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TRIPLE

THREE NOVELS IN ONE MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



A CORPSE FOR CAROLINE

by JEREMY YORK



BLONDE ANGEL OF DEATH

by W. T. BALLARD



THE LADY'S OUT FOR BLOOD!

by STEWART STERLING



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DETECTIVE

Vol. 9, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Spring, 1953

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A CORPSE FOR CAROLINE

Galpin had only six months to live. But for somebody . . . that was just six months too long!

Jeremy York 10

BLONDE ANGEL OF DEATH

It must have been love with Sawyer's beautiful new wife. After all, she hadn't shot him—yet!

W. T. Ballard 74

THE LADY'S OUT FOR BLOOD!

She had an unanswerable question: "What jury will convict me for shooting a tramp like you?"

Stewart Sterling 114

AND

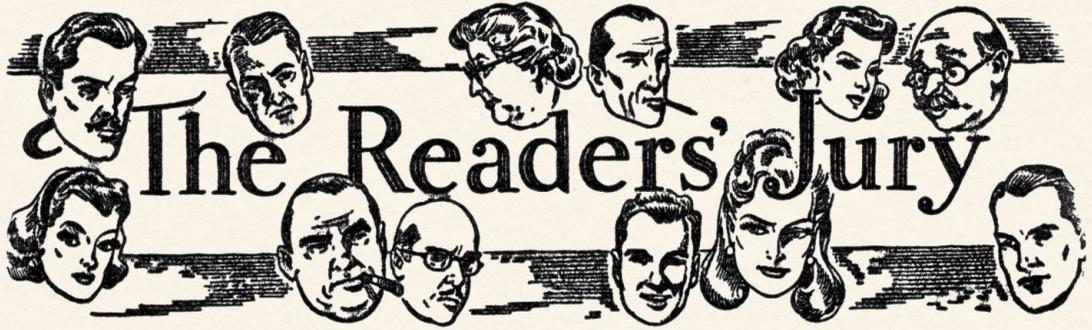
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EVERETT H. ORTNER

Editor

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YOU DECIDE: Are Criminals Just Sick?

ARE criminals different, physically, from other people? Over the years there have been countless tests on this point, with most experts taking the negative side. The Italian scientist, Cesare Lombroso, declared that criminals differ in their facial proportions from normal people, but generally this has been hard to prove. Indeed, it has proved impossible to spot criminals from their mere photographs, despite many attempts.

Recently, however, there have been new developments in the field of criminal psychology that tend to give some slight credence to Lombroso's theories. Not that any scientist in his right mind will say that he can spot a criminal by looking at him, or even by x-raying him, but there are certain physical conditions that seem peculiarly to coincide with criminality.

Criminals Are Sick

It may even be possible that criminals are sufferers from glandular disorders that pervert their thinking.

For almost a century doctors have maintained that criminals are sick people and should be treated accordingly. Prison was a safeguard for the balance of the population but not a cure for the criminal. Recently a group of Army medics proved their point rather convincingly.

During the later part of the war a group of young prisoners sentenced for disciplinary infractions were giving their medical officer a great deal of trouble. They were rude to guards, officers and

each other; they refused to obey the simplest rules, constantly lost their tempers to a marked degree, fought among themselves.

The medical officer consulted with Harold S. Hulbert, a government biologist. Without seeing the prisoners Hulbert described them, notably the worst one of the lot: thin, thin-faced, immature of body, anti-social, uninterested in any participating sports or activities.

Mr. Hulbert advised x-ray and other examinations, and said these would doubtlessly show the patient lacked adequate blood calcium. Examinations, both x-ray and chemical, proved Hulbert right.

Tablets Help

The young offender was given a calcium gluconate tablet every few days to make up this deficiency. Within four months he was brighter, better adjusted to his surroundings, more cooperative, less temperamental.

The improvement was so marked that other prisoners asked to receive the same treatment. They were given the tablets and again great improvement was noted within as little as three and a half months.

Government technicians are now working along these lines. Perhaps some day such tablets will help us cure the majority of our social offenders. Surely it would be cheaper than present methods and more successful. There would be no repeaters.

What do you think?

—The Editor

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



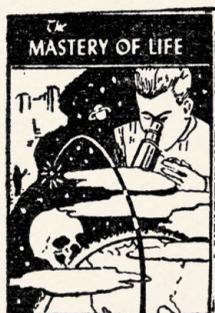
Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

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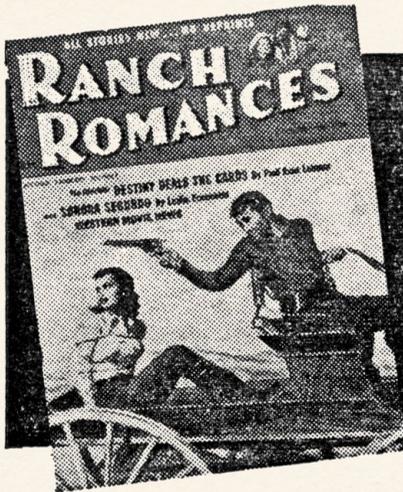
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by **BERT REICHERT**

Sidelights on Crime

MOST of the work done by law enforcement authorities becomes much a matter of routine, with the pattern generally the same day after day. But every now and then along comes an unusual character or an unusual situation to brighten up or mess up the day, as the case may be.

Take the Chicago motorist who complained to police that a man had "stepped between two parked cars, bumped into the side of my car and then left the scene." After a moment's thought, the motorist added, "He dented the car, too."

Police at Spokane, Washington, received an unusual complaint when a man protested that a business house had refused to cash his check, even after he showed letters of reference. The police looked at the letters and found they had been addressed to the complaining gentleman—in care of the county jail.

An officer sitting in a squad car at a St. Petersburg, Florida, airport, was somewhat startled when an arriving traveler got into his car and ordered him to drive to a hotel. Intrigued, the officer complied with the request.

"How much do I owe you?" asked the passenger when they reached the hotel. "Nothing," replied the officer.

"Gee," remarked the man. "This is quite a town. They even have free taxis." Whereupon he flipped the officer a half-dollar tip.

In a class all by herself was a woman arrested at Long Beach, California, on

suspicion of forgery. She confessed that she had bought whisky with bad checks, so that she could break the bottles—because she "hated whisky."

Chicago police recently smashed an extortion racket, but this one was a bit unusual. They arrested three oversized high school boys, two aged 14 and one 15, for selling "protection" to their smaller classmates for a nickel a week.

Officials at the county jail in Springfield, Illinois, had an unusual guest recently when county authorities permitted a youth to receive free room and board at the jail after he was paroled from a sentence for stealing 35 cents and doing \$73 worth of damage to a church. County officials made the arrangements so the youth would not have to be homeless and hungry while looking for a job.

Indianapolis, Indiana, police started using radar speed-detecting equipment several months ago. On the first day out, the radar needle in a squad car began wobbling wildly, although there were no cars passing. The officers were baffled until they noticed a flock of birds passing the squad car.

And at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, confusion set in when a woman entered a private home and began speaking excitedly in a foreign language. The occupants of the home thought she said "fire," so they called the fire department, bringing the police to the scene along with the fire trucks. It turned out that the woman merely wanted to know where a certain street was located.

A CORPSE for Caroline

a novel by JEREMY YORK





"She ought to burn," he said. Then: "Go and light the fire, Charles."

He had only six months to live. But for somebody . . .
somewhere . . . even *that* was too long!

Chapter I

I'VE BAD NEWS for you," said Dr. Madrigal.

"All right," I said. "Let's have it."

He let me have it, quietly, watching me as if the flicker of an eyelid would betray what passed through my mind. I didn't know Madrigal well. I'd heard a great deal about him and had met him once or twice, on formal occasions. To say that he was a brilliant surgeon was an understatement; he was superlative. Even Caroline, my wife, said so. She had little regard for English specialists; but then, being American born and also an osteopath, she not only had little regard for orthodox medical men but

had little hesitation in saying

Yet it was Caroline who had sent me to see Madrigal, and it was through her indirectly, that I had met him before. But I didn't give much thought to her. I waited. In a way, anything which my mind off Caroline was welcome.

"You're going to die," Madrigal said. "Soon."

I wasn't surprised or even shocked. I was more conscious of a numbed feeling than of anything else.

It is several months now since I sat in that office with the hissing gas glowing golden-red and popping occasionally, and the rain spattering against

the frosted glass of the window. The office was small. Madrigal sat behind a bow-shaped Queen Anne desk which was across one corner of the room. Except for a black telephone and a few imposing-looking reference books and a small yellow card, there was nothing on the desk.

The little yellow card was me.

At least, it had my medical history written on it, up to Madrigal's final pronouncement. It was quite a history in its way, a record of minor ailments culminating in a mystery which no one had yet been able to solve.

THE GAS FIRE went on hissing, and Madrigal kept on eyeing me. He looked the part of a distinguished surgeon: massive, with a big head and powerful shoulders, and clothes that fitted like a model suit on a tailor's dummy. His gray hair was long, waving back from forehead and temples. His face would have been startlingly handsome but for the very slight squint, which only became obvious when he looked straight at you for some time.

I looked at the little yellow card, feeling that I had to say something.

"How soon is soon?"

"Within six months."

"You couldn't be wrong, could you?"

"No."

A slight tremor broke through my numbness at the uncompromising nature of that *no*. "I suppose I might go out in much less—a few weeks."

"I don't think so," said Madrigal. "If you continue to live normally, and without excesses, you should feel reasonably well during the next three or four months. After that, you will have more frequent and longer periods of semi-consciousness. Your recent spells have lasted for only a few minutes. If you wish, I'll go into details—what your wife would call the mumbo-jumbo of the profession."

He smiled faintly. He had pigeon-holed Caroline nicely.

"I'm more concerned with effect than

cause," I said. "Is there anything I can do to delay the increasing frequency of the attacks?"

"Nothing."

"Can I do anything to bring them on more frequently?"

Madrigal slipped his right hand into his pocket, then held a gold cigarette case toward me. He had big, broad hands, pale and delicate, perfectly kept. I took a cigarette, and he placed an ash-tray on the desk.

I lighted my own cigarette.

"No, Galpin, you can't do anything to bring the attacks on more frequently. You can make them last longer when they do come, by—let us say—an orgy of drinking or of other excesses. Your six months might then be reduced to three or four."

"I see. And supposing—"

"Supposing what?" asked Madrigal.

"I was going to ask, how will the end come if I continue to live normally?"

"After the first two or three of the long blackout spells you will find your mental faculties weakening. You will become increasingly dependent upon others."

"And I'll end up in the mad-house!"

"That is extremely unlikely. You won't recognize people. Your mind will just be blank for increasing periods. But you are not likely to go insane."

"Thanks," I said. The sentence he'd passed was hurting now.

Madrigal shifted his position. The gas fire popped and hissed and the rain streamed on the window. The room was gloomy, but he didn't switch on the light. What little there was fell on my face but not on to his. His odd eye was almost hidden in shadow.

"In one way you are fortunate, Galpin. You will have little or no pain."

Madrigal was watching me closely. Suddenly he became brisk. "Now you need not accept my word for this, Galpin. I will, if you like, give you letters to other specialists—Ingleby of Washington, Dubonnet of Paris, Guiliani of—"

"I'll think about that," I said.

"I will do anything you ask," promised Madrigal. He had become less the famous surgeon and more a human being. "I know how bad it is for you, Galpin. It isn't any use saying that I'm sorry. Nor shall I presume to advise you what to do. Whom you tell about this is entirely your affair—but I imagine—" he paused, very briefly—"that your wife is a person whom you can safely tell."

I didn't answer. I didn't want to think about Caroline.

"How old is Nigel?" he asked abruptly.

"Fifteen," I said huskily. I had to think about Nigel, and that hurt like an open wound.

"Is it a consolation that you've lived nearly forty years?" Madrigal spoke softly. "Seventeen of them married—happily married, I believe—and for fifteen of them, a son? What consolations are there for a man in your position, I wonder? I wish I knew." He shook his head, not compassionately but in perplexity. "Yes, I wish I knew. Tell me of any consolation you find, Galpin, so that I may be able to pass it on to others."

I got up. "Thanks for being frank, Madrigal. If I do decide to consult someone else, I'll see you first."

"Just come whenever you feel like it, for that or for any other reason. I won't keep you waiting long."

"Thanks."

He saw me to the door, and shook hands. It was my fourth visit to his Harley Street office, and he hadn't done that before, had always been aloof. My car was standing at the curb, a sleek Talbot limousine. I climbed in and drove away.

CAROLINE — consolations — forty years, seventeen of them married—"happily married, I believe."

Happily—

I began to laugh. I couldn't help it.

I thought about consolations and Caroline and 'happy' marriage; of misery, jealousy, indifference and then

antipathy which flared up at times to an all-consuming hatred, when I couldn't trust myself to speak, when I would have struck her at the slightest provocation.

I could get some of my own back. I could murder my faithless wife, and not live to pay the legal penalty. What would Madrigal think of that as a consolation.

Murder was a silly thought; it might avenge my injured vanity but would leave a sordid background for the life of the one person I still loved—Nigel. I must never hurt him.

I need not tell Caroline the news. If she knew, she would be able to count the days until she would be able to marry her *paramour*. She would get several months of anticipatory pleasure, and spend them in secret gloating. Why should she have that?

I would tell no one.

When, quite recently, I had discovered that she had a lover, that she was deceiving me, it had come as a blinding revelation. I did not know him, because I had never really thought of looking for him. A vague and shadowy figure built itself up in my mind, but I was less bitter toward him than toward Caroline. I had been able to resign myself to losing her, but not to the deception.

Suddenly I realized what I could do with my six months of life: find out who the man was, perhaps even make him suffer, and so, hurt her.

Chapter II

I LEFT MADRIGAL at half past three and, at seven o'clock, turned into Green Street. Had I gone straight home the journey would have taken me about fifteen minutes. As it was, I drove into the country as far as Maidenhead, sat by the side of the smiling Thames, brooding, and came slowly home. Green Street is a short thoroughfare not far from Hyde Park. Number 7 has been in my family for three generations.

I was surprised, when I turned into the street, to see several cars parked in front of our house. Then I remembered.

It was Caroline's party night. She threw a cocktail party once a month.

I pulled up behind the last car, but didn't get out. I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to mix with a crowd of people, many of whom I wouldn't like, many of them strangers. On the other hand, it would be easier to meet Caroline while she was surrounded by friends; I should get through the encounter more easily, and she would be less likely to ask questions. I had dreaded that meeting. And—perhaps the factor that decided me—he might be there.

Who was the man she'd been sleeping with? I'd thought carefully about all her men friends and everything I knew about them. She had many whom I knew only slightly, for she had always attracted people, but some I knew fairly well. I could imagine any one of three being the man in question, and I had a fairly good idea when they'd been getting together.

For nearly a year, Caroline had been doing what she called "working up a country practice;" I'd accepted this as the truth. One of her lasting enthusiasms was her work, and I knew she was an extremely good women's osteopath. She had told me that patients who found it difficult to come to London for treatment were prepared to pay handsomely if she would treat them in their homes, and for two or three consecutive nights every month she would be away.

There was nothing surprising about that. Once a patient has benefited, she usually became a fanatical believer in osteopathy—so I readily accepted Caroline's country practice story.

Three weeks ago, she had told me she was going to St. Albans.

I'd received a message from Nigel's housemaster, saying Nigel was ill, so had telephoned Caroline's patient, only to be told that Caroline wasn't there and hadn't been there for months. It was my first realization of the deception. On impulse I had telephoned several other country patients, inquiring whether Caroline had left a certain instrument

behind on her last visit. She hadn't been to any of those places recently, although the patients and the appointments were all carefully entered in her diary.

Nigel's illness had been food poisoning, and the danger was soon past. I was told of that before Caroline returned. I didn't tell her what I'd discovered. I didn't want a scene; I didn't want a crisis, because of Nigel; and my mind was already filled with my own mystery illness.

Now I sat in the car for fully five minutes, and might have stayed longer but for the taxi which pulled up ahead of me.

A girl got out.

I had never seen her before, but the driver said, "Here it is, number seven, miss," so she was presumably a guest. She was tall, and beneath her transparent plastic raincoat was a scarlet dress. Her figure was good and I found myself watching her shapely legs as she paid the cabby. For some reason I was prepared to bet that she was American.

I GOT out and slammed the car door, and the girl looked around and smiled. There was radiance in her smile, the freshness of youth merging with a poise which is peculiarly American and particularly attractive; it was what had first attracted me to Caroline.

"Good evening," I said.

"Hello, there. Are you one of the party, too?" She had a nice voice, and her lipstick was the same shade as her scarlet dress.

"I'm usually in view," I said.

"Does that mean you know Mrs. Galpin well?"

"Yes, I think I can say I do."

"That's swell. You can tell me if I'll really be welcome. I'm a friend of a friend of Mrs. Galpin's, and my friend said I must be sure to come. I called up here an hour ago and a man said surely, come right along. I asked him if he were Mr. Galpin and he laughed and said no, but it would be all right. Do you think it will?"

I didn't answer at once. The girl's smile faded and a little furrow appeared between her large gray eyes.

"Don't you think I'll be welcome?" she asked.

"Caroline loves seeing friends of friends, especially on party nights. Come along in."

I opened the front door with my key, and the girl gave a funny little grimace but didn't speak until we were in the hall.

"So you belong here," the girl said.

"Yes, I'm Caroline's husband."

"Isn't that just like me?" She made the grimace again, a most attractive one. "I've heard a little about you, also—you're Charles, and you're typically British."

"What's typically British?"

"You are!" she said gaily. "I'm Alison Murray."

"From Virginia."

"Say, you're good!"

"I get plenty of practice," I said. "We'll go upstairs. You can put your raincoat away and I'll take you into the bear garden. Then I'll be able to introduce you to some more typical Britishers."

"I hope you're not going to hold that against me," said Alison Murray.

"No, I'm just going to make you change your mind." We reached the landing. "If you go into that room with the open door, you'll find a maid there. She'll look after you. I'll be waiting here."

I went along the passage to my own room, washed, and changed my collar and tie. Alison hadn't arrived when I returned to the landing.

Someone opened the drawing-room door, and I saw two or three people standing with glasses in their hands and cigarettes in their mouths. I heard Caroline speak, once or twice; she has a low, rather penetrating voice, and no Englishman would doubt that she was American, although she has lived in England for seventeen years—since we were married.

"Here I am," said Alison, surprising me.

I hadn't seen her hair before. It was fair and rather fluffy. Her nose was nearly a snub, her wide mouth glistening red. She had even teeth and a perfect complexion. She was probably in the late twenties. Freed from the confining hold of the plastic raincoat, her dress flowed in deep folds from the waist; the tight bodice was plain except for a blue-black orchid. That was rare enough to make me stare.

"Isn't that just beautiful?" she asked. "I bought it in a little shop near Bond Street. I'm mad about Bond Street."

"Yes, it's beautiful," I said. And she was beautiful. I turned away abruptly. "Now let's face the mob."

This was one of the popular nights, and at least seventy people were crammed into the room.

Two or three people saw me and called, "Hello, Charles!"

"Have a drink, old chap," said Tommy Wilding. He was one of the three about whom I had been thinking, but just now I felt no malice, only wondered if Alison would regard him as typically British, too.

TOMMY WILDING combined two things; life as something in the City and life as an amateur boxer. Almost aggressively good-looking, with fair hair and a fresh skin, he attracted women as a honey-pot attracts wasps. A bachelor with a reputation for being a roué, he was always at these parties.

"Hello," he said to Alison. "What will you have? There's plenty of ice and we run to Bourbon."

"Thanks, but I'm going to have an English drink," said Alison. "Gin and lime, please."

"Usual for you, Charles?"

"Thanks."

Tommy threaded his way through the crowd toward the bar. I watched him, while at the same time I looked for Caroline. She was near the piano; leaning close to a short, plump man with

long gray hair, who looked as a musician should; Caroline always managed to collect a celebrity or two, and I was pretty sure she was flattering this man into playing.

Alison said, "That's the man who spoke to me when I called up."

"Oh, Tommy," I said. Yes, Tommy would laugh if he were asked whether he was Caroline's husband, and wouldn't waste time consulting her.

"I thought you were going to introduce me to some people," Alison reminded me.

"Quite right," said one of the little group near us, all of whom were eyeing Alison curiously.

I didn't know any of them well. I introduced Alison as a friend of a friend of Caroline's, and did the same when Tommy returned with the drinks. Caroline looked up as Tommy passed her, and her gaze followed him, I thought, with close interest. Then she saw me, and looked away abruptly; she didn't even nod.

Tommy was talking to Alison about nothing, and talking attractively, making her laugh. A man who wanted a contribution for some youth movement cornered me and drew me away. I had just got rid of him when Caroline came over to me.

"How did you make out?"

"All right."

"Verdict?"

"Take care."

"Oh," said Caroline. She frowned—I could have sworn with disappointment. Then she smiled; and I have never been wholly able to resist that smile. You have to know Caroline before you can have any idea of the warmth and beauty of it. She switched from the subject abruptly. "Who's your friend?"

"Yours. Alison Murray, from Virginia. We met on the doorstep. Tommy had told her to come along."

"Oh, yes, he said something about her. You don't know who told her to call me, do you?"

"No."

"Oh, well," said Caroline.

She really meant, "Charles, you're impossible." In my place, she would have found out much of Alison's history, and so been able to talk warmly of the friend who'd sent her.

Caroline moved away, smiling right and left, tall, dark and graceful. She was dressed in a black afternoon frock which had come recently from Paris, and there wasn't another dress in the room, except possibly Alison's, which could compare with it for style. It was exactly right for her. Her hair, more dark than fair, was a soft curly halo.

Soon she was laughing and talking animatedly to Alison. But for Alison I should have slipped away to my room.

As it was, I kept looking round, and caught sight of Victor Tremaine—the second of the men whom I suspected.

Victor was a high-ranking diplomat, suave, courteous, with regular features and a small, trim mustache. The big weakness in my "case" against Victor was his known horror of scandal. Scandal might affect his position.

The third suspect wasn't present.

Caroline left Alison, and another door opened to admit a waiter, pushing a large, heavily laden trolley, to serve as a buffet. Another came, pushing a second trolley.

I heard Alison's voice by my side.

"That looks wonderful," she said. "I didn't think you had so much food over here."

I didn't answer. I couldn't, because of a momentary flash of panic as a sharp pain stabbed at my head. It was the warning of an impending attack, and I turned and hurried out of the room, my last conscious thought to avoid making a scene.

Chapter III

WHEN I came to, I was sitting in the bathroom. A face moved up and down in front of me. It wasn't Caroline's.

"You feeling better?" asked Alison.

"I—yes, I'm all right."

"Can I get you anything?"

"No—no thanks."

"I didn't know what to do," said Alison. "I guessed you wouldn't want to faint right off in the middle of the hall. This was the nearest room and I just had to get you off your feet."

"Thanks very much. How long—how long was I out?"

"Well, maybe four or five minutes. Mr. Galpin, shall I call your wife or a doctor?"

"No, please—"

She stood back, and I could see her clearly. The blue-black orchid on the tight-fitting bodice moved gently with her breathing. "Do you often get attacks like this?"

"Occasionally. Heart's a bit tricky. I'll go and rest for half an hour."

"Let me take you to your room."

My legs weren't too steady, and I was glad of her help. I could lean against her, without feeling that I was weighing her down. Her arm around my waist was firm and protecting. On party nights, all the servants, including my man and Caroline's receptionist-nurse, are on duty, so no one was about. It took a long time to get to my room. Alison opened the door and switched on the light, which dazzled me, but I quickly recovered. The attack had cleared all right.

"Are you sure there's nothing I can get for you?" Alison asked insistently as I sank on the bed.

"Nothing, thanks. Don't worry about me."

"I'll tell your wife what's happened."

"Thanks."

She smiled, and went out, closing the door behind her.

I must have fallen asleep, because I started up when the door opened.

"Hello," I said, sharply, and looked across.

Caroline came in, and closed the door quietly. "Alison Murray told me what happened. Now what did Madrigal really say?"

"He was portentous and vague," I lied. "No riotous living. I gathered that he thinks it's heart, not brain."

"So it could be worse," Caroline said.

"Yes, Pity, isn't it?"

She stood by the side of the bed, looking down. Although not really a beautiful woman, the half-light gave her beauty.

"So you think I want you dead," she said quietly.

"You'd be happier without me, wouldn't you?"

SHE hesitated for a long time.

"All right, Charles. Yes, I should be happier without you. That doesn't mean that I want you to die, however. And I don't see why you've mentioned dying, if Madrigal talked so vaguely. Not that you can really pay much attention to these English doctors. Madrigal is better than most, but he isn't infallible."

"I'm tired of doctors," I said.

"You're tired of most things, aren't you?" she said, and sat on the side of the bed. "I don't think this is a good time to discuss our position, Charles, but if you want to, I don't mind. I'm sorry we've hit the rocks. There isn't any feeling left between us, but there's nothing unusual about that. We've just stopped being in love, and neither of us is satisfied with pretense. Isn't that true?"

I grunted.

"And isn't it also true that only Nigel keeps us together?"

"I suppose so," I said grudgingly.

"You know it is. If it weren't for Nigel, I'd leave you or you'd leave me. As it is—let's go on keeping up appearances, Charles."

"We can't do much else," I said, "but there are disadvantages. I don't like your friends. I don't like these parties."

"We don't have to have the same friends, and you don't have to come to the parties. Charles—would you like to go away for a while?"

I said, "Where?" mechanically, to cover the thought that flashed into my

mind. If I were to leave the house, she would have everything her own way. There would be no need to resort to subterfuges, to write up a desk diary of imaginary country appointments.

"Wherever you like," said Caroline. "Charles, you have to make up your own mind about some things, you know. A vacation would do you good. It might help you in health and in mind. I know our breakup hits you more than it does me, Charles. I've my work, and you've—"

"I'm a lazy, good-for-nothing idler, with more money than I need, nothing to live or work for. Why not say it?"

"You've said it."

"Is it why you stopped loving me, Caroline?"

"One of the reasons," she said quite calmly. "You haven't any enthusiasms. You just dabble in business. You need a cause, a motivation for living, and you haven't one. If you weren't kindly and generous, you'd be unbearable. Once I hoped—"

She paused, and I was surprised to find myself hanging on her words. Perhaps that was because we were closer, physically, than we had been for a long time. I could have stretched out my hand and stroked her cheek. I studied her, fully used to the kindly half-light, seeing her clearly. The fine arched brows, the high-bridged nose, the firm lips and good square chin. There was purposefulness in Caroline; that was one of the things which had first attracted me, perhaps because I was a purposeless individual. I felt a flicker of the old desire.

"What did you hope?"

"That the war would change you. But you were sent to a quiet spot, and spent the war doing nothing."

"And that was my fault too." The flicker died out.

"No, Charles, none of it's your fault. You've never had any need to go all out for a thing, to fight for what you need. I used to think that underneath that

quiet manner there was a fighter, but I was wrong. You just drift. I even had to urge you to see doctors about your spasms. I had to make the appointment with Madrigal for you. Isn't that all true?"

It was. Caroline stood up.

"I must go. I shouldn't come in to the party again, if I were you. I'm asking Alison Murray to stay behind when the others are gone, I'll let you know when that is. Think about that vacation, Charles. I'm sure it would do you good."

Chapter IV

THE contrast between Caroline and Alison struck me the moment I saw them together after the party. Both were standing in front of the fireplace, had a glass in one hand and a sandwich in the other. Caroline was eating and Alison talking in that fascinating southern voice. Alison was quicksilver, and Caroline—gold? An apt comparison. There was a mercurial quality about Alison's vitality, and something solid and satisfying about Caroline's—even I acknowledged that. The one was restless, the other quiet and sober.

"Oh, hello!" said Alison, as I entered. "I'm so glad you're well again. You had me scared."

"I told you you needn't worry. But thanks for the helping hand."

"I'm very glad I was around. Caroline, why didn't they tell me that you had a really handsome husband?"

Caroline laughed. "Didn't they?"

"No, I guess they wanted me to be surprised." Her frankness, which in an English girl would have been called *naiveté*, was amusing. "You're looking fine now, Mr. Galpin."

"Have you had any dinner, Charles?" Caroline asked.

"Dinner" was euphemistic. On party nights, we had all we wanted from the cold buffet on the trolleys.

"No."

"You must be starving," said Alison. "Shall I get you something?"



I hit him again as he slid down

"I've put a dish aside for Charles," said Caroline and pointed.

Alison brought me the dish that Caroline had indicated.

"Thanks. How long have you been in England?"

"Three days. I'm staying at the Queen's Hotel. I've been telling Caroline, I'm to be in Europe three months."

"Just sightseeing?" I asked, and Caroline smiled faintly.

"Well, not exactly. I mean to see as much as I can everywhere I go, but I've come to study fashions and *décor*. That's why I just had to see Caroline as soon as I could. They told me that she would

be able to give me all the help I needed." The gray eyes swept the room. "That's going to be so, I guess. There's one thing I want to ask you, Caroline."

"Yes?"

"When I'm taking up too much of your time, just tell me."

Caroline smiled. "I will! Who else do you know in London?"

"Just no one, I guess. Why?"

"I was wondering how you're going to do your sightseeing," said Caroline. "I won't have much time to show you London." She looked quizzingly at me. Alison said quickly, "I can find my way around, if only you'll tell me what is

really worth seeing. I'm determined not to impose on you." She seemed to sense the strain in the atmosphere between Caroline and me, and crossed to the piano. She ran her fingers over the keys. "Why don't you show her around, Charles?"

I was about to reply that it would be a pleasure when the door leading to an ante-room opened and Arnold, my man, came in.

Arnold had lived at Number 7 longer than I. He was the only remaining male servant, a man of sixty, who could act as houseman, footman, steward, butler, valet—anything that was required of him. He seldom showed emotion, so the concern that showed in his eyes now made me look at him closely. It obviously startled Caroline, who spoke first.

