

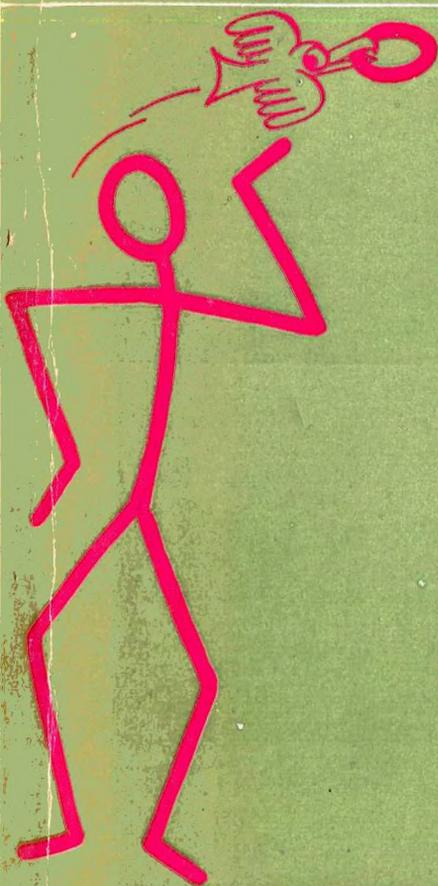
THE

# saint

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Edited by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

**They're Trying To Kill Me**

by *Craig Rice*

**Somewhere in France**

by *Richard Harding Davis*

**Witness to Murder**

by *Hal Ellson*

**The Soiled Diamonds**

by *William MacHarg*

**The Sleepless Knight**

by *Leslie Charteris*

**THE LATE LAMENTED**

A NEW NOVEL by **FREDRIC BROWN**

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

## Excerpts from Notes for an Autobiography:

1937: *Saint* movies are being made in Hollywood by RKO. Am living on boodle in Palm Springs, California. Come home one night to find house burned down. Move in next door where party is going on. Meet starlet, also tied to RKO, attractive but hardly known and not getting anywhere. Name of Lucille Ball. Tell her must try to help her get a good picture some day.

1945: *Writing* script for movie, not about *Saint*, at MGM. Lunch sometimes with another writer in same stable, name of Hope Harding Davis. Tell her will be out of that rat race some day, running a *Saint* Magazine and living like gentleman, when will reprint a story by her famous father. Lucille Ball now also under contract at MGM, doing fair. Suggest her for lead in my movie. She gets it.

1957: *Lucille Ball and husband Desi Arnaz buy RKO.*

1959: *Have Saint Magazine in full swing. Publish SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE, by Richard Harding Davis in February issue.*

I HAVE AN IDEA that if Richard Harding Davis were writing up the above synopsis, he would feel it artistically necessary, as a final touch, that either Hope or myself should buy MGM, but so far I am unable to supply this ideal dénouement. His plots matched the craftsmanship of O. Henry, and his style, I have often thought, may have influenced the irresistible readability of Edgar Wallace.

Even though SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE is obviously 40 years old in its subject, I think you will find it completely at ease in the company of THE LATE LAMENTED, the very latest product of the fertile and engaging contemporary talent of Fredric Brown, who does as neat a job on the theme of civic embezzlement as Davis did on espionage.

Three months ago, when featuring what I said was *perhaps* the late Craig Rice's last unpublished story of John J. Malone, I had no idea what strange hunch dictated that cautious qualification. But I was right: another unpublished manuscript in that series has since been found, and we are glad to be the first to print it, under the title of THEY'RE TRYING TO KILL ME. About this one I shall risk no more than saying that it contains *perhaps* her last word on the time-honored question: *Did the Butler done it?*

This extra rich issue is also loaded with another brand-new Hal Ellson, WITNESS TO MURDER, and a vintage *Saint*, THE SLEEPLESS KNIGHT, by the man who has not yet bought MGM, but is prepared to offer \$100 cash for the joint, although he doesn't really want it.



*Edgar Allan Poe*

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THE **saint**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1959

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# the sleepless knight

by . . . *Leslie Charteris*

Simon Templar was not called the Saint for nothing—but his philanthropies were sometimes unorthodox...

IF A GREAT many newspaper clippings and references to newspapers find their way into these chronicles, it is simply because most of the interesting things that happen find their way into newspapers, and it is in these ephemeral sheets that the earnest seeker after unrighteousness will find many clues to his quest.

Simon Templar read newspapers only because he found collected in them the triumphs and anxieties and sins and misfortunes and ugly tyrannies which were going on around him, as well as the results of races in which chosen horses carried samples of his large supply of shirts; not because he cared anything about the posturing of Trans-atlantic fliers or the flatulence of international conferences. And it was solely through reading a newspaper that he became aware of the existence of Sir Melvin Flager.

It was an unpleasant case; and the news item may as well be quoted in full.

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*FOOTNOTE FOR TURNPIKE-MINDED READERS: THE SPEEDS MENTIONED IN THIS STORY MAY SEEM MODEST. ON THE NARROW WINDING ROADS OF ENGLAND THEY ARE SOMETHING ELSE.*

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FROM: *THE SAINT INTERVENES*  
Copyright, 1934, by Leslie Charteris

## JUDGE CENSURES TRANSPORT COMPANY

Driver's Four Hours' Sleep a  
Week

"MODERN SLAVERY"

—*Mr. Justice Goldie.*

SCATHING criticisms of the treatment of drivers by a road transport company were made by Mr. Justice Goldie during the trial of Albert Johnson, a lorry driver, at Guildford Assizes yesterday.

Johnson was charged with manslaughter following the death of a cyclist whom he knocked down and fatally injured near Albury on March 28th.

Johnson did not deny that he was driving to the danger of the public, but pleaded that his condition was due to circumstances beyond his control.

Police witnesses gave evidence that the lorry driven by Johnson was proceeding in an erratic manner down a fairly wide road at about 30 miles an hour. There was a cyclist in front of it, travelling in the same direction, and a private car coming towards it.

Swerving to make way for the private car, in what the witness described as "an unnecessarily exaggerated manner," the lorry struck the cyclist and caused fatal injuries.

The police surgeon who subsequently examined Johnson described him as being "apparently intoxicated, although there were no signs of alcohol on his breath."

"I was not drunk," said Johnson, giving evidence on his own behalf. "I was simply tired out. We are

sent out on long journeys and forced to complete them at an average speed of over 30 miles an hour, including stops for food and rest.

"Most of our work is done at night, but we are frequently compelled to make long day journeys as well.

"During the week when the accident occurred, I had only had four hours' sleep.

"It is no good protesting, because the company can always find plenty of unemployed drivers to take our places."

Other employees of the Flager Road Transport Company, which employs Johnson, corroborated his statement.

"This is nothing more or less than modern slavery," said Mr. Justice Goldie, directing the jury to return a verdict of Not Guilty.

"It is not Johnson, but Sir Melvin Flager, the managing director of the company, who ought to be in the dock.

"You have only to put yourselves in the position of having gone for a week on four hours' sleep, with the added strain of driving a heavy truck throughout that time, to be satisfied that no culpable recklessness of Johnson's was responsible for this tragedy.

"I would like to see it made a criminal offence for employers to impose such inhuman conditions on their employees."

Sir Melvin Flager was not unnaturally displeased by this judicial comment; but he might have been infinitely more perturbed if he had known of the Saint's interest in the case.

Certain readers of these chronicles may have reached the impression that Simon Templar's motives were purely selfish and mercenary, but they would be doing him an injustice. Undoubtedly his exploits were frequently profitable; and the Saint himself would have been the first to admit that he was not a brigand for his health; but there were many times when only a very small percentage of his profits remained in his own pocket, and many occasions when he embarked on an episode of lawlessness with no thought of profit for himself at all.

The unpleasantness of Sir Melvin Flager gave him some hours of quite altruistic thought and effort.

"Actually," he said, "there's only one completely satisfactory way to deal with a tumor like that. And that is to sink him in a barrel of oil and light a fire underneath."

"The Law doesn't allow you to do that," said Peter Quentin pensively.

"Very unfortunately, it does not," Simon admitted, with genuine regret. "All the same, I used to do that sort of thing without the sanction of the Law, which is too busy catching publicans selling a glass of beer after hours to do anything about serious misdemeanors, anyway. . . . But I'm afraid you're right, Peter—I'm much too notorious a character these days, and Chief Inspector

Claud Eustace Teal isn't the bosom pal he was. We shall have to gang warily; but nevertheless, we shall certainly have to gang."

Peter nodded approvingly. Strangely enough, he had once possessed a thoroughly respectable reverence for the Law; but several months of association with the Saint had worked irreparable damage on that bourgeois inhibition.

"You can count me in," he said; and the Saint clapped him on the back.

"I knew it without asking you, you old sinner," he said contentedly. "Keep this next weekend free for me, brother, if you really feel that way—and if you want to be specially helpful you can push out this afternoon with a false beard tied round your ears and try and rent a large garage from which yells of pain cannot be heard outside."

"Is that all?" Peter asked suspiciously. "What's your share going to be—backing losers at Hurst Park?"

The Saint shook his head.

"Winners," he said firmly. "I always back winners. But I'm going to be busy myself. I want to get hold of a Gadget. I saw it at a motor show once, but it may take me a couple of days to find out where I can buy one."

As a matter of fact it took him thirty-six hours and entailed a good deal of travelling and expense. Peter Quentin found and

rented the garage which the Saint had demanded a little more quickly; but the task was easier and he was used to Simon Templar's eccentric commissions.

"I'm getting so expert at this sort of thing, I believe I could find you a three-humped camel overnight if you wanted it," Peter said modestly, when he returned to announce success.

Simon grinned.

The mechanical details of his scheme were not completed until the Friday afternoon, but he added every hour and penny spent to the private account which he had with Sir Melvin Flager, of which that slave-driving knight was blissfully in ignorance.

It is barely possible that there may survive a handful of simple unsophisticated souls who would assume that since Mr. Justice Goldie's candid criticisms had been pronounced in open court and printed in every newspaper of importance, Sir Melvin Flager had been hiding his head in shame, shunned by his erstwhile friends and treated with deferential contempt even by his second footman. To these unfledged innocents we extend our kindly sympathy, and merely point out that nothing of the sort had happened. Sir Melvin Flager, of course, did not move in the very Highest Society, for an uncle of his on his mother's side still kept and served in a fried-fish shop near the Elephant and Castle; but the society

in which he did move did not ostracise him. Once the first statement-seeking swarm of reporters had been dispersed, he wineed and dined and diverted himself and ran his business exactly the same as he had done before; for the business and social worlds have always found it remarkably easy to forgive the trespasses of a man whose prices and entertainments are respectively cheaper and better than others.

On that Friday night Sir Melvin Flager entertained a small party to dinner, and took them on to a revue afterwards. Conscience had never troubled him personally; and his guests were perfectly happy to see a good show without worrying about such sordid trifles as how the money that paid for their seats was earned. His well-laden trucks roared through the night with red-eyed men at the wheel to add to his fortune; and Sir Melvin Flager sat in his well-upholstered seat and roared with carefree laughter at the antics of the comedian, forgetting all about his business until nearly the end of the first act, when a program girl handed him a sealed envelope. Flager slit it open and read the note.

*One of our trucks has had another accident. Two killed. Afraid it may be bad for us if this comes out so soon after the last one. May be able to square it, but must see*

*you first. Will wait in your car during the interval.*

It was in his business manager's handwriting, and it was signed with his business manager's name.

Sir Melvin Flager tore the note into small pieces and dumped it in the ashtray before him. There was a certain forced quality about his laughter for the next five minutes; and as soon as the curtain came down he excused himself to his guests and walked down the line of cars parked in a side street adjoining the theater. He found his own limousine, and peered in at the back.

"You there, Nyson?" he growled.

"Yes, sir."

Flager grunted, and opened the door. It was rather dark inside the car, and he could only just make out the shape of the man who sat there.

"I'll fire every damned driver I've got tomorrow," he swore, as he climbed in. "What the devil do they think I put them on the road for—to go to sleep? This may be serious."

"You've no idea how serious it's going to be, brother," said the man beside him.

But the voice was not the voice of Mr. Nyson, and the mode of address was not that which Sir Melvin Flager encouraged from his executives. For a moment the managing director of the Flager Road Transport Company did not

move; and then he leaned sideways to stare more closely at his companion. His eyes were growing accustomed to the dark, but the movement did not help him at all, for with a sudden shock of fear he saw that the man's features were completely covered by a thin gauzy veil which stretched from his hat-brim down to his coat collar.

"Who the hell are you?" rasped Flager uncertainly.

"On the whole, I think it would be better for you not to know," said the Saint calmly.

Another man had climbed into the driver's seat, and the car vibrated almost imperceptibly as the engine started up. But this second man, although he wore a chauffeur's peaked cap, had a silhouette that in no way resembled that of the chauffeur whom Sir Melvin Flager employed.

Under his touch the car began to edge out of the line; and as he saw the movement Flager came back to life. In the stress of the moment he was unable to form a very clear idea of what was happening, but instinct told him that it was nothing to which he wanted to lend his tender person.

"Well, you won't kidnap me!" he shouted, and lashed out wildly at the veiled face of the man beside him.

Which was the last thing he knew about for the next half-hour, for his desperate swing was still far from its mark when a fist

like a ball of iron struck him cleanly on the point of the jaw and lifted him back on to the cushions in a dreamless slumber.

When he woke up, his first impulse was to clasp his hands to his painfully singing head; but when he tried to carry it out his wrists refused to move—they felt as if they were anchored to some solid object. Blinking open his eyes, he looked down at them. They were handcuffed to what appeared to be the steering wheel of a car.

In another second the memory of what had happened to him before he fell asleep returned. He began to struggle frantically, but his body also refused to respond, and he saw that a broad leather strap like the safety belt of an airplane had been passed around his waist and fastened in front of his abdomen, locking him securely to his seat. Wildly he looked about him, and discovered that he was actually sitting in the driving seat of a truck. He could see the hood in front of him, and, beyond it, a kind of white screen which seemed vaguely familiar.

The feeling that he had been plunged into some fantastic nightmare seized him, and he let out a stifled yell of fright.

"That won't help you," said a cool voice at his side; and Flager jerked his head around to see the veiled face of the unknown man who had sat at his side in the car.

"Damn you!" he raved. "What have you done to me?"

He was a large fleshy man, with one of those fleshy faces which look as if their owner had at some time invited God to strike him pink, and had found his prayer instantaneously answered. Simon Templar, who did not like large fleshy men with fleshy pink faces, smiled under his mask.

"So far, we haven't done very much," he said. "But we're going to do plenty."

The quietness of his voice struck Flager with a sudden chill, and instinctively he huddled inside his clothes. Something else struck him as unusual even as he did so, and in another moment he realized what it was. Above the waist, he had no clothes on at all—the whole of his soft white torso was exposed to the inclemency of the air.

The Saint smiled again.

"Start the machine, Peter," he ordered; and Flager saw that the chauffeur who had driven the car was also there, and that he was similarly masked.

A switch clicked over, and darkness descended on the garage. Then a second switch clicked, and the white screen in front of the truck's bonnet lighted up with a low whirring sound. Bewildered but afraid, Flager looked up and saw a free moving picture show.

The picture was of a road at night, and it unrolled towards him as if it had been photo-

graphed from behind the headlights of a car that was rushing over it. From time to time, corners, cross-roads, and the lights of other traffic proceeding in both directions swept up towards him—the illusion that he was driving the lorry in which he sat over that road was almost perfect.

"What's this for?" he croaked.

"You're taking the place of one of your own drivers for the weekend," answered the Saint. "We should have preferred to do it out on the road under normal working conditions, but I'm afraid you would have made too much noise. This is the best substitute we were able to arrange, and I think it'll work all right. Do you know what it is?"

Flager shook his head.

"I don't care what it is! Listen here, you—"

"It's a gadget for testing people's ability to drive," said the Saint smoothly. "When I turn another switch, the steering wheel you have there will be synchronized with the film. You will then be driving over the road yourself. So long as you keep on the road and don't try to run into the other traffic, everything will be all right. But directly you make a movement that would have taken you off the road or crashed you into another car—or a cyclist, brother—the film will stop for a mo-

ment, a red light will light up on top of the screen, and I shall wake you up like this."

Something swished through the air, and a broad stinging piece of leather which felt like a razor strop fell resoundingly across Sir Melvin's well-padded shoulders.

Flager gave a yelp of anguish; and the Saint laughed softly.

"We'll start right away," he said. "You know the rules and you know the penalties—the rules are only the same as your own employees have to obey, and the penalties are really much less severe. Wake up, Flager—you're off!"

The third switch snapped into place, and Flager grabbed blindly at the steering wheel. Almost at once the picture faltered, and a red light glowed on top of the screen.

*Smack!* came the leather strop across his shoulders.

"Damn you!" bellowed Flager. "What are you doing this for?"

"Partly for fun," said the Saint. "Look out—you're going to hit that car!"

Flager did hit it, and the strop whistled through the darkness and curled over his back. His shriek tortured the echoes; but Simon was without mercy.

"You'll be in the ditch in a minute," he said. "No. . . . Here comes a corner. . . . Watch it! . . . Nicely round, brother, nice-

ly round. Now mind you don't run into the back of this cart—you've got plenty of room to pass. . . . Stick to it. . . . Don't hit the cyclist. . . . You're going to hit him. . . . Mind the fence—you're heading straight for it—look out. . . . Look out!"

The strop whacked down again with a strong and willing arm behind it as the red light sprang up again.

Squealing like a stuck pig, Sir Melvin Flager tore the truck back on to its course.

"How long are you keeping this up for?" he sobbed.

"Until Monday morning," said the Saint calmly. "And I wish it could be a month. I've never seen a more responsive posterior than you have. Mind the cyclist."

"But you're making me drive too fast!" Flager almost screamed. "Can't you slow the machine up a bit?"

"We have to *average* over thirty miles an hour," answered the Saint remorselessly. "Look out!"

Sir Melvin Flager passed into a nightmare that was worse than anything he had thought of when he first opened his eyes. The mechanical device which he was strapped to was not quite the same as the cars he was used to; and Simon Templar himself would have been ready to admit that it might be more difficult to drive. Time after time the relent-

less leather lashed across his shoulderblades, and each time it made contact he let loose a howl of pain which in itself was a reward to his tormentors.

After a while he began to master the steering, and long periods went by when the red light scarcely showed at all. As these intervals of immunity lengthened, Flager shrugged his aching back and began to pluck up courage. These lunatics who had kidnapped him, whoever they were, had taken a mean advantage of him at the start. They had fastened him to an unfamiliar machine and promptly proceeded to shoot it through space at forty-five miles an hour: naturally he had made mistakes. But that could not go on for ever. He had got the hang of it at last, and the rest of it seemed more or less plain sailing. He even had leisure to ponder sadistically on what their fate would be when they let him go and the police caught them, as they undoubtedly would be caught. He seemed to remember that the cat-o'-nine-tails was the punishment invariably meted out by the Law for crimes of violence. Well, flogging him with that leather strop was a crime of violence. He brooded savagely over various tales he had heard of the horrors of that punishment. . . .

*Whack!*

The red light had glowed, and the strop had swung home

again. Flager pulled himself together with a curse. It was no good getting careless now that he had mastered the machine. But he was beginning to feel tired. His eyes were starting to ache a little with the strain of keeping themselves glued watchfully to the movie screen ahead. The interminable unwinding of that senseless road, the whirr of the unseen projector, the physical effort of manipulating the heavy steering wheel, the deadly monotony of the task, combined with the heavy dinner he had eaten and a long sequence of other dinners behind it to produce a sensation of increasing drowsiness. But the unwinding of the road never slackened speed, and the leather strop never failed to find its mark every time his wearying attention caused him to make a mistake.

"You're getting careless about your corners," the Saint warned him tirelessly. "You'll be in the ditch at the next one. Look out!"

The flickering screen swelled up and swam in his vision. There was nothing else in the world—nothing but that endlessly winding road uncoiling out of the darkness, the lights of other traffic that leapt up from it, the red light above the screen, and the smack of the leather strop across his shoulders. His brain seemed to be spinning round like a top inside his head when at last, amazing-

ly, the screen went black and the other bulbs in the garage lighted up.

"You can go to sleep now," said the Saint.

Sir Melvin Flager was incapable of asking questions. A medieval prisoner would have been no more capable of asking questions of a man who released him from the rack. With a groan he slumped back in his seat and fell asleep.

It seemed as if he had scarcely closed his eyes when he was roused again by someone shaking him. He looked up blearily and saw the strange chauffeur leaning over him.

"Wake up," said Peter Quentin. "It's five o'clock on Saturday morning, and you've got a lot more miles to cover."

Flager had no breath to dispute the date. The garage lights had gone out again, and the road was starting to wind out of the screen again.

"But you told me I could sleep!" he moaned.

"You get thirty-five minutes every night," Peter told him pitilessly. "That averages four hours a week, and that's as much as you allowed Albert Johnson. Look out!"

Twice again Flager was allowed to sleep, for exactly thirty-five minutes; four times he watched his two veiled tormentors change places, a fresh man taking up the task while the

other lay down on the very comfortable bed which had been made up in one corner and slept serenely. Every three hours he had five minutes' rest and a glass of water, every six hours he had ten minutes' rest, a cup of coffee, and a sandwich. But the instant that those timed five or ten minutes had elapsed, the projector was started up again, the synchronization switch was thrown over, and he had to go on driving.

Time ceased to have any meaning. When, after his first sleep, he was told that it was only five o'clock on Saturday morning, he could have believed that he had been driving for a week; before his ordeal was over, he felt as if he had been at the wheel for seven years. By Saturday night he felt he was going mad; by Sunday morning he thought he was going to die; by Sunday night he was a quivering wreck. The strop fell on his shoulders many times during the last few hours, when the recurrent sting of it was almost the only thing that kept his eyes open; but he was too weary even to cry out . . .

And then, at the end of what might have been centuries, Monday morning dawned outside; and the Saint looked at his watch and reversed the switches.

"You can go to sleep again now," he said for the last time; but Sir Melvin Flager was asleep

almost before the last word was out of his mouth.

Sunken in the coma of utter exhaustion, Flager did not even feel himself being unstrapped and unhandcuffed from his perch; he did not feel the clothes being replaced on his inflamed back, nor did he even rouse as he was carried into his own car and driven swiftly away.

And then again he was being shaken by the shoulder, woken up. Whimpering, he groped for the steering wheel—and did not find it. The shaking at his shoulder went on.

"All right," he blubbered. "All right. I'm trying to do it. Can't you let me sleep a little—just once. . . ."

"Sir Melvin! Sir Melvin!"

Flager forced open his blood-shot eyes. His hands were free. He was sitting in his own car, which was standing outside his own house. It was his valet who was shaking him.

"Sir Melvin! Try to wake up, sir. Where have you been? Are you ill, sir?"

Flager found strength to move his head from one side to the other.

"No," he said. "I just want to sleep."

And with a deep groan he let his swollen eyelids droop again, and sank back into soothing abysses of delicious rest.

When he woke up again he was in his own bed, in his own bed-

room. For a long time he lay without moving, wallowing in the heavenly comfort of the soft mattress and cool linen, savoring the last second of sensual pleasure that could be squeezed out of the most beautiful awakening that life could remember.

"He's coming round," said a low voice at last; and with a sigh Flager opened his eyes.

His bed seemed to be surrounded with an audience such as a seventeenth-century monarch might have beheld at a levee. There was his valet, his secretary, his doctor, a nurse, and a heavy and stolid man of authoritative appearance who held an unmistakable bowler hat. The doctor had a hand on his pulse, and the others stood by expectantly.

"All right, Sir Melvin," said the physician. "You may talk for a little while now, if you want to, but you mustn't excite yourself. This gentleman here is a detective who wants to ask you a few questions."

The man with the bowler hat came nearer.

"What happened to you, Sir Melvin?" he asked.

Flager stared at him for several seconds. Words rose to his lips, but somehow he did not utter them.

"Nothing," he said at length. "I've been away for the weekend, that's all. What the devil's all this fuss about?"

"But your back, Sir Melvin!"

protested the doctor. "You look as if you'd had a terrible beating—"

"I had a slight accident," snapped Flager. "And what the devil has it got to do with you, sir, anyway? Who the devil sent for all of you?"

His valet swallowed.

"I did, Sir Melvin," he stammered. "When I couldn't wake you up all day yesterday—and you disappeared from the theater without a word to anybody, and didn't come back for two days—"

"And why the devil shouldn't I disappear for two days?" barked Flager weakly. "I'll disappear for a month if I feel like it. Do I pay you to pry into my movements? And can't I sleep all day if I want to without waking up to find a lot of quacks and policemen infesting my room like vultures? Get out of my house, the whole damned lot of you! Get out, d'you hear?"

Somebody opened the door, and the congregation drifted out, shaking its heads and muttering, to the accompaniment of continued exhortations in Flager's rasping voice.

His secretary was the last to go, and Flager called him back.

"Get Nyson on the telephone," he ordered. "I'll speak to him myself."

The secretary hesitated for a moment, and then picked up the bedside telephone and dialled the number dubiously.

Flager took the instrument as soon as his manager answered.

"Nyson?" he said. "Get in touch with all our branch depots immediately. From now on, all our drivers will be on a forty-hour week, and they get a twenty per cent rise as from the date we took them on. Engage as many more men as you need to make up the schedules."

He heard Nyson's incredulous gasp over the line.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Melvin—did you say—"

"Yes, I did!" snarled Flager.

"You heard me all right. And after that, you can find out if that cyclist Johnson killed left any dependents. I want to do something for them. . . ."

His voice faded away, and the microphone slipped through his fingers. His secretary looked at him quickly, and saw that his eyes were closed and the hemispherical mound of his abdomen was rising and falling rhythmically.

Sir Melvin Flager was asleep again.




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## NEXT MONTH—

Gilbert K. Chesterton's **THE FINGER OF STONE**

Theodore Dreiser's **TABLOID TRAGEDY**

Theodore Pratt's **BULLETS PREFERRED**

Lawrence Treat's **DEATH IN THE SWAMP**

Edgar Wallace's **THE FORTUNE OF FORGERY**

Elizabeth Sanxay Holding's **BAIT FOR A KILLER**

*and*

## **THE CONVENIENT MONSTER**

**A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS**

—in *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

somewhere  
in  
france

by... Richard Harding Davis

If necessary, she must denounce him as a spy. He could be replaced. But she was much too important...

MARIE GESSLER, known as Marie Chaumontel, Jeanne d'Avrechy, the Countess d'Aurillac, was German. Her father, who served through the Franco-Prussian War, was a German spy. It was from her mother she learned to speak French sufficiently well to satisfy even an Academician and, among Parisians, to pass as one. Both her parents were dead. Before they departed, knowing they could leave their daughter nothing save their debts, they had her trained as a nurse. But when they were gone, Marie in the Berlin hospitals played politics, intrigued, indiscriminately misused the appealing, violet eyes. There was a scandal; several scandals. At the age of twenty-five she was dismissed from the Municipal Hospital, and as now—save for the violet eyes—she was without resources, as a *compagnon de voyage* with a German doctor she travelled to Monte Carlo. There she abandoned the doctor for Henri Ravignac, a captain in the French Aviation Corps, who, when his leave ended, escorted her to Paris.

The duties of Captain Ravignac

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*The name of Richard Harding Davis brings back memories of those decades, earlier in this century, when mores and ways of life were considerably simpler, and when men—and women—were capable of the gestures and the gallantry found in his novels. To quote Vincent Starrett, Davis was himself "the beau ideal of romantic chivalry and quite wonderfully he looked the part."*

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kept him in barracks near the aviation field, but Marie he established in his apartments on the Boulevard Haussmann. One day he brought from the barracks a roll of blueprints, and as he was locking them in a drawer, said: "The Germans would pay through the nose for those!" The remark was indiscreet, but then Marie had told him she was French, and anyone would have believed her.

The next morning the same spirit of adventure that had exiled her from the Berlin hospitals carried her with the blueprints to the German embassy. There, greatly shocked, they first wrote down her name and address, and then, indignant at her proposition, ordered her out. But the day following a strange young German who was not at all indignant, but, on the contrary, quite charming, called upon Marie. For the blueprints he offered her a very large sum, and that same hour with them and Marie departed for Berlin. Marie did not need the money. Nor did the argument that she was serving her country greatly impress her. It was rather that she loved intrigue. And so she became a spy.

Henri Ravignac, the man she had robbed of the blueprints, was tried by court martial. The charge was treason, but Charles Ravignac, his younger brother, promised to prove that the guilty one was the girl, and to that end obtained leave of absence and spent much

time and money. At the trial he was able to show the record of Marie in Berlin and Monte Carlo; that she was the daughter of a German secret agent; that on the afternoon the prints disappeared Marie, with an agent of the German embassy had left Paris for Berlin. In consequence of this the charge of selling military secrets was altered to one of "gross neglect," and Henri Ravignac was sentenced to two years in the military prison at Tours. But he was of an ancient and noble family, and when they came to take him from his cell in the Cherche-Midi, he was dead. Charles, his brother, disappeared. It was said he also had killed himself; that he had been appointed a military attaché in South America; that to revenge his brother he had entered the secret service; but whatever became of him no one knew. All that was certain was that, thanks to the act of Marie Gessler, on the rolls of the French army the ancient and noble name of Ravignac no longer appeared.

In her chosen profession Marie Gessler found nothing discreditable. Of herself her opinion was not high, and her opinion of men was lower. For her smiles she had watched several sacrifice honor, duty, loyalty; and she held them and their kind in contempt. To lie, to cajole, to rob men of secrets they thought important, and of secrets the importance of which they did not even guess, was to her

merely an intricate and exciting game.

She played it very well. So well that in the service her advance was rapid. On important missions she was sent to Russia, through the Balkans; even to the United States. There, with credentials as an army nurse, she inspected our military hospitals and unobtrusively asked many innocent questions.

When she begged to be allowed to work in her beloved Paris, "they" told her when war came "they" intended to plant her inside that city, and that, until then, the less Paris knew of her the better.

But just before the great war broke, to report on which way Italy might jump, she was sent to Rome, and it was not until September she was recalled. The telegram informed her that her Aunt Elizabeth was ill, and that at once she must return to Berlin. This, she learned from the code book wrapped under the cover of her thermos bottle, meant that she was to report to the general commanding the German forces at Soissons.

From Italy she passed through Switzerland, and, after leaving Basle, on military trains was rushed north to Luxemburg, and then west to Laon. She was accompanied by her companion, Bertha, an elderly and respectable, even distinguished-looking female. In the secret service her number was 528. Their passes

from the war office described them as nurses of the German Red Cross. Only the Intelligence Department knew their real mission. With her also, as her chauffeur, was a young Italian soldier of fortune, Paul Anfossi. He had served in the Belgian Congo, in the French Foreign Legion in Algiers, and spoke all the European languages. In Rome, where as a wireless operator he was serving a commercial company, in selling Marie copies of messages he had memorized, Marie had found him useful, and when war came she obtained for him, from the Wilhelmstrasse, the number 292. From Laon, in one of the automobiles of the General Staff, the three spies were driven first to Soissons, and then along the road to Meaux and Paris, to the Village of Neufchelles. They arrived at midnight, and in a chateau of one of the champagne princes, found the colonel commanding the Intelligence Bureau. He accepted their credentials, destroyed them, and replaced them with a *laisser-passer* signed by the mayor of Laon. That dignitary, the colonel explained, to citizens of Laon fleeing to Paris and the coast had issued many passes. But as now between Laon and Paris there were three German armies, the refugees had been turned back and their passes confiscated.

