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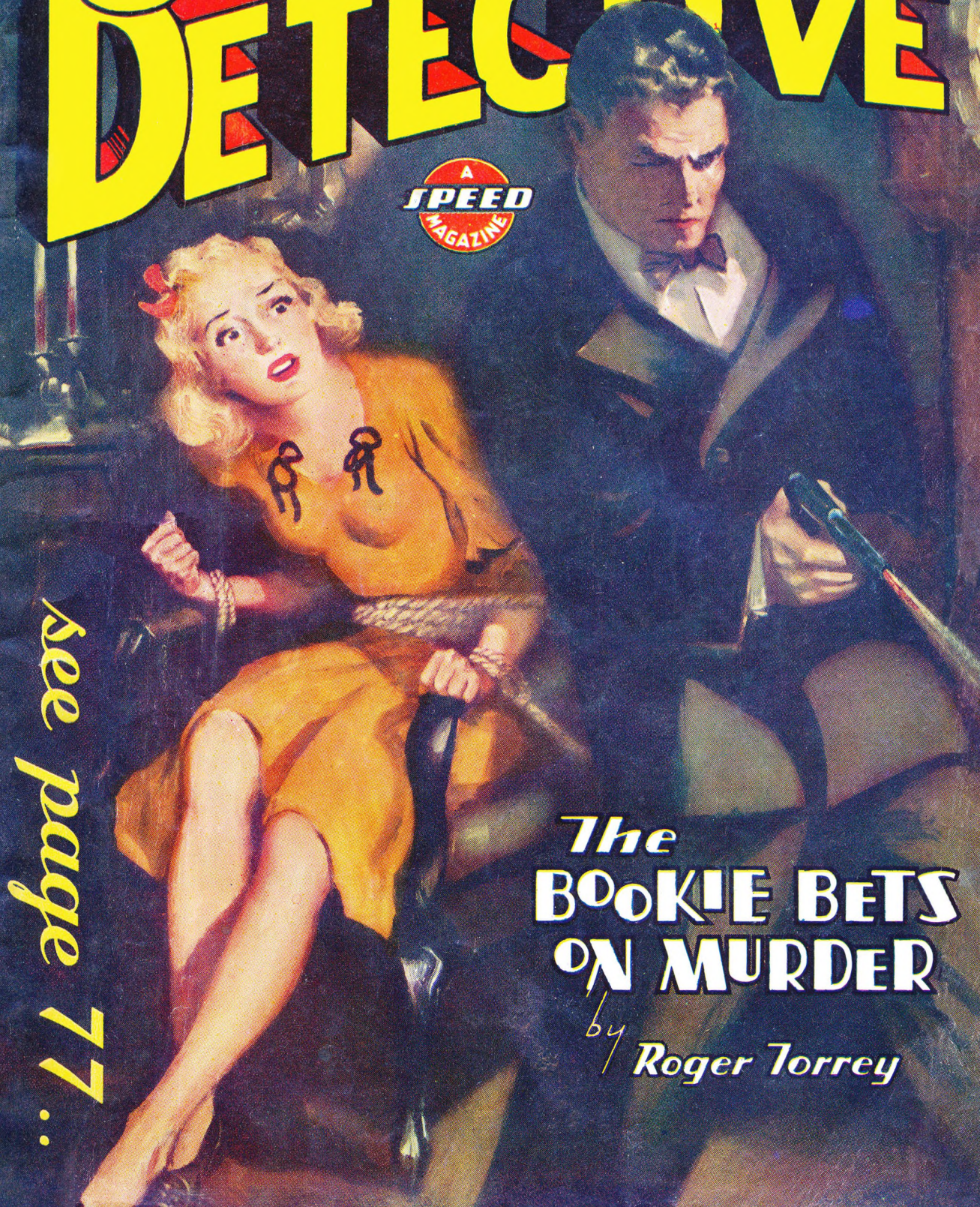
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See page 77...



The
**BOOKIE BETS
ON MURDER**
by
Roger Torrey

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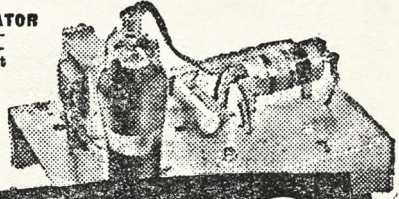


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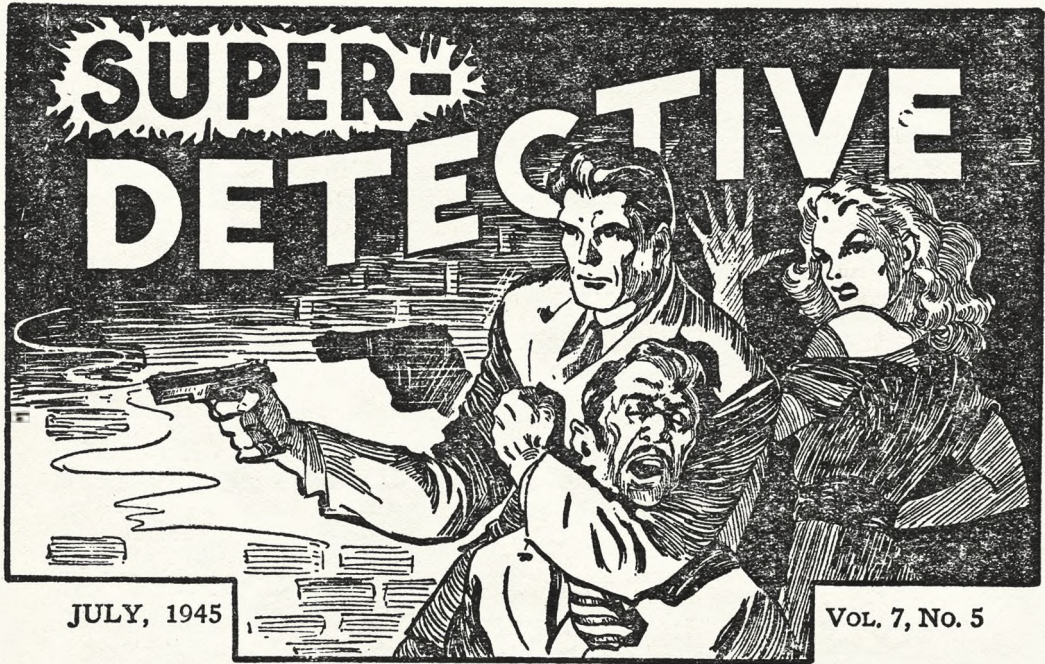
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HOW TO TRAIN AT HOME AND Win Rich Rewards in Radio



JULY, 1945

VOL. 7, No. 5

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Gilbert wasn't shipping his race horses for the benefit of a crooked bookie ring—not after he'd had a son killed in action. But then he found that sometimes even a private detective can't prevent murder.

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What's My Job? - I Manufacture Weaklings into MEN!

Charles Atlas

Actual Photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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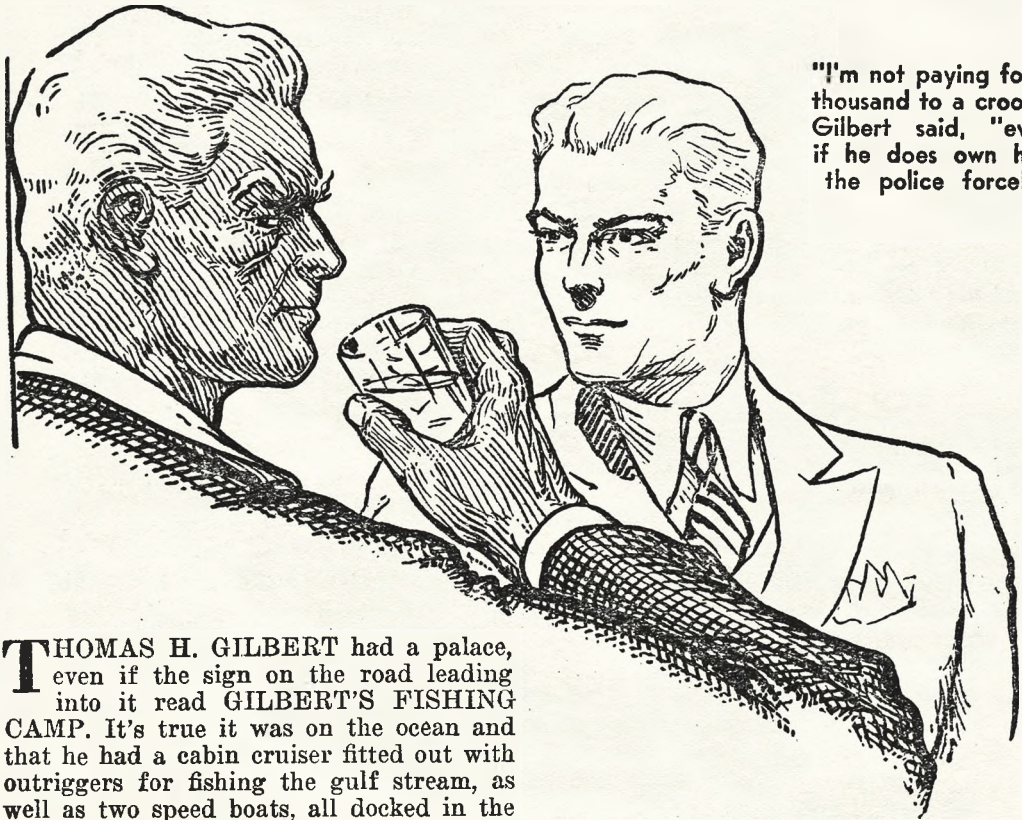
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Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.

Gilbert wasn't shipping his race horses for the benefit of a crooked bookie ring—not after he'd had a son killed in action. But neither did he like his daughter being kidnaped. That's where Phelan came in—to find that even a private detective couldn't prevent murder



"I'm not paying forty thousand to a crook," Gilbert said, "even if he does own half the police force!"

THOMAS H. GILBERT had a palace, even if the sign on the road leading into it read GILBERT'S FISHING CAMP. It's true it was on the ocean and that he had a cabin cruiser fitted out with outriggers for fishing the gulf stream, as well as two speed boats, all docked in the inlet that cut in next the house.

But he also had a house that was entirely modern, with a four car garage behind it, with four servants to run the shebang. He even had the grounds around it landscaped—one of the four tenants who had his own separate cottage at the side, was the gardener.

Quite a fishing camp and Gilbert was quite a man.

He was about fifty, white-headed and distinguished-looking, and almost a giant in size. He stood well over six feet in height and must have weighed two-twenty or over. He was tanned almost black and against this tan his white hair and teeth were startling.

And he was in a rage—he showed this

in the way he stalked around his front room.

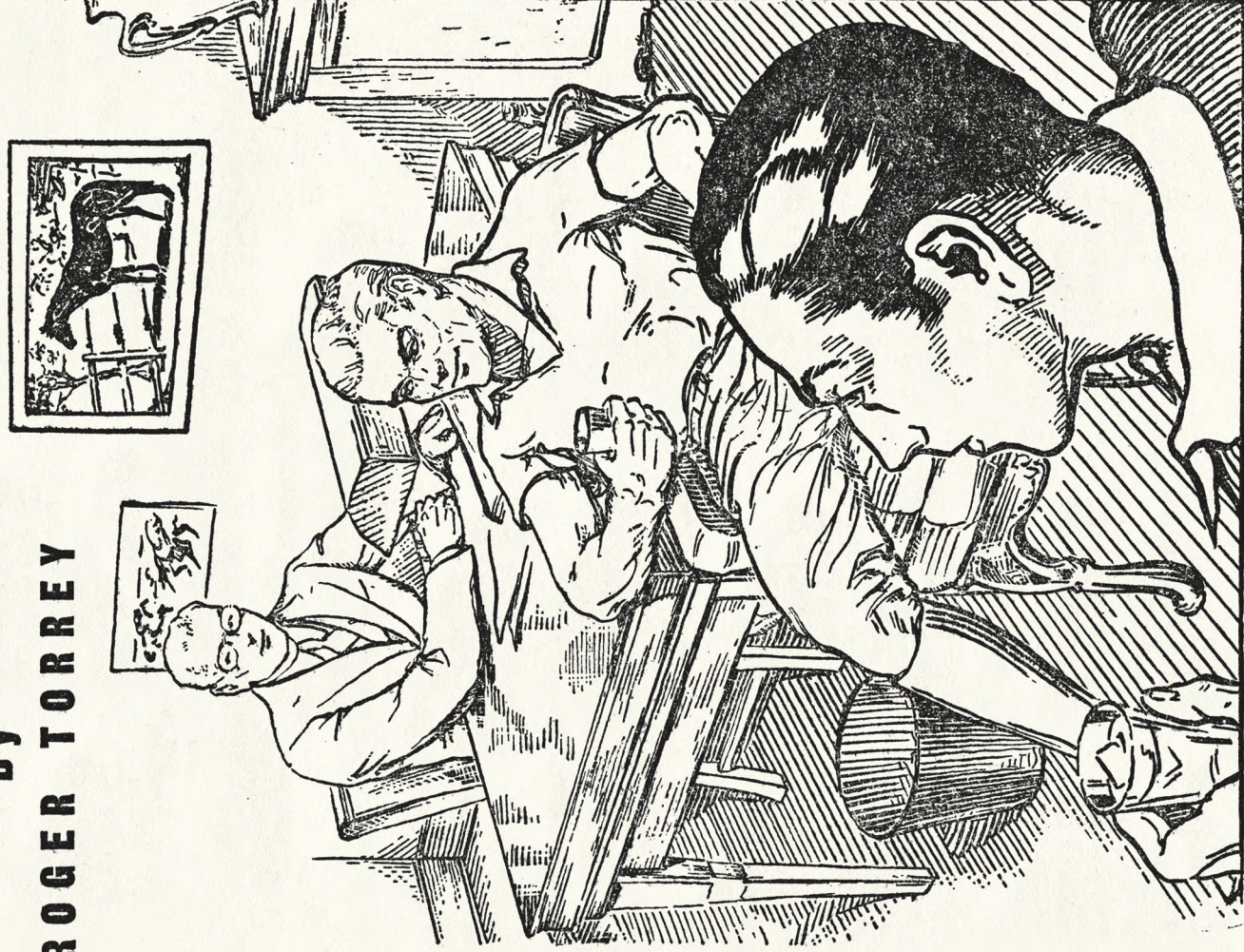
Philip Duval, his son-in-law, on the other hand, looked and acted upset and this was all. Duval was dark and Spanish-looking, and he walked and carried himself like a dancing master. He had a slight accent that wasn't unpleasant, but I thought, then and there, that he'd cultivated it for its effect on women.

He was the Simon-pure gigolo type and no mistake.

Gilbert's secretary, a man named Henson, was so colorless I had trouble in remembering his name, five minutes after I'd met him. And then there was Gilbert's trainer, a little Irishman named Murphy.

THE BOOKIE BETS ON MURDER

By
ROGER TORREY



He looked like an ex-jockey, and I found out afterward that's what he'd been.

Both he and the secretary sat over in a corner and had nothing to say, though Murphy worked steadily on the highballs the butler kept bringing in. I noticed the secretary wasn't having any—this though I wasn't paying any particular attention.

Gilbert said: "I'm glad you came out, Mr. Phelan. I called your New York office, asking them to send a man down, and they advised me you were here on vacation. They suggested I get in touch with you."

I said I was glad he had and lied in my teeth. It was my vacation and I'd earned it, and here the home office was putting me to work. I started figuring right then what I was going to tell Joe Pratt, my boss.

Gilbert said: "I own the Gilbert Stables, Mr. Phelan, and I'm being high-pressured because of it."

"Then you own Corsair."

"He's my best horse."

Duval said: "He's one of the best horses that ever ran, Mr. Phelan."

I'D seen the horse run at Belmont and thought the same, and the records bore me out. And I also remembered that Gilbert was rated as a millionaire horse owner, running his stables as a hobby. Certainly his place backed up the millionaire part of what I'd heard.

Gilbert said: "I've got my horses below, at Miami, waiting shipment. Now that our tracks are closed, there's only the Cuban and Mexican tracks in operation. It's either ship to Cuba or Mexico or stable them for the duration. I want to send my string to my Kentucky place but there are people with a different thought. They want me to ship either to Cuba or Mexico, no matter which. I refused to do either."

"They're your horses," I said.

"It's my daughter, too. They've taken her. Look at this note."

He handed me a type-written note that read:

SHIP YOUR STABLE AS YOU'VE BEEN TOLD TO DO AND WE'LL SHIP YOU BACK SOMETHING YOU HAVE JUST MISSED. AND WE WANT FORTY GRAND FOR THE MONEY YOU'VE COST US BY FOOLING AROUND. MAKE UP YOUR MIND AND MAKE IT UP IN

A HURRY. WE'LL TELL YOU WHAT TO DO WITH THE MONEY BY PHONE. CALL IN THE COPS IF YOU THINK IT WILL GET YOU ANYTHING.

Gilbert asked: "Do you make anything of it, Mr. Phelan?"

I said: "Sure. It's too wordy for a good ransom note. And it was written on an old typewriter. The top half of the S key is broken off, the letter E hits below the line and the letter M hits above it. And the carriage is out of order . . . it doesn't space correctly or write evenly across the page. But that's all. You'd have to find the typewriter to have it mean anything."

"I've had three notes before this. All telling me to ship to Mexico or Cuba if I wished to avoid trouble. This is the first that mentions money."

"Where are the other three?"

"I tore them up. I've had crank letters before and that's what I thought these were."

"D'ya remember whether they were written by this machine?"

"No, I don't."

The secretary spoke up from his seat in the corner. He said: "I remember them well, Mr. Phelan. They were. I recall thinking to myself that the machine that they were written on should be repaired."

Gilbert explained: "Henson opens my mail and gives me the personal letters. The others he answers without bothering me with them."

Duval said: "I've urged Mr. Gilbert to ship the string at once. And to pay the forty thousand, when it's asked for. It won't hurt the horses to run and it may save Cornelia."

Gilbert said: "What's your opinion, Mr. Phelan? I don't want to run my horses, but naturally, my daughter means more to me than all the horses in the world."

I said: "Let me get this straight. Why all this fuss about shipping your horses? Why should anybody care whether you shipped your horses to Mexico or Cuba or whether you shipped them to your place in Kentucky?"

"The book-makers, Mr. Phelan. With a few exceptions, there's not a horse running in Cuba or Mexico that any horse in my stable can't beat. And there's not a horse in either country that can hold a candle

to Corsair. He'd be odds-on favorite, of course, but there are always people who'll play the long shots against the favorite. That's found money for the bookies. And they know the rest of my string as well. Working as a combine, they'd clean up a fortune every time my horses ran."

"Couldn't you?"

HE said stiffly: "Mr. Phelan, I wager five dollars on my horses, every time one runs. As a gesture. I'm not keeping a stable to gamble with."

"What's your objection to running them then? I'm just trying to get this clear in my mind, Mr. Gilbert."

"I had a son, Mr. Phelan. Just before the order stopping racing in the States went through, I got word he was killed in action. In the South Pacific. It has made this war a personal thing to me . . . I'm afraid I took it too much for granted before. I can see the reason for the Government's order stopping racing now. People spend money for transportation, getting to the tracks. That money should be spent for war bonds. People spend money in the mutuel machines and with the bookies—money that should be spent in the war effort. If I ship and race my horses for the benefit of a crooked bookie ring, the Government will lose a sizeable proportion of the money the bookies take from their customers. I feel strongly about this and have, since I heard of my son's death. I'll run my string, naturally, if it means Cornelia's safe return, but I'm not so sure it would mean that."

"You're sure the bookie ring is back of this?"

"It's the only explanation. The note is clear. What d'ya think about it, Mr. Phelan?"

It looked all wrong to me but I didn't say so. Kidnaping isn't in favor since the Government started cracking down on the snatch artists, and taking a millionaire's girl is quite different from grabbing a rival gangster and putting the bite on him. The gangster usually can't even go to the police with it when released. But a man like Gilbert could, and would, raise hell about it.

But there were some truths I could tell him and I did.

I said: "They'll hang no higher for

murder than they will for kidnaping, Mr. Gilbert. If they're killers, they'll get rid of the only witness against them. Whether you run your horses and pay them the forty grand or not. They probably wouldn't take a chance on the girl identifying them if they were picked up. Of course if they worked it in such a way that she couldn't make a positive identification, they'd probably return her safely. Where was she taken from? The house here?"

"She was shopping in Miami," Duval said. "We drove down in the morning, three days ago. She had an appointment at a beauty shop and, after that, wanted to go to three or four women's stores. And I had some people to see, so we separated, arranging to meet at the hotel where we stayed, while the track was in operation. I waited for her a couple of hours . . . it was four in the afternoon by then . . . and then went to the garage where we'd stored the car. She hadn't been there. Then I got worried and started calling her friends. None of them had seen her. Then I called Mr. Gilbert and he hurried down. She hasn't been seen since that time."

I said: "I think this is the best way to work it as it stands. They'll give you at least another warning, Mr. Gilbert. Probably two or three, realizing you're trying to make up your mind what to do. I'd say hold off until this next warning and then give the thing to the F.B.I. In the meantime, I'll see if I can turn up anything."

Duval said: "I think it's a mistake to wait. I think you should ship at once, Dad Gilbert, and then be ready to pay the forty thousand when it's asked for."

Gilbert gave him a look and it didn't take a mind-reader to see the old man wasn't too fond of his trick son-in-law.

He said: "I'll do what I think is best, Phil. Certainly Mr. Phelan knows more about what's best to do than either of us. I shall follow his advice."

I said: "Have either of you any idea of who's head of this bookie ring?"

"Certainly," Gilbert said. "It's a man named Benny Sikes. He runs a crooked gambling house. And a part of the police force, naturally. Other places are raided, but Sikes' *Casino Club* is never touched."

"What's he like?"

"Smooth, but he's hard as nails behind that smoothness."

"I'll go down and look this man Sikes over. And I wish both of you would stay right here, while I do. I don't know him and he don't know me, so I can't do any harm by going down and looking him over."

Duval said bitterly: "You're going to fool around and Cornelia will be taking it on the chin, while you do. It isn't right. She's my wife—I think I should have some say in the matter."

Gilbert snapped back with: "She's my daughter as well, Phil. I'll do what I think is best."

I asked Duval where he was supposed to meet Mrs. Duval and he told me the same hotel they'd stayed when the track was open. In Miami Beach, rather than in Miami proper. And gave me the name of the hotel. He looked puzzled at my asking this and I gave him a lie instead of an honest explanation.

I said: "There's no telling where they picked up your wife, Mr. Duval. She might have gone to the hotel to meet you and arrived before you did. It's barely possible I could pick up a lead there. The hotel detective might have noticed something that meant nothing to him, but would mean a lot to us."

"They couldn't take her out of a hotel like that, Phelan. There'd be fifty people or more in the lobby at that time."

"And they wouldn't realize they were seeing a snatch. It's been done that way plenty of times."

Gilbert said: "Would it help if I gave you a note to the detective? I happen to know him."

"It would do more harm than good. He might let something slip about the note. He might even be in on the kidnaping. I'll meet him casually and try to work out the dope from him in the same way. We've got to play this safe."

He could see that, and I shook hands all around and went back to town and to my hotel. And then packed a bag and caught the bus for Miami. And only hoped that whoever had the girl didn't have a watch kept on Gilbert's place so that I could be recognized as an interested party. Kidnapers are suspicious people and I didn't want to endanger the girl.

I had a notion she was in a tough enough spot the way it was.

CHAPTER II

Family Trouble

I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING about Miami or Miami Beach, but the hotel where Gilbert and his family had stopped, would have given the best a tussle for the honor. He had money, I knew that, and I had a notion he'd needed nothing but that to stay in the place. It was the kind of hotel that had as many suites as single rooms, to show the kind of place it was. I checked in without bothering to see what they gave me for a room, told the boy to take my bags upstairs, and then headed for the bar.

And found it would compare with the best in New York and not lose on the comparison.

It was the bar waiters I wanted to look over, and I thought I could stand a couple of long cold ones, as well.

I sat at the far end of the bar, where I could just see the service bar which was in kind of an alcove in back and at the side, and I started out with a Collins. And I picked the waiter I wanted before I was there half an hour. Apparently there were four of them. The first looked like the fresh type—the kind who'd give you smart answers instead of honest ones. The second looked stupid. The third looked as though he'd tell you what he thought you wanted to hear, just to be obliging.

But the fourth looked honest, intelligent, and a happy sort of lad. The kind that could be won over into telling things he shouldn't, if properly paid for it.

He just happened to be standing in front of the service bar, waiting for his tray to be filled, when the barman brought me my fourth Collins. I nodded toward the service bar and said: "That waiter, now. Isn't his name Eddie?"

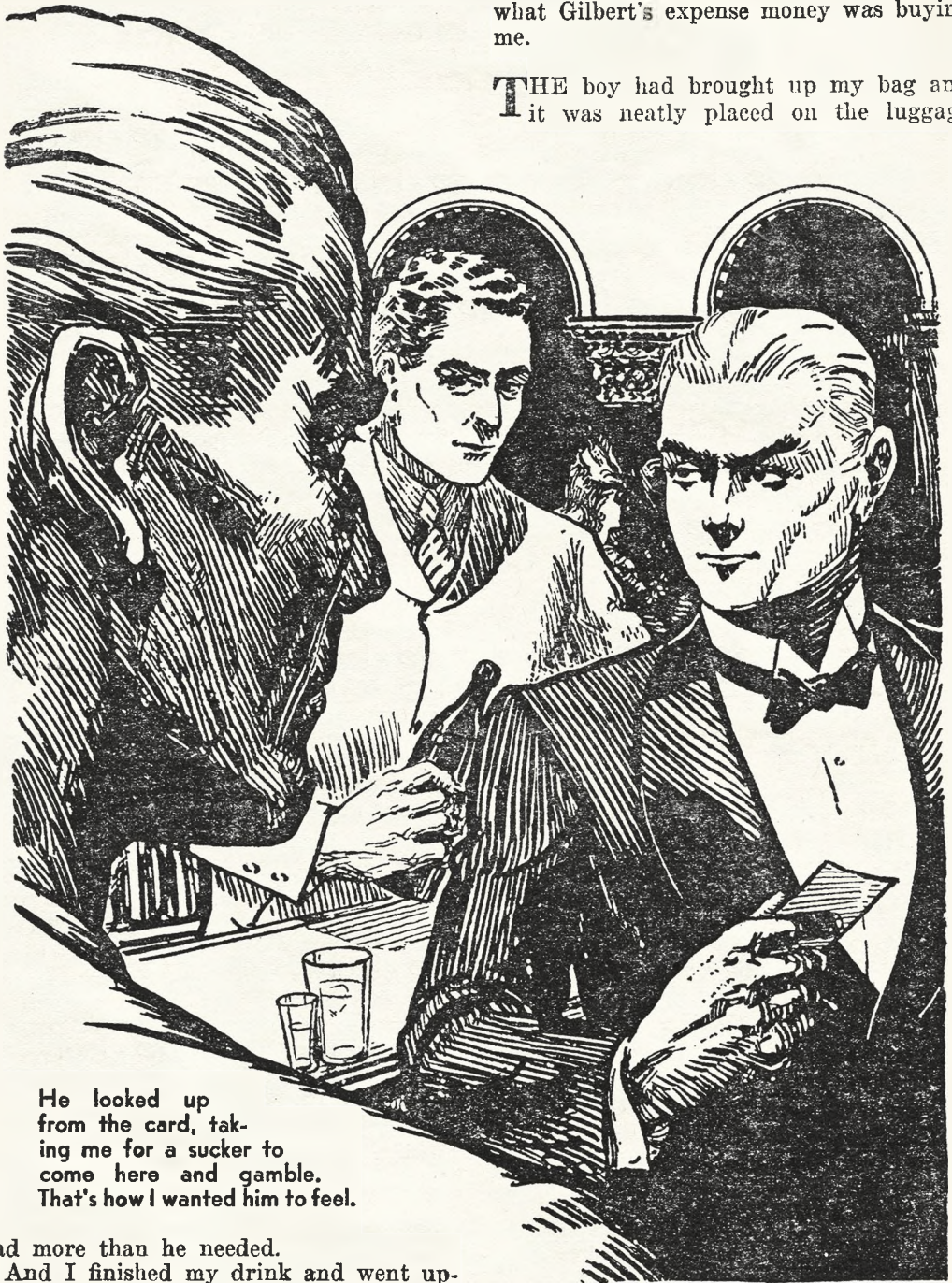
The barman looked and said: "That's Joey."

I took a sip of my drink and said: "My mistake. Not that it makes any difference."

He said: "All these colored boys look the same to me, too," and went away to stir something up for a lad who sat about the middle of the bar and who'd already

what Gilbert's expense money was buying me.

THE boy had brought up my bag and it was neatly placed on the luggage



He looked up from the card, taking me for a sucker to come here and gamble. That's how I wanted him to feel.

had more than he needed.

And I finished my drink and went upstairs and called room service.

I said: "Have Joey bring me up a Collins, will you, please," and got a pleasant: "At once, sir," in return.

And with that done I took a look at

rack. It was a corner room and all the windows were open, with a little breeze gusting across the room and passing through half-opened Venetian blinds. The furniture

looked as though it had never been used and the bath looked like something from a jewelry store. And then I looked at the price card, which the law requires to be posted in every room, and understood why everything was so nice.

Gilbert was paying twenty-five dollars a day to keep me in splendor, which was exactly fifteen bucks a day more than I'd ever paid for a hotel room in my life.

About then there was a gentle tap on the door and I opened up for Joey, who had both a tray and a polite bow for me.

He said: "I hope you're going to like it here with us, Mr. Phelan."

They'd even given him my name when they'd turned in the order for the drink.

I said I was sure I was going to enjoy my stay with them and paid the check for the drink. And then I folded a twenty and handed that over, too.

And said: "You look like a smart boy. That's why I asked for you."

He said: "Thank you, Mr. Phelan. I try to do my best."

I told him I was sure he did and he waited politely to see what I wanted to buy with the twenty.

I said: "Mr. Gilbert, Mr. Thomas H. Gilbert, lived here, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Phelan. He had suite 24-B."

"Wait on him much?"

"Why, yes, sir. And on Mr. and Mrs. Duval. And on Mr. Henson."

"What did you think of them?"

"Mr. Gilbert's a fine gentleman. And Mr. Henson, too, although of course he didn't tip like Mr. Gilbert. He worked for Mr. Gilbert, though, and none of the boys thought anything of it. And Mrs. Duval is as nice a lady as I ever waited on."

I had my answer. He'd left Duval right out of his answer.

I tried to make my voice confidential. I said: "I'm going to trust you, Joey. I'm a detective. Mr. Duval, before he married Miss Gilbert, had some pretty shady friends. We think he's mixed up with some of them who drifted down here for the racing season. We have a line on these other people, but we want to make a clean sweep of it when we pick them up. If Duval was in with them on a couple of tricky deals, we want him, too. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Phelan."

"Now if he was in with this bunch, he'd have money. Did he show any money while he was here? Or wouldn't you happen to know? I know you boys talk about the customers, and if he was in the money you'd know it."

I still had my wallet in my hand and I took out another twenty but held it. Joey gave it one flashing glance and lowered his voice until he sounded as confidential as I had.

He said: "Mr. Gilbert's a gentleman, sir. So are you—I can see that. But that Mr. Duval is just plain trash. But he didn't have any money. He got just the money that Mr. Gilbert gave him for an allowance and what he could get from Mrs. Duval . . . and she's going to divorce him. Just as soon as the horses are shipped to their Kentucky place and Mr. Gilbert has that arranged for sometime this coming week. She's had enough of him, Mr. Phelan, and I don't wonder. He quarreled with her all the time, unless she gave him money."

I said: "You certainly kept your ears open, Joey."

HE had an answer for that, too. He said: "I'm very much interested in psychology, Mr. Phelan. I went to college for two years, and I chose my courses with that subject more in mind than any other. That's one reason I work in the hotel. I can study people. Nobody pays any attention to a waiter, sir, and this is particularly true when the waiter is colored. I've heard the Duvals quarrel half a dozen times or more."

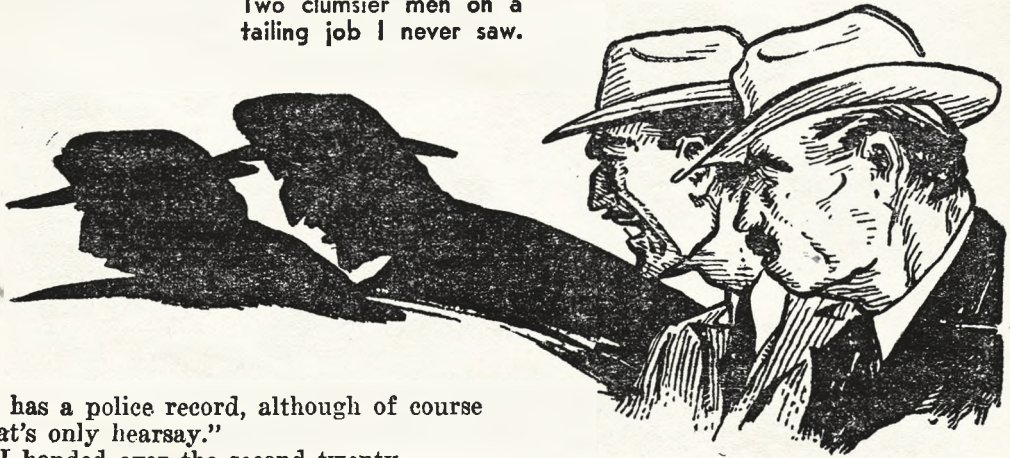
I tried to look disappointed. "It doesn't look like Duval's mixed up with this bunch we're after then, does it. I was hoping I could connect him up with these shady characters. But if he was behaving himself and not meeting any of these crooks, why I'll just have to take him off the list."

"He met Mr. Sikes plenty of times, Mr. Phelan. And that man Sikes is pure dynamite. If anybody could be more of a crook than he is, I'd like to see him. It would help in my studies."

"Sikes?"

"Yes sir. He runs a gambling house and he doesn't run it honestly. And I've heard

Two clumsier men on a failing job I never saw.



he has a police record, although of course that's only hearsay."

I handed over the second twenty.

"There's something else, Mr. Phelan, although I don't suppose it would help you. Mrs. Duval is going to make him a settlement when she divorces him. Forty thousand dollars, just to keep him from making trouble. I heard them talking about it when I brought them drinks."

"Did Mr. Gilbert know about this divorce? And about the settlement?"

"I'm sure he didn't, sir. Mr. Duval is afraid of him. And Mrs. Duval wasn't going to tell him because he wouldn't let her have forty thousand dollars if he thought Mr. Duval was going to get any part of it. He doesn't like Mr. Duval. I heard them quarrel once and Mr. Gilbert called him a leech. It was very interesting."

I said: "I was right about you, Joey. You're a smart boy."

"It's just that nobody pays any attention to waiters, Mr. Phelan. People talk in front of us as though we were part of the furniture."

I knew that, which was why I'd picked a bar waiter for information. I could have gone to a bellhop for it, but there was always the chance that the boy I'd pick might be touting for Sikes or for some other bookie in Sikes' ring. The chance of anything like that going on with a colored boy was considerably less.

I said: "You understand, Joey, that this is between us. If Mr. Duval found I'd been asking questions about him, he'd warn his friends and we'd lose all the work we've put in. We'd just have to do it all over again."

Joey said fervently: "I'll never say a word, Mr. Phelan. I just hope that you

can find something on that Mr. Duval. The man's just no good. Anybody that would treat a nice lady like Mrs. Duval the way he does, should be put in jail and kept there for the rest of his life."

I said I thought the same and asked him to bring me a fifth of Old Taylor, some ice, and some soda. And he was smart enough to see that the conversation was finished and picked up his tray and my empty glass and left on his new errand. That little interview had cost me forty dollars of Gilbert's money, but I thought I'd got value received for it.

I could see why Duval wanted Gilbert to run his horses and why he was making such a point of it. If his wife didn't come back, he'd be out forty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER III

Sikes And His Merry Men

SIKES' CASINO CLUB was set just between the business and the residential section and certainly wasn't on the quiet. Instead it had a neon sign that I could see while still two blocks away, and the front of it, which served as a bar was as wide open as a place could be.

