FEBRUARY 15¢

SUPER-DETECTIVE

IND

A SPEED MAGAZINE

PLEASE LOCATE MURDER

by Roger Torrey

CASH WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST

AMAZING *NEW*

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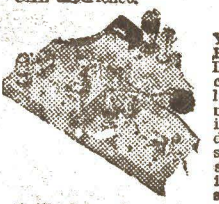

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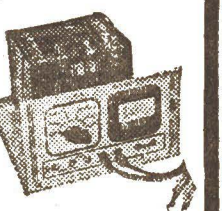

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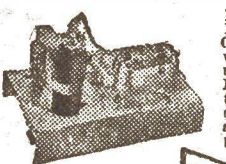

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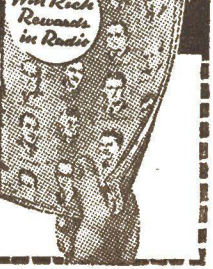
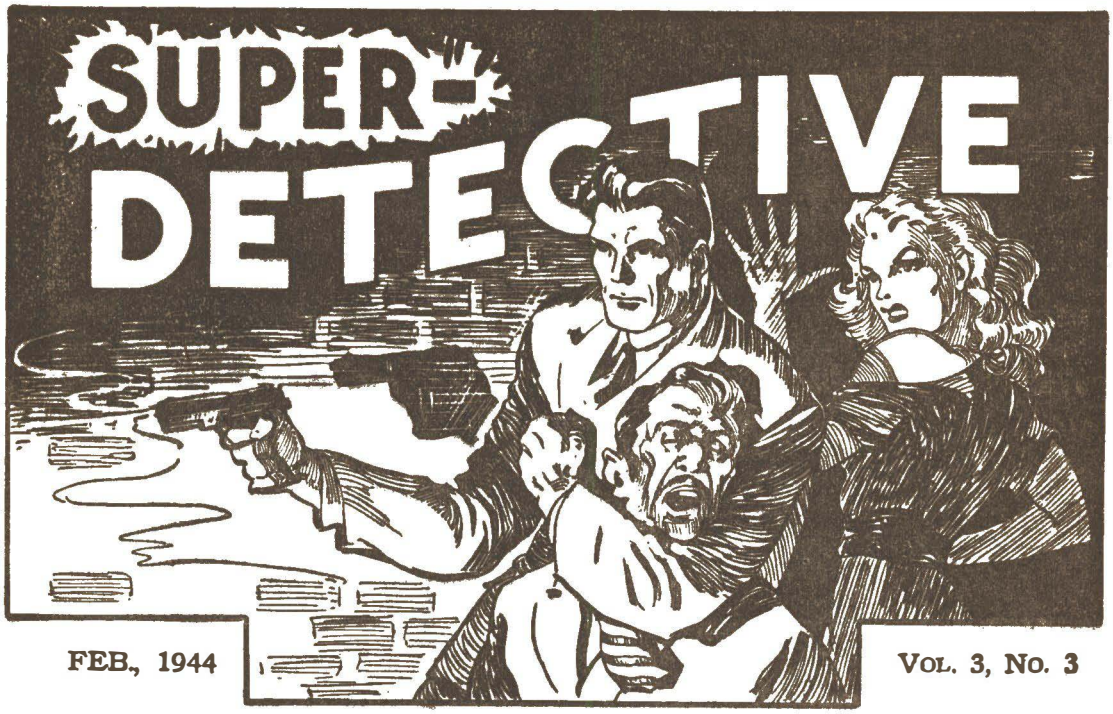


SUPER-DETECTIVE



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Book-Length Novel, Complete In This Issue

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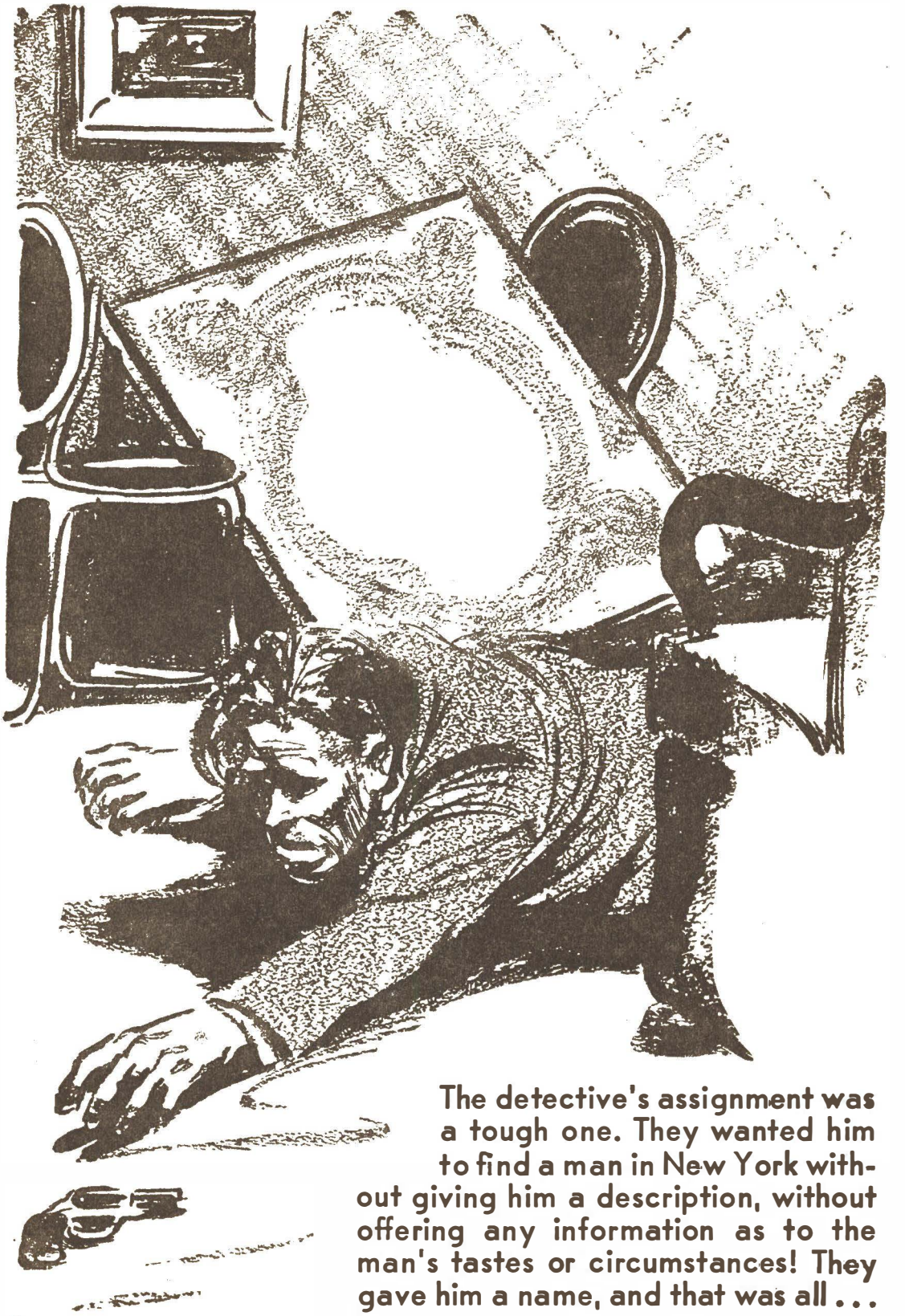
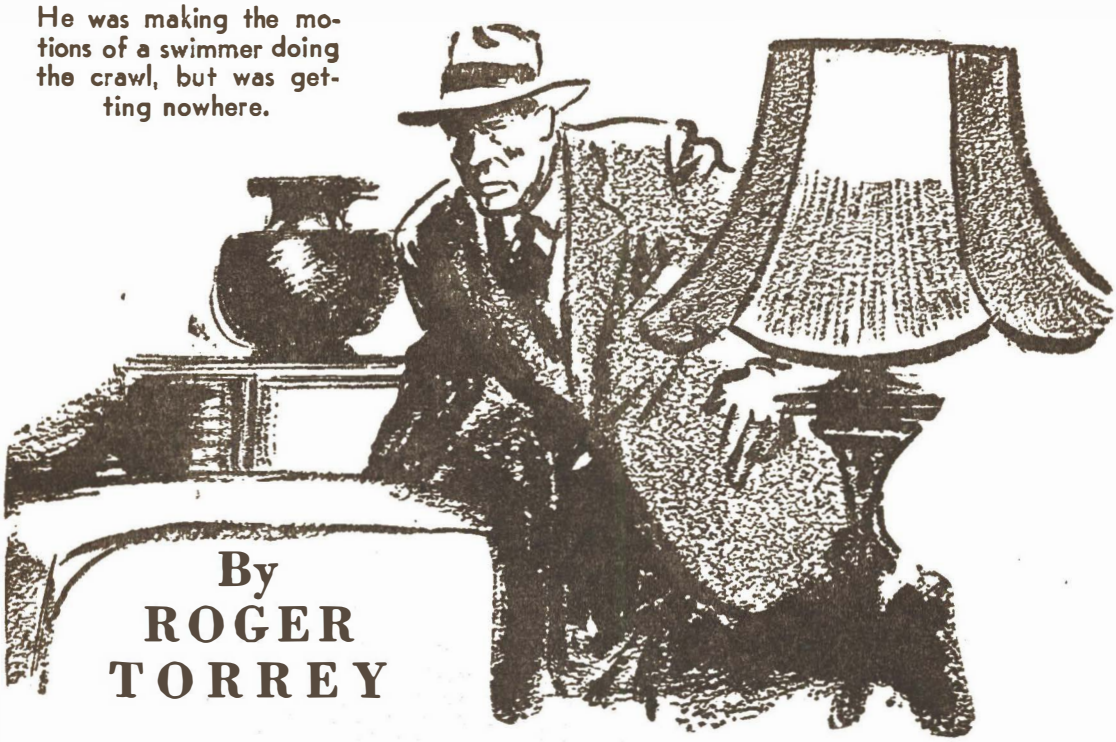


The detective's assignment was a tough one. They wanted him to find a man in New York without giving him a description, without offering any information as to the man's tastes or circumstances! They gave him a name, and that was all . . .



He was making the motions of a swimmer doing the crawl, but was getting nowhere.

By ROGER TORREY

Please Locate MURDER

I COULD see it had been a busy morning for Western Union. Miss Higginbotham had laid out three wires in a neat little row on my desk, and she was waiting for me all in a twitter.

"Oh, Mr. McGowan," she said. "There were three wires for you. One of them was collect."

She pointed out one of the three.

"I paid for it out of the petty cash. Was that right?"

"Sure."

"I—ugh. . . ."

She waited there—she was so curious she could hardy stand it.

I said: "It's no doubt some old pal who wants me to send him some money. He probably paid for the first two and went broke and sent the last one collect."

"But it—it might be a case."

She'd been with me for three weeks—ever since graduating from a secretarial school, and during those three weeks, I'd loafed. Nothing had come in at all, and I suppose she was starting to worry where her salary was coming from.

I said: "I suppose I could open them. It would be one way to tell."

She waited and I waited and then she got the idea. She blushed, which at least hid her freckles, and went outside

to her typewriter, and I opened the wire that I'd had to buy.

It read: SENDING ALL CUSTOMERS TO YOU AS BEST INVESTIGATOR IN CITY. HAVE FOUR OF THEM NOW AND MAYBE MORE LATER. YOU CAN REACH ME AT RICHFIELD NEWS OFFICE. REGARDS. LARRY PRATHER.

IT took a minute to place him but I finally remembered. He'd been a serious young kid dubbing along on a police beat for the old Express. That was when I'd worked for the city—before I'd started the agency.

At that, it was nice to be remembered.

The second wire read: PLEASE LOCATE ARNOLD QUIRES YOUR CITY. KEEP INVESTIGATION SECRET. WILL PAY CUSTOMARY FEE AND EXPENSES. WIRE REPORT WHEN AVAILABLE. FIRST NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY. RICHFIELD TEXAS.

It was getting better. At least it was a job if not a promising one. Getting a decent fee from a bank is a good trick and just about impossible to do.

The third wire was just about to the same effect. PLEASE TRY TO FIND MY COUSIN ARNOLD QUIRES. SECRECY AND SPEED ARE IMPERATIVE. I WILL SEE YOU LATTER PART OF WEEK AND PAY YOU FOR INFORMATION THEN. MADELON QUIRES. RICHFIELD TEXAS.

It made a nice little problem. All I had to do was find a man I'd never heard of before. With no description of him to help—no idea of his tastes or circumstances or anything else about him.

Outside of a suspicion that he came from Texas, and that was pure conjecture, I didn't have a thing to go on and I wasn't in the least hopeful about results.

I rang the buzzer for Miss Higginbotham and said, "Will you take a letter?"

She looked startled. It was the first time such a thing had been suggested. She hurried out and bustled back in, carrying three notebooks and three sharp pencils, and her hands were shaking so that she could hardly open one of the shorthand books.

I said, "Take it easy, kid. This isn't going to hurt."

That shocked her and she blushed. It was the only trick she had, unless she did 'em with cards in the front parlor, and I doubted the last. She'd never have held an audience.

I TOOK it slow and easy and dictated a note to Larry Prather. I asked him to rush me what dope he had on a man named Arnold Quires and also to tell me about Arnold's cousin Madelon. It was all I could do beside go through the routine. Miss Higginbotham went out and typed the thing, and I signed it, after I'd inked over the half dozen mistakes she'd made.

She took it and said, "It *was* a case, wasn't it, Mr. McGowan?"

"We call 'em headaches in this business," I told her. "I've got to find somebody. I don't know whether he's the missing heir or the guy that done the maiden wrong or anything about it. Maybe he's the missing bank cashier—the bank out there's interested in him."

She put her hands together and said, "I think it's so fascinating. Honest, Mr. McGowan, I'd rather work for you than for anybody I know of."

I didn't know whether to put that down to sheer dizziness or sheer laziness. If she really meant it, she was dizzy, but it was a swell job for her in that she had just about nothing to do.

All she'd done in the past three weeks had been to file past due bills and tell creditors that Mr. McGowan wasn't in his office. And she filed the bills under the wrong headings and couldn't make the creditors believe her.

She was just a little gem—with reverse English on her.

I STARTED through the routine while I tried to make up my mind whom to charge for the investigation. Or whether to charge both of them. The bank could probably stand a stiffer charge than cousin Madelon, but I knew banks well enough to know they'd complain bitterly if I stuck 'em more than ten bucks a day and didn't turn in a report that showed I'd spent at least eight hours a day on the job. But I'd get my dough right then and there. Maybe I would from cousin Madelon and maybe not—and I finally decided to let the matter of payment rest until I'd met her, and also until I had something to report.

The boys still knew me at the police department and I didn't have any trouble in checking the records. Arnold Quires hadn't any police trouble in our city or state, at least under his own name. I could have had one of the boys wire to Texas for me and check his past record there, but I remembered both the bank and cousin Madelon stressed secrecy.

I could get the information from other quarters if I needed it—it would just take more time and trouble.

Nobody by that name used electric lights or power or water. Nobody by that name had a telephone or was listed by the gas company. He'd neither married, taken out a dog license, or had died—the Bureau of Vital statistics told me that. He'd neither fished nor hunted nor taken out a car license under his own name—two wires to the state capitol got me that.

If he was in town, which was far from certain, he would have been one of the thousands of single men living in hotel rooms or boarding houses and unknown out of his own little circle. And most of them little known there, if the truth were told. Making a canvas of the hotels and rooming houses would have been a lifetime job and would have cost a fortune so I went through the routine and then sat back and waited for either cousin Madelon to drop in with something I could set my teeth in, or for an answering letter from Larry Prather.

And both of them arrived on Friday morning.

MISS HIGGINBOTHAM was in the hall, waiting in front of the elevator bank. She looked even sloppier than usual. She was wearing a tan suit that didn't fit and that made her fat little figure worse than nature, who'd given her no break anyway, intended. It was about the color of her freckles and somehow made them stand out even more.

She blushed and said: "Oh, Mr. McGowan! She's here! Miss Quires! She's waiting for you."

"Has she got any money?"

"Why, I don't know."

"Let me put it another way, kid. Does she *look* like she's got money?"

"Oh, yes."

That was fine and I said so. I went in the office, with Miss Higginbotham trailing me like Mary's little lamb, and the girl on the bench inside the door stood up. She looked prim and spoke primly.

"I assume you're Mr. McGowan," she said.

"And you'd be Miss Quires?"

"Quite right."

I made the McGowan bow and asked her to go into the private office. She had on a tan suit about the color of Miss Higginbotham's, but she hadn't bought it in any basement. She had a trim little figure with neat ankles and tiny feet. She also had horn-rimmed glasses and not a spec of make-up.

She looked like an old maid school teacher with five hundred bucks worth of Sunday clothes on.

I sat her down and offered her a cigarette, which she startled me by taking, and then gave her the bad news.

"I've been able to get no trace of your cousin," I said. "He's not listed with any of the utility companies and he has no record in any city or state bureau. That was about as far as I could go, knowing as little as I do about him. Are you sure he's in this city?"

"Quite sure."

I looked interested. Miss Quires had a calm clipped way of talking that I liked.

She said: "My cousin Arnold came here in nineteen thirty-one. He is twelve years older than I am."

"That would make him . . ."

"Thirty-seven this birthday. I am twenty-five."

"I see."

She smiled faintly. "My father was in the last war. He named me either after a French girl or a French song. He never would admit which."

I laughed. I could see it was one of her standard remarks.

"A lot of kids were handicapped by that war," I said. "I know a policeman named Wilson Pershing Bernstein Jones."

She looked puzzled. "Bernstein?"

"That was his father's captain's name."

We both laughed.

"Cousin Arnold got in some slight trouble back in Richfield. In fact, he was charged with felonious assault. He left then and went to New York. I had a card from him. In fact I have a card from him every birthday."

"From here?"

"Oh, yes."

"No address?"

"No address."

I SAID: "I'm sorry to tell you, but it's almost impossible to find somebody in this town who wants to drop out of sight. I take it he does. A man can change his name, for one thing. He can live quietly under his own and remain practically unknown."

"What about the draft registration, Mr. McGowan? Wouldn't he have to register for that, being under thirty-eight?"

"He would. But that information isn't available. That's held secret by the War Department."

"I see."

"The only chance of finding him would be by knowing of some peculiarity. Even a physical description of him wouldn't help. A man changes during the years."

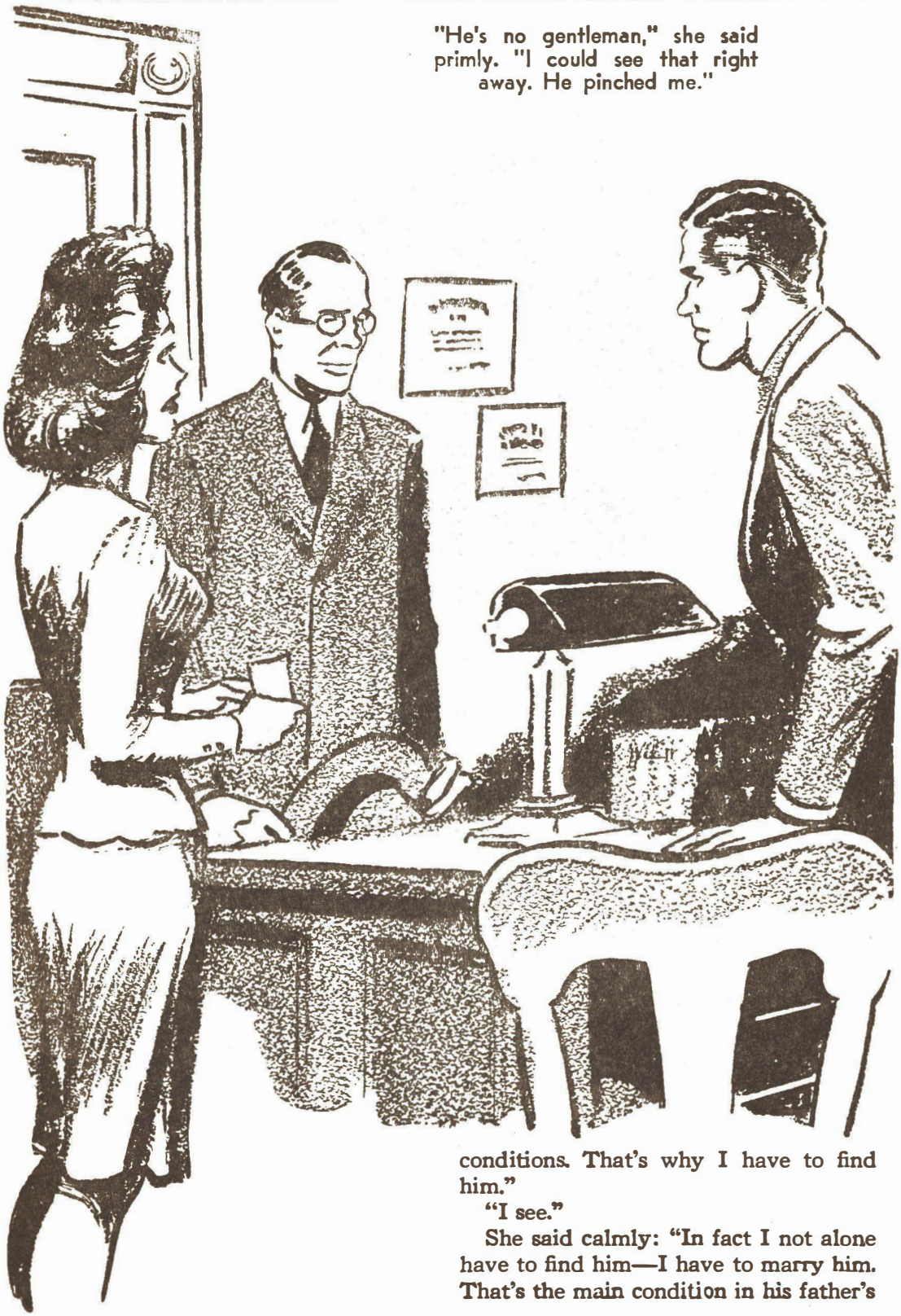
She said doubtfully: "He loved to gamble, Mr. McGowan. That's really what caused the trouble between him and his father."

"Yes?"

"You see his father is the one who swore out the felonious assault charge against him. They were arguing about Arnold's gambling and they came to blows. Arnold's father wasn't expected to recover from it but he did. He swore out the complaint then, but Arnold had already left. I don't know whether it's still standing or not."

"Probably not. His father still alive?"

"He died last year. That's why I have to find Arnold. They've found oil on some land his father left—the land was left jointly to Arnold and me, with some



"He's no gentleman," she said primly. "I could see that right away. He pinched me."

conditions. That's why I have to find him."

"I see."

She said calmly: "In fact I not alone have to find him—I have to marry him. That's the main condition in his father's

will. If we don't marry, the estate is left in trust, the income from which is to be spent in fighting any campaign the Prohibition Party inaugurates."

I laughed. She didn't.

"Uncle Arnold was a strong believer in personal liberties."

"Is the estate valuable?"

"Very. Now with war, oil is up again. The transportation problem is being solved, you see."

"And you haven't seen your cousin since nineteen thirty-one?"

"Oh, no."

"Just a card from him each year?"

"That is correct."

I said: "Well, if we should be able to find him, you'll have an easy out for both of you. You can marry him and then divorce him."

She said: "Another condition in the will, Mr. McGowan, is that I have a child by him within a year after the marriage. You see Uncle Arnold didn't want the name to die. There's just Cousin Arnold and me left—he's only my second cousin, incidentally."

I said: "Will you tell me one thing, Miss Quires?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"Just where did you go to school?"

"Why, Smith," she said, laughing. "Why?"

I said: "I just wondered."

CHAPTER II

Not Enough Money

SHE HAD a few pictures of cousin Arnold, all of them snapshots and all old, but the face somehow looked familiar. A blond guy, looking very collegiate, and this was explained when Miss Madelon told me he'd gone to Princeton.

She said: "He was mad about cards even then. His father kept insisting he was a sissy, because he didn't like to play poker, but Arnold argued that chance entered into poker to a certain extent."

"I thought everybody from Texas was a natural poker player."

"Arnold played bridge almost entirely."

I got it then. I said: "Quires! Reames!"

"Quires? Reames?"

"There's a connection, isn't there?"

"They're both paper measurements," she admitted.

"If he'd changed his name, Reames would have been a logical choice, wouldn't it?"

"Why, it could be, I imagine."

"I play a little bridge myself. I've got a book about it written by a man named Reames. Arnold Reames."

She said: "Why, that's marvelous. That will be cousin Arnold, I'll bet. Do you suppose I . . . that he . . . ?"

She stopped and blushed. She didn't look like an old maid school teacher when she did it, either.

LARRY PRATHER'S letter was written in a half kidding way and from it you'd have thought we were friends instead of acquaintances. He said there'd been a run of requests about the best private investigator in New York and that he'd been glad to refer all comers to his old pal Terrence McGowan. That everybody in his town, namely Richfield, Texas, suddenly wanted to find Arnold Quires. That even the police were interested, this last because of the way his father had met death.

I put this down as something to ask Miss Quires about.

The letter said the Quires estate was estimated as being somewhere between a hundred thousand and five million.

and the proper answer was nearer the first, in spite of the gossip. That this, of course, would be when it was settled and the oil land, the main item of value, realized on in some fashion.

It ended with a request that I keep him informed of anything happening at my end and a promise to do the same for me, in Richfield, and was signed "Your good friend Larry".

I'd bought the guy a couple of beers and that was all. I know half the newspaper boys in town on the same terms.

I was thinking this over when Miss Higginbotham came in. She was blushing harder than I'd yet seen. She was excited but still happy.

She said: "There's somebody else from Texas to see you, Mr. McGowan. A Mr. Landrey."

"Send him in, then."

"He—he pinched me. He honestly did, Mr. McGowan."

"The hell he did! Where?"

"Why, right in the office."

"Are you kidding?"

She got fiery red and said: "I—I couldn't tell you where he pinched me. I—ugh—was going past him to tell you he was here."

I laughed, but she put her nose up in the air and sniffed.

"He's no gentleman," she said. "I could see that right away."

"Well, send him in anyway."

She sent him in, and she didn't act like she was sore at him when she opened the door for him to come into the inner office.

Landrey was about thirty, and a sad-faced, formal man. He wore nose glasses and talked in a soft low drawl that sounded like a Western picture. One of the B-kind.

"I'm from the bank, Mr. McGowan," he said, shaking hands with me. "From Richfield, you know. The First National Bank and Trust Company. I am the second vice-president, in charge of the trust department."

I SAID I was glad to meet him and tried to spot him in the picture as the kind of man who'd pinch young ladies while the young ladies were in retreat. He didn't fit at all. He looked more like the kind that pinched the dollar bill out of the collection plate they were passing through the congregation.

"Have you found Mr. Quires as yet?"

"I have not. I've had no results up to now and so have wired you no reports."

"Quite so—quite so. I thought—the bank thought—that I might be able to assist you. You see I knew Arnold so well. We were good friends, you know."

I didn't know but I said that was very nice. And that it was a matter that needed all the help I could get.

"Arnold was wild, but a good boy. I hope—I really hope—that we find him before the police do."

"Why would the police be looking for him?"

"They suspect him of murdering his father, Mr. McGowan. Of course that is ridiculous. Arnold, as I say, was wild. But he was not vicious. There isn't murder in his heart."

"I understand he half killed his old man once before."

"In anger, Mr. McGowan. The elder Mr. Quires was killed in a fashion that precluded that."

"Premeditated murder?"

"Just that. Shot with a rifle, while he was standing on his front porch."

"Right in town?"

"Mr. Quires lived about thirty miles from Richfield, Mr. McGowan. He was a rancher, you see."

"I see."

"And some of Arnold's old friends thought they'd seen him in town that

day. Ours is a small city, Mr. McGowan, and people are noticed. Particularly old residents."

"I can imagine. That all they got against him?"

"Why, I believe so. Of course there was that hard feeling. Possibly you know his father had sworn to prosecute him if he ever came into the state again."

"No . . . I didn't know that."

"The elder Mr. Quires was a hot-tempered man, I'm afraid. A man of the old school—a believer in an eye for an eye."

I said that from what I'd heard the elder Mr. Quires must have been quite a lad, and Mr. Landrey agreed with me and left.

I wired Larry Prather, GIVE ME DOPE ON LANDREY OF FIRST NATIONAL BANK BY WIRE COLLECT. MCGOWAN.

I was beginning to get interested.

MY next caller was a fast talking man named Carlos Rivera. From Mexico City. A thin dapper little man with a mustache like Ronald Colman's, and with a voice as smooth as butter on top of hot rum.

He said: "I would like you to go to Mexico City for me immediately. You, not one of your employes."

"What for, Mr. Rivera?"

"It is my wife. I have made this trip, just for her."

"Yeah?"

"You do not understand. I see you do not understand."

I admitted I didn't.

"My wife is playing around. I want to know who the man is so that I may kill him. I want you to find who this man is. For that I come here."

"Quite a ways."

"You still do not understand."

"I don't understand why you didn't get a local man on the job. They must have private cops in Mexico City. Or don't they?"

"That would make scandal. That I cannot have. The local men would talk. My wife would hear of it. She would be more careful. You understand that infidelity is the one reason I can obtain a divorce."

"I'm not interested, Mr. Rivera."

"But I will pay."

"Still not interested."

"But I will pay a great deal. Five-thousand-dollars, I will pay, for this evidence."

He spaced out his talk about money as if it made more. It was plenty—too much, for that matter.

I said: "We might as well come right out and say it, mister. You'll pay me five grand if I'll go down to Mexico City and frame your wife with divorce evidence. That's why you're willing to pay that much. It would have to be a frame."

"You are frank, Mr. McGowan."

"And careful," I said. "In the first place I haven't got a license to operate in Mexico City. In the next place I don't frame divorce cases. Not even for as big a piece of money as five thousand dollars. You'll have to try another boy."

"But I have heard of you."

"Who from?"

"I am sorry but I do not recall. It was a man from New York, a tourist, visiting Mexico City. I do not remember his name."

"But you remembered mine?"

"Oh, yes! Even then I was thinking about the divorce."

I said: "I'm sorry, Mr. Rivera, but no dice."

I was sorry, too. Five thousand was more than I'd ever been offered to manufacture evidence in that kind of mess. It was a lot of money, even if not enough.

CHAPTER III

To Report a Murder

LARRY PRATHER'S wire came in about four, that afternoon. It read: NO LANDREY CONNECTED WITH BANK. THERE IS A LANDREY IN POLICE DEPARTMENT. RESEMBLES CHURCH DEACON. PRATHER.

I decided that Richfield, Texas, might be small but that its police department was on its toes. The cops there had undoubtedly heard that either cousin Madelon or the bank was looking for Arnold Quires, and they were coppering all bets. They wanted him themselves, so they'd find what I knew as well as what our police had on him.

I got Miss Madelon on the phone—she was staying at the Astor, and said: "Made up your mind about when you're going to see him?"

"I telephoned," she said. "He—Mr. McGowan, he talked very oddly over the phone. He denied that he was Arnold. He denied ever being in Richfield. But his voice was like Arnold's, that is, at first. When I accused him of being who he is, he altered it—made it deeper and gruffer."

"Still certain it's him?"

"I'm positive. But I don't know what to do. I'm sure that he would refuse to see me. In fact, he told me he would, when I proposed calling on him."

"Did you know the Richfield police suspect him of killing his father?"

"Why, yes, of course. But that's silly."

"D'ya know a man named Landrey?"

"I don't believe so."

"A policeman?"

"Oh, yes."

"He's been up here, too."

"Are they looking for Arnold, also?"

"They are."

"Did you—did you tell them who he is?"

"Not yet."

"I think I'd better see you again, right away, Mr. McGowan."

"How about in the morning? Say at ten."

"Not tonight?"

"I'm sorry—I'm busy."

Madelon Quires said: "At ten, then," and hung up the phone. I rang the buzzer for Miss Higginbotham and, when she came in, I told her I wanted to dictate a wire.

SHE came back with the regular array of pads and pencils—she could have written a book with the equipment she had.

I said: "It's to Larry Prather, Richfield, Texas. Night letter—we might as well save on expenses as long as I don't know who I'm going to charge them to. Make it, *HAVE YOU A CARLOS RIVERA IN RICHFIELD. ABOUT FIVE SEVEN AND A HUNDRED AND THIRTY. BLACK MUSTACHE. IN EARLY THIRTIES. FAST TALKING AND GOOD DRESSER.* Sign that 'McGowan', Miss Higginbotham, and send it on its way."

"Oh, oh, yes, Mr. McGowan. Are you, are you working for Mr. Landrey?"

"Why?"

"Well, I just wondered."

"I don't know whether we're working for Miss Quires or the Richfield bank, kid. But I do know we're not working for Mr. Landrey."

"But he's from the bank, isn't he?"

I remembered that when I'd talked to Landrey the door to the outside office had been closed. The kid had convicted herself.

I said: "Look, babe! Now, right now I haven't any secrets from you, but someday I might want to have. You keep that ear of yours away from the keyhole. If I'm talking to anybody with the door closed, there's a reason for it."

She blushed, and not beautifully. "Yes, sir, Mr. McGowan."

"How d'ya know I might not be planning a bank robbery or something like that? If you heard about it, you'd have to tell the police, and there you'd be, out of a job."

"I—ugh—it was the only time, Mr. McGowan. I mean I listened to what Mr. Landrey said but that's the only time I listened to anybody."

"Why pick him?"

She picked up her notebooks and scuttled out and I remembered how Landrey had brought excitement, even if not cheer, into her dull life. That pinch he'd given her had left the gal with a mental impression at least. And, being chubby as she was, I thought the odds were that it had left a physical impression as well.

That pinch convinced me Landrey was a cop even more than Prather's wire had. It was such a typical cop trick.