"From among them," said the officer, "we have selected one for you. It is issued to the wife of

Count d'Aurillac, a captain of reserves, and her aunt, Madame Benet. It asks for those ladies and their chauffeur, Briand, a safe-conduct through the French military lines. If it gets you into Paris you will destroy it and assume another name. The Count d'Aurillac is now with his regiment in that city. If he learned of the presence of his wife, he would seek her, and that would not be good for you. So, if you reach Paris, you will become a Belgian refugee. You are high-born and rich. Your château has been destroyed. But you have money. You will give liberally to the Red Cross. You will volunteer to nurse in the hospitals. With your sad story of ill treatment by us, with your high birth, and your knowledge of nursing, which you acquired, of course, only as an amateur, you should not find it difficult to join the Ladies of France, or the American Ambulance. What you learn from the wounded English and French officers and the French doctors you will send us through the usual channels."

"When do I start?" asked the woman.

"For a few days," explained the officer, "you remain in this château. You will keep us informed of what is going forward after we withdraw."

"Withdraw?" It was more of an exclamation than a question. Marie was too well trained to ask questions.

"We are taking up a new position," said the officer, "on the Aisne."

The woman, incredulous, stared.

"And we do not enter Paris?"

"You do," returned the officer. "That is all that concerns you. We will join you later—in the spring. Meanwhile, for the winter we intrench ourselves along the Aisne. In a chimney of this château we have set up a wireless outfit. We are leaving it intact. The chauffeur Briand—who, you must explain to the French, you brought with you from Laon, and who has been long in your service—will transmit whatever you discover. We wish especially to know of any movement toward our left. If they attack in front from Soissons, we are prepared; but of any attempt to cross the Oise and take us in flank, you must warn us."

The officer rose and hung upon himself his field-glasses, map-cases, and side-arms.

"We leave now," he said. "When the French arrive you will tell them your reason for halting at this château was that the owner, Monsieur Iverney, and his family are friends of your husband. You found us here, and we detained you. And so long as you can use the wireless, make excuses to remain. If they offer to send you on to Paris, tell them your aunt is too ill to travel."

"But they will find the wireless," said the woman. "They are

sure to use the towers for observation, and they will find it."

"In that case," said the officer, "you will suggest to them that we fled in such haste we had no time to dismantle it. Of course, you had no knowledge that it existed, or, as a loyal French woman, you would have at once told them." To emphasize his next words the officer pointed at her: "Under no circumstances," he continued, "must you be suspected. If they should take Briand in the act, should they have even the least doubt concerning him, you must repudiate him entirely. If necessary, to keep your own skirts clear, it would be your duty yourself to denounce him as a spy."

"Your first orders," said the woman, "were to tell them Briand had been long in my service; that I brought him from my home in Laon."

"He might be in your service for years," returned the colonel, "and you not know he was a German agent."

"If to save myself I inform upon him," said Marie, "of course you know you will lose him."

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "A wireless operator," he retorted, "we can replace. But for you, and for the service you are to render in Paris, we have no substitute. *You* must not be found out. *You* are invaluable."

The spy inclined her head. "I thank you," she said.

The officer sputtered indignantly.

"It is not a compliment," he exclaimed; "it is an order. You must not be found out!"

Withdrawn some two hundred yards from the Paris road, the château stood upon a wooded hill. Except directly in front, trees of great height surrounded it. The tips of their branches brushed the windows; interlacing, they continued until they overhung the wall of the estate. Where it ran with the road the wall gave way to a lofty gate and iron fence, through which those passing could see a stretch of noble turf, as wide as a polo-field, borders of flowers disappearing under the shadows of the trees; and the château itself, with its terrace, its many windows, its high-pitched, sloping roof, broken by towers and turrets.

Through the remainder of the night there came from the road to those in the château the roar and rumbling of the army in retreat. It moved without panic, disorder, or haste, but unceasingly. Not for an instant was there a breathing-spell. And when the sun rose, the three spies—the two women and the chauffeur—who in the great château were now alone, could see as well as hear the gray column of steel rolling past below them.

The spies knew that the gray column had reached Claye, had stood within fifteen miles of

Paris, and then upon Paris had turned its back. They knew also that the reverberations from the direction of Meaux, that each moment grew more loud and savage, were the French "seventy-fives" whipping the gray column forward. Of what they felt the Germans did not speak. In silence they looked at each other, and in the eyes of Marie was bitterness and resolve.

Toward noon Marie met Anfossi in the great drawing-room that stretched the length of the terrace and from the windows of which, through the park gates, they could see the Paris road.

"This, that is passing now," said Marie, "is the last of our rear-guard. Go to your tower," she ordered, "and send word that except for stragglers and the wounded our column has just passed through Neufchelles, and that any moment we expect the French." She raised her hand impressively. "From now," she warned, "we speak French, we think French, we are French!"

Anfossi, or Briand, as now he called himself, addressed her in that language. His tone was bitter. "Pardon my lese-majesty," he said, "but this chief of your Intelligence Department is a *dummer Mensch*. He is throwing away a valuable life."

Marie exclaimed in dismay. She placed her hand upon his arm, and the violet eyes filled with concern.

"Not yours!" she protested.

"Absolutely!" returned the Italian. "I can send nothing by this knapsack wireless that they will not learn from others; from airmen, Uhlans, the peasants in the fields. And certainly I will be caught. Dead I am dead, but alive and in Paris the opportunities are unending. From the French Legion Etranger I have my honorable discharge. I am an expert wireless operator and in their Signal Corps I can easily find a place. Imagine me, then, on the Eiffel Tower. From the air I snatch news from all of France, from the Channel, the North Sea. You and I could work together, as in Rome. But here, between the lines, with a pass from a village *sous préfet*, it is ridiculous. I am not afraid to die. But to die because someone else is stupid, that is hard."

Marie clasped his hand in both of hers.

"You must not speak of death," she cried; "you know I must carry out my orders, that I must force you to take this risk. And you know that thought of harm to you tortures me!"

Quickly the young man disengaged his hand. The woman exclaimed with anger.

"Why do you doubt me?" she cried.

Briand protested vehemently.

"I do not doubt you."

"My affection, then?" In a whisper that carried with it the

feeling of a caress Marie added softly: "My love?"

The young man protested miserably. "You make it very hard, mademoiselle," he cried. "You are my superior officer, I am your servant. Who am I that I should share with others—"

The woman interrupted eagerly.

"Ah, you are jealous!" she cried. "Is that why you are so cruel? But when I *tell* you I love you, and only you, can you not *feel* it is the truth?"

The young man frowned unhappily.

"My duty, mademoiselle!" he stammered.

With an exclamation of anger Marie left him. As the door slammed behind her, the young man drew a deep breath. On his face was the expression of ineffable relief.

In the hall Marie met her elderly companion, Bertha, now her aunt, Madame Benet.

"I heard you quarrelling," Bertha protested. "It is most indiscreet. It is not in the part of the Countess d'Aurillac that she makes love to her chauffeur."

Marie laughed noiselessly and drew her farther down the hall. "He is imbecile!" she exclaimed. "He will kill me with his solemn face and his conceit. I make love to him—yes—that he may work the more willingly. But he will have none of it. He is jealous of the others."

Madame Benet frowned.

"He resents the others," she corrected. "I do not blame him. He is a gentleman!"

"And the others," demanded Marie; "were they not of the most noble families of Rome?"

"I am old and I am ugly," said Bertha, "but to me Anfossi is always as considerate as he is to you who are so beautiful."

"An Italian gentleman," returned Marie, "does not serve in Belgian Congo unless it is the choice of that or the marble quarries."

"I do not know what his past may be," sighed Madame Benet, "nor do I ask. He is only a number, as you and I are only numbers. And I beg you to let us work in harmony. At such a time your love-affairs threaten our safety. You must wait."

Marie laughed insolently. "With the Du Barry," she protested, "I can boast that I wait for no man."

"No," replied the older woman; "you pursue him!"

Marie would have answered sharply, but on the instant her interest was diverted. For one week, by day and night, she had lived in a world peopled only by German soldiers. Beside her in the railroad carriage, on the station platforms, at the windows of the trains that passed the one in which she rode, at the grade crossings, on the bridges, in the roads that paralleled the tracks, choking the streets of the villages and spread

over the fields of grain, she had seen only the gray-green uniforms. Even her professional eye no longer distinguished regiment from regiment, dragoon from grenadier, Uhlan from Hussar or Landsturm. Stripes, insignia, numerals, badges of rank, had lost their meaning. Those who wore them no longer were individuals. They were not even human. During the three last days the automobile, like a motorboat fighting the tide, had crept through a gray-green river of men, stained, as though from the banks, by mud and yellow clay. And for hours, while the car was blocked, and in fury the engine raced and purred, the gray-green river had rolled past her, slowly but as inevitably as lava down the slope of a volcano, bearing on its surface faces with staring eyes, thousands of eyes, some fierce and bloodshot, others filled with weariness, homesickness, pain. At night she still saw them: the white faces under the sweat and dust, the eyes dumb, inarticulate, asking the answer. She had been suffocated by German soldiers, by the mass of them, engulfed and smothered; she had stifled in a land inhabited only by gray-green ghosts.

And suddenly, as though a miracle had been wrought, she saw upon the lawn, riding toward her, a man in scarlet, blue, and silver. One man riding alone.

Approaching with confidence, but alert; his reins fallen, his hands nursing his carbine, his eyes

searched the shadows of the trees, the empty windows, even the sun-swept sky. His was the new face at the door, the new step on the floor. And the spy knew had she beheld an army corps it would have been no more significant, no more menacing, than the solitary *chasseur à cheval* scouting in advance of the enemy.

"We are saved!" exclaimed Marie, with irony. "Go quickly," she commanded, "to the bedroom on the second floor that opens upon the staircase, so that you can see all who pass. You are too ill to travel. They must find you in bed."

"And you?" said Bertha.

"I," cried Marie rapturously, "hasten to welcome our preserver!"

The preserver was a peasant lad. Under the white dust his cheeks were burned a brown-red, his eyes, honest and blue, through much staring at the skies and at horizon lines, were puckered and encircled with tiny wrinkles. Responsibility had made him older than his years, and in speech brief. With the beautiful lady who with tears of joy ran to greet him, and who in an ecstasy of happiness pressed her cheek against the nose of his horse, he was unimpressed. He returned to her her papers and gravely echoed her answers to his questions. "This château," he repeated, "was occupied by their General Staff; they have left no wounded here; you saw the last of

them pass a half-hour since." He gathered up his reins.

Marie shrieked in alarm. "You will not leave us?" she cried.

For the first time the young man permitted himself to smile. "Others arrive soon," he said.

He touched his shako, wheeled his horse in the direction from which he had come, and a minute later Marie heard the hoofs echoing through the empty village.

When they came, the others were more sympathetic. Even in times of war a beautiful woman is still a beautiful woman. And the staff officers who moved into the quarters so lately occupied by the enemy found in the presence of the Countess d'Aurillac nothing to distress them. In the absence of her dear friend, Madame Iverney, the châtelaine of the château, she acted as their hostess. Her chauffeur showed the company cooks the way to the kitchen, the larder, and the charcoal-box. She, herself, in the hands of General Andre placed the keys of the famous wine-cellar, and to the surgeon, that the wounded might be freshly bandaged, intrusted those of the linen-closet. After the indignities she had suffered while "detained" by *les Boches*, her delight and relief at again finding herself under the protection of her own people would have touched a heart of stone. And the hearts of the staff were not of stone. It was with regret they gave the countess permission to continue

on her way. At this she exclaimed with gratitude. She assured them, were her aunt able to travel, she would immediately depart.

"In Paris she will be more comfortable than here," said the kind surgeon. He was a reservist, and in times of peace a fashionable physician and as much at his ease in a boudoir as in a field hospital. "Perhaps if I saw Madame Benet?"

At the suggestion the countess was overjoyed. But they found Madame Benet in a state of complete collapse. The conduct of the Germans had brought about a nervous breakdown.

"Though the bridges are destroyed at Meaux," urged the surgeon, "even with a detour, you can be in Paris in four hours. I think it is worth the effort."

But the mere thought of the journey threw Madame Benet into hysterics. She asked only to rest, she begged for an opiate to make her sleep. She begged also that they would leave the door open, so that when she dreamed she was still in the hands of the Germans, and woke in terror, the sound of the dear French voices and the sight of the beloved French uniforms might reassure her. She played her part well. Concerning her Marie felt not the least anxiety. But toward Briand, the chauffeur, the new arrivals were less easily satisfied.

The general sent his adjutant for the countess. When the adju-

tant had closed the door General Andre began abruptly:

"The chauffeur Briand," he asked, "you know him; you can vouch for him?"

"But, certainly!" protested Marie. "He is an Italian."

As though with sudden enlightenment, Marie laughed. It was as if now in the suspicion of the officer she saw a certain reasonableness. "Briand was so long in the Foreign Legion in Algiers," she explained, "where my husband found him, that we have come to think of him as French. As much French as ourselves, I assure you."

The general and his adjutant were regarding each other questioningly.

"Perhaps I should tell the countess," began the general, "that we have learned—"

The signal from the adjutant was so slight, so swift, that Marie barely intercepted it.

The lips of the general shut together like the leaves of a book. To show the interview was at an end, he reached for a pen.

"I thank you," he said.

"Of course," prompted the adjutant, "Madame d'Aurillac understands the man must not know we inquired concerning him."

General Andre frowned at Marie.

"Certainly not!" he commanded. "The honest fellow must not know that even for a moment he was doubted."

Marie raised the violet eyes reprovingly.

"I trust," she said with reproach, "I too well understand the feelings of a French soldier to let him know his loyalty is questioned."

With a murmur of appreciation the officers bowed and with a gesture of gracious pardon Marie left them.

Outside in the hall, with none but orderlies to observe, like a cloak the graciousness fell from her. She was drawn two ways. In her work Anfossi was valuable. But Anfossi suspected was less than of no value; he became a menace, a death-warrant.

General Andre had said, "We have learned—" and the adjutant had halted him. What had he learned? To know that, Marie would have given much. Still, one important fact comforted her. Anfossi alone was suspected. Had there been concerning herself the slightest doubt, they certainly would not have allowed her to guess her companion was under surveillance; they would not have asked one who was herself suspected to vouch for the innocence of a fellow conspirator. Marie found the course to follow difficult. With Anfossi under suspicion his usefulness was for the moment at an end; and to accept the chance offered her to continue on to Paris seemed most wise. On the other hand, if, concerning Anfossi, she had succeeded in

allaying their doubts, the results most to be desired could be attained only by remaining where they were.

Their position inside the lines was of the greatest strategic value. The rooms of the servants were under the roof, and that Briand should sleep in one of them was natural. That to reach or leave his room he should constantly be ascending or descending the stairs also was natural. The field-wireless outfit, or, as he had disdainfully described it, the "knapsack" wireless, was situated not in the bedroom he had selected for himself, but in one adjoining. At other times this was occupied by the maid of Madame Iverney. To summon her maid Madame Iverney, from her apartment on the second floor, had but to press a button. And it was in the apartment of Madame Iverney, and on the bed of that lady, that Madame Benet now reclined. When through the open door she saw an officer or soldier mount the stairs, she pressed the button that rang a bell in the room of the maid. In this way, long before whoever was ascending the stairs could reach the top floor, warning of his approach came to Anfossi. It gave him time to replace the dustboard over the fireplace in which the wireless was concealed and to escape into his own bedroom. The arrangement was ideal. And already information picked up in the halls below by Marie had been

conveyed to Anfossi to relay in a French cipher to the German General Staff at Rheims.

Marie made an alert and charming hostess. To all who saw her it was evident that her mind was intent only upon the comfort of her guests. Throughout the day many came and went, but each she made welcome; to each as he departed she called "*bonne chance*." Efficient, tireless, tactful, she was everywhere: in the dining room, in the kitchen, in the bedrooms, for the wounded finding mattresses to spread in the gorgeous salons of the champagne prince; for the soldier-chauffeurs carrying wine into the courtyard, where the automobiles panted and growled, and the arriving and departing shrieked for right of way. At all times an alluring person, now the one woman in a tumult of men, her smart frock covered by an apron, her head and arms bare, undismayed by the sight of the wounded or by the distant rumble of the guns, the Countess d'Aurillac was an inspiring and beautiful picture. The eyes of the officers, young and old, informed her of that fact, one of which already she was well aware. By the morning of the next day she was accepted as the owner of the chateau. And though continually she reminded the staff she was present only as the friend of her schoolmate, Madame Iverney, they deferred to her as to a hostess. Many of them she already saluted by name, and

to those who with messages were constantly motoring to and from the front at Soissons she was particularly kind. Overnight the legend of her charm, of her devotion to the soldiers of all ranks, had spread from Soissons to Meaux, and from Meaux to Paris. It was noon of that day when from the window of the second-story Marie saw an armored automobile sweep into the courtyard. It was driven by an officer, young and appallingly good-looking, and, as was obvious by the way he spun his car, one who held in contempt both the law of gravity and death. That he was someone of importance seemed evident. Before he could alight the adjutant had raced to meet him. With her eye for detail Marie observed that the young officer, instead of imparting information, received it. He must, she guessed, have just arrived from Paris, and his brother officer either was telling him the news or giving him his orders. Whichever it might be, in what was told him the new arrival was greatly interested. One instant in indignation his gauntleted fist beat upon the steering-wheel, the next he smiled with pleasure. To interpret this pantomime was difficult; and, the better to inform herself, Marie descended the stairs.

As she reached the lower hall the two officers entered. To the spy the man last to arrive was always the one of greatest importance; and Marie assured herself

that through her friend, the adjutant, to meet with this one would prove easy.

But the chauffeur commander of the armored car made it most difficult. At sight of Marie, much to her alarm, as though greeting a dear friend, he snatched his kepi from his head and sprang toward her.

"The major," he cried, "told me you were here, that you are Madame d'Aurillac." His eyes spoke his admiration. In delight he beamed upon her. "I might have known it!" he murmured. With the confidence of one who is sure he brings good news, he laughed happily. "And I," he cried, "am 'Pierrot!'"

Who the devil "Pierrot" might be the spy could not guess. She knew only that she wished by a German shell "Pierrot" and his car had been blown to tiny fragments. Was it a trap, she asked herself, or was the handsome youth really someone the Countess d'Aurillac should know. But, as from his introducing himself it was evident he could not know that lady very well, Marie took courage and smiled.

"*Which* 'Pierrot'?" she parried.

"Pierre Thierry!" cried the youth.

To the relief of Marie he turned upon the adjutant and to him explained who Pierre Thierry might be.

"Paul d'Aurillac," he said, "is

my dearest friend. When he married this charming lady I was stationed in Algiers, and but for the war I might never have met her."

To Marie, with his hand on his heart in a most charming manner, he bowed. His admiration he made no effort to conceal.

"And so," he said, "I know why there is war!"

The adjutant smiled indulgently, and departed on his duties, leaving them alone. The handsome eyes of Captain Thierry were raised to the violet eyes of Marie. They appraised her boldly and as boldly expressed their approval.

In burlesque the young man exclaimed indignantly: "Paul deceived me!" he cried. "He told me he had married the most beautiful woman in Laon. He has married the most beautiful woman in France!"

To Marie this was not impertinence, but gallantry.

This was a language she understood, and this was the type of man, because he was the least difficult to manage, she held most in contempt.

"But about you, Paul did not deceive me," she retorted. In apparent confusion her eyes refused to meet his. "He told me 'Pierrot' was a most dangerous man!"

She continued hurriedly. With wifely solicitude she asked concerning Paul. She explained that for a week she had been a prisoner in the château, and, since the

mobilization, of her husband save that he was with his regiment in Paris she had heard nothing. Captain Thierry was able to give her later news. Only the day previous, on the boulevards, he had met Count d'Aurillac. He was at the Grand Hôtel, and as Thierry was at once motoring back to Paris he would give Paul news of their meeting. He hoped he might tell him that soon his wife also would be in Paris. Marie explained that only the illness of her aunt prevented her from that same day joining her husband. Her manner became serious.

"And what other news have you?" she asked. "Here on the firing-line we know less of what is going forward than you in Paris."

So Pierre Thierry told her all he knew. They were preparing despatches he was at once to carry back to the General Staff, and, for the moment, his time was his own. How could he better employ it than in talking of the war with a patriotic and charming French woman?

In consequence Marie acquired a mass of facts, gossip, and guesses. From these she mentally selected such information as, to her employers across the Aisne, would be of vital interest.

And to rid herself of Thierry and on the fourth floor seek Anfossi was now her only wish. But, in attempting this, by the return of the adjutant she was delayed.

To Thierry the adjutant gave a sealed envelope.

"Thirty-one, Boulevard des Invalides," he said. With a smile he turned to Marie. "And you will accompany him!"

"I!" exclaimed Marie. She was sick with sudden terror.

But the tolerant smile of the adjutant reassured her.

"The count, your husband," he explained, "has learned of your detention here by the enemy, and he has besieged the General Staff to have you convoyed safely to Paris." The adjutant glanced at a field telegram he held open in his hand. "He asks," he continued, "that you be permitted to return in the car of his friend, Captain Thierry, and that on arriving you join him at the Grand Hôtel."

Thierry exclaimed with delight.

"But how charming!" he cried. "Tonight you must both dine with me at La Rue's." He saluted his superior officer. "Some petrol, sir," he said. "And I am ready." To Marie he added: "The car will be at the steps in five minutes." He turned and left them.

The thoughts of Marie, snatching at an excuse for delay, raced madly. The danger of meeting the Count d'Aurillac, her supposed husband, did not alarm her. The Grand Hôtel has many exits, and, even before they reached it, for leaving the car she could invent an excuse that the gallant Thierry would not suspect. But what now

concerned her was how, before she was whisked away to Paris, she could convey to Anfossi the information she had gathered from Thierry. First, of a woman overcome with delight at being reunited with her husband she gave an excellent imitation; then she exclaimed in distress: "But my aunt, Madame Benet!" she cried. "I cannot leave her!"

"The sisters of St. Francis," said the adjutant, "arrive within an hour to nurse the wounded. They will care also for your aunt."

Marie concealed her chagrin. "Then I will at once prepare to go," she said.

The adjutant handed her a slip of paper. "Your *laisser-passer* to Paris," he said. "You leave in five minutes, madame!"

As temporary hostess of the château Marie was free to visit any part of it, and as she passed her door a signal from Madame Benet told her that Anfossi was on the fourth floor, that he was at work, and that the coast was clear. Softly, in the felt slippers she always wore, as she explained, in order not to disturb the wounded, she mounted the staircase. In her hand she carried the housekeeper's keys, and as an excuse it was her plan to return with an armful of linen for the arriving Sisters. But Marie never reached the top of the stairs. When her eyes rose to the level of the fourth floor she came to a sudden halt. At what she saw terror gripped her, bound her

hand and foot, and turned her blood to ice.

At her post for an instant Madame Benet had slept, and an officer of the staff, led by curiosity, chance, or suspicion, had, unobserved and unannounced, mounted to the fourth floor. When Marie saw him he was in front of the room that held the wireless. His back was toward her, but she saw that he was holding the door to the room ajar, that his eye was pressed to the opening, and that through it he had pushed the muzzle of his automatic. What would be the fate of Anfossi Marie knew. Nor did she for an instant consider it. Her thoughts were of her own safety; that she might live. Not that she might still serve the Wilhelmstrasse, the Kaiser, or the Fatherland; but that she might live. In a moment Anfossi would be denounced, the *château* would ring with the alarm, and, though she knew Anfossi would not betray her, by others she might be accused. To avert suspicion from herself she saw only one way open. She must be the first to denounce Anfossi.

Like a deer she leaped down the marble stairs and, in a panic she had no need to assume, burst into the presence of the staff.

"Gentlemen!" she gasped, "my servant—the chauffeur—Briand is a spy! There is a German wireless in the *château*. He is using it! I have seen him." With exclama-

tions, the officers rose to their feet. General Andre alone remained seated. General Andre was a veteran of many Colonial wars: Cochinchina, Algiers, Morocco. The great war, when it came, found him on duty in the Intelligence Department. His aquiline nose, bristling white eyebrows, and flashing, restless eyes gave him his nickname of *l'Aigle*.

In amazement, the flashing eyes were now turned upon Marie. He glared at her as though he thought she suddenly had flown mad.

"A German wireless!" he protested. "It is impossible!"

"I was on the fourth floor," panted Marie, "collecting linen for the Sisters. In the room next to the linen closet I heard a strange buzzing sound. I opened the door softly. I saw Briand with his back to me seated by an instrument. There were receivers clamped to his ears! My God! The disgrace. The disgrace to my husband and to me, who vouched for him to you!" Apparently in an agony of remorse, the fingers of the woman laced and interlaced. "I cannot forgive myself!"

The officers moved toward the door, but General Andre halted them. Still in a tone of incredulity, he demanded: "When did you see this?"

Marie knew the question was coming, knew she must explain how she saw Briand, and yet did not see the staff officer who, with

his prisoner, might now at any instant appear. She must make it plain she had discovered the spy and left the upper part of the house before the officer had visited it. When that was she could not know, but the chance was that he had preceded her by only a few minutes.

"When did you see this?" repeated the general.

"But just now," cried Marie; "not ten minutes since."

"Why did you not come to me at once?"

"I was afraid," replied Marie. "If I moved I was afraid he might hear me, and he, knowing I would expose him, would kill me—and so escape *you!*" There was an eager whisper of approval. For silence, General Andre slapped his hand upon the table.

"Then," continued Marie, "I understood with the receivers on his ears he could not have heard me open the door, nor could he hear me leave, and I ran to my aunt. The thought that we had harbored such an animal sickened me, and I was weak enough to feel faint. But only for an instant. Then I came here." She moved swiftly to the door. "Let me show you the room," she begged; "you can take him in the act." Her eyes, wild with the excitement of the chase, swept the circle. "Will you come?" she begged.

Unconscious of the crisis he interrupted, the orderly on duty opened the door.

"Captain Thierry's compliments," he recited mechanically, "and is he to delay longer for Madame d'Aurillac?"

With a sharp gesture General Andre waved Marie toward the door. Without rising, he inclined his head. "Adieu, madame," he said. "We act at once upon your information. I thank you!"

As she crossed from the hall to the terrace, the ears of the spy were assaulted by a sudden tumult of voices. They were raised in threats and curses. Looking back, she saw Anfossi descending the stairs. His hands were held above his head; behind him, with his automatic, the staff officer she had surprised on the fourth floor was driving him forward. Above the clenched fists of the soldiers that ran to meet him, the eyes of Anfossi were turned toward her. His face was expressionless. His eyes neither accused nor reproached. And with the joy of one who has looked upon and then escaped the guillotine, Marie ran down the steps to the waiting automobile. With a pretty cry of pleasure she leaped into the seat beside Thierry. Gayly she threw out her arms. "To Paris!" she commanded. The handsome eyes of Thierry, eloquent with admiration, looked back into hers. He stooped, threw in the clutch, and the great gray car, with the machine gun and its crew of privates guarding the rear, plunged through the park.

"To Paris!" echoed Thierry.

In the order in which Marie had last seen them, Anfossi and the staff officer entered the room of General Andre, and upon the soldiers in the hall the door was shut. The face of the staff officer was grave, but his voice could not conceal his elation.

"My general," he reported, "I found this man in the act of giving information to the enemy. There is a wireless—"

General Andre rose slowly. He looked neither at the officer nor at his prisoner. With frowning eyes he stared down at the maps upon his table.

"I know," he interrupted. "Someone has already told me." He paused, and then, as though recalling his manners, but still without raising his eyes, he added: "You have done well, sir."

In silence the officers of the staff stood motionless. With surprise they noted that, as yet, neither in anger nor curiosity had General Andre glanced at the prisoner. But of the presence of the general the spy was most acutely conscious. He stood erect, his arms still raised, but his body strained forward, and on the averted eyes of the general his own were fixed.

In an agony of supplication they asked a question.

At last, as though against his wish, toward the spy the general turned his head, and their eyes met. And still General Andre was silent. Then the arms of the spy,

like those of a runner who has finished his race and breasts the tape exhausted, fell to his sides. In a voice low and vibrant he spoke his question.

"It has been so long, sir," he pleaded. "May I not come home?"

General Andre turned to the astonished group surrounding him. His voice was hushed like that of one who speaks across an open grave.

"Gentlemen," he began, "my children," he added. "A German spy, a woman, involved in a scandal your brother in arms, Henri Ravignac. His honor, he thought, was concerned, and without honor he refused to live. To prove him guiltless his younger brother Charles asked leave to seek out the woman who had betrayed Henri, and by us was detailed on secret service. He gave up home, family, friends. He lived in exile, in poverty, at all times in danger of a swift and ignoble death. In the War Office we know him as one who has given to his country services she cannot hope to reward. For she cannot return to him the years he has lost. She cannot return to him his brother. But she can and will clear the name of Henri Ravignac, and upon his brother Charles bestow promotion and honors."

The general turned and embraced the spy. "My children," he said, "welcome your brother. He has come home."

Before the car had reached the

fortifications, Marie Gessler had arranged her plan of escape. She had departed from the château without even a handbag, and she would say that before the shops closed she must make purchases.

Le Printemps lay in their way, and she asked that, when they reached it, for a moment she might alight. Captain Thierry readily gave permission.

From the department store it would be most easy to disappear, and in anticipation Marie smiled covertly. Nor was the picture of Captain Thierry impatiently waiting outside unamusing.

But before Le Printemps was approached, the car turned sharply down a narrow street. On one side, along its entire length, ran a high gray wall, grim and forbidding. In it was a green gate studded with iron bolts. Before this the automobile drew suddenly to a halt. The crew of the armored car tumbled off the rear seat, and one of them beat upon

the green gate. Marie felt a hand of ice clutch at her throat. But she controlled herself.

"And what is this?" she cried gayly.

At her side Captain Thierry was smiling down at her, but his smile was hateful.

"It is the prison of St. Lazare," he said. "It is not becoming," he added sternly, "that the name of the Countess d'Aurillac should be made common as the Paris road!"

Fighting for her life, Marie thrust herself against him; her arm that throughout the journey had rested on the back of the driving-seat caressed his shoulders; her lips and the violet eyes were close to his.

"Why should you care?" she whispered fiercely. "You have *me!* Let the Count d'Aurillac look after the honor of his wife himself."

The charming Thierry laughed at her mockingly.

"He means to," he said. "I *am* the Count d'Aurillac!"

## NEXT MONTH—

For centuries, Scottish legend has credited Loch Ness with a mysterious denizen unknown to zoologists. And now the Saint himself becomes entitled to judge its authenticity

*in*

## THE CONVENIENT MONSTER A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in *THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

they're  
trying  
to  
kill  
me

by . . . Craig Rice

If you have your wife, your mistress, and your brother, all living in the house with you—anything can happen!

JOHN J. MALONE looked sourly at the young man across the desk.

