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ARGENTINA SLAY RIDE

by

George A. McDonald



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July, 1944

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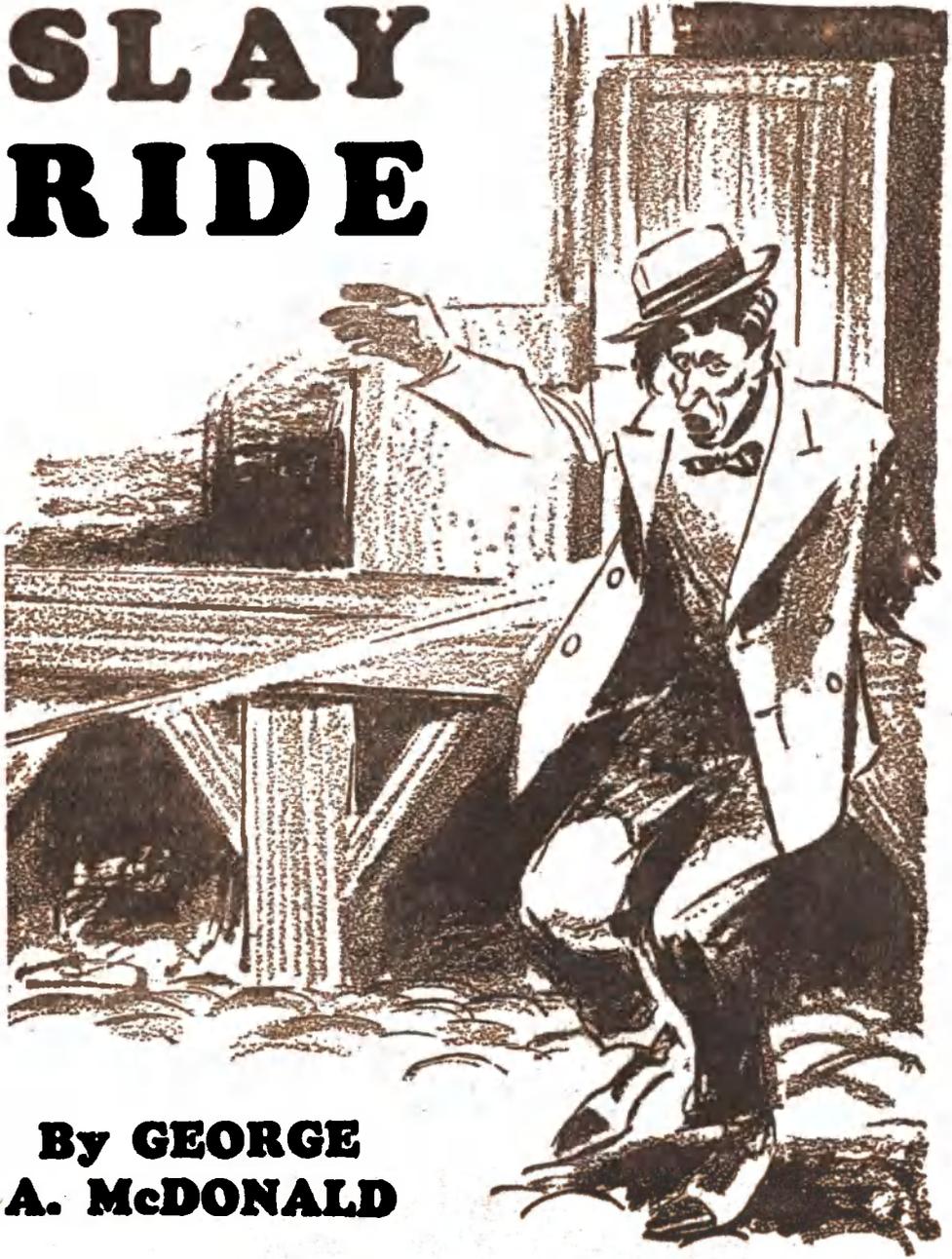
ARGENTINA

Working under cover, as his job required, Cupid Cain seemed to be always in the middle when an important murder turned up in Washington, with nothing between himself and death, but the speed and accuracy of his Magnum .357



I felt the whish of the knife blade as I ducked and snapped a shot.

SLAY RIDE



By **GEORGE
A. McDONALD**



YACHING dogs were barking in cadence with the WAVE's band that was leading the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. I can take parades or let them alone. I would have let this one strictly alone ex-

cept for the orders of the little gray man in the shabby office up on Capitol Hill.

This was a special parade. It launched the 5th Victory Loan and it also launched Major Ramon Alvarez, the flying ace from South America, on a good-will tour to cement the friendly relations between

the United States and the new anti-Axis government of Argentina. Alvarez was an international hero. It was my job to see that nothing happened to him during his brief stay in Washington.

The capitol city was full of Axis undercover agents. Just about the time the Secret Service and Intelligence Departments thought they had them all tabbed, a new crop sprang up. Very often these lethal lads were all bound round with diplomatic red tape. Their cases were usually assigned to Mr. X, the unknown trouble-shooter for the head men in the administration.

I had been brought to Washington to help shoot trouble. My reputation as a hard-boiled private detective in New York had been my chief recommendation, I guess. My friends called me Cupid Cain on account of the two hundred pounds of muscle and flesh hung on a six-foot frame. Others called me Killer Cain on account of the speed and accuracy with which I handled the Magnum .357 that hung in the shoulder clip under my tropical worsted suit.

My eyes flicked over the open touring car I was pacing from the sidewalk. I wondered why the little gray man had wanted me to cover the Argentine ace. I had learned considerable Spanish during a couple years I had operated an agency for the Ajax Investigators, down in Rio de Janeiro. Maybe that was why I had been eased into the South American situation. Right now, there were secret service men trotting beside the car in which Major Alvarez and two American aces rode. My orders were to watch the crowds along the sidewalk. Lots of Latins here still thought Adolph couldn't be licked. They might be tempted to break up the good-will tour of the eagle of the pampas before he got started.

The slim, bearded flyer was a natural for the good-neighbor stunt. He had quit Harvard to join Chennault's Flying Tigers and had become one of the leading

aces in that suicide outfit. He stayed with the Tigers when they were mustered into the service of the United States.

When Argentina decided to toss out the Nazis, the State Department publicity boys had a brain wave. Major Alvarez was furloughed home to serve as an ambassador without portfolio between the two nations. He damned near didn't make it.

The transport flying him back was lost at sea. Alvarez and five of the crew managed to launch a life raft. Eight days later, the raft was picked up by a returning freighter. Major Alvarez was the only survivor. He was almost a skeleton, half-crazed and unconscious, but still alive. He had spent weeks in hospitals, before he got to Washington, and he still showed signs of the terrific ordeal. No wonder he rated along with Eddie Rickenbacker as the man who would not die.

Alvarez was a hero to both continents of the Western Hemisphere. Tomorrow he was going to marry Dolores Molinar, daughter of Juan Molinar, the Argentine diplomat, chiefly responsible for the coup in chasing the Nazi spies out of Buenos Aires. The flying ace had not seen his fiancee since he left Harvard. Dolores was attending Radcliffe then. After the wedding, the newlyweds were to fly to Buenos Aires to launch the good-will tour there.

MY CHAIN of thought was suddenly interrupted. In my racket certain infinitesimal things create lasting impressions. I knew the brief glint that hit my retina was the refraction of sunlight on dull metal. Then I saw a skinny man in white lifting an automatic with a sure, practiced gesture. I grabbed for my Magnum, but the skinny gungsel slid around a huge pillar of the building portico where he stood above the crowd. I lost sight of him for a couple of seconds. Then I heard the double roar of his automatic.

My eyes jumped back to the touring car. Major Alvarez half-ducked and half-rolled from the rolled back top. He was hunched down in the seat. The American flyers bent over him. Then the slim, bearded flyer straightened. He climbed back up, spread his hands in a Latin gesture to show he was unharmed. One dark, thin hand sliced past his ear, as if to chart the path of the bullets. He flashed a row of white teeth between his mustache and beard; signaled for the chauffeur to start the car. Secret Service men jumped on the running board, formed a human barricade as the parade slowly continued.

I pushed my two hundred pounds through the crowd that now milled excitedly along the sidewalk. Common sense told me it was useless. The skinny assassin had ducked into the crowd, probably so smoothly no one had even noticed which way he went. I carried a mental picture of him. Swarthy-skinned, heavy-black brows, and a hump on his nose that looked like a poor job of bone-setting. I climbed the steps, but there were fifty slender men in white suits in the milling crowd below.

My brain was busy as I elbowed a path to a side street where I could telephone Mr. X. I know an expert gunsel when I see one and that hump-nosed Spiggoty had handled that roscoe like an expert. I couldn't figure out why Ramon Alvarez was still alive and uninjured.

The little gray man listened in silence when I told him of the attempt to gun out Major Alvarez. There was no surprise in his voice when he said: "I was afraid that might happen."

I wasn't in the mood for reminiscing. My feet burned and I had let the Spanish gunsel get away. I asked my boss sourly what I was supposed to do about it.

"Go over to the Wardmore Hotel. Juan Molinar may be there. If he isn't, ask to see his daughter. Dolores Molinar may have some idea about who would want to murder Alvarez."

"Listen, chum," I protested. "I'm no Gable or Sinatra. I learned down in Rio that these Castilian dames don't mingle with gringo strangers. The Wardmore isn't a fleatrap where I can crush in and demand to see a guest. I'd get tossed right out on my sternum."

"Use Pete Kyle's name," Mr. X said. "I'll fix it up at this end. Even the women in the ambassadors' families know Kyle's importance."

I whistled softly as I cradled the receiver. Now I knew we were playing in the big league. Pete Kyle was the liaison man between the State Department and the investigation branches. Alvarez was plenty brass hat or Mr. X wouldn't have broken his rule that our department worked absolutely incognito.

The Wardmore was a swanky residential hotel, occupied mostly by families in the diplomatic services. It housed representatives of most of the nations on the earth. The desk clerk stared down his nose when I asked to see Juan Molinar or his daughter.

"Whom shall I say is calling?" he chilled.

"A representative of Mr. Kyle of the State Department," I dished it back with plenty of frost. It worked, for he got busy on the house phone. A few seconds later he returned. He was almost cordial as he told me that *Senor* Molinar was at the embassy. Miss Dolores Molinar was just going out. She would see me in the East Lounge in a minute or two.

I HAD just parked my sylph-like figure in a big chair when I saw a tall, dark-haired girl get out of the elevator. She stopped at the desk, then her dark eyes followed the clerk's nod in my direction. I registered my appreciation of Ramon Alvarez' good taste as she came across the lobby. She was dressed in one of those simple, but expensive white outfits that spell money and enhance the charms of figures like hers.

Her black hair was combed back loosely from her lovely, dark-ivory face and caught in a bun at the nape of her neck. She had the sort of complexion that doesn't need cosmetics. Her eyes were dark brown and they examined me frankly from beneath straight, black brows as she walked toward me. The Argentine beauty was more on the serious side than I had expected. She asked impersonally:

"You wished to see me, sir?"

American schooling had left only the faintest trace of an accent. She shook her head slightly as I moved a chair toward her. Her eyes repeated the question. Finesse is not one of my strongest points. To me a straight line is still the shortest distance between two points.

"An attempt was made to assassinate your fiance, Major Alvarez, a little while ago," I said bluntly. "Fortunately, he escaped unharmed and continued with the parade. Do you know anyone who would dare attempt such an assassination before thousands of witnesses in broad daylight?"

Color drained from her face. She grabbed the back of the chair I had moved toward her. I thought it was the shock of the news. Then I saw it was more than that. Acute pain was making an agonized mask of her lovely face. She fought to speak. Then she moaned, bent double with both arms wrapped around the red belt of her tailored suit. I jumped for her, but I was too late. She collapsed and lay writhing in horrible agony on the floor. Perspiration beaded her forehead and the pupils of her eyes were dilating fantastically. Her red lips were flecked with froth.

I hunkered down beside her, though I knew I could do nothing. She choked and as I bent closer, I heard her whisper: "*la botella.*" Then the sound was too faint to distinguish words. I thought she said: "*el peligro!*" Roughly translated, it seemed as if the dying girl tried to tell

me something about a dangerous bottle.

A bellhop started across the lobby. He came running when I called. I clipped: "Get a doctor. Miss Molinar is seriously ill. Send in the manager."

He was a bright kid. He flicked a glance at the girl, then raced for the desk. I knew the doctor would arrive too late. Dolores Molinar was dead! If I knew anything about toxicology, she had been poisoned!

Cold shivers started chasing up and down my spine. Dolores Molinar had looked the picture of health when she got off the elevator and spoke to the desk clerk. She had walked lithely and gracefully into the East Lounge to speak to me. She hadn't taken any poison while I was with her. Suicide was ruled out immediately. That would leave only one conclusion for the capital police when they were called in. Another foreign citizen had died. Killer Cain was right on the spot when it happened. QED: *Cain murdered Dolores Molinar!*

CAPTAIN MAGUIRE and his capital storm troopers didn't know of my hook-up with Mr. X. They rated me as a high-class torpedo with a private peep's license who peddled his roscoe to the highest bidder. Every now and then some ginzo or other would turn up dead in an alley or in some cheap stash. Lacking any other suspect, Maguire's minions usually tried to hang the job on me.

Very often they were correct, though unsuccessful. What they didn't know was the fact that the ginzos had delusions of knocking off some important allied official, or some equally unfriendly act. To try to bring them to justice would mean international complications and reverberations. That was where I fitted into the scheme of things. My plan of diplomacy was to corner the rats and let them make the first break toward homicide, with me as the object. To date my method had been a hundred per cent perfect. I'd



Suddenly she had collapsed and lay writhing in horrible agony on the floor

collected a scar or two—but the Atlantic Charter was still in force. And Maguire was still trying to get a rope around my neck as if the murder of Dolores Molinar might give him just the excuse he wanted.

CHAPTER II

“It’s Your Funeral!”



HE manager was a fussy, fat little man in a morning coat and striped pants. He was accompanied by a tall, broad-shouldered, sandy-haired man who carried a small black bag. I

took sandy-locks to be the resident physician at the Wardmore.

The doctor took a quick look at the crumpled figure on the floor. Then his bleak, eyes measured me from my Size 11 brogues to my sunset hair. For a moment, I thought he recognized me. Then his face went blank again. He said:

“I’m Dr. Brune. What happened to Miss Molinar?”

“That’s your job, doctor,” I told him. “She collapsed while she was talking to me. From the way she was doubled up in pain, I’d suspect poisoning. But I’m no toxicologist.”

Dr. Brune dropped to one knee. He

flicked open her eyelids; then he gently forced open her jaw. His sandy head nodded slightly. He got up, dished me a flat stare.

"It was poison," he declared. "Who are you? How was Miss Molinar poisoned?" His words were clipped by a strong British accent.

I flipped open my billfold, showed him my private detective's license. I had more confidential credentials, but I didn't want to show them unless I had to.

"I don't know how Miss Molinar was poisoned," I said flatly. "She came out of the elevator, walked across the lobby, talked with me for a minute or more, then she collapsed. She took no poison in that period of time. Nor did she show any sign of having taken it previously. I don't think it was suicide. I think she was given some sort of a delayed-action poison that didn't take effect until she got down here."

The manager started firing questions at the doctor in Spanish. He was worried about the international angle and the scandal that might be attached to the hotel. I kept my face blank as though I didn't know what he was jabbering about.

"The police must be called, *Senor* Muralla," the doctor clipped. "The State Department will see that proper steps are taken to prevent notoriety." He turned to me, still talking Spanish, and asked: "Isn't that right, Detective Cain?"

"I don't speak Spanish," I told him. "I suppose it was Spanish you were talking. You handle it pretty fluently."

"I was a ship's doctor for several years," he explained. "Visiting so many foreign ports, I picked up several languages. The manager has gone to call the police. Before they arrive, do you care to say whether you visited Miss Molinar in a private or an official capacity. I'm not just curious. I have been their physician since the family came to Washington."

"It was government business," I said. I was groping in my mind for an excuse to powder before the capital police arrived. Maguire would certainly try to hang the murder on me. I couldn't appeal to Mr. X for help. That was one of the rules of our department. An agent who got in a jam with public authorities was on his own. Our usefulness was ended when we no longer could serve as anonymous agents.

"I'll notify the family," I told Brune suddenly. "There's a lot about this poisoning that doesn't hit the eye. I've never run across symptoms like these. There was no cyanosis to speak of; she suffered convulsions and frothed at the mouth, but there seemed to be no constriction of the throat. Yet it acted terrifically fast when it hit. Got any idea what it might have been, Doctor?"

"I'd have to make an autopsy to be sure," Dr. Brune said. He shoved back a lock of his sandy hair, rubbed his jaw. Then he said: "It could be curare or one of the other South American poisons. I'll stay here to talk with the medical examiner and the police officers."

I nodded and went across the lobby to the elevators. The hotel manager had finished calling the police. He mopped his brow and tried to explain to the few guests who crowded the entrance to the East Lounge that the police would not want anyone to go inside the room. The elevator boy told me the Molinars occupied Suite 426.

A slim girl with a shoulder-length bob of raven black hair answered my ring. Felice Molinar's picture appeared frequently in the Washington society news. She had all of the dusky beauty of her sister Dolores, plus a vivacity and sparkle that hadn't appeared in her older sister's calm, serious face. Her big, black eyes searched my face.

"I'm Detective Cain," I blurted out. I hated like hell to hand this lovely kid a solar plexus wallop. "Your sister came

downstairs to meet me." She nodded her dark head, waited expectantly. "There's been—she met with an accident!" I stammered.

"An accident?" Her eyes probed at my face. I guess she read the bad news in my moon face. I shifted my grip on my hat, plowed fingers through my red hair trying to find words to lighten the blow.

A SMALL, delicately featured woman with silver hair came into the foyer from the living room. She asked a question and Felice told her mother in Spanish that I was the government agent Dolores had gone down to see. Something had happened to Dolores, the girl said. For a split second, the white-haired mother shivered, then her shoulders and chin stiffened. She told her daughter to invite me into the apartment.

Inside the graciously furnished living room, *Senora* Molinar's dark eyes fixed on my perspiring face. She asked quietly:

"How serious was the accident? Tell us the truth, please."

I heard my choked voice telling them that Dr. Brune and I both believed Dolores had been poisoned. *Senora* Molinar started for the door. Her voice was strained and husky, but it didn't quaver as she said: "Come, Felice. We must go to your sister."

I acted as if I was interpreting the gesture rather than the speech. I said: "Perhaps it would be better for you to stay here. The police must be down there by now. They have routine things to do that are not pleasant to watch. A little later, you can see her privately. In the meantime, perhaps you can help me find the beast who murdered her. I'm sure it was not suicide."

Felice Molinar was dabbing at the tears that flooded her big black eyes. She pushed the handkerchief against her lips as if to choke back the sobs that were wracking her slim little figure. When I

mentioned suicide, she stiffened and her eyes blazed through a mist of tears.

"Certainly not," she declared. "Dolores was heart-broken when it was reported Major Alvarez had been lost at sea. But he returned safely and they were to be married in two days. My sister was much in love with Ramon Alvarez and was very happy. When she went down to see you, she was going to do some final shopping for her trousseau after she left you. Suicide was the farthest thing from her mind."

Senora Molinar sat stiffly in a deep-cushioned chair, staring blankly at nothing. Tears coursed unheeded down her cheeks. She said in a broken voice: "We should notify your father, Felice. He should be here."

The girl went to the telephone, made a brief call in Spanish. A minute later she was back. She told her mother the police, through the State Department had notified the embassy. Juan Molinar was on his way to the hotel. Felice turned her tortured black eyes back to me. I felt like something that had crawled out from beneath a rock as I questioned her. I asked exactly what her sister had done that morning.

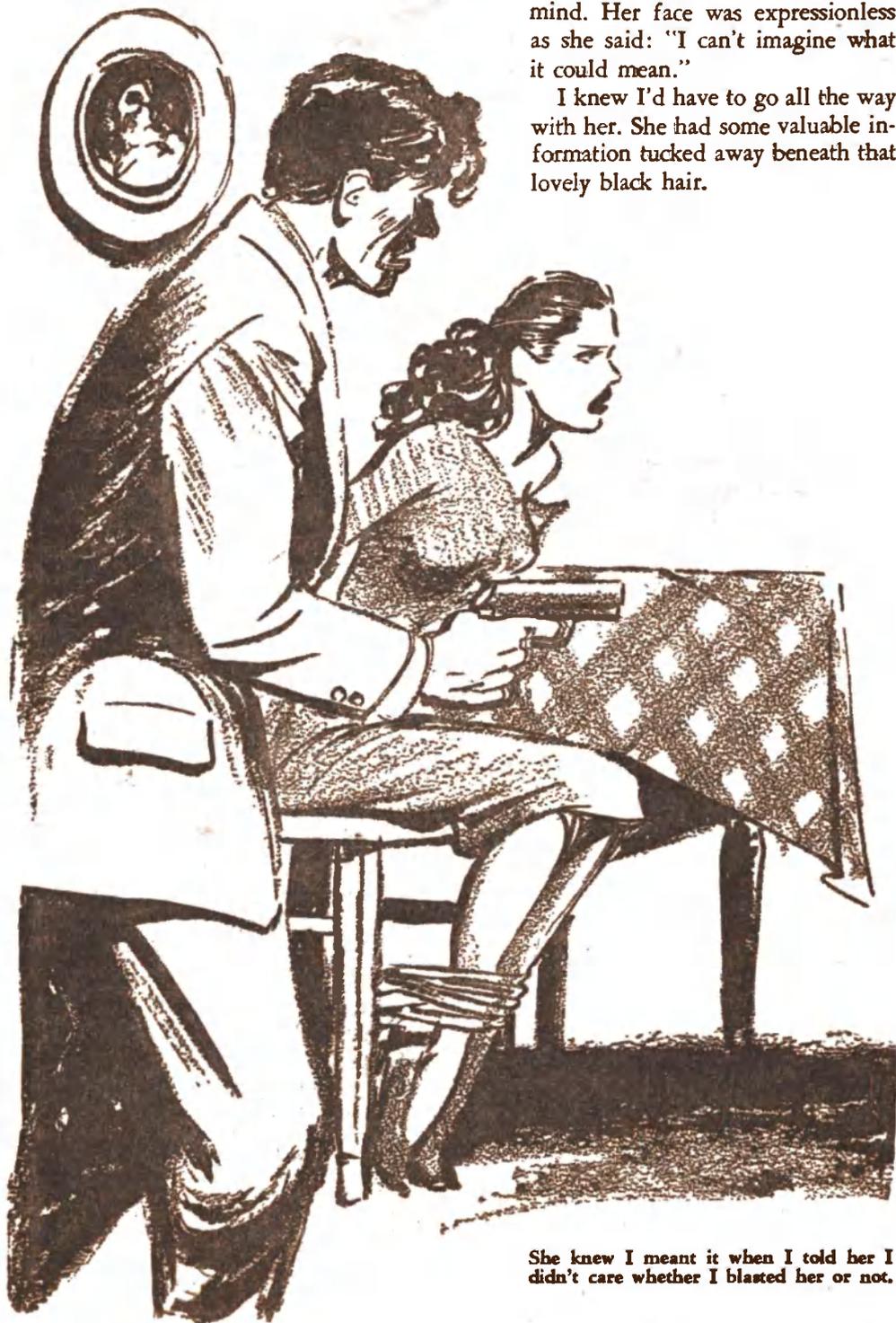
Dolores' schedule had been one of orderly routine. Breakfast and a bath, some packing for her honeymoon trip to Buenos Aires, a visit from the manicurist, then dressing for her shopping trip. That brought it up to my telephone call. But there was something missing. There had to be. No opportunity for suicide or poisoning seemed to fit into that schedule. I decided to lay the cards on the table.

"Just before your sister died, she whispered something in Spanish. I didn't understand it—but it sounded like '*la botella*' and '*el peligro*'. Would that mean anything to you?"

"A bottle—a dangerous bottle—" Felice Molinar's black brows met in a heavy frown. Suddenly her lips tightened and

her eyes narrowed to slits. She started to speak, then changed her mind. Her face was expressionless as she said: "I can't imagine what it could mean."

I knew I'd have to go all the way with her. She had some valuable information tucked away beneath that lovely black hair.



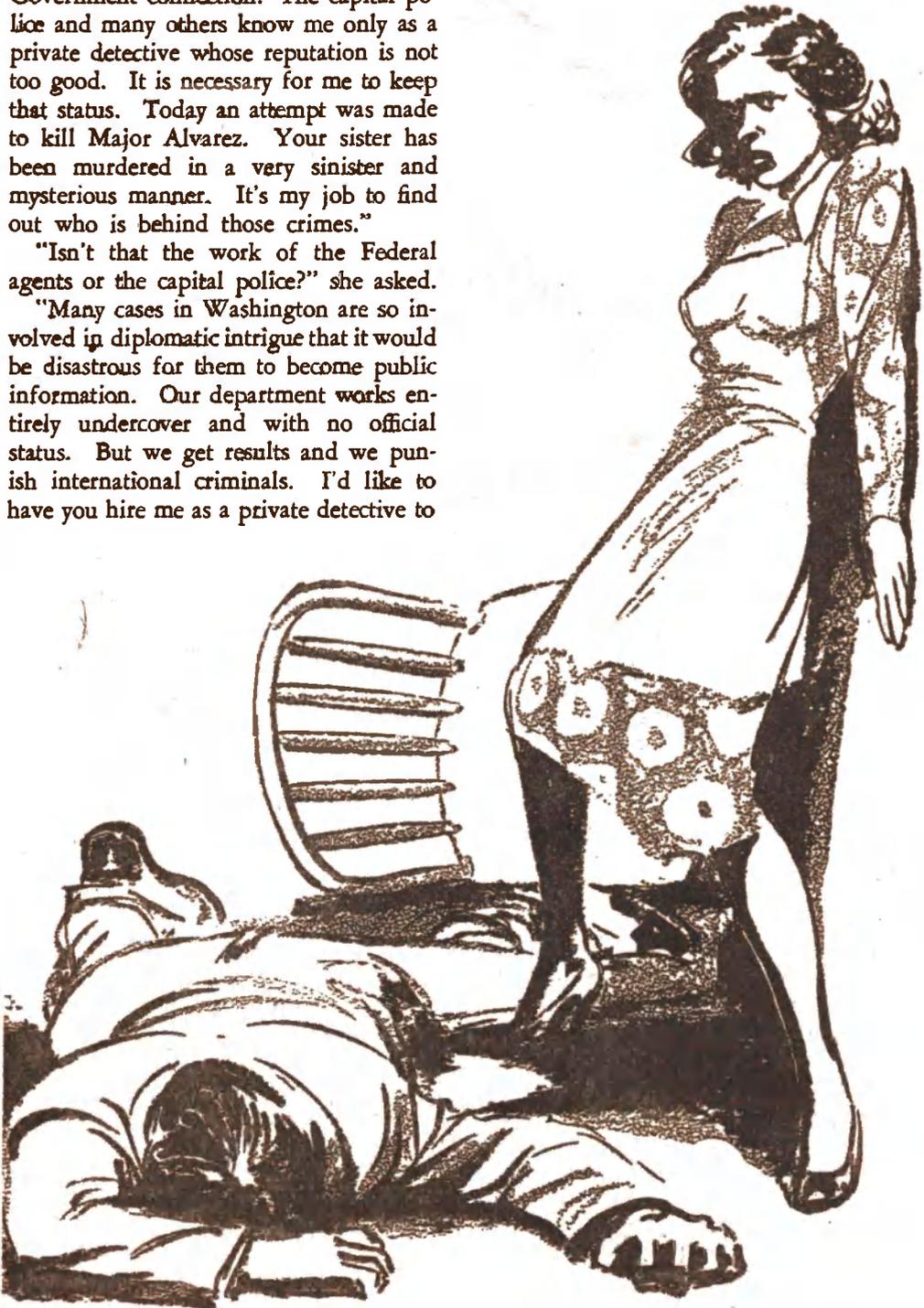
She knew I meant it when I told her I didn't care whether I blasted her or not.

"Miss Molinar," I said flatly, "I am a special agent for the Government. Only a few people in Washington know my Government connection. The capital police and many others know me only as a private detective whose reputation is not too good. It is necessary for me to keep that status. Today an attempt was made to kill Major Alvarez. Your sister has been murdered in a very sinister and mysterious manner. It's my job to find out who is behind those crimes."

"Isn't that the work of the Federal agents or the capital police?" she asked.

"Many cases in Washington are so involved in diplomatic intrigue that it would be disastrous for them to become public information. Our department works entirely undercover and with no official status. But we get results and we punish international criminals. I'd like to have you hire me as a private detective to

investigate your sister's murder. There will be no fee, but I'll have the opportunity to be in on the ground floor and



nose around asking questions without too much suspicion and jealousy on the part of the capital police. Provided they don't try to pop me in the calaboose immediately, for murdering your sister," I added grimly.

SHE was silent for long seconds that seemed like hours. I could see she was studying the question from all sides. She knew nothing about me, had only my word that I was a Government agent. My only recommendation had been that I had used Pete Kyle's name and Pete was connected with the State Department. Then she made her decision. She walked over to the table, picked up her pocketbook, took out a dollar bill. She came back, handed it to me and said: "You are hired, Mr. Cain. What can I do to help?"

"Your sister was poisoned before she left this apartment," I declared. "She wasn't poisoned in the elevator and she didn't take poison in the lobby or in the lounge, when I was talking with her. The poison was one that was delayed in its effect. I think she tried to tell me what it was when she used her last words to mention what you said meant a dangerous bottle. Doesn't that call anything to your memory?"

Felice Molinar's face got pale and there were little flecks of red in her black eyes. She whispered shakily:

"Just before she started downstairs, our new maid, Maria Serrano, came to give Dolores her nerve capsules. Dr. Brune had prescribed them when Dolores was shocked by the news that Ramon Alvarez was lost at sea. But since he was rescued, she felt she hadn't needed them. When the maid brought the capsules and water to her, she took them rather than to hurt the girl's feelings by refusing. Then she went out to get the elevator."

My spine tingled. It was almost too good to be true. I asked her to find the maid. She hurried through the apart-

ment, calling her name. She came back to the living room, with a puzzled expression on her lovely face.

"I can't understand it," she said. "She's gone! In the middle of the day, like this, she has put on her hat and coat and walked out."

I uttered a silent curse. Of course she would be gone. Her dirty work was done and she had taken to cover like a plague-infested rat. I asked Felice some questions about the maid. I learned she had been employed about three weeks before through an employment agency. Her credentials were so good that the family hadn't even bothered to check them. Felice said the girl was from Argentina, and was about twenty-five years old. She was short, swarthy, had a slight cast in her left eye. That was a break. Either the F.B.I. or the capital cops should be able to pick up a short, dumpy Argentine wench with a cocked eye.

Felice showed me the bedroom and bath she shared with her sister. She pointed out the bottle of nerve capsules in the medicine cabinet. I wanted to take them, but I knew the capital police would want to go over that bottle for prints and have their laboratory analyze the remaining capsules when they heard Felice's story. She said they had called in Dr. Brune on the few occasions they needed a doctor because he was right there in the hotel.

When I asked her who would want to murder her sister, she shook her dark head and her eyes filled with tears again.

"I could understand them trying to kill my father," she said. "The nationalists and Fascists in Argentina hate him because he has worked to join our nation with the other South American republics in fighting the Nazis. Dolores knew nothing about politics. She was thinking only of her future happiness. She knew that the airplane trip to Buenos Aires had been arranged so that Major Alvarez could bring about some sort of diplomatic

coup. Neither Dolores nor I had any idea what special mission Alvarez was to perform other than a good will tour."

Heavy knuckles pounding on the door interrupted my questions. That would be the capital police. I didn't want to see Captain Maguire right then. The lantern-jawed chief of the capital cops would have lots of ideas about Dolores Molinar's death. Most of them would center around hanging me for the crime.

I explained this briefly to Felice. Maguire's boys would love to drag me to an outlying precinct station for "questioning." From the tone of my voice she got the picture of the rubber hose and blackjacks that would punctuate those questions. She said: "The kitchen door leads to the corridor on the other side of an el in the building. It can't be seen from the front door of the apartment and the rear stairs are just down the back hall."

Her dark eyes were clouded with doubt again as she led me back to the kitchen. I wondered if she was sorry she had accepted me as a government agent on my own declaration. At the door, she said suddenly:

"Go ask Major Alvarez if he knows why Dolores was murdered!"

Then she shut the door quickly. I heard her hurrying to open the front door for the police.

I WALKED down two flights, then circled the corridor to the elevators, and rode the elevator to the lobby. I skirted the crowd in the main lounge, flashed a quick gander at the Capitol cops doing their routine stuff in the east lounge.

I recognized the short, stocky figure of Juan Molinar from pictures I had seen. He was talking with Dr. Brune and Dr. Sam Magregor, the district medical examiner. The internes were waiting with the long wicker basket, while the medicos argued with the dead girl's father.

I saw his shoulders droop; he made a distasteful gesture of resignation. I guessed the officials had asked, and finally obtained permission to do an autopsy.

When I called Mr. X from a phone in the next block, his voice came the nearest to registering defeat I had ever heard from the little gray man. He said: "The dirty ———. I should have expected it. You'd better sign off the case, Cupid. Maguire will try to hang the murder on you. Hole up somewhere for a couple of days until we can get a line on the killer."

"Like hell!" I grated. I put that girl on the spot. She was murdered because she was coming down to talk with me. Her sister has hired me, as a private investigator, to find the killer. I'm going to do that little thing."

"Then it's your funeral," the little gray man clipped. His voice had a faint note of appreciation. "You understand that you're operating entirely on your own. If you get your neck in a sling, we don't know you."

"That's okay with me, chum," I agreed. "But you might have the F.B.I. boys throw out a dragnet for that cock-eyed maid. Also for the hump-nosed gungel who didn't bump Alvarez off this morning. I've got a hunch these two jobs are closely tied up."

Alvarez had been put up at the Columbian, one of Washington's better cliff-dwellings. The flying ace had been scheduled to speak at a lunch at the Bankers' Club on the bond drive. If he hadn't been informed of the death of his fiancée, he would probably come back to his hotel to rest after the luncheon.

I had time to grab a sandwich and cup of coffee and to get to the Columbian before the bankers' luncheon broke up. In the Capitol district or in downtown Washington, it was a two-hour job to get served a meal. But I knew some of the less popular spots where it would take something less than a day to eat. When

I finished, I still had time to walk to Alvarez' hotel.

I knew I was being tailed before I had gone a half-dozen blocks. I made a few turns, used the plate-glass windows of a couple of stores for mirrors, and a skinny, rat-faced little Latin always showed in the view. That didn't make me mad. It might be helpful. I led my shadow across town to the more deserted streets near the Basin. Finally I got in a district that was mostly warehouses and loft buildings. I picked up speed and went around a couple corners fast. For a big man, I can move promptly when it's necessary. Otherwise, I wouldn't have lived as long as I have.