I was thinking about this with half my mind and making the decision to call on Arnold Quires with the other. I was beginning to get ideas about collecting another fee.

QUIRES lived in the Sansome House, one of the co-operative places that cost a fortune to buy into and another one to keep up. Each tenant owned half a floor and each apartment had its own elevator. Leading up from a private entrance. It wasn't tall—just eight stories, but it ran right thhrough the narrow block between the dead-end side streets leading up from the river.

Quires wasn't keeping up a place like that on book sales, even if his text book on how not to play bridge was going over in fine shape. I'd found that out, early in the evening. He was teaching, both individually and in classes, and he was playing in the half dozen clubs he belonged to during all his spare time.

That was just another way of giving lessons, I gathered. He was making a fortune in that high stake club play. In a game like that he had as much of a cinch as Man-o'-War would have had running against Old Jim, dragging the milk wagon after him.

I made my call about eight, thinking it would be too early for him to have left for one of his clubs and that I'd catch him right after dinner. I rode the elevator up—all there was was one button to punch marked UP, and that let me out into a little foyer, with a single door facing me. I used the knocker and thought I heard movement inside, and so didn't try it again for a minute. The knocker itself was a little man holding a tiny hand of cards, the whole hinged to a brass plaque.

When I rapped the second time, I did it harder and that time I was sure I heard a door slam inside the apartment. But still nobody opened up.

Then I tried the door. I didn't have any particular intention of crashing the place without an invitation—it was just that the knob was there in front of my hand and I turned it.

And the door opened and I heard the voice.

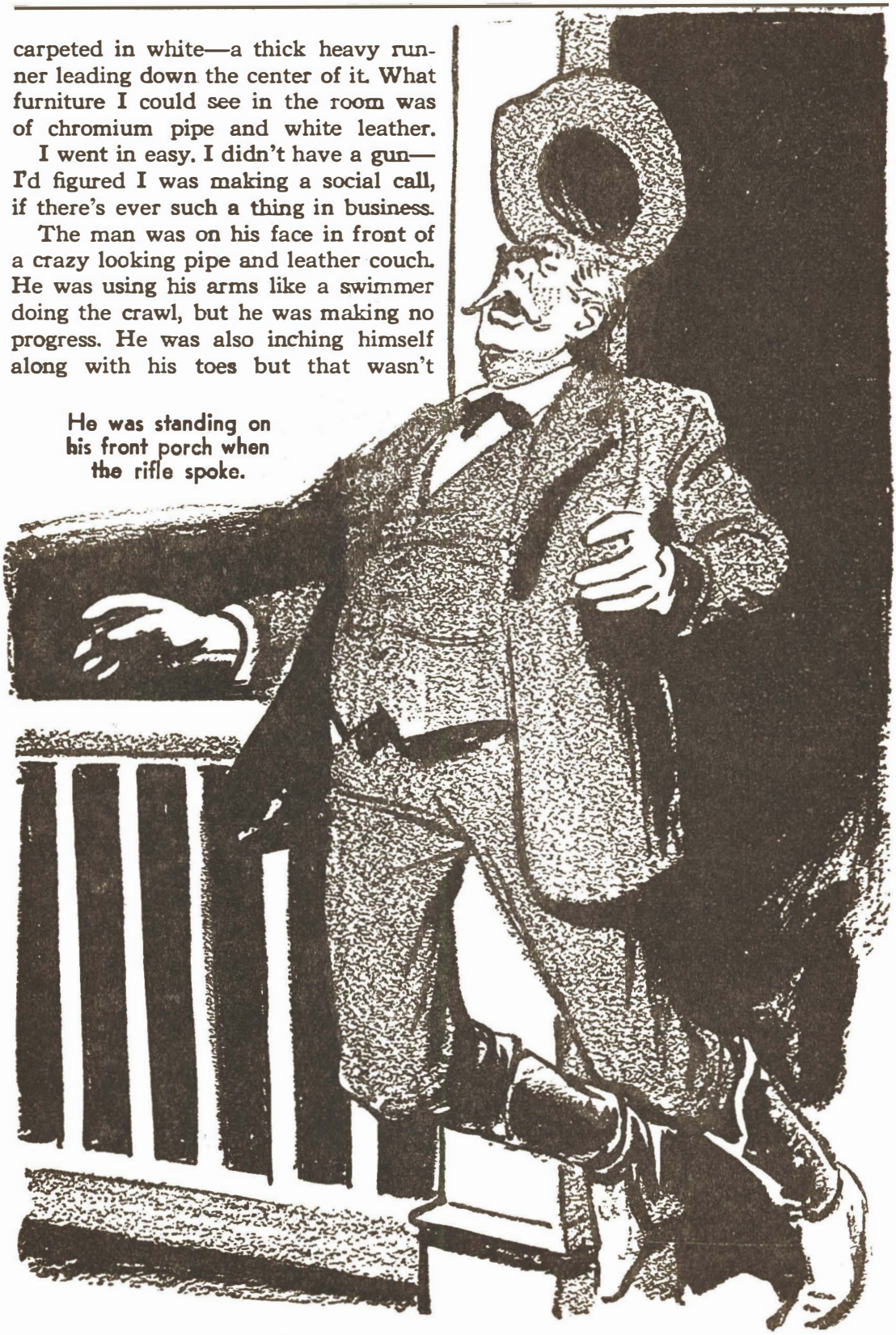
It was soft and it wasn't saying anything. It was just making a gurgling, choking sound.

I was looking down a hallway and into a big room that faced out to the street. A closed door at each side of the hall led to other rooms, and the open one at the end of the hall was at least twenty feet away. The hall was

carpeted in white—a thick heavy runner leading down the center of it. What furniture I could see in the room was of chromium pipe and white leather.

I went in easy. I didn't have a gun—I'd figured I was making a social call, if there's ever such a thing in business.

The man was on his face in front of a crazy looking pipe and leather couch. He was using his arms like a swimmer doing the crawl, but he was making no progress. He was also inching himself along with his toes but that wasn't



He was standing on his front porch when the rifle spoke.

helping, either. He was trying to reach a .38 Smith & Wesson Police Positive that was on the rug not over a foot in front of his hands, but as far as he was concerned it could have been a mile away.

He had his head bent back, so that I could see how the cords in his neck were strained and tense, and his eyes were on that gun like it was the entrance to Heaven.

And from the color, or lack of it in his face, he was either going to Heaven or the other place and fast.

IT was Landrey, the Richfield policeman, and he was dying.

I knelt down by him, keeping out of the blood that was soaking the rug. It was coming from somewhere near his middle, but he was so flat on the floor I couldn't tell where.

"Landrey!" I said. "This is McGowan. Landrey! Landrey! Who did this?"

The voice mumbled on and the eyes didn't look away from the gun.

I took him by the shoulder and tried again. "Landrey! Who did it?"

With that his head went forward, hitting the rug with a little thud. Both hands were still reaching for the gun. One foot made a couple more feeble kicks and that was all.

He'd died like a good cop at that. He'd still been trying to go ahead.

I WENT through the apartment in a hurry, using a handkerchief to open doors and taking along the gun Landrey hadn't been able to reach. There was a card room with eight bridge tables set and ready for action. There were two master bedrooms and a servant's room. A kitchen and two baths and a living room opening from the bedroom that Quires apparently used.

It was about as much a library as a living room, though. A little portable bar and a comfortable couch and chairs with end tables carried the living room effect, and three walls of books took care of the library part of it.

It was a swell room and I liked it. And I was just admiring it when the next surprise happened.

Somebody said: "Drop that gun! Don't turn around."

I was in the middle of the room and at least fifteen feet away from the owner of the voice. There was no chance at all of turning fast and making a grab at the gun he probably held. I let my own drop to the carpet. And I didn't turn. I just stood there and prayed that the guy's nerve would be as steady as his voice—that, just in case he had the hammer back on that problematical gun.

He said: "Turn around slowly, Mr. Quires."

I turned and said: "Wrong number, mister. I'm not Quires."

He asked: "Then what the hell are you doing here?"

He was about forty and didn't have any more hair on him than a toad. Not even eyebrows or eye lashes. His face was pink, and he looked like if he had any hair it would have been very blond. He was a heavy man, solid and not fat, and his arms bulged the sleeves of the dinner jacket he wore all the way from his shoulders to his wrists. His hands were pinkish and looked both soft and well kept, but I had a notion the man had a grip like a pair of pliers in spite of that softness. His eyes were a slaty grey and held about as much expression as a dead cod's.

A tough looking customer, all told.

I said: "Mister, here's the truth. I came up to see Quires and the door was open and I walked in. I heard a noise, or I wouldn't have done it. There was a man dying on the floor, and I picked up the gun that was by him and looked around to see if the guy that

had killed him was still in the place. That's the truth."

"Who are you?"

"Terrence McGowan. I'm a private eye."

"What did you want with Quires?"

"I take bridge lessons from him."

"Oh, hell!"

"Sure I do. I'm nuts about bridge. I've even started to make a little money at it, now that I'm getting smart to the game."

"You're not even a good liar, Mr. McGowan."

"I'm telling the truth."

"Then how did you know Arnold Reames is really Arnold Quires? Does he tell all the pupils that?"

HE was getting me on the same catch I was planning to work on him. He'd said Quires instead of Reames, right off the bat, and I was going to try and slide the same question in at him he'd given me.

I said: "I've known Arnold a long time. Ever since he was back here at school. When he first came East from Richfield."

"Richfield?"

"Sure. Richfield, Texas."

He said: "All right! Pick up the phone. It's on the table, by your arm."

I picked up the phone.

"Now dial the police. Spring 7-3100."

I dialed the cops. I'd heard the hammer of the gun he held click back when I'd hesitated a little.

"Now tell 'em who you are."

I said: "This is Terrence McGowan, calling from Arnold Reames' apartment, in the Sansome House."

"Go ahead, Mr. McGowan."

"I'm calling to report a murder."

"Just a moment, please. I'll connect you with the homicide bureau."

Another voice said: "Homicide bureau."

I said: "This is Terrence McGowan. I want to report a murder."

I heard the cop at the other end of the line say: "Well, go ahead!" and the man behind me say: "Tell 'em what you found."

I said: "I just called on Mr. Reames and there's a dead man in his front room. I think the man's been murdered."

"The Reames' apartment in the Sansome House?"

"That's right."

"Your name's Terrence McGowan?"

"That's right."

"Stay right there, please, Mr. McGowan. An officer will be right with you."

"Certainly, sergeant."

The voice said: "This is Lieutenant Cravens, Mr. McGowan. We'll see you shortly."

I turned around saying: "That's that," and saw my bald man had vanished. I picked up the gun I'd dropped and stuck my head around the door casing with a lot of care, just in case the guy was waiting for me to make a sucker play like that, but that room was empty, too.

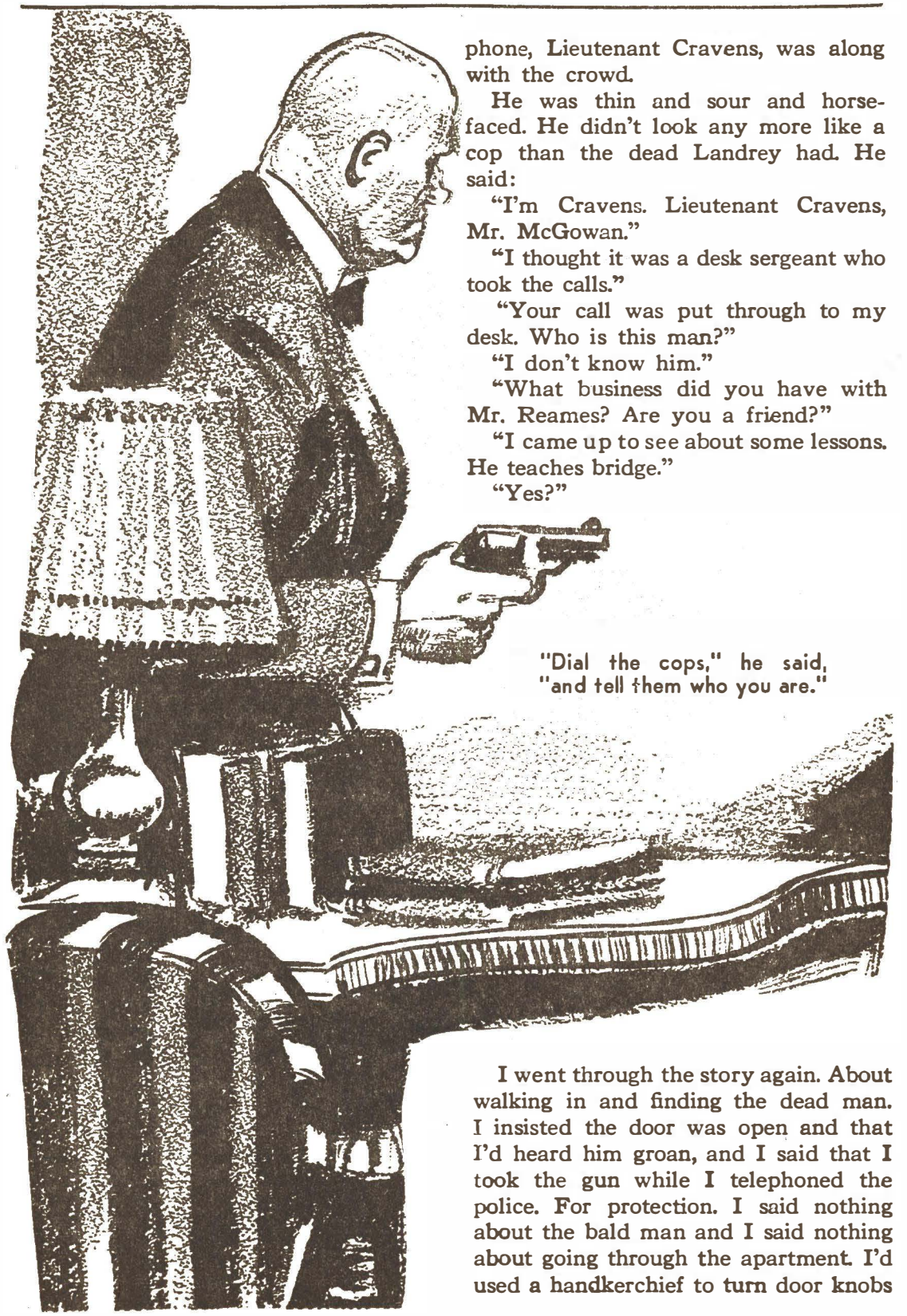
By the time I'd made sure he wasn't in the place the police were knocking on the door.

CHAPTER IV

Barney The Cat

FIRST there were a couple of boys from a prowl car. Then there were a load of detectives, assorted grades, from the precinct station. Then the big shots came in, along with all the specialists.

And the guy who'd answered the



"Dial the cops," he said, "and tell them who you are."

phone, Lieutenant Cravens, was along with the crowd.

He was thin and sour and horse-faced. He didn't look any more like a cop than the dead Landrey had. He said:

"I'm Cravens. Lieutenant Cravens, Mr. McGowan."

"I thought it was a desk sergeant who took the calls."

"Your call was put through to my desk. Who is this man?"

"I don't know him."

"What business did you have with Mr. Reames? Are you a friend?"

"I came up to see about some lessons. He teaches bridge."

"Yes?"

I went through the story again. About walking in and finding the dead man. I insisted the door was open and that I'd heard him groan, and I said that I took the gun while I telephoned the police. For protection. I said nothing about the bald man and I said nothing about going through the apartment. I'd used a handkerchief to turn door knobs

with and there was nothing to show that I'd snooped—and I knew it.

"Do you know Mr. Reames?"

"Oh, no."

"And yet you called on him?"

"I read his book. It's about bridge. So I thought I'd take some lessons."

"What business are you in, Mr. McGowan?"

"I'm a private detective."

He looked suddenly happy. He turned around and beckoned a uniformed cop and said: "Take this guy down to my office. Keep him safe. I want to have a nice long talk with him."

"Yes, sir, lieutenant."

I LEFT with the patrolman. He let me use the phone, once we were at the station, and if it hadn't been for that, Cravens would probably have held me as a material witness. But I got hold of one of the boys I'd worked with when I'd been on the force, and he got in touch with some others, and they called Cravens all night long at intervals, telling him what a good guy I was and the rest of it.

I just got a warning.

Cravens said: "I'm going to let you go, McGowan. You're not telling me what you know about the business and we both know it. I know it and you know I know it. I'm giving you a break because you used to be a fairly decent cop."

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Don't leave town."

"I don't intend to."

"Go on about your business as if nothing's happened."

"Sure."

"That's all."

"Fine and thanks."

I went downstairs to a phone booth and got my office. Miss Higgenbotham answered with: "The McGowan Agency!"

I had a half dollar in my mouth and was holding a handkerchief in front of it, besides. I'd never spoken to the girl over the phone, anyway, so I didn't think there was much chance she'd recognize my voice.

I said, "Is McGowan in?"

"Why, no, sir. I expect him at any moment."

"This is Barney Krausbaum. He knows me."

"Spell it please, Mr. Krausbaum."

"K-r-a-u-s . . . to hell wid it. Tell him it's Barney the Cat. He's onto it. Tell him I'll be in the lobby of the Fidelio, in about half an hour. Tell 'im to get over there and see me, hey, sister?"

"Barney the Cat, you said? I'll tell him, Mr. Krausbaum."

The Fidelio was an old hotel, about ten minutes walk from where I was. I ambled over that way and got there in time to see half a dozen men who couldn't have been anything but cops converge on the front of the place. They went in through the doors like they were rushing the corner saloon for a can of beer, and I hailed a cab and gave the driver my office address.

It meant that Cravens had a check on my phone, something that he wasn't supposed to be able to do but something that's done if there's a strong enough reason for. There's a question about whether any information obtained that way can be used in court, but there's no question about the cops being able to pick up and follow a lead they get that way.

Cravens was letting me go but he was keeping a string on me and I wanted to know it. It added to the complications, but knowing it I could guard against it.

MISS HIGGINBOTHAM was firm but flustered. She stood in front of my desk, with her face as red as fire. She was twisting a handkerchief in her hands, and I was willing to wager she was curling one foot around the ankle of the other.

"Mr. McGowan," she said.

"All present and accounted for, sir," I told her.

"I—I really am not joking."

"I'm deadly serious myself."

"Really, Mr. McGowan! There was a phone call for you this morning."

"Who was it?"

"A gentleman who gave his name as Krausbaum. At least he sounded as if it was something like that. I asked him to spell it out and he swore at me."

This startled me. I hadn't remembered cursing the brat, but it was her word against mine and I couldn't talk.

"That all he did? Just swear at you?"

"Oh no, Mr. McGowan. He asked you to meet him in the lobby of the Fidelio. I looked it up in the phone book, Mr. McGowan. It's a hotel."

"Swell. That's all?"

"Well—ugh—no, Mr. McGowan. I

feel—I—ugh—feel I should ask you something."

"Have at it."

"This man, this Mr. Krausbaum, said you knew him."

"Sure. Barney and I are pals."

"He—ugh—said you'd know him as Barney the Cat. Is that right?"

"Sure. Barney's one of the last of the litter. He's a cat burglar."

"Mr. McGowan. I'm really serious."

"Sure, Miss Higginbotham. So am I."

"I'd—I'd have to quit if I thought my job had any connection with the underworld."

"And I wouldn't blame you a bit."

"It hasn't, Mr. McGowan? It really hasn't?"

I said: "Look, kid, your job is to answer the telephone and tell people that look like they're going to ask me for money that I'm out to lunch. That's all. You will have no connection with crime, unless you go out and do it in your off hours."

"Do what?"

"Crime, of course."

She burst out crying and turned and ran out of the room.

And I felt sorry for her and followed her out to the other office and told her to take the afternoon off. To stay until twelve, and then to go to the park and play kissing games with the soldiers and sailors.

The gag stopped her crying but it didn't win a grin, and I was trying to think of something else I could offer her when Miss Madelon Quires walked in.

That made everything all right. It put the office back on a business basis.

MISS QUIRES looked even more subdued than usual that morning. She said: "Mr. McGowan, I tried again to talk with Arnold, this morning."

"Yeah?"

"I telephoned from the hotel. Somebody answered in Arnold's apartment, but wouldn't connect me with Arnold. They asked me who I was, but there was something about the tone of the question that was suspicious. I hung up the phone."

I waited, to see if Lieutenant Cravens was giving the Reames—Quires apartment the old technic. He was—he wasn't missing a bet.

She said: "Inside of half an hour a police officer was at my door, demanding to know why I was calling Arnold Reames. A detective named Olson."

"That's one of the boys I don't happen to know."

"I told him, naturally, that I was calling Mr. Reames to make an appointment for bridge instruction."

"That was fast thinking."

"I remembered what you'd told me about Arnold's writing a book about it. That was all. The policeman took my name and address—that is, my Richfield address, and went away."

"Did he say anything about why he was there?"

"He did not. I asked him, but he refused to answer. He just mumbled something about a routine police inquiry being made about all calls at that apartment."

"Did he say anything about where Arnold was?"

"He didn't. I asked him particularly and he refused to answer."

I said, "Well, your cousin Arnold's in a jam and I'm betting he's down at the station right now, answering questions. There was a man killed in his apartment last night."

"How do you know? The policeman didn't say anything about it."

"I'm the one who found him."

She stared at me and I could see suspicion grow in her eyes.

"D'ya happen to know a bald man?

I mean a man entirely bald? No hair on his head. No eyebrows, no eyelashes. Not as tall as I am but heavier. Looks like he'd have blond hair if he had any, that is. Know him?"

"I do not."

"Know a Carlos Rivera?"

"Why, no. That sounds like a Mexican name."

"Probably is. It belongs to a thin, snappy looking little guy. A mustache like a movie star. Very well dressed and a very smooth talking man. Little. D'ya know anybody that looks like that?"

She said instantly: "Oh, no."

"Sure?"

"Are you doubting my word, Mr. McGowan?"

I said: "That's it, exactly."

CHAPTER V

Getaway

CRAVENS came in the office then, looking as if he'd just bitten into a particularly sour lemon. His ordinary look, as I'd found out. He glared at me and looked Miss Madelon Quires over as though he was trying to memorize everything about her, but when he spoke his voice was mild.

"Ah, your client, eh, McGowan?"

I said: "Miss Quires—Mr. Cravens. Lieutenant Cravens of the police, Miss Quires."

"Oh, yes," said Cravens. "Quires—Reames. Same family, no doubt. From the same stock—from the same writing tablet, you might say. Ha, ha."

He laughed as though it hurt him. He sounded like a crow with throat trouble.

Miss Madelon didn't laugh. She said: "I beg your pardon!"

"You're the young woman who telephoned the Reames apartment this morning? The one Detective Olson questioned?"

'That is right," said Miss Quires. "I am still trying to reason why the police should be interested in my making an appointment for bridge lessons."

Cravens tried to wink at me but the attempt was a failure. His winking machine was rusty or something—his eyelid almost creaked when it came down.

I said: "Miss Quires, you might as well tell him the truth. Lieutenant, now that my client is here I can speak more frankly than I could this morning when talking with you. Miss Quires, lieutenant, came here to get in touch with her cousin. She had heard, in Richfield, Texas, where she lives, some talk about him being suspicioned in regards to the death of his father. She came here to ask him to go back and clear his name."

"Is that right, Miss Quires?"

"That is right. To be honest, officer, Arnold had some slight trouble with his father years ago. That is why, no doubt, that he changed his name from Quires to Reames. As my cousin, for that matter my only living relative, I thought he should return to Richfield and clear his name of this ridiculous suspicion."

"Did you know an officer from Richfield was killed in Reames'—or Quires' apartment, last night? Did you know your cousin is being held for questioning regarding that same killing?"

"Mr. McGowan has just told me he thought something like that had happened. He didn't tell me the murdered man was a Richfield police officer, however."

"I didn't know it," I said, lying by the clock. "I didn't know the guy. I told you that, lieutenant."

"I still don't believe you, McGowan."

I said that was unfortunate.

"We finally found where the dead man was staying. I looked through his room, myself. We found a notation there—your name and office address."

I said: "That seems odd."

"Are you sure Landrey wasn't here calling on you?"

I HEARD a funny sound from the door and looked up and saw Miss Higginbotham. She was holding a telegram in her hand and she'd heard something I'd have given a pretty for her not to have heard.

She asked Cravens: "Did you say Landrey? A Mr. Landrey?"

I said: "That's right, that's what he said, Miss Higginbotham. A police officer named Landrey. I'm sure we don't know any officer by that name."

"But, Mr. McGowan! That's the man from Richfield, Texas."

I thought fast. It was probably too late but I tried to save it. I said: "Landrey, Landrey! Oh, yes! That was the man from the bank out there, wasn't it?"

Miss Higginbotham corrected me nicely. "Oh, no, Mr. McGowan. Don't you remember? He said he was from the bank in Richfield, but your friend wired he was a police officer. Don't you remember?"

I said it had skipped my mind. Miss Quires was looking troubled and Cravens was grinning like a wolf.

I said: "Give me the wire, Miss Higginbotham. You can go to lunch, if you like. And the afternoon off too, you know."

Cravens said: "Don't leave, young lady, until I ask you a few questions. Well, McGowan, what's in your wire?"

I opened it—there was no harm in that. It read: SORRY ABOUT DELAY. YOUR MAN IS RICARDO TRUJO. STRICTLY BAD EGG. OWNS RANCH AND IS SLOT MACHINE KING. LARRY.

I took it that Prather and I had reached the Larry and Mac stage by wire. That was all right—he was a long ways away and so no bother.

I said to Cravens: "It's nothing—that is to do with this business of Reames."

"You mean Quires, don't you, McGowan?"

I said: "Look, lieutenant! Just as a favor. How did you know that Quires was Reames? How did you trace him?"

He gave me a dirty laugh. "Cinch. He went to Princeton. I just looked up some of the men he'd gone through school with. A couple of them had kept in touch with him and told them he'd changed his name because of some trouble out West. It was elementary, my dear Watson."

Miss Quires made her eyes big and cooed: "Why, I think that's just wonderful, Mr. Cravens. I mean, oh, pardon me, lieutenant. Mr. McGowan, don't you think that was smart police work?"

I was kicking myself for not having thought of it. Of course I hadn't known about him going to school at the time I'd tried to locate him, but I could have found that out by wire, either from the bank or from Miss Madelon. I should have known he'd have friends, and worked that angle, too.

I said: "Sure."

"What did Landrey want with you, McGowan?"

"Just if I knew where Arnold Quires was. He knew I was trying to find Quires through the Richfield bank. Or that's the way I suppose he knew—he gave me a stall about being from the bank but I didn't believe him."

"Why not?"

While he swung me by the knees, I managed to reach my gun.

I WAS glad of a chance to hand him something back. I said: "Because he pinched my secretary right where I'd like to give her a good solid boot. Bankers only pinch their own secretaries like that. I bet that's the first thing you thought of, when you saw mine."

He said: "You're betting on a cinch, McGowan. Ha, ha! Well, Miss Quires, if you want to see your cousin—that's what you said he was, wasn't it—you can do it this afternoon. I'm turning him loose. Please don't go back to Richfield without notifying me."

"That doesn't mean you suspect me of killing the Richfield officer, does it?"

"Of course not. It's just that I might have some questions to ask you about other things. For instance, the real reason you were back here to see your cousin. I'll get out all right, McGowan—don't bother to go to the door with me."

I said: "It's no bother at all."

He gave me his nasty little grin again. "I want to talk to that girl of yours before you get a chance to fire her. She's a regular information bureau, isn't she?"

I said: "She's a fat little fool."

Miss Higginbotham threw open the door between the offices and said: "I

resent that. I—I will resign, Mr. McGowan."

"Go soak your head," I told her.

Cravens gave me his creaky wink before he turned to the girl and got her by the shoulder. He moved her out

into the other office, saying: "Come on, Miss," while he grinned back at me over his shoulder.

Miss Quires asked: "Will that make it bad, Mr. McGowan? I mean the girl telling the lieutenant that you did know Mr. Landrey, from Richfield?"

"It means he knows I'm not leveling with him. He suspected it before—now he knows."

"That's all?"

I said: "Hell, that's enough. It's tough enough getting by in this business without having the cops against you. Sure you don't know this Rivera?"

"Oh, no."

"Or the bald man I described?"

"I told you I didn't."

"And I told you I didn't believe you. Would you know Rivera if I told you his real name?"

"Why, possibly."

"Ricardo Trujo?"

"Why—why he owns a farm—we call it a ranch—adjoining the Quires property."

"Any oil on it?"

"Why, no."

I said: "Lady, you may be a liar but you're a cheerful one. You'd better remember what the lieutenant told you about going back to Richfield. He'll pull you off the train if you even try to start."

She smiled at me but there was no warmth in the smile. I don't suppose anybody likes to be called a liar.

ARNOLD QUIRES looked like a successful lawyer. He looked in his early thirties, rather than his late. His hair was thinning a bit on top and was going away a bit from his temples, but there was plenty of it left. It just gave him a high forehead and an intelligent look. He was nicely built and looked as though he took good care of himself in spite of the late hours he must have spent over a card table. He had a smooth, assured way of talking, but he wasn't at his best.

I've seen few people that were, after a session with the cops.

I said: "I'm Terrence McGowan. I'm a private cop. Hired by your cousin Madelon."

"You mean by the woman who claims my name is Quires and that she's my cousin Madelon."

I said: "Come off it, mister. I've just been talking to Lieutenant Cravens. For that matter, I had you picked out as Quires, for your cousin, before you got in this police trouble. You're Quires and we both know it. So there's no need of stalling."

He flushed and said: "And I can see no need of discussing my personal affairs with you, either, Mr. McGowan. You may work for my cousin—I'll admit she is that—but that gives you no right to question me about a thing."

"I realize that."

"Then?"

I said: "I'll put my cards on the table. I'm not in business for love, Mr. Quires. The Richfield bank asked me to locate you. I'm going to charge them—I located you. Your cousin asked me to do the same, and I intend to charge her, as well. So far, so good. But a guy from the police department in Richfield came in to talk to me and he got killed. That's hurting me with the local force here. Another man from Richfield came to see me and offered me a fake case, just to get me out of town and away from you. It was a fake case, but he offered me five thousand dollars and it wasn't fake money. Now d'ya see my side of it?"

"Not as yet."

I laughed and said: "Okay, mister! I'm not the one that's in a jam. I'll tell you this, though, and I'll back it with money, marbles, or chalk. You'll be back

in jail inside of twenty-four hours. You'll be held for the Texas police. One of their cops was killed, and when they get the word, they'll come down on you. They may have only suspicion on you in regard to how your father met his death, but this cop killing puts you right in the center of things."

He said: "Maybe we had better have a little talk."

I WAS wrong about it being twenty-four hours before Quires was in jail. Cravens nabbed him again on a hold order from Richfield two hours after I'd left the apartment.

His colored boy—who cooked and cleaned for him—told me all about it.

"Yes, sir, Mr. McGowan," he said. "It was that self-same man that was here and asked me all them silly questions. A lieutenant, he says he was, but he wasn't in no uniform. He was a sad looking man, sir, Mr. McGowan—like he was mad at everybody."

"Cravens?"

"Yes, sir, that's the name."

"That all?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Reames he says for me to tell you about it and I am doing that just like he says."

I said: "Thanks."

I called Miss Higginbotham in. She was over her mad but I wasn't. I said: "Miss Higginbotham, I don't feel at all well. If anybody calls for me, tell them I've gone home. That's good for tomorrow, also—it's good until I tell you different."

"Oh, yes, Mr. McGowan."

"What did you tell the cop, before you took the afternoon off, yesterday?"

"Why, nothing. He just asked me about Mr. Landrey. That's all. He asked me what you talked about."

"And you told him?"

"Why, yes. He was an officer. Wasn't that right?"

"I guess so. Tell me one thing else. Did he pinch you?"

"Mr. McGowan!"

She sailed out into the other office, looking flustered, and I decided that our local talent could learn from the Western cops, after all. They knew what they wanted, apparently, and wasted no time in half way measures.

I caught a cab to the bus station on forty-ninth and started from there. I didn't think Cravens would have more than a casual check on me but I played it safe. I went over to the Jersey side and ducked back and forth between two bars. My tag was a sleepy looking bird who was probably just out of uniform—certainly he didn't know beans about a trailing job. I let him watch me have a long and earnest conversation with a bird in one of the bars—I didn't know the guy from Adam, but the way I'd picked him up made it look as though we were old friends—as though I'd gone to Jersey to meet him. This close friendship cost me six whiskey sours—that's all the guy was drinking.

We shook hands when I left, and I said, loud enough for Cravens' boy to hear it: "That's fine. I'll meet you here again, same time, tomorrow afternoon."

I took the bus back, as though I'd done my business. And I ditched my tag with three cab changes and was at the air port twenty minutes before the West bound plane took off.

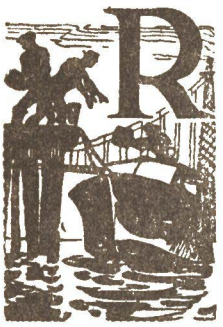
There was a bad ten minutes when I thought they were going to pull a priority travel rating on me, but it was the middle of the week and I got a break. They sold me the ticket I'd reserved from a pay phone—I couldn't call from my office without Cravens having a record of the conversation—and that was that.

The guy Cravens had following me would report he'd lost me. Cravens would raise hell. Then the poor guy

would tell him I wasn't trying to duck —that it had been an accident losing me. That I'd kept an appointment across the river and made another, with the same man, for the following day, and that I'd be a cinch to pick up. That would keep Cravens quiet for twenty-four hours, anyway. And in that time I'd be far, far, away.