"What is it, Arnold?"

"Can you spare a minute, please?"

"Both of us?"

"Yes, please." Arnold glanced at Alison.

Caroline and I went into the next room.

"What is it?" Caroline asked again.

"It's Bessie, ma'am. She's ill—in a bad way, I'm afraid," said Arnold. "I don't know whether it's anything she's eaten or what it is, but I thought you ought to see her."

Caroline said, "Yes, of course. Charles, I can look after this, if you'll stay with Alison."

"All right," I said.

Caroline swept into the passage. I went back to the drawing-room where Alison flashed me a smile.

"Will you have something more to eat?"

I took an anchovy paste sandwich.

"Charles," said Alison, "you don't have to take me around London, if you don't want to."

"I shouldn't take anyone around if I didn't want to," I said. "How about you—would you like me to show you the sights?"

"I'd love it!"

"When are you free?" I asked.

"I've some calls to make in the morning, but after lunch I'll be free."

"Will you lunch with me?"

"But I'm coming here to lunch with you and Caroline!"

"Oh, that's fine. We don't have to fix a meeting place." I selected a tiny piece of Welsh rarebit, wondered how long Caroline would be, and felt a little disconcerted by Alison's frank gaze. I wasn't just sure yet how I should react to her. She finished her drink and refused another, went to a sofa and patted the empty place at her side.

"Come and sit down, Charles, and tell me all about London."

"That's all a tall order. I've one or two old guide books you might like to see."

"Do you have a guide book with Chelsea in it?"

"Yes of course—I'll get it, right away."

I WENT out, thinking that I should really enjoy showing her the sights. We should have to visit some of the well-known places, of course, but I knew London well enough to take her into out-of-the-way spots, little quiet lanes and secret places. It was late in May, and daylight lasted until nearly nine o'clock, we should be able to see a great deal.

I reached my room, and heard someone gasp, then moan. It came from the door at the end of the passage. This led into three small rooms where Arnold and the two maids slept. Someone cried out, as if in pain. Bessie was certainly ill. I hesitated, with my hand on the door handle. It opened suddenly, and I backed away.

"Sorry, Mr. Charles," said Arnold.

"How is she?"

"I'm not happy, not at all happy about Bessie," Arnold said, with a shake of his head. "I'm going to telephone Dr. Grey now, sir."

"Oh. Yes, ask him to hurry." I stepped into the small passage beyond, from which all three rooms led. One door was ajar, and I heard the moaning again. I went into the room. Bessie, a plump

girl, was lying back on the pillows. Her face looked dreadful. Caroline, wearing a white doctor's coat over her frock, was standing over her. There was the sour smell of sickness.

"What's the trouble?" I asked Caroline.

"I'm afraid it's food poisoning. Arnold is telephoning for Richard."

"Anything I can do?"

"No, I'll let you know if there should be."

"Do you know what she's eaten?"

Caroline was exasperated. I knew that because her voice was so calm.

"No, Charles, not yet. We'll find out, if it's serious enough."

I was back on the landing as Arnold finished telephoning. Richard Grey, the third on my list of suspects, was a general medical practitioner with some unorthodox views, who often sent patients to Caroline.

"Is he coming?"

"At once, Mr. Charles, and I've asked him to bring his stomach pump. Madam said I was to make sure of that."

"Good. Go and tell her, will you, and then come back to me." I looked into the drawing room, where Alison was glancing through a copy of *Vogue*. "I'm sorry, I'll have to leave you alone for a few minutes," I said.

"Go right ahead, I'll be waiting."

Arnold came back immediately, but I had a feeling that he didn't want to talk to me.

"Do you know what Bessie's eaten tonight, Arnold?"

"The same as all the rest of us, sir." He sounded on the defensive.

"What was it?"

"You know, sir. We always have a little snack on these party nights. It might have been anything—a sandwich, a bridge roll, the sweets. It isn't going to be easy to find out, Mr. Charles. Especially with Bessie."

"See if you can do better than that," I said. "The catering man is still here, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ask him whether he noticed what Bessie had to eat, will you?"

Arnold hesitated.

"What's the matter, Arnold?" I asked sharply.

"I'm—I'm worried, Mr. Charles. I really am. If Bessie has been taken ill, some of the guests may have been affected, too. If there was something in the buffet—"

"That's just what I'm trying to find out. We may have to telephone everyone and warn them to see a doctor if they feel sick. On the other hand, if Bessie had something no one else had, it won't matter."

"I'll see what I can do," Arnold promised. "I do hope Dr. Grey isn't going to be long."

IT WAS so seldom that anything disturbed Arnold that I dwelt on his dismay as I glanced at my watch. Richard Grey lived only a few blocks away, and should arrive within ten minutes. I decided to go down and wait for him. I hurried downstairs, and unlatched the front door, then stood on the porch.

I wondered what would happen if Bessie died. There would have to be a post-mortem—the first thing would be to notify the police.

I took a turn up and down.

At that moment, my own affairs were at the back of my mind, and in no way oppressive. I kept thinking about the fuss and bother that would result, should Bessie die, told myself I was being callous. The thing to do was work to keep her alive. I was too preoccupied with death.

A car pulled up and Richard Grey jumped out.

"Hello, Charles! You look like a ghost. Waiting for me?"

He leaned inside the car for his black bag, then ran up the porch steps. Richard was a hustler, a tall, lean—almost lanky—man, with a boyish face and a boyish manner. Most people liked him at first sight. I had to come to the conclusion that he had little depth of char-

acter, but was sincere and clever in his own sphere.

"What's it all about? Ptomaine poisoning?"

"Probably. I wondered whether to telephone a warning to everyone.

"Not yet," he said hastily. "It may be nothing to do with the food. Could be gastric flu. Could be an appendix. Could be almost anything. Bessie's the fat baggage, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"Then it could be simply overeating, like little boys with green apples. Caroline all right?"

"Yes."

"She's always at her best on party nights. Wish I could have made it. I was helping a misguided woman bring another brat into the world. Let's see, the staff rooms are at the end of the upstairs passage, aren't they?"

"Yes, I'll show you—" I began.

He didn't need showing, but stalked off, easily outpacing me. He didn't hesitate at the door, either. I wondered how well he knew the house.

The door slammed behind him, and I thought it cut off a scream.

Chapter V

ALISON was standing by the fireplace, wearing her plastic raincoat.

"Charles, I'm in your way," she said. "Don't tell me I'm not, out of politeness. I'll run along now but I'll call you tomorrow to see if it's still all right for you to take me around—if it's not, I'll be glad if you'll tell me."

"There's not the slightest need for you to go," I said.

"Oh, but there is. You don't have to tell me what the trouble is."

"It's quite simple. One of the maids has been taken ill, and it looks like food poisoning. Everything will soon be all right. Take that thing off, and—"

"Good night, Charles." She touched my hand, and went to the door.

"Look here, I'll run you to your hotel," I said.

"You will do nothing of the kind. I can ride in one of your funny little taxis."

Before I could make any attempt to stop her, she was hurrying down the steps. There were plenty of taxis at that hour of the evening, and I wasn't greatly worried about her. I put the car away in a nearby garage, and was away from the house for about ten minutes. Arnold came out of the ante-room as I arrived on the landing.

"Any improvement?"

"No, Mr. Charles. She seemed to have eaten something of everything. The only unusual thing—"

"Well?"

"I don't really know whether it *is* unusual; I don't want to be a scaremonger," Arnold said. "But Bessie was all right until she took something off one of the plates—something that had been left by one of the guests. That's as far as I can tell now."

"Do you know what it was?"

"The girl who saw her *thinks* it was Scotch woodcock. Bessie didn't like it much, but she finished it. It wasn't long afterwards that she complained of having a pain in her stomach. I've asked the caterer to leave all the food here, Mr. Charles, and to put the Scotch woodcock aside. There are still a few pieces left."

"Then you've done all you could," I said. "Take it easy now, Arnold. Dr. Grey's here, and I expect he'll soon put her right."

I waited in my own room with the door open, so that I should know when anyone left the servant's quarters. I couldn't hear much. Now and again I thought I heard a scream, but it could easily have been imagination. My nerves weren't good and I felt myself trembling, from reaction. Of all nights, this had to happen tonight. Then the servants' door opened.

I hurried to my door and saw Caroline. It was a great shock. She didn't know that she was being watched, and had given way completely. But—to what? She leaned against the wall, her

face buried in her hands, her shoulders bowed, her whole body sagging. In all our years together, I had never seen Caroline like that.

Everywhere was deathly silence. She seemed to stand there for an age without moving. She wasn't crying; I had an absurd notion that she was holding her breath.

"Caroline, what's the matter?"

She started violently, snatching her hands away and turning to me. All color had gone, leaving her face waxen. But a metamorphosis took place in front of my eyes. She straightened up and squared her shoulders, and her arms fell to her sides. I doubt if anyone had greater will power.

"What are you doing there?" she asked. "You shouldn't have left Alison alone."

"She's gone. Caroline, what—"

"Bessie's dead," she said.

I feared that it was food poisoning. I hoped it was one of the other things Grey had suggested. I did not dream that it was murder.

I FOLLOWED Caroline into the drawing room. She took a cigarette from an ivory box, and a light from me. Her eyes were glassy.

"I'm terribly sorry," I said. "Does Richard know what it was?"

"He's not sure. He's going to analyze the contents of the stomach."

"If there's a risk of food poisoning, we ought to warn—"

"Can't say it looks like it," said Richard harshly. He must have been standing at the door. "Can't be sure yet. I'll be back in an hour, with a report. Could be one of several things. Just hold tight. I'll telephone you as soon as I can."

I wasn't completely reassured, although what he said was reasonable enough, and he was a fully qualified doctor. I didn't see him to the front door.

Caroline drew very deeply on her cigarette. Bessie had never been a favorite of hers, and would not have been with us so long had it been easy to get domes-

tic help. I was puzzled as to why her death affected Caroline so much.

"Why did Alison leave?" she asked.

"She felt that she was in the way."

"Are you going to take her out tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Good. She's coming to luncheon, did I tell you?"

"Would it be better to have lunch out, now?" I suggested.

"I suppose it might," said Caroline. "We'll decide in the morning. I—Charles, I'm sorry to worry you, but I'm upset. It was—horrible to see her die like that. Will you talk to Arnold, make all the arrangements? There's the laying out of the body, cleaning up—everything. I don't think I can stand it tonight."

"Of course I'll see to it," I said.

I was on the landing when Richard returned.

"Hello, old chap!" He came racing up the stairs, full of energy. "Where's Caroline? Resting, I hope. Bad show, for her. No need to worry though."

"Are you sure?"

"Not food—stomach contents all quite free of ptomaine and that kind of thing. I'm pretty sure she had a burst appendix. Probably had symptoms for some time. I—*what's that?*"

He spoke sharply enough to make me jump. I looked round and saw nothing.

"Someone was there," Richard growled. He strode to the anteroom and thrust it open. "Oh, it's you, Arnold. What are you sneaking about for?"

"Is the caterer needed any more, Mr. Charles?" Arnold looked straight at me.

"No," said Richard.

"Are you sure there's no need to keep any of the food, Richard?"

"Yes."

"All right, Arnold, thanks. He may leave now."

"Better tell Caroline," said Richard. He opened the drawing room door just ahead of me, but I looked past him into the room—and saw Caroline. She was sitting where Alison had been, leaning

forward, one hand stretched out, as if in appeal. The tense expression on her face reminded me of the moment when she came out of the servants' quarters. And she looked at Richard very differently from the way she looked at me.

I felt sure 'he' was Richard.

"It's all right," Richard said. "Appendix. Probably often had tummy-pains."

"Oh, yes. She did!" Caroline almost shouted the words.

"Simple, then." Richard glanced round at me. "Close the door, old chap." He took my arm, and led me to Caroline. When we were all together, he lowered his voice. "Better get it over, Charles. As I hadn't been called in before, I ought to send for another doctor. That would mean an autopsy. Possibly an inquest. I can give a death certificate. Strictly speaking, I shouldn't but I can. Up to you."

"Oh, please—" began Caroline. Looking back, I can fully recall their tension during those few minutes. I know now how much hung on my words, but at the time I was capable only of considering the actual issue.

I didn't want the police and a lot of formalities, and I had faith in Richard as a doctor.

"If you're prepared to give a certificate, you'd better go ahead," I said.

Caroline leaned back, and closed her eyes.

"That won't take long," said Richard. He rested a hand on Caroline's shoulder. There was something intimate about it. "You'd better get to bed, old girl. Had a heavy night. Don't worry."

I slept quite well that night. And I enjoyed every minute of my tour of London with Alison the next day.

TAKING visitors on a high-pressure sight-seeing tour of London isn't a thing that often appeals to me, but it did that day. Alison's interest in everything she saw, her unaffected expression of delight or disappointment, gave me as much fun as the trip gave her. She

had the quality of enjoying life, which I'd almost forgotten. At times, her zest made her seem like a girl of eighteen; at others, she made some mature comment which reminded me that she wasn't a girl.

Not until she had gone did I realize that I didn't know when I was going to see her again. I wished, almost desperately, that we had fixed another meeting.

It rained on Friday, the day of the funeral.

There weren't many present to mourn Bessie's passing. The small chapel of the crematorium at Hampstead was nearly empty. Arnold, Doris and a girl-friend of Bessie's attended. There was little real grief. Caroline and I were there, of course—and Richard Grey. Caroline had decided on the cremation and had signed the second doctor's certificate necessary before such a burial. She was a believer in cremation and her decision didn't surprise me.

After the brief service, as we walked through the grounds, Richard said, "That's that. Mind if I come back for a cup of tea?"

"Of course not," said Caroline.

Why was he sticking to us? I was angry, but couldn't be sure whether it was because of his callousness, because he was clinging to Caroline, or because I was so certain that he was Caroline's lover.

Once in the drawing room, he showed no sign of leaving, and after five o'clock I left them together.

I'd hardly got to my room when I missed my cigarette case. It must be on the arm of my chair, I thought.

I went back, and as I opened the door, heard Richard say:

"Of course he doesn't suspect."

"He must, Richard."

Then the telephone-bell rang, and I was able to go in without attracting much attention. Richard lounged back on the sofa, Caroline spoke: "Oh, hello, Alison . . . I'm so sorry, I can't do a thing tomorrow morning. Charles might

be able to . . . hold on, I'll call him." She turned round. "Charles, it's Alison, I promised to give her a run out to Windsor tomorrow, but I can't manage it. Can you?"

"Well—"

"Here is Charles, he'll speak to you," said Caroline, and held the receiver out to me.

Chapter VI

SATURDAY was a delightful day. I took Alison to Windsor. Afterwards, we had dinner at a Thameside hotel, and we danced. Holding her soft body close to mine, I found myself getting ideas about her, ideas which were delightfully pleasant—yet which I didn't want to have.

It was one o'clock in the morning before I left her at the Queen's Hotel, twenty minutes past when I reached Green Street. Arnold was walking toward me.

"Great Scott, Arnold, you don't often have a late night," I said as I pulled up. "Where have you been?"

"No—nowhere, sir. I couldn't sleep, Mr. Charles. I—I've hardly slept a wink since Bessie died.

"That's bad," I said. "Hop in, and we'll walk back from the garage. You can tell me what's on your mind."

"I don't want to worry you, sir."

"Nonsense!" I leaned over and opened the door. He sat silent as I drove to the garage. As we started back for the house, I said, "Now what's keeping you awake, Arnold? Were you there when Bessie died?"

"Not—not actually in the room, Mr. Charles." His voice was husky. "It wasn't just that, anyhow—I've seen plenty of people pass out of this world. Death doesn't worry me, but the way of it. I don't believe it was appendicitis, sir! Appendicitis isn't as sudden as that. I'm frightened!"

"Dr. Grey—"

"He'd do *anything* for Mrs. Galpin."

"Come, Arnold, he wouldn't sign a

false death certificate for anyone."

"I don't believe it was appendicitis and I don't believe he thought it was," said Arnold stubbornly. "Bessie was poisoned, Mr. Charles. She was poisoned, in mistake for—"

He hesitated.

"Tell me what you think," I said.

"I don't know *what* to think, sir, but I—I'm afraid she was poisoned with something meant for you."

Arnold had had a strict non-conformist upbringing and his particular Christian sect believed in total abstention from alcohol. When we reached the house I made him go into the kitchen to make some coffee, and when he brought it up, we sat opposite each other in the big armchairs in my room.

"Now tell me everything," I said.

"It's a terrible thing to suggest," he began.

"More terrible if you thought it and didn't tell me."

"Yes, that's right." He brightened perceptibly. "Dr. Grey's very fond of Mrs. Galpin, sir."

"Things like that happen, Arnold. No one is wholly to blame."

"I know, but—but unless I make everything clear you—you won't see what I mean. I don't suggest there's anything wrong, not really wrong, but—well, he's in love with her. You might as well call a spade a spade, mightn't you?"

"Certainly, in the circumstances."

"And—and I think she—"

"You think she's fond of him, too."

"I do, Mr. Charles. I've had to stand by and watch it growing. I'm very, very fond of Mrs. Galpin, sir. Next to you, there's no one I like better in the world. I'd do anything for her, I would really. And it was none of my business to tell you what I noticed. How often he came here, and—well, I needn't say any more about that, need I? Only that I don't know there is anything *really* wrong, if you get my meaning."

"I do, Arnold."

"It seemed to me a funny thing he wasn't at the party on Tuesday. It's the

first one he's missed, to my knowledge, since he started to come. I couldn't help wondering why. And then you were taken with one of your attacks and the American lady helped you, so you missed it."

"What do you mean by *it*?"

"Well, sir, you missed supper. There was a special plate, put aside for you, Mrs. Galpin nearly always makes sure of that, doesn't she?"

"Yes."

"She told me to keep one aside, as usual. It was on a corner table, not easy to get at. Once one of the guests stretched out for it, and she said no, that wasn't for them. Then she was buttonholed by Mr. Tremaine and Mr. Wilding, and couldn't get away. I'd omitted to tell Bessie about—about the special plate, and Bessie helped to clear. She ate everything on that plate, sir. I made up another one for you, which you ate, sir. But Bessie ate the first plate."

I TOLD Arnold that now he had talked, his conscience could be quite clear. I promised to think about it, and talk to him again next day. Meanwhile, he was to keep what he knew absolutely to himself—a superfluous reminder, of course. Next morning, I told Arnold to try to find out from our cook and the caterer's waiter whether they had seen Bessie eating the food. I also promised that I would find out more about the different ways appendicitis could take effect.

That meant consulting a surgeon, and it had to be someone who did not know Caroline or Richard. Eventually, I chose Norman Dale, an old school friend who had a big practice in Chelsea. Perhaps it was Alison's interest in Chelsea that made me decide to go there. I remembered, as I went to the garage for the car, that we hadn't had time to visit this part of London during our tour.

As I drove out of the garage into Green Street, Alison was turning the corner.

"Hello, Charles! Are you busy this morning?"

"Well, I have a call to make."

"Isn't that just too bad," said Alison. "I'm leaving for Paris tomorrow, and I thought maybe you could take me to Chelsea."

"Get in," I said, opening the door. "I'm going to Chelsea now. You can poke 'round while I'm there."

"No, Charles, I'm not going to impose—"

"Hop in."

I drove to the Chelsea Hospital where, obligingly, several pensioners in their bright red uniforms were taking the air. Then I made a detour, to show her the spot where Sir Thomas More had lived when Chelsea was a village, then to the river, along Cheyne Walk, Queen Anne's Mansions, with their mellow red brick and their history. Alison listened to the little I could tell her with eager interest. I was happy, sitting there beside her.

Norman Dale's house was a small Georgian period piece on a road leading from the Embankment. In the low brick wall surrounding the garden was a small wrought-iron gate and, beside the gate, Norman's brass plate.

"If I were you, I'd go straight along here for two blocks," I said, "and then turn left, then left again and again. Most of the houses have attics and most of the attics are studios. Just poke around, and be back in half an hour or so."

"Fine. It's good to hear someone say *block* again." She didn't get out. "I'm just going to sit here for a few minutes and smoke a cigarette," she said. "You hurry along. . . ."

A neatly dressed maid opened the door.

"Good morning, sir . . . Yes, the doctor is expecting you, will you please wait in the surgery?"

Before long, Norman Dale breezed in.

"Sit down, Charles, and tell me all about what's troubling you."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Thought you'd come for a check-over." Norman leaned back and placed the tips of stubby fingers together.

"Sure you're all right?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Bit pale about the gills," he announced. "Still, it's up to you to do the talking. How's your wife?"

"Pretty fit."

"Didn't just come to pass the time of day, did you?"

I laughed. "No. It's about a friend of mine."

"Get it off your chest," he said.

"Thanks. What symptoms do you get with appendicitis?"

"Dozens. The most usual is what most people mistakenly call pain in the tummy. Actually it's lower down, on the right side."

"How long do the symptoms last?"

"Well, I can't give you a detailed timetable. I've known people with murmuring appendices to grumble and complain about it for years, but it never bursts—never gets really acute. On the other hand, I've known people who were absolutely unaware of any trouble in that region to get an acute pain and have to be rushed off to hospital at a moment's notice."

"And then?"

"Then the knife is necessary."

"What's the quickest fatality you've ever known from it?"

"Hmmm." His eyes didn't flicker. "Forty-eight hours, a little less. I take it you mean, if you neglect it after it bursts, how long do you live?"

"Yes."

"Get this clear, Charles. You don't have to die with a burst appendix. Not by a long way. Most operations are necessary because of the burst and most of the patients recover. But if they're away from medical help or if they're fool enough not to send for it—well, possibly only twenty-four hours. I'd say forty-eight, though."

"If my friend had murmurings, as you call them, and then it burst, would he be sick?"

"Very."

"And how long would the vomiting go on?"

"Periodically, for a long time. Twenty-four hours or more until there was nothing left to vomit, and even then you'd think there was something."

"I suppose it couldn't happen quicker?"

"Everything's possible with the human body," said Norman, rather senten-



OLD FRIENDS MEET

It's going to be a long time before vacations are going to have any appeal to a York, Neb., prisoner. After he escaped, he went to a nearby recreation spot for a vacation. He was promptly back in the jug. Because, also taking a vacation there, was a prison guard!

—Mark Wall

tiously. "No rule without its exception, you know. But if you had a burst appendix, you'd be alive to know all about it for twenty-four hours or more."

Bessie hadn't died from appendicitis.

ALISON was sitting in the car, smoking. I didn't ask how her sightseeing had gone. As I drove away, she rested her hand on my arm.

"What did the doctor have to say?" she asked.

"About what?"

"Oh, Charles, I'm sorry." She looked really distressed. "I thought—" She turned and faced me. "You didn't go to see that doctor because of any illness? You're not sick, are you?"

"Not in any way that he could help," I said.

"Then what way, Charles?"

"It doesn't matter," I said. "Forget it."

"Surely."

"Would you like a drive out of London?" I asked.

"I'd love it." But her voice was flat.

I drove through Fulham, across the broad sweep of the new Putney Bridge, to Putney Heath. I pulled in outside the Green Man.

"Let's have a drink," I said. "We'll have it outside; the weather's too nice to stick indoors."

"Just as you like, Charles. Will it be all right if I have some beer? I haven't tasted English beer yet."

I ordered two light ales, and we sat on a rustic seat in front of the newish brick building.

"What's on your mind, Charles? Is it—what I said?"

"No."

"I didn't mean—"

"It doesn't matter what you meant," I said. "Very little matters to me, Alison. I'm all mixed up."

Then I told her about Madrigal's verdict.

Alison said, "If I were you, Charles, I think I'd like to spend all the time I could with Nigel."

"That's exactly what I feel," I said quietly. "But I'm not sure it would be a good thing. The more I was with him, the worse I should feel. I can't tell him. I didn't intend to tell anyone. It's bad enough living in a shadow yourself; it would be worse if the shadow touched everyone near you. Caroline or Nigel—they'd think about nothing else. They'd feel so desperately sorry for me, it would darken their lives. There's no need for that."

"Perhaps not," she said. "No need to darken Nigel's, but if you told Caroline—" She hesitated. "If you told Caroline, perhaps she'd feel differently."

"Feel differently about what?"

"About you—toward you. You're unhappy with Caroline and Caroline is unhappy with you. This might bring you together."

"I don't think so," I said. "How did you know, Alison?"

"Anyone with clear vision can see it, Charles. I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yes."

"A thing like this might make all the difference. What were the happiest days of your life, Charles?"

"I suppose—the first few years of my marriage."

"If you could recapture that happiness, then—"

"I'll never recapture happiness with Caroline. I don't know that happiness matters or is possible. Six months isn't long. It gives me time to do certain things, that's all."

"Have you decided what to do?"

"No."

"The important thing is to make sure you do the right thing," said Alison.

"I know."

"You're dead wrong about one thing," Alison told me. "Six months isn't too short for happiness, Charles. Now this Madrigal. Is he a man you can talk to freely?"

"Not—really."

"This Dr. Dale—is *he*?"

"He's a busy man."

"Isn't there anyone you can talk to freely? About everything, Charles. Not only just your illness, but all the other things that worry you. Caroline, especially. It never helps if you have to keep a lot to yourself."

"No," I said, "there's no one."

She said, "If ever you think of anyone you can talk to about everything, just talk, Charles."

"Yes, I think I will."

The journey back was a quiet one, and we were within sight of the Queen's Hotel when I said, "You leave for Paris in the morning, do you?"

"From Victoria Station at ten-thirty."

"I hope you have a wonderful trip, Alison. You'll like Paris. Where are you going to stay?"

"The Rivoli. Is that all right?"

"Oh, yes. Good position, near the Louvre. You'll be all right there. When are you coming back to England?"

"In about five weeks, I guess."

They would be vital weeks, nearly a quarter of what remained to me.

"Call me as soon as you arrive."

"Of course," said Alison. "So long, Charles."

She walked briskly and lightly up the steps, her slim ankles and trim high-heeled shoes and the black skirt swirling about them, catching my eye. She didn't look back.

Chapter VII

ARNOLD looked at me intently, and asked, "Are you sure you're trying to find out the truth, Mr. Charles?"

"There isn't much more I can do," I said.

"You must find out for sure, sir. You must." Arnold shifted uneasily in the chair opposite me. "If I'm wrong, then I've done a terrible thing by suggesting it. If I'm right, then—then—"

During the three days since Alison had gone, I'd reached the conclusion that it was pointless to try to investigate any more. I'd asked another doctor, who had told me much the same as Norman Dale. I was sure Bessie hadn't died from appendicitis, but couldn't prove it. They couldn't exhume ashes.

"If I'm right, there might be another attempt, Mr. Charles. In fairness to everyone, including Master Nigel, you must find out."

"I'll be careful," I said.

Arnold had put his finger on the weak spot of my argument—Nigel. If Caroline's lover were trying to murder me, what kind of a guardian would he be for Nigel?

"That just isn't good enough, sir!" Arnold was tense. "You must know. You really must. You ought to go to the police."

"I don't think there's enough evidence to justify calling in the police," I said in a tone of finality. "Leave it to me, Arnold. I won't be careless."

He said, "You don't want to believe it, Mr. Charles, do you? But you won't do any good to anyone by shutting your

eyes to it."

There was dignity in his persistence. He was determined to get action of some kind, and trying all ways to force my hand. By mentioning Nigel, he had started another train of thought. Suddenly I decided to see Nigel, who was at Heygate that weekend.

"I'm not going to believe it, Arnold, until I know it's true. Nor are you."

"And you won't go to the police?"

"I'll go to the police the moment I think I should, or the moment anything else happens to worry me."

He wasn't satisfied, but he stopped pressing me. He went off to his own room, harassed and obsessed. I went along to the drawing room.

I sat down, and something seemed to explode in my mind. Arnold was right—absolutely right. If Caroline and her lover were conspiring to murder me, I must take action. Then a simple answer to the problem presented itself as swiftly as the horror had come. If Caroline knew that I was soon to die, she wouldn't try to kill me. So—I must tell Caroline. No need to mention my suspicions, only tell her what Madrigal had said.

The telephone rang. I picked up the receiver.

"Charles Galpin speaking."

"Hello, Galpin." That was Madrigal's voice. "How are you?"

I said, "Oh, I'm all right. I didn't expect to hear from you."

"I did expect to hear from you," he said. "Why haven't you been to see me again?"

"I didn't see why I should."

"Have you told your wife?"

"No."

"Anyone?"

I lied. "No."

"Are you free to have dinner with me tomorrow night?" asked Madrigal.

"Well—"

"Meet me at the General Medical Club at seven," said Madrigal, with a tone of finality. "Good-by."

As I replaced the receiver, I pictured Alison, sitting outside the Green Man

and asking me whether Madrigal was human—telling me, also, that it was obvious that I didn't like him. I'd done him less than justice; he was human, all right. Would it be better to see him before telling Caroline? He was a man whose judgment would be dispassionate and to whom I could safely tell the whole truth, including my suspicions. See him tomorrow, Nigel on Saturday and Sunday, and then decide.

Then out of the blue, someone screamed.

IT CAME from downstairs, a high-pitched, frightened cry. I stiffened and stared toward the door. The cry was real and yet did not seem real. Another scream, then footsteps clattered in the hall, as someone raced upstairs. I sprang to the door and reached the landing as Miss Stewart, Caroline's nurse-receptionist, reached the head of the stairs. Her face was as white as the smock she was wearing.

"What is it?" I gripped her arm. "What's the matter?"

"The—the doctor!"

By "doctor" she meant Caroline.

"Fetch Arnold," I said, and ran downstairs. The door of the consulting room was wide open. So was the street door.

I reached Caroline's room, afraid of what I might find. Then, stepping inside, I saw her lying in a crumpled heap by the side of the revolving couch she uses for her patients.