"There's nothing I can do about it," he said. "Hire yourself a bodyguard. Or a bloodhound. I used to know a wonderful bloodhound . . ." He sighed deeply and took a puff of his cigar. "That's another story," he went on. "But there's absolutely nothing I can do."

"I don't know where else to turn," the young man said. He was dressed in a light gray suit, a white-on-white shirt and a light gray Countess Mara tie. He wore thick-rimmed glasses and his hair stood up in a black, bristly crew-cut. He looked about twenty-two years old and he could have come straight from Madison Avenue, New York.

"Well, don't turn here," Malone said peevishly. "I've got troubles of my own. And bodyguarding isn't my business. Now, if I could find that bloodhound for you—"

"A bloodhound isn't going to do me any good," the young man said. "Malone, somebody's trying to kill me."

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*In the quietly zany world of John J. Malone, that extraordinary Chicago attorney, the man—or the woman—whom everybody loved usually ended up very, very dead. Here, in one of Craig Rice's last stories about the unorthodox John J., this doesn't happen—but he does get the murderer!*

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"It isn't me," Malone said.

"But you don't understand," the young man said. "They're trying to kill me. And I need help."

Malone sighed and brushed at his vest. It was early afternoon, and he'd been in his office for several hours. There weren't any cases that needed any work, and he hadn't even been bothered by bill collectors. All in all, the day had been a dull one. Now it seemed to be turning into an irritating one, too.

Maybe, he thought sadly, if I convince this man he doesn't need me, he'll go away and I can go home and get some sleep. He told himself that he needed sleep badly. He had a very important date set for later in the evening, and he wanted to be at his very best.

"Who's trying to kill you?" he said at last.

The young man shrugged. "How would I know?" he said.

"But you told me—"

"I just know somebody's trying to kill me," the young man said. "Strange things have been happening. Last week I nearly took poison by mistake."

"That," Malone said, "sounds like carelessness."

"I had a headache, so I went to the medicine cabinet to take some aspirin. Only the pills in the bottle were just a little too large for aspirin. I stopped just in time."

"So you sent them away to be analyzed," Malone began.

"Not then," the young man said. "I only sent them away after the radio fell."

"Oh," Malone said. "Radio." This wasn't working out exactly as he'd planned it. But he couldn't think of any way to stop things from going on. Soon, he promised himself, the young man would be gone and he could go home and sleep.

"I keep a radio on the shelf above my bathtub," the young man said. "The other day I noticed it beginning to teeter. I got out of the tub just in time. If the radio had fallen while I was in the tub, Malone, I'd have been electrocuted."

"Accident," the little lawyer said, hiding himself behind a cloud of smoke. "Happens all the time."

The young man grimaced. "And I suppose that wooden shelves in bathrooms are being sawn halfway through all the time, too," he said. "Because that's what happened to my shelf. I realized then that somebody was trying to kill me, and I thought of the pills and sent them away to a chemist I know. He told me they contained white arsenic. Malone, I could have been poisoned."

"Or electrocuted," Malone said judiciously. "What else has happened?"

"Nothing," the young man said. "But I don't want to wait for something else to happen. I've been lucky twice. The next

time I might not be so lucky. So, you see, I need your help."

"What do you want me to do?" Malone said sadly.

"I want you to find out who's trying to kill me," the young man said. "Once I know that I can take care of things. Whoever it is—there must be some kind of settlement. I'm not a hard man to get along with."

"Somebody seems to think differently," Malone offered. "But I'm not the man you want. Why don't you go to the police?"

"I'm afraid to," the young man said.

Malone puffed at his cigar. "Afraid?" he said.

"That's right," the young man said. "If the police started asking questions, the person who's trying to kill me might get panicky. And he might just shoot me or get a blunt instrument from somewhere, or something."

Malone tried once more. "I'm very busy," he began.

"I can make it worth your while," the young man said. "I'm Rodney Melcher."

The little lawyer wondered where he'd heard the name before. After a second he had it. Rodney Melcher had inherited his father's jewelry business the year before, when old Cotton Melcher had died of complications resulting from indigestion. The business was estimated to be worth somewhere between two and three million dollars. Malone re-

membered reading about it in the *Examiner*.

"It's not a matter of money," Malone started to say, and then thought better of it. Money would come in awfully handy for his important engagement. "Well," he said at last, "suppose you tell me about some of the people you know who *might* be trying to kill you."

"That's easy," the young man said. "There are only three of them. There's my wife, and my mistress, and my brother."

A nice, friendly little family, Malone thought. "Which one of them might have had the opportunity to substitute pills, or to saw through that bathroom shelf?" he said after a second.

"All of them," the young man said. "You see, Malone, we all live in the same house."

Malone tried to imagine a household consisting of a man, his brother, his wife and his mistress. His imagination boggled, and for a long second he couldn't think of anything constructive to say. He covered the pause by lighting another cigar.

"Will you help me, Malone?" Rodney Melcher said at last.

Malone sighed and blew out smoke. "I'll start first thing tomorrow," he promised. That would give him the time to keep his engagement that night. "But I'll need a retainer," he added quickly, thinking about the engagement.

"Let's say five hundred now, then," Rodney Melcher said. He withdrew a wallet from the inside pocket of his light-gray jacket and counted out five hundred-dollar bills. Malone looked at them, lying gently on the top of his desk. "Is that all right?" Rodney Melcher said.

"That's fine," Malone said. "That's fine."

"And here's my address." From the same wallet he picked a printed card. "I'll look for you tomorrow morning."

Malone stared at the card. The address was in Lake Forest. "You mean you want me to go out there?" he said.

"Of course, Malone," the young man said. "You'll have to meet everybody, and look for clues, and things. I'll just introduce you as a friend, or something like that. So nobody knows you're investigating for me—"

"And so the killer doesn't get nervous and bump you off in a hurry," Malone said.

The young man nodded. "That's right," he said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"I'll be there," Malone promised. Privately, he wondered how he was going to get up at all the next morning, let alone find his way to Lake Forest. But, somehow, he knew, things would work out.

"I'm glad you decided to help me out, Malone," Rodney Melcher said.

"So am I," Malone said dismally.

The afternoon went by, but no more clients appeared. Malone filled his ashtray with cigar butts and wondered how he had ever let himself get hired by Rodney Melcher, and at last it was five o'clock. He put out his final cigar, emptied the ashtray neatly into the wastebasket, and brushed off his vest for the last time. He stood up with a great sigh of relief.

In the outer office, the phone rang.

Let it ring, Malone decided. If it doesn't want to ring during office hours, why should I cater to its whims? He got his hat and coat from the closet.

Maggie's voice called in: "Malone, it's Captain von Flanagan."

"Tell him I died last week," Malone said pleasantly.

"But he's very excited," Maggie said. "He says you're involved in something terrible and he has to talk to you. He said to tell you it was about Rodney Melcher."

Malone stopped. "Rodney Melcher?" he said. "Is he dead yet?"

Maybe the young man had been killed, he thought, while I sat here doing nothing. I should have gone out and helped him right away, he told himself. Now he's dead and it's my fault. I should have known . . .

"He's not dead," Maggie said. "He's been accused of murder and he says you're his lawyer."

It took a long time for that to sink in. At last Malone sighed and sat down at his desk again. "You'd better put von Flanagan on," he told Maggie in a resigned voice.

When he picked up his phone, the police captain was already talking. "—and you listen to me, Malone," von Flanagan said. "If there's any funny business about this—Rodney Melcher claiming you're his lawyer—"

"I am his lawyer," Malone said mildly.

"—and raising a fuss about— Malone, *are* you his lawyer? You're not kidding me?"

"I'm not kidding you, von Flanagan," Malone said. "He came to see me this afternoon."

Von Flanagan took a deep, hissing breath. It sounded as if he were in pain. "So that's it," he said. "He came to see you and told you about what he was planning to do, and you told him it was okay, that you'd get him off no matter who he murdered. But it won't work, Malone. It won't work. It won't—"

"Tap the needle," Malone said. "It's stuck."

"Now, Malone—"

"Rodney Melcher didn't tell me about any murder, and I didn't guarantee him that if he did commit one I could get him off," Malone said. "Really. Would I do a thing like that?"

Von Flanagan didn't hesitate. "Yes," he said. "And what's more—"

"Well, I didn't do it," Malone said. "And that's that."

"Oh, no, it isn't," von Flanagan said quickly. "I want you to come down here right' away. I want to get this whole thing straightened out. When I think of the favors I've done you—"

"I can't come down right away," Malone said. "I've got a date."

"Break it," von Flanagan said. "I want you down here. And that's an order."

"But von Flanagan—"

"Don't but me," the police captain shouted. "Just get down here!"

Malone sighed. "All right," he said. "Where?"

"*Where?*" Von Flanagan sounded as if he were about to have a stroke. "Rodney Melcher's house! You know where that is, don't you?"

"I know," Malone said, fingering the card in his pocket. "Right away?"

"*Right away,*" von Flanagan said.

"All right," the little lawyer said despairingly. He hung up.

After a second he reached for the phone again, to cancel his date.

Rodney Melcher's home was a big white square in the early evening. It stood alone in a grove of trees. Malone walked up the white gravel path to the big front door, found the bell-push and leaned on it.

Somewhere behind him, an owl nooted. At least, Malone thought it was an owl. It sounded like a lost soul complaining about Hell. He tried not to listen to it. After a second he pushed the bell again.

This time the door opened slowly and noiselessly. Malone found himself staring into the oldest face he had ever seen.

"Yes?" said the death's-head. The face was covered with wrinkles, and, in the hall light, it was the color of old dried cheese. Under the face was a body as thin as a stick, wearing a dark-blue uniform.

"I'm John J. Malone," Malone said, wondering if he was. If this place wasn't the House of Usher, he thought, it would do nicely for a substitute. He tried to imagine Rodney Melcher, in his Madison Avenue suit, living in this Chamber of Horrors, with his brother, his wife and his mistress. He felt his imagination beginning to boggle again and stepped inside the doorway.

One of those three people was dead, he realized. But which one? Rodney Melcher could have killed his wife—or his mistress could have killed his wife—or else his wife could have killed his mistress. No matter how you looked at it, Malone thought, it didn't make any sense.

"The police officer is expecting you, Mr. Malone," said the ancient butler. "Please come this way."

He turned and started down the hall. Malone followed him past an umbrella-stand and two faded pictures, turned to the left and found himself in a brilliantly lit living room. The furnishings were ancient, polished and solid. At the far end of the room was the largest fireplace Malone had ever seen, and seated near it, in carved chairs, were four people: von Flanagan, Rodney Melcher and two women.

"You took your time about getting here," von Flanagan said.

"Waste not, want not," Malone said at random. "Does somebody want to explain all this to me? I don't understand any of it."

Rodney Melcher said: "Come over here and sit down, Malone. It's very simple. My brother—"

"He knows about it already," von Flanagan growled. "You told him this afternoon."

"How could I?" Melcher said. "I didn't know it myself, at the time."

"But you—"

"Let him explain it to me, von Flanagan," Malone said. "Humor me. Pretend I never heard about it before." After a second he added: "Which I haven't."

Von Flanagan snorted. Rodney Melcher said: "It's my brother, Malone. He's dead. And the police think I killed him."

"Did you?" Malone said.

Melcher stared. "Of course not. I wouldn't—Malone, he was my brother. Maybe we weren't very

close. But I wouldn't kill him. Not my brother."

"You weren't very close," Malone said, "but you lived in the same house."

One of the women said: "That's the way things are." She was about twenty-five, Malone thought, a tall, pale blonde dressed in an ice-green sheath. The other woman was a redhead in sports clothes. Which, the little lawyer wondered, was the wife? For that matter, which was the mistress?

"I'm sorry," Rodney Melcher put in. "I should have introduced you." He nodded toward the women. "This is my wife, Carla." The blonde gave Malone the smallest smile he had even seen on a human face. Carla was apparently not disposed to be friendly.

"And this is Margery Dawes," Melcher said. The red-head nodded at Malone.

"You're the famous lawyer, aren't you?" she said. "I've always wanted to meet you. You look cute."

Malone had no answer at all for that one. He took an empty chair next to Rodney Melcher, facing von Flanagan, with the women at his left. "So the police think you killed your brother," he said conversationally.

"We don't think anything yet," von Flanagan said. "We're waiting for the evidence."

"That's nice," Malone said.

"Then why bring me all the way out here and accuse me of things you haven't got any evidence for?"

"Malone," von Flanagan said, "for you, I don't need any evidence."

Malone sighed. "I didn't do a thing, von Flanagan," he said; "I have no intention of doing anything; and I resent your suspicious nature."

"I didn't do anything either," Rodney Melcher put in. "Malone, you've got to help me."

Malone looked around the room, fished a cigar from his pocket and lit it. He took a few puffs, wreathing himself in smoke, before he spoke. "Who found the body?" he said.

"You're not here to investigate anything," von Flanagan said.

"I don't know what I am here for," Malone said cheerfully, "and neither does anybody else. I might as well find out who did kill Rodney Melcher's brother—it doesn't look as if anybody else is going to. Because it wasn't me, and it wasn't Rodney Melcher."

"How do you know it wasn't?" von Flanagan snapped.

"Because," Malone said simply, "he's my client."

After a second Rodney Melcher said: "I found him. I went upstairs to change for dinner—and he was there, in my room. Stabbed."

"Let's go upstairs," Malone said. He started to stand up.

"Nobody's allowed up there," von Flanagan said. "We closed the room off as soon as we arrived."

"As soon as I saw what had happened," Rodney Melcher said, "I called the police. Then I locked the door of the room myself. Nobody else has been up there. It's—horrible." He shuddered.

Malone nodded quietly. "I'll have to talk to everybody, one at a time," he said. "Where can we be alone?"

Rodney Melcher said: "There's a little alcove right off this room. I'll show you, Malone."

The little lawyer stood up, brushing ashes from his vest. He followed Rodney Melcher across the great living room to a smaller room beyond a paneled door. It was dimly lit and the walls looked as if they were deciding to close in. There were only two chairs and a small table in the room. Malone sat in one of the chairs.

Rodney Melcher turned to go.

"Wait a minute," Malone said. "I might as well talk to you first. After all, you're the only one who's seen the body, except for the police. When did you find him?"

Rodney Melcher sat down opposite Malone, across the table. "I told you," he said. "I went up to dress for dinner. It must have been about four-thirty. He was lying there . . ."

"All right," Malone said soft-

ly. "Now, who had any reason to kill your brother?"

Rodney Melcher thought. "I suppose I did," he said. "He and Margery . . . well, maybe it wasn't such a good idea to have all of us living in the same house. It seemed sensible at the time, but when Margery and poor George began . . . I suppose I was jealous, Malone."

"Margery's your mistress," Malone said.

"That's right," Rodney Melcher said. "But it looked as if she was going to be George's mistress before long. Or his wife; George wasn't married."

"That gives you a motive," Malone said after a second. "But what about somebody else? After all, you didn't do the killing."

Rodney Melcher grimaced. He pushed a hand through his crew-cut hair. "No. That's right," he said. "Well—George really didn't get along too well with anybody. Even the servants seemed to dislike him. But that isn't much of a motive for murder, is it?"

"I knew a murder once," Malone said, "that was committed solely because of a brown fur teddy bear. But that's another story." He thought for a second. "Ask von Flanagan to come in here, will you?" he said.

"Von Flanagan?"

"The police officer," Malone said.

Rodney nodded and left. In a few seconds the little door of the

room opened again. "Who do you think you are, Malone?" von Flanagan roared. "Coming in and just—taking over as if you were a police captain yourself—"

"Calm down, von Flanagan," Malone said crossly. "How are you going to answer my questions if you don't calm down?"

"Answer your questions?" Von Flanagan was beginning to turn cerise.

Malone lowered his voice. "Or maybe you'd like your wife to know about the five hundred dollars you won at Judge Touralchuck's poker game," he said pleasantly.

Von Flanagan took a deep breath. "That's not fair, Malone," he said. "You were at the poker game too."

"Do you think your wife would mind if I played poker?" Malone asked.

There was a long silence.

"All right, Malone," von Flanagan said at last. "Go ahead. I suppose I've got to play along with you. But all I'm going to do is answer questions, remember. Don't try to get me to do something else."

"I won't have to," Malone said with a confidence he wished he felt. He sneaked a look at his watch. It was after six. Oh, well, maybe she'd meet him tomorrow, he thought. But she'd sounded a little peeved on the telephone.

"When did George Melcher die?" he said.

Von Flanagan shook his head. "Coroner was here, but he didn't say anything definite. Between three and four-thirty, when his brother found him."

"What killed him?" Malone said.

"He was stabbed in the back with a knife from the kitchen," von Flanagan said. "Listen, Malone. If Rodney Melcher didn't come to you about the killing—and I'm not saying I believe that—but, if he didn't, what did he want to see you about?"

"He thought he was going to be murdered," Malone said truthfully, "and he wanted a body-guard."

Von Flanagan turned cerise again, then purple. "If you think I'm going to believe a story like that—" he started.

Malone looked for an ashtray, didn't find one, and sprinkled cigar ash liberally on the polished floor. "Anyhow," he said helpfully, "this time I'm asking the questions. Did you find anything in the room?"

"Nothing except what was supposed to be there," von Flanagan said. "I haven't even started questioning those two women myself, Malone. You—"

"The poker game," Malone muttered.

Von Flanagan said: "All right. All right. But I'm warning you, Malone. If you don't come up with something I'm going to take care of you for good. I'm going

to lock you in a cell and throw away the key. I'm going to put you where you'll never bother me any more. I'm going to build a new jail, seventy feet under the ground, just for you, Malone. I—"

"But I will come up with something," Malone said. "Just watch." He smiled with what he hoped was a confident air. "On your way out, ask one of the women to come in, will you?" he said.

"Which one?" von Flanagan said.

Malone shrugged. "It doesn't matter," he said. "Pick one at random."

When the door opened Carla Melcher stood staring at Malone, her mouth in a firm line, her hands clenched at the sides of her ice-green gown. "You wanted to see me," she said.

Malone thought back. "You're Rodney Melcher's wife," he said.

"That's right," she said. "And I don't see what all this fuss is about."

Malone said: "Come in, sit down, and shut the door." When the woman was seated opposite him, he went on: "George Melcher is dead."

"Oh, I know that," Carla Melcher said. "But I didn't do it. Don't blame me. I don't see why I should be bothered."

"Where were you between three and four-thirty this afternoon?" Malone said.

"I was in my room," Carla said, "working on a crossword puzzle. I do a lot of crossword puzzles. There isn't much else to do."

"But—"

"Rodney and his wonderful ideas!" Carla went on, as if she hadn't heard the little lawyer at all. "Inviting his brother to stay with us—and then—that woman? I suppose it was more—convenient for him. Having her right here in the house."

"You mean Margery Dawes," Malone said helpfully.

"Of course I do," Carla said. "The cheap little slut—spending half her time in the servant's quarters. She's nothing but a—"

"Did anyone see you while you were in your room?" Malone said smoothly.

"See me?" Carla thought. "I rang for Max once, about three-thirty, I suppose it was, to bring me a drink."

"Max?"

"The butler. He let you in this afternoon."

Malone thought of the ancient death's head and shivered. "Oh, yes," he said. "Max."

"There wasn't anybody else," Carla said. "I was alone. I'm usually alone." She stood up. "Do you want to ask me anything more?" she said.

"A couple of questions," Malone said. "It won't take long." Reluctantly, Carla Melcher sat down again. "Did you know about the previous attempts at murder?"

"Previous attempts?" Carla said. "What previous attempts?"

"I guess you didn't," Malone said.

"But you've got to tell me," Carla said. "You mean—somebody tried to kill George?"

"Somebody succeeded," Malone said. "Before that, there were a couple of unsuccessful attempts. Rodney walked into them, and thought they were meant for him."

Carla laughed. Her voice was strained. "For Rodney?" she said. "Now, who would want to kill Rodney?"

"Would you?" Malone said softly.

"Malone," Carla said, "I may be a little bitter, and I may be disappointed. But I don't go around murdering people." She paused, then said: "Are there any more questions?"

"Just one," the little lawyer said. "Who do you think might have murdered George Melcher?"

Carla shook her head. "George was all right," she said. "He was—well, overbearing at times. A little difficult to get along with. But I can't imagine anyone wanting to kill him."

"Well," Malone said, "how did George and his brother get along, for instance?"

"Nothing special," Carla said. "Rodney had the money, you see, and that made for a little friction—but he was generous enough. George never really needed

money. Rodney gave him whatever he asked for."

"I see," Malone said helplessly. After a second he added: "I guess that's about all."

Carla nodded. She stood up and went to the door of the dim little room. Malone crossed the room and opened it for her.

"Von Flanagan!" he bawled.

"What now?" the police captain's voice called back.

"See if you can find that butler—Max. I want to see him right away."

Probably, Malone thought dimly, nothing at all would happen. Carla's alibi would check out, and where would that leave things? Just where they had been. Carla could easily have stepped out before Max came in, or after he'd gone. How long did it take to stab somebody?

But there didn't seem to be anything else to do, Malone realized. He'd told von Flanagan he'd find the answer—and, if he didn't, Rodney Melcher wouldn't be the only one in trouble. Von Flanagan was just waiting for Malone to make one little mistake.

Malone thought he'd probably made the mistake already. He'd probably made it when he got out of bed that morning.

Being alone in a small, dim room with a man who looked like something out of an old horror movie was not, Malone discovered, the most pleasant thing in

the world. He tried to smile at the butler, but his voice came out in a kind of whispered croak.

"You're Max," he said. "You're the butler."

"That's right, sir," the ancient horror said. "You wished to see me?"

"Did you go up to Mrs. Melcher's room with a drink this afternoon about three-thirty?"

Max wasn't sitting down. He stood over the table, looming like Boris Karloff. "She asked me to bring her a drink," he said in a neutral tone. "I did so. The time must have been approximately three-thirty. Is that all, sir?"

Well, Malone thought, he might as well go through the whole series of questions. "Where were you from three o'clock until four-thirty?" he said.

"It was four-thirty when Mr. George was discovered stabbed in the back?" Max asked.

"That's right."

"A terrible thing," Max said, with something like relish. "Terrible." He seemed to recall himself to Malone's question. "I was downstairs, sir, washing-up the lunch dishes, and helping Cook prepare supper. I'm afraid that Cook could not provide me with an—alibi. I believe that is the word—?"

"That's the word," Malone said.

"Thank you, sir," Max said. "I'm afraid that Cook could not provide me with an alibi for that

time; we were not constantly in each other's sight."

"Oh," Malone said. He prepared his second question. "Do you know anyone who might have wanted to kill George Melcher?" he asked.

"Mr. George was a gentleman," Max said.

That seemed to be that. After a second Malone said: "That's all, Max. Thank you. Would you ask Miss Dawes to step in?"

"Certainly, sir," Max said, and left silently. His departure seemed to make the room a more cheerful place. Malone was almost relaxed when the door opened again and Margery Dawes came in and, without invitation, sat herself down opposite him.

"I'll do anything I can," she said. "I think this whole thing is just terrible."

Her voice was flat and honest, like that of a little girl. Malone thought that sports clothes fit her; he tried to imagine her in Carla Melcher's green sheath and failed. "I'd like to know where you were between three and four-thirty this afternoon," he said, wondering how often he'd heard himself ask the same question.

"Between three and four-thirty?" she said. "I was out. I just got back—I found out that poor George had been stabbed, and the police were already here."

"Stabbed in the back," Malone muttered.

"In the back?" Margery said.

"How horrible!" She drew in her breath. "I was out shopping," she said.

"Any witnesses?" Malone asked.

Margery nodded. "Of course there are. Salesgirls—I can tell you where I went, if you like."

"Make up a list, and I'll go over it later," Malone said. But there wouldn't be any time, later, he knew. He had to come up with something now. "How did you and Rodney Melcher meet?" he said. Maybe there was something in Rodney's background, he thought. But that was silly; it hadn't been Rodney who'd been murdered. Even the murder attempts hadn't been meant for Rodney. That had all been a mistake.

"I came to the house one day by mistake," Margery said.

"By mistake?" Malone puffed on his cigar.

"I was looking for someone else. Someone who doesn't live here at all, but I thought they did. I talked to Rodney and he was very nice about it, and—well, after a few dates I suggested staying here, in the house, and Rodney thought that was a good idea. That was about two months ago."

"And you've been staying here ever since," Malone said.

"That's right," Margery said. "Poor Rodney—with that wife of his. He needs me, Malone."

Malone didn't comment on that. Instead, he said: "How

about George? How did you feel about George?"

"I hate to speak ill of the dead," Margery said, and proceeded to do so. George, it seemed, was a slimy, loathsome beast, of dubious parentage and shocking habits. George was everything that Rodney, thank God, was not and could never be. "I'm afraid we just didn't get along," Margery finished.

"I'll say you didn't," Malone murmured admiringly. "Do you know anyone who might have wanted to murder him?"

"I'd have done it myself," Margery said, "except that I didn't, of course. He was mean to the servants; he treated Rodney with nothing but contempt, in spite of the fact that Rodney gave him money, and he was just cold and distant to Carla—though I can understand that. Carla is such a cold person herself."

Malone said: "Umm." He tried to think of another question to ask, and realized there wasn't one. "That's all," he said at last, and followed her out of the little room into the bright living room where everyone was waiting.

"You're just making a mystery out of this to confuse me," von Flanagan said. "You question everybody and get nowhere, because there isn't anywhere to get. Rodney Melcher murdered his brother, and you know it because he told you he was going to do

just that, when he saw you. And if you think all this mystery's going to work, Malone, you'd better get your head examined. Because I'm taking Rodney Melcher in right now. And you're coming with him."

"Wait," Malone said desperately. "Rodney didn't kill his brother."

"How do you know?" von Flanagan said. "And if he didn't, who did?"

"Rodney," Malone said, "where were you from three to four-thirty?"

"I was right here, Malone," Rodney said. "Sitting in the living room, reading. I was all alone."

"There," Malone said triumphantly. "You see?"

"See what?" von Flanagan growled. "I see that you're trying to mix me up again, Malone. But it won't work. It won't work."

"You're stuck again," Malone offered helpfully. Before von Flanagan could say anything more he went on: "If Rodney Melcher had come to me, I'd have told him to fix up a good alibi. He'd have been somewhere else, with witnesses to swear to it. But he hasn't got any alibi. Therefore, he didn't come to me, and he didn't kill his brother." In his best courtroom manner he continued: "It's obvious from that fact alone that you'll be making a terrible mistake, von Flanagan, if you arrest this poor man—"

"Then I'll make the terrible

mistake," von Flanagan said. "Klutchesky!" he called.

The big patrolman appeared in the doorway. "I was talking to the servants," he said. "None of them knows a thing."

"Klutchesky," von Flanagan said, "I want you to take Malone in. He's gone nuts. He thinks he's a great detective."

"Malone?" Klutchesky said. "If you say so—"

Suddenly the little lawyer said: "Hold it." He tossed his cigar inaccurately at the fireplace and waved his arms for silence. "Great detective—that's it!"

"Completely mad," von Flanagan said. "Take him away."

"No, wait," Malone said. "I know who killed George Melcher—and I can prove it." He turned to Margery Dawes. "Dawes isn't your real name, is it?" he asked.

"Of course it is," she said.

"We can check that," Malone told her.

She seemed to sag a little in her chair. "All right," she said at last. "So what if it isn't? I tell you I didn't kill George Melcher."

"I know you didn't," Malone said. "And now that I know your name isn't Margery Dawes, I know why you didn't. I mean I know why the real killer did."

"Malone," von Flanagan said, "are you putting on an act? Because temporary insanity isn't going to get you anywhere."

"I'm not insane," Malone said cheerfully. "I've just solved your

case. It all happened because Rodney had the money."

"But Rodney isn't dead," von Flanagan said.

"That's right," Malone said. "George had to take an allowance from his brother, and he didn't like it. So he thought of a way to get money from somewhere else. If Rodney hadn't been rich, it would never have worked."

"Rodney?" von Flanagan shook his head. "Malone, are you trying to tell me something?"

"I'm trying to tell you the name of the murderer," Malone said, "but you'll have to listen to me to hear me. Is that what I mean?"

"I don't know, Malone," von Flanagan said. Klutchesky stood on one foot and then he stood on the other one.

"Do you want me to arrest him?" he said.

"Never mind that," Malone said. "Margery Dawes isn't her real name. See?"

"See what?" von Flanagan said in spite of himself. Then he added: "This doesn't make any sense, Malone."

"It will," Malone said. "Be patient." He took a deep breath. Everything was perfectly clear in his mind, now. "George Melcher found out who Margery Dawes was, and he was blackmailing her. So he was killed."

"But you said Margery Dawes didn't kill him," von Flanagan said.

"She didn't," Malone said. "Her father did. He mentioned that George Melcher had been stabbed in the back. How did he know that?"

"Her father?" Rodney Melcher was on his feet.

"George knew that Margery would be ashamed of her father's being a butler in your house," Malone told him. "She probably came to live here—at her suggestion, remember—on her father's request. Maybe they thought they could get away with money or valuables if they both worked here as a team. Margery didn't want her connection with her father known, anyhow—so when George tried to blackmail her she went to her father, and her father killed him."

"Malone, what—" von Flanagan started to say.

"Watch Max!" Malone screamed. The butler came out swinging—but Klutchesky was right there, and it was all over.

"I can't thank you enough," Carla Melcher said. "I knew there was something wrong with that woman from the start."

"Sure," Rodney said disconsolately. "She was no good. Knew it all along. I was just waiting for the right time to make my move."

Carla looked at him. But there was less coldness in that look, now. There was understanding, and perhaps a little love. "Of course,

darling," she said. "I understand."

"You do?" Rodney said. His face was amazed.

"Of course I do," Carla said.

Malone cleared his throat. "Maybe I'd better get back to the city," he said.

"Don't go back before I pay you," Rodney Melcher said. He brought out his billfold. "I gave you five hundred this afternoon, didn't I?"

Malone nodded. Rodney Melcher drew out another sheaf of bills. "Here's another five hundred," he said and handed it to Malone.

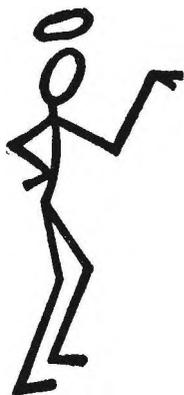
The little lawyer took the money silently. It would come in handy—when he finally got in touch with his important date. Suddenly he looked at his watch.

It was seven-twenty. Maybe she was still home.

He decided to find out.



## TASKS OF AN MVD REPRESENTATIVE ABROAD



TESTIMONY before the Royal Commission on Russian Espionage in Melbourne on July 6, 1954, included a reference to a letter to Vladimir Petrov, the then MVD representative in Australia. The letter, dated June 6, 1952, from Moscow, ordered Petrov to establish an organization of agents who might be employed in the event of war, but he mustn't "frighten" them by hinting that war was likely in the near future. . . . He should recruit agents who had access to intelligence and counter-intelligence work, he was told, and assign these people tasks in advance. He must be particularly careful, he was warned, not to recruit people already being watched by the authorities or by counter-intelligence. . . .

