SPEED MYSTERY

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JETHRO HAMMER

by MICHAEL VENNING

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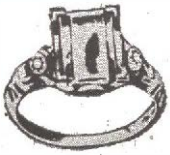

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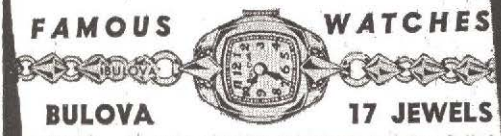

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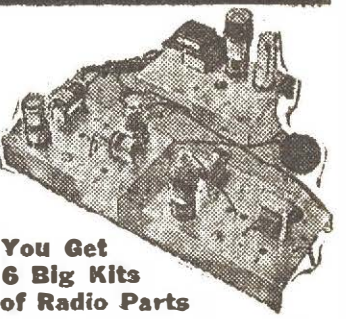

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September, 1945 Vol. 3, No. 5

Book Length Novel, Complete In This Issue

JETHRO HAMMER

Page 4

By MICHAEL VENNING

This edition of the best-selling mystery novel is published by special arrangement with Coward-McCann, Inc.

The disappearance of a man for twenty years, his return, his revenge, and his death unfold with dramatic simplicity in this spine-tingling murder novel. We make this challenge: once you have read the introductory chapter, nothing short of fire or flood will prevent you from finishing **Jethro Hammer**!

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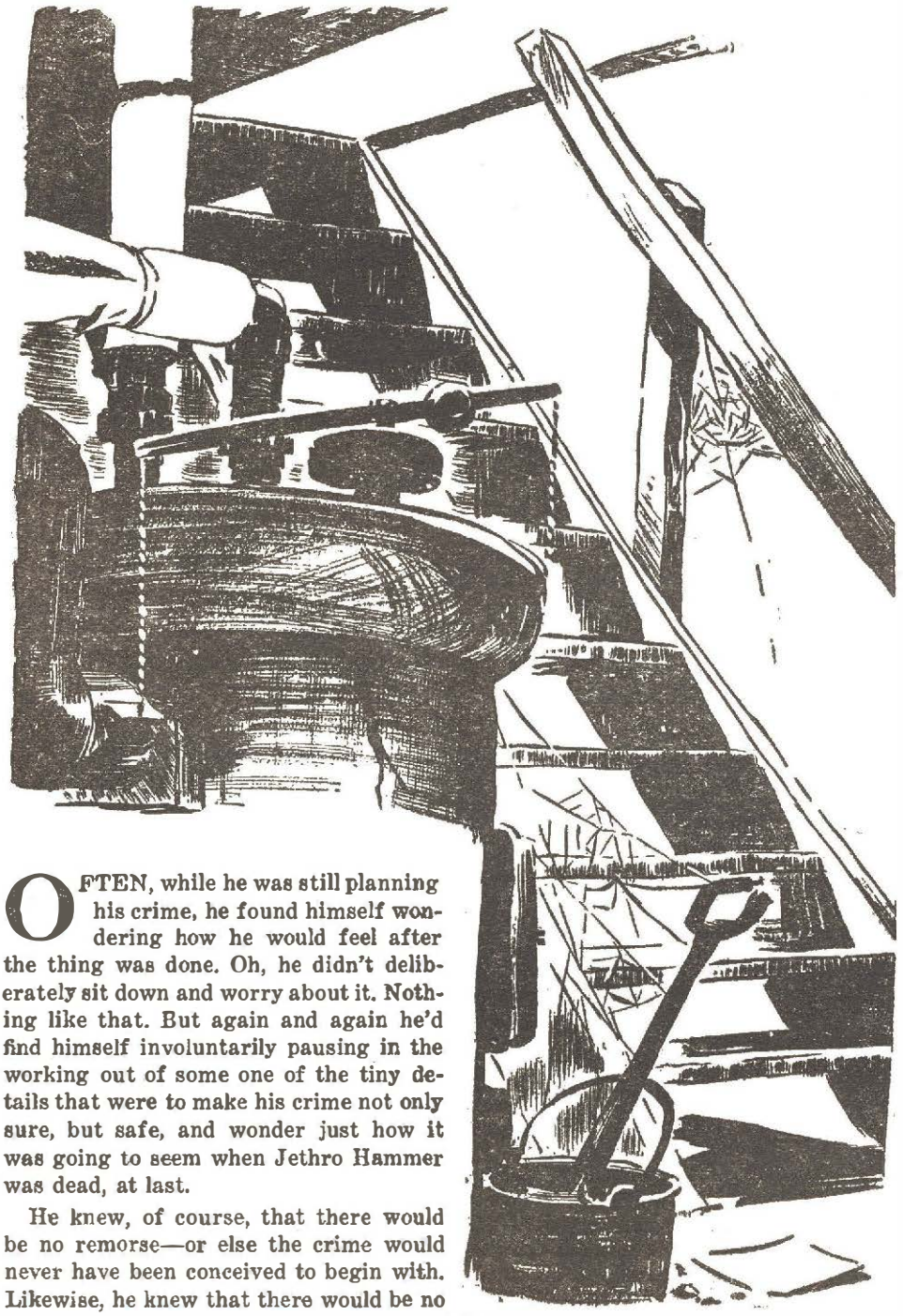
There is, Michael Fahr reasons, a terrible urgency to planned murder. And if it were for greed or jealousy, or hatred, there might be something to condone the crime. But, as in this case, where cold-blooded plotting lies behind the whole thing, well . . . .



OFTEN, while he was still planning his crime, he found himself wondering how he would feel after the thing was done. Oh, he didn't deliberately sit down and worry about it. Nothing like that. But again and again he'd find himself involuntarily pausing in the working out of some one of the tiny details that were to make his crime not only sure, but safe, and wonder just how it was going to seem when Jethro Hammer was dead, at last.

He knew, of course, that there would be no remorse—or else the crime would never have been conceived to begin with. Likewise, he knew that there would be no

JETHRO HAMMER

This edition of the best-selling mystery novel is published by special arrangement with Coward-McCann, Inc.

By Michael Venning

fear—because of that year of careful, methodical planning.

But it was the thought, forcing its way into his mind, that a man was going to die, by his own hand, as a result of his planning. How was it going to feel, afterward?

As a boy he'd killed snakes and set traps for rats and mice, he'd slapped flies and mosquitoes, he'd once assisted in giving lethal gas to an aged poodle. If he had been rich, he might have killed tigers in India or elephants in Africa; if he had been sturdy, he might have killed deer in the North Woods. Killing a man, though—even Jethro Hammer—was something else.

He thought of it, against his will, whenever he saw Jethro Hammer, or

Quietly, efficiently, he searched the dead man's pockets.

stood watching his gloomy, shabby old house in the west sixties. Often, while he stood there across the street, he'd see a doctor hurrying up the brownstone steps, bag in hand, and see Jethro Hammer, who kept no servants, open the door to let him in. There was one doctor who came fairly often. He never hurried. The others, obviously arriving in response to an anxious telephone call, usually went briskly up the steps. They never stayed long, though. There was nothing wrong with Jethro Hammer, except that he didn't want to die.

Sometimes he'd see Jethro Hammer riding the subway to his office, early in the morning—he always arrived there at eight o'clock—and reflect that the old man wasn't looking well. That was age, though, he reminded himself. Age, and undernourishment, and meanness. Jethro Hammer was a tall, thin, bony man; he had a pallid, lantern-jawed face, a narrow nose, a pinched little mouth, and pale blue eyes. The wispy hair that still clung to his skull was a yellowish, dirty-looking white. Summer and winter he wore a black suit, a greenish-black overcoat, and a black derby. He looked ill, though he was perfectly well; he looked extremely old, though he was only sixty-seven; and he looked very poor, though he was several times over a millionaire.

Those many mornings when he watched Jethro Hammer riding the subway, he'd reflect on what a good thing it was that the man was really in excellent health for sixty-seven. Because he didn't want Jethro Hammer to die of natural causes.

HE knew why Jethro Hammer would spend money on doctors when he wouldn't spend it on anything else. He knew why Jethro Hammer worried about his health until he could imagine himself ill and dying. Not from any love of life, or joy that he found in it. But he didn't want to let go of it, just as he never wanted to let go of anything, once he had it in his possession.

Even the front of Jethro Hammer's house seemed to proclaim that fact. A man who wanted to hang onto his money as badly as Jethro Hammer did might very well have sold the house for a handsome price—it was an excellent building site—and moved into an inexpensive apartment or a cheap hotel, even a furnished housekeeping room. But it was Jethro Hammer's house, and he wouldn't let it go, though he wouldn't spend a cent for its upkeep, even for its cleaning.

It looked like a curious misfit, seen from across the street. Next to it stood a tall apartment building, all glass and chromium and pinkish stone, with a fine modernistic marquee reaching out to the street, with beautiful ladies in fur coats and handsome men in expensive clothes coming and going all night long. And then there was Jethro Hammer's shabby, discolored three-story house, with its front steps chipped and worn, and one iron railing bent and sagging; with its shutters—dingy and badly in need of paint—tightly closed. It would have brought a good price, and the taxes on it must have been enormous; but Jethro Hammer wouldn't let it go. He never wanted to let anything go. Especially, not life.

Perhaps that was why, during that year of planning, the thought that he was going to kill a poor old man who didn't want to die would rise up and obscure his hatred of Jethro Hammer, and the necessity for killing him.

But then his concern for himself would come back, and he would get back to his planning again. Because he didn't want to die either, not in the electric chair for the murder of Jethro Hammer.

There wasn't a chance of it! He knew exactly how it was to be done. It was just a matter, now, of working out every last detail, and waiting until the time was right. The reason so many murderers failed was because they didn't plan with sufficient care and long enough in advance. He wasn't going to make that mistake.

Always, at the end of one of his evenings of making plans, he'd remind himself that if ever a murder had been justified, this one was.

Afterward, when Jethro Hammer was

actually dead, he was surprised to find that he felt nothing. In the last few minutes there had been a mounting excitement, a quickening of his pulse, even an impulse—at the very last moment—to abandon his crime. Then suddenly it was done. The thing he'd been planning for a year took only a moment.

He didn't feel remorse, or relief, or pleasure, or even fear. It seemed to him that, with the killing of Jethro Hammer, he had become a vacuum. Life, all at once, was empty. He'd anticipated this crime for so long—even long before he had begun actually to lay his plans. Now there were no more plans to make; the thing was done. In the last minutes before he went to sleep, on the night of Jethro Hammer's murder, he realized that he had no reason for fear or for assurance. He had nothing to look forward to now.

He slept well, and soundly, for the first time in many months. Beforehand there had been dreams, half-waking dreams that invariably ended with him wide and helplessly awake, staring at the ceiling, thinking the whole thing over again and again. This night he went to sleep and slept ten hours without so much as a moment of restlessness.

IT WAS the next morning that he began to feel apprehensive. Had he overlooked something after all? Had there been some unexpected development he couldn't have anticipated? He went over the whole thing, step by step, and found nothing wrong. Then slowly and carefully he went over the events of the past year to reassure himself that he hadn't slipped up anywhere. No, everything had gone right.

He realized at last what had caused his anxiety. In the mornings, when Jethro Hammer boarded the subway at Seventy-second Street, a man got on with him. He never spoke to Jethro Hammer, nor was spoken to by him. Indeed, they never appeared to notice each other. But he was always there, and he always got off at the same station downtown. At night, when Jethro Hammer got on the subway at Rector Street—invariably at ten minutes after six—the same man got on with him and rode to Seventy-second Street.

The man was small, ordinary, inconspicuous—a pleasant, gentle-looking little man, always dressed in gray. A gray suit, and in winter a darker gray overcoat. And he had friendly gray eyes and gray hair. He was a man who would never be noticed in a crowd, or even in a roomful of people. He might have been a shadow, or he might not have been there at all. His presence on the same subway car with Jethro Hammer would never have been remembered if he had not been there every single time. Even a shadow can make itself remembered by sufficient repetition.

But that was nonsense, nothing to worry about! The man in gray happened to live in the same neighborhood as Jethro Hammer, and happened also to go to his day's work near the Rector Street subway station. His office hours were the same—long but not unusual ones—eight to six.

Then why did he always board the same car as Jethro Hammer in the long and almost invariably crowded subway train.

Pure coincidence! And even if it wasn't coincidence—though he didn't know what else it could be—it was nothing for him to worry about. Because the man in gray never came to Jethro Hammer's house, nor to Jethro Hammer's office. Most important, he hadn't been in Jethro Hammer's house the night of the murder. There was nothing to fear from *him*.

The sense of apprehension passed, though not all at once. As the day went on and nothing untoward happened, his confidence grew. By two in the afternoon he felt bold enough to buy a newspaper. The item he looked for was on the first page, but in an inconspicuous and unimportant position.

WEALTHY RECLUSE
KILLED IN FALL

NEW YORK, Feb. 15. Jethro Hammer, 67, famous as "the hermit of Wall Street," was killed last night by a fall down the basement stairs in his home on West 68th Street, it was announced today. The accident ap-

parently occurred when the elderly eccentric, who lived alone, attempted to find his way down the unlighted stairs to attend to the furnace. When Mr. Hammer did not appear at his office this morning, an employee, Miss Sarah White, became alarmed and notified the police, who broke into the house.

Jethro Hammer became known as . . .

He tossed the paper aside, drawing a long, relaxing breath. Everything was all right. Everything was going to be all right. Everything was going to be just as he had planned it would be.

The day went by, and another. The inquest was held. Death by misadventure. The funeral was held, attended by the heirs, the office employees, and a large crowd of curiosity seekers. A week went by. The business of settling Jethro Hammer's estate began. Then a month.

After that first feeling of apprehension, he'd had no further worries. He felt a little lonely, and very bored. He'd lived with his prospective murder for so long that he found himself almost lost now. He tried to find outside interests, to occupy himself in some way—books, parties, the theater, plans for a vacation as soon as it was possible. Everything seemed a little unimportant, somehow, and not very interesting.

Once or twice he found himself almost wishing the police had found that it was murder—with no clues pointing to him, of course. It would have given him something to watch and follow. Then he discovered a new game, planning how he would have hidden his tracks if the police had done so. That led to another: how he would have escaped, where he would have gone, and how he would have changed his identity if the police had learned that he had committed the crime. Finally he began planning what his defense would have been, at the trial, if they had caught him and brought him back after all.

Exactly thirty-one days after the murder of Jethro Hammer, the knock came at his door. He was sitting at his desk, the lights low, engaged in his elaborate game. He had just reached the point where his attorney made his closing plea to the jury, based on the information he had given the attorney before the trial started.

There were two plain-clothes men at the door. He recognized them at once for what they were. Before he could more than blink with surprise, one of them slipped a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and clicked them on his wrist.

The other one said, "You're under arrest. For the murder of Jethro Hammer."

"WHETHER I am innocent or guilty," he said to his lawyer, "is not your concern. It's the defense that I want to discuss with you. Because there's something I've got to know before I"—he didn't bother to say "we"—"can plan what the defense is to be."

Burgess Chidester, lawyer, looked at him gravely, "Suppose, my dear boy," he said in his beautiful rolling voice, "you simply tell me the facts." He'd had experience before with clients who insisted on planning the defense. "Then I can decide on and recommend the best line to follow."

"That's all very well," his client said, "except that I don't know all the facts."

He regarded Burgess Chidester thoughtfully. He not only knew him, but knew of him; and he hadn't the slightest doubt that the little matter of his being guilty would make no difference whatsoever to the great man. "You see, we must know the facts," he said, "so that we can prove them false. Believe me, I have considered every possible angle of this case for—a very long time."

Given the facts—at least, the one he needed most to know—and finding the way to refute them; and then, given Burgess Chidester's courtroom manner and appearance, the trial was going to be easy. If, of course, he could find out what he needed to know.

He had planned to engage Burgess Chidester if it ever got this far. Now he looked searchingly at the lawyer and concluded that he'd done wisely. Burgess Chidester was a tall, dignified, magnificently well-dressed man, with an air of authority. His face might have served as

a sculptor's model for a monument to Truth or Justice. He had a slightly aquiline nose, a firm, perfectly proportioned jaw, and a handsome mouth that managed to be both sympathetic and determined at the same time. There was an almost hypnotic quality to his bright brown eyes. And it did not detract from his appearance in the least that he was entirely bald, with not one single hair showing on his beautifully shaped head. The baldness was, in fact, just the right touch.

He had an actor's voice, on which he played as though it were a pipe organ. It could be sonorous and impressive, a magnificent thundering roar; it could hint subtly at unshed tears; it could drop to a dramatic and compelling whisper.

The fact that Burgess Chidester had managed, so far, to avoid any embarrassing inquiries into various shady transactions and shadier clients was a reassuring proof of his shrewdness and acumen.

Manwhile, Lawyer Chidester had been regarding his client with the same thoughtful stare. He knew in advance that winning this case would be important to him. Already he was figuring ways in which it would bring him in far more than his fee—it might, in fact, if he played it right, assure him a tidy little income for life.

"Of course, my boy," he said, "I'll do everything in my power for you."

His client resisted an impulse to say, "Climb down off that high horse, you old shyster." He restrained himself because, right now, he needed Burgess Chidester.

"Our defense," he said, "has got to be absolutely foolproof. We can't slip up anywhere—not *anywhere*, understand? We may have to conceal some facts, admit some, and be ready to answer others. And so, before we make any plans, we need to know that one thing. *How did the police find out?*"

That had been uppermost in his mind ever since the moment of his arrest, because his plans had been so complete, so perfect. They had covered every detail and allowed for every exigency that might arise. He had left nothing to chance, had left nothing undone. And then, for all his planning, two plain-clothes men had come to his door and arrested him.

How had it happened? He could see now that they had been working slowly and patiently in the month between the murder and his arrest. During that month nothing had appeared in the papers, there had been no outward signs of police activity. The unfortunate fatal accident to poor old Jethro Hammer was almost forgotten. Grass was already sprouting over his grave. And then: *"You are under arrest, for the murder of Jethro Hammer."* What had they found, and what had led them to it?

"How did the police find out?" he repeated. "That's the problem. Because, whatever it was, I have an answer for it. I assure you I thought in advance of everything that might come up. I didn't overlook a thing, not one thing."

"You must have overlooked one," Burgess Chidester said. There was a pause. The great trial lawyer frowned. "What you need," he said at last, "is a private detective."

The prisoner smiled inwardly. Yes, Burgess Chidester was definitely the right man for him. "You're right," he said. "Get me one."

LATER, when the lawyer had gone and he'd been taken back to his cell, he began to feel a pleasant excitement that had been missing from his life for the past month. He had something tangible now with which to concern himself. The plans of the past month for eluding the police and hiding himself, some of them highly colored—shipping on a tramp steamer, joining a carnival show, getting an inconspicuous job in a small town—they had been abstract plans that might never be put into effect. Similarly, until that night of the knock on his door, the plans for a defense were pure works of fiction, mental exercises, with no reason for existence. Now at last he had something definite with which to cope.

Just let this Mr. Melville Fairr, whoever he was, dig up that one essential fact he needed so urgently—and then what fools he and Burgess Chidester would make of the police and the prosecuting attorney! Maybe it was better this way, after all. Once he'd been tried and acquitted, he'd be free.

Melville Fairr had been highly recommended by Burgess Chidester. "An odd sort of a chap; but, then, private detectives so often are. Takes all sorts of cases, but he's been exceptionally successful in this sort of thing. Always works alone, and he seems to have no private life. Works with the police or against them, depending on the circumstances. Seems to be thoroughly dependable. I believe he could find out anything he set out to discover, no matter what it was."

He'd promptly told Burgess Chidester, "Hire him, and get him over here. I want to talk to him myself."

Now he waited. Being in a cell didn't bother him in the least. As he was not a convicted criminal, the regulations were not too stringent, and he had all the comforts he required: tobacco, papers, magazines, books, and time to think. Moreover, since he was there on a serious charge, he was in a cell by himself, and thus not forced to keep up idle conversation with some cellmate who was in for robbery, reckless driving, or assault and battery. The bunk was not as comfortable as the bed at home, the food was poor, and the lack of privacy was unpleasant; but these were minor inconveniences that could be temporarily endured.

He became impatient, waiting for Melville Fairr, because it was impossible to think ahead without that one vital piece of information. He could imagine his trial, setting and all. He could picture the judge, the jurors, the attorneys, and even the spectators; but he could not yet plan the defense. Oh, yes, there were tentative plans in the back of his mind. If the police had found a motive, he could prove that he had been far away from Jethro Hammer's house at the time of the murder. Or if they had found that he was at Jethro Hammer's house, he could prove that he had no motive and was only there for the most innocent of reasons. Even if they found both—well, he still had a line of defense to follow.

Only, he had to *know*.

In a pinch, if it were that necessary, he could even find another murderer to satisfy the police. He knew exactly who it would be, and how the evidence could be found. He'd thought of and planned for that in advance, too.

As he waited, he found himself developing an almost childlike faith in the powers of Melville Fairr. He must, he remembered, be rather careful about what he said to him. Burgess Chidester had warned him of that. Melville Fairr had, it seemed, some rather definite, though unconventional, ideas about honesty, justice, and human behavior. Well, he'd be able to cope with that, too.

He was impatient almost to the point of beginning to pace his cell when the guard called to him that he had a visitor. He stood for a moment, breathing hard, before he turned around to face the door. He felt the same mounting excitement he'd felt in Jethro Hammer's house, the same tightness in his stomach, the same pounding in his ears. The excitement of coming, at last, to something he'd anticipated for a long time.

Already he was beginning to look beyond. Once the trial was over, once he was free, there were other plans to make. If he proved that he could escape the penalty for one murder, it would be safe to commit others. And there was more than murder in his plans. Wealth, great wealth. People to wait on him, listening for his every wish, as though he were a king. Power—power to destroy those who hated him in any way he saw fit. There were at least two women . . .

He heard the rattle of keys and the opening and shutting of the cell door, an almost musical clang. Burgess Chidester had used his influence to arrange a private interview with Mr. Fairr. He heard the retreating footsteps of the guard fade to a shadow of sound.

Then he heard a soft, gentle, almost

whispering voice behind him. It called out his name. He could feel the pulse beating back of his ears like the rhythm of a band. The palms of his hands were wet and cold. He turned around.

"Well, Mr. Fairr . . ." he said. His voice died away on words that he'd suddenly forgotten.

The man who stood in his cell was the small, inconspicuous gray man of the subway trains.

CHAPTER II

Marked For Murder

A BIG GRAY CAT with one torn ear and a long scar over his right eye sat on the most comfortable chair in the shabby little living room and watched the door.

The sound of soft footsteps on the stairs reached his sensitive ears at last. The gray cat sat bolt upright. Yes, there it was, the welcome sound of the key turning. With one magnificent graceful leap he reached the door just before it opened.

"Well, good evening, Mister Thomas," Melville Fairr said, closing the door softly. "You must be hungry after all this time."

Mister Thomas made a happy, throaty noise, and began walking around Melville Fairr's feet. When the feet moved to the closet, and paused there for a long-drawn-out business of hanging up a coat and hat, he voiced a small but well mannered complaint. Anyone understanding his particular language could easily have translated it as "Help! Help! Sardines!"

"All right," Fairr said in mock sternness. "Don't be in such a hurry."

At last the sardines landed in Mister Thomas' dish, alongside of a bowl of milk, and Melville Fairr began making himself a pot of tea.

Twenty minutes later Mister Thomas finished washing the last vestige of sardine oil from his whiskers and bounded onto Melville Fairr's lap, to purr his appreciation. A friendly hand smoothed

"You must be hungry," he said to the cat.

his back, scratched his stomach, and stroked him under the chin.

There was an absent-minded feel, though, to the motions of the friendly hand. Mister Thomas, an intuitive beast, sensed trouble. He tried to express his sympathy and his undying friendship, by stretching, curling his tail around his paws, and rubbing his head against the rhythmically stroking hand. It didn't do any good, as far as he could tell. Finally he made a soft, half-purring, half-growling little sound to explain that he, too, had his troubles.

Suddenly his ears grew stiff. He sat upright in the friendly lap for a moment, then, brushing aside the hand, he leaped down to the floor and bounded over to the window sill. A moment later the

window was opened for him, and he moved slowly and cautiously out onto the fire escape. There was one long, growling cry, and he disappeared into the darkness. The cry had to do with love, and murder.

Melville Fairr sighed and returned to the chair, to the tea that was now too cool to enjoy and not cool enough to throw away.

The day had been unpleasant. A visit to a prison always depressed him. It reminded him too much of the orphanage where he had spent his first sixteen years. It reminded him even more of the reform farm where he'd spent the years between eighteen and twenty-one. And, most of all, of the years he himself had spent in prison.

The visit had made him remember the bedraggled, frightened, belligerent, and often miserable men and women he'd helped to send to prison, sometimes for life. It make him think, again, of the terrible urgency required for murder.

No one ever *wanted* to commit murder. Whatever the motive might be—greed, revenge, fear, lust, hate, pity, or simply the accumulation of unendurable irritations—the murderer was always driven to his crime by some frightful necessity from which he shrank, even to the last.

And yet there were those people in the world who were born to be murdered, who had to be murdered, more often than not through no fault or virtue of their own. Jethro Hammer had been one of them. Even before his birth he must have been marked as the victim of a crime of violence.

"Those who are marked for murder," Melville Fairr murmured, "get the kind of murder they deserve."

He rose, carried his teacup out to the kitchen, and poured the bitter, dark brown contents down the sink drain. Then he went back to his tiny living room and stood for a moment looking down at the desk.

A murderer had sought his help. Obliquely, to be sure, giving a false and yet plausible-sounding reason. *"Certain evidence . . . which will be of inestimable value to my lawyer and myself . . . in planning the defense. . . .* In *short, Mr. Fairr, if you can find out why the police pinned this crime on me . . ."*

"I could have told you why the police pinned this crime on you," Melville Fairr whispered to himself. "Because *I told* the police. . . ."

He'd been engaged, as a professional and licensed private detective, to find the means by which the murderer of Jethro Hammer would be set free. To conduct a certain investigation. To ask certain questions. To interview certain people. To discover certain facts . . .

He sighed and picked up a little black covered notebook from the desk. There was no investigation to carry out, no questions to ask, no people to interview. Because the facts he was expected to discover were already written down in the notebook. It was simply a question, now, of how he should use them.

He went back to his easy chair and opened the notebook. On the flyleaf was written, in his neat, precise hand, "Notes on the murder of Jethro Hammer."

The first entry on the first page read, "I was called to Jethro Hammer's office for an interview . . ." Its date, carefully written down just above the line "Before the Murder," was three years, almost to the day, before Jethro Hammer's death.

THE TELEPHONE had rung at exactly five minutes after eight, startling Mister Thomas and waking Melville Fairr. A cold, businesslike feminine voice on the other end of the line asked, "Are you Mr. Fairr? Mr. Melville Fairr? Mr. Jethro Hammer would like to see you, at eleven-fifteen this morning. The address is . . ." It was like an order for a command performance. The "Thank you, Mr. Fairr" was as automatic as the click of the receiver.

He'd heard of Jethro Hammer, the hermit of Wall Street, the millionaire miser. It wasn't surprising to Melville Fairr that Jethro Hammer might need the services of a private detective.

He fed Mister Thomas raw hamburger mixed with corn flakes, boiled himself an egg, and made two slices of toast. Then he took the subway down to lower Manhattan.

The address was a dingy little office high in an old building that looked down over Pearl Street. There was a tiny outer room, split in half by a brown wood railing. No chairs for waiting visitors, just a shabby, golden-oak desk and straight-backed chair inside the railing.

A tired, gray-haired, spinsterish-looking woman behind the desk greeted him as he came in with a nod, an acknowledgment that he was there. She was as shabby as the office. Her dark woolen skirt hung unevenly, and half an inch of soiled slip showed at the back. Her black oxfords were badly scuffed and worn.

She asked his name in the same cold voice he'd heard over the telephone, told him to wait, and knocked at the door of the inner office. "Mr. Fairr is here, Mr. Hammer."

There was a moment's pause. The door was unlocked from the inside, but not opened. She turned to him. "Please go right in, Mr. Fairr."

As he reached for the knob, suddenly her hand was on his arm. Her eyes looked into his, bright with fear. They were large, dark, lovely eyes, curiously inappropriate in her thin, pale, homely face. *"Mr. Fairr . . ."* It was a whisper.

She had something to tell him, and he was curious to know what it was. Then he saw the doorknob turning, moved from within; her face went back to a spinsterish mask, and the office door opened. He never saw her again until the day after Jethro Hammer's murder.

He went on into the so-closely-guarded inner office. It, too, was tiny, dingy, and undecorated. Another shabby golden-oak desk, two straight-backed chairs, an enormous safe, and a patent-medicine wall calendar. That was all.

Fairr had felt a certain excitement at the prospect of meeting Jethro Hammer, who was famous for paying no visits and receiving no visitors; at being admitted to the inner office of Jethro Hammer, from which his widespread web of financial transactions was woven. It was a little like going into an inner shrine.

Now, this dreary little room, with the dirty windows looking down into a court, the worn, uncarpeted floor, the ugly, uncomfortable furniture— Well, yes, it *was* fitting, come to think of it. Certainly it fitted the thin, black-clad man who'd opened the door and then scuttled behind his desk.

"You don't look very strong," Jethro Hammer said complainingly. He had a thin, whining voice.

Melville Fairr started to say, "If you're looking for a bodyguard, I can recommend an ex-prizefighter—" He caught himself and said, "I'm stronger than I look, and in excellent health." Nobody could guard a man so marked for death as Jethro Hammer. Perhaps, he thought with a quickening of the nerves, that wasn't what he was to be required to do.

He learned very quickly what he *was* required to do. "Frequently," Jethro Hammer said, "I carry valuable securities to and from my office, in my brief case. For reasons of my own, I prefer not to ask for police protection. Therefore . . ."

Melville Fairr didn't believe the explanation. He said, modestly and smiling, "You want me to keep you from being robbed—or murdered?"

"MURDERED?" Jethro Hammer said. "Who would want to murder a harmless old man like me?" His thin, frail hands played aimlessly with the papers on his desk. "That's very funny, you know," he said. "Anyone wanting to murder me. Who? Why? No one will benefit by my death."

"That's right," Fairr said. "No one will be made happier by it." He said it, smiling and comfortingly, with all the warmth he could put in the words. *Yet there were men who had to be killed, who had been marked for it even before their birth.* "And I'm sure you've never done anybody any harm," he told Jethro Hammer. It was a stock remark to be made to frightened men.

"Not intentionally," Jethro Hammer

said. "Believe me, not intentionally. At least, not to anyone I cared—" His voice broke. There was a moment's silence. Then he said, coldly and quietly, "Mr. Fairr, you've been recommended to me very highly. There are certain things I want you to do . . ."

He explained them, in considerable detail. Then he showed Fairr to the corridor door, a door that was both locked and bolted. He unlocked it and stood for a moment, one bluish, trembling old hand on the knob.

"I assure you," he said, "I assure you, there's no danger. No one would want to hurt a sick old man like me. Believe me, Mr. Fairr. Look at me. You can see I'm ill, very ill, and old, very old. Ill, and old, and helpless. No one would want to hurt me, I assure you, I assure you."

He stood there for a moment, framed in the doorway, a thin, tired, trembling figure. The wispy hair that clung to his yellow-skinned skull was a dirty gray, his frightened old face fishy-white.

He then said coldly, "Miss White will send you a check on the first of each month. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Fairr."

The door closed suddenly. A key turned in the lock, and a bolt was shot back. Melville Fairr never heard another word from his client, Jethro Hammer.

For three years he walked down the street on which Jethro Hammer lived at precisely fifteen minutes after seven every week-day morning, watching until the old man appeared at the doorway of his house. He followed him to the Seventy-second Street subway station, boarded the same car, stepped off with him at Rector Street, and walked close behind him to the door of his office. And in the early evening he reversed his course, from the corridor outside the office to the unlighted old house on West Sixty-eighth Street.

A one-room office was rented for him, next door to Jethro Hammer's, to give him an excuse for entering the building so regularly in the morning and leaving it so regularly at night. Daily he unlocked the door, walked in, tore a leaf off the calendar, walked out again, shutting the door behind him, and went down the stairs. At night he came up the stairs in time to cover old Jethro Hammer's departure from his office, ride down the elevator with him, and follow inconspicuously, always pretending to be engrossed in a magazine or newspaper, but always with one hand tense on the small gun in his right coat pocket, until the last few minutes when he walked back and forth in front of the dreary house listening for the heavy door to be bolted and watching for a dim light to show in the windows.

