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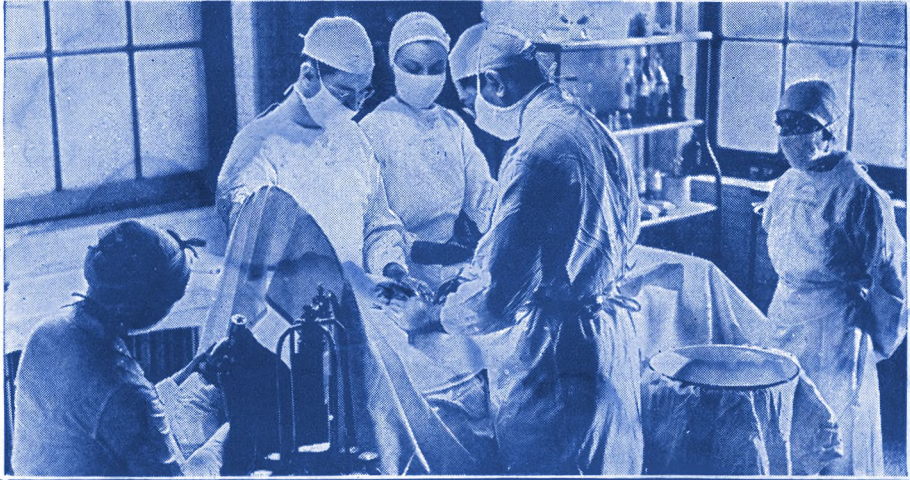


ONCE IS ENOUGH

by

Andrew Holt

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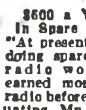
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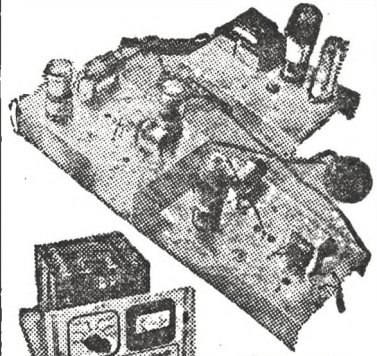
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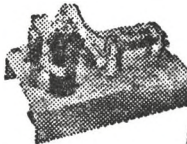
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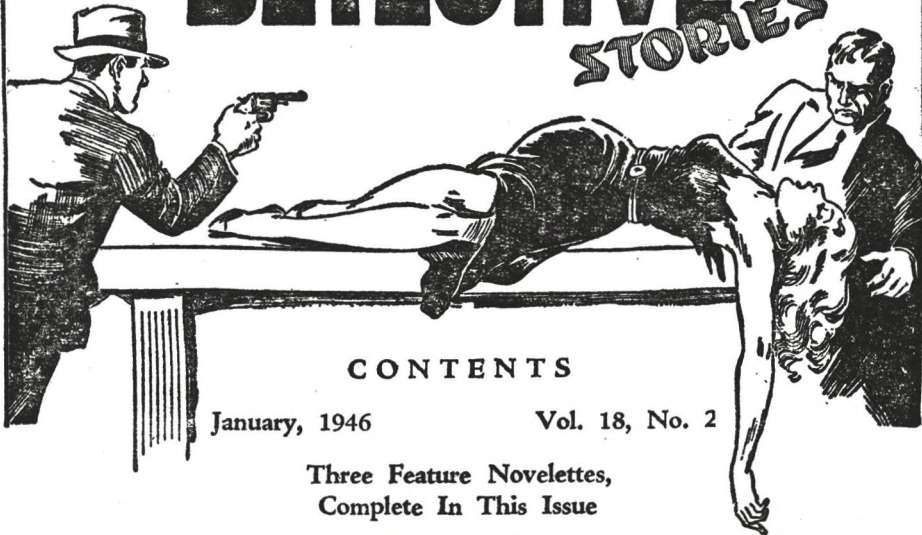
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PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES



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COL. EVANS F. CARLSON, USMC

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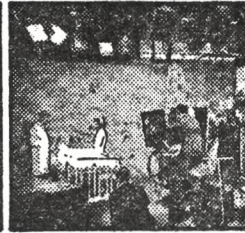
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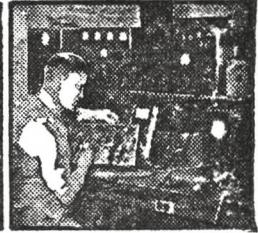
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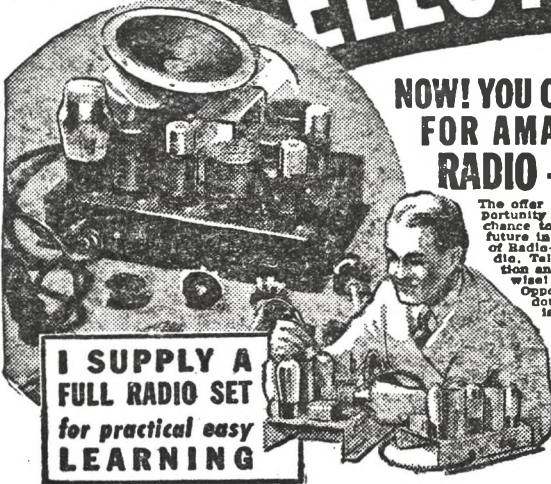
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By
ANDREW HOLT

ONCE IS

Martin seized the producer's tie, pulled him up out of the chair and let him have it with the gun.



MARTIN FERRIS looked at his wristwatch, saw that there were only five minutes until the midnight bar curfew, and turned back to the blonde at the far end of the long room.

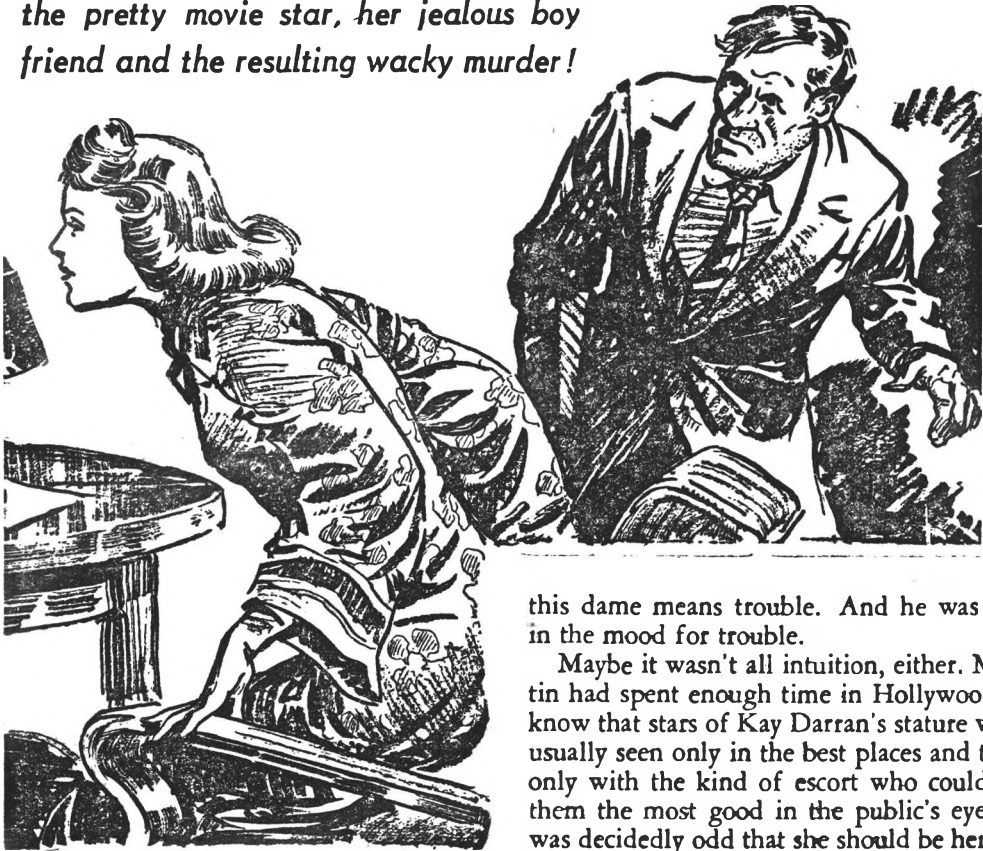
It was now or never. In five minutes the

place would close and she would take herself and the invitation of her smile home or wherever else it was she was going. But still he hesitated.

I must be getting inhibitions, he told himself. He looked at the sleek hair and the knot into which it fell in back as if it had been

ENOUGH . . .

Martin Ferris was a private eye out of his element. He was looking for relaxation and he found heavy trouble—in this bizarre case of the pretty movie star, her jealous boy friend and the resulting wacky murder!



poured, and the slim figure belted into the satin raincoat. She raised her glass and the falling cuff revealed the glitter of diamonds at her wrist. What the hell, thought Martin, so it's not correct to wear diamonds with sport clothes, who am I, a culture authority like Emily Post? But although she candidly returned his stare, he stayed where he was on his bar-stool.

How do I know she'll look that good when I get closer, he asked the wolf howl inside him, but he knew that what kept him at his own end of the bar was not that kind of doubt. From the instant of her entrance, his detective's intuition had warned him:

this dame means trouble. And he was not in the mood for trouble.

Maybe it wasn't all intuition, either. Martin had spent enough time in Hollywood to know that stars of Kay Darran's stature were usually seen only in the best places and then only with the kind of escort who could do them the most good in the public's eye. It was decidedly odd that she should be here in this second-rate, rather shabby place, alone, at this hour of the night.

There was also the matter of her drinking. She had been downing them at a rate he found impressive. Yet, there was nothing of the confirmed alcoholic in her movements and manner. It was almost as if she were desperately trying to drown something that kept rising inside her. In short, it was not good drinking.

He went back to the two bourbons he had ordered at the last call, swallowed them in turn, and watched the only other occupant of the bar, a rather sodden drunk to whom the bartender, as if for variety, was telling his troubles.

The entrance door slammed. Instinct pulled his eyes back to the blonde and what he saw kept them there. The two men who had just come in could not see her because of the angle of the leather booth wall, but she could see them, and she was watching them with an emotion that seemed completely incongruous in a quiet, beachside cocktail lounge.

Martin had seen wide, blank eyes like that before and that stiffness of the hands and face and he knew what they meant. Terror. As he watched, the immobility into which panic had frozen her melted and she darted desperate eyes around the room. Just as the two men's advancing steps brought them to where they could see her, she rose from her seat and slid through the swinging door that led to the kitchen and thence to the back door.

ONE of the men started after her but his companion held him back and, jerking his thumb, indicated the entrance through which they had come. Martin fished a bill from his wallet and put it on the bar. When the two men were outside, he took his topcoat from the stool beside him, drained the last watery ounce of his last drink, said "drop dead!" sharply to his intuition and followed.

Outside, the drifting fog had almost filled the quiet street. Only immediately in front of the bar, in the combination of red neon and street light was there visibility. He put a cigarette into his mouth and, ignoring the lighter in his pocket, struck a match, let it go out, dropped it as if in irritation, and lit another. In the few seconds thus casually gained, he saw the girl run out of the alley and turn toward the fog-veiled promenade along the cliff top. The two men went after her.

The contrast between their purposeful, unhesitating pace and the girl's irregular, frightened running decided him. He waited until the fog had swallowed the three of them and then walked after them.

On the corner, a wind-lifted curtain of mist revealed the gleaming whiteness of the Santa Monica statue across the way. Kay Darran's slim silhouette rushed past it and swerved to the right on the path through the

grove of palms. A few feet behind, the two dark male outlines followed. Martin crossed after them. Soon he lost sight of the trio completely, but the solid tread of the men and the girl's erratic running feet were amplified and clearly audible in the fog.

The changing shadows and the theatrical green of the palms draped in gray vapor and illuminated spasmodically by the sickly yellow of the street lamps made Martin feel as if he had accidentally strayed onto the set for a horror picture. There were no sounds except the footfalls he followed, the surf below the two-hundred-foot cliff, the lonely tolling of the bell buoy, and an occasional gull scream.

Mindful, suddenly, of the steep drop into the swirling gray hollow to his left, he tightened his hand on the gun in his pocket and decided on caution. He had been proceeding as quietly as possible on the gravel path but now, aware that his footsteps were as audible as theirs, he stepped off onto the lawn, moving swiftly but silently, using the tree trunks for cover, and closed the distance between himself and the two men until their blurred shapes were visible ahead.

If they knew he was behind them, the fact did not seem to interest them, for they went on relentlessly. Martin heard the change in the girl's footfalls now. Fatigue had slowed them, made them stumbling and uneven. She must be very tired. They were gaining on her. Her footsteps were louder and louder. Then, suddenly, they stopped completely.

He stood still for long seconds, listening and wondering, then ducked just in time behind a palm trunk. What had happened was obvious. The men were following Kay Darran across the stretch of lawn that had muffled her feet when she swerved onto it. Now the running footsteps rang out on asphalt. She was crossing the Avenue. Briefly, he saw her, then the two men, in the circle of light under the corner lamppost.

When he had crossed, he could still see them, dimly, far ahead up the side street. Then her figure moved under a gate light and disappeared through an arch.

A few seconds later, he stood beside the gate and hesitated. It was, he decided looking at the funereal cypresses looming

overhead through the top of the fog, the tangled dripping vines and the blackness inside the walled garden, a weird joint. He was fairly certain that only the girl had gone through the gateway—but the two men were nowhere to be seen.

A gust of dank air came out of the garden laden with the heavy oversweetness of night-blooming jasmine.

What it boils down to, he told himself, is: do I dare to face that butler, that house-keeper, and that guy who gets out of the coffin when the moon rises?

A match flared briefly across the narrow street. By its momentary light, he saw the two men in the shadow of an overhanging balcony. He walked over to them.

"If this is where you live," he asked pleasantly, "why don't you go inside?"

The shorter of them slid his hand inside his topcoat, under the lapel.

"What's it to you?" he asked unpleasantly.

"This is a high-class residential neighborhood and you guys just don't belong," Martin said. "I think you should beat it back to the wrong side of the tracks."

"Listen you—" began the man with the shoulder holster.

Martin's fist closed his mouth.

The short man clawed inside the coat and brought his hand out with a gun in it.

"Take it easy, Joe," said his companion. He turned to Martin and his voice was matter-of-fact. "At the moment," he said, "we got no time for arguments but if we run into you again sometime when we ain't so occupied, we'll slice off some of that lip of yours."

"It's a date," Martin told him, "any time. Now get going."

He waited until they had turned the corner, a little puzzled because it had been so easy, and then went back to the house across the street with an increasing conviction that he had stumbled into a very odd set-up indeed. There was, however, always Kay Darran.

The gate led to a walled garden and another archway. The second arch led to a patio, thick-walled, black and silent, with heavy wrought-iron bars on its dark windows and a massive, studded oak door.

"Where they keep the gorilla, of course," he told himself, dodging the vines, bushes and potted palms that formed a frenzied tangle of vegetation. When he had almost decided to give it back to the jungle, a lamp was lit on the second floor and he caught a glimpse of blond hair before the venetian



The stiffness of her hands and face meant just one thing: terror.

blinds came down. Skirting the patio, he found a narrow walled stairway and, on its first landing, a door that seemed to correspond with the geography of the lighted window.

After his third knock, she opened it.

"Yes?" she asked as if she thought he might be a brush salesman. She seemed quite sober now.

"Gun for hire, lady?" he offered brightly.

"Scram," said the lady.

"We have other services, madam," he continued imperturbably. "We work quietly, efficiently, and cleanly. Why not let us rid your residence of gunsels?"

She shoved at the door. It jammed against the foot which he had placed casually on the sill and did not close. He pushed the door inward, stepped into the room, and shut it behind him.

"Sorry, honey," he said to the first syllable of her protest. "Usually my manners are just beautiful but right now I'm a little saddle-sore from that white charger I was riding to your rescue and, frankly, I expected your hand in marriage and half the kingdom instead of a kick in the teeth."

"I don't remember asking for your assistance," she told him coldly. "None of this is any concern of yours."

He grinned at her and displayed his right hand.

"For one thing," he told her, pointing to the skinned knuckles, "I did this chasing your two friends away from your door. And there's always the wear and tear on my curiosity."

"You chased them away?" Her eyes widened. She seemed surprised and a little puzzled. "I don't—" She stopped, and appeared to think hard. Then she tried to make her smile friendly. "I suppose," she said, "I could buy a drink."

"That's more like it." He put his topcoat down on a chair.

She left the room, giving him an opportunity to observe that her black slacks looked as well from the back as they did in front. His survey of the room while she was gone corroborated his notion that these were strange lodgings indeed for a girl in the bright lights and big money. The character of the personal accessories scattered about the room—the hand-wrought silver table lighters and the leather desk fittings—was completely out of harmony with the nondescript, roominghouse quality of the furniture.

Idly, he picked up an antique shell ash-tray and found the hallmark. Then she returned with a tray containing ice and bottles and he saw the diamonds on her wrist again and how many there were of them.

"I'm Kay Darran," she told him, pouring bourbon into glasses.

"Martin Ferris is my name." He had not meant to sound unimpressed but he was listening for a repetition of the faint stir of movement he had heard in the room from which she had just come, watching the bulge against the curtained doorway and the bit of shining blackness under the beige drape that might have been the toe of a shoe. Some-

thing warned him that it would be unwise to attempt to reassure her with the news that he was a bona-fide private detective.

"What's this cops-and-robbers business?" he asked, downing a slug of bourbon.

"My boy friend is a little jealous."

"A little?" He tore his eyes away from the fascinating shoe tip and his mind from how dumb he had been to walk into this crawling nest of gunsels and noticed the way her blue eyes were fixed on his as if she were afraid to let them waver. "You mean Joe's your boy friend, or the other one, or both?"

"Oh, no." She laughed. It was a fairly good performance. "Neither of them. I should have said my ex-boy friend. I told him I was through but he doesn't seem to have heard me. He's . . . well, he's a sort of racketeer. He keeps sending his boys after me to see what I'm doing and if I'm with other men."

"You weren't with any other man tonight," he pointed out. "Unless you count me, and that was so spiritual I don't see how they got it unless they're mind-readers." The whole thing was beginning to bore him. It was not such a bad story. In fact, there was only one thing wrong with it—it was not true. And the character behind the curtain occupied his mind. "But you lit out of that bar, you should excuse the expression, like a bat."

"I'm afraid of them," she told him simply. "I never should have been mixed up with people like that."

I'LL rush him, Martin decided, and get the hell out of here before the other two come back. He rose with his empty glass in hand and bent over the tray as if to fix another drink. "Why don't you go to the cops and ask them to protect a taxpayer?"

"My producers would have kittens. That's not good publicity."

"Things are tough all over." He put the fresh drink down, patted his pockets like a man looking for cigarettes, and walked over to his topcoat.

He had his hand on the gun now, inside the pocket. He took a step back so that the wall screened him and so the eavesdropper would have to crane his neck around the doorway to see.

"Honey," he said, "what you need is a big, strong guy like poppa who can take hold of Max, or Luigi, or Babyface or whatever his name is, and slap him silly." He took a step forward quickly, reached through



Martin yanked. The bulge in the curtain became bigger as the man behind it fell forward.

the drape without warning, and yanked. "Like this," he said.

The bulge in the curtain became bigger as the man behind it fell forward. Martin brought his gun down sharply on the smallest, topmost bump. There was a dull thud, deadened by the heavy fabric of the drapes, as the gun struck the headbones. The figure hesitated in its forward plunge, and fell back. Martin thrust the gun against the apex of the biggest curve. There was a grunt of protest as the barrel sank into the soft belly.

"Stand still," Martin ordered. He drew the curtain aside. The man who was revealed seemed sedentary for a gunman. His legs were thin and his midriff sagged. There

were gold-rimmed glasses over his near-sighted eyes and it was obvious that he had made no attempt to use the gun that weighted his jacket pocket.

"Don't be shy," Martin said, "come on out."

The man stepped into the living-room. His eyes glittered through the glasses. He did not deign to look at Martin.

"Get him out of here," the man told Kay.

Martin looked at the girl, was surprised to see on her face an expression half conciliatory, half pleading. He advanced toward the paunchy man.

"You're in no spot to be issuing orders," Martin explained. "Let's have a little humility or I'll forget my respect for age and dry rot."

"Get him out of here," the man repeated. There was a curious note of authority in his petulant voice.

Martin took him by the collar, brought his fist within an inch of his nose.

"No!" screamed Kay, "Don't." She pulled at Martin's arm, her eyes filled with tears and abject pleading. "Please, please go." There was a strange, false note in her voice.

Martin threw the spectacled man aside as if he were a sackful of some offensive matter, picked up his coat and strode to the door. She followed him. At the head of the stairs, she said:

"Wait." She looked around, lowered her voice to a whisper. "If you come back tomorrow afternoon, none of them will be here." She swayed closer to him. He caught her whiskey-laden breath.

"What for? So you can tell some more lies?"

"I want you to come." She was so close to him now that he could feel her breathing.

"Tell me," he asked her, "how does that sagging diaphragm fit into your love life? And do all your romances carry automatics?"

She stared at the wall for a perceptible interval. When she spoke again her voice had an over-natural quality like an imitation of her ordinary tone.

"He's my new boy friend," she said. "He's afraid of them, too. The gun is for protection. I don't think he even knows how to use it. He was there when you came. I couldn't get rid of him."

"Frankly, his charm eludes me," Martin told her. "I suppose he's rich." She flushed. There was a pause. "I don't want to take you off the gold standard," he added at last.

She squeezed his arm. "Come tomorrow," she said.

Downstairs, he shrugged and decided, with a faint tinge of regret, to call the whole thing off. Fun was fun, but somewhere way back in his head he had a quaint, old-fashioned notion that if he was going to have to fight for a dame, he ought to be sure she was on his side.

The fog was clearing and with a New Yorker's instinct, he walked to the Avenue and looked for a cab. There was none. The streets were dark and completely empty. For the tenth time in his three-day stay, he wondered if all the residents of Santa Monica had signed a pledge to be in bed with the lights out by twelve o'clock. There was nothing else to do but walk the mile or so to his hotel. He crossed to the palm-lined promenade and, walking close to the fence that edged the cliff, looked down at the dim, mist-enveloped ocean and the huge dark bulk of the beach houses. Once or twice, he passed parked cars containing late neckers and once a sailor and a girl separated hastily.

A few blocks below Wilshire Boulevard, a big, open-work summer house arched over the pathway in a flower-draped manner which must have been considered Japanese before the war. The heavy vine-covered timbers made thick black shadows.

Almost before he had taken two steps into its black interior, he knew that he had made a mistake. But his first backward movement was arrested by arms that came down over his and held them down, tight against him. They came at him from all sides. Someone shoved a gun in his ribs and he heard a voice that he was certain belonged to Joe, before a fist connected with his chin and something landed on the back of his skull at the same time. He stopped struggling and let himself fall into the soft vagueness that suddenly surrounded him.

CHAPTER II

Bad, Bad Bullets



SCREAMING gull woke him. He lay on his back on the ground looking up at the fantastic filigree of the summer house against the whitish dawn sky. A rat slid down a palm trunk and he decided to get up. His

legs were stiff and cramped but the blow on his head did not hurt unless he touched the bruise.

He stood still for a few minutes, wondering if there was any place, open and close, at which he could get eight cups of strong black coffee, decided that there probably wasn't, and began to walk to his hotel. The gun in his pocket slapped against his side. He took it out, saw that the clip was gone, put it back, and found the paper.

It was a page torn from a memorandum book and its penciled scrawl read: *Get out of Santa Monica and stay out.* There was no signature. He put it back into his pocket, reached the hotel, accepted his key, plus shocked but avid sympathy, and a cup of instant coffee from the night clerk—and went to bed.

It was one-thirty when he awoke. He shaved and showered. After considering his wardrobe and deciding on gabardine slacks and a sport jacket, he dressed carefully. Then he dug another clip out from under the soiled clothes in his suitcase and went downstairs for breakfast. He had tomato juice, scrambled eggs, buckwheat cakes and sausage, a stack of toast and two cups of coffee. It was two forty-five by the time he had hired the Buick. He drove it up the Roosevelt Highway along the ocean to the beach opposite the restaurant that used to be Thelma Todd's and considered the water and sun gravely as if he contemplated swimming.

Then he threw his cigarette away and got back into the car. It was a nice problem and he went over it again in his mind as if he had not already reached a conclusion. In the first place, this was not his fight and he had no intention of staying in Santa Monica after tomorrow night anyway. Besides, he told himself, you're a big boy now and you don't have to stick around any more just to show some gunmen they can't make you go. On the other hand, though, there was La Darran and even if she didn't count for too much, there was the idea according to which he had always attempted to live. He had never phrased it for himself but basically it was that private life was very much like international politics. You let one bunch of guys push you around even over something



Martin knew he had made a mistake. In the dark they came at him from all sides.

small and you ended up flat on your back with the rest of them sitting on your chest.

The house looked different. Daylight made it merely another of the Spanish-style houses so common in Southern California, rather rundown and shaggy with unpruned vines, but otherwise quite ordinary. He saw no one in the unkempt patio. The place was as still as if it had never been lived in.

LOOKING back over his shoulder so that he would not be surprised from the rear, he climbed the little stairway and knocked on Kay Darran's door. There was no answer. He listened carefully. Nothing seemed to move behind it. When he had already turned to leave, he noticed that the crack between the door and the jamb was wider than it would be if the door were locked.

Cautiously, he pushed it open. There was no one in the living room. Careful now, baby, he muttered, this is the place where the hero steps in and gets fixed so he can't step out again.

He took his gun from his pocket and tiptoed into the room. The carpet was thick

and he made no sound. Opening doors and pushing aside drapes as he went, to eliminate any possible ambush, he made a tour of the kitchen, bedroom and bath which brought him back to the living room without result.

It was only after he lit a cigarette that he noticed that the silver lighter he had admired the night before, as well as its companion ashtray, were gone and with them all the other expensive accessories which had seemed so incongruous with the furniture. Suddenly aware of the things his eyes had seen but not registered, he realized how much the room had been changed. Chintz upholstery took the place of dingy brown, the drapes behind which the man with glasses had hidden were striped red and white instead of the beige they had been. He put a finger up gingerly and touched the fresh whiteness of the walls. The paint was still wet.

Some quiet thinking was indicated. He closed the door softly and let the latch click shut. An impulse took him back to the bedroom, where he found the closets and drawers completely empty. Not so much as a hairpin was left to show that there had been a glamorous female occupant only the night before. Then he remembered the bourbon and wondered if that was gone too.

They had not been so careful in the kitchen. There were still cheese jars in the cupboards, the kind of crackers that are used for impromptu hor d'oeuvres, and the whiskey.

Telling himself that it was not the thing to do, he took a long swallow anyway and decided that it was obvious, since they had gone to so much trouble to clear the place, that they had not really forgotten to lock the door. The door had been left open deliberately to tempt him to investigate and find her gone for good.

He took another drink and considered the possibilities. He could watch this house or find Kay Darran's official residence and watch it, but that sounded a little too much like work. Or he could go to the cops and tell them the whole story. But that would mean hanging around until the cumbersome police routine got going, and results were dubious. Besides, although he had had no

previous contact with the Santa Monica police, he was sure that they were enough like cops anywhere else to get considerable pleasure out of the misadventures of a private detective, and he had a prejudice against amusing cops.

It looked as if he would have to chalk the whole thing up to experience with the kind of dame you can pick up in bars and leave it at that.

And the world owed him a return conk on the noggin some time in the future.

HE WENT downstairs. In the patio there were still no signs of life, but when he was halfway through the arch, he had a sensation of being watched, turned quickly, and caught a flicker of movement behind one of the barred windows. Without hesitation, he walked up to the oak door and knocked loudly. There was a long pause and then the door opened slowly, a cautious couple of inches, and a woman stuck her head out.

"What do you want?" she demanded. Her white hair was yellowed and unclean like badly laundered bed linen and she had that general air of fluttery decay that seems to attack aging contraltos and boardinghouse keepers.

"I'm looking for Miss Kay Darran."

"She doesn't live here."

He put his hand up casually and leaned so that she could not close the door.

"Did she leave a forwarding address?"

"No. She never did live here. What would a woman like that be doing in a place like this?"

"I was upstairs in her apartment last night." Martin spoke distinctly and pointed his finger. "Right at the top of those stairs, to the left, and if she was a hallucination, they're casting them better these days."

"The apartment upstairs is vacant," said the woman irritably, "and it has been vacant for six months. We don't rent apartments any more."

"I see. And when did you re-decorate?"

"I didn't." She pulled dignity around her like a badly fitting kimono. "If you'll excuse me now, I'm busy."

"Sure." Martin grinned. "But first I have a surprise for you. When you have a free moment, take a trip upstairs. The pixies



Martin's bullet cut the big man's oath off, gouged a hole in his thigh.

have just painted the walls, and changed the furniture and three or four characters from my dream world left half of a bottle of bourbon in the kitchen."

He released the door and she slammed it in his face. Ten minutes later he was back at the bar. There was no doubt about it, they had gone to a lot of trouble. Something vaguely familiar about the set-up tormented him but it was not until the bartender served his drink that he remembered a story Alexander Woollcott had told about a girl who took her mother to Paris, left her in a hotel room, went out to get a doctor, and came back to find no trace of her mother and the room completely changed. He remembered the suggested explanation, too, but it did not seem to apply in this case. Kay Darran

had certainly not looked last night like the victim of a dread disease.

"Thanks," he told the bartender. "Any cholera in these parts lately?"

"Huh?" asked the bartender. "No."

THE hell with it, Martin told himself. He determined to get drunk, and ordered another one for himself. Then he sat up very straight on his stool and called the bartender again.

"Am I that drunk?" he asked pointing to the last booth.

"I don't think so. If you mean are you imagining that blonde, you're not. She's there all right, and it's her all right, and *she's* all right, if you get what I mean."

"Much obliged," Martin said gravely. He picked up his glass, walked the length of the room and sat down beside her on the leather seat.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Not particularly," said the girl. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought maybe you sat up all night with your paint brush."

"It happens I didn't," she told him. "It's sweet of you to be so concerned, but now please go away. I have a date."

"I know," said Martin. "With me."

She appeared to study him. "You're from New York?"

"Sure. The twang is pure Brooklyn."

"I thought so." Her voice held ironic kindness. "That line of yours may be swell in the big city but you better whip up a new one if you plan to stay here. We've all heard it many, many times before. Now please get up from my table and stop bothering me."

"You've never seen me before in your life," Martin recited as if from memory, "and it's all the same to you if you never do again. Right?"

"Precisely. Go away."

He took her hand. "Look, honey," he began, "I don't like—" Then he stopped. "I'll be a nasty old—"

"Unquestionably," the girl interrupted, "but why bore me with your horoscope?"