CHAPTER VI

Trujo's Dad



RICHFIELD, TEXAS, looked like any other normal town of about fifteen thousand. I was disappointed. I'd expected something like in the movies — oil wells all up and down the street and with every other door a honky-tonk. I checked into a darn nice hotel—it advertised, ONE HUNDRED ROOMS—ONE HUNDRED BATHS, and then went out and strolled around looking for at least a cowboy, but not a thing like that was around.

The gals could have come from Long Island and the guys from Brooklyn, except for a different way of talking. Though most of the guys were in uniform and from an Army camp eight miles out of town.

I looked over the police station and decided to keep away from it if possible—then spotted the First National Bank and Trust Company and planned a call there in the morning. I ate in the hotel dining room—a dinner that could have been served in any fair New York hotel with no reason for shame on the part of the chef—and saw a picture I'd seen a month before on Broadway.

I was back in the hotel and deciding to go to bed early, at ten, and I was on my way to the desk to get my key when Carlos Rivera came in. Or rather, when Ricardo Trujo, if Larry Prather was right and that was his right name, came in.

He wasn't alone. He had two men with him. Both white men, but there all resemblance ceased. One of them was about eighty. White headed and with short white stubble on his cheeks and chin. He looked like a walking skeleton. The skin on his face was wrinkled by his eyes and the corners of his nose and mouth, but it stretched tight across his cheek bones and forehead. His skin was so pale I could see a pulse beating in his temples. He wore a black suit like a minister's, but he was, without doubt, the wickedest looking old devil I ever saw in my life. His eyes were the give-away—they looked like dull grey marbles and they didn't show any more life.

THE other man looked like a bartender on his day off. But a bartender from the gay nineties. He was big and fat and his hair was slicked down tight on his head, except for a lock that was curled across his forehead. He had a big paunch with a gold chain strung across it that must have weighted him down. At thirty odd dollars an ounce it must have been worth a thousand dollars. He had all gold teeth in the front of his mouth, and he kept them showing with a hearty grin. He weighed at least two fifty and he wasn't tall—he was just short and thick from the sides and through front to back.

His clothes were okay. A decent looking light weight suit—not loud in color or cut. A quiet shirt, hat, shoes, and tie. In spite of this they looked like they belonged on a racetrack—he did something to them.

Rivera, or Trujo, looked the same

as he had when he'd called on me, except possibly more confident.

I said: "Well, I'll be damned! If it isn't Mr. Rivera! Imagine, meeting you here like this."

The old gentleman said: "Shut your mouth!" He didn't seem to open his own when he spoke, either. The sound just seemed to come from his direction.

Trujo said: "Now, dad!"

Dad snarled something in Mexican or Spanish.

Trujo said: "He says that you are a dirty police rat! But you're not, are you, Mr. McGowan."

I said: "Certainly not."

"You're just a snooping fool. Isn't that right, Mr. McGowan?"

I said: "Probably."

"Now we will go to your room and discuss how many different kinds of fool you are."

I looked over at the desk. The clerk was talking to the telephone operator, who'd left her board for a moment. The board was at the end of the desk, with just a low swinging door separating it from the space back of the counter. Two bell boys were matching nickels, and the bell captain was standing in front of them with legs spread wide apart, watching.

Two men were talking politics over at the side of the lobby and taking the discussion seriously. They would be no help—by the time they'd got their minds away from the coming election I could have been knocked on the head and stripped clean of clothes. A good looking girl was in another lobby chair but she was spending her time in watching the door. I took it her boy friend had stood her up.

I could see no help any place around.

I said: "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Rivera. Not tonight." I winked. "You know how it is. I'm a sort of stranger but I sort of got acquainted. Ha, ha, ha. She's waiting for me upstairs, and I couldn't drag in a bunch of strangers like this. Ha, ha, ha."

Trujo said: "Ha, ha, ha," like I did. And then, "I'm sure the young lady will excuse it this once."

The old man said: "Mouthy!" and gave me that flat, frozen look he had.

I HAD a hand in my side coat pocket and my fingers curled around the pipe I had there. It was in a combination tobacco pouch—one of the kind that has a division for the pipe, so that ashes won't spill into your pocket just in case the bowl of the pipe isn't reamed out. I got this nestled in my hand and then tried my bluff.

"You guys out here carry guns in your belts, don't you?" I asked Trujo.

He shrugged. "In the belt, yes. And in the pocket. And under the arm. Just why do you ask?"

I said: "Now me, I carry one in my coat pocket. Like this. It's looking right at you, mister. If one of your boys makes a move, I'm going to turn it loose and try to figure out why later on."

Trujo laughed merrily. "Why, Mr. McGowan! You are being ridiculous. You have threatened me, actually. As if you were afraid to discuss the little business we have."

He was stalling and I knew the trouble was just being sidestepped for the moment. The three of them were grouped in front of me where I could see each move they made, but I wasn't too happy about the situation. I knew there was nothing but a pipe in my pocket, even if they didn't—and bluffing with a gun is something that shouldn't be done. If a gun's drawn, it should be used. If it isn't drawn, a man should keep his mouth shut about having one. I knew that and knew they would think along the same direction.

And I was making another mistake—

a natural, but a mistake, just the same. I had the old man figured as the bad actor of the three. He looked like sudden death in any man's league—and undoubtedly was if it came to gun play. Trujo I was watching. I had my left hand free and I was braced and in reaching distance, and I figured I could knock him out of his socks if he made a bad play.

I weigh one ninety-five and he didn't go over a hundred and thirty. If I couldn't sock him loose from his eye teeth, it was time I learned.

I was discounting the big lug and that was where I was wrong. He had his hands well away from his body and I couldn't see where he could pull a gun with any speed from that position. And it was gun play I was expecting.

Instead of that he took a step ahead, moving as fast as a cat, and caught me in the belly with his head. He just took that step and lowered his head and butted me like a goat.

I started to go down but he didn't let me. I started to tip backwards and he caught me around the knees with both arms and pulled on them. He was strong enough to lift me from the floor, so that I was hanging there with the backs of my knees caught under his crossed arms and with my legs sticking out behind his back. And hanging head down. My head was clearing the floor about six inches, and I could twist and see Trujo laughing at me.

THE big man swung me sideways, as though he was going to toss me away, and I twisted in the air and got a hand inside my coat. It was the first time I'd ever pulled a gun from a position like that, but nothing hung and out it came. I put the muzzle against his ankle as he swung me back and hauled back on the trigger, taking it right through the double-action, and then I came down on my head and shoulders, with the big man on top of me.

I got clear in time to see the old man getting a gun from his waist band. Trujo had backed up and was standing there with his mouth open—with the laugh cut off right in the middle.

I didn't say a word. I thumbed back the hammer of my gun, with the muzzle tilted up in line with the old man's belly. The big guy was thrashing around beside me, with both hands around his leg above where my slug had torn through his ankle. He acted as though he was trying to cut the pain off by throttling it before it could start up his leg.

The old man dropped his gun without a word. Then the hotel door slammed open and three uniformed cops came storming in.

One of them raised the gun he held and shouted: "Drop it!"

I dropped my gun and it fell alongside of the old man's. I started to get up and the same cop that had shouted kicked me in the side of my head. The girl who'd been waiting for her boy friend came over and pointed at me.

"He started it," she said. "He tried to hit Big Joe and Big Joe hit him back. Then he pulled a gun on Joe and shot him."

One of the two men who'd been talking politics said: "That's right, chief. We was watching—we seen the whole thing. He hauled out the iron on Big Joe for no reason and turned her loose."

The cop kicked me again, this time in the side. I was back on the floor and I rolled away from the boot and only got part of the effect.

I said: "You the chief?"

"I am, you——!"

The other political minded man said: "He cussed the boys out before he took that poke at Big Joe. Joe was nice enough about it—he took it. But Joe

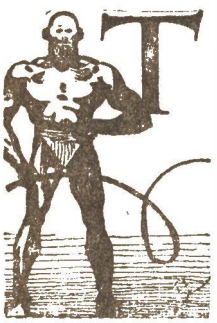
hit him back when he swung on him."

I said: "This is a lot of frame just for one man, chief. I didn't think I was that important."

He kicked me in the head again and I didn't wake up until I was in jail.

CHAPTER VII

Fair Warning



THEY gave me a hearing on the second day. I was charged with assault with a dangerous weapon, assault with intent to kill, carrying a gun without proper permission, and resisting arrest. There were minor charges as well, but all misdemeanors instead of felonies. Resisting arrest and disturbing the peace and using profane language in a public place were some of them.

All in all they threw the book at me. The hearing was before a justice court, this so they wouldn't have to call a special meeting of the grand jury. It was supposed to hold me until the jury met, and unless I put up a beef about it it probably would. The justice didn't even bother to listen to the perjury he heard from the witnesses. His mind was made up and he bound me over to the grand jury without doing more than ask me to tell my side of the case.

And he paid absolutely no attention to it when I told him what had really happened.

Trujo was my only visitor during the two days. He came in, looking very sorry for me, but his little black eyes were snapping with malice.

"This is a shame, Mr. McGowan," he said. "I am really sorry."

I said: "If I wasn't inside where I can't reach you, you'd be telling God's own truth."

"But you *are* inside," he pointed out. "And likely to stay inside for some little time. Mr. McGowan, I have considered this, carefully. I could have you released right now. I admit it. But in the frame of mind that you are in, it would be unwise. You certainly wouldn't go back to New York and allow me to take care of my own affairs in my own way. You would insist on staying here and interfering."

"You're probably right."

"So I have no choice but to let you stay in here."

"Got the chief in your pocket, eh?"

"Truthfully, I have."

"The judge?"

"Him, too."

"What about the jury—in case I demand a jury trial?"

"I doubt that your attorney could find one man out of any twelve on a jury in this county who would hear your side of the case with any fairness. I have interests here, Mr. McGowan. Extensive interests."

"Sure. Slot machines."

"More than slot machines, Mr. McGowan."

I left him standing by the cell door and went back and sat on the cot, as far away from him as the length of the cell would let me. Talking about how solid I was hooked wouldn't help me in the spot I was in—and there was no reason to let the guy know how deep he was getting under my skin.

Right then all I could do was wait for developments—and I had a notion they'd be starting right soon.

LARRY PRATHER came in three days after I was bound over for the grand jury—the first time I'd seen him. Outside of a nice raw sunburn—he had a hide that wouldn't take a

tan—he looked the same as when I'd last seen him.

But then I wasn't looking at him. I was paying attention to the man with him.

It was the bald man, who'd been in Quires' apartment, when I'd found Landrey's body. He looked just as tough as he'd looked then—he was really a hard looking cookie.

Prather said: "Hi, Terry! I'd have come around before but I just got back."

"Yeah!"

"Yeah! Sure. From New York. I want you to meet Mr. Smith."

The bald man reached in through the bars and said: "One of the Smith brothers. I told you before you asked."

I shook hands with Mr. Smith. Larry Prather said: "Yeah, just got back. Flew back, by golly. I came with all the rest of 'em."

I didn't know what he was talking about and said so.

"Well, Mr. Smith's one. Arnold Quires is two. A cop from here named Finnegan is three—Quires waived extradition, you see. Then Quires' cousin, Madelon. Let's see. That makes four. And me, five. Oh, yes. And your secretary, a gal with a long name. A fat little wench who ought to be in an institution. I tell you, Terry, that girl's little better than a half wit."

"Calling her one's a compliment. Who in the hell brought *her* out?"

"*I* did," said Mr. Smith.

I was sore by that time. I'd been in jail for some little time and it gets on a man's nerves. I said: "Okay, mister. I'll bite. Who are you?"

"Quires' brother-in-law."

"The hell you say!"

"That's right. Quires married my sister just before he was picked up by the cops."

"Then what the devil were you doing up in his apartment when I was there?"

"Looking for Quires."

I got it. I said: "Excuse me, mister."

"It's all right. She's going to Nevada where she'll divorce him as soon as the law allows."

"Ugh—I didn't mean to be personal."

"You're not. I wouldn't have the louse in the family. Only just long enough to help the kid out. She's only eighteen."

Prather was looking interested. I said: "It's nothing down your alley, Larry. If it was anything to print, you still wouldn't print it."

Smith turned his pale eyes on Prather and said: "No, he wouldn't print it."

PRATHER looked hurt and said he never printed anything that wasn't news. Neither Smith nor I paid him any attention.

Smith asked: "How much bail you held for?"

"I didn't ask. What was the use?"

"Couldn't you raise it?"

"They'd make it so high there'd be no chance. I ran into a small town frame."

"I know it. I live here."

That was another surprise but it needn't have been. Everything in the case had centered in Richfield.

"I'm president of the Retail Merchant's Association."

I said that was fine.

"Also president and owner of the Malt Beverage Distribution Company."

I said that was even better.

"And president and treasurer of the state association we have formed to combat fanatical dry legislation."

"You'd be in charge of spending the Quires' fund, then, in case cousin Arnold and cousin Madelon don't inherit?"

"Practically so, yes."

"And you married your sister to Arnold."

He grinned coldly. By that time Prather was down the cell block, peering into other cells in search of somebody he could put in a write-up. Smith said:

"What I say is between you and me. I had Quires marry my sister. That's right. He owed it to her. He met her

Coming through the door, she noticed my gun and squealed like a pig.

when he came out here in an attempt at making a reconciliation with his father. That's about all there was to it —he was going to marry her and take her back to New York with him. He didn't marry her, if you understand me. The fact that I'm in a position to handle the Quires' estate, if my brother-in-law and his cousin don't inherit, has nothing to do with it.'

"Oh, certainly not."

He said: "Except that the estate will turn out better than a half million dollars and I'd be practically in full charge of it."

I said: "Money's sticky—that is, some of it is. Certainly some of that much should be."

He smiled frostily. "I've got sticky hands, all right, Mr. McGowan. I'll see about bailing you out and then I want you to clear my brother-in-law on the charges against him."

HERE was another upset. He'd forced Arnold Quires into a shotgun marriage and here he was trying to get him out of trouble. I must have looked as puzzled as I felt, because he explained himself.

"It's because this is such a small town," he said. "And because I've got only this kid sister and I've always looked after her. I don't want anybody to be able to throw up to her that Quires killed his father. And that he was doing time for it. He'd get life in this state for it, at least. He might even be the head man in a lynching bee."

I said: "I see."

"We take family pretty seriously down here," he said.

"I can see that."

"And we take half a million dollars seriously down here, also."

"I can see that, too. One thing, Mr. Smith. Who owns the Richfield First National Bank and Trust Company?"

"Ricardo Trujo owns about half of it."

"I see."

"They're administrators of the Quires' estate."

"I thought they'd be."

"But, Mr. McGowan!"

"Yes?"

"I own the other half of it. Dickie Trujo and I have been in several deals together where there was money to be made for each of us. And a bank is a safe investment, these days."

I thought how nice. Here he was in a position to help administer the Quires' estate. And, in his other job, in a position to spend the money, if his brother-in-law didn't get hold of it. And, if his brother-in-law did score and collect, his sister would collect and plenty, when she got her divorce.

I couldn't see how he could lose.

HE got me out on bail the following day and the bail was stiff. Ten thousand dollars cash bond, and he put it up like it was so many peanuts. I gave the jailer five bucks—he'd been a decent old guy who'd got me cigarets and magazines, and then started down the street to Smith's office. He hadn't bothered to go down to the jail when the chief had released me.

And then I met Larry Prather—who was in a hurry. He was heading for me with his head down, and almost running.

I said: "Whither away?" and he looked up and saw me. And got white in the face.

"Get off the street," he said. "I can't talk to you. Meet me tonight by the Methodist Church."

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

He said, almost desperately: "Meet me there. Get off the street, right now. Don't go any place but your hotel. Hur-

ry, Terry—I'll tell you about it tonight."

I wanted to see Smith. I wanted to go to the bank, and see who was going to pay me for the work I'd done in finding Quires. I didn't know whether Smith had used the bank's name to get that information, or whether the trust officer of the bank, acting as the administrator of the Quires' estate had been acting on the level and trying to find an heir to the property, but in either case I wanted to be paid.

I'd found him, and whether I'd found him as much for Madelon Quires as I had for the bank made no difference. I'd done what I'd been asked to do, and I'd even wired a report to the bank before I'd left the city, so I'd have no trouble collecting.

I wanted to see Trujo—but I wanted to see him in front of responsible witnesses and not those he hand-picked. I wanted to see Madelon Quires and I wanted to see Arnold Quires. Again because of money. And I wanted to see Quires' new wife, Smith's sister. Smith had forced that marriage the same evening he'd found me in Quires' apartment, with the murdered Richfield cop, and I wanted details about the thing.

I had lots to do and little time to do it, but I headed for the hotel and went up to the room, without stopping around.

There was something about the way Prather had acted that got me on the tender spots. He'd been a newspaper man long enough not to fly off the handle for no reason—and he was plenty scared when he'd met me. There was a half a million dollars mixed up in the mess, and people will do lots for that kind of dough or for a cut at it.

And I was in a strange town a long ways away from where I could pull any weight, and I was bucking into a political set-up that was dynamite.

I thought I'd play it safe.

CHAPTER VIII

Taken For a Ride

CRAVENS phoned up from the desk about six. He sounded as sore as ever at the world, but not quite as confident. I could tell it even over the phone.

"McGowan?" he asked.

"You know it is."

"I heard you were out on bail."

"Sure."

"Smith got you out?"

"Sure."

"I heard that, too."

"Is it supposed to be a secret?"

He said: "It's supposed to be one of the damndest messes I've yet seen. Come out to dinner with me."

"No."

"Have you eaten?"

"No."

"What in hell's the matter with you?"

I said: "I'm not playing any favorites. I'm sticking close to home base. Or don't you get it?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"There's blood on the moon, mister lieutenant. That's what us natives call a bad situation with possibilities of murder and sudden death."

"Who'll be murdered?"

I said: "Me. Or that's what I'm afraid of."

"I want to see you."

"Come on up."

"In about ten minutes."

"Okay."

I hung up, thinking that I was safe enough with Cravens, anyway. He was a louse in spades but he wasn't in on any of the local trouble. He might have been but he hadn't had time; he

was too old a pigeon to move in before he'd looked the field over for traps. And to see which side had the most money.

I went to the door when I heard the knock but I didn't take any chances. I had my spare gun from my bag—the cops had taken charge of my regular one—and I had it turned on the door when I threw it open.

And Miss Higginbotham said: "Eee!"

She sounded like a pig.

I said crossly: "Oh, it's you! Come on in. And I'd like to know what you mean by coming out here like this? I didn't tell you to come. Who's looking after the office?"

"Nobody."

As she was all the office force there was, that seemed reasonable. She came into the room, scuttling along the side of the hall and keeping the width between us. It was like one of the grade-B movies, where the heroine comes in to offer her all in return for the mortgage on the family farm.

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

SHE sat down, settling her fat little self down in the chair as though she was afraid of breaking up.

"What is it?"

She said solemnly: "You are in danger, Mr. McGowan."

"That right?"

"I heard them talk. On the plane, when they thought I was asleep."

"Heard who talk?"

"Mr. Smith and Mr. Quires. And Mrs. Quires, too. She's Mr. Smith's sister, you know."

"I'd heard she was."

"She's just terrible."

"Yeah?"

"She's common."

"That right?"

"But she's very pretty."

I laughed. I said: "*That* isn't common."

"She's a bad girl. I can tell—a woman can always tell."

I wanted to laugh but didn't. Miss Higginbotham was working on the old code—I could see that. She wasn't accepting the single standard for a second.

I said: "Well, there's all kinds, kid. It takes all kinds to make the world go round. Just what did you hear?"

"They're going to arrange it so that Mr. Quires can be convicted of murder, if they want it that way. Or that he can go free. In that case, they're going to arrange it so that a man named Trujo is blamed for the murders."

"This is Smith and his sister, Quires' wife, that you're talking about?"

"Of course."

"And what about Quires and Smith? What did *they* have to talk about?"

"Mrs. Quires won't divorce him unless he gives her almost all the money he'll get from his father. That is, unless he agrees to pay her after he gets it. You see, to get it, he has to have a divorce from her so that he can marry his cousin Madelon. If he doesn't marry his cousin, he gets nothing. But Mrs. Quires won't divorce him so that he can marry his cousin unless she gets the money after he collects it from his father's estate."

I said: "You don't have to draw me a picture, kid. I've already got some of the details. And how do I fit in?"

"You're to get the evidence against Mr. Trujo and Mr. Quires. Then you'll be killed so that you can't tell anything about it. Then they can switch the evidence around to suit themselves. They're bad people, both Mr. Smith and Mrs. Quires."

"Why did you come out with Smith then, if he's a bad one?"

She opened her eyes and said stiffly:

"How much bail you held for?" he demanded.

"Why to help you, of course. Mr. Smith said you were out here and in trouble, so I thought I should do as he suggested and come out and help you."

I said I appreciated the thought. And sent her back to her own room, just before Cravens came up from downstairs.

HE had a quart of liquor and consented to take a drink of it, which meant he wasn't on duty. He was the

kind of guy that went by rules and regulations, and one of the first is no drinking while working.

I said: "I've got a notion I should drink hearty. Because maybe I won't be drinking much longer."

"You've figured it out, eh?"

"Sure," I said, neglecting to tell him of the two warnings I'd had. I wanted to keep Prather as an ace in the hole and there was no sense in dragging the Higginbotham kid into the mess at all. "Sure. I'm supposed to be out of jail and waiting for trial, but I think I'm supposed to pull somebody's chestnuts out of the fire and then meet with an accident."

"Trujo?"

"He'd pull the trigger if he got a chance."

"Quires?"

"Him, too, I think. That'd depend."

"Smith?"

"Sure. In a second."

"He made bail for you."

"Sure."

Cravens took a sip of his drink and sighed. He said: "I'll tell you the truth, McGowan. I'm over my head out here. I can figure out the angles when something comes up, back in the city, but I can't out here."

"It isn't a hard one to figure."

"Like hell it ain't."

"Look. Trujo can win this way. If he can keep that estate up in the air—keep it from being settled right away, that is—he can finagle around and get his fingers on some of that estate money while the bank's managing it. That is, if he wants to work with Smith, who owns as much of the bank as he does. Or he can work with Quires possibly—and against Smith. He could maybe cut in that way, if he could help Quires enough to warrant it."

"I've figured that."

"Smith's got Quires hooked every way from the jack. Through the estate, because the bank's administrating the estate. He'd have to split with Trujo on this, but there's about half a million bucks in it and he could afford to split. That's one angle. He can freeze Quires out—make his sister hold to her marriage. Then Quires couldn't marry his cousin and he'd automatically be cut off from the inheritance, as would his cousin.

"In that case, and if Smith wants it that way, he could spend the estate money, after the thing was settled, in fighting any prohi campaign. He could start one himself if he had to—spend a thousand bucks on a few posters and spend half a million tearing them up. That would take time though, and it's taking a chance. Something might happen to spoil it. Then he could just let his sister divorce the guy in return for a settlement, and cut in on that. She married the guy because her brother told her to do it. She'd do just what he tells her to do all the way through."

Cravens looked puzzled. "Why don't he just sit tight and let his sister stay married? Then he could handle all the money to fight any so-called campaign and he wouldn't have to split with anybody. That would be his best bet."

"The time element makes it risky. And Trujo might get sore enough to kick over the traces. They're in the bank together, you see. Trujo wants a bite out of it and intends to get it. He'd rather get along with Smith—there's no doubt about it—but he'll break with Smith if that's the only way he can get a cut."

"What about Quires?"

"He'll get what's left, if Smith's sister divorces him. If she don't, he'll get nothing. It just depends on whether Smith can freeze Trujo out or not—and if Trujo can work out some way

of crossing Smith out of the loot. Quires, the poor sap, is in between."

Then Trujo came out of my bathroom and said: "Nice figuring, my friend. Let us all go out to my ranch."

THE old man was with him and he held an old single-action colt. The big hammer on it was back and the old man's thumb was up in the air over it, all ready to haul it back again, in case he turned it loose for a first shot. His pale grey eyes looked like agate, and his upper lip was curled so I could see that he wore a set of false teeth that looked like they were made out of chinaware.

He didn't say anything, just motioned with the barrel of his gun, and both Cravens and I raised our hands.

Cravens said: "You can't do this to me. I'm an officer of the law."

Trujo laughed and the old man opened his mouth wider. I suppose it was meant for a grin, but it made the old boy look more like a death's head than ever.

Trujo said: "We will have no trouble. It is just a conference. A business conference. Come now—the others are waiting."

"What others?" I asked.

"All of them," said Trujo, waving a hand. "Quires. Miss Madelon Quires. Mr. Smith. Mrs. Quires, Mr. Smith's sister."

"Her, too?"

"Oh, very much so."

I looked at Cravens. He was getting set, the damn' fool, to go for his gun right under the threat of the old man's, and he'd have been blasted apart before he ever got his hand out of sight. The old boy was watching and waiting for it—licking his lips like a cat, while he did.

I said: "That's fine," too loudly. "We can get this settled, once and for all."

Cravens said: "How did you get in here, mister?"

"Through the bathroom."

Cravens looked at me and I said: "The door was locked to the adjoining room. I tried it."

Trujo said: "Ah, but I have a pass key. I have a right to one—I own the hotel. That is, my partner and I."

"Smith in on it, too?"

"He is my partner on almost everything."

"Slot machines?"

"Oh, yes."

I shook my head at Cravens, who looked as though he was ready to make his try. I said: "I don't see what we have to lose by talking it over. We might all win."

The old man said: "Dickie, you shake 'em down. You watch out for a hide-out gun. I don't trust these fellas from the city."

That could have been funny. It was like a rattlesnake admitting he had no faith in a tame rabbit. Because with a gun on us like he had, Cravens and I were about as much danger to him.

THE old boy moved to the side and Trujo patted us over. He got through and stepped away, and the old man said querulously: "You didn't look down the back of their necks."

"What for?" I asked.

"Fellas carry knives there," he said, showing me the china again. "I don't take chances. I lived this long by not taking 'em, mister, and I don't intend to start in now."

"You'll live to hang, dad," I said.

"We got a saying, young fella, that talk's cheap but it takes money to buy whiskey."

I shut up.

We went out through my door and I got a glimpse of Miss Higginbotham just closing her door as we passed it.

I could see her frightening eyes and homely face and so, apparently, could Trujo.

He waved a hand and said: "A homely little wench, gentlemen. I don't see how you managed to stand her, Mr. McGowan. Seeing her all day long in your office must have been a trial."

I said: "Think what it would be if I was married to the gal."

We all laughed except Cravens. Even the old man turned loose a raspy chuckle. And we went through the lobby in that good natured fashion and out to the car at the curb. Trujo slid in back of the wheel and the old gent motioned to us to follow. He had his gun held under his coat, his other hand keeping the coat so that it hid it but so that he could throw it back out of the way if necessary. I had no intention of making it necessary, either, and by that time Cravens had caught the idea and was going along grumbling.

I said: "Sure, dad. If I ride in front, I can watch the road. I can always find my way back then, in case I come back by myself."

"What's that mean, sonny?"

"What I said."

"Meaning that maybe Dickie and I won't be around to run you back?"

"Could be."

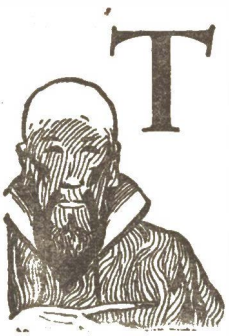
He cackled like a hen. He said: "I been around seventy-eight years, sonny. On foot and on horseback before there was autos. I don't scare."

We got in front and the old man crawled alone into the back seat. He said: "Now just in case one of you fellas gets smart and grabs the wheel and tries to wreck the auto, why I aim to blow the back of your head off while we're heading into the ditch. I'm telling you now."

I said: "Thanks," and Cravens just grunted. I didn't wannt to wreck the car—I wanted to get out to Trujo's ranch in one piece. I figured I had a chance out there and none at all in the car.

CHAPTER IX

Gunfire



THE ranchhouse was long and low and sprawling, set in a little thicket of trees that grew by a little stream of some kind. In the darkness it looked fine—the lights coming through the wide low windows and streaming out on the porch that fronted the house made it look like the welcome sign on a door mat.

The stream sounded fresh and cool and the leaves on the trees made a rustling sound that just burred the water's sound.

All peaceful and quiet—but there was a feeling in the air that was far from that.

There were two cars in front of the porch—a battered old touring car and a brand new station wagon. We got out of the car with the old man and his gun right behind us, and Trujo got out from behind the wheel, and before he snapped out the lights, I noticed he'd left the key in the ignition switch. Craven inched over toward the old man, and the old boy backed away like a crab, clicking back the hammer of that old gun.

"Keep your distance, sonny," he said. "I don't let no man come in reaching distance of my iron."

"My mistake," said Cravens.

Then we went up to the house. Trujo went ahead and slipped inside while we waited on the porch, and the old man kept ten feet in back of us so

there was no chance of getting at him.

Then Trujo opened the door wide and beamed at us and said: "Come in, gentlemen! I think that with you we have a quorum."

Smith was the first man I saw. He was sitting in a chair, with his arms tied along the arms of it. His feet were laced to the back legs of it as well. He looked just as capable tied that way, that was the odd part of it.

He said: "Hello, McGowan! Cravens!"

Arnold Quires was on his back on a sofa. There was a wet towel over his forehead and his cousin Madelon was sitting on a stool by him, rubbing his wrists. She saw us but didn't speak to us—she saved her voice for Trujo.

"I'm going to kill you for this," she told him.

Trujo smiled pleasantly and said: "I certainly hope not, Madelon."

ANOTHER girl—who had to be Smith's sister and Quires' new wife—was leaning against the wall by a fireplace. She wasn't tied. She was smoking a cigarette and her eyes were blazing with excitement. And with something else when she looked at Trujo.

He said: "All right, Elvie?"

"All right, Dick," she said. "I've been telling Lester what it was all about but he don't seem to understand."

Smith was Lester, it seemed. He said: "You dirty little double-crossing rat."

I laughed. I said to Smith: "So sister turns out to be for the other side, eh? That's one I hadn't figured."

"Nor me," he said "My own sister selling me out."

The old man, still behind Cravens and me, said: "Make him shut up, Dickie. I tell you I can't stand to hear him speak."

"Now, dad!" Trujo said.

That was the first time I saw Smith show any emotion. He said: "Dickie, you keep that old hell-cat away from me. You hear me. I've laid off him on your account, but if you turn him loose, and I live through it, I'll have him hunted down like a mangy dog."

The old man cackled and said: "If you live through it, Les, I'll just about guarantee you won't."

The thieves were falling out and it was about time that honest people should start coming into their own, but I couldn't figure who was honest. I didn't have too clean a conscience myself. I'd played it double for one piece of work, and I'd propositioned Arnold Quires in such a way he couldn't say anything but yes.

Right then I wasn't happy about any of it, either.

Cravens was as bad off as I was. He was after a murderer, there ws no doubt about that—but he was working it his own way and not going by department methods. If he had been, he'd have never let Quires and his wife and Smith leave the city. He'd have held them for further investigation and thrashed the thing out then and there.

Madelon was playing a game of her own and the decentest one there. She was crazy about Quires and didn't care who knew it. Smith's sister, Quires' wife, was crazy about Trujo, too—but there was nothing decent about the feeling. Even a dummy could tell the difference.

And Trujo and Smith were breaking up with a bang and the old man had his sights set on Smith. Some old grudge that had come to a head.

I said: "Well, now we're here, what's next?"

Trujo said: "I'm just trying to de-

cide who's going to kill Lieutenant Cravens. That's all."

HE was nice enough about it. He explained it very carefully. "This is the way I want it to look," he told us. "I want it to appear that you, Mr. McGowan, and the lieutenant, tried to arrest Mr. Quires for killing his father. That will be on information you obtained Mr. McGowan. What it would be won't matter—your secret will supposedly die with you. Mr. Smith was with Mr. Quires and took his part of the quarrel. That would only be natural—they are brothers-in-law, are they not? During the gun play everybody is killed. Mr. Smith will be shot in the stomach—he will be able to live long enough to make a dying statement. I have already prepared it, incidentally."

"You forging rat," said Smith.

Trujo bowed. "Certainly. The other gentlemen will die almost painlessly; at least I hope they will, Lester, but you will not. I promised dad that he could shoot you in the belly and watch you tough it out. That'll hurt, Lester."

"You——!"

"I've hated you since I met you, Lester. This is doing me a lot of good."

"What about Elvie?"

"After a reasonable length of time Elvie and I will be married. She will naturally inherit your interest in the bank. After we administer the Quires' estate, jointly, I can assure you, Lester, it will remain in the family."

"What about her?"

Smith jerked his head toward Madelon Quires.

Trujo shrugged again. "I am really sorry about Madelon. She was struck with a stray bullet."

Madelon Quires said: "Dick, you're crazy. You must be. That would be mass murder—cold blooded murder."

Trujo shrugged again. It was the best thing he did. He said: "It makes little difference what it's called as long as it's effective, Madelon. It is a lot of money."

Smith said: "Elvie, you hear that? Are you going along with him on this?"

Elvie Smith Quires said: "Your damned right!"

Trujo explained: "Mr. Smith will be shot with Mr. McGowan's gun, and Mr. Quires will be shot with the lieutenant's. Mr. McGowan will be shot with Arnold's gun and the lieutenant will be killed with Mr. Smith's. Oh yes! I think it would be best to use Mr. Quires' gun to kill Madelon. There'll be little need of a ballistic test on any of it, though, with a witness."

"Who'll be the witness?" I asked.

"Why, Elvie! Miss Smith, that was. Now Mrs. Quires."

He laughed and the girl joined in. The old man showed me his china teeth in what he meant as a grin.

THEN the door opened and Miss Higginbotham came in with Larry Prather right behind her. Prather held a double-barreled shotgun, but it was pointing just as much at Craven and me as it was at the others.

Miss Higginbotham said, in a high little voice that meant hysterics were on the way up: "I heard it! I heard it! Stop them, Mr. Prather. Stop them! I heard them in your room, Mr. McGowan, and I met Mr. Prather and we came out to stop them."