That glimmer of light was his signal that he was through for the day, through to go home to his shabby little apartment and the waiting, hungry Mister Thomas.

Day after day, for three years, the same routine. His fee arrived every month, in an envelope addressed in the neat, Spencerian handwriting of Miss Sarah White.

Then at last, as he had always anticipated, the routine was broken. It was a cold night, clear and cold, with dirty white snow piled in curb-high heaps, and a starlit sky. Melville Fairr shivered as he walked slowly up the last half-block. For the moment he wasn't thinking of old Jethro Hammer. He was hoping that the janitor had let Mister Thomas back in the house, and thinking of the soup waiting to be heated on the little stove.

He moved up and down across the street, breathing on his hands, as he watched the tired old man climb slowly up the brownstone steps that led to his empty house. He stood, aching with cold, while the door was opened. He listened, and heard the sound of the great, heavy lock in the frosty silence.

But the dim light didn't appear in the window.

MELVILLE FAIRR waited, holding his breath, his frostbitten fingers clenched inside his gray overcoat pockets. From where he watched he could see the tiny areaway that ran alongside the old house, a crevice of shadows. He knew that it opened only into the tiny service

A key clicked in the lock and a bolt was shot back.

yard back of the house, that Jethro Hammer had long since had it bricked off from all other buildings.

Suddenly a figure appeared in the areaway, hardly more than a shadow. Melville Fairr crossed the street, quickly and silently, and stood at the entrance to the areaway. There were footsteps clicking on the paving, made sharp by the still, cold air. The figure paused at the entrance to the street, and Fairr's fingers—warmer now—gripped the little gun.

There were two more footsteps, and Fairr made one quick move, pinning a pair of arms behind a back. To his surprise, there was no struggle and no outcry. The arms tightened and then went limp in his grasp. There was a faint, almost sobbing sigh, and that was all.

He wheeled his captive around and looked at the most beautiful and most frightened girl he'd ever seen. Her face was like a sculptor's model. It was pale, not blue-pale, but rich cream-pale. Her odd-shaped mouth was deep red in the half-light; her eyes were big and very dark, and terrified. Great coils of inky black hair fell over the shoulders of her light gray coat. She was shivering with the cold, and she was much too scared to scream.

"I'm afraid you're getting a chill," Fairr said very gently. "Really, you aren't dressed warmly enough for a night like this."

She didn't seem to hear him, and she certainly didn't seem to be afraid of him. But then, only a very few people were ever afraid of Melville Fairr.

"*He* came in," she whispered, talking

to herself. She spoke with a curious—and rather pleasant—accent. "I did not think—not so soon!" Then she stared at Fairr. "Who are you? Are you his friend?"

"The only one, I think," Fairr said mildly. "And why are you prowling around Jethro Hammer's house?"

"I am his daughter," she said.

Melville Fairr looked at her again for a long moment. He drew one slow, steady breath before he dared to speak.

"If you're his daughter," he said, managing to keep his voice controlled, "why don't you go up the steps and ring the bell and walk in the door?"

"*Dios!*" she said. Then she laughed, a shrill, brittle laugh. "He has never seen me. He does not know—" Her voice broke off, and she stared up at the unlighted house. Her fingers tightened on his arm. "*They* will kill him, you know."

Suddenly she looked full at him, remembering where she was, and realized she'd been talking to a stranger. "*Wait!*" Melville Fairr said, but she'd pulled away from him and was halfway to the corner before he could make a move. She ran like a little girl, despite her high heels. Melville Fairr started to move after her, and then stopped.

The gray coat had been far too thin for late winter weather, but it had been an expensive one. The high-heeled black suéde sandals were beautifully made for her small feet. Her hair was exquisitely dressed, and by a professional hand. Yet, he reflected, watching her run for the cab and remembering her lovely little face, she couldn't have been much more than twenty.

For a long time he paced up and down in front of the house. The light didn't appear in the windows. It was like watching for a sleeping person to wake.

Would there be some outcry from the house, some sign? Melville Fairr thought not. This, he sensed, was what he and Jethro Hammer had been waiting for, what *he* had been hired to wait for.

He felt an impulse to break into the house, call the police, rouse the neighborhood, perhaps even still save the old man's life. He had grown fond of Jethro Hammer, though they had never exchanged a word since that first meeting in the dreary office. But he'd had his instructions, and by this time he knew the reason for them. At last, though, it was because of his fondness for Jethro Hammer that he walked briskly and casually away from the old house where Jethro Hammer had just been murdered.

He went home, to warm his stiffened fingers over the tiny radiator, to mix bread and milk and egg for a loudly demanding Mister Thomas, to brew scalding tea and make toast and soup for himself. He tucked himself into bed, with Mister Thomas warmly purring at his feet, read a few pages of the latest comic book, and slept.

AT fifteen minutes after seven, the next morning, he was strolling back and forth across the street from Jethro Hammer's house, as he had done for the past three years. It was a cold gray morning. The sky was thick with fog, and the street was still. Drifted snow lay across the steps of Jethro Hammer's house.

Melville Fairr stopped pacing up and down the sidewalk across from the house, walked to the corner drugstore, and called Sarah White. She notified the police.

"Accidental death," the coroner called it.

"An act of simple justice," Melville Fairr said.

He said the same thing a month later, when the arrest was made on the strength of his evidence against the murderer.

Murder was so easy. Easy and quick and profitable, and yet so difficult. How many bored and ambitious wives, Melville Fairr wondered, had procured poison for well-to-do in-laws, and ended, at the last terrible moment, by pouring the mixture down the kitchen drain, to the future confusion of apprentice plumbers. How many harassed business associates . . . such an easy thing, the twist of an ankle on a stairway . . . and then,

an embarrassed tripping on the stairs, a stammered apology, and the moment gone. How many jealously enraged—or restless—husbands, pretending to clean a hunting gun, or tampering with a garage door, only to put away the damned device before it could do its deed. How many young women, holding tiny pillows over the faces of sleeping babies, and then, just as the breathing began to fail, hurling the pillow into a corner and carrying the helpless little creature to the nearest and most hospitable-looking doorstep.

Yet the murderer didn't always turn back. And when he did not, something had to drive him on.

And the victim, what about him? If he didn't know, if he hadn't been warned, could he, did he, sense what was waiting for him in the next shadow down the street? Did those who were born to be murdered feel, in one of those dark and unexplored places of the mind, that some day someone . . .

If the victim did know, what would he do? Wait? Fight? Hide?

Jethro Hammer had tried, and terribly, to keep alive. For what reason? He had been a sick, lonely, miserly old man, obsessed with fear. It hadn't been fear of death, Melville Fairr reflected. A man who had dared and defied death as Jethro Hammer had, didn't hide from it in such desperation in his weary and lonely years. It must have seemed so pleasant, and so restful, at Jethro Hammer's age. Then why had he made so great an effort to escape his inevitable murder?

There had been a reason, there must have been a reason. That life was a possession, and that Jethro Hammer couldn't bear to see anything, large or small, taken from him? That could be the answer, but Fairr didn't think it was.

Was it that there had been something he had to accomplish, something he had to do before he was murdered? Was that it? And if that was it, had he failed?

Fairr went out into his little kitchenette and lighted the gas under the teakettle. Then he went back into his shabby living room and opened the black notebook again.

He was going to write a letter before the night was over, and the letter would be a life-or-death decision to the man who received it. He was glad, now, that he was a man of unquenchable curiosity, and that, during the three years he'd followed old Jethro Hammer, he'd found one holiday week end to spend in Leesville, Ohio.

For it was important to understand those dark beginnings which determined why he was to be murdered. . . .

CHAPTER III

Never Again

WILL DONAHUE, blacksmith, had been a simple-hearted, friendly man who loved children, especially his own. Of the nine he'd fathered, five had survived the perils of infancy, and he would have welcomed five more. He'd wept bitterly over those he'd lost, and buried them extravagantly in white satin coffins ordered specially from Cincinnati. On those who survived he lavished affection, attention and the best of everything he could manage to provide for Will, Jr., Mary Margaret, Robert Emmet, John Patrick, and the baby, Sally.

The blacksmith shop and the ten-acre farm never did very well, and there was always a note to meet at the bank. But the five young Donahues were the best-dressed children in Leesville, Ohio, and Sally's Christmas doll came all the way from Chicago by mail order.

Will Donahue was a big, happy, hard-working man, with a broad freckled face and a lot of mussed-up sandy hair. He was a tinkerer and a putterer; give him a soft piece of metal, and he'd hammer it into a new kind of lock; give him a fine piece of hardwood, and he'd work it into a sturdy and polished door-frame. There wasn't a horse for miles around Leesville he couldn't shoe, or a man who didn't trust him, or a stray dog that didn't hang around the blacksmith shop for scraps stolen from the Donahue kitchen when

Lizzie Donahue was looking the other way.

So it was only natural that when a tiny, sickly, two-year-old boy—as near as anyone could guess his age, poor mite—was found abandoned, wailing miserably, in a pew of St. Joseph's Church, that Will Donahue should take him home.

"You've brought home dogs and cats," Lizzie Donahue said, "and a broken-legged horse, and a hurt rabbit, but I don't call to mind that you've every brought home a babe."

"It's only for tonight," Will apologized. He'd said it about the dogs and the cats and the broken-legged horse and the hurt rabbit.

In a few days, Lizzie Donahue began cutting down one of John Patrick's old suits for the newcomer, and he became a member of the family. After their first shyness had worn off, the young Donahues welcomed him warmly. After all, a baby was pleasant to have around the house. The trouble was, though, he wouldn't play like other babies. He didn't respond to the puppy Robert Emmett brought him, he didn't reach for the ball John Patrick rolled to him, he didn't giggle and clap his hands when Will, Jr., tossed him toward the ceiling. Nor, on the other hand, did he howl with protest when Mary Margaret dressed and undressed him.

It worried them all, too, that he didn't speak.

"He could speak," Will Donahue assured old Father Umland. "He's not dumb, God be thanked. Maybe it's that he's been frightened. He'll get over it."

Father Umland said gently, "It could be that the child's a foreigner. Our language would be strange to him. If you keep him, Will, be very easy with him for a bit."

"We'll keep him," Will said, almost roughly. "He was sent to us."

No one ever knew, of course, whether Will's or Father Umland's theory regarding the baby's silence had been right. But one night, some three months after his arrival, he looked up from the floor at Will Donahue and said, clearly and distinctly, holding out his hands, "Papa. Up."

"Praise be!" Will Donahue said. And he lifted the boy clear up to the ceiling.

After that he lavished more attention and affection than ever on the boy. The young Donahues felt no jealousy. After all, their father lavished the same amount of affection and attention on them, and on the dog he'd brought home from the pound, and the kitten he'd found in an alleyway, and on the baby goat he'd brought home to John Patrick for a pet.

Yet a problem was growing in Will Donahue's mind. There had to be a name for the child. For months they'd called him, among themselves, the Baby. But a name had to be found for him. And, strangely enough, Will could not bring himself to give him the name of Donahue.

True, he was a son—and yet he was not a son. He had not been conceived, nor born, in the big carved walnut bed that had been Lizzie's wedding present from her ma and pa.

Good Will Donahue spent more than a few long, anxious afternoons in his shop, pondering the problem. The adopted boy would be his son in every way. He would share in all the advantages that were to be given Will, Jr., and Robert Emmett and John Patrick; that would have been given Charles, and Francis Joseph, and Michael if they'd lived. And yet—the name?

He kept remembering that as far as he was concerned the boy had been born at the approximate age of two years (it was rather hard to be exact, since was so undersized and frail, and yet sc bright) in a pew of St. Joseph's Church.

Then one afternoon Father Umland dropped by the shop to inquire after the health of the boy, and Will explained the problem to him. Father Umland understood. After a little thought, he advanced the suggestion that the boy be given another name entirely. Jethro, for instance. After the janitor of St. Joseph's, who'd found him. And the last name? Will discarded the obvious Smith, Jones, Perkins, and Brown. He began looking around the

shop. Shoes, nails, anvil, forge, tongs . . .

The boy was finally name Jethro Hammer.

And so he was christened. He was entered on the town records as "Jethro Hammer, adopted child of Will Donahue. Age unknown. Male. White." (Old Mrs. Mizner always swore he had Indian blood, but then she was past eighty, and not too clear in her mind, and no one paid any attention to her, poor old lady.) He had a standing in the community now; he was named, he had a family, he was a minor citizen of the town.

Trouble was, though, nobody liked him.

LIZZIE DONAHUE tried to, poor little half-starved tyke that he was. She bathed him, clothed him, fed him, and mothered him as best she could. She said over and over to the neighbors, "He's such a *good* baby." That was it—though she wouldn't have admitted it—he was too good. If he'd flown into a baby rage at being washed, she could have spanked him. If he'd cried, she could have picked him up and comforted him.

If only she could get him to laugh. Just once!

Perhaps, after the new baby came—! Everybody laughed at babies.

She was resting out on the front stoop the afternoon Allie Miller came to call. She'd never liked Allie, and she liked her even less now. A mean nosy woman, like her husband, she'd told Will more than once.

"So the new one will be here any day," Allie said. "I should think you'd be afraid, with *that* one in the house. He's a gypsy child, if you ask me, or worse. And I've heard stories . . ." she told a number of them. "Aren't you afraid he'll put some curse on the new little one?"

"No," Lizzie Donahue said hoarsely. "You'd better go home." She never spoke to Allie Miller again.

It was only a few minutes until small Jethro climbed up the steps to her, held out his hand, and said his first sentence. "Flower—for—mama." It was a wilted, pathetic field daisy. Lizzie Donahue threw

She ran like a little girl despite her high heels.

it on the porch floor and ran into the house.

Three o'clock the next morning, after a long, bad time, Sally—christened Sarah Elizabeth Donahue—was born. So bad, indeed, that Will Donahue called in a doctor, and, finally, Father Umland, and thanked heaven that the children didn't wake. Jethro, though, was awake; on one of Will's pacings of the room he saw the little face staring up from the children's bed. The black eyes weren't staring at him, but at the ceiling, and there were tears in them. It startled Will Dona-

hue. He'd never seen tears in the baby's eyes before. He reached to pick him up and comfort him, but then there was a cry, and then Father Umland called.

It was two days before they let Lizzie see the new baby. She was a beauty, no doubt about that. Perfect little features, perfect little hands, and perfect curling toes. Bright round eyes, and a mist of sun-colored hair. Only, one leg was a good inch shorter than the other, tiny, and misshapen.

The neighbor women expected Lizzie to weep and wring her hands when she knew. But she was quiet, perhaps too quiet. After they'd left her alone, she whispered, "Some curse—on the new little one—"

She was good to Jethro, always. She washed him, and fed him, and dressed him, and, in time, sent him off to school. But she hated him. And he knew it.

In time, the people of Leesville began to remark to each other that Will Donahue had gotten a bad bargain. Not that anyone, of course, would have said as much to Will himself. And actually there was nothing definite that could be said. The boy was honest and well behaved, and diligent in school. And yet there was —well, something . . .

Perhaps it was because he remained thin and sickly in spite of Lizzie Donahue's care and cooking, though nothing was ever actually wrong with him.

"He's never actually *sick*," a neighbor once said, "but he never looks *well*." He looked frail, but he was strong and wiry, able to do a man's work at the age of twelve, and willing to do it.

Or perhaps it was because he was so smart in school, because he was shrewd and calculating even at the age of six. From the first grade on, he carried off all the prizes in school, delighting Will Donahue ("I knew he was a bright boy, first minute I laid eyes on him"), disconcerting the young Donahues, who were too concerned with games, fishing, hunting, and parties to give much time to scholarship, and giving the townspeople something to talk about ("I hold with getting an eddication, it's a fine thing for a boy, but there's a limit").

There wasn't a thing, really, to put a finger on. Jethro Hammer was a good, hard-working boy. He did well in school, he was far more helpful to his foster-father around the farm and in the shop than the Donahue boys themselves. He was smart, he was honest, he was polite. Only nobody liked him.

Yet there were two people—

Will Donahue himself did like the boy. But it was in the abstract, warm-hearted way he liked his own kids, and the neighbors' kids, and the boys who hung around the blacksmith shop, and the little giggling girls who came over to play with Maggie, and the darkie youngsters over in shanty town, and the babies who cried in church during the sermon, and the Eyetalian kids with their beautiful little ivory-colored faces, and all the others. Yes, and the kittens and colts and puppies and lambs and baby goats. Will Donahue just liked the young of all species, and Jethro happened to be one of them. Only in those days when Jethro was growing up, Will was a hard-worked and busy man, and somehow there never was a chance for them to get acquainted.

THEN, there was Sally. For some strange reason no one could fathom, she worshiped him from the time she was in her cradle. If she cried, it was Jethro who could always comfort and quiet her. If she laughed, it was because he'd found some way to amuse her. It seemed, too, as though he was fond of her. He made toys for her, he built a little wagon in which to pull her about, he bought her small gifts with the spending money he earned in Will Donahue's shop, he fetched and carried for her. He taught her to walk when no one else thought she'd ever learn; he made her a little crutch and showed her how to hold it; he guided her and steadied her uncertain little feet.

She was a gay, laughing, giggling, irrepressible baby, and a beautiful one. Her fair hair was soft and silky and fell into curls at the touch of a finger. Everything amused her, the simplest toy pleased her,

the slightest attention delighted her. If she was left alone in her crib, she would lie humming happily to herself.

The curious thing, however, was that with all young Jethro did for Sally no one ever saw him show any affection for her. He was always good to her, and he was never very far away from her, but when he spoke to her—well, yes, he was polite, but there was no warmth in his voice. He took her arm to help her up from her chair, but there never seemed to be affection in his touch.

YEARS went by. Will Donahue worked hard to provide for the young Donahues. Jethro always worked with him after school. Bill grew up, married, and became head of a feed store. Robert Emmett became the wild one. More than once Jethro paid off his debts out of his own meager allowance. Maggie grew up to be a beauty—black hair, red lips, provocative eyes, and insistent demands for new clothes. It was Maggie who managed the household after she was fifteen. And John Patrick flunked the last three grades in school and took to writing poetry.

More years passed. It was in 1897, when Jethro was just twenty-one years old, that Will Donahue, who took in all kinds of small repair jobs in the shop, invented and perfected so necessary and simple an improvement in the sewing machine that it made them all rich.

Lizzie lived just long enough to enjoy a fine fur coat and a diamond brooch. Then, quietly and unobtrusively, on an evening when nobody was at home save Jethro, she died—of weariness, perhaps. Will came home, found Jethro sitting at her bedside, and collapsed.

The young Donahues, in their expensive new black clothes, wept noisily at the funeral. Jethro Hammer sat like a stone, his handsome dark young face impassive. The townspeople commented on it critically later. Of course, he had been seen to grip young Sally's hand once, and he had taken Will Donahue's arm, going down the steps to the mourners' carriage. Still, hadn't Lizzie Donahue been like a mother to him all these years since he was found in a pew of St. Joseph's Church? And he hadn't shed a tear!

In later years, though, whenever the Donahue family was discussed, Martha Alling—that was old Mrs. Alling's unmarried daughter—*would* talk about Lizzie Donahue's funeral. How Jethro Hammer had sat there like a stone, all during the singing and that lovely sermon. And then, out at the cemetery, he'd taken a flower out from under his coat and thrown it into the grave. Just an ordinary wild daisy that a person could pick up anywhere.

THEN the Donahue family moved to New York, including Jethro Hammer and old Will Donahue.

Old? He was only sixty-four. But it had all happened so suddenly. From a lifetime of comfortable and well-fed poverty, he'd come overnight into possession of money he couldn't even count. From the warm, shabby little farmhouse just outside Leesville he'd been whisked to the New York mansion that Maggie had picked out. And in the process he'd lost much. He'd lost the little shop where he'd been busy and happy, tinkering and puttering. He'd lost his friends and neighbors, and the children that used to hang around the forge. Finally, he'd lost Lizzie. And sometimes, now, it seemed to him, vaguely and unhappily, that he'd lost the young Donahues as well. He changed in the course of a year from a hard-working, good-hearted, happy blacksmith and m chanic to a sick, broken, bewildered old man.

He'd been proud of the five young Donahues. Bill was well established as a feed-and-seed dealer; he'd married Minnie Snoddy, youngest and prettiest of the six Snoddy girls, and he had a strong, healthy son—old Will's first grandchild. Robert Emmett had a fine mechanical mind; he'd been the first in Leesville to drive a horseless carriage and learn to repair it. Maggie was admitted to be the most beautiful girl in Leesville, and she was engaged to the cashier of the First National Bank. John Patrick, to be sure,

spent too much of his time with his nose buried in books, but wasn't he the only one in Leesville who could write poetry? There had been poets before among the Donahues. And then there was Sally, the little lame one, growing up to be as pretty as a picture, adored and admired by everybody, and loving gaiety and fun so that no one remembered her limp.

And, too, the lost little baby he'd carried out of St. Joseph's Church that cold, bad night, had grown to be as fine a son as anyone might want—honest, hard-working, and reliable. A little on the solemn side, perhaps, but with a good heart in him.

Now it seemed to him that he'd lost the five young Donahues, along with Lizzie and the shop.

Bill assumed the position of head of the family and manager of old Will's business affairs. Robert Emmett went in for motorcars, race-track driving, and chorus girls. Maggie hired the 1900 version of a social secretary. John Patrick went on a tour of Europe. Sally, the baby, just wanted to have fun.

Jethro Hammer, though, didn't seem to care much for New York. And, according to Maggie, he was no social asset. He spent most of his time with old Will.

Jethro had grown into a thin young man with a pale, expressionless face and dark, expressionless eyes. He never smiled, and he seldom had anything to say. He helped Will in and out of his carriage (Will distrusted motorcars to the very last), and he saw to the management of the house. He sat patiently for hours, listening to Will's long, rambling, and often confused reminiscences about the early days in Leesville. And he followed Sally everywhere with his eyes.

Again and again she tried to draw him out into the whirl of fun and excitement that was New York, but she never succeeded. It might have been because old Will would then have been left entirely alone.

Maggie had already become Marguerite when Bill's wife, born Minnie Snoddy, decided that Donahue was not a sufficiently aristocratic name. She had her next box of calling cards engraved "Donohough." Maggie immediately followed suit, and that may have been what finally broke the old man's heart.

He was ill for only a few days. The young Donahues were all too absorbed in their own affairs to realize that it was to be his last illness. Jethro stayed with him, all day and all night, not sleeping for more than a few minutes at a time. No one knew, then or ever, what old Will and Jethro said to each other—if they said anything at all. The five young Donahues were all away from home the night that old Will died.

They gave him a magnificent and fashionable funeral. They wept for him, and honestly. Because, looking at the tired old man, with the lines of sorrow and anxiety the expensive undertaker hadn't been able to conceal on his face, they remembered. The doll, brought all the way from Chicago. The hand-made sled, with forged iron runners. The kitten that unexpectedly stuck a happy little face out of Will Donahue's pocket on Sally's birthday. Will arguing with the principal that John Patrick would study what he liked in school, and no nonsense about it. The money Will had borrowed to set Bill up in business. Maggie's first party dress. And all the other things.

IT OFFENDED THEM that Jethro Hammer didn't weep. He sat apart from them, his sallow face quiet and impassive, his eyes dry as old bones. He listened respectfully to the sermon; he declined, politely and unobtrusively, to go up for a last look at poor old Will Donahue.

The lawyers weren't called in till two days after the funeral, because Maggie was in a state of callapse, with a trained nurse, two maids, and a room full of flowers, but when the lawyers were called in, they were the best that could be bought. Because simple-hearted, friendly old Will Donahue hadn't thought to leave a last will and testament. He'd just assumed that after he was gone the children would divide everything between them,

One blow sent the man reeling backward.

the way they always had when he was alive and they were little.

The children didn't see it that way. They brought in the lawyers and they called a conference.

The lawyer said, "You'd better call in this—Jethro Hammer."

Maggie sent a maid to call him. He came down from the little room behind the servants' quarters to which he'd moved from the cubicle adjoining old Will's bedroom the day after old Will's death. He sat on a straight-backed chair, near the door.

"Mr. Hammer," the lawyer said pompously, "you must understand this. You are not a natural son of the late Will Donahue. Nor are you, legally, an adopted son. We have checked the records very carefully and the inheritance laws of the state of Ohio, of which the late Mr. Donahue was a resident at the time of his death. The records at Leesville, made at the time you were christened, do not constitute legal adoption. Therefore, I regret to tell you, you have no claim on the estate."

"Claim?" Jethro said. No one had ever seen him look bewildered before. "Why should I make any claim?"

The lawyer and the Donahues looked at each other with obvious relief.

Suddenly the Donahues began to talk at once. Sally just said, "Jethro!" and was silent. Bill—W. James Donohough II—strode across the room and said loudly, too

loudly, "Believe me, Jethro, we'll always take care of you. Why, you're—"

Mignon, née Minnie, said shrilly, "You're almost like one of the family."

"Look, Jethro," Bob said. "You know a lot about cars. Why don't you come and work for me? I need a good chauffeur."

"Really," Maggie said warmly. "Just get a good job, and make something of yourself."

"If you could operate a typing machine," John Patrick said (he'd decided to become an author), "I'd give you a job myself."

W. James Donohough II put down his glass of port. He said, "We all want to be fair with you, Jethro. I've discussed this with the lawyers. If it's perhaps a matter of a few thousand dollars to set you up in business . . ."

Jethro rose. He said, "I can manage without it."

He walked out of the room, leaving them staring after him. He walked on out of the house. February snow was falling, but he didn't pause for an overcoat, a hat, or a muffler. Everything he had in the world, save for the clothes he stood up in, and a little less than a dollar in his pockets, he left in the little room behind the servants' quarters. But he carried old Will Donahue's diary with him.

He was just closing the door when it was pulled open behind him. Sally, her face bright-pink from weeping, had limped hurriedly along the downstairs hall. Now, having caught up with him, she could think of nothing to say.

He looked at her impassively, standing there hatless, coatless, penniless in the snow. His face was as blank as a mask. He said, "Good-by, Sally," turned, and went slowly down the steps.

Sally stared after him. Then she gasped, "Good-by," burst into fresh tears, fled back into the house, and slammed the door. She never saw him again.

The Donohoughs conveniently forgot him. It was twenty years before he returned, a rich man, to bring suit against the heirs of old Will Donahue for all accrued royalties from the sewing machine patent on the grounds—as set forth in old Will's diary—that he, Jethro, and not old Will, had invented it.

CHAPTER IV

Motives for Murder?

LITTLE MR. MELVILLE FAIRR yawned, stretched, and shivered. It was very late, and the room was getting cold. He went to the desk and picked up his pen. There still was that letter to write before the night was over, a letter that was life or death to the man who would receive it by a special messenger in the morning. After a minute, though, he put the pen down. There were some facts in the little black notebook he still had to consider, and in the kitchen the teakettle was rapidly boiling away. For a minute he stood by the window, listening for the still-absent Mister Thomas. At last he returned to his easy chair, the tea at his elbow.

Melville Fairr always had found it a simple matter to make friends with people he needed to know. It was, in fact, the young Donahues themselves—*old* Donahues now, of course—who told him what he wanted to find out. There was still that gap to fill in, however: the twenty years that had elapsed after Jethro Hammer walked out of the Donahue mansion and disappeared into the February snow. The secret of those twenty years was something Fairr did not learn until after Jethro Hammer's death.

By the time he had made the trip to Leesville, driven by his own curiosity, he had begun to realize that Jethro Hammer had employed him for a far different reason from merely acting as bodyguard twice a day. It might have been that Jethro Hammer knew of Fairr's reputation and his famous curiosity. For a long time, though, Fairr was in the dark as to what his employer wanted him to do. He knew there was a purpose, a deadly purpose; he knew there was a reason why Jethro Hammer had to stay alive

until just the right time for him to be murdered, but in those days he did not know what the reason was.

Surely Jethro Hammer must have been aware of what his bodyguard was doing in his spare time. He gave no sign of approval or disapproval; but, Fairr reflected, that discreet investigation must have been one of the things old Jethro Hammer wanted him to do. There had been, for instance, the little matter of meeting the well-known and expensive lawyer who had handled the lawsuit for the Donahue family—Martin Reynolds, of Burke, Reynolds, and Chidester. That had been arranged by finding someone who had invited him frequently to the club to which Reynolds belonged. It ook only two or three visits before lawyer Reynolds was telling Melville Fairr all of what had gone on in the days before the suit, and how it was lost by the young Donahues. What had happened to them after that, Fairr was able to find out by himself.

THE DRAWING ROOM of the Countess d'Abazoli, the former Marguerite Donohough (born Maggie Donahue) was greatly admired in New York, though in 1921 families were giving up their Fifth Avenue mansions and moving into penthouses, Marguerite clung to her splendor and her drawing room, which had been created by the most expensive firm of decorators in New York. It was a large, high-ceilinged, deceptively simple room, with pale green walls, deep green draperies, Chinese tapestries, delicately ornat furniture, and a highly flattering portrait of the Countess herself.

The Countess d'Abazoli, then in her early fifties, was what old Will Donahue would have called "a fine figure of a woman." Her magnificent dark hair had turned a becoming and carefully tended gray, and her Irish blue eyes were as provocative as ever. Her massaged and exercised figure showed off to good advantage the clothes for which she made an annual trip to Paris. She appeared at her best in the famous drawing room, receiving guests, the Count at her side. She'd married him only five years before, after what she enjoyed describing as a whirlwind courtship. True, he was some twenty years younger than she, but she assured her friends that it was a love match, pure and simple. "He just swept me off my feet."

The Count himself, Enrico d'Abazoli (his wife always called him Ricky), was a small, wiry man, with thin, smiling lips that curled up from his strong, yellowish teeth when he spoke. His delightful manner, his slight, amusing accent, and his charming at entiveness to his wife were greatly admired.

They made a striking couple, standing before the fireplace in the drawing room, with the long, slanting rays of late afternoon sunlight adding a glow to her hair. This afternoon, however, it was not a social occasion; it was a family conclave which had been hastily called one hour after the first papers in Jethro Hammer's suit were served.

Lawyer Reynolds, of course, was the first to arrive, an enormous brief case under his arm, and a reassuring look on his plump pink face, like a doctor who maintained a cheerful bedside manner even when he knew his patient was dying of some incurable disease. He patted the brief case and said warmly, "Now remember, this is nothing for you to worry about. Naturally this man has no proof. Simply an attempt to extort money from you. Not an unusual case, I assure you."

"I am quite sure the case is in the best of hands," the Countess said politely. Then her eyes blazed. She'd been in a good Irish rage since the papers had been served on her by a seedy little man in a Derby hat. "I always said we should have paid him off!" she snapped.

The Count laid a gently restraining hand on her arm and said soothingly, "Now, my dear . . ."

W. James Donohough II arrived before any more could be said. Old Will would have been proud of him—at least at first glance. He'd grown into a fine, handsome, middle-aged businessman, carefully turned out in a neat gray suit, a handmade white shirt, and a specially woven

blue-and-gray tie. He'd become a trifle portly with the years, but daily workouts in the gymnasium of his club kept his weight pretty much under control. His face was slightly bronzed now from a summer spent at his Long Island country house. His hair had turned a becoming iron-gray. To the clients who laid their financial affairs in his hands and were allowed to see the great man in person at the office of the Donohough Investment Trust Corporation, there was something immediately reassuring about the very sight of him.

His wife Mignon was at his side. She was a small, delicate-looking, vivacious woman with a sharp, fretful face and hair that was still a glistening blonde, in spite of the fact that she was only one year younger than her sister-in-law. She affected perfumed elegance in her dress and, though it was still only early fall, was draped with furs which she tossed carelessly over the arm of a chair when she entered the room.

Having disposed of the furs, she greeted the Count and Countess with a curt nod, shivered, and said, "I should think you'd have a fire in here. Really, I can't see why you go on living in this gloomy old museum."

The Countess' face turned pink. Even back in Leesville she'd heartily disliked her sister-in-law. She said, "Your little apartment is quite delightful, my dear, but *we* have a certain position to maintain."

Mignon plunked down in the most comfortable chair, lit a cigarette—her friends considered Mignon quite daring to smoke so publicly—and said nothing.

The two children of the William James Donohoughs had arrived with their parents.