He grinned at her absently. He was looking at her closely for the first time since he had seated himself beside her and, suddenly, seeing the differences. The nose that turned up the merest fraction of an inch more than it had the night before, the lines of age, or maybe just dissipation, that were missing from under the eyes, and the ears, which according to the books on scientific detection were the things he should have noticed first, the ears had also been transformed. These particular ones were pink, close-set to the head, with thin, delicate lobes, in fact, altogether delectable. . . . He pulled himself together and looked at the things that were the same, ending with the blond hair that was dressed exactly as he remembered it.

"What is it?" he asked at last, "a sister act?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I'm a pretty gullible guy," Martin told her, "so if you say you've been running around looking like that and nobody ever told you how much you resemble Kay Darran, I'll believe you. What I'll gag on are these." He waved a hand that included her slacks and sweater, the satin raincoat flung down beside her. "You're dressed exactly

the way she was, even to the way you're wearing your hair and," he tapped the jewels at her wrist, "that bracelet—honey, it's just too much."

She was frankly amused. "I have no idea what you're talking about." She spoke as if she didn't care if he believed her. "But I do, as I seem to have said before, have a date."

Martin shook his head. "I heard you the first time. I'll fight it out with him when he arrives. In the meantime, you have things to say to me." He picked up her empty glass and sniffed at it. "Martini?"

She nodded.

"I'll buy us a drink. While I'm gone, you think up some lies." He looked straight into her face and his tone was serious. "And make them good."

MARTIN waited at the bamboo bar while the cocktail was mixed, watching her in the mirror. To his surprise—he had half expected her to try to slip out while his back was turned—she sat quite still, staring at her hands as if she were lost in thought.

He was paying for the drinks when the two men came in. In the mirror, he saw their eyes slide over his back as if they did not recognize it. He did not turn. Joe walked up to the girl in the booth. His companion stayed at the door.

"I thought I told you to stay home," Joe snarled. "I'm getting damned sick of playing hide and seek around the town after you."

The girl stared up at him wordlessly. There was a blankness in her eyes, not of terror, but of wonder, as if she did not understand what was happening.

"Come on, come on," said Joe, "what are you waiting for?"

Still the girl said nothing. She flung a single, pleading glance over to Martin at the bar and then gripped the table with both hands. Joe reached over and seized her wrists, pulled at them, and let them fall. He stood there for a few seconds, irresolutely, looking down at her. Then he walked back to his companion.

"It's the other one," Martin heard him say.

The big man considered. "We're gonna

have to bring her in sooner or later. Let's take her now and get it over with."

"Suppose she won't come?" Joe whispered. His nod indicated Martin and the bartender.

The big man laughed. "Aw, go on," he said, "I'll bet you can persuade her." He unbuttoned his coat and walked to the booth. "Come on, Joe," he said loudly, "we'll reason with the lady." His hand was inside his coat. "Rye and a beer chaser," he called to the bartender.

The bartender set a jigger glass down on the linoleum-topped bar. His shaking hand slopped the rye over the sides, made an oily pool around the little glass. In the mirror, Martin saw the girl pale, saw her stare at Joe's hand in his pocket, at the bulge that was not made by the hand alone, and rise slowly from her seat. The big man lounged against the leather partition, watching the bar.

"Take your raincoat," he said, "you're gonna need it."

Martin slid his hand carefully into his jacket pocket, turned silently when the big man's eyes swiveled to the girl, twisted the gun so that the nozzle, tweed-covered, pointed at the big man.

When the girl bent to pick up the satin coat, Martin spoke:

"Don't go out with them, honey," he drawled, "I don't think they're really nice boys."

The big man swore. His hand came out of his coat with his gun in it. Martin's bullet cut his spluttered oath off after the first monosyllable, tore through his trousers leg, and gouged a hole in his thigh. He screamed, fell back against the booth wall, and grabbed his leg with both hands. Joe's slug ricocheted against the ship's clock over the bar and plowed three-fourths of the mustache from the fly-specked picture of Admiral Dewey beside it.

"Duck!" yelled Martin to the girl, the bartender and anybody else who happened to be around. He sent a single shot toward Joe without aiming, put both hands on the bar, and vaulted over it.

Joe fired three shots, smashed a neon beer sign, shattered a bottle of domestic brandy, and gave added impetus to Martin's leap by

slicing four inches of gabardine out of the seat of his pants.

CHAPTER III

Goat for a Trap



IN THE slatted floor behind the bar, Martin caught his breath, gave the whole business a lightning once-over in his brain, and crawled quietly past the crouching bartender to the far end. When he risked a quick look, the girl was under her table, the big man lay back on the seat moaning, and Joe was hidden by the circular back of the next booth. The girl's hand snaked along the floor to the big man's fallen gun. The stones in her bracelet caught the light and glittered icy fire. Joe's heel came down on her wrist and ground it against the floor. The movement brought his head above the leather partition.

Her scream pulled Martin's trigger finger. Joe's scream echoed hers, prolonged it, screeched it to a higher key. The big man bent over laboriously. She bit her lip against the tears of pain, pushed her limp hand forward and shoved the gun out of his reach.

"You can come out now," Martin told the bartender. "It's all over."

He lifted the girl up and held her while he looked at the men in the booths. Joe was completely and unmistakably dead. The big man was bleeding hard, but was conscious. Martin put his gun in his pocket. The scratching of the phone dial whirled him around. The bartender dropped the telephone and stared at it self-consciously as if it had just arrived and was unwelcome.

"Don't do that," Martin said, "you make me nervous."

In all probability, he thought, five minutes would have the place swarming with police. The sensible thing to do was to wait quietly for the law and when it came tell it a simple but succinct story without any troublesome complications like last night.

I'm standing at the bar, he rehearsed inwardly, minding my own business. The girl is in her booth, the bartender's mixing Mickeys and all's right with the world, when these two guys come in, pull a gun on the

girl and try to force her to leave with them. Naturally, I can't stand there, so . . .

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later, Martin was still sticking to it. The cops were taking it but not liking it. Two of them, a plainclothesman and a motorcycle cop, had been detailed to treat him like one of the boys and see where it got them. He accepted a cigar that made his tongue feel as if he had been using it to clean ashtrays, put his feet up on the desk beside the leather leggings of the motorcycle patrolman, withdrew them self-consciously and smiled apologetically.

The detective captain came out of the private office in which he had been examining the girl, took a look into the room in which they were questioning the bartender, and emerged feeling pleased with himself.

"Why did you stop him from calling us?" the captain asked Martin.

"Hell, I was just breathing hard. I didn't even know what I was doing. When I got my bearings, I told him to go ahead."

"You don't look to me like the kind of guy who gets that winded, but forget it. You stuck around, the three of you seem to tell the same story, and the New York police know you; they don't like you—but they know you." He turned to his admiring aides and waited.

The plainclothesman took the ball. "How do you figure it?" he asked.

"Well," the captain began, "that little girl looks a lot like Kay Darran."

Martin slapped his knee. He spoke with guileless enthusiasm. "Of course! That's who it is. I knew she reminded me of someone."

The captain ignored him. "She's her stand-in," he continued, "and naturally, like any one of the Hollywood kids, she accentuates her resemblance to a star."

The motorcycle cop gave an impassioned imitation of an eager beaver.

"You mean they mistook her for Darran?"

The captain nodded impressively.

Martin joined the loyal opposition. "But would they ~~try~~ a snatch in the middle of the day, in front of two witnesses?"

"Well," said the captain, "this wouldn't

be an ordinary snatch. It hasn't hit the gossip columns—because the big boys have been working hard and paying plenty to keep it undercover—but Darran is Ernie Jackson's girl."

Martin made with a slow, appreciative whistle. The captain continued:

"She came out here from a job in one of Ernie's New York clubs and it seems she would like to forget her past. Ernie doesn't see himself as the guy she left behind and his boys have been following her around to make sure that her heart still belongs to daddy."

In spite of himself, Martin put his objection:

"But wouldn't a couple of bullet holes sort of spoil her, even for Ernie?"

"We won't know about that unless that gungel you nicked talks." The captain had the air of a man who is finishing a good day's work. "Maybe she made him really mad, or maybe they were just trying to scare her, or even maybe they just got too enthusiastic about their work."

Martin said nothing. He was in no spot to be pointing out flaws in the captain's theory. But there were two things that refused to lie down and keep quiet. The first was the fact that Kay Darran had been lying the night before or telling half-truths, when she told him who the gungels were and why she was afraid of them. Of that he was as certain as he had ever been of anything. And the other was that little Joe had not made any mistake about who it was he was pulling out of the bar. He had known quite definitely that it was not Kay Darran.

WHEN it was all over, temporarily, and he was, for the moment, free, he walked slowly back to the parking lot. It was a difficult decision and one that had to be made immediately. Certain as he was that there was more behind this than the police seemed to think, he had two plain choices. He could let things ride as they were, hoping that no discrepancies would arise to complicate the formality of his trial, or he could set to work in earnest and turn in a solution before the police were aware of the need for one.

The disadvantages to this last course were

obvious. To begin with, a guy could get killed and, in addition, there was the possibility that he would succeed only in stirring up enough of a ruckus to jar the captain out of his complacency and start him asking new and more dangerous questions. Still, the idea of sitting still and letting the force of destiny move around him on its own power made him itch all over with impatience.

Someone ran behind him. He turned to face the girl.

"I want to talk to you," she panted.

Martin took her arm. "I owe you a drink," he said. "We can't go back to that nice quiet bar because the cops have unquestionably closed it, so let's find another one."

By the time they had reached the car and driven in it to the Bellevue, he had learned her name, Barbara Blackburn, heard a synopsis of her career that agreed substantially with the summation of the captain and an account of her treatment at the hands of the police. They had let her go about an hour before they released Martin, after getting her signature on an affidavit and warning her that she was a witness and that she could not leave town. She had waited across the street in the coffee-and-doughnut joint until she saw Martin emerge.

They sat down in the last, most dimly lit booth where the noise of the juke-box guaranteed privacy. Martin ordered a boiler-maker for himself and a dry Martini for the girl.

"O. K.," he began abruptly, "talk."

She lowered her lashes like a veil and said demurely:

"I want to thank you."

"It was nothing really."

"And I'm scared."

He drank half of his shot and spoke reassuringly. "You've got nothing to worry about. The cops will call Kay Darran and ask her to identify the two hoods as Jackson's boys. She'll probably refuse. Then they'll ask Jackson some questions he won't answer. But it won't make any difference. The cops can't prove anything but they'll have enough to make my trial a mere formality. In any case, as far as you're concerned, your testimony will be taken and that will be that."

She took the olive from her glass and

twirled it on its toothpick. "What if they can't find her?"

"Do you think they won't?"

She did not answer.

"I'll phrase it again," Martin said. "Why do you think they won't find her?"

She drained her cocktail and stared at him defiantly.

He laughed. "All right. I'll tell you mine if you'll tell me yours. Is that what you want?"

She nodded and the warmth came back into her eyes.

IN CLIPPED, brief sentences, he recounted his meeting with Kay Darran, his various encounters with the two men and all the rest of it. When he finished she was alive with excitement.

"I know who the man with the glasses is," she said. "Gordon Styles, the producer. It's a thing with them."

"I'll try to digest that while you tell me where you came in." He ordered two more drinks apiece and told the waiter he'd call him when he needed him. Barbara's words came in a rush as if she had been waiting to speak them and had gone over them again and again in her mind.

"Last night," she told him, "it was early—around dinner time—Miss Darran called me at home. She said she'd be right over. She arrived about ten minutes later in a tizzy—she was so upset her hands were shaking and her hair looked like she'd been renting it out to pigeons. She asked me a couple of times if I was alone. I told her I was but she kept looking around as if she thought there might be somebody behind the sofa. Finally, I made her search the room herself. Then she sat down on the couch next to me and told me she was in trouble, she needed my help. I struggled a little before I bit on that."

Martin raised his eyebrows.

"Well, after all," Barbara said, "look who she is and look who I am. Why would she need me? But she explained it. I was the only one who could help her because I'm the only girl who looks enough like her to fool her servants. She didn't exactly come right out and say it but she implied that it was trouble with Jackson and that she

wanted to be sure that the maid who was spying on her for him would say that she had been home all night."

"So?"

"I'm a romantic little dope and I smelled a new love so I let her dress me up in these clothes—she had them with her in a suitcase—and drape me with this glass." She raised her arm. The bracelet slid down over the purpling bruise and glittered at Martin. "My hair was all right because the studio hair-dresser does it for me just like hers. Then she drove me to her house. It's a big place in Bel-Air with a lot of ground around it. We parked outside the gate, a good distance away so nobody would hear the car."

"And?"

"Then she sneaked me around the back through a lot of shrubbery to the swimming pool. It was foggy and none of the servants were around the garden. She showed me the staircase that led up from the pool to her bedroom and told me to go up quietly, undress, put on her nightgown and get into bed. She said I should turn out all the lights except the night lamp on the bedside table and then ring for the maid and ask for some aspirin so she'd be sure to see me there, all tucked in for the night."

Martin whistled his long slow whistle. "And you did it?"

"Sure. Listen, even movie extras get into the habit of eating. This is the best job I've had in a long time and I didn't want to lose it because Miss Darran found me unco-operative."

"And did it work?"

"Uh-huh. I slept like a log all night on her silk sheets, got up early the way she said I should, rang for the maid and told her I'd have breakfast in the studio commissary, put on her slacks and drove her station wagon to the lot. Then I waited for her to meet me there the way she said she would—but she didn't come."

"I thought even stars couldn't get away with that."

"Oh, they weren't shooting. Nobody else expected her. I waited all morning and then I decided I'd done enough for my country. I began to think about all the little things that seemed phony and decided that I wanted out. So I went home. She called me. She

was very sweet, you know, like she was bringing presents to the poor orphans and very apologetic about how she couldn't make it in the morning and would I please come to Santa Monica to meet her and she'd know how to show her appreciation and stuff like that. I thought I'd gone this far and I might as well go a little further so I said I would, and she told me to wait in the bar at Third and Wilshire and she'd call me within an hour. She didn't. And you know it from there on as well as I do."

Martin handed her a cocktail glass. "Here," he said, "the pause that refreshes." He patted her hand. "I never thought I'd find a brain behind a façade like yours. Tell me about those phony little things."

SHE studied him suspiciously.

"I'm not kidding you," he told her seriously. "I think it's unkosher, too, but I just want to check your reasons against mine."

"Well, for one thing she was *too* scared. I don't know how to explain it, but it's not logical. She's been making a fool of Jackson for a long time and it isn't as if he didn't know about it . . . everybody around the studios talks about the way his boys try to keep track of her. So, why, all of a sudden, is she so afraid of him?"

He cupped her chin and kissed her squarely on her surprised mouth. "You're wonderful, dear," he told her. "When my present partner drinks himself to death, you can come in with me and forget the false eyelashes. What else?"

"You foolish, headstrong fellow!" Then the smile left her thoughtful eyes. "The bracelet. Why should she have an imitation exactly like the real one?"

"Sorry, Sherlock," Martin told her, "that's simple. Lots of women have them to wear when they don't want to risk the real ones."

"Oh." She was deflated for only a second. "I don't care. There's still something very peculiar about the fuss she made."

"You didn't tell me the fuss."

"Well, she was very insistent that I wear it. She said to keep it on when I got into bed so the maid would see it. Then she went into a long, psychological spiel about how she was never seen without it and if it was

missing the maid would look at me more closely and maybe catch onto the whole rig."

"And that was hooley?"

"But strictly. I've seen her dozens of times without it at the studio. Why, even while she was giving me the routine, she didn't have the real one on."

Martin put his beer chaser down so fast it splashed, and yanked her from her seat. "Come on, honey," he said. "We've got two things to do first and then you're going to have some fun and make like a goat in a tiger trap."

CHAPTER IV

Raw Reasons



HE first item—the procuring of a gun for Martin in place of the one he had left as a keepsake with the cops—was easy. He set in motion a deal involving a character for whom he had done some unconventional favors and drove, swearing at the exigencies of crime in a spread-out city like Los Angeles to a Main Street pawnshop, and emerged in possession of a .38 perfect except for its serial numbers which were, by an odd coincidence, slightly the worse for wear.

"Now," he told the girl beside him in the Buick, "the second item—which consists of finding Ernie Jackson, shoving this iron where he's ticklish and saying: shove the info to me, Jackson."

They made it back to Hollywood in half an hour by dint of ignoring all such tempting neon-offered side-tracks as tacos and grog and stepped onto the thick, deep carpet of the Rendezvous Club at the height of the postcocktail-hour lull.

The smart brown boy who lured the cognoscenti into its fake elegance nightly with his trumpet was absent from the bandstand, and the bar was empty save for a sleepy bartender, two obvious luses, one dame who had started to work too early, and a lovely male in a London Shop tweed jacket, suede-chukka shoes, unnaturally black hair and a porkpie hat.

He stepped forward languidly and barred the path Martin and Barbara were cutting

past the bar stools and rest rooms to the door marked OFFICE.

"You want to see someone?" he inquired as if the whole thing dragged at him the same way customers bore floorwalkers.

"I have words to throw at Jackson," Martin told him.

"Tell me." He blocked the passage with his shoulders, and the padding helped.

"Not in that hat, Mabel," Martin said, giving him the straight arm with his right and pulling at the girl with his other hand. In the course of one squeal, he was through the door.

The man at the desk took his cigar out of his mouth and placed it carefully on an ash-tray.

"Yes?"

Martin looked him over, in view of the fact that he was one of the few big ones he had never seen outside of a newspaper, and was duly impressed. This one had come all the way up from taking nickels from newsies. The sportjacket male fluttered in and made shrill noises. Martin unveiled his .38.

"Chase him out," he said, "before I tear off a couple of ruffles."

Ernie Jackson waved a regal hand and the jacket departed.

"I don't care for this sort of thing," he said, "and I never talk into gun barrels."

Martin grinned at him and put the gun back into his pocket. "Sorry. I just wanted your little friend to take me seriously. You're supposed to be hard to see and I'm in a hurry."

JACKSON looked him over with gray eyes that were casual and observant at the same time.

"Cop?"

"Not exactly."

"That's impossible." Jackson said the word like a man whose decisions are always accepted. "You're either a cop or you aren't. There's no halfway about it."

"All right," Martin told him, "I'm a cop. Have any of my competitors been to see you?"

"I haven't seen any cops."

"That's not what I asked you. Have any of them tried to see you?"

"You're asking the questions, I'm giving the answers." Jackson's face hardened, the bullish contours of his neck thickened. "You take what you get."

"You're not as big as I thought you were." Martin considered him thoughtfully through narrowed eyes. "Let me give you a tip. If you want to climb to the top of your chosen profession, remember not to get tough unless it's necessary."

"Get out," Jackson said expressionlessly. "It's necessary."

Martin asked his question as if he had not heard him.

"If, or rather when, you *do* see the cops, what are you going to tell them about Darran?"

"Miss Darran."

Martin smiled. Jackson got up ponderously and walked around his desk. Martin put his hand in his pocket. Jackson ignored the movement. He stood squarely before the bigger man and, raising his hand, slapped its open palm across Martin's mouth. Jackson winced, let his arm fall and watched the trickle of blood flow strangely out from under his shirt cuff, crawl down the inside of his wrist across the knuckle of his thumb, and drop to the floor. Martin watched it, too.

Then he took Barbara's hand and walked to the door. Over his shoulder he spoke to Jackson.

"Thanks. That was what I came for. About the slap, I'll see you later."

They went out fast. On Sunset Boulevard, in the heavy traffic, it was impossible to be sure whether they were being followed. A big Cadillac wove through the lanes behind them. Past Highland, the traffic thinned. The Cadillac turned south on La Brea. The girl sighed and let herself relax. When they had reached the Strip, Martin pulled himself out of his thoughts and smiled at her.

"Tired?" he asked.

"No. I'm just wondering what it feels like to be the goat. And I'm hungry."

The blue neon clock over the Utter-McKinley Funeral Parlor read seven-thirty. Martin made a U-turn and drove back to Ella Campbell's. Inside, against the stained-wood walls and the fussy decoration that somehow managed to be both comfortable

and smart, they had Martinis, rare roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and trifle.

BARBARA giggled as she sank back onto the car seat.

"Pardon my English accent," she said clipping her words into a fair imitation of Ella's, "but don't you think you might brief me now, old boy?"

Martin swung the car down a dark side street onto Santa Monica Boulevard and began to talk. When he had finished, the girl lay back on her seat and closed her eyes. On Wilshire, when he could almost smell the ocean, he slowed down.

"Scared?"

She put out her hand and covered his on the steering wheel. "Of course."

"If you want out . . ." he began.

"Oh, no. You didn't get me into this. Darran *did*, and I'm in it to stay, to the finish."

They drove past the house to which he had followed Kay Darran the night before, circled the block and passed it again. The third time, having seen as much as could be seen from the seat of a moving car, and determined that there were no guards around the outside of the house and no trace of the cops, Martin pulled up to the curb and parked. They got out, carelessly slamming the car doors and letting their feet ring out on the flagstone path, and walked boldly into the patio. The returning night had given the place back its atmosphere of mystery. He felt her shiver as a vine spray clutched at her sleeve, slipped his arm through hers and guided her firmly past the black, wind-whispering shadows of the bushes.

The ground floor was dark, its inhabitants, if any, silent and invisible. From the windows on the second floor, light streamed thinly through the cracks in the blinds and a smooth radio voice oozed through the walls.

"How do you like that?" Martin whispered. "They think they scared me off for good."

"Hush your big conceited mouth," hissed Barbara in return. Her fright was gone now and her words were vibrant with the possibility of adventure.

They reached the bottom of the stairs.

Martin accepted their safe passage as an omen. It was going to go all right. Just as his guess that anyone watching the doors, as someone surely must be, would assume that Barbara was Miss Darran, had been correct.

The girl turned briefly, gave him a quick, gay wink and knocked.

The man who opened the door stared at her in mild surprise.

"Well, come on," Barbara was imperious. "Let me in. Or don't you want me any more?"

A faint frown grew between the gunman's thick eyebrows but he backed up obediently and Martin and the girl were inside.

"Where's Miss Darran?" Martin asked under the audience applause from the radio. The frown deepened. The man stared at Barbara as if he expected her to melt into ectoplasm before his eyes.

"Doesn't anybody ever tell you anything?" Martin demanded. "There are two of them—one for show and one for every day. Where's the other one?" He cast his first glance around the room, saw the shoulder holster draped on the side chair and producer Gordon Styles reach for it in the same instant.

"Stand still, fatstuff," Martin ordered. Then he waved his gun back to the gungsel. "Where is she?"

The man jerked his thumb toward the bedroom. "Inside." Low cunning spread over his face, giving it the almost-human expression of a chimpanzee who has learned to wear clothes for the newsreels. "I'll get her."

"Don't bother," Martin said, "I know where it is." He handed Barbara the gun from the shoulder holster. "Don't hesitate," he told her. "If you have to shoot Styles, I'll get you a job with another producer."

MARTIN strode through the little hallway and pushed at the bedroom door. Kay Darran put down her lipstick brush and surveyed him coldly.

"People usually knock."

"Forgive me. My manners are a little frayed." He bowed. "Won't you join us in the drawing-room?"

She stuck her painted toes into velvet slippers and drew the negligee around her.

"You don't amuse me at all," she told him flatly.

Martin restrained himself from giving her a hurrying slap on the rump. She swayed through the drapes toward the producer.

"Gordon," she said in the voice of one who expects miracles.

"Sit down and don't let's have any more of the throaty voice or any of the rest of the tricks." Martin herded the gungsel into a chair and threw Barbara a reassuring smile.

"Now," he began, "it's all very simple. This afternoon your two friends came into a bar and tried to kidnap Miss Blackburn." Kay Darran opened her mouth. "Wait a minute," Martin said. "We'll skip the song and dance about how they thought she was you. We know they didn't, so we'll take it straight." He looked from one to the other of the three.

Nothing but stupidity showed on the gunman's face. Gordon Styles' near-sighted eyes were fixed blankly on the wall and the star shrugged her silken shoulders. Martin fixed his eyes on her.

"As you put it," he resumed, "that imitation of a gentleman isn't very good, but it's my best. From now on, I'll be my own crude self. Somebody is going to talk or I'm going to do some pistol-whipping—and I *am* good at that."

No one spoke. He walked past the trio slowly as if he were considering them and paused before the gungsel.

"No." He shook his head. "He won't do. His nerve ends are probably desensitized. Besides, even if he knows—which I doubt from the looks of him—neither of you really cares what happens to the proletariat." The gungsel rose abruptly. Martin pushed him back, stepped forward to the woman and shook his head again. "It would ruin your make-up." He progressed to Styles. "Well," he said slowly, "you're not much but you're all I've got."

He seized a handful of Oviatt tie. Styles came up with it. There was sweat behind the lenses of his glasses but his teeth were sunk into his lower lip and there was determination in the line of his jaw. Martin was compelled to a reluctant admiration. It pulled at his arm and brought the gun barrel down straight without the final flesh-raking

twist that is the fine point of the art. Barbara exhaled sharply.

The producer slumped forward. Martin held him upright. Kay Darran glanced shortly and contemptuously at the limp figure.

"Stop it," she said. "He can't stand much more of that and, anyway, you know anything he could tell you. How much will you take to get out of here and keep your mouth shut?"

Martin grinned and let Styles fall onto the sofa. "Now you're talking. How much am I offered?"

She hesitated, looked at Styles again.

"Come, come." Martin feigned impatience. He had heard now the sound he had been expecting, the stealthy footsteps on the stairway outside. "Don't try to figure out how cheap you can make it. You know the regular market price, and there's Miss Blackburn, too."

He cocked his gun. Styles, mistaking his purpose, shrank back against the chintz cushions. "Pay him," he said in a thin, badly controlled voice, "and get him out of here."

Darran considered coolly. "We'll have to get cash," she said.

THE door opened. The porkpie hat came in. He had added a Luger to his ensemble and he wore it with the same negligent ease with which he wore his clothes. And behind him, Ernie Jackson's big bulk loomed.

Darran's lovely eyes popped at him. She opened her mouth twice and swallowed hard before the whisper came out:

"You're alive."

"That's right, honey," Martin told her. "After you shoot them, you should always make sure they're dead."

She did not seem to hear him. Her lovely mouth opened again and this time an ugly scream came out of it. Jackson strode toward her, past Martin as if his gun were non-existent, and brushed the gray-skinned producer aside.

"Close your mouth," he said roughly. "You always were a hysterical tramp. I don't know what I saw in you."

The porkpie-hat gungel leaned against the door jamb. Martin moved slowly until

he stood in front of Barbara's chair. Ernie Jackson ignored them and looked down at his lost love. Then he shook her and the last, strident, almost-mechanical scream died in her throat.

"I was going to make you sweat," he told her. "You've paid my boys once and you were going to pay them again and again. I want you to know I'm sorry I have to make it this easy for you."

He turned his back on her and began to talk to Martin as if they were alone in the room and as if he, Jackson, held a gun instead of the detective.

"You were telling me this afternoon how to be big. I got my own ideas on that. And one of them is never to let anybody hijack me. This was my job. You moved in on it and I can't afford to let you get away with it."

Martin laughed.

"I'll give you some more advice," Martin said. "It's very effective to talk as if you didn't see a gun, but it's impractical to forget it's there."

Jackson shrugged. "So what?" he asked. "Paul has a gun too and he's got a real talent with it. Right now it's a stalemate. You can't shoot because maybe we hurt the little girl if you do. So we'll just leave now and see that you get it later." He took a cigar from his pocket, lit it meticulously, and savored its aroma. "We got nothing to lose that way. You're all set up for us. You can't go to the cops because what can you tell them? Kay isn't going to talk. She knows that all she has to do now is keep quiet to stay out of trouble. Her boy friend won't talk because even if he's lost some of his illusions about her, he's still her producer and she's a good investment. So I set my boys to watch you and one of these nights you come down for us like a nice fat pigeon."

He stuck his cigar back into his mouth, buttoned his coat, and waved a thick hand at Barbara.

"I'm sorry about the little dame," he said. "She looks like a nice kid, but . . ." He put out both palms in a gesture of resignation, "it's your fault—you shoulda kept her out of it."

"She is out," Martin told him. "She just

came along for the ride. I never told her the whole deal."

Jackson grinned at him. "Please!" He chuckled. "I ask you, would you believe it?" He turned and took a single step toward the door.

MARTIN moved faster than he had ever moved before, slid sideways so that his body completely screened the girl in the chair behind him and, in the same instant, shoved his gun into the small of Jackson's back.

Paul straightened as if on springs. "Drop it," he barked, his trigger finger tensed on his gun.

"Go ahead," Martin jeered. He jabbed his gun for emphasis, felt the barrel sink into the fleshy back in front of him. "And I'll put another hole in your boss."

For long seconds, the two men stood, their eyes fixed on each other as if they could not shift them, undecided, the air electric with the struggle of wills. Then there was a sharp crack. The tension broke.

Ernie Jackson's body was flung back against Martin as if a big wind had lifted it, and then it fell forward. Paul and Martin whirled at the same time, saw Kay Darran with the wildness in her eyes and the shape of her hand and the silly little gun in it, outlined through the thin stuff of her pocket. A burnt brown hole spotted the pale blue silk.

"Damn him." Her voice was derisive. "He isn't boss any more."

The gungsel's shot cut her throaty laugh in half, froze her smile into a horrible, painted red grimace. Martin aimed carefully and there were three of them on the floor, including the gungsel.

Afterward, when he had given Styles a drink and called the police and taken Barbara out to the kitchen where she could not see Kay Darran and Jackson and the man called Paul stretched out on the floor, Martin felt very tired.

Barbara drank her half of the last jigger from the bourbon bottle.

"I still don't understand," she said.

"Tonight was the second time she killed him," he told her wearily. "At least, she tried to kill him the other night and thought she had. That was why she got you to make

an alibi for her. But she left her bracelet here accidentally, on the scene of the first murder. I suppose this house was where she usually met him, safe from prying eyes and columnists. Anyway, you remember that she was anxious to establish not only herself but her jewelry at home in her bedroom. She must have left him lying here for dead and when she was gone, he came to and set to work to make her pay for it. His boys were blackmailing her for him, of course. They probably sold her back the bracelet that night but it didn't end there."

Barbara contemplated him silently. Her eyes were grave and accusing.

"You think it's my fault?" Martin jerked his head toward the three bodies on the living-room floor.

She nodded mutely.

MARTIN took her hand. "Look honey," he said, "I honestly didn't know she had a gun."

"But why didn't you tell her right away that Jackson was alive?" she asked.