Larry said: "Put up your hands."

He was making his voice very deep but there was a quaver in it that would have been funny at any other time. And also the shotgun muzzle was wavering around the room like it had eyes. With the eyes looking at me most of the time.

I looked at Cravens and he caught it fast. We had to go in at the first

break and, if it didn't come soon, we had to make it before Prather cracked.

But the old man made it.

He'd had his back half-turned to Prather but he swung around and shot, as he did. The charge of shot from the right barrel of the shotgun caught him on the side of the face and threw him back and down—and his bullet missed Prather by half the width of the room. I jumped for the old single action Colt the old man was dropping, and I heard the shotgun boom again, just as I got it in my hand. I turned and saw Cravens doing the thing I wanted him to do. He'd jumped for Madelon Quires and was holding her back against the couch, with his body as a shield.

Trujo was getting a gun from a back pocket. I thumbed back the hammer of the old man's cannon and let it go—and Trujo went back as though he'd been hit in the belly by a battering ram.

I could hear Miss Higginbotham screaming through the echoing roar of the shooting, but she kept her head enough to catch Prather as he went down.

He wasn't hit—he'd fainted.

Then I looked at Smith. I'd seen that Quires and Madelon Quires weren't touched, and that if Cravens had stopped any birdshot from that shotgun, he'd only been sprinkled and wasn't hurt.

Smith was slumped ahead in his chair with the front of his chest torn out. He'd taken Prather's second barrel there but he was still alive. In fact he was alive enough to be able to say something to his sister.

It was: "So you'll get what the little boy shot at, Elvie."

It was an old gag. The little boy shot his new gun and somebody asked him what he shot at. The little boy said: "Why, nothing. I just shot."

That Smith was quite a guy. Any time a man rubs in a loss like that, with his last breath, he's got nerve. Elvie was not alone out but she was injured. She'd lost her new husband and her sweetie and her cut in half a million dollars—and she was facing prison on top of it.

CHAPTER X

Trujo Talks

TRUJO talked on his way in to the hospital and he proved my theory right. He'd played the Smith girl right along, to cut her brother out of things.

He'd killed Quires' father, thinking he'd be able to finagle his way into the estate, either through administering it through the bank or by tying it up while it was in his hands. If he'd done the last he could have drilled on his own property, right beside that of the old man's and drained the pool that ran below their joint property.

Of course that would take time—and so he had to cut Smith out of the affair.

He'd gone back to New York and tried to hire me to go away on a wild goose chase, so that I couldn't help Madelon Quires find Arnold. Through the bank, he knew she was looking for him. He and Smith had sent me the wire from the bank, with each of them planning on crossing the other, once they had Quires located.

And Landrey, the Richfield cop, had also wanted him for questioning about his father's death.

The old man had killed Landrey. He'd gone East with Trujo—he was the

(*Continued on page* 111)

Double-Cross

THE rain wasn't cold but it was beating along the side of the building and into Riordan's face. He crouched on the fire escape, head bent down and hat low over his eyes, and he listened at the window as though his life depended on it.

His life did, for that matter. The man inside would kill him and think it a good job done well. The State would do the same, and the public would cheer the act. It would be another killer meeting punishment, to the man on the street.

Six floors below, the alley showed black, with the glint from the street light at its mouth casting an oily sheen for a few feet into its length. A prowling cat tipped off the cover of a garbage can—the sound coming up faintly.

And then the phone inside jangled harshly—and Riordan bent nearer the window.

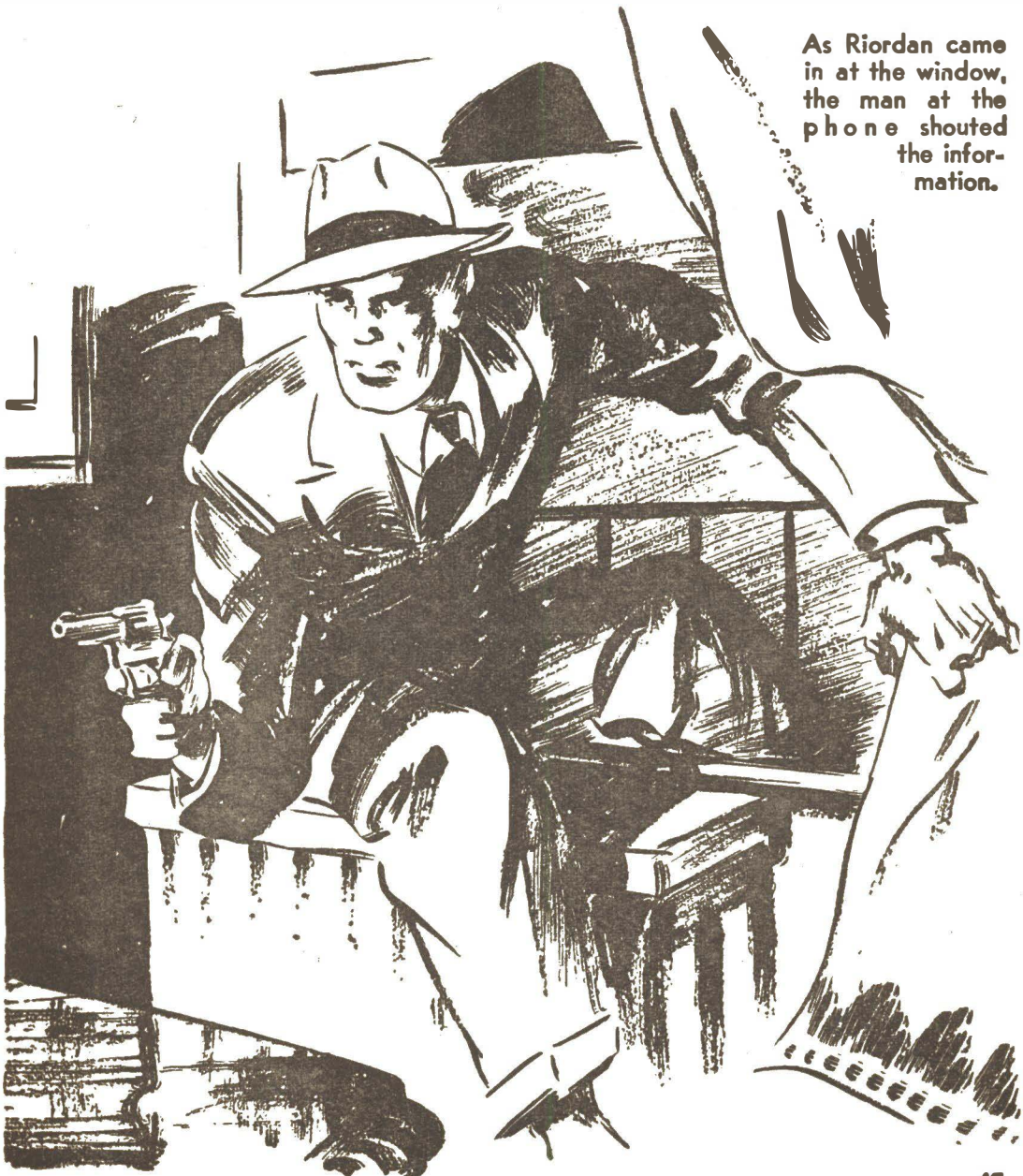
The man in the room coughed once and Riordan heard the click when he lifted the receiver. The man said: "Yeah! That you, Carl? You find him?"

There was silence for a moment, and

Marks the Spot

By JOHN RYAN

Riordan was a cynic. He knew that Emon, the politician he worked for, was a crook. But the "reform" candidate was just as crooked! Riordan would play ball with anyone who shot square with him. But once someone crossed him, Riordan could play that game, too



As Riordan came in at the window, the man at the phone shouted the information.

in the darkness Riordan grinned faintly. He didn't know the words the distant Carl was choosing, but he was in no doubt about the message he was sending.

The man inside swore once in a startled voice and asked: "Smithers and Larry, both of them?"

Riordan grinned wider.

And then he lifted the window and stepped through it, lifting the gun he held so that it bore on the broad back of the man at the telephone as he did.

EITHER the draft or the sound of the rain warned of the open window. The man at the phone swung fast, saw Riordan—and acted in that instant. He lifted the phone to his mouth as Riordan moved in, and his shout could have been heard in the hall outside the apartment as well as by the listener on the other end of the wire.

"It's Riordan here," he called out. "Right here."

Riordan swung his gun from one side to the other, then back again. He knocked the phone out of the big man's hands with the first move, caught him slashingly across the cheek with the second.

"Now, Harry!" he said. "That isn't nice. Not when I just dropped up for a talk."

Harry Emon put a hand up to his cheek, brought it down and looked at the blood on it. The blow had split the skin over his cheekbone and had dazed him, shook him.

He said: "Riordan! You—you . . ."

"Yeah, me! Couldn't you find better help than Smithers and Larry Held? Those two chumps were made to order."

"Carl said Larry's in bad shape."

Riordan nodded. "That's right, Harry. He got slammed right in the face with the side of this very gun. It sort of changed his looks some, but maybe a medico can put his nose back in shape. I sort of fancy you like that."

Emon backed away, putting his bloody hand up as a guard. "No, Irish! No, no!"

"Pick up the phone, you yellow—"

Emon bent for the phone without taking his eyes from Riordan. He set it back on its stand in a fumbling way, and cringed when Riordan moved his gun hand.

Riordan asked: "Where was Carl phoning from? My place?"

"Why, yes."

"That would put him about half an hour away. He wouldn't call in the cops because it's too soon for you to call them in. Sit down, Harry."

Emon sat down and made a task of it. He was handicapped because he was unable to look away from Riordan. He had to feel behind him for a chair, then back into it. Riordan was grinning derisively and tapping the nose of his gun on the palm of his other hand. He waited until Emon was down, then ambled to the stand table at the side of the room and poured himself a solid drink from the decanter there.

He said: "Cold and wet outside. I'll take this for the inner man, Harry. Now tell me! D'ya think you're going to make this frame on me stick? Honest Injun, I mean. D'ya really think you can put it over?"

"It's no frame," said Emon. "I walked in on Sanderson. I was the one that found him. I was the first one to see him."

Riordan took half the whiskey down and choked. He said: "Aghghgh, that's good! That's why I'm up here, Harry. I want you to tell me just what you found."

"You know what I found, Riordan."

Riordan finished his drink and sat down by the decanter. He rested his gun on his knee, so the big bore lined

on Emon's middle, and the clicking noise the gun action made as he brought it to full cock cut through Emon's gasp.

He said: "Just go ahead and tell me about it, Harry. And tell it fast. It'll take Carl a half hour to get here, for sure, but I want to be a mile away by then."

HARRY EMON talked as if he were telling a story he'd learned by heart. It was likely he had at that, Riordan thought. He'd told it to the police and to the district-attorney and to every newsman who'd questioned him, and it was only natural that he recited it easily.

"I went out to see George Sanderson. About threats he'd made concerning me."

"About the dope about the city paving scandal he was holding over your head," said Riordan. "Go ahead. Tell it. Only tell me the truth, not the yarn the cops got."

"All right, Irish. I went out to see him. I rang but nobody answered the bell. I tried the door and it was open and I walked in. The butler was in the hall, past the door to the library. He'd been slugged—he was knocked out colder than a wedge. I stopped and looked at him."

"Okay! What then?"

"I went into the library. George Sanderson was in front of the safe. He'd been slugged, too, but he wasn't knocked out. He was dead. The whole top of his head was smashed in. The safe was open and the stuff was gone."

"What stuff, Harry?"

"The dope on the paving contract. What I went there to buy."

"And then?"

"And then Carl called the police. He was with me. They came and looked around and said Sanderson had been dead at least two hours and that the butler had been knocked out that long. The doctor with them brought him around. He told them you'd sapped him to sleep, when he interfered with the argument you and Sanderson were having."

"And the paving stuff, Harry? What you went there to buy. What about that?"

Emon leaned forward, his fear momentarily forgotten. "I'll give you fifty grand for it right now, Irish, and I'll see you have every break that I can work with you. You won't go free—you can't go free with what's against you—but you should get off with a ten to twenty. You can ask for parole after doing a piece of that, and you'll be out with money in your pocket."

"Are you kidding?"

"Do I kid with fifty grand?"

"I guess not."

"It would give you money to fight the case when the cops get you. They'll get you—you can't go clear."

"I figure that," said Riordan thoughtfully. "That story the butler tells is what's going to make it tough for me."

"Didn't you slug him?"

"Oh, sure." But he didn't mean a word of it.

"Well, then?"

Riordan heard the man on the fire escape even as he heard the crashing knock on the door.

HARRY EMON was fast, for a big man. He got out of his chair as Riordan lunged for him, and he was behind it by the time Riordan was in reaching distance. He ducked the swinging gun, going clear down behind the chair back for protection, and his voice was high and shrill with fear.

He shouted out: "Carl! Smithers! Hurry!"

Riordan cursed and turned toward the window. A sheet of flame lanced out at him as he did, and he realized

it was only his sudden move that had saved him. He fired back, three times, the thunder of his three fast shots roaring into one beating echo, and he barely heard the strangled howl that cut through them. But the sound of the door crashing in made up his mind, and he went through the window in a dive.

He stepped on something that squirmed and cried out, and he almost went over the fire escape railing when the dim figure below him clutched at an ankle, but he kicked himself clear and started up the spidery ladder, taking the slippery treads three at a time. The man below—the one he'd stepped on—shot up at him twice, the second slug clanging on the iron rail as Riordan took his hand from it.

And then he was on the roof and running for the parapet between it and the next building. It was low, and he vaulted over it and the three feet that separated him from the adjoining structure, and he blasted the lock from the trap door leading below when he found it locked.

But he'd wrapped the coat he'd taken off around his gun before he'd shot, and the gun made little noise above the beating rain.

He was wet all through and shaking with both cold and fear when he tiptoed down the steps and found the upper hall of the apartment house a haven of soft warm peace. It took actual effort not to run down the hall to the elevator and almost a physical effort to tuck his gun away under his coat when the elevator rose to his floor.

But he managed a weak grin at the colored boy who ran it.

"Pete's sake," he said. "Sure is wet outside tonight. I guess my people went to a show or something."

The boy agreed with: "Yassuh, sho' is dampish. Guess you'd be callin' on the Bensons. Them people, they never does stay at home."

Riordan laughed and said the Bensons certainly kept weird hours.

LEAVING the apartment house was a problem. Riordan could see one of Emon's cars—the Packard sedan that Carl Grobe used—parked next door, and he could see the lounging figure inside it. That would be either Grant or Huxley, the other two of the strong arm crew Grobe ran for Emon.

Inside the car as he was, the man probably hadn't heard the shooting. He'd probably run the windows up to escape the rain, Riordan thought, and he prayed that they'd be rain-streaked and misted. He stood just inside the door of the building, peering out at the car and planning his next move, and it was with relief that he heard the elevator doors open and people moving toward him.

He put on his beaming smile and spoke to the man of the party. He said: "Pardon me, sir, but I'm a stranger in your rainy city. Would you be kind enough to tell me the way to the bus stop?"

"Going downtown?"

"Why, yes."

"I gotta cab coming," the man said. "You better ride with us. Saves waiting for a bus. And saves an extra cab trip."

"Why, thanks," said Riordan, meaning every word of it.

"Gotta save trips, what with the gas and tire shortage," the man said, leading the way to the street and to the cab that was swinging in by the door. "At least that's what Washington tells us. Though if you ask me, why . . . ."

He ushered Riordan into the cab, along with the two women in his party, and Riordan ventured one discreet glance as they passed the Emon car. It was Grant inside, he saw, and he de-

cided that fate was with him, for the evening at least.

Grant was the deadliest man with a gun in Grobe's picked crew of strong arm men, and Riordan didn't think he'd have missed if he'd been the man who'd shot at him from the fire escape. He decided that had probably been Smithers, who was half blind from having resin dust rubbed in his eyes when he'd been a professional wrestler—Smithers, who'd been hired solely for his bone-crushing tactics. Certainly neither for his brains nor his marksmanship.

Riordan had never liked Smithers and he hoped, happily, that the slug he'd certainly connected with when he'd returned the fire, had put Smithers out of action for some little time.

It was such a cheerful thought that he didn't mind hearing what was wrong with the administration—or at least what the man he was riding with thought was wrong with it—during the ride to the center of town.

RIORDAN thought an oyster bar would be as safe a place as anywhere, working on the theory that he wouldn't be expected to seek crowds. He ate slowly and leisurely, thinking his problem over, and the more he puzzled over it the harder it seemed.

And yet, analyzed, it was simple.

He'd worked for Harry Emon, been one of the crew working under Carl Grobe. It had been a fair enough job for a private detective with more expenses than practice. He and the men working with him had bodyguarded Emon through the state-wide trips he took to protect both his financial and political interests—and while the job held danger, it also held excitement.

Emon, high in the party ranks, had a finger in every pie—and every pie had a plum in it. He was thoroughly hated up and down the state. He'd been threatened with everything from murder down to old-fashioned horse-whipping, and there were undoubtedly fanatical, even if decent, people who'd have applauded the act instead of only the word.

So Emon had a bodyguard as well as a need for one.

Then Emon had stubbed his toe. Badly. He'd cut into a juicy paving contract in Millville, the state capitol, and he'd been careless when he'd gone in it. He'd written letters—had received letters, and part of his graft had been paid in checks. George Sanderson, riding high on the crest of the Reform element had obtained this solid, concrete evidence—and had offered to sell it to Emon for fifty thousand dollars—possibly a tenth of the profit Emon could confidently expect from the deal.

It was a smart deal for Sanderson who was certainly as crooked as Emon. He'd worked his position as head of the reform party, ostensibly trying to clean up the state, for all it was worth, and the evidence against Emon had been given him to use in his campaign for clean government. But clean government didn't pay anything like the fifty thousand dollars he could get for returning the evidence of graft to Emon, and he'd jumped at the offer.

And then he'd been murdered on the night the deal was expected to go through.

RIORDAN thought this over. Harry Emon was the logical suspect for Sanderson's killer. He had fifty thousand dollars to gain—money he'd save if he didn't have to pay Sanderson for the evidence against him. He had a dangerous opponent put out of the way—an opponent doubly dangerous because of the knowledge he possessed. Even with the evidence against Emon out of his possession Sanderson could, and prob-

ably would have, talked—and the fire against Emon's undercover rule would have gained fuel to burn the fiercer.

And, from the police standpoint, Riordan would be as good an arrest as Emon himself. He'd worked for Emon and supposedly knew his troubles and enemies. It was common knowledge that Sanderson was both. The step from a hired guard to a paid killer wouldn't be a great one to take in the police eye, and Riordan could understand why the hunt for him was being pursued with hue and cry.

It was that that made him decide as he did. He left the oyster bar through the side entrance, sliding into the taxi that stood handily by the door. He kept his head tipped low—his soggy hat down over his eyes. He had no notion of resisting arrest if an official hand tapped on his shoulder, and his one aim was to avoid recognition while doing what he had to do.

He told the hacker: "1109 Clear Vista. Out past the park, fella."

The driver grunted assent. And then said, in a startled way: "Hey! That's that guy Sanderson's place! The guy that got killed last night."

"Sure," said Riordan, lying easily. "I'm a cop. I got to ask them people out there some more questions."

The hacker went through his gears, talking cheerily of murder.

OLSON, the butler, was a bland and beaming man who liked to talk. That was fine with Riordan, and better luck than he'd expected.

"I'm from the cops," he said. "New man here. Just put on the case."

"Indeed, sir."

"Every time it is," Riordan said darkly. "The rest of the boys get stuck on a case. Sure! So the commissioner calls me in. I get started late and I'm expected to produce. I got to start from the beginning. I suppose you've told it plenty of times, but I'm going to ask you to go through it from the beginning."

"Certainly, sir," said Olson happily. "Only too glad to. Only too glad to be of service. It was this way, sir. This man Riordan came in and asked for Mr. Sanderson."

"Riordan?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He gave me his name. Mr. Sanderson asked me to show him in and I did, sir. I brought them drinks—Mr. Sanderson rang for me and asked for them—and I noticed they were both, well, let us say excited. Not quarreling as yet, you understand, sir, but I could see they were not in agreement."

"I get it."

"Because of that, sir, I didn't leave. I stayed outside in the hall. I heard Mr. Riordan call Mr. Sanderson a nasty name, sir, and then I went in. I told Mr. Riordan, sir, that I would be forced to evict him unless he held control of his temper. Mr. Sanderson was frightened, I could see that plainly."

"And then?"

"And then Mr. Riordan struck me."

Olson pointed to his chin. Riordan could see where the skin was slightly discolored—slightly puffed.

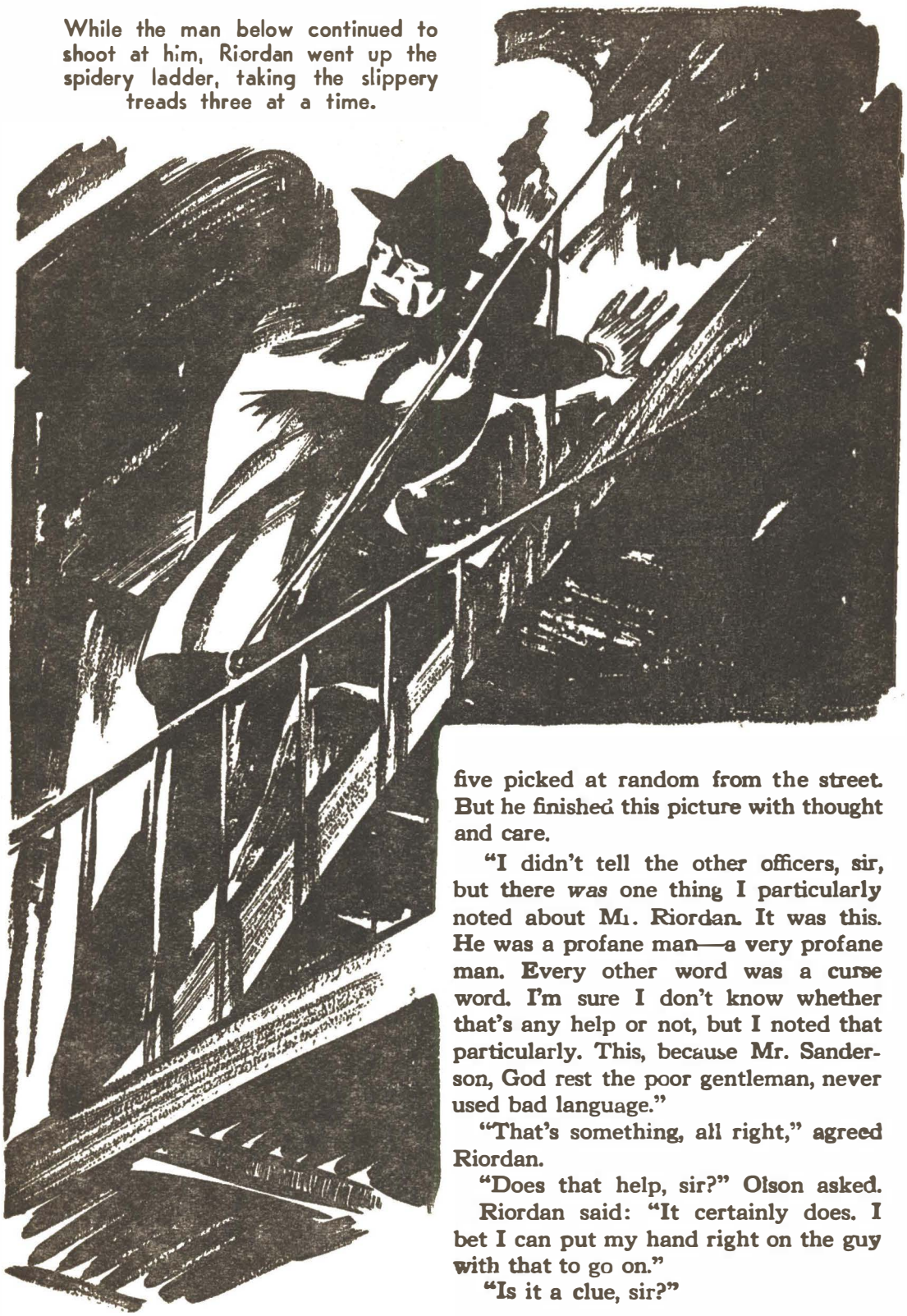
"What did he hit you with?"

"I believe it was a billy, sir. A sap, as it is called."

That checked. Riordan knew a blow with the fist wouldn't have knocked the man unconscious for the length of time he must have remained that way—and knew that a sap, expertly wielded, could do that very thing.

He said: "This man Riordan! Of course I have his description—but I'd like you to tell me what he looked like. It might be that you noticed some peculiarity about the man."

Olson went into a description that could have fitted two men out of any



While the man below continued to shoot at him, Riordan went up the spidery ladder, taking the slippery treads three at a time.

five picked at random from the street. But he finished this picture with thought and care.

"I didn't tell the other officers, sir, but there *was* one thing I particularly noted about Mr. Riordan. It was this. He was a profane man—a very profane man. Every other word was a curse word. I'm sure I don't know whether that's any help or not, but I noted that particularly. This, because Mr. Sanderson, God rest the poor gentleman, never used bad language."

"That's something, all right," agreed Riordan.

"Does that help, sir?" Olson asked.

Riordan said: "It certainly does. I bet I can put my hand right on the guy with that to go on."

"Is it a clue, sir?"

"It's better than that," Riordan said happily. "It's a ticket to the electric chair. Or maybe to a nice little piece of ground in the graveyard."

OLSON was not only genial but he had the instinct of a proper host. As Riordan rose to go, he said apologetically: "Oh, pardon me, sir! I didn't notice it before but you are soaked through to the skin. Couldn't I offer you something to drink?"

"You could," said Riordan.

"I'm sure it would be all right. Of course, it is from Mr. Sanderson's cabinet."

"The estate can stand it, I'll bet."

"Quite so. Quite so."

He hurried out and Riordan sat back in his chair. His immediate plans had called for a visit to the nearest bar after leaving the Sanderson place, and this invitation, he could see, was going to save him time and trouble.

Olson came back with decanter and ice and soda on a tray. He put this on the table by Riordan, then held the gun he'd concealed under the tray so that it bore on Riordan's middle.

"Stand quite still, Mr. Riordan," he said. "I assure you that I'll shoot if you don't."

"What's this?" asked Riordan.

"I knew you the moment you stepped through the door. I'm going to turn you over to the police."

"Then you know it wasn't me that sapped you."

Olson laughed. All geniality — all friendliness—had vanished. His round face was set and his pale eyes were hard and determined.

"Sapped, hell," he said. "I had to make it look good, didn't I?"

"What about that drink before you call the cops?"

Olson nodded toward the whiskey on the tray. And backed away so that Riordan, in reaching it, could not also reach him.

"Go ahead," the butler said. "Then you can call the cops. Tell 'em to come and get you."

"Not me. You do it—you're the one that caught me"

Olson pulled back the hammer of the gun he held. "I could say that you tried to murder me and that I shot you in self defense."

"I'll call," said Riordan easily. He went to the table and tray and poured himself the highball glass on it half full of straight liquor.

And tossed the glass and contents at Olson and followed with a flashing dive at Olson's knees. And when he was astraddle of Olson and with the gun in his possession, he asked but one question.

It was: "And did this guy you were telling me about—the guy that was supposed to be me—did he really swear a lot?"

He got: "Yes!" for an answer.

EMON was cautious—but only at first. He said: "Sure, but Riordan . . . I can't get any fifty grand together at a time like this. I'd have to go to a bank."

"Want the stuff?" asked Riordan. He stared over the phone he held at Olson, tied to a chair on the opposite side of the room. "If you want it, you better get it while the getting's good."

"Can you wait an hour?"

"Sure."

"Tell me where you are. I'll be there in an hour."

Riordan laughed coarsely and winked at the gagged Olson. "Not me, mister. You be back at your place in an hour with the dough and I'll give you another ring and tell you where to meet me."

"Why don't you come here?"

"And run into Grobe and the bunch of gorillas? Don't be foolish."

"I tell you right now, Riordan, I won't meet you any place unless Grobe and a couple of the boys are with me."

"Fine," said Riordan, and: "I'll call you in an hour."

Straddling his victim, he picked up the phone.

He hung up and told Olson: "If I'd told him where I was, he'd have sent the boys out after me. He'd have figured they'd make me tell where the stuff is

and that he'd save fifty thousand bucks."

Olson mumbled indistinctly.

"Sure. He'll bring 'em out with him when he comes. I know you got the idea, but it won't work."

Olson managed to smile in spite of the gag.

"Emon won't stand for murder, you dope. That's the only thing he won't go for—it's too tough to fix."

Olson's smile faded slightly, and Riordan yawned and devoted himself to the whiskey, with an eye on the clock. He gave Emon a full hour, then called again.

"I'm at Sanderson's place," he said. "I'll be here for twenty minutes, so if you want action you'd better hurry up."

Emon bleated excitedly and Riordan listened. "Thirty grand's all right," he finally said. "Only get it here fast. And if the cops should come, I'll know you sent 'em, and I've got that stuff set so that it'll go direct to the opposition papers. No double-crossing—I don't want to be on that spot."

He hung up and grinned at Olson. "Get set, boy," he said. "It's all ready to touch a match to and blow it up."

Olson writhed and mumbled and Riordan gave him encouragement.

"Don't worry, boy," he said. "If there's any shooting, you're out of line. And they won't be shooting at you. The only thing that might happen to you is a stray slug or two, and what's that to a guy that's looking at twenty to life."

EMON was in first, with glowering Carl Grobe behind him. Riordan said, from where he'd stepped back into the shadow of the hall:

"Drop it, Grobe."

Emon said fretfully: "For Pete's sake, Carl, why the gun? This is a pay-off, not a shooting."

"It's both," said Riordan.

And then he was down on his belly, shooting back at Grobe. His first slug took Grobe high in the left shoulder and spun him around. Grobe caught himself and fired twice, and one of the heavy slugs from his gun tore splinters from the floor by Riordan's ear.

Riordan's answering shot caught Grobe at belt buckle line and bent him double, and he followed it and kicked the gun from Grobe's hand as Grobe went down to the floor.

"It's all over, Harry," he said to Emon. "All except the pay-off, that is. The shooting's over, is what I mean."

Emon said: "I've brought the thirty thousand, Irish. We've got to make this fast, before the cops get here. I'll get the other twenty to you at any time or place you say."

"Forget the other twenty," said Riordan. "You're going to need it, maybe. You are if the grand jury does anything on that graft evidence I'm going to give 'em. I mean about the paving deal."

"But that's what I'm buying."

Riordan laughed and said: "I've gone all out for clean government, Harry. I stuck by you in spite of you being a crooked louse. But you dropped me when it looked bad for me. You sent your boys after me, even. You didn't try to give me a hand with the cops. So I can turn on you with a clear heart. Come on in."

He pointed with the nose of his gun and Emon asked fearfully: "In there? But why?"

Riordan said: "That's where the phone is that you're going to use to call the district-attorney. That's where Grobe's partner is tied up—the guy he had with him when he killed Sanderson and took that evidence against you. Sanderson's butler, I mean. He was working with Grobe—they were going

to sell you that stuff that you thought I had."

Emon said: "But, Irish! It can't be. Why Grobe was with me when I found Sanderson. I told you that."

"He wasn't with you an hour before, when he killed him. He was here with his butler pal, cursing away and doing murder."

"But how d'ya know?"

Riordan said: "The butler told me. He was trying to make me believe he thought I was a cop, and he made his act too good. He even put some truth in it. He said the man in the thing with him swore all the time, and Grobe's every other word is a curse. After you telephone the D. A. to meet us here, I'll let you listen to him tell about it."

He followed Emon into the library then and to the telephone and the waiting Olson. He hadn't decided on just what method he'd use to make the butler talk, but he wasn't worried.

Riordan credited himself as being a fast and solid thinker—and he didn't think it would take much thought to devise a plan to make the butler speak.

THE district-attorney said: "It seems clear enough, Mr. Riordan. My man has telephoned me that the briefcase with the papers you mentioned was found where you said it would be."

Riordan altered this to: "You mean where Olson said Grobe had put it."

"Well, yes. And Olson's confession definitely puts the blame for Sanderson's murder on Grobe. I would say that clears you completely—I'll see that my office and the police are notified to that effect at once."

"Poor Olson," said Riordan.

"I feel no sympathy for Olson whatsoever," said the district-attorney severely. "It is true, doubtless, as he says, that he had no idea that Grobe intended to kill Sanderson. But it is also true that he plotted to rob Sanderson, his own employer, and that he worked with Grobe with that idea in mind. I possibly am going farther than I should in prosecuting him only on that account and not for second-degree murder."

"Well then," said Riordan, grinning. "Poor Emon. *He* takes it on the chin, too."

"And a very good thing. Another political leech made harmless. This evidence, if it's what you say it is, will handle Mr. Emon very satisfactorily. Even with the power behind him he will be punished."

Riordan said: "You're not making me a speech, are you, counselor?"

The district-attorney reddened. He said sharply: "There's just one thing I don't understand, Riordan. You worked for Emon and turned against him. I understand that and know your reason. I don't blame you, I'll add. But I don't see why you're turning him over to me like this. Knowing Emon, I know he'd have paid you plenty for this same evidence you are giving the state for nothing."

Riordan said smugly: "Why, counselor, I'm an honest man."

And thought fondly of the thirty thousand dollars he'd taken from Emon and hidden before the arrival of the district-attorney. He was safe enough with it—Emon couldn't mention it without admitting he was planning on buying the evidence against him with it.

And Olson, with a signed confession of his part in the mess, standing against him didn't mean a thing. His word was worthless if he started talk about the money.

Riordan thought thirty thousand dollars was fair pay for being a decent citizen.

