night spots. There was no mistaking his hard, cackling voice.

Digger's brain recorded the fact that that made two men who had known he was a reporter. Larch Sells, the down-and-outer, living on the girl's generosity, and now this Uncle Luke.

"Hell an' Christmas!" muttered Digger. "No one here should have known I'm a reporter. Marilyn Moore herself didn't know it. Could be someone wants me personally to

be found here with a corpse."

He felt quickly for the girl's pulse. There was none. So he slipped an experienced hand against the girl's breast.

If there was a heartbeat, his own pulse was pounding too much in his tingling fingertips to detect it. Digger had but one thought now. Someone, probably right here in this house, was behind his tipoff to come here to be the witness to a murder.

**D**IGGER DOYLE went into action. Before Uncle Luke Saunders, Rita, the Mexican maid, or anyone else could reach the black sun porch, he was running along hard-packed sand of the beach. He held the light body of the girl in his wiry arms, with her platinum head upon his shoulder.

Digger came onto the Roosevelt Road a dozen cottages away. Residents of other cottages were running toward the darkened Marilyn Moore place. The lights of the murder cottage flashed on.

Uncle Luke Saunders proclaimed a definite and damning accusation to the world.

"Somebody call the cops! Marilyn's been murdered! She's been kidnaped by Digger Doyle, a *Chronicle* reporter! Block the highway!"

"So Uncle Luke knows the girl is dead," said Digger grimly. "And he names me personally. But how would he know she's dead? Baby, someone will be needing a *corpus delicti*, and it may be Uncle Luke."

The Roosevelt Road was lighted, but Digger had parked his small, press car in the darkness under a spreading pepper tree. He reached the car undetected.

She might be very dead, but there was still something about the glamorous Marilyn that caused Digger to deposit the lovely body gently in the coupé seat. As he got under the wheel, all hell sired from up the road in the direction of Santa Monica.

Digger left his head lamps dark. He turned the car in the wide highway, his mind upon a nearby canyon side road. As the lovely Marilyn slumped over against his shoulder on the turn, Digger had a cold, clammy feeling.

He had a reputation as a "grave digger" on murder yarns, but this was his first experience at snatching a corpse. Wait till Bunny Roth, the city editor, and Captain Hemple, of Homicide, got this on him. There would be hell, brother!

His impulsive kidnaping of the body had seemed a hot idea at the moment, but it had gone cold on him now. The night sounded as if all of L. A.'s minions of the law had been lying in wait ready to pounce, as Digger turned on his lights in the canyon road.

A glance at his silent passenger did him no good. Her platinum head lolled too far back. Her face and throat were white, and still wonderful.

But there was a crimson blotch just below the white valley of lovely flesh over the tight bandeau. It was apparent that the death wound had been directly in the heart.

"But," questioned Digger suddenly, "what the hell happened to the knife? Did someone have time to snatch it away while I was outside the porch shooting at the killer?"

Digger eluded screaming cars on

back roads, and reached a road through the oil derricks of Venice, the next beach spot to Malibu. He had no definite plan. He was sure of but one thing.

He had been personally called by phone and tipped off to go to Marilyn Moore's cottage. His unknown informant had said "there would be a murder," and upon this fantastic note had cut the connection.

So the whole layout had been framed by someone to take him in.

"But they'll have to catch their *corpus delicti* before they can work out whatever screwy idea is behind all this," said Digger. "And my one out is to discover who the hell is the most anxious to find the body."

Digger decided then upon his next move. He grinned as he came to it.

"I didn't rent that Hermosa Beach cottage to keep house with a corpse," he said grimly. "But Nicky isn't coming down until the week-end and I didn't give my right name."



NICKY wouldn't have been called a glamor girl. But she was red-read and cute. She was the *Chronicle's* crazy gal photographer. And Nicky had thought it would be a grand idea if she and Digger could play at housekeeping on holidays, not knowing when the draft would haul him in.

Hermosa was ten miles from Malibu Beach. Digger parked the car among a whole block of empty cottages. Not one in fifty was occupied in winter.

Digger thought, Lord help him if Nicky could see him now! But when he had the glorified body of Marilyn





Before anyone could reach the sunporch, he was running across the sand with the girl's light body in his arms.

Moore inside, Digger could have a few needed drinks and think more clearly.

The girl's soft body seemed

heavy. Digger had almost forgotten his stabbed shoulder and the weakening loss of blood.

He found the living room couch in

the darkness and placed Marilyn's still warm body upon it carefully. His hand touched the smooth, platinum head, and then he recoiled as if the corpse had bitten him.

"Oh, darling—"

Just like that. A long, sighing murmur. And for the first time in a spotty and girl-checked career Digger felt the soft arms of a "corpse" slip quickly about his neck, and had his face pulled suddenly down to meet the parted, hungry lips that were cold enough for the dead, but very much alive in another and extremely satisfying way.

"Where are we, sweet? Why is it so dark—?"

Digger almost gagged as he heard the murmured words, felt the rounded chin snuggle close to his ear, and found his own instinctive kiss seeking a soft throat that was just above that crimson stain of death where a knife had pierced the girl's heart.

Digger freed himself, although he almost didn't at that. For Marilyn's sweetly fashioned body was quivering, trembling, and her arms were tightening.

And then she screamed. That was almost too much. Only some instinct of self-preservation caused him to clamp his hand over her mouth, for he still had that ghastly feeling that a corpse had kissed him in a dream, then the girl had screamed with realization that she was dead, that a knife had split her heart.

His senses were rocked, but hard sense had been too long a part of the Grave Digger to slip far. He had it now. That second knife had missed her. She had been out cold, fainting from fear, and the blood from his

own shoulder had dripped upon her bosom as he had bent over her.

"Be quiet," he said, still restraining her attempt to scream again. "You're all right. I'm Digger Doyle. An attempt was made to murder you with a knife, but it seems to have missed. I got you away because I thought you were dead."

Back came that cool sense with which she had responded to his first question, about who would want to murder her, and why?

She ceased to struggle. She lay quiet as Digger told her everything that had happened, up to this minute here in his rented cottage at Hermosa Beach.

"And now what about some answers, honey? We leave off the lights just in case. I have to return you, of course, but now that we are here, suppose you answer my original question. Who wants to murder you, and why?"

"When I've bandaged your shoulder," she said calmly, but he had padded the knife stab and it had stopped bleeding.

"That'll keep, but Cap Hemple and the Homicide Squad will be going nuts. And seeing I just happened to take it on the chin, or the shoulder, for you, perhaps you owe me a yarn, baby."

"You're a nice guy, you know that, Digger," she said softly. "Surely, I'll do all that a little girl can, and possibly a bit more. How about beginning where we left off, with another kiss for the lady, honey? You called me the name first, you know."

Well, he had been around some, and then some. He had met them one way and another, and always they were different. But this gal

with the flock of folding money, as widely reported, was something like had never been sandwiched into the middle of a nutty murder case that hadn't turned out to be murder—not yet.

"With all of my best for one swell gal," said Digger, and accepted what the funny little gods that pursue police reporters had provided.

Yet glamorous Miss Millions-or-so had been so calm about it, he got something of a shock from what happened. Her lips were no longer cold. Her arms demanded fiercely and it wasn't the stab in his shoulder that made him dizzy now.

The darkness became sweet and hot. He no longer had to keep a mere memory of the Class-A knees and a little bit more he had seen for lonely ghost watches of the future.

There was more, much more.

But that couldn't go on. The distant pealing of a police siren made sudden impact upon his brain. He came back from one delightful reality to another kind that was grim and highly involved.

"I CAN tell you now what it may be, darling," she said, at first only whispering sleepily, but finding her voice and sitting up beside him in the darkness.

"First, I haven't any millions, Digger," she said when she had quieted. "Only some thousands. And most of that went into a life and endowment insurance policy a month ago, to do something you'd never guess."

"I wouldn't even shoot loaded dice and expect them to come up seven after what's happened, honey. I can only hope there's a yarn in it

that won't hurt you, an' that it'll save my spotty hide from being tanned and tacked up in the police morgue."

"Then, Digger darling, most of my supposed fortune, trimmed down by the war, went into a quarter of a million insurance policy for my baby, now two years old," she said quietly.

"Your baby—two years old—hell and high water, honey! It's a yarn, and what a yarn, but there goes your glamor and your—"

"It doesn't matter," she interrupted. "It's all right about the baby. She had an all right daddy, if that's what you're thinking about. Before the war and the RAF got into his blood. He was one of the first to go. Trying to build up what my father left me was Uncle Luke's idea, and I was really hoping for a chance at the movies, but playing hard to get. See?"

"Smart," commented Digger. "But tonight? I was called to see a murder, your murder, to be exact. And your Uncle Luke, and one other man knew I was there, and who I was, although you didn't. How come?"

"Uncle Luke? That's strange, but it fits in. Don't get this wrong, Digger. I think my Uncle Luke's grand underneath, for all he's been putting on the Groucho uncle act. He couldn't—but, Digger. Since I took out that insurance, Uncle Luke has been getting some mail that has puzzled me."

"Like what?"

"Folders on South America and letters from owners of expensive cars who can't get tires and want to sell the cars cheap, and a whole flock of advertisements of other things that Uncle Luke never went in for—"

"Wait a minute," interjected Digger. "Uncle Luke showed you this mail?"

"No, but Rita, that's my maid and companion, came onto it where Uncle Luke had hidden it, I mean the letters, on a shelf in one of his closets," said Marilyn. "And somehow, I've begun worrying about Lana, that's my baby, who is up on a farm above Santa Barbara. I wonder—?"

"I'm not wondering or waiting another damn' minute," cut in Digger. "Hell, brother! What a story, but there's a lot of work to do and you must stay right here, honey! Baby, you're a corpse! Yeah, there must be a corpse, and I have to be on the spot as a body-snatcher, or at least a kidnaper!"

"Whatever you say, Digger. But surely my uncle—"

"The others at the cottage tonight, honey?"

"Well, they wouldn't mean anything," she said. "Larch Sells, the movie director Uncle Luke picked up down and out, and has been helping along. Samuel Crosser, who was my father's lawyer, and Rita Ibenez, my companion."

"And possibly it was Uncle Luke who suggested the endowment or life insurance for the baby?"

"Well, no, he didn't. I think it was Larch Sells who first put the idea in my mind. But Larch is such a nice person, Digger. He only wants to come back and—well, he says when he does, my baby should have a living father."

Digger had himself a long drink. He was glad he had not lighted up the cottage.

"You're a hundred percent on

brains, honey," he said. "You'll stay here a few hours. Say you have a few drinks, and go to sleep as if you were in your own little bed, baby?"

"Surely, darling," she said softly, touching his face. "Kiss me again, Digger, I'll do anything you say—"

A magnesium bulb splashed light all over the place. A camera clicked where the door had been opened softly.

"Now isn't that just *too* sweet," said a venomously purring voice.

**N**ICKY, the demon camera girl, was all redhead. She was cute, with all of her parts fitted just right. Her mouth was a slash of red now and her eyes were a blue blaze as she slapped on the room light button.

"*Sweet!*" she said again wickedly. "Now if the Million Dollar Malibu Beach doll will stand up long enough to shake her skirt down a few inches nearer her knees, I'll slap her lipstick clear behind her ears! I said, get up! And button your blouse—!"

Nicky's camera hit the floor so hard it bounced, and she hissed not unlike a cat as she sprang. Digger backhanded her just in time, but pulled his punch so his arm only blocked her.

"Hold it, Nicky! You got the wrong slant! Marilyn—"

"Marilyn? Don't tell me you've only been grave-digging this time!" Clawed nails dug suddenly at Digger's face. "You're on the general alarm all the way from Pasadena to Long Beach for murder an' kidnaping, an' you come up with this—this—I sure can play the right hunches!"

"But Nicky, angel—!"

"Just you an' me says you, an' it'll be cozy for the two of us playing



As she tried to use the  
knife, he crashed his fist  
into her chin.



house together so it won't look like you're tryin' to beat the draft—"

Digger got her claws out of his eyes and his hand over her mouth. He remembered to kick the camera so hard it smashed against the wall. If Bunny Roth ever saw that plate?

"Now will you listen, brat!"



**H**EN he told her all, up to and beyond a certain interlude, including Marilyn's baby, and Larch Sells, the movie director who was trying to come back and wanted to be the baby's second father. And he thought of it then, and pulled the heavy-bladed throwing knife from his pocket.

He took on another little lesson in gals then. He knew you could beat some of them, and they would come crawling. Now he found out you could even be suspected of two-timing them, if you could ring in a real baby and pour it on, and Digger could pour.

Nicky wrenched away from him, going to Marilyn.

"You poor dear!" she cried out. "You'll have to overlook it, darling! I guess I got a wrong idea, but Digger'll fix everything for you! And I'll help—"

And damned if Nicky wasn't down beside Marilyn, an arm around her, and buttoning the crimson-stained blouse.

Then she was up and blazing away again.

"Well, what are we waiting for, Digger? The cops are looking for your car, but my sedan hasn't any press sticker! Let's go!"

Digger flicked out the cottage lights.

"Don't be nuts, brat," he said. "This is a lone wolf's job. No, wait. Maybe you've got something, Nicky. You can come along. Marilyn, you'll be okay?"

Marilyn's voice was low and full of something, perhaps only regret, and perhaps a little of "if I had only met you sooner."

"I'll be okay, Digger. Nicky, you're swell to understand."

**W**HATEVER Nicky understood, Digger was still in the driver's seat. He got out of her sedan at a lonely spot on the road across the grimy field of oil derricks.

"Who's nuts now, Digger?" said Nicky as he came back. "Why all the oil?"

He had walked through a sump hole almost to his knees. His trousers and shoes were black and sticky.

"Take the wheel, Nicky," he said. "Malibu Beach, and step on it!"

"Now I know you're nuts," she said, but stepped on it.

The unmarked sedan passed four prowling police cars. It went unnoticed. The cops were looking for a mad police reporter and a body. Nicky was a body, but she was alive and driving.

"Stop here," said Digger, as a closed, boarded up cottage, in the queer shape of a boat, showed up on the beach.