In addition to trying to discover the names and identities of "enemy" agents in the Soviet Union, he must concentrate on people engaged in secret Government work capable of supplying valuable information. He must carry out his plans boldly, aggressively, accurately and with inventiveness. There was to be no indecision, negligence or cowardice. The new Tass representative would help with this work. . . .

the  
late  
lamented

by . . . Fredric Brown

It was very simple. Had her father embezzled the money? Was Wanda Rogers lying? Did she know where it was hid?

MY UNCLE SAID, "Gin, Ed," and put down his cards. "Do I make enough points to win the game? Want to go out and eat, kid, or should we have another game first?"

I was just about to vote in favor of another game—I wasn't hungry yet—when the phone rang. Uncle Am picked it up and said, "Hunter and Hunter Detective Agency."

And then said, "Wait a minute, Ben. Ed's here too; let him get on the extension phone and listen in so we won't have to do this twice. Okay?"

And he nodded to me and I went into the outer office and headed for the extension phone on the desk there. But before I pick it up let me tell you who the Hunters are; who Ben is will come out in the telling.

I'm Ed Hunter, middle twenties. Ambrose Hunter, middle forties — shortish, stoutish and smartish—is my father's brother and my only surviving relative. He'd been a carney for a lot of years. After my father died when I was eighteen I'd gone with the

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*Fredric Brown's novels about the South West (Saint readers will remember his THE AMY WAGGONER MURDER, Feb. 1958), about the interplay of human relationships there, have been called superb studies of people and of an area. Similarly, the world of Ambrose Hunter, former carneyman, and of his nephew, first met in THE FABULOUS CLIP JOINT, while different, is equally credible, equally alive.*

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carnival, working with Uncle Am for a couple of seasons. Then we'd broken with the carney and had come back to Chicago. Uncle Am had been a private detective once before he'd been a carney and he got a job with Ben Starlock. Ben runs a fair-sized detective agency, with office help and usually ten to a dozen operatives. After a little while, after I was twenty-one, Uncle Am had talked Ben into taking me on as an operative too. We'd both worked for Ben a few years, had got a little money ahead, and had decided to take the gamble of starting our own agency, Hunter & Hunter.

We'd stayed friendly with Starlock; once in a while when he had more jobs on hand than he had operatives, he'd throw some work our way. And vice versa. Running a private detective agency is like that. Almost every agency has friendly relations with one or more others for such emergencies.

I sat down on a corner of the desk in the outer office—the desk which would be that of a stenographer-bookkeeper-receptionist if and when we ever got solvent enough to need one—and picked up the phone. I said, "Hi, Ben. We're three-way now. Shoot."

"One thing first," Ben Starlock began. "I may not be able to use you boys if the answer to one question is wrong. When were you up here in my agency last? Together or separately."

"It was together," Uncle Am

said. "I'd guess about a month ago. Anyway, that's the last time for me. I don't think Ed's been there by himself since then. Have you, Ed?"

"No," I said. "That's the last time. But I'd say five weeks ago, maybe six, instead of a month."

"Who was on at the receptionist's desk?"

I said, "The tall redhead. I don't know her name."

"Good." Starlock sounded relieved. "Can I see you boys in half an hour, both of you?"

"Sure," Uncle Am said. "Your office?"

"Hell, no. If you show up here, the deal's off. I'll come around to that hole in the wall of yours. So long."

Uncle Am looked at me when I went back to the doorway of the inner office. "Wonder what the hell that part's about?"

I leaned against the side of the doorway. I said, "You're not thinking, Uncle Am. It adds up only one way. Somebody in his office is involved in whatever he wants us to do and he doesn't want him to see us. And the somebody has worked there only a month or so or he'd have seen us already."

Uncle Am nodded. "You mean *she'd* have seen us already. It has to be a replacement for the redhead on the reception desk. He wasn't sure whether we'd do for the job until he learned the redhead was still working there last

time we were in." He relighted his cigar, which had gone out during the phone call. "Well, no use our wasting our brains deducing things he'll tell us soon anyway. Half an hour's just about time for one more gin game. Okay?"

I said, "I'd better not. Got to send out a check for the rent and one for the phone bill. I'd better do it now in case this job's something we got to start on right away."

I went back to the outer office desk and got busy. I got the checks ready to mail and then found a few other little things to do to keep busy or at least look busy when Starlock came.

I went into the inner office and we gave him the seat of honor, the client's chair. Uncle Am asked him, "How's business, Ben?"

"Lousy. I've got four ops sitting on their tails in the back room right now. But you boys are smart enough to have guessed why I can't use my own ops."

"Sure," Uncle Am said, "How long has she worked for you? About a month?"

"Just about. But for only two more days; she's given notice that she's leaving Saturday."

"And what do you suspect her of? Not stealing postage stamps. Information from your files maybe?"

Starlock shook his head. He smiled and looked like a benign Buddha, as he always does when he smiles. He's a big man with

just the right build for a Buddha, and he even has a mole in the middle of his forehead to carry out the illusion.

He said, "I don't suspect her of anything. Particularly of rifling my files, since she doesn't have access to them. No, Am, I've got a client who's interested in her. He thinks she may know where forty-six thousand dollars is hidden. Have you read news stories on the Jason Rogers case?"

"Name sounds familiar. But ask Ed; he's the one with the long memory around here. If he read about it he can probably quote you the whole thing."

Starlock looked at me. "Did you read it, Ed? And how much do you remember?"

I said, "It was out in Freeland. You still live out there yourself, Ben?"

Starlock nodded. Freeland is a small city just outside of Cook County. It's not exactly a suburb of Chicago and it's politically independent, but a lot of people who work in Chicago live there and commute.

I said, "Jason Rogers was City Treasurer of Freeland. A couple of months ago—"

"Six weeks," Ben interrupted me. "Go ahead. I'll correct you if you're wrong on anything."

"Six weeks ago he was killed—run down by a car. I don't remember details of the accident, but I don't think it was a hit-run."

"It wasn't. Go on."

"Well, apparently he was pretty well-known and liked out there and he'd been treasurer for quite a while— How long, Ben?"

"Thirteen years. It's an elective office, every second year, and he'd been elected seven straight times. The last two times he was unopposed. He was half way through his seventh term when he was killed."

"Yeah," I said. "Anyway he was well thought of. There was a nice obit on him and a eulogizing editorial. He was the late lamented Jason Rogers—until a week later. Then an audit they took incident to turning over the books to his assistant showed a shortage. But it doesn't seem to me the figure was as much as forty-six grand."

Starlock said, "It wasn't, at first. I think the first estimate was thirty-five. But they found a few more discrepancies. Forty-six is the real total. Remember anything else, Ed?"

"Only survivor was a daughter. I don't remember the name. Do I guess right that she's now working in your office?"

"You do. Wanda Rogers. And our client is Waukegan Indemnity; they bonded Jason Rogers for fifty thousand, so they're stuck with paying off the whole forty-six—if the courts eventually decide he was guilty of the embezzlement. That may take a long time, but the bonding company is worrying plenty about it meanwhile.

That's a hell of a chunk of cash for them to pay out."

"Isn't there evidence one way or the other?"

"Not that they've found yet."

"They think that if he took it he cached it and didn't spend it. And that his daughter knows where it is?"

"I'll take one of those at a time, Ed. About caching it—he probably did, if he took it. He made ten thousand a year and his scale of living was well within it."

"Okay, so let's assume he took it, and cached it. What reason do they have for thinking the daughter, Wanda, was in on it and knows where the money is? An embezzler doesn't usually confide in his family what he's doing."

"Right. But with that much money involved he might have wanted his daughter to get the money in case something happened to him—as something did happen—before the operation was completed. I'm not saying I think it did; I'm saying it could have—because of one thing that came out in the investigation. Jason Rogers' lawyer, for what personal legal work he had, was John Carstairs, a friend of his. His will was in Carstairs' safe. And a few months before his death he also gave Carstairs a sealed envelope addressed to his daughter with instructions that it be delivered to her in case of his death. Carstairs gave it to her the day after Rogers was killed—and she opened it in his pres-

ence, but didn't read it to him. It *could* have told her where the money was hidden."

"What was her story about what it did say? I presume she was questioned about it?"

"Oh, sure. A week later, after the shortage came to light. And her story makes sense, that it concerned his funeral and where he wanted to be buried. And that she followed his wishes in arranging the funeral, but didn't keep the note. So she didn't have proof that's what it was, and it's just a question of her word against the other possibility."

"Uh-huh," I said. "You pay your money and take your choice. One more question before we get to what you want *us* to do. How come she got a job with you? Just coincidence? And how come she had to go to work so soon after her father's death? Didn't he leave her some kind of estate, with a ten grand a year income?"

"He left an estate—not much, but a few thousand plus an equity in the small house they lived in. Maybe ten thousand altogether, after the house is sold to settle the estate. But it's going to be frozen in probate for a while—longer than usual under the circumstances. Because if he's judged guilty of embezzling the money and if the money itself isn't found, the estate will be claimed as partial restitution. Carstairs is the executor, and the City Attorney

warned him not to give Wanda even any advances out of it until things are settled. And since she didn't have any money or property in her own name that left her out on a limb, until and unless.

"Now about how she got a job with me," Ben continued. "I'd met her—twice, I think. I knew her father, very slightly. About six months ago I joined the country club at Freeland. He was already a member. I don't go around very often, but we met there. One Sunday I was in a golf foursome with him. And—yes, it was twice that I ran into him there with his daughter and he introduced us the first time. Maybe she got the impression that he and I knew one another better than we did.

"Anyway, about ten days after her father's death—about three days after the start of the scandal—she came in my office one day looking for a job. I imagine—I'm just guessing—she'd seen some other of her father's friends first, ones he knew better, but they hadn't done anything for her. Either because they didn't have any jobs open or because—well, because they believed her father was really an embezzler and didn't want to hire his daughter. But Jennifer—that's the tall redhead you mentioned—had just given notice and I was really looking for a receptionist, and she seemed qualified. What the hell, why not, as long as I needed a girl. I don't believe in hereditary tendencies to

ward crime, so even if her father was guilty—and I was a long way from being sure he was—I didn't see why she should be penalized for that."

"Even if she knew where the money was?" Uncle Am asked.

Starlock rubbed his chin. "At that time I didn't know about the sealed letter her father had left for her."

"And how come," I asked, "Waukegan Indemnity came to you to investigate her? Coincidence, or because they thought you had an in, since she worked for you?"

"Not exactly either. They were keeping track of her, of course, knew where she worked. And this morning the manager of their Freeland office, guy named Koslovsky, came to see me to ask questions about her—"

"Giving his right name and company to the receptionist?" Uncle Am cut in.

Starlock grinned at him. "These insurance boys know their stuff. He phoned me at home last night, made an appointment, and came around to my house before I left this morning.

"Anyway, I told him what little I could—just what I've been telling you—about her and her father. And he asked if I wanted to take over the job on her. Naturally I can use business—even if it's business I have to pass on to guys like you and settle for my cut. So I said sure and we made the

deal. He couldn't do it himself, and anyway he's busy on the Freeland end—working with the auditors and cops there."

"What does he want done, a roping job?" I asked.

"Right, but there'll be a tailing job first. Here's how I figure it. Am can pick her up when she leaves work tonight and see how she spends her evenings, where she goes, that sort of thing. He'll learn enough about her—maybe in one evening, maybe it'll take longer—her habits and habitats, so you, Ed, will be able to pick the right time and place to get to know her. And it'll be mostly your job from there—although maybe Am can take over some tailing again from time to time, evenings when you're not dating her. Okay?"

"Okay," I said. "Anyway, I'll try. If I fall flat on my face the first time I try to make a pick-up, though, it'll be rough to keep trying."

"He won't, Ben," Uncle Am said. "You say she's quitting you for another job. Where is it?"

"With Marshall Field's, starting Monday, as a model. Or so she told me. Come to think of it I can verify that with a phone call, and I will. I'll let you boys know if it's a phoney. She told me she was awfully sorry to quit after having worked so short a time but that she'd been offered a modeling job and it paid ten dollars a week more so she couldn't afford to turn it down. And I admitted she

couldn't—there's not much if any chance for my advancing my office help or paying them much more. With me, it'd have been a couple of years, maybe more, before I could have given her that much of a raise."

Uncle Am looked at me and grinned. "If she's pretty enough to be a model, Ed, sounds like your job won't be too dull."

"She's more than pretty," Starlock said. "Want the rest of the description?"

"Shoot," Uncle Am said.

"Twenty-two years old. Five-foot-four, about a hundred-fifteen pounds, chestnut hair in a loose bob—maybe bobs are out of date but this one is perfect for her—blue eyes, creamy skin. Doesn't wear any makeup except lipstick. Good figure—not too much, but enough. Graceful carriage and walk.

"And today—you'll spot her mostly by clothes the first time, Am—she's wearing, from the bottom up, dull-finish black pumps with Cuban heels, suntan colored nylons, skirt with a complicated check pattern in two shades of green and some brown, but it'll look green from a distance, and a plain tan blouse. But that'll be covered by a tan shortie coat, about hip length, when you see her coming out of the building. No hat."

"That's plenty," Uncle Am said. "And she'll be coming out of the building entrance at five o'clock or shortly after."

"Right. You pick her up there. Oh, she doesn't live out at Free-land; the house out there is empty. She took a room close in, on the near north side. Address is one-eighty-six West Covent Place. That's about a dozen blocks from the office; I don't know whether she usually walks it or takes the bus. But she doesn't have a car, so you don't need to worry about that angle."

"Telephone number? Or do you know her room number at the Covent address?"

Starlock said, "We've got a telephone number in our card file, but I didn't bother to copy it down or remember it. You won't need it for the tail job, Am. And if Ed can't get it for himself, he won't be able to use it anyway. No, no room number. I don't know the building, but I know the neighborhood and what kind of building it would be, and probably the rooms wouldn't be numbered."

He pulled a folded paper out of his pocket and put it on the desk. "Here's the application blank she filled out when I hired her. Not much on it besides what I've told you already—nothing at all that will help you, Am, with the tail job. But Ed might pick up a detail or two that will help him later." He looked at his wrist watch. "Well, I've got to run. Two o'clock appointment at the office, and I'll just make it."

"One more question, Ben," Uncle Am said. "How much time

is authorized on this? Mostly I want 'o know whether we'll have to push on Ed's getting acquainted or whether we can wait till we find a sure-fire setup."

"Client authorized a week. That is, a week's time for one man. I can talk him into stretching it if we're starting to get results by then. If Ed's really getting to know her well. If no results by then, that's it. Well, so long, boys."

When he'd left, Uncle Am said, "Well, kid, We'd better eat. Shall we go together this time?"

Usually we staggered our lunch times so one or the other of us would be in the office ready to answer the telephone or talk to a client who might drop in instead of phoning.

I shook my head. "You go first, Uncle Am, I might as well stick around. You're working tonight, but I won't be. Maybe won't be for days. And when I start, you'll be free. We can still take work, if any comes."

"Okay, kid. If you're more hungry for money than for grub, I'll go first."

Of course no one called during the last half hour. Looking around before closing up I saw Wanda Rogers' employment application and put it in my pocket to look at sometime during the evening.

The sky was dull and gray and a faint drizzle of rain was starting. I put on the spare raincoat I

keep at the office and my own hat, took the elevator down and went out into the drizzle. Our rooming house on Huron is only ten blocks from the office and we usually walk in good weather; tonight I took the bus. But the drizzle had stopped by the time I got off it.

I went up to our room. We share a big double room with two beds at the second floor front. It's nothing fancy but, except for sleeping, we don't spend a hell of a lot of time in it.

But tonight I was going to spend the evening there.

I got out my trombone, polished it up, and ran a few scales and arpeggios, softly and then made myself comfortable with a paperback. I was somewhere in the second chapter when I heard the phone ring in the hallway downstairs. I didn't think it would be for me, but I quit reading and listened and a moment later I heard the voice of Mrs. Brady, our landlady, calling out. "Ed! Ed Hunter! You home, Ed?"

By that time I had the door open and called back that I was coming. She was back in her own apartment by the time I got downstairs and answered the phone.

"Ed," —it was Uncle Am's voice— "listen. Our subject just went into the Park Theater. She'll be in there at least an hour and a half, even if she sees only one of the movies—it's a double feature. I'll go in myself rather than stand around outside that long but first

I'm calling from a drugstore across the street. Meanwhile you get dressed, if you aren't, and—"

I interrupted him. "Are you crazy, Uncle Am? I can't pick her up in a movie—or anyway the odds would be against it; she's a respectable girl. And if I try and miss—"

Uncle Am interrupted me. "Shut up and listen, kid. I got a look at the joint where she rooms. Remember the address?"

"Sure," I said. "One eighty-six West Covent Place."

"Well, if you get there fast, you may get a break. There's a Room For Rent sign in the window. Throw some stuff into a suitcase, grab a taxi and get there quick before someone else nabs off that room. But don't dawdle. Rooms go fast these—"

"Okay, okay," I said. "Don't waste my time. Hang up so I can phone a cab before I start packing."

He hung up and I called for a cab to come right away and then ran back up to our room. I put my shoes and necktie and suit coat back on, then opened a suitcase on the bed and started tossing things into it. It didn't matter what I put in; all I had to do was fill the suitcase enough so it wouldn't rattle.

The *Room For Rent* sign was still in the window where Uncle Am had seen it, and I relaxed. The building was red brick; three

stories high and not very wide. It was older than I was—probably twice as old. But it had been neatly kept up. It was set back about ten feet from the sidewalk and there was even grass in those ten feet on both sides of the walk that led to the door. There were no steps; the ground floor was really a ground floor. It had probably been built as a single family residence fifty years or so ago, subsequently been made into three flats and then later into a rooming house. I guessed there'd be about five rooms to each floor, fifteen rooms in all.

There wasn't any bell outside the door so I walked in. There was a fairly wide hallway leading back to a flight of steps and there was a coin telephone on the wall near the foot of the stairs. Halfway down the hallway there was a table, with incoming mail—a few letters and circulars lying on it—and a pushbutton in the wall behind it, a sign over the button reading "Ring for Landlady."

I went back to the table and put down my suitcase. Since no one was watching me I glanced at the letters first, but none of them was for Wanda Rogers. Of course she'd been home since work and would have picked up her mail if any, so I hadn't expected to find a letter for her. Then I pushed the button to Ring for Landlady.

She came out of the door of the back room. A big bleached blonde battleax of a woman, somewhere

in her forties. She looked tough enough to handle any obstreperous roomers without having to call copper to get help. She looked as though she could be, or could have been, the madam of a house of ill fame. In other words, a typical Chicago landlady. Our landlady, Mrs. Brady, is an exception—a small birdlike woman who wouldn't know how to go about being tough; she gets by only by being awfully particular about choosing her tenants so she doesn't have to keep them in line.

She saw my suitcase and asked, "Looking for a room?"

"Yes," I said. "I saw your sign. Hope it's still vacant."

"It is. The front room there." She walked past me and opened the door of it. Stood aside so I could go in. But she said, "Ten bucks a week," so I'd be discouraged and not waste her time by looking at it if that was too much for me.

I went past her into the room and flicked on the light switch; she stayed in the doorway. It wasn't too bad a room, although seven or eight bucks would have been a fairer price, and I might have got it for eight or nine if I dickered. But I didn't want to dicker, especially as it was ideally located for my purpose. From the window I could see anybody who came and left, and with my door ajar I'd probably be able to hear most of the telephone conversations on that wall phone.

"I'll take it, I guess," I said, trying not to sound too enthusiastic about it. I took out my wallet and found a ten-dollar-bill, handed it to her.

She took it, but didn't move. She said, "I'm not fussy, but I got a few rules. No noise or music after ten. That's one of them."

I felt like asking her, for the hell of it, if she wouldn't mind if I played trombone, but I didn't.

"There's a bathroom on each floor. On this floor it's the third door down the hall. Door's painted white, so you can't miss it. And there are two rules about bathrooms. One is, be sure you lock the door when you're in it. I've got ladies *and* gentlemen rooming here and I don't want nobody embarrassed walking in."

"Okay," I said. "Any other rules?"

"Guess that's all. I'm Mrs. Czerny. I'll have to have your name to put on the receipt."

"Hunter," I said. "Ed Hunter. But you needn't bother with a receipt. Isn't Czerny a Czech name? You don't look like a Czech."

"My husband was," she said. And added unemotionally, "Darn him." She started away and then turned back. "I'll bring you a receipt anyway. I always make a receipt and keep a carbon. That way nobody gets mixed up as to how far anybody's paid or when the next rent's due." And then, as though the mention of the next rent made her think of it, she

said, "You said you didn't know what hours you'd be working, Mr. Hunter. Does that mean you're not working now?"

"I just got into Chicago—from Gary."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a printer," I told her.

"My husband was a printer," she said. And again added unemotionally, "Damn him."

It must have been a ritual, the adding of those two words every time she mentioned her husband or ex-husband. This time she turned and kept going, so I was able to grin while I wondered what her husband had been like, and whether he was dead or divorced.

I followed her out into the hallway and brought back my suitcase. I closed the door and started unpacking, putting things into the dresser drawers and the closet. This time, since I was in no hurry, I checked what I'd used to fill the suitcase and decided I had enough of everything to last me at least a week. Except my toilet articles; I'd have to go back to pick them up. And a bathrobe; I'd want one in case I had to go to the bathroom down the hall in the middle of the night.

Mrs. Czerny came back just as I was finishing and brought me my receipt for ten dollars. But she didn't stay to talk.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was eight o'clock, only half an hour after Uncle Am's phone

call. Probably it would be a couple of hours before Wanda came home, but then again the movie *could* be a stinker that she'd walk out on if she had good taste and I didn't want to take a chance of missing getting a look at her as she came in.

I put a chair—there was one straight chair and one overstuffed one in the room and I picked the overstuffed one—in position in front of my window and tried it. Yes, I'd be able to see anyone who turned in, through the thin curtain.

I set my door a bit ajar. Then I got comfortable in the chair and took up my vigil. I wished now that I'd thought to ask Uncle Am when he'd called me whether she'd changed clothes or coat when she'd come home before going to the movie, whether she'd added a hat or carried an umbrella.

In the next couple of hours maybe a dozen people came in or went out or both; some of them were women but none could possibly have been Wanda.

She came and turned in the walk to the doorway and I didn't have the slightest doubt that it was she. She had changed coats, worn a raincoat instead of the shortie, but she didn't wear a hat or carry an umbrella; apparently she wasn't afraid of getting a little rain on her hair, and I liked that. It was beautiful chestnut hair, in a shoulder length bob as Starlock had described it.

At that distance and through a curtain I couldn't see her face too clearly, but I liked it. And even under a raincoat you could see that her hundred fifteen pounds was very properly distributed over her five-foot-four inches.

The door opened and closed and I could hear the click of her footsteps; they seemed to be heading toward the stairs but stopped before they got there. I was, by then, standing just inside my door to hear better and I heard the sound of the receiver being lifted off the wall telephone and then the sound of a dime being put into it.

And a moment's silence and then her voice. A nice voice, if a bit strained at the moment. Just loud enough for me to overhear, by trying hard. "This is the desk sergeant? My name is Wanda Rogers, one-eighty-six West Covent Place. Got that address down?"

"Well, I want to report that a man just followed me home from a movie. I don't know whether he went on when I came in or whether he's loitering outside, but I'll appreciate it if you'll radio your squad car that's nearest here and have them check. . . . Description? He's about medium height, a little plump, has a mustache. He's wearing a brown suit and a black felt hat."

I swore to myself. She'd spotted Uncle Am. How, I didn't know; he's a damned good surveil-

lance man. But I had to warn him; not knowing for sure whether or not I'd got the room he *would* loiter somewhere in the block, at least for a while until he felt reasonably sure the girl wasn't going out again.

I went through my door and the outer door and to the sidewalk and looked around. I saw him; there wasn't much cover in that block and he was standing in a shallow doorway on the other side of the street and a quarter of a block away. I walked a few steps toward him so I couldn't be seen from where Wanda was standing. I took a quick look around to make sure no one else was watching and then I made violent scrambling motions at Uncle Am. He stepped out of the doorway and headed off, walking fast.

To make the story I was going to tell look good, I passed the one-eighty-six doorway again and went a few yards in the other direction; then came back and went in.

Wanda was still on the phone. She was giving the telephone number. Then she said, "It's a rooming house. But I'll stay here near the phone till you call back, if you'll have your radio car check right away. . . . Yes, I can identify him if they pick him up."

She hung up the receiver and turned to face me as I strolled back toward her along the hall.

"Excuse me," I said. "My door was ajar and I couldn't help hearing the call you just made. And

I thought maybe I could be helpful—if there'd been a man outside I'd have held him till the police came. But there isn't anyone either loitering or walking anywhere in the block."

"Thank you," she said. She turned toward the phone and then turned back. "But I guess it's too late to call it off now; they'll already have radioed the squad car, and besides—"

I grinned a little. "No trouble. By the way, my name is Ed Hunter. Just moved into the front room on this floor. And I heard you give your name as Wanda Rogers, I think."

She nodded. "Glad to know you, Mr. Hunter. And thanks again, but you shouldn't have taken a chance like that."

I managed to keep her talking—about nothing or about the rooming house—until the phone rang a few minutes later, and she answered it. "Yes, this is Wanda Rogers. . . . Well, thank you for trying. . . . Yes, I'm sure he followed me home, but he must have kept on going instead of waiting outside. . . . I'll do that. Good-bye and thanks again."

And then to me, "Good night, Mr. Hunter." And she went up the stairs and that was that. Which, I considered, was more than I'd expected or even hoped to accomplish my first evening here. Uncle Am's fluff had turned out to be a break for me after all.

I decided to read a while, maybe an hour, and then go home to see Uncle Am. Even if he was asleep and I had to wake him, I wanted to check with him and report to him what had happened. Also, I must admit, to razz him a bit for letting himself be spotted on his first night on a tail job, and then to reassure him that it had turned out for the best.

It was very quiet (no noise or music after ten) and although I wasn't especially listening for anything I heard, half an hour later, the sound of a woman's heels coming down the stairs and along the hall. It wasn't likely to be Wanda—surely she wouldn't be going out again tonight—but if it was she, that was something I should know about, even though I couldn't take the risk of going out after her and following her. So I quickly went to the window and took my post there so I could spot whoever was leaving.

But nobody was leaving. The footsteps stopped outside my door, and there was a soft knock.

I went to the door and opened it; Wanda stood there, looking, I thought, a little frightened. She'd changed to pajamas—but the housecoat she wore over them was at least as modest as a dress.

She said, "Mr. Hunter, you said if you could do me a favor—"

"Sure," I said. "Come in." And stepped back.

She came in and pushed the door partly shut, but not complete-

ly so, behind her. She said, "I think that man's back again. I can't be absolutely sure, but I think there's someone in a doorway across the street and half a block east of here."

"Fine," I said. "I'll go see—" But I thought, surely Uncle Am wouldn't be silly enough to come back tonight after he knew I was here and after I'd once waved him off the surveillance. I reached for my suit coat and put it on.

"Wait," she said. "It's just this—I'm not sure enough to phone the police again, especially right after I gave them one false alarm."

"I understand," I said. "You wait here." I gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder and went out.

I walked the length of the block to the next corner, the drug-store, and didn't see anybody on either side of the street. She hadn't imagined Uncle Am the first time but this time she had imagined him, or had had an optical illusion of someone in a doorway where nobody was.

I walked into my room and said, "Miss Rogers, there isn't—"

And stopped, just inside the doorway. Wanda Rogers was there, all right, sitting on the edge of my bed on the far side so that the bed was between us. But she had a gun in her hand, and the gun was aimed dead center at my solar plexus. The hand that held it was steady, and—worse—the

gun was cocked. At that distance and with only the short trigger pull of a cocked revolver, she couldn't miss.

I didn't move.

The gun was my own, the one that had been in my shoulder holster in the dresser drawer, again under a pile of shirts. It was a short barrelled thirty-eight Police Positive and, at this short range, a howitzer wouldn't have been more dangerous.

I said, "Do you mind if I sit down?"

"All right, sit down." Her voice was perfectly calm. "But keep your hands where I can see them, on the arms of the chair."

I moved sidewise to the chair and sat in it, carefully keeping my hands in sight. The gun moved with me.

I said, "Now, one more thing. That gun hasn't exactly a hair trigger, but it takes only a very slight pull to shoot a cocked revolver; you could do it easily without intending to. If you decide to shoot me, all right, as long as you do it on purpose. But it would be a sad thing to have it happen accidentally. Would you mind moving it slightly off center, or uncocking it, one or the other? Either way, if I made a jump at you from this position, you'd have time to shoot twice."

She said, "All right. Now talk. Who are you, Mr. Hunter—if that's really your name."

"It's really my name," I said.

"And you must have guessed that I'm a detective—and since you have guessed it, that ends my usefulness in this case—"

"I don't know whether you're a detective at all; that's the point."

"What makes you think I might *not* be a detective?"

"Because other people besides detectives have been interested in me, Mr. Hunter. I guess they think that I know something about that missing forty-six thousand dollars. The house out in Frecland has been burglarized—and my room here was searched too."

"Couldn't the police have done that?"

"No. When the money was found to be missing, they came out and searched with a warrant, and did a thorough job. Why would they have tried again, as burglars?"

Apparently she'd begun to believe me, though. Either that or her arm was getting tired. The gun had dropped to the covers of the bed—but it was still cocked and still aimed in my general direction. She said, "Besides, I've been followed—before tonight. *Maybe* by detectives, but how can I be sure?"

"Tonight's little episode was. I can relieve your mind a little by telling you that."

I should have kept my mouth shut. The gun came up and aimed at me again. "I still don't know you're a detective, just because you

say so. When I looked through your stuff I thought I might find something that would tell me what you are—but I didn't, except this gun. And that could just as easily prove you a criminal."

I said, "I've got identification. License and all. But they're in my pocket and I'm not going to reach for a pocket with you jittering that gun at me."

"Which pocket?"

She was really being careful. I grinned at her. "Inside coat pocket. And you needn't worry about me having another gun in another shoulder holster under my coat, because I was in my shirt sleeves when you came in here and you saw me put my coat on. Okay?"

She nodded and I reached into my pocket, pulled out the papers I had there—noticing that among them was the envelope holding the check for the office rent; I'd forgotten to mail it—and sorted out a couple of items, tossed them onto the end of the bed within her reach. She picked them up and looked at them, but did it with one hand and kept her powder dry and a corner of her eye on me until she'd finished. Then she let go of the revolver and stood up.

"All right, I'll believe you now. And if you'll excuse me—"

"Please sit down again, Miss Rogers," I said. "We haven't completely finished yet."

"What more is there? If you think that just because I now admit you're a detective and not—"

"Please sit down," I said. "I've got something more to tell you, and—after holding a loaded, cocked gun on me for five minutes—won't you do me the favor of listening?"

A bit reluctantly she sat down again.

I said, "You overlooked one thing in questioning me—who I was working for. Aren't you interested? Some detectives don't care who their clients are. I could be working for some criminal with designs on you—or the money he thinks you have or know the location of. I'm not. My uncle and I don't work that way. But—"

"I can guess who your client is without your telling me. The bonding company that's going to have to pay the money if it's decided my father took it. Who else besides the police—and they don't hire private detectives—would have any honest interest in the money?"

"But I've talked to them, several times. And I've told them the truth. My father didn't take the money. I don't know who did, or where it is. So what have I got to gain by talking to you about it?"