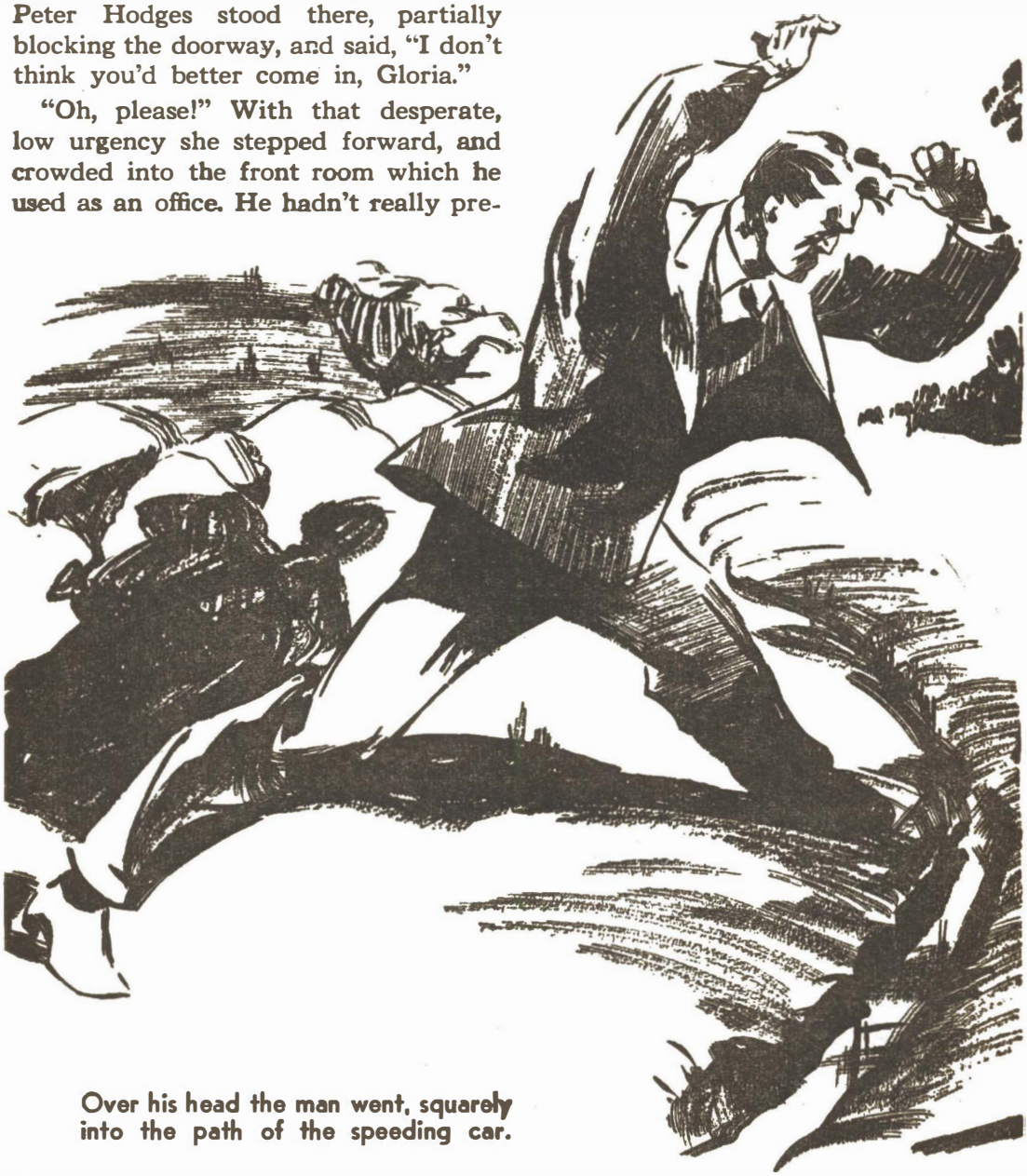
By WALTON GREY

ONCE A

IT WAS all of two years since he had seen her; that would make her about twenty-three years old now, and in the intervening months her loveliness had increased, if that were possible. She was something to haunt a man. But Peter Hodges stood there, partially blocking the doorway, and said, "I don't think you'd better come in, Gloria."

"Oh, please!" With that desperate, low urgency she stepped forward, and crowded into the front room which he used as an office. He hadn't really prevented her from entering, but he hesitated there, frowning, until she said again behind him, "Please!"

She was scared, and she had good reason to be. Deliberately he closed the



Over his head the man went, squarely into the path of the speeding car.

KILLER....

Though she was wanted for murder, she feared the police much less than she feared the gang who pursued her. To Peter, the wole thing was a mess, and he didn't want to get mixed up in it. But Gloria was a determined girl and brushing her off was next to impossible!

door and walked to the slab-topped maple table that was his desk, sat down behind it. Without looking at her he

said in a hard voice, "Just spill it and get out, will you?"

For a moment there was no answer. Then she took an uncertain step toward the door, came back swiftly and rested her hands on the heavy table. This time there was less despair in her voice than revilement. "I heard you were crooked!" she said, and as he looked up, stung—that always hurt—his face slowly reddened. "But I never heard that you were a coward! You're supposed to be smart. You're smart, all right; you wouldn't help anyone in a jam, would you, because you know better than to risk your precious neck!" Abruptly her voice went calm with contempt. "I suppose it might be the smartest thing to do, at that, get away from here as fast as I possibly can."

But she didn't move, watching him with gray eyes that were wide and brilliant.

The flush had died from Pete's face, which meant that he was more than somewhat angry. "I must be the first one," he mused, "to tell you that you're wanted for murder. And just in case you were out of your mind at the time and can't remember, the name of the man you killed was Charlie Scarlatti. Well?"

"Oh, you—!" This time she headed for the door in earnest.

WITHOUT any change in inflection Pete ordered, "Come back here," and though she had her hand on the knob she didn't turn it.

"As long as you're here," said Pete, "you might as well get rid of it, whatever it is. You can't expect a man to be a fool about a thing like this. Come on."

She opened her bag, did something with her eyes, put the handkerchief back. Turning around slowly she looked at the floor and said, "I didn't kill Charlie."

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

"If you didn't do it, why did you run away?"

"Because I was afraid, and I didn't want anybody to find me."

"Naturally, but why?"

"Because the police would find out that I didn't do it, and then they would let me go and the others would . . . I ran away because I was afraid, first, and I stayed away because I was afraid the men who killed Charlie would get hold of me. They were the ones who phoned the police that I had murdered him, because they couldn't find me themselves." She was looking squarely at him now, and if she wasn't telling the truth, she was putting on a remarkable act. "I thought—" she faltered—"that you might be able to prove I'm innocent."

"Why did you come to me?"

"Because Charlie said one time that you were all right. A good head, that's what he called you."

"That's not very flattering, coming from a rat like Scarlatti."

She looked at him without any sign of resentment, and he continued, "Where have you been?"

"Blake's Falls." That was up north quite a distance.

He remarked incredulously, "And no one spotted you in two years."

The ghost of a smile altered her red lips. "Why should anyone? I never told anyone where I came from."

Pete nodded. "Something tells me that Gloria Marr isn't your real name." That was the name she had used as a showgirl, and the name she kept when she quit the stage to become Charlie Scarlatti's girl friend. The pictures the police had of her were only a few bathing suit snaps taken on the beach, found at Scarlatti's; a couple of commercial studio portraits showing her with plenty

of makeup; and one laughing portrait of her, framed, at Scarlatti's.

That kind of stuff was just Big City junk to the old folks in Blake's Falls, who remembered her beautiful mother, and spat explosively when they thought of some snide from the city speeding up number 9 and running down old man Paget that night. Swerving in, a drunken driver, smashing old Paget into a dreadful huddle of rags and broken bones and blood, and going on after the crash. Old man Paget had left Gloria nothing but the frame house, and enough to get her to New York for a start.

She had that gay laugh that she seldom showed, and she could dance; she could dance like the old Harry. The natives of Blake's Falls didn't know anything about that part of her, and thought she had just gone down to the city and taken a job in a department store, or something like that. She was a good, demure, handsomely built girl that several of the boys around town had their eyes on.

She wasn't vicious; oh, quite not; she couldn't possibly be that Marr woman; so when she came back, she had just lost her job in the department store, and she would marry a local boy when she got rid of her fantasies about the city.

PETE said, "I know all about that; I came from a whistle-stop town in the southwest, myself. Texas. You were safe up there in Blake's Falls—why did you come back down?"

"They caught up with me."

"Who did?"

"Merle Pender and Joe Sloan. Ukkie Sloan."

"Ah," Pete commented. Pender had been in business with Scarlatti; whatever that real livelihood was, it was conducted under the "front" of Scarlatti's small but genuine importing business. Olive oil, fancy sardines, spices, caviar, and the like. As a private detective with a shady reputation, Pete had a wide acquaintance with underworld characters, and the only thing he knew about chunky little Ukkie Sloan was that he was a good and ready shot with a gun.

Gloria had him interested, and kept him that way with a straight-sounding yarn as well as by her mere presence. Mostly he kept women at long range, but in spite of his antagonism for what she was or had become with Scarlatti, he couldn't help being undermined. When she skipped town, she said, she had taken a job as waitress in one of the combination gas stations and restaurants that fringe the highway to the mountain resorts upstate. Gangsters like their mountain scenery, too; just yesterday, Pender, Sloan, and a third man stopped for sandwiches and beer, and Gloria had reached their table to take their order before there was mutual recognition.

"Who was the third man?" Pete asked.

"I don't think I ever saw him before." She described him. Going on, she had made a sprint for the kitchen, and the three gangsters had pelted after her. She ducked behind the door, but they had kept right on going through and out the back into a yard of picnic tables. Gloria beat it back the way she had come, found their car parked out in front with the motor running. She stole the car and drove home first, safe in assuming they wouldn't know where she lived.

She stripped out of the waitress uniform, changed, didn't linger to do any packing. Back in the gangsters' powerful machine, she drove north and west to Champlain, where she abandoned the car and took the Montreal express to New York.

Pete's eyes flickered over her. This girl was bright, very quick on the trigger. "There are a few cops hanging around Grand Central," he mused, "and good ones, and you'd never know to look at them what they were. And you walked right through them without getting recognized."

Gloria shrugged. "I thought they might have phoned, the way they did when Charlie was murdered, so I got off at 125th Street, and took the subway the rest of the way."

Pete nodded again; very smart girl. He remarked, "Those lads seem very anxious to get hold of you, and you know why. You wouldn't be interested in getting hold of the jack that Scarlatti's supposed to have had, yourself?"

Because she couldn't deceive him she admitted, "I would be."

"Somewhere between one and three million dollars."

She shook her head. "Nowhere near that amount."

"How much?"

She shrugged. "I know Charlie was crooked, but I don't know what the racket was, if it was a racket, nor how much money he had. There isn't any racket with any fantastic take like three million dollars, no matter how long you stay in it."

Probably right, as the Dutch Schultz business appeared to prove. Nevertheless, rumor had it that handsome, wicked Scarlatti had stashed away a lot of dough. A lot

SHE gave him the rest of the story. She was—well, she was staying with Scarlatti down on Charles Street. She had returned to the apartment one afternoon, after a shopping tour, and gone in and he wasn't there. The place was a shambles, and had been robbed. Drawers had been yanked out, and the contents dumped on the floor. The stink of burning hair was in the room, from a dropped cigarette stub that was still burning a black groove in the rug. She had walked all the way through the apartment and come back to the living room, frightened and wondering whether to call the police.

But Charlie Scarlatti wouldn't have liked that, because he was in some kind of racket up to his everlastingly shaven blue chin, and the cops would jump at the chance to put him through the coffee-grinder and find out every little thing about him, legitimately. He hated cops. He was full of hate, but he loved Gloria, and Pete knew that he had had a couple of men killed because they got too much interested in her. Gloria made up her mind and got out of the apartment as fast as she could, took a cab to Grand Central and got a ticket for Blake's Falls out of the little money left in her purse after the shopping tour.

"Then you don't even know if he's dead," Pete said.

There was an expression of horror on her face, and she shuddered with the memory. She faltered, "I found a—" she almost gagged—"a thumb in the kitchen."

"A thumb!"

"Charlie's thumb." She looked wretched, grimaced. "And there was a little casement window in the front room, near the door, opening to the hall room where Charlie read books. Lawbooks, mostly, and newspapers. He could read four or five languages, and he bought a lot of newspapers. I had made the curtains for those little windows myself, and they were torn off and lying on the floor."

"Then you don't even know if Scarlatti is dead, if you ran off right away."

"I just told you," she said dismally. "There was no reason for them to tear the curtains down. They were fastened

to the windows with little rods, and the windows were a little way open. Charlie did that to warn me. Don't you see?"

The gun went off with a deafening roar as he flicked the cloth into the man's eyes.

Pete saw it. Curtains. Curtains for Scarlatti; Scarlatti was being taken for a ride, and knew it, and had found the opportunity to tip off Gloria while the apartment was being ransacked. Cute of Scarlatti, and quick thinking of Gloria. But the police hadn't found the severed thumb, nor any sign of foul play, which meant that the murderers had returned to clean up. He said, "Do

you mind if I ask you a personal question? Just how did you ever get tangled up with a rat like Scarlatti?"

Still no resentment from her, just the shrug. "I really hated dancing, and I couldn't save any money. The only men I met wanted to paw me. I didn't know what kind of man Charlie was at first, and when I found out, he wouldn't let me get away. He said he'd find me and kill me. But he was nice to me; he didn't beat me or anything like that, and gave me as much money as I wanted. He told me just before he disappeared that he had an island all picked out, that he was going to buy. In some river in Canada. He was really going to take me with him."

Certainly he would. Scarlatti knew what he had gotten hold of. And you couldn't buy an island for peanuts.

PETE shook his head. "It's out of my line. Sorry. Your story sounds okay to me, and if it is, you'd better get a good lawyer and then get in touch with the police."

"Hire a lawyer with what?" she asked scornfully. "I haven't any money. Pete, you've got to let me stay here."

"Nothing doing," he refused promptly. He went to the door, and she ran and got in his way before he could prevent her.

"I haven't any place to go," she cried forlornly. "You can't turn me out!"

"You can't stay here," he said curtly, and reached for his wallet.

"They'll find me again," she said. She put everything she had into the entreaty, "Pete, please . . . I'm finished; I haven't had any sleep."

Her face was raised, and her eyelids lowered languorously. Her breath was warm against his cheek as she whispered, "You will, Pete, won't you?"

He was being a damned fool. He took a full breath and separated a ten spot from his slim wad, gave it to her. She accepted the money, gave him a steady, unfathomable look, turned and walked out. Her spike heels struck the uncarpeted hardwood foyer with scornful hammerstrokes.

Pete closed the door irritably, turned and smacked fist into palm. If she thought she could take advantage of his good nature she was mistaken. He couldn't handle her; the fact that she was broke made no difference. Gloria Paget would dynamite his business wide open. Some mobsters were after her, and that was too bad. His one-man agency depended on keeping on good terms with the underworld, and if he protected her, he would be sticking his neck out in all directions. And the fact that she had been the sweetheart of Charlie Scarlatti—and there was no question that Scarlatti had been a kind of maggot—angered him.

The exciting fragrance of her was in his head. All she wanted out of him, really, was that money, the fortune that Scarlatti was supposed to have hidden. And she didn't care how she got it. Disgusted with human nature, Pete strode to the bathroom and looked at himself in the mirror over the bowl, glaring. He had never looked sillier in his life.

He picked up a washcloth and wet it to cool his face. He was standing close to the mirror, so the wall partition kept him from seeing into the office. Nor had he heard anything in particular above the sound of the usual heavy traffic on Fourteenth Street in front. But he stepped back suddenly and looked out.

Standing there almost within arm's reach was a man, and the gun in his hand was as steady as though it were bolted down. He was dressed like Sunday morning on Fifth Avenue, with slim, highly polished black shoes, a powder-gray porkie hat tilted back on his head; black eyes and bad ones;

Pete recognized him as a certain Adolph Hals, the third man whom Gloria had described. Hals grinned at the ludicrous expression of surprise on Pete's face and asked, "All right, bud, where is she?"

"How do I know?" Pete retorted, before he had a chance to bite his tongue out. "She—"

The gunman's grin broadened. His eyes were frosty. "She what?" He showed his white teeth.

"If you were out in front," said Pete, since he was caught, "you saw her leave less than a minute ago."

"She didn't leave, brother," Hals stated.

"Then she saw you when she was leaving," said Pete carefully, "and went out the back way through the building behind, to Fifteenth Street."

THE gunman's eyes considered him with the deadly fixity of a snake's. "Always pulling fast ones," he murmured. "That was a fast one she pulled on us up at Blake's Falls. Only we got the same idea she did, and found the car where she left it at Westport."

"Well, you miss her again," said Pete. "Too bad. But what gave you the idea that she'd come here?"

"There are a few guys in this town who hear things, and you're one of them," said Hals. He was bragging. "Me and a couple of pals are making the rounds; the minute I got in here I knew it—she's using the same perfume as when she was Scarlatti's girl-friend. So where's the jack?"

"What jack?"

"Don't gimme any of that stuff," Hals ordered rapidly. "She came here and told you where Scarlatti hid all that jack. You get it for her and take a cut, and fix it so she can skip the country. Where is it?"

"Don't be crazy," Pete sneered. "Do you think she's going to walk in and say, 'Here's a key to a safety deposit box. Help yourself!' "

"So it's in a safe-deposit."

"Ah, nuts!" Pete exploded. "Get out, will you? I told her I wasn't interested. Do you think I'd monkey with it, with a murder rap hanging over her?"

"You've been monkeying with it, all right. You gonna tell me where that jack is?"

"She doesn't know where it is herself!" Pete snapped. "How could she tell me?"

"I might even have believed you," Hals said more softly still, "if it wasn't that you two were here all alone. That Gloria bim isn't afraid of any murder rap; the cops can't ever prove she knocked Scarlatti off because they aren't ever gonna find him. Now you talk, brother."

"I don't know where the money is," Pete stated definitely. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"Lou and that tramp are the only ones who know where it is. If I knock you off, there's still Gloria, and we'll find her again. Now, I'm gonna count." The gun was leveled, rigid as stone, at Pete's solar plexus. "One . . . ."

Hals meant it; he was going to shoot to kill. But the old question remained —even if Pete did know, and told a pure fiction if he didn't, wouldn't Hals shoot anyhow? He would. The sardonic thought occurred to Pete that if Hals were told where Scarlatti's pile was hidden, his partners would never see any part of it. Hals wanted it all. Pete looked at the rag in his hand, raised it deliberately as though to complete the job of washing his face.

"Two . . . ." said Hals, ominously.

Pete had hold of a corner of the washcloth as he raised it; his right arm snapped out straight, and he whipcracked the wet cloth in Hals' face, in his eyes. With the blinding smack of

it, the gun went off by sheer reflex, and the report was a deafening roar in the tiled bathroom. The slug struck a tile over the bathtub and shattered it.

Pete sprang, and his left hand clamped around Hals' wrist and nearly snapped it. The gun dropped, and Hals screamed like a woman Still holding the wrist, Pete stuck the heel of his other hand into Hals' face and heaved as though he were putting the shot. He picked up the gun as Hals plowed backward with flailing arms, lost his balance and flopped on the floor, got up again.

"You didn't have to pull a gun on me in the first place," Pete said. "If Gloria knew where that money was, she's had two years to tell somebody where it is and get it for her. She doesn't know where it is, and I don't either and I don't want it. Try to get it through your thick head."

Hals' eyes were watery with pain, but he didn't blink, and his expression was wooden with rage. Pete held the gun on him.

Hals said, "Let's have the rod."

"I'll stick it in your mailbox," Pete promised. "That shot is going to draw heat as sure as hell. You'd better scram while you've got the chance."

Hals cursed him and added, "You'll get yours, wise guy!" He flung the door open and went out; Pete closed the door after him and turned the deadlock. Standing aside just in case Hals carried another gun, he heard him stop at the front entrance as though scanning the street for signs of the shot's being heard. Hals retraced his steps, taking no chances, and departed via the back door of the foyer. The building was one of an estate of four, a pair fronting on Fourteenth Street, and identical pair on Fifteenth. Behind them was an extensive common garden, mostly grass cut through with flagstone walks, one large ailanthus, a little shrubbery and some potted ivy and flowers. From the bathroom window Pete could see Hals traverse the yard, enter the basement of the rear building after a backward glance, to go through to Fifteenth street.

Pete had made a mean, determined, unrelenting enemy.

HE examined Hals' gun, wondering whether Scarlatti had been killed with it. It was a new one and a beauty, a .38 revolver. He spun the cylinder thoughtfully, let the trigger down on the chamber back of the exploded cartridge. This was a gun to get rid of; Hals certainly had no permit for carrying it, and it was probably a hot gun besides. Into the first ashcan with it. But first he had a phone call to make, and he stuck the gun under his belt for the time being.

At the desk, he dialed a number, asked for a man by his initials, identified himself. He said, "Gloria Marr is in town," withholding the fact that her real name was Paget. He stated that he had talked with her, admitted that he had let her go.

After a long bawling-out he snapped, "All right, I let her go; she didn't do that job!"

He listened some more, said incredulously, "You wouldn't send me away for that! Go ahead and try it if you want to! If anybody asks me, I never saw her in my life. I don't know who she is!" He smashed the receiver down.

Now he was in Dutch all around; he had just been told that he could be sent to prison for a long term for harboring a fugitive, even if it was only for a cocktail. She was wanted for murder, and he had let her go.

And he knew where to go. To the address on Charles Street, Scarlatti's old apartment. First, he jerked out the single drawer in the heavy maple table and

picked up his own gun. He held it, turned around fast in a crouch, ready to fire.

GLORIA stood in the doorway.

"You!" she exclaimed scornfully. Her eyes blazed.

"Say!" Pete began.

"You wouldn't double-cross anyone, would you?" she jeered. "Nothing like calling the police as soon as I'm gone. Oh, no! You're nothing but a cheap stoolpigeon."

"Listen," Pete pleaded. "You don't understand!"

The slab that he swept off had the dimensions of a coffin.

"You must think I'm dumb. I overheard you!"

She was mad, and it made her beautiful.

Pete said, "You've got a lot of nerve. How did you get back in?"

"Through the window. How do you suppose?"

"I'll lock that window!"

"Don't bother; I've already locked it."

"I told you, you couldn't stay here!"

"I don't intend to!" With a toss of her thick brown hair she threatened, "And don't think I won't pass along the word about you! All I have to do is make one phone call, and no mobster will ever come to you again."

"You won't do that."

"Oh, won't I! Try to stop me!"

And he couldn't. The only way he could keep her here now was by force, but he couldn't take the chance of keeping her, and if he let her go he was ruined. She breezed toward him and he stood in the way. He said, "I haven't told anyone where you were, Gloria."

"Because you didn't know. You thought I'd gone. And now the police will be looking for me, too."

The fragrance of her ascended into his brain again, envelopingly. And then she brought up her hand to his chest, turned, and was free.

At the door she fired a parting shot, "And your ten dollars is on the dresser."

"Have it your way," Pete said. "But take my advice and go out through the back. They'll be laying for me, too, now."

He watched her glumly from the window. She walked purposefully, with long strides like a man. He liked the way she brought her heels down, decisively, her erect carriage, the rhythm of her hips. She descended to the basement of the Fifteenth Street building in back of him, was gone.

After checking up on the window fastenings he again made ready to leave. Besides his own gun he had Hals' which he intended disposing of in the nearest rubbish receptacle. He glanced over his desk, found his keys in his pocket, and went out.

LOITERING in front of his apartment for a moment to light a cigarette, he saw no sign of Hals nor anything to indicate he was being watched, and he had a highly developed and lifesaving sensitivity to being tailed. It gave him a qualm to think that he might have been playing the game fine, figured that he would take no chances on being waylaid, and would go out the back way. If that was the case, they had Gloria already and nothing could be done about it.

Down at the corner was a stand for one hack, and a hack was holding the place down. Pete got in and gave the driver Scarlatti's old address on Charles Street. The lights were green; the driver put the hack in gear but kept the clutch pedal down. Leisurely turning his head he asked, "What was that number again, chief?"

"What's the matter with you?" Pete asked. He had given the number clearly the first time, but repeated it. Just enough time had been lost for the lights to change. And the door on the traffic side of the hack opened, and in stepped Hals, quick and hostile, with another gun in his fist. Too quick for Pete to draw either of his guns. Hals had lost no time in arming himself with another weapon.

"Driver must be a pal of yours," Pete remarked sarcastically.

"Be good, now," Hals warned, keeping his distance. His right eye was watery and bloodshot from having the washcloth snapped in his face. "No funny business."

Without being given an address, the driver started off with the change of lights to green, went across town to Fifth Avenue, then down into Washington Square. Hals ushered Pete out, walked him to a parked car without paying the hack driver.

In the parked car were Merle Pender and Ukkie Sloan, Pender driving. Hals opened the back door, prodded Pete and said, "Here he is."

"Ukkie," said Sloan.

Hals got in after Pete, slammed the door and the heavy, expensive machine rolled away from the curb. Probably the most dangerous man of the three, the lean Pender with his bitter mouth had merely given Pete a glance in the rear-vision mirror. Pender was the brains.

"Where are we going?" Pete asked.

"For a long ride," said Hals.

"Maybe I better come back there," Sloan suggested.

"Ah, I can handle this guy," Hals snarled.

"Ukkie," said Sloan. "Say, what happened with your eye?"

"A pigeon flew into it," Hals snapped.

"Ukkie," said Sloan. "Don't get into an uproar." He had an elbow bent over the seat back, and nestled in the crook of the elbow was an automatic, trained on Pete. As Pender headed for and entered the West Side express highway, Hals relieved Pete of his gun, and the revolver Pete had taken from him, with a satisfied, "Hah!"

THE revolver was apparently his favorite weapon, because he exchanged, put the other two guns away. Very interesting, Pete observed. Because if he climbed on Hals, and Hals fired, the cylinder would turn one chamber and the hammer would fall on the exploded shell. Unfortunately there was Ukkie Sloan covering him, and Sloan couldn't miss.

"Well, this is a nice kettle of fish," Pete observed.

"Ain't it, though?" Hals jeered.

"You guys certainly are talkative," Pete complained. "What the hell do you want?"

"You know," Hals mocked; "that pile of dough Scarlatti hid away, remember?"

"Do you think I'd fuss around with a dame who has a murder rap hanging over her?" Pete asked wearily. "I told her I wasn't interested, and she didn't tell me where the money is. She said she didn't know, herself. How many times do I have to tell you that?"

"She told you. Where is it?"

"Ah—!" Pete cursed. "I don't think Scarlatti hid any money. You guys are out of your minds."

"Like hell."

Pete didn't see it coming. Hals' left fist landed on Pete's cheekbone and eye like a baseball bat. Blindly he doubled his fists to retaliate, but Sloan warned, "Easy, now. Easy. We can plug you anywhere along here."

"Where's the dough?" Hals repeated.

"I don't know anything about it."

This time he ducked, but the gun barrel grazed his forehead and caromed off the bridge of his nose. His nose started bleeding, and with his hands trembling with rage he held a handkerchief to it.

They thought he knew where Scarlatti's money was, and were going to kill him if he didn't tell. If he did know and did tell, they would kill him anyhow. He didn't have any way out. And they were rolling right along on the excellent parkway engineered by Mr. Moses, as though they had picked the spot for Pete Hodge's demise.

"Listen," he said, "I'm going to get bumped off, is that right?"

"You trying to tell us how to run our business?" Hals cracked.

"All right, one way or the other, you're going to bump me. But I want to remind you of something; after you've done it, there'll be a lot of guys looking for you, and I don't mean the cops."

"Yeah? Who do you mean?"

"The boys who pull the big jobs, for example. And there'll be a few insurance detectives, if you know what I mean. The insurance people carry grudges." He kept on talking, and he knew that Pender was listening closely, because the car slowed down. A private detective, as was well known, he acted as a go-between for the underworld. He was trusted by the criminal and by the insurance people alike; not so much stolen jewelry went to the fences any more.

When there was a jewel robbery, the thieves contacted Pete Hodge, the insurance people likewise. Pete Hodge passed over an envelope full of money, which he himself had changed at a bank chosen at random, to a man who signaled him from a car, or on a corner, or a theater lobby or anywhere, and received in exchange a parcel containing the stolen property. He had never doublecrossed anyone in such a transaction, and no crook had ever held out on him. Once a wooden crate of stolen silver and jewelry had been shipped to him by freight, and he used the box for kindling. He could be trusted.

The insurance people wanted him the way he was, because it was cheaper to deal through him than employ the processes of the law, and recover little or nothing of the property insured. A lot of gem thieves, dealers in packets of blackmail letters and the like, would be mighty sore if somebody knocked off Pete. He talked convincingly, but there was still no way out, because by their actions this outfit had practically confessed to the murder of Scarlatti. And the police were highly interested in what had happened to that man, and what his real business was.

Hals said simply, "You talk too much. We'll fix it so nobody will know what happened to you."

"Where does that get you?" Pete asked grimly. "You knock me off, and where are you? You think you're going to pick up Gloria Marr again?"

"We found her once; we'll get her again, and—boy!"

"It took you a couple of years, and then you found her just by accident."

"We called the cops that she was in town, and the cops get better every year. They'll pick her up. They won't find what happened to Scarlatti and they'll turn her loose, and then we'll pick her up."

PETE looked at the gun in Hals' hand, then at the one which Sloan held. He noted that the back of Pender's neck was freshly barbered, and there was a smell of cloying lotion in the air. He said, "It stinks in here."

Hals hit him, mashing his lips. Pete wet them, remarked obstinately, "Go ahead, heel, but the joke is going to be on you."

Hals hit him again and asked, "How's this for getting even?"

"I thought there was something," Sloan remarked interestedly.

"Keep your mouth shut." Hals was sore. He asked Pete, "You gonna tell us where that dough is?"

Half crazy with rage and helplessness, Pete said, "I wish I did, just so I could tantalize you rats with how much there was. You—!"

Hals gave him a wallop this time, a real one that set all the big bells in hell to ringing. Keeping his mouth shut when he was mad wasn't one of Pete's at-

tributes. In a minute he was going to go crazy and climb on Hals, no matter what the consequences; better to die that way. His left eyebrow was neatly severed with a bleeding cut, his nose still bleeding a little, one eye blackened, his face bruised and his shanks and feet felt like live hamburger from Hals' stamping and kicking.

Whether he had information or not, they were going to kill him. And by now they knew that he wouldn't talk anyhow, because you could trust Pete. He had practically cut his own throat, and Pender speeded up again.

An old road of asphalt crossed Mr. Moses' excellent parkway, and Pender turned into it and continued until the excellent landscaping of squatty foliage and healthy trees obliterated parkway traffic. Hals forced Pete out of the car.

Pender drove up the road a long distance, turned around. Pete was going to be thrown in front of the hurtling machine on the return trip. They must have been mighty sure that there was a lot at stake, to give it to him in this one-two-three manner.

Behind Pete on the cracked curbing was Adolph Hals. As though he didn't know what was going to happen to him, Pete squinted his eyes up at the sky. It was blue, very blue, and there was an unforgettable smell of earth and vegetation in the moist, quiet air. He wanted to preserve that smell like a private possession.

A quarter of a mile up the road to the left, Pender stepped on the gas, and the big sedan come rolling down the hill like a thunderbolt. The pressure of Hals' gun was lifted from Pete's back. As Hals raised the gun to give him a tap with the barrel, taking no chances, Pete lowered his gaze from the blissfully blue sky and rolled his head in such a manner that the gun barrel raked down the side of his head and almost tore his ear off. His knees buckled; before he hit the ground, Hals caught him and held him erect, ready to throw him in the path of the rocketing car.

It was bowling along close to the curb, the roar of the motor advancing in a crescendo.

The timing had to be split-second stuff. The slightest error in judgment would make both of them victims. Pete grabbed upward at Hals' supporting hands, purposefully let Hals jerk his gun hand free, but held on to the other wrist for dear life.

"Hey!" Hals snarled, then cursed with panic. He pulled the trigger of the revolver, and the hammer fell on the exploded cartridge. The plunging sedan was upon them, veered out from the curb as Pete ducked, bracing with all his strength. He heaved, and Hals went sailing over his head with a high-pitched, gurgling scream of sheer terror. The scream was terminated with a sodden, heavy crash, followed by the long, lazy, hysterical squeal of rubber as Pender slammed on the brakes.

PETE ran like the damned, plunged into a dingle crowded with trees before Pender and Sloan started shooting. The slugs snicked through foliage ten feet wide of him, followed by the whacking, flat reports. Pete zigzagged, stretching his legs to the limit, and keeping low, putting cover between himself and pursuit. When he reached the edge of the woods bordering the parkway, he went prone along a low, ornamental log fence, fighting to get his wind back. His heart ached with its rapid pounding. Still panting moments later, he saw Pender's machine enter the parkway from the side road and head back to town, traveling fast.

