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APRIL



*Stands
for
Murder*

by *Roger Torrey*



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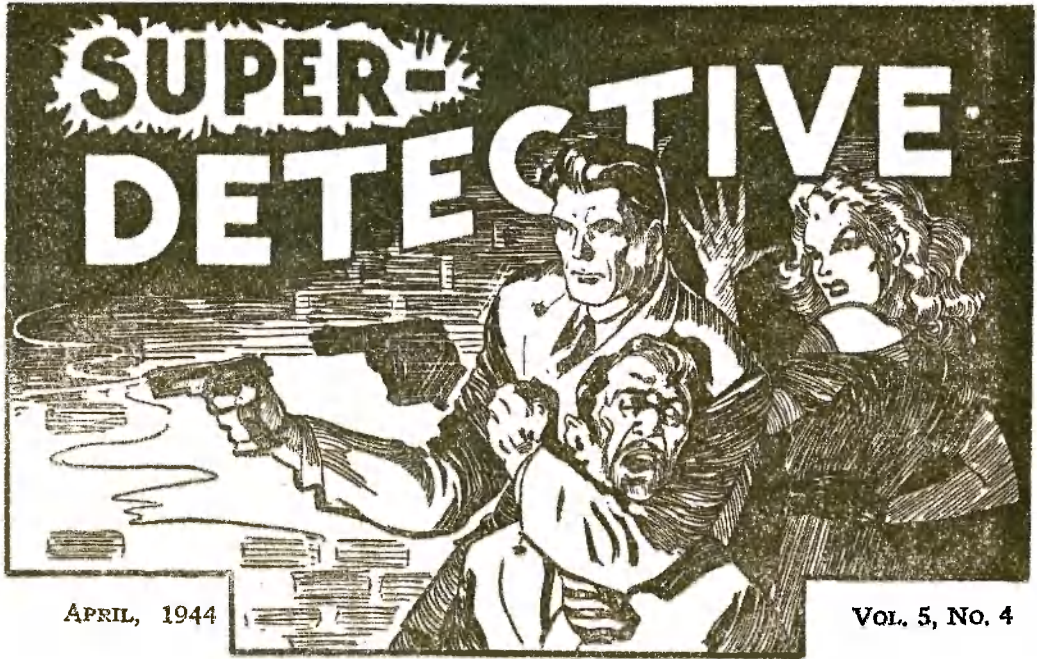
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APRIL, 1944

VOL. 5, No. 4

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M Stands For

By ROGER TORREY

I'D known old Tom Duffy all my life and I knew that the old gent wouldn't have asked for a favor if he hadn't needed one. He wasn't the kind of old geezer that ran around asking for help—the old boy wouldn't have been working as a night watchman if he'd wanted to live with his friends.

He said: "That you, Joe?"

"That's right."

"Will you do something for me?"

"Sure."

"Will you take over for me tonight?"

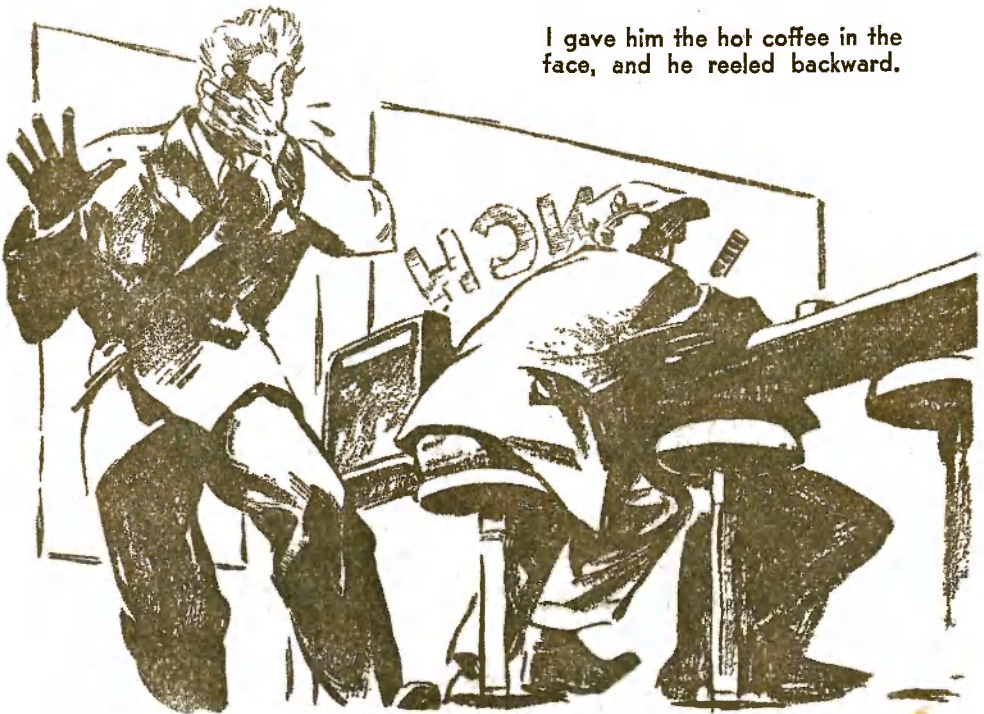
I didn't say anything for a minute. I'd expected the old boy to ask for ten to take him over a rough spot or something, and the idea of playing

watchdog all night in a warehouse didn't appeal to me.

He said apologetically: "I wouldn't ask, Joe, but I don't know of anybody but you I can get. You know how it is with all this war work. Everybody's got a job that wants one. And I can't go out on the street and pick up some bum. I'd get fired for sure if I did that."

I said I'd be glad to help out and he told me he'd already called the man on shift and told him he'd have to send a substitute that night. And that if I got to the warehouse around eleven-thirty, the guy would take me around and show me where I had to punch in to show I'd made the rounds.

I gave him the hot coffee in the face, and he reeled backward.



MURDER

Playing watch dog all night in a warehouse isn't much fun, but it's a little different when it's war stuff. As a matter of fact, most everything is, directly or indirectly, war stuff these days. And when it's war stuff in a warehouse, that spells d-a-n-g-e-r. . .



He went on with: "I wouldn't ask you, Joe, but I'm sick as a dog. I just can't make it, and it's too good a job to lose by not showing up. And if I tell the boss I'm sick, he'll lay me off, and it's a good job for me."

I said I understood and that I'd be down at the place by eleven-thirty. And then I asked: "What's the matter, Tom? Where's it hurt you?"

He thought it was something he'd had for dinner, he said. I told him to get a doctor if he felt any worse, but he said he'd take a couple of pills and go to bed and that he'd be all right in the morning.

And then I hung up and got into some old clothes I'd kept for no reason I'd ever been able to figure, and started out. It was already after ten and by the time I'd eaten and got down to the place, it would be time to make the rounds with the man already working.

HE turned out to be an old man of **LI** about sixty. And a sour old boy if there ever was one. He gave the idea that Tom and I had put up a job to loot the place. He looked at my private badge and checked my gun number with the permit to carry it. He asked me just what Tom had told me—and finally admitted it checked with what Tom had told him. He gave me Tom's clock—the thing that's used to punch in with, using different keys around the building, and that registers the time and key number on a tape inside it.

Then we went out for him to take me around the trip I'd have to make every hour.

I said: "You're pretty careful about who's filling in, mister."

"We're on the docks."

"Sure," I said. I'd walked along the waterfront to get to the place and this was no news.

"Well, it's war now."

This was no news either. I'd been turned down by every branch of the service because of a bad leg. The bone had been ticked by a bullet and that was enough to keep me out, according to the doctors. According to me I was as good as ever but you can't argue with those fellows when they're wearing bars on their shoulders and sleeves.

"Right now they're loading a boat at the next dock."

"War stuff?"

He looked at me as though I didn't have good sense. "Sonny, right now every boat's carrying war stuff. Even if it's for the civilians, it's war stuff. We all got to eat and live, don't we? Soldiers and civilians both. Anything that can carry supplies of any kind is helping the war."

I gave the old boy credit for good sense at that.

He showed me sixteen stations where I was supposed to punch the clock and we went back to his office. A cubby hole, just by the front door.

He said: "You got it all?"

"Sure."

"Nobody's to come in at all."

"Sure."

"I mean nobody. Some of the boys that are loading the ship next to us might want to sneak in here for a smoke. Don't let 'em."

"I won't."

"And the beat cop may stop by to see that everything's all right."

"It's all right to let him in, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but he won't stay. Maybe just stick his head in to see, that's all."

I said I understood, and he took his lunch bucket and left.

I remembered then that I'd forgotten to have the cafe make me a lunch like that—and thought I'd probably be plenty hungry by eight in the morning, when I went off shift.

I made the one and the two o'clock rounds without a thing happening. The building had six stories and covered half the block, and it took at least half an hour to cover the distance. It was probably half full of stuff to be shipped—with boxes and barrels and crates standing separated with just passages between them. I didn't turn on any lights—I wasn't supposed to do that. Just went through with a big flashlight and with that clock arrangement around my neck on a strap. The building was empty except for myself, of course, but there was lots of noise just the same. Creaking and stuff like that. I haven't been scared of the dark since I was four years old, but at that, it's no fun to wander around a strange place, hour after hour. I could see some reason for having a watch dog—he'd have been company if nothing else.

And then at two-fifteen there was a knock on the door right by the cubby. I didn't take any chances but opened it with my gun in hand.

A voice said: "Hey, pal."

I turned the light on it. It was a big, red-faced man who looked to be about three sheets in the wind.

"You ain't Old Tom," he said accusingly.

"Nope."

"Where's Old Tom?"

"Sick."

"The hell you say!"

"That's right."

"You taking his place?"

"That's right."

He noticed the gun. He said: "Hey! Is that thing loaded?"

"That's right."

"Then point it the other way, for—sake."

"You want something?"

"Sure."

"What."

"I was going to buy Old Tom a drink."

"He's home and in bed. He wouldn't want it."

"What about you, pal?"

"I don't want it, either."

"Snooty, hunh?"

"That's right."

He thought that over and then gave me a drunken bow. "All right, mister," he said. "I'll say goodnight and to hell with you."

"And to hell with you," I told him, closing the door.

BECAUSE of that I wasn't too much startled when the next knock came, not two minutes later.

I opened the door the same way, with the gun in one hand and the flash in the other. But a different voice said:

"You're not Tom?"

This time the man was about sixty, tall and thin and mean looking. Behind him was another man, as tall and as thin, but with a cheery happy look. Both of them were well dressed and both of them looked as though they were used to giving orders instead of taking them.

I said: "No, I'm not Tom."

"Who are you?"

"I'm taking his place."

"What's your name?"

I showed the gun and said: "Run along, brother. We're closed for the night."

The second man laughed and said: "Good man! But it's all right. We own the place."

"I don't know that."

The first one snapped: "I'll prove it, smart guy. And then d'ya suppose you'll let me in to my own place of business?"

"Sure."

He brought out identification that showed him to be Horace A. Wilcox. His friend brought out papers that showed him to be Franklyn H. Truesdale. That

was right and I told them so and stood back from the door. They followed me in and I closed and locked the door.

"A matter came up," said Truesdale, "that we wanted to check. Just go on and do your work."

"Sure."

Wilcox said sharply: "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"To let you out, after you make your check."

Wilcox scowled but Truesdale laughed and said: "Good man! That's what we're paying you for, or rather what we're paying old Tom Duffy for. By the way, what's the matter with him?"

"Sick."

"You a friend of his?"

"That's right. I'm a private cop, name of Joseph Shannon."

"I see. Nothing seriously wrong with Tom, is there?"

"I don't think so. He called me and told me he'd eaten something that had disagreed with him, is all."

"And so you took his place?"

"That's right."

"Haven't got much to say, eh?"

"Nope."

He laughed again and said: "Well, that's fine. Come on, Horace, let's get at it."

They went to the warehouse office, which was half way down the main floor we were on, and I followed after them and waited while they looked through some file. I didn't notice what it was—just stood by the door and kept an eye on them. It took them maybe five minutes and then we went back to the door.

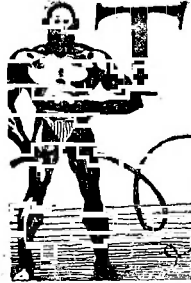
"You're doing fine," said Truesdale. "Just keep up the good work. And tell old Tom not to worry about his job."

"I'll do that," I said, letting them out.

That gave me just enough time to make my three o'clock round.

CHAPTER II

The Lady



HE hospital call woke me at eleven the following morning. It was from some doctor I'd never heard of and he wanted to tell me Old Tom was a very sick man. They'd taken him to the emergency ward about four in the morning and they were still trying to get all the poison from him.

I said: "Poison?"

"Yes. Just what it is we don't know yet. An arsenic of some kind, that's all we'll know until we get the laboratory report."

"The hell you say."

"The old gentleman is conscious and worrying about his job. He's in no shape to receive visitors or I'd ask you to talk with him about it. You're taking charge of it for him, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I gathered that. May I assure him that everything's all right?"

"You may. When could I see him?"

"Certainly not until tomorrow, if then. He's an elderly man and the reaction at that age isn't too good. You understand, I'm sure."

"Yeah. Did you report it to the police?"

"At once. They will probably call on you. They hinted as much."

"I'll be here. You tell Tom everything's fine."

"Goodbye, Mr. Shannon."

And that was that. I went back to bed, trying to figure why anybody would try to poison a nice old man like Tom Duffy. And when the police made their call two hours later, I found they couldn't think of any more reason for it than I could.

They happened to be two of the boys I didn't know, but I'd heard my dad and old Tom mention one of them several times. An old-timer on the force and another Mick, named Hanrahan, and a tough old boy if there ever was one. His partner, a bird named Olson, just was with him and that was all. Didn't say more than, "Glad to meet you," when he came in and "Goodbye" when he left. But Hanrahan said plenty and most of it was bad language.

I took it that he'd known and thought a lot of Old Tom for years, and that he'd raise hell with the man that poisoned him, if and when he got his hands on him.

That was fair enough with me. I'd have done the same.

By that time I'd given up trying to get any sleep, and as soon as Hanrahan and his side-kick left, I went down to the corner for breakfast. It was there that two of the precinct cops found me. They sat down at my table and consented to a cup of coffee, and then Johnny Smithers started the ball.

"D'ya know a man named Johnson?" he asked.

I said I didn't.

Fleming, the other cop, said: "Think hard, Joe."

"I've probably met a lot of guys by that name. It's a common one. But I don't recall any right now."

Smithers said coaxingly: "A big guy. A guy that works on the docks."

"Unh-huh. I don't place him."

"Ever see this?"

HE held out a slip of paper torn from a cheap notebook, and on it was written: JOSEPH TUMULTY SHANNON—GLENDARM—406.

I said: "It's my name and my hotel and my room number. But I never saw it before. Where'd you get it?"

"From this Johnson."

"Where'd he get it?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. The guy's dead."

"The hell you say."

"He is. As dead as mutton. This was on him and the Central Station asked us to check with you on it because you're in our territory and we know you."

"Then you know that if I knew him I'd say so."

Fleming said: "We're not so sure about that, Joe. You don't say much about your business to the cops."

"I'm not supposed to. I've got to protect my clients, when I get one of the things."

"Sure, sure. Now what about Johnson?"

"I don't know a thing about him."

"Why'd he have your name?"

"I don't know."

"You finished with lunch?"

"It's breakfast."

"Well, breakfast then. Whatever it is you been eating."

"Sure."

"Mind coming down and looking at this guy?"

I liked both the boys but I wasn't under any illusions about them. Cops are cops, and they'd have taken me any place they wanted me to go whether I was willing or not.

I said: "Why sure. Why not?"

So we rode down to the morgue in one of the precinct cars.

THE guy was in the room where they do the P. M.'s, and the assistant-medical-examiner who was doing the autopsy was just sewing him up. Very neatly, too, with a sort of cross-stitch pattern that went clear up his front. He was all washed up nice and clean, and he looked like a big homely sawdust stuffed doll.

And for a moment I didn't place him.

Then I said: "Now listen! I don't know this bird but I talked to him."

Just last night. When I was working for old Tom Duffy."

Both Fleming and Smithers nodded happily.

"He came to the warehouse—I was filling in for old Tom on his watchman job last night—and he asked for Tom. That was all. He said he wanted to buy Tom a drink."

"And that was all?" asked Smithers.

"That was all."

"And you didn't know him before?"

"I did not."

"Then how'd he get your name?"

"That I don't know."

Smithers nodded to Fleming. And then said to me: "We'd better talk to Duffy about him, then. Where does he live?"

I gave 'em Tom's address and said: "But he won't be home now. He's at the hospital. Somebody gave him some poison. Hanrahan, out of the Central Bureau's working on it now. He already talked to me about it this morning."

"Poisoned, you say?"

"That's what the doctor said."

Smithers looked at Fleming and said seriously: "This damn' thing is getting all mixed up."

They went over to Central then and I had to take a cab back to the hotel. They wanted to talk with Hanrahan and in a hurry.

And I wanted a drink in a hurry, even if I had just finished breakfast. I don't like to look at dead people, even if they're strangers like this Johnson was. And the M. E. hadn't bothered to fix his head up very much and I kept thinking about how the front of it was smashed in by his temples.

I really needed that drink.

WHEN the desk phoned that afternoon about four and said a Mrs. Carson was downstairs, I had a notion to tell them to keep her there. I was thinking about having to wander around

that damned warehouse another night and wasn't at all happy with the thought. And then I thought of how it might be business and that my future would probably be free of night watching when old Tom got well and that I could use a set of money then and of how business often brought some of the same.

So I said: "Okay, send her up."

They did. She was a buxom blonde, in her middle thirties, I thought. She looked to be about twenty-seven, so that would make her around thirty-five when the make-up was discounted. She was built all right but just a bit too much of it, and she had as pretty eyes as I ever saw in a woman. Big and blue and direct. She wore a tailored suit that looked as though it had cost a lot of money and the rest of her outfit either matched or contrasted well with it.

All in all, she'd put a lot of time and thought on herself, that was apparent.

She hesitated when I opened the door and asked: "Mr. Shannon? Mr. Joseph Shannon?"

"That's right."

She still hesitated. "The detective?"

"That's right."

She said: "But I thought—somehow I got the impression you'd be an older man. Well, a, let us say, a harder man."

"I'm thirty odd and it's quite odd, Mrs. Carson. Will you come in?"

She came in and I sat her in my best chair, the one I'll always think the hotel gave me by mistake. The Glendarm's all right—it's comfortable—but it's old and the furniture is the same way. My best chair must have been some replacement because it was brand spang new.

I said: "Would you care for a drink?"

She said she would, with no fuss about it. I liked that. Most gals hem and haw while they're stretching their arms out of shape reaching for the stuff.

I made a couple of highballs, getting

That first blow knocked him to his knees and lined him up for the next one.



the ice and soda from the ice chest in the pantry. She said:

"You seem very comfortable here, Mr. Shannon."

I waved and said: "Sure. A suite, no less. You see I couldn't very well entertain business customers in a bedroom and this is my business office."

"I see. It's business I want to talk to you about."

"All right"

"It's about my husband. He's in Chicago."

"Yes."

"And he's not alone."

That was a cinch. He couldn't very well have been in Chicago and been

alone, but I didn't point this out.

"He's with his secretary, Mr. Shannon, and there's absolutely no reason he should take her with him on this particular trip. While it's business, or supposedly, it's not the sort of business that requires a secretary. Do you understand me?"

"Sure."

"It's been going on some time, this attachment."

"D'ya know that or just suspect that?"

"I know it. But this is my chance to prove it."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Carson, but you've made a natural mistake. I don't take that kind of case. I'm sorry. I can give you the names of two or three other men who would handle it for you gladly, however."

"But I wanted you, yourself."

"Why?"

"Well, because—because a friend of mine mentioned you as being so discreet."

"Who's the friend?"

She gave me a name I'd never heard of and I said so.

SHE said: "We just happened to be talking once, you know how women do, and she told me about you. I suppose at that she'd just heard of you as I have."

"Probably."

"You don't talk very much, do you, Mr. Shannon?"

I said I'd found that a yes and a no usually was enough, and that when they were elaborated on was when the trouble started.

She said hopefully: "But you haven't mentioned the fee, nor have I. I'd be willing to pay more than the customary charge for this service. Just because I know it would be between us, of course. That is, if I'm right and there's some-

thing wrong between my husband and this Wilkes girl."

I said I was sorry and gave her the name of a couple of my poorest competitors. And I mean poor in the proper sense. Both of them nice guys and both of them starving to death and willing to take any kind of case to pay the grocery bill.

But at that I didn't think I'd seen the last of Mrs. Carson. Just taking it from the way she took another drink before she left and the way her pretty blue eyes looked at me.

It wasn't that she was come-hither because she wasn't that at all. She acted like a lady every second. But she had that unhappy-married look along with a softness, and the combination's bad most of the time.

CHAPTER III

A Delicate Errand



THAT night went with no excitement, though the old boy who was on the job, made me tell him every little thing that had happened the night before. I told him about Johnson stopping by to give old Tom a drink, and he didn't like it a bit.

He said: "I know Duffy. He doesn't drink on the job."

I knew old Tom, too, but I wasn't so sure about that. I've never known a Mick yet that wouldn't take a drink once in a while, and a drink would come in handy during those long hours of the night. However, I said I was sure old Tom wouldn't do a thing like that, just to get along.

And I said nothing about Johnson being murdered. It was none of my new pal's business, that I could see.

He got pretty fussed when I told him about the bosses being down. He said: "I've worked this job two years and a half now and I never ever seen 'em. I don't even know what they look like. The super hired me and he's the only man I seen here at nights that had any right here."

"Just happened, I guess."

He said: "I was worrying all night because I forgot to tell you something. You know that number six station?"

He meant the sixth place I was supposed to punch the clock. I said I remembered it very well.

"That's where the vault is, mister. I should have told you to keep an eye out there. That's where the insured stuff is put."

"Yeah?"

"You know. Things like furs, silk, anything that's really worth something to a thief."

"I get the idea."

"You don't," he fretted. "Anything that's put in there is something that can be sold in a hurry, most of the time. The rest of the stuff is valuable I suppose, but not that way. Stuff in the vault could be hocked, if you know what I mean."

"Sure. I'll watch it"

"I should have told you last night."

"Nothing happened, so what difference does it make?"

When he left, he was still muttering about the vault. He acted like anything that might be in it belonged to him and was his responsibility alone.

I left when they opened the place at eight o'clock and I stopped in the little hole in the wall right down the street for a cup of coffee before going back to the hotel and eating a regular breakfast. It's times like that when a cup of coffee really is good. I was parked at the counter, holding the heavy white mug in both hands and waiting for it to get cool enough to sip, and I wasn't

paying any attention to who was next to me. That is, other than to notice somebody had come in after me and ordered coffee as I had.

Then this one said: "Hey! Ain't you the new watchman up at the W. & T.?"

I said: "No." I was taking old Tom's place as watchman, all right, but that didn't make me one as a steady diet.

"I thought you was."

"Okay."

"Ain't your name Shannon?"

"Yeah!"

"I thought I knew you. How's it going, boy?"

I turned and saw I was talking with a big guy, a man around sixty. Grey haired, with it standing straight up, and he wore no hat so I got the full benefit of the effect. He was very dark so the hair showed up like a fright wig.

I said: "You win the bet, brother. I never saw you in my life before."

"Sure you did. Don't you remember? I met you at that brawl Local Seventy-nine put on."

I went back to my coffee.

"You know. At the Longshoreman's Hall."

"I've never been in the place."

"It must've been your twin brother then."

"I'm the only child."

"I don't get it."

"I'm an orphan. I've got no mother. I've got no father. I've got no brother. I've got no sister. And if I wanted to talk, I'd hire a hall."

"Snooty, hunh?"

I took a sip of the coffee and found it was still too hot to drink. And then he caught me by the shoulder and twisted me on the stool and snarled: "You don't give me the run-around, boy."

I gave him the hot coffee in the face, instead, and he put his hands up to his face and started for the door. He

was saying something but it could have been in Chinese. His hands were covering his face and the words were coming out between sort of whimpering sounds. The place was narrow, just room enough for a passageway behind the counter and the stools, and he stumbled into the stools and the people sitting on them and bounced from there to the wall and back again. He was making the course stone blind but he was covering the territory at a nice rate in spite of it.

Nobody in the place said a word. They just watched him go out the door and stagger down the street.

I said to the waiter: "Could I have another cup of coffee, please?"

He came out of his trance and said: "Yes sir, yes sir."

And, when he brought it, he said out of the corner of his mouth: "You shouldn't ought to have done that, brother. No sir. That was big Tom Leany."

"I'm Big Tom Shannon," I said. "Should I sit here and let the guy go on trying to sell me a hot watch? Hey? When I'm minding my own business and after I tell him I'm not interested? Hey?"

"You got it wrong, brother. Big Tom's not handling any hot watches."

"What's he doing then?"

"He's business agent for Seventy-Nine. The local."

"Local?"

"Stevedore's Union, mister."

I said: "I guess I made a mistake then," but that was just for the waiter. I hadn't slipped a bit. The big guy, Leany, had been bracing me because I was filling in for old Tom, and there was no doubt about it.

I was just sorry the coffee wasn't hotter.

TOM DUFFY died that day about noon. The doctor called me and told me an hour after it happened, and he

seemed even sorrier than the average doctor is over losing a patient.

"He was a fine old man," he said. "A fine old fellow. He was just too old—he didn't react the way he should have."

"It's tough," I said.

"He spoke of you so often, Mr. Shannon. And he seemed to be getting better."

"I know you fellows did your best."

"I even thought I'd be able to call you and tell you you could see him shortly."

"I'd have liked to."

"He had no visitors at all, except, of course, one of the men he worked for. A Mr. Truesdale, I think."

"That would be right."

"Just a duty call, I gathered."

"I suppose."

I told him I'd go to where old Tom lived and find out what I could, and that I'd make arrangements for the funeral. I didn't know for sure, but I seemed to remember Tom telling me he carried a little insurance in some lodge he'd joined. It would be enough to bury him, I thought, though I'd have taken care of that myself if it was necessary.

For that matter I could have gone down to the station house and spread the word around the old-timers and got a subscription that would have done the job. Tom knew all the old boys on the force, as near as I could tell.

I said: "That's fine, doctor, I'll look after it. And I thank you for your courtesy."

He told me he was only sorry he had to give me such bad news and I got dressed, with the idea of going down to Tom's place and seeing what was to be done.

And then there was a knock on the door and I opened up for Hanrahan.

"I was going to get in touch with you," I said. "Old Tom's dead and somebody will have to look after the

She set her teeth in my wrist
and clung there.



funeral and things. How do I go about
it?"

"You don't," he said.

"Somebody's got to."

"We'll do it."

"I know he was poisoned, lieutenant.
But he's got to be buried."

"You still on his job?"

"Sure."

"You going to stay on?"

"Hell, no."

"Why not?"

"I'm no night watchman."

"You're working at it."

"Just to help out Tom. He don't need it now."

HANRAHAN said slowly: "No, he don't need it now. Listen, Joe, I knew your old man. So I'm going to give you a word of warning. As a cop I should keep my trap shut, but as a friend of your dad's I'll say it. It's this. Watch your step."

I said: "Thanks."

"D'ya know what I mean?"

"I do not."

"I wish I knew whether you're telling the truth."

I said: "You were a friend of my old man's and so I'm passing that crack. Let's have no more, eh, lieutenant."

"Your dad was a sorehead, too."

I said nothing.

"This is murder, Joe, and the D. A. will be going through Tom's effects. I'll keep you in touch with things as much as I can. If you can help, I know you will. Is that all right?"

I said: "It's all right."

He left, giving me a funny look while doing it, and I sat down and had a long drink and thought things over. I'd told him it was all right but it wasn't, not by a damned sight. I'd played dumb and hadn't lost my head, but it was easy enough to see what Hanrahan was hinting at.

Tom had been poisoned and the police weren't at all sure that I didn't have something to do with it, though why I should have poisoned the old man was something I didn't know. I had no motive, outside of working for the old boy while he was sick—and that didn't make sense to me.

And I was still trying to puzzle it out when the desk called.

"Mr. Carson to see you, Mr. Shannon."

"Mr. Carson."

"Why, yes."

"Not Mrs. Carson."

"Why, no."

I said: "Send him up."

CARSON was about forty, one of the big smiling kind that played football in college and sold bonds for two years afterwards on the strength of it. His card read: **ALBERT MELTON CARSON—INSURANCE**, so he'd never drifted too far away from the bond business. Bonds and insurance are cousins in the field, as far as I'm concerned.

I said: "I'm glad to know you, Mr. Carson. Will you join me?"

He said he would and I made him a drink and myself another.

I said: "I'm not a secret drinker but I just had some bad news. An old friend died."

"I'm very sorry," he said, with just the right way of saying it. He didn't act broken-hearted. After all, it wasn't his old friend that had died. But he did act sincerely sorry and I liked that, even if I put it down to a smooth professional way of handling himself.

I said: "There's nothing I can do about it. At least not now."

He agreed and finished half his drink. He sat there with it in one hand and with his head bent down, staring at my shabby old carpet, and when he spoke, he didn't look up.

He said: "I'm here on a delicate errand, Mr. Shannon. I hardly know how to begin."

I waited.

"My wife was here to see you, I believe."

"She tell you that?"

"She did."

"I've got such a lousy memory for names I never can remember who I've talked with."

"Very discreet, Mr. Shannon."

"I'm in that kind of a business."

"I'm glad to know you feel that way about it. I'm here on business and I don't want it known."

I said nothing. If he wanted to speak up, that was all right. In the meantime, there was no reason for hurrying him.

"My wife tells me you recommended some friend of yours."

I said nothing.

"A man named Harris, Charles Harris."

"I know a Charley Harris," I admitted.

"As a matter of fact, I'd already left Chicago when my wife was seeing you. She was unduly concerned."

I thought I'd be safe in saying: "Women get funny notions sometimes, all right."

"I am not objecting to a divorce, Mr. Shannon. But I want it on my terms. Am I being plain enough?"

"Sure. You want to sue rather than be sued. Or if she sues, you want enough on a counter-claim to be protected; that in case the divorce doesn't go through on the terms you and she have agreed on."

"That's it exactly."

I waited some more.

"You're a hard man to talk with, Mr. Shannon. You make the other party make all the conversation."

"Sure."

"I like it. If you won't talk to me, you won't talk to somebody else. Here's my proposition. We come originally from Chicago. My wife visits there quite frequently. While there she sees certain men—I will give you their names when you are ready to leave. I would like you to go to Chicago when she does and obtain the necessary information of the kind I will need if matters ever come to such a pass that a divorce is inevitable."

"No dice."

"I will not use that information, Mr. Shannon, as I say, unless it's necessary. It's for my own protection as you understand."

"Sure. But I'm not your party. I don't

handle stuff like that. But I'll give you the names of a couple of boys that will, if that will help."

He said: "Well, I'll be damned!"

Then he started laughing and he actually sounded as if he meant it.

"Then you really meant what you told my wife? About not taking any divorce cases?"

"Sure."

"Regardless of the amount of money I'd be willing to pay for this information?"

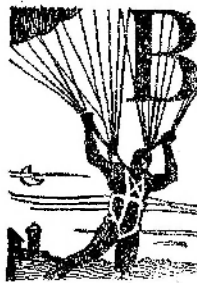
"I've still got a dime or two in the bank. It isn't the money—it's just out of my line."

He didn't argue. He just shook hands and left. And afterward I got to thinking about what a nice smile he had but how his eyes didn't soften a bit when he gave it to you, and decided I didn't like him near as much as I had when I'd first started talking with him.