"I'm a stern and moral man. I didn't think it would hurt her to worry for an extra half hour or so. She wanted to kill him and she thought she had. In my book that's damn' near the same as succeeding. Besides, she was a spoiled dame and I don't like spoiled women. I had to get her into a spot where she'd be forced to spill what I needed for the cops. And then there was Styles—he's not a bad guy. Look at the way he tried to take a beating for her. I had a pretty definite suspicion that he was innocent of anything in connection with the 'murder' and that she just dragged him in because she didn't like to pay her own bills—even for blackmail. I wanted to be sure. And then there was you."

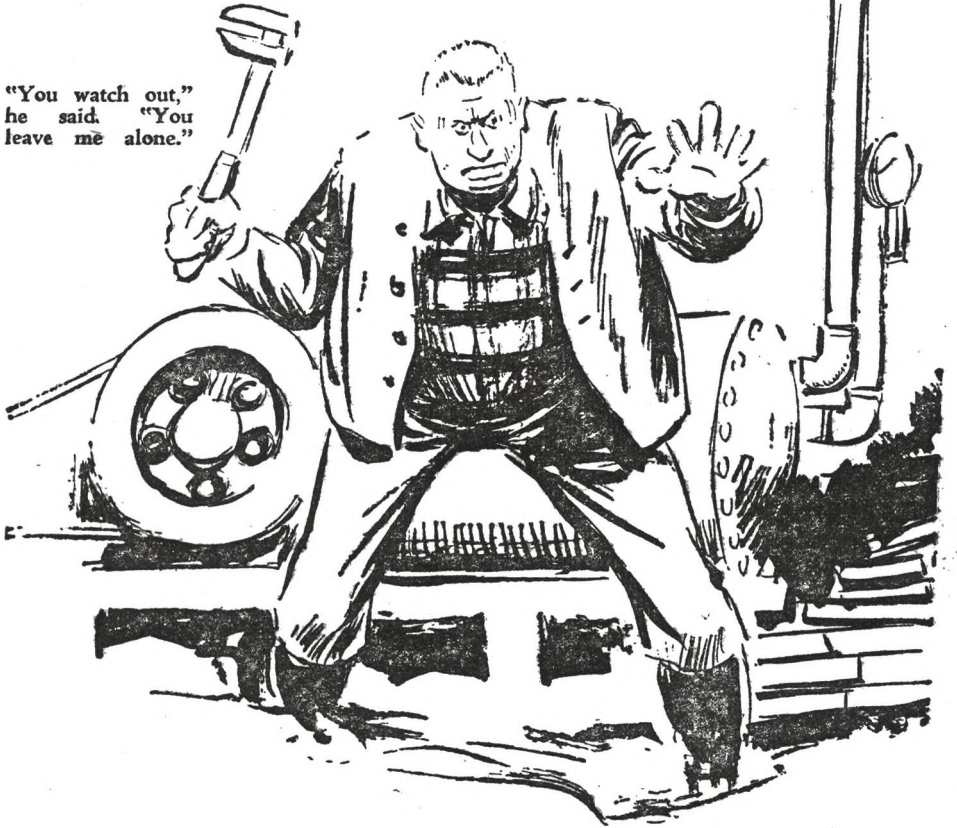
"Me? You mean because I alibied her?"

"Yes, but not in the way you mean. "You remember way back in the mists of time this afternoon, those two hoods tried to kidnap you? There was only one possible reason for that. The way I figure it, they were following her when she took you to her place. Then they sold her back the bracelet, and just when she thought she had everything fixed they said, 'now, dear, there's the matter

(Continued on page 88)

All it takes to solve a fifteen-year-old baffling mystery is patience, fortitude; and the right answers. Brand Hitchens was lucky indeed, he had all three.

"You watch out," he said. "You leave me alone."



AN ICY wind was blowing, a dank and unseasonable breath of premature autumn. Pines sighed a low-down strain of pure blues, a wail pitched in a minor key, sad as sorrow itself. The dead acres of stumps were the graveyard of a mighty forest, and the puny pines still growing or newly sprouted mourned the death of many giants. There is nothing more desolate than the cutover land left by loggers, and in this isolated spot in Northern Minnesota even the little jewelled lakes seemed to be tears in the eyes of Nature.

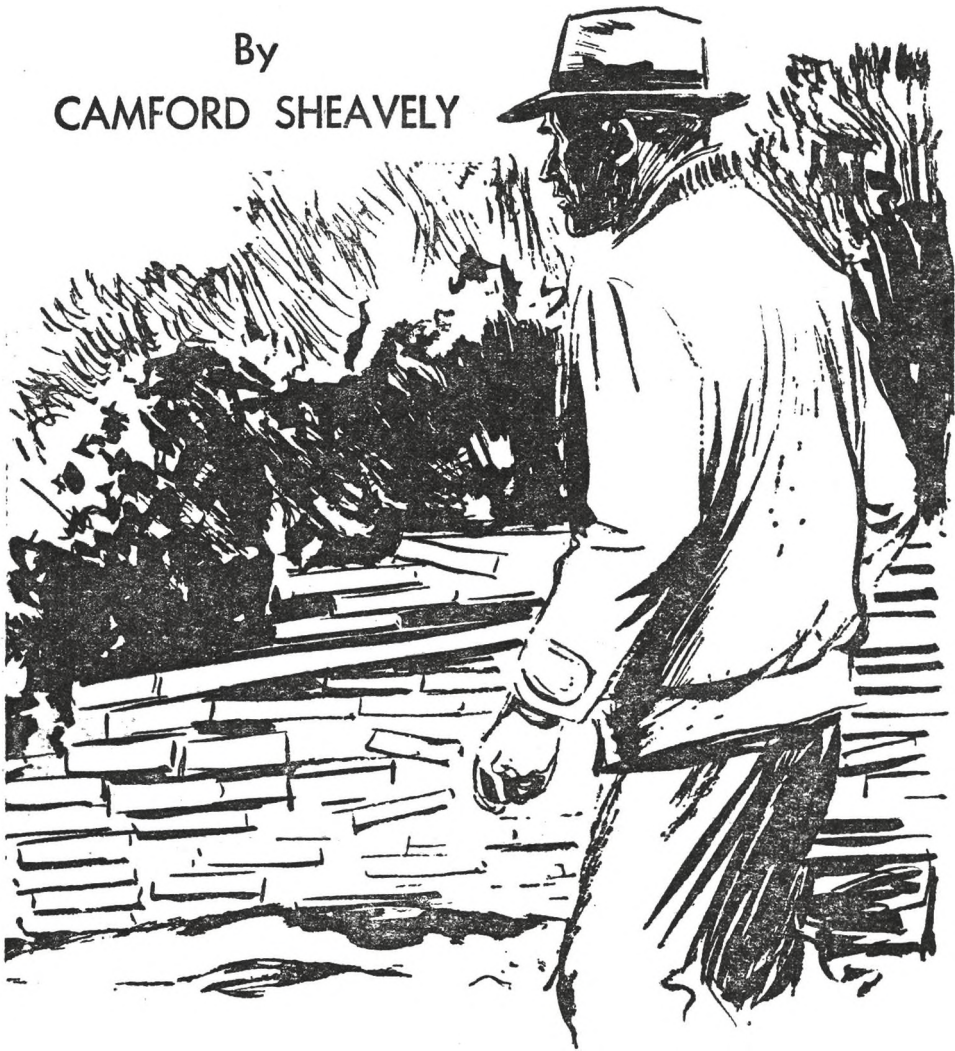
But still it was green underfoot as Brand Hitchens slowly made his way to the little, rmdown house in the clearing, which had

once been a farm. Behind him lay three miles of rutted trail, once a proud County highway, now a grass-grown relic. Murder had brought about this ruin; none came this way any more but ghosts, it was said. And ghosts need no County highways.

Brand stopped at the front door, where a tiny, sagging stoop was almost carpeted by grass growing up through the cracks between the rotten boards. He shivered involuntarily, and his arm grew tighter still around the heavy file of more than two hundred pages of typing and crabbed legalistic script.

The door had fallen from its hinges and a scent of musty decay came from inside. The gaping doorway was like the mocking mouth of a skull. Yet over this same

By
CAMFORD SHEAVELY



SHADOW OF THE AX

threshold childish feet had once tripped— on this very porch a man and a woman had sat with their arms clasped around each other, planning their future on their new farm in the cutover land, fifteen years ago.

"Fifteen years!" he breathed. "Am I crazy—or what—to think there would be a

trail left after this time? There is still time to go back—"

But he did not go back. He stepped through the yawning doorway into a little square room which had been both living room and dining room. The painted wooden walls still showed traces of egg-

shell blue, and this flaking evidence of Mabel Vickers' capacity for making a house a home had the ability to hurt him. For it was going fast, this tracery of blue paint, and when it was gone there would be nothing left in the world to mark that Mabel Vickers had ever lived. Even her killer would have outlived the clues of her existence.

He shuddered, and had a sudden desire to run away from the room.

Still, he reasoned, gripping his file tighter, this was the only room of the four which had not been visited by death on that terrible night fifteen years ago. The Vickers family had lived here, dying in the other three rooms. Here the children had studied their lessons. Here Joe Vickers had smoked his pipe by the stove, reading the *Minnesota Monthly Journal of Agriculture*. Here Mabel Vickers had mended of evenings, raising her brown, wifely eyes now and then in a look of loving pride at her husband, her boy, her two girls, and at the home she had made for them in these four walls.

Fifteen years. . . .!

WHAT was the power of this little house to inspire such a storm of emotion in him, Brand wondered? He was a seasoned criminal prosecutor, a trained lawyer, a man who had seen death in many forms. The impact of this place on his nerves was something new.

He shifted the file on the Vickers case to his other arm and appraised his surroundings again.

To the right was the kitchen, beyond that a little sleeping porch. Time enough to look here later. Across the room from him, at the rear, were two doorways. The one to the left opened upon a small bedroom, once occupied by Joe and Mabel Vickers. The file said they had been first to die when the ax-fiend crept in through the front door fifteen years ago. The other door led to the girls' bedroom, adjoining. Time enough for that, too. He would start, he decided, where the murderer had started—in Joe and Mabel's room.

He stepped to the doorway, as if drawn magnetically by the sagging iron bedstead

which was visible from the front door. The other furniture had long since rotted away or been carried off by vandals.

Here, thought Brand, Joe Vickers had rushed to meet his death. The killer had met him in the doorway between the bedroom and the living room and split his skull with an ax. Brand could visualize his next move as the file reported it. Mabel sat up and screamed, and had been struck down as she sat screaming, according to the coroner's evidence on the position of her body. One blow had sufficed for each, a total of two slashes with a keen woodsman's ax had made orphans of three children.

He shuddered and backed out of the room. Pity them not as orphans, for their orphanhood lasted only a matter of minutes. The killer had gone quickly to the girls' room, the findings of the officers showed. It was a smaller room, just big enough for two little girls in grade-school. Ruth was ten, and she slept on the outside of the bed. Six-year-old June lay next to the wall.

Brand licked his lips. "He came in here after killing Mrs. Vickers," he whispered. "No doubt Ruth awakened when her mother screamed, and sat up in bed. She had time to recognize her murderer, to know what was happening. She probably called out a name—that's why he was so viciously anxious—that's why his blow knocked her off the bed.

"But little June . . . died in her sleep. Poor baby!"

He knelt on the floor, put his fingers on the rough boards. Little girls had run barefoot here, girls who would have been married women now, with children of their own, had they lived.

When he stood up his face was bleak, and he blasphemed because for fifteen years a killer had gone scot-free.

He backed out of the room into the living room and went directly to the kitchen, where only a rusty old stove remained. Off the kitchen was the little sleeping porch where Joe Vickers' idolized son, fourteen year old Davie, had slept and died. Here death made its last stop; for when Davie died the family was gone, the slate wiped

clean of their gentle, homely pattern. The house lost its soul. The tamed trees went back to the wild out in the yard, rot crept into the firm timbers of the house, mold grew, hardwood became soft and rotten. Nature repossessed the little farm even more surely than the County for taxes. For when the County took title again, none came to buy.

He stepped out of the house with a sense of relief, and his nerves jumped again as a brown streak flashed between his legs and across the yard. He smelled something which harked back to his own boyhood among the pines. It was a mink, one of the wildest and most cunning of wild animals, and in seconds it was gone. He realized that it had come from the house, had been inside with him all the time. Indeed, Joe Vickers' farm had gone back to the wild!

A man came out of the woods back of the house and stood watching. Brand withstood his relentless gaze a moment and then lifted his hand in greeting.

"Hello, there," he called.

"Whatcha doin' there?" a shrill voice answered. "Whatcha want? You can't come around here."

The man wore a rolled-up stocking cap, a denim jacket and crudely patched trousers of undistinguishable fabric. His feet were encased in sturdy, home-made moccasins. What his features were like under the curly beard was hard to tell, except that the face was narrow, the arched nose sharp, the forehead low.

"Dan Pratt," Brand murmured, nodding. "The first suspect in the case, the old trapper who tried to scare Joe Vickers and his family out of the cutover country. He hated them, he hated the loggers—he hates me because I've been trespassing on his precious solitude."

Old Dan, according to the file, was a little touched in the head on the subject of the cutover country. He believed the trees never should have been felled. He wanted the deer and the beaver and the mink to come back. When farmers came in and tried—without success—to make a living in the cutover country, he tried to frighten them out.



Brand turned and looked at the little tumble-down house.

But they had never been able to prove that old Dan had killed Joe Vickers and his family.

Brand opened his mouth to shout at old Dan, and left it to hang open incredulously. The old man was gone! He had simply stepped out of sight, melting softly and inconspicuously into the forest back of him like a wild thing. There was absolutely nothing to be seen of him, yet Brand knew he was standing only a few feet away, his patched clothing a perfect camouflage, his

eyes burning with resentment, his whole figure still as stone.

Brand turned and looked at the little tumble-down house, with its pitifully yawning doorway, its blind eyes of windows.

Tears stained his eyes. Mabel Vickers had been his cousin.

THEY had laughed at him when he withdrew the Vickers file from the Attorney-General's office back in St. Paul. It was a closed case. It had broken a dozen politicians before the public finally let it gather dust in the limbo of unsolved mysteries.

"Well," he explained, a little lamely, "the Vickers case was in our FBI crime course as the 'perfect' unsolved crime. It happened when I was a kid, only about fourteen or fifteen, and I got curious. I'm going up north on vacation and I'd like to read up on it, and see why the FBI thinks it is a perfect crime."

A lie, of course—oh, perhaps only an evasion, but having the same moral status as a lie from a peace officer's point of view. He did not think it necessary to mention his relation to the dead woman.

The youngest deputy in the Attorney-General's office, he had jumped at the chance to go to Washington to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's school. The forgotten Vickers case, which had stained his family with a sense of tragedy for years, had turned up unexpectedly, and perhaps it was more responsible than anything else for the way the course suddenly "came alive" for him. He was sorry when it ended.

"Here's an example of what we mean when we say that a 'well-planned' crime is easier to break than one committed on the spur of the moment," the instructor said.

"Study this case well! Here there were no elaborate precautions taken. Your 'perfect crime' usually breaks down because it is too intricately planned—the killer's escape depends upon too many factors, each of which is susceptible of separate 'breaking.' The harder the criminal tries to cover a trail, the more trail he actually leaves. Usually he is a rank amateur, with not more than a few crimes to his credit, and he simply doesn't realize how vast is the ex-

perience of the police system with criminality. So it is usually easy, comparatively speaking, to track a man down quickly in these elaborately planned deeds.

"Here there was a very short, very simple, operation. The killer walked in, killed everybody in the house, and walked out again carrying his weapon. The ax used by him was never found. He kept hold of it and never touched anything in the house to leave fingerprints. Of course there were not any witnesses. And two days later, when the Sheriff got the report from a fellow who turned out to be one of the suspects, there was no trail for his dogs to follow.

"The point is, men, that the things a good officer seeks first—*signs of precautions which the killer took against detection*—simply were not there. A very simple, direct and probably twisted and conscienceless mentality was at work here, one that does not fit into the ordinary pattern. Study this Vickers case well, men!"

The FBI file was not as complete as the one in St. Paul, and he read it eagerly when he returned. His vacation was ready any time he wanted to take it, and he was not sure that his decision to spend it on the Vickers case was as sudden as it appeared. Actually, he thought, he had been slowly coming to this for a long time.

"Look up old Harby Radcliff when you get there," the Attorney-General said.

"I suppose he's getting a little old now," he went on. "I didn't work the case, you know. It was before my time. But Harby is an old political friend of mine and he knows everyone in Redpoint. Tell him I said he was to help you.

"Oh—another thing. There are only about a hundred people in the town. You'll have trouble finding a place to stay—they don't like outsiders much. Go to Mrs. Tarkington's place, and use my name freely. She's also an old political ally. She's a kind of a tyrannical old hellion, Brand, but she'll feed you well and you'll sleep on feather-beds. Now—anything else I can do?"

"Give me your own suspicions," said Brand.

The Attorney-General looked away.

"I have none," he said, at long last. "Like every man in this office, I have read that file until I was blue in the face. I am only thankful it's not a crisis now. As far as your trip goes—"

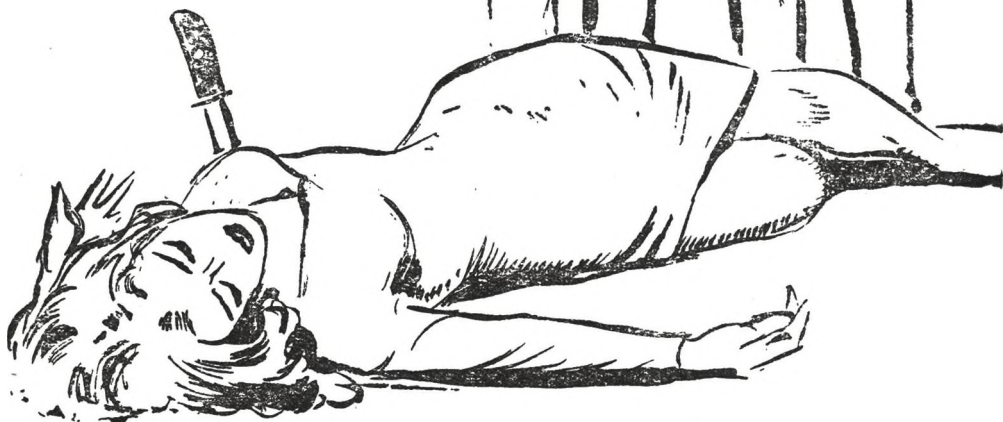
He hesitated, and Brand said, "Yes, sir?"

"As far as it goes," the Attorney-General went on, meeting his eyes directly, "it could wreck this Administration if it stirred up the case again without bringing a solution. It could also 'make' this Administration if a conviction could be obtained.

"But what I want to impress upon you is that none of this is to be taken into consideration by you if you decide to do more than 'read' the file. Oh—I know what you're up to, boy! And I say—give it hell! I didn't send you to that FBI school just for the trip, you know."

This was totally unexpected to Brand Hitchens. He was grateful for his chief's support, but it worried him too. Now there would be no chance of a leisurely academic investigation. It was almost a direct assignment—on a case that had been closed, a file that had been cold, for fifteen years.

"The woman's dead. Dead
—by a knife in her heart!"



REDPOINT was fifteen miles from the railroad. He rode over with the mail truck and asked for Harby Radcliff's house. The old man had gone on over to the County Seat, they told him, and would be back that evening.

Instead of waiting, Brand then went directly to the Vickers place. Returning late

that afternoon he felt as baffled as ever, and not cheered at all to have gone over the scene of the crime and actually met one of the suspects. He went to Mrs. Tarkington's, after picking up his suitcase at the postoffice, and gave her the Attorney-General's message.

She was a gaunt, fleshless woman with

large features and stern black eyes, but Brand somehow liked the fierce, old-fashioned knot of hair on top of her head.

"Humph!" she sniffed. "Not election time so you can't be beating the bushes for votes for your old reprobate of a boss. So you must be up here snooping around the Vickers case. Oh, you needn't deny it, young man! I'm not as stupid as I look. Well, come on in anyway. I reckon I can stand you a few days, if you can stand me."

Brand stifled a smile.

"I have no doubt of that," he said, and added mischievously, "the Chief said I'd find you very pleasant company."

"That's a damned lie, of course," she flashed back, "and he's a liar if he said it. But come in, come in—let's don't stand in the door all day. Humph! Pleasant company, my left eye!"

That evening, after a bountiful supper of stewed squirrel, he went up to the big white house where old Harby Radcliff lived alone. He was surprised to see how old the old man was. He had the frail-looking physique of a man of seventy, and the almost transparent skin of the very old, also. His wife had died a few years back, and now he lived alone in the big house, keeping it clean and cooking his own meals. It was a gentle, peaceful old age that was somehow touching. They talked by yellow lamplight, smoking their pipes.

"I sold Joe that thousand acres of stumpland," Radcliff reminisced in a clear, steady voice.

"He had only a few hundred dollars and I had a devil of a time getting the company to take it as a down payment. I was only their sales agent, you know. But I knew Joe Vickers when he was a little kid, and dammit, I know farmers! He'd have paid that off in no time."

He sucked his pipe a few moments.

"Be that as you like it," he went on, "he'll never pay it off now. Some say the stumplands should never be cultivated—that they'll erode and become useless—that farming can't succeed anyway. The pertinent fact is that no one buys stumplands any more. I won't say it was the Vickers murder that did it, but a sort of a blight came over the whole project to sell

the cutover land to farmers. Why, I well remember—"

As he warmed to his subject, the ghostly figures in the case seemed to flit back to the old man. He talked slowly, haltingly, with many pauses to light his pipe or reload it, but at last he was wrung dry.

"As far as I know, the Vickers family hadn't an enemy in the world," he emphasized. "Joe was a quiet, smart, decent, hard-working farmer. He had a worthy wife, a pretty one too, and three mighty nice kids. Now who would want to butcher folks like that?"

"A lunatic, perhaps," Brand suggested.

"Then you have your choice of four," said Radcliff instantly. "At one time or another in those first hectic weeks, we had four persons in custody. And I think—as I thought at the time—that each of them had a screw loose. The course each has taken since then has kind of proved me right. Wait until you see them all, Mr. Hitchens!

"There was crazy old Dan Pratt—you've met him.

"There was Toby Clelland, who discovered the body. Or bodies, rather. He only saw Joe's, and was so frightened that he ran into the forest, his mind a blank for twenty-four hours. So he said, at least! The next day he came in and reported it to the Sheriff. That was what touched off the hue and cry—and what a changed town it has been since that fateful moment when silly Toby came slinking into the courthouse.

"There was big Ed Wagner—he's the one I had in mind when I said subsequent behaviour proved lunacy then. I claimed from the start that Ed was 'off,' but I claimed it alone. Now everyone will agree.

"And of course there's Frank Knife." Radcliff smiled gently. "Ask Mrs. Tarkington about Frank. Her pet peeve, as the youngsters say. Frank's an Indian, and to begin with Emmy Tarkington hates Indians, and Frank is something of a special problem.

"And if there is ever anything I can do to help you—"

Frank saw that he was tiring the old man. He apologized and took his departure. It was only a short walk back to his

rooming house, and despite the coldish autumn wind a pleasant one because of the limpid moonlight. It was wild here—an almost primitive backwoods and, except for the sickness which seemed to have drained the country of vigor since the Vickers killing, a vacation wonderland.

He thought once that he saw a humped man in a black hat following him, and he thought once that he heard shuffling footsteps behind him; but both times when he turned sharply for a good look he saw nothing.

"Probably some village loafer curious to get a look at me," he surmised.

He sat reading the Vickers file for two hours. When he put it down at last he was astonished to see that it was three o'clock in the morning. He was suddenly weary, his whole body ached.

Just then he heard a downstairs window open, and Mrs. Tarkington's shrill voice shivered the cold autumn air.

"Frank! Is that you, Frank Knife? You dog, you answer me at once."

Brand went to the window and looked out. A light thrill ran through his tired body, stiffening him. In the gravelled roadway outside—it was Main Street but still just a gravelled roadway—stood a stooped man in a black hat. In one hand he held a short-bladed, wicked-looking knife. With the other he was trying to conceal a bottle of whiskey.

"Is that you, Frank Knife?" Mrs. Tarkington screamed again. "Answer me, you filthy dog, or I'll give you some buckshot to teach you manners. And quit using the name of the Lord in vain. Get off down the road, you dirty old savage, and don't let me catch you in town again."

The Indian, thoroughly cowed by the woman's vigorous tongue-lashing, spurted drunkenly down the road. Mrs. Tarkington pulled her flannel wrapper close about her and looked up from the window to grin at Brand.

"Ha! He knowed you was here on the Vickers case, the dirty old thing! Watch out for him away from here, Mister Detective, but don't worry while you're in my house. I've got the Injun sign on that Injun, don't you fear!"

With that she slammed down the window. Brand smiled and went back to undressing. Well, that made two of the suspects. Frank Knife, according to the file and according to old Harby Radcliff, had been a hired man at times for Joe Vickers. Then they quarreled over Frank's drinking, and Frank tried to go back to his tribe. They wouldn't have him. He took to the woods, was gone somewhere when the Vickers family was killed.

Brand opened the file and read the part about Frank Knife. He never did establish an alibi. He merely said he was drunk up by Fiddler's Mountain, all by himself. And they couldn't prove anything on him. The notation said:

"KNIFE, Frank, 34. Discharged. Evidence inconclusive."

OLD Harby Radcliff was fresh from the bath. The rolled cuffs of his flat-knit underwear, visible at the cuffs of his home-pressed brown woolen shirt, had the clean smell of naphtha soap. His hand trembled slightly with the vague weakness of old age as he pointed with his pipestem. The morning sun was bright.

"That road a mile, and then turn to your right," he said. "But be careful. Ed Wagner's the one who was said to be crazy about poor Mabel. I always said he was plain crazy—period, as the young people say."

"The gossip, you know, was that Mabel chased him off the place two or three times, and said nothing to Joe because she didn't want any trouble. Poor kid—poor, tormented girl! Anyway, Ed's wife left him right after the murder. *She* will always believe he did it, I guess. She lives in Minneapolis now, I understand. Well, I'm keeping you with my gossip. Be careful."

"Thanks." Brand smiled. "I'm pretty husky. Don't worry."

"Ed Wagner is strong as a bull, Mr. Hitchens, and he has an absolutely unmanageable temper," old Radcliff said, in a troubled voice. "If you don't care about yourself—why—the town doesn't want any more scandal, Mr. Hitchens."

He actually feared another killing! Thus for fifteen years an unnatural depression

had hung over Redpoint like a fog. The sun seemed not quite so bright as Brand set off down the road.

Nature, he reflected as he looked about him, was gentler than Man in its office of

Mrs. Tarkington screamed, as the ax spun out of the man's nerveless hands.



death. Yesterday the raw stumps had been horrid—yesterday as time is measured in the life of a forest, anyway. But altogether Nature had done pretty well! Already the stumps were going back to the soil as new trees sprang up, new coverage was growing. If there was a blight here it was Man's, and Nature was optimistically and indefatigably repairing it. Too bad, he reflected, that there was not a way to lift the blight from the hundred-odd souls in the town.

They could not grow green again, like a logged-over hill.

He almost went past Ed Wagner's place. He would have except for the sudden nerve-racking yelping of a dog, which turned his head sharply in time for him to perceive the ugly, square little shanty Harby Radcliff had described. No wonder Ed Wagner's wife left him! The place was a den—a barn—a barracks in which no woman could be happy. Not even Mabel Vickers and her eggshell blue paint could prevail against the deliberate ugliness Ed Wagner had created when he run this gray



building up on this barren, stumped-over hillside.

Greenery had taken over since then, half hiding the place, but Brand could see what it must have been like about fifteen years ago.

The little dog kept yelping, a dwindling sound of mortal pain that set his hair on end. He turned sharply and crossed what had once been a small field, what was now a brush-patch. The first thing he saw was the decrepit frame around an old open well. A battered bucket hung by a rope, giving him an excuse for stopping. The dog's wails went on, growing weaker but not fast enough to suit Brand—it was dying slowly, the hard way.

He smelled rank tobacco smoke by the

open window, and heard someone moving around inside.

"Anybody home?" he shouted.

The unseen dog whined eagerly, as though hope had revived with the sound of a stranger's voice. Then a bleak face, blackened by a week's growth of brownish beard, appeared in the window. The two eyes had not the lackluster hatred he had felt in Dan Pratt's and Frank Knife's. This man was plain crazy. His gaze was hot. What could be seen of his shoulders indicated the huge man Harby Radcliff had warned him of. Brand shifted to the balls of his feet like a boxer, somehow wishing he could try his luck with Ed Wagner, who of all the people Brand had met here was the one easiest to dislike on sight.

"Oh, hello!" he said, not making his voice any more cordial than the ordinary laws of civility demanded. "I saw you well. I'd like to help myself to a drink, if you don't mind."

Wagner glared.

"You didn't see my well from the road," he contradicted flatly. "You aimed to butt in when you heard the dog."

"That's the idea," Brand challenged.

The dog was still ululating pitifully. Wagner's mouth opened into a red, beard-rimmed grin.

"I learned him not to fetch his rabbits none," he said. "Dog wants to hunt, let him eat his ketch in the woods. I know what I want brought home and what I don't want brought home. Help yourself to the water and move along! Ain't no Vickers snoopers wanted here."

"Don't like to talk about the Vickers case, eh?" Brand teased gently, squaring instinctively toward the window. Impossible not to challenge this surly, cruel brute.

Again Wagner grinned.

"You heard me," he said. "Help yourself to water and go on down the road. I know who I want on my place and who I don't want on my place. That's good water. I got the best well in the kentry."

"Thanks," Brand said shortly.

"Don't thank me! Water's free hereabouts. See if I give a damn how much you drink—this time!"

The man withdrew his head with startling suddenness. Behind him Brand saw a picture on the wall, the lewdly suggestive "art" nudity of an out-of-date calendar. There were other, smaller pictures whose outlines were indistinguishable, but Brand knew what they represented.

He had a cool, refreshing drink and made his way back to the road. He had no more than reached it when something struck the dirt beside him. It was the body of a small tan-and-white dog, and its eyes were glazed in death. Brand's fists clenched and he looked up to see Ed Wagner, a towering figure at least six foot six, looking at him beside the well, arms akimbo. Suddenly Wagner went over to the woodpile at the corner of the house, picked up the ax, and buried it half its blade's depth in a tree.

As if childishly proud of his strength, he wrenched the ax loose, dropped it on the ground, and went back into the house.

Brand shook his head. "He kicked that poor dog to death and then drew him out here at me as I'd toss a rat! What strength—and what useless, ruthless, cruelty!"

The instinct in him to dare Wagner, to challenge him, had been duplicated in Wagner, he knew. They reacted on each other like acid and soda. The man's gesture with the ax had been a deliberate taunt at him as investigator in the Vickers case. It was as though he had said;

"I'm cruel—I'm strong—I'm ruthless—and I'm good with an ax! Why don't you prove I did it? Why? Why? Why?"

