THE BIG STORY

AMERICA'S RADIO AND TELEVISION FAVORITE

Authentic stories as they actually happened
faithfully reported by the men and women of the press

OCTOBER 1951 • 25c

6 EXCITING STORIES FROM THE FRONT PAGES OF AMERICA!

the inside story of the BIG STORY

Bernard J. Prockter, producer of "Big Story" is seen during the telecast of this program.

THERE is an inside story to the "Big Story," now heard and seen by millions of people every week over radio and television.

About five years ago, Bernard J. Prockter, producer of the "Big Story," read that the Sigma Delta Chi award had been given to James McGuire of the Chicago Times for his investigations clearing Joseph Majczek of a 99 year murder sentence. Prockter saw in that case a model for his program.

Why not, he asked, honor reporters who have done much more than merely cover a story? The Pulitzer Prize did just that. But there were hundreds of worthy newspapermen who solved murders, proved convicted men innocent, or aided the community in other respects. They never secured deserved recognition beyond the confines of their own communities. So the "Big Story" was designed to put the spotlight on the hundreds of brilliant reporters who *don't* get the Pulitzer Prize. In addition, they receive the five hundred dollar Pall Mall award for notable service in the field of journalism.

Since April 2, 1947, there have been, of course, a number of well known reporters who were honored, such as Walter Winchell, Dorothy Kilgallen and Dan Parker. But, by and large, the bulk of the reporters whose cases were dramatized were not known except in the cities where they worked. The "Big Story" has placed the spotlight on their achievements.

In September of 1949, the "Big Story" made its debut on television. Its outstanding success has been due to a number of factors, one of them Prockter's meticulous adherence to realism. His own camera crew, director, and actors spend days shooting scenes in the very locale where a crime occurred. They spare no efforts to give the TV audience a look into every nook and corner that figures in a story dramatization. In fact, the crew—always on the alert to give a telecast complete authenticity—have never hesitated to climb mountains, literally, to attain their objectives.

Such meticulousness delights Prockter, who during his twenty years in radio and television, has developed and produced many other hit shows. "It's the small things, well done," he says, "that make a well produced 'Big Story'."

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Oct. 1951

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as they actually happened.
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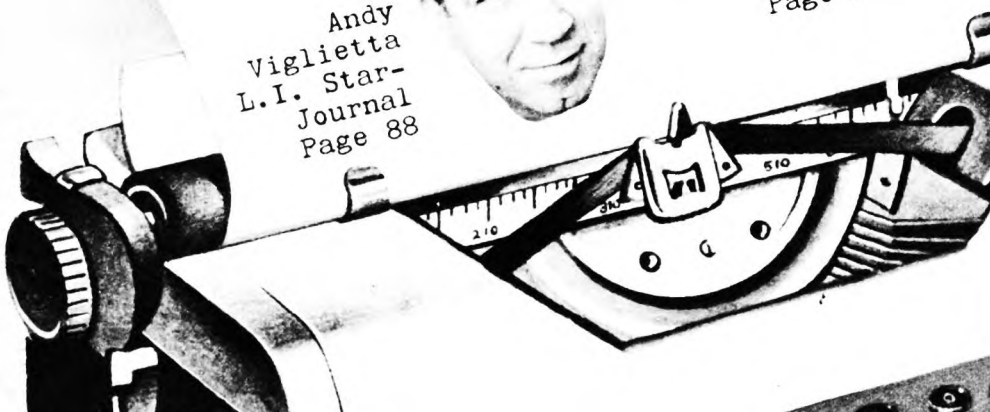
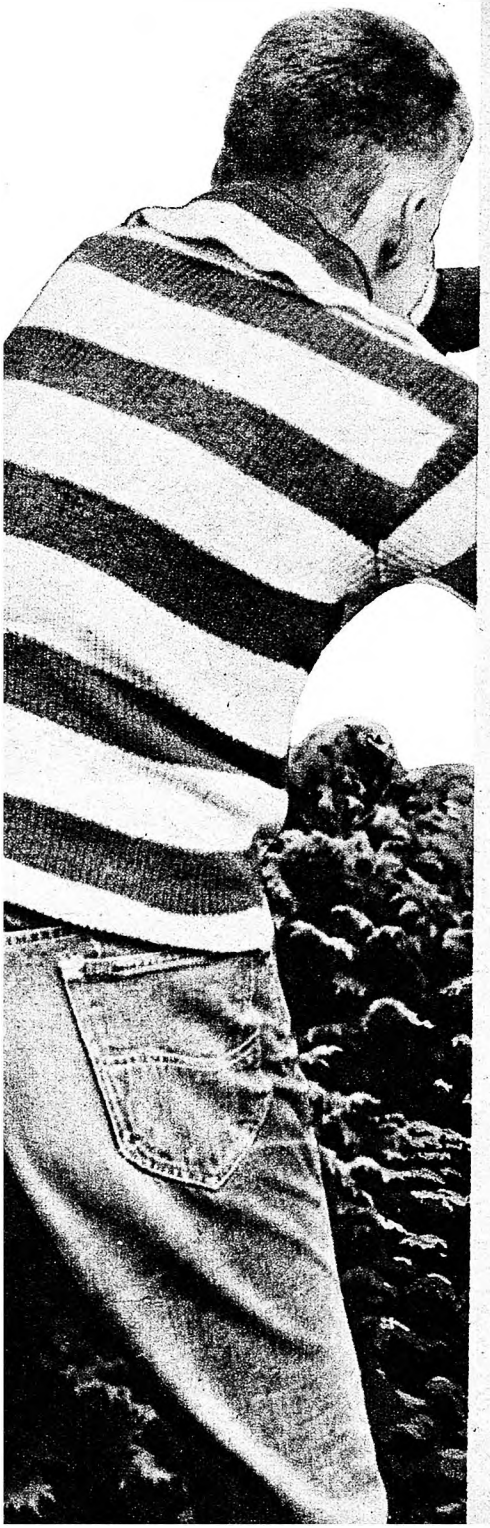




The 7-YEAR ALIBI

THE calendar on the city desk said September 8th. It was just another day to most of the reporters on the Evansville *Press*, but to John Ellert, it meant a great deal more. This date marked another year in a cause so helpless that even Ellert, who had carried the banner from the beginning, was in a mood to abandon it. Everything had a limit and in the case of Eddie Bannon, that limit had about been reached.

Not that John Ellert wanted to quit. When he had a story in the making, he'd stay with it to doomsday. The question was, why had he taken up this crusade at all? Everybody had told him that he had no story from the start. Eddie Bannon was as "guilty as all hell" to use an expression which, seven years before, had been current in southern Indiana. Eddie himself had publicly admitted it, so what difference did it make if he'd changed his story later and cried innocence?

Ellert had asked himself that

very question, a dozen times, perhaps a hundred times. He was asking it again, as he saw the calendar on the city desk, and wished that he hadn't been foolish enough to stop in at the office. His vacation had begun; there was no reason to be here, unless some force more magnetic than mere habit had drawn Ellert despite himself.

In fact, he'd even forgotten that today was September 8th, which showed how hard he'd tried to get his mind away from his obsession. All through this sweltering summer, Ellert had stayed on the job, so he could time his vacation to the early weeks of September and think of them as a block of days, rather than individual dates. If he didn't get away now, he'd wind up in the crazy house, like Tony Grimes. That was worse than what had happened to Eddie Bannon.

Or was it?

Tony Grimes was dead and Eddie Bannon wasn't. That made Tony better off. For Eddie, the long, dreary prospect of a life behind bars, the grim rigor of a monotonous existence, would be bad enough even if he had deserved them. But to take such treatment when innocent, was like a form of torture borrowed from the Middle Ages. Yet Eddie Bannon was getting such a deal and there was nothing John Ellert could do to stop it.

That was, he could no nothing more than he already had, which consisted of arguing with witnesses and making personal appeals to all sorts of public officials from deputy sheriffs through members of the parole board and up to the governor himself. The grim part, now, was that Ellert had begun thinking

How a holiday fishing trip up old Green River uncovered the clues that freed an innocent man convicted of murder.

of the past more than the future. His thoughts were warped, his mind rankled by what Bannon had been through, so that he was ready to accept Eddie's own bitter attitude. Ellert could recall Bannon's often repeated words: "What's the use, when nobody cares?" Now, the reporter was on the verge of adopting that theme as his own.

"You shouldn't be around here today, Johnny," remarked Jerry Stevens, the rewrite man at the copy desk, with an indulgent smile. "The whole staff will start to gripe, wishing they hadn't been so anxious to take their vacations in July and August. Every time they look at that desk of yours, they'll think of you fishing up the old Green River. Two weeks can seem like a long time, if you're stuck somewhere and can't get away. A long time."

"A long time," repeated Ellert. "Yes, it's been a long, long time. But he'll never get away from it."

"But to you," added Stevens, with a snap of his fingers, "it will seem just like that. Before you know, you'll be back here, wondering where the time went. The whole two weeks of it."

"Wondering where the time went," mused Ellert. "Yes, I'm doing that already. Wondering where it went, the whole seven years of it."

The rewrite man eyed Ellert sharply.

"Are we talking about the same thing, Johnny?"

"I guess we are, in a way," Ellert replied, "but it depends on how you look at it. I've been sweltering here all summer, yet the time went fast, just like a snap of the fingers. But up in Michigan City, there's a fellow who thinks differently. It's a summer resort, with nice lake beaches, but he hasn't been lying on them. He's living in a place they call a model of its kind, which probably makes it all the tougher for a man who's eating his heart out. If they had sweat boxes, or solitary cells in the Northern Indiana State Prison, he would understand it better. He could live with the satisfaction of hating the people who put him there, instead of just brooding, the way he does."

"Forget the Bannon case," advised the copyman, seriously. "The story I want you to bring back is how you caught the dangdest, biggest jackfish that anybody ever hooked out of Green River."

Ellert stopped briefly at his desk. He pulled open a drawer, raised some odd papers and dug out a folder from beneath. It flipped open as he lifted it and from the folder fluttered a slip of paper with two torn punch-holes at the top. Ellert turned it over as he plucked it from the desk, where it had landed. The star reporter's lips tightened grimly.

The slip was from a desk calendar. It bore today's date: September 8th. But the year said 1942 and this was 1949. On that memo from seven years ago was a name that Ellert had scrawled in pencil: Ina Ingles.

"I for Ireland— N for Nathan— G for George—"

Ellert could remember how he'd checked those letters and the rest of them, as he'd taken the name "Ingles" over the telephone. He'd never heard of Ina Ingles before that day, nor had he associated

her with Eddie Bannon, when the report of Ina's death first came through. But the name of Ina Ingles had blazed into the front page headlines of the Evansville *Press*. The proof of it was right there, staring from the yellowed clippings in Ellert's folder. Ina's portrait was there, too; the picture of a girl in her late 'teens, hardly out of pigtails. A face with large, trusting eyes; plaintive lips, that seemed to be smiling away some worry.

Another name was among those headlines, but Ellert didn't thumb through them to find it. Nor did he want to look at the photo which accompanied the name; he knew its haunting expression too well. That was the face of Eddie Bannon, or "Hard Luck Eddie" as he'd been known, even before the Ina Ingles case had broken. Ellert closed the folder, tucked it between the pages of today's *Press* and went down to the street, where a friend was waiting for him, with a car.

They drove through the streets of Evansville, those same streets where Eddie Bannon claimed he had been walking, that fateful evening, seven years ago to this day. Ellert didn't find it hard to picture undersized Eddie, silent and morose, passing people who failed to notice him in the dusk. His reputation as "Hard Luck Eddie" had caused Bannon to stay out of people's way. Often, Eddie had been picked up on suspicion by the Evansville police, because he had an unhappy faculty for knowing the wrong people. To break the jinx, Eddie had moved out of town and

Time after time, John Ellert made the same appeal in behalf of Eddie Bannon

kept much to himself whenever he came into Evansville.

The car swung from Main Street and followed Riverside Drive. Silently, Ellert studied the broad, lazy Ohio, as it formed a huge bend past the city. Soon the car would be passing the very road where Eddie Bannon had first met Ina Ingalls, since they both had lived along there. Eyes half-closed, John Ellert let his thoughts drift back. He could see the old shack beside the bean patch, which Eddie and Ina had chosen as their trysting place, thinking that they alone knew of their meetings there.

Then, like a scene from a dream, the drama unfolded itself to John Ellert. It was dream stuff because of the details that Ellert could not piece. Except for those, the story ran as follows:

LATE afternoon, September 8th, 1942. Outside the door of the little vine-grown shack, Ina Ingles was listening intently, sure that she heard footsteps. As they slackened, a puzzled frown arched the girl's forehead. Ina's voice, half-questioning, came low and breathless: "Eddie!"

There was something strangely ominous in the man's approach. The gloom was deep in front of the shack, and Ina could not see the man's face, but she was almost sure that he was Eddie. Who else could know that she was waiting here? Besides, he was Eddie's height, unless those shoulders in the broad-striped sweater were huddled in a forward crouch. Ida rippled a relieved laugh, as she saw the sweater more closely and noticed that its stripes were red and white. Only Eddie Bannon wore a "blanket sweater" of that startling pattern.

It was just one of Eddie's boyish pranks, stealing in upon Ina as a surprise. The girl's voice was no longer tense, as she spoke his name again. "Oh, Eddie," Ina began. "You almost fooled me—you really frightened me—"

Abruptly, Ina halted, her eyes now staring upward. It wasn't the man's face that frightened her; it was the fury that his features registered. Glaring eyes, snarling lips, combined to produce a horrible fascination. Completely terrified, Ina could neither struggle with the hands that thrust toward her throat, nor could she shrink from their clutch. Her gasps were inarticulate, but brief. Then, as the murderous hands tightened their strangle hold, Ina's eyes closed, her head tilted forward and her body went limp.

The man's hands relaxed; his snarl was vocal now, as the girl slumped at his feet. Ina's hands were raised feebly to her tortured throat, her gasps were punctuated by whimpered moans. Her eyes opened slowly, gave a pleading look, then froze.

"No—no." The girl's voice, first a gasp, rose to a piercing shriek: "Eddie—Eddie!"

One hand was clutching the girl's throat again; in the other, Ina saw a big, bone-handled knife. The blade flipped open as the man's thumb pressed a button; the sharp steel caught the ruddy glint of the sunset. Ina was struggling furiously now, knowing that her assailant's anger had reached a murder pitch. They reeled from the shadowy

front of the shack, into the dried bean patch, where Ina stumbled. An arm caught her, twisted her full about, exposing her throat to the deadly blade. There was a sweeping motion of the hand; its fingers loosened, dropped the knife among the bean-stalks, as something no longer needed.

Simultaneously, the man whipped his other arm away and Ina's form sprawled limp upon the soft earth. It wasn't the sunset that crimsoned the girl's throat or that blade which lay beside her. It was blood, lifeblood, its gushing flow the harbinger of death.

The man in the striped sweater stood there, gazing down at his handiwork. His fingers clenched, then opened, as though in reenactment of his evil deed. Suddenly, he turned, looked toward a neighboring house, where a woman had appeared and was shielding her eyes against the setting sun. The house was easily within earshot, and undoubtedly the woman had been attracted by Ina's screams. The man in the sweater hesitated; then made a quick slink through the bean patch, to avoid the woman's gaze.

Such furtive tactics seemed to admit some sort of guilt. The woman turned toward the dirt road, hurried there and flagged a car that was jouncing over the ruts. A middle-aged man was at the wheel; he caught the fever of excitement and queried:

"What's happened, Mrs. Arkwright?"

"It's that no-good, Eddie Bannon!" the woman exclaimed. "He's quarreling again, with Ina Ingles. I heard the poor girl scream at him, I did. Now Eddie's run off past the old shack and I can't see Ina anywhere about. You'd better go after Eddie, Mr. Garver. He's hot-tempered, that boy!"

Martin Garver compressed his lips as though to restrain comment that he might be hot-tempered too, if he lived next door to Clarabella Arkwright. What troubled him, was that the house where Bannon boarded was on this side of Arkwright's. Eddie certainly couldn't have been afraid enough of the old scold to run the other way, beyond the deserted shack. Perhaps he *had* been up to something. To settle the question, Garver jockeyed his old car past the shack, halting it in time to spot the sweatered figure slinking toward a patch of sycamores in the general direction of the Ohio River.

At the sound of the halting motor, the man straightened and Garver, getting from the car, saw the striped sweater very plainly. It struck him as odd that Eddie should be wearing that heavy blanket material on a warm day like this. Garver called "Eddie!" and the fellow gave him a quick, over the shoulder glance, then broke into a lope toward the trees. Garver lost sight of him against the sun, then caught a last glimpse of the red sweater as the soft green of the sycamores swallowed it. Garver turned, walked over toward the shack to meet Mrs. Arkwright.

Both stopped in sheer horror when they reached the bean patch and came upon the pitiful, dying form of Ina Ingles. Garver bore the frail girl to his car, where Mrs. Arkwright tried to staunch the blood flow with her apron. Garver

drove to a house where a trained nurse named Grace Simmons lived. The nurse was at home and she applied first aid, while someone phoned for an ambulance.

It was all too late. Ina Ingles died before the ambulance arrived. During those last fleeting moments, Grace Simmons heard the girl repeat the name: "Eddie—Eddie—"

WELL did John Ellert remember all that followed. Word of the tragedy reached the Evansville *Press* and Ellert arrived at the bean patch with a camera man almost as soon as the sheriff of Vanderberg County. Ellert was present when the killer's knife was found, under the probing glare of circling spotlights from police cars. That knife, stained with Ina's blood, bore the initial "E" within an engraved circle that decorated the bone handle.

The county sheriff was a good listener, with a way of nodding as though he'd learned all he needed to know and was prepared to do something about it. He questioned Clarabella Arkwright, Martin Garver, and then interviewed the other neighbors, not as witnesses, but as persons who might provide the background of the murder. Ellert began to sense something, after the sheriff quizzed the Parkers, who owned the house where Eddie roomed in the third floor back. The sheriff even "did considerable browsing" around Eddie's room, or at least that was the way the sheriff described it later. Ellert himself talked to the Parkers, but found them reluctant to discuss Eddie Bannon.

When Ellert looked into the third floor room, he found that it contained only a few odd clothes and half a dozen pictures of fighters, clipped from the pages of sporting magazines, and pinned up on the wall. Ellert saw nothing of an incriminating sort; but his newspaper man's instinct told him to stick close to the sheriff, so he did.

Back at the court house in Evansville, Ellert broached the subject to the sheriff, asking him point blank what he thought about Eddie Bannon in connection with Ina's death. In response, the sheriff put a blunt query:

"You know this Eddie Bannon, don't you?"

"Why, yes," replied Ellert. "How do you know?"

"Make it my business to know things," responded the sheriff. "Just happened to recall that you wrote something about Bannon in your paper once. 'Hard Luck Eddie' was what you called him."

"Looks like I was right, sheriff. Eddie has had the hard luck to be blamed for a lot of things. Now it's murder."

"Wouldn't say that." The sheriff shook his head. "No, I wouldn't say that at all. Maybe Eddie is the very boy who could help us—if we only could find him."

Ellert brightened at that statement.

"You think you know who the murderer is, sheriff?"

"Can't be sure just yet," returned the sheriff, "but Ina Ingles knew a fellow named Tony Grimes, from over in Kentucky. Ever hear of him before?"

Ellert shook his head.

"This Grimes is considerably older than Bannon," continued the

f, "and maybe more of a substantial citizen. Naturally, the two of them wouldn't get along, each having an eye on Ina. It seems that's why Eddie was meeting Ina over at the old shack, rather than have Grimes get jealous."

"And where is Tony Grimes now?"

"I wouldn't know." The sheriff looked steadily at the reporter. "Some folks out on the river road recollect seeing him off and on, but they aren't sure exactly when. So it isn't strange that Grimes hasn't shown up. But if you'd asked me where Eddie Bannon is right now, I'd have put the same question right back to you, Ellert. Your hard-luck friend hasn't been seen since Ina Ingles was killed. Somebody ought to tell him that it looks rather bad."

Ellert took the broad hint and went out to hunt up Eddie. But the young man wasn't to be found at any of his usual haunts. Nor could his various acquaintances remember seeing him. Friends, Eddie Bannon had none, unless John Ellert could be considered in that category, which would be fair enough, because the reporter was probably the one person in Evansville—or for that matter anywhere—who knew what made Eddie tick.

He'd been kicked around, Eddie had, to the point where he could no longer take it. He had no parents, no relatives—in fact, could scarcely remember when he did have. Eddie's rough, abrupt ex-

Ellert talked to Mrs. Arkwright, but found her convinced of Eddie's guilt

terior was a cover-up for a truly sensitive nature, though how anybody would buy that story at face value, was something that had often made Ellert wonder. The reporter, himself, had only learned the truth by catching Eddie in an off-guard moment. In a few simple, but effective statements during a "hard luck" interview, Eddie had revealed his real self; then, realizing that the mask was off, he'd frozen tighter than Pigeon Creek in mid-Winter.

Morning came, the morning of September 9th, and Ellert went out to the bean patch to arrange more pictures. He talked further with persons like Garver, Mrs. Arkwright, and the Parkers; found that their mistrust of Eddie Bannon had grown to outright antagonism. Public indignation, Ellert felt, might soon be stirring people to begin an all-out man hunt. But the sheriff was quite calm about it, when Ellert stopped at the court house, late in the day.

"Tony Grimes or Eddie Bannon," summed the sheriff. "One or the other killed Ina Ingles with this." He picked up the bone-handled knife from his desk. "We've checked thoroughly enough to know there weren't any strangers around the river road. So there's only two men to consider, and sooner or later, they'll show up. They always do, when they don't have anywhere else to go, and think that there's another party who's going to get the blame."

The sheriff pressed the button on the knife and its big blade flew open wide. He closed it with a squeeze of his hand. Significantly, the sheriff repeated the action.

"It's an open and shut case," he said. "Open and shut. Open"—the blade flipped under the button's pressure; then the sheriff's fingers brought it back into the handle—"and shut."

Ellert used the phrase "open and shut" in his follow-up story, but he didn't apply it to Eddie Bannon. Instead, he intensified his personal search for the hard luck lad. That night, he found Eddie over near the L & N depot.

"If you want to do the smart thing, Eddie," Ellert told him, "you'll stop in at the court house right now and see the sheriff."

Dark eyes glared up suspiciously from Eddie's tawny face. His looks gained no charm from the ugly smile that played upon his wide, droopy lips. All the facial symptoms that commonly accompanied guilt, registered themselves in a series of rapid changes.

"That would be right smart," conceded Eddie. "Who are you siding with anyway—Tony Grimes?"

"You think that Tony killed Ina?" Ellert asked quickly.

"I know *I* didn't," retorted Eddie, "so who else does that leave? No, they'll never catch up with Tony; he's too smart to poke his nose into a trap, the way you want me to do. Besides, what's the use." His eyes lost their glare; they showed a brooding expression. "Ina is dead, and I feel like I was to blame, even though I didn't kill her."

"Where were you at the time, Eddie?"

"Right here in town, I reckon. Walking around the streets, wondering if I ought to go out to the river road, the way Ina felt about me."

"You mean you'd quarreled with her?"

"Not exactly. It always came back to the same thing. How could we get married, until I made some money? I knew she'd be expecting me, out by the old shack where we met. She'd be sorry and forgiving, Ina would; then I'd get moody, as she called it. So I decided not to go out there."

"When did you first hear of the murder?"

"That evening. Some fellows were talking about it, but they didn't know I'd ever even heard of Ina Ingles. So I just decided to duck out."

"I'm telling you, Eddie," Ellert insisted. "You'd better go see the sheriff and give yourself up—"

"Give myself up!" Eddie interrupted hotly. "That's just it. Like everybody else, you think I'm guilty. Go and peddle your advice to Tony Grimes. When he walks into the sheriff's office, I will. That's a bargain and I'll be fair about it. I'll believe it happened when I read it in your newspaper."

Eddie turned on his heel and was gone before Ellert could stop him. The blackness of night swallowed Eddie, just as the green of the sycamores had engulfed Ina's murderer, according to the persons who had witnessed the killer's flight.

Next day, September 10th, the really unexpected happened.

Who walked into the sheriff's office but Tony Grimes, big as life, which was the right way to describe him, because Tony was a man of considerable build. He was tall, rangy, and though probably no broader of shoulders than chunky Eddie Bannon, Tony Grimes would have been much more than a match for the missing "hard luck" lad. Tony had the unpleasant manner of a local bully, and the sheriff, studying him, could understand why Eddie had stayed out of Tony's sight. Also, Eddie's liking for pictures of fighters was more or less explained. With Tony Grimes on the loose, and a rival for Ina's affections, Eddie Bannon had to maintain an up-and-at-'em disposition.

"I heered about pore Ina, sheriff," drawled Tony. "Took a while for the news to drift over to Kaintuck, where I've been living lately."

"How lately, Tony?"

"For quite a spell now, sheriff." Tony's eyes were steady. "I come over here quite frequent, though. I was here the day it happened, 'deed I was, except I started back purty early."

"How early, Tony?"

"About high noon. Certainly not much after. Anyway, I was back in Dogtown afore sundown. That's when the channel catfish go for anything, even a bare hook, there in Green River."

Dogtown wasn't on the sheriff's map, but he knew its approximate location, a good hour's drive from Evansville by road, and an afternoon's journey, should part of the trip be made by river. Tony's alibi, however, could be tested later. The sheriff studied the bully's broad, hard face. Its expression was cruel, particularly in the eyes, and Tony's big, half-clenched fists, lying idly on the desk, weren't the sort to stop short of brute action, should occasion call.

But the sheriff had learned to

During a visit to the state prison, Ellert persuaded Eddie to assert his innocence

discount outward signs, particularly when he dealt with river folk. With them, rugged manners were more than tradition; they were the symbol of survival. At least, Tony had dressed neatly for his trip to town. But the sheriff didn't let that impress him too strongly. Instead, the sheriff leaned across the desk, and demanded, coldly:

"What made you hate Ina Ingles, Tony?"

Tony's eyes glared, more perhaps as a challenge to the sheriff than through any past recollection.

"I didn't hate Ina," Tony retorted. "She and I just couldn't get along, that's all. But it warn't no reason to kill her."

"You always carry a knife, don't you, Tony?"

"Sure. Who don't down to Dogtown?"

The sheriff's hand thrust across the desk; his thumb gave the quick press that he had practiced. The blade flicked open, under Tony's very eyes.

"This your knife, Tony?"

"That toad-sticker?" sneered Tony. "This here is my knife, sheriff." From his pocket, he brought a knife about half the size of the state's exhibit A. Opening the knife, Tony picked up a pencil and began to sharpen it. "Can't say it's much good, even for whittling, but it got this way, when I used it cleaning fish."

Tony clamped his knife shut, dawdled with it, before dropping it in his pocket. Eyeing the blade that the sheriff still exhibited, Tony remarked:

"Nice chunk of knife you got there, sheriff. Wouldn't want to swap, would you, if maybe I steered you to a good fishing hole down Dogtown way?"

The sheriff closed the murder weapon, put it back in the desk drawer. Briskly, he asked:

"Who do you fish with, down to Dogtown, Tony?"

"Teddie Blynn for one," Tony replied. "Then there's a couple of rafters; they've been floating logs down to the cane-chair factory, and fishing in their spare time. They won't be staying there much

longer, so maybe you ought to see them right quick."

The sheriff decided that he ought. By that night, Tony's alibi was established by Teddie Blynn and the loggers. Tony Grimes was released and John Ellert wrote the story for the *Press,* wondering what the effect would be on Eddie Bannon, provided he had actually stayed around Evansville. There had been no "ifs" or "buts" in Eddie's promise to turn himself in, once Tony had done the same. But Ellert could hardly expect Eddie to go through with it, in light of Tony's vindication.

So, on September 11th, the most surprised man in Evansville, Indiana, was a reporter named John Ellert, when he learned that Eddie Bannon had walked into the sheriff's office, in the county court house. It wasn't his promise to Ellert that brought Eddie there; that was hardly in Eddie's mind. He was outraged by the news of Tony's release, and he hurled his wrath upon the sheriff, who sat there, coldly eyeing Eddie's vengeful, distorted face.

"I'm asking you, sheriff," stormed Eddie, "how much did that thieving Tony Grimes pay you to believe him and those lying river folk, who said he wasn't anywhere around here."

"If you're accusing me of bribery," retorted the sheriff, "you can save your breath until you clear yourself of a bigger charge. You're wanted for murder, Bannon."

"This is once my hard luck won't hold," assured Eddie, with a smile so bitter that the sheriff took it as an attempt at veiling guilt. "Maybe I never had a break in life, but I stack up way ahead of a character like Tony."

"We show no preferences here," asserted the sheriff. "I'll give you the same questions that I put to Grimes. Where were you, Bannon, at the time Ina Ingles was murdered?"

"Right here in Evansville, walking around."

"Around what part of town?"

"Well, I came down Sycamore Street for one thing. I thought of stopping at the post office and sending a penny postcard to Ina, saying I was going away a few days."

"Did you send the card?"

"No. I wouldn't have wanted to lie to Ina, the way Tony Grimes had. I wasn't going away, and maybe I'd have seen Ina the next day. Instead of stopping at the post office, I came over Second Street to Main. Then I went down Main Street to the river."

"And then?"

"I followed the drive to Sunset Park. Funny thing, sheriff, I got there just at sunset. The coincidence kind of struck me."

"You wouldn't have noticed the sunset, Bannon. You were headed the wrong way."

"I turned to look at it. Did you ever watch the sun going down over the Ohio River, sheriff? Ina and I, we used to watch it often. Only that afternoon, I didn't want to see Ina."

"Why not?" asked the sheriff, sharply. "Because you hated her?"

"I didn't hate her!" Eddie shouted the denial and his eyes blazed in fury. Then, a sudden emotion seizing him, he choked: "I

—I loved Ina. She was the only person who ever cared for me, or ever meant anything in my life."

There was a witness to the quiz, by then: John Ellert. The reporter had brushed past a deputy who blocked him, and had come into the sheriff's office.

"Just thought you ought to know, sheriff," Ellert announced, "Eddie is here on account of a promise he made me. I'm the man who really produced him, so I'm entitled to hear what he says. Ask him."

"I'll ask him plenty." Coming to his feet, the sheriff scooped something from the desk drawer, flaunted it in Eddie's face. With a click, the blade of the murder knife flew open. "That your knife, Bannon?"

Eddie shied back, speechless, warding with his hands, as though expecting the sheriff to knife him.

"It ought to be your knife," accused the sheriff. "It has your initial on it. That 'E' stands for Eddie, I'll bet."

"Give him a break, sheriff," put in Ellert. "This kid has had everything thrown at him. All he's ever known was poverty, insecurity, and hard luck. Now you're practically trying to frame him."

"If you think so," said the sheriff, "why don't you tell me what 'E' could stand for, besides Eddie?"

"It could stand for Ellert," returned the reporter, "but you're not accusing me." Ellert turned, clapped Eddie on the back. "Tell him Eddie," the reporter added, "this isn't your knife, is it?"

"But it is my knife," Eddie admitted. "I lost it a week ago, or maybe more. But what difference does it make?"

Eddie looked from face to face. Ellert's expression was troubled, the sheriff's triumphant. Yet in a way, they matched, and Eddie suddenly realized why. He'd only read meager details regarding Ina's death. Whether guilty or innocent, Eddie apparently hadn't learned that a knife resembling his own had been found on the scene of murder.

"So it's your knife," nodded the sheriff, "and you lost it. Now tell me what happened to your red and white sweater, the one with the big stripes. Did you lose that, too?"

"You mean my blanket sweater?" queried Eddie. "I haven't had it out all summer. It's in a bureau drawer, in my room out at Parker's."

"No it isn't," returned the sheriff. "We searched that room for anything that might be evidence. We didn't find the sweater, which was natural enough, because you never got back there."

Eddie looked toward Ellert, half-appealing, half-accusing, as though wondering whether his one friend could be trusted. Then, with all the sincerity he could muster, Eddie poured his only argument:

"Would I kill Ina? The only girl I ever had? The girl I wanted to marry? Ina would have married me, too. It was only a question of time. She loved me, Ina did. I tell you she loved me."

"Sorry, Eddie," said the sheriff, bluntly. "You were seen running away from the shack, you admit this knife was yours, and you can't account for the striped sweater. I'm booking you for murder."

THE TRIAL OF EDDIE BANNON was a slow, painful ordeal for the defendant. To John Ellert, covering it for the Evansville *Press,* it was an equally gruelling experience. He'd asked for the assignment, only to regret it, once the trial was under way. For the flimsy web of circumstantial evidence tightened into bands of steel as the case proceeded. Whatever effect popular prejudice had upon the jury, was magnified tenfold where the witnesses were concerned. Ellert had interviewed them soon after the murder and found them all uncertain as to what they had seen or heard. Now he could hardly believe that he was listening to the same people.

Clarabella Arkwright was sure she'd heard Ina scream Eddie's name in frantic anguish. She'd recognized Eddie when he ran from the bean patch, not just because of the striped sweater, but because she also gained a good look at his face. "I've lived next door to that no-good for years," Mrs. Arkwright affirmed, "and when I saw Eddie Bannon with my own eyes, I knew who he was."

Martin Garver, too, was sure it could only have been Eddie Bannon. At first, he'd thought the running man was taller, but he knew now it was an optical illusion, caused by the red stripes against the green background of the trees. He'd tested his eyes at the very scene, Garver assured the jury, and he now agreed with Mrs. Arkwright that the man must have been Eddie.

Grace Simmons added a damaging touch, when she described the death scene with gestures. Clutching her own throat, the nurse repeated Ina's gasps of "Eddie—Eddie—" in a tone that could only be interpreted as an accusation. Then came the parade of neighbors. Eddie Bannon stared unbelieving when he learned how many people knew of his meetings with Ina, as well as their quarrels. When the prosecutor called Eddie to the stand, he was like a hunted creature. Everywhere he looked, all eyes were set against him.