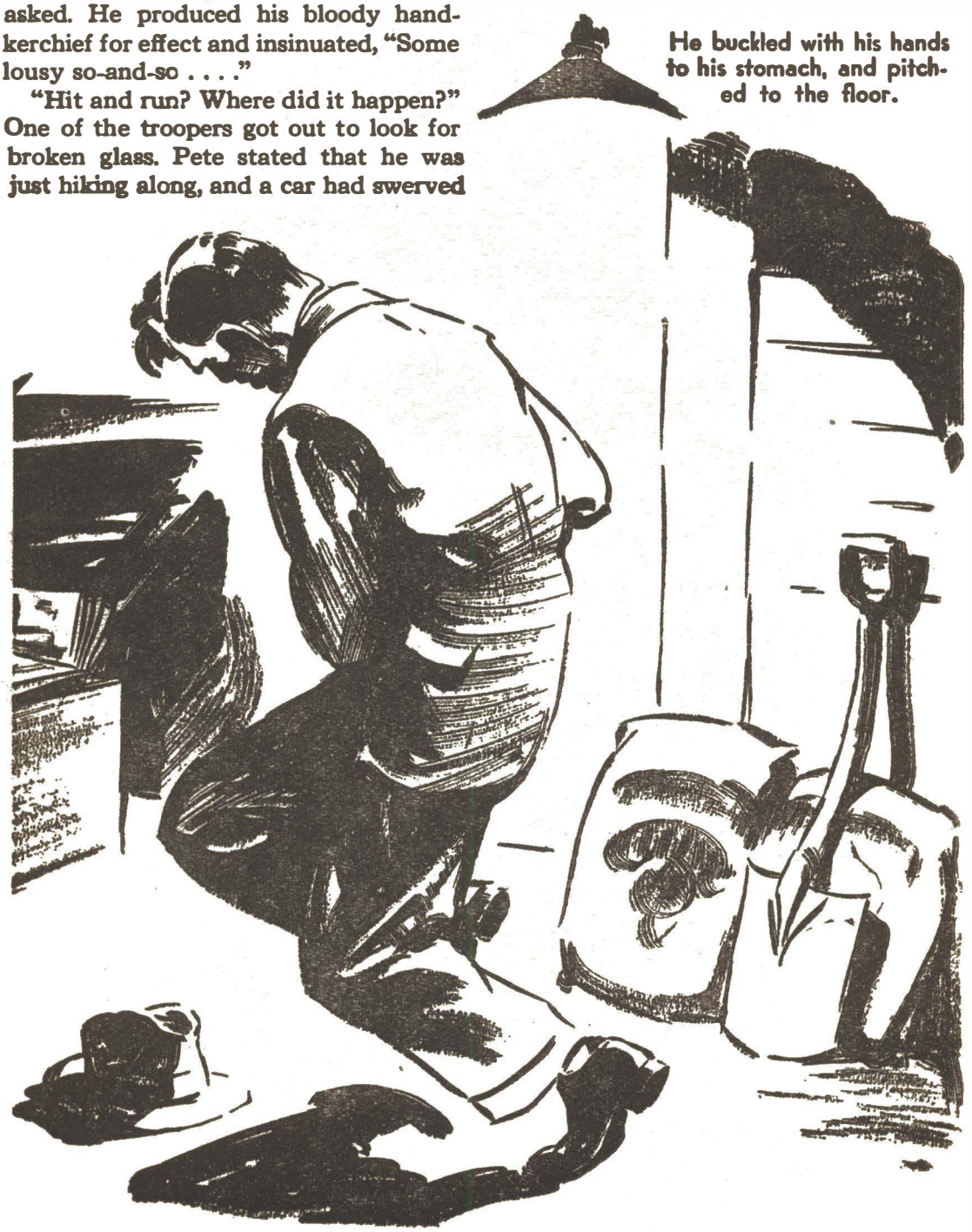
Pete had no desire to loiter in the vicinity himself. There was no way back to town except thumbing a ride. At last

a car stopped, and in it sat a couple of troopers.

"What do you think you're doing, Mac?" he was asked.

"You fellows give me a lift?" Pete asked. He produced his bloody handkerchief for effect and insinuated, "Some lousy so-and-so . . . ."

"Hit and run? Where did it happen?" One of the troopers got out to look for broken glass. Pete stated that he was just hiking along, and a car had swerved in and tossed him before he could jump. Landed on the boulevard, luckily. Didn't see the driver's face; driver was talking over his shoulder to someone in rear seat, which explained car's swerving in.



He buckled with his hands to his stomach, and pitched to the floor.

Didn't know make of car; didn't get license number. He furnished a fictitious name and address for himself, and was told dubiously, "Looks as though you're out of luck, Mac. If that guy broke a headlight or something it'd be different, but this way I don't think there's a chance of picking him up. Get in; we'll take you far enough to catch a train."

They were nice guys.

He ended up by taking a hack to the Van Cortlandt station, then the subway for the long, dusty ride all the way down to Fourteenth Street.

One of the enemy was eliminated, by themselves. But the way they probably figured it, Scarlatti's money could now be divided fifty-fifty between Pender and Sloan.

PETE let himself into his apartment feeling dog-tired, bruised, in a foul humor. Splitting headache.

He poured a quantity of scotch over a couple of ice cubes, added the merest squirt of soda and started working on it. Back in the office, he set the highball down on the desk and glared around, sniffed. The exotic fragrance of Gloria Paget had lingered in the air for a long time. It was getting dark out.

He stole to the adjoining door, opened it with deliberation. The shades were down; in the twilight he could make out a form on the divan, thick hair tumbled on a cushion. A very quiet form. The fragrance of feminine occupancy was quite pronounced in here. Pete turned the light on, and with arms akimbo stared grimly at her.

Her eyes were open, staring at the ceiling, lips parted; her breast was quiet either with the lightest breathing or with no breathing at all.

"Gloria!" he called, and when she remained immobile alarm galvanized him; he crossed swiftly to the divan, with gooseflesh roughening his arms and the back of his neck. "Gloria!"

He took her by the shoulders and shook her and called her name, shocked. Her head rolled as though in negation, as though she said, "No, I'm dead and you can't call me back; I'm through getting kicked around."

He rolled her over nervously to see how she had been killed, whether she had been shot or stabbed. Gloria blinked, drew a deep breath and looked at him. Then she sat up suddenly, eyes wide and bright with apprehension. Pete sat down weakly.

"What's the idea of giving me a scare like that?" he demanded. "I thought you were dead!"

"Why—why did you think that?" she stammered.

"Do you always sleep with your eyes open?" he asked belligerently.

"Not that I know of," she faltered, and her eyes were completely innocent.

He eyed her with suspicion, accusing, "And you weren't breathing any more than a sparrow." He couldn't tell whether she was lying or not, decided that she had actually been asleep, that what he had seen was a phenomenon resulting from mental and physical strain approaching hysteria. But he wouldn't ever know. Covering up his relief and compassion, he barked, "Well, how did you get in this time?"

"You left the door open."

"Like hell I did, and you can't pick that deadlock."

"Oh, all right," she confessed. "There was a key on your desk when I called the first time, and I stole it." And it had turned out to be the spare. Pete had looked for it casually when he had gone out. In a dull, heartrending voice Gloria said, "I'll go. I'm sorry."

Pete returned her to a horizontal position with a shove and glared at her. After returning the glare with a hunted-

animal expression, she wriggled close to him, tentatively, took his hand gently. Before he guessed what she was up to; she buried her head away from him, and then the back of his hand was stroked with clinging, moist softness. She was kissing his hand like a whipped dog, and it outraged him.

He jerked free, swallowed. Her body was tense as she waited for his anger to descend on her, and he tried to think of something fittingly castigating to say to her. The moment passed, and subtly she relaxed.

SHE fell asleep with the light on, for her breathing became long and regular while she waited. In her sleep she turned over luxuriously, her arms assuming a graceful position over her head, fingers in her hair. Her eyelashes were wet.

If this wasn't sleep, it was the most convincing imitation Pete had ever seen. After a skeptically long minute, he tested the reality of that sleep by bending over and kissing her very delicately. In sleep her lips parted with the suggestion of a smile. He rose, his lips set in a sardonic grin, because there was involuntary, twin evidence that indicated pretty certainly that she was faking.

All right, he'd let her get by with it. He stole to the door, closed it softly after turning the light out. His lips formed a silent, profane opinion of himself for being a sucker.

He cleaned up in the bathroom. The bruise on his cheek was going to involve the eye with some fancy coloring, but hadn't proceeded far yet. One ear was torn at the top, his upper lip was swollen a little, throbbed But he combed his hair and didn't look bad.

Out in the office he killed the drink while printing in large letters on a sheet of typewriter paper the warning: DON'T LET ANYONE IN—PETE. He tacked the sign to the door, went out and locked the door, and departed for his original objective.

SCARLATTI'S old address on Charles Street now had a tenant whose name on the brass mailbox read EVELYN HOWELL. The parlor floor lights were on; Pete rang the bell.

The lock buzzed, and he entered a high-ceilinged, carpeted foyer, which had the usual old gray-silvered pier glass set in a baroque silvered frame. The door on the left opened, and a tall, rangy girl, rather striking in a strapless, backless evening gown asked, "Yes?"

Her voice was cultured, her mouth broad but well-formed and humorous. Just going out for dinner, he guessed. As she measured up Pete from his immaculate shoes to his straight hair he declared quietly, "Charles Scarlatti, a gangster, used to live here."

"Yes, I know he did," she smiled; cocked her head. "Are you one?"

Pete produced a card from his wallet, carrying a brief legend and a couple of bold, well-known signatures. He explained unnecessarily, "I'm connected with the D.A.'s office."

"So I see."

"I'd like to take a brief look around, if you don't mind. In connection with Scarlatti's disappearance."

"Come in," she invited. "But I don't think you'll find anything. Someone has been through. When I leased the apartment, it was wrecked. The woodwork was torn out, and someone had slashed open all of that man's upholstered furniture. Even the baseboards and some of the flooring was ripped out. They were looking for his money, weren't they?"

Pete nodded. "If he really hid any. What we're most after is some clue as to what they did with him." He ques-

tioned her about details of the condition in which she had first seen the apartment. The pillaging had been done after the police investigation of the anonymous tip that Gloria had murdered the man who lived here. Evelyn Howell told Pete that the building's management had stored all of Scarlatti's stuff in the basement, with the understanding that the police would collect it eventually. It was still down there.

"I hope I'm not detaining you," Pete said.

"Not at all," she assured him, and showed her teeth in a smile that was almost knowing. Fleetingly Pete considered the possibility that the gang had planted the girl here so that they would have ready access for repeated search. Evelyn might be Pender's girl, for example. She wasn't dressed like that unless she was being taken to dinner, and her escort might be Pender. Evelyn seated herself on the edge of a chair and crossed her legs. She lighted a cigarette, Pete refusing her offer of one.

She watched with interest while he strolled through the apartment, scanning the architecture of the house, letting his mind receive any impression it would.

THE place was a typical floor-through. Large living room in front, small study connecting; cramped middle room, large bedroom at rear overlooking a ratty garden; kitchen at rear, corresponding to study in front. Evelyn followed him as he inspected the bathroom, informed him, "Most of the tiling was torn out, too."

"Thank you," Pete said nervously, bothered by something hinting and undefinable in her manner. His athletic, compact build appeared to interest her more than somewhat, because he caught her glance estimating him a couple of times.

There was nothing here, of course. The place had been thoroughly searched, gutted, and nothing had been found. Time to go. She didn't actually detain him, but she put him in the position of being rude by refusing to drink with her. Her nearness to him at the door, made him self-conscious.

"I've done you a favor," she pointed out. "Will you do one for me in return?"

"Surely, if I can."

"I've been stood up, and I'm free tonight. After you've reported to your office, will you take me to dinner? I don't think you'll be—disappointed. . . ."

"I'd be delighted," Pete grinned. "There's nothing in the regulations about taking a girl to dinner."

"I'll have drinks ready here when you get back," she promised.

She would drink them by herself, Pete reflected morosely after the door closed. He wondered if he had betrayed his connection with the D.A.'s office by showing his credentials to her. No doubt he could have gained entrance on some pretext.

There were two doors in the foyer, one of them to the basement. He noticed that the woodwork of the two didn't match. Both door and frame at the left of the mirror had been added since the house was built.

It turned out to be a closet, in which were a vacuum cleaner, dust rags, cans of paint, a pair of coveralls hanging. Pete nodded. This house was of the same period as his own. The dumb-waiter shaft here, as at his own place, had been condemned by fire-retarding regulations, and the shaft converted into closets for each floor.

Pete opened the other door, turned the basement light on, and went down to give a look at Scarlatti's stored belongings before he left.

There were trunks, boxes, and mu-

tilated, dusty furniture piled up. He left everything intact, strolled curiously about the basement. It was a vaulted red-brick labyrinth suggesting a catacombs. A rich family had owned this house, and the vaults were wine bins. There was an old, inadequate furnace in disrepair, and at the rear a huge new modern furnace sunk in a concrete pit. Loose and broken brick and mortar littering the floor, which was only packed bare earth for the most part. For the most part, because Pete's feet gritted unexpectedly on a section that had been paved. Against the wall leaned obese bags of cement that had turned to rock in the wet air before they could be used. There was a pile of dirty sand, a trough and a hoe for mixing the concrete.

PETE came back to the paved panel of floor and stamped on it experimentally. Solid. Hunkering down, he whipped a section clean with his handkerchief. Crouching frozen for a moment, he jumped up, grabbed a stubby broom near by and swept the whole pannel clean.

The slab had the dimensions of a coffin, which it was. Scarlatti's. To his horror, Pete discovered near the end of the slab three holes. There was a fairly large one in the center, formed by a section of bamboo whose inside end must have been inserted in Scarlatti's mouth. The other two holes were smaller, and rubber tubing appeared to have been used. The gang had dug a pit in the earth floor, dumped Scarlatti in, mixed up a batch of concrete, and poured it around him up to the floor level. With tubing to his ears and mouth, he could breathe and hear. And under this torture he hadn't told where the money was hidden, if it existed.

With an involuntary shudder Pete rose, and then his attention was caught by a box-like projection in the masonry of the wall behind the abandoned, original furnace. Of course, the bottom of the dumbwaiter shaft, bricked up solid. The furnace, a rusty, ugly pile of castiron sheathed in asbestos packing, was smack up against it. That had been a fire hazard, all right.

The thing was, if Scarlatti had really amassed a pile of dough he had kept it around where he could lay his hands on it. So with a slow, incredulous smile Pete toured around the furnace and the bricked-up shaft which might have been taken for the chimney.

The shaft appeared to be sealed fast, with no access to anything which might be inside it. The mortar between the bricks was sound and showed no sign of ever having been tampered with. After half an hour there was a frown between Pete's eyes. No progress, if there was a secret here.

He looked into the firebox of the furnace for the fifth time, noting again that the door hung crazily from a bent nail used as a hinge-bolt. He lighted a match, examined the blackened, ashy, rusty interior.

Funny-looking corroded knob back there, of unknown purpose. Sort of cylindrical rivet-head. Pete reached in and tried it in all directions, suddenly yanked his arm out and jumped out of the way.

Like the new furnace, this little old one was mounted on a concrete base. It was hinged at the back invisibly; small but massive, it was leaning out from the wall behind, being let down into an aperture in the concrete on grinding chains running over steel spools. Out of sight below the floor of the shaft revealed were counterbalancing weights for the clumsy mass of the furnace. A lever projected from the wall of the shaft, to set in motion another system of weights designed to return the furnace to position.

In the dust-coated shaft stood a locker-trunk on end. Pete reached in over the canting furnace and rocked the trunk, and it was heavily resistant. With a good grip on the end strap he hauled away, and after tremendous heaving and wondering whether he was going to rupture himself, he worked the trunk out of the shaft into the basement.

Panting, he had to admit that Scarlatti must have been a powerful customer.

The trunk wasn't locked. He unsnapped it, threw the lid back. For a long moment he just stared in consternation, finally murmured with awe, "Well, I'll be snag-dabbed."

THE trunk was almost full of money. Banknotes. United States currency absolutely, with several packs of bills of the old large size. Some yellowbacks, gold currency. And the money smelled, with the peculiar smell, penetrating and mustily choking, of perfume and human sweat and grime that it gets from passing through innumerable hands. How much there was couldn't be guessed at; there might have been a million or over, in spite of the fact that it was "fat" money; there were no bills that he could find above the denomination of twenty, and all the money was old, thickened to the texture of moldy leather from being in long circulation.

In a compartment in the lid of the trunk were papers and a slim notebook filled with Scarlatti's spidertrack handwriting. Pete was examining them when he heard the door at the head of the basement stairs being opened surreptitiously. He took the papers and notebook, thrust them into the furnace chamber and resumed handling the money. Listening.

He was unarmed, couldn't escape from the basement.

There were two of them, he guessed, and they were very quiet, sneaking up behind him on the dirt floor. At the last minute he leaped erect and turned around.

Pender and Sloan.

Either they were due here, Evelyn's apartment being their headquarters, or she had called them, or they had received this address from the number Pete had given the hack driver.

The eyes of both took in the crazily tilted furnace in a flash, and the trunk of money. In that instant Pete lunged for them and sidestepped as each fired the gun in his hand. Two shots. Pete buckled up with his hands to his stomach and took a pitching headlong fall to the earth floor.

"Well, that's the end of that wise guy," Sloan said. "Where'll we dump him?"

"Put him in there behind the furnace," Pender said. "If we can find how the damned thing works. See. That little tramp did tell him where the money was."

"Holy Moses. Look at that dough," said Sloan. "Let's get that upstairs first."

"Wait a minute." Pender rolled Pete over and saw a spreading stain of blood. He explained, "This guy's tricky. He's not dead, but he will be with those slugs in his guts."

They slammed the lid of the trunk, and each took an end strap. Pender said, "Okay?"

"Ukkie," said Sloan.

They lugged the trunk to the stairs and went up.

Watching their ascending feet, Pete got up in a hurry. His left side was gashed, through the waist where it bled the most. Only one slug had hit him, thanks to his sidestepping. The gash was shallow, but burned wickedly and made him feel weak in the knees.

He retrieved the papers from the furnace, ghosted to the stairs and up, reach-

ed the foyer door before it had swung completely shut. He kept it open a fractional inch, saw Pender and Sloan enter Evelyn Howell's apartment. The door closed, kicked shut by Pender, and Pete issued from the basement. He went down the foyer on tiptoe and let himself out. He walked briskly, looking for a cab; one shoulder was hiked higher than the other, and the fingers of the hand clamped to his side were sticky with blood.

Back in his office he made a phone call, asked for a man by his initials and reported what had occurred. "When they find I'm gone, they'll skip out," he reported. "They won't be there, but we should worry. I've got some of Scarlatti's papers over here, and they're mighty interesting."

He hung up, went to the kitchen for a hooker of scotch to combat his giddiness. He grinned, thinking of the million bucks or so that had slipped through his fingers.

IN the morning, late, with a bright sun shining through the window, Gloria was applying a fresh bandage to Pete's side. She asked, "Does it hurt much, Pete?"

"It hurts good." He grinned at her. "Those are nice, cool fingers you've got there, Gloria."

She taped the gauze pad, patted gently, and he put on his shirt again, tucked it in and buttoned up. She looked forlorn, and said, "Well, I don't suppose I had any right to that money, but if I only had a little of it . . . I hope they catch those men, and that girl."

"They'll get caught," Pete assured her. "And you don't want a dime of that money, either."

"But I haven't got anything, Pete. I'm broke."

"That was pretty filthy money, Gloria."

"I don't care if it stunk."

"Stank."

"Stank. I don't see why you couldn't have taken just one bundle of it, Pete. You got out with the papers."

"The records were the important things. That money was no good." Pete chuckled. "Scarlatti was dealing in hot money. He was a broker. All that dough was blackmail stuff, ransom money from kidnapings, all earmarked. The F.B.I. has sent lists of those serial numbers all over the country, and as soon as Pender and Sloan and the Howell girl start spending, they'll be leaving a trail.

"All the money was old. Blackmailers and kidnapers want old bills. Do you see? And they can't possibly pass those gold notes. Those were recalled.

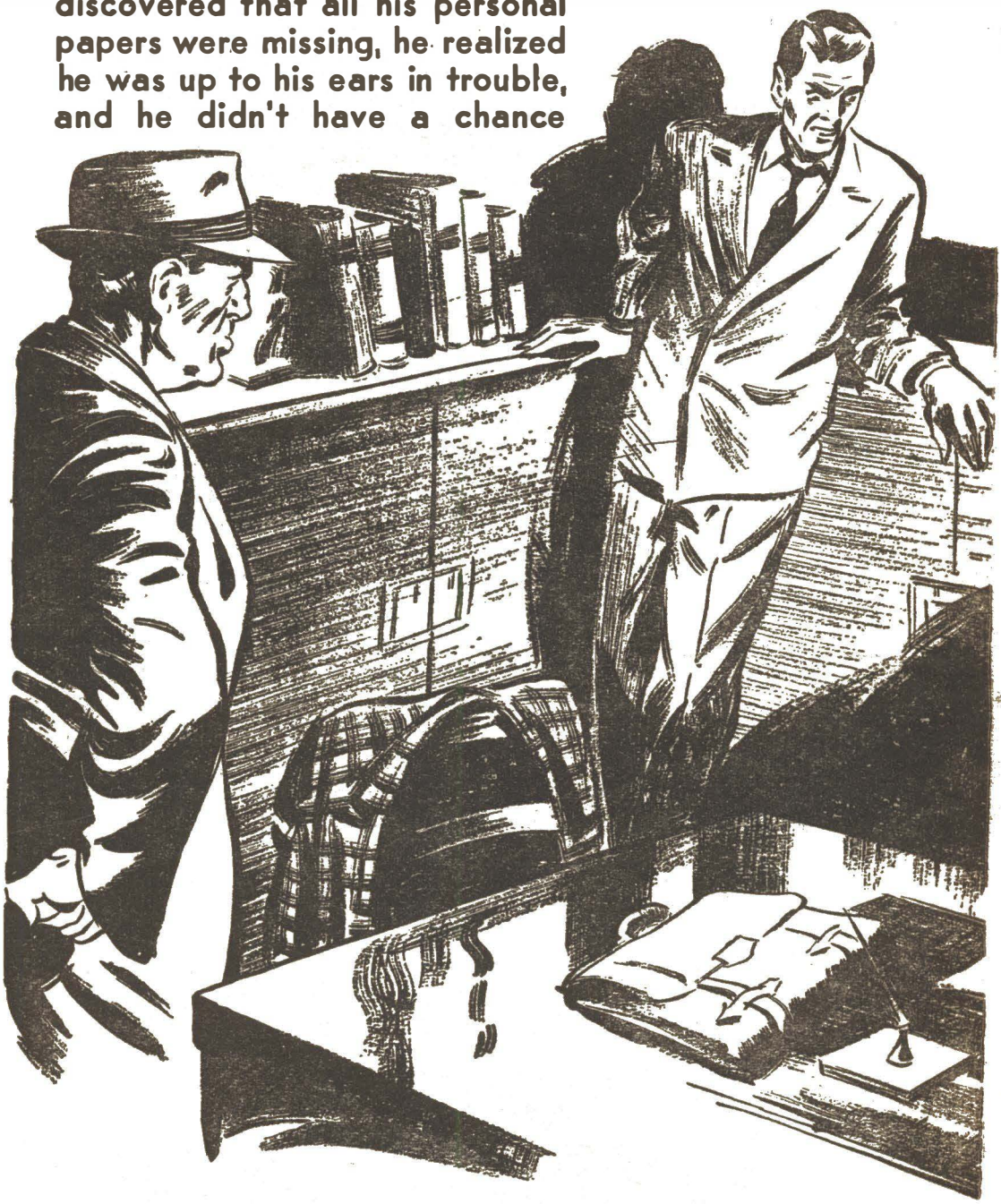
"Scarlatti had made some foreign contacts through his importing business, and found, or thought he'd found, a way of making a heavy profit on this hot money that he bought for, perhaps, as low as ten cents on the dollar. Maybe it would have worked; we don't know how he planned to get rid of it."

"I won't feel safe until they're caught," she said.

"They won't be looking for you any more now," said Pete. "And if they find out that the money is hot and don't try to pass it, they're just as badly off. The D.A. has men on the hunt already. You see, either Pender or Sloan, or maybe Hals, laid a hand on that concrete coffin of Scarlatti's to see whether it had set, and it took a handprint, and some other prints, and they'll all go to the chair for murder."

Gloria looked at him gravely, shuddered involuntarily. Looking at him with steady eyes she asked, "It's horrible, but will you believe me when I say that I'm glad Charlie is dead? I never would have been able to get away from him."

What would you do if you registered in a strange hotel in a strange city and found yourself identified as a public enemy? When it happened to Ward, and he discovered that all his personal papers were missing, he realized he was up to his ears in trouble, and he didn't have a chance



"IT *IS* odd," the nice old gentleman agreed, frowning at me. "Do you suppose something happened—something unfortunate—and he was too proud to own up to it?"

I said I didn't think so. I said it wasn't like Eddie Ervin to pull a stunt like that. We'd been fraternity brothers and

FALL GUY

By JUSTIN CASE

"We've found another dead one," he said.

the closest of friends at college, and Eddie had worked with me for the Wearesist Company for seven months before coming west to Centralton. For the past three years, I pointed out, he'd been listed in the fraternity records as

sales manager for Centralton's big jewelry concern, the Weldon Fischer Company.

"And they claim he left their employ two years ago?" the old gentleman asked, as puzzled as I was.

"That's what they told me this afternoon."

"Strange."

I thought it strange, too. I couldn't make it out at all, unless for the past two years Eddie and Helen Ervin had been kidding the folks back home.

According to letters we'd received, Eddie had become a big shot with the Weldon Fischer Company during those three years, and was on the way to being one of Centralton's leading citizens. Was that a lot of malarky, ladled out to make the boys back home jealous? Had Eddie flopped, and been too proud to say so?

I hoped not. For Helen's sake I hoped there'd be a happier solution. I hadn't seen Helen in three years, but before that—well, she'd been the mistress of all my dream castles. I hoped Eddie hadn't let her down.

So I was disturbed and bewildered. And somewhat sore, too, I suppose, because after all, Centralton was a couple of hundred miles off my route. I'd get hell from the home office for my detour, and that, it seemed, was all I'd get. No visit with Eddie. No rehash of old times. No chance to see Helen and reopen that old ache in my heart.

"You say," the old gentleman murmured, "that you went to this man's home?"

"That's right. They moved two years ago, the landlord told me."

"Then if they continued to receive your mail, it must have been forwarded by the post office. Perhaps if you were to make inquiries there . . . "

"I did. He has a box, they told me, at the North Side Station. But the only home address they have listed is the one I went to."

"Perhaps the telephone book or the city directory . . . "

I shook my head. "He's not listed. I've tried everything."

"Strange," the old gentleman said again, looking down at his fingers.

"The hell with it," I said. "Let's have another session at the bar."

"Thank you, but I mustn't. I really should go now" He stood up, a frail gray-haired little man as mild as milk. "It has been a great pleasure, Mr. Ward. A very great pleasure. And I do hope you find your friend."

I SHOOK hands with him and watched him patter across the hotel lobby. I smoked a couple of cigarettes, and then, addled by the mystery of Eddie Ervin's disappearance, took myself to the bar and ordered more Scotch.

I'd had more than enough already, of course. Otherwise I never would have poured my troubles into the ears of the old gentleman. We'd met at the bar two hours ago. His name was Phillips. He'd been a good listener.

Mooning there, I had three or four and wondered what to do with myself. It was a little after eight p.m. I'd rushed through my chores in Pittsburgh in order to visit Eddie and Helen before going on to Wheeling. There was a midnight train from Centralton to Wheeling, but how was I going to kill time until midnight in a city where I knew no one, had no connections?

Walking the streets didn't appeal to me, nor did the idea of going solo to a movie. I come from a long line of people who feel lost and depressed when left alone.

This should be rare, I suppose, in a man who makes his living traveling solo around the country, running sales campaigns. All the same. I suffer from

it. And there at the Hotel Windham bar I suffered acutely, because of my disappointment in not being able to locate Eddie Ervin. And Helen.

I was pretty well tanked when I went up to my room. In a crowd you can watch your intake, but when drinking alone you pour them down one after another, just for something to do. I had trouble getting the door open, and when I bumped into the bed and got the wind knocked out of me, I realized I was drunk.

I lay on the bed, watching the ceiling, wondering about Eddie Ervin and Helen. About half an hour later I heard a noise.

THE window of my room overlooked Centralton's main artery, and there'd been a steady rumble of noise right along, but this was different. It was sharp and explosive. Then I heard a door slam shut in the corridor, and heard someone running.

People don't usually run in hotel corridors.

If I'd been on my feet, I might have opened my door and looked out, but I was on the bed with my shoes off, and it seemed like a lot of work. Peace and quiet returned. I reached for a cigarette. A few minutes later someone else went by my door in a hurry, and I heard an anxious voice say shrilly, "Be careful now, Cooney! We don't want any trouble!"

That settled it. I hiked across to my door and looked out.

A couple of men were standing in front of a door a little way down the hall, one tall and sloppy-looking, the other short, nervous, meticulously dressed. The tall one knocked, then after waiting a moment, turned the knob and went in. I heard him say in a toneless voice, "Dark in here. Shades drawn." Then the door closed.

I shut my own door and sat on the bed, still wishing I hadn't downed so many Scotches. There was more traffic in the hall. Then—I guess it was ten minutes later—someone knocked on my door. I opened it and there stood the same two men.

"Mr. Ward?" the big fellow asked.

I nodded.

He said he was Cooney, the house detective, and introduced the man with him as Dolliver, the manager. I got the impression right away that Dolliver was scared. An immaculate, thin little man with bulging blue eyes and high blood pressure, he made quick, nervous gestures in Cooney's direction as though anxious to hold him back.

"Mr. Ward," Cooney said, eyeing me, "do you know a man named Nick Traynor?"

"Traynor?" I said. "No."

"M'm," Cooney said in a way I didn't like. "Your name is Frederick Ward?"

"That's right," I said.

Dolliver massaged his pink hands and Cooney sent a slow, thoughtful look around the room. I didn't like Cooney. He was a wise guy, I judged.

"This is a very funny business, Mr. Ward," he said. "A very funny business." If it was funny, Mr. Cooney lacked a funny-bone; his face belonged on a pall-bearer. Without haste he extracted a slip of paper from his pocket and held it out to me. "What do you make of this?"

I read a penciled scrawl that said: "Nick Traynor registered as Frederick Ward, room 517 Windham Hotel. Careful of him. G."

I read it twice. What it meant was beyond me, but I didn't like the looks of it. I got that smothered feeling some people get in a room without any windows. My lips dried and the rest of me began to perspire.

"You don't know any Nick Traynor, Mr. Ward?"

"I've already told you—"

"That's right; you already have." Mr. Cooney, I imagined, was not over-anxious to believe me. He suspected everyone and everything as a matter of course, trusting only himself. He had cold gray eyes and a stone-gray personality.

"A very funny business," he said.

I felt frantic. "Look here," I protested. "I'm not mixed up in anything that may have happened here. I'm just a salesman. I can prove . . . " I yanked my suitcase off the chair in the corner and slapped it on the bed.

When I opened it, that smothered feeling got worse. Someone had been in my suitcase.

I STOOD there scowling at a newspaper clipping which had been placed on top of my clothes. *I* hadn't put it there, and it hadn't been there when I opened my bag to get a clean shirt just after my arrival. It was a small, yellowed photograph of a man I didn't know. Just a photograph. No name, no accompanying writeup.

He had an egg-shaped head and large, close-set eyes. His ears protruded. Unruly hair sat low in a thick mass on his vertical forehead. His mouth was a flat, unsmiling line, and the general impression was one of shrewdness.

I turned the picture over, but the other side was no help. It was part of a cookery column with a recipe for barbecued spareribs.

Cooney took the clipping out of my hand and said, "M'm."

I turned to the suitcase again. In addition to the photograph, I had acquired a little cardboard box—the sort you buy book matches in. But it didn't contain matches.

It was a box of bullets—or do you call them shells? There were sixteen of them, all alike, all marked "Remington UMC .38 S & W."

My brief case, which had been pretty well choked with business papers of absolutely no value to anyone but me, was empty. My monogrammed handkerchiefs and an initialed silver belt-buckle were gone.

I looked helplessly at Cooney and Dolliver. "Someone," I said, having trouble with my breathing, "has been at my suitcase."

Cooney nodded in that way of his. "A very funny business, Mr. Ward." He scowled at the newspaper clipping. "Do you know this man?"

"No."

"He's dead," Cooney said. "He's dead in room 621, right close to here." His gaze roved to the box of shells. "Shot between the eyes," he said, "with a thirty-eight."

I looked at him and wanted suddenly to be out of there, out of the hotel to somewhere quiet. I don't think straight when I'm excited, and I wanted to think —*had* to think, before this thing gathered any more momentum and overwhelmed me.

"You must have heard the shot, Mr. Ward," Cooney said. "Several others did. That's what brought us up in such a hurry." He stared at me questioningly.

"I—think I did hear it. But I didn't know what it was."

"Where were you?"

"Here," I muttered. "Right here. On the bed."

"A very funny business," Cooney observed. He fingered the clipping again. "Are you positive you don't know this man?"

I said I was positive.

"He's registered," Cooney said, "under the name of Marvin Decker, from New York. Does the name mean anything?"

I didn't know any Marvin Decker, and said so.

"We-e-ell . . . we'd like for you to come down to Mr. Dolliver's office and make a statement, Mr. Ward. *If* you don't mind. You'll do that?"

He took hold of the front of my shirt and pushed.

He wasn't asking; he was telling me. Dolliver, the manager, stood there saying "Dear, dear!" to himself and massaging his small pink hands.

I DIDN'T have a chance, and knew it. Even before the police arrived, I knew it. Oh, they were polite enough. They gave me the most comfortable chair in the office, and Dolliver offered me a cigarette from a silver container, and Cooney held a match to light it, but the air reeked with suspicion and these men were convinced that I'd either murdered Marvin Decker or knew a good deal more about it than I was admitting.

All over again I told them my name, and the name of the firm that employed me. And I explained that I'd come to Centralton to visit a friend, Eddie Ervin, but hadn't been able to locate him, and was planning to take the midnight train for Wheeling.

Cooney said, "We'd like to check with the company you work for, but I don't suppose it's possible this time of night. Eh?"

I said the home office would be closed at this hour, but he could call my boss, Paul Ryan, at his home.

"You don't mind if I do that, Mr. Ward?" Cooney said. "It won't make trouble for you?"

The police captain in charge of the investigation, a dour-faced man named Sackett, said crisply, "Of course he won't mind. He wants to clear himself, doesn't he?"