All around the closed cottage was sand as white as flour. It had been trucked all the way from Carmel, near Santa Cruz. And it was the only "flour white" sand on any California beach, except that single, half-mile beach at famed Carmel.

All other Southern California beach sand, including Malibu, was

golden yellow. No doubt the one-time movie star owner of the closed cottage had a mental quirk. But the white sand had been brought here just to make her different.

She was so different that all of Malibu Beach residents took her to their hearts, so to speak, for they, too, believed they were different.

"Digger, what now?" wondered Nicky.

"Come on, brat," he said. "You'll have to do for a body. Play you're bait for a murderer who would kill an innocent baby and you won't mind the wear and tear."

He explained more in a few brief words. Nicky relaxed. Holding her under the arms, he pulled her along with her very nice legs dragging in the white sand, all the way to a little shack out behind the closed cottage.

And then he picked her up and carried her back in his arms. White flour sand stuck to his oily trouser legs and his shoes. Evidently the police hunt was dead in the vicinity of Malibu Beach and the Marilyn Moore cottage.

Digger waited while Nicky drove on. She was back in a few minutes.

"They're all there at her cottage, Digger," she said. "That is, all but Rita Ibenez, the maid. There's only one copper posted, and he's half asleep. I asked for pictures, but her Uncle Luke Saunders slammed the door in my face. They're a worried lot, Digger."

"They'll be more worried," said Digger grimly. "You see, Nicky, they have a murder the way someone wanted it, but a Homicide without a body is not what it should be."

"You be careful, Digger," cautioned Nicky.

"An' darling," she said, "I still want to play house."

He kissed her and said, "You be ready with your extra camera. Wait down the road a hundred yards."

**D**IGGER was right beside the lone policeman on guard before he made a sound. He coughed and the copper pivoted, his chin sticking right into Digger's driving punch. Digger hated to hit him the second time, but he had to be out for several minutes.

He put the sleeping copper behind some rose bushes.

Uncle Luke Saunders, beady-eyed, bony of face, a hard old man with too much Adam's apple, opened the door. The light was full on Digger, but the way Uncle Luke said, "Well, what is it?" he knew Uncle Luke did not know him.

Digger jammed his police gun hard into Uncle Luke's stomach. Uncle Luke would have cried out, but Digger said, "Don't get any ideas! I can burn only once, whether it's kidnaping or homicide! On in, Uncle Luke, and let's see the others!"

A big, young man with anxious eyes and trembling hands said, "What is this—?"

"Quiet, Larch," said Uncle Luke. "It's Digger Doyle, the kidnaper. And he—"

"Shut up!" snapped Digger, looking at a dark, dapper little man who was getting out of a chair and peering through thick-lensed glasses.

The dark, little man said, "What is wrong? You say this is the killer? This is Digger Doyle?"

Digger let him ask all of it before he spoke.

"That's right, friend," he said, and—"

But the slim, dark man was moving toward a phone on a table.

"You can go just so far, Doyle," he said. "I am Samuel Crosser. I'm calling the police. Your gun doesn't bluff me."

The cold nerve of the little lawyer made it tougher than Digger had expected. But there was a murderer on the loose, or at least one man who believed he had killed Marilyn Moore.

Digger snapped a shot at Samuel Crosser's hand reaching for the phone. The lawyer groaned and Digger pushed Uncle Luke down into a chair.

Larch Sells made a sudden reach for his pocket, but seemed to think better of it.

Digger was snarling. He was fairly sure Captain Hemple must have given him a tough rep. For that matter, Captain Hemple would like nothing better than to pin a murder or a kidnaping rap on Digger Doyle.

Nursing his bleeding hand, Samuel Crosser said, "You crook! Kidnaping's a capital offense. Marilyn's probably dead, or you wouldn't be here—"

"Keep that in mind, Crosser!" snarled Digger. "I can't cook any more for one thing than another! Someone else started this racket! Well, I'm hooked in, an' I'm collecting! See?"

"You whelp!" cackled Uncle Luke Saunders. "Is my niece alive? What do you want? Is it money? What have you done with her?"

"Now we're getting somewhere," said Digger. "You want Marilyn

Moore, don't you? I'm the only one in L. A. who knows where she is. You're right. I want money. I want twenty G's. I've had too much of the cheap newspaper racket. This lifts me out."

"But where is she?" insisted Uncle Luke. "Twenty thousand? Yes! Yes! Tell us where to find her, and if she's alive, she'll need care right away! You fiend—!"

"Easy," cautioned Digger.

He had wasted all the time he had to spare. And he had watched their eyes go over him. That was enough. They couldn't have missed that "flour white" sand.

"A'right," grunted Digger. "Have the money in cash. I'll phone you at six in the morning. She's in a place where no one will find her, dead or alive, until I talk. I made sure of that. And as I leave, you sit tight."

He backed toward the door, his gun level.

"I'll know if you've spilled to the police before morning," he said. "Then you'll never see her again: Somebody picked the wrong guy when I was rooked into this thing."

**W**ATCHING Larch Sells, Digger turned just in time to see Rita Ibenes. She was standing back in a doorway, her black eyes blowing, watching him.

Digger shivered. He was convinced that if Rita Ibenes had had a gun, he would have got it right there. He had another idea fast.

"You, Rita!" he said. "Come with me! You may be my little guardian!"

Larch Sells started from his chair, his hands clenched, but he sank back



when the Mex girl spoke quickly.

"I weel come," she said. "You weel take me to Mari-leen?"

"I'll think about it," said Digger. "Just walk ahead of me, Rita. Remember, a spill to the cops, and no one will ever see Marilyn again, dead or alive. That's how sure I am. *Adios*, and sit tight."

The three men, Uncle Luke Saunders, Larch Sells, and Samuel Crosser stayed as if frozen to their chairs.

"For God's sake, Doyle!" burst out Larch Sells. "If they pay, promise you'll not hurt Rita!"

Digger laughed harshly. He left on that, worried some about the copper in the rose bushes. But he was still out of circulation.

**N**ICKY stared hotly at Digger as he urged Rita Ibenez into the car.

"How you pick them up, I don't know," she said. "Now what good can she do?"

"None whatever," said Digger sharply, and crunched his fist on the Mex girl's chin.

He caught her as she fell, and picked up the heavy-bladed knife she had tried to use. He had caught the gleam of the weapon just in time as she had turned at the moment he was helping her into the car.

"And that answers what became of the knife that missed Marilyn," he said. "But we'll have other answers fast. Nicky, how did the radio calls say Marilyn was killed or hurt?"

"Why, the police gave out she was shot," said Nicky. "Everyone heard shooting, and there was blood on the floor after you had taken her away."

"That may make it just dandy, Nicky," he said. "You'll tie up the careless little lady in the car, and come back for me. You get yourself set off to one side of the empty cottage with your picture box, and maybe there'll be action stuff."

He slipped from the car where the white sand showed around the lone cottage that looked like a beached boat. Nicky went on down the road and he saw her turn off, before the car lights went out.

It was less than a mile from the Marilyn Moore cottage. But Digger worried when he had waited nearly half an hour.

"Hell! They couldn't have missed that white sand," he grunted.

Several cars passed, but none were of the police. Evidently the copper was still sleeping in the rose bushes.

Digger crouched just inside the little shack back of the closed cottage. He stiffened suddenly as a shadow moved around the sand in the darkness, coming toward the shack.

The shadow reached the half opened shack door and flashed a light. Digger, fully in the beam, rode it straight with a smashing fist wrapped around his automatic.

He pulled the fallen prowler inside the shack with, "One down, and a couple to go."

But he was caught by the flaming of a gun from the doorway before he could turn. The man with a pistol was no expert. Digger threw himself sideways and headlong at the gunman's knees.

As they crashed, Digger regretfully cracked him over the skull, a smart tap that caused him to drop a cheap revolver, but didn't quite put him out.

"Two down!" grated Digger, spreading the light of the fallen torch. "Larch Sells and Uncle Luke! Now—"

So many sirens screamed it sounded as if the police had brought the FBI and part of the coast defense army. It looked liked it, too, as armed men sprang from screaming cars.

Digger saw everything from police revolvers to Tommy guns encircling the white sand. Then another car skidded from the road into the sand.

CUTE, little Nicky jumped out, sprawling under a dozen flashlights and beams from cars. Her shapely legs, the way she fell, were distracting.

"Here's the snatcher!" roared the voice of Captain Hemple, surging toward Digger with his gun drawn. "So you really dig a grave this time, Doyle! Murder, kidnaping, extortion, and you'll fry brown!"

"Yeah, he's killed her," said a sharp voice behind Cap Hemple. "He said he would, but all I could do lawfully was call the police. He's probably got her body buried in the sand, or—"

"Hold it!" With blood streaming from his nose, Uncle Luke Saunders cackled harshly. "She isn't here! He tried to kill us!"

Larch Sells was rubbing his swollen chin. He came out of the shack, weaving drunkenly.

"He's killed her sure," said Larch Sells.

The down and out movie director continued: "We tried to get to him, to find her, hoping she was still alive."

Digger saw Captain Hemple turn to the man behind him.

"How does it happen these two men came ahead of the police, Mr. Crosser?" he demanded.

"I warned them not to do it," said Samuel Crosser, the dark, little lawyer. "I—"

Nicky was up, and she was rolling Rita Ibenez from her car, all bundled up in ropes. Cap Hemple had his gun in Digger's stomach.

Digger said slowly, "I didn't kill her, but she's dead. The murderer jumped me at her cottage, hit me over the head, and he must have used my gun to shoot her."

Samuel Crosser blustered out, "That's a lie. The killer threw knives and—"

The little attorney stopped abruptly. Digger smacked Cap Hemple's gun to one side, made a jump, and punched Crosser solidly.

"That's absolutely right, Crosser," said Digger, holding him from falling in a twist-arm grip. "And everyone else thought she was shot. Sure, I demanded twenty G's, and I warned three of you if you called the police you would not find Marilyn Moore alive."

Cap Hemple's men ringed Digger.

"Her Uncle Luke Saunders and Larch Sells wanted to save her, so they followed a trail to the only place I could have got white sand on my trousers," said Digger. "But you, Crosser, you called the cops, being sure I'd hear the sirens and carry out my threat."

"That's all a damn lie!" raged Crosser. "I'm Miss Moore's lawyer! I had to protect—"

Digger jerked one of Crosser's

thin hands up, holding it. He showed ridged callouses along his thumb.

"No one but a professional knife thrower ever carried those marks, Crosser," said Digger, bringing to view two knives. "You threw by the pointed blades, so probably there are no prints. But I think Rita Ibenez—"

"Ramon! Ramon! Don't be treaked!"

Rita Ibenez, the maid, screamed from the ground. Uncle Luke Saunders swallowed hard and got out words.

"So that's why you kept reminding me of a manslaughter rap years ago?" exploded Uncle Luke. "That was it, Crosser! You had my niece insured for a quarter of a million, for the baby! And the baby is on a farm you picked out! With Marilyn and the baby out of the way, that

money would have come to me, only there would have been that old manslaughter rap for you to hold over my head!"

Nicky straightened from beside Rita Ibenez.

"Samuel Crosser is Mex, and was or is Ramon Ibenez, the husband of Rita," said Nicky. "What a yarn. And she called Digger Doyle, because Crosser needed a quick newspaper story as to a murder, and believed Digger would dig in as usual and probably fix the crime upon Uncle Luke Saunders or Larch Sells."

"Holy cow!" roared Captain Hemple. "All this time, is Marilyn Moore dead or alive? And anyway, Digger, you obstructed justice! You kidnaped Marilyn Moore!"

"Ask Marilyn Moore. She's safe  
(Concluded on page 127)

## "I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering — and now? — well, I am President of the News Review Publishing Company, which corporation publishes the largest circulating afternoon daily in North Idaho. I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God,

and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about — it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well — just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 45, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now — while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable — but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

By **RANDOLPH  
BARR**

# Death's



HE woman's white arms went around the man's neck. Her eyes were lit with unrestrained eagerness as she settled back in the corner of the divan. The chiffon negligee slid off one bare shoulder. The man's lips lifted in an audacious smile as he stared boldly.

"Arnold—you shouldn't—" The desire in her eyes belied her half-hearted protest. His hand slipped to the creamy warmth of a bare shoulder, fingers caressing the flesh.

"You do that—with such a practiced hand," she challenged. "I might almost think—you were two-timing me—"

"Two-timing you! That's good!" he mocked. "You could give me lessons in that." He crowded her back against the upholstery, and his sensuous lips hovered over hers. The chiffon fell farther away from her shoulders, her arms tightened—

It was neither sight nor hearing that warned them of the almost imperceptible movement behind the half-closed door. The woman's eyes widened in horrified alarm, as she attempted to sit up.

Two coughing, muffled reports broke the tense silence. The two figures surged convulsively, then slumped limp upon the divan, still

locked in each other's arms. An acrid scent of burnt powder mingled with the perfumed fragrance of the room. Footsteps, almost soundless, died away. The dead stillness was broken at intervals by a faint drip . . . drip . . . drip . . .

**B**RADLEY DAVISON pulled irritably up at the curb in front of his home, and shut off the wiper. The windshield was clouded with the faint drizzle. He had been damned lucky not to hit that jay-walker as he turned the corner.

Home. A place where you could shut out the rasping irritations that were piling up. A spot where you would be greeted by a pretty young wife, who would touch her lips to yours, who would fling rounded arms about your neck—

His footsteps were outlined on the damp boards of the veranda as he fumbled for his keys. The door was abruptly flung open from inside. Annette's face was chalk-white. "Mr. Davison! Oh, Mr. Davison!"

The maid had caught at his sleeve, was dragging him into the hallway, up the stairs. At the half-open door of his wife's upstairs sitting-room she choked, and pointed with shaking fingers.

