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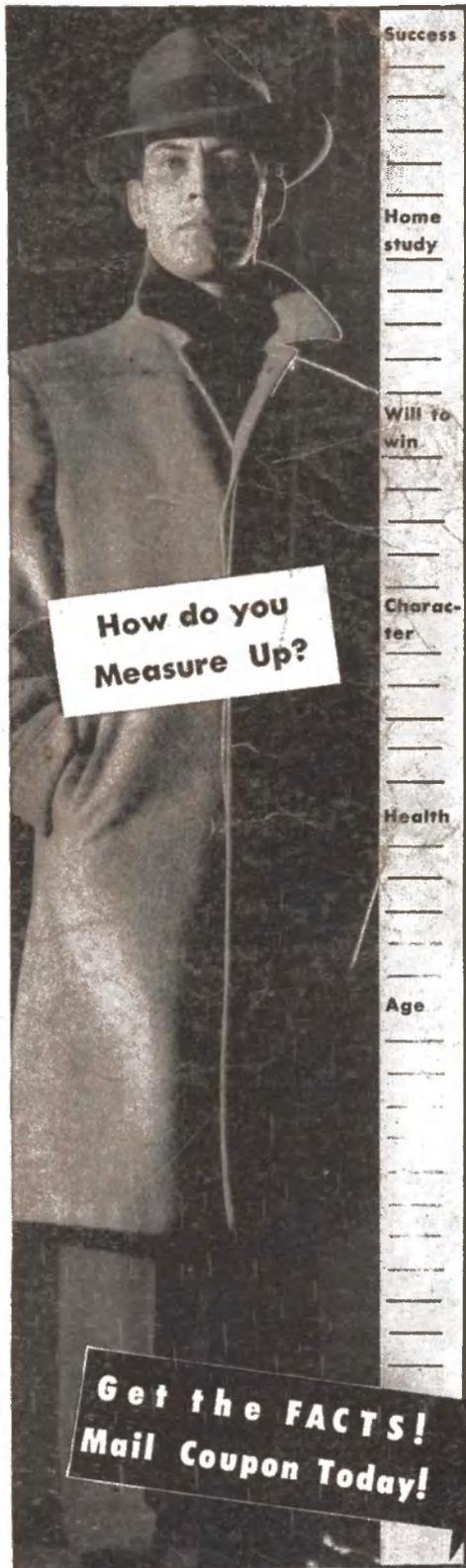
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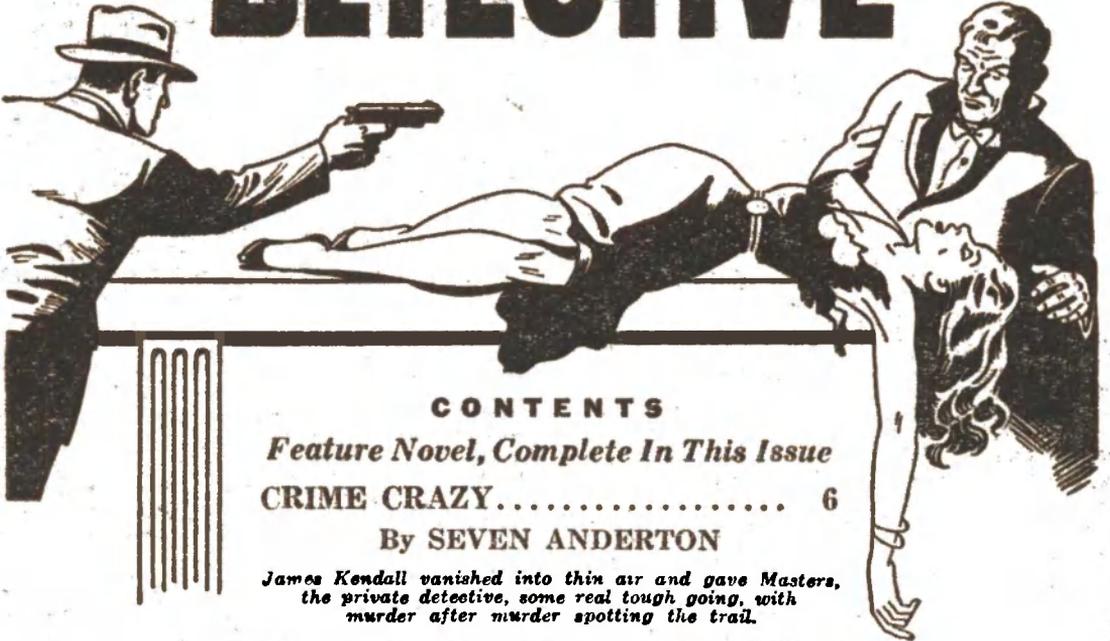
PRIVATE

DETECTIVE

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All names and places in this magazine are entirely fictitious and any similarity to persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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FRANK ARMER, *Publisher*

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CRIME CRAZY

By SEVEN ANDERTON



Illustrated by
William Meilink

A NORTHWEST gale was tearing along the streets and across the rooftops of the prairie town of Shelbyville. It was the third of December and the thermometer registered two degrees above zero. Light snow that had fallen during the day was being

swept into drifts in hollows and sheltered places. The streets were practically deserted. It was a night for staying in a snug home. But murder was abroad—stalking a victim in Shelbyville for the first time in the town's history.

In the lobby of the Shelby Hotel it was

James Kendall vanished into thin air and started a trail that was spotted with murder, deceit and double-crossing. When my old friend Masters took a hand, we had some real tough going to unravel the seven-year-old mystery.

Gibson fired again and Hayes staggered against the cabinet.



warm and cozy. I sat in my favorite leather covered chair reading a Sioux City newspaper. I had lived in the hotel during the two years since I had purchased the Shelbyville Clarion, published twice weekly. Across the lobby, Nick Summers, the middle aged night clerk, was playing cribbage with a pudgy grocery salesman. Tom Dennison, night bell

boy and porter, sat on the edge of a rockingchair and watched the game.

The street door opened and a man entered. His dark overcoat and hat glistened with particles of frozen snow. He was Dan Travis, a detective from Chicago.

Travis, an ace operator for the Brent Investigation Service, had been in Shelbyville about three weeks. He was investi-

gating the nearly-seven-year-old James Kendall case. Outsiders had investigated the Kendall case at least a score of times since James Kendall had apparently vanished into the air. Local police had long since decided that the case would never be solved. All former investigations had netted nothing and Shelbyville citizens were beginning to marvel at the tenacity of Dan Travis.

"Hell of a night," Travis said as he closed the door. "Any mail for me, Mr. Summers?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Travis," the clerk replied.

Tom Dennison went behind the counter and handed Travis a key. Travis laid down a nickle and took a newspaper from a stack on the cigar counter. "I hope it's warm in my room," he said.

"I'm keeping the furnace red hot," the porter told him.

"Good night." The old fashioned clock above the desk struck nine as Travis mounted the stairs. He had room 209 at the far end of the second floor corridor. His footsteps faded down the carpeted hall. Then the report of a gun echoed through the building.

The pudgy salesman dropped the cards he was preparing to deal. The four of us in the lobby exchanged startled glances. The sound of a heavy fall and running feet mingled with the echoes of the shot. A door slammed.

"Upstairs," Tom Dennison gasped.

The four of us moved towards the stairs. We reached the top in a close group. The hall was lighted by a single and not-too-powerful bulb. We ran down the corridor to where Dan Travis lay on the floor before the door of room 209. I knew Travis was dead by the wide open eyes and total lack of expression. I had seen a lot of dead men in the South Pacific. But I felt for a pulse and tried for breath with a mirror. Travis still wore his overcoat and I saw no blood.

"I think he's dead," I said, "But call a doctor and the police."

"I'll call." Tom Dennison hurried away.

"I wonder where Bert Larrabee is?"

Nick Summers pointed at an open door half way down the corridor. A light was burning in the room but it was unoccupied. "Bert went up to his room an hour ago," the clerk added.

I felt a pang of fear. Besides myself, the pudgy salesman and Dan Travis, Bert Larrabee was the only other guest in the hotel that night. Nick Summers had remarked a short while before that the weather had "put business on the bum."

LARRABEE, a good looking youngster of twenty-five, operated a linotype machine at the Clarion and helped me with other work. I had good reason for my fear for him. He was an ex-convict. This, I believed, was known in Shelbyville only to myself and Dan Travis, and we kept our mouths shut.

Larrabee had been recognized by Travis on the second day after the detective's arrival in town. I had prevailed upon Travis to keep the youngster's secret—arguing that Bert was trying hard to make good and could not possibly have had anything to do with the Kendall case.

"Maybe Bert went to the movie," I said, "and you didn't see him leave."

"And left his door open and the light burning?" Summers shook his head.

In the silence we heard the howl of the gale. The two-story frame hotel trembled.

"Swell night for murder," the pudgy salesman observed.

Nick Summers shivered. Downstairs a door slammed. Tod Gibson, chief of Shelbyville's three-man police force mounted the stairs. The police station was in the town hall on a side street just a block from the hotel. Dr. Paul Cooper was only a moment behind the chief. They went to the body.

The breast of Travis' overcoat was now soaked with blood. After a brief look, Chief Gibson turned and questioned the three of us while Dr. Cooper partly undressed and examined the body.

"He's dead," the doctor announced presently. "Shot through the heart. Bert,

ter get him over to Enders' mortuary. I'll have a good look there."

"You tend to that, doc," the chief said. "Killer must have gone down these stairs." He pointed to a stairway that led down to a back door. "I'll have—"

The sound of the back door opening silenced Gibson. The door closed and Bert Larrabee, hatless and coatless, bounded up the stairs. The knee of Bert's trousers was torn. His brown hair was awry from the wind, his face red from the cold. He was breathing hard. His eyes swept the waiting group.

"He got away," Bert puffed. "I opened my door after the shot and heard him running down the stairs. I took after him. When I got outdoors, I could see him running north down the alley. But it was too dark to tell who he was. I chased him, but I got tangled in some wire and fell on an orange crate behind Redd's store. Time I got untangled and got to the end of the alley he wasn't in sight. He had turned west, so I ran that way for a couple of blocks and looked in all directions. I didn't see him again."

"You never saw anybody in the first place," Chief Gibson snapped. "You shot Travis yourself. Then you chased out to hide the gun and come back with a cock and bull story."

"I— I didn't," Larrabee's eyes sought mine pleadingly. "Why would I—"

"Open and shut," Gibson declared. "I should have done something about you as soon as Travis told me you was an ex-con."

"Travis — he told you?" Larrabee seemed to sag.

"Uh huh," Gibson grunted. "Told me he promised not to give you away to the town, but he thought the chief of police ought to know. Looks like a good thing he told me."

I HADN'T liked Gibson from our first meeting. I liked him less as time went on. In some ways he was a good officer. But he was one of those who enjoy being policemen. He had a firm conviction that everybody was guilty of something for

which they could be arrested, if it could only be found out. His eagerness to expose Larrabee's past made me boil—and I tied into him.

"That was dirty, Gibson," I said. "Even if you really suspect Bert, you didn't have to publish his mistake to the town. His debt to society—"

"Nuts to you," Gibson cut me off. "He's an ex-con, hiding out here in your shop—and you've been helping him. You took his part when Travis recognized him and jumped him. The rat has got to be a fair-haired boy with some people in this town. He was afraid Travis would tell on him, so he killed Travis."

Gibson had produced a gun and a pair of handcuffs. He handed the cuffs to Dr. Cooper.

"Put the nippers on him, Doc," the chief ordered, "while I keep him covered."

"Gibson," I said, "don't be a damned fool. Bert—"

"Shut up," Gibson growled. "You can talk all you want to at his trial."

When Gibson had taken Bert Larrabee to jail and Travis' body had been removed from the hall by Ed Enders, the undertaker, I went to my room to think what I could do to help Larrabee. My room was 206, almost directly across the hall from 209 and the second door from the top of the back stairway.

I had not locked my door. The first thing I noticed when I opened it and flicked on the light was a quart bottle of whiskey standing on my stand table. The whiskey had come in an early Christmas package that morning. I had unpacked it but had not opened it. It had been unopened when I went down to the dining room at seven o'clock. Now it was opened and a good big drink had been taken from it. A glass that had been on a shelf above my water tap now stood beside the bottle. I picked up the glass and smelled whiskey.

I looked about the room. So far as I could tell, nothing else had been disturbed. I knew Bert Larrabee had not tapped my whiskey. He had refused a

drink from the bottle I kept at the office, telling me that he was a teetotaler from here on. I decided that Tom Dennison might be the guilty party and turned my thoughts to Larrabee's plight.

I felt certain that Larrabee hadn't shot Travis. I sat down in the comfortable chair beside my table, filled my pipe and reviewed what Larrabee had told me about himself when he answered my ad in a trade paper soon after I took over the *Clarion*.

The crime which had cost Larrabee seven years of liberty during the best years of his youth had been committed when he was a kid of eighteen. Having no relatives of which he knew, Larrabee ran away from an orphanage in Indiana when he was a husky fourteen-year-old. He wandered and took care of himself in a haphazard manner until he got into trouble in Chicago.

There, Larrabee met a man in a tavern and was offered a chance to make a lot of money easily. The man offered Bert a thousand dollars to set fire to a warehouse. He said it was his own place and he wanted to collect the insurance. The job would be safe. A rear window of the warehouse would be open. Some cans of gasoline would be standing on the floor in the right place. All Bert had to do was climb in at the window, upset the cans and lay a ten-foot fuse the man would give him into the spilled gasoline. Then he could light the end of the fuse and be blocks away when the fire started. The owner would be elsewhere with a perfect alibi.

LARRABEE was young and broke. He fell for the man's offer. The man gave him a hundred dollars and arranged to meet him the day after the fire to give him the rest of the thousand. But the fuse the man gave Larrabee flashed fire into the gasoline instantly. Bert ran for the window and into the guns of police who had been tipped by telephone that somebody was breaking into the warehouse. The tipster was never found. The owner of the warehouse had been in St.

Louis for a week before the fire. He was not the man who had hired Larrabee. Bert described that man for police, but he was never found.

The warehouse, containing much highly inflammable material was destroyed. The owner alleged competitors had fired it to hurt his business. The insurance companies lost heavily and pressed charges. Bert was sentenced to ten years—which good behavior and merits reduced.

Larrabee had learned to operate lino-type in prison and had answered my ad in the hope that he might begin to make something of his life in Shelbyville. All this Larrabee told me of his own accord and declared his intention to never do another dishonest thing. I believed him and advised him to tell no one else of his past. For two years he had justified my faith. He was a likable lad. He worked hard and saved money. He was all but engaged to Jane Melton, daughter of a well-to-do merchant. He had talked with me about the advisability of telling Jane about his past.

I smoked and pondered on ways to help Bert. I knew that the news, in spite of the hour and the storm, would be all over town in an hour. Shelbyville was that sort of town.

There was a rap at my door. Jane Melton entered at my invitation. She was a small dark girl and pretty. She had been crying.

"Oh, Mr. Porter," Jane said. "Is this awful thing true about Bert Larrabee? Chief Gibson won't let me see him."

"No, Jane," I assured her, "Bert didn't kill Dan Travis."

"Chief Gibson says Bert is an ex-convict. Is he?"

"Yes," I told her as I mentally damned Gibson, "Bert served time in Joliet—but he has paid for his mistake. Do you love him?"

Jane's dark eyes dropped for a moment, then met mine bravely. "Yes, Mr. Porter, and I don't care if he was in prison. He's fine and—" she choked on a sob.

"Put the nippers on him," the chief ordered, "while I keep him covered."



"Listen, Jane," I said. "I think I'd better tell you about Bert. He's going to need friends now."

Jane listened while I told her Bert's story.

"It makes no difference to me," she said when I had finished, "and I want to tell Bert so. How can I get to see him?"

"I'll arrange it," I promised, "in the morning."

"Chief Gibson is mean," Jane said.

"Bert wouldn't kill a man to keep a secret he was going to tell me anyhow."

"No," I agreed. "I feel sure the secret of Travis' murder is tied up in this Kendall case he was investigating. What will your parents say about your seeing Larrabee in jail?"

"I'll explain to them. But I'm twenty-two—and my own boss." Jane's chin came up defiantly. The girl had spunk.

"I'm going to see Harrison Gaddis

right now," I told her. "I'll walk you home."

HARRISON GADDIS was the ablest of Shelbyville's two attorneys. He had heard the news and was not surprised when I called at his home at ten thirty. He said he would be glad to do what he could for Bert and, at my insistence, got his wraps and went with me to the jail. Gibson was still there. He wasn't nice about it, but he let us talk to Larrabee.

I delivered a message from Jane Melton that brightened Bert. Gaddis questioned him and promised to see him again in the morning.

"You're making a mistake, Gibson," Gaddis said as we were leaving. "Perhaps laying yourself open to false arrest charges."

"Ain't neither," Gibson retorted. "I'm holding Larrabee for investigation. I'll find the gun he hid tonight and round up the evidence. Then I'll charge him."

I slept poorly and got up at five o'clock. It was press day and I must get the *Clarion* out without Bert Larrabee's help. Sam Brant, my aged journeyman printer, could operate the machine well enough to set the story of the murder and the arrest of Larrabee which I must write.

The dining room didn't open until six, but Tom Dennison said there would be coffee ready in about ten minutes. I remembered.

"Tom," I asked, "did you open the bottle of whiskey in my room?"

"No, Mr. Porter," Tom grinned. "But I would have if I knowed you had one up there."

I sat down in a rocking chair and put my feet on a radiator to wait for Tom's coffee. As usual at that hour of the morning, Nick Summers was sleeping soundly in two of the leather chairs. The wind was still howling and peppering the lobby windows with the frozen snow.

A CAR pulled up before the hotel and a tall man in an ulster got out and paid the driver. The car rolled away and the tall man carried a gladstone bag into

the lobby. I looked at the newcomer and came to my feet with a yell.

"Kent Masters! By thunder!"

Masters dropped the gladstone and wrung my hand while gripping my shoulder. "Chuck Porter," he exclaimed. "What are you doing in this godforsaken place?"

"I own, operate and try to control the local newspaper," I told him. "What brings you here?"

"Murder," Kent said. "Guess you know about it. I work for the Brent Agency. Dan Travis was our man. Your police chief wired our office. Said he was holding a suspect. I chartered a plane to Sioux Falls. Hired a car to drive me here. I was hunting the police station when I saw the lights here."

"Why all the rush?" I asked.

"Tell you all about it," Master said, "but first can't we get some coffee around here?"

Our commotion had awakened Nick Summers and brought Tom Dennison from the kitchen.

"Coffee's on the fire, Mr. Porter," Tom said.

"There's whiskey in my room," I told Kent.

"Why keep it a secret so long?" he grinned. "I'll get a room and take my bag up."

"Put Mr. Masters in 208, right next to you, Mr. Porter," the clerk said when Kent had registered. He gave Kent the key.

I led the way and opened the door of 208 as Kent stepped up with the key. "Unoccupied rooms are always open," I said.

"That kind of a hotel, eh?"

I snapped on the lights and stood looking down at a moist dirty spot on the rug, just inside the room.

"What's the matter?" Kent asked at my shoulder.

"That spot," I pointed. "It adds up with something else about last night—maybe."

"How?"

"Put your bag in here and come to my room. I'll tell you about it."

In my room I poured whiskey.
"To old times," Kent raised his glass.

WE DRANK the whiskey neat. Kent and I hadn't heard of him in nearly three years. I was no more surprised to learn that he was working for the Brent people than he was to find me an editor in Shelbyville.

"The spot on my rug ties in with Travis' murder?" Kent asked as I rinsed our glasses.

"That and something else." I told him about the minor mystery of my whiskey and an idea that was forming in my mind.

"I see," Kent nodded. "Room 208 vacant and unlocked. Your room unlocked—careless habit. Killer sneaks in the back door, samples your whiskey and waits in 208 to shoot Travis at the door of 209, just across the hall. Dirty snow melts from the killer's shoes while he lurks. Marvelous, Watson—but why in hell did you handle that bottle and glass before they were tested for fingerprints?"

I felt my face getting red.

"Anyhow," Kent went on, "if your police have the killer—"

"Chief Gibson has arrested an innocent man," I broke in. Then I told Kent about the events of the preceding evening.

"I've met the chief's sort," Kent nodded. "I'm glad I ran into you before I met him."

There was a knock at my door. "Coffee's ready," Tom Dennison called.

As we ate rolls and drank coffee in the dining room, Kent explained his hasty arrival in Shelbyville.

"Time is wasting on this Kendall case," he said. "If there is hanky panky it must be uncovered in the next nine days. Otherwise, two insurance companies that the Brent service represents are stuck for four hundred thousand bucks—a respectable bundle, even in these times."

"You think there is hanky panky?"

"I've only had one night to think about it," Kent replied. "But Travis' last report indicated that he expected to turn

up something fishy at any moment. Maybe he did—and that's why he was killed."

"That's it," I declared. "If you could prove—"

"Proof would get your Larrabee out of the poky," Kent cut in. And, of course, I'm supposed to do what I can about Travis—but the Kendall case has priority. Time marches on. What do you know about the Kendall business?"

"I've only been here two years," I said, "but I heard enough about the Kendall case to make me curious. I looked it up in the *Clarion* files. There's a pretty complete story there."

"Good," Masters exclaimed, putting down his coffee cup. "Let's go to your shop. I have our file on the case. With yours to check, I should get a pretty clear picture."

"I can't help," I warned him. "I have to get the paper out—and I'm short-handed."

IT WAS a quarter past six when we reached the *Clarion* office. It was still dark. I turned on lights and showed Kent where to find the files. Then I sat down to write my lead story. Sam Brant and Myrtle Cox would arrive soon. Myrtle was dignified by the title of society editor. She gathered local news, solicited advertising and subscriptions, collected bills and read some proof. A high school senior who edited the school page completed my staff.

Shortly after nine Harrison Gaddis came to tell me that he had been to see Larrabee. Introduced Kent Masters and stated his business in town.

"Jane Melton went with me," Gaddis said. "She took Larrabee some breakfast. So did three other people. Reverend Mackley visited him. Others tried to. Chief Gibson is sore. I don't think this is going to do young Larrabee's standing in the town much harm."

"How soon can we get him released?" I asked. "I'll furnish bond."

"That may not be necessary," Gaddis said. "But Gibson can hold him until tomorrow without a hearing—and he's go-

ing to. He says he can find the gun by then. He's got the whole force out looking for it."

I told Gaddis about my whiskey and the spot on the carpet before he left.

We got the paper out at two o'clock by skipping lunch. Kent had worked steadily at a table in my office. He and I went out to a lunch room and ate. The wind had dropped to a breeze. The sky was still leaden.

Back in my office we lighted smokes and Kent picked up a sheaf of penciled notes.

"Here's an outline I have prepared of the Kendall case," he said. "I'll read it. If you spot any holes or mistakes, you can fill them in or correct them."

This was Kent's outline: James Kendall inherited the Kendall lumber and coal yards—one in Shelbyville and the other in Curtis, twenty miles west. James was the only child of Nathan Kendall, founder of the concerns.

About a year before the death of his father, Kendall married his father's secretary-bookkeeper. Kendall was a native of Shelbyville and had worked since boyhood in his father's yards. Upon becoming owner of the business, James Kendall got the get-rich-quick bug and began flirting with the market. He also got the ambitious idea of expanding his business to include a dozen more yards in the state.

Before Kendall accomplished much towards the expansion, both the Shelbyville and Curtis yards were destroyed by fires which started within the same hour on a windy night. The fires were proven beyond a doubt to have been incendiary. Kendall, who was in Omaha on business at the time, blamed enemies who sought to prevent the expansion of the Kendall yards.

The loss was fully covered by insurance and it appeared at first that Kendall would suffer little financially. Then Kendall disappeared. He left his home on foot on the night of December 12, 1941, to attend a conference with insurance adjusters at the Shelby hotel. He didn't

arrive at the hotel—and was never located afterward.

It developed that Kendall had become so financially involved that the insurance money barely paid his debts. His wife was left with the home, a big eleven-room house, and less than three hundred dollars in the bank.

CHAPTER II

Disputed Money

SEARCH for Kendall had begun to lose momentum when it was learned that the life of the missing man was insured for four hundred thousand dollars. Kendall had taken out the policies on the advice of Warren Hayes, president of the Shelbyville National Bank. At the time Kendall was negotiating for a huge loan to finance expansion of his business and Hayes had explained that the loan would be more easily obtained if Kendall would take out the large amount of insurance.

After the fires and the following developments, the loan was forgotten. But the insurance remained. The first premium had been paid and the policies were found among Kendall's papers. Mrs. Kendall was joint beneficiary with a non-existent business. She stood to collect the money if her husband was found to have died in any manner except suicide.

Another premium on the policies came due. A local attorney, Lewis Jordan, investigated and found that under the law Kendall would be legally dead if not found or heard from in seven years. In that case Mrs. Kendall could collect the insurance—if she had kept up the payments.

Mrs. Kendall mortgaged her home and made another payment. The insurance companies scented danger and began to investigate. The investigations were fruitless.

"That's as far as I got." Masters laid down his notes. "And Kendall is still missing."

"And," I said, "in nine more days Mrs. Kendall will be a wealthy woman."

"Bert served time in Joliet,"
I said. "Do you love him?"



"Maybe," Kent said tersely. "Do you know how Mrs. Kendall has managed to keep up the premiums on those policies?"

"As I have it from the natives," I told him, "she mortgaged her home and then turned it into a boarding house for school teachers and others. In that way she met the first three payments. Since that Warren Hayes has loaned her the money as she needed it."

"The banker," Kent observed, "seems pretty certain that Kendall is dead—or permanently missing."

"So does Mrs. Kendall," I said. "There is a strong rumor that she will become a bride soon after she is a legal widow. The groom-to-be is Martin Saum, a clerk in Holliday's department store. He's lame—a deformed foot. He boards at Mrs. Kendall's place."

"That's in our file," Kent nodded. "What else do you know about Saum?"

"He came here about five years ago,

from San Francisco. Found work at Holiday's store. He stayed at the hotel for a time—then went to board with Mrs. Kendall. Been courting her since. I've heard he helps her pay the insurance premiums."

"Saum," Kent said, "is definitely on the list of those with a motive to stop anybody from interfering with the collection of that insurance. He'd better have a good alibi for last night."

"Who else is on the list?" I inquired.

"Everybody who has a chance to get their hands on a sizable hunk of that insurance," Kent replied. "Four hundred thousand bucks is a lot of motive."

"That would mean Mrs. Kendall, Saum and Warren Hayes—that I can think of."

"And Kendall," Kent added, "if he isn't dead."

"You think Kendall may be in Shelbyville—in disguise?"

"Possible," Masters said.

An idea struck me. "Saum!" I exclaimed. "He showed up here two years after Kendall vanished."

"We wondered about that," Kent shook his head. "Our check shows that Saum has a crippled foot while Kendall was sound. Kendall would be thirty-eight now. Saum registered in the draft as thirty-five—which would make him forty four now."

"He looks older," I said.

"And," Masters went on, "he bears no resemblance to pictures we have of Kendall. Also Kendall was thirty pounds heavier than Saum is—and records show that Saum was working in a San Francisco fish market when Kendall disappeared."

"Then if Kendall is here in disguise," I asked, "who could he be?"

"You think about that," Kent said. "Maybe you'll come up with something. I'm going to see Mrs. Kendall. Want to go along and introduce me?"

"Sure," I said.

The Kendall home was three blocks from the Clarion office. We set out on foot.

"This town got any gangsters," Kent

asked as we walked, "a professional killer who bumps off citizens at so much per head?"

"Not to the best of my knowledge and belief," I chuckled. "This is not Chicago."

"Dan Travis never got killed in Chicago," Masters retorted.

The big white Kendall house stood on a quarter-block of ground opposite the high school. Mrs. Kendall herself opened the door.

THIRTY-FOUR years old, Mrs. Kendall was a solidly built but shapely built brunette. She was neat in a blue house dress with her dark hair coiled close about her head. She looked capable and sure of herself. Before marrying James Kendall she had been an efficient office assistant. There was little warmth in her welcome upon learning of Kent's business.

"I'm very busy, Mr. Masters," she snapped as we took chairs. "And I'm very tired of being bothered by you detectives. I've stood it for seven years—and my patience is worn thin. My lawyer, Lewis Jordan, is the person for you to see. Regardless of what you may think, Jim Kendall is dead. If he wasn't, he would have come back to me. He committed no crime. He foolishly lost most of the fortune left by his father. Fortunately he left insurance enough to restore the fortune—and I'm going to collect that insurance." There was defiance in her voice.

"What do you think happened to your husband," Kent asked.

"I have always said that somebody killed him and disposed of his body," Mrs. Kendall replied. "Probably the same person who set fire to the lumber yards. At any rate, my husband is dead."

"Dan Travis is also dead," Masters said.

"I suppose you'd like to blame me for that," she retorted hotly.

"Travis was killed by somebody who was scared by his investigation of this case," Kent declared.

"Well I'm not scared," Mrs. Kendall snapped. "And I'm not even going to pretend I'm sorry about Travis. If you detectives wouldn't snoop around in the business of respectable people and—" Her eyes narrowed and her mouth closed resolutely.

"Where were you at nine o'clock last night," Masters asked.

"I was right here all evening. I played cards with Mr. Saum and two of the school teachers from about eight until after ten." She glared at Kent and added, "I'm not going to answer any more questions."

"I didn't come to ask questions, Mrs. Kendall."

"You've asked plenty," she sniffed. "What did you come for. I've told you I'm busy."

"I came," Kent answered, "to give you one chance to escape consequences soon to develop. I—we have no desire to bring hardship on a woman if it can be avoided. If you will tell the truth about this entire conspiracy and sign a voluntary confession before Mr. Porter, you will not be prosecuted and the money you have paid in premiums will be refunded. Otherwise you will have to face the music with the others involved.

A derisive sniff was her only answer.

"Well?" Kent asked quietly.

"You are crazy as well as a meddler," she flared. "Will you please go and leave me to finish my work?"

"As you say," Kent got up. "But I may as well tell you that whoever killed Dan Travis was too late to stop what he hoped to prevent. That's why I'm here. Justice is soon going to overtake all concerned in this plot. You would be wise to take advantage of my offer. If you change your mind, I'm at the Shelby hotel in room 208. Think it over."

Mrs. Kendall's eyes narrowed. She walked to the door and opened it. "Will you please go?"

We went. I walked silently beside Kent for the better part of a block—puzzled by what he had said to Mrs. Kendall.

"You've been holding out on me," I accused presently.

"Not much," Kent said. "What I said to the woman was mostly bluff—but it may produce results. Dan Travis *must* have scared somebody in some way. Mrs. Kendall saved me the trouble of seeing Saum just now. I'll check, of course, but the card game alibi will probably stand up. That leaves banker Hayes—and Kendall."

"Hayes is out," I told him. "His wife called the Clarion this morning to say that Hayes went to Curtis yesterday on bank business. Towards evening he felt ill and decided not to drive home in the storm. He went to bed in the hotel where he grew worse and a doctor had to be called during the night. Something he ate, his wife said. He's better now but the doctor ordered him to stay in bed until tomorrow."

"The devil," Masters said.

"Looks like you've got to find Kendall," I observed.

"Or somebody with a so-far-undiscovered connection with this mess," Kent replied.

We reached the hotel just before four o'clock. Chief Gibson rose from a chair in the lobby to meet us. His face was grim.

"Porter," he said, "have you got a revolver—a forty-five?"

I felt my throat tighten. "Why, yes," I answered.

"Where is it?"

"Up in my room."

"I want to see it."

I led the way to my room. Masters came along.

"What's up?" I asked as we entered.

"Let's see the gun," Gibson growled.

I WENT to the dresser and opened the bottom drawer. My revolver was not there. I hastily searched the other drawers. No gun. I turned to find Gibson holding a gun in his hand. He wore an unpleasant expression.

"This it?" he handed me the weapon. It was dirty.

"Looks like it," I said after a brief inspection. "Where did you get it?"

"Found it in the alley ash can where Larrabee hid it last night," Gibson gloated. He took the gun from my hand.

"Does Bert admit that?" I asked.

"No," Gibson answered, "but he said you showed it to him not long ago. He knew where to find it when he wanted it."

I felt cold. I had shown the revolver to Larrabee less than a week before. He was in my room talking while I repacked some things.

"Look here, Gibson," I said, "If you wouldn't try so hard to convict an innocent man, you might find the real killer—someone connected with this Kendall affair."

"I've got the killer," Gibson declared. "Larrabee is an ex-con and a firebug. The Kendall yards burned. If he ain't connected with the Kendall business, what's he doing in Shelbyville. Innocent my eye!" He was thick-headed and stupidly prejudiced.

I remembered two things. I introduced Kent Masters.

"Heard you was here," Gibson told Masters. "Thought you might come around to see me. Hick town cops can help sometimes."

"I've been very busy," Kent said. Neither offered to shake hands.

I told Gibson about the spot on Kent's carpet and the mystery of my whiskey.

"Somebody," Gibson looked hard at me, "had plenty of time to carry snow from the alley and let it melt on that rug. If people wouldn't try so hard to cover up for crooks, police work would be easier."

"Why, you—" I took a step towards Gibson.

"Hold it, Chuck," Kent said.

"Yeah," Gibson grinned nastily, "Keep cool. And don't worry about Larrabee's bond. There won't be any." He left the room.

I looked at Kent, who frowned back at me. I was cold with anger—and fear for Bert Larrabee.

"Charming fellow, the chief," Kent

said. "Are you still sure about this Larrabee?"

"As sure as I am of myself," I declared.

"Let's have a snort of that whiskey," Kent suggested, grinning. "I don't think you carried snow up and dumped it in my room."

I poured liberal drinks. I needed mine. Kent drank half of his before he asked:

"When was Larrabee arrested in Chicago?"

"In September, 1941," I answered.

"When did the Kendall yards burn?"

"The day before Thanksgiving, 1941," I exclaimed. "Say—"

"You should have pointed that out to Chief Gibson." Kent finished his drink. "I wonder if we could see Larrabee before time to eat. I'm getting curious about him."

"I'll call Harrison Gaddis," I said. "If we can see Larrabee, I'll have the cook fix him something to eat."

IT WAS five-thirty when the attorney, Kent Masters and I reached the jail—two cells behind the fire engine house in the town hall. Chief Gibson inspected the tray I carried and was still grumbling about it as he let us into the cell corridor.

"He gets enough fancy grub to feed an army," Gibson growled. "Funny how folks like to pet a killer."

"A man is considered innocent until he is proven guilty," Gaddis remarked.

Gibson grunted and locked us in the corridor. Before Larrabee's cell I introduced Kent and we talked with Bert for nearly half an hour.

"Gibson never said a word to me about your gun, Mr. Porter," Larrabee said when told of the chief's visit to me.

"Looks like Gibson foxed you into admitting something," Kent grinned at me.

Before we left I promised to bring a change of clothing and his razor to Larrabee before his hearing in the morning. We all told him not to worry.

Gaddis left us at the door of the sta-

We bounded up the stairs and found Masters covering Mrs. Kendall with a gun.



tion. Kent and I walked toward the hotel and dinner. It was still cold and cloudy. There was no wind.

As Kent and I came out of the dining room at half past seven, Tom Dennison met us in the lobby. He was obviously the bearer of news.

"There's a bag here for you, Mr. Masters," the porter said. "Came by express."

"I know," Kent nodded. "Too heavy for the plane. Take it up to my room, will you—and open the window a little to air the place. I'll put it down when I come up pretty soon."

Dennison got the bag and went up the stairs. I went to the cigar counter and

got my Sioux City paper. Kent was asking Nick Summers for change.

"I'm going to put in a call to Chicago," Masters said.

"Stop in my room when you come up-stairs," I said. "I'll buy a drink."

"I'll be there," Kent promised, "as soon as I talk to the office." There were no room phones in the Shelby Hotel.

From the top of the stairs I saw that the door of Kent's room was open. The lights were on. I heard the sound of a window being raised. Then I heard a sharp snapping sound and a strangled cry, followed by a heavy fall. I sensed tragedy.

"Kent. Nick," I yelled, "come up here quick." I raced down the hall. Feet pounded the stairs.

ON THE floor of room 208, beneath a slightly open window, Tom Dennison lay sprawled. Kent was beside me in the doorway. Dennison twitched and groaned. We moved toward him.

"Dead," Masters announced a few moments later as he rose from beside the now quiet form.

"My God," Nick Summers croaked from the doorway.