So Cooney put through a long distance call to Providence, and got his party, and this is what he said: "Mr. Ryan?" he said. "Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Ryan, but this is the Centralton, Pennsylvania, police." He glanced at Captain Sackett and the latter gave him the go-ahead signal by nodding. "We are most anxious to locate a Mr. Frederick Ward, who is employed by your firm. What's that? No . . . no, he is not in trouble, Mr. Ryan. Nothing like that. Can you tell us where to get in touch with him?"

I could hear Paul Ryan's voice, but couldn't make out what he was saying. Cooney scowled, though, and listened most attentively. Then he said, "There can't be any mistake about that, Mr. Ryan? You're sure of it. A telegram, eh? Well . . . thanks. Thanks very much."

He cradled the phone very slowly and stared at me, and I didn't like his stare. I didn't like his eyes, or the twist of his mouth, or the way he drummed the desk with his fingers.

"Your Mr. Ryan received a telegram half an hour ago from Frederick Ward," he said. And after a significant pause: "From Pittsburgh."

I guess I said, "What?"

"This is a very funny business all around," Cooney observed gravely. "I'd say it was very funny indeed. Wouldn't you, captain?"

They all scowled at me: Sackett, Dolliver, Cooney, and the rest of them. I could feel perspiration forming under my arms and beneath my collar. I said lamely, "I didn't send any telegram from Pittsburgh."

"No," said Cooney, "of course not. But you *are* Frederick Ward, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm Frederick Ward!"

"If you just had some papers or something to prove it," Cooney said, shaking his head as though the whole situation depressed him. "We're not implying, you understand . . . " He sighed noisily. "But you say all your papers were stolen."

I said frantically, "I've got some cards in my billfold. I've got a Selective Service card and a driver's license."

"Have you?"

I plunged a hand into my inside coat pocket with such haste that it must have been ludicrous. But they didn't smile at my haste. Not one of them smiled. And neither did I—because the bill fold wasn't there.

Feverishly I explored my other pockets. After all, I'd been drinking, and when you drink a lot without being used to it, you're apt to get careless. But I didn't have any billfold. I had a fistful of change and a pack of cigarettes and some matches and a fountain pen. But no billfold.

The walls of Dolliver's office began to swim before my eyes. I opened my mouth and words wouldn't come, and when they did come they sounded weak and idiotic.

"It—it's gone."

"Look again," Captain Sackett said crisply.

I LOOKED again. I went through every pocket, took my coat off. My hands were shaking and I dropped the coat, and Cooney picked it up.

"A very funny business," Cooney said. "Now look. You say your name is Frederick Ward and you work for the Wearesist Company of Providence. So we call up Mr. Ryan of the Wearesist Company and he tells us there *is* a Frederick Ward working for his company, but he's in Pittsburgh. That puts us in a predicament. We'd like to believe you, but you haven't a solitary scrap of paper to prove your identity!"

"I've told you the truth!" I groaned. "I can't help it if I can't prove it!"

"Do you know anyone in Centralton, Mr. Ward?"

"Only—only Eddie Ervin and his wife."

"I see. Only Eddie Ervin and his wife." He sighed again, shaking his head. "Well, then, did anyone know you were coming to Centralton?"

"No."

"That's too bad. It really is," Cooney said.

I pushed my fingers through my hair and stared at the men around me and tried to think of something to say. But what could I say? Some part of me detached itself and I began to see myself as these men were seeing me.

A man named Decker had been murdered. There was that crazy note warning someone to look out for me because my name was Nick Traynor. There was the picture of Decker in my suitcase—the box of cartridges. My briefcase had been emptied. My billfold was gone. Even my initialed handkerchiefs had been taken.

You couldn't blame these fellows for what they were thinking . . . could you?

So I did a foolish thing. I lost my head. With hair in my eyes and sweat pouring from my face, I shook my fist at those staring, accusing faces and yelled, "I don't care what you think! You can't prove anything! You can't hold me here! I'm going to Wheeling!"

Captain Sackett widened his eyes a little, and two of his men stepped quietly between me and the door. At that instant the door opened. A policeman stood on the threshold.

The policeman said to Sackett, "We've found another dead one."

I don't know why I looked at Dolliver, but I did. He turned white. His hands gripped the edge of his desk. His mouth jerked and he whispered, "Another one! Oh, Lord!"

Sackett and Cooney exchanged glances, and Sackett stepped to the door. I heard the policeman say, "Donegan found him under the stairs near the Hale Street entrance. . . ." Then Sackett went out, shutting the door behind

him, and Cooney said in that toneless voice of his, "Sit down, Mr. Ward."

I sat down. Two of them, I thought. They'll say I did this, too. They'll take me to police headquarters, or someplace, and third-degree me. I ran my fingers through my hair and they came away wet. I hadn't known a man could sweat so much.

After a while the door opened again and Captain Sackett came in. He didn't shut the door this time. He stepped aside, looking grim, while two men entered carrying something wrapped in a hotel blanket. He told them to put it on the floor.

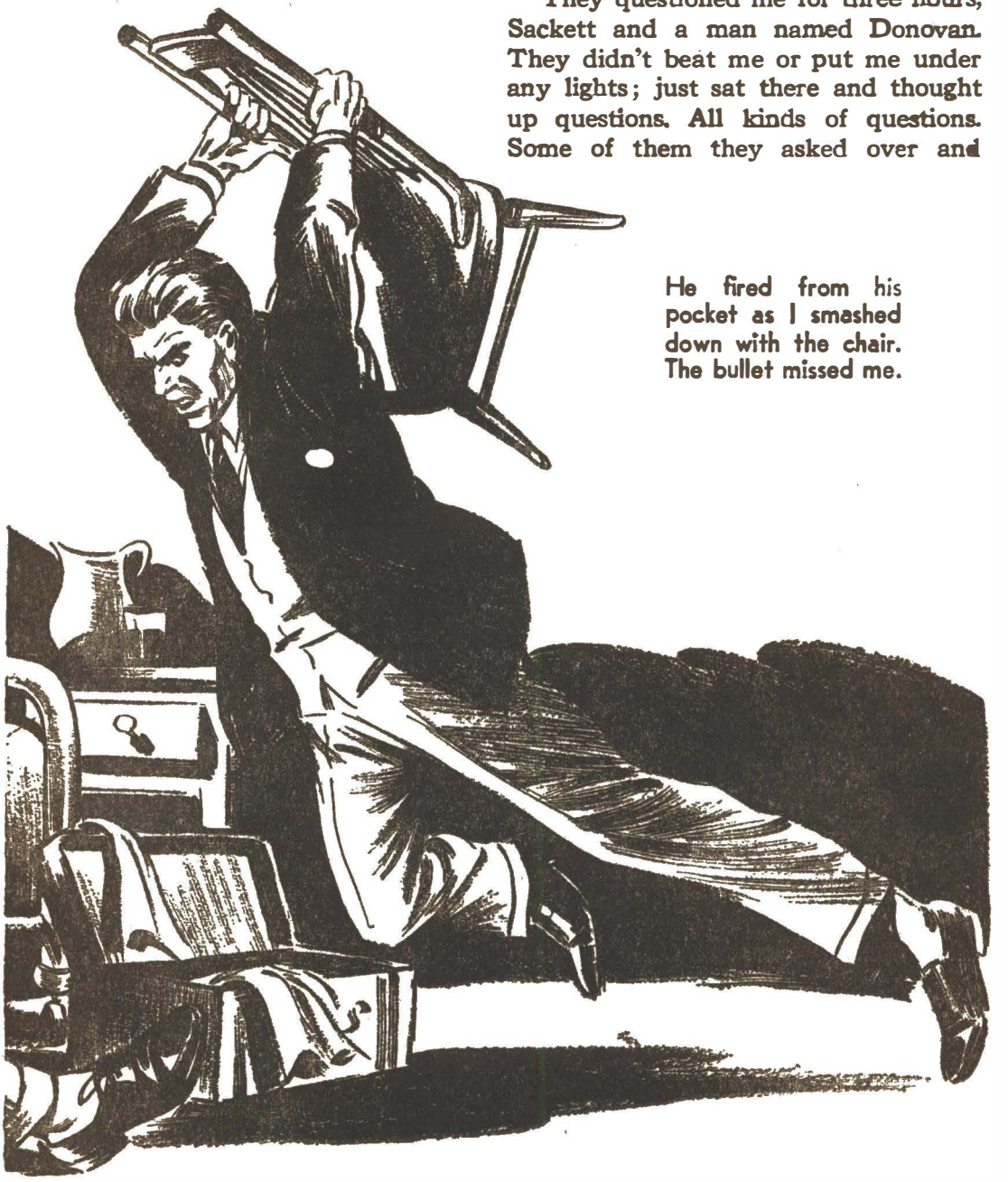
They did, and he closed the door and bent over the thing and folded the blanket back. "He was under the stairs near the Hale Street entrance," he said to Cooney, looking up. "His head's caved in. Somebody slugged him from behind."

I looked at the man. I could feel my stomach throbbing, and a thickness forming in my lungs, so that it hurt me to breathe. I stood up, lurching a little, and they all stared at me.

"It's Eddie," I said. "Eddie Ervin."

He lay there with his eyes open, his mouth open, his hair caked with blood and a thin red line of blood crawling down his face. Eddie Ervin—looking just the same as when we'd chased the same girl. Except for the blood, and the dullness of his eyes.

I could feel my knees sagging. I reached behind me for my chair and backed into it, shaking all over . . . thinking of Eddie's wife.



They questioned me for three hours, Sackett and a man named Donovan. They didn't beat me or put me under any lights; just sat there and thought up questions. All kinds of questions. Some of them they asked over and

He fired from his pocket as I smashed down with the chair. The bullet missed me.

I'D never been in a police station before. It surprised me, it was so big and modern. We went along a rubber-tiled corridor to a bank of elevators, went up two floors and along a duplicate corridor, past a lot of doors. Captain Sackett thrust open a door with some lettering on it, and I was led to a chair.

over. Then Sackett and two policemen walked me out of there and down the corridor to the elevators.

"Am I—am I under arrest?" I asked.

Sackett just looked at me.

They didn't put me in a cell. I was led to a small cream-colored room at the end of a long hall. It contained a

couple of chairs, a table, and a cot. Sackett spoke to one of the policemen, who stayed with me. The others went out, and he said, "Better lie down and get some rest, Mr. Ward."

"Do I—have to stay here?"

"You'll have to ask the captain."

I looked at the closed door and sat down. After a while I got over being so scared. The situation wasn't hopeless. If they would let me phone Providence, I was sure I could persuade Paul Ryan to send someone to Centralton, and then that crazy Nick Traynor business would be cleared up, at least. Unless they were stupid enough to think I was leading a double life!

I began to get my thoughts organized. About an hour later Captain Sackett came back, and with him was Cooney, the Windham house detective. Sackett looked uncomfortable. Cooney wore the same dead-pan expression with its tired sadness.

They sat, and Sackett said to the policeman who'd been guarding me, "All right, Clark," and Clark went out. Sackett leaned toward me. "We're finding out more about this business, Ward. Putting it together, so to speak."

I said bitterly, "I don't know a thing about it. I've been framed!"

"Perhaps." Sackett nodded. "But we still can't figure out how you were framed."

Cooney said, "Let's go to the beginning, Ward. You came here to look up your friend Ervin, and no one knew you were coming. Let's go over everything you did from the moment you arrived in town, whether it seems important to you or not. What time did you arrive?"

"About noon. I cleaned up and had lunch in the hotel grill."

"And then?"

They stopped me when I got to the nice old gentleman at the bar. Sackett and Cooney exchanged glances. Sackett stood up. Cooney put his fingertips together, puckered his lips and said, scowling, "What was the old gentleman's name, Ward?"

"Phillips."

"You'd never met him before? You didn't see him in Pittsburgh, or on the train?"

"No. He just struck up a conversation with me at the bar."

"Staying at the hotel, was he?"

"I suppose so. I don't think he said, one way or the other."

"I'll tell you what happened, Ward," Cooney said. He glanced at the captain, and Sackett nodded, with what could have been a slight shrug.

"Marvin Decker, the man who was murdered in room 621," Cooney said, "checked in last night, with a bag and a brief case. He took the bag to his room, but had the brief case placed in the hotel safe. This evening he signed for the brief case and just about had time to return to his room with it before he was murdered. We can't find the brief case. We think he was murdered for what was in it."

I scowled at him. I suppose it hadn't occurred to me to wonder why Decker had been slain.

"We don't know what was in the brief case," Cooney said, "but obviously the whole business was carefully planned and timed. Your nice old gentleman, Mr. Phillips, was in on it—and when you talked to him, Ward, you wrote yourself an invitation to the ball."

I thought it was fantastic and said so, but Cooney just looked at me with those cool gray eyes of his and ignored my interruption.

"You were a stranger in Centralton," he said. "You didn't know a soul in town, weren't supposed to be here in the first place, and couldn't locate the

man you'd come to see. You were the perfect fall guy! All Phillips had to do was lift your wallet—and you were high enough to make that fairly easy—then get into your room, plant the cartridges and the photo, and steal everything you could use to establish your identity."

He paused, scowling at me. "As for that piece of paper we found in the murder room—that Nick Traynor thing—if this line of reasoning is correct, it was put there to lead us straight to you."

That queer dizziness gripped me again and the walls of the room began to swim. "But it's so—so mixed up," I said, shaking my head.

"And that's precisely how our friend Phillips wanted it," Captain Sackett said. "It's full of holes from start to finish. But you need time to spot the holes in this sort of business. That's what Phillips was after—time! He knew you'd be able to clear yourself in the end, but a few hours of free sailing meant a lot to him. And it worked."

I said, "Where does Eddie Ervin fit into this?"

"We can only guess," Cooney said. "We didn't know the second victim was Ervin until you told us. His pockets were clean except for cigarettes and an automatic."

"An—automatic?"

Cooney thinned his lips. "I'll tell you what I think," he said. "There was something of value in Marvin Decker's brief case. Last night he got it out of the hotel safe and went back to his room with it because he was expecting someone. Your Mr. Phillips knew about this and was waiting for it. He'd already tabbed you for a fall guy. Soon as the brief case was out of the safe, he went up to Decker's room, shot Decker, grabbed the case and vanished.

"At the same time," Cooney continued, "your Eddie Ervin was entering the hotel from Hale Street, and was brained. It's mighty improbable the two murders were unrelated. Chances are, Ervin was the man Decker was expecting, and was slugged by an accomplice of Phillips to delay his arrival. I'm guessing, of course, but it makes sense."

It made sense? I wasn't so sure about that.

Cooney said, "You're in this, Ward, whether you like it or not. But if you'll give us your word to stick close to your room, you can return to the hotel with me."

"You mean I can't leave town?"

They swapped glances again and I didn't like it. I didn't care for Cooney's trick of suddenly wiping all expression off his face.

It came to me then that he and Sackett hadn't told me all these details for *my* sake. There would be hell to pay if they didn't get to the bottom of this business, and I was their only point of contact with what had happened. They might be planning to use me. But what could I do about it?

Cooney offered me a cigarette and I went back to the hotel with him, wondering if it would be wiser, safer, to insist on being locked up by the police.

WHEN the story broke in the newspapers, the name of the hotel was not mentioned. Nor was Eddie Ervin's. Mine was, though, and so was Marvin Decker's. But the story as a whole was miserably told, full of mistakes and omissions. The police perhaps gave it out that way.

I telephoned my home office and explained the situation, then stayed close to my room. When I did go out, I was followed, and before long it became obvious that every move I made was being checked. They weren't even subtle about it.

The evening of the second day, fed up

with all this, I cornered Cooney in his office. "Have the police found out anything about Eddie Ervin?" I asked him. "Do you know where he lived, how I can get in touch with his wife?"

He shook his head, dealing me a long, hard stare that chilled me. "But we know a little more about Marvin Decker," he said. "His name is Harry Dakeman, and among other things he was a notorious fence—dealer in stolen goods. His prints were on file in Washington." Cooney paused to let this sink in. Then he added ominously, "That sort of puts your friend Ervin in a bad light, doesn't it?"

I said defensively, "How does it?"

"If he had a date with Dakeman and it concerned the contents of the brief case . . . figure it out for yourself."

I said, "That isn't fair to Eddie. It's just a wild guess." But Cooney wouldn't admit it was a wild guess. He talked about logic and "line of reasoning," and his tone was proof that he thought Eddie a crook. Or else he was deliberately feeling me out.

I didn't like it. I hated Cooney for thinking it. But when I went to my room later and walked the floor and thought it over, I felt rotten. What if they were right? Eddie certainly had pulled the wool over our eyes. He had lied in his letters. Somehow it all came together in a pattern, and the pattern was not pleasant.

What about Helen? She hadn't gone wrong; I'd stake my life on that! Had Eddie kept her in the dark? Had she left him?

The more I thought about it, the sicker I was. "They can't condemn Eddie until they have proof," I insisted, talking to myself. "It isn't fair to Helen, wherever she is!" Wherever she was. But where was she?

There was a knock at my door and I opened it, and a short, slim man was standing there. He looked like—well, I forget the name, but the fellow I mean is a movie-actor who plays a lot of tight-lipped gangster roles. "Are you Ward?" he said.

"Yes."

He said to someone behind him, "Okay, Kel," and the next thing I knew, he and the man to whom he had spoken were inside, and the door was shut.

THEY stood there looking me over. The slim fellow had a way of moving his eyes without raising or lowering his head, and an easy, slack-muscle way of standing. Kel was bigger. He was lazy looking, as if he loved his comfort and hated to move in a hurry. Both were well dressed.

"We're finding it hard to get information on what happened here the other night," the slim one said. "Suppose you tell us what you know about it, Ward."

I said uneasily, "Who are you?" thinking they might be reporters.

"Name's Smith," he said. "This is Jones." He didn't have a smile to go with the names, either. He made them sound ominous.

I said, "I don't know you. I don't know a thing about what happened here. If you want information, the police . . . "

They weren't reporters. The big fellow stepped into me and took hold of the front of my shirt. He pushed me and I fell across the bed with the wind knocked out of me. He was husky. He stood over me and I looked up at him, wetting my lips.

"Talk," he said.

I wondered what would happen to me if I yelled for help. It wouldn't be pleasant, I decided, so I said warily, with little drops of ice-water forming under my skin, "What do you want to know?"

"Who killed Dakeman?" the slim one asked in a purring tone.

"I don't know."

"Sure you do, friend. You were mixed up in it."

"No I wasn't," I said. "Whoever killed him tried to put the blame on me, but I wasn't mixed up in it."

"You're lying, Ward. We've heard things. We've been listening around."

I lay there half on the bed and half off it, and looked up at them and said desperately, "If I had anything to do with it, do you think the police would have let me go?"

"The cops have to play things cozy, friend. We don't." Kel took an automatic pistol from his pocket and held it loosely in his fingers. "I'd talk, if I were you. Maybe we'll let you off easy if you steer us to the brains of this business."

I said frantically, "But I don't know anything, I tell you!"

They looked at each other, and the slender one nodded. Kel said, "Get your hat and coat, Ward."

"Why?"

He didn't answer, just looked at me. My stomach was in knots and I felt weak. I'm not exactly proud of that moment—of the way I slithered off the bed, watching them, and dazedly fumbled my coat og the chair.

They were going to walk me out of the hotel and take me somewhere and work on me. They thought I could tell them who had murdered Dakeman and what had become of the brief case. Probably they were Dakeman's friends.

Just then there were footsteps in the corridor, outside my door. Someone knocked. Kel raised his gun, warning me to be still.

The person outside knocked again, and then a voice, a girl's voice, said anxiously, "It's Helen Ervin, Fred. Are you in?"

Helen, there outside the door! And I couldn't answer her!

None of us moved while she was there. For the longest time she waited, and then a sound of footsteps told us she had gone. The slim man scowled at me and said, "Helen Ervin, hey? Who's she?"

"It was Eddie Ervin, her husband," I mumbled, "who was killed at the side entrance, the night Dakeman died. He—" I stopped. The look on his movie-actor face told me I shouldn't have said it.

"Say that again, Ward!" he snapped.

"I—"

He didn't wait for me to say it again. Shoving Kel toward the door, he said sharply, "You can catch her at the elevator! Tail her! Grab her the first chance you get!"

Kel opened the door and was gone. I hadn't thought he could move so fast.

"Sit down, Ward," the slim one told me then. "Tell me more about this guy. His name was Ervin, hey?"

I was sunk. I couldn't take back what I had said, and I had said too much. I sat down, praying that Helen would get to the elevator before Kel could overtake her, or that there'd be others waiting at the elevators and he wouldn't be able to identify her. It was a faint hope, terribly faint. Bitterly I blamed myself for not having kept my mouth shut.

Now I tried to back out my mumbling, "I don't know anything. The police said his name was Ervin, that's all."

"Sure," he said. "And the cops told you to jump like a rabbit at the sound of his wife's voice. Who is she, Ward? What's the angle?"

What could I say? If I told him the truth he wouldn't believe me. If I invented some fantastic story. . . .

HE didn't wait. Catlike, he came up to me, swaying on his toes. He grabbed my shirt with his left hand and shook me. He was strong for a man so slender. "I want this straight!" He bit the words out. "Dakeman was supposed to see Link Andrews that night. The man your hijacking pals slugged downstairs should have been Link. How come it wasn't?"

The temptation was too great. His chin was right there in front of my face,

outthrust, a perfect target. He was off guard because he knew I was scared. He didn't know that most of my terror had changed to desperation, or that I had been a pretty good athlete in college despite my lack of weight.

I brought the flat of my hand up to his chin as hard as I knew how, lifting him clear off the floor. As he fell, I sailed in, throwing punches.

He went down with a crash, grabbing at his pocket, surprise and fury twisting his face out of shape. He fired from his pocket as I snatched a chair. The bullet missed me. He fired again, missed again, and then I slammed the chair down and broke it over his head, and he was finished.

I ran to the door and looked along the corridor, afraid I might see his friend coming back. But the hall was empty. Into the telephone I said, "This is Fred Ward, room 617. Send Mr. Cooney up here, quick!"

The switchboard girl must have sensed I was frantic. She sort of held her breath, then said, "Mr. Cooney is not in the hotel right now. Can I—?"

"Then call the police!" I said. "Tell them I've got one of the men mixed up in the Dakeman case!"

I hung up. The fellow on the floor was still out. I took the gun out of his pocket and sat on the bed and watched him, more afraid of him now than when I had sailed into him. But he didn't stir; he was out cold. Ten minutes went by and I reached for the phone again.

The same girl answered, and I said impatiently, "Did you call the police?"

"Yes, Mr. Ward," she said. "And I'm trying to locate Mr. Cooney for you. The police should be here any minute."

I wondered why she hadn't sent the manager up to my room, but before I could ask her, someone knocked on the door. I hung up and hurried to the door to unlock it.

There were two of them, and they said they were detectives from the homicide division, which explained why they were not in uniform. Without wasting time in talk, they pushed past me and looked down at the man I had captured.

They exchanged glances. "Slipper Towne," one said. He scowled at me and demanded, "What happened?"

I tried to tell them what had happened, but he kept interrupting. He seemed anxious to get away. The other detective stood close to the door, which was open an inch or two so he could look along the hall.

The man listening to me said suddenly, "All right, Ward, we'll be back." The next thing I knew, I was alone again with the man they had called Slipper Towne. It didn't make sense. Something was queer about it.

I found out what was queer about it when the police arrived a few minutes later. I told them about the two homicide men, and Captain Sackett gave me a very off-side look.

"They tell you their names?" he demanded.

"No."

"What did they look like?"

WHILE I told him, everyone in the room was oddly quiet, and I knew before I had finished that my suspicions were correct, and the two men had not come from the police at all. They'd been imposters.

Sackett said, "Exactly what did these men say and do, Ward?"

I told him, and he said crisply, "They were not detectives. They were interested in this man here." And he shifted his scowl to the man on the floor.

"His name is Slipper Towne," I said. Then I told how Towne and his friend, Kel, had come to my room and pushed me around; how the other fellow had

chased out after Helen Ervin. I didn't leave anything out.

Sackett said softly, "So Dakeman had a date with Link Andrews that night, did he? Another notorious fence. But it was Ervin who got killed, not Andrews." He seemed to be trying to straighten things out in his mind by reviewing them aloud. "And this fellow," he added, frowning at the man on the floor, "is Slipper Towne. *The* Slipper Towne."

One of the policemen had spilled cold water over Towne and the latter was coming around. They put him on a chair and began to ask questions.

He wouldn't answer them. He made a thin line of his lips and just sat there, looking everyone over by moving his eyes. Two or three times during the next ten minutes his gaze fastened on me and I knew his one desire was to get even with me for having caught him. But he wouldn't talk.

They took him to headquarters and at Sackett's request I went along. I sat in Sackett's office and retold my story while a young fellow took it down and Sackett asked questions. I waited, hoping Slipper Towne would talk, would at least tell us where to look for the man who had trailed Helen from the hotel. But he was tough, that lad. He kept his mouth shut. So at last, worried and weary, I went back to the hotel.

It was on the way back that I got my idea. Maybe I hadn't been doing any real thinking up to that point. Maybe I'd been too worried or scared. Suddenly it came to me. When the cab let me out at the hotel, I hurried across the lobby to the phone booths, to call Captain Sackett.

I didn't call him. As I went by the desk, with a glance at the switchboard girl, the girl was putting on her coat, talking to a clerk. It was the same girl. I remembered her voice. There wasn't time to call Sackett.

When the girl left the hotel, I followed her. She ignored the cabs parked out front, walked two blocks and stepped into a cab at another stand. I got into one, too. We went across the city. The meter read two-seventy when my driver slowed up and said, "She's stopping in front of the Elmcrest Apartments, mister. Should I stop too?"

I told him to go on to the next corner, got out and paid him. It was Cooney's money. My own had vanished with the theft of my billfold, and Cooney had advanced me some. And then, looking at the Elmcrest, I knew I was right. Telephone girls don't live in that kind of style.

But she had disappeared inside by the time I reached the entrance, and the list of tenants was as long as my arm. How was I to know which apartment was hers?

I stood around a while, feeling foolish. "Better call Sackett now," I thought. "The rest is up to him."

I opened the door again and stepped outside, and found myself face to face with the nice old gentleman of the Windham taproom—Mr. Phillips.

"Good evening," he said gently, looking straight at me.

I WONDERED why I had not seen the evil in that deceptively bland face before. It was there now, a sardonic devil only thinly veiled by the innocence of his pale blue eyes and his senile smile. Hands in his pockets, one pocket hunched up a little, he faced me for a moment in silence, his gaze weighing me. Then softly, with a trace of wonder, he said, "Our Miss Reagan was quite sure she was followed here, Ward, but I hardly thought it would be you. In a way I'm sorry. I rather liked you." He crowded me against the door. "Suppose we go upstairs and talk it over."

The apartment was on the second

floor, at the rear, and on the way up we passed not a solitary soul to whom I might have flashed a signal of distress. Phillips knocked, and the door was opened by one of the two men who had come to my room at the hotel, posing as detectives. The other "detective" was not in evidence. The girl sat on a divan, nervously smoking a cigarette.

It was a small apartment, and the furniture obviously went with it. Phillips had not established a residence here; he had merely rented a place from which to operate. There were no fancy trimmings. I was told to sit, and I sat —with an eye on Phillips' right hand which now was out of his pocket, competently clasping a gun.

He spoke to his companion, and the latter, a thin, rangy man, bent over me and searched me, then stepped back.

"Why did you follow Miss Reagan?" Phillips asked me.

I said, "It just occurred to me that she must be mixed up in this business."

"I see. And your line of reasoning?"

"After I caught Slipper Towne, I picked up the phone in my room and told the operator to get the police. Your friends arrived a short time later, posing as policemen. Someone must have got word to them in a big hurry that I was expecting the police."

"Not a very air-tight line of reasoning."

"Perhaps not," I admitted. "But it also occurred to me that the Dakeman murder must have been done with inside help, too. Dakeman was killed soon after he got his brief case from the safe. That took some nice timing. It was fast work. And who was in a better position to contact you fellows than the telephone girl?"

Mr. Phillips gravely studied me for a moment. Then he said, "Do the police know how smart you are, Ward?"

I didn't like the way he said it. Once again I had talked too much. Not knowing what sort of answer to give him, I tried to play safe by shrugging my shoulders.

"I see," he said. "You're not the innocent fellow I thought you were. First you jump on Slipper Towne. Then for glory you go in for solo investigations." He smiled faintly, but the smile vanished as he turned to the girl on the divan. "Mr. Ward tailed you on his own, Marie. For you that's a lucky break."

The girl was nervous and frightened. She wouldn't look at him.

"But next time you think you are being followed," Phillips said, his tone ominous, "don't rush to your destination and cry for help. Use the brains God gave you, if any, and think twice before you imperil your betters!"

The thin, slack-jawed man glared at her, too. "Amen," he said.

Mr. Phillips said, "We're leaving in ten minutes, Lester. Go down and have Lannard move the car to the rear entrance." He smiled at me. "Have Lannard prepare a change of plates. Mr. Ward is going with us."

I said, "Where are you taking me?"

"You are dangerous to us," Phillips declared matter-of-factly. "You happen to be the only living person who can prove our connection with the death of Dakeman. Therefore you leave when we do."

I REALIZED what he meant, and ice formed under my skin. Lord, how I had underestimated this man! He wasn't mild. He was cold-blooded as a snake— an educated, cultured, level-headed killer to whom no deed was repugnant if it suited his ends. He meant to get rid of me. When the proper time came, he would kill me without hesitation.

My mouth was full of tongue. I couldn't make my voice work.

Lester went out of the room, and I

heard the hall door shut. Phillips said to the girl, "Be useful. Get a roll of tape from my suitcase."

He made me stand up, and after Marie had handed him the tape he told her to stand behind me, holding a gun against my back. With scissors he cut the side pockets of my coat, forced me to thrust my hands through those pockets and into the pockets of my trousers. He cut those, too, and taped my hands to my body.

When he was finished, I couldn't move either hand, yet no one could possibly know that I was bound, and helpless. My hands were in my pockets, my shoulders pulled down a little in a sort of slouch; that was all.

Mr. Phillips sat down and lit a cigarette, retrieved his gun from Marie and looked at me. We waited, and I was sick with fear. I knew I hadn't a chance.

The hall door opened, closed again. Phillips said to Marie, "Go out first. Get in the car." Then his eyes bulged and he caught a noisy breath, because the man who appeared on the theshold was not Lester.

It was not Lester at all, but Slipper Towne's friend, Kel. He had a heavy flat automatic in his hand and was pointing it at us. "A nice friendly gathering," he said.

My heart beat like a hammer against my chest, and I looked at Phillips. He was half out of his chair, his face white and stiff, his eyes popping.

"Go ahead," Kel said. "Try it, pal. Dakeman was a good friend of mine."

Phillips fell back into his chair, perspiring. The girl looked terrified. I don't know how *I* looked, standing there with my hands in my pockets, but when Kel ordered me to put my hands up and get back into a corner, I thought my voice sounded way off key, answering him. "I can't," I said. "My hands are taped."

"How did you get here, anyway?" he demanded.

"I followed this girl."

He grinned and said, "You and me, we both follow dames." He meant, I suppose, that he had trailed Helen Ervin from the hotel. Now, ignoring me, he walked over to Phillips, hit him across the face and almost in the same movement relieved him of his gun. "Where's the stuff that was in Dakeman's brief case?" he demanded.

Phillips wet his lips, stared a moment, and replied darkly, "In my suitcase."

"Get it."

Phillips got out of his chair, cringing. He seemed older and very feeble, very much afraid. It didn't fit with my previous estimate of him, and I suddenly realized that he was stalling. He was playing for time, waiting for Lester to come back.

He overdid it, though, and Kel caught on. "Lester and I," Kel said, "had a little talk downstairs, friend. He won't be around."

Phillips sighed. On his knees, his back to Kel, he opened his suitcase and lifted out a couple of shirts and placed them on the floor beside him. And took out some socks. And a somber dark blue dressing gown. And then a gun.

It was uncanny in a way. The gun was suddenly there in his hand—there like magic—spitting flame and thunder.

Marie screamed. Kel staggered, cursed, miraculously stayed on his feet, and answered the old man's fire. It was awful. It was the most cold-blooded exhibition of butchery you can imagine—two men, one on his knees, the other leaning against a chair—two men deliberately pouring death into each other.

Kel collapsed first. He let go the chair and slid to the floor, his gun still in his hand. Phillips knelt there watching him. Seconds went by, and suddenly

a thick red stream of blood poured from the old man's mouth. His head drooped and he pitched forward over the open suitcase.

I looked at the girl. She had fainted. I walked across the room to the telephone, pushed it off its cradle with my elbow and told the operator to get me the police.

I HAD been at headquarters about an hour, talking to Captain Sackett in his office, when a sergeant entered: a big, beefy fellow with his coat off, his tie askew, sweat pouring from his face. He said, "Slipper Towne's ready to talk now, captain. We let him look at what was left of Kel Cleaves for a while, and that did it. You want him in here?"

Captain Sackett nodded, and they brought Slipper Towne in. He didn't look defiant any more. The handsome movie-actor veneer had been stripped from him and he was unkempt, his hair in his eyes. He stumbled as they led him to a chair.

"Well, Towne?" Sackett said.

"I'll tell what I know," Towne mumbled, glancing furtively at Cooney, the Windham house detective. "It isn't much, but I'll spill it."

He said Dakeman had been a big-time fence. He said Dakeman had been waiting at the Hotel Windham to peddle some stuff to a man named Link Andrews, who specialized in handling ice. When Towne got this far, Captain Sackett produced a brief case and took from it a glittering, dazzling collection of gems.

"Where did this stuff come from, Towne?"

"I wouldn't know," Towne mumbled.

"Take him out of here," Sackett snapped at the sergeant. "We're wasting time."