Judge and jury, like the witnesses, seemed to be glaring the one word "Guilty!" So Eddie looked no further. He failed to see John Ellert, the one man whose sympathy could have bolstered his failing courage. Before the prosecutor could proceed with his cross-examination, Eddie broke.

"It's no use!" Eddie shrieked from the witness box. "No use, I tell you. I killed Ina Ingles. Sure I killed her, with that knife the sheriff found. She wouldn't marry me, so I killed her. I'm sorry she's dead, but I killed her. Give me the chair and get it over with."

Eddie screamed his final words at the jury, drowning Ellert's protests. The reporter was on his feet, calling "Don't, Eddie, don't!" but his words might as well have been a whisper. Now the courtroom itself was in pandemonium, the raps of the judge's gavel lost in the confusion. The trial of Eddie Bannon had broken all apart. It would mean more, big headlines tomorrow.

It was Ellert who wrote the story that accompanied those headlines, and he wrote it with a heavy heart. It wasn't the chair for Eddie Bannon; the jury had shown what they

From Old Hank, the ferryman, Ellert gained his all-important lead

considered clemency and recommended life imprisonment. But to Eddie, that was a quality of mercy that was very badly strained. He said as much to the one and only visitor who came to see him at the state pen, after he began his term there.

That visitor was John Ellert; but he didn't come for a story. He'd gotten more than he ever wanted from Eddie Bannon. Once, Eddie's eyes had shown warmth when he talked to Ellert; that trace was gone now. Instead, Eddie's gaze was listless, filled with resignation. To stir him from it, Ellert spoke forcefully through the partition wicket:

"You know you didn't kill Ina, so why did you make that crazy confession? You still had a chance, Eddie."

"What sort of a chance," Eddie demanded, "and for what? Ina was dead; she was the only girl I ever loved. They were all against me in the court room, so why should I care if I died?"

"It happens that you're going to live," reminded Ellert, grimly. "You didn't get the chair, after all."

Eddie's eyes flashed angrily, his lips tightened in that old, bitter smile of failure. He hadn't even been able to bait a jury into depriving him of his own worthless life. But Ellert regarded Eddie's sudden flare-back as a good sign.

"You've got a lot to live for," Ellert told Eddie. "You used to say so, once. You're young, Eddie, with the world ahead of you. There's other girls besides Ina."

"Not for me, there aren't."

Ellert's departure puzzled Old Hank.

"There are, Eddie. Why, Ina herself wasn't sure that she could marry you. What if somebody else had come along? Not somebody vicious like Tony Grimes, but somebody who deserved Ina? You'd have had a look for another girl then, Eddie."

"I guess that's right. I'd have had to find another girl."

"You will too, Eddie, if you retract that foolish confession. Make it a matter of record that you've declared your innocence, and I'll take it from there. You always said you wanted one real break. You didn't kill Ina, did you?"

"No, I didn't kill her." Eddie was breathless now. "I'll write it all out and sign it for you, John. I'm entitled to one break; I know Ina would want it that way." By then, the sparkle had gone from Eddie's eyes. "But I don't know how you'll ever clear me."

"When I do, Eddie, it will be my big story."

THIS WAS SEPTEMBER 8th, 1949. The date pounded itself home to John Ellert, as he rode in his friend's car to begin his fishing trip. In the seven years between Ina's murder and today, Ellert hadn't gotten that big story. Eddie Bannon was still serving his life term, reconciled perhaps, to wearing Number 12791 for the rest of his natural days.

Yet nobody could say that John Ellert hadn't tried.

He had made Eddie's retraction public. He'd pleaded with witnesses, gone over the ground with them. He'd sought a new trial, failing that, he'd fought for a pardon, even commutation of Eddie's sentence. Unless new evidence could be produced, there was no hope of changing Eddie's status. That was final.

There was no cracking the alibi that Tony Grimes had furnished. The sheriff had the affidavits of Teddie Blynn and the two raftmen who had been snagging channel cat-fish on that fatal day. They'd disappeared before Ellert thought to go looking for them, down Dogtown way. Tony had gone away somewhere, too. When he returned, he'd been a broken, drunken bum. He'd made money as a war worker, then had squandered it. Still a bully, Tony no longer had the punch to back his ugly nature.

Never had Ellert found an opportunty to get Tony in a talking

mood. Always he'd been too drunk or too sober, seldom the latter. Then Tony, seriously injured in a drunken free-for-all, had gone to the hospital and from there to a mental institution, where he died. Whatever his secret, he had sealed it with his death.

Ellert tried to forget all these things as he climbed into his motorboat at the mouth of Green River and waved good-bye to his friend. With his outboard propelling him upstream, there was adventure around every bend. Ellert had slipped the leash of reality. The deep green of the water, the soft verdure of the winding banks, became a realm all their own.

With each day, Ellert experienced new delights in his tussles with the wily muskellunge, the scrappy Kentucky bass and an occasional school of perch. He explored small creeks and deep pools; hailed the random steamers that passed in the main channel. At night he found lodging at landings or hamlets along the lazy river. It was a long, intriguing journey, how many miles, Ellert neither knew nor cared, just so long as they continued to invite him.

Old Ken lowered his gun . . .

The vacation was half spent before Ellert even considered his return trip down the carefree stream. As a tentative mark, he'd set a ferry-wharf where an old road came down to the river banks. Fishing was good thereabouts, Ellert had heard. So, with his kicker ploughing a white wake behind the boat, he pulled into the turning point, intending to spend at least a day there. On the wharf, Ellert saw the old ferry-man, gave him a friendly hail.

"Anything to eat up there?" Ellert queried. "Particularly if a fellow wanted to stay a day or so?"

"Plenty," nodded the ferry-man. "Just tell the women folks in any of those houses up the bank that old Hank sent you. We get lots of fishermen in these parts. That's what you are, huh?"

"For two weeks a year, yes," replied Ellert, climbing from his boat. "I use my spare time, fifty weeks of it, working as a reporter on the Evansville *Press.*"

"Right good paper," complimented Hank. "Last time I read it was when they were sending that Bannon boy to jail, on account of he was supposed to be the one that killed that girl."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ellert, on a sudden hunch. "If he didn't kill Ina Ingles, who did?"

Hank marred the beauty of the river with a blob of tobacco juice.

"I wouldn't know," Hank declared, "but I can tell you who does. There's an old duck named Ken Kenneths, has a houseboat somewhere up the river, or did have, if it hasn't gone and sunk from under him."

"But you don't know just where?"

Old Hank shook his head.

"You can't miss it if you keep looking," he declared. "But you've got maybe two hundred miles of river to go. Mind, I don't say that Ken had anything to do with what happened up in Evansville, 'cause I don't think Ken's ever been off of Green River in his life. But he does know who was responsible for it. He said so, and Ken Kenneths isn't a person to lie, not having no reason for it, like some folks."

Ellert dropped back into his motor boat, cast off, and had the kicker going before old Hank thought to yell after him, and ask him why he'd forgotten about dinner. He was heading straight up stream, Ellert was, the lure of the old crusade taking him past the very fishing pools he'd wanted most to explore. If Ken Kenneths had even a half way answer, Ellert intended to get it.

It was a strange trip up the old Green River, theme of song and story, As he prodded his outboard to the limit, the reporter kept thinking of the freakish way fate had played into his hands. Here he was, following the very trail he wanted, during the two weeks he'd tried to get away from it. Singular too, his chance stop at the newspaper office, the morning of his departure. Except for that, Ellert wouldn't have had the file on the Bannon case with him, complete in every detail, tucked deep in his water-proof duffle bag.

First, to find the house boat; next, to learn if Kenneths really could help crack the riddle of Ina's death. If he'd been going only on the say-so of an eccentric ferryman, Ellert might not have stayed with the quest. But the further he traveled, the more people he discovered who cagily linked Kenneths with the Bannon case. It took smart work to sound out these river folk, but Ellert had covered many stories in this general region, and knew the native ways. Each time he pulled away from some shack along the shore, he heard the customary parting: "Glad you came. You all hurry back." Yes,

Ellert entered cautiously

he'd hurry back, but only after he'd found Ken Kenneths, if it took him all the way to the head waters of the Green River, before he did.

The river had narrowed now. It became a somber, mysterious stream, with weird music in its ripples. Ages ago, geologists claimed, the Green River had been an underground stream, flowing through a great black cavern. At last, the limestone roof had worn away, opening these endless depths to daylight. Supporting this theory was the fact that Green River received the underground streams from Mammoth Cave and other caverns that Ellert passed on his long trip to the source.

Fifty persons in all, had encouraged Ellert to keep on his way, even when the river did become a green cavern, where the great limbs of ancient trees arched clear across its breadth. Ellert wondered how Kenneths had ever worked a house-boat up through here, but he ceased wondering when he saw the craft. He came upon it at a bend where the shallow river widened. It was just a dilapidated shack, perched on a barge that was little more than a crude raft. The flat roof and the walls were coated with tar-paper. The windows were panes of glass that looked as though they'd been used wherever the builder ran short of planking.

It was Ken's house-boat, right enough, for on the cleared shore, Ellert saw an old abandoned mine shaft, grown over with a wealth of poison ivy. Miles down the river, some woman had said that Ken had gone clear up to the old Rattlesnake Mine, a worked-out shaft in an abandoned coal region. So Ellert pulled his motor boat up beside Ken's relic, clambered on board the house-boat and rapped at the weather-beaten door. It swung inward on its sagging hinges, and rather than try to balance on the narrow ledge that served as deck, Ellert went inside.

The single room looked like a cabin, with a couple of bunks against the walls. It was piled high with old automobile tires, broken-down furniture, gasoline cans and other assorted junk. Even fire-arms were included, for Ellert came across a shot-gun barrel poking out between two boxes that were side by side upon a table. He gained a sudden shock, when he discovered that the gun had a man on the other end of it.

Ellert dropped back as though Rattlesnake Mine had disgorged a couple of its pets for his special benefit. Hoarsely, he asked: "That you, Mr. Kenneths?"

"It's me, a'righty." Kenneths came out from his improvised pill-box. "I come way up here to git away from people, but still they bother me. Could have shot you for trespassing, mister. Maybe I will, if you don't git."

"I came to talk to you about something special," returned Ellert. The gun muzzle still prodded him, but he resolved to chance it. "I want to find out what you know about Eddie Bannon."

"What would I know about Eddie Bannon?" demanded Kenneths. "And what's it to you, if I do?"

"Only this." Ellert put all his sincerity into the tone. "I'm Eddie's friend. I'm the reporter who wrote the story of Ina Ingles' murder, but I still don't believe that Eddie did

it. I want to get him out of jail."

Kenneths let the short-gun drop down to the crook of his arm. He gestured with it toward a tumble-down chair.

"Sit down," Ken cackled. "I can tell you all about who killed that girl. It was Tony Grimes, dirty, yellow Tony Grimes, who did it."

"You can prove it?" asked Ellert, eagerly.

"That's the hard part." Ken shook his head wearily. "I can swear to what he said, the night he came here. To this house-boat, I mean, but I was moored way down the river then, near Dogtown. Seven years ago, it was. He came right in that door, like you did. He wanted me to put him up, he said, but it sounded more like he wanted me to hide him."

Kenneths paused; Ellert nodded for him to go on.

"I asked him if he'd killed somebody," the hermit said. "Boy, did I hit it, clean as a wad of tobacco ringing a spitoon. Who was it, I asked, somebody up Evansville way? No, then a cop, maybe? No? Must be a girl, I decided. That struck it, because Tony told me to shut my mouth. He rolled into that bunk there, and went to sleep.

"Come morning, Tony went down to Dogtown and fixed himself an alibi. Teddie Blynn, he took an affidavit. So did a couple of other fellows who called themselves rafters. But they weren't no more rafters than this house-boat is the Queen Mary. They were moonshiners, selling corn liquor to the factory hands. Tony knew that and he'd of given them away if they hadn't vouched for him."

Ellert's hopes were flickering as Kenneths paused. After seven long years, this unsupported testimony could sound too much like a half-crazed tale. For Ellert simply to dig up an old hermit like Kenneths and let him sound off, wouldn't be enough to square Eddie with the law.

"Why didn't you tell all this before?" queried Ellert. "People might have believed you, then."

"Didn't want them to believe me," returned Kenneths. "Not while Tony was still alive, I didn't. But I can prove he was in this house-boat, I can, if nothing else. Open that cupboard over past that heap of tires."

Ellert complied, but all he found was a ragged old mop, with no handle. Kenneths spread his arms in a wide gesture.

"Open it out," he said. "It was Tony's."

As Ellert spread the thing in the light, he realized what a find he'd gained. This improvised mop was an old sweater, grimy, but with stripes that had once been red and white. Its material had the blanket texture that tallied with the description of Eddie's missing sweater, the one that the murderer had been wearing when he ran from the bean patch.

"Tony Grimes was wearing this?"

"Sure," replied Kenneths. "Kind of hard, though, to prove it was his'n, unless you're willing to take my word that I saw him in it. Wait, though—I got a letter that might help."

Ellert was scarcely willing to wait. He wouldn't need to prove it was Tony's sweater, which in fact it wasn't. The sweater really be-

longer to Eddie Bannon, a man whom Kenneths had never seen, and who therefore couldn't have brought the sweater to this house-boat. But Ellert was glad he waited, when he saw the proof that Kenneths produced.

It was a letter, written by Tony Grimes from the hospital, at a time when his mind was still lucid. It told Kenneths to get rid of the sweater, and to forget whatever Tony had told him about the dead girl. The letter contained a reference to Dogtown and other pointed, but unwise statements that might not have been incriminating alone, but would certainly gain teeth through Ken's interpretation.

"We're getting out of here," Ellert told the house-boat hermit. "I'll make it worth your while, Ken. I'll give you a chance to tell the world that Tony Grimes was the dirty, yellow character you say he was. How about it?"

"Mister," said Kenneths, with a happy grin, "those are the most pleasant words I ever expect to hear."

A few weeks later, the Parole and Pardon Board of the State of Indiana sat in session. The documents before them were impressive: A statement signed by Ken Kenneths; a letter in the handwriting of Tony Grimes; a full but concise report from John Ellert—all these dovetailed in a most conclusive style.

But the principal exhibit was an object, which by its absence seven years before, had convicted Eddie Bannon, and now was to prove the clincher in his exoneration!

That object was the striped blanket sweater; frayed, torn, mauled and faded, like Eddie's own hopes, yet still recognizable, as they were. With it were affidavits from Eddie's one-time neighbors along the river road, identifying the sweater as the one that had belonged to Eddie. In those affidavits, the witnesses had amended their trial testimony. Clarabella Arkwright was no longer sure that she had seen the murderer's face. Martin Garver was positive that the fleeing killer had been a taller man than Eddie. Grace Simmons recalled a plaintive, trusting echo in Ina's voice, when the dying girl had gasped the name "Eddie" in what could have been her last hope on earth.

The case stacked up very obviously now.

Tony Grimes, vengeful and ugly by nature, had been watching his chance to spoil the budding romance between Eddie Bannon and Ina Ingles. Whether Tony had found Eddie's knife by accident, or had snatched it up when Eddie temporarily laid it somewhere, the result was the same. Tony was then provided with a murder weapon to incriminate his rival in the slaying of the girl whom Tony no longer loved, but hated. But Tony wanted something more to clinch the case against Eddie.

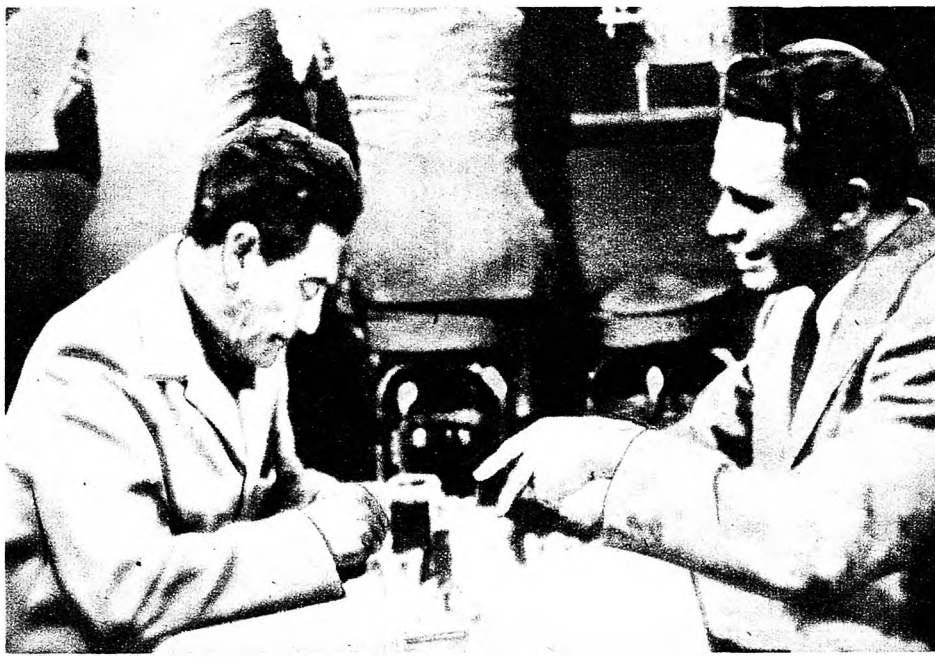
Biding his opportunity, Tony entered the Parker home when its occupants were away. He looked through Eddie's room for something that would serve his fell purpose and found the blanket sweater. He lurked among the sycamores until he saw Ina approach the shack by the bean patch, late in the afternoon of September 8th, 1942. Tony then stalked boldly

to the kill, hoping he'd be seen on the way there and mistaken for Eddie Bannon.

When Tony had escaped such notice, he took grim but effective measures. His very actions as a killer now exposed his scheme. He could have choked Ina without an outcry, with those big hands of his. Instead, he'd given the girl a chance to run shrieking to the bean patch, where he had used Eddie's knife for murder and deliberately flung the weapon where it would be found. Openly, he'd let two people see him, knowing they'd identify him as Eddie. He'd used the crouch to fake Eddie's short build and his one mistake had been that of revealing his full height when he raced for the trees.

Either Tony Grimes had thought he'd gotten far enough away to escape recognition, or he was afraid that Garver could have pursued him somehow in the car. It was evident, in any case, that Tony must have shoved off across the Ohio River into Kentucky and gone up the Green River to Ken's house-boat, which that year was well down stream.

Tony Grimes might have kept right on going to parts unknown, if he hadn't been able to fix his Dogtown alibi, like he'd planned. That business settled, the killer could call on the Vanderburg County sheriff with impunity and meet the evidence of murder with an unflinching eye. Everything for which Tony had steeled himself, was calculated to make Eddie wince. Tony had counted on all that.



Eddie Bannon listened, but didn't appear convinced by Ellert's arguments to give himself up

John Ellert

John Ellert was born and raised in Evansville, Indiana. He began his newspaper career in his home town and now, after 35 years of journalism, Ellert is political editor of the Evansville Press. He has a family of four grown sons and daughters. He enjoys spare-time farming, and perhaps his "down-to-earth" knowledge of both the land and its people aided him in cracking his most celebrated case. That, plus the fact that he goes in for fishing, too!

Further details didn't concern the pardon board, once they had the over-all pattern. In record time, the big gate opened up in Michigan City and Eddie Bannon walked out free. John Ellert was there to greet him and bring him back to Evansville, where, as the reporter had predicted, Eddie's release had become the big story. But Eddie Bannon didn't stay in town.

One night, over coffee at a little lunch room, Eddie said to Ellert:

"You know, John, I've got a job now. A good job that will make me forget those years up in the pen. What's more, a job means I can get me a girl and maybe some day I'll be married."

"That's swell, kid," Ellert approved. "It's just the way I wanted to hear you talk."

"Like you said," Eddie continued, "there's lots of other girls. Besides Ina, I mean, though I didn't want to think that way before. In fact, I've got a girl already."

Ellert's eyebrows raised above his glasses, in a half-way query.

"I almost forgot," Eddie added, "but I got a date tonight. Right now, I mean. Of course, to get married, I'm going to need a better job. So I'm heading out of town, maybe where I can find something better, good enough to suit my new girl."

Solemnly, Eddie thrust out his hand in a farewell shake. Then, with an air of bravado, he strode from the lunch room. Ellert watched his departure and pondered. There isn't any job; there wasn't any girl. What's more, it wasn't likely that Eddie was going where he'd find either; at least not for a while, until after he'd really learned to forget the past.

There was just one place where that could happen as Ellert himself had learned, only to have himself yanked suddenly back to cold reality. Ellert rather fancied that Eddie was going up the old Green

River, where nobody cared which of six ways you spelled muskellonge, because they called it jackfish and it tasted the same anyway. Besides, there was a berth for Eddie Bannon up Green River, if he wanted it.

It may be that Eddie is sitting at the door of an old tar-papered house-boat, tossing a line out over the chunks of automobile tires that serve as bumpers along the narrow deck, while an old hermit called Ken is sizzling fish in a skillet over a kerosene cook stove.

Could be, 'cause there's no telling what you'll come across, once you get started up Green River.

Frank Shenkel ran into a stone wall of fear and silence when he tried to write finis to his Big Story. A woman was murdered and her husband was the boss of Pittsburgh's Bottoms, the toughest district in the city. Still, Shenkel had to get his story to the Sun-Telegraph*—and did!*

Our next issue tells it.

Post-Intelligenc

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of a Murderer's

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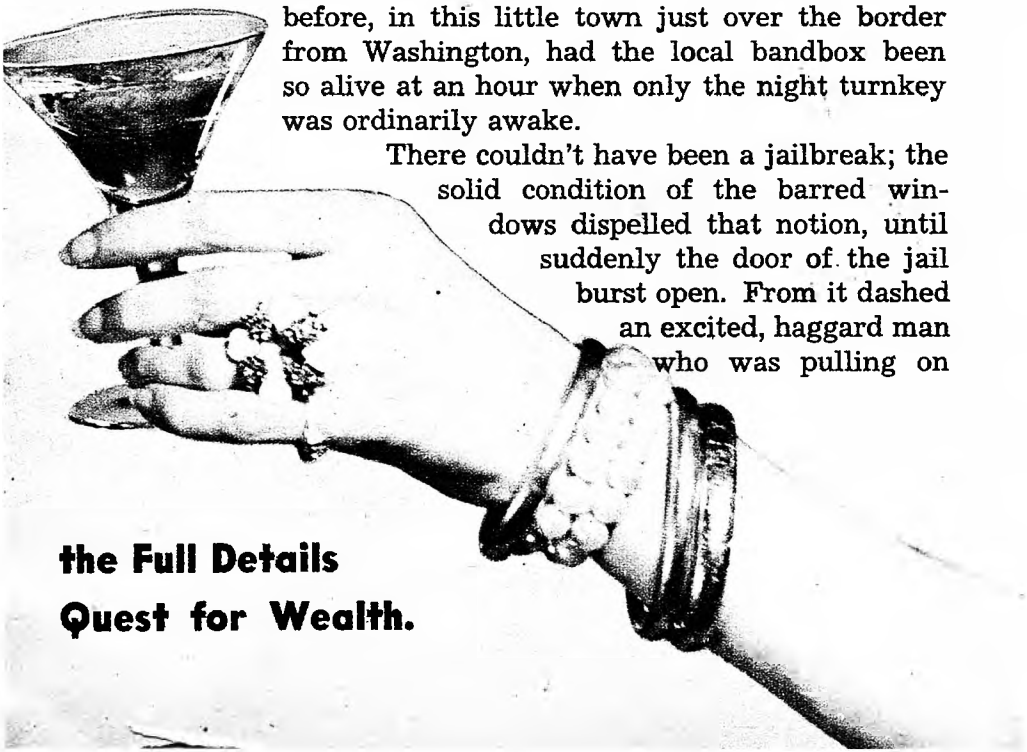
LONELY HEARTS LURED TO DOOM

It was one-thirty in the morning and snow was falling steadily in the streets of the Oregon mountain town. Lights were glowing from the windows of a low, squat building, projecting a grilled pattern on the whiteness of the snow. They were sinister, those shadows, producing the effect of grim bars that offered no escape.

This was not an illusion.

The squatty building was the town jail; the streaks that silhouetted the snow were cast by actual bars of steel. Yet the scene caused late homecomers to pause as they drove by. Never before, in this little town just over the border from Washington, had the local bandbox been so alive at an hour when only the night turnkey was ordinarily awake.

There couldn't have been a jailbreak; the solid condition of the barred windows dispelled that notion, until suddenly the door of the jail burst open. From it dashed an excited, haggard man who was pulling on



the Full Details

Quest for Wealth.

his overcoat and clamping a hat on his tousled hair without losing a stride. If there had been people on the sidewalk, they'd have flagged the man for an escaping prisoner. As it was, his mad dash didn't take him far. He wound up in an all-night lunch room across the street from the jail. There, his rush found its dead-end in the town's only telephone booth.

This man wasn't an escaping prisoner; he was a newspaper reporter. His name was Charles Russell and he was putting in a call to Seattle, five hundred miles away.

Russell's joggle of the phone hook roused the central operator. She was expecting this call and promptly told long distance to get the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, collect. Tensely, Russell listened, while the linking circuits beeped in his ear. Never, in more than a dozen years as a newspaper man, had he experienced a situation so taut as this. Here he had a story, his big story, a bigger story than any of his fanciest dreams. Now he was fighting against a deadline, with only minutes to go.

It was a story they didn't expect, one they didn't believe would break, a yarn that made a wild-goose chase seem like a turtle hunt. It had to make tomorrow's newspaper, for now that it was official, there was no telling how fast it would leak. Until a few minutes ago, Russell's work had been strictly a hunch, over which he had control. But as news, it couldn't stay bottled, not in this small town.

The connection clicked through. Almost frantic, Russell shouted his name, and that he wanted the city desk. He could hear a drumming that wasn't due to the wires and his heart sank at the sound. It intensified when the city editor answered the phone, for the city room was close enough to the press room to catch the full throb of the pounding presses. Tomorrow's "Sunrise Edition" was already in the works.

"It's Russell," the reporter heard his own voice saying. "Henry Kramer has confessed. . . . Yes, to all three. . . . In every last detail. . . . The trip here was a hoax, like we thought. . . . A wild bluff that didn't work. . . . Yes, I have the whole story. . . ."

Those next moments were fateful. Russell's whole career, his lifetime, seemed hanging in the balance, wavering as the presses pounded away. Then, above the thrum-thrum-thrum came the city

Charles Russell states that he is interested in "crimes that have an element of mystery; or perhaps the study of human nature itself." How those two can link, Russell himself demonstrated amply, when he cracked his Big Story. Russell's background, as a law student at Gonzaga University has also helped his coverage of murder trials and man-hunts for the Seattle Post Intelligencer. In his forties, Russell is a native of Livingston, Montana.

editor's fervent shout:

"Stop those presses! Hold the edition for replates on page one!"

Next, a rewrite man was on the phone; his voice, cool and methodical, was saying: "Let's have it, Charley." But that wasn't the sound that gave Russell his reassurance. As he spieled his story from the penciled notes that he had scrawled on copy paper over in the town jail, Russell's ear was gauged again for background noises. He heard them, a slacken-rattle which became dead silence, proving that the great presses had come to a complete standstill. They wouldn't start again until Russell's notes had been typed into final copy, which in turn would be set for the remake of page one.

The big story was in at last, and it was literally stop-press news!

The grim details recited, Charles Russell came from the pay booth, lighted a cigarette and stood looking out into the night. The jail lights cast a misty glow; by it, Russell could discern the white slope of the mountainside, rising from the highway that formed the town's main street. Against that spectral background were etched the shapes of towering blue spruce, black in the gloom, except for streaky tufts of snow that gave them the look of decorated Christmas trees.

It was an appropriate end of the trail for Henry Kramer, the bland, dapper man who had poured his confession in the jail across the street. Appropriate, because with Kramer, every day was Christmas and he was the perpetual Santa Claus. Kindly, persuasive Henry Kramer, with a line of time-tested phrases that brought flutters and palpitations to lonely hearts. He had fooled others with his chatter too, but not consistently. Not after Charles Russell, a reporter in search of a big story, had begun to question what Henry Kramer called his real story.

Yes, it was trail's end for Henry Kramer, a liar without a conscience, who took when he said he gave. A man who twisted white and black until he believed they were the opposites, until he consented—in fact demanded—that his fabric of falsehood be put to the proof. For Charles Russell, though, it was just the beginning of an arduous task that he had sought and won. He'd cracked his big story, yes; right now, it was drying on the front pages of the first copies from the press. But tomorrow, back in Seattle, he'd be at his typewriter, batting out a day by day play of the Kramer case. It would run through weeks, perhaps months, of statements, hearings, finding of new evidence, legal technicalities and finally the trial, with its lawyers, witnesses, psychiatrists, jury, judge and other human factors that formed the panoply of justice.

Russell's hunches had all come through; his spade-work was complete. Beside the notes scrawled on his copy paper, he had dozens of others in mind. But between the breaking of the story and the events that were to follow, people would want to know the whole story of Henry Kramer, told in its simple, direct form. Russell's problem was how to begin the incredible tale of a man whose career was due to shock the whole North-

West. Not since the original Bluebeard made a hobby of acquiring wives and disposing of them had there been a man like Kramer.

It was so innocuous. It was something that might happen to anyone. It could have grown on you, the way Henry Kramer himself did, until suddenly the oil was dry and you realized that he grated. That was what three people close to him found out.

There could have been more. It was something that could have gone on—and on—and on—

Except that it hadn't. Charles Russell had put an end to it. All because he played a hunch that he thought might make a human interest story for the *Post-Intelligencer*. Instead, he'd wound up exposing a most inhuman interest. It was too bad that he hadn't spotted the whole thing in the making, six years ago. Russell had been covering the same old beat back then, and it included the Harmony Social Club. But the chatter Russell used to hear there had been so much chaff. Trite talk, passing flattery, all the more innocuous, the longer you listened to it.

Now, however, as Russell closed his eyes and thought back, it had a strangely familiar ring. He could almost see the mild, yet quick-eyed face of Henry Kramer, peering from the fog of the past; he could hear the smooth, yet quiet tone of the man whose whole air was designed to create confidence in others.

Charles Russell sensed a story behind

Six years ago.

It was Seattle, in the Springtime, and lonely hearts throbbed in the Harmony Social Club, just off one of the steep streets that slanted down to the waterfront. A radio played soft melodies while some couples danced, others twittered away with small talk, and a few gazed happily at each other. But Henry Kramer was a light that shone alone, a sun in its own firma-

ment. He revolved in the vicinity of the big punch-bowl, a regular attraction at the Harmony Social Club. His purpose, however, was merely to keep a watchful eye on lovely, lonely ladies, particularly newcomers.

the grief shown by Sarah Keene

As its motto, the Harmony Social Club had taken the slogan "Life begins at forty," thus excluding junior members. It gave Kramer, a man approaching fifty, an opportunity to spring a coy introduction upon any lady who might catch his fancy. He was playing his usual trick on this occasion, for the benefit of a buxom woman whose build belied the dimpled smile that spread upon her roundish, baby face.

"My, my," remarked Kramer, his tone as soft as his approach. "How in the world did they let you in here? You can't be eligible for this club."

The baby face wrinkled into a frown. The lady didn't take kindly to the remark. They never did, until Kramer clarified it. That was all part of the self-introduction.

"You certainly can't be over forty," objected Kramer, "and you know the rules. Now, now!" He wagged a finger reprovingly. "We old folks can't have the kiddies crowding us!"

The lonely lady blushed and laughed. Then, smartly, she responded:

"You don't look so very old yourself, Mr. ——"

"Kramer is the name," put in its owner. "Henry Kramer. Of course my friends call me Henry. And your name?"

"Elaine Morris. Of course—"

"Of course your friends call you Elaine. A lovely name, a classical name. Elaine the Fair, the Lily Maid of Astolat. That's Tennyson, you know."

"I know. Elaine was in love with Sir Lancelot. It was all so very romantic."

"Very. And now—" Kramer made a profound bow—"may I offer the lady fair a glass of our most delicious punch?"

Elaine nodded and Kramer made a trip to the punch bowl. Purposely, he approached Elaine from the left, noted her hand as she raised it to receive the glass. His quick, birdlike eyes glinted as he saw the plain gold band on her third finger. A widow was precisely to Kramer's liking.

They were seen together often, Henry and Elaine, but less and less

did they frequent the Harmony Social Club. They loved to take boat trips on Puget Sound, where the purple waters were suffused with the pink of the setting sun, which matched the color of Elaine's blushes, when Kramer, her shining knight, proposed marriage.

All that had happened six years ago—or a little less, and Charles Russell, a capable, ambitious reporter, might have observed the beginning of it, if he'd been around the Harmony Social Club more often. But Russell himself was under forty, and besides, he was after a big story, not just a touch of romance with a dash of bitters, the sort of mixture that you'd find around a lonely hearts club.

FOUR years ago. Springtime again, in Seattle. They'd gone strictly commercial in the Harmony Social Club. A juke box had replaced the radio, so you had to come up with a nickel if you wanted music, music, music. But the punch-bowl still flowed and once more Henry Kramer bloomed as its self-appointed custodian. He was the same Henry, not a whit grayer, nor with any more lines in his face. Indeed, those who remembered him from before agreed that he looked younger.

Kramer was back at his vigil, watching for lonely ladies, a trifle on the lovely side. He saw one today, with chubby red cheeks, as bright as a pair of Washington State apples. A touch of his old whimsy impelling him, Kramer approached and said:

"How in the world are you here? Don't you know the rules? Nobody under forty can be a member of this club."

"But I'm over forty," the woman replied, "and I'm proud of it. After all, it's nice to find one place where you can admit your real age. Or can you, Mr.——"

"The name is Kramer. My friends call me Henry. And your name?"

"Helen Rogers. You can call me Helen for short."

"Helen, a lovely name. A classical name. Helen of Troy, whose beauty caused war among men and gods."

"You've read about that too? How nice!"

"Our punch is very nice, also. May I offer you a glass?"