"Call the police and a doctor," Kent ordered. "Hurry."

The clerk ran down the hall. Masters closed the window and pulled down the blind. He faced me with a grim look on his lean face.

"Nobody came out of this room?" he asked.

"No."

"Shot through the window as he opened it," Kent said, "by somebody who thought he was me. Poor devil."

I realized the truth of what Kent had said. Tom Dennison was a tall youth—about the same build as Masters. Both wore dark suits. Through the window, with his back to the light, the porter could easily have been mistaken for Kent.

"I'll bet dollars to dimes," Kent said, "I can name three persons who will have perfect alibis for this."

"No takers," I said. "Let's go to my room. I need stimulant." I led the way.

"The killer," Kent said as I poured whiskey, "had to be somebody who knew

what room I have and its location in the hotel. Who?"

"Everybody in town knows the location of the rooms in this building," I said. "Rotary and other clubs meet in the front parlor on this floor—and use vacant rooms for cloak and powder rooms."

"Who knew my room number?" Kent swallowed his drink. "I told Mrs. Kendall."

"And Harrison Gaddis," I said, "and Chief Gibson. They might have told others. Tom Dennison might have told somebody. You'd be surprised how such information gets scattered in a town like this."

"I grew up in one," Kent said. "Kansas. Anyhow three alibis are going to get a real shaking down when they are offered."

My door was open. We heard Chief Gibson talking to Nick Summers. Then the chief was on the stairs. We went out to meet him. He grunted at us and went into Kent's room. After a quick look at Dennison's body Gibson faced us.

"You touch anything in here?"

"I examined the body," Kent said, "and pulled down the shade."

"You're supposed," Gibson snapped, "to know better than to monkey with things before—"

"I thought the man might be helped," Kent explained, "until I saw that hole over his heart. And I didn't want whoever shot through the window to do it again."

Gibson scowled and ran up the window-shade. There was a starred bullet hole in one pane of the upper sash.

"This is one," I said, "that you can't blame Bert Larrabee for."

"Ex-cons usually have pals around," the chief retorted. "What was Dennison doing in here?"

Masters explained. Gibson asked a few more questions and dismissed us, saying he might want us again after Dr. Cooper came.

"What now?" I asked in the hall.

"Check up on our three suspects,"

Kent answered. He led the way to the lobby where he entered the phone booth. I knew we had work to do.

AS I stood waiting by the cigar counter Harrison Gaddis came through the street door. He had come to ask me more about my gun and Larrabee's knowledge of it. I floored him with the news of Dennison's murder.

Masters came out of the booth shaking his head. "Mrs. Kendall," he said, "has been at home for the past three hours—completely surrounded by schoolma'ams. She says her boy friend, Saum, came to the store after supper to dress windows."

"Martin Saum," Gaddis said, "was working in a window when I passed Holiday's store a few minutes ago."

"Perfect," Kent snorted. "Has himself on display. I suppose the window is in plain view of somebody all the time?"

"There's the Britt lunchroom across the street," Gaddis nodded. "The window could be plainly seen from there."

"And before asking," Masters said, "I'll bet it was. And Warren Hayes is probably under an oxygen tent in Curtis."

"Oh, no," Gaddis said. "Hayes will be home in the morning. I have some rather urgent business with him. I called him at Curtis this evening. He was up and had eaten."

"What time was that?" Kent asked.

"About half an hour ago."

"Better and better," Kent growled. "Nobody could have done it—but somebody did."

"I'd like to tell Bert Larrabee about this," I said. "He'd sleep better." I looked at Gaddis. "Do you suppose we could get in?"

"I think so," the attorney nodded. "With Gibson over here, Lloyd Toller will probably be on duty. Toller is friendly."

"Let's go," I looked at Masters, "or maybe you'd better stay here. A man who doesn't want you to live is running around loose with a gun."

"A few years ago," Kent grinned, "we were not worrying about just one man with just one gun."

It was beginning to snow as we stepped into the street. The wind was rising. Half way down the block we passed Holiday's store. Martin Saum was at work in a show window. His face was turned away and he did not even look up as we passed.

"That was Saum," I said.

"Sitting pretty," Kent nodded, looking across the street to where a woman was frying hamburgers in a lunchroom window.

Gibson's assistant, Toller, let us in to see Larrabee. Bert listened excitedly to our account of Dennison's murder.

"Less than an hour ago," he exclaimed suddenly. "Say! I heard shots here about then. I thought one of the cops was shooting at the targets in the back room of the station. That room faces towards the hotel."

We looked at each other in startled silence.

"Young fellow," Kent said, "you might have something there. We'll look into it. Maybe you talked yourself out of this cage." He went to the door and rapped on the bars with some keys.

"Let me know, Mr. Porter," Larrabee said as I turned to go. I promised.

"How long have you been on duty, officer," Kent asked as Toller came to let us out.

"Bout an hour," Toller answered. "Wasn't supposed to come on 'till ten, but Gibson phoned that Dennison had been shot. I was through supper, so I hustled right down."

"Gibson was here alone?" Masters asked.

"Always is," Toller nodded, "from six until ten."

"May we see your target range?"

"Reckon so," Toller locked the corridor door and led the way.

Silently we filed through the cheerless corridor behind Toller. I had a feeling that the target range would hold a tangible clue to the mystery of the killings.

CHAPTER III

Suspicious Targets

THE shooting gallery was in a long narrow room at the rear of the building—behind the second floor auditorium. Targets were arranged before a sandbag backstop at one end. There were racks of pistols, rifles and riot guns. Kent's principal interest was in the windows. There were three—all unscreened. From them there was a good view of the hotel's rear windows. We could see into room 208, where Gibson stood while Dr. Cooper worked on the body of Tom Dennison.

Kent walked around the room, looking at targets and guns. Then he thanked Toller and we left. It was snowing hard as we reached the street. The wind was stiff.

"Gibson!" Harrison Gaddis exclaimed. "It's hard to believe."

"What can we do?" I asked. "Toller will tell—"

"Take it easy," Kent said, "until we see where else that bullet might have come from and— Say! Could Gibson be Kendall?"

"No," Gaddis answered. "Gibson was a deputy here when Kendall disappeared. He's been here for years."

Masters shrugged. We rounded the corner, ducked into the wind and moved toward the hotel. Saum was still draping a figure in Holliday's window.

"You said something this afternoon," I reminded Kent, "about somebody with a so-far-undiscovered motive."

"Uh huh," Masters grunted. He was not in a talkative mood.

"Do you fellows mind me staying along?" Gaddis asked.

"Hell no," Kent said. "We may need you. Where is the sheriff?"

"Curtis," Gaddis answered. "The county seat."

We met Dr. Cooper leaving the hotel. Undertaker Enders was in room 208, preparing to remove the body. We could hear Gibson's voice. Kent led us into my

room. He raised my windowshade and we looked out.

We could see the windows of the police gun room through the snow-filled night. We could also see across the whitening roofs of a shoe shop, a plumber's shop and the wide Holliday store—all one-story buildings. We could see the rear windows in the second story of the brick bank building. There was also a view of part of the alley that ran behind the hotel and between the bank building and the town hall.

Sounds told us that Enders and his assistants were taking Dennison's body down the back stairs. We went into the hall. Gibson was watching the removal.

"Chief," Kent said, "come into my room a minute."

Kent stood by the window and faced Gibson's frown. Gaddis and I stood against the wall.

"Did you do any shooting in your target room tonight, Gibson?" Kent asked.

"Yes," Gibson said, "I shot—"

"What time was that," Kent cut in.

"Just before—" Gibson hesitated. "Say, what is this? I fired some test bullets from Porter's gun to compare with the one we found in Travis."

"That's what you say," Kent snapped. "Look out this window."

Gibson strode to the window.

"Clear view of this window from your gun room," Kent pointed out. "Range about forty yards. You were there when that rifle bullet killed Dennison—and there were plenty of guns handy."

"Why—by God," Gibson's face paled, then purpled as he whirled on Masters. I had never realized that Kent carried a gun—but there was one in his hand.

"Easy, Gibson," Kent's voice was brittle. "Sit down in that chair beside you. We'll talk a bit. And don't go for your gun—I've had lots of practice, at live targets."

Gibson sat down. Gaddis and I remained frozen.

"You were shooting—alone—in the gun room," Kent said, "at the time when

Dennison was killed. The bullet came from that direction. You were alone at the police station last night from six until ten. You could have slipped over here and shot Travis and—"

"Hold on, Masters," Gibson snarled. "I was in the hotel when Larrabee got back from chasing—"

"Then you've changed your mind," Kent stopped him, "about Larrabee chasing the killer?"

"No I ain't," Gibson yelled. "And I was at the station last night when Nick Summers called to—"

"All right," Kent said. "What about tonight? You shot Dennison from the gun room, thinking he was me. Then you hurried to your office and waited for the telephone to ring."

The chief glared. He seemed to be choking on words. I was tense. Gaddis was apparently enjoying himself.

"There is more evidence against you in Dennison's murder than there is against Larrabee in that of Travis," Masters went on. "There is enough to hold you."

"You can't do that," Gibson growled.

"Want to bet?" Kent asked. "I can have it done. I am a licensed operative of the Brent Agency—in all states. You'll be in that cell next to Larrabee in short order—unless—" Kent hesitated.

"Unless what?" Gibson demanded.

"Unless you let Larrabee out to sleep in his own bed and quit horsing around and give me a little cooperation."

"Threatening an officer," Gibson barked. "Intimidation of—"

"I'm sure these other gentlemen were not listening," Kent said soberly.

"What were you saying, Mr. Masters?" Gaddis asked.

Gibson snorted. I was too puzzled to say anything. I was wondering if Kent didn't think Gibson guilty.

"I was just pointing out to Chief Gibson," Kent went on, "that both Travis and Dennison were killed by somebody who was gunning for Brent operatives. I mentioned that solving the Kendall case would probably turn up the killer—and asked the chief to help. I also pointed

out the obvious innocence of Bert Larrabee and suggested his immediate release from the klink."

"Oh," Gaddis said gravely, "I'll pay closer attention from now on, Mr. Masters."

"Nuts," Gibson blustered. "You know I didn't shoot Dennison."

"I can make out a case for the proper authorities," Kent retorted, "that will keep you in your own poky while the investigation proceeds."

"What do you want to know about the Kendall business?" Gibson twisted in his chair.

"All you know," Masters replied, "and anything in your files that you may have forgotten."

Gibson shot a dark glance at Gaddis and me, then faced Kent. "All right," he growled, "but my turn is coming."

"Let's go," Kent said. "I imagine Larrabee is getting pretty tired of that cell."

In the hall, Gibson suggested that we go by way of the alley. "Shorter in this storm," he said.

THE wind was now howling. Snow driven by it was getting thicker. It was growing colder. I thought of my whiskey—but didn't mention it.

"I'll be right behind you," Kent told Gibson, "with both eyes open. Chuck and Mr. Gaddis can follow me. And the rest of us are saying nothing until you have told Officer Toller to release young Larrabee and send him to your office."

Gibson grunted. We filed down the back stairs and along the alley.

At the station Gibson gave Toller the required order. Toller looked surprised but went, jangling keys. We went into Gibson's private office, leaving the door open.

Bert Larrabee came quickly. He was haggard and rumped, but he looked happy. He kept looking warily at Gibson. He began thanking everybody. Kent stopped him.

"Young fellow," Kent glanced at his
(Continued on page 96)

FIESTA OF MURDER

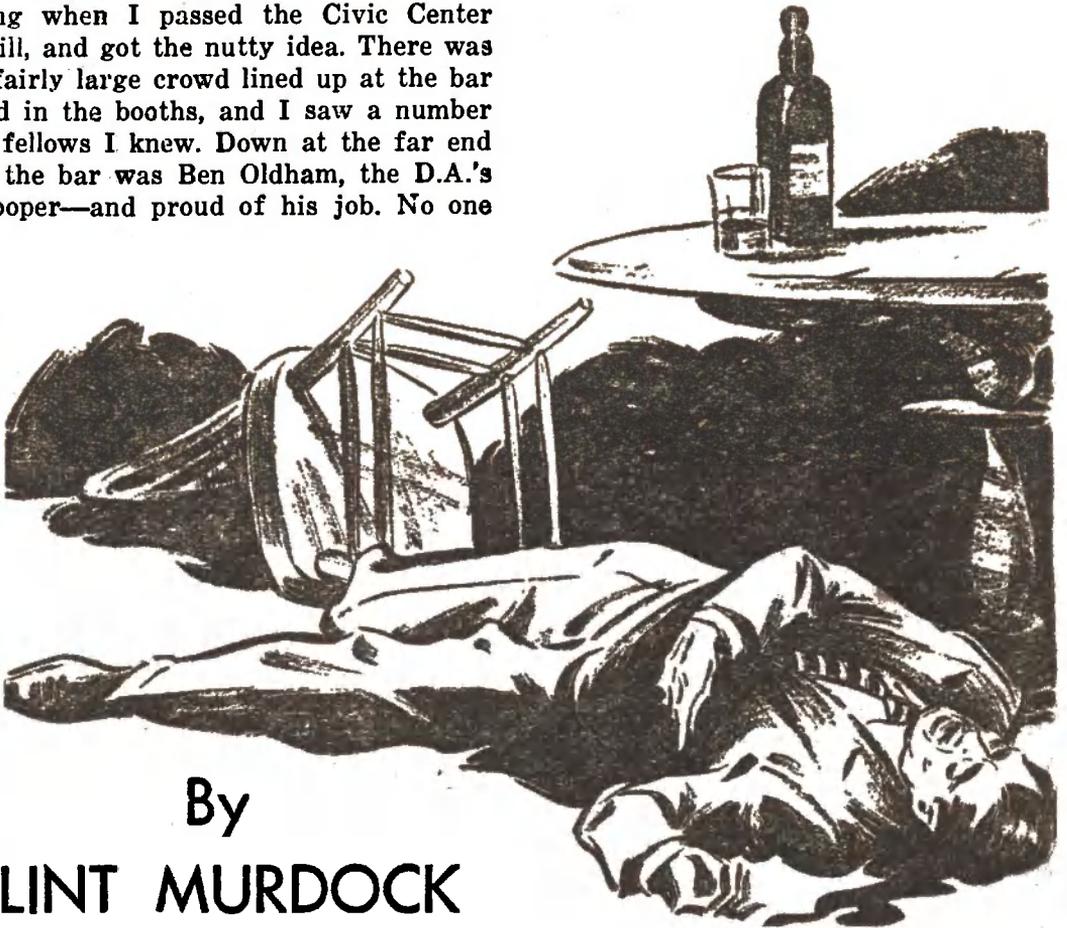
IT WAS Cinco de Mayo, Mexican day of Fiesta, and I was heading for a gay evening down in Olvera Street. I was dressed in a Mexican costume—wide flaring *pantalones*, blue silk shirt, a little monkey jacket with a lot of silver trimmings, a red sash around my midriff. A stiff-brim flat-topped sombrero with little balls around the edge, set atop the black wig on my head. My face and hands were stained the color of ripe wheat, and a little trick mustache perched daintily on my upper lip. I was a typical Mexican dandy.

It was about eight-thirty in the evening when I passed the Civic Center Grill, and got the nutty idea. There was a fairly large crowd lined up at the bar and in the booths, and I saw a number of fellows I knew. Down at the far end of the bar was Ben Oldham, the D.A.'s snooper—and proud of his job. No one

seemed to recognize me, and I grinned with satisfaction.

As I walked down the aisle, the curtains of one of the booths were flung back, and Oliver Crane, a Hollywood actor's agent, squat and florid, backed out, talking to the man who remained inside. He flashed me a look as I came up behind him. It was obvious that he did not recognize me.

"Just remember what I said, Hudson," he said. His voice was low, but hard with a grim harshness. "Lay off, or I'll bounce you around on your ear."



By
CLINT MURDOCK

It was a swell idea to dress up for the Fiesta, but how was I to know that I was walking into a carnival of killing where I would be the suspect? Anyway, I had to make a quick change and do some quicker thinking to pin the bumpings on a cold-blooded murderer!

"Aw, go climb a tree," Hudson snarled. "She's over twenty-one."

"I'll put you in the hospital, if you don't lay off," Crane threatened. He dropped the curtain, turned on a heel and strode away, his face an angry red.

I pushed the curtains aside and looked in at Hudson.

"May I take the empty seat, *señor?*" I asked, with a strong Spanish accent, playing up to my costume.

I knew Hudson fairly well, but he

"Why did you kill him?" Oldham growled, pointing to the corpse.



Illustrated by
Frank Volp

didn't recognize me. A young fellow in his late twenties, handsome in a blonde way, well built, with a pleasing personality. Eyes a bit too close together, but always a smile on his lips. He ran quite a profitable bail bond business, was a familiar figure around the criminal courts.

"Huh?" he grunted. He jerked his head up and looked at me, and for a moment his blue eyes were puzzled. Then he smiled and nodded. "Oh, sure." He waved an indifferent hand at the vacant seat. "I'm leaving in a few minutes, anyway. Going down to the *Fiesta* on Olvera Street, eh?"

"*Si Señor,*" I grinned. "She's the beeg *Fiesta*. The *caballero* who just leave, he no seem ver-ee 'appy."

"Oh, that guy!" Hudson snorted. "Got the crazy idea I've been playing around with Nita Ruiseñor, and he's sore. Fact is, she's not interested in me. It's the room upstairs." He seemed to be talking to himself more than to me.

Bob Andrews, one of the waiters I knew, stuck his curly head through the curtains and looked at me inquiringly.

"Wheesky," I told him.

HE ducked out, leaving the curtains open. I glanced idly through and saw Andy Sloan, the tall dark-eyed, swarthily handsome owner of the grill, walking behind the bar toward the rear. I could never help staring at Sloan every time I saw him. It was his right hand. It had been amputated at the wrist, and he'd had one made of wax which he wore with a black glove over it. I understood, though, he could operate the roulette wheel quite expertly with his left hand, in that big room upstairs.

Bob brought my whiskey, and a glass with ice cubes in it which I filled from the water bottle on the table. He backed out, and this time closed the curtains after him.

"*A su salud, Señor,*" I said, lifted the glass and looked across the rim at Hudson.

"And to yours," he responded, and

picked up his nearly empty glass and drained the last few drops.

It was then the lights went out.

There was a chorus of exclamations from around the bar, and a shuffling of feet. I laughed.

"Just a fuse blown out," I said to Hudson. "They'll have it fixed in a minute." Hudson just grunted. Somebody started the juke-box—it was plugged into the baseboard, and evidently on a different electric circuit. It began playing "*El Rancho Grande*", and I sang the words softly in Spanish, tapping time with my feet.

I looked up as a dark form blocked out the door to the booth. I thought it was the waiter, and started to kid him about the lights, when he lunged at me. Startled, I tried to get to my feet, heard Hudson mutter a curse. Half way up, something slammed against the right side of my head. Red, blue, and yellow balls of fire danced before my eyes, suddenly blotted out by a black and empty void.

When I came to my senses, the lights were on. The music had stopped, and I looked up into the squinting black eyes of Ben Oldham, his lips twisted into his habitual sneer. I don't think I ever saw him without that sneer—he must've taken it with him to dreamland every night. If a guy like him could have dreams.

I was still sitting at the table in the booth, slumped back against the partition. I groaned and sat up, still dazed. The sight of my stiff-brimmed sombrero on the table in front of me reminded me of the costume I wore. I picked it up and put it on, hoping my black wig hadn't gone awry and exposed my yellow hair. I flinched as the hat touched the knot that was beginning to form above my right ear.

"All right, Mex," Oldham growled, reaching out and taking hold of my arm. "Come on, spill it. Why'd you kill him?"

"Huh?" I said. "Me? Kill who?" I forgot my Spanish accent for the moment, in my bewilderment.

Oldham jerked a thumb toward the floor on the other side of the table. I stood up on wobbly legs and looked where he pointed.

There, face up, lay Edgar Hudson.

The right side of his head was caved in, his brown hair a bloody mess. The waxiness of his face glowed under the glare of the light on the wall, and his right jaw and cheek were bruised and beginning to swell. His blue eyes were open, bulging with terror, hideously staring at the ceiling.

SUDDENLY I felt sick, but couldn't tear my eyes from that gruesome body. Close beside the body lay the water bottle from the table, smeared with blood. I knew my fingerprints must be on it, put there when I poured water over the ice cubes. I just stood and gawked, my mind whirling and seething, trying to get it straight.

Then, like a blinding flash of lightning, it dawned on me that whoever had killed him was trying to pin it on me. That cleared my mind with a shock. To all outward appearances, I was a Mexican, and it wouldn't be too hard to frame me. And when my disguise was discovered, I'd have a hard time making anybody believe my absurd explanation. And my fingerprints were on that whiskey glass and on the glass that held the ice cubes. Those on the water bottle were probably blurred by whoever had used it to kill Hudson.

"Why'd you kill him?" Oldham repeated.

I turned and looked at him. He was standing with feet apart, hands on hips, blocking the doorway, beady eyes watching every move I made, every flickering expression of my face. My quite evident bewilderment seemed to puzzle him. Back of him I could glimpse the crowd trying to peer in. Already they were beginning to mutter.

"I didn't kill him." My voice was almost a whisper.

I picked up the half-glass of whiskey and downed it. I needed it. As I sat the

glass back on the table, I ran my hand around it, hoping to blur the fingerprints beyond recognition. Then I picked up the glass of water and drank a chaser, and tried to blur my prints on that, too.

"Sure, you did," Oldham snapped. "Come on, spill it. Why'd you kill him?"

If Oldham had been capable of any deductive reasoning, he easily could've seen how absurd his statement was. The crowd back of him was pressing closer, the muttering grew louder. I knew if they ever laid hands on me, I'd be finished. I had to get out of there, and fast.

"I won't talk here," I shrugged. "Take me to the jail, or to your office. I'll talk there."

Oldham's eyes searched my face. He threw a look over a shoulder, then back at me. He heard the muttering, too.

"Yeah, guess you're right, fella," he said. "We really ought to wait till the cops get here. But I'll handle it."

OLDHAM always did feel his own importance. He flashed his badge, waved the crowd back, took me by the arm again and led me out of the booth. For a moment I was tempted to jerk off my hat and wig and proclaim my identity. But I wasn't so sure that would improve my position any. It would be just like Oldham to figure that I had disguised myself and gone into the booth purposely to kill Hudson. He was just that dumb. He had an overwhelming dislike for me, and he knew I hated his guts. No, I'd take a chance as an unknown Mexican.

"Tell the Homicide boys, when they get here," Oldham told Andy Sloan as we went toward the front door, "that I've got him up in my office. They can get him there—when I finish with him."

That suited me just fine. Oldham's office was on the sixth floor of the Hall of Justice, diagonally across the street from the Grill. A hazy plan began to form in my mind.

Then we were out on the sidewalk, and walking along the street. I wondered

why Oldham hadn't handcuffed me; probably because he didn't have any handcuffs with him.

"Don't make any foolish moves, fella," he warned, "or I'll fill you full of hot lead." I shrugged and grunted.

"What's your name, fella?" Oldham asked, as we stepped up on the curb.

"Pedro Rincón," I answered readily. That was the name I'd selected when I donned the costume.

We went on down the sidewalk to the Broadway entrance of the Hall of Justice. Just before we got there, I stopped and stared up at the second floor windows. Oldham gripped my left arm tighter, and stopped with me.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What'n'ell you looking at?"

I continued to stare without answering, motionless, trying to look startled. Oldham turned his head and glanced up to see what had attracted my attention. That was what I was waiting for. His head tilted back, exposing his throat. The hard edge of my palm sliced down, caught him on the Adam's apple. He staggered back, gasping for breath. He let go of my arm, and I hit him with my fist. He crow-hopped back a step, shaking his head, still trying to get his breath. I hit him again, with all my hundred and eighty pounds back of it. His knees buckled, and he sprawled face down on the sidewalk.

The whole thing hadn't taken more than ten seconds. I didn't wait to see if he caught his breath. I whirled and dashed back to the corner, turned east down the hill. I slowed then to a fast walk, went past the Post Office. On Main Street I turned south past the City Hall to First Street, then west to Broadway and my office.

In three minutes I was out of the Mexican costume and into my own suit. Two more minutes, and alcohol had removed the dark stain from my face and hands. I washed up with soap and water, put on my tie, and once again I was blonde Ed Beck, private eye.

I closed the door softly behind me. I

didn't feel too badly about Oldham; he was always making himself obnoxious. Bill Dugan, on Homicide, didn't like him any better than I did. Several times, Oldham had tried to hog the credit of solving cases, taking it away from Dugan. I knew if it came to a showdown between me and Oldham, Dugan would give me the breaks. Anyway, I wasn't going to take a murder rap, not if I had to knock out two Oldhams. I went around the corner to the parking lot, got in my car and started home.

ABOUT halfway out Hollywood Boulevard, I began to worry about my fingerprints. I'd tried to blur them on the glasses there in the booth, but I didn't know whether I'd succeeded or not. The thought sent a cold chill up my spine. Just suppose that even one of my fingerprints remained intact. My prints had been taken and filed when I got my license and gun permit. It wouldn't take the cops long to find out whose prints were on those two glasses.

So I'd better not go to my apartment.

I looked at my wrist-watch, and it showed five after ten. It had been nearly an hour since Hudson had been killed, about half an hour since I'd escaped from Oldham. Maybe the cops wouldn't be on my trail yet. Maybe I could go to my bungalow and get a bag with a change of clothes, ride back to town, leave my car in one of the all-night garages, and get me a hotel room till this thing was cleared up.

Once my mind was made up, it didn't take me long to get a bag with a change of clothes and get out of there. Fast. I got a room at one of the third-rate hotels east of Broadway, using an assumed name on the register, and went to bed.

The morning papers were a mess, with scary headlines that told about the murder of Edgar Hudson. And about a Mexican suspect, a Pablo Rincón, who had knocked out Oldham and made his escape. But the police theory of the killing rather startled me. They learned that

Hudson had been seen around with Nita Ruisenor, the Mexican singer and movie star. From this they deduced that Rincon must have been Nita's sweetheart up from Mexico, found her playing around with Hudson, and in a jealous rage had killed him.

Then I thought of that Mexican costume hidden in the back of one of the drawers in my filing cabinet at the office. If the cops ever got a hint that put them on my trail, and they made a search of my office, I'd be sunk. Maybe I'd better go in and have a talk with Bill Dugan.

But if I stuck my nose into Headquarters, I'd be slapped into a cell. I didn't know what to do. So I did nothing. I stuck close to my room, had lunch sent up to me. Then I phoned down for the early editions of the afternoon papers, and got another shock.

Dan Higgins, one of the waiters at the Grill, had been found dead in the alley back of the Grill just after daylight that morning. Too late to get into the morning editions. He'd been slugged, then stabbed. The men on a garbage truck that made the early morning rounds, had found the body.

I threw the paper down and began to pace the room, trying to figure out just why Higgins had been killed. I was sure that it connected up somehow with the killing of Hudson. I figured that Higgins, working there at the Grill, had seen who had turned out the lights. That the killer knew Higgins had seen him, and had to kill the waiter to close his mouth. And if that was so, and he had penetrated my Mexican costume, then the killer wouldn't hesitate to knock me off, too.

I was glad I hadn't stayed in my bungalow overnight.

HIGGINS had been stabbed with a butcher knife from the Grill—the cook recognized it, and one of his knives was missing. That cinched it. Whoever had killed Higgins, it had to be somebody connected in some way with the Grill. It had to be somebody who'd have ac-

cess to the kitchen and the cook's knives.

I stewed that around in my mind for about an hour, then another idea flashed in. I stopped and stared out the window. It could be. But I couldn't get the motive.

Then I thought of Oliver Crane, and what he'd said to Hudson as he backed out of the booth. Maybe it was Crane that had killed Hudson. He could've gone around to the back of the Grill, through the back door and pulled the light switch. Then come into the part where the booths were, knocked me out, and killed him.

But I didn't think so. There'd hardly been time enough. Maybe if I could talk to Crane, though, I could get some ideas. He might know what was behind the killing. And Nita Ruisenor. Crane was her agent. Might be she could tell me something. Hudson had said something about it not being him she was interested in, but the room upstairs.

I knew what he meant. Andy Sloan had a large room upstairs where there was gambling—roulette wheel, poker, dice, anything the customers wanted. But I didn't know where Nita lived. I put on my hat, got my car from the parking lot, and drove out to Hollywood, and went into Oliver Crane's office.

Crane turned pale, and his black eyes bugged out, when I told him I'd seen him coming out of Hudson's booth, and what he'd said to the bail-bond broker.

"What're you after?" he snarled. "Blackmail?"

"No. Oh, my, no," I assured him and grinned. "I don't think you killed him, Crane. There wasn't time for you to go around the block and come in the back door. Forget it, and have a smoke."

I held out my package of cigarettes to him. He reached out his right hand and took it, and heaved a long sigh of relief.

"But if the cops find out what you've just said, they'll put me over the coals," he said.

"They won't find out from me," I assured him. "All I want of you is the address of Nita Ruisenor."

(Continued on page 102)

SALLY the SLEUTH

by Charles Barr

"DIRTY POLITICS"

ONE MORNING, THE OFFICE OF SALLY'S CHIEF IS VISITED BY JUDGE GRAY, WHO IS IN THE MIDST OF A BITTER BATTLE FOR RE-ELECTION ...

PETE MURDOCK AND HIS CROWD WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO DEFEAT ME.

YOU HAVE A FINE RECORD, JUDGE. YOU ARE SURE TO WIN.

BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! IF I DON'T WITHDRAW FROM THE RACE, THEY THREATEN TO RUN THESE PICTURES IN THE NEWSPAPERS!

WHEW!



JUDGE! HAVE YOU BEEN PLAYING AROUND?

OF COURSE NOT! THIS IS A FRAME-UP!



SEVERAL TIMES. IN COMPROMISING-PLACES, A GIRL WOULD PLANT HERSELF ON MY LAP AND SOMEBODY WOULD SNAP A PICTURE. IT IS ALL PART OF MURDOCK'S PLAN TO GET A STOUGE OF HIS ELECTED TO MY POST.

LEAVE IT TO US, JUDGE.

YOU MUST CLEAR ME IN THIS PICTURE MESS -AND FAST. REMEMBER. THE ELECTION IS ONE WEEK OFF!



AFTER THE JUDGE LEAVES...

MURDOCK MAY TRY TO FRAME THE JUDGE WITH MORE PICTURES. SALLY, YOU'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHO THE PHOTOGRAPHER IS.

SALLY VISITS MURDOCK'S "SHAMROCK" BAR...



INSIDE, SALLY PICKS UP A GIRL ...

CRIPES! I NEED A DRINK!

HAVE JOE MIX YOU A "SHAMROCK SPECIAL". IT PACKS A WALLOP.

THIS IS A **WOW!** -AND I NEED IT, THE WAY I FEEL.

WATSA MATTER, KID, IN TROUBLE?





OH, I JUST GOT OUT OF THE PEN, WHERE THAT LOUSE, JUDGE GRAY, SENT ME FOR SHOPLIFTING!

YOU OUGHTA MEET PETE MURDOCK. HE'S A RIGHT GUY AND HE CAN HELP YOU.



HELLQ. PETE. THIS LITTLE GIRL GOT A RAW DEAL FROM JUDGE GRAY. MAYBE YOU CAN FIND SOME WORK FOR HER.

HIYA, MAE. WE CAN USE HER IF SHE'S SMART. COME BACK TOMORROW.

SALLY REPORTS TO THE CHIEF...

SO FAR, SO GOOD, SALLY. KEEP THAT APPOINTMENT TOMORROW, AND REMEMBER, WE WANT TO KNOW WHO TAKES THE PICTURES.



NEXT DAY, IN MURDOCK'S OFFICE ...

HI. MR. MURDOCK. HERE I AM!

OKAY, TOOTS. NOW YOU CAN GET EVEN WITH JUDGE GRAY. THIS IS SAMMY. YOU AND HIM WORK AS A TEAM. NOW LISSEN-



THE JUDGE IS GOING TO SPEAK IN A REAL TOUGH SECTION THIS AFTERNOON. WHEN HE'S IN FRONT OF PADDY'S SALOON, YOU RUN UP AND GIVE HIM A BIG HUG - MAKE IT HOT! SAMMY'LL DO THE REST.



THAT AFTERNOON...



LATER, THE JUDGE PASSES PADDY'S...

OKAY - HERE WE GO!



SAMMY KNOCKS OFF THE JUDGE'S HAT...

WHAT THE - ?



I SAY - STOP IT!

PADDY'S BAR



SAMMY AND SALLY HURRY AWAY ...

I'M GOING TO MY APARTMENT TO DEVELOP THESE. WANNA COME UP, BABY ?

SURE, I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU DEVELOP.





BREAK IT UP, YOU DAMES, OR WE'LL ALL GET IN TROUBLE WIT' MURDOCK!



I'LL BREAK YOUR HEAD, YOU DOUBLE CROSSING LOUSE!

MEANWHILE, I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE.



EVERYTHING IS AT SAMMY'S PLACE, CHIEF, 124 ELM STREET.

FINE, SALLY. WE'LL PAY HIM A VISIT.



BUT THAT NIGHT, JUDGE GRAY IS CHLOROFORMED AND KIDNAPPED ...



HE'LL BE FOUND HERE, IN FRONT OF PADDY'S JOINT.

REEKIN' WIT' BOOZE, BOSS. DIS'LL FIX HIS WAGON!



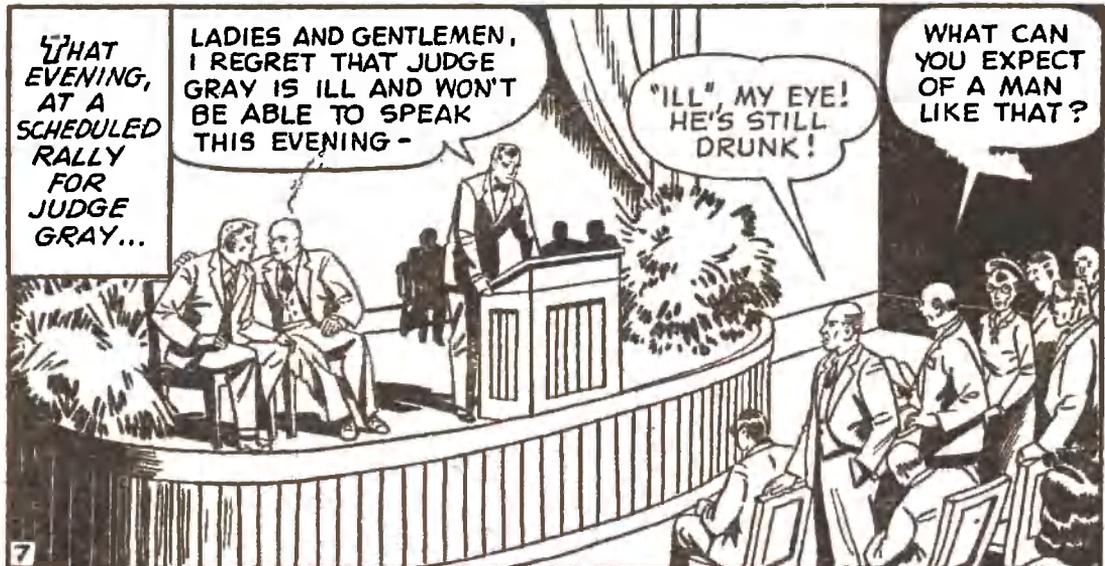
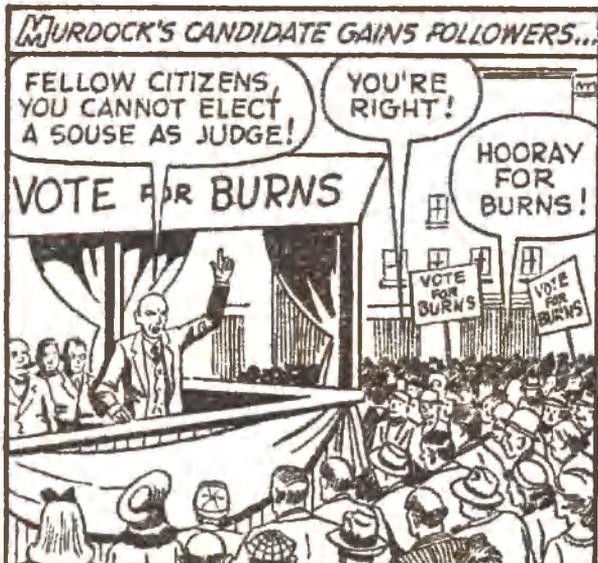
NEXT DAY, THERE ARE HEADLINES ...