I ducked into a dark alley, flattened against a wall. My ear was cocked for the scuff of his feet. I meant to step out, collar him, and find out who had put him on my trail.

It didn't work out that way. I stepped out and the skinny guy stopped so short he skidded on his heels. But his hand whipped to the back of his collar. Remember I had spent a couple years among the Spigoties down in Rio de Janeiro. I learned about knifemen and their technique. This lad was a smoothie; I knew that in a flash.

I jerked my body to the left flashing for my Magnum as I ducked down on one knee. I fired across my chest, even as I saw steel glinting in the air. It was that fast. I felt the *whish* of the knife blade as it sliced the air near my ear. Then I heard the *plunk* as it bit into wood beyond me. The roar of my Magnum choked off any other noise.

The skinny knife-thrower went down as though a sledgehammer had tapped him. I raced to his side, then cursed bitterly. My snap shot had torn through his throat. He was deader than the Atlantic Charter in Joe Stalin's opinion. I'd get no information out of him. I frisked him hurriedly, found nothing to identify the little rat. He had a pack of mari-

juana cigarettes, a crumpled dollar bill, some silver, and a couple keys on a ring. Then my fingers probing his vest pocket, found a little folded slip of paper.

It had been torn from a pad, one corner was partly gone. Showing at the corner was a short black line, crossed by a shorter, heavier, black line. It looked like a lop-sided X, with part of the upper left hand arm gone. The paper bore an address in the waterfront district, near the river. Then I heard feet pounding the pavement and the shrill wail of a police whistle.

The shot from my Magnum had been heard and the cops were coming to investigate. I wasn't in a spot to answer my questions or to be dragged to headquarters. The footsteps were nearer now. I raced my fingers futilely through the other pocket, turned and lammed down the alley.

CHAPTER III

Death Threats



WAS lucky enough to flag a cab a couple blocks from the warehouse district. My brain was busy as I rode uptown to the Columbian. The killers had hooked me up with the case damned quickly. I mentally checked the few people who knew I was interested in South American politics.

Felice Molinar and her mother were ruled out immediately. They wouldn't try to have me murdered. I was trying to find Dolores' killer for them. Dr. Brune knew I was mixed up in the picture, but he didn't fit as a suspect. He was a Britisher if I had ever met one.

Most of the staff at the Wardmore was made up of foreigners, since the hotel catered almost exclusively to a foreign clientele. I'm not exactly unknown in Washington, and some of the help might have recognized me. Perhaps the Fascist ring had agents spotted in the



For my pains she gave me back the Spanish equivalent of horsefeathers.

hotel. It would be an ideal hunting ground for Axis agents.

I knew now that I was fighting a ruthless, efficiently organized enemy machine. The clerk at the hotel desk was a Latin. So was Muralla, the hotel manager. Either one of them, or both of them could belong to the Fascist group from South America. My temper began to sizzle. The rats underrated me if they figured a pint-sized knife-thrower could take me.

I learned at the desk at the Hotel Columbian that Major Alvarez hadn't returned yet. I parked my two hundred pounds in an easy chair where I could watch both of the main entrances. My own spot was partly screened by pillars and potted palm trees. About fifteen minutes later Alvarez came in. He was accompanied by the American aviators who rode in the parade with him. There were a couple of brass hats from the War Department with them.

Flipping a bellhop, I flashed my private dick's badge in the palm of my hand. I gave him a dollar tip to go page Alvarez and bring him into the lobby. He wasn't to tell the Argentine ace who wanted him but just to say it was Government business. The kid was a born diplomat. He was back in a couple minutes with Alvarez and there wasn't a sign of suspicion on the flyer's dark, bearded face.

As I climbed out of the chair to greet him, I thought I saw his dark eyes widen as though in recognition. I was certain I hadn't met him when I was in South America. I decided I must have been mistaken for his face was a mask of polite inquiry as he asked:

"Do you have a message for me, sir?"

I decided not to do any shadow-boxing. Latins are temperamental. Maybe I could jolt him into saying something that would give me a lead.

"Your fiancee, Miss Dolores Molinar, was murdered at the Hotel Wardmore about an hour ago," I said bluntly. "Do you have any idea who might want to see her dead?"

I knew he wasn't acting. Color drained from his face, leaving it a putty-colored shade above the beard. His mouth and jaw went slack. Fear, incredulity, and then suspicion chased across the surface of his dark eyes. He grabbed the back of a chair; rallied a little, then shoved his dark head toward me. "What kind of joke are you trying to pull on me?" he asked savagely.

"It's no joke," I answered flatly. "*Senorita* Molinar was poisoned, and she died in my presence. I am a private detective. I've been engaged by her family to find the murderer. Can you help me?"

He shook his head in a dazed fashion, like a punch-drunk fighter. He said vaguely, half to himself: "I must go there at once." He started across the lobby, then came back. Now his dark eyes were narrowed in suspicion. He rasped:

"Why did Dolores Molinar's family engage a private detective? Her father is a diplomat. Surely one of the Federal agencies would investigate such a case."

"They probably will," I admitted. "But they are all tied up in red tape and international intrigue. I happened to be working on a case that concerned a maid the Molinar's hired. Maria Serrano was suspected of stealing some jewelry from her former employer. I happened to be on the spot when Dolores Molinar died. Maybe they had heard of Cupid Cain's reputation. I've gotten some pretty good results on other murder cases. Besides, it looked as if the maid I was trailing might be hooked up in the murder. So they hired me on a contingent basis. If I get the murderer, I get a fee. If I don't, I'm out my time and trouble."

HE ASKED me more about the maid. I told him about the capsules the cock-eyed maid had given Dolores just before she came down to meet me. And about her disappearance, right after that. I asked him if he had any ideas on the subject.

"It was the Fascists, of course," he said bitterly. "They hate Juan Molinar and they hate me because of what we have done to chase the Nazi spies and agents out of my country. They struck at both of us—through Dolores. Perhaps they think they can frighten us from the task we have undertaken in trying to unite Argentina and the United States. I wish it could have been me they murdered. Killing an innocent girl is a filthy, Nazi trick."

His voice was freighted with hate and it strengthened his Latin accent.

"You've had your share of tough breaks," I agreed. "Shot down mid-ocean; nearly dead from starvation; nearly assassinated today—and now this. Death seems to be riding with you, Major."

"I faced death too often over there

to fear dying," he said simply. "There it was in the open where it could be faced. But the Nazi agents are not as brave as their fighting men. They prefer to stab in the back in the dark."

"I guess you get used to riding with death in the cockpit with the Flying Tigers. That's what my friend Jim Dougherty said in a letter I got from him over there. I suppose you knew Dougherty. He was a flying cop on the New York police force, but he volunteered for service with a bunch of young aviators who went over to join the Tigers."

Alvarez' dark eyes seemed to be probing at my brain. He frowned for a minute, then shrugged.

"I do not recall the name," he said. "We changed assignments frequently. Most of us were called only by what you call 'nicknames.' Over there I was called Firpo, because I came from the pampas of Argentine. Maybe your friend had a nickname?"

I said I didn't know. Then I asked him some questions about the Fascists in Washington. He pointed out that he had been in the city only for twenty-four hours and most of that on exhibition. He said he would inquire among his South American friends in the capital and pass along any information to me.

I handed him one of my agency cards. He frowned, then said: "This is a New York address. Where can you be reached in Washington?"

I apologized, took back the old card, gave him one with my address on F Street, where the Government unwittingly hired an old maid to take messages for me as a camouflage to cover my special agent activities. Alvarez said he had to go. He told me he had never met Dolores' parents, as they had become engaged while at college. That made his task of expressing his sorrow doubly hard.

From a pay booth in the hotel I called

the unlisted number Felice Molinar had given me. I wanted to talk to her but I figured Maguire would leave a plain-clothes cop to grab me if I showed around the Wardmore. She picked a small cafe not far from the hotel that was a favorite spot for the visiting Latins.

FELICE was sitting in a secluded booth when I got there. The vitality had been drained from her face and her eyes were dark wells of misery. She ordered a cocktail and I had a double Scotch. I gave her a fast resume of what had happened since I left the Wardmore, including my conversation with Alvarez which hadn't seemed to lead anywhere. I asked what the capital cops had learned.

"They found the maid, Maria Serrano, was using faked credentials. Even her passport was forged. They have taken the capsules to see if any of the others contain poison." She hesitated a minute, playing with her cocktail glass. Then she said:

"The police captain asked my father to check with Mr. Kyle of the State Department. Mr. Kyle said he knew nothing about you except that you had a reputation as a dangerous gunman. The police have put out an alarm to pick you up. Captain Maguire believes you and the maid are both working for the Fascists."

"I told you to expect something like that," I said. "Neither the State Department nor my own chief could afford to openly admit any connection with me now. Do you still want me to work for you?"

"I want to have my sister's murderer caught," she said flatly. "If you are working for the Nazis—and helped in that crime—you will die—unless you kill me first."

It wasn't a threat. Just a plain statement of fact. Something in her black eyes told me she wasn't bluffing. I said that was okay with me.

"Why did you suspect Major Alvarez

might know something about your sister's death?" I asked her. "Don't you share the worship both of our countries are dishing out to the Argentine ace?"

"I met Ramon Alvarez only once. When I was at school in New England, my sister invited me to Boston for a week-end party. Then he was absolutely devoted to Dolores. So much so, that I can't understand why he didn't rush to see her the minute he arrived in Washington. I know he has been busy—but—I think Dolores felt too, that he might have arranged to see her for just a few minutes in the two days he has been in the city. Maybe the war has changed him. I wanted you to see if he was really shocked at the news of her death."

I gave her my opinion of Alvarez' reactions and tried to tell her that he was still in the Army and subject to orders. She gave me back the Spanish equivalent of horsefeathers.

Just then a big, heavy-set South American came back from the bar. He seemed surprised to see Felice there. For a minute or more, he expressed his condolences, staring at me, all the while. I gave him a dead pan, not letting on that I understood Spanish.

He must have been an intimate friend of the family, for he started to bawl out Felice, in polite but searing Spanish phrases. He told her he was surprised to see her in a public drinking place, so soon after her sister's death. Especially with a character like Killer Cain, known in Washington as a professional gunman and a cheap, roughneck private detective.

Felice checked her temper, but it was an effort. She told him frigidly that she was keeping a business appointment and not a tryst and that I was trying to find the beast who had murdered Dolores. That was more important, she thought, than sitting at home wringing her hands and moaning. The heavy-set man's dark skin was a couple shades darker as he stalked off stiffly.

"Who is the character with the John L. Lewis eyebrows?" I asked her. "He didn't like me—but definitely."

"*Senor* Tomas Bazan is at the embassy with my father," she said shakily. "He was shocked to see me here—with a notorious gunman like you. He suspects the worst of me."

"Any chance that he's mixed up with the Fascists?" I clipped. "Sometimes a good attack is the best defense. Maybe he thought he had a special reason for not killing me."

"That couldn't be," she said firmly. "He has worked closely with my father in negotiating recognition of Argentina's government. I learned since I saw you that Argentina may receive lend-lease aid from the United States. My sister and Major Alvarez were to take a token payment to Buenos Aires, when they flew there on their honeymoon. Perhaps that was why Dolores was murdered, to prevent that payment from reaching the new government there."

She refused a second cocktail; said she had to get back to the Wardmore before *Senor* Bazan had a chance to ruin her reputation. I went to the sidewalk with her. She said she didn't want me to walk back to the hotel.

I WENT back for another drink to piece together bits of information I had gathered. I had a visitor, almost as soon as the drink was served. Bazan was at my table again. He was accompanied by two pretty Latins whom I had mistaken for gigolos. At closer inspection, I saw they both wore shoulder clips underneath their white linen suits. Things began to look interesting.

This time Bazan talked English—and how!

"If you ever try to see the daughter of my friend Juan Molinar again, I will make you exceedingly sorry," he said. "I know your reputation. Perhaps you think Felice Molinar offers a chance for

you to compromise her and blackmail her family. I will see that you die, if you attempt anything like that."

The temper that goes with my sunset hair began to sizzle.

"Listen, Bush Face," I growled. "This is a free country. I'll talk to anyone I want to talk with. If those pantywaists with you are anxious to go back to the pampas in wooden overcoats, they needn't wait until they see me with Miss Molinar. They can start their trip right now by making a play for the pop-guns they are wearing."

The South American gunsels understood me. Maybe they hadn't been around long enough really to appreciate my ability with a gun. Perhaps they just didn't give a damn. They both nursed murder in their hearts and they begged Bazan to let them unleash it. I thought for a second I was going to have to take them, or wind up on a slab myself.

Bazan barked in Spanish that he didn't want me murdered. He just wanted to protect *Senorita* Molinar's good name. I dared him to repeat it in English, though I understood damned well what he said. He gave me a dirty scowl, went on to give the gunsels directions to blast me, if he saw me even speak to Felice. He promised that he rated high enough in diplomatic circles to square it—if anyone was interested enough to bother about my demise.

I was still hot under the collar; mad enough to force the hands of the imported torpedoes right there; when Dr. Brune strolled in from the bar. He must have listened in on the battle of words, for he was grinning a little as he walked over to Bazan. His Spanish was perfect as he said:

"I think you are making a mistake, *Senor* Bazan. The red-headed one is an agent of the United States Government."

"The State Department today denied that fact to Juan Molinar," Bazan said heatedly. "He is known only as a crim-

inal private investigator who kills for hire."

I scowled at them as though I didn't understand but knew they weren't paying me any compliments. I asked Dr. Brune:

"What's eating old Hairy Brows? He's supposed to be a friend of the Molinars. I'm working for them, but he wants me knocked off. Which side of the fence is he on?"

"The Latins have peculiar standards," Brune smiled. "He believes you are trying to compromise Felice Molinar."

"That sounds like Mairzy Doats to me," I rasped. "He wants to see me dead. Period!"

Brune's shoulders lifted. He invited me to have a drink as Bazan and his pretty gunsels pushed off. The two double Scotches were beginning to jet propel my brain. Pieces of the puzzle were falling in place.

I was afraid that unless I could move fast, there might be another murder in the Molinar family. Felice was too lovely to join the heavenly choir so young. Besides, there was a damned good chance that a private peep by the name of Cupid Cain might be collecting an Irish banjo at the same time Felice was being issued a harp.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Big



LLAN DOUTHIT, the special agent in charge of the F.B.I. office for the district, was a friend of mine. He knew about my assignment with Mr. X, so he readily agreed to meet me at my office on F Street when I telephoned him. I slipped into the office building by an alley and a rear stairway, in case Captain Maguire's dragnet was spread for me.

The acidulated virgin who acted as my receptionist and secretary, told me a Major Alvarez had called. He thought I

might be interested in visiting a house on Water Street. I checked the memorandum I had lifted from the pocket of the skinny knife thrower. It was the same address. Alvarez probably had something at that.

Douthit figured I was slap-happy when I asked him to have a check made of Ramon Alvarez back in Buenos Aires. I wanted to know whom the Spanish ace had played around with. Also whether there were any other Argentine flyers who had gone into the service, either for the Axis or the Allies. My theory sounded weak when I repeated it out loud. But Douthit had seen several of my hunches work out before. He even agreed to have the card with my New York agency address that Alvarez had handled checked for fingerprints.

The G-man pointed out that I was skating on thin ice. The Argentine situation was still a keg of TNT ready to blow in almost any direction. First Ramirez was in the driver's seat; then Peron and the Colonel's Group had the upper hand. A wrong step might ruin any chances of lining the South American nations up solidly with the Allies. If I made that misstep, I'd rank right along with Benedict Arnold and the man without a country as the prize heels in history. I told him I was ready to take the rap if I was wrong.

After he had gone, I took care of a few detail reports at the office. Then I found a restaurant where I could battle my way in to a fairly decent meal. It was dusk when I went out to hunt for a cab. By the time I had flagged one and ridden down to the waterfront, it was dark.

I wanted to get the layout of the Water Street house before I stuck my neck out too far. It was a shabby, three-story affair, flanked by a vacant lot on one side and an abandoned transmission plant on the other. There was nothing sinister or suspicious about the run-down, drab building.

I walked down the opposite sidewalk.

Lights showed behind curtains at the front. The rear of the house was dark. I saw a taxicab pull up to the curb at the next corner. I slipped into the shadows of a convenient areaway. My eyes popped open as I saw Felice Molinar get out and pay off the cabby. She waited until the cab tooled off. Then she took a piece of paper from her purse, checked it under the street light. She came along the sidewalk across from me, scanning the numbers.

The dark-haired beauty had the same address I did. She went up the steps, rang the bell. The door opened and she was admitted. All I saw was the dress of the woman who let her in.

I crossed the street, kept to the dark part of the sidewalk as I made my way back to an alley between the transmission plant and the house. I crouched for a long minute beneath one of the lighted windows listening for the sound of a scream or a struggle. I heard nothing but silence, as the Irishman said.

I WRACKED my brain over the latest turn of events. Was it possible that Felice Molinar was double-crossing her family? Maybe she was in love with Alvarez and the suspicion she had voiced was either jealousy or an act to cover her own real feelings. I had only the girl's word that the cock-eyed maid, Maria Serrano, had given Dolores poisoned capsules. Felice could have put me on the spot for the skinny knife man. It could be that *Senor Bazan* was suspicious of Felice and figured that I was in a deal with her. It looked as though Mrs. Cain's little boy had been taken for a sucker. Dames always make a bum out of me.

In spite of my two-hundred-pound bulk, I can imitate a back-alley cat when I want to. I slid silently around to the back of the house, tried the rear door. It was locked. One of the two keys I'd snatched along with the note from the knife-thrower fitted the lock. He probably

used the rear entrance to avoid being noticed by the neighbors. I moved the tumblers quietly, gently shoved the door inward, listened for a sound that might indicate a reception committee had been planted in the back hall to greet me. I couldn't detect even the faint sound of bated breathing. I negotiated the darkness to a door that led to the kitchen. Again I listened, then eased into a darkened room.

Every nerve was taut as I eased into the kitchen. In my racket you develop extra-perceptory senses. Intuition was warning me of some hidden danger. I swiveled my eyes around trying to locate the source of peril. Then I spotted a big, shapeless blob that loomed darker than the surrounding gloom. My hand was flashing toward my Magnum when the dark shape leaped at me. I sidestepped and moved in, but I wasn't quite fast enough. A blackjack grazed the side of my head, then crashed down on my shoulder. It was a terrific wallop. It numbed my whole left side and made my knees buckle. I dove forward, hoping to clinch my enemy before I went down.

My fingers clawed down, caught on something that I judged was a fountain pen. Then my fingers slid free, pulling the hard rubber cylinder loose. I tried to bury my chin in my assailant's chest, like a groggy fighter clinching for a breathing space. A familiar odor hit my nostrils, but I was too groggy to recognize the smell. I was pushed off balance as I tried to hook a right to my enemy's belly.

I heard a grating laugh behind me. I knew I'd walked into a double trap. There were two Joes in the room with me, and I was propped between them for a killing. A second later a depth bomb exploded inside my skull as a gun barrel smacked against the side of my head. This time I didn't even feel the floor come up to smack me in the kisser.

I came out of the fog with balls of fire bouncing against my eyelids. I finally

decided it was the lights. I heard a voice a long way off saying:

"Tie him securely. I'll be back to take care of both of them tomorrow. We can't take a chance on getting rid of them until after the plane has gone. Moving the flight ahead has changed the whole schedule."

It was a terrific effort to lift my eyelids. The room was still a blur in front of my unfocused gaze. I thought I saw a big man in dark clothes going out the door. Then I tried to lift my head. Nausea and dizziness chased me back to unconsciousness again. I felt ropes being looped around my wrists, but there wasn't much I could do to stop it. I gritted my teeth against the pain in my head, tried to make my brain function in place of my muscles.

When I finally did open my eyes, I saw I had been dragged into a living room. My fogged vision fixed on a slender figure in a chair near the big radio cabinet. It was the hump-nosed lad who had blasted at Major Alvarez. He was cuddling a pearl-handled .38 revolver in his lap. The feral expression on his swarthy face told me he wouldn't miss if he had to use the gun. He bared a mouthful of white teeth in an evil grin that dared me to make a funny move.

I turned my head painfully. Felice Molinar was in a big chair at my left. Her knitted dress was torn at the neck, revealing a nice round shoulder and a little more. Her black hair was tumbled about her face; one shoe was off and a nylon stocking was in shreds around her ankle. Felice had put up quite a battle before they subdued her enough to lash her hands and feet. The cock-eyed maid was taking a blindfold off the South American girl's eyes. Maria Serrano was sporting a beautiful shiner. I felt better when I knew Felice had been decoyed to the Water Street address and hadn't come voluntarily to keep a Fascist or Nazi assignment.

I learned later that Maria Serrano had

answered the bell. She stepped back and when Felice crowded in, Hump Nose had lowered the boom on her. But not before the Spanish spit-fire had gotten in a couple of good licks herself. She'd been trained on basketball courts and field hockey grounds in the United States. They finally had to slug her unconscious before they could tie her up.

Hump Nose told the Serrano woman to go out in the kitchen and make some coffee. They had an all-night job watching the prisoners until the *Jefe* came back to dispose of them, he said. Felice Molinar followed the departing maid with lethal hate in her dark eyes.

"How did they manage to rope you in, gorgeous?" I asked her.

"I received a telephone call that I thought was from you, telling me to come to this address. The message said for me to ring the bell and you would let me in. I should have known it was a trap. But whoever called, imitated your voice and made it sound excited. The message hinted that you had something definite pointing to Dolores' murderer. I was too excited even to guess it was a trap."

"I fell for the same sort of a gag," I admitted sheepishly. "It was our friend Alvarez who sucked me out here. Though I already had this joint on my list for investigation, so I probably would have wound up here anyhow."

"That's another reason I was anxious to see you. Because of the attempt on Ramon Alvarez' life and because of Dolores' death, the government agreed to advance the date of Alvarez' trip to Buenos Aires. He is to leave the airport at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow. He told my father he was so sorry he wouldn't be here to attend Dolores' funeral."

"That ties in with what the big boss said about the schedule being changed," I thought out loud. Then I asked Felice: "Did you get a look at Mr. Big? I met him in the dark, then I didn't see his face when he powdered out of here."

She shook her head regretfully.

"There was a big man in dark clothes in this room when they dragged me in here. I think he had a white cloth over his face and his hat was pulled low over his forehead. I remember thinking he was bigger than Ramon Alvarez. But I was so mad because I had been trapped that I didn't pay much attention to him. I was busy trying to fight to keep from getting tied up. Then I was hit on the head and when I came to, I was blindfolded."

Hump Nose had been listening. A derisive grin split his ugly puss as he said:

"The Americans are all fools, *senorita*. This beeg palooka—in this country he is a killer, a dangerous *lobo*. In Argentina, he would be a braying burro. It is because you believed he was a superman, that you must die tomorrow."

Felice Molinar started to get steamed up. I shot her a warning glance. It might help if the gun-throwing Spick rated me as a cluck. He might be tempted to get careless.

THE hope seemed futile. Hump Nose rested on the end of his spine in a corner chair, still cradling his revolver, through the long hours of the night. The silence of the room was broken only by his insulting comments or by Maria Serrano bringing in coffee. But the hours weren't entirely wasted.

The swarthy gunman had made a mistake when his boss ordered him to tie me up. He figured my bones were padded with fat instead of muscle. I had managed to get enough fog out of my brain to expand the muscles of my arms and wrists as much as I could. It was an old escape trick of Harry Houdini's that had come in handy before. Now when I let the muscles contract, there was a little bit of slack in my wrist-bindings.

Fearful of dissipating this slender chance for freedom, I had to work on the ropes almost imperceptibly. Once in a

while I was able to roll or twist my body as though in pain. These moves usually brought up the gun in Hump Nose's lap, but as he relaxed again, I could work on the slack, trying to push the loose loop down over the fingertips of one hand. My left hand was cut. I figured I'd ripped it on the pen I pulled from the big guy's pocket, when I got sapped.

The gunman sent Maria Serrano to bed shortly after midnight. He said he would call her if he wanted her to take over the sentry duty. It was nearly three a. m. before I had worked the coil down over my right hand. Then it was just a case of waiting for a break. Felice appeared to be asleep. She was slumped uncomfortably in her chair. I pretended to drop off into solid slumber.

Through slitted lids I saw Hump Nose's eyes were getting heavy. He would nod, then catch himself. The nods came at briefer intervals. Then I heard him swear. I rolled a little on the floor, muttered as though I was talking in my sleep. The move enabled me to ease my left hand out of the rope. Hump Nose got up, came over and looked at me. He seemed satisfied, for he started for the bedroom, probably to wake up the cock-eyed maid for a relief on guard duty.

It was the break I had prayed for. His back was toward me for a few seconds.

I eased my lashed feet up beneath me, until I was squatting as if in a leap-frog game. I braced my hands and feet, then launched forward in a desperate dive. Luck was with me. The drive from my legs carried me onto Hump Nose's back. He went to the floor like a limp puppet under the impact of my two hundred pounds. His chin hit just after his knees and elbows. He didn't even quiver. I rolled him over and planted one on his jaw to make sure he didn't come out of the fog too soon.

The crash wakened Felice. She came out of her chair with a cry of fright. I had just scooped up the pearl-handled .38

when the maid rushed out of the bedroom, awakened by the rumpus. Felice's eyes got round as I ordered the Serrano woman to back up against the wall, with her hands over her head. The cock-eyed maid knew I meant it when I told her I didn't care whether I blasted her for the murder of Dolores Molinar or whether I let the district executioner put a rope around her neck. She backed up to the wall, her face putty gray with fear.

I frisked Hump Nose, found the usual long-bladed knife that the Spicks carry. I sliced my own ankles free, then hobbled over to free Felice. There were some cords on the portieres. Hump Nose was regaining consciousness. I parted his hair with the barrel of his revolver. Then we tied up the gunman and the cock-eyed maid. I prowled the living room until I found my own Magnum.

It was nearly four o'clock then. Felice had said Major Alvarez was to take off at six. There was a lot to be done, and the time was short. I said to the dark-haired girl:

"You've got to get to a telephone, Felice. We've got to stop that plane fight."

I gave her Mr. X's home phone number, instructed her to tell him what had happened about the flight. He could pull wires to have the flight held up. Also I wanted the little gray man to get hold of Allan Douthit, the G-man, at home or at his regional office. I wanted Douthit out at the airport, with the information he had been able to dig up on Ramon Alvarez. When she had gotten that message over to Mr. X, she was to call her father. I had a hunch I might need Juan Molinar out there to unscramble me from red tape, if anything went wrong. I told Felice it might be a good idea if *Senor* Tomas Bazan accompanied her father.

Felice wanted me to go along with her, but I shook my head grimly. I looked at Hump Nose, said flatly:

"I've got a little job to do here, first. This rat has some information I want tucked away in his skull. I'm going to get that information. It may take a little time—and it won't be pretty to watch—but I'll get it."

She knew what I meant. She gathered up her purse and her hat. She made a few repairs to her dress and she was ready to go. I didn't know how far she would have to walk to find a telephone. I hated the idea of sending her out in that tough neighborhood at that hour in the morning. But it had to be done. I gave her Hump Nose's revolver, which she said she knew how to use. She tucked it in her handbag, left the purse partly open under her arm, so she could get the gun fast, if she needed it.

CHAPTER V

Hump Nose Sings



IT TOOK more than a half hour of my best persuasion to persuade Hump Nose to sing. My knuckles were raw and his face looked as if it had been through a meat chopper. If I felt any compunction while working over him, it faded when I thought of how he had boasted that he would kill me and Felice Molinar as soon as the big boss returned. The maid spilled her intestines after Hump Nose cracked. She filled in the rest of the details.

I made sure both of them were securely lashed. I cut up a soiled Turkish towel from the bathroom, fashioned a couple of crude but effective gags. I dragged the Serrano woman into a closet in the bedroom where I could lock her in. I double-hitched Hump Nose to the pipes beneath the sink in the kitchen. While I was in the kitchen, I spotted some broken glass on the floor. That must have been what cut my hand. I looked around, found other bits, then located a bulb partly filled with mercury. It had been

a thermometer I had grabbed, not a fountain pen.

I took a few valuable minutes casing the lower floors, hoping for further evidence to tie up the Fascist gang. There were no records or statements. But I found a short-wave sending outfit in the cellar. It was hooked up with the poles and wiring of the abandoned transmission plant next door, offering an excellent cover for the illicit broadcasting of messages to South American Nazis. The big radio in the living room was also a receiving set for short-wave stuff on a special band.

Dawn was breaking when I let myself out of the house. I had to walk five blocks before I found an all-night restaurant with a telephone. I called the capital police. Without identifying myself, I told Maguire's desk sergeant they could pick up the maid who had murdered Dolores Molinar and the gunsel who had blasted at Ramon Alvarez if they got out to the house on Water Street right away. I told the desk man to hold the pair for questioning by the F.B.I. later that morning. I pronged the phone before the capital cop could ask any questions.

I managed to flag a night-hawk cabby, gave him a five-spot to get me out to the air field in a hurry. It was just after 5:30 when I paid the meter. There was a big cargo transport warming up on the runway in front of the administration building.

My heart-beat picked up as I legged it toward the small crowd gathered near the gangplank of the plane. It looked as if I was going to get away with it. That is, provided my wacky theory stood up. Otherwise—my rusty scalp would be nailed right to the walls of the Smithsonian. I'd be deader than a dodo as a private peep.

Allan Douthit was there with two of his agents. I saw Juan Molinar and beside him was the stocky figure of Tomas Bazan. I had ordered Felice to go home

to bed after she made her telephone calls, but she was right there, beside her father. The dark haired beauty was so excited that she didn't know the pins had come out of the repair job she did on the neck of her dress. She was offering an intriguing display of lingerie. She must have told her father part of the score, because he was so excited he didn't notice his daughter's dishabille either.

Major Ramon Alvarez was in the center of the crowd. He was flanked on either side by flight officers of the Trans-National line. The Latin flyer was arguing vehemently with Alan Douthit and a hawk-nosed, thin-faced man. I breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of Pete Kyle. The little gray man had done some fast work, getting the State Department liaison man out there at that time in the morning. Both Kyle and Douthit were listening to Alvarez's beef with granite faces.

AS I neared the crowd, a small, inconspicuous figure slid away from the fringe, started toward the administration building. Mr. X had his topcoat collar up. His chin was hunched down, and as usual he was avoiding publicity. He lifted his face enough to glare at me as we passed.

"It's your neck in the sling, from here on," he rasped. "God have mercy on your soul, if you can't deliver."

"It's in the bag, chum! In the bag!" I said blithely. I wished that my confidence matched my voice. He profanely told me it had better be. Then he went on home. I was on my own, his actions told me louder than words.

Douthit handed me a doubtful grin as I joined the party. He said: "Okay, Cain. Where do we go from here?"

"We start by arresting this Fascist agent who is masquerading as Ramon Alvarez," I clipped.

The Latin flyer's head came up. His dark eyes were blazing wells of hatred.

He screamed: "What do you mean by such an insult. *Senors* Molinar and Bazan know Ramon Alvarez is not a Fascist!"

"Ramon Alvarez isn't—but you aren't Ramon Alvarez!" I rasped. "Alvarez was shot down at sea. You thought you could safely take his place. But you forgot that Major Alvarez's fingerprints went on file with the War Department, when the Flying Tigers were mustered into United States service. Did this man's prints match those of Alvarez, Douthit?"

"The prints over at the War Department on Ramon Alvarez' file say this man isn't the flying ace from Argentina," the G-man said flatly. "We have contacted our South American agents trying to identify the prints I got from that card you gave me."

"I can identify him. He is Alejandro Gonzales, one of the youngest officers in the Colonel's group and an ardent Fascist. The Nazis learned by radio that Alvarez' plane was shot down. They conceived the smart idea of creating a stand-in for Alvarez. Gonzales is a flyer. He was given an intense course in the history of the Flying Tigers and in the background of the real Alvarez. He grew a beard like the ones the Tigers sported which made the impersonation easier. He fasted for days to give himself that starved look. Then he was put on a German submarine. The Nazis learned by radio that Alvarez' plane went down. When the sub spotted a merchant ship through its periscope, it surfaced and launched the life raft with Gonzales aboard. It was a natural. It gave the Fascists a chance to spot a spy right in the midst of the liberals who were working to rid Argentina of Nazi domination."

I turned to Juan Molinar. He and Bazan were listening open-mouthed.

"Am I right in believing this plane was to carry \$5,000,000 in gold as a token payment of the lend-lease aid Argentina could obtain if she lined up one hundred per cent with the Allies?" I asked them.

The South Americans nodded. Pete Kyle nodded in agreement with them.

Then Juan Molinar's face grew black with anger. He took a step toward the South American flyer. Bazan grabbed his shoulders, said quickly: "No! No! *Amigo*, the law will punish him."

"Because of this impostor, my daughter was murdered!" Molinar grated. "They knew Dolores would see that he was not Ramon Alvarez. She had to die before she exposed him. With Dolores gone, he could continue the deception. *Senora* Molinar and I had never met the real Alvarez. We knew him only from pictures."

"That's the story, *Senor* Molinar," I said harshly. "Gonzales planned to board this plane carrying \$5,000,000 in gold as Ramon Alvarez. The Fascists have a man planted in the transport crew. Gonzales and this other Hitlerat would have overcome the crew, throwing them out of the plane somewhere between here and Buenos Aires. Gonzales would pilot the plane to a rendezvous previously arranged. The Fascists would have gold to finance another revolution to reestablish Nazi domination of the nation."

THE G-men had to help Bazan hold the insane Molinar. When they got him quiet, Bazan came over, stuck out his hand. He said: "A thousand apologies, Cain. I thought you were a Nazi agent who had murdered Felice Molinar." I grinned a little, said: "It's okay, chum. I figured you had sold out your own party and were running with the nationalists. So we're even."

Kyle nodded for two of Douthit's agents to handcuff the sullen, defeated Latin Fascist. He turned to me and said: "Just to keep the record clear, Cain. What makes with the attempt to kill this guy in the parade yesterday?"

"Window dressing!" I snorted. "That's when I first got suspicious. The greaser who blazed at him was an expert gunman, yet he missed at less than twenty-

five feet. He didn't want to hit Gonzales; it was meant as a build-up for Gonzales' impersonation. Next, both Felice Molinar and I got suspicious when the man we believed was Alvarez didn't rush over to visit his fiancée as soon as he got to Washington. I trapped the impostor; caught him flatfooted when I asked him if he knew Jim Dougherty, the flying cop, who joined the Tigers. Dougherty is nearly as famous as the real Alvarez was. Gonzales didn't know that. He thought I was following the usual detective story plot of asking him about a non-existent person, hoping I could get him to say yes. He tried to outfox me, by theoretically denying he knew Dougherty. If he'd been with the Tigers, he certainly would have known Jim. He went over with the same bunch that Alvarez went over with. I finagled the business cards, so as to get a set of his prints. It worked out perfectly."