Again, the gleam of a golden ring caught Kramer's eye as he placed the glass in Helen's left hand. Then, as they raised their glasses together, Kramer solemnly proposed a toast:

"To Elaine. She was my wife. I met her here in this very club, only a few short years ago."

Helen's voice gave a disappointed tremble as the glass quivered in her hand.

"Then—then you're married?"

"No longer." Kramer shook his head sadly. "She took ill—with a chill, one evening. She died, very suddenly. Poor Elaine."

"Elaine is a very pretty name."

"Yes, it was. But somehow I fancy Helen much better."

They took trips together, up toward the Canadian border, among the lakes. There, where the great evergreen forests formed a fitting contrast to the red of Helen's cheeks, Henry proposed that they, two spirits young in heart, should no longer mourn the past, but find

their happy future in the bonds of matrimony.

That was only four years ago. If Charles Russell had witnessed the punch-bowl scene, with Henry Kramer playing the Ganymede to Helen of Troy, he'd have walked out smiling from the social club. But he still wouldn't have rated the incident as worth a piece in his paper. Such tidbits were run of the mill, around a lonely hearts hangout.

Two years ago. Once more, Spring had come to Seattle, to turn a young man's fancy to thoughts of love. Again, Henry Kramer was back at his old stand beside the punch bowl in the Harmony Social Club. This time, he was spooning out a drink for a lady quite as attractive as her predecessors, but more on the mature side. But then, Kramer had grown older, too, though he didn't show it. The regulars around the Harmony Club thought him more youthful than ever. They had come to regard him as sort of a biennial phenomenon, that showed up every other year, in between congressional elections. Around the social club, Kramer talked only in terms of love; never marriage. He reserved that for the great outdoors.

True to form, Kramer had sprung his tricky introduction, only to receive a wise smile from the handsome, fashionably dressed widow who practically flaunted her wedding finger under his approving eye. She didn't fall for the "under forty" line, and she was very prompt to give her name. "It's Claire," she said. "The rest of it is Foster. Claire Bigby Foster, if you want it in full."

"Claire is quite enough," breathed Kramer. "It reminds me of the French phrase, *clair-de-lune*. It means moonlight, you know. Claire, for moonlight. That makes me think of 'Moonlight and Roses,' my theme song."

Claire's moon-face shone happily.

"I think they have it on the nickelodeon," she said. "Why not play it, if they have?"

The juke box had it, so Kramer invested a nickel. The music suggested more realistic adventures, so by day Henry and Claire drove to places from which they could return by evening, under real moonlight, amid the perfume of actual roses. And so, one blithe afternoon, when they were headed toward Olympia in Kramer's good used car, the punch-bowl specialist proposed marriage.

"I'm not an unhappy man, Claire," Kramer avowed. "I've just been unfortunate. I told you about poor Elaine, how suddenly she died—" Kramer paused, timing his next comment to Claire's nod—"and how Helen left me, just as suddenly. You know, I don't think Helen could have understood me, do you?" This time, he waited for Claire's head-shake. Then: "The divorce papers have come through at last," continued Kramer, "and I'm a free man. Free to marry anyone I choose."

Kramer pulled the car into a turnout, which offered a magnificent view. Far ahead, the snow-capped summit of Mount Rainier towered like an approving sentinel. But Claire, though usually self-possessed, was far too tearful to

consider the scenery. Forgetting her reserve, the third widow flung her arms about Kramer's shoulders, half-sobbing: "Henry, oh how happy I am! How I have waited for this moment."

It was a moment for which Kramer, too, had waited, though he didn't say so. That was just two years ago, and the Kramer story still wouldn't have been worth a few random notes on copy paper, so far as Charles Russell was concerned. People who visited lonely hearts clubs were often the sort who made mistakes in marriage, or were hard to get along with; otherwise, they wouldn't keep coming to such places, looking for more they couldn't handle.

Even an experienced reporter like Charles Russell was inclined to accept the obvious. Russell had been piling up six years of facts while Henry Kramer was making his forays into matrimony. At that, Russell wouldn't have spotted a thing wrong with Kramer, if they'd met head on. What it took, was a slight twist of circumstance that allowed for a long-shot hunch.

THIS year, as usual, Russell was handling the King County courthouse in Seattle. One of his regular stops was Sheriff Belknapp's office, which in its spare moments served as a Bureau of Missing Persons. On this mild evening in late winter, Russell was in the sheriff's office, checking the day's reports, when a woman walked in and insisted that she see Sheriff Belknapp in person.

There was something both eager and earnest in the woman's manner. Russell noticed it, as the sheriff stepped from his office to speak to the visitor. The woman's face was haggard, aged it would seem through worry, but her eyes brightened and her voice lost its tremolo as she warmed to her speech.

"You've got to do something about Claire, sheriff," the woman began. "Claire is my sister; she's been missing almost a week now. But Henry claims he doesn't know where she could have gone."

Sheriff Belknapp, a tall, impos-

ing man, but above all things methodical, immediately introduced a calming note into the discussion.

"One moment, lady," he said, indulgently. "I don't know who Claire is, or who Henry is. Even more important, who are you?"

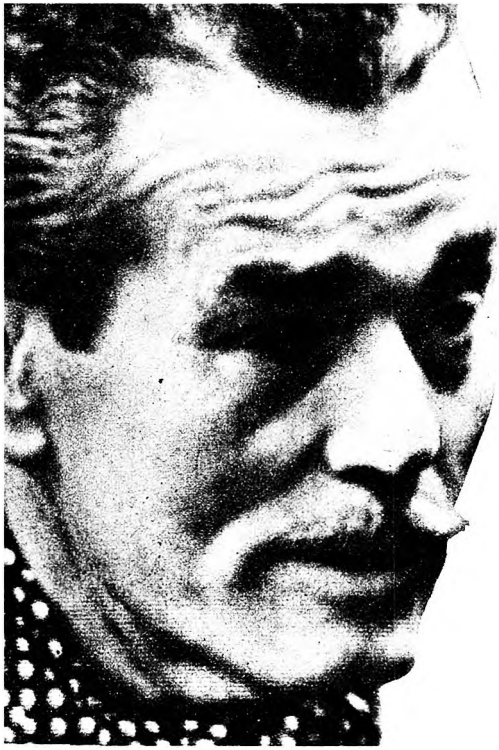
"I'm Mrs. Victor Keene. Sarah Bigby Keene. Oh, yes, I'll write it all out for you—" Impatiently, Mrs. Keene reached for the printed form that the sheriff held—"And I'll sign it. But I'm not the missing person, so why should I be important? It's Claire who's missing; she's my sister."

"Now we're getting somewhere," nodded the sheriff. "What's the rest of your sister's name?"

"Claire Bigby Foster Kramer," recited Mrs. Keene. "She was married first to Rufus Foster, over in Port Orchard. He was a farmer once, but he'd gone in for growing rhododendrons until he died five years ago. A lot older than Claire, he was."

"And what did you say your sis-

They were always pleased when Henry Kramer returned to the Harmony Social Club



Henry Kramer was worried over his wife's absence

ter's age was?"

"I didn't say, but it's forty-six."

"And her present husband's name?"

"Henry Kramer. Address, 316 East 140th Street. That's where Claire is missing from right now."

Obligingly, the sheriff filled in those details and more, including Sarah Keene's address on 136th Street, East. Then, after the weary-faced sister had signed the form, Sheriff Belknapp stated:

"We'll give it the regular listing, with the usual coverage, Mrs. Keene. But the fact that your sister is married and—well, let us say approaching middle-age—has considerable bearing in the matter. Ninety percent and more of these cases are due purely to domestic problems."

"Not Claire's," insisted Mrs. Keene. "I'm sure her case is different."

"That's what everybody thinks, Mrs. Keene," returned the sheriff, a bit brusquely. "However, we'll do all we can."

Mrs. Keene's lips showed a sudden whiteness. Charles Russell was sure that she was biting back indignant words. Sheriff Belknapp didn't notice it; he was busy checking the form that he had filled. For a moment, Mrs. Keene's eyes flashed fury; briefly, they registered appeal as she turned them toward Russell. Then, for some reason, their light faded; wearily, the woman turned and left the sheriff's office.

Just why had Sarah Keene acted that way?

Charles Russell debated the question. It could be that he'd shown a slightly dead-pan attitude, not unusual with a veteran reporter. In that case, Mrs. Keene would have classed him with Sheriff Belknapp and decided it would be useless to press her appeal further. On the contrary, Russell's steady eyes might have been probing Mrs. Keene too deeply. Perhaps she feared that he'd spotted her antagonism toward the sheriff—which indeed Russell had—and didn't want him to mention it to Belknapp. That in turn, would mean that Mrs. Keene was desperately anxious to have a search pushed for her sister. So desperate indeed, that she had withheld all criticism, rather than cause the sheriff to neglect the case.

After the door had closed on Mrs. Keene, Russell turned to the sheriff, before he could file the re-

port.

"There's something odd about this case, sheriff," said Russell. "Why, for instance, didn't the husband report it?"

"That's just it, Charley," rejoined Belknapp, cheerfully. "Why didn't he?"

"If she's really missing, he'd be the first person to know."

"Naturally, Charley. What's more, he'd know why, which the sister apparently doesn't. Do you think he wants to air his home life, like it was last week's wash?"

"But if he doesn't know where she is—"

"He knows that she'll be back," the sheriff inserted, in a convinced tone. "If she heard then that he'd been running down here, making a big fuss about her absence, she'd be sore as all blazes."

"What if she doesn't come back?"

"Sometimes these cases turn out to be skips," the sheriff conceded, "and that's the last we ever hear of them. You've covered this court-house beat a long while, Charley, long enough to know that these missing person reports are just a case of file and forget. If there's really anything to them, we get them from the police blotter, not from the home front."

"Then you're not going to talk to Henry Kramer?"

"Not unless he asks us first. But there's nothing to stop you from going out to see him, Charley. Here's his address, why don't you take it down?"

"All right. I'll do just that."

The reporter wrote down the Kramer address, as well as that of Mrs. Keene, while the sheriff chuckled. By next morning, when Russell came across his notation, he about decided that Belknapp was right. Still, he couldn't shake away the haunted look that Mrs. Keene had given him. One thing did impress Charles Russell. If Claire Kramer had really skipped, why hadn't she told her sister?

That point, at least, urged Russell to further investigation. He took a bus trip out to Seattle's northern limits; suddenly found himself within a few blocks of the Kramer home. There the whole quest struck him as both futile and stupid. If Henry Kramer had experienced wife trouble, why hound the poor man? Certainly, the fact that his sister-in-law had butted into his affairs wouldn't put Kramer in any better mood. Russell paused and idly flipped a coin. Heads he'd go see Kramer; tails, it was back to the office.

The coin fell tails. Better make it two out of three. Tails again, it fell. That settled it; the office. Pocketing the coin, Russell tightened his top-coat against the gathering fog and stalked toward the bus-stop. Again, the reporter paused.

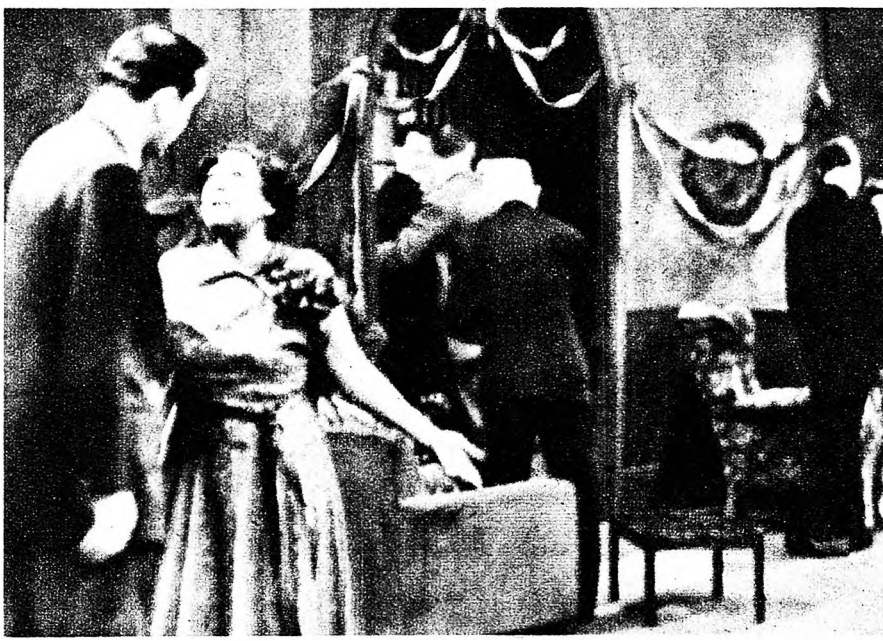
He'd been playing a hunch so far. What a sap he'd be to throw it over now. If only to convince himself that there was "No story" where there ought to be a big one, Russell would have to call on Kramer. He was acting like a cub reporter now, not a veteran newshawk, in thus letting his qualms get the better of him. Just what was the matter—why didn't he want to interview Kramer? The man certainly couldn't be any tougher than some that Russell had handled. As for the fact that there

was so little to go on, Russell had frequently worked from scratch in running down a story.

A bus drifted by while Russell mulled it over. That settled the point. He'd see Kramer, get the whole thing over with, and get back to town, with at least the satisfaction that it hadn't all been a wasted trip. So he traced his way to Kramer's, chuckling when he saw the bungalow home where the fellow lived, a pretty place, with well-kept lawn and trees. For one thing, Russell decided, Kramer couldn't be too bad a sort, to choose a residence like this. From the way his sister-in-law had acted, you'd have expected Kramer to be a hideous monster dwelling in a weird castle, like an ogre—or a Bluebeard.

The analogy sprang to Russell's mind just as Kramer answered the front door bell and the reporter had to work fast to smother his smile. Bluebeard was a human brute who had murdered a string of wives, while Henry Kramer, at first sight was a mild, sympathetic man who couldn't hurt a fly. Russell was apologetic as he gave his name and stated that he was a reporter. To soften the situation, he termed it a routine call, adding on the spur of the moment that the *Post-Intelligencer* made it a sort of service to its readers to check on reports of missing persons. Someone, Russell couldn't precisely state who it was, had sent in word that Mrs. Kramer was missing.

Henry Kramer took it all in such good spirit. He was delighted that



At the Lonely Hearts Club, Russell was invited to join the party

Russell had called. He was worried because of Claire's absence. He'd been so lonely, he'd been anxious for someone to talk to him and advise him. He invited Russell into the house and began hunting about for a wee bit of Scotch, so that they could have a drink together. But there wasn't a bottle anywhere, Kramer not being much of a drinking man. Meanwhile, Russell was sizing up the attractive living room, with its decorative rug, new upholstered furniture, and the fireplace where logs were already crackling in a cheery blaze, against the chill of the gathering fog.

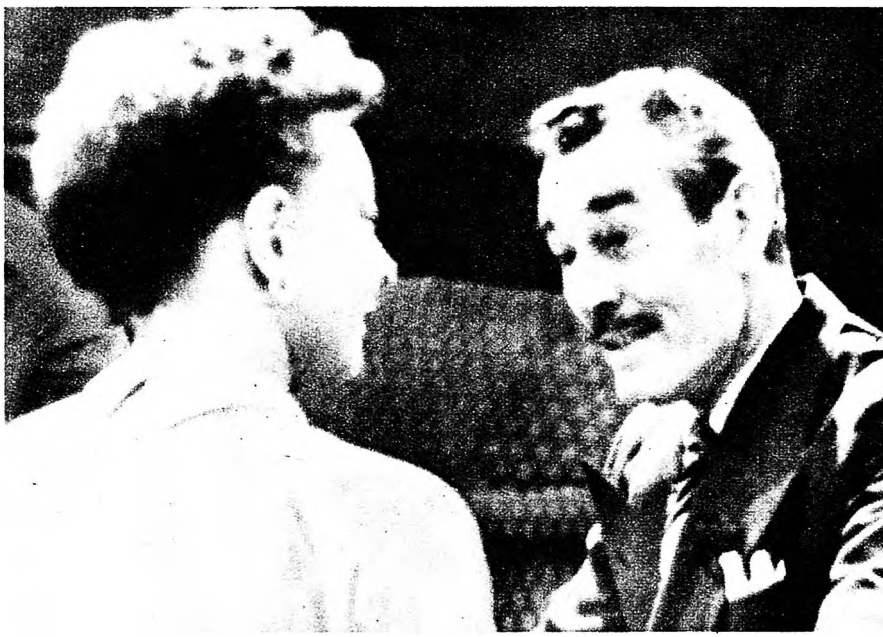
At one side of the fireplace was a book-case, which Russell, with his reporter's eye, noted was well-stocked with classical volumes. Above the fireplace was a balcony, indicating a second floor. Kramer observed Russell's upward glance and suggested that they go upstairs, where perhaps the missing bottle might be found. So up they went, to a room which Kramer mentioned was Claire's, but all they found was a closet full of clothes belonging to the missing Mrs. Kramer.

The unhappy husband shook his head as they went downstairs. Then:

"Claire must have taken the bottle with her," Kramer decided. "I suppose your informant mentioned that she had been drinking heavily, of late?"

"I don't recall that detail, Mr. Kramer."

"Naturally, he wouldn't mention it," said Kramer, with a nod. "The



"And how, my dear, did they let you in? You can't be over forty!"

man Claire ran away with, I mean."

"So that was the real trouble?"

"Just about," nodded Kramer. He gestured for Russell to seat himself beside the fireplace, then spread his hands quickly, saying: "No, no—please don't take notes!" as the reporter reached into his coat pocket. But all that Russell was after was a cigarette. As he produced it, Kramer was quick to provide a flame from an ornamental lighter on the table. "That's fine, Mr. Russell," Kramer added, "just relax and I'll tell you my whole problem. But I'm not speaking for publication. That may come later."

Through the clouds of cigarette smoke that he blew, Russell sized Kramer. Superficially, the fellow was suave, even a sophisticate. But Russell had been around enough to recognize that Kramer was trading on borrowed phrases. He could see in the man's whole manner that of a would-be actor, which in turn spelled egotism. Kramer's speech was so neatly studied, so timed to his quick, tilted glances, that his very statements marked him as a phoney. Whenever Kramer spoke the truth, it could be charged to coincidence or to expediency.

"I was lonesome when I first met Claire," said Kramer, in a reminiscent tone. "It was at a lonely hearts club, you know the sort, I suppose. Where forlorn folk find others of their ilk, like misery seeking company. When a man's lonely, he has to talk to somebody, like I'm talking to you right now."

Russell encouraged Kramer with a sympathetic nod.

"Understand, I can't blame Claire," continued Kramer, earnestly. "She really meant to make a happy marriage of it, I believe. But old associations, like habits, are so hard to break. Why, only a few days after our first wedding anniversary, I found these letters."

Kramer went to a desk, rummaged there, came about with a sad, wan smile.

"I forgot," he said. "Claire asked for them back. So I gave them to her with all her other things. They were from Frank."

"An old friend, I suppose," put in Russell.

"Precisely that," nodded Kramer, "an old friend from the Harmony Social Club. Claire had been stealing down to the place, on the sly."

Russell shook his head and said "Tsk, tsk."

"Claire was seeing Frank behind my back," asserted Kramer. "I told her she would have to stop it. She laughed and said that she was young. She wanted excitement and hated being chained to a doddering old fogey like myself. She said I should have known that when she insisted on having a separate bed-room, the one I showed you upstairs, Mr. Russell. So she left, and I've only seen her once since."

"Then she isn't missing," decided Russell. "When and where did you see her—at the lonely heart club?"

Kramer shuddered as though the very suggestion harrowed him. When he spoke again, his voice grated, almost mechanically.

"I met her two nights later, at a downtown tea-room," Kramer testified. "We agreed upon a settlement. I had raised every cent that I could beg or borrow. I paid it all

to Claire; she was too cold-hearted to leave me even a small pittance. Twenty thousand dollars I gave her, all in hundred dollar bills. That, Mr. Russell, is my story and not a pretty one. It certainly could not interest the readers of your fine paper."

"Probably it wouldn't," reassured Russell, as he rose to leave. "I'd rather hold it, anyway, in case your wife comes home."

"If she only would," said Kramer, prayerfully, as he clung to the front door's big knob with both hands, "I would tell my darling Claire that all had been forgiven."

As he looked back from the street, Russell saw Kramer still hanging in the doorway. The thickened fog created a peculiar illusion. It shrouded the house, obscured it, so the place could have been anything, even an ogre's castle. In turn, Kramer's figure was magnified by the mist, gaining monstrous proportions. Russell had sensed, in Kramer's last, grated words, that the oil had run out. Kramer could purr persuasion just so long; when he tried to state facts for the book, he betrayed his metallic nature.

Russell pulled into Belknapp's office, all agog.

"Sheriff, this Henry Kramer is a weird character," the reporter began. "He handed me a yarn about somebody named Frank running off with his dear Claire. So what does our boy Henry do, but meet up with his ever-loving and hand her twenty thousand to squander on the boy friend!"

"Cool off, Charley," advised Belknapp. "You're steaming worse than the fog. Maybe he's trying to buy her back."

"It wouldn't make sense," Russell argued. "He must have been walking around with the cash for hours after he drew it from the bank, because he passed it to her in a tea-room, of all places, in the evening. All in hundred dollar bills, Kramer claimed. You ought to have him picked up for questioning, sheriff."

"Because we can't find the wife," retorted Belknapp, "we should pick up the husband? You don't make sense now, Charley. You'd better swap suspicions with that Mrs. Keene. She's your speed."

"You know, sheriff," said Russell, "you've got something. I'll drop in on Sarah Keene tomorrow."

WHEN the reporter called on Claire's sister, he found her only too anxious to confirm his suspicions. At first, Mrs. Keene was vague, and if it hadn't been for Russell's own meeting with Kramer, he would have classed Sarah's statements as a combination of guesswork and prejudice. Fortunately, Russell could now provide some links.

"You see, Mrs. Keene," Russell explained, "you can't expect action from the sheriff just because you don't like Kramer, or because you think Claire ought to have told you before she went away. Those are negative factors. You've got to produce something as evidence of foul play. If anything did happen to Claire, it might be that some dangerous characters saw Kramer give her that twenty thousand dollars."

"What did you say?" shouted Mrs. Keene. "Henry gave Claire twenty thousand dollars?"

"That's right. All the cash he could beg or borrow."

"Henry didn't have to go far to do either. Claire had that much herself, in bonds that her first husband left her. Of course Henry wouldn't tell you that. I don't suppose he mentioned that he was married before, either."

"No, he didn't."

"He was married to a woman from Olympia, named Helen Rogers. She was supposed to have run away with all Henry's money and later she divorced him, though Claire never saw any papers. But if Henry was so broke when he first met Claire, where did he get that house of his, and the car that hadn't gone more than seven or eight thousand miles?"

"You may have something tangible, Mrs. Keene, in the matter of Kramer's previous marriage."

"Previous *marriages*," emphasized Mrs. Keene. "There was one before the Rogers woman. Her name was Elaine Morris. She came from Yakima, or somewhere around there. She was a widow, too, and she died, according to Henry, though he didn't say how or where. You know, Mr. Russell"—Sarah's eyes were taking on the expression of miniature saucers—"I'd almost believe that brother-in-law of mine is a regular Bluebeard!"

That odd thought had already occurred to Russell. But rather than go too far on suspicion, he still sought the tangible.

"I'll have to check on that fellow Frank," said Russell. "Maybe Kramer kept a few of his letters after Claire took all her things. He might find some in Claire's room—"

Russell brought himself short. Momentarily, his eyes were reflective, as they recalled something they'd seen. Then:

"Jot down everything you can remember," he told Mrs. Keene. "It may all be important. For instance, Kramer said Claire had taken all her things, but I saw her room, and it's full of clothes! We'll add up all these points and throw the total right at Sheriff Belknapp. Then we'll get results."

After he left Mrs. Keene, Russell headed over to the Kramer house, hoping to find [illegible] still there. Russell was [illegible] the right mood to bluff the mild-mannered gentleman along. Nobody answered his ring at the door-bell, however, and observing that the garage was empty, Russell inquired next door to learn if they knew when Kramer would be back. The lady next door had a prompt answer.

"Why, this is Mr. Kramer's club night," she said. "He always asked us to take messages for him on Thursdays. I mean before he was married, this last time. I suppose he's been going to the club again, since Mrs. Kramer left."

"What club would that be?" inquired Russell.

"Why, the lonely hearts club," the woman replied. "The one called the Harmony Social Club."

That was Russell's next stop, the Harmony Social Club, the very place where Kramer had accused his wife of going on the sly. When Russell walked in the door, he heard music and laughter, all indicative of a gala evening. He stopped at the desk, received a careful look from the woman in charge there.

"Our organization is purely social," the woman announced. "Your application must be recommended by at least three of our present members, otherwise you must wait—"

"I'm not an applicant," interposed Russell. "I'm just stopping by to find my friend Henry Kramer."

"Why, he's one of our oldest and most regular members," the woman replied. "Old in point of membership, I mean. Tonight, he is giving a wonderful party, so of course that's why he's expecting you. He's been away a long time on business, as you know."

Russell soon spied Kramer. The dapper Lothario of the lonely heart league was at his favorite lookout spot, the punch bowl. While others danced and chatted, Henry watched for newcomers in the feminine field. The season was early, perhaps, for others; but it was always Springtime for Henry, here in his chosen preserves. Russell didn't even have to dodge Kramer's eye. It didn't stop long enough to study any of the male contingent at the Harmony Social Club.

Action, at last. A demure lady, hovering on the verge of fifty, sat down for a breather near the juke box. Like a spider moving to the outskirts of its web, Henry sauntered over, carrying a glass of punch. Russell edged close enough to catch the soft-toned introduction: "And how, my dear, did they let you in?"

It was the same play all over. It should have been new to Russell, but somehow it rang a familiar note. Kramer's gag about the lady looking under forty; the exchange of names and Kramer's effort to produce a classical connection. It didn't work in this instance, since the lady's name was Lucille. Nevertheless, Russell could picture how it had worked in the past. His visit to Kramer, in the latter's home, had given the reporter a thorough insight into the man's shallow nature.

It now remained to catch Kramer unaware on a more important question. So Russell bided his time, until the party got in progress. When champagne corks were popping and the smorgasbord had been served in profusion, Russell strolled over and hailed the host of the evening with:

"Hello, Henry. What happened? You must have had a rich uncle drop dead, to throw a party like this."

Kramer's face went ashen gray.

"Yes, that was it," he said, in the tone of a professional mourner. "My rich uncle did die, down in Portland."

"Sure it wasn't a Dutch uncle?"

"I said a rich uncle." Kramer was on his dignity. "You see, Lucille," he confided to the lady beside him, "I didn't want to spoil the evening by any melancholy reference to my late Uncle Purvis. As a matter of fact, he passed away quite some time ago. It required several months to settle the estate. You would understand that, of course, being a widow."

Kramer threw a glance at Russell. It combined both glare and triumph. But the reporter didn't mind. He'd gotten a real break at last, a copy hook for his big story. He'd made Kramer deliver a statement before witnesses as to the

Sheriff Belknapp was ready for a red-hot interview with Kramer

source of the money he was throwing on this evening's party. Russell had also seen some of that very money when Kramer was settling accounts with the woman who ran the Harmony Social Club.

It had been in hundred dollar bills.

Sheriff Belknapp did more than listen when Charles Russell barged into his office. Already, the sheriff had gone over a sworn statement provided by Sarah Keene, along the lines that Russell had suggested. Now, the details that Russell had given Belknapp previously, fitted so neatly with subsequent events, that they had to be taken at more than face value.

"I'll take it from here on, Charley," the sheriff asserted. "I'll have the county detective check Kramer's home and make inquiries in the neighborhood. We'll cover that lonely hearts club like a blanket. We'll ask your good friend Henry to tell us all about his Uncle Purvis after we've looked into it first.

"Meanwhile, I'll get the full report on both those earlier wives, Elaine Morris Kramer from Olympia and Helen Rogers Kramer, originally of Yakima. It's going to be a lot easier to trace them than Uncle Purvis, except"—the sheriff paused grimly—"I haven't a guess as to where any of them wound up, including Claire Foster Kramer!"

"Good enough," agreed Russell, "but remember, it's my story. I deserve the chance to break it, sheriff."

"Don't let that worry you. Until this case is all wrapped up, I don't want any newspapers getting

it. If you're helping keep it out instead of in, more power to you, Charley. When it busts, you'll have first crack at the pieces."

After several days, Sheriff Belknapp had gathered the required data for a red-hot interview with Henry Kramer. Chief of Detectives Thornton had been equally busy. Both were in the sheriff's office when Henry Kramer came voluntarily to the King County Courthouse. Charles Russell was present, an eager listener, as they threw the questions. But dapper Henry was a hard chap to wear down. When he told a story, he stuck to its last ditch, while mentally digging a new one to replace it.

"So poor Elaine died," stated the sheriff, "about four years ago, as you recollect, but you can't name the exact day or where it happened. Odd, too, that she left you nothing, not even the insurance she once carried. Apparently she turned it in for its cash value, at your insistence."

"I never believed in insurance," replied Kramer. "Life insurance in particular. Once 'Die to Win' was the old life insurance slogan"—he gave a horrified shudder—"and the very thought of it frightened me."

"Naturally, it would," nodded Sheriff Belknapp. "You'd have had a flock of claims agents on you, if you'd tried to collect on Elaine's life that way. So you had her cash it in, instead. It was an endowment policy for ten thousand dollars, with only a couple of years to go, so you came pretty close to collecting the full amount. Elaine

The reporter studied the photograph of Kramer's missing wife, Claire

had some other property too, I understand. It was all liquidated before her death."

"Her former husband, Mr. Morris, was a very poor investor."

"But you weren't. You invested in Elaine. What did you do with her, Kramer?"

Kramer met that question with a bland, almost vacant stare. Sheriff Belknapp jabbed another.

"That fishing trip you took in Bremerton Sound," he said. "Some people saw you start with Elaine and come back alone."

"It wasn't the same fishing trip," returned Kramer. "You just can't mix me up, sheriff, no matter how hard you try."

Sheriff Belknapp took a long breath. Then:

"What about Helen?" he demanded. "You say you gave her twenty thousand dollars when she walked out on you—the same sum you mentioned with Claire, later. You slipped there, Kramer."

"They just happened to think in the same terms, sheriff."

"Helen's twenty thousand was drawn from a bank account in Olympia," continued the sheriff. "The check was in your name, but it happened to be a joint account."

"Helen wanted me to draw it out," explained Kramer. "She was afraid the bank might not understand."

"Peculiar that they wouldn't," snapped Sheriff Belknapp, "considering that Helen Rogers deposited it there in the first place, after selling some hotel stock left by her previous husband. I take it she sold the stock at your advice."

"I wouldn't know," returned Kramer, "since I never heard about the hotel stock before today. When Helen squandered the money she had in the bank, I gradually made it up. That's how we happened to have the joint account."

"Too bad we can't find Helen to ask her about this. You might at least tell us where you put her."

"Sheriff," purred Kramer, "she hadn't even courtesy enough to tell me what state she got her divorce in. That's how little I know about that woman, or where she might be."

Sheriff Belknapp gave a hopeless shrug. Chief Thornton promptly took over the quiz.

"We've checked your story about your third wife, Claire," Thornton told Kramer. "You didn't pay her any twenty thousand dollars. She paid you, by selling the stock that her former husband, Rufus Foster, had left her."

"I never heard of any such stock," returned Kramer. "We didn't talk about Mr. Foster, Claire and I. Experience taught me not to bring up past husbands with any of my wives. Besides, Claire didn't think about the past. She was thinking of the future—with Frank."

"There wasn't any Frank," stormed Thornton, "and you know it. We've checked for such a character at the Harmony Social Club."

"How Claire deceived me, then!" exclaimed Kramer. "Why, she must have been meeting him somewhere else!"

"Maybe they met in that nice new car of yours," suggested Thornton. "You bought it too soon, Kramer." Thornton turned to Russell. "Remember that used car Claire's sister talked about?

Kramer swapped it in for a brand-new V-12 that we found in the garage. He had it out, the day you looked in there, Russell. What's more''—Thornton concentrated suddenly on Kramer—"you paid for it, Henry, in hundred dollar bills, like you settled the tab at the Harmony Club. Now let's have it, whose cash was it?"

"Mine," admitted Kramer, meekly. He turned to Russell, with an appealing look. "You see, I didn't pay Claire the full twenty thousand. Actually, I talked her down to five. But I was afraid she might have told her sister Sarah something about it. I never did like Sarah, and I was sure you'd be seeing her next."

"All right, so it was your money," shot Russell, hotly. "But you didn't get it from any uncle. We've shaken your family tree until there isn't a nut left on it, Kramer. We know you're descended from pioneer stock that came to Oregon. You've moved around a lot in the Northwest; that, we discovered too. But your last two uncles died ten years ago. One was a lumberjack, the other a carpenter. Neither of them left you anything, and neither of them was named Purvis."

Kramer fairly wilted under Russell's scathing denunciation, but it was all for effect. The dapper Bluebeard could find more places to crawl in than a Dungeness crab. His faculty was picking somebody else's chance remark and turning it to his own devices. There wasn't a doubt in the minds of the men who quizzed him that Kramer was a threefold murderer, with his guilt hinging upon his inability to explain the source of his money. But Kramer was still determined to make one grandstand play.

Even as he cowered, the man with the smooth gray face and quick, birdlike eyes, was coming up with a real masterpiece. He was looking ahead, with all a Bluebeard's cunning. Russell's reference to Kramer's pioneer background and his knowledge of the Northwest, was the ideal substance upon which to weave a fantastic fabrication, which could never be disproven until put to actual test.

"You're right, Russell, when you say I'm from pioneer stock," spoke Kramer, suddenly. "The state of Washington was the stamping ground for my family, those of them who didn't go on to Alaska and the Yukon. I spent my boyhood clear down in the southeast corner of the state, among the Blue Mountains. I know every trail in that whole area, and every odd character too."