WHAT'S THIS- 'JUDGE GRAY FOUND DRUNK IN A LOW DIVE'

THAT'S NOT THE KIND OF MAN I'LL VOTE FOR.

I EITHER!

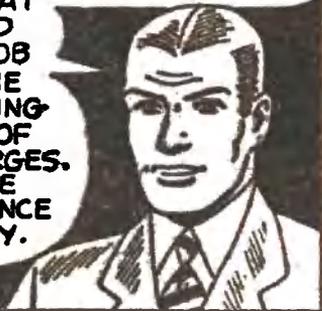






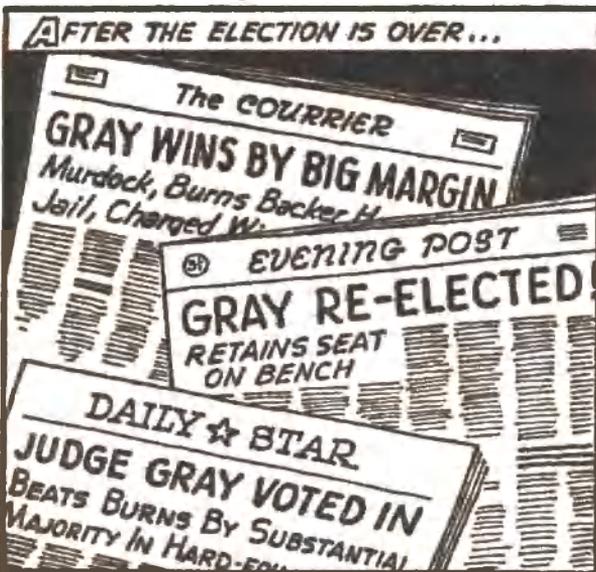
JUST A MINUTE, FOLKS. I HAVE SOME NEWS FOR YOU -

JUDGE GRAY WAS FRAMED WITH PHONEY PICTURES BY PETE MURDOCK. THEN MURDOCK KIDNAPED THE JUDGE AND SATURATED HIS CLOTHES WITH LIQUOR... ALL TO GET HIS OWN MAN INTO OFFICE SO AS TO CONTINUE THE REIGN OF THE UNDERWORLD IN YOUR FAIR CITY. I'M HAPPY TO TELL YOU THAT MURDOCK AND HIS WHOLE MOB IS NOW IN THE CITY JAIL FACING A LONG LIST OF SERIOUS CHARGES. YOU MAY HAVE FULL CONFIDENCE IN JUDGE GRAY.



SURE YOU FEEL WELL ENOUGH, JUDGE?

YES, I'LL MAKE IT, SALLY, THANKS TO YOU.



FOLLOW SALLY IN PRIVATE DETECTIVE

★ ★ DEATH IS

By CLARK DEMERY



The murderer wanted all the world to know of the crime. So the body of the beautiful young victim was arrayed at her loveliest — and right in the center of town!

A DUMMY



CHAPTER I

Death's Show-Window

IN SPITE of three bromos, a Turkish bath, and a handful of aspirins, Barney Cunard's head still felt too large for his hat as he ankled into the Westervelt Department Store basement that rainy morning. He punched the time-clock with rancorous distaste and hoped to God that no shoplifters would intrude upon his elephant-sized hangover. Not until after lunch, anyhow.

To the chirpy greeting of red-haired Kitty Cavane from the merchandise-display department he responded with only a low moan. He wasn't interested in she-males today. Not even shapely young she-males with ooomph, like Kitty. His jaundiced eye took little satisfaction in

surveying her trim silken ankles and the form-fitting frock that stressed her curvesome contours—of which she had plenty.

His disinterest apparently irked her. "You might at least notice my new dress, Sherlock. I bought it especially for your benefit," she pouted.

He said: "Yeah."

"Gee-gosh, Sherlock, can't a girl speak to you without you biting her head off? What's the matter—dark brown taste?"

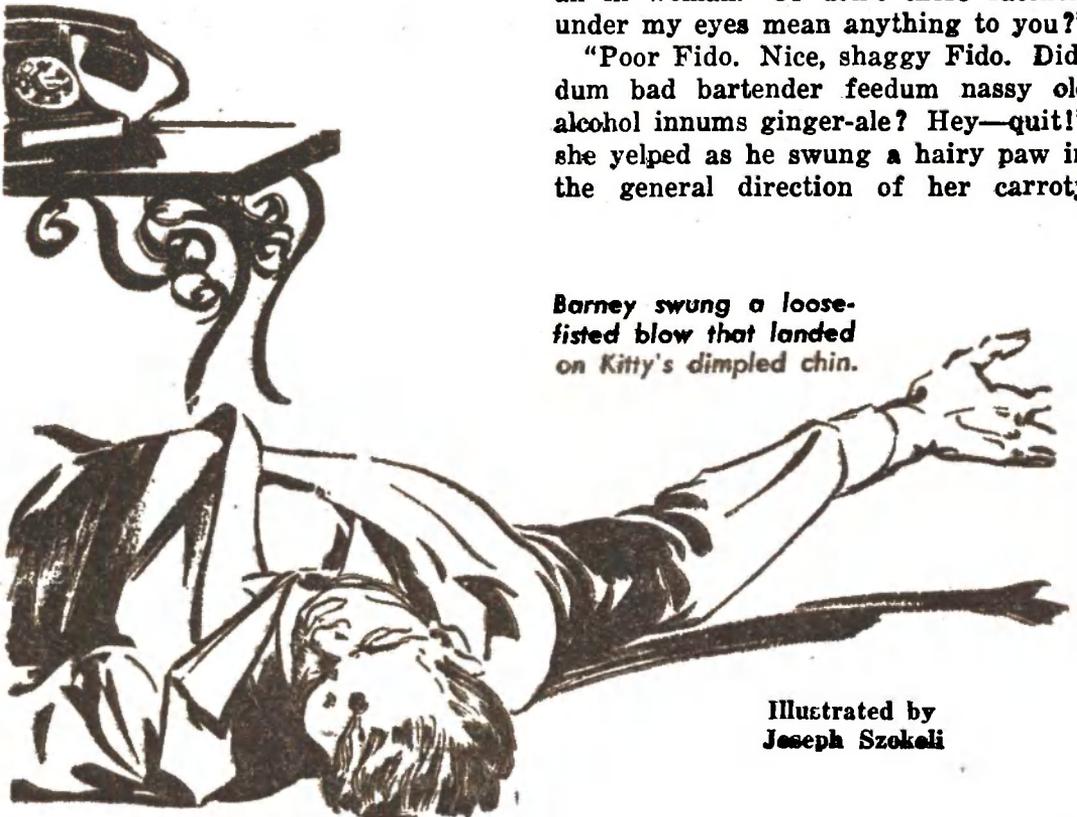
"Dark purple," he told her, and moved heavily toward his basement office whose door was marked: "*Store Detective.*"

Kitty pattered pertly along at his side, her stilt heels clicking on the tile floor. "Want me to get you a bromo, Barney?"

He said: "I've got three of 'em fizzing in me already, like tom-cats on a back fence. Go away and let me suffer. I'm an ill woman. Or don't these satchels under my eyes mean anything to you?"

"Poor Fido. Nice, shaggy Fido. Did-dum bad bartender feedum nassy ole alcohol innum's ginger-ale? Hey—quit!" she yelped as he swung a hairy paw in the general direction of her carroty

Barney swung a loose-fisted blow that landed on Kitty's dimpled chin.



Illustrated by
Joseph Szokali

thatch. "I paid six bits for this marcel, you big goof!"

"Then carry it back where it belongs, up in the advertising department," he advised her.

"Oh. Trying to get rid of me, huh? Okay. Settle yourself in a chair with your dainty Number Twelves on the nice soft desk. Then little Kitty will play first-aid nurse. Go ahead, open your door."

HE BLINKED foggily at her, wondering why she was so damned anxious to see him go into the two-by-four dungeon that did duty as his private sanctum. Her sparkling violet eyes were suspiciously merry, and an impish dimple hovered near the left corner of her mocking red mouth. He said: "All right. If this is some kind of rib, God help you." He opened the door, snapped on the light and abruptly yelled: "Suffering tripes—!"

Oscarina was sprawled face-upward on his battered desk. Oscarina's arms were over her head, her legs were askew, and she wasn't wearing a single stitch of clothing.

Kitty Cavane emitted the feminine equivalent to a horse-laugh. "So that's your method, Sherlock! Love 'em and leave 'em unconscious!"

Barney snorted wrathfully and strode forward toward Oscarina. Oscarina was a show-window dummy, startlingly life-like, with wavy brown hair, slumbrous eyes, a come-hither smile, and a wax figure indicating that she'd been manufactured by a gent as knew his feminine anatomy. Barney roared: "Who did this?" and swung around balefully at Kitty. "Did you?"

"Uh-uh. No, kind sir. Hope to die. Cross my heart."

Bitterly he said. "Get out of here, you little hellion. Beat it! And send a punk down to get this damned hunk of wax. Go on, now."

Still laughing, Kitty turned and fled.

Barney fished for a cigarette. But before he could set fire to its solace,

his telephone rang, jangling his nerves. He grabbed up the receiver and growled: "Yeah?"

"Is that you, Cunard?"

"No. It's Napoleon."

"This is Mr. Westervelt, Junior."

"Oh. Excuse me." Barney's heavy face went thoroughly brickish. Hell of a way to talk to the boss's son! "I didn't mean—"

"Come up to my father's office right away, Cunard. It's very important. Hurry."

Maybe they'd learned about the binge Barney was on last night. He squared his huge shoulders and tried to be jaunty as he walked toward the elevators.

En route, he passed Mike Gleason, the night watchman, just going off duty. Mike was a twinkling little Irishman in his sixties, with the Ould Sod branded all over his wrinkled face. "Hey, Mike, wait a minute," Barney commanded.

The old chap halted, his brow furrowing and a queer expression sliding into his faded blue eyes. He seemed almost scared. "Yeah, Barney?"

"Take a swivel at me. Do I look as if I had the gin jitters?"

Mike wagged his head, and his chuckle seemed whelped of a vast relief. "You look gr-rand, me bhoy. Fresh as a daisy."

"Thanks. That's a load off my mind." Barney grabbed an elevator-ride to the eighth floor, where the offices were located. The Westervelt suite had a whole corner, with solid masonry walls, unlike the thin board partitions that formed the other departmental offices. That was typical of the Westervelts. For themselves they demanded only the best.

IN THE ante-room the store-dick found Percy Milton nervously pacing holes in the thick rug. Percy was Kitty Cavane's boss: head of the merchandise-display division and a hell of a good window-trimmer. But he affected artistic purple shirts and a tittering giggle that had never gone over very well with Barney.

Percy Milton wasn't tittering now, however. He looked thoroughly worried about something. Barney said: "All you need is an eight-ball to complete the picture, Perc."

"An eight-ball?"

"Yeah. You're behind it, aren't you?"

Milton's unprominent Adam's apple bobbed up and down spasmodically. "This whole damned store is behind an eight-ball, if you ask me," he said from high up in the back of his throat. He mopped his forehead with a silk handkerchief that had his initials embroidered on it.

For no particular reason, the handkerchief reminded Barney of Oscarina down in his basement office. "Say, did Kitty Cavane tell you to send a punk down after that dummy?"

"What dummy?" He seemed to be genuinely surprised.

"The Oscarina that some sharp disciple left on my desk. Very unfunny, too."

Milton seemed to be turning green around the fringes. "An Oscarina—on your desk?"

"Yeah. Know anything about it?"

Percy ignored the question. "A brown-haired Oscarina?"

"Yeah. Say, what is this, a questions-and-answers game?"

Milton said: "My God. . . !" and gulped again. "So that's where it went!"

"Meaning what?"

"You'll find out."

Barney blinked. "Are you trying to horse me? What will I find out?"

Before the window-dresser could answer, the heavy door of Old Man Westervelt's holy-of-holies swung open. Westervelt, pompous and gray and grim, appeared first. He was a civic big shot, and he looked it. He not only owned the town's largest store, but he was a member of the City Board as well. He carried a lot of political as well as abdominal weight. His son Rodney, dapper and athletic, followed at the Old Man's heels. Senior said: "All right, men. Let's go."

"Go where?" Barney demanded without eliciting any response. Mystified, he

fell in behind the others and trudged over to the owner's private elevator.

AS JUNIOR pushed the button, Kitty Cavane appeared from the merchandise-display offices. With her was a statuesque blonde lovely named Martha Deayne, who also worked in Percy Milton's department. Kitty and Martha were giggling to beat hell, as if at something very humorous.

But when Kitty spied Barney Cunnard trailing along behind the Westervelt's and Percy Milton, her liquid laughter was abruptly stilled. Looking disturbed, she left the yellow-haired Deayne girl and pattered up to the store dick, drawing him aside.

"Listen, Sherlock. You didn't report that Oscarina to the Old Man, did you? That wouldn't be good baseball. It might get somebody in trouble."

Barney said: "Nah, I didn't report it. I've got something else on my mind just now. But if I ever lay my hands on—"

"Yes, darling. You said that before, remember? Maybe I'll tell you some day, if you ask me real sweetly." Her conversation was turned off like a faucet as Barney swung his broad back to her and pushed into the elevator behind the Westervelts and Milton.

The cage dropped them down to the main floor. It was now about fifteen minutes before opening time, and the place seemed almost weirdly quiet. Clerks and salespeople were still folding white cotton dust-covers away from counters, shelves, and display racks. The hush was in curious mute contrast to the buzz of activity that would follow when the main doors were thrown open.

Through the jewelry department, most elaborate in any of the city's department-stores, the little group headed toward a corner show-window facing the main drag intersection of Ninth and Broadmoor. It was the best window of the store from the standpoint of pedestrian circulation figures.

Percy opened the narrow window-door and stepped through. The two Wester-

velts followed. Barney edged his hefty frame past the narrow aperture and looked around.

Heavy draped curtains were drawn, completely shutting off the window from the passing world beyond the plate glass. The drapes were always thus closed whenever Milton undertook the task of changing a display. But ordinarily Percy had his work finished long before this hour of the morning. It was peculiar that the main window should still be shut off now.

BARNEY surveyed his surroundings. The window-set represented a feminine boudoir in the modernistic manner. Lingerie, negligees, giddy nighties, and other bits of intimate lacy attire were fastefully draped over various pieces of chrome-and-blondewood furniture. Under the deftly-mussed covers of a bed reposed what appeared to be a sleeping girl, with the satin comforter turned down just enough to display an intriguing hint of bare shoulder. No doubt of it: Perc Milton knew his onions.

Old Man Westervelt looked at the window-trimmer. "You didn't disturb anything?"

Milton shook his head and gulped.

Westervelt swung around to Barney. "What do you make of it, Cunard?"

"What do I make of what?"

"Hm-mph! Didn't Milton tell you?"

"He didn't tell me anything."

"Well, take a look at that." Senior pointed to the bed.

"Very nice," Barney assumed the complimentary tone which he figured was expected of him.

Junior Westervelt snapped: "This is no time for joking! What's the matter with your eyes?"

Barney started to say: "Hangover," but caught himself in the nick of time. "I don't get you, sir," he growled.

"Go over to that bed. Take a good look."

Completely at sea, Barney ankled across the window-set. "Oh. I catch on. It's a new Oscarina. And much more

life-like than—Good God! That's not an Oscarina! *That's a dame!* It's Thora Gleason from the costume-jewelry department—Mike Gleason's daughter!" He yanked back the covers. "*Croaked! Somebody slipped a shiv in her heart!*"

CHAPTER II

Scream of Terror

FOR a brief space there was no sound except the pelt of raindrops on the curtained plate-glass window and the sharp breathing of men. Then Junior Westervelt said: "Exactly. That's why we brought you here, Cunard."

Barney stared down at the corpse, and lost the last remnants of his hangover.

Internal hemorrhage had been the cause of death. Her eyes were closed, her lips were parted in a faint smile, and her brown hair was unmussed. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

That illusion was quickly shattered when Barney seized her wrist to feel for pulse-beat. Her flesh was icy, and her joints already stiffened. "Rigor mortis," he muttered. "Dead several hours. Killed some time last night." He swung around. "Who found her?"

"I—I did," Percy Milton whispered, licking dry lips and having trouble with his knees, which were thudding together almost audibly.

"When?"

"A little wh-while ago. About twenty minutes ago."

"Why wasn't I called right away?"

Junior Westervelt rasped: "We did call you. But you weren't in your office. You were late."

Barney reddened as he turned back to Milton. "Just exactly what happened?"

Percy said: "I g-got orders to change the window this mornjng, although it had just been dressed last night after store-hours. Miss Cavane and Miss Deayne stayed late, helping me. I usually let a display stand for a week, but—"

"Who told you to change the set?"

"Mr. Westervelt, Senior."

Barney looked at the Old Man. "How come? Did you know about the corpse?"

"Certainly not!" Senior snorted indignantly. "I decided I wanted a display of street-wear instead of lingerie. Are you hinting—"

"Nix." The store dick faced Milton again. "Okay, Perc; so you were told to change the window this morning."

Percy nodded, his head rocking on its pipestem neck like a Christmas toy. "I came right down and started. Imagine

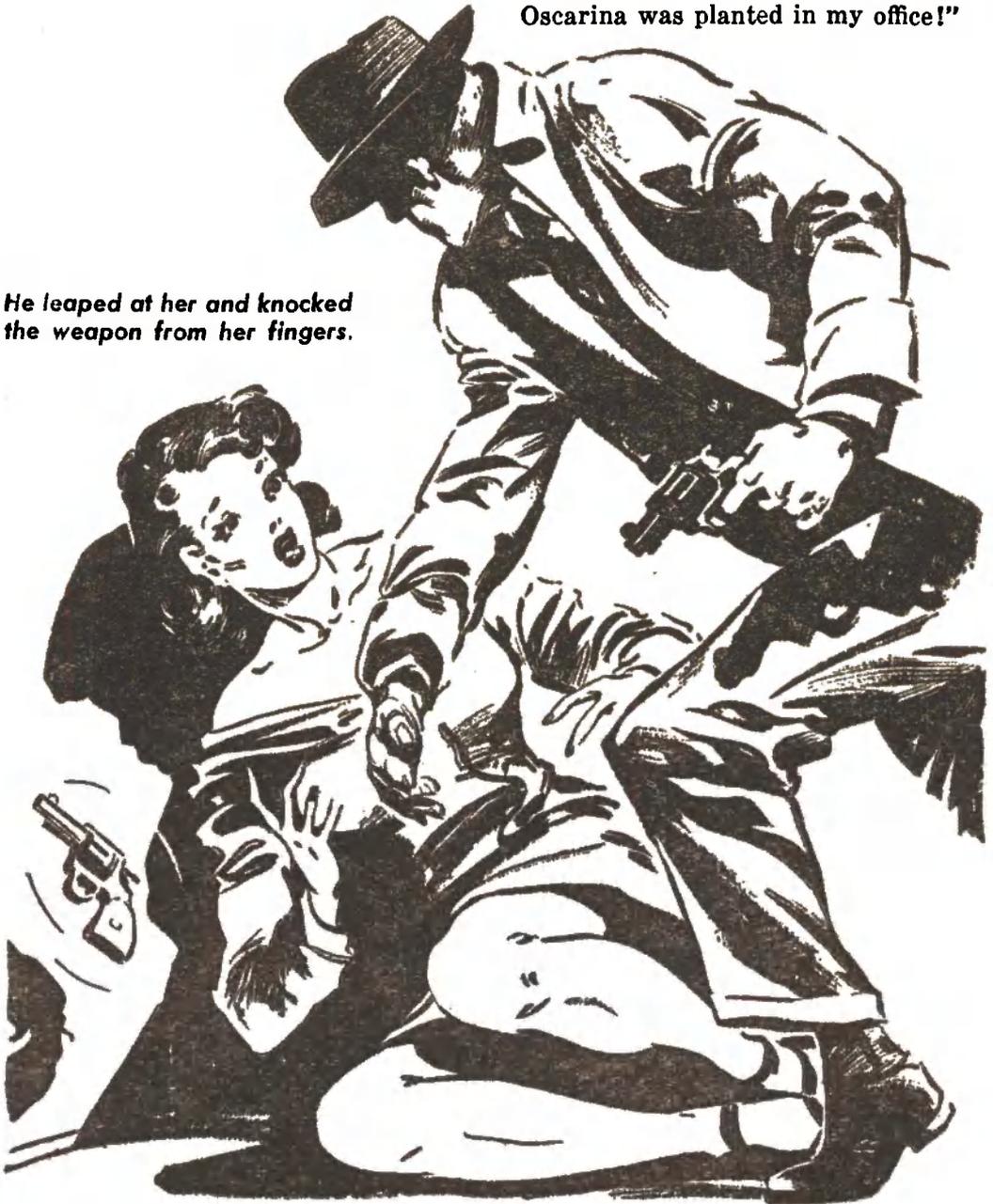
how I felt when I went to pull a dummy from the bed and f-found . . . *that!*"

"Can you prove you put a dummy in the bed last night?"

"Of course! Miss Cavane and Miss Deayne helped me to arrange it. And I left before they did. They had some extra work to do, so they stayed later. . . ."

BARNEY'S huge fists suddenly tightened into hairy balls. "By cripes!" he breathed. "Now I savvy why that Oscarina was planted in my office!"

He leaped at her and knocked the weapon from her fingers.



"What Oscarina?" Junior stared at him.

Barney said: "A dummy was left on my desk last night. I thought it was a rib, but now I know better. It was the one from this bed, see? The murderer had to remove it, to plant the corpse in its place. And my dungeon was picked as a stash-away."

"So what?"

"So Martha Deayne and Kitty Cavane can tell us the name of the killer!" Barney grated.

Junior stiffened and seemed to lose some of his polo-field sun-tan. You could almost sense his muscles tightening and crawling into knots under his tweed sports-coat. The veins stood out on his neck, like throbbing cords. His voice sounded oddly strained as he demanded: "How do you make that out, Cunard?"

"They both saw the dummy being planted on my desk last night. They thought it was a hell of a big joke on me. They didn't realize that they were looking at a murderer covering up his dirty work."

Old Man Westervelt cleared his throat. "So all we need to do is to ask them who placed the figure in your room, and we'll be able to clear up the whole case," he said softly.

"Yeah."

There was an instant of silence, almost thick enough to slice. And in that silence, Barney found himself regretting that he had said so damned much. It might have been better if he'd kept his kisser locked until he had a chance to question Kitty and Martha. But it was out now, and that was that.

Then Percy Milton's nerves seemed to snap. His voice rose to a sudden piping treble of hysteria. "A murder in my best window!" he shrilled. "And my two assistants know who did it! My God—!" The fastidiously dressed man was bordering on a crack-up.

"Shut up, you fool!" Senior Westervelt rasped in an undertone. "We don't want this spread all over the store!"

And as he said it, some dizzy bimbo

screached like blue hell from beyond the narrow doorway to the costume-jewelry department. It sounded like a banshee's tortured wail.

CHAPTER III

Murder Strikes Twice

HEARING that senseless, keening bleat, Barney Cunard pivoted and jammed himself through the window-exit. He landed heavily on the soles of his shoes behind the counter that displayed trumpery rhinestone trinkets, and almost fell sprawling over a limp feminine form on the floor; a brunette girl.

He recognized her as Peg Vollney, manager of the diamond section. Her face was the blue-white of diluted milk, in sharp contrast to the utter blackness of her sleek hair which she wore in a tight coiffure, without waves. She was clad in the black taffeta frock uniformly required of all Westervelt salesgirls.

Muttering an oath, Barney leaned over. He grunted when he felt regular heart-beats. "Fainted," he said sourly. "Now what in hell—?"

Junior Westervelt gave him a shove that almost toppled him from his haunches. "Peg . . . er, Miss Vollney! Junior grated, kneeling by her supine form.

Barney blinked and wrote down on his mental cuff a notation to the effect that Junior had called the girl by her first name—if that meant anything. Then Junior's old man said: "By God, this is piling it on too thick! Another killing—"

OLD Man Westervelt saw a congregation of clerks and floorwalkers running forward to investigate the commotion. "Back to your stations, all of you!" he roared like a top sergeant. "I'll discharge the first one who even *looks* curious!" Then, having verbally blasted back the tide, he said to Barney. "We've got to get this woman upstairs at once."

"Yeah, to the store hospital."

"To my office," Senior grimly corrected him. "She overheard too much. We must make sure she doesn't start spreading rumors; otherwise we'll have a panic on our hands among the other employees. You send down to the hardware department for a padlock, Cunard. Stay here until you get it. Guard the window; don't let anybody near it. As soon as you've got the door locked, you may come upstairs to my suite."

Barney said: "Okay. You'll phone headquarters?"

"Certainly. And I'll have a talk with Miss Cavane and Miss Deayne right away—before the police arrive. Then we'll have definite information to give the homicide men. We'll know who placed that dummy in your office, and we can arrange a quiet arrest without any hub-bub." He turned to Junior. "Give me a lift with this girl, son."

Barney Cunard beckoned an errand-boy. "Go down to the basement and get me a padlock, punk."

It seemed an hour before he returned. Actually it was about five minutes. He handed Barney a miniature brass Yale. "This do?"

"Yeah." The store-dick grabbed it; sent the boy on his way. Conscious of curious eyes watching him, Barney locked the window in which Thora Gleason's corpse reposed. Then he lumbered to the nearest elevator and snapped: "Eighth floor. Don't stop for passengers."

The operator apparently sensed something wrong. He shot his cage up the shaft at top speed. Barney emerged on eight and almost collided with Perc Milton. Perc was coming from the direction of the merchandise-display department. He had a vial of smelling-salts in his hand. "We're still trying to bring that Vollney girl around," he piped. "She's still unconscious in the Old Man's office."

Barney said: "Have the Westervelts talked to Kitty and Martha yet?"

"N-no." Perc seemed furtive, nervous. "But they will, as soon as they bring Miss Vollney out of her faint."

"For the love of cripes! Why waste time on that dame?" Barney shoved past the window-trimmer and continued along the labyrinthine corridor, heading for the merchandise-display offices. As he sailed around a corner, he barged smack into the Westervelts.

THEY were emerging from a stock-room. Junior had a fistful of brandy bottle, and Senior was puffing like a grampus and rasping: "Maybe we'd better get the store doctor—"

His son said: "No, dad. We can bring Miss Vollney around all right ourselves. Then you'll have to keep her quiet while I find those two girls and question them—Say, Cunard! What the hell are you doing up here?"

"You told me to come up as soon as I locked that window."

Senior said: "Did you lock it?"

"Yeah, sure. Now I'm going after Miss Cavane and Miss Deayne."

"Very well. Bring them to my office right away." The Westervelts proceeded toward their suite. Cunard headed in a different direction.

Barney lumbered on to the merchandise-display department. He entered; looked around. Nobody was there. Percy Milton, of course, was away on a smelling-salts expedition. But Kitty Cavane should have been somewhere about. So should Martha Deayne. Yet neither girl was in sight.

Barney raised his voice. "Kitty."

No answer.

"Kitty Cavane!"

Still no answer.

"Miss Deayne!"

Silence.

His lips a thin gash on the square-hewn granite of his face, Barney ploughed a forward path over a litter of placards, Oscars, Oscarinas, and assorted display junk. There were two rooms and a half in the partitioned-off layout. He frisked them all, without result. Then, not even blushing, he tried the door marked: "Women."

He came out a damned sight faster

than he'd gone in! He turned and pelted heavily from the merchandise-display suite; raced to the Westervelt offices. Gaining the main ante-room, he drew up short and listened.

Senior's door was slightly ajar. From within, Peg Vollney's choked voice was saying: "Miss Gleason's assistant in Costume-Jewelry came over to my d-diamond counter. She told me that Miss Gleason hadn't shown up this morning. Just then I saw you all going into the show-window, and I thought I'd volunteer to take charge of Miss Gleason's counter as well as my own. I went to the window-door to ask if it would be all right. Then I heard Mr. Milton saying something about Miss Gleason being m-murdered. The shock . . . w-well, I guess I must have f-fainted. I'm sorry. . . ."

"Quite all right, Miss Vollney," Senior Westervelt's tone was paternally unctuous. "But really, you misunderstood what Mr. Milton said."

"Y-you mean. . . .?"

"There was absolutely nothing mentioned about a—er, ahem—murder. It's absurd to think that such a thing could possibly take place in the Westervelt store." Senior put resonant emphasis on Westervelt, as if speaking of God in the first person.

"Then Miss Gleason w-was n't k-killed?"

"Of course not. It's ridiculous. But due to your shock, I think you should have the day off. With pay, of course," the Old Man added benignly. The old four-flusher was full of pomposity.

HAVING had a bellyful of this pap, Barney Cunard stepped into the room and surveyed the group. Percy Milton was over in a corner, gnawing a polished fingernail to the utter destruction of a dollar manicure. The Westervelts were standing by a leather divan near the desk. On the divan lay Peg Vollney, now completely recovered from her fainting spell.

Junior looked up and saw him. "Well?"

"Well, hell! It's time to quit playing mumbly-peg. Why haven't those headquarters birds shown up yet? Put in another call for 'em. Quick."

Young Westervelt's face darkened. "I don't like your tone, Cunard. As a matter of fact, we haven't called the police yet. We've been waiting to question those two merchandise-display girls. Where are they? I thought we told you to bring them in here."

"What? You haven't phoned the cops yet?" Barney's temper went up in a pyrotechnic blaze. He felt anger rising in him like a Bay of Fundy tide. Ten years a city dick before he took this softer berth as a store detective, he had a healthy respect for laws and statutes. This was a murder beef—and according to the penal code you're supposed to report murder to the police the minute you discover it, even if your name happens to be Westervelt. "You damn fools!" he roared, plunging toward the phone on Senior's desk.

Senior pompously blocked him. "See here, Cunard—"

"I'll see where I please. If you don't like it, you can stuff your job up your nostril! Out of my way, mister!"

Westervelt's bluster vanished. His tone dropped to a wheedle. "We're going to call headquarters as soon as we've questioned Miss Cavane and Miss Deayne."

Barney said: "Yeah? Well, you'll have to find Kitty Cavane before you can question her. She's gone. And Martha Deayne is deader than last Easter."

Percy Milton sagged. "Then . . . you found her. . . .?"

"Oh, So you knew about it, huh?" Cunard demanded.

"I—I," the window-trimmer gulped and subsided into panting silence.

Junior Westervelt looked pallid. "Wh-what's this about Miss Deayne? You say she's . . . dead?"

"Plenty! She was murdered. She's got the same kind of stab-wound in her breast that killed Thora Gleason. There's

a killer running loose in this joint. And would somebody care for a nice solid I'm phoning the cops right now. Or bash in the teeth, by God?"

CHAPTER IV

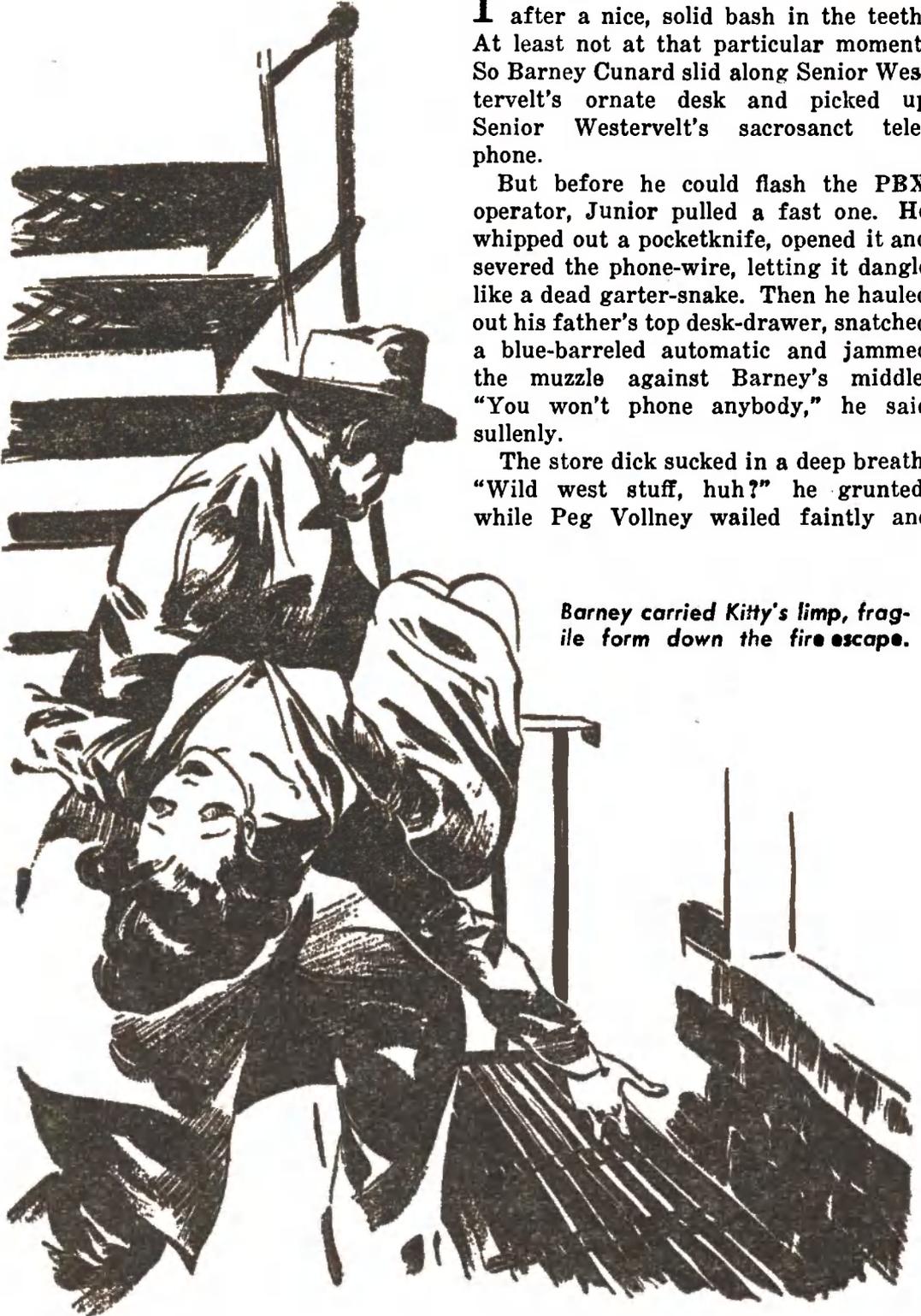
Cover-Up for Death

IT APPEARED that nobody hankered after a nice, solid bash in the teeth. At least not at that particular moment. So Barney Cunard slid along Senior Westervelt's ornate desk and picked up Senior Westervelt's sacrosanct telephone.

But before he could flash the PBX operator, Junior pulled a fast one. He whipped out a pocketknife, opened it and severed the phone-wire, letting it dangle like a dead garter-snake. Then he hauled out his father's top desk-drawer, snatched a blue-barreled automatic and jammed the muzzle against Barney's middle. "You won't phone anybody," he said sullenly.

The store dick sucked in a deep breath. "Wild west stuff, huh?" he grunted, while Peg Vollney wailed faintly and

Barney carried Kitty's limp, fragile form down the fire escape.



Percy Milton seemed on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown.

Senior looked disturbed. "I don't think you should have cut that phone-wire, son."

"I had to, dad!" young Westervelt said. "Look. You said yourself that you wanted a quiet arrest, without putting the store in an uproar. If the police come blundering around before we're ready to name the murderer, we'll have a fine mess of hysterical salespeople on our hands."

"Yes, but—"

"And besides, we've got something else to think about. We promised Cunard we'd call headquarters; but we didn't do it. How will that delay look to the police if we notify them now? You're a city councilman, and the publicity might do you a lot of political harm. But if we find the murderer and *then* call the cops, we're all set. Nobody can question our actions if we trap the killer and bring him to justice."

Senior said: "If we trap him."

"It'll be easy enough. All we have to do is find Miss Cavane and ask her who put the dummy in Cunard's office last night. She's probably in the store somewhere; Cunard just didn't look hard enough for her." He handed the automatic to his father. "You keep him under control, dad, while I take care of a certain matter."

SENIOR accepted the weapon. "Very well, son. I guess you're right. I must consider my position in the community. Now that I've gone this far, I suppose I'll have to see it through."