Juan Molinar was still livid with rage as Douthit's agents started across the field to the F.B.I. car. He asked Kyle: "What will be done with him? He is at least an accomplice in the murder of my daughter!"

"That will be arranged between your country and mine," Kyle told him. "You may rest assured, *Senor* Molinar, no matter which country metes out the punishment, it will be a fitting reward for his crimes. We are at war—and death is still a penalty for espionage in war time!"

Then Kyle turned to me. He said: "What about the rest of the gang? Miss Molinar says you have them rounded up."

"The capital cops have the hired hands, holding them for the F.B.I.," I said. "We'll stop off on our way to the capital clink and pick up the boss."

Kyle had a State Department car at the field. We rode back to the city in it, taking Douthit with us. Juan Molinar and Tomas Bazan insisted on coming along. So did Felice Molinar. I agreed, but whispered that she'd better do a little

more dress repairing. I guess that was the first she knew of the strip-tease act she had restarted. I'm sure her blush wasn't faked.

I told Kyle to drive to the Wardmore. The South American contingent started to protest in Spanish and English. They were afraid they were going to be dropped out before the final curtain of the show. I grinned a little cockily, told them to keep their respective shirts on.

I asked the desk clerk if Dr. Brune was in, got an affirmative answer. We all rode the elevator to the sixth floor.

Brune answered my rap on his door, dressed in a dressing gown over pajamas. His ruddy face had a surprised look when he saw the crowd. Then he bowed politely, said: "What is it, gentlemen?" He saw Felice and added "—and ladies." He stepped back as I pushed my two hundred pounds through the door. I didn't waste time in setting the stage. I shoved my chin at the sandy-haired doctor, told Douthit:

"Take him, Allan! He's the head man of the Fascist mob here in Washington!"

I could hear Kyle suck in his breath sharply. Pete cried: "Hell—he's a British citizen, Cain. We've checked up on him at the Department, away back."

"He's a renegade Britisher, like the famous Lord Haw-Haw," I said. "He worked on German liners and got convinced the Heinies were a race of supermen. In his travels in South American ports, he got hooked up with the Fascist ring. They planted him in the Wardmore, which is about the center of international intrigue and diplomacy. Brune planted Maria Serrano, one of the Fascist group, as the Molinar's maid, to pick up information about the Argentine situation. When the fake Alvarez reached Washington, this traitorous rat gave the maid some poison capsules to feed Dolores, so she couldn't expose Gonzales' masquerade. I was getting too close to the truth and he arranged twice to have

me bumped off. Felice knew too much, so he lured her to the house in Water Street, where both of us were to be murdered."

Brune's face looked like a granite slab. He said coldly: "I suppose you know I will take action against you for this slander. Those accusations are absolutely false. There isn't a shred of proof to sustain them."

My lips gave him a grin that didn't match the hate in my eyes. I showed him the gash in my left hand.

"I did that when I tangled with you last night," I clipped. "I jerked a thermometer from your pocket, then fell on it when I went down. No one but doctors and nurses carry clinical thermometers with them constantly."

He sneered: "Do you think I am the only doctor in Washington who might be carrying a thermometer in his pocket?"

THERE was an anteroom off the main foyer that looked like an office. I went over to the desk, examined the prescription pad. My pulse skipped a beat as I saw the sheets had been torn off unevenly. The last half-dozen or more had been missing a corner when they were torn off. I took out the memorandum I'd gotten from the skinny knife thrower, and the torn corner matched the jagged scraps left on the pad. Placed against these scraps the broken X became the prescription sign R.

"I took this from the pocket of the rat you sent to murder me, Brune," I grated. "His prints are on it. They will match with the ones they took from him at the morgue. Your prints will be on it, too. You'll have a tough time explaining that connection away."

For a second or two his face fell apart. Then his jaw stiffened. He was determined to bluff it through.

"You'll have to do better than that, Cain," he grated. "This assassin could have been a patient of mine. My contract

permits me to have office hours here in my suite. He could have come here and ripped that sheet off my pad without me knowing anything about it. If that is all you have for proof, I'll have to ask you to leave with your friends. I want to consult with my lawyer about bringing libel action against you."

Kyle and Douthit had both begun to fear I'd led with my chin. It looked as if the sandy-haired renegade had made a bum out of me. I showed them my teeth in another lip grin.

"Okay, master-mind," I snarled. "Get your mouthpiece—but tell him to get ready to defend you on a charge of inciting murder. We've been having a bit of a sleigh ride, as they'd say in your country. Now, we'll go for a slay ride, as they know it here and in Argentina. I've told you about the clues that tied you up with this case and I could make them stand up in any court. I hadn't told you that we've got your little chums Maria Serrano and Hawk Nose Estobar down in the capital police headquarters. They are singing plenty, brother, while they start you on your slay ride—right into the hands of the executioner—for the murder of Dolores Molinar. If you want further proof, pick up your phone and call for Captain Maguire. He'll tell you the song your killy-loo birds warbled."

Brune stared at me bleakly. Then he walked over to the desk to pick up the phone. Instead, he flipped open a desk drawer. I thought he was going for a rod. My Magnum appeared out of thin air. But Brune's hand came from the drawer without a gun. It flashed to his lips. I was so mad, I nearly squeezed the trigger of the gun. I knew the British renegade had outsmarted me in the final play.

He gave me a stiff little bow. His ruddy face had a mocking smile. He said:

"I made a mistake in underrating you, Cain. You should have been removed as soon as I learned downstairs that you were interested in Dolores Molinar's death. I hate to disappoint you, but your Federal friends won't take me far. I just swallowed four of the *curare* capsules that I was forced to give to Miss Molinar. I really hated to murder such a lovely girl—but total war is a cruel master."

Juan Molinar was swearing terrible oaths. He started toward Brune. The doctor's uplifted pal stopped him.

"I'm suffering—more than you—could hurt me—Molinar!" he gasped. A paroxysm of pain shook his big frame. He twisted and bent like a sapling in a gale. Then he went down, writhed horribly for a second or two. Then he was still.

I got Felice Molinar by the arm, started her out of the room. "You've seen enough of this murder play," I told her. "Let's leave the final scene to the Federal boys. They've played it often before."

She mustered a wan smile. Her voice was shaky as she said:

"You proved to be a hell of a good detective, Cupid Cain. We didn't set any fee when I hired you to get Dolores' murderer. Now you can name your own price."

I rubbed my triple chins reflectively. I looked at my wrist watch, saw that it was nearly eight a.m.

"Okay, beautiful," I said. "I always charge beautiful lady clients the price of a good meal. And breakfast is my best meal of the day. You're hooked, sister."

"Once again the woman pays," she murmured. "This time, believe me, it's a pleasure. Only I still think I'm being taken for a sleigh-ride—only this time it's spelled the way I learned it at school up in New England."

Long Search Ends as Dick Retires



AFTER twenty-four years of police work during which he spent the last seven in a fruitless hunt for an insane murderer, Detective Peter Merylo of the Cleveland police department has retired, leaving his unfinished task to younger colleagues. Even though Detective Merylo has turned in his badge, however, he announces that he will never rest content until the "mad butcher of Kingsbury Run" is apprehended and punished.

It was in 1936 that Merylo was given the full-time assignment of tracking down the degenerate monster who was responsible for thirteen hideous murders. Kingsbury Run, a small stream on the outskirts of Cleveland, was the place where the first corpse was found a headless torso horribly hacked as if by a maniac surgeon or butcher. From that time on, twelve more corpses turn up at intervals, all of them decapitated and some still unidentified to this day.

Who was the killer?

That was the question which Detective Merylo set out to answer. Devoting his entire time and energies to the task, he began a saga of manhunting which has few parallels in modern criminological history. Acting on hunches, on tips, on rumors from the underworld and squeals from informers, the Cleveland officer traveled a long and weary road. Disguised as a hobo, he haunted the railroad "jungles" of the region; he ferreted into squalid squatters' shacks and swamps and city dumps. In other attire he investigated stores, lake front residences and even the offices of professional men.

ALL told, Merylo was responsible for the arrests of more than a thousand suspects—many of them criminals who deserved imprisonment for various crimes of which they were genuinely guilty. A vast number of lawbreakers went to jail through Detective Merylo's efforts; but in all that time he never succeeded in nabbing the one person he really wanted—the Kingsbury Run killer.

That quest became his life work, his hobby, the one thought constantly in his mind.

He studied psychology, took courses in psychiatry, consulted with alienists and specialists in mental diseases: always with the hope that he would find some psychological clue which would "type" the butcher murderer. Once he knew the kind of derangement which would cause a murderer to decapitate thirteen victims and cut off their arms and legs, Merylo figured that he would have a better chance to single out the culprit.

But his efforts proved fruitless, for the deeper he studied, the more he concluded that the killer was a maniacal degenerate of a type hitherto unknown to science—and therefore a man impossible to recognize by external symptoms of insanity.

Today, in retirement, ex-Detective Peter Merylo devotes himself to a continued interest in the unsolved case, even though he no longer takes an official part in the hunt which still goes on. He believes that the murderer is a transient, moving from one hobo jungle to another between Cleveland, Youngstown, Pittsburgh and Newcastle, and that some day the law will pounce upon the perpetrator of those unlucky thirteen butcheries.

It was a little sickening,
but Ryan let him continue.



TAKE THE GUY HOME

The prize ring had left Bozo slap-happy. Right now, he was like a child mentally, hungry for the approval of those who took care of him. But Ryan knew that Bozo was fundamentally a fighter. Given something really worth fighting for, he was still the old Bozo

By DON JAMES



OR a long time the man lay motionless on the roof. Night fog settled over his huddled body, dampened his clothing, and put small beads of moisture on his upturned face.

The city sounds had long since sub-

sided after the late theater traffic. It was quiet except for an occasional car, the distant noise of a freight yard, the dismal growl of a foghorn from the bay.

Finally the man moved. His hand came up slowly and rubbed his face, as if he were trying to pull away a mask. His legs moved, stiffly and awkwardly.

He was still again and then he pushed himself up to a sitting position. He half

rolled, but staggered gamely to his feet.

Slowly, in a course that wavered, he walked to the door that opened from a roof cupola.

His footsteps clumped on stairs as he went down.

He opened another door and stepped into a dimly lighted hallway. Doors on each side bore room numbers and the carpet was worn.

He stopped before a door marked "72" and hesitated. He wiped his face again and shuddered.

He was a small, thin man in middle age. His clothes were well cut, although crumpled and wet. His face was thin and sharp featured. There was a slight scar on the bridge of his nose. His eyes were dark and glittering, full of purpose.

He took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly.

He opened the door and went into the room. The door closed behind him.

THE hotel room was like a thousand other third class hotel rooms. There was a brass bed, a table, a straightbacked chair and a rocker. The furniture was of the "Mission" era. Two doors in the room were open. One led into a bathroom where a light gleamed in dead silence. The other opened into a closet where two dresses and a white slip hung from wire hangars.

The small man leaned back against the door and shuddered again. A dark bruise was beginning to show above his temple. His dark eyes were centered upon the bed and the scar across his nose suddenly was white.

The girl on the bed wore magenta-colored pajamas. She was young appearing with a neatly molded body. Her hair was dark red. She would have been attractive if it were not for the contorted expression on her face, the wide, staring, lifeless eyes, the straining open mouth, the fingermarks at her throat.

"They killed her!" the small man said angrily.

Abstractedly he found a package of cigarettes and lit one. He smoked in silence for a moment, his eyes weaving over the room as if he searched for something.

Abruptly he pulled a handkerchief from a hip pocket. He carefully wiped the doorknob and held the handkerchief over it as he opened the door and, after a quick glance in both directions, stepped into the hallway and wiped the outside knob. Carefully he extinguished his cigarette in a hallway stand.

For a second he thought he heard the click of a closing door down the hallway, but he couldn't spot the door.

He hurried to the stairs and lightly ran down two flights and entered another room marked "57."

The room was much like the one above, but masculine articles were in the closet. He hung up his coat and went to the bathroom where he bathed his face and inspected the bruise above his temple.

He took a suit of clothes from the closet and changed from his rumpled one. From a Gladstone bag he took a small automatic pistol and made certain that it was loaded.

He left the hotel by a side exit and hurried away through the night. Two blocks from the hotel he found a taxi and gave directions to the driver.

The driver eyed him suspiciously.

"Look, Mister," he said. "That's five miles out of town and this fog is tough driving. It'll cost you extra."

Anger flared in the small man's eyes for an instant and then he shrugged. He brought out a wallet from a hip pocket and counted out five one-dollar bills.

"That will handle it," he said flatly.

"Get in," the driver grunted.

The taxi wheeled in midblock and then moved through the fog toward an arterial highway leading from the city.

The thin, small man leaned back and stared with unseeing eyes at the back of the driver's head.

"They didn't need to kill Jane Rossi," he said to himself. "That poor kid didn't even know what the score was!"

THEY drove along a lakeshore road, the taxi lights fighting the fog, speed throttled down to little more than a walking pace.

Suddenly the small man leaned forward and tapped the driver's shoulder.

"This is the place. Don't drive in. I'll walk."

The taxi drew into a parking space beside the stone pillars of an entrance.

"Wait for me," the small man said. "I'll be back in about twenty minutes."

The driver nodded and shut off his motor and lights. His passenger got out of the car and closed the door behind him.

It was quiet. The small man walked quickly, his eyes flicking about him constantly. The outline of a rambling, low house loomed through the fog. The man saw a light showing beneath a curtain and nodded in satisfaction.

A figure loomed out of a clump of bushes and stepped into the small man's path.

The small man stopped. His voice was low as he spoke.

"It's Packy Ryan, Bozo. Take it easy."

A large man stepped close to him and a flashlight flared for an instant. The small man's eyes were like jet in its glare.

"Okay, Packy," the large man said. "But you know how the boss is. I gotta be careful. I saw the lights of your car."

"Sure, Bozo. I know how Scudder is."

The big man stepped back and Packy Ryan walked on to the house. He pushed a bell button and waited. After several moments a tall man in a rough tweed suit opened the door. He looked at

Packy and smiled. His teeth were white against a tanned face. He appeared to be middle-aged, although his hair was gray at the temples.

"Come in, Ryan," he said. "I've been waiting."

Carl Scudder led his visitor into a spacious, low living room expensively furnished in a ranchhouse tone. As Scudder mixed a drink for the small man, Ryan looked at the woman in the room.

She might have been thirty. She was smartly dressed and she regarded Packy Ryan with shrewd eyes. She smiled and Packy thought of the word "glamor."

With a graceful movement she toned down a radio and a voice singing, ". . . they're either too young or too old . . ."

Scudder introduced them as he finished mixing the drink.

The woman's name was Aileen Connel. Packy Ryan acknowledged the introduction and smiled tightly for her.

The drink Carl Scudder handed him was long and cool with the taste of expensive whiskey in it. Packy drank little before he put the glass down.

Scudder sank his hands in trousers pockets and watched Ryan with legs apart as he teetered a little, his face mirroring a question.

"You found her?" Scudder asked.

Packy Ryan nodded grimly.

"She's dead," he announced. "I followed her from Los Angeles. I took a room two floors below her in the hotel. That's when I called you yesterday."

Packy sipped at the drink again.

"She didn't go out yesterday nor today except to eat. At about nine o'clock tonight I went up to her room. Just as I was about to knock, the door opened and two men came out. It happened fast. One of them clipped me. I followed them to the roof."

His eyes narrowed.

"I made a mistake. I thought I heard both of them running. Only one was

running. The other waited by the door. He knocked me cold. When I came out of it, I went to the girl's room. She'd been strangled. I had this date with you—I came straight out here."

The smile had left Scudder's mouth. He looked annoyed.

"Did you recognize the men? Were they Kranz?"

"I didn't know them."

A silence held the room, the two pairs of eyes steady upon Packy Ryan, facial expressions hard. He lit a cigarette and returned their looks without expression.

Finally the woman spoke.

"Our private detective doesn't seem too competent," she said dryly.

Packy glanced at her.

"No?" he asked curtly.

Scudder waved a hand in a small gesture of impatience.

"That's enough, Aileen. Save your wisecracks for your act. Ryan did the best he could. We've got to plan what—"

"Just a second," Ryan interrupted. "I'd like to talk."

Scudder stopped speaking, his eyebrows lifted.

"Go on," he said quietly.

"**YOU'RE** a big man, Scudder," Ryan said. "You control half the gambling in the state. You've come up steadily and you've had a name for being on the square. You pull a hell of a lot of weight."

"Thanks," Scudder said ironically. Abruptly his eyes were menacing.

"You needed a private dick who knew his way around, you told me," Ryan continued. "You said one of Kranz' men—Cal Lain—wormed into your organization and got away with a cool fifty grand. Your boys couldn't find him. You called me in. I learned that Cal Lain had a girl friend named Jane Rossi who might know where he was hiding out, or, as you suggested, where Kranz had hidden him out.

Tonight I had a chance to find out from the girl. But she died before I talked with her."

"I know all this," Scudder said. "What is the pitch?"

"The pitch is that I think you lied to me. I don't like the case—any part of it. I'm washed up. Get someone else."

"I don't get it," Scudder said flatly.

Ryan shook a cigarette from a package and deliberately lit it, his eyes watching Scudder's face.

"I found out some other things in Los Angeles," he said quietly. "I found out that Lain wasn't working for Kranz. Never had. I found out that Kranz is looking for him, too. I found out that your story about the missing fifty grand smells. Your manager down there had the story too pat. He recited it as if he'd memorized it. I think you and Kranz are plenty friendly, but wanted to find Lain without my knowing that."

"So you're going to quit?"

"That's right, Scudder."

The small, dark detective had wandered about the room until he stood near the door, his back to the wall.

For several moments no one spoke, and it was Scudder who finally shrugged his shoulders and smiled thinly.

"All right, Ryan. How much do I owe you?"

"Eight days at fifty a day—four hundred. Another hundred will cover expenses."

Silently Scudder glanced at Ryan's hand which had sunk into a coat pocket and obviously cradled a gun. Carefully, throwing his coat back to show that there was no concealed weapon, Scudder removed a wallet from the inside pocket. He counted out five one hundred dollar bills.

He walked slowly to Ryan who took the money.

"Just in case," Ryan said. "Both of you turn around and face the other way. I'll

go out alone. And don't call Bozo. He used to be a good boy in the ring. I like him. I don't want to have to use a gun on him."

Carefully he wiped the doorknob, looking into the dead girl's staring eyes.



"You're very dramatic, Mr. Ryan," Aileen Connel said mockingly.

"Jane Rossi was small and good to look at—just as you are," Packy Ryan said in a soft voice. "But she wasn't good to look at when I last saw her. Murder is dramatic, too. I don't like that kind of drama."

He backed out and closed the door.

Bozo appeared silently in the fog and growled a goodnight as Packy Ryan passed him.

The taxi driver started his motor and

snapped on the lights as the detective approached the car.

"Geez!" the driver said. "What a night for a murder. I hope you're head-in' back to town!"

"And fast!" Packy Ryan said. "The faster the better."



HERE was no excitement in the hotel lobby to indicate that the body of Jane Rossi had been found.

Packy went straight to an elevator. He was glad to be rid of the case, yet he wished he could do something about Jane Rossi.

"Somebody ought to take the big rap for that," he told himself. "The poor kid didn't have a chance."

He shoved the thought from his mind. Murder was out of his line. The cops had the organization and facilities to handle murder. He was just a good private dick who had been in the business for ten years and had some sound accounts and a clean business. Taking the Scudder case had been a slight concession to politics. The guy was powerful and a good word in the right place sometimes helped.

Well, he was out of the case. He'd get his bag from the room, check out, and go home to his small apartment on the other side of town. In the morning he'd go to his office and read the mail that had accumulated, find out from his office girl who had been in, and get back into the calm groove of his daily existence.

There wasn't a chance in a hundred that he'd be involved in the murder when it was discovered. Scudder wouldn't talk to the cops—he wouldn't want to be involved himself. Even if, by some chance, the cops connected Packy Ryan with the murder, Packy assured himself that his record was clean and he was friendly with the department.

That was the way it was, except that he felt sorry for Jane Rossi.

The elevator stopped and Packy Ryan walked down the hallway to his room. He opened the door and snapped on the light.

For ten seconds he stood perfectly still. The window by the fire-escape landing was open and the curtain stirred in the

night air. The odor of tobacco smoke was heavy in the room and Packy knew that he had not smoked when he had changed clothing and picked up his automatic.

He glanced at the bathroom door. It was halfway closed. Behind it a voice spoke.

"Come all the way in and close the door. You're covered."

Packy slid his look down the crack of the door between hinges. He caught the reflection of light upon a gun muzzle pointed at him.

He stepped completely into the room and closed the door behind him. Instantly a young man stepped from the bathroom.

He was tall and thin and wore a dark blue suit, snap-brim hat, and gray topcoat. His mouth was grim, his eyes looked cold and foreboding.

"Turn around," he said.

Packy turned and automatically raised his hands. The young man removed the small automatic from Packy's topcoat pocket.

"All right," the young man said. "Relax. Take a chair. I want to have a talk with you."

Ryan sat down and watched the young man lean back against the wall, the gun loose in his hand.

"You're Cal Lain," Packy Ryan said.

"That's right. I'm Cal Lain. I saw you come out of her room. You killed her—I didn't know until later. I'd been asleep. I saw you leave her room and followed you down here. I thought you'd been talking with her. When I went back to find out what you wanted, I found her. You were gone, but your bag was here. I've been waiting for you."

"I didn't kill her," Ryan said. "Scudder hired me to find you. I'm a private detective. I learned about your girl and followed her here. When I went up to talk with her tonight, I was clipped when

a couple of men came out of the room. I followed them to the roof and was laid out cold. I've got this bruise over my temple and some damp clothing in that closet to prove it. I was on the roof for a while. It was wet up there. Those two men killed her."

"You're working for Scudder," Lain said. "That's enough for me."

Ryan shook his head.

"I just told Scudder to take his case and go to hell."

DOUBT came into Lain's eyes. "Maybe," he said. "But I'm going to take you to the D.A."

Ryan shook his head again.

"It won't get you anywhere, but I'll go. How are you going to explain your hiding out? Why are Scudder and Kranz looking for you? They want you badly enough to kill the girl when she wouldn't tell where you were."

"That isn't why she was killed," Lain said briefly.

Ryan's eyebrows went up. "Scudder said you got away with fifty grand of his dough."

"That's a lie."

"I figured it was. One reason why I dropped the case. Why does Scudder want you? Why does Kranz want you?"

"I'm saving that for the D.A.," Lain said. "I have an appointment with him tomorrow."

"The hell you have!"

Suddenly confusion filled Lain's eyes. The hand with the gun dropped to his side.

"Are you on the level?" he asked simply, his voice abruptly weary.

"If you'll let me get out a wallet, I'll show you credentials," Ryan said.

Lain nodded and took the credentials the detective held out for him. He read them swiftly, including the three cards that identified Ryan as a retained investigator for bonding companies.

"I guess I was wrong about you," Lain admitted and returned the cards. "I'm glad I didn't blow my top when you came in. I intended to kill you."

Ryan felt a small knot of tenseness form in his stomach. He'd been lucky that time.

"She meant a lot to you," he said.

"Every damned thing in the world. I've been half crazy since I found her. I don't know what to do. I don't care much what I do—except . . ." his voice became hard, ". . . except find who did it."

Ryan took a deep breath. He might as well play it through now. Lain would involve him in the murder no matter how it broke. It would be better if Packy Ryan knew the whole story. Sometimes things went wrong if the cops got the wrong ideas, or if a man was working in the dark.

"Why did you want to know if I was on the level, Lain?"

Lain looked at him for half a moment and then spoke quietly.

"I have a little over a thousand bucks in cash. If you'll follow through on this and see that the cops keep on the job and find the guys who killed her, the dough is yours. I won't be here after tomorrow. I want to be sure the job is finished."

"You won't be here?"

"We were going to be married tomorrow. Before I reported for induction. She was going to join the WACS."

"After you talked with the D.A.," Ryan said softly, concealing his surprise.

"That's right."

"I'll help you. Forget the thousand. Just cover my expenses. They won't be much. You'll need your dough when you come back, and your girl looked like a good kid. Maybe I'd like to do something for a kid who wanted to join the WACS."

Lain stared straight ahead of him, his eyes suddenly gentle.

"She never got much of a break. !

guess neither of us did. She was decent, clean, and alone in the world except for me. I worked for Scudder because the dough was good. I dealt one of his games. The game was on the level. The kid and I were going to be married. We planned things for the future—after the war. Maybe a small business somewhere."

"But something happened to change things."

Lain nodded.

"Scudder and Kranz were together on

draft here. We decided to get married . . . well, you know the rest."

Ryan listened, tight-lipped, his eyes narrowed in thought.

"He's playing you for a sucker, Bozo," the girl stormed.

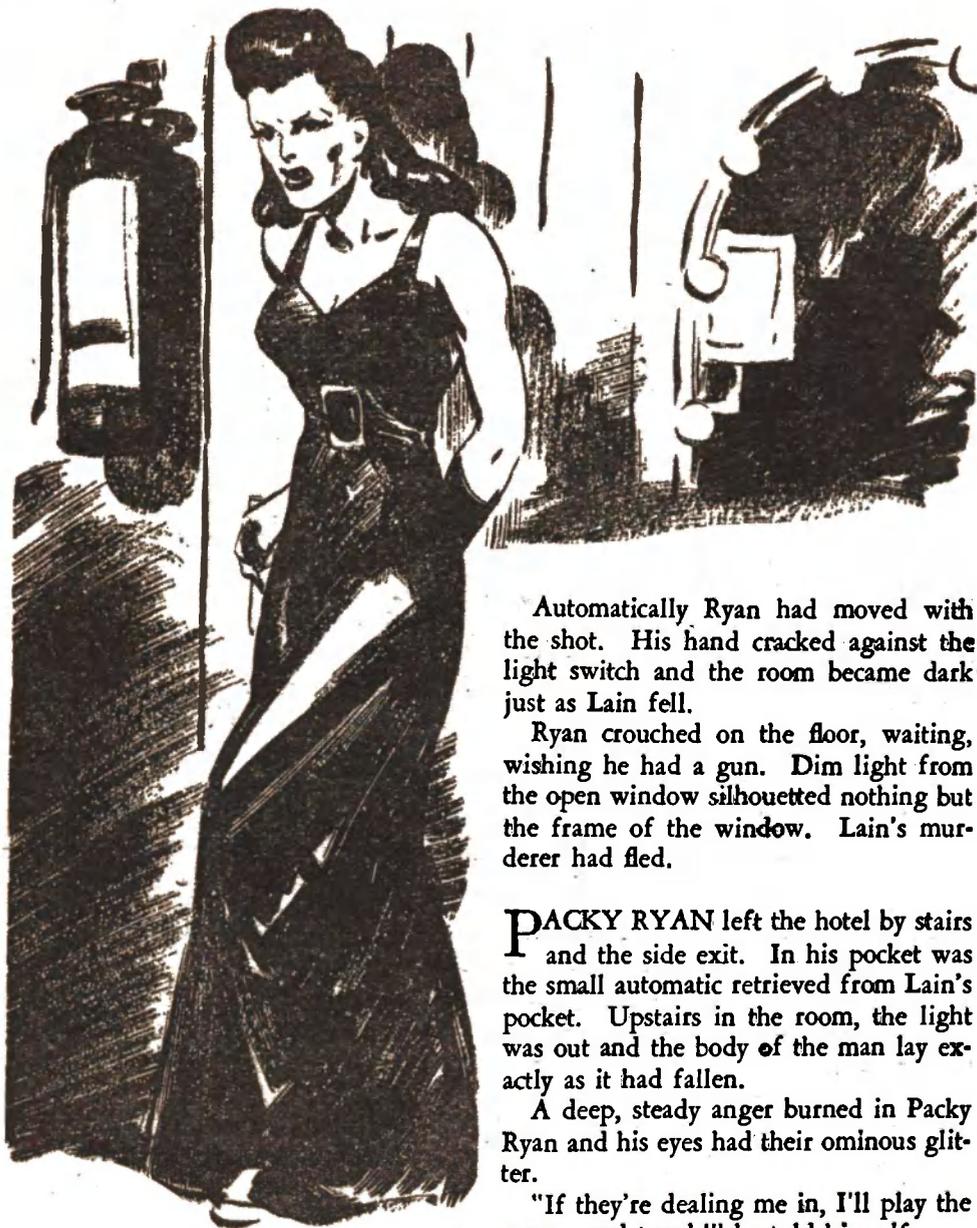


a liquor deal," he said. "I found out about it accidentally — overheard them talking at the joint. They saw me at the last moment. Kranz was all for taking care of me then. I slugged him and got away. I came up here and Jane followed me. My number was up and I had to come, anyhow. I registered for the

"They killed her because they decided you had told her."

"That's the only reason. They knew that I'd tell her and if they erased me, she'd go to the cops."

"What did you know about them, Lain? What are you going to tell the D.A. tomorrow?"



"On the third of last month—"

A single shot barked from the open window.

Cal Lain jerked straight and a look of bewilderment crossed his face. Above his right eye a small hole had suddenly appeared. A thin trickle of blood came from it. Lain fell forward to the floor.

Automatically Ryan had moved with the shot. His hand cracked against the light switch and the room became dark just as Lain fell.

Ryan crouched on the floor, waiting, wishing he had a gun. Dim light from the open window silhouetted nothing but the frame of the window. Lain's murderer had fled.

PACKY RYAN left the hotel by stairs and the side exit. In his pocket was the small automatic retrieved from Lain's pocket. Upstairs in the room, the light was out and the body of the man lay exactly as it had fallen.

A deep, steady anger burned in Packy Ryan and his eyes had their ominous glitter.

"If they're dealing me in, I'll play the game—and tough!" he told himself.

Whether he liked it or not, he was certainly involved in a murder case now. No one could ignore a murdered man in his room. The cops would want answers and plenty of them.

The small, dark man fought down his anger and contemplated his next few hours with distaste.

His best out was to find who had committed murder. It would simplify everything if he could present the police with a solved case before they hauled him in for questioning, restricted his movements, even—Packy shook his head. They might even accuse him of the murders!

Stepping out into a foggy night just before midnight and finding a murderer, or two murderers, was not an easy task, Packy thought.

He knew one thing for a certainty. Scudder and Kranz were involved. They had a reason — something about the third of the previous month, a liquor deal.

Both of them employed men who could and would commit murder. Scudder was the larger operator, but Kranz had been known to be the rougher.

"I need a lead," Ryan told himself. "A tip on who *might* be doing the rough work for them."

He hesitated in his quick stride and spotted an all night cafe where he could find a telephone. Maybe he knew how to get that lead, but he didn't want to go out to Scudder's place. He needed every moment he could get.

He found a telephone booth in the cafe and quickly found the number he wanted in the directory: "Casey's Gymnasium." He was glad that Casey lived in the back room of the establishment.

He dialed and after a short wait a throaty voice answered.

"Casey," Ryan snapped. "Packy Ryan speaking. I'm trying to find where Bozo Crnich lives. Has he a room in town?"

"Hi, Ryan! When you comin' in to see me? Bozo lives out at Scudders' place on the lake. You want to see him?"

"Quick."

"Well, he drives that singin' dame, Aileen Connel, in to Scudder's night club every night. She has a show at around midnight. He waits to take her back out to Scudder's. She lives there."

"Thanks, Casey. I'll be in to see you one of these days."

"Any time, Packy. Long time no see!"

Ryan hung up and hesitated with his hand over the dial. If he were smart, he would call the cops now and tell them about the two bodies in the hotel.

After a few seconds he left the booth without dialing again. He didn't want the cops looking for him—not yet.

IT WAS close to midnight. Bozo should be at the night club now, and Bozo was his only wedge with which to pry into the Scudder-Kranz setup.

He found a taxi and ten minutes later stood at the bar of Scudder's night club. He took a short drink and eyed the bartender with a friendly smile.

"Say! I wonder if Bozo is around? You know, that ex-pug who drives for Scudder. I met a friend of his in L. A. Said to say 'hello' to Bozo for him."

The bartender grunted.

"He's probably in the back room—last door in that hallway," he motioned to a hallway at the rear of the room. "He usually waits there to take Aileen home."

"Okay to go back?"

"If it isn't, you'll know quick enough," the bartender grinned.

"Maybe I could take him a drink."

"Maybe one—but no more. We got strict orders about Bozo and drinks. He gets one when he's here."

A moment later Packy walked down the hallway to the back room and knocked. Bozo's voice told him to come in.

The ex-fighter sat in an easy chair of an unused dressing room with his feet propped on another chair. He was reading a comic magazine. At the sight of Ryan and the drink in Ryan's hand, his face broke into a lopsided grin, marred by a scar at the corner of his mouth—a scar that Bozo had not received in the ring, Packy knew, but at the Argonne in another war.

"Hiyah, Packy! You bring me a drink, huh?"

"Sure. Heard you were back here. Thought as long as we're both working for Scudder, we could do our drinking together."

Bozo's face saddened for a second.

"They only let me have one, but that's okay. I don't mind watching you take a coupla extra. I gotta keep a clear head. Gotta drive Miss Connel."

Packy Ryan remembered when Bozo had kept a very clear head in the ring, before he had taken too many beatings and before his mind sometimes was cloudy.

Ryan settled himself in the chair vacated by Bozo's feet. Carefully he guided the conversation into fight talk, the fights that Bozo had won, the other boys who had reached the heights and had fallen into oblivion.

"Any other fighters working for Scudder?" he asked casually.

Bozo shrugged. "Maybe one or two."

"Kranz got any working for him?"

Bozo nodded and his eyes held a far-away look. "I was tellin' you about that fight in Fresno. I had this guy in the third and—"

Ryan listened patiently until he could edge conversation back.

"Scudder's quite a guy to work for, isn't he, Bozo," he said in approval. "He's got some tough guys, though. I met a couple yesterday. They'd bump their mothers for a dime."

Bozo nodded. "Mike Orenz and Slim Coggans. Some day I'm gonna bust 'em in the snoots. They keep pushin' me around."

"They think they're as tough as those mugs Kranz has? What's their names? Blackie something and Gunner?"

Bozo's face clouded in concentration.

"I don't know no Blackie or Gunner. I only know Curley and José, but they ain't here right now. They're in L. A."

"Seen Mike and Slim around tonight?"

Bozo nodded. "Sure. They come out to Scudder's a half hour before you did. They left right after you did, too. They looked like they was on business."