The bright blade of the ax twinkled in the sunlight. Brand remembered the notation which closed the record of the man's arrest:

Wagner, Edwin Suffolk, 28. Discharged. Evidence inconclusive.

The sunlight seemed suddenly false, a glittering masque that covered without illuminating. Brand had a wish to take a stick and stir the muddy depths as he would have roiled a pond. There was a feeling of bafflement that made him angry. He started walking swiftly up the road.

He turned onto the main highway suddenly, and there stood Frank Knife. The Indian's hairless face showed the effects of his prolonged debauch, but there was instant recognition in his opaque eyes, which glittered in the shadow of his dirty, battered black hat. He was a pitiful wreck of a once perfect physical specimen, and he exuded a baleful resentment against the world which he seemed to blame for wrecking him. Brand could understand this, and pity him, and at the same time be on guard.

"You're Frank Knife," he said.

"You policeman," the Indian muttered. "You catch him man kill Joe Vickers maybe, no?"

"Maybe," Brand agreed.

The Indian licked his lips and shot his glance down at the ground.

"Anyway you watch out," he said. "You leave me alone. Everybody better leave me alone, you hear that?"

"I heard it," said Brand. "But don't you

think you and I had better have a little talk?"

"I don't want to talk to you."

He walked away. It occurred to Brand that it would be interesting to get Knife and Ed Wagner together, and see how they behaved to each other. Yes—and Dan Pratt, too! And the fourth suspect, Toby Clelland. Of the four, at least three were innocent. Would there be anything come out of the meeting—any of those curious sparks which come from the clash of personalities—to point the criminal forth? It was something to wonder about.

HE WANDERED deeper into the forest, working steadily toward the high "hogback" of hills back of the town of Redpoint. He wanted as much of a panorama as possible, the kind of a view a map would give, yet with the photographic detail of reality.

At a hilltop he stopped for a cigarette. Ed Wagner's place was not visible, but the barren hill that hid it was. Of course there was no place on any map or picture where you could put an "X" and call it the home of Dan Pratt or Frank Knife—all the dark corners of the wilderness was theirs. They could manifest themselves any time, he felt, by a hurled knife, a shot, a trap.

By turning his head slightly he could see the center of the picture he sought—the Vickers farmstead, a gray roof in a rolling blanket of green. Beyond a few miles was Redpoint, a toy village at this distance.

He sat dozing and smoking, aware only at long last of something else, a thin thread of smoke off to his right. It rose lazily on absolutely motionless air. Realization suddenly came, and he nodded in satisfaction. It was the exhaust smoke from a steam engine—a sawmill, and the "X" which marked his last suspect, Toby Clelland.

The Clellands were locally famous, although they had pulled out of the country a generation ago, abandoning it for New York and Europe. They made something like thirty million dollars out of its timber first, however. Tobias Clelland was a misfit scion of this family, a branch "not quite right" in his mind, and consequently brusquely kicked out by the old tyrant who

ruled the Clellands—and their thirty million.

When Redpoint heard a Clelland was coming back to open a sawmill there was rejoicing and a great hustle and bustle. It took months to make them aware of the truth, so sly and gentle and squeamish and devious a character was Tobias. Finally they realized that he was a Clelland in name only, and they suffered him to putter around town on the little allowance the family sent. Finally they were able to laugh at his "sawmill" and his dream of capturing a fortune in lumber, as his ancestors had done.

Brand remembered part of the Sheriff's interrogation of him as it showed in the file. They wanted to know why he had run off into the timber after finding Joe Vickers' body, and he couldn't tell them.

Q—Your mind went blank, you say.

A—Yes. The door was open so I walked in, you see. I told you that. Then I don't remember until the next day. Then I thought I better come tell you.

Q—So you came right in, the minute you remembered?

A—Yes. Like I told you, Sheriff.

Q—Do you forget things like this often?

A—Yes. No. I don't know. Sometimes I—oh, you wouldn't understand. You're picking on me.

Q—Did you ever have any trouble with Joe Vickers?

At this point the witness had refused to answer. He had shut his lips and closed his eyes, and nothing they could do would pry another word out of him. They promptly clapped him in jail and lodged a murder charge against him, but it ended in failure weeks later. Brand remembered the notation:

Clelland, Tobias George, 20. Discharged. Evidence inconclusive.

He got up and headed for the smoke pillar. It was a two hours walk before he reached the rusty little clearing where stood an old, semi-portable, steam-powered saw rig, of antique design. Clelland, a fat man with closely cropped hair that was either gray or pasty white, was puttering at the engine with a wrench, a dreamy smile on his somewhat characterless face. The mound of sawdust which choked the narrow brook

on which the mill sat drowned Brand's footsteps until he was at Clelland's side. The man gave a whimper of alarm and brought the heavy wrench up defensively.

"I'm sorry," Brand apologized.

"You scairt me," Clelland accused. "You shouldn't."

His hand trembled. He licked his lips, and let the wrench drop furtively into the sawdust.

"You're the detective on the Vickers case, aren't you?" he said. "Oh—you can't fool me, sneaking up on me that way! You can't catch Toby Clelland napping—no, sir! Why, I could tell you a few things that would curl your hair—but I won't."

He set his lips stubbornly. Brand offered him a cigarette, began talking at random of other things. Quickly the man was soother, as much by sympathetic treatment as by nicotine. But it was not until Ed Wagner's name was mentioned that he disclosed any willingness to speak of the Vickers case, and then in an entirely unexpected way.

"Sure. I know. Yeah. But I'm not talking, see?" he muttered. "I don't want that Ed Wagner after me. But if you knew what I knew about his wife, you'd change your mind about a few things. Ha! Left him because he was chasing around, did she? Well, she had odd tastes, did Marie Wagner! She made that up about Ed. And what she was doing—who she was meeting by the big tree—well, you'd just be surprised, that's all!"

"The man's name?" Brand said in a soft voice.

But Clelland said only, "I—I forget. Sometimes I forget things. I best be fixing my steam engine. Got a big job coming up."

And that was all he would say. Brand asked where he could find Dan Pratt, and Clelland gestured vaguely toward the Vickers place. Brand decided to return to town before seeking out Pratt. For one thing, he was hungry.

HE TOOK another route home, avoiding Wagner's place for the reason of Wagner's temper, while all the time he turned over in his mind the startling hint

Clelland had thrown out before his own undependable wits wandered. So far Wagner's wife, Marie, had appeared only obliquely in the file, never by direct testimony. There were references by other witnesses to her abuse by her husband, to his unfaithfulness, and most of all to the shameful way he ran after a good woman, Mabel Vickers, to her distress and his wife's.

Old Harby Radcliff had said that the woman was now living in Minneapolis. Arriving in town, Brand put in a long-distance call to the Chief of Police there, and caught that official just as he was leaving for supper.

"I don't suppose you can give me anything on this offhand," he said, "but if by tomorrow at this time you could give me a pretty good report on a woman by the name of Marie Wagner, address unknown but she was the wife of a suspect in the Vickers ax murder here, I'd appreciate it."

It was a day of astonishing answers. The chief said instantly, "Why surely, Brand—I can give you everything we've got out of my head. The woman's dead."

"What!"

"Yep, dead—by a knife in her heart! We put it down as 'possible suicide' at the time—there were some unexplained circumstances. Namely, a guy that came to visit her the day she died. But we never turned anything up on him and nobody had a decent description of him. Frankly, it could be suicide—or something else.

"And here's another thing!" he added. "She died on October twenty-first, on the first anniversary of the Vickers case. That might prove remorse or regret or nerves, thus bolster up a suicide theory. Or it might prove something else, if you had anything to go with it. Anything else I can do for you?"

Brand said no, and hung up thoughtfully. There was a package for him, Mrs. Tarkington said. It had been left on the doorstep without postage, and his name was illegibly scrawled on the brown wrapping. He opened it and was overwhelmed by the odor of a freshly killed skunk. Mrs. Tarkington laughed until tears came to her eyes.

"Some sense of humor old Dan Pratt's got," she said. "No mistake about how he feels about *you!* Now go change your clothes and come to supper. No, not in here—change out in the woodshed and then bury 'em—bury 'em deep."

She sobered suddenly. Her mouth fell open.

"My God!"

"What's the matter?"

"I just happened to think," she whispered, "that the old fool sent one of those to Joe Vickers, as a warning for him to get out of the timber, just two or three days before they were killed. Nobody ever took it serious enough to mention it at the investigation. But you be careful, won't you?"

"I promise," said Brand.

AT HER insistence he carried not merely a .38 revolver in his waistband that night, but a powerful, five-cell police flashlight as well that evening. The moon was high as, nearing eleven o'clock, he left the house.

Walking swiftly, he soon left the last house of the village behind, and plunged into the stumpland. Instinctively he sought the sparse shadows of the second-growth trees, aware that woodsmen like Pratt, Knife, Wagner and Clelland would have no trouble following him if they chose. But if they had in mind a shot or a thrown knife, say, there was no use making their job any easier.

He reached the little tumble-down house, squatted down in the grass-grown ruts of the old, abandoned road to smoke a cigarette and study it a moment. And as he squatted there he sought to recapture the mood of his first visit—the feeling of actually being present while Joe and Mabel and the three children were living their last moments.

Illumination came with stunning force, and he leaped to his feet and almost ran to the gaping doorway. Suddenly a number of factors which had not fit each other before clicked into place in his mind, and as he peered through the door his brain teemed with unspoken questions—questions that tumbled over each other in their necessity for answers.

"I've been a fool!" he whispered to him-

self. "All this talk of madness, of *lunacy*—that's what threw me off. Because it wasn't madness at all—it wasn't a simple killing frenzy, brought on by some imagined or real hurt! It was a viciously deliberate and premeditated crime by a man who might not be 'normal,' but who certainly had all the cold, crafty intelligence necessary to do the job."

The file, he remembered clearly, had said there was a full moon that night, and that it had been an *unseasonably warm evening*. The little house was poorly ventilated. Everything hung on one thing—had the front door been open when the killer arrived? Brand was sure this was the case. People like the Vickers, who worked and lived outdoors, liked fresh air as they slept.

And from the roadway, a hundred yards away, Brand had been able to see the sagging iron bedstead in which Joe and Mabel Vickers slept.

"That meant they could have seen the killer, too, had he come in the front door. And no one could come in the front door without disturbing Joe! No one could get across the little stoop and all the way over to the bedroom door, carrying an ax, without having Joe Vickers on him like a tiger."

There was a terrible sureness to the way Brand felt about this. These people did *not* lock their doors, because there were no intruders. Yet by the same token an intruder would bring a man like Joe up fighting with the instinctive ferocity of a cornered bear. Anything else was out of character with the Joe Vickers pictured in the file.

There was only one alternative. The killer could not have entered through any of the windows for the same reason. That meant he had come in the back way—and this meant that little Davie Vickers, and not his father, had been the focus of the slayer's mad hatred.

"God!" Brand breathed. "A fourteen-year-old boy. The rest were killed to cover his tracks, but not until the boy and whatever he knew had been destroyed."

Trembling with eagerness he went to the back door, retraced the killer's steps. First Davie had died. There was then time to speed through the house and strike down

Joe as he leaped, roaring, out of bed to investigate the ominous sounds in the rear of the house. Then Mabel, at the killer's leisure. Lastly the two little girls.

Looked at this way, there was a cold, studied ferocity about the crime that dropped into a more familiar pattern. So far there was nothing to indicate who the intruder had been; but at least the false leads had been worked out, the inconclusive inferences, based on that first fatally bad guess as to the place of entry, had been eliminated.

But why had the intruder wanted to kill little Davie?

Standing in the sagging old sleeping porch where the boy had died, Brand pondered this question. The boy had been going to school for over a month when this happened. School was almost his entire life then, since it took up most of his waking hours. Brand was sure that he had somehow acquired that deadly knowledge while he was in school. Otherwise, why had he not been slain before? Why had he been safe all through the summer, in mortal peril a month after school opened?

HE KNEW vaguely where the school-house was. It was almost midnight when he reached it. The neat little one-room building stood on a pleasant hillside at the north edge of town, as much in the country as in the village. There were swings for the children to swing on, nearby an entire forest of trees and stumps, not far away a rocky chasm ideally suited to boyish campaigns against Indians. Surely, he thought, there could be no pleasanter place to go to school.

Furthermore—he smiled—the door was easy to force.

Inside he smelled the nostalgic odor of chalk and schoolroom paste-pots, but he wasted no time on the memories they evoked. He clicked on his flashlight, holding the beam down so that visibility from the windows would be at a minimum, and swiftly examined the desks. He was interested only in the larger ones—Davie Vickers had far outgrown the beginners' desks on the other side of the room.

It was in a corner desk at the rear of

the room that he found what he sought—the boyishly carved initials, "D. K.!"

His heart pounded as he lowered himself into Davie's seat, fingers touching those last wistful mementoes of the boy's boyishness. He was interested in them only as identification of the desk, however. What he sought would be found *out of the window*.

Here, he was sure, Davie had sat day after day for a month, gazing forlornly out at the trees, the brightly colored fall leaves, the beckoning hills—. It was hard for a kid to stand school, those first sunny weeks of it! Brand remembered his own boyhood, how many times the teacher had rapped his own knuckles for dreaming out of the window after his lost summer liberty.

And suddenly some other pieces of the puzzle clicked into shape, and the formless lines of the other side of the pattern became less obscure.

That road! It led to Ed Wagner's place, and Ed Wagner used it coming to town. Davie Vickers could have sat here and seen Ed Wagner come to town one day after day—and *he could also have seen Marie Wagner*, had she come down that road, too.

Again the pattern had been reversed—again a fresh starting-point had brought him to a fresh motive with stunning suddenness. Marie, silly old Tobias Clelland had said, had been meeting someone "by the big tree." As conclusively as the rap of a judge's gavel, the truth leaped at him. For yonder was the big tree! Yonder it stood, visible clearly from where Davie Vickers sat, but invisible to everyone else in the room.

Invisible, also, to everyone else in town, he discovered when he left the schoolhouse. A fold in the hills hid it from the other houses. He wanted no more conclusive proof than this. No, too many things fit—Toby's wandering talk, his discovery that Davie had died first—now the intricately designed series of deductions available only from little Davie's desk.

He did not need his flashlight outside. He went to the big tree and studied the terrain from there. Here he made another discovery which, alone, had no significance, but which was important as a link in the chain

of circumstance he was accumulating piece by piece. The big tree was not merely a pretty trysting place for a misguided farm wife and her village Don Juan, but it also lay on the natural route a man would take from Joe Vickers place to town—if he happened to be avoiding traveled roads!

Yes, there was no question of it! After leaving the death-place, the killer would undoubtedly hurry home by the shortest route, the one with the fewest hills and gullies and the most natural cover from trees and stumps. The gentle convolutions of the land led one naturally past this tree. From there—?

HE SNAPPED on his flashlight and started up the slope. It suddenly became steep as he passed out of sight of the school. There was a well-worn trail, undoubtedly used by children who lived in town, and he followed this easily. When he reached the top of the rise, the entire town lay spread before him, lovely on the moonlit slope.

Here the first Redpoint settler had built his cabin, and here he had dug his cellar. The cellar had long since fallen in, and the fence built around it by the town constable to keep out school children had long since been carted away. Brand went to the edge of the depression and played his flashlight into it. Here, he was convinced, the murderer had tossed his ax. He had dared not drop it anywhere behind him, lest berry-pickers, hunters, picnicking children—even stray dogs—should discover it. Neither did he dare take it home. And the cellar, which then must have still had a semblance of a roof, would be his last chance to dispose of it.

Brand broke off a limb and began digging. It was soft soil up here, and it turned easily, but he realized he never could excavate the amount of dirt that might be necessary without a shovel. Mrs. Tarkington had one. He glanced at his watch—one-forty-five. It was a shame to awaken her, but while the moon lasted he wanted to dig.

"Shovel? What do you want with a shovel this time of night?"

Mrs. Tarkington clutched the flannel

wrapper closer to her skinny chest and with the other hand tried to wipe the sleep from her eyes. Suddenly she was very wide awake.

"You're up to something!" she accused. "You know who did it!"

Brand tried to evade her, "I don't know anything of the kind! What would I be doing with a shovel if I did? If you'll just be kind enough to let me have the key to your woodshed, so I can get the shovel out—"

"You lie!" she flared. "You young pup, you're up to something and you're trying to keep me out of it! Well, it won't work, d'you hear? Wait until I get some clothes on and I'm coming with you."

"All right," Brand sighed. "I'll wait for you outside."

The formidable old woman took little time dressing, and he was actually glad of her company as they set out together. He had her long shovel over his shoulder and she carried the flashlight. The moon was dropping; it would be dark in the old caved-in cellar.

"Who was it?" she kept coaxing. "You know, don't you?"

"I'm not sure," he kept putting her off. "Be patient."

"Patience comes hard at my age," she grumbled. "What are we digging for, anyway? Think what's going to be said about a body if I'm caught." She chuckled. "I'd clout you one over the ear if I wasn't having such a hell of a time!"

They reached the old cellar, and she trained the light down into it while he set to work with the shovel. The wind was cold—he heard her teeth chattering as he worked, and suggested at last that she step down into the hole with him, where the banks would protect her.

The shovel grated on something and he stopped digging with an exclamation. He dropped to his knees.

"Turn the light this way," he said.

Her teeth chattered: "What is it? What are we looking—oh, my stars and garters!"

Brand nodded grimly.

"The ax," he said. "Here it is—I'm sure of it."

(Continued on page 89).

RED POINTS

By WILLIAM DECATUR



HE STOPPED in the doorway, pushing his vestfront a foot ahead of his sleeves. He seemed to like the varnished oak desk and the varnished oak chairs. He walked in, his hands hanging like lead weights at his sides. He wore gray herringbone, and he didn't own the First National Bank, but I figured he had a nice healthy account there.



He said, "Mr. Berry?"

I admitted it.

He raised one of the lead weights and plumbed in a vestpocket and got out a small leather case. He slid a card from the case and handed it to me and the card said: Walter S. Goodluck, Studio of Interior De-

TO MURDER

The lady owed Mr. Goodluck, or so he said, nine hundred dollars. He didn't want to dun her, if there was any likelihood of losing a good customer, but, at the same time, he didn't want to be stuck with a bad bill. That's why he hired a private detective to handle the job with infinite tact and subtlety

I flashed my private badge and her hands got all fluttery.



sign, 1127 Lincoln Boulevard, Crescent 3030.

I said, "That's too bad. I just had the office redecorated."

Walter S. Goodluck didn't think I ought to be writing gags for Abbott and Costello. He was a big, solemn, deadpan bird of around fifty, not very fast on his feet but not easily knocked off them, either. I thought he was a kraut, and I thought his name had been Gudlacht or Gutlacht origi-

nally. He'd win a lot of arguments by being so damned dumb the other guy would wear himself out trying. He wasn't going to win this argument. I threw his card on the desk and said, "It's final, brother."

He said, "Mr. Berry, I'm afraid I'm being robbed."

"Pull up the other chair," I said. "That one's weak in the hind legs. Who's taking you, Mr. Goodluck?"

HE SAT down and told me, "Mr. Berry, the designing profession is a peculiar one from the credit viewpoint. Persons who can afford the services of a designer are wealthy people to begin with; they're accustomed to think of their credit as being good and they don't like being dunned. Then, all the big department stores have their designers, and the stores think nothing of carrying a large account for six months or a year or longer. If I weren't willing to extend the same credit accommodation, frankly, I'd lose my clientele. I always have a lot of money outstanding on my books, and of course the accounts are good, but they're slow."

He wasn't making it up as he went along. I changed my mind about his bank account. I decided he had plenty of practice stalling off his own creditors, and this was the spiel he used.

He said, "Naturally, once in a while an account isn't so good."

I said, "You mean you want a bad bill collected."

"I wonder if it's bad," Goodluck said. "I'm beginning to wonder. It could be, you know."

He told me he had a customer named Mrs. Cornelia Beale. Her account totaled nine hundred-and-odd dollars and had been on the books ten months. He said Mrs. Beale had asked him to estimate a larger job in a new apartment she was moving into, and his estimate touched on three grand.

I asked what she said when he tackled her about the nine hundred.

"I didn't dun her," he said. "Mr. Berry, I didn't want to lose her good-will." He meant he didn't want to lose her three thousand dollars. He didn't want to lose the new job if she intended to pay, and he didn't want to be stuck with it if she wouldn't or couldn't pay.

I asked then, "Where do I come in on that?"

He said, "I thought of this. Suppose you go and see her, if she's not good for the nine hundred, that's the end of it. If she is good and if she pays you, then I can explain Miss Chase made a mistake and her account was turned in for collection entirely by error."

He thought he was good if he thought he could get away with that.

"Chase?" I said.

He said Miss Chase was his cashier and handled all the bookkeeping.

"And who handles all the bad bills?" I asked.

He said a lawyer named Willis, but Willis charged fifty percent, and it wasn't worth fifty percent because for all he knew Mrs. Beale would sit right down and write out a check. "I'd be willing to pay ten," he said.

"Fifteen," I said.

We settled for fifteen percent. Goodluck got up to go, and picked up his card from the desk when he did. He had a saving nature, I thought.

But mostly I thought fifteen percent of nine hundred is a hundred thirty-five bucks.

I got excited thinking about it, and I locked the office and went right out to see Mrs. Cornelia Beale. She was living in a three-room apartment at the Parkside, with nine hundred dollars' worth of Mr. Goodluck's drapes and several thousand dollars' worth of junk left over after she'd buried or divorced Beale. She had a grand piano that filled a third of the front room and a console radio big enough to hide the body in. She was picking out *Rum and Coca-Cola* on the piano when I reached the door.

She was a little red-haired woman with freckles and a way of talking with her hands. She fluttered the hands when she saw me, a strange man. She lifted the hands when she saw the strange man's shiny badge.

I told her I was private, that I wanted Mr. Goodluck's nine C's, and I wanted it bad enough to play mean.

She twisted her hands and said, "Oh, dear, but I paid that long ago. I'm sure I did."

"Maybe you'd like to prove that."

SHE put a hand on her forehead and said, "Just a minute. Let me think." Then she opened the radio cabinet, and fished out a lot of brown manila envelopes containing monthly bank statements. The checks were wrapped up inside the orange-colored statements. Her hands were shak-



The shiny thing in her chest was an upholsterer's needle.

ing by the time she found the right one. It was six months ago, it was a check for \$912.33, and it had one of those rubber stamp endorsements on its back.

I looked at the check and said, "Good Lord, you're not Mrs. Bean!"

She cut up some paper dolls with her fingers.

I said, "Look, it's all my fault; I was supposed to see a Mrs. Bean about an overdue account of \$945.50. I must have copied the wrong name off the list because her

name would be right after yours." I told her I'd been discharged from the army three months ago, that I was trying to set up in business for myself, that I would undoubtedly lose Mr. Goodluck's patronage as a result of my blunder. I *had* been discharged from the army, I *was* trying to set up in business for myself, and I would lose Mr. Goodluck's patronage if she phoned and raised hell with him before I got to the guy. She clasped her hands on her breast and said she would never, never tell on me.

To catch a Lincoln Boulevard bus meant going back downtown, and I stopped at Krancke's Chemical Supply for a half-ounce of powdered naphthionate of sodium. It's a white powder which glows under ultra-violet rays.

Eleven-twenty-five—twenty-seven Lincoln Boulevard was modernistic, one-story, cement and glass brick construction. There was an eye, ear, nose, and throat man in 1125. Goodluck's half of the building had a curved corner window displaying peacock plumes in a Chinese copper vase. The layout was salesroom in front, workshop, office, and cashier cage at the back. The salesman was showing two women something in the tapestry line, and a girl came out of the cashier's cage to take care of me, or take me.

I wouldn't have whistled at her.

She wore her brown hair in a bun, some of it leaking out of the bun. She was a middleweight trying to pass as a welter, trying to take off fifteen pounds with a brassiere and girdle.

She said Mr. Goodluck was in the workshop, and please wait.

Goodluck came out and said, "Oh, did you—?"

I practically pushed him into his office. I closed the door and said, "It was paid six months ago. I saw the check."

He said, "My God! Miss Chase," and started toward the door.

"Wait a minute. Suppose she tells you she doesn't know?"

He said something about the police.

I said, "Take it easy. Maybe this isn't the only one. Maybe there's a couple others, maybe a dozen others. It may be nine hundred or nine thousand or nine-

teen thousand. She keeps the books, doesn't she?"

"I'll find out, Berry." He had a dirty look on his face when he said it.

"So will your creditors," I said.

He caught on good and fast.

I SAID, "You can stay in business just as long as the wholesalers figure you've got it on your books, good pay but slow. The minute they figure it's off your books and in Chase's stock, they'll take you the way the Russkies took Warsaw. They'll be all over and around and on top of you as soon as you holler John Law." I wasn't telling him anything he didn't know. I was telling him so he'd know I knew too. I said, "Arrest that girl for grand larceny, and they'll wonder how much she's left you, and it'll be a dogfight with each man trying to get his, first and fast."

"What do you suggest, Mr. Berry?"

"I'll find out where you stand. I'd have the books audited. But good and audited."

"Naturally." He thought and said, "Won't she suspect something, though?"

"Not necessarily. Look, I'm an income-tax dick. There's some question about your return. You'll tell her the auditors are tax sharks you're hiring to fight me."

He nodded.

I said, "Then I'd find out how much of your money she's still got in her sock."

"How?" he said.

I said, "That's detective work. I'd leave that part to a private dick."

Walter S. Goodluck didn't like it. He pulled a stubborn, dumb look that showed he'd need a lot of convincing.

"How much is that going to cost me?" he asked.

I said he could stand fifty dollars retainer and twenty-five bucks a day as long as I worked on it, and he could call me off any day and hour he wasn't satisfied.

He didn't like it. He said, "You're trying to push me into this, Berry. For all I know it may be just the one check, and even that maybe a mistake or an oversight. You are asking me to put out this money before I know where I stand."

I didn't like him, either. I said, "You were willing to put out a hundred thirty-five

bucks to find where you stood with the Beale woman. It's the same \$912.33; why are you kicking at fifty dollars?"

"The fifteen percent was if I got my money." I thought for a minute he was going to offer me fifteen percent if I got the money from Miss Chase. He said, "That was different. You couldn't put Mrs. Beale in jail." I thought he was figuring whether five percent was too good an offer."

I said: "Percentage is out. Percentage is compounding a felony."

"What is this fifty and twenty-five dollar proposition?"

"It's a flat fee. It's legal."

"I don't see the difference."

"You're not looking in the Revised Statutes," I said.

I COULD have told him the difference. A flat fee hired me to investigate the theft, and what he wanted to do about it afterward was his business. Percentage was a piece of the business. I said, "It's up to you. You want your money back or you don't."

We argued and he decided he could stand fifty dollars retainer and twenty-five bucks a day as long as I worked on it, with the privilege of calling me off any time he liked.

It was easier for him to say it than to open his wallet and count out the fifty.

I asked him, then, what he could tell me about Miss Chase.

He said her name was Dora Chase, she had worked for him the past six years, he had always considered her efficient and industrious. She lived at 4384 Barrow Street; lived alone, so far as he knew; had no boyfriend, to his knowledge. He'd never caught her poring over a *Racing Form* in her cage. He didn't think she was interested in the stock market. He looked like he wanted his fifty dollars back and he said, "I'm beginning to wonder if all this isn't a mistake she could clear up in five minutes."

I told him to start wondering how Dora Chase got the \$912.33 out of the bank after she banked it in his name.

He said, "Well, she might take it out of the cash drawer a little at a time. She could take twenty and thirty dollars a day until she'd held out that much, and she

could alter the books so the deposited check would show as a cash deposit."

I thought, no wonder he wanted his fifty back. He thought he had it all doped out in his own head.

I said, "Who else handles the incoming cash?"

"You mean Stepping. He's all right."

I asked anyway. He said the salesman was LeRoy Stepping, he'd been in the shop three years, I'd find him in the phone book.

I told him to get out his wallet again. He had a twenty and some fives and ones in the wallet. We wrote down the serial number of the twenty. I told him to put the twenty in the cash drawer and take out another and keep the serial number of that. I said he could manage to keep tabs on the big bills, and he could check the cash nights after Miss Chase and Stepping left the shop. I said when he missed a bill to let me know.

"But we make change out of the drawer," he said.

I asked him how often he handed out a twenty in change.

I said, "Now when I leave, you get her in here and say I was an Internal Revenue Unit man." I stopped outside and used a paper cup at the water cooler. Stepping was still up in front telling the two women they couldn't get the color of tapestry they wanted because of an OPA regulation.

Goodluck called from his doorway, "Miss Chase!"

SHE walked out of her cage into his office and I walked into her cage. Her coat dangled on a wire hanger at the back of the cage, and her handbag lay on a shelf under the ledger. It was a cloth coat and a cloth bag, and she wasn't putting Goodluck's money on her back. She had facial tissue and a compact and a ration book and two keys and a coin purse in the handbag; she had two fives and a one and some silver and some ration tokens in the coin purse. I left the small Yale key that looked like a front-door key and took the big out that looked like a back-door-key. I sprinkled a little naphthionate of sodium in the coin purse, and it might have been face powder if you weren't too curious.

(Continued on page 93)

The Murderer

By RAY CUMMINGS



The bearded giant had tried to get to his feet, but Tubby was already on top of him.

on Palmetto Key

Those movie stories were the cause of getting us into dangerous trouble. There was plenty of battle murder and sudden death in Tubby's scenarios, but I sure never figured anything like that could actually happen to us in real life.



“HUMAN meat,’ the old man said, ‘is the finest meat there is, for eatin’!”

Tubby beamed at us over the typewritten manuscript he was reading. “Pretty neat beginning, don’t you think? Gets your interest at once, eh?”

“Well,” I said.

“Good,” my sister Edith said. “Go on, Tubby. Read it.”

It was Tubby’s latest movie scenario. He wrote lots of them, sometimes as many as

one a day. He hadn’t sold any of them yet, but he had hopes. We had known Tubby Jenks about three months; met him down here in Florida, where Edith and I were spending the Winter. Edith hadn’t been too well; and when I got back from eighteen months slogging around the slush and mud of France and Germany, and a lame shoulder where a couple of Heinie bullets went in, lying around in the hot Florida sunlight was just what the doctor ordered for us both.

Without realizing it ahead of time, we



sure picked a lonely spot. Sandy Cove may be on some maps, but not on many. It's well south of Miami, beyond the south-eastern tip of the peninsula, on what they call Big Key, where the Overseas Railroad passes on its jump to Key West. There's a microscopic town; a nice beach; a cove with about three docks; and there is a little frame building that passes for a hotel. The maze of islands of the Bahamas stretch out to the east and north.