He never did have me fooled in a big way. I wouldn't have trusted him as far as I can throw a bull by the tail, and that from the second I saw him.

CHAPTER IV

Another Friend of Duffy



BOTH Truesdale and Wilcox were in their office—which was as big as a fair-sized barn and empty except for the two of them. Both of them nodded to me when I walked in, but they both had that blank expression on their faces that meant they hadn't placed me.

I said: "I'm Shannon. The man that was taking Tom Duffy's place."

Truesdale smiled and said: "Oh yes, Mr. Shannon."

Wilcox scowled at me and I figured he was still sore because I hadn't buttered him up the night he and Truesdale had called at the warehouse.

"Tom's dead, so there's no further need of my working for him. I thought I'd tell you now, so you can get somebody for tonight."

They both looked at each other and both said, in a shocked tone: "Duffy dead!"

"That's right."

Truesdale said: "Why, I saw him just last evening."

"He died today. He was an old man—he didn't get over that poisoning like a young man would have."

"But this is terrible," Truesdale said. "Did—has he any people? Children? I'll admit we don't pay as much attention to the employees as we should. Even men like Duffy who have been with us for a good many years."

"He was alone."

"Friends?"

I lied: "Not many and none close. I knew him better than anybody. My father and Tom were pals, for a good many years."

"I see," said Truesdale. "I hope—did the old man suffer much toward the end?"

"The doctors say he didn't," I said. "He was conscious, right up to the last."

"You were there?"

"Why, of course. They called me as soon as he took the turn for the worse."

Truesdale pulled at his lip. "I see. I see. But if the old man was poisoned, I mean purposely, why, that's murder."

"The police have it now."

It went on like that for maybe five minutes, with Wilcox having nothing to say and with Truesdale doing enough talking to make up for it. And then Wilcox broke in.

"It puts us in a bad spot, Mr. Shannon. You realize that Duffy's job is an important one in these times. We can't

go out on the street and pick up a good man to fill it."

I said: "Sure."

"He has to be honest and reliable. Shipping is an important matter in these war days."

"Sure," I said again.

"Couldn't we persuade you to go on with the job until we can find somebody to take over?"

"Not a chance."

"We would, of course, be willing to pay you more than a regular watchman's pay. It would only be until we could select the right man for the place."

I said: "I wouldn't have done it except for Old Tom worrying about his job. With that reason gone I'll go on about my business. I was working for Tom, you see, when he died from this poisoning."

TRUESDALE asked: "Do you mean you're going to work with the police and find who poisoned the old man?"

"With them and by myself."

"I think that's fine and right, Mr. Shannon. You see, Horace? It's only right. I mean as Tom's oldest friend and all."

Wilcox grunted something that could have been a yes or a no.

"Have you any lead on it, Mr. Shannon?"

I said: "Sure. Do you gentlemen happen to know a man named Leany?"

"Leany. Leany," said Truesdale, thoughtfully.

"I know him," Wilcox said. "A union man of some kind. The kind that gives us trouble."

"That's the man," I said. "Here's another. D'ya know a man named Carson?"

Wilcox said instantly: "No, we don't."

"You, Mr. Truesdale?"

"I don't believe so."

I said: "Well, thanks."

“What about Leany and this Mr. Carson?”

I said: “They’re mixed up in a couple of murders, that’s all. The police don’t know it yet, but they probably will in time. I’ll say good day to you gentlemen.”

I went home then and went to bed,

I wet the strip of cloth and tied her ankles with it.



even though it was only four in the afternoon. Between the night watching job and all the commotion, I was way

behind, and that seemed a good time to catch up.

I didn't expect anything doing for at

least a little while, but when it happened I wanted to be in some sort of shape to handle it.

HANRAHAN stopped in the next day to tell me Tom's funeral was set for the following Friday and that some of the boys in the department were taking care of it. I said I'd be glad to be a pall-bearer and he said the boys were counting on that. And then he coughed and came out with his real reason for calling.

"Tom had some insurance," he said.

"Yeah, some lodge stuff," I said.

"That and more. His sister was to get it, but his sister died six or seven years ago and Tom kept his policy in force. It was paid for, you see, and he didn't need the money so he didn't cash it in."

I said: "He was smart, all right. He wasn't going to be dependent in his old age."

"Didn't you know about it?"

"I remember he said he had a policy in some lodge or something. I took it he was carrying it so that he wouldn't have to be buried by the city."

Hanrahan said: "He left fifteen thousand, five hundred dollars. The fifteen thousand was with one of the regular companies, but the five hundred was with the lodge. And there was a note with 'em, Joe."

"Yeah."

"You don't know anything about it?"

"Hell, no. I told you I didn't."

"You get the fifteen grand. That's all. The five hundred is for burial expenses. He had enough in the bank to cover what small bills he owed, so you get the fifteen grand clear, outside of the tax you may have to pay the State and Government."

I said: "Holy Mother!"

"And the D.A. wants to talk to you about it. About how long it was before

Tom was poisoned when you saw him and all that."

"A month or more."

Hanrahan grinned. "We've checked it as much as we could already, Joe. That is, we checked you on the day he took the poison. You're clear, as far as we can tell."

"Thanks for telling me."

"You'd better go up to the D.A. before he calls for you, just the same. You can tell him I told you about this. He knows I know you—I told him so."

That was the advantage of being an old-timer on the force. Hanrahan could get away with a thing like that—giving out office information—where they'd have taken a rookie's badge away for the trick.

And I said I was grateful and rode back with him as far as the building the D.A.'s office was in. I had to get that talk over with, sooner or later, and I wanted it sooner just in case things started to break.

At that, it wasn't too bad. The D.A. knew I'd been checked and put in the clear, and I imagine Hanrahan had told him I was fond of the old man. He told me I was to get the insurance, when it was paid and the little estate Tom had left was settled, and that was about all.

Except, maybe, right at the end.

He said: "You're a private detective, aren't you, Mr. Shannon?"

I said: "Yes."

"You—uh—wouldn't be planning on trying to find who poisoned Duffy by yourself, would you?"

I said: "Oh no, sir."

"Because the police are making steady progress on the case."

"I'm sure they are, sir."

"And you'd only interfere."

I said: "I can see that. Good day, sir."

And that was that. The police were getting nowhere and I knew it, but it

was a polite warning to stay out from underfoot.

THE bar in the Glendarm is a shabby old place, with two old-timers changing back of the bar who've been there since Prohibition went out. One opens at ten, two hours later than the saloons do. The other takes over at six and closes at two, two hours earlier than the saloons close. Maybe because of the late opening and early closing, but more likely because the place is quiet and old-fashioned, there's little trade from the street. Most of the customers live in the hotel and are old pals of the barmen, and most of the customers know each other, at least by sight.

And the two barmen frown on young and unescorted women and there are damned few who drink in the place.

So it was a nice surprise when I stopped in that evening and found one.

She was sitting on the stool nearest the hallway from the hotel lobby, and, when she saw me, she started to smile as if she knew me. And then she looked away fast and down at the Martini she had before her.

I didn't know her, because, if I'd ever met a little honey like that, it would have stayed in my mind.

I said: "Hiya, Tommy," to the barman and told him I thought I'd take rye and plain water, the same as always.

I sat down by the girl, two stools away, and saw her watching me in the mirror, but I didn't smile or act as though I was interested. I'd known Tommy long enough to get away with trying to pick her up—I didn't doubt that—but I didn't think a pick-up was in order with what little encouragement I'd had. Just that first look and that could have been an honest error on her part.

Tommy mopped the bar in front of me and told me all that had happened that day, which boiled down to just exactly nothing, and that was that. By

and by the girl finished her Martini and Tommy stirred another for her. By and by my glass got empty and Tommy did the right thing by it, as well.

And then I said: "I'm a rich heir, Tommy. An old friend of mine died the other day and left me some money. I didn't think the old man had a dime, and nobody else did, but he left me fifteen thousand dollars, no less."

Tommy whistled. "That's a lot of money."

I said: "I shouldn't say no less, at that. By the time I get through paying income and inheritance taxes, I won't be much better off. But it's the idea of the thing. It makes me feel good to know Old Tom thought that much of me."

"Did I know him?" Tommy asked.

"Name was Tom Duffy. He was an old friend of my father's."

The girl said: "I couldn't help hearing you. Did you say Tom Duffy?"

"That's right."

"Why, I knew him, too."

"You mean the Duffy that just died?"

"Why, yes."

I got it fast. It was another way of angling a pick-up and a nice smooth one. There'd been a few lines in a couple of the papers about the windfall that had fallen to a lowly private cop from an unexpected source, and I figured the babe had read it and decided to get in on the ground floor. Before some other sharp-shooting little tramp got her hooks into me.

I said: "Why, isn't that nice. A swell old gent."

She agreed and moved a little on her bar stool, but I beat her to the punch by sliding onto the one next to her. I picked up the check Tommy had just given her for her drink, without her protesting too much, and then we got talking about Tom.

And there I got a surprise. She sounded as if she'd actually known him, so

help me. She knew a lot more about him than had been in the little squib in the papers and for a while I thought she was leveling about knowing him.

Then she stubbed her toe, though I was the one who shoved her onto the stubber.

I said: "A swell old man, all right. Too bad he was so damned thin. If he'd had a little weight on his bones, he might have fought the thing off."

She agreed that it was a shame old Tom was so thin, and the old man had weighed around two hundred and hadn't stood over five-six in his socks. He'd been built like a barrel and everybody that had known him had kidded him about his figure and about how much of it he'd had front and center.

I still figured she was sharp-shooting but I didn't want to miss a trick. I kept her going along on the Martinis, taking my rye slow and easy; not pushing 'em down her fast enough to make her suspicious but making it so she was taking about three to my two.

Tommy, the bar man, who had a nasty mind, figured I was getting her tight for another reason entirely, and he was getting a bang out of it and helping me along.

It was about a quarter after six when I met her and it was half past eight when she remembered she had to phone somebody. She headed for the bar booth, clear at the end next to the ladies' room, and I picked up the house phone at the other end of the bar. I didn't wait until she got a chance to get the hotel operator but got my call in first.

"You, Grace?" I asked.

"Un-huh."

"This is Joe Shannon. Now shut up and don't ask me questions. You're putting a call through from the bar booth and I want to listen in on it."

"Why, Joe Shannon! You know I can't do that."

"Don't be a fool. It's about a murder—I'm not trying to listen in while a gal stalls her sweetie out of a date this time."

"It'd be my job, Joe."

"I'm not fooling. It's murder."

GRACE didn't say another word but the next thing I heard was my new little pal saying: "—hooked solid. Sure I can keep him."

A man's voice said: "Sure now?"

"Positive."

"You know what might happen if you don't."

"Of course, sugar."

"Then I'll leave it to you."

"Still love me?"

The voice at the other end let out a strangled sort of snort and said: "Don't start that now. This is business. Of course I love you."

"I won't see you tonight?"

The voice said, in a patient way as if explaining to a child or halfwit: "Of course you won't see me tonight. You're to keep him with you at least until three o'clock, and all night would be that much safer."

"Trust me for that, sugar."

"Ugh—if anything happens, don't be too scared."

"What you mean, sugar?"

He hung up the phone on her then and I waited a minute. Grace said: "Get it?"

"Got it."

"It's Gramercy—here comes that damn' night manager, Joe."

"Thanks, kid. I've got an idea who it was."

The phone clicked off as she broke the connection and I watched my new little pal come out of the booth and go into the ladies' room. I hadn't told Grace quite the truth when I'd told her I knew who the call was to, but I knew it was to one of three parties and it

didn't make any difference in my book which one.

That call was all I needed.

CHAPTER V

Three in a Row



ALONG about nine-fifteen she put the hook in, and if she hadn't I'd have made the suggestion myself. She put her hand up to her head and giggled and said:

"Mama's drunkie. I think papa'd better take mama home."

I said: "Sure. Where you live?"

There were half a dozen people right by us at the bar, but Tommy heard this and managed a wink at me. He decided that little Joe had struck pay dirt and no mistake.

"I'll tell you in the cab, honey."

I wondered what I'd have to do to rate being called "Sugar" and felt a little sorry that I wouldn't have time to find out.

I said: "All right. You wait right here. I've got to go up to my room for a minute and get something."

She brightened. "I could go up with you, honey, and wait up there."

I tried to look shocked and said the hotel would kick me out if I had a girl in my room at that time of the evening.

She was a little drunk, at that, because she giggled and told me I must be living in a sort of gentlemen's Y. W. C. A. And that she'd never heard of a hotel that a steady roomer couldn't have a friend call on him, day or night, male or female, thin or fat and dark or white. It wasn't very funny but I laughed right along with her.

And then hurried up to the room. I slid into the shoulder rig that holds the

.357 Magnum I laid out sixty some dollars for just before the war started, and was glad again I'd spent the money for it. I had a notion it was going to turn out to be a wise investment. I tucked the one I'd carried before I got the Magnum into the waistband of my trousers and smoothed my vest down over it so I hoped it wouldn't show. Another good gun but without the slam of the Magnum—a .44 S. & W. Special.

And then I got the keys I was going to need and decided I was as ready as I'd ever be. But I stopped at the door and thought it might be better to be safe than sorry and went back and got a handful of shells for the big gun and scattered 'em around various pockets so they wouldn't weigh me down too much.

I felt like an armored division going into the battle line but I had a dirty feeling that I might need the spare hulls for the big gun.

That's what I was grinning about on the way down the elevator, and the kid that ran it gave me an answering grin.

"What's so funny, Mr. Shannon?" he asked. "You're certainly on your toes and on the mark tonight."

"I'm loaded for bear," I said.

"You're not half as tight as lots of times I've seen you. Honest, you'd pass for sober anywhere."

"I didn't mean loaded in quite that sense," I told him.

That struck me funny, too. We laughed together, but I knew what I was laughing at and he was just laughing out of politeness and because of the fifty cent tip I handed over.

THE little girl had told me to call her Amelia and that last names didn't matter, but I got a break the minute we got in her apartment. It was a very nice apartment, too. Nothing a sharp-shooter, like I'd picked her for,

would choose. In the first place, any girl who depended on touches found in bars, couldn't have afforded that kind of set-up. That bar trade isn't reliable enough. In the second place, the place

wasn't right for the bar trade. It was too quiet, too nice.

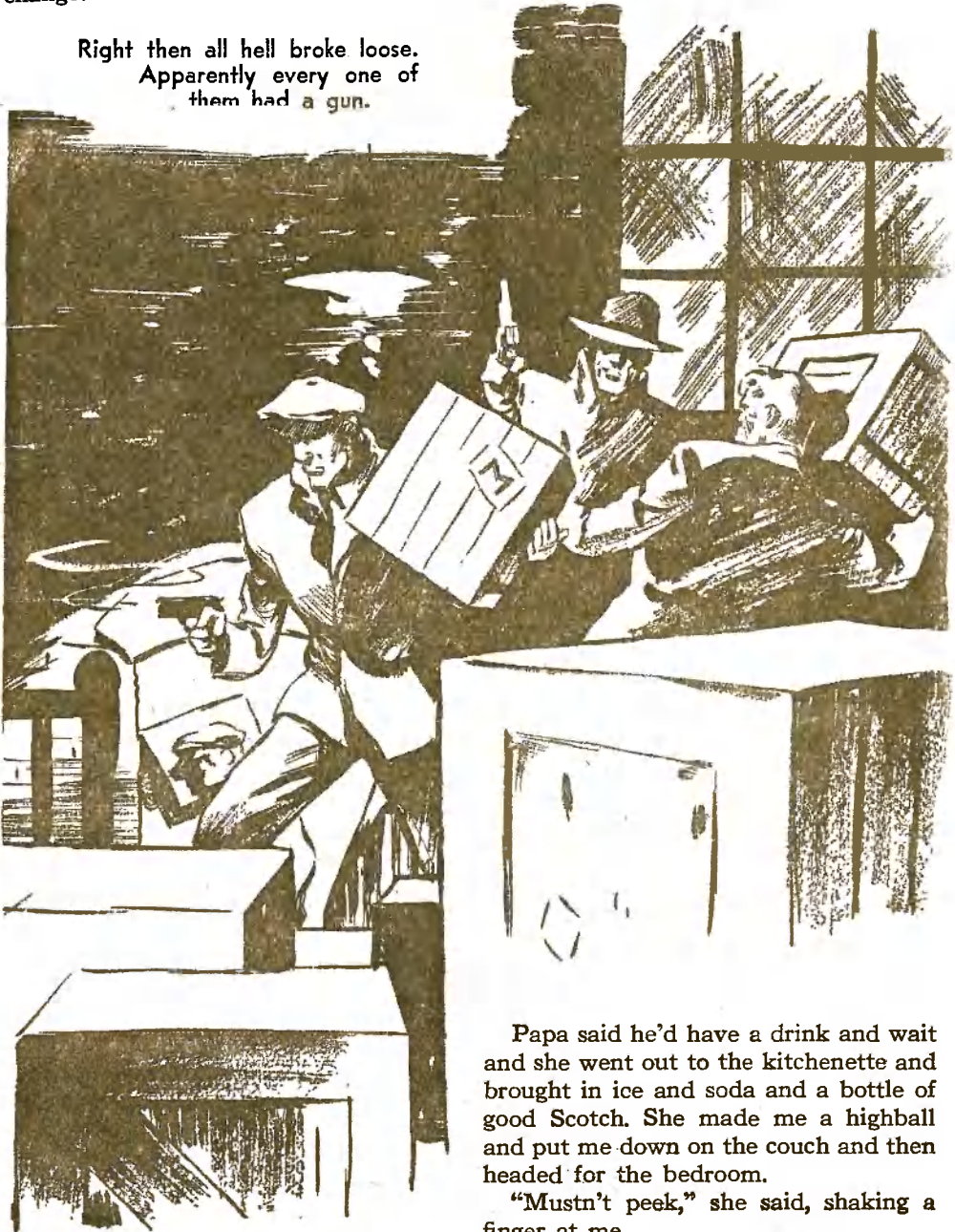
As soon as I'd opened the door with the key she'd handed me, she went into



the act.

She said: "Please, mama's got to get into something more comfortable. Won't papa have a little drinkie and let mama change?"

Right then all hell broke loose. Apparently every one of them had a gun.



She must have thought baby talk went along with her drunken act, because she wasn't near tight enough to talk that way as yet.

Papa said he'd have a drink and wait and she went out to the kitchenette and brought in ice and soda and a bottle of good Scotch. She made me a highball and put me down on the couch and then headed for the bedroom.

"Mustn't peek," she said, shaking a finger at me.

I agreed I mustn't peek.

And I didn't. The minute the bedroom door closed I was going through her purse, and the first thing I found was a driver's license made out to Amelia Wilkes.

That was enough. I sat back on the couch and started on the highball, and I was about half through it when the knock on the door came.

I was expecting it and she wasn't. I'd figured what the guy she'd called had meant, and she hadn't.

I said: "I'll answer it."

"I will," she said.

"If I'm going to meet the boy friend, I'm going to meet him on my feet," I told her.

"It won't be the—any boy friend."

I shook my head at her and tip-toed to the door. She sat on the couch right where I left her, trying to decide whether to do anything about it or not, and then she saw me slip the Magnum out of its shoulder rig.

That got her. It got her so scared she couldn't do anything but open her mouth and her eyes. She couldn't even make a sound and she was trying, because I could see the muscles in her throat wriggling.

I opened the door and stepped back, with the Magnum trained on the doorway. I'd centered Leany, the big lug I'd thrown hot coffee on while I was nightwatching. There was another man at his left but I did my talking to Leany.

"Both of you come in," I said. "The hammer's back on this and I'm just itching to let it off."

Leany said nothing.

The man beside him moved so that I couldn't see both his hands and I shoved the gun out a little farther at Leany.

"He moves and you take it through the gut," I said.

Leany gasped: "Sam, Sam!"

He didn't tell Sam what he wanted but Sam knew. Sam came back in sight with both his hands up at shoulder height.

I said: "Come on in," and backed away, and they followed me as if there was a string between us. The man with Leany closed the door behind him without being told.

I moved 'em in like that until I got 'em through the hall, and by then I could see the girl. She hadn't moved. What was going on was no part of her game and she didn't know on whose side was who.

I said: "Turn around and walk up to the wall. Quick, now—I'm getting tired of this fooling."

Leany's white hair was standing up straighter than ever. I'd thought it had looked like a fright wig the first time I'd seen it and now I knew it was really that. His face was ordinarily very dark, but now it was a funny, mottled color. He looked as though he was sick to his stomach.

He said: "I—ugh—what are you going to do, Mr. Shannon?"

"It's mister now, is it? Turn around and walk to the wall."

He turned and, as he turned, I hit him on the side of the head. He started to fall and bumped against his partner, and that threw me off on my aim and I only slammed the gun down on this one's shoulder blade. At that, it knocked him to his knees and lined him up for the next clip which connected where I wanted it.

They were both down then, Leany on his side and the other one flat on his face with his arms out ahead of him. Leany was bleeding like a pig where the heavy gun barrel had pulped his ear.

I said to the girl: "You know 'em?"

She tried to say something and couldn't. She did manage to shake her head.

I said: "You should. Your boy friend sent 'em around."

She just stared at me.

"Get up," I told her.

She didn't move. She was so scared I don't think she realized what I was telling her to do. I got her by the shoulder and lifted her up to her feet and that broke the spell.

She said: "What—what are you going to do?"

"Put you away."

She looked at the two men on the floor and probably thought I was going to lay the gun barrel against her head, too. Anyway, she opened her mouth to scream and, now that speech had come back to her, I knew better than to let her go. I caught her around the waist and dragged her up to me with my other hand over her mouth, and I'm damned if the little devil didn't set her teeth in my hand like a wolf.

It hurt like hell, too.

I was in a hell of a spot. I didn't want to slap her down but I couldn't let her go and scream and wake the neighbors. By the time I explained the kind of a frame I was in, it would be too late to do any good. So I wrestled her down to the floor, with her hanging on to the palm of my hand like a bull dog. I twisted her around until I could get across her and hold her down, and then I got the thumb of my free hand in the corner of her mouth and tried to pry her jaws apart. That didn't work at all and she kept on gnawing away and the pain was driving me nuts.

I said: "Let go, sister, or I'll slap you out."

She just hung on.

I said: "So help me, I'll spread that nose of yours all over your face. I'll fix you up so that it'll take a plastic surgeon three months to make you look human."

That did it. She let loose.

And I measured her off and clipped

her on the chin and I hit her hard. I shouldn't have done it but my hand felt like a mad dog had ripped it all apart.

I fixed the three of them up first class. I wadded a couple of handkerchiefs and shoved 'em in the girl's mouth and I held 'em there with a silk stocking I found in the same drawer that had held the handkerchiefs. She didn't know it though—she was out colder than last Winter. I tied her ankles together with a strip I ripped from a sheet I took off her bed, and I wet the knot I tied it with. I put her hands behind her back and fixed them up the same way, and I put knots in that sheet that would have to be cut loose.

And then I laid her out, nice and pretty, on the floor at the far side of the bed. Anybody just going in the room wouldn't see her—they'd have to circle the bed to get her in view.

I fixed the two guys up much better—and much rougher. I didn't think Leany would come to in less than two hours if then, but I didn't take any more chances with him than I did with his pal.

I got a couple of lemons from the kitchen and popped one into each of their mouths. I got adhesive tape from the medicine chest in the bathroom and made sure they wouldn't spit the lemons out. I took straps from a trunk and three handbags and tied their hands and feet together, with their hands up behind their backs, and to make it solid I ran another strap between these, so they were bent backwards like a bow. I put Leany in the hall closet and the other man in the dressing room, right off the bath, and I figured then I was all right unless one of the three happened to be a mouth breather.

In that case it would be too bad. It would take the poor devil quite a while to strangle but that's what would hap-

pen. But I checked 'em over and they seemed to be doing all right, except for the snoring sounds Leany was making, and all that noise meant was that he had a bad concussion and maybe a skull fracture.

I wasn't worrying about him. I thought of old Tom Duffy, as a matter of fact, and rather hoped it was the last.

And then I hung a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door that I found in the hall closet and locked it after me, not depending on the night latch.

I thought I'd taken care of that end of things very well.

CHAPTER VI

Shooting in the Dark



HANRAHAN was still at the Central Bureau, and with him, of course, Olson, Hanrahan's side man, the one who didn't talk. Hanrahan was sitting at an absolute empty desk, rolling a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other and Olson was in a chair at the side, reading a ten day old paper for lack of anything else to do.

Hanrahan said: "Ugh, Joe! Come on in."

"I am in," I said. "You still working on the Duffy thing?"

"I am."

"So am I."

He laughed sourly. "Have at it, boy," he said. "We're getting no-place. We've found where Tom ate the last three meals of his life and we've found a hundred people that could have dropped a bit of poison in what he ate. He knew everybody and he was always gabbing while he ate. Any of the people where he ate could have stopped for a word and fixed up his coffee or something

or other. It's like shooting at the moon with a kid's bow and arrow."

"Not quite," I said. "Let me guess. One of the places he ate was that little joint just down the street from the warehouse. Right?"

"Right. He had breakfast there the day he got sick."

"And he talked to a guy named Leany there. Or did he?"

Olson got a little book from his pocket and thumbed through the pages. He said: "I ain't got that name. I got maybe twenty others from that place, though."

Hanrahan said: "What's the name of the waiter that waited on him, Oley?"

Olson thumbed through more pages and finally came out with a name and an address and a telephone number, and Hanrahan dialed this last. He talked for a moment and then hung up and swung around to me.

"Sure enough," he said. "You're right, Joe. The guy'd forgotten it, but Leany had stopped by and talked to old Tom for maybe a minute or two. Just one of the hello-how-are-you things, and the waiter'd forgotten all about him being there. Who's this Leany?"

"I think he's the one who put the stuff in Tom's coffee, if that's the way he got it. You don't have to worry about him, anyway."

"The hell I don't if he's the guy that did it. You know about this, maybe you know where I can pick him up. Eh, Joe?"

"You don't want him now."

"I don't?"

"You don't. You want the guy that's back of him. I'll give you Leany, or what's left of him, when this other's done."

"Are you nuts? Hey! What's happened to your hand?"

"I got bit."

Hanrahan looked at my hand and said: "You got mangled. You should

see a doctor before you get blood poisoning."

"Afterward."

"After what?"

I said: "Now listen, because I only want to go through it once. We got things to do and they've got to be done now."

I told them what I'd done that evening, with Hanrahan grunting comments and Olson sitting like a dummy. I got all through and Hanrahan said: "Now this is fine. This is all right. Where'd you say this apartment is? Where Leany and the other guy and the girl are now?"

"I didn't say."

"Well, where?"

I said: "I've gone this far with it and, if you think I'll let you louse it up now, you're crazy. You'd have the three of them picked up, and there's nothing against them now that would hold them. All you'd have is a hold on a bunch of assault against me and maybe attempted murder charges. To hell with that—they'll stay right there until there's something to hold 'em with."

Hanrahan nodded approvingly. "I had to ask, didn't I, Joe? I couldn't just leave a girl tied up like that, along with a guy with a fractured head. Now, if you won't tell me where they are, we can go ahead. What now?"

I said: "Come on along."

"Oley, too?"

"Sure."

"Do we need more men?"

"We probably will. But we can't take 'em. Too many would give the thing away."

Olson got his hat from the rack by the door without saying a word. But Hanrahan talked a blue streak, all the way down through the building to the police garage in the basement.

I didn't pay any attention to what he said, though. I was trying to figure out what the next step was going to be.

IT wasn't hard to get in the place, I though I had a little argument with Hanrahan about the actual going in. It wasn't legal, he said, and I admitted the fact. There was another way of going about it, he said, but, pinned down, couldn't think of it.

So we went in my way, with the key I'd thoughtfully forgotten to turn in. The watchman was on his rounds, as I knew he'd be, and I'd timed it so that we were near the number six station while he was up on the fifth floor punching in those stations up there.

We found us a nice little place to hide, behind a bunch of baled blankets for some relief outfit overseas, and then we waited for the watchman to pass us on his way back to the cubby by the door.

Sure enough he did. The same tough old boy who'd shown me what to do. And up on his toes so much that I thought for a moment he'd spotted Olson when he turned his flash our way as he passed.

We heard him tramp down the stairs to the first floor—we were on the second. And then Hanrahan said querulously:

"Why don't they take the place when he's here? Why all this fooling around until the other man comes on?"

I guessed at that one but tried to sound as if I was sure of what I was talking about.

"It's the boat," I said. "They'll take the stuff out of here by boat instead of by truck. They've got to wait until it quiets down on the next dock, and that isn't until after midnight."

It sounded reasonable and satisfied Hanrahan. He grunted and ducked back of his bale.

IT was almost twelve then, and by and by the watchman came back, but this time with a new man. We could hear them coming up the stairs and could

hear the old timer telling the new one about how the vault must be watched above everything else.

He said: "They been loading that vault full all day. There's stuff in there that's worth a fortune."

"What is it?" the new man asked.

The old timer said: "I dunno. A bunch of little crates stamped with a big *M*. That's all I seen. I come down this afternoon after my pay check, and saw 'em trucking the stuff in."

They went upstairs then, with the old timer keeping right on with his talk about the vault.

I whispered to Hanrahan: "You see? If there's anything in there worth a lot of dough, they'd probably want to move it fast. So that's why they have to work in such a hurry. That's why they just can't pick and choose their night."

Hanrahan said he understood, and by and by the two watchmen came back downstairs. Shortly after that we could hear the old-timer saying goodnight to the new man, and then the new man made one round by himself. It took him forty-five minutes instead of the half an hour it should have because he had trouble in finding the places to punch in.

I knew because the same thing had happened to me.

And then it happened. He was still upstairs when we heard the downstairs door open and heard some men come quietly in. We couldn't tell how many but there were enough of them for us to hear a lot of shuffling feet and quite a lot of whispering. We could hear somebody hushing them down and then they must have hidden someplace toward the back of that first floor. Once they passed the stairs there was no way of knowing just where they were.

The watchman passed us, whistling, **PISTOL-PACKIN' MAMA**, out of tune and went downstairs, and then we heard

a muffled thud and a voice say clearly:

"All right, now."

Then we heard more voices, still low but not like before and heard the feet come tramping back through the building.

I could also hear Hanrahan's hard breathing and decided he should do something about his asthma if he was going to go on many expeditions like that one.

We heard 'em come up the stairs and ducked clear to the floor. Somebody said something about how it wouldn't do any harm to have some light on the subject and somebody else told him to pipe down; that they'd work in the dark and like it. We heard the vault open and heard the feet start tramping up and down the stairs, and that got Hanrahan.

He whispered hoarsely: "Joe! Joe! We should take 'em now, any time."

I hadn't heard the boat and said so. We waited another fifteen minutes, and then somebody in charge said:

"Snap it up. He's pulling in right now."

That was it.

I slid out from behind my bale and fell in behind one of the men going back toward the stairway with a load. Nobody said a word. The light inside the vault was on but that was all, and where I joined the parade was in shadow. I got to the head of the stairs and stopped and found the switchbox for that floor and opened it and got my flash ready.

And then I shouted: "Okay!" and turned the flash into the box so I could see what I was doing. I slammed up the big switch that was lettered: **"WORK LIGHTS"** and the place came brighter than day. I heard Hanrahan shout:

"Hold steady, you guys!"

Then a gun blasted at me from not more than twenty feet away and some-

The man at the wheel was calm as he shut off the motors.



thing felt like a hot iron being laid across the top of my left shoulder. I yanked out the Magnum even as I spun around and the guy's second shot must have missed me a foot or more. It was somebody I didn't know—somebody dressed in a business suit. I got him in the chest with the snapshot I

made and he went back five feet before falling.

