

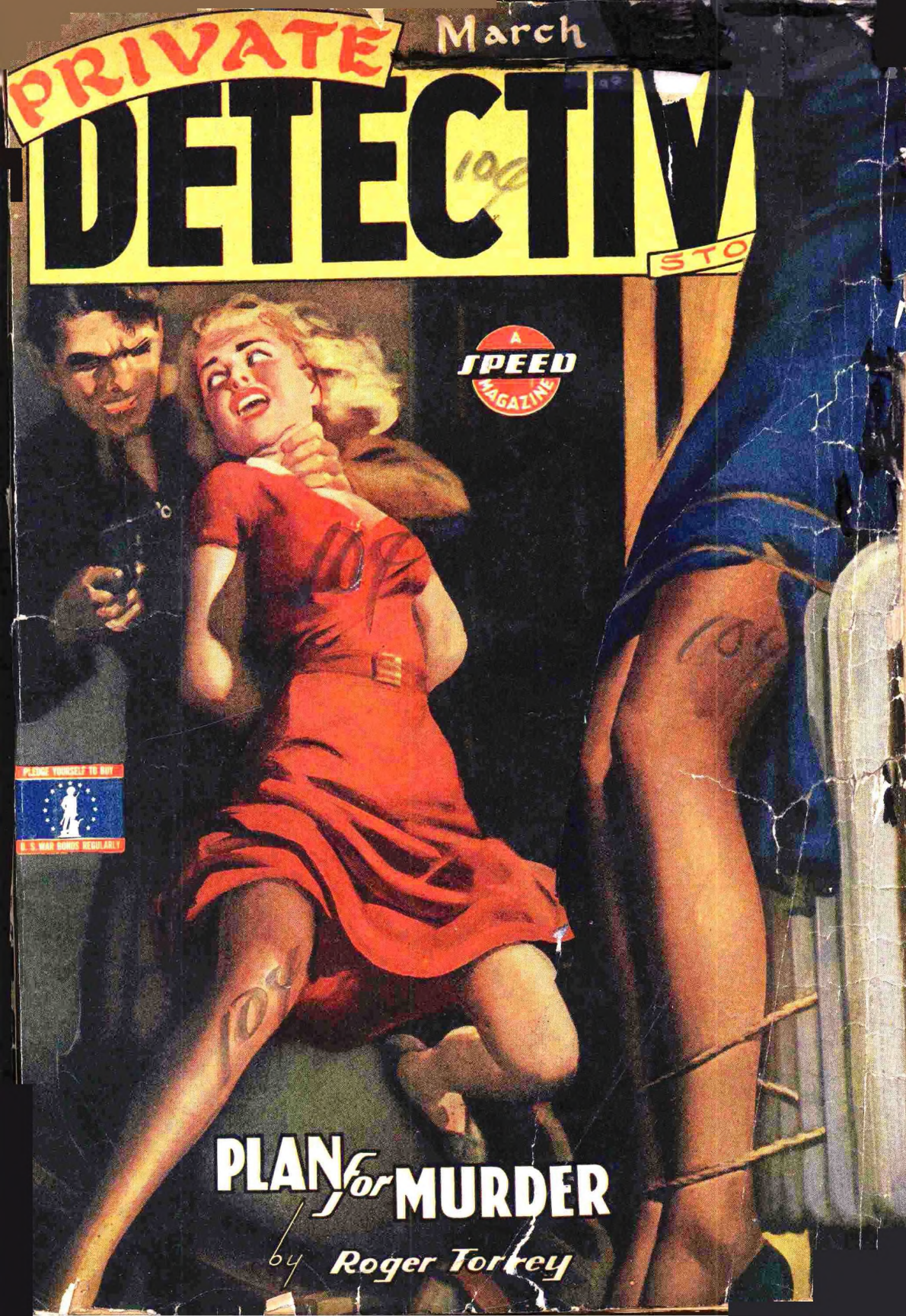
PRIVATE **DETECTIVE** March

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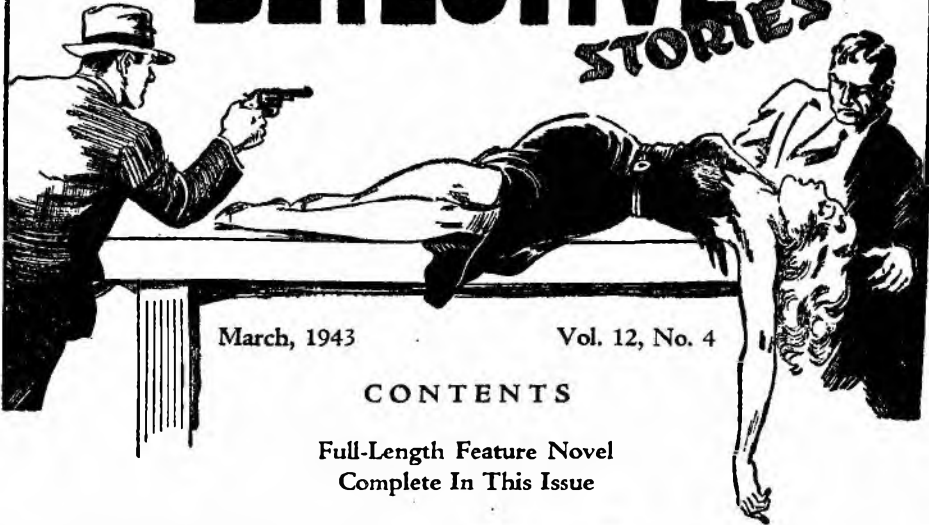
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PRIVATE

# DETECTIVE

STORIES



March, 1943

Vol. 12, No. 4

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

PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES is published monthly by Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 East Forty-sixth Street, New York, N. Y. Michael J. Estrow, President; Frank Armer, Secretary and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter August 25, 1933, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Subscription: Yearly, \$1.50; single copies, 15¢. Canadian and foreign postage extra. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Copyright, 1943, by Trojan Publishing Corp. Title registered U. S. Patent Office.

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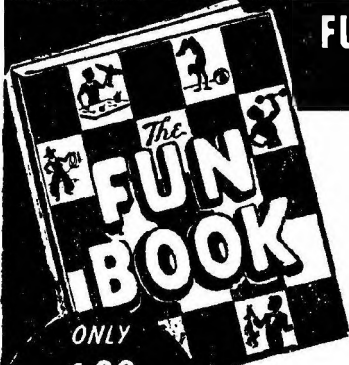


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# PLAN



She grabbed me. "He can't shoot you, Tim! He just can't!"



I WAS Dorrie on the phone. She said, "That you, Tim?"

I said, "Yeah!"

"You alone?"

Dorrie was one of the two that I didn't like and I didn't want to talk to her. But if I'd told her I was busy, she'd just have called me back.

I said, "Yeah!"

"I'm sending you down a client."

"Thanks."

She said, "You don't seem very happy about it," and I could almost see the pout on her chubby little face.

I said, "I'm not."

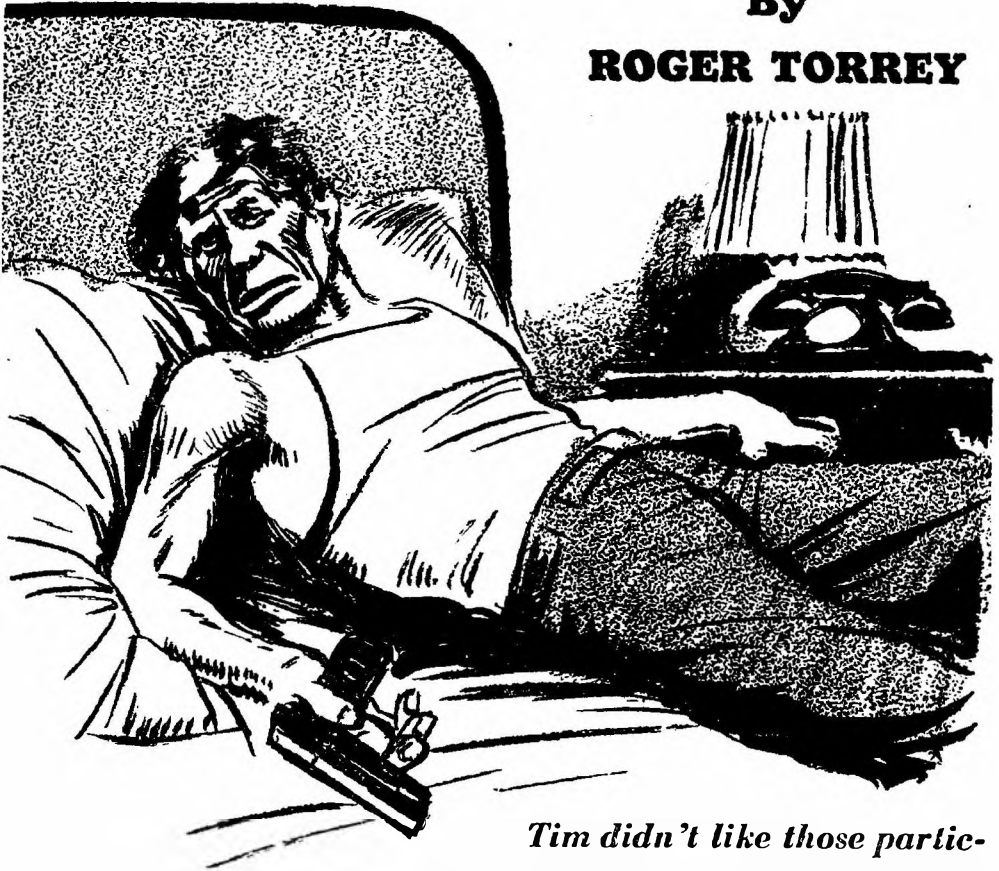
"But, Tim! Why not?"

I figured I might as well give her the needle then as any other time. She was always in the way, and what

# For MURDER

By

**ROGER TORREY**



*Tim didn't like those particular girls, but they liked him well enough to go out and scout up clients for him! And funny clients they were, too! Clients who hire the same detective to protect one against the other!*

I was going to tell her was nothing but the truth.

I said, "Because any client you could send me would mean trouble, just like you mean trouble, to me."

She slammed up the phone with that, but I knew better than to think she'd hold her mad.

That was too much to hope for—the Hickeys were never lucky people.

**T**HE next was from Joe, in the outer office. The buzzer buzzed. "You in conference, Tim? I told Miss Ransom you were, but she tells me I'm a liar."

Jane Ransom was the other one I didn't like. I said, "Tell her you told the truth. Tell her I'll be busy from now on."

Then the door opened and Jane sailed in with a silly looking guy, saying, "I knew that ape was lying in his teeth. Tim, this is Mr. Heywood. Mr. Heywood, this is Mr. Hickey."

Joe came to the door and said, "She walked past me. You want I should heave her out, Tim?"

I said, "She's in! She might as well stay."

Heywood looked startled and Jane said, "Tim will have his little joke, Mr. Heywood."

She was passing it off, but there was a dopey look on her horse face. She looked like Man of War's twin brother, but she was one of the sensitive kind. With another crack like that she'd have broken out crying, so I softened up for a minute.

I said, "Glad to know you, Mr. Heywood."

Heywood said he was glad to know me, too, but he didn't look or sound like it.

"He's a client," Jane told me. "Aren't you glad? I brought him to you."

I said nothing and she waited a minute and then came out with, "Well-l-l?"

"Well what?"

"Aren't you going to thank me for bringing you a client?"

"I've got a client."

Heywood said, "Come, Jane, let us go."

I said, "Good-by."

Jane said, "Just don't you pay any attention to Tim. He's always joking. Sit down, Mr. Heywood, and tell Tim what you want."

Heywood sat down, but on the edge of his chair, all ready to take off, at another dirty crack.

AND I was just getting ready to give it to him when there was a little scuffle in the outside office and a big burly man came in, with my little Joe hanging on to him like a terrier to a bone. The guy weighed about two-thirty and Joe won't go over one-twenty, ringing wet, so it was no contest. I got out behind the desk and got the big brute by the arm. Joe started dragging and I started shoving, and we got him as far as the door.

And then he panted, "You Hickey?"

I panted back, "I am."

"Dorrie—ugh, Miss Furman sent me."

I said, "Okay, Joe. Let go."

Joe went out of the office, glaring, and I closed the door after him. And when I turned around, here was this new man with his hands on the front of Heywood's coat, shaking him to beat the band. Up and down, back and forth, and sideways. Jane Ransom was shrinking, if a gal six feet tall and half that broad can shrink, and she had both hands up to her face and was making goofy sounds behind them.

I said, "Oh—!" and broke that up, and without too much trouble. I'm fair-sized, too, and by that time I was getting sore about the thing. I got the big bird in one chair, over at the side; I got Heywood in another, and at the other side, and I got Jane planted between them. I figured if the big guy wanted Heywood bad enough to climb over a mountain like Jane, he was entitled to him.



Then I said, "And now will somebody tell me what this is all about? And somebody had better, or I'm going to heave the whole crew of you out of here. What, for the love of Mike, is this? Come up to a man's office and start a riot! What's it about?"

The big man and Heywood said together, "We want to hire you!"

"One at a time."

Heywood pointed a shaking hand at the big man and said, "I want to hire you to protect me against this . . . this . . . this big . . ."

"Don't you say it!" the big man warned.

I said, "Wait a minute, Heywood!" and asked, "And who are you, Mister, except a friend of Dorrie's?"

"My name's Still."

"Okay! Go on, Heywood."

Heywood said, "I want to retain you. I will give you the details when we are alone."

I'd got the general idea of what he wanted, but that left the other end of the thing wide open. I said, "I tell you what, Mr. Heywood! Suppose you and Miss Ransom go out now and come back and tell me more about it in, say, half an hour. I'd like to speak to Mr. Still."

"I've hired you first," Heywood shrilled at me.

I said, "Don't rush me. Suppose you come back in half an hour."

Jane Ransom gave me a meaning look and said, "I trust you, Tim. We'll be back in half an hour."

She took Heywood out with her and I'll always think that if he hadn't gone willingly—or partly that way, at least, she'd have tucked him under her arm and walked out with him.

The Lord knows she was big enough.

I SAID, "All right, Mr. Still! Now what's it all about? D'ya want me to protect you against Heywood?"

He laughed and said, "That little —! My Lord, no! I just want you to get back the money he took me for."

"How'd he take you?"

"Does that make any difference?"

"It does to me."

"Well, I invested some money in his business. He claims he lost it. I don't believe he did. I think he just took it, that's all, and then said it was lost."

"What kind of business?"

Mr. Still looked faintly uneasy and said, "Oh, sort of general importing. Buy and sell. Anything that would show a profit—that is, a quick profit. *You* know! For example, suppose we had a chance to pick up a half a dozen carloads of lettuce, let's say, far below the market price. We'd do that. We'd turn it quick to a produce dealer and take a quick profit. Anything like that."

"Legitimate?"

He looked injured and said, "Why, of course."

"Why not take it to the D.A.? That's what he's for. He's got facilities I haven't got. He's got powers to go into things that I haven't. He's the man to see."

Still leaned forward and said, "I see I'll have to tell you the truth. The truth is, Mr. Hickey . . . You understand this is confidential, I hope?"

"Absolutely."

"I have a record, Mr. Hickey. I

was in prison. I was in prison for five years."

"For what?"

"Well, income tax evasion. That's the charge I was convicted on, anyway."

"Was it beer, in the old days?"

"That's right. I served it fairly, but you can see why any complaint I could make to the D.A. wouldn't be listened to with much hope of action for me. A thing like that's always held against you."

I figured that depended a lot on the particular D.A. that heard the complaint, but I got his idea. Any lag's always got a holy horror of the law, and more so if they've been stuck hard.

"You want me to check this guy then, and see if I can prove he's gone South with your dough. That it?"

"That's it."

"He's in the phone book?"

"Sure. Now I'll tell you about the guy. He's . . ."

I said, "Look, Mr. Still. You're prejudiced. You've got your own ideas. If you tell me something it may influence me, and I'd like to go into it with a clear mind. Suppose you let me work it out."

He looked puzzled but agreed with, "Well, yes."

"And another thing. It's a few bucks in my pockets, and better than that, it gives me an in with the guy. Any objections if I take a job from him, protecting him against you?"

He just laughed. He didn't even bother to nod. And then he reached into his pocket and brought out one of the fattest billfolds I've yet to see, and counted out a thousand bucks. He didn't even ask about rates—he just counted out ten one hun-

dred-dollar bills and pushed them across the desk.

"For a retainer," he said. "It's not a fee. We can talk that over after you've got your teeth in something."

Then he nodded cheerily and went out, and I didn't have strength enough even to nod good-bye at him.

The thousand weakened me that much.

## CHAPTER II

### A Matter of Protection



OE had just ushered in Jane Ransom and Heywood, giving me a dirty look while he did the job, when the phone rang.

I said, "Just a minute, folks," and picked it up and said, "Tim Hickey speaking."

I didn't have to know who was at the other end. There was panic and horror in the voice, but I couldn't miss when it was Linda.

She said, "My God, Tim! Get up here fast."

I said: "Where?"

"Home."

I said, "Right away!" and hung up. I said to Heywood, "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Heywood. I'm sorry. I have to leave. I can't help it. Where can I get in touch with you?"

He looked offended and said, "You made an appointment with me. I resent this."

"I said I was sorry. It can't be helped."

"Tell me one thing. Are you working for me or for Still?"

"Why, for you, of course."

That made him feel better. He



When I turned around, here was this new man shaking Heywood to beat the band.

said, "I'm at the Canterbury."

"I'll get in touch with you."

I watched them out, then got my gun from the desk, along with the shoulder rig that went with it. Joe came in, looking a lot of questions, and knowing better than to ask them.

I said, "Hold the fort until I get back."

"When'll that be?"

I said, "And that's something that you'll know when I get back."

Joe's a good office boy, but sometimes he's too curious. And the way I was feeling right then, I was of no mind to satisfy his little notions.

**L**INDA lived in the same apartment building that Dorrie Furman and Jane Ransom did. The three of them were pals and nothing I could tell Linda would break her away from the other two. I'd tell her how the two tramps were giving me the eye, thirteen to the dozen, and she'd tell me that I should forget how much of a devil I was with the women. It was right in front of her eyes and still she couldn't see it. Dorrie and Jane were bigger bums than ever rode brake rods, but Linda was too loyal to recognize it. I admired her for that little trait, but at the same time it made it tough for me. It's bad when you're interested in one girl to have two of her friends acting the same way toward you.

I was thinking about that when I rang the bell at Linda's apartment, but I forgot all about it when I saw her face.

I said, "Lord! What's happened?"

She said, "Thanks, Tim, for coming up so fast."

"You asked me, didn't you?"

She just motioned for me to follow her and I did.

At first I didn't see it. Linda's got a nice little place — very cozy and snug, with heavy chairs and a nice davenport. It was one of those dark, dreary days, and she had the shades

down almost to the bottom, with a floor lamp in a corner giving about all the light there was in the room. It cast a shadow past the davenport, and at first all I saw was something that looked like a little darker shadow.

Then it took form and made itself into a man. A man sprawled on his back with his hands tucked straight down at his sides and with his feet nicely placed together.

And then I smelled the blood—that sweet sickening smell that can't be mistaken.

I said, "For \_\_\_\_\_'s sake, kid! Why'd you do it?"

"I didn't," she told me.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

**BY THAT** time I was over there and down looking at the guy. And I caught on quick — which wasn't any credit to me. He'd died the hard way. The front of his clothes was soaked with blood just old enough to be sticky. He'd worn a white shirt—there was enough of it still showing to prove that. There were a dozen or more neat little slits showing where the knife had entered, and there was one on the side of his throat, where it was a cinch to have hit the big artery. Yet, with all the blood on him, there was none on the floor.

If he'd been killed in the kid's apartment, there'd have been a pool around him deep enough to drown a small cat, but the rug was dry up to within a few inches of him.

I said, "Call the cops, kid. It's better coming from you. When they get here, the story is I just stopped in and got here just before they did.

Don't tell 'em you called me before you called them. Cops are funny that way."

"I'm afraid, Tim!"

"You won't have to be. That is, if you're not lying to me about not knowing the guy."

"But, Tim! He's here in my place."

"He wasn't killed here. Don't fret, kid. All we've got to do is find out who could get in here. All we've got to do is trace the keys."

She called the cops then. I didn't know then that there were more keys out to that apartment of hers than a dog has fleas. They must have made keys for that scatter by wholesale lots.

But we'd have had to call the cops, anyway, so there was nothing I could have done about it.

**H**EWWOOD had a nice place at the Canterbury, but I didn't find that out until eleven that night. It took that long to get away from the cops. They had Linda down in jail, taking advantage of the twenty-four hours they had before they had to put a charge against her.

Of course there was a chance of getting her out on a habeas corpus writ, but that would have put the cops solidly against her, and, the way it was, they were treating her all right. They were asking her a lot of questions she couldn't answer, but they were asking them in a decent way and they couldn't be blamed for trying to find out what it was all about.

When they're acting like that it's best to leave well enough alone.

Heywood said, in a very disapproving voice, "I expected to hear

from you long before this time, Mr. Hickey."

I said, "I was busy."

He said, "Well, now you're here, sit down."

I did and he did, only I managed it where I intended to and he didn't. He made a perfect landing a foot in front of his chair, and sat there goggling up at me.

"Oh my!" I said.

He said, "No remarks," and then I got what I should have caught when I first saw him. The guy was one of those drunks that can walk and talk when they're loaded for bear. He looked the same and talked the same as he had up to the office, but he was sober as a coot then and drunker than a coon right now. That accounted for the silly look on his puss. He was so used to going around in a daze that he'd got the habit and the look.

I said, "Oh, pardon me!" and right then Jane Ransom staggered out of hiding.

**S**HE was really a horrid sight. She was a ratty looking gal at best, but with her hair down over her eyes, with her mouth half open and with a silly smile on her ugly puss, she was that much harder to take. One sock was down around an ankle and she'd spilled a drink down the front of her dress.

I said, "Why, Jane! I'm surprised!"

She gave me that goofy grin and staggered toward me, saying, "Doll-ing!"

I got out of the chair I was in and put it between us, and she started to circle it. I kept moving, keeping it for a fender.

And Heywood sat on the floor watching the performance. His baby gal was really nuts, and you could see he wasn't too drunk to realize it.

She said, "Timmy, dolling! Don't be sore. Don't be sore."

I was getting sore. I said, "Keep away from me, you silly fool."

She wrinkled her face up and started to cry, but she didn't slow up in the chase.

She said, "There was once when

you didn't talk to me like that, Timmy, dolling."

Another funny thing. She could talk pretty well except for that one word. She couldn't say "darling," but I give her credit for trying. Though not at the time. I was sore at her and more at myself, for ever giving her a chance to make that crack. It just shows a man shouldn't ever get drunk when he's around a gal. Even a gal like that one.

I said, "Now, Jane!"



A man sprawled there  
on his back . . .



I smelled blood and said,  
 "Why'd you do it, kid?"

Heywood said, "Jane!" and it snapped like a whip. She stopped like he'd laid one across her back, too. He got up from the floor and gave me a funny looking grin and said, "Just a few drinks amongst friends, Mr. Hickey. Will you join us?"

I said I'd be very pleased to join them. I'd have taken a drink of mild poison to have that gal taken off my neck, and that's what he'd done.

We all sat down with glasses in our hands. He said, "I presume you are now ready to go to work."

I said, "Sure! You mean seeing that big lug don't make passes at you. I mean that man Still."

He said, "I mean seeing that man Still doesn't murder me."

"That's fine, Mr. Heywood," I told him. "But there's no reason to

get hysterical about it. When you're home like this, with your door locked, you're perfectly safe. He's not coming up here with a fire axe and smash his way in. Suppose we make it like this? You tell me when you're ready to go out, and I'll either go with you or send a man who will? You're protected then. I've got to have some time by myself, and I can get that while you're safe at home here."

He thought that over and said that seemed reasonable. And I said that in that case there was no reason why I shouldn't be running along. He also thought that was reasonable and admitted he thought of retiring shortly.

I said, "In a case like this it's customary to exact a retainer."

"Why?" he asked. "You haven't done anything yet, have you?"

He had me there but I wouldn't admit it. I said, "It's customary. In fact, it's such a customary thing that I couldn't accept the job unless I got it."

After a ten minute argument I got him up and over to his desk, writing out a hundred-dollar check, and then I gave Jane the business. I was starting to check on keys. She'd had three drinks while I'd been nursing one, and they hadn't improved a mind that wasn't too bright at best.

I said, "Oh, Jane! While I see you, will you give me your key to Linda's apartment? I lost the one I had, and she told me to ask you for yours."

And the big horse managed to get herself on her feet and staggered over to where her purse was and brought out the key. She dumped the purse upside down on the rug to

find it, and fell on her face during the finding, but she came up with it.

I took the check and the key and got away from there. There wasn't a second I was there that I wasn't scared to death she'd open with details about that one awful time I took her out for a round of the hot spots.

A man's a fool when he's drunk.

### CHAPTER III

#### Enter the Law



ORRIE said, "Why, it's not late at all, Tim. Why, sure! Come on up!"

She opened the door for me and she'd just come out from under a shower. At least she was all red and flushed that way. She had short, curly hair that went well with her round little face, and it was all crinkly from the steam. Linda had told me that the gal's brag about having naturally curly hair was the truth and for once I believed something Linda told me about her two bum friends. Dorrie was dressed very simply, if there's anything in understatement. She was wearing a black silk thing that wrapped around her, obviously not intended for formal company.

She held out a hand and said, "Come on in, Tim! Excuse the costume."

I said, "I don't mind. I don't mind it at all."

She looked me over and said, "That sounds like you're drunk. You don't look drunk, though."

I said I was sober.

"You never talked like that to me yet when you were sober," she told me. "The only time you ever gave



me a decent word was when you were so drunk you couldn't walk. In fact, when I had to put you to bed."

The gals were raking me over the coals and no mistake. I decided then that I'd at least cut down on the hootch, even if I didn't climb all the way to the top of the wagon.

"That was then," I told her.

"You're like every other man in the world. Any port in a storm. I'm the next best thing."

"I don't get it."

"Linda's still in jail, isn't she?"

"Well, yes. What's that got to do with the price of rice in China?"

She tossed her head and made her curls shake and said, "It's easy enough to figure out. You had no place to go—that is, you couldn't go to Linda's apartment—so you came to mine."

"Now, Dorrie!"

She grinned suddenly and reached out for my hand. "I don't care, Tim. Not as long as you're here."

I said, "What's the matter? You and Still go round and round? You a lone wolf again?"

"Still?"

"That's right! Still! You know! Still! The man you sent me today. The big guy. The ex-racket guy! Think hard and you'll place him."

**S**HE squeezed my hand and said, "Silly! Why, I hardly know him. I just heard him say he thought he needed a private investigator and I thought of you. I know you always need money."

"Hardly know him, eh?"

"Why, yes."

"What about Cole? King Cole? Hardly know *him*?"

She had a round, pretty little face,

but her eyes were as shallow as saucers. They suddenly showed about as much expression. "Isn't that the dead man they found in Linda's apartment?"

"That's what the cops tell me."

"I met him. I'll tell you the truth, Tim. I met him. Through Still. That is all—I only met him that once."

I figured that if the old gag about the Lord liking liars was true, Dorrie was a cinch to pass through the Pearly Gates. She was lying by the clock. She was acting too frank about the thing to be honest.

I said, "Well, no difference, kid. Linda'll be out as soon as the cops do a little more checking. They can't hold her—the guy was dead for two hours before she got home, and she's got an alibi for those two hours. Somebody just handed her a nice fresh corpse."

Dorrie shuddered, or pretended to, and squeezed my hand a little harder. She made her face into a pout, and even if I didn't like her two cents' worth I'll admit it looked well on her.

"You come up to see me, Tim, and you stand there and talk about Linda. You shouldn't *do* that to poor little Dorrie. Come on and sit down. What would you like to drink?"

"What you got?"

She ticked off on her fingers. "Well, there's Scotch, rye, and bourbon. There's gin—two kinds. I've got sloe gin, too. There's cognac. There's rum. There's different kinds of wine. I had some champagne, but I drank it. I didn't like it, either, Tim. It was sort of like apple cider, and it gave me a headache. Oh yes! There's Irish whiskey, too."

She got through with this list and looked at me triumphantly. It was the first time in her life that she ever had more than a bottle of gin or some cheap Scotch in the house, and she was so proud of it she hurt all over.

I said, "Like with the liquor store, eh, kid."

"Everything. We went right down the shelf."

"You and Still?"

She looked sullen. "Well, yes! Why is it, Tim, you have to guess just everything?"

I said, "Baby, that wasn't a guess, that was a certainty. Still just wanted a drink when he stopped up, and he was making sure of getting one."

**WE DECIDED** on Scotch and plain water and she went out in the kitchenette to get it. I called out to her to excuse me a moment and went in the bathroom, and sure enough, there were two razors in the medicine cabinet and there was a tube of fresh shaving cream and some after-shave lotion. There was a can marked "Talcum for Men," in the dark shade that went well with Still's heavy jowls, and there were four toothbrushes instead of the customary two. I went back with no illusions and just the least bit thoughtful.

Thoughtful enough to say, when she came back with the ice and glasses and bottle, "Look, kid! He's not likely to stroll in tonight, is he?"

She looked innocent and her baby face was made for it. "Why, Tim! What d'ya mean?"

"Still! Don't kid old folks, baby."

She looked at the floor and said, "He's out of town tonight. He's talk-

ing about a bigger place for me. Honest, Tim! You can see how crazy I am about you. I won't even lie to you about that."

We started in on our drinking. It was getting late—it was high time.

**IT WAS** about four when the first bad moment came. Steps came tramping down the hall, so heavy we could hear them through the door and on the thick hall carpet. They slowed when they came to Dorrie's door, then went on. Then they came back, and there was one short ring on the bell. Then a wait and then two short rings.

Dorrie squeezed my hand and said, "Don't bother, darling. That's not him."

I got up and got my sap from my coat pocket. I had no intention of having Still catch me with his gal friend with no percentage in my favor. I figured that I was working for him and all that, but he might not believe I was just waiting for a street car.

Dorrie said, "Silly! That's not him," but I noticed she said it in a whisper.

By and by footsteps went away and she said, "That was just somebody looking for him. Did you notice the way he knocked?"

I said I'd noticed.

"He's had friends with him up here, Tim. It must have been one of them."

I said that was probably it, and took another drink. But I took the sap back to the couch, where it would be nice and handy.

The next beef came at about a quarter to six and there wasn't a bit of warning. All of a sudden there

was a thunderous knocking on the door and it had to be police. Nobody else in the world would make that much noise at that time in the morning.

A voice shouted out, "Open up, in there! Open up, I say! This is police!"

They came in with a pass key a half minute later, but the warning was ample. We were sitting very sedately by the tray with the Scotch, and if we looked a little ruffled there was an excuse for it. We had two empty bottles by the one that still had power in it—and how could the cops tell that we'd started with one that was just about gone? They could see we'd just started the third but that was all.

Both of the boys that came in knew me. Not well, but enough to know who I was, and that I was supposed to be Linda's man. They'd seen me at the station, when they'd taken Linda down, for that matter. They were both scowling but there were grins behind the bad looks.

"Where's Still?" the first one said.

Dorrie shrugged her shoulders and almost fell off her chair. I thought she was doing the drunken act a bit too heavy, but it apparently got over.

"Why ask me?" she said.

"You should know."

She tried to look insulted but that was a flat failure. If you're a bum, you can't kid a cop successfully. They know 'em by instinct.