For that matter the place was supposed to be a supper club, and there was a nice little dining room opening from the bar. With a tiny dance floor and a dais at the end that was just about big enough to hold a grand piano and a four-piece dance band. And they had entertainment as well, if the signs outside could be believed. A

fan dancer, a tenor, and a guy, who if his billing were right, could imitate everything and everybody.

I had a notion the food would be very good and that you'd pay a very good price for it.

The building itself was low and squat, one-storied and too fancy for my taste. But then I never did like the way they build them both in Florida and Southern California. And even I could see the building went well back from the bar and dining room—that these didn't take up more than half the floor space.

I ordered a drink from a curly-haired barman who was as pretty as many a movie star and then took out the guest card the hotel clerk had given me. He'd also given me a pitying look when I'd asked for it, but I suppose that he thought if a sucker wanted his feathers clipped, it was none of his affair. The barman came back when I'd finished my drink, and I ordered another and showed him the card.

I said: "Who do I show this to? I . . . uh . . . didn't come here for dinner, if you know what I mean."

He grinned and said that he knew what I meant. Then jerked his head toward the end of the bar and said: "Go to the men's room and you'll see a door there marked *PRIVATE*. Just walk through it and you'll see somebody that will look at your card and pass you in. You staying at the hotel?"

I said: "Sure."

He sighed and said: "I'd like to just once, just to make it an even twice. But, brother, I couldn't stand the gaff. One night there would cost me more than a week in the joint I've got."

"I couldn't stand it either, for long," I told him. "But when a man takes his first vacation in two years, he's entitled to spend a little dough. I've got to work for it the same as you do, believe me."

He must have had a good heart as well as a pretty face, because he leaned over and said: "Watch yourself out in back, brother. I wouldn't go too heavy or you'll have to cut your vacation short. You might have to walk back to where you came from."

And then he changed his voice and said: "Here's Mr. Sikes right now. You can give him the card right here. Oh, Mr. Sikes!"

I TURNED my head and saw a short and stocky man who was probably in his early forties. And that was striking an average because he could have been thirty or fifty. There wasn't a line on his face or a wrinkle around his eyes. He wore a dinner jacket and looked as though he'd never worn anything else. He had almost white hair—there was just the faintest tinge of yellow in it, but his eyebrows were three shades darker, and these slanted up a little at the ends. They made him look like a blond devil. He was probably around five-seven and must have gone around one-sixty for weight. There wasn't the least trace of expression on his face as he took the card the hotel had given me and looked it over, but when he was through with it, he gave me a pip of a smile and this changed him from a careful cautious man into a friendly, happy-go-lucky, cheerful soul.

He held out a hand and said: "Ah, Mr. Phelan. Glad to have you here, sir. You're at the hotel?"

"Why, yes."

I knew what he was thinking. Anybody that could afford the hotel could also afford to drop heavy dough in his games. And probably would. He nodded at the barman and said: "Another of the same for Mr. Phelan, Jerry," and then leaned against the bar, at my side.

He said: "From the North, Mr. Phelan?"

I said: "New York. I'll be here only for a week or so. With all this war work up there, contracts with a penalty clause and all, a man can't take much time away from his business."

He said that was certainly right and waited for me to tell him more. I knew the trick as well as he did. Just hold quiet and the other man will pretty soon tell you the story of his life. And I played chump and went along with the play.

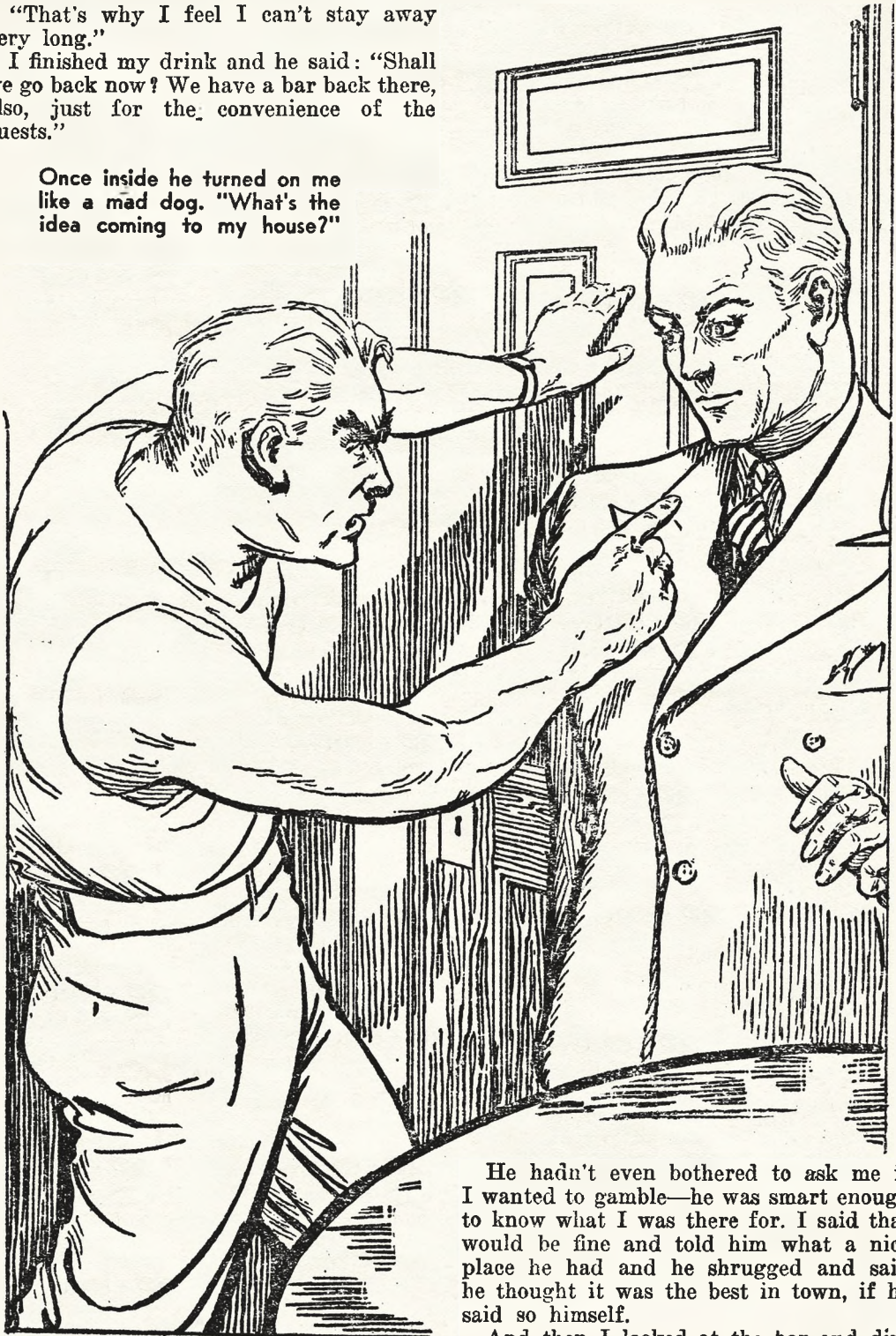
I said: "I've got a little plant that turns out things for the Government. Of course I can't say what things. It's nothing much, but Uncle seems to think we can make them as well as some of the bigger outfits."

"Probably better," he said politely. "With a smaller place, a man can keep his eyes on things and not have to depend on foremen."

"That's why I feel I can't stay away very long."

I finished my drink and he said: "Shall we go back now? We have a bar back there, also, just for the convenience of the guests."

Once inside he turned on me like a mad dog. "What's the idea coming to my house?"



He hadn't even bothered to ask me if I wanted to gamble—he was smart enough to know what I was there for. I said that would be fine and told him what a nice place he had and he shrugged and said he thought it was the best in town, if he said so himself.

And then I looked at the bar and din-

ing room and said: "I don't mean this part of it, of course."

Then I followed him to the back and main part of the place and saw what he meant—and we didn't go through the men's room to get there. He led me straight through, down a hall that started at the bar end and I took it this was private and just for the help and him.

And then we were in the gambling room, or rooms.

THE main room was, at a guess, thirty by fifty. It had two roulette wheels and three crap tables running down the center, but only one of the wheels and one of the tables were working. There were four blackjack stands on each side of the room, against the wall. Past these there was a bird cage on one side—one of the rigs where a single die, probably eight inches square, is in a wire contraption shaped like an hourglass. This is spun over and over and the house pays off if the number you've picked is on top of the die, after it's flopped back and forth between both sides of the hour glass.

Of course the house pays five to one if you hit, but there's six numbers on the die and it makes nice odds for the house. An eight year old child would know better than to bet on the thing, but people who are smart enough to out-fox their fellow men go for it like a bar-fly goes for whiskey.

Across from this trap there was a nice little bar, not over fifteen feet long, but furnished and stocked with really fancy liquor. And on the bird cage side of the room, and between it and between each blackjack layout on that side, were a series of doors, two of which stood open. In each I could see a poker game running.

Sikes waved toward the last door and said: "We have a faro bank there, but we have little play on it. I don't understand it . . . I think it the best game there is."

I said: "All you need is a keno game set up against the back wall. Then you'd have everything."

He took it seriously. He frowned and said: "I've thought of that and decided against it. We'd get a cheaper sort of trade—there's not the money in keno any more."

He was right, of course. People play

it at church socials where they call it bingo.

He beckoned a tall thin man who was as bald as an egg over, and said: "Ole, this is Mr. Phelan. See that he's treated right."

And then, to me: "You'll excuse me, Mr. Phelan, won't you? I have to be out front at this time. It's dull now, but things will open up later—we really have a nice place from eleven o'clock on."

He went back through the hall we'd come in, and the bald man showed me a dozen gold teeth and said he thought it was about time for a drink. He had a little accent and I decided he was Danish instead of the Swede I'd taken him for.

We went to the little bar, where I met a barman named Tom and here Ole informed me that all drinks were on the house and that the bar was maintained solely for the convenience of the players. That there was no charge for anything at any time.

ANOTHER gambling house trick — a man who's half drunk will spend his money faster than a sober man, and he won't catch a fast one nearly as quickly. And I also saw half a dozen hard-looking customers lounging around, watching everything, and I decided that if any fast stuff were caught by a customer, he'd be silenced fast and thoroughly. He'd be out on the street in less time than it would take him to tell about being bounced.

Ole didn't introduce me to any of this tough crew and I was just as happy. I've met my share of hoodlums like that and I'm not fond of any of those I've met.

And then I decided I'd better play dope as long as I was doing it with Gilbert's expense money, and bought a couple hundred dollars worth of chips from the cashier, who had a cage at one of the front corners of the place.

Ole bowed and showed me the teeth again while he wished me luck and I cut in at the wheel and started to play black and red while I tried to see if the wheel was gimmicked. And after an hour, when I'd run my two hundred dollars up to a great big two hundred and twenty-four, I decided that if the wheel were fixed they weren't using it. Of course the wheel itself had both a zero and a double zero, but most of them have, these days.

Then four new customers came in and headed for the wheel like homing-pigeons, and the fix went in right then.

The boys had money and wanted action with it. And how they got it. They started out with two thousand apiece and that did not last them twenty minutes.

And by that time, playing my system, I'd run my two-twenty-four to four-sixty.

My system was simple. I'd check to see which third of the wheel most of the money was on, then lay a bet on one of the other sections. I was winning three times out of five and that's percentage enough for anybody. I even figured out how the gimmick worked. The croupier, who looked like a Cuban, would merely put most of his weight on one foot or the other. This would automatically open the pins on one section of the wheel and tighten the other two. If he wanted the middle section activated, he'd shift a foot back and put his weight on that.

The gag's old but still good. He was on flooring so arranged that a man's entire weight would depress it in that spot. Sort of a rubber floor, you might say. Under the three tender spots on the floor were copper plates, these wired to other plates under the table legs. The legs were also wired in such a way that the slight current needed to operate the pins jumped through the floor. The table could be moved and would not show a sign of the gimmick—that's the beauty of the thing. The old way was to have the contacts in the table itself, where the croupier could operate them by hand pressure, but that kind of wiring is a cinch to find.

The boys got themselves more money from the cashier and came steaming back to get even, and inside of fifteen more minutes I'd won two hundred more. And then somebody tapped me on the shoulder and I turned around and saw Sikes.

He said: "Could I speak to you a moment, Mr. Phelan?"

"Sure," I told him, and started to pick up my chips, figuring to cash them in.

Sikes said: "They'll be all right there. Manuel will watch them and hold our place for you. Let's go to my office."

I said: "Sure," again.

His office was reached through one of the doors between the blackjack games, and I was a little surprised at it. With the

swanky lay-out he had in front, I'd expected to see something nice, but this was bare, with just half a dozen worn-looking chairs, a battered desk, and some filing cabinets.

One side of the wall, though, was taken up by one of the biggest safes I've ever seen, outside of a bank. And it was flanked by two smaller ones, and I took it those would be used to handle the fast money, while the giant was used more as a safe deposit vault.

Sikes said: "Sit down, Mr. Phelan," and put himself in the chair across the desk from me. He said: "I misjudged you, Mr. Phelan, and making a mistake on a man is something I rarely do."

I looked as blank as I could and asked him what he meant.

"I mean I had you pegged as an ordinary customer, not a smartie."

I said I still didn't understand him and tried to look as though I really didn't.

He said: "Anybody that lays his bets on the tiger like you do is no chump. No ordinary customer bets like you do."

I laughed and said: "Gambling is a hobby of mine, Mr. Sikes. I always play small money against the big money."

"Do you always win?"

"Not always. It depends on a lot of things in the game, if you know what I mean."

I WAS telling him I knew his wheel was rigged but I was doing it in a wise way. Right then, all I wanted was a chance to get my hands on the battered portable that sat on the corner of his desk.

He leaned back and made a steeple of his hands while he tried to stare me down. And then he said: "I might make one mistake, Mr. Phelan, but not two. Not with the same man, anyway. Let's put it this way. Go ahead as you've been doing. And then let's say you let my place get along without you."

I knew what that meant, too. He was trying to see if I'd bluff, as well as how much I knew about his games. It was a straight challenge and I was sunk if I let it go.

I said: "Wouldn't you rather have me around here than the cops here? I know you're paying off and that you're under city police jurisdiction, rather than coun-

He'd tried for me three times and missed, but I knew that wouldn't last!



ty. And I also know that the state troopers can come into either town and county and will with little urging. This is a tourist state and they'll crack down on anybody that's taking them. You know and I know the wheel I was playing is gimmicked. I doubt if any game you've got in the house will stand inspection. This town and county don't mind gambling if it's fair

gambling, but they don't like the other kind. And a raid will show any smart cop what's going on."

"Think you could get away with going to the cops?"

"Think you can get away with barring me from this drop of yours? I don't like to be pushed around, Sikes. I'm in your town but you're not fool enough to have me taken care of. You don't know whether I might not have a letter stuck around, telling about this conversation. Think it over."

He'd been thinking and thinking fast. He said: "How'd you like to work for me, Mr. Phelan? We could get along if we knew each other better."

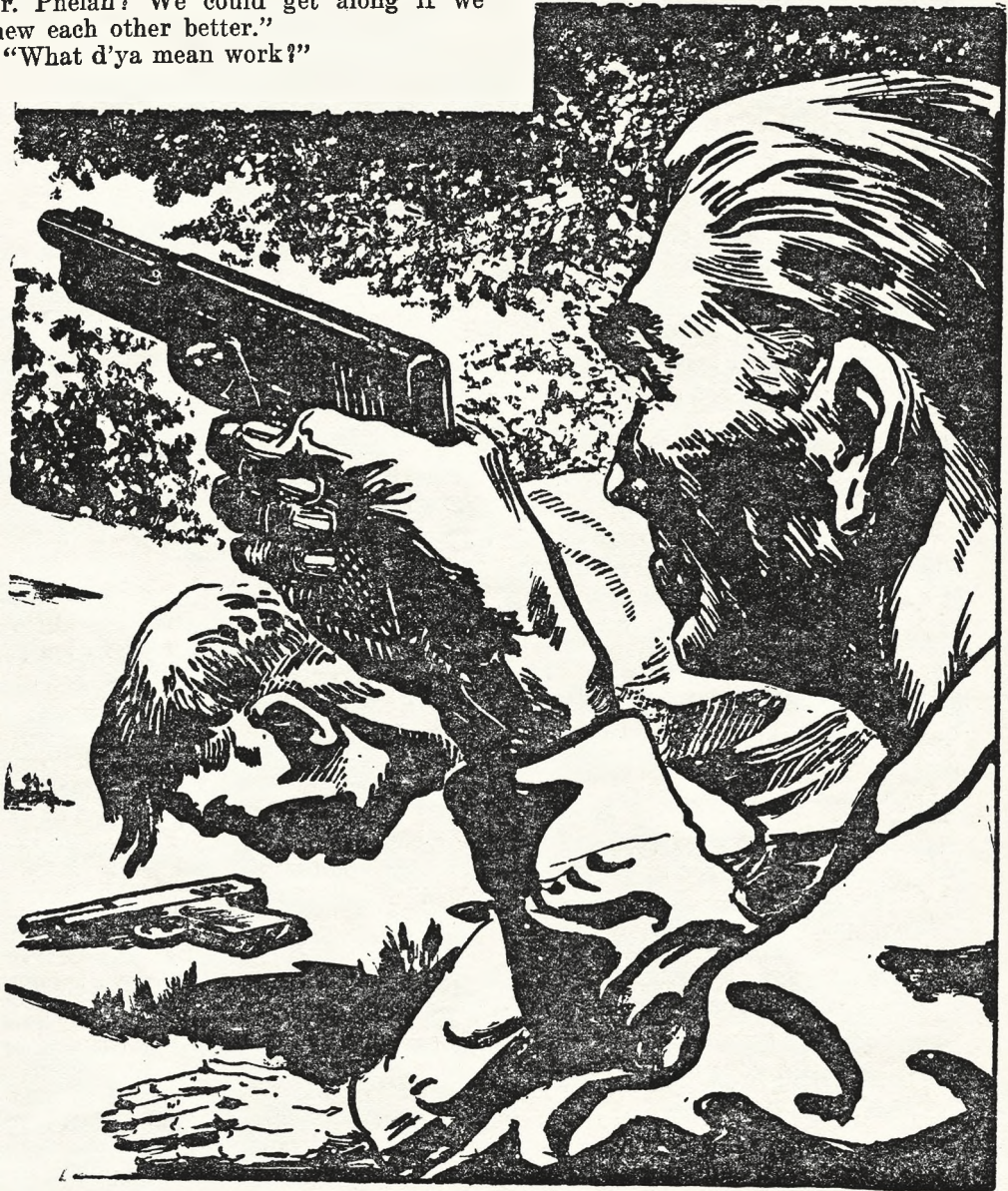
"What d'ya mean work?"

"Suppose you played steadily here and that if you had a bad night, you'd get your money back. And when you won you'd keep it. The only thing I'd ask is that you'd keep it reasonable."

"What would you make by it?"

"People like to go to a place where they see a man win all the time. It convinces them the games are level."

It didn't mean any such thing in my case. It meant he didn't want anybody



prosperous enough to live at my hotel, going around squealing about fixed wheels and odds and ends like that. And it meant he'd have time to look me up. But it was an in and I took it.

I said: "I can't see how I'd lose and I can see how I could win. That's fair enough."

He smiled at me then and stood up and shook hands. And said: "Let's have a drink on it then, Phelan. You'll find I'm not such a bad guy when you know me a little better. If a chump comes up to you, holding out money for you to take, you'd be a bigger chump if you didn't take it. Isn't that right?"

I said that was my very thought. And tried very hard not to see the two men Sikes sent after me, and that was a job. Two clumsy men on a tailing job I never saw—they acted as Hawkshaw did in the funny papers a few years back. And to show the trust I put in Sikes, I gave the desk clerk a thousand dollars to put in the hotel safe for me.

I figured Sikes would steal the gold from his mother's teeth if he knew a place he could hock it. And that the boys who worked for him were as tough, even if not as smart.

CHAPTER IV

Lost and Found

I GOT BACK TO THE HOTEL about four and the phone rang and woke me at ten-thirty. And I'm never at my best after a hard night. I reached for it, wishing the thing was out of order and, at the same time, wondering who could be calling me at that hour or any other. I was a stranger, outside of the thieves I'd met the night before, except for Gilbert and Duval, and they were supposed to be in Fort Lauderdale, not down on Miami Beach.

I said: "John Phelan speaking," and heard: "This is Phil Duval. I'd like to talk with you, Mr. Phelan."

I told him to come on up, and got room service and asked for ice and soda. And the order got there at the same time as Duval.

In a way it was funny. It was Joey who'd brought the ice and soda and while

he bowed and smiled at Duval, he kept giving me funny looks. And I winked at him and nodded, to show him it was under control. I asked Duval if he cared for a drink and he said he'd like nothing better, so I mixed two highballs and we started on them, watching each other like two strange dogs, making up their minds whether to fight or frolic.

Me on the bed, still in pajamas, and him in the best chair. From his looks he'd had as hard a night as I had.

I waited him out and finally he said: "I came to ask for help, Mr. Phelan."

He'd come to about the poorest place in town for it but I didn't tell him that. Instead I tried my best to look sympathetic.

"It's Dad Gilbert, Mr. Phelan. We never did get along well, I might as well admit it, but I've tried to do my best. And I think the world and all of Cornelia."

I remembered what Joey had told me about how much Duval had thought of his wife and had to resist the impulse to get up and smack his lying mouth. Instead I said it was nice to see a young married couple get along.

He said: "I want you to use your influence with Dad Gilbert, Mr. Phelan. He believes in you and he trusts you. He'd follow your advice I'm sure."

"I've already given it to him," I said. "I told him what I honestly thought was the best thing to do. I can't do more than that."

He said earnestly: "I don't think you've got a clear picture of this, Mr. Phelan. Let's take the note apart. It asks for forty thousand dollars. Well, Dad Gilbert is a wealthy man. Forty thousand dollars is a drop in the bucket for Dad. Corsair alone has won twice that, at least, in purses in this year's racing. And he hasn't got a poor horse in the string . . . they've all won consistently this year."

I said that was swell.

"But you can see, Mr. Phelan, why forty thousand dollars shouldn't mean much to him. I don't think it does, for that matter."

"I don't either," I agreed. "But money's money and there's no sense in throwing it away."

"If it would help get Cornelia safely home, it wouldn't be throwing it away, Mr. Phelan."

I said he was right there, of course.

HE went on with: "Now about racing the string. I can't see what harm that would do, either. What's the difference whether the horses are racing or exercised on the home track at the Kentucky place? For that matter, they'd be paying their way if they were running, and the other way they're nothing but an expense."

"From what you've said, I take it Mr. Gilbert can stand that. He's got definite ideas about running them now, and I see no reason why he should."

"But it would bring Cornelia back."

"I'm not so sure. Once she was home, Mr. Gilbert would probably pull the string back to Kentucky. The bookies would figure that . . . know they'd have to keep a hold on him. I'm sorry to be blunt, but they'd probably get rid of your wife and just stall Mr. Gilbert by telling him they'd send her home at the end of the season. They'd have to do something like that to protect themselves."

"I've got a feeling about this, Mr. Phelan. The thing for Dad Gilbert to do is what he's told to do. It may not be logical, but I've got that feeling."

I couldn't stand any more of it. I got up and started mixing a couple more drinks and said, while I had my back to him: "How'd you feel about your wife getting a divorce? And don't it bother you about money, now that she's gone and you can't wangle it out of her?"

It took me another minute at least to finish with the drinks and his mouth was still open when I turned. He said weakly: "You've been hearing dirty gossip. You . . . you've been misinformed, Mr. Phelan. You can ask Dad about it. He'll tell you there's nothing in this talk about divorce."

"Could it be that she didn't tell him about it because he wouldn't give her the forty thousand dollars you want, if he thought you'd be the beneficiary? The forty thousand she was going to give you to make no trouble?"

He was looking at me like he was seeing a ghost. He said: "Damn you, Phelan. You can't snoop around in my personal affairs like that. I won't have it."

I laughed, and he said bitterly: "All right! All right! I can't whip you! You're half again as big as I am and I don't doubt but that you know all the tricks in that



I started to wrap the seat cushion around the gun to muffle it.

sort of thing. But there's other things I can do."

I took a chance and said: "Such as sic your friend Benny Sikes on me? That wouldn't work either. I've met Benny and he don't want any part of me right now."

"I've got nothing to do with Sikes."

"He tells me different."

"What if I play in his place once in awhile? There's no harm in that."

I MADE another guess but this was just about a certainty, knowing both Duval and Sikes. I said: "And you paid the I.O.U.s you gave him by giving him tips on the condition of each Gilbert horse that was entered. If I told your father-in-law about that you'd be out on your ear so fast it would make your head swim. Whether you were married to Cornelia or not. He wouldn't stand a thing like that a second. He's honest."

"Sikes never told you anything like that."

"You don't know what Sikes told me. Sikes and I have an understanding."

"I did nothing like that."

"How much you owe him now?"

"Nothing."

I laughed again and said: "Why lie to me, sonny? Didn't you just hear me say I had an understanding with Sikes?"

He said desperately: "I'll make you a proposition. You help me to get the old man to ship to the tracks and I'll give you ten grand of the money I'm going to get from Cornelia."

"Aren't you going to cut me for half on the dough you're going to get from Sikes, for getting Gilbert to ship the string to a track? You wouldn't hold out on a poor guy like me, would you?"

Duval didn't even try to deny that Sikes would pay him if he got Gilbert to shift his string to a track where they still ran. He just sat there, looking sick. And then the phone rang and I answered it and heard a voice that was just faintly familiar.

It said: "That you, Mr. Phelan?"

I said: "Sure."

"This is Mickey Murphy."

"Who?"

"Murphy. You know. I work for Mr. Gilbert. You met me. I'm Mr. Gilbert's trainer."

I said: "Oh sure! I just got up and my head's not cut in yet. How are you, Murphy?"

"There's trouble here, sir. Bad trouble. I thought I should call you and I know where you'd be staying, of course."

"What's happened?"

"Somebody just killed Mr. Gilbert."

For a second I didn't think I was hearing right. I said: "Now what's that?"

"Somebody just killed Mr. Gilbert. He was walking out toward the beach, meaning to swim, and somebody shot and killed him."

"When did this happen?"

"Not over twenty minutes ago, sir. We all heard the shot and cook even saw Mr. Gilbert topple over. He was shot in the back and he was dead by the time we got there. It's terrible."

"Have you called the police?"

"I thought I should call you first, sir."

"Well, call them now. I'll be up there just as soon as I can get there."

I hung up and started to dress and Duval said anxiously: "What's wrong? What's happened?"

I said: "Somebody just shot and killed your father-in-law. Shot him in the back and he was dead when they got to him."

Duval said: "My God! This is terrible. I'll go right up there."

I was lacing my shoes but I stopped that and looked up at him. I said: "Not yet, sonny. You've got to help me with a little chore. Got a car?"

"Parked outside."

"Then you can drive me to where Sikes

lives when he's not in his joint. And if you tell me you don't know where it is, I'll knock your face out the back of your neck."

He said: "I know where he lives. That's no secret . . . he's listed in the phone book."

SIKES lived in a neat little house, possibly six rooms, and in a moderately priced neighborhood. I knocked and a nice-looking girl—I put her down as around thirty—opened the door and stood there looking at me inquiringly. I suppose she wondered what I was going to try and sell her. She had one child, a cute little tyke not over three, hanging to her skirt, and I could see another in the hall behind her, although this last one must have been at least five. And I could hear a bunch of squealing coming from inside and decided that Sikes was really a family man.

I said: "I'd like to speak to Mr. Sikes, Miss. Tell him it's John Phelan, please."

The 'Miss' stuff got her. No gal of around thirty minds being taken for a girl years younger, no matter what they say.

And this one said: "Why, yes, Mr. Phelan. Come right in. John's in the kitchen, just having breakfast. Right back here and excuse the looks of the kitchen. I haven't had time to get at it yet—my maid quit last week and I can't find another one. That is, one I'd trust to look after the baby."

I took it there was a third child and my respect for him grew. I followed Mrs. Sikes back through the hall, and when she opened the door of the kitchen, I thought all hell had broken loose. One kid, a boy of about six, grabbed her around the waist and hung, just screaming with laughter.

He said: "Mother, make Daddy stop. He grabs me and tickles me and I can't keep from laughing. And then I can't stop."

By then I could see in the kitchen and the first thing I saw was Sikes, wearing a pair of pants, an undershirt, a pair of slippers, and nothing else. He saw me just as I saw him and gave me a guarded look.

He said: "Well, Phelan. It's good to see you."

This as though we hadn't seen each other for months or years.

He shook hands with me as though he

meant it and managed to shake his head warningly as he did. He said: "Myra, this is an old friend of mine. John Phelan. Johnny, this is my wife, Myra."

Mrs. Sikes said she was glad to meet me and asked me if I'd had breakfast or not. And when I told her I had, she tried to talk me into having a cup of coffee with them, at least.

Sikes said: "If you don't mind, Myra, I'll take John into the front room. We've got a lot of things to talk over. . . . Don't time fly by, John?"

I said it certainly did and followed him into a front room that was definitely shabby. But also so clean it glistened. And once there he turned on me like a mad dog.

HE said: "What's the idea of all this? What's the idea of coming to my house? I keep my business and my family separate. My wife doesn't even know I own the *Club*. I don't like this, Phelan."

I said I was sorry and that I didn't realize how he felt about it . . . how for that matter I didn't even know he had a family. And that what I had to tell him wasn't really important, but that I thought I should tell him, anyway.

He looked impatient and said: "Well, what is it?"

"It's just that I have to leave town for a couple of days."

"You're three times seven, aren't you?"

"I didn't want you to think I was up to some funny business. Something like calling cop, for instance."

Sikes lost part of his temper and said: "I might have thought something like that, when I come to think of it. Okay, Phelan. You're excused for a couple of days."

I said I'd see him when I got back and went outside and around the corner, to where I'd left Duval and his car.

And found neither—which didn't surprise me too much. The cab cost me twenty dollars, but after all, the hacker was smart enough to see that I was in a hurry and took full advantage of the fact. It wasn't an easy trip up for me, either. I'd lost a damned good client, through no fault of mine, and I didn't think that would compensate for what I'd found—which was a lot of dope on the two men I was after.

CHAPTER V

Ambush Killer

GILBERT'S FISHING CAMP was really something when the hacker and I got there. In the first place, every cop in the county, city, and state, seemed to have gathered there. There must have been fifty or more of them, with half inside the house and the other half hunting around the grounds.

We had trouble getting there for that matter. The hacker started to turn off on the side road that led down to the place, and a fat cop in uniform stepped in front of us with his hand raised.

He scowled at us and said: "This road's closed. Sorry."

He didn't sound sorry. A tin badge on some people makes them think they own the world.

I said: "I work for Mr. Gilbert, officer. I was sent for."

"Who sent for you? Where were you when you were sent for?"

"Quit playing cop, stupid. I'll tell all that to whoever's in charge. That isn't you."

He stood there trying to make up his mind. He couldn't do a thing about it, though, and this finally drifted through his dim mind. He took down his hand and stepped back out of the way, but his neck was three shades redder than it had been before he stopped us.

The hacker stopped before he reached a tangle of at least thirty cars, and I paid him off and started into the house. And got stopped at the door by another bright lad.

I said: "Now what the hell is this? I work here, mister."

This cop could have been a twin for the one out on the road. He growled: "Doing what?"

"I'll tell that to the boss."

"He's too busy to talk with the likes of you."

"Like to bet on it?"

He looked undecided and then stepped to the side so I could pass. And I found the boss with no trouble at all.

He was in a uniform that didn't fit him and he neither talked or acted like a cop. For that matter, he wasn't. He knew the

city commissioners though, and that's better than knowing a job, any time.

He came stalking over and said: "Who are you?"

I said: "John Phelan."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was working for Mr. Gilbert. Murphy, Mr. Gilbert's trainer, sent for me."

"Where were you?"

I gave him the name of the Miami Beach hotel and he lost three parts of his bluster.

He said: "What was the nature of your work, Mr. Phelan?"

"Confidential, Chief. I couldn't tell you without Mr. Duval's permission."

"Where's Duval now?"

I tried to look surprised and asked: "Isn't he here yet?"

"He is not."

I said: "Well, that's odd. He was with me in my hotel room when we heard the news of his father-in-law's murder. He started back here right then in his own car and I followed him in a cab. He must have broken down between here and there."

The chief said triumphantly: "You'd have passed him. Ain't but one road."

"I wasn't looking for him."

That was one bit of truth I'd said, anyway.

The chief said thoughtfully: "Well, I guess he could have pulled into some garage to have his car fixed, at that. I'm Chief Brown, Mr. Phelan. Anything you know that can help us?"

"I just got here, Chief."

"Yeah, that's right. Any idea of who might have had it in for Mr. Gilbert?"

"Plenty of them."

"Who?" he asked, beginning to look eager.

I said: "Benny Sikes, down in Miami, but I stopped at his house on the way up here and he's clean. He was playing with his kids. He's got three or four of them."

The chief looked embarrassed and said he knew Sikes and that he didn't think Sikes would be mixed up in any murder. And I agreed with him.

I said: "He wouldn't. Not as long as he had the money to hire somebody to do his killing for him. But I wasn't taking a chance of missing anything."

"You shouldn't talk about people like that, Mr. Phelan. You can be sued for that, you know."

I laughed and said I'd like to live long enough to see the day Benny Sikes would sue anybody for slander.

And I added: "Let's not horse around, Chief. You know and I know what Benny is. He'll do anything he's big enough to do, and we both know it. You want to remember that protection of his is liable to wear out. Or Benny's liable to wear out. In fact, I think he's wearing out right now."

"Who else might have it in for Mr. Gilbert?"

"There's his son-in-law, Chief. Of course he was with me when this happened, but he could hire it done. Benny would set him in with the right people for the job if Duval asked him for a break-in."

"The hell you say," said the chief, with interest. "He could have been with you for an alibi, Mr. Phelan. You didn't tell me what kind of work you do, while I think of it."

"It's confidential work, Chief. As I told you."

HE'D have done a bit of bullying then and there, but he didn't know who I was and he was afraid I might be somebody who could make him trouble. Instead he waved a hand and gave me a lesson on police work.

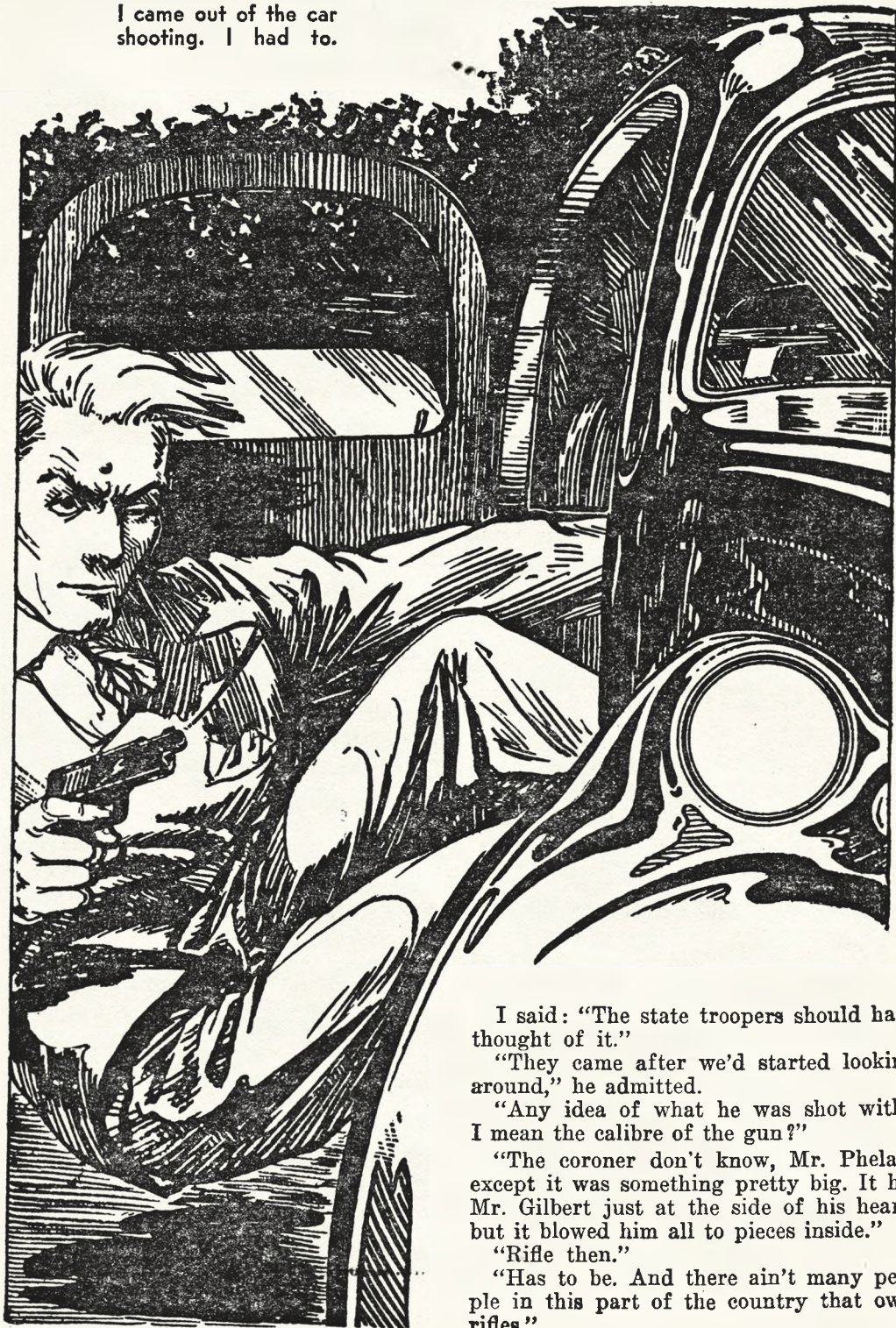
He said: "I've got every available man out searching for the place where the killer stood. I even borrowed men from the county police. And the state men volunteered to help without being asked."