Packy Ryan felt the muscles of his stomach contract. This was it! This was the lead he wanted. One of the men coming from Jane Rossi's room had been thin—they might have called him "Slim".

"Wonder where they are now?"

"Over at the apartment. Did I ever tell you about the time I fought The Slugger in Butte?"

"How about my getting us another drink, Bozo? I—"



UDDENLY he was aware that the door behind him was open. He looked into the mirror of the dressing table and saw Aileen Connel framed there. Her smile was cynical and without humor.

Ryan glanced at Bozo's face. The battered features held a look of adoration as the big man grinned at the woman.

"We goin' home now, Miss Connel?" Bozo asked.

Aileen Connel came into the room and closed the door behind her.

"You get around," she said to Ryan. "Did you find out what you wanted to know from Bozo?"

"We're old friends—Bozo and I," Ryan said. "We were just having a chat."

"It's okay, Miss Connel," Bozo said cheerfully. "He works for the boss, too."

"No he doesn't, Bozo. What was he asking you?"

Bozo tried to remember, his eyes suddenly troubled.

"Well . . . we was talkin' about fights and the old days and . . ."

"Did he ask you about Scudder? About anyone working for him?"

"Yeah. He asked about Slim and Mike. He knows 'em, too," Bozo said. He saw

the look in the girl's face. "I didn't do nothin' wrong, did I, Miss Connel? I didn't mean to. I've known Packy a long time. Him and me is friends."

The woman shook her head and her smile for Bozo held secrets. She was dressed in an evening gown that revealed more than it concealed and she concentrated her charm on the ex-fighter with steady intent.

"He was playing you for a sucker, Bozo. He's trying to get the boss in trouble."

Bozo looked doubtful. He had risen and he shuffled his feet in awkwardness beneath her gaze.

"Aw . . . I think Packy's okay, Miss Connel. I don't think he would . . ."

"Bozo!" she said softly. "Bozo—he's trying to get *me* in trouble with the police. Do you understand, Bozo? He's after *me*."

A strange look of anger came over Bozo's face as his cloudy mind absorbed her words. A glaze curtained his eyes and the shuffle of his feet became a light, alert shift to the toes.

"You want I should take care of him, miss?"

"Yes, Bozo. Quietly. Then we'll take him out to the lake with us. No one must see us. Scudder will handle it after that."

"Yes, miss. I sure will. Just like you say. I'll handle him like I did The Slugger in Butte that time."

Ryan jerked the small automatic from his pocket.

"Take it easy, Bozo. I've got a gun. She's lying to you. I don't want to shoot you, but I will if you come for me."

The large man's shoulders looked strangely sloped and powerful. His eyes had become narrowed and intent. He barely glanced at the gun.

"Miss Connel says to take you, Packy. I'm gonna tear you to pieces. That's what she says to do."

"Don't, Bozo. I'll shoot!"

The ex-fighter was less than two feet from him. Packy tightened the grasp on the gun. He didn't want to shoot Bozo. The poor guy was punch-drunk and the woman had him wrapped around her finger. But he'd have to shoot. Bozo would kill him with his fists, his brute strength.

Packy waited too long. Bozo's fist seemed to come from nowhere. Ryan jerked his head and caught the blow on his cheek. He hurtled back across the room, his eyes filled with a great flash.

He crashed into something soft behind him and Aileen Connel went to the floor with him.

FOR a second Ryan's mind was as foggy as the night and then dimly he realized he was holding something with his right hand until the muscles ached with strain. He still had the gun!

He shook his head and the room came back into focus. Bozo was coming at him.

Ryan grasped the woman's arm with his left hand and jerked her in front of him.

"Tell him to stop!" he demanded. He looked over her shoulder into Bozo's face.

"Bozo, I've got a gun on her. I'll kill her if you don't stop!"

Bewilderment crowded into the large man's eyes and he looked hesitantly into the woman's face.

Ryan jabbed the gun into her back. "I don't intend to be killed by that ape," he said quietly. "This gun might not stop him. It's small. But you can. Tell him. If he keeps coming I'll shoot—and you're in the way!"

Aileen Connel stiffened and after a second her voice was tense with anger.

"Leave him alone, Bozo. It's all right."

Slowly the big man relaxed, but his eyes remained alert, his lips set and thin.

"You mean it, Miss?"

"For now. Maybe later it will be different."

"I don't understand all this," Bozo said, the cloud coming into his eyes again.

Thoughts clicked through Ryan's mind with the mechanical rapidity of a calculating machine. Suddenly he knew exactly what he was going to do. It was a long, desperate chance, but now that Aileen Connel knew about his talk with Bozo and the information that he had obtained, Packy Ryan's number was up as much as Lain's had been. Scudder would attend to that!

"Bozo," he said. "Listen to me. We're going to the car. You're going to take me to the apartment to see Mike and Slim. Miss Connel is going with us. I've got a gun against her back. If you don't do what I tell you, I'll kill her. Do you understand?"

Fear abruptly shoved the bewilderment from Bozo's eyes.

"Is that the truth, Miss Connel?" he whispered.

"He has the gun," she said crisply. "I don't know if he'd use it—I'm not going to take a chance to find out. Do what he tells you, Bozo. Do it for *me*, Bozo."

"Yes'm."

OBVIOUSLY the apartment was one that Scudder kept for town use. It was in a building that reflected expensiveness and it was located on the top floor.

The ride to the building had been uneventful with Bozo driving and the girl between him and the small detective. Ryan kept the gun pressed against the girl's side.

Going into the building and up in the elevator, the gun was a small, firm bulge in the detective's pocket. Bozo eyed it dismally and then directed his gaze to the passing floors.

The girl stood stiffly, her lips curled in a faint, strained smile.

The elevator stopped and they walked down a heavily carpeted hallway and Bozo rapped sharply on a door. After

a moment it opened and a tall, thin man in shirt sleeves looked at them suspiciously. A relieved smile touched his lips when he saw the girl, but disappeared as his cold eyes met Ryan's.

"You have company," Ryan said. "Isn't that right, Aileen?"

The girl nodded curtly, evidently aware of the gun pressed against her side.

"That's right, Slim," she said. "Company for you and Mike."

"Is the boss coming, too?" Slim Coggans asked nervously.

"I don't believe so," the girl said.

"Okay," Slim nodded. "We got a couple of dames. Sometimes the boss is funny about our havin' bims here."

"It's quite all right," Aileen Connel smiled thinly.

Packy Ryan didn't like Slim's bit of information, but his face remained expressionless.

Coggans opened the door and the trio followed him into the apartment.

Slim and Mike Orenz, a burly, dark man, were throwing quite a party, Ryan decided. The girls were nondescript, underclad, and evidently had helped to empty several bottles that were on a table.

They giggled at the newcomers.

"Swell party," one of them announced. "Lotta fun!"

Slim Coggans found glasses and began to mix drinks.

"We don't want the drinks," Ryan announced. He had backed against the door and the girl was in front of him. The gun was in sight.

Mike Orenz caught the glint of gun metal and abruptly stood.

"The guy's heeled," he snapped at Slim. "This deal's a phoney."

Slim whirled and his hand reached for a pocket and then hesitated as he glanced toward a coat hung over the back of a chair.

"You two girls get in another room," Ryan barked.

"You can't—" Orenz began to protest.

"I can't, but I will," Ryan smiled grimly. "And I shoot straight."

The girls looked frightened. One of them started hesitantly toward a door.

"That's right, sister," Ryan said. "Keep going. Open the door and turn on the light. I want a look into the room."

The girls obeyed him and stood back from the open door. Ryan edged himself and Aileen Connel carefully around the room until he could take a full, sweeping glance into the room. It was a bedroom. There was no other door into it and no telephone.

"Open the window," he commanded one of the girls.

She crossed the room and opened the window. There was no fire-escape landing outside.

Ryan silently motioned for the other girl to join her in the room. He closed the door and locked it, his eyes wary as he watched Coggans and Orenz. His gun remained firm against Aileen Connel.

"What's the deal?" Slim Coggans rasped.

"Two murders," Packy Ryan said thinly. "Tell me about them."

HE EDGED himself around the room again until he reached Slim's coat and removed a gun. Mike Orenz' coat hung over the next chair. Ryan found Orenz' gun and slipped both of them into his suit coat pockets under his topcoat.

"You're crazy," Orenz snapped. "We don't know about any murders."

"You know all about them," Packy said. "Give."

"Go to hell," Slim Coggans said evenly.

Packy Ryan shook his head.

"You're sure you won't talk?" he asked.

"Damn' sure!"

Ryan quickly glanced at Bozo who stood silently near the hallway door.

"Remember where the gun is pointed, Bozo?" he said.

Bozo nodded and fright filled his eyes again for a second.

"Take Slim first," Ryan said. "Don't knock him out. Just make him talk. I'll tell you when to quit. You got that?"

An expression of confused emotions came over Bozo's face and Ryan remembered the ex-fighter's voiced desire to revenge himself on the two men who had pushed him around. Bozo looked at the girl as if expecting orders from her. Ryan nudged her with the gun.

"Do what he says, Bozo," she whispered.

Bozo suddenly grinned and took off his coat. Coggans looked nervously about the room and his eyes watched Ryan's gun hand for a second and then glanced quickly back to Bozo.

"I'm your friend, Bozo. You won't take any socks at me. We're pals."

"You been pushin' me around," Bozo said in a monotone. "I'm gonna even things up. Miss Connel says to take you like Packy asked. I gotta do it, Slim. I want to do it, see?"

He started a wary, steady approach upon the slim gunman, his fists in the position he had known through a hundred fights, his lips tight, his face deadpan.

Bozo struck. Slim rolled from the punch. Mike Orenz lunged forward in unexpected attack. His fist glanced from Bozo's cheek.

Bozo grunted as if annoyed and his left jolted. The fist cracked smartly and Mike's head jerked back. He lit heavily on his back and lay motionless. Bozo resumed his steady walk toward Coggans.

Then it was a little sickening. The girl shuddered and the steady, solid smack of Bozo's fists jarred against Ryan's nerves as he watched red blotches appear on Coggans' battered face, saw blood trickle from the man's nose and lips, saw the pain, the desperate, sodden attempt to cover up as blows rocked his body.

Bozo's arms pumped monotonously with the carefully planned precision of a machine.

"Hold it, Bozo," Ryan ordered.

DELUCTANTLY the large man **I** stopped the punishment. Slim reeled and fell against a wall, his head hanging, his face puffed and red.

"What about the murders, Coggans?" Ryan asked quietly. "You went to the girl's room and killed her after I told Scudder where she was when I called yesterday. You shot young Lain from the fire-escape by my window—you followed me there tonight. Tell me about it."

Slim shook his head.

The tight feeling of distaste settled over Ryan, but his lips set.

"Maybe you really came to get me tonight and found Lain instead," Ryan said. "Talk Coggans."

The man shook his head.

"More, Bozo," Ryan said.

Bozo's fist flicked out tentatively, lightly jolting the beaten man's head up. Another fist crashed full into the face and Coggans moaned.

Carefully keeping the man conscious, Bozo continued his relentless attack, continued it until Coggans was on the floor moaning, talking.

"Stop him . . . I'll talk . . . Mike killed her. . . ."

"Lain?" Ryan snapped. "Who shot him?"

Coggans shook his head weakly.

Ryan's eyes narrowed.

"That's easier," he said. "There's a bullet in Lain's head. It came from your gun or Mike Orenz'. Ballistics can determine that. Tell us about Mike and the girl."

"We went to her room . . . she struggled . . . scratched Mike's arm . . . he choked her . . . you were there when we came out."

Ryan nodded.

"There'd be some of Mike's skin under her fingernails. The cops can check that and tie it to Orenz," he said grimly. "That's better. A confession obtained by force isn't worth a damn. Ballistics and skin will furnish evidence."

Coggans struggled to his feet and stumbled toward the door.

"You won't get me for Lain!" he muttered hysterically.

Bozo glanced at Ryan. The ex-fighter seemed to have concentrated his thoughts only upon punishing Coggans.

"He used to shove me around plenty," Bozo said to Packy.

Packy Ryan nodded consent.

Bozo stepped in front of the stumbling man. His final blow was swift, solid, merciful. Coggans went to the floor and was as silent as Orenz.

Ryan looked down at the two men. The girl trembled slightly and turned her eyes away from Coggans' battered face.

"You're somewhat of a heel, Ryan," she said hoarsely.

Packy Ryan smiled bitterly.

"The girl and Lain wanted to live," he said simply. "So do I."

RYAN didn't hear the door open, nor know anyone had stepped into the room until Scudder spoke sharply.

"You should have kept out of this, Ryan."

Ryan stood perfectly still. Two men stepped near him. He recognized the large, fat man with Scudder. It was Kranz. Both men held guns.

"Drop your gun, Ryan," Scudder said. "You can't get both of us before we get you."

Ryan relaxed his fingers and the gun dropped to the floor.

Aileen Connel turned to face him. Deliberately she slapped his face.

To Scudder and Kranz she said, "Slim spilled everything."

Scudder nodded.

"We'll take care of it," he said softly.

Bozo looked at Scudder nervously.

"Look, Boss, I had to do this to Slim," he explained. "Packy had a gun on Miss Connel. I had to do it!"

"It's all right, Bozo. That was right. Your job is to take care of Miss Connel," Scudder said in his smooth voice.

He walked up to the ex-fighter and smiled.

"*But how did he get the gun on her in the first place? Where were you?*"

"Well . . . look, Boss . . . I was talking with him and . . ."

Scudder hit him full in the lips.

Bozo stepped back and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, his eyes confused again.

"I did wrong, Boss?"

"Fool!"

Packy Ryan's muscles tightened and he glanced at Kranz. There might be a chance to make a break. Kranz met his eyes and shook his head.

"No chance, Packy," he said. "Keep them high!"

Aileen Connel bent over Coggans and tried to stop blood that flowed from a cut over one of his eyes.

"There are a couple of girls in the bedroom," she said.

Scudder swore under his breath.

"How much of this do they know?"

"Probably all of it. That door is thin. I know—I've been in there and heard people talking out here," she said.

Scudder glanced at Kranz.

"What do you think?" he asked.

Kranz shrugged. "We're in too deep now. Maybe a car accident with the two girls and Ryan. Off the bridge out there into the lake."

Packy Ryan's mind raced. Aileen Connel had forgotten something. He was thankful for the draping topcoat that he wore. If he could create a diversion for a moment, he had a chance.

If he were lucky, he could do it. After-

wards there would be a great amount of explaining to the cops, a fingerprint or two that would need explanation, but Aileen Connel had remembered something he had forgotten—the girls. They must have heard all that had been said.

He looked at Bozo. Back through the years the fighter had seen his high spots, had heard the cheers of the crowd—back in the years before his mind had become clouded and before he had become a body-guard and chauffeur in a world strangely grotesque in the vagueness of his fight-groggy mind.

"Scudder," Packy said. "You're going to erase me and the girls?"

"What do you think, Ryan?"

"I think you are, and I want to have my words now."

Scudder smiled slightly.

"Go ahead," he said.

The glitter of Ryan's dark eyes had become crystalline and the small scar across his nose whitened. He started to speak quietly, his arms relaxing a little, his voice steady and distinct.

"You killed Jane Rossi and Cal Lain because they knew something about you and Kranz. Something they learned accidentally. It was none of their business, but you made it their business—and *your* business because they knew it. Your business to kill them!"

"Make it fast, Ryan," Kranz snapped.

"Did you know that Cal Lain was going into the Army?" Ryan asked slowly. "Did you know that Jane Rossi was going to join the WACS?"

"So what?" Aileen Connel asked sarcastically. "Do you want to make a speech about patriotism?"

"Maybe," Ryan said. "Maybe I do. Maybe I want to talk about Scudder. About a man who deliberately had a man murdered—a man who was going to fight for his country. Had a girl murdered. A girl who was going to fight for her country. You did that, Scudder."

Ryan's eyes shifted to Bozo and back to Scudder.

"Scudder, you're no better than the foulest Nazi. You're no better than the Germans who have been killing other women. Some of the boys in uniform would make it tough for you if they knew. Some of the *men* in this country. Some who have fought for this nation."

He paused for just an instant, his mind searching for words.

"There are men who would know how to handle you. Men who fought in the last war. They'd take care of you, Scudder! Men who fought in Flanders—*men who fought in the Argonne!* A veteran of the *Argonne* would even things for Cal Lain and his girl—two kids who were going to fight for us! He'd smash that face of yours to a pulp!"

RYAN glanced at Bozo again. The ex-fighter's eyes were clear and intense. His nostrils were pinched as he stared at Scudder. A thin, white line edged around his lips.

"Bozo!" Ryan snapped. "*You* were at the Argonne! Take him! Even things up for the kids. They were going to fight for you! *Take him!*"

Scudder saw the sudden mad light in Bozo's eyes, the thin lips. He tried to move, but was too late. Bozo's fist caught him clean on the point of the jaw. Scudder crashed back into Kranz. Aileen Connel screamed.

"Bozo! No! Stop!"

Bozo sprang forward and jerked Scudder to his feet. There was one more sharp crack of his fist. Scudder crumpled.

Kranz was on his feet and his eyes widened as he stared at Ryan. Slowly his hands went up.

Aileen Connel had forgotten the guns Ryan had taken from Slim and Mike and had put in his suit coat pockets under the topcoat. Now he held one in each hand.

Suddenly the girl laughed hysterically. "It's—it's like a lousy B picture!" she said shrilly.

"With the happy ending," Ryan said grimly.

He backed to a telephone across the room and dialed the operator.

"Police!" he told her.

After a few seconds he talked rapidly. He explained about the bodies in the hotel—obviously, from his conversation, they had not been discovered. He told what had happened in the apartment. He asked for help.

"And fast. Wait! . . . one thing. The motive for this mess. What happened the third of last month? Anything you cops have been worrying about?"

He listened and nodded slowly.

"That's it!" he said. "Get some men here fast."

He hung up and looked at Kranz.

"I'd forgotten about the liquor stolen from the state warehouse," he said. "The papers played it down. It must have been worth plenty."

Kranz smiled crookedly. "One hundred grand," he admitted.

Bozo nursed a cut knuckle. He wrapped a handkerchief around his hand and then looked at Ryan with his troubled eyes. The brightness was gone again.

"Packy," he said hesitantly. "I guess they wouldn't want me in the Army again, would they? I guess I'm no good for them. Sometimes I don't think so good. Things get all fogged up."

"You'll be all right, Bozo. You're a good man."

"But they won't want me in the Army. I guess I won't work for Scudder any more. I guess I was wrong about Miss Connel."

"That's right, Bozo."

"Packy—you won't shove me around. You treat me all right. You couldn't give me a job, could you, Packy?"

Ryan smiled softly.

"I'll see that you get a job—and I won't shove you around. Never again."

"You never did," Bozo said in a puzzled voice. "You never shoved me around."

Aileen Connel said, "You punch-drunk dope! He's been shoving you around all night!"

Bozo looked at her calmly.

"I guess you're not much account, Miss Connel. That girl who was murdered was gonna join the WACS. I ain't never socked a dame, but maybe—"

The woman's self-confidence suddenly faded and fear came to her eyes.

"No, Bozo! Not me!"

Bozo looked at Ryan. "What do you say, Boss?"

"She's not worth a slap from your

hand, Bozo. She's worse than that tramp you fought in Butte."

"You remember that fight, Packy? Remember how I—"

"I remember," Ryan said softly. "I remember."

Bozo nodded and his eyes clouded. He sat down and stared vacantly at his battered hands, unmindful of the shriek of approaching sirens, or the heavy breathing of the men he had battered down for a murdered girl and a murdered boy.

Packy Ryan stood silently, the guns becoming heavy in his hands, his eyes alertly watching the unhappy occupants of the room.

He wondered what the apartment manager would say when Packy Ryan brought Bozo Crnich home to live.

**To shorten the War,
to save American lives,
buy and buy and buy
WAR STAMPS
AND
WAR BONDS!**

CHIMNEY AT No. 21

IT WAS the Paris of the German occupation, yet things weren't very much different on Rue Le Sueur. It was just an ordinary residential street in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, and nothing much ever happened there. That is to say, nothing much ever happened until one day not very long ago when a staid French housewife noticed that the chimney of No. 21 Rue Le Sueur was belching forth smoke whose fumes were particularly annoying. The housewife telephoned the surete, and in due course a gendarme was sent around to make a routine investigation.

When the policeman came to No. 21, he found the chimney still giving off nauseating smells. So he called the fire department, and when they arrived, together they broke into the house and into a stench so overpowering that all vomited.

Continuing their investigation into the cellar of No. 21 Rue Le Sueur, they stumbled over a bag which, when opened, was found to contain two human heads and a mutilated leg. But that was not all. Continuing further, they found another bag stuffed with a cloven corpse. When at last they came to the furnace, they were amazed to find four charred female bodies. Would this pile of corpses never end? In the courtyard, they found a lime-filled pit. The pit was filled with the last remains of thirteen persons. To add to the utter confusion, the investigators found assorted limbs, and about thirty pairs of women's shoes in the many closets.

Here was a mass murder, the work of

a deranged mentality. Was it thirty murders that had been committed, or was it only twenty? It was thought that no one would ever know. Here was a series of crimes that made old Henri Landru, the Bluebeard of Gambais, look like an amateur by comparison. Would they ever find the murderer? They thought they knew who he was, but for the present he had disappeared, perhaps never to be found.

Continuing their investigation, the Paris police have discovered that a doctor, one Marcel Petiot, had rented the house at No. 21 Rue Le Sueur as a laboratory some time ago. Now, however, he was gone. Perhaps he was the murderer, said the Paris press. For women of all kind and description now came forward to say how the doctor had always had lime-stained hands and had worn rough, brick-layer's clothes. Also, they said that he was possessed of magnetic, evil eyes. There was much conjecture as to how the evil doctor put his victims to death. The most popular theory was that his victims were given fatal injections and then chained to the walls of a soundproof "death chamber." The doctor is supposed to have watched their agony through a peephole.

However, the suspect is still just a suspect, although the real killer may have been found by the time this article is published, and many Parisians are saying that this new Bluebeard is just a fiction invented by the Vichy government to take the people's minds off the war. Possibly we may never know the truth.

DEATH BUYS



PALL of clouds draped the night, staining the late darkness darker still with presaged rain. Tim Clanton looked at the clock in his suburban service station, saw that the hands stood at ten-thirty, and set about the task of closing up.

He had scarcely switched off both neon signs that redly proclaimed "*Trojan Gasoline*" when a sleek black convertible drifted into the covered driveway and

stopped at the ethyl pump. It was an expensive car with its automatic top folded down, and Clanton eyed it admiringly as he approached it. You had to be in the big money to drive a rig like that, he told himself without envy. He noticed, too, that its windshield bore a "C" sticker.

"How many gallons?" he asked deferentially. Then he went a little pale as he got a good glance at the girl who sat gracefully under the steering wheel.

She smiled at him. "Hello, Tim. So



As he folded under the punch, his trigger finger worked on the trigger of the gun.

BLACK GAS

By **ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**

this is where you've been hiding out!"

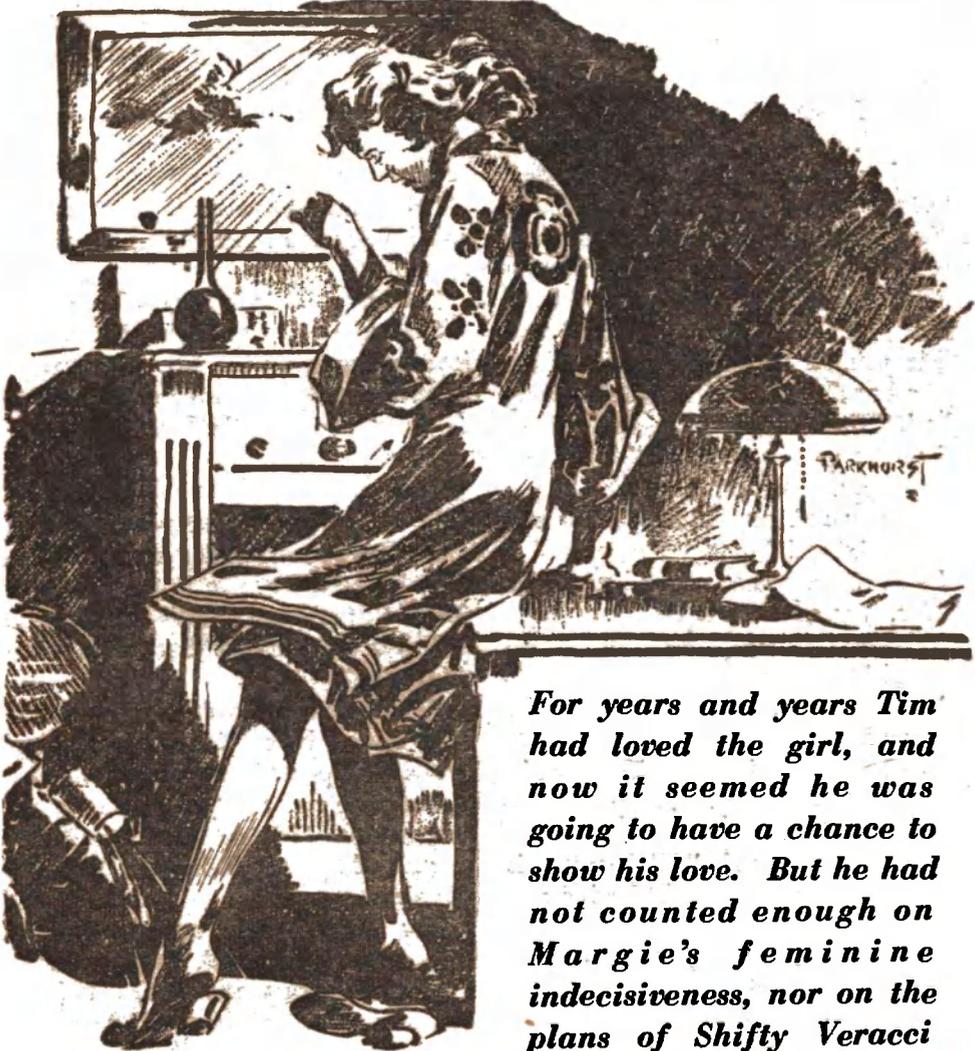
"Hiding out?" he repeated her words slowly, in a curiously dull voice. He studied her with eyes that were hungry, as if they had been long starved for the sight of her yellow hair, her carefully rouged cheeks, the petulant fullness of her mouth, and the symmetry of her fig-

ure. "I'm not hiding, Margie. I work here."

"Work?"

He nodded. "It's a decent job. An honest job."

"So you're going straight!" she said. There may have been a hint of mockery in her tone; he couldn't be positive. She



For years and years Tim had loved the girl, and now it seemed he was going to have a chance to show his love. But he had not counted enough on Margie's feminine indecisiveness, nor on the plans of Shifty Veracci

looked beyond him. "I guess they must trust you or they wouldn't leave you here alone."

"The cash register always balances. Yes, they trust me."

She smiled again. "Well, as long as nobody's watching, why don't you kiss me? Or am I poison?"

"Not poison, Margie. Just . . . dangerous."

"You didn't used to think so."

"That was three years ago, before I got sense. Before I had some brains beaten into my skull up at the Big House."

She made a coquettish gesture. "Still brooding over the rap you took, eh? You ought to forget it, Tim."

"I can't forget the way Shifty Veracci framed me to save his own lousy hide," Clanton answered quietly. Then he looked inside the convertible. "I suppose you're Veracci's moll now?"

"Not his moll. His wife. How'd you guess?"

He pointed to the registration certificate on the column of the steering wheel. "There's his name."

"You're quite a detective."

"No. Just observant."

Her eyes met his, boldly. "What else can you observe?"

"You've got a good car and expensive clothes. Veracci seems to be doing okay."

"Yes, he is." She paused. "Is that all you see?"

"What else am I supposed to see?" he countered.

"I asked you to kiss me. That should have meant something." She parted her crimson lips lazily.

He shook his head. "All it meant is you want to play and I'm not having any, thank you."

"Now wait a minute," she said, her voice suddenly crisp. "A girl's got to live. You went up for a stretch. Did you expect me to sit around and wait for you to get out of stir?" Her eyes narrowed

resentfully. "You didn't make any effort to look me up, after you got out."

"I didn't want to. I'm going straight. No more mob stuff. No more of the old connections. I learned my lesson. Let's let it stay that way."

She sighed faintly. "I guess I understand how you feel, Tim. I wish I could break clean. When I saw you and recognized you, it . . . it sort of stirred up an old memory, like poking at the ashes of a dead fire and finding one live coal still glowing." She laughed without mirth. "I had a sudden picture of getting away from all this and letting my hair go back to brown and . . . and maybe driving an old battered Model A instead of this classy heap, and living in a cottage. . . ."

"Are you screwy, Margie?"

"Sure. Screwy enough to realize money and jewelry and swell clothes won't buy love."

"Meaning you don't love Veracci?"

She made a bitter mouth. "No woman loves a guy who beats her. Not even if he gives her diamonds the next minute."

"I can show you the bruises."

ANGER swelled in Tim Clanton. "Where is he? Take me to him. I've owed him something for a long time—for what he did to me. I was willing to forget that, though. Willing to bury it and steer clear of him. But this is something else."

"Tim! Then y-you do love me?"

"I always have," he admitted reluctantly. "I suppose I always will. But this is something else. Shifty Veracci's slapped you around. He's got to be taught he mustn't do that. Take me to him, Margie."

Her lower lip was tremulous. "No. It wouldn't do any good. I mean I c-can't have you fighting my battles. Besides, he's out of town tonight." With a sudden gesture she extended her arms, pleadingly. "Tim, t-take me away!"

"Huh?"

"Let's go away together. To some other town. Somewhere as far as we can travel, where he won't ever find us. Tonight's our chance, while he's away. Tim . . . will you?"

Clanton fought a battle with himself, inwardly and silently. He wanted to refuse; to handle things the open way. "A divorce—" he started to say.

"No, darling. Shifty wouldn't stand for that. You know the sort of man he is. He'd fight it, and—and maybe he'd win. I'm afraid of him, Tim. You don't know how afraid."

"Afraid to divorce him and afraid not to, eh?"

"Y-yes. Running away is the only way out. There's nothing we can do except that."

Clanton nodded. "All right. If that's the way it's got to be, that's how it will be." He went back into the service station to lock up the cash register, turn off the lights, and padlock the door. Then he climbed heavily into Margie's convertible. "Let's go pack."

IN HER penthouse apartment she mixed a drink for him, then left him alone while she went into her boudoir to toss a helter-skelter assortment of clothing into two Gladstones. In the midst of this indiscriminate packing she returned, took his emptied glass to the kitchenette and presently reappeared with a fresh highball.

He accepted it gravely. "You didn't have to use a clean glass. And I'm not sure I need a second drink."

"Not even to k-keep your courage up?" she asked him. Her tone was gay, but the gaiety seemed forced.

"You're all I need for courage, Margie." He took her in his arms, then. He did what she had asked him to do back at the service station. He kissed her gently. The kiss sent a strange spaté of

emotion through him, nostalgic, laden with the yearning of three long years. But somehow the thrilling warmth of her mouth upon his own made him oddly uneasy—almost unsatisfied. It was as if he sensed a lack, an emptiness, a dark void where there should have been fervor. *I wonder why, he reflected. I wonder why her kiss seems to hold danger instead of love?*

He dismissed the feeling; watched her as she went again into her boudoir. After a while she came back to him, carrying her two hastily-packed bags. He took them, and together they quietly left the apartment.

"We'll use the convertible," she announced. "You drive, Tim. Drive fast—and far!"

Clanton objected. "Veracci could trace us if we use that car. A train will be better. Or a bus."

"We can switch tomorrow. Right now the convertible will mean speed. Speed's what I want, darling. Speed!"

"Okay," he surrendered, helping her into the machine. Then he slid under the wheel and headed into the darkness of the night; into the gathering storm. Bye and bye he began to feel the sleek power of the motor, the silken purring energy that made him master of distance. You didn't really drive a car like this; you merely sat there and let its mechanism become a part of you, so that you felt a sensation of triumph over time and the miles. . . .

"Tim!"

"Yes, Margie?" he answered. Her voice had almost startled him; it had been almost an hour since either had spoken to the other. He reduced his pressure on the throttle. "What is it, sweet?"

She shivered. "I—I'm scared."

"Scared? Of what?"

"Of shifty. We can't go through with this, Tim. He'd . . . never rest until he found us. And then he might . . . k-kill

you. And me." She clutched his arm. "Turn around, Tim. Take me back."

"Back? Back to Veracci?"

"Yes. I—I've made a mistake. We can't run away from—from reality. I want to go home, Tim."

He scowled. "You want to go home to your diamonds and soft living, is that it?"

"You—you're not being fair." Then she squared her shoulders. "All right. Think what you like. Maybe I *have* decided I couldn't stand a cheap cottage and a battered Model A. Does it matter what my reasons are? I want to go back."

Clanton drew up at the side of the highway. "Better think it over thoroughly, Margie. If we go back, it's for good. I mean there won't be another time like this."

"No. I suppose there won't. Take me home, Tim. And then p-put me out of your thoughts. Forever."

THE MADE a U-turn, wordlessly obedient, wondering why he felt no particular regret. Maybe Margie was right; maybe this wouldn't have worked out. Queerly enough, he experienced a feeling of relief as he aimed the convertible back toward the city. Tomorrow he would resume his service station job, and in retrospect tonight's incident would seem no more than a remembered dream. A dream with no repercussions, no regrets . . . and no fears, he told himself.

At the apartment house he relinquished the wheel. "Want me to carry your bags upstairs?"

"No. I'll manage. Good night, Tim."

He corrected her. "Good-bye," he said, and stalked off. Rain began to fall before he gained the next intersection. He paid no heed to it.

He paid no heed to anything until he reached his rooming house and went upstairs. Then, as he opened the door of his cheap hall bedroom, he found plenty to occupy his attention. Somebody

was in that room, waiting for him; somebody with a gun.

THE gun was a police positive .38 in the capable fist of Detective Sergeant James Kronniger. "Hold still, pal," Kronniger said gruffly.

Tim Clanton stiffened. "What the hell is this?"

"You know damned well what it is. A pinch. I thought you promised me you'd go straight? That was the agreement when I got you that service station job."

"Straight?" Clanton parroted, dazed. "Good God, how could I go any straighter than I've been going?"

The plainclothes officer sneered sourly, as if he had a flavor in his mouth that he disliked. "I suppose you're going to deny you cracked the main downtown office of the rationing board this evening, eh, Clanton? You're going to tell me you didn't steal a whole carload of gasoline coupons, A, B, and C books to be sold on the black market. I guess you're going to deny you shot a cop when he tried to nab you coming out?"