I started down the stairs and, as I did, I heard two more shots from behind me. One was an echo and I knew that either Hanrahan or Olson had fired back at somebody who'd turned one loose at him. Then I was at the bottom

of the stairs and running toward the side door that opened on the dock. There was a heavy work boat tied alongside with half a dozen men right by it and as many more in it, taking down the crates that were being passed to them, and I put 'em all in it when I shouted.

"Get 'em up," I said. "This is police."

Right then all hell broke loose. They didn't mind me worth a cent. Apparently every one of them had a gun and I don't think there was one of them that didn't use it. The only thing that saved me was the lack of light. They couldn't see to shoot but I couldn't either, and I turned loose the other five shells in the big gun and didn't think I'd scored a hit, and I was shooting at men not over sixty feet away from me.

I was on my belly by that time. I was latching out the cylinder of the gun and trying to stuff more shells in it when somebody stepped right in the small of my back, and then somebody clouted me alongside the ear. I was squirming out from under the foot so it didn't land square, but it dazed me and the next thing I knew I was in the boat and it was pulling away from the dock.

Then I heard Hanrahan bawl out: "Stop that boat!" and he ripped out five shots at us as fast as he could pull the trigger.

Some of the boys in the boat shot back at him but I didn't think he was in any danger. All the dock was in shadow and it would have taken a bullet with his name on it to find him.

I had my eyes open and was looking around but I was keeping quiet. They'd tossed me into the open cockpit of the boat and I was alongside a stack of the crates they'd been taking from the warehouse vault. They'd taken my big gun when they'd thrown me in, but I took out the other, the .44 Special, and

put it alongside of me so that it was shielded between the crates and me.

And there I stopped—it didn't seem the logical time to start using it.

In the first place, I was trying to see just where I was and what I was facing. The boat was decked over in front and somewhere around sixty feet long, and I didn't have any idea how many men were up in that front compartment. The cabin, or whatever it's called. There were three in the cockpit, crouching low along the sides and watching back where we'd come from, and one of them called out something to another about a police boat.

The other called back: "It'll take 'em some time to get hold of it. By that time we'll be under cover."

I thought that maybe I could do something about that, and in a minute I was sure of it. The door into the cabin thing opened and Carson came out. I knew him the minute I heard his voice.

"Anybody after us yet?" he called.

"Not yet," one of the three said.

"We'll be out of sight in ten minutes more."

I said: "Carson!"

He left the door and came toward me and I saw the dim gleam of light on the gun in his hand.

I said: "This is Shannon."

He called me a name I've never liked and said: "I thought I cracked your thick skull, back on the dock."

Then, right over me and it seemed so close I could reach up and touch it, something loomed over us, and a voice shouted down at us.

"You—!" it said. "You got no running lights."

Carson shouted something up and back at it. I heard its engines then for the first time, and over them the sound of a bell. Then the engines stopped and the voice bawled:

"Pull up! I want to look you over."

CHAPTER VII

The Loot

CARSON wasn't looking at me at all so I stood up so that I could see. I could see a big motor cruiser—looking like a darker shadow on that shadowed water—and it was probably a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards astern of us and getting farther away every second. And for the first time I heard our own motors—I'd been conscious of them but that was all.

They'd made hardly a sound up to that time—there was just a little sense of vibration—but now they blasted out full force and the stern of our boat settled in the water and we started to go away from there in a rush.

The man in the cruiser shouted again but I couldn't make out what he said. Carson spoke to one of the three in the boat.

"By the time they get that scow around and under way and after us, we'll be a mile away."

I said: "Drop the gun, Carson."

He swung, bringing up his gun, and I shot three times at him, aiming center in that bad light, and letting 'em go as fast as I could get the gun down from the recoil from the shot before. A heavy-calibered gun don't just kick back at you. The muzzle tilts and you've got to bring it down in line. He managed to get one shot in at me but it went into the floor between us. Then he sagged ahead and fell toward me and I jumped for the gun he'd dropped and got it just as the man Carson had been talking to let fire.

I got him pretty. He was standing up so that I could see him above the edge

of the boat, and I let loose just as the muzzle of my gun blotted him out of sight.

I swung toward the other two and they were both shouting at me not to shoot. You had to shout to make yourself heard by that time. The engines of the boat were going all out and a boat engine apparently makes more noise than one in a car. Bigger, I suppose, or maybe they're not muffled so well.

I motioned with the gun at the one nearest me, meaning for him to come closer so that I could tell whether he had a gun or not. But he took it to mean something else and overboard he went. The other man hesitated and then followed him, and that left me in command of the after part of the boat.

RIGHT then a searchlight from the boat we'd just passed turned on. It pointed out over the water like a big white finger and then headed our way, dabbing around and back and forth, just as a finger would if the man who owned it was trying to settle on something he couldn't see. I thought it was a police boat—knew anyway that it was something official.

And I also knew it was too far away to be of any help to me.

I looked then at the gun I'd grabbed when Carson had dropped it and found it was my own Magnum. I looked it over and found three empty shells, and I filled the cylinder with spares from my pockets. It gave me a full gun and I thought I might need it. I went ahead to the door into the cabin and threw it open, and the two men inside turned around and stared at me. One of them had started to say something but stopped with his mouth open, and I doubt if I could have heard him anyway over the noise of the two big engines that were in the cabin.

Both men were at the front of the boat, one of them behind the wheel

at the left side of the boat. The other was about the center of the thing, maybe three feet away from him. Right before me were the two engines, going wide open, and they were making plenty of roar. The cabin was maybe twenty feet long and the engines took up about half of that length.

I shouted at the two men and raised the gun. The one in the center slid a hand into his pocket and shot at me from there, and the Magnum caught him and slammed him back so hard his head hit the glass that ran from above the wheel to the roof. It was tilted like the windshield of a car, but all I could see through it was a few lights quite a ways away and black night.

The man behind the wheel slammed back on a pair of hand levers and the motors died down, then coughed and stopped. The silence, after that tremendous roar, was actually something I could feel.

The man said mildly, and in an ordinary tone of voice: "You know I told Carson and Frank that we couldn't get away with it."

I said: "Frank would be Franklyn Truesdale?"

"Certainly. Of course."

It was a silly question on my part because the man before me was Wilcox, the other owner of the warehouse. But after all the shooting I wasn't hitting on all eight.

I said: "Turn it around and start it up and go back where you came from."

"That Coast Guard boat will have us before I could get moving, Mr. Shannon. It's up on us now."

"Coast Guard?"

"It's Coast Guard, Mr. Shannon. They patrol here right along with the police boats."

"I see. Where's Truesdale?"

He shrugged and didn't answer.

"Was he back in the warehouse?"

He shrugged again.

THEN something hit us, first on one side and then on the other. I thought the first collision was going to tip us over. Then I heard men jumping into the cockpit behind me and the next thing I knew a kid in dungarees was jamming a sub-machine gun into the small of my back and telling me to drop my gun.

The next thing two cops, dressed in heavy clothes but with the badged city-cop cap on, were shoving the Coast Guard kid to the side and taking over.

One of them said: "Your name Shannon?"

I said it was.

"I'm Hennessy, Harbor Patrol. Lieutenant Hanrahan called us in."

"Everything all right back there?"

Hennessy grinned. "They must've had a sort of little war, Mr. Shannon. We heard the shooting and we was quite aways up the river. We started down and it's taken us this long to catch you. We took the call on the way."

He took over from that time on. One of the Coast Guard boys and one of the cops took over the work boat we were on and Wilcox and I rode back to the dock in the police boat.

By that time Wilcox had clammed up. He said he wouldn't say a word until he had his lawyer with him.

THEY had the work lights on all over the dock and the warehouse by the time we got back. The boys on the police boat told me that the boat I'd been on was supposed to be doing quite a bit of smuggling but that they'd never been able to prove it. Instead of having slow speed, heavy duty motors, it had the opposite, and was souped up so that it could run away from any average pursuit. Its registration and ownership had been made through so many dummies they couldn't even be sure who owned it.

I said: "I'll take a guess on that and,

if you work back instead of ahead, you may be able to make a check on it. I'll guess it belongs to Mr. Albert Melton Carson. The guy I shot back there. You'll find he's been using it right along in his insurance racket."

"I looked at the guy. I didn't know him."

"I don't imagine he used it much himself. He'd have a skipper for it. All he did was make the deals."

The cop looked puzzled. "I'd like to know what he was loaded with, back there. There was nothing but them little crates, all stamped with a big letter *M*. And that's all. Usually, these warehouse pirates take furs and silk and stuff like that. Cigarettes make a good haul, too—they're easy to hock if they are bulky to handle. What's in the crates?"

I said: "I'm damned if I know."

We pulled into the dock then and Hanrahan jumped into the boat before we even tied up. He was as mad as he could be.

He said: "A fine thing, Joe, a fine thing. You go chasing off over the river and I don't even know where to go on from here. Suppose you'd have been killed? I wouldn't even have known where to find those people you've got tied up. That guy could have died from that busted head before I'd have found him."

Two of the cops were hustling Wilcox up on the dock, but he heard this and turned his head. He said:

"Carson hired him. I'll tell you that much now."

"Hired who?" roared Hanrahan.

Wilcox shut up again.

HANRAHAN told me they'd taken twelve men from the warehouse, all told. Two dead—the man I'd shot and one who'd shot at Olson when I'd turned the lights on. Olson had killed him then and there—I didn't know it

but Olson was one of the crack men on the police pistol team.

I said: "You'll find they're all friends of this man Leany. He's a union organizer and he'd know every bad one in the union. He picked and chose and got his gang, and it's this gang you've got."

Hanrahan grumbled: "Well and good, but we've got that to prove."

"It won't be hard," I said. "Carson's dead. Truesdale and Wilcox are still alive and they're going to be fighting to give evidence against each other. There'll be too many murder charges out over this mess. First there was this man Johnson—this friend of old Tom's. He got wind, undoubtedly, of what was going to happen, and they were afraid he'd tip Tom off. So they killed him first, even before Tom died."

"Tom was in the hospital when the guy was killed."

"Sure. They figured he'd tell Tom about it and then that Tom would know why he'd been poisoned. Or that he'd tell me—Tom must have given him my name sometime."

Hanrahan said: "I was trying to put him in it, someplace, but damned if I could. It sounds all right, Joe."

"It was probably Leany that gave Tom the arsenic stuff. In the little restaurant, right down the street from the warehouse."

"Sure."

"Then I think Truesdale finished the job, the night he called on Tom. The evening before Tom died. He probably gave the old gentleman a drink or something."

"He'd taste it in water."

"Tom drank whiskey, didn't he? And he'd take a snifter, feeling low like that. With the man he worked for bringing it up to him as a favor like that, he couldn't well refuse."

"That'll be a hard one to prove. And we haven't got Truesdale."

"Who was the man I shot in the warehouse? The one in business clothes?"

"Name of Anders. He worked for Carson by his papers. What I want to know, Joe, is this. What the hell are in these crates stamped *M*? What does *M* stand for?"

"Murder, Mr. Hanrahan. Why didn't you open one and find out?"

"We did. There's nothing but a bunch of fine wire in 'em. That's all. Just fine wire, hardly any thicker than spider web."

"Stuff insured in Carson's company?"

"Haven't had time to check that yet."

I said: "You'll find it was. And if you keep on checking, you'll find that Carson's been back of a hell of a lot of losses his company's paid for. Working with warehouse men like Wilcox and Truesdale. Working with this bunch that Leany had. Probably working with

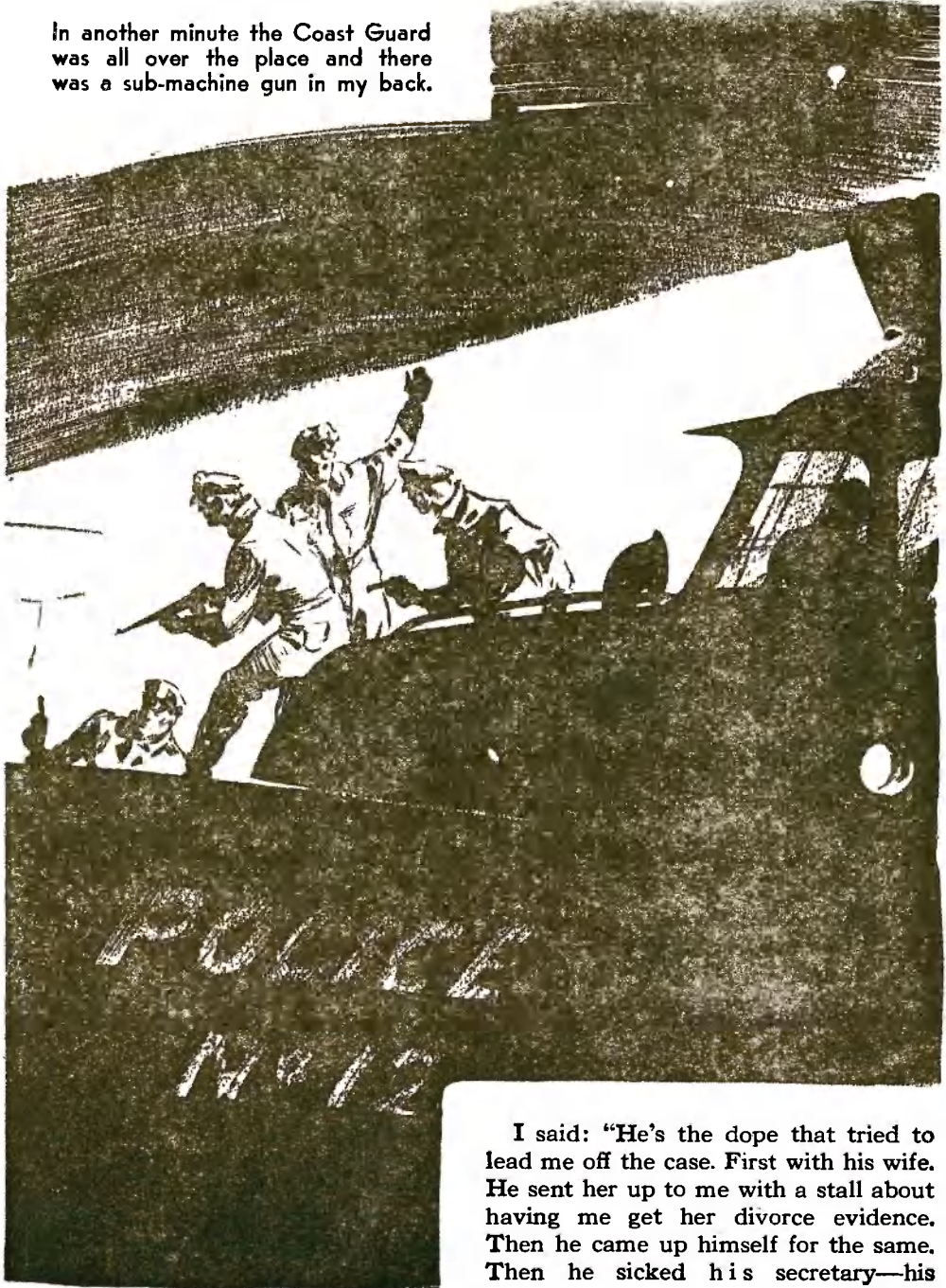


straight hi-jackers, if he couldn't make it any other way."

"You seem to have it in for Carson,"

In another minute the Coast Guard was all over the place and there was a sub-machine gun in my back.

Hanrahan said curiously. "He's in this no deeper than the others, that I can see."



I said: "He's the dope that tried to lead me off the case. First with his wife. He sent her up to me with a stall about having me get her divorce evidence. Then he came up himself for the same. Then he sicked his secretary—his

sweetie—on me. That's what got me sore at him. He was using his harem to tie me up. He must have been afraid I'd tumbled to something phony about the warehouse thing."

"I can understand that," said Hanrahan.

"What's making me so sore," I said, "is that he never gave me time enough to get myself tied. Not with either one of them."

"I don't understand that one," Hanrahan said doubtfully.

I said: "You will when you see the girls. We'll go up and talk to one of them right now. I want to know where Truesdale is."

Hanrahan agreed that so did he.

CHAPTER VIII

The Wind-up



MISS WILKES had managed to kick herself around to the foot of the bed but the other two were right where I'd left them. Leany was still unconscious, and after one look at him Hanrahan called the ambulance. The other one had snapped out of it but he was a pretty sick man.

A heavy gun along the head is bad medicine.

We untied the girl and took the straps off the other man's feet but left his hands tied. The girl looked pleadingly at Hanrahan and gave him the works.

"If you're any kind of a man," she said, "you'd call the police. This man has abused me terribly."

"Madam, I am the police," Hanrahan told her. "And if you think he abused you, wait until I get through with you."

She'd tried her bluff and it didn't work. So she started crying. That didn't

work either, because Hanrahan and I had a drink of her good Scotch and just waited for her to get through with it. The ambulance came during the course of this and took Leany away, with both the young internes who got him looking doubtful about his head condition.

Then she snapped out of it. She said: "I want to know what right you've got to treat me like this."

Hanrahan said: "Carson's dead, sister. Come off it."

"Dead?"

Hanrahan looked at me and I nodded. I said: "He made a mistake. He fooled with a loaded fire arm."

"But—but I don't believe it"

She looked at Hanrahan's red face and it must have convinced her of the truth. She went into the crying act for a while, but this time I got tired and broke it up.

I said: "All right, Miss Wilkes. The thing's done. It's busted wide open. We know you were playing around with Carson and, if you're smart, you'll tell us about it. We won't put you in jail for being the man's sweetheart, but we sure as hell will for complicity in his crimes."

"I had nothing to do with it," she sobbed. "I—I just knew about it."

Hanrahan said: "What was this stuff in those crates they was after tonight, miss? That's all I want to know."

"Platinum wire."

I got it then. Hanrahan didn't.

She said: "The wire was from the Mordoff Company. It's for radios and television and range finders and things like that. It was to be sent to England, I think, for the war, but it's worth a lot of money in this country. Priorities, you know, besides what platinum is worth just by itself."

"It was all platinum?" Hanrahan asked.

She shrugged. "Other things, too, all made by the Mordoff Company. But

all valuable like that. Al, Mr. Carson, said it was the biggest haul they'd made yet."

I SAID: "It was a good graft, Hanrahan. You see Carson would insure the stuff. With the warehouse people of course—while the stuff was in transit, you see. Then he'd steal it, using Leany and his gang for the actual thieving. Then he'd sell it and collect from that end. Then he'd get his cut from the insurance money the warehouse men got. Everybody won except the insurance company and the people that should have received the shipments. They didn't lose in money, of course, just in not being able to get necessary material."

Hanrahan said he understood. And then asked the girl: "Where was Truesdale tonight?"

"Why at the warehouse. Al was always careful about that. He made the owners of the place work right with him so they couldn't double-cross him in any way."

"I was right about Leany?" I asked.

She nodded. The man who was tied up cleared his throat and said: "I can tell you something about that, mister. Maybe I was along with Leany on some of this stealing, but I wasn't mixed up in no murder. I couldn't get out after that started, but I wasn't mixed up in that. No, sir. That's too rich for my blood."

"Leany and Carson worked together?"

"Sure. With every crooked warehouse owner they could find. Just like this tough guy says."

The compliment was for me because he nodded in my direction.

The telephone rang and Hanrahan took the call. He said, as he did: "It'll be for me. I told 'em where you was taking me."

He talked over the phone for a min-

ute and then hung up, grinning. He said: "We don't have to worry about Truesdale, by golly. We got him."

"Where?"

"You got him. In that shooting on the dock. He was one of them you shot at and you hit him and he fell in the water. The police boat just picked him out and they say he's got a tunnel through him as big as your fist. That'd be from that cannon you use."

I decided again that the Magnum had been worth the money I'd paid for it.

Hanrahan said: "I guess that's about all. We'll hold you, sister, as a material witness. And you, guy, we'll hold and figure out just what and how much we can put against you."

The man said hurriedly: "Now wait. Carson told Leany and me to come up here and make sure this guy kept out of the way tonight. That's all. The girl was supposed to do it but Carson wasn't sure she could and he didn't want to take any chances. He said this guy was suspicious and would get in the way as sure as hell."

I grinned and Hanrahan said: "He sure did, didn't he, bud?"

"And I know something else. About Leany. Leany gave old Tom something to make him too sick to work. That was because old Tom would have been wise that something was going on when that shipment came in and they had to get him out of the way and have a new man in who didn't know what to watch. It was something Carson gave Leany to give Tom, but it wasn't enough to kill him. Just enough to make him sick."

"It killed him, though."

"It did not. Truesdale did that. He thought Tom might tell you things and that you'd add 'em up and get the answer. He went up to the hospital and gave Tom some more of the same."

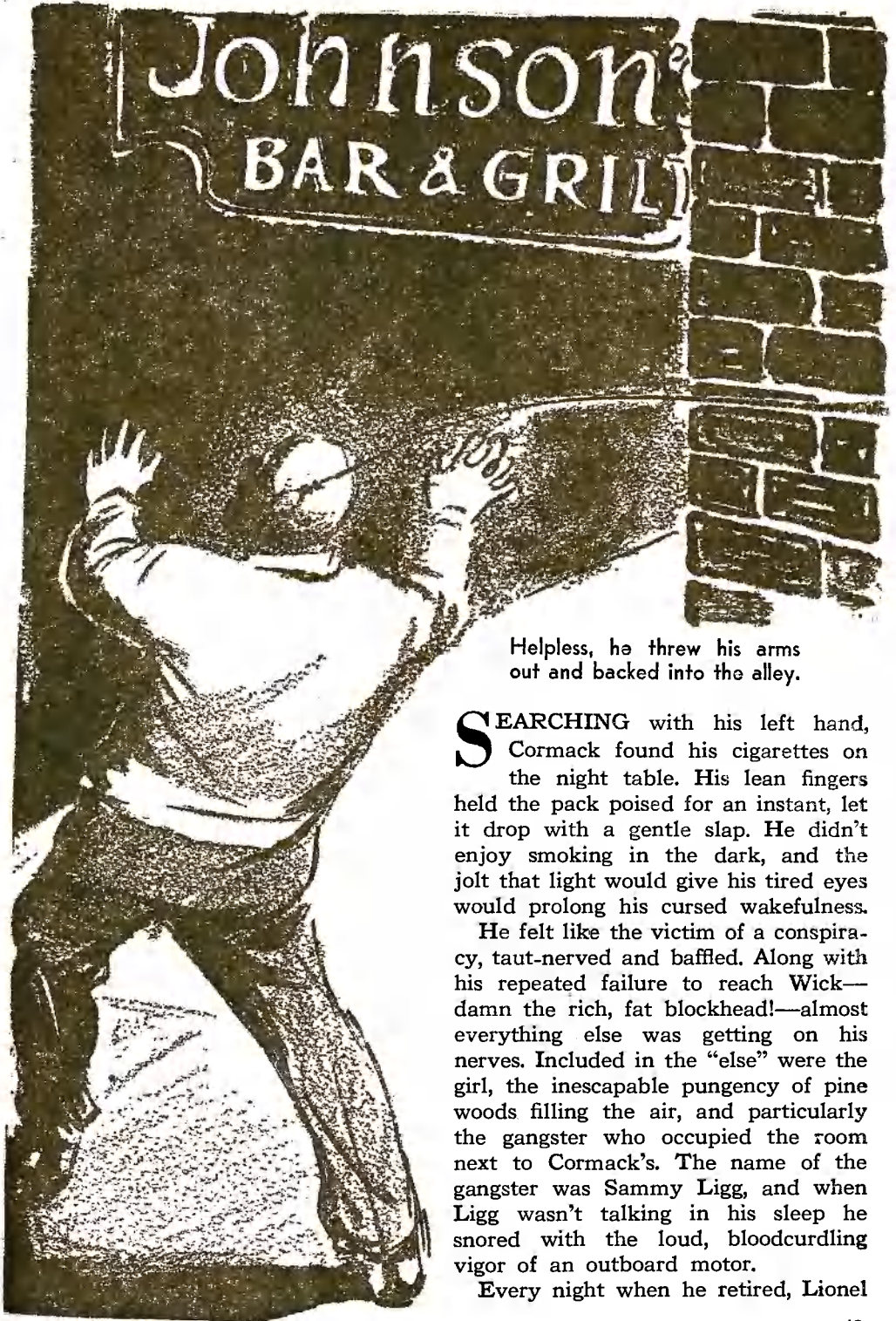
(Continued on page 106)

Not Big Enough

By T. V. FAULKNER

It seemed certain there were very good fishermen around. But when it comes to murder, there are bigger fish to be caught than a mere killer . . .





Helpless, he threw his arms out and backed into the alley.

SEARCHING with his left hand, Cormack found his cigarettes on the night table. His lean fingers held the pack poised for an instant, let it drop with a gentle slap. He didn't enjoy smoking in the dark, and the jolt that light would give his tired eyes would prolong his cursed wakefulness.

He felt like the victim of a conspiracy, taut-nerved and baffled. Along with his repeated failure to reach Wick—damn the rich, fat blockhead!—almost everything else was getting on his nerves. Included in the "else" were the girl, the inescapable pungency of pine woods filling the air, and particularly the gangster who occupied the room next to Cormack's. The name of the gangster was Sammy Ligg, and when Ligg wasn't talking in his sleep he snored with the loud, bloodcurdling vigor of an outboard motor.

Every night when he retired, Lionel

Cormack prayed patiently on his knees, "Please damn Andrew Wick, Harriet Unmay, Sammy Ligg, and the lousy newspaper I work for."

He was a city man, and he hated it up here in the big pines where there was nothing to do but stay healthy, and where nothing happened. Out on Horseshoe Lake, curving away and out of sight from the Lodge in the big timber, a fish jumped with a shivering splash, walking on its tail. *Whop!*—there he fell back into the water. That was a big fish.

In the next room, in his sleep, Sammy Ligg stated categorically, "That guntzel Jackie takes the rap for me, and somebody knocks him off for a fink in stir . . . s-s-s . . . hngng . . . same as I never did the job."

But Ligg was plenty worried about it, thought Cormack. Someone named Jackie had gone to prison for Ligg, had been killed by another convict who thought he was a fink, or finger; whatever crime it was that Ligg had committed, it would go unpunished now. Maybe. Cormack doubted strongly whether he would bother with it; it wasn't evidence, a man's shooting off his mouth in his sleep.

What Cormack was on was the Wick thing, held up because of Wick's inexplicable silence. If the Chicago millionaire really had any political ambitions he should have started talking his head off long ago. Andrew Turnbull Wick, Senator-to-be.

"Wickersham 2 . . . Wickersham 2 . . ." said Ligg in his sleep; he took a snoring inhalation, choked. Silence. He had awakened himself.

CORMACK listened, hoarding his own breath, but he couldn't hear a sound from the next room. Ligg was awake and listening, too, wondering whether any of the other guests in Torgie's Lodge had overheard him, whether he had

given anything away. Cormack nearly chuckled aloud. Then came the stealthy click of the lock, like a couple of coins striking together in a man's pocket. A murderous sound in the darkness.

Ligg.

Cormack breathed with the slow, deep regularity of sleep, heard the latch-bolt of his door engage with no more sound than a loving kiss as the door was closed. Ligg was barefoot and approached the bed one step at a time.

Pale starlight slanted through the window and barely left an oblong stain on the floor. There was no moon. Cormack faked a snore, keeping his eyes closed for fear the gleam of them might show that he was awake.

Ligg's bare heels whispered on the rug as he came to a halt about ten feet from the bed. A delicate beading of sweat spread over Cormack's face and forehead while he waited. His legs were rigid; he was ready to bang his heels against the wall and shoot himself headlong off the bed.

The silence was like a bomb at the point of going off. Ligg was so quiet that Cormack didn't know whether the gangster was in the room or not.

From the middle of the lake, on Loon Island, came a brisk, dry report. After it came a staccato, ragged string of reports. Someone on the island had touched off a pack of firecrackers. From the sound of them they were little ones, the kind that Cormack called "lady-crackers" when he was a kid.

Cormack used the rattle of explosions as an excuse for awakening; he cursed, turned the light on and blinked at Ligg with a wonderful show of surprise.

"Well, I'll be a son of a gun," said Ligg, looking around with even more bewilderment than Cormack. "How the hell did I get in here?"

Cormack shrugged. "It looks as though you walked in your sleep, mister."

"Yeah," Sammy agreed. "I'm all embarrassed." His bright brown eyes considered the newspaperman through lids that were narrow creases of fat. His shiny brown hair was mussed. He had high cheekbones, wide and rather well-drawn lips, a pugnacious jaw; his stocky frame was clad in tailored pajamas of heavy silk, whereas Cormack was sleeping raw. The gangster prompted, "You have any trouble sleeping?"

"I could be getting a shave and a haircut," said Cormack, "but something ought to be done about those damned firecrackers. There must be some kids over there at Wick's."

"Somebody's having fun," Ligg said absently. "Well, sorry I busted in on you."

"No offense taken."

Cormack heard Ligg's bed take the weight of the chunky-torsoed, bowlegged body. One last firecracker popped. Cormack turned his light off and lay back on the sheet.

THE other person lying awake was the movie actress, Miss Unmay, in the room adjoining Cormack's on the left. If Cormack didn't think of Miss Unmay off and on he wouldn't have been human. Whatever her acting abilities, she had a figure. But he wasn't saphead enough to think he'd get anywhere with her. Phooie on women.

What angered and mystified him was the situation on Loon Island; Wick had nothing to gain and everything to lose by not granting Cormack an interview. Cheap intrigue. Certainly the thought of murder in the show which the millionaire was running was fantastic; even if Ligg had not been in the room Cormack would have been no wiser.

He didn't obey the impulse to go down to the beach for a midnight swim, and so missed witnessing the rather eerie progress of the crime just committed. But before he fell asleep finally

he heard the rhythmic groan of oarlocks as a boat was rowed slowly away from Wick's dock out into the dark lake.

TWO hundred yards out from Torgie's float, with the oars hanging in the still water, rested Wick's green rowboat. No one aboard. On the beach big Torgie squinted at it curiously in the morning sun, now an hour above the trees. Under a beach umbrella, his clammy face glistening, Ligg sat sipping a Scotch and soda while his unwinking eyes watched Miss Unmay out on the float.

Cormack came hiking down the footprint-puckered sand to the water and greeted, "Hi, Torgie."

"Good morning, Mr. Cormack. Say . . ."

"Yeah?" Cormack waited.

"Would you stand up on the float and see if you can look into that boat, please? She's anchored out there, and if there is anybody lying in it the sun will kill him."

"Sure." Cormack dropped his beachrobe, stalked a few paces out into the water and plunged in.

At the float he catapulted his rangy, muscular brown body aboard and grinned a hello to Miss Unmay. Standing up he gave the green boat a look. No one aboard, almost certainly. He turned around and made a negative gesture to Torgie on the beach with his open palms.

"What's that for?" Miss Unmay asked.

"There's no one in the boat, Miss Unmay."

"Oh." She watched him proceed to the edge of the float, giving him close appraisal. He was long and lean and hard, especially hard to get acquainted with, and he was the only one at Torgie's worth cultivating. She caught him just at the point of diving by asking, "What's your first name?"

After a brief stare at her he said, "Lionel."

"Mine's Harriet," she countered. She kicked the water idly with her feet, sitting on the edge of the float. "You don't like me, do you? I'll bet there's hardly anyone you like except yourself."

He eyed her warily without answering and her voice became crisp with antagonism as she went on, "Well, why don't you like me? Is it because I'm a lousy actress, or what? I know. Some girl made a fool of you one time, and you're getting even by going right on being a fool. Do you ever have any fun?"