I told him that he had little chance of finding the place, and when he bristled and asked why not, I explained the crew would have the sand so scuffed up it would be impossible to tell a thing. Then he asked what he should have done to locate the killer's hide-out. I told him.

I said: "The cook saw Mr. Gilbert fall, Murphy told me. All you had to do was find out which direction Mr. Gilbert was facing when the bullet hit him, then check on the angle the bullet made going through him and then put the two together. You'd have narrowed it down to a lane not more than ten feet wide. Get the idea?"

He looked at me as though I'd pulled a rabbit out of my hat and said he never thought of that and that nobody on his force had thought of it, either.

I came out of the car shooting. I had to.



I said: "The state troopers should have thought of it."

"They came after we'd started looking around," he admitted.

"Any idea of what he was shot with? I mean the calibre of the gun?"

"The coroner don't know, Mr. Phelan, except it was something pretty big. It hit Mr. Gilbert just at the side of his heart, but it blew him all to pieces inside."

"Rifle then."

"Has to be. And there ain't many people in this part of the country that own rifles."

I nodded toward the wall, where there was a gun-cabinet with at least thirty different guns, all of them special jobs and all of them set so they'd show to best advantage. I took it Gilbert had been a gun crank, and a gun crank with unlimited money to spend can buy a lot of things with it.

I said: "With the size of this place and with the help busy about their business, a man could sneak in here and pick and choose among that collection. And there are shells for the guns in that cabinet, I'm willing to bet. And a man like Benny Sikes could get about any kind of gun his helper would want. You don't have to have a permit to buy a rifle."

The chief said fretfully: "You keep talking about Benny Sikes. You shouldn't do that unless you know something about him. Maybe he wouldn't sue you but that don't mean he'd like it much."

DUVAL came in then, swaggering a little, but he hesitated a bit when he saw me. And I gave him a break. I said: "I was just telling Chief Brown, Duval, that you probably had a break-down on the way up from Miami. I explained you were with me when we heard the news, and that we heard of it no more than twenty minutes after it happened."

He looked startled but picked up the cue. He said: "That's just what happened. My car started to miss and knock and I barely managed to make it to a garage. The mechanic had to drain the tank—there was as much water in the tank as there was gasoline."

And after that I'd catch him giving me puzzled looks all the time.

I asked the chief where Murphy was and he looked embarrassed and admitted he had him in one of the other rooms, under guard, along with the secretary and the help. And then I burned a little.

I said: "Any reason why? If he was trying to get away from you, he'd have done just that instead of calling in and reporting the killing. Whoever did it had half an hour to get away, that is, if he wanted to get away."

Chief Brown caught the last anyway. He said: "What d'ya mean by that?"

I waved and said: "Mr. Gilbert isn't the only man to have a house on the beach,

Chief. Any reason why one of the neighbors couldn't have sneaked up, shot him, and then sneaked back home. And then just sit there and wait for you to pin it on him? You'll have a job here, Chief, this is one of the bad ones."

"Now that you're here, Mr. Duval," Brown said, not having an answer to that one, "is it all right for Mr. Phelan to tell me what his job was with Mr. Gilbert?"

I shook my head at Duval and he caught it. He said: "I'm afraid that wouldn't be advisable at this time, Chief. You understand that Mr. Gilbert had many irons in the fire and that some of them are dependent on secrecy."

I said: "I'd like to talk with Murphy, if I could, Chief. And then, if it's all right with you, I'd like to go back to Miami. You don't need me as a witness. I wasn't even near here at the time Mr. Gilbert was killed. And my business in Miami is important."

"Go any time you want, Mr. Phelan. Murphy and the others are in . . . uh . . . the sun room. You tell the officer who's at the door that I said you could talk to anybody you want. And I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Phelan."

We shook hands and wished each other luck, and I thought he'd need it if he ever got anywhere with his case.

And then I got thinking of how much of the same I'd need, and lost a lot of my cockiness. Then I said: "I'd like to see you a moment, Phil," and Duval followed me to the side of the room.

I said: "I gave you an out, mister. I could have said I hadn't seen you today. It would be a bit of perjury but what's that. Now what I want to know is this. Am I still working? I suppose you'll be in charge until your wife is found. At least until the will is read and whoever are named as executors take charge. What about it?"

"Well, yes, of course, Phelan. At least until I get Cornelia back safely. I intend to follow my own idea about this matter, though, Phelan. The string will be shipped to Cuba at once. And I'll arrange with the bank to have forty thousand dollars in cash in readiness at all times."

I said it was his and his wife's money now. And that I supposed it was their business what they did with it.

And then I went in for a chat with Murphy.

CHAPTER VI

Dog Eat Dog

MMURPHY, HENSON, the secretary, and the four people that worked on the place were all at one end of the sun room, and the cook, a big, buxom, colored girl, had been crying. I don't think Murphy was far from it, but Henson was quiet and colorless as ever. I got Murphy away from the others and started trying to make some sense out of the thing.

I said: "Now tell me all about it, Murphy. Right from say about an hour before it happened."

Murphy said: "Well, we all had breakfast about nine. Maybe a quarter after."

"All?"

"The boss and Henson and me. Then we go in the front room and have another cup of coffee and the boss dictates three or four letters to Henson. When he gets through with this, we talk about the Kentucky place and how we're going to fix it up, after the war, when we can get stuff to do it with. A place like that goes to hell quick, unless it's kept up. Then we just talk about horses, and Henson goes away. He don't give a damn about horses but the boss always said he was the best secretary he ever had."

"What did Henson think about running the horses in Mexico or Cuba?"

"He was for it, Mr. Phelan. He says that they pay their way if they're running but that they're an expense if they don't. He's all business, that guy."

"What did you think about it?"

"I thought we ought to run 'em, too. But if the boss didn't want to, I didn't want to. I've been working for him sixteen years, and anything he wanted to do was right with me. If he wanted me to stand on my head in a corner, I'd have tried it."

"Sure. Go on, Murphy."

"Well, by and by the boss says he thinks it's a good day for a swim and goes and gets into trunks. He was like a damn' seal in the water anyway. He'd go down and splash around by himself if he couldn't get anybody to go with him. He starts



I decided nobody had found the two men yet, because there were no police cars around the house.

down toward the ocean and in a couple minutes I hear this gun go boom. And then Alice, the cook, comes into the room and says Mr. Gilbert was shot and we all go down there. And he was dead by the time we got there."

"Were you all there? I mean everybody that stays here?"

MMURPHY hesitated and then said: "Now, I think so but I can't be sure. We was just about nuts. The boss was on his face and there wasn't much blood coming from the little hole in his back, so I stuck my handkerchief in it to plug it up. Then we turned him over and there was a hole in the front of him that you could put your fist in. I ain't a doctor but I've worked enough on sick and injured horses to know he was a goner. I knew he was dead right then but I didn't want to believe it. Henson went back to the house to telephone for the doctor but I knew it was no use. A man can't be alive if the front of him's gone, and this hole wasn't more'n an inch from his heart."

"Where did the slug enter?"

"Straight across. Straight through."

"When you heard this shot, how far away did it sound?"

Murphy said slowly: "You know I've been wondering about that. I was in the front room and the door and windows were open on this porch, here. And the porch glass was down. And the back door, leading to the patio was open, so we'd get a draft through. So it would be hard to tell. But it seemed to me that it was pretty damn' close."

There was thick shrubbery growing right up to the house, so that didn't mean much. And a man in a room can't tell what direction sound comes from, half the time.

That was about all he could tell me, so I took the others in turn. Nobody was sure about anything except the cook, and the only thing she was positive on was that she saw Gilbert fall, just as she heard the shot. And she hadn't the faintest notion from where the shot came or how far away it sounded. She was in much the same position Murphy had been on that, though. Fore and aft ventilation, none from the side. She'd worked for Gilbert five years, acting as caretaker for the place when Gilbert and his menage were away, and she was really broken up over the killing.

And for that matter, so was I. I'd barely met the man but he seemed such a swell guy.

I went back to the front room and found Duval and told him I was going to call a cab and go back to Miami Beach and start in again where I left off, and he agreed that was the thing to do. And surprised me by offering me the use of one of the Gilbert cars.

He said: "I can drive only one of them and there's the station wagon for somebody to go into town for groceries. So take any one of them you want except the Caddy."

Which was fine. I went back to Miami Beach in a Packard convertible that was one of the last series sold before the tie-up.

SIKES was back in the gambling part of his place when I got there, and so I had to use the men's room entrance. And I could see he was getting a heavy play that night. He nodded to me as I started toward him, but kept on talking to Ole, who gave me his gold-toothed smile.

Sikes said: "Be with you in a second, Phelan. Anything new?"

I said: "Not a thing." And went to the bar and stalled there waiting for him. And while I waited I watched Sikes, and Ole, who was the manager when Sikes was away, and decided they were having a quiet little quarrel about something. Both were smiling and all that, but I could see that both were holding their tempers with an effort. Some people think that Swedes and Danes are calm and placid people, and no doubt some of them are, but I've never happened to meet any of that kind. Those I know argue and fight almost as fast as the Irish, and they have a flary temper along with it.

Finally they broke it up and Sikes came over to me, and while I was no authority on the Sikes' temper, I could tell he was steaming.

I said: "I came back before my own affairs were over because I ran into something funny. You know I used to know a guy named Phil Duval. He tells me he knows you, too."

"I know him," Sikes said briefly.

"Well, I ran into him this morning. And do things happen to the guy! I took him up to the hotel for a drink and he tells me his wife has been snatched, and that her old man's got lots of dough. So then he gets on the phone and calls her old man—he lives at Fort Lauderdale, and he finds that the old man's been shot and killed not over twenty minutes ago. So I go up with him and he stands there and tells the cops you had the old man knocked off. And that you had his wife kidnaped."

Sikes was looking at me in a funny way. He said: "Her old man owned Corsair."

"So Duval told me. Well, if I was you, I'd be expecting a little visit from the boys in blue."

"I've been expecting it," he said, staring at me with that same odd look. "I've been looking for it in fact. Listen, Phelan, I've got somebody I've got to see before he gets away. Wait here, will you—I'll be back in ten minutes or less. I want to hear more of this."

I thought of his typewriter sitting there on the corner of his desk and said I'd be glad to wait. I knew something was going sour—but I didn't know just what it was. I'd slipped and I knew it, but I didn't know just where.

HE left and I was out of my chair and around to the machine with a rush. I was nervous enough, though, to take my gun from its sling and lay it on the desk right handy. I tapped out the usual quick-brown-fox and the all-good-men-thing and then slipped my gun back where it belonged and got back to my side of the table. And I was barely in time.

Sikes came back, looking meaner than I'd ever seen him. He said: "That straight about Duval?"

I tried to look innocent and said: "Sure. Why the hell would I turn around and come back here to tell you a yarn?"

"Now just what did he say?"

"Well, he said you'd grabbed the girl to try and force her old man to run his horses either in Mexico or Cuba. That you asked for forty grand on top of it. And that the old man refused to pay or ship his string and that you had him killed, because you knew you could make the girl promise to do it."

"Didn't the cop want to know what I'd make by having Gilbert's horses running on a Mexican or Cuban track?"

"Sure. And Duval told him you could clean up on the betting because Corsair could take any race against the competition he'd meet. And that the rest of the string would hold their own or better. He said you were head of a bookie ring."

"He really spilled to them, didn't he?"

"He did."

"I didn't think he'd do that. I knew he'd crack if any pressure was put on him, but I didn't think he'd go out of his way to make trouble for me."

I asked: "Did he know you well enough to know anything about your business?"

"He might have," Sikes admitted. "He was a prize sap, you understand, and there's lots of times I'd bring him in here and we'd have a drink or two together. It makes it more personal than drinking at the bar and they come back oftener. Would you say I was a guy that ratted on a friend, Phelan?"

I lied with: "Of course not. I wouldn't be here if I thought that."

"Then I'm going to tell you something. If it's going to be dog eat dog, I'll beat harder than he can. In the first place, he said I stole his wife and the price for returning her was forty grand and the Gil-

bert string to run on a foreign track. That right?"

"Right."

"Well, I'm going to rat. He stole his own wife. He got her convinced that she was in danger because of the letters her father was getting about shipping the string out, so he got her to hide. And I don't know one damn' thing about this forty grand business. Between you and me I wanted that string running in either Mexico or Cuba, but I don't stick my neck out for a kidnaping rap for a thing like that. I offered Duval ten thousand bucks if he could talk the old man into it. And I offered twenty-five grand to the secretary, a guy named Henson, if he'd work it. I also told Henson I'd get tough about a couple of I.O.U.s of his that I hold, if he didn't get busy."

SOMEHOW I'd never thought of Henson as being a gambling man, but that didn't mean a thing. I once met a bank president who played the numbers.

I said: "I couldn't see anybody taking a chance on the chair, or on life imprisonment, for a thing like that. Certainly not anybody with as nice a set-up as you've got here. D'ya know where the girl is now? Where he put her?"

"Sure. It's not more than a block from here. She's under the name of Dickson and she's in Apartment 2B. It's the Palmetto Gardens Apartments, and you reach 2-B by an outside stairs. Here! I'll show you—I can point it out for you."

He led the way into the gambling room and across to a door that opened on an alley. It was bright moonlight, Florida has the brightest moonlight I've ever seen, and while it wasn't bright enough to read by, every building stood out as though painted against canvas.

He pointed and said: "The fourth building. That two story affair . . . the first white building you come to. The stairs lead up from the street on the far side of it."

I started feeling an itching between my shoulder blades. I said: "What the hell! It's none of my affair. What do I want with her?"

"You'd do me a favor if you went to her and told her to get the hell home, where she belongs. She probably don't even know

her father's dead. The way it is, I'm in the middle. The cops can maybe prove I wrote the guy some notes—sometimes they get ideas. I'm damned sure I don't want the Federal boys snooping around on it. They would close me up here before I could spit."

"Why don't *you* talk to her?"

"She thinks I'm a devil with two tails. And with you knowing Phil Duval, you're the guy that can make her see reason. Do me a favor, Phelan."

I was getting touchier by the second. I'd had that feeling since I'd walked in the place. And it wasn't getting any easier. And I thought if I ever got my hands on that girl she'd go home, whether she wanted to go home or not.

So, like a fool, I said: "Okay," and started down the alley.

But I kept enough native caution, at least, to take my gun from its sling, and carry it loose, under my jacket.

CHAPTER VII

Murder Strikes Again

THE PAY-OFF STARTED just before I reached the Palmetto Gardens, and at a place where the alley narrowed slightly. Two men stepped out in front of me, and the bright moonlight showed me the guns in their hands as clearly as if it had been broad day. Neither man said a word, but they raised their guns as though some drill sergeant had roared out *AIM*.

And I started shooting before they were half-way ready.

It had happened fast and I was rattled, and so I shot between them on the first try. Just dumb work, but the gun flashing right in their faces threw them as far off balance as they'd tossed me, by stepping out at me like that.

I put the one on the right down to his knees with my next try, this before he'd had time to get in action. The second of them was shooting like hell by then but he was a lousy shot. He'd tried for me three times and we weren't more than twenty feet apart, and he hadn't touched me yet. I also knew that wasn't going to last; the law of averages would give him a hit pretty soon, so I took steps about it. In

that moonlight, and shooting a gun I knew as well as I did mine, I could pick and choose my shots, and I did that one. I shot him in the belly and I could hear him grunt even over the roar of the gun. He sat down so hard he bounced, then went over on his side.

They'd both dropped their guns so I crossed the few feet between us and looked them over. The first one had caught it high on the right side, and would probably live if a doctor got to him right away. The second was dying right then, although he'd probably take fifteen minutes to do it. He didn't have a chance, and I doubt if he heard what I said to them.

I said: "Learn to shoot, you—, before you start out again."

The first one heard me, all right. He was trying to spit blood, which showed I'd caught him through the lung, but he managed to call me three dirty names before I turned and went back down the alley toward Sikes' joint.

I had a few things to say to Mr. Sikes and I thought no time was like the present.

THE alley door was locked so I went around to the front and through the men's room. And Sikes didn't see me until I was within ten feet from him.

Even then he tried to carry it off. He said: "Did you see her?"

I said: "In the office, you—. You've got a better chance of talking yourself out of it in there than here."

"Now, Phelan!"

He hadn't changed expression but I suppose I had. Anyway, he said hurriedly: "I'll go! I'll go!"

I looked for Ole as I herded Sikes into his office, but when he started around the desk for his regular place, I stopped him and made him stand against the wall, with his arms crossed so that each hand held an opposite shoulder. Then I edged around him, holding my gun against my hip so he had no chance to spin and grab it, patted him for a gun. And found none.

I said: "What's the matter, big shot?" and backed away so he wouldn't be close enough to rush me. "Trust the boys to look after you, eh?"

He said: "This isn't smart of you, Phel-

an. I don't know what the hell's the matter with you."

"There's two of your boys down the alley that can tell you," I said. "But I don't think one of them is able to talk and won't, unless he gets a doctor soon. A doctor can't help the other one. What he needs is a coffin."

"You say they're my boys?"

"I said it. They work here. Or they *worked* here—if that's better."

"They try to hold you up? That it?"

"They didn't bother with a stall. They just started to shoot."

"I don't know anything about it."

I said: "I'm going to do my good deed for the day in just a minute. And, mister! If I have any more foolishness from you, I'll do a lot more. What's the idea of sending punks like that after me? Don't you think I rate a good workmanlike job? Did you honestly think that two dopes like that could take me, when I'd been warned?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"When you went out to see somebody, maybe a man about a dog, I don't know, you told them what to do and where to do it. Don't kid the old folks, sonny. What I want to know is this: Who tipped you on me?"

He said instantly: "Duval. And the secretary. You know, Gilbert's secretary. I've known who you were all the time . . . I knew about you an hour after Gilbert hired you."

"You put up a good act, mister."

"I thought you were better off here, where I could keep an eye on you," he admitted.

"Still think so?"

"Well, no."

I said: "I shot one of your boys through the belly. He's dead by now, or near it. I'm going to give you a break. I'm going to shoot the ankles out from under you, and this gun will take 'em apart so that nobody'll put 'em together again. Or maybe you can think of a better place."

He said: "My God, Phelan! Don't. I'll sign a confession about trying to get Gilbert to ship his horses. I'll write it right now. You can turn me over to the cops then, yourself. What more do you want? I didn't ask for that forty grand, but I'll even say I did that, too."

"What about the girl?"

"I told you the truth about that."

"What about the two boys you had way-lay me? Will you put that in, too?"

"I'll put in anything you say."

HE was talking in a hurry then, but that was because I'd taken the cushion from his chair and was doubling it around the gun's barrel. His room was almost sound-proof and I suppose he thought I was banking on that. As a matter of fact I had thought of it, and if I'd had any intention of crippling him in cold blood like that, I'd have no more taken a chance on that "almost" sound-proofing than I'd try to fly. I'd have marched him out through his place and into the alley.

I said: "Sit down then and start pecking away at that typewriter."

He wasn't handy with the machine and it took him at least three quarters of an hour to get it done, with everything I wanted him to put in. And then I spoiled what I think he was planning on.

I said: "I'm going to call in a couple of men to witness your signature. And they won't be boys that are working for you. They'll be a couple of customers. And if you make a peep, I'll bust you through the belly. Nobody's going to send me into a plant and get away with it, mister."

I opened the door and saw two prosperous-looking gents not ten feet away, and I called them over, watching Sikes all the while. I told them what I wanted and they said that certainly they'd do a favor like that for anybody.

And they did. Sikes signed, with them watching, and they witnessed at the side, putting down their home addresses when I asked them to. And I thanked them and they left.

Sikes wasn't whipped, but I could see he didn't want any part of rough stuff. He had a notion his lawyer could clear him, and I thought very likely he could. So I made sure he'd at least get his lumps, and it was a labor of love.

I said: "Stand up."

He asked: "Why?" but he got on his feet.

THE first time I hit him I landed on the bridge of his nose, and I could hear the bone and cartilage crunch under the

gun barrel. He sat on his backside so hard I thought he'd break the chair and he squealed like a pig. And then I really worked him over. He'd put his hands up to his face and I'd take a full-arm swing at his short ribs. When you swing forty ounces of solid metal against a man's ribs like that, and put your weight behind it, something has to give, and metal's harder than bone. He'd moan and drop his hands and I'd smash him in the face. And all the time I was telling him that he was getting off cheap, that I should kill him.

At that I almost did. When he passed out, and it was from shock and pain more than from anything else, he was a hospital case, and I made sure of his being one by kicking him a couple of times in a place where I knew it would do him no good.

I left him there on the floor, and I had a notion it would be sometime before he was able to send a couple of killers to way-lay a man, even if he wanted to take the risk of another beating like that. And I also had a notion that, by the time I'd sent the confession he'd signed, all properly

witnessed, to the paper instead of giving it to the cops, he'd be in the pokey whether he owned part of the force or not.

I'd done a dirty job, but I thought I'd done it well. My thought was that if the cops couldn't, or wouldn't do anything about a man that got away with what Sikes did, it was time somebody else stepped in.

And then I was sore about him trying to have me put out of the way.

THIS time I approached the Palmetto Gardens from the front, and as a respectable citizen, not as an alley prowler. And I decided that nobody had found the two men in the back, because there were no police cars around that I could see, and it wasn't likely they could have come and gone during the time I was working Sikes over.

It takes time for the cops to work around a place where a couple of men are shot.

Henson pitched back so hard the chair broke.

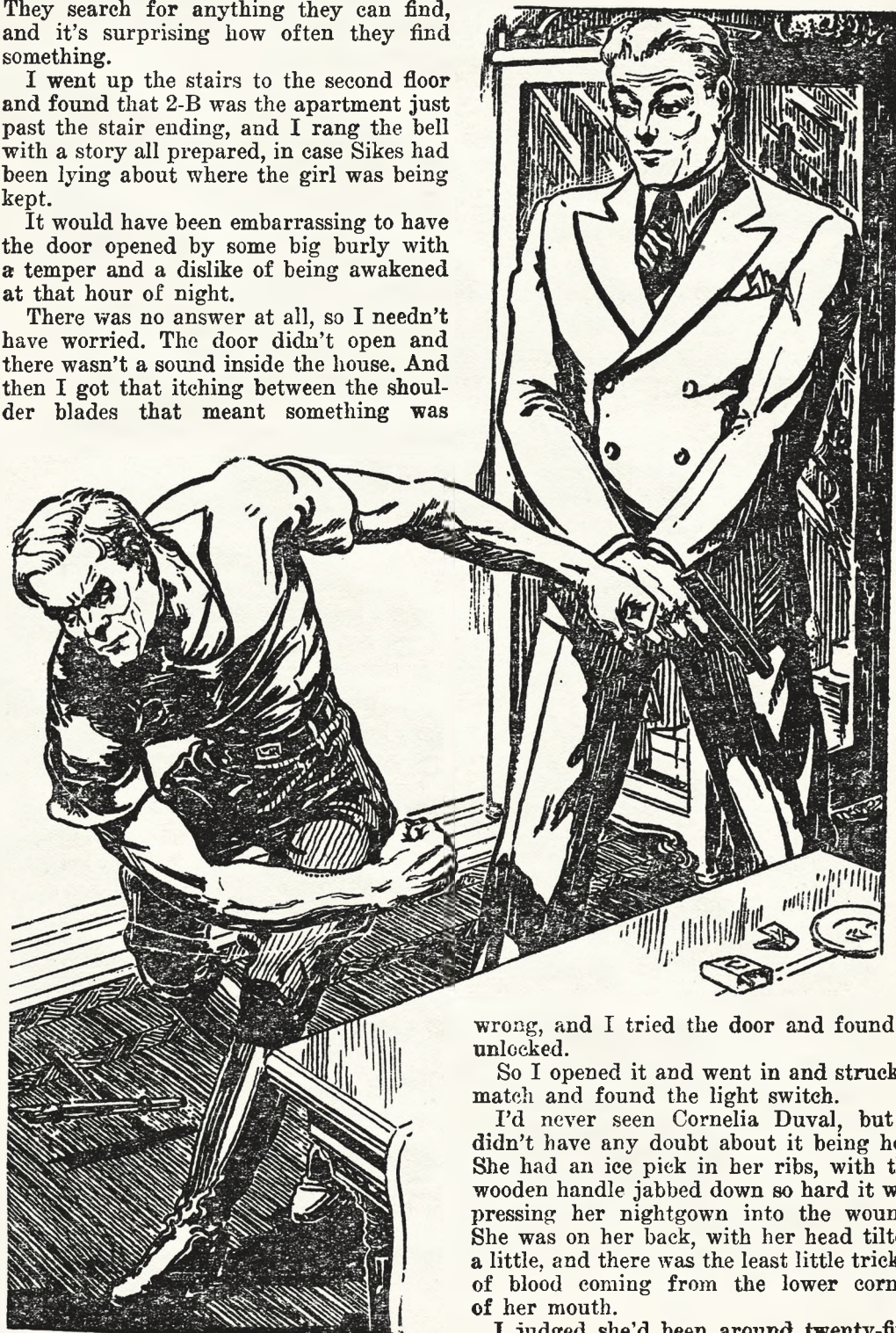


They search for anything they can find, and it's surprising how often they find something.

I went up the stairs to the second floor and found that 2-B was the apartment just past the stair ending, and I rang the bell with a story all prepared, in case Sikes had been lying about where the girl was being kept.

It would have been embarrassing to have the door opened by some big burly with a temper and a dislike of being awakened at that hour of night.

There was no answer at all, so I needn't have worried. The door didn't open and there wasn't a sound inside the house. And then I got that itching between the shoulder blades that meant something was



wrong, and I tried the door and found it unlocked.

So I opened it and went in and struck a match and found the light switch.

I'd never seen Cornelia Duval, but I didn't have any doubt about it being her. She had an ice pick in her ribs, with the wooden handle jabbed down so hard it was pressing her nightgown into the wound. She was on her back, with her head tilted a little, and there was the least little trickle of blood coming from the lower corner of her mouth.

I judged she'd been around twenty-five

and that she'd been a darn' nice-looking girl.

There was only one thing to do and I did it in a hurry. I found the phone, which was on a stand by the bed, and got the police department in a hurry. And I got a nice soft voice when the connection was made.

It said: "Desk-sergeant Callahan speaking."

I said: "I want to report a murder."

The voice said: "Man, is this a joke?"

"It's no joke. It's Cornelia Gilbert, the daughter of the man who was killed at Fort Lauderdale this morning."

"You mean Gilbert?"

"That's right."

"Where are you?"

I told him.

"And who are you?"

He was filling out a form and being very exact about it. So I told him my name, my present address, and my permanent one in New York.

And then he said: "I wish you'd stay there, Mr. Phelan, until the officers arrive. Are you alone?"

"Why, yes."

"Alone when you discovered the body?"

"That's right."

He said: "I'm sure Lieutenant Bellew, who's in the station now, will want to talk with you."

And that was that. The sergeant had just told me, in a nice way, that if I wasn't there when the cops came, they'd be looking for me in a hurry. Working on the theory that I wouldn't have been the first man to commit a murder and turn it in before someone else did. And while I waited I spent the time trying to figure out just how much I should tell them.

I'd been hired to find Cornelia Duval and I'd found her. That was fair enough. And I knew who'd killed her, or thought I did. Fair enough again. But I had no proof of anything, any more than I had proof of who'd killed her father.

I thought I'd better play it safe until I found out what kind of man Lieutenant Bellew was.

You can talk with the right kind of cop, but the less you have to say to the other kind, the better off you are. If Bellew happened to be a friend of Sikes, I could see

where finding Cornelia Duval's body might not have been a good thing after all.

BELLEW came, and with him a dozen more cops. And the police doctor and an ambulance. And a man from one newspaper and a woman from another, this last looking for human interest, I gathered.

Bellew turned out to be a grizzled old duck who didn't speak two words where one would do, and who apparently had his crew under complete control. He'd look at the print man and nod, and the guy would jump as though somebody had touched off a firecracker in his pants. He nodded when I told him I'd found the body and that my name was Phelan and then said just one word.

It was: "Wait!"

He let the newspaper man stay, so he and I went to the kitchen where we found an almost full bottle of bonded rye, standing on the kitchen sink, and the newspaper man and I went for that like a baby for its bottle. The newsman gave me the dope on Bellew and it didn't take him long to do it.

He said: "He's a mean old—, but he's honest. He's one of the old-timers on the force, and he's too good a cop for the public to stand for him being fired. It's the one and only example I've ever seen of honesty paying off. And in spite of his rank, there are plenty of green men on the force who're making dollars where he's making dimes. Just because they know enough to look the other way. Sure, honesty pays—but not in money."

"I don't suppose that crack could have anything to do with Benny Sikes?" I asked.

He said: "That stinker!"

I said: "Want to see something interesting. It might even be something you could use in your paper."

I handed over Sikes' confession and watched him. He took it in sort of a bored way, but he hadn't got more than half the first paragraph read before he gasped and really took an interest in what he was reading. He went all through it, taking particular notice of the way it was witnessed, and then he stared at me with the blank look a blind man has.

He said: "My God! How'd you get this, Phelan?"

"Just asked him for it."

"Who the hell are you?"

"A private cop working with no license. You might say I'm down here doing a public service. Of course, in this case, I'm sort of satisfying a private grudge. You read there where he tried to have me killed, and I'm funny that way."

"I've got to see Sikes. But I'll leave this written up before I do. It's big news when a girl like Mrs. Duval gets murdered, but this will take the top off the bookie situation in this town, and that's bigger. Okay if I show this to Lieutenant Bellew?"

"I wish you would. If I showed it to him, he'd raise hell with me for not turning it in to the department. I couldn't very well tell him I was afraid I'd be giving it to somebody who'd tear it up before I was out the door."

"He wouldn't mind hearing it. He knows what's going on better than we do. Was Sikes at his place?"

"He was when he wrote it out and signed it. He'll be in a hospital now, though."

"What happened to him?"

"He ran into the end of a gun some way. Clumsy of him, wasn't it?"

The newsman stared at me as if he didn't believe I was alive. Or human.

And then he said: "I thought I'd seen and heard just about everything, but how wrong I was! Mr. Phelan, I thank you."

I said: "Then stall Bellew for me, will you? Tell him I'll see him before noon, tomorrow, but that I've got important business in Fort Lauderdale that can't wait."

Then I left through the kitchen door, which opened on a fire-escape.

CHAPTER VIII

The Pay Off

IT WAS JUST GETTING LIGHT when I hit Lauderdale and the town had that dead, early morning look that goes along with that time of day. I slammed through the town and turned toward the beach, and by that time I was in a worse rage than I'd been in when I worked on Sikes. I'd been thinking about what he'd started, and how it was finishing, and the more I thought of it the madder I got. I'd liked Gilbert from the moment I'd met him, and apparently he'd been a fine gentleman because every-

body else seemed to feel the same way.

But he'd had a full and presumably a happy life and he'd lived the bulk of it. His murder was a terrible thing, but nothing like that of his daughter's.

I granted that she was unhappy at the time she was killed. She was planning on a divorce, which certainly meant an unhappy married life, but that had taken only two years from her life. She had everything to look ahead to. Money, position, friends, and it somehow seemed so much worse for her to be cut down like that than her father's being murdered. Her life was ahead of her and his was largely past.

So I was raging when I drove into the side road that led to the *FISHING CAMP*. And it didn't help my disposition any when a man stepped into the road ahead of me and held up his hand in a stop signal. And I felt no better about it when I saw he had a sawed-off shotgun slung across his arm in such a way he could bring it to bear in a hurry.

I said: "Now who the hell are you?"

And at the same time picked up my gun from beside me. I'd taken it out because its weight in the shoulder sling was binding my left arm in driving, and right then I was thanking my stars I had.

Because I was getting that itching between my shoulder blades, and because, somehow, the man with the shotgun didn't look like a guard.

HE was looking at the license plates on the car, and shifting his feet, probably without realizing it, so that he'd have solid footing when he brought that scatter gun into action. I opened the door on the driver's side, as though I was going to get out, and he moved over to command that side of the car. I'd planned the move for him before he made it.

Then he spoke. He said: "I'm the guard, mister. This road is closed. Mr. Duval is sick and tired of people coming in and pestering him."

He tightened his grip on his shotgun and waited hopefully. He was thinking that it would look much better if I was out of the car when he shot me. It would be hard to make a self-defense plea stand up if he had to shoot me through the windshield of the car. It would be so much better if I was on the road and clear of the car. He

could claim that I went for a gun and that I had to shoot—and who could prove different.

I said: "I work for Mr. Duval. What the hell! This is one of the Gilbert cars—I suppose the Duval cars, now."

"What's your name?"

"Phelan."

"Can you prove that? Got anything on you to prove it?"

"Sure."

"Well, show me. I can read 'em by the headlights."

By that time he was at the side, where he could blast me the second I got clear of the car. And I decided that I might as well get it over with, win, lose, or draw.

I located the door latch on the other side of the car and ducked my head below the windshield and dived for it. I fell out of the car; there was no time to get out properly, and he came around the hood just as I got myself straightened out. I shot once at him and was a little too bit to the left, because the slug hit the bonnet of the car and went screeching off in a ricochet. He ducked out of sight and I got to the back of the car in a rush.

And then got flat on the road and looked for feet and ankles.

Of course there were tires in the way but I figured I could last him out. And it took five minutes or more but I did. But he was in retreat, though ready to fight a rear-guard action, from the looks of it. He was backing away from the car and moving as though he was walking on eggs, and it was like shooting clay pipes in a shooting gallery. I had it all my own way. I was half under the car and he was in the open, and that made him stand out against the gun sights like a clay pipe in a shooting gallery is outlined against the back-board.

I shot, and he squealed like a pig as he went down. He'd even tossed the shotgun ten feet from him as his ankle went out from under him.

It took maybe five seconds for me to scramble from under the car and around it to where I could see, but in that time he'd managed to get to a sitting position, where he could hold his leg above the ankle with both hands. And I looked him over for another gun and found one in a pocket holster on his hip.

I said: "How's it go, Mac? You make a hell of a poor road block."

The guy had nerve. He was sweating from the pain in his ankle, but he managed to snap back at me. He said: "I was doing what I'm paid to do. You'll do twenty years for this."

I said: "I'll get a medal, Mac," and took off his belt and made a tourniquet of it above his smashed ankle. And then I loaded him in the car and kept on to the house.

THE cook was up and nobody else. I said: "Where's Murphy sleep? And was Mr. Duval home last night?"

She pointed out where Murphy was and told me Duval had gone into town with the police. And that he had to see Mr. Gilbert's lawyers and had said he'd probably just go to a hotel. The lawyer being in Miami, of course.

And I said that was fine and went to talk with Murphy, who was in the cottage at the side. He was in bed, but as soon as I went in, he got up and began putting clothes on his tough and wiry little body.

I said: "It isn't much, Murphy. I've got it tied and wrapped up, I think. Did Mr. Gilbert ever say anything about his will?"