Tubby Jenks was here on what he called a vacation. He and I had rented a boat—the *Marybelle*—and when we weren't cruising or fishing, Tubby wrote movie stories, sound sequences, and such. We understood he was secretary to the president of a large New York corporation, a promising job, much more promising than the movie plots which were his passion.

I mention all this because it was those movie stories which in a way were the cause of getting us into quite considerably dangerous trouble. There was plenty of battle murder and sudden death in Tubby's scenarios, but I sure never figured anything like that could actually happen to us in real life. Especially down here at the edge of nowhere.

But it did.

THE thing began that same afternoon about an hour after Tubby had read us his gruesome little story of the old man epicure. He had another one, too, partly written, about a dangerous killer, a wanted man who had escaped from jail and was hiding in the welter of little sandpit islands of the Bahamas. Maybe you think Nassau is about all there is to the Bahamas. So far as civilization goes, it just about is. But there are hundreds, maybe thousands of islands, stretching over several hundred miles of ocean. It's a marvelous place to get lost in.

Anyway, Tubby was telling me his little tale of one Red Mike, a Gargantua-style character who was wanted for all the crimes there are, and was skulking around down here; and then suddenly he changed the subject abruptly. And what he said was about as startling as one of his movie stories. Edith had gone back to the hotel; Tubby

and I were alone. And what Tubby was telling me was that he wanted to marry Edith.

"I suppose I haven't a chance with her," he said dolefully. "Only I thought just possibly I'm wrong."

"Why don't you ask her?" I said. "That's a quick and easy way to find out."

In a way I could see what Tubby meant. His round, cherubic face, with big horn-rimmed spectacles, was usually beaming with the utmost good nature. I liked Tubby mighty well. He was a regular guy. And nobody's fool; any man would like him. But when you take a girl of nineteen, like Edith; and you figure her secret dreams are on a romantic lover of the young Lochinvar type—well, that just wasn't Tubby.

"Ask her?" Tubby echoed. He grinned lugubriously. "If she said yes, that would be absolutely the best policy. But the trouble is, she might say no. See what I mean, Jack?"

I did. He gripped my arm earnestly. "Listen, old man, what I want to know, how do you stand on it?"

Edith and I are orphans. I figured that at nineteen, she was able to pick a husband for herself. My policy was hands off.

"Matter of fact, I like you a lot, Tubby," I said. "But having you for a brother-in-law, well it just hadn't occurred to me."

He shivered. "That's what she'll say. 'I like you a lot, Tubby, but as a husband you just never occurred to me.' You see, Jack, a girl has to get a thrill of romance out of—"

"She's thrilled by your movie stories," I said.

"But I don't live them," he retorted. "Or anything like them."

"Don't be an ass," I said. "Edith doesn't live like a movie heroine."

"No, of course she doesn't, Jack. But when the hero flings the villain into a corner of the cabin and clasps the beautiful girl to his manly bosom—Edith could imagine herself doing that—being clasped, I mean—and it wouldn't seem out of place. See what I mean?"

"Well—" I said.

"Remember my *Virginia Delacorte* in

'*Youth's Flaming Heart*'? You could imagine Edith as *Virginia*, couldn't you?"

I admitted that I might.

"But take my *Harry Hathaway*. You couldn't imagine me as *Harry Hathaway*. Could you?"

I REMEMBERED the tall, stalwart *Handsome Harry*. By no stretch of the imagination could he remind me of Tubby Jenks. I shook my head. "What you getting at, Tubby?"

He drew a deep breath and stared at me earnestly. "I've got a plan," he said. "If I can just once, well, *pretend* I'm engaged in something, you know, dangerous—deeds of daring—you know, he-man stuff, even if it came out to be nothing, while it was going on Edith would see me in a different light. See what I mean?"

"No," I said cautiously.

"Look," he said. "Here it is in a nutshell. We'll tell Edith—"

"We?" I said.

"I need your help, Jack," he said. "Just this once. Listen, when I come to you tonight all excited, Edith will fall for it. You won't, of course, but you'll pretend to."

"Will I?" I said.

"Please. Please, Jack—It won't be much trouble—we'll all three go out in the *Marybelle* or something. Dangerous stuff, that's what Edith will figure, and it'll be romantic, see?"

"Will it?"

"Of course it will. You'll see. I'll plot it all out between now and tonight." He clutched at my arm appealingly. "You won't go back on me, Jack? You won't laugh or anything to spoil the illusion. You won't, will you?"

"Okay," I said. "I won't."

"That's a promise, Jack?"

"Okay, it's a promise."

I've learned my lesson. Never give a promise to anybody under any circumstances! Never again for me!

We shook hands on it—Tubby insisted; then we got up off the sand and started back for the little hotel. It was just about sundown. The little sandspits of Cat Island and Crescent Key lie just outside the mouth of Sandy Cove. A motorboat was coming

around the tip of Cat Island—a low, rakish craft, dead-black, half-hidden by its up-flung bow wave. It went past like an express train, heading up toward Miami.

Tubby gazed after it thoughtfully. "What boat's that, Jack?"

"The *Dixie Girl*, of Miami. The revenue boat."

"Yes, I thought it was. I've met Randall. He's interested in my movies. I've



Red Mike—the bearded giant.

talked with him a lot, he's given me several ideas for plots."

Then Tubby fell into a moody silence that lasted all the way back to the hotel. Edith was on the veranda, but Tubby didn't join her.

"I'll contact you tonight," he murmured.

He was very dramatic. "You will?" I said.

"Sh! Not so loud! You and Edith—you'll hear my signal. About nine o'clock."

I could only stare at him as he ducked furtively away and vanished into a side entrance of the hotel.

I'm a man of honor. I said nothing at all to Edith. She wondered why Tubby didn't show up for dinner; why he had it taken into his room.

"I guess he's busy on a plot," I said. Which, Heaven knows, was the truth.

AT NINE o'clock that evening I was on the veranda with Edith. It was a pretty uncertain-looking night—low-flying patches of sullen clouds which off and on again obscured the brilliant moon and stars. From the veranda all you could see were

clumps of palmettos and patches of the interminable sand. The whole thing was blackish with shadows, and sometimes little areas of shifting moonlight. And out beyond the palm-clad shoreline there was the dark, sullen blur of the sea. Everything was very silent. If you want to know what real silence is, try a windless night on a Florida key.

Tubby was punctual. Right on the dot of nine P.M. we were startled by a sibilant whistle from the darkness off to the left.

"What's that?" Edith said.

We listened. The whistle came again; it seemed to be from a clump of palmettos about a hundred feet away. Then a blob stepped out of them.

"It's Tubby!" I murmured. "What the devil?"

He was gesturing to us wildly, and like a jackass letting off his shrill blasts at intervals.

"Come on," I said. "Let's go see what he wants."

When we came up to him, he pounced on us. He was bareheaded, very furtive and very tense.

"Quiet," he muttered. "Get into the shadow of the palms!"

Edith gave me a startled, questioning glance.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Look here, look what I found!"

He fished a sheet of dirty, crumpled paper from his pocket. He drew us behind a palm trunk. "Edith, can I trust you?" he demanded.

"Why—why yes, Tubby. What is it?"

He produced a flashlight and furtively held the paper in its beam. "Look at it! Hurry, nobody must see us! This damn light—"

He gave us only a quick glimpse. It was a crude map drawn with lead pencil; and there was a big X to mark the spot of something.

It struck me that this was a very similar sheet of paper to those Tubby used for his scenarios, except that this one was dirty, and rumped. Fortunately, the resemblance evidently didn't occur to Edith. She was more than startled, she was thrilled.

"What does it mean? Where did you

find it?" She clutched at Tubby's arm, but he flung her off.

"Don't bother me with questions, Edith. Not at such a time as this. Jack, listen—there may be others who know I found this. That's the bad part, for if they do, they'd stop at nothing! And there might be money in it, money for you and me, Jack. We'd split fifty-fifty."

I had an inspiration. "You mean, buried treasure, Tubby?"

He gave me a dirty look. "I mean, this fits in with something Randall was telling me the other day. He knows he can trust me, Randall does. He was telling me about a wanted man—a real killer—and Randall has had a tip, some sort of information, that seems to indicate that this bird's hiding out in the Bahamas. And they say he's a bad one, he kills on sight!"

TUBBY flung a sidelong glance at me to be sure I was backing him up properly. "That's Red Mike," I said. "A big giant, like Gargantua. You're writing a scenario about him, Tubby. You mean to say he's a real character? I never guessed that."

"Sure he is," Tubby said glibly. "Randall told me. Red Mike Mulligan. And Randall's just as interested in him as the FBI is, because it seems that Red Mike might be working with a bird named Shorty Connolly—fellow who was suspected of peddling dope in Miami, and now they can't find him."

Edith was certainly thrilled. All she could do was stare at the breathless Tubby.

"What's that got to do with this map you found?" I demanded.

He drew a deep breath, and gave me another dirty look. "Something I didn't mention to you and Edith. Day before yesterday, remember, when I had the *Marybelle* out alone—I was quite a ways out, just at sundown. Anyway, off in the region of Palmetto Key, I could have sworn I saw a little thin trail of smoke rising up. Now why would smoke rise from Palmetto Key? Nobody's there."

"Spontaneous combustion maybe," I said. "Mouldy palmettos, and—"

"Don't be an ass," Tubby retorted. "I don't know which key it was from—there's

a whole mess of them out there—but Palmetto's the largest, and that's where it seemed to be. I could see the smoke, trailing up. And now when you put it together with what Randall said—and this map, it's a crude drawing about the shape of Palmetto Key, isn't it?"

Tubby paused for breath. "What are you going to do?" Edith murmured. It was a fair enough question, because Tubby certainly seemed ready for action.

"Do?" he echoed. "Well, there's a ten thousand dollar reward for Red Mike, dead or alive, and—"

"That Gargantua," I put in, "I'd rather find him dead than alive."

"Don't be smart," Tubby retorted. "If I can get some information on his whereabouts, and turn it over to Randall—" Tubby fixed me with a warning gaze. "I'm going to take the *Marybelle* and snoop around—"

"Tonight?" I murmured. My question was a simple one.

"Yes. Tonight. Now! You and Edith can come if you like. You, Jack, I really hope you'll come. I need you. And it wouldn't be particularly dangerous for Edith. We'd just investigate that smoke I saw."

It would take a good part of the night to go to Palmetto Key and back. "Let's go tomorrow," I said.

He was scornful. "You think I'd run up there in the daylight, and be spotted? It has to be at night, under cover of the darkness. We could keep Edith out of all danger. You could say with her in the boat, Jack, if I found there was anything I had to do. Want to try it, Edith?"

My sister is no sissy. She gripped Tubby's arm. "Oh Tubby, I'd love it. We'll go, Jack," she decided.

"All right then, I'll let you go if you promise to do what you're told," Tubby said. He flung back his jacket lapels. The hotel's big kitchen carving knife was thrust into his belt.

Edith gasped. "Tubby! You'll cut yourself—"

He ignored it. "And I've got the *Marybelle* ready, water and provisions, just in case. Come on, let's get going."

WE WENT. The best I can say for myself is that I figured I could sleep awhile in the *Marybelle* and it was to be a nice romantic cruise for Edith and Tubby. With Tubby leading us, we hurried down the path which was a shortcut to the cove, where near its mouth there is a small dock belonging to the hotel. We kept the *Marybelle* there—a thirty foot, cabin cruiser. Tubby had everything ready; we climbed in and started, heading through the mouth of the cove, with the tiny twinkling lights of the distant village fading behind us.

Under normal conditions you might get to the neighborhood of Palmetto Key in about two hours. The *Marybelle* was powerful, but slow. Things were all right when we started, the sea was like glass. But the weather looked increasingly bad the further we progressed. The clouds gathered thicker, more sullen; and now a wind was coming up, a wind from the southeast; and you ought to think twice before you go out at night in a wind from that quarter. As we passed beyond the shallow channels of the inner keys into the more open water beyond, I was startled at how strong the wind had grown. It struck us on the bow quarter, throwing sheets of spray all over us. The clouds were low and black as they swept over the face of the moon; and ahead, above the southeast horizon a black mass of cloud was coming up, with lightning flares playing about it.

From the first, Tubby refused to talk. He silenced Edith's eager questions with a curt command, and I had the good sense not to ask him anything. I steered from the cockpit where I was handy to the engine; and they both sat beside me. Beyond Cat Island the white-capped rollers began striking us heavily. The *Marybelle* plunged and leaped, but she was seaworthy. I had no fear about that.

Out of one of the long silences Tubby muttered:

"When we get there, you do what I say, understand?"

"Okay," I agreed.

"Good. And you too, Edith. Don't worry, I'll see no harm comes to you." Then he relaxed into his grim silence.

When the spray began hitting us, I got out our oilskin coats. Tubby waved his away abstractly.

"You'll be drenched," I remonstrated. He was already.

"Oh, yes, okay," he said. He let Edith help him on with the coat. His wet hair was blowing in his eyes. Then abruptly he left us, and clambering the length of the plunging boat, pulled himself up to the top of the cabin in the bow. The spray up there struck him full, but he lay prone on his stomach, facing forward, one leg wound in a rope, an arm crooked around the small flag-staff in the peak of the bow.

Once he called back: "It's a dirty looking night ahead—just the kind of night we want."

It wasn't the kind of night I wanted, not by a long shot.

Then presently Tubby called again, "Say, can't you make this damned boat go faster?"

What Edith was thinking I had no way of knowing. She spoke seldom, sitting there by my side. After another interval, with the weather getting worse each minute, she said, "I'll go up with Tubby. Hold her steady as you can."

Edith is as handy around a boat as any man. She's a strong swimmer; perfectly at home on or in the water. I let her go. She climbed past me, sure-footed with her rubber-soled shoes; and watching her chance between the *Marybelle's* plunges, she drew herself up to the bow and crouched beside Tubby with her arm crooked in the mast under his. He turned momentarily to face her, but neither of them spoke.

I HAD all I could do to keep the *Marybelle* on her course. The moon seemed permanently to have gone under the clouds. The lightning ahead was closer, and now occasionally you could hear rolling thunder. It didn't look good to me, but by this time we were well over halfway to Palmetto Key; I figured we'd get there before the storm broke, which was better than turning back and getting caught in it.

The figures on the bow showed only as black blobs, blurred in a smother of spume. Then I heard Tubby speaking to Edith. They had to raise their voices over the noise

of the engine, and the wind whipped the words back to me.

"Only one thing worries me, Edith. If we should happen to locate this killer—we better make sure *we* spot him first. Before he spots us, I mean. My idea, we'll land on the lee side of the island—"

"You know I'll help anyway I can," she said tensely. "I'm not a bit afraid."

I'll wager she wasn't. Not Edith.

"I know you're not," he agreed.

"I'll do what you tell me. That's what I'm here for."

He turned around to her, and wiped the water from his face with his wet coat-sleeve. "You're wonderful, Edith," he said.

I imagine it was the most intimate thing he had ever said to her. She didn't answer. Together they crouched there, staring ahead. Then at last Palmetto Key was a blob in the murk ahead of us, and the sea was getting calmer as we came into its shelter.

We were pretty close inshore when Tubby ordered Edith back to the stern. They came back and joined me. It was raining heavily now.

"There's a little cove on this side," Tubby said. "We'll land and have a look around."

"I've heard there's some old fishing shacks over by the west shore," I said. "And a brokendown dock there."

"I'd rather land here in the lee," Tubby said. "I guess we can make the *Marybelle* secure some way."

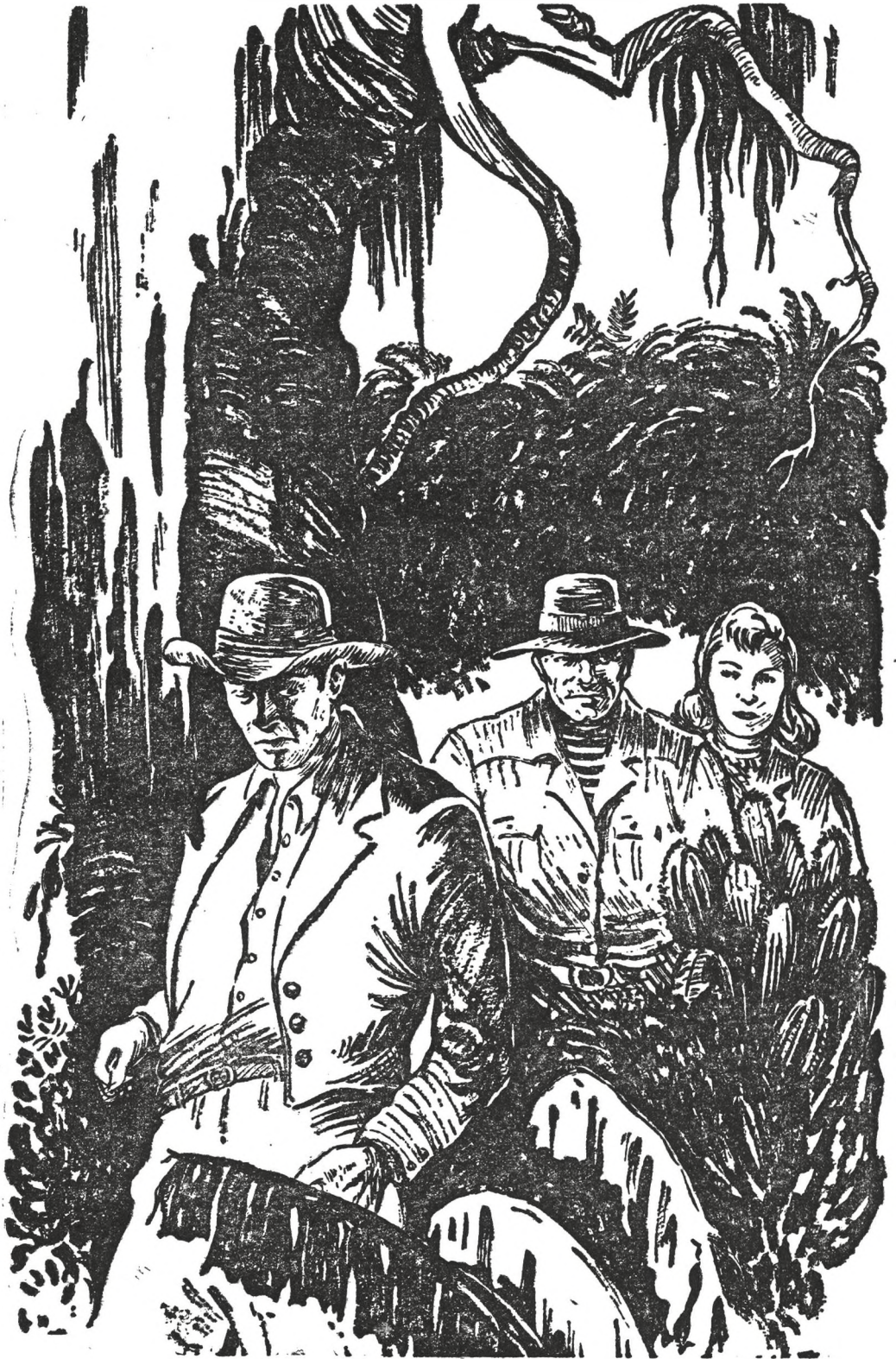
We headed into the dark little cove. It was almost windless behind a rise of ground. The wind was a roar in the palms overhead.

Palmetto Key was irregularly circular, perhaps half a mile in diameter. "If it's a bad storm we can take refuge in one of those old shacks," I suggested.

"I was thinking of those shacks," Tubby said.

We landed at the back of the cove. With

The rain was a patter down through the palms and on the clumps of scrub palmettos as Tubby led us swiftly across the middle of the little island.



a line from the bow and stern of the *Marybelle*, out to a couple of palm trees, it seemed that she would ride safely a little distance from shore.

Tubby had cast off his jacket and rolled up his white shirt-sleeves. He was grim and tense as he jerked the carving knife from his belt. Edith gave him a look. It wasn't one of her usual demure, self-confident looks. Not at all. This one was new; an awed and humble look. It was astonishing; but he didn't see it.

"I'll lead the way," he said to me. "You keep Edith behind you. And keep quiet now. We'll sneak up on those shacks."

GETTING to the shacks where we might be able to build a fire and dry out and wait for the storm to ease up, suited me fine. The rain was a patter down through the palms and on the clumps of scrub palmettos as Tubby led us swiftly across the middle of the little island. Once he stopped and whispered to me tensely:

"If there's any sign of anybody here, Jack—don't take any chances! You and Edith run back for the boat!"

"And you?" I murmured.

"I'll snoop around. Then join you."

We went on. And it wasn't more than five minutes later that a lightning flare showed us one of the shacks. Two or three hurricanes had just about done it in. It leaned drunkenly among the thick palmetto bushes; but it had a roof that was still on, and a couple of windows with shutters hanging askew.

"We can take shelter in that one," I told Tubby. "At least it's better than—"

The words died in my throat. As we advanced, a palmetto clump which had intervened from this new angle was gone, so that the windows were more plainly visible. And from one of them there was a straggling beam of yellow light! Tubby gasped, stood gripping me.

"Look!" he cried. "There it is!"

Momentarily Edith was just beyond ear-shot. She was standing numbed, gazing at the blur of cabin, with that faint little straggle of light coming from its window.

"Tubby," I whispered. "All that junk you been telling me—"

"Nothing but the truth!" he snapped back. "Randall's got an idea that Red Mike's hiding out somewhere around here!"

"And you *did* see smoke here on Palmetto Key—you—"

I was the one being tricked, not Edith! "I knew you wouldn't come," Tubby was mumbling apologetically. "It wasn't smoke I saw, it was a little light here—night before last. I was going to investigate, then I thought I better not tackle the job alone. I did try to 'phone Randall about it yesterday, but he was away in the *Dixie Girl*. And I knew you'd advise me to wait and tell him, but then I got the idea—"

And all he'd done was throw in the phony little map to intrigue Edith! He was clutching his knife now; he was tense, shaking with excitement.

"Take Edith back," he mumbled. "I—I'll see what's in that shack—"

I found my wits. "The hell you will!" I retorted. "You and Edith keep out of this! Wait for me in the *Marybelle*—I'll see if—"

Edith was gripping us now. "That light—"

We kept her behind us, but she was right with us when we crept up to the window. Breathless and tense we peered through the broken shutter. A portion of the shack's room was visible. A guttering candle stood on the floor—a dim, quavering light, but it was enough to show a burly form reclining on one elbow on the floor. We could see him clearly—a half-naked giant of a man, with a reddish spade beard running down into the matted red hair of his chest. He was wide-awake, gazing moodily at the spot of candle-light. A black, short-barreled, ugly looking revolver lay just beyond his reach near the candle. And by the wall, beyond the circle of light, there were small tin boxes piled up in a stack.

Then suddenly Tubby bent to my ear. "You and Edith beat it! I'll attend to this! See that scar on his chest—it's Red Mike, sure!"

Whether I'd have tackled that killer and his gun when we had only a carving knife between us, I don't know. Tubby didn't give me a chance to decide.

"I'll surprise him with a rush!" he mumbled. "You an' Edith beat it!"

BEFORE I could stop him, and heedless of Edith's exclamation, he had darted away and burst through the rickety door of the shack like a cannonball; a lightning flare illumined his gleaming naked knife-blade as he went through.

I shoved Edith violently away. "Run for the boat!"

But Edith didn't run; I was aware of her at my elbow as I reached the open doorway. There was quite a commotion inside. The bearded giant had evidently tried to get to his feet, but Tubby was already on top of him. The giant was cursing, heaving Tubby's clawing body into the air; fumbling on the floor for his weapon. His groping hand knocked the candle over; the light went out.

Then Tubby's voice sounded: "You dirty villain! Take that!" There was a thump, and then the clattering of Tubby's knife as it evidently was knocked from his hand to the floor.

I was in the cabin, dashing at Tubby, when a match suddenly flared. It was in the hands of another man! He was rising from the floor across the room where evidently he had been asleep. He was a little, weazoned, sawed-off individual, not even as large as Edith. He was rushing at me, then changed his mind and dashed for the door, ripping out an oath and dropping his match. I jumped on him as he went past and he fell, with me on top of him.

The uproar from Tubby and the giant continued. And now there was Tubby's shrill, triumphant shout:

"I've got the gun! You dirty villain, you quit or I'll shoot! S'elp me, I'll drill you dead!"

The small man under me was lying motionless; he had hit his head against the wall. I jumped off him. Tubby was shouting:

"I got him! Light the light!"

It was Edith who first found the candle and got it lighted. And there was Tubby, astride of Red Mike, who was docile enough now with Tubby poking the revolver into his face.

TUBBY is quite a hero now in Sandy Cove. The four-eyed fightin' fool, that's what they call him. Even up in Miami people stop him on the street, to shake hands and congratulate him, because that revenue man Randall is a regular guy and he spread around lavishly the story of what Tubby did. The little runt was Shorty Connolly; and the tin boxes were full of narcotics and hopped-up cigarettes, opium, marijuana, stuff like that. They had a little launch hidden on Palmetto Key; we found it that same night, pretty well wrecked by the storm. We waited for the storm to blow over, and it was after dawn when we got our prisoners back in the *Marybelle* to Sandy Cove, where we 'phoned for Randall to come and get them.

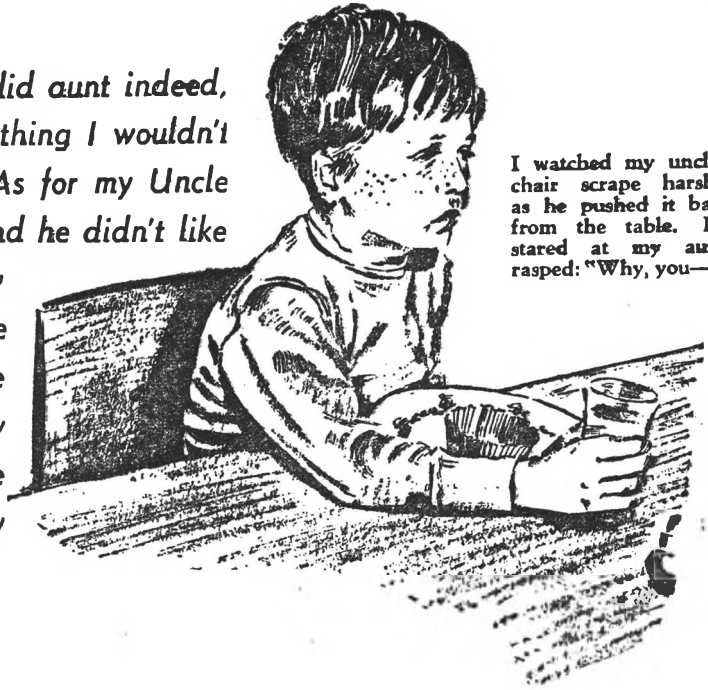
Edith says I'm jealous of Tubby being a hero. She says she can't remember anything I did that night on Palmetto Key, except fall on a little ninety pounder and accidentally bash his head against a wall. Which I guess is about right. She also says she loved Tubby from the minute she saw him. Maybe so, but I doubt it.

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SPEED MAGAZINES

"IT'S FOR ME"

She was a very splendid aunt indeed, and there wasn't anything I wouldn't have done for her. As for my Uncle Peter, he was surly and he didn't like me very well. Now my aunt was missing, gone forever, and my uncle was still alive—how could I know the strange answer in my devotion?



I watched my uncle's chair scrape harshly as he pushed it back from the table. He stared at my aunt, rasped: "Why, you—!"



THIS is something that happened to me when I was only five years old. I did not know what it meant then; but perhaps when I have told it to you, you will understand why I remember it so clearly, and why I have remembered it for so long.

It happened one afternoon in late Summer, a few months before my sixth birthday. I was like any child of that age; shy and wild, imaginative, curious, sensitive—a yellow-haired, big-eyed, freckle-faced little boy. I had just learned a fascinating trick of looking cross-eyed at my nose, but that was my only outstanding accomplishment.

My parents were dead, and I lived with my aunt and uncle in a small house on a hilltop. Our nearest neighbors lived at the bottom of the hill, on the other side of the woods, so I had no playmates of my own age; but my Aunt Joan often played with me, and I loved her very much. I

missed her that afternoon. She had gone away the night before, and I did not know where, or when she would be back.

"We found her in the woods. Skull smashed in, apparently with a rock. . . ."

I COULD hear the low voices of the two strange men who had come to see my uncle. They were talking inside the house, and I was out in the backyard; but the warm, heavy air of August brought every word to me plainly. The only other sounds were the tiny airplane-drone of a bee, arching from flower to flower in the bright beds of the small garden; and the scratchy noise of my toy tin spade, cutting into the earth in search of buried treasure. The leaves of the apple tree, at the edge of the yard, were silent and motionless, with the fine dust of the Summer heat lying greyly upon them.

I remember glancing at the apple tree, and at the hard green balls of unripened fruit. I knew that even the lowest branches were beyond my reach, but with

By
E. STARR



the unquenchable optimism of little-boy-hood, I would have enjoyed jumping up and down under them for awhile, just in case. I wondered how an apple tasted before it was red, and whether or not this would be one of those things punishable by spanking.

"I can hardly believe it's true. I . . ."

The sound of my uncle's voice, coming from the house, gave me a vague sense of uneasiness. I did not understand what the two men were talking about, or what my uncle—in that strangely quavering and uncertain voice—was saying to them. But I had a funny feeling in my stomach, a cold feeling that something was wrong. Something I knew nothing about, and that only my Aunt Joan could explain. She always had explained the things that troubled me,

and then I felt better, and was comforted.

But she had not come to tuck me in the night before, and at breakfast-time she had not been there to make a game of the oatmeal; and all morning the sun had been bright on the garden, but she had not been there to play with me or to work among the flowers.

Suddenly the lonesomeness for her flowed into me again as it had been doing off and on during the day, and I felt bleak and miserable with it. I did not like my uncle. He was always cross and abrupt with me, and I could not talk to him as a child loves to talk to grownup people, asking questions and sharing fantastic imaginary adventures. I could tell my aunt that I was an Indian going out to scalp somebody, and she would wish me luck; but Uncle Peter

was different. Now that Aunt Joan had gone, I felt completely friendless and alone.

I would have thrown the little spade across the yard and cried, except that pretty soon I would be six years old, and I had tried very hard not to cry so much lately. I bent over the ground, jabbing at it with the spade, but I didn't care about buried treasure anymore. My throat ached, and I rubbed one small grimy fist into my eye to keep back the tears.

Without my aunt, I had nobody to talk to or play games with, and nobody to tell me stories about pirates and castles and far-away places, or to invent glorious kingdoms and make me ruler of them. There was nobody who would be interested if I ran into the house with an oddly-shaped rock or a bit of string that I had found.