The girl, so help him, was good at this game.

"I don't think you're a lousy actress," he said judiciously; "just a little bit phony."

He thought he meant that. Her everyday personality, particularly with her throaty, lazy voice, was a product of the glamor business, and Cormack couldn't be bothered with counterfeits.

Harriet digested the comment with a smile and asked, "How did you get the scar?"

The knotty scar on his upper lip made his otherwise unsmiling expression sinister. The scar was of recent origin. "It was self-inflicted," he explained, "so that people could tell which was me and which was my twin brother."

"He must be good-looking," she hazarded.

Harriet asked, "You're not up here just for a vacation, are you?"

"It's beginning to look as though I am," he said glumly.

"Business before pleasure, mmh?"

She certainly was provocative, and he wasn't the only guest who thought so. On the beach Sammy Ligg's eyes were burning a hole through her. Ligg ordered another Scotch and soda without shifting his eyes from her.

SUDDENLY embarrassed, he dived from the float in a falling slant that took him deep into the water. Simultaneously Harriet jackknifed from her seat, using her legs against the float for momentum in the downward plunge in pursuit. Coming alongside at the bottom of the dive she grabbed his hair and gave him a fright worse than any he ever received in China as a newspaper correspondent. In reaction, their arms embraced each other, and their lips joined without any seeking.

Diffused light from above brightened as they rose; in an abrupt flurry of arms and legs she escaped him and broke to the surface first.

Cormack shot himself up into the sunlight and shook his head, gasping. Harriet was laughing in a kind of bubbling mockery, looking over her shining wet satin shoulder as she swam back to the float.

Cormack set out for the green rowboat in a lazy, deliberate crawl and didn't look back. Smart girl. She had determined to make a chump of him and accomplished it with neatness and dispatch.

At the boat he hung on for a minute with both hands, eased himself over without shipping water. A few fish scales and withered angleworms sprinkled the bottom of the boat. Under the stern seat was a chauffeur's cap. With the hot sun stinging his back he glanced at the float and saw Harriet's lithe body sparkle in a looping dive; she was heading back to the lodge.

Funny that the oars should be trailing in the water. Cormack's casual regard lighted on the heavy fishline snarled around the port rowlock. He picked up an end of the stout line and shortly a heavy-duty rod and reel came up from the bottom and was in his hands. He untangled the snarl and the reel purred as the line fattened on the spool.

The handle of the crank popped out



weight. He thought he might have a giant turtle; whatever it was it was alive, putting up only a spasmodic, sluggish fight. As it came closer his mystification increased. Ten feet from the boat the thing came to the surface and rolled over; a shining silver length whipped up and smacked the water,

Cormack said, "It looks to me as though you walk in your sleep, mister!"

of his hold with the unexpected tautening of the line. Snagged. He reeled the line taut again; it vibrated with suggestive jerks, not violent, like a dog worrying at the end of a long rope.

Mystified, Cormack laboriously commenced reeling in the heavy, quivering

went under; Cormack's hand stopped cranking for a moment and a chill breeze fingered his back.

He laid the rod in the boat and continued his task with the line hand over hand with cautious steadiness. At length he snubbed the line and reached into

the water with one hand, clutched a handful of wet jacket.

CHAPTER II

Enemy's Country

THERE was something particularly gruesome about what he finally worked aboard. The dead man, the owner of the chauffeur's cap, was a well-set-up specimen; his open eyes had a cold, lunatic glitter, but it was the fixture back of the head which gave Cormack the creeps. The fisherman had been using an enameled wooden plug carrying five sets of dangling hooks, three barbs to each unit. Two of the wicked clusters were hooked deep and fast at the base of the fisherman's skull, behind the left ear. Hooked just as fast to the tail cluster of the plug was a fighting muskellunge whose powerful length still whipped with the drive to spit out the hooks.

Cormack spent a moment trying to unhook the giant game fish, gave up and stepped to the anchor rope hanging over the side. He hoisted aboard a heavy, rusty machinery part of unknown purpose and took the oars.

He looked at Loon Island. A brilliant mote of light over there, tiny but blinding, struck him in the eyes. He shook his head, blinking away the blackness from his shocked nerves. Sunlight had been reflected from glass or metal for the most fleeting instant. Perhaps from a tin can, or, say, from the lenses of binoculars. . . . No one in sight over there.

The island was much farther away than Torgie's. In a curving course to avoid the beach he rowed to an inlet just above the lodge where Torgie kept his launch and canoes. A last heave on the oars grounded the bow of the boat. He yelled, "Hey, Torgie!"

The screen door of the kitchen opened and the heavyweight figure of the

proprietor descended to the path. Torgie stared, broke into a lumbering run down to the boats. His plain, coppery face was aghast when he made sure of the newspaperman's cargo. Better skilled at this kind of thing than Cormack, his hands freed the fish, limp and gasping now, with ease. He slung it back into the water and for a few seconds it floated as though dead. Then a wriggle, and a swift vanishing to deep water as though it had dissolved.

"Well," said Cormack sardonically. "Nobody'll believe what a big fellow he was now, and you tossed away a whole fish course for tonight besides."

"You wouldn't eat him, would you?" Torgie demanded.

"You bet your sweet I wouldn't," Cormack responded readily, and made an involuntary sound of revulsion.

Torgie went ahead, and Cormack learned that the hook clusters unscrewed from the plug. The ugly accident was easily reconstructed. The man had gone trolling at night, dropped the oars when the muskellunge struck. He had tossed over the anchor, played the fish and probably had himself a hell of a time before he brought the exhausted giant in. In the boat the muskie thrashed unexpectedly in one last explosion of fight. It was dark; the fisherman lost hold and ducked; the plug snagged him back of the ear in one of the freak and horrible accidents that always happen to fishermen and he was overboard, out of his mind with fear and unable to locate the boat in the darkness.

It must have happened after Cormack had fallen asleep, or he would have heard it.

Torgie identified the dead man. "It's Mort Pincus. He was Wick's man. The chauffeur. He took care of the grounds over there, too, and in the winter he was the caretaker. Too bad. He was a good boy."

They were carrying Pincus up to the lodge.

"Now, it's funny," Torgie remarked, and spat.

"What's funny?"

"More than three years I've known Mort, and this is the first time I ever heard of him going fishing. He couldn't swim, and he was afraid of the water. One time he told me it made him sick just to sit in a boat, when I asked him to go out on the lake with me one time."

Cormack said, "Hmh." It was very funny indeed, if a man who was afraid of the water went fishing at night when there was no moon. He asked, "How about Wick?"

"Oh, he fishes. I haven't seen him out this season yet. He's got a launch, bigger than mine," Torgie said placidly.

IN the lodge Torgie phoned the Wick place first, and after dialling, commented to Cormack, "I called Wick before, about his boat off my beach, but I couldn't get any answer."

Nor did he get any answer this time. He then called the Marshal of Bertha, the town nearest the lake. Cormack collected his robe from the beach and went up to his room to change. His window faced the lake, and he stared across inimically at Loon Island.

When he came down he looked around casually for Harriet and after an hour of restless strolling about inquired for her.

"She took a bicycle," Torgie retorted, grinning a little at the flush showing through Cormack's tan. So he was supposed to take another bike and go chasing after her. Like hell he would. Torgie hinted, "She said she was going around the lake."

If she really intended making the circuit he would have plenty of time to catch her. Nix. But he couldn't get that kiss out of his mind.

IN actuality, Horseshoe Lake was round, but Loon Island was separated from shore by a channel ranging in width only from ten to twenty-odd feet. At no point was it deeper than five feet, and heavy foresting hid it effectually.

Two rustic bridges crossed the channel, one at each end of the island, all of which was Wick's property. The trunk highway from Bertha turned past Torgie's Lodge and went a half mile beyond the island before cutting east. At the turn-off began a trail of compacted earth, just as easy for cycling as the highway macadam, which serpentine through the timber all the way around the lake back to Torgie's.

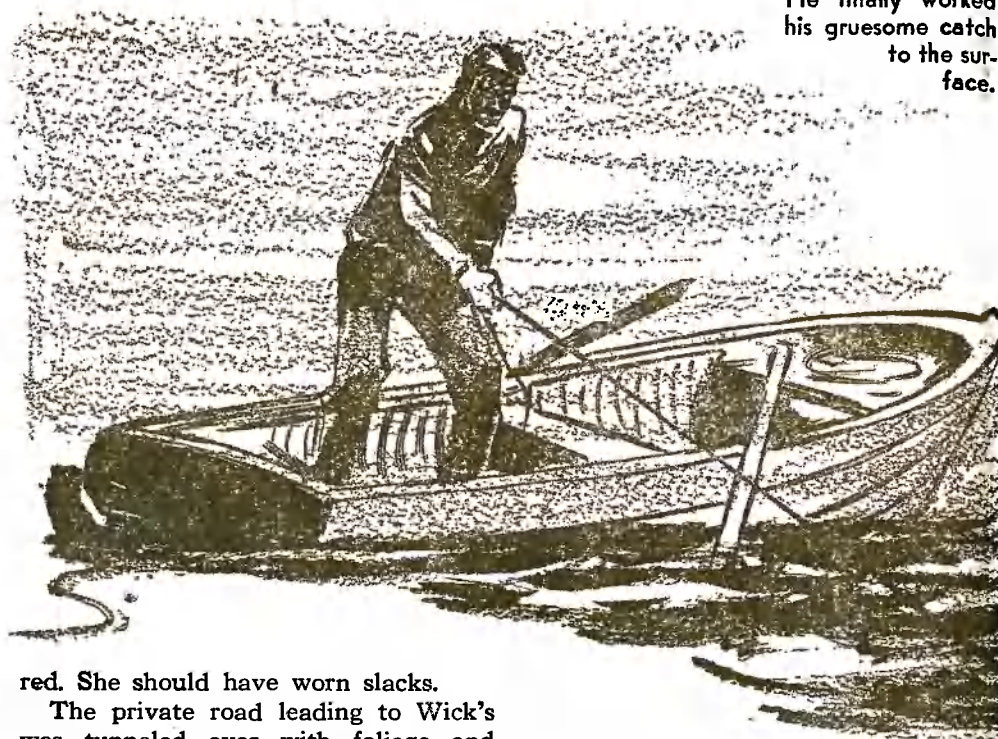
The bicycle was balloon-tired, making the riding comfortable, the paddling hard, and the coasting rotten. Harriet pedaled along at a pace that was scarcely exercise, just in case the good-looking Mr. Cormack took a notion to follow her. Occasionally she glanced over her shoulder.

She was wearing silky gabardine shorts and a snug, neckless and sleeveless sweater of fine wool, hand-knitted. On her feet were woolen anklets and sneakers, a green visor protected her eyes; the green shadow gave her face an interesting waxen translucency, emphasizing her immaculately-drawn lips.

At the private road leading in to Wick's estate she braked to a stop, stretched her handsome legs to the ground and balanced on tiptoe. She looked back. There was no one in sight on the macadam, shimmering in the sun, all the way back to the curve near Torgie's.

She felt warm. Her yellow hair, fastidiously clean and worn in a roll that gleamed like silk, was burning hot to the touch of her palm. Besides, her arms were wrapped in gauze from wrist to shoulder as protection against the deadly sunlight. Her legs, especially at the knees, were already turning an angry

He finally worked
his gruesome catch
to the sur-
face.



red. She should have worn slacks.

The private road leading to Wick's was tunneled over with foliage and looked cool. Moreover, her curiosity about the place was aroused. She pushed off, turning, and in a moment pedaled across the bumpy planks of the bridge. The road turned right; abruptly she had a view of Wick's sprawling, massive lodge of varnished yellow pine logs. At the main entrance the driveway was flanked by twin spruces over two hundred feet high. The grounds had been well kept and the grass, though somewhat long, still looked like velvet in its gentle sweep down to the dock and beach.

THE screen door of the entrance banged against the logs of the front, and out burst the short, fat figure of Andrew Wick, running for his life. He cleared the porch steps with a bound, his short legs churning. His eyes were deeply sunken and looked blacked, and his apple-round face was contorted

with effort. He was in shirtsleeves, and his huge belly danced a frantic, ludicrous jig as he fled. Inside the lodge someone yelled, "Hick! He's loose!"

Before the screen door slammed shut a lanky man wearing wrinkled denim slacks stepped out on the porch. He had a bony, sunburned nose, a buttonhole of a mouth, bright blue eyes. In his right hand was a fishing rod, with the glitter of a reel above his clamped fist. From the tip of the rod dangled a many-barbed plug.

For an instant he regarded the fleeing millionaire; then the rod whipped back, he stepped forward, and with the powerful cast the reel released line in a vicious, long, slowing whine. Bull's-eye. The plug socked Wick at the base of the skull and the blow tripped him to his knees. Immediately bounding to his feet he started running again but

the line was taut and his short legs shot out from under his belly. He sat down hard, his breath exploding. From her point of partial concealment, as he climbed slowly to his feet, Harriet could hear his whimpering gasps while Hick, the fisherman, methodically reeled in the millionaire backwards.

Another man in gabardine and a panama, and a girl wearing shorts and a halter, appeared on the porch. The man showed his teeth in a barking

laugh at the sight of Wick backing, balancing with his chubby arms outstretched as though he were crucified.

Aghast and trembling, Harriet turned the bike to go. Standing behind her in the road with legs wide, his feet in worn gray sneakers which explained the ease of his stalking her, a man barred the way. His lips grinned unpleasantly, giving an ugly meaning to the fixed glare of his eyes.

Harriet uttered an involuntary cry, put her weight on the pedal and turned to wheel around him.



"Aw, stick around!" he pleaded mockingly. In a quick step and reach he seized the handlebars, and hastily she tumbled off. With a shove he sent the bike into the bushes lining the road.

She tried to keep her voice calm. "You've got a lot of nerve!" she said. "I'll have you arrested!"

"Who, me?" he asked with innocent surprise.

She took a step toward the fallen bike, stopped and backed away as he approached her, grinning again. His eyes were like crawling things upon her, and tension made her shake.

"Keep away from me!" she cried. Her lungs collapsed, filled to bursting again. In sudden flight she sprang for the woods to the left. The gangster tore after her, dived and snaked his arms around her legs. The fall knocked her wind out for a moment, but sheer animal panic gave her a desperate strength that made the unpleasant Mr. McCloskey stop grinning. She was as hard to hold as a jackrabbit. He reached her face with a heavy, grazing slap; in return he received one of her kicking knees in the Adam's-apple and she got away as though she had been catapulted out of his wiry arms. She left the neighborhood in such a hurry that she slipped and fell, and gargling with rage he recaptured her. His arms whipped around her waist and he thrashed her from side to side, shaking the fight out of her.

She found her breath, but his hand clapped her scream short. Twisting and convulsing she clawed at him before she fell into the blackness of the faint. He scouted the lodge with a hurried glance, breathing hard not entirely from his exertions.

CHAPTER III

Bigger Fish

WHEN she came to, wet-eyed, she was a prisoner in the lodge along

with Wick. Their captors took no pains to conceal identities. The fisherman was Hick Putnam, the leader, and the dark-haired, hard-eyed girl in the play suit, Gay Taylor, was his. The man who had laughed at Wick was Herbert Curran, and the rat whose kisses had smeared her lipstick, McCloskey, answered to the awkward nickname of Step-and-a-half. Step-etc. had a short right leg which was entirely a peculiarity, not a handicap.

In a twanging, implacable voice Hick was still bawling McCloskey out. Lying on a varnished pine bunk upstairs, with Gay Taylor on guard temporarily in the small room, Harriet listened apathetically.

"I stuck you on that bridge to stop anybody from paying us a call," said Hick in his violin-string snarl. "And just because you've got the red ants you let this girl come through. Maybe we'll leave you behind when we lam out of here. Like Pincus."

"I tell you she seen you snag Wick with the rod," McCloskey protested in a subdued voice. "I hadda hang onto her after that."

"Shut up!" Hick twanged. "You know who she is?"

"Sure," McCloskey answered. "Harriet Unmay."

"Damn you!" Hick responded. "Everything was gunna be easy and you make it tough. She never would of seen nothing if you didn't let her across the bridge. Now we got a movie actress on our hands, and there's a million people who'll recognize her if we take her along. What are we gunna do with her?"

In the ensuing silence Harriet felt cold, and her heart was a knot.

McCloskey argued weakly, "Well, what if she came across the other bridge? I couldn't have stopped her."

"You can see the other bridge from where you were. From now on you

stick around here and play with the firecrackers."

"I heard you! I heard you!" McCloskey complained.

"I'm going fishing," Hick announced. "No funny business while I'm gone. That dough might get here today; it's gotta come this week."

Harriet's eyes were brilliant as she stared at Gay. Gay was watching her with a curious mixture of hunger, jealousy, and hatred. She asked, "How does it feel to be a movie actress?"

Harriet shrugged. "It's hard work."

"I'll bet it is," Gay mused sarcastically. "With all them actors around."

"What are they going to do?" Harriet asked. With herself, she meant.

In answer she received a cold, menacing little smile.

She wondered what they had done with fat Mr. Wick. Poor millionaire. And she prayed that she had cracked the rangy Mr. Cormack's hard shell, and that he would come cycling around the lake after her.

CORMACK figured that he'd catch up with Harriet about half way around the lake. He was wheeling right along on another of Torgie's pleasure bikes, the oversize tires whining steadily as the tar on the road sucked at the treads. Now and then he spotted the tire marks left by Harriet's bike. At Wick's road he braked abruptly; if the curving tracks here were hers, she had turned in; Cormack turned in.

He came to a rustic bridge. A man in natty gabardines and a Panama left the rail, stood in the middle of the bridge and shook his head. "No visitors, Jack."

Cormack didn't like him. Voice, manner, appearance, dress, eyes, the smug grin, all wrong.

But Harriet had gone in here.

"I'm a reporter. I'd like to see Mr. Wick."

"No reporters," said Curran.

Cormack eyed the bulge at Curran's handkerchief pocket. Gun. Automatic, likely. He fished for cigarettes and lighted one, balancing on the bike.

"Move along," Curran ordered.

"Surely. Nice place you've got here," Cormack remarked.

If Wick had hired this man as a body-guard he had hired a gangster.

He cycled back to the highway. Half way between the two bridges crossing the channel to the island he wheeled off the road. He laid the bike in weeds, vaulted a barbed-wire fence. At this point the channel was fourteen feet wide. He cleared it with a running broadjump and headed into the woods toward the lodge, which was still out of sight.

First he came upon a crow, hanging by the neck from a low branch, with the head wedged in a narrow crotch. He examined the bird briefly and found no wound. Either it had been stunned and strung up, or more improbably flown into the tight crotch and hung itself.

A little farther on he found two dead squirrels on the ground not far apart. While he was examining these, a pack of firecrackers was set off on the lodge grounds. The squirrels looked perfectly healthy; there was no evidence of their being shot or barked, and he wondered if those kids with the firecrackers were good enough, or just plain wanton-wicked enough, to stone the animals out of the trees.

"Okay, Jack!" said Curran behind him. He was breathing hard. "I thought I told you to stay to hell out of here."

Cormack straightened unhurriedly and answered, "You didn't put it quite that way."

"Outside! And damned quick about it!" He jerked his head toward the highway, but the automatic stayed rooted fast in his fist, with Cormack's wishbone the target.

"It's this way," Cormack explained.

"I've got to get a statement from Wick for my paper."

"I said no visitors! Get out!" Curran barked. There wasn't the shadow of a doubt that he would use the gun. He had a right to, presumably; Cormack was trespassing.

"Okay." He shrugged. On his way back he avoided the gunman, who maliciously stepped aside to give him a mighty kick from behind. Before the kick landed Cormack jerked around, seized the uplifted leg at the ankle and yanked.

Curran hopped forward three steps; his arms were outflung, and his eyes were popping with the effort to keep from falling. It was ludicrous, but Cormack was too angry to laugh. When he let go of the leg he was in perfect position for a righthand swing, and mad as he was he remembered to keep the bones of his hand and wrist in line. Curran ducked, but the blow nearly tore his jaw off all the same and made a beautiful smacking sound besides.

The gun bounced on pine needles. He retrieved it as Curran opened his eyes, and gave it a long underhand peg. Curran bounced up and legged it in the direction of the thrown automatic. In an insane, sobbing snarl he yelled, "You'll get yours, smart guy! I'll fix you!"

Cormack hiked for the channel with his customary long strides, not running. He could hear Curran cursing in the frantic search for the automatic. At the channel he measured the jump deliberately; he backed the required distance, sprinted hard enough so that when his heels jammed into the earth over there, the recoil didn't spring him back into the water. He rose, keeping his back to danger. He knew exactly the spot where he was going to get shot—it was that chilly spot between the shoulder blades.

He wouldn't hear the sound of the shot; the bullet would reach him first.

He raised the bike, pulled a weed from the back wheel and mounted. There was no point in going farther. He pedaled back to Torgie's, and the shot never came, though the gangster had had plenty of time.

"You're a damned fool, Cormack," he muttered.

There wasn't the slightest doubt in his mind that something rotten was taking place on Loon Island. All kinds of heat would have been drawn if he had been found murdered, from behind. If something was going on, the question was whether it was any of his business. Decidedly it was.

A cannon-cracker exploded on the island, made him jump. It was remarkable how plainly sounds carried from the island to Torgie's side of the lake.

He racked his bike with the others of Torgie's half-dozen by the veranda, went in to the bar for a drink. Usually Ligg had his foot on the rail, depending on Harriet's whereabouts, but this time he wasn't among those bending their elbows in the low-ceiling room.

A girl in a sunsuit invited him with her eyes. Cormack's exasperated glance slipped from her casually. The bar window looked out on the cove where he had brought Pincus in. He saw movement down there by the boats and squinted. Sitting on a rock, in partial concealment from both Torgie's and the island, Ligg held binoculars trained on Wick's. The binoculars were Torgie's, good ones, taken in payment from a guest who couldn't pay his bill otherwise.

By craning his neck Cormack could see a boat lying about fifty feet out from Wick's dock, in it a fisherman who was just executing an expert, long, looping cast from his seat in the stern.

Through the kitchen was the shortest way.

The door next to the kitchen led to Torgie's office and sleeping quarters, and it was open. Big Torgie called, "Hey, Mr. Cormack!"

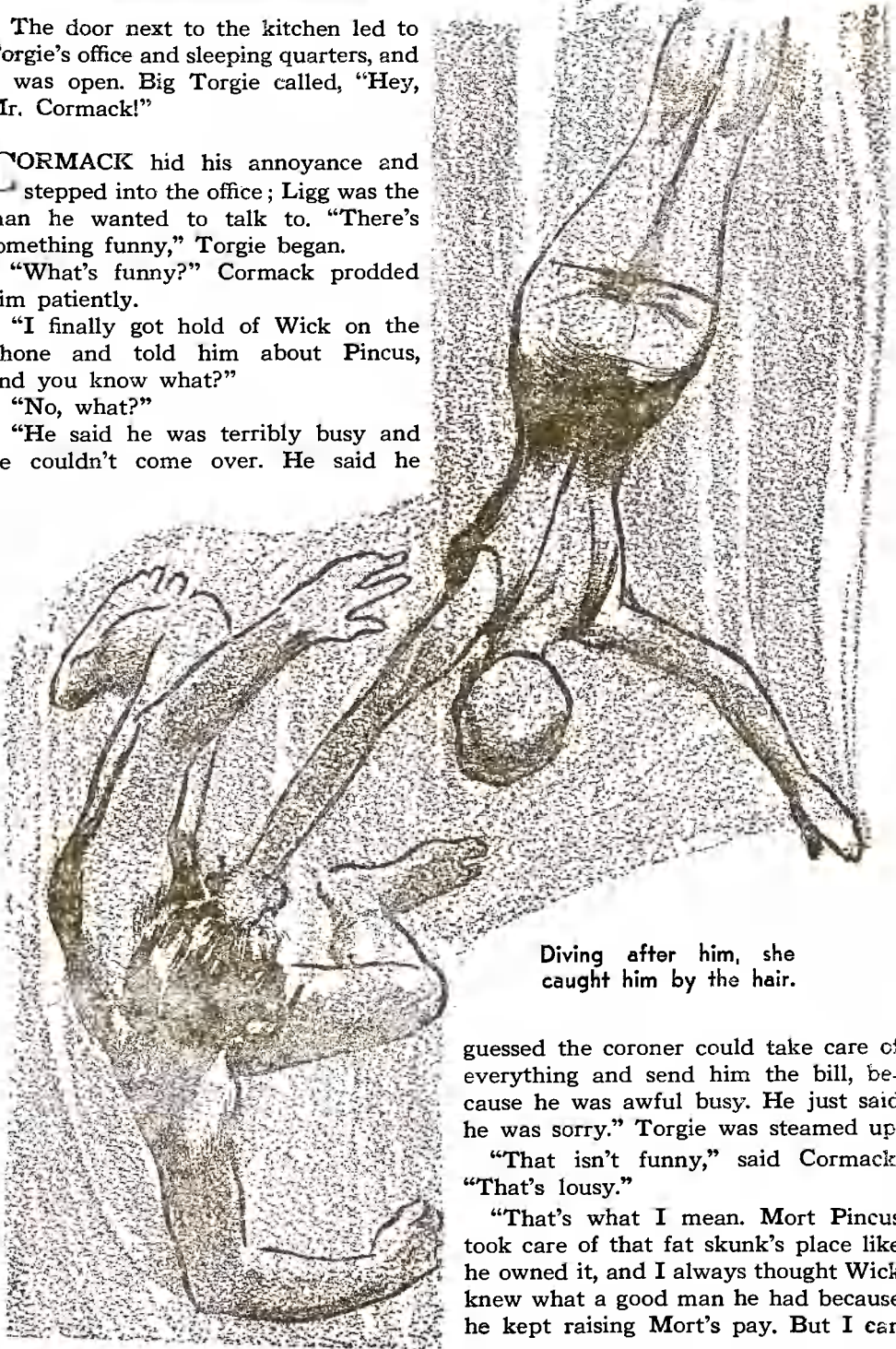
CORMACK hid his annoyance and stepped into the office; Ligg was the man he wanted to talk to. "There's something funny," Torgie began.

"What's funny?" Cormack prodded him patiently.

"I finally got hold of Wick on the phone and told him about Pincus, and you know what?"

"No, what?"

"He said he was terribly busy and he couldn't come over. He said he



Diving after him, she caught him by the hair.

guessed the coroner could take care of everything and send him the bill, because he was awful busy. He just said he was sorry." Torgie was steamed up.

"That isn't funny," said Cormack. "That's lousy."

"That's what I mean. Mort Pincus took care of that fat skunk's place like he owned it, and I always thought Wick knew what a good man he had because he kept raising Mort's pay. But I can

see I was mistaken. I called him a dirty skunk to his face and hung up on him."

"Has Wick ever been over here?"

"Lots of times. Not this season."

"What was done with Pincus?"

"Mize took him to town." Dr. Mize was the coroner. "Ol' Mize was spittin' mad, because Mort was a good boy, and he said he was going to send Wick one hell of a bill."

"You say Pincus never went fishing?"

"He never did," Torgie said positively. "But Mize called up just now—he was thinking the same thing I was—and it couldn't be anything but an accident."

"Water in the lungs?"

"Yah; he was drowned, all right."

A man could drown in a bathtub. Artificial respiration could force water from a man's lungs. Likewise, artificial respiration, with the head of a dead man immersed in water, might pump his lungs full of water. Cormack shrugged. "The weight of his clothes was enough, let alone the fish."

"Let alone the fish," Torgie repeated. "I'd swear there was only that one big muskie in this lake. Three seasons, people have been trying to catch him. But that feller you see out there off Wick's dock right now, the muskie he pulled in yesterday was just as big."

"Maybe," Cormack suggested, "he put the fish back in, the way you did."

"Maybe."

Cormack adjourned to the beach soundlessly in the mushy sand, approaching Ligg.

THE gangster was muttering to himself. Cormack drew closer and heard, "Hick Putnam; Hick and Curran and McCloskey and that—little Taylor dame! I'll be a dirty so-and-so!" A few seconds later, querulously, "What and the hell are they doing up here?"

"What and the hell are they doing up here?" Cormack mimicked, grinning.

Ligg whipped around, fell off the

rock and got up dusting sand from his pants. He chuckled, the sound contradicting the unfriendly stoniness of his eyes.

"Brother, I wouldn't know," he stated.

"You talk to yourself," Cormack told him pleasantly. "You talk in your sleep, too."

"Maybe you heard something," Ligg suggested. The fingers of his right hand were performing an interesting twitching little dance.

Cormack rounded his eyes with innocence. "Naturally," he admitted. "You used to be in the racket, didn't you?"

"So you was listening," Ligg challenged.

"Your room is next to mine. How can I help hearing?"

"Okay, Cormack. Get this straight: I ain't in no rackets, see? I got my wad and I got out. Nobody's got anything on me and nobody's gonna. You just keep your nose clean."

"That's what you're doing, hmb? I take it that Hick Putnam is an old pal of yours."

Ligg snapped, "Don't be funny."

Cormack asked, "How did he pick up the handle—Hick?"

Ligg scrutinized him for an instant, responded carefully, "That's what he looks like, pal. Like a rube, an apple-knocker. Big gold watchchain slung across his vest, and always chewing on a weed. He chews with his back teeth. Big meathooks from driving a plow and pitching pumpkins. Get the idea? Only he's been around a lot."

"Tough people, hmb?"

"Tough," said Ligg, "and smart. If I was you I wouldn't go anywheres near the island. I'd stay away from the place. Good-bye now."

He strode up to the lodge, looked back from the kitchen doorway, disappeared inside.

In the middle of the afternoon Torgie

lost his feature attraction. McCloskey drove up in front with Wick's station wagon, returning the bike Harriet had used. He delivered a note from her to Torgie which read simply, "Mr. Wick has invited me to remain here. Kindly show the bearer to my rooms, and this man will bring over my things. He will pay you what would be due up to the end of the month. Harriet Unmay."

"What's the idea?" Torgie asked.

"Maybe she likes it better over there than she does here," McCloskey answered.

Torgie retaliated by comparing her signature meticulously with her registration in a ledger he brought out. There was nothing else to do but show McCloskey up to her rooms, and he remained in the doorway while the emissary dumped the actress' belongings together. On his way to his room Cormack stopped to look on, after a glance from Torgie.

McCloskey jeered, "You guys getting an eyeful?" He was emptying drawers of filmy underthings and dumping the lot into suitcases along with bottles of perfume and lotion and jars of cream. Just as sloppily he was stripping the wardrobe of her dresses, shoes, hats, chucking the whole shebang into the trunk or wherever it would go.

CORMACK repaired to his room without a word and returned with his Leica ready for use. There were five suitcases, a trunk, and two hatboxes for all the fine raiment, and what McCloskey was doing with it was an outrage. Cormack snapped a picture. McCloskey snarled, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Cormack snapped another picture, and another, methodically. McCloskey finished up in a reckless hurry, pitching everything into the luggage in a mess that would break a woman's heart.

Torgie shook his head at McCloskey's

viciously short order to help him, and he had to make four trips before the luggage was in the station wagon. Solemnly Cormack harried him en route by taking more pictures. When he was in the driver's seat ready to go McCloskey made a laughably clumsy attempt at savoir-faire. "Say, Jack," he bargained, "I'd like to have that roll of film. Give you a good price for it. Yeah?"

"What's a good price?" Cormack asked gloomily.

"It's worth ten bucks to me. I'm funny about collecting pictures of myself. See?"

Cormack shook his head, face expressionless.

"Twenty bucks," McCloskey bid. His smile was a warped leer that wouldn't convince his own dog that he was a nice boy. Cormack took a picture of it.