Kramer came up to his full height. His eyes had a far away glint; his face seemed to shed its gray and gain a youthful flush. There was a cocky tilt to his head, as his lips delivered a wise, convincing smile.

"Name any town within fifty miles of Walla Walla," suggested Kramer. "Any lake, any stream, any mountain. I'll tell you all about it, because I've been there. But I'll tell you more; I'll tell you about people. One old cattle rustler, in particular, who paid me well to keep the secret of how and where he got his herds. Why should I have given him away? After all, like myself, he had an interest in the country. It was his before other people spoiled it."

Under the "truth serum" test, Kramer responded to every question

With quick glances, Kramer took in the faces that surrounded his, picking Russell's as an index. The reporter was interested, even though not convinced. So Kramer continued his confidential tale.

"I hid the money that the rustler paid me," related Kramer. "It's in a cache just off a trail I remembered from my boyhood. I stowed it in a five gallon gasoline can that I buried under a big rock. If you take me there, I'll show it to you. What's more, I can prove that it's really mine, now that the old rustler is dead. That will end this stupid talk about my robbing my poor wives."

There weren't any buyers for Kramer's story; nor was there any way to discredit it, except by demanding actual proof, which was obviously what Kramer wanted. But Charles Russell, anxious to wrap up his big story, was game for anything, too.

"Why not start right away?" Russell queried, as he turned from Belknapp to Thornton. "You can keep Kramer in your custody, all the way to Walla Walla. The sooner we start, the sooner we'll be back, with or without this money that Kramer says he can show us."

They were off that same day,

driving the three hundred odd miles to Walla Walla: Chief Thornton, two county detectives, Henry Kramer, and of course Charles Russell. Something of the prisoner's game began to disclose itself toward nightfall, before they had reached their destination.

"If we take a short cut south," suggested Kramer, "I'll get you to the place that much quicker."

"You mean you'll get us over the Oregon border," corrected Thornton. "Then you'll claim you are out of our custody. Not a chance, Kramer, until we notify the Oregon state police to meet us. What's more, you'll sign papers, waiving any demands for release."

They stayed in Walla Walla that night and drove into Oregon the next day. Then began a slow, painful drag, through the rugged Blue Mountain country, where Kramer kept looking for his cache, all the while proving only that he was planning some new trick. What it could be, Russell so far hadn't guessed. He was certain only that if this last ruse failed, Kramer would be a defeated man.

Toward sunset one afternoon, Kramer called for a halt on a rough, steep road. He pointed to a path that scaled a slope to an overhanging cliff, where great blue spruce trees looked like baby shrubs, a thousand feet below. The snow had begun to fall and Kramer seemed eager to complete his task, as he pointed to the high cliff.

"That's where it is!" he exclaimed. "Come along, I'll lead the way. You'll see where I keep my money."

On one point, Kramer hadn't lied. He not only knew these mountains, he'd been among them. Agile as a goat, he easily clambered ahead of the younger men who composed the party. They didn't worry, for Kramer had no place to hide. Moreover, they knew his burst of energy couldn't last. But it did last, long enough for Kramer.

Triumphantly, he reached the brow a hundred feet ahead of all the rest. There, he spread his arms; against the dull crimson of the half-clouded sunset, Kramer shrieked his challenge.

"There isn't any money," he shouted, "because there's no hiding place. But you're letting me go. You understand? Letting me go, because if you come any closer, I'll jump off this cliff into the crevice below. You'll never have a chance to catch me then!"

Russell was hurrying forward as Kramer issued his defiance. Now, the reporter halted, realizing that his big story would vanish with Kramer's falling body. Only through the Bluebeard's own confession could his monstrous crimes be fully proved. So far, Kramer was outguessing his captors. It was up to Russell to turn the trick about. The reporter looked back; he saw the detectives with their guns half drawn. Two Oregon state troopers were also pausing on the draw.

"You haven't a chance, Kramer,"

called Russell. "They'll shoot you down the moment you make your suicide attempt."

Kramer laughed a derisive reply and Russell kept walking closer, taking advantage of the fugitive's temporary mood.

"Let them shoot me!" Kramer bellowed. "If they kill me, what's the difference? I want to die, anyway."

"Only they won't kill you," declared Russell. "They'll only cripple you. They're expert marksmen, all of them. They'll make you stumble in your tracks. You won't be able to crawl to the edge of the cliff. You're licked, Kramer."

Detectives and state troopers had drawn their guns and were advancing, in keeping with Russell's game. The reporter himself was moving ahead; he was surprisingly close, when Kramer suddenly galvanized, knowing he'd been tricked, and ready now to chance a dash to the cliff edge, despite what Russell said about those gunners. An instant later, Kramer jumped the guns.

So did Russell. Hoping the other men would hold their fire, the reporter cut across Kramer's path, intercepting the murderer just short of the rocky brink. Russell hit Kramer shoulder first, with a tackle that literally knocked the fellow's wind out. Kramer rolled back from the ledge, lay there panting, unable to get to his feet. As Russell pounced to hold him, the others arrived.

THAT was how Henry Kramer, the dapper little man with the kindly eyes and pleasant chirp, happened to be brought to the jail of a little Oregon town. There, he was quizzed incessantly, while Charles Russell paced the hallway and waited for the confession to come, which it did, in a surprising way.

Kramer, an absolute egotist, kept styling himself a "man of truth." Chief Thornton, wearied by the phrase, studied the haggard face of the prisoner and made an apt suggestion.

"If you're telling the truth," said Thornton, "you will welcome what I have to offer. It's the sodium pentathol test, the equivalent of a truth serum. We can get a physician to administer it, if you're willing. At least it will rest you."

"I'm willing," returned Kramer. "After all, what have I to hide? Nothing, absolutely nothing."

Perhaps Kramer knew that he had reached the limit of his physical endurance and was risking one act of sheer bravado. More likely, he felt that his false story was now so well established in his mind, that he could outmatch any test. Whatever the case, he came out second best. The scene in the little jail was tense, as Kramer faded into the mental twilight, induced by the drug. Then, at the doctor's nod, Chief Thornton put slow questions to the dapper little man who appeared to be half asleep, but whose answers came in methodical response.

"What happened to Elaine?" asked Thornton. "Why did she die so suddenly, Kramer?"

"Because I pitched her overboard," Kramer replied. "On our fishing trip in Bremerton Sound."

"You remember the exact spot?"

"Almost. I am sure I can locate it."

"And Helen, your second wife,"

continued Thornton. "What happened to her?"

"She died. As suddenly as Elaine."

"You drowned her, too?"

"No. I shot her. I buried her near Conway, just off Route Ninety-nine."

"Your third wife, Claire. You murdered her as well?"

"Yes. I strangled Claire in the house. I took the body in the car and buried it near the county line."

"Your motive, of course, was money."

"Yes, always money. Though I liked each wife at first. It was when I tired of them that I killed them. I could always find another."

Charles Russell could have verified that final statement. He had been witness to Kramer's preliminaries at the Harmony Social Club, where the Bluebeard had planned to acquire a fourth victim. It was probable that Kramer wouldn't have stopped at that number. Only old age could have softened his lust for murder.

That, or a reporter's desire for a big story!

The Kramer trial ran true to form, while Russell, whose big story had roused public interest to the fever pitch, continued to pound out copy on the case. The body in Bremerton Sound had drifted somewhere beyond reclaim, but the others were found in the exact places that Kramer had stated.

The verdict was murder in the first degree; the sentence, life imprisonment. Today, Henry Kramer, a ruthless killer, stares from his cell with vacant eyes, as though visioning the faces of his dead wives, toward whom he feels no remorse. The reason Kramer's hands twitch as he stares, is because they dislike the cold steel of the bars against which they press. They are saving their clutch, those hands, until they can find another warm, soft throat.

That time will never come. It was forestalled forever because an inspired reporter persisted in his quest for a big story, when many would have dropped it as a mad, impossible caper. Of course Charles Russell treats it with due modesty, as a reporter of his standing would. He gives full credit to the capable enforcement officers, whose teamwork brought the murderer to bay. That was their business and they performed it to the letter of perfection, which built the big story all the more.

Yes, Charley Russell wanted a big story and he got it. They say he's someday going to find another that will equal it. But it probably won't include a modern Bluebeard. They're scarce in Seattle, since Henry Kramer was put away for keeps. It isn't smart to slaughter wives wholesale, while Charles Russell is working for the *Post Intelligencer.*

Murder

THE PAUL RINGER home in Camden, New Jersey was on the broad tree-shaded Van Hook Street. It was a neat, pleasant looking house, set back from the street and surrounded by a spacious and well kept lawn. Everything about it gave a feeling of comfortable, happy, sedate family life.

It was one o'clock in the morning and the only light in the block came from the windows of Ringer's private study. Inside this room he was pacing the floor, his small and frail body tensed and his lower lip quivering. He was of Polish

Joe Clarke broke into newspaper work as a correspondent in Burlington County, New Jersey. At that time Ellis Parker, the famous detective, was at the height of his career and Clarke gained good experience following this noted sleuth around. In 1937, Clarke joined the staff of the Philadelphia Inquirer as its Camden correspondent, his territory being all of New Jersey. Clarke is 35, married and the father of 4 children.

WITHOUT CLUES

A killer had the perfect crime but a smart reporter found the one weak link

extraction and had the thin, ethereal face sometimes seen in Slavic people.

He was a certified public accountant. His books, many of them, lay in order on his desk, each in its exact place. Papers were carefully piled beside the books. Five newly sharpened pencils were placed within reach of his chair, and they were arranged at certain intervals so he could reach for them quickly. Paul Ringer was a man of meticulous and precise habits.

There was a sound outside the door and he rushed to it, opened it with a bang. "Natalie! Where in the world have you been?"

But it wasn't Natalie at the door. It was Tip, his daughter's dog, who seemed as worried and disturbed as Ringer over the girl's absence. Ringer walked back into the study, sat down at his desk, drummed the top with his fingers, which were as carefully manicured as his hair was groomed.

He picked up the phone, dialed the operator. When she came on the wire he said in a hollow voice: "Get me the police . . . quick, get me the police."

There was a pause as the oper-

ator made the connection and then: "Police Headquarters. Sergeant Jim O'Brien talking."

"My daughter," Ringer's voice was now shrill. "My daughter Natalie . . . she is missing since eight o'clock. She went to the store and. . . ."

"Who's talking and what's the address?" Sergeant O'Brien interrupted.

"My name . . . yes, my name. Paul Ringer, and I live at 1335 Van Hook Street. You've got to find her. Six hours now and I haven't heard from her."

"I'll give you the Missing Persons Bureau," Sergeant O'Brien said. "I wouldn't be too worried. You know how these young . . ."

"Get me the Missing Persons Bureau at once," Ringer cut in.

He was connected with the bureau. They asked questions about Natalie, her age and general description. In his precise voice, Ringer told them she was only eighteen, five feet five inches tall, light haired and with blue eyes. She weighed about a hundred and ten pounds, and when she left home she was wearing a white blouse, black skirt and a light blue coat. The sergeant took down this information and assured Ringer that a bulletin would be sent out in the morning on his missing daughter, but asked him to be sure to call them if she came home.

Paul Ringer didn't sleep that night. He paced the floor of his library, and when the first rays of dawn began to break through the gray mist in the east he walked out of his house, without hat or coat. He cut across Van Hook Street in a daze, taking a path that led to a park several blocks away. His eyes darted to the right and left, as if trying vainly to see Natalie.

He passed a telephone pole and on it was a police phone. Behind this was a clump of bushes. Ringer got to the edge of these and stopped suddenly, his face losing all color. For a moment he stood there, his lower lip trembling. Then he whirled around, went back to the police phone, took it off the hook

Natalie Ringer lay dead, victim of a mysterious and brutal killer.

and when a voice answered he said: "This is Paul Ringer. I called headquarters last night about my daughter. You . . . you . . . don't have to look any more. I have found her dead . . . in the Fort Benton park near Hook street."

DETECTIVE HENRY RICH is a stout, jovial man with eyes that always seem to twinkle. He moves slowly, as if twenty years of pounding the street as a cop before he became a detective had slowed down his gait to a shuffling walk. His contagious good humor and the slow way he moves are deceiving, as many crooks behind prison bars can confirm.

Joseph Clarke, police reporter for the Philadelphia *Inquirer,* was with Detective Rich when Rich's car came to a skidding stop at the curb near Fort Benton Park. Joe Clarke's assignment was to cover crime in New Jersey, and Camden was his headquarters. Detective Rich was one of his close friends. Ten years of looking at victims of brutal murders and chasing other types of crooks hadn't hardened Clarke to the sordid and tragic sights he had to see.

And eighteen-year-old Natalie Ringer, lying huddled in death, caused his stomach to flop over. Not that the body was horribly mutilated. It wasn't. There was a blue streak around the throat where a strangler had used his garrot. No other marks were on the girl's body. It was seeing her lying there, like a child who has suddenly gotten tired and fallen asleep, that did something to Joe Clarke.

He stood there, his six feet of slim body tense and his thin face, handsome in a collegiate way, pale and a little drawn. He watched the medical examiner, who had followed in the ambulance, bend over the girl, turn the head slightly to the right and then pull it back in place because rigor mortis had started to set in.

The medical examiner stood up, said: "The girl was strangled. There is a slight bruise on the side of the head. She could have been

Paul Ringer cried: "I can't talk—not now!"

Joe Clarke, Police Reporter, looked for clues but found none.

knocked down before she was strangled. The autopsy will tell us that."

Detective Rich was leaning over another body, a little to the right of the telephone pole where the police phone was. It was Paul Ringer. After he had called the police, the shock of seeing the lifeless body of his daughter had apparently been too much for him and he had collapsed.

The Camden police department, organized on modern lines, works swiftly in a murder case, and within a few minutes two cars full of technicians arrived at the park to go over every inch of ground around the body in search of clues. Detective Rich had the stricken father taken to his office in a car.

In the office, the father slowly began to get control of himself. He sat stiffly in a chair, legs and feet together in his usual prim position. The only movement that betrayed the ghastly strain he was under was the constant rubbing of the palm of his right hand across the back of the left.

He said weakly: "I can talk now, but there isn't much I can tell."

"We can wait if you wish," Detective Rich said. "I can understand how you feel."

"I want to talk now," Ringer answered quietly. "I know I have to talk if the murderer of my daughter is ever to be found."

Detective Rich nodded and said nothing.

"Natalie was everything in the world to me," Ringer continued. "Her mother died when we lived in Chester. That was two years ago. Natalie took her place and made a home for us. I have two young sons, Michael and Teddy. I am an accountant, but somehow I never was any good with figures about the house. Natalie could do everything and do it so well. She was kind and good and as fine a girl as you would ever know."

Joe Clarke watched the pain-stricken face of the father. Then he looked at Detective Rich, his eyes asking the question: "Does he have to talk now?" Detective Rich

shrugged and turned toward Ringer.

The father continued: "It was eight . . . maybe five after. She went to the store. It was raining. I said: 'Don't go now.' She wanted to buy a pair of stockings and she answered: 'What's a little rain?' She was always like that, joking and happy. She was healthy and she loved life . . . I . . . I . . . it is hard for me to talk about her. She didn't come back and I got worried. You have heard so much about these sex crimes. At one-thirty I called the police. When dawn began to break I started to look for her."

"In your car?" Rich questioned.

Ringer shook his head. "I don't have a car. I walked and walked and came to that clump of bushes in Fort Benton Park. I . . . I . . . think . . . they call it Lover's Lane."

"A girl like Natalie naturally doesn't have enemies," Detective Rich said, "but somebody killed her and there was a reason. Do you have any idea why she was killed?"

"None whatever, unless she was the victim of a sex maniac."

A detective entered the office and handed Detective Rich a paper. He glanced over it quickly. "Your daughter," he said to Ringer, "was not the victim of a sex attack. This is the preliminary report on the autopsy. It states definitely that she was not criminally attacked and that no attempt was made."

Ringer brushed his hand across his face. He was getting paler and his lower lip was quivering noticeably now.

"I . . . I . . . don't. . . ."

Detective Rich got up, said: "You better go home and get some rest. You are in no condition to talk now."

He helped Ringer up and motioned to a detective to take him home in a police car.

The next hours produced no clue to the baffling mystery of Natalie Ringer's murder. The complete report on the autopsy ruled out completely any sex crime. Robbery was also eliminated when it was discovered that a diamond ring Natalie was wearing had not been taken. Her purse, found close to the body, had over twenty dollars in it. A solid gold watch, a present on her graduation from high school, had not been removed from her wrist.

Everything Detective Rich and his men could find out about the girl was good. She had been a banner student in high school and was liked by everybody. She didn't smoke, drink, or run around. Her only interest seemed to be her school work and being a second mother to her two little brothers. Paul Ringer had moved his family to Camden two years before and they were known to the neighbors as a pleasant, apparently happy family, although Ringer himself was so quiet and reserved that few were intimately acquainted with him.

LATE THAT EVENING Detective Rich sat in his office, his heavy body slouched in the chair behind his desk. Joe Clarke was with him. Clarke had spent the day talking to people in the neighborhood of Van Hook Street. He hadn't learned anything.

"All we know," he said to Rich, "is that a charming girl of eighteen was murdered. Somewhere among

the millions that live in Camden or across the river in Philly is the killer. Finding him or her is like picking out the proverbial needle from a haystack."

"It isn't done that way," Rich grunted. "You guys want to be heroes. No killer commits murder without leaving a track behind. We find this and presto—the case is solved. Only sometimes we don't find the track, and then the case isn't solved."

"I've talked to a hundred people in the Van Hook Street neighborhood," Clarke countered. "They all agree that Natalie was a fine kid. Nobody has any theory about why she was killed unless some homicidal maniac who likes to kill and isn't a sex case, is loose."

"Falling back on that old gag is too easy," Rich said. "It never gets you anywhere. Natalie Ringer was killed because somebody wanted her dead for a specified reason. What is that reason? I don't know and we may never know."

Clarke left the detective's office and started to walk. He didn't have any plan in mind. He wanted to think. In his ten years of covering police cases in New Jersey he had been up against some tough problems, but none quite as sickening as the murder of Natalie Ringer. He knew Detective Rich was right. Somewhere there was a definite pattern for this murder. As Detective Rich had said, there always is.

It was six-thirty when Clarke got out of his car in front of the Ringer home. Twelve-year-old Teddy Ringer was sitting alone on the porch. He was a good looking boy and his eyes were red-rimmed from crying. Clarke walked up and sat down beside him.

"It's tough, Teddy," Clarke said. "Talking sometimes helps."

Teddy gulped to hold back the tears. "She was strict sometimes," he said. "She wanted to be a Ma to Mike and me. Mike is only ten and he don't understand."

"But you understand," Clarke suggested.

"Sure, but what's the use talking about it? It won't bring her back. Nothing will bring her back."

Teddy's eyes filled with tears and this time he didn't struggle to keep them back.

"Did Natalie go out with many fellows?"

"She didn't go out with anybody. She . . . she . . . just took Mom's place. Kept house and . . ."

"How has your father been?"

"He tries to act like he's brave, but he ain't any braver than I am. He cries just like me. He's been crying ever since he came home."

"Did you talk to Natalie before she went out last evening?"

"No, Mike and I were out playing. We came home and went to bed. We didn't know anything about it until Dad came home crying and woke us up."

A light went on in the house. Teddy said: "It's Dad. Want to talk to him?"

"He's having it hard enough without me asking him a lot of questions now," Clarke answered. "Try to think if you know of any fellow Natalie liked. Call me at this number if you get any ideas."

Clarke handed Teddy a card with his phone number. Teddy's father called him in for dinner and Clarke walked back to his car, got in it and

drove away.

For the next three days Clarke worked on the story, questioning everybody in the Ringer neighborhood. Always it was the same story. Examining the ground where the body of Natalie had been found the technicians came up with some important information. From the imprints on the grass it was apparent that the girl had not been killed there but had been murdered some other place and carried to that secluded section of the park. Applying special powder to the grass, the technicians picked up a set of footprints going to where Natalie had been found and the same set going away. No sign of any girl's print was there.

It was early on the fourth morning after the murder when Clarke ran into his first piece of valuable information. Mrs. Frank Gruber, who lived close to the store where Natalie had gone for her stockings, said: "I knew Natalie Ringer by sight. A nice girl, from everything I ever heard. I would see her come to the neighborhood stores to shop for her household. Well, on the night she disappeared I saw her. She was standing outside the store and acted like she was scared or something. I passed her and saw how pale her face was."

"Was anybody with her?" Clarke asked.

"Not when I first passed her, but when I came out of the store I saw her walking away with some man."

"What did he look like?"

"I only saw his back, but I would say he was a young chap with a slim body and blond hair. That's all I can say because I didn't see his face."

Ringer jumped back.

"How was he dressed?"

"As I remember, fairly well."

"You didn't notice anything unusual about him?"

"No, he was just a young man, tall and slim. He wore a blue topcoat and a gray hat. I wouldn't say he was a dude, but he wasn't badly dressed."

"Were he and Natalie walking fast?"

"Come to think of it, they were, and Natalie was pleading with him. He had hold of her arm and seemed to be pushing her along."

This information meant two things to Clarke. Natalie Ringer had rushed out of her father's home to meet somebody. This person wasn't a stranger. He was young and he was the last person seen with Natalie, and if he wasn't the killer, he knew plenty about the murder.

The days passed and the murder of Natalie Ringer continued to take space in the Philadelphia papers. It was one of those tantalizing mysteries without clues that intrigue the public. Clarke was assigned to other stories, but every spare minute he was working on the Natalie Ringer story. He questioned all her high school friends. None of them ever knew Natalie to have a date. He went to the church she attended and questioned the members of the congregation and learned nothing.

It was a long shot, but he had nothing left. So Clarke drove to the pool hall owned and operated by Jim Sullivan. Jim was a fat-faced crook who had served time and who had long ears that picked up everything that was said in his pool hall, a hangout for the small time underworld. Clarke had done several favors for Sullivan, and to reciprocate Sullivan often gave the reporter tips on cases. Sullivan's pool hall was a small, dirty, smoke-filled room in the slum section of Camden. When Clarke entered, the usual habitues were either at the tables or on the chairs that lined the walls.

"How about a game, Jim?" Clarke said to Sullivan. "You name it."

Sullivan's round face had a knowing grin as he answered: "Make it Chicago."

Clarke took down a cue, squinted along it to see if it was straight, and answered: "Okay, it's Chicago."

"How much?" Sullivan was still grinning. "My time is worth money."

It was their usual gag when Clarke wanted information. Sullivan could beat Clarke at any pool game with one hand tied behind him, and the price for the game was the price for the tip-off.

Clarke suggested: "Five dollars."

"You're too cheap tonight," Sullivan countered. "Let's make it fifteen dollars."

"Your price is going up," Clarke laughed. "We'll make it fifteen. I might win."

"You'll never win, Joe. You can't win because you shoot the world's worst game."

Sullivan racked the balls, pushed them together with his hand in the triangle, walked to the end of the table, put the cue on his fingers with an easy grace and shot. The balls scattered, but none fell in a hole.

"Nice work," Clarke said, chalk-

ing his cue. "What do you know about the Ringer killing?"

Sullivan was standing near Clarke. He said: "My shot, isn't it?"

"I asked you a question," Clarke said.

"Better give me the chalk," Sullivan answered.

This was a signal Sullivan was ready to talk. Clarke picked up the chalk and handed it to him and Sullivan moved closer to him.

"They tell me," Sullivan whispered, "some of the boys over in Chester liked her. Pete Lawson went steady with her. Pete's a small-time crook who did some heist jobs."

Clarke said nothing, let Sullivan continue.

"Sometimes he tries jewelry jobs, but he isn't good at that. He's a bad one and . . . and they say he was in Camden the night she was killed."

"What does he look like?"

"Rather handsome, tall and a blond. Some say he showed her the rackets over in Chester and she was good at it."

"You're not talking about Natalie Ringer, Sullivan. That kid never knew what a racket was."

"Okay, okay," Sullivan answered. "I'm just telling you what I heard. Why did she keep her nose clean after she came to Camden? The boys say she was taken for a ride and almost killed because she talked too much."

"It doesn't make sense," Clarke answered. "That kid was too straight for anything like that."

"Some of the boys say Nick Natti took her on the ride. You know Nick Natti?"

"Heard about him and what I heard isn't good."

"Nick was in town the night she was bumped off."

Clarke put his cue in the rack. Sullivan said: "What about the game?"

"I lost," Clarke answered and tossed three five dollar bills on the table. "I can't beat you in pool, but I think your info this time is all wet."

Sullivan picked up the five dollar bills. "Little boys get some hard bumps because they don't know about life," he said. "Wake up and learn some facts. That kid wasn't as lily white as you think."

WHEN CLARKE walked into Detective Rich's office the fat man was reclining in solid comfort and ease on the couch in his office. He didn't bother to look up as he asked: "You still on the Ringer story?"

"Rich, I've just gotten some information that can't be true," Clarke said. "Natalie Ringer was too young and too naive to be mixed up with men like Nick Natti."

Rich grunted, pointed to his desk where some papers lay. "Take a look-see over there and get up to date."

Clarke picked up the top paper, which was a police file on Natalie Ringer. It gave her name, age and description. The record showed she had been picked up for shoplifting in Chester and was suspected of being mixed up with Pete Lawson and Nick Natti.

"Sometimes," Rich said, "you get surprises in this business. Who would have thought the daughter of the respectable Paul Ringer knew such men as Pete Lawson

and Nick Natti? But when you're on a case, you have to check every angle. The police over in Chester sent us those files."

"You're wrong," Clarke retorted. "I'll prove you are. Natalie was only a kid then and she may have been infatuated with this Pete Lawson and because of that she was mixed up with him. But it doesn't prove she was bad. She just made a mistake and got in bad company."

"Okay, she got in the wrong company," Rich said. "A lot of kids do that. I'm not interested in morals or reforming the world. Solving murder cases is my job. We're picking up this Pete Lawson and then we may know something."

Clarke found Paul Ringer in his study. He looked up with little expression on his thin face as the reporter entered.

"It's nice of you to come, Mr. Clarke," Ringer's voice was hollow and lifeless. "Have the police learned anything?"

"They have several suspects. One is Nick Natti from Chester. I am sure you never knew him."

Ringer shook his head slowly. "No, the man is a complete stranger to me."

Clarke sat down and felt better. "The other suspect is Pete Lawson. Did you know him?"

"Pete Lawson!" Ringer exclaimed. "There must be some mistake."

"Why do you say that?" Clarke asked.

"Why, Pete Lawson boarded at our house in Chester. I knew him very well. They say he was rather wild at one time in his life, but when he lived at our place he worked and was a good boy. I treated him like a son. Peter couldn't have had anything to do with Natalie's murder!"

"That clears the picture a little for me," Clarke said. "Peter Lawson lived at your house and so he knew Natalie and that doesn't mean Natalie was running around with him."

"Natalie never ran around with anybody," Ringer replied. "I would bet my life that Peter had nothing to do with Natalie's murder. Why would he? She was always good and kind to him."

Clarke said: "I want you to understand what I am saying, Mr. Ringer. The police have a file on Natalie, and I am sure it is because Peter Lawson lived at your home. Peter Lawson is no good. The file says that Natalie was arrested for shop lifting. Lawson must have been back of that."

"Natalie has a police record?" Ringer cried. "That is absurd. The sweet child wouldn't know how to commit a crime. I can't believe the police could have been so stupid."

"Pete Lawson is a bad one," Clarke said. "He could have influenced Natalie."

Ringer brushed the back of his hand across his face, as if trying to clear his brain.

"It's . . . it's . . . all so confusing," he said. "I can't believe that about Natalie and I can't believe Pete Lawson is bad."

"There's an order out for his arrest," Clarke answered. "I will let you know what he says when they grill him."

Pete Lawson had been picked up and Detective Rich was giving him

a thorough questioning as Clarke walked into the detective's office. He was a pale-faced youth, handsome in a cold way. He sat on a straight-backed chair, facing Detective Rich.

"Sure, I was in Camden the night Natalie was killed," he admitted. "Is there anything unusual about that? I come over every day or so. But I didn't see Natalie that night."

"Be careful," Rich cautioned. "We have a woman who saw some man walking away with Natalie that night. This woman might be able to identify that man."

A sneer came over Lawson's pasty face. "Trying to frame me, eh? That's an old trick, telling a suspect you know something you don't. Nobody will ever identify me as the person who walked away with Natalie that night."

"You and Nick Natti come over that night?" Rich questioned.

"I ain't seen Nick for some time. . . ."

"Since the night you and Nick took Natalie on that ride and killed her? What was the trouble? Did she know too much? Maybe that's why you and Nick killed her."

Lawson screamed: "I didn't kill her . . . I tell you . . . I didn't kill her."

"You lived in the girl's home and she was young and at an impressionable age. You used her for your evil work and then had to kill her to keep her from talking."

"I didn't kill her," Lawson's voice rose to a shrill pitch.

Clarke walked out of the office.

"He tries to act like he's brave, but he ain't any braver than I am."

He had seen too many third degrees not to know that Pete Lawson would never break. Rich had a lot of suspicion but no facts to throw at his man.

At the curb Clarke got into his car and drove to the section of Camden where the restaurants are basement dives and where the spawn of the underworld gathers at night to whisper over cheap liquor and dirty tables their latest plans.

At an old brick house Clarke stopped his car and got out. He went up the steps and rang the bell. There was no answer at first. Then the door opened a few inches and a thin face peered out. Clarke's foot was in the door and his shoul-

der went against it and it slammed open.

A wiry little old man said: "Hell, Joe, you don't have to be so rough."

Clarke smiled at the old man. "You never can tell who you are going to meet in this dump, Freddie. I had to get in to see you. I need help and need it badly."

"Come with me," Freddie Blaine, an ex-con, said.

Clarke followed him to a rear room. Freddie closed the door and locked it. Then he turned, faced Clarke and said: "What's the trouble, Joe?"

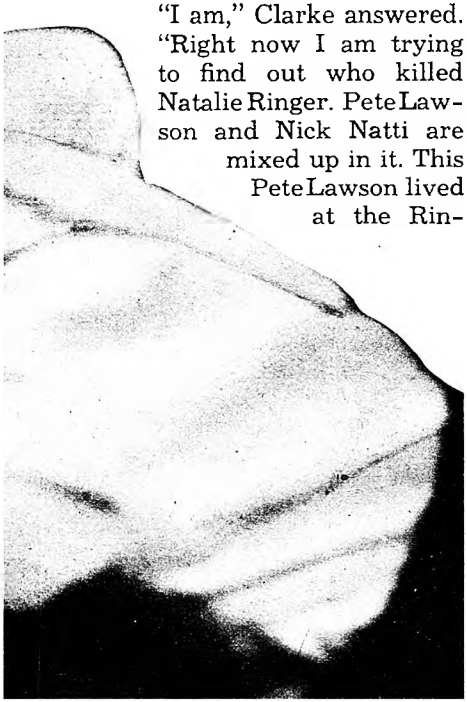
"Plenty," Clarke answered. "You were in stir with Nick Natti, weren't you?"

"Two years, and then somebody sprang Nick," Freddie answered.

"You know Pete Lawson?"

"Yep, I know that rat very well. How come you are mixed up with them? I thought you were a newspaper man."

"I am," Clarke answered. "Right now I am trying to find out who killed Natalie Ringer. Pete Lawson and Nick Natti are mixed up in it. This Pete Lawson lived at the Ringer home in Chester. He used the girl. Maybe she knew too much and that's why they had to bump her off."



Freddie's face tightened. "What do you want from me, Joe? You did me a good turn with that story when I wanted to get a parole. I'll do anything I can to help you, if it is in my power."

"It's in your power," Clarke countered. "What is Nick Natti's big racket? I know he's mixed up in some petty stuff, but this is only a cover-up. Pete Lawson is just one of his punks."

Freddie shrugged. "You're asking for info the cops would give their necks to get, Joe," he said. "This is inside stuff we boys don't give you."

"You'd help me a lot if you did," Clarke answered.

"Okay, I can trust you, Joe. I know that from experience. Nick Natti's big racket isn't dope or heist jobs. It's counterfeiting."

"Thanks," Clarke replied. "I had it figured out that way."

He left Freddie's house, got in his car and drove into Philadelphia. It was night and he went to the home of Frank Stoddard, an insurance broker. Stoddard was a typical insurance man, hale and well met. He slapped Clarke on the shoulder and offered him a drink.

"That," Clarke said, "is something I can really use now."

He downed a Scotch straight, took a chaser. "I want some information, Frank. You can't give it to me now, but tomorrow you can check and find out. I want to know if there were any insurance policies taken out on the life of Natalie Ringer."

Sullivan spoke in whispers.

"Ringer?" Stoddard questioned. "That's the girl that was murdered. What are you uncovering—an insurance racket? This is interesting."

"Not that," Clarke said. "There is a lot more to all this than an insurance racket, but I figure it may fit into the picture some way."

"I'll have the information for you tomorrow," Stoddard assured him.

It was midnight when Clarke got back to Detective Rich's office. The detective was again lying on his couch, munching on a sandwich. He looked tired and he had a surly look on his usually jovial face.

"These rats," he exclaimed. "You know they are guilty, but you can't break them. You have everything, but the one little detail necessary. Pete Lawson killed that girl, but he'll never break."

"I could have told you that when I walked out of your office while you were grilling him," Clarke said. "I went to get that one little thing that will cause him to break."

"Fine—and did you get it?"

"I'm not sure what I got, but I'm getting something."

"That's interesting. A newshawk becomes a cop. What are you after?"

"The real motive for the murder of Natalie Ringer. Maybe it was because she knew too much about Nick Natti, but somehow this doesn't look like a job Natti would pull. He doesn't go around strangling victims. A bullet in the back along a country road is easier and quicker."

"Pete Lawson is a sadistic rat," Rich said. "He would strangle a girl and get a kick out of it."

"I'm not so sure," Clarke replied. "Pete Lawson is in it some way, but not like we think. I should know tomorrow. You still got him in jail?"

"We have and he'll stay there," Rich retorted. "He's the killer and if we can't hold him on suspicion, we can on violation of parole."