* * *

I knelt beside her, and turned her head and shoulders around, so that I could see her face and make her more comfortable. Her neck was red and puffy. There were angry marks on it, both bruises and scratches. I put her on the couch and straightened her arms and legs. Her head lolled back. I felt sure that she was dead. But on the chance that she might be alive, I tried artificial respiration. It was fairly easy, as she was lying on that couch where

she had worked on so many people.

There was a movement at the door. Arnold and Miss Stewart had arrived.

"Send for Dr. Grey," I ordered.

"Yes, sir." Arnold went to the downstairs telephone, which was in the hall. As he touched it, another bell started to ring—the drawing room telephone. It went on and on. Arnold fumbled with the dial of this one, while Miss Stewart came up. "Let me take over, sir."

I stood aside. Miss Stewart was a big woman, with large, capable hands. As she took over, Arnold turned from the telephone.

"There's no answer, Mr. Charles."

The bell up stairs was still ringing.

"Dial again," I said. "There's always someone at his house. If you can't get him, get another doctor."

As I went upstairs, I was sweating freely. The upstairs bell didn't stop.

I snatched at the telephone.

"Hello!"

"That you, Charles?" It was Tommy Wilding. "Is Caroline about?"

"No. Ring up later, will you? 'Bye."

"Half a mo', old chap!" But I banged the receiver down. Going downstairs, I looked at my watch. It was ten past five. Arnold came out of the consulting room.

"Dr. Grey's coming at once, sir."

"Good."

I pushed past him, into the room, and saw Miss Stewart astride the body of Caroline, moving rhythmically, big hands pressing on the ribs slowly and deliberately.

By the time Richard Grey arrived, Caroline was breathing evenly.

Richard came striding in, bag swinging from his left hand. "What's all this?"

"Someone tried to strangle Caroline. I think she's all right."

Richard went to Caroline, lifted her gently and turned her on her back.

"Clear out, Charles," he growled. "Nurse, you stay here. Charles—hot coffee, hot-water bottles in her bed, and get it all ready quickly."

I went out. Arnold wasn't in sight, nor was he in the drawing room. I went along to the kitchen and found him putting the coffee percolator on the stove. Hot water was splashing into the sink. He took a large kettle and filled it with the hot water.

"I was coming to tell you to fix all this," I said.

"I thought it would be needed, sir. Is she—"

"She'll be all right."

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Yes, we were in time."

"You see what it means, don't you?"

"I see what it can mean, Arnold. If someone has attempted to kill her now, then the poisoning—"

"Might have been meant for her," finished Arnold. "I can't make it out, Mr. Charles. Who hates her so much? Who hates you? I just can't make it out."

"Fill the hot-water bottles," I said. "I'll go and turn her bed down."

MISS STEWART was coming briskly upstairs, quite composed. "I'll be in Mrs. Galpin's room," I said, and she followed me. There Miss Stewart took a stand.

"I'll see to all this, sir."

"Thanks. How is she?"

"The doctor thinks she will be all right," said Miss Stewart, stripping off the bedspread. "I'm sorry I made a fool of myself."

"Great scott, no blame to you!"

"It was such a shock," she said. "I'd been out for half an hour; the doctor sent me on an errand. So I don't know who it was, sir, but it must have been one of the patients." She seemed emphatic.

"Why?"

"Well, I—but I'm talking nonsense!" Miss Stewart turned the bedclothes down and smacked one of the pillows. "I don't know which it could have been. Who would want to murder the doctor? She's so good to all of them. It just doesn't make sense, does it?"

I thought Miss Stewart was lying. I

thought she had some idea who the assailant had been. But at that moment Arnold came in with two rubber hot-water bottles, and I heard Richard on the stairs. I went out.

"Charles, I want a word with you," said Richard, and led the way to the drawing room. "Do you know who it was?"

"No."

"Caroline does. One of her patients had a brainstorm. Medical job—psychopathic case. She had several. She doesn't want the police informed. Have you telephoned them?"

"Not yet."

"Then don't. Must go now and see how she is. Got the bed ready?"

"Yes. Richard—"

"No time to talk now."

"Then you'll make time," I said sharply. "You're very reluctant to let the police know when we have trouble here, aren't you?"

"Don't be a fool! This is a professional matter."

"Neither you nor Caroline is always right," I said. "I'm going to tell the police."

I strode across to the telephone, but he was by my side before I could finish dialing. He grabbed my shoulder and swung me around.

"Stop that!"

"Take your hands off me!"

"I'm not going to let you telephone Scotland Yard until you've spoken to Caroline." He tried to pull the telephone out of my grasp, so I bunched my other fist and hit him. I struck at his stomach and the wind exploded out of him. He staggered several feet, falling up against a chair. His only expression was one of astonishment.

Arnold came in.

"What is it?" I snapped.

"Mrs. Galpin is asking for you, Mr. Charles."

"See—see her, first," Richard pleaded. He stood upright, pressing a hand against his stomach.

"She'll have to be pretty convincing,"

I said. "All right, Arnold, I'll come right away."

I HADN'T seen Caroline in bed for— months. It might have been a year. She reclined against the pillows, disheveled and flushed. "All right, Miss Stewart," I said as I entered. "Wait in the drawing room, will you?" The door closed after her with a snap. I went to the side of the bed. "Who did it, Caroline?" I asked.

She looked at me levelly as she said, "One of my patients. I can't tell you which. It would be betraying a professional confidence."

I laughed. "Nonsense. Who was it?"

"I'm not going to name the woman, Charles."

"Woman?" I said skeptically.

"Yes. She came for treatment in the usual way. She'd telephoned this afternoon for an appointment and I fitted it in. I've known for some time that she was also having psychiatric treatment, and that she had a tendency toward violence. I oughtn't to have sent Miss Stewart out. It was foolish of me. But the patient has never given me any trouble before."

"And what happened?"

"Charles, I'm sorry but I don't feel like talking about it."

"Caroline, someone tried to murder you. The police ought to be informed. Richard says that you don't want that. But I shall insist, unless there is a very strong reason why they shouldn't be summoned. Perhaps this isn't the first attempt."

"Charles!"

"Caroline, I don't like the way you and Richard are behaving over this. If it was a patient, all right—tell me her name. I'll see the psychiatrist who's treating her, and make sure that she is carefully watched. If she's homicidal, she might attack anyone."

"I'll tell the psychiatrist."

"My job, Caroline, and I'm going to see it through."

She closed her eyes, and was silent

for some time. She almost looked her usual self. The fluffy angora wool hid the swelling bruises on her neck, and the only other signs of violence were three scratches, one of which had bled a little. Then: "Don't worry me now, Charles, please. We'll talk about it again, later."

"What was the name of your patient, Caroline?"

"Please, Charles." She opened her eyes. "You may be right, but I'm all mixed up about it. Give me a few hours rest. Perhaps I'll see things more clearly tonight. Just wait until I feel better."

Caroline, pleading with me, was a new experience. "All right, Caroline. But I intend to know who that woman is before the day's out."

She said, "Yes, Charles. Thank you for being patient."

I went out, closing the door quietly. The drawing room door was open, and before I reached it, Richard came out.

"Well?"

"I've given her a few hours to think about it."

"You ought to be damned well ashamed of yourself. In her condition, she—"

"Shut up, Richard. This was attempted murder. And don't put on your righteous indignation act. You've too much on your conscience."

HE TURNED color in front of my eyes, and backed into the room.

"What do you mean, Charles? What are you hinting at?"

"Signing a false medical certificate isn't a thing to be proud about, is it?"

He paled.

"Sit down," I said. "Bessie didn't die of appendicitis. I know how Bessie died. And I know that someone else was the intended victim. Did you supply the poison?"

He gasped. "You must be crazy!"

"Was it meant for Caroline or me?"

"You *are* crazy! Bessie died of acute appendicitis."

"It can be proved that she didn't," I said.

"That's a lie!"

"All right, please yourself. But get this clear. I'm going to see the thing through."

He was quivering with anger.

"If you do anything to harm Caroline, I'll kill you. Understand that! Hurt her, and I'll kill you."

"There's another thing you forget," I said. "I'm her legal husband and her

She drew back, as if I'd struck her. Perhaps she was afraid that I would. The surge of rage hadn't completely gone and she had seen it at its height. I think I might have battered him to death. I knew I had hurt him, and also knew that I hadn't just turned on Richard Grey. When I'd hit him, I had struck out at the past: at unhappiness, at the cruelty of Caroline's double life, and at



PAID IN FULL

The Soo Line Railroad has finally found out what happened to a nine-foot pole that disappeared from the right-of-way 23 years ago. The company received a five-dollar bill in the mail with an unsigned note explaining the money was in payment "for the pole I snitched in 1929, when I needed it for a clothes line pole."

—Walt Robbins

custodian in law. Get out!"

He turned on his heel and went out, slamming the door. I leapt across the room, flung open the door and saw him approaching Caroline's room.

I shouted, "Come away from there!"

He didn't look 'round, but touched the handle of the door. Before he could open it, I was on him. I smashed a fist against the side of his head, pushed him against the wall, and hit him again as he tried to turn around. He cried out, weakly, and began to slide down the wall. I struck again and again. He fell clumsily. I yanked him to his feet and pushed him towards the head of the stairs.

Caroline's door opened.

"Charles!" It was Caroline, not Miss Stewart. "Charles!" Caroline, behind me, clutched at my arm. I shook myself free, but Richard had had time to recover, and he didn't show fight. He backed hastily down the stairs, turned and ran. I didn't go after him.

Caroline was trembling. "Charles, you might have killed him."

"Get back to bed," I ordered. "I'll see you later. A fine lover you've got. A fine, brave, handsome lover!"

its cunning. I had hit out to save myself from murder, too. All the dead years had come to life and mocked me, and I'd attacked them—and would attack again.

I didn't feel violent toward Caroline. She was safe enough, even if she didn't realize it. I almost felt sorry for her because I could see that she was dumfounded. Perhaps she knew now that I would never again submit to her rule.

The front door slammed.

"Look at him running," I sneered. "Scared out of his wits. I thought better of you."

"Oh, you fool," Caroline said. "You fool."

Chapter VIII

SHE was no longer flushed but very pale. I led her back to the bedroom. I helped her back into bed. She wore a pale green nightdress that clung to her body. She was very warm, I could feel the clamminess of her skin through the flimsy silk of the nightdress.

I pulled the clothes over her.

"Lie back and take it easy," I said. "If you get out of bed again, you might have

a serious relapse. I shall send for Norman Dale. He can look after you."

Miss Stewart was waiting outside the door.

"See how Mrs. Galpin is, and let me know," I said.

"Yes—yes, sir." She hesitated. "Dr. Grey asked me to get his case."

"I'll take it."

The black case was closed. I glanced 'round, saw nothing else belonging to him, picked up the case and took it on to the landing. Arnold was now at the head of the stairs, Richard at the foot. "Take this down to Dr. Grey, Arnold." I ordered. "If Dr. Grey calls when I'm not in, he is not to be admitted. If I am in, he is not to be admitted until you have spoken to me."

"Very good, sir."

Richard didn't say a word, just took the case and hurried out with a scared look. I telephoned Dale, and was told he wouldn't be in for another half-hour. I left a message, asking him to come around when he returned, then sat back to think. One thing puzzled me—that cry of Caroline's.

Oh, you fool. You fool!

It wasn't exactly the comment one would expect after accusing one's wife of having a lover.

I was trying to imagine why she had spoken like that when I felt a twinge of pain at the back of my head—the old warning. A blackout was coming. It came quickly, as quickly as on the night of the party. I just had time to be grateful that it hadn't come earlier.

* * *

Norman Dale was dressed in tails. The ends of his scarf hung down to his big stomach and swayed to and fro as he came into the drawing room. I was on the sofa where Miss Stewart had put me when she found me. I knew Dale had arrived twenty minutes or so ago, and that Arnold and Miss Stewart had talked to him.

He planted himself in front of me.

"What's all this, Charles?"

"Bad show, isn't it?"

"Funny kind of appendicitis."

"That joke's over. Sit down."

"Some husbands would inquire about their wives."

"Oh, yes. How is Caroline?"

"She's to stay where she is for a couple of days. Have you sent for the police?"

"No. Can I get you a drink?"

"You can get me a double whisky and have one yourself. You look all in. Been to a doctor about yourself lately?"

"Dozens." I went to the cabinet and poured the drinks. As usual, when I had completely recovered from a blackout, my mind was very clear. "If Caroline's careful, she'll be all right?"

"Yes. The bruises won't disappear for a few days." He took the drink, but held it away from his lips and looked at me over the brim of the glass. "Did you attack her?"

I nearly dropped my glass.

"Don't be crazy!"

"I'm being logical. Wife murderously assaulted, nurse and servant lying like troopers, husband looking as if he's just recovered from a brainstorm. It won't do, Charles."

"I did not attack her. What did they tell you?"

"Some fantastic story about a patient who went berserk."

DALE took a long drink and looked at me intently. "Now listen to me, Charles. As a doctor, I owe certain obligations to society, and that, in this instance, means to the police. Your wife has been savagely attacked and I don't believe this bunkum about a homicidal patient. I don't believe anything I've been told. The nurse said no other doctor had been called, but a stethoscope is on the floor by the dressing table."

"Could be Caroline's," I said. Of course, it was Richard's. I'd missed it.

"So you're going to keep on lying."

"You've got the wrong end of the stick," I said. "But you're right about

the other doctor. It was a friend of the family, and he left somewhat hurriedly. But that was after the assault on Caroline. The nurse was out on an errand. Caroline says that a special patient, who rang up for an appointment, attacked her. I've no evidence that it's false. You're not being asked to cover anything up. I haven't laid a hand on Caroline, except to put her to bed."

He said, "Hmmm," stretched out his hand and lifted mine. "Who have you been knocking about?"

"The friend of the family."

"Well, you certainly didn't get those knuckles knocking your wife about." He turned away and sat on the arm of a chair. "If this story is true, why haven't you sent for the police?"

"Isn't it a sound medical axiom to think of the patient first?"

"I'd want to know more about that patient. A homicidal maniac musn't run around loose."

"She won't. for long. I'll handle that side of it, Norman. Just look after Caroline, and leave the rest to me."

"I oughtn't to." He finished his drink. "Damn it, no! I won't."

"Where are you going from here?" I asked abruptly.

"Trust you to pick tonight. My anniversary, and I'm taking my wife out. She's downstairs in the car."

"Call on your way back," I suggested. "You may find the police on the premises. If I can't get more satisfaction out of Caroline, I'm going to send for them. Is it all right for me to talk to her?"

"No. I've given her a sleeping pill. I'll be in early in the morning, and we'll decide what to do then. If there is any emergency, you'll find me at the Dorchester until midnight. Home after that."

* * *

It was morning.

There was a telephone in Caroline's room, and when I reached the door, I

heard her speaking. I strained my ears, hoping to catch what she said, but her voice was too low. She was replacing the receiver when I went in.

Arnold had told me that Caroline was much more herself, and she looked it. A breakfast tray was on the bedside table. Her eyes were clear and bright, and she smiled at me almost gaily.

"Who was that?" I asked.

"A patient."

"Why lie to me, Caroline? That was Richard, wasn't it?"

"So you're still the new Charles," she said, half-mocking. "Yes, it was Richard. We might as well be candid from now on."

"Good. Is Richard your lover?"

"No. Charles, he is not."

"Who is?"

"I'm not going to be so candid as all that," said Caroline. "I might have been, had you asked me yesterday. I don't like lying any more than you do, Charles. This miserable deceit, the twisting and turning—but no, I won't tell you now. Not after the way you attacked Richard."

"Who was your homicidal patient?" I asked. "Norman Dale is coming in again soon. He wanted to tell Scotland Yard last night. I persuaded him to wait, hoping you'd tell the truth. Was it a patient?"

"Yes, of course," she said.

CAROLINE gave me a long, level look. "I've decided to tell you who it was, on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That you'll see her, before you say anything to anyone else."

"I can't speak for Norman Dale."

"You should never have called him in," said Caroline. "But I think he'll be reasonable, if he knows who the girl is and who is treating her."

"He hasn't much time for psychiatrists."

"Nor for osteopaths, but not all of us stink in his nostrils," Caroline said, and there was bitterness in her voice.

"The patient is quite a young woman. She had a bad time during the war. The surgeons patched her up and made a fair job of it, but she's had a lot of spinal trouble and was sent to me. She's now very much better, physically. I'd nearly finished with her. She was believed to be cured of the other trouble—"

"What other trouble?"

"The homicidal tendency."

"So you knew she had it."

"Oh, yes," said Caroline calmly. "You'll probably understand it best if I tell you she has a hate complex. There are two parts to the cure. First, to get her right physically; second, to find out more about her childhood, bring the old hatred to the surface, Richard was doing one, I was doing the other."

"Richard!"

"Yes, he practises psychiatry as well as general medicine. He does it quietly. That's one reason why he was so anxious not to tell the police. I didn't want you to know who her doctor was."

"If the police knew one of Richard's patients was running around strangling people, they wouldn't much like it," I said dryly.

"It might ruin Richard."

"A very fine argument for going to the police."

"I don't think I like this new Charles," she said. "What made you change?"

"Bessie's murder," I said.

She didn't flinch, didn't show any sign that she was surprised. So Richard had told her what I suspected. She continued to look at me calculatingly.

"Go away, Charles," she said at last. "I can't stand you any longer,"

"I don't yet know your patient's name."

Then there was a tap at the door. I called. "Who is it?"

"Miss Stewart, sir."

"Come in."

She came in smartly. "Good morning, sir. Doctor, Miss Wilberforce has called."

Caroline sat up. She looked really astounded.

"Who?"

"Miss Wilberforce, Doctor."

Caroline looked at me, as if she were scared, and I wasn't used to that. "This doesn't make sense," she said in a low-pitched voice. "She oughtn't to have come here. She can't remember what happened." Caroline flung back the bed-clothes. "I must see her."

I caught her arm. "You're to stay in bed, Caroline. Doctor's orders. Is Miss Wilberforce alone?" I asked Miss Stewart.

"No, sir. Dr. Grey is with her. Mr. Arnold asked him to stay in the waiting room, sir."

"Send Miss Wilberforce up here, alone," I said. She went and I faced Caroline again. "Is Miss Wilberforce your homicidal patient?"

"Yes! She shouldn't—"

"If you're going to say she shouldn't be allowed up here alone, don't worry. I can look after you far better than Richard can."

"Charles, listen to me." Caroline clutched my hand. "She's a psychopathic case. I can't understand why Richard has brought her here, but don't tell her what she did. It might do irreparable harm to her. Promise me that, Charles."

There was another tap at the door, and I called, "Come in."

MISS WILBERFORCE was a big woman — deep-breasted, broad-shouldered, with a pleasant moon-shaped face. She looked unnaturally calm—docile is the word. The thought of Caroline giving osteopathic treatment to a woman of this size was almost ludicrous, but there was no doubt what damage Miss Wilberforce could cause if she lost her self-control.

"Hello, Miss Wilberforce," said Caroline. "I'm sorry I'm not able to give you treatment this morning, but—"

"That's all right," said Miss Wilberforce. "I'm very sorry about what happened last night, Doctor."

Miss Stewart interpolated, "Dr. Grey thought it better that she should know,

Doctor, because she remembered a little."

"I can't imagine what came over me," said Miss Wilberforce. "It was a terrible thing to do. The doctor says that I couldn't help myself. I certainly don't remember much about it, only that I wanted to see you very badly. I like coming to see you. I feel ever so much better after a treatment."

"Of course, you knew nothing about it," Caroline said, "and I'm sure it will never happen again. You mustn't worry about it."

"That's what Dr. Grey says, but it isn't very easy," said Miss Wilberforce. She looked down at her hands, obviously of great strength. "I'm ever so sorry. I've promised Dr. Grey that if I ever feel I want to see you again, when I haven't an appointment, I'll telephone him. Well, I'd better be going. Dr. Grey said I wasn't to stay up here too long, because it might make you more ill. Good-by."

"Good-by."

"Good-by, sir," said Miss Wilberforce to me. She turned and trotted out of the room, like an obedient spaniel at the behest of its mistress.

Footsteps faded, and I was conscious of Caroline's gaze. "That girl might go completely insane," she said. "Richard must have told her, just so that you should be convinced of the truth. He shouldn't have done it, but I don't blame him. If she does go mad, I shall blame you, Charles."

I said, "Now you're getting hysterical." She didn't answer back, and I went on, "I'll take a lot of responsibility for many things, but not for Richard's idiocy. You tell me he's not your lover and I'll take your word for it, but that puts a lot more blame on your shoulders. He hardly knows what he's doing. He covered up a murder, and that could get him a long prison sentence. He's running to seed, too. And it's simply because he's in love with you. If anything happens to Miss Wilberforce or to anyone, don't shift the blame. It's yours."

There was hatred in her eyes. "Am I

responsible if a man falls in love with me?"

"A little while ago I would have said no. I've changed my mind. You're using Richard because he's in love with you. I wonder how many other poor fools worship you."

She said harshly, "Go away, Charles."

"I just wanted you to see yourself as I see you," I said.

Chapter IX

I PLANNED to drive to Heygate the next afternoon. But a meeting of one of the hospital boards on which I've served for many years dragged on interminably and wasn't over until six o'clock. By the time I was back at Green Street, it was nearly seven. I had a bath and was dressing when Arnold came in.

"Will you be in to dinner tonight, Mr. Charles?"

"Yes. Er—yes, I'll be in."

"Seven-thirty, as usual then," he said, and went out.

I went along to the drawing room just before seven-thirty. Caroline came in.

"Hello, Charles. How are you feeling?"

"All right, how are you?"

"I'm much better. Your friend Dale had the wit to know I'd be better up than lying in bed."

"Yes, he's a good chap." I knew Norman had called. Also that he had talked with Grey, and was now convinced that the story about the patient was true.

I was going to invent an engagement for the rest of the evening when, over coffee in the drawing room, Caroline said quietly, "Will you take me with you, to see Nigel?"

"What?"

"I know you'd much rather see him on your own. So should I. But I can't ask you to let me have this weekend and I'd very much like to see him."

"Why so urgently?"

"Things have changed a lot this week, haven't they? When I've seen him I'll know what to do. Oh, I won't be with

you all the time. I can go and see a patient tomorrow afternoon, and leave you alone tomorrow evening. We need only share Sunday."

"All right," I said. "I'm leaving at eight o'clock."

"I'll be ready." Caroline finished her coffee and got up. "I'll go to bed early, Charles. Good night."

In the nature of things, it was a strange weekend, and there was an additional oddity about it. The real significance of that didn't dawn on me until afterwards. Several times on the journey down and while at Heygate, I noticed a man who drove a small Morris car. When I first noticed him in the village, I assumed that he was the father of one of the boys and just happened to be in the same place at the same time. I remembered having seen him about near home because of his pipe, which had an outsize bowl. The bowl seemed as deep as the stem was long. It was an old black pipe. I wasn't going to be allowed to forget that pipe.

The one thing I hoped—prayed—was that Nigel noticed nothing amiss. To me, the atmosphere had an almost unbearable tension. It was as if Caroline and I were seeing Nigel for the last time. It would have been bad enough had there been only my impending death on my mind, but the fear of disrupting Nigel's life touched us both.

The second and only remaining good reason I had advanced for telling Caroline the truth pulled much stronger. We could surely patch things up for six months, concealing the truth from Nigel so that he would have to contend only with the shock of my death, not that of an open breach between his parents. But although telling her the truth was no longer a matter of self-defense, I still had to learn the name of her lover. Would she tell me if she knew the truth?

I should have to tell her what Madrigal had said.

ON SUNDAY afternoon we were going to take Nigel for a drive over

the Welsh border—Heygate is in Herefordshire—have tea out, and get back in time to deliver him up to the school by half past seven. But at lunch Caroline complained of a severe headache and said that she would be wiser to rest for the afternoon. I went to the bedroom with her.

"If you're doing this for me, Caroline, I'd rather you didn't. You gave me a good break yesterday."

"Charles, I mean what I say. Your friend Dale wasn't so good after all. I should have had another day in bed."

"It's been the strain of all this," I said. She said simply, "It's been hell."

During the afternoon, I kept rehearsing what I would say to her on the way back in the morning. Nigel kept up a running fire of general school and cricket talk, and all I had to do was to take an intelligent interest. I cut the trip short, by twenty-five miles, so that he would have a chance to go back and say good-by to his mother. Nigel as usual pleaded for a few minutes at the wheel, and I let him have them. He handled the car well. Now and again I thought of the risk I was taking by driving, but I felt sure I'd have good warning.

"Have to get you a license soon, old chap," I said.

"Gee! Do you mean that?"

"We'll make it an extra birthday present as soon as possible."

I took over for the last few miles, and we reached Heygate at seven o'clock. When we went into the hotel, the little old porter came hurrying up to say that Caroline had received a telephone call and had immediately asked for a taxi to take her to the station. There was a fast train at ten minutes to five, and she had just caught it.

She'd told the porter that she had to see a patient in London.

"Bad show," said Nigel. "Heck of a life being a doctor."

"Yes, you can't call your life your own."

"Tell her I was beastly sorry, won't you?"

"I will, old chap. Well, we'd better get back to the school."

* * *

I was up at eight o'clock next morning, and began the journey home at half past nine. If I had a good run, I'd be at Green Street by two o'clock. I was thinking of Caroline, a few miles along the London Road, when that warning twinge of pain shot across my head.

I don't know what happened during that period of oblivion. All I remember is the first stirring of consciousness, the painful harshness of the sunlight on my eyes. Then I became aware of a strong smell of tobacco. A man spoke.

"Feeling better?"

"Er—yes, I'll be all right."

The smell wasn't unpleasant, but was stronger than any tobacco I ever used. I didn't turn my head to look at him. I was interested only in getting a grip on myself. If only it were possible to shut out the sunlight! I pulled out my handkerchief and spread it over my eyes. The shade helped me. Presently I took the handkerchief away.

"No hurry," said the man.

"I'll be all right." I looked at the man now, and saw the big pipe. Even then I recognized the pipe."

"Nasty thing to happen on the road," he said.

"Yes."

"Had 'em before?"

"Occasionally. Usually have more warning."

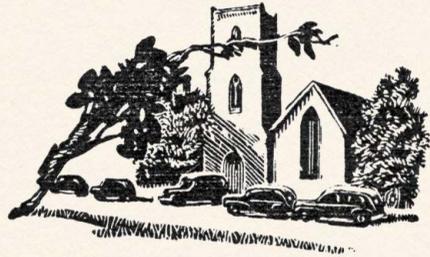
"You did very nicely," he said, and puffed out smoke. "Try a walk."

"Yes, I will."

IT WAS good to move, and to be able to look about me without the light hurting my eyes. My mind was very clear, with its customary heightened sense of perception, and I looked curiously at the man. He was rather less than medium height, broad and tough looking. His kindly face—if kindly is quite the word—held a faint, amused smile, the smile of a man who enjoys living. I liked his snub nose and his big

chin, the full lips and the white teeth which kept showing as he bit on the stem of his pipe. The pipe almost seemed part of him.

"Feeling better?" he asked.



AMEN

Hymn singing proved the nemesis of a would-be Elkton, Md., bandit. The congregation was singing a hymn, led by the Rev. Paul Hilbert, when the bandit entered a church, bent on robbing it. From the pulpit, the minister saw the man in shiny black-face make-up, and carrying a .22 rifle, come through an entrance. The pastor quickly switched tunes in the middle of a chorus and set his flock to singing the hymn that always closes the service. Sensing something was amiss, some members began moving to the door and grabbed the gunman.

—James Brand

"Much. Sorry I delayed you."

"Not a bit. I was just behind, and saw your wheels wobble. Sure you're fit to drive? Another attack might—"

"I've never had two on the same day. Seldom two in the same week."

"Then that's all right. Going far?"

"London."

"So am I. I'll see you on the road. Like me to keep behind you all the way?"

"No, there's no more need to worry."

"Good. Tell you what; we'll stop for lunch together somewhere. Breaks up a long journey if you can chatter."

At lunch we talked about the weather, cricket, the government and Heygate. He didn't know much about the school,

just said that he had been to see a nephew. He also said that his name was Bramley—Hugh Bramley. We didn't exchange cards, but he made a note of my name and address. At half past two, I turned into Green Street. He was still behind me, and pulled up as I got out of my car.

"Safe home," he said, and grinned. "Forgive me, but I was a little worried in case you had another spasm. Odd thing, I work near here."

"Oh?"

"Real estate," he volunteered. "If you ever want to sell this place, let me know, will you?"

"It isn't likely, but I will, should I ever decide to do so."

"Bound to see you knocking about some time, anyhow. 'By."

Thus he had explained why I might see him near Green Street, but he didn't satisfy me with his story. I felt quite sure that he had been to Heygate to follow me.

ARNOLD had heard me come in. "How is Master Nigel?" he asked.

"Very happy, and doing wonders at cricket."

"That's good, sir. Let me take your case." I handed it over. "Mr. Wilding telephoned twice, sir, but wouldn't leave a message. Dr. Madrigal telephoned—"

Memory flashed. I had clean forgotten my promise to dine with him. "Did he leave a message?"

"Will you please telephone him, sir."

"Yes, I'll do that right away. Is Mrs. Galpin resting?"

Arnold had turned, carrying the case upstairs, and appeared not to hear me. I didn't repeat the question, but went up to the drawing room and telephoned Madrigal. His receptionist told me he was out, but would be in at half past five. I asked her to tell him I would call again, and went along to my own room. And then I saw the note, propped up on the dressing-table.

I knew what was inside before I opened it.

She had written:

I've gone, Charles. Don't take any action until you hear from me.

Caroline

Then the telephone rang. I looked at the instrument sourly. The bell kept ringing and Arnold came to the door.

"Are you in there, sir?"

"Yes. See who it is, at the drawing room phone. I'm out, understand."