Billy, the older of the two children, and now in his middle twenties, was the only member of the family who looked like old Will Donahue. He was big and awkward, his broad, friendly face was covered with freckles, and his thick sandy hair was perpetually disheveled. He was a happy young man, and good-natured. He loved dogs, horses, and children. He enjoyed puttering in the garage of the Long Island house. The intricacies of business and finance and the delicate little problems of social life were entirely beyond his comprehension, but the motor hadn't been made that he could not repair, and to all the small boys in the neighborhood he was a hero.

THE ENTIRE FAMILY was thoroughly ashamed of him; and, after innumerable unsuccessful attempts to improve him, had silently settled down to a policy of ignoring him, secretly hoping that if they pretended he did not exist, he might, indeed, vanish.

He lumbered into the room like a big, amiable puppy and said cheerfully, "Hullo, Aunt Maggie. Is it true the family's going to lose all its dough?"

"Billy!" W. James Donohough II said sharply.

Bill blushed, grinned, and said, "Sorry, Pop."

His sister Muriel gave him one thoroughly scornful look and turned her back on him. She was the family beauty, and she knew it. She was small, like her mother, but her black hair and blue eyes had come straight from her Irish grandmother. By the time she was two years old, she'd learned that her father and mother worshiped her, and loved to show her off; by the age of three she'd learned the value of a good, noisy tantrum to get whatever she wanted. Now, at nineteen, she didn't have to bother with tantrums any more. She simply said, "I want that roadster," or "I want that necklace," and automatically got it.

She knew Lawyer Reynolds well. He'd gotten her out of several minor difficulties in the past. She greeted him curtly and said, "What's all this nonsense about a lawsuit? Who is this man Hammer? I never heard of him."

It was Maggie, not the lawyer, who answered, "He was some little waif your grandfather picked up and befriended. He lived with us until he grew up. He was—well, I guess you'd call him a handyman. This suit, of course, is utterly ridiculous."

Muriel looked bored. "I don't see why we need to have a lot of stupid discussion about it. Why can't father just give him a check?"

"That," Lawyer Reynolds said, beaming at her, "is precisely what I am going to advise your father to do."

"Not if I have anything to say about it, he won't," said a voice from the doorway. "I say turn the fellow over to the police. It's blackmail, pure and simple."

The newcomer was Robert Emmett Donohough, millionaire sportsman and playboy, whose marriages, escapadea, and scandals were the despair of the family. At fifty, Robert was a big, hearty, red-faced man, slightly bald. His portrait was a familiar sight to Sunday-supplement readers. His early passion for motor cars had turned to an even more violent passion for airplanes around 1909, and in 1911 he had nearly broken his neck trying to better the continental flight record. Not surprisingly, he had become one of the popular heroes of World War I when, kept from active service by his age, he flew the length and breadth of the country, selling Liberty Bonds.

That, unfortunately, was also the year of his spectacular divorce from a famous stage beauty, and it was a long time after that before the more conservative members of the family would speak to him. He had recently become a manufacturer of aircraft, was in the midst of his third divorce, and was publicly engaged to a Follies girl. Nevertheless, the family had considered it necessary to invite him on this occasion.

"I'm damned if we'll pay one cent," Robert boomed. "Talk about ingratitude! Why, every one of you here heard me offer him a good job as chauffeur the day he walked out!"

Mignon looked at him coldly. "Has it ever occurred to you," she said, "that offer may not have been entirely tactful?"

"Tactful!" Robert exploded.

"Oh, come now, Bob," William James Donohough said mildly. "Right or wrong, let's save ourselves all the trouble we can."

Clasping the curiously carved rosary, she began a prayer of her own.

John Patrick arrived in time to hear the last words. "And let's get it over with as quickly as possible," he added. "I'm planning to sail three weeks from today. A month in America is about all I can stand at a time."

Robert snorted derisively. He had the heartiest contempt for John Patrick, who preferred to live exquisitely in Paris writing slim volumes of poetry which he published at his own expense.

MARTIN REYNOLDS opened his brief case and cleared his throat. "I must warn you," he said, "this man does appear to have a rather strong case."

"Based on what?" Robert demanded indignantly.

"Certain facts," Martin Reynolds said,

"substantiated by your late father's diary."

"Forgery!" the Countess said. "I never knew my father to keep a diary."

"Possibly," Reynolds said soothingly, "but that may be difficult and expensive to prove."

"I tell you it's blackmail," Robert said again.

"Oh, shut up," Mignon snapped at him. "You don't know anything about it."

"If you'll allow me," the lawyer said hastily, lifting one hand in a quiet gesture, "I should like to point out these circumstances: Whether or not this man's claim is false, the fact remains that to contest his suit would lead to a long, expensive, and definitely unpleasant court battle."

"And for heaven's sake," Mignon said, "let's avoid that at all costs. This family has already had enough publicity from lawsuits." She looked meaningfully at Robert Emmett.

John Patrick added, "Besides, it might drag on for heaven only knows how many weeks. I say let's pay him off and be done with it."

"The only question is," William Donohough said, "how much is he going to want?"

"I'm afraid there's one other question," Martin Reynolds said. "Will he accept a settlement, or will he insist on going to court? Perhaps if some member of the family would deal with him privately, on a friendly basis. . . ."

"I'm damned if I will," Robert Emmett said.

"It would be extremely distasteful," John Patrick murmured.

They all looked expectantly at William James, who frowned. "I never got along with him very well. I'm afraid . . ."

"You're all being stupid," the Countess said. "The person to approach him is Sally, of course. She's the only one of us he ever liked."

"She's the sort of person he would like," Mignon began catily. She broke off at a warning signal from John Patrick.

Sally Donahue—she'd never changed the name from its original spelling—stood in the doorway, leaning heavily on her cane. On one side of her stood her companion, Miss White. "I think I heard my name mentioned," Sally said. "Something pleasant, I hope?" Her tone indicated she had no idea that it had been pleasant.

William James coughed and looked embarrassed. "We were discussing the possibility," he said, "that in the event we offered a settlement of this suit, you would be the best person to make the offer."

Lawyer Reynolds looked up hopefully. "Would you consider it?" he said.

"Not on your life," Sally Donahue said. "I'm not going to get mixed up with him or the suit. It's your problem. I won't even give you advice because you wouldn't have the sense to take it if I did."

Mignon looked at her sister-in-law coldly. "Perhaps," she said acidly to the room at large, "it might be just as well if our little Sally didn't approach him. It might disillusion him after all these years."

"Why, you bad-tempered old cat," Sally said. She said it amiably, without anger. She knew perfectly well what the family thought of her, and she hoped they knew what she thought of them.

But Mignon's jibe got under her skin just the same. She remembered how she'd looked when Jethro went away—a laughing, slender, curly-haired girl of nineteen, attractive, even fascinating, in spite of—or possibly because of—her lameness.

Now, twenty years later, she had grown enormously stout. What had been delicate, flawless features were obscured by the mottled puffiness of her face. Her hair was dyed an outrageous henna, and her cheeks were streaked with thin, dead-white powder. There were a few spots down the front of her garish violet afternoon dress, and she wore an incredible amount of gaudy jewelry. And she was just a trifle drunk.

The family hated her, not only because she embarrassed them, but because she dared to do publicly things which they

sometimes did not dare to do even in secret.

SHE STOOD THERE for a moment, coolly surveying them, and then said, "I just dropped in to tell you I don't intend to have anything to do with this affair. Whatever you do will probably be wrong and foolish, but it's your lookout, not mine." She turned to her companion, and said, "Come on, Sarah, let's get out of this morgue!"

The Donohough family was silent until they heard the front door close. Then Muriel said bitterly, "My aunt!"

"Sally has always been difficult," the Countess said, in an unsuccessful attempt to save face.

Mignon turned appealingly to her husband. "Can't something be done about her? Couldn't she be committed to an institution or—something like that? After all she—*drinks*."

Robert Emmett laughed loudly and rudely. "So do I," he said. "You people leave Sally alone. She's not half as crazy as the rest of you."

Martin Reynolds cleared his throat very loudly. "It does seem," he said, "as though she were not quite the right person to approach this Jethro Hammer; and in that case—"

"As a matter of fact," William James Donohough said, "it would probably be best for you to handle the negotiations yourself. If this can be kept on a business basis rather than a personal one—" The rest of the family nodded vigorous agreement, relieved at the prospect of having the problem off their individual hands.

"Quite right, quite right," Martin Reynolds said briskly. "I'll arrange an interview with him as quickly as possible. Now what kind of offer shall we make him?"

Two days later, he telephoned W. James Donohough II to inform him that the plaintiff, Jethro Hammer, refused even to consider the possibility of a settlement, and that the case would have to go to court.

Sally Donahue was the only member of the family who flatly refused to attend any of the court sessions. She pretended great disinterest in the proceedings, and frequently voiced the opinion that the defendants—of which she was one, of course—were getting exactly what they deserved. It was noticed, however, that her inconspicuously dressed and spinsterish companion, Miss White, was frequently among the spectators, undoubtedly for the purpose of reporting everything later to her employer.

For several years after Jethro Hammer's disappearance, Sally Donahue had clung to the hope that he would come back. Indeed, she even borrowed money—the estate had not yet been settled—and had a private search for him conducted. It was no use. Jethro Hammer had vanished into some world as mysterious as the one from which he'd appeared years before. It was a long time, though, before Sally completely abandoned hope. In fact, it may be that her belief in his eventual return never did die, but lingered on in some hidden corner of her mind. After all, she had been in love with him. No one knew, and no one would ever know, if she quite got over it.

Sally's first reaction to the new world into which the Donohough family had so suddenly plunged was one of childlike delight. She loved lights and music, and theaters, and people, in exactly the same way she had always loved circuses; and as the years went along, they continued to delight her. But Sally had always had what old Will Donahue described as a smart little head on her, smart enough certainly to see through the posturings and pretentions of her brothers and sisters. Besides, she realized, now that it was too late, what, between them, they'd done to old Will Donahue. She began to drink because she loved champagne and she loved gaiety. She kept it up, first because it was the only revenge she could take on the rest of the Donoughs, and later because it was the only comfort she could find in a world which daily grew more empty and more dull. To have fun became her sole reason for

living, and year after year she had to have more of it—more exciting fun, more exotic fun. She never married, nor was ever rumored to be engaged, but she did have one constant companion in her search for excitement.

The family always suspected that Peter Schuyler was her lover. They liked to apologize to their friends for the tragedy of Sally's life by explaining that Peter Schuyler had an invalid wife hidden somewhere in a sanitarium. The invalid wife was, of course, a myth on the part of the Donohough family, but neither Sally nor Peter himself ever bothered to contradict it.

Peter Schuyler had been one of the first New Yorkers the young Donohoughs met. In fact, it was he who provided the opening wedge into the society world that was Maggie's and Minnie's goal. In later years, Maggie—then Marguerite, of course—liked to make amusing little jokes about the way in which they'd met Peter Schuyler.

"Our little Sally quite literally picked him up in the park. Isn't that delightful?"

She always described it as having been a beautiful spring day, with the first leaves beginning to appear on the trees. Actually, it has been a rainy day in March, when the walks in Central Park were covered with mud and slush. The Countess' description of Sally sitting on a park bench under a blooming branch and engaging in conversation with the young man who occupied the same bench was very different from the true picture of Sally sprawled in a puddle of melting snow, her cane having treacherously slipped on a hidden sliver of ice. But at least it was true that Peter Schuyler met Sally in Central Park and brought her home. He might not have made such immediate friends with the Donohough family if it had not been for the fact that he fell in love with Sally at first sight, mud, melting snow, and all.

Maggie cultivated him purely because of his family, an old and greatly respected one. He had no money and, even more unfortunately to Maggie, no personal charm. He was slight and rather frail-looking. He had very light wispy hair and a bad complexion. The aristocratic Schuyler nose dominated his narrow face, which slanted back at forehead and chin like two sides of a triangle. Worst of all, however, was his speech impediment, a stammer which at times made conversation with him not only difficult, but downright impossible. Those were trifles, however, which could be overlooked in a member of *the* Schuyler family.

HE'D BEEN BORN POOR into a family which even then was on the downgrade, and the last remnant of the family money had gone to put him through school. Of course, there was still the old country estate, to which Maggie loved to refer in conversation; but it was in tragic need of repair, and its household consisted of Peter's aged great-aunt, who was believed to be quite mad—at least she was always kept locked in her room when visitors were there—and a middle-aged, slightly eccentric uncle whose life consisted of desperate attempts to keep up the estate with the help of one ancient and stone-deaf handyman.

Peter Schuyler did not care to live on the estate. The roof leaked, the plumbing was impossible, and the handyman's cooking was atrocious. But he had to live somehow, and what income he had inherited just barely covered the cost of his clothes and personal necessities. Taking a job, of course, was out of the question. There was nothing at which he could have earned a living, anyway. So he lived simply by being Peter Schuyler of *the* Schuyler family, and paying long visits to the homes of his wealthy but not so well connected friends.

In all honesty, though, it was Sally herself he fell in love with, not the Donohough money. Maggie encouraged him. It was going to be difficult to find a suitable husband for Sally She was lovely to look at, but there *was* that limp; and, besides, Sally could be very difficult at times, almost eccentric. She considered Sally a very fortunate girl, and dreamed

The window was open an inch, and he could hear everything.

of the prospect of having a Schuyler in the family. "My brother-in-law—Peter Schuyler, you know." Only, to her infinite disappointment, the marriage did not come off.

That had been twenty years ago. Peter Schuyler was continuing to court Sally, though he knew—as he'd feared from the very beginning—that it was no use. In the beginning, her beauty and her lameness had appealed to him irresistibly; now the fat, untidy, boisterous old maid had the same appeal. She told him in the first weeks of their acquaintanceship about Jethro Hammer.

In fact, it was Peter who handled the details and arrangements of her search for Jethro.

While he knew that he would hate Jethro heartily, he hoped that he might be found if that was what Sally wanted.

As the years went by, he became a kind of unpaid companion. He accompanied Sally to theaters, parties, cabarets, and some less respectable places of amusement. He went along on several trips to Europe—quite discreetly, of course—and on winter excursions to Florida. He encouraged her in whatever she wanted to do, but as little by little he watched the slow process of decay which he was powerless to stop, his unhappiness turned to bitterness and resignation. The trouble was that he couldn't bear to see Sally do without anything she wanted, whether it was a trip to a gambling house or a bottle of brandy. He found diversions for her, he watched over her, and he wept over her more than once.

Sally, for her part, would have given anything she owned to fall in love with Peter Schuyler. It would, as Maggie had pointed out to her, have been perfect; but she couldn't do it. It might have been because of Jethro Hammer, or it might not. No one, however, knew; perhaps not even Sally herself. She liked Peter Schuyler as she had never liked another person in her life. She depended on him; she realized again and again she could not get along without him. She tried to reason with herself that that should be enough basis for a successful marriage, but in her heart she knew it wasn't so. Sometimes the thought did occur to her that Peter might marry another girl, and she'd be left entirely alone. She found that she honestly wished such a thing would happen—a nice girl, pretty, and with money. She simply couldn't marry him herself. Then, too—if Jethro *should* come back . . .

Perhaps the strongest of the bonds that held them together was the fact that they were both cripples—Sally with her short, misshapen leg, and he with his incurable stammer.

NOW THAT THEY were both in their forties—he was only a few months older than she—the search for excitement and diversion had lost its appeal. Once in a while they might go to the theater, but not often. It was growing increasingly difficult for Sally to get around, even with the aid of her cane. Usually they spent afternoons and evenings together in Sally's elaborately decorated but cluttered and dusty apartment, swapping outrageous stories, while Sally slowly but steadily got cheerfully drunk and Miss White sat quietly and disapprovingly in a corner with her knitting. Peter did not drink; he did not dare. His only pleasure was in seeing Sally happy. When she'd laugh uproariously, slapping her fat knee and wiping the tears from her eyes, he'd laugh with her, just as loudly. Sally liked to hear him laugh.

"You know," she would say, "I'm a Donahue and you're a Schuyler, but there's a streak of vulgarity in both of us."

Sometimes, in sober moments, she'd become deadly serious. "Why are we like this?" she'd cry out. "What happened to us? Look at us—not worth a tinker's damn to anybody, or even to ourselves, a pair of cripples."

Peter knew in those times that she was not referring to her limp or to his stammer.

"There must be a reason for it," she'd insist. "Peter, I swear a curse was put on both of us the day we were born."

Peter always laughed that off and called her a superstitious Irishwoman, but he knew the story of Sally's birth—he'd heard it from Sally herself. He knew what the neighbor-woman had said on the day Sally was born, and he knew what Lizzie Donahue had always believed. He told himself that such things were nonsense, and that he was too rational to pay any attention to them. And yet sometimes he wondered . . .

By the time Jethro Hammer reappeared and filed his suit, he was beginning almost to believe it himself.

ALTHOUGH Sally never visited the courtroom—or any of the many courtrooms through which the case was destined to be dragged—the rest of the family did, largely from curiosity to see the man who'd grown up with them as an adopted brother, and now was trying to ruin them all.

Jethro Hammer, in his early forties, was beginning to look like the old man who became famous as the hermit of Wall Street. He was extremely thin, and his face had a curious waxy color. He was tanned, but it did not look like a healthy tan. His hair was beginning to grow a trifle thin, but his black eyes were as bright and hard and unfriendly as ever. Even in those days he always wore cheaply made and rather rusty black suits.

The case dragged on for more than three years, with appeal after appeal by the Donohough lawyers. Always the appeals failed. Jethro Hammer based his case simply on the facts in old Will

Donahue's diary. Handwriting experts were called in time after time. They inevitably testified that the writing was definitely that of old Will Donahue, and experts on paper and ink testified as to the approximate age of the entries in question. Even the Donohoughs themselves—though naturally they'd not admit it—had to accept the fact that it was indeed old Will's diary, written by his own hand; written at the time the invention was being developed. Jethro did this; Jethro did that; Jethro suggested . . . Jethro made . . . And invariably, to the embarrassment of the Donohoughs, "Jethro is a good boy. I'm glad he was sent to us."

At last there was a verdict which could not be appealed. It awarded Jethro Hammer the full rights to the patent and the damages which he had claimed. Martin Reynolds was coolly sympathetic and sent in an enormous bill. By the time the damages were paid and the Countess' mansion mortgaged to pay the legal costs, the Donohoughs were bankrupt.

CHAPTER V

Cops Aren't Dumb

MELVILLE FAIRR rose, stretched, and yawned. He was tired, extremely tired, and stiff in every limb. The cold March air whisked gloomily through the windows.

There was the strange matter of the unsigned letter.

There was the curious fact that all Jethro Hammer's money seemed to have disappeared.

There was the inexplicable behavior of Miss Sarah White.

There had been no surprise in her voice when she answered the telephone that morning. Mr. Hammer had not appeared at his door this morning? Mr. Fairr thought that she should notify the police? Very well, she would do so. Was there anything else Mr. Fairr felt that she ought to do?

Yes, there was. Mr. Fairr wanted to go through Jethro Hammer's house before the police arrived.

Miss Sarah White could attend to that, too. There was a key to Jethro Hammer's house in the office safe. She would bring it to Mr. Fairr by taxi, then return to the office and telephone to the police that her aged employer had not come to the office at his usual time, and she feared that something might have happened to him.

Fairr walked up the steps of Jethro Hammer's house with a mounting sense of excitement. As many times as he'd watched its doors and windows, he'd never seen nor been able to guess at its interior. He knew the story of how Jethro Hammer came to own it. He'd taken it over in a stock deal and preferred to live in it himself rather than sell it at however large a price and then pay rent for his living quarters. At least that was the story Melville Fairr had heard, but he'd wondered privately any number of times if the real reason had been that Jethro Hammer wanted to live in a house of his own.

He unlocked and pushed open the heavy door and stepped into a hallway as dark as night. He fumbled for the light switch and finally lit a match to find it.

The hall was bare and empty. No carpet, no pictures, not a stick of furniture. The house was one of those high, narrow buildings whose downstairs consists of two or three rooms opening off a hall from which a flight of stairs goes up to the rooms above. Fairr stood listening for a moment. There wasn't a sound in the house, not even the rustling of mice. The stairs were thickly coated with dust, as was the hall itself. He went cautiously through the double doorway into the front room of the house, paused, and gasped.

He had stepped into Will Donahue's little farmhouse back in Leesville, Ohio. He'd enough descriptions of it from the Donohoughs and people in Leesville to recognize every detail of it. He'd seen the house itself on one hurried visit. It stood desolate and empty, and he'd wondered at the time what had ever become

of the Donahues' possessions. Now he knew. Jethro Hammer had bought them and put them in his house. There were the faded colored photographs of Will and Lizzie Donahue on their wedding day and the picture of Will Donahue's mother. There were the photographs of the young Donahues and of Jethro himself in various stages of childhood. There was the wicker rocking chair with its well-worn cushion, and a mending basket beside it. There was even a tiny cradle in one corner and a box that Fairr suspected held ancient broken toys. There was even the old stove, its chimney ending incongruously above the unused fireplace. Obviously Jethro Hammer had heated his house with it.

The next room was the bedroom, and Fairr recognized it, too, from those descriptions. There was Will and Lizzie Donahue's big bed, the beds where the young Donahues had slept, and Jethro Hammer's cot. Only the cot had been slept in. The other beds were smooth and unwrinkled.

Fairr stood looking at the two rooms for a long time. They and the kitchen were the only rooms on the first floor. He went through the rest of the house, uncomfortably conscious that he was disturbing the unbroken dust, and found that the rest of it was as completely empty as the hall. Empty and obviously unused for as long as Jethro Hammer had owned it.

There was still no sign of Jethro Hammer. Melville Fairr found the door that led to the cellar stairs and switched on another light, gun in hand.

HE LAY at the foot of the stairs, his thin old arms flung out, his head twisted oddly to one side. His old face was no more pale in death than it had been in life. The look of fear and anxiety had gone, and he seemed to be serenely and peacefully asleep.

Fairr looked thoughtfully at the wooden cellar stairs. They, too, were thick with dust, and there were no marks in the dust.

He stood for a moment considering the picture that he saw. An old man, infirm and doubtless with bad eyesight, had fallen down a flight of cellar stairs in the dark. But why had he gone down the cellar stairs at all? And why had they been dark? If the light had been on at the head of the stairs, Fairr could have accepted the picture as it looked—that is, if he had come on the scene with no previous information about the man who had undoubtedly been murdered.

At last he caught the stair railing in his hands and leaped over, dropping to the cellar floor as gracefully as the cat. Jethro Hammer had been dead for hours, and he lay stiffened in the position he had taken when he fell. He looked very frail in death, and helpless, as he must have looked when the janitor of Saint Joseph's Church found him sixty-five years ago; and, curiously, he looked happy, as he must have looked when Lizzie Donahue took him on her lap and fed him bread and milk.

Quickly, quietly, efficiently, Fairr searched through Jethro Hammer's pockets. There was nothing. A few coins for tomorrow's carfare, a cheap handkerchief. Nothing else. He stood for a bit, looking down at the body of the man he had spoken to once in his life, and who, he felt, had become his friend. Then he pulled himself carefully over the stair railing, went back to the two rooms that were Will and Lizzie Donahue's Leesville farmhouse, and searched them. There was nothing.

Melville Fairr reminded himself that what he wanted to find would not be here, since obviously the murderer of Jethro Hammer had been here ahead of him. He allowed himself one last lingering glance around the rooms, and went out into the street, locking the door behind him and being careful to leave no fingerprints. By the time the first police car came screaming up the street, little Mr. Melville Fairr was on the subway, bound for Jethro Hammer's office, and Sarah White.

Until that day Melville Fairr had never thought of Sarah White as a person. An efficient machine, yes; a face

The newspaper men besieged her, but she disappointed them.

in the anteroom of Jethro Hammer's shabby office; a name repeated more than once in the story of the Donahue family. Now, riding down to the Rector Street station on the subway, it occurred to him appallingly that this had been a serious mistake. Sarah White might very well be the key to the whole affair. He thought of his first glimpse of her, tired, gray-haired, spinsterish-looking, shabby, with half an inch of soiled white cotton slip showing below the hem of her badly fitting dark woolen skirt, scuffed black oxfords. And those lovely, expressive dark eyes.

She had seemed extremely old to him then; now he began to remember and think back. The day Sally Donahue had walked into the Countess d'Abazoli's exquisite drawing room to discuss the matter of Jethro Hammer's lawsuit, she'd been leaning on the arm of her companion, Miss White. Miss White, according to the description he had been given, had been a plainly dressed but attractive and very young girl. Certainly she could not be much more than forty now. Fairr called himself a number of names for having overlooked Miss White. Instead of searching Jethro Hammer's house at this moment, he should have been searching her mind.

It was strange to take the familiar subway ride and leave the train at that very familiar station alone. Only yesterday he had taken the same train, keeping a watchful eye on the frail old man in the rusty green overcoat. The train had been crowded. It was crowded now, yet to Melville Fairr it seemed empty.

He walked briskly to the old building that looked down on Pearl Street and

went up to Jethro Hammer's office. He had plenty of time, he knew. Few people in the city of New York knew the address of Jethro Hammer's office. It would take the police a little time to find it. He reached for the knob and then stood for a moment, his heart beating fast.

This would be the first time he had entered the office since that first visit, when Jethro Hammer had engaged him. On that day he had known that Jethro Hammer was marked for death. Now, on his second visit, Jethro Hammer's frail old body lay at the foot of a dusty flight of cellar stairs. And the things he wanted most to know might lie behind that office door. He pushed it open. The room was empty.

The office looked exactly as it had on his first visit. The brown wooden railing, the shabby golden-oak desk, and straight-backed chair. And no sign of Sarah White.

HE STOOD considering what to do. It was curious that the office should have been unlocked. Curious that Sarah White should not be here. He opened the gate in the railing and tried the door of Jethro Hammer's private office. It, too, was unlocked, and that was even stranger. Fairr stood in the doorway for a moment. There was nothing about the dingy little room to indicate that its customary occupant lay murdered at the foot of a flight of cellar stairs. No, there *was* one thing. The door of the enormous iron safe stood slightly ajar. Fairr wrapped a handkerchief around the handle of the safe door and pulled it open. The safe was empty.

The drawers of the desk were empty, not so much as a pencil stub or an old eraser in them. He stood for a moment, staring into them with a feeling of defeat. Had the murderer been here ahead of him? Then he saw that the drawers were thick with dust, the same undisturbed dust that had been on the cellar stairs of Jethro Hammer's house. The desk drawers were empty and dusty because they had never been used.

A voice from the doorway said, "Oh, Mr. Fairr, I didn't think you'd be here so soon. I hurried as much as I could, but—"

Melville Fairr wheeled around. A smartly dressed, middle-aged woman stood in the doorway. Her gray hair was exquisitely waved and dressed. Her smartly tailored suit was several seasons out of date, but it fitted beautifully. Her patent-leather sandals had outrageously high heels and looked brand-new. Her attractive face had a nice job of make-up, just the right amount of color on her smooth cheeks and well-shaped lips, and just the right touch of eye shadow flattering her beautiful dark eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fairr," she said. "I didn't think it would take so long to get my hair done."

He stood speechless, staring at her.

She laid down her good-looking black patent-leather purse and began taking off her monogrammed gloves. "Even at that," she said, "you'll admit it was a fast job of hair washing."

Fairr recovered his breath and his senses at the same moment. "You certainly didn't lose any time after"—he jerked his head toward what had been Jethro Hammer's chair—"was dead, did you?"

"I have spent a great deal of my lifetime waiting," she said, laying the gloves on top of her purse, "and this looked like a good time to stop." She lifted a quizzical eyebrow at him and said, "What makes you think I'd know he was dead? All you told me over the telephone was that he hadn't appeared at his front door this morning."

"You knew it," Melville Fairr said, "because you've been expecting it for a long time. You were expecting it the day I walked in his office to keep my appointment with him. You were expecting it, and so was he, but did either of you know—" He paused.

"Who?" she finished for him. "No, he didn't and I don't; and, if I'm not greatly mistaken, Mr. Fairr, you don't." She opened her purse, took out a handsome and brand-new thin gold cigarette case, lighted a cigarette. "Wouldn't it simplify

everything," she said, "if we decided to be friends?" She held out the case toward him.

Fairr reached for a cigarette and said, "Thank you." He detested cigarettes, but this was no time to refuse any offer of friendship. "You look gorgeous," he said, though if I may make one suggestion, a little remodeling wouldn't hurt that suit any.

She smiled at him and said, "I bought it two years ago, and this is the first time I've had it on. As a matter of fact, I've already arranged about the remodeling."

"Why did you buy it?" Melville Fairr asked, "and why have you never worn it before? And why are you wearing it now when Jethro Hammer is lying at the foot of a flight of cellar stairs with a broken neck?"

She caught the edge of the desk, steadied herself, and said, "Then he *was* murdered."

"I didn't say so," Fairr told her, "and answer my question first."

SHE WAS SILENT for a moment or two, gazing through the window at dingy New York roofs. "I couldn't wear pretty clothes," she whispered. "I couldn't have my hair done. I couldn't wear makeup. He wouldn't have trusted me, you see, if I hadn't been homely and dowdy and friendless. And it was necessary for him to trust me. You know that."

Melville Fairr nodded and said, "Because of Sally, of course."

"Yes," she said, "because of Sally. She was my only friend when I needed one. That's a very old story, Mr. Fairr, and it has nothing to do with Jethro Hammer's murder."

"I'm not going to ask about it," Fairr reassured her. "You don't need to look so alarmed. You were her companion, as I remember."

"Secretary-companion," she corrected him.

He went on, "After the lawsuit and all the rest of it, she arranged that you should go to work for him. Because you could spy on him. Because you could inform her of everything he did and said and thought. Because she didn't want to see him, and she didn't dare let him see her. But she *did* want to know. And you told her. You told her when he had a cold in his head. You told her when he finally sold an old suit to a second-hand dealer and bought a new one. You told her when he lost money or made money—"

There was a sound at the door of the outer office. For a split second the two stared at each other. If the police were in the hall, there was no time to escape through the other door and into the little office next door. It looked as though Melville Fairr would have to brazen it out with whoever had come from the police department. Then she caught his arm and pulled him toward the window. A moment later they were on the fire escape, and the window was closed behind them.

"We can't be seen from the window," she whispered, "and they won't be looking for anyone. Not yet, at least." She pulled him a little to one side and went on, "You can see a little of the office from here."

He could see part of the brown wood railing and the door. It opened, and three men came in, one in police uniform, another obviously a plain-clothes man. The third Fairr recognized, a tall, stocky, broad-faced man with huge muscular shoulders, Police Lieutenant Alfred Fowler of the Homicide Department.

Melville Fairr smiled to himself. Sometimes policemen *were* stupid, but not often. It hadn't taken the bright boys in the first squad car very long to notice that evidence of the dusty flight of cellar stairs. He nudged Sarah White sharply with his arm and said, "You'd better get in there fast. It's going to look odd if his secretary is missing after she went to the trouble of calling the police."

He knew he didn't need to add a warning regarding what to say to them. Sarah White would know how to handle it. She ducked in through the other window and, by the time the policemen had entered the inner office, she was waiting

for them by Jethro Hammer's desk.

She'd left the window open about an inch, and, as the policemen came into the office, she adroitly moved a little closer to it. Fairr grinned to himself. Sarah White was a smart girl. She knew he would want to hear every word that was said, and she was arranging matters so that he would.

The conversation, unfortunately, was disappointing. Are you Miss White? I am. You telephoned the police because your employer hadn't appeared at the office at his usual time? I did. Was it sufficiently unusual for Mr. Hammer to appear late at his office that you considered it necessary to telephone the police? It was. Mr. Hammer kept very regular hours. He was an old man, and he lived alone. She was afraid something might have happened to him. Then, with just the right touch of anxiety in her voice, Is he—?

Lieutenant Fowler said bluntly, "Looks like he fell down the stairs of his house and broke his neck."

Sarah White said, "Oh!" in a shocked voice. Melville Fairr suspected that there would be tears in her eyes.

"Don't take it so hard," the plain-clothes man said. "You'll find another job."

"Shut up, Clancy," Lieutenant Fowler said. He added, in a surprisingly gentle voice, "I am sorry, miss."

"I've worked for Mr. Hammer for so many years," she said, in a very small, unhappy voice. "It's so awful— It's so unbelievable for a thing like this to happen to someone you *know!*"

FAIRR couldn't see into the office, but he sensed that Lieutenant Fowler was patting Sarah White's shoulder. He smiled to himself at the gentleness of Lieutenant Fowler's voice as he said, "Sudden death is happening to people all the time, sister. Might happen to you or me any day now."