"Sure he did, Mr. Phelan. And he always made a joke of it. He said he'd live longer than any of us that was mentioned in it. I'm to get twenty-five thousand and Henson is to get the same. The cook here gets five thousand. The gardener two thousand. It's the same with the Kentucky place. The people who'd been with him longest got the most money."

"Has Henson worked for him long?"

Murphy frowned. "Now that's funny. He hasn't. I guess it was because he depended on Henson so much. You see Mr. Gilbert didn't like details."

"Henson wasn't in the room with you when Gilbert was shot, was he?"

"Well, no. But he was in his room, because when we ran down to Mr. Gilbert, he was along."

I said: "Come along, will you? I want a witness to what I'm going to find."

We went over to the main room and to the gun case along the wall, and the cook came in and said: "You want that I should make your breakfast now, Mr. Murphy?"

Murphy waved at her to go away but I stopped her. I said: "If you will, I'd

like you to call the town hospital and ask them to send an ambulance out here. As soon as they can."

She stared at me and Murphy said: "Ambulance!"

I said: "I shot a man, down the road, and I've got him in the back of the car. He won't talk with me, but he'll talk with the cops."

AND it was then that Henson came into the room. He had one of the guest bedrooms facing the ocean, and he was as neat and colorless as he'd always been. He didn't even flinch when I jammed the gun in his belly and patted him over for a gun.

I said: "Murphy, you can do this as well as I can. The cops might even like it better, with you turning up the proof instead of me."

I'd forgotten the cook. She said: "Oh my Lawd!"

I said: "Susie, you call for that ambulance. D'ya want that man outside to die, just because you don't telephone?"

She scuttled out, and I said to the staring Murphy: "Open that gun case and start looking the rifles over, will you. I want to find one that's either been fired and put back without cleaning, or one that's been cleaned this last two days. Either will do."

Murphy opened the gun cabinet, which was built-in and glassed in, and which was at least fifteen feet long, with the guns arranged in sets. And very pretty, if you're anything like a gun crank.

Henson said precisely: "I hope you know what you're doing, Mr. Phelan. I shall certainly have you arrested for this outrage."

I said: "That'll be just before they set you in the chair at Raiford."

Murphy was taking each gun in turn, out of the case. He'd sniff the barrel, then open the breach and rub a handkerchief around the chamber, looking for fresh oil. And he hit pay dirt on the fourth gun he tried.

It was a 32-40 target rifle, a heavy barrel mounted on a Winchester single shot action. One of the kind of guns that uses hand-loaded ammunition and which, with a good man behind it, can put 'em in a three inch circle at two hundred yards. It had an eight-power Fecker 'scope on it and it was really a job.

Murphy said: "This is it. I can smell it. It's been shot the last couple days. I can smell the burnt powder."

I said: "Lay it on the table. And remember, you're the one that found it."

He said: "Yes, sir, Mr. Phelan."

I said to Henson: "Okay, that does it. I've got the motive for you and now I've got the weapon that did it. And I can place you next it. This gun doesn't make much noise, nothing like one of the new high-velocity guns. You shot from your bedroom, with the muzzle of the gun clearing the window so the sound would come from outside. Murphy, this is the guy that killed your boss."

Murphy said and calmly: "Is that a fact? Stand up, Henson."

Henson looked startled but he stood up. If he'd had a chance to think about it, he wouldn't have made a move, but Murphy's voice was at an ordinary level and I suppose Henson was used to doing what he was told to do.

And then Murphy sort of uncoiled. He hit Henson in the mouth with a looping right that pitched him back in the chair so hard that the chair went over backward.

And then he turned to me, just as calmly and said: "And should it be I should call the cops?"

I said: "Lord, no. We've got to get another killer yet."

CHAPTER IX

Lady Killer

THE AMBULANCE HAD COME and gone by the time Duval drove up, and I had Henson in his bedroom. And I hadn't taken any chances with him. I'd got fine copper wire to tie his wrists and ankles and I had him trussed to his bed in addition.

This, because he'd blown his cork. He cracked and all of a sudden, and for a little while I believed he'd really broken up. And then I realized it was a phony, that he was already building up for an insanity defense. He raved about how Gilbert had mistreated him and how Gilbert was an unnatural father because he hadn't done more to get Cornelia away from the bookie kidnap gang. And how he felt himself called on to kill Gilbert, this so Duval would

be in charge and in a position to meet the bookie's demands.

I put a handkerchief in his mouth and held it there with a piece of tape and went back to waiting for Duval.

And, in the meantime, put in a call for Lieutenant Bellew, at Miami.

I said: "This is John Phelan, Lieutenant. I wish you'd come up here."

He said: "Why should I?"

I said: "I'm waiting for Duval to get here. He's the guy."

"You mean she was killed by her husband?"

"Sure."

Bellew said heavily: "You're crazy, Phelan, and I advise you to get down here in a hurry. If not, I'll have to put charges against you. You're the one that found her—I can't have you running over the country."

I said: "Listen! He did it. Got that clear?"

"A man don't kidnap his own wife. It's that — of a Sikes. He's in a hospital room—some guy almost killed him, but I've got a man on guard at his door. I've been in touch with the chief up there. I know about the extortion demands that Sikes was back of."

"Part of it, only, Lieutenant. Duval wrote the last note, the one asking for the forty grand. He had access to Sikes' typewriter and wrote it there. She was going to divorce him, and he saw his chance for big money, when her father was killed."

"The next you'll say he killed the father."

"I've got that killer here. Duval originally was playing for the forty grand. He talked his wife into thinking she was in danger, because of the notes Sikes was sending her father. He talked her into hiding out in that apartment—he may have even rented it for her. You might check on that with the manager there. He thought that if he could get the forty grand that way, he wouldn't have to depend on her for a settlement . . . she'd promised him one if he didn't make trouble over the divorce. But there was a better than even chance that she couldn't get the forty thousand from her father, who hated Duval. So he insured himself by the ransom note, thinking it would be blamed on Sikes."

"You say you've got the man that killed Gilbert?"

"I've even got a verbal confession, in front of two witnesses, besides myself. Gilbert's cook and trainer both heard him. He's acting crazy now, but that can be beaten out of him."

He said he'd be right up then, and he actually sounded friendly.

DUVAL came in twenty minutes later, walking in as though he owned the place. He was half drunk and I suppose he'd been taking it to keep from thinking of the ice pick he'd driven into his wife. He looked at me as though he didn't believe what he saw, then looked at the gun I held and turned greenish.

I said: "That's right, Duval. I can't make an arrest but I'm holding you for the Miami officers. They're on their way."

He mumbled: "What's this?"

I said: "You slipped all over the place. The man you hired to stand guard on the road out here, to shoot me down as I drove in, is in the hospital. With a police guard on him. The note you wrote on Sikes' typewriter is another thing. Sikes admits writing the others but he knows nothing of that one. His confession will be out in a Miami paper this evening. In it he tells of you talking your wife into hiding out and he admits he told you he thought it would be a good thing. He also says that he said that, knowing it would put pressure on Gilbert and help in forcing him to send his string out racing again. I've got that confession properly witnessed, and Sikes will go on the stand and testify against you. He has to—he'd be likely to be charged with it himself, if he didn't."

Duval sat down and said: "Murph, will you bring me a drink. I need one, if I'm going to have to listen to this crazy talk."

Murphy told him he could get his drink in hell.

I said: "I think you were only playing for forty grand, but when somebody did you a favor and killed your father-in-law, you saw where you could run it up into the big money. It would be a cinch to prove your wife was killed after her father was, and that would put you in line for the Gilbert money. You were taking a big chance but it was for big dough and you tried it."

He said: "None of what you're saying makes sense. It can't be proven."

I said: "It'll surprise you. I don't doubt but that you've left prints in your wife's apartment. Unless you wore gloves every second, you're bound to have left them. Maybe you wiped that ice pick handle clean, but a man can't be in a place ten minutes without leaving signs of his presence. And then the police, knowing you're guilty, will really go to town on you for a confession. You can think of that. If they were questioning you in a routine way, you'd probably come through on it. But when they're certain you're guilty, they don't question you that way. They know tricks. I don't know half as much as they do and I made Sikes talk all over the place."

Bellew must have come up from Miami with the siren open all the way. He walked in and looked the situation over and asked: "This the one?" He nodded at Duval.

I said: "He's the one you want. He killed his wife in your county. I've got the one that killed Gilbert in the other room, but I didn't want to turn him in to the city cops until I got this one for you."

Bellew had dull slaty eyes and he turned these on Duval and studied him carefully. And then said: "Wife killer, eh? What we'll do to you before we book you and you get in touch with a lawyer! So it wasn't enough, just shaking down your wife, faking a kidnaping and working with a crooked bookie outfit? No! You had to go whole hog or none. I'd pull the switch on that Raiford chair on you myself, if they'd let me. You can call the local chief if you want, Phelan. Any time now. I want to get this guy back where I can talk to him quietly."

Murphy said: "God give strength to your good right arm."

I said: "I'll be down as soon as I get rid of my other boy. Murphy, will you call

the cops?"

And that was that. Bellew even cuffed Duval's wrists together behind his back, instead of letting the two men with him take care of him. He explained this to me, gravely.

He said: "I just can't take a chance with him, Phelan. You can see how he's acting. He's a homicidal maniac. Look at him jump up and down and try to get at us."

This with Duval standing as still as a statue—and with no more to say.

THAT was all there was to it. I put in a bill for services to the executors of the estate and they paid it. Henson pleaded guilty, of course claiming insanity, and the state brought out his real motive and backed it up with Gilbert's will, leaving him twenty-five thousand. When Sikes got on the stand and testified he'd offered Henson another twenty-five grand if he could get the string on a Cuban or Mexican track, the thing was all over but the shouting. Even the dumbest juror could see that with Gilbert out of the way, Duval would race the string. Or that Henson, her father's confidential secretary and companion, could sway Cornelia into letting the horses run.

He got the chair, although it's now up on the automatic appeal all death sentences have.

Duval's case was even simpler. The D.A. came into court with a signed confession and Duval got life. I think he should have got what Henson got, but life in a Florida jail is nothing I'd wish on my worst enemy.

And I got a lot of work instead of a vacation.

It's worked out that way for the past five years, and the next time I take one, the office won't know where I go.

They'll have to send a detective to find me.

FOR MODERN DETECTIVE FICTION
WITH A PUNCH—
PRIVATE DETECTIVE

on sale at all newsstands

That these two lovely girls had practically ruined one clerk and wrecked an office seemed inconceivable to Detective Cassidy. Yet he had his duty to perform. "I'll have to take you in," he said, not knowing how determined the sisters were not to go to jail . . . nor how capable they were of enforcing their wishes



As he came toward her, the bush whip snapped out and his lashed wrist involuntarily allowed the gun to drop to the floor.

"I'M Aileen Court, and this is my sister Thelma. We have just arrived from Australia. We wish to see Counsellor Arnold Barker at once."

The speaker was red-headed. It was a natural color and bright like a flame. Sister Thelma was also a gorgeous redhead.

DEATH ROLLS ITS OWN

By LAURENCE DONOVAN



But her hair had a different tinge, like the glowing of polished copper.

Three girl typists in the front office of Attorney Arnold Barker, in Miami Av-

enue off Flagler Street, looked up with eyes snapping. The three gave a combined sniff and a snicker. Two of the typists had boy friends in the Land Down Under.

Their general opinion of Aussie girls gave way to scornful giggling. The Aussie sisters could have given them all handi-

caps and beaten them from neck to heels on the delightful curve of their tall figures. Their faces were differently shaped, but a man would have had trouble making up his mind which was the prettier.

The outer office of Attorney Arnold Barker maintained a sort of wornout dignity. Along with this went a male reception clerk with slick black hair and a 4-F chest expansion. He thought he was quite a lad with the ladies, seeing there were so many girls left behind.

The male clerk put on his best condescending smirk.

"Mr. Barker doesn't bother himself with the troubles of foreign war brides," he announced, getting the expected snicker of applause from the three typists. "Mr. Barker wouldn't see you if he were in, peaches."

"My name is still Aileen, and it's none of your confounded business why we wish to see Counsellor Barker," flashed the red-head called Aileen.

Aileen's blue-green eyes glinted with warning. Her sister Thelma turned slowly speculative brown eyes upon the snickering girl typists.

"From what I can see, Aileen, you don't have to guess twice why the American boys are picking out so many Aussie girls," said Thelma, of the coppery hair, with malicious intent. "Also," and she turned her slow eyes upon the 4-F male clerk, "these American girls must be suffering with what the Yankee army men left behind."

The male clerk drew himself up indignantly on his skinny legs. The Aussie called Aileen laughed musically. The typists by this time were staring at the oddly fringed jackets the Aussie sisters were wearing.

"Must have come right out of what they call the bush," put out one typist in a hoarse whisper meant to be heard.

She didn't know how right she was. The soft, hand-worked jackets were of the finest tanned kangaroo hide.

The 4-F male clerk recovered his poise somewhat. He stepped closer to the girl Aileen at the rail.

"While Mr. Barker doesn't bother himself with war-bride cases, if you happen to be lonesome, how's about me picking up a pal and showing you girls some of the bright spots in Miami?" simpered the clerk. "Whassay, peaches?"

The male clerk was close enough to make a mistake. The milky smooth cheek of Aileen, with her impudently tilted nose and a few sun freckles, was too much for the smirking clerk to resist.

"I'll bet we can make you forget—" The clerk walked right on into it.

He reached out a thin hand and lightly pinched the cheek of the Aussie called Aileen. The Aussie girl did not speak. It was doubtful if the three typists had time to observe what happened.

Aileen's right hand snapped out with the speed of a striking snake. Her long white fingers were hooked behind the neck of the romantic clerk. The clerk's squawk was almost a scream as he came off his feet, giving a splendid imitation of the man on the flying trapeze before he landed in a crumpled heap against the outer office wall.

THE clerk started to scramble to his feet, swearing. It was then that the little Aussie called Thelma went into action. She assisted the clerk from the floor and he sailed right on over her head to crash head-on into the private switchboard.

"We came up here peacefully to claim two millions in diamonds!" announced Thelma without batting one beautiful eye.

The three typists were clustered together, evidently trying to escape from these crazy Aussies. The switchboard was a complete wreck, but the 4-F male clerk had all his fighting mad aroused. He was still game enough to make another pass at the Aussie called Aileen.

This time the Aussie girl took him with what might have been a strangle hold learned from some commando sergeant. She used him as a battering ram to break through the door of the private office, heedless of the broken glass showering around her.

Aileen left the male clerk on the floor. He was out cold this time.

"We'll have to call again, Thelma," said Aileen. "Counsellor Barker is not in his office."

By this time one of the terrified typists had made it to a corridor phone. As the Aussie sisters gathered up their hand-worked purses, also of soft kangaroo leather, Thelma's purse popped open.

A very efficient army automatic hit the floor with a metallic ring and bounced.

Perhaps the safety catch had been off. The gun exploded and its slug caromed wildly off the office rail and splintered the glass of a picture frame on the wall.

At this inauspicious moment one Bart Cassidy, plainclothes dick who had been in the building, entered in response to the call for help made by the scared typist. Cassidy swallowed hard when he lamped the pair of redheads and, in spite of his sworn duty, he wondered which he would pick—Aileen, of the blue-green eyes and flaming hair, or Thelma, of the big brown eyes and the deeper coppery sheen to her well-poised round head.

Cassidy took in the damage at a glance, heard the reviving male clerk yammering for the Aussies to be taken to jail, and looked at the army automatic which Thelma was just then restoring to her purse.

That these two lovely creatures had practically ruined one clerk and wrecked the outer office of Attorney Barker seemed inconceivable to young Detective Cassidy. But he had his duty to do.

"Sorry it is I am," announced Cassidy, confronting the brown-eyed Thelma. "But I'll have to take you in. You girls oughtta stay out of these cocktail bars. I'm havin' to charge you with disorderly conduct, assault and battery, and illegal possession of firearms, which will probably give you the next six months to cool off."

Cassidy added, "I'll take that gun," and reached for Thelma's purse.

A white arm as lithe and strong as a young python was suddenly wrapped around Cassidy's throat from behind. That was Aileen. Cassidy received the purse from Thelma. But he got it squarely between the eyes with the hard weight of the army gun inside.

The department dick folded up, closed his eyes and not even the screaming of the fleeing typists could awaken him.

"We do not want to go to jail, Thelma," said Aileen calmly. "I think we should leave at once."

"We'll have to go pronto, as that Yankee army sergeant always said, Aileen," advised Thelma. "If we descend by elevator, someone might interfere with us. I saw a fire escape at the corridor window."

The Aussie redheads departed by way of the fire escape.



The clerk's squawk was almost a scream as he came off his feet.

CHAPTER II

Violent Redheads

JIM (THE OWL) O'HARA hesitated over taking the phone call. It was now 2:30 A.M. in the editorial rooms of the *Miami Tribune*. Owl O'Hara had promised to sit in on the poker game starting at 3 A.M. in the club the gang called Poverty Flats.

Watkins, the city editor, growled at his ace police reporter. Owl O'Hara had been so long a veteran digger-upper of crime in all its brackets that virtually all the city detective department was out to hang up his hide.

Owl's long face didn't fit his name. Still there were dicks in the department who swore O'Hara could see in the dark. Owl considered himself hardboiled and murder was his meat.

"Y' takin' this call, Owl?" grunted fat and graying city-editor Watkins. "Voice sounds like a blues singer who's strained her V strings."

Owl O'Hara had a hunch then. That kind of voice would fit one of the red-headed Aussies who had been giving him the jimmies for the past two weeks. Either Aileen or Thelma.

"And why would either one be buzzin' me at this hour?" muttered Owl O'Hara. "I'd be in a jam with Chief Martin if he even suspected I knew the pair of violent outlanders, not to mention livin' in the same Coral Gables apartments."

O'Hara glanced at his watch, figuring on the minutes left to arrive at the poker game after one of these outlander Aussies finished pegging him an earful. O'Hara's first discovery was that he wasn't sitting in on any poker game at 3 A.M.

"Mr. O'Hara?" The voice was throaty and deep. "I can't waste time. This is Aileen. There will be a killing if you don't come to your Venetian Apartment as fast as you can push your car. You may be too late even then—"

"Hold everything!" snapped O'Hara, pushing black hair out of his agate-blue eyes. "What's this tripe? What's—?"

"There isn't time, but a killer with a gun is trying to break in right now. He's prying at the window."

"For the luva Pete!" exclaimed O'Hara. "You're on a phone. Whyn't you call the cops?"

"Because, as you well know, O'Hara, Thelma and I do not want to be locked up for the next six months!" replied the deep voice. "Now will you please hurry? This killer has me cornered alone, and in your apartment, O'Hara."

"What the—? In my apartment?" yelled O'Hara. "An' what are you doing—?"

He was abruptly cut off by what sounded like his apartment phone cradle crashing to the floor. He thought he heard a scream, but he wasn't sure.

"Of all the nitwit dames!" complained O'Hara, making sure his .38 was in its shoulder holster. He said to Watkins: "If there's a call for me, say I got tired and I'm hittin' the hay for the night."

Watkins had gimlet eyes and they bored into him.

"From what I heard of your end of the conversation, and the feel you made for your rod, I don't think it's the hay you're figurin' on hittin'," exclaimed Watkins sarcastically. "Chubby! Grab a handful of plates and take a little ride with Mr. O'Hara!"

Chubby Merkle would climb a ship's mast in a hurricane for good pictures, but he couldn't stand the sight of blood.

"Hell's bells, chief," pleaded O'Hara. "This is a personal matter."

"Get on your horse, Chubby!" snapped the dyspeptic city editor. "There ain't any personal business on your beat before three o'clock, Mr. O'Hara. And who were you advisin' to call the cops?"

"C'mon, Chubby!" growled Owl O'Hara.

He figured he could ditch the overweight cameraman somewhere between Miami Avenue and Coral Gables. Which he failed to do.

OWL O'HARA let Chubby and himself into the Venetian Apartments less than twenty minutes after he had taken the call from the red-headed Aussie girl.

"Both of them Aussies are crazier than the kangaroos they brag about ropin' in their native badlands," muttered O'Hara as he failed to detect any sign of bloody carnage about the ornate, tiled first-floor lobby on which his bachelor apartment was located. "This one about a killer just about equals the wild one about hunting two millions in diamonds."

O'Hara reached the thick, wide door of his home, Apartment 1-B. He placed an ear to the panel and listened. If there were death inside, or life either, it gave forth no sound.

O'Hara inserted his key and swung the heavy door open silently. A pink, dozing lamp gave the only light. But that was sufficient to show the body lying in the middle of O'Hara's best and only rug.

Owl O'Hara was far from being a meticulous bachelor, but he had gloomed onto that Oriental rug at a bargain. His first look was for bloodstains, but there were none.

Behind him, Chubby Merkle moaned. The cameraman was never completely at home in the presence of violent death. Nevertheless Chubby was preparing a mag-

Once he was gagged, they doubled him unceremoniously into the trunk.



nesium bulb and was getting set to snap a picture of the body on O'Hara's rug.

O'Hara had no intention of permitting that picture to appear as a public record that his apartment had become the sudden resting place of a corpse. At the best, this wasn't a nice corpse to have appear in the public prints.

Something, several things had happened to detract from the symmetry of the face.

One ear was twisted and torn as if a vicious terrier had made a running jump for it. The nose was a blob of bloody flesh. Both eyes were blackened and closed, and the thick lips of the mouth had been split.

Notwithstanding all this, Owl O'Hara instantly muttered, "Legs Killian! An' that means Gent Barillo is in this some-

where. Which makes horses of funny colors since Barillo lost his tourist sucker play on the shutdown of Hialeah, Tropical Park, an' the dog tracks. Barillo's neck-deep in some other racket by this time, but where do the Aussies come in?"

The shock of discovering that Legs Killian, one of Barillo's gunsels, had chosen his one arty rug as a last resting place had temporarily caused O'Hara to forget all about the phone call of the redheaded Aussie dame, Aileen, that had summoned him to his suddenly unhappy home.

Chubby Merkle was still moaning, but was going right ahead planning for a magnesium shot of the corpus delicti, as Legs Killian appeared to be. O'Hara had just observed the strange circumstance of Killian having dropped his blue-steel rod with-in touch of his facile, killer fingers.

"O'Hara! Stop that moon-faced fellow from making a photograph of this kidnaper or myself!"

The abrupt cry came from shadows at one side of the door where O'Hara had not yet glanced. There was action with the throaty but musical words.

It seemed to O'Hara that the heads and writhing bodies of half a dozen snakes hissed past his ear. Chubby yelped behind him with all the pathos of a dog that has just had its foot stepped upon.

The special bulb was torn from Chubby's fingers. Its thin glass splintered and stung O'Hara's cheek as it passed, firmly in the grip of the writhing lashes. O'Hara now had identified the "snakes" as the three-foot split ends of an Australian bush whip.

ONE of the red-headed Aussie lovelies had shown O'Hara such a whip. It had an over-all reach of about six feet. Its split lash ends were weighted with leaden shot. This did not add to the pleasure of man or beast upon which it might be used.

At the time, Aileen had carefully explained:

"There are some bad black boys in the back bush where we rope kangaroo. There are also wild dogs. We have heard there are some of what an army sergeant told us are the wolves here in America. The sergeant suggested that our bush whips would stop any of the wolves he had ever seen."

As Chubby lost his flashlight bulb and nursed aching fingers, O'Hara snapped

back to the real reason for his sudden summons from the lure of a poker game at Poverty Flats.

"Aileen?" exclaimed O'Hara. "What happened? Why is this gunsel here and why was he trying to kill you?"

"Gunsel?" The throaty voice was puzzled.

The trim girl who came from the shadows could be described as full-blown, but like a creamy white rose at its best before any of the petals begin to fall. Her loosely bound red hair was so flaming that it gave her oval face the appearance of whitest buttermilk.

Sun freckles sprinkled lightly over the broad forehead and along the tilted nose made her skin appear only more milky. It was her firmly curved, naturally red mouth that would have conveyed a warning of danger to any of the army sergeant's predatory wolves.

"Gunsel?" repeated Aileen. "He wasn't trying to kill me. In my room he only said someone he called the boss wanted to see me. Then he pointed that little gun. I ran out of our rooms and over here, because I had no telephone. Mrs. Blossom, the landlady, let me in. But this . . . this gunsel found a window and followed me."

"Then you killed him?" wondered O'Hara.

"That I did not, O'Hara. I had the bush whip hidden behind me. I snapped the gun out of his hand. When he kept coming toward me, I stopped him. He can't be dead."

CHAPTER III

"Here's Your Gunsel!"

"YOU SAID IT, Aileen, he's alive," admitted O'Hara, arising from beside the sleeping Legs Killian. "But when he wakes up, he's gonna wish he was dead. When he wakes up—?"

Owl O'Hara permitted his final words to trail off. Which at once produced a choking protest from Chubby Merkle, the *Trib's* ace cameraman as long as there was no blood involved.

"No, O'Hara! No! Not that! I won't be party any more to body-snatchin', what with Chief Martin achin' to get you or me

caught up in something that will put us on the road gang."

An unholy light danced in O'Hara's dark eyes. In the first place, this apparent attempt of the notorious Barillo to snatch one of the red-headed Aussie girls lent some credence to a story that Aileen and Thelma had told him, but which O'Hara was too smart a newshound to believe—or thought he was.

This story of the red-headed violent cuties had to do with a cold two million dollars' worth of diamonds, established as a trust fund for them by their late father during pre-war days. Which would make their value at least double under existing demand, providing there were such diamonds.

Aileen and Thelma Court had wangled their way over from the land "down under", as they had blandly told Owl O'Hara a few days before, to claim these diamonds. It seemed that this compact fortune had been left by their late father in the hands of an uncle who bore the good, old-fashioned and honest-sounding name of Nathaniel.

"And since Thelma, she's the younger, turned eighteen, we haven't heard a word from Uncle Nathaniel," was what Aileen had told O'Hara. "We've never seen Uncle Nathaniel, but he always had written us a letter twice a month."

Seeing that the red-headed sisters, each in her own way, had plenty of what it takes to bring on the wolves, O'Hara had taken, as he told himself, a strictly friendly interest.

With one of Gent Barillo's hottest gunnies sleeping upon his one and only rug, O'Hara had a sudden reversal of mind concerning the story of the Aussie sisters, Aileen and Thelma Court. If it were true that a top-flight racketeer of the ilk of Barillo had suddenly taken an interest in these Aussie sisters, there might be something to that fabulous story of the diamonds after all. From Aileen's own words, O'Hara could but assume that a kidnaping and not a killing had been intended.

"Where's your sister Thelma?" questioned Owl O'Hara suddenly.

If it were possible, Aileen's face turned a little whiter.

"I wish I knew," she said. "She left here shortly before twelve o'clock saying she

was going to the midnight cinema. It's long past the time for her to be home."

O'Hara puzzled for a moment, pushing the thick black hair out of his eyes. "This whole thing has got me backed up," he said musingly. "Gent Barillo does not send out to pick up someone without a reason, and that's not all, Aileen; you wouldn't know who Barillo is, I hope, but how would he have your address here at the Venetian Apartments when the cops have had a general alarm out for two days and have not been able to pick your address up?"

"Oh, that?" exclaimed Aileen casually. "After we had the trouble in Lawyer Barker's office, I called Mr. Barker on the telephone and gave him our address. Mr. Barker said it wouldn't be a good idea for us to run into trouble with the police right now, and he would keep it a secret."

"Barker said that?" snapped O'Hara.

"Why, yes. He also said that he hadn't seen or heard from Uncle Nathaniel Court for nearly two months and that his cottage, in some place he called Coconut Grove, has been closed."

By a series of quick deductions, Owl O'Hara thought he was beginning to add up to the answer. It was an answer, though, that left out the one mysterious figure X of the whereabouts of this Uncle Nathaniel.

"You've really been telling me the truth about a trust fund of two million dollars in diamonds?" questioned O'Hara sharply.

Aileen's bluish green eyes widened.

"Had you thought at any time we were not telling the truth?" she said indignantly.

"I'm just a poor struggling newshound," said O'Hara, almost plaintively. "I hear, and I even see, so many things I don't believe."

Chubby Merkle was standing in the middle of the room, as shaky as a mold of jelly, trembling with fear. "What're you gonna do?" asked Chubby. "Ain't it about time we called the cops?"

O'Hara's mind was made up for him suddenly. A maliciously humorous light came back into his dark eyes. "Calling the police because one of Gent Barillo's gun-sels got himself bush-wipped?" He grinned. "Not any! I've got a better idea."

"No!" pleaded Chubby. "There ain't any better idea."

Two minutes later, O'Hara had emptied an old-fashioned round-topped trunk that he had dragged from the rear of the long

clothes closet. The old trunk had many cracks and seemed well enough ventilated. Nevertheless, O'Hara brought a knife from the kitchen and widened some of the cracks.

Chubby just stood in the middle of the floor and moaned.

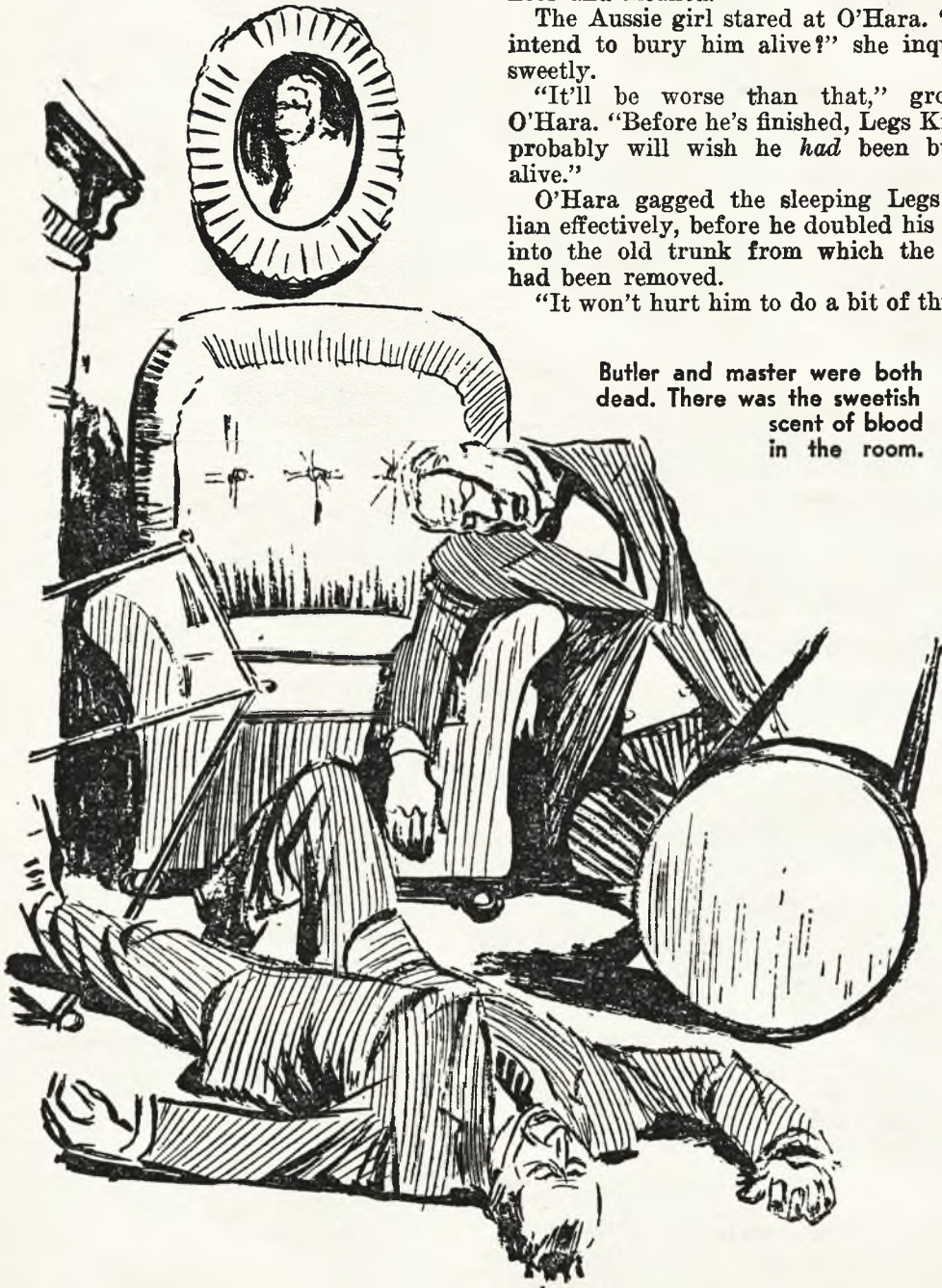
The Aussie girl stared at O'Hara. "You intend to bury him alive?" she inquired sweetly.

"It'll be worse than that," growled O'Hara. "Before he's finished, Legs Killian probably will wish he *had* been buried alive."

O'Hara gagged the sleeping Legs Killian effectively, before he doubled his body into the old trunk from which the tray had been removed.

"It won't hurt him to do a bit of thump-

Butler and master were both dead. There was the sweetish scent of blood in the room.



ing around, when he wakes up," observed O'Hara. "Only, I don't want him yelling ahead of time. In a few minutes, Chubby, we're moving some of my old books."

Chubby's teeth were clicking together. O'Hara took a long two minutes out thinking, then he summoned the sleepy Mrs. Blossom, the landlady. He had lived at the Venetian Apartments a long time. He soon arranged for Aileen and Thelma, if and when Thelma returned, to be transferred immediately to another apartment on the second floor. Their names to be omitted from the vestibule list for the present.

"You always were the devil, Jim O'Hara," Mrs. Blossom smiled. "But I never thought you would go so far as to adopt two redheads all at the same time."

Aileen consented to the move, saying she would keep watch for the return of Thelma and having O'Hara's promise that he would be back in a short time.

Some fifteen minutes later, O'Hara's battered sedan stopped alongside a stretch of vacant lots bordering the Tamiana Trail.

"Isn't Gent Barillo gonna get a big surprise when Legs Killian is finally picked up, alive and kicking, in an old trunk!" O'Hara grinned. "Especially seeing that I'm leaving his rod, fully loaded, in the trunk with him."

CHAPTER IV

Crafty Mr. Barker

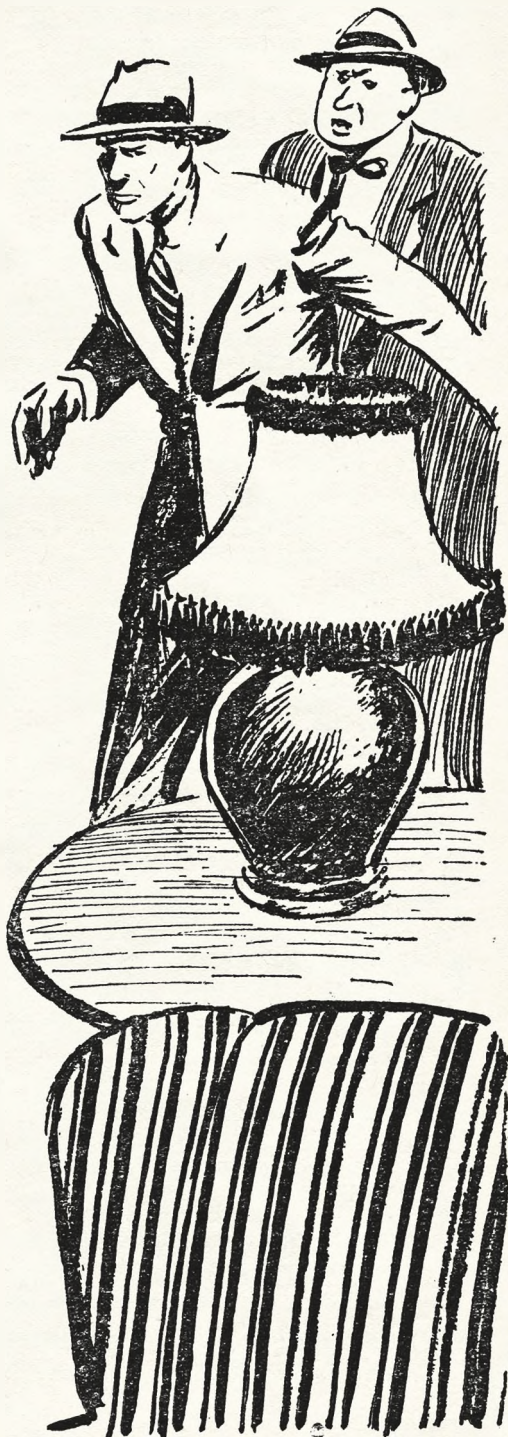
"NO, THELMA HAS NOT returned," spoke the throaty voice of the red-headed Aileen. Tears were not far behind her throat now. "O'Hara, what am I going to do?"