Bradley Davison stood rigid in

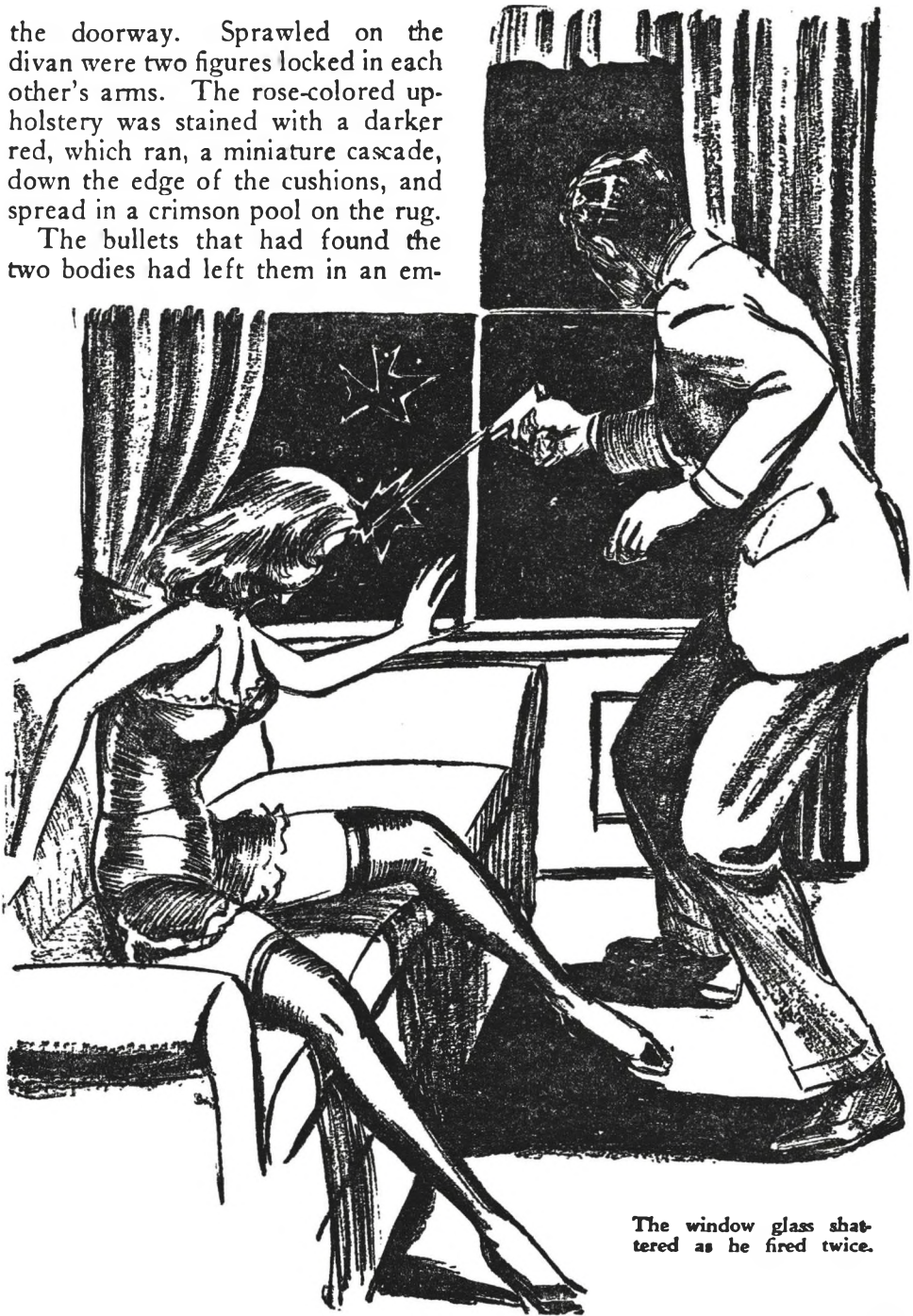
*A fanatic might have committed the murder.  
There was no doubt but that the love that  
occasioned the double murder was contrary  
to all the laws of God and man!*



# Calling Card

the doorway. Sprawled on the divan were two figures locked in each other's arms. The rose-colored upholstery was stained with a darker red, which ran, a miniature cascade, down the edge of the cushions, and spread in a crimson pool on the rug.

The bullets that had found the two bodies had left them in an em-



The window glass shattered as he fired twice.

brace of death. Even their lips were pressed together. One, he recognized grimly, was Arnold Webb. Death could not rob him of his arrogant, mocking fascination. The other—

Clad in a sheer, blood-stained negligee, lay his young wife, Norma. Just below her breast dripped a thickened red stream. A dull crimson blotch stained Webb's shirt.

Annette let out a sudden scream. Davison's face whitened, then set into flintlike hardness. He forced himself across the room, to peer down upon the two bodies. Like an automaton at last he swung about toward the whimpering maid.

"Call police headquarters."

"THIS Webb, now—he was coming here quite a lot, wasn't he?"

In the death-room Inspector Tom Dolan and Detective Dave Ludgate of the Homicide Squad were savagely questioning the frightened maid.

Annette twisted her fingers until the joints showed white. "Yes—no—no—sometimes—"

"Generally in the afternoon, wasn't it—like this? When her husband was away at the office?"

"M-most always. Sometimes she'd give me an extra afternoon out. Same as she did today."

"Kind of her, wasn't it? You found them—like this? When did you get back to the house?"

"Why—somewhere about half-past five. I went to the movies. I wondered why I didn't hear Mrs. Davison moving around upstairs. I didn't know but what she might be taking a nap—she did quite often before dinner."

"Especially when you were out?" Dolan asked.

The girl ignored the pointed sarcasm. "I waited a few minutes, then went upstairs to her room. I wanted to ask her something about the sauce for the dessert—whether she'd have whipped cream or hard sauce. The door was half open. I tapped on it. She didn't answer. Then—"

The girl covered her eyes.

Ludgate was moving restlessly about the room. He strode to the half-opened door of the adjoining bedroom and stared at the little intimate details the dead woman had left. A dress tossed over the bed, its sleeve torn, a discarded pink girdle, faintly creased, with dangling garters, a half-finished bit of embroidery, needle and scissors still lying upon it. On the floor lay a few tiny shreds of clipped embroidery silk. He gathered up the scraps of pale blue and stuffed them into his pocket. They clung annoyingly to his fingers.

Abruptly his lean figure tautened. He crept catlike to the closet and flung the door wide.

"Come out of there!"

Out into the light stumbled a dark-haired girl. His eyes traveled involuntarily over her half naked figure. He stared at the white columns above her rolled stockings. Hell, a dick didn't have time to waste looking at girls' legs. And Dolan, attracted by the sound, had crowded into the room.

"Where do you fit in on this?" the inspector growled. "This guy out there anything to you?"

The girl nodded defiantly. "I was—I was—"

"I get you. You came barging in here—"

Ludgate had been rummaging around in the closet. He came out with a wadded-up dress and shook out the crumpled folds. The girl cringed.

Sinister red streaks stained the pale blue fabric.

THE inspector caught the garment from his subordinate's hands. "So this is why we find you in your pants! Didn't have time to make a getaway, eh, baby?"

"I didn't have anything to do with it!" screamed the girl. Her eyes bulged with frightened repulsion, her face was ashen under its make-up. "I tell you, they were both dead when I found them! I came here to—to see Mrs. Davison—to tell her to lay off my boy friend—I was going to tell that dame I'd spill the dirt to her husband, if she didn't let him alone—"

"Blackmail, eh?" snapped the inspector. "Chiseling in on your meal-ticket? This Webb guy getting fed up on you? And you found them mixed up in a little hot necking? Well, you shot straight. Where's the rod?"

"I tell you I didn't have any rod! Where'd I get one? I rang and rang—found the front door unlatched, and nobody downstairs. I thought I might find her in her room—was going to have it out with her—she wasn't going to chisel in on me—"

"And your trigger finger got nervous?"

"I tell you they were both dead! Blood dripping all over them! I tried to see if Arnold was still alive

—my dress switched in the blood!" She shivered convulsively.

"You don't suppose I'd dare to go out of the house with my clothes all over blood? I yanked off my dress, looked for one of hers. Then I heard somebody downstairs. I hid in the closet—I knew I was in an awful jam—"

"You bet your life you're in a jam! Maybe the D. A.'ll believe your story—but he's a hard guy!"

LUDGATE studied the jumble of footmarks on the veranda. At one side the faint outline of a man's print still pointed streetward—and near the heel a half-inch fragment of powder-blue floss. He picked it up and put in in a separate pocket. Sometimes men had burned because of trifles like that.

The dampness made his nose tickle. Must have left his handkerchief in the house. He called to the driver to wait a minute.

Sure enough, the bit of linen was lying on the living-room floor. He noted casually the lone cigarette-stub in the smoking-stand. Peculiar sort, strong and dark.

Ludgate hesitated at breaking in upon the harassed man in the den. Must hurt like hell, what he had gone through.

"Mr. Davison, what sort of cigarettes do you smoke?"

Without a word, Davison held out his half-smoked stub.

"Menthol-cooled? Ever use any like this?" He pointed to the stand.

The realtor's eyes hardened. "Never. Too rank. Looks like a kind Perry Schuyler tried to get me to smoke last week—something he brought back from the Philippines.

Smoked half one, and threw it away."

"This Schuyler—friend of the family?"

Davison's eyes narrowed to slits. "Hardly—well, you might say an old — er — acquaintance of Mrs. Davison's. I believe he was quite—devoted, before her marriage. He's been out in the Philippines most of the time since. Only came back about six weeks ago. Mrs. Davison told me last week, I think it was—he'd dropped in to see her once."

Ludgate dropped the stub carefully into an old envelope, as he got into the car. "Maybe Schuyler's dropped in a few times that hubby doesn't know about. That dame appeared to like variety."

**P**ERRY SCHUYLER stared at his inquisitor out of cool gray eyes. "Suppose I did call on Mrs. Davison this afternoon? We have been friends—close friends—for years." The arrogant hostility in his tone deepened.

Ludgate flipped back his coat, and afforded a momentary glimpse of his badge.

"Oh—the police! Really, when did it become a police matter if an old friend calls? Yes, I was there a few minutes—somewhere around three. I doubt if I'll repeat the visit."

"You probably won't have another chance," Ludgate drawled.

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Davison is dead—shot through the heart." Ludgate's eyes were glued upon the other man's face.

"Norma—shot!" Schuyler's face turned a ghastly lead-color. "Good

God! I held her in my arms just before I left—warm, breathing, desirable—"

"Yeah? You weren't the only one."

Schuyler's eyes were retrospective. "She struggled—pushed me away—her dress got torn—"

"And you left in a huff—but came back later, didn't you? Sort of brooded on things? Burned you up, didn't it? You slipped upstairs—turned on the heat—"

"I never was above the first floor! And I never came back after I left the house! God, officer, are you accusing *me* of killing them?"

In the somber pattern of the rug a tiny fleck of powder-blue stood out like some miniature floret. With seeming casualness Ludgate bent forward and picked up the tiny wisp of silk. The same sort of floss that had been scattered on the floor in Norma Davison's bedroom—the same kind of thread that had winked at him from the drying footprint on the Davison porch.

At least four persons had been in Norma Davison's room that afternoon while her husband was at the office. One of them was past speaking for himself or anybody else. Rose Fenner, the show girl, Annette, the maid, and Perry Schuyler, who said he hadn't, but who, Ludgate felt sure, was lying like hell. The evidence of that bit of blue silk showed that.

Schuyler's indignant words still rang in his ears. "'Are you accusing me of killing *them*?' I didn't say a word about a man being bumped off. How did he know that?"

Any one of this outfit might have had a reason for wanting to rub out



this Webb guy. Swell feller. No great loss, any more than the two-timing dame who had gone over the hurdles once too often.

Four persons besides the gray-haired husband. If anybody had a real reason for wanting to rub out the philandering wife and her partner, he was the one—provided he knew anything about it. But she was a clever little witch, and he had given her everything her greedy brain could think up—calmly and cheerfully paid the bills, and seemed to like it.

DAVISON hadn't even been out of the office till closing time that afternoon, Ludgate found out the next day, when he dropped in at the luxurious suite that the realtor maintained in the city's swankiest office building. Evelyn Scott, his secretary, was in charge of the office. Davison hadn't returned that day—naturally he wouldn't.

Ludgate looked her over approvingly. There was a girl. He felt himself wishing that her skirt would hunch up a bit more—he felt an unreasonable curiosity to see how those trim stockings were held up—did she roll them?

"Mr. Davison had a busy afternoon. He had an appointment with a Mr. Walter Sherburne to go over some subdivision plans for some plots we were going to handle. Mr. Sherburne came a little after four and they went into the private office." She indicated Davison's private desk.

"This door opens out into the corridor?"

"Uh-huh. Usually Mr. Davison lets his clients out that way, so that

they don't have to come back into the main office."

"And they were in here all the time—till pretty near closing time?"

"Just about. Mr. Davison told me particularly that he didn't want to be disturbed. He had a lot of details to go over with Mr. Sherburne—he's a new client and his business means quite a lot to us."

Ludgate took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. He dropped it and bent over apologetically. "Seem to have a habit of dropping things. You were out in the main office all the time, I suppose?"

The girl dropped into a chair and crossed her knees. Attractive ones. Ludgate found himself comparing them with the show girl's.

"Mr. Davison came out into the main office shortly after Mr. Sherburne came, and got some papers out of the vault. I heard them talking in here a long time afterward. Their voices were raised once or twice—they seemed to be arguing about something."

"I suppose office ethics wouldn't let you tell me what they were arguing about?"

"Really, I couldn't tell you. I couldn't distinguish the words—just the sound of voices." Her skirt *had* hunched higher. She wore the kind that had a green garter-stripe.

"They were quiet for quite a while—oh, possibly ten or fifteen minutes. I began to think Mr. Sherburne had gone—I wanted to ask about a mortgage I was making out. I went to the door and listened. Just then I heard someone moving about—the voices again. I was glad I hadn't knocked. I went back to my desk—they were talking again, per-

haps ten or fifteen minutes. Then the door opened, and Mr. Davison came out. He seemed quite upset—”

THE skirt had crept up. She didn't roll 'em. She noticed the detective's gaze fixed on the stocking-top and pulled down her skirt till the garter-clasp was hidden once more. He sighed regretfully and began following her words again.

“He put some papers back into the vault and slammed the door. I was sorry for him—I knew the deal meant a lot. He went back into the private office, lit a cigar, and sat there smoking till just before closing time. He didn't say a word to me, but put on his hat and coat and went home.”