"You're crazy," Clanton said. His voice didn't sound like his own. It had a strained, taut timbre. "I didn't—"

Kronniger waved his revolver disgustedly. "No use beating your gums to me, Clanton. Your fingerprints are all over the rationing joint. You petered the vault, glommed the ticket books. Then this patrolman spotted you making your lam."

"That's a lie," Clanton spoke deliberately through clenched teeth. "A rotten lousy lie."

The detective ignored him. "The flat-foot ordered you to halt. You started running. He fired a shot at you. Then you turned and let him have it in the guts."

"No. No, Kronniger. That's all wrong."

"We got to the cop just before he died,

He told us all about it. You wore a mask, he said. He thought he'd hit you with one of his slugs, but I guess he was wrong; you don't seem to be packing a bullet around in your hide. Anyhow, he said a masked man drilled him; and when we checked for dabs inside the layout, we found plenty of them. Yours, Clanton. Your prints."

"They couldn't have been mine. I—"

"Save it. Let's go. It's a murder rap this time."

Clanton felt the sweat forming on his

The weapon roared as he closed in and a bullet ploughed into the ceiling.



forehead and running in little cold trickles down his face. "Listen, Kronniger. It must be a mistake. I've got an alibi."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. I was with—"

"All right, spill it."

"No, I can't. I don't dare. The woman I was with is married. Her husband beats her. If he ever found out she and I were eloping tonight, he'd—he might—"

Kronniger shook his head. Too thin, fella."

"Well, wait. Maybe I can establish my alibi without using the girl's name. How about a rent receipt for a tourist cabin? Here, in my pocket. Get it yourself. Reach in. I'm not packing a gat." He held his hands up while the detective stretched forth delving fingers.

AND then, as Kronniger fumbled in the pocket, Tim Clanton twisted sidewise. His left fist knocked Kronniger's .38 upward. The weapon roared, firing a pellet at the ceiling. Then Clanton whipped over his right fist, smashing it against the astonished point of Kronniger's lantern jaw.

Kronniger collapsed.

Clanton hit him again as he fell. "Sorry, Kronniger," he muttered, knowing that the man couldn't hear the apology.

He raced toward the room's single window, realizing there were probably more cops downstairs and knowing that he did not dare chance running into them. He slipped through the window, down to the roof of a small side porch immediately below. He crept silently to the edge, peered downward, saw nobody. Panting, he lowered himself until he dangled by his hands from the porch roof. Then he dropped.

He landed on his feet; took the jar on relaxed knees and fell sprawling. He was up again in an instant; and pelting toward the street.

Something moved, ahead of him. He thought he discerned a metallic glitter, as of light striking a badge on a copper's tunic. Shivering, Clanton reversed his direction and darted toward the rear yard behind the rooming house; leaped over a fence and noiselessly raced along an unimpeded alleyway.

At the mouth of the alley he emerged to find nobody in sight. He slouched out

into the open, forcing himself to walk slowly. He couldn't risk haste; it might call attention to him and invite pursuit. He moved forward, counterfeiting a casual manner; felt his heart hammering when he reached the next intersection. Thus far his luck had held.

IT CONTINUED to hold. A clattering street-car rumbled past, and Clanton broke into a lope; caught it and flung himself aboard. He groped in his pocket, found a dime and handed it to the conductor. It was his last change—and he suddenly remembered that he had only two dollar bills in his wallet. Two dollars to get him out of the city, away from the law!

His mind was numb, dazed. How the hell could his fingerprints have been found in that OPA rationing office? He hadn't been anywhere near the place. It was axiomatic that fingerprints never lie; yet they had lied this time, and a policeman was dead, and Tim Clanton was now running away from the rap—trying to escape on just two dollars.

It couldn't be done. He knew this. And he knew he dared not go to the service station where he worked, open its cash register to steal its contents for a getaway. There would be cops at that station, staked out to nab him just in case he showed himself in the vicinity. . . .

"Margie!" he whispered to himself.

Sure. That was it. He would go to Margie and tell her what he was up against. He wouldn't ask her to corroborate his alibi; he had no wish to jeopardize her. But she had funds, and maybe she would loan him a hundred or so. He made for the trolley car's front exit; got off at the next stop. He started walking through the rain, oblivious to the cold wetness that soaked his clothes and squished in his cheap shoes.

At long last he came to the apartment house; entered a deserted lobby and used

the automatic elevator, unobserved. He stepped off at penthouse level, approached Margie's door and lifted his knuckles to knock.

He didn't knock.

Someone was in there with Margie. You could hear a man's low, tense voice: "Keep probing, hon. Gimme another whiskey and then keep digging until you—blazes, that hurts!"

"I'm being as easy as I can, darling." That was Margie talking, her tone throaty with concern. "I think we ought to have a doctor. The bullet's pretty deep in your thigh."

"Nix. You think I want some sawbones ratting on me? You know they got to report gunshot wounds. No. You keep probing with the knife until you dig out the slug. Then we'll sprinkle me with sulfa powder and put a bandage on. I'll be okay. Hell, this ain't the first time I ever lost a little blood."

Outside the door, Clanton stood frozen as he eavesdropped. He recognized that masculine voice. It was Shifty Veracci—Margie's husband. Veracci, who'd framed Tim Clanton to prison three years ago. Veracci, with a bullet in his thigh. . . .

"God!" Clanton whispered. The truth had suddenly dawned on him; he thought he understood, now, what had happened tonight. A seething fury ripped through him, shaking him like a fist. And as anger mounted, he hurled himself at the door; slammed his weight against it and burst it inward.

He went surging into the room.

LIKE a hurled missile he flashed across the threshold, seeing Shifty Veracci and the blonde Margie as if through a dull crimson haze—Margie had just finished bandaging her husband's leg; and now she swayed backward, a moan escaping her lips as she stared at the intruder. "Tim!" she choked.

Clanton snarled: "Yeah, me," and

launched himself at Veracci. "This is it, you rat."

"Hey—!" the chunky Italian ducked, limping on his bad leg. He tried to protect himself from a battering fist, but the fist slashed past his guard and caught him full on the mouth. A froth of oaths mingled with the blood that made an abrupt smear of his lips. He lurched, staggered. Clanton nailed him again, sending him against the wall.

Margie let out a wild wail. "Tim—don't! He's in no shape to fight! He's been shot!"

"Yes, I know." Clanton closed in on Veracci. "Who plugged you, Shifty? Talk before I break you in half with my bare hands. Come on, spill it."

"I—it was—an accident—"

"A cop shot you. Isn't that right?"

"How the hell did you know? What business is it of yours?"

Clanton hit him on the face, hard. "It's my business because you tried to use me for a fall guy. I get the whole setup now. You're the one who petered the rationing board office and stole those gas coupons, aren't you? And you're the one who croaked the patrolman who tried to pinch you."

"That's nutty talk! Your fingerprints—"

"Thanks," Clanton said darkly. "You gave yourself away when you said that. How could you know about my fingerprints *unless you put them there yourself?*"

Veracci cringed. "Now wait a minute. Listen."

"No. *You* listen. The whole thing was a plant. Margie picked me up, fed me a cock-and-bull story about wanting to elope with me because you beat her, mistreated her. She made it convincing. I fell for it; came here while she got some bags packed. Meanwhile she gave me a drink; and later took the glass away, brought me a fresh highball in a clean

tumbler. I wondered about that at the time, but I was too dumb to understand what was going on."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning you must have been hiding in the kitchenette. When Margie took away my first highball glass, she gave it to you. And it had my fingerprints on it. You sneaked out the back way, made gelatine impressions of my prints, transferred them to a rubber glove and wore that glove when you robbed the OPA office of those gas coupons. That's why the law found my dabs on the safe that I didn't pester."

Veracci's eyes were hot slits. "Smart punk."

"Smart enough to realize Margie took me for a ride in more ways than one. The automobile ride was to keep me from having a decent alibi while you burgled the ration board headquarters," Clanton retorted grimly. "But the jig's up now. That bullet she just pried out of your thigh will match the gun of the cop you killed. It will prove he plugged you—and that you, in turn drilled him."

Veracci snarled: "That's what you think, sucker," and drove his knee into Clanton's groin.

THE foul was as brutal as it was unexpected. Clanton doubled over, sickened. At the same instant, Veracci yanked a .32 automatic from a shoulder clip.

"No, Shifty!" That was Margie, her voice shrill with crafty warning. "Don't blast him. The noise will bring people. Don't!"

Veracci hesitated. "Yeah. Maybe you're right." And he clubbed his Colt viciously down on Clanton's head. Clanton sprawled to the rug, dazed, semi-conscious. Pain screamed through him in waves that washed surf-like over his senses and filled his ears with thunder.

Through the thunder he heard Veracci

saying: "We got to get rid of him. I know what. We'll put some of the gas coupons in his pocket, take him downstairs and dump him on the street; run over him with the convertible. He'll be too dead to spill what he knows when the cops pick him up."

"Better hurry," Margie said callously.

It was her calmness, her willingness to participate in a deliberate murder, that shocked Tim Clanton back to full awareness of his peril. Once he had been in love with this girl. As recently as tonight he had still cared for her. But now. . . .

He tightened his muscles; waited until Veracci was leaning over him to start dragging him. Then he rolled; smashed himself against the swarthy killer's legs. The impact wasn't particularly violent, but Veracci had a wounded thigh. That helped. For a split instant the murderer was off-balance.

Clanton came off the floor; grappled with him. "Now, by God!" he grated as he wrestled his enemy across the room.

They were evenly matched: Veracci with a bad leg, Clanton's reflexes dulled by that bash on the head a moment ago. Like two injured animals they were locked together, hammering, kicking, butting, clawing. Veracci tried to bring his automatic into play. And even as he raised it, Clanton buried a fist in his belly.

Gasping, nauseated, Veracci folded forward. He twitched all over—and the convulsive movement of his trigger finger brought a barking explosion from the gun in his hand. The report seemed to be split asunder by a scream.

It was Margie who screamed; but her outcry was not repeated. Veracci's wild bullet had caught her full in the chest. A stupid expression came into her eyes; distorted her red lips. She toppled, fell.

Veracci stared at her. "Margie!"

In that single instant of his inattention, he was lost. Tim Clanton swung on him,

connected, knocked him down. Then, with utter savagery, Clanton leaped with both feet onto the fallen man's face. . . .

THERE was a telephone in the far corner of the room. Clanton dialed it; obtained a connection with police headquarters. "Let me talk to Detective Sergeant Kronniger. Hello. Kronniger? This is Tim Clanton."

"Clanton —? Why, you stinking son—"

"Hold it. I'm in Shifty Veracci's penthouse. Shifty just murdered his wife. Margie was her name. I think you'll find that the bullet in her breast matches the one that killed the cop on that gas-coupon burglary. In other words, Veracci's gun was responsible in both cases."

"What?"

"Moreover, Veracci's got a wounded

thigh. The slug will fit the dead cop's rod. And there's a batch of gasoline ration tickets in Veracci's apartment to prove he pulled that robbery."

"You must be crazy! Your fingerprints—"

Clanton smiled into the phone. "I've even got that figured out. There's a rubber glove in Veracci's pocket; a glove that's got my dabs on it. That was what he used to frame me. Come on over, Kronniger, and I'll show you."

"Damned right," Kronniger snapped. "I'm on my way."

Clanton rang off. He stirred Veracci with his toe. Veracci groaned, so Clanton kicked him on the head to quiet him. It was very effective indeed. Veracci grew silent, except for his stertorous breathing.

At least he breathed, though. That was more than you could say for Margie. . . .

SAVE ALL PAPER!



¶ There is no such thing as "waste paper" in war time. Paper of all kinds is needed for dozens of purposes — all contributing to getting supplies to our men . . . and ammunition to the enemy.

No Fish Scales

By HAROLD de POLO



Boyd Gleason had been notorious all his life for shiftlessness, for poor sportsmanship, for carelessness in paying his debts. Now that he had turned over a new leaf, everyone rejoiced . . . and wondered

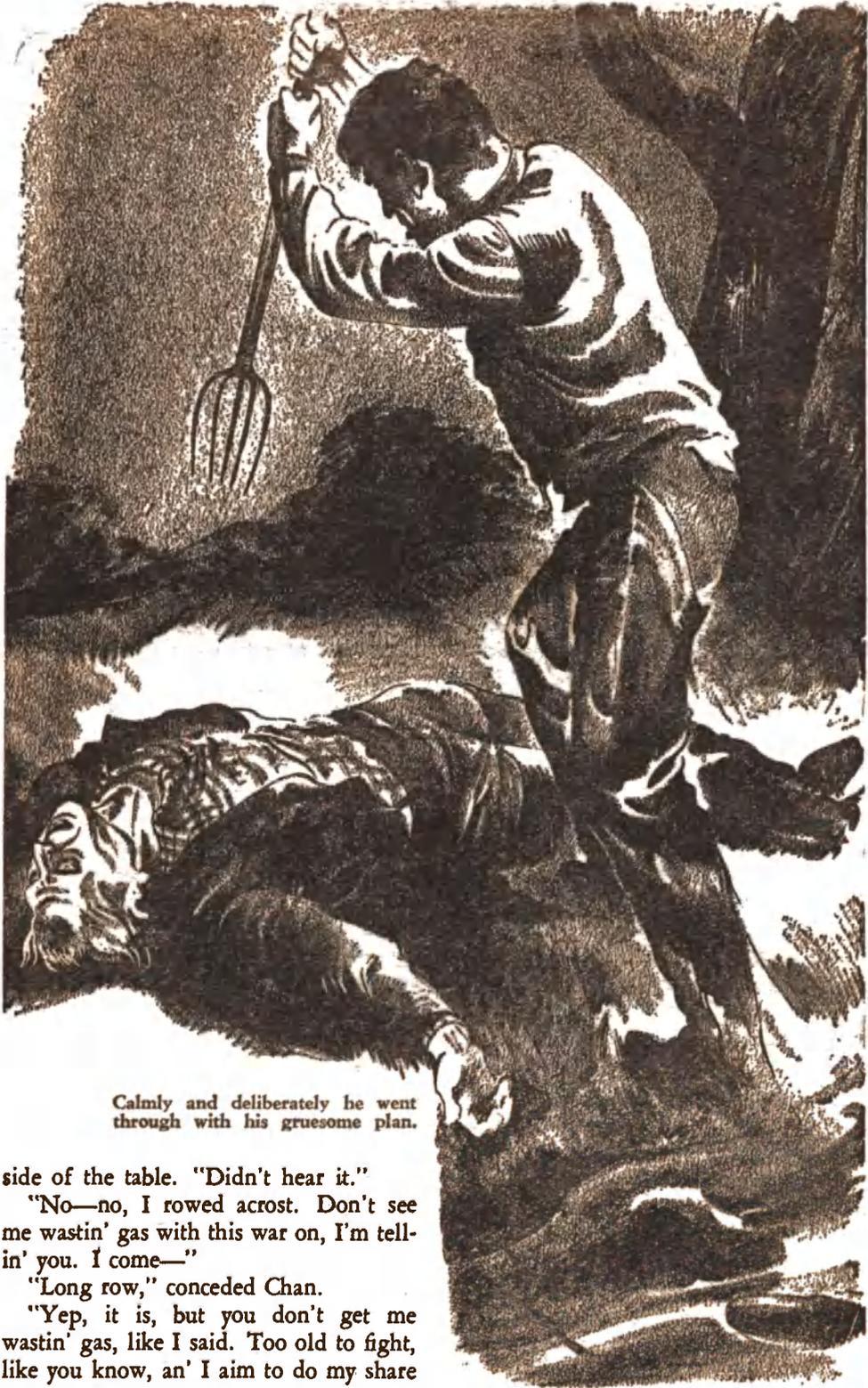


HAN BUZZELL, the Loon Lake game warden, was surprised to see Boyd Gleason come through the door of his cabin on the East shore. He was the last man he had expected to have visit him in the whole State of Maine, you might say, when he had answered the knock on the door by telling whoever it might be to walk in. Chan didn't show his surprise, though. He nodded in his quiet, solemn fashion and said:

"Back from South Portland, eh?"

"Yep. I figgered Uncle Ben needed me," said Gleason with a sigh. "He ain't as perky as he used to be. Seventy-six, this July. Didn't figger it was fair, me staying down there on the shipyards an' makin' big money an' leavin' him alone up at the farm. I—so I give up the job an' come back," he finished, his rather weak face taking on a certain air of self-laudatory sanctity.

"Come over in your car?" asked Chan, waving a hand at a chair on the other



Calmly and deliberately he went through with his gruesome plan.

side of the table. "Didn't hear it."

"No—no, I rowed acrost. Don't see me wastin' gas with this war on, I'm tellin' you. I come—"

"Long row," conceded Chan.

"Yep, it is, but you don't get me wastin' gas, like I said. Too old to fight, like you know, an' I aim to do my share

every other way. I come to see you, Mr. Buzzell, to pay you that eight-fifty I've owed you for—darn it, I reckon it's two year. Remember? I'd blowed a tire an' was out o' gas up by Rockland way, an' you come along an' lent me the money to pay the garage an' get home with."

"That's right. Seems as though I do recollect," said Chan, still not showing his surprise as the man who was notorious for never having paid a debt in his life put some bills and silver on the table. "Thanks, Boyd."

"Thank *you*, Mr. Buzzell," said Gleason, although he had never before called the game warden anything but Chan.

"Wanted to see me about anything else?"

"No. No, I just figgered to make good what I owed you, seein' I been savin' my money I earned down to the shipyards. Makes me feel easier, gettin' my debts paid. Got to get me home now an' help Uncle Ben get to bed."

"How is he, outside o' not bein' too perky? Haven't seen him in two-three weeks, myself."

"Oh, he's fine. I mean he's right glad to have me back, that is. He ain't as strong as he was, like I said. Sort o' wobbly, at his age. Son of a gun, he sure does hanker to be spry, though. Wants to go out tomorrow night, if it's good weather, spearin' suckers up to Sucker Brook. Told him I'd take him, if he seemed strong enough. Cold work, in May. Feller's apt to get pneumonia."

"Yes, Ben always did like taking suckers in the Spring," said Chan with one of his rare smiles. "Liked to salt 'em down, I remember. All of five years or more since I was out with him. Mighty good sportsman, too, about all kinds o' fishing and hunting," he added.

"That's right, that's right," laughed Boyd pleasantly. "Well, thanks for helpin' me out that time. Sure needed it. Reckon I'll be rowin' back. S' long."

Chan rose with a stretch. Chan was lean and long and tanned, with a loosely-knit figure that hid his superb muscles as completely as his lazy air hid his amazing swiftness of action. He had wide gray eyes with an odd somberness in them. Somehow, they seemed to be looking at and into and through a person. They were looking that way at Boyd Gleason now. He said gravely:

"Glad you decided to pay your debts, Boyd. Not for my sake. For your sake."

The other man flushed. Then he laughed. It was a shame-faced one:

"Aw, shucks, time I made good, ain't it?"

As he hurried to the door and went out of it and closed it after him, Chan stood by his table for a moment with a thoughtful frown. Then he shrugged and turned up the lamp more and sat down and went back to his magazine.

OUT on the lake, dipping the oars into the still; onyx-black water of a calm night in early May, Boyd Gleason was grinning with keen and cunning satisfaction. He wasn't grinning because he enjoyed rowing. He always had hated all forms of work, of physical exercise. He was doing it because he was blamed sure he'd set the scene right for killing Uncle Ben Morgan. He'd thrown off any suspicion of it being murder with that devil of a Chan Buzzell, all right.

He didn't worry about Joel Hendrix, the dumb old coot of a sheriff over at Loon Lake Junction. Chan had been the man to worry about, damn him. Chan always seemed to be butting into every crime or shady dicker that wasn't any of his business, even if he was a game warden. He had a funny sort of luck, too, in getting at the bottom of things. He wouldn't this time, though. Boyd was as sure of that as he was that it wouldn't be so darn long now before he'd get Uncle Ben's money.

Chan just *couldn't* suspect anything, this trip, the way he had it figured out and the foxy way he'd work it. Neither would anyone else.

He'd planned it right for over three months, ever since that night in late January when Uncle Ben had eaten the last of the suckers he'd salted down and said he'd be glad when the season came around again. That was when it had hit him how to do it. That was when he'd decided to make it look like he was turning over a new leaf, the way they called it, and go down to South Portland and get that job in the shipyards.

He had to laugh, when he thought how easy it had been. He'd gotten a job the first day he'd hit there. The work hadn't been easy, he didn't mean. It had been easy fooling people around Loon Lake. Uncle Ben had written that people had—yep people had been *proud* of him, the way he'd made a man of himself. So he'd kept on working, and kept on saving his money, and kept on paying up a few little debts. The best bet he'd made was in paying Chan tonight. Hadn't the solemn-faced dub made a speech about being glad about it for his, Boyd's sake?

Oh, he had Buzzell fixed, all right.

What the hell, he was a fool to worry about *anyone*, when you came right down to it. Even if everyone used to call him a bum and a loafer and a no-good, didn't they know he was going to heir Uncle Ben's money when the old man died? Sure they did. He wasn't even his real nephew. He was the son of a girl that Uncle Ben had been sweet on, that had married another man, his father. When he and Boyd's mother had died in a train wreck, when Boyd was about six, Ben Morgan had taken him under his wing. He hadn't exactly adopted him, legal like, but he'd been sort of a father to him. Boyd had lived with him all his life, and Boyd knew that he was the only one mentioned in the will. Boyd had seen that

will again after he'd gotten back from South Portland, that was why he was sure.

It was a cinch, a cinch.

He was a fool, probably, to have *ever* worried about it. Uncle Ben would be seventy-six in July, like he'd told Chan, and he guessed most people didn't figure he could live much longer anyway. Why would he want to kill him? It wasn't as if the old man had what you would call a lot of money. He might have between twelve and fourteen thousand stacked away in securities and the farm wasn't worth more than a couple of thousand. Uncle Ben had worked hard to scrape together those savings—running a little one-man farm, dealing some in timber in this logging section, working out by the day when things was slack to get a few more dollars. He'd said he was saving it to leave Boyd well off, the crazy old galoot.

Boyd Gleason would have liked it better if Ben Morgan had given him more money to spend, to go away with to the big cities once in a while, when he'd been younger. He was getting old himself, and he wanted money *now*. Uncle Ben might live ten more years, easy. Didn't some of these old men around here live to be ninety or over? Hadn't George Lissom been *ninety-seven* when he'd died last winter? No, Boyd couldn't take a chance on waiting. He wanted to collect that money just as soon as he could. That was why he was going to take that trip tomorrow night to Sucker Brook.

WHEN he got over to the West shore, to where Uncle Ben's property ran down to the lake, he pulled the boat up on the sandy beach and stood there contemplating it for a few seconds. The farm was worth a couple of thousand, he'd figured? Hell, with these city sports coming in, and buying Summer places even in this remote logging settlement, he

ought get maybe *double* that money with this swell shore frontage thrown in. Sure he should. The thought made him grin some more, and break into a whistle, as he climbed up the hill the quarter mile or so to the farm.

He didn't seem at all like a man who intended killing his benefactor, as he went into the farmhouse door. He entered with that cheery whistle still on his lips, and he said just as cheerfully:

"Made a quick trip, all right. Didn't like to leave you alone too long. You feelin' good, Uncle Ben?"

"Why—Judas Priest, yes, sure I be," said the thin wisp of an old man with a clean-shaven face and very bright brown eyes. He put down the last pot he had been wiping on the stove, and asked a bit anxiously: "You see Chan, Boyd?"

"I sure did, Uncle Ben. Paid him up, too, like I told you I was goin' to."

"That's fine, Boyd. Reckon people'll say you're a-takin' holt o' things, now," Ben Morgan smiled happily.

"Yep, Chan seemed real glad," said Boyd, although he was thinking that he wished he could have choked that damned game warden instead of giving him money. He added, as he walked over and gently, with a show of affection, clapped Morgan on the shoulder: "You an' me'll be glad tomorrow night, all right, when we get up to Sucker Brook. Hope the weather stays like it is now."

"Reckon it will, if I know anything o' this section. . . . Yes, spearin' suckers is great fun, an' saltin' 'em down an' eatin' 'em later is just as good."

THE next night was even milder, and there was also no wind. It was ideal, Ben Morgan said, for spearing. The surface of the water up in the brook would be even more unruffled than that of the lake, and one could easily see what one was doing.

The old man, as he talked, was sitting

in a chair and sharpening, with a file, the five tines of his spear. He always did this, before going spearing, even if the weapon was as sharp as a fine Toledo steel rapier. It didn't matter if it had been filed the night before. It was, so to speak, a ritual with him. He always fussed this way over his tackle and fire-arms, before going out on any sporting venture. He was a careful man, even a cautious one to an almost exasperating extent in some matters. Fishing and hunting happened to be the two most outstanding ones.

He proved this again, while Boyd stood by trying not to show his nervousness, his impatience. Like most old-timers, he used the obsolete type of bicycle lamp when he went spearing instead of the modern flashlight that practically all the younger element carried today. He went over this, too, with the same methodical attention he had shown with the spear. He shined the nickle on it, even though it was speckless, and then polished the glass lens both inside and out. Finally, apparently, he was quite satisfied, for he put it down on the table with a pleased grunt and said:

"There, that's done. Be ready in a minute. Just got to get *you* a spear. . . . You got one o' them bug lights, I see, so—"

"Yep, I'm all set. Any spear'll do me."

"Only got one five-pronger. Give you one with four. Me? I like that five, like you mebbe remember. Digs into a fish better, does a feller happen to see a real big one."

"All the same to me," laughed Boyd agreeably. "You allus get the big ones, anyways. Let's get goin'."

"All right. Just a minute."

He went into the woodshed, adjoining the kitchen as is invariably the case in the Northern part of New England, and came back with a spear and two pair of high rubber boots:

"There your boots be, Boyd. I kept 'em hangin' like you did when you left 'em."

"Thanks, Uncle Ben."

"Well, let's amble off over the West pasture. Ain't more'n a mile an' the goin' ain't too hard."

THE going was as hard as hell, Boyd Gleason told himself before they had covered much more than a hundred yards. The ground was hummocky with a lot of boulders scattered around, and the first part of it was uphill. Always, when he'd gone up to Sucker Brook himself, Boyd had taken a car and traveled seven or eight miles by road. Uncle Ben was certainly a tough one, though, darn his soul. He'd had three attacks of what they called vertigo in the last few years—one doc had called it biliousness from eating too much—and that was about all. He'd fainted on the last one, which everyone local knew about, and that was why Boyd had told Chan about the old man not being too perky and strong. Oh, he'd be covered, all right, all right. They'd believe him.

Boyd told himself ruefully that he was certainly the weak and wobbly one, by the time they got to their destination. Sucker Brook was one of the feeder streams to Loon Lake, the source being up on Shalecliff Mountain. It ran down in a tumultuous torrent until it hit the lowlands, and then it became almost placid as it wound its way, snakelike, through the wide stretch of hay meadows. It was shallow, most of the way, not much over two feet deep. The bottom was gravelly, with a few rocks, and not muddy the way it was nearer the outlet. That was why the suckers came up here.

Uncle Ben, like most fishermen of all kinds, had a particular spot he preferred. This was on a curve of the brook, where a gigantic old hemlock trunk, felled many, many years ago when the land had been cleared, allowed him to sit down

to change into rubber boots and sort of organize himself for the fun ahead. He did this now, with a sigh of infinite contentment, and pulled out a pipe and tobacco pouch from his pocket. This was another ritual. He always smoked a pipeful, before wading into the brook. It "peace-ified" him, as he put it, before starting out to kill his food. No harm in killing wild things, finned or furred or feathered, if it *was* for food, was another of his beliefs.

"Pretty out here, ain't it?" he said, as he took the first puff. The sky was a black-blue with innumerable silver stars twinkling in it, and off to the East, beyond the ribbon of the stream, stretched the wide water of the lake with a faint new moon making the surface look like a bowl of molten lead.

"Goin' to be prettier when we take some fish," grinned Boyd, now in his boots and fastening the loops of them around his belt so that they would hold up.

"Ain't only catchin' fish that counts," said Ben Morgan, taking off his shoes and reaching for his rubber boots.

But Boyd was in the brook by then, his flashlight in his left hand and his spear poised in his right.

"They're layin' awful thick tonight, Uncle Ben. Hustle up."

"Be there right soon," the old man chuckled quietly.

Boyd, his flashlight stabbing through the water, let out a triumphant shout and jabbed down with his spear. He brought it up immediately with a big sucker, three or four pounds, impaled on the tines. He tossed this up on the bank, moved a step or two ahead, and shot the weapon down again. Once more he came up with another sucker, and as he flung this one beside the other, he said:

"Better hustle, like I said."

Ben Morgan had finished putting on and attaching his boots, by that

time. As he started to climb down the bank, and find footing in the brook, Gleason let out an exultant shout and again crashed down with his spear. This time, he brought up the beautiful, silvery, glistening body of a gorgeous six- or seven-pound salmon.

"My God, Boyd, you shouldn' ought to 'a' done that," cried Morgan with a note of actual pain in his voice. "That's a *salmon*. It ain't right to kill salmon thataway. It ain't *legal*. We can spear suckers an' eels, but we can't spear salmon. It ain't *right*, Boyd."

"I—I'm sorry, Uncle Ben," mumbled Gleason. "I just forgot, I guess."

"Too bad, too bad," sighed the old man.

He got into the brook, then, and started to light his lamp, and Boyd suddenly decided that this was the time to act. While the old man was bent over a trifle, applying the flame of the match to the wick, Gleason jumped on his back, got his hands around his neck, and pushed him under.

Old Ben Morgan struggled, convulsively, gamely, but old Ben Morgan was nearly seventy-six years old and Boyd Gleason was in his early forties and imbued with the desperate strength of a murderer. He pressed in his fingers around his victim's throat, and soon he felt the body go limp. He still didn't take a chance. He relaxed his grip on the neck, and put his right foot in the small of the other's back. Bearing down with all his weight, he held his friend and benefactor down on the bottom of Sucker Brook until he was sure that life was extinct.

Then he reached down, yanked up the body, and threw it up on the bank.

He wasn't finished. Not yet. Here was where he had to get in his evidence of accidental death. Calmly, deliberately, he got hold of Uncle Ben's spear, held it poised above the chest of the corpse, and

drove those five tines in as hard as he could and as close to where he thought the heart would be as possible.

Still calmly, yet with a gloating grin breaking over his weak face, he removed the salmon from his own spear, tossed it alongside the suckers, and stood for a moment looking down at what he had done.

Then he cursed. He had the hardest job ahead of him now. Uncle Ben hadn't kept a telephone, and it meant he'd have to walk close to three miles to the nearest farmhouse that did have one. That row back and forth across the lake to see Buzzell last night had been bad enough, the walk here to the brook had been worse, but this job of hiking up to where he could call the *sheriff* would be still tougher.

Cripes, but he hated work, and walking was work. He guessed he wouldn't have to do much more of it from now on, though, he told himself as he started out.

IT WAS close to dawn before Gleason I was back at the scene of his crime. The Loon Lake Junction sheriff was with him. So was the Loon Lake game warden.

"Reckoned I'd better bring Chan along with me," Joel Hendrik had explained. "Chan's smart as all sin on these here fishin' an' huntin' accidents."

Boyd was wishing that Chan hadn't appeared. He didn't know why. He had nothing to worry about. Chan just made him nervous, that was all, that funny, quiet way he looked at you.

Chan was looking at him that way again now, as he turned his flashlight once more on the body of Ben Morgan. Chan was asking, in his solemn voice:

"Exactly how you say it happened, Boy?"

"Like I already told you an' Mr. Hendrix, Mr. Buzzell. Me an' Uncle Ben come here for spearin'. Uncle Ben was

awful anxious to get goin'. He was in the brook before I had my boots all tied to my belt. He took one sucker an' another one. Then he got that big salmon. He was real excited. Then he—poor ol' feller, then he had one o' them dizzy or vertigo or bilious spells an'—” He paused, for a moment, and shook his head: “Well, whilst I was fixin' on my last boot, I see him slip, sort of twist his spear round like as if to balance himself, and then fall right on down on the point of it. . . . He was dead an' drowned when I tied my boot on an' went an' pulled him out,” he finished, with a gulp of what seemed to be overwhelming sorrow.

Chan nodded his head, in his slow fashion, and the sheriff said with a shrug of resignation:

“Well, poor Ben. He went sudden, leastway, an' that's somethin'. Cal-late he'd like to 'a' gone either fishin' or huntin'.”

“Poor Uncle Ben,” said Boyd, brushing a hand across his eyes.

“Trouble is,” said Chan, “that he didn't go while he was doin' any fishin'.”

“How's that—*how's that?*” cried the sheriff.

Chan Buzzell snapped on his flashlight again, but this time he centered it full on the face of Boyd Gleason. He spoke in his drawling, even, inexorable voice the way he always did whenever he was called upon to pass sentence:

“Overplayed your hand from the be-ginnin', Boy. Thought it funny when you went to work an' turned over that 'new leaf' they tell of, but I sure thought it funnier when you come to pay me. Rowed over, too, you that never done a stroke o' labor if you could help it. That puzzled me. Didn't mean anything, though, till Joel called for me tonight an' told me about Ben's accident.' Then I began to suspicion. I saw right off,

though, that you'd been tryin' to make a good impression, with all your talk o' leavin' a good job an' comin' back to help Ben. I see now why you spoke o' him not bein' too perky, too. I—”

“What in hell you *mean*, Chan?” Gleason cut in savagely, his face greenish under the stab of the flashlight.

“I mean you murdered the man that done everything in the world for you, Boyd Gleason,” said Chan sadly, gravely. “I mean I come to be sure of it, first off, when I saw that salmon lyin' there an' you told me that Ben Morgan speared it. Old or not, faintin' spell or not, Ben never would have broken a game law. He was one o' the cleanest, finest sportsmen I ever had the—yes, the honor o' know-in'. . . . He *couldn't* have made a mistake an' taken that salmon for a sucker.”

Chan paused, now, and there was genuine pain on his face as he turned the beam of his light on the body of his old friend. There was grim righteousness on his face as he again focused the light on the now twitching features of Boyd Gleason:

“Don't know just *how* you done it, but we'll find out at the inquest. You killed him, though. Thing that makes it sure, you see, is that there don't come to be a *single fish scale* on that there spear that you say Ben Morgan got them suckers an' that salmon with. . . . Most likely we'll get other evidence, but—”

Boyd Gleason interrupted him with a cry of maddened rage as he lunged forward and reached down for his spear, but Chan exhibited some of his amazing swiftness of action. He moved gracefully forward like a trained and perfectly poised boxer and clipped the killer directly on the button:

“Better slip your handcuffs on him, Joel,” he said to the sheriff, as Gleason pitched forward. “I left mine to home.”