"I know exactly what we're going to do," said O'Hara. "I'll have Mrs. Blossom keep an eye out for Thelma if she comes back. We're going for a little ride over the Venetian Causeway to a nice big house up on Hibiscus Creek. That happens to be the domicile of Arnold Barker, one time big-shot lawyer. Today, a shyster scraping together any business, clean or dirty, that comes his way."

"Why, O'Hara!" exclaimed Aileen. "He was my father's counsellor for many years."

"You heard me say he was a one-time big-shot lawyer," said O'Hara dryly.

"I . . . I don't think . . . there would be any pix for me, would there?" stuttered



Chubby Merkle.

"Might not be any pix," snapped O'Hara, "but as long as I've got your fat mouth right close to me, I know who you're talking to, and about what."

Still chuckling over what Gent Barillo would think and say when Legs Killian would be rescued from that old trunk in that vacant lot, O'Hara pushed the sedan back downtown. He got on Flagler Street, turned off on Biscayne Boulevard and crossed over the toll-charge Venetian Causeway.

It was not quite graying dawn, as he followed the winding roads along the so-called creeks that created numerous islands for millionaires' residences. He pulled in from a straight boulevard to the monstrous pile of stucco where Lawyer Barker still managed to live in splendor in spite of his greatly lowered rating as an attorney-at-law.

Arnold Barker was not a prepossessing figure; he was partly bald, with a hooked nose, a tight mouth and black eyes that dug into O'Hara. Barker very grumpily wanted to know the occasion for a call at this ungodly hour. Then the middle-aged shyster saw Aileen Court for the first time. In O'Hara's keen judgement, there was more than surprise at the mere fact of Aileen's presence here, after O'Hara had introduced them. It was as if Lawyer Barker were questioning how she could be here at all.

From that moment, Lawyer Barker exuded a forced geniality.

"Sit down, my dear, sit down," he invited Aileen. "I'll mix up some drinks," waving away a sleepy, half-clad butler.

O'Hara caught Aileen's bluish green eyes studying him. They created a sensation along his spine such as the hardboiled police reporter had never known. Aussie girls who went around beating up armed gunnies with bush whips hardly fitted into romance. Yet, O'Hara wondered if Aileen were not something of the type he needed to fit into his life. He shook off the feeling.

It seemed to him that the hook-nosed Lawyer Barker was gone for some considerable time for the mere mixing of drinks. He wondered why the sleepy, gray-haired butler had not been sent for the drinks.

The butler was carrying the tray when Barker returned to the living-room.

"Now, let's have it!" said Barker, apparently having loosened his spirit with some Scotch while he was absent. He said to Aileen: "After that muss in my office, I considered it best to keep your address out of the hands of the police. In fact, I went so far as to file a complaint just to keep the cops from getting ideas."

O'HARA was too old a hand to have the blinkers pulled over his eyes.

"Let's begin at the beginning, Barker," he said curtly. "What's become of Nathaniel Court?"

"I wish I knew," Barker sighed heavily. "It's been almost two months since I saw him. He said then that he expected his nieces from Australia, although he would try to prevent them from coming to America."

"Why?" snapped O'Hara.

"That, I wouldn't know," said Barker. "I had been given to understand by the father of these girls that he had entrusted two millions in diamonds to their Uncle Nathaniel to be delivered intact when the youngest, Thelma, would reach eighteen." "Where are these diamonds?" asked O'Hara.

"That is a point upon which Nathaniel Court has been adamant. Beyond letting me know that they are in a private steel vault and probably not in a bank, he has told nothing."

O'Hara's brain worked in the usual deductive grease. He remarked quietly, cynically: "And not even Gent Barillo can get the secret out of him."

"What in hell do you mean by that?" raged Barker. "Are you intimating—?"

"I'm not intimating," drawled O'Hara. "I'm just saying that Gent Barillo doesn't play for peanuts, and Gent Barillo has somehow obtained the address of the Court sisters that all the regular police force of Miami has failed to produce."

Barker arose. "I find no reason to discuss this with you further, O'Hara," he said harshly. "On the other hand, I'll be pleased to take the whole matter up, at any time, with Aileen or Thelma Court. Goodnight, sir."

Aileen started to speak but O'Hara put his hand on her arm.

"When you've been given the brushoff," he said, "sometimes it's wiser to let yourself be brushed. Let's go."

Barker seemed genial again as he accompanied them to the door.

Chubby Merkle had been left waiting in the car. As usual, he was growling. "There is too much traffic along the creeks, for this hour in the morning," he complained. "I've seen three cars go by. Mebbe I dreamed it, but the men in all three seemed to be giving this old jalopy the hard once-over."

O'Hara laughed. "Demon cameramen should not have imagination," he grunted. "We're heading for the nearest phone. I want to call the Venetian and see if your sister has returned, Aileen."

There it was again, her firm hand closed on his arm. O'Hara felt as if a hot iron had been run down along his spine. He never would have believed he would fall for a girl tough enough to whip a gun out of a mobster's hand and then give him the works. But that was the way it seemed to be. It was worse when he glanced at Aileen and she smiled at him.

They found a phone at a filling station before leaving the millionaires' islands.

"Yes, O'Hara," said the voice of Mrs. Blossom. "Sure and the other redhead has come back. Also, she has brought company. She is entertaining a truck driver. And that ain't all, O'Hara. He brought along his truck, which is all loaded and should be well on its way north by this time. I tell you, O'Hara, them redheads are the devil."

That was all O'Hara could get from the usually loquacious Mrs. Blossom. He returned to the car and told Aileen.

"Let's hurry, O'Hara," urged Aileen breathlessly.

O'Hara swung his old sedan away from the filling station and into the middle of the graveled driveway. A heavy black car, bearing down upon them, was hitting at least seventy. O'Hara twisted the wheel desperately. Seeing that a collision appeared inevitable, he failed to clear the other car. His old sedan was much lighter and it was lifted by the heavy bumper of the speeding car.

For the space of ten seconds, O'Hara was conscious only of turning over and over. Then he knew the water pouring through

the doors was that of dredged-out Indian Creek.

O'Hara pulled Aileen through a door that just cleared the surface of the creek at the shore. Chubby Merkle was climbing out, pulling his camera and swearing.

The speeding car, which O'Hara had no doubt was meant to be a murder car, had not waited. O'Hara got himself and his soaked companions back to the filling station where the attendant gawked at them.

No, he had no time to get the license of the speeding car. All he had seen and heard was the collision. O'Hara loosened up with about all the bills he had in his pocket. It was enough to hire the coupe the filling-station man used to travel to work.

"We've got to get to Thelma," pleaded Aileen.

O'Hara examined his .38 and discovered it hadn't been water-damaged.

"I'm sure Thelma will be okay for the time," he said. "We're returning to pay a surprise call upon Lawyer Barker. If I'm not mistaken, he had a hand in what has just happened."

Crowded into the small coupe, they passed a maroon sedan coming from the direction of the Barker residence. At the moment, O'Hara was thankful for the change to the coupe. He had a hunch that the maroon sedan would have stopped if they had been identified.

O'HARA punched the buzzer at Lawyer Barker's big house. The five or six times he punched it brought no results. A queer look came over his face.

"It doesn't pay to play with fire," he observed to no one in particular.

He tried the big door and the latch had not been closed. When he went in and turned toward the living-room, he held out an arm and told Aileen to stay back. He could hear Chubby Merkle's teeth chattering. He knew that Chubby had the same sensation that he had encountered. The hardboiled police reporter had experienced it all too often. That sweetish smell in the air could be but one thing. That was human blood.

The one-time big-shot Arnold Barker, more recently shyter mouthpiece for racketeers, lay in front of the fireplace. There was ample reason for the scent of human blood. Most of Arnold Barker's blood had been drained from two deep knife wounds

in his throat. There might have been a possible witness if it had not been that the aged butler lay across a chair. The back of his skull had been crushed.

"Now I know," O'Hara said softly to himself. "Barker, the shyster, is no longer useful to Gent Barillo. I should call Chief Watkins but there's no sense in stirring up the law until discovery of the crime comes about in due course."

He came out to Aileen and Chubby Merkle, shaking his head.

"Lawyer Barker will be of no further use in finding your uncle, Aileen," he said gently. "I think we have business with a truck driver. Some things are beginning to add up. Hundreds of trucks are hauling the winter produce out of the Everglades. That racket would be peanuts for Gent Barillo, but—many mysterious things happen in the heart of the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamps."

CHAPTER V

A Living Ghost

THIS TRUCK DRIVER had the drooping jowls of a bulldog and less than the intelligence of a smart monkey in his eyes. He bore the remarkable name of Bowser. He was gloomily happy.

While the Aussie sisters were in each other's arms, O'Hara studied the heavy-featured Bowser. The abducted truck driver had something more than respect for his red-headed abductor.

Thelma's nose was straight and she lacked freckles. Her skin was darker than Aileen's, more in harmony with her coppery hair. Bowser's truck was parked in front of the Venetian Apartments and was piled high with crated lettuce from the truck farms far back in the Everglades.

"Two men grabbed me and put me into a car when I came out of the cinema," explained Thelma. "I was blindfolded and gagged. The car went many miles. I could hear frogs and loons and other swamp birds. I guessed we were driving west from Miami."

"How come you're here?" asked O'Hara.

"Oh, that," said Thelma. "I was put into a small hut with but one guard. I took his gun away from him and hit him over the head. Then I saw Bowser starting out

with his truck. I climbed over the lettuce crates and held my gun against Bowser's neck. So he brought me here."

Thelma told her simple story with a little smile, but then her brown eyes clouded.

"I think I've found Uncle Nathaniel," she told Aileen. "An old man with a white beard was taken into a canoe. He was crying out, 'I can't stand another night out there.' I heard one man tell the old man he would soon have company and then he would be glad to talk. That was all before the canoe disappeared."

This was clicking with what O'Hara already had surmised. He had guessed that Uncle Nathaniel Court was being held by the Gent Barillo mob. The abduction had been engineered by the dead Attorney Barker.

"With two millions in ice at stake and the girls' uncle holding the secret of the diamonds, why should Gent Barillo take a chance on having to split with Barker?" muttered O'Hara. "But there's more to it than the diamonds."

O'Hara turned upon Bowser.

"All the truckers coming out of the 'glades have been paying off to Gent Barillo, haven't they?" demanded O'Hara.

Bowser stuttered a denial of knowing anything about it. O'Hara slapped the big trucker to the floor. When he got up, he slapped him down again.

"You're all through anyway when they find your truck," asserted O'Hara. "You might as well come clean."

"We've been paying five dollars a week to different fellows," admitted Bowser sullenly. "Now will you let me go?"

"No, O'Hara," put in Thelma suddenly. "I've heard about these American rackets, but there's more than that. There's more than lettuce on that truck. I heard a slickly dressed man telling some of the others to 'be sure the stuff has heads of lettuce packed around it in the inside crates.'"

A trucking-protection racket. A kidnaping in a play for two millions in diamonds. Now the suggestion that Gent Barillo was working the Miami and northbound trucks for smuggling.

Gent Barillo appeared to have done himself well after the closing of the ~~lace trade~~ ~~lace trade~~. O'Hara tried to guess what might be smuggled in such quantity as to be hidden in the trucks.

IT was well after daylight now. A boy on a bicycle rode along crying out an extra of the morning *Trib*. O'Hara sent Chubby out to buy a copy.

Several things had been busted wide open. First, the bodies of Attorney Barker and his butler had been found by a neighborhood patrolman.

Second, one Legs Killian, identified as "one of Gent Barillo's boys," had been discovered at daylight. The gunsel had been sitting on a bench in Bayfront Park. A slug had gone into one ear and out of the other.

O'Hara was tired, but there was no time to lose. Thelma's description of the gray-haired prisoner in the 'glades made it seem certain that Nathaniel Court had been a prisoner and tortured for many days, perhaps weeks.

Attorney Barker had lied though when he had said he had not heard from Nathaniel Court for two months.

"I don't care about the diamonds," cried out Aileen. "If only we can save Uncle Nathaniel."

"I'm having a look-see inside that truck-load of lettuce," announced O'Hara. "Chubby, you stay here and help keep an eye upon Bowser."

Thelma laughed shortly. "That's all right, but Bowser likes me too much to want to run away. Don't you, Bowser?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the droop-jowled driver.

His dull eyes held all the devotion of an overgrown Newfoundland puppy.

O'Hara didn't mind Aileen's trailing him out to examine the truck. Because the Aussie girl caught his hand and held it in a warm clasp. He was swearing inside, thinking of her being the heiress to millions in diamonds. O'Hara was wishing he had never met the Aussie sisters.

They reached the grilled entrance of the Venetian Apartments which stood out alone in a wide, unbuilt block. O'Hara swore and made a jump forward.

The loaded truck was starting to move away. O'Hara could not see the driver, being on the wrong side. But he cleared his path and made a run for it. He almost missed Aileen keeping pace easily beside him.

Apparently there were no witnesses to the departure of the loaded truck or the



Arms bound, the old man was taken off in the canoe.

pursuit of O'Hara and Aileen. The big truck picked up speed slowly. O'Hara believed he could intercept it or at least get a crack at the driver when a turn had to be made into the Gateway Boulevard leading to the Tamiami Trail.

That was a big mistake. O'Hara had seen no sign of human life as he raced with Aileen to catch the truck at the corner turn. The truck appeared to stall, stopped abruptly near a long stretch of vacant lots.

O'Hara saw the black and the maroon sedans too late. They were parked around the corner. And four tough hoods were bobbing up from the protection of wild cactus and cabbage palms.

Two of the hoods carried choppers. Two depended upon their rods.

There was a fifth fellow who seemed to be armed with only a toothpick. O'Hara had seen the sartorially elegant Gent Barillo too often to mistake the racketeer. Barillo came up facing Aileen and O'Hara.

"Too bad for you you didn't drown in Indian Creek," said Barillo softly. "So you had to stick your newsy nose into this, O'Hara. You'll be a long time under when the story is printed, if it ever is. You an' the redhead get into the black sedan."

Even then O'Hara believed the spirited Aussie girl would have made a fight against

overwhelming odds. Then O'Hara ceased to believe anything at all. Gun metal crashed across the back of his skull.

O'HARA was seated alongside the red-headed Aussie girl when his senses came back. He was completely taped, gagged, and blinded. He knew Aileen was there only by the soft pressure of her shoulder.

O'Hara's intimate knowledge of the Everglades informed him their car must have come some distance along the Tamiami Trail, the only direct, paved highway between Miami and the Gulf Coast. He knew when the car turned into slower and bumpier going that it was following one of the countless sand-rut roads penetrating the heart of the 'glades and Big Cypress Swamp.

O'Hara could hear Barillo, in the seat ahead, conversing in a low tone. The car's radio was blasting. A news bulletin came suddenly and it had the impact of an electric shock:

"SPECIAL BULLETIN:—Thelma Court, one of the Australian girls wanted for several days by the police for wrecking the office of the murdered Attorney Barker, has been picked up in Coral Gables. The girl was in the company of a truck driver who is alleged to have been connected with the Gent Barillo mob. Thelma Court is being held in connection with the Barker murder, on the report of a filling-station attendant that a red-headed girl and two men hired a car from him which has not been returned. The attendant stated that the red-headed girl and the men spoke of going to Attorney Barker's residence. The other sister and James O'Hara, newspaper police reporter, are on the police pickup list."

O'Hara could feel the convulsive straining of Aileen's soft body alongside him. Barillo swore heavily and turned off the radio.

"That ain't helping you two one damn' bit," he growled over his shoulder.

CHAPTER VI

An Old Man's Nerve

THE TAPE WAS TORN painfully from their eyes and lips when the car finally

came to a jolting halt. Gent Barillo's face was oily and his black eyes mirrored his enjoyment.

"What you're seein', O'Hara, won't be doin' you a damn' bit of good unless you kick in and be reasonable. Then what you're seein' won't be here to make you a story anyway."

O'Hara saw a small but complete warehouse and wharf set upon a deep black channel. He could tell from the oyster shells on the piling and the tide-run marks that this channel was in Big Cypress Swamp. Also it had to be close to the Gulf of Mexico. As he looked a loaded vegetable truck was pulled up alongside the small warehouse. Four or five small crates were brought out of the warehouse and shoved to the inside of the crated vegetables.

Barillo snapped out an order: "Let's get this started and we'll see what the old man will do when he finds his pretty red-headed niece on the platform of the sun shack."

O'Hara might have said several things but he kept his teeth clicked shut. Although her mouth and eyebrows were reddened where the tape had been torn off, Aileen smiled at him.

"I think we'll soon find Uncle Nathaniel," she half-whispered.

Their legs had not been bound and they were shoved toward the flat-bottomed boat. Two men picked up long poles then sent the boat across the black channel into what appeared to be an endless space of more black water. O'Hara shuddered in spite of himself.

While the swamp here became more shallow and the knees of an occasional cypress thrust down into the black water, O'Hara knew that all the space they were covering was filled with deadly sink holes and quicksands. O'Hara didn't miss either the spots of gaping white that looked like open mouths. They contained the deadly fangs of the one snake more deadly than the rattlers, the cotton-mouthed water moccasin.

It seemed to O'Hara the boat had been poled nearly a mile and the course it took hid the warehouse and wharf from view. The light spring sun was already broiling O'Hara's face and hands. He knew Aileen must be suffering equally. But even this did not prepare him for the cruelty and

torture that lay ahead, devised by the sadistic soul of Gent Barillo for the seeming purpose of compelling a helpless old man

to reveal the secret of where he had hidden two millions in diamonds.

It was a sheet-iron shack that stood upon the tiny hummock entirely surrounded by a wide expanse of the deadly black water with its quicksands and its poisonous moccasins.

Not until Aileen and he were compelled to mount a small raised platform inside

Already they could see the fire on shore and knew that they were near the end of the trail.



the sheet-iron shack did O'Hara realize to the full the torture that was ahead. It was only after their swearing captors tore the tape from their arms and freed them, keeping their guns upon them, that O'Hara realized what was to come.

O'Hara realized too that the emaciated body with only torn rags as a covering, and with a face swollen under a white beard to almost blackness, must be the Uncle Nathaniel of the two Aussie girls.

Their captors lost no time in leaving the shack. The shack was boiling to a temperature far above a hundred and which was filled with literally millions of mosquitoes and tiny black gnats.

THE attack of the insects was immediate and vicious. O'Hara tried to protect Aileen's face and neck with his coat. It was now late afternoon. Finally the coat had to serve to keep the myriad of mosquitoes and gnats off both Aileen and O'Hara as much as possible.

The emaciated old man had pulled an old gunnysack about his face. He seemed in a delirium and his eyes were swollen almost shut. Uncle Nathaniel, however, was of saner mind than he seemed, though his thickened lips only whispered:

"I'll never tell . . . Barker will never find . . . diamonds are where nobody . . ."

Uncle Nathaniel laughed croakingly, deliriously. O'Hara agreed that Attorney Barker would never find the diamonds.

"Full moon—" whispered Uncle Nathaniel. "Water comes . . . fish . . . 'gators crawl in. Aileen, I know that is you. Diamonds gone . . . have few thousands . . . you and Thelma . . ."

O'Hara quieted the old, apparently dying man and he slept.

O'Hara saw the sheet-iron door had not been locked. The black water and the oozy quicksands provided prison enough. O'Hara studied the tide marks inside the shack.

The four-foot platform was necessary. High tide, now already in flood, would come into the shack around the platform. O'Hara looked out through the doorway.

Hundreds of fish, Gulf fish—red snappers, kingfish, tuna—were floating toward the shack on the tide.

"I have the answer to Barillo's smuggling game," said O'Hara. "Commercial

fishing boats are being passed by the Coast Guard. Gent Barillo isn't in the fish business. The fish are being dumped from boats coming to his wharf. That means something much more valuable has been hidden under the iced fish."

"Do you think this Barillo wishes us to die out here?" asked Aileen.

"No," stated O'Hara. "Barillo must realize that Uncle Nathaniel hasn't many hours to live. He may leave us here part of the night as a final play upon your uncle's nerves, hoping he'll break. I don't believe he ever will."

"And then—?" Aileen's voice was anxious.

The girl's face and hands were swollen from insect bites. But she still tried to smile.

O'Hara had suddenly made up his mind.

"There'll be no *and then*, Aileen," he said. "High tide will give me three or four feet of water over the quicksand ooze. I can swim out by resting some on cypress roots. We were brought no more than a mile."

"Then what will you do, O'Hara?" asked Aileen.

"Barillo's few men will be busy, off-guard. There are Tommy-guns. I'll need only one. Then I'll be coming back for you and Uncle Nathaniel."

"But how will you find the direction of Barillo's wharf?"

It was growing dark, suddenly as always over the 'glades. A faint glowing light appeared above the trees in the distance.

"There it is," said O'Hara. "Barillo is rushing to unload a boat. A fire has been built for light to load a truck. That'll be my pilot light. I can make it."

O'Hara was staring at the bodies of fish floating in on the tide. The water was in a turmoil out there. Many fish were disappearing.

O'Hara had forgotten about the 'gators.

"Yes, O'Hara, we can make it!" exclaimed Aileen suddenly. "It's dark enough to start."

"What do you mean, *we* can make it?" growled O'Hara. "It's *my* job. Once the feet are put down into the oozy bottom to rest, the quicksand will take you. I'm a good swimmer and I'll take breathers on cypress roots."

He looked at Aileen, swore and turned

his head quickly away. The amazing Aussie redhead already had her dress stripped over her head. She was right down to essentials for swimming.

"Thelma and I hold the mile swimming record at home," Aileen smiled. "If you get tired, O'Hara, I'll give you a hand."

CHAPTER VII

Tommy-Gun Talk

O'HARA SLIPPED into the warm, brackish water with Aileen close beside him.

"I forgot about the 'gators," he muttered.

"Alligators never attack humans in my natural history," said Aileen. "They eat fish, eggs and small animals. Unlike the crocs—"

"Is there anything you Aussie gals haven't learned?" muttered O'Hara.

"Not much," admitted Aileen casually. "Except one thing, and O'Hara, I think I'm taking lessons in that since meeting you."

Her small hand touched his shoulder, then she was slipping ahead with a gliding crawl stroke that seemed to mark her as tireless. Although O'Hara knew 'gators were not dangerous to humans, the stir in the water about them sent little bugs crawling along his spine.

Porpoises, as big as cows, had followed schools of mullet into the Big Cypress Swamp. Combined with the 'gators they kept the water churning. Phosphorescent light played over the water.

O'Hara could be thankful for this. Otherwise their own swimming might have been marked later or if Barillo had decided to send out a boat. When they reached a jutting cypress knee, O'Hara was compelled to pull himself up for a rest.

Aileen stayed partly in the water, her white legs moving slowly.

Suddenly the rustle and hissing of a deadly moccasin came from the big cypress knee on the side nearest Aileen. The reptile's head was within inches of Aileen's face.

O'Hara was chilled, but he went into action. He could see only the snow-white mouth of the snake in the moonlight. O'Hara hurled himself across Aileen's

body. His stomach shrank, but his hands snatched directly at that white, venomous mouth. His sudden movement and considerable luck carried the four-foot moccasin with him on into the water.

O'Hara expected every instant to feel the deadly fangs. Yet he clutched at every available part of the writhing snake. He was crushing the moccasin's triangular head upon the cypress root before he fully realized that he had escaped being bitten.

The Aussie redhead was not one to bubble over.

"You'll do in a pinch or for a lifetime," she remarked quietly.

Which was sufficient to drive the shaking reaction from O'Hara and give strength to his almost paralyzed muscles.

THE flat boat, with two men poling, stood out, a magnified, enormous shadow. O'Hara touched Aileen and whispered:

"Stay back. I'll have those two mugs in the water before they know what hit them. I'll get at least one rod."

"You keep forgetting me," replied Aileen. "Suppose you take the mug, as you call him, at one end of the boat, and I'll work on the other one. It will be easier if their legs are suddenly snatched from under them."

The two disgruntled mugs were cursing over the job of poling the flat boat over the shoal black water. The boat carried an outboard motor for deeper channels. It was unsafe to use this motor where the water shoaled and was filled with cypress roots and snags. Once jammed with the tide running out, the boat might remain there for many hours.

As O'Hara reluctantly consented, Aileen, whom he had to admit was a better swimmer than he, glided silently toward one end of the boat. O'Hara selected the chunky mobster poling at the stern. He noticed the outboard motor. He didn't realize then how much that motor was to mean within the next hour.

A sibilant hiss came from Aileen. Because 'gators still stirred the water and thumped it loudly with their tails as they fought over the floating fish, the noiseless approach of Aileen and O'Hara was unnoticed.

Thus it came about that two unsuspect-

ing muggs uttered combined yells. They must have believed that a pair of 'gators had reached into the boat and closed upon their legs. O'Hara vaguely saw the mugg seized by Aileen go toppling overboard, his pole clattering to the bottom of the boat.

O'Hara pulled a fast one. He locked his arms around the legs of the mobster at the stern pole. He jerked them from under him, throwing him into the boat on his face. Because the mugg was half-stunned, O'Hara was into the boat and handing him solid punches on the back of his neck before the mugg recovered. He retrieved an automatic from the man's shoulder holster and just to make sure, he clunked him on the back of the skull with the gun barrel.

He looked and Aileen was pulling herself into the bow of the boat.

"I couldn't help it, O'Hara," she half-apologized. "That fellow hit his head on the side of the boat and went under. He didn't come up so I missed getting his gun."

By this time O'Hara saw that the boat was but a couple of hundred yards off the Barillo wharf. The fire on shore outlined a small fishing schooner and a truck being loaded. Half a dozen figures were moving between the fishing boat across the wharf to the truck.

O'Hara saw Gent Barillo's slick well-garbed figure standing fully in the light of the fire. None of the men seemed to be especially on guard, but one mugg held a light Tommy-gun over his left arm. It caused O'Hara to have a suspicion that one of the three fishermen he saw aboard the boat might not be in thorough agreement with the smuggling racket.

The tide, having reached its flood, was setting out strongly. Drainage from the miles of flat black water was flowing in the deeper boat channel that led to the Gulf.

O'Hara half-whispered to Aileen: "The tide's swinging along the shore directly into that old wooden wharf and the boat. Pole in close to shore. I've an idea we're going swimming again."

They had but the one gun that had been seized by O'Hara. Because of the firelight brilliance, the boat was still in deep darkness.

"Slip into the water, Aileen," directed

O'Hara. "We'll make it ashore here. I'll dump this sleeping mugg close to shore."

He made sure the automatic clip was filled with its quota of ten slugs. Half a minute later he had emptied all the gasoline from the outboard motor tank by turning it up and releasing the cap. The extra two-gallon can with the precious priority fuel was next poured along the bottom of the wooden boat.

WHEN they were in the water, O'Hara said ruefully: "This is the chance we have to take." He put the automatic close over the gas and triggered it once. There was a flash of flame.

The tide ran faster as they neared the channel and swung the flaming flat boat directly into the flimsy wooden wharf and the fishing schooner. The crack of that shot had startled Barillo and the half-dozen men with him. They were rushing onto the wharf watching the oncoming boat.

At this moment O'Hara's feet touched solid coral. Aileen and he climbed out. The boat was within a few yards of the wharf. Barillo's men with drawn guns were watching the boat, looking behind it into the darkness. The direction of that one shot had been indefinite.

Aileen and O'Hara were within thirty or forty yards of the wharf and warehouse but in the darkness on the other side of the fire. A man ran out with a long pole evidently intending to fend off the flaming boat.

O'Hara snapped a carefully aimed slug. The man with the pole crumpled down with a leg shattered. O'Hara dropped, pulling Aileen down. Instantly the guns of Barillo's men were blazing. Slugs whined into the darkness. O'Hara had Aileen flattened behind a slight hummock.

Gent Barillo was the first man to dive for cover. He didn't quite make it. Once more O'Hara used a carefully aimed slug. He was thankful now for the long practice he had had on the police target range. He was convinced he had shattered Barillo's knee as the racketeer rolled and screamed.

There was a slight crash. Gas-fed flames licked up over the flimsy wooden wharf. It caught and the blaze spread. O'Hara counted four men darting out of the warehouse which the flames were swiftly approaching. There was a grinding noise of a motor

starting. A loaded vegetable truck came into full view in the firelight scarcely twenty yards away. O'Hara wasted two slugs before a front tire of the truck blew out with an explosion louder than that of the guns.

"Stay here, Aileen," grunted O'Hara.

He was weaving through the darkness. Barillo's boys were piling off the truck. One carried a Tommy-gun. O'Hara was suddenly so close upon them that he might have been mistaken for one of their own number in the darkness. The man with the Tommy-gun found out his mistake too late. O'Hara's automatic cracked across the back of his skull. In O'Hara's mind was a picture of a dying skeleton that had been a man, out there in an iron shack where he had undergone weeks of torture. . . .

Only Barillo himself and one of the fisherman aboard the schooner were alive when the Tommy-gun stopped rattling in O'Hara's hands.

O'HARA'S first move was to strip the clothes from one of the mobsters. He handed them to Aileen in the darkness. Gent Barillo was pleading, cursing, promising big dough. O'Hara simply wore a hard grin. He found that the surviving fisherman was friendly.

From the ice hold of the fishing boat and from the burning warehouse they brought a dozen small, tightly wired bales.

"It was a tight little racket," said O'Hara to Aileen. "There's still a boat here. We must go back for your uncle."

OWL O'HARA pointed out to the county and city law the bales of deadly marijuana that had been brought in by fishing boats and smuggled into Miami and northward in the vegetable trucks. "Only the greediness, first of that shyster Barker and then of Barillo who had him murdered, brought us to this racket that pays off big both in money and the lives of boys and girls."

"One of these days you'll get too far ahead of the department," growled Chief Watkins from Miami, "and when you do —"

O'Hara grinned at him. The police doctor said Uncle Nathaniel had some chance for life and that his mind was already clearing. Thelma had been brought out in a police car and joined her sister Aileen. Bowser, the truck driver, had been released. Chubby Merkle had returned the filling-station car by remote control. He had hired a boy to take it back.

O'Hara looked at Aileen. The Aussie redhead looked just as beautiful in the mobster's rough clothes as she had in a dress.

"Too bad," he muttered, "you girls have to have millions in diamonds."

"But they haven't millions in diamonds," came the thin voice of Uncle Nathaniel. "That is what I've been trying to tell. The diamonds were in a steel safe on my private yacht. The insurance lapsed because of war risk. Before it could be renewed, the yacht was apparently sabotaged and sank in the deep water off the Miami Beach channel. There are no diamonds. There will be only a few thousands of my own money for Aileen and Thelma."

O'Hara drew in his breath sharply. Aileen and Thelma were smiling at each other.

"Now," said Thelma. "We can get us a job in an American war plant like we wanted to do. Possibly my boy friend in Melbourne will now listen to sense when he finds out we're no longer heiresses to a diamond fortune."

Aileen's blue-green eyes turned toward O'Hara.

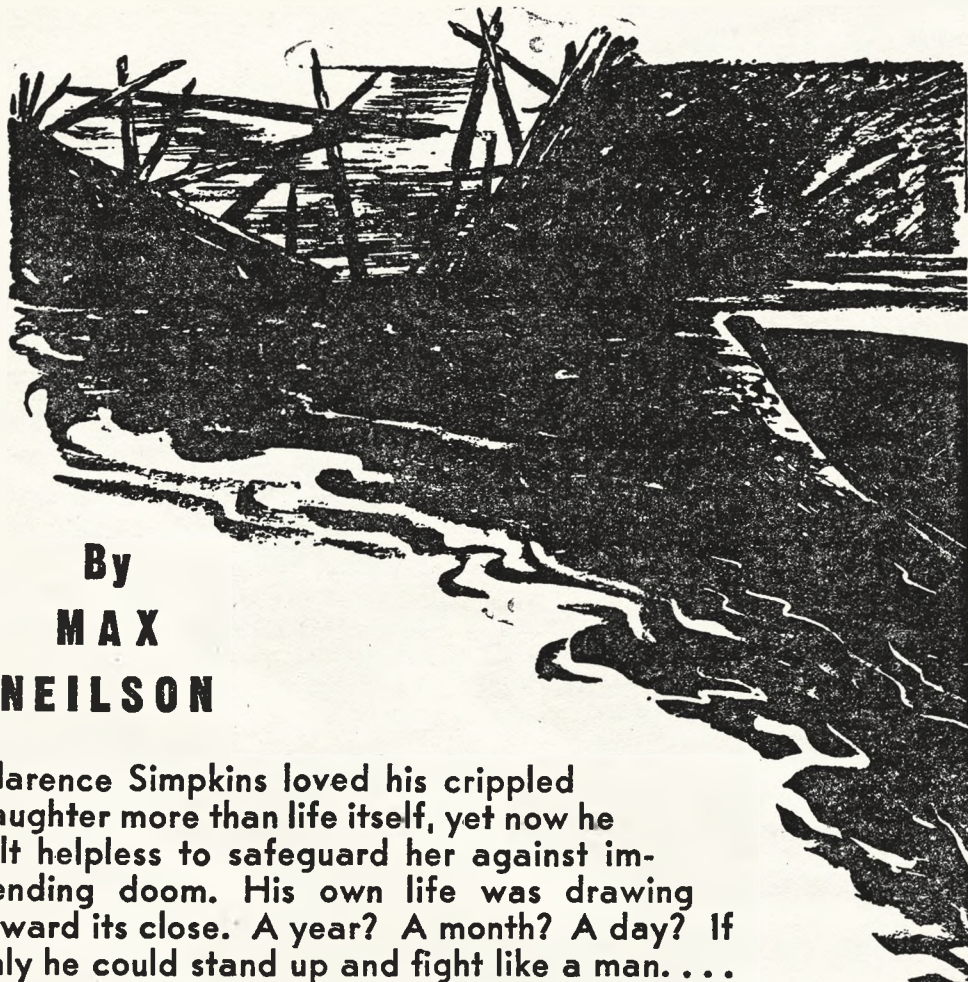
"I wonder," she said quietly, "if I could find an American boy friend who would also listen to sense."

O'Hara grinned broadly. "You're sure enough through looking," he said and took her in his arms.

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By
**MAX
NEILSON**

Clarence Simpkins loved his crippled daughter more than life itself, yet now he felt helpless to safeguard her against impending doom. His own life was drawing toward its close. A year? A month? A day? If only he could stand up and fight like a man. . . .

THE rain pounded dismally on the Montana ranch house roof. The dim, lamp-lit living room where Clarence Simpkins sat alone, gripping the arms of his chair, was chilled, dismal—as dismal as his thoughts for it seemed to Clarence Simpkins now that this man Peter Daigh was an invincible antagonist. Daigh was going to get what he wanted, in spite of anything Simpkins could do. And the fellow knew it.

You could see that in his quiet, confident smile, especially today when the letters from Katie came. You could see it in his contemptuous manner toward Simpkins. It was as though Daigh were sardonically willing to admit now what a damn' dirty game he had been playing. He had the cards to win, and to hell with Simpkins.

The letter from Katie, which had come

this afternoon, lay on Simpkins' lap. He adjusted his glasses, picked it up, read it again with its words pounding in his thoughts, like the inexorable pounding of the chill and dismal rain on his ranch-house roof. "Father dear, I don't want to hurt you, but I have to tell you that I haven't changed . . . I'm eighteen now. I'm coming now to Peter."

He didn't have to read it through; he knew it all by heart. Katie was a woman now. She would be gentle and sweet with her father, as always. But she was taking the moulding of her destiny into her own hands. She had come suddenly to a crossroads, just this last winter. And now she was taking the wrong turning. So confidently starting into the path that would wreck her life.

"I love him, father dear . . . I'll be

THE DEAD MAN WINS



With the launch lurching, wallowing in the trough of the waves, he realized his danger.

home almost as soon as you get this letter. . . . And please don't make it hard for us. We've planned it all, and we're going to get married a few days after I arrive. . . ."

Damnably sentences. If only he could make her understand! If only things had broken a little differently last Winter. If the war hadn't caught Bert up in its maelstrom and taken him away. Bert would

have made the little crippled Katie a good husband. He would have cherished and guarded her all her life. If only Bert had married her before he left; before this damned Peter Daigh had come along. But that wasn't Bert's style. He wanted to wait 'till the war was over.