The second one said, "And you, Hickey! What *you* doing here?"

"Waiting for a street car," I said. "Ask me silly questions and you'll get silly answers."

It wasn't their business what I was

doing there and they knew it and didn't press it. They weren't looking for me but for Still.

**T**HEY peeked in the bathroom and the closet and kitchenette and then stopped in front of us again.

I said, "Have a drink, guys. There's more where that came from."

Dorrie said to me, "You big stupid. Where d'ya think you get off at, giving away my liquor?"

She winked at me to show that she didn't mean it, but she was getting over good with the mad drunken woman business with the cops.

Both of them said, hurriedly, that they didn't care for a thing, and thank you, just the same.

Then she said, "What the devil! Too good to drink with me, eh?"

They jumped at the reprieve like a cat at a fish head, and the two drinks they poured took that Scotch bottle down three inches. They started to go then, and I went to the door with them.

"Look, guys," I said. "You don't have to say anything about me being here, do you?"

"Not to anybody that'll repeat it," said the first one.

"Don't fret, Hickey," said the other. "And don't fret about your lady. We're going to turn her loose in the morning. We won't say a thing to her."

"Thanks. When I catch you in a spot, I'll do the same. What you after Still for?"

Both gave me a blank look.

"Now listen! Suppose he comes up here? What am I supposed to do?"

The first one said judiciously, "Well, if I could get to the fire escape, I'd go down it. If not, I'd just go out the window."

The second one said, "It's about all you can do, Hickey. That apartment is too small to hide in. Next time why don't you pick a gal that's got an extra room. A man can't crawl under a davenport."

They went out, laughing. I went back to Dorrie and said, "Listen, baby! They're after Still for that killing. They're going to turn Linda loose in the morning and they want Still to take her place."

"Did they tell you that?"

"They did not. Cops don't tell you things like that."

"Then how d'ya know they're looking for him for killing King Cole?"

"If it had been something easy, they wouldn't have come up here after him. They'd have picked him up on the street or in a bar or at his own place. They've got a general order out for him, that's all. It takes murder to put 'em on their toes like that."

"How'd they know enough to come up here looking for him?"

I laughed. "Listen, baby. The guy's an ex-lag and one time he was big-shot stuff. That guy can't even spit without the cops knowing it."

"It's persecution, that's what it is."

I said, "The cops call it keeping law and order."

**I**T WAS about nine before I said, "Look, babe, I've got to get out of here before Linda gets back. And oh yes! The cops took Linda's key, of course, when they took her down.

She says for you to give me hers."

She gave me an argument but she was too tired to quarrel and win. I got the key, but only after promising I'd make a return visit and that soon. She was supposed to call me at the office and tell me when it would be all right, because we both knew the cops wouldn't hold Still long after they found him. The guy was too hot to hold without more evidence than they had, which was only that he'd been a friend of the dead Cole. If Still had any kind of story at all they'd have to turn him loose.

I figured the night showed a profit in more ways than one. I'd got the second key and Dorrie was a talkative girl if urged at the proper time, and I'd seen the time was proper.

Something had to be proper, even if Dorrie never was.

## CHAPTER IV

### Two Down



**R**ATHER expected a cop to be on duty in front of Linda's apartment, but there wasn't a sign of one. If there'd been one hiding around the corner, I could have told it by the cigar they always smoke. Each and every plainclothes man I ever saw picks the same kind—and how they can smoke 'em without strangling I'll never know. A plain ordinary man can smell one of them for blocks.

I went in, with either Dorrie or Jane's key—or maybe it was the one I had—and there was Still, sitting in a chair where he could watch the door. He had a half grin on his big face but there wasn't any humor in it.

I said, "Don't be that way, kid, I was just trying to help you."



He said, "Well, chiseler!"

I said, "Why, Mr. Still!"

He waved a hand and said, "I was just about of a mind to kick that little tramp off anyway. This is business. What's going on?"

"You mean the cops?"

"I mean the cops."

"How'd you know they were after you?"

"I've got friends. I knew they'd be at my place and I knew they'd be upstairs at the kid's. And I knew there'd be a general order out for me and I didn't want to take any chance on some young punk just on

the force. Some of those kids'll shoot first and talk it out afterwards."

I said that was right.

"I knew you'd show up here, sooner or later. What's happened?"

"It's Cole. King Cole."

"Oh I know that. He was found here, I understand."

"That's right. The cops want to talk to you about it."

"Give me the dope."

I told him what I knew about it—which wasn't too much. The cops hadn't taken me into their confidence to any extent. But I did know, at least approximately, the time the guy'd been killed, and I told him that. And that he'd been dropped in the apartment—that he certainly hadn't been killed in there.

With this his face cleared and he said, "Then I'm sitting pretty. I was out of town all during that time and I can prove it. It isn't like having half a dozen guys swear where I was—I've got it by a train conductor and a hotel clerk two hundred miles away. It's the kind of alibi that can't be broken."

I said that was certainly fine. I'd have said anything, just to keep his mind away from Dorrie and where I'd spent the last few hours. I was facing him and he was half turned from the door, and I'd dug out Linda's jug and we both had a drink in our hands. Neither of us were paying any attention except to what we were saying and drinking, and so what came next was a perfect surprise.

**S**OMEBODY said, "That's fine, boys! Just sit right still."

The man who'd spoken was leaning against the wall of the short hall

leading into the apartment, and his friend was right beside him. The talker was a little short man, with the flattest face I've ever seen on a human. For that matter, there'd be a question if he could pass as one, in a decent light. His nose was pushed right back against his face, and his forehead and chin were in the same plane. He looked like somebody had put his face on the floor and made it fit.

His partner wasn't any bigger, but he was a pretty boy. Not over twenty and blond. I couldn't see his hair because he was wearing a derby hat, but it looked as though there'd be a wave in it. The flat-faced one was dressed in ordinary street clothes, no better or worse than average, but the pretty boy was dressed to the nines. His derby matched his guard's coat. His tie had just enough color to set off the black, and I could see his shirt was matched to contrast it. His shoes were shined so they actually glistened, and the gun he held on us had a pearl butt and chasing on the barrel. I could see this last even at that distance, because there was gold set in the engraving.

The flat-faced one held just an ordinary little .32 Colt automatic, but he held it as if he knew how to use it.

I said, "What the devil! How'd you get in?"

The flat-faced one held up a key without saying a word, but the pretty boy spoke. He said fretfully, "This them, Jinks? This them?"

"This is them," said Jinks.

"Well, then," the kid said.

I looked at Still then and saw he had his lips drawn back away from his teeth like a dog's. He knew what

was coming and so did I. I twisted a little so that my coat wouldn't be in the way.

"You looking for me?" I asked.

Jinks said, "Yeah!"

I was watching him and the pretty boy, figuring to fall out of my chair and go into action at their first movement. And so, when Still started it right in my ear, it caught me flat-footed.

THE gun blasted and I saw the flat-faced man jerk when the slug hit him. It didn't put him out of action but it slowed him up. I had it planned and I did it—I went out of my chair and to the floor behind it, and I had my gun in my hand by the time I hit the floor. Even then all three of them had shot—Still trying again and the two in the doorway trying it. It was an example of too small guns and too poor shooting. Still hit his man again because I saw the flat-faced one wobble, but he kept on his feet and shot back.

The pretty boy must've had a hard time making up his mind which of us to aim at because he shot between us. His slug smashed a vase that Linda had on a desk back by the window. I figured where his belt buckle would be, under that tight coat of his, and held for that. My gun's heavy and I shoot heavy police loads in it, and it put him right down in a sitting position. He sat there with a hand out on each side of him and he was knocked so far out he didn't realize he still held a gun in one of them.

Still shot again and he was hitting every time, but it was like a man shooting ducks with a B-B gun. His guy just wouldn't fall. He was so

sick he couldn't shoot back straight but he was trying.

Then Still hit him in the neck, or so we found out afterward, and that put him down. I looked at Still for the first time since the fracas started, and there he was, leaning ahead with his gun ready. And then I found why he'd had to shoot a man four times to put him on the floor. He'd apparently prowled the apartment and found the little gun I'd once given Linda. A nice little .25 automatic, but nothing for that kind of work. I climbed out from behind my chair and went over and kicked the guns away from the two in the hall and then came back.

"Where'd you have it," I asked.

"Tucked in the cushions in the chair here," he said. "I can't carry one—I'm an ex-con."

"Who're these guys?"

He shook his head. "I never saw either of them before in my life."

I said, "This apartment is certainly going to get a bad name. Here's three men dead in twenty-four hours in it, and nobody knows who they all are. I can see Linda's going to have to move."

"You're not funny, Hickey. The cops'll beat the stuffing out of me for this, and then I'll do life. I'm an ex-lag, you fool."

I said, "Gimme the gun. I used one in each hand."

He handed over Linda's little gun as though it was burning his hand. "I'll make it good."

"I just want the reward, if there is one."

"What?"

I waved and said, "There should be a nice piece of money on two thugs like that. It stands to reason.

"They were both too tough to be running around with nothing on 'em."

The cops started breaking the door down then.

**T**HERE may be some people who can kill a couple of men and talk the cops into letting them walk away from the scene, but I'm not one of them. Not even when the two men have hired gunman written all over them, like the two in the apartment had. And at that I did better than poor Still. They turned me loose in twenty-four hours, after I'd told it all to a coroner's jury, and the cops didn't shake me up much. That is, I still had all my teeth and my bruises didn't show.

They held Still as a material witness under twenty-five thousand dollars bail, and he was having his lawyer dig it up when I got out. His marks were right out in the open. He had both eyes blacked and his face looked like they'd put him down on it and rubbed him up and down the floor.

He was right—an ex-lag don't get treated well in jail.

They still hadn't found who'd hired the two thugs, but they'd found who they were and that was what let me out. The flat-faced one was called Jinks Bailey, among several other names, and he had a record that stretched from Sing Sing to Alcatraz. The pretty boy was Johnny Carter, and the only reason his record didn't stack up to Jinks' was that he was younger. He was following in the master's footsteps as fast as two feet and a gun would let him.

There wasn't a reward out on either of them, though the police wanted them badly. I felt bad about

it. I'd done the police's work for them and all I got out of it was a shellacking. And on top of that my other client would certainly be sure I'd quit him, and he might even have hired another boy.

**H**IS office was in the Parker Building on Monongahela, and I headed there first. It was a lousy building on a lousy street, and I knew the office would be the same, so that wasn't what surprised me when I walked in.

It was Jane Ranson perched in front of a typewriter and backed by a filing cabinet.

I said, "Ugh . . . hello, kid!"

She was sober, anyway, and that kept her off my neck. She said, "He's busy now. Where have you been?"

"Jail."

She laughed.

"It's no joke. At least the cops don't think it's a joke when you kill a couple of guys."

She looked worried and asked, "Who were the guys?"

"Named Bailey and Carter. Two thugs."

"I don't mean that. Who were they?"

I said, "It's more of that King Cole business, I figure. So do the cops. Both the cops and I think these guys were pals with Cole and that they thought Still had Cole killed. Or maybe that he killed him himself. So they tried to make it even-Stephen."

"Did he?"

I told the truth and said I didn't know. I said, "He may have hired it done but he didn't do it himself. The cops have proved that. He had



a cast-iron alibi for the time Cole was killed. But the two of them have been in business together before, and the cops have found out that Cole had given Still money here just lately. The cops think they're in something again. Still claims he don't know anything about it and that the money from Cole was just a loan."

"That Still is a bad character," said Jane, seriously. "He's threatened Mr. Heywood, that I know."

Heywood came scuttling out of his office as if he'd been called. He gave me his usual silly look and said, "I thought you were working for me."

"I am."

"You mean you were."

I said, "Okay," and turned to go.

"Of course I want that hundred dollars I gave you returned to me."

"Want and get are two different things."

"You mean you refuse to return it?"

"That's it."

He thought that over. He was sore but that hundred loomed big. He finally said, very reluctantly, "Very well! You may stay until that money is worked out."

I said, "Why, thanks."

He gave Jane a hard glance and did me a favor, the jealous dope. "But not in here," he decided. "You will wait inside, in my private office."

So I followed him inside.

The outside was crummy but the inside was okay. He had a nice big desk and the chairs across from it looked comfortable. There was a leather sofa at the side and there was a built-in Frigidaire in the wall. There were glasses on the table and

a bottle and ice and soda by it.

And there was a man sitting by the desk and the bottle.

## CHAPTER V

### A Matter of Money



T FIRST I thought I was seeing things. It looked as if the dead King Cole had come back to life. I'd only seen the original once and then he was dead, but this man could have doubled for him, if he'd had blood all over him and if he'd been stretched on his back. If he'd have gone down to the morgue, they'd have held him for a zombie.

Heywood waved me over to the sofa without introducing me and without offering me the drink I could have used. And then picked up the conversation where it had been dropped.

"So you see, Mr. Cole," he said, "there's really nothing more that I can say. As I said, I'm in business with Mr. Still. It's not my affair just how Mr. Still financed his share of our little venture. If your brother invested money with Mr. Still, why, Mr. Still is the man to see about the investment."

I got it then. It was the dead King Cole's brother. Cole had been a tough baby, according to all reports, and this brother was just as tough. He didn't change expression in the least.

"You could be making a mistake, Heywood," he said, sipping away at the highball he held. "It's the King's money. He's dead—it's my money now."

"That sounds like a threat."

Cole just shrugged and finished his drink.

Heywood nodded at me. "You heard that, Mr. Hickey. I believe I'm under my rights if I ask the police to put Mr. Cole under a peace bond, am I not?"

I didn't say anything. Cole laughed.

Heywood said: "Why don't you talk to Mr. Still about this matter? There's no reason for our arguing about it, Mr. Cole."

"I've talked to Still. He's passed the buck to you."

It was Heywood's turn to shrug and he did. They just sat there staring at each other and then Cole heaved himself out of his chair.

"Well, I've got things to do and people to see," he said. "Think it over, Mr. Heywood. A thing like this'll stand a little thinking about and no mistake."

He nodded at me and left, and Heywood stared after him. "A dangerous man, Mr. Hickey," he said. "A hold-over from the old times. The old times of prohibition. A man who'd take the law in his own hands if he felt safe enough to do it."

I said: "You've got the guy all wrong."

"I don't understand."

**I EXPLAINED:** "He'd take the law in his own hands whether he felt safe or not. He's going to raise Cain as soon as he finds out who killed his brother."

"The police think Still did that. Or hired it done."

"You know that, do you?"

Heywood smiled gently at me and said: "I keep my fingers on the pulse of things, Mr. Hickey. Now

if you'll call Miss Ransom in, we'll all have a little drink."

He didn't want to drink with me any more than he did with a beggar from the street, but he wanted a drink and I was there. He just wanted the drink more than he grudged me the one I took.

A swell guy, that Heywood. We sat there all afternoon, sloshing down whiskey, with Jane ogling me every time she thought he wasn't looking and with him catching her at it every time.

I could see life wasn't going to be dull. Still knew I'd been visiting with Dorrie, and he was sore about it no matter what he said. This Heywood knew the same about Jane Ransom, and he was the back-biting kind. Between the two of them, life would be a busy thing and I knew it.

And the worst of it was I was just playing around the two girls for business reasons, though I couldn't tell either of them about it.

**I LEFT** Heywood and Jane at the Canterbury with Jane supposedly going up for a drink, and then went over to Linda's place. I figured by that time the cops would be out of the place and that she'd be home.

She was and how. She was just steaming. She opened the door for me without saying a word, letting me get all the way in before she gave me the blast.

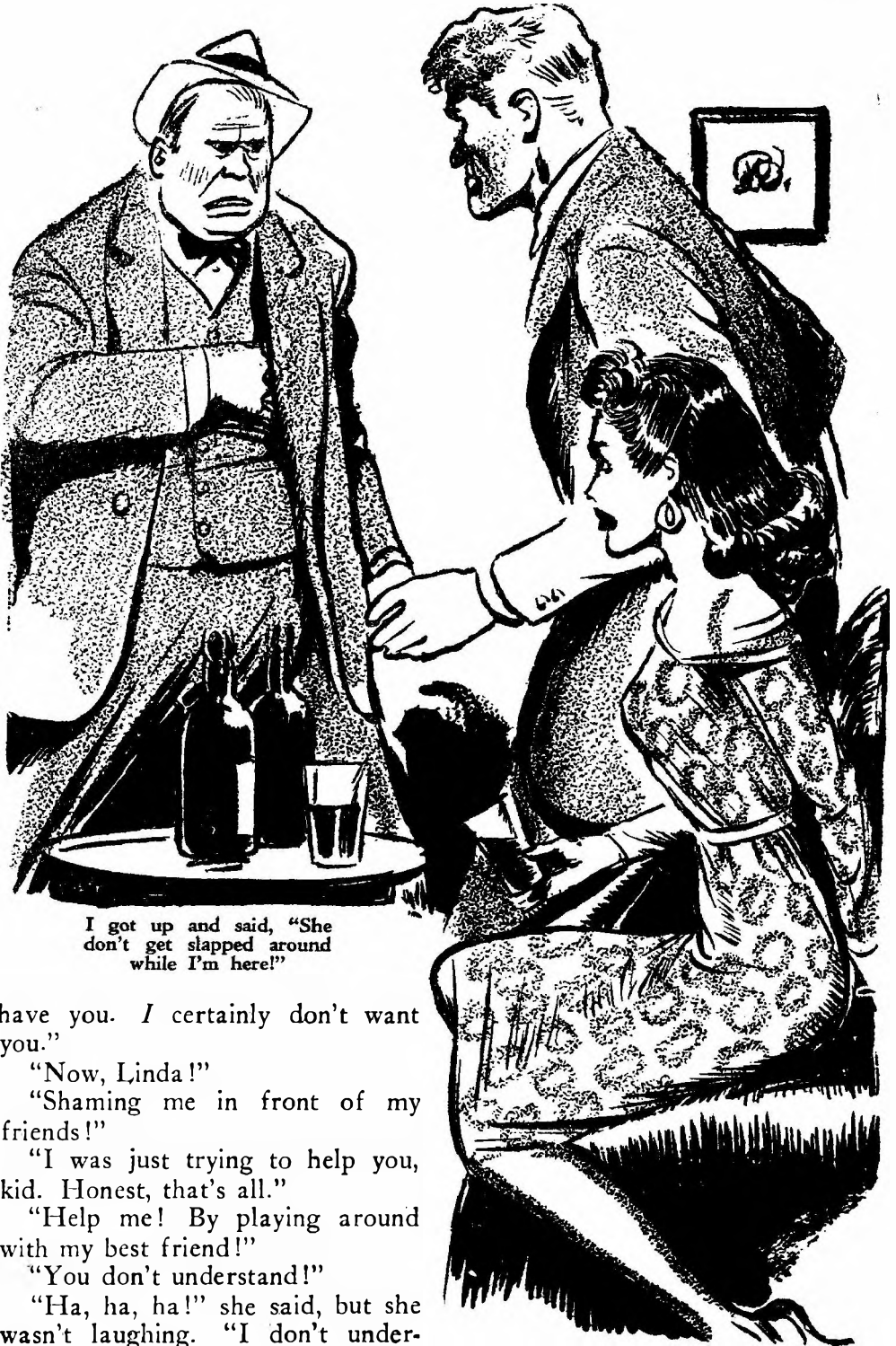
"I saw Dorrie," she started.

"That's nice."

"She . . . she bragged."

I tried to look innocent. "She bragged? About what?"

"About you. And why anybody should brag about you I don't know. She can have you. Anybody can



I got up and said, "She don't get slapped around while I'm here!"

have you. *I* certainly don't want you."

"Now, Linda!"

"Shaming me in front of my friends!"

"I was just trying to help you, kid. Honest, that's all."

"Help me! By playing around with my best friend!"

"You don't understand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" she said, but she wasn't laughing. "I don't under-

stand! That's a good one. So I don't understand! Here you've been taking up most of my time for three months and you tell me I don't understand! That's good. I understand too well. You're just like every other man. Any port in a storm."

That's what Dorrie had said, and if she'd been talking to Linda she'd probably sprung the same gag again.

I said: "You don't understand, just like I said. It was on account of you. I was trying to find out what Dorrie knew."

"I bet she knows just plenty," she said venomously. "I bet you learned a lot. You—you . . . oh, I don't know what to call you."

"I'm not fooling. I had to find out how much Dorrie knew about that dead man being put in your apartment."

Linda stared. "Dorrie! How would Dorrie know anything about that?"

"She's playing around with a man named Still, and Still was a friend of this dead man. That man Cole. He and Still had done a lot of business together. Dorrie admitted she'd met that Cole, through Still."

"Dorrie wouldn't know anything about any murder."

"Still might. The cops think so. They let you go in order to pick him up."

SHE looked thoughtful and said: "Now that I think about it, they did ask me if I knew anybody named Still. But that doesn't alter your spending the evening with Dorrie."

"It was just for you, honey."

"I'm all right. The police said so. They said I didn't have anything to

do with it. They even apologized for asking me all the questions."

I said patiently: "You don't get it, sweet. You don't understand. It was in all the papers. Unless the whole thing's cleared up, half the people you meet will think you killed the guy. They'll just think you were smart enough to put it over on the cops. And then there's my side of it, too. People who know I know you will think I'm a rotten private detective, if I can't even find the guy who leaves dead bodies around your apartment. And on top of that, it ties in with a case I'm working on. I've got a couple of clients for a change, and that stiff is right down their alley. Just how I don't know, but somehow. I've got to protect myself."

She smiled sweetly then and said: "And don't you have the fine time while you're protecting yourself, Mr. Hickey. Well, after this, do your protecting yourself away from my apartment."

"Why, honey! You called me yourself. You know you did. You called me at the office."

"That was different."

"How."

"Well, I was frightened. I didn't know what to do. Now it's different—I know what to do."

"What?"

"Give you to Dorrie. She can have you. Goodby, Mr. Hickey."

She looked like something from a third act while she was leading me to the door, but I was in no mood to appreciate the acting.

DORRIE was better-natured, by the way she looked, but I never gave her a chance to show it. I

started right in—I was so mad. I was red-headed.

“What was the idea of telling Linda?” I said. “What was the idea of spilling it to her?”

“It just slipped out, Tim. Honest. She said something about you and I said something about you and the first thing was she knew all about it.”

“Well, your boy friend knows all about it, too. That makes it even all the way around.”

“Tim! Did you tell him?”

“D’ya think I’m nuts? He found it out, some way. I went downstairs to Linda’s place, and he was there waiting for me. He knew all about it.”

“How would he find out?”

I said: “Well, one way he could have found out was to have a tail on me. He might not have trusted me and he might have put a tag on me to see I was doing the right thing by him. Then the tag could have told him where I spent the evening.”

“Don’t be a sorehead, Tim. It’s finished with, for now. Linda will get over it—she always has, hasn’t she?”

That was a dirty crack in itself. Linda had caught me, or thought she’d caught me, playing around once before. Of course, she’d raised Cain all over the place and told her two little gal friends all about it. Finally she’d believed me, or pretended to believe me, and all was peaches again.

I said: “All right, kid. I’ll take a drink, anyway. Linda was too mad to even offer me one.”

She got the Scotch and I sat there and thought things over. I didn’t

know a thing about anything, the way it stacked up. But then there was a chance that Dorrie did, and I was lonesome, anyway.

“How much dough did Still have in with Heywood?” I asked.

“Didn’t he tell you?”

“I don’t know whether he told me the truth.”

“He told me he had over a hundred thousand dollars of his own money, and as much belonging to friends in with him.”

“That ties. Except he told me it was all his.”

“All men lie,” Dorrie stated.

“You shouldn’t say that, kid.”

“It’s true. Look what you told me the other night.”

I CHANGED the subject with: “And I’d like to know just what the business is. It’s supposed to be a general buy and sell, importing business, and that’s phony. That’s too vague. A business has to specialize on something, these days.”

“Oh, I can tell you that,” said Dorrie, settling comfortably beside me on the couch. “I know that. They take anything that’s big and too hot for anybody else to touch. Still’s got a bunch of men who used to work for him, and they handle the stuff, whatever it happens to be.”

I was getting the idea, but it was pretty big to grasp all at once. “A sort of high class fence for stuff that comes in bunches. That it?”

“Why, of course, silly. You don’t think Still would go entirely legitimate, do you? This is honest enough to get by, as long as it’s handled right and he’s got a front man to handle it, and that’s all he wants.”

“And Heywood’s the front man?”

Dorrie sat up. She said, in an indignant voice, "That Heywood's no better than a common thief. He's crooked, Tim, so help me. Still takes him in as a front, and puts the whole business in Heywood's name, and then Heywood won't turn loose with the money, after he takes it in."

I thought this was funny but I didn't say so. Here was Still, in a crooked business, crying because his partner out-crooked him. And hiring me to get his money back, if possible.

I could see why he didn't want to go to the cops, and it wasn't because he was an ex-convict, either.

Dorrie said, "And speaking about the devil, how long are they going to keep him in jail. I'd just as soon he didn't come busting in here, right now."

"He'll be in until he makes bail, and that'll take time," I said, believing it. "Did he happen to have a key to Linda's place?"

Dorrie sat up again and said viciously, "If I thought he did, I'd scratch her eyes out. You're kidding yourself, Tim. That wench is no better than she should be. She may tell you that you're the only pebble on the beach, but that gal's done plenty of beach-combing. Don't let her make a fool of you."

"We'd better leave Linda out of this," I said. "I didn't come up here to talk about Linda."

"You came up here to find out all you could about Still," said Dorrie, and I decided she wasn't the fool she sometimes seemed.

She added: "But that's all right with me. I like it, anyway."

Then Still said, "Oh, you like it, do you?"

## CHAPTER VI

### Tough Guy



HE WAS standing in the doorway leading to the kitchenette, and I didn't like the way he was looking at me.

Dorrie was a little drunk, but she hadn't lost her nerve. "Came in the back way, eh?" she said. "Usually it's the other guy that uses the back stairs, isn't it?"

He said, "Oh shut up, you ——."

"I *won't* shut up."

He took a step toward us and I got up and said, "Easy does it, Still. It's maybe your argument, but she don't get slapped around when I'm around."

"She likes it, you sap."

Dorrie said, "Hit him, Tim! Hit the big ——. Did you hear what he called me?"

He hadn't called her out of name and I had no intention of hitting him anyway, unless I was forced. And it would have taken a bit of forcing—I didn't forget he'd been a big shot and still probably had contact with a lot of tough nuts he could set on me.

Still said, "Skip it, Hickey! At least for now. I'm not forgetting you took me out of a spot, downstairs, when you took that gun. But also I'm not forgetting about this little deal. They just about even up. Why aren't you with Heywood? Aren't you looking out for him?"

"He's busy with his love life," I said. "He don't need a guard for that." And then I thought of Jane Ransom and what a mess she was and how she went right out after a man and added:

"Well, maybe he needs a guard then, at that."

"He's not home. Not at the Canterbury."

I was surprised and said so. "I left him there. He acted like he was too scared to leave without a guard."

Still gave me a dirty look and said, "Have a good time with my girl and my Scotch," and left, this time by the front door.

Dorrie said, "I'm not going to put up with that very much longer. If it wasn't that . . . well, you know what I mean."

"Hang on to him, babe," I said.

"They come scarce these days. Most of the boys have a hard time keeping themselves, much less anybody else."

She said I was just terrible and snuggled up close to me, but what Still had said began to worry me and I couldn't concentrate. After all, I'd hired out to protect Heywood, no matter the reason, and, if Still was looking for him, there was a good chance that Heywood would be needing that protection. I didn't know where he was but I knew how I could find out, and that seemed indicated, no matter how painful the process might be.

I SAID, "Look, baby, I've got to run along now for awhile. I can't help it—it's just business that's come up."

"You mean because Still came up and found you?"

"No. Well, yes, in a way."

"I get it. You're afraid he'll find Heywood."

"Well, yes. Any idea where he'll go looking for him?"

She said she hadn't, and then,

vaguely, "He talked sometimes about a warehouse, but that's all I know about it. I don't know where it is or anything."

"It wouldn't be at Heywood's office, would it?"

"That office is just a front. The real office is at the warehouse. I know that from what I heard Cole and Still say."

I said that was a help and left. And ran into Jane Ransom, just as she was unlocking the door of her apartment, down the hall.

I didn't particularly care for Dorrie, but she was at least a good looking kid. If it hadn't been for Linda, I'd have got along with her fine. But this Jane was a different bill of goods. I never could figure that slip I'd made, not when I thought of that horse face she wore and the silly line of chatter that went with it. I wanted to find where Heywood had gone and this was the way to do it, but it was like pulling teeth to work at the job.

I said, "Why, Jane! I was just coming up to see you."

She said, "You came out of Dorrie's apartment. I saw you."

"Why, sure! I just stopped to see if you'd happened in there. I'd rung your bell and got no answer."

"Even if I don't believe it, I like to hear it," she said. "Come on in and I'll stir up a drink. I don't need it, but what's another two pounds on top of a ton."

She was drunker than a fool—I could tell that by the trouble she was having with her door key. She was half as big as outdoors, anyway, and she was crouched down over the key hole like she was set for the broad jump. I took the key away from

her and used it, and she threw her handbag one way and her coat the other and staggered for the kitchen and the essentials.

SHE shouted out from there, "What's this about you and Linda busting up?"

"What about it?"

"I just heard it."

"From who?"

"From Linda. I just stopped in. She's bawling her eyes out. If you'd quit playing around, you might get her back."

"D'ya want me to quit playing around?"

She came weaving back with two glasses, spilling half that was in them, and said, "Well, no. But I don't know what I'm going to do about it. This guy Heywood watches me like a hawk. That's funny. About Still. You know Dorrie and I met them, together. Now they hate each other like poison. That guy that was killed was with them. That King Cole. The one whose brother was up talking to Heywood, when you were there today."

"What kind of a guy was Cole?"

She collapsed on the davenport and I barely saved the drinks. "A tough guy, Tim. A very tough guy."

"And Still? How d'ya place him?"

"Another tough guy, Tim. Another very tough guy."

"How'd they get along?"

"Like this," she said, showing me her first two fingers tight together. "They had to get along. Each one knew enough about the other one to hang him. And then they were in business together."

"Sure, I know. With Heywood."

"Before then, Tim. Still was in with Heywood, but Heywood had to get rid of him. You see the business lost money, and Still couldn't put in enough more to hold his share."

"That's Heywood's story?"

"Why, sure. He tells me everything."

I thought he was telling her everything but the truth but I didn't say it. A gal as homely as that is used to being lied to by everybody, anyway.

I said, "I thought you'd be over at the Canterbury, to tell you the truth. I stopped, but it was just on the chance."

"He had to go down to the warehouse. Something came up down there. So he brought me home."

"The warehouse?"

"Down at Fourth and Main."

She leaned back and looked as though she was going to pass out. I'd found what I wanted to know and I was more than happy she was in that shape. She'd been too drunk to even remember what she'd told me. So I eased out and went down the stairs, instead of waiting for the boy to bring up the elevator.

And because of that I saw the guy going into Linda's apartment and using a key to do it.

He was a big blond pretty boy and he turned as I came up to him. He didn't act like a sneak thief, but often they don't. The smart ones brazen it out and say they made a mistake on the apartment.

I said, "What's the matter, guy? Key won't work?"

He said, "And what's it to you, pal?"



"Oh, I just asked."

"Just run along and peddle your papers, pal. It's all right—I belong here."