Clarke didn't get much sleep the rest of the night. At two o'clock he was in the Fort Benton Park, near the clump of bushes where the

He sought Natalie's killer.

"Natalie was a charming girl."

body of Natalie Ringer had been found. He stood in the darkness under some trees and watched the clump of bushes. A form came out of the darkness so swiftly that he had no chance to get a look at the man.

The shadowy figure darted through the trees. Clarke didn't bother to give chase. He got a fair glimpse and the figure was tall and powerfully built, like that of Nick Natti. Clarke remained in the park for half an hour but the shadow didn't appear again. Then Clarke cut across the street and the lawn of the Ringer home. He tried the side door. It was open and he slipped inside. A half hour later he came out of the house, carrying a small piece of wood with him.

He got to his room at five o'clock. He slept until nine, got up, took a shower and drove down to police headquarters. Detective Rich wasn't lying on his couch. He was pacing the floor angrily.

"Don't let it get on your nerves," Clarke said. "This case is going to be broken before the day is over."

"Yeah," Rich shot back. "You got some way to make Lawson talk?"

"I think Lawson will talk gladly," Clarke replied. "But I'm not going to bother with him. Somebody else is going to do the singing."

Detective Rich sat down, his heavy body causing the chair to squeak. "You think you're a good cop, don't you? Maybe you are, but you're not getting anything we don't know."

Stoddard phoned Clarke at one o'clock. "Okay, here is the dope," he said. "There are five policies on the life of Natalie Ringer. One is for a hundred, several for five hundred, and only recently two more policies for three thousand each were taken out on her life. It makes around seven thousand, all told."

Clarke rushed to Rich's office. He exclaimed: "I got the dope. There were five policies taken out on the life of Natalie Ringer."

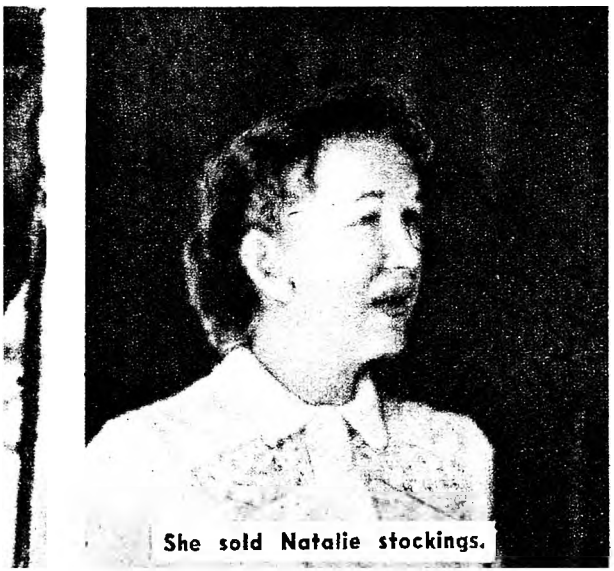
Rich gave a grunting laugh. "Is that what you've been trying to get?" He reached down and picked up a paper. "That's the first thing checked in any murder case. I have had this information for days now. Want to know who the beneficiary is. . . ."

"I know. It's the father."

"You think the father had something to do with the murder?"

"He would profit by her death, but Paul Ringer is too fine a man to have anything to do with that."

"You'll make a cop some time," Rich said, "when you learn that all



She sold Natalie stockings.

people are bad until proven otherwise. Take a look at this report. We've had it for over a week."

Clarke took the paper Rich handed him. It was a police file on Paul Ringer. It read:

"Paul Ringer, Age 57, Weight 120, Height 5′ 2″. 5/2/47 attempted to pass counterfeit bills, Chester. Held on suspicion but case dropped on lack of evidence. Suspected of arson 8/9/47. Wife died under suspicious circumstances and suspicion directed at him but no evidence. Ringer is a quiet type of man whose looks are deceptive."

"He killed his wife for insurance," Rich said, "but we can't prove it. We have more on him from the government. He is believed to be one of the smoothest counterfeiters in the country, using his work as a CPA as a cover-up."

Sleepily Clarke took the piece of wood he had found in the Ringer home from his pocket and handed it to Rich. "This might help you," he said. "I thought I was really uncovering something about him being a counterfeiter. I sneaked in his house and got this wood plate. It is the type used to make engravings for twenty dollar bills."

Rich took the wood. "It's good work, Clarke," he said. "Now I want you to do something else."

"What?"

"Get Ringer to confess."

"Get him to confess? What are you talking about?"

"He likes you and will talk to you. Naturally, the minute any of us appear out there, he will close up like a clam. Frankly, outside of suspicion we haven't got a thing on him. He'd make us look like fools in court. You go out and talk to him and tell him we have questioned Pete Lawson. Lawson was the man who pulled the murder. Tell Ringer he has talked. Ringer may believe you, but he wouldn't us. If you have the makings of a good cop, you can pull the trick; and if you don't we'll never break the case."

"I'll do my best," Clarke answered, "but you've taken a lot of the wind out of my sails. I figured I was a real cop when I uncovered these things. But now—well, I feel a little foolish."

"You did good work. Just keep it up by going out and making Ringer break."

Paul Ringer was sitting at his desk when Clarke walked into the study. He was still pale and his lower lip was quivering. Clarke had a funny feeling at the pit of his stomach when he looked at Ringer, one of the smoothest and most deadly killers he had ever faced. It still seemed incredible to him that the quiet, frail looking Paul Ringer was anything but a highly respected father.

Ringer said: "What's the news, Clarke?"

"I've come to get you to help us break the case and bring to justice the man who killed your daughter."

"You want *me* to help? How foolish to ask such a question. Of course, I'll do everything within my power."

"The police have questioned Lawson," Clarke said. "They feel that he is the man who actually killed your daughter, but not the

man behind the murder."

Ringer's eyes narrowed a little and the muscles in his thin face tightened.

"And who is this man?" he asked.

Clarke sat down. "I'm a newspaper man and not a cop, Mr. Ringer," he said. "I am only interested in a story and that's why I wanted to get to you before the cops. Pete Lawson has told all. You took out insurance policies on your daughter's life and then hired him to kill her. He has signed a statement to that effect. He claims you are the real murderer."

For a split second Clarke thought the frail body of Paul Ringer was going to burst. Every muscle seemed to stand out on his face and hands and neck. He tapped the top of the desk, and then his body relaxed.

"So he has told everything, has he?" Ringer's voice was strangely composed. "He said I hired him to kill Natalie."

"That's what he said, and the cops are coming to get you."

Beads of cold sweat stood out on Ringer's forehead. The lower lip started quivering again.

"The squealing rat," he said in a whispering voice. "He thinks he can put his murder off on me. I'll tell the truth, the whole truth. He'll die in the electric chair. He is as guilty as I am."

The door to the study opened and the portly Detective Rich came sauntering into the room. "Nice work, Clarke," he said. "You handled it like an old time cop."

Ringer had jumped to his feet, his face twisting with fury. "What . . . what . . . does . . . all this mean?" he gasped

"It means, Ringer, that we are arresting you for the murder of your daughter and we have a tape recording of the statement you made to Clarke."

AT HEADQUARTERS Ringer made a complete confession. He admitted that he had taken the insurance policies out on his daughter's life and then hired Pete Lawson to kill her. Lawson turned state's evidence and got off with a life sentence. Paul Ringer was tried, found guilty and sentenced to die in the electric chair.

Four months later, his frail body little more than a shadow, he walked into the death house at Trenton. As he passed Clarke he cried: "If it hadn't been for you, Clarke, I wouldn't be here."

"No, you probably wouldn't," Detective Rich, who was standing by Clarke answered. "But every murderer has his Nemesis. That's something they never seem to learn."

Walking away from the death house, after Paul Ringer had been pronounced dead, Rich said to Clarke: "It was your Big Story, and boy, did you live it!"

"I guess I did," Clarke replied.

Today, Margrete Daney is a farmer's wife, but she hasn't neglected the typewriter. She writes short stories and feature articles. Before the mystery of the Mad Clubber broke, she had been on the Toledo Blade for several years, handling features and general news. It was an accident that she got the assignment to cover the Mad Clubber story, an accident that brought her fame along with the hours of mental anguish in which she wondered how long she had to live.

TO

One

116th Year

THE

The shadow of death hung over Toledo and a newspaper woman risked her life to solve the mystery.

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FIVE CENTS

MAD CLUBBER STRIKES AGAIN

IF you had met Margrete Daney in those days when she was the famous reporter on the Toledo (Ohio) *Blade*, you would have wondered how this very pretty, petite, delicate girl could have solved the city's most vicious and brutal mass murder mystery. When Margrete tells you the story, she proudly shows you an army helmet of World War I vintage, which made it possible for her to break her Big Story for the simple reason that she probably would have died if it hadn't been for this protector.

Terror stalked the streets of Toledo that spring. A mad killer was loose, wreaking a terrible carnage of death on the women he caught alone. A frantic and desperate police department had thrown every available man on the case and had gotten nowhere. Women seldom went out at night, and if they did, they walked hurriedly, frozen with the fear that death might strike them any minute.

It had started with the murder of Mrs. Ethel Langhorn, a kindly and decent American housewife and mother. She wanted to bake a cake, the most delicious and tempting one she had ever made. Her son was coming home the next day and there was to be a good old-fashioned family dinner. At ten o'clock Mrs. Langhorn discovered she didn't have any baking

powder, so she hurried out of her kitchen door, cutting across the alley toward her neighbor's home where she could borrow some.

She never arrived there. The next morning her body was found in the alley, head crushed by some powerful weapon and most of the clothes torn from her body. To the police it looked like another sex murder, which happens far too often in our cities. They had no warning that this was the beginning of one of the most hideous reigns of horror and death any American city has ever known.

They made the usual investigation, but the killer, like most sex fiends, left no clues behind. By the end of the week the case was rapidly slipping into the category of an unsolved murder. Then suddenly the police were jarred out of their complacency. Seventeen-year-old Alice Farlon, who lived in that same neighborhood, passed the end of that alley on her way home from a party, and out of the darkness came a strange creature who swung a huge club.

Alice didn't die because the first blow was a glancing one and her screams scared the attacker away. It was several days before she recovered enough to tell what had happened. She said the man was short and moved in a crouching position, and he carried a huge club. The blow aimed at her head, which missed because she twisted her body, was so terrific that when it hit her shoulder it broke three bones.

Detectives scattered over the neighborhood, questioning everybody. The newspapers picked up the story and dubbed the attacker "The Mad Clubber." A haunting fear fell over the city. The police got no clues to the identity of the Mad Clubber, and after a week the feeling of fear and apprehension began to relax.

CLARA GARTENBAUM sat at her desk in the public library. For twenty years she had worked in the library, a sweet, simple person who had opened the door to the exciting pleasure of the world of good books to countless men and women and children. It was nearing nine o'clock, but Clara Gartenbaum wasn't the type to object to working overtime. To her it was merely a part of her day's work.

The clock struck and she looked up, surprised at the hour. Quickly arranging her cards, she slipped her glasses off, got up and walked to where her coat was hanging. She didn't see the leering face that appeared at the window, hands clutching the ledge. As she walked to the door, the face and the hands disappeared and the crouching figure darted for the bushes a short distance from the library building.

An hour later a policeman walked past the library building on his nightly beat. He was swinging his club idly, and when he got to the building, he pulled his flashlight out and sent its beam over the grounds to make sure that all was well. The darting beam outlined a woman's foot protruding from a bush that had been crushed.

The policeman knelt down and pulled the bush away. He was staring at the mutilated body of Clara Gartenbaum, her head crushed as Ethel Langhorn's had been.

Dennis said, "It's a great story."

In the editorial rooms of the Toledo *Blade* Martin Dennis, the city editor, sat at his desk, reading the lead front-page story. Its headline was: "Mad Clubber Kills Librarian." Margrete Daney stood beside his desk, nervous and obviously upset.

"Terrific," Dennis exclaimed. "A great story you did!"

Margrete said without enthusiasm: "Perhaps it was lucky for me it was Shaw's day off on police."

"Lucky?" Martin Dennis cried. "I'd say it was. I've discovered a new star reporter on the staff. I think so much of this story that I'm going to do this."

He reached down, picked up a pencil and at the top of the story on the first page he wrote: "By Margrete Daney."

"It's a by-line for you, Margrete," he added. "Keep this up and you'll be at the top in no time."

"I hope it doesn't keep up," Margrete answered quietly. "I hope it ends right here. I knew Miss Gartenbaum. When I was a little girl, she introduced me to the wonderful world of books. It . . . it . . . was she who put the idea of being a newspaperwoman into my head. And now . . . now she's dead."

Martin Dennis swung around in his chair, his hand still holding the copy. "You're a class writer, Margrete," he said. "That's the best compliment I can give anybody."

"Right now," Margrete answered, "I wish I wasn't. Before this it has all been names, nothing more to me, but now it is a friend, somebody I knew. It hits home a little too closely."

Martin Dennis shrugged. "Okay, want me to take you off the story?"

"Don't you dare!" Margrete answered.

"All right, can a cynical old man give you some advice?"

"Sure, any time."

"You've got to learn one thing, Margrete. If you do, you can save yourself heartaches. Get tough and get hard and get calluses on your heart. The characters in all our stories are not people. They are names, just names, addresses, and facts. They're stories. Once you let them stop being that, you're whipped."

"You can't make people names," Margrete protested. "You can't write great stories if you do that. You like this story. All right, the only way I could write it the way I did was to know this poor woman and feel for her—to imagine myself in her place, walking down that street and seeing that creature

come out at me, and . . . and. . . ."

"Have it your way," Dennis cut in. "You're going to get hurt and get hurt badly, but don't say I didn't warn you. I think you better drop this story and I'll put Shaw on it. . . ."

"Guess again," Margrete retorted angrily. "I wrote that story to make every woman who walked the streets at night be afraid so they won't be victims of the Mad Clubber. I want every woman to demand that the police find this Mad Clubber, and until they do, I'm on the story, no matter how many heartaches I have."

"Okay," Dennis agreed, "you're on the story."

Margrete kept the story going for a week. The Mayor of Toledo publicly announced that he would call on the governor for aid if the Mad Clubber wasn't found. Women's clubs and civic organizations put on a campaign for reward money and within a few days the total was well over five thousand.

But Margrete felt a sense of futility as she wrote story after story, and back of this was the grim realization that at any moment the Mad Clubber would strike again and another woman would die. And she was right, only it happened sooner than she expected.

HILDA COOPER was walking hurriedly down the sidewalk in the section where the Mad Clubber had operated. Hilda was in her late twenties, tall and very pretty. She was wearing a nurse's uniform because that was her profession. To many families she was a real angel of mercy, and this night she had gone to a home where a little child was seriously ill.

Hilda didn't want to go and she didn't want to be in that section, despite the fact that police cars were patrolling every block and cops and plainclothesmen were everywhere. But she was a visiting nurse and she had been called. It was her duty to go. She got to a streetlight, passed under it and moved on into the shadowy darkness.

A form came out of the bushes. There was no sound save the crunching of a blow as the club caught Hilda full on the head, crushing her small hat into a mass of blood and flesh and hair. She went down without even a groan and a long powerful arm reached out, grabbed her by the shoulder and pulled the lifeless body into the bushes.

The street was silent and deserted as the police car, with its searchlights sending rays into the trees and bushes, cruised slowly by some minutes later. Then one of the searchlights stopped as it outlined the body of Hilda Cooper, lying in the bushes, covered with the nurse's blue cape.

The next morning Margrete stared numbly at the front page of the Toledo *Blade*. The screaming headline was: "MAD CLUBBER STRIKES AGAIN AND NURSE DIES." The city editor leaned over Margrete's desk.

"Great piece of work, this story," Dennis said.

Margete's lips quivered and she was struggling to keep back the sobs.

"Yes," she answered. "It's a good story."

"You knew her, too. . . ."

"We went to high school together."

Dennis gripped her shoulder. "I told you about the calluses on your heart, Margrete. You're learning the hard way. I suppose you'll cover her funeral?"

"Why not?" Margrete's words snapped from her lips. "She was my friend and her getting murdered like this is making me a famous newspaperwoman. I owe that much to her for what she is doing for me."

Martin Dennis shook his head. "You can't keep this up, Margrete. Knock off and get some rest."

"Rest!" Margrete gave a cold laugh. "I have other things to do. These killings have to stop and if the cops can't stop them, somebody has to. I've been figuring. It has to be somebody from that neighborhood, someone who knows the habits of his victims. He's killing them right under the eyes of the police."

"That makes sense, but what. . . ."

"Let me finish. Somebody who could duck into a house in the neighborhood or climb a back fence and disappear. It has to be somebody in that neighborhood."

"My dear," Martin replied, "the police aren't wholly dumb. They have had that figured out for a long time. They haven't fallen down on the job. We just got some information, but we can't use it."

"What is it?"

"Three policewomen are going to act as spies."

"Policewomen?" Margrete exclaimed angrily. "Oh no, not that. . . ."

"They won't really be policewomen. They will be policemen dressed like women. It's a great story, but we can't use it until something breaks. Things like this happen in threes and fours. You know the old rule of three and four in the newspaper code."

"I've heard something about it, but it doesn't make much sense when helpless women are dying."

"Women or train wrecks or storms, it doesn't matter. These things run in threes and fours."

"Things?" Margrete cried. "How can you call human beings things?"

Dennis Martin sat down wearily. "Twenty years on the city desk give you a lot of calluses, Margrete," he said. "You'll get them too—in time."

Margrete wasn't sure whether she was getting calluses or what as she wrote story after story about the Mad Clubber. A numb fear seemed to creep over her, and somehow she was able to inject that into her stories, which kept Toledo breathless and on edge. She tried to follow Dennis's advice and look on the characters in this ghastly drama of death as only names. But she couldn't. They were live people, vital and with the joy of living. She wanted to help them, to save them, but she felt wholly inadequate.

A plan was forming in her mind, absurd and fantastic, one that caused a shiver of terror to pass over her. She knew she had to do more than sit there and write about these tragic deaths. It was more to her than her Big Story; she had to live it and be more of a part of it. Clare Gartenbaum and Hilda Cooper had been her friends.

THEN CAME THE fourth victim,

Claire Riley. Claire was only eighteen, pretty and very much in love with Jimmy Freeborn. Jimmy and Claire stood under the street light at the corner not far from where Hilda Cooper had been killed. Jimmy was holding her hand, squeezing it tightly and muttering: "I love you, Claire . . . I love you so much."

"I know, Jimmy," Claire answered, "but Pa is waiting and I got to get home."

"The heck with Pa," Jimmy protested. "Why don't he like me?"

"He likes you all right, but he thinks I am too young. I have to go now."

"You can't go alone," Jimmy said. "I'm not letting you get killed."

"I'd get killed if Pa saw me with you," Claire laughed.

A policeman came sauntering down the sidewalk, stopped beside Jimmy and Claire. "All right, lovebirds," he said. "Break it up. It's getting late."

Jimmy growled: "Can't a man have any privacy around here?"

"Not in this neighborhood," the policeman answered. "Go ahead, Romeo, and kiss her good night and let the girl get home to her parents."

The policeman walked on. Jimmy said: "I'll see you to your door."

"Don't be silly, Jimmy," Claire countered. "The door is right over there, and if Pa saw you it would be worse than the Clubber."

She gave him a goodbye kiss and a good hug and then darted into the darkness for her home, and as she did, the shadowy form of a crouching creature moved swiftly and silently toward her. She passed the library and then the fateful alley. She stopped under a street light to take her compact from her pocketbook and repair the marks of Jimmy's kisses on her lips. She smiled happily and then started to run for her home.

The shadow moved faster. Again there was the crunching sound of a club hitting a human head, and Claire went down as Hilda Cooper had, without even a groan.

The next morning Margrete Daney stared at the headline on the front page. "MAD CLUBBER MURDERS HIGH SCHOOL GIRL." Then she walked to Martin Dennis's desk, her face flushed with anger.

"Come on, boss," she said. "Give me a yes or no."

"It's no—final and flat and irrevocable. It isn't your business, Margrete. You can't interfere with the police."

"Interfere with the police?" Margrete gasped. "What have they done? They put a couple of flatfeet on the streets dressed like women. This Mad Clubber is no fool. He wouldn't take any bait like that."

"So you want to offer yourself as bait," Dennis countered. "It's no, first and last and forever."

Margrete gave a humorless laugh. "What's happened to your calluses, boss?" she taunted. "Don't think of me—think of the story. It's the story that counts."

Martin answered angrily. "You're twisting my words."

Margrete spread the front page out on the desk. There was a diagram map of the neighborhood where the murders had been committed and an X marked the spot

where each victim had fallen.

"Look at this, boss," she exclaimed. "All of them are in the same area. It has to be somebody in that neighborhood. You've got to give this Clubber real bait. He's bound to. . . ."

Margrete stopped and shuddered at the thought racing through her mind. Then she added: "Anyway, it would be a great story."

And to impress Dennis, she wrote out in the air over her head, her fingers carefully spacing the type:

BLADE REPORTER
POSES AS DECOY
FOR MAD CLUBBER!

"Fine, wonderful. Terrific!" Dennis said. "But suppose something does happen and he takes the bait. What about you?"

"I'm ready for that. I have a World War helmet for a hat and I'll rig it up with flowers and velvet."

"Those helmets!" Dennis groaned. "I wore one for two years in France. They don't even keep the rain out, let alone stopping the club of a mad killer."

"All right, you and the circulation crew and the whole force can follow me," Margrete answered. "Everybody but the police. They can't know anything about it."

"No!" was Dennis's answer.

"Okay," Margrete said. "I'll do it myself."

Her trim and petite body was tense. She stared at Dennis and he stared back. Then he shrugged, knowing full well she would carry out her threat.

He said quietly: "All right, but we follow you and we'll be close."

"A hundred yards."

"All the murders were in this area—let's bait the clubber."

"Nothing doing. Fifty at the best."

"I'll split with you. Make it seventy-five."

'All right, make it seventy-five, but the whole thing is crazy, insane, and I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to you."

"I've got my helmet," Margrete laughed heartily this time.

The Toledo *Blade* press car stood at the corner two blocks from where Hilda Cooper had been killed. Margrete Daney was at the side, wearing the helmet. She had covered it with velvet and flowers and it looked very attractive. Dennis was in the driver's seat, surly and mad and out of humor.

Margrete adjusted the helmet. "How does it look?" she asked.

"Please give up this crazy idea, Margrete," Dennis pleaded.

"What, when the worst is over?" Margrete asked. "Getting up my nerve to do it was the hardest part of the whole thing."

"Then do me a favor."

"Anything."

"Take this and use it if you have to."

Dennis handed her a revolver.

"I don't need that," Margrete said. "I've got this."

She pulled a rabbit's foot out of her pocketbook and dangled it in front of Dennis's face. "This," she said, "is all I need."

"Take that gun, you little fool," Dennis exclaimed. "If you are crazy enough to go through with this, have some protection."

"All right, all right, boss." Margrete dropped the revolver into her pocketbook. "I am wearing high heels so you can hear them click and follow me. Don't forget, now. Play fair with me. No closer than seventy-five yards."

"Fifty. . . ."

Margrete was trembling, but she answered: "No, no! Can't you see you're making me go through all this for nothing if you spoil it by playing safe? Let me do it my way or not at all."

She turned and walked away, her high heels clicking on the sidewalk. A lot of thoughts raced through her head. She wouldn't have admitted it to Dennis, but she had never been quite so scared in her life. She felt like a child walking through a graveyard on Hallowe'en—walking down a street crimson with the blood of the victims of the Mad Clubber.

The click of her high heels sounded like a pile driver to her, and under the absurd hat she was wearing her mind was filled with whispers of a terror she had never known before. But she went on. She passed

the library where Clara Gartenbaum had been killed. Instinctively she turned, wondering how far behind Dennis and the others were. She wished now that she hadn't insisted on seventy-five yards.

The spot where Hilda Cooper had died loomed up in the darkness before her. The silly rhyme "Two down, one to go, two down, one to go" raced through her mind. She fumbled for a cigarette, found one, but her hand was trembling so she had a hard time lighting it. The rhyme was still passing through her mind.

The yawning alley where the Mad Clubber had first struck was on her right. Then it happened, with such terrifying suddenness that Margrete never fully remembered what did take place. Out of the darkness came a lunging form. She saw the club over her head. She ducked. The club came down, grazing her side. She let out a scream that could be heard for blocks and then everything went black.

When she opened her eyes, Dennis was standing over her. "What . . . what . . . happened?" she gasped.

"Plenty," Dennis answered. "If we had followed your instructions and stayed seventy-five yards behind, you would have been the fifth victim of the Clubber to die. We were closer and you're alive now."

He helped Margrete to her feet. Her helmet was lying on the ground and it had a deep dent in it. Weakly she picked it up, said: "What did you say about this not keeping the rain out? It kept that club from crushing my head."

"That helmet," Dennis grudgingly admitted, "did help, but no more such foolishness."

Police cars were racing toward the street. Their searchlights were sending powerful shafts of light through the night. Members of the *Blade* force who had been with Dennis were running through the darkness. Within seconds the area was surrounded, but like a phantom in the night, the Mad Clubber had disappeared.

Dennis half carried the weak and limp Margrete to the car. "How does this killer disappear so easily?" Margrete asked. "Maybe he isn't human."

"The Mad Clubber is one thing you're not going to worry about any more," Dennis said. "You're going back to your regular work and leave stories like this to the police reporter."

"Think so?" Margrete countered. "I started and I'm finishing and you and nobody else will stop me."

"You need some rest and sleep," Dennis answered.

Margrete wasn't taken off the story. Two days after her hideous experience she was back at her desk. She wrote her own by-line story of the attack. She had one consolation for her failure: a week passed, and then another, and the Mad Clubber didn't appear. Slowly, like frightened children peering out from under bedclothes they have pulled over their heads, Toledans began to come out from under the blanket of terror that had covered them so long. They didn't leap out; they moved cautiously, expecting any minute to read that the Mad Clubber had struck again.

EIGHT WEEKS LATER Margrete sat at her typewriter. She had written: "In the last eight weeks, the dread Mad Clubber has failed to strike. The police say. . . ."

She crossed out the word "say" and wrote "have not." Then she got up and walked to the City Editor's desk.

"Boss," she said, "the Clubber story is dead. I can't milk it for anything more."

"Okay, kill it," Dennis seemed relieved.

"If the police get anything, they'll let me know."

"You *hope*," Dennis shot back. "I know a little girl who isn't very popular down at police headquarters. They say she muffed their plans to get the Mad Clubber by trying to be a great big heroine."

"It was rather foolish, wasn't it?" Margrete agreed. "But just the same, the Mad Clubber is lying low, and I wonder who will be the next victim. There'll be one all right. Don't kid yourself about that."

"Keep the clips ready, just in case."

"I will. By the way, you haven't forgotten I'm on police relief tonight? That's where I came in on this story."

"Better luck this time," was Dennis's comment.

There was something ironical in the grim fact that the Mad Clubber picked this night, while Margrete was at police headquarters, to strike again. It almost seemed that he was trying to taunt and laugh at her.

Only this time the Clubber didn't kill as he had before, and the police failed to see any connection between this murder and the others. Margrete didn't either until her alert eye caught the one thing the police had overlooked.

Joe Olgowiski was returning from the hospital where he had visited his wife. Life hadn't always been good to him. He had worked hard; there was sickness, always sickness. There was no money to hire anybody to remain with eleven-year-old Theresa. So Joe Olgowiski hurried back to his home, hoping Theresa was all right.

He didn't see the car that drove up so silently in the darkness and the man who got out, carrying a blanket. The man laid the blanket on the steps and hurried away, his car disappearing in the night as Joe walked up the steps. He saw the blanket, knelt down and opened it. The limp arm of a child fell out and then Joe Olgowiski was staring down at the lifeless form of his eleven-year-old daughter.

Margrete got the report at police headquarters where she sat in the detectives' room with Detective Fred Urbana, short and chunky and with a half-smoked cigar in his mouth. Urbana's face was drawn and haggard as he faced Margrete, who asked: "How old was the child?"

"Eleven," Urbana had a way of grunting his answers.

"Parents' names?" Margrete was taking notes.

"Joe and Maria Olgowiski." Urbana hesitated, looked up at the ceiling. "The mother . . . well, she is my sister and the kid was . . . my little niece. A sweet kid, the kind you couldn't help liking. Here's a snapshot. I been carrying it over a

year in my wallet."

Margrete swallowed hard as she looked at the snapshot of a cute and very sweet girl.

"Go ahead and write it all down," Urbana growled. "It's an angle, all right . . . good news. Tell the world I'm staying on the case night and day until I find the killer."

"Was there an autopsy?" Margrete asked quietly.

"Sure, and the report's in. Death was due to repeated blows on the head with a heavy instrument. We figure the murderer stole her from

"That mark on the child's face."

the bed and struck her when she screamed, to keep her quiet."

"I see," Margrete hesitated. "Can I . . . could I see her. I mean. . . ."

"You news hounds are all the same," Detective Urbana grumbled, chewing angrily on the unlighted cigar. "All right . . . maybe when you see her, you'll try to help us instead of getting in our way."

The detective got up, walked out of the room, and Margrete followed. They walked through the chill grim door that led to the Toledo Police Department morgue. The body of Theresa lay on the slab and an attendant pulled the sheet back.

Margrete gulped and felt sick at her stomach, but she struggled not to show it. Then she put her finger to her cheekbone and said: "That mark on the child's face . . . on the cheekbone. . . ."

"It was put there before she was killed," Detective Urbana explained. "The doc reported that when he made the autopsy."

"Any idea of the weapon?"

Detective Urbana answered by shaking his head.

Margrete suggested: "I better not mention it."

"Now you're helping," Detective Urbana exclaimed. "In return I'll tell you this . . . off the record, of course. We're convinced it was somebody in the neighborhood."

"How?" Margrete questioned.

"Somebody who knew the mother," Detective Urbana continued, "and knew she was in the hospital . . . somebody who could get into the child's room without any outcry, and knew where she was sleeping. We're so sure, we're putting a dragnet out tonight. We're picking up everybody who was seen in the neighborhood after dark. As I said, you can't print that."

"Of course not. . . ."

Detective Urbana continued: "But if you turn up at the line-up,

a special one at three a.m.—well, don't say I told you."

THE ROW OF suspects stood with their backs to the white wall, stiffly and like soldiers on parade. Powerful lights glared in their faces, blinding them to everything in front of them. A row of detectives sat in the seats, viewing the whole affair with an ill-concealed boredom. It was an old story to them, the early morning line-up, and most of them always wanted to get it over with as soon as possible.

This morning the exception was the stockily built Detective Urbana. The unlighted cigar was still in his mouth and he was chewing it slowly; his face still had that haggard and drawn expression. From time to time he took out the snapshot of his murdered niece and looked at it.

Margrete and Dennis were with him. The suspects passed in front of the powerful light slowly, one at a time, answering questions shot at them by the detectives in monotonous and flat tones. A short, squat man was before the lights. He blinked and was obviously nervous.

"Another angle you can't use," Urbana whispered to Margrete. "This is Walter Hofski, a distant cousin of mine. He has an unimpressive police record. We're checking every possible suspect who lives in that neighborhood, but he is in the clear."

Then Urbana said louder, addressing Hofski: "All right, Walter. Your story has been checked with your wife. Go home and get a shave."

Walter Hofski smiled, rubbed the stubble on his chin with his right hand. Margrete noticed a ring on one of his fingers.

"Can I really go?" Hofski asked.

"Sure, get home to your wife," Urbana answered.

Margrete said to Urbana: "Wait . . . could I talk to you a minute?"

"Yeah," Urbana looked at her in surprise. "What's on your mind?"

"Hold him here," Margrete said. "It may be nothing—yet it may be important."

Hofski had started down the steps. Urbana called out to him: "Hold it a minute." The suspect

stopped halfway down the steps, a startled expression on his face.

Urbana turned to Margrete, asked: "Now, what's this all about, lady?"

"Listen. That mark on the little girl's cheek," Margrete said. "I've been wondering what could have made it. It's too small for a club and too big for a fist. Please, I know I sound as if I'm trying to play detective and maybe you've already. . . ."

"Go ahead," Urbana cut in. "What are you trying to say?"

Margrete hesitated.

"If it will help us, speak up."

Hofski left the line up, thinking he was a free man.

"It's just this," Margrete stammered, a little embarrassed. "Maybe this man's story is okay and he was home with his wife, but if he was, and has nothing to fear, he shouldn't mind letting you examine that ring. Those marks could have been made by a ring."

Urbana turned, yelled at Hofski: "Walter, hold up your hands."

Hofski did so, slowly and nervously. Urbana got up, walked to him and pulled the ring off his finger.

"We're holding you, Walter, until we examine this ring."

The walls of the criminal laboratory were a snow white and the men working there—the silent detectives who never make the front pages—wore equally snow white gowns. One was bending over a microscope, studying the glass slide.

Margrete was with another detective, who said to her: "He'll be ready in a minute, Miss Daney. Let me explain several things to you. The ring we got from Hofski has interstices in the design and in those we found traces of blood. Hofski claimed he'd killed a chicken for his wife. We can quickly determine if it is chicken or human blood."

The detective bending over the microscope straightened up, said: "It's human blood."

"But how can you tell that?" Margrete asked.

The detective with her answered: "It's simple and I'll show you. You deserve this break. You're the only member of the press who ever got into this room."

Taking two slides, the detective added: "This first one has a smear of the blood from the ring. The

Human or animal blood?

other has blood from the autopsy. Look at them."

Margrete bent over the microscope while the detective adjusted it. She saw a lot of misshapen objects, large and grotesque under the powerful microscope.

"What you see," the detective explained, "are the erythrocytes and leucocytes which make up the blood plasma. Now look at the other one."

Margrete did and then exclaimed: "They look the same to me."

"That's the important point," the detective explained. "That proves that the smear taken from the ring is human blood, of the same type as the murdered girl's. However, that alone won't convict anybody. A smart lawyer can attack our case on the ground of circumstantial evidence. We might get conviction for second degree murder. We want more. We want the chair for this killer, and if we can get a confession out of him, that's what he'll get. Do you want to help us?"