I said, "You're right, we're working for the bonding company." I didn't see any harm in admitting that much—as long as I kept Starlock out of the middle; I didn't want her to get mad at Ben Starlock and maybe not go to work tomorrow and Saturday morning. "But here's something

you're overlooking. The bonding company isn't interested solely in finding the money. They'll be just as happy to find out—and be able to prove—that he was innocent, that someone else got it. So, in that way and to that extent, their interest is the same as yours, isn't it? You certainly want your father's name cleared, don't you?"

"Yes—," I definitely had her interest now, "—but—how would it be helpful? What, since I don't know anything, could I do to help you, or them?"

"You could play along, let yourself be roped."

"Roped?"

I explained to her what roping was—the operation of a detective making friends with a subject and, without the subject's knowing he was a detective, getting him talking and learning things from him that he might not want to tell to someone he did know was a detective. And I explained what the Hunter & Hunter operation had been planned to be—how Uncle Am's tailing her had just been a preliminary step to help me learn how to make contact with her.

"So," I said, "you won't have to be worried about being followed any more—at least not by him. Why not let me follow through with my part of it, and become friendly with you?"

"But—"

"And here's something nice. Any dates would be on the expense account, not on me. Why

shouldn't you have dinner with me tomorrow night at the Blackstone or Ireland's or somewhere, maybe a show afterwards, and with the bonding company paying the bill?"

She laughed. "It might not be bad. But would it be honest—for you, I mean? Since I *do* know that you're a detective . . ."

"I think that will be an advantage. If you didn't know what I was I'd have to work up to talking about the case—about the money and about your father—slowly and gradually to keep you from getting suspicious. This way we can talk frankly—as we have been talking. And we'll have fun, but we *will* talk about the case too."

"But what can I tell you about it that isn't already known?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but I'll find out. Is it a date? Shall I pick you up tomorrow at five? I know where you work, of course."

She smiled—and it was the first time I'd seen her smile. I liked it. "All right, except not at work. If we're eating at a nice place, I'll want to come home and dress first. Here at half-past six? My room is the one right over this one."

"I'd already deduced that," I said. "Don't forget that I'm a detective. By the way, do you drink?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"Good. It would be harder for me to rope you if you didn't. But

more specifically, it's only a little after eleven o'clock. Why don't we wash the taste of gunpowder out of our mouths right now with a pair of martinis or highballs?"

"Thanks, Ed. But not tonight. I'm tired and I'm a working girl; I've got to get up tomorrow morning."

She stood and I stood and opened the door for her. She passed so close to me that I was tempted—but refrained. I didn't want to crowd my luck and risk spoiling things by trying to kiss her tonight. Let alone trying for anything more than that.

After I heard her moving around upstairs I uncocked my gun and started to put it back in the drawer. Then on second thought I put it and the holster in the suitcase instead and locked the suitcase. Mrs. Czerny might snoop through drawers for all I knew and I didn't want to have to explain to her too that I had a right to have one, and why. In that case the whole damn rooming house would know my business, not just Wanda.

Then I left and headed for Mrs. Brady's rooming house. It was less than eight blocks and I walked. It was about half-past eleven when I got there and I could see there wasn't any light in our room so I figured Uncle Am was probably asleep.

But he wasn't. He'd turned out the light only a few minutes be-

fore and was still awake. He swung his legs out of bed and sat on the edge of it.

"Hoping you'd show up," he said.

"Why especially?"

"Because, dammit, I've been wanting to have a beer or two ever since you waved me off the job. But I figured something had come up and you might be calling me or dropping around, so I came right home. Haven't had anything to eat yet either—except a sandwich I picked up on the way home and ate here. You're not in any hurry to get back there, are you?"

"No," I said. "I've got all night."

"Good. Then I'll get dressed and we'll go out. What happened?"

"Long story on my end," I said. "I'll tell you that over the beers. But while you're dressing, tell me how she spotted you. She did, you know; she was calling copper while I went outside. There'd have been a prowler car by in a few minutes."

"I figured that. Yeah, I know how she spotted me, but I don't see how I could have helped it, Ed. She must've been suspicious someone might be trailing her—and she picked a damn smart way of finding out. It was at the movie—

"When she went out I gave her a full minute before I got up and left. But that's where she spotted me. She was still in the lobby, pre-

tending to put on lipstick but facing the door I had to come through. She got a good look at me, naturally. I had to walk right past her. But I quick got out of sight outside and waited till she was over half a block away—heading back toward home—before I got out of cover. And I gave her plenty distance and most of the time stayed on the other side of the street. And she didn't turn to look back. Still, she stopped and looked in shop windows several times, and must have caught me in a mirror in one of them. Having seen me close up once—"

He shrugged. "Well, so I flubbed it. I should have stayed outside, across the street, while she was in that movie. Would have if I'd known she was suspicious of a tail and going to trap me. But I guess no harm's done—we got you in over there where you'll have a chance to meet her, if you already haven't, and that's all the tail was for. I wouldn't have been tailing her any more after tonight anyway."

He'd finished dressing while he talked and was putting on his suit coat. "You ready, kid?"

"Just a minute," I said. "I packed in such a hurry I didn't take a few things I'll need. I'll take them along now and then I won't have to come back here when we're through talking."

I went down the hall to the bathroom and got my razor and other stuff, then came back and

got my bathrobe and slippers from the closet.

We went to Tom, Dick & Harry's, a tavern actually run by three guys—two brothers and a cousin—having those first names. It's not the nearest tavern to our place, but it's the nearest one that's a good place to talk without having to yell over a juke box, television or radio—or in some taverns all three. Besides they have good hot sandwiches available at all hours and Uncle Am was hungry.

We took a corner booth. Uncle Am ordered a hamburger with french fries and we each ordered a bottle of beer. I waited till we had our beer and then I started my story, from the time of getting his phone call. I was up to the point where Wanda had just knocked on my door to send me out to look for 'that man' again when Uncle Am's sandwich came and I had to wait till the waitress had gone away.

Then I went on. Uncle Am was on the second bite of his sandwich and choked on it when I got to the point where I'd come back to my room and found my own gun cocked and pointed at me. I stood up in the booth and reached across to slap him on the back.

I took up the story again. He didn't interrupt until I was telling him about passing over my license and identification and then

he said, "My God, kid. If she knows you're a detective we *both* pulled bloopers. I guess we'll have to tell Starlock—"

"Wait," I said. "Eat your sandwich and let me finish." I finished the story. Then I said, "Honest, I think the bloopers we pulled were the best things that could have happened. Suppose she hadn't spotted you. She wouldn't have stopped at the phone to call copper and I wouldn't have had a chance to get in conversation with her. She'd have tripped on up the stairs to her room—and I wouldn't even have met her yet. It might have been days before I could have got to know her.

"And as it is, I've got a date with her for tomorrow night. Tonight, rather; it's after midnight now. And sure she knows I'm a detective and what I'm interested in—but I'd say that's to the good. We can talk frankly. Bet I can get details out of her in one evening that—"

"Sure," Uncle Am interrupted me. "That's fine and okay if she's on the square. But what if she knows her father is guilty and knows where the money is?"

"Do you think she'd tell me that any quicker if she thought I was Ed Hunter, printer, instead of Ed Hunter, detective? No, and under cover I'd have a hell of a time getting her to talk about the case at all. And if she's lying, I think I'll be able to tell—at least after I get to know her fairly well.

Shall we have one more bottle of beer apiece?"

We ordered one more bottle apiece and while we were drinking it, Uncle Am said, "Kid, here's what we'll have to do. Even if you're right that you've got a better in this way. We'll have to level with Starlock."

"Sure," I said. "But let me be in on the interview with him. I think I can convince him to keep me on the job."

And Starlock did.

I got to Mrs. Czerny's on the stroke of half-past six, bypassed my room and went up the stairs and knocked on Wanda Rogers' door.

Amazingly, she was ready. She called out, "Just a second, Ed," and came out in only a few seconds, just long enough for her to put on the coat she was wearing—the tan shortie she'd worn when Uncle Am had followed her home from work last night. It was open, and under it she wore a taffeta dress with wide pink and white diagonal stripes that made her look like a peppermint stick—except for shape; she wasn't shaped in the least like a peppermint stick, and she looked much sweeter than one. It was cut low in front and from that and its length I knew, without being able to see shoulders or arms, that the dress was formal or at least semi-formal.

"Hi," I said. "You're beautiful. But we should have compared

notes on dressing; I should have worn a tux."

She looked concerned. "Want me to change, Ed?"

"No," I said. "You're perfect. And luckily I at least wore a dark suit. Nobody will look at me anyway."

She laughed and pulled the door shut behind her. I said, "But will you do me a favor, Wanda? Let's not talk on our way down the stairs and through the hallway—not till we're outside. I'll explain after we're out."

She looked puzzled, but she said, "Okay, Ed. *If* you explain once we're outside."

So we went down the stairs and along the hall together but without talking, and outside.

"Now, Ed, what was that all about?" she asked, the moment we reached the sidewalk.

"First, where do you want to go, Wanda? We might as well be walking, or scouting for a taxi, while we talk."

She thought a moment. "You mentioned Ireland's—and that sounds fine. And it's walking distance, so let's walk."

"Fine," I said. We started west toward Clark Street. She tucked a hand under my arm companionably; I like a girl who does that instead of walking apart from you. I said, "In a nutshell, I'm told there is a character named Jules Black, or Blackie, in the room next to me. He seems to be very interested in you."

"But he's been so nice—and he's made no passes, hasn't even tried to kiss me. He acts like a big brother, Ed. I think of him as being—well, like a big friendly Newfoundland dog. And he got me my job, the one I start to-morrow night."

I almost stopped walking, but managed to make my question casual. "What job is that, Wanda?"

"Cigarette girl at the Gray Goose, Ed. Oh—I guess that surprises you. You said the bonding company turned over whatever information they had about me when they hired you. So if they checked with Mr. Starlock he'd have told them that I told him I was going to work at Marshall Field's."

"Yes, they did check with Starlock. But why did you tell him that? There's nothing wrong with a cigarette girl job."

"A lot of my friends—my father's friends—back in Freeland would think so. And Mr. Starlock lives there and knows quite a few of them. I just didn't want it to get back to Freeland, that's all. I'm—well, I'm not too proud of it myself, Ed."

"That I can understand," I said. "But tell me about Blackie's getting you the job. When, how?"

"Last Saturday evening, a week ago tomorrow, he came up to my room, early evening. He told me there was going to be an opening at the Gray Goose for a cigarette

girl. He said he didn't know exactly what the job would earn me—it's all tips, of course—but he knew it would be at least twice whatever I could be making in my first office job. He said if I was interested I could go out with him when he reported for work at nine and that he'd introduce me to the boss. He said it was a respectable place, that it would be an easy job and for only six hours a night, six days a week.

"Of course I was interested—who wouldn't be interested in a job paying twice what he's earning? I went with Blackie when he reported to work and he introduced me to Mr. Cavallo, who owns the place. I had a talk with Mr. Cavallo—and liked him. And I liked the place; it at least looks respectable. And he must have liked me; he offered me the job. So I said I'd take it if he could hold it open a week so I could give Mr. Starlock notice—and he said he would. That's all, and I start tomorrow evening."

We were almost to Ireland's by then, so I didn't carry on. Mentally I breathed a sigh of relief. I'd made the first hurdle, and without trying. She'd explained to me, and without my even asking, what had worried Starlock: why she'd lied to him. Now I could tell him that at least as far as that angle was concerned she was leveling with me, and that meant he'd keep me on the job. A job I was beginning to like more and more.

We checked her coat—exposing beautifully creamy bare arms, shoulders and back above the peppermint taffeta—and were led to a booth. But the place was fairly busy and no waiter came right away, so I reopened the meeting.

“Now about this big friendly Newfoundland dog of yours, Wanda. You suspected me of an ulterior motive in getting acquainted with you—and rightly, as it happened. What puts him above suspicion?”

“Why—he was living there when I came, and I picked that place accidentally; no one sent me there. So how could he be involved?”

I said, “He was not there when you came. You’ve been there four weeks and Mrs. Czerny told us Blackie came there three or three and a half weeks ago. He might have been there only a day or so when he managed to get acquainted with you.”

“But—do you think Blackie, even if he’s what you think he is, could have had any ulterior motive in getting me the cigarette girl job where he works?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “But I hope to find out. Or *we* hope to find out. Don’t be startled tomorrow night if you see the detective who followed you last night—my uncle—in the club. He knows Cavallo and is going to have a talk with him. Until then let’s put Blackie in abeyance. We’ve got a

lot of other things to talk about.”

“Goodie, now you’re going to rope me. How do you go about it?”

I saw a waiter approaching our booth, finally. I said, “The first step in roping is to start mellowing you with strong drink. What will you have? Manhattan, martini?”

She said a martini would be fine and I went along with the idea and ordered two of them.

“And the next step?” she asked, when the waiter had left to go to the bar.

“The next step is to gain the subject’s confidence by talking about oneself. Should we skip that?”

“I’m interested. Talk.”

I talked, and told her quite a bit. All of it true—except that I skipped the fact that Uncle Am and I had worked for Starlock before we started our own agency. There wasn’t any real reason now for keeping Starlock out of it, but I’d told him I would.

By the time I’d finished—not my whole biography, but the high points of it, such as they were—our cocktails had come and we’d each taken a few sips.

Wanda took another. “And now I’m supposed to tell you my life? I’m afraid it’ll be a dull story, at least up to six weeks ago. Nothing much had happened to me up to then. Except my mother’s death twelve years ago, when I was ten. That was the year after

my father was elected city treasurer for the first time."

"Your father kept you with him, straight through after that?"

"Yes. With the help of a housekeeper until recently, just a few years ago. Then, when one left us, I insisted that I was a big girl and could take over the house myself. And I did."

"And went to college too?"

"Yes, but I was taking a light course, the minimum number of subjects, so I had enough time to be a homemaker for us too. Anyway the routine homemaking. We found a woman who came in one day a week to give the house a thorough cleaning."

Our food started to arrive then and we quit talking for a while. I don't care to talk much while I'm eating—especially talk that requires concentration, as my next questions would, and especially when I'm eating good food, as we were. And apparently Wanda felt the same way about it and was quiet too.

Finally we were through and lighted cigarettes.

"That was wonderful," Wanda said.

"Shall we top it off with a brandy or a B. and B.?"

"First, let's decide what we do next."

"Anything you want to do. But what's that got to do with a brandy?"

"Just that I'd rather skip it if we're going somewhere to do any

more drinking. If we're not, I'll have one. What would you like to do, Ed?"

"Go to a quiet place where we can keep on—or rather resume—talking. And I guess that does mean another drink or three so okay, let's skip the brandy. Know a place called Tom, Dick and Harry's?"

"Yes, on State Street near Grand. That is, I know it from the outside, from walking past. I've never been in."

I said, "The inside is nicer than the outside. And it's quiet."

She said that it sounded fine, so I got the check and paid it, and then bought her coat back from the checkroom and helped her on with it.

Again the distance was only a few blocks, so we walked. The back corner booth, the one in which Uncle Am and I had sat last night, was vacant so we took it. And ordered highballs.

"Now," I said. "Tell me about your father, Wanda."

"There isn't much to tell—except that he was a good man, Ed. Kind and considerate. Maybe most people would have thought him a little on the stodgy side, a bit of a Babbitt. I guess a lot of accountants—and treasurers and bankers—are that way. But it's absurd to think of him as an embezzler—no matter what the evidence against him is or seems to be. You don't really think he took that money, do you, Ed?"

I said, "I didn't know him, Wanda. So I have no opinion. From what you tell me, it doesn't sound likely. But let me say this much in defense of my client's suspicions. Embezzlers aren't the usual type of criminal at all. Usually they're men such as you describe your father to have been. They have to be to reach positions of trust where they *can* embezzle money in sizeable quantities. And sometimes being so respectable, *having* to be so respectable eventually causes something to slip inside of them. Inside them they build a secret life, a secret dream. It may come on gradually or suddenly. Sometimes the very pressure of respectability does it. You know the old limerick:

*"There once was a monk in  
Siberia  
Whose life became drearier and  
drearier,  
Till he burst from his cell  
With a yell of a yell,  
And eloped with the Mother  
Superior."*

She smiled. "I've heard that limerick, yes. But I can't see my father doing anything like it. I think he was satisfied with the life he had, the position he had. I don't think he had built up repressions."

"What did he do for excitement?"

"He was a Sunday golfer. He used to bowl one evening a week,

up to about a year ago when he got a touch of bursitis in his right elbow. It wasn't bad enough to stop his golf playing, although it probably hurt his score some, but he quit bowling until and unless he got over it. And he played cards some, usually at home."

"You mean the two of you?"

"Just when we had company—I don't care too much for cards and we didn't play any two-handed games. But we knew couples who played bridge and—oh, maybe once every couple of weeks either they'd be at our house for an evening or vice versa—and we'd play. Never more than a tenth of a cent a point; you couldn't call it gambling."

"Did your father drink?"

"Socially, yes. We kept liquor on hand but I never knew him to take a drink unless we had company, or were visiting someone. And he didn't hang out at taverns."

"How old was your father?"

"Forty-six. He'd have been forty-seven next month."

"And your mother had been dead for twelve years? Didn't he ever consider marrying again? Do you think he remained celibate all that time?" I saw her frown and said, "You don't have to answer that if you don't want to, Wanda."

"All right, Ed. The honest answer is—I don't know. There's a woman—a very nice woman; I know and like her—with whom

he was very friendly the last few years of his life. But whether there was any affair going on between them or just companionship, I don't know. And didn't care to know."

"Tell me about her."

"Well, Mrs. Agnew—"

I interrupted. "Married, or a widow?"

"Not exactly either. Technically married. But her husband is in an insane asylum, has been there six or seven years, and is probably incurable. So for practical purposes she's a widow, except that she can't remarry."

"You think your father and she might have married, if she could have?"

"I honestly don't know, Ed. I think they might have; they were both alone, I imagine sometimes lonely. She's forty, incidentally. They might have married even if there was only companionship between them, up to that point."

"How often did they see one another?"

"Once or sometimes twice a week, Dad would go over to her place to spend the evening. But he always told me where he was going, so I'd know where to reach him; he wasn't secretive about it. And he never stayed awfully late; usually he was home by eleven o'clock, or not much later."

"Did she ever come to your place?"

"A few times, but always when we were having other guests too.

But Dad always went alone to her place—so that's why I feel there *could* have been something between them. I—I'm afraid I rather hoped there was, for his sake. After all, my mother had been dead a long time."

"But didn't he take a chance on compromising her—and himself—by spending evenings that often?"

"A pretty small chance. You could call it a calculated risk. You see, we lived only two blocks from her on the same street, way out on the west side of Freeland in a neighborhood that isn't built up yet, and there aren't many houses in between. And she lives alone in a small cottage. He *could* have been seen going in or coming out, but—by anyone who knew him or her at least—the odds were pretty much against it. Besides, if he was seen, there shouldn't have been too much of a scandal. Most people who know her in Freeland think she's a widow—and with Dad a widower—"

"I see," I said. "How does she live?"

"How does—? Oh, I see what you mean. She earns her own living; Dad wasn't supporting her. She's head of alterations in a fair sized women's clothing store in downtown Freeland. She makes, I'd guess, a fair salary, enough to account for the scale she lives on."

I said, "I guess that gives me something of a picture of your father, Wanda. Next subject—"

but I guess we need another drink first."

I ordered our drinks. Then I said, "You don't believe your father took the money. All right, let's assume he didn't. The money *is* missing. Who else could have taken it?"

"That's the horrible thing, Ed. Offhand, no one else could have. There were exactly six people, counting Dad himself, who worked in his department. Three of them were girls—typists, billers, comptometer operators. None of them could have possibly performed the various operations required in the embezzlement; the auditors are positive of that. Then there's an office manager—Tinsley, his name is—but they say he couldn't possibly have done it either. His work is routine, supervising the girls, buying the office supplies, taking care of the payroll, things like that.

"So that leaves only Dad and his assistant as possibilities. And the assistant seems to be eliminated too, so—"

"Why is he eliminated?"

"Because the embezzlements started about eight months ago—I mean, eight months from the time when they were first discovered; that would make it nearer ten months by now. Dad's assistant at that time was John Whittaker, and he died five months ago."

"Died how?" I cut in.

"A heart attack, right at the

office. And Dad hired a man named Wilbur Schwarz for the job and he's held it since. So there were two assistant treasurers during the period in question—and both of them could hardly have hit on *exactly* the same system of embezzling—and used the same bank account for the checks."

"Unless they were conspirators—having known one another before Whittaker's death, with Schwarz helping from the outside somehow at first, and then applying for Whittaker's job when he died."

"The police thought of that. But they were able to find no point of contact between the two, or any indication that Schwarz had ever known Whittaker. Besides, if it *had* been that way, it was just coincidence that Schwarz got Whittaker's job. There were forty-some applicants for it, Dad happened to tell me. It pays almost as much as Dad's job, and carries almost as much responsibility. Besides, there's another reason why they couldn't possibly have been conspiring when the embezzlements started. Schwarz was working in New York then and for a few months afterward—the police checked that; they didn't overlook him."

"That does make it sound tough for your father—or for his reputation," I said. "Do you know how the operation was worked?"

Her eyes widened a little. "Don't you? If you're working for

the bonding company, didn't they tell you? Or are you wondering if I'm going to give a different version?"

"Neither," I said. "Don't forget I'm working for them only on one angle of the case. Which is you. They've probably got a man of their own, one with accounting knowledge, working with the auditors on the Freeland end. But I'm interested, if you'll tell me what you do know about it."

"Not a lot, not the details. Maybe it would take an accountant to understand them, Ed. But I have a rough idea of how it was worked. The missing money wasn't in cash, of course; even a fair sized city like Freeland doesn't keep that kind of cash in their treasurer's hands. Everything but petty cash is handled by check.

"The missing money went out in the form of checks—about one check a month for eight months, each for an amount somewhere under ten thousand dollars, some as low as two or three, to a mythical company called Midwest Construction Company, presumably for construction work ordered by the city. They were mailed out, and were later deposited in an account opened under that name at the Freeland Merchants Bank, and then the account was later drawn upon—"

"Wait," I said, "let me get things straight, one thing at a time. You say they were *mailed* out. How can they be sure of that?

And if they are sure, they must have the address they were mailed to."

"The girl who types envelopes and does the mailing remembers the name, knows she typed envelopes and mailed checks to them. But she took the address from the bills that were given her with the outgoing checks, and doesn't remember it. They've got the address, though; it's a post office box address at the Freeland P. O. They got it from the bank where the checks were deposited."

I said, "Let's stay in your father's office before we get to the bank. Did he sign those checks?"

She sighed. "Probably. If the okayed bill and an authorization to pay it came with a ready-to-sign check to his desk by the usual channels—or what would seem to be the usual channels—there's no reason why he would have been suspicious or even hesitated to sign the check."

"Not even in amounts like that? And to a company he'd never heard of—at least, the first time?"

"They weren't large checks at all, comparatively. Freeland is a fair sized city, Ed, and it's expanding. They spend well over a million a year on street and road construction and widening, repairs, things like that. Most of it directly, of course; they have their own Department of Streets and Highways. But it's not big enough to handle everything and a lot of the work is placed, through bids,

with independent outside contractors. Dozens of them, maybe, particularly on relatively small jobs. Dad must have signed lots of checks like that and some of them for amounts several times the nine-thousand-odd dollar one that was the biggest single one that went to Midwest Construction. There's no reason why he'd have looked at it twice before signing it if it came to his desk with an okay and an authorization-to-pay from the Street and Highways Department."

I said, "But wait a minute. That's a loophole. The operation could have been worked by somebody not in your father's office at all but by someone in the Streets and Highways Department. Someone there could have sent up fake bills with forged okays and forged authorizations, couldn't they?"

She shook her head. "No, Ed. I don't understand the system, but there are checks. Somebody in another department could send Dad a fake bill or two to pay and get by with it, probably, for one month. But not for eight months. I don't understand accounting, as I said, so I don't know how it works but there's an interdepartmental check as of the first of every month. A sheet comes up from Streets and Highways, for instance, itemizing the bills they sent to the treasurer for payment; he has to check it against his own accounts and okay it. If he doesn't they have to get together and find

the discrepancy. For the eight months in question the S. and H. department sent up lists that did *not* include any payments to Midwest Construction, and got them back with okays. And with his signature. Genuine; or a handwriting expert says it is. Whatever juggling went on was in his department, not theirs."

"But isn't that *proof* your father was implicated, Wanda?"

"I'm afraid a court may think so. That's the most damaging single thing against him. But those inter-departmental checks were fairly routine; he could have asked his assistant to check the figures and okayed them on his word that they were okay. I think that's what happened—what *must* have happened. After all, he couldn't check everything that went through his hands; he had to trust people under him—or he might as well have tried to do the whole work of the office himself."

"But that would mean both assistants had worked it that way. And unless you could prove collusion between them— Well, it looks pretty bad, Wanda. How about the eight checks that were mailed out to the mythical Midwest? They must have cleared from the bank. Was your father's signature on them genuine?"

"They cleared from the bank all right and must have come back with the monthly statements. They're not listed by name on the statements, of course, but there are

amounts that check with the checks. But the checks themselves are missing, were missing when the audit started. And so are the bills and authorizations. If they could be found—there'd be a chance to clear my father."

"If his signatures on them were forgeries, yes. All right, you say the police found out where the checks were banked. How?"

"Easy. They just phoned banks till they found one that carried an account under the name of Midwest Construction. They'd have covered Chicago and other nearby cities or towns if they'd had to, but they didn't have to. It was the fourth Freeland bank they tried, the Merchants."

"Tell me about the account."

"It had been opened ten months ago, which would have been about the time the first Midwest check was issued—for around three thousand dollars. He—the man who opened the account—had it with him, wanted to open an account with it. He introduced himself as Ralph J. Morrison—I think that was the name—president of a small construction company, the Midwest. Gave them a business and a home address, a few references—all fake, but there was no reason why they should investigate, and they didn't. And a post office box number that he said he used for all his business mail, and that they should send receipts for the mail deposits and statements to him there."

"Wouldn't that have been slightly suspicious?"

"No, Ed. A lot of businesses, legitimate ones, prefer to get their mail through post office boxes for one reason or another. He put his signature on record with them, signed the check the same way—it had already a rubber stamp endorsement with the company name; he put his signature under it. And left. And the check cleared okay and—"

"Wait. Wasn't the new accounts clerk able to describe this man?"

"Only in a general way. That was the only time she ever saw him. About all the description she could give, after so long a time, was that he was fairly big, middle-aged or a little better, gray or graying hair."

"Could that description have fitted your father?"

"No, definitely not. Because of size; he was a small man, a little under five-feet-six. He never weighed over a hundred and twenty pounds. Even with elevator shoes and padded clothes he could never have looked like a fairly big man."

"No, Ed, it couldn't have been my father; they showed pictures of him to all the clerks at the bank and none of them identified him. Also pictures of Schwarz, even though he was in New York when the account was opened, and of Whittaker, even though he was dead when the man was still com-

ing into the bank once in a while. Even of the chief clerk."

"And there was no identification at all?"

"Well—the new accounts clerk said Whittaker's picture *could* have been the man. And his general physical description fitted, more or less. But she wouldn't make identification, and none of the tellers thought Whittaker's picture looked like the man at all, or at least not much like him. And some of them had seen him more recently than the new accounts clerk had. For that matter, since Whittaker's death—so unless there were two Ralph Morrisons, or men using that name, it couldn't have been Whittaker who opened the account."

"Have you ever suspected that your father's death wasn't an accident at all, that it might have been murder—murder that tied in with whatever crooked work was going on in his office?"

"Yes, I did, Ed. Not at first, not until the following week, after the funeral, when the shortages came to light at the office. I think the police considered it too. But there just doesn't seem to have been any way—or any connection."

"Were there any witnesses?"

"No, except the man who hit him. He was injured too; his car went out of control and hit a tree. He was hospitalized for over a week—no major injury but a few cracked ribs and a concussion."

"What do you know about the driver of the car?"

"Almost nothing. His name is John Sohl. He lives in Chicago, not in Freeland. And I think Mr. Carstairs said he was young, in his twenties. Ed, isn't it getting late? What time is it?"

I looked at my watch. "Still early," I said. "Not quite ten yet. But I've been making you talk too much. I can't expect to learn everything you know in one evening—and I wouldn't want to; I'd rather make the job last a little longer. So let's forget Freeland and just have fun for the rest of the evening. Go somewhere for a few dances. Okay?"

She smiled. "For a little while. If you'll get me home by midnight."

I took her to Smoky Joe's, which is a better spot than you'd think from its name. It has a good small combo, and a small dance floor for those who want to dance, and some of the customers do; most come for the music.

We danced a few times—and found we danced well and enjoyably together—but I was glad to find out that she really did like and appreciate good jazz, and we spent more time listening than dancing. What talking we did was purely personal, or about music.

After a while she relaxed and was enjoying herself. She'd been a little tense while we'd been talking about her father and especially about the accident.

I could probably have talked her into staying longer but I kept my promise to get her home at midnight. Or almost that; we left Smoky Joe's at midnight, took a cab, and got to the rooming house by a quarter after.

I walked back with her as far as the foot of the stairs. She took one step up and then turned. "Good night, Ed. And thanks for a nice evening."

"It was better than nice," I said. "When shall I see you again? Not tomorrow, you said. How about Sunday afternoon?"

"All right."

"Would one o'clock be too early?"

"Well—all right; I may not have had too much sleep by then but if the date's just for the afternoon I can get back in time to take a nap before I have to report at the club."

"Fine," I said. "One o'clock it is, and we'll decide then what we're going to do. Good night, Wanda."

And because she was standing on the step her lips were just on a level with mine, and I leaned forward and kissed them. Gently. Or at first gently. She didn't pull back and after a second her lips responded under mine; she put her hands on my shoulders and my arms went around her and it turned into a real kiss. A kiss that might have exploded.

But before it quite reached that point, she broke it. She said,

"Good night, Ed," and turned and went on up the stairs.

I went to my own room, under her room, and undressed and got into bed. Thinking, but not about the case I was working on. Thinking about that kiss and still feeling it. Wondering if it was going to lead to something, deciding that it might and that if it did the something it would lead to would be something very wonderful indeed.

I opened the office at nine and nothing happened all morning. Except that I decided I might as well save time later by writing out a report for Starlock, and I did.

At a few minutes after twelve I called Starlock's office. I figured Wanda would have left by then and if her voice did answer the phone I could pretend that it was she I'd been calling. But Starlock's voice answered. I said, "Ed Hunter, Ben. Is the coast clear?"

"Yes, Wanda and the new girl just left. Did you find out where Wanda is going to be working?"

"I did, but listen. I've got the whole report written up so why don't I drop around with it?"

"Sure, come on up."

And about twenty minutes later I gave him the report and sat waiting while he skimmed through it. He grunted. "Good going, Ed. I doubt if there's anything in it Waukegan Indemnity doesn't know already—except about the cigarette girl job—but she sure

opened up to you. Keep digging like that and something may come out. Off the record, what do you think—thus far?"

"I don't know whether her father was guilty or not—he could easily have been and the facts are certainly damning against him. But I don't think Wanda's crooked. I don't think she knows he took the money, if he did, or where it is now."