He had the key in his hand, just the way he'd been trying the door with it, and I happened to look down that way. It was the match for the one I carried and the two I'd taken from Dorrie and Jane. So I didn't argue—I just lost my temper. I reached in the side pocket where I carry my sap and brought it out and swung it with the same motion. The blond boy went to his knees and from there looked up at me stupidly.

"What's that for?" he mumbled more than half out.

I said, "Wise guy!" and swung again.

And then I went down the stairs and out of there, so mad I was almost blind. What Dorrie had said had come back to me, and all I could think about was that Linda had given me the out so that she could have other company. By that time I'd managed to kid myself into thinking I was trying to clear up the mess on her account, rather than because of what I could get out of it, which was the truth.

## CHAPTER VII

### Two-Man Limit



FOURTH and Main was clear down by the tracks, and warehouses were a dime a dozen down there. I didn't have the faintest idea which one was right and spent at least fifteen minutes prowling the street before I saw two big trailer trucks up an alley about halfway up the Main Street block. So I went up

there, figuring I could at least ask the drivers or loaders which warehouse was the one Heywood used.

Both trucks were loaded—the trailers were almost down to the axles with the weight, but there was nobody around either of them and the warehouse doors were locked solidly. So I just stood there like a stupid for a minute, looking around.

And got a grandstand seat for the fracas, which broke right then. I heard a muffled shout from inside and then two shots, with them coming so close the second sounded like an echo. And then the door nearest me slammed open and two men raced out and to the seats of the trucks and started backing them out of the alley with a rush. I'll say the drivers were tops—they took trucks and trailers out there backwards faster than the average man could navigate that alley going ahead.

They left the door open and I stood there wondering whether to go inside or leave well enough alone and stay where I was. I didn't know whether it was Heywood's warehouse or not, but I thought so.

Then the inside gun slammed out sound three times more, and I dragged mine out and decided to go in. If it was Heywood being shot in there, I knew I should go in and give him a hand. He'd paid me to do just that. Against that was Still, who'd paid me to spy on Heywood. If Heywood was being shot, it was likely that Still was doing the shooting, and I had more than a notion that Still might make a mistake on purpose, and turn loose at me as well as Heywood. I was just even on the thing but curiosity about what was going on won out for the trip.

**I**NSIDE, the place was dark as a pocket. I moved to the side of the door, and crouched as low as I could get without actually getting down flat. And then waited. By and by I heard a little scuffling sound, at the other side of the place. It was probably fifty or sixty feet from me, so whoever made it was making far too much noise for anybody engaged in a shooting match in the dark. I took a chance and called out—and I got action from two different quarters. Somebody shot at me from both ends of the building—both guns sent out flashes that looked orange in that light.

Neither shot came from where I'd heard the scuffling noise and that had stopped with the shooting.

I said nothing more and did as much. I just snuggled down into myself and cursed myself for a fool. I should have stayed outside and I knew it by then.

Then somebody called out, "Cole!"

It came from the end of the building at my left, and I knew the voice. It was Still, and he sounded as calm as if he'd been at a picnic. The man at the other end of the building shot at the sound of the voice and Still shot back twice. I knew then what he was trying to do—he was trying to spot the other guy by his gun flash, and he'd be trying to lay those slugs of his on each side of the flash, just in case the guy was playing cute.

It was a big barn of a place and the shooting had it ringing with echoes. It was even hard to tell which man had shot because of them. Then a police car siren started wailing up the street, getting louder by the second, and I got down on one

knee and waited for the rush I knew would come. And it came and from all directions.

The doorway beside me was just a little lighter shadow in that darkness, and four of them came toward it like a herd of wild horses. I'd thought there were only three—the two who'd been shooting and the one who'd made the noise at the side of the room. I was flattened against the wall right by the door and one of them, Still, I thought, ran into me while he was getting out. It didn't stop him—he went through me like it was football and he was making a line buck. The siren was right outside by the sound of it by that time, but they apparently knew the neighborhood well enough to take a chance on getting away outside.

I didn't, so I stayed where I was. I closed the door, feeling for the snap lock that held it and clicking it closed, and then I trusted to luck. If I'd gone outside I'd have been nabbed for sure, and inside I at least had a chance. It was fifteen minutes before somebody tried the door, and it worked out perfectly.

**W**HOOEVER was outside shouted, "Not here, either, Sarge! Hasn't the guy got any notion at all where he heard this shooting?"

The sergeant must have called something back that I couldn't hear, because I could hear the man outside grumble about people who called the police on false alarms. Then I heard him tramp away, putting his feet down like a man who's sore at the world, and I lit a match and looked around.

The place was so big that it took a book of matches and ten minutes'

time to find the office. It was in a corner in the back — just a little cubby walled off, with a cheap desk and two kitchen chairs for furnishing. It had a light though, and with this on I could look around. The place was clean as a pin as far as anything like evidence went, but as far as litter went it had everything. I don't think it had been swept since it had been built. There were no books or any other sign of any business ever having been done in the place, but there was a five cell flashlight and I doused the light and took the flash and went back out into the main building.

And struck pay dirt.

The first thing I found was a dead man, over by where I'd heard the scuffling sound. He was against the wall with his face toward it, and he'd been shot once through the chest. The next dead man was almost at the end of the building, probably a hundred feet from the first, and this one had taken two slugs. One through the belly and one through the head. I'd never seen either of them before. One of them had a wallet with a little over four hundred dollars in it, and the other had just a little silver. Both of them carried truck drivers' licenses, and both of them were dressed like a trucker might rig himself out. Neither looked like a trucker. Both of them had soft hands, even if dirty, and both licenses gave phony names, or what sounded like phonies. Albert Smith and Robert Jones, to be exact. If both of the boys weren't hoodlum Wops, from the old prohibition days, I was badly fooled.

I could see why everybody had run out. If the cops had come in

and found those two stiffs, there'd have been a lot of explaining to do.

The only other thing I found was a long spiral paper wrapping, but that meant plenty, too. I tore off a piece of this and put it in my pocket. And then I opened the door and went out, taking care I didn't leave any prints on it. Mine are on record because of my private license, and I had a hunch the cops would print the place when they found the bodies.

It wasn't much of an evening's work but I was satisfied. One of the men through the door had been Heywood. I was sure of that, even in the dark. One of the others had been Still—I'd heard his voice and he'd even run into me. One of the other two would be Cole—the dead King Cole's brother. Still had called out his name so that was easily figured. I didn't know the fourth man. Two other men had gotten away with the two trucks that had been parked outside, but I wasn't worrying about them or their loads.

I knew what it was all about by then. I knew what was behind the thing, that is. I knew within a two man limit who'd killed King Cole, and I knew within a two man limit who'd set the two hired killers on Still and myself.

And when it's narrowed down like that, it's only a matter of time. Time and a little routine work.

COLE lived at the Prince George and the head bellhop there was a smart lad. He looked at the five-dollar bill I showed him and offered to look at everybody in the morgue, if it took that to earn the piece. He looked at flat face, Jinks Bailey, and

the pretty boy, Johnny Carter, and shook his head.

"Wrong party, doc," he said. "If they visited Cole, that is, while I was on shift, I'd know it. I'd never forget a puss like that in my life."

He meant flat face and I'll admit that, once seen, that face would always be remembered.

Which was what I was banking on.

The doorman at the Canterbury hit it right on the nose, but it took me ten dollars in money and an hours' worth of talking before he'd go for the shot. He was colored, and I found that colored people don't care a cent for morgues. But I finally got him down there and he took one look and then ran for the door. I didn't blame him much. Flat face was a horrid sight in life, and dead, he was that much worse. I caught up with the doorman outside.

"Tha's him, Mister," he said. "Tha's the man. He all the time come to the place with that other man. Once when I tol' him that sometimes the gen'lmen gimme a dime or two when I lets 'em out of their cabs, he jus' stuck his elbow in my belly. Jus' hard, too. Ooooh! He a awful looking gen'leman now."

That gave me Heywood as the man who'd hired Bailey and Carter to kill Still and myself. Finding Still there at Linda's place had been a break for them, they'd thought. They'd probably just figured to catch me there and to pick up Still later on. Jane Ransom would have told Heywood about me hanging around Linda's apartment and he'd have told the thugs just where to pick me up.

How they got a key to the place

bothered me, but I figured that would come out in the wash.

Hiring the two fitted right in with my idea of Heywood, but the King Cole thing was different. For one thing it wasn't like a hired killing. Mighty few of them use knives these days. They take a gun and turn it loose with all the loads to make sure of the job, and, if it has to be a quiet affair, they use a sap and hit the customer on the temple. With weight behind it the guy's a gone goose. If they don't want to bother with a sap, they use a gun barrel. There's a technique to things like that—and King Cole wasn't killed according to those rules.

Still had an alibi, and if it was good enough for the cops to turn him loose on, it was good enough for me.

SO I picked my logical suspicion and got Dorrie to work on it with me. She hadn't heard from Still, and I got her to go with me by telling her I'd take her to him. That I had it just about fixed up between them again, but that she'd have to make the first move. And she thought about what a good provider he might turn out to be and went for the bait.

The wise bellhop took us up, in the Prince George elevator, and he was wise enough to be giving Dorrie the bad eye every foot of the way. I hadn't told Cole there was anyone with me—just said I had to see him about Still and Heywood. And I made Dorrie wait outside, telling her to give me another five minutes to smooth Still over, and then to walk right in.

Cole was on the bed. He'd been

reading a newspaper and he dropped it on his lap when I came in but didn't bother to get up.

"Hiya," he said.

"Don't get up," I told him.

"I'm not going to. Now what's this about Still and Heywood?"

I told him I'd heard what he and Heywood were talking about, and that I'd taken the job of recovering Still's money for him, so that he was in the picture, too.

He said, "Still's talked about you. Quite a bit. He says you did him one favor but that you're a heel in spite of it."

"I'm misunderstood," I said. "He don't know it but I'm the best friend he's got. Now about your brother."

"What about him?"

"I'm trying to find out who killed him."

"Well?"

"D'ya think it was Still?"

He laughed and sat up straighter in the bed. He was wearing pants and just an undershirt. Socks but no shoes. An empty gun sling hung over the foot of the bed.

He said, "Still and the King were pals, Mister Hickey. Pals! They worked together in the old days. They did their time together. No, it wasn't Still that killed him."

"Who did?"

"Heywood, of course. The King had his dough in that business, and Heywood was trying to crook him, just like he did Still. Still has the cop horrors and wouldn't take the thing to the D. A., but the King told Heywood that he would, unless Heywood came through. The King wasn't afraid of any copper that ever walked in shoe leather and Heywood knew that and knew the

King would go to the D. A., just like he said he would. So he either killed him himself or hired somebody to do it for him."

THAT made it a sure thing. I knew better than that. I said, "That don't check, Cole. Your brother wouldn't go to the D. A. and Heywood knew he wouldn't. Your brother couldn't go to the D. A. and tell him that he wanted to get his money out of that business. That business was unloading hot tires, over this rationing thing, and the D. A. was the last person your brother would want to know about it. They'd steal the tires—probably a phony theft from some crooked dealer—and then they'd hold 'em in the warehouse until they got a sale for 'em. Still and the King had the men they'd used back in the old days and it gave the men a job. Heywood was the front and he took it over, knowing that Still and the King couldn't make too much of a kick. They both had records and he didn't—it would have gone harder with them than with him."

"Maybe I was wrong," Cole said.

"You were too fast blaming him. You blamed him when you knew better. Heywood wouldn't kill him—that would kick the thing open, just like it has."

"Then d'ya think it was Still?"

I said, "I think it was you. You had the motive—you told it to me there in Heywood's office. You'd get the King's money—you said right there you would. You'd step in his shoes, after you and Still got Heywood back in line. It was you or Heywood or Still—and it wasn't Heywood or Still."

## CHAPTER VIII

## Too Many Keys



**WHEN** Dorrie opened the door and walked in, just at the right moment. I was right by the door and I could see the expression on her face and what it did to Cole.

She looked at him and of course thought she was seeing the dead man, who'd been found in Linda's apartment. King Cole, the brother. She'd just met him before he'd been murdered, and naturally that had made that first impression stick. She put her hand up to her mouth and half-screamed.

"Oh! Why, that's the man. . . ."

That's as far as I let her go. I got her by the shoulder and threw her out in the hall as hard as I could and I slammed the door as I did it.

I said, "She saw you carrying him in Linda's apartment. I wanted to make sure on the identification. You carried him up the back stairs."

I was taking a chance on that but not much of one. I knew he'd been carried to Linda's place and that he hadn't been killed in either Jane or Dorrie's apartments. They'd have tipped it off—they wouldn't go for murder even if they weren't maybe so fussy about larceny. So that left the back stairs.

He sat up straighter on the bed.

"Not that it makes any difference, but how'd you get in the apartment? How'd you happen to have a key to Linda's place?"

He said, "Not that it makes any difference so I'll tell you. You dope! Just about everybody in town's got a key to that gal's place."

I'd started to suspect that so it didn't bother me much. What did was looking again at that empty holster at the foot of the bed and at the newspaper draped across his lap. I knew where the gun was—knew where the gun just had to be. And I was flat-footed, with mine under my arm in its sling. I didn't want to do it—I had to force myself to take each step, but I moved until I could reach the bed.

I said, "You're lying to me."

He laughed and said, "*I'm lying!* Why, brother, you've been lied to by an expert. That gal of yours has more keys out to that apartment of hers than most hardware stores keep in stock. She runs a shuttle system—they go in and out through a turnstile."

**I** GOT a hand on the foot of the bed, on the railing that ran between the posts. I said, "I'll certainly go to town with her for that."

He said, "Brother, you've done about all you're going to. I'm going to tell the cops that you walked in here and pulled a gun on me and that I had to shoot you in self-defense. Your gun will be fired—I'll see to that. I'll have time before anybody can come in. You're up the creek without a paddle."

If it had been his tough brother, he'd have shot and not talked about it. This boy talked. And when he started to shoot, he lifted the gun under the newspaper, and I yanked on that bed railing with every bit of strength I had and dropped to the floor as I did it. The jerk threw him back and down and tilted his gun hand, and the slug went into the wall behind me, three feet above me.

And I shot up through the bed. Springs, mattress, and all. I shoot a big gun, and while the soft stuff they put in mattresses slows up a slug, it doesn't stop it. I shot four times before I lifted my head to see what damage I'd done, and I had him crippled from the waist down. One of those heavy bullets had caught him in the spine and what it had done to him was a pity. It didn't kill him and with an operation he'd probably live, but only to go to a prison hospital for life.

Then Dorrie came in, regardless of the shooting. She was screaming, "Tim! Tim!" at the top of her voice, and then she saw me still on my feet, she grabbed me and wound her arms around me and swung me until she was between me and the man on the bed.

"He can't shoot *you!*" she said. "He just can't."

Well, she was right. The poor guy couldn't but barely move his hands, much less handle a gun.

The next was the wise bellhop who called the police and who kept the hotel customers out of the room until the police got there with their surgeon.

And then we all went to jail for a while. They sent up for Heywood while they held us, and he gave up to the cops without a struggle.

**STILL** got out of it all okay. Heywood had taken the place over, with everything in his name, and so he took the rap for dealing in tires. That spiraled wrapping paper I'd found in the warehouse was tire wrapping—it's the one thing in the world that's wrapped like that and it gave the show away the minute I

saw it. The shooting down there had started with a little row between a couple of men that worked for Still, and a couple that worked for Heywood. Still's men won. Both of the dead men had records a mile long, so the police weren't pushing that angle very hard.

Still and Cole and Heywood had traded a little fire there in the dark—somebody had been smart enough to pull the light switch—but that was caused by fright on Heywood's part. He'd started blasting at Still and Cole, and they'd shot back once in a while, just in the spirit of things. They'd gone down to try and get a settlement and caught him there, while they were loading out two truckloads of hot tires and while he was superintending the job.

Still even got most of his money back. Heywood had to have money for a lawyer, and he had to tell Still where he'd hidden it, so that Still could dig it up and hire him one.

And Still did it—I'd have taken the money as soon as I found where it was—and then told Heywood to go to and not come back.

All this took a little time and so it was almost a week before I got back to the girls' apartment house. I knocked on Linda's door and then went in, not waiting for her to open up for me, and the first thing I saw was the blond guy I'd slugged. The one who'd been opening her door.

I said, "Hagh! You again!"

He stood up and said, "Now I don't want any trouble with you, pal."

"Smart boy," I said. "Then sit down and shut up."

He sat down.

Linda came out of the kitchenette.

She said, "Don't you dare speak to my brother like that, Tim Hickey. Don't you dare."

"He your brother?"

"Why, of course."

"He your only brother?"

"Why, yes."

"Haven't got a brother named Cole?"

"Why . . . why, no?"

"Haven't got a pretty blond brother named Johnny Carter? He had a key to the joint, too."

"Why . . . ugh."

"You remember the guy. He had a pal—a guy with a face as flat as a board. You should be able to remember Johnny this long. He's only been dead a week or ten days. You remember him—you met him through Jane Ransom and Heywood."

She said, "You can't speak to me like that, Tim Hickey. I've got a right to have friends."

I said, "Kid, you haven't got an enemy," and tossed her the three keys I had. "Take these and put 'em around. Save you getting more spares."

I thought it was a pretty good exit line.

STILL and Dorrie and I were in her apartment, doing a job on what was left of her whiskey, gin, and fancy drinks. She was drunk and happy—I was so-so—and Still was feeling sorry for himself.

"Tha's it," he said. "Every time I get a gal, she goes for somebody else. Just old man Still, tha's me. The guy that can't hold a woman."

"But I've been in love with Tim for years," said Dorrie, in a consoling voice. "It isn't that I don't

like you. It's just that I like Tim better."

"Goin' out west," said Still. "I'm through here. Couldn't hold up my head. Goin' out west."

"Where?" I asked.

"San Francisco, I guess. Sure! Tha's a good town. Take good care o' this little gal, Hickey. One in a million, tha's what she it. Take good care of her—make her happy. Frisco's not so far—I'll fly back now and then and see how you folks are makin' out."

Dorrie said thoughtfully, "I've got to get a fur coat, before the government puts these priority things on them. And there's a sale at Steinbocher's—they've got some lovely things in the window. There's a black crepe that I'm nuts about."

She was looking right at me while she said all this.

I said nothing.

Still waved his glass and said, "All settled now. Heywood's in jail. Poor old King's dead, but his heel brother'll never walk again and he'll die in prison for killing the King. I got most of my dough back. You got a fat chunk of it for doing what you did. Dorrie's got you and she always wanted you. Poor me! I'm the only one that's out. I lose my girl—I lose my Dorrie."

I thought about that fur coat crack and about the lovely things at Steinbocher's. And about how I never did give a whoop in the hot place for Dorrie, anyway, and that Still was a pretty good guy, even if he *was* in the rackets.

I said, "You hadn't ought to go to San Francisco. You ought to stay right here."

He beamed and Dorrie scowled,



and I said I had to get down to the office and see how things were getting on. I figured it was better that way. He had what he wanted, even if she didn't. I'd lost Linda, but I'd never had anything there, anyway, so it didn't mean a thing.

And in return I had money in my pocket and the field wide open. If worse came to worse I could always give Jane Ransom a ring, even if she did have a face like a horse. I didn't think, though, that things would ever get that tough.

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*He had it all figured out. Every day there are twenty killings in the United States. He was going to commit the next one — and all on account of a girl burglar!*



THE girl stood at the base of the tree, which was one of the gaunt, scarecrow genus common to Manhattan back yards. The top of the fence was considerably higher than she could reach, and the tree grew close to the fence. By no means a runty girl, she was slender and roundly proportioned; she didn't look soft, but she stared up at the tree, and at the night sky, in doubt.

Abruptly her manner was deter-

mined. In the darkness of the yard she lifted her skirt so that her legs would be free. Then she embraced the tree and shinned upward, alternately hugging with her arms and scissoring with her legs. Her stockings snagged inevitably and runs started, and bark scratched her tender skin.

When she was above the level of the fence she had a branch to hold onto. She extended a leg and hung it over the top of the fence, swung the other leg over and



Not knowing whether the gun would go off or blow up in his hand, he opened fire.

# PHOTO FINISH

By  
**WILLIAM  
DECATUR**



perched. The only exit from below had been the tree. The means of descent now was a line-post, which she could reach by shifting along the fence only a couple of yards toward the rear. She would have to reach

for it and take a chance on falling, but she could make it. Overhead in the mild, saturated night air hung a couple of lines festooned with various gray laundry being left out till morning. No windows were lighted.

She scrutinized the whole of the neighboring yard; then she inched along the top of the fence to the left toward the line-pole, keeping her heels well out so that she wouldn't kick the fence-boards.

So far, she hadn't made more noise than a prowling cat, if that much. The top of the fence was strung with telephone wires, and the harsh, twisted strands abraded her. She found the fence soundlessly with her heels, and braced, leaned out. She strained; as she slipped she caught one of the iron spikes in the post; after a little exploring with her feet as she hung, she found descending spikes and reached ground.

Here were more high fences, and there was no exit from the yard except via the way she had come. She stole toward the back doors of the ground floor apartment. She reached the brick wall of an extension to the building and stole along it; at the recess of a doorway she backed in just in time.

**T**HE light was a soundless explosion, a smash of brilliance that illuminated the yard and the buildings backing on it. At the back doors of Earnshaw's apartment a man sprang backward with a curse and started running, blinded by the flashbulb that had gone off in his eyes.

Simultaneously the girl left the doorway, groping frantically, and they collided. The man struck her and she sprawled on the ground. Still blind, he banged into the fence, found the line-post by flailing his arms, went up and over like a cat and landed in a running leap in the yard where he had entered. A door slammed.

For a moment the girl lay sprawling, stunned, in Earnshaw's yard; the pain of the stone pressing into her temple made her raise her head, slowly at first as though she were drugged. For about a minute she had been knocked out cold by that lucky blow to her jaw, and she was going to get caught. And in spite of the fear, she couldn't get up and explain herself. If people came.

In the rear room of Earnshaw's apartment, on the ground floor, lights went on in a broad doorway and a huge window. It was inescapable, she knew. Earnshaw had laid a trap. He had rigged the door with a camera and a flashbulb, so that when the door was forced by a prowler a trigger mechanism would function and a picture would be taken of the scene.

If the camera had been aimed right, she might be in that picture herself.

It was too late for her to get over the fence. He would get a couple more pictures of her at least—running, climbing the line-post. So she got to her feet and slipped along the wall toward the lighted rear doors of the apartment. She was a bright girl, and she worked on the theory that if Earnshaw had just awakened, his eyes wouldn't be accustomed to his surroundings yet. He was in a brightly-lighted room, and he wouldn't be able to see a thing in the dark yard. For a few seconds.

She saw him. He was a tall, rangy individual with mussed hair, and he was blinking and squinting as he walked. He was wearing pajama trousers and slippers only, and the fluff of hair on his chest had a red glint in the light. The slippers were

sole-shaped pieces of thick leather with crosswise straps sewed on. Sandals. And they made a gentle slapping sound against his heels, like a light hand-clap, with each step he took.

**T**HERE was a flashlight on the bureau in the rear room. Sleepily he picked it up, turned it on, and inspected the apparatus which the burglar had set off. He was an engineer, and wiring the rear doors had been a simple matter. He looked at the flashbulb in the socket screwed into the wall overhead, and nodded as he saw that it had been blown. The bulb was a big one and had smacked the burglar right in the eyes. Lots of watts. The man had probably been blinded by that jolt of light, and wouldn't be able to see for a while. Earnshaw walked out into the yard, spotting corners and fences and the line-post with his flash.

He got a whiff of perfume and sniffed the air, looked up at windows overhead. He couldn't locate the source of it, and made a circuit of the yard. There was a mark on the fence at the left side, where the man had banged into it, and shoes had scraped rust from the iron spikes of the line-post.

Three stories above in the building backing on his yard a woman was resting her elbows on her window-sill and sticking her neck out. She called down, "What's the matter?"

Earnshaw looked up speculatively and said, "My cat got out." He didn't own a cat. "I've been wanting to talk to you. You shake your mop out of that window once more, and I'm going to call the Department

of Health, or the police, so help me. Your dirt comes right down in here, and I'm not going to clean up any more of it."

"Oh, yeah!" she yelled, and then slammed the window.

And he turned around fast and legged it back into the apartment, because his hall door had just slammed shut. The prowler had been hiding behind the outer back doors, which were solid wood and opened on the yard. The inner doors were glass. The man had simply sneaked into the apartment behind his back, and departed via the front way without letting any grass grow.

**E**ARNSHAW yanked the door open as the door to the street slammed, and galloped down the hall in pursuit. He reached the entry under the high stone steps in front before he realized that he would get very much looked at if he appeared on the street as he was dressed. There was a small grilled opening in the left wall, and he was able to look in both directions, east and west. No one on the street was running, and no one looked any more suspicious than usual for the time of night. Scratching his chest, he reentered and went down the hall walking somewhat gingerly because of his toes, stung from slapping down on the linoleum. Just to make sure that there was no slapstick work going on and another burglar entering from the yard.

On the steps over the entry, the one place where he couldn't see her unless he went out to the sidewalk, the girl rose from her seat. She listened for a moment after the door below slammed, then descended leis-

urely. Some distance behind her a man commenced walking faster. Miss Belknap increased her own pace, entered a cab at the corner of Eighth Avenue in plenty of time and gave the driver a false address.

Earnshaw, Beverly L., locked the hall door and the back doors after inspecting them with considerable puzzlement. The rear wooden doors were secured with a hasp and swivel-staple, permitting them to be left ajar for needed ventilation in the deep apartment. There had been a pickproof lock of the best make on that staple, and he had found it lying in the yard just outside the doorway. The key to the lock was still where he left it for convenience, on the corner of the kitchen table by the glass doors. He stood there scratching his head for a while, and figured it out with the stubbornness of the scientific mind. The lock was pickproof. Ergo, the burglar had a key; an arm couldn't reach between the doors to the key on the table.

The flat brass key was lying tail-side-up, and stamped in the head was a serial number. The name of the lockmaker had been taken from the lock itself. A man with a good eye could read the number with a flash-beam and get a duplicate key from the manufacturer. So that was that, and a new lock would have to be picked up at the hardware store. This had been a patient burglar and a thinking one, probably not the same one who once clumsily tried to force the doors with a jimmy and a lot of racket. Probably there were fingerprints again this time, as there had been on the four previous occasions when a housebreak had been attempted. Neither did he call the po-

lice this time. His interest was not in getting burglars captured and involving himself in a nuisance with the law, but chiefly in keeping pests of all kinds out of the place.

The place was handsome, a floor-through, furnished with the opulence of money spent in chunks by a man of good taste. The furniture was heavy and masculine, the rugs were thick, and there were pictures on the walls.

The expression that eluded him was "casing the joint." One of his annoyances when he was at home was people gawping in the front windows as they passed by. Undoubtedly there was a percentage of criminals in the pedestrians, and a burglar among the pickpockets and murderers had thought that here was a nice layout to crack for himself.

Earnshaw screwed another flash-bulb into the socket, avoided the broadloom mat under which he had wired a switch, yawned, turned the lights off and went back to bed in the middle room.

His time was his own to a certain extent. He showed up an hour late at the Bourne Laboratories, where he had a job of work, and before mid-afternoon had forgotten about the attempted burglary. He knocked off then, telling his employer that there was a second-run picture in the midtown area which he had missed and wanted very much to see. A foreign talkie.

**H**E ENTERED the theater from the bright sunlight of the street, took three drags on his cigarette while his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and put the stub in an urn of sand. He walked a third of



She went up that tree with all the agility of a monkey.

the way down the left-hand aisle, chose a moderately-unobstructed row and took a seat smack in the middle of the section.

Shortly after his interest became involved in the action on the screen, a girl entered his row from the right-hand aisle, came against his knees and sat in the seat beside him. Their shoulders came together; Earnshaw removed his elbow from the arm of the seat for her, replaced it when she withdrew hers. Her fragrance was subtle and heady, and he wondered what it was. The same perfume on ten different lovelies would smell ten different ways. The picture, he thought, was spotty, and when his interest lagged he stole glances aside. Her profile was extraordinarily good; her lips were soft but well-defined, and had a shine from the screen; the chin was pointed, determined, but not prominent, and she had the curve of cheek which he especially liked in women.

In the darkness, the color of her dress was ambiguous, but it was silk, and fitted her with nutshell rightness. The length of her skirt was in fashion, and her silken knees just showed, close together. Her hands were gloved and held a flat bag in her lap. Her fragrance annoyed him, because there was the sort of mischief in it that would tempt a man to make a fool of himself.

Smoking was allowed in these rear seats, and Bev went through the motions of fishing a cigarette out. While he was lighting it, her hands worked swiftly with her bag, and she asked in the most disturbing undertone he had heard in a long while, "May I have a light, please?"

"Mmh." The jewel-blue bud of

flame from his lighter touched the end of her cigarette, and gilded the lids of her lowered eyes, and revealed a paper of matches not quite hidden by a handkerchief in her purse. He snapped the arm of the lighter down and thoughtfully put the gadget away. Maybe those were lipstick tissues instead of matches. Ghosts of smoke rose and became inextricably involved in the beam from the projection machine.

Before her cigarette was smoked down she bent over, turning her knees aside, and dropped the butt to step on it with the shapely toe of a high-heeled shoe. Her gloved hand touched his knee for support; she ground the butt out and straightened to continue watching the picture. Her hand was as light as a moth; he couldn't tell whether it was still there, and he didn't want to make himself conspicuous by moving his head around for the benefit of people behind. It was still there. Their fingers hooked together, hers giving his a squeeze, and for moments he just sat still, staring straight ahead in surprise with a feeling of pleasant and increasing numbness in his chest. He had never picked up a girl in his life, which was typical of his way of thinking; *he* was getting picked up.

Her lips moved in a whisper too soft for him to hear. In leaning over to put out his cigarette he got close enough to hear her repeat, "Busy?"

"Not yet," he whispered back, and got a squeeze to warn him that he was too loud. He freed his fingers and her gloved hand returned to him, restless and absent-minded.

Her wrist was cool to his fingers, exploring. The scientist. Her



deliberateness and composure were so convincing that his eyes widened a little at the scared hurrying of her pulse.

She wasn't angry, because she took hold of his arm above the elbow and closed her fingers affectionately.

"There are people behind us," she mentioned in that stirring low voice of hers. "Let's take a couple of those vacant seats in the back row."

Where the ushers could look on and grin. Uh-uh.

"I don't like this picture very much anyhow," Bev insinuated.

"I don't either."

"Let's get out of here and go somewhere."

"All right, darling."

The term of endearment affected him in a way which there wasn't time to diagnose. The girl had such a swell figure that she couldn't be bad, and anyhow his scientific curiosity was still at work concerning what was going to happen.

In his mind he prettied up the adventure ahead. The temperature was up and down between eighty-six and ninety-two, the Scotch in the drinks was twenty years old, it was night, and there was nothing to worry about because a girl of experience was handling the whole business.

Then they were going up the carpeted incline of the aisle, and nobody was looking at them because they didn't matter. Leaving. When she staggered, Bev circled an arm around her waist and sustained her as though they were brother and sister.

"My purse," she said suddenly. She turned out of his arm restraining her and hurried down the aisle

to find it in the row where they had been sitting.

Bev Earnshaw got interested in a cold feeling in his stomach when he had taken a step after her, and he stood for a moment. Policemen. The city was hiring good-lookers nowadays, and his girl was one of them. They worked in pairs. The procedure was for the girl to take a seat beside the man; there would be advances made, witnessed by another policewoman who had quietly assumed a seat behind the incipient affair.