More Murders That Boomeranged

The Case of the Human Torch



HOSE who plot to kill their fellowmen often are the victims of their own cunning. For murderers are a conceited lot. They overlook their own slips and mistakes. And, fortunately, many of their schemes, even though often at first successful, will eventually boomerang, bringing to them their just deserts.

The sudden death of Bob Robinson shocked all Marshfield. Much sympathy went out to the widow and her son, Lloyd, who had been with his father the night their Chevrolet coupe burst into flames.

Lloyd Robinson and his father left home outside Marshfield, Missouri, about seven o'clock to visit Uncle Cliff Rouliff at Newburg. Interest on the farm's mortgage was long overdue and the Kansas City Trust Company was demanding payment, Lloyd Robinson explained to Sheriff Ralph Day.

It was still daylight that June evening a few years ago as the coupe set off along U. S. Highway 66 north through Conway, Brush Creek, and Lebanon. Here, Lloyd said, he had taken a short cut, a dirt farm-to-market road, when suddenly flames began to spurt from under the pedal brake at his feet.

Seventeen-year-old Lloyd opened the

door at his side and jumped, he told the sheriff, calling at the same time to his father to do likewise.

The boy said he landed in a ditch, his ankle turning under him. Before he could get to his feet, the car rolled on with the flames mounting higher and higher. He looked around for his father but in the dark couldn't see any sign of him.

"I ran after the car as well as I could with my bum ankle," continued Lloyd, "but I couldn't get near. The flames were all around it."

He knew then his father was inside. So he hobbled off, crawling on hands and knees, criss-crossing a field until he came to the farmhouse of the Waggoners where he roused the family.

The Waggoners phoned for help. Others had already seen the flames pyramiding toward the sky. And before help arrived the flames subsided. But on the front seat of the coupe was huddled the remains of what had been Bob Robinson.

The next morning the car was towed to the garage of O. C. Fordyce at Marshfield and the body removed to the undertaking parlors where Coroner Licklider was waiting to perform the autopsy.

What was left of poor Bob Robinson

The man who plans a murder can be too clever for his own good. For killers are a conceited lot and tend to think they make no slips or mistakes. This enthralling story shows how they are wrong

By ZETA ROTHSCHILD



While flames shot up, he landed in a ditch and his ankle turned.

was a sorry sight. The fire had completely consumed the legs; all that was left of the head was the bone structure. But strangely enough, the arms and trunk had been barely singed. Even the clothing was almost intact.

Of course, the flames shooting up from the flooring would account for the destruction of the legs. And if Bob Robinson had relaxed and doubled over, letting his head droop on his knees, that would explain the fire-eaten head.

But as the autopsy progressed, the coroner came upon a condition that puz-

zled him. And he immediately put in a call to Sheriff Day.

"The trunk was intact, so was the neck," explained Licklider to the sheriff. "And in the stomach, in the gullet and even in the mouth of the corpse, I found food. Meat, potatoes and canned fruit. There was even a piece of a peach right between his teeth!"

"Which means that Robinson died while he was eating?" asked Day.

"Exactly," said the coroner. "Bob Robinson died before he could swallow that last morsel of peach."

Then he hadn't died from the fire!

Moreover, there had been a deep dent on the top of the skull. The flames couldn't be held responsible for that.

Both the sheriff and the coroner decided to keep this news to themselves. But the investigation now took a different turn. Just how much of Lloyd Robinson's story would stand up?

What about the car itself? Sheriff Day put in a call to the garage.

"I can't find anything wrong with the Robinson car," admitted Fordyce. "I thought maybe the gasoline tank had exploded. But it hadn't. And the wiring is okay, too."

Then he added a significant bit of news.

"Pears to me there was gasoline and kerosene on the upholstery," commented Fordyce. "Now that the smoke is out of it you can smell kerosene on upholstery that didn't burn."

And, what had puzzled Fordyce even more, was that the flooring under the brake pedal where young Robinson had said the fire started, was practically intact. This section of the flooring wasn't even singed. Only the place where Bob Robinson sat had burned.

Sheriff Day after this telephone conversation hurried to the garage to pick up pieces of the upholstery. He, too, got a whiff of kerosene from the piece which, Fordyce told him, came from the back of the seat where Lloyd Robinson sat at the steering wheel.

But the evidence of his nose wouldn't be enough proof, the sheriff knew. And he quickly decided to take the upholstery to a local chemist for tests that would stand up in court if necessary.

Now, if kerosene had been sprinkled on the upholstery, it must have been brought to the scene in a can. There had been no can in or near the fire-wrecked car. Perhaps it had been thrown away somewhere in the neighborhood.

The sheriff's next move was to contact Officers V. A. Dosing and O. L. Viets of the Highway Patrol and ask them to cover the route young Robinson had taken that night from the burning car to the Waggoner farm where he sought help.

It was difficult to think of the seventeen-year-old boy as having had a part in the sudden death of his father. Lloyd had an excellent reputation. He was hard-working, honest and dependable, said neighbors. But there was something strange about the death of Bob Robinson, and Sheriff Day meant to get to the bottom of it.

From Mrs. Waggoner the sheriff learned that Dr. E. C. Breuer had been called in by Lloyd's uncle the morning after the fire to examine the boy.

"Frankly, I didn't find anything wrong with Lloyd, though I might say he was suffering from shock," answered the physician slowly.

"He didn't have a sprained ankle?" asked the sheriff.

Dr. Breuer shook his head. "There was nothing the matter with his ankle. Nor did he show any signs of burns," he added.

Odd, how these contradictions kept cropping up.

Back in Marshfield the chief topic of conversation was the sudden death of Bob Robinson. The family had lived in Webster County for several generations. Most of the family, on both sides, were farmers. Though Price Robinson, the seventy-nine-year-old father of the dead man, was the local blacksmith and still worked at his forge opposite the jail.

Twelve years earlier Bob had bought a two hundred and seventy acre dairy farm in the rich valley of Osage Fork outside Marshfield. It had cost \$19,000. Three of the children had since married and left home; Lloyd was the oldest of those still on the farm.

And according to local gossip, there

had been no trouble whatsoever between Bob Robinson and his son or any other member of his family.

Sheriff Day now decided to go out to the farm for a talk with Lloyd. He found the two-story farmhouse filled with sympathetic neighbors. Lloyd was upstairs resting, said Mary Robinson. And the sheriff mounted the stairs to the boy's room.

"Got the clothes you wore that night, Lloyd?" he first asked.

The boy, his blue eyes showing his curiosity, nodded and brought from a closet a pair of overalls and other articles, among them the shoes he had worn.

"We were having supper when pop said he wanted to go to my uncle's," explained Lloyd. "And I didn't have time to change. I went in my working clothes."

Day eyed the shoes. If Lloyd had been wearing them, wouldn't they show considerable signs of scuffing at the toes if he had crawled the distance across fields from the fire to the Waggoner home? These shoes didn't. Nor did they have any marks of scorching which, if the fire had started beneath the brake pedal as Lloyd said, they certainly would have gotten.

The overalls, too, were spotless. "Have they been washed since you wore them?" suddenly demanded the sheriff.

"No, sir," answered Lloyd promptly, still puzzled.

"Then how come, the knees are so clean?" quickly put in the sheriff. "If you went on your knees that night over the fields, surely these overalls should be badly stained?"

Lloyd swallowed hard. His face flushed. He began to wring his hands.

"I don't know," he stammered. "I don't know."

"Lloyd, have you been telling the truth?" gently asked the sheriff. "Don't you think you'd better tell me what really happened?"

The boy looked miserable. He didn't reply for a minute or two.

"Maybe I had," he finally answered. "Pop had a bottle with him. It was whiskey. He finished it and fell asleep. Then, just as we turned in on that dirt road, a man with a mask jumped in front of the car and when I stopped he made me get out. He told me to get going. I thought I'd better go for help."

Then when he was only a short distance away he saw flames shooting up from the car.

"I guess that man had it in for pop," added Lloyd. "I was afraid to say anything about him lest he'd get after mom and me."

"I wish you'd told us about this man in the first place," was Sheriff Day's only comment. "We'll have to try to find him."

That was all.

On his way out, the sheriff stopped to talk with Mary Robinson. She was the typical farmer's wife, hard working. Now she was tired and nervous, showing the strain of the last few days.

As he stepped off the porch, Day saw three children. He asked them their names. One was fourteen-year-old Robert; Ruth Jane, eleven; and a small boy of five, Eugene Rouliff, a son of the uncle the Robinsons had set out to visit the night of the tragedy.

He eyed the children thoughtfully. He bet their keen eyes hadn't missed anything that night. It wasn't yet time to question them, Day decided, but he could not resist asking them one question. Gradually he led up to the subject—what had they had for supper the night Bob Robinson had died?

"Meat, potatoes, and canned peaches," piped up Ruth Jane promptly.

Then the five-year-old boy added another significant detail. "We had supper before Uncle Bob came home," he volunteered. "We were playing tag outside when Cousin Lloyd and Uncle Bob ate."

Then a frightened look came over the child's face. Day pretended not to notice it and, after a few more words, said good-bye.

Back in his office he put in a telephone call to Coroner Licklider.

"No, there wasn't a sign of liquor in Bob Robinson's remains," said the coroner. "You can bet on that. Not a drop."

So much for Lloyd's story about the whiskey.

During the afternoon Dosing and Viets phoned in. They were coming to his office.

"We found something that will interest you," said Viets.

Within the hour Viets handed over a kerosene can, explaining they had found it in a ditch about two hundred feet from the spot where the Robinson coupe had burst into flames.

"It hadn't been there long," explained the patrol officers. "The grass under it was only crushed and the can isn't rusty."

And it still reeked of kerosene.

Viets and Dosing had tried to find the filling station whence the kerosene can had come. The can bore no identification but near its bottom was a long indentation and the sheriff hoped the man who had last filled it would recognize the can by this mark.

The second station brought a nod of recognition.

"Sold that can full of kerosene a few days ago," the attendant told the men. "To Mrs. Robinson."

Of course, there were many uses for kerosene on a farm.

After a talk with Deputy Sheriff H. P. Highfill, Day decided on another visit to the Robinson farm, this time for a show-down with the son.

"While I'm with the family," Day said to Highfill, "you talk to the children. That boy, the youngest, saw something that scared him."

Back at the farm, Day came to the point quickly.

Briefly he told Lloyd Robinson, while his mother listened, of the facts that contradicted his story. The youth turned to look at his mother. But Mary Robinson's eyes were fixed on her shoes, her hands twisting the corners of her apron. Both mother and son were silent.

Somehow the sheriff got a very definite impression Mary Robinson herself was tied up with the truth. And he made a sudden decision to take her along with Lloyd.

"Pack a few things," he told them abruptly. "I'm taking you both back with me to the jail."

The two stared at him goggle-eyed. Mary Robinson began to cry. Someone would take care of the children, he assured the mother.

Then Highfill came into the kitchen where this talk had taken place. He had a triumphant air and gave Day a quick nod. That was all.

When the news broke that Mary Robinson and her son Lloyd were in jail, all Marshfield was aghast. What could the sheriff have against them?

But Highfill's story assured Day he was on the right track.

Robert, the fourteen-year-old boy, had been sent out after the early supper to look after the ducks. The other two, Ruth Jane and Eugene, started to play tag.

It was the small boy, who running round the house, had come close to the porch and saw Lloyd and Aunt Mary carrying between them his uncle from the house to the waiting car.

"There was red all over his head and his shirt," said Eugene. "He was making funny noises, too."

So Bob Robinson had been attacked in his home, while he was eating his evening meal. The fire in the car had been carried out to destroy the body. Unfortunately for their plans, the fire had died down be-

fore the corpse had been consumed. That was the true story, decided the sheriff.

Mary Robinson still refused to talk. But Lloyd was not cast in the same iron mold. "I guess I might as well talk," he finally said and then told the sheriff the tale of the coldest murder his experienced ears had ever listened to.

That evening after the children had been sent out to play and his father was sitting at the kitchen table eating, his mother had called to him to come downstairs.

Then she pointed to the horseshoe rasp his pop had brought from the blacksmith shop the day before and his mother had brought in from the barn.

She put the rasp in his hand, Lloyd said. And he had stood behind his father's chair.

It took him a long time to make up his mind. But his mother nudged him.

Then, finally, he raised the rasp and brought it down again and again on his father's head.

His mother, in the meantime, had stepped out on the porch, but was watching him through the window. As Bob Robinson fell off his chair to the floor, she came back into the kitchen.

"Mama, it's done," Lloyd said to her. "But I already hate it."

"You done it at last," was her reassuring answer. "You done it right."

Then they carried the body to the car, propped it in the front seat, pulling it down so while the head sagged, it looked as if Bob Robinson was asleep.

Then Lloyd had driven off and stopped, as Dr. Caps had advised him, on the dirt road and started the fire with the kerosene.

"Dr. Caps?" said the startled sheriff. "How does he come into this?"

(Aside—this is a fictitious name, for though this Dr. Caps finally went on trial, he was exonerated.)

Dr. Caps was well-known, practicing

in Marshfield for more than a quarter of a century.

"He was to get half of the insurance," explained Lloyd.

And without hesitation, Lloyd Robinson signed his confession.

Bob Robinson had been carrying insurance for several years. One year after taking out this policy, Bob had applied for disability benefit. He had tuberculosis, he told the agent, and gave the latter the report of Dr. Caps to back up his claim, but this claim had not been allowed.

However, the company later got word that Robinson was insane. And reluctantly the company had not only paid Robinson fifty dollars a month disability benefit, but had recently raised it to seventy-five.

By her husband's death, Mary Robinson stood to gain a flat sum of ten thousand dollars.

But that Dr. Caps was involved was unthinkable. Both as a medical man and a family man his reputation was above reproach. Lloyd Robinson couldn't have picked out for a confederate a more respected and popular man in all Missouri.

However, on the strength of Lloyd's confession, Dr. Caps was also held and lodged in the Marshfield jail.

"I had no knowledge of the crime whatsoever," protested the physician. "I do not know why I should be implicated."

But the Grand Jury, meeting the 22nd of June, handed down indictments against all three.

Lloyd Robinson went on trial first. He did not deny his confession. Because of his youth, he got only a life sentence.

Mary Robinson's trial was postponed and her lawyer granted a change of venue. She continued to deny any part in the murder of her husband. But the jury found her equally guilty and gave her the same sentence meted out to the son—life imprisonment.

In May, 1936, Dr. Caps went on trial.

The jury, after five and a half hours' deliberation, decided it could not agree.

Fainter and fainter became the evidence against the physician. There was nothing except the accusation of mother and son to tie up Dr. Caps with the crime. And that was not enough. In September, 1937, the charge was dismissed.

Lloyd Robinson and his mother, alone, were guilty of the planned murder of father and husband.

Thus did the carefully planned murder boomerang against the plotters.

It had seemed the perfect crime to the mother who had undoubtedly engineered it.

But as fortunately so often happens, the unforeseen slips provided enough evidence to warrant suspicion. And these suspicious details, backed by the story of the child at play, established the case against mother and son.

The Case of the Careless Husband

Many a murder, planned ever so carefully, has suddenly turned on its author and practically pointed him out as the guilty party.

Shortly after five o'clock, the morning of July 8, 1939, a phone call came to police headquarters at Leavenworth, Kansas.

A farmer had found the dead body of a woman, face downward in the road, said the man at the other end.

Following directions, a half hour later Sheriff Ted Morrow and Chief of Police William Cranston arrived at the scene. The girl lay sprawled on a side of the road, a large bloodstain had spread over the back of her gray dress close to the heart.

Cranston quickly noted the soles of the high-heeled slippers the girl wore were not soiled. Evidently she had come to this spot in a machine. But the macadam road was too hard to give up any tire threads.

A group of farmers had joined the party on the road. None of them recognized the girl, they said. One of them had heard a shot a little before eleven the night before. He had paid no more attention to it. But it might have been the one that killed this poor girl.

The body, brought to the morgue, was

handed over to the coroner who in turn had his report ready the same afternoon.

The girl had died probably about six hours before the body was found. That put her death at eleven, when the farmer had heard that distant shot.

The bullet had penetrated from the back. She had probably been shot as she walked away from the car.

Another joy ride that went wrong, thought Cranston.

By late afternoon the dead girl was identified; she was Lucy Brown, wife of a taxi driver, Charlie Brown, and lived on Seneca Street, Leavenworth.

Odd that this Charlie Brown had not inquired about his wife, thought Cranston. Husbands usually are concerned when their wives stay out all night.

Inquiry at the railroad station brought out that Brown was not there. He was probably still asleep at his home, unaware of the tragedy.

Repeated knocking at the door brought no response. And Sheriff Morrow thought he'd drop in the house next door.

"Of course I know Lucy Brown," said Mrs. Flora Wesson, an attractive young matron. "I was with her last night."

The three, husband, wife and Mrs. Wesson, who had dropped in, were listening to a Guy Lombardo program when



A group of farmers joined the party, but none recognized the dead girl.

Charlie Brown had jumped up and said he had to be off to catch the 10:55 train at the railroad station. He had kissed his wife good-bye and hurried off. Shortly after Mrs. Wesson had gone home.

"You're sure it was close to eleven o'clock?" asked Morrow.

The young woman nodded. "I'm positive," she answered. "I looked at the clock too."

Only one other interesting fact was brought out. When Mrs. Wesson left, Lucy Brown was wearing a yellow print house dress. When the body was found,

she was wearing a light gray dressy frock.

Evidently Lucy Brown had changed clothes to go out on a date, perhaps.

By the time Morrow got back to headquarters, he was told detectives had located the husband.

"He's in the lock-up; he was arrested for speeding last night on Military Road by Patrolman Murphy. The time? 10:55," Morrow was told.

Because Brown had been drinking the patrolman, instead of giving him a ticket, had brought him in and locked him up.

"He was all broken up when I told him of his wife's death," the detective added.

Brown, brought to Morrow's office, seemed all in.

His story of listening to the Guy Lombardo program with his wife and Mrs. Wesson, of leaving hurriedly close to eleven, tallied with the neighbor's story, though Brown did not know of Morrow's talk with her.

"Tell me," interrupted Morrow, suddenly struck by a slight discrepancy, "how come if you left shortly before eleven to go to the station, you were arrested at 10:55 on Military Road?"

"That's easy to explain," answered Brown quickly. "As I was going toward the station, a soldier hailed me, said he'd just come in by bus from the fort but there were some men there he'd promised to send a taxi for. That was a sure fare, so I started out."

Brown, in this conversation, admitted to the sheriff that his wife had a couple of boy friends. Maybe she had had a phone call and gone out with one of them after he left.

But inquiry of Lucy Brown's friends denied this possibility. Lucy wasn't a two-timer. On the contrary, the husband was, said his colleagues at the taxi rank at the railroad station.

"He falls for women like a kid goes for candy," said one of them.

There was nothing in Brown's cab that was suspicious. In his pocket was a handkerchief with a small stain, reddish brown, about the size of a dime. Morrow decided to have the spot analyzed.

Back from the laboratory the same day came the report the stain was blood, of type O, one of the most common.

A specimen of blood was taken from the dead girl, another from Brown, who made no objection to the test. Brown's blood was AB, a very rare type. That of the girl, O, the same as that on the handkerchief, reported the laboratory within twenty-four hours.

Brown shrugged his shoulders when told of this discovery.

"Maybe Lucy pricked herself and used my handkerchief," he countered. "I didn't notice the spot."

The bullet recovered from the girl's body came from a .45, a ballistic expert had reported, most likely an army automatic."

No gun had been found on Brown at the police station or in his car. If the husband, and suspicion turned on him only because the most diligent search had brought to light no other man in Lucy Brown's life, had shot her, he would have had to ditch the weapon before his arrest.

Authorities at the Fort sent out, at Sheriff Morrow's request, a company of soldiers to search the ground on both sides of Military Road from the point where the body was found back to the city.

It took six days of continuous hunting before results. Then, fifty feet off the road, one searcher came upon an army automatic. In the clip holding seven bullets, six were still there. It had been fired recently, said ballistic technicians to whom the gun was handed over for examination. And further tests convinced these experts that the fatal bullet recovered from Lucy Brown's body had been fired from this very weapon.

Alas, there were no fingerprints on the

gun. And Brown swore he had never possessed a weapon of any kind.

Sheriff Morrow was in his home that night, his thoughts on the unsolved murder of Lucy Brown. It was Friday, precisely one week since the poor girl's body had been found.

The radio was going. Mrs. Morrow turned the dials and strains of music came over the air.

"It's Guy Lombardo's band," she told her husband in answer to a query from him.

The sheriff glanced at the clock. It was nine-thirty-five.

But hadn't both Brown and Mrs. Wesson said they had been listening to the Guy Lombardo band between ten-thirty and eleven the previous week when Brown hurried off to work?

"Is Lombardo always on at the same time, nine-thirty to ten, every Friday night?" Morrow anxiously asked his wife.

"Of course, my dear, a sponsor always has the same time, every week," she answered placidly.

But her look became one of surprise when the sheriff threw down his newspaper, smudged the end of his cigarette in the ash tray, bounded from his chair and made a leap for the clothes closet for his coat.

"You've given me an idea," he told his wife exultingly.

Chief of Police Cranston, hastily summoned to headquarters, listened to Mor-

row's suspicions. Brown, still detained, was again brought in for questioning.

"You turned the clock ahead," insisted Morrow. "You knew you'd have an alibi if Mrs. Wesson swore you were at your home close to eleven and if you were arrested at eleven. But the clock was an hour fast. What did you do in that hour?"

Finally Brown collapsed.

He had parked his car a little way down the street and watched until Mrs. Wesson returned home. Then he had gone back to the house, suggested to his wife that she change her dress and go out with him.

This she had done. And he had driven out on the road. Here he had persuaded the unsuspecting Lucy to get out of the machine on the pretext that he saw a purse in the road and as she walked toward it, shot her in the back.

Then he had raced to Military Road where he knew a motorcycle patrol kept a constant watch for speeders and had maneuvered his arrest. Thus he planned to bolster up his alibi. His motive: freedom to play around with other women!

Brown later signed this confession.

But, at his trial in October of the same year, 1939, even though Brown now repudiated this confession and swore it had been obtained under duress, the jury that listened to the accumulated evidence against him held otherwise. It found him guilty of murder. And Charlie Brown, whose alibi almost cleared him, was sentenced to a twenty-year term in jail.

The Case of the Diving Car

Even the best planned murders can boomerang—fortunately. For murderers are a conceited lot, and like all self-satisfied people cannot see their own shortcomings.

About eight o'clock the morning of December 12, 1939, a telephone call

came through to Police Headquarters at Los Angeles.

"I'm a truck driver," said the man at the other end. "I was driving on Mount Wilson Observatory Road just now when a man stopped and asked me to get in touch with you. He said his car went

over a parapet there and his wife and three children were in it.

Captain Burns of the Criminal Division, to whom the message was quickly relayed, telephoned immediately for two ambulances and telling Deputies George Wiener and H. L. Pulfer to come along, jumped into his car and set off for the scene.

They drove swiftly to Red Box Canyon, here to be stopped by a tall man, disheveled, bespectacled, on his face the ravages of despair and grief.

"I'm Laurel Crawford of Pasadena," he introduced himself.

He was hardly able to continue but motioned to Captain Burns to follow him. A little further up the road he pointed to the timber rail that guarded and warned motorists of the canyon below. Here a large section had been smashed.

"The car went through here," Crawford continued. "There they are." And he broke into violent sobbing as he pointed down the 1,000-foot abyss below.

Burns peered cautiously down the canyon. The car had not gone down all the way. It had caught on a shelf five hundred feet lower. From this distant point, however, Burns could make out the bodies scattered below, the white showing up clearly against the dark background.

"You stay here," said Burns considerately. "We'll go down for a look."

And the three men began to clamber slowly down the dangerous route to the ledge.

There they found five bodies, one of a woman about forty; close to her two children, a boy and a girl, the former about ten years old, the latter in her teens. Another girl, about eight, was caught in the crotch of a tree, and a little to one side was the body of an elderly man, probably in his sixties.

After a quick survey, the three climbed back to the road.

It would be better to get the distracted Crawford back to headquarters. He could tell his story there. Wiener could wait at the scene for Coroner Webb and the others who would come to go over the place, decided Burns.

"Pulfer, you go back on the road to where those C.C.C. men are working. Get them here and as soon as Coroner Webb gives you an okay, let them help you bring those bodies and the car up to the road."

Back at headquarters, Crawford told a simple story, smoking a cigarette and talking calmly enough. After an early dinner his wife had suggested a ride and he decided to take her, the children and a Mr. Barnet, who boarded with them, up to Mt. Wilson Point.

They got up all right and started back. All was well for four miles. Then suddenly the car got out of control.

"I knew the brakes were bad so I kicked into neutral and tried to get into the second gear," continued Crawford, dropping his cigarette butt on the floor and crushing it with his heel.

"But the old gear was in bad shape, too, and I couldn't get into gear. And the car kept going faster and faster."

The two little girls had screamed. Mrs. Crawford, sitting beside him, leaned over and grabbed the wheel. Crawford struggled with her but her frenzy, he said, had made her desperate. The car suddenly veered toward the canyon side of the road and through the guard rail.

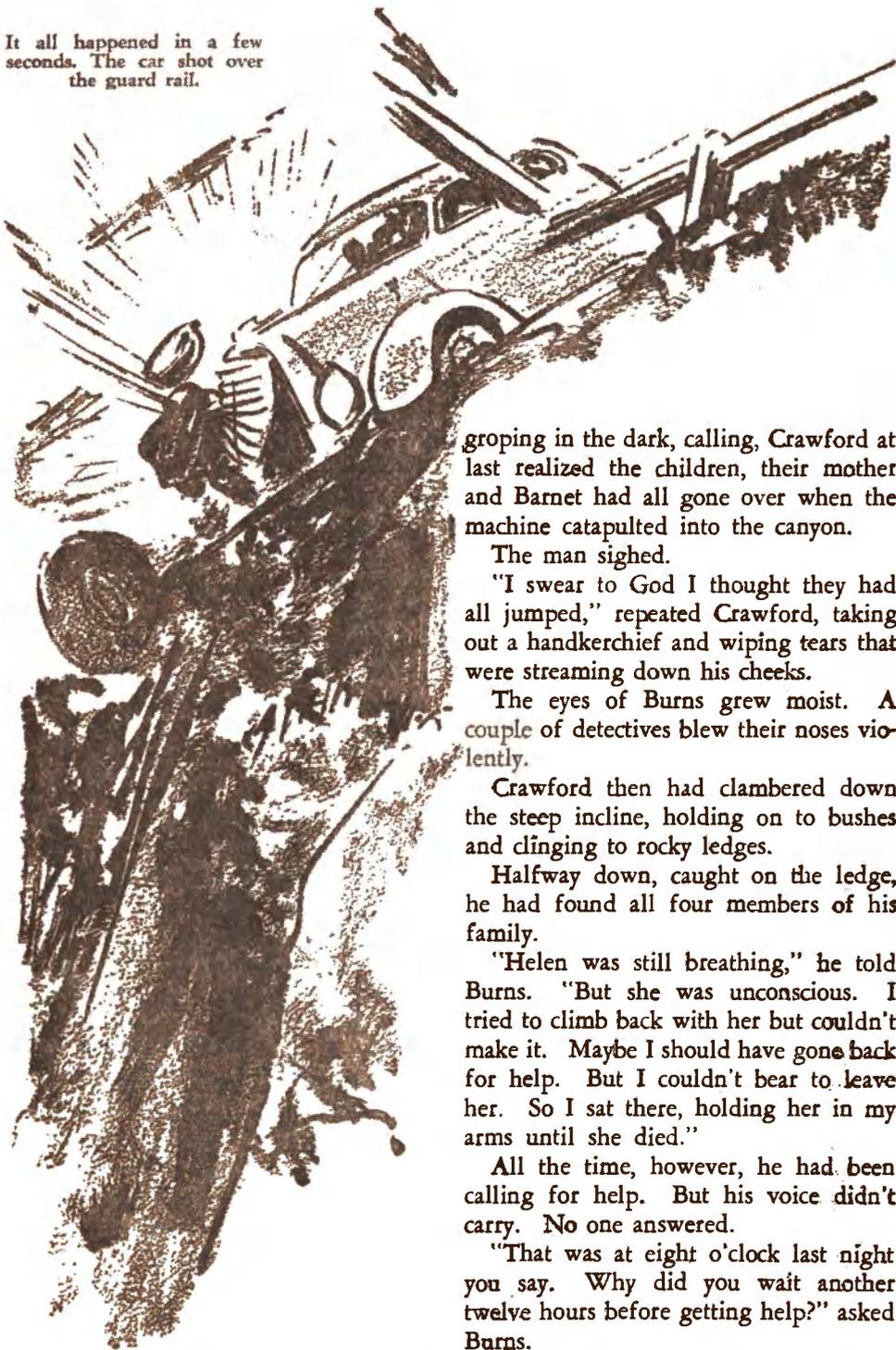
Crawford mopped his forehead with a shaking hand.

"I screamed to the others to jump. It all happened in a half-minute. Just as the car started to fall I made a leap over the door. I was stunned."

But even as he heard the car crashing its way down the thousand-foot canyon, he got up and began calling to his wife and children.

No one answered. And when, after

It all happened in a few seconds. The car shot over the guard rail.



groping in the dark, calling, Crawford at last realized the children, their mother and Barnet had all gone over when the machine catapulted into the canyon.

The man sighed.

"I swear to God I thought they had all jumped," repeated Crawford, taking out a handkerchief and wiping tears that were streaming down his cheeks.

The eyes of Burns grew moist. A couple of detectives blew their noses violently.

Crawford then had clambered down the steep incline, holding on to bushes and clinging to rocky ledges.

Halfway down, caught on the ledge, he had found all four members of his family.

"Helen was still breathing," he told Burns. "But she was unconscious. I tried to climb back with her but couldn't make it. Maybe I should have gone back for help. But I couldn't bear to leave her. So I sat there, holding her in my arms until she died."

All the time, however, he had been calling for help. But his voice didn't carry. No one answered.

"That was at eight o'clock last night you say. Why did you wait another twelve hours before getting help?" asked Burns.

"I was too exhausted to move," ex-

plained Crawford. "I just sat there with my dead."

Then with dawn, he had clambered back up the hill and stopping the truck driver, asked him to phone for help.

"It's all my fault," exclaimed Crawford again and again. "The car was in bad shape. I was going to trade it in for another. But I waited too long."

The man's clothing was torn, the palms of his hands showed deep scratches from his hold on the bushes. Burns himself had hurt his hands as he went down that morning. His story rang true.

"I'd like to tell my father before he reads of the accident in the papers," spoke up Crawford. "Can I go home now?"

Burns nodded. "We'll get in touch with you as soon as the bodies are recovered," he said kindly. "And I'll send you home in a police car. What's your address?"

Burns jotted down the address, 124 Sierra Bonita Avenue, as Crawford thanked him, his voice breaking.

It wasn't an easy job hoisting that car a thousand feet up to the road. An even more gruesome task was bringing the bodies of the dead to the wagons from the morgue.

Late the same afternoon came a telephone call from Coroner Webb. He was coming over to see Burns about the autopsies.

A half hour later the two men were together.

"Not one of those five died from the result of that fall down the canyon," Webb told the astonished Burns. "Someone deliberately attacked every one of them with an instrument with a round hard end, a hammer probably."

There were these indentations, similar in size and shape, on the heads of all five.

Burns was aghast. No one but the father had been on the scene.

"You're not implying that this Crawford deliberately killed them?" he demanded.

"What's more, didn't he say that when he went down the canyon right after the accident he found only one child, Helen, alive," was Webb's only answer.

Burns nodded.

"Well, judging from the contents of their stomach, digestion of their last meal continued for several hours," continued Webb. "Which backs up my claim that not one of them died immediately after the accident."

Burns had to admit the strength of this evidence. They would have to see whether other angles backed up the father's story or disproved it.

Now Burns returned to Mt. Wilson Observatory Road. Crawford said the car had skidded for some distance and then had gone out of control. Also that he had been going at a moderate speed.

Yet Burns, examining the car, found the speedometer recording a forty-five miles an hour pace. An average rate would have been twenty-three.

Crawford had said the brake and gears were out of order and that he had been negotiating for a new car.

Questioned, Crawford gave the name of this agent, Sullivan, and his address.

"There wasn't anything the matter with that machine," said Sullivan emphatically. "I remember it well. It was a Studebaker, 1929."

CRAWFORD had spoken of a trade-in and Sullivan had gone over the machine carefully. It was in first-class condition, he said. "This Crawford said he wanted a new car of the same make and that he'd be back in a month or six weeks. He was expecting a twenty-thousand-dollar legacy by then."

Moreover, examination of the car after the accident showed its gears and brake in first-class condition.

Now why should the man tell such a story? Was there another woman in the case?

Inquiry of neighbors of the Crawfords brought out that they seemed a very happy couple. True, Crawford hadn't worked for four years, not since he retired from the post office on a disability pension. Added to a pension he got as a disabled veteran of World War I, he was getting about two hundred dollars a month, enough for the family to live simply.

Mrs. Crawford was working as a maid for \$62 a month and they took in a boarder besides.

But there was no other woman in the case. Crawford had no matrimonial plans that would have made the death of his wife necessary for their fulfillment.

What about insurance? Crawford, questioned, admitted he carried insurance, that he would receive about one thousand dollars, enough to cover funeral expenses.

But now Burns' curiosity was aroused.

A SURVEY of insurance companies brought out that during the last six months Crawford had taken out insurance on his three children and his wife. The agent was Albert J. Prideaux.

"Crawford and I had our first talk about a year ago, in September, 1938," said Mr. Prideaux, consulting his records.

"Finally he decided to take out \$4,000 on nine-year-old Paul, \$3,500 on seven-year-old Helen, \$5,000 on fifteen-year-old Alice, and \$8,000 on his wife, Elva.

"He wanted a double indemnity clause in case of accident on all policies," continued Prideaux. "I told him he couldn't get double indemnity on children under ten."

But Paul had passed his tenth birthday before the fatal accident. And the father stood to gain \$37,000 by the death of his little family.

The next day a still more thorough search was made of the side of the canyon where the corpses had lain. A little way down searchers found a ball-peen hammer.

Fingerprint experts said the only prints on the hammer's wooden handle were those of Laurel Crawford.

One more fact, the most damning of all, came to light when detectives brought to Headquarters a metal box found on a shelf in a closet in Crawford's bedroom. In it were the insurance policies and under them a paper covered with figures.

IT TOOK time to interpret these figures. Here Crawford had penciled the amounts coming to him from the deaths of his children and wife—\$37,000.

Other notations showed the man's plans. He had jotted down figures which showed what he would get should he invest this capital in annuities. Plus his pension, he would have a total income of \$375 a month.