I went to the window and looked out to the narrow back garden and the row of houses opposite. Presently Arnold tapped at the door.

"It's Dr. Grey, sir. He says he must speak to you."

"Tell him to—oh, all right! Put him through."

Arnold hurried off, and I picked up the receiver when the bell tinkled. The last man I wanted to talk to was Richard Grey.

"Hello. You there, Charles?"

"What is it?"

"I've got to see you, Charles. It's about Caroline. It's desperate. I'm coming 'round right away."

He would be here in ten minutes, and he wouldn't have behaved like that unless he had something really urgent to say. Then it dawned on me that he might know where Caroline was.

I sat down, keeping alert for the sound of Arnold going to the front door. Immediately after he passed I went along to the drawing room and left the door open. Richard came bounding up the stairs. I was near the window when he burst in.

"Caroline's disappeared!" he blurted out.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"You cold-blooded devil! She's missing. Anything might have happened!"

"Keep your head, Richard," I said coldly. "Caroline has left me. That shouldn't surprise you. She knows how to look after herself."

"But she was going to meet me. I phoned her this morning, at ten. I knew she was walking out on you. I was going

to drive her down to Dover. She didn't turn up. I was to meet her at the Queen's Hotel. Her baggage is in the lobby there. She arrived a bit early, went off, and didn't come back. I tell you something's happened to her."

"People don't get kidnaped from the Queen's."

"Listen," said Richard harshly. "Caroline was in danger of being murdered. Now she's disappeared. You thought she was just walking out on you, but that was only part of it. She was trying to get away from the murderer. He's tried twice. The third time he might get her. We've got to do something. We *must* do something."

"So now we're getting at the truth," I said. "Whom do you suspect, Richard? And why come to me? Why not go to the police?"

"We can't do that!"

"What's all this about the police?" That was a new voice. I turned toward the door.

Tommy Wilding, spruce, frowning, arrogant, crossed the room.

Chapter X

MY MIND fastened on to a trifling thing, rejecting the more significant.

"How did you get in?" I demanded.

"Never mind," said Tommy. "I'm here. What's this about the police? What's happened?"

Richard stood utterly still, staring at Wilding.

"He thinks that Caroline is missing," I said. "She was going away for a week or two, and he was going to drive her down to Dover. She didn't turn up."

Wilding laughed. "I wondered when she would catch up with our Richard, the medical Don Juan who—"

"I'll smash your face in," Richard said.

He moved as he spoke. He landed one blow on Wilding's face, and then Wilding let loose a tornado. Richard had suffered badly enough at my hands, but

this was much worse. Wilding was a ruthless fighter, and he smashed blow after blow into Richard's face with bewildering speed. His own face was set and savage. I picked up a book and slapped Wilding across the head. I held the book at the ready in case he turned on me, but he simply dropped his hands and stepped aside.

"Sorry I made this the arena, Charles. He's had that coming to him for a long time."

I said, "I take it that you're rivals for my wife's favors."

"You can take it as you like. I detest the little rat. Now let's get things straight. Caroline was going to let him drive her down to Dover but didn't turn up. Did you know she was going to France?"

I lied. "Yes."

"And now you want to send for the police? That might cause a scandal, you know, and do more harm than good."

"So it might. But there have been two attempts to murder her."

"What's that?"

"You heard," I said. "I'm going to telephone the police right now."

"Steady." Wilding turned to Richard, gripped the lapels of his coat, and began to shake him. "Why don't you want Charles to call the police?"

"She wouldn't want him to. She—"

"Why not?"

Richard mumbled. "She's afraid."

"Of what?"

"They might find out—" he stopped.

"What might the police find out?"

"Who's doing it."

"That's their job. Why doesn't she want them to find out?"

"She's afraid. She's been scared for months. I don't know why she doesn't want the police; she wouldn't tell me anything about that." His voice became shrill. "Let me go."

WILDING released him. "Let's have it," he said.

"I've helped her for a long time. She thought someone was trying to kill her."

She was scared, and relied—she relied on me to help me. I'd do anything for Caroline." There was a whining note in his voice. "I knew it would never be any good, she didn't love me, but I thought—I—oh, what does that matter now? He's got her."

"Do you know who it is?"

"I thought—" He looked at Wilding. "I—I thought it was you!"

"Damned fool," said Wilding. "So Caroline wasn't interested in you as a man, but found you useful as a watchdog. Go on from there. When was the first time someone attempted to murder her?"

"That party night. There was poison in some of the food. Caroline was keeping a special dish back, and the poisoner must have thought it was for herself and Charles. But Bessie—you know, the fat maid—cleared the plate. She was dead in a few hours. Arsenic."

"I thought Bessie died of appendicitis."

"Caroline didn't want the truth known. She asked me to cover up the whole business, so I—I did."

Wilding marveled. "Maybe there's more in you than I thought. Or maybe less. Next murder attempt, Richard?"

"That was the Thursday of last week. We said that one of her patients was homicidal and had turned on her, but it was someone else. I think Caroline knows who, but she wouldn't tell me."

"And where did Miss Wilberforce come from?" I asked slowly.

"She's an actress. Had spinal trouble, Caroline put her right. She's one of my patients. I introduced her to Caroline. After you'd cut up rough, I fixed it all with her and phoned Caroline next morning. We just did it to fool you and your friend Dale."

I said heavily, "Well, you succeeded."

"Never been difficult to fool you, Charles," said Wilding. "So Caroline saw her assailant, and didn't want him named. Any idea who it was?"

"I always thought it was—was you or—" He broke off. Wilding rubbed his

hands together, as if about to launch another assault. "Tremaine!" gasped Richard.

"I won't break your neck," Wilding said contemptuously. "You thought Victor Tremaine or I was trying to kill her. Why?"

Richard glared.

"I knew she'd turned you both down!"

"You doubtless have a vivid imagination," Wilding said, and looked at me amusedly. "Is there any more information you can give us, Richard?"

"No."

"Well, no one wants you here for your own sweet sake."

Richard licked his lips. "One day I'll make you suffer for this."

RICHARD slunk off, without looking back. As the door closed behind him, I pressed the bell. Arnold came in.

"Yes, Mr. Charles?"

"Take a taxi to the Queen's Hotel, Arnold. Try to find Mrs. Galpin's luggage. If it's there, telephone me and then bring it back. If it isn't, inquire among the porters whether they saw her this morning at about half past ten, whether they noticed her luggage, and who, if anyone, took it away."

"Very good, Mr. Charles."

He went out, and Wilding's eyes narrowed.

"You know," he said in a puzzled voice, "Caroline was wrong about you. Anything else you're going to do?"

"Yes." I went to the telephone and dialed Victor Tremaine's number. The ringing sound went on for a long time. When I felt sure there would be no answer, I telephoned the Ministry, and a detached voice asked me to hold on. After a short delay, a man with an incredibly drawling voice announced that he was Mr. Tremaine's secretary.

"I want to speak to Mr. Tremaine. My name is—"

"I'm so sorry," drawled the secretary. "Mr. Tremaine is not in this morning, and won't be in for a few days."

"Where can I get him?"

"I really don't know."

"Is he away on business? This is an urgent personal matter, I am speaking for Mrs. Charles Galpin."

Something went wrong with the drawl. "Oh! But I thought—"

I put two and two together, and added swiftly, "She has been delayed. Are you sure Mr. Tremaine isn't available?"

"Oh, positive." The drawl revived. "He has left an address in Paris for

"I don't know."

"Dr. Madrigal would very much like to see you."

"I'm not sure that I'll be home but I can let you know later."

"I'll tell him that, sir," the girl answered, and I put down the receiver.

"That was a woman," announced Wilding. "Only a woman could make you talk like that. Why does one have to be polite to one when you'd tell a man to go



SHORT STORY

A little old bug was responsible for a Tulsa bootlegger ending up in a little old cell. When the horn of his car got stuck downtown, officers helpfully looked under the hood and found that a bug in the horn wires had caused a short. They also found 16 bottles of whisky. —*John Dunn*

urgent messages, sir. I'll pass a message on, if you like."

"Where's he staying in Paris?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't divulge his address, but I will send a message if you like."

"I'll call again later," I said, and put down the receiver.

Wilding regarded me with an almost mocking smile.

"Bird flown, eh? Looks like an elopement, Charles."

"We'll see what Arnold has to say."

"You could also book seats on the next Paris plane," said Wilding. "Victor has a little hideaway in Paris where he retires on occasions with his latest light-of-love. You might catch the guilty pair redhanded, as it were. I know the address. Mind if I come with you?"

The telephone rang before I could answer. It seemed always to ring just when I didn't want to be disturbed.

"Hello. Charles Galpin speaking."

"This is Dr. Madrigal's secretary. Dr. Madrigal asked me if you would be good enough to tell me whether you will be at home this evening."

to hell? I wonder how long Arnold will be."

"Some time yet. Tommy, I've some questions to ask you."

"Must you, old chap?"

HE SHOWED no signs of dishevelment after the attack on Richard. He stood there, perfectly groomed, faintly smiling, a modern Adonis. I could understand Caroline falling in love with him. There was something almost too perfect about his face, and yet he had a masculinity that prevented him from looking a dandy. He didn't want to answer my questions now, and without putting it into words, was suggesting that this was neither the time nor the place.

I said, "What was your relationship with Caroline?"

"Charles—" He became very earnest.

"I want to know. I intend to know."

He shrugged. "All right, but why invite hurt?"

"Nothing I learn about Caroline will hurt me now," I said. "But I'm going to get to the bottom of this business. If

she is in fear of being murdered, I'm going to find out who she's afraid of."

"Not me."

"What was your relationship?"

"Purely platonic—of late."

The *of late* hurt, in spite of what I'd said. I finished my whisky.

"When did the platonic state start?"

"Quite a long time ago."

"How long?"

"Rather more than a year. The difference between you and me, Charles, is that I'm still in love with her, and you're not. You're a more reasonable cove than I thought. Let's call a halt to history. I want to find out what's happened to her, and whether Richard was telling the truth. I think he was. Caroline's been living at a high pitch of nervous tension for some time. She wouldn't tell me why, which isn't surprising, if she thought I was trying to murder her." He gave a short, harsh laugh. "Lover scorned, far more dangerous than a woman. Pack some things for the Paris trip, if you're coming."

"More than a year ago, your association with Caroline became platonic," I said. "I'll gloss over what it was before that." I wanted to ask when the intimacy had first started between them, to know when she had first looked elsewhere for love. But I managed to hold my tongue about that. "Since then, she's become nervous. She hid it from me, but not from you. Is that right?"

"Oh, she tried to hide it, but I know her fairly well, Charles. And as I've said, I'm in love with her. The fool who said that love was blind needed a kick in the pants. It's a sure precursor to clear vision." He went to the cocktail cabinet and picked up the whisky bottle. There was tension in his movements, in the way he gripped the bottle. "Not being in love with her, you regard her as a handsome, clever woman in complete control of her emotions. I, being in love, regard her as a heartless bitch. I can well understand someone wanting to murder her, although I don't, myself."

"You can cut out the abuse," I said.

"You asked for it, now you'll get it." The smile had gone. Everything was stripped from his expression, leaving his face bleak. "You've got my temper up, Charles. See if you can take it. Caroline and I were lovers for four years. She confessed from the beginning that for her it was simply carnal. I thought I could arouse a purer love in her. I didn't realize, then, that her heart was made of stone. She told me that if she ever got tired of amusing herself with me, she'd tell me. She did get tired, and she did tell me. From that moment on, I was on the other side of the blanket. *You* ought to know what it feels like to be her lover, and then to be cast aside."

I didn't answer. I couldn't.

He went on in the same harsh voice.

"I still thought and I still think she's the most desirable woman on earth. I'd give my right hand to go back to the old association, but it's out. I had to accept the situation or be denied the consolation of seeing her again. I accepted it. I suspected, without being sure, that she'd found someone else. I think it was Victor. What she could see in that stuffed shirt, I can't imagine. There are a lot of things I can't imagine. One will probably shock you, Charles, and obviously you take some shocking. I have reason to believe, as the policeman says in evidence, that I was not the only paramour during my term of office. Whether the other was Victor or not, I don't know. It's possible that she treated the other poor fool as she treated me, and that he isn't as hardened as I am. Yes, I can understand a man wanting to murder her. Can't you?"

His eyes had an icy look.

"Yes," I said.

I felt that I wanted to murder her myself.

Chapter XI

WILDING and I waited together for Arnold to return. "Well?" I asked, when he arrived.

"Her luggage wasn't there, sir. I was

assured that she returned for it a little before eleven o'clock and drove off with a gentleman in a Daimler car."

"A Daimler!" cried Wilding. "I—er—sorry. Forget it."

"I telephoned, sir, but the number was engaged. I thought it better to return quickly, but the taxi was held up in a traffic block."

"That's all right, Arnold. Pack a bag for me, will you? A weekend bag. I'm going to Paris."

"Very good, sir." He paused, looked as if he wanted to say something else, but checked himself. I was sure that it was because Wilding was in the room.

"So you're going to Paris, after all," Wilding said when Arnold had gone.

"Yes."

"Why not the police?"

"I'd rather settle this myself."

"You're doing this for Nigel's sake, aren't you? Is it worth it, Charles? If you go over to Paris, you might find something worse. I don't know what, but it can't be an elevating experience for you. Nigel won't suffer all that much, whatever happens."

"I don't intend to take the risk. If Caroline should be murdered, there'd be a trial, and the whole foul business would come out. It might do untold harm to Nigel."

There was a cynical look on Wilding's face. "How are you going to stop the murderer from trying again?"

I said, "I'll find a way. The first thing is to identify him. Caroline can do that." I went to the telephone and dialed British Airways, but before they came on the line, Wilding said, "If that's Airways House, leave it to me. I know a wallah there."

I surrendered the telephone, and he arranged for two seats on the four o'clock plane to Paris with surprisingly little difficulty. He banged down the receiver, turned and dropped a hand on my shoulder. "Like to bash me, Charles? If I were you, I'd want to break my neck."

"I thought you understood that the

one thing I want is to stop anything happening to Caroline, for Nigel's sake. You might be able to help."

He pressed my shoulder. "Right, Charles. I'll meet you at Airways House at twenty to three. Don't be late."

He smiled and went out.

From the window I watched him climb into his Cadillac coupé and drive off. I man followed him in a small Morris car. I recognized the car first, craned my neck, and just caught a glimpse of the big black pipe in the driver's mouth.

Hugh Bramley, the self-styled real estate agent, was following Wilding.

Arnold was packing when I went into my room.

"Have you any idea how long you will be away, Mr. Charles?"

"A few days, no more."

"You'll leave a forwarding address, won't you?"

"The Hotel de Rivoli will find me."

"Very good, sir." He paused. "Mr. Charles, I hope—I hope you'll forgive me, sir."

"What about?" I asked.

"It's very difficult for me to make the confession, and I assure you I did it only for the best. I had your interests at heart, nothing else at all. You will believe that, Mr. Charles, won't you?"

"I'm quite sure of that, Arnold, but what's it all about?"

"I—I hired a detective, sir. To watch over you. A Mr. Bramley, sir. Mr. Hugh Bramley."

"CHARLES, this is wonderful!" I was standing at the reception desk of the Hotel de Rivoli.

"It's good to see you, Alison! What luck!"

"I was waiting for you. I called Green Street just after you left, and dear old Arnold told me you would be here." Her candid eyes searched my face. She looked so good, lovely, desirable. "Charles, why have you come?"

It was too long a story and I didn't want her to know everything, so I said, "Business. I'll have to do some right

away, but I'm free for dinner."

"That's won—" began Alison.

"Charles, you dark horse!" Wilding appeared by my side. "Hello, Miss Murray, how are you? Now I know why you chose the Rivoli, Charles."

I wished him to perdition.

"Are you together?" Alison searched my face and then his—and my heart contracted. He was such a handsome devil, and he certainly had a way of looking at women. "Kind of," said Wilding. "But if you've a dinner date, I won't spoil it."

"Do you have to leave right now?"

Alison asked.

"Sorry, yes," said Wilding. "I've arranged for a car, Charles. We won't be long," he assured Alison. "I'll deliver him back, safe and sound."

"My room number is one hundred and one," Alison told me. She pressed my hand again, swung around with a swirl of skirts and left us.

It was raining hard when we started off. Wilding made no comment about Alison. He had managed to hire an old but powerful Chrysler.

"Are we near Tremaine's apartment?" I asked as we passed the Arc de Triomphe.

"Not far away. It's at the back here. Filthy day. Wonder if this is going to be a fool's errand, Charles."

"We're trying."

"Yes. I suppose you'd be glad if Caroline died, provided there was no scandal."

"Would you?"

He took his eyes off the road for a second to look at me, and the mocking glint in them angered me. I felt a quick surge of alarm, without being able to say why. It dawned on me, belatedly, that I had trusted Wilding a great deal. We turned along a narrow road, with gray houses on either side, then took several turnings. At last Wilding slowed down at a cobbled courtyard.

"Can you read the name of that place?"

I cranked the window down and

looked at the blue-and-white enamel nameplate fastened just inside the archway.

"*Ville de Coeur*," I said.

"That's it. Nice touch—City of the Heart." He grinned as he swung the wheel. The car splashed through puddles, and Wilding drew up.

THIS SPOT would have been desolate enough at any time. Now it was the last word in desolation. There were two flower-pots outside a front door, dripping and miserable. No one was about. One end of the cobbled yard was a large pool of water, and the front wheels of the car just touched it.

"Number six," said Wilding. "Yes, there it is."

I couldn't believe that a fastidious man like Victor Tremaine would have an apartment in such a place.

"Tremaine wouldn't—" I began.

"Oh, he does. All very secret. I'm told he actually owns this property. Had a French mother, did you know? The green paint on the door ought to reassure you."

The door of Number 6 was freshly painted in a dull greeny-gray color. I looked up. The long windows above were also freshly painted. The shutters were up at two of them.

"That's it, all right," said Wilding. "What tactics are we going to use?"

"I'm going to see if he's in."

"Walk up and bang on the door?"

"What else do you suggest?"

"We could wait," Wilding said. "This is a hot spot. Most of these places are brothels, although no one will admit it. No one will be surprised at seeing a car parked here. We're sitting comfortable and dry. If they come out together—"

"You're losing your wits," I said. "They won't come out on a day like this. I'm going to see if Tremaine is indoors. Is there a *concierge*?"

"Might be. Not very likely. More likely to be greeted by a fat, inviting madame."

I didn't like the place, I didn't like his

manner, and I didn't intend to stay in here indefinitely. So I opened the car door.

"I'll come with you," he said. "There's safety in numbers."

As I climbed out, I saw a curtain move at a ground floor window. A fat, be-ringed hand clutched it, and I could imagine the fat madame inside, watching greedily. I didn't wait for Wilding, but hurried across to the doorway. It was ajar. Inside, a flight of stone steps faced me, and there was one door, which was closed.

A little old man came shuffling up a flight of stairs which I hadn't noticed.

"Here's your *concierge*," said Wilding. "Your French any good?"

"I can manage."

I spoke slowly and deliberately, and a pair of owlish eyes peered into mine. The man didn't appear to understand what I asked for—the flat of M. Tremaine. I thought Wilding was laughing at me, but I ignored him and went over it all again. Then I began to describe Tremaine, and was in the middle of it when the old man spoke.

"*Quatre.*"

"Four," said Wilding. "*Merci, m'sieu.*" He pushed paper money into the old, veiny hand, and thin fingers crossed it. Then Wilding spoke in fluent French which I could only just understand. He was asking if the Englishman was alone, or whether anyone was with him. The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Tricky beggar," Wilding said. "Better just go up and knock, I suppose. Shall I wait here?"

"Please yourself," I said.

"Shout, if you want me."

I hurried up the stone steps. The first-floor doors were marked 2 and 3, and another flight of steps faced me. I tiptoed up the second flight of stairs. A door marked 4 was on the right. I hesitated outside it for a moment, then clenched my fist and thumped.

Downstairs, Wilding and the *concierge* were talking in undertones. Then a woman spoke to them. Perhaps Wild-

ing had simply wanted a word in secret with the old man or the woman.

No one answered.

I knocked again, with the same result, tried the handle, and found that the door was locked. I stood with my ear close to it, listening intently. I didn't hear anyone behind me, and the first inkling of trouble was the blow over the head that knocked me silly.

I DIDN'T know much after the first blow, but was just conscious enough to feel the second. It went through me like the blackout pains that were so horribly familiar. I lost consciousness, and the next I knew I was lying down, with one leg bent under me. Then I heard a voice, deep and familiar.

"Take it easy, old chap."

I couldn't place it.

"He's all right." That was Wilding.

"Of course he is. I wonder whether he was blacking out before he was hit?"

"What's that?"

"Doesn't matter," said the first man, and then I placed him. It was Bramley.

I opened my eyes and saw him bending over me. He smiled, his pipe in his mouth. "Feeling better?"

"Did you get him?" I asked heavily.

"Didn't see anyone to get," said Wilding, in a puzzled voice. "I heard a thump and came up to see what was the matter. Found you stretched out."

"Someone hit me. They must have come downstairs."

"They didn't. I was talking to the *concierge* all the time, and a sweet madame."

"Let's sort it out later," said Bramley.

"No, now." I sat up. "I was listening at the door, and someone came down the stairs and hit me."

"Sure it was *down* the stairs?" asked Bramley.

"No one came up, or I'd have seen them," Wilding said. The way he looked at Bramley wasn't exactly friendly.

"If the beggar came downstairs and didn't get away through the front hall, he must have gone back up," Bramley

said easily. "So he's probably still in the house.

"Let's go up and have a look around," said Wilding.

They left me sitting against the wall and disappeared. I saw their legs on the landing. Bramley's trousers were damp around the cuffs and hoisted rather high. Wilding's gray ones were perfectly creased. Bramley's shoes had rubber heels, Wilding's leather. They weren't talking.

It took a lot out of me when I stood up. I had to lean against the wall, to steady myself. I heard Wilding and Bramley talking on the next landing, but couldn't catch what they said. For a moment it appeared to me as if they were deliberately lowering their voices so that I wouldn't hear. I felt a spasm of anger, and might have brooded over it, but for the fact the door of Flat 4 was slightly ajar.

I should not have noticed it had I not been leaning against the door and looking at it from an unusual angle. Then I remembered having tried the handle. I moved forward, the discovery driving away the pain, and I found myself in a small passage with three doors leading off it. The doors on my right and left were closed, that in front was ajar. The contrast between this passage and the bleak stone hall and landing was astonishing. It was beautifully paneled, in walnut, and gave an impression of luxury. I went forward and pushed the door wider open. Then I saw the body sprawled on the carpet.

Victor Tremaine was dead. His head had been smashed to pulp.

I stood looking stupidly down at the scarlet blood which spread over his hair and the pale gray carpet. I sat down heavily in a chair not a yard away from him.

This *was* Tremaine's flat, and the man who had attacked me had come in here and killed him. Tremaine and Wilding were the suspects. Now only Wilding was left. Only Wilding? No! Bramley had been here, too.

I LOOKED around the room with my eyes and perception sharpened, as if this were after one of my familiar blackouts. But for that sharpened sense of observation, I might not have noticed the handbag. It lay on the floor, tucked beneath a chair with a low frame. I got up and bent down to retrieve it.

It was Caroline's. I slipped it into my pocket.

Voices outside drew nearer. I didn't move as Wilding called, "Where are you, Charles?"

"In here. Come in, shut the door and don't make a fuss." I sat by the corpse when the others entered.

Wilding said slowly, "So he's come out into the open."

Bramley came forward swiftly and knelt by the body. "Not dead long. Probably the killer was—"

"Charles's assailant."

"How did you get here?" I asked Bramley. "What were you doing here?"

"Good question." Wilding measured Bramley with his eyes. "Talk, Mr. Bramley!"

"I came in the same plane as Mrs. Galpin. This chap was with her. I recognized him and I knew his Paris address, so I didn't follow them. I came by a roundabout route."

"Why all this?" asked Wilding.

"Do you know, Mr. Galpin?" asked Bramley.

"Tell us."

"Your man Arnold hired me to look after you. I thought I'd do that best if I followed your wife for a bit." Bramley wasn't telling the whole truth; he hadn't explained why he had followed Wilding.

"So easy," sneered Wilding. "Did you know about it, Charles?"

"Yes."

"So we ought to believe him. How did you actually get into the house, Bramley?"

"I was in a doorway across the yard when you arrived, and followed discreetly. You were going upstairs when I came in at the front door. I wanted to talk to the *concierge*, but I heard you

cry out and followed you. You'd seen Galpin."

"Hmm," said Wilding. "I suppose it could be true."

"The question is, what are we going to do?" asked Bramley. He looked straight at me. "We can get out, without warning the *concierge*, without reporting to the police. If you send for a French detective from the nearest Commissariat, or even one from the *Sureté Générale*, you're going to have some awkward explaining to do."

Wilding said, "We could tell the truth."

"In a manner of speaking, Mr. Galpin is my client," Bramley said easily. "What are the facts? He chased over to Paris to find his wife, believing she was with another man here. He was alone for ten minutes after he'd been attacked. He was next found sitting by the side of the body of the man he suspected. The French," he added very clearly, "are a logical people. And no respecters of Englishmen whom they suspect of *crime passionnel*. If the police come, Mr. Galpin will be in the lockup for the rest of the night and maybe longer. Want that?" he asked challengingly.

"No," said Wilding.

"Well, what are we going to do?" I asked.

"Get out," said Wilding.

I WOULD have gone straight out, closed the door, and hurried down the stairs. Wilding looked impatient when Bramley stayed in the room, wiping furniture with a clean white handkerchief. He called to us softly.

"See if that old sourpuss is about, will you?"

No one was on the bleak stone staircase. There was no sign of the *concierge*. Bramley wiped the handle of the drawing room door, closed it, and then wiped the handle and the side of the landing door.

"I hope I've got 'em all off," he remarked. "Did you touch anything else,

Mr. Galpin?"

"I don't think so."

"All right, let's go," said Bramley.

The hall was empty. We ran for the car. I stepped in a pool of water and it spread damply into my shoe. My shoe squished as I climbed into the car. Bramley got into the back.

Wilding drove noisily through the sheet of water and turned into the far road.

"Like us to drop you anywhere?" he asked Bramley.

"I'll come to the Rivoli with you."

"How did you know we were staying there?"

"I can't teach you my job in ten minutes," said Bramley.

There was nothing offensive in the way he spoke. I liked the man. Still, either he or Wilding could have hit me and then killed Tremaine. I leaned back, my head aching, but my thoughts very clear.

"I wonder when they'll find the body," Wilding said.

"That old coot will probably poke around soon—maybe poking around now," Bramley said. "On the other hand, he's paid to mind his own business. Tremaine wouldn't want him nosing around too much. There's an even chance that no one will go into the flat until tomorrow or the next day."

"Can we find out when they discover the body?" Wilding persisted.

"Yes." Bramley leaned forward. "I've an agent in Paris, we often work together. I'll get him to watch the *Ville de Coeur*."

"Quite a boy, aren't you?" Wilding sneered.

"I do my job," Bramley said.

A taxi in front spurted blue exhaust fumes over us, and the car reeked with them. I felt a sudden cold draught from behind me, as if Bramley had opened a window. I glanced around.

"I'll be seeing you," said Bramley.

He opened the door and jumped to the pavement. There was nothing Wilding or I could do to stop him. In a few

seconds Bramley was swallowed up in the traffic.

* * *

My room at the hotel was 207, Wilding's 227. We went upstairs together and parted outside my door. Once inside, I shot the bolt because I didn't want Wilding to come in unexpectedly, and crossed immediately to the telephone and asked for Room 101.

The miracle of Alison's voice was repeated. "Hello," she said.

"I'll be ready in half an hour," I said. "Where shall we meet, Alison?"

"Why, you come along here. I've a sitting room, Charles. We'll be secluded. I'll fix some drinks. Don't be too long."

I sat on the bed for a few seconds, looking at the telephone. Then the events of the afternoon crowded upon me. It was no use allowing myself to be dazzled by Alison so that I couldn't see the dangers in the situation. If Victor's body were discovered, I'd be in a bad spot, and—

Caroline had been at the flat.

Where was she now?

I bathed my head, which didn't feel too bad, washed, changed my clothes and, half an hour later, went down to Alison's room.

I told Alison everything.

Chapter XII

I TALKED for nearly an hour. She sat on a sofa, with her legs tucked beneath her and the wide skirt of the green dress spread out. When I had finished she went to the telephone and in a slow but excellent French ordered dinner to be sent up. Then she came and sat on the arm of my chair.

"You just have to find Caroline," she said slowly.

"I'm glad you see that."

"There isn't anything else to see. It wouldn't matter so much if you were going to live, Charles. You would be able to help Nigel, but he'll be left alone."

I was glad she didn't mince words.

"That's the trouble."

"Have you any relatives who might look after him?"

"No, Alison."

"Will you let me look after Nigel, if someone has to?" she asked quietly. "That would mean he would come to America, Charles, and maybe that would be a good thing. I'd be glad to do it."

"Have you considered what it means to have a boy of fifteen on your hands?" I countered.

"I'd love it, Charles!" She stood up, smiling. "But don't worry about that right now. Right now, you have to worry about Caroline. You're sure she was at that apartment?"

I took out the handbag. "She left this behind."

"And Wilding believed she was there with Tremaine."

"Yes."

"I wish I could trust that man, but I can't," said Alison. "Maybe it's just prejudice, Charles. Maybe. It's a crazy thing, but—I knew about him before you did."

The words didn't sink in at first. Finally they registered. "I don't understand."

"It must be nearly two years since Caroline came to the United States, on a long visit," said Alison. "Remember?" I did remember. Caroline had spent three months in New York, on a refresher course in osteopathy. "She wasn't alone, Charles. Wilding was with her. I didn't meet them, but the friend who told me to call on Caroline knew them well, and talked about you. She had an idea that you were having a raw deal. That's one of the reasons why I looked up Caroline."