The plain-clothes man added, almost in a singsong, "You're a short time living, you'll be a long time dead."

"Shut up, Clancy," Fowler said for the second time. Then, to Sarah White, "There's a lot of stuff I'd like to ask you about, if you don't mind."

Hardly the procedure in a case of accidental death, Melville Fairr thought. He listened anxiously for what Sarah White would have to say.

Sarah White said, "Why?" There was a little gasp. Then she added, "You're a policeman. Why are you here? Why are you asking questions? Was there—anything about—Mr. Hammer's death?"

Out on the fire escape Fairr grinned again. Sarah White was a *very* smart girl.

"In any case of accidental death," Fowler said, "a routine investigation is necessary."

"You don't think anyone *pushed* him down that flight of cellar stairs!" Sarah White said. She said it in a shocked little-girl voice, as though she were saying, "You don't mean there really *isn't* a Santa Claus!"

"Heck, no," Clancy said. "Nobody could of got in that house without they dynamited the door."

Lieutenant Fowler said, "Clancy, I'm getting tired of telling you to shut up. Why don't you just pretend you're a mirage and quietly vanish?"

Clancy said, "Sorry." There was the sound of heavy footsteps as Clancy vanished. He'd be vanishing into the front office, Fairr reflected, to search Sarah White's desk and the little filing cabinet.

For a moment Fairr wanted to be twins. He wanted to move to the other window and watch that search, and at the same time he wanted to listen to what questions Lieutenant Fowler would put to Sarah White. Even more, he wanted to listen to her answers.

Sarah White solved his dilemma by saying, in a slightly louder voice and rather excitedly, "I'm afraid, officer, that your stooge won't find anything in that filing cabinet worth taking the risk of examining without a search warrant. And why do you think poor old Mr. Hammer was murdered?"

Another and less experienced policeman might have risen to the bait. Mel-

ville Fairr wondered if Lieutenant Fowler would. He did not.

"I've said nothing to suggest that Mr. Hammer was murdered," he said. "*You* brought up the question of murder. Do you have any reason for believing that your late employer's death wasn't—accidental?"

"Of course not," she snapped. "If I'd thought that, I'd have called a private detective agency instead of the Police Department. I'm only trying to find out, officer, why you think it's necessary to come here and bother me with questions at a time like this, and why this Clancy person is taking the liberty of searching the office files without a warrant."

"Clancy isn't searching your office files," Lieutenant Fowler said. "He's standing by the door, smoking a cigar, and I'm asking you questions because the city has a technically unidentified corpse on its hands, and we'd like to know what to do with it."

Sarah White said in an unexpectedly meek voice, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so cross. It's just that—" She paused, and Fairr could picture her fumbling in her purse for a handkerchief. "I *am* sorry, and I'll be glad to answer any questions you have."

"That's better. Did Mr. Hammer have any family?"

"No."

"Close friends?"

"None."

"He lived alone. Did he have a housekeeper?"

"No, no housekeeper."

"How long have you been his secretary?"

"About—twenty years."

"Know anything about his personal life?"

"No, nothing." A pause. "Except—he didn't seem to *have* any personal life. All I knew about him was he came into the office every morning at eight and remained until six. I never saw him outside the office. Not once in my life."

That was a lie, Melville Fairr reminded himself. She'd seen Jethro Hammer many times in a certain courtroom.

His diagrams made everything seem plausible.

"How did you happen to enter his employment?"

"I answered an ad in the newspapers."

That was *another* lie.

"How much do you know about Mr. Hammer's business affairs?"

"Very little. My job consisted mostly of answering the telephone. He never confided in me about his business transactions, and I wasn't curious. He paid me a good salary for very little work.

There was a brief silence. Then Lieutenant Fowler said, "Warrant or no warrant, do you mind if I look through Mr. Hammer's desk?"

"Not at all," Sarah White said. "I imagine it's unlocked."

MELVILLE FAIRR felt an impish delight, picturing Alfred Fowler's face as he gazed into those empty, dusty

desk drawers. He heard the drawers open and bang shut. He heard badly smothered exclamations of surprise from the police lieutenant. And then Sarah White's voice, with a good imitation of amazement, saying, "But they're empty!"

"Look here," Fowler said indignantly, "you were this man's secretary. You must have known this desk was empty. Been empty a long time. Look at that dust. Ten generations of mice could have been born in that desk without being noticed. What's the answer?"

"I don't know," she said, and she made it convincing. "Mr. Hammer always kept his office locked when he wasn't in. I never looked inside his desk."

Lieutenant Fowler cursed under his breath. Then he said, "Have you a record of visitors to the office?"

"No. Practically all the people who came to see Mr. Hammer on business used his private door. I never saw them."

"Where did he keep all his personal papers?"

"I don't know. I assumed they must be in his desk." She caught her breath and went on, in a sudden rush, "I don't really know anything about him—*anything!* I don't understand any of this. *Was* he murdered? *Who* murdered him?"

Lieutenant Fowler made the bad mistake of answering the second question first, and said, "We don't know." Then, in a hopeless attempt to correct his error, he added, hastily and angrily, "Nobody's suggesting that he was murdered except you." There was a little silence, and the police officer continued, with a change of voice, "But perhaps you can tell us who his enemies were."

"Mr. Hammer didn't have any enemies," Sarah White said.

"Who was he afraid of?"

"Nobody."

"He had no enemies," Lieutenant Fowler repeated, almost mockingly, "and he wasn't afraid of anybody." He paused. And then he added thunderingly, "Then why in blazes is a private detective hiding on the fire escape outside his office window the day after his death?"

Melville Fairr resisted an impulse to race down the fire escape, catlike, and flee through the nearest alley. Instead, he shoved the window wide open, stepped into the room, and stood smiling at the police officer, looking very gentle, very small, very friendly.

"Because it's a rare privilege for me to eavesdrop on policemen asking foolish questions," he said pleasantly. "Hello, Al. Nice to see you again."

"What do you know about Jethro Hammer?" Alfred Fowler said hoarsely.

"That he's dead," Melville Fairr said. He smiled at Sarah White and said, "I'm sure the police are through bothering you now, my dear. They already know there's nothing to find here in the office. So why don't you run along and get some rest? They'll want you to make the formal identification at the morgue sooner or later, and it's bound to be unpleasant. And I don't know about you, Al, but I'm hungry, and there's a very good restaurant around the corner." He smiled wickedly at the police officer and added, "And before we go, pick up your jaw. It's dropped halfway to your wishbone."

CHAPTER VI

"Murder Is My Concern!"

"I'M NOT SURE it would be legal to throw you in jail," Al Fowler said crossly, "but it'd be a lot of fun."

Fairr dropped two lumps of sugar in his tea and sprinkled salt and pepper delicately over his scrambled eggs. "Why?" he asked, in his most innocent voice. "Have I done anything wrong?"

"I won't say that you have," the police detective said, "but I wouldn't swear that you haven't. Mr. Fairr, what were you doing on that fire escape?"

"Eavesdropping," Melville Fairr said. He added, "Your chowder is getting cold, and there isn't a restaurant in New York where—"

"The hell with the chowder," Al Fowler said. He picked up his spoon just the same. The aroma was too much for him. He took a mouthful, relaxed, and said happily, "Ah!"

Fifteen minutes later he scraped the last bit off the bottom of the bowl, leaned back, said, "Ah!" again, and lit a cigar. Then he remembered he had a problem on his hands and laid the cigar down on the ash tray.

"Mr. Fairr," he said anxiously, "you've given me some nice breaks in the past. Give me one now. Why were you on that fire escape, and what do you know about Jethro Hammer?"

"I told you why I was there," Melville Fairr said, sipping his tea. "I was eavesdropping. I love to listen to police detectives asking questions." He put down his cup. "I was Jethro Hammer's bodyguard. Evidently I wasn't a very good one." He told, in detail, of his being hired by Jethro Hammer, of the daily trip back and forth on the subway train, of the cover-up office. He told, too, Jethro Hammer's excuse for hiring him—the valuable securities that had to be carried back and forth. But he didn't tell any more.

"You saw him home last night," Al Fowler said, musing. "You went to pick him up this morning." He looked sharply at Melville Fairr and said, "Well?"

"Well?" Melville Fairr said.

"I still want to know what you were doing on that fire escape."

"I still say I was eavesdropping," Melville Fairr told him. "Now don't lose your temper, Al. Jethro Hammer didn't show up. I went down to his office. Shortly after, the police arrived. I thought that secretary of his might answer your questions more honestly if I weren't present. And what's more, I thought *you* might *ask* the questions more honestly."

"And just what did you learn?" the police officer said.

"Exactly what you did," Fairr said. "Nothing." He pushed the cup and plate away. "And if you don't mind my being curious, why do you have to learn anything? How did Jethro Hammer die?"

"He fell down his cellar stairs and broke his neck," Al Fowler said.

"Oh," Melville Fairr said gently. Then he added, "It hardly sounds to me like a case for the Homicide Division."

"There was dust on the stairs," Al Fowler said. "And the lights were off. And the furnace hadn't been used for years."

Melville Fairr raised his eyebrows and said, "Perhaps I'm being very stupid, but I don't quite see—"

"The squad car went up to investigate after that secretary of his called," Fowler told him testily. "They had to break into the house. it was locked up like a fortress. Looked like an ordinary case of accidental death. Old man, alone in his house, goes down cellar to tend the furnace. Falls on the stairs and breaks his neck. But one of those cops was smart enough to look around. Old Man Hammer didn't use the furnace, he used a stove. See?"

Fairr looked blank and said, "Sorry, but I don't see."

"If he didn't go down the stairs to tend to the furnace, what did he go down them for?"

"I don't know. Jethro Hammer was eccentric. Maybe he just felt an uncontrollable desire to inspect his cellar. Or maybe he heard a mouse."

Fowler glared at him and said, "The lights were off. He didn't have a flashlight, or anything. Are you suggesting he was eccentric enough to go down those stairs in the dark?"

Fairr shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"And the dust," Fowler said. "It was an inch thick, I give you my word. How could he fall down the stairs without disturbing the dust?" He was silent for a moment, and then said, "Mr. Fairr, give me a break!"

"It could have been this way," Melville Fairr said slowly. "He was alone in the house. He heard a noise in the cellar. Rats, possibly. Or he imagined he heard a noise. He rushed off to investigate. He was nervous enough to hire a bodyguard, remember. He didn't wait to turn on lights or pick up a flashlight. In the darkness he missed the top step and pitched clear over. People do fall down stairs like that, you know, not hitting a step on the way down. If he'd caught his foot just right, he'd have been catapulted

over the stairs and landed on the floor."

Al Fowler nodded thoughtfully. "It could have happened that way," he said. He looked at Fairr and said, "But you don't believe that it did."

"NO," Melville Fairr said. "I believe Jethro Hammer was murdered." He seemed to forget that anyone was present as he went on. "I believe that, with good luck, one day soon I will walk into your office and say, 'Here is the man who murdered Jethro Hammer.' And I believe that if you try to find him yourself, you'll only run into confusion, because the murderer is smart, and he's been planning this murder for a long time. But if I can find why it was necessary for someone to murder Jethro Hammer, then I can deliver that man to you."

"Somebody wanted to make it look like he fell down those stairs," Al Fowler said stubbornly. "So I figure that the somebody didn't know about the dust. In other words, it was somebody who never was in that house before. Have you ever been in there, by the way? Damnedest place you ever saw. Looks like an old country farmhouse. Well, everybody to his own taste."

Melville Fairr said nothing.

"This party," Fowler went on, "figured it would look like old Mr. Hammer went downstairs to see about the furnace and took a tumble, being an old man and uncertain of his steps. He couldn't have lured old Mr. Hammer to the top of the stairs and shoved him, account of, I can't see a nervous guy like old Mr. Hammer being lured around that way. So he must have picked up old Mr. Hammer, carried him to the top of the stairs, and thrown him. Only he didn't know about the dust, and the furnace not being used, and he forgot about the light."

"A murderer can't think of everything," Melville Fairr murmured.

Ignoring the comment, Al Fowler continued, "But this somebody must have been somebody old Mr. Hammer knew, or else how did he get in the house? The squad men had to tear the whole front door off when they broke in. His getting out was easy; the door had a snap lock. And he walked all over the place while he was there, there're footprints upstairs, downstairs, and all around every place. Was he looking for something, or what?"

Fairr, still silent, made a mental note to toss the shoes he was wearing into the East River, in case the police really got curious about those footprints.

"So," Al Fowler said at last, "here's the murderer. A guy old Mr. Hammer knew, or else old Mr. Hammer wouldn't have let him in. And a guy who never had been in that house before, or else he'd have known about the dust and the furnace. Only, Mr. Fairr, who is he, and why did he want to murder old Mr. Hammer?" He drew a long, slow breath and said, "It *was* murder."

"Of course," Fairr said very softly. "But I'd bet you that at the inquest the coroner's jury will bring in a verdict of accidental death."

"Meantime," Fairr said, "the question is, not who murdered Jethro Hammer, why did he murder Jethro Hammer, how did he murder Jethro Hammer? It is, what was there about Jethro Hammer's life that made it necessary for him to be murdered at all? That's a question I don't think we will answer, not in this world."

He suddenly realized that Al Fowler was not a man who could deal in abstract things. He pushed back his chair and said, "It's been nice seeing you again, Al. If I find Jethro Hammer's murderer, I'll let you know."

He paid the check and walked out into the street. A thin, cold, dreary rain was falling. The sidewalks were wet and muddy underfoot. Fairr found shelter in the doorway of a corner drugstore.

He drew a little notebook from his pocket and wrote in it:

Sarah White.
Alibis (everybody).
Someone never in the house before.
Someone Jethro Hammer let in the house.
Jethro Hammer's daughter.
Who?????

He glanced at the page for a moment, then, on an impulse, ripped it out, tore it into shreds, and ground it under his heel. Clues, plenty of clues. He had to follow up every one of them, and he would.

"You handled them very nicely," Melville Fairr said approvingly. "You're a bright girl, Miss White." He smiled at her. "I thought you'd come back to Jethro Hammer's office for—our talk."

"I'm sorry, he hasn't been in," the waiter said, almost belligerently.

"I knew you expected me," Sarah White said. There was an almost sullen note in her voice. "But I don't know what you want to talk about."

"About you, of course," Fairr said. "About the years in which you came to this office, daily except Sunday, and sat at a desk, answered the telephone, and spied on Jethro Hammer, and reported everything he did or said to Sally Donahue."

She gazed steadily at him for a moment, her lovely eyes expressionless. "You know a great deal, don't you, Mr. Fairr?"

"I know a little," Fairr said. "Why don't you tell me the rest?" He spoke very gently; his face was friendly. "You lived in a shabby rooming house, and you wore ugly, dowdy clothes, and you didn't have any friends or"—he hesitated

a moment—"lovers. You bought smart, pretty clothes, but you never dared wear them. You knew you were a pretty girl, but you didn't have your hair done, and you didn't wear make-up."

He paused. Suddenly he stood up and looked at her almost angrily. "It was unfair," he said, "*damnably* unfair. You could have been happy. You could have married, had a home and a family. Instead, you've lived like this for years. For a third of a normal lifetime. In the name of heaven, why?"

Sarah White didn't answer. She went on looking at him.

"It wasn't for money," Fairr went on. "You've been poorly paid for this. It wasn't for Jethro Hammer's sake. You'd never seen him until that day he walked into the courtroom where Sally Donahue had planted you. Then, *why?* Was it"—he paused again, giving her a searching glance—"because Sally Donahue—had something on you?"

"No," she said. "*No!*" Her face was white with what was almost fury. "You know a great many things, Mr. Fairr, but you don't know much about Sally Donahue, do you?"

"I'm sorry," Fairr said.

"You should be," Sarah White said bitterly. Then her eyes softened. "*I'm* sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you like that. It's simply that you don't seem to understand."

"I'm trying to understand," Fairr told her. "That's why I'm here."

She began to pace up and down the tiny office. Watching her, he realized that she had a beautiful, still-young body. She moved with an almost tigerish grace. She would fight savagely, mercilessly, to protect anyone she loved; she wouldn't hesitate to kill, if that were needed.

"This is the secret of Sally Donahue," Sarah White said. "She was born a person with tremendous capacities for good or evil, nothing in-between. It was one or the other. Circumstances were such that—she became—evil. You may know what those circumstances were."

"I do," Fairr said. He said it, but at the time he wasn't sure. Later, when he'd learned more of Jethro Hammer's life, he was to link that word "circumstances" with the picture of a lacepaper and pink-satin valentine, torn to bits and left to be trampled underfoot in the muddy snow.

"Yet, Mr. Fairr," Sarah White said, almost in a whisper, "she had the ability —she didn't know she had it—to inspire people who came in contact with her with a—feeling of livelong devotion. I wasn't the only one." She sat down on a corner of the desk and said, "Perhaps you know that already."

"Yes," Melville Fairr said. "I know of two others." And one was Jethro Hammer.

"You see," Sarah White said, "it was devotion. And something else." She drew a long, slow breath. "She was my mother."

Only a superhuman effort kept Melville Fairr from gasping. He counted ten slowly and said, "I don't believe you."

"It's the truth." She opened the patent-leather bag and took out a yellow collection of folded papers. "I knew you wouldn't believe me, and I wanted you to. That's why I brought these along." She thrust them into his hand.

MELVILLE FAIRR unfolded the papers and stared at them. They were copies of adoption proceedings, dated 1919. Sarah Elizabeth Donahue, spinster, aged thirty-seven, had adopted Sarah White, orphan, aged seventeen.

"No one living knows about this," Sarah White said. "No one save my mother and myself."

He refolded the papers carefully and handed them back to her.

"You see," Sarah White said, "if she hadn't adopted me, I would have been sent to a reform school. Because I ran away. She hid me. She got a good lawyer. Her family was well known. She had a lot of money. Managing the adoption was easy for her. She handled everything."

"Why did she bother?" Fairr asked, in a very matter-of-fact voice.

"Because she was sorry for me," Sarah White said.

Fairr shook his head. "That isn't right. It's because you were an orphan." And Jethro Hammer had been an orphan, a nameless one. "Tell me," he said softly, "when, and how, did you first meet Sally Donahue?"

Her lovely eyes misted a little. She looked over his shoulder, into the past. "I was very young, Mr. Fairr. And very poor. At the orphanage they taught me to typewrite and keep books. They were going to find me a job, when I was eighteen, and then—supervise me. One day I had the feeling that I'd had all the supervision I could stand, and I ran away. When I was seventeen."

He nodded. "And how many years had you spent in the orphanage?"

"I'd been there since I was ten days old," she said.

"Your family?"

She shrugged her graceful, beautiful shoulders in a gesture that said, "Who knows?"

Melville Fairr filed what might be an important fact in his mind. Sarah White was an orphan who knew nothing of her family. She'd been brought up in an orphanage, with more supervision than she could stand.

"You ran away," he said. "And then what?"

"I hid," she said. "All kinds of places. And I starved. I didn't have any money. It was summer, and it wasn't so bad, having no place to go. But it was terribly hot in the daytime, and I walked around to employment agencies, and I ran whenever I saw a policeman, and finally I decided that after one more day I'd either go back or kill myself. And I couldn't go back. And that day one of the employment agencies sent me to Sally Donahue."

. . . About a month later Sarah White, orphan, aged seventeen—fed, rested, and hidden from the police in the meantime—had become legally the daughter of Sarah Elizabeth Donahue, spinster, aged thirty-seven.

"And"—Sarah shrugged her shoulders again—"that's all."

Fairr nodded and said nothing.

"Believe me, Mr. Fairr," Sarah White whispered, "it wasn't gratitude. I never felt grateful to Sally Donahue. I simply—loved her."

He could understand that. Because it hadn't been charity on Sally Donahue's part, or a drunken whim. It had been because Sarah White was an orphan, and Jethro Hammer had been an orphan.

"She talked to me," Sarah White said. "About—him. About the little crutch that he made for her, and how he taught her to walk. About—everything. About his—going away. It was St. Valentine's Day, you know, and he'd always had a valentine for her, ever since she could remember. That year he didn't have one. He said good-by, and walked off into a snowstorm, and that was all."

"Tell *me* about *her*," Melville Fairr said.

Sarah White lifted her shoulders in a lovely, expressive gesture. "She was—Sally Donahue, that's all. She was good to me, kind to me, we were friends. And then, there was that feeling of *evil* about her. Almost as though it were something you could see, or hear, or even smell. A self-destructive evil. She harmed a lot of people, but she never really wanted to harm anyone, only herself. She hated herself, and she hated her family."

"For what they'd done to Jethro Hammer?" Fairr asked.

"Yes. And for what they'd done to themselves."

There was a silence. Melville Fairr thought of the Donahues and Donoughs as he knew them now. But it hadn't been that way when Jethro Hammer turned up out of nowhere to file his suit. He could understand why Sally Donahue hated the members of her family. In fact, he doubted that he would have liked them himself in those days. And Jethro Hammer?

But at the time of his interview with Sarah White, he hadn't yet learned that Jethro Hammer didn't hate or resent the Donahues when he brought his famous lawsuit, that he'd done it coldly and im-

partially, because it was something that had to be done.

"The lawsuit—" Sarah White paused, and then went on, "She wouldn't go to see him to offer a settlement. She didn't go to the courtroom. But it wasn't for the reason you think. It wasn't because she was old and fat and ugly and a drunkard. It was because she wanted him to come to her, and he never did." She paused again. "He couldn't."

Melville Fairr wanted to ask why, but he'd realized it was better to let Sarah White tell things in her own way. But it wasn't until the day of Jethro Hammer's funeral that he learned the answer to that "why".

"She sent me instead," Sarah White told him, "and I reported everything to her. I was her eyes and ears. And after it was all over, when everyone wondered what he was going to do, I found out for her that he had rented this little office. She knew he'd have to hire an office girl. Someone drab and efficient and trustworthy. She told me to ask him for the job. I did, and he hired me."

"And you've gone on being drab and efficient and trustworthy ever since," Fairr said, with a resurgence of that almost angry pity.

"I haven't minded," Sarah White said. "I've been happy." For a moment stars shone in her beautiful dark eyes. Then she said, "Mr. Fairr, it's finished now. Can't it be forgotten? Can't I destroy his private papers? Can't you go away and forget about Jethro Hammer and let him rest in peace?"

"No," Fairr said, "because he was murdered."

She looked at him silently, as though to say, "Is that any concern of *ours*?"

For a moment it was a deadlock. Melville Fairr said, "And murder or no murder, I'd like to see those papers—if only to satisfy my own curiosity."

She still went on looking at him without a word.

"I'll make a compromise with you," Fairr added at last, almost in desperation. "You'll be reporting all this to Sally Donahue. If she agrees, will you turn over to me those papers and letters Jethro Hammer hid so well"—he gestured toward the shabby old desk—"so well that there was not a thing about his office to indicate that it was ever used?"

He had a feeling that those things he sought were right here in this room, that he could return, after Sarah White had gone, and find them for himself. But he didn't want to do it that way. Besides, there was surely more that he could learn from Sarah White if she decided to tell it to him.

To his relief, she nodded. Not impulsively, but slowly and thoughtfully. "I'll let you know," she said. Then, unexpectedly, her eyes filled with tears. "If he could only have lived one more day," she whispered. She drew a long, almost sobbing breath, and said, "But, of course, it wouldn't have made any difference, not any difference at all." Fairr didn't ask any more questions. But he had a profound conviction, as he went away, that Sarah White not only knew the secret of Jethro Hammer's life, but the name of his murderer as well.

THE INQUEST was well attended by the press. The death of Jethro Hammer, hermit of Wall Street, was an important and interesting event. Unfortunately, the press went away disappointed.

There was brief and rather dull testimony by the squad-car men who had broken into the house and found Jethro Hammer's body. The door had had to be broken down. The body was lying at the foot of the cellar stairs. Why had Lieutenant Fowler been called? Well, because there hadn't been any marks in the dust on the stairs. Marks in the dust? Kindly make your meaning a little clearer, officer. Red-faced, perspiring, and embarrassed, the policeman explained his theory.

Lieutenant Fowler, called to the stand, agreed with the theory and gave his reasons. The coroner's jury looked impressed.

Regrettably, the assistant medical ex-

aminer who had been called to the scene of Jethro Hammer's death had a feud of long standing with Lieutenant Fowler, based on some purely personal matter. Following the police officer to the witness stand, he would have contradicted his testimony regardless of what it had been. He stated flatly that Jethro Hammer had met his death by accident. He produced diagrams showing how it would be possible for a body to describe an arc over a flight of stairs and land at the bottom without touching one step on the way down. Particularly, he added, if the deceased were not in the habit of using the cellar stairs—as was obviously proved by the fact of the dust—he might very well miss the top step, or trip on it, and be catapulted into the dark. The coroner's jury looked even more impressed when he had finished.

The squad-car cop was recalled to the stand and asked if, in his opinion, it would have been possible for anyone to enter Jethro Hammer's house. The policeman, a little flustered, stated that it would have been impossible and again referred to the fact that for the police to gain admittance it had been necessary to break the door. Were there any indication of the presence of another person in the house at the time Jethro Hammer met his death? No, none. The policeman left the stand, looking a little sheepish, and privately resolved to abstain from theories for the rest of his life.

Sarah White was called briefly to the stand, and testified that, to the best of her knowledge, her late employer was not in the habit of admitting visitors to the house at any hour of the day or night.

And so, because at some time in his life Lieutenant Fowler had wounded the feelings of an assistant medical examiner, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of death by misadventure. *We find that the deceased came to his death by falling down an unlighted flight of cellar stairs.*

The press was, indeed, bitterly disappointed. Something spectacular had been expected, especially in view of the disclosure, made the day before, that Jethro Hammer, the millionaire hermit, had died broke. They cornered Sarah White the minute she stepped into the corridor, besieging her with questions. She declared that she knew nothing of her late employer's business affairs, that her only duty had been to answer his telephone. She fled from them and from Melville Fairr, who'd been watching quietly from a shadowed corner.

The sedan swung nimbly from the driveway into the road.

His own testimony had been brief, even trivial. Yes, for some years he had been employed by the deceased, to accompany him back and forth between his house and his office. He had been given to understand by the deceased that the protection was required because of the

large sums in money and securities the deceased was in the habit of carrying in his brief case. No, he had never entered Jethro Hammer's house (he added, "in Jethro Hammer's lifetime," but no one seemed to notice), nor had he ever seen anyone enter Jethro Hammer's house.

If it had not been for the insistence of the medical examiner, the fact of the missing money would have excited the curiosity of the coroner's jury. It provided a possible and plausible motive for murder. The reporters, being of a more imaginative turn of mind, thought of it in spite of the medical examiner, and looked around hopefully for Mr. Melville Fairr, ready to pounce on him. They were disappointed for a second time. Melville Fairr had slipped away like a shadow.

CHAPTER VII

That Matter of Alibis

GOOD OLD RELIABLE Al Fowler, Fairr thought. The verdict of the coroner's inquest hadn't stopped him. And Fairr had once done a favor for Fowler's file clerk's uncle-in-law, which helped now . . .

(From Al Fowler's Records)

Donohough, Wm. J., broker. Left his office at approximately 5:45 p.m. Stopped to give birthday gift (box of candy and ten-dollar check) to girl at switchboard. Was expected to meet friends at club (Mr. M. Reynolds, Mrs. J. C. Burke, and Mr. Lewis Eberhart). Did not show up. Telephoned Mr. Reynolds at approximately 7:15 and cancelled engagement. Made telephone call to Mrs. Donohough at same time. Mrs. Donohough being out, left the following message. "I may not be home till late. Tell Minnie not to worry about me." (Note: message was written on telephone pad by Miss Kate Flanaghan, housekeeper.) Engaged taxi at corner of Fifty-ninth Street and Central Park West at approximately 11:45 and was driven home. Mr. Donohough's statement follows, quote:

If you have to know, I didn't feel like sitting around playing bridge with three damned old fuddy-duddies. I felt restless. Didn't you ever feel restless? Maybe it was that girl at the switchboard. No, I'm not a lecherous old man. Besides, she's homely as a log fence, and not half as smart. Her name's Mary Burns, in case you want to check. Gave her a silly little birthday present, and she bawled like a kid. Maybe that's the only present she got. Imagine being alone in the world like that. Made me feel like a dog, having a wife, and kids, and grand-kids, and all that. I just wandered around. Got some dinner in a saloon on Fulton Street. Took the subway up to the park and walked around in the cold, thinking how damned inefficiently the world's run. And I felt restless, I tell you. Got pretty cold and tired, and called a cab and went home. That's all.

Q. Mr. Donohough, do you remember if at any time you walked near Jethro Hammer's home?

A. Might have. I just walked all over the park. He lived near it.

Q. Did you meet anyone during the evening who might identify you?

A. Didn't meet a soul I knew.

Q. Could this restlessness you speak of have come from any foreknowledge of Jethro Hammer's death?

A. Do you think I'm psychic? Say, what is this, anyway, a courtroom?

Donohough, Mrs. Wm. J. (Jinnie), housewife. Had dinner on tray early, approximately 6 p.m., as was expected at Red Cross meeting at eight. Telephoned chairman of meeting (Mrs. Camille Gerke) and made excuse of slight attack of influenza. Had personal car (light coupé) brought around at approximately 7, and drove away, alone. Stopped at service station to have left rear tire checked. (Statement of service station attendant attached.) Returned home approximately 12:30 and ordered hot milk brought up to room. Statement follows, quote:

I see no reason why I should have to explain my actions on that or any other night to you, or anyone else. I didn't feel like going to a Red Cross meeting. The fact is, I felt a sudden impulse to go into town and talk to my sister-in-law, the Countess d'Abazoli. A purely personal matter, and none of your affair. It is true that I seldom drive myself, but that night I had a feeling that it might be pleasant to drive into town alone. I told you, it was simply an impulse. I've always been an impulsive woman.

Q. Your impulse couldn't have come from any premonition of Jethro Hammer's death, could it, Mrs. Donohough?

A. Don't be ridiculous. If I'd had any premonition of his death, I'd have called the police and had them there to prevent it.

Q. Did you see your sister-in-law that night?

A. No. When I arrived at her house, I suddenly felt that my reason for seeing her was rather absurd, and I drove away again.

Q. Where did you drive?

A. Oh, I don't know. I just drove around. The cold air felt good on my forehead. I had a slight headache.

Q. Mrs. Donohough, what was the reason for this impulsive visit to your sister-in-law?

A. It's none of your business, but I might as well tell you. Maggie and I never got along well, from the time we were girls in high school. I had a sudden feeling that here we were, old women, and we ought to make up all our past differences and be friends. I told you, it was just a sudden impulse.

Q. Then why did you drive away without seeing your sister-in-law?

A. Because I had a funny idea, when I stopped the coupé in front of her house, that she felt the same thing. That the next time we met, we'd talk like friends, and not be catty to each other.

Q. And the next time you met?

A. We were friends.

DONOHOUGH, WILLIAM (BILLY), engineer. Worked late in experimental department of Donohough Aircraft Corporation. Left plant at 6:24 p.m. (Gate Record). No record of later return or departure, but claims to have returned, worked until sometime after midnight, and gone straight home. Statement follows, quote:

How do I know where I was, and when? I worked until I got hungry and then I started home. Five, or six, or seven, I guess. Going out the gate, I got this idea. Suddenly. Just like that. I grabbed something to eat at the dog wagon. Or maybe it was at the Greek's. Anyway, I ate. Then I beat it back to my office and started making drawings. When I got done, I went home. What's all this about, anyhow?

Q. Did you notify anyone that you were working late? Your wife, for instance?

A. Huh? Gosh. No. Guess I forgot. She isn't sore at me, though.

Q. How is it that you returned to the plant without being checked in at the gate and left it again without being checked out?

A. Oh, I guess I just walked in and out absentmindedly. Or maybe I used the private entrance. I can't remember. Heck, I don't know. I had my mind on this idea.

Q. The idea didn't have anything to do with the death of Jethro Hammer, did it?

A. Hammer? Hammer? Oh, *that* guy. Gosh, that's right. He is dead, isn't he? Somebody was talking about it at lunch today. Whatever happened to him?

Q. Mr. Donohough, just what was this idea that you had?

A. Well, you see, it's like this. Now you take the fulchronograph, the instrument that measures the power of lightning. If the same principle was applied—using the principle of—

[Testimony not taken beyond this point.]