Junior turned and crooked a finger at Perc Milton. "You come with me."

Percy's breath made a whistling sound in his throat. "Wh-what for?"

"I've got a job for you. Or would you rather have your walking-papers right now?"

Percy, it developed, wasn't at all anxious to seek other employment. "I'll go-go," he mumbled.

"Good. And don't make any breaks

for a phone." Junior stood aside to let Milton go first. Percy staggered out of the office like a condemned man on his way to the gallows; Junior followed like a hangman.

Barney Cunard looked at Old Man Westervelt, in whose right hand the automatic was menacingly steady. "Quite a lad you raised! While he fumbles around playing detective games, a murderer runs loose. Or doesn't that spell anything in your highfalutin' language?"

Senior refused to answer.

Over on the divan, Peg Vollney shivered disconsolately. "Th-then Miss Gleason really *was* k-killed . . . and Miss Deayne, too! Oh-h-h," she whimpered.

Barney felt sorry for her. "Take it easy, babe. Everything will be okay."

In about fifteen minutes, Junior and Percy returned. Junior took the gun from his father. "All set, dad. Let's start hunting for Miss Cavane."

"What about these people?" Senior pointed to Barney, the brunette girl, and the window-dresser.

"We'll lock them in here until we locate Miss Cavane and find out what we want to know. Then we'll notify the police."

"Suppose we can't find Miss Cavane?"

"We'll find her."

"Suppose she won't talk?"

"I'll make her talk!"

Barney's muscles quivered involuntarily. "Listen, lousy. If you lay a hand on that girl I'll punch your head off and throw it in your face!"

"Enough out of you, Cunard. Come on, dad." The two Westervelts strode from the room, and the lock clicked after them. Barney hurled himself at the heavy door, but it bounced him back. He tried again, but succeeded only in accumulating a pair of sore shoulders.

Percy Milton moaned and fluttered his hands, like butterflies.

Barney stared at him. "Why did Junior want you with him a while ago?"

"He—he made me carry that dummy from your office, take it up to the show-window and put it in the bed. Th-then

he forced me to wrap Miss Gleason's c-corpse in a sheet, stick a pedestal-stand under it, and c-carry it up to my own suite. . . ."

"That makes two stiffs up here on the eighth floor, huh?"

"Y-yes."

"I wonder why he did that?"

"He said he didn't want the window-drapes drawn all morning. People might suspect something wrong."

Barney scowled. "Maybe he had another reason," he growled.

CHAPTER V

Call from Kitty Cavane

PERCY'S intestines rumbled, and he was suddenly sick.

Barney grabbed him by the shoulders and gave him a shove in the general direction of Old Man Westervelt's private lavatory. Perc staggered into the tiny room and closed the door after him.

Peg Vollney swayed to her feet. "Mr. Cunard—Barney—"

"Yeah, babe?"

"G-get me out of here! I'm f-frightened!"

"Nothing to be scared of," he said, patting her on the arm. "The Westervelts can't get away with this. It's too raw."

"You don't know them!" she flung back at him bitterly. "Especially Junior. He'd—he'd do anything. He's ruthless."

"Yeah? To me he's just a punk with a swelled head."

"You're wrong, Barney. Junior's . . . savage. He takes what he wants—and throws it away when he's through with it. That's what he did to Thora Gleason. It's what he's doing to me. And . . . I'm scared of him."

Barney stared down into her dark eyes. "Are you accusing Rodney Westervelt of croaking the Gleason girl?"

"N-no. I didn't say that. But he's capable of it. Any man who'd beat a woman with his f-fists might also do something . . . worse."

"He beat Thora?"

"I don't know. But he beat *me*." Quietly she peeled her black taffeta dress down off her shoulders. Her skin would have been dazzling in its creamy whiteness except for the disfiguring black-and-blue marks on her upper arms.

When he saw the bruises, he swore softly. "Junior did that?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Night before last."

"Where?"

"In . . . my apartment."

"What was he doing there?"

She blushed. "Telling me he was . . . through with me." She turned her head in uncomfortable embarrassment.

"You were his girl?"

"For awhile," she admitted ruefully. "It didn't last long. Nobody ever lasts long with Junior."

Barney said: "He threw you over for somebody else?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Martha Deayne."

"The hell you gargle!"

"It's true."

"And you tried to hold him?"

"Yes. I pleaded with him. I . . . loved him, Barney. But he knew how to stop that. I hate him, now. Which was what he wanted. That's why he beat me."

"And you say he gave the same kind of deal to Thora Gleason?"

Peg nodded. "I don't suppose I've got so much kick coming, when I think about her. She was his girl until he started . . . going around with me. . . ."

"Oh. So he ditched her for you, huh?"

"Yes."

"Then, later, he gave you the gate when he started fooling around with Martha Deayne."

"Y-yes."

"Did the Old Man know that Junior was flinging woo with girls here in the store?"

Peg Vollney nodded and shuddered. "Yes. He knew. He even came to me not long ago and made th-threats. He

said I had to quit seeing his son; or else s-something would happen to me. . . ."

"Hm-m-m. That was nice. Did you break up with Junior after that?"

"I—I didn't have to. Junior did the breaking. By that time he'd already fallen for Martha."

Barney said: "And now she's dead. So is Thora Gleason. And you're scared."

PEG suddenly flung herself into Barney's hard arms. "D-don't let them do anything to me, Barney! Please!" Her crimson lips were tremulously upturned, and her dark eyes were deep wells of supplication.

In the light of his new knowledge of Junior Westervelt's habits, an abrupt fear assailed him regarding red-haired Kitty Cavane.

Suppose it *had* been Junior who murdered Thora Gleason and planted that dummy on Barney's desk, with Kitty and Martha Deayne secretly watching? Suppose it *had* been Junior who had slipped into the merchandise-display department a few moments ago and knifed Martha Deayne to keep her from spilling? Or, for that matter, suppose Old Man Westervelt had murdered the Deayne cutie in order to save his son from a murder charge?

Both Westervelts had had the opportunity to stab Martha. They'd both been in the corridor near the merchandise-display suite. And now they were searching for Kitty Cavane—perhaps not to question her, but to bump her off!

Barney pushed Peg Vollney from his arms. "I'm getting out of here!" he rasped.

"But—but you c-can't leave me here alone!" she wailed.

"You won't be alone, babe." He moved over to the lavatory and opened the door. "Feeling any better, Percy?"

The window-dresser wiped his lips on a paper towel and said: "A little, thanks."

"Then come here. I want to ask you something."

Milton looked at him dully. "What?"

"Listen. You knew about Martha Deayne being croaked, didn't you?"

"I—I—yes."

"How did you find it out?"

Percy said: "It w-was when I went into my suite, looking for smelling-salts. I knew Martha kept some in the rest-room; she was subject to dizzy spells."

"Okay. Go on."

"W-WELL, I didn't see Martha in the outer office but Kitty was there. So I asked Kitty to go into the rest-room and get the bottle for me. Kitty opened the rest-room door. Then she screamed. I rushed over . . . and saw Martha's body. . . ."

"Why didn't you raise a bleat? Why didn't you tell me when you saw me in the corridor?" Barney demanded bitterly.

"I—I was afraid to."

"Afraid?"

"For Kitty's sake. I realized that the murderer had killed Martha because she knew too much; and Kitty might be next. So I told Kitty to get out—run away. And I k-kept my mouth shut so that she'd have a chance to escape from the store."

A weight seemed to lift from Barney's broad shoulders. "Then Kitty's gone? You warned her, and she lammed?"

"Y-yes."

"Where did she go?"

"I d-don't know. I didn't wait to ask her."

Barney snarled: "You damned aap! She's the key to this whole mess! I'm going to find her—and call the cops! I'm tired of fooling around."

"But—but we're locked in!" Percy whispered.

"Yeah. And I'm getting out!" Barney pelted to a window behind Old Man Westervelt's massive desk. He unlatched it and raised the sash. He stared outward and downward.

Peg Vollney whimpered: "You can't do that, Barney! You'll kill yourself!"

"Maybe not, babe," he grunted.

But he wasn't any too sure. It was

eight full floors to the street, and a sheer drop. Rain whispered against the smooth granite sides of the building, making the stones treacherously slippery. There was a cast iron overflow-pipe running perpendicularly from the rooftop water-tank to an alley outlet far below.

The store dick eyed the set-up with dour distaste. That iron water-pipe was strong enough to support his weight; but if he ever lost his grip on it—good night, Barney Cunard!

It was a risk he'd have to take, and nuts to the possible consequences. He swung himself over the ledge and made a grab for the pipe. Then, inch by cautious inch, he edged his legs over the sill. He clung to the wet pipe like a huge monkey.

SWEAT ran down from the inner band of his slouch hat and joined trickles with the raindrops running into his eyes. His arms ached with the strain of supporting his two hundred pounds, and his hands felt numb from desperate pressure around the icy pipe. He clenched his teeth and inched downward.

There was an open window at the seventh floor, directly below him to the left. He lowered himself level with it; started to swing a leg over the sill. Then he drew back, cursing. The window gave access to the try-on room of the corset department, and a bulky matron was standing over by a mirror, lacing herself into a whalebone-and-lastex harness to the accompaniment of sundry grunts and wheezes. Barney shuddered at the bleat she'd emit if she ever saw him coming through that window. She'd have the whole floor in a panic.

It just wouldn't do. He'd have to try the sixth.

Down he went, inches at a time. His belt caught on a projecting pipe-collar, and he felt the leather pull away from the buckle. "Gawd!" he whispered, and risked a one-handed grab for his pants. He caught them before they could slip more than a little; and for a moment he clung motionlessly in space and cursed.



Peg peeled the dress down and showed the black-and-blue marks on her arm.

And at age-long last he was level with the sixth floor window. It opened into the sporting-goods department; and nobody fortunately happened to be purchasing fishing-tackle or boxing gloves just then. There wasn't even a clerk in sight, for which Barney was duly grateful. Gasp-

ing and red-faced, he swung himself like an unbalanced pendulum until his legs hooked the sill. He gave himself a shove—and reached safety.

Crouching low, he looked around to see if he'd been noticed. Apparently the coast was clear. He hitched up his belt, made hasty repairs on it and then made for the escalator, narrow-eyed and wary.

His Police Positive .38 snub-nose was down in his basement desk, and he decided to get it while the getting was good. Then he'd phone headquarters, notify them about the two murders, and start an immediate search for Kitty Cavane.

When he thought of that job, his heart sank. He hadn't the foggiest idea where to start looking for the red-haired cutie. Would she have gone home to her own apartment? It wasn't likely. She was too smart for such a dumb stunt.

Riding the moving staircase, Barney finally reached the basement and made for his office. When he opened the door, he saw that Perc Milton had told the truth: The Oscarina had been removed from the desk. Barney hauled his roscoe from the top drawer and shoved it into his pocket. Then he reached for his phone to call the police.

It jingled as he touched it. Someone was calling him. He lifted the receiver. "Yeah?"

"B-Barney? This is Kitty Cavane. I'm s-scared green!"

CHAPTER VI

Crack on the Noggin

THE store dick stiffened. He forgot all about calling police headquarters. "What? Kitty? Where are you?"

"I—I'm over across the street in Constance Hotel, Room Four-Thirteen. I've been trying to reach you for the last half-hour. Oh, Barney. . . .!"

He said: "Listen, kid. You stay right there. Don't leave. And don't let anybody in. I'm coming over. Catch?"

"I c-catch."

He slammed up the receiver and sprinted out of his little office, dashing out into the rain through the employees' entrance. The rear alley was wide, but clogged with delivery-wagons bearing the Westervelt coat of arms. Barney had to squeeze through a narrow space between two trucks, and a couple of buttons popped off his vest.

Pelting out of the alley, he lumbered across the street against the traffic-light, snarling up a street-car and two taxicabs in the process. Oblivious to chauffeurs' shouted oaths, he gained the opposite curb unscathed and went surging into the lobby of the Hotel Constance.

IT WAS a cheap, run-down hostelry that had seen better days, back in the Wellsbach gas-light era. Barney strode past the desk without stopping and entered the old-fashioned, open-grillwork, pullrope elevator. The cage creaked and jounced under his weight. "Fourth floor, cousin," he said to the operator.

The lift shuddered upward wearily. Cunard cursed its slowness.

Emerging at the fourth, Barney legged it to the door of Room 413 and knocked.

"W-who is it?" That was Kitty Cavane's voice, quavering and decidedly uneasy.

"Me. Barney Cunard. Open up. It's okay."

The door swung inward.

Kitty was standing before him. Her red hair made a cascade of waved flame-strands about her, dimpled white shoulders. "Barney—Barney darling—!" she whimpered, and threw herself into his bear-like embrace.

And she was whispering: "B-Barney . . . I'm so glad you came. . . .! If you hadn't answered the phone that last time I—I think I'd have lost my mind . . . what's left of it!"

"Perc Milton came rushing into the merchandise-display, looking for smelling-salts. He told me about Thora Gleason being d-dead. Then, a minute later,

we discovered Martha Deayne's b-body!" She shuddered at the recollection.

"Yeah? Then what?"

"Perc told me to run away—quickly. He said I was in danger; said I knew too much. He told me I'd be k-killed, too, if I didn't get out of the store. . . . So I put on my topcoat and ran out through the rear door of the suite."

Barney's fingers tightened on her arms. "By God! I'd forgotten about that back door out of the merchandise-display layout! Anybody could have sneaked in that way and croaked Martha while you were in the front office—and you would not have known a damned thing about it!"

Kitty nodded.

"And you were lamming out that back way while I was coming along the front corridor to look for you! That's when I barged into Milton and the Westervelts. . . ." He hauled her close to him. "Listen, babe. I want the truth. Who planted that Oscarina on my desk last night?"

Her eyes widened. "Why, that was—Barney, look out!"

He released her and started to swing around. But he wasn't fast enough. Something as hard as the Rock of Gibraltar bashed down on his cranium with a conking sound that should have been recorded for future use in Hollywood. Then he took a trip to dreamland.

CHAPTER VII

Cops and Robbers

HE AWOKE with an ache in every bone of his body. For a minute he thought it was morning again, and that he had another hangover. Then, abruptly, he remembered all that had happened to him. "Kitty!" he called out thickly.

Kitty didn't answer. She wasn't there. Neither was the person who had raised an ostrich-egg on Barney's noggin.

He staggered to his feet and watched the room drift around him like a crazy carrousel. On the third circuit he



Something glittered and a knife smacked into the wall, point first.

spotted the wall-phone and managed to grab it as it floated by. He rattled the hook and snarled: "Get me police headquarters—quick!"

After awhile he heard: "Central Precinct."

"Give me homicide."

Another wait. Then a tough voice said: "Homicide detail. Maguire talking."

That was Maguire, Barney's side-kick in the old plainclothes days. "This is Barney Cunard."

"Hi, Shaggy. How goes?"

"Listen. Two janes got scolloped over in the Westervelt department store. One last night and one this morning. Get a squad over there and put the pressure on the Westervelts. They're trying to cover up."

Maguire said: "Where the hell have

you been in the past ten minutes? We've already got that beef. Old Man Westervelt himself phoned us about it."

"What?"

"Yeah. Sure."

BARNEY felt dizzy. What in hell had happened to make Westervelt change his mind so completely? "Okay, Maguire. So you've already got the beef. But here's a new one. Send out a radio bleat for a wren named Kitty Cavane. She's red-haired and about twenty-four and damned pretty. I think the killer snatched her. It's a hell of a mess."

Maguire said: "Say—you're not drunk, are you?"

"I'm leveling, you dope!"

"Okay. The bleat goes out for a frill named Kitty Cavane. Anything else?"

"Not now. I'm going back over to the Westervelt store. See you later."

Ringling off, Barney steadied himself to keep from falling down again. He edged cautiously toward the room's door like a slackwire walker. Half-way to the goal, he saw something on the floor. It was a white silk handkerchief with embroidered initials in lavender: "P.M."

Barney whispered: "Percy Milton!" on an indrawn breath, and stooped to pick up the square of silk. That was disastrous. He went all the way down—and couldn't get up again. A minor concussion can do some damned funny things to a man's brain.

Finally he contrived to drag himself back to the wall-phone. By supporting himself against the wall, he was able to gain his feet; but he had to keep his eyes closed or he'd have taken another nose-dive. He lifted the receiver, and when the clerk at the desk answered he moaned: "Send up a bellhop with a pint of rye. Any kind of rye—but quick."

THAT'S where the bellhop found him five minutes later. But the boy asked no questions as long as Barney forked over a five-dollar william and didn't request change.

Barney unscrewed the metal cap. Then

he tilted the jorum to his mouth and allowed a good half-pint of raw fire gurgle down his gullet. The instant it hit bottom he began to feel better. He discovered that he could stand up with reasonable assurance that he couldn't topple over backward.

It was good to get out in the rain. The pelting drops on his face refreshed him as he picked his careful way across the street to the Westervelt store. By the time he barged into the emporium he was almost his own man again. He went in through the front entrance and saw a uniformed copper standing just inside the storm doors. The harness bull recognized him. "Hiya, Barney. Trouble in the joint, huh?"

Barney said: "Yeah. Who's here?"

"Lerch of Homicide and two of his bright boys."

"Where are they?"

"Up on eight, I think. The boys just carried the two stiffs out the back way."

"Much obliged." Barney went over to the elevators and caught a lift to the eighth floor. He made straight for the Westervelt suite. But instead of going directly through the main door into the ante-room, he walked around to the side corridor and entered through the stenographer's cubicle. He wanted to arrive unobserved, so that maybe he could listen to what the Westervelts were saying to Lieutenant Lerch.

When he trudged into the steno's room, he got a surprise. Peg Vollney was at the typewriter desk, pecking away with two inexpert fingers. Barney said: "For God's sakes! What's the idea?"

"What idea?"—she countered evasively.

"You being here. When did Junior let you out? And where's Perc Milton? And why did the Old Man finally decide to phone the cops?"

"Percy escaped out the win—" She caught herself and switched to: "I don't know anything about it."

An abrupt feeling of relief surged through Barney's veins. "So Perc climbed down the pipe the same as I did, huh? Then when the Westervelts came

back and found out that Perc and I had lammed, they decided they'd better get in touch with headquarters. They also decided to turn you loose. Is that it?"

She wouldn't meet his eyes. "Wh-what do you mean, turned me loose?"

Barney's jaw jutted forward. "Are you trying to hand me a run-around, babe?"

She refused to answer.

HE PUT his palms on her shoulders and forced her back in the swivel-chair, so that her face was tilted up to him whether she liked it or not. He said: "So the Westervelts got to you! They bought you off. That's just dandy."

Her trembling hand darted out to a push-button on the desk. It was connected with a buzzer in Senior's private sanctum. Barney yelped an oath and slapped her fingers aside. Then, stealing a trick from Junior Westervelt, he grabbed up the wire and tore it from the wall. He pivoted and went to the door of Senior's office.

He heard the Old Man's pompous voice: "So you see, lieutenant, my actions may have been misguided; but my motives were quite sound. I delayed calling you because I thought I could find Miss Cavane and get the necessary information from her, thus making it easy for you to arrest the murderer. Unfortunately, she has disappeared. I trust that you will not—er, ~~shame~~—cause me too much embarrassment because of my interference. As you know, I have influence, and—"

Barney barged into the room. "Yeah. You've got influence. But it won't do you any good when I get through with you!"

Senior, Junior, and Lerch swung around to stare at him. The Westervelts bristled with surprise and antagonism. Lerch looked troubled. He said: "Why, hello, Barney. Er—listen—"

"Listen my eyeball! You listen! If these damned meddlers hadn't stuck their beaks in, that second murder might not have happened. While they were

horsing around playing first-aid to a dame that had fainted, Martha Deayne got opened. And even then they would not let me put in a call to you. How do we know the Westervelts aren't the killers?"

Senior turned an apoplectic purple. "Damn you—how dare you insinuate—!"

Lerch tried to soothe matters. "Take it easy, Barney. Mr. Westervelt has already explained why he acted as he did."

"Nuts! I'm not accusing him; but if he's so damned innocent, why the hell did he lock me and Perc Milton and Peg Vollney here in this office? Hell, the killer would have had time to lam from here to Alaska while everybody was fumbling around! The Westervelts are fronting for somebody."

Lerch widened his eyes. "What's this about being locked in an office?"

Junior said: "He's a liar."

"Yeah? Am I?" Barney strode into the steno's cubicle and grabbed Peg Vollney's arm; sank his fingers into her flesh. He hauled her back into Senior's sanctum. "How about it, babe?" Didn't the Westervelts lock us in here to keep us from beefing about the murders? And didn't you tell me Junior had been playing around with both those janes that got opened?"

She paled and shook her head. "I—I never told you anything of the kind. And I wasn't locked anywhere." Barney looked at her in amazement.

JUNIOR smiled over an indrawn breath of relief. "You see, Lieutenant? Cunard's either crazy or drunk—or both. Smell his breath. It's like a distillery."

The homicide man looked dubious. There was no question about it: the aroma of raw rye exuding from Barney Cunard was almost a visible aura. The store dick could almost read Lerch's thoughts. Lerch was up against a tough one. To believe Barney meant jeopardizing his official career; because Old Man Westervelt packed plenty of civic drag. "Afraid you can't make it stick, Barney. It's just your unsupported word."

"The word of a man who's been fired," Junior put in.

Barney's rage choked him. "Okay. So I'm fired. But I'm putting the knuckle on the lug who knifed those two janes. And God help you if the trail points your way!"

Barney turned and strode ponderously from the suite. He rode the escalators down to the street floor; trudged toward the basement stairway. As he passed the jewelry department, a sales-girl hailed him. "Oh, Mr. Cunard, we found that missing stuff."

He stopped and stared at her. "What missing stuff?"

"Why—I sent you a note about it a while ago. Didn't you get it?"

"No. Maybe the kid left it on my desk. I've been out. What about it?"

The girl said: "Some costume-jewelry turned up missing. Rhinestone pins and such. But I just discovered it here among the genuine diamond stock, of all places. I can't imagine how it happened, but—"

Barney growled: "Okay, kiddo. Report it to Junior if you want to. I'm all washed up here." He tramped down to his basement office; started gathering his personal belongings together.

He was just clearing out his last desk-drawer when somebody slipped into the little dungeon and softly closed the door. "Barney—"

He looked up and saw Peg Vollney standing there.

CHAPTER VIII

Mike Gleason's Tea

THE brunette cutie said: "You think I'm a heel, don't you, Barney?"

He saw no reason to deny it. "Yeah," he told her. "But maybe it's not altogether your fault."

Her crimson lips twisted wryly. "Thanks for giving me the benefit of the doubt. I suppose you know why I lied to those headquarters men, don't you?"

"Sure. Junior paid you to do it."

"No," she said. "Senior threatened me if I didn't."

"Senior? Threatened you?"

She nodded. "When he came back to his office and found out that you and Percy Milton had escaped down that water-pipe, he knew the police would be showing up soon. So he called them himself. And he said he'd . . . make me regret it if I mentioned being locked in his office or told about Junior being mixed up with those d-dead girls. He'd already dismissed his secretary for the day. He got rid of her when he and Junior took me upstairs this morning. So he put me at her desk and warned me not to say anything. I—I couldn't help myself, Barney." She came close to him, pleading with her dark eyes and imploring with her trembling form.

She looked so thoroughly forlorn and contrite that he slipped a soothing arm around her cuddly waist. He said: "That's all right, kiddo. I guess I can't blame you much. You *were* in a spot."

She shuddered against him. "Y-yes. And what else could I do?" she whimpered. "The Westervelts are too b-big for me to buck, Barney!"

He said: "The bigger they grow, the harder they fall. I'm not scared of 'em. I'm going to do something about it."

She squirmed around in his arms and faced him, jamming against his chest. "Barney—get me out of it! I—I don't want to go to jail on account of the lies they made me t-tell. . . .!"

He detached a key from his ring and handed it to the brunette girl. "Okay, honey. This is to the front door of my flat." He told her the address. "Grab a hack and go there; hide out for awhile. When the time comes, you can spill your story to the police without worrying about what the Westervelts might do to you."

"C-can't you come with me, Barney?"

"Not yet. I've got some things to do. First I've got to have a talk with Mike Gleason about last night. Then I've got to locate Kitty Cavane."

"You—you know where she is?"

"I've got a damned good idea. And when I've seen her, I think I'll have this case all iced up. You go to my joint and wait for me. I'll be needing your testimony."

"I'll do anything you w-want me to do," she whispered. There was a lot more than mere gratitude in the kiss she gave him.

AFTER awhile she pushed herself free and ran from his office.

He waited a few moments, and then he, too, left.

He stopped at the time-clock long enough to riffle through the cards until he found one with Mike Gleason's name and address on it. Mike lived in a flat over on Fenworth Place. Barney committed it to memory; then he went out and hailed a taxi.

Ten minutes later he knocked on the Irishman's door. Mike, pajama-clad and sleepy-looking, opened up. When he saw Barney, his eyes were suddenly disturbed and uneasy. "Hi, me bhoy. Whut brings ye here to disturb an ould man's sleep?"

The store dick said: "I wanted to talk to you about Thora. She used to run around with Junior Westervelt, didn't she?"

Mike flushed. "Yeah. An' he gave her a raw deal, the scut! I'd like to twist his dir-rty neck for him. But Thora thinks he'll come back to her whin he gits tired foolin' around with thim other dames—Say! Whut the hell businessa is it of yours, Barney? Whut's on your mind?"

"Plenty," the store dick said slowly.

"Meanin' whut?"

"Listen, Mike. I'm going to ask you a question, and I want a straight answer."

"A question?"

"Yes. What happened at the store last night?"

Mike seemed to shrink in his flannel pajamas. "I—I don't git ye, Barney," he mumbled sullenly.

"Yes, you do. Come clean, Mike. I'm your friend."

"Are ye?"

"You know I am. Now—where did you go last night?"

"I didn't go nowheres. I was right on me job."

"That's not so, Mike. You know it isn't. You left the store for awhile, didn't you?"

Mike licked his lips. "No. I didn't leave the store, Barney. I . . . went to sleep." Then he clutched at Barney's sleeve. "I don't know how ye found out, but . . . that's what I done. I suppose it means I'll git the sack?"

"It means worse than that," Barney said slowly.

MIKE'S lips trembled, and a dribble of moisture ran down his chin. "But the whole thing was funny!" he protested. "I niver slept on the job before. 'Twas somethin' in me tay, it seemed like. I always drink me tay out of me thermos bottle at midnight. It kapes me awake. But this time it made me so damned drowsy I couldn't hold me eyes open. I dozed for an hour on me chair in the basement. An' yit—'tis the queerest thing, but when I woke up—"

"Yes? What about when you woke up?"

Mike quavered: "I knew I done wrong by sleepin'; an' I was expectin' the alarm-patrol to be bustin' in any minute. Ye see, I'm the only watchman in the buildin', an' me jooty is to make the rounds from top to bottom ivery hour, punchin' me key into the alarm-system on the different floors. If I don't ring me boxes at certain times, the central patrol knows somethin' is wr-wrong an' sinds over a squad to investigate."

"But nobody showed up?"

"Divvle a bit. So I gr-rabs me phone an' calls 'em up, an' they laughed at me an' told me that me boxes had all been punched okay. So maybe I musta done it in me sleep, I thinks, outa habit. An' I sez nawthin' about it to nobody."

Barney sighed gently. He said: "Listen, Mike. I suppose Thora knew a hell of a lot about your job? I mean regard-

(Continued on page 105)

JERRY JASPER

IN A TOWN IN PENNSYLVANIA, JASPER, THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR, AND KATIE LANG ARE IN A TAXI, BOUND FOR THE RAILROAD STATION...

"MURDER EN ROUTE" by
Ray McClelland

I'LL BE GLAD TO GO BACK TO NEW YORK TO TESTIFY FOR SAM KERN. HE'S A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE.

I KNEW YOU WOULD, BABE.

WHO SENT YOU TO FIND ME?

I REALLY DON'T KNOW - CALL CAME OVER THE PHONE, THEN A MESSENGER CAME OVER WITH INSTRUCTIONS AND A WAD OF DOUGH.



THEN YOU CAN PROVIDE AN ALIBI FOR SAM AND SAVE HIM FROM THE HOT SEAT - HEY-- DUCK!

SAM'S IN A TIGHT SPOT. HIS GUN KILLED THE WATCHMAN IN A HOLD-UP AND ALL THE EVIDENCE IS AGAINST HIM.

BUT SAM WAS WITH ME WHEN THAT HAPPENED. THE "SPIDER" AND HIS MOB PULLED THAT JOB!



A
STRANGE
CAR PULLS
ALONGSIDE
AND
TOMMY
GUNS
RATTLE
AS THE
CAB IS
RIDDLED
WITH
BULLETS



THE DRIVER'S
DEAD!

LUCKY WE GOT TO
THE FLOOR IN TIME.

COME ON, BABY, WE CAN'T STICK
AROUND HERE. LET'S SCRAM!



I'M NOT GOING!
I'M AFRAID!

HEY!

COME BACK
HERE!

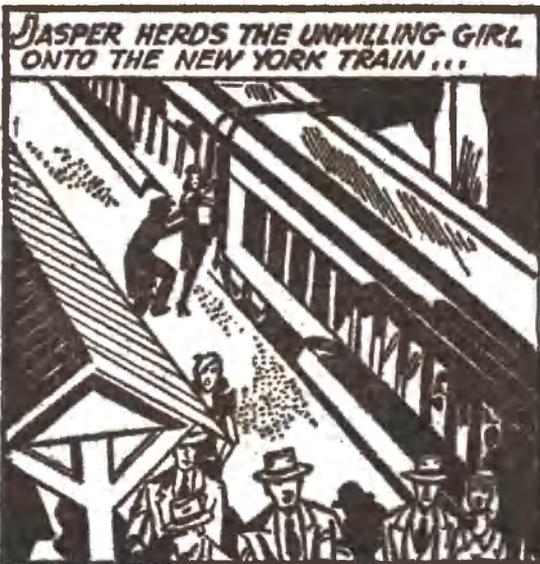
OOH-H!





THE 'SPIDER' IS OUT TO GET ME! I'M NOT GOING TO NEW YORK!

LISTEN, KID, I'VE GOT THE RAILROAD TICKETS AND YOU'RE GOING WITH ME!



JASPER HERDS THE UNWILLING GIRL ONTO THE NEW YORK TRAIN...



YOU'LL BE SAFE IN THIS COMPARTMENT.

I WISH I WERE IN CALIFORNIA.



YOU JUST SAW A SAMPLE OF THE 'SPIDER'S' METHODS, BUT HOW DID HE KNOW WE WERE IN THAT CAB-?



I SEE IT ALL NOW. THE 'SPIDER' HIMSELF HIRED ME TO FIND YOU AND BRING YOU BACK-

BUT I WOULD GIVE SAM HIS ALIBI, AND THAT'S NOT WHAT THE 'SPIDER' WANTS AT ALL!



HE DIDN'T PLAN FOR YOU TO GET TO THE WITNESS CHAIR. HE JUST WANTED ME TO PUT THE FINGER ON YOU SO HE COULD GET AT YOU. I'M GLAD I ARRANGED FOR A POLICE GUARD WHEN WE GET TO NEW YORK.

AFTER HOURS OF TRAVELLING ...

JERRY LOCKS THE COMPARTMENT DOOR...

I'M GOING OUT FOR A LITTLE WHILE, I'LL JUST PUT THESE NIPPERS ON YOU SO YOU WON'T JUMP OFF THE TRAIN.



JERRY RELAXES IN THE SMOKING-CAR FOR HALF AN HOUR ...

I'D BETTER BE GETTING BACK -



HE NOTICES THE DOOR OPEN ...

SAY -- SOMETHING'S WRONG!



I SUPPOSE YOU'RE ONE OF THE "SPIDER'S" MOB!



SHE'S D-DEAD! BUT I DIDN'T KILL HER - I SWEAR IT!





I'M INNOCENT, MR. JASPER.

SO YOU KNOW MY NAME - DON'T TRY TO KID ME!



I'VE SEEN YOUR PICTURE IN THE NEW YORK PAPERS. I'M WANDA TALLEY, A REPORTER FOR "STAR FEATURES". I WAS ASSIGNED TO GET A STORY ON KATIE LANG'S ROMANCE WITH SAM KERN, WHO'S ON TRIAL FOR MURDER.



I SAW YOU LEAVE THE COMPARTMENT AND I THOUGHT I COULD GET A STORY FROM KATIE. I FOUND HER DEAD. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TOUCHED THE KNIFE, BUT I DIDN'T THINK!



ALL RIGHT - ALL RIGHT! WHERE WERE YOU RIDING ON THIS TRAIN?

I HAVE A COMPARTMENT NEAR THE OTHER END OF THE CAR.



WE'LL GO THERE. THIS ROOM GIVES ME THE CREEPS.



AS THEY GO DOWN THE DIMLY-LIT AISLE, SOMETHING BRUSHES JASPER'S LEGS...

HE SHOVES THE HAND AWAY AND FINDS IT BLOODY...



OPENING THE CURTAINS, HE SEES A MAN'S BODY IN UNDERWEAR -- AND A VEST...

CROAKED! THAT VEST LOOKS LIKE-



IN WANDA TALLEY'S COMPARTMENT...

STAY IN HERE WHILE I SPEAK TO THE CONDUCTOR.

OKAY, BUT HURRY BACK SOON.



IN THE SMOKING CAR, JERRY FINDS THE CONDUCTOR COUNTING TICKETS...

I WANT TO TALK TO YOU, CONDUCTOR.

WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?



I'M A PRIVATE DETECTIVE, TAKING A GAL BACK TO NEW YORK. SHE JUST GOT KNIFED. SHE'S DEAD!

WHAT!



I'VE GOT ANOTHER PRISONER, EVEN MORE VALUABLE IN THE SAME CASE - IN COMPARTMENT FOUR. I DON'T WANT TO BE DISTURBED.



BACK IN WANDA'S COMPARTMENT...

STUFF THESE PILLOWS TO LOOK LIKE A PERSON ASLEEP -

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?



I EXPECT A VISITOR, NOW WE'LL LOCK THE DOOR, PUT THE LIGHT OUT AND WAIT.



JERRY SNAPS ON THE LIGHT AS A KNIFE RIPS VICIOUSLY AT THE PILLOWS IN THE BERTH...



IT'S THE CONDUCTOR!

LATER, A KEY TURNS IN THE LOCK AND THE DOOR IS QUIETLY OPENED...



SAVAGELY THE KNIFE IS TURNED ON JERRY, BUT HIS GUN BARKS...

7

THIS GUY'S A PONEY, YOU'LL BE SAFE NOW.

BUT WHY SHOULD THE CONDUCTOR-



THE REAL CONDUCTOR IS DEAD IN A BERTH OUT THERE, THIS GUY KILLED HIM AND STOLE HIS UNIFORM AND KEYS.



HE MUST BE ONE OF THE "SPIDER'S" GANG.

NOT EXACTLY-



WITHOUT THE FALSE MOUSTACHE AND GLASSES, IT'S -THE "SPIDER" HIMSELF!

DAMN YOU!



WHEN THEY ALIGHT AT NEW YORK ...

HELLO, LIEUTENANT. YOU'LL FIND KATIE CROAKED IN COMPARTMENT ONE. HERE'S HER KILLER. HE DID IN THE CONDUCTOR, GOT IN AND COOLED HER WHILE I WAS AWAY.

GOOD THING I GOT KATIE'S AFFADAVIT IN WRITING. IT'LL CLEAR SAM KERN. NOW I CAN DO WITH SOME RELAXING.

SO CAN I. JERRY COME UP TO MY APARTMENT AND HAVE A DRINK -



READ **JERRY JASPER** IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

SPILL NO BLOOD

By TOM STONE



Illustrated by
Frank Volp

I FOLLOWED the gullied lane over the hill. There's a pleasure in poking along a road. A road can go any place, like a free man.

This one passed an overgrown cellar-hole where a fire had devoured everything but memories and a chimney. Swifts hunted the darkening sky. A katydid offered the opening premise in

an ancient argument with a katydidn't.

The lane slid through a bank and said hello to the little-used township road to Wickahonk. I sat on the high bank, relit my pipe because the Jersey mosquitoes were foraging for blood in force. The night dropped in for a visit and brought along handfuls of stars.

You tire of city life and the job of

She was helpless and scared that night on the country road. How was I to know that she was a slick operator with one of the toughest gambling mobs in the state? But she wanted out—and I made it my business to show her the way to freedom.