There was no doubt that these figures were in Crawford's handwriting. It was the last damning bit of evidence to prove that the "accident" on Observatory Road had been deliberately planned.

Crawford was held, accused, later indicted and charged with first degree murder on five counts.

The second week in March, 1940, Crawford went on trial. Prosecuting Attorney John Barnes had experts on hand to testify the hammer marks could have been produced only by the hammer found near the scene, the hammer with Crawford's fingerprints.

Technical experts testified that the car brakes were in first class condition. Insurance Agent Prideaux contributed his bit, showing premeditation and motive.

And a jury, with short deliberation, brought in a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree.

A week later, Superior Court Judge

Clarence L. Kincaid sentenced Laurel Crawford to life imprisonment on each count, sentence to be served consecutively,

and prevent any attempt for a parole.

And one more crime had been arranged.

The Case of the Exploding Box

Sometimes when the law and the authorities fail through no fault of their own to turn the tables on a murderer, fate itself steps in and takes over.

In an apartment on the ground floor of a five story house on West 77th Street, New York City, in February, 1912, an attractive woman in her thirties sat talking to a young man about ten years her junior.

"I'm sorry," the young man repeated again and again. "We've been friends so long it seems a shame for us to quarrel like this."

The woman smiled. It had taken quite a lot of persuasion from Charlie Dickenson to get her to make up. But woman-like, she had prolonged their reconciliation because she liked to listen to his pleading.

"All right, Charlie," answered Grace Walker. And she got up from her chair to stand back of him and put her arms around his neck.

Even as she put her cheek against his, the front door bell rang.

She came back from the door with a small package in her hand. The mailman couldn't put it in the box in the vestibule so had brought it to her. It was small, oblong-shaped, wrapped in white paper and tied with red string. Her name and address were typed on it; it had taken two ten-cent stamps for postage. All these details were idly noted by Dickenson as Mrs. Walker put the box down on the table in the center of the room and proceeded to open the package.

He watched her remove string, then wrapper, and lift the lid. Then came a

terrific explosion and Dickenson and the woman were hurled to the floor.

Dickenson got to his feet. There lay Grace Walker, her face blackened, her blouse soaked in blood. He spoke to her but she didn't answer. Her jaw sagged, her eyes had rolled back in her head but the lids were open. The young man decided to get a doctor there as quickly as possible.

Downstairs in the basement, Joe Crossen, the janitor, had been rocked off his feet by the explosion. But he pulled himself up and limped up the back stairs. The kitchen door had been thrown off its hinges.

He hurried down the smoke-filled hall to the living room. After one brief glance at the broken body of the woman on the floor, he picked up the telephone and put in a call for the police at the 68th Street station.

The neighborhood physician, brought back by Dickenson, and the police arrived at the same time. Mrs. Walker was dead, said the physician. Telling Dickenson, who admitted he had been in the room alone with Mrs. Walker, to wait, they immediately began an examination of the premises.

In the wrecked room police found bits of the pasteboard box and scraps of the bomb it had contained. In the collection was a small steel spring, a piece of iron pipe two inches long and a half inch in diameter, two electric dry batteries and some pieces of white paper in which the box had been covered, on it still part of the address.

When the body had been removed to



When she undid the package a terrific explosion shook the room and knocked her backwards.

the morgue for Coroner Feinberg's autopsy, and the scraps of the bomb handed over to Chief Inspector Owen Eagan of the Bureau of Combustibles for examination, the police began their hunt for the perpetrator of the crime. Who had sent Mrs. Grace Walker the bomb-laden box?

Charles M. Dickenson, questioned, explained his connection with Mrs. Walker. They had long been on extremely friendly

terms. This relationship had endured for almost two years. He had a job as stenographer to one of the heads of the United States Meter Company.

"Odd that you were in the room and weren't even scratched when almost every piece of furniture here was wrecked," commented one of the detectives.

Dickenson was thoughtful. "Mrs.

Walker was standing between me and the table," he answered, "and the box was on the table when she started to open it. Maybe because she was between me and it the shock only knocked me down."

It was possible.

Now an excited young woman appeared at the door of the living room. She introduced herself as Miss Edna LaMarre and added she was living with Mrs. Walker.

"She asked me to go out and phone as soon as this Dickenson came and pretend he was wanted at his boarding house. Anything to get him away. She was through with him," said Miss La Marre, turning flashing eyes on the young man.

They had quarreled only the preceding Wednesday night and Mrs. Walker had written him she never wanted to see him again. He had phoned he would be there this Saturday night and she had arranged the telephone call to get him out of the apartment.

Dickenson admitted the quarrel but insisted they had become reconciled.

Now if Mrs. Grace Walker had been the average respectable housewife, this theory involving Dickenson might have been more impressive. But the lady was already known to the police. In fact, just about a year earlier she had been up in court as the keeper of a disorderly house, a business which had provided her with a livelihood for the last fifteen years.

Two men who had been involved in her arrest were duly considered by the police as possible senders of the bomb. Two taxi drivers, Carl Kasebier and Phil Snyder, had been accused of bringing a young girl to her house. All three had been arrested, with Mrs. Walker turning State's evidence against them.

A search made for both these men brought out that one, Kasebier, had been in the Middle West for several months while the other, Snyder, was able to show he had no knowledge of explosives, no

opportunity to get any, and was in no way involved with the fatal bomb-gift package.

The report from the Bureau of Combustibles was not very helpful. The bomb was home-made, said Eagan. It was constructed of short lengths of pipe, loaded with chlorate of potash, powder and sugar, and wrapped in the package with an electric midget battery which closed the circuit and provided the spark which caused the explosion.

The package had been mailed at Grand Central Station, a scrap of the white wrapping paper carried a few letters of the postmark. On it had been two ten-cent stamps. The address had been typewritten.

Because of his recent quarrel with Grace Walker, and for lack of any other suspect, Charlie Dickenson was held. The young man, however, was soon able to convince the police he knew nothing of explosives. He was a stenographer. And though there was a laboratory in the company where he worked, and nitroglycerine was kept there, it was proven that only three persons had keys to it; the general manager, the chemist in charge, and the night watchman.

Their keys had never left their persons. Dickenson had never been in the laboratory. Moreover, every ounce of the explosive could be accounted for.

Despite the intensive search made by the homicide squad, its detectives were unable to accuse anyone of having mailed the bomb to Mrs. Walker. The investigation was dropped with the general suspicion that someone tied up with the underworld had nursed a grudge against the woman and had taken this means to get even with her.

Another six weeks passed and the story of the home-made bomb had disappeared from the front page when another bomb story broke.

General Sessions Judge Otto A. Rosal-

sky returned from court late on the afternoon of March 16, to find on his library table a small oblong box. It had come in the late afternoon mail, the maid explained.

Judge Rosalsky, an extremely logical person, eyed the box with misgivings. Its wrapper bore the imprint of a well-known department store located at 14th Street and Sixth Avenue. His name was type-written on it. And the wrapper bore three ten-cent stamps.

Now since when had the department store sent out packages by mail?

Judge Rosalsky slowly cut the red string, removed the wrapper, to find himself holding a pasteboard box five inches long, two and a half inches wide and the same in depth. It looked like an ice-cream box.

The box looked harmless enough. But Judge Rosalsky, still suspicious, took up a paper cutter on the table and tapped the box here and there. There was something hard inside, certainly not candy! He decided to put in a call to the 125th Street police station as well as to the Bureau of Combustibles.

Owen Eagan, the inspector who had been active in the first bomb case, arrived at the Rosalsky apartment within the hour.

Judge Rosalsky with his wife and the maid, at Eagan's request retired far from the library. Gingerly the inspector picked up the box. He wasn't going to lift the lid, it might set the mechanism in action. He took a knife and started to rip the sides of the pasteboard box. He inserted the point an inch from the top and cautiously began to cut along the side. Then came a terrific roar, a flash, and the room was filled with fumes and dust.

Eagan was thrown to the floor. His right hand was badly mangled, one finger had been blown off. Splinters of glass from the top of the library table, smashed into smithereens, had penetrated his face.

His clothing was torn. The library looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

Remains of the bomb were quickly gathered from the wrecked room. Three lengths of one-inch piping were recovered in the debris, two longer pieces with short pieces of copper wire.

The wire had evidently been strung through the pipe, one end attached to a cord and detonator, the other buried in a foundation of yellow and white powder.

The chemicals used to bring about the explosion were soon identified. They were chlorate of potash and sulphur.

The similarity of the construction of this bomb and that sent Mrs. Grace Walker was quickly noted. Both had been home-made by a skillful mechanic. Short length of pipe had been used with chlorate of potash the explosive.

In both instances the packages had been mailed and carried ten-cent stamps. Both had been tied with a red cord detectives found was used to bind brooms. Moreover, the addresses had been typed on the same machine.

But how could this keeper of a disorderly house and a respected judge of the General Sessions Court have the same enemy? What was the connecting link? Detectives could find no clue.

Never did New York detectives work harder on a case. Recent sales of explosives were checked on. Typewriting agencies were queried. Prisoners who had been sentenced by Judge Rosalsky and recently released were questioned. But the result was nil.

A watch was kept in all local post office branches now for small oblong packages. For the police were convinced that the sender of these two bombs would continue to mail his death-dealing gifts to those he had a grudge against.

But another ten months passed. Not until February 3, 1913, precisely one year after the bomb package had been received

by Mrs. Grace Walker, did another fatal bomb make the front pages.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernardo Herrera, after a pleasant afternoon at the movies, returned home to their apartment on the second floor of a remodeled house on Fulton Avenue, the Bronx. With them was a woman guest.

In the vestibule Mrs. Herrera and Miss Sarah Fischman noticed a small oblong package on the floor, neatly placed just below the mail box that bore the former's name.

Mrs. Herrera picked it up. It bore neither name, address or stamps. Evidently someone had left it there. For whom was it intended? Mr. Herrera wanted to give it to the janitor but the ladies insisted on taking it up to the apartment.

Laughing, Mrs. Herrera cut the red string, put aside the white wrapping paper and removed the lid of the pasteboard box. The explosion that followed split the living room table, blew out the windows, sent pictures on the walls into the street, knocked Mr. Herrera and Miss Fischman senseless, and killed Mrs. Herrera.

Pieces of the bomb were recovered. Caps had been screwed into short lengths of pipe. Small blocks of wood had been used to brace the box and support the bomb. The pipe had contained a fulminated compound, probably chlorate of potash. One cap, recovered intact, had a tiny hole in the center through which a wire had been passed.

The first thought was to trace an enemy of the family. Herrera was a cigar maker, on good terms with fellow workers. Miss Fischman was a forelady in a factory and had stayed on the job during a strike. But who could have known she would be a visitor at the Herrera flat that Sunday afternoon?

Mrs. Herrera, a housewife, had had several arguments with the janitor of the

house, one Farrel. The latter, taken to headquarters for questioning, told detectives he had made the bomb and left it in the vestibule.

But investigation soon proved that Farrel, not very bright, had simply answered "yes" to every question put to him. He was not a mechanic and knew nothing of explosives.

The mechanism of the bomb bore a striking similarity to the arrangements received by both Judge Rosalsky and Mrs. Walker. Pipes, caps, wire and explosive, were practically identical. So was the white paper wrapping and the red string that tied it.

But here, evidently, the bombmaker had feared to use the mail and delivered the package himself.

But what tie could there possibly be between Mrs. Walker, Judge Rosalsky, and the cigarmaker and his wife that could make them the objective of a common enemy?

There was no doubt the same hand had made all three bombs. They were a little different in make-up, admitted Eagan of the Bureau of Combustibles, again on the job. But this difference only made the situation all the more alarming.

For each bomb had been an improvement on its predecessor!

The man was continuing his experiments. Somewhere in New York City was a madman, a first-class mechanic, familiar with explosives. The first bomb had been a simple affair; the second a little more complicated. And this third one, left in the hallway of the apartment house where the Herrera family lived, was a first-class piece of work.

Would the man strike again?

For the third time this maniac had struck without leaving a single clue. He evidently laid in his supplies long before he sent his bombs. He could take his time. A man working alone as this one was could carry out his hellish plans without

anyone catching on. There was gloom at headquarters.

Then the second week in March came a telephone call to the Bureau of Combustibles.

A man living in the Bronx had been seriously injured by an explosion in his apartment. No, he hadn't received any package. He said he had been playing with a toy cannon.

"We'd like you to have a look at his room," said excited Detective Jordan. "You'll be interested."

Eagan made a note of the address. It was about a block from the Hererra home. At the house he found the detective waiting for him with a curious crowd hanging around.

The man's name was Henry Klotz. He had been employed for seventeen years as a draughtsman and civil engineer in the Bronx Topographical Bureau under the Borough President.

He was now in the hospital, seriously injured but conscious, Eagan was told.

"But he won't talk," added the detective. "And when you see his place you'll understand why."

Eagan's first eyeful took in the room where the explosion had occurred. Chairs had been blown over, windows knocked out. A table was blown into splinters. But these details weren't the most important.

Hanging on the walls of the room, stacked in corners, piled on a shelf were at least thirty to forty rifles, shotguns and pistols!

"Look what we fished out from under his bed," suggested Jordan.

Eagan, was glancing at the collection of tin cans, leaned over for a closer look and took a pinch from an open container.

"Dynamite," he exclaimed as he thumbed the greasy yellow powder.

"And here's chlorate of potash and sulphur," added Jordan.

In a dozen cans stored in the room

were enough explosives to blow up New York City.

In a box in the kitchen was a supply of slugs, nuts, and bolts. Odd lengths of pipes filled a small crate in the flat's kitchen.

"He's got about everything here that that bombmaker used," commented Eagan. "What does he say?"

"First he told us he was making a toy cannon," said the detective. "And now he's changed his story and says he was filling some gun shells when a tin of gunpowder exploded."

Klotz denied knowing anything of the three bombings. But detectives brought Miss LaMarre, Mrs. Walker's friend, to his bedside.

"It's Crazy Henry," screamed the young woman. "Mrs. Walker had him kicked out of her house."

Henry Klotz had been a regular customer. Along with other men he had become enamored with the minor girl who got Mrs. Walker into trouble. Though a minor in years, she was long on experience. And to enhance her own value, had played the men against one another.

Klotz had sworn to be revenged on Mrs. Walker. She had given orders he was not to be admitted to her establishment.

Still Klotz denied the bombings.

Detectives were, however, giving his quarters a thorough going over. And in his battered desk, buried in the debris of the explosion, they found a notebook. It had been carefully kept over several years. In it Klotz had carefully jotted down his actions, each carefully dated.

January	constructed machine
February	1912 M. X. 3rd
February	1913 M. X. 2nd
March	1913 M. X. 16th

The first two dates covered the Walker and Hererra bombings. Had he been

working on another bomb this March when the explosion occurred? Who was his next victim to be?

Klotz, questioned, still refused to answer.

But detectives were now certain they were on the right track. And when they found an old typewriter hidden under a pile of clothes in a closet, they were able to verify their claim.

For this was the machine, they soon proved, on which the addresses on the packages mailed to Mrs. Walker and Judge Rosalsky had been typed.

Still Klotz refused to confess.

Then Detective Cavanaugh was placed in the hospital as an orderly on night duty. He made a point of becoming friendly with Klotz. During the long night hours he went frequently to Klotz's bed to talk with him.

Another week and Klotz was talking freely. Like most self-appointed wielders of justice, he was boastful of his success. He bragged to Cavanaugh of the tie-up

between himself and his victims.

The authorities already knew why he had picked out Mrs. Walker for one of his gift-bombs. Judge Rosalsky, he said, had once sentenced one of his friends to jail. In revenge, Klotz mailed him his package. As for Hererra, he and Klotz had met in a neighboring saloon. One night Hererra spoke disparagingly of the Germans.

Though Klotz said nothing at the time, he followed Hererra home one night, got his address, and several months later mailed him the bomb.

The case against Klotz was complete. But the man never recovered from the explosion. On March 29, he died.

Thus did Klotz's own plot boomerang against him. He died as had two of his victims. Had fate not taken sides against him, Klotz probably would have gone on mailing his bombs to those against whom he held a grudge. It was a lucky day for many persons that he mishandled the explosives that March day.

**Increasingly, as the War goes on,
paper plays an ever-growing part
in the efforts of our Army, Navy,
the Red Cross. To defeat the
enemy and to save the lives of our
boys, your government says —**

SAVE WASTE PAPER!

Truth Serum

SOME time ago, the American people were amazed to read the latest mouthing of the Goebbels' propaganda mill, to the effect that a "truth serum" had been perfected in Germany. As a result, many scare stories began to appear in our press. "What would happen," people asked, "if one of our Air men should be captured in Nazi-land, fed with the 'truth serum' and accordingly made to divulge our latest technical secrets with regard to plane production, mechanical advances, and the like."

After these propaganda stories had appeared, our American scientists began an investigation. Their findings, in their essence, were that it was most unlikely that a "truth serum" existed, or was ever likely to exist.

From time immemorial, the Intelligence Sections of armies have striven to make people "talk." It is a matter of military expediency. If a man's mind is the repository of military secrets which may alter the course of a war, then it is most important that an army know about them.

"Truth serum" to the contrary, the German practice for obtaining military secrets from recalcitrant spies has thus far been the simple "torture" method. Torture is either physical or mental. Physical torture takes on many shapes and forms. Either a man may be beaten with a rub-

ber hose into unconsciousness, or he may have his fingertips seared, one by one, with lighted cigarettes. Or, he may be given the water cure; also he may have his bones broken, one by one.

The mental school of torture, on the other hand, goes in for dire threats to one's family and loved ones. A spy may be told, for example, that his mother, sister and brother will shortly be killed unless he sees fit to divulge certain information. Or, the spy may be given a strong dose of solitary confinement, to the point where he thinks he is going insane.

Each school of torture, of course, has much to recommend it. However, much as the Nazis would like to possess it, a "truth serum" is held by most of our scientists to be only the figment of a wild Nazi imagination.

Perhaps, the Nazis may mean by "truth serum" nothing more than the old-fashioned alcohol trick. As long as mankind has imbibed alcoholic beverages, so long has alcohol been a weapon in the hands of the unscrupulous. Dose a man with more Scotch or rye than he can take, and his tongue becomes loosened. He may begin to talk on easy terms with total strangers about his most intimate secrets.

No doubt it is only alcohol after all that the Germans have been misnaming their "truth serum."



"Murder will out!" Henry Bascomb orated, thereby indicating the subject for his next editorial in the Gazette. Although Bascomb didn't know it, with those same words he was writing his death sentence!



MURDER, orated Henry Bascomb, "will out! There is your subject for my editorial this week, Steve!"

That's how the thing started, from *his* idea in the first place. *He* laid the powder train and lighted the fuse. It wasn't an editorial he ordered me to write, it was his own death sentence!

Whatever happened afterward was his own fault—frankly, if he'd listened to me, Henry Bascomb would be a living man today.

"But, Mr. Bascomb," I said, "I've al-

ready written your editorial—Let's Crack Down on Congress Quick!"

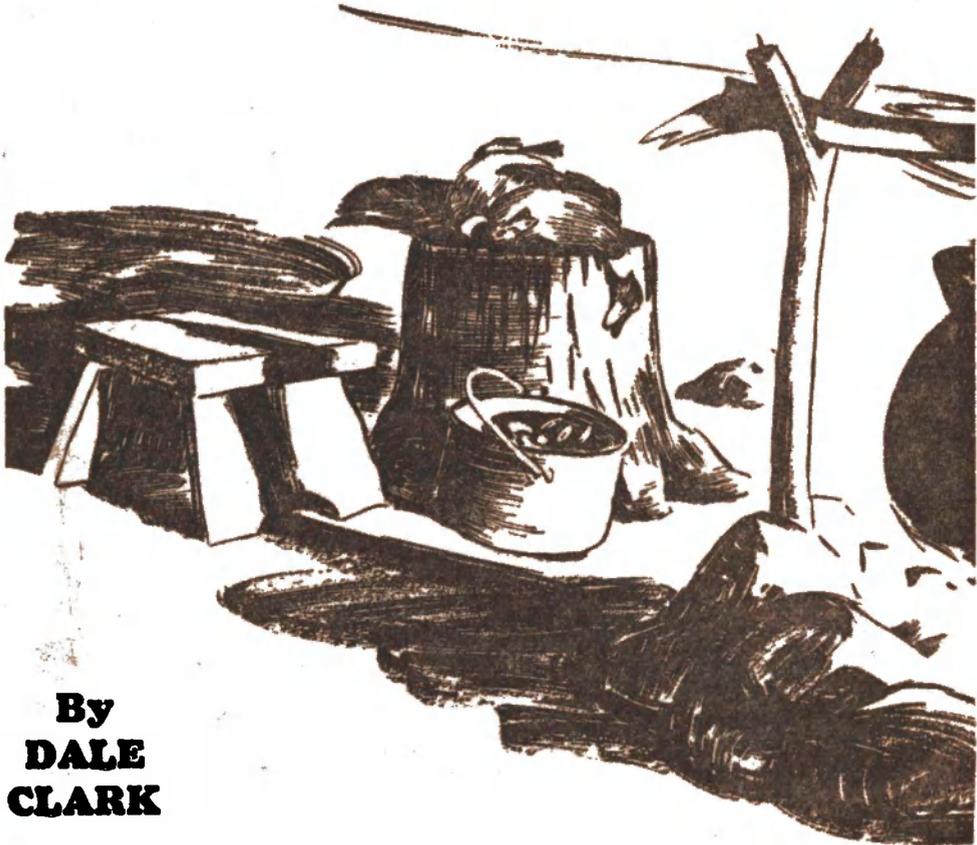
Listen to me?

Not Henry Bascomb!

My words only spurred him to red-faced resentment, made his fingers clench angrily on the shotgun he was cleaning.

He yelled at me—well, almost yelled:

"For the thousandth time, I tell you the *Meadsville Gazette* is a home-town weekly, people read it to see their own names in print, they get their national news and opinions from the big city daily papers and the radio!"



**By
DALE
CLARK**

DAMASCUS GUN

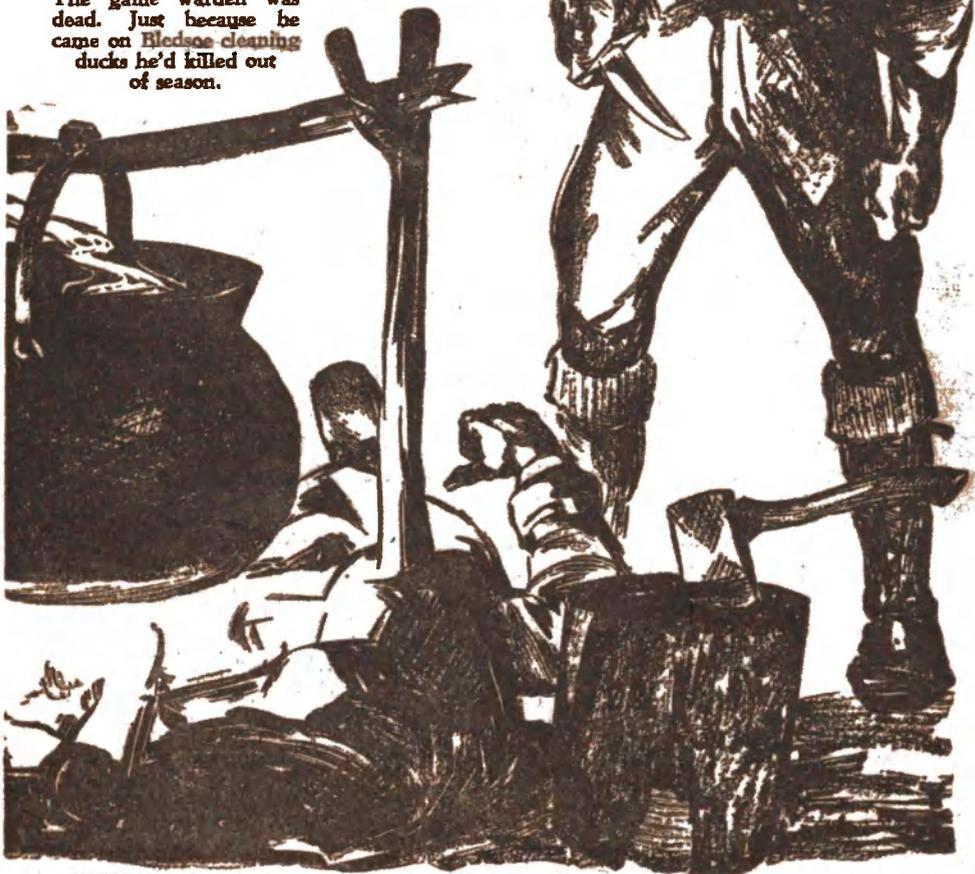
"Precisely," I replied reasonably, "what ails the country! The people are misinformed, they know only what the big-finance-controlled press and broadcasting chains tell them. This nation is being led around by a gold ring in its nose—"

Listen to me?

He wouldn't even let me finish.

"Oh, forget it! Congress and the war aren't on our newsbeat. We can't com-

The game warden was dead. Just because he came on Bledsoe cleaning ducks he'd killed out of season.



pete with Ernie Pyle and Kaltenborn and Kiplinger at solving the world's problems, but on the other hand they can't scoop us on our local Ladies' Aid doings and county crimes."

"Fiddling," I interjected, "while Rome burns."

"The hell with Rome! This is Meadsville, and piddling as it may seem to you, a murder has happened in our midst. And I want to see an editorial in tomorrow's *Gazette* about it—and not a write-up of your half-baked notion of what's wrong in Washington." He grabbed up his shotgun, started for the street door, growled as he went: "I want to see it before tomorrow, you can send a proof of it home with Hannah tonight."

HANNAH was his daughter, married to Ed Beale, editor of the *Gazette*. The service star in the print shop window was for Ed, who'd rushed to enlist the Monday after Pearl Harbor, and was now a war prisoner in Germany. At that, I doubt if he was in any hurry to have the war end—considering what this country was coming to.

She'd been pecking away at a typewriter, while all this went on, hacking out a hunk of poetry. She hardly waited for the door to slam; then she jumped up and ran over to me.

"Steve," she babbled, "I heard every word and you're absolutely right. It isn't only the newspapers and radio, the big national magazines are secretly controlled by big-finance interests, too. It can't be just a coincidence that not one of them will buy my poems!"

You could have knocked me over with an em-space. I'd always figured Hannah as one of those long-haired literary dames without a serious political idea in her head. And besides, personally, she affected me like those girls in the ads who have to be told about their armpit shadows making them unpopular.

I kept it from showing on my face; I even patted her shoulder. "Of course it isn't a coincidence. It's a conspiracy. But never mind, there's going to be a house-cleaning in the U. S. A.—starting with the White House and Supreme Court and Congress, and also including all those kept press editors and columnists and foreign correspondents!"

Hannah wiped some dangling locks of hair away from her features, leaving some ink smudges instead. She always used green typewriter ribbons because that was the color of her psychic aura, and then she invariably jammed the keys on the machine and had to untangle them with her fingers.

"Goodness, Steve," she sighed, "just hearing you say so gives me fresh hope."

"It's true, Hannah. The day of doom is dawning for a lot of higher-ups in this country, but meanwhile your pa's the boss and I have to humor him. The *Gazette's* got to cover this murder in a big way, so suppose you trot over to the jail and interview Buck Bledsoe. See if maybe there isn't a hidden woman angle to his crime."

I knew better. It was just a case of a half-wit farm hand knifing a game warden who caught him cleaning a mess of wild ducks a week before the legal season. I merely suggested it so I wouldn't have Hannah breathing down my neck while I wrote the editorial.

"Murder Will Out"—I leaned back, lighted a cigarette, felt sick as I stared at the typed words. I'm too fundamentally intellectually honest for my own good!

And honestly, my intelligence told me murder does *not* out. Statistics would prove a big percentage of homicides never get solved—if I wanted to look up the figures on it. I didn't bother because the statistics wouldn't tell the whole truth, anyway. They don't include the really clever killings which are disguised to look like suicide or accidental death.

Can I help it if that's the way my brain works, always plunging straight to the inside, low-down, secret truth of things?

FOR instance, I immediately saw it wasn't fair to argue that a man can't get away with murder because Buck Bledsoe didn't! You might just as well argue a man can't fly because a Buck Bledsoe couldn't handle a P-38 without any previous training.

"After all," I reasoned, "committing murder is just about the most serious, single step a man may take in a lifetime! Nobody would expect to step out on a major league diamond and pitch a no-hit game the first time he ever had a baseball in his hand, would he? Or walk onto a stage and try to play Hamlet without even bothering to learn the lines?"

Murder was like that, I figured — a highly specialized art or science, requiring preparation the same as any other. Even a moron of Buck Bledsoe's type wouldn't stretch himself out on an operating table to have his appendix removed by an amateur without any medical training; probably he wouldn't even sit down in a barber chair to be shaved by a student taking his first lesson with a razor. And if he had an ailing radio, he'd take it to a radio repair store and not to a blacksmith shop. Yet this lamebrain, without any advance training or even elementary understanding of the principles involved, had rushed headlong into the deadly-serious business of murder.

So what did it prove that he'd been caught red-handed?

"It doesn't prove a damned thing!" I reflected. "And what's more—I could bump off that fat old fool of a Henry Bascomb without anybody knowing it *was* homicide."

The next instant the thought struck me, *why didn't I do it?*

It was a brand-new thought, a notion that had never remotely entered my head

before. Why should it? You see, people in Meadsville thought old Henry Bascomb had taken over the management of the *Gazette* while Ed Beale was away. They imagined Hannah was handling the reporting end of the business, and to them I was only a 4-F typesetter and all-around printer's devil. They'd have been surprised to know I brought in two-thirds of the local news items, and a lot more surprised to find out Henry Bascomb never authored his signed editorials in the paper.

My feelings weren't slighted; on the contrary, that was the way I wanted it. Bascomb was the town's banker, and naturally his word carried weight in the community. Writing under his name gave my ideas an authority they wouldn't otherwise have had, though of course I couldn't let myself have full play. After all, Bascomb read the stuff after it got in print. So I couldn't come right out and say what I meant about the President and the Supreme Court and Congress—much less could I take an out-and-out crack at the Constitution. . . .

But then, that was all right. I couldn't have, anyway, because the general public was just as dumb as Bascomb himself. I had to educate them to the facts by gradual degrees, starting with kindergarten lessons about the Communists and Bureaucrats and Labor Racketeers on one hand, and Wall Street Bankers and Big Business on the other. And for that purpose, Bascomb made a swell front; I could always inject a little propaganda into his editorials, and so much the better if people didn't realize it was there.

That is, I could do it if only the old fool would let me stick to the really vital national issues of cracking down on the government and capital and labor. If only he wouldn't keep butting in with his idiotic suggestion for editorials about the price of potatoes, or paving Main Street, or buying War Bonds.



I had my head poked out from under the running board—

The worst, of course, was this latest brainstorm—"Murder Will Out." It made me sick even to think of it! Because how the hell can you stir up the public to reform the country by telling them everything is hunky-dory, that murder will out of its own accord? You have to tell them the exact opposite! In plain words, crime is on the rampage—they're liable to be slaughtered in their beds any night now—and there isn't a thing their silly pluto-democratic form of government can do to save them.

All at once I heard a giggle behind me. "Gracious, Steve, I wish the Muse would inspire me to write like that!"

Will you believe it, in my mental ex-

citement I'd actually started pounding the keys and hammering out this editorial the way it ought to be written!

I made a quick grab, tore the paper out of the machine, whirled around. Hannah was just closing the door, though—she was fifteen feet away, and she couldn't possibly have read my stuff from that far away.

"What about the woman angle?" I asked her.

She gave a headshake. "There just isn't one. That Bledsoe brute isn't interested in the fair sex in the slightest. He's sitting there in his cell poring over a magazine called the *Outdoors Digest*, and he wouldn't even lay it aside long enough to talk to me."



and saw Buck swing the gun, club-fashion, again and again.

I thought a minute; said, "There's something funny behind that, Hannah! Bledsoe can't be interested in the outdoors any more—the literature he ought to be studying is how to live inside and like it. I'm going to investigate his peculiar reading tastes."

So I hustled down to the drug store and bought a copy of *Outdoors Digest*. Even if there'd been nothing in it, going out gave me a chance to pause in an alley and touch a match to my editorial under the pretense of lighting another cigarette, just in case Hannah wanted to see what I'd written.

But the *Outdoors Digest* was important, even though at first glance it seemed to be just another capitalistic smokescreen,

devoted to ducks and deer and fish so's to distract public opinion from the political and economic issues of the day. Not until I thumbed through to the back pages did I find the gold-mine; in fact, two gold-mines.

"Hannah," I pretended after I got back to the *Gazette* office, "I'm having trouble with the linotype again, so you better not wait. It'll be eight o'clock before I can get this editorial set up in type, and so I'll bring the proof by your house on the way home."

What I'd found in the back pages was a department on guns and ammunition, beginning with a lead-off article advocating restricting automatic weapons as a means of preserving wild game. Part of

that I lifted and used in my editorial—it showed how Buck Bledsoe's mind had been corrupted by reading Communistic propaganda! Buck was a tool of the Reds! That whole article was nothing but typical Communist underhandedness, being a hellish trick to pass a law keeping modern firearms out of the hands of honest citizens. And this was followed by a question-and-answer column giving the scientific, ballistics facts on various guns—in other words, enlightening the radicals just which secondhand weapons to buy in preparing for a bloody uprising. From the political angle, it struck me this *Outdoors Digest* must be required reading in all the anarchistic clubs and secret societies in the country!

But what specially and personally gripped my attention was a boxed notice in the middle of the firearms page. With the hunting season coming on, it warned against the practice of shooting high velocity, smokeless powder loaded shells in old-fashioned shotguns equipped with Damascus steel, twist or laminated barrels. That certainly surprised me, inasmuch as I'd always imagined Damascus steel was the ne plus ultra. Yet the warning was clear, any hunter who made that mistake was likely to blow off a hand and maybe his head besides.

Henry Bascomb's shotgun, unless I was badly mistaken, was an old-timer dating away back to pre-World War I days.

YOU'RE beginning to see what he started with his mulish insistence on an editorial on murder? *He* laid the powder train, as I said before; otherwise my thoughts would never have turned in that direction, Hannah would never have revealed her soul to me, I wouldn't have sent her to the jail, consequently I'd never have dreamed of looking inside the covers of an *Outdoors Digest*.

He wasn't through playing the mule; I hadn't heard the last about that editorial,

because when I took the proof to Henry Bascomb's home a couple of hours later I found his next door neighbor, Morris Epstein, sitting in the parlor. Epstein's kid was in the Marines. He'd sent home some Jap trophies from the Marshall Islands, and the two old cronies were admiring the stuff when I walked in.

Frankly, I can't go Epstein even if he is the smartest lawyer in the county. But when Bascomb offered me a drink, what could I do but accept?