"Do I?" Margrete exclaimed. "Just give me the chance."

"You'll get it. You'll have a front seat to a modern, painless third degree."

Again Margrete stood in a room with snow-white walls. But there were no gleaming lights, only a haze that seemed to make the white walls stand out cold and bitter. A door opened and a detective escorted the startled and frightened Walter Hofski in. He was pushed into a straight-backed chair that sat against the wall. There was no other furniture in that bare room. On the wall was a clock, ticking the solemn seconds away loudly and with seeming glee at the noise it was making.

"Hey, what is this?" Hofski yelled.

"Just sit in that chair," the detective said. "And I mean stay there."

Hofski sat back. The detective walked over to where Margrete, Detective Urbana and three other officers stood with their backs to the wall. Nobody said anything. The silence, punctured by the ticking of the clock, was unbearably grim.

"What you playing, a game?" Hofski shouted.

Nobody answered him. The detectives and Margrete stood motionless. There was no shuffling of feet, no sound whatever save the ticking of the clock.

A minute passed and then another and then ten minutes. Hofski screamed: "Say, listen, you

wise guys. I got rights. I gotta get some sleep. My lawyer will hear about this!"

Still only the weird silence answered him. In the shadowy darkness the faces of the officers and Margrete looked ghostly. A half hour passed. Hofski squirmed in his chair and a cold sweat stood out on his face. Then with a leap he left the chair, screaming: "I ain't gonna stand for this! I'm tired of playing a game. Did you hear me? I'm through playing a game. Why don't you say something? Somebody say something."

His words died away in a shrill, hysterical wail. Nobody in the room moved. He fell back in his chair limply. The ticking of the clock went on, seemingly louder and louder. Another half hour passed. A detective walked casually to the chair, whistling softly. He passed Hofski, whose terrified eyes followed him. The detective kept walking back and forth, his low whistle giving an eeriness to the whole proceeding. Two of the detectives with Margrete started tapping on the wall with their fingers. The sound was muted, almost too indistinct for the human ear to catch, but it set up a vibration that reached every part of the room.

Once again Hofski leaped from his chair. The whistling detective pushed him back. Hofski wailed: "You gotta let me out of here. I gotta get some sleep . . . some sleep. . . ."

His head was in his hands and his body was shaking with sobs. A detective turned on a light. The dazzling brilliance, reflected against the white walls, was blinding. The detectives with Margrete walked toward Hofski and then stood in front of him in a half circle. Margrete moved with them. She seemed to be in a trance, not knowing what she was doing. The weird scene had affected her almost as much as it had Hofski.

Then suddenly out of the air came a pair of baby shoes. Little Theresa had worn them. They dangled close to Hofski's face.

Then Detective Urbana said: "Tell us the truth, Walter. You killed Theresa . . . I know you killed her . . . why . . . why did you do it?"

Hofski's head was still in his hands and his body was shaking. "All right . . . all right," he screamed. "I done it . . . I was drunk . . . I didn't know what I was doing."

Then the hideous details came out in a babbling stream. He had had a fight with his wife because he had gotten drunk. He drove to the Olgowiski home, kidnapped the girl and when she started to cry, he hit her and killed her.

The shoes dangled before Hofski.

"I don't know why I did it," he blurted. "I was drunk and the kid was yelling. I guess I went crazy. I don't know why I did it."

Margrete Daney became the outstanding police reporter not only in Toledo, but throughout the Midwest, because of her brilliant work on the Olgowiski case. She had no intimation that she had accomplished the one purpose in her life—capturing the Mad Clubber. The dramatic end of this Big Story didn't come for several months.

The trial of Walter Hofski was a routine affair. Interest in the case had died down, but Margrete was assigned to cover the trial.

Martin Dennis said to her: "Anyway, Margrete, you won't get killed on this assignment."

"The Mad Clubber isn't dead," Margrete said, "and when he strikes again, you'll have plenty to worry about."

"You're telling me," Dennis groaned.

Two detectives were put on the witness stand first, and they confirmed Hofski's confession. Then Hofski took the stand. He told his story in a low, hesitant voice.

"So I put the body . . . on the doorstep and took off in the car."

"Just one more question," the lawyer appointed by the court to defend him asked. "Did you know what you were doing?"

Hofski's head came up. He shouted: "So help me God, I didn't know what I was doing!" He stared at the crowd, his face twisting with terror. His lawyer said: "That's all."

He was led from the stand. He passed the table where Detective Urbana and Margrete sat. Hofski stopped, screamed at Urbana: "You did this, you did this to me!"

Breaking away from the attendant, he lunged for Urbana. The stockily built detective moved quickly, caught the infuriated Hofski by the arm and turned him around. The attendant had him by the shoulders. Hofski was facing Margrete, who shrank away in fear.

"Damn you," Hofski shouted. "I should have killed you that night . . . clubbed you to death . . . you followed me with that helmet."

Margrete's hand went to her mouth in dazed amazement. Hofski was led to his place behind his lawyer. The lawyer leaned back and talked to him. Then he got to his feet.

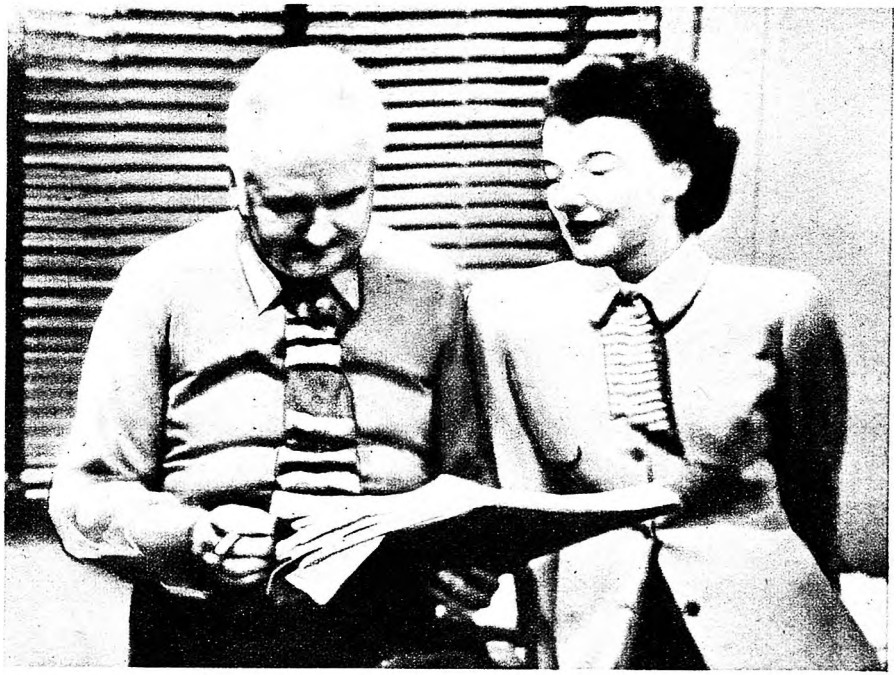
"Your Honor," the lawyer said to the judge, "I have defended this man to the best of my ability, and now that I have concluded my defense, it is my duty to give this information to the court."

The silence in the courtroom was oppressive. A dropping pin would have made a thunderous noise. The lawyer turned, pointed to the cringing Hofski.

"This man," the lawyer announced, "has just admitted to me that he is the Mad Clubber. He is the man who killed all those women."

All eyes turned to Hofski. Then Margrete was on her feet. She demanded: "Why did you do it? Why did you kill Hilda and Clara? Why . . . why. . . ."

Hofski said simply: "I liked to hear the sound of the club when it came down on their heads . . . I wanted excitement and thrills.

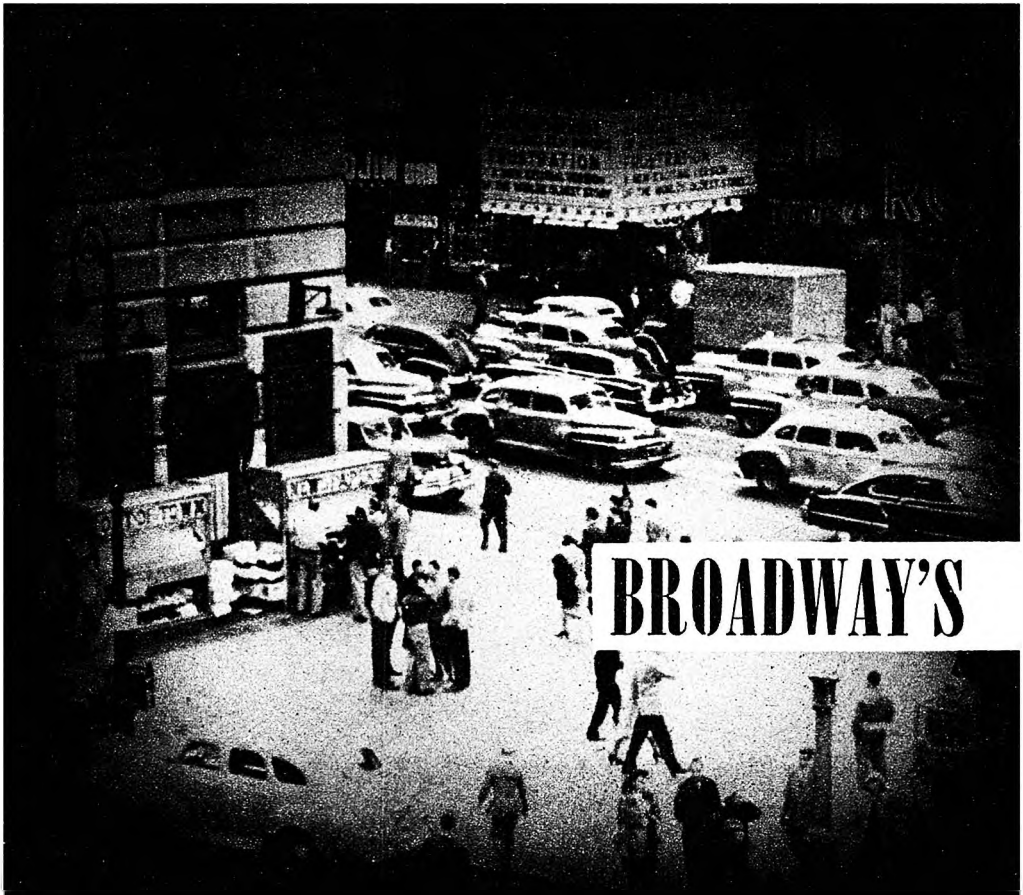


"You did it, Margrete—you solved our greatest murder mystery."

Back in the office of the *Blade,* Martin Dennis said to Margrete: "You did it, Margrete. You solved the greatest murder mystery this city ever knew—or probably ever will know. You've made a name that will be known all over the West."

Margrete nodded weakly and then did what most women would do in like circumstances. She started to cry.

● He thought he could get away with murder —but he was too clever! Even the manner of his murder was a clue to his identity, and when he turned in the key to the love nest he had shared with the victim, his guilt was proven by that very act.
Such was the Big Story covered by James Fusco of the Columbus (Ohio) *Citizen.* Read its details in the next issue.



BROADWAY'S

ANDY VIGLIETTA is one of the crack police reporters of Greater New York City. For some twenty years he has tracked down murderers, blackmailers, crooks of every kind. Letters and telegrams from such men as J. Edgar Hoover, Walter Winchell, and several police commissioners are in his file to vouch for his amazing reputation.

He has had a number of Big Stories, but the one he claims is his biggest, and one that remains the Big Story on Broadway, had its origin some twenty years ago when Viglietta was a young reporter on the Long Island *Star Journal.*

We can pick it up on a humid and sultry July night on Broadway. The glittering lights of this famous street, gaudy and with a touch of shabbiness in its dazzling splendor, blazed through the almost unbearable heat. The crowd was there, as it always is, a

"Dear Mr. Viglietta:
On behalf of the FBI, let me take this occasion to thank you for your support and cooperation which helped us immeasurably in the apprehension of a dangerous criminal.
Yours very truly,
J. Edgar Hoover."

BIGGEST BLACKMAIL MYSTERY

A mad extortionist plays a losing game of death with a reporter

surging, slow-moving, sweating sea of humans, made up of every stratum of humanity.

Tourists from the Midwest, gaping wide-eyed at what they saw, New Yorkers pouring out of the theaters on the side streets, characters that seemed to have dropped out of a Damon Runyon story and who give Broadway its greatest color, teen-age girls wearing bobby socks and slipping down the path to prostitution—all these and many others, including suave-faced crooks of every hue and color who find the Big Street a happy hunting ground of suckers and victims.

Johnny Taine was one of the latter, a perfect pattern of a Broadway crook. He had a rather stocky body, wore a trim, expensively tailored blue serge suit. His swarthy face, heavy and sensuous, had the cold, expressionless look of a jungle beast stalking its prey. He was standing a few feet inside

Johnny Taine

Ellen Prescott

William Edwards

the alley leading from 44th to 45th Street. His body was tense, motionless, like a statue. There was the jerky twitching of a muscle in his right cheek.

It was after eleven-thirty, and the stage door Johnnies who usually crowd around the side doors of the theaters were gone and the alley was dark and deserted in the sweltering summer heat. The door to one of the theaters opened and a tall, graceful and beautiful girl came out alone, walking hurriedly.

She was Ellen Prescott. Her name wasn't blazoned in lights as a great Broadway star, but she was good and in the big money as a dancer and singer who had had a successful career in Hollywood. Johnny Taine moved a little to keep out of her sight as she walked toward the 44th Street restaurant where she had her midnight snack before going to her hotel. . .

Taine hesitated, fingering the solid gold watch on his wrist. His eyes narrowed a little. The beauty of Ellen Prescott did something to him. But Taine wasn't interested in love or romance or even sex at that moment. He was one of the despicable vultures who prey on Broadway celebrities through the devious means of blackmail.

A successful actress, working her way to the top, is possessed of only one thought and that is success. Nothing can stand in the way and such a person is sensitive to the point of hysteria about anything that might reflect on her character and get her adverse publicity. So they make ideal victims for blackmail. Real information against them is preferable but not a prerequisite for a successful shakedown. Implied threats and phony information can many times do the trick.

Ellen Prescott didn't see Johnny Taine when she walked to the street. If she had, she wouldn't have recognized him. His sensuous face might have worried her, but Ellen had been in the business too long to worry about stage door Johnnies. After a midnight lunch with friends, she hailed a taxi and drove to her hotel. Inside her room, she kicked off her shoes, threw herself on a chaise longue and lit a cigarette.

Life was pleasant to her at that moment and on the horizon appeared no clouds to mar her upward climb on Broadway. She inhaled deeply on the cigarette and watched the smoke circle toward the ceiling.

There was a sound at the door, so indistinct that it was hardly audible. Ellen glanced in that direction and saw a piece of white paper sticking in the crack. She got up, thinking it was a hotel phone call notice which the boy had failed to stick under her door earlier in the evening.

But when she picked it up it wasn't a phone call slip. It was a Valentine, with a large flowery heart and cupids flying around it. Below was printed "To the Valentine I love." Puzzled as to why she would get a Valentine at that time of the year, but a little pleased at the idea, she opened it.

Written with a typewriter was the message:

"I want $10,000 and a girl like you knows how to get it. I have some pictures that can ruin your career and if you

want them, get the money."

Ellen Prescott felt a cold chill go down her back. She knew Broadway well enough to realize that this wasn't a joke. The vile creatures that preyed on actresses were something she had heard a great deal about. Pictures were one of their tricks, phony ones that had ruined many a promising actress's career because she didn't raise the money.

A feeling of numbness came over Ellen. She tossed the blackmail Valentine on the table and sat down on the bed and tried to think. The realization came over her that she was strangely alone in a world where thousands moved around her.

After a while she went to bed, but she didn't sleep. She tossed and turned, trying to formulate some plan of action. If she went to the police, there would be embarrassing questions and always the danger of publicity. Finally she fell into a restless, nervous sleep.

When she awoke, tired and exhausted, she decided to do nothing for several days. There would be other warning notes, and until they came she wasn't in any danger. The second note came three nights later. It was more explicit. It ordered her to have the first two thousand of the ten in twenty dollar bills, and to take them to a small restaurant on 125th Street. The warning added that if she called the police, the pictures would be turned over to a well known Broadway columnist who relished juicy bits of scandal and who could make or break any actress.

Midnight fell over West 125th Street. That street of many nations was almost deserted. Here and there a shadowy figure moved through the darkness. A few taxis cruised the street. The small restaurants had only a few late customers. Johnny Taine stood in the shadowy blackness of a doorway across the street from one of those typical small eating places in a basement, one flight down from the street.

Johnny's eyes darted nervously up and down the street. Courage was not one of his attributes. He had a wholesome fear of the cops, with justifiable reason. He had served three years for robbery, and he had gotten out of prison six months before thoroughly chastened as far as any rough type of crime was concerned. Blackmail seemed to offer a lucrative and safe income.

His body stiffened suddenly. A taxi had driven up and stopped in front of the restaurant. A girl got out and in the light reflecting up from the basement window of the restaurant, he saw that it was Ellen Prescott. Johnny's heart thumped with anticipation, but he didn't move from the darkened doorway.

His eyes searched the darkness to make sure he wasn't walking into a trap. Five minutes passed. He stepped out of the doorway, stopped on the sidewalk. Then he saw it. Only a slight movement in the darkness near the restaurant. He caught his breath, flattened himself against the wall of the building.

A man appeared across the street where he had seen the movement. Johnny didn't have to look twice

to know it was a detective. He sidled to the right, got to the end of the block and then started to run. He didn't stop until he hailed a taxi three blocks away. He was trembling and his mouth was dry when he walked into his furnished room on West 50th Street.

He hadn't figured Ellen Prescott would call the police. She looked like an easy victim. Had she ever seen him? Could she tip the police off to who had sent the warning notes? Johnny Taine was ready for just such an emergency, and a smile came over his face as he walked to a drawer in a bureau and pulled out one of the Valentines he had used for the notes.

Jimmy Carlton would be the fall guy. Jimmy wasn't bad. He didn't know Johnny Taine but Johnny knew all about him and the prison sentence he had served. Jimmy was going straight now. He had a job as a super in an apartment house in Queens. The police had a record of his fingerprints. Nothing else was needed.

Three nights later another Valentine was slipped under the door of Ellen's hotel suite. She took it to the police, and the next evening Jimmy Carlton was arrested. His fingerprints had been found on the Valentine, and it had been a simple matter to trace him.

He denied knowing anything about the blackmail Valentine, but he was tried, convicted and sent to prison. Andy Viglietta covered the story for his newspaper. He was puzzled about several aspects of the case. He went deeper into the investigation than the police, found that Carlton had an excellent reputation for work and had not been to Manhattan for several weeks prior to his arrest. But this couldn't break down the overpowering evidence of the fingerprints.

Johnny Taine smirked and strutted on Broadway. His trick of getting Carlton's fingerprints on the Valentine had been clever and not difficult. A trip to Long Island, a casual meeting with Carlton, did it. Carlton never knew he had touched the Valentine when Taine gave him a letter purporting to be from one of his former friends in stir.

Four months passed and Carlton was in prison and Taine rose to heights of success as a vulture preying on innocent Broadway hopefuls. He had money in his pocket and this gave him a cocky contempt for the police. His bitter

Johnny Taine and his blackmail Valentine

hatred of Ellen Prescott still rankled. He wanted revenge on the girl who had almost landed him in prison, and in his distorted, twisted mind a strange and fantastic plan began to form.

Andy Viglietta was at his desk in the editorial rooms of the Long Island *Star-Journal*. The Ellen Prescott case had been forgotten by him, as it had by the police and the public. At that moment Andy Viglietta was struggling with the problem of getting tickets to the World Series without the unpleasant necessity of having to pay twelve dollars for four-dollar seats.

His problem was one that faced thousands of baseball fans who had waited too long. He was on the phone, having no success.

Bill Williams, freckled, blond, and on the city desk, said: "Maybe an angel will bring you some tickets."

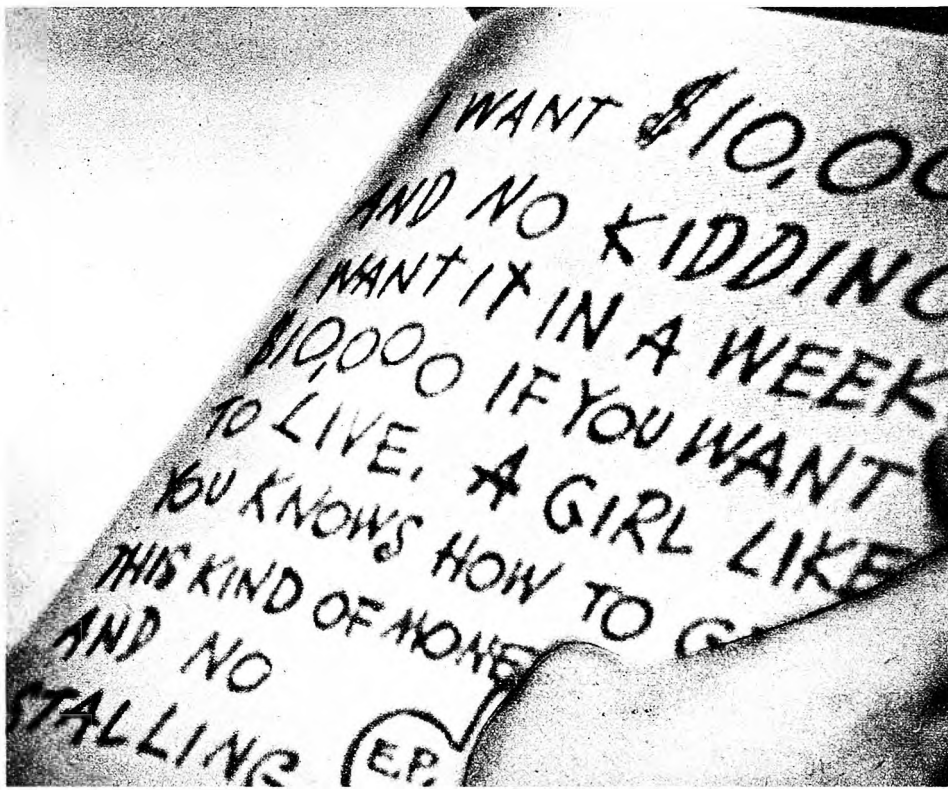
"Sure, two little angels," Viglietta groaned, "and now. . . ."

Williams interrupted with: "Here is a call for you. Maybe an angel is coming to see you."

Andy Viglietta grabbed the phone, said: "Viglietta speaking."

"Don't get excited, Viglietta," the voice at the other end, which was Taine's, said. "You're the newspaper guy that wondered if Carlton was guilty in the Ellen Prescott case. Want me to tell you something? He wasn't guilty."

"What the hell," Viglietta growled. "Does some crackpot have to call every time a case breaks? We buried the Ellen Prescott case four months ago. Where have you



been all this time? And by the way, you haven't got a couple of tickets for the World Series, have you?"

"Smart boy," Taine snapped. "I thought you were a good newspaper man. They got the wrong man, that super. I know who did it."

"Okay, okay," Viglietta answered. "Who did?"

"I did. I sent her those notes, and when she called the cops I got scared and framed that super."

"Interesting," Viglietta retorted. "Why are you calling me?"

"I just want to tell you what fools the cops are."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"It's a story, isn't it? You got something to write about and make the cops look like boobs."

"Sure, it's a great story. It only has one weak point. The cops got the man who wrote those notes. Got his fingerprints and he's in prison. If it wasn't for those two little facts, it would be a great story. Take a couple of aspirins and go to bed. I'm interested just now in getting tickets to the World Series."

"You don't believe me?"

"Sure, I believe every word, buddy. Now tell me you know where Judge Crater is. Goodbye."

Andy Viglietta hung up. Crackpots were annoying enough under normal conditions, but with the World Series two days away and no tickets, things weren't normal for Andy Viglietta.

The phone rang again and Viglietta picked up the receiver. Taine's voice came over the wire. "This is me again."

Andy Viglietta let out a groan. "No, not you! Have you found Judge Crater?"

"Listen, smart guy," Taine spoke up bluntly. "You didn't believe me before about that super being framed. Here's a deal I'll make. Call Miss Prescott and ask her if she has received any more of those Valentines. Call her in exactly one hour. You might ask her also if they got the right guy. She can give you the answer if she'll do it. Her phone number is Gramercy 7-4932."

The receiver clicked in Andy Viglietta's ear as Taine hung up. Viglietta sat back in his chair. He forgot the tickets for the World Series. The second mysterious call had brought him back to reality. There had been something about Carlton's arrest and conviction that hadn't rung true to him. He waited exactly one hour and then he picked up the phone, dialed Gramercy 7-4932.

F.B.I. men watched from their car

It was a free afternoon for Ellen Prescott. No matinee. She sat at her desk, catching up on her correspondence. The phone rang and she picked it up, said: "Hello!" in a cheery, carefree tone.

"Miss Prescott?" Andy Viglietta asked.

Ellen was puzzled, as she had never heard the voice. She said: "This is Ellen Prescott. Who is calling?"

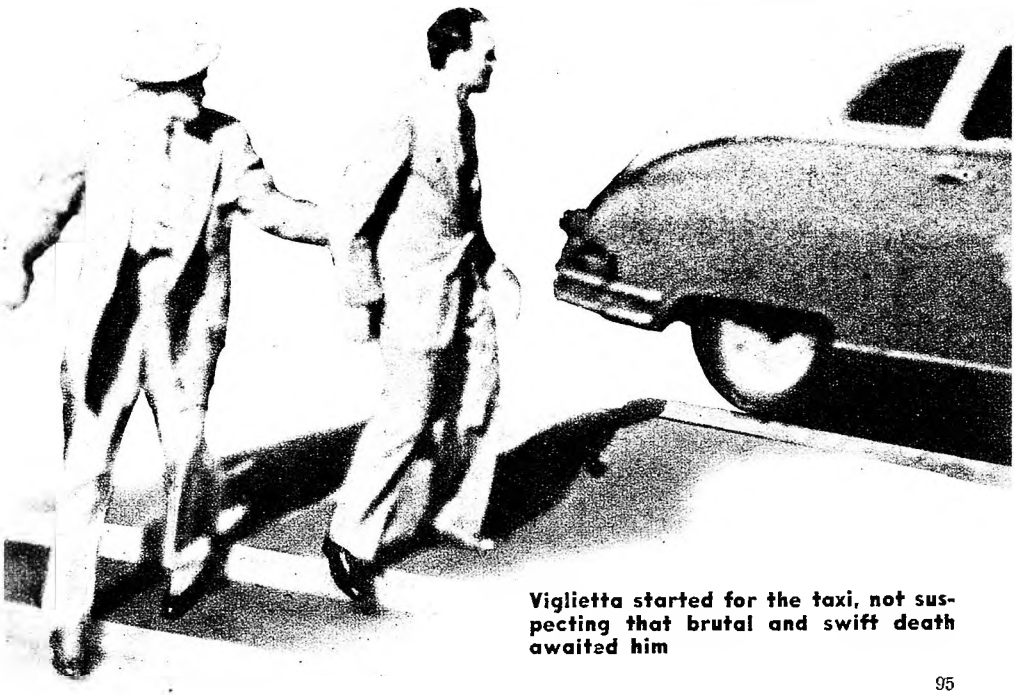
"My name is Viglietta. I am a reporter on one of the papers. I just want to ask you if you have received any more of those blackmail Valentines."

"Those blackmail Valentines?" Ellen frowned and answered: "No, I haven't, Mr. Viglietta. But why do you ask?"

"It's nothing," Viglietta assured her. "Just a routine check-up. You see we have to follow up on our stories, but as long as you haven't received any more of those extortion notes, I haven't any more questions. You are sure you haven't gotten any—recently?"

As he talked Ellen reached for a cigarette, and not seeing a match, she turned to pick the lighter off the end table. As she did so she heard a faint scraping sound at the door, the same sound she had heard before. Then she was staring at a Valentine, with the flowering heart and the cupids dancing around it, sticking under the door.

She gave a muffled scream, swayed and then fell off the chair onto the floor in a dead faint. On the other end of the wire Andy Viglietta was yelling: "Hello . . . hello, Miss Prescott. What hap-



Viglietta started for the taxi, not suspecting that brutal and swift death awaited him

Ellen Prescott saw the man—a feeling of fear seized her

pened? Miss Prescott, what happened?"

There was no answer and Viglietta slammed the receiver down, turned and yelled at the switchboard girl: "Get me the police . . . quick! No, not the police. Call the FBI. Then find out the address of Gramercy 7-4932. Something has happened to Miss Prescott."

Ellen Prescott had regained consciousness and was sitting limply in a chair when Andy Viglietta and William J. Edwards, head of the New York FBI, entered her hotel suite. In a trembling voice she told what had happened while she had been talking to Viglietta on the phone. The extortion Valentine lay on the table. She hadn't had the courage to read its message.

Edwards used his handkerchief when he picked it up, as a precaution against smudging any possible prints. Opening it, he read:

"You set the cops on my trail. They won't help you because I am smarter than any cop. I still have those pictures and I'm giving them to a columnist."

"The man must be crazy," Edwards said. "Yet we mustn't overlook the possibility that this is another blackmailer, trying to cash in on Carlton's work."

"Carlton," Andy Viglietta answered, "isn't guilty. I had that feeling when he was sent up, but I was fool enough to lie down on the story."

"Fingerprints," Edwards countered, "don't fly out of the air and land on a piece of paper. Carlton had to handle that Valentine to get his prints on it."

"I tell you Carlton is innocent,"

Viglietta protested. "I don't know how his prints got on that Valentine, but I'm going to find out."

The FBI, the most efficient police organization in the world, had built its success, under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, on the principle that no organization is any better than the individual men that make it up. The FBI agents, who work under the cloak of anonymity, are the highest trained operators that can be found in the country.

William J. Edwards represents the best type of FBI man. College brained, with a keenly alert mind, schooled in the science of human psychology, he approaches every case with a thorough understanding of the mental make-up of the man wanted.

It was three days later when Andy Viglietta walked into Edwards's office. The reporter was excited as he exclaimed: "I've been up to Sing-Sing and talked to Carlton. This blackmailer pulled a neat trick on him. Carlton says that about three days before he was arrested he had a visitor, some chap claiming he had a letter from a buddy of Carlton's who was still in stir. The letter was phony. But what Carlton remembers is that the chap dropped a square envelope and Carlton, wanting to be obliging, reached down and picked it up. This was the Valentine that had his fingerprints."

"We're ahead of you," Edwards answered. "Our men talked with Carlton several days ago and got that information."

Viglietta shrugged. "You don't let any dust settle on your feet when you get on a case."

"Those fingerprints looked phony from the beginning," Edwards said. "Professional blackmailers are not stupid enough to leave prints on cards. Carlton's description of this man is so general that it would fit thousands of men in New York. That is usual in a case like this. But this man has to have served time himself or he wouldn't have known Carlton had been in stir."

"New York," Viglietta answered, "is full of ex-cons."

"We might trace him in time that way," Edwards said, "but I have a better plan. This man will call you again."

"What makes you think he will?" Viglietta asked.

"If a man calls twice, he will call the third time. He is playing some game, which I can't figure out yet. We'll have a tab put on your phone so we can trace the call."

Edwards's hunch was right. Two days later the call came through from Taine and Edwards's men were ready to trace it while Viglietta stalled, acting like he didn't recognize Taine's voice.

Finally Taine said: "You know who I am. So you found out that Carlton was framed?"

"You don't miss any tricks, do you?" Viglietta answered, considerably taken aback at Taine's knowledge of his actions. "It shows how wrong a man can be. You might at least give me your initials. I don't like talking to a ghost."

"Call me J.T.," Taine replied. "I want to find out just how right a guy you are. Maybe I'll give you the whole story."

"You seem anxious to go to prison, J.T.," Viglietta said. "What's the big idea?"

Edwards said, "You are our only hope of trapping this human vulture!"

"I'm not going to prison, buddy," Taine countered. "I'm too smart for the dumb cops and I got a score to settle with Ellen Prescott and you're going to help me settle it. She ain't as lily pure as she likes to have everybody think. She doesn't want all this publicity. I got to make a living, buddy."

Taine hung up. The switchboard girl connected Viglietta with the FBI office. Edwards said: "I'm waiting for a report on tracing the call. He's some dynamite kid, this Mr. J.T. Here's the report now. He was calling from a pay station on Nassau Street."

"That helps," Viglietta answered. "We have about one chance in ten million of finding him."

"He is too smart to call from a private phone," Edwards said. "We'll have to work some other trick to get him."

"The man is nuts," Viglietta suggested. "That may help us. Suppose I start running a story and he'll be sure to call back. . . ."

"And we'll trace his call to another pay station," Edwards replied. "He would be more certain to call you if you didn't run the story. For some crazy reason he wants the story run, and if he sees it in the paper he won't bother to contact you. He won't have to."

"You may be right," Viglietta agreed. "I won't run the story and he'll call again. But where do we go from there?"

"When he calls again, you are going to meet this blackmailer," Edwards said. "He wants that story run so badly, he'll risk anything to get it. It's up to you at this point."

"Maybe it will work," Viglietta said. "Anyway it's worth a try."

Viglietta waited at the newspaper office late the next night, hoping for the call. None came. He went home. At the FBI office operators sat with their ears glued to the receiver, waiting to catch any call Taine might make to Viglietta. When seven came and no call had come through, they gave up and went home.

Andy Viglietta was sound asleep when the hands of the clock got around to three-thirty a.m. The phone rang and he stirred in his sleep. It rang again. He opened his eyes, not quite awake, and in his drowsy condition he reached for the telephone.

"Hello," he said sleepily.

From the other end came: "This is J.T."

"J.T. . . . who's J.T.? Oh yes! Hey, what's the idea of calling at this hour?"

"I know you're no friend of mine. You said you were going to run the story, but you haven't."