I caught Nick on the chin, then I hit Pete and he went down and out.



private investigator in Newark. So Jeremiah T. Wendell had taken over a distant cousin's bungalow in the mid-Jersey hills.

I had two weeks. There's an elm by the bungalow where a man can lie down and forget, ice in the kitchen for mixed drinks, the nags running at a nearby

track if you've the urge to drop two bucks, and the lonely hills to wander over.

I don't know how long I sat there, unless you measure time by the pipeful. That would be two pipefuls and seven burnt matches later.

Then the brisk tap-tap of heels on the hard macadam, and I glimpsed an approaching splotch of white. Headlights glowed. The heel tapping ceased, and the splotch stood in the ditch a hundred feet distant.

The car came up fast, braked to a stop. Behind the glaring headlights, a man's harsh voice jeered: "You had enough or you wanna walk back to town, huh?"

A woman's angry voice. "I'll walk, thank you!"

"Six miles, and maybe you'll learn some sense, huh?"

"Not your kind of sense!"

Suddenly, orange-red flame stabbed the night. CRACK. The acute danger of a roaring gun. She screamed shrilly.

"So long," harsh voice called, and the car took off. Below me, the swift passage of a low-slung, shiny sedan.

A couple of minutes passed, then the tap-tap of heels again. They were headed in my direction.

Below me, not more than fifteen feet distant, she stopped. A white patch of life, poised and listening. She smelled the pipe smoke, I thought, way out here in the loneliness and dark.

"It's all right," I said. "He fired in the air."

She stooped, straightened, and the white shoulders were a bit lopsided. She quavered: "W—who are y-you?"

"A friend by the side of the road. Was that a yes-or-walk-back rat?"

Up the road, the approaching hum of a car, a funneling of light behind a thank-you-ma'am. She uttered a cry, boited across the road, and stumbled up the high bank. My hand found hers, pulled her to the top. Instinctively, we crouched low behind a squat cedar.

A sedan braked to a stop below, only

the top visible. "Helen!" harsh voice shouted.

Nobody answered. He started to back the sedan around. I patted her shoulder, whispered: "If he comes up here, I'll shoot him with my pipe, honey."

He had the sedan turned around, shouted: "There's snakes in there!"

After the gun shot, that was almost funny. Imagine, snakes competing with a bullet!

"You be on the job tomorrow night," he warned. "Or we make a phone call, see?"

Even the katydids offered no rebuttal.

He shouted, "The hell with you," and the sedan swooped off.

We stood up, her head level with my shoulder. "A high-heeled shoe," I suggested, "makes an excellent weapon. But it's no good against a gun."

"You knew I—I had the shoe off and—"

"You've a right to be scared. What's it all about?"

"I'm not afraid of him!"

Bravery in it, like tattered flags over Corregidor.

I asked lightly: "Who is the tough guy?"

She slipped on the slipper. A fragrance, subtle and blood-stirring in her nearness, but she avoided the question.

"We can walk into Wickahonk," I said. "Or we can walk over the hill to my place."

"I can't walk six miles in—in high heels! And—and I'm not afraid of a man with a—a pipe!"

I laughed, said: "I'll use that in my next commercial."

WE STUMBLED up the rutted lane.

She had ceased trembling, but she wouldn't join in with my attempts at conversation. Five minutes got us to the bungalow, the lights on. She sat in a club chair, and taking off the slippers, massaged her bare feet.

As a guess, say twenty-four years old. Auburn haired. Tanned, above the white blouse. Green or gray colored eyes?

That could wait. Rather a nice build, the legs long and slim.

I asked: "Cigarette?"

"I never smoke, Mr.—uh—"

"Highball?"

"I never drink."

"Glass of water, milk? Or don't you ever—"

"Water, please. Do I sound like a prude?"

"No," I said truthfully, and fetched the water.

She drank greedily, set the empty glass on the rug.

"I've seen your face somewhere before," I offered, puzzled. "What's the scare-line about a phone call, eh?"

Whatever jumped into her eyes, crawled under the lids a second later. She gave me a level stare. "Are you about thirty years old?"

"Twenty-nine, if I live till December."

"Six-foot tall?"

"The name is Jerry. Some vital statistics. Six-one tall. Weight, one-ninety. Mole on left shoulder blade. Very dangerous, known to snore in his sleep." Lightly: "Why the chill-stuff with the gun?"

She countered: "Are you married?"

"Should I be?"

"What's your job, Jerry?"

We weren't kidding anybody. In my game, if they don't talk, you wait. If that doesn't work, you browse around. The way it stood, I was Jerry. She was Helen, an attractive woman you meet along a lonely, dark road to the sound of a gun.

"I'm on vacation," I finally explained. "I couldn't stand the six kids and wife any longer. Besides, she didn't know how to boil water. Look, sleep in the bedroom. Use my spare pajamas and lock the door from the inside. Or you can—" I left that drift.

"You're a bachelor, a nice bachelor," she decided, and slipping on the slippers, stood up and tugged the green skirt into position. "Thanks, Jerry."

"I'll get the car out," I said, shrugging.

Twelve-ten P.M., in a one-street town. A neon sign advertised FRED'S BARBE-

CUE. Juke box music. Three parked jalopies. A man leaning against a lamp-post. He was the town marshal or the man who rolled up the sidewalks for the night.

She stood by the roadster and said: "Thanks, for everything."

"Look, if you need some more help—"

"Goodbye, Jerry."

"Goodnight, Helen."

The roadster made a U-turn with a little help. Look me up sometime in the Fournier Building in Newark. Jeremiah T. Wendell, eighth floor. I'm a ball of curiosity, and bounce around. Questions don't bother me any more than buzzing mosquitoes in a bungalow bedroom.

Who was she? What did she do? Where did she live? Who was harsh voice? Where was his hiding-rock?

Why fire a gun in the air? Chill-stuff, so she'd do what he wanted? This was more than kiss-or-walk-home.

Why the threat about a phone call? Was that enough to make her report to work tomorrow night? What color eyes, gray or green?

She was scared, no doubt about that.

I should go home to a highball and bed. So I swung the roadster around a tree-lined block, cut the lights, and drifted to a stop on a sidestreet across from Fred's.

A cab picked her up shortly and the roadster tailed along. Outside town, we met a six-lane super-highway flooded with shore traffic. Three miles along that, and the cab turned into a side road. Next, it slid between brick gate posts, reached a dimly lighted, sprawling, ex-millionaire's shanty called the FRENCH CASINO, or so the neon said.

The cab disappeared around the building and I parked at the front with the plenty-of-money cars. I was getting into it a little deeper.

Everybody knows the Casino. Four miles from the race track and the race mob for plenty of easy money. Downstairs, a glittering bar and a dance floor, handkerchief-sized. Upstairs, the real business with any kind of gambling.

The sheriff? Certainly, he raided the Casino every three weeks. That's how it kept open.

Curley Ergun, a former rum runner from Newark, ran the spot. Ergun was rich and important enough now to avoid any spilled blood. Not like the old days when he waded around in the stuff.

Things began to add up. Did she work here? Maybe you subtracted.

When the cab swung around from the back, I flagged the driver. "Just say where," the fat driver challenged.

"China," I said.

He fired a cigarette, grinned. "You got a passport, Mac?"

"Coming right up."

I pulled out a fin, slowly crumpled it into a ball. When his eyes had swallowed the ball, I tossed it onto his lap. "First, her name."

He made no move to pick up the ball. Whatever he called thinking, went on in back of his face. "For a fin, sure." He started to drive off slowly, called back, "Her name is—Helen," and gunned off.

Five bucks in a slot for a piece of gum. Maybe five bucks had been too much. Maybe fat stuff was scared. Or loyal. So what, Wendell?

SHE hadn't gone upstairs, I figured, because that's where the gambling took place. I strolled behind the Casino. Gravel walks radiated across a lawn, and beyond that under some trees, what appeared to be bungalows. Back there, eh?

I strolled along one of the walks, looking for a lighted bungalow. Short of the first tree, somebody behind me asked politely: "Are you looking for something, sir?"

I swayed, mumbled: "Lorsh my car. You sheen it, huh?"

He was taller than I, thinner. Strong fingers gripped my right elbow. "If you'll come this way, please."

So he went this way. Back to the front of the Casino where, unhesitatingly, he helped me climb into the roadster. A dumb guy, yes.

I hiccupped. I'm proud of that trick.

I can do it any time, like a bore with parlor tricks. "Thanks," I said.

"Not at all, sir."

I started the engine, said softly: "Not like the old Newark days."

That brought him closer. He put on his working clothes—thin, hard lips, taut shoulders, tough voice. "Scram, pal."

I scrambled. You don't buck Curley Ergun's mob. At least, not in their own territory.

I parked the roadster under the elm, opened the unlocked front door, and switched on lights. Emptiness, and that subtle, blood-stirring perfume that lingered to remind me she had come and gone.

A couple of minutes, and I loafed in the club chair, a tall tinkling glass in my hand. The case had been finished. A NO TRESPASSING sign. Closed. An unfinished chapter and—

Somebody opened the door and stepped inside quickly. A short, square-shouldered man with a nightmare face.

I set the drink down slowly, stood up. Anger put a sting in my voice. "You always knock, pal."

He sneered: "Starting to nose around, huh?"

Harsh voice, the guy who fired a gun along a dark road. "We don't like nosey guys, see? We don't spill no blood, but—" He let the threat hang, like the tough mug in a Grade-C chiller.

"Who doesn't want who nosing around what?" I challenged.

"You followed her to the Casino and got nosey with the cabbie. Lay off, see?"

It was practically my bungalow. Bills of Rights, sanctity of the home. I snapped: "You going or do I throw you out?"

"No sense, huh?"

"You pulled enough kid stuff for the night," I growled. "Making a girl walk a lonely road, shooting off a toy gun."

I moved across space on the balls of my feet. He didn't move. Not a hair turned over on his head. He was hardly scared to death.

"So you gotta get sense, huh?" He



The girl screamed shrilly as an orange flame stabbed the night.

glanced over my shoulder, ordered: "Pete."

It's an old gag, but I turned anyway. Pete stood there. The thin polite mug. I hadn't heard him come in the back door. I hadn't heard him come across the grass behind the Casino, either. But here he was, and no mistake,

I DUCKED, but Pete was an expert. The sap tapped the bridge of my nose. I staggered backward, slivers of pain jabbing my brain. Harsh voice whirled me around. "A little lesson, pal."

His fist cracked my mouth solidly. Then the sap tickled the back of my neck. . . .

I sat up. Somebody had run my nose through a meat chopper. An elephant's headache fired my brain.

I was on the floor. Hey, they'd remembered to shut the front door on the way out. Nice, polite pals.

I staggered into the bathroom, stared at the stranger in the mirror. They don't spill no blood, I remembered.

What was that dried stuff on my nose, on my puffed lips and chin, dribbled over my clean shirt front?

Junior, don't ever sit by the side of a road in the dark. See what happens to a nosey guy's nose?

I washed in cold water, wandered into the front room. Change that sign on the door of the Newark office, Wendell. Make it "public" investigator. You're as private as the sign on the men's room.

Oh, my drink. Maybe there was poison in the drink. I drank some of the poison. Warm, and tasting like lysol.

"They can't do this," I growled. "They—"

That face—where had I seen her before? It would come to me. In the morning. Maybe by next Valentine's Day.

Two o'clock in the morning.

What would you have done?

Sure, the bed felt soft.

The weekend race mob flooded the Casino. A hundred parked cars outside, but I didn't see Pete. I shoved through the packed crowd downstairs, walked up a wide stairway.

A chunky man in a Tux inventoried my wallet, opened a door, and said smoothly: "Right in here, sir."

Smoke and glitter and noise and bright lights in a huge room.

I bought twenty one-dollar chips from a brunette who smiled and said: "Quite the plunger, eh?"

"Nick, the Greek, in disguise."

I strolled over to the dice game. I dropped five chips backing a six to come home. The game seemed on the level. I wondered whether Ergun's stickman would switch the cubes if the stakes got high enough to matter.

I moved on, mostly kibitzing. A pause,

here, there. Five more chips gone. So I went over to the wheel in the center, where big stuff seemed to be happening.

A fat man with unhealthy red spots on his cheeks growled at a gray-haired woman: "Mabel, she's beginning to hit it big!"

"Jeff, you know what the doctor said. Don't get excited and—"

He jerked loose from her grasp, a fever alight in his eyes and folding money wadded inside one fist. He elbowed into the table like a Notre Dame fullback and I followed his interference.

A statuesque blonde in a strapless gown trilled: "Two thousand on the white! Is this my lucky night!"

A wad of other people's money backed her play. If she was on a streak, things would tighten up fast.

I leaned over Jeff's shoulders, said lightly, "Wish me luck, honey," and dropped ten chips on the diamond.

Two croupiers handled the heavy play. A little, blank-faced man. A green- or gray-eyed girl with auburn hair, tall as my shoulder. Helen, whom you meet on a lonely, dark road beneath the stars.

AT THE sound of my voice, she glanced up quickly. Dismay or disbelief in her eyes. Make that the newly battered nose, the puffy lips. She turned on a smile that had come off an assembly line and said: "No more bets, please."

I had placed her this morning. The Helen Glennway case, remember? Think back to the first of June. Along with her picture, the incident had hit the front pages of the sensation-starved city editions.

A school teacher in a one-room building in mid-Jersey. Somebody had discovered that after school she was working as a croupier for Curley Ergun. The School Board soon heard of it.

"What I do in my spare time," she'd defended herself, "is my own business. Besides, I have to earn a living."

"I don't like the publicity," Curley Ergun had said, "but people trust school teachers, see?"

The local Board of Education ordered: "Fired."

Here she was. Here I was, still nosing around. Don't attractive school teachers get scared, too?

A deft flick of her left wrist sent the ball skimming in the groove. In the traditional manner of the croupier, she drew back her hands, placed them in full view on the table top.

Her eyes found mine. They said, "Please go, Jerry." Mine must have said, "No," because she nibbled her lower lip. Nobody saw us. That little ball was drifting to a stop.

Click, the ball said.

"The white wins," Helen intoned, and the blank-faced croupier used a rake to shove money at the big winners.

Floater in the room, sensing a run, had piled in for the kill. The gambling spirit, a mixture of greed and insanity, oozed from the mob.

Again the little ball started its journey, while Helen and I played games with our eyes. The blonde won again.

"Into Curley deep, Sol," a little man gloated, and Sol said: "She's still hot."

"One thousand on the diamond," the blonde trilled.

They backed her, sure of her luck. White faces and bright eyes and fevered brains wasted on a spinning ball. Click, and wild laughter and cheers as the blonde won.

It was big, now. I wondered how much of it the house could handle.

Somebody clawed my back. I turned partly. "Is he all right?" Mabel asked nervously.

"He's winning, if that's what you mean."

"His heart," she half-sobbed, bewildered.

"Spm that thing!" Jeff howled, and dropped a wad of green stuff where the blonde had chosen the red.

There was trouble behind the table. Helen whispered to the assistant. He nodded, left quickly. Helen turned on her best smile, said: "One moment, please. Mr. Ergun is coming."

"Don't cool me off," the blonde pleaded.

The little man nudged Sol, gloated: "Curley's smart to keep that red head back there."

"An honest wheel," Sol agreed.

Curley Ergun strolled up. A big man, gray-haired and solid. A smile on his lips and hard dollar eyes. "No trouble," he offered.

NONCHALANTLY, he tossed a wallet on the table. Helen took out two slim packets of bills, her hands trembling a little. Thousand dollar bills. She counted out twenty bills slowly, laid them on the table. It wasn't quite enough, and she reached for another bill.

"You know the rules, everybody," Ergun said genially. "Twenty thousand is the house limit."

"Yellow," the blonde sneered.

"You're mistaken, Mrs. Lawson," Ergun answered quietly. "Aren't you backing the red?"

Forty grand rode on the red.

Enough excitement to last for a year. So that was the moment that fat Jeff chose to collapse. He dropped straight downward, like a wet sack. Somebody elbowed between me and the table. I wriggled down after him, burrowed among sets of legs. His numbed body lay half under the table.

You think anybody had noticed? You think fat Jeff had stopped the play with a heart attack?

I couldn't get him out through the mob. I leaned under the table, tried to check his pulse. Just beyond, I glimpsed Curley Ergun's stocky legs and shiny shoes. The assistant, off to the right.

Directly in front of me, so close I could have touched it, the hem of her evening dress. She stood with weight on the left foot, the high-heeled right slipper canted upward.

Anybody could have seen the round copper disk on the sole of that slipper. Anybody, that is, who was under the table.

Above me, she said: "Here goes luck," and there was a little fear in the sound.

The click of the little ball.

The poised slipper shifted forward, moved imperceptibly to the right and settled downward. I grinned wolfishly. Not tonight, Curley, I thought, and stuck my hand out.

Look, there had to be a metal floor-plate near her foot. And thin, hidden wires that ended under the wheel to gimmick the thing.

Sure, Curley Ergun ran an honest wheel, but this was for twenty grand, enough to test anybody's honesty. And he'd window-dressed the wheel with a girl whom everybody trusted. A nice setup. The copper disk on her sole, a floor-plate and wires, and the things that had been puzzling me began to straighten out.

Not a sound overhead. Not the release of a single, pentup breath. Then, click. The ball dropped into a slot.

"The white wins," Helen said, almost hysterically.

The suckers had dropped twenty grand. Babble of sound. Curses. The blonde shrilling wildly: "Oh, God!"

I shoved backward through unyielding legs, and grabbing Jeff's ankles, pulled his numbed body through the mob. We were alone on a desert, Jeff and I. The mob flowed in again, unheeding, like water finding a hole in the dam.

I got him into a cleared space on the floor. Mabel brought water, bathed his stiff white face, and moaned softly. Only Mabel and Jeff and I, and the rattle of voices.

"Five grand on the red!" the blonde shrieked.

"Any sum up to twenty thousand. Any sum—"

"She's still hot, Sol. Get it down and—"

A man in a Tux came along and said: "If you'll help me carry him into the rest room, sir."

We lifted the dead-weight, went through a couple of doors, laid Jeff on a divan. "There's probably a doctor in the house, sir," the Tux-man said, and hurried off.

The minutes crawled past, and Jeff stirred a little, and moaned. "Don't sit

up," I warned, and held his shoulders down.

A doctor came in presently with the Tux-man.

I went back into the big room. A lot can happen in a short time at the wheel. The suckers had dropped their money and drifted away from the center table.

ONLY blank-face guarded the wheel. He said to a lean man with a bored expression: "Five hundred on the red 22, sir," and spun the ball with a light flick of his left wrist. The bored-faced man dropped his five C's to double-zero, strolled off as if he'd just lost a match.

I walked to the double doors, wondering about the next move. I didn't have to wonder. The stocky door guard said: "Mr. Ergun would like you to stop by for a drink, sir."

"Certainly," I said. It had been an order, not an invitation.

I followed his back along a dimly lighted corridor, around a corner. He knocked lightly, twice, on a door that said OFFICE, opened the door, and gestured me in.

More of a lounge room, than an office. Wide, low, easy chairs. A portable bar. Soft, overhead lights. Four or five people. Curley Ergun, Pete, the thug with the harsh voice, Helen Glennway, and a man I'd not seen before.

"I didn't see him come in," Pete said tiredly.

"All here," Ergun said, and puffed on a thin, dappled cigar.

I said: "One extra," and pointed to the strange man.

"Check him, Nick," Ergun drawled.

Nick came in warily, patted my pockets, under my arms. "Clean," he announced, and backed off.

"We make you," Ergun began, using the hard, authoritative voice. "A private dick name of Wendell, from Newark. You hung around here last night and now you show up again. Who's behind you?"

"It was an idea I had," I said lightly.

"Who stuck the idea in your brain?"

"You mean, I can't get an idea by myself?"

"Who you working it for, Wendell?"

"Right now I'm on vacation."

Nick said harshly: "See, boss, he don't have no sense."

"You can come around here," Ergun snapped, "and play games. In the big room, that is. You start to nose around and—"

"I get it," I interrupted, rubbing my battered nose. "You don't spill any blood. You're in the big money, refined and polite. Not like the good, old days. Now if this was then—"

"You don't worry me none," Ergun snapped. "I'm solid here and that's the way I like it. I checked Newark and they said maybe you're square." He shrugged those wide shoulders, added: "Maybe you'd better take a walk, but fast, Wendell."

He was king of this cheap, little world, but I wasn't ready to leave. I turned to Helen Glennway, hovering off to one side.

"You don't have to work here," I said.

A little hope, or was it fear in her eyes?

"They won't spill any of your blood," I said. "What they'll do is squeeze it out, drop by drop. At first, you'll wince whenever you look in a mirror, Helen. After a while, it won't make any difference. You'll be like them. After the easy money. No more morality than you find in a hoptoad."

She whispered: "I—I don't dare—leave!"

"You mean somebody will reach for the phone? What have they got on you?"

"Nobody's tied her tongue," Ergun said, enjoying it.

She loosed it fast. "—man lost a wallet. Over two thousand dollars in it, they told me. They found the wallet in my room—empty! So they'll call the—the—" Her voice trailed off.

As simple as that. I stepped to her side, flipped my coat back, and pulled out the little gun under my belt over the stomach.

"It talks," I said, swinging the bar-

rel to include the four men. "Eight times, it talks. Anybody want to argue?"

Nobody moved. Nobody picked up a book end and slung it. They don't spill blood, anymore.

"It's up to her," I told them. "If she wants to leave, she goes. Clean, the way she came in. Ergun, do you want to press a button and have the sheriff come running in?"

He said thoughtfully: "You think it'll stick?"

"Sure. We'll round up a few witnesses and inspect that center wheel. You gimmick it with a copper disk on the croupier's sole and with a floor-plate and wires."

Nick cursed and Ergun glared at the girl. "Spilled it, eh?"

"She didn't talk," I explained. "I was under the table with the guy that had a heart attack. Which way is it, Helen?"

"Give me five minutes," she said, and hurried to the door. Nobody stopped her.

AFTER a while, I said: "Let's make a deal, Ergun. I don't care about gimmicked wheels, just her. You said maybe I'm square, and what about your word?"

He thought it over a while. Maybe he was figuring how long it would take to de-wire the wheel. Or if somebody would risk jumping the gun. Or how soon he could locate another school teacher.

Finally, he said: "We'll call you a square guy, Wendell. If you show here again—"

I backed to the door, suggested: "Why not send Pete and Nick along to see that we don't walk off with the woodwork."

Ergun nodded.

We three went downstairs together. Like three pals headed for a drink or the men's room. Only we went out back to the second bungalow under the trees and I still had the little gun.

She came out directly, wearing a light summer suit. She had two bags. I motioned with the gun, but it wasn't necessary. They had had their orders. Polite

(Continued on page 112)

DIVE TO DOOM

By HERBERT CARTER

Illustrated by
Frank Volp



It looked awfully strange that a rich, successful lawyer would deliberately drive his car over a cliff, so when his attractive daughter asked me to look into this suspicious "accident," I speedily dug up an unsavory batch of double-dealing behind the scenes.



"You're going to disappear," Nick chuckled "in a nice concrete coffin in the river."

I WAS just getting ready to button up my two by four cubbyhole, which I sometimes allude to as my office, for the day when I walked Felicia Broadbent.

Now, ordinarily a gal like Felicia would not be calling on Johnnie Neal, private investigator. And Johnnie Neal would not even know who Felicia Broadbent was. But with all the publicity she'd been receiving as a debutante, there wasn't anyone in town who hadn't seen her picture and read about her social activities. She'd been keeping company with Frank Heath for the last six months and it didn't hurt Frank's business to have his name mentioned in connection with Felicia.

What I was looking at was even better than her pictures. Five foot four, one hundred thirty pounds, all in the right places and blonde shoulder-length hair.

Those thoughts being strictly aside from business, I hastily put them away in a mental file marked "future reference" and adopted my most cultured voice.

"Yes?" I said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm Felicia Broadbent," she said softly.

I'd already been through that part of the conversation by myself, but I didn't tell her. "Won't you sit down?" I said, motioning to one of the two remaining empty chairs.

She accepted and didn't waste any time getting to the purpose of her call.

"My father died this afternoon in a car accident," she said. "The police say it was accidental. But I don't believe it was. I want you to—that is, I wonder if you would accept employment on the case."

I knew without Felicia telling me that her father was Stanley Broadbent, one

of our most well known and successful attorneys. His specialty was trial work. About sixty-five years old, he'd reached the top and made a lot of money. What I didn't know was that he was dead.

I cocked myself back in the chair in a more comfortable position. "Suppose you tell me a little more about it first."

"Well, Dad was driving a few miles south of town. It was about two o'clock this afternoon. It must have been some business trip. It couldn't have been a long one. He told me he would be home for dinner. The state police came to the house an hour ago. They said his car had gone through the railing on a curve. It was on a bluff. The car dropped a hundred and fifty feet. They say my father was killed instantly."

It wasn't easy for her to talk about it, but she was a game kid. She was squeezing back genuine tears.

"Any other car involved in the accident?" I asked.

"They don't know of any. They say Dad must have lost control."

"Could have been heart attack," I mused half aloud.

Felicia heard me. "No. Dad had a complete physical only last week. He was in perfect health, and he was a careful driver."

"Aside from that do you have any reason to suspect that it wasn't an accident?"

"Well—no. That's why I came to you. Of course Dad had practiced law for years. I know there were people who didn't like him. But I don't know of anyone that would have killed him. I thought perhaps you could—"

"I can try," I said, "but I won't guarantee the results."

"Please do."

BEFORE I could object, and I didn't try very hard, she reached in her oversized handbag and pulled out a checkbook. I sat there like a heel while she was writing. She tore it out and handed it to me. I whistled mentally as I saw it. Five hundred dollars! Plenty

for a week's hard work at my class A rate and necessary expenses.

"Will that be sufficient for now?" she asked.

"Yes. Quite sufficient. Now, suppose you tell me a little more about your father. Let's start with your family."

She gave a little shrug. "That's all there is—I mean, was. Just my father and myself. I had a brother killed in the war. Mother passed away a year ago."

"Is there anyone you know among your father's personal acquaintances who might have had difficulties with him. Perhaps even in a business way. Your father was a wealthy man. I understand his investments were rather widespread and varied."

"Yes. But I don't know much about them. I never heard him mention difficulties in that way."

"How about his current practice? Do you know of anything he was working on that would have been cause for someone to arrange for his death?"

"You would have to see his secretary about that. Dad never discussed office matters with me. She would know what he had been working on."

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Franc English."

"A man?"

"No. It's spelled with a 'c'. Pronounced 'Frank'."

"I'll talk to her in the morning," I said. "You might phone her and say I'll be in."

She nodded.

I could see she was tired and the shock was beginning to tell on her. "Suppose I take you home now," I said.

She smiled gratefully, but declined. "I have someone waiting for me downstairs."

I figured that would be Frank Heath. He was a handsome brute. Good looking and forty, which I figured was about fifteen years too old for Felicia. He'd set up camp in town about six months ago to sell stock in some prospective gas wells. He hadn't solicited me. Private investigators, honest ones, that is, don't

have extra folding money laying around to sink in gas wells. But I'd seen Heath around town and had him pegged as a smooth operator. He was quiet to the point of acting shy—until he got warmed up on his favorite subject of gas wells. With his Emily Post manners it was easy for him to circulate in Broadbent's crowd and pick off the easy money. Escorting Felicia was quite an advantage in his business.

I handed Felicia my card. "Call me any time you like. I'll report to you just as soon as I have some information." I went with her to the door.

BEING a single man with nothing on my mind but work—when I had a new case—I decided to take a view of the accident. After a leisurely dinner I drove out the highway south of town. It was a nice April evening with a clear sky lighted by a new moon. The air had the fresh smell that followed a late afternoon shower.

I spotted the break in the railing at the curve and pulled my car onto the shoulder of the road. If Broadbent had been driving south when he hit it his car would have headed out over the corner of the bluff. I walked to the edge and shone my flashlight below. It finally found the car, lying wheels up against the railroad track. I went over every inch of the bluff with my light and drew a complete blank. There wasn't a single way for me to get down without going through the same automotive gymnastics as Broadbent had. I had to find another way.

I got into my car and turned around. About a mile and a half back was a road leading off to the left toward the river. I turned in and found the railroad track that cut along the east bank of the river under the bluff. It took me more than an hour's walk along the track to reach the wreck.

There wasn't much to look at. The car was completely shattered from the drop. It was wedged in between the bluff and the bed of the railroad track.

Shattered glass around the car looked like snow in the early moonlight.

I managed to get a door open and crawled into the car. I spent ten minutes going over it carefully. There wasn't a thing to help me.

As I crawled out the door a spotlight was suddenly thrown on me from the cliff. I was blinded by the glare. In an instant I heard the thud of the bullet as it hit into the car body and the crack of the rifle from above.

I ducked and ran around the end of the car, the light following me in quick jerks. The car was piled up so close to the bed of the railroad track that there wasn't room for me to protect myself from the stabbing fingers of the light. I didn't have any choice in the matter. My only hope was to get on the other side of the track. I made the move in one flying leap. The light stabbed wildly in the darkness trying to focus on me. It flashed across me just as I dove over the tracks and into the ditch on the other side and the gun cracked again. The bullet ricocheted off a steel rail and whined up into the air with an unearthly sound.

The light disappeared, leaving me in darkness. I heard a car door slam above me and the soft sound of the motor as the car pulled away.

I crawled back over the bank and sat down by the car. I waited fifteen minutes to be sure there was going to be no more shooting gallery activity before I looked for the bullet. It had gone into the panel just below the running board. I checked the otherside of the car for holes and found nothing. Crawling back into the car I rummaged around and found the lead stuck in the metal top. A little work with my pocket knife got it out. It was a soft nose 30-30. I stuck it in my pocket.

BACK in town I located the morgue that had taken care of Broadbent. When I showed them my card and answered a few questions in a vague sort of way they let me view the remains.

It wasn't a pretty sight. He was broken in forty pieces and his face was cut so badly it was hardly recognizable. There was a gash in his neck big enough to stick your hand in. That part, sure as hell didn't look like an accident.

After a visit to the morgue I always drop into The Club for a drink. It sorta evens things up. I like to consider it occupational therapy. Nick Berr, the owner gave me a grin as I stepped up to the bar. He typified the affable host, as always.

"What'll it be tonight, Johnnie?"

"The usual, Nick."

"How's tricks, Johnnie?"

I looked up. Nick was still standing there grinning at me with his mouth, but his eyes were cold. "Fine," I said, "and with you?"

His grin widened as it always did before he started talking, but his eyes never changed. "Fine, Johnnie. Fine! With Nick, things are always good. I hear I lose a customer today. Mr. Broadbent."

I played dumb. "Your lawyer?", I asked.

"No. He used to be. Good one too, Johnnie. Lately he don't come in so much. But a fine man!"

You couldn't tell about Nick by listening to him chatter. He was clever that way. He'd been running The Club for a good many years and he'd made money hand over fist. Nick was the kind of guy that liked to loan his money out to people that needed it—that is if you'd mortgage your life for security, and he wasn't above foreclosing on that if he didn't get his money back. He was notorious for tricking people out of what was rightfully theirs. All of which is my way of saying that I wasn't in love with Nick Berr.

Nick turned away to wait on a customer who sat down beside me. When I heard him order scotch I turned around. It was Frank Heath. He gave me a smile.

"Good evening, Mr. Neal." He said.

I didn't know whether he was looking

for me or had just dropped in for a drink. "Hello, Heath."

"Terrible thing about Broadbent," he said. "I heard you and Nick talking about it as I came in."

"Nick was doing the talking. I was listening." I clipped the words off a little too short.

"Ah, yes. I believe Felicia did mention that she had retained you. And of course, you don't discuss your cases in public."

I let him have it again. "I believe she mentioned that you were waiting for her downstairs when she was in my office this afternoon."

Heath raised his eyebrows a little on that one. "Yes," he said softly, as if to apologize for my ruffled feathers. "I was waiting for her. But I didn't know until she came back that she had asked to have you investigate the matter."

Nick set the drink in front of Heath and moved on down the bar.

Heath toyed with it for a moment and turned to me again. "What do you think about it, Mr. Neal?"

"About what?" I parried.

"About Broadbent's death. It seems very peculiar that it could have been anything other than an accident. After all, it happened in broad daylight."

I HAD already thought about that one myself. "Sure, but that road isn't used much. I'll bet you I could maneuver you through that railing in broad daylight without an eyewitness to it. There isn't a house within two miles."

"You think that's how it happened?"

"I don't know," I said. "If I were going to put a guy and his car over the bluff, I'd figure on using my car to do it. You seen the place?"

He nodded. "Yes, I drove out there this evening."

All of a sudden I got a confused buzz in my head, like maybe there was a short circuit. I didn't know where to go from there. "I thought you'd be looking after Miss Broadbent." I said.

He smiled easily. "No, I took her to

His car went through the rail on a bluff
and dropped one hundred and fifty feet.



some friends. She's going to stay with them tonight. Then I took a drive out the south road to have a look. You see, Neal, aside from my concern for Felicia, I had a business matter pending with her father."

"Anything to do with your gas wells?" I intently awaited his reply.

"Most certainly."

"Care to elaborate?"

"It's a long story. Suppose Felicia tells you. You wouldn't take my word for it

anyway, you know. You fellows never do." He said it in a friendly manner.

"O.K.," I shrugged. "I will. Did you find what you were looking for this evening?"

"No. I found the break in the rail, but it was too dark to see the car."

I leveled a close look on him. "With a spotlight you could have gotten a fine view."

If those words had any significance to him, he didn't show it. "Unfortunately, I didn't have one and there is none on my car."

I wasn't getting any place so I dropped the conversation. We sat in silence finishing our drinks. I tossed a four-bit piece on the bar and said goodnight. At the door I turned and saw Heath talking to Nick. Already I was wishing I could get into Broadbent's office and have a chat with his secretary. I was anxious to get at the bottom of his legal activities.

I arrived at nine the next morning. The waiting room was jammed with panicky clients, screaming for their files. It seemed that men may die, but business and litigation go on forever. I had to wait my turn before I could get a word with the secretary, a pretty little brunette trick who answered my greeting.

"Miss English?"

"Yes."

I was very careful to explain the purpose of my call.

"Looks like Broadbent had a pretty big practice," I said, referring to the last of the clients who had just left with his coat pocket crammed full of legal documents.

"One of the largest in town," she said in staunch defense of her deceased employer.

"Any big cases that are going to miss his fine touch?"

"One. Amelia Brown's. It was to be tried next week."

I pricked up my ears. "Was Widow Brown one of his clients?"

"Yes. Of course."

SOME things began to make sense to me. I remembered that she had at one time owned the land on which the gas wells that Heath was interested in were located. "Suppose you tell me all about it," I said.

"Well, Mrs. Brown borrowed some money on the farm from a Nicholas Berr and—"

I was out of my chair like a shot. "Nick Berr!"

"Why, yes. Is there—what—"

"Never mind," I said impatiently. "Go ahead. Tell me more."

"Well, Mrs. Brown borrowed this money and gave a deed to her farm about a year ago. She had a written agreement with him, giving her the right to redeem the land upon payment of the loan. The defendant, that is, Berr, claims there isn't any such agreement."

"So he keeps the land?"

"Well, that's what he claims."

"Is there a written contract?" I asked.

"Certainly."

"Where is it?"

"Mr. Broadbent kept the original in his safe."

"The widow come in for it yet?"

"No."

"Could I see it?"

"I don't see what all that has to do with Mr. Broadbent's death."

"Maybe more than you or I know," I said. "Look, when Miss Broadbent called, didn't she ask you to help me in anyway you could?"

"Well, yes. She did. But when it comes to client's affairs, I don't know—but I guess it would be all right for you to look at it."

We went into Broadbent's office. I admired the lush carpeting while she fiddled with the safe. She finally got it open. But the agreement wasn't there.

"I don't suppose," I asked, "that Broadbent was on his way to talk to Mrs. Brown, when he met with his accident."

"Yes. He was."

"And do you suppose, by some quirk

of fate, he could just have happened to take the contract out of the safe and with him when he went to see her?"

"Well, yes. He could have. But I don't know."

"Would anyone else have known?" I asked.

"I don't know. I don't see how anyone could have known."

"That's the sixty-four dollar question," I said.

"What?"

"Never mind." I was mulling the whole thing over in my mind. I thanked her and left.