When I rushed to Aunt Joan with these small discoveries, she had made much of them, so that my uneventful young life seemed a continuously exciting drama. Now I could sense the emptiness of it without her; and as I sat there on the warm ground in the sunlight, with my toy spade clutched in my hand, I was chilled with panic at the thought that I might never see her again.

SHE was so pretty. Even today I can remember how very pretty she was, with short, curly black hair and gleaming dark eyes, and a humorous, upturned mouth. There was always a wild-rose color in her cheeks, as though she had been running in the wind, and her slight body had the swift grace of a gypsy. She had the gypsy love of jewelry, too. No matter where she was going or what she was doing, she wore a thin circlet of rubies on her wrist, a shining bracelet that my uncle had given her before their marriage. Somehow it did not look out of place with her simple clothes.

It looked gay and different and fanciful, like Aunt Joan herself.

Any child would have loved her; but she and I were more than aunt and nephew. We were friends, and I would have done anything for her. Sometimes when I wanted to rebel under my uncle's unimaginative discipline, she would smile and

whisper, "It's for me." Then I obeyed as unquestioningly as a devoted little dog. It was a sort of pact between us that everything I did right was like a present for her.

So I did not try to reach the green apples on the tree, although that might have made me feel better, and I did not cry. I dug the tin spade into the ground, turning up the soft dark earth and thinking very hard about everything.

"If you're sure she was wearing it last night. . . ."

"Yes . . . yes, I'm sure. She always wore it." My uncle's answer came louder than the quiet tone of the other man.

Dimly, I realized that he was upset and that his visitors did not care whether he was or not. This frightened me, and I sat quite still for a moment, confused and filled with the terrible dread that can overcome a child when he understands only part of what is going on around him. My uncle had told me at breakfast that the men might come.

He had told me just what I was to say if they asked me any questions, and he had told me how to behave. "Not as if you were scared to death of me, you little brat. Treat me the way you do your Aunt Joan. Get what I mean, Joey? Because if you don't act right, I'll wallop you as soon as the men go away again."

I knew what he meant. I was supposed to pretend I liked him. It was strange and puzzling, because he never had bothered before about whether I liked him or not. And for the first time in my life, someone had told me to lie deliberately.

I knew they were lies, the things Uncle Peter wanted me to say to the men. I knew, because I remembered what had happened the night before, and it was nothing like the story he had made up.

I REMEMBERED how quiet Aunt Joan had been at the supper table, barely speaking except to answer my usual enthusiastic babbling. Her smile had looked strained, and the wild-rose color was gone from her face. Her eyes were not happy. I thought of one occasion when I had broken the living-room window by throwing my teddy-bear through it, and she had



She always explained the things that troubled me, and it was comforting.

had to tell Uncle Peter. Her eyes had been the same way then.

"Mad at me?" I asked her finally, trying to think of something I might have done wrong.

She had smiled. "Of course I'm not mad at you, Joey." She got up and began clearing the dishes from the table. The ruby bracelet gleamed on her narrow wrist as she had poured more milk into my glass, and set a plain cupcake down before me.

We all had eaten our cupcakes in silence, and I tried to be quiet about drinking my milk because the silence was so rigid and uncomfortable. Then I began to be bored, and I couldn't think of anything to say, so I looked cross-eyed at my nose to attract Aunt Joan's attention. Usually she was politely horrified, and exclaimed in mock fear until I uncrossed them. But this time she did not even notice until my uncle said, "That kid looks half-witted."

"Don't, Joey," she said absently.

After another few moments of silence, Uncle Peter flung down his napkin irritably and turned to her. "What's the matter with you? Why all the gloom?"

She looked down at her plate, and pushed a few crumbs around. Then, "I've found out, Pete," she said quietly,

My uncle's face did not change, but his voice was different. It could have been frightened, or angry, or both.

"Okay, so you found out. What about it?"

"I'm going to tell the police, Pete. I've been pretty sure of it for a long time, but today I found out, and I'm going to tell them."

"Why, you—!" His chair scraped harshly against the floor as he pushed it back from the table. He stood with his fists doubled at his sides, staring at her. Then he began to smile a little, and he laughed unpleasantly. "Yeah? And if you do, I'll go to jail. What about the home you're always talking about, the home you gotta have for Joey? You're always saying you'd leave me if it wasn't for Joey. What about him?"

"I hate to be trite," Aunt Joan said. "But home is where the heart is." She reached across the table and took my hand without turning away from him. I clung to it. "Joey loves me. He's the only person in the world who really loves me. I'll make a home for him myself, and he'll be happy in it, Pete. You've never done anything to make him happy."

He had placed his knuckles on the edge

of the table and leaned toward her. "Is that so? Why do you think I got into this racket in the first place? Just because I'm always thinking of you and the kid, and—"

"Don't say that!" Her dark eyes glowed with anger, and she tightened her grip on my hand. "Don't use Joey for an excuse. Do you hear me? Don't ever use Joey—"

"Oh, shut up for a minute!" He slapped the table with the flat of his hand and my glass jumped, but I had finished the milk in it. "Now you're going to listen to me, and keep in mind that you're my wife, even if nobody'd know it to hear you talk. How'd you like it to tell all your friends, 'My husband's in jail?'"

AUNT JOAN had turned to me quietly, and she gave me the ghost of her humorous, upturned smile. "Trot along outside, hon," she had said gently. "You can play in the yard for awhile, till it gets dark."

I slipped down from my chair, and she gave me a small, affectionate spank as I passed her. I ran out into the yard, but their voices followed me. I heard Aunt Joan say, ". . . and blackmail is about the lowest, cheapest thing you could be mixed up in . . ." and Uncle Peter taunted her about being married to a jailbird, shouting as she answered him calmly.

Finally she said, "Please don't talk so loud, Pete. I don't want Joey to hear us fighting."

"I don't give one damn what he hears. I—"

"Please." Her voice was pleading with him. "Let's go out and take a walk, then. We can talk in the woods."

They came to the back door for a moment, and Aunt Joan told me to go up to bed. "You can manage all the buttons yourself. I know you can," she said matter-of-factly, "because most of last week, you were Superman." I nodded, and she blew me a kiss. "I'll be up later to tuck you in."

From my bedroom window I saw them walking off together in the gathering darkness, disappearing into the woods on the hillside. I remember that Aunt Joan seemed very small and slight beside Uncle Peter. The early-night breeze lifted her

dark, curly hair and rippled her skirt so that she looked more like a gypsy than ever.

She did not come back. Waiting up for her, drowsing on the window-seat, I saw my uncle return to the house alone. It must have been much later then, because a white path of the summer moonlight fell on him as he crossed the backyard, and I could see everything he did.

So the next morning, when he had told me what I was to say if the men questioned me, I knew everything I said would be a lie. But Aunt Joan had always told me to obey my uncle, and I was going to do the best I could and not forget anything.

MY UNCLE called:
"Joey!"

Now, waiting in the desolate heat of the backyard and missing my Aunt Joan, it was almost a relief to hear him calling and to know that the men were ready to hear my story, while I still remembered it. I knew that I would make no mistakes, and I was not afraid any more.

"Joey!"

I threw down my toy tin spade and ran to the house, slapping a few strands of hair back from my moist forehead. It was very dark and cool inside, after the hot glare of sun in the yard. When I reached the living-room, I had to stand blinking in the doorway for an instant, before I could see the three men clearly.

Uncle Peter was hunched in an easy chair, gripping the arms of it with both hands. He looked at me warningly as I came slowly in. His chair was turned so that it faced the sofa, where the other two men were sitting side by side. One of them got up and came over to me, smiling reassuringly. He was very tall, and I began to feel smaller and more uncertain than I had in the yard.

"So your name is Joey," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder and bending his face close to mine. "That's right, isn't it, son?"

I stared up at him mutely, and nodded.

"Well, then, Joey," he said, smiling, "do you mind telling me how old you are?"

"Six," I said. "Almost," I added softly. "I see. Almost six. Well, then, you're a big boy, aren't you?"

It was a question that always nonplussed me. Some thought I was, some thought I wasn't. I said nothing.

"And you must know," he went on, straightening and looking down at me from his great height, "that big boys are supposed to tell the truth. Now, will you tell me the truth if I ask you some questions?"

I had a momentary qualm as he waited smilingly for my answer. He was a nice man. I didn't want to lie to him. I glanced at Uncle Peter, and the look on his face made me nod hastily.

"All right, then." The tall man drew me over to the sofa and lifted me to his knees, settling me comfortably. "Now. Here's something I want you to tell me, Joey. Think hard and try to remember. When was the last time you saw Aunt Joan?"

"Supper," I whispered.

"I see. You mean last night, at supper-time."

I nodded.

"Well, you have a good memory, Joey, and you're a big help to me. Now let's see if you can remember something else. Was it *before* supper that you saw Aunt Joan, or was it afterward?"

"After."

"I see." He smiled, and patted my shoulder. "Now, tell me this, Joey. I'm sure you can. Tell me where your Aunt Joan went after supper. Tell me why you didn't see her any more."

"Went for a walk." I had not realized that talking about Aunt Joan would make me lonely for her again. I began to ache with the misery of missing her and wanting her to come back. "When's she comin' back?" I asked the tall man, squirming on his knee so I could see his face.

He hesitated. "Tell me something else first, Joey," he said gently. "Was there anyone with Aunt Joan when she went for a walk? Anyone at all?"

I COULD feel their eyes on me; Uncle Peter's eyes, alert and watchful; and the kind eyes of the man who was questioning

me; and the eyes of the other man who sat beside us on the sofa. All of them watching me, and waiting to hear what I would say.

"No," I whispered. I looked down at the living-room rug, and at the familiar pattern of it, confused and unhappy. But I was not going to make a mistake.



I remembered how he had stooped over in the night and dug a little hole, then covered it up again.

"There was no one with her," the tall man repeated. "And where—Joey, listen to me now—where was your Uncle Peter while Aunt Joan took a walk?"

I stared at the rug as though it were new and interesting. "He put me to bed," I said, "and told me a story."

"I see." He lifted me from his knee and smiled. "Well, thank you very much, Joey." He patted my arm, and I started to turn away. "Oh, Joey, just one thing more. Do you remember if Aunt Joan was wearing a bracelet the last time you saw her? A shiny red bracelet? Was she, do you think?" I nodded, and he patted my arm again. "All right then. You've remembered a lot, Joey, and you've been a big help to me. You really have."

I pulled away and ran through the house,
(Continued on page 90)

DEAD RINGER



HE was a leggy blonde in a mink coat. She was pretty, but not so pretty a man couldn't take his eyes off her. She said, "Your name is Sharkey?"

The print on the door said my name was Kayo Sharkey.

She asked, "You're a detective?"

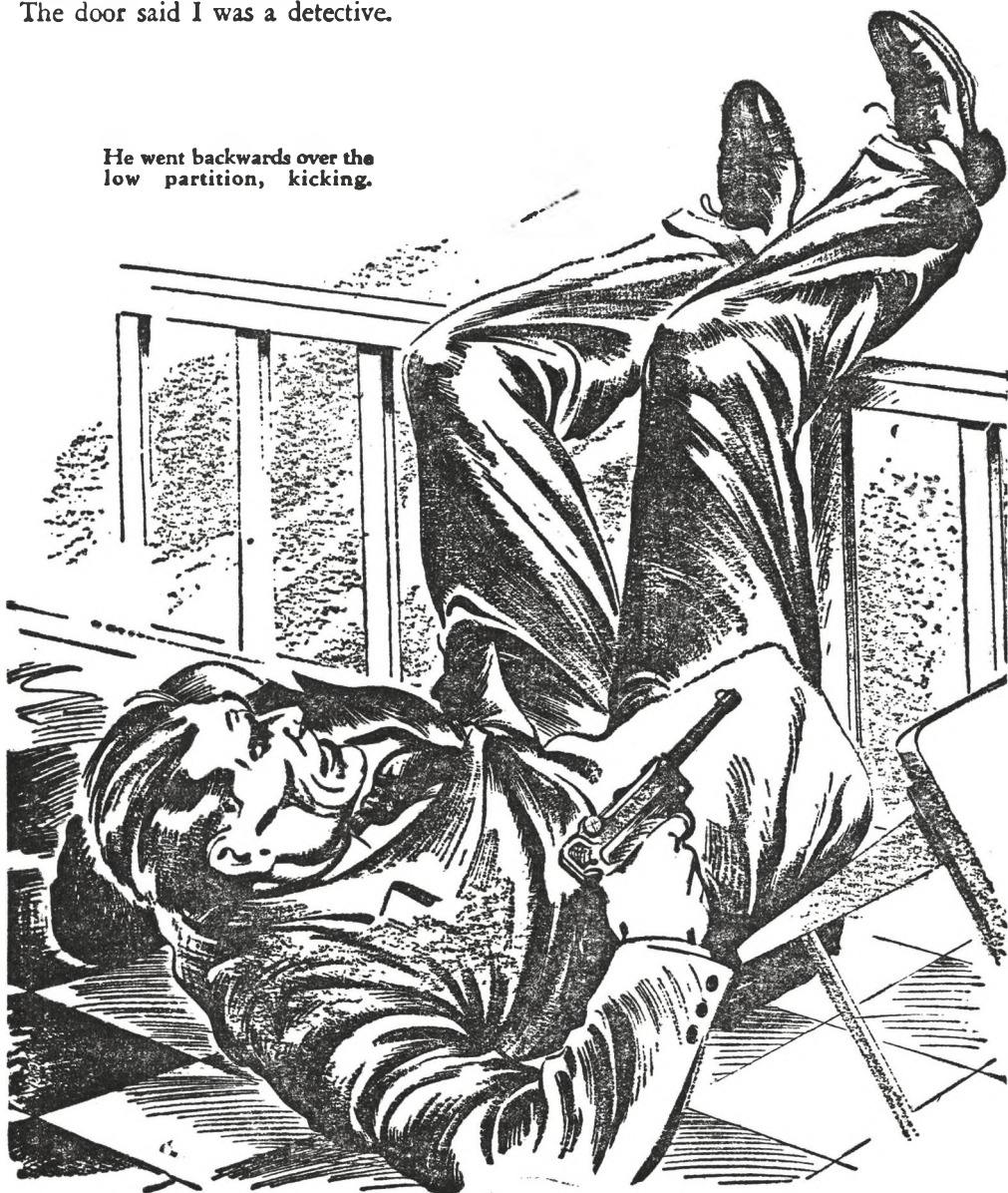
The door said I was a detective.

I nodded both times to show the door wasn't lying.

She said, "I'm Jo-Anne Welch. I have a little job for you."

(She said it fast, and at first I thought she meant Joan Welch, but it didn't spell a damned thing to me, anyway.)

He went backwards over the low partition, kicking.



By DALE CLARK



"What kind of job?" I said.

She pulled a zipper on her handbag and reached in and got out a piece of newspaper. It looked like a piece of the *Times*. The item began, *Waupepogma, Me., Jan. 9 (A-P)*; it said Sheriff J. C. Creighton was investigating the murder of Heath William

Welch, 27, of Deborah, N. Y.; Welch's body had been found in a snowdrift a few miles north of Waupepogma by a rural mail carrier. It amounted to about three lines of type in all.

"Relative?" I said.

The blonde in the mink coat said, "Heath

It seemed unlikely that the temperamental young artist could have knocked himself off in Maine if he'd already been dead four years in Long Island Sound. But shamus Kayo Sharkey discovered some peculiar and personally dangerous angles in this wild and chilly murder jaunt!

William Welch is my brother but he's dead."

"That's what it says here."

"I mean he's been dead for years."

I thought then this must be some other Heath William Welch. Then I thought if it was some other Heath William Welch, why was she worrying me about it?

I said, "Then what are you worried about?"

She said, "Well, Deborah is where we are from, originally, and Heath would have been twenty-seven if he'd lived."

I waited.

She said, "And of course we never recovered his body." She told me that Deborah was a little village on the Sound, which I already knew, and that her brother had left his clothes with a note beside them on the shore.

It said he was going to row out and jump in. She said the next morning a lobsterman had picked up the rowboat, empty, and nothing had ever been heard of Heath William Welch since, and that was back in July, 1939.

"What made him do it?" I asked.

JO-ANNE WELCH said, "Heath was psychotic." Her voice stayed level. She might have been saying he had flat feet. "He had a maniac-depressive temperament. He'd be up in the clouds one day and sunk in gloom the next. He got one of his blue spells and killed himself."

"He didn't get one of his blue spells and just run away?"

The blonde said, "No. He'd have been twenty-one in a few weeks, and he'd have come back and claimed the money."

"Money?" I encouraged.

She wasn't encouraged. She squared the shoulders of the mink coat, opened her eyes at me a little. "We needn't go into all the whys and wherefores. What I want you to do is run up to Waupepogma and see this body. It probably won't be our Heath at all, and that'll definitely settle the whole thing."

It sounded easy. It wasn't easy. I said, "Run up how? I haven't got any priority to jump on a plane. I might make a train reservation in about three weeks. The wait-

ing lines for the buses reach over into Jersey."

She said, "Oh, I've got a train ticket."

Lucky her.

I said, "How will I know if it's your brother?"

"I've brought some pictures." She went into the handbag again. The pictures showed a thin-faced youth with a thin nose and long ear lobes. One of them showed him posed beside a plaster-of-Paris head.

"What's this?" I said.

"He was artistic. He sculpted. That's when he was feeling fine. When he was feeling blue, he smashed it all to pieces."

"What color was his hair?"

"Yellow like mine. He had blue eyes. He was five foot six. There was a scar back of his left ear where he was struck by a snowball with a stone in it." She made it sound easy—too easy. All she had to do was forward the pictures and the description to Sheriff J. C. Creighton.

I asked, "What do you want me to do if it isn't your brother's body?"

"Nothing. Use the return half of the ticket."

"And if it is him?"

"Let's cross that bridge if we come to it."

"Okay," I said. It looked like she was a little afraid the bridge was ahead. I wondered who had the money Heath Welch could have claimed in a few more weeks. I didn't wear my brain out wondering because there was the chance the body at Waupepogma wasn't her brother. I made with the fingers and thumb and said, "What about money?"

"How much do you usually charge?"

I didn't usually have clients in mink coats. "Twenty-five a day and expenses."

"Suppose we make it a hundred dollars and the train ticket." She carried a check-book in the handbag. "What is your real name, Mr. Sharkey?"

"Kayo. My old man was nuts about prizefighting. He ran a gym on Sixth Avenue."

She wrote a check for Kayo Sharkey for the hundred bucks. It was from the check I found out she was the Jo-Anne and not Joan. It was a check on the Grand Central

branch bank, and I cashed it before I did anything else.

The next thing I did was walk over to the Public Library and look up the newspapers for July, 1939.

The papers described Heath Welch as a promising young sculptor and attributed his death to a fit of artistic temperament. There was mention of an uncle, James Welch, with whom Heath apparently had lived. The suicide note had been found by an Emil Miller, who worked part-time for the uncle as gardener and part-time for Heath as a model. The gardener angle sounded like money, but the papers said nothing about money. Of course, it takes a lot of dough to be news in New York, and this was the kind of story a reporter covers from a police blotter. The reporter could have overlooked a hundred thousand dollars or so. But if Uncle James had been a really big shot, the copy desks would have caught it and run the story as: FINANCIER'S NEPHEW A SUICIDE. Jo-Anne's name wasn't in the papers at all.

I had time to run out to Deborah for a quick look, or I had time to go down to the Village and pack a bag.

I packed the bag.

CHAPTER II

Jackrolled Corpse



I SHOULD have packed snowshoes.

Snow tickled my face getting off the train, blanketed the Waupepogma station platform ankle-deep. But the platform had been shoveled clean to begin the day. The streets hadn't. The sidewalks were half-filled trenches. Icicles hung a foot long from a sign up the block announcing Ye Olde Mermaid Inn.

That was for the Summer, beach resort crowd. Ye Olde Mermaid Inn was closed for the Winter.

I suddenly realized I was walking the wrong way, toward the Atlantic Ocean. The business part of town lay on the other side of the tracks, and its sidewalks were shoveled.

I realized, too, I had a lot to learn.



She squared the shoulders of the mink coat, opened her eyes at me a little.

So I asked where I'd find Sheriff J. C. Creighton.

The answer was, for me to try the courthouse.

The courthouse looked older than the National Capitol in Washington. Icicles bearding its eaves were a yard long. It had a bad breath of steam heating, sweeping compound, and dirt the sweeping compound hadn't removed. There was a courtroom in it somewhere but the doors advertised mostly school and tax and records

officials. The sheriff's office was on the first floor, far back.

I expected chin whiskers and a drawl.

Actually, Creighton was a pale-eyed, clean-shaven man wearing a neat pin-stripe in gray. He took a silver banded cigarette holder from his teeth before he said,

"Let's begin by seeing your credentials."

After that he said,

"You understand a New York license isn't a Maine license."

"Miss Welch merely wants to make sure this body isn't her brother's. She's pretty sure it isn't."

"All right," Creighton said. "You can leave your bag here. I'll walk over to the mortuary with you."

He went to a coathook and donned a gray topcoat of better fit and quality than the average topcoat you see in New York. Of course, he put on galoshes, too.

"I'll take the bag with me," I said. "I'll probably be catching the next train, anyway."

Creighton said, "That would be about my luck, I guess."

"That means if your corpse isn't really Heath Welch of Deborah, you're stuck to say who he is?"

"He was carrying Heath Welch's draft card."

"Heath never registered with any draft board. Not in Deborah."

"Are you sure?" the sheriff said.

"He disappeared before selective service started."

We walked kitty-corner of the courthouse lawn, following a shoveled walk. The mortuary was one of those old-style Colonial homes, made over for business purposes. The mortician was busy with a "preparation," so Creighton and I went downstairs alone.

The body lay on a slab in an unheated basement room. Creighton turned back the sheet.

IT WASN'T Heath Welch, unless he'd dyed his hair and eyebrows black and had a plastic surgeon build up his nose and recede his chin. I took a pocket tape and measured him—five feet nine.

"He weighs a hundred and sixty-three,"

Creighton said. "His back teeth are full of silver fillings."

I said, "That isn't our Heath Welch."

I kept looking at the face, though. I had a vague feeling it was a face I'd seen and ought to remember.

"He isn't marked up badly," I said.

"You haven't seen his back."

"Oh?"

"Somebody chopped his spine in two with an axe."

"I certainly hope you get the guy who did it, sheriff."

Creighton smiled. "Don't worry, I will."

That sounded like he had a clue. It was none of my damned business. "Well, good luck to you," I said.

He spread the sheet over the fake Heath Welch and we climbed the stairs. We walked all the way back to the courthouse square in silence.

"Good luck to you," I said again.

He smiled.

I went along the side of the square to mid-block and a commercial hotel that had no tourist nonsense about it. The clerk said the earliest southbound train was at eleven that night. I hired a three-dollar room, went up to the room, and poured the melted snow out of my shoes. There was a change of socks in my bag, but I hadn't thought I'd need other shoes. I put the wet shoes on top of the steam radiator; sat down on the bed to change socks, and then stretched out on the bed.

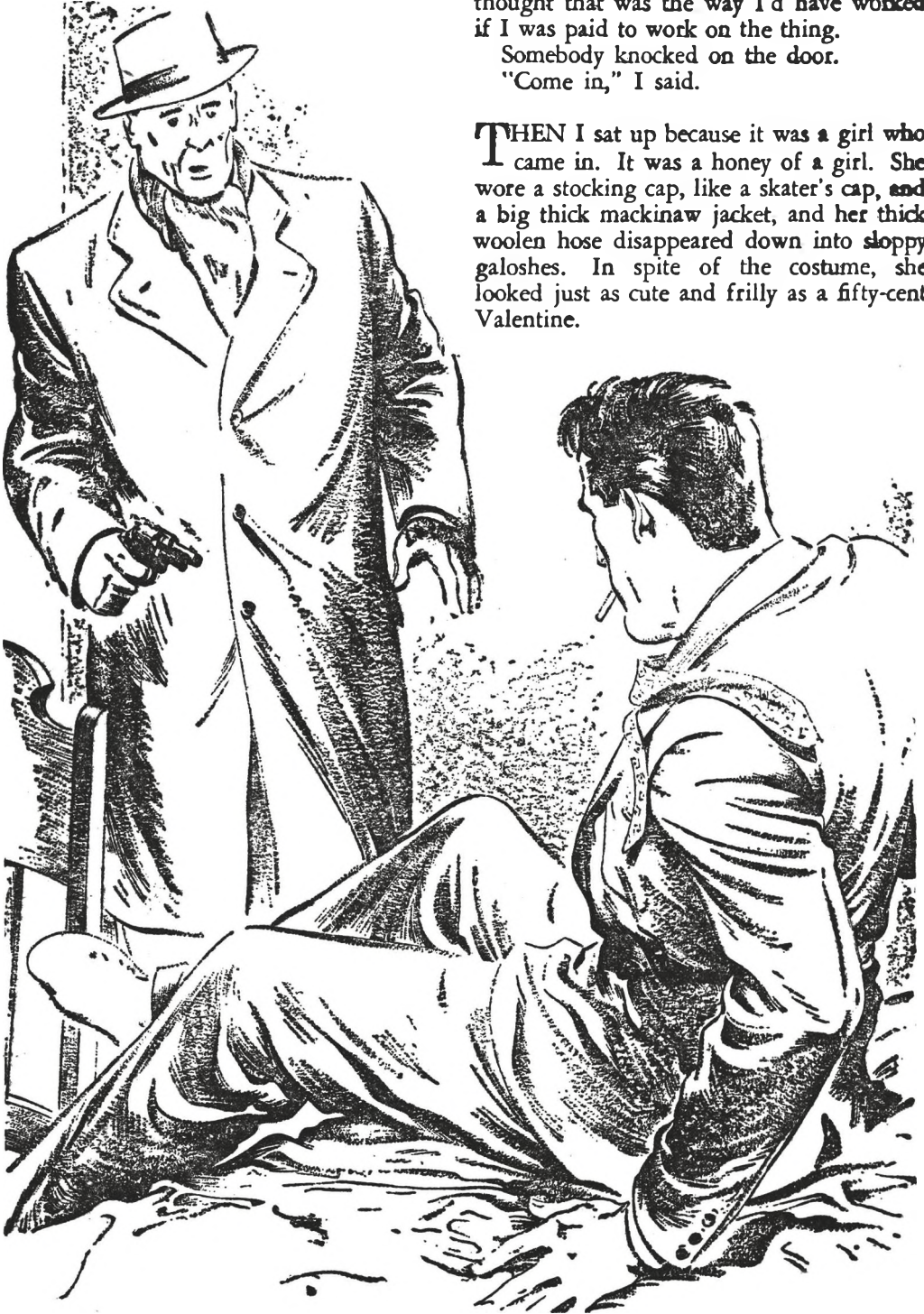
If it had been Summer, if my feet had been dry, I might have moseyed around trying to find out why the corpse with the faintly familiar face had borrowed Heath Welch's name.

It was snowing outside and my shoes were wet, so I just lay there on the bed and smoked a cigarette and wondered.

But I'm no Sherlock Holmes. I got to thinking up screwball answers; like, suppose it was the killer who palmed off the fake identity onto his victim. It was screwball because killers who chop backbones and throw bodies into snowdrifts aren't quite that subtle.

There was another way to go at it. Ask yourself who in a place like Waupepogma would bump off a phony for calling him-

The sheriff said to me: "You're under arrest, Sharkey. What'd you do with the stuff?"



self Heath Welch. I asked myself. The only human being I knew in town was the sheriff, so I didn't get an answer, but I thought that was the way I'd have worked if I was paid to work on the thing.

Somebody knocked on the door.

"Come in," I said.

THEN I sat up because it was a girl who came in. It was a honey of a girl. She wore a stocking cap, like a skater's cap, and a big thick mackinaw jacket, and her thick woolen hose disappeared down into sloppy galoshes. In spite of the costume, she looked just as cute and frilly as a fifty-cent Valentine.

She said, "Mr. Sharkey, I'm Ginny Beale. I'm a reporter for the *Waupepogma Free Press*," and her voice made music of a word like *Waupepogma*.

"That's fine. Some of my best friends are reporters. I owe the newspaper profession quite a few drinks. I've got a bottle in my bag and—"

"I'm afraid this is a business call, Mr. Sharkey. I want to interview you for publication."

"It's a pleasure. You can quote me as saying *Waupepogma* is my favorite town in Maine. Make it New England. I predict a bright post-war future for *Waupepogma*. Also, I think the girls here are much prettier than the New York girls I've seen."

"I mean I want to interview you about the Welch murder case," Ginny Beale said.

"You don't need a newspaper in this town, the way news gets around."

"I'm pounding a beat. This is my day to pick up the county news at the courthouse. Creighton told me you were in town. It's my job to check the hotel register, and when I saw your name downstairs I came on up. Because it isn't very often a big New York investigator comes here to solve a crime."

I said, "Okay, I'll give you the story. The body isn't really Heath Welch of Deborah at all."

She shook her head. "That isn't enough to do me any good."

I said, "What the hell kind of burg is this? A disclosure like that would be sensation in New York."

"I mean it isn't enough for me, personally. Of course, it's a startling development but it's something Creighton will tell Mannerly, anyway."

"Tell who?"

"Steve Mannerly. He's the owner and editor of the *Free Press*, and he's covering the murder himself, naturally. He wouldn't trust me to handle the biggest story we've had in years. But if I could go out and dig up something big, something he himself couldn't get, well, it'd be a tremendous feather in my cap."

I said, "You don't see any feathers in my hair, do you?"

Ginny Beale said, "Who is the dead man, anyway?"

"I don't know."

"Creighton said you looked queer as if you did too know."

"The dead man is just frozen beef so far as I'm concerned. I'll tell you what you can print. I was sent up here by Welch's sister to make sure this wasn't her brother who suicided in Long Island Sound six years ago. They never recovered the body, that's why she was interested."

"Why didn't she come herself?"

I thought and said, "Off the record, she may have had something important to do in New York if this was actually Heath Welch. There was a money angle to the real Heath Welch's disappearance, but you could get sued for libel by saying so in your paper."

"Then you're not going to solve the case?"

"Nope. I was hired to look out for a possible financial interest, so far as I know."

MY SHOES were still wet after she left. I turned them upside down on the radiator. I figured I had a long night in a day coach ahead of me, so I lay down on the bed again. It was getting too dark to see the snowflakes outside the window when the second knock shook the door.

This one was a red-faced man wearing a muskrat cap flapped down over his ears, a canvas-skinned, fleece-lined overcoat falling to his knees, and galoshes buckled up almost to his knees.

"Excuse me for not being dressed up," he said. "I just got in from my route."

He saw I didn't get it.