I said slowly, "I see."

What a fool I'd been! And how I hated Caroline.

A pain shot through my head—familiar and yet far more acute than any I had known before. I felt it again—and heard myself cry out. Then blackness fell upon me.

When I came to, slowly, I was lying on a bed, an eiderdown spread over me. The door of the room was ajar. I heard a voice, Alison's.

"Did you find everything you needed?"

"Thank you, yes."

"Well, Doctor, how is he?"

"I'm afraid it's not so good," said a voice. I knew the voice well. It was Madrigal. Madrigal, *here!*

"You mean, he'll get worse quickly?" asked Alison.

Madrigal was crisp. "He is already worse. This blackout has lasted for over an hour. In fact, nearly two. The longest he had previously experienced was ten minutes, I believe. I should say that it has taken three months off his life."

Alison didn't speak.

Madrigal asked, very gently, "How well do you know him, Miss Murray?"

"We're old friends, if that's what you mean. He told me about this, because—because there was no one else to tell, I guess. He couldn't talk, and I made him talk."

"You were quite right."

"I wanted to help him," said Alison. "Will you tell him this?"

"I don't think it would be kind," said Madrigal. "But his wife should be told, now. He hasn't told her, has he?"

"He hadn't told her when I left London."

"Did he come to Paris to see you?"

"No, on business. We just met." She wasn't going to betray a single secret, if she could help it.

"I'll have another look at him," said Madrigal. He crossed the room and I heard every step. "Hello, the door's open."

"I thought I closed it," Alison said.

"It doesn't matter, he probably isn't conscious." I closed my eyes.

THEY DIDN'T put the room light on, but walked softly across to me. Alison going to one side of the bed, Madrigal the other. After a few moments, I stirred.

Alison caught her breath. "Is he com-

ing to?"

"I think he is." Madrigal switched on the bedside lamp. I stirred again, and blinked up into Madrigal's face and forced myself to start in astonishment.

"What the devil are you doing here?"

Madrigal smiled. "Hello, Galpin. You had me worried. Why didn't you come and have dinner with me?"

"I'm sorry. I forgot all about it."

"If I were you, I'd keep a diary," he said dryly. "I was worried about you. I couldn't get in touch with you, and your valet told me you'd come to Paris. I had to come and see some patients over here, so I looked you up. I was inquiring for you at the desk because you weren't in your room, and a friend of yours told me you might be at Room 101. Does that answer everything?"

"Thanks. It's good of you to take so much trouble."

"Dr. Madrigal has been wonderful," said Alison.

"Now we've finished with the compliments, let's be serious," Madrigal said. "I don't know how you got that bruise on your head, Galpin, but don't get into any more fights. I warned you against excesses. I didn't think it necessary to warn you not to throw your weight about too much."

"I don't see that it matters."

"A great deal matters. What you do in the next six months might make a big difference to other people."

"You've already told me all that."

"Make sure it makes the right kind of difference," said Madrigal, and he smiled at Alison. "I'm less worried now than I was before I came. You needed someone to talk to, and Miss Murray is supplying that need. But, perhaps you'd like to talk to me as well, Galpin. I've plenty of time, I haven't any London appointments until tomorrow afternoon, and I've a feeling that it would do you good to talk freely. Now try getting up and having dinner. I'll come and see you again afterwards."

The dinner was perfectly cooked, but I hardly noticed the flavor of anything.

I'd lost three of the six months I was to live. Every day was vital now. I must protect Nigel.

Alison said suddenly, "Charles, my offer still holds good, I want you to understand that. But if you don't want to consider taking Nigel away from his school, well, maybe Madrigal would help."

That decided me to confide in Madrigal when he returned later, and the only thing I kept back was Tremaine's murder. It was nearly eleven o'clock when I had finished.

He spoke at once.

"I'm glad you've told me, Galpin, and I won't waste time telling you I'm sorry. I'm still a surgeon, and I've one interest as far as you're concerned: making these next six months bearable. That's why I'm going to advise you to go back to London as soon as you can. Let your wife work out her own affairs. Get things settled for your son. He matters, she doesn't."

I nodded slowly.

"Then go home and make your plans."

Alison said, "That's the trouble."

"More trouble?" Madrigal asked.

"I know of no one whom I'd like to look after Nigel," I explained.

Madrigal stood up.

"I'd like to see the boy. Will you arrange that, when you come back to London? And when I tell you I want to help, Galpin, I mean it."

Madrigal left at half past eleven. At a quarter to twelve, Wilding arrived.

"I rang up and was told you weren't well," he said. "Had a doctor?" I nodded. "What did he say?"

"That I ought to take it easy."

"The profundity of the medical profession!"

"Anything happened?" I asked.

"Not a thing. But I have been bending the great mind to the task, Charles. Seeing that you're *hors de combat* and other things have an unpleasant association, why not give it up?" He looked at Alison. "Don't you agree?"

"Yes."

"What will *you* do?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll stick around." He studied the tips of his fingers. "I'd come back too, if it weren't for Bramley. I didn't like the way he ran out on us, and I'm not a bit sure we can trust him. But leave him to me, Charles. You toddle back home. If you don't, you might get your head chopped off."

"Don't be crazy!" exclaimed Alison.

"That's not crazy, honey. Ever heard of the guillotine? It chops off your head."

He got up, lazily, said good night and went out.

Alison said, "I hate Englishmen who call me honey. But they're both right, Charles. You must go home. Will it help if I come with you?"

IT WAS DARK, and I was alone in my own room. I was afraid. The ugliness of fear possessed me, the stark, simple fear of death. It was nothing else. It wasn't thoughts of Nigel or Alison, it was just the fear of death. I'd kept it at bay while I'd been with Alison, but once the door had closed on her, it surged over me.

Three months—or less.

I couldn't stand it. I lifted the telephone receiver.

Alison's voice was calm and soothing.

"Hello, who is that?"

"Alison—" My voice broke. "Alison. I can't get to sleep."

"I'll be right along, Charles," she said.

Alison came and sat on the arm of the big chair by my bed and looked at me inquiringly. I wanted to take her in my arms, but that was madness. I had to control myself now.

"I heard all that Madrigal told you," I said.

"I was afraid of that," she said quietly. "It was careless leaving the door open, and yet maybe it's a good thing you know, Charles."

"It will be, when I'm used to it."

"I've been asking myself how I'd feel if I knew my life had been cut in half," said Alison, "and I think I'd feel the

way you do. You're so tired, Charles, you ought to rest. Go and lie down." She wouldn't take a refusal, and insisted that I should get into bed. She put the pillows behind my head and then took a cigarette from my case, on the table, and sat on the bed with her feet resting on the arm of the chair. Her pajamas were of a pale gold color, her ankles white and trim, her feet thrust into backless, fur-lined slippers. We smoked in silence for a while, and I marveled at the change that had come so quickly and so surely. Now and again I closed my eyes, then opened them quickly, to make sure that she was still there.

Suddenly, she yawned.

I started.

"Oh, hell, why didn't I think of you. You must be so tired."

"I'm fine. It's two o'clock. I guess it isn't surprising to be tired at that hour."

"I'll be all right now. You go back to your room. It was just the shock."

She smiled. "Sure, you're fine now. Wonderful! And the minute the door closed on me, the horror would close on you. I'm here to stay, Charles."

I said, "Then why not—" and broke off.

She stood up slowly, smiling.

I slept in her arms, knowing peace.

THE NOISE was harsh, smashing against my ears. It wouldn't stop. The telephone. I opened my eyes and saw Alison blinking into my face. She smiled, turned and eased herself up and stretched out her hand. Blessed quietness fell when she lifted the receiver.

I struggled up, took the receiver from her, and said gruffly, "Who is it?" There wasn't an immediate answer, and I didn't care. I had hated waking, but was glad I was awake. The satiny glow of Alison's arms and shoulders, the gentle swell of her silk-covered breast, the loveliness of her smile, all contributed to the peace I felt now.

A man's voice jarred against my ears. "Galpin?"

"Yes."

"It's Bramley. Be careful, they'll try to kill you. I can't stop. Be careful."

"Bramley!" I shouted.

Alison stared at me in sudden alarm. I repeated Bramley's exact words, in explanation.

"I wish I knew this man Bramley," Alison said. "Is there any way of finding out whether he can be trusted?"

"I don't know any way to find out," I said. "Wilding said—"

"Charles, if you trust Wilding an inch, you're crazy."

I licked my lips. They were dry. My mouth was parched. Alison picked up the receiver, asked for Room Service and, in her easy but heavily accented French, ordered orange juice and coffee for one.

"When it arrives I'll go into the bathroom," she said.

"Yes, but—"

"If Bramley really thinks there's danger, why didn't he explain more?"

"He might be in danger himself."

"And he might be trying to frighten you," she repeated. "I wish I knew more about these people, the way I know Madrigal now. Madrigal!"

There was a tap at the door.

"The waiter! Tell him to wait a minute," whispered Alison. She sped to the bathroom. When she was inside I crossed to the door and opened it.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of a man with dark hair and a black beard, as he drove his fist into my stomach. I felt the wind explode out of me. I doubled up, and he struck again, this time on my chin. I went sprawling. The room turned upside down, but I couldn't get away from him.

I didn't see the bathroom door open. I didn't hear anything except this man's heavy breathing and the thudding sound of his fists on my face and body. Then I saw something. Alison! I cried out, saw that she held something high above my assailant's head.

She brought it down with all her force.

The man gasped, the blows stopped

coming. His knees bent, and without another sound he crumpled up.

Alison stood with the bathroom stool in her hands, staring at him. Then she dropped the stool and came to me, and as she moved, there was another tap at the door.

ALISON turned her head and called out in French: "*Attendez un moment,*" throwing caution away. As she spoke, she bent down and gripped my assailant's ankles and dragged him towards the bathroom.

"Get into bed," she told me. "Turn over. Face the window."

As I did so, she went to the door, opened it and spoke to the waiter—the real waiter. She took the tray from him, and asked him to close the door for her. Then, quite steadily, she brought the tray back to the bedside table and lowered it. It dropped sharply, clattering noisily, for the last inch. I turned again, and saw her drop on the side of the bed. But it didn't help, she kept shivering, as if with bitter cold.

I managed to sit up, leaned forward and put my arm around her shoulders.

"Alison, it's all right, it's all right."

She was icy cold, and the shivering spasm grew worse.

"Get into bed," I said. She didn't move. I pulled her back, and drew the clothes over her, and held her close. She was still shivering violently, and her teeth were chattering, but gradually she grew calmer.

"I—I'm s-sorry, Charles."

"Just keep still," I said.

She wasn't shivering so much now, and soon she was still. We were face to face, and her eyes were closed. When she looked at me it was through her lashes.

Then she said, "See—see if he's all right, Charles."

"Who was it?" I asked.

"I don't know. I think—" her body stiffened. "I think I killed him. Something in his head cracked like a plate."

I got out of bed and went unsteadily

to the bathroom. I turned the handle and pushed the door, but it didn't open.

"It must be stuck," Alison said. "Let me try."

She turned the handle, shook the door and pushed, but it didn't open. "It's fantastic, Charles!"

"No," I said quietly, "it's logical enough. You didn't kill him, and he's bolted himself in. He's the man who killed Tremaine, who has tried to kill Caroline and me. We've got to get that door down!"

"How *can* we?"

"Stand back a bit."

Instead, she came closer, gripped my arm.

"Charles, don't throw yourself at it. Remember what Madrigal said."

She was right of course. "But we've got to catch him," I said.

"He can't stay in there forever. I—Charles! What is it? What's the matter?"

Judging from her tone of voice, she thought I was in for another blackout. I'd never felt further from one, and I grinned at her reassuringly. "I won't be long, Alison," I said, and crossed swiftly to the hall door. I heard her gasp as I stepped into the passage.

I turned right, toward the next room.

The door stood open. I went in. The bed was made; the room hadn't been used that night. Another door, in the corner, was also open. It led to a bathroom—*my* bathroom, which could serve either room. Unthinking, I went into the bathroom, unbolted the communicating door—and heard Alison gasp, "No!" as I pushed it open. She was in the middle of the room, bending down and grabbing at the stool.

"Charles!"

"Silly of me. Sorry. It's simple enough." I pointed to the other communicating door, and she saw the explanation in a flash. She dropped the stool, sat heavily on the side of the bed and stared at me.

"Well, you didn't kill him," I said heavily. "I half wish you had." I bent

down and picked up the stool. One of the cross-struts was cracked, near a leg. "That's what you heard break, not his skull."

Alison said quietly, "Well, you're alive, Charles."

"Yes, I am." A fact surged over me: she had saved my life. My arms went around her, I held her tightly and felt her straining against me.

As we stood there, forgetful of everything but the warmth of our bodies and the fierce, hungry pressure of our lips.

Chapter XIII

PARIS baked in a dry heat, so different from London's and much more exhausting. Alison and I had started out for a walk in mid-morning, but by lunch time my head was aching dully and my eyes felt hot and dry. We'd walked leisurely, and for the first half-hour I'd pointed out places of interest, but had no heart for it. After a while, I said very little. The noisy traffic made my head throb and the smell of gasoline made me feel sick.

"We'll get back to the hotel, Charles," Alison said presently.

"Good idea," I said. "Sorry I'm so hopeless."

"I shouldn't have suggested coming out. You ought to rest all the afternoon."

She signaled a taxi and told the driver where to go. We didn't speak again until the taxi drew up outside the hotel. Arm in arm we went into the hotel. There weren't many people in the hall, but the dining room was fairly full.

"Would you prefer to have lunch in my room?" Alison asked.

"I don't want to overdo that," I said. "I don't want to compromise you more than I have to."

She smiled, and the head waiter came up, fussy and friendly, and found us a pleasant corner table, far enough away from others for us to be able to talk without being overheard. A waiter presented the menu, and we gave our or-

ders. When we were left alone, Alison leaned forward and took my hand.

"Charles, I want you to understand one thing, and not to forget it. I don't care what people think."

We ate leisurely and for a while were oblivious of all others. Then a man approached our table.

It was Bramley.

He stared intently at Alison, not at me. I felt that he was trying to place her. Then, deliberately and without invitation, he sat down at the table. "Where have you been hiding yourself, Mr. Galpin?" he said. He looked from me to Alison, adding, "I was afraid you'd run into more trouble, and it looks as if you have. What happened to your face?"

"I had a fight."

"So you didn't listen to me."

"I didn't have much chance of getting out of that fight," I said. "Alison, this is Mr. Bramley. I've told you about him. He is a great detective, from London."

Bramley nodded curtly. I had a feeling that he didn't like Alison.

"How are you? And not so much of the sarcasm, Mr Galpin. I was hired to do a job and I'm trying to do it, but I can't if you won't cooperate."

"What an infernal nerve!"

"I don't get you," he said. "What's a nerve?"

"You ran out on me yesterday afternoon. The next thing I heard was a silly telephone message. Of course I'll be careful. I'm spending my life being careful. You not only ran out on me," I added, warming up, "but you took Tremaine's dairy—and certain other things from his place. Oh, I saw you! Where are they? What have you been doing?"

"Checking up," Bramley said gruffly. "Have you seen Wilding this morning?"

"No."

"How did you get knocked out?"

"I was attacked in my room."

"Did you recognize your assailant?"

"No, he'd disguised himself. Why?"

"Wilding spent some time at a doctor's this morning, with a wound in the

head. It looks as if Mr. Ruddy Wilding had a go at you, doesn't it?"

I felt a rising excitement. "Yes, it looks as if Wilding's our man. Do you know where he is?"

"No. He slipped me, after visiting the doctor."

"You're a wonderful detective!"

"I'll find him again," Bramley said confidently. "I can tell you more, Mr. Galpin." He took out a small pocket diary. "This is Tremaine's. It's a talkative little book. It makes it clear that he often met Mrs. Galpin. The letters that I took—" he patted his pocket—"show that he was in love with her, that he knew she was in danger, and that he suspected Wilding. Think I'm doing a fair job?"

I didn't speak.

"How will all that help if you don't know where to find Wilding?" asked Alison.

Bramley ignored her. "I want to get one thing clear, Mr. Galpin," he said. "Do you want to go on with this, or do you want to stop?"

"I'll see it through," I said. "That's why I'm here, Bramley."

"That's fine. Then the next thing you have to do is to see your wife. I've located her."

I FELT Alison's hand press against mine and then draw away. I knew that Bramley was watching her closely.

"Do you want to see her?" Bramley asked roughly.

Alison said, "Of course. He must."

He shot her a surprised glance, then looked at her with a more friendly expression. His smile was apologetic.

"I don't want to appear rude, Miss Murray, but I think I ought to talk to Mr. Galpin alone about this."

"You'll talk to us both," I said sharply.

Alison leaned forward. "No, he's right, Charles. I should only be in the way. Maybe there are things it would be better I didn't know about, right now. I'll wait for you."

Before I could answer, she stood up,

nodded to Bramley and walked away. Bramley said, "I think I owe both of you an apology."

"I know you do. Where is my wife?"

"At a house on the *Quai de Bethune*. She doesn't know I've located her. I told you I was going to work with an investigator here, didn't I? He found her. He managed to persuade that *concierge* to talk, and he traced her from the *Ville de Coeur*."

"Have they found Tremaine?"

"Yes, they've found Tremaine's body, but the *concierge* has told the police he doesn't know who visited him yesterday. There's a call out for two Americans because the *concierge* called you American, not English. That gives us a bit of time, but not much. Wilding was there yesterday, before you arrived. He'd been there before, too."

"He wasn't there yesterday. He was with me all the time after we left London, until we went to Tremaine's flat."

"That's not what the *concierge* told my French pal. Maybe Wilding telephoned. Did he have time to do that?"

"Well, yes."

"Then that's it. Wilding telephoned and primed the *concierge* on how to behave when you arrived."

"Does Wilding know where she is?"

"I doubt it. But if he does, you needn't worry about him getting in to see her. My Paris friend is watching the apartment."

"Whose apartment is it?"

"I haven't got second sight," said Bramley. "Perhaps you'll be able to find that out from your wife." He tapped the stem of the pipe against his teeth. "This is about the queerest job I've ever tackled, and I don't know that I like it. Give me a clean, straightforward divorce job." He laughed. "Oh, I don't mind the excitement. But there's something I can't get my teeth into. The relationship between you and your wife and—hell! I suppose it doesn't matter."

"Not to you," I said.

"Galpin—"

"Well?"

"Have you any crazy idea of killing your wife's lover?"

I said slowly, "I want my wife to come back to London with me. I think I can make her. I don't want a divorce and I don't want a scandal. You saw my son, didn't you?"

The stem tapped against the white teeth again.

"I get you. No violence, then?"

"Not from me, but is my wife with a man now?"

"When I last heard, she was alone," Bramley said. "I don't know everything, by a long way. I thought at first it was so simple. She was in love with another man, and you were in the way. It isn't so simple."

"Let's go," I said.

I DON'T know why I trusted Bramley, why the doubts I'd had of him were dissipated. Whatever the reason, I forgot my suspicions of him until we crossed the bridge and turned on to the *Quai de Bethune*. I expected to see his detective friend leaning against the rampart of the river wall, but no one was about.

"Where's your friend?" I asked.

"Inside, not outside," Bramley said. He had an old Renault car, which drew to a stop before a big, double door, its blue paint old and peeling.

"Here we are."

We got out, and I looked up and down the road, and became keenly conscious of the fact that no one else was in sight. My head throbbed.

Bramley pushed open the big door. We stepped over the ledge, but not into a house. In its way, this was rather like the *Ville de Coeur*, except that it was under cover. Through the glass panels of a door opposite the front entrance I saw a courtyard. On the right, inside, was a flight of stone steps, newly white-washed. On the left was a door, on which was painted *Conciergerie*. Next to that was a little wall-case in which were several white cards. I glanced at the cards. All the names were French, and I rec-

ognized none.

"Upstairs," said Bramley.

We reached a stone landing, off which two doors led. Each had a card tucked inside a little bracket. One was number 1, the other, 2.

"That's odd," said Bramley.

"What's odd?"

"My French friend should be here." He started up the stairs. I backed against the wall, so that I could see everywhere. Bramley was frowning when he came down.

"He's gone."

I said in a harsh whisper, "Was he ever here?"

Bramley stared at me. "My dear chap! I'm all I've claimed to be. No need to look at me as if I were one of the villains. I tell you I don't like the fact that my pal isn't here. He was to have waited until I came back, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or telephone me, if your wife left and he had to follow her. That may be the trouble. She went off in a hurry, and he hasn't been able to phone me. I said I'd be at the Rivoli, but we left there half an hour ago. Might be a wasted journey."

"We could ring the bell," I said.

He stabbed the bell button with the stem of his pipe. There was no answer. I tried the handle. The door was locked.

"Let's see if we can get in the back way."

"Bypassing the *conciergerie*? Might not be a bad idea." We hurried downstairs, and into the courtyard. At one wall was a fire escape.

"Does that lead to the apartment?" I asked Bramley.

"As far as I can make out, yes. First floor, remember." Bramley stowed his pipe away in his pocket, rubbed his hands together, and started to climb the iron ladder. I followed. Bramley stopped on a small landing.

"I think this is it," he whispered, peering at a window. "Think anyone's watching?"

I glanced about. "No."

"Can't see anyone inside. It's a bedroom." Bramley took a knife from his pocket and slipped the knife between the frame and the catch. It was the old-fashioned sash-cord type of window, easy to open.

A MINUTE later I followed him into a small bedroom. It was charmingly furnished, a woman's room. There was a faint smell of perfume. We stepped across to the door and listened; there was no sound of voices.

It opened into a narrow passage. On the left was what I took to be the front door.

"Check if it's the right flat," whispered Bramley.

I opened the door and I glanced outside. Yes, this was Flat 2—M. Blanc. I turned, closed the door and nodded—and then I saw another door open, opposite Bramley.

I saw the gun before I saw the man.

Bramley heard a movement and swung around, right into a full-blooded punch that rocked him on his feet.

It was Wilding. Ignoring Bramley, he covered me with the gun. "Brave boy, Charles," he said. "Here you are, right in the lion's den. Don't try to run away, or I shall shoot you in the guts. Where it hurts most." He raised his right leg and kicked Bramley in the groin. Bramley groaned and doubled up.

My fingers were on the front door handle.

"Don't be silly, Charles, or you'll get worse than he got," Wilding warned. "Come forward." I obeyed, and he waved towards Bramley. "Drag him into this room—the room I've just left—and lock the door on him. Then give me the key. If you don't, I'll make a mess of both of you and your beloved Caroline."

I did what he told me.

"Toss me the key." I did so. "Open the third door, Charles. That key's on the outside. Go in slowly, and don't try to slam the door in my face."

He was too close for me to risk defying him, yet too far away for me to knock the gun out of his hand. He shot out a foot and kicked me farther into the room. Before I'd steadied, he was inside, and the door was closed.

He took the key and slipped it into his pocket.

Caroline, naked, stood at the end of a long, beautiful room.

Chapter XIV

ISN'T she lovely? Isn't she beautiful? Have you ever seen a more perfect example of the female form divine?" Wilding pushed me farther into the room, but looked at Caroline.

She stood upright, her hands behind her back as if some invisible bonds were

THE ADVENTURES OF

IT SMELLS GRAND



**TAKE ONE WHIFF!
(FOR THIS YOU'VE YEARNED!)**

IT PACKS RIGHT



**PACK YOUR PIPE—
NOW YOU HAVE EARNED**

holding them there. She didn't move. Her head was raised, her chin tilted in defiance. There was scorn in her violet eyes. She'd looked at me like that sometimes, but not with the same burning intensity.

"Can you think of a better way to bring husband and wife together?" Wilding jeered. "What a reunion! You'd almost forgotten what she looked like, Charles, hadn't you?"

"You unspeakable swine," I said.

"Oh, come, Charles!" He slipped the gun into his pocket with a nonchalant gesture, but kept his hand in the pocket, too. "No abuse please. We came here to find Caroline, and we've found her. We took two different roads, but that doesn't matter. Here she is. She wasn't expecting visitors—not us, anyhow. Some other fine gentleman." He laughed. It wasn't a natural sound; the note of madness was all too clear.

"We'll all be here when he arrives," he went on. "I wonder whether we'll know him. Care to tell us who he is, Caroline? Some fine Frenchman, perhaps. No doubt—you got tired of the clumsy English—as you got tired of Charles, Victor, Richard—and me. But you made a mistake when you pushed me off as you did the others. I don't like the brush-off. I meant to get you *and* your new paramour. I didn't expect there would be a touching reconciliation

like this, but it's a fitting end. *End*, sweet, treacherous, lecherous Caroline—the end. Charles, too. Before the night's out, you're going to die, and so is the other man. I'm sorry about Charles. I rather like him. But I want a run for my money. He has a wonderful English conscience, almost a Puritan's conscience. Haven't you, Charles? You'd have to tell the police that you knew I'd killed them, so you'll have to go where you can talk only with the angels. You won't see Caroline there; she'll be in another place."

"Let her free," I choked.

I'd seen by then that she was tied to a hook at the side of the fireplace. A long hearth-brush still hung from the heavy silvered hook. Her wrists were tied by a thick cord; that was why she had to stand like that. Being Caroline, she didn't cringe.

Wilding laughed.

"Oh, no, Charles. I'm not that kind of gallant. And I want her to feel shame, if she's capable of it. I'd like to make her cheeks burn with shame. They haven't even turned color yet. She's immune to you and me, but when *he* comes—that'll be the moment, Charles. Aren't you looking forward to it? He'll let himself in with a key and come gaily in, and the first thing he'll see is Caroline, a nymph beside the fireplace. She ought to burn!"

[Turn page]

UNCLE WALTER

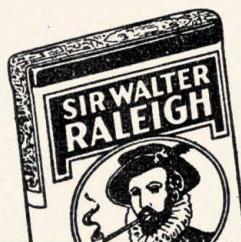
IT SMOKES SWEET



—HAPPINESS FOR ALL CONCERNED!
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IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



*It costs
no more
to get
the best!*

"Let her free," I said again, and my throat hurt me.

"One track mind, Charles, that's your trouble. No, I shall not let her go free. She ought to burn." The first time he'd spoken, the words had rushed out. Now he uttered them slowly, reflectively. "Go and light the fire, Charles."

I didn't move. He raised the gun and jerked his head towards the fireplace. Caroline spoke for the first time.

"Do what he says, Charles. Don't let him have any excuse for turning on you."

"Sweet Caroline! How thoughtful for your husband's comfort, aren't you? Be careful what you take out of your pockets, Charles. If it's anything but matches or a light, I'll break your neck."

I WENT forward slowly, groping in my pocket. I touched my penknife. It wasn't easy to open it inside the pocket, but I managed it. I stood in front of the fireplace by Caroline's side. I sensed that both of them were looking at me intently. I had no matches in that pocket and no lighter. I couldn't fool him any longer. I knelt down slowly, as if I were going to put flame to the tinder-wood—and then I snatched the knife out and slashed at the cord. The blade caught it. Caroline was jerked backwards against the mantelpiece, but the cord resisted the knife.

Wilding rushed at me.

I grabbed a poker, struck at him, but missed his head and hit his shoulder. That threw him off balance. Caroline pushed out her right leg. Her foot pressed against Wilding as he tried to recover, and he went backwards. I tightened my grip on the poker. Wilding was on his back, legs waving in the air. I ducked beneath his legs and smashed at his arm. Wilding squealed with pain, and his arm went limp. I struck again across the temple. He lay still.

I bent down and took the gun from his pocket, transferred it to my own.

"Charles," said Caroline, "you must make sure he can do no more harm."

I dragged him across the room to a sofa, took off his tie and bound it around his wrists, tying a double-knot. It might not hold for long, but he couldn't take me by surprise. Then I went to Caroline.

She smiled at me, a smile I hadn't seen for many years.

"Thank you, Charles," she said.

I groped on the carpet for the knife and found it. I cut through the cord, but when it parted, her wrists were still tied behind her back. She turned around. I couldn't untie the knot. I had to cut that, too. Two little globules of blood welled up from her white wrists, but at last the frayed ends fell aside and she was free of her bonds. There were deep red and white ridges on her wrists, and she gasped with pain as her hands dropped.

"Where are your clothes?"

"In the corner, on a chair."

I stood by the window, looking out into the courtyard, while she dressed, and suddenly I remembered Bramley.

"What's the matter?" she asked, as I started.

"There's a friend of mine outside. He was knocked out."

"Go and rescue him," she said. "I won't run away." She saw me glance at Wilding, and slowly shook her head. "No, I won't do anything to him, either," she said. "I promise you, Charles, I won't do anything else to you. I've done enough."

BRAMLEY was conscious and seemed to understand what I said to him. He was to go out, as soon as he could, telephone Alison and tell her that I was all right and would be back soon. Then he was to wait in the passage until I called him. I didn't say anything about a man who might soon arrive—the man whom Wilding had expected.

When I went back into the big room, Caroline was doing her hair in front of a gilt mirror. I went towards Wilding and saw his eyes glittering up at me.

"Did you kill Tremaine?" I demanded.

"Find out!"

Caroline said, "Yes, he did."

"You trollop. keep your mouth shut!"

"He killed Tremaine. I slipped out down a back staircase. He attacked me at the house. He tried to poison me, and killed Bessie. I always knew it was either he or Victor. He killed Victor because Victor had proof he was trying to murder me. Tommy did it."

"I'll get you yet," Wilding growled. "I'm not through."

"So you killed them, Wilding. You killed them and tried to kill me."

"Not you, old chap. Always felt sorry for you. In fact I always thought that if I killed Caroline it would be a happy release for you." He meant it. He hitched himself up on the sofa, having difficulty because of his bound hands, and went on in a harsh voice: "You fool, Charles! You ought to have left her as she was. She's corruption itself. Foul, filthy corruption. You should have let her stay, and burn." He laughed suddenly. "Know how I found her, Charles? I followed your pal Bramley and his French chum! Realized he'd go back for you, and I broke in and hung around—I didn't want any interruption—not for my set piece."