“Thanks, sister. You — you thought quite a lot of your boss?”

Her dark eyes opened a bit wider. “Who wouldn't? He'd been good to me. You don't often find a better man to work for.”

“How good? Played around a bit with him, did you?”

Her eyes flashed. “I certainly didn't. Mr. Davison isn't that kind.”

“Sorry. I shouldn't have asked that. You've been with him quite a while haven't you? In on most of his business deals?”

“I've been in this office for something like five years. Before Mr. Davison was married, in fact.”

“Were you wise to this mess at home?”

The girl's eyes searched his. “I'm not altogether blind. And a girl in my position hears things. There was quite a difference in their ages—more than twenty years. And Mr. Davison was all business. She wanted to go places, of course. And he

couldn't always take her everywhere. Naturally there would be gossip about her.”

“Know anything of this Schuyler fellow?”

“Perry Schuyler? Why—I used to. He was quite hard hit, when Mr. Davison married her. He didn't like me very well—blamed it on me, because I was—well, the indirect cause of their getting acquainted. And after that, Mr. Davison didn't have eyes for anybody else. Mr. Schuyler is inclined to be—rather unreasonable—”

“You have some pretty swell quarters here.” He looked approvingly about the luxurious rooms. “All the gadgets—”

“Mr. Davison believes in efficiency—in making use of all the modern time-saving conveniences. Yes, we have a modern vault—adding-machines—dictaphone—electric typewriter — apparatus for copying maps—”

“As well as a high-grade secretary,” Ludgate smiled approvingly. “Thanks a lot. Maybe I've been kind of inquisitive—but that's my job. A dick has to be sort of nosey at times.”

The girl looked at him clearly. “If you can straighten out this awful mess—anything I can do to help—”

Ludgate found her hand in his as he left. There wasn't any need of it—but he held on to it—it sent little warm tingles through his veins.

“I'll be seeing you,” he told her, as he closed the door.

Out in the hallway he looked at his handkerchief. It had not been all clumsiness, his dropping it. When he had retrieved it, he had gathered

something from the floor by the realtor's desk in its folds.

DAVE LUDGATE sat at his desk at Headquarters that evening. The threads of this case were as unsatisfactory and led to nowhere as much as did those tiny bits of blue floss on the dead woman's boudoir floor. He took them out and looked at them. The half-smoked cigarette—those clipped bits of silk. He thought grimly of the flopped business deal—the grimmer tragedy when the soured business man had reached home. A day to break a man's heart. Maybe this Sherburne could throw a little light on things.

But a telephone call brought out that Sherburne had left town the very afternoon of the disastrous conference—wouldn't be back for three or four days. He hung up the receiver with irritation. Well, anyway that guy didn't fit into the picture.

He thumbed through the pages of the telephone directory. He found the address he wanted, got into his car, and drove uptown.

The door of the apartment opened cautiously. A slim, dark-haired girl in a blue negligee peered out at him. Her eyes hardened. And yet there was a light of quickened interest in them that she tried unsuccessfully to conceal.

"Oh—the man from the Homicide Squad? Didn't you grill me enough this afternoon? Or have you thought of some more things—that wouldn't keep till morning?"

Ludgate grinned cheerfully, and edged his way into the apartment. "We don't keep union hours at Headquarters, sister. And there were two or three more things that

I wanted a little more information about."

"If you'll wait a few minutes—till I get something on." She gathered the negligee about her. Not so quickly that Ludgate missed the chance to satisfy his curiosity about some things he hadn't been sure of that afternoon. She kept up her stockings in the good old-fashioned way.

"I won't keep you but a minute. And I like you better—the way you are."

"I'm not in the habit of receiving callers—even policemen—in a rig like this. But if you're in a hurry—and you're as considerate as you were this afternoon—" She dropped down upon the divan. The negligee had an intriguing habit of yawning open at the throat. He dropped down beside her.

"Pretty clever sort of fellow, your boss? Mechanically, I mean?"

"Mr. Davison is quite ingenious that way. He has worked out one or two little inventions—that was his hobby—a clock-work device for shutting off the radio at a certain time, for instance. But he found somebody else already had a patent on it."

He edged closer to her. The girl looked at him out of clear eyes.

"It was a mistake to let you in here," she drawled. "Are you sure you came here to investigate a murder case—or just to see me?"

Ludgate had the grace to blush. "Maybe a little of both," he admitted. He slipped an arm about the slim figure. "You sort of do things to me—give me heart palpitation—"

She stared searchingly into his eyes. "If I hadn't taken a liking to

you—though why, I don't know—”

He drew her audaciously upon his knee. “Carbon copy of the same feeling, good-looking. Only that isn't half putting it—”

**S**UDDENLY the girl stiffened.

The faint breeze that blew in the window suddenly became menacingly chill. Her eyes stared at the window, widened, terror-stricken.

Ludgate whirled abruptly. Hampered by the girl on his lap, he was slow in getting the gun out of his shoulder-holster. With a swift gesture he swept her downward, a sprawling, lovely figure of white arms, shapely legs and frothy underthings.

On the old-fashioned fire-escape whose landing ran nearly the length of the building crouched a figure, dimly outlined by the faint light from the room. Ludgate's shot was almost in unison with the coughing report from the darkness, and the bullet that ripped along the upholstery of the couch. The window-glass shivered as he fired twice more at the shadowy figure. He heard the creak of metal rods, the scuffle of a heavy body over the iron steps.

The noise of the shots was rousing the building. Windows were going up. Before he could fling himself out the window upon the ancient fire-escape, all trace of the sniper had disappeared.

“No footprints,” Ludgate snapped, as he ran his flashlight over the court under the fire-escape. “There wouldn't be, on this cement. Hel-lo.” He bent swiftly and picked up a tiny stub whose white paper was almost a signpost in the gloom—a half-smoked, still warm cigarette, of

some strong, blackish foreign tobacco.

The Scott girl sat shivering on the couch, her negligee huddled about her. She shuddered as she felt gingerly of the long rip across the upholstery, where the bullet had plowed across the top of the couch.

“For the first time in my life, I'm really afraid,” she shuddered. “If you hadn't moved so quick—I'm almost afraid to stay alone here.”

“If I didn't have work to do, you wouldn't,” the detective growled. “I'm going to telephone Headquarters, and have a man sent up here. There's somebody loose that's too handy with a rod—seems to have a peeve against petting-parties—and I have a hunch I know who it is.”

He looked at her quivering figure with sudden gentleness. “Place for you is in bed—where you can get a little shut-eye.” He picked up the trembling figure in his arms, and strode with her into the tiny bedroom. She clung to him, as he set her down and patted a white shoulder reassuringly.

“You—you must think I'm helpless,” she grinned faintly at him.

“First time I ever played lady's maid,” he grinned back at her. “But I kind of like the job. I'd like to do it for you—right along.”

“You do it very nicely,” she smiled. “I—I don't mind having you do it. If I should ever decide on having it done regularly—” Her white arms slipped around his neck.

Ludgate pulled the covers over her and went to the telephone. He hated to leave—but there was a job to be completed.

“Police Headquarters. Listen, send a man up to 131 86th Street,



will you? Somebody tried to snipe Bradley Davison's secretary—and damn' near got her."

"That you, Ludgate?" growled Dolan's booming voice over the wire. "Where in hell have you been? I wanted you—we got another sweet little investigation. They just found Perry Schuyler, shot through the throat, deader'n a herring. He had a rod with a silencer in his hand—and he did a damned thorough job!"

**B**RADLEY DAVISON'S haggard face was seamed with repressed irritation as he came out of his library. "The police again! Is it really necessary to disturb me at this time of night? I was just going to bed. The past two or three days haven't been—well, easy ones for me."

"I know." Ludgate nodded sympathetically. He looked abstractly at the other man's ankles. "I won't take but a few minutes. But I thought you ought to know about the murderous attack on your secretary—somebody tried to shoot her through the window a little while ago—and under the window I picked up a cigarette-stub—the same sort that I found in your smoking-stand after Schuyler had been here."

"My secretary—Evelyn! Good God!" The veins stood out on Davison's forehead. "It looks as if a homicidal maniac were loose!"

"Yes, it was one of Schuyler's cigarettes," Ludgate went on slowly. "But he won't smoke any more—they found him dead about an hour ago—with a revolver in his hand. Seems to have written the last chapter in this set of killings."

Davison's iron face twitched mo-

mentarily. "The man must have been insane! It's a terrible thing. He was—almost insane about Norma—never quite got over it, I felt. Well, I congratulate the police on solving this puzzle so quickly."

"Schuyler lied to me," Ludgate went on retrospectively. "He must have come back to the house, slipped in again, gone upstairs—and found the two in Mrs. Davison's room. Then—"

His gaze again sought Davison's ankles. "Let me see, Mr. Davison. You didn't go into the bedroom at all, when you came home—you discovered the two bodies in the sitting-room, didn't you?"

Davison nodded. "I don't think I did. Annette dragged me upstairs—I was all but overcome by the shock—I called the police and went into the library—I couldn't bear to go into the room afterward." His voice choked at the gruesome recollection.

The detective leaned forward slightly. "Well—I guess that's all." His hand shot downward and pinioned Davison's arms. Metal clicked abruptly. The astonished realtor tugged angrily at the handcuffs that encircled his wrists.

"Why—what the devil—this is an outrage!"

"Not taking any chances—with a man who shoots as straight as you do. You're under arrest, Davison, for the murder of your wife and Arnold Webb. Incidentally also for Perry Schuyler, whom you shot and tried to make it appear that he had committed suicide. And that attempt on your secretary, incidentally leaving one of Schuyler's cigarettes under the fire-escape, pretty near

clicked. Thought she'd found out too much, did you? And you weren't resting easy, while she could talk. Or do necking-parties *always* set your trigger finger to working?"

"You—you can't prove a word of this! It's all trumped-up—"

"Oh, you had an air-tight alibi, all right. You were in your inner office with Sherburne, discussing real estate subdivisions all the afternoon. Only Sherburne didn't stay more than ten minutes—and after he went out, you slipped out, too, and made a flying trip home. You had a suspicion of the way things were going—not as blind as people thought you were—only you couldn't prove anything. This was your chance.

"**N**OW if you didn't go into your wife's bedroom after you came home—how did you get that bit of blue floss on your trouser-cuff? Or how did the one that I picked up in your office get there? I gathered all of them up when I looked the bedroom over. And any of those things which cling like burdocks, must have gotten on your clothes before the police came—but you didn't go in there before that? Incidentally I found one of those bits in Schuyler's apartment, so I knew that he lied when he said he didn't go upstairs."

"I—I saw Schuyler's car turning the corner, just as I drove up to the house," the trapped husband admitted.

"But you found somebody else besides Schuyler there," Ludgate persisted. "Caught them in the act. And that was a nice little clockwork gadget that made that dictaphone repeat itself over and over again. A record that sounded like conversa-

tion between you two—what did you do with it, by the way?"

"It's where you'll never find it!"

"Then there was such a record? And while you were out the block-work ran down, and you rewound it the first thing when you came back. Made your secretary think you were in there all the time. Well, it would have fooled wiser people than her—and she isn't so dumb, at that. Smart kid. If you'd only picked her, Davison—you wouldn't be in this mess."

Ludgate's eyes softened at the thought of the girl he had held in his arms not two hours before.

The tortured husband stared straight beyond him, and his manacled hands twisted. "Now what would *you* have done, officer, if you had found your wife—as I found mine—know that you had been cheated—double-crossed—"

The detective's eyes narrowed. "Hard to say, Davison. I shouldn't want to find myself in the same situation. But when you start this killing stuff—I dunno. Maybe your wife and Webb deserved all they got. Maybe you had some excuse for lumping off Schuyler—but when you try to rub out a great little girl, whose only fault is that she's been too damn' good to you—and you thought she knew too much—God, Davison, if that's the way you do business—it's a good thing there's one firm that's going to shut up shop!"

He crossed to the telephone. "Hello. Police Headquarters? Ludgate speaking. Send up the wagon. And, listen, you can call off that dumb flatfoot at 131 86th Street. I'm going to take over that job myself."

By **FRANK DECKER**

# Exit Dying



**W**ALTER LONIGAN, hook-nosed, iron gray, looked up as Val Vernon, who was Acme's Number 1 bloodhound, breezed into his office.

"Hello, Chief," he greeted. "You wanted me."

There was a man seated at Lonigan's right. A little, mousy-looking man with washed-out blue eyes and not much chin. He sat with his thin hands clasped in his lap, bluish lips tightly compressed.

"This is Mr. Eckerley, Vernon," Lonigan said.

The little man extended his hand. Val took it. The fingers were cold and clammy.

"I'll let Mr. Eckerley tell you his story, Vernon," Lonigan said. "Go ahead, Mr. Eckerley."

*What manner of a man would go around poisoning harmless pigeons? Was there something about the birds that made them dangerous to a human being? And what part did the gorgeous red-head play in the whole bizarre tragedy?*



The man was falling almost before he could reach him.

The little man licked his lips. He tried to smile but the result was a travesty of mirth. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down the scrawny column of his neck.

"It's—it's about Mr. Courtney's pigeons," he said. "They've been dying off pretty fast, poisoned I guess. Mr. Courtney can't notify the police on account of the health ordinances. You see, he's had a lot of trouble with the police because of the pigeons. You know, you're not allowed to keep pigeons where the neighbors don't like them. There've been complaints.

"And so," Eckerley continued, "Mr. Courtney and I decided it might be best to hire a detective. They're valuable pigeons and there's no reason for anyone killing them off like that." He leaned forward, his eyes blinking.

"I don't get it, boss," Val said.

Lonigan frowned. "It's simple enough. You've heard of Felix Courtney, haven't you?"

"The banker?"

"Yes. He has a home in Westchester. He's a pigeon fancier. Breeds them. Lately, the pigeons have been dying mysteriously. Mr. Courtney suspects foul play. And then there's something about threatening letters."

"There is," Eckerley said. "Mr. Courtney has been receiving letters through the mail, asking for money."