He frowned. "Ed, I don't think she's crooked, either. But she could be keeping something back to protect her father's name. She could know something she won't tell because it would prove him guilty, or indicate that he was."

I nodded. "Ben, I'd like to talk to someone who's on the inside on this case, get a version of things to check with what Wanda's told me and whatever else she does tell me. I can spot a discrepancy then, if there is one, and know what questions to concentrate on."

Starlock thought a minute. "Harry Koslovsky, our client, would be your best bet. He's manager of the company's Freeland office. He's probably been as close to the case as any other one person, ever since it broke. He's worked with the police and the auditors."

"When could I talk to him?"

"Their office would be closed now. Would Monday do?"

"It'll do if it has to do. But my next date with Wanda is tomorrow afternoon. I'd rather talk to

him this afternoon or this evening, before that next date. I'd go out to see him if I could talk to him at home. Do you know how to reach him?"

"I can try. He lives somewhere in Freeland." He picked up the phone, got the Freeland operator and a minute later was talking to Harry Koslovsky.

He hung up and turned to me. "He'll be home this afternoon, but not this evening. You heard me tell him one of my operatives wanted to talk to him, so don't confuse the issue by saying you're subcontracted. And go along with the one lie I told him and don't cross me up on it. An omission rather than a lie; they don't know that Wanda knows you're a detective. They think it's a straight roping job. Come to think of it, you should key Wanda in on that too. In case, for any reason, she should ever talk to Koslovsky again."

"Okay," I said. "Thanks a lot, Ben. I'll go right out there."

"Might as well wait. I'll be leaving here in a few more minutes, and I brought my car in today. I can run you out and get you there at least as soon as you'd get there by bus. I got the address when I got the listing, and it's right on my way home." He handed me back the report I'd given him. "Here, you might as well give him this."

I said that was swell, and killed time till he was ready to

leave. We walked to the parking lot where he'd left his car and he drove us out to Freeland. It was new territory for me; I'd never happened to be there before. He drove through the downtown district and then about a mile and a half beyond stopped in front of what turned out to be an apartment building.

"I won't go in with you, Ed. Promised my wife to take her to do some shopping this afternoon and I'd better get on home."

I said, "O.K.; thanks for the lift, Ben," and got out of my side of the car. But he called, "Ed. Just a minute." And I stuck my head back in the window.

"Listen, when you're through talking with Koslovsky, you can take a look at the scene of the accident if you're curious about it. It's walking distance from here. Five blocks west and one block south."

"Maybe I will," I said. "Know Rogers' address?"

"Not the street number. But it's on Linden, first house west of the corner of Barthold Street. South side. Not many houses in the block—and you won't have any trouble spotting where the accident happened; it took quite a bit of bark off the tree the car ran into. Wait a minute." He reached over and opened the glove compartment, rummaged through some folded maps and handed me one. "Street map of Freeland. Bus lines are marked and you'll want it in

any case to get back downtown where you can catch a bus for Chicago."

I thanked him and put the map in my pocket. Then I went into the apartment building and started looking at the mailboxes till I found Koslovsky and an apartment number. I found the apartment, pushed a button, and got chimes. A few seconds later the door opened.

A big man, pleasant looking, asked me, "You the man from Starlock?" And stepped back to let me in when I nodded. "Sit down." He indicated a comfortable looking chair and I took it; he took another one. He was maybe fifty, bald except for a fringe of hair that hadn't started graying yet. He had sharp, alert looking eyes.

"My name's Hunter, Mr. Koslovsky," I said. "Did Ben Starlock tell you what I wanted to talk to you about?" I knew Starlock hadn't, but I thought it as well not to let him know I'd listened in.

He said, "Just that it's about the Rogers case. I presume you're the op he assigned to rope Wanda." And when I nodded, "All right. What do you want to know?"

"Everything," I said. And told him what I'd told Starlock, that the more I knew about the facts of the case the better I'd be able to spot a false note in anything Wanda told me, and would know

better what points to follow up in talking to her.

He sighed. "That's a big order; it's going to take some talking. And I was just thinking about having a highball—will you have one with me? I won't tell Starlock on you if it's against his rules for an operative to drink on duty."

"Fine," I told him. As he excused himself and went to make the drinks, I looked around the room. It was a nice room and since presumably the rest of the apartment matched, a nice apartment. Koslovsky obviously drew a good salary in his job. And definitely it was a bachelor's apartment. Everything had been chosen and arranged by a man; there wasn't the faintest hint of a feminine touch anywhere. I got up and strolled over to the big bookcase—I always do when I'm left alone in a room that has one. Koslovsky had good taste in reading too. Steinbeck, Hemingway, Maugham, Dos Passos, Wolfe, and such. It wasn't all fiction; there was a whole shelf of books on insurance, insurance law, actuarial mathematics, another shelf on accounting, even some books on criminology. One of the latter struck my eye as something I'd like to read, *The Psychology of the Embezzler*. I considered asking if I could borrow it.

He came back with drinks and we both sat down again. He said, "Skoal," and we each took a sip.

Then he said, "You've already made contact with Wanda, talked to her about the case?"

I told him I'd brought my report; I handed it over and he read it.

He whistled softly when he'd finished. "Son, you're a real roper, to get all that in one evening."

I said, truthfully as far as it went, "She seemed to *want* to talk about it, once we got started. I didn't have any trouble keeping her going. Are there any discrepancies?"

"No, it's true as far as it goes—and I can't even add much. I presume you'll try, next session, to get around to having her tell you about that note or letter her father left for her with the lawyer?"

"Yes, definitely. But I'd like your version of that episode first."

"It's simply this. About three months before his death—Carstairs doesn't know the exact date—Jason Rogers gave him a sealed envelope addressed to Wanda, asked that it be given to her in case of his death. Carstairs put it with Rogers' will, which he was also holding. The will, incidentally, was quite simple—left everything to Wanda, his only surviving relative.

"The morning after the accident—if it was one; let's say Jason Rogers' death—Carstairs phoned Wanda to give her his condolences and to offer his help in making funeral arrangements or whatever. She thanked him and

said she'd come into his office and talk it over with him, and she did. They discussed the funeral arrangements and he said he'd take care of them—it would be paid out of the estate, of course—and then, before she left, he remembered the matter of the letter and gave it to her.

"She opened it and read it, across from his desk, but made no comment on it, just put the envelope and letter into her handbag. That's Carstairs' version of what happened."

"And does Wanda's differ?"

"No. Of course she wasn't asked about that letter until some days later, after the shortages in the treasurer's office had come to light. And then her story was that the note had just concerned funeral arrangements, in case of his death. That all it said was that he wanted a simple ceremony, not a big funeral, and wanted her to be sure that she remembered that they owned a plot in Spring Grove Cemetery and that he wanted to be buried there, beside his wife. And that she didn't show the letter to the lawyer or bother to tell him what was in it, because those were the arrangements they'd already decided to make."

I said, "What's your honest opinion, your personal opinion, of the whole deal, Mr. Koslovsky?"

"I think Jason Rogers was guilty. That's the only way I can add it up. And I don't think his death was an accident—I think it

was suicide, that he stepped in front of that car deliberately."

"You think he learned that he'd been double-crossed just the evening of his death?"

"Quite probably. Maybe he'd begun to suspect something—Wanda said he got home a little late and seemed preoccupied, remember? And—I'm guessing here of course—but I'm guessing that while Wanda was out in the garage he either got or made a phone call that told him he was right, that his accomplice had skipped with the swag and without him.

"He went out for a walk, to think—but what was there to think about? He was through. An auto comes along, going fast enough so that if he steps directly in front of it—" Koslovsky shrugged.

"But if you—if your company feels sure of that, why continue the investigation? You bonded Rogers, and if he was guilty, you're stuck, even if that story could be proved."

"Especially if it's proved. But there's still Morrison to look for, and he won't have spent all of that money as yet. If he can be found and the money, or most of it, recovered, our liability is reduced by that amount."

"Then your investigation is concentrating on finding the accomplice, the outside man. Any leads?"

Koslovsky shook his head sad-

ly. "Not a lead. For one thing the description is so damn general it could fit thousands of people, even if none of it was a disguise. With a partial disguise—hell, it could fit me if I wore a gray wig. Especially we've been checking on anyone ever associated with Rogers in any way. Some of them fit the description, at least more or less. But one way or another they're eliminated. Those we couldn't rule out on other counts, we managed to get pictures of to show to the bank tellers. Not even a borderline or doubtful identification. But yes, we're mostly looking for Morrison. He's the key to this, whether or not I'm right in thinking he double-crossed Rogers and that Rogers committed suicide when he learned he was left stranded."

"All right," he continued, "here's why we want the truth from Wanda, even if it definitely proves her father guilty. She knew him better than anyone else; she'd lived with him all her life. If anyone has even a suspicion who his accomplice was, it would be Wanda. If she knows that her father was guilty she must have some idea who Morrison is. An embezzler doesn't conspire with a complete stranger.

"But as long as she sticks to her lie about that letter and insists she believes her father is innocent she won't, she can't, level with us on the rest of it and give us a lead to Morrison. Even if she doesn't

know his name and address, she must suspect who he is and be able to give us a lead to him. And a lead is all we need; we'll take it from there, find out who he is and then find *him*."

I said, "Okay, Mr. Koslovsky. I guess that's all— Wait, on Jason Rogers' death—accident or otherwise. Do you have any information besides what Wanda told me?"

"Not much. One minor thing, but I don't see how it could fit in or be important, even if true. The people who lived on the corner and who heard the crash as Sohl's car ran into the tree—let's see, the name is Wilkins—didn't agree on one point. Mrs. Wilkins said she thought she heard another car driving past or driving away just after she heard the crash. But she isn't sure—and besides, if she did hear it, it doesn't necessarily mean anything. Another car could have been going past, in either direction, about the time of the accident. And not have stopped. A lot of people see or hear accidents happen and tend to run away from them instead of toward. They don't want to be held up, become witnesses."

"And Sohl's story? Did he say there was another car anywhere near in either direction?"

"He said there wasn't—at least that there wasn't one that he'd noticed or that he remembered—coming either way. And Sohl's story fits all the other facts

brought out by the police investigation of the accident, despite what he was."

"What do you mean, despite what he was?"

"That's right. Apparently nobody told Wanda anything much about Sohl or she wouldn't have had any reason not to tell you. But he was investigated—and he's a fairly unsavory character. No convictions, but he's a tough boy from South State Street—his address is the Worth Hotel there, which isn't exactly a Y. M. C. A. He may not be a gangster, but he has connections that way. On his reputation he'd be a dead duck on the accident—except that his story about it fits everything the police found."

I leaned forward, interested. "Including a good reason for having been in Freeland—and on that street at that time?"

"So the police tell me, and they asked him. I didn't go into details with them because—hell, why should I have? Either Rogers was killed accidentally or he stepped in front of that car on purpose. And in either case who was driving it doesn't matter. It could have been Jack the Ripper or Billy Graham and the same thing would have happened. Nothing else you want to know? That I can tell you, I mean."

"Not unless there were questions I should have asked you and didn't."

He shook his head. "I think

we've covered everything. Oh, I could look up my notes and give you exact dates of issuance of checks, and of deposits and withdrawals, things like that. But I can't see how, from the angle you're working on, they'd matter. And if anything does come up that might make anything like that important, call on me again—or just phone me."

I said I would, thanked him again, and left. Outside, I headed toward the general direction Starlock had indicated, and then checked the map he'd given me. I didn't know what good it would do me to see the Rogers house or the scene of the accident—or suicide?—but I was so near that I might as well.

While I walked I thought, and I didn't like what I was thinking. I'd had at least a vague hope that I could find out or prove that Jason Rogers was innocent of embezzlement. I liked Wanda a hell of a lot—and I'd believed her when she'd said that *she* believed he was innocent. Koslovsky had shaken me.

I found the corner of Linden and Barthold and looked west on the south side of Linden. Starlock had been right that there weren't many houses in the block; specifically, there were three—and one new one still under construction.

The first house was on the second lot; it would be the Rogers house. A modest enough home for

the treasurer of a city, even a small city. Smallish, two-story house, neither cheap nor expensive. Probably three bedrooms. Probably—since it would have been built some years ago—built for ten or twelve thousand.

The grass needed cutting, but I didn't feel like breaking into the garage for a lawnmower to do the job. It was going to be sold to settle the estate, in any case; Wanda would never live there again and a cut versus an uncut lawn doesn't much change the price a house will bring. And anyway—if the courts decided Jason Rogers was responsible for the embezzlement—the estate wouldn't go to Wanda; it would go toward making up the money he'd embezzled.

I walked past it with no notion of trying to find a way in. The police had searched it, and—unless Wanda was mistaken or lying—it had also been burglarized. I wasn't going to find anything there that police and burglars hadn't found.

The next house, a few lots away, looked occupied—there were diapers hung out on a line in the side yard—and then, another few lots past it, the house under construction.

Beyond it was a wider vacant space—seven or eight or nine lots—and then the corner house which would be that of the Wilkins family, the people who'd heard the accident and reported it. About halfway there I cut out into the

street—there wasn't any traffic at all and hadn't been since I'd reached the block—and started looking for a tree with some bark knocked off it on the street side. I found the tree, but it didn't tell me anything except that it was the tree Sohl's car had run into after running into or over Jason Rogers. And that the impact had been a fairly hard one, at least twenty or twenty-five miles an hour even after brakes had no doubt been slammed on. The tree was about five inches in diameter; probably if the impact had been much harder it would have broken off. As it was, there was quite a bit of bark gone, but the tree would live. So would John Sohl, the driver of the car.

But not Jason Rogers, accident victim or suicide. I walked back to about the point where, according to Sohl's story and all the evidence, he'd been hit. But the spot didn't tell me anything. If there were any tire or skid marks they'd have been worn off long since, even on a quiet street like this. And did I expect to find bloodstains, after six weeks and half a dozen early fall rains?

I went back to the sidewalk and went on. There wasn't any reason to stop in the Wilkins' house; I couldn't think of any questions I wanted to ask them to which I didn't already know their answers. And besides, their garage door was open and the garage was empty; they'd probably gone for a

Saturday afternoon drive and weren't home.

I reached toward my pocket for the map to see which way to walk to the bus line and then I remembered something and didn't reach for it. Wanda had told me that Mrs. Agnew, her father's woman friend, lived on the same street and only two blocks away. That would make it automatically in this direction, because Linden dead-ended one block the other side of the Rogers house. Of course she probably wouldn't be home—she was head of the alterations department of a downtown women's clothing store and would surely be working on a Saturday afternoon, the busiest time for stores. But what did I have to lose walking another block?

I walked another block. And I didn't have any trouble identifying Mrs. Agnew's house. Wanda had described it as a cottage, and it was the only one-story house in the block.

It was on the other side of the street from the Rogers place. Which meant that Rogers could have been heading for it the night of his death; he could have crossed over anywhere and had—if his death really was accidental (I was coming more and more to agree with Koslovsky's suicide hypothesis)—picked exactly the wrong place at the wrong time to do his crossing.

It was a neat little cottage of probably three rooms over all. No

garage, but there was a carport—and a car in it. I'd guessed wrong in thinking that she'd surely be working on a Saturday afternoon.

I went to the door and knocked. A woman, a nice-looking woman, opened it. She wasn't beautiful but she was definitely attractive. Wanda had said Mrs. Agnew was forty, but she could easily have passed for thirty-five; you wouldn't have called her a liar if she'd said she was thirty. She had a pleasant face and a pleasant smile—even while she didn't know whether I was serving a summons or trying to sell her magazines.

I introduced myself, and told her I was working for Waukegan Indemnity. I said, "I know that another representative of ours has already talked to you, Mrs. Agnew, but—"

"Come in. Don't stand there, Mr. Hunter. Of course I'll be glad to talk to you."

The living room, neat but not gaudy, was just beyond the door and we sat down. I led off with a song and dance about just having been assigned to the case and, although of course I'd read our reports, I wanted to form my own opinions first hand and hoped that—

I didn't finish it because she cut me off, quietly. "Of course, Mr. Hunter. You needn't explain. I'm glad to talk to anyone, at any time, if I can help clear Jason Rogers' name. And it should be cleared. He didn't take that

money, you know. He just wasn't the kind of person who'd do anything like that."

I said, "I hope you're right, Mrs. Agnew. If only—since I didn't know him personally—because it would be to our company's interest to be able to prove that he didn't. Would you rather I asked questions, or just let you talk?"

"Either. But I'll start off by answering the question that you might find embarrassing to ask. I was not Jason's mistress. Nor were we having an affair—if you interpret *mistress* to mean that he was supporting me or contributing to my support. We were close friends, very close friends."

I asked, "Do you think that, if circumstances had made it possible—if you'd been free, I mean—he might have asked you to marry him?"

"I'll be honest, Mr. Hunter. I'm almost sure that he would have. There was affection between us. I won't say love—because neither of us dared, under the circumstances, to think of love. But I think he would have wanted to marry me, if possible, and I'll be frank enough to say that I'd have accepted him. But it happened too late."

"What happened too late?"

"My husband's death." Suddenly there were tears in her eyes. "He died only ten days ago, in the asylum."

I said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Agnew."

"You need not be. It was a merciful thing."

I cleared my throat. Discussing the mercy of God wasn't going to get me anywhere, and that wasn't what I'd really meant anyway. I'd meant that I was sorry Jason Rogers had died too soon.

"I've got only a few more questions to ask anyway," I continued apologetically. "One of them is—did Mr. Rogers ever discuss his work, the treasurer's office, with you?"

"No, not to speak of."

"Or did he ever discuss his subordinates with you?"

"Again, only casually, a mention or two. I know that he didn't like Mr. Whittaker, his assistant for a while, very well personally, but thought he was efficient and very good at the job. And Mr. Whittaker's successor—what was his name? The one who had the accident?"

"Schwarz, Wilbur Schwarz. But what's about Schwarz having had an accident? I hadn't heard about that."

"He was struck by an automobile too—a drunken driver in that case—just a short time before Jason's death. He was injured—a broken arm—and he was away from work for a few days or maybe it was a week. Naturally Jason mentioned that—it gave him a lot of overtime work during that period. But I don't recall anything else he ever told me about Mr. Schwarz."

"You said it was a short time before Mr. Rogers' death. How short a time?"

"I believe about two weeks. Not over three. At any rate he was back at work, although with his arm in a cast before—what happened to Jason."

I stood up. "Thanks an awful lot, Mrs. Agnew."

She walked to the door with me. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to help you."

So I took a bus back to Chicago. It was after six o'clock by the time I got to Mrs. Brady's and went up to our room. Uncle Am was there.

We went and had some steaks. I started my story while we were going to the restaurant, talked while we were waiting for service, managed to talk a little while we ate, and finished over our coffee.

Uncle Am shook his head slowly. "Kid, it looks bad and the more you find out the worse it looks. From the angle of what you're trying to do, I mean."

"What am I trying to do?"

"To find an out for Jason Rogers. For Wanda's sake. Have you fallen for her?"

I said, "I like her a hell of a lot. I wouldn't say I've fallen for her. Yes, I'm trying to dig the truth, but I'll admit I'll be happier if that truth turns out to be something good for her father."

"Yeah. But your Koslovsky sounds like a bright boy. Everything he says makes sense, and he thinks Rogers was guilty. And

that part about Rogers' accomplice having taken off with the boodle and Rogers' death being a suicide—Hell, that makes almost too much sense.

It was Wanda who, over our coffee the next afternoon, first brought the meeting to order. "Whom did you see in Freeland, Ed?"

I said, "Koslovsky and Mrs. Agnew. In that order, but I won't talk about them in that order; I want to save Koslovsky for last. From Mrs. Agnew I learned only two things you hadn't already told me. One of them you probably don't know about. It hasn't anything to do with the case, not possibly, but I may as well tell you. Her husband died recently in the asylum."

She looked stricken. "Oh, Ed, how horrible. That it should have happened too late, I mean. She and Dad would probably have married, and I think she'd have made him happy."

"How well did you know her, Wanda?"

"Not too well, I'm afraid, and we didn't see one another often. We liked one another well enough—or at least I liked her and think she liked me. But there was so much difference in our ages, and we just didn't have much in common—except Dad.

"I've seen her only once since the funeral, and that was over a month ago. After the embezzle-

ments had come to light and Dad was first being suspected of being responsible for them, and before I left Freeland. She called on me to ask if there was any way she could help. But there wasn't, of course."

I said, "And the other thing she told me I hadn't known was about Wilbur Schwarz's accident, just two weeks before your father's. You must have known about that."

"Of course. Dad told me about it, and it was in the Freeland papers, the whole story. But I never thought to mention it to you because— Well, what could it possibly have to do with the money? Or Dad's death? Do you want me to tell you what I remember about it?"

"You needn't. Did you know he lived only a few blocks from you?"

"Yes. Sometime last July Dad mentioned that the Schwarzes had rented a house near us. I asked him if he'd like to have them over for dinner some evening, but he said no. He said Schwarz himself was all right but we couldn't invite him alone. And that he'd met Schwarz's wife and didn't think she was a woman we'd care to know. But what else happened?"

"Well, we've got Koslovsky to cover, but we don't want to sit here that long. What would you say to a drink? I know it's right after breakfast, but it's also nearly three o'clock in the afternoon. If you liked it the other time, I'll

suggest Tom, Dick and Harry's."

"All right. But let's walk there; it's such a nice day. I let you take a cab in to the Loop only because I was so darned hungry."

So we walked. On the way she told me we shouldn't stay more than an hour or so; she wanted to get back to her room by five.

"Why so early?" I asked her. "Are you planning to sleep some more?"

"No, I'll get by with what sleep I had. But I've got things to do, women things. Washing out some stockings and lingerie, a little sewing. But mostly washing my hair. And I'll have to do that first, no later than five, to give it time to dry before I go to the club."

"All right," I said. "I'll give you an evening off. But—we might as well settle this now—when will I see you again? Tomorrow afternoon?"

"Let's make it tomorrow evening. I guess I didn't get around to telling you this but I found out what my night off is, and it's Monday. So if you want to take me to dinner again—"

"Fine," I said. "I'll pick you up the same time as I did Friday evening, half-past six."

I waited till we had a booth and drinks in front of us at the tavern, and then I opened the meeting again. By doing a lot of talking myself first. I told her about my interview with Koslovsky, and everything he had told me. I didn't pull any punches; I

wanted to shock her. I told her Koslovsky's current theory that her father had been guilty and had committed suicide because his outside partner had double-crossed him. Nor did I pull any punches in telling her that Koslovsky definitely disbelieved the story she, Wanda, had told about the letter her father had left for her.

'Ed, do you—agree with him?' she asked when I stopped talking.

I decided to gamble and tell the truth. It might make her angry at me, but I had to take that chance. I said, "About the suicide hypothesis—I don't know. But about the letter, I'm afraid I do, Wanda. Your story just doesn't hold up. Why did you lie?"

She wasn't angry. For a moment I thought she was going to cry, but she got control of herself. Her face was a little pale and her eyes were troubled, but they met mine. "Ed, I had to lie. Either that or refuse to answer and that would have been worse. The letter didn't concern embezzlement—or any other crime—but it was something personal, private. And in it Dad specifically asked me not to tell anybody—except one certain other person."

I said, "Consider it this way. Let's assume your father was innocent. Then when he wrote that letter to you three months before his death he didn't know anything about the embezzlement. And he couldn't possibly have foreseen the spot that your keeping silent

or having to lie about that letter's contents would put you, that it would throw suspicion on you—and, indirectly, additional suspicion on him."

"I—never thought of it that way, Ed. Maybe you're right. I know if I tell you you'll have to tell Mr. Koslovsky—but it really wouldn't matter if a few people know. As long as it doesn't get in the newspapers."

"Koslovsky isn't going to do anything to hurt you, Wanda."

"It isn't I who could be hurt, Ed, or I'd have told the truth right away. It's Mrs. Agnew. But I suppose not too badly, especially now that she's really a widow, even if the truth does get out. Here's all it is, Ed. Dad told me, in the letter, that he wanted to leave a bequest of a thousand dollars to Mrs. Agnew. He said he didn't want to make a new will or add a codicil to the old one because then when the will was probated, the bequest would become a matter of public knowledge, and might hurt Mrs. Agnew's reputation. So he asked me to take care of it privately by giving her a thousand out of the estate. And that's all."

"My God, Wanda, don't you see how important that letter would be, if you can produce it? You *did* destroy it?"

"Yes, after my father was accused, I knew the police would come out to search the house and I didn't want them to find it; it would have become public knowl-

edge in that case, too. Destroying it was the only way I could keep it secret, and Dad had asked me to."

"Damn," I said. "And did you get around to telling Mrs. Agnew about it? Can she corroborate your story to that extent?"

"No, Ed. I intended to tell her, of course, but there didn't seem to be any hurry, and I had so many things to do. And then by the time she came to see me, I didn't tell her for another reason. The estate had been blocked and it looked—it still looks—as though it's going to be confiscated as partial restitution. If that happens there won't be any thousand dollars for her. So why raise her hopes, till I know? And then have to disappoint her. Ed, why do you seem to think that letter is so important?"

"Because, you silly little fool, it would practically prove your father's innocence. It was written five months after the embezzlements had started. The embezzler knew he had only a few more months to go, that he had to lam before the next regular audit. And that, when he lammed, any tangible assets he left behind him would be seized immediately."

"But if he wrote it just on the off chance that he might die sooner than—"

"He did die sooner than, and it happened anyway. His death would just move up the date of the audit, as it did. And your father would

have known that. If he was guilty, there was utterly no possible reason for him to have written that letter and made that bequest. Not even as a misdirection, since it wasn't going to be opened until he either died or disappeared."

She sighed. "You're right, I was stupid. I should have kept that letter and turned it over. But all I thought of was Dad's request that I keep the bequest a secret. What can I do now?"

"Talk to Koslovsky. Right now if he's home and can see you. It's more important than washing your hair."

"But he's your client. Aren't you going to report to him?"

"Of course. But we want him to have it first hand as well as second. So he'll have a chance to question you on details, and be convinced, if you can convince him. If you can make him believe you, it's going to change his whole thinking on the case. Phone him from that booth over there right away, tell him it's something important and that you'll come out to talk to him if he can see you. I don't think he'll say no to that but if he does make an appointment to see him at his office tomorrow. Afternoon, so you'll have time to sleep. Just remember one thing in talking to him. He doesn't know that you know I'm a detective so don't give me away on that point. Just tell him you confided in a friend and the friend talked you into going to him. That

won't be a lie, anyway, just an omission. Tell him the truth about everything else."

"Even if he asks me who the friend is?"

"Of course. But he won't ask that—he'll know it already. Do you have change to make the call?"

"Yes, Ed." She went to the booth and while she was gone I ordered us two more drinks. We'd have to drink them fairly quickly or abandon them if she made a right-away appointment, but that would be all right.

She shook her head when she came back. "No answer."

I said, "If he's out now, he's out for the afternoon, and an evening appointment would make you late for work. So all right, skip it for today. Phone him late tomorrow morning or early afternoon, as soon as you're up and dressed."

"All right, Ed. I've been wanting to go out to Freeland sometime soon anyway to pick up a few more things from the house. Especially a heavier coat I'll be needing soon, even if it's Indian Summer today."

"Only one more question, Wanda, and then let's talk about other things, what time we have left. I told you Koslovsky still thinks you might be able to give him a lead to Morrison. Can you?"

"No, I told him the truth about that. Even if my father was guilty, I haven't an idea who

Morrison might be. And I gave Mr. Koslovsky the names of every one of my father's friends and acquaintances who, even with a degree of disguise, could have fitted the Morrison description. All the big men, that is. I even included the mayor of Freeland. And Mr. Starlock."

I laughed at that, and then we talked about other things until it was almost five and then took her home. She wouldn't let me take her as far as her room, though; she insisted that she had to start on her hair right away or it would never be dry in time.

I considered trying to phone Koslovsky again and keeping on trying at intervals until I got him, and then decided against it. I thought he might find Wanda's revised story about the letter more believable if he got it from her cold, without my having given it to him second-hand in advance of seeing her. And there was nothing else new worth reporting.

I killed the evening in various irrelevant ways and got to bed by midnight, and that was Sunday.

Monday I lit a fuse that caused a murder, then another one that blew the whole case wide open.

I got down to the office about ten minutes late and Uncle Am was already there, at his desk, just starting to make out a report in longhand.

"Hi," I said. "Finish your case for the supermarkets?"

"Yeah. And I just talked to our client and reported but he wants a written report for his files, damn him." Uncle Am hates paperwork. He put down his pen. "Well, at least there's no hurry on this; I can do it any time. How've you been doing?"

"I've been thinking about the case," I answered. "You know, we're not sure John Sohl has any connection with our case, except an accidental one. We're not sure Blackie has any connection either; it could be accident he moved into the rooming house right after Wanda did and that he was with her when her room was frisked as I think I told you. But they're both hoods—or at least Blackie obviously was one until he reformed recently, if he really did. They both live in downtown Chi. Wouldn't it be interesting to know if they know one another? If they do, I'd say it's odds on they're both involved, regardless of who's working for whom."

"Sure, Ed. And what's to lose but a phone call for a try at finding out. You can imitate Blackie's voice well enough to get by over the phone; just pitch your voice a little lower and put a touch of growl into it. Phone Sohl, say 'This is Blackie.' And see whether he says 'Who?' or 'Hi.'"

It made sense, but I didn't try it cold. First I spent about ten minutes trying to talk like Blackie until Uncle Am, who has a good ear for voices, told me I had it

pat. Then I looked up the number of the Worth Hotel and dialed it. I asked for John Sohl and waited half a minute, presumably while the operator rang a room, and then a voice said, "Yeah?"

It was a high-pitched, rather unusual voice, and I decided it would be safe to pretend to recognize it without having to ask "Sohl?" or "John?" or "Johnny?" since I didn't know which one Blackie would use. I growled, "This is Blackie."

"About time. Got something for me?"

"Maybe," I said. "Come on around." And hung up.

Uncle Am said, "Sohl knows Blackie—or at least a Blackie. But why the 'Come on around' part? He'll find out that much sooner that the call was a phoney."

"Sure," I said. "Not only that but he'll spoil Blackie's beauty sleep; he can't have been in bed more than five hours. So they find out the call was phoney—or else each of them thinks the other is lying and they quarrel. And whether they get scared or mad, somebody might make a mistake or do something foolish. And that's what we need, for somebody to *do* something. Everybody in this case has been sitting tight since we started on it."

I went back to the typewriter desk and tried to think some more. To figure what it meant that Sohl knew Blackie, how it could fit into a pattern. But I couldn't get any-

where; there were still too many missing pieces and I couldn't even imagine what they were. I sweated maybe twenty minutes and then suddenly I saw, not the answers to any of the questions, but what a damn fool I was being.

I rushed to the door of the inner office and said, "Uncle Am, grab your hat. We're missing a boat. We should be on Covent Place, damn it. Come on."

In the elevator I said, "Maybe we'll beat him there yet. Even if he drives or takes a cab, he's got to go through the loop."

"Sure," Uncle Am said. "And maybe he didn't leave the minute you hung up. Guys like that usually sleep late. Maybe you woke him up and he wasn't dressed. I think we'll make it."