IT WAS ten thirty when I arrived at the Broadbent home on the edge of town. A two story ten-room house with a beautifully landscaped yard. I was taking a chance that Felicia would be in. She was.

"What have you learned?" she asked.

"A lot of things," I said, "but I haven't been able to add them up and get the right answer. Maybe you can help."

"How?"

"Let's take Frank Heath first."

Her face seemed to freeze. "What about Frank?"

"He told me he had some business dealings with your Dad. Did it have anything to do with the gas wells that he was promoting?"

She seemed surprised that I knew so much. "Why, yes. It did. Frank wanted my father to invest in them. Father refused and Frank asked me to use my influence."

"Did you?"

"Yes. But it didn't help. Father said he was involved in a lawsuit that had something to do with the wells and he didn't think it would look right."

"Just who does Frank Heath work for?" I asked.

"Why, for himself, of course."

"He's promoting the development of those gas wells?"

"Yes."

"Where did he get the money?"

"He sold stock."

"Who bought it?"

"Well, some of them have been my friends. Of course I don't know all of them. Business men around town, and others."

"How about Nick Berr?" I asked.

That one didn't click with her. "Who is he?"

"A business man," I said. "And it just so happens that at the present time he has the title to those gas wells that Heath is promoting. It also happens that your father was attorney for the lady who originally owned them and was trying to get them back under what she claims was her legal right. The case was to be tried next week."

Felicia's frozen features seemed to get ten degrees colder. She was catching on fast. "If you think for a moment that Frank had anything to do with my father's death—"

I held up my hand. "I'm not making any accusations. I'm just trying to do the job you hired me for."

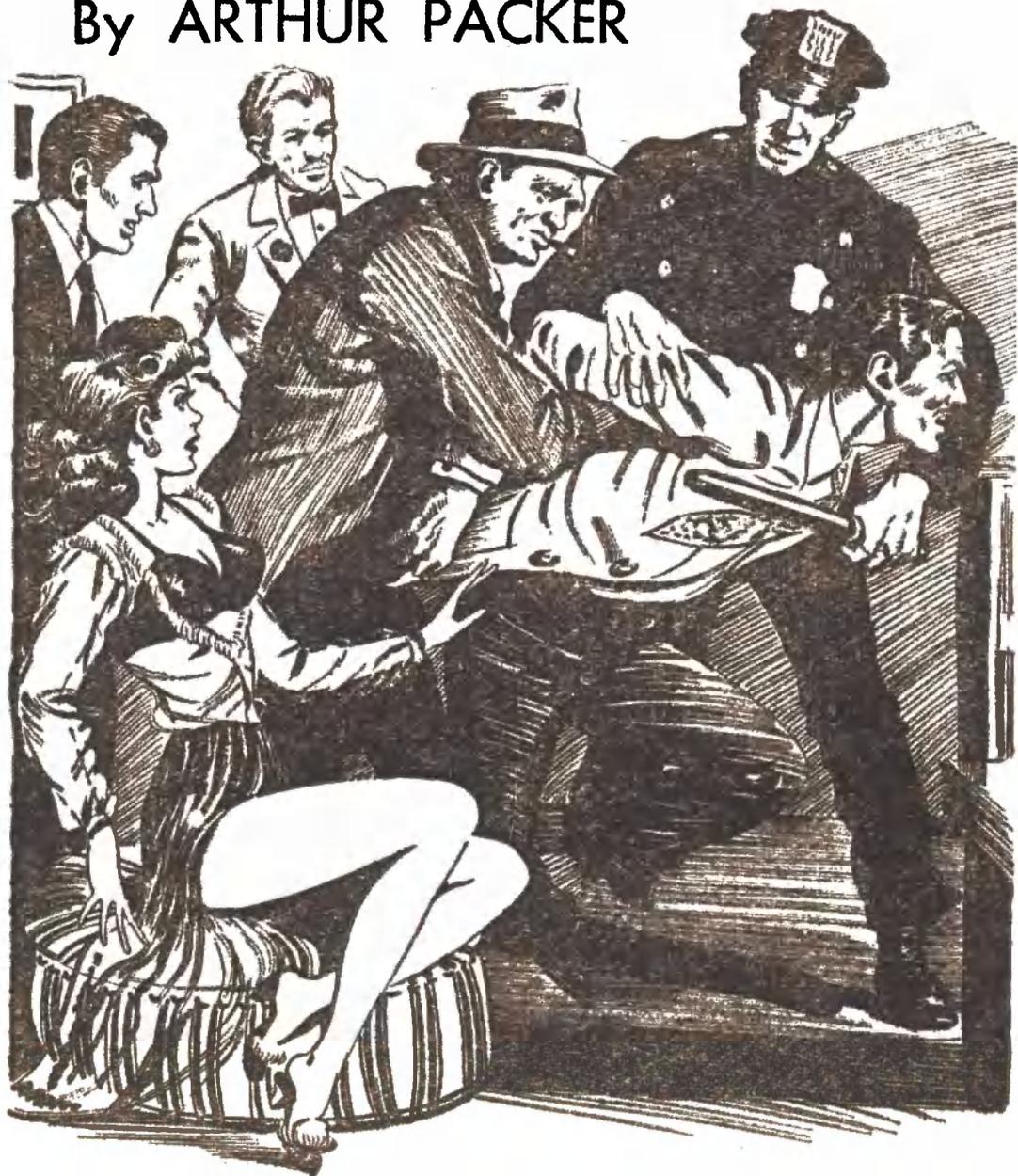
She was quiet for a moment. Then she spoke deliberately. "Mr. Neal, I don't want you to continue your work on the case. Please consider your employment at an end. You may keep the money I paid you."

I KNEW that was coming. "Thanks," I said. "That will be plenty to finance my research to get to the bottom of the whole thing. I'm not working for you anymore, but I don't pull out on a job just when it gets interesting. Yesterday neither one of us was sure your father was murdered. I'm sure now. And I think you are too. It might interest you to know that someone took a couple of shots at me last night, just because I was getting too nose. I'm not complaining, you understand. That's one of the risks I take on a job like this. But after someone tries to lay me low, I get a personal interest in it that just won't let me quit. If the answer turns out to be your Frank Heath, that's just too bad."

(Continued on page 114)

SUICIDE TIP-OFF

By ARTHUR PACKER



HIS real name was Horatio, but the newspaper fraternity called him "Scoop" Nelson, and not without cause. He was long and lanky, with unruly, reddish hair, blue eyes that went through you and saw something beyond, and a nose that remained surprisingly long and sharp after having been poked into so many people's

private affairs. It was a nose for news.

He sat on a comfortably tilted chair in the city room of the *Morning Bulletin*, his big feet cocked on the desk by his battered typewriter, dreaming through a lazy exhalation of pipe smoke.

But his eyes, as piercing as ever, were on Myra Wharton's legs.

Not bad legs, for a sob sister. Scoop

This newsman butted in on a perfectly logical suicide and made a murder out of it. In the whole case there was one girl he wondered about—he would hate to find dynamite and death done up in one lovely package!

Illustrated by
Robert McCarty



The crooner lost control of his temper and tried a wild swing at Scoop.

had been appraising them now for two weeks, ever since Myra had been on the staff, taking a sardonic delight in making her feel uncomfortable.

He thought: If she'd take off those Harold Lloyd glasses, wash that carbon paper smudge off her slightly retrousse nose, and dress to flatter her figure instead of to deny its shapeliness, he'd take her out. He knew a lot about women. You never could tell by—

The phone on his desk rang. He re-

garded it with mild annoyance, for his legs were so long as to make it a considerable distance beyond his reach. Probably some dame. That little hat check girl at the Deauville Club. It had been a mistake to make a play for her, anyway. He let his tilted chair down with a grunt, reached the phone and balanced the receiver expertly on his hunched shoulder, leaving his right hand free.

"Nelson speaking."

At the other end of the wire was heavy breathing. A man cleared his throat. Somehow, the pause was nervous and tense. Then came words, high-pitched, and curiously edged:

"Nelson? This is Bradley Jordan. Yes, Bradley Jordan. You ought to remember the name, after all the rotten stories you've written about me!"

"Now, look here, Jordan. The *Bulletin* has printed nothing that wasn't a matter of record, nothing you can deny. After all, you're news, you know. A man can't be a stage favorite for years and expect to keep his matrimonial difficulties—"

"I'm not blaming you, Nelson. I'm giving you a break. A real story. Because I'm going to jump off this roof. I'm jumping. You can print it, or read about it in the other papers. So long!"

Scoop's eyes widened. Unconsciously, he gripped the telephone tighter, brought the mouthpiece nearer. His feet banged on the floor. He could hear that heavy, labored breathing—

"What is this, Jordan? A joke—or a publicity gag?"

"Neither!" The man at the other end of the wire laughed shortly, bitterly. "I'm tired of all this mess. I'm jumping. So long!"

"So long!" Scoop said, and put down the phone as he heard the click at the other end. There was a peculiar, drawn-out inflection in the man's last two words. Scoop sucked in an amazed breath, and grabbed the phone again, jiggling the hook for the *Bulletin's* switchboard.

"Operator! Trace that call. And hurry—it's important!"

Then he sprang to his feet, eyes on the clock that frowned over the bustle of the city room. Ten twenty-nine p.m., with an edition due to leave the composing room floor at half past. Scoop hurried with a long-legged stride past Myra Wharton's inquiring eyes, and reached the city desk.

Foster Payne, baldheaded, nervous, dyspeptic and eternally on the go, was

hemmed in here by a battery of telephones and a row of copy-laden spikes. He looked up under shaggy eyebrows, his rimless glasses setting low on his nose.

"Well?" he growled.

"Maybe it's a story. Maybe Bradley Jordan's only drunk again. But he just phoned me that he's going to jump off the roof of that ten story apartment hotel where he has his penthouse!"

Payne was always ice until a story was proven; thereafter he was fire. He shrugged stooped shoulders.

"Ever talk to Jordan on the phone before? No? Then maybe somebody's putting up a job on you. Still, you can't tell. He drinks plenty, and some birds get the suicide complex when they're boiled." He reached for the nearest phone. "Get me Central police. No—not the beat man. I want a cop! That's the Marlborough, isn't it, Scoop?"

"Yeah—the theatrical joint with the broadcasting station."

The police station answered, but Foster Payne and Scoop Nelson were listening to the short-wave radio on the city editor's desk. It shrilled twice. A deep voice spoke:

"Radio Patrol Car Number Thirty-Foive! Patrol Car Three Foive! Go to the Marlborough Apartments on Park Drive. Man jumped off the roof. Repeating: Radio Patrol Car—"

"Good Lord!" Payne was ablaze, now. "It's a story, even if it isn't Jordan! Jump on it, Scoop. Give me a hundred and fifty words—I'll see if the news desk can hold this edition for a couple of minutes. Hurry—get the mystery phone call in your lead. Unidentified body found in the street two minutes later!"

Scoop Nelson's eyes went through the clock. "One minute later!" he said slowly. "And when you consider it takes time to buzz the cops after you find a body, that's action. Look, Payne, give that yarn to a rewrite man. I've got a hunch, and I'm on my horse. Call you from the Marlborough!"

He grabbed his hat and topcoat from

the hook, and dashed out, leaving Payne bellowing. Five minutes later, a taxi dropped him in front of the ornate facade of the Marlborough, and an ambulance was wailing down the Drive in his wake.

The police cruising car was already at the curb; a curiously silent knot of pedestrians gathered on the sidewalk, drawn and yet repelled by that tragically misshapen huddle over which the officers stooped. From an open window in the apartment hotel, two or three floors up, a radio blared in swingtime. Cymbals crashed, the melody softened, and a crooner took up the song:

"My lone-ly rose,
No other flow-er so fair,
No other rap-ture so rare
As lov-ing you-u-u—"

The siren drew close, drowning the singer's voice. It died to a moan as the ambulance swung into the loading zone. Two plainclothes men from Central Station swung from it as the steward and driver yanked out their stretcher.

SCOOP NELSON joined the detectives on the edge of the crowd, let them run interference for him through the huddle.

"Hello, Rooney!" he greeted. "Hi Sarge. What do you make of it?"

Detective-lieutenant Dennis Rooney whirled a map of Ireland on the reporter.

"So it's you!" he boomed. "And what do I make of it, you're askin'. When I ain't seen it yet. I guess you'll be after wantin' me to call it murder, so you can make a story. Come on, Grimes!"

One of the uniformed cops looked up at Rooney.

"It's Bradley Jordan, Lieutenant," he said. "I seen him on the stage lots of times. Look—in his hand."

Rooney turned a flashlight on the crumpled form. Jordan's fingers gripped a torn sheet of paper and a pearl necklace.

"Them beads ain't broke," Sergeant

Grimes pointed out. "I guess he didn't pull 'em off no dame's neck when he jumped. What's the paper say?"

Scoop bent closer with Rooney. It was sheet music. "His wristwatch stopped at ten twenty-six," Rooney said. "I'll take these things. Put him in the ambulance. Now—who saw him fall? Who called the police? Anybody see him jump?"

Scoop Nelson looked around the ring of faces. They reflected the marquee lights like pale, unlovely flowers. A woman was elbowing her way through; she walked with a slinky, provocative sway. Under an evening wrap of velvet, loosely thrown over the creamy satin of her almost bare shoulders, the rhinestones in the bodice of her gown made mockery of the tragic shadows. She jerked her gaze from the huddled heap that had been Bradley Jordan, and her breast lifted high in a shuddering breath.

Scoop had seen her somewhere. She wasn't a natural blonde. She had on too much eye shadow; the mascara was a bit heavy. But she was a good looking doll.

A handkerchief fluttered in her nervous hands, dabbed at her eyes, smeared the mascara.

"I—I saw him strike the sidewalk!" she said in a strained voice. "Poor Bradley—I can't believe it! I can't—I can't!" Her words lifted to the thin, ragged edge of hysteria. She turned and swayed, and Scoop Nelson took her in his arms. For a half minute she shuddered there, her warm, curved figure quivering against him; then she looked up. "His body nearly hit me!" she moaned.

Rooney touched her arm, jerked his chin at Scoop. "Bring her inside!" he said, and the crowd, staring at that broken body being lifted into the ambulance, made way as if in a dream. A policeman brought sand and poured it on the red trickle that crept over the curb.

Scoop had to lift the girl. Perfume swam in his nostrils; she let her head fall limply, and the lights shone on the throbbing white column of her throat.

In the lobby, the reporter eased her into a big chair and she lay against its upholstery with her eyes closed and the swell of her bosom rising and falling in long, shuddering breaths.

"Now, lady," said Rooney. "What's your name?"

They should have known. It was easy to see that amazed resentment smothered her other emotions for an instant. Her eyes fluttered open; she crossed her legs under the swirling shimmer of the long gown. Scoop Nelson, watching, made a note on his mental cuff: slender, shapely legs, arched insteps, silver evening slippers, gossamer hose—

"Why, I'm Marie Vickers—the actress. And I'm Mrs. Bradley Jordan, his third wife! I was on my way up to the penthouse for a party he was giving tonight." The reporter went into action.

SCOOP sprinted for a telephone. Things were breaking fast. Suicide or murder, it was a story that would have made Foster Payne's hair stand on end if Payne had any hair—

He collided with a stoutish, dark young man, caromed off, and bumped into a taller, blond youth who wore a dirty hat. The first was Jerry Doyle of the *Press*; the second was Ed Miller of the *Herald*.

"What's doing, Scoop?" demanded Jerry. "Any angles on why he took the dry dive?" asked Miller.

Scoop looked around, cautiously, then laid his finger across his lips. "Shhh!" he said. "I'll let you in on something. It's exclusive, but you can quote me!"

"Yeah?" There was distrust in Doyle's tone.

"Yeah. He's dead!"

"Come on!" growled the *Press* reporter. "Scoop will be making an illegal operation ring out of this, with Jordan as the victim!"

Scoop made his phone call and told Payne to go strong on the blonde coincidence. There was a radio in the lobby, mercifully muted. But the same song was playing to its close:

"—We'll go where Happiness goes,
Then you'll be lonely no more,
My lonely rose!"

"And he had a piece of sheet music in his hand, and his watch stopped at ten twenty-six!" added the reporter. "Get that—ten twenty-six! He wouldn't have worn a cheap watch. Chances are it was correct. Payne, he was already dead when that call came!"

"H'm! Maybe!" said the city editor with cynicism. "I'll send Myra Wharton over to cover the woman's angle. A camera is already on its way. Keep on it, Scoop!"

Scoop whirled toward the group, then teetered on his toes. The radio again. Good human interest stuff—

"That was 'My Lonely Rose,' sung for the first time on the air by Perry Dormer, the Campus Crooner. This new song, composed by Solly Blumberg, is to be featured by Miss Fay Hall in Vernon Posey's new Symphony Club revue. Next—"

The reporter whistled. Fay Hall! Bradley Jordan's latest heart throb! He hurried back to the knot of people around the big chair. The manager of the Marlborough was there, deploring everything with expressive white hands. And Vernon Posey, the producer, a little man with a heavy shock of graying hair, was standing tip-toe to look at the piece of sheet music in Rooney's hand.

"But why should the song drive him to suicide?" the lieutenant was asking.

Posey shook his head. "I can't say. He had nothing to do with the song. As you see, this is in manuscript form—it hasn't been published yet. But Fay Hall was going to sing it in my new revue, and Mr. Jordan and Fay—well—"

"I get it!" Rooney said. "He was sweet on her. That's the torch singer—the dame with a voice like a man."

"Her voice is of a low register, yes."

"Maybe these are her pearls, too?"

"I can't say. She lives here, but I'm sure she knows nothing of this unfortunate affair!"

The girl's body was limp as Scoop carried her into the lobby.



Rooney shoved the pearls and the manuscript into his coat pocket. Scoop Nelson performed an adroit bit of pocket picking, saw the torn sheet bore the title: "My Lonely—" and replaced it without the officer's knowledge.

"Cripes!" said Scoop, and then jammed his pipe into his mouth, biting hard on the cold stem. Then he saw Marie Vickers being helped to her feet, and he gallantly offered his arm.

"Thank you," she smiled. "I'm sorry to be such a bother. The shock—"

"Shall I call you a cab?"

"No, thank you. I live here, you know. If you'll see me to the elevator—or my apartment."

HE SAW her to her apartment. The maid was out, and it was obvious that the third Mrs. Jordan needed a

drink. So did Scoop. He poured one, lighted a cigarette for her, and then saw her go to pieces again. Once more he had to take her in his arms and pat her shoulder comfortingly.

She clung to him, the appealing softness of her slender form close, the cloying fragrance of her hair against his face. He never knew how it happened, but suddenly the flashlight bulb shot its glare through the room and made them both jump.

Marie screamed and hid her face in the silken pillows. Scoop blinked, and made out Red Murphy, the *Morning Bulletin's* ace cameraman, grinning triumphantly over another candid. Then Red saw who was in the picture with the blonde, and Scoop saw the disapproving Myra Wharton just behind the stocky photographer.

"How did you get in here?" growled the reporter. "Can't I interview a lady without—"

"Man at work, eh?" snickered Murphy. "If you want to know how we got in, look for yourself. You left the door open."

"Yes," said the sob sister. "And I'm supposed to be covering the woman's angle on this story. Mr. Payne—"

"To hell with Mr. Payne!" said Scoop, conscious of the fact that lipstick was smeared generously over his face and mouth. "I'm covering this angle, myself. You go on up to the penthouse and have a look around. Find Fay Hall, the torch singer. Jordan had a piece of her latest song in his hand. Also a string of pearls. Well, don't stand there like a pair of dummies!"

Myra Wharton's eyebrows were still high. She swung around with a flounce, and a rather enticing flounce it was, Scoop had to admit. Some time, if she'd take off those glasses, he'd. . . .

"Well, I like your nerve!" the sob sister flung over her shoulder. "And men reporters accuse *me* of using sex appeal to get my stories.

The door slammed. Scoop turned to face an almost certain wrath from Marie Vickers, Mrs. Bradley Jordan III.

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I forgot to tell you I'm a reporter. You see, I—"

"Will that photo be in the paper?" she demanded coldly.

"Oh, certainly not! That is—well, I have considerable influence, and I may be able to keep it out. That is, if—"

"If what?"

"If you'll kiss me again."

She paid off double, smiled, and added interest. "Newspapermen," she said, "are so nice. I think it would be very thrilling to be a newspaperman."

Scoop agreed that newspapermen did meet some very interesting people. "I've got to ask you a few questions," he said. "You were having some trouble with Bradley Jordan over back alimony, weren't you?"

She nodded. "Who wasn't?" she asked,

with a trace of bitterness. "He didn't even pay his first wife. I gave up a good part in a road show to marry him. All I got was a string of—"

Her hand went over her mouth. Scoop nodded. "A string of pearls. The pearls he had in his hand?"

"Yes. But I swear I don't know anything about that. You see, he took the pearls back. He wanted them to give to Fay Hall!"

"Fay Hall!" gasped the reporter, jumping to his feet so quickly he spilled a hundred and ten pounds of blonde loveliness out of his lap. "And I sent that sob sister up to interview her! I've got to get on my horse, sweetheart. See you later!"

HE WAS gone before she could protest, snatching up his hat and topcoat on the way. Her apartment was on the seventh floor; Scoop buzzed for the elevator, and stepped inside.

"It turned out to be some return match, didn't it?" the operator commented.

"What turned out to be a return match?"

"You're a newspaper guy, ain't you? Thought so. Well, you see, Jordan had invited a bunch of his friends up for a party—including his ex-wife, and Andy MacGregor, the former football star. Remember how MacGregor slapped Jordan for a row of wilted lilies at the Symphony Club two weeks ago?"

Scoop reached for the control lever. They stopped between floors. "Go on!" said the reporter.

"Don't use my name, but if you do, it's Vaughn—spelled with just one A, see? Well, MacGregor laid Jordan out cold when Jordan made some crack about he was going to marry Fay Hall, see? So Jordan was going to put on the gloves with him tonight—at the party. He was a damn fool, because MacGregor could kill him. And MacGregor didn't want to fight—he was up here tonight, and told Jordan so. He took my car just as I brought Jordan down, and instead of

going out, Jordan rode back up with him. They argued all the way up."

"Cripes!" breathed Scoop Nelson. "Did you tell anybody else about all this?"

"No. Just the cops."

"Oh—just the cops, eh?" said Scoop with sarcasm. "Then it'll remain a deep, dark secret! Take me on up. Does the elevator go to the penthouse?"

"No. You have to get off on the ninth floor, where the broadcasting studios are, and walk up. Over there, see? The studios take up this whole left wing."

"Thanks," said Scoop, and remembered he ought to check in with the office. As he started for the stairs, he saw a telephone in an alcove, and made for it.

The *Bulletin* operator recognized his voice. "Hello, Mr. Nelson," she said. "We traced that call for you. It came from Parkside 32016. The telephone is located in the Marlborough Apartments, on the ninth floor."

"The *ninth* floor?" howled Scoop. "You're telling me, sister! That's the phone I'm using now. Give me the city desk—no, never mind! Tell Payne I'll ring him a little later!"

A breathless minute later, he was on the roof. A group of men stood over near a high parapet, but not against it. The roof was bright with lights, and green with potted shrubs. A radio played in the penthouse living room, and above everything the radio broadcasting towers loomed, their spidery-legged shapes diminishing to pin-points against the dim stars. From the street below came the faint hum of traffic.

SERGEANT GRIMES detached himself from the group. "Watch out, there!" he warned. "Fresh paint on the floor. Come over this way."

Scoop walked a plank placed over the paint, peered over the parapet. Rooney joined him. "That's where he went over," said the lieutenant. "And I'll be after goin' over myself, if we don't get all the angles cleared up so we can turn this suicide case over to the coroner."

Scoop laid his hand on the officer's

arm. "Here's a tip for you, Rooney. Check that phone down by the stairs for fingerprints. Pass up *my* prints. Look for the prints of a woman—a woman who has a voice like a man! This wasn't suicide, it was murder!"

"Go on!" scoffed Rooney. "He was lousy drunk, that's all. What are you trying to do, pin a case on that torch singer?"

"Maybe. Can you prove it wasn't? Anybody see him jump?"

"No. The only servant he had was a house boy, and Jordan gave him the evenin' off. But he was lousy drunk, I tell you. He was so stinko he couldn't walk this plank. Look there, and you'll see where he stepped off into the paint."

"How do you know it was his footprint? I didn't notice any green paint on his shoes."

Rooney grinned, and extracted a patent leather evening slipper from his capacious pocket. "Well, notice it now," he said. "I sent down to the morgue for this. And the way the footprint is twisted in the paint shows he was unsteady. Look at it."

"I'll take your word for it, Rooney. But that doesn't explain that phone call we got in the office—*after* Jordan was dead, if I can figure it right!"

He told the officer the details of the call. "If that had been a woman's footprint, now—" he said, and Rooney waved his hand.

"But it wasn't a woman's, so where are you gettin'?" demanded the cop. "No, it may be lookin' good in headlines, but this ain't a murder. I'd look like a sap, tellin' the district attorney that it was. Here comes somebody—I guess it's the big lug who poked Jordan and was going to fight him tonight. I'll have to ask him a few."

"Wait a minute. Where's Fay Hall?"

Rooney pointed down. "Her apartment's on the ninth floor. We already give her the works. She had a quarrel with him, all right. She found out that necklace used to belong to the other dame—Marie Vickers. So she threw it in

his face, and in the tussle he tore off a piece of that sheet music. Or maybe he tore it off to wrap the pearls in. There ain't no use of your bothering her—she's all upset."

Scoop walked the plank. "So was Miss Vickers. They talk best when they're upset. I still think it was a murder, Rooney, but I'll leave you alone. When the police are baffled, as we playfully say in the newspapers, they like to be alone!"

"Scram!" growled Rooney, and strode over to meet Andy MacGregor, who was arriving under guard.

THERE were three new plainclothes men escorting the brawny ex-football player into the penthouse. Scoop paused for a moment at the door, and saw Doyle and Miller taking notes inside.

"Suppose I don't answer those questions?" the broad-shouldered, red-faced MacGregor was asking belligerently. "I had some trouble with Jordan. Lots of people may figure the wrong angle!"

"Now, listen!" soothed Rooney. "It was suicide—as plain as can be. But we have to know why, see? Now, spill it. You was up here tonight—"

MacGregor's eyes went steely. "Yes, sure! I was up here. I wanted Jordan to call off his plan for that silly fight. I knew I could whip him with one hand. And I felt that punch at the Symphony Club left things square. But he made me sore, and I couldn't run out on the scrap he'd arranged for his guests. It would look like I was yellow."

"What time was that?"

"I don't know, exactly. About ten, I guess."

"I know, Officer!" It was the elevator operator, who had left his cage for the glare of the spotlight. "It was about ten minutes after ten. I know, because I come on duty at ten."

Rooney nodded. "Ten after ten, then. What did you do?"

"I rode up here with Jordan, and stayed a few minutes. Then I left. On

the way down, I stopped in to see Perry Dormer—the radio crooner. But he wasn't in his dressing room, and I went on downstairs."

"Then what?"

MacGregor hesitated. "Well—well, when I got outside, they had already found Jordan's body on the sidewalk. I realized that I might have to go before a coroner's jury, so I went home in a hurry. That's all."

"H'm!" Rooney jammed a cigar in his mouth and forgot to light it. "Sure you didn't lose your temper and poke Jordan in the jaw again—when he was standin' close to the parapet?"

"Certainly not!" snapped the big man.

"I guess you can go for now," Rooney said wearily. "Jeez! I wish the coroner would hustle on over here!"

Scoop Nelson grabbed the elevator man as he started to leave. "Where's Fay Hall's apartment?" The man was eager to co-operate.

"It's 903. I'll show you."

THE reporter reached the door in time to see it jerked hastily open. A magazine flew out, missing him by inches. Through the door came Red Murphy and Myra Wharton in undignified retreat, and the stridence of a low-register voice raised high in anger.

"No, I won't pose for a picture. You can take this one on the table, or leave it! The last one a newspaper photographer took was terrible. And—"

She bounced into view. Out of the corner of his mouth, Scoop Nelson taunted the sob sister. "Nice coverage, Myra! H'm!"

Fay Hall stood glaring at him, a tigress at bay. Redhaired, shapely, wearing a negligee over silken underthings. She placed her hands on slim hips, and her eyes flashed green.

"Well?" she demanded.

Scoop Nelson drew a long breath. "Mighty well!" he said, and boldly entered, turning to close the door on the stares of Myra Wharton and the photographer.

She stamped her foot, breaking the heel off a fur-trimmed mule. Scoop bent his lanky form. "Allow me!" he said. "You've got a flat on this side. There—that'll hold for a minute!"

He was holding for a minute, too. He was holding the warm, bare curve of her ankle for an unnecessarily long time after he replaced the heel, and there was a caress in his fingers.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she demanded. Now her voice lost its shrillness, and became a warm, rich huskiness that sent a shiver along the reporter's spine.

"I'm a—well, a sort of private investigator. Didn't you call me tonight?"

"Call you? I certainly didn't. I don't even know you!"

She sat on a sofa. Scoop Nelson had her guessing. He took a chance, and sat down beside her.

"My name's Nelson. You didn't call me just before—or after—Bradley Jordan was shoved off the roof?"

"Shoved off?" Horror leaped into her green eyes. She seized the newspaperman's arm, and dug tinted fingernails into his sleeve. "Shoved off? No—it couldn't be that! It couldn't be!"

"I'm afraid it was," said Scoop, grimly. "There—there!"

THE evening was full of women flying into little fragments of hysteria. He looked over the mop of red hair and saw an open box of chocolates beside the sofa. Close by was a morning paper that hadn't been off the press an hour, opened at the drama section. Yes, Fay Hall was taking the death of her reported fiance hard, mighty hard.

Scoop kissed away a tear, or went through the motion of doing so, to make her believe he really thought there was a tear there. But that was the penalty of being a newspaperman. And she had been eating chocolates, in the last few minutes.

"Look," he said. "I want to help get at the bottom of this thing. There are people who may accuse you of shoving

Jordan out of your window, you know. It takes all kinds of people to make up a world. You threw those pearls at him, and—"

"He lied to me! He didn't buy them for me—they belonged to his third wife!"

"I know!" Scoop nodded. "Now, about that sheet music. What's this over here?"

He walked toward the window, and stooped to pick up a torn paper from the floor. It was the rest of the manuscript of "My Lonely Rose." And the window was wide open!

Fay Hall's eyes flashed greenly. "I never saw that before. I don't know how it came to be in here. What are you driving at?"

Scoop wanted a picture of her looking like that. It would wow the *Bulletin's* readers, done in three columns, on Page One. He thought fast.

Suicide or murder, she'd be a picture in that negligee that would make a tabloid editor bite himself with envy. But Red Murphy was up on the roof, by now—

"I asked you what you're driving at?"

Remembering the green paint on Jordan's shoe, he shook his head dubiously. "I don't know, exactly," Scoop admitted with a great deal of truth. "Things don't tie in. But I'll have to ask you to come up to the penthouse with me—where the rest are. Sort of a get-together for a final check-up on everybody's story. Routine, you know."

She hesitated. Scoop Nelson took his hand out of his pocket, gave her a brief peep at his press badge. It looked like authority.

"I'm not being arrested?" she asked, her voice rising again and the danger lights beginning to blaze in her green eyes.

"Hardly," Scoop laughed. "Be a sport and help settle this. Come on."

He thrust the torn manuscript in his pocket and stood for a few seconds facing the window, wondering if a breeze might have blown the paper in as it

fluttered from the roof. But there was none. He looked at his watch. It was hard to believe it was just about an hour, and no more, since Bradley Jordan's body hurtled ten floors down—

THEY went up. Everybody was sitting around the penthouse living room. The radio was still going. Fay Hall swished silken strides to an ottoman before the console set, curled up there with the negligee lending enchanting mystery to her slim shapeliness. Looking, Scoop Nelson could imagine that a man would kill for her.

"Damn that coroner!" said Rooney with passion. Vernon Posey, the little producer, flicked a cigarette butt into the doorway and sighed.

"It was to be a party, and a strange one, but gay!" he said. "It's a strange party, all right. But not gay. Poor Bradley!"

Myra Wharton was throwing a scornful glance toward Scoop and the red-haired girl. Jerry Doyle was on the telephone in one corner of the room, talking in a low tone. Fay Hall was hard, all right. She leaned back and raised the volume of the radio:

"—and gentlemen, this is Perry Dormer, the Campus Crooner, signing off for tonight. If you have enjoyed this evening's program, write the Bates Sporting Goods Company and tell them so. 'My Lonely Rose' was presented by permission of the copyright owner, Solly Blumberg. And now, so long!"

SCOOP NELSON jerked upright in his chair, and bit the pipestem he shoved between his teeth. For the first time, he felt he had a real lead.

"That coroner!" said Rooney. "Maybe this is him!"

The stairway door opened. But it wasn't the coroner. It was a tall man who brusquely gained the roof, hurried into the penthouse, and then stared at so many strange faces.

"Why—where's Jordan?"

Fay Hall leaped to her feet. The tall

man's arms went around her. "There—there, dear!" he said. "What's the matter? Who are all these people?"

"Bradley has—Bradley met with an accident!" she told him. The words tumbled from her red lips in a rush: "He fell off the roof. He's dead!"

"Dead?" gasped the tall man, and recoiled, leaving the redhead unsupported. She sank back on the ottoman. The newcomer looked around, blankly. "Dead!" he muttered again.

Vernon Posey waved an expressive white hand toward the tall man, gestured with the other toward Rooney. "Lieutenant Rooney, of the police," he said. "Perry Dormer, the radio singer."

Dormer didn't even nod to acknowledge the introduction. He sank into a chair, limply, his long legs thrust out before him, like a man who has been given a knockout blow.

"And I was coming to his party!" he said as if to himself.

"Did you see him this evenin'?" Rooney wanted to know. Dormer shook his head, then nodded.

"No—well, yes, I did. Earlier. We had a drink. He was despondent, but I never dreamed—"

"Despondent over what?"

Dormer ran a thin hand through his black, straight hair, and shot an appealing glance at the officer. "Why, how should I know? I only—"

Fay Hall's voice cut in. "I can tell you. He killed himself because I broke off our engagement. Because he couldn't stand to see Perry marry me! Tell them that, Perry."

Scoop Nelson stared at the girl. MacGregor had socked Jordan over her. And now she was going to marry Dormer. . . . The reporter shook his head in amazement at the perfidy of women, and glanced down at Dormer's feet.

Then he jumped up, his brain whirling. A mist swept over it and dissolved, leaving everything clear. He jabbed a forefinger at the crooner.

"Jordan was dead when you telephoned me, Dormer!" he said with cold,

calm precision marking each word. "You killed him!"

There was sudden, stunned silence in the room. Dormer gasped incoherently and pulled himself erect, blinking.

Rooney's voice boomed over the hubbub. "You're crazy, Scoop! What makes you think—aw, nuts! The guy was a suicide!"

"Crazy?" Perry Dormer's tenor almost went soprano. "He's not only raving mad, he's a liar! It's preposterous! I—I—"

THE crooner lost control of his temper, and lurched up to take a wild swing at Scoop. The reporter ducked and sidestepped. Rooney and Grimes caught Dormer and forced him back into his chair.

"He's a reporter," soothed Rooney. "All reporters are nuts."

"I'm sorry!" Dormer panted into a semblance of control again. "But I warn him. If he prints one line connecting my name with this case, I'll sue. I don't know a thing about it. I've been broadcasting for an hour."

"Go ahead and sue!" flared Scoop. "Look, Rooney! Look at this guy's shoes! Pull 'em off and look—the heels don't match. They are not a pair. One belongs to Bradley Jordan!"

Dormer's feet jerked in guiltily toward his chair. Tenseness gripped the room, and even the phlegmatic Rooney went slightly mad. He grabbed Dormer and yanked off a slipper. Jerking the paint smeared shoe from his pocket, he compared them, and looked up with an astonished whistle. They were mates.

Scoop Nelson was talking: "You knocked out Jordan when you found him making love to Fay Hall. In the fight, he tore off a piece of the manuscript of that song. You put the pearls in his hand, perhaps. It doesn't matter, anyway. Then—"

"You're a liar!" screamed Dormer, but his face was deadly white.

"—you carried him up and walked that plank. One of your feet slipped into

the paint. You had sense enough to rest Jordan's body on the parapet and change the shoe. Maybe you thought you heard somebody coming, so you only changed one. Then you shoved him over!"

"Stop him!" shrieked Fay Hall, covering her ears with clawing, crimson-tipped hands. "Shut him up!"