Caroline hadn't spoken for a while. Now she looked at me, and said, "He's quite right about me, Charles."

"I know."

"How long have you known?"

"Only a few days."

"It was your bad luck, Charles," she said. "I'm sorry, I won't do anything else to hurt you. I've finished."

"You'll do what I tell you, if we can get out of this mess," I said. "I don't care a damn what happens to you, but I care what happens to Nigel."

She winced, and closed her eyes.

"It's a pity you didn't think about him before," I said.

"*Think* about him. I was obsessed by him! If it hadn't been for Nigel I should have left you years ago. *Years!* I'd have gone as soon as I discovered the truth about myself. As soon as I realized that I had all the—qualities—Tommy extolled so nicely. Charles, it wasn't

your fault, it was born in me. I think you held it in check for years. But one man wasn't enough and I didn't think I'd ever find one who would hold for long. I was clever at first. I didn't let them come to the house. But you suspected nothing and I became bolder, and made them my friends. How blind you were!"

"Caroline, this isn't necessary. We're going to patch things up, for Nigel."

Her head jerked back. "You'd patch things up, *now?*"

"I'm going to. If Wilding hadn't killed Tremaine it would be easy, but they've found Tremaine's body, and—"

CAROLINE said, "Yes, I know. When I saw that Tremaine was dead, I knew it wasn't any use fighting. I'd fought hard for Nigel. I tried to keep everything secret. Tommy tried to kill me, killed Bessie instead, came to Green Street and tried to strangle me—and still I wouldn't do anything, because I thought we might keep it all from Nigel. I decided to leave England. Richard was going to take me to the boat, but Tommy was at the hotel and I had to slip away from him. I telephoned Victor, and he came and collected me and my luggage." She spoke in a calm, passionless voice. "I suppose Richard told you I was going to France?"

I nodded.

"He was always so weak," said Caroline. "Charles, there isn't much more you have to find out. You know practically everything. Do you still want to patch it up?"

"For Nigel, yes. And you'll come back to me. You'll do what I tell you. Oh, you can have your lovers." Bitterness poured out of me. "You can live your own life in your own beastly way, but we'll put up a front to shelter Nigel. Do you understand?"

"I see, Charles." She was almost submissive. "It's strange that you can live with a man for seventeen years and never really know him."

"You keep making discoveries, don't

you?" I asked harshly. "They don't matter. What you do is the main thing now, and me. If you really want to save and I've told you what you'll do."

"Unless they charge Tommy with murder."

I didn't speak.

"They'll know Victor's name, and they'll get in touch with Scotland Yard, and they'll trace Tommy." Her voice was still emotionless. "Then they'll find out that you were there, and they'll know about the intimacy between Victor Nigel, Charles, you'll have to kill Tommy."

She looked at Wilding, who was staring at us through his lashes. Then a bell pealed through the flat.

I thought, "Here he is—her lover!" I went to the door and pulled it open. Bramley stood there, with Alison beside him.

ALISON'S eyes searched mine as she moved forward with her hands outstretched. "I had to come, Charles," she said.

"How did you know where to come?"

"I told her on the phone," said Bramley. He walked slowly, as if he were in pain. "I thought the best way of telling her I was sorry was to bring her here. You need more help than I can give you."

It was the first time I hadn't been overwhelmingly glad to see her. I was going to fight to keep Caroline, and that meant losing Alison.

"What's up?" asked Bramley.

Wilding began, "Caroline had a brainwave. How foul she is! Charles wouldn't—"

"Shut up!" I said, and Alison stared at the tone of my voice. Wilding gulped and fell silent.

Caroline, her eyes storming at me, said, "You fool, Charles. You—"

"Obviously I'm not the man you thought I was," I said. "You keep quiet, too. Bramley, I want you to take Wilding away from here. Keep him somewhere safe. Find out whether anyone

knows about the Englishmen who visited Tremaine yet. Find out if your French friend can bribe that *concierge* to stick to the American story."

Bramley didn't move or speak, and I snapped, "Are you deaf?"

"Not quite," Bramley said. "I'm a bit dubious. If we bribe the *concierge* and the police do make him talk, it'll look pretty nasty for us."

"Never mind that."

"I'm in this, too," Bramley said. "I want to know more about things first. Has Wilding confessed that he killed Tremaine?"

"Yes. And that he tried to kill Caroline."

"Who had a go at you?"

I said, "Look here, Bramley, this thing is all sewn up, except for that. I think I can deal with it. I can even patch up some kind of happy ending. If you're worried about Wilding getting away with murder—all right, we'll talk about that later. I want to get my own position clear. I think my wife's—friend—tried to kill me this morning and he's due here soon. I can handle him."

I took Wilding's gun out of my pocket.

Alison exclaimed, "Charles! You mustn't kill him!"

I looked at her in astonishment.

"Kill him? Of course not. I shall just keep him quiet with this. Do what I've asked you, Bramley, will you? If you're worried, let your French pal stay outside and watch. That's if you've found him."

Bramley said slowly, "Wilding knocked him out and pushed him into a coal shed. He's all right now, on duty outside. Galpin, I'm not promising you anything, but I'll give you the next hour. And I'll look after Wilding." He took a step towards Wilding. "Get up."

Wilding said, "Keep away from me or I'll kick you in the guts."

Bramley ignored him and went forward. Alison's hand was unsteady on my arm. I looked down at her. I wished she weren't here, and yet—how much I loved her.

The door opened, then Madrigal stepped in.

Chapter XV

HE SAW me, and stopped abruptly. "Hello, Galpin," he said. "How did you find out that I have a flat here?"

No one could have dumfounded me more than Madrigal. "It was rumored," I answered. "Come in."

Then he saw the others. I thought he would turn and run, and I snatched the gun out of my pocket.

"Come in." I repeated.

"I didn't know you were going to throw a party here," he said. "Put that gun away, Galpin, I'm nervous of firearms."

"You'll be nervous about a lot of things," I said. "Come in."

He shrugged his shoulders, stepped inside and pushed the door closed. Bramley released Wilding and hurried to the door and locked it. Then he went to the window and stood with his back to it, guarding that way of escape.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"Dr. Madrigal, the famous brain specialist," I replied. I didn't suspect the whole truth, even then. He looked immaculate and, now that the shock was over, completely self-possessed. He didn't seem nervous of the gun, but gave me a wide berth.

"How much do they know, Caroline?" he asked.

"Everything!" cried Wilding.

"Nearly everything," said Caroline steadily.

"Not—that?" He spoke as if no one else were here.

"No," said Caroline.

"Good." He smiled at me. "I warned you not to excite yourself, Galpin. It doesn't make much difference to you what your wife does. We tried to keep it from you, because there was no need to make your last months miserable. We've been very discreet."

"Discreet!" howled Wilding. "She's the soul of discretion. She was even dis-

creet with you! She didn't tell you about the others, did she? She didn't—"

"Of course she didn't, and there was no need for me to tell her that I knew everything. The past is the past, isn't it, Caroline? Galpin, I think you should know that your wife and I have found something very rare and precious. In fact, history records very few instances of a great love between man and woman. I needn't cite them. When one of the partners is married, it makes difficulties, and I accept the commands of convention. Her anxiety not to upset her son was most praiseworthy, and I was determined to assist her.

"In fact," he went on smoothly, "I suggested to you this morning that I might look after him. I shall, of course. It is quite possible that I might have a better influence on him than you would. There is no need to get upset about this—or to threaten me with a gun. In fact, your incurable complaint has made the situation for us much easier, but it's not because of anything we have done. Is it, Caroline?"

She shook her head.

"Galpin, my dear fellow, I've given you every consideration and every help I could. And I've warned you solemnly. If you get involved in violence, you'll end up in an asylum. You need absolute peace and quiet, and you can get both, with Miss Murray's help. You needn't worry about Nigel. Your wife and I will take care of him."

He slid his right hand towards his pocket. Bramley barked, "Keep your hands in sight!"

"My dear sir—"

"Just keep your hands in sight," said Bramley. "Keep him covered, Galpin. Miss Murray, get behind the gentleman and see if he has a gun."

ALISON wasted no time. She went behind Madrigal, slipped her hand in the pocket his hand had been near, and drew out an automatic pistol.

"Let me have it, Miss Murray," Bramley said. "You can put yours away now,

Galpin. Where do we go from here?"

"This matter is no concern of yours," Madrigal said heavily. "Galpin, presumably you are responsible for bringing these people here. I wish you would explain why you thought it necessary."

"Isn't he wonderful?" Wilding marveled. "Don't you know you're in a bad spot, Madrigal? That Tremaine—Caroline's last boy friend—had his head smashed in? That's murder. I did it. But if ever I get charged, I'll explain *why* I did it. I'll also explain how you've tried to kill Charles."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, no, it isn't nonsense. Charles, old boy, you're showing signs of sense." The sane Wilding was back now. "Try to realize that I'm the key to the whole business. Try me for Tremaine's murder, and it will all come out. Let me go, and I'll keep nice and quiet. You can do what you like with Caroline and Madrigal, but I've got enough on them to get them nice long prison sentences if they get nasty. Attempted murder is quite a crime."

I said, "Can you prove it was Madrigal who attacked me this morning?"

"I'm not referring to that. I'm referring to the other diabolical business. Diabolical is the word. The most fiendish attempt at murder I've ever come across or read about."

Caroline said in a low-pitched voice, "Be quiet!"

"Oh, no, my beauty. It's all coming out now. Charles, they—"

She flew at him, before Bramley or I could stop her, and there was murder in her eyes. She had an open knife in her hand—my knife, which I'd put down after cutting the cord. Wilding strained. Suddenly his hands were free. The tie fluttered to the floor.

He smashed his right fist into Caroline's face. She reeled back. He struck her again on the chin, and I heard a crack. Caroline crumpled up, and didn't move.

"He—he's broken her neck," Alison said in a small voice.

Caroline was dead.

Bramley held Wilding's arms behind him, in a grip that made him helpless. Wilding didn't struggle at all now. He was grinning triumphantly as he looked down at the lifeless body and at Madrigal, who knelt beside Caroline.

"That's all I wanted to do," he said. "I won't cut up rough again, Bramley. You can let me go. I always meant to kill her." He looked at me. "I've done you a good turn, Charles. You ought to be everlastingly grateful. You're free for your Alison. What you do about Madrigal is your affair. I'm not interested in him. I—oh! I didn't tell you the way he attempted to murder you, did I?"

Madrigal said slowly, "I attacked you in your room, Galpin. I was afraid you'd find out the truth and I wanted you dead."

TRIUMPH glowed in Wilding's eyes. "Good try, Madrigal. But there's another thing I discovered only today. *Very* interesting. It isn't diabolical or fiendish to bash a man over the head if you hate him, but to try to drive him to suicide—"

"That is a lie!"

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Wilding. "There's nothing much the matter with you, Charles. Your complaint isn't incurable. It's a form of migraine, which only crops up once in a million people. It puzzles most doctors, and is often confused with a brain tumor. Caroline first had the idea of telling you it was an incurable disease of the brain. She first put the suggestion to Richard Grey, who turned it down. That's why she sent you to Madrigal. He pronounced sentence, believing you'd kill yourself when you'd put your affairs in order."

"Charles!" cried Alison, and her eyes blazed with a new and wonderful light.

Bramley muttered uneasily, "No one could do that."

"Madrigal *did*," cried Wilding. "Richard Grey is in Paris, Charles. I've seen him, forced the truth out of him. He

told me about the nice thought Caroline had, but it didn't mean anything to me until Madrigal started to talk about your short lease of life. He'd asked Caroline if you knew 'everything,' remember? No doubt at all. First the blunt statement, and if that didn't work, some gentle prodding to drive you to suicide."

It was crystal clear. But only for a moment. Then the warning stab of pain came, and I lost consciousness.

* * *

When I came to I was still in the room, and only Alison was with me. The room was darkened, the only light coming from a crack in the curtains. I lay on the sofa, and Alison sat in a chair by my side.

"It's all right, Charles, it's all right. You aren't going to die. Richard Grey has been here. He told us what he told Wilding. Just rest, honey. You're not going to die."

It was true, unbelievably, wonderfully true. I looked into her clear eyes and held her hands so tightly that it must have hurt.

"And I love you, Charles."

"Oh, my darling!"

"It's all been so horrible but ended so —so wonderfully for us, Charles. We've all of the future."

We kept silent for what must have been a long time, and then I began to think of the others.

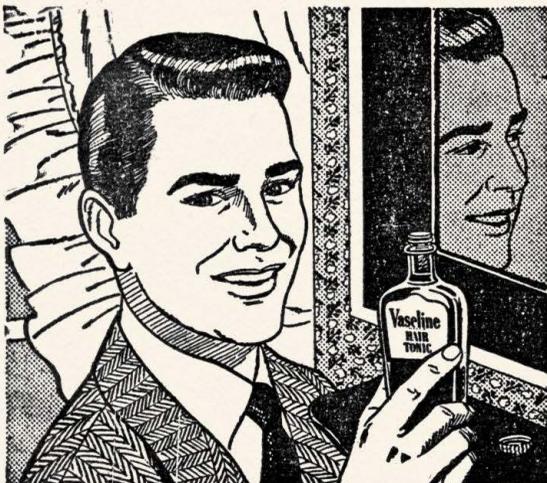
"What happened after I blacked out, Alison?"

"Not so much. Bramley took Wilding and Madrigal away. His friend helped him. They carried Caroline into the next room. As soon as we're ready to go, they're going to telephone the police. But, Charles, you don't have to worry now. They'll make Wilding and Madrigal stand trial, and perhaps a lot will come out, but you'll be there to help Nigel, and I'll be there to help you. Everything's fine, Charles." ● ● ●



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



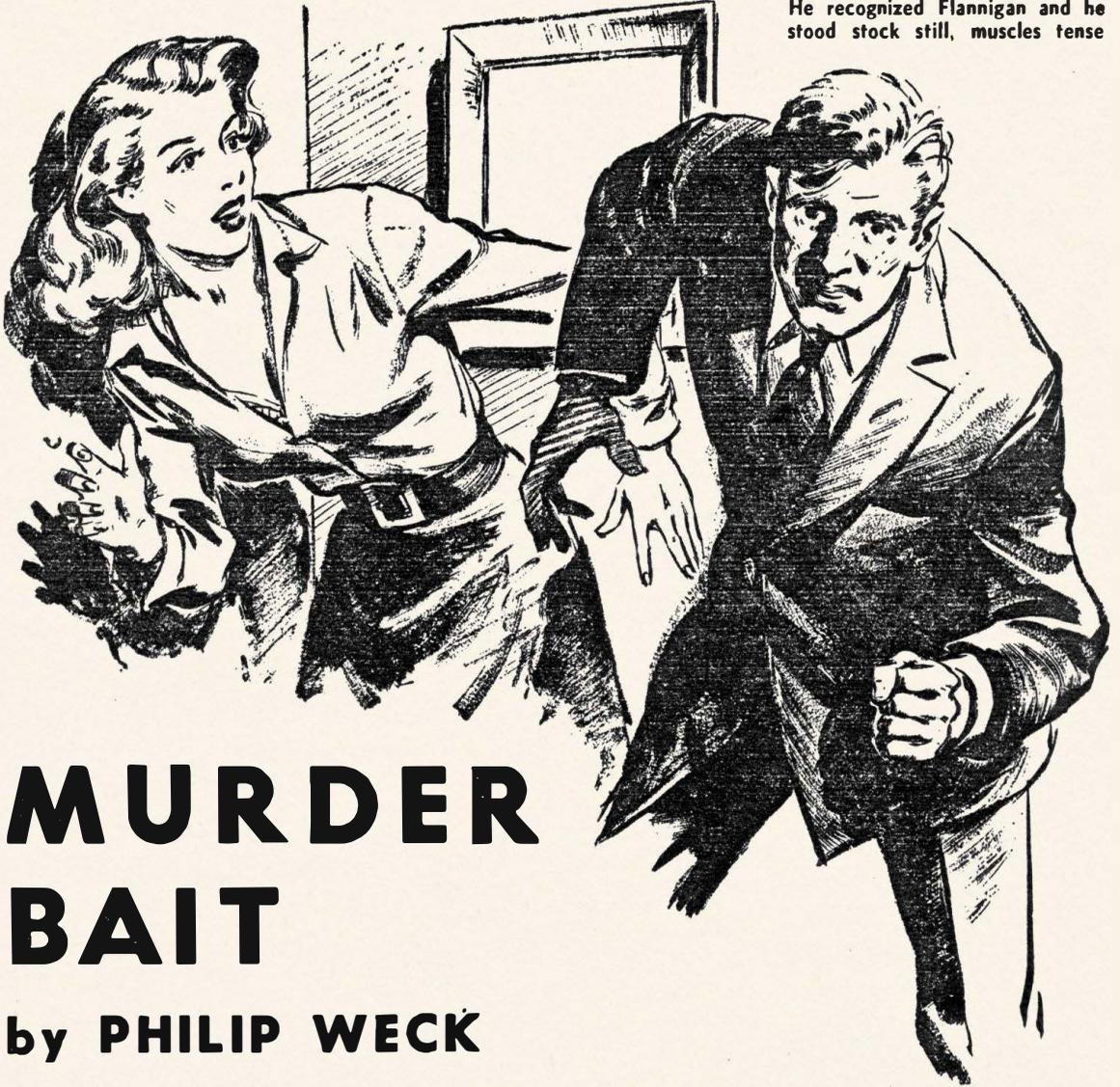
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Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN, starring JEAN HERSHOLT, on CBS Wednesday nights.

He recognized Flannigan and he stood stock still, muscles tense



MURDER BAIT

by PHILIP WECK

She was an awfully pretty kid. What a waste, Flannigan thought, to use something like that—for murder bait!

THE babe was standing under the movie house marquee with the captain when Detective Ed Flannigan drove up. Not a bad-looking babe, either. Fresh, with those long, slim legs.

Flannigan double-parked, got out, and pushed his way through the crowd, keeping his eyes on her. Pretty hair, too, a light brown. And the figure—

Relax, Ed, he told himself. Take it easy. Her face was pale and she was

frightened. You never could tell about a babe as scared as this one; sometimes they fell right into your arms and sometimes you couldn't even get close to them. Take it easy, Ed.

He realized that the captain was glaring at him, his thin, flat face as expressionless as a puppet's.

"Take her in, Flannigan," the captain said abruptly. "And keep her there until I get back."

He strode off into the lobby of the theater where Sergeant Edmonds was waiting.

So Ed Flannigan turned toward this strange, frightened, nice-looking babe and put his hand on her elbow.

She jerked away, instantly hostile.

All right, Ed, all right. Take your time. Let her get over the scare.

"You heard the captain, didn't you, girlie?" he asked.

Still she didn't speak. She stared at him, and Ed saw the tears that were struggling to come out, and the white-faced anger and confusion and hostility.

"Okay," he said. "Follow me."

He shoved his way through the crowd, pushing people aside roughly with his hands, not looking back until he reached the car and opened the door on the curb side. She was behind him, all right; she ducked her head and got in, still without saying a word.

Okay, babe, Ed Flannigan said to himself. Okay, if that's the way you want to play it. We can wait.

Again he shoved the crowd aside, circled the front of the squad car and slipped in behind the wheel. With a touch of the siren, he cleared a path and drove off.

Stiff and frightened, she sat beside him. Her legs—those long, firm, intriguing legs—were bent at the knee, the skirt tucked firmly underneath because of the breeze that blew in through open windows.

Half a block away the traffic had cleared, and Ed drove straight ahead until he was almost to the station. Then he turned right, into a quiet, tree-lined, empty side street, and pulled up at the curb. He turned off the ignition and faced the babe.

This was what he'd been waiting for, Ed Flannigan knew. A break like this. A break like this with a dame like this. The kind of break he'd never had before. He let his eyes run over her, from the knees back to the slim waist and up to her face.

"Why did you stop here?" she asked.

"What's the matter?" She was scared.

Ed grinned at her. "Take it easy, kid," he told her. "Don't worry. Nobody's going to hurt you." He brought a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket and held it out to her. "Have one," he said. "It'll do you good."

She didn't refuse the cigarettes; she ignored them.

WAS she still frightened or was she playing hard to get? Ed Flannigan's throat was dry and his voice unnaturally high when he spoke again.

"Look, kid," he said, "what're you so scared of? Nobody's going to hurt you." He took a smoke himself and lighted it. "Pull yourself together," he said. "Nothing's going to happen." When, for an instant, he thought he detected a softening of the firm line of her chin, he added, "I'll take care of you myself."

With a flick he tossed the match across in front of her and out the right window and he put his hand on her shoulder. Through the thin blouse he could feel the shoulder strap and he could feel, too, a tremor, as if she had a slight chill.

She moved her shoulder out from under his hand and slid over in the seat, away from his hand.

A little surge of anger flushed his cheeks. He glared through the windshield. Don't get excited, Ed. The kid's too scared now; she ain't acting normal.

He smoked the cigarette slowly, looking straight ahead, calm and big and placid to outward appearances, a big man with a hard face and a slow smile that seldom brought smiles in return.

She'll be all right, Ed, he told himself. She'll change her tune. Don't rush things.

Finished with the cigarette, he flipped it out the window. "Feel better?" he asked the girl.

Still she didn't answer.

Ed pressed the starter button and drove off, taking a left at the corner and pulling into the drive behind the station house. He opened the door for the babe, but he didn't touch her when she got out,

and he intentionally kept his eyes away from the flash of those long legs.

Inside, he took her into the detectives' room and pointed to the wooden bench along the wall.

"You gotta wait for the captain," he said. "You might as well sit down."

He sat down himself, behind his desk, and fumbled with a few reports. He read one of them, but he didn't know what he was reading. Across from him the girl was stiff and uncomfortable, her hands pressing into the seat, her back shoved flat against the bench, her blouse tight and firm.

"Look, kid," Ed said, "you might as well loosen up. Relax. This may take quite a while."

She glanced at him briefly then looked away again. She did not speak and she did not relax.

She was sitting that same way, stiff and unrelenting, ten minutes later when the captain telephoned.

"Flannigan?" the captain asked.

"Yeah."

"That babe still there?"

"Yeah, sure," said Ed.

"Take a statement from her and let her go."

That was all. Take a statement from her and let her go. The telephone clicked in Flannigan's ear. The slob. The big slob.

Ed Flannigan got a sheet of blank paper from his desk drawer and scribbled his name and the date on it and the words, "Statement of—"

He cleared his throat. "Lady," he said, "what's your name?"

"Sally Bestor," she said.

"Address."

SHE gave it to him. A rooming house on Hillside Avenue. Probably she lived alone in a little room where they didn't ask too many questions. Ed Flannigan wrote it down.

"Telephone number?"

This time she hesitated.

"Telephone number!" Ed Flannigan snapped.

"Circle 4-5635."

"Occupation?"

She was surprised. "Why, I'm the cashier," she said. "At the movie."

Again the pen scratched and moved over the paper.

"Now," said Ed, "tell me what happened today. Just the way it happened. And don't leave anything out."

Her voice was low and warm as she talked, and it wavered from the fear that still had not left.

"I was alone," she said, "in the window. It wasn't quite two o'clock when this little man came up, a very little man, almost a midget. . . ."

He'd stuck a gun through the opening in the window, and she'd handed him the money in the cash drawer. That was all—a stickup. He was a little man, only about five feet tall, with a funny face and thick eyebrows and a white shirt and no tie. When he had the money, he ran down the street and around the corner.

"How much did he get?" Ed Flannigan asked.

This time her voice was even lower than usual. "A thousand dollars," she said. She peered searchingly into his face. "Most of last night's receipts. I should have put them back in the safe but I forgot."

Ed Flannigan wrote that down, too. Let her go, the captain had said. Well, if that was what he wanted, that was what he got. Let her go. Away from the captain and the police and Ed Flannigan, detective. But not away from Ed Flannigan, the man.

"Okay," he said. "That's all."

Instantly she was on her feet.

"May I go now?" she asked.

"Look," he said, "if you change your address, let us know, see? If you take a new job, let us know. If you get a new telephone number or if you want to leave town for a couple of days, come in and tell the captain. Got that?"

She didn't answer. She was looking at him instead, and the soft lines of her face were almost friendly.

"Go ahead," Ed told her.

She was out in the hall, her heels clicking on the tile floor of the station, before Ed could get up from his chair.

From the office door he bellowed after her, "Hey! Wait a minute!"

She stopped and waited, and he plodded after her.

"I'll drive you," he said when he was at her side. "I brought you here and I'll take you home."

"No!" she cried. She stepped away from him. "Oh, no! No, please!"

Then she was gone, almost running down the stone steps in front, the breeze whipping her skirt around those long, lovely legs.

A thousand bucks, Ed Flannigan thought, and a pair of long, sweet legs, and a honey of a figure. And the captain had said to let her go. To a rooming house where they wouldn't ask a cop any questions at all, any time, day or night, when she got over being so scared.

BACK in the office he copied the address and telephone number and slipped them into his pocket. Then he waited, stolid, unmoving, patient. He could wait a long time. Two, three days, a week. He'd be around.

The captain and Edmonds came in at two-forty-five with a swarthy, pimply-faced youth who was an usher at the movie. His name was Dominic Tulero, he said, and he had seen the holdup; he'd been looking out the front door and had spotted the little man running toward the corner.

"He was a midget," Tulero said. "A freak. I didn't know what he was runnin' for until the babe let out a yell."

Ed Flannigan took down his statement, too, and they sent him packing.

"That's a lousy break," the captain muttered as Tulero walked out. "A lousy break. We had the babe backed up against the wall without a witness, and this punk had to stick his nose into things. Flannigan, type out a report for the robbery squad downtown and sign my name to it; I've got a date."

A thousand bucks, Flannigan thought as the captain and Edmonds, golf bags over their shoulders, walked out. A thousand bucks, and they didn't even see that she was a good-looking, frightened babe.

The box-office was closed at ten-thirty; the theater emptied a little after eleven. At ten-forty-five, Ed Flannigan was parked outside the rooming house on Hillside Avenue in his own car, hunched down in the seat, a cigarette damp between his lips. At eleven the babe came along and went in, and Ed Flannigan noted the room, toward the back, where the light flashed on a minute later. At eleven-fifteen Dominic Tulero slithered through the same doorway. At eleven-twenty somebody pulled down the shade in the room near the back. Flannigan tossed his cigarette out the window and climbed out himself.

The front door was open, the hallway dark and deserted. Heavily, Ed Flannigan went upstairs to the room he'd singled out. He put his shoulder against the door. Flimsy, it burst open with only slight pressure.

Her eyes big, her blouse down off one shoulder, and a long, red scratch running down past her straps, the girl was standing in a corner, hair disheveled, glaring wildly.

Tulero, in front of her, whirled around. One hand flicked toward a hip pocket. Then he recognized Flannigan and he stood stock still, crouched, muscles tense.

"Okay," said Flannigan. "Give me your back, punk."

For an instant Tulero didn't move.

"Your back!" Flannigan bellowed.

The fear that showed in Tulero's eyes was different from the girl's. It was an animal fear, crafty, trapped, expecting the worst, but not the helpless terror she had shown. He glared at Flannigan and then, slowly, hands half raised, he turned around.

Flannigan patted his pockets. It wasn't a gun but a knife, a switch-blade knife with a long, sharp blade that sprang out when a slight pressure was

put on a button in the handle.

"Where is it?" Flannigan asked.

Neither the girl nor Tulero answered him; they didn't move.

"Who's got it?" Flannigan demanded, short, sharp, angry. "You, girlie, where is it?"

She spoke as if she were out of breath, as if she'd been running or struggling, as if she were still frightened and bewildered. "Where is what? What do you mean?"

"One grand, girlie. Every penny of it."

"But—but—" she sank onto a couch, fists tight and pressed against her temples, face pale, the shoulder naked and soft and tempting. When she spoke she talked rapidly, almost hysterically. "That's what he told me. He said he really didn't see anything and he'd admit it to you and I'd go to jail if—if I—if I didn't—"

SHE was weeping. Her shoulders rose, hunched, and the blouse fell even lower; and on that soft, white, tempting skin was the long red mark of someone's fingernail. Red and vivid, but not as red as the rage that surged through Flannigan's veins.

"Punk," he said softly to Tulero, "I ought to put a slug in your back."

Half crouching, arms still raised, Tulero turned around like a cat, and Flannigan slapped him on the cheek, a heavy, brutal slap that was more of a blow with the heel of his left hand and sent him spinning and reeling toward the door.

He was fast and agile; he stayed on his feet, legs half bent and still facing Flannigan. But he didn't run. You don't run from a cop like this one, a tough cop in a tough town. You take what's coming and hope you last it out and you burn with a hatred that flames through the rest of your life. You can hate any man who snatches a thousand dollars out of your hand, but that hatred was nothing to Tulero then. Because this was not a thousand dollars. This was soft, honey-

brown hair and long, limber legs and a soft, bare white shoulder.

Tulero crouched and waited, hands at his sides, facing Flannigan—two men after the same thing.

"You lost, punk," Flannigan said. "You lost everything this time."

Still Tulero crouched, not moving.

Flannigan hit him again with the heel of his left hand.

"Now git!" he said. "Git! And fast!"

Tulero slithered through the door, looking over his shoulder, ready to run should that gun hand move upward.

But it didn't move. From the hallway Flannigan watched until he was down the stairs and out the door. Then the big, red-faced cop sheathed his gun and went back into the room to the girl.

She was waiting, staring wide-eyed at the door.

Sheepishly, Flannigan said what he had said so futilely before. "Don't be afraid. Nobody's going to hurt you."

She didn't answer; her shoulders shook again, uncontrollably.

"He was just a punk," Flannigan said. "He won't be back."