"Where do you fit in, Mr. Eckerley?"

The little man smiled. "You see, I raise pigeons on my place in Jersey. Most of Mr. Courtney's pigeons come from my coops. When they started dying off, he called me. He thought the pigeons were sick. But

they weren't. Someone had poisoned them." He pulled a huge, gold watch out of his vest pocket. "It's getting late. I must go. You'll come with me, Mr. Vernon?"

"Where?"

"To Mr. Courtney's estate."

Lonigan answered. "Yes, Vernon will go along, Mr. Eckerley. He'll be with you in a moment."

"Thank you." Eckerley picked his faded derby from the desk, hurried out of the private office. When the door closed behind him, Val turned to Lonigan.

"Say, what's the idea. He wants the Audubon Society, not a shamus. What the hell do I know about pigeons except that they cost three bucks on toast at the Ritz?"

"Don't be a fool, Vernon," Lonigan barked. "Courtney will pay a fat fee. Go up there and look around. You'll probably discover that one of his neighbors is poisoning the pigeons."

Val grunted, jerked the brim of his brown felt hat. "All I hope, Lonigan, is that the giraffe over to the zoo doesn't up and give birth to a little giraffe. You'll be wanting me to dig up the father!" He put his hand out, palm up. "Expense money."

Lonigan counted out four fives. "Report in the morning."

**D**URING the half-hour train trip to Rye, Val learned all he ever wanted to learn about pigeons. Eckerley's high-pitched voice didn't stop from the moment they embarked at Grand Central to the moment they were ushered into Felix Courtney's oak-paneled study.

Val was impressed with both Felix



Courtney and the study. The banker, impeccably groomed, even to the clipped ends of his dark gray military mustache, rose from behind a huge desk as the butler announced Eckerley and Val.

"I brought him, Mr. Courtney," Eckerley piped.

"Good! I know this must sound silly, Mr. Vernon, but it's important to me. If I can discover who is murdering my pigeons, I'll prosecute to the fullest extent of the law!" His gray eyes flashed fire. "If anyone can solve the mystery, you can," Courtney added. "Shall we go to the coops?"

The wire-netted pigeon coops were built on the roof of a solarium extending from the west side of the Courtney mansion. Fully a hundred birds were imprisoned behind the netting.

"Another Blue Rock!" Eckerley cried, pointing to a bird on the floor of the coop. He opened the door, reached in, removed the pigeon. It was still alive.

He hurried off the roof into the house, carrying the bird.

"Where's he going?" Val questioned.

Felix Courtney's jaw was hardest. "To try to revive the bird. That makes twenty-three of them. You have no idea what this means to me, Mr. Vernon. The flying and breeding of pigeons are my only diversion. I live for the joy I get out of it. To see them being murdered like this is heartbreaking to me."

"Do you suspect anyone?"

The banker shook his head. "No, I don't. There isn't anyone to suspect."

"Who's in the house?"

"My wife, my daughter, a butler, and a maid."

"No chauffeur?"

"Oh, yes, a new man. He was engaged two weeks ago."

"When did the first pigeon die?"

Courtney's eyes flickered. "Just about two weeks ago. You don't think—?"

"What about Eckerley?"

The banker looked at Val as though the detective was mad. "Mr. Eckerley? Why, his entire life has been wrapped up in pigeons. He breeds them, raises them. Why, the man knows more about pigeons than any individual in the world. Why should he destroy what he creates?"

Val shrugged. "What about the threatening letters you've received?"

"I'm certain they're from the killer of my pigeons. They demand money, threaten to do me harm."

The butler stepped out on the roof. "Mr. Eckerley would like to see you, sir. Immediately."

"He's probably discovered something," Courtney said. "Will you come along, Mr. Vernon?"

"I'll look around here," Val said.

**A**LONE on the roof, he examined the coops. Personally, he thought this was the nuttiest thing he had ever run across. Lonigan was knocking down a \$1,000 fee on this case, all because of a couple of lousy pigeons!

He walked to the end of the roof, peered over. There was no way of getting up except by shinnying one of the smooth granite columns supporting the solarium. Six windows looked out on the roof. Val peered into one after the other. His eyes popped as he looked into the last one.

There, standing before the full-length mirror that backed a closet door, was one of the most beautiful red-headed women he had ever seen. Diaphanous chiffon covered her sleek body. Val's mouth got dry looking at her. Blood rushed up to his head and pounded against his temples.

She was a knock-out from slim patrician ankles to the waves in her bright auburn hair. Everything in-between was perfection plus.

He could hear his own excited breathing, the mad throb of his heart. This was class with a capital "C."

So engrossed was he in admiration that he failed to dodge as she turned from the mirror. She saw him peering through the window pane. Fright marked her beautiful features. She screamed.

The window was closed but Val heard the outcry. He headed for the door leading into the hallway. Just as he stepped over the sill, the girl came flying out of her room, shrieking at the top of her lungs. Val grabbed her wrist, spun her around. He felt her fingernails rake his cheek. The next moment he pinned her against him.

"Stop yelling!" he barked.

Pounding footsteps on the stairs forced Val to release her. No sense getting caught in a position it would be hard to explain. Eckerley and Felix Courtney appeared. The girl ran to the banker, sobbing hysterically.

"I guess I frightened her," Val explained. "I was looking in the windows and she saw me. I'm sorry."

Courtney was patting the girl's shoulder. "There, there, Gloria.

Mr. Vernon meant no harm. He's a detective I hired to solve the mystery of the pigeons being poisoned."

Gloria Courtney broke out of her father's arms. For a moment she glared at Val. Her breast rose and fell rapidly with her agitated breathing. Without a word she dashed into her room, slammed the door shut.

"It might be wise for me to meet everyone in the house," Val suggested. "I don't like the idea of frightening people."

"Yes, of course," the banker replied.

**I**N THE study, Val was presented to Larkin, the butler, and Ella, the maid. They were both silent, inscrutable. Mrs. Courtney and George, the new chauffeur, were in the city and would not return until evening, Courtney explained.

Val examined the threatening letters. They were four in number, all written in pencil on cheap, copybook paper. The last specified that \$50,000 in small bills was to be wrapped in newspaper and placed under a designated bridge at ten that night. There was a crude diagram of the bridge. Courtney knew its location.

Val glanced at Eckerley. His pale blue eyes were blinking. "You called Mr. Courtney down from the roof a few minutes ago, Mr. Eckerley. What for?"

Eckerley opened his hand. A pale blue fragment rested on the palm. "The pigeon disgorged this before it died," he said. "Bichloride of mercury."

"Who supervises their feeding?"

Courtney answered. "Larkin."

"You trust him?"

"Implicitly."

"I've examined the feed and water," Eckerley offered. "They showed nothing."

"Do the pigeons ever alight when you fly them?"

"They do not," Courtney replied, "except when they return to the coops."

Eckerley glanced at his watch. "I'll have to be leaving shortly, Mr. Courtney," he said. "I want to catch the 5:22."

"I'll ride to the station with you," Val said. At the moment Eckerley seemed a better lead than anyone in the house.

A taxi was called. As Val and Eckerley rode toward the station, the latter opened the conversation.

"You have no idea how this has troubled poor Mr. Courtney," he said.

Val noticed the black suitcase between Eckerley's legs. It was screened at both ends. "You brought some new pigeons today?" he asked.

Eckerley nodded. "Yes, five new ones." He clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Tsk! Tsk! I forgot to tell Mr. Courtney to keep the moulter separate. I'll have to call him from the station. It's very important."

"What's a moulter?"

"A bird that's shedding."

Val bade Eckerley good-by at the station. He doubled around the wooden building, watched the pigeon dealer closely. Eckerley walked inside, stepped into a phone booth. He came out a minute later, stood on the platform. Val entered the waiting room through the freight storage shed, collared the station agent. He flashed his badge, pointed out Eckerley.

"Instruct the conductor of the 5:22 to keep an eye on that man. I want to know where he gets off."

The train pulled in, Eckerley boarded. Val waited until it steamed out, then called the Acme office.

"Lonigan, this is Vernon. Eckerley may be coming in at Grand Central on the 5:22 from Rye. Have him trailed. I want to know where he is between nine and eleven tonight. Call me at Courtney's at midnight."

IT WAS five-thirty when Val stepped into a cab to return to the Courtney place. A big black limousine turned off the main road in front of the cab. There was a bleached blonde in the rear seat and a uniformed chauffeur up front. Val's hunch told him the blonde was Mrs. Courtney.

"Don't get too close to that limousine," he said to the cabbie. "Keep it in sight but run about a hundred yards behind it."

The thrill of calling the turn was Val's. He watched the limousine swerve into the Courtney driveway, pull up under the portico.

"Drive around the block," Val snapped. "Let me off at the rear of the house."

As the cab went by the driveway, Val saw Mrs. Courtney emerge from the limousine. The chauffeur followed her up the steps, his arms laden with bundles.

The landscaped terrain behind the house and three-car garage was heavily wooded. Dusk was falling and it helped Val as he crept up to the rear of the garage. He wanted to observe the chauffeur before he met him.

He went rigid as he heard the snap of a dry twig. Down on his knees he hugged the cement foundation of the garage, held his breath. His eyes popped from their sockets when Gloria Courtney turned a corner of the garage, flattened herself against the wall only a bare ten feet away from him.

Val scanned the profile of her body. She was wearing a jersey dress, and it clung like wet tissue paper to the curves beneath. Her strained breathing lifted her breast sharply and the thin dress hugged the slim lines of her waist caressingly. Her dark blue eyes were fastened on the rear door of the house.

Suddenly her arm shot out and she waved her hand. Val couldn't see the house door but he had a pretty fair idea of what was going to happen. Again he called the turn.

George, the chauffeur, swartly handsome in his tight-fitting uniform, joined Gloria Courtney. With a soft sigh she melted into his arms, gave him her parted lips, moist and red.

A vicarious thrill shivered through Val. His mouth went dry as the chauffeur's arms tightened about her, as one of his hands smoothed the delicate curve of her back. They strained against one another, young bodies tense. Long estatic moments before the girl drew her mouth away.

"George, darling!" she gasped. "There's a detective here. We'll have to be careful. If everything turns out right, we can leave about—"

A shrill, high-pitched scream sounded from the house. It knifed through the air, sharp as a razor edge. Val momentarily forgot himself, shot erect. His reflexes, trained

to danger cries, reacted too perfectly.

The chauffeur spotted him, lunged. Gloria's muted cry warned Val. He side-stepped, threw a punch. It landed on the chauffeur's cheekbone, spun him like a top, dropped him to one knee.

He was up again in a flash, dark eyes spitting fire. Again the scream sounded from the house. Val decided discretion was the better part of valor. He pulled his gun, smashed the barrel down on the chauffeur's head as he came forward. Val caught him as he fell, slung the limp body over his shoulder.

"March, baby!" he snapped at the girl, jammed the gun into her back. "To the house!"

VAL dropped his human burden on the kitchen floor, hurried to the front of the house. Instinct led him to the study door. He stopped short as he crossed the threshold. His photographic eyes took in three points.

One was a couch with the blonde Mrs. Courtney sprawled on it, her skirt wrinkled up over her knees.

The second was Larkin and Ella staring at the third, which saw Felix Courtney, his body on the floor in front of the desk, dark blood clotted on his throat.

"Oh, God!" the maid gasped.

Larkin, the butler, started forward. Val stepped into the room. "Stay where you are!" he barked. One look at Felix Courtney's face was enough. The banker was dead. His sightless eyes were wide in abysmal horror, his blue lips open.

Val pulled out a handkerchief, reached for the phone. He called



the local Police Headquarters, reported. Just as he hung up, Gloria Courtney came to the study door. For a chilling moment she stared at her father's face, the cheek swimming in blood. Her body trembled. Without a sound she collapsed in a dead faint.

Two uniformed cops guarded the members of the Courtney household in the drawing-room. Val, the local chief of detectives, and the medical examiner were in the study.

"Was that filing drawer open when you came in?" Madigan the chief, questioned.

Val looked at the half-open steel drawer. "Yes, so was the window."

Madigan gnawed at his bristling black mustache. "No footprints outside, no fingerprints on the sill. What does it look like, Doc?"

The medical examiner shrugged. "Not much, yet. The wound wasn't enough to cause death. I should say he was stabbed with the point of a poisoned knife. He was killed by a quick-action poison of powerful venous action. An autopsy will be necessary to determine what was used."

There was a silver-bladed letter opener on the desk. Madigan picked it up with a handkerchief, examined the tip. No sign of blood.

"From what you've told me, Vernon," he said. "It looks like the chauffeur. I talked to Mrs. Courtney. She said she came in from a shopping expedition, removed her coat, asked the butler where her husband was. He said in the study. She opened the door, found him dead. She screamed twice, fainted. The butler and the maid corroborated the faint. They were both in the kitchen

when they heard the first scream. Suppose we quiz the chauffeur."

Val nodded. "You take the chauffeur and I'll take the girl. Then we can match stories."

**I**N THE privacy of an upstairs bedroom, Val faced Gloria Courtney. Her eyes were bloodshot, the lids inflamed. She held a damp, balled handkerchief in her right hand, pressed it at intervals against her quivering lips.

"I want you to come clean on this, Miss Courtney," he said. "Don't shield anyone."

A sob caught in her throat, died as she drew a deep breath "I—I don't have to shield anyone," she murmured tonelessly.

"You can explain your relations with the chauffeur?"

Spots of color flamed in her cheeks. Her hands clenched at her breast. "Yes! I love him!"

"Did your father know about it?"

"Yes and no."

"What do you mean?"

"George isn't really a chauffeur. I met him at Lake Placid last winter. We saw a lot of each other in town. Someone told my father. He forbade me to see him because George was poor. I concocted a story about our old chauffeur and had him fired. George applied for the job so he could be near me."

"Do you think he murdered your father to—?"

She flew at Val, fists upraised. "Don't say that!" she screamed.

Val caught her, locked his arm around her pliant waist. "Take it easy, kid. Why shouldn't he? Now he can marry you and get all the dough."

She struggled to release herself. Val held her, squirming and writhing, her heart throbbing, wildly against his.

"He didn't! He didn't!"