But as soon as we turned into Covent Place we knew we were too late; there were cop cars in front of the rooming house. We hurried up and both of us went in.

There were people and cops in the hall and the door of Blackie's room was open. I started for it and a cop stopped me, but I was close enough so I could see over his shoulder into the room. There were cops in there too—and one of them was Frank Bassett, our best friend in homicide. Blackie was there too, but he was lying on his back across the bed, dressed only in a pair of shorts. There was a bullet hole in his bare chest, right over his heart, and a powder

burn around it. The shot had been at very close range, almost contact.

I called out "Frank!" He turned and saw me and came out. "Hi, Ed. You guys know anything about this?"

"A lot," I said. "But let's get out of this hassle. I've got the next room there." I went to the door of my room, unlocked it and went in, and Bassett and Uncle Am followed me.

Inside, I said "Listen, Frank, we know plenty but it'll take time to tell. You can tell us what happened here in one minute, so you go first."

Most cops won't give you the time of day till they've turned you inside out first, but Bassett is reasonable and saw my point.

He said, "It happened—" He glanced at his watch. "—fifteen minutes ago. We've been here five. Two people on this floor heard the shot and got their doors open in time to see the killer. The landlady and one roomer. He was running for the outer door when they saw him. Still had the gun in his hand but was putting it into his pocket as he ran.

"Not too much description— young, tall, blond. But when he turned outside, the landlady got a profile view of his face and says she can identify him. Does the description, such as it is, mean anything to you?"

"Not the description," I said. "Because we've never seen the

guy. But we can give you his name and address if that'll help. John Sohl, Worth Hotel. And he was the driver of the car that killed Jason Rogers out in Freeland. And Blackie—"

"Hold it," he said. "With name and address let me start the machinery."

He went out into the hall and toward the phone. I said, "Hold the fort, Uncle Am. I'll be back in a couple of minutes. If Bassett gets back before I do, keep him amused."

I went past Bassett, who was dialing, and up the stairs. I knocked on Wanda's door. I had to knock a second time and when she opened the door, in a robe, she still looked half asleep, so I knew that she'd slept through the shot and the excitement.

I said, "Sorry to wake you, Wanda, but it's important. Let me in a minute." She said, "Sure, Ed," and stepped back. I went in and closed the door behind me.

I said, "I want to stay only a minute so I'll talk fast. The case is beginning to break open. John Sohl just killed Blackie. That indicates they're both tied in with the Freeland deal and it also means that your father's death was probably murder.

"I want you to stay here so I'll know where you are and can get in touch with you any time I want. Don't call Koslovsky. That business about your father's letter to you isn't important right now.

And may never matter at all, if they catch Sohl and can make him talk. 'Bye now." I leaned forward and kissed her lightly, and left.

Bassett was still talking on the phone when I passed him. I didn't think he'd noticed me either going or coming and hoped he hadn't. Not that it mattered, but it would be one less thing I'd have to explain.

I was telling Uncle Am what I'd told Wanda to do when Bassett came in and I broke off.

I said, "Sit down, Frank. This is going to take some time."

I gave him a rough outline of things first and even that took a lot of talking. Then when I went back and started to fill in details he said, "Hold it, Ed. That's enough to go on and I don't want to listen to you the rest of the morning. I want to concentrate on Sohl and supervise the manhunt personally. I'll get all these details from you after we've got him."

"Swell," I said. "We'll go back to the office. You call us if you get Sohl and tell us where to meet you. Preferably wherever he'll be being questioned."

Bassett said he'd do that, and we left. This time, since we weren't in any hurry, an empty cab came along and we took it.

When we got back to the office Uncle Am said he felt too keyed up to go back to his work on the report on the supermarket deal.

I paced. My mind was going in circles. Then suddenly a few of

the circles intersected. I stood upon a peak in Darien, with a wild surmise. I sat on a corner of Uncle Am's desk and said, "Uncle Am, I've got a wild surmise."

"I want one more thing, if I can get it," I told him. "You've got Blackie's boss, Cavallo's unlisted phone number. Call it. You can tell him he'd better start looking for a new doorman for the Gray Goose, but that's incidental. Ask him if he happened to find out where Blackie was born."

"Kid, what the hell could that— Oh, all right." He picked up the phone and dialed. And then talked a while and put it down.

He said, "Yeah, he talked to a few people about Blackie and didn't learn anything he thought was important enough to call us about. But one of them did happen to remember that Blackie once told him where he was born—or anyway where he came from."

I glared at him.

He said, "Milwaukee."

I let out the breath I'd been holding and sat down in the chair across from his.

I said, "My surmise is not too wild, then. Wilbur Schwarz was also from Milwaukee, born and raised there, Mrs. Schwarz told Koslovsky. She also happened to mention that he has a 'cute little brother' named Julius. Julius is pretty close to Jules, and I think 'cute little' is just the way Mrs.

Schwarz would think of Blackie, if she knew him as Julius Schwarz, Wilbur's younger brother."

"Maybe, but—"

I said, "In the words of Frank Bassett, hold it. I haven't finished. The word *schwarz* in German means *black*. Anyone raised in Milwaukee, a German town, and named Schwarz would know that, would have been told that, even if he didn't speak any German himself. And if Julius or Jules wanted to change his name when he came from Milwaukee to Chicago, what's easier than to translate it? And maybe he never did like Julius as a first name. Uncle Am, I'll give you ten to one that Jules Black, alias Blackie, was once named Julius Schwarz, and is Wilbur's younger brother. Ten to one in bucks or sawbucks, and in money, not on the gin rummy account.

"Uncle Am, I know how we can light another fuse and blow this case sky high. If we do it today. Schwarz can't possibly know Blackie's dead, or learn it till he reads the evening papers. And we don't know whether learning that will make him run or decide it's safe for him to sit tight a while longer.

"But if I phone him at his office, using Blackie's voice like I did on Sohl, I can say, in effect, 'This is Blackie—' No, if Mrs. Schwarz calls him Julius, that's what Wilbur calls him. 'This is Julius. The cops have got Sohl

and he must have blown the whistle because I got a tipoff they're looking for me. So I can't go home; they'll be there. We better lam fast.' Only first we'd phone Koslovsky, give him a chance to stake out the city hall with cops to follow Schwarz when he leaves. Plainclothes cops who could tail him, of course. He'll head right for the money, wherever it's stashed, and then they can pick him up."

"Kid, it might work. At least call Koslovsky and suggest it, see if he'll go along with the idea. Hell, you should have called him half an hour ago anyway, the minute we got back here, to tell him about the murder."

I called Koslovsky. I told him about the murder first. Then about my wild surmise and the reasons for it. And then about my idea for scaring Schwarz into heading for the money.

He said, "Let me think a minute." I did, and then he said, "All right, try it. There's nothing to lose. If you're wrong about Schwarz the call will puzzle him instead of scaring him, but that won't hurt anything. Soon as I've got the stake-out set I'll phone and give you the go-ahead. You're at Starlock's office?"

"No," I said. "Call me at—" And gave him our number.

Uncle Am said, "Wait a minute, Ed. Let me talk to him." So I said, "Just a minute" to Koslovsky and handed the phone over.

Uncle Am said, "This is Ambrose Hunter, Mr. Koslovsky. Remember me? . . . Yeah. . . . No, Ed's not my son; he's my nephew. Listen, I've worked on some angles of this case with Ed and I'd like one of us to be in on the kill. Can you hold off till I get out there? . . . Fine, thanks a lot."

He hung up and told me, "He'll wait for me if I take a cab. Says it'll take him that long to get things set anyway. I'm to meet him across the street from the main entrance of the city hall; he and I will cover that."

He went for his hat. I said, "You never mentioned you knew Koslovsky."

"No reason to. Yes, I worked with him on a job or two while we were with Starlock. So long, kid."

I waited, and when it began to get near noon, I began to get impatient. Schwarz might start his lunch hour at twelve and if he did, the deal would have to wait until he got back, an hour lost.

The phone rang. But it wasn't a call from Freeland; it was Frank Bassett. He said, "No, we haven't got Sohl. But something else that might interest you. I had a team search Black's room. They found two thousand dollars—twenty hundreds—hidden, and pretty well hidden. Give you any ideas?"

"No, Frank," I said, "but thanks a lot for calling. I'll think about it and see if I can fit it in.

Call you back if I do. You at headquarters?"

"Yeah, I'm spreading the net from here. Okay, Ed. So long."

I did have an idea what that two thousand meant, but I didn't want to tell him just then because I didn't want to tie up the phone. And for the same reason, doubled in spades, I didn't want to tell him what was going on out in Freeland.

But I thought that two thousand explained Sohl's motive in killing Blackie. It was probably money Schwarz had given Blackie to give Sohl, Sohl's payoff for killing Jason Rogers. But Blackie hadn't paid it; he'd stalled Sohl along. He figured that if he stalled long enough, until he and Wilbur were ready to lam out, he'd be two grand ahead. Two grand even Wilbur wouldn't know about, and in addition to his cut of the main chunk of swag.

The first thing Sohl had asked when I'd identified myself to him as Blackie was, "Got something for me?" And he'd sounded mad about it, and I'd answered, "Maybe." And Sohl was fed up and not willing to take another stall; he'd taken a gun with him when he'd gone to see what "maybe" meant. And when Blackie had not only denied making the call but had stalled again when he demanded the money, Sohl had pulled the gun and shot Blackie.

The phone rang. It wasn't Koslovsky, but it was Uncle Am. He

said, "Okay, Ed, go ahead. Deal 'em down and dirty."

I got the treasurer's office through the Freeland operator and asked for Mr. Schwarz. Half a minute later Schwarz's voice said, "Schwarz speaking."

I growled, "This is Julius. The cops have got Sohl. And he must of blown the whistle on me because . . ."

And when I finished, I waited. And sweated a little. If he hadn't answered yet because he was wondering what the hell I was talking about—

Then he said, "Where are you?" And I knew that I was in.

"Cigar store in the Loop," I said. "But I can't wait here for a call-back. I got to get out of sight."

"Okay. I'll meet you. In a couple of hours; it'll take me that long. You know where."

"Yeah," I said. And hung up while I was ahead, before he asked me anything I might not be able to answer. Of course I didn't know *where*, but nothing could matter less. He'd never get there. Neither, and for even stronger reasons, would Blackie.

I took a deep breath.

And then I started waiting. I considered phoning Bassett back, since I couldn't be getting a phone call right away in any case, and telling him the score. What I thought was the explanation of that two grand Blackie had had,

what was happening in Freeland, and why I'd cut him short when he'd phoned me. Then I decided to hell with it; none of that information would help him find Sohl, and that was what he wanted to concentrate on and what I wanted him to concentrate on.

I waited and I waited. For over two hours. It was almost exactly two o'clock when the phone rang. It was Uncle Am again.

"Case closed, Ed. We got Schwarz, and the money. And he opened up like a book. Embezzlers always do when you catch them with the loot on them. Started babbling even on the way to the station. I could have called you sooner but I wanted to listen in while he did the talking and not miss anything."

"Swell," I said.

"Something sweller. With all the loot recovered, Koslovsky says a thousand-buck bonus. He still thinks we're with Starlock, of course, and he'll send it that way. But Ben's honest. He'll turn it over to you. Most of it, anyway. He might figure he deserves a slice."

"Not to *me*," I said. "To Hunter and Hunter, agency take. But since we're that rich, take a cab in. And listen, I'll phone Wanda and—hey, let's all three meet at Tom, Dick and Harry's."

"Sure."

"Wait a minute. We'll get there well before you do, and I might as well have a start at tell-

ing all to Wanda. Give me some of the highlights."

He gave me some of the highlights. And then I called Wanda and told her where to meet me and not to let any grass grow under her feet getting there. And I told her that *All Was Well*, but that she'd have to wait for the story; I wasn't going even to start it over the phone.

I got there only half a minute before she did and I'd taken a booth for us but I hadn't ordered yet. I asked her if a highball would be all right.

She said, "I'm a little hungry, Ed, and you said they had good sandwiches here. Could I have one first?"

"I'm hungry too," I told her. "But I don't want to talk around a sandwich. And Uncle Am will be hungry when he gets here. Can you wait a while, till we get the talking over with? Then we can all three have lunch together, a nice big lunch."

She said all right, so I ordered us highballs, and then dived in.

I said, "I'll start at the beginning. The beginning was ten months ago, when the embezzlements started. And Whittaker, your father's previous assistant worked out the system and started them—the checks going out to a mythical construction company on forged orders-to-pay put in with genuine ones that came in from the Streets and Highways Depart-

ment, and sent to a post office address.

"When he got the first one he opened the Ralph Morrison account with it—yes, there were two Ralph Morrisons and I'll get to the second one later. Remember the new accounts clerk, shown, a photograph of Whittaker said he *could* have been Morrison but that she couldn't be positive. Which isn't strange since she saw him only once and that once nine months before she was shown the photograph. And he never went back to the bank; he banked the subsequent Midwest checks by mail and had intended to let them accumulate and close out the account all at once when he was ready to run. But five months later he died of a heart attack at the office and that ended his part in the matter.

"A week or so later Schwarz took over his job and his desk. And on his second day there he found a big manila envelope in the desk. It had been under some stationery and hadn't been noticed or opened by whoever had cleared Whittaker's personal effects out of the desk.

"Schwarz opened the envelope and found some damned interesting things in it. There was a rubber stamp of the size used for endorsing checks that read Midwest Construction Company. There was a receipt for a post office box rented for a year and the key to that box. Most interesting

was a set of four monthly bank statements—still in their envelopes so he knew they'd been mailed to the P.O. box. They showed a series of deposits—and no withdrawals—showing that the Midwest Company had a total account of slightly over twenty-seven thousand bucks. Also a set of the receipts banks send out for deposits made by mail, and they covered all deposits shown except the first, so he knew that 'Morrison' hadn't been in the bank since he opened the account five months before. For lagniappe, there were items of identification for a Ralph Morrison, several things, including a perfectly genuine driver's license; Whittaker had applied for and got one under that name. He wouldn't have needed, probably, to show identification to open the account but might have been asked for it when he got around to drawing against the account or closing it out, and he'd been ready.

"The driver's license had a physical description—height, age, weight, color of hair and so on. And by casually asking the chief clerk what Whittaker had looked like he found it fitted and knew that Whittaker himself had been Morrison and hadn't worked with an accomplice.

"And it was easy for him to find in the office files the cancelled and returned Midwest checks—each endorsed by Morrison under the Midwest rubber stamp, so he had a signature to copy. And clip-

ped to each check was an order-to-pay form purporting to have been made out by the Streets and Highways Department. So he had every detail of Whittaker's operation and everything he needed to carry it on and swell that bank account as much as he could.

"But it wasn't going to do him any good to carry it on unless he could get the money *out* of the bank. He couldn't pretend to be Morrison himself, even though the tellers there would never have seen Morrison, for a simple reason. By sheer bad luck he'd opened his own checking account at that particular bank the week before and was known there by his right name.

"So—Blackie. Blackie was twenty years younger than Whittaker had been, but he was almost exactly right in height and weight. And a gray wig would not only take care of hair color but would make him look older, and so would a few simple lines on his face made with a make-up pencil. Besides, who could he trust better than his own brother?

"So he took Blackie into the deal—on a one-third basis. But he didn't want Blackie quitting his job or drawing attention by suddenly spending money so he insisted that all the money, as Blackie drew it, was to be turned over to him. He'd give Blackie his split when the operation ended and they'd lam together. So he made out the checks to cash, forg-

ing the Morrison signature, and Blackie made the trips to the bank. And he figured he might as well keep on until just before the next audit and swell the take as much as he reasonably could. All clear so far?"

"Yes, Ed."

"Then a wheel came off, the day of your father's death—your father's murder—something, and we'll never know what, drew his attention to those Midwest checks. And he took them all out of the file, with the Streets and Highways order clipped to each, and took them home to study. He knew something was wrong, but hadn't yet decided what. He probably suspected that the shenanigans were in the other department, but he wanted to study things out before he made an accusation. He probably didn't suspect Schwarz as yet because some, in fact most, of the checks had been issued before Schwarz had started in the job.

"So Schwarz called in Blackie and made a quick plan to have your father killed. Uncle Am didn't tell me just how that was worked, so we'll let that wait till he gets here. And then—"

"But, Ed, *why?* Why did he think he had to kill my father? By then the Morrison account had been drawn down to a few hundred dollars, so he already had the money. And he was going to have to run soon anyway—before the routine audit. Why didn't he just

run sooner? Before Dad figured things out."

"The cast," I said. "That's where Schwarz's completely genuine accident was a factor. He had on a big cast, not only on his arm but up over his shoulder, a particularly conspicuous cast. He couldn't have run and had a Chinaman's chance of getting away with it. No matter where he went or how he traveled he'd have stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. And, that soon after his accident, he couldn't possibly have taken it off; he'd probably have had a crippled arm and shoulder for the rest of his life, and that too would have marked him. So he took a desperate chance to stall things and it worked for him—until today."

I looked at her. "Tell me, Wanda, did you destroy those checks and papers? You must have."

Her face flushed. "Yes, I did. At the same time I destroyed the letter about a bequest to Mrs. Agnew. I found them in Dad's desk, and they were from the office and, being checks, they seemed like something he shouldn't have brought home.

"I guess I wasn't thinking straight; I'd had two shocks so close together. First his death and then the accusations against him. I'm afraid my first thought, when I found those things, was that maybe he really was guilty and those things would prove that he

was. It wasn't until later, when I'd had time to think, that I realized how ridiculous it had been for me to think that. And by then it was too late. Admitting I'd found and destroyed them would have made the case against him just that much blacker. Tell me, if I'd turned them over to the police, would they have cleared him?"

I said, "They might have. Schwarz probably did a good job of forging Whittaker's Morrison signature; it got by at the bank. Ditto any writing or signatures that would have been on the order-to-pay forms. But if a handwriting expert had studied them he might have come up with the fact that one man had written those dated before Whittaker's death, another those dated after. And that would have put the police on the right track, right away. Here comes Uncle Am."

He came up grinning. Wanda moved over and he slid in beside her. "How much have you told her?"

"Just about everything you told me on the phone. Take it from there."

"Okay, I'll start with the pick-up. Schwarz came out right after your phone call. The front way, so Koslovsky and I got him. We broke up. Since he didn't know me by sight, I took a short tail, he stayed farther back, keeping me in between. First Schwarz stopped in a hardware store, came out with a package. Then he went to a

hotel and checked in, went up to his room and stayed half an hour, then came down. Without either the package or the cast; he'd got tools, of course, to take it off. Must have been awkward, but he'd managed it.

"Then he went to a bank and to a safe deposit vault. When he came out of there he had a different package, and a sizeable one. Forty-some thousand dollars in assorted bills, none larger than hundreds, makes quite a bundle. Koslovsky and I grabbed him. Or, technically, it was Koslovsky who arrested him; Koslovsky's a deputy, carries a star. And, as I told you, he started babbling even before we got him to the station. And that's that end of it. But before I go on, Ed, did Bassett call back while you were at the office? Have they got Sohl?"

I said, "Yes to the first question, no to the second." And I told them about two thousand dollars having been found in Blackie's room, and the guess I was making, from that fact, as to Sohl's motive for having taken a gun when he went to see Blackie and how Blackie's death had happened.

Uncle Am nodded. "Probably right, kid, down the line, except for one minor correction. Schwarz had given Blackie three thousand to give Sohl; that was supposed to be his payoff. Blackie must have given him a grand, stalled him on the other two."

"Makes more sense that way," I said. "If Sohl actually got *one* grand in cash, I can see his taking the stall as long as he did. If he hadn't got any money, he'd have called on Blackie with a gun a lot sooner. Okay, go ahead. How was the murder worked?"

"Damn well for a spur of the moment operation. Schwarz planned and master-minded it, of course. Blackie and Sohl went out to Freeland in separate cars. Blackie rented one and Sohl used his own. They were to be in their places before eight o'clock. Blackie was parked across the street from the point at which Rogers was killed, facing east. Sohl was parked on the other side of the street and heading the other way, beyond the Rogers house.

"At eight on the head Schwarz phoned Rogers. He said he had something important to talk to him about and wondered if Rogers could drop over for a moment. He said he'd walk over to the Rogers house but his shoulder was paining him—reasonable, that shortly after his accident, even though he'd already returned to work.

"And of course Rogers said yes, he'd come over. Rogers probably figured that Schwarz too had come across something irregular or unusual at the office and that that was what he wanted to talk about. And he knew Rogers would walk, for so short a distance, since he didn't drive a car himself,

rather than ask his daughter to chauffeur him. As, of course, he did—or started out to do.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “How could he have known Rogers wouldn’t tell Wanda where he was going?”

“He didn’t. He thought he probably would—as he probably really would have done if Wanda had happened to be in the house and had heard the phone call, instead of being in the garage. But it wouldn’t have mattered. If he had told Wanda where he was going, Schwarz would have had some perfectly good reason to tell afterwards why he’d called Rogers and what he’d wanted to talk to him about. As it happened, he got a break.

“When he came out and started toward Schwarz’s—and there was only one way he could have walked there—Sohl started his car and crawled it along just about the right distance behind him, and without lights. When Rogers got to the point opposite where Blackie was parked, Blackie called out to him—by name. Even Schwarz doesn’t know exactly what Blackie said, or asked, but it was something that got Rogers to start across the street toward Blackie’s car to see who Blackie was and what he wanted.

“And when he was far enough from the curb Sohl gunned his engine and flashed on his lights to blind Rogers and was going at least thirty when he hit him.

“And it worked out perfectly—or almost perfectly. It was supposed to be a hit-run accident. But the impact, or the wheels of Sohl’s car running over the body, jerked the wheel out of his hands and he crashed into the tree. Only Blackie took off, instead of both of them, but Blackie took off quick enough and fast enough so he was around a corner and out of sight by the time Wilkins had run out of the house. Yes, Mrs. Wilkins *did* hear another car, after the sound of the crash; it was Blackie’s taking off. And Blackie, since he didn’t have to be at work until nine, got there in time.

“Is there anything else? Oh, yes, the burglaries. Or the burglary of the house and the searching of your room, Wanda. Schwarz knew Rogers had taken home those checks and other papers and, if he could get them so he could destroy them, he’d be better off. Maybe they wouldn’t exactly have implicated him but they’d have thrown some suspicion his way.

“And it was Sohl who went through your room, Wanda, after Blackie had moved in on you, and while he took you to a show to make sure you’d be away. That was shortly enough after the original deal so Sohl wasn’t really mad at Blackie for not having given him all of the money yet.”

I said, “That accounts for the difference in techniques between the burglary of the house and the

search of Wanda's room. But there's one thing I don't see, Uncle Am. If Wanda had found those checks and vouchers she'd either have turned them over to the police or destroyed them, wouldn't she? So, in case she hadn't found them, I can see the reason for the burglary. But why search her room? If she had them by then, she'd have done one thing or the other with them, wouldn't she? So why the search?"

"Schwarz was a careful guy, and there *was* a third possibility, Ed. She might have had them but be doubtful. Afraid to turn them over in case they'd definitely implicate her father, close the case against him. Afraid to destroy them in case they might be something that would clear him. Waiting to learn more, to see which way the cat would jump. Well—I'm starving to death. Have you people eaten?"

We people hadn't eaten and we were starving too. It was almost three o'clock and none of us had had lunch. We decided we wanted more than sandwiches and that we'd go to the nearest good restaurant. And we went there.

Uncle Am said, "Ed, you order for me. I'll call Bassett; I'm curious about Sohl."

So I ordered for him, something I knew he'd like, and he came back and sat down with us. "They've got Sohl," he said. "Hasn't talked yet, but it doesn't matter. They've got him cold on

both killings. The Freeland one, from Schwarz's confession. Blackie's, because he hadn't even ditched the gun yet. A thirty-two with one chamber fired, one empty cartridge. Not to mention Mrs. Czerny's being able to identify him."

I had a thought and said, "One loose end. I still don't see why Blackie tried to help Wanda get that job, and still treated her the way he did. Look, Wanda, did you exaggerate a little?"

Wanda shook her head. "No, it's true. He never tried to put his arm around me or kiss me."

Uncle Am said, "We'll never know, but we can guess. I'd guess it this way. He really did fall for Wanda, but with a worship-from-afar complex. Tough guys can have soft spots in some places and Wanda hit one of his. He put her on a pedestal, saw her as a goddess too pure and beautiful to be touched. Even by him, let alone by anyone else. So, whether you'd call it jealousy or protectiveness or a mixture of both—"

He shrugged and stopped talking as the waiter started to bring our food. We ate till we were stuffed.

Then Uncle Am said, "Listen, I've got an idea. I promised Frank Bassett I'd come around and make a statement, fill him in on all the points he doesn't know yet. And he'll want to talk to you too, Ed, but I talked him into letting that go until tomorrow.

"So why don't you two celebrate? You've been talking about wanting to play together—piano and trombone, I mean. And there's a baby grand out at Freeland that's now again yours, Wanda. Why don't you two go out there and make music? Pick up a bottle on the way if there's no liquor there."

"There is some," Wanda said. "It sounds perfectly wonderful to me, Ed?"

I said it sounded considerably better than wonderful to me.

When we left the restaurant I flagged a cab. Wanda and I got

in and I gave an order to the driver. But before he took off Uncle Am came to the curb and called out to us, "Have fun, kids. Ed, don't forget your trombone."

I laughed, and waited till the cab had turned a corner and was out of Uncle Am's sight before I leaned forward and changed my instructions to the driver, gave him Mrs. Brady's address and told him to stop there a minute before he took us on out to Freeland.

I *had* forgotten my trombone, or would have if Uncle Am hadn't reminded me. But I'd never tell him that.

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## SPIES IN AUSTRALIA

BRITISH SECURITY OFFICERS believe that foreign agents in Australia may have obtained detailed information about performance figures of the Black Knight rocket, tested recently at the Woomera rocket range, and that information may also have been obtained about parts of the missile and other weapons under construction.

Performance figures are naturally top secret. Plans for future missiles and rockets are based, at least in part, on these figures. Information pieced together by these foreign agents has undoubtedly saved their people at least two years of experimental work.

Several agents seem to be used, each concentrating on only one or two aspects of rocket development and research. There are reports that the movement of scientists to Australia for rocket tests and to work at the experimental centres is closely observed, and that when they arrive agents are ready and waiting to follow them. Spy movies and thrillers to the contrary, no attempt is apparently being made to get all the details or plans at one time. Instead there is this piecemeal approach, innocuous and apparently merely "polite" questions about a man's work, patient listening to conversations—not only between people working in research developments but even to conversation of people living or working in the neighborhood. . . .

In other words, the whole thing is a jig saw puzzle. Research is being carried on and work done at a number of places. Agents with specialized knowledge are believed to be assembling these scattered oddments of information, and getting a reasonably accurate picture of the situation. And once the puzzle has been put together. . . .



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SM 82

# THE saint's RATINGS

## *We talk and talk*

*but nobody seems to listen. Hollywood still feels that because good movies can be made from books, the reverse is true. But is it? Sausage is made from pigs—but that doesn't mean we can pour the links back into a hopper and come up with the original porker. This works up with the screen as well. So the painful pastime of making bad movies into worse books is rapidly going to the head of our Public Enemy list. At the moment it is vying for first place with the "white slave" cover, showing a girl on a bed, with a gent going out the door while pulling his hat on. Though this cover perhaps deserves some historical notice, it does not deserve its present prominence on every second paper-bound cover. Come you sluggard art directors! More imagination! How about at least one book with the guy on the bed and the girl slipping out?*

### OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- ○ ○ Three haloes:  
Outstanding
- ○ Two haloes:  
Above average
- One halo:  
Passable reading
- ♯ A pitchfork;  
For the ash can

### **MURDER IN ROOM 13, by Albert Conroy (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Steve is framed as neatly as a Rembrandt painting, and has to fight up-hill against all the forces of law and crookdom to prove his innocence. Innocence of the crime that is—as regards Sex and Life he is about as naive as a 90-year-old playboy. ○

### **THE DEADLY PAY-OFF, by William H. Duhart (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Again the big frame-up—a standard gambit in these yarns. The only novelty here is that the frame keeps being tightened the more the hero struggles. This, plus a complete guide to criminal slang, manages to drag the story up out of the literary sub-basement. ○

### **DEATH TAKES AN OPTION, by Neil MacNeil (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

A sort of Executive Suite with crime. At least it starts out that way, but soon transforms itself into a familiar pattern of crooks and sex. Good thing too. If it'd stayed with the opening confusion of cardboard business types, it would have earned the rare distinction of a double pitchfork. ○

### **PARTY GIRL, by Marvin H. Albert (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

Presumably book versions of screen plays make money—but that is no reason to read them. The only highlights in this book are the sex scenes, and they won't appear in the film. This version proves the utter barrenness of movie plots of this type. ♯

### **THE DECKS RAN RED, by Andrew L. Stone (Signet, 25¢)**

Mutiny on the high seas and the contribution of one woman to the general mayhem. James Mason and Dorothy Dandridge star in the movie. No need to read the book version. ♯

witness  
to  
murder

by . . . Hal Ellson

He wondered what the two strangers had wanted, and why his father had been silent. But not too long.

THE car moved down the road and stopped in front of the house. Two strange men were in it. They studied the house, then dismounted from the car, walked through the gate and up the path to the porch. They paused there. One spoke to the other in a whisper. Then they mounted the steps and approached the door. One coughed quietly, the other knocked and every room in the house echoed the sound.

No one answered. The house seemed asleep, or dreaming. The men spoke softly now, barely above a murmur. Then the one who'd knocked on the door knocked again, loudly this time, and for a moment it seemed the house would come awake.

But no one answered.

The men exchanged glances and returned to the car. One looked back at the house. Its windows, like empty eyes, reflected nothing but the white violence of the sun.

Both men got into the car. The one behind the wheel lit a cigarette, flicked the match away with a careless gesture and started the car. It leaped away. Behind it on

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*Hal Ellson's name has been made in "rougher" climes—his novel DUKE sold over a million copies—but readers of this magazine will perhaps remember him for his offtrail stories of the impulse to violence on our side streets, such as BAD AND DANGEROUS (Jan. 1958) and now this story of death on a country road.*

---

the sinuous road a cloud of yellow dust rose up.

Hot and breathless, it was just past noon. Spiked corn stood motionless in the fields. The wilted landscape shimmered, green where the shadows survived, yellow in the fields where countless leafy mirrors reflected the white erotic light.

The road was empty now. The strange auto had vanished like a dream and the house where it had stopped was as silent and aloof as before, but round the columns of the porch vine-leaves trembled to a hot fragrant breath of wind.

In that moment a curtain stirred at a window and a small dark face appeared behind a screen. A boy looked out, but where the car had been the road was empty. There was nothing at all to see.

Presently the face vanished from the window to reappear at the side of the house. A clump of lilac concealed the boy's body. His eyes were watchful, but nothing threatened now.

Relieved, he came from behind the lilac clump and went to the front of the house, a gangling boy with dark skin and fuzzy hair. Still alert, he looked around again, but distance impaled the danger he'd felt.

He sat down on the porch, lifted his knees and clasped them. A beetle crawling on the ground drew his attention. He watched it till it lost itself in a jungle of

grass, then thought of the two men once more.