Still no answer.

"That's a bad scratch," he said. "Let me fix it."

Above the wash basin was a medicine chest where he found cotton in it and alcohol. He rubbed the scratch while she shrank back, watching his hands, trembling under the touch of the cotton, so apprehensive she did not notice the sting of the alcohol.

While he swabbed, he felt the softness of the flesh under the slight pressure he exerted and saw the firm swelling of her curves and the trembling of her muscles. He knew his face was flushed and when he spoke, his voice was high and strained.

"Okay," he said. "You're clean, kid. Don't worry; you're clean. I know you are." Then: "I'm sorry, kid."

Then she was sobbing and leaning toward him, and one of his hands dropped to her waist and the other went around her shoulder, and he pulled her to him

for an instant before her guard went up.

She squirmed and twisted and got her hands between them and shoved against his chest with all her strength.

"Let go of me!" she cried. "Get your hands off me! You dirty, stinking, lousy cop!"

Flannigan let go, and she sat on the couch and sobbed, hands cupped over her face. Flannigan walked softly out of the room without a word, his hands shaking, his legs weak.

He went downstairs and out of the building. For a long time he sat in his car, smoking and thinking, until at last the trembling stopped and he could trust himself to drive downtown.

THE records room at headquarters was nearly empty at that hour, and Flannigan went over the files himself, hour after hour, looking first under Armed Robbery, then under Burglary, for often the one crime follows the other. He pulled out six cards—six men with criminal records, and all under five feet five. He wrote down the names and nicknames and last-known addresses. Then he went to his own room in his aunt's home and lay awake with a cigarette in his mouth until the grayness of dawn showed through the windowpane.



"—And another one of my aliases is Blabbermouth."

That morning he called the station a little after nine, when he knew the captain would be out for coffee.

"I got a tip on this theater holdup," he told Edmonds. "I won't be in today."

"Well, I don't know," Edmonds said. "You ought to tell the captain."

"I'll call in every hour," Flannigan said. "Is that good enough?"

Edmonds said, "I guess so, Flannigan," and hung up, and Flannigan went to work. He found Two-Top John, already hopped up, half asleep in a grimy Fifth District tavern, and he slapped the addict into some vestige of awareness.

"I'm looking for a man called Shorty," he told Two-Top. "A little shrimp, bushy eyebrows, did a stretch for housebreaking. Where is he?"

"Boss, I dunno," Two-Top said, his head nodding. A minute later, he protested, "Boss, I'd sure tell you if I could. You know that, don't you, boss? You ain't gonna run me in, are you, boss?"

"It ain't too important," Flannigan said. "We'll find him sooner or later and when we do, we got a surprise witness. But I'd sorta like to make the pinch myself."

"Honest, boss, if I knew—" Then Two-Top's head slumped heavily to his chest, and he was dreaming again.

Willie Morrow was playing pool when Flannigan dragged him out to the sidewalk, slammed him up against a brick wall, and asked the same question.

"Get your dirty hands off me, copper!" Morrow snarled. "I wouldn't tell you if I did know!"

"It ain't too important," Flannigan said.

So it went in the neighborhood where the six little men lived and where Dominic Tulero lived, too. For Dominic Tulero was not one to let a thousand dollars, or any split of a thousand dollars, slip out of his hands. Not even for those lovely legs and firm curves. Not when he might have had them both if he'd played it right.

Dominic Tulero had lied, all right. But he'd been after one thing the night be-

fore, not two. He'd lied when he said he hadn't witnessed the holdup. He'd known the girl was clean, and Flannigan, the cop, hadn't known.

Flannigan talked to a small-time bookie and numbers writer, a pimply-faced kid who had an irresistible desire for new automobiles, a bartender in a cheap tavern, who'd made the mistake of rolling a drunk once when Flannigan was passing.

At eleven o'clock, Flannigan thought he'd better call in.

"For cripes' sake, Flannigan!" the captain bellowed. "Get in here! I told you to turn that case over to the Robbery Squad, didn't I? What the hell do you think this is?"

So he went in. But he had planted his lines well. That afternoon Tulero's body, with a single bullet hole in the back of the head, was found in a vacant lot in the Forty-second District only a few miles from where the captain and Edmonds were playing golf.

IT WAS a case for Homicide, downtown. Flannigan didn't bother them; he knocked off, as usual, at four o'clock and went back to his rounds, back to the business of shaking up the little people, the hangers-on, the punks who were on the fringe of things. This time he handed out a new line: "We still got a good witness soon as we make the pinch. . . ."

After dark he parked across the street from the theater.

The girl, wearing a loose-fitting blouse, was in the cashier's cage, and the manager was with her. Flannigan watched for a while and then drove off. Even after dark that street was too crowded, too congested. He parked two blocks away, on the route she would take to her room, and waited.

Nothing happened. He followed her home. He waited outside, snoozing intermittently in his car, until dawn came and the sidewalks once again were busy. Sleepy, he reported for duty at eight o'clock.

The captain was downtown that

day, and Edmonds didn't bother with the previous day's teletype notices. Nobody was paying much attention to the death of Dominic Tulero.

At noon Flannigan dragged Willie Morrow out of the poolroom again and took him for a little ride.

"Listen, copper," Morrow said, "I don't know nothin'. Lay off me, will you? I ain't no stool."

"You're wise, Morrow," Flannigan told him. "You're wise. But it won't do any good. We still have a good witness."

That was all he said. Cursing under his breath, he put Morrow out a mile away from the poolroom, and then drove back to the station.

At ten o'clock that evening, foggy from lack of sleep, he parked three blocks from the theater. He knew Morrow would have squawked loud and long. The person who mattered would have heard. When the girl came along, he would know if the plant had worked.

At eleven o'clock she hadn't shown up.

At eleven-thirty Flannigan cut in his ignition, made a U-turn and drove slowly back toward the movie. He'd gone a block when he saw her, tripping along the sidewalk, her head held high, her shapely legs outlined as the breeze whipped her skirt against them.

The parked black car was facing in the wrong direction, and at first Flannigan thought no one was in it. From a few feet away he saw the man, a short man, his head barely showing above the top of the driver's seat.

Flannigan hit the street, running, when she was less than ten feet from that car.

He fumbled for the door handle and saw the pistol come up inside the car, level with the open window.

He yanked the door open and bellowed. The pistol swung around on Flannigan as he reached for his own gun; it went off, and his left shoulder jerked as if from a giant blow. Flannigan was forced backward a step, but he shot the little man in the chest three times before he could fire again.

That was all. The babe screamed, and half a dozen people came running. The thousand was in the midget's pocket, all right—most of it anyhow—but witnesses were around, and all Flannigan could do was count it out and turn it over to a deputy coroner.

He let a doctor bandage his shoulder and drove to headquarters. The babe was still there, answering questions. He drove her home; she couldn't very well avoid it. She sat quiet, far over in the front seat, against the door. She didn't say a word.

Half a block from her rooming house Flannigan pulled up to the curb and cut his engine. Before she could move, he reached over her and grabbed the door handle and held it.

"Don't," she said. "Please don't!"

Now was the time to make his play, he knew. Now or not at all. On the drive from headquarters he'd been planning what to say: "You can cut that stuff out, sister. You're not fooling anybody. You been around. You know what it's all about."

HE CLEARED his throat, took a deep breath. "Look, sister," he said. Then he stopped. Those long legs were crossed at the knees, tight against the skirt of her dress, thighs full and yet slender. In her deep blue eyes the fear was gone now; they were numb, almost hopeless.

"Look, sister," he said again. Then he

plunged on. "You got me wrong," he said. "You got me all wrong. I just thought maybe—well, we could get along together. you and me. We could maybe—well—"

That was when she laughed. A shaky, high, almost hysterical laugh.

He seized her roughly by the shoulders. "Don't laugh at me!" he bellowed.

He shook her and he shook her again and he roared. "Don't laugh at me! Do you hear me?"

She stopped. She stopped and looked into his eyes, not trying to squirm from his grasp.

"Copper," she said finally, talking low, "maybe I'm like a lot of girls. Did you ever think of that? Maybe I'm normal, see? Maybe I like to go out dancing or to a night club or on a picnic. Or have somebody bring me candy and flowers. Did you ever think of that, copper?"

Flannigan's hands were still on her shoulders, and he was glaring into those eyes and slowly, as his anger smoldered, he saw hope returning to them.

Quickly then she kissed him on the mouth, a light, fast kiss, and she shoved open the door and got out.

"Call me up, copper," she said, "and take me out dancing some time."

Then she walked away, her heels clicking on the sidewalk, her head held high, her hips swaying, the breeze blowing against those long, firm legs as she stepped rapidly away from him, like a thoroughbred. ● ● ●

"I
WAS
FRAMED!"

THEODORE ROOSEVELT McCLURE, awaiting electrocution in Ohio for murder, was so persistent in his claim of having been framed that noted private detective Ray Schindler interested himself in the case. His investigation proved that McClure was correct: He had been framed. But checking further, Schindler dug up legitimate evidence so clear and strong that McClure confessed and was electrocuted

—Stephen J. Schmiedl

BLONDE ANGEL of DEATH

A Novel by **W. T. BALLARD**

It must have been love with Sawyer's beautiful

new wife. After all, she hadn't shot him—yet!

Chapter I

KORNETT gave me the job at the Sandhurst Inn. Kornett had made three million dollars in moving dirt, the honest kind of dirt that you pick up in a scraper, not the kind that the gossip columnists write about.

He'd been a contractor, a big one, and he got tired of building dams and laying out roads. So he built the Sandhurst Inn, and it was well named. It stood on a low string of sand hills to



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Suddenly his hand was up, the
gun pointing directly at me

the southeast of town. About as desolate a spot as you could hope to find in a long day's ride.

He built the inn and then went off to Europe, taking his son and daughter with him.

Before he left, he gave me the job as house detective. I wasn't a hotel detective. I wasn't a detective of any kind.

All my life I'd been a dirt mover. I'd started as a kid with a team and a scraper. I'd moved up to tractors and then to cats. I'd been Kornett's field boss for three years before he quit, and I'd picked up some kind of a bug on a job down in the jungles of Central America.

The doctors didn't seem to know what it was. They finally tossed their hands in the air and said that I'd live six months if I was lucky. They told me that, and they told Kornett. I was too sick to care. He moved me into a chair in the new hotel and called me a detective.

It was just another way of paying my keep until I got around to kicking off.

But I didn't kick off. Something about that desert air did what none of the medicine I had taken had done. I got stronger, sitting there, watching the hotel, watching the guests who poured through the arched doorways from the East, from Hollywood, yes, from Europe.

I stayed on, partly because I'd promised Kornett I would, partly because I was afraid to leave, afraid that the bug might come back.

IT WAS just three years to the day from the time that Kornett had left until the evening when I watched the blonde register. A lot had happened in those three years. The boss had disappeared in Central Europe, no one knew what had become of him or his family, and the hotel had turned from something the natives had called "Kornett's Folly" into a gold mine which was raking in dollars faster than the manager could count them.

When Kornett had first built the place, the dam had just been finished. Vegas was a struggling desert town, watching hopelessly as the construction workers, who had made it their playground for three years, prepared to move on.

Everyone thought that the town would die—everyone but Kornett. He'd made money out of the dam, and he loved the country. He'd used his crew to build the hotel, counting on tourists who would come to see the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Men had laughed. Auto courts were more suitable to house tourists than a two-million-dollar hotel, they'd said. But they had counted without Hollywood, without the lure of easy marriages, easy divorce, and gambling.

Southern Nevada boomed. The hotel was full, coining money, the boss was lost, hidden by the surging tides of struggling refugees who overran unhappy Europe, and I was sitting in the ornate lobby, watching the girl register.

She was blonde and clean and fragile-looking, like a dream out of a Disney picture. She hardly looked real. Something about her caught my attention. It wasn't her clothes. By that time, I was used to the silver fox and mink of Hollywood.

It wasn't beauty. The beauties of America had stopped with us. It was the feeling that we had met somewhere before, sometime, a long while ago, perhaps in another life.

I watched as she turned away from the desk and noted that it took two bell-boys to carry her luggage, and that it was expensive. Subconsciously I noted something else. It was brand-new.

As I said before, I wasn't a real detective, but I'd worked all my life, and I'd formed the habit of learning any new job that came my way. In spite of myself, I'd picked up the tricks of the trade from my two assistants who were experienced men.

In a resort hotel you watch the baggage more closely than you watch the guests' clothes. And her bags were

brand-new. I wasn't the only one who watched her. The clerk, a patent-haired punk with a woman's complexion, was following her progress with interest, and the assistant manager had his office door open and was looking out.

I rose and wandered over toward the desk. From the corner of the mail-boxes the clerk watched me examine her card. He didn't like me. None of the regular employees liked me. They thought I was the boss' spy, left there before he set out on his ill-fated pleasure trip.

I didn't pay any attention. I saw that her name was Laura Thomas, and that she came from Chicago. That was the information on her card.

I turned and moved carelessly across the lobby. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I had to do something. A great restlessness filled me. No other woman had made me feel that way in the thirty years I had lived. I had to talk to that girl and I didn't even know what I was going to say.

I took the stairs rather than the elevator, because I didn't want the clerk to know what I was doing. It was a long climb to the seventh floor, but she was in Room 722.

Three years before, I couldn't have climbed one flight, but now I was in the best of health. I went down the hall, sensing that my heart was pounding the inside of my ribs like a trip-hammer, and it wasn't from the climb, either.

SHE opened the door herself, and for an instant, I fumbled with the words like a schoolboy who had forgotten his lesson.

"Yes?" she said, and I realized that she was younger than I had thought.

I mumbled something, and she got scared. I could read it in her eyes. She started to close the door, but I couldn't let her. I felt that if I did, I would never see her again.

I had one of my oxfords in the way, and the door bumped against it. Her eyes got careful then, and a film seemed to come down over them, shading their

color down until they looked dull and uninteresting.

"What do you want?"

I had to say something. I couldn't tell her that I felt we must have met in another world, that she had been a queen and I—

I said, "I'm the hotel detective."

I meant to go on, to tell her that I only wanted to be of service, that if I could do anything, I would. I never got the chance.

One of her hands had been hidden from sight by the partly open door. It came into sight now, and it had a gun in it.

"Come in," she said, and her tone was as cold and chipped as any that I have ever heard. "Come in, Mr. Detective, and close the door."

If I hadn't been so surprised, I could have done something about it. She was only a few feet from me, and I had faced guns before, many times. A man doesn't build things in the jungles of the world without running into trouble.

But surprise held me in its grasp, and I obeyed as if I'd been hypnotized. I came in and closed the door. She ordered me to turn around, and she got the gun which I had carried under my left armpit for three years and had never once had to use.

She did it expertly, as if she were used to guns. Then she backed away and told me to turn around. I turned slowly. I was feeling something of a fool and I was sore—sore at her, but sorer at myself.

"What's the idea?" I asked her.

She said slowly, "I just wanted to show you that I won't stand for any nonsense. Now, what did you come up here for? Lying won't get you anywhere."

Some of my anger must have showed in my voice. "I don't know what you think you're getting away with, Miss Smarty, but we don't stand for gun-girls at the Sandhurst. We don't like trouble, either, so if you want a word of advice, you'll pack those nice new bags and move on."

Her tone sharpened. "Who are you? What's your business up here?"

I told her again that I was the hotel detective. "The name is Sawyer, Robert Alfred Sawyer, and now that we've been formally introduced, you might tell me just what you are doing with that gun."

She didn't answer. Instead, she backed toward the small telephone stand and, never taking her eyes from my face, lifted the receiver.

"There's a man here," she said clearly, "who says that he's the house detective. He's just ordered me to leave and—" She listened for a moment, then extended the receiver toward me. "For you."

I took the receiver and heard the desk clerk sputter angrily. I knew that I was in for it then, but I didn't have anything to say over the phone. I just hung up and started for the door. When I got it open, I turned around.

"My gun?" I asked her.

She smiled faintly. "Gun? Did you have a gun, Mr. Detective?"

I swore at her. "I'll run you out of town!" I said, and slammed the door.

THE assistant manager was named Reese. The clerk was Hyland, and they were talking together furiously when I arrived. But they weren't alone, for Carroll was with them.

Carroll had appeared the year before. Carroll was some relation to the old man. When Kornett had failed to return from Europe, and when nothing was heard from him, his American heirs had got together and formed a kind of trust to protect his interests. That was what they told the court, anyway.

What I actually thought was that they were trying to protect the money the old man had left in the States, in case, for any reason, he failed to return.

Carroll was the result. He'd been appointed by the court to look after the interests of the Kornett family and as such, he was busy running the hotel.

They all looked around when I came in, and it was the black-haired clerk who

jumped me first.

"What do you mean, threatening our guests?" he bleated.

I'd done a lot of thinking on my way down in the elevator. I was in a spot and knew it. The job in itself wasn't so important, but the old man had left me at the hotel, and I meant to be there when he came back, if he ever did.

Personally I was afraid he wasn't coming back. The Russians had long since overrun the district of Eastern Germany in which he had been visiting, and all my efforts to learn anything through our State Department had come to naught.

If I meant to stay on the job, I'd have to placate these men.

"So you want guests who carry guns around, do you?" I said.

They looked at each other and then at me. Carroll cleared his throat. "Guns?" he said.

I nodded. "She has one and she acts as if she knew how to use it. I just gave her a friendly tip to move on, and she got tough. If you want her to stay, it's okay by me, but with four movie stars under the roof and enough jewels on them to start a Tiffany branch, I didn't think it was a good idea."

I saw Reese and Carroll exchange worried glances, and I knew that I had scored. The clerk still viewed me with active dislike, but he didn't matter.

Reese muttered something about maybe being too hasty and disappeared, with Carroll at his heels. I winked at the clerk and went back to the lobby. But I couldn't get the blonde off my mind.

After I'd eaten, I decided to have another try at it. Perhaps she would be cooled down a little by then. One of my assistants was in the lobby, and I told him to keep an eye on things. Then I went back up the stairs.

When I got to it, I saw that the door was standing open a couple of inches. I raised my hand to knock, changed my mind, and pushed it wide. What I saw inside stopped me in my tracks.

She lay on her face, in the middle of the green carpet, absolutely naked. I couldn't see her face. The blonde bob was mussed, as if she might have been dragged around by her hair.

I had a sick feeling at the pit of my stomach and for a moment I couldn't go into that room. I just stood there, one hand on the doorknob, my muscles frozen.

Then I got over it. I'd seen people die. You can't work without brushing death's coat-tails now and then, but for some reason, her death seemed to hit closer than any that I had ever known.

Chapter II

I FORCED myself to go into that room. I forced myself to bend down over the girl to see what had caused death. I saw, all right. There was a hole just above the heart. Blood had run down from it to make a wide damp stain on the carpet, but I'd lost all interest in the cause of death.

The girl was not the same one I had seen register at the desk downstairs! She wasn't the one who had held me up and taken my gun!

She was as blonde as the other girl, but neither so young nor so pretty. I knew her, as I knew more than half of the odd collection of people who made up the population of the desert town.

She was a singer at one of the night-clubs which clung to the Los Angeles highway like beads on a wide string. Her name was Mida Forbes, and she was reputed to be the personal and private property of Big Jim Tullover, who owned more clubs and ran more wheels than any other man in southern Nevada.

Under ordinary circumstances, I would have stopped to think. It wasn't that I feared Tullover, but anyone in his right mind who meant to continue living in Vegas, thought twice before they butted into the affairs of the big, unsmiling man who ruled the town as if it belonged to him.

But I was so startled and so relieved

to learn that the dead girl was not the blonde who had registered as Laura Thomas of Chicago that I lost my head a little. I picked up the telephone and told the switchboard girl to find my assistant and send him upstairs, then phone the police.

I hung up and looked around. There wasn't much to see. Evidently someone had taken a shower. The curtain was wet, and there was a puddle of water on the bathroom floor. In the closet were a lot of dresses. I examined them with interest. They were all new, and they all bore labels which showed that they had been purchased in Los Angeles.

I stood there thinking it over. If Laura Thomas was from Chicago, why the devil had all her clothes been bought in L.A.?

There was a sound at the door which I had closed. I thought it was my assistant, Grogan, and crossed to pull it open. It wasn't Grogan. It was a little man I had never seen before. He wore a dark double-breasted suit with a pronounced pin stripe, and a soft gray hat pulled well down so that it shadowed his small triangular face.

He started to say something, then apparently he saw the naked girl stretched out on the rug behind me. He swore, and there was something stabbing in the way the words dribbled from his tense lips, as if he blamed me not only for her death but also for the position in which he found himself.

He had a gun. It was in his hand, and the hand had been hanging at his side, the gun concealed in the folds of his topcoat. Suddenly the hand was up, the gun pointing directly at me.

There wasn't time to do anything, not even time to think. He fired, and how he missed, I'll never know. I ducked. The movement was purely instinctive, but as I ducked, my feet went out from under me, and as I fell, I cracked my head on the door jamb.

A million purple lights danced through the darkness which closed about me like an embracing shroud. I

wasn't out, not entirely, but I couldn't move, couldn't right myself or get my eyes open until I felt someone grasp my shoulder.

Then I came up swinging. Grogan's voice said through the fog, "Hey, cut it out, cut it out," and his big arms smothered me.

I got my eyes open finally and stared into his red, Irish face. I shook my head, trying to clear it of the ringing which still persisted. Then I realized that Reese, the assistant manager, was standing behind Grogan.

"What happened?" Reese asked.

"I slipped." One hand was pinioned between Grogan's big body and my own. With the other I gingerly touched the knot which was rising on the side of my head.

"You slipped!" The assistant manager's voice was contemptuous. "What do we care what you did? Who killed that girl and what the devil are you doing up here, anyhow? I thought we told you to keep out of things."

I DIDN'T have to answer, for the elevator door clanged shut and Lou Hertz was with us. Lou was the big-shot police detective of the town. He was a little man, with a sharply pointed nose and the palest eyes I have ever seen.

I don't know where he came from originally or what he'd been, but he was no Westerner. He looked at the blonde and smacked his lips. Then he saw who she was, and what little color he had in his face faded out, leaving it a kind of slate-gray.

"This will make trouble," he said.

Reese almost screamed at him, "Trouble? You fool, of course it will make trouble! We're full, and some of the most important people in Hollywood are staying with us."

Lou Hertz turned and looked at the assistant manager coldly. I've never seen such contempt in a man's eyes. It was easy to see that he considered Reese of no importance, but the fact that the dead girl had been a close friend of Big

Jim Tullover was important, indeed.

He turned to me. "Sawyer," he asked, and his tone was crisp, "how do you come into this?"

I told him that I didn't come into it at all. I told him exactly what had happened. While I talked, his men were searching the place. One of them appeared in the bathroom door.

"Look what I found in the laundry bag," he said and held up a gun.

I stared at it with widening eyes. It was my gun. There could be no mistake. Hertz hadn't turned to look at his assistant. His eyes were still on my face, and he must have seen me change expression.

"So it's your gun, Sawyer," he said. "Did you kill her? Let's go down to Headquarters and have a talk."

I was almost glad to go to Police Headquarters. Anything was better than staying at the hotel. I knew the knife would be out for me there, and plenty. We went to Headquarters and sat around while a ballistics man proved that the bullet which had killed Mida Forbes had come from my gun. Then they went to work on me. For two hours they asked questions. There weren't any rubber hoses or any rough stuff. Lou Hertz was too smart for that.

After the questions, they turned me loose. That was a surprise. I hadn't expected it.

Outside, I came down the steps with the shirt clinging wetly to my back. It was hot, and the white lights which they had trained on my face had added to the heat of the room.

I took a look at Main Street. The place was parked full. Every club was running, and the loafers made little knots of shirt-sleeved humanity along the sidewalks. I stood there, knowing that along all those streets I hadn't a friend in the world. In that company, you were supposed to look after yourself, and woe to the guy who couldn't.

That the police had turned me loose didn't fool me a bit. There wasn't any real need of putting me in jail. There



A man stood against the wall behind her

were three hundred miles of desert road in any direction I might choose.

A half-dozen phone calls would head me off if I tried to make a break. No, as long as that girl had died with a bullet from my gun, I was on the spot. The only way to get off was to find the real killer.

I went down the street. All the natives turned to look at me as I passed. The word was out. Big Jim Tullover's girl was dead, and my gun had been the murder weapon.

I don't think that any of those men gave me more than two or three hours to stay alive at the most. They figured that I'd never live long enough for the State of Nevada to do anything about it.

Big Jim settled his own quarrels. He had to, to maintain his prestige.

NONE of the watchers knew where I was headed. I felt like a Western movie hero, walking down that sidewalk. You've all seen the routine—the hero walking straight into a gunfight.

The only difference was that I didn't feel like a hero, and I didn't have a gun.

When I reached the doorway of the One-two Club I turned in. Behind me, the street seemed suddenly still.

The gambling room was on the order of all desert clubs. You can see the same arrangement in any town from Oregon on south to below the Border. There was one difference. Most of the rooms

are dirty, with the collection of years of dust. In most, the wooden floors are scuffed so thin you hesitate to trust your weight on the worn planks. The One-two Club was new. Even the wheels which spun for twenty out of each twenty-four hours were new.

That club was Jim Tullover's pride, the spot in which he kept his office. He was there now, in his office, as if he had been waiting for me to arrive. He was alone, and no one tried to bar my passage.

He looked up as I came in, flipped the newspapers onto the bare top of his desk, and leaned back. He was so big that his weight made the chair creak alarmingly. Sitting, he seemed almost as tall as I was, standing.

"Well, Sawyer?" His tone lacked expression of any kind.

I took a chair unasked. I leaned back against the wall. I wanted him to think that I was at ease. I don't believe I fooled him much. I don't think anyone ever did.

"I suppose you've heard what's happened?" I was opening the attack, carrying it directly to him.

He nodded, and I thought I detected a slight surprise in his manner.

"I didn't kill her," I went on. "The cops think I did because it was my gun, but I didn't pull that trigger."

He said slowly, "You've got nerve, coming here."

"Why?" I asked. "It was the only smart thing to do. I'm safer here, talking to you, than I am any place else in town."

He pretended he didn't get it, and I went on to explain.

"You run this place, don't you? What you decide about me will govern what happens. Now look, I'm assuming that you want to know who killed your girl friend."

For just an instant his eyes blazed, and I shivered in spite of myself. It was as if someone had raised a shutter and given me a look at hell. Then his natural caution reasserted itself, and his eyes

were veiled again, and watchful.

"Go ahead—I'm listening," he said.

"All right. I, too, am interested in finding out who killed her. It was my gun, and as I said the cops blame me. What is more important, maybe you do." I paused, but he didn't say anything, so I went on, "It would help a lot if you told me why she was at the hotel tonight, and why she was in that particular room."

He drew a long, crooked stogy from his pocket, bit off the end carefully, and held a match to the cigar. When it was going to his liking, smoke drifted up between us, and he said through the blue curtain:

"I got a phone call tonight. Maybe you don't know it, but I've been trying to buy that hotel. The call was from a girl. She wanted to know if I was still interested in buying. I admitted I was, and she asked me to send someone over to talk about it. I sent Mida, and she's dead."

"Then you know that the blonde I talked about to the police really exists, and that I didn't just dream her up."

His words were careful, as if he considered each one with care before uttering it. "Yes, I know she exists. I also know you had some kind of an argument with her before dinner, but what I'm not certain about is what happened after dinner. Maybe you went back up to that room to continue your argument. Maybe you saw Mida, mistook her for this other girl, and shot her."

THE palms of my hands were damp, and not because I was too warm. I had a vivid picture of what was going on in his mind. It could have happened just as he said, or a lot of other things could have happened.

This unknown girl who called herself Laura Thomas could be a friend of Tullover's. She could have slipped into town to see him, and Mida Forbes could have caught them together. A lot of things could have happened. It looked as if it were up to me to find out.

If I didn't, I stayed neatly where I was, behind the eight ball.

His next words confirmed this. He said, "I'm a fair man, Sawyer. Maybe you aren't mixed up in this. Maybe everything happened just as you say. I'm willing to wait until tomorrow to find out. If you can produce this other girl by tomorrow, and she admits taking your gun away from you, I'll tell the cops to lay off. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise you'll take care of it yourself."

He held up one hand. It was curiously long and slender for a man of his build. It might have belonged to a sensitive musician—or to a gambler.

"Let's not be crude," he said.

I told him that the last thing in the world I wanted was to be crude, and went on out into the gambling rooms. I didn't know what to do next, so I stopped to watch the players at the front crap table. Someone jolted against my elbow, and I looked around to see a little man whose weazened face looked like a dried apple.

"What is it, Snipe?" I asked the fellow.

He was a barfly, and as far as I knew, he had no other name. Where he came from, why he lived, was one of the town's minor mysteries.

He pressed close to me, too close for my comfort. I doubt if he had had a bath that year. "She told me to find you," he whispered. "She told me to have you meet her at the Bride-a-way."

I stared at him suspiciously, thinking he must be drunk.

"What the devil are you talking about? Who wanted me to meet her at the Bride-a-way?"

"Your girl."

For an instant I was certain that his liquor-soggy brain had given way before the constant assault of the bad whisky which he poured down his throat. Then I had another idea.

"Which one—the dark one?" I asked.

He laughed, a high cackling sound which made a dozen people turn to stare

at us.

"Naw, a blonde, and what a blonde." He made little curving motions with his hands.

We were attracting too much attention to suit me. I slid a folded bill into his hand and left the club. The street loafers were surprised to see me appear. I think a lot of them had never expected to see me again. I paid no attention.

Chapter III

AT THE curb I got a cab and told the driver to take me out to the hotel. I had a little car there in one of the rear garages. In it I drove out to what is laughingly called Matrimony Lane.

People think of Nevada as a place to get a divorce. It's also a place to get married. California has a three-day marriage law, and since a lot of the Golden State's citizens refuse to wait that long, Nevada gets a lot of business.