Val released her. "Maybe not, but it looks bad."

Her complete attitude changed. "No!" she gasped. "He couldn't have done it."

Val's voice was low and insinuating. "Didn't I hear you tell him that if everything went right you could leave?" He paused dramatically. "Everything *did* go right, didn't it? Your boy friend murdered your father so that he could have you *and* the money! Didn't he?"

She went deathly pale, stumbled back against the bed. "That wasn't what I meant."

"What *did* you mean? Think fast!"

She sat down wearily, passed a shaky hand across her brow. "I—I wrote those letters to my father. I wanted to marry George and I needed money. I thought I'd get it that way."

Val restrained his amazement. "And *you* killed the pigeons?"

"No. I—I don't know anything about that."

Val approached her. "Is that the truth?" He looked down at her, at the tumultuous heaving of her breast . . . at the quivering of her red mouth that she couldn't quite restrain.

"It—it's the truth."

"What did your mother know about all this?"

Her head shot up. "My—my mother is dead." Tears formed in her blue eyes.

Val scratched his head. "But—but—"

"That woman is my father's second wife." Each word was cold as steel. There was resentment in her very manner.

"You'd better go down," Val said. "Captain Madigan is questioning the boy friend. If your stories match, he may have a chance to squeeze out."

VAL made a quick search of all the bedrooms including the butler's and the maid's.

Downstairs again he drew the butler side.

"Where did you work before Mr. Courtney employed you?"

Larkin's beady eyes rolled. "F-for P-professor Elliot at Moorhaven, Long Island, sir."

"How long were you employed there?"

"Seven years, sir."

"What about the maid? Where did she work?"

"For a Mrs. Ardsleigh, sir, right here in Rye."

"How long ago?"

"Just a few months, sir. Mrs. Ardsleigh discharged Ella and Mrs. Courtney engaged her."

"All right, Larkin, that's all." Val entered the study. A sheet covered Felix Courtney's body. Madigan was towering over George, firing accusations at him. He quit as Val entered.

"Claims he was the girl's fiance," Madigan sneered. "Says he took the chauffeur's job to be near her because her old man objected."

Val approached the perspiring youth. He still had a lump on his head from the gun barrel blow.

"Now, listen, son. Your girl friend spilled the beans. You were

trying to extort money from her father, weren't you?"

He started. "It—it was not my idea. It was Gloria's—" He stopped short, body tense. "Yes! I—I thought of the idea!"

"You're lying! The letters were Miss Courtney's proposition. But you decided to end it quicker than that! You didn't think the old man would pony up the fifty grand, so you killed him!"

"I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

Val winked at Madigan. "Okay, kid. We'll give you a little time to think it over. Get into the other room."

Alone with the chief, Val summed up his findings. "Ever hear of Mrs. Ardsleigh?" he questioned.

"Yes, she's a wealthy old spinster. Owns a home on Roxborough Road. That's one block up."

Val smiled grimly. "Call the station and find out whether she complained about Courtney's pigeons."

Madigan put the call through. He nodded when it was completed. "Yes, she did. Three times."

"Swell! Get the maid in here."

A strain of Ella's sand-colored hair fell down over her pale cheek as she stood before Val, nervously fingering her apron.

"How much did Mrs. Ardsleigh pay you to poison Mr. Courtney's pigeons, Ella?" Val questioned quietly.

The maid's lower jaw dropped. Her eyes bulged. She was struck speechless.

"You did poison them, didn't you?" Val snapped.

"Y-yes, s-sir. It—it was Mrs. Ardsleigh's idea. She—she made me do it."

"All right, Ella, you can go."

Madigan spoke when the maid left the room. "How in hell did you know that, Vernon?"

VAL dug into his pocket, brought out a small jar of blue tablets. "Bichloride of mercury. Found them in her room. Her window overlooked the coops. All she had to do was insert a piece of a tablet in a grain of corn and toss it down. Birds swallow things whole."

Madigan's eyes glittered. "And Courtney caught her at it! She murdered him to keep him quiet!"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple, Madigan. Courtney believed the dying of the pigeons and the extortion letters had some connection. We've proved they didn't. Now I'm inclined to believe his murder was a thing apart. Either it was coincidence, or the murderer knew about the mysterious death of the pigeons and took advantage of the situation as a cloak. Let's reconstruct the crime if we can."

He walked over to the steel filing cabinet. "Now, Courtney was evidently at this open drawer when he was attacked. If you notice, the drawer isn't open far enough to remove any of the papers in it. He was struck from behind before—" Val stopped short. "Wait a minute. He *wasn't* hit from behind! He was stabbed in the throat—from the front!"

"Somebody called him," Madigan supplied. "He turned and he was stabbed!"

"Wouldn't he have cried out?"

"I should think so."

"Unless he didn't have time to cry out. Unless—" Val leaped for the

phone, called the Acme office. The night man, O'Brien was on duty. "Any report on Eckerley?"

"Yes. Donovan picked him up at Grand Central, trailed him to his house in East Orange. He's still there."

"Now what?" Madigan queried.

Val shrugged. "I don't know. We're up a blind alley."

Madigan opened the filing cabinet drawer to its full length. He reached in, brought out a gray pin feather. "What's this?"

"Pigeon feather. Probably all over the place. The birds shed them when they moult. That reminds me." He left the room, crossed the hall, motioned to the butler.

Larkin came out of the drawing-room. "Yes, sir."

"Mr. Eckerley called from the station about a moulting pigeon. Did you deliver the message to Mr. Courtney?"

"No, sir. Mr. Eckerley asked to speak to Mr. Courtney."

"Where was Mr. Courtney at the time?"

"In his study, sir."

"He took the call there?"

"Yes, sir. The study phone has an extension in the hall."

"And you heard no sound from the study until Mrs. Courtney discovered the body?"

"No, sir."

"What about the moulting pigeon?"

"I—I don't know of any, sir."

"Mr. Eckerley brought some new pigeons today, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir. They're in the coops. Four of them."

Something clicked in Val's mind. Like the neat meshing of gears. He

strode back into the study, called the Acme office again, secured Eckerley's address.

"You and I are going to Jersey, Madigan," he said.

AT MIDNIGHT, Val and Madigan drew up in a taxi before Eckerley's ramshackle house. A man stepped out of the shadows. It was Donovan, the Acme operative. He relaxed when he recognized Val.

"Nothin' doin', Vernon. He came out of the house once, went over to the pigeon coops, fooled around there a little, then came back."

"Stick right here," Val said, leading the way up the rickety porch steps. Long moments of waiting, then a light burned in the hall. Eckerley, in a long flannel nightshirt, opened the door.

"Mr. Vernon!" he gasped.

Val and Madigan entered. "Sorry to disturb you, Eckerley," Val said, "but it's rather important. I'm arresting you for murder!"

The little man blanched. "Murder!" he echoed.

"That's right. Mr. Courtney was murdered!"

"But—but I left him perfectly well! I—"

"I know you did, Eckerley. You didn't kill Courtney. You left something in the top drawer of his filing cabinet that did the trick, didn't you?"

Eckerley's head snapped back. His eyes glowed defiance. "It's a lie!" he screamed. "You can't prove anything!"

"Cover him, Madigan," Val said quietly. "I'll take a look around."

Ten minutes later Val returned

from the rear of the house. He carried, in a bunched handkerchief, the charred remains of a pigeon.

"Cleverer than I thought, Eckerley," he said, picking out a long, sharp sliver of blackened steel. "There's probably enough of the poison still on this false beak to send you to the chair."

Madigan stared in puzzled amazement.

"Don't you get it, Madigan?" Val asked. "It's simple as hell. Eckerley didn't murder Courtney. This pigeon did. It had a sharp steel beak, impregnated with poison. Eckerley left the bird in the filing cabinet drawer, called Courtney from the station, told him to look in the drawer for something he had left there. When Courtney opened the drawer, evidently the pigeon attacked him."

**M**ADIGAN took his eyes off Eckerley for a moment. The pigeon dealer leaped for the light switch. There was a *click* and the hall was plunged into darkness. Madigan's gun barked twice. Eckerley moaned, slumped to the floor. Val switched the light on. Blood was seeping between the fingers of the hand Eckerley held to his stomach. His face was green.

"Get a doctor, Madigan," Val snapped.

"N-never mind," Eckerley gasped. "It—it's too late." He wet his lips. "You—you were pretty smart, Vernon, but—but you should know that pigeons don't attack people. The bird was very affectionate. I trained him to kiss my throat with his beak. It took a long time. When Courtney lifted him out of the filing drawer, he did just that—kissed his throat. The steel beak and—and the poison did the rest. It—it was an Oriental poison—works in a minute."

Eckerley was sinking fast. Pink froth bubbled at his lips. Val came down on one knee. "Why did you do it, Eckerley?"

He smiled wanly. A film covered his eyes. "We were going away, Martha and me."

"Mrs. Courtney?"

Eckerley nodded. "But—but she didn't know I—I planned to kill him. She didn't know."

His voice faded off into nothingness. His chin dropped to his chest. There was a low gurgle in his throat as he died.

Val placed the charred remains of the pigeon beside the dead fancier. "Your killers, Madigan," he said softly.

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# ONE PART



WITH her disturbing violet eyes, the girl looked at Detective-Sergeant Phil Stone. "I—I don't know what happened," she faltered. "I was here in my bedroom. I heard a shot. I ran into the next room and—and saw Mr. Claypoole lying there d-dead . . ."

In the living room adjoining, cops and medical examiners and reporters were swarming about the sprawled, still-warm corpse of a gray-haired man. Even in death, Karl Claypoole wore an expression of leering bestiality; the grin of a satyr. The bullet-hole through the back of his skull didn't help his appearance any.

But here in the apartment's boudoir, in the softly shaded light, the violet-eyed girl seemed strangely out of place. It seemed queer that one so vibrant with life should be linked with death. She was young and somehow girlish despite the intriguing sheerness of her silken negligee. Phil Stone had a difficult time keeping his voice at the correct official pitch and his eyes from the loveliness of her sweet young figure.

"Your name is Inez Langley?" he asked.

"Y-yes."

"You were Karl Claypoole's . . . er, sweetheart?"

She flushed, lowered her eyes. "I—I y-yes."

"Claypoole paid the rent on this apartment? You just moved in here today?"

She nodded miserably. Her hair was like spun, burnished copper; her face a piquant oval shadowed now by despairing fear.

"Isn't it true," Phil Stone persisted, "that Claypoole quarreled with you tonight? Was going to break off with you?"

"I—"

"You may as well tell the truth, Miss Langley. Your neighbor in the apartment next door heard you and Claypoole scrapping. Then, in the middle of the argument, she claims she heard a shot fired. That's when she called Headquarters. When I got here with my men, I found you here in this bedroom. Claypoole dead in the next room. A gun on the floor." It was hard to make himself get tough with her, but he went on, "It all adds up, sister. It adds up to the hot squat for you unless you quit lying and enter a plea. Then maybe you'll get off with a third-degree rap."

*It was a strange dilemma in which the detective found himself. For the first time in his career, though he was sure of a girl's guilt, every fiber in his being clamored for him to win her freedom!*

# of REVENGE

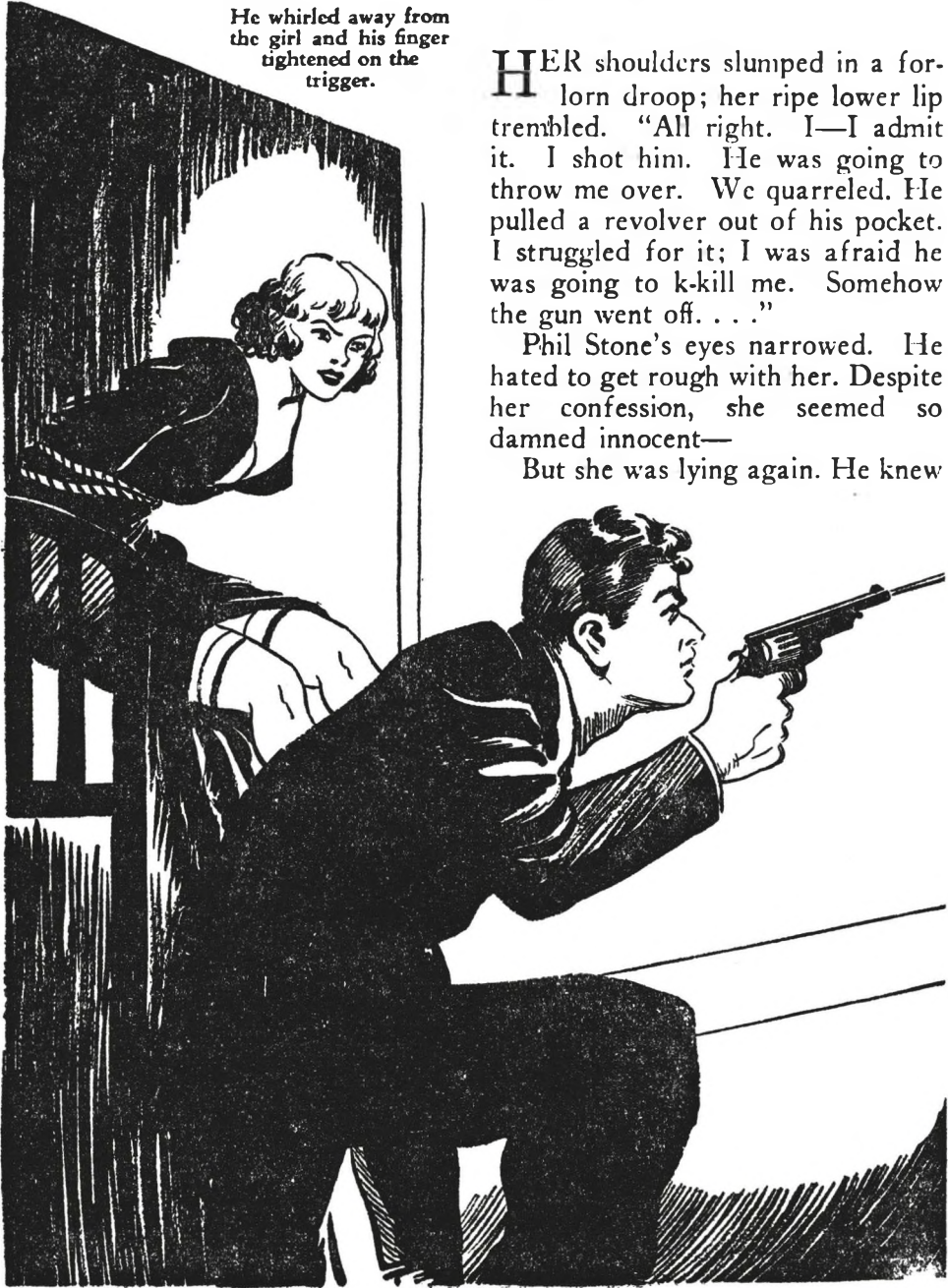
By RALPH CARLE

He whirled away from the girl and his finger tightened on the trigger.