Dormer whirled to look at her. Flame suddenly leaped into his smoky black eyes—

"On the way down," Scoop went on, "you stopped and phoned me. It was a slick stunt. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it would have worked. But you forgot one thing, Dormer. You forgot you weren't in front of a mike. You added that program tag line of yours—in the way only you can say it: 'So long'! And then—"

Perry Dormer was on his feet. "Squealer!" he gritted at Fay Hall through spasm-twitched, colorless lips. And then he broke for the door.

Sergeant Grimes grabbed at his long legs, but missed. The redheaded torch singer's scream knifed the room's breathlessness. For an instant that would be forever etched on the memory of those who saw, Dormer's body was silhouetted above the parapet, against the lights of a farther building. Then it vanished, and a scream drifted up.

There was a mad scramble for telephones, but Rooney got the one in the room, and Scoop Nelson got the one at the foot of the stairs, and Doyle and Miller ran down the hall banging on doors and ringing for the elevator.

A little later, with Myra Wharton wedged between them, Scoop and Murphy rode back to the *Bulletin* office.

"Jeez!" said Murphy. "What a picture. I got him just in the air. And say, Scoop—how do you do it? You're a regular Sherlock Holmes, with your deductions!"

"Simple, my dear Watson," he told Murphy. "Elementary, in fact. The word is not deductions. It's—well, it's much nicer. I learn from and about women."

CRIME CRAZY

(Continued from page 23)

watch, "it's nine-forty. Wouldn't you have time to see a girl named Jane?"

"Can I?" Larrabee's voice was eager. He looked at me.

"As far as I am concerned," I smiled.

"If I can help—" Bert hesitated.

"Not until morning," I said, "at the office."

Bert was off like a shot. Kent closed the heavy door behind him. Gaddis chuckled.

"Sit there, Gibson," Kent indicated the desk chair, "where I can watch you."

"Hell, Masters," Gibson sat down, "you don't—"

"Right now," Kent cut him off, "you are my number one suspect in what might have been the murder of Kent Masters. You know your best out—if you are innocent. Help find the guilty party."

"Had one locked up," Gibson growled. "Now he'll have to be chased all over the country."

"Be your age," Kent was disgusted. "Larrabee couldn't have had any part in the Kendall affair—and these two murders are definitely tied up with it. I think I can name one killer now, but there is a well built alibi to tear down. Tell me all you know about the night Kendall disappeared. According to our files, Kendall could have had at most only a few hundred dollars. He left his home on foot. It was very cold and there was deep snow. How do you think he got away?"

"I don't think he did," Gibson said. "He couldn't have walked to any other town that night. Anyway he was well known in these parts. We know he didn't take a train or bus—and all the cars here were accounted for. I think somebody killed him and got rid of his body."

"I've got a theory," Masters said, "that fits better than that one. A body so well insured wouldn't have been so well hidden. I think Kendall hid right here—

and somebody helped him get away some time later. Have you records of the first investigations?"

GIBSON went to a cabinet and got some folders. Kent dug through them and asked questions which one or another of us answered. This had gone on for nearly an hour when a telephone rang in the outer office. We heard Toller's voice faintly as he answered. Then the door of Gibson's office opened.

"Martin Saum has just been killed," Toller announced.

"Where? How?" Gibson and Kent asked in unison.

"Mrs. Kendall and a schoolma'am just found him in Kendall's garage," Toller answered. "That's all I know."

"I didn't do this one," Gibson glowered at Kent, "and Bert Larrabee has been on the loose nearly two hours."

"Nuts," Kent snapped. "Let's get to Kendall's garage."

"Toller," Gibson ordered, "get out and find Larrabee. Try the hotel first."

"You'll find him at Fred Melton's," Gaddis called as Toller moved away.

We went to the Kendall place in the police car. The porch light was on. As the car turned into the drive we saw that the garage door stood open. Light streamed out. Gibson led the way and slid the door further open.

Martin Saum lay on the floor in the vacant stall of the two-car garage. He wore an overcoat and his crushed hat lay beside him. The head and face were covered with congealed blood. There was more on the floor. It was evident the man had been savagely beaten. Gibson knelt. Kent bent above him.

"Dead," Gibson said, rising. "Head smashed like an eggshell."

Kent's eyes swept the garage. "There's your weapon," he said, pointing to where a heavy machinist's hammer lay partly under the Kendall car. Gibson raked it

out with his foot. The head was bloody. "Don't touch it," the chief said. "Fingerprints."

"Bet on no prints," Kent declared.

"This cinches it," Gibson said. "Saum was Larrabee's partner and when—"

"I think," Masters cut him off, "I'll call the sheriff." He strode towards the door.

"Wait a minute," Gibson hurried after Kent.

"Begin to use your head," Kent flung over his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV

The Trail Narrows

GADDIS and I followed them to the front door. Mrs. Kendall admitted us. She was not crying, but her eyes were red. She led us into the living room. Three school teachers, one middle aged woman and two younger ones sat in chairs drawn close together. They looked frightened.

"Tell me about it, Mrs. Kendall," Gibson said. "How did you happen to find him?"

"Miss Avery and I," Mrs. Kendall looked at the older teacher, "went to the garage to get the car and—"

"Where were you going so late?" Gibson cut in.

"Up town to get Martin—Mr. Saum," she replied. "The girls came home at half past nine. There was practice for the Christmas program at the school tonight. The girls said they had quit early because the storm was getting bad. Mr. Saum had walked to the store, so I phoned the store and asked if I should bring the car to get him. He said not to bother, he could make it all right and he would be right home."

"What time was that?" Gibson asked.

"A little before ten," Mrs. Kendall replied. "When almost an hour went by and he hadn't come, I asked Miss Avery to go with me to find him. He was lame—and the snow was getting deep. We went to the garage and—" she stopped.

"I see," Gibson nodded. "Did either of you touch anything out there?"

"No. Miss Avery became ill. I thought she was going to faint. I got her back to the house and called you."

Gibson nodded, then stood silent and frowning. Kent's eyes had been busy while he listened.

"I'd like to ask some questions," Kent said.

Gibson scowled, but told him to go ahead.

"What time did the teachers go to the schoolhouse, Mrs. Kendall?" Kent asked.

"Eight o'clock."

"And what did you do here alone until nine-thirty?"

"Housework. I cleaned the kitchen. Then I picked up this room and went upstairs. I was up there when I heard the girls come home."

"At four o'clock," Kent said, "you were wearing a blue dress—quite fresh. Did you wear it at dinner?"

Mrs. Kendall hesitated. Her eyes flicked to the three teachers. "Yes," she said, "I did."

"Then you changed to the gray one you are wearing now," Kent said, "after these ladies left. Why—at such a late hour?"

"I felt like freshening up," Mrs. Kendall snapped. "And if you have any notion I had anything to do with Mr. Saum's death, you're crazy. I was here in this room with the girls every minute after I talked to Martin on the phone. Isn't that right, girls?"

The teachers substantiated Mrs. Kendall.

"In that case," Kent said, "you wouldn't mind showing us your blue dress. That job in the garage had to spatter blood."

"Not on my dress," Mrs. Kendall declared. "I'll get it for you."

"I'll go along," Kent moved after her toward a stairway down the hall.

Gibson looked after them uncertainly, then went to the telephone on a small table by the wall.

"I'd better call Doc Cooper and Enders," he said.

THE chief had just started talking to Dr. Cooper when the sound of a shot crashed through the house. There was a scream and bumping sounds from upstairs. One of the teachers moaned. Gaddis and I moved towards the stairs.

"Get over here quick," Gibson barked into the phone. "More trouble." He was close behind as we bounded up the stairs.

In a room at the end of the hall, Kent Masters was covering Mrs. Kendall with a gun. The woman sat on the side of a bed. Kent's left arm hung limp. As we came through the door, she burst into speech.

"I was going to make this snooper get out of my house," she panted. "When I got the gun out of the closet, he tried to take it away from me. It went off. Make him go away," she appealed to Gibson.

"Are you hurt, Kent?" I asked.

"Nicked a little in the shoulder," he nodded. "I want to see that blue dress."

Mrs. Kendall sprang from the bed, snatched a dress from the closet and handed it to Gibson. "There it is," she cried, "and there's no blood on it."

"Not *the* dress," Kent shook his head, "is it, Chuck?"

I looked at the dress. It was blue and all blue dresses look alike to me—especially when not full of woman.

"Never mind," Kent saw my trouble. "Let's take the dress downstairs. Come on, Mrs. Kendall."

Miss Avery was certain the dress was not the one worn by Mrs. Kendall at dinner. This one was piped—which meant nothing to me. The other had been without piping.

"There you are, Gibson," Kent said. "Mrs. Kendall killed Saum and—"

"You're a liar," Mrs. Kendall screamed. "I was here with the girls every minute after I talked to Martin on the phone."

"You know calls on dial phones can't be checked," Kent retorted. "But Saum

wasn't on the other end of that wire. Nobody was. Did any of you ladies hear a voice on the phone?"

Miss Avery and one of the others thought they had heard a voice. The third had been too far away.

"Examination of the body," Kent said, "will show that Saum was dead at the time Mrs. Kendall called the store." His gun still covered Mrs. Kendall.

The phone rang. Gibson answered it and listened a moment. Then he snarled into the phone, "Turn him loose, you damn fool—then come over here quick." He slammed up the receiver.

"Toller," the chief explained sheepishly as he met Kent's gaze. "Found Larrabee at Melton's house and brought him back to jail."

THE doorbell rang. It was Dr. Cooper. When he had heard the facts, the doctor wanted to see Kent's shoulder. Kent insisted on an immediate examination of Saum's body to determine the time of death as nearly as possible. Later the doctor dressed the slight flesh wound in Kent's shoulder. Toller came and he and Gibson took Mrs. Kendall to jail.

Kent and I reached my room at midnight. I broke out the whiskey.

"You never thought Gibson killed Denison," I accused.

"I knew he didn't," Kent grinned. "A bullet fired from the gun room would have hit the pane at an angle and smashed it. That bullet hit squarely. But it was too good a chance to give Gibson a dose of his own medicine. He can dish it out, but he can't take it. Also I wanted cooperation—and thought I might as well do your friend Larrabee a good turn."

"Then who—"

"Saum," Kent cut me off, "killed Denison from the roof of Holliday's store. I think I can prove that in the morning—with any luck."

"Then—" I started again.

"Bed," Kent said firmly, putting down his glass. "I haven't slept in this hotel yet. And three murders in twenty-four hours is— Good night,"

Next morning, Kent and I sat in my office. Bert Larrabee was whistling in the back shop. Kent's shoulder was stiff.

"In stories," Kent grumbled, "the captured killer eagerly tells all. In reality the truth has to be extracted like teeth. Mrs. Kendall won't talk—and she's going to be hard to convict without more evidence. Gibson is hunting for that dress but—"

My office door opened. It was a messenger with a telegram.

"Mr. Masters," the messenger said, "I took this to the hotel and they said I better bring it here to you."

Kent took the message and the messenger departed.

"Hm-m," Kent said, "addressed to Travis." He ripped the envelope and scanned the message. It was long. Just as Kent looked up, Chief Gibson entered the office.

"I found buttons in the ashes of the Kendall furnace," Gibson announced. "Schoolma'ams think they were on that dress of—"

"Here's something," Kent interrupted, "that may be the break. This wire is from our San Francisco office—evidently an answer to a query by Travis. The Saum that worked in a Frisco fish shop in forty-one and forty-two had a strong cockney accent. He quit to work in the Oregon lumber woods for better wages. Another clerk in the store thinks he was killed in an accident, but can't remember where. Best of all, Saum was not lame when he worked in the fish shop."

"Hell," Gibson grunted. "Then Saum—"

"By some freak business may be James Kendall," Kent finished for him. "If we only had Kendall's fingerprints. Too bad he was too young for the other war and—"

"Say," Gibson exclaimed. "Kendall was in the National Guard when he was a kid. Should be prints at the armory in Curtis."

"It's breaking," Kent declared. "If Saum proves to be Kendall, the rest is just digging until somebody cracks."

"Still be tough," Gibson said. "Mrs. Kendall and Saum have concrete alibis for Travis. Mrs. Kendall has one for Dennison's killing—and we ain't broken Saum's yet."

"And Warren Hayes is in the clear on all three," I added.

"Not so sure about Hayes," Kent said. "Gibson, take prints from Saum. Then we'll go to Curtis. I want to check on the banker's sick spell as well as the prints."

Gibson stopped in the door. "Enders," he said, "wants to know when he can hold some funerals. He's running out of places to keep bodies."

I left Larrabee in charge at the *Clarion* and went to Curtis with Kent and Gibson in the police car. By noon we had established the fact that the dead Saum was really James Kendall.

"How in thunder," Gibson asked, "could a man change so much in a couple of years?"

"Digging will answer that," Kent replied. "Let's eat. Then I want to dig into Warren Hayes' alibi for Travis' murder. Is there a lunch room in the hotel where our banker stayed?"

THERE was, and we ate there. The hotel was a bit larger and built of brick, but much like the Shelby Hotel in other ways. There was an easily accessible back door which was seldom locked. It could be reached by a back stairs from the second floor. We learned that the night clerk, George Whiting, was awake. He had eaten his lunch just before we did. We found him in his room.

"Mr. Whiting," Kent asked after we had introduced ourselves, "what time did Mr. Hayes go to bed night before last—when he complained of feeling ill?"

"About seven o'clock," the clerk replied.

"What happened after that?"

"Why Mr. Hayes buzzed the desk just a little before ten," Whiting said. "There are buzzers in each room that register on a board above the key rack. I went up and Mr. Hayes asked me to call a doctor. I called Dr. Gaston. He gave Mr. Hayes

some medicine because something he ate had made him sick. Doc said Mr. Hayes would be all right in a warm bed. Next morning Mr. Hayes was better. He went back to Shelbyville early this morning."

"In his own car?" Kent asked.

"Yes."

"Where was Hayes' car while he was stuck?"

"It was parked around the corner on the side street that first night," Whiting said, "but yesterday morning he had the porter take it over to Barrett's garage."

"Now think," Kent said, "Can you swear that Hayes was in his room all the time from seven o'clock until he called you to get the doctor?"

"Well," the clerk said, "I couldn't swear. I took him up and showed him how to buzz the desk. He said he was going right to bed. At nine o'clock I went upstairs to call a railroad man. I wondered how Mr. Hayes was feeling, so I rapped on his door. He didn't answer and his light was out—so I figured he was asleep and didn't knock again."

"I see," Kent nodded. "Thank you."

Next we found Dr. Gaston at his office. Kent explained our business. The doctor knew Gibson.

"Could Hayes' illness have been caused by something taken voluntarily—some drug?" Kent asked.

"Yes," the doctor said after a moment. "It could have been caused by an emetic, such as ipecac. Mind, I'm not saying that it was. The man had vomited and had a slight fever."

Kent thanked the doctor and left to check on where Hayes' car had been parked the night of Travis' murder. We timed our return trip to Shelbyville at a safe speed. We made it in thirty-two minutes. Chief Gibson had been surly and silent since noon.

We reached Warren Hayes' bank just before three. Hayes, a compact, well-groomed man of fifty with a florid face, invited us into his private office.

"I suppose—" Hayes began as he sat down at his desk.

CHIEF GIBSON turned from closing the office door and snarled, "Hayes, you are under arrest for the murder of Detective Travis. Your alibi is all shot to hell. The clerk looked in your room at nine o'clock and you wasn't there. So I warn—"

"Just a minute," Hayes' voice shook as he interrupted. His face had gone pale. He raised a trembling hand. "I can explain my absence from the room—and I can show you something that will absolutely prove I did not kill Travis."

Kent was scowling at Gibson. Neither of us had expected the chief's sudden action. Hayes rose shakily and stepped to a filing cabinet. He whirled suddenly. There was a nickled revolver in his hand and stark fear in his eyes. Chief Gibson drew his gun and fired from the hip.

Hayes staggered against the cabinet and brought his gun around to point at Gibson. He did it slowly. Gibson fired again. Hayes went down—his gun thudding on the floor.

"Stop it, Gibson," Kent yelled. "You trigger happy fool!" Kent was on his knees lifting the banker's head and shoulders. He looked at me. "Call a doctor, quick."

As I dialed Dr. Cooper's number Kent snapped at Gibson, "You idiot, that gun wasn't loaded. I could see the cylinder."

Dr. Cooper's office girl said he was out on a call, but she would get him by phone. I told her to hurry and hung up.

Kent was holding Hayes as comfortably as possible. Gibson, gun in hand stood over them. The banker's shirt was no longer white. His face was gray.

"Never mind Cooper," Hayes gasped. "Too late. Listen. I killed Travis. Stole—Porter's gun. Travis was—hot on Saum. Saum was—Kendall. I was—ruined if Kendall—caught."

"Who killed Dennison?" Kent asked.

"Don't know," Hayes gasped. "Guess Kendall." Hayes shuddered and closed his eyes.

"How did Kendall get to be Saum?" Kent asked.

"Accident," Hayes' voice was weak.

"Plastic-surgery. Ask — ask — Inland Lumber Company. Oregon." Hayes writhed. Blood trickled from a corner of his mouth.

"How did Kendall get away from here?" Kent asked.

"Hid. Own—house," Hayes wheezed. "I drove—Sioux City—next night." Hayes groaned. His eyes sought Gibson. "Thanks, Gibson," he panted. "Best—way. Insurance—good now. Family—" Hayes went limp.

Kent bent close, then looked up and shook his head. When Dr. Cooper arrived five minutes later, he pronounced Hayes dead.

TWO mornings later, Kent came to my office to give me the latest details for the *Clarion*. Bert Larrabee had most of the story in type.

"Found the gun Saum-Kendall used to kill Dennison," Kent said, "under a pile of blankets in Holliday's store. It was a rifle from stock. Saum-Kendall shot from Holliday's roof between appearances in the show window. There was a ladder and a trap door."

"What else?" I asked.

"Kendall, working under a n o t h e r name," Kent went on, "was injured in a lumber camp accident that killed two other men—one of them the real Martin Saum. Kendall had a broken nose, crushed foot and internal injuries. Lost a lot of weight and had a plastic job in Portland. His hair turned gray. No relatives of Saum were found and he was buried in a charity plot. Kendall saw the chance to come back here as Saum. He knew a lot about Saum from their association in the camp. It almost worked."

"What about Mrs. Kendall?" I asked.

"Still a sphinx," Kent said. "Swears she didn't kill Saum and don't know who did. Admits nothing that can't be proven. She'll probably get off with life. I'd say she saw a chance to get rid of a crippled husband and have all that insurance dough—except what went to Hayes. Hayes' insurance, by the way, is good. A break for his family."

The office door opened. Jane Melton and her father came in.

"Want to announce Jane's wedding to Larrabee," the implement dealer told me. "Jane and Bert can give you all the details."

Jane blushed and laughed as she went into the back shop. I told Melton I was glad that he didn't hold the past against Bert.

"I got in jail myself, when I was a sprout," Melton grinned. "Swiped a case of eggs off a farmer's truck. The judge had more sense than to throw the book at a fool kid. Bert Larrabee's all right. The town likes him."

Bert and Jane came in. "Mr. Porter," Bert asked, "can a fellow have three best men? We can't decide between you and Mr. Masters and Mr. Gaddis."

"I'm not Emily Post," I grinned at Kent.

"Neither am I," Kent smiled at Bert. "See Gaddis. If he agrees, we'll set a precedent."

"Chuck," Kent asked when we were alone, "what will you take for half of this yellow journal of yours?"

"You serious?" I gawked at him.

"Yep," Kent nodded. "I'm small town folks. I like them. And I'm sick of this racket. It's hazardous. I might get to be like Gibson. So. I'm quitting. I've got some dough. Do I get half of the *Clarion*?"

He got it—and we're making it pay. Everybody but Chief Gibson seems to like us. Gibson doesn't like anybody.

Our city editor, Bert Larrabee, is an expectant father. He says the kid's name is going to be Charles Kent Harrison Larrabee. It will probably be a girl—named Jane.

Mrs. Kendall is serving a life sentence in the state prison. The jury found her guilty, but balked at the death penalty. A cousin of James Kendall turned up with a good lawyer. They are trying to collect Kendall's insurance. Kent Masters says they can't win.

"Murder is a deadbeat," Kent says, "it never pays anybody."

FIESTA OF MURDER

(Continued from page 29)

"Huh? Nita?" he looked startled. "She wasn't there."

"No, she wasn't," I nodded. "But she can tell me some things about Hudson that might help a bit."

"What're you mixing in this for, Beck?" he asked, suddenly suspicious again.

"I was there and saw what could be seen," I told him vaguely. "The cops will get around to me pretty soon. They'll question everybody they can find that was there. They're pretty thorough. I just want to clear up a few minor points in my mind. I think I know who did the killing, but I want to be more sure of my ground before I pass it on to the cops."

He gave me an address out in Malibu, and I got back in my car and drove out there. She was a cute little minx, this Mexican nightingale, about five feet two, with blue-black hair and large black eyes. She'd come up from Mexico to play in a part in *Nights In Yucatán*, and had remained on with a contract from one of the larger studios.

HER house was a low sprawling structure, an hacienda-type house, with a red tile roof. A pretty little Mexican maid answered the door, and I asked in Spanish for Nita Ruisenñor. She smiled and invited me in, led me to a large front room. She sat me in a big overstuffed chair, and said she'd tell the Señorita I was here.

I looked around the room. Thick carpet on the floor, big davenport across one end, a small bookcase filled with books, a center table, another overstuffed chair and a couple of occasional chairs. Heavy drapes on the windows.

Then Nita Ruisenñor came through the door.

"Señor Beck?" she asked, in that flute-like voice.

I got to my feet and bowed over her

hand, spoke to her in Spanish. Her face lighted up.

"Sorry to have to break in on you this way," I apologized. "But I'm looking into the death of Ed Hudson. You knew him?"

"You are of the police?" she asked, and the smile faded from her face. "Already they have been here, and I told them—"

"No," I said, "not of the official police. I am a private investigator. You see —"

"Then for whom are you working?" she persisted. She wasn't anybody's fool.

"You might say I'm working for Pablo Rincón," I smiled. I presumed she'd read the papers.

"But I know no such man," she said.

"Even so," I ventured, "you wouldn't mind answering a few simple questions? Hudson was a friend of yours?"

"A friend?" She pursed her lips. "I thought so, yes."

"And the police think possibly it was your agent, Crane, that killed him," I said. "You read the papers?"

"Yes, I read the papers," she nodded. "But I do not read the English so well. Señor Crane? The papers said nothing—"

"Just what was the trouble between Crane and Hudson?" I asked.

"He—he didn't like Señor Hudson. He thought it might not be good publicity for me to be seen around with him. That was all."

"Just protecting the reputation of his client," I nodded. "Have you ever been in the Civic Center Grill?" I asked.

"Yes, Mr. Hudson took me there occasionally," she said. A peculiar little light leaped into her dark eyes.

"And you know Andy Sloan, the owner of the Grill?" I asked.

"Yes, I know Mr. Sloan," she admitted, voice low.

"And have you been in Sloan's room upstairs?" I persisted.

"But surely!" she said, and smiled

her slow smile. "Why else do you think I would go to a place like that Grill?"

"And you played the wheel?" I smiled and nodded.

"Of course," she shrugged.

"And how much do you owe Andy Sloan on I.O.U.'s?" I shot at her.

She jerked in her chair as if I'd slapped her. She sucked in her breath, and began to bite one corner of her lip, staring at me wide-eyed.

"Wh-what's that got to do with Hudson's murder?" she asked.

"Maybe nothing," I shrugged. "Maybe a lot. How much?"

"It's none of your business," Nita snapped. "I refuse to answer such a question. It's —"

"Under the law," I said slowly, "there's only one valid reason why a person can refuse to answer questions in court. And that is because they think the answers will tend to incriminate them. Do you think your answer to that question might incriminate you? You didn't kill Hudson, did you?"

"How absurd!" Nita flashed, lips curling in disdain. "Of course not. Sloan holds my I.O.U.'s to the amount of about seven thousand dollars. That's why Crane was so angry with Hudson—taking me there to gamble."

"Okay," I said, and stood up. "And thanks a lot for seeing me."

IT was nearly ten o'clock when I got back to town. From a drugstore I called up Bill Dugan. I'd been fortunate enough to have helped him on several other cases, and he'd at least listen to what I had to say. He had a cubbyhole of an office over at Police Headquarters in the City Hall. I caught him in, and he said come on up.

I went to see him. I started at the beginning and told him the whole setup, Pablo Rincón and all.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he snorted. "I had an idea that Mexican was you, before I got the reports on the prints, remembering you speak Spanish. Then when I got the reports, I was going to

call you in and ask some questions. Boy, wouldn't Oldham be wild if he knew it was you!" Bill's eyes twinkled. "You know, Ed, assaulting and knocking out a cop is pretty serious business."

"If you tell him, Bill, I swear I'll never help you on another case," I yelped. "Besides, Oldham isn't a cop. He's just a nosey snooper for the D.A.'s office, with a greatly exaggerated idea of his own importance."

"I know, I know. Don't worry," Bill assured me. "Pablo Rincón has simply disappeared into thin air. Now just what was it you wanted me to do?"

"I want you to go with me to the Civic Center Grill," I told him, and grinned.

"What for, and why?" he insisted.

"This is murder, Bill. You have the authority to arrest Hudson's killer. I haven't. And besides," I added and grinned again, "you'd like to get the credit for cleaning up the case, wouldn't you, huh?"

"Yes, but—"

I shook my head and continued to grin. He stared at me, then finally nodded.

"Okay," he said.

We got up and walked over to the Civic Center Grill, and went inside. It was half past ten, and there was a fair-sized crowd at the bar. Bill and I took a booth, and sat where I could see Andy Sloan up at the cash register.

"I was right," I said after a few minutes. Bill looked at me blankly. "Call Andy back here, Bill," I added.

Bill beckoned to the waiter and told him to ask Sloan to step back to our booth. I saw the waiter go up to Andy and whisper to him. Andy slid off the stool and started on the way back toward us.

"Get out your gun, Bill," I said, "and when he comes in, cover him. Don't let him make any funny moves."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Bill growled.

As Sloan stepped into the curtained entrance to the booth, Bill raised his

hand, the gun pointing at Sloan's chest.

"Come on in, Sloan," I said coldly, the vision of Dan Higgins before my eyes. And the body of Ed Hudson lying on the floor of the booth, eyes staring at the ceiling.

"Wh-what's this?" Sloan asked, his beady eyes darting from Bill to me and back again to Bill.

"You're under arrest, Sloan," Bill said.

"For what?" Sloan asked.

"For the murder of Edgar Hudson and Dan Higgins," I told him.

FOR the space of two heartbeats Sloan stood motionless, as if petrified. The look on his face was that of a cornered animal. It was so fierce, so savage, it startled me. Fright blended with anger—an over-powering, maniacal anger. The veins of his neck and forehead, in blue knots, were corded and bulged like ropes.

Then his left hand darted for his shoulder-holster. Bill waited till the gun began to come out, then fired. Sloan spun around with a shattered left shoulder.

It was nearly midnight when we got back to Bill's office.

"Now, you cock-eyed son of a tadpole," Bill said, dropping wearily into a chair and lighting a cigarette. "How did you dope it out? All the time, I thought Crane was the killer."

"Sloan confessed, didn't he?" I asked blandly.

"Yeah, sure, but how—"

"Well, the whack that I got on the head," I said, "was on the right side. The blow that killed Hudson was on the right side of *his* head. The blow that knocked out Dan Higgins was on the right side of *his* head—and that one had me stopped cold, for a while."

"Well, but—" Bill began.

"Don't you see, Bill?" I cut him short. "Those blows were given by a left-handed man. If the killer had been right-handed, the blows would have been on the *left* side of the head. Sloan is left-

handed. In fact, he has no right hand at all. It was amputated, and he wears a wax hand covered by a glove.

"Yes, but—" Bill tried again.

"When I found that I had been hit on the right side of the head," I went right on, "and so had Hudson and Higgins, I figured that the killer must be a left-handed man."

"But when Higgins was slugged," Bill got in, "he must've been reaching into his locker, and his *back* was to the man that hit him. Thus, a left-handed man would hit him on the left side of the head. But he was hit over the *right* ear."

"That's what had me stopped for a time," I nodded. "It busted up my left-handed theory. Then I figured out that Higgins must've turned around, or at least turned his head, and caught the blow on the right side. And if he turned his head, he must've seen who hit him, and knew who had murdered Hudson. Sloan figured that out later, when he saw where he'd hit Higgins. So he went back after he killed Hudson, and stabbed Higgins, dragged his body out into the alley."

"But I don't see,—" Bill began.

"It was when Nita Ruiseñor told me she'd lost a large sum of money in Sloan's crooked gambling room, that I got the full picture," I told him. "Crane couldn't have been the killer—he's right-handed. It would be a rather awkward blow, at best. At least, it wasn't logical to me, for everything pointed to a left-handed man. And Crane's motive wasn't strong enough for murder."

"Yeah, that had me stopped on Crane, too," Bill said. "But how did you figure out Sloan's motive?"

"Hudson was trying to chisel in on the gambling end of the business," I answered. "And he was running around with Nita, too. He brought her into the Grill, and Sloan took a shine to her—he was jealous. Hudson knew Sloan's games were crooked, and he told Sloan he'd tip off Nita and she'd cancel the I.O.U.'s, if Sloan didn't let Hudson in on the busi-

ness. Sloan figured to get rid of a rival in both business and love—and save seven thousand dollars. So he cracked Hudson over the head, and tried to frame it on the supposed Mexican in the booth with Hudson. When the Mexican disappeared into thin air, Sloan had to dig up another likely suspect quick, to keep the police from thinking about him, so

he told you about Crane being there.”

“Yeah,” Bill yawned. “You did all right, Ed. And thanks.”

“The thing that irks me,” I said, “is that I missed out entirely on the Fiesta. I’d counted on having a swell time, in that Mexican costume.”

“You had a Fiesta, all right,” Bill said. “A Fiesta of murder.”

DEATH IS A DUMMY

(Continued from page 57)

ing the call-boxes, and the time you’re supposed to ring them, and where they’re located—things like that?”

“Sure.”

“And you say your tea made you sleepy?”

“Yeah. ’Twas damned funny, but—”

“Look. Who brewed that tea? Did you do it yourself?”

“Nah. Thora done it, like she always does. She gits home a little afther foive, an’ I don’t go on jooty until six, so she always gits home in time to make up me lunch. Ye kin ask her yourself, Barney.”

THE store dick put a paw on the old man’s shoulder. “Nobody will ever ask Thora anything again, Mike,” he said slowly. “Brace yourself for some bad news. Thora must have drugged your tea last night; and while you were asleep, she got into the store. She must have had a master duplicate from an impression that she probably swiped from yours. Anyhow, we know she got in. We can guess that she rang your alarm-boxes to keep you covered. And then . . . she was murdered, Mike.”

The old man jerked convulsively. “My Thora . . . *kilt* . . .?” he almost screamed. “You’re jokin’ Barney! Tell me you’re only kiddin’!”

“Sorry, Mike. But it’s true.” Barney turned away from the look of stricken agony that dulled Gleason’s faded blue eyes; an agony spawned of bitter re-

morse that would endure as long as the old Irishman drew breath. If Mike hadn’t gone to sleep on his job, he might have saved his only daughter from death. It wasn’t a very pleasant thought for a man to live with in his old age.

Mike’s gnarled fists hammered against his thin, shriveled chest. “My Thora . . . kilt . . . whilst I was asleep . . .!” he accused himself wildly. “But whut was she doin’ in the store at such an hour?”

“I think I know. But I’m not saying anything yet.”

“Ah, God . . . God . . .! I know whut you’re thinkin’. She was havin’ a date with young Westervelt . . .”

Barney said: “I don’t believe that’s it, Mike.”

“Ah, yes it was!” The old man clutched at the store dick’s arm and broke into an incoherent tirade. “An’ ’twas the Westervelts that done her in, damn their black souls to hell! They was afraid of Thora because of whut she had on that young cur-whelp! ’Twas Junior that kilt her, because he was through with her an’ she didn’t want to give him up! ’Twas him an’ his ould man! Yes, the ould man! He hated her because his high-an-mighty son fell for her—an’ she was beneath their station! Ah, God—I’ll git even with them, Barney! I’ll cut out their foul hearts, an’ the heart of that Kitty Cavane, too!”

Barney tensed. “Take it easy, Mike. What about Kitty Cavane?”

"She's in on it! Ain't Junior Westervelt been makin' sheep's-eyes at her? An' ain't she been makin' a play for him? Oh, she was a smart one with it. She didn't let on. But my Thora knew. Thora could tell. An' mayhap Thora could have won Junior back again if it hadn't been for him fallin' for that red-haired—"

Barney said: "Maybe. Maybe not. Anyway, I'm going to find the Cavane girl now. And then I think we'll know all the answers." He turned and walked out of the little flat.

CHAPTER IX

Death Comes Calling

IT TOOK him five minutes to lure a cab, most hacks being busy because of the rain. He finally snagged a Checker; and ten more minutes took him to a high-class apartment building over on West Nineteenth.

Alighting, he tore a five-spot in half and handed one part to the jehu. "Wait here for me, cousin. I'll be needing you some more."

The cabby nodded.

Barney trudged into the building and looked along the banked rows of glass-and-chromium letterboxes until he found one bearing a card that read: "Percy Milton." The apartment-number was 218.

Lumbering upstairs, he found Milton's quarters. The apartment had two doors. One fronted the staircase; the other, apparently a kitchen service-entrance, opened into a short hallway running at right angles to the main corridor.

Barney tried the back door first. It was locked. Scowling, he moved around to the front door and applied gentle pressure to the knob, hoping for a break. But he didn't get one. That lock was fastened, too. "Nuts!" he whispered sourly, and knocked.

From inside, Percy's voice quavered: "Who's there?"

"Express package for Mr. Milton—collect."

The bolt whispered out of its keeper, and the door opened. Percy stuck his head out. "Give it to me. How much?" Then he saw Barney, and his jaw dropped. "Y-you—!"

"Yeah. I want to see Kitty."

"Damn you—you can't accuse her of—*oh-h-h, my God!*"

AS THE window-trimmer's voice soared to a keening pitch, a pistol-shot spanked out from the corridor behind Barney Cunard. He felt a sudden stinging sensation in his left shoulder. At the same instant, he saw a round blue hole appear in Milton's forehead directly between the eyes. Percy pitched toward him without a sound.

Barney's reaction was reflex; without conscious thought. Yelping an oath, he shoved Milton away from him and then leaped over the threshold himself. As the window-dresser thumped to the floor, Barney slammed the door with a backward kick of his foot and heard the spring-latch snap home. Then he hurled himself flat alongside Milton's sprawled body as another vicious slug drilled a splintered hole in the door-panel above him.

He waited for a third report.

It didn't come.

Barney reached up toward the door-knob. This case was coming to a head—with a vengeance! He fumbled for the snaplock release—

And as his fingers searched for the button, a bleating scream knifed from within the apartment. From the rear.

The store detective drew his .38 and scrambled upright. He lurched into the kitchenette. "*Kitty—!*" he yelled.

The red-haired Cavane girl was crouched by the back door, wide-eyed and panting. And in her right fist there was a nickel-plated roscoe with smoke curling up out of its muzzle!

For a frozen instant Barney stared at her in stunned silence. A kaleidoscope of thought-pictures blurred through his mind like a movie-montage gone nuts. Kitty and the Oscarina which had been

planted on his basement-office desk. Kitty in the merchandise-display department, alone with Martha Deayne—and Martha with a knife-stab in her heart. And now Kitty with a smoking gat—and Perc Milton drilled through the skull in the front room. . . .

She cringed away from the look in his eyes; from the .38 in his own mitt. "D-don't shoot me—!" she wailed.

He leaped at her; knocked the nickel-plated weapon from her fingers with a sweeping, chopping blow. "What the hell are you doing with that thing?" he snarled.

"It—it—somebody just tossed it over the transom!" she whimpered. "I picked it up—"

HE SCOOPED it from the floor and thrust it into his pocket. Then he wrenched at the knob of the kitchen door. It was locked. He twisted the key, opened the door and cautiously peered down the short hallway leading to the main corridor. He saw people running toward the front door of the Milton apartment; tenants aroused by the two pistol-shots. He slammed the door and locked it again, hastily. He spun around to Kitty. "Were you out of this room a minute ago?" he demanded harshly.