"Listen, J.T.," Viglietta answered. "You may be smart at your racket, and you are, but you don't know much about city editors. They like to have facts when they run this kind of story. They don't like crackpots calling up and giving some cock and bull story."

"I told you Carlton didn't pull the job and now you know he didn't. What else do you need—a written confession?"

"I'd like to know who's talking to me," Viglietta countered. "A ghost isn't very convincing."

"I don't like walking into traps," Taine said.

"Listen." Viglietta had a convincing tone. "I'm not a cop and sometimes I don't like them any better than you do. I'm a newspaper man and if it's a choice between a good story and justice, I say to hell with justice."

"Then explain one thing. Why did the cops tap your phone and try to trace my calls? If you know the sound it isn't hard to know a tapped phone."

Viglietta did some fast thinking. "Cops tap all newspaper phones when they suspect somebody they want is calling the newspaper."

"And how did they know they want me unless you told them?"

"You got it all wrong, J.T.," Viglietta pleaded. "I want the story, a big story, and the city editor wants it too if we can only know who is back of it."

There was a pause over the phone. Then Taine said: "Okay, I'll make a deal with you—but, buddy, this is no time to play games. I ain't working alone now and if

Viglietta saw the hand as it reached for his shoulder

you try any tricks the boys will fill you with so much lead they won't be able to pick up your body. Tomorrow night at eight o'clock I'll be at the out-of-town newspaper stand on 42nd Street, on the north side of the Times Square Building. Meet me there and I'll give you the whole story."

"Times Square," Viglietta said eagerly. "I'll be there."

"Ellen Prescott's theater is only a short distance away," Taine said. "We may see her going to work. I want you to see her."

"Fine, but how will I know you?"

"You don't need to know me. I'll know you. I've seen you many times."

Viglietta felt a twinge at the pit of his stomach. "When did you see me?" he demanded.

"I'm no fool," Taine countered. "I know all about you, every bad habit you have. I know what you like to eat, when you go to sleep, and what you are thinking. You're a dumb egg in a lot of ways, but I can use you."

"Thanks," Viglietta said. "I like compliments like that."

"Be there tomorrow night and you'll get the story if you come alone. If you don't—well, I'll know how many cops you have talked to and it won't be a nice evening for you."

"Okay," Viglietta replied, and Taine hung up.

The next morning Viglietta was in the FBI office, as excited and as happy as a kid. "It's your baby from now on," he said to Edwards. "This J.T. will be at the out-of-town newspaper stand at eight o'clock. Your men can pick him up and please do it, because he knows too much about me."

"Fine," Edwards answered, "except for one thing. How are we to know this J.T.? There will be thousands on Times Square at that hour. The description we got from Carlton will fit hundreds of the men we see there."

Andy Viglietta looked at Edwards. "You mean you want me to be the lure to trap this blackmailer?" he questioned.

"There isn't any other way, Viglietta. My men have to have this man spotted and you are the only man that can do it. We'll have Times Square covered and the minute you meet this blackmailer, we'll have him."

"I see, Edwards. There isn't any other way."

"None whatever."

Courage and the tough fiber that the streets of New York give its children are the two qualities that have made Viglietta one of the country's greatest reporters. He nodded his agreement with a smile that wasn't too humorous. There were no illusions in his mind as to what that meeting might mean.

"Thanks," Edwards said. "This human hyena won't prey on any other innocent girls, because you are willing to help."

The crowd at Times Square at eight o'clock that night was larger than usual. It wasn't hot now and the chill touch of fall was in the air. Overhead electric signs blinked crazily and the running lights that told the news around the Times Building were going at a fast rate, spelling out a story about communists in France.

A car stopped at the corner of 42nd Street and Seventh Avenue

and Viglietta darted out of it and it moved on, losing itself in the traffic jam. Viglietta walked slowly across the street to the out-of-town newspaper stand.

The car had stopped at a spot from which it overlooked the place where Viglietta was to meet Johnny Taine, with two men in it and guns trained on that area. Viglietta got to the north of the Times Building. A crowd was around the out-of-town newspaper stand, buying papers, but between them and the subway entrance the sidewalk was clear. So Viglietta stood there, his heart pounding and his mouth suddenly dry.

A man came up at his rear, tapped him on the shoulder. He whirled around and was looking at a thin-faced chap who could have been a college boy. It passed through Viglietta's mind that this couldn't be J.T., yet why would the youth have tapped him on the shoulder?

The youth said: "Could you tell me where the Gaiety Theater is?"

"The Gaiety Theater," Viglietta repeated slowly. "Sure, that's where Ellen Prescott is playing. It that what you want?"

The youth eyed him suspiciously. "I asked where the Gaiety Theater is. I don't know Ellen Prescott and I don't care about knowing her."

Viglietta saw two men coming toward him and he felt better. They were FBI men and they gave Viglietta courage, although he could hardly picture this youth as a killer.

"Okay, J.T.," he said. "You came. Now we can talk."

The youth gave him a funny look and said: "You must be nuts. I'm not J.T."

And he walked hurriedly away. Viglietta motioned to the FBI men that he wasn't the wanted man.

Five minutes passed and Viglietta watched the crowd around him. He saw nobody who looked like the vague description of J.T. Then a boy came running up to him. "Say, mister," he said, "you got change of a five? That taxi driver over there wants change."

Viglietta's nerves needed a change, so he reached for his wallet and walked to the taxi parked near the curb. The door opened and a hand reached out, and befo Andy Viglietta knew what was happening he had been yanked inside and the taxi was racing up the street, dodging cars and not paying much attention to the signal lights.

Johnny Taine sat in the rear seat. His stockily built body was hunched over a little and he had an automatic in his right hand. It was against Viglietta's ribs and Taine's heavy face was twisted in an angry sneer.

"It's better this way, Viglietta," he said. "I told you not to play any games."

Andy Viglietta's face tightened, and he said nothing because there was nothing to say. The taxi was roaring through the streets, having passed the Times Square area, and was out of the traffic jam.

For half an hour the taxi twisted its way through the streets, and then it was going up the road that leads to the top of Fort Tryon Park. The taxi stopped and Taine pushed Andy Viglietta with his gun and said: "Get out."

Andy Viglietta got out of the taxi and Taine followed. The taxi drove

ANDREW VIGLIETTA

Andrew Viglietta was born on Mott Street, in the heart of New York City's famed East Side. Before getting into newspaper work, he tried his hand at several things. He started out being a salesman, but the depression of 1932 left him without a job. Looking for a change of scenery, he went to Hollywood, tried his hand at writing and playing bit parts. With only a dollar in his pocket, he hitch-hiked back to New York, tried acting again, and then landed on the Long Island Star-Journal.

away. Viglietta looked around and made a mental note that a better place for a killing could hardly be found in all of New York. The darkness was a misty black and through it the trees and shrubs looked like ghostly apparitions.

"Okay, Viglietta," Taine said. "You know who I am now and that would be inconvenient for me."

"You got me all wrong," Viglietta answered. "I didn't have any FBI. . . ."

"Cut it," Taine countered. "I know every move you've made. I don't know whether you know it or not, but you're not leaving here alive. They can't trace me up here."

"Okay, go ahead and make a fool out of yourself," Viglietta countered. "Fill me with bullets and the FBI won't stop until they get you. You're not exactly a complete stranger to them. Don't forget that Carlton can identify you."

"They'll never catch me," Taine sneered. "Let's sit down. I like to kill men when they're sitting down. Maybe I'm crazy, but I wanted that story so bad I have risked everything for it. I wanted the cops to look like fools and I wanted to make that Ellen Prescott suffer. She doublecrossed me and almost led me into a trap. I got feelings, like anybody else, and I got pride. You doublecrossed me. If you had run that story like I told you to everything would be fine."

Viglietta questioned: "Ever see a man go to the electric chair? I've covered several electrocutions. My death will be nothing like yours. It's hell, a living hell, walking into that death house with everybody gawking at you, and sitting down. . . ."

"Shut up," Taine snapped. "Keep your mouth shut about the electric chair. I ain't sitting in no electric chair."

"You haven't the chance of the proverbial snowball in hell if you kill me," Andy countered. "The FBI will trace you to the ends of the earth."

"I'm killing you," Taine answered quietly. "I have to kill you because you doublecrossed me."

"My God," Andy Viglietta mut-

tered, "I'm talking to a crazy man."

"Perhaps," Taine admitted. "Sometimes I think myself I am crazy. I must be, or I would have let Carlton rot up there in prison. I don't care anything about that bloat, but I do care about myself and my pride."

His finger was playing with the trigger of the gun. Even in the darkness Andy Viglietta could see Taine's finger on the trigger.

"Okay," Taine said. "We might as well get it over. They won't find your body here. I got news for you. They'll never find your body. I got that all arranged."

Andy Viglietta's body stiffened. If he was going to die, it wouldn't be without a struggle. His right hand went out, knocked the gun away from his body, and then before Taine knew what was happening Viglietta had overturned the park bench and Taine was sprawled on the ground. Turning a park bench over was an old trick Viglietta had learned when he was a kid and played in the parks.

With a lunging leap, Viglietta was on Taine. The short, heavy-set man came up, his right catching Viglietta in the stomach, and Andy felt sick all over and he went backwards, landing on the ground. He whirled around. Taine was standing over him and the gun was again in his hand.

"Okay, hero," Taine said. "Here it is."

Viglietta closed his eyes, waiting for the gun to roar. It didn't. There was a shuffle above him and a man was cursing vilely. Andy opened

It's the end of the road for Johnny Taine and his blackmail schemes

his eyes. Two men had Taine and were snapping handcuffs on his wrists. Edwards reached down and pulled Andy to his feet.

"It was pretty rough on you," he said. "We followed the taxi, lost it and then found it coming away from the park. The driver told us where he had taken you two."

"I feel weak," Andy Viglietta said. "I am sure of one thing. I'm not walking into any more traps."

"We got Taine," Edwards said, "and he won't bother any more girls."

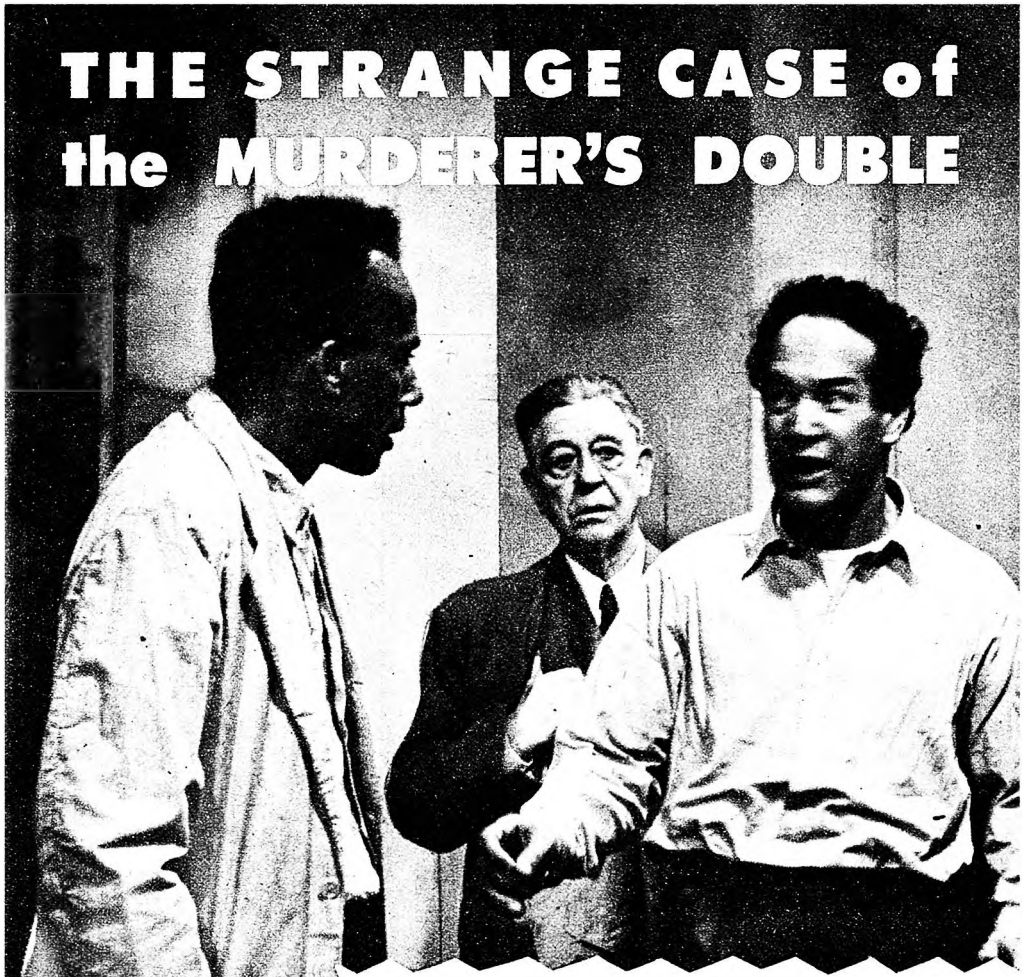
"That's something," Andy agreed. "Right now, I want a drink."

The next day Andy Viglietta sat at his desk in the Long Island *Star-Journal* editorial rooms. He was wearing a new suit and before him was a nice fat check, given him by the paper as a bonus for breaking his Big Story.

There was a scribbled note from Walter Winchell. It read:

> "Let me congratulate you on your fine work in the Ellen Prescott case. That's first class reporting.
>
> Sincerely,
> Walter Winchell."

THE STRANGE CASE of the MURDERER'S DOUBLE



How a mother's plea, a reporter's hunch and a scrap of handwriting reversed the sworn testimony of a dozen witnesses!

JULIAN HOUSEMAN sat at his desk in the office of the Richmond *News-Leader* and studied the letter that lay before him. It was a pitiful epistle, even its scrawl looked pathetic. But it carried sincerity, even when spelling failed. No crank could ever have written such a letter. Too much pain and sorrow had gone into the effort, though the message was one that brimmed with hope.

Old Mr. Dawson, who had brought the letter, was seated by Houseman's desk. Dawson was

When young Julian Houseman attended the University of Richmond, in his home city, he majored in Sociology, Psychology and History. He needed his knowledge of all three when he met up with his Big Story. Today, Houseman is Director of Public Relations with the Virginia Transit Company. He is married and has two children. He is a first flight golfer with a low handicap.

the postmaster in a little town named Brodnax, so it was odd that he should have come all the way to Richmond, to deliver a letter in person. But as Dawson himself had stated, he "wanted to make sure the right person got it" and apparently he considered Houseman to be the right person.

"Tell me, Mr. Dawson," said Houseman. "You're sure you remember this Mrs. Goodman when she lived in Brodnax?"

"Recall her perfect," nodded Dawson. "The son, though, I don't recollect."

Houseman waved his hand for a copy boy; told him to go to the newspaper morgue and bring the envelope on Arthur Tenny. Then, to Dawson, Houseman explained:

"That's the only name we have to go on. If Mrs. Goodman's boy Jamie has been mistaken for Tenny, we'll have to look over the Tenny case from the beginning."

"Quite natural," said Dawson, with a nod.

"While we're waiting for the clips," added Houseman, "I'll call the Henrico County jail and get Sheriff Raye on the phone. We can check what he says with the data from the morgue."

Soon, the clippings were spread on Houseman's desk, and he was listening over the phone to Sheriff Raye's statements. Old Mr. Dawson kept watching Houseman's pencil as it jotted down short notes. Dawson's sharp eyes looked pleased, his withered face wrinkled into a smile. He rose from his chair, tapped Houseman's shoulder and undertoned: "You keep the letter from Mamie Goodman. If you need me, I'll be down to Brodnax, in the post-office."

Houseman nodded a good-bye and kept on jotting notes. His own eyes were reflective, as they visualized the scene that Sheriff Raye described from memory. What the sheriff couldn't tell, the clippings did. Together, they formed a preface to the story Houseman now sought, a prelude that had happened "seven years ago, come this July," as Sheriff Raye put it.

Here was the way the sheriff told it and brought it clear up to date.

Arthur Tenny was aiming to make trouble, that hot July day, and when Arthur Tenny aimed to make trouble, Sheriff Albert T. Raye didn't like it at all. Sooner or later, Tenny might kill somebody in Azalea Corners, like he so often threatened. It was just a little place, outside of Richmond, Virginia, but Tenny apparently

thought himself much too big for it.

So Sheriff Raye went to Azalea Corners and found a small, silent crowd watching Tenny split pine logs in his yard. When Raye called his name, Tenny gave a sullen look across his shoulder, then drove the axe so deep in the chopping block that he almost split it. Tenny crossed his big arms on the picket fence and drawled:

"What's the trouble, sheriff?"

"You're the trouble, Arty. That's why I was called here!"

Tenny glared at the neighbors and his eyeballs grew big and white. The crowd melted, nobody wanting Tenny to think that they'd summoned the sheriff. The door of the house opened and Raye saw the thin but pretty face of Tenny's wife Marie. She beckoned indoors and out stalked Mrs. Lucille Clayton, Marie's mother. Tenny gave a mock bow.

"Glad you're here, sheriff," quavered Mrs. Clayton. "I came over to borrow some books from Marie. See?" She held up some books. "Right out of a clear sky, my worthless son-in-law said that if I didn't git, he'd batter me with an axe!"

"I called her a battle-axe," put in Tenny, quickly. "She just misunderstood me. I'm a patient man by nature, sheriff, but there's things nobody can stand. One's a meddlesome mother-in-law."

"Run along, mother," called Marie. "Arthur has chopped all the wood I need for the cook stove. I'm sure Sheriff Raye will take the axe back where we borrowed it from."

"You won't be safe, Marie—alone with that madman!"

Mrs. Clayton glared at Tenny, who returned it. They were eye to eye and Tenny's features turned hard as stone, when he gave his jaw a forward thrust. Sheriff Raye stepped between, as Marie called:

"I won't be alone, Mother. Bertha is here."

Sheriff Raye looked past Marie Tenny and saw Bertha Jarvis in the house. Bertha was by far the prettiest girl around Azalea Corners, if that rated as a compliment. Neither Marie nor Bertha appeared to be afraid of Tenny now, so Sheriff Raye took along the axe and escorted Mrs. Clayton home. The sheriff was confident that Tenny would show no new outburst, after his mother-in-law had gone.

The sheriff was mistaken.

Exactly one hour later, Arthur Tenny exploded. He was seated in the living room when Marie happened to glance from the stove where she was cooking dinner, and at the same time, Bertha looked up from her sewing. Tenny came to his feet in a frenzy.

"Watching me, aren't you!" he stormed. "Both of you, spying on me, like my dear, dear mother-in-law. She's been telling you I'm running around with other women, hasn't she, Marie? All right, I have been. What's anybody going to do about it?"

Marie turned back to her stove and Bertha resumed her sewing. Again, Tenny mistook this for concerted action. He sprang to a hall closet, crouched there, and finally came up with a double-barreled shotgun, cracking it open as he arose.

"These are for my mother-in-

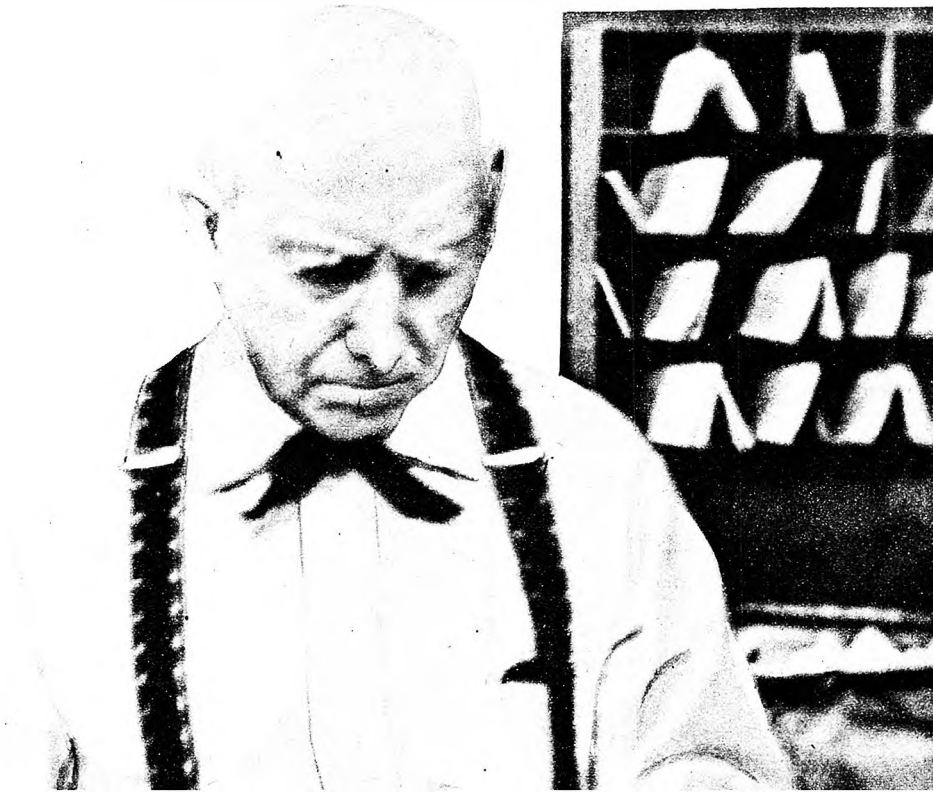
law," chuckled Tenny, dropping in a pair of 12-gauge shells. "Loaded with solid ball. They'll do better than an axe, and quicker. Now let's find the victim."

Before Tenny could reach the front door, Marie dashed from the stove and blocked him, while Bertha stared, horrified, from her chair. Over Tenny's broad face came an ugly, clouded expression, that Marie must have recognized, for she cried: "No, no!" From waist-level, Tenny pulled one trigger of the shotgun, Marie swayed; then, as she sagged, Tenny gave her the other barrel.

Hard upon the gun-bursts, Bertha Jarvis dashed shrieking from the house. Tenny overtook her, tried to beat her with the butt of the shotgun, then flung the weapon after her, as she broke away. Men came from neighboring houses, heard Bertha screaming "Murder—murder—murder!" They tried to stop Tenny, but he smashed them from his path, using his forearms as if they were clubs. The backs of his flaying fists caught faces squarely and Bertha saw them bob away. Then, the gasping, terrified girl watched Tenny race across the Corners, down through Martin's Woods to Clover Run.

There, as Tenny took to the swamp beyond, he gave a last look across his shoulder, and Bertha Jarvis never forgot the expression on his wild, hunted face.

Sheriff Raye went into the details of the man-hunt that followed. He told how bloodhounds, posses, police flyers, all had failed to catch



up with Tenny. "If I'd only had him fingerprinted," the sheriff said across the phone, "one time when we had him in jail for disorderly conduct, it mightn't have been too hard to pick him up when he was wanted for murder. But anyway, we've got him now, and we've got him dead to rights."

While Julian Houseman thumbed through further clippings on his desk at the *News-Leader,* Sheriff Raye went on to specify just how far the phrase "dead to rights" could carry. The details, as Houseman tallied them, were convincing indeed.

There were plenty of people who remembered Arthur Tenny during the six years and more since his flight from the Richmond area. His wasn't the sort of face you would easily forget. Whether sullen, sarcastic, angry or outright vicious, Tenny was an individualist. Whether he drawled his words or snarled them, he drove the import home. At the time when Tenny murdered his wife Marie, there had been only one shotgun in Azalea Corners; that was the gun which Tenny himself had flung when he fled.

Now there were more than a dozen, all loaded. Every man who lived at the Corners was armed in case of Tenny's unexpected return. They didn't know but what he'd come back to murder his wife's relatives, or even wreak vengeance on anyone unfortunate enough to have witnessed his flight. Though people remembered him, they wouldn't be anxious to identify him, not unless he was safely behind bars. Two persons, though, stood out as exceptions to that rule.

One was Lucille Clayton, the other Bertha Jarvis, Marie's friend.

As Marie's mother and the dead girl's closest friend, those two made a pact. Always, wherever they might be, each would cherish Marie's memory, and be on the watch for her murderer. After all, it was Marie's sheer bravery that had saved them both. She had prevented Tenny from going to kill her mother. She had struggled for his gun, while Bertha escaped from the house.

Though Mrs. Clayton was more bitter toward Tenny than was Bertha, it was the younger woman who remembered the murderer more vividly. Terrible nightmares tormented Bertha Jarvis. Often she would wake screaming because she'd fancied that she had seen Arthur Tenny's face leering at her, in all its hideous reality. When Bertha, at her physician's suggestion, took a brief trip from Azalea Corners, the dreams did not disturb her. As a result of that test, she went away to stay. Finally, Bertha located in New York; there, in the life, tumult and gaiety of the great city, she managed to forget the horror of the past.

Then, one evening, it awoke again, as grim as ever. It happened when Bertha was dining with friends at a night club in Greenwich Village. From across the dance floor, a broad, expressionless face stared Bertha's way. She saw a heavy, tawny hand rise slowly; a moment later, the man's features were wreathed in a gray-white cloud.

It was only cigarette smoke, but Bertha gave it a different translation. To her, it was the smoke from the barrels of a shotgun, coil-

Postmaster Dawson read Mrs. Goodman's letter.

The man who called himself Goodman was convinced no one could aid him.

ing above a victim who had slumped to an untimely death. That face, smiling now in a manner that Bertha regarded as a leer, belonged unmistakably to the human monster, whom Bertha Jarvis had last seen more than six years ago.

The face of Arthur Tenny!

Quickly, Bertha turned away and whispered her discovery to her escort, who in turn relayed it to the others in the party. They were all friends to whom Bertha had related the tragic story of Marie's death, so they recognized the gravity of the situation. Unnoticed by the man who kept giving them casual glances, they got a message out to the manager. It wasn't long before a pair of plainclothesmen entered, sat down at the table with the man whom Bertha Jarvis had tagged as Arthur Tenny.

At a nod from Bertha, the headquarters men introduced themselves to Tenny. Across at the other table, Bertha gave a sharp gasp.

"Look at him now," she voiced to her friends. "Look at how big his eyes are getting and how white. That's when Arty gets real angry. They've mentioned me and now he'll be looking over here. You'll see how fierce his glare will be. Here it comes, across his shoulder, like the last time I looked at him."

True to form, the typical Tenny glare came across the rugged shoulder. Then the man was on his feet, in the brisk style that Bertha recalled. Instead of a ragged, short-sleeved shirt, he was attired in a well-fitted tuxedo. But he packed all the power that Bertha had seen in action back at Azalea Corners.

This time, though, his human punching bags were more than a parcel of undernourished tobacco farmers.

With hard, back-hand swings, the big man flattened the two detectives, then turned to settle a flurry of bouncers and waiters who descended on him. Bertha shrieked and dived away, as he broke free and dashed toward her table. Then, the officers and the hired help overtook him, bore him bodily to the floor. When they finally brought him to his feet, he was reeling and groggy, but he still managed to glare at Bertha, when they shoved his bloody face in front of her.

"This the man, lady?"

"Yes," affirmed Bertha. "That's Arthur Tenny!"

"And who are you?" the prisoner mumbled. "What's the trouble? What did I do to you—except look?"

"You know me," retorted Bertha. "Don't say you've forgotten Bertha Jarvis."

"Can't forget somebody you never knew," the man retorted. He turned to his captors and glowered. "What's this," he asked, "some sort of a gag? They said anything might happen in these Village joints."

The detectives flashed their badges. At that, the man gave a mock bow, then became serious.

"I'm a patient man, by nature," he declared, "but there's some things nobody can stand—"

"I know he's Arthur Tenny!" interrupted Bertha. "He has the same mannerism, uses the same expressions. Don't let him bluff you. If you should ever let him free, he'd kill me!"

"We'll hold him, Miss," one of the detectives promised. "Long enough to notify the sheriff in your home county, and get him to come up here."

When Sheriff Raye reached New York with all the necessary papers for the extradition of Arthur Tenny, he identified the prisoner as emphatically as Bertha Jarvis had. In his turn, the prisoner merely stared at Raye, then shook his head.

"Never saw this man before," he said. "Never even heard of the county he says he comes from. Why should I? My name's not Arthur Tenny; it's Jamie Goodman. What's more, I've got papers that will prove it."

Sheriff Raye asked to see the papers. They were bona fide proof of Jamie's service in the merchant marine. But their dates failed completely to give him an alibi. Jamie Goodman, as he preferred to call himself, hadn't joined the merchant marine until a year after the murder of Marie Tenny.

Jamie Goodman, branded as Arthur Tenny, was shipped back to Henrico County. He made no objection. Instead, he first became sullen, then adopted a cocksure attitude. Sheriff Raye witnessed those changes of mood. They were true to form, as he remembered Tenny. Whatever the murderer was planning, Sheriff Raye was sure he could forestall it. Tenny probably thought he could bluff the home-folk from Azalea Corners. If so, he was due for a surprise.

And so the prisoner was brought to trial.

To Julian Houseman, sorting

more clippings at his desk, the trial news was both brief and fresh. He remembered it only slightly, because he had gone out of town that week, on another assignment. That showed how unimportant the Tenny case was, when a reporter like Houseman wasn't needed. It hadn't been a murder trial in the full sense, for there was no question as to Tenny's guilt; it was just a matter of degree.

He'd always been a stubborn sort, Arthur Tenny; hence no one who knew him was surprised at his line of defense. Every time he was addressed as "Arthur Tenny" he would retort: "I'm Jamie Goodman." The prosecutor, Stephen Bayliss, took quick advantage of this. He deliberately baited the prisoner by confusing the names, then using them interchangeably. The trick worked, for Tenny's old anger flared to the fore. He glared at Bayliss, even letting his eyeballs betray the whitened gleam that witness after witness described as a sure sign of Tenny's fury.

At one point, court attendants had to restrain the prisoner from attacking the prosecutor. Bayliss simply ordered:

"Let him go. Let him try to kill me. He doesn't have a shotgun or even an axe. But his urge to reenact the crime unquestionably establishes the identity that he seeks to deny."

The shotgun and the axe were among the state's exhibits and were identified by the dozen or so persons who had been around Tenny's the day Marie was slain.

Houseman learned why Mrs. Clayton wanted her daughter's death avenged. The answer was in the book.

Far more damaging was the close scrutiny that those witnesses gave the prisoner, all saying: "That's Arthur Tenny. I'd know him anywhere, anytime. On oath, I would."

They were simple, backwoods folks, from the Corners. Clannish, to the point where they'd defend their own against the world. Not the sort to interfere in a man's domestic life, no matter how serious it became. They had no vengeful sentiments; with seven years gone, the magnitude of Tenny's crime had dwindled in their eyes. But it turned the tide all the more against him, this native honesty of Tenny's neighbors, which caused them to identify him as promptly as they did.

The prosecution handled both Lucille Clayton and Bertha Jarvis with kid gloves, rather than have them break into outbursts that would indicate personal hatred. Marie's mother was whisked from the stand, the instant she identified Tenny. Bertha was confined to statement of cold fact: how she'd witnessed the murder and later had recognized Tenny in New York.

Houseman had trouble finding the relatively small clipping that announced the jury's verdict: "Guilty." That had been a mere formality. The great question had been that of identity, which had been settled quite conclusively. The judge had sentenced the prisoner to forty years in the state prison; but at present he was still in the county jail, awaiting transfer.

Houseman stuffed the clippings back into their envelope, called the boy to return it to the morgue. On the desk still lay that mournful letter that Postmaster Dawson had dropped off. It was slim testimony compared to that which had been given in court. There was a story in it, as old, as fine a story as any ever written in the history of man. It was the story of a mother's love, an appeal which could not help but tug the heart-strings of a reader. But it was Houseman's business to write news, and unless it had fact to go on, even the most touching human interest story was not for the Richmond *News-Leader*.

News—news—news—

The word repeated itself through Houseman's mind as he folded the letter, put it in his pocket and went to the window, where he stared out into space. Houseman was a man of shy appearance, with a self-effacing manner. He was a far cry from the brash, rowdy burlesque of a star reporter so often depicted in the Grade-B movies. Houseman was a down-to-earth representative of the new school in journalism, a man who rated a story's value by comparing it with others that he had studied. Already, this serious-minded young man was regarded as one of the South's brilliant reporters, for the very reason that he appraised his assignments thoroughly.

Some of the greatest stories of all time, Houseman knew, had been gained by reporters who stayed with them. Often, some false lead would be accepted by the press at large, leaving opportunity for a keen reporter to score a scoop. Here was a story with a ninety-nine and nine-tenths average against it, but the one shot in a thousand would be a sensation if it came through. Even more, it would be the rendering of a public

service, on the part of the *News-Leader,* a purpose which every worthy newspaper seeks to perform.

But even if the story did exist, it wasn't going to be easy to prove it; not unless Houseman himself was ready to believe it and thus crack down the opposition that was sure to pooh-pooh his endeavors. With that thought firmly fixed in mind, Houseman snapped from his reverie and went to call on Sheriff Albert T. Raye.

"Sheriff," began Houseman, "Here's a letter a poor old lady up in New York state wrote to the postmaster down in Brodnax."

"Brodnax?" queried the sheriff. "That's in Mecklenburg County, isn't it? Close to the Carolina border."

Houseman nodded, then read the letter.

"Dear Mr. Dawson, Sir," read Houseman, aloud. "I got to make myself known to you, and maybe you remember me. Daniel Grain's daughter Mamie, now name of Goodman, since I married. I hope you will not think me being forward to write you, Mr. Dawson, but my son Jamie, who you may remember when we all lived in Brodnax, got himself in trouble. He is in the Henrico County jail accused of murder.

"The man's name who did that crime is Arthur Tenny, but some folk swear my son Jamie is that Arthur Tenny. But he is my son and never murdered no one. You know me, Mr. Dawson, when I work for your wife before I come to New York, when I bring Jamie with me. So please, sir, get in touch with the sheriff, Mr. Raye, and help Jamie get off. To you, I will be everly grateful, Mamie Grain Goodman."