HER shoulders slumped in a forlorn droop; her ripe lower lip trembled. "All right. I—I admit it. I shot him. He was going to throw me over. We quarreled. He pulled a revolver out of his pocket. I struggled for it; I was afraid he was going to k-kill me. Somehow the gun went off. . . ."

Phil Stone's eyes narrowed. He hated to get rough with her. Despite her confession, she seemed so damned innocent—

But she was lying again. He knew



that. "Your story's haywire, kiddo," he clipped out. "In the first place, if Claypoole had been shot while you were struggling for the revolver, there'd be powder-marks around the wound. Instead, we know he was shot from a distance—clear across the room, probably. Besides, the bullet went through the *back* of his noggin. He had his back turned toward you when you croaked him."

"Oh-h-h . . . !" she moaned.

"Get dressed, baby," he said grimly. "I'm sorry, but I've got to take you down to the jug."

"V-very well," she whispered hopelessly. "You wait for me outside the door."

"Nothing stirring!" he shook his head. "I'm not leaving you alone one minute. Go ahead and finish putting your clothes on. I'm keeping an eye on you."

She flushed painfully. Embarrassment leaped into her eyes. "But—but—"

"Nix on the fake shyness, sister. Get started."

She averted her gaze. Then with seeming reluctance, she went to the closet. She pawed around several minutes before she found the dress she wanted. She glanced at him, hesitated while a flush of distress spread to her face; then, defiantly, she turned her back to him, dropped the negligee, and started pulling her dress over her underthings. He saw the vague outlines of her fingers tugging at stocking-tops high above her knees. He watched avidly as she drew the dress down over her lovely figure.

He caught his breath sharply; no question about it: she was absolutely gorgeous. Her skin was like smooth

cream; her body a flawless symphony. The very sight of her made Phil Stone's blood tingle.

Which gave him a sudden idea. He got up, pulled down the window-blinds, made sure the boudoir door was closed and locked. Then he approached the girl. "Listen, baby."

"Yes-yes . . . ?"

"I like you, see? You're a knockout in any man's language. You've got everything it takes to drive a guy bughouse. How would you like to take it on the lam out of here?"

"I—I don't understand you."

"Sure you do. Listen. How about being nice to me a little bit? Then maybe I can let you escape. It's a hell of a thing for a Homicide copper to do—but, honestly kid, you're a knockout. I'm goofy about you!" He went toward her; and suddenly his arms snaked around her pliant waist. He drew her close; fastened his mouth upon her lips. One hand slid up to her shoulder blades, and the pressure of it crushed her against his chest.

SHE struggled in his grasp; tried to pull her mouth away from his questing kiss. Dancing flood-tides of sensation swept through him at her nearness; at the soft girliness of her body and the faint fragrance of her hair. His arms tightened; his mouth left hers and burned against the pulsing hollow of her throat.

She managed to wrench her right hand free; slammed her tiny, doubled fist against his cheek. "Damn you!" she panted. "Let me alone!"

He released her, grinning enigmatically. "Okay, kiddo. You're

the doctor. Put on your coat and hat."

Then he took her into the next room, turned her over to a pair of uniformed men. "Run her down to Headquarters," he ordered. "Book her on a homicide charge."

There were tears in her violet eyes and her lips were trembling as they led her away.

**A** LITTLE later, after the meat-wagon had carted off Karl Claypoole's corpse and everyone else had departed, Phil Stone took another look about the apartment of death. Then he went out; stalked up a flight of stairs; rapped on a door.

It opened. A tall man stared out. "Stone! What on earth brings you here at this ungodly hour of the night, old man?"

"Hello, Lundgren. Listen. I want you to do me a favor. You're a hell of a good attorney, and I've got a case I want you to handle for me. But keep my name out of it, of course."

"A case?"

"Yes. You know Karl Claypoole, the cabaret owner?"

"I ought. I used to handle some work for him."

"Well, he just got knocked off in an apartment downstairs a while ago. We've pinched the dame who occupied the joint with him. She

was his sweetie; name's Inez Langley. It looks bad for her; but I feel sort of sorry for the kid. As a personal favor to me, I want you to act as her mouthpiece. Try to get her off with a self-defense plea or something. I'll foot the bill out of my own pocket."

Steve Lundgren looked startled. "That's a funny one! You put the collar on a dame for murder, and then you hire a lawyer to get her out from under the rap. What did you do, fall for the cutie?"

"Maybe. Anyhow, will you take the case?"

"Sure—for you, Phil. I'll go down to the hoosegow and have a talk with her right away."

"Much obliged!" The detective-sergeant turned, went back downstairs. Once more he walked toward the apartment where death had struck. But he passed by its door; went to the adjoining flat. He rapped softly.

He was admitted by a bleached-blonde, over-rouged girl who looked to be in her early thirties—a lush, well-built creature whose diaphanous negligee concealed very little of her obvious feminine charms.

He smiled at her. "You're Miss Maizie Medland, aren't you? You're the one who heard that murder next door and then phoned for the cops?"

"Yes."

*(Please turn page)*

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"I'm Stone—Homicide Squad." He flashed his tin. "May I have a little talk with you?"

There was something furtive in her mascara-fringed eyes. Her demeanor was one of sullen watchfulness. "I've already told my story to the bulls—the police."

"Sure. I know. But I want to hear it again."

WITH a surly nod she admitted him to the apartment. He sank down on the divan. "In the first place, you say you heard Karl Claypoole and Inez Langley come into the next-door apartment about an hour ago? And they were squabbling?"

"Damn right they were squabbling. He was telling her he was all washed up with her. Then she started to scream and call him all kinds of names. After that I heard a shot. I phoned the coppers. That's all I know."

"You didn't happen to know Claypoole yourself, by any chance?"

"No!" she ground out. But her voice sounded uneasy.

He studied her. Her face, despite the lines drawn by dissipation, was still blatantly pretty in a petulant, sophisticated way. She'd been around; he could see that. She knew the ropes; knew all the answers.

Over on the table, he noticed a fat scrap-book and photo-album combined. His eyes narrowed. He had to see the contents of that leather-bound book. He had a sudden hunch he'd find out what he wanted to know if he somehow got a chance to thumb through its pages.

He moved over on the divan. "Sit down here a minute, baby," he in-

vited. "There's something I want to say to you."

She looked at him suspiciously as she sat beside him. "What's on your mind?"

"Listen, kiddo. I'm out to make a rep for myself, see? I'm a sergeant now; the next move upward is a lieutenantcy. That's what I'm shooting for."

"So what?"

"So this. If you're willing to give me a little co-operation, you and I can go places together. Plenty."

"What kind of co-operation, copper?"

"Help me pin this murder-rape on Inez Langley. Of course, your testimony will already be damaging enough. But if I can walk into court and spring an eyewitness to the killing, it'll be a plume in my bonnet, get me?"

"An eyewitness, huh? But I've already told you I didn't see anything. I just heard the fight between Claypoole and his girl; then the shot. That's all I know."

"Yeah. But suppose you were to lie a little? In the first place, we already know the Langley dame bumped Claypoole; so anything you might say will just help pin the blame where it belongs—on her shoulders. Now, here's what I want. I want you to testify that when you heard Claypoole and the Langley wren scrapping, you went out into the corridor. I want you to say their front door was open and you peeped in. I want you to testify that you saw her put a slug through him."

"That would be perjury, wouldn't it, copper?"

"Sure. What of it? It'll just help me make my case stronger; give



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me a boost up the ladder for having solved this murder."

"What do I get out of it?" she demanded.

"Dough. Five yards."

"Five hundred, eh? I don't get this. Why would you slip me that much jack?"

"Maybe because I like you!" he retorted. His arms slid around her shoulders, and his hand dropped down along her arm, tightened. The pressure brought her against him and he could feel the warmth of her body through the thin negligee.

She drew a deep breath. "You're a fresh dick!"

"Sure I'm fresh. I believe in making hay while the sun shines."

"I'm not hay and the sun isn't shining."

"No, you're not hay. But you're plenty sweet. Come on—slip us a kiss."

He smeared his mouth against her lipstick; felt her lips part moistly, trembling. He kissed her throat, felt the pounding blood heat her mouth skin to a glow.

Suddenly her arms locked around his neck; she clung to him as if she might lose him altogether. "Damn you, copper—!" she moaned.

**L**ATER, while the girl was out of the room, Steve grabbed the chance to look around. He heard water running. Under cover of the sound, he leaped to his feet; snatched at the photo-album and scrap-book. Swiftly he scanned page after page. His lips tightened.

There was a clipping from an old newspaper—a San Francisco sheet. A half-tone picture was above the clipping. It showed a blonde girl in

scant dancer's costume, and the caption said: "*Tessie Tilford, featured performer at the Karl Claypoole Klub. . . .*"

Phil Stone smiled grimly. He remembered, now. Karl Claypoole, the murdered man, had once owned a cabaret in Frisco. And while this newspaper photograph was captioned with the name Tessie Tilford, the girl's features were those of the woman who now called herself Maizie Medland!

So Maizie had once worked in one of Claypoole's joints!

Again he thumbed through the pages. At last he found a snapshot. It showed the blonde girl and Karl Claypoole together, arms locked.

The detective-sergeant closed the album. He had found out plenty. He had discovered that Maizie lied when she said she didn't know the murdered cabaret-owner. . . .

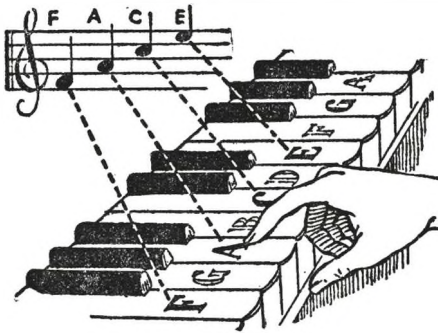
He stared at the window of her living room. It led out to a fire-escape balcony which ran past the windows of the adjoining apartment where Claypoole had been rubbed out. Phil got an idea.

He called: "Listen, Maizie-baby. I've got to beat it. I'll be seeing you—maybe later tonight." Before she could answer, he walked out of the flat.

But he didn't go very far. He stopped at the door of the murder-apartment; opened it with the key he had taken when he left the place a while before. He walked in; snapped on the lights.

He squinted at the blood-stain on the living-room rug, where Claypoole's corpse had sprawled. Then he looked at the window leading out upon the fire-escape balcony: the

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same balcony which ran past Maizie's apartment. It would have been a simple matter for a killer to hide out there on that balcony and fire a shot through the open window. . . .

Whistling tunelessly, Stone next strode into the boudoir where he had arrested Inez Langley. His eyes searched the chamber. Then, suddenly, he hunched his shoulders.

The boudoir window was open; and he remembered that it had been closed when he left the apartment an hour or so previously. Now, what did that mean?

Then he saw something else. It was a small-sized door in the far wall of the room; a door not over two feet square, partially open. He went to it, drawing his flashlight.

The opening led into a laundry-chute. Soiled clothing could be dropped here, later to be collected by the laundryman in the basement of the building. Phil whirled, dashed from the room. He went pelting downstairs to the basement; found the bottom of the laundry-chute. He rummaged around in a basket at the mouth of the chute—

"So!" he grunted. He snatched at a wadded bundle of cloth—a feminine frock! In the middle of the wad he found a handbag of tooled leather.

In the brilliant white circle of light from his flash, he opened the bag; saw a couple of letters in their canceled envelopes. Both were addressed:

*"Miss Jacqueline Langley  
Apt. 652, Clarendon Arms  
1125 Boulevard Way  
City."*

PHIL STONE drew a sharp breath. "Jacqueline Langley!" he muttered. And the copper-haired girl he had arrested for the murder of Karl Claypoole was named Inez Langley!

Langley! Langley! The name dinned in his ears. He turned, raced to the street-floor, dashed out into the night. He found a cruising cab; signaled it. "Eleven-twenty-five Boulevard Way, cousin. Step on it." He flashed his badge.

The taxi lurched forward. A little later, the detective-sergeant got out in front of the Clarendon Arms. "Wait here," he said to the cabby. Then he legged inside the building; took the automatic elevator to the sixth floor.

He sprinted to a door marked 652; gathered his muscles. With a mighty crash, he catapulted against the portal; smashed the lock from its keeper. He went thundering into the room as the door sagged on its bent hinges.

There came a feminine scream. Phil stared into the white features of a girl—a copper-haired girl. For a single instant he thought it was the girl he had arrested and sent to jail. Then he noticed faint traces of dissimilarity. This doll was a little more slender. Her face was just a little weaker, more worldly. And her eyes were green, rather than violet.

She was dressed in a close-fitting *tailleured* traveling-costume; had a packed Gladstone in her hand. But when she saw the detective, she dropped the bag; plunged her tiny fingers into her purse. She yanked out a small, toy-like automatic. "You'll never get me, copper!" she panted. She squeezed the trigger.



Stone ducked as the weapon's small-caliber muzzle spat fire. He felt a lead slug pluck at his sleeve. Then he dived in. With one hand he knocked the girl's gun aside. Then he popped her in the jaw with his loose right fist. It wasn't a hard blow—not hard enough to break her jaw. But it knocked her cold. She sagged, slumped.