"No," Cormack refused softly. "You see, the roll had some snaps on it already, and they're not for sale."

"Fifty. That's a lot of dough."

Cormack burst out laughing.

McCloskey stared for a moment, without any pretense of good humor. "Okay." The sound of his voice suggested grit. "I'll be seeing you some time. Soon." The motor was running, and when it was yanked into gear the wheels ripped up a white talc-like cumulus of dust from the crushed granite coating the driveway; the station wagon careened into the highway and was gone in the direction of Wick's.

Cormack scowled. Taking the pictures was a blind gesture; they proved nothing except that McCloskey didn't like to be snapped, were worth nothing.

All he had come up to the resort for was to interview Wick, and Wick was inaccessible. The interview was unqualifiedly peanuts as far as he was concerned, and except for Harriet he would have folded his tent without delay. Harriet had shifted her address to the island, and Torgie's wasn't the same

without her. According to appearances there were three men and a girl of Sammy Ligg's kind over there on the island; Ligg, apparently a retired racketeer as he claimed, was keeping an eye on them. The best that Cormack had been able to get out of Wick through telephone conversations was that the millionaire would call back when he was ready to discuss his political plans. So with nothing better to do now that the beauty was gone, Cormack kept an eye on Ligg.

OVER at Wick's, in the pine-scented upstairs room, Harriet was using all her talent on the hard-eyed Gay Taylor, playing with all her might on the susceptibilities every good-looking girl has. And Hick's girl had physical beauty.

Composed, Harriet asked, "Would he kill you if you left him? Would Hick kill you?"

"What?" Gay ejaculated. "What do you mean?"

"Have you ever taken a screen test?"

Gay stared back suspiciously, placed her hands deliberately on her hips. Excellent figure, as shapely as Harriet's.

Lying, Harriet chose her words. She said, "My contract calls for three more pictures this year. I can get you a good part in the picture they're shooting now. They're taking background shots; the studio wired me yesterday and I have to get back."

Gay uttered an Anglo-Saxon word of disbelief.

Patiently Harriet confessed, "I think I'm going to be murdered, and you've got to help me escape. I don't know what this is all about and I don't care, but listen to me, darling: You're quite slim. You're too slim, aren't you?"

Gay's eyes narrowed.

"You think you're too slender," Harriet said confidently. She eyed the slenderness professionally, from long legs

to the clean gleam of the painstakingly-coiffeured dark hair. "You're not too slender. The camera always gives you more weight than you have, and if you can act at all I can get the part for you. I really can."

"You wouldn't be fooling me, would you?" Gay asked.

"You have a lovely form. For God's sake, hasn't anyone ever told you that?"

Perhaps Gay heard the sound; Harriet didn't. Gay sauntered over to the bed on which Harriet sat, Gay wore a smile of conspiracy that fooled Harriet completely. Gay was muscular in spite of her round femininity, and her slap across Harriet's cheek was as hard as a man's.

Harriet sprang erect, sat down again trembling and breathing hard. Gay had drawn a beautiful, wicked little .25 automatic of foreign make from the pocket of her trunks. And besides, the door was suddenly open, with the carrot-nosed Hick Putnam standing there.

Gay sneered, "I happen to be in love with Hick, and besides that you can't lie worth a damn."

Hick cleared his throat, and Gay turned with too much surprise to be genuine.

"That's right, Gay," Hick twanged. "Don't let her pull any fast ones on you."

Looking at her he backed, and the door closed as silently as it had opened. He had been listening.

A while after that the phone rang.

"That damned snoop Cormack again," came Hick's muffled complaint, then his whining, "Hello!"

But it wasn't Cormack this time.

CHAPTER V

Murder By Neon Light

KEEPING an eye on Ligg meant drinking in the bar. Sometimes

there were five or six, sometimes only the two of them. Ligg's beady glance flirted at the phone several times, and twice lingered calculatingly on Cormack, which Cormack noted in the bar mirror. There was only one phone, on a kind of lectern at the end of the bar, and Ligg wanted to use it. But he didn't want to use it unless he was alone.

"Keep away from me!" she cried.
But he had already fackled her.



At last he gave Cormack a poisonous look and left.

Cormack nursed his beer for ten minutes, abandoned it and went out to examine the bicycle rack. One was missing. He backed another one out and mounted it, shoved off in the direction of town.

The town of Bertha wasn't much, mostly a huddle of stores in a clump of trees on the highway north to Duluth.

He justified the need for going to town by the fact that he was practically out of his particular brand of cigarette.

He had better legs than Ligg's, and pumped down the final stretch in time to see the gangster turn into Main Street.

Ligg made a telephone call in a store which had a private booth. He dialed Wick's number, and it was Hick Putnam who twanged, "Hello!"

"Hello, Hick; this is Sammy Ligg; you're cutting me in."

"You've got the wrong number."

"That's waht you think. Listen. I'm busted and I need a stake. It won't cost you much; you know me, Hick."

"I know you, you cheap chiseler. How much?"

Andrew Wick was a millionaire. Without hesitation Ligg demanded, "Fifty grand."

"You can go to hell," Hick snorted.

"You ain't got any choice," Ligg chortled. "The least you'll get here in Minnesota is life, and you know how tough they are at Stillwater; you'll never get out, and you'll get T.B. in the twine shop. You know what you'll get if they ship you down to Illinois."

"You dirty fink. You always were a fink, weren't you, Sammy?"

"Y' gotta live," Sammy chortled.

Silence at Wick's end, which meant a hand clamped over the mouthpiece, then Hick's voice, "Okay. Come on over here and we'll talk business."

Ligg laughed contemptuously. "Okay, the deal's off."

"Where do I meet you, then?" Hick snapped.

"In the bar at Torgie's."

"Nothing doing," Hick refused. "That—Cormack snapped pictures of McCloskey this afternoon, and he's not getting any of me. Wait a minute." A longer silence this time.

Hick's hand unclamped from the mouthpiece and he gave Ligg directions with finality, "I'll meet you on the sidewalk in front of Johnson's Bar and Grill on Main Street, after Johnson turns his neon lights on. That's after dark."

Ligg thought it over. The meeting had to be outside the bar because the customers might recognize either Hick or Ligg. Both had been in newsprint and weren't kidding themselves that they looked like simple-minded taxpayers on vacation. On the street, under deceptive artificial light, in public, the infamous Hick Putnam wouldn't try anything. Whatever his game was, probably kidnaping, it wasn't through yet and he wouldn't be taking chances. Sammy Ligg was a smart guy. Sammy asked, "With the fifty grand?"

"With the fifty grand."

LIGG hung up and wiped his brow and swore under his breath. He could have asked for a hundred grand, got it, and never paid income tax on a dime of it. He wondered how much Hick was clearing, even took the receiver off the hook again to call back. He decided to let well enough alone.

On his way out of the store he ran into Cormack. Stopping short he demanded, "What do you want?"

"Not that it's any of your damned business," said Cormack, slapping some money down on a glass counter, "I'm buying some cigarettes." He accepted the carton from the proprietor behind

the counter and remarked, "It smells like skunk around here."

The door of the shop slammed. Cormack went out and climbed onto his bike, balanced with the pedal against the curb. Without turning his head he could see the reflection of Ligg in the angled display window of the store's entrance. He pedaled off, turned on the road to Torgie's, continued around the block and picked up Ligg again on Main Street. He got behind some lilac bushes on the side-street boulevard and watched Ligg go into Johnson's bar.

He had not overheard any of Ligg's phone conversation.

Ligg was in the bar long enough for a drink, issued and strolled up and down the sidewalk in front scrutinizing all the details of the scene as though it were a memory contest. The south wall of the bar was flush with a grocery store. The north wall had a weedy, stony, narrow alley between it and that of a ramshackle blacksmith shop closed and gone out of business. Ligg walked into the alley, kicked a tin can and reappeared. He returned into the bar and was gone long enough for five or six drinks, with Cormack's own thirst increasing by leaps and bounds by the minute.

When he emerged at last he headed for a restaurant for dinner. Cormack mounted his bike and pedaled to the inescapable white-enameled diner, which was on the corner. He bolted a veal cutlet, string beans, mashed potatoes which had the consistency of soup, and one slice of bread. The coffee was too hot to drink and he couldn't wait for it to cool.

He returned to the lilac bushes.

Ligg showed up picking his teeth, parked his bike in the alley by the bar, and had a grin on his face when he pushed open the door of the bar and vanished again.

The grass behind the lilac bushes was littered with cigarette butts.

Old female natives in aprons and gingham house dresses happened by and invariably greeted him, commented on the hot weather. One brown, wrinkled, wiry hen delayed to tell him the highlights of her one and only trip to St. Paul, the state capitol. She had been in Minneapolis, too, but together they were only "the city."

The sun went down, flooding a crowded, horizontal ladder of ropy clouds with a grand slam of color.

The orange and red dulled, and the purple turned leaden. It was only post-card stuff to begin with.

Sveinn Christopher Johnson turned on his neon lights.

LIGG appeared on the sidewalk, lighted a cigarette and smoked it close, dropped it and lighted another one. He swayed. He backed up to Johnson's plate glass, advanced to the curb and looked up and down the street. His nose itched, and his stubby left forefinger frisked back and forth beneath. The coal of another cigarette splashed on the state highway.

Wick's station wagon coasted into the highway and curved in toward Johnson's, parking at the curb in front of the alley to leave Johnson's curbage free. The only man in the station wagon was the driver, a man with a Panama. Curran.

Ligg stepped eccentrically toward the car as though dickering with himself. Curran held out a small package wrapped in a pack of firecrackers.

Ligg was reaching for the red package.

It was the neatest trick of a lifetime. From behind the bushes Cormack was watching the hand of a master; he saw what happened, but he couldn't imagine how it was done.

Behind Ligg's head something flashed

in the air. Ligg stuck his neck out, stopped, raised both hands to the back of his head. Then he dropped his arms, holding them away from his sides in an attitude of utter helplessness, and backed toward, into the alley beside Johnson's.

The expression on his face was something Cormack would never forget. Under the red glow of the neon his face resembled greasy gray dough and in his backward progress was something maniacal and nightmarish.

When he disappeared in the alley, Curran emerged from the car. He started to open the red package, tearing off the wrapper. Along came a ten-year-old youngster playing kick-the-can on his way home. The battered can bounced under the station wagon. Curran gave the kid the contents of the package—firecrackers—and a stick of punk.

With the punk lighted the kid wasted no time in touching off the fuse of one of the long strings of "ladycrackers," and while the chatter of sharp reports was going on, Curran returned to the station wagon and drove off. When he turned the corner, Johnson burst from his tavern and chased the kid away. Whereupon Cormack mounted the bike and pedaled up the street to the alley. Parking the bike against the wall he entered the alley, sliding his feet along the ground with searching steps.

He kicked something, and it was as though his stomach were in the grab of a cold hand that reached out from the darkness. He lighted a match, and by the flickering petal of light found that he had kicked Sammy Ligg on the crown of the head.

Another lighted match.

The back of Ligg's scalp was lacerated as though he had been jabbed repeatedly with a sharp knife. The deep ruby beads of blood oozed like horrible little live things. The wounds were

not sufficient to cause death, but by some planned means this was murder. He had seen it happen.

It was perfect, with a convincing semblance of plain accident. Shards of a broken bottle glittered on the ground, and Ligg's head lay in them. He had stepped into the alley, for whatever reason men step into alleys after drinking, had suffered a heart attack and been cut in falling. Besides the cuts there were glass-punctures, but the cuts all had been knifed in the same direction.

Cormack got out of there, having no desire to be found with a dead man for one thing, and otherwise feeling the need of immediate hurry. He jumped on the bike, took the curb; straining his long legs, he had the bike going at a sprint when the station wagon cut across Main Street into the road to Horseshoe Lake. No street lights. Just enough light from shop-signs to show him two men in the front seat of the car.

Cormack's bike was equipped with a battery headlight, which he hadn't turned on. On the rear mudguard was only the ruby reflector button. He cut around the corner, in close, then raised his fanny off the saddle and pumped with heart and soul to catch the tantalizing, dancing taillights of Wick's car ahead. His seared lungs were at the bursting point when he reached out over the handlebars, brushed smooth wood and then clamped hold. The car picked up speed to about fifty miles an hour and he hung on, dizzy and sobbing as he fought to get his wind back.

CHAPTER VI

The Last Fish

THEY sailed past Torgie's, took the hitch around the lake and swung into Wick's private road across the lower bridge. McCloskey was on guard there,

but closed his eyes and turned his head away from the dust that rolled up from the rumbling planks.

Near the lodge entrance Cormack let go and wheeled off the drive onto the lawn. He had enough momentum to coast all the way around to the slope up from the beach.

There was a flagstoned porch here, and the French windows of the living room stood open. There was nothing to it but hiking in and taking a look at the sumptuous appointments of the great room. There were voices from the direction of the garage, where the car had stopped. No sound in the lodge ex-

Curran ducked, but the blow nearly tore his jaw off—and made a beautiful smacking sound besides.



cept for Cormack's still hurried breathing.

His glance lighted on the telephone, on a massive maple table. He lifted the handpiece, dialed Torgie's number. After a brief wait Torgie answered.

The voices were getting nearer the lodge.

"This is Cormack," he reported in an urgent undertone.

"Yah," said Torgie, in a whisper of conspiracy.

"Pincus was murdered. Ligg has just been murdered. Get the . . ." His voice died in his throat.

His head turned to the oak stairs mounting to the second floor. Gay Taylor was standing there, having descended soundlessly on the thick carpeting. The gun in her hand was small, but Cormack respected small guns; therefore he slowly and shruggingly laid the handpiece of the telephone on the maple table, not in the cradle.

Gay's red lips wore a satanic little grin. She said, "The upstairs radio is going. Hear it?"

With his attention called to it he could, as though a door had opened. The voices outside were close, at the front porch.

"Yes; I hear it." He breathed the words.

"You dialed Torgie's, didn't you?" The clicks of the dialing had sounded in the radio's loudspeaker and Lionel Cormack was out on a limb. Gay's narrowed bright eyes flicked at the handpiece, and she ordered, "Hang it up, wise guy."

"Jump," he said in a contemptuous tone, and grinned. Several steps up behind Gay were a pair of golden-tanned nether limbs, and the only limbs of those fashioning which he knew of belonged to Harriet Unmay. The limbs bent obediently.

"Say! . . ." Gay began, and then Harriet's falling weight struck her, knock-

ing her headlong. The little gun popped like a firecracker, socking a slug into the floor before Gay lost hold of it.

Gay was up first as Harriet sprawled with her legs in the air, but before she could reach the gun Cormack reached her and returned her violently to a sitting position with a short, murderous poke to the head. After she sat down she lay down so hard that her head bounced on the rug.

Harriet was getting to her feet. Cormack grabbed her around the waist and hustled through the French windows onto the porch with her as Hick Putnam charged into the living room with Curran.

Putnam was carrying a rod and reel, with a plug dangling from the tip of the rod. He whipped the steel rod back and cast at Cormack and Harriet as Curran yanked a gun from his shoulder-holster and fired. Curran was in the way and the barbed plug ripped bloodily through his ear and snagged fast in his cheek. His shot went wide and low into the wall and he staggered, cursing.

By that time Cormack had jumped the rail with Harriet into the darkness. When they hit ground Harriet started running, but Cormack dragged her down and backed into the shrubbery bordering the porch. There was a flower bed bordered with large stones; he took one and hurled it with all his might toward the beach. It hit the beach with a rattle of pebbles and tumbled splashing into the water.

Curran emptied the clip of his automatic at that point on the beach, firing from the porch rail. In the pause after the reechoing roar of the shots he said bitterly, "I'm bleeding like a pig!"

"The game's up," Hick said in a twanging, emotionless voice. "All because that fool McCloskey let that girl cross the bridge."

"We've got fifty grand, anyhow."

"It would be a quarter of a million if

we could only wait until the end of the week," Hick snarled. "Come on; let's get out of here!"

"Wait a minute, Hick; get these hooks out of my face, will you?"

"I'll have to cut." A knife blade snicked. "Can you take it?"

"I can't do anything else but." Silence, and then Curran sucked his breath in and cursed.

CORMACK lay with Harriet, both keeping very still. Up at the garage the starter of the station wagon growled, and the tires spit gravel as the car turned down the drive. The bridge planks rumbled, and they had the silence to themselves.

Harriet turned her head, and her smooth cheek touched Cormack's. Her lips moved to kiss him full on the lips.

The magic was shattered by the distant banging of shots near Torgie's, closely-bunched shots, then silence again.

Cormack withdrew, rose and helped Harriet up over the porch rail.

In the living room he listened at the phone to a dead wire, put the hand-piece back in the cradle. He wondered about Wick. He found the plump millionaire slumped over a desk in a study off the living room. Wick was dead. The back of his head was bandaged with gauze and tape, and with the pad peeled back there were ugly short slashes in the short hair of the scalp. Like Pincus, like Ligg.

WHEN Cormack had broken off in his phone conversation with Torgie, Torgie didn't have to listen very long before he rattled the hook and got the operator, and then located the Marshal drinking beer at Johnson's. They figured that Putnam had to go through Bertha to get away, and laid an ambush half way to town with Doc Mize and a deputy.

The Marshal parked his car across the road. Like the others he was armed with a deer rifle, and when Wick's station wagon came boiling down the road he fired a shot in the air. Answering fire came from the station wagon, and the driver tried to navigate around the car blocking the way.

Torgie, Mize, the deputy and the Marshal opened fire with the rifles and pumped a fusillade of cupranickel slugs into the careening car. It went into the ditch, turned completely over and came to a hellish, sudden stop against the trunk of a great oak.

In the wreck they found McCloskey and Curran shot dead, Gay Taylor with a broken neck. Hick Putnam was dazed but otherwise unhurt, and he was clutching a briefcase which contained fifty thousand dollars and a flat steel box filled with flies and other items of fishing tackle.

Hick was a great fisherman.

They took him to the town calaboose, picking up the president of the Bertha Bank on the way, and for a while they were a gang of exceedingly worried men.

Because it didn't look as though they could prove murder or anything else on Hick Putnam.

Lanky, meanfaced, with a sneer pinched under his long carrot of nose, arms akimbo, he demanded his money back, demanded a lawyer, cursed them in his twanging voice.

They knew where the fifty grand had come from. The banker explained that a check for the amount had been deposited in his bank, and that since he had never had any such amount on the premises it had to be shipped up from Chicago. He identified the dead Curran as the man who had collected it, a few days previously. The banker said also that two more of Wick's checks, totaling two hundred thousand dollars, had been deposited, and that very likely the money would arrive tomorrow. He iden-

tified the currency in the briefcase as the lot which had passed through his hands.

But it had no earmarks, and Hick's ownership couldn't be disproved.

Cormack arrived, and was admitted into the office full of scared men. Torgie said, "Mr. Cormack, did you say Mr. Ligg was murdered?"

"He's lying dead in the alley next to Johnson's." Cormack gazed at the sneering Hick with interest. At the sun-burned beak, the denim shirt with rolled sleeves, the baggy pants, scuffed shoes, the vest with the heavy gold watch-chain slung across the middle through a buttonhole. He looked like a hick, all right. Cormack added, "Wick is sitting at his desk over on the island; he's dead, too. The same way."

"What way?"

"Remember those scratches on the back of Pincus' neck? Ligg has them, and so has Wick."

"Hell," Mize objected. "I probed those, and they're just cuts from fish-hooks. They don't mean anything."

"No offense, Doc, but you didn't do a thorough job." Cormack walked casually up to Hick; when he was close enough his right hand snaked out, captured the watchchain and jerked. A button popped and hit the ceiling, and out of the pockets jumped a fat old solid gold turnip of watch and its anchorage of a mother-of-pearl penknife.

Hick leaped at Cormack, and for a couple of minutes following, all the men had their hands full subduing a wild-cat. It was savage but short. When they had the gangster handcuffed the marshal demanded, "Well, what the hell?"

Cormack was rummaging in Hick's box of fishing tackle. He produced a cloth tobacco sack and poured from it into his palm a pile of small, cylindrical objects that clicked like seeds. Seeds of death.

The marshal squinted at them, poked them and repeated, "Well?"

"They're subcaliber bullets," Cormack said. "These are what killed Pincus and Ligg and Wick."

"Ah, shucks! They ain't the size of a BB."

From Hick's watchchain Cormack removed a charm. The charm was a miniature single-shot pistol scarcely an inch long. Dinky gun or not, it was a firearm. He said, "These fishhook cuts are camouflage. Maybe one of these bullets wouldn't even prick you at twenty feet, but if you stick the nose of the gun into a cut at the base of the brain you can kill a man. Just stick a needle into the spinal cord and see what happens."

"One of them little specks?" the marshal asked incredulously.

Cormack fitted one of the tiny shells into the peewee gun and asked, "Want me to prove it?"

The marshal scrutinized his horny palm, held it out grinning broadly and said, "Sure."

Cormack cocked the gun, aimed it at the calloused palm and pressed the sliver of trigger. For a gun that size the report was a concussion, and everyone jumped. The marshal started to laugh triumphantly, looked at his hand palm and back, inhaled and let out a roar of pain. The bullet had gone all the way through.

"You'll find one of these pinheads lodged in each of their brains," Cormack concluded. "And unless I miss my guess, a ballistics man can find markings on the bullets that will prove they came from this gadget, toy that it is."

WHEN he mounted the bicycle to go back to Torgie's he was thinking of the firecrackers that had been shot off on the island, keeping him awake. More camouflage, since Hick knew how sound carried across the water.

He thought of the two squirrels and the crow he had found dead. Trophies of a childish, cunning sadist. It was a simple plan after all. When Wick had left Chicago on his vacation, Putnam and his mob had kidnaped the millionaire and ridden all the way up to Horseshoe Lake in his private car. First they had forced the millionaire to write out a check for fifty grand. When they found out how easy it was to collect, they tried to make it a quarter of a million, which was about all the traffic would bear. Even millionaires don't have much cold cash available.

Cormack opened the door of his room, thinking how glad he would be to rest his aching legs. He turned on the lights, and the first thing he saw was Harriet. She was very, very beautiful and appealing and young, no matter what a lousy and affected actress she was.

"All packed?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she answered in a small voice.

"You'd better get back to Hollywood. Publicity in a murder case won't do you any good."

She stared at him, looked at her folded hands in her lap and up again. He took a breath and recited, "I'm washed up; I'm busted; I was supposed to be a crack war correspondent but when I say it I'd even call myself a liar. They sent me up here to get an interview from a fat old bum who wanted to make a fool of himself in politics, and even a lousy assignment like that was too tough for me. I guess I'm not much good. Just why don't you get out of here?" The scar on his lip was white, and twitched imperceptibly.

"You haven't got any right to ride yourself down," Harriet retorted with surprising curtness. "You think I'm a lousy actress and you're right; I am. I'm not going back to Hollywood. My contract wasn't renewed and I'm out."

Cormack stared at her for a long while, then suggested cautiously, "I wonder how you would feel about both of us starting all over again from scratch. Together."

Harriet's reply left him no excuse for wondering. . . .

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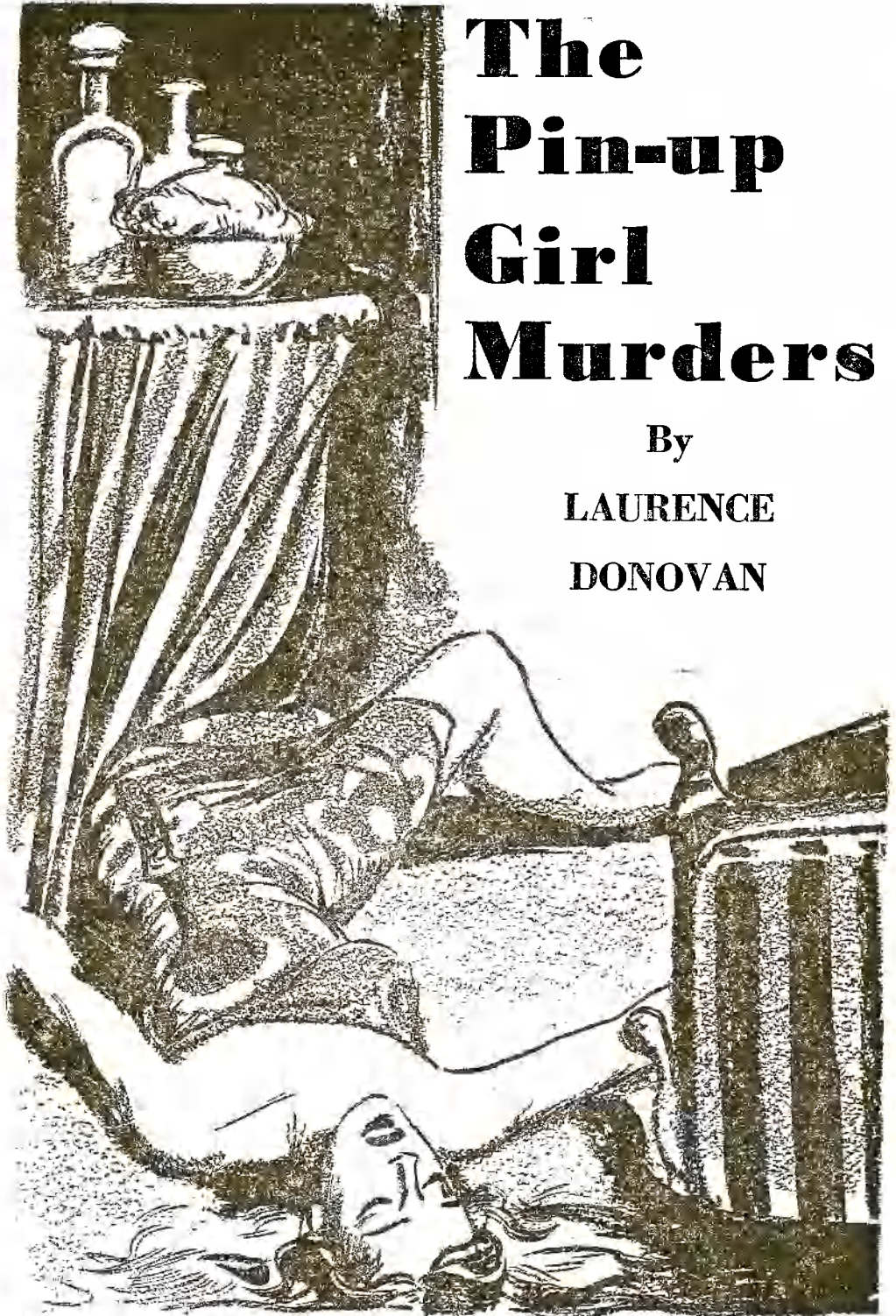
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The Pin-up Girl Murders

By
LAURENCE
DONOVAN





She was alone—as alone as anyone can be with a knife in her heart.

Lieutenant Kemp had his girl's picture on his wall—until he discovered that she had become the 'pin-up girl' for half the company. Then, when he found his tank plans missing, he thought there might be more to it than that!

LIEUTENANT DON KEMP stood with his hands clenched in cold, fury. His rooms, including the blueprint draughting office, appeared to be in perfect order. But Don Kemp's precise, orderly mind and eye told him that his quarters had been thoroughly ransacked, although every article apparently had been restored to its place.

From habit Don Kemp's slate gray eyes went to the unusual "pin up girl" on the wall above his drawing table. His eyes became colder and he uttered an oath through clenched teeth.

Now the pin up girl certainly was not such as to arouse the anger of a red blooded lieutenant of army engineers. The scanty sarong of the pin up picture proved that she had everything the most

discriminating male might demand, from her massed golden hair to slender ankles and tiny feet.

"Smile, blast you, smile!" exploded Kemp audibly. "So my shy, little Tina will be far from the old home town tonight. Yeah! In person! To show off her pin up charms to all the other boys of the *steenth* engineer corps! An' I placed you special, before I found out half the wolves in the company had the same picture!"

Don Kemp permitted one phase of anger to overcome the other momentarily. His "barrack rooms" in the swanky Miami Beach hotel had been searched, it was true. But the one item of immense value he had left there could not have been discovered, he was sure.

His own new, secret traction was being tried out back in Everglades. With some changes, it promised to revolutionize the speed and efficiency of Allied tanks. The final prints, with all the necessary changes, had been made.

"Who could have entered these rooms?" muttered Don Kemp, as he stepped over to the pin up picture he had so carefully mounted on a special black background, and which he so obviously appeared to dislike. "We'll find out any possible spies in the outfit. In the meantime, my dear Tina, besides bringing sweet dreams to a whole pack of wolves, you've been faithfully guarding the plans which may alter the whole outcome of the war and shorten its time."

The lieutenant engineer spoke with confidence. For it appeared obvious that the recent prowler had been seeking other valuables, or, if the tank prints was the objective, it had been missed. Otherwise two rooms overlooking the white beach and the Atlantic would not have been so thoroughly searched.

"My beloved Tina!" he muttered again through set teeth, as he touched the apparently immovable and pasted

black cardboard and it slid to one side. "Tina who has become the pet of the engineers, and who—"

The come-on eyes of the golden-haired girl still seemed to be watching him as the black background slid to one side. Her fixed smile was unchanged even as Kemp bit off his words, jerked a hand to the wall, and then started swearing low and steadily.

"Gone?" His gasped exclamation was a question, as if he could not believe it. "Gone! They've got the tank plans!"

THE wall safe he himself had installed behind the cardboard of the pin up girl had a sliding door. He saw that its combination had been solved by an expert. The blueprints vital to all of the tests now being carried on by the —th corps were in alien hands.

Don Kemp slipped the pin up girl back into place instinctively as he heard footsteps outside his door. Ragged nerves sent his hand fumbling at his revolver holster. The thieving spy would scarcely be returning, but Kemp's brain was seething that such a theft could have been accomplished.

He was compelled to recall that there were civilian employees about the big beach hotel given over to the engineering unit. Of course, all had been checked and double checked for loyalty. But this war had developed some strange and dangerous enemies, even among those who could prove American birth.

When the steps halted and there was a quick rap at the door, Don Kemp said, "Come in!"

Red-headed, round-faced "Legs" McCarthy, the corps photographer, pushed his good-natured countenance into the crack of the door. Don Kemp was still standing under the replaced pin up girl, his lean face darkened by his scowl of suspicion and rage.

McCarthy was the only man in the outfit who came from Kemp's small

home town of Centerville. The cameraman's face cracked into a broad grin as he saw Kemp's position and the storm of anger in his eyes.

"Holy gosh, Don!" exclaimed McCarthy, neglecting any formal salute. "You still burnin' up over Tina winnin' that big pin up girl contest an' gettin' her picture in the papers an' pinned up all over the place? Jeeminee! An' with Captain Morgan's girl all out for you! I'd think you'd know that most of the gals that promised to wait have been spreading that same hooley around to—"

"Shut up, Legs!" exclaimed Kemp with an intensity of anger that rubbed off McCarthy's smile. "You been upstairs long? An' if so, did you see anyone—?"

Don Kemp checked his own raging speech. It had come to him that the first report of the tank plans theft must be made to the C. O. Just as quickly it dawned upon him that he did not intend to make that report at once. Not until he had done some investigating on his own, while the spy and thief might still be unaware that the theft had been discovered.

McCarthy slowly recovered his grin.

"Sure, I saw someone who might have come calling with the proper escort, Don," he said with a little laugh in his voice. "You missed seeing her then? She's here already for the big show downstairs tonight. And I happen to know she asked Captain Morgan if she could see Lieutenant Don Kemp. That's why I'm here. Tina—"

"Tina?" grated Kemp. "I'm not seeing her. And I'm not seeing the show either."