As Houseman finished, Sheriff Raye gave his head a sad shake. Then: "Not a thing to it," he said. "A dozen witnesses testified that he was Arthur Tenny. Heck, they didn't even need the girl who identified him in New York. But she's back in town, because she feels safe at last, with Tenny put away."

"How did the fingerprints tally?"

"We didn't have any on Tenny. They were taken when he entered the merchant marine, but he was calling himself Goodman, by that time. I know Tenny myself. Was out to his house not long before he murdered his wife. When a dozen more people identified him, without a miss, what other answer is there?"

"None, maybe," replied Houseman. "Still, I'd like to see the prisoner and get his reaction. Any chance?"

"Why not?" laughed Sheriff Raye. "I'll give you a visitor's pass, over to the jail. But don't go making a story where there isn't any, or all the other prisoners will start springing fool ideas."

WHEN JULIAN HOUSEMAN looked through the wire-mesh in the visitors' room at the county jail, he recognized his man as soon as he was brought in. The newspaper clippings described Arthur Tenny to the last dot, and there was no mistaking him. Through the mesh, he gave Houseman a dead-pan stare.

"I'm Houseman, of the *News-Leader,*" the reporter said by way of introduction. Then, noting no

change of the alleged Tenny's expression: "That's the local newspaper. People tell me you say you aren't Arthur Tenny."

"That's right," the man replied, dully. "I'm Jamie Goodman."

"So I've heard. But what proof have you?"

"Proof?" The man's tone came bitterly. "I say who I am, that's all. I got papers, too, that say I'm Jamie Goodman. Then ten, maybe fifteen people get up in court and call me Arthur Tenny. How can I tell them they're lying, and get them set against me, for rights? I just keep saying that I'm Jamie Goodman."

"You don't know anybody who would say the same for you?"

"Only my mother. She's up in New York state. But she's old and poor and maybe sick, too. How can I get her to come way down here, specially when she has no money? Besides, if nobody believes *me,* how would they believe *her?*"

The man who called himself Jamie Goodman gave a despairing shrug of his broad shoulders. He turned and shambled back to his cell, as though he felt that the whole world was against him. But he had gained one friend: Julian Houseman.

The reporter's keen eye had detected nothing subtle in the big, dumb-ox of a man who claimed himself the victim of a most bizarre case of mistaken identity. To Houseman, that meant that Goodman—as the reporter decided to term him—knew nothing of his mother's letter; at least could have no idea that such a note, if sent, had reached the *News-Leader* and was therefore behind this visit. So even though Houseman was inclined to befriend the prisoner, he'd caught him off guard. That was the best thing he could have done for Goodman; a policy which Houseman intended to follow.

Goodman's mention of his mother had tallied pretty much with the letter. It didn't link him far, but enough to promise further connections. Houseman's stop now, would be the prosecutor's office.

ATTORNEY BAYLISS supplied an indulgent smile after he read the letter from Mrs. Mamie Goodman. Then, sternly, he said:

"I know you wouldn't have faked this letter, Houseman, but it still could be a hoax, and at best, I consider it unfounded. Somebody gave this Mrs. Goodman the bee that her son was in trouble."

"Which he is," returned Houseman. "I've just seen him."

"If you mean the prisoner, he isn't Goodman. You know how mothers are. They see a parade with ten thousand soldiers and say 'They're all out of step but my son Jim'—which in this case happens to be Jamie."

"It takes a pretty good eye to spot one person in ten thousand, even if he is out of step. Ever think of it that way, Mr. Bayliss? I'm still willing to follow through on a mother's intuition."

"If you've really sold yourself that idea," said Bayliss, "You're going to forget it when you find there aren't any buyers."

As a reporter, Houseman knew his business. He didn't begin with random interviews, nor seek the line of least resistance. That would mean building false hopes for him-

self as well as Jamie Goodman. This story had to be cracked the hard way, if it were going to be cracked at all. You had to study the other side's armor, to uncover its weak points. So Julian Houseman went direct to Bertha Jarvis, the girl whose positive identification of Goodman as Tenny had brought the man before the bar of justice.

Bertha was working as a waitress in a Richmond restaurant. She was quite willing to talk to a representative of the press. Marie's bosom friend told her story with childlike simplicity. Bayliss had produced Bertha in court, more as a witness to murder than for the identification of Arthur Tenny. The prosecution hadn't wanted Bertha to display prejudice against the prisoner.

But there seemed to be no prejudice in Bertha's nature. Only loyalty to Marie.

"Marie Clayton was my one best friend," Bertha told the reporter. "She and I grew up together. I was there when Arthur Tenny married Marie. I can't forget how happy I was for her, when he promised to love, honor and cherish her, so long as they lived. Only she didn't live long, because he killed her. She was a fine girl, Marie. She should be alive today."

"I know," agreed Houseman, sympathetically. "We all feel that Tenny deserves punishment. But this man who calls himself Goodman; how can you be so sure that he's Tenny?"

"Because I swore never to forget him," rejoined Bertha, "until I'd found him. I got to know his face better than I had at first, from the

way it kept leering at me in my dreams. Then I saw him in that restaurant they call the Village Roost. He was laughing, enjoying himself, looking for somebody to dance with. All the time with poor Marie lying in her grave. Recognized me, Tenny did, but he didn't latch on to just who I was until too late."

Houseman next called on Lucille Clayton. He found her to be a tired-faced, elderly woman, whose features bore more wrinkles than the gingham dress that she had just begun to iron. Here, in the living room of her modest home near Azalea Corners, Mrs. Clayton evidenced all the rancor that Bertha Jarvis had suppressed.

"I was Marie's mother," said Mrs. Clayton in a strained, dry-throated tone. "I've got nothing to say about Arthur Tenny, that man who was my son-in-law, excepting this. They should have electrocuted him, instead of just putting him in jail. He murdered my poor daughter in cold blood, he did."

"But first," put in Houseman, "he threatened you, didn't he?"

"Sure did," rejoined Mrs. Clayton. "That's why I can remember him right well. Sneering at me with that mean face of his, going out to get the axe, the way he did. For nigh seven years I prayed I'd be seeing him some day, right where he finally showed up, before a jury. Now I'm praying I'll live all the forty years he stays in jail."

"You identified him at the trial—"

"Of course I did, though the prosecutor wouldn't let me say more than just 'That's him.' He couldn't fool me, nor nobody, when he sat there saying: 'My name ain't

Neighbors who had known Marie agreed that her murderer had been caught.

Tenny; I'm Goodman. You got the wrong man.' They got the *right* man, that's who they got!"

A ferocity swept over the slight frame of Mrs. Clayton. She lifted the iron as if it were a feather-weight, then thudded it emphatically on the dress. Flashing a grim look at Houseman, the woman fairly shouted.

"They say I'm prejudiced?" she queried sharply. "They say I'm acting like a mother-in-law, like the old battle-axe that this Tenny says he called me? I'll show you why I'm so dead set agin him. I'll show you something, mister, that I didn't even take to court."

Mrs. Clayton stalked from the room, while Houseman gingerly removed the iron from the dress it was about to burn, and placed it on an asbestos pad. Soon, Mrs. Clayton returned, clutching a book between her arms, as though she intended to croon over it, as a child would with a doll.

"This is my last memento of poor Marie," said the girl's mother, sadly. "One of the books I borrowed of her. Guess you know that's all I went over to her house for, that last morning, seven years ago. To get some books she said I ought to read."

Houseman nodded, recalling the clips.

"This is the one I was reading." Mrs. Clayton extended the book and it fell open automatically. "That's the very page I was at, when the sheriff came and told me about Marie. I laid it down on its pages, still open. For weeks it laid like that, I guess. Never did read no further in this book; never want to read no further. But I'm keeping it because of—*this!*"

The woman hissed the word "this" with a startling venom, which took Houseman totally aback, until Mrs. Clayton swung the cover of the book wide open and showed him the title page.

There, in ink that still showed a blue color, was an inscription written, dated June 15th, seven years ago. It said:

To Marie, my darling sweetheart. From your loving husband, Arthur Tenny.

"Shows you what a liar that man was," affirmed Mrs. Clayton. "Wrote that for Marie when he gave her the book, only a few weeks before he killed her. He'd written her some sweet letters before they were married, but I burned those when I found them. This I didn't notice until I was putting the book away. I 'most tore out the page, but I decided I wouldn't. Proves Tenny the liar he is, it does."

The book, a popular novel, went back on the shelf. When Houseman left by the front door, he cautiously broached the all-important subject:

"There could always be a mistake, you know, Mrs. Clayton. Just like you feel about your daughter Marie, there's a woman named Mamie Goodman, who's worried over what's happened to her son, Jamie—"

"But that's not her son in the county jail," objected Mrs. Clayton. "Listen, Mr. Houseman. If I wasn't sure my Marie was dead, I'd be wishing so hard I'd find her, that any girl who looked the least bit like her would make my heart jump. This poor Mrs. Goodman,

she's lost a son. I'm sorry for her, but it's no use to deceive her. Besides, she'd be hoping so much, you couldn't allow for what she'd say. I ought to know. Good-bye."

His cause dwindling to the proportions of a lost one, Houseman made the rounds of other witnesses, only to find them thoroughly convinced that the proper man had been put away. The reporter couldn't shake off what Mrs. Clayton had said; how any testimony from Mrs. Goodman would be ruled too much by hope. Houseman had gathered that Jamie's father was dead; hence there wasn't anyone who could support the mother's belief. Meanwhile, Houseman exchanged letters with Postmaster Dawson in Brodnax, but to no avail. Some people there remembered Mamie Goodman, but Dawson had not yet found any who could say the same for her son Jamie.

"There must be a way," Houseman muttered to himself, as he mulled over the Tenny clippings for perhaps the fiftieth time. "If Goodman's mother won't do, there must be somebody—"

In a flash, he had it. Quickly thumbing through the clips, he found the one he wanted. Next, he was at the telephone, calling one number after another. Houseman was asking everybody who might know, just how and where he could find a certain man.

That man, whose name was mentioned in a clipping, was Amos Tenny, father of the murderer. He'd been living in Richmond at the time of the crime, but had soon left, unable to bear the stigma of his son's name. Out of those calls, Houseman gained only a few thin leads, but he at last traced the elder Tenny to Norfolk. On the hunch that this could produce a big story, Houseman raced to the C. & O. depot in time to catch the afternoon train for Newport News, where he went by bus to Norfolk. That night, he located Amos Tenny, brought him back to Richmond the next morning.

On the way to the county jail, Houseman pummeled the old man with questions in the presence of Sheriff Raye who accompanied them. A thin, tired shell of a man, Amos Tenny showed distress from the start.

"You weren't at the trial?" quizzed Houseman. "Were you, Mr. Tenny?"

"Why should I be there?" was the old man's quavery reply. "My boy disgraced his family. Should I want to see him?"

"But this man may not be your son," explained Houseman. "That's what we want you to tell us; whether he is or not."

"Hate seeing him at all, I do." Old Amos shook his head. "But the world's got enough trouble without some poor man paying for something he didn't do. Depend on me, mister."

The sheriff gave old Amos a sharp, doubting look that Houseman in his eagerness, failed to catch. Next, they were in the visitors' room at the jail and the prisoner, more bowed and shambling slower than before, was coming over to talk to them through the mesh. Not once did he show the slightest recognition of the old man who was studying him with quick, blinking eyes. The sheriff inter-

ested him more than old Amos.

"I'm Jamie Goodman," the prisoner insisted. "I'll be telling you that for the next forty years, sheriff, in case you want to know."

"How about it, Mr. Tenny?" asked Houseman, addressing the question to old Amos.

"I'm not Tenny," interjected Goodman. "I told you that already, Mr. Reporter."

Old Amos slowly shook his head.

"Looks like my son Arty," said Amos. "Talks like him, even stands like him. Except maybe he's a bit shorter than Arty if he isn't stooping too much, maybe on purpose. Looks enough like Arty to be his twin, almost. But he's not my son" —Amos Tenny shook his head emphatically. "Nope, he's somebody else."

Goodman's mouth opened and his eyes went wide and white, but not in anger. His surprise, it seemed, was total.

"Do I get you right, Mr. Reporter?" questioned Jamie. "This man's the father of the Tenny that I'm supposed to be?"

"You got me right, Jamie."

Julian Houseman was now determined to set the whole world right, as well. He pounded out a story and the *News-Leader* printed it. This wasn't the big story, but it could be the beginning of something big. The phrase "Tenny's father supports Goodman's claim" was quite enough to put teeth in the trial scenes, where Goodman had stubbornly fought for his own identity. When Houseman stopped in the sheriff's office, however, Raye was frankly worried.

"Better go see Bayliss, Julian," advised the sheriff. "He's prosecutor and he'll write out the ticket. Might even be contempt of court, meaning I'd have to arrest you. No use of us being too friendly, until I know.".

Over at the prosecutor's office, Houseman found Bayliss in a stormy mood.

"A great story you wrote," began Bayliss. "A great public service. I'm a blunt man, and if you think

"Looks like my son Arty—

I send people to prison all on hearsay, you're wrong. I know what I'm after and I'm always fair about it."

"So am I," inserted Houseman. "I set down the facts as I got them—"

"You set down the facts you wanted to set down." Bayliss asserted. "You ignored the testimony of a dozen witnesses, including the sheriff of this county, and took the

word of one man—Tenny's father—that the prisoner wasn't his son."

"Why not? That was the real story."

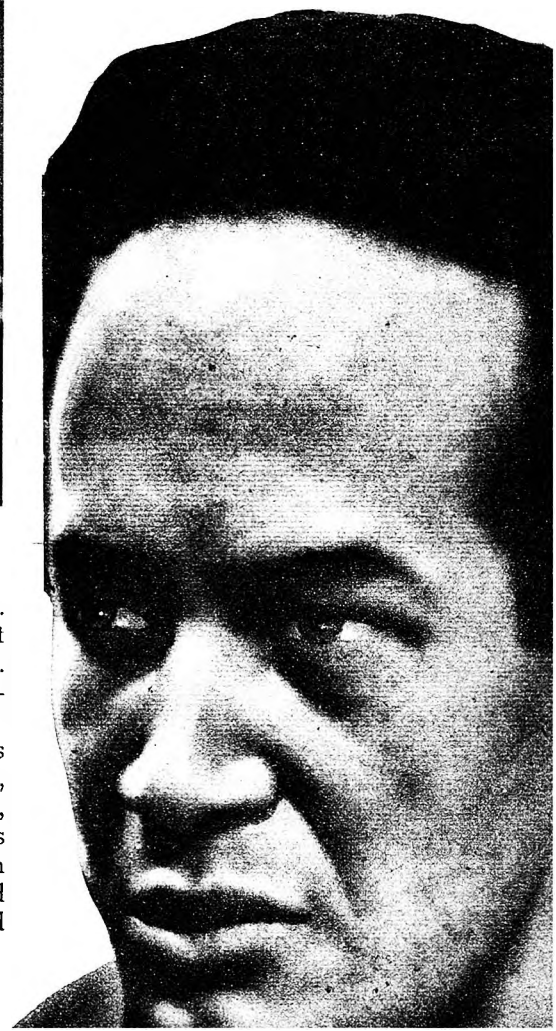
"I'll tell you the real story, Houseman. Just as Arthur Tenny has something to gain by claiming to be someone else, so has Amos Tenny. I learn from Sheriff Raye that old Amos is ashamed of his son and feels he's disgraced him.

talks like him, even stands like him!"

So naturally he wants him clear. Then people can't be saying that Arthur is a convicted murderer. Besides, there's a father's sympathy involved."

"When I talked about a mother's sympathy," reminded Houseman, "you gave me the same answer, prosecutor. Except that Goodman's mother is in a different boat than Tenny's father. Whichever could get their own son out of jail, would let the other's son stay in—right?"

"It doesn't follow," snapped Bayliss. "They've both had grief, so they've both turned soft. I was fair when I prosecuted Arthur Tenny. I didn't let either Bertha Jarvis or Mrs. Clayton say enough to sway the jury. But you're trying to sway the public by quoting a prejudiced witness. To bring in another would make it all the worse. Besides, now that somebody has said that the prisoner isn't Tenny, there'd be no stopping



Mrs. Goodman. She'd claim he was her Jamie for sure."

"And she'd be right—for sure."

"You've talked big story long enough, Houseman," was the prosecutor's reply. "Now you'd better get one, or your sheet will have to print a retraction. I'll give you time, but I don't want you bringing Goodman's mother here, like you did Tenny's father. Not until you've produced impartial witnesses first, like I did."

Attorney Bayliss branded the letter a plot to free Tenny.

It was going to be a fight, and Houseman knew it. But he could be a stubborn guy himself, when so inclined. At least, if he couldn't send for Goodman's mother, the prisoner could. Or so Houseman thought, until he tried. He arranged for the prisoner to write such a letter, in the sheriff's presence, which Goodman did. Sheriff Raye took the letter; said that he would mail it. Then, outside the jail, Raye told Houseman:

"I didn't say *when* I'd mail this letter. That's up to Prosecutor Bayliss. I'm turning it over to him, until the right time." The sheriff glanced at the letter; gave a blunt laugh: "It says here, 'Dear Mom. There's a reporter here who promises to get me out of this trouble. He says he will pay your expenses so you can help. But he can't demand quick action, on account of needing other people who know me. Your loving son, Jamie."

"Yes, the prosecutor will keep this a while, I reckon. He might even frame it for his office. Could be that it will hang there for the next forty years. Maybe this fellow will give up by then, and write something to go alongside it. Something like a confession, signed with his real name, Arthur Tenny."

Houseman couldn't blame Sheriff Raye for his attitude. The reporter felt that if he did come through with proof that the prisoner was Jamie Goodman, the sheriff would be first to offer congratulations. But where to find that proof? Postmaster Dawson wasn't reaching enough people, down Brodnax way. A lot of them probably got all their mail by R. F. D.; never came into town at all. But many of them were subscribers to the Richmond *News-Leader*. That was Houseman's answer. He'd reach them direct, with an appeal straight from Jamie Goodman, couched in the prisoner's own language, all from quotes that Houseman had put down in a note-book, during his interviews.

As Houseman sat at his typewriter in the newspaper office, shaping the appeal, he could hear Jamie's voice, saying:

"Look, Mr. Houseman. You've been good, real good, taking time to help me. But nobody cares what happens to me. That old man who says I wasn't his son. Did anybody listen? The sheriff, or Mr. Bayliss? No, there's just no use. They put me away; they

won't bother to get me out, ever.

"I don't complain. Food's good, I'm not worked too hard. But I can't help thinking how I want to get out. I want to get in the sun, go on a ship, meet up with girls, get married, have kids. But I don't want you coming in here, stirring up my hopes. I'm going to rot in here, and there's nothing you nor anybody else can do to help me. Nobody in this wide world."

So ran the burden of Jamie's theme; all that and a great deal more. But through it, Houseman interspersed his own hope for Jamie's vindication. He told what little he knew of the young man's past, Just as he, Julian Houseman, had traced old Amos Tenny, so people could be found who must have known Jamie Goodman.

A few days after that appeal appeared in the *News-Leader,* a tall, brisk gentleman came into the newspaper office and introduced himself as C. B. Sager, a planter from North Carolina. He asked to see Houseman and promptly came down to business.

"I was from around Brodnax, originally," announced Sager, "and I remember this Jamie Goodman, right well. Worked for me at one time, he did. Now if I could see him, and ask him some questions right to the point—"

As Sager outlined the questions, Houseman halted him. The reporter's enthusiasm was jumping its bounds.

Bertha Jarvis remembered the murderer's face, every feature.

"Not yet, you shouldn't see him," Houseman decided. "We want it to be strictly official, in court and under oath. Now what about some of the other men who worked for you at the time? Could any of them be located?"

They were drifters, mostly," replied Sager, "but I've already given their names to old Mr. Dawson and he thinks he has the forwarding addresses on a few."

"Good. We'll reach all of them we can. Now one thing more, Mr. Sager. Do you have anything in the way of documentary evidence; account books, for instance, particularly certified accounts, that would contain Jamie's name and establish when he worked for you?"

"Didn't keep books back then," returned Sager. "But I've got something even better. I gave Jamie Goodman some advance money when he worked for me and I've got his canceled note here. Signed by Jamie, with the date and all, back more than seven years ago."

From his wallet, Sager brought the note in question. Houseman's eyes really brightened when he read it. From the way that promissory note was worded, Jamie's case was won. Before Sager left, the wheels were in motion toward the climax of Houseman's big story. Houseman called on Bayliss. reminded the prosecutor of the virtual ultimatum he had delivered, and stated that he was willing to meet it, by producing witnesses

should the case of Marie Tenny's death be reopened. As fair a man as he had claimed, Bayliss agreed.

Old Mrs. Goodman was brought from New York state. Through the mesh at the county jail, she identified her son with the glad words: "Jamie, my boy!" In response, Jamie brightened for the first time since his arrest. Noting the prisoner's change of expression, Sheriff Raye for the first time felt just the slightest touch of doubt as to this being Arthur Tenny. Prosecutor Bayliss, though, was less impressed. He'd expected Tenny to take advantage of somebody else's mother, should the opportunity come.

Shortly before the court hearing, Houseman talked with Bertha Jarvis, found her only too willing to rectify her mistake—if she had made one. Bertha couldn't very well object, because, as Houseman argued, she had done more than merely identify the man now in the county jail; she had literally forced his arrest. Together, Houseman and Bertha called on Mrs. Clayton, but they found Marie's mother firm and adamant.

"You started this on one man's say-so," Mrs. Clayton told Houseman, reprovingly, "and if I'm the last and only person left who says that prisoner is Arthur Tenny, I'll still stand by my guns, so long as I'm sure. And remember—" she gestured to the book that Marie had given her—"I've got proof there, like I showed you, of how that man lied. You hurt his case instead of helping it, when you stirred my memory on that."

"About the book," remarked Houseman. "I think it should be presented as evidence in court. You would accept whatever it might prove, wouldn't you, Mrs. Clayton?"

"By all means, young man, and I'll say that's downright fair of you. I'm ready now to believe you're impartial, like Bertha says you are. So long as I know you want a murderer brought to justice, I'll be anxious too, to make sure the law has got the proper man. Whichever of us has guessed wrong, Mr. Houseman, we'll soon find out. Take the book with you. I'll give my testimony on it."

WHEN THE JUDGE'S gavel pounded for order in the case of the Commonwealth versus Arthur Tenny, alias Jamie Goodman, the prosecutor opened with the parade of his previous witnesses. Their recognition of the prisoner was repeated, while Jamie sank deeper and deeper into the slough of despair. Prosecutor Bayliss called Bertha Jarvis and Lucille Clayton to the stand. Therefore, the defense had both Amos Tenny and Mamie Goodman give their testimony; one to the effect that the accused was not Arthur Tenny, the other that he was Jamie Goodman.

The prosecutor insisted on that distinction, on the ground that Arthur Tenny still could have posed as Jamie Goodman, but that claim lost its punch when C. B. Sager took the stand. The planter furnished sufficient evidence that Jamie Goodman had been working for him during the same period when Arthur Tenny had been living at Azalea Corners. The town of Brodnax was too far from the Richmond area, for anyone to have

lived a double life by shuttling between the two places.

Sager identified the prisoner as Jamie. So did three other witnesses, who had worked for Sager back in the Brodnax days. But they still could be mistaken, quite as logically as the witnesses who had known Arthur Tenny. Then, at the request of the defense attorney, Sager was allowed to put his own questions to the prisoner.

"You remember me," began Sager. "Don't you, Jamie?"

"Yes, sir. You're Mr. Sager from down near Brodnax."

"When did you last see me?"

"Guess it was seven years ago. Yes, that it was. Seven years ago, come this July."

"Tell me," chuckled Sager. "Why do you say July?"

"Because you fired me, Mr. Sager. On the first, that was. Then you hired me back again July Fourth. You said it was patriotic."

"Exactly what I did say," nodded Sager. "Tell me, Jamie, what's the name of my brother-in-law?"

"Why, that's Doctor Carson."

"What did he say to you, when he last saw you?"

"That was when I fell off your roof, wasn't it? Sure! When Doctor Carson fixed my sprained ankle, he said, 'Don't go doing that again, Jamie, or next time you'll be breaking a leg.' That's what he did say, Mr. Sager."

"Yes, that's exactly what he did say."

By then, a buzz had stirred the court-room. This was powerful testimony toward Jamie's claim. Doctor Carson had died during the past seven years, but others present who had worked for Sager, remembered Jamie's fall from the roof. Then, the defense delivered its clincher.

"We have in evidence a promissory note," the defense counsel stated, "signed by Jamie Goodman and dated seven years ago. We also have a letter written by the defendant to his mother, in the presence of Sheriff Raye. We should like to project both upon a screen, so that from their enlargements, Professor Felix Blye, document examiner from Washington, can point out their similarities."

This test produced a staggering result. Certain words in the letter fitted precisely with those used in the promissory note. To his mother, Jamie had written: "There's a reporter here who promises to get me out of this trouble. He says he will pay your expenses so you can help. But he can't demand quick action, on account of needing other people who know me. . . . Jamie."

The note furnished by Sager said: "I, the undersigned, have received twenty dollars on account from C. B. Sager, and promise to pay said sum in full, upon demand. . . . Jamie Goodman." At least a half a dozen key-words were identical in each and their writing tallied to the tiniest detail. After Professor Blye, an authoritative, matter-of-fact man of unquestioned repute, had discussed the key-words and traced them with a pointer, another specimen of handwriting was flashed upon the screen.

Unlike Jamie's writing, which was methodical, detailed and a trifle cramped, symbolizing a man who by nature was cautious, this new exhibit was in a bold, slap-

Jamie Goodman gained hope when his mother arrived to claim him as her son.

dash hand, which had not even been sparing with the ink. Its words actually glared from the screen, much in the fashion of the man who had written it: "To Marie, my darling sweetheart. From your loving husband, Arthur Tenny."

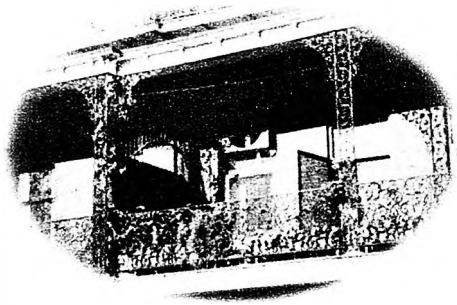
"This is from a photostat," the document examiner stated, "taken from the title page of a book, given to Mrs. Lucille Clayton, by her daughter Marie Tenny. Neither the writing nor the signature of Arthur Tenny agree in any striking point of detail with those of Jamie Goodman. It would have been next to impossible for either man, even by exhaustive effort, to have copied the other's handwriting, so sharply do they vary."

The courtroom was in an uproar. The judge was banging with his gavel. As order was restored, Houseman's excited voice could still be heard, shouting: "You're free, Jamie. Free!" Then, as the reporter quieted, the judge remarked: "Please, Mr. Houseman, a little respect for the dignity of this court." Again, the gavel rapped: "Jamie Goodman," the judge declared, "you are free."

Yes, Jamie Goodman was free. He was out in the sun, out in the air, happy as a bird as he chatted with his old mother. Others were there: Sager, the witnesses from Brodnax, Sheriff Raye, Prosecutor Bayliss—even the witnesses who had originally testified against Jamie Goodman. They were all congratulating Jamie on his vindication. The world was gay and everybody felt free.

Everybody except Julian Houseman. He was over in the *News-Leader* office, practically chained to his typewriter, pounding out his big story.

Next Month—



DARKNESS lay over New Orleans, deepened by a foggy drizzle. Steamship whistles blared an eerie chorus from the river, broken by the shrill music of a calliope on board the show boat where passengers made merry despite the weather.

Those blended sounds lost themselves in the deep gloom of the Vieux Carre, the famous old French Quarter. There, beneath the overhanging shelter of a balcony, crouched a wiry young man, who had chosen this spot not to escape the drizzle but to watch the entrance of an alley opposite.

He was Herb Mayer of the New Orleans *Item*. He saw a shadow glide across the dim patch of light cast by an old-fashioned street lamp. That flitting shape was a deadly Apache, a killer from the by-ways of Paris, wanted for a murder as vicious as any that New Orleans had ever known. Mayer had tracked him through a curious clue, a burlap sack with the word "Java" stenciled upon it, used as a shroud for the body of a missing jeweler found floating in a canal that led into the Mississippi River.

Herb Mayer was on the verge of his Big Story. Sound judgment prompted him to bide his time until he could clinch the evidence that would bring the murderer to justice. How the *Item* reporter accomplished this is told in vivid detail in the next issue of this magazine.

IN that same issue will appear the story of a love tryst that brought death in Pensacola. It tells how Wesley Chalk, of the Pensacola *News-Journal,* uncovered crime in a Florida trailer camp, after the dying victim himself had refused to name the killer in order to protect a mystery girl who had fled into the night.

Here was a case that hinged on one great question: Who was the girl in red and white? Until she could be found and her full testimony taken, the life of an innocent man was hanging in the balance. For seventy-two sleepless hours, Chalk worked on this Big Story, which is told in all its gripping details.

WHAT was the riddle of the flaming bier, the burning automobile, that flared like a beacon in the night, dooming its lone passenger and destroying the evidence of the crime itself? The answer was found by Harry Friedenberg, star reporter of the Boston *Traveler*. How he cracked a seemingly perfect crime, will be related as another feature of the next issue.

The BIG STORY Magazine

October, 1951, Vol. 1, No. 1

COVER:
Painted by Avrom Winfield

Posed by Owen Jordan who portrayed the part of Reporter Andrew Viglietta in the television presentation of "The Big Story." The other illustrations throughout the magazine were posed by professional models and the actors who represented the characters in the television versions of "The Big Story."

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Names of characters, with the exception of the reporter, are fictitious, but all characters and locales are photographed to portray scenes as they actually happened.

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KXLK	Great Falls, Mont.
WFBC	Greenville, S. C.
WGRM	Greenwood, Miss.
WCRS	Greenwood, S. C.
WKBO	Harrisburg, Pa.
WSVA	Harrisonburg, Va.
WTIC	Hartford, Conn.
WFOR	Hattiesburg, Miss.
WAZL	Hazelton, Pa.
KXLJ	Helena, Mont.
WMFG	Hibbing, Minn.
KGU	Honolulu, H. I.
KPRC	Houston, Tex.
KWBW	Hutchinson, Kans.
WIRE	Indianapolis, Ind.
WJDX	Jackson, Miss.
WJAX	Jacksonville, Fla.
WJAC	Johnstown, Pa.
KINY	Juneau, Alas.
WDAF	Kansas City, Kans.
KTKN	Ketchikan, Alas.
WKPT	Kingsport, Tenn.
WROL	Knoxville, Tenn.
WKBH	La Crosse, Wisc.
KVOL	Lafayette, La.
KPLC	Lake Charles, La.
WLAK	Lakeland, Fla.
WEAT	Lake Worth, Fla.
WGAL	Lancaster, Pa.
WAML	Laurel, Miss.
WMRF	Lewistown, Pa.
WLOK	Lima, O.
KARK	Little Rock, Ark.
KFI	Los Angeles, Cal.
WAVE	Louisville, Ky.
WIBA	Madison, Wisc.
KYSM	Mankato, Minn.
WMAM	Marinette, Wisc.
WMVA	Martinsville, Va.
KMED	Medford, Ore.
WMC	Memphis, Tenn.
WIOD	Miami, Fla.
WTMJ	Milwaukee, Wisc.
KSTP	Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.
KXLL	Missoula, Mont.
WALA	Mobile, Ala.
KNOE	Monroe, La.
WSFA	Montgomery, Ala.
WSM	Nashville, Tenn.
WMIS	Natchez, Miss.
WSMB	New Orleans, La.
WNBC	New York, N. Y.
WTAR	Norfolk, Va.
KODY	North Platte, Neb.
WKY	Oklahoma City, Okla.
WOW	Omaha, Neb.
WORZ	Orlando, Fla.
WCOA	Pensacola, Fla.
WEEK	Peoria, Ill.
KYW	Philadelphia, Pa.
KTAR	Phoenix, Ariz.
KOAM	Pittsburg, Kans.
KDKA	Pittsburgh, Pa.
KSEI	Pocatello, Ida.
WCSH	Portland, Me.
KGW	Portland, Ore.
KYCA	Prescott, Ariz.
WJAR	Providence, R. I.
WPTF	Raleigh, N. C.
WRAW	Reading, Pa.
KOH	Reno, Nev.
WMBG	Richmond, Va.
KROC	Rochester, Minn.
WHAM	Rochester, N. Y.
KCRA	Sacramento, Cal.
KGLU	Safford, Ariz.
WSAM	Saginaw, Mich.
KDYL	Salt Lake City, Ut.
KFAM	St. Cloud, Minn.
KSD	St. Louis, Mo.
WOAI	San Antonio, Tex.
KFSD	San Diego, Cal.
KNBC	San Francisco, Cal.
KIST	Santa Barbara, Cal.
WSAV	Savannah, Ga.
WGY	Schenectady, N. Y.
KOMO	Seattle, Wash.
KIBH	Seward, Alas.
KTBS	Shreveport, La.
KELO	Sioux Falls, S. D.
KIFW	Sitka, Alas.
KHQ	Spokane, Wash.
WBZA	Springfield, Mass.
KGBX	Springfield, Mo.
WSYR	Syracuse, N. Y.
WFLA	Tampa, Fla.
WBOW	Terre Haute, Ind.
WSPD	Toledo, O.
WTTN	Trenton, N. J.
KVOA	Tucson, Ariz.
KVOO	Tulsa, Okla.
KTFI	Twin Falls, Ida.
WHLB	Virginia, Minn.
WRC	Washington, D. C.
WSAU	Wausau, Wisc.
KRGV	Weslaco, Tex.
KANS	Wichita, Kans.
WBRE	Wilkes Barre, Pa.
WRAK	Williamsport, Pa.
WDEL	Wilmington, Del.
WSJS	Winston Salem, N. C.
KIT	Yakima, Wash.
WORK	York, Pa.
KYUM	Yuma, Ariz.
WHIZ	Zanesville, O.

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the cigarette
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