It was wretched irony that just today, the letter from Bert had come, in the

same mail with Katie's letter. Bert was coming home on furlough. He'd be here soon. But that would be too late. There was no one here but the futile Clarence Simpkins—just a wretched invalid who couldn't stand up and fight like a man because his pounding heart, even from thinking about it, would send those horrible agonizing pains through his chest. The dread angina. For a year now there was no doctor who could say that Clarence Simpkins could live very much longer. A year? A month? A day? . . . You must be quiet. Avoid emotional stress. That's all they could tell him. That, and to take the little pills instantly he felt the pains—the little pills which day and night he kept within reach of his hand.

What a futile antagonist for the swaggering Peter Daigh! No wonder the fellow was contemptuous!

"It's nine-thirty, Mr. Simpkins. Don't you think we'd better get started?"

SIMPKINS looked up to see Daigh standing in the living room doorway. He was a big, handsome man of about forty, with wavy black hair and a touch of grey at his temples. His long black raincoat glistened in the living room lamplight.

"Her train arrives at White Horse Junction at quarter of eleven," Daigh added. "We haven't too much time, especially on a night like this."

"Is it that late? I hadn't realized. You're right. Get the car out, Daigh. I'll be ready in a minute."

Even now Simpkins could feel that premonitory constriction of his chest: a twinge of the terrible pains; that sudden rush of weakness from his accelerating heart. He sat huddled in his chair, with his hand crumpling Katie's letter. The yellow lamp-light fell on him, but behind his chair there were great encroaching shadows, like the blackness of death, lurking there so ready to leap upon him. He was a small, frail man, hardly older than Daigh, with sparse sandy hair and mild blue eyes.

All his life Clarence Simpkins had been frail, delicate, ineffectual. Despite the strength of his spirit, he had never been able to accomplish anything. A failure. Often he had bitterly contemplated it. His father had left him a considerable fortune. But he had done nothing with it. He was

a widower now. Wealthy; and Katie was his only child, all there was in life of importance to Simpkins.

An evil fate seemed always to have dogged Clarence Simpkins. In her childhood Katie had suffered infantile paralysis, so that one of her legs was shriveled. She was not pretty, just gentle, sweet. And with his angina getting steadily worse, Simpkins had bought this Montana ranch farm. Just a small ranch where he did a little truck farming. Then young Bert Greet, from White Horse, had met Katie. And it was Bert's idea to enlarge the farm. To Simpkins, physically unable to cope with the activities of business, Bert had seemed suddenly like a son who would carry on, who would accomplish so much that Simpkins had always wanted to do, but could not. And Bert would marry Katie. He sincerely loved her. It would be Bert who would care for Katie when, so soon now, Simpkins would be gone.

Then the war took Bert; and there was the enlarged farm that needed a manager, and Simpkins had hired this Peter Daigh, about whom he knew—then—almost nothing. . . .

"The car is ready, Mr. Simpkins. I think we should start now."

Again the tall, powerful figure of Daigh stood in the doorway. His wet raincoat was buttoned up around his throat. His black wavy hair was plastered with the rain, and the raindrops glistened on his face. To little Clarence Simpkins, sitting there huddled, frightened with the constriction of his chest and his panting breath, the figure of Daigh seemed incredible with its rugged masculine strength. This adversary who somehow must be beaten. . . .

"I don't think you'd better go, Mr. Simpkins. A night like this—" That faint smile was playing on Daigh's handsome mouth. "I'll meet Katie. And if the storm gets worse, we can put up in White Horse and I'll bring her home tomorrow."

Baiting him. You could see it in Daigh's ironic smile, and in that gleam from his handsome dark eyes.

"I'm going," Simpkins said. "Get my raincoat and hood, Daigh."

"Whatever you say," Daigh smiled.

ACCURSED pounding heart. The pain around it made it seem to Simpkins

that the damnable thing was trying to burst out of his chest. His hand reached for the little box of pills in his pocket. But he checked himself. That was weakness which Daigh mustn't see.

And it occurred to Clarence Simpkins then that heart attack or not, life or death, he was going to beat off Peter Daigh. Daigh wasn't going to marry Katie. He thought he had it cinched, but he didn't. Albert Green would come back from his furlough, and he'd be the one who in the end would marry Katie. She'd forget her infatuation for this handsome scoundrel quick enough. Maybe it would be Clarence Simpkins' last fight—but he would win.

He stood up from his chair, with his hand resting on it to steady himself.

"Katie wrote you today, her letter tells me," he heard himself saying quietly. "I suppose she said about the same thing to us both. You're going to be married in a few days. And you know I can't stop you."

Daigh turned from the closet where he was getting Simpkins' raincoat and hood. He looked startled. "That's right," he said cheerfully. "And we hope you're going to be nice about it. Katie hates to upset you, she really does."

"We'll talk about that on the way to the train," Simpkins said. "Come on, let's get started."

"Talk about it? We have talked about it," Daigh retorted. "You sent Katie to her Aunt in New York, so she'd get over loving me, and she didn't."

Daigh came with the raincoat and hood. He stood, like a great mountain of strength towering over Simpkins; and when he gazed down Simpkins saw that he was still smiling.

"You found out about my Chicago record, as you called it?" Daigh persisted. "So what? Have you told Katie about it, so she'll stop loving me?"

"No, I haven't. But I—" Wretched futility. If only he could take this fellow by the throat, instead of standing here panting, with the room unsteady around him and his mind more on the anguished tumult in his chest than on what he was trying to say to Daigh.

"Well, it may surprise you to know, then, that I've told her," Daigh was saying. "I'm what you call a jailbird, so what? And a lot of other—what you call unsavory

stuff. So what? I've explained all that to Katie. She's sorry I had such a raw deal. She's going to make it up to me. And you are convinced that what I'm after is not her, but this ranch? Her money—"

"Yes—I am—I can't—I don't want to talk about it now—" Simpkins turned away. He took one of his pills. He knew he had a few trump cards, but he wouldn't play them now. Later, in the car. Later, when he felt a little better.

"I'm satisfied not to talk about it at all," Daigh retorted. His hand went to Simpkins' shoulder, as though it were a gesture of affection, but there was still that faint ironic smile playing on his lips. "You shouldn't excite yourself. You know that. What the doctors have said—and I gave Katie my word I'd take care of you, be careful of you—"

It set Simpkins' teeth on edge, that patronizing tone. The pill was taking effect now. They were like magic, these little pills. He felt better, stronger. It came like a great wave of relief; a new strength surging in him. In the car he'd tell Daigh what he was going to do. And Daigh would see that he was beaten. He'd never marry the crippled little Katie, if he realized that he'd get no money out of it. No ranch, no nothing except the liability of Katie. . . .

"Come on," Simpkins said. "Let's get going."

SIMPKINS' big black limousine stood with the rain pouring off it. Clutching at the collar of his raincoat, Simpkins climbed into its front seat; and Daigh took his place at the wheel beside him. The April night was black, roaring with wind and rain. When the headlights snapped on, the rain was a slanting yellow curtain, like shining gauze that separated into tiny whirling droplets of gold, when you followed them with your gaze.

Even above the roar of the wind and the pound of the rain, the lashing of the White Horse River, which ran here beside the ranch, was clearly audible. They'd cross it by the Canyon Bridge, which was about a mile lower down. Then it was about a twelve-mile drive out beyond the village of White Horse to the railroad station where Katie would arrive.

They started off. The road was a sloshing, brownish ribbon of mud. It would be

slow going. But still there was plenty of time. In the sheltered darkness of the car, Simpkins felt much better. He slumped back at ease beside Daigh. He wouldn't talk about Katie now. The determination steadied him. Not now. He'd wait until they were past White Horse, and then he'd deliver his ultimatum to Daigh. Oh, he held the trump card all right, and it wouldn't take him long to play it!

"With the normal Spring thaws," Simpkins remarked conversationally as the car sloshed slowly along, "and a rain like this—three days now, hasn't it been?"

"Four," Daigh said. "It started Monday."

"Four," Simpkins agreed. "We could have flood conditions if it keeps on. The river's come up quite a bit, especially today."

Normally the river was fairly placid; but not tonight. As the road rose to the summit of a long flat butte, off to the left down in its valley the river for a moment was visible. There was pretty solid murk down there, but Simpkins could see the little patches of white where the accelerated river was lashed upon itself, with the wind nipping off the tops of its waves despite the heavy rain that was pounding them down.

"I hope Katie's train won't be late," Daigh said presently. "She'd wait in that Junction station for us, she wouldn't take a car and go on to White Horse."

It was a lonely little station, out there on the open plain. This was the first time in her life Katie had ever been away from him. If Katie arrived there and no one was there to meet her—

Simpkins shivered a little. "You're right, Daigh. Better go a little faster, don't you think?"

They were almost to the bridge now. And suddenly, far ahead of them, the headlight gleam disclosed the blob of a car standing in the muddy road. Its lights were on; the sheen of them showed the figures of men in the road. And a man waving a flashlight. Its tiny beam darted like a glinting needle in the murk.

"What's that?" Simpkins murmured.

Daigh was leaning forward tensely, trying to peer through the wet windshield where the wiper swung in its crescent back

and forth, but still the dashing rain made a blur.

Then they came to a halt. Simpkins opened his door, leaned out a little with the rain pelting him. He called:

"What's the trouble?"

The man with the flashlight came sloshing up. "The bridge went down. Just a few minutes ago, and we were damn' near on it."

Almost flood waters, and the bridge was gone. Simpkins slammed his door. Daigh was talking to two of the other men.

"Turn us around, Daigh," Simpkins said.

THE sagging bridge was visible now; its splintered roadway was leprous with part of it gone, part of it dangling horribly down into the lashing white water; and a broken end of it was standing grotesquely up into the air.

"Turn us around, Daigh," Simpkins repeated. Queer. He suddenly felt better than he had felt in weeks. Katie needed him at the Junction; he would be there.

"We'll have to try telephoning to the Junction," Daigh said, "if the wires aren't down. Katie can stay in White Horse."

"We'll cross in the launch," Simpkins said crisply. "Make it fast, Daigh. The crossing could take us quite a while, but we'll make it."

With a normal river it was only a twenty-minute crossing from Simpkins' boathouse diagonally over to the White Horse dock. They still had time. . . . There was in Simpkins' mind only a vague sort of triumph that when he told Daigh what he proposed doing if Daigh married Katie, the fellow would see that the game wasn't worth the candle; only that thought, and the determination to get to the Junction before Katie's train arrived. She'd be horribly worried, with no one there to meet her. . . .

The car was lurching back along the muddy road now, with the wind behind them. But the storm seemed roaring louder than ever.

"You'd better let me go," Daigh said suddenly out of silence between them. "That open launch—your heart—"

"My heart's all right," Simpkins retorted. "Drive direct to the boathouse, Daigh. We haven't much time."



Even as he sat there he could feel that sudden rush of weakness.

The river was a black abyss of murk. They parked the car, climbed down into the launch. It was a crude little affair, which in good weather Simpkins used for fishing more often than for transportation over to White Horse. Entirely open, like a large, rather narrow rowboat. The two-cylinder engine was in its center. The tiller was just a rudder handle at the stern.

"You'd better steer," Simpkins said. "We ought to see the lights of the White Horse dock before we're halfway across."

They backed out into the murk, turned in a crescent and headed for White Horse. Once out of the shelter of the boat house, the wind and the rain came with a solid blast. The little launch wallowed for a moment and then steadied as Daigh headed the bow diagonally against the slanting whitecaps. The wind was against the current. It blew the heads off the waves with

flying spume that whipped at Simpkins, stinging his face.

"You'd better sit back here with me," Daigh suggested. "Careful as you move around!"

The little launch occasionally was plunging. "I'll spread a tarpaulin over the engine," Simpkins called. The wind whipped away his words, but Daigh heard them and nodded. Daigh had a lantern in the bottom of the boat, sheltered under the side seat. Its light gleamed on his wet face.

The exposed ignition of the little engine had to be kept dry. Simpkins spread the tarpaulin and tied it down. Then he made his way back to the stern. They sat with the lantern light streaming up between them.

The little launch plunged on. The swirling river current was far more rapid than normal. Simpkins could see that. At the water level here it was all a dark blur of flying spume and rain, with the whitecaps coming toward the bow of the lurching launch like dancing little ghosts appear-

ing out of the darkness, flattening out under the boat, and reappearing behind the stern. That's about all you could see close at hand. But in the distance, the main configurations of the rises of ground beyond the river banks were dimly visible against the blur of the sky. Daigh was steering by them.

FIVE minutes. Ten minutes. Simpkins could see that they were nearly in mid-stream now. The wind and the rain seemed to increase in fury; and the swirling current here was far stronger than before.

But they would be in time. They'd be at the Junction when Katie's train arrived. . . .

"I might as well talk to you now," Simpkins said suddenly. "Let's have it out, Daigh, before we meet Katie."

"I thought we did have it out," Daigh retorted. "You don't want me for a son-in-law. You've made that plain. You've tried every way you can think of to queer me with Katie. You want plain talk now, for once, don't you?"

"Have your say, then I'll have mine," Simpkins said. His quiet, even tone seemed to surprise Daigh. The lantern glow on Daigh's face showed his surprise, his sudden, quick sidewise glance at his companion.

"Okay," Daigh agreed. "I came to your ranch last Winter, and you hired me. I've always done my work well—"

"No argument on that," Simpkins put in.

"Right. No argument on that. And then I fell in love with Katie. And she fell in love with me—"

"You lie," Simpkins said abruptly. "I didn't know it then, but I sensed it, and I know it now. Oh I've looked into your record—"

"We know that," Daigh retorted sardonically. "We've gone all over that."

"Before you went to jail," Simpkins kept on steadily. "A woman of sixty, wasn't she? That foolish woman who married you and gave you her money? That didn't work out very well, did it? The money didn't last you more than a couple of years, and then you deserted her and she divorced you. Oh I've spent quite a lot of money, these past few months, finding out about you. A gentleman adventurer, living by his wits.

Then you descended to burglary. You shouldn't have done that, Daigh. It wasn't in your line. They caught you too easily."

How good it was to open up and talk to Daigh like this! To forget your failing heart—just for this once to forget it, so that you could fight this scoundrel like a man. . . . Simpkins sat with the spume flying past him. His hand clung to the gunwale of the plunging launch. The lashed river waters, the driving rain, the lowering sky overhead, it was all just a blur. But the lamplight between him and Daigh was clear. The lamplight on Daigh's handsome, rugged face was something to focus on. And Daigh was still smiling that faint, contemptuous smile.

"So you've got it all straight," Daigh said calmly. "And what good does it do you? Do you think I'm a fool? You told me, about two weeks ago, what you had learned. And you gave me a week off, remember? Did you think I went to see some old friends over in Billings like I told you? Well, I didn't."

"What did you do?" Simpkins knew he mustn't think about his heart. Not now. Not this time. He tried to keep Daigh from seeing that he was panting. He must keep smiling. Daigh did that. You couldn't tell his thoughts because he always kept that faint, confident smile. He mustn't see the anguish that the pains always stamped on Simpkins' face. Not now! Keep smiling! "You—you didn't go to Billings? Where did you go?"

DAIGH leaned sidewise before answering, leaned out over the gunwale a little to see past Simpkins' head at the distant blur that marked the shore ahead of the bow. A faint far-away cluster of lights showed there now; the lights of the White Horse dock. Daigh swung the tiller a trifle, and then turned to Simpkins.

"It was Katie's birthday, remember?" He was still smiling so calmly. "So I hopped a plane and went to New York to see her."

Simpkins could only stare blankly. "You . . . you saw Katie—last week?"

"Sure I did. Not at your sister's home—she met me outside." Daigh's face was grinning now. "Your little daughter stooped to that much deception. Why not? We didn't want to worry you, or your old-

maid sister either. And that was when I told her about my past, so as to save you the trouble. I explained it all to her. My past errors. The bad breaks I've had. And she understood. Why not? She loves me—"

Yes, that would be Katie's way, of course. To stand by the man she loved, the man she had promised to marry. A great rush of helplessness rushed over Simpkins. This damnable scoundrel knew his own power with the gentle little Katie. His rugged strength, his handsome face, smooth, suave voice; his arms around her; his kisses. . . .

"I—you—you're a damnable villain," Simpkins blurted out suddenly. If only he had the strength to stand up now and grab this Daigh by the throat! "You—you think you're going to marry Katie, but you're not."

"Why not?" Daigh retorted calmly. "She is eighteen now. I love her and she loves me—"

"You've said that before. You—shut your damn' mouth and listen to me." It was as though white-hot hands of flame were gripping Simpkins' struggling heart. Agonizing flames, blurring everything, blurring this water, and sky and rain, making everything fade into unreality so that there was only his gasping breath. No, there was more than that. There was Daigh's hated, lamplit face. And Daigh's smouldering dark eyes, watching him. . . . This could be suicide, this loosed torrent of emotion within Simpkins. What matter? Katie must be saved for Bert. Bert would love and cherish her all her life. Yes, he remembered now, that was what he was fighting for.

Simpkins gripped the gunwale of the launch harder with his clenched fingers. It made his fingers hurt. He must think about that, and try to forget those flames that gripped his heart.

"You—Daigh—you listen to me. You're after Katie's money. Why—don't you admit it?"

"I'm not. But if I was—then what?"

"You've—mentioned that two or three times, Daigh. *Her money*. Her inheritance from her grandfather. Four hundred and fifty thousand dollars nearly, which she gets now that she's eighteen."

"Yes, so I've heard. Very nice," Daigh murmured.

"But she—hasn't got it." Simpkins clung to the gunwale and tried to keep Daigh's face clear in all the whirling blur. "I've—still got it, Daigh. I can keep it. And I—swear I won't give it to her if she marries you. I'll change my will. She'll never have a penny of mine either. I'll do that tomorrow—"

Tomorrow! How strange that it had not occurred to Simpkins, that now, for him, there might not be a tomorrow! A moment ago he had been telling himself that this might be suicide—this wrangling, this fighting for the daughter he loved. And now, suddenly, here was something else he must fight for! Fight to live until tomorrow, so that he could make good his threats. This wretched villain wouldn't want Katie if she was penniless.

AND in those tense seconds, Simpkins saw a real emotion leap to Daigh's face. The ironic smile had faded. There was a startled surprise. And then something else. Something very queer. It seemed to show in the new set of Daigh's lips; and in those smouldering dark eyes, watching Simpkins so narrowly now.

"So *that's* the way it is!" Daigh muttered.

"Yes—that's—the way it is. If you don't believe me, you will—in a little while now, when Katie arrives. I'll tell her—in your presence, that I'm—going to disinherit her. Oh I—mean it, Daigh. And then we'll see—whether you'll marry her or not."

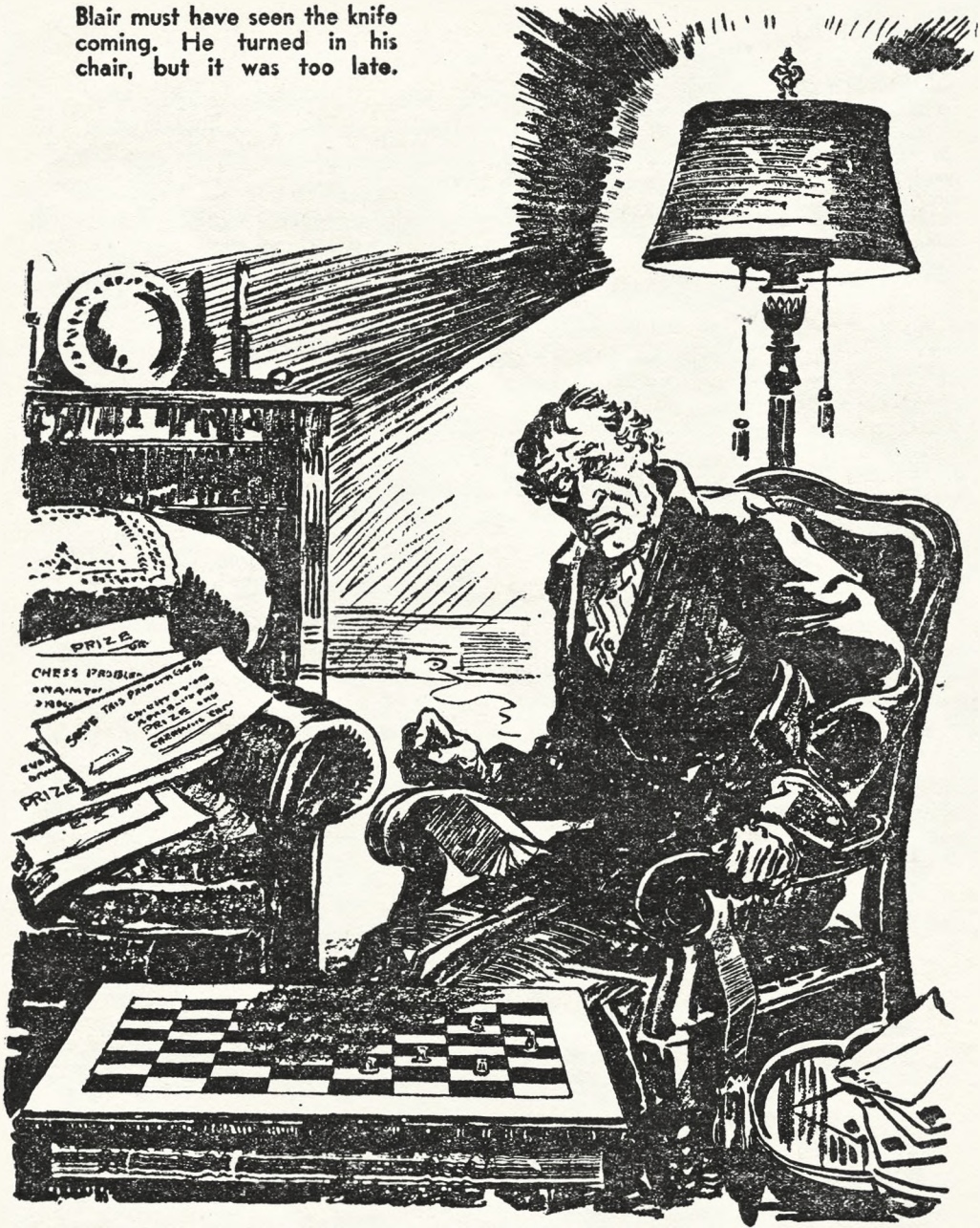
It seemed that Daigh muttered an oath, but the wind tore it away. Simpkins hardly heard it. He was conscious only of those gripping flames of pain that were trying to hold his leaping heart. And his one guiding thought: he must live until tomorrow. . . .

His little box of pills! How queer that, in all this agony, he had forgotten them!

With Daigh so narrowly watching him, Simpkins knew that he was slumping down against the gunwale, trying to grip it. And then with his other hand, he was fumbling in his pocket, bringing out the little box of pills. Trying to open it, but his fingers were trembling so violently it seemed almost impossible. . . . Try harder! Got to get it open! Hurry, take them now before it's too late! . . .

(Continued on page 83)

Blair must have seen the knife coming. He turned in his chair, but it was too late.



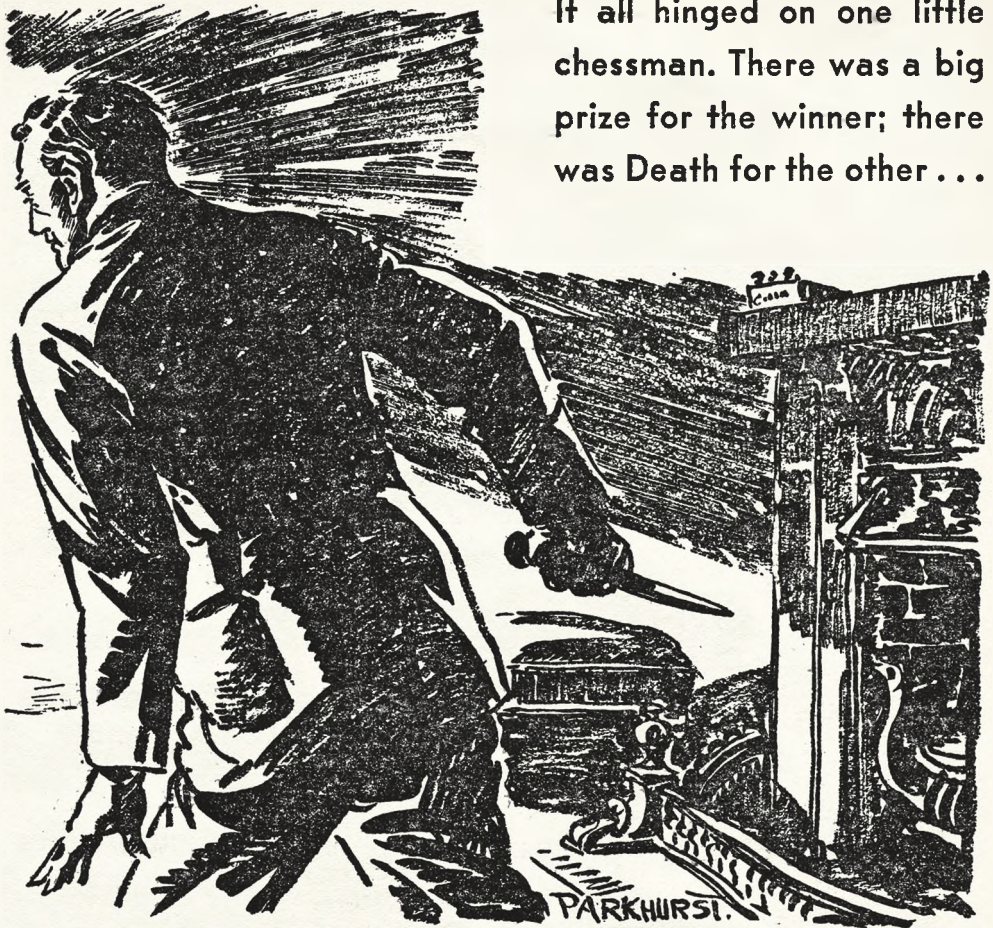
THE offices, show rooms, and small manufacturing plant of the Blair Game and Toy Mfg. Co. were located, not in the business section of Pleasant Grove, but about a mile near the edge of town. It was a small concrete building, with a railroad siding beside it. The place was dark, this warm Summer evening, with just a single glow of light in one of the

second floor office windows marking where young Rob Murdock, general manager of the company was still at his desk.

Murdock's lighted office was on the north side of the building. At the south corner the old watchman sat somnolent in his little shanty.

Rob Murdock was a big, handsome fellow in his late twenties. With the sleeves of

It all hinged on one little chessman. There was a big prize for the winner; there was Death for the other . . .



THE PAWN'S MOVE IS PECULIAR

By RAY CUMMINGS

his sport shirt rolled up he sat now at his desk, slumped back in his chair. His shock of wavy black hair was rumpled. In the heat of the evening his forehead was dank with sweat. A lock of his hair was plastered to it. Impatiently he brushed the hair back, and continued gazing moodily at the littered desk before him.

But young Murdock's mind was not on

his work. Since the sudden death of his wife Gloria a week ago—that Summer cold which had hung on and then suddenly run into pneumonia—since then his mind had been absorbed with many things beside the routine business details of the Blair Game and Toy Company. This cash account, for instant. The long columns of figures lay before him now on the desk. They seemed

to blur and sway, and then dance like little imps as he stared at them. Why had old man Blair sent for the auditor to come so unexpectedly? It was startling, frightening.

For a long time now young Murdock sat moodily staring. The auditor was coming tomorrow or the next day. And old man Blair had insisted that Murdock stop in and see him tonight before he went to bed. Did the two have any connection? Was the old man suspicious?

Elias Blair was Murdock's father-in-law. When Murdock had married Gloria a year ago, old Elias had decided to retire. Why not? In the handsome young Murdock he had a son now. And Murdock had a smiling, engaging personality. It had been easy to win Gloria, and her father too. Absurdly easy, how in a short month or two he had stepped from the position of just a young man, unfortunately rejected by the Army and looking for a job, into being Gloria's husband and general manager of the Blair Company. Easy enough. Murdock had often chuckled as he thought of it. Just a question of playing the game skillfully.

But now Gloria was dead. Would that make any difference? The old man certainly had been acting queerly these last few days.

IMPATIENTLY MURDOCK shoved away the sheets of figures into the litter of his desk. He glanced at his watch which was in the little right hand fob pocket of his white flannel trousers. A tiny, furry rabbit's foot which Gloria had given him for luck when her father made him general manager hung from the watch. A rabbit's foot for luck. The thought was ironic. Well, maybe tonight was the night he'd really need it.

Ten o'clock. He might as well go home, stop in and see the old man and get it over with. On his desk was a big artist's sketch which Blair had put there this afternoon. "A THOUSAND DOLLARS IN PRIZES! SOLVE A CHESS PROBLEM WITH CHESTER'S CHERMASOL CHESSMEN! BUY YOUR CHESS SET TODAY AND WIN ONE OF THE BIG CASH PRIZES!"

Another of the old man's schemes. Murdock barely glanced at the artist's proposed drawing of little chessmen. Then he scribbled his okay on the sketch and tossed

it aside. A minute later he had put on his sport jacket, turned out the office light and left by the lower side door of the building. Old Sam, the watchman around at the south corner, didn't see him go.

It was just a mile of sandy road and a block or two of village streets from the Blair plant to the hotel where Murdock and his father-in-law lived. The Summer night was brilliant with stars and moonlight.

The little thing lying by the side of the road glinted with moonlight. The glint caught Murdock's attention as he came trudging moodily along. He stooped, picked up the shiny object. It was a small, white metal horseshoe, hanging on a link or two of silver chain. A little bauble for a watch fob. A lucky horseshoe. With an ironic grin Murdock attached it to his watch so that it dangled where the rabbit's foot had been. And he put the rabbit's foot into the side pocket of his jacket, the left side which was luckier. He was doubly fortified now against what the old man had to say. He was still ironically grinning as he walked on; he'd probably need all the luck he could get.

The handsome suite which Murdock and Gloria had occupied was on the second floor of the hotel. A small side entrance led directly to it. Murdock hadn't given up the large suite. He went up the single flight, then decided to go on, up another story to the smaller quarters of his father-in-law.

He knocked on the door.

"That you, Robert? Just a minute."

Elias Blair opened the door. He was a small weazened man of sixty-odd, with a shock of iron-grey hair that made his head seem overlarge for his shriveled little body. He was in his pajamas now, with a thin summer dressing gown wrapped around him.

"Come in, Robert. Where you been all evening?"

"I was at the office," Murdock said. "Those new orders from Jamison out on the coast—I was checking the credits."

The old man's living room was dim, shadowed. There was just a yellow sheen and round circle of glow from a standing lamp. The illumination fell upon a small table which held a chess board on which a few tiny black and white chessmen were

standing. And Murdock saw that on a chair nearby a sheaf of other artists' sketches were standing. The lettering on some of them was visible: "SOLVE A CHESS PROBLEM WITH CHESTER'S CHERMASOL CHESSMEN!" "WIN A HANDSOME CASH PRIZE!"

Elias Blair waved with a gesture at the discarded sketches, and then went back to the chair before his chessboard.

"None of that stuff's any good, Robert," he said contemptuously. "The only good one, I put on your desk. What'd you think of it?"

"Swell," Murdock said. He slumped into an easy chair across the room. "I okay'd it. I'll give it to Grinnel when he comes in in the morning."

"Yes, yes, do that. It seems pretty good. This contest, pretty clever idea, eh Robert?"

"Sure," Murdock agreed.

THE OLD MAN was supposed to be retired. He had been, but he couldn't stay that way. He'd always been a nut on chess. It was his hobby. At home here he played chess games with himself. Studied the chess problems in all the big city newspapers he could find. And he had a shelf of books on chess. Just give him half a chance and he'd spout for an hour on checkmates in two, or maybe three. And King's Gambits and what the ethics should be when a pawn wanted to move *en passant*. It was all Greek to Murdock; just a lot of nutty stuff.

Old Blair's enthusiasm for chess was reflected in the business. The line of games put out by the Blair Game and Toy Mfg. Co. was topheavy with chess sets of every size and design and price. Then about a month ago, the Chester Metal Products Co. had talked Blair into handling a new type of chess set. They were made in black and white, of "Chermasol"—a metal alloy, extremely light in weight, a product of the Chester Company's war research. Blair had gotten the exclusive rights to handle the "Chermasol Chessmen." They were very tiny, which was Blair's idea of a novelty, the King, the tallest figure was hardly more than an inch high.

Old Blair was thrilled. And now he had doped out this contest, which would launch the new chessmen with a bang.

"Come here, Robert, I want to show you something." Blair was scribbling intently in a little notebook on his knee. "Draw up a chair. I want to show you." He gestured toward the chessboard where the few little black and white pieces were standing, gleaming in the light. "I've got the contest problem worked out," he added triumphantly. "My own invention, why should I use somebody else's problem? Black to play and checkmate in three moves. I've got it set up here. Only involves one pawn and five other pieces. Come take a look. It's pretty neat if I do say it myself. Whoever figures this out deserves to win a prize, and yet it's perfectly obvious once you see it."

Just nutty on chess. Was this why the old man had insisted that Murdock stop in here tonight? A sudden sense of relief swept him. Of course that's all it was.

"Yes, I see. Very nice," Murdock murmured absently. At the old man's insistence he had drawn up a chair on the opposite side of the chessboard. With its six tiny gleaming pieces it stood at the level of their knees between them.

"Wait, I'll show you," the old man was saying. "I've got the set-up written down. White King—he's the one who gets checkmated, see? He's on Black King's Rook four. He's already been chased about half way across the board. Now the problem starts with a move of the black pawn—the only pawn on the board. You don't know anything about chess, Robert! If you did, you'd realize—the pawn's move is peculiar—"

He had sent for the auditor to come tomorrow, to look over the Blair books. Why had he done that, when the auditor wasn't due for nearly another three months? Murdock had counted on those three months to get things right again. His system for playing the races surely couldn't go wrong any further. The law of averages would have to bring it back.

"You sent for Keenan to come tomorrow." Murdock suddenly heard his voice blurting it out. "What's the idea? And why didn't you tell me? Why did I have to find it out from an employee?"

HE shouldn't have said it! He shouldn't rasp it out like this! Murdock's nerves

were more taut than he realized. He tried to smile. "What I mean, it puzzled me."

"Eh? Auditor? Oh—just a minute, Robert." The old man finished scribbling in his notebook, and then he looked up. "I sent for Keenan to come? Why yes, so I did. Why shouldn't he come, if I want him?"

He was a queer character, this old man Blair. Absorbed, enthused over this chess problem he had invented, there had been nothing abnormal in his manner toward his son-in-law. But now suddenly a vague hostility leaped into his tone. And there was hostility stamped on his thin, seamed face and in his grey eyes as he stared across the chessboard at Murdock.

"Don't you want him to come, Robert?" he added caustically. "You're not afraid to have him come, are you?"

Murdock sat tense, with a chill running through him. "You—I don't know what you mean, afraid? Is that—is that why you wanted to see me tonight?"

But he mustn't stammer! This old buzzard, suddenly taunting him! A hot thrill of anger seemed to follow the chill in Murdock's veins. This damned old buzzard—

It had come so quickly it startled Murdock. Just a minute ago there was only his vague fear as he watched this ineffectual old man fooling with his chess problem. But Blair wasn't that now. He was a canny businessman, the man who had built up the Blair Game and Toy Company. A man you couldn't trifle with, not in a matter involving sizable money.

An antagonist, to be feared. There was an edge of menace in Blair's voice as he crisply answered. "You want straight dope, Robert? Well, poor Gloria's death was quite a shock to me. And in the last few days, I've done a lot of thinking. While she was alive, my hands were sort of tied. But they're not now."

"I—I don't know what you mean," Murdock mumbled.

"Oh yes you do. You never made her very happy, Robert. Your damned arrogance. Your cursed ugly temper that she had to cope with. You never made her very happy. Quite the reverse, but I could not butt into it."

"You—you lie! You damned—" Take

it easy now! Let him talk! Find out his plans! This damned, foxy old buzzard!

Blair's calm, crisp voice ignored his son-in-law's mumbling anger. "My hands were tied, Robert. Even when I was puzzled where you were getting all the money you threw around, and gambled with—and when I found out you were keeping the books instead of getting somebody to take old man Jones' place when he left. I could not have a scandal—not for Gloria's sake. But I don't mind it now."