"Look, Don," reasoned McCarthy. "I'm the only guy in the outfit that knows the now famous pin up girl, Tina Layton, is also your sweetheart. I know you were to be married, and that you mailed back her letters unopened after

this pin up publicity came out a month ago. Show some sense, Don."

DON KEMP glanced at the red glow from the sun going down over the Everglades. Dusk and darkness would settle within a few short minutes over Biscayne Bay and Miami Beach.

Legs McCarthy stood there uncertainly. It was like this. Tina Layton, small townner from Centerville, the girl he had intended to marry since high school days, had become a Big Town celebrity. All because of shapely legs and other proper proportions.

Tina Layton had gone to Chicago. She had come out first in a radio "pin up girl" contest. Don Kemp's memory of her was of a shy, sweet little blonde who had kissed him ardently and promised she would be waiting.

There was a newspaper column clipping in his wallet. One of the latest. It read—

**BOBBY LANE, PLAYBOY,
ALL OUT FOR PIN UPPER**

Bobby Lane, of the tungsten millions, is being seen around with Tina, the BYT radio pin up winner. One more matrimonial splurge seems to be in the offing. Tina, the pin up girl, will make a tour of the camps where her saranged person has become well known by photos colored to life. Bobby will trail along.

Lieutenant Don Kemp responded to Legs McCarthy's advice. In the movie-vaudeville entertainment tonight, Tina Layton was to be featured in person. Kemp did not desire to see Tina in person. He had compelled his surface emotions to believe that was over.

In showing some sense, Kemp said, "Get out, Legs. I've work to do. I'm afraid I'll be too busy to be present in person at tonight's blowout. Have a good

time, and if Tina talks to you, give her my best wishes."

That was cold and McCarthy's smile slowly died. Kemp's tone had a razor edge. He was fighting back tearing emotions that insisted upon trying to choke his voice.

There was the theft of the tank blueprints. Kemp had learned that the notorious Bobby Lane was accompanying the show. Kemp could take it on the chin, he believed. But he was not making a public effort at proving it.

"Okay, pal," grunted Legs McCarthy, and closed the door.

Kemp debated briefly. He gave the rooms the quick once-over. He was tempted to pull down the pin up girl's picture and tear it into bits. But he had to show the C. O., Captain Morgan, exactly how the spy robbery had been committed.

Fast semi-tropical darkness was closing in on the dimmed-out beach and Collins Avenue. Kemp switched on lights and checked the rooms.

"That's queer," he said musingly. "The only other thing missing is the Spanish dagger."

He had used the sharp, thin-bladed dagger as a tool for point marking on the blueprint desk. The dagger had a duplicate.

Don Kemp passed perhaps ten minutes in self debate. Regulations called for an immediate report of the loss of the blueprints. He was convinced he was being watched.

"The thief would know when I reported to Captain Morgan," he reasoned aloud. "But if I don't report and appear unconcerned, the spy may think I have not yet found out about the robbery."

A thought hammered in the back of his mind. He alone had planned that wall safe behind the picture of the pin up girl. No other member of the engi-

neer corps, including Legs McCarthy, knew of its existence.

But when it was being contrived, and while Tina Layton was still the small town girl waiting for him, he had confided in her. That had been on one of his brief furloughs back in Centerville.

Kemp had been given no furlough since that time. The tank traction plan was considered too important. It was a hard, a mean and a sickening thought that now pounded at his brain.

DETERMINED to avoid the patriotic entertainment for the engineers in the hotel ballroom, Don Kemp knew he must appear as usual. The elevator dropped him ten floors. The civilian operator was a colored man who grinned at him.

Kemp decided he must not ask questions. He strolled from the elevator through the lobby. He met Mary Morgan, as if she had been waiting for him to appear. She smiled and her dark eyes looked up at him.

"What gives, Don?" said Captain Morgan's vivacious girl child. "The show's starting soon, and it isn't the direction you're taking. Of course, I wasn't asked, but I thought I'd like to have a look-see at this pin up girl. I hear they've planned a stunt opening the show that is copied after the very artistic setting little Miss Pin Up has in your room."

Her oval face was uplifted. Her curved mouth was a smiling challenge. The depths of her dark eyes nevertheless conveyed a hint of jealous observation. There was a bit of it in her voice.

Don Kemp liked Mary Morgan. But at this moment he wondered what she would think if she really knew what was pounding inside his mind.

He had a job to do. Somewhere about the swanky beach hotel he was convinced the blueprint thief and spy must be lingering. He could not get his thoughts



In Chicago she came out first in a radio "pin-up girl" contest.

off the remembrance that only Tina had been told about the concealed wall safe.

It was true, a thorough enemy agent might have accidently tested that pin up picture. That was something he had to know. His idea of not attending the ballroom show was changed.

Kemp had not known of his own background for the pin up girl being copied. He had intended to rid himself of the captain's attractive daughter. On an impulse he gave her his arm.

"We have a date to see the show together," he said gruffly.

"Maybe it's the Miami moon makes grouchy bears out of some men," chattered Mary Morgan. "Lost something. Don?"

"Naw, c'mon," he grunted, his breath pulling in at the nearness of her random retort.

He was determined to excuse himself quickly. Mary Morgan laughed musically.

"You know, Don, at times I've wanted to see these pin up girls in person," she said. "Especially this Tina Layton. And there's that Bobby Lane, too."

Don Kemp saw a partly bald, baggy-eyed man in youthful clothes not far from the ballroom doorway. Bobby Lane was rising from a chair as they entered.

Because of the sudden outcry from the stage, Kemp did not see Bobby Lane suddenly disappear through a side door. And the excitement was confined to those nearest the stage.

Kemp had heard of the show manager, the civilian agent who was making the tour of the camps. And he saw him now. A tall and black-haired man strode quickly to the middle of the stage and he was signaling with both hands.

"Ring it down, boys!" came the show manager's voice.

His name was Lonny Walsh, according to publicity. Now his tone was sharp and hard. Mary Morgan gripped Kemp's arm. Apparently she had seen the same thing he had.

"Don, that isn't funny!" cried out Mary.

IT was not funny. There was an artist's life-size drawing of Tina, the famous pin up girl. Her shapely person was seemingly vital and living as it stood out against the black background on which the artist had painted his picture.

From golden hair to slender ankles, the figure was one to bring forth an approving applause of the engineers that just as suddenly died out. That was

why Lonny Walsh, the camp show manager, was ringing down the curtain. He ordered all stage lights off.

For the green jade haft of a knife showed distinctly where the blade had been driven into the pin up picture, just where the heart would have been in the living person of Tina Layton.

"What the devil?" exploded Kemp, freeing himself from Mary Morgan. "Why, it's my dagger—!"

The exclamation had been shocked from him. He cut it off as Mary's dark eyes widened. But Kemp did not wait. He left Mary staring after him as he wedged his way to the side of the ballroom, and the narrow corridor leading backstage.

The shouting in the ballroom had died out. There were angry murmurs coming from the men, frightened cries from the WACS and nurses who had come to see the show.

The corridor was darkened. A shadowy figure brushed by Kemp. Instinctively he struck out with a quick, short left punch. A man grunted and fell down. Kemp kept on going. He had identified Legs McCarthy as he had fallen.

An electrician and some other stage employees were collected in the stage wings. Kemp bore down upon them.

"Where's Miss Layton's dressing room?" he inquired.

"That way," pointed a stage hand. "Who're you—what the devil business—?"

But Don Kemp was not answering questions. He was asking just now.

He saw a door the hotel management had decorated with a gilt star. He tried the knob and the door was locked. He backed off and drove at it with one hard shoulder. Metal snapped.

The room was all dark. Kemp cupped his cigarette lighter looking for the button. He kept the light cupped in his hands.

Tina Layton, the pin up girl, was there. She was alone. As alone as anyone could be with a green-hafted knife driven into her heart. Her blue eyes were open, unseeing, but they seemed to Kemp to be asking a question—"Why, Don? Why?"

One moment Kemp was down beside the pin up girl. All she had been wearing was the skimpy sarong. Her body was still beautiful. Her face and her sightless blue eyes were ghastly.

Yet Don Kemp held her in his arms for a few seconds. He scarcely considered the green-handled dagger. He kissed the cold lips, in farewell to the past.

A HAMMERING came at the door he had slammed shut. Kemp snapped to his feet. He moved to one side among a hanging collection of garments. The lights flashed on.

Lonny Walsh, the swarthy stage manager was in the doorway, backed up by others.

"For the love of heaven, look!" Lonny Walsh's voice trembled. "It wasn't just a show stunt. It's true."

Kemp edged slowly toward two big wardrobe trunks.

"The same kind of green jade dagger!" exclaimed Lonny Walsh. "Someone on this stage—no—Tina had that kind of a stabber! What does it mean?"

Don Kemp crouched, considering his next move. The twin Spanish daggers, of Chinese origin probably, had been the gift of an uncle. Don had been in a laughing mood the night he had put a stone upon Tina's finger and one of the twin daggers in her hand.

He had said then, "Here's my heart, Tina. You can bind it to you or use the knife."

She had been unwilling to accept the twin dagger. She had been shy, clinging to him.

He had said, "Every time you see the dagger, you will know its mate is

on my desk. You will think of me. It's a swell letter opener."

Far away and long ago that seemed.

Lonny Walsh stood with clenched fists. Beside him was the fussy, elegant dresser, Carlos Carnes, civilian assistant manager of the hotel who had remained as a director of other than army activities.

Carnes was rubbing his hand along a thin nose. His light hair appeared to bristle and his mouth quivered.

Several others of the traveling entertainers were crowding into the room. Lonny Walsh waved them back with a soulful oath. Legs McCarthy, one eye swollen, forced his way through the crowd to the inside.

Lonny Walsh was bending down, looking at the death dagger.

"Not a chance of fingerprints," he said. "The jade haft's all carved into little figures."

Carlos Carnes rubbed the back of a hand across his mouth. He seemed to have all the natural instincts of a hotel man, even if the army was in possession.

"Can't the army keep this from being smeared all over?" said Carnes. "It'll be remembered when the hotel's turned back."

Carnes' interest in the dead girl, her body still warm and lovely, was purely business, it appeared.

"Look!" said an entertainer. "Wasn't there a little light like a match or something beside the body when we came in?"

That had been Don Kemp's cigarette lighter.

"Sure thing, and the shock almost made me forget it," said Lonny Walsh. "Tina was killed in the past few minutes. It must have been the killer."

"If it was," said Carlos Carnes, "he could be mixing up right now with the crowd. There was a small light and a man's figure. Seeing the girl and that

same dagger that was on the stage a few minutes ago made me forget it."

Baldish Bobby Lane thrust others aside and came in.

Bobby Lane's eyes were bagged and his thick lips were too loose. But he appeared to have genuine grief. He cried out with an oath, then he was on the floor, one arm around the dead girl's shoulders.

"Who's the killer—?" then Bobby Lane barely touched the tip of the dagger haft. "That stabber!" he cried out. "Tina had one like it. She said it was a twin to a dagger owned by some engineer named Kemp, Lieutenant Don Kemp, I think. She's—"

Bobby Lane's voice broke convincingly.

"—the only girl I've ever really loved."

DON KEMP swore silently, holding to his hiding place behind the trunks. He knew that Bobby Lane had already had four wives and considerable other newspaper notice of woman troubles.

A pair of tough M.P.s used their clubs to get through the room.

"Get away from her, buddy!" rapped one at Bobby Lane. "Nobody's to touch anything. What's that about the dagger belonging to Lieutenant Don Kemp?"

"Yeah, Tina had one of a pair Kemp had given her," repeated Bobby Lane vindictively. "I demand Kemp's immediate arrest."

"But, Bobby," countered Tony Walsh. "It's the same as the dagger someone stabbed into the heart of our life-size pin up picture. Perhaps a search of the room—"

"You'll leave that to the regular cops, mister!" ordered one M.P. "This isn't a part of the show. It's murder and in the city of Miami Beach!"

Apparently it had not occurred to anyone that the man seen with the

light could still be hidden in the room. Kemp's eyes strayed to the dressing table close beside his hideout trunks. A gold, beaded handbag lay there. He noticed that its clasp was open as if the murderer might already have explored its contents.

Or it could have been left that way as Tina made up for the show.

Kemp decided he had to take a chance. If he could reach out and snatch the handbag without being detected, there was a possibility that it might contain some hint of a motive for killing the pin up girl.

An overalled stage hand spoke up then from the back of the crowd.

"Heard you say that knife was the same as was in that pin up picture on the stage," he said. "Maybe it's the same one. Anyway while the lights was out that knife was grabbed by somebody an' we ain't seen it since."

"When the city cops get here, we'll pay a visit to Don Kemp's quarters," said one M.P.

Legs McCarthy spoke almost viciously.

"Kemp isn't there! That's where I got this eye! I met him in the stage corridor an' he slammed me one!"

"And what were you doing back here?"

Tony Walsh's black eyes glittered and he was quick.

"Why—well, you see Tina Layton comes from my home town," said McCarthy, the corps cameraman. "I was back here, yes, but her door was locked and she didn't answer. I was going back out front when Lieutenant Kemp rushed me and slammed me one."

All interest was for seconds centered upon Legs McCarthy. Kemp saw his chance. He possessed the beaded handbag with cat-like quickness.

Homicide men of the city police were coming in. There was light enough for Kemp to open the handbag. His first

"What the devil—!" he exploded.
"Why—that's my dagger!"



find was a half dozen letters, tied together.

Kemp's anger flared. The return marked was—

"Thomas McCarthy,
—th U. S. Army Engineers,
Per Government Island,
New York City."

Kemp had no opportunity to open a letter. But the situation was clear

enough. Postmarks showed that Legs McCarthy had been writing regularly to Tina Layton, all letters addressed to Chicago.

"Of all the double-crossing heels—" Kemp whispered it.

Then he stopped. What might Tina have written to McCarthy? Evidently she had been wildly ambitious. Perhaps she was only playing Bobby Lane for a sucker.

Kemp wondered how many war bond purchases might have gone into choosing the winner of the pin up contest?

A SERGEANT REARDON was in charge of the city homicide squad. Getting a quick review from the M.P.s, Reardon demanded, "Find this Lieutenant Don Kemp. Don't waste time!"

A musical, angry voice came from the doorway. Kemp risked being seen and had a glimpse of pretty, dark-eyed Mary Morgan.

"Lieutenant Kemp was with me outside when this—this pin up girl was killed!" she announced. "How about asking Bobby Lane some questions? I saw him go toward the stage just before the curtain went up on that dagger in the pin up picture."

Bobby Lane turned toward her his mouth twisting.

"That's a blasted lie!" he mouthed. "I was outside when the curtain went up, and went into the hotel lobby to make a phone call."

"We'll check with the switchboard operator," said Sergeant Reardon.

"I used the public dial phone in a booth and didn't contact the operator," hastily supplied Bobby Lane. "Why would I want to kill the girl I intended to marry?"

"On the records you drop 'em fast!" snapped hardboiled Sergeant Reardon. "Maybe she had somethin' on you, Lane. One of you take over her things. Where's her handbag? A dame like her always has enough in one to fill a trunk."

Two minutes later the searchers announced that the murderer must have taken the handbag.

Kemp thought, if Legs McCarthy happened to be the man, he would have taken his letters at least.

Then, holding them in his hand, Kemp noticed a few words written across an envelope in Tina's scrawly hand. As he was reading the brief sen-

tence in amazement, Captain Morgan came in.

Mary Morgan was still in the doorway. Kemp heard the C.O.'s low-voiced command to the girl.

"Go home—don't make a fool of yourself over Kemp—we've been in his rooms—that dagger he always used on the draughting table is not there—"

Kemp was still digesting Tina's scrawled writing.

"If anything happens to me, it's because I talked too much to Bobby and Tony about how I would surprise them with what my pin up picture is hiding in Don Kemp's—"

That was all. The girl might have been interrupted in her scribbling. But clearly she must have had a hunch that she was in danger. She could only have told Bobby Lane and Tony Walsh about the safe behind her pin up picture, thought Kemp.

And that stunt of the dagger thrust into the life-size pin up drawing on the stage? Kemp squinted to study the face and small, beady eyes of Tony Walsh.

What a throw-off alibi, virtually spoiling his show, that stabbing of a pin up picture might have been!

This Sergeant Reardon was tops at picking out what might turn out to be his meat. He rasped an order.

"Clear the room, boys! You, Walsh, Carnes, Bobby Lane, and this girl with Don Kemp's alibi, stick here! Don't any of the rest of you leave the hotel!"

The room was being cleared, except for those the police sergeant had named. Kemp was surprised that Legs McCarthy had not been included with the others told to stick.

The police medical examiner was doing his stuff. The fingerprint boys were completely balked. The dagger haft was too rough to retain impressions. Virtually everything else in the dressing room might have been touched by any number of persons.

The C.O., Captain Morgan, started to exercise his right. Murder was under civil law. But this hotel was military reservation.

"My daughter will go to her room and be on call, Sergeant Reardon," declared Captain Morgan. "She isn't mixed up in this, except by the accidental meeting with Lieutenant Kemp."

Kemp's whole attention was drawn to the girl's flashing eyes and the quality of her sudden defiance.

"I'm staying right here, father," she declared. "They are trying to put something onto Don Kemp. It's my place beside him, if he is found. You see, this is all foolishness. I'm sorry for Tina Layton, but Don had given her up weeks ago. Don and I expect to announce our engagement."

KEMP really saw Mary Morgan then for the first time. Slim and straight, lovely and daring, she faced her father. Kemp uttered an inward groan. He knew now that this girl had been growing upon him, in spite of his bitterness over Tina's sudden selfish ambition that had made her another person—a pin up girl.

"Okay, miss!" growled Reardon. "Clear 'em out! You stay, if you insist. Captain Morgan, the circumstances fit Lieutenant Kemp fairly straight. We'll have to hold him when he is brought in."

The room was clearing. The murdered Tina's scrawled words took on sudden, vital importance. Kemp realized that any one of four persons still in the room, although Legs McCarthy was trailing out slowly behind the others, might be the killer.

And one or a pair or more could be involved in the theft of the tank plans from his room.

Tony Walsh and Bobby Lane evidently had been told too much by Tina about his hidden safe.

Legs McCarthy had been secretly corresponding with Tina. Had he made that double-crossing play for the girl, or for what he believed she might know?

Kemp's position could not be maintained much longer. It had been sheer audacity that had kept him behind the big trunks. He must get out, be free to put a finger upon the killer and the thief who had stolen the tank plans.

As the space cleared about the dead girl, the idea came. Kemp looked at the small, brass square around the light button only eight or ten feet away.

"It's one chance and a long one," he whispered.

He slid his army .45 into his hand. Always a crack shot, he had no doubt what he could do to that light button and the wires connected with it.

Then he fixed the position of everyone in the room.

Legs McCarthy was just going through the door, slowly, as if there was something here that he wanted. It could be those letters.

Bobby Lane was standing beside Tony Walsh, his apparently mournful eyes upon Tina's body. Black-eyed Tony Walsh seemed to be studying everyone who went through the doorway. Carlos Carnes, the civilian manager, was rubbing at his nose in a worried way.

Captain Morgan and Mary were to one side. The C.O. was red-faced with anger and talking in a low tone to the vivid girl. She was shaking her head with firm determination.

Don Kemp lifted the army gun slowly. The explosion of the .45 was like a crack of thunder in that small room. There was a blue flash from the wall. Then there was almost instant and impenetrable darkness.

Kemp dropped, crawling a few feet, coming up and diving as Sergeant Reardon roared out an oath.

(Continued on page 107)

With the ether rag clamped over his face,
he gave every sign of passing out.



A HOODLUM

By CLARK NELSON

After prison and the gutters, it was Deming's first visit home in twelve years; and he came back as a hobo. But that didn't keep him from doing the job he came back to do.



GOES HOME

DEMING landed in the gravel and he rolled as the freight drag slowed for the Pineville crossing. His broad shoulders, tapering to lean hips, took the impact. But he skidded on his face causing bloody scratches in his week's growth of beard.

Deming came to his feet, moving to escape the circle of the one street light nearby. He missed on that, however, for Deputy Sheriff Saunders had been watching the train for 'boes. It was hopping time. Itinerants avoided riding the cushions if they could hop a freight

up the mountain.

Deputy Saunders weighed around two hundred. For the purpose of meeting such trains he carried a short, oak club. The deputy would collar any poor devil, and he would accept as low as a dollar to let him get back on the train, or even four bits if the bummer showed he could not dig up a buck.

Deming saw Deputy Saunders' flattened face and calculating eyes with the street light shining in them. The deputy was moving toward him. Some bummers made the mistake of running. Deputy Saunders could throw that oak club with bone-breaking accuracy. A fractured leg now and then could be laid to the bummer's jump from a train.

Deming's already patched coat had been torn some more by his fall. His hair was long and ragged. His slouch hat was almost shapeless. Yet he fooled Deputy Saunders who had been all set to cut him down.

Deming limped a little. He walked straight toward the big deputy as if he did not know he represented the law hereabouts. He had known Deputy Saunders all his life. But twelve years, especially between twenty and thirty-two, ten in prison and two more climbing up from the gutter of the Big Town, can make a whale of a difference.

Deputy Saunders may have been shrewd, but that didn't mean he was smart. He judged this tramp for a regular who was neither a hop-picker nor an apple-knocker. Therefore he would not be holding any weapon.

"On your way, bum!" rasped Deputy Saunders. "Back on that drag! Whatcha fallin' off for in Pineville? We don't feed 'boes!"

Deming's arms were long. He was loose-jointed and he looked awkward.

"Aw, say, mister," he whined. "I once lived around here, an' I've been havin' trouble not bein' able to show a draft

card. Thought I could get one off the Centertown board?"

Deming purposely avoided mentioning Pineville. Centertown was the county college town, fifty miles up the line.

"This ain't Centertown!" said Deputy Saunders harshly. "Git back on that drag before I—"

He brought up his short oak club in a menacing gesture. It was what Deming had been playing for. Deming short-punched the deputy in the ribs under the raised arm, and ribs bent if they did not break.

That brought the club and Deputy Saunders' guard down fast, as he doubled and groaned. Deming's left traveled about eight inches. If he'd been whaled on the chin with his own club, the deputy could not have been put out colder.

"An' that's only a starter for Bob," muttered Deming, fading into the darkness at the side of the railroad crossing street. He knew every alley in Pineville and this was his first visit in twelve years.

DEMING held up a minute when he came to a neat, white fence and the trim white house with the green shutters back of a smooth lawn. A grim chuckle came from his grimy lips. A white light showed the square of a kitchen window.

"Ma'll still be puttering around with batter for the breakfast griddle cakes," said Deming softly. "Now so's not to scare her out of her wits—"

He halted under the partly opened kitchen window. His eyes misted some as he watched the frail but energetic old lady bustling about. He put his tongue between his teeth and then gave a low but perfect imitation of a Bob White birdcall.

As the startled little old lady turned, her wistful face a picture of unbelieving surprise, Deming said, "A'right, ma. It's only Cal."

"Calvert? Oh, Calvert! It can't be."

"Don't be surprised when I come into the door, ma," warned Deming. "You just hug me up tight an' look at me afterward."

A pair of thin, trembling arms did just that. Ma Deming probably could not have seen clearly anyway through the tearshine in her eyes.

"I've waited so long, Calvert—and Robert is—"

"I know about Bob," said Deming hastily. "That's why I've come home. I'll straighten that out if I have to—"

"Calvert—please!" Ma Deming was suddenly pleading. "Not that. They sent you up for killin' a Harper in a fist fight, an' now my Robert—they say he beat John Harper an' robbed him. No, Calvert. There's only Rick Harper left of the brothers, an' he's the doctor now, besides bein' mayor o' Pineville."

Deming had learned all of that. John Harper, the banker, had been slugged to death and robbed. Twelve years before Cal Deming had been sent up for manslaughter when Charles Harper had met him in a fair fist fight, then had fractured his skull when Deming had knocked him down on the steps of the dance hall.

Deming changed the subject quickly.

"How's Evelyn, ma? How's she takin' Bob's trouble? An' has there been money for a lawyer?"

"Evie, Calvert?" His mother's voice quivered. "She's keeping up for the two little ones. She almost lost Bob, anyway, in the draft. And Calvert—son—there's ugly talk. It's said, but I can't believe it, that them with money enough could get themselves deferred, an' while it couldn't be true, it makes it look all the worse for Bob. He was to be 'ducted right away, Calvert."

Grimy and bearded, he was, ragged and a bum all over, but all Ma Deming said about that was, "Calvert, you wash up an' put on some clean clothes.

I've kept some o' pa's and Bob's, and then I'll have a snack ready for you."

But Deming shook his head.

"I had to see you, ma," he explained. "But nobody but you would know me for Cal Deming of twelve years ago. I'm gonna see the sheriff, Tully, just as I am. I've my reasons, ma."

"Sheriff Tully? No. Oh, no, Calvert. Not like that. Tully's gittin' old an' cranky. Deputy Saunders about runs everything now."

"Yeah, him an' Dr. Rick Harper are the big noises on the local draft board, too—"

Deming changed the subject. He had not meant to let Ma Deming know he had found out all about what had been going on in Pineville. He did not intend to have ma know either that it had been his money which had built this new house.

No. He must accomplish what he had come for strictly as an anonymous bum of the road. Ma Deming must never know how he had come up from the gutter in the Big Town. Certainly she must not find out why in some circles he had the monicker of "The Crusher."

Deming wondered if age had dulled Sheriff Tully's kindness or his sense of humor. He stayed only long enough to eat ma's snack, drink some coffee, and then said she would see him again.

But Deming did not intend that Ma Deming ever would.

SHERIFF BILL TULLY was not far from seventy years. But there was a keening spark in his rheumy eyes, an understanding twitch to his tight, broad mouth.

"So you're the drifter that set Saunders back on the tail of his pants?" The words came slowly from the corner of Sheriff Tully's nearly toothless mouth. "An' you walk right into my calaboose. Kind o' wasteful, ain't you, having a fine two-hundred-buck suit

ripped an' patched, like that'n you're wearin'? You hadn't ought've hit town with such soft, calfskin shoes either and your skin's too white under that growth o' whiskers."

Cal Deming watched the big body of the aging Sheriff Tully angle over in his creaky chair. A hard smile broke the stiffness of the short beard about his mouth.

"Observing as ever, sheriff," he remarked slowly. "But do you know how Deputy Saunders has taken over the works? Pineville sort of walks the chalk line according to the say-so of its mayor, doesn't it? An' Dr. Joe Carleton is the only other doc, and has to depend on Rick Harper for handouts?"

Sheriff Tully nodded, but he said thinly, "You're a perfect stranger to me. Got to vag out've town or put you on the road gang. Tramps has to show at least five bucks."

Deming did not speak for thirty seconds.

Sheriff Tully reached into his desk and pulled out a folded paper, a reward notice. He unfolded it, peered closely at the creases, at the profile and full face, somewhat blurred.

"Been around the Big Town some, ain'tcha?" said Tully half musingly. "Ever cross a character known by the pe-cooliar name of The Crusher? Nope. Reckon not. Seems he licked hades out'n a whole draft board that wouldn't put him in one-A, on account of him havin' been up for accidentally slaughterin' a man."

Cal Deming sat silent and watched the reward poster put back in the desk. Then he chose his words.

"Can't vag me out've Pineville, sheriff. Have more than five dollars. Heard of The Crusher. Never met him face to face."

He fished into the ragged coat. The roll he produced had a century note

outside. He flipped it and the ends showed more of the same.

Then he said, "I suspect that Bob can't get out on bail?"

"Nope," said Sheriff Tully sharply. "You've got innards to come back here. Seen Evelyn, Cal?"

"Naw," snapped Deming shortly. "Don't aim to see her. Been up and talked to ma. That's all. Some tramp, answering my description, knocked Deputy Saunders kickin' a short while back. He didn't recollect me."

"Have his collectin' club?" said Sheriff Tully.

"Yup, made him swallow it. Suppose I register in as I am at the Grand Hotel, an' pay for a room off this roll, sheriff?"

Sheriff Tully rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Know Mayor and Dr. Rick Harper owns the hotel, too?"

"Heard of it, sheriff," admitted Deming. "Being one of these felonious muggs, as it seems I am, I've always made it possible to know my way around. When I'm visiting, I case in all of the angles."

"And Pineville, stranger?" said Sheriff Tully softly. "What's your layout? Remember, I'm still vaggin' you out've town if you can't show five bucks or a job."

Deming's lean jaws tightened and his teeth clicked.

"Pineville has a draft board," he said. "Being the political highbinder, Dr. Rick Harper has a lot to do with that board. Deputy Saunders is chairman, yes?"

"Come to think on it, yes," said Sheriff Tully.

"There are then, Dr. Harper, Deputy Saunders, Lars Olsen, a hop-grower in the red up to his neck to the dead John Harper; and Cliff Randall, who means well and is patriotic, but whose Bon Ton store makes its profits off of the circle in which Mrs. Rick Harper is the guiding light."

Deming paused, made a pyramid of his fingers.

"Patriotism and graft," he said to the ceiling, "are much like gold. They're where you find them."

"The Grand Hotel?" said Sheriff Tully musingly. "You look like a tough bindle stiff (itinerant worker) to be flashing a roll. Mayor Rick Harper is the clerk's boss you know. If you was to be found, the way you look, somewhere out on the railroad shoulder in the morning, and Deputy Saunders was to say you was the 'bo who knocked the tar out've him, who is there to say different?"

"I'd say different," spoke the clear, calm voice of a woman whose face had the youngness of humor, and the oldness of having lived. "Cal? Please, why didn't you come to me? I've a few dollars, an' I heard about your being here and down on your luck."

BEING the mother of two young ones had left the shapely person of Evelyn unspoiled.

"Evie?" exclaimed Deming. "You shouldn't have come!"

But his ragged shoulders were enclosed by this time in her firm, young arms. Her kiss was upon his bearded cheek.

"Cal, don't lie to me," she said in a fierce whisper. "You're here to help Bob. He didn't kill John Harper. He was lying in a field then, drunk or knocked out. I still love him, Cal. You know that."

The thing that had been gnawing at his soul for years seemed to cease biting in. He kissed his brother's wife, caressingly and yet without that old pain he once had known. Because of her, an insult from a Harper, he had served out time in prison and had not come back to Pineville until now.

For half a minute, it was as though all this had never happened. Then he

put her from him, watching the thing in her eyes that told him her love would always be for his brother Bob.

"You're an idiot, Evie, but sweet," he said, the words coming strangely from that hard, bearded face. "We will save Bob. I hear you called one of the kids Calvert?"

"Yes—oh, yes—and Bob told me about the money you sent for Ma Deming's house," the young wife claimed. "But now you're in trouble and I have—"

He put a hand over her curved mouth.

"Tell her enough, but not too much, sheriff," he said to the lawman, who sat there with his shrewd eyes half closed. "Would you sleep well tonight, sheriff, if you knew a murder was being planned?"

"H'mm!" the sheriff's exclamation was noncommittal. "I sleep good always. I'd never wake up to confound a felony. I'm thinkin' I'd best be seein' Evie home personally."

"But, Cal?" the woman exclaimed. "I brought money. You can get out of town."

"Thanks, Evie," said Deming, and solemnly accepted a handful of crumpled bills.

Sheriff Tully took an unconscionable time getting his coat and buckling on his gun belt. When he had this done, the girl-wife was looking at Deming with wide, brown eyes.

"I love Bob," she said. "He didn't kill John Harper. But he didn't have the money to pay to keep himself from being drafted into the army. They say that was what he was after."

Deming made a swift motion with his hand. His face was rough, but his eyes were sky-clear and aching.