The policewomen carried guns. It would be suggested that they leave the theater for greener pastures and elbow-room, and if the man acquiesced he would be led to the theater-manager's office where he would be arrested as a masher. It had never occurred to Earnshaw that any girl would ever take him for a masher, but he didn't want to get arrested and decided forthwith that the theater was no place for him. The girl was coming back up the aisle with her bag. Bev turned his back and sauntered out into the lobby in the way a man does.

When he turned aside and was out of sight of her, he looked at his watch for the benefit of the ushers and ticketman and ejaculated, "Gee whiz!"

And he ran like blazes out to the street.

**W**ITHIN five steps after he turned to the left he was sauntering along like a casual pedestrian, and he entered a cab at the corner, keeping himself from looking behind. He gave the driver the first intersection that came to his mind,

and then remembered with a smile that there was an excellent bar on that corner. It was evening now, and dark, and lights were on. Neon light came through the cab window and made his hands look dead.

He wondered about that peachy girl, and shook his head. A girl like that did not have to do police work to make very, very good money.

He paid off his hack, took about a dozen steps, then stopped to look down at the hand on his arm and up at the owner of the hand. She was a knockout, and when she smiled she was even better.

"Hello, Bev," she said. "Will you buy me a drink?"

"Why should I?" he asked, grinning back at her. It was the same girl who had sat beside him at the theater, he was positive, but that didn't explain how she knew his name.

"Because," she said, "a girl can't go into this bar unescorted after seven o'clock."

"Sure enough."

The pressure of her fingers on his arm was light but firm while they entered; she wasn't going to get ducked again. She preferred a booth, and while they were waiting for their drinks he observed that her dress was a dull smoldering red and that her gloves were the same rust color.

"Let's see," he prompted. "Didn't we meet somewhere?"

"Not quite. Have you got the picture with you?"

"What picture?"

"You know what picture. The one you took last night. Of the man breaking into your apartment. It was a mistake; you'll only be doing harm if you use it in the wrong way."

"Who's the picture of?"

"My brother, Lloyd. I'm Margaret Belknap. Wasn't I in the picture, too? I was there last night."

Her voice remained low and earnest and matter-of-fact. Listening to the rhythm of it and watching the expressiveness of her lips, he neglected the importance of what she was saying.

"You weren't in it," he said.

The drinks arrived, and she pleaded in the most beguiling way, "Will you give it to me?"

"**WOULD** you expect me to do that?" he asked. He pointed out, "That was housebreaking, even if he was your brother. He was inside the apartment, you know, when the flash frightened him off."

"I know he was." She sipped her drink thoughtfully, set it down, and a tip of soft pink tongue followed her lips. She opened her handbag on the table, glanced casually out into the bar, then guardedly produced a gun from the bag so that he could see what it was. Gun and hand went back into the bag, aimed at his midriff.

"Does that work?" he asked, grinning and perspiring a little.

"Oh, yes, it works," she assured him. "Queer as it looks." Because it was a four-barrel antique pistol, double-action, with a revolving firing-pin. She added, "It's loaded."

"I'll take your word for it. Now what?"

"We're going to leave, and go down to your house and get that picture."

"Mh-mh," he answered, not smiling.

"Oh, yes, we are." Her voice

was hard, compelling. "You're going to get up before I count to three, or it's going to go off."

"Finish your drink first," he suggested.

"One. . . . I don't want to do this, Bev. Be a good sport, won't you?"

"Don't do it. It will make everything worse."

"Two," she counted, white-faced. "Please. . . . Three."



With the collision they both went sprawling.

**H**IS stomach was pulled in with anticipation as he sat where he was, elbows on the table. For a moment longer she stared at him, then withdrew her hand from the bag and snapped it shut on the odd gun inside.

"Nuts," she said flatly, and when he laughed she joined in with him wryly. She asked, "Want the gun?"

"Not me. Where'd you get it?"

It had been her father's, and the .25 caliber bullets in it were corroded; she didn't even know whether they were live shells any more. She outlined the story while they finished the drinks and had more.

Her brother had gotten in with a couple of stinkers one night at a bar, two men named Nicholas Baen and Abner Hurley. Whatever their business was, it was wrong. They had tried to convince Lloyd Belknap that it was casier and smarter to make crooked money than straight, and when he had resisted they had gotten tough. They had framed him one night in a shooting, one of them sticking the gun in his hand and telling him to run.

"Who was shot?" Bev asked.

"Nobody. The gun was loaded with blanks, and the dead man was just a stooge for those men."

"What dead man?"

"He isn't dead. Lloyd described him, and I saw him with those men at a bar they go to. Through the window."

"Where's the gun?"

"Lloyd's just a wild kid. He'd always come running to me every time he got into trouble. He came home and blabbed, instead of taking the gun to the place where they told him to meet them. The gun was

loaded with blanks; I took it down and threw it into the river without telling him about it, and made him promise not to see those men any more. But they convinced him that they had something on him. They spotted your apartment and worked over him to make him burglarize you. If he robbed you, they really would have something on him; it's obvious that that shooting was a fake. There was nothing about it in the papers."

"Didn't they come around for the gun?"

"Of course they did. They were mad, and they were going to 'take care of me' until they saw that Lloyd was getting mad and turning on them, because I threw the gun away. They don't do anything themselves; there's a gang, and the gang does all the work and takes all the blame; Baen and Hurley just take the profits and keep the boys happy by telling them how good they are. Then there's a club where they play pool and so on. Lloyd's all right, Bev. Honestly. He told those two crooks to leave him alone, and this time he means it. He's getting a job."

"You mean a job of work?"

"You don't have to laugh at me. He couldn't sleep, and was out walking when the men came, and I wouldn't let them in. I lied about where Lloyd said he was going to be, and sent them several blocks away to a bar. They didn't come back.

"This morning Lloyd called from Washington."

"Washington!" Bev ejaculated.

**H**E BOUGHT a newspaper while he was walking," she explained, "and there was an ad for

a chauffeur. He went right up to the address on Fifth Avenue and bluffed his way in. The man was furious at first about being awakened in the middle of the night, and then changed his mind and said it was a good idea to start early, and got dressed. He was in a hurry to get to Florida. He has a wife.

"They'd just had breakfast, and Lloyd told the man the story, and the man gave him enough money to call me by long distance. So it's up to you. Baen and Hurley want that picture so they'll have something on my brother."

"How do you know?" Bev asked.

"Because they called the Bourne Laboratories this afternoon and went down there where you work to get you. I called just after they did, and took a cab. I beat them. You had just come out and gone when they arrived; I saw them going in. Then I took the next cab and followed you. May I have the picture, please? If you don't give it to me, or destroy it, the police can put him in jail in Florida when he gets there."

"I went to the bank this morning and put it in my safe-deposit box," said Bev, narrowing his eyes at his drink. "I couldn't get hold of it till tomorrow anyhow."

"Do you believe me?" Margaret asked.

"No," said Bev involuntarily.

"You think it's just a fancy story." She tapped the table gently with her fingers, asked abruptly. "What do you do at the laboratories?" When his labors were accounted for she persisted, "How much do you make?"

He told her frankly, "Between a hundred and a hundred and forty a

week, depending on how much time I put in. Besides, I've written three textbooks on chemistry, and now and then I get a royalty check."

"That's enough to get married on," she remarked. Her eyes appraised him. "Would you marry me?"

"Now, there's an idea. And then?"

"You'd destroy that picture of your wife's brother."

"You mean you'd marry me just for that? You're getting sort of melodramatic, Margaret."

"Not very; I mean it. I've got to have it."

"I wouldn't marry you on those grounds," he said.

"Of course; I didn't think you would, but maybe we can do it anyhow. Why aren't you married already?"

"Never met the right kind of girl. You?"

"Never met the right kind of guy. Do you want to do any more drinking here? Then let's go."

"Want me to take you home?"

"Lloyd and I haven't been able to afford much of a place. Take me to your apartment."

"That's an idea, too."

"I'm sort of hungry, Bev. If there's anything in the refrigerator, I'll cook us the dandiest eggs you ever saw."

HE UNLOCKED the iron grille under the front steps, admitted her first into the hall. Six feet from his door in this corridor was a large recess for a door leading to the basement. Out of the corner of his eye Bev noticed that the recess was occupied, but not in time. Baen and Hurley jumped him, Baen tripping

Margaret and simultaneously giving her a shove that sent her sprawling on hands and knees.

"If it ain't the kid sister," said Baen through his teeth, sneering. He put his foot to her with unnecessary force and stretched her at full length, tumbling her over so that her head hit the floor. Hurley had time to tell Bev, "We been waiting long enough for you."

Then his teeth cracked together as with a continuous swipe Bev got him under the jaw with his elbow and plunged his fist into Baen's belly.

"Oo-ongh!" Baen groaned, and then didn't breathe for a while because of a paralyzed diaphragm.

Both men held automatics on him, an unpleasant fact which he hadn't been aware of until now. Retching for breath, and murderous with pain and hate, Baen chopped at Earnshaw's head with his gun. Bev ducked, but the gun clipped him on the side of the head and on the shoulder, and he fell hard.

Margaret was sitting up. Her hand was in her purse, and she slid the four-barrel pistol along the floor to Bev. He grabbed it, turned around and stood up cautiously.

"What's that thing?" Hurley inquired contemptuously.

"Same as what you've got there," said Bev, feeling the side of his head.

"Yeah? Does it work?"

"I don't know. Make a move and we'll find out."

Standoff. They were wary and kept their distance.

Baen got just enough breath to expel a tiny groan, and his bulging eyes were ugly.

Hurley said, "Listen, buddy, we don't want no trouble. Give the girl

your keys and have her go in and get that picture for us, and then we'll beat it. See?"

"I don't see anything. You put her brother up to breaking in, didn't you? And when the cops get him, they'll go right after you, believe it or not. That shot went to the police by special messenger as soon as I got it developed and dried."

"Then what's the kid sister doing with you?" Hurley asked. "Come on, Mac, don't be funny. Fork it over."

"What kind of business are you guys in, anyhow?" Bev asked. "What good is the Belknap kid to you?"

"Don't get nose. This ain't any skin off your nose, Mac; give us the snap and we'll forget the whole thing. If you don't, something is very liable to happen to you some day when you think we forgot all about you."

"Oh?" Bev asked as though unimpressed. "I hear there are twenty murders a day in the United States. It looks as though I'm going to be the next murderer, because I'll sure get one of you if you don't scam. On your way."

Margaret had risen to her feet, and stole up behind him, so close that he could feel her trembling.

"You're asking for it," said Hurley. "I'm telling you, Mac, we've been waiting long enough."

"Beat it," Bev ordered. "I told you what I did with the picture; it isn't in the house."

"We'll soon find out," said Hurley, scowling. "Come on, Nick. That screwy rodney he's got is only a bluff."

They started for him.

The stubby old gun in Bev's hand went off with a yapping report

that echoed through the hall. Baen and Hurley fell back with a yell, and with the next shot responded by taking flight. Glass shattered in the front door and the bullet smacked into the stone under the steps. When the two mobsters flung the door open, Hurley's arm dangled. He had been nipped through the shoulder, and it was his gun that banged to the floor.

Bev waited in the recess with Margaret until he was sure there was no danger, then retrieved the automatic.

He proceeded to make drinks immediately in the apartment and set them on the coffee-table in front of the big sofa in the rear room, sat down with her.

"Are you going to call the police?" she asked.

"No." He shook his head.

"But they sounded as though they meant it. About laying for you."

"Just have to wait until it happens, if it does."

"No, I don't think it will. I don't think we'll ever see them again."

"I've got a gun of theirs, and they

will never find out whether I sent it in and the police are trying to trace the serial number."

"Did you really mean it when you said you'd kill one of them?"

"Why, yes. You were standing right behind me, and if they shot me the bullet would have gone right through and gotten you. Look, Margaret, I want to tell you something."

"I know what it is." She took his hand, put it around herself and held it. "You really haven't got any picture."

"For that matter, I haven't any camera, just that rig with the flashbulb. How'd you figure that out?"

"I was thinking about it on the way down in the cab, when I was looking at a sign flashing on and off. Right after the flashbulb went off last night, you got out of bed and turned on the lights here. The light would have gotten into the camera and spoiled the picture, if you had one."

She stirred closer and laid her hand against his chest. Deliciously wet from sipping the drink, her lips were ready.



# SPECIAL KILL

*To find the little men in the racket was easy enough. But to get at the master mind behind it all was a different matter until Lady Luck stepped in and Death picked a posy!*



ORCHY SEARS tossed typewritten papers on the district attorney's desk. He took off his battered crusher and ran his fingers through hair the red of a Hamlet fright wig and his broad face screwed complainingly.

"There's the low on a half dozen service spots for slot machines and pin games," he grunted. "And don't look pleased. I'm no wiser as to the identity of the guy behind all this than I was before. Look! When I cleaned up the mess for the D.A. in Wingro, I got the guy behind the guns. I figured the same would hold when you sent for me to come to Jubra City. And what have I done to earn my dough?"

Powers, the D.A., grinned. "I heard you were the biggest griper and bellyacher running loose," he said. "What have you done? You've given us information we couldn't even smell before. Gambling joints, one-arm bandit and pinball set-ups that were causing a lot of men to be



# By JOHN WAYNE

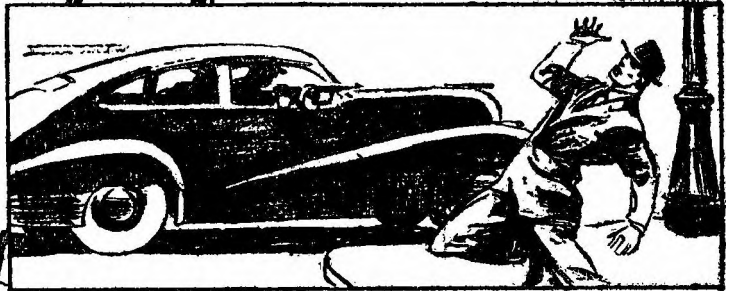
taken for rides; causing good citizens to be killed."

Powers shook his head. "I admit it's mighty strange we can't get a line on the man behind all this; nobody talks, because nobody seems to know a thing. But you'll learn, Torchy. You'll get him." He added warningly, "If somebody doesn't get you first. Be careful."

"Aw," Torchy griped, "nobody knows who I am or what I do." He slapped his dilapidated hat askew atop his head and moved to the door. "And I still say," he beefed as he went out, "I'm not earning my dough."

He moved slowly down the street away from City Hall, hands shoved

She said, "But I want you to like me." It looked then as if the big shot was getting interested.



into topcoat pockets, a sour look on his pan. He stopped at a corner where wind whipped around a tall building and spent a thoughtful five minutes watching blondes and brunettes and assorted redheads grab at skirts and hats.

"And me, I haven't met a girl I

could go for in this town," Torchy complained to himself. "Or one that'd go for me. I need a drink, and even the liquor you get these days is bum."

On a street close to the downtown district, Torchy went into the Chester Apartments and up to his own diggings on the fifth floor. He walked into his littered living room, hung his hat and coat on the floor at the end of the divan, and turned toward his bottle in the kitchenette.

He stopped, then, and frowned, his right hand sliding under his coat and gripping the Police Special in its armpit holster. He listened, head thrust forward, jaw squared pugnaciously, eyes hard and meaning. He didn't seem the same man at all.

He moved catfooted on the balls of his feet, pushed open the door to his bedroom, and stood staring through the partly opened door of his bathroom a few feet away.

Steam floated over a shower curtain and made a sort of thick dreamy cloud in the bathroom. Even through the steam and the curtain, Torchy knew somehow that the figure inside was that of a woman. He felt his palm go moist on the butt of his revolver.

And then she emerged, wrapped in Torchy's enormous bathrobe.

The girl seemed to sense Torchy's bug-eyed stare. She looked up. Her red lips parted, her eyes got very wide and she made a hasty, natural pass at her blond hair.

"Get out of here!" she commanded.

"That's nice," Torchy said. "You bust into my place, take a shower and then tell me to get out!"

She frowned. "Your place? But

it can't be. It was the apartment of a friend of mine. I'm supposed to take it over today. I got here early, got a pass key and came on up."

"You came on up," Torchy admitted, coming over to lean on the door casing. "But you're in the wrong doggone flat."

She shook her head. "I couldn't be," she insisted. "This is four-twenty."

"You skipped a flight," Torchy informed her. "This is five-twenty. Look on the door and see."

THE girl padded barefooted into the living room, opened the door and looked at the number. "Ohhh!" she said and slammed it. She turned to Torchy, her cheeks flaming.

"I don't know what to say. What must you think of me?"

"If you insist," he answered, "I'd say I think you're fine company and swell to look at. But," gloomily, "I suppose you'll beat it now, without even having a drink with me."

"Think I will? After you've been so decent? Not this gal; not Essie Locke." She sat down on the divan and smiled up at him.

Torchy spluttered, tripped on his own feet as he turned, and almost ran to the kitchenette.

The girl was smoking one of his cigarettes when he came back to the living room. She patted the divan beside her, took the drink he handed her and said: "Sit down. Since you know so much about me and we'll be neighbors, we might as well know things. I didn't get your name."

"Torchy Sears," he said, blinking as she downed her drink in one long gulp. It was a stiff one, too. He moved over until they were close to-

gether. "As for knowing so much about you, I don't know enough."

She crushed out her cigarette, and squirmed around until she almost faced him. "No!" she whispered. "Not yet. I'll get dressed and go now. Before we get too well acquainted on first notice, I want you to think nicely of me."

"That's the kind of things that happen to me!" Torchy growled. He downed his drink and rammed out to mix another. Bent above his little sink, however, he ceased to gripe. He grinned slowly. "Something tells me the guy I want is getting interested and suspects what my job in Jubra City is. That dame—Nuts! Women don't make mistakes like that."

Essie Locke came out of the bedroom. She was dressed like a million bucks, with expensive furs over the collar of her tailored suit jacket. She had her second drink. Said, "I'll be lonely in this place the first night. And there's a good floor show at the Red Road Club."

"I've been there once or twice. Twice. Tonight will be the third time and the best time," Torchy said.

**T**HE Red Road Club wasn't too expensive or expansive; it was no dive. Dimple—"Dimp"—Waugh owned the Red Road and conducted his own orchestra. Had, since the Red Road's previous owner was found dead with three bullets in him a year before.

Torchy knew these things. He'd investigated Dimp Waugh's place as a matter of routine. No gambling; bouncers to bust brawlers . . . just a night club and that was all.

Dimp Waugh came to Torchy's table when the orchestra finished the next number. He smiled, showing the big dimple in his left cheek and said, "Hello, Essie. You working now?"

"Mr. Sears, Mr. Waugh," said Essie. "Nope. Not going to. Remember that aunt of mine? One I told you about? She died and I got the dough." She looked at Torchy. "I used to sing for Dimp. In Los Angeles. Come around and see me sometime, Dimp."

She wrote her address on a menu and handed it to him. Dimp Waugh bowed, said, "I'll do that. . . . Watch the little black haired pony do the next number." He went back to the orchestra.

A baby spot hit the dance floor as the lights went out. Torchy wasn't paying much attention. He couldn't figure why Essie Locke had brought him here; nor the by-play—if it *was* by-play—between Dimp Waugh and the girl.

And then Torchy forgot everything but the soft voice that brought him around in his chair. "I've got something for, yooou," it said. In a way that got into a man's spinal column and made him tingle from head to foot. It dragged at a guy and made him feel the owner of the voice meant just him and him alone.

Torchy stared. Feminine dynamite wrapped in a five-foot-three bundle was moving with the spotlight. Her black hair was close bobbed and fitted a shapely head. A skimpy, goofy kind of tight costume fitted her like skin.

Torchy's heart skipped six beats, because the girl was coming toward him now, looking straight into his eyes. "I've got something, I've got a lot, I've got everything for you," she sang in a whisper. And leaned, brushing her lips lightly against Torchy's. She whirled away while the crowd applauded and Torchy's face turned red.

"I'll have to watch you," Essie Locke said laughingly.

Dimp Waugh walked back to their table. Torchy said, "You didn't have to sic her onto me. What's her name?"

"Nalda Ruane," Dimp Waugh said. And then gruffly, "I didn't sic her onto you." He eyed Torchy thinly, then drew a mask of forced affability across his face.

"He goes for her himself, I guess," Torchy commented when Dimp Waugh again returned to his orchestra.

Essie Locke's face assumed a harshness that startled him.

"Dimp always was a fool," she snapped. She drained her glass. An alert waiter came forward and leaned over near Torchy as he filled Essie's glass.

"Boy's room," he hissed in Torchy's ear.

**T**ORCHY lit a cigarette, pressed his left arm down to get the comforting feel of his gun, pushed back his chair, and grinned at Essie and said, "When you gotta go," and went out.

The waiter was waiting for him. With pencil and paper and an envious look. "She wants your address," he whispered. "Miss Ruane, I mean. You must have something

nobody else's got, because she's never had a thing to do with a guy before. She even holds Dimp at the end of her little finger."

Torchy's lips set in a thin line. A man would sure get dizzy trying to figure out this set-up, he allowed. Okay, they were getting wise to him. Why Dimp Waugh and these two girls were putting on this show, he didn't know; and who they worked for, Torchy couldn't guess.

"I'll play," he said, and gave the waiter his address.

"I'm ready to go home," Essie told him when he returned to her table. She scowled over at Waugh as Torchy helped her on with her wrap and there was an angry frounce to her walk as they went out.

Back at the Chester, Essie said, "Take me to my own apartment, Torchy. I'm tired." She gave him a quick kiss and added, "Maybe I'll want to take another shower tomorrow—dear."

"And maybe I'm all wet and don't know it," Torchy grunted as he let himself into his own place and mixed himself a drink.

He removed his coat, put his gun on an end table by the divan, and stretched himself out so he could watch the door. His telephone rang. "Can't even rest," he grumbled, getting up. He lifted the receiver. A guarded voice said, "D.A., Torchy. Our men worked on the stuff you left me this morning. The warehouse was full of pinball machines worth a fortune. We got the Club Illona, too. Two wheels and a craps layout and five men."

"Yeah? And not a one of them knew a thing!" Torchy said.

"They really don't know, Torchy.



That's plain. Somebody is slick enough to keep his organization ignorant. No one part knows about the other, or who's jamming things."

Torchy grunted sourly and hung up.

He went back to the divan and stretched out. The hours dragged. Still no Nalda Ruane. Torchy dozed;

then slept. And awakened with morning sunlight streaming into the room. He cursed himself for a fool, showered and shaved, and started out for breakfast. The elevator door, as he punched the "Down" button, opened in his face and a luggage-laden taxi driver bumped into him.

Torchy opened his mouth to swear and kept it open with surprise. Nalda Ruane, chic in a funny little hat and tight wool dress smiled at him. Torchy stepped back, shaking his head at the elevator boy. The cage went down, stopped at four, started back up. Torchy wasn't watching the indicator over the bank. He was watching Nalda Ruane.

She lowered long lashes and said,

"I'm moving in, you see. The number is five-thirty-two, in case you'd like to know."

She was turning away when the elevator door again opened. Essie Locke stepped out. She seemed to freeze as she glared at Nalda Ruane. She eyed Torchy thinly.

"You two had met before last night?" she snapped.

"No, dearie," Nalda said sweetly. "But last night was enough." She went on down the hall, singing, "I've got *everything* for yooooou."

Essie turned and punched the elevator bell. "That's nerve," she stormed. "If she thinks she's going to cut me out, she's nuts. Take me to breakfast, Torchy. Your shower bath gal's hungry."

"Yeah," thought Torchy gloomily. "For my blood."

He was puzzled. The enmity Essie held for Nalda Ruane was real. And yet, Torchy would have bet his life—was betting it—both girls and Dimp Waugh were part of a frame to get him. He wouldn't be the first district attorney's investigator to be "gotten" in Jubra City in the past two hectic years.

He fed Essie's face, returned her to her apartment, and went on to the fifth floor. His steps took him toward Nalda's apartment.

**D**OWNSTAIRS, Essie was busy on the telephone.

"Dimp," she snarled. "Get over here."

She yanked the door savagely and snapped, "Step in, sap!" when Dimp Waugh arrived. He came in demanding, "What's gotten into you, Toots?"

"Nalda Ruane," Essie spat. "I

told you to lay off when you gave her a job."

"She draws trade," Dimp answered.

"She drew you," Essie grunted. "And she's fooled you. Know where she is now? Right upstairs and down the hall from Torchy Sears. Moved in this morning. You like that? Huh?"

Dimp Waugh showed the unmasked face of the deeply dangerous man. "Nalda's just fallen for him," he snarled.

"If that's all, don't let it worry you," Essie jeered. "Because you aren't giving me the air for any other dame. After all I've done."

"You haven't found out anything about him yet," Dimp pointed out sullenly.

"I think I've found out enough. Look what happened last night at the Illona Club and the warehouse. Look at the other places that've been knocked over. And this red-headed guy's been around every place that's been knocked off."

"I've called the boys. From outside. Did it last night," Dimp Waugh growled. "Make it the same old thing. Let him smell flowers."

"Not because you're sure he's working for the D.A.," Essie sniffed. "Because the Ruane frail's gone for him."

"You're crazy," Waugh growled. "She's nothing in my life."

"She'd better not be," Essie Locke warned. For spite, she added, "I'll bet Torchy Sears is upstairs with her now."

She'd have won that bet. Torchy was in Nalda Ruane's little living room, seated on a divan, a drink in his hand. In a chair facing him,

knees almost touching his, Nalda Ruane sat and smiled.

She set down her glass and inquired archly, "You like me?"

"Uh-huh."

"Better than that blonde?"

"You bet!"

She leaned nearer him. "Torchy," she almost sobbed in her earnestness, "you've got to like me! I've got to have your confidence!"

SHE was trembling, and she was desperately urgent when she stated, "Torchy, you're the district attorney's man!"

The words were like ice water down Torchy's back. He sat up straight and a dark look clouded his face.

"You've got to tell me, Torchy," Nalda begged. "I was pretty sure of it when I saw Essie Locke bring you in the Red Road Club. You just met her, I'd bet. Under odd circumstances."

"She was in my shower bath," Torchy muttered.

He was trying to learn what Nalda was getting at.

"They're the same two. I know it!" Nalda cried. "Torchy, I can't tell you what I mean unless you tell me who you are. You are an investigator for the D.A., aren't you? If you weren't, Essie Locke and Dimp Waugh wouldn't be spotting you. If you are and they didn't suspect it, Essie Locke wouldn't have showed up in your bath and made a play for you."

Torchy rose. "It's hard for me to hate you," he ground out. "And I'll admit but one thing: this is too deep for me. I don't like things that are too deep. So you can tell

whoever you're working for that I said 'go jump in the lake!'"

"Torchy!" the girl cried. The door slammed and she heard his angry footfalls receding up the hall.

NALDA hurried to her bedroom and began getting ready to go out. While Torchy Sears slammed into his own apartment, just in time to turn around and open his door again. He stepped back. Essie Locke, shaking her head sadly, came in and stood very close to him. She leaned against him now, her arms stealing up, going around his neck.

"I saw you come out of her apartment," Essie muttered. "Torchy, aren't I your shower bath girl any more?"

"Are you?" he demanded, wondering what her next move was to be.

"Of course I am," she insisted, holding her head against his chest that he might not see the venomous look his indifference inspired. She raised her arm and looked at her wrist-watch.

"I've got to go, Torchy. I just wanted to be sure you are mine. If you are," brightly, "you'll meet me as soon as I get a manicure. I'm due at the beauty parlor now. Meet me—oh, in front of the drug store at Ames and Main."

She smiled deeply and dropped her hands to the belt of the dress she was wearing, "wear this so I'll know you, sweets."

She unpinned a miniature corsage from the belt. A tiny rose-bud, a pink sweetpea, a little yellow flower Torchy could not name were wound together with a bit of orchid ribbon. He stood still while Essie pulled the

wrapped stems through the button-hole of his coat lapel.

"You'll be sure and wear it, to prove you love me?"

Torchy nodded. It occurred to him that Essie Locke might just be in love with him, and had nothing to do with Nalda Ruane and Dimp Waugh. He pulled Essie to him, kissed her, and went into the hall.

**D**OWN in Nalda's apartment, Nalda Ruane was facing Dimp Waugh. "You accuse me of coming here because of Sears," she pouted. "Well, I'll tell you the truth. I came because I'm jealous of you and that Essie Locke. Don't tell me that you haven't been seeing her!"

She had Waugh, who'd slipped into her apartment after Essie had gone to Torchy's, on the defensive now, "Nalda," he protested. "It's not so. I love you, and you've stood me off. Why didn't you tell me you were interested?"

"To keep you more interested," she told him coyly. She was close to her door. She heard a woman's footsteps in the hallway; heard the elevator door clang shut. Waugh was coming toward her, saying, "Nalda, kiss me—and then I've got to go. A little business, and then I'll be right back."

A flicker of fear was a brief spasm on her face.

"Wait just a minute," she begged. "I just remembered I'd forgotten to tell the elevator boy about a package I'm having delivered. Wait a minute and you'll get that kiss. Fix us a couple of drinks. I'll be right back."

She closed the door behind her, waited briefly until she was sure that

Waugh wasn't going to look out after her, then ran on tiptoes to Torchy's door.

"Torchy—don't shut me out," she begged when he opened his door, stiffened, scowled down at her. "I just came to see you a moment."

Her little mouth set grimly, her eyes narrowed at sight of Torchy's oddly-assorted boutonniere.

"Torchy, I guess I won't see you again," she almost sobbed. "Give me this to keep, always, so I'll remember you."

She reached up quickly, snatched the flowers from his lapel, turned and hurried back down the hallway.

Waugh had drinks mixed and was waiting impatiently. Nalda Ruane concealed her flowers in one hand and said, "Just a minute," went into another room and came back, showing the boutonniere openly.

"Some flowers for your button-hole so people will know your love is mine," she laughed, and put them in his buttonhole. Waugh paid scant attention to that, but grabbed her, bent, kissed her. He was breathing hard when he stepped back, lifted his drink, downed it and said, "I wish I had more time now. I'll attend to business and come right back."

"I pray not!" exclaimed Nalda as she watched him go out. She rubbed her lips with a handkerchief to wipe away his kiss.

**T**ORCHY walked toward the corner of Ames and Main.

"That Nalda's nuts," he griped. "Now I got to make up a lie to Essie about losing those posies." He almost bumped a lamp post, walking head down as he was. He decided he'd better look ahead. He found



himself walking a quarter block behind Dimp Waugh. He knew it was Dimp when the man turned his head and showed his dimple as he gave a passing red-headed girl the eye.

Waugh was walking fast. He was close to Dimp Waugh when they got to Ames and Main.

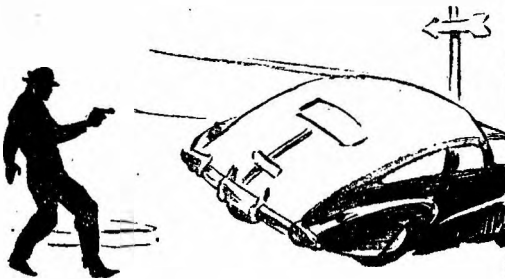
Things—a lot of things—happened then. A low, long sedan with license plates smeared so as to be unreadable, clashed gears and then started pulling out from the curbstone toward swiftly-moving traffic. A window was lowered, the barrel of a sub-machine-gun stuck from the car and began to chatter a murderous, hellish tone.

Torchy noted these things automatically as he dragged his gun and sprinted forward. He dropped to one knee and leveled the gun over his upraised left forearm. He saw people scatter, heard a woman scream, saw a fat man jump through a plateglass window of the drug store.