The detective caught her in his arms. He turned, raced for the apartment's door; carried his limp burden down the staircase. He didn't risk using the automatic elevator; someone might see him lugging the senseless girl and ask embarrassing questions. He had no time to answer any queries now.

At last he had the green-eyed girl out of the building. He carried her to the waiting taxi; dumped her into the tonneau. He climbed in after her; spoke his own address to the driver.

TEN minutes later, Phil Stone carried the still unconscious girl into his flat. He took her into his bedroom; placed her on the bed. He tore a sheet into strips, fastened her so that she couldn't move. He gagged her.

He pelted out again; had himself driven down to Headquarters. At the jail, he held hurried colloquy with a turnkey. "I'll accept full responsibility!" he finished.

The turnkey shrugged. "It's your funeral, Phil." He went down an iron-barred corridor; came back a moment later with the Langley girl whom Phil Stone had originally arrested.

Stone looked into her violet eyes; studied her features. He swore softly under his breath when he saw how much she looked like that other

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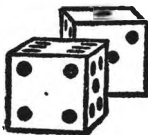
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wren—the one he had left tied up in his apartment a few moments ago. But there was no time to go into that now. He took her arm. "Come along with me, Miss Langley."

"Wh-where are you t-taking me?"

"You'll find out."

Outside, in the speeding taxi, she shivered against him. "I—I want to thank you for sending that attorney, Mr. Lundgren, to see me. He says maybe he can get me off with only five years—"

"Maybe he'll get you off with less than that, baby. I've got a brand-new angle on this Claypoole killing that's going to smash the case wide open—and clear you, or I'm a liar!"

"Y-you mean—?"

"Don't ask questions. Here we are at my place. Come on upstairs and keep your mouth buttoned."

He led her up to his flat; took her into his bathroom and locked the door on her. Then he went to his phone; dialed Steve Lundgren, the attorney.

"Hello?" Lundgren's voice came over the wire.

"Steve? This is Phil Stone. Listen close. I want you to deliver a message for me. On the floor under you, in the flat next to the one where Claypoole got rubbed out, there's a bleached-blonde bimbo by the name of Maizic Medland. I want you to go down and tell her something for me."

"Okay." Lundgren agreed. "What shall I tell her."

"Tell her the deal's off between her and me. Tell her I've got a real honest-to-God eyewitness to the murder of Claypoole right here in my own apartment. A girl who saw the murder-shot being fired from the open window."

"Good God, Phil! You mean

you've actually got somebody who saw—?"

"Yeah. Unfortunately this dame I'm holding here in my joint is unconscious just now. I had to pop her in the jaw. But when she comes to, she'll spill. I'm sure of it—because if she doesn't, she'll face the murder-rap herself!"

The lawyer's voice was grim. "If that's the case, why drag this Medland woman into it? Why tell her anything about it?"

"Listen, Steve. The Medland bimbo is the one who claims to have heard the murder-shot in that adjoining apartment. She's the one who called the police."

"I still don't get it."

"WELL, look. I found out that the Medland dame used to be Claypoole's girl friend, see? Or anyhow, she was thick with him in the old days in Frisco. I've got a sneaking hunch she's the one that did the killing herself. And as soon as this dame in my apartment regains consciousness, I'll be sure. But meanwhile, I want Maizie Medland to know she's about to be uncovered. Maybe she'll take a chance and come to my joint and try to stop this girl's mouth with a bullet—catch on?"

"Okay. I'll go down and tell her what you've told me to say." The attorney rang off.

Phil Stone settled back to wait. Ten minutes passed like so many creeping snails. Then, suddenly, his phone jingled.

He answered it. "Yes?"

"Phil—for God's sake! This is Steve Lundgren. I just went down to the Medland woman's flat—and found her dead! I'm calling from my own place. You'd better hurry over here!"

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Phil Stone swore as he slammed up his receiver. Maizie dead! That knocked his theories into a cocked hat! He leaped for the door, hurled himself downstairs.

At the lobby, the night desk-clerk hailed him. "You get your call okay from that gentleman here in the lobby a minute ago, Mr. Stone?"

The detective-sergeant stiffened. "Phone-call from here in the lobby?"

"Yes, sir. Gentleman rang you from the desk here; then he took the automatic elevator and went up—"

But Phil wasn't listening. A surging fear in his heart, he was slamming back up the stairs. He reached his floor, lanced down the hallway to his door. From within his apartment came a muffled feminine shriek—

He smashed himself inside; dived for the bedroom. He was just in time to see Steve Lundgren jam an automatic at the trussed girl on the bed. She screamed again. The attorney's finger tightened on the trigger—

And then he saw Phil Stone. He whirled. "Keep 'em high, Stone! And say your prayers! As long as you've seen this much, I'll have to plug you too—"

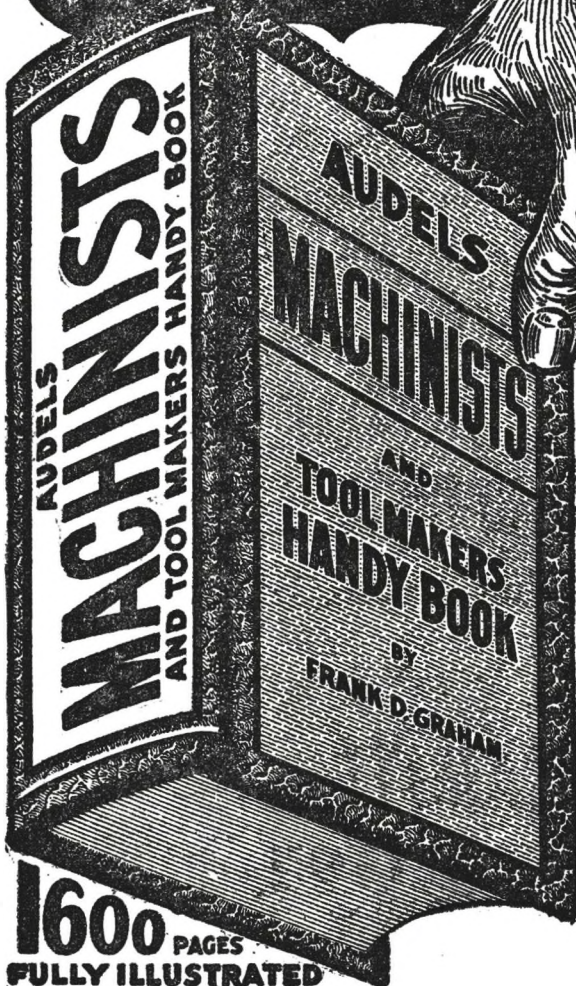
"Then you're the one!" the detective-sergeant gasped. "You killed Claypoole—"

"Sure I bumped him! He did me dirty in a couple of business deals. I was gunning for him. I found out he'd just rented a love-nest in my apartment-house; so I sneaked down the fire-escape and croaked him through the window; tossed the gun in the room after I put a slug through his skull. And now, since this dame here saw me do it, I'm going to rub her out—and you too!"

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But even as he fingered his trigger, Phil Stone launched himself sidewise. The slug missed him. He caromed into a chair. He grabbed it, raised it—and hurled it full at the lawyer's head.

Lundgren fired again. His bullet splatted into the chair that was hurtling toward him; and then the piece of furniture smashed into his head. He crumpled; went down.

Phil Stone leaped in; grabbed the fallen man's gun. "God almighty!" he whispered unevenly. "And I thought it was Maizie Medland all the time!" He whirled, went to the bathroom, unlocked the door. He yanked the violet-eyed girl into the room.

She saw the other girl strapped to the bed. Her eyes widened. "Inez—!"

Phil Stone grunted. "I thought so! That girl on the bed is your twin sister, isn't she? Her name's Inez Langley; and you're really Jacqueline Langley!"

"Y-yes . . ."

"Inez, here, was Karl Claypoole's sweetheart. He was setting her up in an apartment love-nest. You didn't want her to string with him; and you went to her apartment tonight to talk her into leaving him. Isn't that right?"

"Yes—"

"YOU were waiting for her in her boudoir. She entered the apartment with Karl Claypoole. A shot was fired. You rushed out and saw Claypoole dead, and your sister standing over him. The death-gun was on the floor. You jumped at the conclusion that your sister had shot Claypoole. You hid your sister in a closet of the boudoir; and then you decided to take the rap for her. A

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sacrifice rap—so that she could escape later.”

“Y-yes. Inez had a sweetheart in our old home town in the middle west. I wanted her to go back to him, marry him, be respectable. I knew he'd never marry her if he ever found out about her and Claypoole . . . and that she had been in a scandal. So I was going to take her place; stand trial for the killing . . .”

“Sure,” Phil Stone nodded. “I got wise that you weren't the real Inez Langley when I watched you getting dressed. First, you didn't seem to know what closet your dress was in. Then, when you finally put it on, it was much too tight—didn't fit at all. That's when I got my hunch. So I tried making a pass at you—and you socked me in the mush. That proved you weren't a chippie; otherwise you'd have played ball with pleasure, in order to escape.”

The girl blushed.

The detective went on. “After I sent you to the jug, I found where you'd taken off your own dress and tossed it down the laundry-chute. That's where I got your real name and address—from your discarded pocketbook. I found out you weren't Inez Langley. You were *Jacqueline* Langley. And when I saw a window open in the boudoir of that apartment, I knew that the real Inez Langley must have got away by the fire-escape after everybody had gone.”

“Th-that's how you t-traced my sister . . . ?”

“Sure. I found her in your apartment at the Clarendon Arms, just getting ready to lam. I brought her here. Meanwhile, I thought it was a dame named Maizie Medland. She used to be Claypoole's sweetie in the

old days out in Frisco; and I figured she had killed Claypoole and was trying to pin the rap on the woman who had stolen him from her. I was wrong as hell about that. She was willing enough to pin the rap on her former lover's present sweetheart, all right; but she wasn't guilty of firing the shot that killed Claypoole.

"The real killer was Lundgren, here. But I never suspected him. In fact, I even hired him to be your lawyer! And of course he jumped at the chance, because if he acted as attorney for the accused murderer, nobody would suspect him of the crime!

"Then I set a trap for Maizie. Or at least I thought I did. But actually, it was Lundgren who took advantage of it. He was afraid someone would spill and implicate him. For all he knew, I was handing him a straight story about having a girl here who had seen the murderer's face through the apartment window. So he came here to kill the one person who might put him in the hot squat.

"He phoned me just now from the lobby downstairs. He lied; told me he was home in his own apartment. He lied about Maizie being dead . . . didn't you, Lundgren?"

The bruised, battered attorney sat up. He scowled. "Yes, damn you! The Medland woman isn't dead. That was just a trick to get you out of this joint so I could come up here and bump off the dame you said had seen me. . . ."

Phil Stone nodded and he slipped the bracelets on Lundgren's wrists. Then he went to the bed, released the real Inez Langley. He said: "Kid, I don't think much of you. You were going to let your innocent sister take the rap for you, and you deserve a damn good push in the face. But as long as things turned out okay, I'm

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going to let you go. Get to hell out of here."

The green-eyed sister got up, left.

Then the violet-eyed Jacqueline Langley looked at Phil Stone. "H-how can I ever thank you?" she whispered.

He smiled at her. "You might let me visit you some time, baby."

She blushed and lowered her demure eyes. "Y-yes. I might. . . ."

## THE ENGLISH KNIFE

(Concluded from page 51)

breeze held her dress tight against her. His hand made her dress fit a little closer at the bodice.

"It's a pretty corny gag about that knife of yours," she said, "but I'll say it and then you can throw me overboard."

"Go ahead and say it."

"The expression they use in billiards. My Dad used to use it. It wouldn't matter whether the knife was made in England or Germany. All that matters is putting some 'English' on it. Oh, gosh!"

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**NOT QUITE DEAD***(Concluded from page 83)*

enough, in my own cottage," said Digger. "Let me go, and I'll bring her along in an hour."

Redheaded Nicky smiled a little.

"Come along, Captain Hemple, and we'll make it a party," she said. "Digger might forget to come back. Marilyn's probably sleeping in his bed. You see, Cap Hemple, Digger and I rented the cottage. We're being married in a few days. Aren't we Digger, darling?"

"Hell, yes," muttered Digger.

"It took me long enough to persuade you!"

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| Obtain property.                            | Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.   |
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THERE ARE THINGS WITHIN YOUR GRASP THAT CAN BE OBTAINED TO REMOVE THE CAUSE

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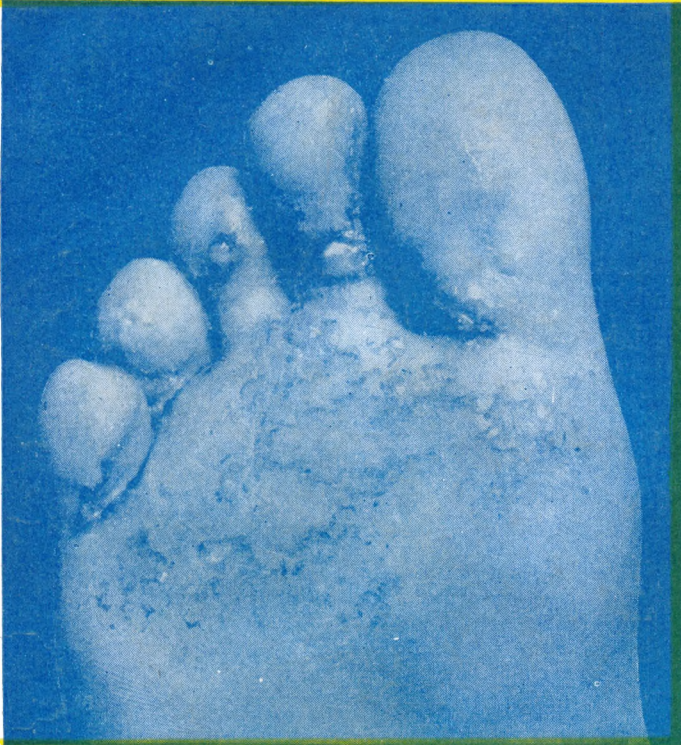
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# FOOT ITCH

## ATHLETE'S FOOT



### WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

### ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

### H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

## PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

### Send Coupon

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

## BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



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C. P.

Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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