Donohough, Lucy (wife of William), housewife. Declares not unusual for William (Billy) Donohough to work late. When he did not return at the customary time, she attended to her family duties and retired early. Statement follows, quote:

If I waited dinner for Billy every time he came home late, we'd all starve to death. He gets one of these sudden ideas and has to work on it. I held dinner until seven, then the children and I sat down. After dinner, I helped Maggie plan a party—she's fifteen, and those things are so important to her—and scolded John and Patrick about their homework. And I was afraid Elizabeth had a touch of croup, so I sat with her for a while. Then I hemmed up Lucy's new dress, and made out my grocery list for the next day, and went to bed.

Q. Is that your usual routine, Mrs. Donohough?

A. Usual? Good Lord, with seven children in the house, nothing is usual. You never know what's going to turn up next.

Q. When did you hear about the death of Jethro Hammer?

A. It was in the papers. That poor old man! What a blessing he's at rest! What a shame he never married and had a family of his own!

D'Abazoli, Countess Enrico (née Margaret Donohue), decorator. Dined at home at approximately seven. Worked in study for a short time on projected article for *House and Garden.* Decided to go for walk. Left house at approximately 9:30, returned at approximately midnight. Claims to have been at the zoo. Statement follows, quote:

I'm doing a dining room in black and silver for Carlotta Cline—the actress, you know. It's going to be a really magnificent thing. All around the walls these shiny black trees on dull silver paper. Then it occurred to me. There should be leopards skulking around the trees, the same motif to be carried out in heavy embroidery on the linens. Not a room I'd want for myself, but for her it would be a sensation. I was making just a few sketches, and suddenly I felt an urge to look at leopards. Real leopards, you know. So I just threw on my coat and walked over to the zoo. I gave one of the attendants five dollars, and he let me into the leopard house. I stood there for hours, watching them pace up and down. Then I went home.

[Penciled Note: An attempt was made to check this alibi with the attendant in question. It develops that he was fired three days ago for intoxication, and there appears to be no trace of him.]

Q. You just wanted to look at leopards, is that it?

A. Quite right. Didn't you ever get an urge like that?

Q. I'll ask the questions, if you please. Can anyone testify as to the time you left and re-entered your house?

A. I doubt it. I haven't punched a time clock since I stopped working in the cannery in Leesville, Ohio.

Q. Please don't be flippant. This inquiry is being made because a man is dead.

A. I know. I'm sorry, officer. Jethro is dead, poor boy, and you're checking alibis. And I haven't one. I haven't even a ghost of an alibi. But that doesn't mean I killed him. Now, any more questions?

Q. Yes. Just one, if you don't mind. My wife is doing over our living room, and she thinks a blue-and-rose chintz would be nice for the draperies. But it seems to me . . .

[Testimony not recorded beyond this point.]

D'ABAZOLI, Count Enrico (husband of Margaret), no occupation. Dined, with wife, approximately 7. Went for walk after dinner, returned approximately 10. Retired early.

I walk for a while after dinner, after every dinner. At my age, you understand, it is necessary that the exercise be taken in moderation. I walked to the park. I walk down Fifth Avenue a little bit. I walk back. I return, my wife is gone out. I do my bending and stretching exercises, I take a book, and I go to bed. It grows late, my wife returns, she is crazy about cats. I say, "Cats, cats, cats!" I turn over and I go to sleep.

Q. You didn't sneak out of the house while your wife was away, cross the park, and murder Jethro Hammer, did you?

A. *I?* I had no quarrel with poor Jethro Hammer.

Q. What did you think about your wife going out to look at leopards and not coming back until midnight? Huh?

A. That? I think, my wife is unpredictable. All women are unpredictable.

Donohough, John Patrick, writer. Had dinner at Bianca's Neapolitan Restaurant at 77 Ramm Street, approximately 7:30. According to testimony of Mr. Bianca, restaurant owner, he appeared uneasy and nervous. Ate lightly and left early, approximately 8:15. Went home, worked on book, went to bed late. Statement follows, quote:

I had work to do, understand? You'd be uneasy and nervous yourself, under the same circumstances. Something I had to put down on paper, quick. I was in the groove, but good. Look, I'll show you a couple of pages of it—

Q. Mr. Donohough, if you don't mind. On the night of February—

A. Look. This passage here. The guy plays a clarinet in a dance band, see—

Q. Do you have an alibi for the time during which Jethro Hammer met his death?

A. Hell, no. Oh, here it is. This is the paragraph I want to read to you. He meets this girl that wants to sing in the opera, and—

Q. Did you murder Jethro Hammer?

A. Me? Do I look like a murderer? Look, are you going to listen to this, or aren't you? They meet in this cheap saloon, see, and he says . . .

[Penciled Note: Investigator read several pages of Mr. Donohough's manuscript. It had a certain amount of force and interest. However, it appeared to be written in what might be termed "Gutter English."]

Donohough, Robert Emmett, industrialist. Dined at home with wife, daughter, and son-in-law, approximately 7. Following quarrel with son-in-law, drove out to private landing field on Long Island, took off in experimental plane named Trixie III, and was gone for approximately two hours and fifteen minutes. On return, drove to lunchroom and bar approximately three miles from landing field, called his chauffeur, and sat drinking until said chauffeur arrived to drive him home. Statement follows, quote:

Who does that guy think he is, telling me I'm too old to fly a plane I designed myself? Look, I was flying planes when they were put together with baling wire and spit. And I'll be flying 'em when he's sitting up talking to his ulcers. Now that night. I felt low as a snake's navel anyway, and none of your business why. He makes a crack that makes me sore. What does he mean, I'm too old to fly? I slammed the hell out of the place and drove out to the field, and I flew, brother, way out over the ocean and back again, just to show him, and everybody else, and God too, in case he was looking, that I could do it. And then I landed and had a couple of drinks and went home. Want to make something of it?

Q. Is that your alibi, sir, for the night when Jethro Hammer died?

A. Alibi? What do I need an alibi for? Look, you get out of here quick, or . . .

[Testimony breaks off here. Penciled note: Mr. R. E. Donobough proves to be a difficult subject for questioning. Statements of members of his family follow.]

Donobough, Trixie, Why shouldn't Pops fly his own plane, day or night, if he wants to? It's his life, isn't it?

Joe Brookes, The darned old fool. He's going to break his neck one of these days, doing stunts like that.

Brookes, Mrs. Joe, Gosh, I wish grandpop would be more careful. But he does get a kick out of it. If it makes him happy—besides, he can fly circles around most of these kids.

Reed, Art, Yes, I'm Robert Donobough's chauffeur. Yes, I picked him up at Skip's Café. He was skunk drunk, and why not? Believe me, when I get to his age—

Donahue, Sally, occupation not given. Spent entire evening at home. Retired early. Statement follows, quote:

Look at me. Would you say I could go running all over town at all hours? I had my dinner, I read a good book, and I went to bed.

Q. Miss Donahue, would you mind telling me—

[Penciled Note: Miss Donahue refused to answer any questions. As a special favor to an important member of the police department, she was not imposed upon.]

Schuyler, Peter, no occupation. Lunched with Sally Donahue. Took 3:10 p.m. Greyhound bus to Schuyler's Mills, arriving at approximately 5 p.m. Was driven out to old Schuyler home by local taxi. Same taxi picked him up at approximately 2 p.m. next day, drove to bus station at Schuyler's Mills. Took 4:05 p.m. Greyhound bus, arriving New York approximately 6 p.m. Learned of Jethro Hammer's death from newspaper. Went directly to home of Miss Sally Donahue from bus station. Statement follows, quote:

"It took me a year to learn this combination," she said.

There were certain family matters I felt I must discuss with my uncle. Rather difficult to explain to an outsider—Oh, well, if it's necessary—! My uncle, I fear, is quite mad. He's always been a bit eccentric, of course. Possibly a family taint. One never knows about these very old families. My great-aunt Abigail was quite definitely insane, poor old soul. Had to be locked in her room when visitors came, and all that sort of thing. Now my poor old uncle gets the crazy

notion to sell the family estate. Can you imagine it? Why, it's been in the family since before the Revolutionary War. It's a drafty, beastly old place to live in, but you wouldn't want to see strangers live in it. With a little money, it could be thoroughly restored, without losing any of its character or tradition. There's always been he old Schuyler house, and Schuyler's Mills, and a Peter Schuyler. That's why, when Uncle got this insane notion of selling the place, I rushed right up there to talk him out of it. When I came back to town, I learned of the death of this Hammer fellow. Must have been something of a shock to poor Sally Donahue; I gather he was something of an old beau of hers.

Q. Then you were out of the city on the night of Jethro Hammer's death?

A. That's right. Damnable shame, too. I should have been with Sally when she got the news.

Q. You can produce proof, I assume, that you were at the Schuyler home that night.

A. Proof? Why, I suppose so, if it's necessary. There's my uncle, if you want to question him. Mr. Lawrence Schuyler, Post Office Box 169, Schuyler's Mills. And he has a handyman, who carried my bags in from the taxi. I imagine you could check with the bus drivers, too, if you needed to.

[Penciled Note: Checked alibi with Mr. Lawrence Schuyler. Difficult person to interview. Aged, quite near-sighted, and rather childish. States that Peter Schuyler arrived and departed at times corresponding to his statement. Tells of having received letter offering large sum for Schuyler home, but unable to locate letter. Handyman's story agrees with statement by Mr. Peter Schuyler.]

Dane, Mary (née Muriel Donohough). In private life, Mrs. Arthur Dawes, actress. Appearing in play, *Seven Slayers*, at Behan Theater. Comes on stage for first time approximately 8:45 p.m. No opportunity to leave theater until after last appearance, approximately 10:30, as she is going on and off stage all the time.

[Penciled Note. Miss Dane takes the part of a young girl accused of murder. The guy that wrote this play certainly didn't know much about cops. Also I didn't think Miss Dane's make-up did her justice.]

Left the theater approximately 10:45. Had appointment to meet husband and some friends at night club. Did not show up. Was at apartment and asleep when husband returned home approximately 1:30 a.m. Statement follows, quote:

Now look here, my friend. I don't think it's any of your business what I did that night, or any other night. But let's not get nasty about it. I wanted to get off by myself for a while. Look. Try to imagine. Night after night, you say the same words, make the same gestures, take the same steps across the stage. Same faces looking at you. Oh, I know, it's a difference audience every night, but the same faces, understand? Then, night after night you leave the theater, go to the same kind of places, with the same kind of people. God! Now please, my friend, I love Art and he loves me. We've been married twenty years, but for the love of Mike, don't tell any reporters how long it's been. Only—well, that night I just got an urge to break the routine. Different places, different people. My car wasn't there, and I couldn't see a taxi anywhere. I just thought, what the hell. I walked around a little, and had a drink in some bar on Eighth Avenue, and walked some more, and got some food, and went home to bed. Now, is that all you want to know?

Q. Miss Dane, Mrs. Dawes, I mean, what's the name of the, uh, saloon?

A. Oh, I don't know. I didn't pay any attention.

Q. And where did you stop for supper?

A. At the Automat.

Q. If you don't mind. Did anyone see you —uh—recognize—I mean, remember you?

A. Probably a few thousand people saw me. But I doubt like the devil if anyone recognized me. I didn't have any make-up on, you know. And as far as remembering me is concerned, your guess is as good as mine. I bet you money, nobody'll remember me ten years after this play closes. Now, any more questions?

Q. Well, just this, Miss Dane. My little daughter is collecting autographs—

[No further testimony taken.]

DAWES, Arthur (husband of Mary Dane), no occupation. Spent evening (approximately 8:15 to 10:30 p.m.) in conference with Hollywood producer named Riegleman concerning possibilities of Mary Dane's next picture. Conference held in bar of St. Regis Hotel. Was broken up when Mr. Dawes called Mr. Riegleman an unpleasant name and withdrew from the conference without paying the check.

[Penciled Note: Statement of waiter attached, including spelling of the un-

pleasant name. It is one I have never heard before.]

Mr. Dawes was next seen at the Stork Club at approximately 11:15, when he joined several friends there. According to the testimony of his friends (statements attached), he seemed ill at ease and angry. Miss Dane (Mrs. Dawes) was expected to join Mr. Dawes and friends, but did not appear. Approximately 1:15 a.m., Mr. Dawes rose, said, "The hell with Riegleman," paid the check, and left. (Statement of waiter attached.) Mr. Dawes arrived home (apartment on Central Park West) at approximately 1:30 a.m.

[Penciled Note: On further questioning, both Mr. Arthur Dawes and Mr. Riegleman denied having had any difference of opinion. Mr. Riegleman stated, quote, Art Dawes is my best pal. Mr. Dawes stated, quote, Perry Riegleman is my best pal. Also when questioned regarding the friends Mr. Dawes met at the Stork Club, he gave their names as Mr. Ferdinand, Mrs. Isabella, and Miss Christopher Columbus. It is the opinion of this officer that these names are fictitious.]

Statement of Mr. Dawes follows, quote:

I can see no reason why you should annoy me with all these questions. Have I committed any crime? I did not accompany my wife to the theater on the night in question. After all, I've seen *Seven Slayers* around two hundred times, not counting rehearsals. In case you're interested, following our conference my good friend Mr. Riegleman signed her to play the lead in *Seven Slayers* on the screen. That's how I was wasting my time! It is true that Mr. Riegleman and I had a slight difference of opinion, and I left the conference. I walked up and down Fifth Avenue for a few minutes to cool off. Then I joined some friends at the Stork Club for a drink. After that I went straight home. Itsy was sleeping, so I went quietly to bed without waking her. Anything more you'd like to know?

Q. Who is "Itsy," Mr. Dawes?

A. Oh, that's a pet name I have for Muriel. When we were on our honeymoon, I'd call her "Itsy" and she'd call me "Bitsy." After our daughter arrived we decided Itsy and Bitsy sounded a little undignified for parents. But she'll always be Itsy to me. If you'd ever been in love, you'd understand.

Q. How long have you and Miss Dane—beg your pardon, Mrs. Dawes—been married?

A. Oh, about twenty years. Why? Is there any law against staying in love with the same girl for twenty years?

Q. Mr. Dawes, did you know a Mr. Jethro Hammer?

A. Hammer? Hammer? Oh, Lord, yes. That's Itsy's uncle. Well, practically her uncle. He was adopted, or something. Some kind of rift in the family, as I remember. Don't think she'd ever seen him. Never told me about it, if she did meet him. Why?

Q. Because, Mr. Dawes, Mr. Hammer is dead.

A. Was he murdered? Itsy's uncle? Great God in Heaven! With her appearing in *Seven Slayers!* What a publicity tie-up! And this screen contract! Just a minute—I've got to call Riegleman. I've got to call her press agent. I've got to call a lawyer—

[Note: Questioning broke off at this point.]

Little Mr. Melville Fairr chuckled as he read the pages so carefully taken down in shorthand and transcribed neatly by Al Fowler's aide. The methodical Fowler hadn't missed a thing, nor had he been deceived by the verdict at the inquest. But then, Fairr hadn't expected him to be. There was a bulldog quality to Al Fowler's mind.

There were more names in Al Fowler's record. He glanced over the pages with lessening interest. Fowler had checked on everyone who had, in even the most remote way, touched Jethro Hammer's life. All save one. He, Melville Fairr, was going to check on that man himself.

Then he came to two last entries that quickened his interest.

White, Sarah, secretary to Jethro Hammer. Her employer had left the office approximately thirty minutes before. She remained, in case any late telephone calls came in. Took subway to Seventy-second Street, had dinner at Friendly Inn Tea Room, leaving at approximately 8:15. (Note: Statement substantiated at this point by waitress in tea room.) Walked home to rooming house, let herself in with own key, went directly to room. Read for several hours and went to bed.

[Note: this statement does not agree with statement of landlady, who declares she took an extra blanket up to Miss White's room at approximately 9:30 and found no one there.]

Statement follows, quote:

I see no reason for these stupid questions. And I am sure this procedure is entirely illegal. I told you what I did and where I went that night, but let that be an end to it. It's none of your business.

Q. Miss White, your landlady, Mrs. Josephine Piazza, states that when she went up to your room at approximately 9:30—

A. Mrs. Piazza is a very absent-minded woman. Besides, what if I *was* out at that time? Was that breaking any law?

Q. Please. If you'll only co-operate with us—

A. Stupid nonsense.

Q. All right. Then tell me, why is it that the first thing you did after receiving the news of Jethro Hammer's death was to go out and have your hair done and dress up in new clothes?

A. Because I knew Mr. Hammer's death would be interesting to the newspapers, and I thought photographers might come around. Now, will you get out of this office?

Q. If you please—

A. Good-by. Or I'll call the police.

Q. May I remind you, Miss White, that we're—

A. I said *good-by!*

[No further testimony taken.]

Melville Fairr grinned. He wished he might have been a mouse in the wall while Al Fowler was questioning Sarah White. Then he turned to the final page.

Melville Fairr, licensed Private Detective. (Penciled note: Better not question in person. Look over testimony given at inquest.)

This time Fairr laughed out loud. He folded the papers neatly and put them back in their envelope, so that they could be replaced in Al Fowler's private file without anyone except himself and the file clerk knowing that they had been missing overnight.

Al Fowler had evidently figured out method. He'd done pretty well with alibis. Fairr wondered how he was doing with motive.

There was one recurrent theme running through all the statements. He wondered if Al Fowler had noticed it. "I felt restless."—"I had a sudden feeling."—"I got this idea. Suddenly."—"I felt an urge to look at leopards."—"He appeared uneasy and nervous."—"I felt low as a snake's navel anyway—"—"That night I just got an urge to break the routine."

The night of Jethro Hammer's death there had been restlessness, uneasiness, depression. Melville Fairr suddenly found himself hoping Al Fowler hadn't noticed the theme. Because it would worry Al Fowler, who was, for all his method and efficiency, a superstitious man. And Al Fowler could know the reason.

CHAPTER VIII

Killer Wanted

MELVILLE FAIRR suspected what that reason was. He was wondering how to check on his hunch when his course of action was decided for him by a telephone call from William James Donohough. "Mr. Fairr? Wonder if you could spare an hour or so for a conference with me. With us, rather. It's a matter that concerns the whole family."

Fairr said he would be delighted, and hung up the phone, his heart thumping. No one knew better than he how greatly the matter did concern the whole family. An hour later he was on a suburban train, heading for the Donohough ong Island estate.

The family was waiting. All the family.

Melville Fairr paused in the doorway of the chintz-hung living room that somehow managed to seem sunny in spite of the dreary midwinter rainfall outside. He had a curious feeling that he had been unexpectedly catapulted into the past, into a scene of more than twenty years ago.

Only the background for the scene should have been the famous pale-green drawing room of the Contess d-Abazoli, and the members of the family should have been twenty years younger.

Otherwise, the picture was the same. There were the Countess d'Abazoli and

her husband, a striking couple. There was William James Donohough II, in a gray suit, and a specially woven gray-and-blue tie; his wife born Minnie, white-haired and elegant; Billy Donohough, clumsy, friendly, and happy-faced; Muriel, the beautiful; Robert Emmett, with his pilot's eyes; John Patrick, looking thin, scornful, and sardonic; Sally, in a comfortable chair, her cane beside her, wearing a sleazy purple dress with stains down the front; Sarah White, neat, efficient, and inconspicuous, at her side; and Lawyer Reynolds, his plump pink face sagging a little now, but with his brief case on his knees.

It was the scene as Martin Reynolds had described it. No—not quite the same. Sally had been standing in the doorway, looking scornfully at them all, leaning on young Sarah White's arm. Now she was in a chair, watching the doorway. Yet her chair seemed to be a little apart from the others.

There was another difference. Someone had come into the group, and everyone was looking at him. Someone, an alien, a shadowy little man in gray, named Melville Fairr. They were looking at him with what seemed almost like suspicion.

"Mr. Fairr—" Martin Reynolds began.

Was it only suspicion? Fairr looked from one face to another, slowly, searchingly. Was there, anywhere a sign of fear?

Martin Reynolds cleared his throat and began again. "My dear Mr. Fairr. It has come to the attention of the family that, for some time prior to his death, you were employed by Mr. Donohough's foster-brother, Mr. Hammer . . ."

Melville Fairr laughed softly, and Lawyer Reynolds broke off, staring at him with a shocked face and anxious eyes that seemed to be saying: Remember me, Mr. Fairr? Martin Reynolds of Burke, Reynolds, and Chidester? We met at my club; we lunched together; you got me tickets for that privately produced burlesque show; we spent a few evenings together at the club, talking about a lot of things, including the Donohough family; remember? The anxious eyes went on to say: Believe me, Mr. Fairr, calling you in isn't any of my doing; the family insisted on it and on my being here. I assure you, Mr. Fairr, I trust we will continue to be friends . . .

"What the hell are you laughing at?" Robert Emmett demanded.

"Just a silly thought that ran through my mind," Melville Fairr said. "When I heard that word, *foster-brother*."

"Let's get to the point," William James Donohough said, a faint flush on his cheeks. "There's a number of things we'd like to know, Mr. Fairr."

"There's a number of things I'd like to know, too," Melville Fairr said. He sat down on the nearest chair. "First among them, who murdered Jethro Hammer?"

"Nonsense," the Countess said. "The whole situation is—absurd." Her handsome face was pale. "Who would want to murder poor Jethro?"

"Who *did?*" Fairr said gently.

"DAMN IT," Robert Emmett said, "I like to see things handled straight. Jethro hired you because he was afraid he was going to be murdered. You did a hell of a job protecting him, if you ask me."

"Bob!" the Countess said in a shocked whisper.

"Because he *was* murdered. You can't fill me up with a lot of stuff about evidence at a coroner's inquest." He rose and pounded on a table in the center of the room. "Jethro was *murdered*. If you couldn't prevent it, by heavens, the least you can do is find out who murdered him!"

"Is *that* why you asked me here?" Fairr said. "To find the murderer of Jethro Hammer?"

"My dear Mr. Fairr," Martin Reynolds said. He cleared his throat again. "The family has empowered me to offer you a more than generous sum, if you will undertake—"

"I will undertake to find his murderer," Melville Fairr said, "but not for the payment of this—generous sum. I've already been paid to do so."

There was a faint gasp from Sally Donahue's chair. "Who?" she whispered. "*Who?*"

"Why," Melville Fairr said pleasantly, "Jethro Hammer paid me."

He rose then, stood looking at them. "Jethro Hammer knew he was going to die," he said, his voice very quiet. "He knew he was going to be murdered." The room was deadly, frighteningly still. "There was something that he had to accomplish, before he died. I don't know —yet—if he accomplished it or not."

William James Donohough II said, "Look here, Mr. Fairr. There's something you ought to know. Late in the afternoon, on the day Jethro died, he telephoned me."

There was a stir in the room. Robert Emmett looked up and said, "That's damned funny. Because—" The Countess caught her breath and said, "Will! He—" John Patrick's sardonic mask dropped from his face for a moment. He leaned forward, put his elbows on his knees, and said, "Jethro called me, too. He said—"

Melville Fairr looked at the people who had once been the five Donahues. Only Sally sat without a word, her mottled old face impassive.

"He called up all of you," Melville Fairr said. "And what did he say?"

The older four of the young Donahues all began to speak at once, and Sally, silent, turned white.

"It was a—social call," William James Donohough II said at last. "Funny thing. You'd have thought—we'd been close to each other, on the best of terms, for all these years. That we'd spent holidays together, and exchanged Christmas presents, and called up every now and then to say, 'How are you?' "

The Countess d'Abazoli said softly, "I knew his voice. It had been a long time, but I knew his voice. He said, 'I'm sorry I haven't called you before—but I've been busy—' "

"That's a damned funny thing," Robert Emmett said. "That's almost exactly what he said to me!"

"He said—" John Patrick paused. "He said, 'How have you been? Can't we get together for lunch one of these days?' "

Sally said nothing.

"I can't explain it," Melville Fairr said. "Because—so far—I don't understand it." He paused. One day, after so many years' silence, Jethro Hammer had contacted all those who had once been the young Donahues. And that night he had died by violence. . . .

"Jethro Hammer always kept me paid a month ahead. It was, I think, so that when he—died—I'd have a month in which to find his murderer. I'll do that, of course."

"You'd better," Robert Emmett roared. "That's what we called you here about. Find who murdered our brother Jethro, and I'll give you every cent I have in the world!"

Fairr opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it again. What he'd been about to say would have been a rebuke not only to Robert Emmett, but to everyone in the room. "If you'd ever called him *your brother Jethro*, he might never have been murdered at all." There was no point in saying it now, because everyone was thinking it.

He said instead, "I'll do the best I can." He looked around the room and continued, "You must understand. There are certain—mechanical matters to be considered, when a man has been murdered. I refer to the matter of alibis. If you don't mind—"

All the people in the room looked at each other, startled.

"You mean, one of *us?*" John Patrick said incredulously.

Melville Fairr said nothing.

THERE WAS a long and painful silence. The members of the family looked at each other furtively and suspiciously, each wondering about the other. As long as they lived, Fairr realised reluctantly, they would look at each other like that unless he found the murderer of Jethro Hammer.

Martin Reynolds coughed apologetically. "There was a gentleman from the police department who made the same inquiry," he said. "A Mr. Fowler. Al

Fowler, I believe his name was. He was given statements regarding alibis, Mr. Fairr, and I am sure that if you check with him, he will be glad to give you any information you may desire."

"Thank you," he said. "I'll get in touch with Mr. Fowler." He looked once more around the room. "One thing more, if you don't mind."

Everyone seemed to stiffen.

"Someone sent a bunch of field daisies to Jethro Hammer's funeral. Who was it?"

No one answered. Everyone looked bewildered. John Patrick said, "Who cares?"

"I care," Melville Fairr said. "But never mind. Perhaps it *isn't* important." But he knew, in his heart, that it was important.

Was someone in the chintz-hung living room lying to him, was someone acting a skillful role? He hoped, as he'd never hoped before in his life, that no one was.

Sally rose and said, "If you're going back to town, Mr. Fairr, I'll give you a lift. Take my arm please, Sarah." She shuffled uncertainly toward the door.

It was difficult for Sally Donahue to negotiate the steps. She clung to Sarah White with one hand, and to the railing with the other, and felt her way cautiously. Fairr offered his arm and met with a furious glance from Sarah White.

Getting Sally into the sedan was even more difficult, but Sarah White managed it single-handed. The fat, mottled-faced woman sprawled over the seat and closed her eyes.

"You'd better ride up in front, Mr. Fairr," Sarah White said quietly, sliding into the driver's seat. The sedan leaped forward with a sudden jerk. Then Sarah White swung it capably down the driveway and into the main road. In the back seat, Sally Donahue began to snore.

"This has been very difficult for her," Sarah White said, in a coldly defensive voice. "And she had a drink before she left the house."

A couple of drinks, Melville Fairr thought. Three or four, in fact, quick ones. He said, "I don't blame her. I could have done with a drink or two myself."

Sarah White flashed him one grateful glance and said nothing more. She drove capably. Fairr noticed her hands, large, pale, and excellently manicured. Not beautiful hands, though. Broad fingers, big knuckles, and wide, flat palms. They looked capable; he wondered if they looked criminal. He realized suddenly that the lids over her lovely dark eyes were thick, white, and heavy; and that she had full, pulpy lips.

Yet her profile, seen in the gathering dusk, was sharp and well-cut. High forehead—wrinkled now into a slight frown—straight, handsome nose, half-curling upper lip, round but definite chin. Not a criminal profile, but, he added to himself, a determined one.

She'd known more about Jethro Hammer than anyone living. She'd been able to find a way to get into his house and wait for him in the dark. But would she have had a reason? Fairr couldn't answer that.

They'd reached the approach to the Queensboro Bridge when Sally Donahue stopped snoring. Halfway across the bridge, she spoke.

"Sarah, is there any place around here we can stop for a drink?"

"There's Hoppy's," Sarah said. "Just off Third Avenue."

"Hoppy's it is," Sally said thickly. "I'd like to buy Mr. Fairr a drink. Like to buy one for myself, too."

HOPPY'S was dingy and underlighted, but, fortunately, not crowded. Sally squeezed into one of the brown painted booths and leaned her fat elbows on the table. A waiter with a dirty apron came to take their order.

"Double gin," Sally muttered.

"A glass of ginger ale," Sarah said crisply.

"A double gin for me, too," Melville Fairr said.

The waiter stared at him curiously. His eyes said, "Sure you wouldn't like a nice hot cup of tea, Mr. Fairr?" Melville Fairr had been in Hoppy's before. Then he half-dropped an eyelid toward Fairr,

and said, "two double gins, one ginger ale," and went away.

Sally gulped down her double gin. Then she leaned her chin on her elbows, stared at Melville Fairr, and said, "He wrote me a letter. I'm damned if I'll show it to you. But I'll tell you what he said. He said he wanted a date with me. Get it? A date with me. He wrote—wait a minute, Mr. Fairr, I'll remember every word." She leaned back and closed her eyes.

"He said—'Sally darling: Forgive me, I've been too busy to call you. But I'm so anxious to see you, soon. May I come to see you, tomorrow?' " She paused, pushed a stray lock of hair back from her forehead, and said, "That's all he wrote. But what does it mean? Why didn't he write it before? Twenty years before? Forty years before?"

"You know why," Fairr said. He looked at her thoughtfully. Her hair was loose and untidy from sleeping in the back of the sedan, the powder was streaked and caked on her face, and there was a wet smear on her fat chin where she'd spilled some of her last drink.

In his mind's eye he saw Jethro Hammer, the frail, trembling old man, yellow-faced, sickly, frightened, with blue veins showing on his face, and his sharp little eyes darting continually from side to side. Standing there in the doorway of his office, repeating over and over, *"No one would want to hurt a sick old man like me. No one would want to hurt me, I assure you, I assure you."*

"Miss Donahue," Fairr said in his most ordinary voice, "can you suggest any reason why he should have written to you, after all this time?"

She stared at him from under her wrinkled old eyelids. Her loose old lips twisted into a sardonic smile. "You're a private detective, Mr. Fairr. Why don't *you* find that out?" She nodded her head toward the bartender and pointed to her empty glass.

Sarah White's eyes implored Melville Fairr to go away. He nodded at her, smiled reassuringly, and rose.

"Miss White," he said, "there are certain things—you were going to show me—"

Before Sarah White could answer, Sally Donahue lifted her head again. "I know what you want to see. All Jethro's private papers. No one knows where they are except Sarah here. And she won't show them to you unless I tell her. And I don't know any good reason why I should."

"He was murdered," Fairr said. "That's reason enough."

"I have no proof he was murdered," she said. The bartender put a glass in front of her; she emptied it. "Mr. Fairr, I'll make you a bargain. If you can come to me with the proof that Jethro was murdered, I'll tell Sarah to turn over to you everything he ever hid away in his private files. Because if he did simply fall down a flight of stairs in the dark and break his neck, the whole thing's best forgotten."

"Do you want me to prove it to your mind," Melville Fairr said softly, "or to your heart?"

"I'm a smart old woman, Mr. Fairr," she told him. "You'd better prove it to my mind."

Because, Melville Fairr reflected, she already knew it in her heart.

"It's a bargain," he said, smiling at her. "Shall we shake on it?"

She held out her flabby old hand and said, "Sure. And we'll drink on it. *Waiter!*"

They drank on it. Sally Donahue's head drooped. Sarah White said, under her breath, "Why don't you go home? You can get a taxi at Third Avenue."

"You can manage all right?" Fairr said, glancing at the half-sleeping Sally Donahue.

Sarah White's lovely eyes shot fire and hatred at him for a moment. "I have before. She's tired, that's all." Then, in a milder tone, "She meant that, you know. About proof."

"I know she did," Melville Fairr said, fastening his overcoat. "I'll deliver her the proof. And then you'll show me the private files I want to see. Including the things you've never told her about."

CHAPTER IX

The Mystery of Twenty Years

FOR A WHILE—indeed, up to the very day of Jethro Hammer's death—Fairr had wondered if Jethro Hammer had returned from that twenty-year absence at *his* convenience. He doubted it, partly because it left too much unexplained; more, because it wasn't logical, and Melville Fairr preferred everything to be logical. The alternative, then, was that Jethro Hammer had somehow been prevented from returning. The question was how. No, he reflected, it was more than merely "how"; there was a where to be considered and, perhaps even more importantly, a why.

He had entertained a few mad thoughts of walking into Jethro Hammer's office—if he could get past Sarah White—or perhaps catching up with the old man on that nightly walk up the shadowy street and putting the question to him without preliminaries. He'd have done it, too, save for one reason. There would be no answer.