And he saw, as he squeezed the trigger, Dimp Waugh spin half around, a horrible look of surprise and pain and awareness of death in-

delible on his twisting face. Waugh was down in the gutter now. And Torchy Sears was firing at an angle into the murder car's opened window. The machine swerved, side-swiped a bus, rocked up and rolled over on its side. Torchy came to his feet and, gun thrust before him, ran to the car.

While police whistles began shrilling, and then a prowler car's siren be-



Her singing voice was only a whisper, but it was husky, vibrant, compelling.



gan sounding in the distance, Torchy looked inside the car. One of the two men in there would never ride again, save in a hearse. A bullet had caught him squarely behind the ear. The other one was out, cold. Torchy stepped back.

A half dozen cops pounded up. Torchy reached into his pocket, revealed a tiny badge and muttered, "I'll report to Powers. I don't want to show in this."

He pushed through the mass of people around the car and into another mass surrounding the riddled thing that a few moments before had been Dimp Waugh. Hands in pockets, he stared at Dimp, and slowly, very slowly, Torchy realized what it was held his attention most: A yellow flower he couldn't name, a sweet pea and a tiny rose-bud. All wrapped 'round with an orchid ribbon and thrust in Waugh's button-hole.

"It's the same one Nalda took from me!" Torchy swore. He moved out, stopped a cab and headed back to the Chester full speed ahead.

He stopped on four, tried the knob, walked in.

Essie Locke hadn't moved in much baggage, he now knew. Because in this short time, the apartment was empty and Essie Locke was gone.

Torchy took the stairs two at a time, slammed into his own place and grabbed the telephone. "Powers? . . . You just heard? . . . Put out a grab on Essie Locke, blonde, about —Yeah. And call me back right away."

He pronged the receiver, a stride took him to the door and he yanked it open in Nalda Ruane's face. Torchy said "Swell!" grabbed her,

yanked her inside, and locked the door.

"Torchy!" she cried when he turned to her. "You're safe. Did Waugh—"

"If you mean get shot, he did! And the posies you took from me were on his coat. Bigod, you cough up clean!"

"You are a D.A. investigator," she stated.

"All right," he snarled savagely. "I am."

SHE shuddered, came timidly to him and buried her face against his coat. "I asked you if you were before, so I wouldn't tell things on the wrong people—even if I thought I was sure for myself. You see, Torchy, you were marked to die when they learned what you were. That's why Essie Locke came after you. Torchy, in Los Angeles, over two years ago, my brother was an investigator, too.

"He was shot and killed, and he had an odd little nosegay in his buttonhole. I knew he'd been seeing a blonde, whose husband conducted an orchestra and owned a night club. I've been trailing them as best I could, and I was sure Waugh and Essie were the ones. When I saw you marked for murder with those flowers—I did what I did. I couldn't tell you about them then, not being certain you were the law. Waugh didn't notice. A man never does. Didn't notice I put on him the posies Essie had marked you with. Torchy, does that make me a murderer?"

"It—it makes you a lifesaver!" exploded Torchy Sears.

He spun toward the ringing telephone. Powers' voice came to him. A

voice filled with extreme elation and no little perplexity.

"We checked fast, grabbed the Locke dame, got into Waugh's safety deposit box and talked to the mugg—some—that was in the car that was wrecked."

"Yeah?" said Torchy.

"Yes. The man behind all our rackets was Waugh, Torchy! He worked smoothly. When he wanted a man killed, he sent away for killers, never saw them, talked to them

only by telephone, and put the victim on the spot by marking him some way. This 'time, the Locke dame swears, you were to get it by being marked with a boutonniere. How did Waugh come to be wearing one like that?"

"That," said Torchy, "is a long story. I'll make a report on it," he winked at Nalda Ruane, "later on. I'm busy now. G'bye."

He was grinning as he turned to Nalda. He held out his arms.

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# Glass House



HE WAS unendurably sleepy. But they wouldn't let him close his smarting, red-rimmed eyes even for an instant. Every time he tried it, they slapped him wide awake again; or else they grasped a fistful of his

touseled yellow hair, jerked his aching head far back and sloshed ice-water at his haggard face.

They kept hammering questions at him. Their voices drummed on his consciousness like sharp hail. For thirty consecutive hours they'd been at him, giving him no rest.



"Call off your dogs, or I'll break her neck!" he threatened.

# Killer

By  
**FRANK DECKER**

*Although he swore he didn't know the gangster, all the facts made him an accessory. Yet, even with all his own troubles, he worried even more about his kid brother—particularly since he was in love with his brother's sweetheart*

They worked in shifts, these Headquarters Homicide detectives. Every couple of hours a new crew would take over. Then Dr. Jonathan Lane would be propped up straighter in his chair; the glaring lights would be adjusted to shine more fiendishly in his burning eyes. The monotonous grind of interrogation would be resumed, drilling away at his raw and screaming nerves like a dentist's burr whining into a tortured tooth:

"You took those slugs out of Butch Moski's guts! Don't deny it!"



"I never saw Butch Moski," Lane reiterated wearily, his voice a croaking whisper.

"You lie!"

"I'm not lying. I don't know the man."

"Baloney! Next you'll be telling us you don't know that he and his mob petered the Second National vault to the tune of a hundred and seventy grand."

"Yes, I know that much. You've said it often enough."

"The bank's night watchman got bumped!"

"You've told me that, too."

"Don't interrupt! The watchman shot two bullets into Moski's belly—and lived long enough to tell us about it when we answered the alarm."

"I don't know anything about it."

"Come clean, Doc! Moski's hoods brought him straight to your surgery. A neighbor saw the car parked outside your door, got suspicious and phoned us."

"The neighbor made a mistake."

"Yeah? Don't hand us that! How much did Moski pay you to patch him up?"

"He didn't pay me anything."

"Oh. So you did the job free, huh?"

"I didn't do any job. I never saw Moski. He didn't come to my surgery." Lane wanted to shriek out the denial, but he hadn't enough strength. If they'd only let him sleep a few minutes!

**SLEEP!** The need of it pressed in on him like the weight of water at five hundred fathoms. He'd been up all night attending a difficult confinement in the slum district; a

charity case. On returning home, the police had picked him up, brought him here to Headquarters, started firing their broadsides at him. Now his tongue felt thick and furry and useless; his muscles thrummed and throbbed with utter fatigue. Again he closed his eyes. A heavy hand splatted across his cheek, jarring him and almost splitting the skin along his unshaven jaw.

"Wake up!"

"I'm awake."

"You say Moski's gang never came near your surgery?"

"That's right."

"How do you know? You claim you were out on a call."

"I don't know. Not really. What I meant to say was I never saw Moski or his mob."

"You can't get away with that, Doc!"

"It's true."

"And yet we found the two slugs in a pan on your surgical table! They match up with the rifling in the dead watchman's roscoe."

"Well?"

"Those bullets came out of Butch Moski and you know it! You took 'em out of him!"

"I didn't. I don't know anything except that I was on a confinement case. Get in touch with the Angostino family. I've told you their address. They'll back me up. I delivered Mrs. Angostino of twins."

"Yeah, sure. We already checked that."

"Then why do you keep on torturing me?"

"Because we know it was a charity case. You pulled Mrs. Angostino through a bad time. And you didn't charge her a dime."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"She and her husband would lie their souls away to give you an alibi, that's what of it!"

"You're insane!"

"Nuts! It's the Angostino's way of paying your fee. We're not taking their word that you were in their house the whole night. You left early. Early enough to get back to your surgery and be there when Moski showed up leaking like a sieve. You dug the slugs out of him, sent him on his way, and then went back to the Angostino dump."

Lane gripped the arms of his chair until his knuckles showed white. "I didn't!"

"Quit giving us the needle, Doc! We've got you dead to rights! Turn state's evidence and it won't go so tough with you."

"How can I turn state's evidence when I don't know anything?"

"We'll even give you a nice bed to sleep on. Think of it. A soft mattress. Plenty of pillows. A swell blanket, fluffy and warm—"

"It would be heaven!"

"Open your glims. Now look: if you treated Moski, you must know where he's hiding out. He'd tell you, because he'd expect you to call and see him, change his bandages, take care of his wounds. Where's his hangout? That's all we're asking."

"If I knew, I'd tell you. But I don't know. For Pete's sake, let me alone!"

**B**UT they wouldn't let him alone. Another shift came on duty, started roaring at him again. His rebellious sinews twitched and jumped as if with palsy. His head seemed

full of booming drums. The dazzling lights blinded him, bored into his brain like white-hot scalpels probing. He was desperately fagged, fast approaching the breaking point. And he mustn't break, he told himself. If he cracked, he might tell what he knew—or rather, what he suspected. . . .

For Jeff's sake he mustn't do that. For Jeff's sake, and Myrna's, he must keep his wits sharp and his tongue still. "I don't know anything!" he said stubbornly.

Then something happened. A uniformed man walked into the room, drew Lane's interrogators aside. There was a hurried, whispered conference; somebody mentioned a writ of habeas corpus, a bail bond that had been posted. Dazed, as if swimming up out of a nightmare, Lane heard himself told that he was free to go home; that the questioning was over. Like a drunken man he shambled from the room, into a corridor. He saw Myrna standing there waiting for him.

"Oh-h-h, Jonnie . . . Jonnie . . . !" she whispered; and she put her arms around him comfortingly.

Myrna Dartmouth was Jeff's sweetheart; and Jeff was Jonathan Lane's kid brother, whom he had put through school and medical college and who was now an interne at Mercy Hospital. But for a single blissful instant, Jonathan Lane forgot that Myrna's love belonged to his brother. As always when he saw her, a lump came into his throat and a surging tenderness filled his veins.

"Myrna!" he mumbled.

She was dainty and fragile and golden-haired, supple and lithe and altogether feminine. Her eyes were

blue stars, her lips crimson buds brimming with the dew of unspent kisses. The fragrance of her hair somehow seemed to blend with the mellow tinkle of her voice as she said: "Jonnie, Jonnie, what have they done to you. . . .?"

Then he remembered that she was Jeff's sweetheart. He drew back, forced a wry smile. "They sweated me a little," he confessed. Then, anxiously: "Where's Jeff? And how did you get me out of this?"

Her coupe was parked outside. She helped him into it; slid under the steering-wheel. Driving, she answered: "As soon as I heard, I located an attorney and put him to work getting you released on bond. Jonnie, you—you look like a ghost."

"Where's Jeff?" he persisted.

"I d-don't know. It's all so very strange. . . . When I learned that you'd been arrested, I tried to contact him at the hospital. He wasn't there. They said it was his week-end off duty. And he wasn't at the house, either. I can't locate him anywhere . . ."

AS A FOG is dissipated before driving winds, the leaden desire for sleep rolled from the crevices of Lane's brain and vanished; tense alertness replaced it. Jeff was in trouble; he knew it, sensed it intuitively.

"Take me home, Myrna," he said quietly, striving to keep from his voice any hint of the thing he was thinking. He must not unduly worry this childlike girl whom he secretly adored. . . .

"Aren't you g-going to try to find Jeff?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes. But first take me home."

He must look around his house, his surgery; maybe he would find some clue, some message that Jeff might have left for him.

"You d-don't think anything's . . . happened to Jeff?" Myrna faltered.

"Of course not." Lane tried to inject a carefree casualness into his manner; the effort was not wholly successful. And then, as Myrna's little coupe rounded a corner and approached Lane's house, he saw something—

He saw his brother Jeff and an overrouged, overdressed brunette girl getting into a sedan; pulling away. Jeff was carrying an instrument case; moved slowly, with seeming reluctance. Or so it appeared to Dr. Jonathan Lane.

Lane stiffened. "Stop the car, Myrna. Get out. Give me the wheel." He wondered if she, too, had seen Jeff and that black-haired woman.

She had. Her eyes were narrowed. "I'm going to follow that sedan!"

Lane reached for the ignition-key, switched it off. "I said get out!" he snapped. He was harsh, domineering. "Get out before I throw you out, Myrna."

She started to protest. He leaped from the stalled coupe, grasped her wrist, twisted it cruelly. She wailed with pain—and came out of the coupe at his savage tug. "Jonnie—please! You're h-hurting me. . . .!"

He gave her a shove that sent her stumbling to the sidewalk. He hated himself for the act, but there was no other way. He bounced back into the little car, stepped on the starter. With Myrna's whimpering cry still ringing in his ears, he gunned





out after the sedan in which his brother rode.

He knew he was heading into danger. But he knew also that Jeff was already in peril. It *had* to be that way. Jeff was in a tight spot; needed help. Lane needed no other urging . . .

He trailed the sedan carefully, barely keeping it in view—but never

He tried to thrust her to safety, but she was already in that hail of bullets.

allowing it completely out of his sight. The chase was tortuous, winding its way deviously to an ultimate destination in the suburbs: a commonplace cottage in a subdivision row, marked by scabrous and patchy lawns, an occasional tattered trellis. The larger car stopped; Jeff and the brunette girl alighted, went into the house.

Lane parked a half-block away, waited three minutes, then went forward on foot. He reached the bungalow into which Jeff had gone. He rang the bell.

It was a long while before the door was opened by the dark-haired woman. At closer inspection she proved more mature-looking than Lane had first thought her. Her eyes were hard, her lips marked by the hint of suspicion. "Well?" she asked coldly.

Lane contrived a smile, knowing and brazen. "I've come to take over from my brother."

"Your brother—?"

"He's treating Moski. But he's not well-enough equipped for taking care of serious gunshot wounds. He's just an interne. I'm an established surgeon. Moski needs me—and I need the fee."

The brunette girl paled beneath her rouge. She backed three steps into the house, reached down for the hem of her skirt. There was a small automatic strapped to her leg. She pointed the weapon at Lane. "Come in, copper—and keep your hands high!" she grated.

He followed her, closing the door behind him. "You've got me wrong. I'm no copper. I'm Dr. Lane."

"Whoever you are, you know too much!" she snapped. She called:

"Spider—Conky—come here!"

Lane dived at her, grabbed for the automatic. It was a desperate move; a foolhardy move. Before he could wrench the gun from her hand, two thugs came at him from the living-room to his left. One of them raised a blackjack, brought it whistling down in a savage arc.

It kissed off the side of Lane's skull, felled him to his knees like a polled steer. Blasting pain shot through him, paralyzed him. On all fours, he shook his head viciously to clear away the thrumming darkness that tried to close in on him. The floor rocked and swayed drunkenly beneath his knees.

He was jerked upright, supported on either side by the two gorillas. They dragged him into a bedroom at the rear of the bungalow. Its shades were tightly drawn; unshaded incandescents glared brightly overhead. Through a swimming haze that blurred his vision, Lane saw a thick-necked, pock-faced man lying in bed. Over him, both hands full of bandages, stood Lane's kid brother.

Jeff stared. "Jonnie—!"

**T**HE man in bed was unquestionably the wounded Butch Moski. He rasped: "Who's this guy?"

"He's my brother," Jeff answered slowly, as if dazed.

Lane nodded, drew himself together. "I'm Dr. Lane. And you're Moski. I came to see about those bullet-wounds."

"Who asked you?" Moski snarled. He looked at Jeff. "Did you spill your guts, you punk? Was that why you asked us to let you go back to your joint after more tools? Blast you to hell, I'll—!"

The brunette girl interrupted. "Wait a minute, Butch. The guy didn't have a chance to leave any message or talk to anybody. I was with him every minute he was in his house—and I had my rod on him."

"Then how—?"

Lane spoke quietly. "Take it easy, all of you. The police arrested me for operating on you, Moski."

"Arrested *you*?"

"Yes. They found two bullets in my surgery; bullets that matched the Second National watchman's gun. Naturally, they thought I must be the doctor who'd probed them out of your wounds."

"Yeah? So what?"

"So I knew the answer right away. I realized that you must have been brought to my place—and that my brother happened to be there during my absence. He took care of you."

"You spilled that to the bulls?"

"Certainly not. I waited until I was released; then I went home. I happened to see Jeff and this young lady leaving in a sedan. I followed. And here I am."

"Yeah. Here you are. But why?"

"Because I didn't trust Jeff with a gunshot-wound case. He's just an inexperienced kid; you can see that for yourself. I figured he'd need help."

"You're lyin'! Now come clean. Why didja come here?"

"Okay," Lane shrugged. "I came because I wanted a slice of the gravy. I'm a better doctor than Jeff. I'm worth more to your mob than he is."

Jeff strode forward, white-faced, shaking. "Curse you, Jonnie—you've butted into my business once too often!" he roared bitterly. His tone

shocked Jonathan Lane. Jeff had never spoken to him that way before; not in all his life.

"Listen, Jeff—" he said.

"Listen, nuts! You think I'm satisfied with the dough I make as a lousy hospital interne? You think I want to waste the next ten years of my life establishing a practice? Nuts! When they brought Moski into your place, I saw my chance to climb into the heavy sugar right away. Now you're trying to chisel a cut for yourself. Well, you won't get it, see? There's ten grand in this for me. Enough to pay for a swell honeymoon for Myrna and me. You'll keep your beak out of it."

Jeff turned to Moski. "Tell your guys to tie him up for a while. You can't afford to let him get away from here and spill his guts to the law. You'll have to hold him until you're well enough to lam with the boys."

Moski nodded on his pillow. "Yeah. Put him in the attic, you bozos. An' see that he stays there."

Lane felt a cold fury ripping through his heart at Jeff's callous ingratitude for all he'd done to put him through school . . . "You young whelp! Do you think Myrna would touch a cent of the money these people will pay you?"

"Sure. What does she care where the dough comes from—as long as I get it?"

**F**ROM the doorway a soft, mel-  
low voice said: "You're quite wrong, Jeff Lane. And quite despicable. I'm through with you."

It was Myrna Dartmouth. She had hailed a passing taxi, followed Lane as he trailed the sedan. She

had found the bungalow's front door open, walked in—and overheard the conversation. Now, foolishly, she showed herself; emotional stress had undermined her judgment.

Moski cursed, hurled an order at his hoods. One of them left Lane, went to her, grabbed her roughly. He patted her, seeking weapons. Finding none, he said: "What'll I do with this jane, boss?"

The wounded mob-leader's face writhed with fury. "We'll knock her off. Her an' this other buttinski. Soon as it's dark. Take 'em for a ride. Too many people are findin' out where we're holed up. We gotta make sure they don't belch!"

Myrna tried to fight free of the gorilla who held her. She twisted and fought furiously. "Jeff—!" she panted. "You can't let them do this to me—to your own brother—"

"He tried to chisel in. And you said yourself, you were through with me. Why should I worry? I'm looking out for Number One!"

It was more than Jonathan Lane could stand. Seeing that leering thug put his hands on Myrna, he went berserk. He jerked away from the crook who held him; went plunging forward like an unleashed fury. But as he bashed at the thug who pinioned Myrna, the brunette gun-moll threw herself at him and blocked his way.

He grappled with her, jerked her around, gripped her from behind. His free right hand, with its surgeon's strong and spatulate fingers, felt for and found a certain spot at the nape of her neck. He roared: "You—Moski! Listen to me! If you don't call off your dogs, I'll kill

your sweetie—understand? She dies unless you let Jeff and Myrna out of here unmolested! My hand is right over this woman's odontoid peg and atlas vertebra; a sharp blow will fracture that connection, block her windpipe, cause asphyxia. She'll choke to death. It won't be a pretty sight. If you think anything of her, you'd better deal with me. I'm telling you!"

Moski propped himself up in the bed, groaned as the movement sent pain through his punctured midriff. "To blazes with you!" he snarled. "Go ahead an' croak her; see what it gets you! I'm kinda tired o' her anyhow. Maybe I'll take over this blonde baby instead a sendin' her on a one-way ride with you. Think that over, smart guy."

The brunette shrilled: "Butch—no! Not if you love me! Don't let him—"

Moski grinned. "Shut your face, Helen."

Lane's heart sank. His bluff had been called—and he hadn't the nerve to make it good. He was no killer; he couldn't murder the girl in cold blood. . . . He started to release her. . . .

He was attacked from the one quarter he hadn't thought to guard: his right side. His own kid brother jumped him, struck him a savage blow on the jaw. His teeth clicked together like dice under the impact of those driving knuckles, but he didn't hear the sound. The punch caught him on the button, knocked him instantly unconscious. He didn't even feel himself falling. . . .

**H**E OPENED his eyes in darkness; he was lying on rough,

With a violent tug he dragged her out of the coupe.



unfinished boards. And someone was cradling his aching head, massaging his temples, softly moaning over him. He said: "Myrna. . . ?"

"Y-yes . . . oh, Jonnie, Jonnie, what are we going to d-do. . . ?" Her breath was warm on his cheek, her lips were close to his own. "After Jeff knocked you out, they brought us both up here to the attic, locked us in. I heard them say we were to be taken out and k-killed at m-midnight . . . unless Moski changes his mind and decides to k-keep me here."

Bitter futility surged through Dr. Jonathan Lane. "My own brother—and he turned against me. Turned against you, the girl he was going to marry—!"

"No, Jonnie. You mustn't think about J-Jeff. We've got to forget him. Both of us must. He . . . doesn't exist for us any more. We've just got each other . . . and we must think of some way to get out of here. . . ."

She was right; they must forget Jeff. For them, Jeff no longer lived. Lane pressed himself closer to Myrna, there in the attic's blackness; his arm encircled her slender waist. He pulled her very, very close to him; found her lips. She sighed, melted wearily in his embrace.

**A**ND meantime, in the bungalow's dimly-lighted living-room downstairs, Jeff Lane and the brunette Helen were alone together. Moski's two thugs, Corky and Spider, were back with their wounded leader in his bedroom.

Jeff's arms were about the gunmoll. "It'll be easy," he was whispering. "You see how things stand. Moski was ready to see you killed

without raising a bleat. And my girl gave me the gate."

"Well. . . ?"

"Well . . . this: I go for you in a big way. You've got everything. Maybe you can go for me, too—if you'll let yourself."

"So what?"

"So we'll lam together. You know where Moski stashed that bank dough. You can get it—and have the car ready to go when I give the word. We'll travel high, wide, and handsome, kiddo." He kissed her. "Okay," she said. "It's a deal. We'll do it."

**D**R. JONATHAN LANE pulled away from Myrna as the trapdoor opened. He gathered himself to lunge at whoever was approaching. Then he heard his brother's whisper: "Jonnie — Myrna — it's Jeff."

"Come to take us on a one-way ride?" Lane asked bitterly.

"Don't be a dope, Jonnie! Listen to me. I had to put on an act. Can't you see the spot I was on? Those hoods brought Moski into your surgery while I was there waiting for you. They pulled guns on me, forced me to operate. Then they kidnaped me, brought me here to look after him. I tried to get away by saying I needed new instruments—and they sent that dame with me to guard me. The trick didn't work."

"Well. . . ?" Dubiety came to the older brother. Maybe Jeff really *was* on the level. Maybe he wasn't crooked, after all. . . .

Jeff went on swiftly: "I corked you because it was the only way to make Moski think I was on his side.

But now everything's fixed. Helen—Moski's moll—is getting the car ready for a quick getaway. I tricked her into it. The three of us will make a break for it, toss her out of the sedan, head for the police. Come on. There's no time to lose."

Myrna swayed to her feet. "Jeff . . . then you didn't mean what you said about . . . wanting to join those m-murderers. . . ?"

Jeff caught her in his arms, kissed her. "Certainly not! Oh, Myrna . . . beloved . . . I was half-crazy with fear when you showed up here. . . . But we can't talk about that now. We've got to move!" He led the way to the trapdoor.

Jonathan Lane held back. "You two go first. I'll guard the rear in case we're discovered." He followed them down the ladder, saw them make for the front door. Outside, a car's motor purred. Jeff opened the door, stepped into the night with his arm around Myrna.

The older brother tiptoed after them, nerves taut. He saw the brunette get out of the sedan, run toward the house. He saw her yank out an automatic. "So you thought you could double-cross me and get away with the doll-faced wren, huh?" she rasped. She aimed at Jeff.

In that fleeting instant, Lane knew what he must do: as he had always done in the past, he must protect Jeff, see him through. . . . In his heart he realized that he had misjudged the younger man, and now he must atone for that mistaken appraisal. He tumbled himself at Helen.

The blasting report of her gun was a shock-reverberation to his eardrums; but the slug missed him. He snatched the smoking weapon away

from her, swung her around. He yelled: "Jeff—Myrna—run for the car! Drive to the police—!"

THEY obeyed, thinking that he'd follow. But he had no chance to pelt after them. Moski's two henchmen were racing toward the front door of the cottage, automatics drawn. Jeff and Myrna tumbled into the sedan; the machine lurched forward, gathering momentum. And Dr. Jonathan Lane was left to face his enemies—alone.

He realized that he was holding the gun-moll's squirming figure before him, shield-fashion; tried to thrust her aside to safety as the two gunmen cut loose with a hail of bullets. He didn't want to seek safety behind a girl's body; it wasn't in his code. But even as he shoved her sideways, tearing suits ripped into her, knocked her down. Riddled, she shrieked bloodily—and died.

And as she fell, Lane triggered the gun he had taken from her. Triggered it—and sent the two gorillas following her to hell.

He leaped over their sprawling corpses, dived into the house. He had a score to settle with Butch Moski, watchman-killer; Moski who had forced Jeff to perform illegal surgery under threat of death; Moski, because of whom Lane had been forced to undergo thirty hours' torture at Headquarters. . . .

He flung himself down the hallway. And then he froze. Moski was out of bed. Moski was walking toward him. Moski had a Luger in his fist. The Luger vomited stabbing, roaring flame-streaks.

Lane felt the impact of those high-velocity slugs burrowing into his

vitals. He tried to fire in return. His own gun clicked empty.

Then Moski's Luger jammed.

Lane stayed upright; gave no sign that he had been hit. "You're a fool, Butch Moski," he managed to say without his voice breaking. "You're a fool. Those wounds in your belly — they've probably broken open. You had no business getting up and walking. You'll die."

Moski looked sallow.

"Maybe I can save you, Moski.

"You—save me? After I drilled you. . . ?"

"You didn't hit me," Lane lied.

"Get back on that bed. Let me look at you."

Moski was groaning as he reclined on top of the mussed covers. "You gotta fix me up, Doc. An' get me outa here before the cops come. I'll split that bank dough with you—"

"Keep still. I'll see you through."

Fighting back the awful pain that gnawed and burned in his own guts, Lane leaned over his enemy, ripped away the bandages. A tingle of pride laced through him when he saw the job that Jeff had done on the gang-

ster. Two dangerous wounds—but properly dressed, beautifully sutured. Jeff Lane would make a topnotch surgeon some day. A topnotch surgeon . . . and a swell husband for Myrna. . . .

Lane doubled both fists and jammed them into Moski's midriff, splitting apart the catgut sutures, opening the raw wounds. Blood gushed—

Moski screamed horribly. Crimson welled from the holes in his belly, filled his peritoneal cavity. "You rat—ah, God—God—ar-r-gh. . . !"

Lane smiled and very slowly collapsed over the man he had slain. He knew that he, too, was dying. Dying as Moski had just died, painfully, messily. . . . But it didn't seem to matter. He had got Jeff out of a bad jam; had given him back to Myrna. It wasn't so hard to go out, knowing that. It was pleasant, with the memory of those moments he had spent with Myrna in the attic a while ago.

He closed his eyes and swam far out in a sea of darkness.





# Suicide or Murder?



ANY a killer has gone to the gallows, the electric chair or the lethal chamber because of some slight error or lack of scientific knowledge. Especially is this true in cases where the murderer has attempted to "frame" his victim to make death look like suicide.

For instance, take a case where homicide officials are called in to investigate the death of a man who, to all intents and purposes, has killed himself by a gunshot wound. The corpse is found in a normal recumbent position, the gun is clenched in the stiffening fingers, and there are powder burns around the eye socket where the bullet entered and passed into the brain.

"Suicide!" the layman states flatly.

"No," the police will answer. "Murder!"

And how do the detectives know this? By a very simple process of deduction. In all the recorded annals of self-destruction, *not more than a few scattered instances have ever been reported of a suicide shooting himself or herself in the eye!*

This curious fact is well-known to Homicide investigators. There seems to be a queer psychological quirk in all of us; a subconscious disinclination to injure our eyes voluntarily. Try it yourself as an experiment; make up your mind that you're going to poke a finger in your eye, even gently. You simply can't do it! And that same factor enters into the psychology of the person bent on

killing himself. He may put the muzzle of the gun in his mouth, pull the trigger and blow off the top of his head; or maybe he'll aim a bullet through his chest or stomach. But almost never will he send the slug into his eyeball!

Therefore, when a corpse is discovered with a wound in its eye-socket, the answer is almost inevitably—murder!

Numerous cases have also been recorded of apparent suicides whose throats were cut; and here, again, scientific knowledge has frequently led to the apprehension of murderers. Assume the headquarters detectives have been summoned to examine the corpse of a woman who quite evidently gashed her own gullet with an old-fashioned straight razor.

All the surface indications seem to show that she took her life voluntarily. The razor is either clenched in her hand, or is found near the body. There is a single deep incision across the throat from ear to ear all the way into the windpipe. You can even see plainly that the slash was made from left to right, clearly indicating that the stroke was inflicted with the right hand. And the dead woman was right-handed.

"This time it's *bound* to be suicide!" you say.

But once more the police experts show you that you're quite mistaken. "Notice this one, single, deep cut. That spells murder," they'll tell you.

How do they know?

Again statistics are brought forth. In the recorded history of suicides

*(Continued on page 127)*



# MURDER the By R. T. MAYNARD **BUM!**



VER since I was old enough to figure it out I have been a great believer in that old saying —When in Rome do as the Romans do. My mirror was none too good, but speckled and stained

as it was it gave back a pretty elegant picture of me, yours truly, Horace Widgeon. The studs in the stiff shirt weren't so expensive, but they made a nice flash. The coat fit swell in the shoulders, padded just enough, and the tails dangling down

In the light of the blaze I could see her digging jewelry out of Dink's pocket!



*To protect the mysterious Miss Smith, he depended entirely on his muscles. Her enemies made the mistake of injecting a gun into the picture — which was the worst thing they could have done!*

the back of me swished swell every time I took a step. The white butterfly tie was fixed perfect, me having

worked twenty minutes on it, and the silk topper was set at just the right angle. The only thing I didn't like

were the stripes down my trousers legs. They reminded me too much of my uniform.

Yeah, I wear a uniform. I been with Wilson Protective Association for four years. We're the lads that tour the better parts of town on bicycles—bicycles being noiseless—and watch the homes of the rich folks that are closed for the season, or try the front gates to the different estates that should be locked.

Here at Mrs. Martin's boarding house, where I live, they've never seen me in my uniform. A man's got to have a little pride. Them uniforms, and what with us on bicycles and all, make us W.P.A. boys look like we was working for the Western Union. So I always dress down at headquarters and pedal my wheel out to Olmos Heights. Don't know how it happened, but the folks here at the boarding house think I'm some sort of private detective. They ask me lots of questions, about spies and saboteurs, and if fingerprints can be identified if left on cloth and all that. At first it was sort of embarrassing, but rather than make any of them—they're all nice folks—feel uncomfortable, I've gotten to where I always give them an answer of some kind.

We Wilson men carry a gun only on special assignments. We're not supposed to tackle anything ourselves, except in great emergencies. We're just supposed to watch, and if something is wrong, call the police. But I got me a chance not long ago to pick up a Luger and a shoulder harness. Not having a permit, I don't carry it. But what I started to say was sometimes of an afternoon I leave my door open and sit

on the bed cleaning the rod. You'd be surprised how some of the other roomers get big eyed and open-mouthed when they peek in and see me. Gives me sort of a kick.