"Deputy Saunders may walk in at any moment," said Deming.

"I have no jurisdiction over the office

Suddenly he grabbed the clerk and threw him back over his head.



when I am absent," said Sheriff Tully. "C'mon, Evie!"

THE clerk at the Grand Hotel was thin-faced. His wisp of a mustache looked like a rat's whiskers. When Deming peeled a fiver off that roll of centuries, he licked his lips.

Bummers seldom sought rooms at the Grand Hotel.

Deming turned out the light in his room. He set a pint of whiskey on the

dresser after pouring half of it over the bed-clothing and the floor. The .38 automatic still nestled close to his thigh.

Sheriff Tully had not searched him. He laid his clothes on a chair and lapsed into what seemed like a deep sleep. It was perhaps an hour later that the door creaked.

sliding one hand close to a revolver he kept on a shelf under the desk.

"I'm reporting I was robbed last night," announced Deming. "The room must have been entered with a passkey.



Deming had his own hope. Deputy Saunders or Dr. Rick Harper might be outlined in the square of the doorway. He could not tell and he did not move until the cloth was clamped down over his mouth and nose.

Deming gave every sign of passing out. Only he had not breathed any of the ether on the cloth. He lay as quiet as a switched off light as he heard the furtive searching of his clothes. He knew exactly when the wallet was taken.

After that, the tired hoodlum from the Big Town rolled over and slept soundly until long after daylight. He appeared to have nothing, not even a bad dream to disturb his conscience.

Scarrup was the name of the fidgety, pimply-faced clerk of the Grand Hotel. He fiddled with the register and kept

The door was locked and the window showed no marks."

Scarrup was visibly frightened, at first. Yet he glanced with disdain at Deming's ragged clothing, at the scabbed scratches on his face.

"Robbed?" Scarrup gulped the question. He seemed to become a little bolder. "You're the fellow what registered in drunk, ain'tcha? I took a bottle off'n you to keep you from disturbin' respectable guests, an' I've got it here with your fingerprints all over it. You scribbled some name that might be John Jones or Bill Smith or anything."

"You're a filthy, little jackal, ain't you?" said Deming without raising his voice. "I'm not mindin' the twenty-two thousand, four hundred an' eighty-five bucks that was taken. But there were

some mussed up bills amounting to eighteen dollars that I'm wantin' back."

The eighteen had been the money accepted from Evie the night before.

"Twenty-two thousand—"

The pimply clerk's mouth opened like that of a fish suddenly taken from the water.

It was evident that the clerk had no idea there had been such a sum on his scraggly guest. If so, he might have made a try for it on his own.

"You're fitten for the bughouse, you tramp!" gulped Scarrup. And Deming caught the new note of confidence in his voice, which told him that expected help was coming up behind. "Wait'll you tell Mayor Harper—he's the police judge—that screwy story. Why, you had to dig up some pennies to make out the five bucks I charged you for the room. Now get out—"

The pimpled clerk made the mistake of grabbing at the revolver under his desk. Deming's long arms and gripping hands were like the irresistible claws of a steam shovel. But they were infinitely faster and he made no sound.

The revolver banged and cracked the clerk's shinbone as Deming collared and hurled him back over his head. Scarrup squawled with the agony of a cracked shin. There was a collision, a loud grunt, and then the cursing voice of flat-faced Deputy Saunders.

"That's him, boys! He's the assaulter that headed five other bums rushing me an' beating me up last night."

The pimply clerk's flying body struck Saunders so hard that both rolled to the floor. But Deming lifted his hands then. Half a dozen Pineville citizens armed with shotguns had him covered.

DEPUTY SAUNDERS was taking no chances this morning.

"You just seen him feloniously attack an' shoot Mr. Scarrup!" bawled out Deputy Saunders. "You heard his

ridiculous claim that he has been robbed of thousands of dollars! Grab him! I'm bringin' up charges of shooting with intent to kill, leading a gang in assault an' battery, an' resistin' the law! Besides that, he's proved he's insane, an' we'll have Mayor Harper bind him over to be examined for commitment to the asylum!"

Firmly held by the arms, with handcuffs ornamenting his wrists, Cal Deming grinned sourly.

"An' if you think of somethin' else, you bad-smelling draft grafter, you'll mention it, won'tcha, Saunders?" said Deming coolly. "So one o' the thievin' Harpers turns out to be the mayor and the judge. I can see why low-grade army stuff like this pimple-faced clerk here, is still deferred. After shootin' himself, maybe he'll want his money back to keep out of the draft."

Deputy Saunders spat out an unprintable name and slashed his knuckles across Deming's mouth. Nevertheless, Deming got rid of a loose tooth and still grinned at him.

"Ay'll tal you Ay am on the draft board, an' Ay never took a dime."

One man with a shotgun was Lars Olsen, and Deming was convinced that he was honest.

"I'm agreein', mister," said Deming. "Only you walk chalk if you want to keep on sellin' hops through the Pineville bank. Ain't any profit in the long haul to Centertown, is there, Lars?"

At that, for the first time Deputy Saunders appeared to have an inkling of the identity of the visiting tramp. He stepped closer and peered into Deming's face.

"Cal Deming!" ejaculated Saunders. "Jailbird and killer—"

Deming was held, but his feet were free. He let go with a hard toe that must have jammed the deputy's right kneecap an inch out of place. Saunders howled, pulling out his holstered gun.

But two citizens with shotguns interposed. One was Cliff Randall, owner of the Bon Ton store. Crossed shotguns blocked the raging, groaning deputy.

"Cal Deming?" exclaimed Cliff Randall. "You intimatin' our draft board has been sellin' favors?"

"I'm not intimatin', Randall!" rasped Deming. "I'm sayin' right out that there's been a devil of a lot of deferrin' Pineville citizens if they have dough, an' with all the bum hearts your Drs. Rick Harper and Carleton have reported, half the town might be expected to drop dead at any time. Your Bon Ton clip joint is still holdin' the peanut society set in Pineville, ain't it Randall?"

Randall drew back the barrel of the shotgun and would have swung.

"We'll have no more violence upon a defenseless prisoner o' the law," rolled out the mellow voice of Sheriff Tully, even as he took in Scarrup, the hotel clerk, staunching the blood from a bullet-torn shin, and saw Deputy Saunders bent over rubbing a knee that had been nearly broken. "Mayor Harper is waiting in his court, gents. I'll take the prisoner in charge, it appearing he might become a dangerous character."

At least Lars Olsen and Cliff Randall were two citizens who wished they had not been deputized. Both were staring at Deputy Saunders. Perhaps this half of the draft board had never before suspected that so many of their fellow citizens were afflicted with chronic ailments, or vitally needed for the welfare of their country on the home front.

MAYOR - JUDGE - BANKER Rick Harper was the tycoon of Pineville. That mountain town could not have defined the word. But that was Dr. Rick Harper. His majestic presence was somewhat cramped by the table behind which he was crowded by his own stuffed paunch.

Deputy Saunders had his gun held

upon Deming. The store-room used as a court was crowded. Deming swore under his breath as he saw Ma Deming's round, worried face. Beside her was Evie.

Deming's love for the young wife was as great as ever. But years had tempered him. He sat quietly now, listening.

Deputy Saunders repeated, with venomous emphasis, all of the new charges. "Intent to kill" and a recital of his record entered into it.

Sheriff Tully remained back near the door. The double-chinned face of Dr.-Mayor-Judge Rick Harper was like a mask.

"Under the circumstances I can only hold this ex-convict for the Superior Court," he said solemnly. "He was a menace to the community long before he was sent away. He has committed—"

Then it was that Deming had for a split second the straight line between himself, Deputy Saunders, and the gun touching his shoulder. He acted upon that slim chance. His muscled arms strained and the chain of the handcuffs split.

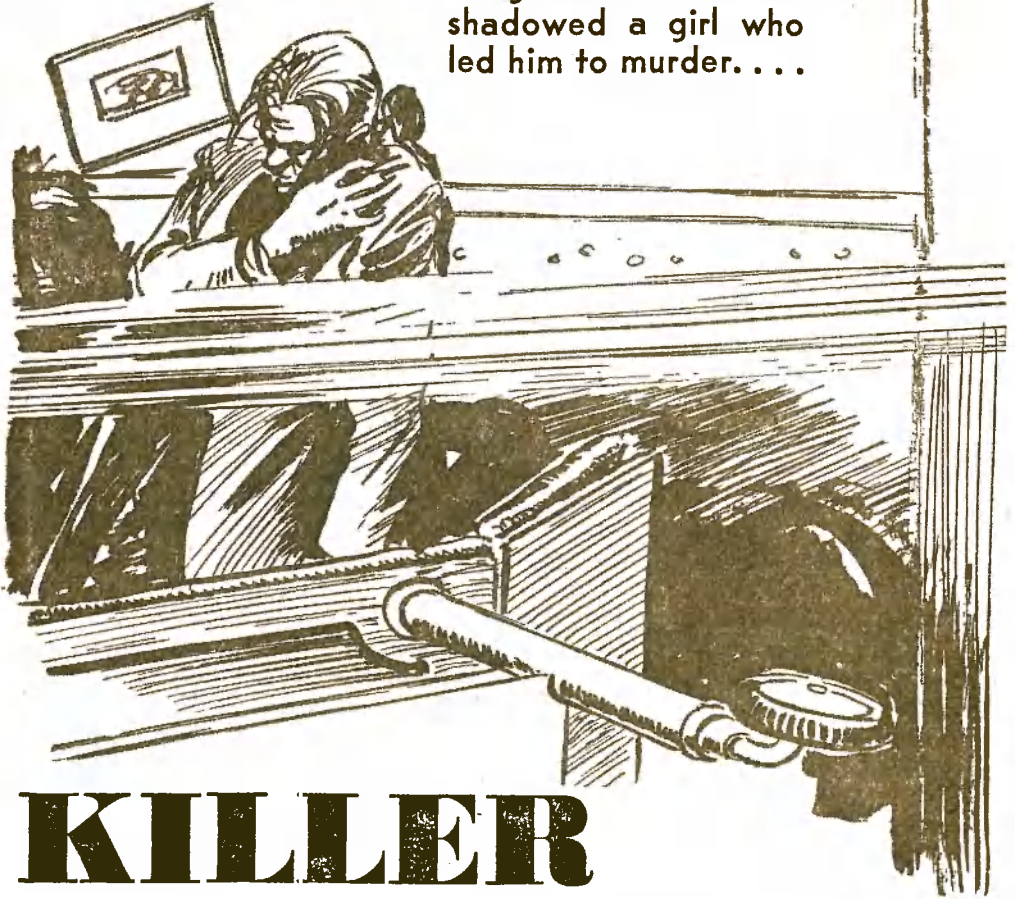
He dived and arose with the table of Judge Harper's court upon one hard shoulder. At the same instant he was getting out the .38-calibre hidden inside his thigh all of the time he had been searched.

The smashing of the table on his own hard skull dizzied him. But Deming was sheltered, his rod rammed into the soft belly of the pooh-bah of Pineville. Dr. Mayor Rick Harper grunted. Lead smashed into the hard walnut top of the table close to Deming.

The store-room court crowd had come to its feet, yelling. Deming hoped that Ma Deming and Evie would get out before there was a panic. He rammed his free hand into a pocket and

(Continued on page 110)

Rudy got the less sensational detective assignments—until he shadowed a girl who led him to murder. . . .



KILLER CASHES IN

By WILLIAM DECATUR

THE corridor leading to the service elevator and alley entrance formed an "L" lying on its side. In the lobby of the Commander, the corridor opening was partially concealed by a palm in a sizeable green wooden tub. A man in lightweight gray worsted, immaculately pressed, barbered, and manicured, stepped past the palm into the corridor. On his arm hung a slender

blonde girl whose high heels made her height about the same as the gray man's five feet ten.

"What's the trouble?" he asked pleasantly.

"Stay out," the heavyweight told him curtly. The heavyweight was Detective-Sergeant Phillip Byrne, who had nothing left of his top hair except some pink fuzz, and who was condemned to be



They went down—and the machine gun laced bullets over their heads.

a fat man before he died. The man with him was Detective Rudy Marrow—slim, swarthy, with the assassinating smile of a handsome stage villain. Black eyes, thick and curly black hair, and as fastidious in dress as the gray man.

There was evidence of a third man with the detectives. Projecting outward from the angle of the corridor was a pair of shoes cocked upward in the manner of a man lying on his back.

"I beg your pardon," said the gray man. "I'm Dr. Spillrane. If someone is hurt I'm at your service." His serene eyes flickered at the gleam of the shield whose edge showed past the lapel of Byrne's rumpled coat.

"Oh. No thanks," Byrne refused. "Nothing you can do."

"Don't you think I had better make sure?" Spillrane persisted.

"There isn't any doubt about it!" Byrne snapped. "The man is dead."

"Oh, very well," Spillrane said coolly.

Rudy Marrow grinned at the blonde girl, and she smiled back at him automatically, dropping her velvety eyelashes. She wasn't twenty-one, and she had fine, pale blonde hair like spun platinum. She wore clinging chiffon, and there was no contesting that she had a superior brand of curves.

Byrne turned his back in dismissal and vanished around the angle of the corridor. Marrow kept on looking while the doctor plucked a cigar from his pocket, removed the cellophane, cut one end with a keen pocket-knife. He lighted the cigar, turning it slowly while he drew on it to get an even light before he departed. Then he said, "Come, Jeannette."

"Yes, Uncle Mark," she murmured obediently, and her voice had the miraculous softness of a bright feather floating.

Rudy rejoined Byrne and sighed, "Now, there's something I'd like to have around my apartment for a pet."

Byrne muttered something about having told the damned hotel manager to keep anyone from using the corridor.

THE man on the floor had no identifying marks on his person. No laundry marks on his shirt, which meant that his stuff was probably laundered at his place of residence. Washwoman. No drycleaning marks on the trousers, which were of seventy-five to ninety dollar quality. The jacket was missing. The man was in shirtsleeves, with the cuffs buttoned, indicating that the jacket might have been taken after death. There was a little money in the wallet in the back pocket, but no identification cards, no driver's license, no nothing. The shoes were among the best made, but could be purchased in dozens of places. Shirt likewise. The necktie was missing. Also missing, and most important of all, was the man's head.

The man had been killed with a blunt instrument in the form of giant parallel-jawed clippers. The clippers consisted of the floor of the automatic elevator and the lintel of the fifth-floor doorway, where all the blood was.

Between each door and the shaft was a recess more than deep enough to take the head of a man who stuck his neck out. To the bottom of each door was riveted a sheet of metal slanting into the shaft at a forty-five degree angle, so that any rubbish tossed from the car into a recess would bounce from the flange and fall to the bottom of the shaft.

Logically the head should have been found down there in the accumulation of crumpled cigarette wrappers, cigarette stubs, used-up papers of matches and scrap. But it wasn't.

In short, the headless man had been murdered. Byrne had ascertained that the elevator couldn't operate so long as the collapsible gate of the car was open, and the gate had to be open to let a man stick his neck out. It couldn't hap-

pen by accident, nor by design if a man wanted to commit suicide in such an unwieldy fashion.

A man lying on the floor of the car wouldn't be able to reach the patent switch in the ceiling of the car, the switch which was automatically operated by the spring-controlled gate when it closed. Likewise, all the doors to the corridors in the fourteen-story hotel had to be completely closed before the elevator car could move. The elevator was a late model, foolproof.

Therefore, the headless man had been unconscious or dead before his decapitation. His murderer had held the collapsible gate open, manipulated the safety-switch in the ceiling, pressed a button that sent the car aloft. Immediately when Shirtsleeves was guillotined, the murderer had thumbed the top-button and somehow gotten away with the head.

Obviously the beheading had been done to prevent or delay identification of the victim.

In the furnace room, the janitor swore that he had had no visitors since coming on duty, and that no one had used the metal trap in the floor leading to the passageway whereby he periodically cleaned out the trash in the mucky bottom of the elevator shaft.

Periodically was right. Byrne had gone down there and found a yellow newspaper six weeks old amongst the blood-spattered litter. Gum wrappers, theater stubs, a cheap vanity with the enamel scarred, all the junk of the scavenging had gone into paper bags and was down at headquarters.

Mostly, the shaft-bottom was a gigantic ashtray. The hotel employees were forbidden to smoke on duty; the washrooms were watched, so most of the habit was enjoyed between-floors with a thumb held on the stop-button. Anybody in a hurry, by common con-

sent among the hired help, could damn-ed well use the stairways.

That was the way matters stood in the murder of the stranger at the swanky Commander Hotel, where a year's rent practically amounted to ransom, but where people who wanted to live like that got just about what they paid for.

Just waiting for the dead-wagon to come for the body, Byrne hunkered down, the tendons in his elephantine legs cracking like dry sticks. He scrutinized the soles of the stiff's feet, and ejaculated, "Hah!"

"What?" Rudy asked.

Byrne pointed with a hunky forefinger.

On the arch just in front of the heels of the dead man's shoes, dirty but not obliterated, a stamp had cut the word **DAMAGED**. That meant that the expensive shoes had a slight flaw somewhere, perhaps nothing more than a needle-prick, or a knife-cut in the inside lining. Such merchandise was to be purchased at stores serving as "factory outlets" and handling "bankrupt stocks." This man wasn't a guest of the hotel.

"What's more," said Byrne, "I'm betting that this is a hot suit." He unbelted the trousers, and from the back seam cut off a strip of material with his penknife. The resulting sample was wide enough, the trousers having been taken in from an oversize. Cheap tailoring, further proof of hot goods.

The dead-wagon rolled into the alley. The body was covered with a sheet, hoisted onto a stretcher and taken out with dispatch.

ON the way through the lobby of the hotel Rudy stopped at the desk and inquired, "Dr. Spillrane a guest here?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about Jeannette?"

Rudy's manner was familiar, and the clerk frowned. "I think you mean Miss



"What's the idea?" Byrne asked.

"I asked about that blonde," Rudy answered. "She's only Spillrane's niece. I never saw a real platinum one before."

"A lot of good it will do you. Niece!"

Before they left with the eight thousand dollars, they killed the cashier.

Byrne scoffed. "The way she was hanging onto his arm!"

"You're telling me," Rudy agreed. But Byrne hadn't seen the way Jeannette smiled, and when a girl smiled like that, it told Rudy Marrow all he wanted to know.

He drove, and upon Byrne's direction had the car coasting down Dock Street within five minutes. He found a parking space a foot longer than the sedan and got into it with the lightest *tick* of bumpers, finishing the swift S-curve flush with the curb. He said, "I thought we had a foot more of room."

Jeannette Lorenz. She is Dr. Spillrane's niece."

"Thanks." Rudy caught up with Detective-Sergeant Byrne, grinning with something accomplished.

"I'll be right back." Byrne slammed the door.

Rudy lighted a cigarette and thought about Jeannette Lorenz. Of course, he couldn't conscientiously talk to her



alone on the excuse of police business. But it would be all right to mention that he was a detective, and if she wanted to turn down his offer to chew the fat over a cocktail, it was up to her. Just one cocktail. Barely enough was left of his last paycheck for rent, but he was the apple of his landlady's eye.

His bright eyes were busy with the grimy perspective of Dock Street, whereon anything could be bought. Got out a comb, and combed his curling black locks into perfection. He had the best head of hair he had ever seen.

ON Dock there were five garment shops where hot suits could be purchased. The stuff came from job-lot burglaries and hijacked trucks as far away as Philadelphia and New York. Labels from the suits were removed, local labels sewn in. Rudy himself had one of those suits, sixty dollars worth that he had picked up for eight bucks, plus a dollar and a half for fitting.

He saw Byrne emerge from the first shop and enter another farther down. Byrne's methods were direct. He would show his sample of goods to the shop-

keeper, demand, "Did you handle this garment?"

Then he would grab the haberdasher by the throat.

Rudy got a hunch, settled his hat on his head, and expertly turned the car out of the parking place without nicking the fender ahead again. He straightened out, coasted down and double-parked. He honked as Byrne came out and looked back up the block. Byrne sidled between cars and got in.

"Yanah," Byrne grunted. "He bought the suit in there. The dead man is Nathan Lister."

"Who's he?" Rudy asked dreamily, swinging the car around a corner.

"Nate Lister has been a private dick around here for years. He's been picked up several times, but he's too smart to carry a gun. We won't give him a license. He doesn't sue the city for false arrest, either, because he's afraid we might get curious and find out how crooked he is."

"That's all there is to it, then," Rudy remarked.

"Except for finding out who did it," said Byrne. "Whoever took Lister's head off was wasting his time." He growled. "I almost hate to find out who killed him. Getting rid of him was doing us a good turn."

"What's his address?"

"We're not going there. Headquarters."

"Yes, sir," said Rudy, and went to the southern end of the business district, to park in front of the new, handsome limestone Public Safety Building. He was ordered to stay in the car, and smoked five cigarettes, passed the time of day with a uniformed cop who had come off duty, scraped his nails and had time to get out and tuck his shirt into his pants before Byrne came back.

"All right," Byrne ordered, and gave Lister's business address. It was on Broadway, and Rudy got there with the

headlong velocity of a man who was born with driving in his fingertips. Again he was ordered to stay in the car. He screwed himself down, sulking, muttering something to himself about jealousy. The Commissioner of Public Safety wanted to replace the old-timers with bright young college graduates, and Rudy Marrow was in line. He had earned the rank of first-grade detective, but Byrne was reducing him to a mere police detective. He wanted a chance.

This time, Byrne wasn't gone so long. He came out of the simple entrance to the Midwest Commerce Building and hulked into the car. He removed his hat and palmed the pink fuzz on his skull. When he was a broth of a lad that hair had been as red as fire, and as his dome shone through its thinness and his weight increased, so did his anxiety. He didn't mind his weight, because there was a large-limbed, buxom, Polish gal he was seeing, but he was sensitive about the way his hair was going. It couldn't be stopped, and he reacted as though every hair that came out in the comb was worth a dollar. Byrne clapped his old hat on his head and directed, "Get out. Lister is the man, all right. You stay here and follow his secretary if she comes out." Byrne described her.

Rudy waited for further instructions, but Byrne whipped the sedan out from the curb, and he had to jump to keep his toes from under the rear wheel.

RUDY loitered on the sidewalk, and he knew that he was handsome. He was looked at. He anchored the back of his right leg to the fender of a car and smoked.

He wasn't very brainy, but he was beautiful, and he had orders to keep his bonnie black eyes on a girl. A man needed more than brains for such a task.

Out she came, and he could see that this was a job he was going to like. Monica Hawley, Lister's secretary, was

as choice a morsel as ever made a masher chew the head off his cane. Where the blonde was somewhat on the clinging vine side, Monica carried herself with an athletic briskness. She was in black from top to bottom. Shako of black felt embellished with a mist of veil on her curling bronze hair; black crepe dress with shirring, sheer black stockings.

A fine way for a working-girl to dress. Secretary, phooie. Rudy fell into step with her, and her stride was just as long as his.

"May I carry your groceries?" he inquired politely, doffing his hat to show his beautiful hair.

"I'm not carrying any groceries," she retorted. Her lips, beautiful as they were, looked as though she were going to bite.

"I noticed that. Quite a coincidence, eh?" He grinned his most fetching grin, and the moist carmine of her lips quirked in response. But she paid no further attention to him, turning the corner with the spikes of her heels coming down with the same decisive hammerstrokes.

Abruptly she cut across in front of him and opened the door of a low-slung, old but powerful roadster. Rudy slipped into the deep red-leather seat beside her and hauled the door shut.

"You know I can have you arrested, don't you?" she asked. "You'd better get out, mister. Quick!"

"Oh, this is just a lark," he assured her deprecatingly. "Mashing is just a sideline with me. Well," he sighed, "as long as I'm so amateurish about it. . ."

He rested a hand on the latch of the door.

"I suppose this is your first time?" she observed sarcastically.

He took his hand off the latch. "Believe it or not, it is. I said to myself, there's a beautiful girl, and if I don't find out her name I'll never forgive

myself, and the only way of finding out is to ask her."

Monica turned on the ignition, put the car in gear, and the efficiency of her driving was typical. "My name," he said, "is Rudolph Marrow. You can either call me Rudy or tell my whole name to the first cop we pass."

"Mine is Monica Hawley." She looked straight ahead, and her profile was something to remember.

"Is this your car?"

"I guess so. Nate—my boss won't have any use for it any more."

"That sounds odd. Something happen?"

She told him that a big bull of a detective had just called and informed her that Lister had been killed. Lister was a private detective, "Not a very good one," she guessed.

"Must be interesting work," Rudy offered, and got a mere shrug. "Did he get killed in connection with something he was doing?"

"I don't know," she said guilelessly. "He didn't talk much about anything he was working on. What he was doing in a snooty place like the Commander, I haven't the faintest idea. That's where it happened. Anyhow," she sighed, "I'm out of the best job I've had since I left the U."

"I wouldn't worry," he said easily. "With the figure you've got, it will be as easy as rolling off a log."

"Yah!" she jeered. "The town is lousy with girls who have better figures than mine, and they can type better, too."

"Tsk, tsks," he commented. "I can see where I'm not getting any place."

"You're doing all right."

RUDY reached for the radio switch and turned it on. The radio had a good short-wave hookup, and he used it automatically, tuning in the headquarters dispatcher as usual. He covered

this egregious absent-mindedness by remarking, "I like to listen to that guy. He's got a voice like a frog in a beer barrel."

"If you have the idea that I'm driving you around for any other reason but just wanting to talk to somebody, get it out of your head."

"You don't mind if I just sit here and ogle you, do you?" he asked.

She burst out laughing. Her eyes danced at him fleetingly, and her hand gave him a brief pat, which was more eloquent than a verbal statement of the fact that they had broken the ice and were friends.

Herkimer, the police dispatcher, ordered Car number 12 to proceed to a certain address and "Meet a lady." The hum of the short-wave stayed on. Another broadcast was coming, and it was a good one. For all cars, to keep a lookout for a black Plymouth sedan, license plate plastered with mud and unreadable. In it were two men, farmers dressed in overalls and cotton shirts, both with several days growth of beard. Both perhaps an inch short of six feet in height, but one was thin, and the other was a broadshouldered husky. The thin man had a remarkably long nose and might be Jeff Elkin, a will-o'-the-wisp gunman born the eldest of a fecund family of squatters, two of whom were serving time in the state prison now. His pal with the truckdriver build might be a brother, Orrin. Both were armed, Orrin with a sub-machine gun. They had held up the bank in Jay's Mills, a hamlet about fourteen miles up the river from the city of Caulfield, killed the cashier, and made off with something like eight thousand dollars.

Across the street from the tin-can bank was the blacksmith shop. The blacksmith, a burly man was he, and not a bad trapshooter in his spare time besides. He was also the bank's self-appointed watchdog. So at the sound of

shooting he had snatched up his single-barreled shotgun and socked a load of buckshot through Orrin Elkin's shoulder when the brothers loped out of the bank with a flour sack full of coin and currency.

All roads to be watched, in case the brothers were heading for Caulfield.

"Either they've got a hideout, or they're across the state line already," Rudy commented on the alarm. "It's just about time somebody cracked that bank in Jay's Mills."

"Oh, do you know the place?" she asked. "I was born near there."

"You weren't born on a farm."

"Why wasn't I?" she challenged, but she admitted that she had been in the city so long that she had forgotten how to milk. "If you haven't anything to do," she proposed shyly, "if you don't have to be anywhere, we might go driving. I haven't been in the country for a long time."

Promptly he agreed, "It sounds all right to me."

He had a qualm of conscience, but the only orders he had received were to stay with Nate Lister's secretary. If Sergeant Byrne wanted to cop all the glory, Rudy Marrow would just as soon make the best of it.

A HALF mile beyond the city limits, Monica turned off the state highway without warning and headed into a dirt road. It wasn't even marked as a country trunk road.

"Well," Rudy asked negligently, "What's this?"

"I'll show you some landscape," she promised. "There isn't anything on the main highway."

He began to wonder whether he was kidding her, or whether she was kidding him. Since she worked for a private dick she might have a gun. Taking him for a masher, she might have the idea of pulling an old one—giving him a

jaunt way out into the country, then putting him out of the car and making him walk back. Rudy had a gun himself, and if she tried to work such

Following the creek was the only way they could get through without being seen.



a dodge on him, she'd get the surprise of her life. He kept a wary eye on her, trying to analyze the little smile on her lips.

The scenery was excellent—rolling hills, rock formations, and woods whose sweeping masses of foliage would have looked artificial in a painting. There was a brook, and in it stood a glistening chestnut mare munching pale green water-grass.

Monica knew the back roads, all right. She kept on jigsawing in a general northeasterly direction, but according to such a cunning pattern that Rudy abruptly didn't know where he was. The car swayed from side to side, slipping in and out of snaky wagon-tracks. The heavy roadster slowed, taking the turn into a road that was just an impossible cut over the shoulder of a hill—all loose pebbles and gravel.

They made it with a leap, and with a careening flourish bowled down a single track of fine, soft sand which plunged into a stand of dense woods. She switched off the ignition and let the car roll. It went rocking down the incline through a hollow past a mudhole where cat-tails stuck up like enormous spitted caterpillars.

As the car slowed shortly after they entered the woods she turned off where there was no track. Brush scraped the car. It had just enough momentum to roll into a clearing, a panel of grass that had escaped being used as a picnic site.

Monica pulled the service brake back with a manner of deliberation.

"What's the general idea?" Rudy asked, getting ready to pull his gun.

"Shhh!" she warned. "We're not far from a house. Don't slam the door."

Rudy slid under the wheel, leaving the door open when he got out. He took a cigarette from his pack, and she

slapped it out of his hand, shaking her head. He stared blankly at her.

"Somebody might smell it," she whispered. "Don't worry. We're less than a mile from the state highway, if you're afraid I'm trying to duck you." He reddened. "We had to come in this way because the road from the highway to the house is private, and the man who owns the place is mean enough to shoot. His dogs keep on getting run over on the highway, and it makes him mad. He shot over my head once."

"Couldn't we find a better place?" he whispered back.

Monica closed her eyes. "I used to come here with a couple of quarts of strawberries, and powdered sugar, when I finished my classes at the U. I used to take sunbaths here." She looked at Rudy. "The farm was abandoned, but then that nasty man bought it and wouldn't let anyone use his road any more. Do you ever take sunbaths?"

To himself he said, "Something's going on here. Why am I so dumb that I don't know what it is?"

Walking two or three steps away, she went gracefully to the ground. She took off the felt shako, placed it on the grass and lay prone. Rudy took his hat off and scaled it expertly into the open car. He knelt beside her.

"Get down!" she commanded. Rudy obeyed, stretching out on the grass beside her. She said, "They can see us from the house now, and hear us. Is there anybody home?"

Rudy squinted over the crest of bare gray granite from which the grassy slope descended. He reported, "There's a car in the yard."

"Is it the farm truck?"

"No, just an ordinary black sedan. Listen. What's the use in our taking chances on some nutty farmer taking potshots at us? Let's get out of here, Monica."

"I like it here," she whispered stub-

bornly. "Isn't that a dream of a house?"

"It's all right, I guess," he grunted noncommittally.

ON the distant knoll below them was a sprawling one-story dwelling, logbuilt, evidently remodeled from a farmhouse. It was painted a yellowish tan. The rooms of the house were in stages, built by a native architect to conform to the swell of the knoll. There was a flat block of garage, a flagstoned verandah, and terraced panels of lawn flowed away on all sides with the lushness of velvet. Below and beyond the house was a dam, and its pool looked as black and still as oil in the shadow of the trees.

"I covet that house," said Monica. "I've always wanted it, and, come the revolution, I'm going to have it."