They had called yesterday too. He'd seen them while he stood near the pump at the side of the house. They hadn't noticed him, and they left as they had today. Who they were and what they wanted, he didn't know, but they were different from other strangers. He couldn't say why, but they were.

When they'd gone, his father came out of the house. Perhaps he'd been napping. Anyway, he hadn't answered them. The boy had wanted to tell him about them, tried and couldn't. The words wouldn't come, for there was a look in his father's eyes that he'd never seen before.

Now he recalled the morning. At breakfast he'd wanted to ask his father about the men, but the same look warned him and he did not speak.

There was no conversation at breakfast. Silence weighted the morning, the house stayed tensed and hushed. Each room harbored a secret which it threatened to tell and yet did not.

When his father got up to leave he finally spoke. Lorenzo recalled his words and repeated them now, but they clarified nothing.

A sharp whistle distracted him and he lifted his eyes. A boy was coming down the road. He whistled again and Lorenzo arose. Jogging now, the boy reached the

gate and turned in. He was smaller than Lorenzo, lighter complexioned. Like Lorenzo, his pants were patched and his feet were bare.

"Hi, Lorenzo."

"Hi, Jigger."

"Going swimming?"

Lorenzo looked up at the sky, at nothing really, for his mind was empty. "Don't know," he finally answered. "I might. Then again I might not. I was considering going for bullfrogs."

"We did that yesterday," Jigger reminded him. "Anyhow, my aunt said for me to keep shy of the swamp."

Without looking at Jigger, Lorenzo smiled. "You're just scared," he said.

"Of what?"

"Snakes."

Jigger didn't reply.

"Scared of snakes. Scared of 'em," Lorenzo went on as if to himself rather than Jigger. Then he opened his mouth wide and laughed.

Jigger kicked at the dust. Snakes terrified him; even the thought of them chilled his blood, but he wouldn't admit it. He kicked at the dust again, and Lorenzo stopped laughing. He looked at Jigger.

"Well, what you waiting for?" he said. "Come on. I thought you wanted to go swimming?"

"Don't know as I feel like it now," Jigger replied.

"You mean you ain't going?"

"I just don't feel like it no more."

Lorenzo scratched his fuzzy head. "Then you must be crazy, boy, coming all the way here to tell me you're going when you ain't."

"Well, I can change my mind, can't I?"

"Sure, you can change anything if you want to—but you're scared of the water. That's about it."

"Yeah?" Jigger looked at Lorenzo, doubt in his eyes. He seemed ready to walk away, but suddenly he said, "If you're ready, I am," and Lorenzo smiled.

They went down the road together, cut off it then and followed a path through a wood thick with shadows and finally came to a sluggish yellow stream. In no time they undressed and waded into the water.

Later, when they tired, they lay naked under a tall sassafras and talked, but there were intervals of silence when their minds were free and they escaped each other.

Then the car arrived. It was no place for a car to come. It stopped under a tree and both boys turned and stared at it.

Lorenzo recognized it immediately and the two men in it. They stepped from it and paid no mind to the boys. One had a bottle and he raised it to his lips. The other took his turn at it. Then they sat on the runningboard and continued drinking.

"Let's get dressed and go," said Lorenzo.

"Yeah, what for? We got a right to be here. Heck with them men."

"I'm getting anyhow. You want to stay, you can stay by yourself," Lorenzo answered, rising and starting to dress.

"We can go downstream a bit, can't we?" said Jigger. "There's nothing else to do."

Lorenzo hesitated and looked toward the car. Jigger read his mind.

"Hey, what's wrong? You afraid of them men? They only drinking."

"I'm afraid of nothing. Remember that," Lorenzo said fiercely.

It was enough for Jigger. He had no mind to argue the point. It was easier to go along with Lorenzo and he, too, began to dress. When he finished he turned to Lorenzo and saw him watching the men with the same expression on his face.

"Coming?" he said.

"Yeah."

They walked off, moving downstream and stopping beyond a bend. There they lay down again in the shade of a tree.

"Them men was drinking stuff," said Jigger. "I wonder how it is to get drunk?"

"Nasty," said Lorenzo, chewing on a blade of grass. "Kind of nasty."

"Yeah? How would you know that?"

"I tried it once."

"You got drunk?"

"Naw, I just tasted the stuff. I sneaked some from a bottle my father had. It just burns, that's all. Burns your whole mouth and throat."

"Why they drink it then?"

"Who knows. They just do. I ain't ever going to touch it again."

"Them big men must be crazy to come all the way out here just for that," said Jigger.

"They must be something," Lorenzo answered and stared up through the branches of the tree, suddenly not wanting to think about the men any more.

"They must be town people," Jigger went on. "I never did see them around here before. They got fine clothes. Got a nice shiny car."

"Who cares," said Lorenzo, and Jigger got to his feet.

"I'm hot again. Going in that water. You coming, Lorenzo?"

"Not me."

"You just going to lay around?"

"Yeah."

Jigger stripped again, started for the stream, then stopped and looked back at Lorenzo. "What you thinking about?" he said.

"Nothing."

"Them men?"

"I said nothing. Didn't you hear?"

A look of doubt remained on Jigger's face as he turned away

and walked to the bank of the stream. Below, he saw the dim reflection of himself wavering on the sluggish water. Himself? It seemed like another boy down there, a phantom waiting to greet him in the cool depths. The fancy passed. He tensed and dove into the stream, twisted below surface with the ease of a marine-creature and came up on his back spouting water, his mind free now, the conversation with Lorenzo forgotten.

Through the tangle of branches and leaves Lorenzo continued to stare at the sky. Yesterday was lost. Even the morning seemed far away and out of grasp. As in a mirror he saw his father leave the house and go down the road. The words he had spoken were still words but their meaning eluded him.

It was simpler to close his eyes and forget. A bird called from a secret place in the wood and completed his isolation. Islands of leaves stirred softly. Where the bird had called from was another land that floated in a deep green sea. Lorenzo closed his eyes tighter, the better to hold the images, and the bird ceased calling. A vast stillness embraced the world.

Later, Jigger swam to the bank of the stream, climbed it and went to the spot where Lorenzo lay. Lorenzo felt his shadow, opened his eyes and saw him, his body all glistening with drops of water.

"You going to sleep?" asked Jigger.

"No."

"Feel like playing hide-and-seek?"

Lorenzo considered the suggestion. "If you be it," he said, "I'll play. Not otherwise."

"Yeah, the same old story. You never want to be it. Why not?"

"Don't play then," said Lorenzo.

"All right, I'll be it. I always am, anyhow."

Lorenzo smiled and got to his feet. "And remember, keep your eyes closed. No cheating."

"Yeah, who cheats?"

"I'm just saying, that's all."

"All right, start hiding."

Jigger covered his eyes and began to count. Lorenzo lingered a moment, then dashed off into the brush. Once hidden, he made his way slowly and stopped close by the road where the brush was thickest.

It was quiet here, the air motionless, the sun hot and alive. Jigger was hunting him in another area. The stillness told him that. Jigger would never find him. About to sit down and wait, voices alerted him.

Turning, he pushed aside a branch. A man was walking the road. The voices stopped suddenly; the speakers remained invisible. There was only the road and the man coming toward him, face averted as if trying to avoid the naked blaze of the sun.

A strange stillness had seized the day. The air grew hotter, the glare of the sun more violent. The man coming down the road seemed to falter. Then he lifted his face and stopped in his tracks.

Lorenzo saw two men step out on the road. One lifted his hand and a dark object caught the sun and glistened. Three shots rang out, shattering the stillness. The man facing Lorenzo fell. There was a moment of silence.

Then the two men fled to the car in the wood. They climbed into it, took to the road and drove off in a cloud of dust.

The man on the road lay still. Lorenzo hadn't moved. A bug crawled over his hand. He didn't notice it, for his gaze was focused on that inert figure lying in the dust. He waited for it to move, the man to rise. When he didn't, Lorenzo screamed and ran toward his father.

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## VIRGINIA LADY SHERIFF

DEPUTY SHERIFF DRAPER of Campbell County, Virginia, appeared before special grand juries in Henry County and Martinsville Circuit Court recently, reporting on findings during a three weeks' investigation of bootlegging activities in Martinsville and Henry County.

Deputy Sheriff Draper is 27 years old, blue-eyed, and her full name is Evelyn Byrd Draper.

During the three weeks she was hunting bootleggers (she doesn't like whiskey, by the way) she continued with her regular duties by day, and worked nights as Special Investigator for the State Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, under orders to make as many purchases as possible from the bootleg ring. She soon learned, she told later, to punch a hole in the bottom of the paper cups in which most of the drinks were served.

On her arrival in Martinsville she asked a waitress in a restaurant, "Where can you get a snort in this town?" She was told to drive to a nearby place, honk the car horn, and she'd be taken care of. She bought a mixed drink in a paper cup and a pint of "legal whiskey," there, for \$3.50. There followed a round of visits to service stations, store buildings, trailers, an abandoned blacksmith shop and an abandoned farmhouse, she recording each sale carefully in a little black book which she carried in her handbag, next to a .38. One or two of the salesmen became quite interested, it seems, after she told them how she'd been having trouble with her "former husband" back in the other county.

Finally—but too late for the bootleggers—her identity became known, and she got a threatening phone call. "Evelyn Draper, if you are the law, you won't ever testify against us."

But Deputy Sheriff Draper did testify, the grand juries indicting 16 men on 34 counts of violating the State's liquor laws.

what's  
new  
in  
crime

by... Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts—novels that you will wish to relax with, and others, reflecting our times.

THIS is one of those rare occasions when I find myself agreeing with a publisher's blurb.

Erle Stanley Gardner is quoted as saying, about Jack Usher's *BROTHERS AND SISTERS HAVE I NONE* (Mill-Morrow, \$2.95),—"His characters are real, and you are fighting either with them or against them all the way through . . . The fastest action and best dialogue I've run across in a long time. If he writes more books as good as this, he's going to make history in the mystery field."

I agree.

Just as Fredric Brown's novels about the Southwest capture much of the contradictions in the mores and the manners of that part of the country, Jack Usher paints a vivid and hard-to-forget picture of life in the small southern California community where Cal Baker is said to have committed murder. Steve Pelchek has five days to find a lost witness, to trap a killer, and to establish a motive for murder, five days before Cal dies for a crime he did not commit. That he does so, with the aid of some rather extraordinary characters who

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*Again comments on current mystery and suspense novels—by both British and American writers—novels which, in their variety, illustrate this column's frequent preachment that there is no such thing as one definition of the mystery novel, particularly these days.*

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may at first seem overdrawn, is testimony to the drive in the man who is Steve Pelchek, but equally so to the essential weakness in the fabric of the way of life Cal Baker bucked. **BROTHERS AND SISTERS HAVE I NONE** is perhaps not great literature, but it *is* a vivid and dramatically told example of a trend in this field which I have referred to before. Novels like this are mirrors—mirrors of our times, mirrors reflecting our weaknesses and also reflecting our strength. In time to come, novels like this will be studied by people who will want to understand—not so much the statistics of our times—but simply what made us tick, what made us behave the way we do. . . . It is to be hoped that books like this will be available then.

William Haggard's **THE TELEMANN TOUCH** (Little, Brown, \$3.50) is that unique thing, and I say this with some deliberateness,—a politically literate thriller. Commenting on the author's earlier novel, **SLOW BURNER**, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* is quoted as saying that,—“William Haggard is as urbane as Evelyn Waugh, as scholarly as C. P. Snow, and with a narrative felicity comparable with Somerset Maugham.” The astonishing thing is that, as has occasionally happened in other matters in bygone days, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* is quite correct. Haggard *is* all they say.

Perhaps a number of intangible factors contribute to this, factors which I need not go into at this point. Be that as it may, the result is, as I have said, a politically literate thriller, without the lushness implied, perhaps unfortunately so, in the blurb, and so immensely more readable—for that precise reason.

Life—and love—and intrigue—and sudden death—on a small island in the West Indies, can so readily lend itself to almost unconscious accenting of some matters. Make no mistake. **THE TELEMANN TOUCH** has definite movie possibilities. You are conscious of this throughout the novel, even in Telemann's final moments, and certainly on a dozen other occasions—when a Governor weeps, and when David Carr's wife forgets, for one brief moment, the years she had spent abroad. But, apart from this, here *is* an eminently readable—and literate—suspense thriller, set against an interesting background! Do read it!

Jerome Barry, who will be remembered for his **LADY OF NIGHT** and **LEOPARD CAT'S CRADLE**, returns with an extremely interesting novel about a young Brooklyn teen-ager, Joey Tripp, a car-crazy kid, accused of a murder he has not committed. Jerome Barry's **EXTREME LICENSE** (Doubleday, \$2.95), has an unusual quality, lacking in some novels in this field, a deliberate

emphasis on characterization to the point where we *see* the devoted husband as he plans the murder of his mistress, and we are *with* young Joey as he thinks things out, clumsily at times, but with something of the ages-old wisdom that survival in our streets appears to teach our young. Yes, there is, of course, another word for it, but it *is* important to remember that there are youngsters like Joe Tripp, surviving in and growing out of the jungle they find themselves in.

John Sherwood's **UNDIPLO-MATIC EXIT** (Doubleday, \$2.95) will seem to come right out of yesterday's headlines. The author of the delightful **MR. BLESSINGTON'S IMPERIALIST PLOT**, and of **AMBUSH FOR ANATOL** and **DR. BRUDERSTEIN VANISHES**, has again written, if I may use the expression once more, a politically literate thriller—this time about the Near East. (The publisher's blurb says Middle East. Very confusing.) British paratroopers have just landed in the Suez Canal area, and sentiment rises in the country—presumably pre-revolutionary Iraq—against the British action. The situation is not improved by the fact that England's representative in the country is not exactly a brilliant man, disliked and even distrusted both by his colleagues and by the local Government which finds it necessary to walk a shade softly. Which makes Em-

bassy Counselor Richard Hadden's life rather difficult when his chief is murdered and all sort of people, including Mr. Hadden, are suspected. Do read this.

How secret *is* a great man's past? And how ruthless can those who serve him be to protect him—and themselves—from the disclosing of that past?

A Chicago detective, a determined man (as it seems most Chicago detectives are) faces trigger-happy cops and assorted citizens—rich and poor, in Thomas B. Dewey's **YOU'VE GOT HIM COLD** (Simon & Schuster, \$2.95) and solves his case. Not too believable, but you'll like it.

Harry Carmichael's . . . **OR BE HE DEAD** (Doubleday, \$2.95), describes the pleasant doings when London playboy Paul Craven is kidnapped, and his slightly-less-than-fond father is asked for a ransom of five thousand pounds. (Ignore the publisher's blurb which says fifteen thousand . . .). Insurance agent John Piper finds himself drawn into it all, first at the request of the father, and then out of concern for Carole Leslie. You may find yourself slightly indifferent to what happens to the Craven family, but Carole Leslie—whom John Piper meets and realizes he has waited for for so long—is a lovingly drawn and charming person.

And rare. . .

In Thomas Sterling's rather obscurely titled **THE SILENT SIREN** (Simon & Schuster, \$2.95), the lady who is the Siren—an eventually very dead Siren—is far from silent. In fact, she can't keep quiet. In fact, she talks and she talks and she talks, half the time hysterically and the remainder of the time with a rather dreadful singlemindedness. **THE SILENT SIREN** possibly merited publication as a study of some singularly useless—but very familiar—people—the kind of people you meet in some "society" columns. But as a mystery—I don't know. . . .

Carlton Keith's cheerful improbable **THE DIAMOND STUDDED TYPEWRITER** (Macmillan, \$3.25), may cause handwriting experts to turn green from envy. Jeffrey Green is supposed to be one, and his life is far from dull as he runs into lovely looking girls, gets himself slugged a few times, and goes through all the tribulations recruits to the ranks of private eyes must survive. The saving grace of this far from memorable contribution is its literacy, and a suspicion of a glint in the author's eyes as he takes Green through his paces.

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# the soiled diamonds

by . . . William MacHarg

He was supposed to have gone alone. Apparently his not doing so had cost the young man his life.

"WHAT we got now," said O'Malley, "is a jewelry salesman got murdered and robbed. They tell me they got the case as good as solved, but still they put me on it. What good I should go around and ask a lot of questions when they already got the answers? This was a salesman named Alliday and he worked for a jewelry house downtown called Morant & Company. Well, they had to send fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds to a jewelry store in the Bronx, so Alliday took 'em in a cab and another guy went with him.

"When they was in Central Park the driver heard a shot fired in his cab and slowed up to find out what was wrong, and the other guy jumped out and run away into the bushes. A lot of people and cars got around, and they got a cop, and the cop went in the taxi with Alliday to the hospital, but by the time they got there the guy was dead."

"Have they got the man who did the shooting?"

"They got one they think is him. Burrel his name is, and he was a friend of Alliday's. They

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*William MacHarg's doggedly determined O'Malley, doggedly determined that Headquarters will one day appreciate him, returns with this story of a salesman who is robbed—and murdered—in Central Park, and of O'Malley's puzzling interest in the cooking of an extremely good-looking woman.*

---

got him at headquarters and the taxi guy, too, who they're holding for a witness."

"Well, what's to be worked on, then," I asked, "if they've already got him?"

"That's what I told you in the first place."

"Did they get back the diamonds?"

"He had got rid of the diamonds and the gun. I got to go and talk with him, but I don't expect he'll tell me anything."

We went to headquarters and saw Burrel. He was an undersized young fellow of unpleasant appearance and had, I thought, a particularly evil face.

"How long had you known Alliday?" O'Malley asked him.

"A couple of months."

"Got acquainted with him, did you, because you knew his business and thought you'd stick him up?"

"I was at a picture show when this thing happened."

"Yeah, I heard you said that. You're out of luck that none of the attendants at the picture theater remember seeing you."

The taxi-driver's name was Durman. He was about twenty-five years old and looked like any other taxi-driver.

"You're sure this Burrel is the guy that was in your cab?" O'Malley asked him.

"He looks like the guy," the taxi-driver answered, "but I never seen him but that one time, so

maybe I couldn't really swear to him."

"You tell us about Burrel getting in the cab."

"Why, I was waiting in the cab when Alliday came out of the office building, and this other guy—Burrel, if he's the right one—was standing near the corner. He seen Alliday and came up and spoke to him, and they talked for a minute, friendly, and then both got into the cab. They kept on talking but I didn't pay attention or even hear what they was saying; and in the park I heard the shot."

He described the rest of the event just as O'Malley had already told it to me.

"Say, listen," he said just as we were leaving him, "how long are you guys going to keep me here?"

"I got nothing to do with that," O'Malley told him.

"Well, somebody has. You treat a guy that's just a witness like he had done something. I got a wife, and she's worrying her heart out and the cops are bothering her."

"They got no business to do that," O'Malley said. "I'll see they quit it. You got any message you want I should give your wife?"

"If you see her, tell her to stop worrying."

"Get anything from either of them?" I asked after we had left them.

"Not a thing; and now I got to

go and see Morant & Company, and it ain't likely I'll get anything there, either."

We went downtown. Morant & Company's offices were on an upper floor of a tall building, and Morant himself, the senior partner, saw us.

"Anything unusual, Mr. Morant," O'Malley asked, "about the way them diamonds were being sent?"

"Nothing whatever. It was all in accordance with our usual custom. We continually receive requests from jewelers to show them diamonds from which they can make selections, and one of our salesmen takes the diamonds to them in a cab. It was unusual, however, that Alliday took anyone with him. He was supposed to go alone."

"Yeah? Well, this time it seems he didn't. I don't suppose you know what time he left here?"

"We know exactly. We keep a record when stones are sent out and returned. I'll get it for you."

Morant sent for the record. Alliday had left the company's offices a little after three.

"I see," said O'Malley. "So it was this way: Alliday took the diamonds, went down in the elevator to the street and found a cab—"

"Oh, not that way at all," Morant told him. "We don't care to have a salesman with a pocketful of diamonds wandering about the streets looking for a cab. One of

the boys went down and got the cab for him."

"I'd like to see that boy."

The boy proved to be a frank-faced and intelligent young fellow.

"You see anybody hanging around the building entrance like they was watching for Alliday when you went down to get the cab?" O'Malley asked him.

"I didn't notice anybody in particular. There were plenty of people in the entrance and on the street, of course."

"Tell us how you done it, son."

"Why, the way I always do it. There's a cab stand at the corner and I went and got a cab and came back in it and told the man to wait, and then I came up and told Mr. Alliday it was there, and he went down to it."

"By sight. He's carried salesmen plenty times before."

We went down to the street. There was a cigar store in the building entrance and O'Malley went into it and telephoned headquarters.

"What did you tell headquarters?" I inquired of him.

"Told 'em I wasn't learning nothing. Well, here we take a cab."

We went to the cab stand on the corner and got a cab, and O'Malley looked at his watch as we got into it. Then we drove north through the downtown district and along Fifth Avenue and turned into the park.

"Here's where it happened," O'Malley told me finally.

The murderer had picked out an excellent place for it. Bushes on both sides hid the road, and there was less traffic on this road than on most of the park drive-ways. We got out and spent some time examining the locality, but we didn't find anything. Then we drove to the hospital and, on reaching it, O'Malley again looked at his watch.

"O.K.," he stated. "Alliday left Morant's at three-five o'clock and they got him here, according to the hospital records, at five minutes of four. It's about the same time of day and traffic is about the same, and he done the trip in one minute less than we did, but we might have spent more time in the park."

"What does that show?" I asked.

"Shows the taxi-driver told the truth and didn't go nowhere but where he said he did. That being the case, I guess I'll give his message to his wife."

We drove to Durman's apartment. It was in an unattractive building in the Bronx. A smell of cooking greeted us. Mrs. Durman was in the kitchen, cooking a chop and some potatoes, and a pot of soup was simmering on the stove. She was about twenty-two years old and poorly dressed, but I have never seen a more startlingly beautiful young woman.

"I got a message from your

husband," O'Malley told her. "He said to tell you not to worry."

"I'm not worrying. But the police keep coming here and I don't like it because of the neighbors."

"They got no business to. I'll put a stop to it."

He sat down as if he wanted to keep up the conversation and I was amused to see that he was attracted by the woman. They talked for a while.

"You wouldn't want to go to a picture show tonight?" O'Malley asked her bashfully.

"Not with my husband being held."

I was sorry for her, but I felt like laughing at O'Malley.

"Well, O'Malley," I kidded him after we had got outside, "you certainly fell for that woman. She had you going. It's the first time I ever saw you fall for one of them, but I don't blame you. She's a knock-out. Put that girl in the right clothes and the right surroundings and she'd have it over all of them."

"That's right," O'Malley agreed. "But it wouldn't do me no good if I was to fall for her, because she's married to this taxi guy. It's a pity he don't make enough to dress her up."

We parted and I did not see him till the next day.

"Anything new?" I asked him.

"Sure. They found the gun in the park where the guy threw it."

"Fingerprints on it?"

"It had been rained on. They

tried to trace it by the number, but it had been stole a month ago from the guy that had a right to own it; so there's no clue."

"You better trace it," I urged, "because it will be the best evidence you can have against Burrel."

"You're smart," O'Malley said.

"How did they connect Burrel with the murder in the first place?" I inquired. "You haven't told me that."

"That was simple. Alliday wouldn't have taken nobody in the cab with him unless he knew him, and this taxi-driver gave a pretty good description of the guy. They looked for who among Alliday's friends answered that description, and Burrel did and couldn't prove where he was when the murder happened."

"They got the right man," I declared. "I knew that when I looked at him. Did you take Mrs. Durman to a picture show?" I asked derisively.

"I went out there but she wouldn't go with me. I'm going out there now."

There was a uniformed policeman in front of Durman's door and Mrs. Durman asked at once the meaning of it.

"I put him there," O'Malley told her, "to keep the other cops away. You ain't been bothered since, have you?"

"No," she replied, "but I wonder what the other tenants in the building think about it."

"I'll have him taken off then."

Everything in the place was exactly as it had been the day before. Mrs. Durman was getting her luncheon ready and soup was simmering on the stove.

"You're certainly some cook!" O'Malley told her. "Your soup ain't healthy for a hungry man to smell. It makes him hungrier. You wouldn't let me taste it, would you?"

"I'll give you some," she offered.

"Don't bother, I'll get it myself."

Before she could prevent him he had dipped a ladleful from the bottom of the pot, inspecting it closely. Then he took the kettle from the stove and, following his directions, I helped him strain the soup through a dish-towel, and I saw unset diamonds glistening among the meat and vegetables that were left.

"Were you kidding me into believing that Burrel had done it, O'Malley?" I asked, after we had taken Mrs. Durman to the station-house, "or did you believe it yourself?"

"Sure I believed it," he replied. "The first I thought it might not be that way was when Morant & Company's boy says Durman had drove their salesmen on them trips before; then when I seen Mrs. Durman I got sure of it. You said yourself she'd be a knock-out if she had the clothes;

and she knew that a lot better'n you and figured she'd get 'em anyway she could.

"Durman knew that when he carried salesmen on them trips they were loaded up with jewels and him and his wife fixed the job up between 'em. After the boy had got Durman's cab and Durman was waiting for Alliday to come down, he went in the cigar store and telephoned his wife, and she went and waited for him in the place they had picked out in the park. Of course there wasn't nobody but Durman and Alliday in the cab. Durman knocked Alliday off. Mrs. Durman was there and he slipped her the diamonds and the gun before the crowd begun to gather.

"Mrs. Durman threw away the gun, so it couldn't be connected with 'em, and Durman took the cop into his cab and beat it for the hospital to tell his story. He's a smart guy, and so he described as the third man in the cab a fellow he's once seen with Alliday. It was his luck that Burrel didn't have no alibi."

"But what made you think the diamonds were in the soup?"

"Why, there was always the question, if Burrel done the job, whether Durman had been in on it with him; and if he was, Bur-

rel might have took the diamonds out to Durman's place. So they searched Durman's place but they didn't find nothing. I guess Mrs. Durman didn't expect it would be searched and put the diamonds in the soup when the cops came, because it was the quickest and safest place to hide 'em; and afterward she never had a chance to dispose of 'em.

"After I got the hunch Durman might have done the job alone, you and I went out and talked with Mrs. Durman and I looked the place over and I couldn't see nowhere in them two rooms where the stones could have been hidden that the guys searching wouldn't have found 'em. If I could have got her to go to a picture show we'd have searched the place again.

"I went out to her place three different times of day, wondering whereabouts the stones could be, and every time the soup was cooking on the stove. That didn't seem natural."

"You're a clever cop, O'Malley."

"You tell 'em that at headquarters, will you?" he replied. "I've been trying a long time now to get somebody to think that, and I ain't found nobody that will believe me yet."



a  
filipino  
“fbi”

by . . . H. S. Singh

A report on another law-enforcement agency, this time in the Philippines, and what it is doing. . .

THE Criminal Investigation Service, popularly known as the CIS, dates back to the establishing of the Philippine Constabulary itself some 57 years ago. Created by an act of the Philippine Commission, it was first known as the Section of Information and placed under the Intelligence Division of the Philippine Constabulary. Reflecting the succession of official approaches to its possibilities, it was reactivated, after liberation, as the Criminal Investigation Branch of the Intelligence Division of the Military Police Command, becoming known, some years later—in 1950, as the Police Affairs Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. It was not until July of 1953 that it was designated as the Criminal Investigation Service of the Philippine Constabulary headquarters.

At the present time, the CIS investigates major criminal cases—which average 1,000 a year—on orders of the President, the Secretary of National Defense, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, or the Chief of Constabulary. The Service is, in other words, a clearing house for these very

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*H. S. Singh turns from South East Asia to the Philippines in the second of his series of short articles on law enforcement agencies in the East. Here is an agency that is in the forefront of the fight against organized crime, with an impressive record of achievement in criminal investigation.*

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special needs of government agencies, working also with city and provincial agencies throughout the country in the solving of crimes and arrest of wanted criminals.

Here is where the CIS particularly justifies the occasional reference to it as the "FBI of the Philippines," for it undoubtedly has the longest "reach" of any of the arms of the law in the land. Apart from its main strength, concentrated at Camp Crame, Constabulary Headquarters, the CIS has teams of investigators assigned to constabulary detachments throughout the provinces.

The Service is divided into three branches, (a) administrative, (b) investigation, and (c) crime laboratory.

The administrative branch handles most of the paper work for the CIS like the issuing of warrants of arrest, police clearances, serving of subpoenas, etc.

The investigation branch, the nerve center of CIS activity, is concerned with (1) police intelligence, (2) crimes against persons, (3) crimes against property, (4) general investigation, and (5) evaluation.

The ballistics section, the questioned documents and photo section, and the identification section of the crime laboratory branch, examine and analyze items used as evidence in criminal cases handled by the CIS or other government agencies. As a matter of fact,

it's only been in recent years that the testimony of the CIS experts has begun to be accepted by the courts in major criminal cases. During the period when Brig. Gen. Manuel F. Cabal headed the Constabulary, the CIS acquired some of the latest equipment from abroad; Brig. Gen. Pelagio A. Cruz, the present Constabulary chief, is apparently continuing this policy despite current sniping at the Service because it has stepped on VIP toes.

It is important to note that the personnel of the Service is composed mainly of constabulary officers and men who do not get any other pay outside of what they get as military personnel. The only CIS personnel who draw salaries from the government are the technicians, the civilian agents and the clerical employees.

In addition to investigating major cases which by now, as we've said, average 1,000 a year, the CIS has been carrying on an active drive against gambling, prostitution, opium smuggling, etc. Recent cases handled by the Service have included a diploma mill racket through which an as yet undetermined number of public school teachers were able to secure fake diplomas and transcripts of records, and the *Samabang Puti* murder syndicate—a gentle group that specialized in murder, rape, armed robbery and extortion, anything that might bring an honest peso. . . .



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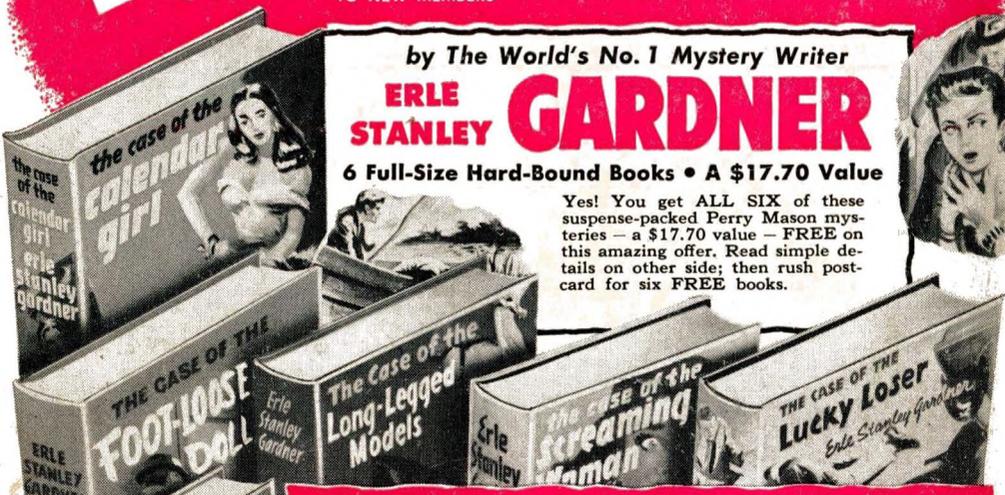
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