Now I'll have to explain the crack about the Romans. We get one night off a week. But business is good, and if we want to work that night, we can. For the last year I been working three of them per month, and just taking one night off every twenty-eight days.

Me, Widgeon, I am a funny fellow, I guess. I like to see how the other half lives. So I bought me this nice soup and fish, and on the one night I take off I go to some nice club, or hotel, or something, and mix in with the society folks. It is shocking, a revelation indeed, some of the things I see. And a waiter or doorman never sees anything but the white bosom of your dress shirt, and the folded dollar bill in your hand. He does not even care what is beneath that bosom, and you would be surprised what often is.

So I was dressed and getting ready to go out and spend the \$31.45 I had saved for the occasion. Out in the hall the phone rang. We have two pay phones, one on the lower floor and one on the second floor. On the second floor I am closest to the phone so I aired out to answer it. A woman's voice, sort of throaty with excitement, said, "May I speak to Miss Smith, please?"

AS I went to knock on the proper door, I couldn't help thinking about Miss Smith. She had only been at the boarding house about three weeks so far and was pretty much of a mystery. She never wore

no powder nor no woman paint. That is, rouge or lipstick. Not that her nose was ever shiny. It just looked funny, natural like. She wore the biggest pair of blue-black glasses I ever saw, and the glasses was just the color of her hair, which she kept pulled back tight on her head and caught in a little knot at the nape of her neck. Her clothes was always old fashioned, skirts coming nearly to her ankles, and her waists high about her throat. But the funny part—well maybe I notice those things being sort of a detective—the funny part was the way she walked. She never walked like no middle-aged dame, no out of a job school teacher like she claimed to be. She wasn't exactly unfriendly, just cold like.

And if she was an out of work school teacher how could she afford two meals a day in her room? That takes money at Mrs. Martin's boarding house. She came down for her breakfast—after the others had left—and me getting home just about that time, I often saw her alone.

Well, like I say, I tapped on her door. And I'll be a monkey's uncle, if she didn't call softly, "Come in!"

Maybe I should have just said *telephone* and let it go at that. Instead I twisted the knob and went in. Then, right fast, I leaned against the door and took a deep breath, shaking my head so hard I like to have lost my topper. She was sitting across the room before her vanity, Miss Smith was, and believe me, I was right. She wasn't no middle-aged school teacher.

A cigarette in a long holder was between her lips, and her lips were rouged! Her face was made up like

a babe's face should be, and her hair was fixed different, sort of in a couple of winding braids on top of her head. Little braids, all shiny and neat and pretty!

I finally managed, "Excuse me, please, Miss Smith!"

And she whirled around, getting up so quick she knocked over a glass of something beside her. Her eyes got mad and big and she froze stiff and stern.

"And what are you doing in my room?" she demanded. "You—I—you—I was expecting a visitor."

All I could say was, "You're wanted on the phone," and turn around and scam out of the room. My ears were still burning when I sank down on my bed and wiped my sweating brow. I shut my eyes tight, but it wasn't any use, all I could see was a vision of the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life. A girl like I've dreamed about ever since I was old enough to have such dreams. I sort of saw myself then for what I was, working three extra nights a month to be a phoney on the fourth. For if ever there was a woman had class written all over her it was little Miss Smith.

**I** HADN'T shut my door all the way and I could hear her saying, real tense like after she'd listened for three-four minutes to the other party, "No, no, Dora, I won't have it, do you hear? There's some other way. Why stick your head in a noose? It's murder, and sudden death I tell you, *I know the man*, know what he's capable of doing. I won't have it!"

Then I could hear her jiggling and jiggling the hook and saying, "Hello! Hello! Operator you've cut us off."



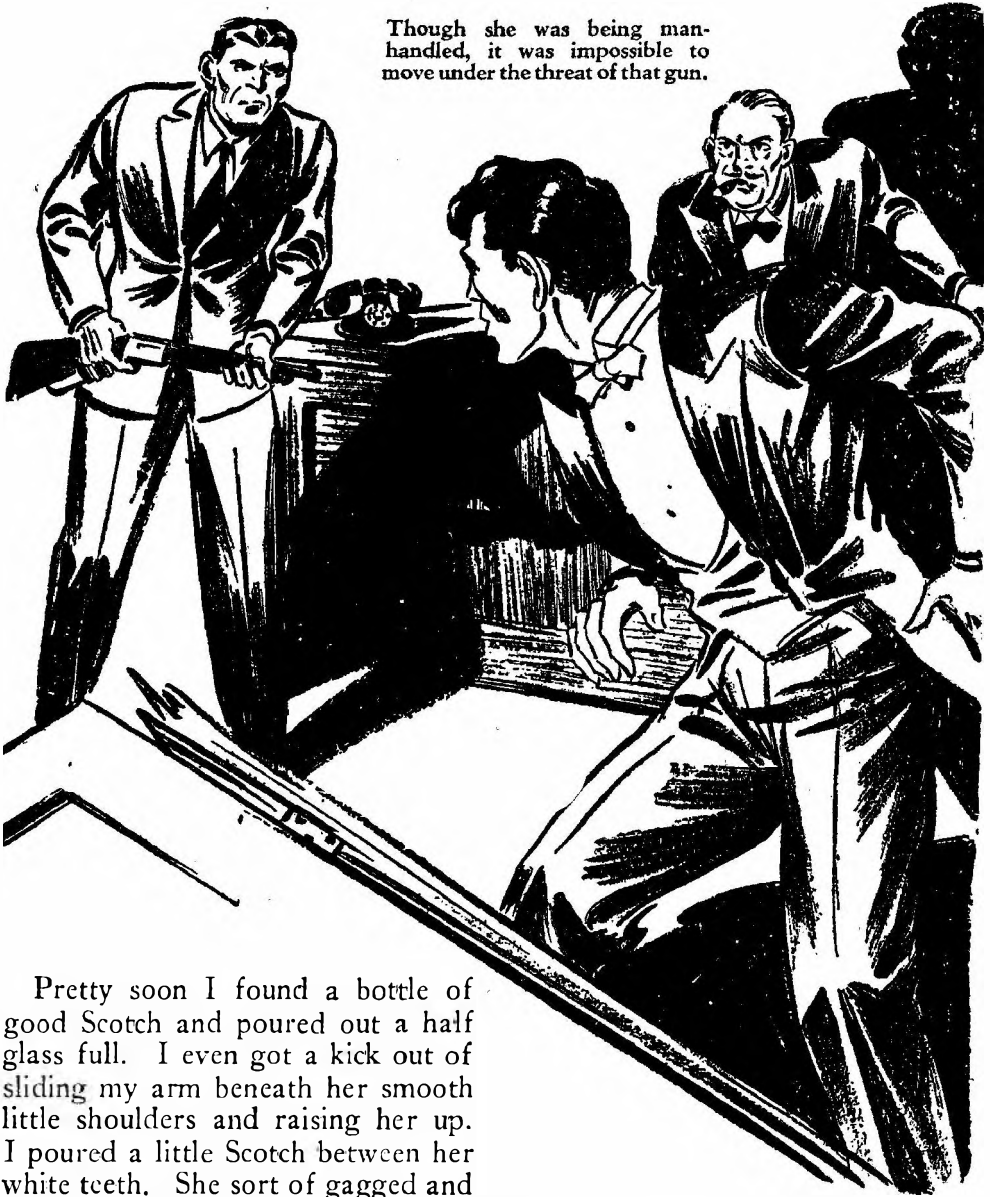
Evidently operator said the party had hung up, for Miss Smith hung up too. I could hear her sort of moan, like a stricken person, and all at once there was a thump!

I'll bet you I was there in a split second. There she lay, sure enough, a little crumpled heap beneath the telephone. We got a weak light in the hall, but it was enough to let me see how pale and twisted her sweet face had gone, her red lips slightly parted and her chin still trembling, even though she was out.

I picked her up, and I remember I still had on my silk topper. I'll bet you I looked funny, me, big Horace Widgeon, carrying that little doll-like thing down the hall to her room, her dressed like she was, and me in dinner clothes. But I wasn't thinking of that then.

I lowered her to her own divan, after kicking the door shut with my heel, and for a minute I just stood there looking at her. I couldn't help it. I leaned over her and I kissed her.

Though she was being man-handled, it was impossible to move under the threat of that gun.



Pretty soon I found a bottle of good Scotch and poured out a half glass full. I even got a kick out of sliding my arm beneath her smooth little shoulders and raising her up. I poured a little Scotch between her white teeth. She sort of gagged and coughed, then swallowed, and bye and bye her eyes blinked open, and she looked at me for a long moment. Then a faint little smile came to her lips and she laid her fingers on my arm to pull the Scotch nearer.

**W**HEN she'd finished, I said something asinine like was she

feeling better, but she didn't even bother to answer that. She sure asked some funny questions. But first of all her grin got wider and she said gently, "Wipe the lipstick off your mouth, Mr. Widgeon." Whew, did I feel foolish!

She raised up on one elbow then, and she said, "Mr. Widgeon, would

you turn around please and walk across the room and back?"

Dumb me, I did.

She muttered, sort of to herself, "Built like an All American. About six two, two-twenty, looks tough enough."

I said, "Six two and a half, and two-thirty. I'm pretty solid."

She said, "You've a gun, haven't you? Of course, how stupid of me, you're a detective." And while I was feeling bad about that, her believing that old hokum I'd put out for the past couple of years, she said, "Mr. Widgeon, how would you like to take me out to a nightclub tonight?"

Now look, how would you have felt? What would you have said? Class? She was as far over my head as the Big Dipper, and here she was wanting me to take her out!

She got up then and swayed across the room to me and put both her hands on my arms. I tell you I like to have choked on the fragrance of her hair. The top of her head came just under my chin. She sort of tilted it and looked up at me with those big blue eyes, and said, "There are several stipulations, Mr. Widgeon."

All I could do was say hoarsely, "Call me Horry, Miss Smith."

Her fingers tightened on my arms and she smiled. "My name is Diane," she answered, pausing a minute I suppose for the red to recede from my face. "You probably heard part of my phone call?" There came that red again, and there came the soft sweet pressure of her little fingers. I gulped and nodded. "A very, very dear friend of mine is taking an awful chance for me tonight," she said gravely. "In trying to do something

for me she is endangering her very life. I've got to prevent it somehow. Will you help me?"

Maybe I am a guy with no will power. I put my hands under her arms and lifted her off her feet until she was right even with me. I guess my voice was pretty weak, because I had to swallow three times before I could speak. I said, "Whoever you want killed, you just point 'em out." And I held her up close and kissed her. At first she sort of kicked at me, but not too hard, and pretty soon she didn't kick at me at all. She put one arm around my shoulders and cupped her other hand beneath my chin. After a long while I set her down. She sure looked at me funny, and I guess I was pale faced that time.

She said, "You're so big!" Then she shuddered. "But we can't think about that now! I want you to try to wear your gun with those clothes, and I want you to wait about fifteen minutes for me. You mustn't ask a question, and—and you won't mind if I wear clothes like I've been wearing around here?"

She could have gone in a barrel as far as I was concerned.

## CHAPTER II

### Puzzle, Puzzle



**EXACTLY** thirty minutes later we were in a cab headed outside the city limits. We were going to Shadowland, Dink McPherson's swell nightspot, about two miles out. I was feeling pretty stuffy, what with having strapped on that Luger and not being used to it, but worst of all was Diane sitting so



close to me and never saying a word.

Just as she'd said, she was wearing the sort of old-fashioned clothes she always wore about the boarding house. The sort of semi-evening dress you'd expect a middle-aged woman to wear if her son or something was taking her out. But that didn't make me no difference. She could have worn a suit of chain mail and still the only picture I'd have gotten would have been that one in her room at Mrs. Martin's, when she was sitting before the mirror. I was feeling then that as long as I lived I'd never wipe that picture out of my mind. Not that I wanted to.

After a while when I got up courage, I said, "Miss Smith, I mean Diane, I wish you wouldn't worry about whatever it is. I'm with you and I'll take care of you."

She pointed those big blue glasses at me and her mouth sort of trembled and she said, "Oh, Horry, it's *you* I'm worrying about. I've no right to get you into something like this just because you're big and capable. Driver! Oh driver!"

Afraid on account of me! I couldn't stand that, so when the driver slowed and pulled back the glass partition I called, "Never mind, Mac, keep going. Shadowland." And to her, I said, "Don't be silly. Us detectives are used to taking care of ourselves in all kinds of danger and peril."

So on we rode, me wondering just what it was all about, but never caring very much as long as I was with her, Diane. Bye and bye she said, as if to herself, "Surely they wouldn't shoot an unarmed man." And then louder, to me, "Horry, give me your gun." She could have

had my right arm! After she stowed the big Luger away in the big bag she was carrying, she said, "Now get rid of that shoulder harness. Toss it out of the cab!" And I did that, too.

**S**HADOWLAND is on the main highway between here and Houston. Ten or twelve years ago a couple of real estate hustlers got hold of a sucker and convinced him that there was enough cross country travel through here to justify building a sort of resort hotel about twenty miles from nowhere. He went—hook line and sinker, that sucker did. He built a joint with a swimming pool and tennis courts and a golf link. He hauled palm trees out of the Valley and set them out. And he built one of those rambling Spanish hacienda structures like you see a little farther south and west. You can imagine how far he got with it. Anyway, that's Shadowland.

Dink McPherson owns it now. He puts in pretty lousy orchestras, but the floorshows are hot, and when the drunks feel so inclined they can go swimming in the pool with humpty-nine lifeguards to pull them out. You can even come inside in your swimming suit to watch the floorshow if you like. One wing of the place has some dice games and roulette wheels and whatnots. The patio is the pool, the front of the joint is the club, and the remaining wing holds Dink's offices and a few private rooms.

I paid off the cab in front of Shadowland, took Diane's arm and went through the little court into the club proper. It was early—about eight-thirty, and so far there wasn't

much of a crowd. A Mexican orchestra was on the stand, and maybe four or five couples were dancing beneath the soft colored spotlights. We got a table and a couple of menus and I just sat there looking at Diane. Like I say, even in those funny clothes and those big blue glasses she looked like a million to me. From where we sat we could see the bar proper, off to our left, across the dance floor.

Before we even had our first drink I caught the intake of Diane's breath. Her foot found mine beneath the table. "Watch the blonde girl come," she whispered, "watch her close!"

I looked over into the bar. She was pretty, that blonde, not as pretty as Diane, not by a long shot, but pretty enough for a blonde, and she didn't leave much of that prettiness to imagination.

True enough, she wore sort of a bathing cape, the ribbon of it tied at her throat, but the motions of her arms kept it open. Yeah, and she wore a pair of rope soled sandals, too. But it took a long time to see those. Her slim body was covered, or partially covered, by a black bathing suit, one of those kind that doesn't have any shoulder-straps. Everytime she laughed—and she was laughing gayly—I caught my breath, wondering if the suit was going to make it that time.

She sat down on a high padded stool, there at the bar, leaning one elbow on it, her shapely leg stretched out, talking and laughing to the fellow she was with.

Diane whispered, "Who is the man, Horry?"

I looked at him for the first time.

Everybody in town knew the man. It was Pete Carmer, Dink McPherson's brains. At least everybody said Pete was the brains behind Dink. I told Diane, and she sucked in her breath and turned paler than ever. I tell you she was scared, just hearing the name! I patted her hand and said, "Don't you worry none about Pete! The little four-eyed squirt won't bother nobody while I'm around!" That's what he was, too, a little four-eyed squirt, skinny, narrow shoulders, maybe five six in height. I could pinch his brains out any time!

**J**UST about that time this blonde woman turned and looked casually over her shoulder into the night club. Just for a second her eyes seemed to linger on our table and I would have sworn she nodded her head briefly, though she kept on chattering to this Pete Carmer. You could tell by the way Pete smirked and hung on her every word that he was really gone on her!

Then Diane's slim fingers were on my arm. Her voice shook with fear as she whispered, "This is it, Horry. You've got to help me!"

She told me just what I was supposed to do. If she had said: Go butt your head against the wall until your brains fall out, I expect I would have done it. So I pushed back my chair from the table and started toward the bar.

Just about then Dutch Nuremberg, who is Dink's gorilla, hove into the picture and touched Pete Carmer on the shoulder. Pete didn't like it. He shook his head and began to argue. Now this Dutch Nuremberg is about the closest thing to the missing link I ever saw. He is even bigger



"Excuse me, Miss Smith; you're wanted on the phone."

Well, him and Pete was still arguing when I walked to the bar. I turned like I was surprised and said, "Dora! By golly, imagine seeing you here!"

And this blonde, whose name was Dora, turned and beamed, and said, "Georgie! Of all people! I haven't seen you for two years! Where have you been keeping yourself?"

Two years? I never saw her before in my life! But like Diane had told me, I kept chitter chattering with her and all the time Carmer and

than me, and much uglier, though goodness knows I never won no beauty prizes myself.

Nuremberg were arguing behind us, though Pete kept glaring at me every once in a while.

After a few seconds I said, "Darling, would your friend care if we danced this one?"

She didn't wait to ask Pete Carmer! She just slid off the stool and took my arm and pretty soon we was light-fantasticking all over the floor. She was swell to hold, nice and round and smooth, and danced well; but you know, from the minute we left the bar she acted scared. Yes sir, just like her mask had fallen for a moment. She actually trembled in my arms, and I could actually hear her heart going twice as fast as it should!

She whispered, "Keep talking and laughing, Pete's watching!" So I did, I played up. And by and by she said, "When we get in this dark corner I'm going to stumble, like these sandals are clumsy!"

So she did that, too. She stumbled and went clear down to her knees, catching at me as she fell. She like to have jerked one tail off my new full dress suit! I helped her up and we laughed about this and that, and the music stopped and I took her back toward the bar, wondering just what was the reason Diane wanted me to pull something like this. Pete Carmer was there scowling and I thanked him politely and told Dora I'd see her again.

I moved down the bar and ordered a drink I didn't want. They talked a second and started back toward the pool in the patio, him holding her arm like he was scared she'd get away.

I finished my drink, like I'd been told to do, turned and started back

to our table. I like to have fainted. Ugly Dutch Nuremberg was sitting in my chair, leaning over toward Diane, a smirk on his face, and he had his big paw on her wrist.

I got there in a hurry! I grabbed him by the shoulder and hoisted him out of the chair, and I said, stern like, "Out, bum! Amscray!"

He just looked at me, grinning, and looked back at Dianne. He said, "You pick up the funniest trash, darling! You coming along to see Dink or will I carry you? Them cheaters and that getup didn't get you anywhere at all, did they? Tell papa where you been hiding out?"

All the time he'd never let loose of her wrist! Real polite again, trying not to lose my temper, I said again, "Amscray, umbay!"

Just as politely he said to Diane, "Pardon me, honey!" Him calling her honey!

**H**E MUST have thought I was a sucker, because he started his right waist high when he swung. I rolled easy like and I'll admit I lost my temper. No gentleman would have done what I did. I not only rolled with the punch, I pivoted on my heel so his arm slid clear over my shoulder, me with my back to him. Soon as his chest hit my back I grabbed the wrist, stooped and heaved.

I threw that monkey clear over a party of four at the next table, and he lit on his back on the next one, knocked over a couple of shaded lamps and the water bottle, skidded on, hit the floor and brought up against a column. I turned around to smile at Diane, encouragingly, feeling pretty proud the way I'd

handled things, but she was sitting there with a dead white face, her glasses off, the back of her hand pressed against her mouth.

"Horry! Horry!" That was all she could say. She started fumbling at her purse, the one that was holding the Luger, but she quit all at once and just stared past me. I turned. Dink McPherson was standing right at my elbow, smiling whitely, debonair, his hand in his jacket pocket.

Beside him, more in front of me, was a kid I'd never seen before, a blonde kid with wavy hair and a buttonhole for a mouth, with a funny light in his washed-out blue eyes. He had his right hand in his jacket pocket, too, and whatever he held had a short muzzle and was pointing right at my belly.

Dink McPherson said, "Evening, Miss Grady. I sent word I wanted to see you."

She got up, trembling all over, bowing her head.

"We'll just go to my office, dear. Perhaps your escort will await you here?"

In a dull lifeless voice she said, "Wait here for me, Horry: Wait here."

"Look," I blustered, "the gun in this sissy's pocket makes no difference to me. If you don't want to go, I will gladly take this whole joint apart piece by piece, Diane!"

By this time Nuremberg had got to his feet and rambled into the circle glaring at me. Diane, head still bowed, said in the same lifeless voice, "Wait here, Horry. I'll be back."

Dink said, "Dutch, suppose you sit down with Horry and keep him

company while Miss Grady and I talk over the situation!"

*Miss Grady?* What was this? I watched them go across the floor toward the bar, where there was an entrance to the east wing, that held Dink's office. Diane walked like one of those automatic dolls, stiff, artificial steps carrying her across the floor. I believe she'd have walked right into the bar itself if Dink McPherson hadn't steered her to the right.

All at once Dutch Nuremberg growled, "That was a fluke, chum. I will bet you you could not do it again in a million years!"

So I said, "Amscray, umbay," wanting to act like a gentleman, but he just sat there glaring at me, so I disregarded him altogether and tried to watch the hot floor show. But them ponies had no charm for me. I was trying to figure out why I had to dance with the blonde, Dora, why she pretended to fall down, and why Dink McPherson called Diane *Grady* instead of Smith. To say nothing of wondering what right Nuremberg had talking to her like he did.

**N**OW in a few minutes a funny thing happened. I didn't hear any uproar, no screaming or yelling, but something made me look back toward the entrance to the patio swimming pool. I guess maybe ten minutes had passed since Diane and Dink and his blonde gunman had left the table.

Well, through the patio door came Pete Carmer. Even at that distance his face was pasty looking, just a pale white blurb in the shadow and he walked with his hands well

away from his sides. No wonder. Right behind him, and a little to his left, walked the blonde gunman, and he still had his hand in his pocket. He was holding a rod on Pete Carmer. Next in the procession came another gorilla, one I hadn't noted before, and he had Dora by the wrist. She was fighting him, straining back, kicking at him. And evidently he got tired of it. He jerked her to him and slapped her, hard. She cringed away and that strapless swimming suit slipped, and for a minute she was busy straightening it. During that minute he dragged her through the big door into the bar, after the gunman and Carmer, and the four of them disappeared from view.

I got up, and said politely to Nuremberg, "Pardon me, umbay."

He said, "Sit down, punk. You're not going any place. Lookee." He picked up a napkin, shook it out and dropped it over his right hand that was on the table top. In the right hand was a gun.

So I answered, "Do you think I'm stupid? Even a plugugly like you would have more brains than to shoot an unarmed man before witnesses. So long, umbay."

I was right, too, and I knew it. I wasn't really taking a chance. Guys like Nuremberg shoot men in dark alleys, shoot them in the back, not in night clubs before maybe a dozen witnesses. Well, that put him in a fix. And I'll be darned if he didn't get up, and keeping the napkin over the gun, take a swing at my sconce with the rod.

I am sorry to say I lost my temper again. The Wilson Protective Association gives all us boys a thorough

course in judo. In less time than it takes to tell, Dutch Nuremberg was flying through the air over the same foursome at the next table. He lit on the same table he'd lit on before, skidded the same way and slid into the same post. There was a bored redhead at the next table, one of the foursome.

She got up and she said, "This is getting very tiresome, indeed folks." So she slapped me, but I was sorry for losing my temper twice in a row so I just bowed and went on. I walked through the bar and turned right, down the corridor where I knew Dink McPherson's office was located.

The hall made an ell there, and turning I saw still another of Dink's gorillas outside the door. He said, "What do you want, pal?"

I SAID, "Is that the washroom down that way." I pointed, and when he instinctively turned his head to look I gave him my Sunday punch, a short left hook and caught him, easing him to the floor. He went out real peaceful. Then I put my ear to the door.

A man's voice was saying, "You chump! Letting a woman rook you! You gave them to her, where are they? God knows she doesn't have them!" That was Dink McPherson.

Carmer's voice answered, "For the love of Mike, I don't know, Dink, I don't know!"

*Whoom!* That was somebody busting Pete, for he yelled right afterward.

Dink said, "Dora Grady, I'm asking you once more. Give, sister, give, or I'll let Blondie here work on you!"

The door opened slowly, inch by inch.

about!" All the time I was trying the door. It was no use. The door was locked. All at once Dora



I could hear Dora say, "I don't even know what you're talking

screamed. And then Diane added her scream to Dora's. That was enough for me! I went back three steps and went through the door. The lock was plenty strong but the hinges were ordinary. The door splintered and came loose there.

In a way it was sort of a mistake.

It did stagger me a little, and by the time I straightened up I was staring into the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun held by the monkey that had dragged this Dora into the office. I knew enough not to buck a thing like that. So I got a toehold and held myself, glancing around.

Dink McPherson was at his desk, his hand in the top drawer, looking a little startled. Diane was huddled in a corner peering out over her shoulder. Dora was being man-handled by the blonde punk with the curly hair. Whatever it was they wanted, they'd searched her for it. Blondie had his right hand in her hair, and had her bowed back over a filing case. His right fist was still doubled.

**B**EFORE any of us could say anything footsteps echoed in the hall and Dutch Nuremberg plunged into the room. He had his face twisted like he was about to cry. He roared, "I will bet you you can't do that again, chum! Twice you have had the breaks. I will bet you—!"

"Shut up!" That was Dink. He looked me up and down grinning that white grin of his, and he relaxed and closed the drawer. To the man with the shotgun he said, "Watch him, Tony. You, punk, what do you know about all this?"

I started to answer and he shut me up.

"Never mind. From the dumb look on your puss you don't know anything. Just another of the stupid boys being used by the Grady sisters. Tony, throw him and the oldest gal into the anteroom there. If he busts that door, he's good. Fan him first."

The guy felt beneath my arms and

on my hips, then poked the shotgun into my left kidney and started me for the door. I went, too. A gun like that makes a terrible hole. He shoved me and I brought up against the far wall of the little room. I heard footsteps behind me and then the door closed and the lock clicked. Diane said, "Horry!" Just that, "Horry!"

Then I had her in my arms and she had her own arms wound around my neck, and she was crying and I was trying to gulp down the big lump in my throat and comfort her by telling her everything would be all right.

"Listen, Horry," she finally said, through her tears, "you've got to believe me. Dink said I got you into this just to use you. All right, I'll admit it. But I had to have help, you were big and strong and brave looking and I—"

I kissed her again, plenty.

Bye and bye, in a weak voice she said, "Oh Horry. I've got to tell you the truth. My name is Grady. Dora's name is Grady. Randolph Grady is our foster father!"

You could have knocked me over with a blackjack. Now I'll tell you about this Randolph Grady. He is a retired broker that has a dollar for every bean in Boston. He lost his wife and his two little girls, years ago in a train wreck. So he turned right around and adopted two little girls from an orphan's home. And those little girls, now grown, were Diane and Dora! Now Grady was an old man. Rumor had it that he was stone deaf, and partially blind, and had a heart so bad he scarcely dared walk across the room.

As a hobby he was a collector of



historical jewels. You know, jewels that have a history attached. As a matter of fact, my regular nightly route included Grady's house! You know how rumors always grow? Well, rumor was that in that house of his, set down in a saucer-like valley on grounds of maybe three acres, he had close to a million bucks worth of jewels, that he put away each night in a steel safe. Burglar alarms really decorated the place. For example, when I tried the gate at night I had to be careful of an electric eye, which, had I crossed the beam, would have set off the system. And the rest of the house was fixed the same way.

Well, I was thinking about these things and scarcely heard what Diane said. "—so Dora and I, foolishly thinking we could take care of ourselves, began coming here to Shadowland. I guess we thought it was thrilling. Anyway—I—I—well," she bowed her head on my breast and I patted her back—"I got into a lot of trouble. Poor Daddy's heart is so bad that if he learned of it it would kill him! I—I—well, there are some papers that Dink McPherson holds over my head. He blackmailed me, and I paid once, I gave him the Marquise de Pinada diamonds. Eight of them. But that wasn't enough. You know what he wants now?"

Heaven might have known but I didn't.

"He says if I don't give him the safe combination and tell him how to disconnect the burglar alarm, he'll take the paper to Daddy! Don't you see the fix I'm in? The shock of that—that—paper—will kill Daddy. Is it better to risk that, or simply

let McPherson steal the collection of jewels? Pete Carmer was pretty crazy about Dora. I hid out for a couple of weeks trying to plan something, and Dora made a play for Carmer, thinking she could get that—that—paper and the jewels back. That way we'd be all right. I knew it was dangerous, and brought you here with me to try and stop her. But now you see what's happened."

"What's happened?" I asked. As far as I knew, outside of me throwing the Dutchman over a party of four twice in succession, I didn't know what really had happened! And I never got a chance to find out. The door opened. I started forward, but there was this Tony with his riot gun, hoping I'd move. Funny how a fellow's stomach draws back against his spine when a sawed-off shotgun is pointing at it!

"Outside, Babe," he grinned. And to me, "Go on, try it. Go on!"

Diane said, "Don't Horry, don't! Wait here for me!"

THE door closed behind them. So I began pacing the floor. Then I went to the door and laid my ear against it, couldn't hear a thing. It was a plenty thick door. There was absolutely nothing in the room I could use as a weapon. There weren't even any windows, just a little ventilator too high up to reach.

I don't know how long I stayed there. Not a sound penetrated that wood for minutes and minutes. Then, just faintly, I heard the shrill scream of a woman! But it didn't come through that door, it came through the ventilator! And it had hardly died away when I heard the sound of three shots. Not from a

shotgun, but flat and dull, like an automatic spat. I like to have went crazy. I drew back and ran across the room and hit that door with my shoulder. It shivered, but it held. I did it again. And again. Until my shoulder was numb. Sweat was breaking out all over me. All I could think of was Diane. Was it Diane that screamed? Was she shot? What had happened?

From outside the door I heard the laughing voice of Tony. "Come on, break through, punk, and I'll blow you back, in pieces."

Nuts with that!

Back I went against the wall, the far wall. This time I didn't hit it with my shoulder at all. Six feet from it I leaped, feet first, right at the lock. Me, I'm pretty solid. I weigh two-thirty. There aren't many locks can stand such a kicking around. It gave, and I went into the room skidding flat on my back.

I guess that saved my life. For friend Tony let loose with both barrels of the shotgun. Something stung like the devil in my right hip and thigh. But that didn't stop me. He threw the gun at me and was clawing for a shoulder gun when I got to him. I gave him my Sunday punch, caught his head as he fell, turned and threw him against the wall with a flying headlock. He looked pretty white and still, I tell you. So I slammed open the door and by golly the fellow that had been on guard was still lying there, out like a light!