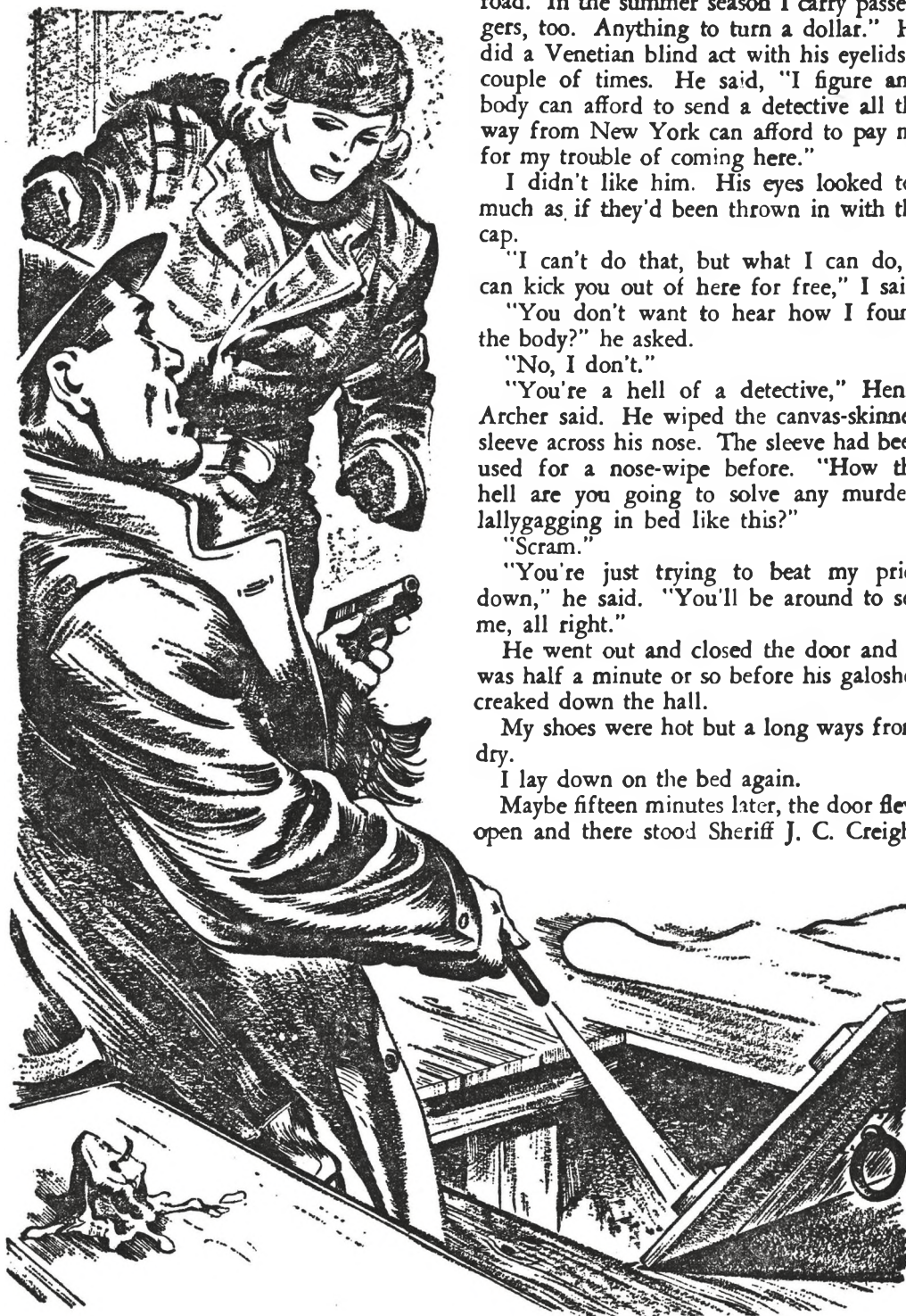
"My mail route," he said. "I'm Henry Archer. I'm the one that found the body."

"Oh. I didn't recognize the uniform."

"You're a hell of a detective," Henry Archer said. "Don't you know I run a Starr route?"

"I'm a hell of a detective. I don't even know what that is."

"It means I'm not civil service. I'm a contractor. I'm the low bidder that trucks the mail from the postoffice here up to Gull Point and Stone Isle. Mail has to be hauled there because those towns don't have a rail-



road. In the summer season I carry passengers, too. Anything to turn a dollar." He did a Venetian blind act with his eyelids a couple of times. He said, "I figure anybody can afford to send a detective all the way from New York can afford to pay me for my trouble of coming here."

I didn't like him. His eyes looked too much as if they'd been thrown in with the cap.

"I can't do that, but what I can do, I can kick you out of here for free," I said.

"You don't want to hear how I found the body?" he asked.

"No, I don't."

"You're a hell of a detective," Henry Archer said. He wiped the canvas-skinned sleeve across his nose. The sleeve had been used for a nose-wipe before. "How the hell are you going to solve any murders lallygagging in bed like this?"

"Scram."

"You're just trying to beat my price down," he said. "You'll be around to see me, all right."

He went out and closed the door and it was half a minute or so before his galoshes creaked down the hall.

My shoes were hot but a long ways from dry.

I lay down on the bed again.

Maybe fifteen minutes later, the door flew open and there stood Sheriff J. C. Creigh-

I pointed the flashbeam down into the hole. She yelled out: "Good heavens, who's that?"

ton with a dirty look on his clean-razored face and a gun in his fist.

"You're under arrest, Sharkey," he said. "What'd you do with the stuff?"

"Stuff?" I said.

"Welch's clothes," he said. "What'd you do with Welch's clothes?"

It seemed somebody had broken into the mortuary and stripped that corpse as naked as a jaybird.

CHAPTER III

Missing Face



ASKED him, why would I steal the corpse's clothes?

He asked me, all right, why did I?

I told him to touch one of those shoes on the radiator and tell me how long ago he thought I'd been out in the snow.

He said the theft could have happened an hour ago or two hours ago.

I said it was his fault, that in New York the cops stripped their own corpses and the clothes were locked up by a Police Department Property Clerk.

Creighton said, "We left the clothes on him for a reason. We hoped somebody would come along and be able to identify him."

That sounded more reasonable. That was talking to me, not just at me.

"Mr. Creighton," I said, "let's face it. I've got no alibi to prove I didn't leave this room. You've got no way of proving I did leave it, either. A tug of war like that won't get us anywhere. Why don't we both grab the same end of the rope and pull together?"

"Pardon me for looking around here first," he said. He looked in my bag and in the clothes closet and lifted the bed mattress and looked under it. He opened bureau drawers and found a Gideon Bible and said, "Will you swear on this to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing—?"

"Cut it out. I don't know the truth. I'll swear I didn't swipe the clothes off the stiff."

"Swear."

I did

The sheriff said, "What do you mean, pull together?"

"I'm just thinking off the cuff," I said. "A man's clothes aren't worth much after he's been axed in them. So why were they worth stealing?"

"I might have overlooked something. A dry-cleaner's mark or something that would identify the man."

"Who cares whether you identify him or not?"

"The people who sent you up here," Sheriff Creighton said.

"Who else?"

"Whoever killed him."

"And who else?" I shook my head. "That's all, isn't it? And neither of them fit, do they?"

"No?"

"The killer is the easiest. If he wanted to get rid of dry-cleaning marks, the time was before he threw the body into a snow-drift."

"Unless he didn't think."

"The killer is out," I said. "If he was worried about the body being identified, he had a whole big Atlantic Ocean to dump it in."

"Well," Creighton said, "maybe you're right."

"The people I work for are out, too. They wouldn't hire a legitimate, licensed private cop to pull the kind of job you're thinking about."

"What did they hire you for, Sharkey?"

"Heath Welch's sister hired me. I imagine she has some money Heath would have inherited if he'd lived. She wanted to know where she stood."

THE sheriff's pale eyes looked tired and discouraged.

I said, "It's like this. The clothes weren't worth stealing, just as clothes. Your theory about dry-cleaner or laundry marks doesn't satisfy me, either. It must be something else."

"What else?" he said, his shoulders slumping.

"Diamonds."

He reared up half a foot taller than he'd been standing.

"That's just for instance, sheriff. It

could be diamonds or pearls or emeralds—anything small enough and valuable enough to be sewed into clothing."

He brooded. "Why didn't the killer take the jewels in the first place?"

"It must be he didn't know about them—or he thought he had them all, later he learned different."

He thought.

Finally he said, "Put on your shoes, Sharkey."

I laced on my hot, half-dry shoes. I put on my topcoat and my hat.

Two men unfolded their legs and stood up from chairs in the lobby as we came downstairs. The taller was a beaky, mustached man wearing eyeglasses, a black ulster, and a white wool muffler. The other was a fat round man in a camel's hair coat belted around his middle.

"Come on," Creighton said.

It was dark outside, and windows of the courthouse streamed yellow light through the falling snowflakes. It was Christmas-card scenery, but my shoes weren't hot by the time we stomped into the sheriff's office.

Creighton introduced me. He said, "Boys, this is Mr. Kayo Sharkey, an investigator from New York." Then he introduced the short round chap. "Steve Mannerly, he runs the local paper."

Mannerly said, "I'm a New Yorker myself, so to speak. I took my journalism at Columbia. I'd like to ask you one question, Mr. Sharkey."

"Shoot."

"Let's suppose you were at Times Square, and you wanted to make an investigation at 612 East Fifty-first Street. Would you take the subway or a bus to get there fastest?"

"I'd swim."

Mannerly said to the sheriff, "That's right, that address would be out in the East River."

Creighton was expressionless. He introduced the tall, beak-nosed man. "This is Ed Lund of the Associated Press in Boston."

"Is it that big?" I said.

"Mr. Lund really came up here on another story," Mannerly said. "A girl in my

I hugged my shirtleeve as if I'd really been shot.



office got excited and sent out a foolish yarn about a rocket-firing submarine off Gull Point."

I stared.

"It wasn't a submarine at all," Lund said. "It turned out to be lights in a Summer cottage up there on the Point."

Creighton said: "Let's get down to business. I want to tell you boys what's up, so you'll know what *not* to put

in the papers. Sharkey and I are teaming up, at least temporarily."

"Is that confidential?" Lund asked.

"No, but Sharkey's idea about the missing clothes is. He thinks Welch, whoever he was, may have been carrying jewels."

"Good God!" Mannerly exclaimed.

Lund didn't quite yawn.

"But keep it under your hats," Creighton said. "We don't have any jewel mobs in Waupepogma. If it was that, it was an outside job. And we don't have many outsiders in Waupepogma, either, in January. It boils down to not more than maybe a dozen suspects in all."

"I can run over and get the hotel registrations at the *Free Press* office," Mannerly offered. "Miss Beale picked them up today."

Creighton said, "Sure. But they wouldn't have to stop at a hotel. Just drive in town and out again. I'm going to have the roads blocked and cars stopped. It'll work better if we pretend we don't know the corpse was stripped, so I'm asking you not to put that part of the story out at all."

He looked at me. "Can you think of anything else?"

I said, "I can think of a pair of size eight shoes and galoshes to go with them."

"I wear eights. I can fix you up," Mannerly said.

"Send them over to the hotel," I said.

Mannerly and Lund went out. Creighton opened a desk drawer, fished out some typed sheets and photographs. "If you're going to help me, you'll want to study these?"

I looked at the photographs. One of them showed the body still in the snowbank, the others were close-ups taken in the mortuary. The location of the wound surprised me a little. Six inches higher and it would have been a neck wound.

"How did Archer happen to find it?" I asked.

"He saw a hand sticking out of the snow-drift. That was day before yesterday morning."

"How long had it been there?"

"Twelve to eighteen hours."

"What was this story about lights in a Summer cottage?"

Creighton said, "There's a cottage away out on the tip of the Point. A light there could be mistaken for one at sea. I don't put any stock in that submarine talk, but if you're theory is right, Mr. Corpse may have been using the cottage as a hide-out. Until his gang caught up with him."

"Was it snowing here day before yesterday?"

"Blowing. Drifting snow."

I went back to the hotel.

The room looked just the same as it had when we left it, except there was unmelted snow sprinkled on the carpet around my bag.

I jerked the bag open. Nobody had stolen the toothbrush or the pajamas or the shaving equipment. One of the pictures was missing. It was the picture that showed Heath Welch posed beside his home-made statuary.

Then I knew where I'd seen the faintly familiar face of the dead man. It hadn't hit me before because I'd been trying to connect it up with a human being. But now I knew it wasn't any human being I'd ever met.

It was the face Heath Welch had modeled in plaster-of-Paris.

I ran downstairs and asked the clerk who'd been in my room.

He didn't know.

I said, "I want you to send a telegram for me." I wrote out a telegram to Jo-Anne Welch, Deborah, L. I., New York, asking her to phone me right away.

Right away would take a couple of hours or longer.

"Where would I be apt to find Henry Archer?" I asked.

The clerk said why didn't I phone him?

I did, and Archer walked into the lobby in less than five minutes' time. He said, "I knew you were bluffing. My price has gone up—"

"How much would you charge to drive me to Gull Point?" I cut in.

"You mean now or with the mail in the morning?"

"Now."

He thought and said, "Ten bucks."

I was on an expense account. I said okay.

CHAPTER IV

Sitting Up Dead



E SPOKE once during the trip.

"Make it fifteen and I'll show you where I found the body," he said.

I said what the famous general said. "Nuts."

It was eight miles, and all the ride I wanted for my money. A little snow and a lot of cold wind sifted in around the old-fashioned curtains of the old-fashioned truck. Henry Archer had a clear spot as big as one of those little shaving mirrors he could see through. The rest of the windshield was half an inch thick with frost. Tire chains pounded on the back wheels.

A couple of times the sound of surf advertised the ocean wasn't far off. My feet turned to ice and my ears ached.

He braked and the trip was over. He said, "Here you are."

I opened the door and looked up and down the road. It was a road, not a street. There might have been a dozen buildings hidden around in the snowdrifts.

"Where's the hotel?" I said.

"No hotel."

"Where can I get put up for the night?"

"You'll have to go back to Waupepogma," he said. He split his red face in a grin. "That'll be ten bucks more."

"Wait here," I said.

Actually, there was more to Gull Point than I'd seen. The highway didn't cut through the biggest part of the village, which fronted onto the ocean. Using a fountain-pen flashlight, because it was really night now, I followed the beaten path as far as there were paths. This brought me out onto the Point itself, which was a sickle of land pointing toward Iceland.

The wind was blowing straight out of Iceland tonight, and apparently had been blowing that way for weeks. The snow was blown almost completely off the surface of the ground, leaving only little white tails on the lee side of the rocks.

I ran to get warm. My feet changed from blocks of ice to pincushions full of

needles. The pain brought tears to my eyes and the wind froze them there.

Finally I fetched the black oblong which must be the Summer cottage on the end of the Point.

I went around it once looking for an unlocked door. The next time I looked at the windows. One window had a plywood pane where the glass had been broken out. I knocked the plywood loose, reached in and unlocked the sash, and lifted the sash.

It was ten degrees warmer inside and out of the wind. But I thought a man could still spit hailstones. The flashlight slid along a section of wallpaper to a stone fireplace. Wood ashes in the fireplace had been stirred up with a stick. When I got as far as the kitchen, there were wood ashes in a stove there, too. A calendar on the kitchen wall was torn down to September, 1944.

But I already knew it was an unoccupied cottage in which lights had been seen recently.

I STARTED taking the place apart for something I didn't already know. It wasn't in the kitchen. It wasn't in the front room. It wasn't in the one bedroom or the bedroom's one closet.

I tripped over it—a round iron rung that had been covered by a piece of carpet in the front room. The carpet was spread to cover a trapdoor in the floor. When the trapdoor was lifted, the flashbeam showed a dirt cellar hardly larger than a phone booth.

There wasn't even room enough for the dead man to lie down. He sat propped, the way primitive men buried their dead. Only primitive man never killed with anything that would make a hole a little larger than a lead pencil back of one ear, and as big as a baseball bat on the other side of the face. A high-velocity, dumdummy job.

The rest of the cellar was filled with junk, the odds and ends and leavings of Summer tenants since the cottage had been built. Somebody had thrown a broken chair down here, and there were old whiskey bottles, a felt hat, a stringless tennis racquet, and a rubbish pile of broken up

statuary modeled in clay and crumbling in pieces.

The statuary was for my money.

I lifted that half of a face out of the debris and hoisted that out and up onto the cottage floor. With the flashlight shining under it, the face must have looked like

my own, and the hand under it could have looked like a glimpse of my neck.

The guy wanted me to do my bleeding down in that hole under the house—or he had buck fever and his trigger finger couldn't wait.

It wasn't a loud shot. It had the high,



piercing, ear-sting that a souped-up, velocity cartridge packs.

The slug smashed the scrap of statuary so hard I thought my fingers were gone with it. I jerked the hand down and played the light on it and counted my fingers.

A mistake. He saw the light move and knew I was alive to move it.

I clicked off the light; listened. There had been no sound of footsteps, no opening door letting in the howling wind. He figured to be outside the window with the missing pane, pointing his gat in where the plywood was out.

I could have easily tossed a blind shot in that general direction, except that I carry a gun about as often as I have a birthday. I had a license—a private dick can get the license—but I reasoned, shoot somebody and see what happens. A private cop has to prove self-defense like any other citizen, otherwise he's the homicide squad's pigeon.

The guy outside didn't know I lacked a gun.

I reached down and picked up a whiskey

bottle by its neck and waited. Let him come in and get me if he wanted.

It was a wait. I was getting to be an old man by the time I heard the noise of the window sash lifting.

I came up fast with the bottle in my right hand and the fountain pen light in my left. The figure was half in and half out of the window.

I jammed the flashlight into its ribs and yelled,

"Hands up, you—!"

Something heavy clanked on the floor. The yell that answered me was soprano.

I jerked the light out of the ribs and switched it onto Ginny Beale's face.

She was scared. She said, "You?" with



He screamed and fell down in the snow and cried out loud.

the word forming a cloud of vapor in front of her eyes.

"Where's the gun?" I asked.

"In my bag."

It was her handbag that'd clanked onto the floor. I bent down and broke its jaws apart and picked up her gun. The gun was a fly-killer, a pearl-stocked .25-caliber automatic. I sniffed at it and got a whiff of perfume.

It hadn't been fired recently and anyway it wasn't a high-velocity gun.

Staying bent down, I pointed the fly-killer up at the window. "Who's out there with you?"

"Nobody. What's the matter with you?"

"Didn't you hear the shot?"

She said no, and what shot?

I told her what shot.

She said, "Whoever it was must have been frightened away when he heard me coming."

I asked, "What are you doing here, anyway?"

She said: "What are you?"

"I'm a detective, remember?"

"And I'm a reporter. I don't intend to spend the rest of my life writing up Ladies' Aid teas for the *Waupepogma Free Press*."

"Is that why you put a cock-and-bull story about a submarine on the press wires?"

Ginny Beale said, "I can't help it if people here thought lights in this cottage were lights at sea."

"Who gave you that yarn?"

"It wasn't given. We have an arrangement by which the *Free Press* pays Henry Archer for local news from Gull Point and Stone Isle."

"When was all this?"

"Two days before the murder, before the body was found."

"The sheriff went right out to investigate?"

She said, naturally.

"And you went with him, naturally?"

"Yes. He decided it was just that vandals had broken into the cottage, looking for something to steal."

"Did he look under the trapdoor?"

Ginny Beale said, "No," in surprise.

I told her, "Take a look but don't faint and fall in."

I pointed the flashbeam down into the hole.

She choked and got out, "Good heavens, who's that?"

"He isn't local?"

"I never saw him before in my life," she told me.

I SAID, "This set-up is rough on strays and strangers. Two down, and I'm lucky to be alive myself." Picking up the smashed clay, I showed her how lucky I was.

Ginny Beale said, "We'd better get out of here."

"Have you got what you came after?" I asked.

"I've got a story."

She nibbled her lip. Then she said, "Look. You've been holding out on me. You knew perfectly well all along who the first dead man is, or was."

"So you're the one who burglarized my room?"

"I found that picture in your valise. I took it to the *Free Press* office. Mannerly was there, digging an old pair of overshoes out of a closet for you. I wanted to talk to you, anyway, so I offered to take them to the hotel.

"The clerk said you'd hired Archer to drive you to Gull Point. I tagged along to see what you were doing." She gave with a very pretty smile. "Mr. Sharkey, who is the other dead man?"

"I'll know as soon as I hear from New York. I have an idea that probably he's Emil Miller."

"Who?"

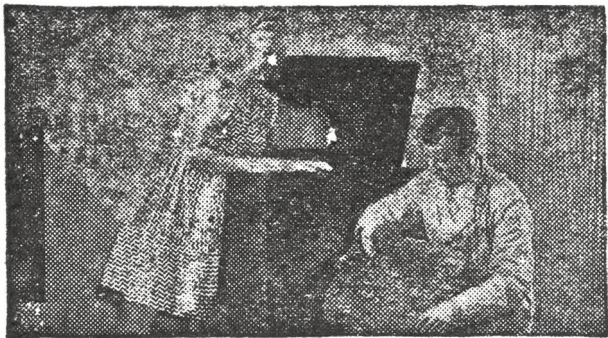
"A fellow who used to pose for Heath Welch back about '39." Feeding the pieces of clay into my pocket, I said: "All right, let's go."

It seemed if I had walked another hundred yards to the left, I'd have found a road across the Point. Ginny Beale had a coupe parked there. It was a nice warm coupe, kept that way by an electric heater under the dash.

The best part of it was riding past the truck where Henry Archer sat and froze and waited for me to come back and fork over ten dollars.

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CHAPTER V

Caught Cold



GINNY BEALE dropped me in front of the hotel, explaining she had to rush to write her lead on the second murder story. "I left a bundle for you at the desk," she said.

I took the bundle upstairs, then unhooked the room phone and asked for the sheriff's office. I told Creighton about the body in the cottage cellar.

He said he and the coroner would hustle right up there. "Come along with us. I want to talk to you."

"Not me. I'm waiting here for a very important New York call."

I stripped off my shoes and socks, took a towel, and rubbed my toes pink. I was still barefooted when the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"This is Mr. James Welch in Deborah, New York, calling Mr. Kayo Sharkey in Waupepogma, Maine."

"Yep."

"I have a telegram here asking my niece, Jo-Anne, to call you immediately."

"That's right."

"My niece is out for the evening. I thought perhaps I could help you."

I said, "Your niece gave me some pictures of your nephew Heath."

"Yes, I know."

"One of them showed him posed beside a piece of statuary."

"I know the picture you mean."

I said, "Mr. Welch, that head was modeled from the features of a man named Emil Miller, wasn't it?"

The voice on the wire said, "Oh, no, that's not Miller."

"Then who is it?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Heath was always picking up queer characters among the fishermen and hiring them to pose for him."

I asked, "It wasn't a head Heath made that Summer he spent at Gull Point, was it?"

"Where? My nephew was never at Gull Point. I don't understand this at all." The voice sounded irritated. "Perhaps you'd

better call my niece in the morning."

The line went dead.

I turned to the bundle, wrapped in a week-old *Free Press*. It contained a pair of ankle-high, one-buckle galoshes and a pair of tennis sneakers. Spiked track shoes would have looked pretty good to me. I put on the socks I'd taken off to dry that afternoon, then the sneakers, then wrapped a page of the *Free Press* around each foot, and still had room to slide around inside the galoshes.

I expected an emergency call any minute now. While I sat expecting, I examined Ginny Beale's gun. She'd neglected the slightly important feature of having any cartridges in the magazine.

The phone rang.

"Hello," I said.

It was her voice. "Kayo," she said, "I wonder if you'll help me. I'm at the office now, writing the story and there's one little—"

THERE was a sound like you'd make breaking a piece of wood across your knee.

"Hello?" I said.

The line was dead again.

I grabbed the .25 and jammed it into my pocket. My hand struck clay. I remembered and fished out the pieces of bullet-shattered clay that had been half a face and dropped them into my valise. I picked up the valise and started for the door. I had the door open and a foot in the hall when the phone rang.

"Hello?" I said.

A woman's voice I hadn't heard before said, "Deborah, New York, calling Mr. Sharkey."

"This is Sharkey."

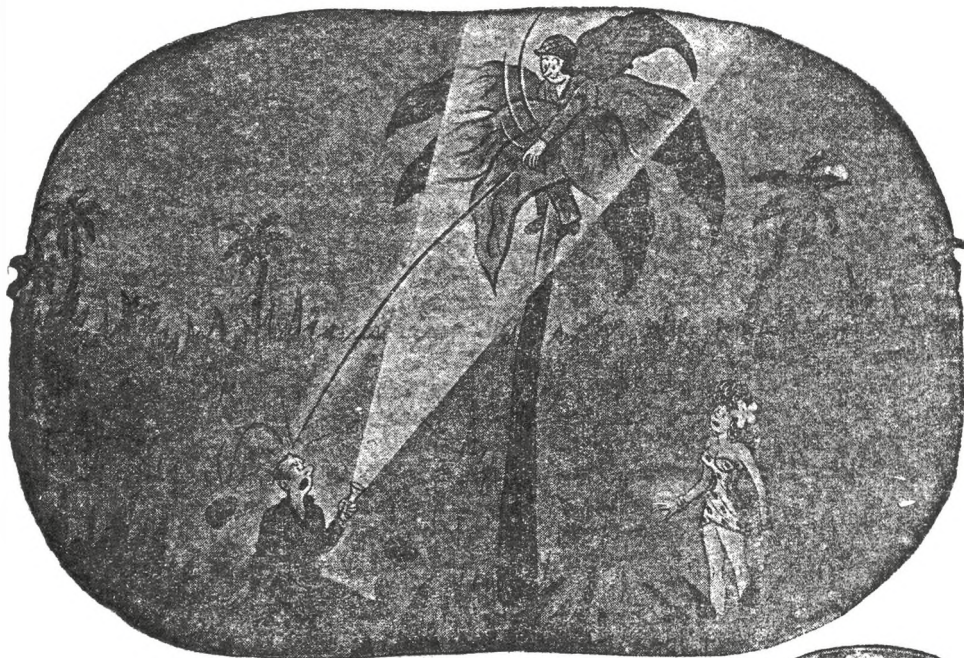
"One moment, please." Fainter, the voice said, "Here is your party, Miss Welch."

I recognized Jo-Anne's voice saying hello and what is it?

"You gave me a picture of Heath standing beside some of his statuary," I said. "I wondered if Emil Miller posed for that hunk of bric-a-brac?"

"Yes," Jo-Anne Welch's voice said. "Why?"

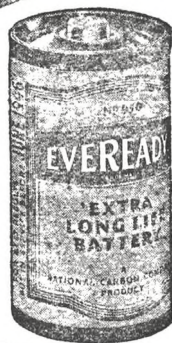
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"Emil Miller is the dead guy up here, Miss Welch."

"Oh, he couldn't be."

"Tell me a reason."

"He isn't in this country at all," she said. "He was deported as an undesirable alien."

"Deported to where?"

"They sent him back to Germany before the war," she said. "So you see."

I could see, all right. I said, "Miss Welch, didn't your brother spend a Summer at Gull Point, Maine, shortly before his death?"

"Not a Summer. A few days, perhaps a week."

"Miller with him that time?"

She said, "No."

"CHECKING out, Mr. Sharkey?" the clerk said when I came downstairs with the valise.

"I might at that. You can give this to the sheriff if I never come back. Tell him to get in touch with Jo-Anne Welch in Deborah, New York." I slid him the valise and went out into the street. It was colder, and it had stopped snowing. I sank down deep into the heels of the galoshes at every step.

The *Waupepogma Free Press* had ground floor offices on a sidestreet, with light glowing dimly through its heavily frosted windows. A bell above the door went ping when I opened it. A rubber matting stretched ahead to a desk labeled *Classified Advertising*. The Frankenstein shape on the right was a linotype machine. On the left, a door was marked: Stephen D. Mannerly, Editor & Publisher. Mannerly's office was set off by a wooden partition. Next to it, enclosed by a low railing, were several desks covered with typewriters, copy paper, and pastepots. A piece of paper fanned from the platen of one of the typewriters.

The only light in the place shone directly down on this typewriter. I shoved through a swinging gate and stared at the typing. It read:

Kayo, I wonder if you'll help me. I'm at the office now, writing the story, and

there's one little thing I can't understand. I'd ask Steve, but he might suspect you were after the diamonds yourself. Will you call me as soon as you find this under your door and

The rest was twisted back into the machine so I could read it if I pulled the paper out. I pulled it out.

A voice said, "Drop that and put up your hands."

Ed Lund walked out from behind the linotype. He had a gun in his fist. I couldn't see what kind. They all look pretty much alike, pointed so straight at you the barrel becomes an O.

I dropped it and I put up my hands. I stood on one foot and dragged the other foot across the instep of the first, unlatching the overshoe buckle.

I said, "What are you trying to pull?"

He said, "You're all through, Sharkey. It happens I'm not an Associated Press man at all."

"You're Uncle James."

He wore a grin under his beak nose as he came through the swinging gate.

He said, "You'll find out who I am. You and I are going to the sheriff's office and have a quiet little chat and—"

I kicked at his grin. My leg would have had to be a yard and a half long, but the galosh flew off my foot at his head. He triggered as he ducked. He didn't miss—completely. It felt like a hot poker kissing my arm.

I PILED onto him. Raised in the old man's Sixth Avenue gym, I knew when to use my fists. Fists are for sparring, getting a square stance and a clean shot. I didn't use them. I bulled into him, wrestling him back and onto the railing. I hung on and kept my legs pumping. He went backwards over the low partition, kicking.

He got a heel into my belly, driving me back a step. He still had the gun. His head and shoulders were on the floor, his knees across the railing. He windmilled his legs and fishflopped his body. He wanted to get up, hanging onto the gun and having the partition between us.