No, to solve the mystery of that twenty years he would have to work behind Jethro Hammer's back, and there was a torturing lack of clues. A man had walked out of a door into a February snowstorm. Twenty years later he had returned, and no one knew where he had been. How, then, could one set about finding out the truth?

Then, too, the whole thing had happened so long ago. At the time of Jethro Hammer's disappearance, or even at the time of his return, something might have been accomplished. Fairr had tackled more difficult problems with complete success. There were railroads, steamship companies—oh, a hundred places to make discreet inquiries; but now the trail was too cold to follow. Those who might have seen and remembered Jethro Hammer then would certainly have forgotten him now, if indeed they were still alive.

Again and again Fairr told himself it was of no importance. The clue to the as yet uncommitted murder of Jethro Hammer existed here in New York, within his easy reach. But the question continued to tantalize him. There had to be some answer to it, somewhere, from someone.

Then came the night when Jethro Hammer was murdered at last, and the encounter with the very young and very beautiful girl who claimed to be Jethro Hammer's daughter. She, if anyone in the world, could tell him what he wanted to know. The only question was to find her again.

He did not know her name, of course, and he had no idea of where she might live. Yet surely finding so unusual a girl, even among all the thousands of girls in New York, should not be an impossible task.

From what she'd worn he guessed that she had not been in New York long. Certainly she had not been dressed for a New York winter. He began asking discreet questions here and there of hotel clerks, of taxi companies, of steamship lines, and all the other sources of information he always kept available for just such purposes.

Yet, before any of his inquiries could bear fruit, little Mr. Melville Fairr interrupted them, called himself every kind of fool, and settled down to wait until Jethro Hammer's funeral. If the girl was indeed Jethro Hammer's daughter, she would undoubtedly be there.

The funeral wasn't held until a week after Jethro Hammer's murder. There had been the inquest, of course, and all the police inquiries. Then there had been a certain doubt as to who should make the arrangements. It turned out that Jethro Hammer had left no will, and on further investigation it turned out that the "millionaire hermit of Wall Street" had left practically no money. It was Sarah White who finally took charge, and the funeral was held in a gloomy, slightly shabby undertaker's chapel on Amsterdam Avenue, on one of the dampest and dreariest days of the year.

Sarah White and also the police had been to considerable pains to keep the announcement as inconspicuous as possible, but the curious public found out,

of course. There was a crowd outside the door when Fairr arrived. His first thought was to go across the street and wait, watch for the girl to come out afterward, and then follow her. Then suddenly he saw her get out of a taxi, pay the driver, and stare with sudden dismay at the horde of curiosity-seekers.

Melville Fairr did not waste any time. He hurried up to her, took her arm, and said, "Let me help you."

She gasped, startled, looked at and recognized him, and then said, half-smiling, "You are very kind."

She was in black, the dead black of Latin mourning. A discreetly cut dress, high-necked and long sleeved. Thrown over her shoulder was a black cape of some rich, glossy fur, reaching well below her knees. Black stockings, black sandals made of many fragile interlacing straps, certainly only the flimsiest of protection against the snow and slush underfoot. A black hat and a heavy black crepe veil, lace-edged.

In one hand she clutched a tiny black-bordered handkerchief, in the other a rosary of a curious design Fairr had never seen before. He wished that he could look at it closely. Well, he would manage that in due time. He placed a reassuring hand over her elbow and said, "Permit me." Quietly and unobtrusively he made space for her, and the crowd fell back, nudging and whispering. At the door of the chapel itself, Fairr turned to her, looking again at her costume. "You must have been very fond of your father," he said gently.

She shrugged her shoulders almost impatiently. "I never saw him in my life," she said.

HE GLANCED at the girl. She looked frightened and uncertain. He held her arm more tightly and at the same time more gently, and said, "Shall we sit way back here out of sight, so that no one will disturb us?" She nodded gratefully, and he guided her into the farthest and darkest corner of the little room.

The coffin was covered with flowers, costly flowers, chosen with the best of taste—a sheaf of roses, lilies and violets in profusion, and even a spray of orchids. Suddenly Fairr leaned forward, starting. Was it? Yes, it was. Nestled among the elaborate blooms was a little bunch of ordinary field daisies, tied with a ribbon.

The Donohoughs had sent flowers, he realized, but which of them had sent the daisies? John Patrick, who was so discerning? William James Donohough II, who was so warmhearted? Maggie, who was so thoughtful? Robert Emmett, who felt so keenly the wrong he had done? Or Sally, who'd loved Jethro Hammer? Could the pitiful little handful of daisies have been sent—or even brought—by the one who'd murdered him?

Music began to fill the chapel, music that obviously came from a hidden record machine and not from a pipe organ; very solemn music, very sentimental, and thoroughly detestable. Fairr shuddered. He glanced at the girl beside him and saw that she looked first surprised and then shocked. He wondered if he ought to tell her that this was "the custom of the country." But then the Donohough family began to arrive, little by little, and he forgot everything else momentarily, watching them.

From the shadowy corner in which they sat, Melville Fairr found he could watch everything without being seen. That was fortunate, he thought. If he were forced to greet any or all of the Donohoughs, it would be difficult to explain the presence of the exotic dark-eyed beauty in deep mourning. As things were, however, he could watch and observe, and wonder why any of them had come there at all.

He wondered for only a moment, and then he began to remember. There had been Maggie, the Countess d'Abazoll, saying: "I used to wash him and dress him when he was a baby, just as I used to wash and dress John Patrick. Why, he was my baby brother!" Then William James Donohough II: "Jethro was one of us." And John Patrick, the ex-poet: "We all wanted to be friends with him when we were kids. I'd still like to make friends with Jethro." Robert Emmett

had said simply: "Jethro was like my brother"; and Sally Donahue had said, "Mr. Fairr, do you think he is still in love with me?"

Melville Fairr gave two glances to Sally Donahue, and a long, curious stare to the man who walked beside her wheel chair. That would be Peter Schuyler, could be no one else. Now in his sixties, he looked very much like the description Fairr had had of him, though that description was of him in his twenties. Slight and frail-looking. Pale wispy hair —it was hard to tell whether it was yellow or gray. Sallow complexion. The profile that was like two sides of a triangle. Fairr saw all that in his first glance. He went on watching because he caught the look of near adoration that Peter Schuyler turned on Sally Donahue. And because he noticed how carefully Peter Schuyler kept his eyes away from the cheap, pathetically small coffin.

The girl in black touched Fairr's arm. She whispered very softly, "This is his family? These are his own people?"

"His family, yes," Fairr whispered back. "But not his own people."

She frowned. "I do not understand," she said. "Then why are they here?"

"Because they have discovered that they were once very fond of him."

But which of them, he wondered, had sent the daisies?

The girl at his side fell to her knees when the minister appeared and, clasping the curiously designed rosary, began a prayer of her own in an almost inaudible undertone, and in a language Fairr could not understand and had never heard before.

For a moment he completely forgot where he was, watching her and listening to her, and trying to get a closer look at the rosary. The key to where Jethro Hammer had been in his twenty-year absence was right here by his side. The key was in the language the girl was speaking, if he could only identify it. The key was in the intricate carving of that rosary, if he could only interpret it.

But, he realized, he did not need to recognize the language or to examine the barbaric and yet beautiful design of the rosary. In a little while now he could ask the girl herself.

DURING the rest of the service, he sat with his eyes closed, his mind very far away. In his way he was mourning for Jethro Hammer—not for the shabby, sickly old man he had pretended to guard for the past three years, not for the black-eyed baby who had been found abandoned in a church in Leesville, Ohio, and not for the man who filled in the years between. He mourned for the unknown, the secret Jethro Hammer, the man no one knew anything about, not even he, Melville Fairr.

The recorded music finished with an organ version of "Abide With Me." Melville Fairr opened his eyes and watched the Donohoughs file out. He sensed, as they went along the aisle, that they, too, had been absorbed in their own private mourning for Jethro Hammer and had not heard one word or one note of the uninspiring ceremony. Only one face showed that a tear or two had been shed —Trixie, who had never known Jethro Hammer, but who would always cry at weddings and funerals, no matter whose. The Donohoughs themselves looked impassive, even a little disinterested. The Count's face, as he went past, wore the correct expression of deep sorrow, and his head was respectfully bowed. Peter Schuyler's face was very pale.

Melville Fairr waited until he was sure that they had left the parking space in front of the chapel. Then he led the girl into the anteroom and said, "I'll try to find a taxi."

She folded the black-edged handkerchief she'd been carrying and put it in her handbag. There was an air to the way she snapped the bag shut that suggested she was now completely through with the funeral of Jethro Hammer. With that gesture the black dress, the black fur cape, and even the black veil had ceased to look like mourning. She smiled at Melville Fairr and said, "I am hungry."

"In that case," Fairr answered, "I

won't find you a taxi, I will find you a restaurant."

"Please do," she said. "Any restaurant. But very quickly."

A thin, cold, uncomfortable February rain was beginning to fall. Underfoot the sidewalk was covered with mud and melting snow. She shivered. "I do not like it here," she announced. "I think now I shall go home."

"And where is home?" Fairr asked very casually, his heart beating fast.

"That is where I was born," she answered. "Where my people live."

Melville Fairr consoled himself with the thought that he could try the same question later, phrased perhaps more tactfully.

They found a fly-specked little restaurant around the corner on a side street, and the girl insisted on going there, not because it was in any way attractive, but because it was the nearest. She ordered an enormous meal and announced that she was not going to speak until she had finished it. Melville Fairr sipped a cup of badly made tea and thought of what he should ask her first. At last she ate a dish of ice cream slowly and contentedly, licking off the spoon like a little girl. Then she leaned back and sighed with well-fed satisfaction.

"It occurs to me," Melville Fairr said, "that I do not know your name."

She grinned, "Miss Hammer."

"Yes, of course," Melville Fairr said. "But what's the rest of your name?"

"In my country," she said almost impishly, "it is the custom that the young lady does not tell her name to the gentleman who has not been presented to her by her father or brother."

"In a sense," Melville Fairr said, "I was presented to you by your father, but I won't press the point. Tell me now, where is this country whose custom you just described so charmingly?"

She stared at him and said, "Why do you ask these questions? What is it that you wish to know? And why must you talk around in circles? I am not afraid of you. I know that you were the friend of my father, and so you are the friend of myself."

"I want to know a lot of things," Fairr said, "and I'll ask them one at a time. First, may I see the rosary you are holding? It fascinated me, but I couldn't get more than a glance at it."

She took it out of her bag and handed it across the table. He looked at it closely and curiously, turned it over and over in his hand. The carving was beautiful, the work of a fine artist, yet with that strange barbaric touch. There was something that puzzled him about the carving of the face. He stared at it for a long time, as though the shape of the eyes and nose and mouth could tell him the name of the country where it had been carved. And on the back of the crucifix was a strange design of a flowering vine and a serpent. He handed it back to her and thanked her.

With this girl, he realized, it was going to be far wiser to come straight to the point. He said, "There is a mystery in the life of Jethro Hammer, and I want to find out the answer to it—only because I am curious. He walked out of a door here in New York one night long ago. No one knew—no one knows now—where he went. Twenty years later he returned. That is why I ask so many questions."

She laughed. It was a nice laugh. Fairr liked it. "But you should have said this at the very beginning," she told him. "I know everything of what happened to him. I know even what he thought and felt and dreamed about."

Melville Fairr felt his skin fairly prickle with excitement. He kept his voice as calm as he could and said, "How do you know?"

"When he was ill," the girl said, "he told my mother. He did not know that he told her. He talked like a madman, but she remembered, and she told me. And now, if you wish, I shall tell you, because you were his friend."

"I do wish," Melville Fairr said, acutely conscious of the pounding in his ears. "First"—he looked at her searchingly and hopefully—"there is one ques-

tion—perhaps the most important of all. Why did he not return in those twenty years—why did he wait so long to come back?"

She looked at him with surprise, as though he should have known the answer himself. "But how could he return?" she said. "He was in prison."

IT WAS the fourteenth of February. Jethro Hammer had never been able to forget that date because it was St. Valentine's day, and in the pocket closest to his heart he'd carried a valentine of lace paper and pink ribbons to give Sally Donahue.

The snow was falling everywhere when he left the house, and by the time he'd taken half a dozen steps, it had made a thick veil between him and the door. He heard Sally's voice through the door, half sob, half gasp, *Good-by*. He took one more step and then paused.

He could go back. He could say to her, "Sally, come with me. I don't know where we'll go or what we'll live on, but come with me." He could say all the things he had wanted and never dared to say. Or—one of his hands gripped a spike of the wrought-iron gate until his fingers were bruised and almost bled—he could go back and brave them—*shame* them—all. He could tell them . . .

Then, from the other side of the veil of falling snow, he heard the door close. Then there was silence. He turned away and walked on down the street with no idea of the direction in which he might be going, or of where it would lead him.

He had walked a dozen blocks before he realized that he was shivering with cold, and that there was only a handful of change in his pockets. He passed under a street light and examined the handful. Two quarters, a dime, three nickels, and four pennies. That was his fortune. He wanted to retrace his steps along that dozen blocks, storm into the Donohough mansion, and throw the money he had carried away with him in their faces. But he pushed on doggedly in the direction he had first taken, as though some instinct led him that way. Perhaps somewhere he would find shelter.

As for the Donoboughs—he would return, but in his own good time, when he had found a name, his own name.

That was it, that was what he had to do. He had to know his own identity. Walking through the snow, he thought again and again of what old Will Donahue had said in the last weeks of his life—his mind half wandering sometimes. "I made a mistake, Jethro. I should have named you after the Donahues and not after a tool in my shop"—"Jethro, don't you ever wonder who your family was, and what your own name might have been?"—"You must have come from good people, Jethro; you're a good boy, you have been a comfort to me." Over and over in what the old man said in the pitifully few days of his last illness was the conscience-stricken refrain, "I made you my son, I should have named you Donahue." Until, at last, young Jethro had stood beside the bed, taken the dying man's hand, and said, "It's no matter. I have my own name."

Yes, but what was his own name? How would he ever find it out now?

He paused for a moment in a doo way, for shelter against the snowfall that was rapidly becoming a storm. His fingers reached into the coat pocket where he had placed the little book old Will Donahue had given him, the diary. "Keep this, Jethro," Will Donahue had said. "You'll need it some day, not for yourself, you're a good boy, but to protect *them*. They are your brothers and sisters, Jethro, for all that you don't have the same name." Jethro had never looked within the pages, but he had carried the diary with him since that moment. It was the only thing of Will Donahue's he carried away with him now.

In the same pocket his fingers touched the cheap paper lace of the valentine. He drew it out and stared at it in the winter darkness, a blurred, heart-shaped outline in his hand. He wished suddenly that he had given it to her before he left the house. Now it was too late. Now he could not return to her until he had done that one thing: learned his own name.

He stood there for a while, braced against the doorway, almost unconscious now of the cold. How should he go about accomplishing what he had to do? It had been a long time, a very long time, since he'd been found, cold, hungry, and whimpering, in St. Joseph's Church in Leesville, Ohio. No one had ever bothered to trace the people who had left him there. Could they possibly be traced now, when so many years had gone by? Then, too, there was the chance that they might not have been his own parents at all. But they must be the starting point in his search. It was the only starting point.

There might be firms of private detectives who could pick up so fragile, so tenuous a thread, and follow it. That would take money, a great deal of money.

He must make money then, a fortune. He, who stood now shivering in a doorway, coatless, hatless, homeless, and with only a handful of change in his pocket. And in the meantime. . .

He looked again at the valentine, and then slowly tore it into tiny shreds. The wisps of white lace paper mingled with the drifting snow. The tiny bows of pink ribbon were buried an instant after they touched the ground. The pink satin heart fell to a step of the doorway, where, later, it would be trampled by a wet and muddy overshoe. Then Jethro Hammer pushed on into the snowfall that had now become a blizzard.

HE LOST all sense of direction and all sense of time. More than once he paused, clinging desperately to walls or to fences, and then he went on again. It was hours—or it seemed hours—later that he finally saw a lighted doorway ahead of him. With his last strength he flung himself toward the door. It opened inward. He heard voices and laughter, and felt warmth. Then he fell, fainting and half-frozen, on the dirty sawdust-streaked floor of a water-front saloon.

For a while—it seemed a very long while—he was conscious of only a confused blur; someone bent over him, poured something hot and strong down his throat; little by little he became aware of voices around him, although it was a little while before he could tell what they said. Then, at last, one voice—a thick Scottish voice—said, "I wonder where he's from and what his name is."

That was what the janitor of St. Joseph's Church must have said on that other cold winter evening so many years ago now. "Wonder where he comes from and what his name is."

"Bring him another drink," the Scottish voice said.

Jethro Hammer rose painfully to his feet, uncomfortably conscious of the bedraggled figure that he was, and yet holding himself very straight with pride. Through the smoke and fog that clouded his eyes he could see dimly the man with the Scottish voice, a broad, red face, sandy whiskers, bright blue eyes. Jethro said stiffly, "Thanks, I'll get it for myself," and stumbled toward the bar, fumbling in his pockets for one of the two quarters.

They made way for him respectfully as he leaned his elbows on the polished wood, laid down the quarter, and asked for whisky. A moment before they had seen him half-dead at their feet. Now here he was, standing up to the bar and calling for his drink like a man.

"It's on the house," the bartender said, shoving back the quarter. He exchanged a surreptitious glance with the red-faced Scotsman, who winked, nodded, elbowed up beside Jethro Hammer, and said, "And what did you say your name was?" Jethro downed the glass of cheap whisky. It burned his throat. For a moment he choked and all but gagged on it.

"Come now," the Scotsman persisted, "who are you and where did you come from, and where are you going on a night like this?"

Jethro Hammer began to laugh wildly, hysterically, as he had never laughed in his life, and never would again. "I'm nobody," he said. "I've come from nowhere. I don't know who I am, and I don't know where I'm going."

He didn't notice that the bartender and

the red-faced man glanced at each other again and moved a few feet down the bar, almost out of earshot. He didn't notice the black-haired, dark skinned man who eyed him curiously from a corner of the saloon, nor did he hear when the bartender whispered, "He's young and he looks strong." The Scotsman looked at his big silver watch and then at Jethro. He nodded to the bartender, and there was a whispering again regarding the sum of money the bartender should receive. . .

HE NEVER KNEW quite how long a time passed before he woke. A day perhaps—or had it been a few hours, or a week? He couldn't tell. He opened his eyes and saw a cold, cloudy sky. He moved his head and felt a stab of pain. He moved his hands over what he imagined must be a bed, and they touched cold, hard boards.

For a few minutes he lay motionless, trying to remember. The scene at the Donohough mansion. The walk through the snow. The valentine. The waterfront saloon. But where was he now?

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, oblivious of the pain in his head. He saw a broad, friendly face with dark eyes and discolored teeth close to his own. A voice said, *"Buenos dias,* I trust you're well. We have moved you here on the deck that you might awake with more comfort."

Jethro Hammer stared around him, bewildered. For a moment he was on the verge of asking, "Where am I?" But it would have been a senseless question. Obviously he was on a boat, a small, not-too-clean, and rather disreputable boat. As for how he had come there and how he would get back—those things could be attended to later.

There were footsteps close to him, and another face appeared, a weasened yellow face.

The brown-faced man stood up and made an elaborate bow. "Allow me to present our new comrade," he said to the newcomer, *"Mi amigo Nadie."*

"My friend Nobody." From that moment it became his name.

"I am Carlos," the man said. "Perhaps you would enjoy to see the boat? She's not large, the boat, but extremely swift." He reached out a hand as though to steady Jethro, and said, "You feel quite able to walk, yes?"

"Perfectly well," Jethro said. He realized that he must of necessity make friends with this stranger. That was not going to be hard to do. There was something about his expression that made it almost impossible not to smile at him at first sight, just as there are some friendly overgrown dogs that it is almost impossible not to pet. Jethro hadn't intended to smile at the man, but he realized that he was smiling in spite of himself. "What boat is this?" he asked.

Carlos grinned broadly, showing his strong, discolored teeth. *"La Perla,"* he announced with an air of mocking pride.

Jethro looked about him. The boat certainly did not look like a pearl. She was small but extremely broad, and he realized that she was strongly built. Forward there was a small wheelhouse and behind it the cabin; aft, a low deckhouse and a hatch, then another hatch and a cockpit. A variety of smells mingled with the sharp smell of the sea—oil, copra, paint, and tar, and the smell of unwashed human beings. Jethro wondered what kind of cargo she carried, and how long it would be before he could find out. He sensed already that this was a situation where questions might be unwelcome, if not dangerous. So he confined himself to one.

"What are my duties to be?" he asked.

"That depends, Señor, on what your talents are," Carlos said. "And on how Captain Mac wishes to use you," he added. "You must understand, Señor, that we are leaving New York seriously shorthanded, and when you so providentially announced that you had no immediate plans. Captain Mac took the quite unpardonable liberty of bringing you to join us. I assure you he will presently deliver his apologies in person."

Captain Mac was an enormously fat man, completely bald. He looked shrewd. He looked as though he could be cruel

if cruelty were called for, or kind and generous if that happened to serve his purpose. But whatever he did, Jethro decided, it would be in some manner for his own benefit.

"Mr. Nadie, eh!" Captain Mac said. "That's a hell of a name, and I don't believe it's yours."

Jethro said nothing. He stared at the captain stubbornly.

"Have it your own way," the captain said, shrugging his fat shoulders. "Mr. Nadie it is. And when we picked you up, you'd already said you came from nowhere and you were going nowhere, or words to that effect. So I figure it's no use asking you about yourself."

"No use at all," Jethro said amiably.

"I know this much about you," Captain Mac said. "When we picked you up, you were broke. Well, you won't be broke when we get back from this trip. Not if you behave yourself and keep your mouth shut. And if you don't, Carlos will shut it for you."

He glanced over Jethro's shoulder as he spoke. Jethro instinctively turned his head and saw that Carlos had reappeared in the doorway. Again he was aware of the friendliness of Carlos' brown face. At the same time he realized that Carlos would cut his throat without a moment's hesitation on orders from Captain Mac, or even on his own initiative if it seemed like a good idea. Yet still he felt no sense of fear.

CARLOS was delighted when he discovered Jethro's mechanical ability and his general handiness with tools. *La Perla's* engines were continually in need of attention, and Sandy was just as continually lying dead-drunk on the deck. Carlos declared over and over that the new crew member might be "Mr. Nadie," but that he certainly had been sent to *La Perla* by the good God himself. As time went on, he and Jethro became friends in a curious half-detached manner. Carlos was a garrulous man, and he had been starved for company. Captain Mac was hardly designed for friendship.

They spent long evenings on deck while Carlos drank *aguardiente* and talked about women, religion, politics, philosophy, and drunkenness. Jethro listened, and occasionally the mournful songs of the Carib crew drifted up from their quarters. Yet in all the conversations, two things were never mentioned: *La Perla's* cargo or her destination.

Then one day land was sighted, a gigantic symmetrical column whose top was half hidden in a veil of clouds. *La Perla's* engines stopped. Jethro was called into Captain Mac's cabin. The Scotsman seemed more red-faced, dirty, and bad tempered than ever, and he glared at Jethro suspiciously for a moment or two before he spoke.

Jethro, for his part, said nothing. He sat down on the battered chair to which the captain motioned him and accepted with a nod the glass of cheap whisky that was shoved across the table.

"Look here," Captain Mac said at last, "you probably know this is not a pleasure trip, and *La Perla* is not carrying flour or cotton cloth."

Jethro smiled silently and shrugged his shoulders as though to say it was no concern of his what kind of cargo *La Perla* carried.

Then Captain Mac stared at him for a long time, closely, searchingly, thoughtfully, and, Jethro feared dubiously. "I don't know if I can trust you or not," he said at last. "If I can't it's a bad business for both of us."

"If you can't," Jethro said, still smiling and still noncommittal, "it looks like a bad business for me, but it would be a shame to throw me overboard to the sharks when you need a good mechanic as much as you do."

To his great relief Captain Mac laughed noisily and heartily. He poured out more of the cheap whisky and said, "You're a man after my heart, Mr. Nadie. Tell me, are you running away from something? What kind of a crime did you commit back in the States?" Jethro kept quiet and looked wise. If Captain Mac decided he was escaping from the law, so much the better.

"All right," the captain said, "I won't

ask you questions. What you've done is your business and none of my own, and if I don't trust you, we're going to be monstrously short-handed in the future."

Jethro wondered what was going to happen to Sandy, but he didn't want to ask.

"You will have to do," Captain Mac said at last. "But I warn you, it's going to be a dangerous business. You'll make yourself a nice piece of money if it all comes off well, or you may end your life in some stinking jail, or with a knife in your ribs. If you want to back out, Mr. Nadie, this is your only chance."

"I don't know what the enterprise is," Jethro said calmly. "And evidently you don't want me to ask. But I haven't any intention of backing out. Not if there's any money involved."

"Good," Captain Mac said. He smiled, almost a friendly smile. "Just keep in mind, though, you joined us of your own accord. And, so far as trusting you is concerned, there's very little worry in my mind. Carlos will have an eye on you."

Jethro went back up on deck where Carlos was waiting for him. He sensed immediately a change in the big man's manner. He realized that Carlos had been listening to everything that had been said.

Carlos grinned at him, waved a brown hand toward the odd-shaped island, and said, "We approach with caution."

Jethro leaned his elbows on the rail and gazed over the water. The moon was out now, and the cone-shaped piece of land seemed mysterious, ethereal, unreal. The silvery water was as smooth as glass.

"We approach—what?" Jethro asked.

Carlos chuckled. "If I were to tell you its name," he said, "you'd know nothing more of where you are than you do at this moment. It is an island. It is one of the Antilles, and the water you are admiring is the Caribbean Sea."

"I'd guessed that," Jethro said easily, "but what island, and why are we going there, and what are we carrying?"

Carlos chuckled again. "Not too many questions at one time," he said in a tone of mock reproof. "The name of the island is Nevis. We pause there only to acquire a passenger. And the boxes in the hold, Mr. Nadie, contain ammunition."

"Who is he?" Jethro asked, trying not to sound too curious.

Carlos tilted the bottle of *aguardiente* to his lips, put it down, shrugged his shoulders, and said. "He is a madman who believes himself to be the coming dictator of Mexico. Whether he succeeds or not—and I don't think he will—is nothing for us to concern ourselves about, Mr. Nadie, since Captain Mac has collected his money in advance. As for revolutions, they come and they go. In my own country there is always a revolution, sometimes two or three, and one may change sides from day to day depending on who has the most arms, the most money, and the most liquor. For me, I am a man of peace. So let us take the good Señor's American dollars and allow him to have his little revolution at his pleasure."

A MORNING CAME when land appeared, and for the rest of the day *La Perla* idled far off shore. Then night fell, a moonless night, yet lighted by the brilliant southern stars. *La Perla* moved in closer until the dim outline of land was less than five hundred yards away, and a tiny boat came out to meet her. All night long the little boat went back and forth between *La Perla* and the beach, carrying first the passenger and then the great heavy boxes which the native crew carried up from the hold. When dawn came, *La Perla* was headed out to sea again.

In the morning they met in Captain Mac's dingy cabin, the four of them. "Now," Captain Mac said, with surprising amiability, "we shall divide our money and head for Veracruz, where we shall take on our thoroughly respectable cargo, refuel, and be off again." He grinned. "Then we shall dump our respectable cargo in the Gulf of Mexico and pick up a more profitable one with which to return to the United States."

Jethro asked no questions about the "more profitable cargo." That was Cap-

tain Mac's business. He would learn about it in time. His share of the money amounted to six hundred American dollars, and that was only the beginning. By the time he reached New York, there would be more. If the total was not enough for what he intended to do, he would make another voyage on *La Perla.*

The night before they came to Veracruz there was trouble on board. Jethro sensed what was going on long before he actually knew. Captain Mac and Carlos held a long conference in the captain's cabin in hushed voices. Jethro tried to listen, but he could hear only the sound of words and not their meaning. If it was important, if it was a matter that concerned himself, he would hear about it in good time. Meanwhile there was no use trying to eavesdrop.

Apparently Sandy did not possess the same quality of patience. Coming around the wheelhouse, Jethro discovered him by Captain Mac's cabin, his ear pressed tight to the boards. In the same moment Sandy saw him and straightened up, his yellowish face twisted into a frightened and angry snarl.

Instinctively Jethro leaped. One blow caught the little man in the face and sent him reeling backward. Another sent him sprawling on the deck. Before he could get up, Jethro was on him, pinning his arms behind him, dragging him into the Captain's cabin.

"He was listening," Jethro said. That was enough explanation.

Sandy did not move. He lay on the floor exactly where Jethro had left him, his pale little eyes fixed on Captain Mac.

"You see," Carlos said.

Captain Mac nodded. "We can't let him go ashore at Vera Cruz," he said, "and it will be difficult to keep him shut up on board."

Nothing more was said, then or later. Jethro could not ask whether it had been Carlos or Captain Mac who had finally disposed of the ratlike little man, nor what kind of weapon had done the deed. As a matter of fact, he did not especially want to know.

That day they entered Veracruz. Captain Mac made a report that his engineer had died and had been buried at sea, and Carlos prepared to show Jethro the delights of the town. Jethro went along half unwillingly. The immediate business having been completed, he was anxious to be off again, engaging in the next one. But Captain Mac and Carlos felt that they had earned a holiday, and there was nothing to do but go along.

In spite of his reluctance, Jethro found himself fascinated with the city and its noisy, bright-colored life, like nothing he had ever seen before. Walking through the plaza, he found himself suddenly wondering if he belonged here, if his unknown origin was some similar, hot, dusty, and—to him—pleasant place.

The sun was beating down so fiercely that the little arcades around the plaza were already curtained with sun blinds reaching to the ground. Within was shadow, but an even more stifling heat. Captain Mac sat down at one of the small tables, motioning to Carlos and Jethro to join him, and ordered rum. He announced that he intended to remain right there for his entire stay in Veracruz, to which Carlos replied with a pleasant leer that there were better things to do in Veracruz than sit and drink rum, which could, after all, be done just as well on board *La Perla.*

Jethro rose with him. They promised to meet Captain Mac at his table late that night and went out into the blazing sunlight of the plaza.

"We go to the establishment of my sister," Carlos volunteered. "In New York you would call it a saloon. She is very beautiful, and you will admire her."

CHAPTER X

"We Shall Escape!"

LA CANTINA DOMINGA was a small two-story building not far from the quay. Its downstairs was divided into three rooms, the first a kind of general clubroom with small round tables crowded with sailors of all nationalities and women of all colors. The

second room contained a long homemade bar, behind which a pock-marked Mexican dealt out liquors, and against which a dozen men drowsed over their glasses. Before Jethro had time to do more than look around, Carlos had led him into the third room at the rear of the building. It was small, simply furnished, and very clean. There was a little wooden table, a couple of rickety chairs, a few colored pictures of saints on the walls, and a baby's cradle in one corner. There was a bottle on the table and a few glasses, and in the one comfortable-looking chair sat a woman with a child in her lap.

"This is my sister Dominga," said Carlos cheerfully. He turned to the woman and murmured something in Spanish. She laughed softly and murmured something in return. Carlos turned to Jethro. "She does not speak English," he said, "but she wishes me to inform you that she is honored at your presence and proud to become your good friend."

Jethro bowed as formally as he could. He wished that he knew even a few words of the language, enough to say something gracious and graceful to the woman whose face he could still not make out in the dusky shadows. He had to say instead, in English, "I'm pleased to meet you, ma'am."

She laughed again and said something. He could not understand it, but he knew that it meant the same thing. Carlos walked to the table and helped himself lavishly to the contents of the bottle. A rapid conversation began between him and the woman. There was something in its tone that Jethro recognized, and at first could not quite place. Then it came to him. John Patrick talking to Maggie, Robert Emmett to Sally, brother and sister talking together while an outsider once named Jethro Hammer and now named Mr. Nadie sat by and listened and could not take part.

There were occasional words that he could understand: *La Perla*, Sandy, Captain Mac. He could guess that Carlos was telling the story of *La Perla's* most recent voyage. He sank down into one of the rickety chairs and stopped trying to listen for words that he could understand.