I stepped over him and paused to listen. The strains of music were coming uninterruptedly from the club. I could even hear the shrill giggles of dames in the swimming

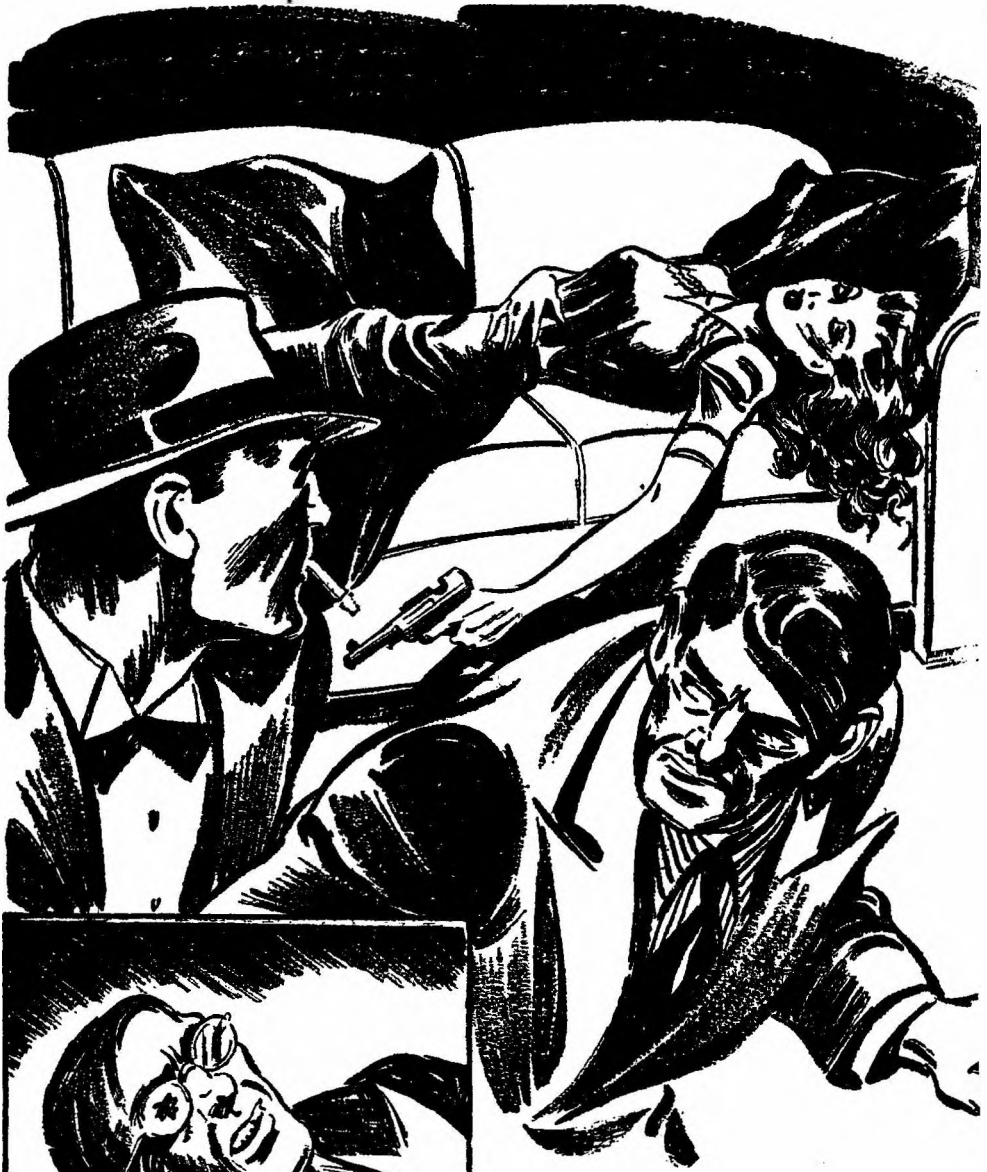
pool. Then I got it. The office was sound-proofed. Nobody had heard that shotgun roaring. No one else had heard the woman's screams and the sound of the automatic that came through my ventilator!

Ventilator! All connected, of course, and that meant an inside room.

I will bet you I barged through twenty doors before I found the right one, and it was the last one, right at the end of the corridor. I opened it, all hunched, ready to go to bat.

Pete Carmer was in the center of the room. He was looking right at me, but he wasn't seeing me! Pete was very, very dead. There is always one odd thing you notice about a corpse. Did you ever see a bullet hole in a plate glass window? How round it is, just white about the edges, but holding its shape? Pete was still wearing his glasses. And in the exact center of the right lense was the kind of bullet hole you see in plate glass. The shot hadn't even knocked off his glasses, but it had sent Pete to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

I remember standing there staring down at him. Then I heard a soft moan. She was lying sprawled out on the davenport. And it was Dora, not Diane! She was unconscious, with a big welt over her temple where they'd busted her with something. And on one cheek was a great red and black burn, like ashes had been ground into the tender skin. I went hot and cold all over just imagining Diane being handled like that. And where *was* Diane? Where were the rest of them? What were Dink McPherson and his gunmen



Seeing the gun in her hand, I'd no doubt she had shot the man.

I leaned over poor Dora and suddenly started back. Her right hand had been dangling out of sight the way she lay, and as I leaned over her I saw what it held. A gun! There was no doubt in my mind then that the bullet that killed Pete Car-

Blondie and Dutch Nuremberg doing to her?

mer came from that gun! Had she shot him? Had he tried something on her and somehow she'd bobbed up with the gun and—I looked again!

I moved her. The gun rolled out of her fingers. It was my Luger! The one Diane had taken from me earlier in the evening and stowed away in her big bag!

**P**ANIC is most certainly an unreasoning thing. Heck, if I'd have just thought I'd remembered such things as paraffin tests, and all that, would have known that I could prove I had had no hand in the thing. No doubt the prints on the thing were Dora's only, I had nothing to fear. But listen to me. You walk in on murder sometime, and suddenly realize that the lethal weapon is registered in your name. See how you feel.

I snatched that gun out of her hand. My fingers felt cold and nerveless as I tore out the clip. There wasn't a shell in it! The thing was empty! If I'd had any thoughts of putting up some sort of fight, they were gone now! So I wiped the butt carefully, went over to Pete Carmer and clasped his fingers around it, left it lying right beside his corpse with his own fingerprints on it.

I hadn't closed the door all the way; it was open maybe half a foot. And all at once it seemed to me I heard someone stirring out there in the hall. I tensed, ready to go to bat, and at that exact moment Dora opened her eyes wide and screamed!

The rest is sort of a blank. I remember trying to jump to her and put my hand over her mouth, for she was utterly panic-stricken. And

then the door started opening an inch—another inch—and another. A gun snout poked around it. The door flung wide, and there stood Detective-sergeant Hollis, a guy that's hated my guts ever since I won the wrestling championship from him a couple of years ago in the police games.

Luck is usually with the drunk and the scared. Maybe I was a little of both. He hadn't gotten clear in the room yet when I was diving feet first at him. The gun boomed and a red-hot poker skidded from my right hip clear up and across my shoulder blade. Then I had him in a flying head scissors. It carried him clear out into the hall, slammed him against the wall. As we dropped, I fumbled beneath me for his wrists. It was needless. He was out like a light and the gun was beneath him, out of his hand.

And here's the worst of it. *I was so scared I forgot to pick up his gun!*

The rest was instinctive. I hustled back into the room, picked up Dora in my arms, kicked out a window screen and went out into the night.

I went tearing and stumbling through a tangle of mesquite, thorns tearing at me, my tails hanging every few steps, thorns scratching the woman in my arms. Thank God she recognized me! For a minute sanity was in her eyes as she moaned, "Hurry, hurry, we've got to get home. They've taken Diane there! They started to torture me and she gave in, she told them she'd give them the combination to Daddy's safe, show them about the burglar alarm! Hurry! Hurry!"

She didn't need to say hurry after that! If Dink and that blonde rodman and Dutch had Diane, heck, I—well, I was doubly speedy. But that tailcoat kept snagging. By the time we'd gotten to a cornfield bordering the highway one tail was half-torn off. It actually kept wrapping about my ankles. I stopped, and set her down carefully.

I ripped off my coat. There at arm's length was a scarecrow. Funny how a man's mind works. I took time enough to drape that tailcoat over the scarecrow, even to put his arms in the sleeves! Both Dora and I giggled hysterically as we stumbled toward the highway, then crawled through the barbed-wire fence.

I don't know what the drunk driving the Lincoln must have thought. Put yourself in his place. Breezing along the highway in a little world all his own. Suddenly into the swath of his lights cuts a couple. The woman is frightfully mussed. The man is wearing a dress suit—except for the coat. Both are bloody, both have mad looks in their eyes. I will bet you you'd do the same thing the drunk did. He skidded to a stop, opened the door and got out.

**O**N THE opposite side of the road was a goat proof fence, which, in case you don't know it, is a five-strand barbed wire outfit. This drunk never stopped to look twice. He took the six-foot ditch with one bound, landed and took off like a rubber ball on the second bounce. He never even touched the fence. The last we saw of him he was making at least ninety across the goat pasture. Seconds later we were roaring back toward town in the Lincoln.

### CHAPTER III

#### Date with a Scarecrow



DORA was having a high-grade case of hysterics. First she'd laugh uproariously, laugh until every muscle twitched and trembled. Then she'd cry a little. Then she'd talk, talk like a victrola, probably with no more idea of what she was saying than a phonograph at that. I didn't pay a lot of attention because I had too much on my mind. I was remembering Pete Carmer back there dead. I was realizing what a dumb thing I'd done about that gun. It wouldn't take a smart cop to figure Pete hadn't killed himself. I was wondering if Detective Hollis had recognized me and wondering just what in heck he was doing there at all.

The answer to that was easy. They'd killed Carmer with my gun—for some reason. Probably because he'd fallen for Dora and let her talk him out of those papers necessary for blackmail. They'd started to torture Dora to make her tell what she'd done with these mysterious papers, and to keep her foster sister from being harmed, Diane had agreed to show them how to get by her father's burglar alarm system, to show them how to loot the safe, no matter where these papers were! Okay. Then, paying off the rat, they'd killed Carmer with my gun, clouted Dora and left her there with the gun in her hand.

I remembered how the scene had looked when I busted in. In so many words it looked like Carmer and Dora had been fighting, like she'd shot him to protect herself.

Then, Dink or someone had called copper and tipped them off. Hence—Hollis, blast him!

But what was Dora saying now? “—do hope they won’t make any noise. Daddy doesn’t hear well, he doesn’t see well. If nothing happens in the house itself, everything will be all right. He’ll hate losing some of his jewels, but he’ll be philosophic about it, we can perhaps keep it from him for a while. But if he finds out this other— With that heart of his, he’ll drop dead as sure as the world!”

I said, “What other? And what is this paper?”

“Diane’s marriage certificate!” My heart turned a flipflop completely! Diana married! I hardly heard the rest of it. “—we both promised Daddy not to marry until we were twenty-one, and considering *who* Diane married—”

I can’t tell you how I felt. Not that I was any less crazy about Diane. But I just had a sinking, gone feeling. Me tossing umbays around, me tackling a detective-sergeant, me taking a shot streaking clear across my back and a buckshot in my hip— for a dame that was married. I wanted to pull over to the curb and lay my head on the wheel and bawl. Honestly.

**A**UTOMATICALLY I wheeled the Lincoln into Olmos Heights. Automatically I twisted it around the corners, until we were on the little hill looking down at the landscaped saucer that was the grounds of the Grady Estate.

Straight ahead of us a quarter of a block was an ornate filling station, a replica of the Alamo. Straight

down the hill from it, maybe a full block, was the light that illuminated the entrance to the Grady estate. That light showed that the gate was ajar!

And it showed the new Cadillac sedan of Dink McPherson parked boldly beside it.

I said, “Hey, they’re open enough about it! What about the servants!”

Dora began to moan. “Don’t you understand? Diane herself has taken them in. She’ll try to keep them quiet. If any of the servants awake, Diane’s there and they’ll think nothing of it! You’ve got to do something about it. You’ve got to get them out of the house before you kill them!”

Kill them! Me, Horace Widgeon? Kill somebody for a married woman, and me in as deep as this already! Hell’s bells! There were at least three of them in the Grady mansion. Dink himself, Blondie the gunman, and Dutch Nuremberg the human gorilla, the missing link! And all she wanted me to do was get them outside the house so her Daddy, Randolph Grady, wouldn’t notice the fracas, and calmly wipe them out with my bare hands! When all three of them were armed!

Whew!

Well, I’d gone this far. No use backing out. How to get those lugs quietly out of the house, that was my problem. Down there in the glow of the light the new Cadillac gleamed and glistened, all decorated with chromium. And it come to me that anybody willing to sink thirty-five hundred bucks in a car must be pretty car crazy. And, no matter what he was doing, if he saw something happening to the hack that was the apple

of his eye he'd drop it and go for the car.

While I was still thinking about it a big gas truck rolled into the drive of the filling station. The driver got out and went in to the left hand wing of the Alamo, which was an all-night restaurant. I said, sort of grim, "Well, we're going to get some action of some kind. You better sit

right here and pray, sister."

Then I was out, heeling it toward the gas truck. Along the right hand side, in the rack on the truck, sat five or six big gas cans, you know the kind they carry. I lifted one out and went to the back of the truck. There were three spigots, all of them locked, padlocked. But the padlocks were old. I got out a handkerchief,

Soon as his chest hit my back, I tightened my grip and heaved.



wrapped one of the locks, grasped it with my left hand and wrapped my right hand over the left for double effort. I twisted on that lock until the veins in my temples actually hurt.

The cords of my neck hurt from effort. And just as I was about to give up something clicked. The lock came away in my hand. I filled that can with gasoline, turned it off, and by golly, the heavy iron handle of the tap came right off, too. I'd twisted the screw out.

I don't know to this day why I carried that iron handle with me. It fit nice and snug, right into the palm of my right hand. Down the hill I went, gas can in one hand, iron grip in the other.

**T**HE rest happened fast. With the iron grip I shattered the glass of a door. Don't let them kid you about unbreakable glass! And I emptied that can of gas in on the red leather upholstery. I tossed in a match and the *whosh* jumped out and burned off my eyebrows, and eye lashes and blistered my face.

I never saw such a fire in my life! It lit up everything for a full block. Crouching there beside the gate it was as light as day. And sure enough it worked. I heard footsteps coming sixty miles an hour. The first one through the gate was Dink McPherson himself. I tripped him as he went by and then jerked him up. I laid my right fist, holding that piece of iron, right against his jaw. That is the first time I ever heard bone crushing and breaking like eggshell. He dropped.

Then there was this Blondie, the gunman, skidding to a stop, jerking

a .45 from a shoulder holster and blazing away. Afterward I found out he hit me. I knew something turned me half around — it was through the fleshy part of the left arm — but I was too busy turning back and going after him to pay much attention. He only got the one shot. I took the gun away from him and laid it parallel to one of the waves in his blonde hair.

And friend Dutch, the gorilla man was among us. Now a rummy like Dutch has a funny mind. He braked to a stop, saw it was me, and never even thought of the car or his boss or the gun in his holster! He yelled, "Ha! It is you, hanh! I will bet you you don't do it this time!" I'll be switched, if he didn't fall into a wrestler's crouch and start after me, weaving a little, hands extended. And heck, that Cad was due to blow up any minute! I waited until he got close, slapped down his extended right hand, stepped in close and rabbit punched him with all I had—with the iron in my hand! He dug up at least a yard of cement sidewalk with his nose.

I picked up Dink McPherson and staggered away a hundred feet. I dropped him and went back for both the others. Dutch was the last one. And when I dropped him with his boss, there was Diane leaning over Dink, digging jewelry out of his pockets.

"Horry, Horry," she choked. "I knew you'd come!"

I remember saying, "Will you please explain why you didn't tell me you was married?" Then the effect of that shot in the arm crept up and got me. A slug from a .45 does that sometimes. It makes a hell of



a hole. For the first time in my life I passed out.

**A**FTER a while I opened my eyes. I could feel soft arms about me, feel Diane's lips on my face, warm and moist, and hear her crooning something. I turned my head and looked.

There was a couple of fire trucks there, the Cadillac was a smoldering ruin, and there also were a couple of police cars close to the curb.

Dora was hanging on the arm of a guy I recognized as P. Rolland Gibbs, the biggest attorney in town, and Gibbs was talking fast to some cops, including Detective-sergeant Hollis.

Diane was saying, "—and oh, darling, you've got to believe me. Didn't you ever do something wrong, something you didn't intend to do at all? I did get sloppy at Shadowland that night, and while I was practically out, Dink McPherson got a crooked justice of the peace to marry me to—to—well to the man I married! He's never been near me, darling! I would have gotten it annulled, Mr. Gibbs would have done it for me, but Dink held the certificate. He threatened to go to Daddy, and the shock would have killed poor Daddy, I know. Please, darling—!" She kissed me. She might have been married to someone else but she kissed me like she was married to me, Horry Widgeon!

Then there were the reporters, Gibbs hovering in the background. Name, what, why, where, when, was all I heard.

Diane spoke up. "I'll talk for Mr. Widgeon," she smiled. "After all he's my fiance!" I just shut my eyes

and lay there. "We heard, my sister and I, of a plot to burgle the house, and we called on Mr. Widgeon to help us prevent it, as we wanted no excitement about the house, due to Daddy's weak heart. You can see exactly how thoroughly Mr. Widgeon did his work. He not only caught these men in the act, but he was shrewd enough to get them outside before capturing them. No doubt Daddy, being a little deaf, had slept through it all."

And blamed if he hadn't!

Detective Hollis growled, "Widgeon, didn't you hop me at Shadowland tonight? What about Pete Carmer?"

Diane said, "Ridiculous! Horry has been here at the house with me all evening. Mr. Gibbs?"

Mr. Rolland Gibbs cleared his throat and glared at Hollis. "Don't forget," he said sternly, "that you are listening to Miss Diane Grady. Her father is Randolph Grady—who still, if I have to remind you—wields a lot of influence in this town! No doubt the intruder you saw at Shadowland killed this Carmer. Good riddance, say I. But that intruder, who attacked you, most certainly was *not* Mr. Widgeon. You have Miss Grady's word for that!"

Boy, influence is swell! Hollis rocked back on his heels and went away from there talking to himself. I remember blubbering a little then and holding Diane close and saying, "Honey, how can I be your fiance if you're married?"

And she just kissed me and said something about not knowing my own strength. Dink McPherson had a broken jaw. The gunman, Blondie,

*(Continued on page 125)*

# WELCOME to Murder



INCE this is to be truth, utter truth, I mustn't try to shield myself. I had no excuse whatsoever for doing the thing I did, the dreadful thing that started the whole mess. Martha and Phil Lee, people used to exclaim, the typical happily-married couple! And for two years we were. Then Phil lost his job. We had money saved, enough to carry us indefinitely, and an income, small but sure, from Phil's dead

grandmother. And the prospect of much more, for Phil was his grandfather's only heir. We had no worries. Yet Phil did worry, he retired within himself. I can see now that he was simply sensitive, ashamed of being idle. Then, I thought he was hateful—and grumpy!!

**By**  
**PAUL**  
**HANNA**





The poker rose and fell, again and again.

*No doubt that a girl who is careless can get herself in a lot of trouble. But a murder frame seems too big a price to pay for minor indiscretions. Fortunately, what looks like the end of a story may actually be a beginning*

He began having excuses for not going out. I was young. I enjoyed parties, I wanted to go. And there

was always Paul Stuart. That was the trouble. There was always Paul Stuart. Paul and Phil were never

what might be called bosom friends, Paul was the fop type, the lady's man; Phil was more sensitive, more thinking. Not that I noted that then—oh, no! Paul was the sweet fellow willing to take a friend's wife about town. Phil was a surly husband, who, I thought, didn't care much for his young wife any more!

**T**HERE has to be a starting point for everything. I suppose my real troubles began the night of the Beaux Arts Ball. Phil was drinking a little. He wouldn't go. When I protested, he snarled that I should call Paul Stuart; then he stormed out of the house. Stubbornly I did call Paul, who said he would be delighted. I was going as an odalisque, with full trousers and a jeweled breastplate affair. In those days I was foolishly proud of my figure. And while Paul waited in the living room, I struggled and toiled with that ridiculous costume. Try as I might, I could not hook it behind me. So I called Paul.

I can see him now, peering over my shoulder at the reflection of me in the glass as he fumbled at the hooks. Every woman likes to think she holds it in her to interest a man, I suppose. I make no excuses. I smiled at him deliberately, breathed deeply. "Blast the thing," he said thickly, and took me in his arms.

**T**HAT was the beginning. We did not go to the ball that night. We rode instead. After that there were many evenings, evenings when Phil didn't come home, evenings when I lied to him about where I was going and with whom! It grew and grew, something inescapable, and

yet through it all I knew I didn't love Paul Stuart. I loved my husband, yet there was that feeling of wanting to get even with him for his sureness of me, his coldness, his drawing ever within himself.

I met Paul at the usual place that fateful night. We rode, we parked at the lake, we drank the liquor he had in the car. No one saw us. Afterward I was to remember that. And before we knew—perhaps because of the liquor, perhaps because of ourselves—it was late, past one o'clock.

"He'll be asleep," I said, liquor-brave, "so you can drive me home." I remember sitting for long moments before the house, while Paul kissed me. I even remember what I wore, a tailored suit and a white silk waist beneath it.

"Nuts," said Paul, "the liquor stores are closed and I surely need another drink!" So, still liquor-daring, I invited him in. More as a lark than anything else, we took our shoes off like a couple of silly children. I found the bottle, and in the darkness we sat down on a divan and drank from the bottle itself. After a little while Paul put it on the floor and reached for me. I felt his lips on mine, and didn't care. Until the light came on.

Phil's face, black with anger, glared at us, and all I could see was his eyes. There was madness in them, murder and sudden death. Somehow I got to my feet. There was never a word said, not a syllable! He came across the room and cut off my escape! His fist lashed out, crashed into my jaw, knocked me against the wall. Even then I was conscious enough to see the white

face of Paul Stuart, the darting eyes, like those of a trapped beast. Then Phil was on him.

Paul Stuart was too yellow to fight. He merely tried to escape. Three times Phil knocked him down. The last time he fell against the fire screen. The poker, the tongs, and the brass shovel in their little stand crashed over with him. And when he came up, sullenly, like a cornered rat, the heavy poker was in his hand.

I tried to scream, and no sound came. Phil charged in, in time to catch the poker across the head. He dropped to his knees. The poker rose and fell again and again; it seemed to me Phil's skull crushed sickeningly. Blood came from his nose, from his ear, in a crimson stream. Somehow, still without being able to scream, I leaped to my feet, grasped Paul Stuart's arm. And slowly the poker came down, thudded to the floor. Together we stood there, peering down at my bleeding husband.

The rest is all too vague in my memory to tell. I remember Paul with his lips pulled back, snarling like an animal. I remember his saying we'd have to run for it, remember putting a few clothes in a bag while he tore things apart in the living room. He even put the silver in a tablecloth, saying we'd toss it in the bay, to make it look more like a robbery.

What did I think? I don't know. My mind was numb, blank. My husband was dead, there on the floor, and I was the cause of it, I alone. I couldn't even cry, I couldn't speak. I did the things Paul Stuart told me to do, obeyed him like a frightened child. I remember returning to the

living room with the bag. He was standing against the front door, and he was polishing the handle of the brass poker with his handkerchief. His voice seemed to come from far away as he said, "Lay it beside—beside—Phil!"

Wordlessly, without thinking, I gripped the handle, walked across the room and dropped the poker on the floor. We turned off the lights and went out together, got into his car. He kept to the back streets all the way to the bay, tossed in the silver, drove downtown.

"Listen," he told me nervously, "we've got to be careful about this. Lots of people ride busses, so we'll ride one. You sit outside while I go get the tickets." Moments later he was back, slipping an envelope and some bills into my purse. "Just in case it becomes necessary for us to separate," he said. "Now we'll sit apart—pretend like we don't know each other. The bus is in now, so you get on and sit toward the front. Pretend to sleep, with your head down on your hand."

I never even looked to see what it said on the front of the bus. It was like a crouching gray monster, waiting to swallow me up, and I was thankful for the shielding darkness of its maw. I found a seat, slid into it, put my elbow on the window and sank my head into my hand, looking at the blank brick wall of the terminal, not two feet from my eyes. I never saw who got on, who got off.

**M**OMENTS later we slid away into the night. I remember but faintly the sleeping towns we wheeled through, roaring along the unwinding highway in the deadness of early

morning. "Dead, dead, dead," was the refrain running over and over in my mind. We slid through Austin, paused at Waco for moments, and even then I did not open my eyes.

Outside Austin someone dropped into the seat beside me. Paul, I thought, still numbly, coldly, without feeling. He sat very close to me. He even put an arm tentatively around my shoulders, drew me close to him. I didn't care. I was past all feeling, nothing mattered. The wheels spun on over the highway rhythmically. "Dead, dead, dead, they taunted. Exhausted, I slept.

It was gray dawn when I awakened and stirred. The arm was heavy on my shoulders. I looked at Paul.

It wasn't Paul! A pimply faced youth with a fringe of mustache leered at me, whispered, "H'ya, babe, quite a night we had!"

I pushed him away, stumbled to my feet and gazed wildly up and down the bus. Questioning eyes stared back at me. "Paul, Paul," I whimpered, while the man beside me tried to hush me, tried to make me sit down once again.

Paul wasn't in the bus! I was alone! I screamed. The pimply faced lad got to his feet. Just a trifle too late.

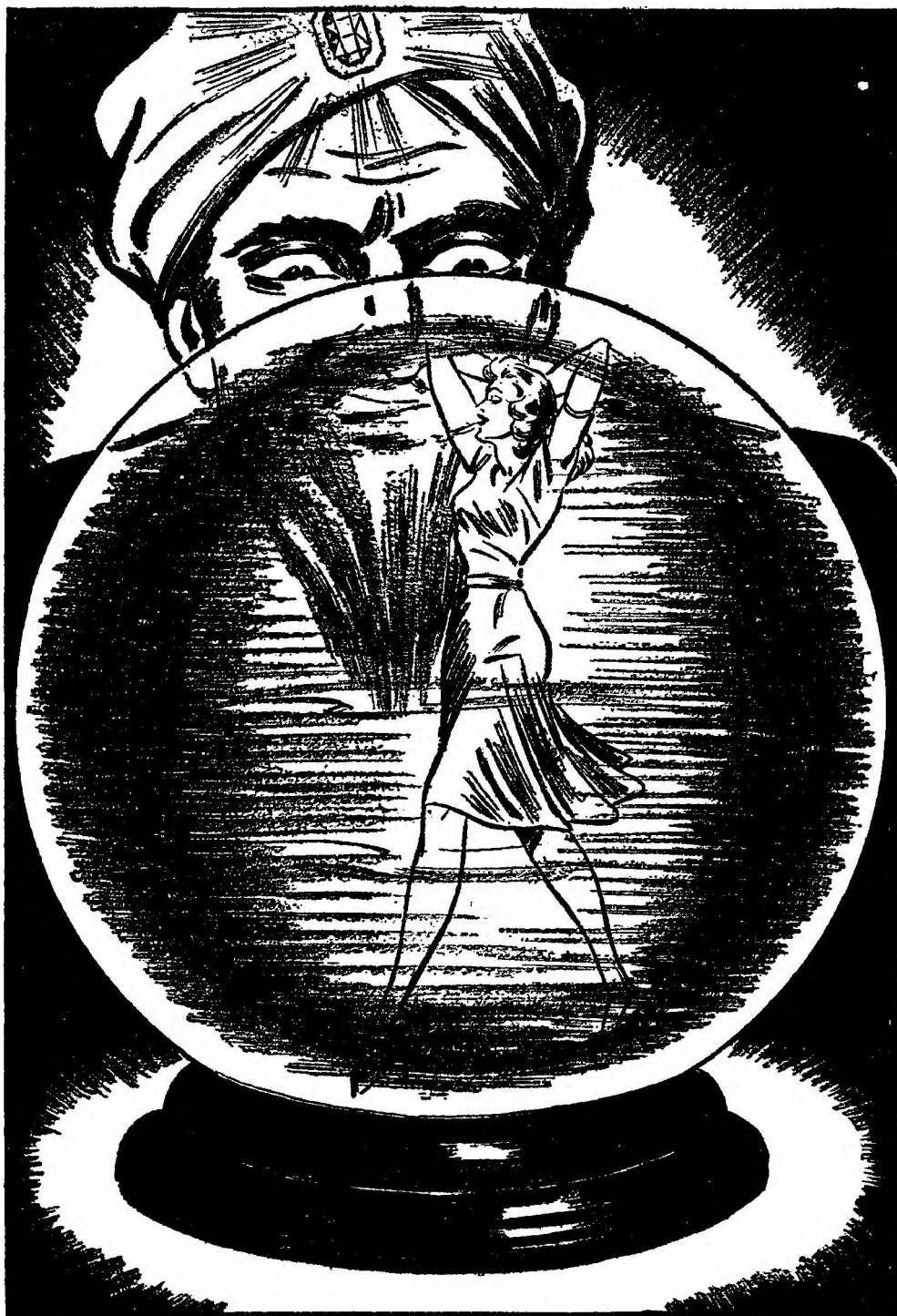
I hadn't looked at any of my neighbors. Now I saw a slim, brown-faced man directly across the aisle, rising easily to his feet. He wore a dark suit, a stock was at his throat, a stock or a scarf, and wound around his head was a turban, clasped at the front by a gold pin. These things I glimpsed as he came toward us, these and his white teeth, his flashing eyes.

"This man, madame," he said, "annoys you?"

"Take your black fingers off me," snarled the man beside me, and getting up, pawed out viciously at my rescuer. I never knew what happened. I know the fist whizzed by harmlessly, I know my night's companion sailed through the air and lit farther back in the aisle with a thump. The bus driver stopped, came back to see what was the trouble. Half a dozen passengers explained. My helping friend made washing motions with his hands, sat back in his own seat, bowing but slightly at me, and gazing straight ahead. The man who had annoyed me kept in the back of the bus.

Already, as we sped along, the whole thing was out of my mind. It didn't matter at all. I didn't wonder about the turbaned man, or even the pimply faced youth. I was seeing things clearly now. Seeing that Paul Stuart, thinking only of his own skin, had wrapped a noose about my neck. Perhaps the shock of realizing that I was alone made me think clearly. Step by step I went over the thing, the turning on of the lights, the blow to my face, Paul's beating, and how Paul had stood over Phil with that awful poker rising and falling until I stopped him.

I cursed myself now for listening so dumbly, for running away. I remembered that no one had seen Paul and me together that night, and a man seldom tells anyone he is going out with a friend's wife! He could alibi himself a half dozen ways no doubt. And the poker! He'd deliberately wiped the handle of the poker, then extended it to me! And I'd taken it! My prints would be on it, mine and mine alone! Police were clever, they'd find that silver



Materializing in the crystal, I danced for customers.

in the bay, they'd know it was a phony clue, perhaps! And I'd be missing, only me, Martha Lee!

Blindly I got off the bus at Dallas, blindly stumbled into the restroom. Outside the window I could hear newsboys crying their papers. I shuddered at the thought of newspapers! I visioned them, with my name in headlines, the picture of poor Phil as a corpse, perhaps our wedding picture. WIFE SLAYS HUSBAND, those letters would shriek. A woman sewing up a run in her stocking looked at me curiously. Half fearfully she arose, as if she saw something that frightened her in my face. She fled from the washroom.

My picture! She'd seen my picture in the paper, I thought! She was going now to summon the police! I rushed from the washroom. Once on the street I stepped into an alley, hid my face in my hands and shuddered. I would have fallen then, would have fainted there in that grimy alley except for a firm hand that caught my arm.

A soft voice said, "Bear up, my dear madame. Come, a little stimulant will help."

**B**LINDLY I went where he guided me. It was the man in the turban. I remember drinking coffee with him at a cafe. I remember his kindness, his help and assistance. But most of all I remember his black, shiny eyes, constantly peering at me, his gentle voice soothing me, the very blandness and evenness of his face assuring me that everything was going to be all right. He, too, was going to St. Louis. And all the way there, by bus, during all those long

hours, he was constantly at my elbow. He saw that I ate, he bought me candy, he tried to buy me newspapers. Those I could not stand! I *knew* what was in the papers!