Slipper Towne looked sideways at the sergeant, and ran his tongue over his lips and mumbled, "All right, it's the stuff from the Weldon Fischer job, last month."

I picked up my ears. Weldon Fischer was the big jewelry firm for which Eddie Ervin had worked.

"You and Kel Cleave pulled that job, Towne?"

"You can't prove it."

"We'll look into that later," Sackett said ominously. "All right, go on."

Towne said that was all he knew, but it wasn't. "Dakeman was supposed to turn the stuff over to Link Andrews," he added under pressure. "When we heard Dakeman was rubbed out, we figured it was a hijack job. So Cleaves and I went up to Ward's room to see what he knew. While we're there, a dame knocks on the door and says she's Helen Ervin. We don't know any Helen Ervin, but Ward tells us the guy who gets knocked off downstairs is this dame's husband. That's a new angle. We been taking it for granted all along the guy knocked off downstairs is Link Andrews, because the papers don't say *who* he is. So Kel tails the dame."

Sackett looked thoughtful a moment and then said, "In brief, Towne, you and Kel Cleaves pulled the Weldon Fischer job and turned the loot over to Dakeman, who made arrangements to sell it to Link Andrews. The loot was hijacked and you were trying to get a line on it when Mr. Ward slapped you down."

Towne stared at his fingernails. "That's about it."

Sacket leaned back, and it struck me that he was very tired. He said, "We haven't found Helen Ervin, Towne. It looks very much as though Cleaves caught up with her before he went to Phillips' apartment. Hadn't you better tell us where to look?"

"I wouldn't know."

(*Continued on page* 105)

MURDER WAS HIS HOBBY

By Zeta Rothschild

WHEN a man murders solely for the satisfaction that the thought of his victim's agony gives him, he hands the detective his most difficult case.

For his is not the crime of personal revenge, nor is it a crime of passion. The detective draws a blank if he turns to the victim's friends for the murderer. Nor of theft—for the murderer takes nothing except life.

He who kills for the thrill of killing picks his victims casually. There is little, if any, connecting links between him and his dead.

Therefore, with no reflection on Scotland Yard, one of the most vicious of murderers brought about agonizing deaths for four harmless women in London before the law even suspected his identity.

TWO men walking late one evening on Waterloo Road suddenly spied a young woman clinging to the railing of a house. As they came near, they could hear her moaning. Her eyes were closed, her hands clenched.

But she was able to tell the men in painful gasps where she lived. Since it was only a block or two, they helped her to get there. But her landlady could not quiet the writhing girl and sent for a constable. Maybe the doctors in a hospital could do something for her.

But on the way to the hospital, Ellen Donworth died.

This was the night of October 13th, 1891, the background, London.

To the constable the dying girl had been able only to gasp that a man had given her some pills. The additional information offered by a girl friend living in the same house had not been very helpful.

Ellen had made fun of this man; he was bald and cross-eyed. But a dinner was a dinner and Ellen had accepted.

"He wrote asking her to meet him," said this friend. "Then he told her to be sure to bring along the letter." And a search of the room showed the letter missing, so Ellen probably had.

The pill story stood up. For the autopsy brought out the presence of a quarter of a grain of strychnine unabsorbed, while more had undoubtedly been assimilated.

There was a short postcript to the case a few days later. Coroner Wyatt received a letter from one "O. O'Brien".

"I am a detective," he wrote, "and I can put my hands on the murderer of Ellen Donworth. But first £300,000 ($1,500,000) must be handed over to me."

The whole idea was preposterous. A joke. No effort was made to contact the man—and the letter was filed away.

THE very next morning the second of a series of murders that was to puzzle Scotland Yard for another eight months, got off to a start.

To Matilda Clover, a young woman living in two rooms with her small child on the top floor of a house on Lambeth Road, the postman brought a letter. It was from a man Matilda had met a week or so earlier and he asked her to meet him outside Canterbury Hall at 7:30 that evening.

To keep an eye on the child, Matilda asked the maid-of-all-work, Lucy Rose, to come upstairs to put him to bed and stay. Together the two watched Matilda primp for her date and go.

Accompanied by the man, Matilda returned to the house at nine.

Evidently her landlady didn't trust her with a key for it was Lucy Rose who had to open the door for her. But thus Lucy got an opportunity to get a good look at Matilda's cavalier.

That night, about 3 o'clock, Lucy Rose was awakened by violent screaming. She and the landlady traced the screaming to Matilda's room where they found the poor girl writhing in agony on her bed. She was having convulsions, vomiting, twitching. She had been poisoned, she screamed.

The landlady sent for the doctor who had been treating Matilda for alcoholism. He was away and his assistant took the call. He took it for granted that Matilda was having delirium tremens and, leaving, sent her some medicine to stop the vomiting.

Matilda Clover died the next morning at nine o'clock. And her physician, getting the story from his assistant, did not hesitate to sign a death certificate, giving acute alcoholism as the cause.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later another young woman was greeted by a man outside St. James' Hall and after several hours together made a date for the next evening. He had noticed, he told her, she had some spots on her forehead. He would bring her some pills that would help her—he was a doctor, he added.

Lou Harvey kept the appointment on the embankment. The man was waiting, in his hand a bunch of roses. Alas, he could not take her to the music hall as he had planned. But he gave her five shillings to pay for her seat. Then he took from the pocket of his coat a small box and took from it three longish pills and handed them to the girl.

"They'll cure that skin condition," he told the girl. "Take them now. Swallow them whole."

He put them in her hand. And prodded her elbow as if to start the movement toward her mouth.

Lou Harvey's good angel must have been on the job that night. For the girl was suddenly possessed with a determination not to do what this man was urging her to do—take those pills. She started to raise her right hand to her mouth. But the embankment was gloomy. Catching the man's eyes with hers, she smiled. And in that instant that his eyes were raised from her right hand, she slipped the pills into her left.

"See, I've taken them," she said with a smile and held out the palm of her right hand.

The man looked pleased, rubbed his hands. He seemed suddenly very happy. He wanted to hail a cab to take Lou Harvey to the music hall, offered to pay for it. But the young woman had made another date with her boy friend, waiting a short distance down the embankment. So she said she'd find a cab herself. And the man handed her another few shillings and watched her hurry off.

According to the description of this pill purveyor Lou Harvey was to give many months later, he was bald-headed, stooped, behind his glasses, she could see his eyes were crossed. It was undoubtedly the same malevolent monster who had handed out those death-dealing pills to Ellen Donworth, Matilda Clover, and Lou Harvey, the one who didn't take them.

There was a demoniacal urge back of this man's twisted brain. Why he made his next, and his next, move, it is difficult to understand. No one had connected him with either the sudden death of Ellen Donworth or Matilda Clover and here he was putting his neck out and

asking for suspicion to come light on him.

ON November 5th, a Mr. Frederick Smith, member of a firm which owned a chain of stores, received a long rambling letter telling him that one Ellen Donworth who had died October 13th had been poisoned by strychnine. In her room had been found two letters incriminating "you", the letter writer wrote. "Think of the shame and disgrace it will bring upon your family if you are arrested and put in prison for this crime. If you will employ me at once to act for you in this matter, I will save you from all exposure and shame." So read the astounded Mr. Smith.

If Mr. Smith wanted to retain his services, he need only paste a paper with the message, "Mr. Fred Smith wishes to see Mr. Bayne, the barrister, at once," in a shop window of the store at 186 Strand next Tuesday morning. Mr. Bayne promised he would pass by and finding the invitation there, would drop in immediately on Mr. Fred Smith.

But Mr. Fred Smith had no desire to meet Mr. Bayne. Nor strangely, was Scotland Yard. For Mr. Smith, worried by the note, decided to hand the letter over to that organization.

But the threats in it were so preposterous, so untrue, Scotland Yard only filed it away. True, many anonymous letters, and many, signed, are written by cranks. And if all such letters brought out inspectors on a wild-goose chase, they wouldn't have time for a real murder hunt.

But it wouldn't have taken much time or effort to have posted that message to Bayne on the shop window and waited for him to deliver himself into their hands. They already had a vague description of the man from whom Ellen Donworth had gotten her pills—wouldn't it have been worth while to see if her description fitted this man?

For murderers of a certain type are never content to let their crimes fade. They haunt the premises, and talk, and sometimes even write letters.

The last week of the same month, November, Scotland Yard was to have forwarded to it another letter of almost the same type.

It had been mailed originally to Sir William Broadbent, a well-known physician who after skimming over its contents, sent it indignantly on to Scotland Yard.

"Sir," it began, "Miss Clover who before her death lived at 27 Lambeth Road died at the above address through being poisoned by strychnine. After her death a search was made, and evidence was found which showed that you not only gave her the medicine which caused her death, but that you had been hired for the purpose of poisoning her."

The evidence was in the hands of the detectives, the letter continued. But these detectives were open to reason—they did not care to whom they handed over this damning evidence. For the sum of £2500 ($12,000), it was available. But Sir William was to have first chance. And if he was prepared, yes, anxious to take advantage of this bargain and avoid disgrace, he could put an ad in the personal column in the *Daily Chronicle*. "I have evidence strong enough to ruin you forever," were the last words before the signature, "M. Malone."

The indignant physician's only answer was to forward the letter to Scotland Yard.

NOW, according to the records, Matilda Clover had died of acute alcoholism. Had Scotland Yard been sufficiently interested, and had had poor Matilda's body disinterred then, it might have learned this "Malone" knew what

he was talking about. But it didn't; not yet. The Yard filed this letter away and asked Dr. Broadbent to let them know if he heard again from "Malone". He didn't.

December brought a lull which continued for four months. It was later to come out that the cross-eyed bald-pated man had business interests back in Canada and the United States which took him away. But the first week in April, he was back again in London.

Early in the morning of the 13th of April, police constable Eversfield on duty was called by an excited man to hurry down to 118 Stamford Street—a girl was awfully sick. He was going for a doctor. At the house, in the downstairs passage-way, lay a young girl, writhing in agony.

"She was taken sick like that sudden," explained Mrs. Vogt, the landlady. "I sent my husband for you and a doctor."

From the second floor came the sound of screaming. The constable hurried upstairs—there on the floor lay another young girl contorted in convulsions on the floor. Both girls had already been given a dose of mustard and water but it had not helped either.

The constable decided not to wait for a doctor but tc get the two girls at once to a hospital. Some one called a cab and helped him stow the girls in it. But Alice Marsh died on the way and Emma Shrivell a few hours after arrival.

Constable Eversfield had immediately returned to the house. The two young women were friends, he learned. That night, they had told Mrs. Vogt when she first came to them, they had had dinner with a man they called Fred. He came frequently to see them. This evening they had been out with him. After the meal, he had given both girls some "longish pills" and insisted on their taking them as he watched.

Then he had brought them home and left.

Automatically a post-mortem was made on both bodies and the viscera sent to the Government analyst, who found 6.79 grains of strychnine in the organs of Alice Marsh and 3.26 in those of Emma Shrivell.

Who was this mysterious pill-donating escort of the two young women? The man had been a frequent visitor to the house—many had had a glimpse of him. Bald-headed, cross-eyed, they said. But the best witness was Police Constable Comley, on duty on Stamford Street earlier that same evening, and who saw him return with the young women. He was about forty to fifty, said the constable, who recognized him for a regular visitor of the establishment, about five feet nine, wore glasses, had a moustache and no whiskers and was dressed in a dark overcoat and silk hat. This was Fred, and a description of him was given to the constables in this neighborhood with orders to keep on the look out for him.

NOW a month later, Constable Comley who had seen the bald and cross-eyed companion of Alice Marsh and Emma Shrivell suddenly spotted him again on Westminster Bridge Road. The constable saw him eyeing the women passing, then greet one and go off with her. Following at a discreet distance, he saw the two enter a house.

That gave Constable Comley time to get a message to headquarters and Constable Ward was sent to join him. Together they saw him emerge from the house he had entered with the young woman and while Comley went in to see if this young woman had been given any pills (she hadn't) the other constable, in plain clothes, followed the man.

The man went in a straight line to 103 Lambeth Palace Road and when

Ward saw him open the door with a latch key, he rightly deducted that here was his home.

Discreet inquiries brought out a little of the background of the man. His name was Neill Cream, an American of Scotch parentage, who claimed to be a doctor. He seemed to have an income. But that was all the constable learned. Obviously it was not enough to take any action against him. But Scotland Yard determined to keep him under surveillance nevertheless.

Shortly after his return to London, Cream had made the acquaintance of a young man at whose quarters he frequently dropped in. And this John Haynes, for a reason soon cleared up, became aware that his guest was being followed. And on this particular evening was, despite a heavy rain, waiting outside to accompany Cream on his homeward trip.

"Why is that man following you, Cream?" Haynes demanded after explaining his suspicions.

Cream did not seem at all disturbed. "There's a fellow in my house, a medical student, the police suspect of having been the man who poisoned three women he picked up on the street," he explained. "And because I live there, they're keeping an eye on me."

This wasn't the first time Cream had told of his suspicion of young Harper, the medical student. He had mentioned them to Miss Emily Sleeper, his landlady's daughter, and even told her he was working with the police.

But the last week in April he went even a step farther. On the 26th of the month, Dr. Harper of Barnstable, father of the young medical student, received a letter stating that "one of my operators has indisputable evidence that your son, W. J. Harper, poisoned two girls on the 12th inst. and that I am willing to give you said evidence (so you can suppress it) for the sum of £1,500."

The letter was signed "W. H. Murray"—and ended with the advice, if Dr. Harper wanted to get in touch with him, to place an advertisement in the *Daily Chronicle*. But if he didn't agree to his terms, he, Murray, was going to get in touch with the coroner at once.

Dr. Harper reacted as had the two other recipients of similar letters. He forwarded the letter immediately to Scotland Yard. But this time the letter was not filed away; it was carefully scrutinized. It was to provide several connecting links that made deep impressions on a jury.

But unlike his actions heretofore, Cream wrote Coroner G. P. Wyatt that he had positive proof that Walter Harper, student of St. Thomas Hospital was responsible for the death of Alice Marsh and Emma Shrivell by having poisoned them with strychnine. By paying the bill for his services, he would hand over the proof. This letter was signed "W. H. Murray".

IN the meantime Haynes, Cream's friend, who happened to be a private enquiry agent in the employ of the British Government—(we would call him in the Secret Service) became suspicious of Cream and his stories. And while he listened to the other's stories, including his accusations, against young Harper, he began to make notes, adroitly to question Cream, making him explain his contradictions and get in further complications.

It was these notes later that were to prove a very definite help to Scotland Yard.

Though there was no obvious connecting link at the moment between Cream and the "Murray" who had written to Dr. Harper and the Coroner,

through Haynes, he was identified as the writer.

Now Cream at Haynes' rooms had met Sergeant Patrick McIntyre of Scotland Yard's C.I.D. as a fellow guest. And when it became known that he had this contact with Cream, he was delegated to visit the man at his rooms.

McIntyre explained his visit by saying Cream's account of the deaths of the Marsh and Shrivell women had been so important that he, McIntyre, wanted to talk it over with him further.

Cream now explained that all his information came from a detective named Murray who had some time ago stopped him on the street, introduced himself, and began to talk of the murder of the two women.

"He knew I lived in the same house with young Harper," went on Cream, "and he had a letter warning the young girls to stay away from the doctor or they would be treated as he had treated Clover and Harvey." More than that Cream could not give.

McIntyre managed to get, before the visit ended, a sheet of Cream's writing paper and also a sample of his handwriting. Examined at Scotland Yard, it proved to be identical with the paper on which the letters to Dr. Harper and Coroner Wyatt had been written. All three bore the watermark—"Fairfield-Superfine Quality." (It came from a Canadian mill and had probably been brought back by Cream.)

And the handwriting of these letters matched the script of the bald cross-eyed Cream.

Yet Scotland Yard did not feel it had enough evidence against Cream to accuse him of the murders of the Marsh and Shrivell women. But with the cooperation of Dr. Harper, he was arrested for sending a blackmailing letter. This was the 3rd of June, eight months since Ellen Donworth had taken those fatal pills.

Now while Scotland Yard was suspecting that Cream was involved somehow with the sudden deaths of Alice Marsh and Emma Shrivell, it had never occurred to connect him up with the death of Matilda Clover. Not until he told the story of the stranger, the fictitious detective Murray.

McIntyre naturally repeated this story of Cream's. It was decided to look up the details of the sudden death of Matilda Clover the preceding October. The death certificate, true, said acute alcoholism. But the symptoms, as reported by the landlady and Lucy Rose, the slavey, were suggestive of strychnine poisoning.

Detective McIntyre went to see Lucy Rose. And for the first time she told of a letter received by Matilda Clover the morning of her death. Matilda had left the letter open on a table during the day and Lucy had read it.

Fred asked for the appointment that evening—and at the end warned Matilda to destroy the note. And Matilda had.

The story had a reminiscent sound, thought McIntyre. And he made a mental note to try to follow up a hunch.

Lucy's description of Matilda Clover's escort fitted Cream. And from a group of men, bald and wearing glasses and of the same build, the young girl picked out Cream as the man she knew as Fred.

An order was made to disinter Matilda Clover's body. It was found in a pauper's grave; already fourteen other caskets had been placed above it.

The second autopsy brought out that Matilda Clover had died, not of acute alcoholism, but of strychnine.

AND now this very fact became evidence against Neill Cream. For

until this second autopsy, no one had suspected poisoning. Only the writer of the blackmailing letter to Sir William Broadbent had mentioned strychnine. Who could have known this, except the man who gave it to her?

Then the letter signed "Bayne" had come from this Neill Cream, too!

The hunch that had led McIntyre to this blackmailing letter was still working. Hadn't there been another letter of the same order received about the same time by another well-known and reputable citizen.

The letter to Mr. Smith, signed "Malone", accusing him of the murder of Ellen Donworth was recovered from the files. It was in the same handwriting as the other two blackmailing letters, the one to Dr. Broadbent and the third to Dr. Harper of Barnstable.

Now this fourth girl was brought into Cream's circle. Ellen Donworth. No one had tied him up with her before. But again the facts showed the connecting link. There was the report of the inquest. The friend had testified of a letter Ellen Donworth received that morning. He had asked the girl to bring the letter with her. That, of course, was so that he could make sure it was destroyed.

And here the autopsy had shown the presence of strychnine in the contents of her stomach.

But though it was generally felt that this Neill Cream had brought about the death of Ellen Donworth, Alice Marsh, and Emma Shrivell, it was as the murderer of Matilda Clover that the state meant to prove him guilty.

Additional evidence was gradually gathered against Cream. In his bedroom was found a case containing fifty-four bottles of pills. Seven of these bottles contained strychnine, a small amount, the usual dose. But he had bought large gelatine capsules and in these he had evidently put enough strychnine so that three of them made more than a fatal dose.

The strongest evidence against Cream was supplied by the girl who got away, Lou Harvey. For discreet messages to the circle in which she moved had brought the young woman to Scotland Yard.

She identified Cream as her escort the preceding October, brought in witnesses who had seen them together. And told, moreover, of his trying to induce her to take the pills. (Evidently capsules are popularly known in England as pills.)

Cream, Scotland Yard also learned, had been implicated in other sudden deaths in the United States. In the first two instances, the evidence had not been strong enough to convict him. On the third occasion he had been found guilty of feeding strychnine in capsule form to the husband of his sweetheart. He had gotten life imprisonment which had been commuted to seventeen years and further shortened by good behavior. Then he had been freed.

It took the jury ten minutes to decide Neill Cream was guilty. And at nine o'clock, the morning of Wednesday, the 16th of November, Neill Cream took his place on the gallows.

He holds a unique place in criminal history; he gained nothing material by the death of his victims. Neither did he have any personal grievance to settle with any of those poor four girls.

He evidently did not crave the satisfaction of seeing them die in agony. He didn't want to enjoy their suffering. It was enough for him to know that he, with little pills he could so casually supply, could bring about an agonizing death whenever he wished.

Of such stuff are multiple murderers made.

FALL GUY

(*Continued from page 97*)

"Kidnaping is bad business, Towne. You and Cleaves were in this together."

Slipper Towne looked at his fingernails and thought it over and said, "He maybe took her to a tenement we rented on Dyer Street. I'm not sayin' he did. I never told him to snatch the girl—just to have a talk with her."

Captain Sackett sent for a couple of his men and told them to go to Dyer Street, told them the number, and what to look for. He said to me, "Perhaps you'd like to go along, Ward."

I went along. It was I, twenty minutes later, who cut Helen loose from the chair to which she was bound, in the kitchen of the tenement . . . and took her in my arms, and told her, as best I could, that everything was going to be all right.

She told us, at headquarters, that Eddie had known he was heading for trouble. For the past two years he had been private investigator for an insurance company that specialized in handling jewelry accounts—logical step up from his job with the Weldon Fischer Company.

He had been after Dakeman, the fence, for months. He had learned that Dakeman habitually used the Windham Hotel as headquarters in putting over big deals. Working from the inside, Eddie had awaited Dakeman's next coup, moved in, removed Link Andrews, and taken Andrews' place that night in hopes of nailing Dakeman red-handed.

But he had been afraid. He had known of the presence in town of Phillips—whose other name, when I heard it, was more familiar to me and would be to you—and so Eddie had left a note for his wife before venturing into the mess. This note, later read by Kel Cleaves, led Cleaves to Phillips' apartment.

I said, dazedly, "But if you and Eddie lived in Centralton the past two years, why couldn't I find you?"

They hadn't lived in Centralton, but in a neighboring town. And there was nothing queer, really queer, about Eddie's deliberate attempt to veil his activities. His job called for it.

I said, "What will you do now, Helen?"

She was brave. She hadn't cried, even while telling us about Eddie. Now she said faintly, "I—I don't know."

"You need a friend," I said, reaching for her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I'll need a friend."

The way she said it, I knew everything was going to be all right after a while. A man can be a fall guy just so long—then his luck changes.

SUPERCHARGED SABOTEURS

"IT SEEMED as if the world had exploded."

Those are the words of a bystander who witnessed perhaps the worst act of sabotage ever inspired by the German government in this country. And well might he imagine that our world was blasting itself into eternity, for standing at a point on Washington Heights, the highest area in Manhattan, he saw the Jersey side of the Hudson go up in red, blue, and yellow flames of blinding intensity. Not only that, but the shock of the explosion was so great that on all sides of him the sky was raining down glass fragments with the force and fury of machine-gun bullets. Surely he had a right to feel that our world was coming to an end, for never since has America been visited with an explosion of like intensity.

Nor was that the last of the explosion, for only seventeen minutes later another blast of almost equal fury shook the city to its foundations. New York completely forgot its calm and sophistication that day, for unrestrained bedlam had broken loose. Police whistles and fire-alarms echoed through Manhattan's man-made canyons. The streets were filled with hysterical citizens who picked their way through the rubble of bricks, glass, and smashed street signs.

It was a whole week before New York returned to its normal routine. Many had been killed outright, thousands were in hospitals suffering major injuries. Schools had suspended classes in many sections.

No, this was not an attack by countless squadrons of long range bombers. It was the result of a fire that had been started by German agents in the Black Tom ammunition dump, which used to be on the Jersey shore, just opposite from the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. This horrible tragedy, which took place on an otherwise peaceful Sunday morning on July 30, 1916, was one of the first acts of sabotage by the German government in this country. History reveals that it was probably not the first, and surely not the last.

THE Black Tom Case, as this act of sabotage has come to be known in the police files of all the countries of the world, is not the first act of sabotage in this country. The day after the tragedy, *The New York Times* printed an article showing that from 1914, when Germany first went to war with England and France, to July 30, 1916, the date of the Black Tom disaster, there had been 99 cases of unexplained explosions in various plants throughout the country, with loss of life to 120 people. There was no proof as to the exact cause, but the finger of suspicion pointed at Germany.

It was almost twenty years before the Black Tom case was solved. The Secret Service, the New York police department, and scores of private investigators combed the four corners of the globe in search of the conspirators. It was first a lead here that petered out to nothing, and then minor details that suddenly developed into clues of the greatest importance. But the persons finally responsible were tracked down, and the evidence of guilt finally obtained. True, as everyone had guessed, it was Germany who was responsible, and the day came, in June of 1939, twenty-three years after, when Germany had to pay to the United States some $50,000,000 in claims.

Now we are again engaged in a war with Germany, only this time we fight for bigger stakes, and where the stakes

are larger, the risks taken are greater. Will, then, a Germany that is made desperate by continuing defeat attempt repetitions of such acts of sabotage? The answer is that Germany has already tried, but that she has failed miserably and will probably not try again.

We are all familiar with the School for Sabotage in Berlin. There it is that Germany trains her saboteurs in every conceivable method of wreckage and destruction. After a thorough course, her graduates are further trained in the habits and way of life of the people of those countries to which they are eventually assigned. When these saboteurs are considered ready for their grand adventure, they are supplied with money and tools and are carried aboard a U-boat to a point a few miles from the coast of the country they seek to infiltrate. In the dark of night, the submarine surfaces, and the saboteurs take to inflated rubber rafts and row themselves toward the near beaches. Once ashore, they proceed in a leisurely and methodical fashion to the objectives which they have been ordered to "liquidate".

Does this work in America? The answer, of course, is "No." What might have succeeded in 1917 cannot succeed in 1943. The reason is simple enough. In 1917, there was no Federal Bureau of Investigation. That the FBI is efficient and dependable is best demonstrated by the fact that since the outbreak of the present war there has been no major act of sabotage in this country. Germany's recent scheme, elaborate and thorough in preparation though it was, ended in shameful humiliation and death in the electric chair for its participants.

It was a few hours before dawn when a Coast Guard sentry, patrolling a lonely stretch of Long Island beach, noticed several men approaching land in a rub-

ber raft. The guardsman was hopelessly outnumbered; to shoot it out against such odds was futile. Keeping his wits about him, the guardsman took the sensible course and permitted the men to make their landing. Then, instead of running back to headquarters, he engaged the men in conversation, finding out as much about them as he could; for he knew that he would have to let the men go and that this was a case for the FBI. So dull-witted were these foreign-sounding men that they attempted to bribe the guardsman not to make his report to headquarters. However, the sentry had made a careful study of them, their facial characteristics, their mannerisms, and upon his return to headquarters, he made a complete and extensive report to his commanding officer, who in turn relayed the information to the FBI.

The FBI had very little to go on, just a few hurried descriptions of men who might or might not be saboteurs who had come to this country to wreck our vital defense installations. But the FBI followed up every possible clue with painstaking thoroughness, and, as a result, the men were captured and proven to be deadly saboteurs sent here from Germany to spread destruction and disease among the civilian as well as military population. A military court was assembled, it heard the evidence, and it found those men to be guilty of being enemy agents in war-time. There was only one penalty possible—death. Not long after, they were executed, and another threat to our national security was eliminated. Again it was demonstrated to the American people that the FBI well deserved the trust placed in it by all of us.

UNTIL quite recently, the Axis countries believed the FBI to be a sloppy, inefficient, over-publicized organization. "How can the FBI expect to catch our smart, well-trained agents," they asked, "when their only experience has been with dumb American criminals?" How indeed! It is perhaps sufficient to say that when an American criminal is smart, he is surely more clever than an Axis gangster. Certainly, he is more subtle, more inventive, more ingenious. The Axis should have respected an organization that was able to apprehend criminals even after the New York and Chicago police departments had failed.

How does the FBI guard against spies and foreign agents? This question is not easily answered, since the FBI does not publicize its methods and they come to our attention only after another gang of criminals or spies has been captured.

Possibly the principal reason for the FBI's success lies in its selection of personnel. A special agent must be a college graduate, either a lawyer or an accountant; he must pass one of the most grueling written and oral tests yet devised by any law enforcement agency. Nor is that all. These young men must be physically fit in the best sense of the word, for they all pass a physical examination that is a rough equivalent of the one given by the Army Air Corps. Mental brilliance and physical perfection are not enough. They must also give evidence of good character and background, for they are investigated almost from the cradle forward.

To assist their special agents, who do field work exclusively, the FBI maintains what is probably the most elaborate laboratory for scientific crime detection in the world. Nothing that has been discovered in recent years in the fields of chemistry, physics, and biology is unknown to their research specialists. So advanced are they in scientific technique that, from a single strand of hair that might have been left at the scene

of a crime, they are able to reconstruct a fairly accurate picture of the individual unfortunate enough to leave such a tell-tale clue behind. For that single strand of hair will show a person's race, sex, approximate age, and even facial coloring. Often a lipstick smear, a smudge of dirt, some minute particles of metal are all that the laboratory technicians have to go on; but using the physicist's spectroscope, this faint clue may sometime suddenly blossom forth into forceful, conflicting evidence.

It is well to keep in mind that the FBI has the largest collection of fingerprints in the world. Whenever a city or state law enforcement agency has occasion to fingerprint a criminal, copies of those prints are immediately sent to FBI headquarters in Washington, where they are placed in giant central files. Although there are countless millions of fingerprints on file, yet so efficient is the organization that a particular print can be identified in a matter of minutes.

Our entrance into the war has multiplied the responsibilities of the FBI. The country looks to J. Edgar Hoover, its director, to ferret out the thousands of Axis spies to whom the United States has always represented the ultimate in decadent, disorderly democracy. To eliminate the Jap spy has been a relatively easy matter. Those slinking, bespectacled, slant-eyed Japs, with their ever-present miniature cameras, are no longer the familiar sight they used to be. But the FBI does not claim great credit for that. For finding a Jap agent is easy enough, since a Jap can disguise everything but the fact that he is Japanese.

However, German agents have proven to be another matter. The Germans are trained to look, to act, to think like Americans. True, it is more difficult to track them down, but the FBI has already shown the Gestapo that in the United States there is no room for Ger-

man agents, and that such agents remain in this country at their grave peril. The FBI has had occasion to compare these German agents with our own brand of domestic criminal, and it has been found that the two work very much alike, except that the German agent is dumber by far.

Strangely enough, it is the American people themselves who do most of the detective work for the FBI. For example, let us take the case of Mrs. O'Brien who lives just opposite a bar and grill. She notices that the place is frequented by foreign-looking people who, so far as she knows, do not live in the neighborhood. She also notices that these people never drink at the bar, but go into a back room from which they do not emerge until the early hours of morning. Her suspicions are aroused, and she puts a telephone call through to the FBI. Immediately upon receipt of such a call, the FBI sends a special agent to investigate, upon whose preliminary report depends whether the matter will be pressed further or dropped.

Should Mrs. O'Brien's suspicions indicate the least cause for concern, the matter is then thoroughly pursued until the guilty parties are ferreted out and a conviction obtained.

So it is that the FBI works day in and day out, protecting America's most vital interests in these hours of national crisis. It is a tribute to the FBI and to its director, J. Edgar Hoover, that not one major act of sabotage by the enemy has been consummated since our entry into war.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

Of SUPER-DETECTIVE, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1943.

State of New York, County of New York: ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Frank Armer, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Super-Detective, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, Kenneth Hutchinson, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Managing Editor, Wilton Matthews, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Business Manager, Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Frank Armer, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; Michael Estrow, 114 East 47th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; G. Donenfeld, 125 East 46th Street, New York 17, N. Y.; J. E. Wasserman, 801 Harries Bldg., Dayton, Ohio.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

FRANK ARMER, Business Manager

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 13th day of October, 1943
ALFRED B. YAFFE, Notary Public (My commission expires March 30, 1944.)

Please Locate Murder

(*Continued from page 43*)

killer of the combination—and they'd found where Quires lived through Smith's sister, of course. She'd told Trujo everything—she was crazy about him. Crazy enough about him to turn up her own brother. She'd given Quires a play on Smith's instructions, when Quires had gone out to visit his father—but Trujo knew of it all the time and approved.

It was just that both Smith and Trujo worked every possible angle. They didn't overlook a bet and I didn't blame them. They were shooting for half a million bucks.

There was one thing I didn't know and Trujo died before he could tell me. I wanted to know why the old man was so mad at Smith—but I never learned.

It really worked out fine for me. By the time it was finished, I'd collected from the bank, from Madelon Quires, and from Arnold Quires. He paid me for breaking up the jam—though it was a thing that just broke itself.

But he paid and that was that.

And then, when I got back, I really got the break.

Miss Higginbotham came in and stood before the desk, looking very strict and stern. As much that way as she could, anyway.

"I wish to resign, Mr. McGowan," she said.

I said: "Oh, no, Miss Higginbotham."

"Oh, yes, Mr. McGowan. I—I don't feel it's safe for me to work here."

I said: "If you'd stay in the office and not go running out to Texas, where you don't belong, you'd be safe enough."

"It—it isn't that. I—I . . ."

"You what?"

"It's the men, Mr. McGowan. They—every time somebody comes up to see you, they pinch me."

Then she got mad when I laughed.

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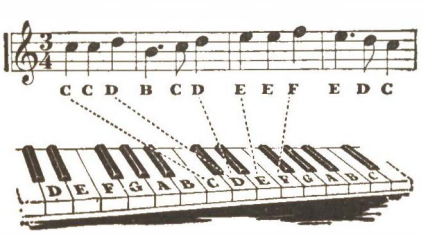

● Look at the diagram. The first note on the music is "C." Follow the dotted line to the keyboard and locate "C" on the piano. Find the other notes the same way. Now strike the notes as indicated and you'll be playing the melody of that famous patriotic hymn, "America." Easy as A-B-C, isn't it?

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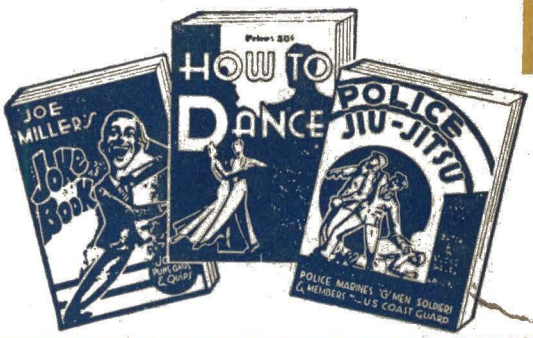

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