"Why, you damned slimy—"

Murdock's eyes, like the eyes of a trapped animal, were roving the room. And then he saw, almost here at his elbow, some of the old man's letters which he had been opening with a big silver paperknife. The letters and knife lay here, discarded. When Blair got interested in his chess problems. A knife, here beside Murdock. He swung sidewise a little, furtively reached for it—a knife that was cool and sleek in his hot trembling grip. Take it easy now; the old man hadn't noticed. . . .

Murdock had leaned out, partly to the left over the Chessboard. And then he stood up, shoving his chair backward.

"You—you damned—if you think I'm going to stay here and be insulted—"

DON'T let him see the knife! The thought leaped into Murdock's confused brain. And with it came the startling realization that he was clutching the knife, tensed to leap! Don't do it! Stop and think! Take it easy now! It seemed that half his mind was warning him to turn and run. But there was the old man's damning voice:

"I'm not going to trust you with an interest in the business, Robert. I put that in my will at Gloria's pleading. I'll fix that. And if it should be that Keenan finds our accounts are short—I'm not a fool, you know. I've been down to the plant quite a bit lately, and I've looked over the books—if there's anything wrong, I'm not going to baby you, Robert. If you deserve jail, that's what you're going to get! Son-in-law or not, I'll—"

Damned, sneaky old buzzard! Murdock had stepped sidewise, away from the chess table. . . . One leap, a stab into his back—

Blair must have seen the knife coming. He slid back his chair and tried to rise



"We didn't even cross the threshold,"
Murdock said. "It wasn't necessary."

THE little two room and bath hotel apartment of Elias Blair was noisy with voices now, and glaring with its lights. In a corner of the living room young Murdock sat watching the local police as they moved around, trying to find some clue. It was getting on toward midnight now. One Captain Rance was in charge here. He was a big, good-looking fellow, intelligent-looking, and with a friendly smile for young Murdock. It was Murdock who, with one of the hotel bellboys and the hotel manager, had discovered the murder. That was only about half an hour ago. Murdock hadn't planned anything of the kind. There had been a moment when he stood numbed, stricken with horror at what he had done.

to his feet. But he never made it. He just seemed to groan as the knife sank between his shoulder blades, a mumbling cry which in another instant was choked with the blood that gushed from his mouth as he coughed.

Murdock had staggered away, panting. And in the chair for just an instant the old man's crumpled figure lay twitching. Then his head dangled and he slumped sidewise, limp in death over the chair-arm, and with the knife buried to its hilt, standing up like a little silver cross from his back.

Then, with no thought of anything but escape, he had turned and fled from the apartment. Blair's door locked by a spring
(Continued on page 84)

HOT-CHECK

Inspector Davelleto let him have it as he came up off the floor. The little room seemed to spin, turn.



There were curious angles to this case of the murdered radio producer — and for me, Doctor Carlton, it had some grimly personal angles!

BIG BERTHA weaved and rocked; she was doing her best and her best was a good sixty-five. She could do even more under duress. The big red ambulance was as much a part of my daily and nightly existence as my heart. We were inseparable. I was devoted to her. And now I sat there with the dying man, Jim Nordyke, trying to tell me something, on the stretcher, my fingers clamped to his waning pulse.

I saw him trying to reach his vest pocket, but already the numbness of death had set in. He was practically paralyzed. His eyes rolled, deep, black, intense eyes. There wasn't any pain in them because I'd given him a hypo. It relieved me to think he wasn't suffering.

Ten minutes ago I'd despaired of saving his life. I doubted if even an emergency operation would do it. And it was a cinch he wouldn't last till we could get him to the hospital. He'd been shot, the bullet had lodged near the base of the sternum. The police would want to get at this as soon as life left his body. It was only because he was still breathing that I'd whisked him away, and Inspector Haig Davelleto, he of

HOMICIDE

By
REX
WHITECHURCH



the corpse face and the sepulchral voice, had cautioned me to hurry.

A police car was coming behind and Big Bertha was giving it a run for the money. Sirens split the night wide open—our siren and the wailing monster on the speeding cruiser behind us.

I let go of Jim Nordyke's wrist and felt, with trembling fingers, up over his vest. I wondered what he wanted me to do. There was something in his top left vest pocket that troubled him. My fingers groped, slid inside and I felt a touch of folded paper. I drew it forth, held it up and the dying man nodded. What he was saying, in a whisper that barely reached me, set my pulses to hammering:

"It's h-hot, Doc. K-keep it! Stanlo . . ."

But he was lost now in a gray fog and he couldn't see through it. The exertion had been too much. I saw his head lolling and caught his hair gently to lessen the jerking which had taken possession of him.

It touched me to see him go like that. My unseeing eyes swept the windowed walls. The echo of traffic rumbled low in my ears. Snow was falling on the glass, little swirling flakes formed dainty lace patterns on the panes. The floor bounced and the car rocked far to one side as Red Barnett took the turn two blocks this side of the city morgue. It was a touch of irony, I thought, that Jim Nordyke should go like this so close to the house of the dead.

I grabbed up the speaking tube, spoke to Red, "Take it easy, bud," I said. "Stop at the morgue. Our patient has just passed out on us."

I held the check up to the light so I could see what was written on the check. I read: *Pay to the order of Josephine Blanton the sum of ten thousand dollars.* (Signed) *Jim Nordyke.* It was bloodstained.

Ten grand! Something cold, clammy gripped my insides. Sweat popped out on my face. My eyes blurred again. I heard my heart pounding hard on my eardrums. He'd said it was hot. But he'd evidently given it himself. Or had he? Josephine! What in hell was she doing mixed up in this?

Slowly I folded the check and slipped it into my wallet. I knew what I was going to do. Although this was vital evidence

and might be the clue that would crack the case, the police would never get their hands on it until I found out why Josephine was involved.

You feel like the devil himself when you do such a thing. I shuddered. I was letting myself in for something. Only I didn't care. I was willing to risk my professional reputation, my entire future, to hide the hot check until I could at least determine to what extent the woman I loved was involved. Men do those things for those in whom they're interested to the fullest extent of their capacity. I'd known of plenty men who'd done as much if not more. Josephine! Involved with Jim Nordyke!

The ambulance was coming to a gradual stop at the alley entrance to the morgue. It was all dark now, there were no lights shining on the windows. But I saw the green lamp over the back door of the house of the dead, and heard the swish of snow.

THEY put a red identification tag on the dead man's left wrist and wheeled him to the elevator. The row of crypts in the wall, with their wrought-iron handles, deepened the depressing atmosphere of the stone-floored basement. I didn't go up on the lift, but stopped to lean against the wall to get my breath. Soon now I must face Davelleto and this was bound to be a trying ordeal. He would drive questions in his sepulchral voice, lots of questions, questions I knew I'd answer until they came to the one I couldn't, wouldn't answer.

Fighting for composure I moved through the shadows to the iron stairway. They'd want an immediate post. No doubt the prosecutor or one of his assistants would be upstairs by the time I got there. The murder of Jim Nordyke was important, sensational enough to cause excitement, and the hot check burned a hole in my wallet. Slowly I climbed those steps, holding to the iron rail, incapable of thinking in this awful moment. My brain was a whirling pinwheel of flames. My feet dragged on the iron plates. I'd lost my grip and it wasn't going to be easy to recover it.

For a moment I was alone with the corpse in the hall outside the lab door. I drew the sheet down from the dead man's face, stared at the dead eyes. If only he could talk, could finish what he'd started

in the ambulance— Oh, if this were possible!

A flock of men suddenly appeared. Among these were the lab scientists in long white coats. Another was George Hackensmith, a bright young reporter with a bald head and close-set blue eyes. He'd made a name for himself. He was tall, thin, wore a red bow tie and a loud green snapbrim. A little mustache decorated his upper lip.

Two detectives and the assistant coroner appeared. The lab door opened and they went in, except for Hackensmith, who came over to me.

"Strange killing," he said crisply. "It was a mess, wasn't it, Doctor?"

"Pretty bad," I said coldly. "I wonder why he was killed?"

"Something in his business went hay-wire, maybe. A crazy actor, or writer. They're all nuts, you know. I'll bet she'll be a dinger."

He meant so far as the news stories were concerned.

Inspector Davelleto suddenly appeared. He was tall, dark, skinny in his immaculate black clothes and black soft hat turned down in front. His eyes burned with a weird fire. He reminded me of a corpse, his voice sounded like it was coming from a grave shrouded in gray mist.

"You needn't wait here, doctor," he said. "I'll get in touch with you if I need you."

I thanked him, but decided to wait anyhow. I stuck around there thirty minutes, relieved because Davelleto didn't question me. Hackensmith stayed, also. When the white coats came out, they all flocked around a little ball of lead—the lethal bullet.

Davelleto said, "Where was the bullet?"

I said, "I would guess it was lodged somewhere near the base of the sternum, inspector."

He joined the clot of men outside the lab door. Presently he turned back to me. "You were right," he disclosed.

I went down the basement steps and Hackensmith followed me. They were bringing the corpse down on the lift. The reporter tugged at my arm. "I want to take a squint at him," he said. "I knew him pretty well. Then I'd like to ask you some questions. I'll bet they'll find a woman involved in this killing."

The eerie lights from over the doors of the crypts blinked at me. Long shadows moved on the plain white walls. Our feet scuffed the stone floor as we moved toward the rear door where a red light burned dimly.

He paused, but I continued on my way. "Wait a minute, Doc," he said. "I—"

"I don't know anything," I said sternly. "Don't waste your time."

"Didn't he talk? Didn't he say anything? Didn't —"

"No!" I put all the emphasis I could summon into my retort.

I stepped lightly past the row of crypts, on out into the white bluster. Old Bertha was pretty well draped in snow. Her motor was purring. I ran my hand over her sleek crimson side. She seemed closer to me now than she'd ever been before. Big Bertha, of course, knew my ghastly secret.

THE radio newscast gave it that Josephine Martha Blanton had been questioned at headquarters by Inspector Haig Davelleto. She'd denied any connection with the murder. She'd gone to Nordyke's



**TOPS FOR
QUALITY**



apartment on business, but he was out. She'd waited until she'd missed an appointment with her dentist and then, desperate, she'd quit waiting. She'd gone straight home. Her maid, also questioned, said she'd come in with a raging toothache about twenty minutes before nine—about the time it was believed the crime had been committed. Since she resided several blocks away it was logical to believe she was not present at the time of the shooting.

Nordyke, representing a chain of shows, who'd made "One Woman's Life" the most popular radio serial on the air, had been a strange man, a sort of recluse who hated night life and had avoided women. He'd never been married. He'd seemed to live only for his work, building the best radio shows possible. The police now were investigating other angles. Josephine Blanton's maid was being detained for further questioning by Inspector Davelleto, but the actress had been dismissed.

I sat there by the radio, sipping whiskey from a thin glass. I drew my blue robe closer around me, for it was suddenly cold and uncomfortable in the living-room. The radiators sputtered, a white steam came from them, but the warmth was inadequate. But then, it surely was my nerves. I'd have been cold sitting on a hot stove.

I got up, unable to sit still, took a nervous turn about the room. When the telephone jangled the sound almost caused me to jump out of my shirt.

It was Davelleto calling. "Doctor," he said, "how well do you know Josephine Blanton?"

Shocked almost speechless, I gulped. "Pretty well," I said, and my voice amazed me because it was calm, perhaps coldly professional. "Why?"

"You knew she'd been questioned?"

"Yes."

"Are you engaged to her?" The sepulchral voice bit at me, and yet it was polite. He was so sad, so apparently despondent.

"No," I said.

"I hope you'll pardon me for imposing on you like this. I'm merely making a routine checkup. What do you know about her?"

I told him I'd met her about two years ago, we'd chummed around. She ran with a clique with whom I frequently went out.

She knew a lot of people I knew, and she was from my home town, Drayton Falls. But I hadn't been acquainted with her back there. I'd had numerous dates with her, thought she was a charming girl and was willing to recommend her for anything.

"Thanks," he said again. "That will be all. Again, good night, Doctor Carlton." It seemed he thought I'd lied.

Just as I turned away from the phone, wondering why he'd quizzed me to such an extent, the door buzzer sounded. I opened the door to see a young man standing in a snow-dappled trenchcoat. I knew him. Curt Reynolds, a writer.

He came in, short and good-looking. He had raven-black hair and was slightly nearsighted. His thick glasses shimmered.

"Let's have a drink, Jerry," he said. "I'm frozen to the bone. It's sure pleasant in here."

I led him across the Persian rug to a deep chair. He sat down, without removing his coat. He put his gray hat on the floor.

"I haven't seen much of you lately, Jerry," he said, downing the slug I'd poured for him. "Where you been keeping yourself?"

I told him I'd been exceptionally busy and asked him about the writing game. His visit puzzled me. I knew I'd be a poor host due to my troubled state of mind. He almost immediately brought up the nature of his call.

"It's too bad about old Nordyke. It's hit us all pretty hard. You knew they'd had Josephine on the carpet?"

"What do you know about it?" I asked casually.

"Well, I've been writing for Nordyke a long time. I turned out 'One Woman's Life' and he's been keeping me hard at it. The thing clicked. He was thinking of starting another as soon as I could get around to doing it for him. But the damned well's gone dry. I've been fishing around for weeks for an idea. There's a new writer Nordyke was dealing with. Nordyke was going to start the guy's serial. 'A Yankee Family,' I believe he called it. The usual sob stuff, with just enough romance in it to make it go. I read the script. Nordyke had sold it to a soap company and was looking for a cast. He was too particular, of course, and he hadn't signed all the players he needed. He offered Josephine the lead but



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she didn't like the part. Turned it down."

I nodded, drank my whiskey and set the glass on the radio.

CURT REYNOLDS continued: "I think it made Nordyke sore and he told her he was going to close 'One Woman's Life'. He hadn't said anything to me about it. But you know how he was. He was impulsive and maybe he was going to tell me the first time we met. I've had a cold and haven't been out much during the last week. Josephine called me on the phone."

"Who killed Nordyke?" I asked impatiently. "Have you any ideas?"

"No." He shook his head. "Can't say I have. But they've been trying to get something on Josephine. I guess it's because it's known they had a serious quarrel and Nordyke threatened to ruin her in the show business."

"Why," I expostulated, "that's ridiculous." I guess I was too vehement. He looked at me kind of funny.

"There's another thing. Nordy was broke. None of us knew that, either. I learned about it over at the police station. They found a stub in his check book where he'd evidently written a check for ten grand, to Josephine. But there wasn't enough money in the bank to cover it. Now they're trying to find the paper and if they don't, they'd have a good excuse to arrest Josephine. You see what I mean? They think she's lying about not seeing it. You understand?"

"I'm beginning to," I replied, somewhat coldly. A strange fear began to pound at my brain. It was all I could do to don a mask to hide my bothered thoughts.

He rose, crammed his hat on. I opened an Oriental cabinet and got a box of Havanas. He helped himself, lit from my jeweled lighter (a present from Josephine). He skewed round at the door.

"If they could find the check," he said, "it would go easier for her. They think perhaps she's lying now. They believe she destroyed the check." He stopped, pawed at his face. His thick specs gleamed like the eyes of a cat. "Well, good night, Jerry."

The street door closed. I sauntered to the window, drew back the lace curtain. It hit me hard, with cruel force. Was Davelleto stalking me? This was a grave possibil-

ity. I wondered if he suspected me of having the check.

It didn't make sense. I couldn't see how it'd happened. Why should Josephine be involved? But why had Nordyke written a check to her for such a staggering amount? Why such a check to Josephine? The more I thought of it the deeper my puzzlement.

However, I knew I wasn't going to surrender the check—not until I was sure to do so would be to help Josephine evade the police trap. No matter how much Davelleto worked on me, no matter what he pulled—I'd hold on to the hot check until I was certain that to give it up would help to exonerate the woman I loved.

THE Blue Swan wasn't that, at all. It was a violet swan and the man who'd originated the title must've been color-blind. A check girl wanted my hat but I gave her two bits instead. I stepped into the violet haze of the bar. Glasses tinkled, a hum of refined voices reached me. Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the violet light. The bar was busy but there were some empty stools. Above me the ceiling, a maze of shining silver stars, blinked in the mirrors. A barman in an immaculate mess jacket took my order: "Bacardi and grenadine."

"That'll make you sick, Jerry," a voice said. Two men were approaching me, Hackensmith and Curt Reynolds. The two writers knew their way about. They were accustomed to making big money and letting it slide through their fingers.

"What's new?" Hackensmith asked.

I didn't like his suave cordiality. "Nothing," I said.

"See Josephine?" Reynolds' voice was clipped. There was something disdainful in it.

"No," I said. "I feel she'll come out all right. I can see no reason for butting in."

"You know about the check?" Hackensmith asked.

"Certainly." I took my drink, asked them to join me.

Hackensmith said, "I never indulge, thanks."

"I'll take what you had," Reynolds condescended.

"I guess the radio script-writing game's a nice racket," I ventured.

"Sounds like it to an outsider," Reynolds

said. "But it's tougher than boot leather. It requires something more than an ability to write scintillating dialogue. You have to have guts, because it takes guts out of you."

A big man came through the door and stopped. He was waiting for his eyes to get used to the violet light. His glance traveled to me, my two companions. He pulled his sharp gaze away quickly. I knew he was one of Inspector Haig Davelleto's men.

I gulped the bacardi and grenadine down and lit a cigarette. I got up off the red leather seat. Hackensmith slid a gilt-metal lighter out of his pocket. I lit off it. The man at the door strolled away.

I touched my hat, moved off past a protruding chromium staircase as a headwaiter appeared. He wore black clothes, had wide satin stripes on his pants, a stack of silver-plated menus under his arm. He spoke to me, called my name.

I remembered I'd taken him for a fast ride to the hospital in Big Bertha, after his wife had clouted him with a wine bottle. I paused before a huge round mirror with an Egyptian water jar on either side of it. A girl with metallic blonde hair was preening herself. Her evening gown was so low in the back I saw a red welt across her lumbar muscle. Suddenly I felt nauseated. This damned artificiality. The world was being teetered on its moral base.

When I raised my eyes in the mirror I almost jumped. The plainclothes man stood with his back to the violet plush drapes at the side door. His analyzing eyes were burning a hole in me.

I heard Curt Reynolds' voice. "You know, Jerry, if they could find the missing check it would help to pull Josephine through the tight crack."

"Damn the check," I said irritably. I dove out through the ornate foyer, unmindful that I'd been unpardonably rude and had left the writer standing there gulping.

But I suddenly thought of something. He was coming out behind me. I waited under the canopy. I said, "Sorry I was rude, Reynolds. I want to ask you something. Do you know anyone named Stanlo—?"

I couldn't see so well in the violet neons' glare. But I thought he ducked his head, held his gaze away from me to hide what

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was in his face. What passed over him seemed to start in his head and travel swiftly to his feet. The silence allowed nothing but the organlike wind on emblazoned plate glass to interpose.

He was glowering at me now, appeared a little sick. "That damn bacardi and grenadine," he said lushly. "Stanlo? Sorry, old fellow, I never heard of him. Good night, and I hope you sleep well."

His feet clattered on the sidewalk. A cab moved up. He waved as he scuttled into the tonneau.

A GAIN I PLOWED through the drifting snow, walking the four blocks to my apartment. It was quiet in the little street; with the white flakes swirling down, the miniature church on the corner across from my apartment stuck its steeple and cross proudly up to the gray skies. I strolled along, deep in thought, wondering what was best to do.

A car stood with panting engine curbed at my door. It had passed me, had been following me, I was sure. A man stepped out, with his overcoat collar turned up about his face. He had his hat lowered over his eyes. He was tall, skinny. Inspector Davelleto!

I almost rushed to him, I was so glad to see the corpsy inspector. He put an arm around my waist, strode up the steps with me. I fitted a key to the door, unlocked it, and stood aside as he entered.

In the living-room he declined a chair. I offered him a drink. He accepted that. He put the glass back on the radio, cleared his throat and said: "It seems to me like I'm imposing on your good-nature, doctor, always turning up like this. But the truth is, there's something very important I want to ask you. A lot depends on your answer. You're the last hope and we've been leaning on you more than you know."

I nodded, cold inside. Cold as death. I was almost sure what he was going to say had something to do with the lost, hot check.

"Nordyke was shot once; the slug, a .32, was found where you said it was, lodged near the base of the sternum. There was a brief struggle. When he fell, he was bent over his desk. He'd just come in and hadn't removed his hat. It was still on his head.

He'd written a check. The ink on the pen wasn't dry yet. He'd blotted it, turning it upside down on the gray blotter, and the whole thing was left imprinted there. The check was for ten thousand dollars, payable to Josephine Blanton."

I smiled, waited. But the smile cost more than I'd care to pay again. He was smiling too, and the look was oddly out of place on his sad, gloomy face.

"We have reason to believe she forced him to write that check," Davelleto's sepulchral voice continued. "She must've been standing there with the gun on him then. As we reconstruct it, he blotted the check, extended it toward her with the warning that it was no good. In a fit of blind anger she shot him, then she ran from the room. She either took the check and destroyed it or . . . it was lost while he was being driven in the ambulance. Unless we find it, we're certain the woman's lied and it will go hard with her. If we find it, then her story will stand hitched. She denies knowing anything about the murder, says she left his apartment before it happened."

He waited. My answer was a long time coming. So much counted on it. But I suddenly thought, "Suppose he's set a trap for me? What if he thinks I'm shielding her and hiding the hot check? If I tell him the truth and surrender the evidence he wants, then—"

No, I believed Davelleto was telling the truth.

"Let me ask you something," I said, turning to the Oriental cabinet and a fat squat Buddha incense burner, hollow on the inside. "Do you know of anyone called Stanlo?"

He remained poker-faced. There was a slight deepening of the lines past his thin mouth, however. He closed his eyes, opened them, quickly. They were blazing with that weird fire again.

"It seems familiar to me, but I can't recall it at the moment. I might call you back—"

"Inspector," I said gravely, "I have what you're looking for. I have the check. Found it in the red ambulance this morning, and I'm terribly sorry I've delayed so long in getting it to you."

I placed in his eager, shaking hands the evidence that would either exonerate or convict the woman I loved.

A SOUND at the door disturbed me. I looked at Davelleto, he nodded and I crossed to the vestibule. I turned the knob and pulled the door inward slowly. A snow-covered figure stood there.

"I've found out what you want to know, Jerry," Curt Reynolds said. "That guy Stanlo—"

Too late I saw the automatic flashing in his hand. He thrust it toward me. I felt it against my stomach. I heard his deep breathing. His eyes were narrowed, black as jet and full of murder lust. Hatred was written in his thin face. His mouth was locked in determination. The gun was shoved deeper into my flesh.

"You know too damned much," he snarled. "Only one man ever called me Stanlo, which was the name of one of my characters, a killer, in a serial I wrote a long time ago. That man's dead. You're going to be dead, too, in a minute."

"Okay," I stammered, "what . . . what do you want? G-get it over with. If—" I was just about as seared as I acted, too, and I hoped it registered. "I've done you no harm, Curt. I—"

"Where'd you get the Stanlo stuff?" he sneered. "Come clean and save time. I got this gun a foot in your belly and nothing can keep my itching finger from letting it go off. You going to talk?"

"Maybe Josephine," I said. The sweat was pouring from my face now. Even if Davelleto came to the door and saw us, even if he shot Reynolds, that wouldn't save me. The nervous reaction of the writer's trigger finger would be the end. A bullet in his brain wouldn't be quick enough. "Maybe Josephine heard Nurdy call you Stanlo," I finished desperately. "She said something about Stanlo once, casually, and I figured she was going big for the fellow."

"I'm going to let you have it," he said, "just for lying. It doesn't sound right!"

Footsteps came across the living-room. Davelleto cautiously appeared. He had his gun in his hand. Quickly Reynolds turned. He glanced over his right shoulder. His eyes strayed from mine. And then I grabbed his gun hand.

I shoved down with all my strength. He whirled, throwing me in front of him. Davelleto was very calm, stood with the gun

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held slightly elevated. I tried to shove Reynolds away from me. Then I tripped him.

I held onto his wrist as he went down. He crashed like a ton of iron. The gun crashed, exploding almost in my face. The slug singed my scalp, and I kicked him hard in the stomach. He grunted. The sweat began to stream from his throat. I grabbed his tie with my free hand, jerked it. He came up off the floor. He was still trying to use the gun.

Then Davelleto let him have it. Both guns thundered simultaneously I fell back with a bullet in my shoulder, high up on my left side. I slammed against the wall. Cordite rose in sickly fumes. My eyes were veiled. Blood shot out of the hole in my coat. There was a little fire there where the flames had set my coat ablaze.

I went to my knees, groping with my hands for something to hold onto. The little room seemed to spin with me, turned over twice, and I knew I was down on my hands and knees with the crimson dripping from the wound I'd sustained. I shut my eyes as a haze of violet enveloped my head.

“AND so,” Davelleto said in his sepulchral voice, his eyes sad and burning with the weird fire which never seemed to go out, “we write finis to the case before I could get the check to nail him. I waited too long, perhaps, but you waited too long, too. You were trying to save the girl and I was trying to get enough evidence on the killer to stick him before I made the arrest. You see, doctor, he killed Nordyke because he didn't know Nordyke was broke. He meant to murder him anyhow. Nordyke was all washed up with him. Reynolds demanded ten thousand dollars because the producer had broken his contract.”

“I don't get it,” I said. Fresh pain webbed my shoulder. “He knew the check would incriminate him if he murdered Nordyke.”

“He'd thought of that. He made Nordyke phone his secretary and tell her he was leaving immediately for Chicago and would be gone several days. But the producer was smart. He was stalling for time. He hoped to change Reynolds' mind about killing him. What Reynolds planned was to hide the body in the basement. Nordyke was a

recluse who didn't go out much, who never entertained. The body, perhaps, would go unfound for days.

“Reynolds would have time to escape. But as I said, the producer was crafty. He wrote out the check—but he made it out to Josephine Blanton instead of to Reynolds. Because Reynolds is near-sighted he figured he'd have to look at it closely and while he was doing that, Nordyke would jump him. That's what happened. They engaged in a struggle. The killer was frightened off by Hackensmith, the reporter, who was writing another serial for Nordyke and who'd had an appointment to meet the old man at his home. But before he left, skipping out the back way, the cunning killer stuck the check written to Josephine Blanton in Nordyke's pocket.

“This was a break for him. We'd find the check and immediately suspect her of committing the crime because there was blood on it. That's about the smartest thing Reynolds did. Hackensmith broke in because he'd heard the gunshot as he was approaching the house and because he heard a door slam inside. He knew something had happened. When he got in the study where the body was bent over the desk he saw what had taken place, found Nordyke still alive and phoned for you. There was need for an ambulance. He knew Nordyke was badly hurt.”

I turned on the stretcher. You couldn't fool me on the sound of Big Bertha's wailing siren.

“The doc here says you'll be okay, Jerry,” Davelleto continued. “But let me tell you something. I knew Josephine Blanton didn't commit the murder because Nordyke left a line in the check stub. He couldn't write much. Only because Reynolds is near-sighted was he able to get away with it. The line read: *Stanlo is going to murder me as soon as I write this check for ten thousand dollars.* It was difficult learning who Stanlo was. George Hackensmith dug it out of an old scrip Reynolds authored ten years ago. It seems nobody called him Stanlo but Nordyke. The rest—well, Reynolds made a clean breast of everything over in your apartment—before he died!”

“Then why did you bring Josephine into it?” I blarted.

"A sort of booby trap for Reynolds. It threw him off guard. He was afraid the check wouldn't turn up. It meant so much to him to have it placed in our hands. You know."

"Sure," I admitted, recalling how Reynolds had worked on me to get me to turn the check over to Davelleto in case I had it.

"There's another thing made it hard for me, Jerry," Davelleto said. "You should have come clean with me. Why didn't you tell me Josephine was your ex-wife and that you'd separated when you were kids after one of those trial marriages? I know all about that, knew it then. You both were ambitious and you didn't like the idea of your wife wanting to be an actress."

I sat up on the stretcher and he gently pushed me back.

Big Bertha rocked and weaved. Snow fell on the windowed walls. I saw the quaint little doilies. Then I heard Josephine's voice. She'd been there in the crimson ambulance with me all the time.

THE DEAD MAN WINS

(Continued from page 65)

"Here, let me help you."

Was that Daigh's smooth, ironic voice? Simpkins vaguely realized that Daigh was reaching for the little box, taking it from him. . . .

Calmly Daigh took the little round box. But he made no move to open it. For a second or two he held it in his hand, staring at it with his slow, calm smile. And then he flipped it over the gunwale into the water.

"You—why, you—" There was just an instant when the gasping, agonized Simpkins stared at the tiny blob out there on the swirling river. The box that was his life. He could see it for a second, and then it was gone.

"You—why you—" Simpkins knew that he was on his feet. If only he could do something to this damnable, murderous villain! He felt his knees buckling as the launch lurched. Then he knew that he was falling and there was nothing else but the white-hot pains in his chest as his consciousness faded.

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FOR that same instant, Daigh sat holding the tiller, staring at the dying Simpkins. Relief swept Daigh. For a moment he had been horribly startled. Queer that he had always assumed that Katie had the money in her own right! She had always spoken of it casually like that, and Daigh had never dared question her too closely. . . . But this was just as good. Better, for now she would have all her inheritance. . . . And Simpkins' death would be so easy to explain. This unfortunate trip in the storm, the excitement of it bringing on this fatal heart attack. . . .

Daigh's swift, triumphant thoughts were only for a second or two. And then suddenly he was conscious that the body of Simpkins had fallen toward the middle of the launch—had fallen on the little engine. There was a weird, grinding thud. The engine stopped.

With the launch lurching, wallowing in the trough of the waves, Daigh staggered to his feet. Then he was bending down over the engine and the body lying there. Daigh knew his danger. The launch was in mid-stream now; and the swollen current was swift. Already the little boat was swinging, helpless, being whirled along in the maelstrom of white, lashing water. And Daigh could see the narrowing banks—the bottleneck where the bridge went across. There was always a swift current in that bottleneck. He must get the engine started at once!

With panic rising in him, Daigh stooped,

gripping the body. Then he saw that the engine had stopped because one of Simpkins' arms had hit the flywheel, was ground in it. . . .

Frantically cursing, Daigh pulled and jerked at the corpse. But it took so long! A minute . . . then another. . . .

Daigh was aware that the launch, heavily rolling as the waves hit it sidewise, was shipping water now. Then suddenly the body came loose, and with a curse Daigh staggered erect with it, to cast it out of his way. In the plunging, wallowing launch the horrible dead thing sagged limply against him. It was almost as though the dead man were trying to wrestle with him! Little Simpkins, fighting now in death the way he never could fight in life!

Then Daigh heaved the ghastly thing overboard. It went down into the white water with a little splash that was lost in the roar of the storm. And frantically Daigh tried to spin the flywheel. But it was too late now! He looked up and saw the looming, broken bridge coming like a monster out of the darkness. . . .

The crash of the little launch as it struck the dangling, broken wreckage of the bridge mingled faintly with the crying wind and the roar and pound of the water. The launch sank in a moment. And then there was only Daigh's crushed body hanging there, pressed against one of the broken struts, with the white torrent swirling over it.

THE PAWN'S MOVE IS PECULIAR

(Continued from page 71)

lock when he closed it. In the hall, no one had seen him scurrying down the single flight to his own quarters. But he had no sooner entered them than a bellboy had knocked on his door. A telegram had come for Mr. Blair. It was especially important, because Mr. Blair earlier in the evening had notified the office that he expected it, and to bring it right up to him.

But the boy, pounding on Blair's door, could get no answer. So the bellboy and the manager, and Murdock with them, had

gotten the passkey and gone in, gazing numbed with horror at the terrible scene. Already they had all three told Captain Rance about it.

"We didn't cross the threshold," Murdock said. "We just took a look, slammed the door again and ran downstairs and telephoned for you, Captain Rance."

Rance nodded. "That was natural."

Then Murdock had explained how he hadn't seen his father-in-law all day, except for a minute at the plant this after-

noon. He had worked late tonight, he explained, had just gotten home when the bellboy knocked on his door about the telegram.

"I see," Rance agreed.

And now Rance and his men were poking around to see what they could find that would lead them to this dastardly murderer. But there didn't seem to be anything. As he sat in the corner silently watching, Murdock found himself calm and composed now. The horror at what he had done had faded, and a quiet triumph had taken its place. The thing was done. He couldn't have planned it, but now that it was done he could see it was for the best. He'd be half owner of the Blair Game and Toy Co. now. In supreme command.

He'd order Keenan away tomorrow. The books wouldn't be audited. Not now. There'd be big money, if he worked this thing right. With the money he had available with nobody to check on him, he could buy out the small stockholders. Big money, for himself—and Vivian. He hadn't seen Vivian since Gloria died. What a change this past week had brought to his life, and Vivian's!

"The old man was pretty interested in chess, by the look of things around here, wasn't he?"

Captain Rance's voice jerked Murdock out of his roaming thoughts.

"Eh? Why yes, captain, he sure was."

RRANCE was standing gazing at the artists' sketches lying on the chair across by the opposite wall. Murdock chuckled. This big policeman couldn't find any clues, so that all he could do was stall around and talk about chess while he waited for the county medical examiner to come and pronounce Elias Blair dead of a knife-thrust in his back. Murdock had had one frightening moment a while ago. He had fled from the room with no wits to think about anything. And he might have left his fingerprints on that knife handle. But Rance's man had already failed to find any; the knife-handle was all crinkled, ornately carved.

"Evidently was planning some sort of contest," Rance was saying as he gazed at one of the sketches. "'Buy a set of Chester's Chermasol Chessmen, solve a



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chess problem and win a big cash prize," Rance read from the sketch.

"I can tell you about that, captain," Murdock volunteered. "A business scheme of his. He's been talking about it for a week or two. I'm general manager of the company, you know."

He explained the thing to Rance. The big policeman's interest was obvious. "I see," Rance said. "Sure sounds like a swell scheme. You buy a set of chessmen, and use the coupon that comes with them to enter the contest. Solve a tricky chess problem? Well, that sure would hook me, all right." He grinned at Murdock. "You see, I'm sort of fond of chess myself," he added. "In my spare time. It's the best indoor game in the world."

"Is it?" Murdock smiled. "I wouldn't know."

And now Rance was standing, gazing down at the chessboard. It hadn't been touched. It still stood on its low table under the light which shone down on the five tiny black and white chess figures. So Rance was another daffy chess enthusiast? It seemed so. He just stood pondering. A couple of his men gazed at him in disgust, and one of them offered a suggestion about how the killer might have fled unseen so easily down the hotel side stairway. But Rance waved him away.

"Seems like he had a chess problem set up here," Rance was saying musingly. "The problem he was going to use for this contest, maybe?"

"I wouldn't know," Murdock said.

Rance turned to gaze at him. "A few things are clear here. Mighty interesting. Blair was seated here at his chessboard, just about where the body is now."

That dead thing in the chair was so horribly gruesome! The corpse had been straightened up a little by one of the policemen. It was almost as though Blair was slumped here, still pondering his problem.

"I figure the killer was well known to him," Rance was saying slowly. "The killer sat in this other chair across the board from him. See where the chair has been pushed back and scuffed up the rug? And here are some of Blair's letters, some of them opened, others not. The opened ones were slit with a paper knife. Then if the knife lay there with them, the killer on

sudden impulse would reach for it; and then jump up, avoiding the chessboard and leap around to stab his victim in the back. Just a guess, but that could be pretty damn' near what happened."

IT was indeed! In his chair across the room, Murdock sat tense, staring. Several of the uniformed men were gathered near Rance now, watching him, but he ignored them.

Then again Rance looked over at Murdock. "This problem won't work!" Rance exclaimed suddenly. "I'm a monkey's uncle if it will. You can't checkmate that White King in three moves, or three hundred. Not with just these five pieces involved. You need more."

What was he getting at? Was he trying to solve this murder by dopping out a chess problem?

"What do you mean?" Murdock said involuntarily.

Rance had Blair's little note-book in his hand now. "His notes are here," Rance said. "Listen, here's what he had scribbled: '*Contest problem devised by Elias J. Blair. White King on Black King's Rook 4.*' See, that's where it's standing now," Rance went on. "And then he lists the other four pieces, placing each of them just where they are now. The problem's all set up; it didn't get disturbed at all by the killing. And he says in his notes, '*Black to play and checkmate in three.*' But you can't do it, not with these pieces! And he hadn't finished his notes, that's obvious the way the pencil trailed off. Could be that the murderer interrupted him."