But while he was pouring it, Morris Epstein picked up the proof page where Bascomb had laid it down on the table. He gave it a quick glance, said:

"Henry, sometimes I wonder. . . . You can't even write two hundred words about a local murder without dragging in politics. My God, man, you don't really think Buck Bledsoe's a dangerous Bolshevik, do you?"

Bascomb's jaw dropped about a foot.

I said, quickly: "Nobody says he is, Mr. Epstein. He's just an unconscious tool of the Third Internationale. He's a fellow-traveler, a poor dupe whose brain has been poisoned by that insidious Red literature."

Epstein shook his head, "But the *Outdoors Digest* is no parlor pink organ. I know because I read it regularly myself."

"Certainly," I came back at him, "they don't come out in so many words and say they're un-American! But read between the lines! You admit, don't you, they're in favor of restricting the sale of firearms? And don't you agree Bledsoe's in favor of that—considering if people didn't own guns, posses couldn't pursue killers? You can't deny the Reds and *Outdoors Digest* and Buck Bledsoe are all fellow-travelers going along the same road in the same direction!"

Lawyer or no lawyer, old Epstein saw he couldn't stand up against my barrage of inexorable logic, so he shrugged and shut up. Unfortunately, Henry Bascomb

by this time was reading the proof to see what caused the fireworks.

He glared: "Hell, so am I against a lot of game hogs running wild with their automatics and super-souped-up ammunition! They cripple more birds than they kill—but never mind, Steve, you wouldn't understand what I'm talking about. Forget the whole thing. I'll write this week's editorial myself."

Morris Epstein opened his eyes at us, then quickly jerked them away. He pretended to be suddenly interested in a belt of Pap machine-gun bullets, but of course he knew the score now.

I THOUGHT fast, realizing that if once Bascomb saw his own words set up in type, from that time on he'd insist on writing all the editorials. Up to now, I'd been able to kid him he was too busy to waste his time on mere journalism. But I'd be wasting *my* time talking, if ever I let the authorship bug bite him.

"I'm sorry," I told him, "but the linotype's out of order again, and in fact it broke down completely just as I finished this. If you want to write a different editorial, okay. But if you do, the *Gazette* can't come out tomorrow, and it may be Friday before I get the machine working again."

To show you how little he knew about the newspaper game, he was so dumb he didn't savvy the editorial could easily be set by hand out of the ad cases.

"Oh, well," he scowled, "let it go this time! But I'm tired of you sticking a lot of words in my mouth all the time!"

I knew I couldn't lie about the linotype being broken every week.

So when I left the house, I walked around back to the garage.

It was a good guess on all three counts. Henry Bascomb hadn't bothered to lock his garage, he hadn't locked the car, either, and the shotgun lay in its case across the back seat.

I switched on the dome light, held the gun up to the light. The fourth guess was okay also. Bascomb's old double-barrel boasted "Damascus Steel" engraved right into it—probably the manufacturer had been proud of the fact, thirty or forty years ago.

I helped myself to a couple of shells from the box he had stowed in the gun case. Not until I closed the old cowhide case did I notice the name stamped on its lid—Henry Bascomb, Sr.

Well, I might have suspected that the weapon had been handed down to him from his father! He was that kind of a reactionary conservative, what was good enough for his father would be good enough for him.

As a matter of fact, I'd known it all along. Henry Bascomb didn't belong to the wave of the future at all—he was mentally a holdover from the horse and buggy days of old fogies like Lincoln and George Washington. I could use him for lambasting the Communists and Congress, but deep down in my heart I'd never doubted he'd balk at the next logical step. He wouldn't admit the country was in such a mess our only hope lay in starting all over again, and this time with a strong man dictator in charge of things!

I'd been aware of his pluto-democratic prejudices from the first, only up to now I hadn't seen any way of helping it.

I was beginning to see a way now. Suppose something happened to Henry Bascomb, such as a shotgun blowing up in his face while he was duck hunting?

That kind of an accident would leave Hannah in sole charge of the *Gazette*—and Hannah, I'd learned today, could be educated to the vital political issues of the times. Of course, she needed a whole lot of education before she'd go all the way with me; but at least I could hope to make some progress with her, which I couldn't with Henry Bascomb.

I got so excited thinking about it, I had

to slow down and remind myself there was no hurry—the duck hunting season didn't start until next week. All I could do tonight was fix the linotype. Of course it didn't need fixing. But that gave me a reason for staying late inside the locked-up *Gazette* office, in case anybody was curious.

WHAT I really did was set up a handbill exposing the International Bankers' plot to overthrow our government. Naturally, the handbill wasn't for use in Meadsville — the local yokels weren't ripe for receiving a real, red-hot revelation like this.

What I did with these handbills, I mailed them to Mr. X in Chicago. For every thousand I sent in, I got a silver star, and when I'd saved up ten stars, I mailed those in and got a gold one. In turn, ten gold stars entitled me to a promotion in rank.

Already I'd worked up from private to the level of captain in the Secret Army to save America. But it was slow work, especially when you consider I could get promoted by merely sending in the names of five new members—besides keeping half of the ten-dollar initiation fee!

I COULD hardly wait for people to get good and scared, so I could come out in the open and organize a couple hundred recruits. That'd make me a four-star secret general, not to mention I could use the money, too. But now I was glad I *had* waited, because obviously it'd be a terrific help to have the local newspaper endorse the movement with a lot of favorable publicity.

In fact, I felt so pepped up about it that after I ran off the first thousand handbills on the job press, I kept right on going and printed another five hundred to be used right here in Meadsville after Henry Bascomb had his sad accident.

Wouldn't you know there'd be a catch

to it? I went around to the hardware store first thing in the morning intending to help myself to a box of the highest velocity smokeless powder shotgun shells. But there were none on the shelves, so I was compelled to come right out and ask the clerk.

Risky? Well, yes, but I could cover up later by saying Henry Bascomb told me to buy them for *him*—if anyone asked questions. I didn't think anyone would, because during the night I'd thought up something else to divert Meadsville's attention from such minor matters as hunting accidents.

But coming back to the catch—the clerk looked at me as if I must be crazy. "Good Lord," he said, "don't you know there's been a sporting ammunition shortage since Pearl Harbor? I haven't any shells in stock, and if I did have, I couldn't sell them except to a farmer or rancher with a priority permit."

I couldn't believe my ears. Even though I was wise to the Red plot to disarm law-abiding citizens, I frankly never dreamed Congress and the President would be so short-sighted as to make it impossible for patriotic Americans to defend themselves against riots and rebellions on the home front. But worse than the political angle was my personal problem of where to get my hands on some high-velocity smokeless powder.

For ten minutes or so, I was really discouraged—until I walked by the bank and saw Henry Bascomb and Morris Epstein fixing up a window display of those Jap trophies in order to peddle War Bonds.

So I went in and helped them do it.

And slipped a handful of Imperial Japanese Army high-powered cartridges in my pocket.

They never noticed.

Next, I stopped at the variety store and bought a plug of child's modeling clay off the toy counter. I could buy that

openly because who'd ever dream how I used it?

Finally, I stopped at the jail to ask Sheriff Hackles if there was any last-minute news on the Buck Bledsoe case before I put the *Gazette* on the press. His big iron jail key lay right there on his desk. I leaned against the desk, pulled the plug of modeling clay from my hip pocket, and pressed it down behind me on top of the key.

Hackles never noticed, either.

Now all I had to do was empty the black powder out of Bascomb's shotgun shells and fill them up with high velocity, nitro-cellulose smokeless explosive. I had a whole week to do it in, so I took my time and figured out exactly what I was doing. Those shells had been loaded with 4 drams of the black powder—approximately 109 grains. The Jap cartridges, still loaded, held 33 grains of powder each, and I emptied five of them into each shell—165 grains of concentrated military mankiller. I didn't put in any shot at all. Instead I soaked filler wads in glue and tamped these down one on top of the other. When I set these aside to dry, I had a product packing enough wallop to rip Henry Bascomb's old-fashioned gun barrels to ribbons, and blow the hammers back through his brain.

But I didn't count on it. Just so the gun blew apart was all I cared. An accident like that could easily knock a hunter unconscious, make him fall out of his boat and drown — or he could be pushed out and held under the water.

I whittled a hardwood key, and bought some rat poison and I was all set. Nothing less than broken bones would keep Henry Bascomb and his dog and his pal Epstein off the river at sunrise the first day of the season.

FUNNY thing. . . . The very night before the season opened, Epstein tripped and fell over a wire some fool kid

must have strung across the sidewalk in front of his house. I happened to be right behind him, hurrying to tell Bascomb some bad news. I fell over the wire, too. In fact, I landed right on top of Epstein as he was getting up. I wasn't hurt. Epstein's ankle got busted, though. I could hear the bone crack when my knee came down on it.

The bad news I had to tell Henry Bascomb was that his dog had got into some rat poison behind the print shop.

My alarm clock went off at four a.m., and it wasn't too early. By the time I was up and dressed, window lights were showing around Meadsville. Duck hunters like to be in their blinds before daylight—the blind is the hide-out they shoot from. Henry Bascomb's blind was down the river about two miles, located in a few acres of marsh he'd bought and built a boathouse on. He needed a boat to get around the property, it was mostly under water with just a few hummocks of dry land sticking up here and there.

That's where I headed for, but first I stopped outside the jail and threw a stone through Buck Bledsoe's cell window. The breaking glass would wake him up, but nobody else because he was the only prisoner in the hoosegow. I figured when he found the key tied onto the stone, a guy going to be sent up for second-degree murder would know what to do—even if he was half-witted. Then at breakfast time the sheriff would find him missing, and in the excitement of the jailbreak people would overlook any slightly suspicious circumstances connected with Henry Bascomb's death.

Sooner or later they'd catch the poor sap, but he couldn't tell them who supplied the key. Even if he looked, it was too dark to see me running across the jail yard. It was still practically pitch-black when I reached the boathouse, and the sky had barely turned a little gray when Henry Bascomb's car came chugging

down the lane from the river road.

From where I stood peeping around the corner of the building, he was just a dimly visible human haystack silhouette spouting white vapor from his nostrils as the old fool sniffed the air in caveman style.

The ducks out there in the dark must have heard the car—they started quacking and gab-gabbling. So he quickly grabbed a bamboo whistle out of his disguise and quacked and gabbled soothing talk back at them.

You'd have laughed your head off. He was all dressed up in a camouflage suit of grass until he looked like a marsh hummock on two legs. First he reached in and got his gun out of the car and leaned that against the fender and then he got out a double armful of imitation, decoy ducks and started down the path to the boathouse.

I knew he wouldn't be back in a hurry, I'd jammed a twig into the boathouse keyhole, and it'd take him a minute to fish that out.

And I didn't need a minute—only a couple of seconds to pounce on his gun and break it. The shells in it partly popped out when I opened it, and fast as you could say, "Little lambs eat ivy," I'd picked them out and pushed those super-charged deathdealers into the barrels.

Then I heard him coming, and I dived flat and rolled out of sight under his car.

But it wasn't him, it was some other guy.

"Mr. Bascomb?" this other guy said. "Mr. Bascomb, you got to help me!"

Of course when he heard that, Henry Bascomb started back up the path from his boathouse. "Who's there?" he wanted to know.

"It's me—Buck Bledsoe."

I guess I gasped, but Bascomb's gasp was louder. He had reason—the killer being between him and the car, and yards closer to the gun.

Probably the old fool wasn't really cool—just scared ice-cold, I imagine. "Well, Buck, what can I do for you?"

Bledsoe laughed and said, "It's okay, I ain't any dangerous Red Bolshevik like you said in the paper. I'm just as good a member of the secret army as you are!"

"The *what?*"

Bledsoe laughed again and said, "Hell, Mr. Bascomb, you can't kid me. A lot of them editorials you took just about word for word from Mr. X's secret newspaper, the *Brown Front Bugle*. Last winter I had a factory job in Chicago, and that's when I joined this great organization to liberate the U. S. A. from the grip of the Bolsheviks and pro-British, un-American Wall Street big shots."

IT'S almost lucky I was already lying on the ground—I might have fallen over on hearing Buck Bledsoe prove he wasn't the dumb hick everybody thought, but actually had one of the most outstanding, enlightened, political visions in Meadsville. It took me so by surprise I couldn't warn him until it was too late.

"Oh," said Henry Bascomb, "that makes all the difference in the world! Naturally, as your fellow member in a Fascist crusade to make the world safe for Hitlerism, it's up to me to help you."

He was moving while he said it. He grabbed the shotgun, and his voice changed.

"Hands up, you stupid tramp! You're going back to jail, and you're not the only one—"

That was when Bledsoe quick-wittedly grabbed the gun barrels. I heard a couple of dry *clicks*, it sounded to me like Henry Bascomb cocking the hammers. But Bledsoe being the superior man physically as well as mentally, he easily twisted the weapon free before any harm was done.

I poked my head out from under the runningboard just in time to see Buck swing the gun club-fashion. Henry Bas-

comb threw up his arm to save his head, but the first blow knocked him sprawling.

Then Buck hit him a couple of more licks, standing over him and wielding the shotgun like an axe. The third stroke the gun stock broke off, after which he threw the pieces away from him into the water beyond the boathouse.

Bledsoe took to his heels. I wanted to tell him he could go a lot farther and faster by taking Bascomb's car.

I figured, though, I'd better not say anything. He might have killed me before I could convince him we were both loyal to the same high ideals, only I as a captain was even more so.

I went over to make sure Henry Bascomb was beyond the help of first aid. His wristwatch had been broken when the shotgun crashed across his outflung arm. I moved the hands so they pointed to five-thirty.

Five-thirty gave me plenty of time to walk back to Meadsville and be having a cup of coffee in the Victory Hamburger Hut. That being the only place open that early, I could count on a few early-bird witnesses to confirm my alibi.

Only it wasn't open, there was a sign in the window that said, "Gone Hunting."

I had to have an alibi, didn't I?

So I went and routed Sheriff Hacklees out of bed. I told him I'd come down early because the linotype was out of order, and that I was pretty sure I'd witnessed Buck Bledsoe dodge around a corner. I said that was about twenty minutes ago, and at first I hadn't believed it was Buck, but finally I thought I'd better play safe and notify the Law. In connection with mentioning the time, I pulled out my watch and said it couldn't be six-thirty already!

Hacklees looked at his watch, and of course I'd looked at mine wrong—it was five-thirty on the dot.

After that, I went over to the *Gazette*

office and diddled around taking the distributor mechanism off the linotype. I was still doing it when Hannah came in at eight o'clock, crying because a couple of other hunters had just found Henry Bascomb's body.

Pretty soon after that, Sheriff Hacklees walked in and he had a gun in his fist. "Steve," he said, "you're under arrest for murder."

I told him he was crazy, if anybody had murdered Henry Bascomb it was Buck Bledsoe.

He shook his head. "Buck's in his cell, and has been there all night. You made up that clumsy lie to give yourself an alibi."

THAT'S the trouble with secret organizations. They always include a few unreliable persons you simply can't count on. Buck had rushed back and locked himself in his cell, figuring he'd use that wooden key some other night. And those hunters in the meanwhile had looked around and rescued Henry Bascomb's broken shotgun.

"You made an awful dumb mistake, Steve," the sheriff told me. "You assumed Henry would blow his head off with his own gun—you didn't know a black powder primer in a shotgun shell won't explode a charge of smokeless powder! So when he pulled the trigger and nothing happened, you grabbed the gun and brained him instead."

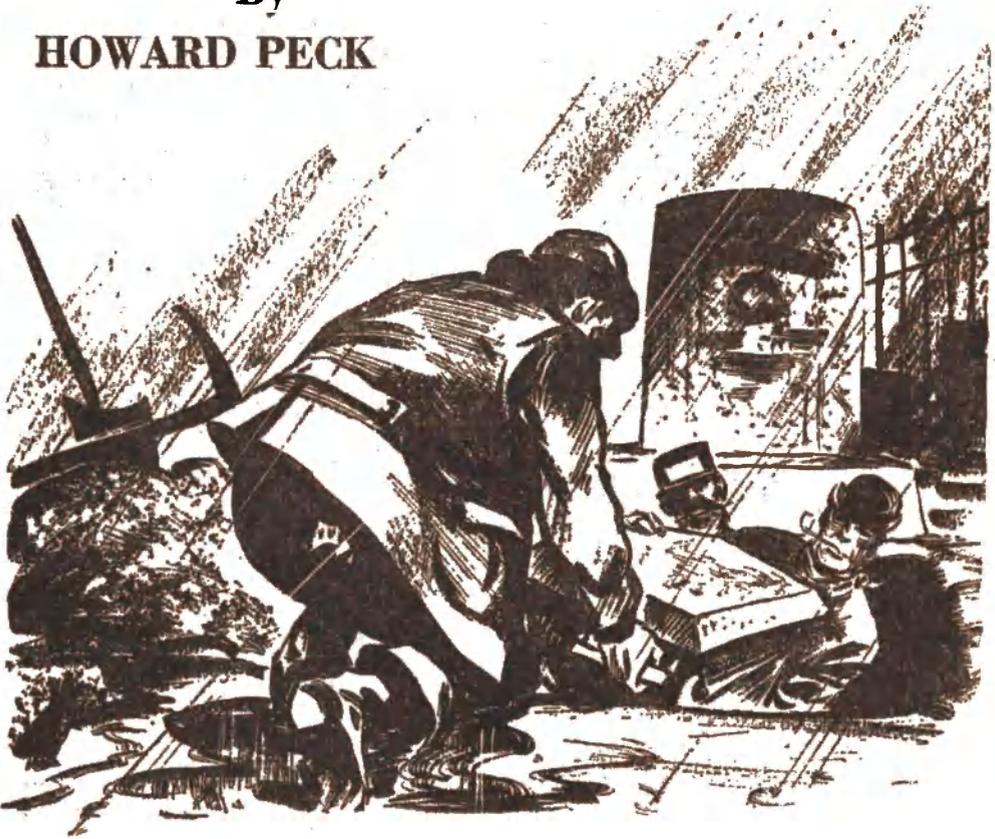
That shows you what to expect from the so-called legal justice in this plutocratic country! Sheriff Hacklees is so incredibly dumb he's still sticking stubbornly to his crazy theory that I went hunting with Henry Bascomb that morning. He insists some ducks flew over, and Bascomb's gun only clicked when he tried to shoot both barrels at them . . . and I had to kill him to keep the old fool from finding out what ailed his ammunition!

(Continued on page 112)

For The Love Of Murder

By

HOWARD PECK



THE COURTROOM, which had been crowded only a few weeks before with morbid curiosity seekers, was now empty, except for the defendant and his attorney, the man from the D.A.'s office, a few detectives, and the bored attendants. The defendant had been found guilty of murder in the first degree by a jury of his peers. There had been no recommendation of mercy and the death sentence was mandatory.

"Young man," spoke the solemn-faced judge, his voice echoing through the emptiness of the court, "you have committed fiendish murder for paltry profit. You come of good family and you have had an excellent education. Fortunately, your brilliant schemes bore no fruit, and you were apprehended before you had perpetrated more death and destruction." The judge paused. He had always found the actual sentencing difficult. "I sentence you," he



SOKOLI

He was still a medical student when his crimes started.

continued, "to be hanged by the neck until dead." There were further details as to where and when, and, finally, the words, "May God have mercy on your soul."

The murderer's screams were so loud that his words made no sense, and he was led away, to await his meeting with destiny.

One of the attendants, who had viewed many such dramas, turned to the man from the district attorney's office. "I just can't make it out. There was a guy who

Murder for profit is understandable. Murder in a fit of passion has its own logic. But murder without motive is always an enigma. Here is the true story of a man who killed for many reasons—but primarily because he enjoyed the thrill of murder

had everything, brains and ability. He could have made a fortune honestly. Why, I wonder, did he kill for measly peanuts?"

There was no answer, nor could there be one. Criminologists and psychologists have not yet been able to determine why some men of education, background and personality should see fit to live lives of crime, when by remaining honest and law-abiding, they might have amassed fortunes and been pillars of respectability in their communities. Why should a man who can make money legitimately strive to make less money in crime? And why should some men be driven to murder when there is no apparent need for killing? Unfortunately, we do not know the answer. About all we can do is to study the many recorded cases of murder for profit, and murder just for the sake of murder, and then silently wonder.

Just such a man, who, had he thrown his energies into lawful pursuits, might have been a very successful and respected member of his community, was born in the sleepy town of Gilmanton, New Hampshire, in the year 1860. His name was Herman W. Mudgett. In later years he was to assume the other names and other origins, and he was to become one of history's most fiendish murderers. How many persons he actually murdered will never be known, although estimates range from twenty to a couple of hundred. And how these people were murdered will never be known either, although it is believed that some were chloroformed, some strangled, some gassed, and some simply beaten to death. As a rule, the bodies of his victims were dissolved in cellar pits containing quicklime and acids. But often this efficient murderer would save some of their skeletons, which he would sell to medical schools and the like, for he was always determined to realize every penny of profit from his crimes.

To rank with the "great" criminals of history, a murderer ought to conform to a certain rigid pattern. There should be many victims, preferably female, who are killed over a period of years. The murderer should have unusual ways of disposing of the bodies. And he should be scientif-

ically inclined. Also, he should be young, good-looking, and suave. This man, born Herman W. Mudgett, possessed all these qualifications, and more. He was a physician, hypnotist, liar, and skillful business man, and he was hanged when he was thirty-five in Philadelphia.

THIS murderer's downfall can be traced to a string of events which were set in motion on September 4, 1894. A caller, thinking it unusual that an office at 1216 Callowhill Street, Philadelphia, should be locked, summoned the police. The police arrived, forced the door, and found the body of a man who, apparently, was the victim of an explosion. The face and left arm were completely disfigured. Near the body lay a pipe, some matches, and a broken bottle which might have contained kerosene. The coroner estimated that the man had been dead three days.

Identification was difficult, but the dead man was finally discovered to be B. F. Perry, who had been the tenant of the office. In his pockets, police found several letters, presumably from his wife in St. Louis, which indicated that his wife intended to join him shortly. Neighbors knew very little about him, except that he was supposed to have been some kind of inventor. It is not surprising, therefore, that the official verdict was that death was due to burns as a result of an accident. The body lay unclaimed in the Philadelphia morgue for ten days, and then was buried in Potter's Field.

Shortly thereafter, the Fidelity Mutual Life Association of Philadelphia received a letter from St. Louis. The letter said that the B. F. Perry who had died was really Benjamin F. Pitzel, whose life had been insured by them. A few days later, two professional men, a Dr. H. H. Holmes, the widow's friend, and a Jephtha Howe, her attorney, called at the offices of the company. With them was Alice Pitzel, aged fourteen, the dead man's daughter. In due course, the body was exhumed and properly identified. The insurance money, \$10,000, was paid to Holmes, acting on behalf of the widow and the five children.

But the matter was not to end there. One Marion Hedgepath, a notorious train

robber and petty swindler, feeling that he had been cheated his rightful share in the loot, disclosed to Police Chief Larry Harrigan the details of a plot to cheat a Philadelphia insurance company. Hedgepath was questioned and he revealed that several months before a fellow prisoner named Howard had offered him \$500 if he would suggest the name of an attorney who could assist in a scheme to make \$10,000. Howard planned to insure the life of B. F. Pitzel, to fake a fatal accident, to send Pitzel into hiding, and then to obtain a body at the morgue which he would identify as Pitzel's. Howard had said that he was an old hand at this kind of fraud, having perpetrated many similar frauds at other times. The attorney suggested for the job was Jephtha Howc, who was to get \$2500 for his part in the conspiracy.

Chief Harrigan suspected some fraud, and communicated with the Philadelphia insurance company. The police and Pinkerton detectives were called in, and soon investigators were hot on the trail of Howard, alias H. H. Holmes, who was apprehended in Boston on November 17, 1894. By that time, warrants had been issued charging him with conspiracy to defraud, murder, and horse thievery. It was not long before he confessed the insurance fraud, but he denied the murder. He claimed that Pitzel was not dead, but was in South America. The body of the dead inventor was exhumed a second time, and the autopsy revealed that he had died of poisoning by chloroform, administered before the explosion and fire. The net was beginning to tighten. Soon many details of his weird past were uncovered. They proved this man Holmes to have been the most fantastic criminal of his generation.

HOLMES, or Howard, or Mudgett, had spent a rather uneventful childhood in his home town of Gilmanton, New Hampshire. Before he was twenty-one, he married the daughter of a refined, well-to-do New Hampshire family, who helped finance his education. He studied first in Vermont and then at the medical school of the University of Michigan, where he was known as a brilliant, although erratic, student. One night while he was still a student at the medical school, a cadaver disappeared while being taken to the college dissection room. On the same night, a

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resident of the town mysteriously died after a short illness. Holmes collected the insurance. Thus he started on his long road of crime.

After he had finished with medical school, his wife and child returned to New Hampshire. They were not to see him again until ten years later, when he reappeared, this time a fugitive from justice. In the intervening years, he left a long trail of murder and fraud behind him.

In 1885, he turned up in Chicago as H. H. Holmes. Casting aside his past, he married bigamously the daughter of a wealthy family of Wilmette, a Chicago suburb. No longer interested in medicine, he attempted to carve out a business career for himself. His money-making schemes varied somewhat, but followed a pretty set pattern. First, with worthless notes and smooth talk, he would borrow enough money to buy some unimproved property. To repay the original loan, he would borrow on the property. Then he would build a house on the property. Once the house was completed, he would cargo huge quantities of furniture and other items for it. All these purchases were on credit, of course. By the time the furniture company got around to repossessing the furniture, it would find only an empty house and no Holmes, who in the meantime, would have disappeared. There is a record that he was once in an honest business, but that was of very short duration.

In between his various frauds, Holmes found time to father three children and to establish himself as a solid citizen of the community. His wife knew nothing of his many criminal activities. How he managed to keep the details from her is something of a mystery.

Finally Holmes began the activities which were to give him lasting infamy. He started off humbly enough, as a clerk in a drugstore in the Englewood section of Chicago. Before long, he had bought out or driven out the proprietress, and then in 1892 he commenced building his murder castle on the opposite corner, on Sixty-third Street. It was an enormous, strangely constructed structure. It was huge and ugly, more than a hundred and fifty feet long and more than fifty feet wide, with

three storeys and a basement. The first floor was cut up into stores, including a drugstore which Holmes operated for a time. The third floor consisted of apartments. But the second floor and the basement contained medieval chambers of horror.

How Holmes got the money to finance his murder castle is not known, but he succeeded in furnishing it through a master swindle. He bought truckloads of furniture, mattresses, chinaware, hardware, and gas fixtures from the Tobey Furniture Company and ordered them delivered to the house on Sixty-third Street. The furniture company, still unpaid a week later, sent an agent to watch the house and then demanded payment. When payment was not forthcoming, the company sent vans and brawny moving men to repossess its property. But they found the house empty. Yet the company's agent swore that no furniture had been taken out and, most assuredly, it had been taken in. But the janitor at the castle gave the game away for a \$25 bribe. He said Holmes had moved all the furniture into one room, taken out the door frame, bricked up the door, and papered the wall.

It has never been determined whether Holmes, when he built the house, contemplated merely these simple merchandise swindles or the mass murders which were later attributed to him. However he was not prosecuted by his creditors, and he was thus able to complete his house of crime.

THE murder house was completed in time for the opening of the Chicago Fair of 1893. Holmes had decided to go into the business of mass murder for profit. At this time, he was in his early thirties, and he had reached the height of his mental and physical powers. With the years, he had grown more handsome, with a sallow complexion enhanced by dark, soulful eyes and a curled mustache. He was now widely read, an absorbed student of hypnotism and mesmerism, and he had evolved certain strange theories concerning the origin and nature of human life. During his medical school days, he had taken a great interest in corpses and cadavers. Now he wanted to conduct various experiments on human

bodies. What it was that he hoped to prove or establish through his experiments will never be known. Possibly it was a diseased mind that impelled him to murder. But now his laboratories were complete, and, more important, he had found means to dispose of dead bodies. He was at last ready to go into the murder business.

Although the number of his victims will never be known, it is sufficient to say that newspapers of the day estimated that at least two hundred women lost their lives at his hands. Only when it is realized that Holmes operated his murder castle for only two years, is the tremendous scope of his "enterprise" seen.

Holmes' pattern for murder and profit was pretty much the same in all cases. He would manage to find beautiful and wealthy women, especially wealthy, to whom he would represent himself to be a man of great fortune. As a rule, these women fell in love with him. Not long after, they would be married to him, and come to live with him at the murder castle on Sixty-third Street. From that house they never returned. After securing their wealth for himself, Holmes would kill and artfully dispose of his victims.

When police broke into the murder castle after Holmes' death, they found it contained nearly a hundred rooms. There were staircases that led nowhere in particular, blind passageways, hinged walls, false partitions, rooms with many doors, and rooms with no doors. It was no wonder that no victim ever emerged alive. Holmes' own apartment was at the front of the house. A trap door was cut in his bathroom, and from it led a short hidden staircase to a windowless cubicle in-between floors, whence a chute dropped straight to the cellar.

Near the rear of the house was an asphyxiation chamber, an asbestos-lined, windowless room. Apparently, it was the murderer's practice to lock his victims into this room and then to turn on gas. How many of his victims met their death this way is not known. But directly behind the asphyxiation chamber was another chute down which the bodies could be sent to the basement. The doors to all the rooms on this second floor were wired to an elaborate alarm system which rang a buzzer in the murderer's apartments.

But the cellar was by far the eeriest

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YOUR BONDS



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section of the building. Dark and damp, it was filled with a variety of operating tables, a crematory, pits containing quicklime and acids, surgical instruments, and strange pieces of apparatus which resembled medieval torture racks.

Some have held that Holmes used these appliances to wring from his victims the whereabouts of their wealth; others that he used them to demonstrate his pet theory that the human body could be stretched indefinitely, so as to be able to produce a race of giants by artificial means. It was in this cellar that the bodies of his victims were sometimes completely destroyed, and other times merely stripped of their flesh and then sold to medical institutions which had advertised for "well-preserved skeletons".

It was toward the end of 1893 that the murder mill ceased operations. Before the year was out, Holmes was driven from his castle, hotly pursued by angry creditors and a fire insurance company that he had tried to defraud. Being in desperate need of money to hold his many creditors at bay, he set fire to his castle in November, 1893. He tried to collect on a \$60,000 insurance policy, but the proof of loss looked fraudulent, as did the building's ownership, and an investigation was finally under way. The investigation might have ended up a blind alley, had not his old creditors begun to make serious trouble. Holmes owed about \$50,000. Up to that time, he managed to hold his creditors off with all sorts of cajolery and smooth talk. But finally, on November 22, 1893, they met in a body, and decided to take some affirmative action. Their attorneys swore out warrants for the arrest of Holmes, but he had already fled from Chicago. He had finally become a fugitive, and he wandered about the country trying to avoid apprehension.

IT is to be noted that up to this time, Holmes was not in trouble with the police. It was only his creditors who were in pursuit. But somehow, he decided to

take another chance with his tried-and-true insurance fraud. He convinced an old friend, Benjamin F. Pitzel, that some easy money was to be made. Pitzel's widow agreed with the plan, for she was under the impression that there would be no murder. Unfortunately, in his last crime, Holmes resorted to murder, and, because of a dissatisfied confederate (Hedgepath, who had not been given his \$500 share), the crime came to the attention of the police, who were successful in tracking him down. Holmes was caught in Boston on November 17, 1894. He was brought back to Philadelphia, to stand trial.

Needless to say, the trial became a national sensation. On October 28, 1895, the first day of his trial for Pitzel's murder, Holmes dismissed his attorneys. He boldly undertook to try his case. Although he displayed a remarkable familiarity with the law, and continually read law books, he offered no witnesses in his defense, and the evidence adduced against him was such that the jury was unanimous in finding him guilty. Whether he would have been found guilty today under the same circumstances is questionable, since the evidence against him was circumstantial. But he was convicted of murder, and he was duly hanged at Moyamensing Prison.

Although the murderer was convicted and executed, many interesting questions still remain. Since Holmes was tried in Philadelphia for murder committed in that city, no really thorough investigation was ever made of his murder castle crimes. There is still the question: How many people did he kill? And also these others: Why did he kill? Did he kill for money alone? Or for passion? Or simply because he enjoyed killing? These questions can never be answered, and there seems to be no adequate explanation. But for his indiscretion in taking Hedgepath into one of his schemes, he might still be alive today, a free man, and possibly still engaged in his queer business of murder.



Detective Plays a Hunch

HHEADQUARTERS was on a man-hunt. The most daring gang-leader of recent months was still on the loose, and the daily press was beginning to cry for the mayor's scalp and the police commissioner's hide. If the boys wanted to keep their jobs, something would have to be done quickly.

Pictures of the criminal, together with detailed descriptions of his physical characteristics, were immediately posted on all public bulletin boards, and the radio stations kept up a constant of "lookout" bulletins. Every policeman on the force, down to the youngest rookie on the most outlying beat, was lectured on the importance of swift apprehension. One important physical characteristic of the gunman was stressed. It was known that the criminal's eyes were very bad indeed, that he suffered from a severe case of myopia, and that he could not see two feet ahead of him without the aid of his unusually thick glasses.

One day shortly thereafter, a detective, on a routine job of investigation, noticed a man who vaguely resembled the racketeer. Only this man wore no glasses, seemed to be perfectly able to do without them, and also he had a mustache. However, playing hunches, the detective picked him up and brought him along to headquarters, where he was booked on a charge of vagrancy until the record could be checked. The detective was about to be severely reprimanded by his superior for unduly annoying law-abiding citizens when the report on the fingerprints came through. Strangely enough, this man, without glasses, was the man they were after!

What miracle had been wrought which enabled this man to see without glasses?

The answer is a simple one. The sought-after criminal had discarded his old-fash-

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taken and ground to fit the mould. Once that is done, the rest is easy, except for the fact that the patient must accustom himself to wearing them, much the same as owners of new false teeth.

In many ways, these new lenses have proven a boon to a world at war. An aviator who would ordinarily be rejected by the Air Corps for slightly under par vision may be accepted now if his eyes will meet the tough standards now required when wearing the "contacts." And the captain of a liberty ship finds them a great convenience, for he knows that these "glasses" will not get sprayed or fogged.

DAMASCUS GUN

(Continued from page 103)

Moreover, it looks very much as if they might hang me on just such a trumped-up case! Nobody in Meadsville believes my story—nobody except Morris Epstein. The reason he believes it is that Hannah found those five hundred handbills and showed them to him.

That's why I've sat down and wrote all

this out. Because Epstein honestly believes I'm just an insane nut—and he thinks if I tell the jury all about Mr. X, and being a captain in the secret army to overthrow the Reds and Capital and Labor and Congress and everybody else, probably they'll send me to the looney house instead of a death cell.



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