Carlos was right. She was beautiful. Not as Maggie or Sally or Minnie Snoddy had been beautiful, or any of the girls he had seen in Leesville and in New York. She was large—tall and full-bosomed; her hair was black and pulled back straight from her face to be caught at the nape of the neck with a cluster of brilliant red flowers. Her eyebrows were straight and dark and as heavy as a man's. Below them her great brown eyes were like pools he had seen at night in the brook that ran near Leesville. She had a wide red mouth, made for laughter, for rapid talk, and for sympathy.

He heard a tiny sound, half whimper, half giggle, and his eyes went to the baby in her lap. It was a laughing baby, perhaps a year old, plump and fairly boiling with the happiness of being alive. The little half-whimpering sound had been made purely in the hope that someone would pay attention to her.

Neither her uncle nor her mother paid that attention immediately; they were far too concerned with the things they had to talk about. Hardly realizing what he was doing, Jethro walked across the room, picked up the baby just as he had picked up Sally so many times in her young life, and lifted her toward the ceiling. She waved her tiny coffee-colored hands excitedly and gurgled with delight. Jethro sat down on the rickety chair and began beating her hands together; she laughed and tossed her head and blew bubbles through her lips. He remembered an elaborate game he used to play with Sally when she was two and he was eight, a game that consisted of his pretending to bite off her fingers one by one, hide her nose, and pull off her ears.

Evidently it was a game that all babies of this age liked. They were so absorbed in it that it was several minutes before Jethro realized that Carlos and his sister had stopped talking and were watching, half surprised, half amused. Feeling a little foolish, he said, "She's a beautiful child."

Carlos beamed. He said something in Spanish to his sister—evidently a trans-

lation of Jethro's remark, to judge from the expression on her face. Jethro put the baby back on its mother's lap. It promptly began to squall and hold out its hands to him. Carlos laughed loudly and raucously. Dominga patted the baby on its back, turned to her brother, and said something, gesturing toward Jethro as she spoke.

Carlos shrugged his fat shoulders and said in English, "My sister invites you to remain as long as you wish. She regrets that she cannot speak your language, and that her daughter is too young to afford much entertainment to a man who has been on *La Perla* for many weeks. However, she wishes me to tell you her house is your house. But if you would like to come with me, I assure you you will have a much better time."

Jethro looked at the baby, who had suddenly gone to sleep and was sprawling like a kitten in her mother's lap. Dominga's friendly eyes and laughing mouth. "I think," he said a little haltingly, "I would like to remain."

Carlos said loudly that Jethro was seven different kinds of a fool, yet, Jethro sensed, he was pleased. He kissed his sister's hand with an elaborate flourish and said to Jethro, "*Adios, amigo Nadie,* and I shall return for you late in the evening." He paused, grinned, and said, "Very late." Then he was gone.

Dominga looked at Jethro; and her brown eyes, wet with helpless laughter, indicated to him with a gesture, a movement of her shoulders, and a look on her face, that "after a man had been so long on the sea, and had just arrived in Veracruz, where there were many girls . . ."

She laughed and Jethro laughed with her, and he found how easy it was for people to share each other's thoughts, even when they did not know each other's language.

THEY CARRIED on a long, almost wordless, and entirely satisfactory conversation. She indicated to him with one word and a gesture that she did not know his name. He said, "Mr. Nadie." She obviously understood. She lifted her lovely shoulders and her heavy dark eyebrows in one questioning gesture. "Mr. Nobody?"

That was when he began to realize that communication was possible without the ordinary medium of language. He managed somehow to explain to her with gestures, one or two Spanish words he had picked up from Carlos, and the expression on his face, that he was an orphan who did not know of his family nor the land of his origin. She gazed at him, her dark eyes half filled with tears, and murmured, "*pobrecito.*"

He said haltingly, pointing to the baby, "*Como se llama?*"

Dominga smiled and said, "*Soledad.*" He knew that word too. Solitude. A strange name for a baby that laughed and blew bubbles through her lips and wanted to make friends with everyone!

He sat down, the baby on his knee, and stared at Dominga. There were so many questions he wanted to ask her, and he had to ask them all with his eyes!

Why had she come here, so far from her own people? Who was Soledad's father? Was he alive or dead? How did she come to be running La Cantina Dominga? Was she happy? Did she ever wish to travel to faraway places as Carlos had done?

Somehow she sensed all that he wanted to know, somehow she managed to tell him. Life in the village of her birth was very primitive and at the same time very dull. She had not been happy there, though occasionally now she wished to return—not forever, of course, but for a little while. Once when Carlos had been back on one of his brief and infrequent visits, she had run away and joined him when he left. Here in Veracruz she had met and married a sailor. "*Inglés,*" she said. He had bought her many fine things, but after Soledad had been born, he had gone away and she had never seen him again. She had sold most of the fine things and opened La Cantina Dominga, which was doing a very fine business and making much money, so she was very happy.

Suddenly he realized that the baby had curled up and gone to sleep, nestled like a kitten in the curve of his arm. Dominga laughed. Jethro rose and carried Soledad to the cradle, Dominga following to smooth out its covers. For a moment they gazed down at her, her long lashes dark against her cheeks, her little hand half curled. Jethro felt a profound sadness that was almost despair. It might almost have been a dark premonition of the circumstances under which he was to see her again.

Dominga laid a hand on his arm. *"Qué es?"* her voice was almost sharp. Jethro spoke one word, almost a cry, "Dominga!"

She said very simply, *"Siempre te amaré."* Jethro did not know the words, but he knew what she was saying to him. *"I shall love you all my life."*

And he had nothing to say to her in return, nothing to give her. In a few hours he would go away with Carlos. He would probably never see her again. In time he would return to his own country, carrying out his plan, and then —Sally Donahue.

"Qué quieres?"

Jethro looked at her. How could he tell her all he wanted was the warmth, the security, the sweetness of being here with her for these few hours. But she knew. Her eyes told him that she knew. Without another word she moved forward into his arms. For uncounted moments they stood there, silent, motionless, breathless.

SUDDENLY Carlos burst into the room. Jethro stared at him in surprise. The big man was puffing for breath, his brown face glistened with sweat, and he was cursing loudly as he came into the room. They must find Captain Mac at once and be out of this cursed city. There was trouble—he did not know yet what it was—but the *rurales*—the police, were seeking them.

There was no time for a farewell, only a quick, anguished glance. Then Jethro and Carlos were out of La Cantina Dominga and hurrying up a dark, narrow side street.

But Captain Mac had been warned and escaped on board *La Perla*. Carlos stood gazing out to sea and called Captain Mac every name in his vocabulary. Before they could even leave the quay a troop of gray-uniformed *rurales* came clattering up and took them into custody. Jethro understood that he and Carlos were charged with participating in the willful murder of one Jack Higgins, otherwise known as Sandy, late engineer of *La Perla*, whose body had been washed ashore near Veracruz. There had been one chance in a thousand that Sandy's body would escape the notice of the sharks and be washed up on shore in sufficient good condition so that it was evident that his throat had been cut. That chance had landed Jethro and Carlos in the Veracruz jail. Jethro had nothing to say.

TOPS FOR QUALITY EVERYWHERE
TOPS FOR QUALITY EVERYWHERE
TOPS FOR QUALITY EVERYWHERE

It was hard for him to tell what was happening and what was going to happen. At last, Carlos informed him that they had been sentenced. Not to death, because there was still doubt as to who had actually cut the unfortunate Sandy's throat; but to life imprisonment.

Carlos was cheerful, almost gay, at the verdict. "It is good," he said. "We shall escape."

The day after the verdict they were taken from Veracruz by a night train. Two Mexican guards accompanied them, fastening them, before the train departed, to the arm rests with heavy, shining handcuffs. A moment later, just before the train left, they were joined by another prisoner and two more guards bound for the same destination.

The new prisoner seemed to treat his captivity as a particularly delightful joke. He made himself comfortable on the green-leather seat, demanded a cigarette from the guards, and immediately plunged into conversation with Carlos.

Jethro paid attention to them for a moment or two; and then he realized that Carlos was addressing him. He wanted to introduce Jethro to their new friend, Pablo. The introduction was a highly formal one. Everyone, including the guards, bowed as much as the handcuffs would permit. Pablo Montejo. Señor Nadie. And everyone bowed for a third time. Their fellow passenger, Carlos explained, was a very great and distinguished man; though only nineteen, he had participated in a dozen robberies and killed six men with his own hands. Whereupon one of the guards who understood a little English spoke up and corrected the figure, "*Eight* men." He looked even more proud than Pablo himself at the accomplishment.

Jethro said, in English, that he was deeply honored, and Carlos translated it into what Jethro sensed was a flowery compliment. Then Carlos went into a long speech, gesturing occasionally toward Jethro. The expression on the guards' faces turned to surprise and then to admiration. Even Pablo looked a trifle impressed. Finally Carlos said to Jethro, in English, "I have been telling them how in America you robbed two hundred banks and killed sixteen men." The look in his eyes made it plain to Jethro that it was a matter of honor to him not to let this stranger Pablo, however charming, outdo them; and Jethro tried to look as though he had robbed at least that many banks and probably more. The guards looked respectfully at Jethro and passed around cigarettes again.

Was their new friend going to the same destination? Jethro wanted to know. Carlos put the question into Spanish. Pablo and the other guards laughed heartily. One of them said something at which Carlos also laughed. Then Carlos said, "He is going to Mexico City to be shot. He is a very great criminal, and I am proud that we ride on the same train."

A SHORT DISTANCE from Mexico City, the guards who had brought Carlos and Jethro on board glanced through the window and hastily began making preparations to leave the train. Pablo, left alone with his two guards, called one last sentence after them.

"What?" Jethro asked, almost in a whisper.

"He was asking us," Carlos said gravely, "to pray for his soul." In the same instant he laughed heartily. "But it would take the prayers of all the saints there are to pray that one into heaven!"

Jethro remembered very little of the rest of that day: more guards, uncomfortable conveyances, a few moments spent in the office of the penitentiary, a small, stuffy cell furnished only with a hard bench, and a sleepless night. His thoughts were with their fellow prisoner who had not escaped.

At what hour had he been shot? During the day he tried to imagine at what moment it might be. Perhaps—now? Was Pablo frightened at this last moment?

When night fell and he was left alone—as was the custom with a new prisoner—he realized that it must be over. He

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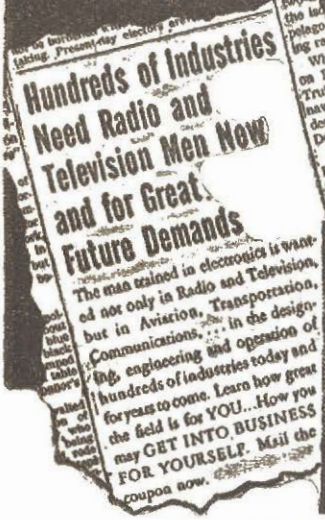

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wished that he could pray for Pablo's soul. But perhaps his prayer would bring as much misfortune to one so recently executed as his friendship brought to everyone in life.

He stayed awake all night, sitting on the hard bench. In the morning the new prisoners—Carlos and Jethro among a number of others—were called into the prison yard for inspection and to be assigned to their tasks. Carlos waved at Jethro, and then he pointed a quick, surreptitious gesture that would not attract the attention of the guards. Jethro let his eyes move in the direction Carlos had indicated.

There was Pablo, dressed in prison clothes, still smiling, still joking with the guards.

Later Jethro learned that Pablo's sentence had been changed at the very last moment to life imprisonment. For one reason, Pablo had too many friends, followers, and admirers. There might have been an uprising had he been shot. For another, he was young and strong and in excellent health, and he would be useful working on the roads.

At the moment, however, Jethro knew only that the young man was alive. Suddenly the hope he had almost lost returned to him. For Pablo's eyes met his across the prison yard, and Pablo made a gesture whose meaning Jethro already understood: *"We shall escape!"*

CHAPTER XI

His Shadow To The Grave

TELLING IT TO Melville Fairr in the fly-specked little restaurant just off Amsterdam Avenue, the girl who called herself Miss Hammer paused at that point, stared across the table at Melville Fairr, and whispered, "It is a great pity. I know so little—my mother knew so little about those years."

"Years?" Melville Fairr said. "What years?" This was the answer to the question that had been plaguing him.

"It was a long time," she said. "He always knew that he would escape. But it was eighteen—nineteen—years . . ." She paused and then said, "So long a time. And of what they were like, of what he did and what he thought—I do not know. He never spoke of them. He said only, 'I was in prison for nearly nineteen years before we escaped.' For the rest, I do not know, I cannot even imagine."

"Nor can I," Melville Fairr said, but that was not entirely true. He knew nothing of the Mexican penitentiary. He could not picture what Jethro wore, ate, and did, during those years. He could picture in his mind, however, what Jethro thought.

Jethro must have been a model prisoner, obeying rules and making no complaints. He would have aged slowly during that time from the very young man he had been on the day he was ushered in through the prison gates to the man of forty-odd who had somehow gotten away. But during those years there would have been one thought burning in his mind: to escape, to accomplish those things which he had not abandoned but had only postponed.

"Only I know this," the girl said. "In prison he and Pablo and my granduncle Carlos became great friends."

Great-uncle Carlos! Melville Fairr looked up at her sharply. She was, then, the daughter of that Soledad who had been a laughing, dark-haired baby in the back room of La Cantina Dominga. But what had happened to Dominga? And to Soledad herself? And to Carlos?

"But how did they escape?" he asked.

"It was arranged by my grandmother," the girl said. "At first my granduncle Carlos believed that the escape would be simple, that they could arrange it within a few months, or even a few weeks. But that was impossible. You must understand, Señor Fairr, that the man who had been smuggled into Mexico on *La Perla* was unsuccessful in his little revolution, and he was arrested. He was not a very brave man, and he told quite freely how he had entered the country. So that my father and my granduncle Carlos were watched very closely in case they should escape and smuggle in some

other men who might make a successful revolution. And Pablo was watched with great carefulness because he was so great a bandit that once out of prison he could have raised an army and begun a little revolution of his own." She sighed, shrugged her beautiful shoulders, and said, "According to my mother, there were always revolutions in those days."

Melville Fairr was beginning to understand why it had taken so many years for the escape to be made. These three men would have been treated with great consideration, yet they would have been watched very closely. No one would have dared to put them to death, and no one would have dared let them escape. "And—?" he prompted her gently.

"That is why it took my grandmother so many years to arrange things," she told them. "Though from the moment they were taken to prison she did not stop, no, not once. And at last she succeeded in finding those who could be bribed. It was all arranged with great delicacy. Three men, in return for quite a large sum of money—and it took a great many years for my grandmother to accumulate what money was required—allowed themselves to be smuggled into the prison by a guard. And the guard, too, required a great sum of money. It was necessary for the three men to be smuggled in, you understand, because it was going to take several days to get the escaped prisoners out of the country. And during those days it had to appear that no one was missing from the prison."

"Those three men," Melville Fairr said. "What happened to them?"

She looked a little surprised that he should even bother to ask such a question. "They were freed," she said. "They had committed no crime. There was a chance, of course, that they might have been kept in prison, but they were aware of that when they made the bargain. That was why it cost my grandmother so great a sum of money."

"Of course," Melville Fairr said, nodding. "And there would be other expenses."

She smiled at him and said, "Great

expenses. It was very difficult conveying them to the coast, even though their absence from the prison was not discovered until they were almost safe." Her face grew sober. "But then there was some little trouble getting on board the boat. It was a very small boat, Señor Fairr, and it was waiting at a place on the coast where one did not expect anyone to see them. And it was night. In spite of all that, they were discovered, and there was a great trouble in getting away. They did get away, of course, but my father was injured. Badly injured. My mother nursed him." Again she smiled. "It was a great surprise to him when, after a very long time, he became conscious and found how many miles he had traveled without knowing anything of them."

Melville Fairr could picture it all in his mind—the very small boat waiting for the three escaped convicts. Dominga with them. Or had she been waiting on board? And at the end to have it all come so close to failure!

"It is fortunate," the girl said simply, "that my grandmother lived long enough to tell of what happened after that, because otherwise we would never have known what happened on the way."

"IT WILL NOT be a lucky voyage," Dominga had said gloomily as the small boat headed away from the dark shore.

Certainly it had not begun auspiciously. The careful arrangements, the bribed guards, the substitutes who had been smuggled into the prison, the perilous journey to the seacoast—all these things had gone well. Then, at the last moment, there had been the unexpected arrival of the *rurales* at the point where the boat was waiting with Dominga on board.

Back on the shore three men lay dead and several wounded; one of the dead was the member of the *bandidos* crew Dominga had engaged at so great cost to convey the three fugitives to the seacoast. The rest of their number had fled into the darkness of the hills.

The escape had been made, the three men were on board, and the little boat was rapidly losing itself in the shadows of the sea. But now they would be watched for at every port. And Mr. Nadie lay on a blanket on deck, looking much more dead than alive. By the time they rounded the Yucatan Peninsula, the provisions were almost gone, and Dominga had another patient on her hands.

Carlos had spent most of his life on the sea; now it seemed that he would die on it. Through the years of his imprisonment he had remained serene and cheerful, accepting whatever came without question; yet the period of his confinement had destroyed him as it would have destroyed some wild bird in captivity. He had been sturdily stout; now he was unhealthily fat, almost puffy. His dark eyes had been gay; now they were the eyes of a man whose heart knows that he is about to die. Dominga listened to his continual cough, looked at his eyes, his skin, and his fingernails, and prayed only that he would live long enough to be buried beside his father. He did not.

Dominga gazed over the side of the boat at the silvery light that was the only marker for Carlos' grave. Truly, she mourned Carlos. She had not seen him for nearly nineteen years before his imprisonment. But he was her brother, she had been fond of him, and she mourned for him, her head bowed over the rail of the small boat.

If it had been Jethro who'd died during the voyage, she would have thrown herself overboard after him.

Dominga would never have described herself as having a highly complex personality. Yet there were a hundred contradictions in her nature. She was incredibly patient with an unwavering steadfastness of purpose; at the same time, she was impulsive as a child. It had been an impulse that had sent her into the arms of Mr. Nadie, the stranger Carlos had brought into La Cantina Dominga. Even now she could not understand her own reasons for having devoted her life to his rescue from the Mexican prison. If questioned, she would probably have said she was in love with

him, yet at the same time she would have known that was not the answer. She remembered how she had looked on the day when Mr. Nadie first walked into the Cantina. She did not need the compliments of customers and admirers to know how beautiful she was. But that had been a long time ago, and the years had been hard. Her hair was streaked with gray, her skin was sallow and deeply lined, and her fat shoulders sagged.

Perhaps once she'd had some mad thought in her mind that if she rescued her Mr. Nadie from prison he'd make her an offer of marriage out of gratitude. She would have attempted the rescue in any case, however, simply because she could not bear the thought of him in prison. But if that had been in her mind once, she had abandoned it now. Indeed, she would not like to see him married to a fat old woman. At last, and slowly, another plan began to form in her mind.

THEY WERE within sight of land when the wind struck. The boat was flung toward the shore in a cataclysm of raging water, sand, and stones. In the distance the tall palm trees swayed double. One of them cracked with a sound like a gunshot. A moment later the boat was thrown violently against the shore, its timbers crashing.

Dominga caught the unconscious Mr. Nadie in her arms as the water swept over them.

There was sunlight on her face when she woke. A familiar voice said, "You have had a good sleep." She looked up into a familiar face, one Señor O'Rourke's.

She gasped, recovered herself, and said, "How is it that you are still alive?"

Señor O'Rourke grinned at her. He had a thin, sharp face, black with tan. His bushy eyebrows were red, and so was what was left of his hair. He was very tall and extremely thin, and there was a dark red flush on his cheekbones under the tan, and a curious glitter in his unexpectedly black eyes. Señor O'Rourke, you are very ill, Dominga thought.

He grinned at her and said, "Mamma

Dominga, I must ask you the same question. How is it that you are still alive?"

She started to answer before she thought that she was still alive because she had prayed to the good God, but she remembered in time that Señor O'Rourke would make fun of her.

He had been a smuggler until his illness came—something to do with transporting rum and brandy and mysterious liquors from European ports to New York, a business which she could not quite understand, only that it was profitable. More than once she had hidden him there from the authorities; perhaps she could expect as much of him now. She stared at him, her fat, wrinkled face whitening. "El Señor Nadie?"

"He recovers," O'Rourke said. "I would not have expected it, but he recovers. He still sleeps, but he is alive. I think that he will remain alive. Pablo is alive and in good health. At the moment he is asleep, which is just as well. The boat, I regret to say, was entirely destroyed. The boatman was drowned, and that, too, of course, is just as well. If he had lived, he might have insisted on a share of the money."

"Money?" Dominga looked at him uncomprehending.

"Occasionally in this out-of-the-way-place we hear a little of what goes on in the world," O'Rourke said, smiling. "There was a great reward offered for the capture of the men who escaped from the Mexican prison."

"Many condolences," Señor O'Rourke added, "not only for the loss of the boat, but for the death of your brother. How especially sad when you had gone to such length to accomplish his escape!"

Dominga looked at him searchingly. There had been sincerity in his voice, and his eyes were friendly. She reminded herslf again that she had been a good friend to him more than once in the past. At any rate, she had to trust him now. There was nothing else to do.

"It was not because of my brother," she said evenly, "but because of Señor Nadie."

His eyes widened with incredulity, then narrowed with amusement. Dominga could read what he was thinking, and she felt her face grow hot. True, Mr. Nadie did seem like a poor, skinny excuse for a man but that was only because he was so ill, and, as for the other thing she read in O'Rourke's gaze—the reminder that she was old and fat and ugly—well, she had an answer for that, too, but she was not going to tell what it was.

"I will take him to the home of my people," she said. "He will be safe there."

Señor O'Rourke looked eloquently at the scattered wreckage on the sand.

"It is possible," she said, half angrily, "to go by another route. On the river."

"Possible," O'Rourke said, "but difficult and extremely dangerous."

She shrugged her shoulders both at the difficulty and at the danger. "Good strong canoes," she said, "and men I can trust."

He nodded and said, "It will take money, and you have none." He paused and added slyly, "But there is the re ard money, and there is Pablo. We could divide it equally between us. After all, I am your good friend, Mamma Dominga."

Dominga hesitated for a moment. After all, she owed nothing to Pablo. She nodded assent.

"INCREDIBLE," Melville Fairr said, leaning back in his chair. "Simply incredible."

The girl had just finished telling him of that terrible journey through the swamps and jungles. By the time it ended, Jethro Hammer had recovered consciousness, and Dominga was very ill with fever.

"Incredible," Meville Fairr repeated, "and amazing."

"My grandmother was a very determined woman," the girl said. "She insisted on making the journey, even though she believed that Pablo had put a curse on it."

For the moment Melville Fairr had forgotten Pablo. He sat up straight and said, "What became of him?"

She looked a little surprised. "He es-

caped, of course," she said. "You do not think my grandmother would have arranged for his recapture without arranging also for his escape before he had even reached Mexico? Unfortunately, he did not know that it was she who arranged it, and is probably angry about it to this day. I think perhaps I will go to visit him and tell him."

"Visit him?" Melville Fairr said. "Here?"

"Of course," she said. "After he escaped, he came to New York. He became an American and very rich. Perhaps you have heard of him."

Pablo Montejo. The name sounded no note in Melville Fairr's memory.

"He calls himself now Paul Monte," she added.

Melville Fairr swallowed a gasp. Paul Monte! Of course he had heard of him—the almost fabulous owner of night-clubs, bars, and gambling houses, owner of a racing stable and, by reputation, one of the head men in the numbers game. Pablo had done all right for himself in America! Melville Fairr made a mental note that he, too, would call on him. Pablo had lived all these years in the same city as Jethro Hammer, for whose safety his own had been almost sacrificed.

"The rest is very simple," the girl said. "They came to the village, and my mother was there. My grandmother had given her a good education, Señor. Mexico City, even once a trip to New York; and then when the escape was to be arranged, she sent my mother home in case there should be trouble with the authorities. They came to the village. My grandmother said, 'Mr. Nadie, I have saved your life. It is my wish that you marry my daughter Soledad.' They were married, Señor Fairr, before my grandmother died of the fever. And my father was very ill for a long time. He, too, had taken the fever and, while he was out of his head, he told my mother all of these things which she later told to me. And that is all."

"Why did he go away?" Melville Fairr said.

"He was a stranger," she told him. "He did not look or act like the other men of the village. He did not speak their language, and they were superstitious, Señor, not educated and intelligent like myself. Whenever trouble came it was blamed on my father; and at last they gave him money and told him to go away."

That would be it, of course, Melville Fairr reflected. A nameless stranger in Leesville, Ohio. Mr. Nadie in an obscure village on the Honduran coast.

One thing Jethro did not know was that in his illness he had told Soledad all about himself. He did not know that more than once he had called her Sally. Nor did he know that on the day of Dominga's burial he had repeated over and over again the one word "daisy." Soledad simply considered it to be the name of Jethro's foster-mother. She preserved in her mind every detail of his voyage, yet when he recovered she never mentioned these things.

Soledad was essentially a cheerful, simple-minded girl who wanted only to do as she was told and to please everybody. Dominga had told her to marry Mr. Nadie, and she had done so without protest, without comment. And again when he felt it important that he return to New York, he worried about how to tell his wife he had to leave her behind.

He was greatly relieved when Soledad announced that she did not wish to go with him.

He still carried old Will's diary, a shabby, well-worn little book by now. It had been his best companion during the years in prison, and he knew quite well the significance of old Will's references to his inventions. The whole thing was very plain and simple in his mind. It was necessary for him to have a great deal of money. The easiest and quickest way to accomplish that was to make use of the diary.

"ONE would think," the girl said, "that he would have been very angry at these people. Yet, Mr. Fairr, he was not a person who becomes angry. It was simply something that he had to do, do you understand?"

Melville Fairr nodded.

"We never saw him again," she said. "He sent money to my mother, a great deal of money. She sent me to very fine schools, so that I would become a lady. When she died, I made up my mind to come here and find him. Mr. Fairr, was it one of these foster-brothers who killed him?"

Melville Fairr looked at her thoughtfully. "That night when I met you beside his house," he said, "your words were, 'They will kill him.' What did you mean by that? Who are they?"

She spread her hands in an expressive gesture. "These people," she said. "He had taken all their money away from them. Naturally they hated him."

CHAPTER XII

Mr. Nobody's Quest

IT HAD LONG been a question whether actors portraying big-shot gamblers on the screen copied Paul Monte, or whether Paul Monte copied them. Melville Fairr inclined to the former theory, for no screen portrayal had ever been as fabulous or fantastic as Paul Monte himself.

Fairr had no trouble getting to see the man, though Paul Monte was ringed round with bodyguards and lived behind sliding steel doors. Because, five years before, Melville Fairr had done Paul Monte a favor, in a set of circumstances which cannot be told about now or, perhaps, ever.

Paul Monte lived in a penthouse on top of a Park Avenue apartment building otherwise inhabited by the well-bred wealthy. None of the tenants knew that he lived there because no one ever rode in the same elevator with Paul Monte. And certainly none of them knew that he owned the building.

The doorman looked like any other doorman, but he wore a shoulder holster under the coat of his tailored uniform, and he had an incredible memory for

faces. He tipped his hat to Melville Fairr and said, "Good morning, Mr. Fairr. You want to see Mr. Monte, I assume." It had been five years since Fairr had passed through that door.

"That's right, Nick," Fairr said. He, too, had a memory for faces. He went on into the lobby and knew that, behind him, Nick was picking up a telephone.

The elevator operator looked like any other elevator operator. He slid open the door for two minked matrons and remarked that it was a nasty day outside. But he had a gun in the pocket of his coat. He looked coldly at Fairr, and then glanced at the doorman at his telephone. The doorman put down the receiver, a tiny signal light flashed on the ceiling of the elevator, and the operator said politely, "Step in, please, sir." The elevator shot up without a stop.

The gunman in the hallway who sat facing the elevator door rose, smiled cordially, and said, "Good evening, Mr. Fairr. Go right in." He stepped on one particular spot on the carpet, a latch clicked, and the white enameled door swung open.

It would all have seemed a little theatrical and silly, Fairr reflected, except that there were perhaps half a hundred men in just the city of New York who would want to murder Paul Monte. He found himself wondering, as he walked in through the doorway, if there had been just one man in New York that Paul Monte had wanted to murder.

Fairr didn't have to look at the room, he remembered it. Expensive and comfortable, and everything in the gaudiest possible taste. A strong smell of Mexican cooking. But he closed his eyes, to remember something else. A mental picture he had of Pablo Montejo.

A criminal, yes, but also a laughing youth who joked with the *rurales* on the train that was carrying him to his execution. A bright-eyed boy who boasted of his prowess as a thief and murderer, who loved music and joy and liquor and girls, and who was destined to spend nearly twenty years of his life in prison.

He looked at Paul Monte and saw a

paunchy man, well past middle age, with a round, brown face, heavy gray hair, a smiling mouth. A man who wore an expensive smoking jacket and house-slippers. A very ordinary, amiable, aging man. But the dark eyes were still gay and bright.

"You've changed," Mellville Fairr said, "except for the eyes," and then could have bitten off his tongue.

"Changed?" Paul Monte said. "My dear Mr. Fairr, how is it you can be so cruel? Surely it has not been more than five years. Have I aged so much?"

Melville Fairr closed his eyes again for a moment, made a quick decision, and plunged right on, "I mean—you've changed since the night when you boarded the train on the way to your execution." He silently counted five and opened his eyes.

Paul Monte was laughing. "You come right to the point, do you not, Mr. Fairr? Please sit down. May I offer you a cigar? No? A cigarette? A glass of wine?" He sank into a comfortable chair near the little man in gray, lighted a thin black cigar and said, "I had wondered, Mr. Fairr, if you would make the mistake of attempting to conceal from me the fact that you knew I had been Pablo Montejo."

"I spoke on an impulse," Melville Fairr said. He decided against asking Paul Monte how he'd known.

"I have changed, outwardly," Paul Monte said. "At heart, I am the same. You said the eyes have not changed. The heart looks through the eyes, Mr. Fairr, if I may misquote someone whose name I do not remember now." He sighed deeply and shook his handsome old head. "All that was so long ago. Strange, that I can remember it all with so little difficulty. That journey by boat. It was a journey through hell, Mr. Fairr. By the grace of the good God, our poor Señor Nadie remembered nothing of it."

FAIRR SIPPED his glass of wine and said nothing. In some strange manner Paul Monte knew the purpose of his visit, knew that he, Melville Fairr, had been told the circumstances of that terrible journey. This was a time when it was best to listen in silence.

"I give you my assurance, Mr. Fairr," the gambling and vice czar continued pleasantly, "I did not push poor Señor Nadie down those unlighted cellar stairs. If I had wished to kill him, Mr. Fairr, I would have used some other means, and a long time ago. We have lived in the same city for something like twenty years, you may remember."

Fairr twirled his glass in his fingers, nodded, and remained silent. He'd thought the same thing. If Paul Monte had wished for revenge on Jethro Hammer, there would have been a quick, unspectacular killing in some dark alley within a few days of Jethro Hammer's return.

"But for that," Paul Monte said, "I can only take the liberty of asking you to accept my word, Mr. Fairr."

"I believe you," Fairr said. He paused and said, "You read the newspaper stories about the inquest. But you, too, know in your heart that the man was murdered."

Paul Monte nodded slowly and thoughtfully. His dark eyes turned an infinitesimal shade darker. "I know a great many things, Mr. Fairr. For a long time, he was as my brother. He said nothing of himself to me, I said nothing of myself to him. For on my part, what had I to say? Ambitions. To escape from prison. To go somewhere and make much money, dishonestly if possible."

He rose and said, "May I fill your glass, Mr. Fairr?"

"Thank you," Fairr said. His nerve ends were like live wires pressing against his skin. In another instant he was going to learn something important. But he dared not ask questions.

"I was born to be a great thief, Mr. Fairr," Paul Monte said, sitting down again. "Oh, no, I do not refer to some curious superstition of my birth, nor to some scientific phenomenon concerned with blood chemistry, nor to heredity, nor to psychological factors in my youth.

You observe, Mr. Fairr, that I have done some reading since I was a simple-hearted Mexican criminal escaped from the penitentiary. Or do I bore you, Mr. Fairr?"

"Far from it," Fairr said.

"It is, then, Mr. Fairr," Paul Monte went on, "that circumstances conspired against me and for me. Otherwise, I would never have become a thief and a murderer; never been caught, convicted and sentenced to death. But on the other side, Mr. Fairr, otherwise I would never have had my sentence changed to life imprisonment, I would never have escaped, reached New York City, made my fortune, and married a good wife. But for *him*—"

Paul Monte paused, rose, put his hands in the pockets of his velveteen smoking jacket, and stared at Melville Fairr.