"No—no—!"

"I don't believe you." He tried to grab her and shake the truth out of her.

She eluded him and darted past him into the front room, like a harried animal. He plunged in pursuit. "Come here!" he rasped.

Then Kitty froze as she saw Percy Milton's corpse. A fresh scream was distilled from the terror in her throat. "He's dead! He's dead. *You* killed him!" she stared at Barney with wild, hysteria-filled eyes.

Knuckles were beginning to thud on the front door. Upraised voices filtered through from the outer corridor, demanding admission. And Kitty was getting ready to shriek again.

Barney's lips compressed. "Damn," he whispered savagely. Then he did the

only thing possible under the circumstances. Hating himself for it, he swung a loose-fisted blow that popped home to Kitty Cavane's dimpled chin.

Her even white teeth clicked together. She moaned, sagged and went down.

BARNEY hurled himself toward the telephone over in a corner of the room. He dialed police headquarters and asked for Lerch of homicide.

After a while, Lerch himself answered. "Yeah?"

"This is Barney Cunard. Listen. I'm not drunk, Lerch. I'm as sober as a judge. Percy Milton's dead. Drilled through the noggin. In his apartment." Barney gave the address.

"And who the hell is Percy Milton?" Lerch demanded sharply.

"Head window-trimmer for the Westervelt store. He was mixed up in those two bump-offs."

Lerch rasped: "By jumping God!" Then he said: "You stay put, Barney. Don't move until I get there. Understand?"

"Ix-nay. I'm hauling hips. And I'm thumbing the killer for you. But you've got to play it my way." He lowered his voice and issued swift instructions.

Lerch listened and then said: "I'll string with you, Shaggy. But God help you, if you slip up! I mean that!"

"I won't slip up. I *can't!* Now get busy. Send somebody else up to Milton's dugout. You handle the main trap yourself. Be seeing you."

"Right." Lerch rang off.

Barney waited an instant, hoping that his theory would hold water. If he was on the wrong track, his cook was goosed. Damn it, he couldn't be on the wrong track, he told himself! He dialed the Westervelt store.

When the P. B. X. operator answered, he said: "Give me Old Man Westervelt."

"Sorry, sir. He's out."

"Junior, then."

"He's out, too. We expect them back soon. Will you leave a message?"

"Yeah." Barney made his tone harsh,

emphatic. "You tell the Westervelts that Barney Cunard called. Tell them I'm going to be in their private suite pretty soon and I'm going to have some hot dope for them. I'm going to give them the low-down on Kitty Cavane. Got it?"

"Yes. I've got it."

"Good." He hung up; put away his gun and lumbered across the room to Kitty. She was still out cold.

THE store dick's left shoulder was stinging and burning where that bullet had clipped him before it smashed into Percy Milton's brain; but he disregarded it.

Carrying Kitty to the window, he saw a fire-escape leading downward to an alley behind the apartment structure.

He raised the window-sash and boosted Kitty's limp, fragile form over the sill. Rain pelted against his face as he tightened his hold on her and started down.

He made it to the alley, unobserved. Bracing Kitty in the crook of his arm, he went cautiously to the street and saw his taxi still waiting at the curb. "Open up!" he called to the driver.

The man looked startled when he saw Kitty sagging in the detective's grasp. "What the hell, mister—?"

"It's okay. This is my wife. She was taken suddenly drunk. I've got to get her away from here."

The jehu shook his head. "Nix, buddy. I don't like any part of it. Get her out."

"Okay, wisenheimer. Have a swivel." Barney flashed his tinware. "I'm a dick, see? This is police business. Are you doing what I tell you, or do I feed you a load of lumps?"

That did the trick. The cabby said: "Excuse me, inspector. Where to?"

Barney slid in alongside Kitty's lolling form. "The Westervelt Department Store. Fast. And close that partition. Your ears look too big to suit me."

BARNEY pulled Kitty close to him and massaged the back of her white neck. Pretty soon her eyelashes fluttered. She stared at him for a stupid

instant, then tried to fight free of his embrace. "Let me g-go . . .!" she wailed.

"Like hell I'll let you go!" he said softly, lowering the arm that encircled her shoulders so that he could squeeze her cuddly waist. "What are you scared of, if you haven't done anything wrong?" He probed her eyes. "You didn't murder anybody, did you?"

"I—I *knew* you'd ask that!" she moaned. "Perc was afraid you'd try to pin something on me because I happened to be in the same suite with M-Martha Deayne when she was k-killed!"

"Sure," Barney nodded heavily. "I guessed that much. Percy figured I might suspect you, so he followed me to the Constance, busted into that room and conked me. Then he convinced you that I was trying to tangle you in a murder mess, and he persuaded you to go to his apartment with him."

"Y-yes."

Barney sighed a little. "He was a pretty good guy, after all. He was in love with you, wasn't he?"

"He . . . said so."

"And now he's dead."

She tried to draw away. "You killed him!"

"What makes you think so?"

"Wh-what else can I think? You had a gun—"

"And so did you," he reminded her softly.

She wailed: "But—but I told you it was thrown over the kitchen transom! I picked it up just as you rushed in. . . .!"

"Okay, honey. I believe you. And you've got to believe me. I didn't bump Milton. The shot was fired from behind me. It nipped a piece out of me before it hit him." Barney opened his coat and showed her the blood on his upper shirt-sleeve.

"B-Barney—you're hurt!"

"Just a nick. I was lucky. That slug was meant for the back of my noggin, but it missed—and killed Perc instead. The murderer didn't intend it to be that way. I was to be bumped first. Then

Percy Milton. And then you. But I got the door closed in time to stop it. So the killer tossed that roscoe over the kitchen transom and lammed."

She whimpered: "But why, Barney? *Why?* Who'd want to kill you and Perc and m-me. . . .?"

"Somebody who's going in for murder in wholesale lots—to keep from being discovered," he answered her. Then he said: "Tell me, babe. Did you ever make a play for Junior Westervelt?"

"No!" Her voice was indignant, honest.

"Well, that's cleared up," Barney grunted. Gloom entered his tone as he added: "I wish I hadn't led death to Perc Milton's door."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"**I**T WAS my fault that he got bumped.

I knew he was the one who conked me and put the grab on you in the Constance Hotel. I found his handkerchief when I came to. That's why I didn't start searching for you right away; I knew you were safe. If Perc thought enough of you to warn you of danger, he wouldn't turn around and harm you later. And I knew he wasn't the killer, because if he'd been guilty, he *wouldn't* have warned you. He was trying to protect you all the way through, and I realized it. And now he's dead—and it's my fault. The murderer must have followed me to his apartment. I can see that, now."

Kitty reached up and patted his tired face. "You couldn't help it, Barney. You didn't know." Then she whispered: "But why did the murderer follow you to Percy's place?"

"To get at you. To croak you because you know too much."

"You mean—about that dummy on your desk?"

"Yeah."

"But, Barney—that's wrong. Just as I told Perc awhile ago; Martha and I didn't have any information about the murder."

He said: "You saw somebody planting

the Oscarina in my office last night, didn't you?"

"Not last night, Barney. It was this morning. *And Martha was the one who did it.*"

CHAPTER X

Trap for a Killer

BARNEY felt as if a mule had kicked him in the teeth. "What?" he gasped.

"Y-yes. Martha did it. I helped her. We thought it would be a big joke on you."

"When did you do it?"

"This morning. We came to work a little early. We found the dummy in front of your door, as if it had been left there by accident. And so . . ."

He stared. "You're sure it wasn't last night?"

"Positive, Barney."

"You and Martha didn't see the Oscarina in front of my office when you left last night?"

"No."

"And you didn't see who carried it to the basement?"

She shook her head.

The cab drew up in front of the Westervelt store. Barney opened the glass partition and handed the other half of that torn five-spot to the jehu. "Thanks, cousin," he grunted. Then he grabbed Kitty's arm and whisked her into the emporium before she had a chance to ask questions.

JUST inside the door he spotted two plainclothesmen. He knew them, and he darted an interrogative glance at them. One winked; the other nodded imperceptibly. Which meant that Lieutenant Lerch was upstairs on Eight. The trap was ready for the baiting.

"Come on, babe," the store dick whispered to Kitty. "Let's get this over with." He drew her over to an elevator, pushed her in, followed her and snapped: "Eighth floor. No stops."

The cage arrowed upward.

Barney gripped the red-haired girl's

arm. "Now listen. You go into the little room that Old Man Westervelt's steno uses. Hide there. I'll let you know when to come out. Understand?"

She nodded and ducked around the corner of the hall.

The store-dick clenched his fists and made for the Westervelt anteroom. He entered. It was empty. He pounded on the door to the Old Man's private chamber.

It opened. Senior stared out at him. "So you're back?"

Barney ambled in. "Yeah. Where's Rodney?"

"He—he's not here. I think he's still out looking for Miss Cavine."

"Oh, yeah? Were you with him?"

"No. I had some business to attend to at city hall."

"And you just got back?"

Senior nodded. "I received your message. What is the meaning of all these questions, Cunard?"

"You'll find out. Keep your shirt on. I'm going to hand you the murderer of Thora Gleason, Martha Deayne and Perc Milton."

Old Man Westervelt's knees seemed to jelly out from under him. "Wh-what...?" he choked. "Milton . . . dead? M-murdered?"

"You heard me."

"But—but who—"

Barney drew a deep breath. He walked over to the door leading into the stenographer's room. He opened it. He grabbed Kitty Cavane by the wrists and hauled her from her hiding-place. "Okay, kiddo. Shoot. Tell us who planted that Oscarina on my desk. Spill."

Kitty quavered: "Why—why, I've already told you. It was—Oh-h-h-h, *no—no—NO!*" Her scream shrilled out in yeeping terror. She shrank against the far wall. Something metallic glittered in a flat arc toward her white, throbbing throat.

Barney hit her. He knocked her sprawling. She landed on the thick rug. She screamed again, horribly.

A knife smacked into the wall, point-

first. It stuck there, quivering and twanging like a jew's-harp. It had missed the Cavane cutie by inches.

At the same instant, a hell of a commotion broke loose in the anteroom of the suite. A fist impacted bruisingly against yielding flesh, and Lieutenant Lerch's voice snarled: "Quiet down or I'll drill you full of holes!"

Barney Cunard turned around and said sharply: "The jig's up, Peg Vollney."

CHAPTER XI

Motive for Death

THE brunette Vollney girl was kicking and squirming between two hard-armed dicks who pinioned her. "Damn you—turn me loose! I'll get all of you—!" she foamed like a maniac.

"You're all through killing," Barney said evenly.

Senior Westervelt gulped. "What on earth—?"

Barney said: "The tip-off was some rhinestone jewelry that was found mixed in with the real sparklers downstairs. Thora Gleason managed the costume-jewelry department. Peg Vollney was in charge of the diamond division. Thora and Peg had been your son's girl-friends. He gave 'em both the gate when he took up with Martha Deayne.

"But Thora was trying to win him back. And so was Peg. Peg figured she might beat Martha Deayne's time; but she wasn't so sure about Thora. Thora had some hold on Junior. Letters or some thing probably. I learned that much from old Mike Gleason."

From the doorway came Junior's voice. He had just entered; and overheard what Barney was saying. "Yes," he answered dully. "You're right, Cunard. Thora had some letters of mine. . . ."

Barney swung around to the Vollney wren. "Everything hinged on Thora's reason for being here in the store last night. Why did she dope her father's tea, so that he'd go to sleep on the job? And

why did she ring all his alarm-boxes to keep him covered?

"It looked like robbery. But what could she steal from her own department? Rhinestone junk. No value. On the other hand, diamonds were worth plenty.

"But *you* were manager of the diamond department. You were the only one who had the combination to the diamond safe. So where did you fit in?

"I began to catch wise when I found out about the rhinestones being mixed in with the diamonds. Here's the way it probably happened. You went to Thora Gleason. You must have told her you wanted to get even with Junior for giving you the air. You said you wanted to swipe a lot of Westervelt sparklers. And you asked her to join you, so that she'd be getting revenge, too.

"Her part of the robbery was simple. She was to hand over some rhinestones, and you'd substitute them for genuine rocks in the safe; rocks that you'd steal and divvy with Thora. You told her you could both lam before the theft was ever discovered."

Peg Vollney spat an oath at him.

HE WENT on: "But you planned to double-cross Thora. Maybe you were going to have her pinched for swiping the diamonds. For that matter, maybe she figured on doing the same thing to you—so that she'd get you out of the way and have a clear track to Junior Westervelt.

"Anyhow, you both got into the store last night. Thora got some paste sparklers from her stock and handed them to you. Then you knifed her. And you made one bad mistake. In your excitement, you shoved the rhinestones into the diamond safe instead of returning them to the costume-jewelry stock.

"You locked the safe. You undressed Thora and put her into that bed in the show-window. You carried the dummy down to the basement and dumped it. Then you went home. You figured you were in the clear. Nobody knew about you being in the store at night. So no-

body could suspect you of the killing.

"Then, this morning, you over-heard something that scared you. Martha Deayne and Kitty Cavane had seen you with the dummy! At least that's what you thought—although you were wrong. Neither Martha nor Kitty had anything on you. But you thought they did; so you had to do some more killing.

"You pretended to faint. The Westervelts and Percy Milton brought you up to the eighth floor; left you here in Senior's office while they all went hunting for smelling-salts and brandy to bring you around. They were gone four or five minutes.

"You weren't really unconscious. That was a stall. The instant you were alone, you got up and sneaked past the steno's room, through the rear corridor to the merchandise-display department. You stabbed Martha. You didn't get a chance at Kitty, because Percy Milton busted in at that minute. You heard him. So you had to lam back to Senior's office and go into your faint again."

Junior Westervelt whispered: "Good God!"

Barney went on to his grim conclusion. He pointed a thick finger at Peg Vollney. "You came down to my office; pumped me into telling you I was going to look for Kitty Cavane. I gave you a key to my flat, but you never went there. Instead, you grabbed a taxi and followed me. You trailed me to Percy Milton's joint; shot him because you were afraid maybe Kitty had spilled to him. You'd have shot Kitty and me, too, but the breaks weren't with you.

"So you hurried back downstairs to your cab. You followed my taxi here to the store, knowing I had Kitty with me. You wanted to bump her before she could talk. I figured you'd do that; so I phoned Lerch; had him and his men waiting for you. And now—"

Lerch broke in: "And now she goes to the gas-chamber. Come along sister." He started to snick handcuffs on the brunette's wrists.

She jerked away. "They'll never gaa

me!" she screamed. She leaped to the wall, snatched the knife she had thrown at Kitty. She made a vicious slash at Junior Westervelt; missed him. Then she buried the blade in her yielding breast before anybody could reach her and grab the weapon.

Barney caught her as she slumped. The hilt of the knife pinned her breast flat; her heart had already stopped

beating. "Too late," he whispered. He lowered her to the rug.

Then he turned to Kitty Cavane; pulled her upright. "Sorry I had to put you in danger again, baby," he said softly. "But I knew the cops would be right behind Peg Vollney to spoil her aim. Forgive me?"

Her kiss was answer enough for anybody.

SPILL NO BLOOD

(Continued from page 75)

Pete carried one bag, Nick the other. Pete even helped her into the roadster.

I said: "Look, pals, let's have no hard feelings. I was a good sport last night out at the bungalow. Pals, eh?"

Nick grinned, and Pete said tiredly: "Why don't you scam?"

"Sure, if you aren't sore. I had you on a spot up there. Let's shake hands all around and call it square."

So Pete brought up his hand. I grabbed his wrist with my left hand. The palm of my right hand cradled his chin. I snapped his head back and caught Nick smack on the chin. Twice I hit Peter in the face and he went down and completely out.

Nick was on his feet again, the dope. It was fun. Boom, boom, boom. "Even," I said grimly, and left them lying there to be swept up in the morning along with the rubbish.

I stopped the roadster at the six-lane, super-highway. "Which way?" I asked.

She stirred a little on the seat. "Did you have to do that?" she asked, and shivered.

"You saw my nose and lips," I said softly. "Which way?"

"Wickahonk," she decided. "I can get a bus."

We went back to the one-street town. I stood her bags on the sidewalk where a sign said BUS STOP.

"Thanks," she said, "for everything."

"If you ever need help," I suggested, "my name is in the Newark phone book."

"I'll be all right. Goodbye, Jerry."

"Goodnight, Helen."

I climbed into the roadster, waved. The roadster did a U-turn with a little help. This time I went straight back to the bungalow. And to bed.

By two o'clock the next afternoon, I had my fingers practically chewed off at the wrist.

I shouldn't have worried. The fat driver of the cab fetched her. She sat on the back seat. She looked like a million in a white linen suit and jade green blouse.

I tried to shove a fin into the hand of the fat driver, but he grinned and said, "You got a lot of change coming from the first five, Mac," and drove off about his business.

We went into the bungalow. She curled up in the club chair as if she belonged there. Elbow on one knee, chin cupped in one tanned hand. "I had to come back, Jerry."

"That's all right, but it was up to you."

Thoughts, deep thoughts in her eyes. "Don't you—aren't you afraid that—you know I had that disk on the shoe-sole!"

"Forget it."

"But they lost all that money!"

"The percentage was against them. You can't buck even an honest wheel."

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I walked over close to her. "I don't care what you had on your shoe-sole. I was under that table, remember? I had my hand over the floor-plate so nobody could gimmick the wheel. Your slipper didn't even graze my hand, you faked it so carefully to fool Ergun. So the ball ran square. The blonde's luck had run out."

Her eyes pleaded with me. "Did you have to put your hand over the plate, Jerry? Didn't you trust me?"

"I trusted you from the moment I saw

you walking along that road. I didn't know how scared you were."

I leaned close to her. "One thing's bothered me," I said roughly. "Gray or green?"

"Gray or green?"

"The eyes, the eyes! Gray or green-colored?"

She pulled me closer. "You'll have a lot of time to find out, Jerry."

Oh, well, a guy gets tired of being a bachelor. A "nice" bachelor, she had said. Remember?

DIVE TO DOOM

(Continued from page 83)

"Frank said you suspected him."

That didn't surprise me either. "So he called you last night after our little talk."

"No. He called this morning."

I picked up my hat. "I'll be seeing you, Miss Broadbent."

She didn't say a word. The look on her face told me I had definitely lost a client.

It would have been too conspicuous for me to call on Nick in the afternoon. I never dropped around The Club until after dinner. I killed the afternoon in my office. It was a dull day and I was glad to get out for a steak and head for Nick's.

I knew that Frank Heath bought most of his drinks at The Club, but I figured that with Felicia's father not yet buried, he would spend the evening with her. I was wrong.

As I took a stool I saw Frank coming out of the door to Nick's private office behind the left end of the bar. He was mad. It showed on his face. Nick followed him, smiling. You could never tell a thing from Nick's smiles.

Heath stomped right by me without speaking. Nick disappeared back in his office. I killed my drink and went back. I didn't bother to knock.

Nick was sitting at his desk toying with a letter opener. For once there was no smile. He managed a faint one when he saw me. "Hello, Johnnie. You should knock." The voice was soft. The words were edged.

"You should be pouring my drinks, Nick," I grinned. "What gives with Heath?"

"Ask me more, Johnnie." The old grin was in full bloom again.

"What gives with Heath," I repeated, "And what about the gas wells and Broadbent?"

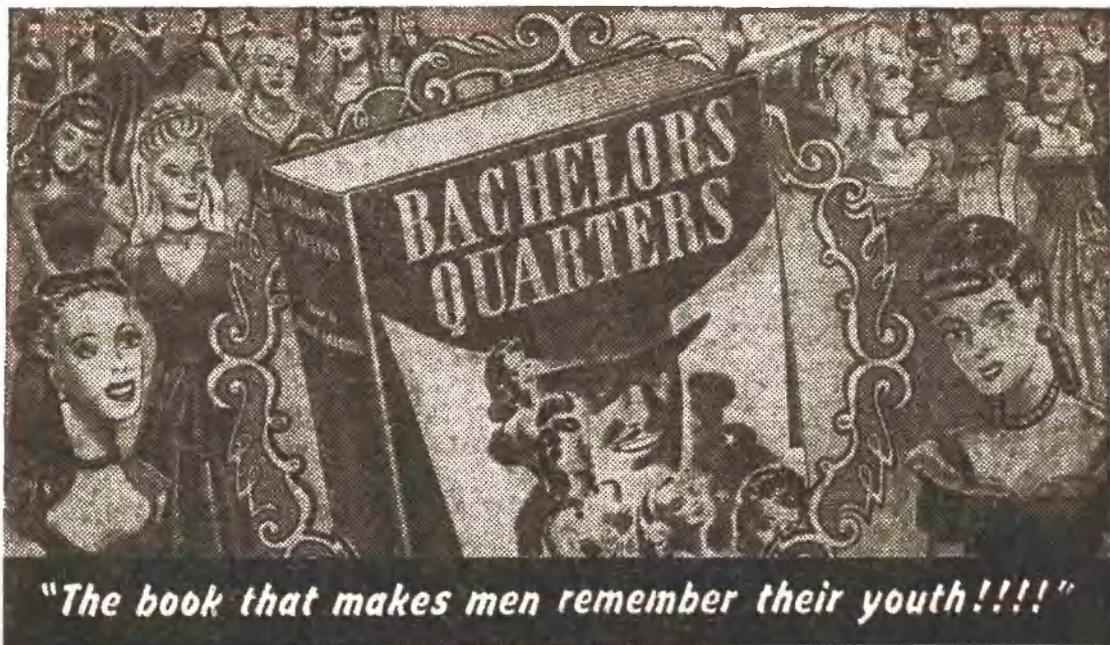
"You interested, Johnnie?"

"You're damned right I'm interested. And you know some of the answers, Nick. You're defendant in a lawsuit over those wells. Heath's promoting them. He was even trying to sell stock to Broadbent. It sounds like a cockeyed set up. I'm after the answer. You can start by telling me where you were last night before I came in."

"I was here all evening, Johnnie. And if you want to know about Broadbent, Johnnie, suppose you ask someone else. Me, I don't know nothing."

"O.K." I said. "I'll get it out of Heath. He's just about my size."

"Sure, Johnnie. Get it out of Heath." Nick was laughing at me.



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I WAS beginning to wonder just how long Heath would be around to tell his story when I walked back through the bar and headed for the door. I knew he'd been arguing with Nick. You don't argue with Nick and stay healthy long enough to brag about it.

There was a taxi sitting in front. The cabby was trying to read a magazine with the help of the streetlight. He hopped out and opened the door for me.

"Know Frank Heath?" I asked.

"Heath? The good-looking guy? Sure."

I flashed a five dollar bill. "Which way did he go?"

"Left in a cab about five minutes ago."

"Alone?"

"Naw. A couple of Nick's men picked him up outside here."

"Think you can find them?" I fished a twenty out of my pocket.

"Nick'll be along in a minute," the cabby said. "Hop in and we'll wait for him. Then we'll do it the easy way."

I got in. "What's the pitch?"

The cabbie grinned. "Whenever Nick's boys escort someone away from The Club, Nick always follows. Whatever working over they get, Nick does it personally. His boys are strictly softies when it comes to mayhem."

The cabbie was right. Just as he finished talking Nick's sedan swung out of the alley and headed up the street. I saw the flash of a chrome spotlight on the side of the windshield as it passed us. The cabbie waited until it was two blocks away. Then he started out.

"Ever hear of a guy by the name of Broadbent?" I asked hopefully.

"The lawyer that drove himself off the road? Yeah. I've heard of him."

"Did he drive off the road?"

The cabbie shrugged. "You got me, mister. All I know about that is what I read in the papers."

"You on nights?" I asked.

"Yeah. Six to six."

"Did you see Nick leave last night any time around nine-thirty to ten."

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The cabbie swung around a corner sharply in pursuit of Nick's car as he pondered.

"Yeah. Come to think of it, he did. He was gone maybe an hour. I was just unloading a fare when he came back."

We were on the river front now. The cabbie swung another corner and stopped. "On up the street a block and a half," he said. "That's where Nick pulled in. It's a warehouse he rents. Keeps his gambling equipment there when the drives are on. Want me to wait?"

I handed him the twenty. "Sure. After I'm in, pull on up and wait outside." I climbed out and took off up the street at a lope.

THE first cab was gone, but Nick's car was parked in front. I glanced in it as I went by. Suddenly I stopped. There was a short rifle in a clever rack on the back of the front seat. I grabbed the back door. It opened. I took the rifle off the rack. A thirty-thirty! I thought about taking it with me, but left it in the car. My .38 was a lot easier to handle.

There was a small door cut out of the main warehouse door. It opened without a sound. I could see a light to my left which was evidently the office. It was built up on a platform about five feet off the main floor. I made it up the wooden steps without a sound. There was a window glass in the top half of the office door.

Flattening myself against the wall I could get a good view at an angle that kept me hidden.

Nick and his boys had their backs to me. The boys were stripping Heath. Nick was holding an automatic on him.

I heard Heath say, "You can't get away with it Nick. You kill me and Neal will know you killed Broadbent."

Nick chuckled. "I think Johnnie believes you killed Broadbent. That is good. If he ever thinks otherwise I will personally take care of him. In the meantime, no one is going to think I

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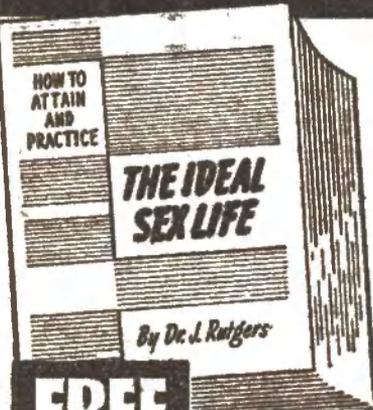
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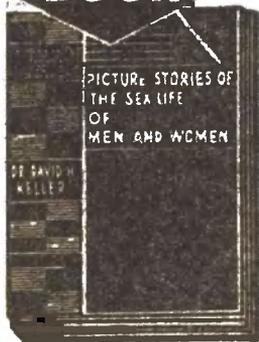
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killed you. You are going to disappear. You are going to have a nice concrete coffin and a decent burial—in the river. I thought you were a smart boy, Heath. I thought you would play along with Nick when he was trying to save the wells. But you would rather play the other side. Perhaps it is because it would be nice to marry money. And if you know I killed Broadbent, how can I let you live? You see, it is impossible. Hurry boys. Get him ready."

I'd heard enough. I swung the door open, kicking it wide with my foot. At the sound Nick whirled, gun in hand. There wasn't time to argue. I squeezed the trigger twice. Nick grimaced as the gun fell from his hand. He grabbed his arm and held it close to his side. Neither of his boys made a move.

"O. K. Heath," I said. "Get your clothes on and help me. I've got a cab waiting with the flag up. Now that this case is ready to close, there's no use running up expenses."

Heath went with me to headquarters. We came back to The Club and picked up my car. I drove him out to see Felicia.

"Sorry I gave you a bad scare," I said, "but how was I to know you hadn't bumped off Broadbent. When I found out you were promoting that deal and Nick was trying to hold on to the title to those wells I figured you were mixed up in it. Felicia said her father refused to invest money with you. That was good enough for a motive."

"That's all right, Neal. You see, I didn't know until tonight that it wasn't an accident. Even when Nick told me that he'd phoned Broadbent to meet him at the Brown farm and he'd settle the case out of court, then followed him and run him off the road, I couldn't believe it. But when he showed me both copies of the agreement and said he'd had one of his boys open Broadbent's safe last night and that I had to play it his way I lost my head. You see, I had an option from the widow Brown for a lease to drill wells if she got the property back.

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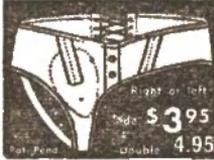
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So I told Nick off and bought myself a one way ticket to the river."

I let Heath off in front of the Broad-bent home.

"Won't you come in with me?" he asked.

I grinned. "Not me. I got fired. But you tell Felicia all about it. And," I said, remembering Felicia was still in my future reference file, "if you decide in the future you need a good private eye, just give me a ring."

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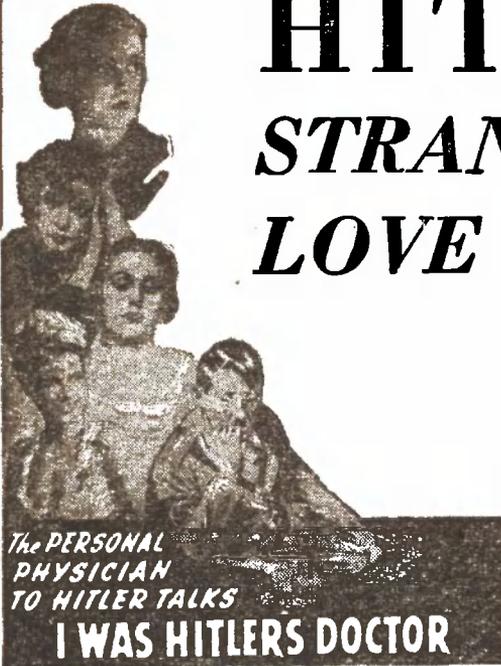
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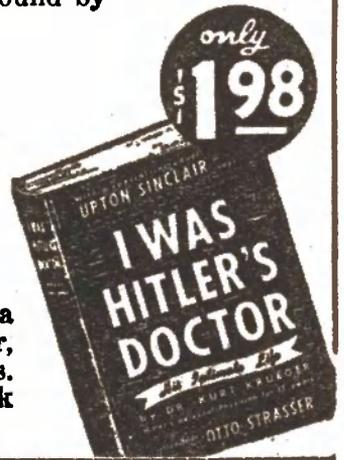


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quality. An extra locker is provided for at least two or three extra hats, as hats are the first thing a shoplifter memorizes when they look around to see if they can locate anybody who may appear to be a store detective.

MOST of the larger department stores have a call or signal system—either bell or lights. One of these is assigned to the store detective when she enters the store's employ. Clerks, observing some customer acting in a suspicious fashion, will report; the light flashes for the operative, and she receives the message from the telephone operator. These signals are frequently changed because the professional crook attempts to learn them.

Also confined in her locker, the operative has a few dummy packages. Carrying these parcels creates the impression—"just another customer."

However, the detective is not the only one carrying dummy parcels; the habitual shoplifter does this to allay suspicion. The "booster's" package, oftentimes, may have a slit in the top or side, covered by a smaller flat package or a large envelope. When a favorable moment arrives, the stolen article is deftly slipped through the slit, and the opening hidden again. Hat bags are used, too, arranged so the shoplifter's arm is in the top, her hand through another opening below.

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She merely puts the bag over the things to be stolen, picks them up. Big sleeves have their obvious place in the shoplifter's wardrobe, as do pockets in a voluminous cape, large hand or shopping bags, even an elastic waistband in a skirt.

The store detective learns not to watch the eyes but the hands of a suspected person, without arousing suspicion. She acts at all times in a natural manner, displaying no eagerness or excitement. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat to shade her eyes, she "covers" a suspect's action without betraying herself.

One of the things an operative does not do is to talk to clerks or other employees unless it is absolutely necessary. Naturally, she talks as much as a customer would, but further conversation only calls the attention of people in the store to the detective in question. Many a "catch" has been ruined because a store detective tried to "look her part," sharply glancing here and there with the look of a hunter, or bragging of her many successful "catches" to clerks within earshot of customers.

When the detective actually sees the shoplifter take an article she keeps the crook in constant sight until taken in custody. This gives the "booster" no opportunity to dispose of the purloined goods. Shoplifters may become suspicious and try to conceal the article or pass it to a confederate, then disclaim all knowledge of the theft, even threatening action against the detective and the store for false arrest. Suspected persons must be followed even to rest rooms or telephone booths.

Under certain extenuating circumstances, stores agree to the release of the shoplifter if the merchandise is returned. This is not done, however, except where the attempted theft may be due to certain mental or physical conditions. The operative in such a case must obtain a release from the guilty party to protect the store from any liability.

AT ALL times the store detective must be courteous and considerate, even to a prisoner in charge. Real diplo-

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macy is needed to prevent actual fist fights. Furthermore, if consideration is shown a crook, it will be much easier to obtain information and details from even the most hardened "booster." Hardboiled methods merely arouse the fighting instincts in the criminal and are often the cause of confusion in public places, bringing undesired notoriety to the store and making the operative conspicuous and possibly worthless to the store from that time on.

Pickpockets operate in similar fashions to "boosters." Their criminal activities are favored by large crowds, and department stores are "happy hunting grounds" to them.

In arresting a pickpocket, the detective has to get the stolen article—which is considered subsequently as evidence—plus the name and address of the victim and witnesses. This is all-important as pickpockets are notorious for taking advantage of all legal technicalities to obtain their release. It is likewise wise to have the victim accompany the operative to the police station and there prefer charges while the detective makes a written report of the case. This also applies to all cases of shoplifting, whether an arrest is made or not, so that such reports may be filed both in the store and in the agency employing the store detective.

ALL in all, a private eye on duty in a large department store has an interesting, colorful job. Always in the swirl of myriad crowds of all sorts and conditions of people, he sees a vast panorama of humanity pass, day in and day out. And just as a fisherman waits patiently for a nibble, so he can never tell when out of the jostling throng somebody makes a suspicious move and then it is up to him to follow and nail his quarry. In discouraging thievery in the stores, he is a public as well as a private servant in his efforts to uphold the moral standards of his community and contribute to the maintenance of law and order for the general good.

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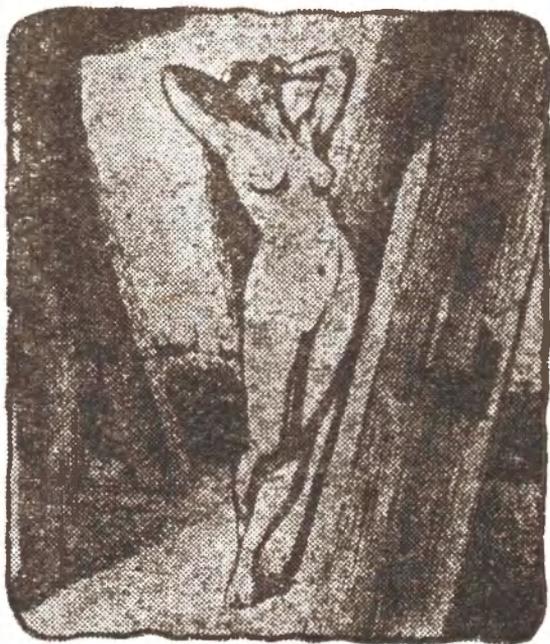
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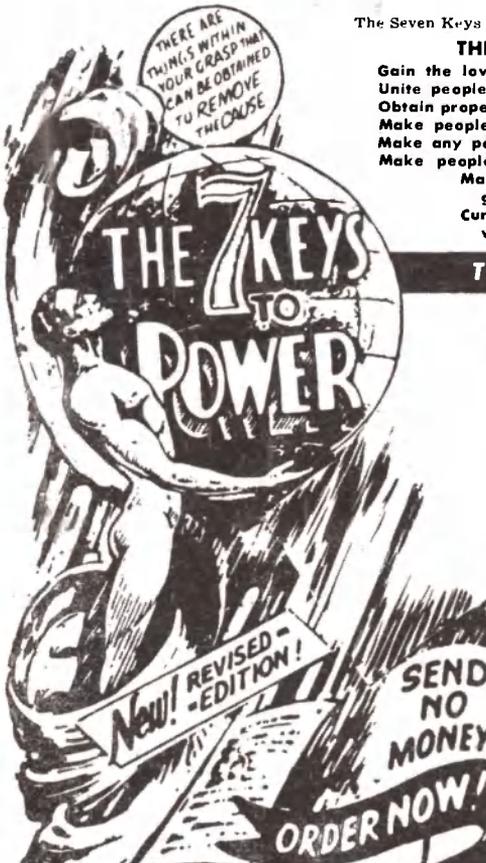
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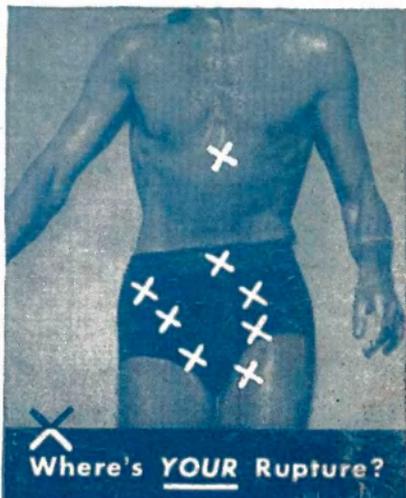
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