"There's another car coming," he reported.

"A truck?"

"No, a— a sedan. I can't tell the make, but it's one of the late models. Green paint-job."

Monica's ripe lips smiled.

"Two passengers in it," he continued. "A man and a woman. They've gone into the house."

The slam of a car door came from the distance. In the farther distance was the repeated telescoped whine of fast-traveling machines on the state highway.

Monica's grin was almost elfin.

"How good are you, Rudy?" she asked.

"I guess I'm good enough," he hazarded, wary for some subconscious reason.

"Do you think I'm a nice girl?"

"I haven't got any doubt about it."

She said softly. "What a bum."

So she knew. He asked, "What gives you that idea?"

"If you were working for me, I'd discharge you," she murmured. "A pair of

legs is all that's needed to make you throw your job overboard."

"Legs plus," he corrected. "So I'm a detective?"

"You don't keep your badge pinned inside your jacket like Sergeant Byrne, so that you can pop it out for the musical-comedy effect. You keep it in your side pocket. It was pressing against me when we were in the car."

"How do you know it was my badge?"

"I've got it in my purse."

Rudy explored, and his shield was gone. He said, "Pickpocket."

"And nice young mashers don't wear revolvers in shoulder holsters."

"The hell with it," said Rudy. "Listen, Monica. I would have told you. You can make a monkey out of me, and get me a dishonorable discharge. My cards are on the table. I don't care one damn about what you were to Lister. All you have to do is start laughing, but I'm in love with you."

She looked back at him, combed her fingers through his beautiful hair and messed it up.

"Rudy, darling," she whispered, "you've got a good start. Will you do me a favor?"

"Anything. I'll do anything for you."

"Will you please start using your brains, if you have any?" There was a snap in her voice.

HE looked at her with complete disillusionment, because she could do that to him. His face reddened, then stiffened to a drawn white. He shot a look at the distant house on the knoll with the suddenness of his realization. He started scrambling to his feet, but Monica caught him. He tore free. When he was still in a crouch she kicked and tripped him flat, pinioning him with strong arms. In a furious whisper she said, "I told you to start thinking, not

to turn into a wild man. I'll show you the way."

"That black sedan down there!" he said. "It's the car that was used in the holdup at Jay's Mills."

"Of course it is!"

"And the Elkin brothers are in the house. And that big green car is Dr. Spillrane's, and that was Spillrane and his girl Jeannette Lorenz!"

"And now we'd better hurry!" she ordered curtly. She rolled to the abutment of rock which girdled the slope of grass on which they had lain, and Rudy followed suit. She climbed down into the ravine through which flowed the brook which fed the broad pool formed by the dam. Rudy started along the steep, treacherous bank of rock, and Monica hissed, "No! No! You can't get through! This way."

She sat on a flat boulder, removed her shoes and stockings. Holding them in one hand, she walked down into the bed of the brook. It was spring-fed and cold, and she took a swift inhalation of shock.

Rudy followed suit. He took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his trouser legs and gingerly stepped into the water. The cold of the water stung through his feet like acid. The stream-bed was stony, varying with packed sand and a couple of stretches of granite worn as smooth as petrified gravy.

Leading, Monica knew the way, skirting pockets of deep water where they would have gone in over their heads. But Rudy still reflected that she must have been a campfire girl or something because she kept steadily on while he hesitated now and then because of excruciating stone-bruises, and then had to hurry to catch up.

The stream-bed descended into a trough of smooth rock, with perpendicular walls on both sides. This was the bottle-neck which couldn't be passed without their being seen from the house.

He couldn't pull his trouser-legs up any higher; water touched his knuckles, and then he was wet, and wetter. And the cold of the water was numbing as it climbed.

The level of the stream climbed to Monica's waist. She gasped; Rudy was wet to the belt, and the water was a continuous icy shock.

But they couldn't have come along the bank.

She headed for a gentle slope of embankment.

Rudy came out, rolled the legs of his trousers down, and they were in clammy, accordion wrinkles. He wanted to laugh.

There was a gravelly cut running from the brook up to contour level. Rudy gauged the height, took a run and made it up to the top with sand cutting the tender between of his toes. He had dropped his shoes and socks. Monica ran up after him and sprawled as she made the top. She landed with her face in the grass. She spat; by the time she got up, Rudy was forty feet away and rapidly getting smaller in a crouching run. He got up to the house and dumped himself flat behind a bank of shrubbery.

Barefoot too, and crouching low, Monica made a bee-line for the bank of shrubbery which was a thick green wall along the side of the house. She went down in a flat sprawl, nearly stunning herself. She had forgotten her shoes and stockings, but she still held her handbag. She flopped, with her cheek against the grass, just as he started running.

She stood up and watched. She pressed her hands to her cheeks and whimpered, "Don't! Rudy, you damned fool!"

There were casement windows back there at the rear of the house. They were ajar, and with scarcely a glance inside he piled through. Since the damage was

done, Monica ran down there, swung a leg over the sill herself.

THE kitchen was modern throughout—in tile, monel metal and gleaming plumbing fixtures, immaculate enough to be used for an operating room, which it was. An opened cabinet showed an array of surgical instruments, and on a small table near the sink steamed a sterilizer.

Jeff Elkin had shaved and changed into flannels and a loud plaid coat, and stood with his hands in his pockets by the swinging door to the living room. On a wheeled table with end-leaves which gave it sufficient length to be used as an operating-table lay his brother Orrin—husky and grizzled, stripped to the waist. His skin was oystery in hue, and his shoulder was riddled and soggy like a sponge soaked in blood.

In a white uniform and rubber gloves, Dr. Spillrane was poking a glittering instrument into the shattered shoulder. Beside him in a nurse's uniform stood Jeannette Lorenz with a tray bearing bottles of stuff, instruments. There were pliers, curved needles and ligature silk for sewing up that gory mess when Spillrane was through.

Oddly enough it was the wounded man, Orrin, who first saw Rudy pop through the window. Rudy's bare heels thumped on the floor before Jeff's eyes jerked and he swore, "I be dogged!"

Orrin rolled off the wheeled table with the chromium probe sticking into his shoulder like a scissor-handled dagger. Jeff grabbed at his shoulder for a gun that wasn't there, cursed again and slammed the swinging door wide open.

Rudy fired, but the wheeled table hit him across the middle at a speed of forty miles an hour or so, and his bullet went into the floor. By the time he kicked the table back, Orrin had lum-

bered through the door after his brother in a crouching run.

Spillrane just stood there for a fraction of a second staring at Rudy, but Jeannette picked up a jar of liquid from the cabinet behind her, and cocked her arm to pitch it.

A small-caliber gun yipped so close to Rudy's ear that he thought his eardrum had burst. Whether it was good marksmanship or an accident, a hole appeared in the breast of the nurse's starched uniform, and she nodded as though looking down at it; her knees buckled and she spilled forward. The jar broke when it hit the tiled floor, and fumed. Acid.

Rudy had put a foot to the bottom shelf of the table and sent it flying just as fast as it had come at him. Dr. Spillrane turned to give the Elkins a good shagging, and the scooting table caught him broadside just below the hip. Rudy was going to shoot him in the legs, but he was caught from behind by an octopus. He was no softie, but he was caught in Monica's noosed arms, and he didn't have the leverage to break free. He cursed her. A leg flashed in front of him, jackknifed backward, caught him across the shins, and he smashed to the floor.

When the metal table hit Spillrane it knocked his lanky legs into the air. It went under him and he bounced off the top in a spinning sprawl of arms and legs. The door's spring-hinges had just brought it into the frame when a section of the panel at about the height of a man's breast began to sprout holes. There was a burst of splinters, the hysterical roar of a sub-machine gun, and the tinkle of glass showering down from panes in the casement windows.

All the bullets went over the heads of Rudy and Monica, but when Spillrane hit the floor he lay still. Rudy put a bullet through the door below the Swiss-cheese cluster, but he didn't get any

answer. Just before the front screen door banged there was the roar of a motor, and the furious hiss of tires spinning before they got traction.

Spillrane was bleeding from three wounds, one in the scalp and two in the chest, all of them superficial. Monica stooped over him. She opened her handbag and grabbed something out with the crackle of stiff paper. She unscrewed a fountain pen and stuck it into Spillrane's gloved hand with the order, "Sign here, on this line."

"What do you think you're doing?" Rudy asked mildly, swallowing with the realization that she had saved his life by tripping him to the floor. The Elkins had left their guns in the living room. They had too much of a head start now to make it worth while chasing them. Anyhow, Spillrane was Rudy's game.

"He's signing a deed to this house," Monica explained. "He won't need it any more. You remember I said," as Spillrane affixed a wobbly signature, "come the revolution. . . ."

At the first turn in the private road below the farmhouse there was a tremendous crash, and a bumping and crumpling and rending of metal. A man let out a high-pitched scream, and there were three deliberately-spaced shots from a revolver.

Rudy stampeded out through the screen door, looked down and saw two wrecked cars over which lifted lazy billows of brown dust like smoke. Up the road, holstering his gun, came marching Sergeant Byrne. He took his hat off, wiped his sweating face in the crook of his coat-sleeve, and palmed the downey pink nudity of his skull. Rudy ducked back inside.

THIS hat was back on when he found Rudy in charge of the shambles in the kitchen. He took his hat off, flung the soggy pelt on the tiles and demand-

ed with ripe disgust, "How the hell did you get here, Marrow?"

"Why," Rudy stammered, "I just figured things out and came here, Sergeant."

Monica stared at him.

"Like hell you figured things out!" Byrne bellowed. "I figured things out! You didn't! You couldn't have! I did!"

"Yes, sir. I don't want any part of it," Rudy agreed meekly. "Just so we got them. Are they dead? The Elkins?"

"Both of them. Now let me tell you something," Byrne snarled, and he gave Rudy a lesson in detection after making sure of Spillrane. First, there was the missing head. Identification of Lister was so easy that preventing it couldn't have been the reason for decapitation. Rather it was something about the head which would *identify the murderer*. What would that be? A bullet in the head. And why would that identify the murderer? Because the murderer had murdered before, and the original bullet was in the property room at headquarters.

The original murder was that of a nurse, Agnes Hess, who worked in the Hale Clinic. Spillrane had been on the staff of the clinic three years ago, and the murder had occurred in the girl's home a year before he retired. He was a crooked doctor, performed illegal operations and did favors for underworld characters such as fixing up bullet wounds and neglecting to report them to the authorities. Presumably Miss Hess had found out and threatened to expose him. He had persuaded her to talk things over at her place. She had taken fright, gotten to the telephone and dialled the operator before he shot her.

Jeannette Lorenz had also been a nurse at the clinic with him, besides serving as his assistant whenever a wounded gunman, or girl with good looks and a rapid pulse turned up to take advantage of the open house he

offered in the country. He couldn't get out of the game he was in; he was known in the underworld, and they had a club with which they tapped his head none too gently.

Byrne thought that Monica would show up at the Commander, with Rudy, since she worked for Lister. But at the Commander he had asked the switchboard operator about calls, and there was one for Spillrane through the Jay's Mills exchange.

And Spillrane murdered Lister because Lister had found out about the doctor's underworld connections and was trying to shake him down. There was a reward out for the murderer of Agnes Hess, but that wasn't enough for Nate. Nate Lister was a maggoty, backstabbing blackmailer, and Spillrane knew that he would get bled white if he ever shackled himself to the private detective with a single payment for silence.

When Spillrane took his car out of the hotel garage, along with his girl, Byrne went into his apartment at the Commander, and found the .25 caliber gun under the dust-cover on top of the typewriter on Miss Lorenz' desk.

The head, with the bullet in it, was still missing. That was all.

Byrne went lumbering to the telephone, to call headquarters in Caulfield.

SOMEONE banged the screen door instead of knocking, and Rudy answered. It was the rural postman, very much on foot and with a lean, perspiring red face. He gave Rudy a large package addressed to Spillrane and remarked with a twang, "If ye want me to bring parcels up here, y'better clear out that junk down there at the turn so's I can git my car past." He cleared his throat. "And while y're about it, ye might as well shovel off that Elkins garbage, too." He stamped down the steps whistling, and there was a spring

in his bowed legs as he headed for his car beyond the wrecks. He had been held up by the Elkin boys once.

The package was wrapped in brown paper, and it contained a sturdy, double-corrugated box in which had come a dozen bottles of Scotch. Inside the box was an object wrapped in a man's jacket. The object was the head of Nate Lister. Monica squealed and turned her back.

The head was bloodless, the lips parted to show the yellowish teeth. One eye stared fishily, the other was smashed dead center by the bullet from Spillrane's gun, and sunken. The bullet hadn't come out through the back of the head. Thick skull.

Lister had a heavy crop of medium-brown hair, and it was tied up in a top-knot with his own necktie. Very resourceful of the doctor. After the shooting and the decapitation, he was able to stop the elevator, bring it down a couple of feet and stop it again, and haul up the head through the recess between the cutting edge of the elevator and the corridor door.

Byrne came back and looked at the head as though deciding on a lobster for dinner, and he said with an air of mild flabbergasm, "I've just been talking with Coroner Ingebritssen. He found a blue lump on Lister's back, almost between the shoulder-blades. He cut it open, and there was the bullet. The doc was wasting his time."

SPILLRANE, bandaged by Monica and then handcuffed to a chair, started laughing with a sort of dry hysteria. He hadn't been entirely wrong, though. After a quick probing in the head, and failure to find the bullet, he thought it might have ranged down. After packing and posting the head, he had tried to get close to Lister's corpse, on the outside chance of nipping out

(Continued on page 109)

DEATH'S HANDYMAN

ONE of the most ruthless, scheming killers of all times, and definitely not a fellow to have around today, was Cesar Borgia, the Italian ecclesiastic and scholar. Because of Cesar and his sister, Lucrece, the name of Borgia has become synonymous with sudden death, particularly by poison.

But, believe it or not, with all the crimes he committed, Cesar was temperate and sober. He loved and patronized learning and possessed a persuasive eloquence.

Cesar was the son of Rodrigo Borgia. He was born in 1476, and early received high ecclesiastical preferment. Soon after Rodrigo Borgia ascended to the Papacy, Cesar was made a Cardinal. Suddenly, an assassin's hand descended upon Cesar's brother, Giovanni, Duke of Benevento and Count of Terracina and Pontecorvo.

For the first time, people began to suspect the machinations of Cesar, which had been evident from childhood up. He had a lust for death and power. However, there was no evidence to convict Cesar of his brother's untimely demise. But there was still the law of succession. And that was a law people didn't abrogate in those days.

But could a man of the church indulge such mad whims? Cesar believed not and, shortly after he had obtained the duchy and counties for himself, he managed to persuade his father to let him resign, to follow the profession of arms. The request was granted and the year 1498 found Cesar in France on a delicate diplomatic mission.

Cesar's job was to convey to Louis XII a bill of divorce from his consort Jeanne, on the grounds of no consummation. How Cesar must have laughed when the delicacy of his mission was told him. Licentious and fool-hardy,

brave reckless, he had always done what he pleased, either openly or through scheming.

Louis XII was vastly pleased with Cesar Borgia. He rewarded him with the Duchy of Valentinois, a bodyguard of 100 men, 20,000 livres of yearly revenue, and a promise of support in his schemes of ambition.

CESAR'S marriage, in 1499, to the sister of the King of Navarre marked the turning point in his career, setting his feet on a path of death and destruction that endured many years. The year of his marriage, Cesar accompanied Louis XII to Italy, where he undertook the conquest of the Romagna for the Holy See.

Unfortunately, his French allies in the northern part of Italy were defeated and Cesar found it wise to desist. Besides, his father had promised to name him Duke of Romagna and so, until 1501 when this promise was fulfilled, Cesar bided his time.

Then he struck. That same year he conquered the principality of Piombino, but failed in an attempt to acquire Bologna and Florence. He took Camerino and caused Giulio di Varano, the town's lord, to be strangled and when Camerino pleaded for the lives of his two sons, Cesar had them murdered, also.

His treachery in the taking of the Duchy of Urbino was one of the first Fifth Column jobs to be recorded. Inside, his conspirators weakened the Duchy and then Cesar rode in on a wave of violence, rape, pillage, and murder.

Alarmed by the growth of this bloody Borgia, a league of Italian princes was formed to resist him. But the wily Cesar kept them in awe by force until he succeeded in winning some of them over

by promises of power. These traitors against the league he employed against the stalwarts, attempting to divide and conquer the latter. He did. Also, he put to death those who had been foolish enough to believe his promises.

So, on December 31, 1502, with great loot and possessions in his power he seemed to have removed every obstacle in the way of becoming King of Romagna and of Umbria. But before he could reach this goal, his father, old Rodrigo Borgia, died. There were rumors that he had been poisoned, and the wise ones in Cesar's council knew that the latter had been a party to the design. This time, however, Cesar had been smart. Or so he thought. He, too, had partaken of the poison, in just enough quantity to make him ill. That way, suspicion against him would be lulled.

He missed his timetable. While he

was ill, enemies rose against him on all sides, including men whom he had trusted. His most hated enemy ascended the papal throne as Julius II, and the balance of power passed from Cesar's hands.

Cesar was arrested and taken to the castle of Madina del Campo, in Spain, where he was in chains for two years. They were two years in which he plotted escape and, when he finally managed to do so, he joined the King of Navarre, accompanying the latter in the war against Castile.

It was Cesar Borgia's last campaign. He came to an inglorious death at the hands of a peasant-soldier in the castle of Biana, on March 12, 1507. Cesar had been trying to storm the castle and, in his headlong rush, failed to see a missile fall from the roof. Death was instantaneous and so passed one of the Grim Reaper's most famous henchmen.

NEXT MONTH—

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH

DETECTIVE NOVEL

by

ROBERT

A.

GARRON

M STANDS FOR MURDER

(Continued from page 39)

"Giving Leany a break, eh?" asked Hanrahan.

The man said, and I'm damned if he didn't grin a little about it: "He'll need it, won't he?"

WHAT ended it up. Hanrahan had the insurance company records checked and there was hell to pay up and down the docks. Every deal was looked into and every loss investigated again.

They didn't find much but there were a lot of worried men in the warehouse business. Leany's gang split up so fast it was pitiful. Each one laid the blame on all the others, giving the bulk of it to Leany, though.

A jury can't be depeled on, ever, but it looked as though Leany would do life and a hundred years on top of it. He was the only one of the ring-leaders left except Wilcox, who was just in the one case.

Wilcox pleaded guilty of intent to defraud an insurance company, and there wasn't a way Hanrahan could prove he had a hand in poisoning old Tom Duffy. But the supposition was there and it was a certainty the judge would give him the limit on the defrauding charge and that was the same as a life sentence for the man.

He was up around sixty and they don't do a twenty year stretch on top of that much age. Not and walk out of prison.

Miss Wilkes got nothing. She'd lost her reputation years before, so all she lost was Carson and the apartment he was keeping her in.

And Mrs. Carson. I saw Hanrahan just after he had the thing well in hand and he was telling me how the Leany

gang had split up and how they were chasing them all over the country. That is, those they didn't have. Some of them had talked and I'd even been right on my first guess, the one about why they'd killed that first man, Johnson.

Hanrahan said: "And this Mrs. Carson! Bah! She knew what her husband was doing right along, but she won't admit it."

"I think you're wrong," I said. "She and Carson had been separated for all practical purposes for some time. She wanted a divorce and she wanted alimony and I don't blame her."

Hanrahan grunted. "It's funny she picked on you, out of all the guys in your racket."

I grinned and he asked me what was so funny.

"That's the only coincidence in the whole mess," I said. "She'd seen me in a bar one night and she remembered me. Somebody told her who I was."

"Why would they tell her that?"

"She asked. She said she liked my looks the first time she saw me."

"You believe this?"

"Sure."

"You're a chump, Joe. Just a sucker for a gal."

"Sure."

He thought it over for a while and then asked cautiously: "I take it then, Joe, that you've been seeing this lady?"

"Sure. D'ya blame me?"

He thought this one over, too, and then grinned. He said: "Not one damned bit. I used to like 'em big and hefty like that myself, when I was twenty years younger."

I told him I'd repeat that remark to the lady that very same evening.

THE PIN-UP

GIRL MURDERS

(Continued from page 77)

"Dumbheads! Get him! The killer's been here all the time!"

Reardon's own Police Positive must have cracked and Captain Morgan called out.

"Stop that! Someone will be killed! Block the door!"

Don Kemp made a long dive to where Legs McCarthy was just departing. His hooked arm brought the cameraman of the corps crashing down.

But there was a concerted rush for the door. As McCarthy fell, cursing wildly, a man screamed hoarsely. His death agony was almost like that of an animal.

Sergeant Reardon blazed a flashlight across the room. Kemp let go of McCarthy and rolled. He saw Bobby Lane on the floor with blood pumping from his ripped throat. The millionaire playboy was speechless now and would be dead in seconds.

Tall Tony Walsh had half fallen over the dying man. Kemp's smashing bullet had torn the wiring and blown a fuse. The outside corridor was all in darkness.

Kemp let go of McCarthy and came up. He smashed a left to Tony Walsh's chin. But as Walsh fell, Kemp saw the pudgy white hand that thrust the jade-hafted dagger into Walsh's pocket. The dagger had been snatched from the pin up girl's heart.

Kemp smacked the barrel of his gun across the teeth of Carlos Carnes, the

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civilian manager. As the man went down, Kemp whirled, talking, with Reardon and three other coppers covering him with their guns.

"Lieutenant Kemp reporting, sir!" he snapped at Captain Morgan. "Plans two-four-three were stolen by one of these three men this afternoon! The blood on Carlos Carnes' hand shows who knifed Bobby Lane, possibly because he was afraid he would talk. Before I'm under arrest, I would suggest Carnes' rooms and all of the baggage of Bobby Lane and Tony Walsh be searched."

BEFORE he submitted the scribbled words of Tina, the pin up girl, Don Kemp separated the envelope from the other letters of Legs McCarthy. McCarthy stared at Kemp as the lieutenant made a swift pass of the letters to him, and then reversed his gun and handed it to Sergeant Reardon.

A little later, Tony Walsh cleared himself. The tank plans were unearthed from under a rug in Carlos Carnes' office.

"Tina told us about a hidden safe behind her pin up picture," explained Tony Walsh. "I tried to stop her. Bobby Lane's reputed fortune has dwindled to nothing. But he had been getting regular remittances.

"Bobby Lane was being paid as an Axis agent. I knew he was already acquainted with Carlos Carnes, here at the hotel. As soon as that stage stabbing stunt and the murder loomed up, I was convinced either Bobby Lane or Carnes was the killer. I kept quiet for the time, waiting to see how the frame-

up might be pinned upon Lieutenant Kemp.

"I congratulate you, lieutenant, on being smarter and quicker than these Axis stooges. I've an idea Carnes killed Bobby Lane and Tina. He would figure that Kemp would know or guess where the information had come from about his hidden safe. No doubt Carnes was planning to take quick leave of this place."

"You're all technically under arrest," announced Sergeant Reardon a little later. "However, we have checked with the F.B.I., and they are fairly certain Carnes is one of the Axis agents who slipped out of their trap up in Detroit nearly a year ago."

Don Kemp faced the C.O. a short time after that.

"I should have you up and drummed out for keeping priceless information to yourself," grunted Captain Morgan. Then his rugged face cracked into a grin.

"However, if what Mary says is true, I'll guarantee you'll never again hide anything behind the picture of a pin up girl," added the C.O. "By the way, Mary is waiting up for you. After what she had been through, I ordered her to get to bed. So she's waiting up. My boy, Mary doesn't take orders and I've never known her to miss what she goes after."

Don Kemp smiled a little. He snapped a salute and stepped out into the room where Mary was waiting, her dark eyes lifted to meet him.

Don Kemp heard Captain Morgan mutter, faintly, "An' may the good gods have mercy on your soul."



KILLER CASHES IN

(Continued from page 103)

the bullet with the penknife with which he trimmed his cigar. That was when Byrne turned him out of the corridor.

"Say, how did you get here?" Byrne demanded.

"Our, uh, the car is on a back road across the brook," Rudy said. He looked at Monica, back at the Sergeant. "You've got to take off your shoes and roll up your pants. It's pretty deep."

Byrne made some sounds in his throat, and for some reason or other got very red in the face. He grumbled, "Sure."

It was Monica who had done the whole thing. Sunbathing here, she had eavesdropped on Spillrane and guessed what he was up to. She wanted this house because she hated the city. And besides that there was a queer reward out for the murderer of Agnes Hess—\$5,743.94, the total of subscription and popular indignation. She put it up to Lister, and he had gone about double-crossing her in a blackmailing game. Now it was all hers. If the giveaway deed Spillrane had signed wouldn't stand in court, she could bid in an auction.

And she said, "It's only a short drive. Nate took out the car in my name, in case he ever got into smashups. He was a rotten driver. I guess it's mine now. It won't take you any longer to get down to headquarters from here than it would by streetcar from where you live, in the city."

They were going down to the brook with their prisoner. Monica stumbled, and Rudy's arm went around her waist. Behind them there was a low ejaculation

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from Byrne, "Damn!" as though he had turned his ankle.

Rudy didn't like the idea of anyone doing his thinking for him, but there was no doubt in his mind that Monica was miles ahead of him. She had maneuvered this whole thing. As they walked, his right arm and hand supported her, as though she needed support.

"Well?" she murmured.

Rudy said, "Hell, yes!"

A HOODLUM GOES HOME

(Continued from page 87)

came out with Dr. Harper's wallet. He thumbed the contents and put it back.

"Git outta there, Deming, or I'll drill you!" shouted Deputy Saunders.

"I've an automatic .38 with the safety off and jammed into Dr. Harper's stomach. And—but you tell him what I'm saying—Doc Harper—"

Deputy Saunders had too much sense to shoot. Deming talked fast. Dr. Harper called out in a broken voice.

"Don't shoot, Saunders—don't—he's a vicious killer—he's a hoodlum—he's—"

Then the clear voice of Cal Deming rang out.

"Not good enough, Doc Harper—tell him you're both carrying marked bills, all counterfeit money, an' some of it has already been put into the dead John Harper's bank this morning—tell him, Doc Harper—tell him you robbed me at the Grand Hotel with the help of Scarrup—or else I'll make a sieve out've your fat stomach—talk!"

All of a sudden Rick Harper, doctor-

banker-mayor, was fairly screaming with panic.

"Don't——"

Deming's automatic cracked out. Its slug scarcely grazed the ribs of Dr. Harper. He may have been a student of anatomy, but he was not sure about that bullet.

"No — Deming — no! Don't shoot again—Saunders killed my brother—it wasn't Bob—it was Saunders——"

"Why, you yellow blowoff!" raged Deputy Saunders. "Didn't you pay me to get John so's you could have the bank——?"

Cal Deming reared to his feet then. His laugh was terrible, coming from his bruised and bearded face.

"When thieves fall out!" cracked Cal Deming. "Outta my way! Sheriff Tully, you heard. Get going. We're freeing Bob from jail——"

It was then the third of the Harper brothers died. With a wild oath, Deputy Saunders condemned Dr. Rick Harper. His gun bucked in his hand. The erstwhile mayor and judge sat down behind his overturned table. Deming watched Dr. Harper then sink back slowly.

Sheriff Tully's eyes may have been rheumy, but they were good. The old .45 he had carried for years exploded but once. Deputy Saunders fell to the floor across his own smoking gun.

YOUNG BOB DEMING held Evie in his arms. Cal Deming freed himself from his mother's clinging hands.

"Now you can stay in Pineville, Calvert," said Ma Deming.

Cal Deming glanced at the bright happiness in Evie's eyes. He had come almighty close to winning her once.

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But his brother Bob had proved to be the better man.

Deming looked at the heavy face of Sheriff Tully. The sheriff turned his eyes away. Deming realized then it could not be.

"It wouldn't be possible to stay here and carry on my business in Chi," he said. "Keeps me hoppin' day and night. But sometimes I'll drop in, say at odd times."

Evie came over and put her arms around him. She appeared to understand better than his own blood kin.

"What has to be, has to be, Cal," she said softly. "I'll never forget what you've done for Bob."

Then she kissed him upon his bearded, bruised mouth.

"You've gotta get some clean clothes better than that cheap suit you're wearin' Calvert," said Ma Deming.

Sheriff Tully concealed a smile. That suit had cost at least \$200 and it was not old. It had been purposely ripped and torn like that. With his promise to visit them, Ma Deming and the others left the jail office.

Sheriff Tully gazed at a spot on the ceiling. He pulled a much creased reward notice from a drawer and glanced at it.

"Says here, Cal, that a Big Town hoodlum known as The Crusher licked a whole danged draft board on account

of them fellers not classifying him as a 1-A," drawled Sheriff Tully. "Says he'd been convicted of a felony, an' now he's wanted for puttin' half the Big Town draft board in the hospital."

Cal Deming looked thoughtfully at the same spot on the ceiling.

"An' half the Pineville draft board killed itself off," said Deming musingly. "Remarkable."

"You wouldn't by any chance be knowin' this feller called The Crusher, wouldja, Cal?"

Sheriff Tully rubbed a broad, calloused thumb along his chin.

"Nope, sheriff," replied Deming! "I've heard of him, that's all. Never met him face to face. Well, I'll be grabbin' the first rattler north, sheriff. Kind o' look out for ma."

One hard hand gripped another. Deming went out. He headed for the grade where the freight drags slowed near the water tank.

Sheriff Tully sat for five minutes looking at the photographs and description of the Crusher on the reward notice. Then he tore the paper into many small bits and went over and put it into the big heating stove.

Although it was August, smoke from the fire drifted from the jail chimney for a few minutes. About that time, Cal Deming, bearded and ragged, swung onto an empty flatcar on the northbound freight.

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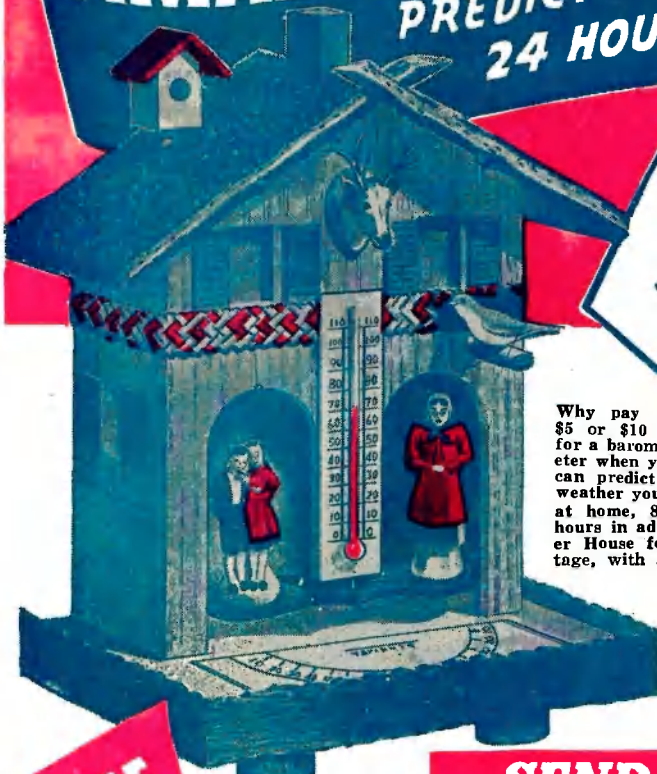
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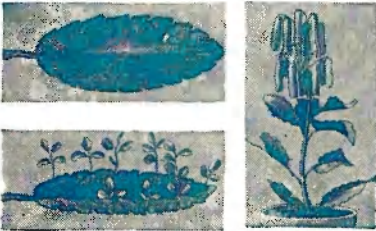
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