He said softly, 'How many times did I not think of visiting him, of telephoning to him, of writing to him! Only to say this, 'My good Señor Nadie, this is your old friend Pablo, who shared your cell and your rations, who escaped with you, who helped to nurse you when it seemed that you were about to die. I am still your friend Pablo, let us visit together, come to my house, my wife will cook for you with her own hands, we will drink wine together and talk of the old days, and drink many toasts to Carlos and Dominga, bless their names.' I should have said that to him, Mr. Fairr, and I did not."

Fairr suddenly thought of old Jethro Hammer going back and forth from his empty office to his lonely house, and he looked away from Paul Monte. His eyeballs were hot and wet.

"And at the end, Mr. Fairr," Paul Monte said, in a very low voice, "it was he who spoke to me, and on the day before he died."

"He—" Melville's Fairr's head jerked up involuntarily as though it had been pulled by a string. He saw that Paul Monte's eyes were wet.

"We were friends," Paul Monte whispered. "From the first. There was great grief in his eyes when he believed that

I would be shot in the morning. And there was a pain in my heart that I can still feel, when I think back to it, when we carried him on board Dominga's boat, and it seemed that he was about to die. But I did not speak to him, Mr. Fairr, and on the day before his death, he spoke to me. He said"—Paul Monte paused, and swallowed hard—"he said, 'Pablo, my old friend, it has been too long since we last met.' I knew his voice. It had been more than twenty years, but I knew his voice. Mr. Fairr, I said, *'Amigo Nadie,'* and he said, 'We must meet soon and talk of the old days, and drink toasts in good wine to Carlos and Dominga.' And the next day I saw in the newspapers that he was dead, and I knew that he was murdered."

THERE WAS a little silence. Paul Monte refilled his wine glass to the brim and stood staring at its color and sparks of light.

"It was like this, Mr. Fairr," he said, as though he were talking to himself. "That good Señor O'Rourke, bless his name, came to me while we were at Bailey's Lagoon. He told me that Dominga's money had been washed away in the hurricane and that it was necessary that she turn me over to the authorities to obtain the reward money, which he would then divide with her. I raved and raged like an insane man, Señor Fairr, I swore seventeen kinds of vengeance on Señor Nadie. And then I learned that one-third of the money was for me, to bribe the *rurales* and to provide what I would need for the rest of my escape."

He smiled, shrugged his shoulders. "Those were wild days, Mr. Fairr. By chance there was trouble among the members of the crew on the rum-runner that brought me here, and by the time of the landing the cargo was owned by me. Since then I have prospered, and I have never ceased to bless Señor Nadie. I have all that an old man could desire, a happy home, a good wife, much money, and faith that I shall enter heaven in spite of my crimes."

Paul Monte smiled again, drained off the wine glass, and sat down. "Now, my good friend Mr. Fairr, what more may I have the honor of discussing with you?"

"Several things," Fairr said. "Why didn't you just call him up on the telephone and say, 'Here I am'?"

"Because—" Paul Monte drew a long slow breath. "Mr. Fairr, I think perhaps you do not understand about this Señor Nadie, or Jethro Hammer, or whatever his name once might have been. He was—Señor Nadie. Mr. Nobody. All he knew of himself was that he was alive and walked upon the earth. And circumstances made a little conspiracy against him, too, so that he believed he brought great trouble to whoever he might love, like, or even touch. It may be that he was correct in this belief, Mr. Fairr, but at this late time we will never be able to know for sure. Yet it seemed also, though he never realized it, that he brought great good as well. For so long a time he walked alone, Mr. Fairr, and then, just at the end of his life, he called his old friend Paul Monte, once Pablo Montejo."

He'd called others as well, Fairr remembered. Will, and Maggie, and Robert Emmett, and John Patrick, and Sally. He said, "Why was he murdered?"

Because he was Señor Nadie," Paul Monte said.

"I don't know just what you mean," Fairr said.

Paul Monte shrugged his shoulders again. "But you are an excellent detective, Mr. Fairr. Surely, you can find that out for yourself. And, may I give you more wine?"

The telephone buzzed sharply. Paul Monte said, "Excuse me, Mr. Fairr," picked it up, and said, "Yes, yes." Then he went on. "I will add this, Mr. Fairr. I am Paul Monte. But I know that I am Pablo Montejo. I know the name of my parents, and of the town where I was born. But Señor Nadie—was, Señor Nadie. A gipsy, an Indian, a—perhaps—a changeling. If he had known—"

A bell sounded quietly over the door.

Paul Monte again said, "Excuse me, Mr. Fairr." The door swung open.

It was the girl named Daisy Hammer. She was beautiful, disheveled, and hurried. Her eyes shone.

A cannonade of excited Spanish conversation almost deafened Melville Fairr for a moment. Then she noticed him, her voice stopped in the middle of a word, her face whitened with surprise.

"Señor Fairr—!" Then, "Oh, Senor Fairr, the friend of my father, I have come to see him, I have talked much with him, I have told him what I wished most, and I am so happy, Señor Fairr!"

"She is young," Paul Monte said, his eyes twinkling. "But she is sensible. We spoke of her father, and we became friends. She told me, yes, what she wished most. That is, to marry well, but with love. I own certain night clubs, you understand, Mr. Fairr, and it was not difficult to arrange meetings."

"I love him, I worship him, I will die for him," she broke in. *"Siempre se amaré."*

All my life. It was what Dominga had said to Jethro Hammer.

"Today," she said, "I have met his family. Next week we will be married."

"Who?" Melville Fairr demanded.

"Young Bob Donohough," Paul Monte said, smiling at Melville Fairr.

There was another burst of excited Spanish conversation. The walls fairly vibrated with it. Melville Fairr took advantage of it to slip quietly out of the door.

The daughter of Jethro Hammer and Dominga's daughter Soledad. The grandson of William James Donohough II. It would, he sensed, be a happy marirage.

It had been Daisy Hammer, of course, who had told Paul Monte that he, Melville Fairr, was bound to be around asking questions. That was just as well, too.

Circumstances conspire—

The gunman in the hallway rang for the elevator.

"If he had not been Señor Nadie"—

MY DEAR MISS SALLY DONAHUE:

He was murdered because his name was Mr. Nobody.

Sincerely,

MELVILLE FAIRR

"IT'S HERE," Sarah White said. She took a large insurance calendar down from the wall of what had been Jethro Hammer's private office and revealed a wall safe.

"I hope you know the combination," Fairr said.

She nodded. "I do. It took me nearly a year to find it out, though."

He watched, holding his breath, while she worked on the safe. The chances were that behind that little metal door was the final answer. It wasn't so much the answer he was hoping to find now, but the proof. He believed he knew the answer itself already.

Inside the safe was a package of letters, an accumulation of years, neatly arranged into packages and labeled. Sarah White spread them out on the flat-topped desk and sat down opposite Melville Fairr, her lovely dark eyes fixed on his face.

"That's where his fortune went," she said softly. "Every cent of it."

He hardly heard her. He untied the string from around the first packet, took up the top letter, and began to read.

Spring Private Inquiry Company
New York City

MY DEAR MR. HAMMER:

We must warn you that the investigation you wish to engage us to make appears an almost impossible task—

Melville Fairr laid the letter down and stared at the wall across from him. It was strange, ironic, that the first of those letters should contain those words.

Letter after letter, the whole pitiful story of Jethro Hammer's last twenty years. One firm after another—big ones, small ones, reputable ones, crooked ones—had taken on the task of finding out Jethro Hammer's parentage; and one after another had given up.

Oh, there had been leads to follow, leads that had only brought false hopes. A woman on her deathbed in the Cook County Hospital confessed to deserting her child some fifty years before in a small midwest town. It took time, and it took money, finally to discover that the town had been in Illinois, and the child had been a blond boy, now grown up to be a successful farmer. Someone thought a man and woman answering the description of Jethro's people had settled on a farm near Bloomington. That started another chain of investigation, until at last the man and woman in question were traced to Oregon, and turned out to be the wrong ones.

Even the less reputable firms of investigators didn't hold out too much encouragement. The chances of Jethro's parents being alive were very slim. So were the chancs of finding out who they had been. And even if one or the other of those aims could be accomplished—or both—there was always the possibility that they might not have been Jethro's parents at all. He might have been a nephew, or a grandson, or a neighbor's child, or some stray picked up along the road.

But the old man had refused to give up. Every letter confessing failure and advising him to let the matter drop had been followed by one from a new firm admitting the difficulty of the undertaking, but agreeing to make a try at it.

"That was what he had to do," Melville Fair said. "That was why he had a bodyguard and spent so much on doctor bills. He had to stay alive until he found out.

And until he found out, he had to be a recluse, for fear that he might bring disaster to anyone he touched or loved.

The dates of the last packet of letters began only a little more than a year before. They were unsigned. There was no printed firm name at the top. They were typewritten. They had been, Melville Fairr realized, old Jethro Hammer's last desperate hope.

The writer didn't ask for money for expenses. He stated simply that he had stumbled on certain facts which made him believe that he could find out all about Jethro Hammer's parentage and background. If he succeeded in doing so, he would exchange the proof for a hundred thousand dollars, cash. Otherwise, not a cent.

Evidently Jethro Hammer had told the letter writer to go ahead. Then the letters continued over the course of a year, eighteen or twenty of them in all, and they grew increasingly hopeful. Finally, the last letter of the whole collection.

MY DEAR MR. HAMMER:

My search has been successful. Your father and mother were New England farming people; poor, but of good family and reputation. Finding it impossible to make a living in the small village near which they lived, they decided to emigrate westward. Near Leesville, Ohio, traveling in an open wagon, they resolved to leave you in the nearest church, knowing that kindly people would take you in, for there was very little money, and your mother was ill. Their intention was to return for you when circumstances permitted. However, continuing the journey, your mother died several weeks after. Your father reached Colorado where he obtained work, but was killed some months later in a mine cave-in.

I have obtained all the proof, including baptismal certificates of your father, your mother, and yourself, parish records of your family, letters written by your mother to her family during the journey, one of which refers to leaving you in St. Joseph's Church in Leesville, Ohio, etc.

I will be glad to turn all this material over to you on payment of the sum previously agreed upon, and will bring it to your home address at nine tomorrow night. The payment, you remember, is to be in cash.

"And he fell for it!" Melville Fairr murmured.

"I beg your pardon?" Sarah White said, staring at him.

He shook his head. "Nothing." He began folding up the letters, rearranging and tying them in packets, finally stacking them into a neat pile. "Thank you for showing me these, Miss White."

Melville Fairr rose and began fastening his gray overcoat.

She frowned, puzzled. "But what am I to do with them?"

"Give them to Sally Donahue," he said. "Tell her she knows, now, that he always loved her. And tell her to watch the newspapers for the name of his murderer."

CHAPTER XIII

A Long Time Dead

IT WAS daylight, a cold, raw, dismal daylight. Mister Thomas woke, yawned, stretched, licked at his wounds, and began rubbing his head against Melville Fairr's ankles.

"All right," Fairr said in mock annoyance. "Breakfast."

He rose and walked into the kitchen, stiff in every limb. Mister Thomas walked with him, circling around his feet, and uttering sounds of complant.

He mixed ground cooked liver, raw egg, and concentrated cat food in a dish, and set it before Mister Thomas, who sniffed, growled, stating plainly that such food was fit for neither beast nor man, and, finally, with one last *meraouw* of objection, settled down to eating it.

He boiled two eggs and made toast and tea for himself. For Mister Thomas he poured a dish of milk.

Al Fowler had been hard to convince. The accused had an alibi. But, Melville Fairr pointed out, alibis could be cracked. Al Fowler doggedly went to work, asked a few questions, interviewed a few people. The alibi was broken.

He didn't have a motive, Al Fowler objected. He'd never even met Jethro Hammer. But he did have a motive, Melville Fairr insisted. Revenge, jealousy, hatred, and greed.

But he didn't have the money, Al Fowler complained. He didn't have any money at all. He did have the money, Melville Fairr stated flatly. Perhaps a search? Al Fowler searched, found the money, and, at last, arrested the murderer.

All on his own account, Al Fowler traced, discovered, and had tests made on the typewriter which proved (a) to have written the letters to Jethro Hammer, and (b) to have belonged to the arrested suspect.

Also on his own initiative, Al Fowler found that there never had been any investigation made into the origin of Jethro Hammer by the arrested suspect, and that the letters which had come from various towns and cities had been handled by a mailing service, whose clerks readily identified the arrested suspect as an ex-client.

It was enough for an arrest, probably enough for a conviction.

But those were tangible things. Melville Fairr still preferred to depend on the intangible. . . .

But it was late and he still had that letter to write. He poured himself a cup of tea, and sat down at his writing desk.

You engaged me to find out, I quote your words, why the police pinned this crime on you. The police did not pin this crime on you. I told them you had committed it. They arrested you on the strength of the evidence I gave them.

If you had been an ordinary criminal, I would have felt otherwise. If you had merely committed theft, or murder, I might have found it possible to do what you wished me to do—that is, to find a loophole by which you could escape. But you committed a far greater and crueler crime, that of destroying hope.

If you had robbed, or cheated, old Jethro Hammer of a hundred thousand dollars because you wanted and needed the money so greatly, or if you had murdered him because of what he had done to Sally Donahue, or because you loved her and were jealous of him; if you had robbed him from greed or murdered him from hatred, it would have been a forgivable crime. It may be that I would have done what you wished me to do, and that you might walk out of a courtroom a free man. For there are those who are born to be murderers, just as there are those who are born to be murdered. But for you to break his heart at the last—that was the unforgivable crime.

Perhaps if circumstances had not conspired against you—

Melville Fairr paused for a moment in his writing. A big black drop of ink fell unnoticed on his desk pad. Then he went on, rapidly:

Or perhaps, if you had not tried to conspire against circumstances—

That, too, was the wrong phrase. He recopied the entire letter, slowly and carefully, and continued:

You made certain serious errors. The matter of the alibi, for instance. An alibi invites investigation. In this case, it was easy to discover that there was a car at the country house, and to check its mileage, to learn that your uncle was a simple-headed and quite near-sighted old man, and that the letter offering to buy the place for a fabulous sum—which situation would naturally call for a hasty visit on your part—had been written on your typewriter.

One other error. You should never have sent a bunch of field daisies to Jethro Hammer's funeral. Someone was bound to guess their significance.

I regret that I cannot help you, that you will undoubtedly be convicted and executed. Believe me, I am sorry.

He signed it, "Sincerely, Melville Fairr." He picked up the telephone and called for a messenger boy.

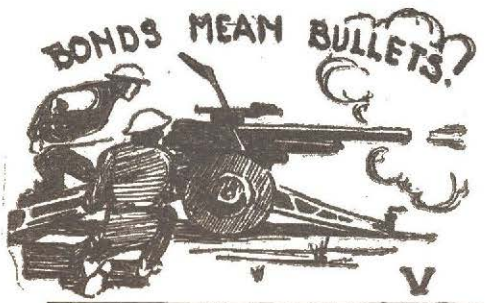
While he waited, he folded the letter carefully, placed it in an envelope, and addressed it to Mr. Peter Schuyler, care of Burke, Reynolds, and Chidester.

The room was cold, dismal. Melville Fairr shivered and put the teapot back on the stove to warm. In the hall outside, the cleaning woman was singing. Out on the fire escape, Mister Thomas was improvising a song about love and murder.

The vacuum cleaner in the hall was a pleasant sound. So was the *bup-bup-bup* of the teapot. Melville Fairr leaned back in the shabby chair, closed his eyes and dreamed. The letter would be on its way any minute now.

The cleaning woman continued to sing;

"You've been a short time living
"You'll be a long time dead. . . ."



Fry, Damn You, Fry!

By JOHN WALLACE

Vengeance had become a smoldering obsession with this man . . . and at last it burst into flame.

IN THE DEEPNESS of the Summer dusk, from a cluster of trees below the old Virginia mansion which sat proudly up there on the hilltop on the outskirts of town, James Strumper was planning to kill a man—to kill a man and that man's wife, in fact.

James Strumper had a down-at-the-heel look about him on the outside; and he had the same look, but worse, on the inside. He was washed-up and he knew it. His one last chance of ever having ease and security had been lost three years past when Frank Burch had married the wealthiest girl in town.

Strumper had been as fond of the girl as he had been of her money, which had made it a sort of double shock when Burch had come along with his depressing (depressing to Strumper) clean-cut look and kindly amiable manner and had stolen Gloria right off the front porch of Strumper's wallet, as it were. Strumper was the last of his family—financially washed-up semi-aristocrats. He had left town in his bitterness, but he had fared badly elsewhere, having never developed any fragments of skill or talent that may have been latent in him.

The bitterness and frustration had increasingly eaten into him until the desire for vengeance had become a smoldering, cancerous obsession. Yes, he was going to kill them both, removing from his mind the bitter (to him) irony that these two were thriving and happy while he was little more than a brokendown bum.

It wasn't going to be any ordinary murder. He wanted them to suffer and to know the horrible tortures of fear. He was going to burn them to death, house and all.

From time to time for the past week, hidden in the woods, Strumper had studied the habits of the Burch establishment. This was Sunday night and the four negro servants had gone to town to prayer meeting. Strumper knew there were only four of the servants. Only yesterday afternoon all four had come out from town in a light springboard wagon, bringing groceries and cans of paint and other supplies—regular Saturday shopping.

Frank Burch and his wife weren't especially religious—or maybe they preferred to rest on Sundays. Certainly they had remained here in the big house alone last Sunday night, and they were remaining again. He could see them in the lighted living-room, reading and talking. Presently they would go upstairs to bed and when they were asleep—well, there was no fire-escape from the high second story of that old wooden mansion. It would burn fast and hot once Strumper had sprayed that gasoline, which he had hidden in a five-gallon can back in the woods, all over the lower floor and set it afire. . . .

PRESENTLY, after an impatient wait, Strumper, through his old telescope, saw the lights go on upstairs in the moldy old mansion—and at the same time the living-room light downstairs went out. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Burch were going to bed. It never took them more than ten minutes, he knew. And being outdoors people of the horsy set, they'd be healthfully tired and would go to sleep in a hurry.

Strumper, eager for revenge, his breath coming hard, didn't wait to watch the light go out upstairs. He threaded his way carefully back into the woods a

hundred yards or more, where he had carefully hidden the can of gasoline in thick grass under a clump of sumac. It had been a nervous week for him, hiding so close to town—it was less than three miles away—where he was so well-known. It hadn't been pleasant, living on the compressed food he'd brought in when he'd first slipped into the woods in the night a week ago. But he was sure nobody had seen him or even knew he was within a thousand miles of here. . . .

When he got to the edge of the house clearing, the lights were out upstairs. His heart beating in him with savage anticipation of triumph, Strumper waited ten minutes impatiently, for them to get to sleep. Then he crept toward the house.

He had a gun with him. In case they tried to leap out of those upper windows, he would shoot them—but he much preferred to see them burn, as compensation for the hell he, Strumper, had endured on their account.

Removing his shoes, Strumper crept up onto the front porch, found the front door unlocked as he had expected, and spread the gasoline around inside thoroughly. He left the can there inside.

He touched a match to the gasoline-soaked rug nearest the front door and sidled hastily down the front steps in the dark and into the clear.

And even as he got into the clear and the flames started roaring inside, Strumper suddenly thought of that bane of the criminal in the South—the hound dogs that could track most any man most anywhere. Suppose the law somehow learned that this fire had been set—and put the hound dogs on his trail? Strumper didn't want to die, dismal though life was for him. On foot, he would be easy to track down and—

On *foot?* He laughed suddenly. Hell, with a whole stable full of fast horses right here a few rods away? . . .

He glided over to the stable, slid inside and slapped a saddle and bridle onto a horse that looked like a good steady six-year-old. Meanwhile he kept one eye's gaze out the stable window toward the house. Yes, it was flaming up like an

inferno on the lower floor now—and there was no sign of Frank Burch or Gloria's being awake and trying to jump out the window yet.

Strumper mounted the horse, sat there on the docile animal just inside the stable door, out of sight of the house—he could see without being seen; he could ride out and yell at them at the last moment if they awakened in time to try to jump out the window.

There was a good easterly breeze. Strumper sat there, gun in hand, and watched the flames mount higher, watched them lick out viciously from inside, and climb up outside, up outside those bedroom windows like greedy hot fingers of death snatching at the two humans he hated most in life.

That was superb, better than he had expected. Now they *couldn't* get out those windows without being burned to death by those glorious flames—and certainly the stairway was an inferno. Look at those sparks fly! Embers, red and hot and savage. Like bank night in Hell . . . and this the jackpot!

But why didn't they *try* to jump out the window? He wanted to see them fry and burn and writhe and scream and beg for mercy. No sign of them. Had they suffocated simply in bed—an easy death? Damn it, had they died easy on him—cheated him?

Strumper glared at the bedroom windows—and it was then he felt his horse tremble. Strumper looked behind him.

The whole haymow behind him was afire! One of those embers! . . .

Strumper kicked his mount in the side. It snorted, plunged outside, snorted frantically, stopped, quivered, trembled—then whirled around abruptly and ran back into the stable, into a stall with a blazing haybox.

It happened so abruptly and so confusingly, so unexpectedly that Strumper had no time to dismount, no time to shoot the horse—no time except to freeze in terror. The horse stopped so abruptly that Strumper, who had never been a horseman, went right over its head into the blazing hay, striking his head on a two-by-four. Behind him, vaguely, he heard a man and woman yelling. . . .

THE pain was as hideous as any pain could be within the realm of consciousness. Dimly, Strumper could hear Frank Burch's voice:

". . . Peculiar how hate can backfire on a man, isn't it, Strumper? And backfire is the right word in this case! We've been livin' in that uncomfortable old house out of sentiment and tradition, though really cravin' a modern house. Why, just yesterday we had the boys bring a few cans of paint out from town. Painted our bedroom this mornin'. But it was a hot day, and the smell of turpentine and stuff was still so strong tonight when we went up to bed that we couldn't stand it. It was too hot downstairs, so we went down by the creek in the pasture with some blankets and mosquito-nettin', to sleep on some pine boughs. . . . And now with the insurance from this old house we can build a right pert modern one."

Gloria said: "If you'd ever taken any outdoor exercise, the way we horsy people do, you'd know that a scared horse—and especially one scared by fire—wants to run back into his stall, because he associates it with peace and safety. It's a very strong instinct in them. . . . Well, thank the Lord, we managed to drive the others out and keep them out before the stable burned down."

Strumper had known that peculiar horse instinct—but he hadn't had time to do anything about it.

The pain inside him was as great as that of the burns which seared most of his body, as great as the hate and frustration inside him. He wanted to die.

He did . . . within a few dim and terrible minutes.

The Masked Men of Grenoble

By DAVID CARVER

THE thin-legged children of Grenoble, France, scurried into the doorways to hide. Gaunt women with hollow eyes stared out of windows; it was a wonder their burning gaze did not sear the strutting group that marched into the Grand Hotel. There were thirty men, armed to the teeth, swaggering—the dregs of the gutters of France, made to look fear-inspiring in their uniforms of the collaborationist police.

Previous guests at the hotel were ordered out without notice. The maitre d'hotel was summoned. The best store of food and what remained of the good French wines were demanded by the quislings in preparation for their dinner.

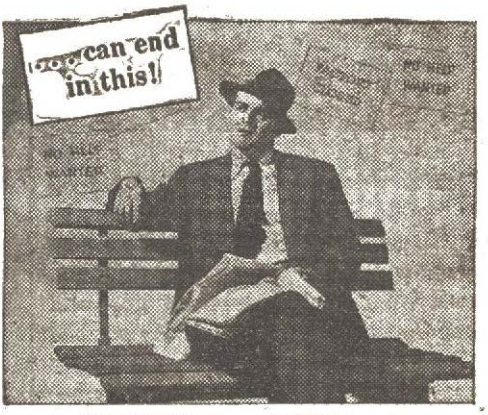
Waiters trotted at double time, and from one of the waiters a whisper passed to the chef, from the chef to a laundress, and then out into the street by bicycle route the whisper was carried into hovels and shops and basements where members of the Grenoble underground carried on their work.

The warning was clear. The contingent of thirty, selected by the fascists for the psychological effect of their brutal appearance, had arrived to exterminate the guerilla leaders in Grenoble. Certain underground leaders had proved a bone in the throat of occupational rule. It was plain that these men who at this very moment were gorging on the hunger of French children knew that word of their arrival would soon spread. The manner of their heel-clicking invasion of the main avenue, the loud commands of their officers, signified a warning rather than a challenge to stand and fight. They much preferred the guerillas to flee than remain to confront them.

Meanwhile, in the Grand Hotel, the

What you do with your money can wreck you (*and your Uncle Sam*)

BUY, BUY, BUY! Foolish people are doing it, *overdoing* it. But sensible folks know that with every needless purchase—or every time you patronize a black market or buy above ceiling—you do your bit to force prices up all along the line. That's the way inflation gets a boost.



IT CAN HAPPEN HERE—again! Today, with fewer goods in the stores while incomes are high, the danger of inflation is greater than ever. Inflation is always followed by depression. What can you do to head off another depression? Buy nothing you do not really—*really*—have to have . . . today.

SAVE, SAVE, SAVE! That's the way to make America good for the boys to come home to. Pay up debts, put money in life insurance, savings bank, War Bonds. Every cent you save now, helps to keep prices down—and when the war is won you'll have use for that nest egg you've laid away.

A HOME OF YOUR OWN, a better farm, a real vacation, something to retire on—these are things worth saving for. Store up your money now while prices are high. There's a time to splurge and a time to save: today, while money's coming in, is a good time—the *right* and patriotic time—to SAVE!

4 THINGS TO DO
to keep prices down
and help avoid
another depression

1. Buy only what you really need.
2. When you buy, pay no more than ceiling prices. Pay your ration points in full.
3. Keep your *own* prices down. Don't take advantage of war conditions to ask more for your labor, your services, or the goods you sell.
4. *Save.* Buy and hold all the War Bonds you can—to help pay for the war, protect *your own* future! Keep up your insurance.

A United States War message prepared by the War Advertising Council; approved by the Office of War Information; and contributed by this magazine in cooperation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

food was being devoured. Second helpings of fish and meat were demanded. Belts were slipped on their notches.

"Garcon! More wine!"

THE wine waiter, for once, was not on hand. The dining room help, for some peculiar reason, had quietly deserted. Suddenly, from three doors and the windows overlooking a garden, six masked men burst in upon the feast with sub-machine guns, knives, and pistols.

The traitors were ordered to rise, while one gruff-voiced figure relieved all thirty of their arms, credentials and lists of French patriots they had intended to hound down. The laughter of a youngster in the masked group rang out as he scanned the names on one of the lists.

"Here we are—all six of us!" he cried, and folded the paper with others in his pocket.

The eyes of a grizzled machine-gunner at a window glittered through the eyeholes of his mask as his companions gathered up the confiscated weapons and began to file out beneath his covering muzzle. The greasy lips of an officer quivered, for he expected momentarily to hear the rattle of fire from the leveled gun, to feel the stab of 45-caliber bullets. . . .

But this seemed not to be the masked men's plan—at least not yet. Stripped of lists and weapons, the Lyon contingent would have to return to their base, and it would not be easy to find volunteers for a next mission.

And now the very men marked for capture locked their deflated hunters in the room where they had stuffed their bellies with food. The telephone lines were swiftly cut, and the patriots vanished.

Thirty Vichy hirelings looked at one another and made no move. Eventually their commander half-heartedly pummeled the dining room door. He didn't even dare to speak sharply to the wine waiter who finally came to release them.

Poking his head in the doorway, the waiter pleasantly inquired: "Anything else, messieurs?"

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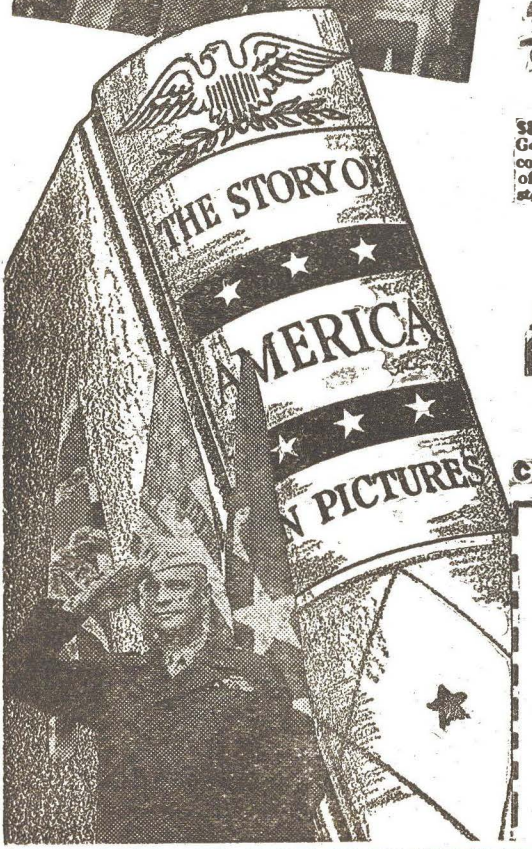

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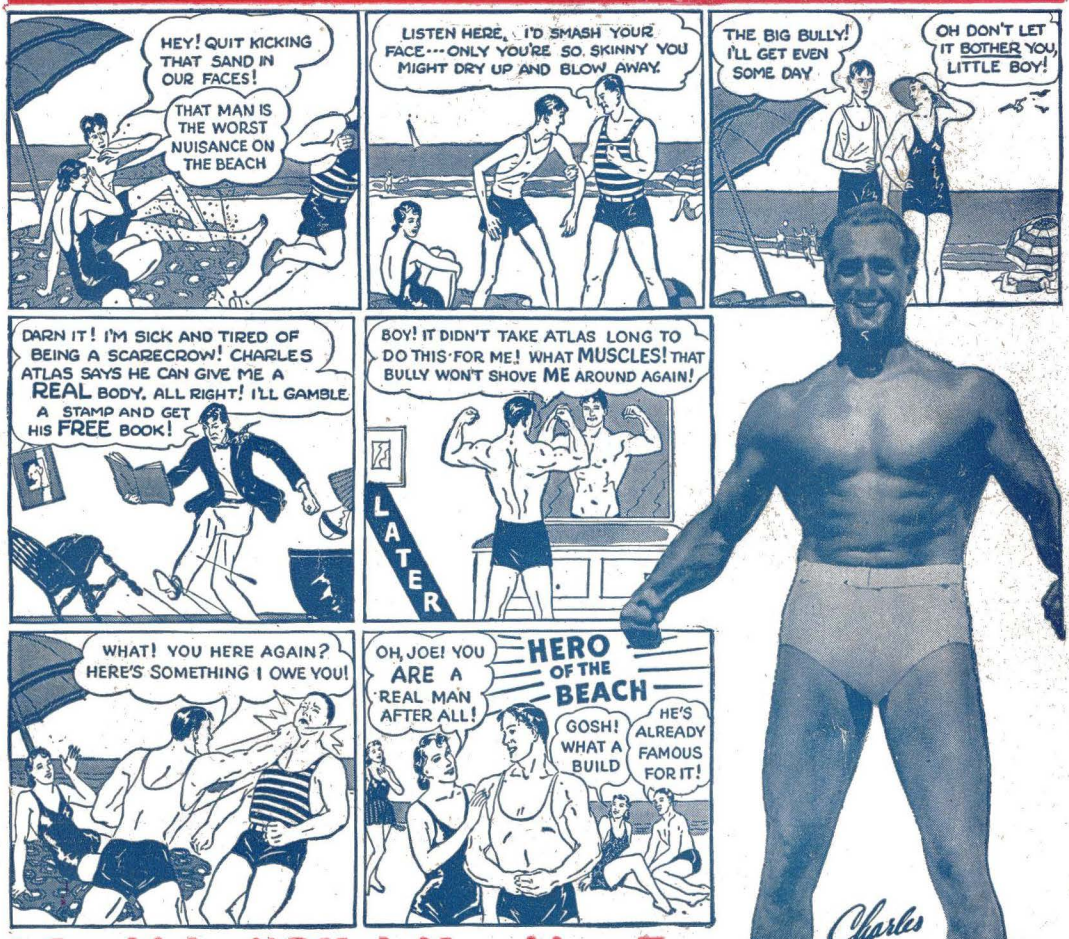

—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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