I turned and grabbed the typewriter off Ginny Beale's desk. It was a standard

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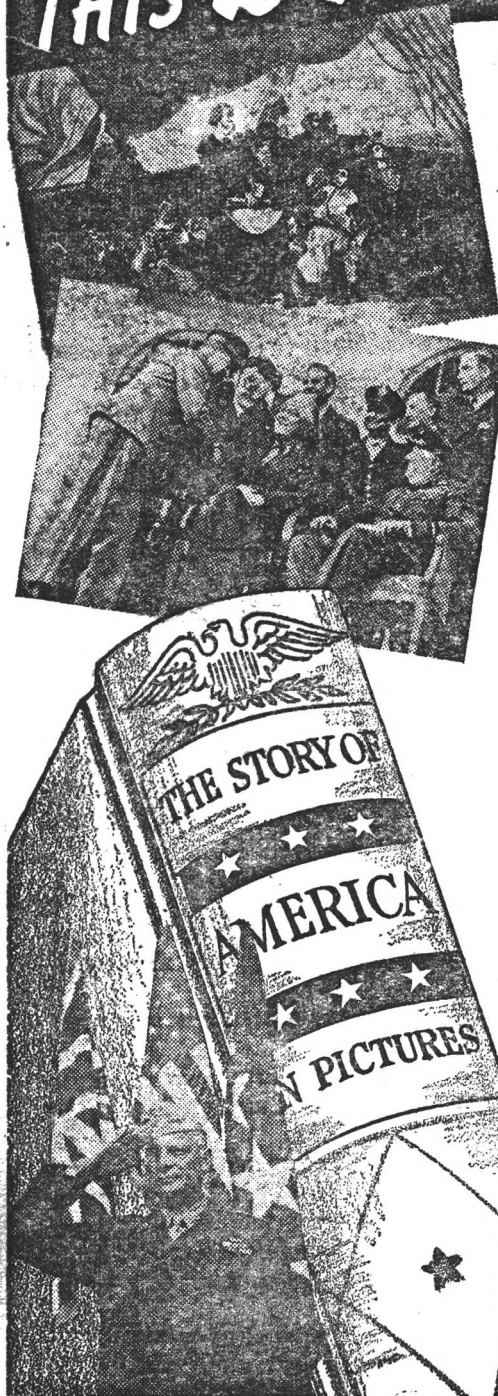
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heavyweight office machine and I grunted lifting it over my head. I took two running steps up to the railing.

He had rolled over and was on one knee, with one hand planted on the floor and the gun aimed in the other. I threw the typewriter down onto his head and shoulders.

That stopped him. It would have stopped Joe Louis. That's what I learned about fistfighting around my old man's gym. Fistfighting just doesn't amount to a damn compared with grabbing a sashweight or a bungstarter or anything else that's heavy and handy.

I reached and picked the gun out of his fingers. I heard my name called. "Kayo!" Ginny Beale stood in the doorway of Mannerly's private office.

"You crazy fool," she said, "he's an F. B. I. man!"

I looked at the gun. It was a Luger.

"Take a peek at this," I said.

I pointed at a word on the extractor above the breechblock. It said, *Geladen*. I told her, "F.B.I., hell, he's an I.F.B. man."

"What?"

"Intelligence From Berlin," I said.

She said, "What? Oh, you're crazy."

I said, "Since when has the Federal Bureau of Investigation been issuing kraut guns to its operatives?"

"There are plenty of Lugers in this country."

"Sure, but the export ones are marked loaded, not *geladen*." I said, "If he was on the level, why would he try to cover up Emil Miller? Miller was sent back to Germany years ago. You figure out how he got back to Waupepogma in the U.S.A. and you're getting somewhere."

She went saucer-eyed. "There really was a submarine, Kayo?"

"It'd be a long cold swim, wouldn't it?"

She said, "Did you tell the sheriff? Did you tell anyone?"

"I didn't know until I heard from New York. *He* knew," I said.

She blushed.

"Sure," I said. "The guy said he was F.B.I. and you told him everything you knew. The identity of Emil Miller was something he had to keep under cover. It would have brought a flock of genuine G-

men down on him. Therefore he faked a call from New York to make me think I was all wet. But that wasn't enough, he had to get me out of there before the real call came through. So he sat down and pounded out this little message for you to read over the phone."

She said, "Kayo, he told me—"

"Wait a minute. He's coming around. You got some rope anywhere here?"

"There's some heavy parcel-post twine in Mannerly's desk."

She brought it. I tied his wrists and his ankles and his knees. Then I dragged him back and lifted him into the little low chair in front of the linotype machine. "Light the lead pot," I told Ginny. I tied him into the chair. Then I went and found some headline type and printed a sign that said: Danger. This Man is a German Agent. I tied it around his neck, hanging back over the chair.

H HE WAS wide awake. He said, "You'll spend the rest of your life in prison for this, Sharkey."

I tied another cord around his neck, and ran it up over the machine, and pushed the chair up in front of the lead pot. "Give me the ladle," I said. Ginny gave the dipper they use to empty the pot. I dipped it in, held it, and tied the other end of the cord to the handle. Lund could start throwing his weight around—and pour a pint of boiling lead on himself.

"Come on, Ginny."

When we got outside, she said: "It would have been much simpler to have got somebody to sit behind him with a shotgun."

"Do you have any deaf mutes in town?"

"Why?"

"I don't want the whole town in on the story yet. Where was Lund staying?"

"At the hotel."

We jumped in her car and rode around the block to the hotel. "Wait outside a minute—when you come in, the clerk will be off duty. Get Lund's room number off the register, pick up a key, and come along."

The clerk said, "Back already?"

"I forgot something."

I went into my room, threw my topcoat and coat onto the bed, walked to the window, raised the sash, and pointed Lund's Luger at the moon. The gun banged. I yelled, and ran to the bed, and sat hugging my shirtsleeve.

The clerk came up fast enough.

"I had a little accident," I said. "I looked to see if there was a shell in the chamber and the damned thing went off."

"I'll call a doctor for you."

"It's just a scratch. You can help me tie a rag around it."

He looked at my arm and jumped his Adam's apple. "A scratch? It's half an inch deep."

I argued that I didn't need a doctor. He insisted I did. He finally agreed he'd wind a towel over it to stop the bleeding and then go call a doctor. As soon as he left, I put on the coat and topcoat and Ginny Beale opened the door.

"I've got it—223."

We went down the hall to 223. That was at the back of the building. I looked into Lund's suitcase, looked into the clothes closet, into drawers and under the mattress. Then I noticed the back window looked over the fire escape. There was a lot of snow on the escape. I opened the window and fumbled in the snowpile and dragged out a man's topcoat and suit coat and vest. The lining of each garment had been opened up with a razor blade.

Ginny said, "But, Kayo, Lund didn't even arrive in town until *after* that body was found. . . ."

"Let's sneak down the fire escape and talk in the car."

We jumped off the fire stairs into a snowbank. It reminded me I had a galosh on one foot and just a tennis shoe on the other. I felt I had to work fast, now. I told her, "Let's get back to Gull Point."

She asked, "But how do you explain about Lund?"

"How did he explain about himself?"

SHE said, "He told me the submarine thing was a hoax, that the whole thing was a tax-evasion fraud. He claimed Heath Welch never committed suicide at all, he simply wandered off in an insane spell. The family made up the suicide story

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to settle a large estate without any legal difficulties. Then when Heath reappeared, they decided to kill him and palm off the body as Emil Miller's. He said if we pretended something had happened to me, you'd be frightened enough to blurt out the truth to clear yourself."

"It stinks," I said. I thought and said, "Of course, he had to think it up pretty fast."

"What was he going to do?"

"Beat my brains out on the courthouse steps and claim an icicle fell on my head, I suppose."

"And me?" she said.

"He figured I had a gun. He'd take it and shoot you, and then put the gun back in my pocket and slip that typed note under my hotel door. . . . Hey, look out where you're driving!"

She got the car headed away from the ditch and toward Gull Point.

"Why did he kill those other two men?"

I said, "I don't think he did."

"But . . ."

"He was looking for the killer the same as we are." I thought some more and said, "As soon as you told him the second body had been found, I guess he knew the answer."

"You're holding out on me again," she accused.

I saw another machine coming up in the headbeam of her car. The wind flapped its side curtains violently.

"Stop," I said. "Let me out."

I jumped out and walked toward the approaching truck, flagging it down with both arms. I pulled open its door and looked in. It was Henry Archer, all right. He had his sheepskin collar turned up around his ears, and the light from Ginny's car striking through the clear spot in the windshield touched only half his face.

Faces are funny. The halves so often don't match. I hadn't noticed it before, but I saw now the lighted half of his face was a dead ringer for the broken clay one in my valise.

"Get tired of waiting?" I asked.

"I thought you was never coming back."

"I'm coming back right now." I came ap over the runningboard onto the seat be-

side him. "I want to see that place you found Miller's body."

The tire chains rattled as he got his wheels going. "You mean Welch's body, don't you?"

I SAID, "No. I've found it was a guy I named Emil Miller. He was deported to Germany before the war. I imagine they trained him in one of their spy schools, and sent him back over here. He borrowed Heath Welch's name because nobody could prove Heath was really dead, and because he knew enough about Long Island to answer a few questions about it."

"You think there really was a submarine, huh?"

"And a rubber boat. And lights flashing back and forth. I imagine there was somebody on shore here to meet Miller."

"Why so?"

"I figure the Nazis wouldn't have turned him loose with fifty or a hundred grand cash on him. Their spies always bring along a bale of money. That's the advantage of a U-boat over trying to slip somebody over the Mexican border."

"That's a lot of dough," Henry Archer said.

"Yeah. I dope it out that somebody had heard talk, three or four days ago, about mysterious lights at sea. Then the next day a couple of strangers showed up wanting to thumb or hire a ride to Wauppeogma. The somebody sort of tied up the strangers and the submarine talk. He asked who they were, and one of them said Heath Welch. The fellow I'm thinking of knew Heath Welch, so he knew better. He decided they were spies, so he murdered them for their bale of money."

Henry Archer said, "Served the rats right, if they was Nazis."

"I'm not sorry for the rats. I just say that a good citizen would have had them arrested, or notified the F.B.I. so they could be shadowed and maybe turn up a whole nest of rats. I don't think it was very patriotic to kill them and keep the cash and say nothing."

"What do you mean them? We never found but the one body."

"The guy was smart," I said. "He left

only one corpse out in the open. He wanted the krauts to think one spy had killed the other and run off with the cash."

Henry Archer said, "I don't believe any American jury would do very much to a guy for killing a couple of stinking spies."

"I don't, either. But I don't think the F.B.I. will let him put the money in the bank. He'll have to give that up—"

"Hell!" Archer said, punching his foot on the brake. "Damn!"

"What's wrong?"

"I busted a chain, didn't you hear it?"

He opened his door and swung out and walked to the back of his truck. I heard him rattling around in a tool box back there. He called, "Sharkey! Come on and hold the jack for me!"

I got out and kicked through the snow to the back of the truck and he shoved the jack at me.

"Push it down under the spring here," he pointed.

I had to kneel to do it. He picked something else out of his tool box. There was just moon enough to make the shadow of his arm going up.

I whipped the jack around, hard, and cracked him across the shins. He screamed and fell down in the snow and cried with tears running out of his eyes. There was a hole in the snow where he'd dropped something. I picked the thing out of the snow. It was about the biggest and cleanest hatchet I'd ever seen. He must have boiled the blood off in lye water.

"Where's the money?" I asked.

He was bawling too hard to hear me.

THEY found five thousand dollars of it—**T** in fifty-dollar bills—in a money belt around his waist when we got him to the hospital to have his broken shin set. He said that was all of it. We found another five thousand in a can in his garage. He said ten thousand was all of it. Creighton found twenty thousand more scattered around his house.

I said, "He must have one more hiding place. Let's go over the truck again."



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We found five thousand dollars and a target pistol tucked in the wadding of the old-fashioned truck top. It was a single-shot gun loaded to blow itself up with a .220 rifle cartridge. He admitted he'd faked a broken tire chain, gotten Miller to hold the jack, and chopped him down; then he'd pushed the gun through the side curtains and shot the other Nazi. He wouldn't admit he'd trailed me to the cottage, but it was a .220 slug we dug out of the floor beside the trapdoor. He couldn't deny he'd posed for Heath Welch sculpting, and knew what Heath looked like.

"Imagine a man with all that money trying to shake you down for an extra ten dollars," Ginny Beale said.

"He had to. It'd been suspicious if he quit trying to turn himself a dollar," I said.

About four a.m. I poured in a big drink and hit the hay. In half an hour I was awake and phoning the clerk to call me a doctor quick.

"I told you that arm would give you trouble," he worried. "You've probably got blood poison in it."

I said: "Blood poison, hell! I've got chilblains!"

ONCE IS ENOUGH

(Continued from page 25)

of disposing of Jackson's body. It's got a bullet in it and somebody has to be rigged to swing for it. So how about your little chum Styles who is halfway fixed anyway because of that hocus-pocus with your bedroom. We'll arrange it and you can pay us again. Of course, they didn't really mean it, but *she* did."

"And knocking you on the head and changing the furniture and stuff was just to scare you away?"

"Sure. They didn't want her to have outside help, except Styles and his bank balance. I don't imagine they tried to keep her locked up. Anybody as well known to the public as she was would leave a trail as wide

as a highway if she tried to get lost. But they did watch her and they did try to keep her as scared as possible so she wouldn't think too straight, because they couldn't afford to have her find out that Jackson was alive."

A siren rent the night air. Martin finished his drink and rose to answer the knock that announced the police.

The girl put her hand on his arm. She was smiling now.

"And, of course," she said, "there was another reason why you wanted to punish her. She stood you up."

Martin patted her shoulder.

"Let that be a lesson to you."

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SHADOW OF THE AX

(Continued from page 41)

The wooden handle had rotted away, and the keen woodsman's edge had long since been eaten up by rust. It came away from its clay bed reluctantly, but he felt a thrilling sense of triumph to hold it in his two hands at last. The almost incredulous admiration in Mrs. Tarkington's eyes was only an added touch, the extra bit that makes a good moment perfect.

"Found it, didn't you? I was afraid you would—but oh, how I wish you hadn't!"

It came from behind and above them, a broken whisper, a sad sound as full of ghostly regret as the pines that wept their sorrow when the wind blew over the graveyard of white stumps. Mrs. Tarkington screamed and dropped the flashlight. Brand tripped over her and felt the gun fly out of his waistband into the dirt.

He had a moment to marvel at how slow the man was with the ax. Here the man had miscalculated. He started his swing too late. He had not the strength, the murderous will, of fifteen years ago. Brand saw the glittering silver blade curve languidly into the air, swirl toward him. Like a boxer he charged under the blow, and as he came up the bank his head struck the man in the pit of the stomach.

Mrs. Tarkington screamed. But as the ax spun out of the man's nerveless hands it struck the other side of the bank. It stuck there firmly, the bright blade buried, six inches of white hickory handle showing in the moonlight, the rest softened by the darkness in the old cellar pit.

Brand hit once with his fist. The man crumpled. Mrs. Tarkington scrambled out of the pit and knelt beside him.

"Why, it's not Frank Knife at all!" she babbled. "It's—it's Harby Radcliff."

Brand nodded. He felt of Radcliff's pulse. Radcliff still lived.

"Yes. That's what fooled everybody. They were looking for people who might kill Joe Vickers, and it was Davie who carried the burden. You see, Harby had been

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meeting Marie Wagner, Ed's wife, down by the big tree yonder. Somehow he got wise to the fact that little Davie knew about it. How? Well, perhaps Davie told his teacher—"

Mrs. Tarkington interrupted shrilly: "Didn't you know? Harby Radcliff was the teacher! His real estate business was only in the summer."

Brand cursed.

"Another of the important things that did not turn up in the file because it did not fit into the pattern of Frank Knife or Dan Pratt or Ed Wagner or Toby Clelland! But maybe you'd better take the flashlight and try to rouse somebody. You won't want to see his face when fifteen years accumulation of guilt and fear break through that thin mask of respectability. Believe me—I've seen it happen."

She obeyed, weeping. But as she neared the first house she began yelling full-throated, enthusiastic alarm that had a sort

of gossipy excitement about it. Dogs barked, lights appeared in one window after another. Harby Radcliff groaned, and his eyes opened. He seemed to take in the situation at once.

"Get me out of here," he pleaded. "Please, Mr. Hitchens! Don't let them have me. They'll lynch me!"

"No," said Brand, "they'll not lynch you. They've had their fill of killings, these people, and besides—it was so long ago, so long ago!" Involuntarily his eyes sought the dark rolling hills where lay the Vickers household. Then he remembered something else:

"I suppose you killed Marie Wagner, too?"

"She knew," Radcliff whimpered. "I knew she knew about it. So I—I had to kill her."

He fell silent and cowered against Brand Hitchens' leg as the first of many running men approached.

"IT'S FOR ME"

(Continued from page 63)

out into the shimmering heat of the backyard. I was sobbing convulsively with relief and shame and pride, all mingled together so that I could not sort them out. I wanted to talk to Aunt Joan, and hear her tell me not to cry, and have her explain why Uncle Peter wanted me to lie to the nice man who had held me on his knee.

I sprawled out on the ground on my stomach in the sun, trying to understand, but everything was too mixed-up and I felt terrible, but glad that I had not forgotten what I was supposed to say. The toy spade was under me, and it jabbed my chest, so I pulled it out and began digging again with one hand.

I heard my uncle's voice from inside saying, "I was always telling her she shouldn't wear that bracelet all the time. Every tramp for miles around must have seen it on her wrist."

And then the voice of the nice man, "I

think you're right. I think when we find the bracelet, we'll have the killer. Somebody stole that bracelet from her arm and killed her in a panicky fear that she might identify him later."

A soft breeze wavered through the heavy August air, ruffling the leaves of the apple tree and the bright flowers of the garden. I thought again of jumping for apples, but this time the idea was not even tempting. I had been good today, and had obeyed my uncle so well that Aunt Joan would be pleased, and would know how my extra goodness had been meant as a sort of present for her. I could not spoil that now.

THE sunlight glittered on a little tin soldier that I sometimes played with in the yard. Lying against the dark earth, with the sun shining on it, it reminded me of something. It reminded me of my Uncle Peter, crossing this same ground last night

in the darkness, in the white path of the moon. I remembered how he had stooped over and dug a little hole, and then covered it up again before going into the house. Perhaps he, too, had been looking for buried treasure. . . ."

Suddenly my spade struck something hard as I jabbed down. With a quick thrill of excitement I plunged my hands into the earth, and felt the solid shape that rested there. It was a rock; a rock with a strange red-brown color on it. And beneath the rock, soiled and gray with lumps of the soft earth clinging to it, there was a white knotted handkerchief. I picked it up, and it clinked a little. There was something inside.

Kneeling, with the treasure clutched tight in my hands, I almost shouted aloud for Aunt Joan to come and see, and be thrilled with me in my discovery.

Then I remembered that she would not come if I called. Nothing wonderful had happened, after all. Nobody would help me pretend that this handkerchief harbored hidden gold from pirate days, or a long-lost key to an enchanted city.

Then I remembered something else. "Treat me like you do your Aunt Joan," Uncle Peter had said. It was the one thing I had forgotten before, but now it would be all right. I could hear the men saying goodbye to my uncle at the front door, so there was just time before they went away.

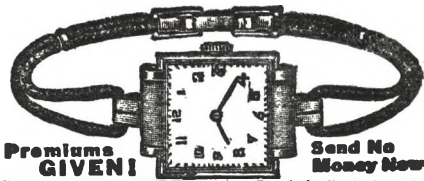
I raced around the house, panting, gripping the knotted handkerchief in both hands and shouting my uncle's name. All three of them smiled tolerantly as I ran up and thrust the small bundle at him.

"Buried treasure," I gasped. "Something inside."

Uncle Peter made a soft, wordless sound and began to stuff it into his pocket, but the tall man stopped him. "Let's see that." He took the handkerchief and unknotted it. I caught a glimpse of something gleaming red. "The bracelet. . . ."

The tall man stood still, holding my buried treasure in his hand, but I did not mind. Now I had done every single thing, just as I was told. Aunt Joan would be proud.

"It's for me," she always said.



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SLEUTHING vs. LUCK



THE science of criminology, as epitomized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D. C., reaches its long arm into many a distant spot in the interests of justice. And that same criminological science often functions to protect the innocent as well as to convict the guilty.

One of the most famous cases illustrating this point is cited by Arnold Miles in his interesting book, *How Criminals Are Caught*. The story started in far-away Alaska, where a prospector had been murdered by a shot from a rifle. Local Alaskan law-enforcement officials investigated the homicide and found a number of clues which seemed to indicate that the crime had been committed by a former convict who had been in the vicinity and who owned a rifle of the same caliber. Moreover, this ex-con was found to have bloodstains on his clothing.

He violently protested his innocence, but was held in custody. Meantime the police had also picked up a young Eskimo lad on suspicion, for the reason that he, too, had a rifle of the same caliber as that of the murder slug.

Because the best police laboratories in America are located in Washington and maintained by the F.B.I., all tangible clues on the case were speedily sent there by plane, including the two rifles and the blood-stained clothing taken from the suspected ex-convict. The Federal technicians went to work at once, first applying blood-serum tests to the stained garments. It was immediately found that the samples were animal blood, not human. Then a ballistics examination proved that the lethal bullet had been fired by the young Eskimo's rifle—not by that owned by the former convict.

When these findings were flashed to

Alaska, the Eskimo was confronted with them and soon confessed his guilt. Thus the ex-jailbird was freed of a charge which, in the old days, might well have resulted in his conviction and execution.

At the other end of the sleuthing scale comes plain old-fashioned luck, which coupled with dogged routine persistence, sometimes brings spectacular results. "Be suspicious without being discourteous," is a cop maxim that often works wonders in the apprehension of criminals. Take the case cited by Mr. Miles, for example, in which he tells of a certain detective-lieutenant in a middle western city—a homicide dick working on a murder mystery. The lieutenant had gone for weeks without appreciable success, when, one day while walking along a side street, he noticed a taxi pull in to the curb. Its driver leaped out and ran into a nearby house, leaving the cab's motor running. Since there had been an epidemic of car thefts in the city during recent months, and since any machine left with an idling engine is a direct invitation to an automobile thief, the detective-lieutenant waited on the sidewalk for the driver to come out of the house so that he could warn him not to be so careless.

Soon the hacker appeared, and the detective, as a matter of ordinary routine, asked to see his credentials and driver's license. The cabby became evasive and had no credentials to display; whereupon the cop began to suspect that the cab was already stolen and that this supposed hacker was the thief.

A trip to headquarters, with the suspect in tow, soon proved the lieutenant to be correct in his surmise. It was a "hot" cab, and the driver had actually stolen it. But—and here's where luck entered the story—the thief turned out also to be the very murderer for whom the dick had been searching!



RED POINTS TO MURDER

(Continued from page 47)

Stepping was telling the women the Government was going to freeze tapestry. He worked on a commission, I thought.

Forty-three-eighty-four Barrow Street was a bus ride and a streetcar transfer and three blocks walk. It was a back-door key into a kitchen, and she used the kitchen to cook in. She used the other room to live and sleep in; the bed was an inador swung up into a two-by-five clothes closet. It left room for her wardrobe. She wasn't putting out money for a telephone. She wasn't spending it on liquor. Her writing desk held a flock of V-mail letters from a brother in Iceland. There was an unfinished letter to her brother. There was a savings bank pass-book—\$456.16; \$1.16 was interest, the rest was five bucks a week. She had a record of fourteen War Bonds, the \$18.75 size, but the bonds weren't in the desk.

She was clean, or she was careful.

I left the back-door key in the back door and went out the front way.

LeRoy Stepping was in the phone book, 1912 Aldebaran Avenue. A woman's voice said hello. I said sorry, wrong number, and hung up.

So I went back to my own office. It was about a quarter past five when the phone rang. Goodluck's voice sounded guttural on the wire.

"I've talked with Miss Chase," he said.

I said, "What the hell?"

He said, "I won't need you any more."

"Wait a minute," I said.

"You agreed I could call you off any time," he said. He hung up.

I dialed Cresent 3030. "What time do you close out there?"

"Five," he said. "We're closed now."

"You stay right where you are," I said. I hung up.

I took a cab.

The door was locked, I rattled it and Walter S. Goodluck walked out of his office and the length of the salesroom floor. "You're making a nuisance of yourself, Berry," he said.

"What'd she say?"

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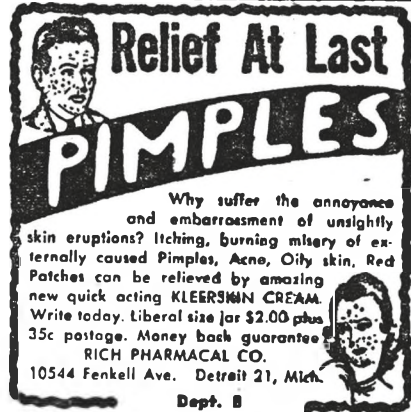
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"The girl's as honest as the day is long. It was one of those things. A mistake."

"She told you?"

"I'm satisfied."

I said, "I want to hear her tell me."

"She's gone home."

"Her coat's still hanging here."

I WENT in past his vestfront, to the door. Miss Chase wasn't in his office. I came out and looked into the cage and her handbag was there.

I went past the office again, into the workshop. They used it for upholstering jobs. The cloth-wrapped coil-spring intestines bellied out of a love seat.

"What's that door?" I said,

"Washroom," he said.

Then he said, "Mr. Berry!"

I opened the washroom door. It was dark in there. Miss Chase was a dark shape on the floor with something shiny standing up out of the left half of her brassiere. I pawed and grabbed a light chain. The shiny thing was an upholsterer's needle, sixteen inches of it, I could see. I've bled more cutting myself shaving.

Goodluck said, "She must have braced it against the wall there and fallen against it."

There was a scratch on the wall, all right.

"Call the cops," I said.

Goodluck went into his office. I went into the cashier cage. The coin purse held a twenty, two fives, a one, and some silver—I didn't touch it, but I thought I could guess the serial number on the twenty.

I kept my mouth shut until the cops came.

Goodluck talked enough. He said Miss Chase must have been stealing, after all, that she'd realized her jig was up, and that she'd taken the easy way out.

He said it all over again for Ed O'Fane, the Lincoln Boulevard precinct lieutenant. He said after Stepping left at five, on impulse he'd asked Miss Chase to step into the office and he'd asked her pointblank about the check. She said she remembered it, and took him to the cage and showed him the \$912.33 was entered in the cashbook, there'd merely been the unfortunate little oversight of not crediting Mrs. Beale's account. Then he'd walked into the office, and Miss Chase must have run into the washroom and taken the easy way out.

O'Fane was bright enough, and he knew the easy way out was to give back the money, or part of it.

Goodluck said there was something else, there was my idea of checking the money. He said bring in the handbag, and a cop brought it in, and Goodluck examined the money. "There, that's one of the bills. She

**STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC.,
REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,
AND MARCH 3, 1933,**

of **PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES**, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1945.
State of New York, } ss.
County of New York, }

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

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Trojan Publishing Corporation, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, Kenneth Hutchinson, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Managing Editor, Wilton Matthews, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Business Manager, Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: Trojan Publishing Corporation, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Michael Estrow, 114 East 47th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Q. Donenfeld, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; J. E. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.; Anna Estrow, 114 East 47th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Janet DePinna Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Alice U. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.; Linda B. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

FRANK ARMER,
Publisher.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 5th day of September, 1945.
[SEAL]

ALFRED B. YAFFE,
Notary Public.

Kings Co. Clks. No. 3, Reg. No. 14-Y-6; N. Y. Co. Clks. No. 4, Reg. No. 13-Y-6. Commission expires March 30, 1946.

was leaving with it, you see, when I spoke to her tonight."

I said, "I'd run him downtown, O'Fane."

Goodluck looked at me as if downtown wasn't in his language.

I said, "He's a saving guy, Ed. He's been bashing his own cash and stashing the cash. His creditors won't get a dime on the dollar, it's all clear, and he won't even have to pay income tax on it, he figures. He figures close to his vest, this guy."

Goodluck put on his stupid kraut look and O'Fane looked like a puzzled Irishman. "That takes some proving," O'Fane said.

"I'll prove he's saving. He turned me loose on the Beale check on a percentage—he knew it couldn't be collected, and it made him look good without costing a cent. He didn't look so good when he had to put up fifty dollars cash. Is that a guy who wouldn't miss \$912.33 of his own money?"

"You can't keep it downtown long on that much," O'Fane said.

"He wasn't worried enough about nine hundred bucks, and he was too worried about fifty. I didn't think he really believed she had his dough, and I slipped a dose of naphthionate sodium in her purse here."

Naphthionate of sodium wasn't in Goodluck's language, either.

"Put his hands under ultra-violet rays," I said, "and it'll show who planted the twenty in the handbag."

He knew about ultra-violet. He probably even knew it wouldn't show on Miss Chase's hands.

He said, "That's ridiculous. Why," he said to O'Fane, "you sat right here and saw me handle that money."

O'Fane looked like he would take me downtown because I'd sat here and watched Goodluck handle the money.

"You didn't put it there?" I said.

"I certainly did not."

"You weren't in her purse at all after you killed her?"

"No," he said, pushing out his vestfront, "and I didn't kill her."

I knew better. I knew what was in her purse before and what was left there now.

"He's a liar, O'Fane. He's got something else in his pocket that's marked with the naphthionate, too. He's a saving guy. He saved himself her red ration points."

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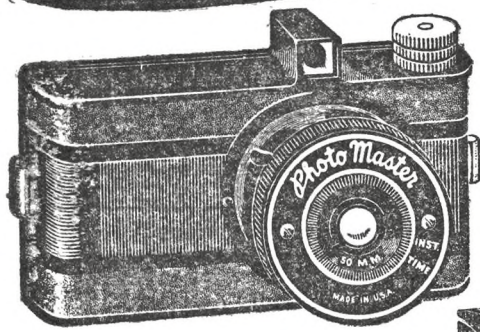
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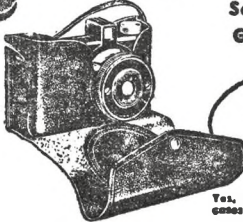
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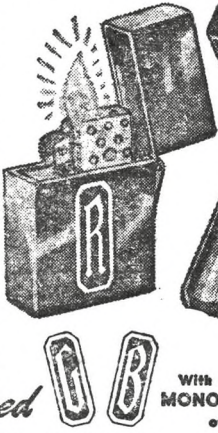
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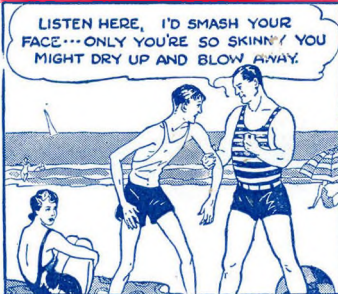
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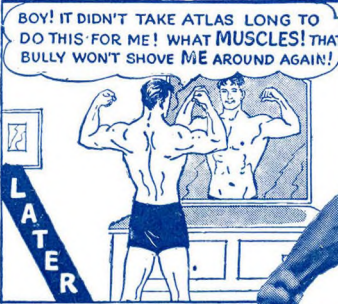


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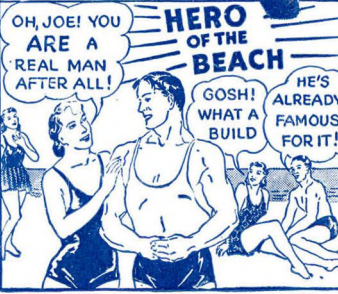


BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT MUSCLES! THAT BULLY WON'T SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!

LATER



WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!



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