And by the time we reached St. Louis, weary and worn, I, Martha Lee, accomplice to murder, was an old friend of Zerda, the Seer.

**I** THINK I would have died had it not been for him. I checked into a hotel and stayed there three days and nights without even going out for food. I lay on the bed and gazed up at the ceiling hour after hour unseeingly. I saw Phil, always Phil, stretched out on the floor with the blood pouring from his nose, from his ears. And I lived with that image for three days, would have died with it had it not been for Zerda.

Checking into the hotel I'd been quite fatalistic about the whole thing. Sooner or later the police would locate me. I might dye my blonde hair black, I might attempt any one of several disguises, but in the end they'd get me, I knew. So I registered as Mrs. Phil Lee, and lay on my bed for three days and nights, waiting for the police.

The third day came the phone call. I remember watching how my hand trembled as I reached for it, listening like a different person altogether to the sound of my voice saying hello. It wasn't police. It was Zerda. I said, weakly, "Come up if you like. My door is open." All those hours I'd kept it open, waiting for the police to come and get me, to take me to jail—and the chair.

I lay back with closed eyes, waiting for Zerda. I was tired, worn out, so tired my mind was an abso-



lute blank. I couldn't sleep, had hardly closed my eyes during the time I was at the hotel. Yet I didn't hear the door open. I opened my eyes wearily, and there he stood, arms folded across his chest, staring down at me. He did not speak for long moments, simply gazed with those obsidian eyes. And I *could* not speak, I tried and words refused to come.

Men have always found me attractive, I have always been proud of my figure. A woman soon learns what a man is thinking by the way he looks at her. Almost I could picture myself, lying there with my blonde hair spread on the pillow, my arm thrown back over my head. A funny thing occurred then, a funny thought. I remember thinking: This man is not human. He does not sweep his eyes over me. He peers at me as if he is trying to read my mind.

He said softly, "You have had great trouble, you cannot rest, you are like a night flower too long in the burning rays of the sun. Look at me, look at me."

He leaned closer, his face was only inches from mine. For the first time I saw the pupils of his eyes. They startled me, they shocked me, for they dilated, they seemed to grow larger and larger, until the iris was wiped out, until his eyes were one huge gleaming pupil. He placed his brown fingers on my forehead, murmured, "Your burden is too great to bear alone, too great, too great. You will rest, you will lay down your load. Rest, rest."

**I**T WAS evening when I awakened, heavy with sleep. And there was Zerda to smile down at me, his eyes

gentle and kind, his teeth white and gleaming. "Better? You are better?" he asked and I nodded, even smiling a little in return. I sat up and ate the food he ordered for me, and drank the cocktail. Then, at his bidding I arose, bathed, fixed my hair and my face, and packed my clothes. I can't explain it, I didn't try very hard. He seemed, somehow, a thousand years old, sitting there so indolently, the smoke from his cigarette forming a blue cloud about his head.

He was not a man at all! I looked at my image in the mirror and wondered.

Yet never did Zerda's eyes so much as wander! Standing there before the mirror his black eyes were constantly on mine. Strangely enough I felt a little piqued at this, as if it were a challenge. There must be a bit of the devil in every woman, or perhaps it was the cocktail. I turned and regarded him with a smile. I leaned against the dresser.

And all he said was "Hurry, Hertha, there is much to be done."

"Hertha?" I said, astonished. "My name is—"

"Your name is Martha," he said slowly. "You are Mrs. Phil Lee. Zerda knows about you—and understands. Your bill is paid, we will go to my place."

We did, in a cab. Zerda's place was a huge, old-fashioned frame dwelling out Page Boulevard, in Wellston, a suburb of St. Louis. There was no sign on the house, nothing to indicate who dwelled within. A huge Negro, clad fantastically in Eastern costume, salaamed low as he admitted us. The walls were hung with heavy drapes, orien-

tal statues stood in niches, the air was heavy with incense. Something stirred within me, vaguely uneasy.

We drank again, sweet, heady wine. Zerda, his eyes never leaving mine, said, "Zerda sees all and knows all, Hertha. You have done well to put yourself in my hands." Then suddenly he leaned forward and said, "You have had news from San Antonio, letters, wires, papers?"

I shook my head, shuddered at the word *papers*. I'd formed an obsession, a mania against them. Headlines, headlines, was all I could see when I thought of the vile things. He arose, without a word, led me into a sheltered alcove. A table sat in the exact center of a deep-napped rug. The table was covered with a long cloth, falling in folds on the floor. And in the center of the table was a crystal, perhaps ten inches, perhaps a foot, in diameter. A chair was on either side of the table.

At his bidding I sank into one, he into the other. And again at his bidding I leaned forward and peered intently into the crystal. Inside the ball, clearly, I saw a deep dark cave, a stick fire burning in one corner, throwing grotesque orange fingers against dark walls, deepening shadows, sending up spirals of colored smoke.

Surprised, for I have always been a skeptic about such things, I looked across the table. Zerda's eyes looked directly into mine. He sat with his right elbow on the table, his thin chin propped against his clenched fist. A small gold serpent coiled about his ring finger, its fangs clutching a huge emerald.

"Look," he said softly, "look and believe."

**I**NSIDE the crystal, the fire emitted a great cloud of dense smoke. And from that smoke stepped a giant, coal black figure, clad in loin cloth and yellow turban to match, his chocolate body gleaming with oil. To me, it seemed as if he advanced to the middle of the crystal, or the cave, and suddenly he sank onto his knees, placed his arms straight before him and salaamed three times.

A voice, so faint as to be almost a whisper, intoned, "I am the geni of the lamp, the recorder of the past, the peerer into the future. Ask, oh, Master, and you shall know!"

Wildly I jerked my eyes away, glanced around the room, frightened, unbelieving. The whispering tone seemed to materialize out of the clouds of incense, thick and aromatic, that swirled through the alcove.

"Who," asked Zerda, his voice partially muffled by his clenched fist, "who is the lady with me, geni?"

"Her name," came the whisper, and I saw the miniature geni's lips move, his teeth glow, in the crystal, "Is Martha Lee, she is the widow of Phil Lee, of 1919 Craig, San Antonio, Texas."

I caught my breath, bit my lip, gazed fearfully into the black eyes of Zerda.

"Why does she flee?" asked Zerda. "Why is she haunted?"

"She flees," came the whisper, "from the police of many states, who search for her. She is haunted by the memory of her husband. She sees him lying bloody on the floor of their living-room."

"How can she save herself?"

"She can save herself only by doing the bidding of you, the master," came the colorless whisper.



His eyes were filled with madness, and there was a gun in his hand.

That was the last I heard. I fainted.

I SLEPT all through that night, never awakening until sunlight on my face brought me to consciousness. Amazed, I sat up in an ordinary bed in an ordinary room and looked about me. My window opened out onto a courtyard filled with flowers in bloom, a fountain bubbling and sparkling in the exact center. But to me, the significant part was the bars across the window! I got up and walked barefooted across the floor to the door. It was locked. Bewildered I sat down. A crystal bottle filled with wine sat on the bed table. That and a tiny bell of silver. I drank. Curiously I picked up the bell and rang. Its tinkle was scarce discernible.

A key clicked in the door. "You all dressed?" asked a drawling voice as the door swung wide. "I'se comin' in."

A Negro, the same who had opened the door when Zerda and I entered the house, came into the room bearing a loaded tray. Grinning from ear to ear he set it down, pulled a table up and started laying out my breakfast.

I recognized him then. "The geni!" I gasped. "The man in the crystal ball!"

He giggled. "Suah, now, missy, that'us ol' Pete. Suah do feel nekkid in them theah baby britches!" He roared and shook with laughter. I tried to question him, knowing then there was some trick about the crystal, but the only answer I got was to wait until the boss man came, that he'd tell me all I needed to know.

Presently, breakfast over, Zerda appeared. He wore a robe, this time, with the ever present stock. He was without the turban. His hair was thin, sleek and black, plastered to his well-shaped skull. He sat down beside me, looked at me with those black expressionless eyes and waited.

Somehow I was angry. "It was a trick," I grated, "a contemptible trick! Even Pete, your geni of the crystal admits it!"

He leaned forward, smiling sardonically—for once, out of character. For those eyes suddenly took on an expression that I have seen too many times. They looked like the eyes of Paul Stuart, faithless, yellow Paul, who had left me to take all the blame for Phil's murder!

"A trick?" he sneered. "Perhaps it was a trick, the way you killed your husband, you and your lover. The way you made the house to look as if a burglar had done it! Perhaps that is a trick on my part, my knowing that?"

How did he know? How did he know? His voice droned on, his eyes held mine. "For months, my dear, there've been you and this Paul Stuart. Your husband had lost his job, he'd grown surly. You lacked for nothing, wanted nothing, for he had a small income and the promise of a great sum of money when his grandfather died. Yet he was ashamed, ashamed to face people. So you lost yourself with Paul Stuart."

I moaned a little, but his brown fingers bit into my shoulder.

"There was the fateful night," he went on, his voice vibrant, "that night when you and your sweetheart

last your caution, when you drank too much. The night when he held you in his arms, there in your own living-room. The light whirled on and there was your husband! Can you not feel his fist crashing into your traitorous face? And the way he felled your boy-friend. And listen, listen to the thud of the poker against your husband's head. Like the crushing of an eggshell! See the blood, the gray of his brains—!"

I shrieked aloud, leaped to my feet. I beat on the door until my fists and elbows and knees ached. Then I remember huddling there in a corner. Over and over something within me shrieked how does he know, how does he know?

Then he was leaning over me, his fingers wound in my hair. "A trick," he sneered, "is it a trick, like the crystal?" He jerked me to my feet, held me at arm's length. "The police," he said steadily, "would like to know your whereabouts. I can turn you over to them. You will go to the chair. They'll shave the pate of your beautiful head, they'll clamp the wire to your leg. Your fingers will curl! Smoke will trickle from the wet sponges!"

I moaned. "What do you want, why do you torture me?"

Curse the look in his eyes! The look of Paul Stuart!

"Yes, Zerda could turn you to the police." He fairly purred, "Or you could stay out of the world. Safe, here with Zerda. The slave of the master!"

What else was there for me to do? I closed my eyes and tried to turn my face away as he drew me to him, pressed me close. His fingers jerked my head about, jerked it back so

viciously it hurt my throat. His lips on mine were like his hands—cold—and dank.

SOMETIMES, in retrospect, the three months that followed so swiftly are like a dream. There were times when I was almost happy. And there were also times when I cried bitterly at my very loneliness. For I had no one at all except Zerda himself, and Pete, the colored door-man. Had it not been for Pete, I do not know what I would have done. At least his broad, infectious smile was a happy spot in the lonely days. There was no radio, there were no papers allowed in my sight.

Strangely enough, Zerda did not mind my being seen—in the house. At times I was his secretary, receiving those who came for a reading. At times I was—something else. But that came later.

Zerda drank. I used to laugh to Pete and tell him Zerda was constantly drunk. Even on his sober days, he was drunk with power, for it was amazing the influence he exerted over some of the richest—and most gullible—people in St. Louis. On the days that he had a hangover, Pete or I simply told his callers that the master was communing with the dead. The customers were left then, to tear their hair and wonder for another day or so. After a day of spirit-communing, fees were usually doubled. For Zerda knew that money was power. Money! Money! That was his constant cry. He was the greediest man I have ever known.

AFTER the second day I knew his act was a fake. Faked, that

is, except for one thing. He was an hypnotist extraordinary. Had he not been a charlatan, no doubt he could have made huge sums of money legitimately. He preferred to get it as a clairvoyant.

The crystal was so simple as to be amazing. Once he laughed and told me that Santa Claus gave him the idea. And that I remembered that I, too, had seen a patented contrivance the Christmas before, used in the same manner by some of the department stores and theatres. Children peered through a peep hole into what seemed a miniature room, to see Santa Claus working at his bench. Santa, however was only about three or four inches high! The child raised a normal sized phone, and was astonished to see Santa answer it in miniature in his workshop! He even talked to her, the tot, answered questions, promised gifts!

Of course it was done through a clever system of diminishing reflections. Santa Claus was a normal sized man in a mirrored room of normal size, and his reflection was caught and passed along into the miniature room by other mirrors.

Zerda used the same system. His mirror room was in the basement. The mirrored and reflecting and diminishing tubes ran upward to the crystal. Pete as the geni of the lamp, and later I, as an Eastern houri, appeared in the basement room. By a clever set of microphones, our answers could be heard in the seance room! We could not see that room ourselves. We were asked the questions through another microphone, very small, which Zerda concealed in the palm of his hand. There was a

clicker on this, so that he could turn it on, ask the question of us—either Pete or me—then turn it off. Zerda was clever. This was in order that neither of us could hear the customer. He worked on the theory of what we didn't know, not hurting us!

I was astonished that people would fall for this. But the fact was, its success lay in the preparation. A customer came to the house, was received by either Pete or me and led into a waiting-room. This room was wired, so that anything the customer said could be heard, it had peepholes, so that actions could be observed. A heavy, heady wine was always served, and the master insisted that the customer use it, too! The flagon, of course, was kept in the room, which was usually stifling with incense.

In the meantime, should the customer prove to be a new one, I had already phoned a connection of ours and told him the customer's auto license number. Several moments later I knew without further ado, who the customer was. An old man who worked in the morgue of a huge daily newspaper was also paid by Zerda. The name was phoned to him. He went through the morgue file hurriedly and came up with any significant facts concerning the customer's past. It was fairly easy, as well, to go through an unsuspecting one's purse, and after I learned, I became surprisingly efficient in extracting information from the contents of such a purse, or a wallet.

If things got along nicely, if the customer seemed gullible enough—or full enough—he or she saw the geni in the crystal!

It was an amusing business. And Zerda was particularly shrewd about it. He wore a small earphone beneath his turban. If the customer was already opposite he could apparently sink into a trance. By pressing a button he opened the connection, and I told him all that I had been able to learn.

Zerda the master! A cheap crooked clairvoyant. And I, Martha Lee, the accomplice to a murderer, working for him, finding a little fun in it. Always I wondered—knowing him for a crook—how he knew in detail so much about me. But he never told me.

Before I was married, I was a dancer, amateur, but good, having studied under the best teachers in the southwest. Often, as an houri, materializing out of the smoke in the basement room, I danced for customers. And often, when Zerda was drunken on his own spiced wine he made me dance for him. He was not a hard master, all in all, only a jealous master. Sometimes I liked him, sometimes I almost thought I loved him. And at other times the touch of his cold dank lips, the lifeless feel of his hands nauseated me.

Pete slept out, coming in early. Once, he knocked on my door, rolling his eyes. "Wha' time ol' Zerda go out, ma'am?" he asked.

I hadn't heard him leave. I knew he was drinking the night before. Pete handed me a note. It read, "Life is too much for me. I am going to end it all! Death is peace. Zerda!"

"My God," I remember saying excitedly, "you'll have to—"

Pete grinned wearily. "That

man ain't killin' he-se'f," he moaned, "he killin' me. Ever' couple months he get so drunk he gonna kill he-se'f. Then ol' Pete got to go and drag him out of a saloon!" He thrust the note at me, turned and plodded away.

I thank my Gods that I kept that note—as a curiosity.

THE weeks dragged on, and on. Almost I'd forgotten the man for whose death I was responsible. I remember pleading with Zerda for papers, for magazines, and his response, grave and kindly, that they would only upset me. Zerda was my life. Zerda's home was my world.

Once he burst into my room, some three months after I had come to him, as jubilant as a child. He grasped me in his arms, held me close. "How would you like to go to South America?" he crowed.

I drew back in amazement. Bitterly I said, "Me? When I can't get myself out of the house?"

He laughed and kissed my unwilling lips. "Zerda can do anything," he bragged, wine heavy on his breath. He let me go then and strode up and down the room, slapping his thighs. "Haven't I always told you that one of these days I'd hook an important sucker? One who'd lay real money on the line. You've brought me luck! Listen."

And he was off, telling of the pleasure spots of the Latin world, picturing our life together. Entranced I came to him listening. He made me believe. He was so intense, so sure of himself. Again his arms went around me—and again I shuddered at his eyes, the eyes of Paul Stuart!

"Has Zerda been cold?" he crooned. "It is only that Zerda has been busy. With this money, little one, you will find Zerda different, different indeed."

I closed my eyes as his cold dank lips found my lips. . . .

**T**HE next afternoon I appeared in the mirror room in the basement. The odd part was I wore ordinary clothes! There was no dancing, only a demure standing beside a little table and answering rehearsed questions.

"Your husband," came Zerda's voice, "wants to know if you are happy."

"I am not completely happy," I answered, "because I yearn for him, I want him and need him!"

The little click was Zerda's mike turning off—so I couldn't hear the customer!

"Why don't you go back to him?" your husband asks," came Zerda.

"Because I am ashamed."

And my eyes filled with honest tears, that time. For I thought of poor dead Phil—thought of how unfaithful I'd been to him with Paul, the yellow traitor!

"And if you knew all was forgiven?"

"I would go to him on my hands and knees, if I crawled to hell to find him!"

And that was that.

Zerda was jubilant. He held me in his arms, he crooned over and over. "My luck piece, the best thing that ever came to me, the luckiest thing. He's coming tonight, darling, he's bringing the money. The poor, deluded man!" He laughed shrilly, began rehearsing me.

The rest of the evening was a flurry of packing. Most of the trash in the house we decided to leave. Some we packed. Even Pete was not let into our secret. Once Zerda had the money from his newest sucker, we were on our way! I felt no pangs, no regrets. If a man were fool enough to spend a large amount of money on such a swindle, he *should* lose it!

**S**MOKE poured into the basement room from the chemicals I tossed on the fire. I stepped into the smoke, kicked the switch that set on the fan to clear the room. Then came Zerda's tense, hoarse voice.

"Your husband is here. He wishes to know why so much money is necessary?"

I said gravely, "Money means nothing. I feel here," I placed my hand over my heart, "that we can only be happy as we were. You must give your money to my master, then tomorrow I will come home, beloved!"

I kicked the switch that set the lights off, wondering if the poor sucker, drunken and deluded, who thought I looked like his missing wife, would fall for it. And suddenly I tensed. For through the stepped up microphone on the wall that brought Zerda's questions to me, came a crying, moaning, anguished voice—a voice that was not Zerda's.

"Oh, God," it came faintly but distinctly, "don't let it be a hoax! Martha! Martha! I've given him the money, only come back to me. It's all right. It doesn't matter about Paul, it doesn't matter about anything, it—"



*Click* went the mike. Zerda had forgotten to turn it off when the so-called sucker had laid his money on the table!

*And the voice was the voice of my dead husband, Phil Lee!*

Seconds later I burst into the seance room. I didn't see anything except the white, tear-stained face of Phil, whom last I had seen lying in his own blood on the floor of our living-room a thousand miles south!

Then I was in his arms, pressing him close, and we were crying incoherent things to one another. I remember his thick laughter, his beloved voice saying, "We Lees have tough skulls, dear; Paul Stuart only fractured mine. And when I awakened in the hospital, you were gone. The maid found me the next morning of course, and I lied, I told police burglars had beaten me, that you were away on a visit." He pressed me even closer. "I've advertised, I've done everything trying to find you. Things are all right now, grandfather died, I've inherited nearly one hundred thousand—?"

Then I guess we both remembered Zerda. We turned together. Zerda stood over the stacked money, the stacked bonds of the crystal table like a mother tigress guarding her young. His lips were pulled back from his teeth, his eyes were filled with madness. A black gun gleamed in his brown hand.

"The Lees have hard skulls," he jeered. "Maybe the skull will turn a bullet." He glared at us both like a demented person. "Perhaps you think Zerda will stop at murder to get this money. When all my life I've planned and schemed for a coup like this!"

Slowly, slowly, Phil, now perfectly sober, put me behind him.

His voice sounded grim and uncompromising.

"You crook, you cheat," he said levelly. "I see it now. You saw my ads in some of the papers. You wrote me, knowing Martha was my wife. I was mad to find her, desperate. There's my fortune on the table, you cheap crook. I have my wife now, and I'll die for her. I'm coming after you, and you haven't the guts to pull the trigger!"

I screamed. But he started forward, a step at a time. A brown hand swept down to seize the money for which it lusted. Then Zerda backed, the money beneath his left arm, the gun in his right hand.

Saliva trickled from his mouth, his eyes were feral—yet the eyes of a skulking beast. Money! He had money at last, a great amount of money!

Suddenly Phil dove across the table at him. Zerda didn't fire! He clutched the money to his breast, raised the gun and struck at Phil with it. I saw Phil's white hand on his wrist, pushing the gun aside, white fingers at a brown throat. Then the gun roared!

It had all been too much for me. I fainted.

**I** AWAKENED in Phil's arms. His face was white, his eyes haggard. "We'll have to run for it," he said, history repeating itself. "He's dead. I'll swear I never touched the gun. He pulled the trigger and the bullet went into his heart! As if he'd meant it."

I sat up. *As if he'd meant it! I never touched the gun!*

"What," I whispered, "it's going to be all right!"

**W**HEN the police arrived, they found Zerda lying in his life's blood on the floor of his seance room. They examined the gun carefully for prints, and only Zerda's were on it! The note beside the body cinched the thing. It was the note Old Pete had left with me, the note I'd kept for a souvenir. It read, "Life is too much for me. I'm going to end it all! Death is peace. Zerda!"

I admitted that I worked for Zerda, admitted it with a straight face and steady words. Pete, puzzled and eye-rolling, suddenly summoned, said Zerda often threatened suicide.

"Who," asked the suspicious sergeant, "is this fellow you were riding with? The one that came in with you when you and he discovered the body?"

"This," said I, putting my arm about Phil's neck, "is my husband, now and forever more!"

I often think now that the thing is over, that although it was horrible, gruesome, it was all for the best. Zerda was undoubtedly a little insane. His suicide broke up a ring of

fake clairvoyants and spiritualists who had mulcted the public out of much money.

We never speak of the past, Phil and I.

He realizes that Zerda had some hold over me, realizes that I thought he, Phil, was dead.

When little Phil, Jr., was born I told my doctor about it. "How," I asked, "could he, Zerda, describe, detail, by detail, events that had happened to me on the night I thought Phil was killed?"

The doctor was a kindly man. This was not the first time I'd unburdened myself to him. "Sometimes," he said, "hypnotism is a strange force. Although such information is not admissible in a court, criminals have often told the absolute truth when under the influence of a master hypnotist, such as this Zerda must have been. These terrible things were fresh on your mind. He had only to put you into that twilight zone of which we know so little, to question and prompt you deftly, and he learned all. Now will you forget it?"

Maybe, with the help of both my Phils, I will. Sometimes I wonder. I, Martha Lee, a slave of the master, a geni of the lamp!

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# New Chisels

## *Watch Your Step!*



FROM the main office of the National Better Business Bureau, frequent bulletins and warnings are issued to the public, bidding the average American citizen beware of new rackets and grafts schemed by chiseling crooks to bilk unsuspecting victims of money and property.

As fast as fresh grafts are uncovered, the authorities try to spike them. One of the newest chisels is the so-called "priorities purchase" racket, based upon consumer buying of commodities that are officially rationed.

Take typewriters, for example. Everyone knows these machines have been frozen, and that it requires a priority order from your local rationing board for you to purchase one.

Assume, however, that you have obtained such a certificate and have bought a new, or even a used, typewriter. You take the machine to your home or your office; as far as you're concerned, the deal is completed.

But beware of the man who may call upon you within the next day or so, representing himself to be from the rationing board. "There's been a slight hitch concerning the purchase of your typewriter," he will tell you glibly. "I must take it down to rationing headquarters for a check-up of serial numbers against the priority we issued to you."

If you are very foolish you will allow him to depart with your typewriter. But if you do, the chances are a hundred to one that you'll never see the machine again—for the simple reason that your caller was a thief rather than a government inspector; a crook operating with fraudulent credentials. By devious channels he had learned of your purchase, and used his glib trick to steal the merchandise from you.

This is a variation of a still older dodge, wherein a crook would call upon some unsuspecting housewife, representing himself to be a vacuum cleaner repairman and quoting ridiculously low prices for his work. Far too often the trusting lady of the house would hand over her expensive vacuum cleaner for "adjustment and tuning," only to wake up later and realize she had been duped by a confidence racketeer who'd decamped with the cleaner, never to return.

That same chisel has been worked on housewives, with sewing machines as the stolen goods rather than vacuum cleaners. So if an itinerant repairman rings your doorbell and suggest that you allow him to take away some household article for "repairs," be very certain that he isn't a thief before you trust him with anything valuable. These days, under priorities, many such articles can't be replaced because new ones are frozen by the government. And if yours is stolen, you'll have to get along without it for the duration!

# “TIN CAN” EXPERTS



IN “Modern Criminal Investigation,” a book on police procedure written by Sodcrman and O’Connell, an entire chapter is devoted to scientific methods of burglary detection. One especially interesting phase of the subject is that which concerns the technique used by twentieth-century safe crackers.

“Knob-knocking jobs,” or “punch jobs,” as they are known in underworld language, are those in which the burglar knocks off a safe’s dial by means of a sledgehammer. The spindle, or dog, is then punched back with a mallet and center punch, whereupon the small sockets are broken to allow the release of the lock. This, according to the experts, is a method frequently used by today’s safe robbers.

“Ripping jobs” require the use of specialized equipment such as a sectional jimmy, a large “can opener,” brace and bits, and a flashlight. Sectional jimmies come in several types, among them a single-piece kind with one end chiseled, and the two-section or three-section jimmies with one end like a pointed pencil and the other end chiseled.

“Torch jobs” demand the services of a burglar who is also a mechanic with a complete knowledge as to the proper admixture of air and acetylene gas which is necessary for the

right amount of concentrated heat to burn through a safe’s steel plates. According to police experts, this method is now almost obsolete because it is necessary to transport the oxygen and gas tanks, the footage of hose and the burner. The risk of detection is therefore much greater than in some of the other methods.

“Chopping jobs” are the simplest of all, provided they are worked on old-fashioned safes. In this case the safe is merely turned upside down and the bottom chopped out.

Most spectacular of all safe-burglary methods is that which employs explosives to blow the vault open. The criminal who uses this system must be an excellent student of his dangerous trade, with a thoroughgoing knowledge as to the exact amount of explosive necessary for the job at hand. Too little may result in failure and capture; too much might blow the thief himself to gory bits!

A hole is first drilled in the safe’s door, somewhat to the left of the dial and a few inches above it. Then a piece of cotton is saturated in nitroglycerine, wrapped around a fulminating cap and inserted in the hole. All other crevices are then sealed with ordinary soap. A connecting wire is now run from the detonating cap to a battery or electrical outlet, which must be a minimum of fifteen

feet distant. A spark sets off the fulminator, the nitroglycerine explodes, the force of the explosion is restrained by the soap-filled crevices—and as a result, the door of the safe is blown outward much the same as a bullet is propelled from the barrel of a gun by means of the powder-charge.

Equipment carried by safe blowers, according to Soderman and O'Connell, usually includes brace and bits, flashlight, nitroglycerine, and a jimmy or other burglar tools necessary to force entrance into the building.

## MURDER THE BUM!

(Continued from page 105)

had a fractured skull. "And, darling," she breathed, "it's terrible to be happy about it I suppose, but I'm not married any more. I'm a widow! You broke Dutch Nuremberg's neck and he's the man I married!"

Tie that one!

**W**ELL, the upshot of it all was that an hour or so later—a little past midnight, we were at Gibbs' house taking a drink, a stiff drink. My arm was dressed, they'd put iodine on the bullet burn along my back, and picked the buckshot out of my hip, and I had my good arm full of Diane.

Gibbs was pacing the floor, "If," he was saying, "we could just locate that marriage certificate before some newspaper man gets hold of it, I am sure I can fix the justice of the peace. But if we don't find that—"

Dora said, as if in surprise, "Why, we have it! And the Marquise de Pinada diamonds as well! I kidded



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Carmer into showing them to me, picked them out of his pocket in a wallet, and at Shadowland when I danced with Horry I pretended to stumble. Well, I slipped the wallet into the pocket in his tails!"

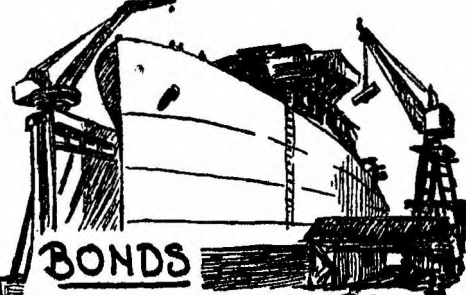
Everybody looked at me. And I had to grin!

I said, "Mr. Gibbs, if you will loan me a car, I'll go and get my coat. It is in very good hands indeed, probably in the hands of one of the few men in the world who won't talk!"

"Who has it?" shrilled Gibbs. "A scarecrow in a cornfield," I grinned.

So he loaned us a car. I knew we were going to be gone a long time, what with Diane sitting so close to me, and there still being several hours of darkness. On the way out she said, "A penny for your thoughts, darling!"

But I didn't sell out. I was wondering how much money I could get for my bicycle. You see, we boys who work for the Wilson Protective Association have to furnish our own wheels. And I was figuring I wouldn't be needing mine much longer!



**BONDS BUILD SHIPS FOR VICTORY**

## SUICIDE OR MURDER?

(Continued from page 81)

there is a factor which almost always appears. When a suicide cuts his own throat, in nearly ever instance *he will make two or three tentative and preliminary tries*. That is, he slashes that many shallow incisions before he finally musters sufficient courage to do the job properly and thoroughly.

Then he cuts the deep slit and dies.

Obviously, then, when Homicide detectives find a corpse with its throat cut, they always look for those preliminary shallow wounds. If the wounds aren't present, then the chances are a hundred to one that the victim was murdered.

Here, also, the suicide's psychology is a determining factor. Practically nobody, not even a crazy person, ever has quite enough courage to make the fatal slash on the first attempt. There's always a few experimental cuts first. And the lack of them has sent the police out to track down many a murderer who thought he could get away with a perfect crime!

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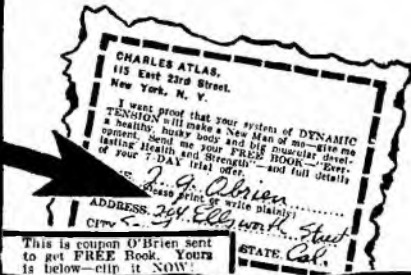
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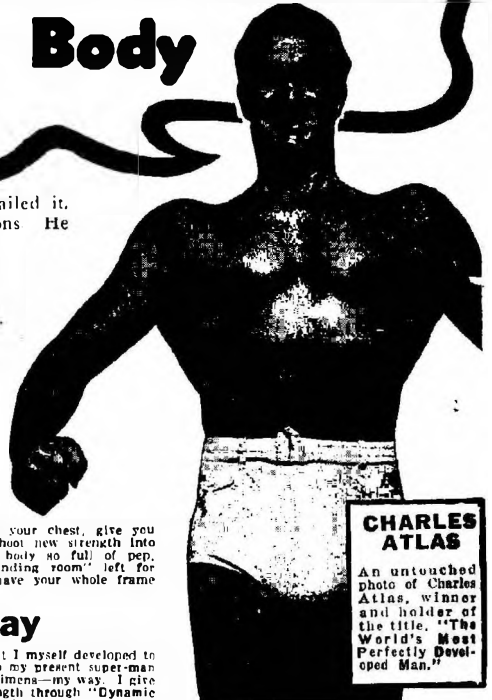
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