Again the room was silent. This strange detective, who just stood fussing over a chess problem! But somehow it sent a thrill of fear through Murdock. As though there were a menace here. Those tiny gleaming chessmen down there on the board, little warriors, ready to march upon him.

"I've got the idea!" Rance's voice was suddenly triumphant. "With a black pawn this thing works out! I can't say I've solved the problem—not yet. But it does seem as though a black pawn ought to be here. It sure does. With a black pawn on the board the thing looks reasonable."

A tiny black pawn! Murdock's mind swept back. Old Blair had said something about a black pawn. . . . The pawn's move

is peculiar. He had said something like that. And now it seemed to Murdock he could remember that there had been *six pieces on the board*. Five, and the tiny black pawn. The men were searching the room now. On a shelf they found the box of the remaining chessmen. Seven black pawns, not needed for the problem, were in it. But the other was gone. They searched, futilely, the floor of the room.

"Queer," Rance was saying. He was still staring at the chessboard, and in the tense silence his pondering words were clear. "There surely was a black pawn here, or this problem's impossible. Now let's see, suppose it was here on the lower left hand side of the board. The knight's pawn, still on knight two. That would make mate in three look reasonable. I'm convinced it was here, but where the devil did it go?"

WHY did this thing seem to hold such a menace? Murdock found himself involuntarily rising from his chair.

"A pawn missing, captain?" Murdock said. He took a step or two forward.

Rance was still pondering. "That pawn was here. And if that killer leaned over to seize the knife—" Rance had turned, with his puzzled gaze on Murdock. And suddenly the police captain's jaw dropped and he gasped.

"Well, I'm a monkey's uncle, *there it is!*" Then he leaped at Murdock, gripping the lapel of Murdock's sport jacket, drawing it further aside. "There it is! Well I'll be damned!"

Blankly Murdock gazed down at his belt, at the small horseshoe watch fob that hung there. And his mind swept back to when he had reached for the knife, and the horseshoe bauble just for an instant had dangled over the left hand corner of the chessboard! The lucky horseshoe bauble that he had found in the road! But it was more than that! It was a little gleaming steel magnet!

"We've got you, Murdock!" Rance's triumphant voice was saying.

"Got me? I—guess you have, I never realized—"

Murdock couldn't help stammering it. Numbed by horror he gazed down at the damning magic of magnetism—that tiny, light-metal black pawn clinging so tenaciously against the prongs of the little horseshoe!

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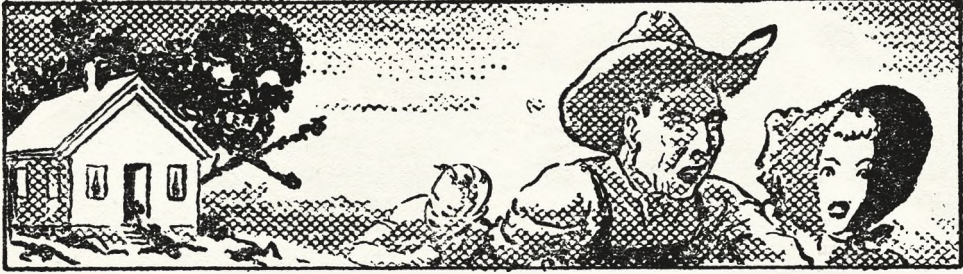


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DEATH DEEPENS MYSTERY

AN UNSOLVED multiple murder which occurred more than thirty-two years ago in Iowa and which became that state's most famous mass homicide was recently brought back to public memory by the death, early this year, of a one-time private investigator named J. N. Wilkerson of Kansas City.

Wilkerson was the detective who journeyed to Billisca, Iowa, in 1912 to assist in the man-hunt for the slayer or slayers of Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Moore, their four children, and two neighbor children—all of them bloody victims of an unknown axe fiend. Discovery of the eight hacked and mutilated bodies had brought terror and panic to the tiny farming community; armed posses and packs of bloodhounds had already been pressed into service by county and state authorities when Wilkerson appeared on the scene. He found the little village swept by fear; residents refused to go to bed at night without a final check-up of their homes, and dozens of special locks had been bought for windows and doors, because nobody knew when the axe murderer might strike again.

Conducting a private investigation, Wilkerson worked independently of local officials and continued his efforts over a lengthy period of time. Eventually he formed certain conclusions regarding the identity of the killer, or killers; but his opinions differed from those of the attorney general's office and the result was probably one of the most protracted controversies ever recorded between officialdom and a free-lance detective. Billisca village found itself split into two factions, one supporting Wilkerson and the other adhering to the D. A.'s views.

SO strong did this division of sentiment become that on one occasion Wilkerson was sued for slander to the tune of \$60,000—an action which he won in the county seat of Red Oak after a 30 day trial marked by much bitterness and re-creation. Both during and after that slander trial Wilkerson spoke before scores of mass meetings, many of them in pastures. He repeatedly charged that his efforts to solve the murder were being hampered by politicians who were protecting the guilty person.

A curious sidelight on the case developed when a traveling evangelist was arrested and accused of the eight axe slayings. This itinerant preacher confessed, but subsequently changed his plea to Not Guilty. Two trials were held, the first resulting in a hung jury which was dismissed when it could not agree. At the second trial the preacher was acquitted.

Wilkerson and his followers sided with the defense in both trials, and later the private detective continued to work on the mystery. At one time the Attorney General of Iowa obtained an injunction preventing Wilkerson from holding his meetings, whereupon the investigator rented a theater in Omaha, Nebraska, where he addressed more than a thousand citizens of Villisca who had come by special train to hear the two-hour speech.

In spite of all this, the murders were never solved and Wilkerson eventually bowed out of the case. His recent death in Kansas City brings to a close his long, tireless efforts to track down the axe killer—who, if he is still alive after all these years, might perhaps now breathe a sigh of relief to know that Wilkerson will never again reopen the investigation.

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We are so sure that once you try this safe, sensible method of weight reducing, you will be overjoyed with the results it can make in your appearance that we make this unconditional no-risk offer! Send \$2.00 today for a 30-days' supply of Solene, or order C.O.D. plus postage. Try it for ten days at our risk. If you are not thoroughly satisfied . . . if you don't begin to notice a decided improvement in your appearance, in the way you look and feel, return the unused portion for full refund. We take all the risk. Don't delay! Don't suffer the embarrassment of excess weight a day longer! Send today . . . now . . . for Solene and begin at once to enjoy the popularity and improved vigor that come from normal weight.

BEAUTY AIDS, DEPT. 7-JD

89 FLATBUSH AVENUE • BROOKLYN 17, N. Y.



Appear **SLIMMER**
Look **YOUNGER**
Feel **BETTER**
Instantly!

Don't let them talk about your "Bay Window"—stay slenderized with this amazing free-action, ever comfortable, elastic woven garment!

"INTERLOCKING HANDS" Sensational NEW PRINCIPLE of Abdominal Support

Clasp hands over abdomen, as in picture—raise and press gently—notice how much better you feel! Sturdy non-stretch fabric is BUILT IN with the stretchy weave of the Commander for EXTRA DOUBLE STOP-PORT across the abdomen. Instantly the Commander flattens your "Corporation"—BRACES YOUR BACK—improves your appearance!

TRY IT 10 DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE

Send coupon—wear the Commander TEN DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE—if you do not get all the results you expect, return it and YOUR MONEY WILL BE REFUNDED.

MAIL COUPON NOW

Ward Green Company, Dept. T-637
113 W. 57th St., New York 19, N. Y.
Send me Commander Supporter for Free Trial. I will pay postman \$2.98 plus postage. (Sizes 28 to 47.) If not satisfied I may return it in 10 days and get money back. (Sizes 48 to 60, \$3.98.)
My Waist Measures.....My Height.....

Name

Address

If \$2.98 is enclosed with order, we pay postage charges. Check here.

**10 DAY
Free Trial
Coupon**

There was one woman who was traced through no less than fifteen marriages, most of them without benefit of previous divorce. Of this woman's list of husbands, several were service men; and she was collecting \$50 per month from Uncle Sam on every one! Needless to say, she is now languishing in a Federal jail.

Another case was that of a girl who had "married" ten different men, four of them in the armed forces. Those four soldier husbands represented a cool \$200 a month to her, but she is a lot cooler now—in a cell.

Still a third flagrant example was that of a woman who accumulated no less than fifteen husbands. The last on her list happened to be an army corporal who became suspicious when he noticed the unusually

large number of government checks his bride received every month. Quietly he tipped off his post intelligence officer, who, in turn, communicated with the G-men after discontinuing the corporal's allotment to his "wife". Shortly thereafter she was honeymooning behind bars.

With all the national newspaper publicity that has attended such cases, the multiple-marriage racket is beginning to wane. But a new and even dirtier grift has come to light in the discovery that mail boxes are being robbed of allotment checks, endorsements forged, and the checks cashed by unauthorized persons. Postal inspectors are co-operating with the F.B.I. to stamp out this chisel, and scores of arrests have already been made.

DON'T WASTE PAPER— IT'S A WEAPON OF WAR!



60 days to the front . . .

every scrap of paper is needed!

It takes about two months before your waste paper, reprocessed into cartons, arrives at the battle fronts carrying such essentials as blood plasma, rations or ammunition to our fighting men overseas. Turn in your old paper regularly. Never burn it!

It's needed! When waste paper is sold, many organizations channel some of the funds to help wounded veterans by providing the little extras which mean so much during

convalescence...or to support other worthy community projects. Back up the Double V Program—Save Every Scrap of Paper!



This advertisement prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.



Space contributed to Double V Waste Paper Program by this publication.

Separate and tie in bundles:
1. Wastebasket scraps. 2. Corrugated boxes, brown paper and bags. 3. Magazines and books. 4. Newspapers.

SUICIDE IS A SINISTER SUBJECT

SUICIDE IS the one crime which is punishable only if unsuccessful. The successful self-slayer is forever beyond the reach of the law. This quiz is about people who took their own lives. Some were forced to do so, some did it willfully, some by accident or Fate's decree. Their guilt varies with the circumstances. How many of these recipes for the "perfect crime" do you know? Score one point for each. Rating: 12 to 15—Good, 10—Fair.

1. What great queen committed suicide by snake poison rather than be taken captive?
2. What lovers committed suicide because each one thought the other was dead?
3. The champion betrayer of all time, Judas, killed himself. How?
4. What famous painter shot himself because of recurrent fits of insanity?
5. The world's first poetess jumped off a rock for the sake of unrequited love. Who?
6. What Roman emperor, cornered by his enemies, was shamed into committing a sloppy sort of hari-kari with his sword?
7. Who killed both his enemies and himself as he pulled down the walls of a house?
8. Who inadvertently committed suicide by looking back?
9. What great general is said to have expired from sheer boredom because there were "no more worlds to conquer"—although it is more probable that he drank himself to death?
10. What Greek philosopher committed suicide by state decree through drinking a cup of poison?

CUT ME OUT

Mail me today for **FREE** book about America's finest 3c-a-day Hospital Plan. **PAYS CASH—\$25 A WEEK.** Also pays Hospital Room and Board; Surgeon's Fee. And many other valuable benefits up to \$1000.00. No medical examination! No agents! No obligation!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Commonwealth Mutual Ins. Co. of America
208 E. Lexington St., Baltimore 2, Md., Dept. SF-7

PLASTICS

**TRAINED MEN NEEDED IN
NEW, ESSENTIAL INDUSTRY**

Plastics is a great new industry and the time to get started in it is *now*. Opportunities are unlimited. In your spare time, at home, you can prepare to enter this important field. A new, practical training plan is now ready to help you realize your ambitions and win success. Send name and address *today* for **FREE** information.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. PB93
Drexel Ave. at 58th, Chicago 37, Ill.

Name

Street

City, State

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 Inches
on **DOUBLE-WEIGHT PAPER**

Same price for full length or best form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture.

57¢ 3 for \$1.25

Original returned with your enlargement.

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo, negative or snapshot (any size) and receive your enlargement, guaranteed fadeless, on beautiful double-weight portrait quality paper. Pay postman 57¢ plus postage—or send 57¢ with order and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer! **Send your photos today.**

STANDARD ART STUDIOS
100 East Ohio Street Dept. 8515-H Chicago (11), Ill.



USED
10 Street Dresses \$3.90

We make every effort to bring you the biggest dress bargains in the country. Many of these dresses were easily worth up to \$10.00 each when new. Assorted colors and materials. Sizes up to 20—10 for \$3.90. Larger sizes 5 for \$3.25. Send \$1.00 deposit with order, balance C.O.D. plus postage. State size desired. Purchase price refunded if not satisfied. Many other clothing bargains for entire family. **FREE CATALOG.**

HOUSEHOLD MAIL ORDER CO.
368 Sutter Ave., Dept. BS, Brooklyn 12, N. Y.

FREE — ENGRAVING — NEW

NAME OR INITIALS on 1945

14k Gold Finish FRIENDSHIP PIN



Write For Catalog

Send 42 cents, plus 8¢ Federal Tax, in Coin, Stamps or Money Order.

TASH NOVELTY ENGRAVING CO.
1301 SURF AVENUE, DEPT. 96-F, BROOKLYN (24), N. Y.

11. What queen lit her own funeral pyre as a torch to guide her deserting lover out of port?

12. What Roman matron killed herself rather than face a life of dishonor?

13. What father of an infamous family accidentally committed suicide by eating poisoned candies he intended for his guests?

14. Through fear of political reprisal, the world's first etiquette expert, a sort of male Emily Post, committed suicide by delicately slashing his wrists. Who?

15. What Swiss patriot committed suicide by flinging himself forward to break a wall of enemy spears?

ANSWERS

- 15. Arnold Von Winkelried
- 14. Petronius Arbiter
- 13. Roderigo Borgia
- 12. Lucrece
- 11. Dido of Carthage
- 10. Soerates
- 9. Alexander the Great

- 8. Lot's wife
- 7. Samson
- 6. Nero
- 5. Sappho
- 4. Vincent Van Gogh
- 3. By hanging
- 2. Romeo and Juliet
- 1. Cleopatra



"I'm Saving Paper For My Daddy"

Millions of fathers and sons in uniform today depend on the paper required to make or wrap over 700,000 vital war items.

Paper is still a No. 1 war material shortage. Last year's collection of 7,000,000 tons wasn't enough. 8,000,000 tons must be collected this year to meet the essential needs of the battlefront and homefront. So please save every scrap!

And remember, your paper now has a chance to serve twice. In some localities, funds from the sale of waste paper are being devoted more and more to buying little extras for wounded veterans. Or the money can go to other worthy community projects.



Separate and tie in bundles: 1. Waste-basket scraps. 2. Corrugated boxes, brown paper and bags. 3. Old magazines and books. 4. Newspapers.

This advertisement prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.



This advertisement contributed to Double-V Waste Paper Program by this publication.

HOLLYWOOD

LEG-MAN

THERE IS a certain hosiery technician in Hollywood whose profession probably arouses envy in half the masculine hearts of the United States, and small wonder! For this expert fits and furnishes stockings to the requirements of glamorous movie stars—and actually gets paid for it. As somebody once said, it's nice work if you can get it.

Just imagine designing a pair of stockings with a zipper pocket at the top for a key, the outfit to be worn by a famed pin-up girl. Or fancy creating 14-karat gold mesh hose for the gorgeous gams of Marlene Dietrich—and receiving \$350 per pair for them. If that staggers your day-dreams, think of the privilege enjoyed by this Hollywood leg man of repairing hosiery runs every time a feminine star snags her nylons—thereby affording himself an artist's-eye view of perfection in measurements and dimensions.

And yet the life of a hose expert isn't all beer and skittles. For instance, the technician under discussion recently permitted himself to be interviewed by a writer for a national newspaper syndicate, and during the course of the conversation he made some remarks about beautiful legs that had repercussions all over the country. That is, the remarks backfired; not the legs. For in stating his conception of the perfect female underpinning he also purported to let a few secret cats out of the bag. One famous star, he claimed, has "piano legs" which he disguised with dark stockings in gunmetal, black or brown, with vertical ribs, clocks and pointed heels to give a slenderizing effect. He turns seams toward the outside for two other well known movie cuties, he said, in order to counterbalance their bowlegged condition;

Expert Enlargements

on Selected Double-Weight Matte Paper
 5" x 7".....5 for \$1.00 from one negative. Each enlargement receives individual attention. Negative made from your photo. 50c extra.
 8" x 10".....3 for \$1.00
 11" x 14".....3 for \$2.00
 We pay postage. Send money with order. No C.O.D.
HI-LITE PHOTO STUDIO
 704 Eastern Parkway, Dept. T, Brooklyn 13, N. Y.

PSORIASIS-ECZEMA

OH BOY, WHAT A RELIEF!
JUST BRUSH "EN-EX" ON!

with Caution, as DIRECTED in 30 DAY "Chart".
 Satisfaction or MONEY BACK on 1st Bottle. No stain, Not Greasy!

\$1.00 Reg. Size Bottle
 Send currency, Money Order or sent C.O.D.
WRITE TODAY!

"EN-EX" Company
 572 Society for Savings Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio

DETECTIVES

TRAINING • SECRET INVESTIGATIONS
 Easy Short Method-Reports-FINGERPRINTS-by Former Government
 Detective-Rewards-Home-Travel-Secret Code-Booklet FREE-Write
INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM
 1701-K MONROE STREET, N.E. WASHINGTON 18, D. C.

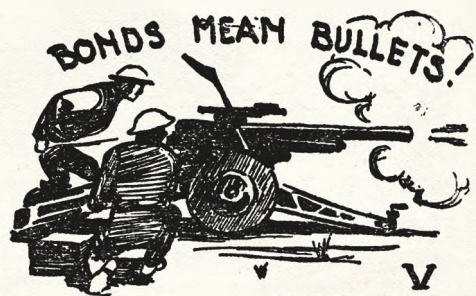


10 DRESSES \$3⁹⁵

(Used Clothing)

We are confident you will agree with us that these are the best dresses available at the price. When new, some sold as high as \$12.95. Assorted colors. Sizes up to 20-10 for \$3.95. Larger sizes 5 for \$3.00. Send 50¢ deposit, balance C.O.D. plus postage. We aim to guarantee satisfaction or refund purchase price. Rush order now. Give size desired. Invest postage and discover these real bargains. Many clothing bargains for everybody. Illustrated catalog free.

NATIONAL SALES COMPANY
 367 Satter Ave., Dept. PF Brooklyn 12, N. Y.



The SPEED

magazine is your guarantee in
 fiction entertainment!

"Ceilings" are saving you money



**24 months after war started*
 It's a far longer and more expensive war than the last one—but this time the cost of living hasn't been allowed to get out of hand. If you're ever tempted to grumble at price-and-wage controls, look at these charts—and DON'T. They're one reason to bless ceiling prices . . . and to check 'em whenever you shop. (They're posted for your protection!)

Rationing gives all a fair share



The Millionbucks get no more points than the poorest folks in town. Necessities are rationed to see that each gets his share. And rationing also keeps prices down: without it the fellow with the biggest wad of dough would have a terrific edge. Share and play square . . . pay points for everything you buy. (And shun black markets like the enemy they are!)

—and the money you DON'T SPEND helps hold living costs down

The plain bread-and-butter fact is this: there's about \$1.50 in people's pockets for every dollar's worth of goods in the stores.

Splurge—buy anything you don't actually need—and you put the heat on everything to rise all along the line.

Save—deny yourself something you want but can get along without—and you help yourself a little today and a lot tomorrow.

Squeeze that budget. Squeeze a little more into your savings account. Squeeze a little more money into insurance. Squeeze yourself into buying another War Bond today . . . and every month from now on.

Wise enough to harness your money for your own safety?

ONLY YOU CAN DO IT.



and in another instance he puts the seams on the inside to correct an appearance of knock-knees.

"The eye follows the seam, not the shape of the leg," was the way he explained it. He then went on to divulge a system he'd used to convert still another famed glamour girl into a ballerina for a role in a ballet film. First he padded her calves with rubberized "falsie" shaping, then an understocking for skin tone and finally a regular pair of hose on top.

This was all very well except for the fact that he named names. The resultant explosion of indignant denials thundered in print from coast to coast. Columnists took up the cudgels for and against the hosiery expert. Other correspondents flew to the defense of their maligned favorites among the pin-up gender. And several of the pin-up cuties themselves conducted skirt-lifting displays to prove themselves gifted with faultless stems. "See for yourselves," they said to carefully selected juries of writers.

Now those favored writers are convinced of one thing, anyhow: It's an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody a glimpse of gorgeous and shapely shafts. Stocking experts aren't the only lucky guys, after all!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**War Bonds are
HIS Ticket Home!**
**Will YOU help
bring him back?**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CLASSIFIED SECTION

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Build profitable home mail order business, spare time. Free details. Victory, Box 179-N, Dowagiac 11, Michigan.

EDUCATIONAL

CORRESPONDENCE COURSES and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, Rented, Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete information and 32-page, illustrated bargain catalog Free. Write: NELSON COMPANY, Dept. 2-41, Chicago 4.

MAGAZINES, PERIODICALS, ETC.

Magazines (Back dated)—foreign, domestic, arts. Books, booklets, subscriptions, pin-ups, etc. Catalog 10¢ (refunded). Cicerone's, 865 First Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

MISCELLANEOUS

RECEIVE MAILS, Literature, Opportunities. Your name in numerous mailing lists, 10¢. Greenwood, 277 Broadway, New York.

NURSES' TRAINING SCHOOL

MAKE UP TO \$25-\$35 WEEK AS A TRAINED practical nurse! Learn quickly at home. Booklet Free. Chicago School of Nursing, Dept. D-5, Chicago.

OLD COINS WANTED

WILL PAY \$10.00 EACH FOR CERTAIN LINCOLN PENNIES! Indianheads \$30.00; Dimes \$1,000.00. Catalogue 10¢. Federal Coin Exchange, 4-CF, Columbus 15, Ohio.

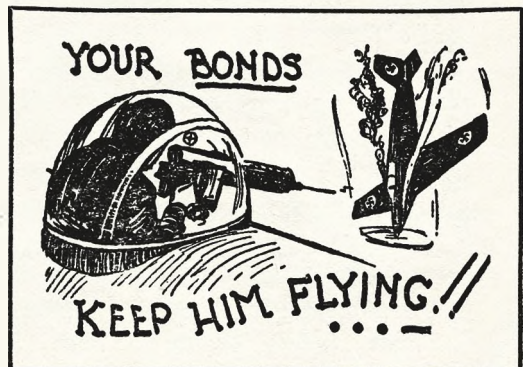
We purchase Indianhead pennies. Complete coin catalogue, 10¢. Fairview, 277 Broadway, New York.

PROFITABLE OCCUPATIONS

AMBITIOUS? Anxious to get ahead? Write for Free Details on "From Fifty Cents a Day to Ten Thousand per Year." WEBB, Box 184-B, Drexel, Missouri.

SONG POEMS WANTED

SONGWRITERS: Send poem for immediate consideration and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. RICHARD BROTHEKS, 45 Woods Building, Chicago.



GET THIS **BIG**

PICTURE HISTORY
 Nearly 500 Pictures · Over 400 Pages
OF AMERICA

From the Discovery down
 to World War II

**Pictures Every Important Event
 in America in the Last 944 Years**

Here is a tremendously exciting *continuous* picture history of the growth of America — from the coming of the Northmen in 1001 A.D. right up to World War II. You see every important historical event as recorded by the world's greatest artists or in photographs—a total of 448 action pictures each with a complete story outline by the noted historian, Claude C. Bowers. Portraits and biographies of every president of the United States are given together with complete coverage of all our national wars, major battles, treaties, political crises, panics, great inventions and great personalities. This is a book for the whole family, a treasure chest of American history and inspiration. It is a beautiful cloth-bound book you can proudly place in your library.

Thrilling Scenes of American Might



SEE the landing of the Pilgrims, the Indian Wars, the great Westward development, the Boston tea party, the Signing of the Declaration of Independence.

SEE the battles of Shiloh, Gettysburg, Antietam, Lincoln signing the Proclamation of Emancipation, the first steamship, first submarine.



SEE the battles of World War I and the opening scenes of World War II, the first and latest airplanes, the big inventions of our era, photos of famous generals and leaders, and hundreds of other fascinating subjects too numerous to mention.

SPECIAL!! Our price \$2.49

Regular price \$3.50

CLIP AND MAIL COUPON TODAY

SUPERIOR PUBLISHING COMPANY

17 East 48th Street, New York (17), N. Y.

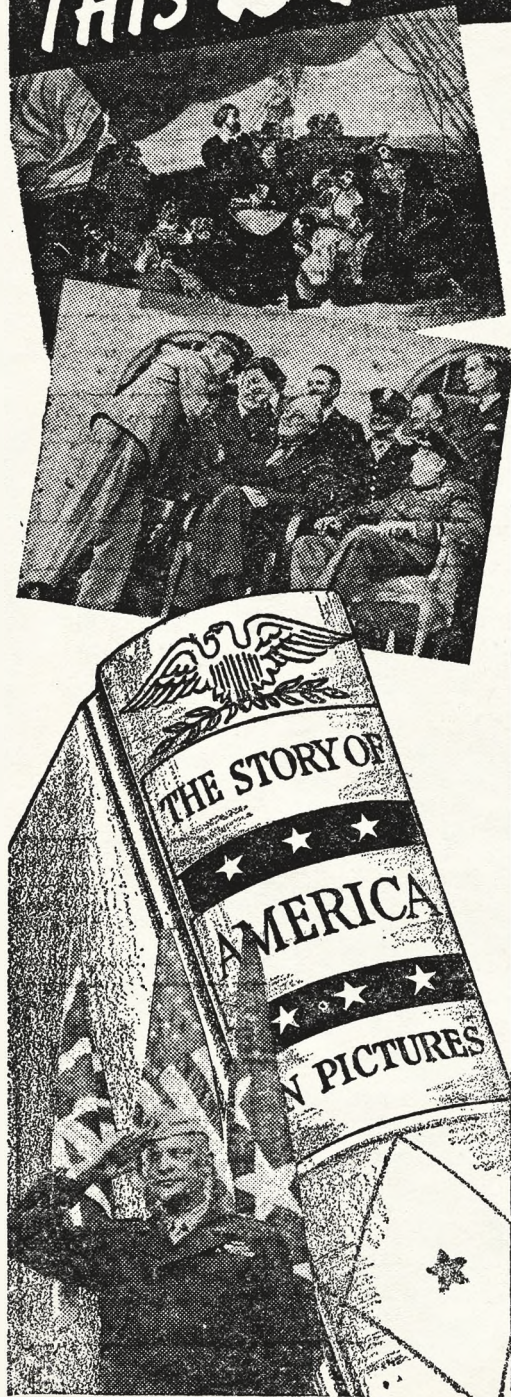
I want to examine **THE STORY OF AMERICA IN PICTURES** for 5 days **FREE**. Send me the book by return mail **C.O.D.** I will pay the postman \$2.49 plus a few cents postal charges. Then, if for any reason I am not fully satisfied, I may return the book within 5 days and you will refund my money.

Name

St. & No. Postal Zone No., if any

City State

SAVE C.O.D. FEES. Yes, we will prepay all postal charges if you remit in advance. Same money-back guarantee, of course.



Here's the Greatest **BILLFOLD BARGAIN** in all America!

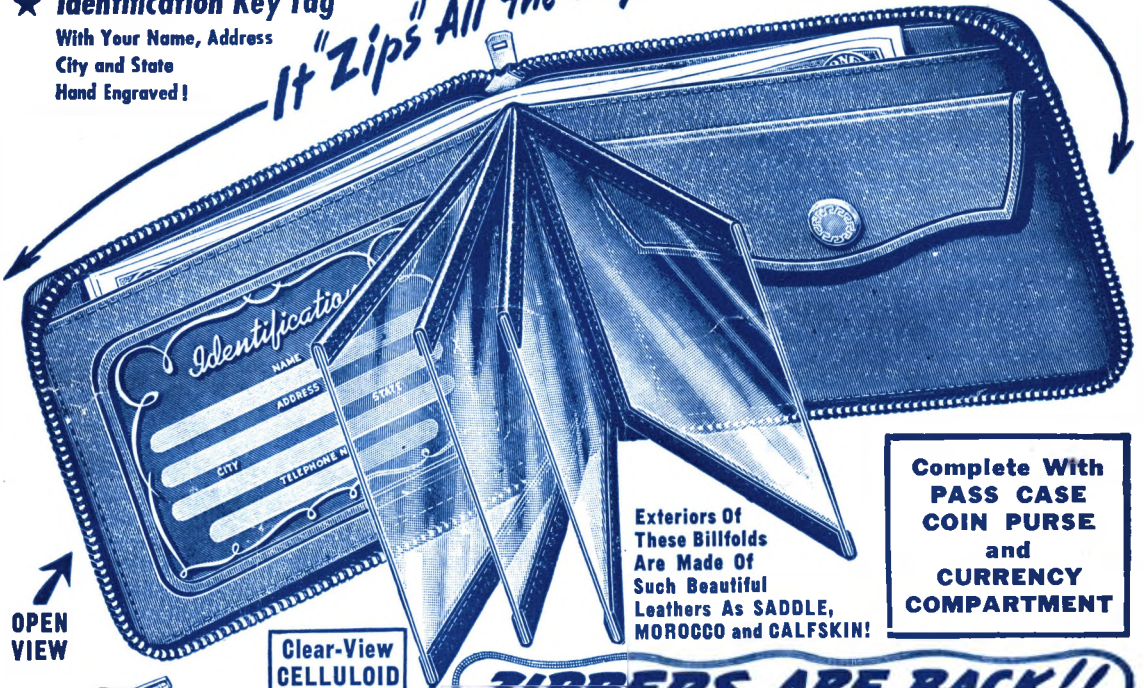
3 BIG VALUES in ONE

All for only
\$ **2.98**

- ★ SMART ZIPPER LEATHER BILLFOLD AND PASS CASE
- ★ BUILT-IN CHANGE PURSE
- ★ Identification Key Tag

With Your Name, Address
City and State
Hand Engraved!

It "Zips" All the Way Around



OPEN VIEW

Clear-View
CELLULOID
WINDOWS

Exteriors Of
These Billfolds
Are Made Of
Such Beautiful
Leathers As SADDLE,
MOROCCO and CALFSKIN!

Complete With
PASS CASE
COIN PURSE
and
CURRENCY
COMPARTMENT

ZIPPERS ARE BACK!!



CLOSED VIEW

Hand Engraved Identification Key Tag
Included With Every Zipper Billfold!



We also send you this beautiful 3-color identification key tag, hand engraved with your full name, address, city and state. It's the ideal key tag. Provides ample room for all your keys with your permanent identification for recovery in case of loss.

At Last! Here's the Billfold you've been waiting for since Pearl Harbor. Here's the Billfold most wanted by men everywhere—now for the first time offered at a price that's sensationally low for a Billfold of such unmistakable fine quality. You've never known real Billfold satisfaction until you've used this "Zip-all-around" DeLuxe Pass Case Billfold with its Built-in Change Purse and roomy Currency Compartment. When closed it's as neat and safe a Billfold as you've ever seen. Shake it all you want and nothing can fall out. Slips easily into your back pocket or coat and will not bulge out of shape. Yet when you want to get at it, the Billfold "Zips open all the way" — so that everything you carry is in full plain view, ready for instant use. No guess-work. No fumbling into tight corners to get at valuables.

Here without a doubt is the last word in a real man's Billfold. A veritable storehouse for everything a man likes to carry with him — his currency, his change, his credit and membership cards, his personal identification. Along with the all around Zipper Billfold and Change Purse, we also include a hand engraved Identification Key Tag as shown. You get the 3 Big Values in one as described all for only \$2.98. But hurry. SEND NO MONEY. Just rush your order on the handy coupon below today. On arrival, pay postman only \$2.98 plus 20% tax and postage with understanding that if this isn't the greatest Billfold Bargain you've ever seen, you can return in 10 days for full refund.

SEND NO MONEY—RUSH THIS COUPON TODAY!

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, Dept. 4336
500 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 10, Ill.

Please rush me the "All-around" Zipper Pass Case Billfold with Built-in Change Purse and hand engraved Identification Key Tag. On arrival I will pay postman only \$2.98 plus 20% Federal Tax and few cents postage and C.O.D. Charges. It is understood that if I am not positively thrilled and delighted in every way I can return the billfold within 10 days for full refund.

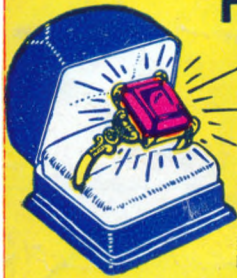
MY FULL NAME..... (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

To save shipping charges I am enclosing in advance \$2.98 plus 20% Federal Excise tax (total \$3.58). Please ship by Zipper Billfold order all postage charges prepaid.

BIRTHSTONE RING



Smart, new, dainty Sterling Silver ring set with sparkling birthstone correct for your month date. *Given* for selling only 5 boxes.

Hollywood Photo Folder

4 x 6 inch, Genuine leather folder has celluloid protected fronts for 2 pictures. Comes with 2 Movie Star pictures. *Given* for selling 5 boxes.



ORCHID

GLOWS IN DARK

Alluring Orchid in size and delicate coloring by day and at night a shimmering butterfly jewel that glows with mysterious beauty. *Given* for selling 10 boxes.



HOLSTER SET

Cowboy Outfit. Regular Texas type Pistol and decorated holster with leather belt. *Given* for selling only 10 boxes.



FOOTBALL Official size, very tough and sturdy FOOTBALL. *Given* for selling 10 boxes as specified in gift catalog.



LEATHER BILLFOLD This LEATHER BILLFOLD provides space for currency and protected pockets for membership cards, credit cards, etc.

Given for selling 10 boxes.



Dozens of useful gifts and cash offered in our free catalog.



POWERFUL TELESCOPE

Everyone enjoys this Powerful Telescope for spotting planes, hunting and vacations. *Given* for selling only 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner." Just send the coupon for your order to start.

GOLD CROWN PRODUCTS

GIVEN

Your Choice of Valuable GIFTS or CASH

Send No Money Now. Do like thousands of others do and get cash or valuable gifts such as billfolds, scissors, games, bracelets, rings, lockets, jewelry, hosiery and other premiums that are easily yours. Simply send the coupon and tell us what gift you would like to earn. The gift you select is given to you promptly and sent postpaid for selling just a few boxes of nationally known "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" at 25c each and returning the money collected as explained in our free catalog sent with your first order.

Here's your lucky chance to receive a valuable gift. Your friends, relatives and neighbors all need "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" that saves many, many dollars in dry cleaning bills. Repeat orders bring cash or more gifts.

Mail This Gift Coupon To-day

CHARMING LOCKET



Choice of Dainty Heart Locket or Round Hollywood Remembrance Locket with space for pictures of loved ones. Beautifully embossed 18-inch chain. *GIVEN* for selling only 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner."

REPLICA PEARL EARRINGS

Button type Iridescent Replica PEARL EARRINGS half inch size.



Given for selling 10 boxes.

DOLL 7 inches high. Lifelike hair and coloring. Dressed in colored print and felt bonnet. *Given* for selling only 10 boxes and remitting as explained in free catalog.



MEN'S NECKTIE

Attractive designs in lively colors.

Given for selling only 5 boxes.



SHEER RAYON HOSIERY

Mock seam fashion. Ring free. Every pair gives excellent wear, and is sent in the size you specify. *Given* for selling only 5 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" and returning the money collected.

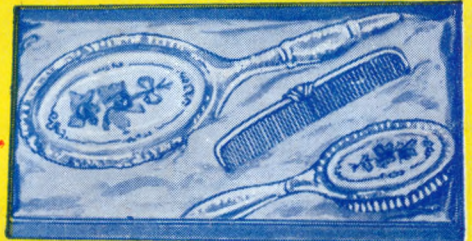


Friendship RING

"2-in-1" Sterling Silver "True Love-and-Friendship" Ring. Hands actually clasp and unclasp. *Given* for selling 10 boxes.



Ring opens and closes as shown



Dresser Set

This DRESSER SET consisting of COMB, BRUSH and MIRROR in beautiful gift box given for selling 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" as explained in our catalog.

Enclose this coupon in an envelope or paste it on a postcard and send it to **GOLD CROWN PRODUCTS, Dept. E-404, Jefferson, Iowa**, for order to start.

GIFT Wanted

Name.....
 Address.....
 City..... State.....

Dept. E-404, Jefferson, Iowa