To service this trade, a number of wedding chapels had sprung up. The Bride-a-way was not the least of these. Reaching it, and parking my coupé in the big circular entrance driveway, I walked up one of the side paths past the wishing well. The whole layout had cost dough. A man and his wife ran it, having got the idea several years before and starting with a single-room shack.

Now they had four separate chapels so that four couples could be made happy at the same time. But they had plenty of competition. It seemed that half the people of Vegas were engaged in the business of promoting marriage. The county clerk's office stayed open most of the night so that licenses would be available for all comers. It was big business and brought a lot of money into the desert town.

Hank Ofstead, the owner, was in his office. I knew him. I'd sent him a lot of business from the hotel. He looked up as I pushed the door open and grinned, his freckled face splitting with real pleasure.

"Hello. Bob," he said. "I never ex-

pected to have you for a customer.”

I hid my surprise. “Is my—er—bride around?”

He jerked his head toward a door on the right, and I went through it and down a short hall. She was waiting for me at the end and she led the way into a little room. In spite of myself, I caught my breath. She removed her furs, and the dark, soft wool of her traveling suit added to the blonde softness of her beauty.

“Hello,” I said, trying to hide my uncertainty. “Snipe got your message to me. What’s the gag?”

She shook her head, and her blue-gray eyes were as impersonal as if they had been chipped from granite.

“This isn’t a gag, Mr. Sawyer,” she said.

I shrugged. “You’re smart,” I told her. “You’ve chosen the one place in town to hide where the cops wouldn’t think of looking for you. But what’s the idea of sending for me? I’m as interested in locating you as the cops are. Remember, sweetheart, that it was my gun that was used to kill Mida.”

“I’m sorry about that,” she said.

“You’re sorry,” I mocked her. “And how do you think I feel? Do you know that I have until tomorrow to find you and turn you in, and I’m not talking about the cops, either. I’m talking about a guy who is a lot tougher than any cop you ever heard of.”

She didn’t seem impressed. “The minister will be here in a few minutes,” she told him. “I’ve already arranged about the license.”

I laughed. I’ve been in a lot of strange situations in my time. I remember once that I served as messenger for a rebel general, trying to talk to the president of the banana country, and they lined me up against the wall as a spy.

The only thing that saved my skin was the fact that the rebels took the presidential palace while His Excellency was bossing the fring squad, and that the news reached them just before I was to die.

But that was nothing to the spot I was in at the moment. “And just why do you think that I’ll go through with this little game?” I asked.

She took her hand out of her suit pocket and there was a gun in it. The gun wasn’t much longer than my finger, but it was a nasty-looking little thing with twin barrels.*

“You’ll go through with it,” she said. “Do you doubt that I’ll shoot?”

I didn’t doubt it. I kept remembering that dead girl I’d seen, lying face down in the middle of the floor.

SHE smiled at me, and the smile made her look like an angel of death, I thought. She retreated to the far side of the room and picked up her furs from a chair. She draped the cape about her shoulders and the gun hand disappeared beneath the edge of it.

Her ears must have been better than mine, for it wasn’t until a full minute later that I heard footsteps coming along the hall.

Were you ever married with a gun in you ribs? Of course, I’ve heard the old gags about shotgun weddings, but that was the first wedding that I ever knew of when the bride held the gun and concealed it beneath a cape of silver fox.

The minister knew me. He was a little guy with thinning hair and a moon face. You might think, since he was working for a marriage mill, that he wasn’t a good minister. If so, you’re wrong. I’ve never known a better man. Running a church in a resort town isn’t the easiest spot in the world, but this man handled it and kept everyone’s respect.

After the service was finished, and he was signing the certificate, I walked over behind him and looked across his shoulder. I wanted to know what name my wife had used. I wanted to know whether Laura Thomas was her real name. It wasn’t. The name on the certificate was Laura Kornett.

For a full second I didn’t get it. Kornett, the name of my old boss! The

name of the man who had built the Sandhurst Inn! The name of the man who had taken his son and daughter and disappeared into the waste which once was Europe.

I turned around, words trembling on my lips, but the minister had also turned and was smiling at me.

"Aren't you going to kiss your wife, Mr. Sawyer?" he asked.

I walked over to her then, and for a long instant our eyes locked, mine asking questions, hers seeming to measure me. Then I bent forward and took her in my arms.

The perfume was faint, so faint that it barely carried a suggestion of fragrance. I drew her body against mine, and felt the hard outline of her gun between us.

But at the moment, I wouldn't have hesitated if the muzzle of that gun had been buried in my stomach. I kissed her. Her lips were cold and unresponsive, as if she were going through an ordeal which she could not avoid.

And then, suddenly, they weren't. It was as if someone had thrown a switch. After an age, she backed off, and we looked at each other, two strangers, conscious that something had happened which neither of us could understand.

"Sawyer," she said wonderingly. "Sawyer." And then she had no chance to say anything else, because the minister was at our side, beaming at us.

"I hope," he said, "that you'll be very happy. Most of my clients are. A lot of them come back to be married all over again. It's one way of celebrating their anniversary. I hope you'll try it sometime."

The girl said we would. She suddenly was in a hurry, as if it were imperative that we get away from there at once. She took me out the back way, across the dark yard. Just before we reached the 'dobe wall which marked the rear of the property, she turned and said a strange thing.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Sawyer."

"I'm not," I told her. "I don't know what the game is, Laura, but whatever it is, I like to play."

She caught her breath. "You know who I am?"

I nodded. "I saw it on the license. I— Look out?"

There was a man standing against the wall behind her. I tried to catch her arm, but it didn't work. A gun exploded so close that my ear-drums threatened to burst, and at the same time something hard came down on the back of my head.

I went out like a light. I don't even remember falling. I was out, cold. . . .

A NURSE with nice black hair pulled back tightly from a center part, was giving herself a few dextrous touches in the mirror when I snapped out of it.

She said, "You don't know how lucky you are, partner. Whoever hit you didn't figure on the thickness of your head. It isn't even cracked."

I found a grin somewhere and turned it on for her benefit. It was a lot of effort. "You mean that I can get out of here?"

"In a day or two," she told me. "After we find out just how bad the concussion is."

I laughed and shook my head. That was a mistake. The motion stirred up the pain. "I'm okay. Send in the doctor."

The doctor came in, and everything went 'round and 'round. I never saw a doctor who hated to get rid of business the way that guy did. He was practically in tears, trying to make me stay put, but I wouldn't listen. I got out of bed, found my pants, and climbed into them.

After I was out of there and had covered a third of a block, I wished that I hadn't been so smart. Maybe I've felt worse some time, but if so, it must have been in another life.

I headed directly for the Police Headquarters. I wanted to know what had happened to my wife. The hospital hadn't known, and the cops claimed they

didn't. She hadn't been around when I was picked up out of the gutter. They asked me a lot of questions to which I didn't know the answers. They'd found the marriage record, knew who the girl was, and thought I was putting over a fast one.

Then, while I was there at the station, the news came in. Her car had gone over the cliff into the canyon. They hadn't got the body out, but a man had been lowered by ropes, and there was no doubt about it—she was dead.

It knocked me all in a heap. After all, I'd never seen her before that afternoon, and just because I'd been married to her in a freak ceremony, you wouldn't think that I'd be bowled over with grief.

But I was, plenty. I felt like a crazy man. I wanted to go out to the scene of the accident and climb down the cliff. They wouldn't let me. They bundled me into a police car and took me back to the hotel.

The room I had was a nice one, but it wasn't in the main building. It was in the L which had been built to house the help. I lay on my bed, feeling that the world had ended.

Someone knocked on the door. I said to come in, thinking it was one of my assistants. It wasn't. It was one of the town lawyers and Carroll.

I noticed that Carroll's face looked white, and that he seemed to be worried. I thought it was a trick my eyes were playing. I was pretty certain that Carroll wasn't worried about me.

I just looked at them. The lawyer was a tall, thin man with a corded neck that looked as if it should have belonged to a turkey gobbler. He wore a low, old-fashioned stiff collar and a string bow tie. I knew he was reputed to be smart—and more crooked than the hind leg of a jack-rabbit.

Carroll put a smirk on his face which told plainer than any words that he wanted something. Usually he was very high and mighty where I was concerned. The lawyer cleared his throat and tried to sound ingratiating.

"We hate to intrude upon your grief at this time, Mr. Sawyer, but matters are so pressing that we have no choice."

I didn't understand what he was talking about. "My grief?" I asked.

"Your wife's unfortunate accident."

I stared harder, wondering for a moment how they knew: But it wasn't so surprising. The grapevine was better than a news service. Nothing much could happen in town without all the natives knowing it, and they never had to wait to read it in the papers, either.

BUT it still didn't tell why these two of all people should be here, offering me their sympathy. It just didn't make sense, and I said so.

The lawyer cleared his throat again and shot an uncertain glance toward Carroll.

"You mean that your wife didn't tell you, that you don't realize you are the owner of the hotel?"

I still felt awful, and my head ached as if my hair had been parted with an ax. But surprise lifted me off that bed.

"The owner? But the old man still owns it."

The lawyer shook his head. "No, sir—you do. Your wife came directly to my office. She had a quit-claim deed signed by her father. We took it over to the courthouse and recorded it, and since we haven't been able to locate any will among her effects, that means that you own the Sandhurst Inn."

Anger was rising in me. "What the devil right did you two have to paw through her effects?" I choked a little as the vision of her blonde beauty rose before my eyes. "What right did you have, pawing around like a couple of buzzards?"

If I hadn't been so shaky, I'd have thrown them out. As it was, I tried, but Carroll caught my arms and held me as one might hold a struggling child.

"Take it easy, Sawyer." He wasn't careful about the way he pushed me into a chair.

I sat there, glaring up at them, rage

making it hard to talk.

"Get out of here! Get the hell off the grounds, or I'll have you thrown off."

I made a grab for the phone, intending to have him throw them out, but Carroll knocked my hand away.

"Wait a minute, Sawyer, before you do anything rash. Two men's lives depend upon what you do."

The lawyer was nervous. "Maybe you'd better wait, Mr. Carroll."

"Why wait?" said Carroll. "There's no time to wait." He glared at me as if I had suddenly tried to burn the building down. "This has to be handled now!"

The lawyer washed his hands in the air. "I don't like it," he said. "I wish that I'd never got into it."

Carroll swore at him, then turned to face me. "Listen, Sawyer, many times you've talked about how much you owed old Kornett. Now you've got a chance to show it. He's in Russian hands, and he'll die unless you do exactly what we say!"

Chapter IV

MAYBE my head was a little bit thick, I thought, or I wasn't hearing too clearly. I passed one hand across my eyes, trying to clear them.

"Tell me again," I said. "My head, it hurts."

Carroll told me savagely, "You fool! I said that unless this hotel and all of the Kornett interests in America are operated as I say, the old man and his son won't live out the week!"

I got it then. I'd seen Communists operating in South America, even before all the trouble started across the seas, and now I saw more than these two men intended me to see. I saw that the hotel was situated close to one of the biggest of this country's dams. I realized that it was the perfect headquarters for any undercover work, and I groaned.

What was I to do? Everything I'd ever been I owed to Kornett. Even my

life, for if he hadn't brought me back from the tropics, hadn't set me in the lobby as a phony detective, I'd have died.

I sat there, trying to think, trying desperately to plan. But my mind was like a piece of rusty machinery which refuses to work properly. I simply couldn't think.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

Some of the tension went out of Carroll. It was obvious that he thought he had won. "It's simple," he told me. "We've drawn up a bill of sale. All you have to do is sign it, and everything will be all right."

I saw that in a sense he was telling the truth. If I signed the papers which the old lawyer was even then drawing from his brief-case, everything would be all right—for them. But what about me? Everything certainly would not be all right for me, nor for the country.

What is patriotism? It's not the cheering you do in crowds. It goes deeper than standing up and repeating the oath to the flag. To me, it was doing the best I could in my own little way for the nation as a whole.

I sat there, trying to decide, trying to weigh in my own mind what I should do. On one hand, they held the old man and his son, held them under the shadow of death. Would they kill them if I refused to follow their dictates? Probably. But on the other hand, it was my duty to report the presence of these men. I knew that once I signed the bill of sale for Kornett's property, I would be needed no longer. Something would happen to me. It had to happen because now I knew too much.

I didn't think of the property as mine. I had no sense of ownership, and yet in that ownership lay my only chance of safety.

"To hell with Kornett," I told them. "You aren't as smart as I gave you credit for being. You came here to threaten me with Kornett's death. Does it occur to you that maybe his death

is the one thing I want? This is a nice hotel and worth a lot of money. If he came back, he might deny the quit-claim deed which his daughter recorded. If that deed was shown to be no good, my chance of owning this hotel would be gone."

They exchanged quick glances. They hadn't expected this, and they didn't know quite how to proceed. Carroll's face got ugly.

"Why, you crook! I half believe you had something to do with your wife's death."

I managed to sneer at him. "Look who's calling names now. It makes you sore because someone else had sense enough to play the game with an eye to business." I let my voice harden. "Now, look, you want something, something I have. I might be willing to deal, but certainly not through threats."

I didn't say any more. I wanted him to consider carefully what I had already said. I could see that he was thinking it over. I wanted him to think. I gave him a couple of minutes to do it before I added:

"This hotel is worth a lot of money. I could sell it to Jim Tullover, and the sale would be for cash."

"But you won't," he told me. "You aren't going to sell it to anyone."

"Who says I'm not? You've got to show me a better reason why I shouldn't than any that you've mentioned to far."

He smiled, a little secretive gesture, as if he were amused by a joke that he alone knew.

"What do you think of this for a reason?" he asked, and took a gun out of his pocket

It was a .38 Special, mounted on a .45 frame, a nice gun and a deadly one. It was pointing directly at my stomach, and I could tell by the careless way he held it that he was used to guns.

"Is this a better reason?" he demanded.

I didn't need to pretend that I was surprised. I was. I hadn't expected quite so direct an attack, and it took me a couple

of seconds to recover.

"Put it away," I told him. "You aren't going to shoot me. At least, not until we've made some arrangement as to the ownership of this hotel. Shoot me, and a couple of my cousins will inherit the joint. You'll be worse off than you are now."

He didn't move the gun, but I could see that he was considering my words. I had a moment of panic. I'd known this man for almost a year, and I had never liked him. But he was clever.

IN ALL that time, I had never suspected that he was a Red agent. I wondered now if he were actually any relation to Kornett. I doubted it. Somewhere there had probably been a real Carroll. What had happened to him, I had no way of knowing, but it was obvious that this man had stepped into his place, got himself appointed as trustee by the court and had been busy ever since transferring the old man's assets into things useful for the Russians.

He said, "We could kill you, Sawyer. A good lawyer could fake your signature on a bill of sale—that is, if he knew a good forger."

I grinned with a lot more confidence than I felt.

"And my dear, darling relatives would tie you up in court for so long that the war would have been won three times before you got out. Believe me, those guys can smell a profit farther than I can smell an Indian. There's a better and a simpler way for all of us."

His face was expressionless. "Keep talking," he said.

"I don't know why you're so anxious to get control of this hotel, and I don't care. I've got the hotel, and for a consideration I might be willing to play along with you."

His eyes flickered. "What sort of a consideration?"

I was thinking rapidly now. The excitement of the interview, instead of making my head worse, seemed to be clearing it. I wanted to make it enough

so that it would sound important, yet not enough so that he would rather kill me than pay.

"A thousand a month," I told him.

The lawyer was grumbling, "I don't like it. I don't trust this man."

Carroll silenced him with a gesture of his free hand. "That's pretty steep."

"Peanuts," I told him, "when you consider the stakes you're playing for."

His eyes were narrow again. "What stakes are you talking about? How much do you know?"

I shrugged. "If you come right down to it, I don't know anything, and I don't want to know anything. But you and the men behind you wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of bringing the girl back from Europe to go through all this business unless something was in the wind."

He said, "You're pretty clever at figuring things out," and I didn't like his tone. "You've sold a deal, Sawyer. Now see that you keep your part of it."

"And my part?"

"That I run the hotel. That you question nothing that I do, and that you talk with no one regarding the deal. Someone will watch to see that you don't. Is that clear? Then good night."

Long after they had gone, I lay there in the darkness. Once I got up and opened my door a crack. There was a man in the hall outside, a man I had never seen before. Evidently, Carroll wasn't taking any chances with me. . . .

Next morning, I was in a spot. The news that I was the new owner of the Sandhurst Inn was all over town. I didn't dare try to leave the hotel, and I knew that I should leave. I knew I should go down to see Big Jim Tullover and try to explain to the gambling king why I hadn't found the murderer of his girl friend.

But I knew, also, that Carroll wouldn't let me get far away from the hotel grounds. I felt something like the Mayor of East Berlin must feel. I was the boss in name, but there were guys around to tell me what not to do.

There wasn't a soul in the hotel that I trusted. I thought that Grogan, my assistant detective, was okay, but I couldn't be certain. I sat in the lobby, smoked a cigar, and watched what went on without appearing to.

IT SEEMED that half the town came in to see me that morning, men whom I hardly knew by name. But Jim Tullover was not among them, and I paid little attention to what they said. Most of them had heard of my good fortune. Most of them had something to sell. I was offered anything from gold mines, horse ranches and gambling clubs, to a part interest in one of the town's leading cribs.

I refused them all, and I was careful to conduct all conversations so that one of Carroll's men could overhear. I didn't get a chance to speak to him personally until after lunch.

He came through the lobby then and motioned for me to follow him into his office. From the way he acted, you'd have thought that I was still the hotel detective. He told me to close the door, then stared at me with his peculiar eyes.

I'd never liked him, but I'd never really looked at him this closely before. He had the coldest eyes I had ever seen, and there was a lidless quality about them which reminded me of a snake's.

He said, "You seem suddenly very popular."

I laughed shortly. "They smell easy money. There never was a town where they could smell easy money as quickly. Do you want me to throw them out?"

He shook his head. "No, but I've got something I do want you to do."

He pulled open a drawer in the desk, and I had a glimpse of packeted money. There was a lot of it. I'd never seen so much money in my life.

"This hotel carries three accounts. The one in the Nevada Bank is the only one that concerns you. The other two don't, but you'll have to sign whatever checks I give you."

"And if I don't?"

He showed his teeth in what he fondly thought was a smile. "Then your grand a month stops, and something might happen to you."

I signed the checks. I'd learned something, at least, and I meant to learn more. He placed them under the edge of the blotter so that only the line for my signature showed, but I managed to get a look at three of them, and the names surprised me. I also got a look at the bank names. Both were in Los Angeles.

I went out of there, not knowing quite what to do. I realized something which I had not realized before. I knew now that they were using the hotel for a front, that they were clearing alien funds through the hotel accounts, paying off their agents with checks drawn in the name of the Sandhurst Inn.

I realized something else. By signing those checks, I had put myself directly in the middle. Suppose the Government forces closed in, suppose they traced checks back to those accounts?

My name had been substituted for Carroll's. I'd signed three cards at the same time I had signed the checks. I wondered how much of my story the F.B.I. was going to believe. I didn't know, but I was pretty certain they wouldn't believe much of it. It was too fantastic.

I looked around the lobby, wishing there was someone I dared talk to. There wasn't. There wasn't a man in town I trusted. And then I had an idea. It was a screwy idea.

I admit it now and, looking back, I can't actually understand why I ever thought of it. But I did. All afternoon I watched the door of Carroll's office. He wasn't around. He'd left almost as soon as I had signed those checks.

I watched the door and hoped that something would happen to the clerk so that I could get into Carroll's office without being seen. Along about five-thirty my chance came. There was some trouble in the dining room. Carroll wasn't there, and neither was Reese. The headwaiter

came for the desk clerk.

I wandered over. The clerk looked at me for orders. His attitude toward me had changed since the preceding night. I concluded that he couldn't be one of Carroll's men. From the way he acted, it was obvious that he thought I owned the hotel.

I told him, "Go ahead, see what the trouble is. I'll watch the desk."

He had no more than gone then I turned and ducked into Carroll's office. His desk drawer was locked, but a paper knife served as a jimmy. I got the drawer open and I got the checkbooks. They were the big, flat kind, and I slipped them up under my vest.

I didn't dare take the time to go through the rest of the desk. I ducked out of there as fast as I could, and I wasn't any too soon. The clerk was already coming back.

Chapter V

WHEN the clerk relieved me at the desk, I went back to my room and bolted the door. That done, I looked at the checkbooks. The balances amazed me. Together they totaled almost three hundred thousand.

That made me stop and think. Three hundred grand was more money than I'd realized there was in the world, and what I intended to do was impossible. At least, it seemed impossible to me.

But I meant to try. I wanted the affairs of the hotel investigated and I didn't want to go to the police. It was splitting hairs, I knew, but I didn't want to give the gentlemen across the water any more reason for making things tough for old Kornett and his son.

I knew I'd be in a spot when the investigation came, that I might even be in line for a term in the Federal pen, but I didn't care. Since the time they'd told me the blonde had gone over the edge into the canyon, I hadn't cared about much of anything.

But in order to carry out my plan I

had to get away from that hotel. First, I tore a couple of blank checks out of each book, carefully noting the amount on deposit, then hid the books under the mattress of my bed.

Next I took off my shoes and socks. I stuffed the socks into the shoes, tied the laces together, and hung them around my neck. I rolled my pants above my knees, put on my bathrobe and pulled it up around my throat so that no one could tell I was fully dressed. Then I got a towel and went out into the hall.

The same man who had watched my room the night before had followed me from the lobby and was seated in a chair at the end of the hall. He looked up sharply when I appeared, but when he saw the towel and robe, he lost interest.

I pretended I had not even seen him. I went straight toward the bathroom door, pushed it open, and stepped through. There were four shower stalls. I turned on the water in the end one, draped my robe over one of the doors, hung the towel above it and without stopping to put on my shoes, crawled out one of the end windows.

I was in the paved court behind the row of garages. In the west, enough sun lingered to give the sky a crimson glow, but already the shadows were long across the court. In five minutes it would be dark, with the suddenness of the desert night.

I walked around the garages, paused beside the big incinerator, and put on my socks and shoes. So far, so good. No one had noticed me. The hardest part was yet to come. I had to reach the cab rack at the end of the hotel and get a taxi.

I skirted the little pitch-and-putt course and the two tennis courts. They were empty, but shouts from beyond told me that someone was still in the swimming pool. I didn't know how long I would have before the alarm was given. Not too long. Sooner or later, when I failed to leave the bathroom, the guard would become suspicious and find that I

was no longer in the bath.

Someone called my name as I rounded the end of the garage, and I thought I was caught. But it was only the Negro porter, telling me how glad he was of my good luck.

I thanked him and hurried on. He was, I thought, one of the only friends I had. The cabs looked inviting, and I climbed quickly into the first in line. But not until we were clear of the grounds and speeding uptown did I draw a long breath.

The driver wanted to know where I wanted to go, and I told him to drop me at a Greek restaurant. I didn't go in. I chose the first bar and had two quick drinks. I bought drinks for every man at the long counter, and I repeated the process in the next place.

The word spread quickly. Bob Sawyer was celebrating his good luck, and soon I did not lack for help.

My new friends trailed me from one place to the next. I saved the One-two Club till last, purposely, and by the time I got there, I had consumed a lot of liquor. Nature has given me a hard head. I'm not bragging, but I can hold a lot of alcohol without its affecting me too much. But I staggered as I entered the One-two Club.

I WALKED carefully, as if I weren't certain that the floor wasn't going to move out from under me on each step. I paused just inside the door and looked around the long, smoky room as if I were trying to see clearly. I shook my head a couple of times, then started for Jim Tullover's office.

A lot of men had trailed me into the club. The room had been almost empty when I'd entered. It was early as yet, but it wasn't empty now. Half the population of the town was at my heels.

I didn't appear to know it. I didn't appear to be conscious of anything save the office door toward which I was heading. I shoved it open so hard that it banged back against the partition, and I left it that way.

Tullover was behind his desk, his eyes glittering between his narrow lids like two pieces of flint.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

I stared at him drunkenly. "I'm important now, Tullover. I'm a big shot." I steadied myself with one hand on a corner of the desk. "I want to gamble. I want to really gamble."

"That's what those wheels are for." He made no effort to conceal his contempt.

For answer, I pulled the blank checks from my pocket, seized his pen from the stand and made them all out.

His eyes flickered when he saw the amounts. "You're crazy drunk."

I got insulted. "A piker, huh? You can't cover those bets, huh? I thought you was worth a million."

He almost bit through his cigar in his annoyance. "I can cover any bet you can make," he snapped. "But I don't pick on drunks."

"Cover those," I railed. "Tell your dealer to give me that much credit, and I'll break you. This house never saw any real gambling before."

He picked up the three checks, one right after the other. "Are you certain these are good?"

They weren't. I'd carefully overdrawn each account by two hundred dollars. I said, "If they aren't, I still own the hotel. You can sue me for that. Gambling's legal in Nevada."

Tullover didn't answer me. He just got up and carried the checks out to the first wheel and handed them to the dealer. The man's eyes actually popped a little way from his head when he saw the amounts.

I said, "Make the chips a thousand. Give me a hundred at a time."

He recovered enough to obey. Tullover didn't stay to watch the game. He just turned and went back to his office. No one else left, and the word went out all over town. It was the biggest game that part of the country had ever seen. Men pressed so close about me that I could hardly place my bets. Finally the

lookouts had to shove them back.

I was losing, not much but steadily.

After an hour, I was loser by a hundred and fifty thousand and going strong. There was a disturbance behind me. I didn't need to look around to know that it was Carroll and some of his strong-arm men.

I doubled my bets and lost again, seventy thousand on one turn of the wheel. Someone grabbed my shoulder and turned me around, and I was staring at the white mask of fury which was Carroll's face.

"You drunken fool, what are you trying to do?" he snarled.

I broke his grasp and started dealing out chips. He tried to reach around me and rake the chips from the board. One of the lookouts hit him, and one of Carroll's men hit the lookout.

It was swell. In less than one minute, every man in that room was either swinging or trying to get out through the door. There never has been such a riot again, and I hope there never will be. It took the Fire Department and lots of water to cool it off.

Well, I was sober by the time we hit jail and feeling quite unhappy about it.

THE old lawyer who promptly appeared to see me was scared.

"Carroll said you weren't to talk," he said hoarsely. "Just keep your mouth shut."

I shook my head. "It's worse than you think. I cashed checks for more than the balances in the banks. Tullover will attach the hotel."

He moaned at that, and for an instant I thought he was really going to cry. Then he hurried out.

I waited. There wasn't much to see in the cell. I waited a long time. I wondered how the food was at Alcatraz.

Finally a couple of jailers came to get me and walked me along the corridor. To me it seemed that we might be covering the last mile and, frankly, I didn't care. They walked me into Lou Hertz's office, and there were several

people there. I saw Jim Tullover first, then the little man who had come to the blonde's room and taken a shot at me. And then I saw her!

"You're dead," I said to her. "You went over the cliff and were killed."

She was at my side and she was smiling at me. "No, Sawyer. I hated to fool you last night, but it seemed the only way. We'd gone too far to turn back. I didn't know you then as well as I do now."

I didn't get it, but suddenly I realized that while she'd been talking, the rest of the people had been fading out. We were alone. She made me sit down.

"I'll try to explain," she said. "I was sent back from Europe because my father's other relatives were beginning to object to the way Carroll was running things here. I was told that if I'd help him, my father and brother would be released. I never really intended to help. I hired a little detective in Los Angeles to come down here with me. I sent him to see Tullover. Tullover may be a gambler, but he's an old friend of Dad's.

"I wanted to go to see him, but I knew they would be watching me at the hotel, so Tullover sent Mida Forbes over to take my place while I slipped out the back way. Mida was to answer the phone, pretend to be me.

"But Carroll went up to the room during dinner. Mida must have been using the time to take a shower. Carroll let himself in with a passkey and must have seen your gun where I'd laid it on the table. Mida apparently came out of the bath, not realizing that anyone was there, screamed, and Carroll shot her. Then apparently you came up, found the body, and were there when we sent the little detective over to find out if Mida was all right.

"He came back to report that she was dead and that you were there. We thought at the time you had killed her. We also thought you were in with Carroll. We decided then to have me marry you, then pretend to be killed. With me dead, we thought you and Carroll would

feel secure and go ahead, and that you would trip yourself up by overconfidence. We didn't count on your not being in on the play or on your playing that drunken act and gambling away the money to start a riot."

"How'd you find out all this?" I said.

"We had dictaphones set up in the cells. The old lawyer and Carroll who was held in one of them talked very freely. They were so angry with you that they weren't careful. I was in Tullover's closet when you arrived.

I COULDN'T think too clearly, but one thing stood out in my mind. "But what about the old man and your brother?"

Her face got shadowed. "They were killed almost a year ago, trying to escape. One of the other prisoners told me. Those—those brutes didn't think I knew."

I was silent, too. I'd liked Kornett.

She said, "My dad used to talk about you. When I was very young he used to tell me about the man who ran his South American jobs. I built up a picture of you. I intended to ask you for help. Then you came up to that hotel room and ordered me to leave. It made me so mad I thought you must have gone over to the other side."

I grinned. "I was just dumb. I'm sorry for everything I've done. I'm sorry I gambled away that money."

"Tullover tore up the checks," she said. "He's going to take over the hotel and run it for me."

"I suppose you'll want an annulment," I said.

She looked at me. "Must we hurry?"

I grinned then. "No hurry," I said, and felt swell. "No hurry at all. I've got almost a year to persuade you to celebrate our anniversary by being married all over again."

"That," she said without looking at me, "might be an idea. But next time, Mr. Sawyer, I hope it won't be necessary for me to hold a gun in your ribs. I was never so embarrassed in my life." ● ● ●

"Don't you worry about anything," Mrs. Milenberg told her. "You just think about the insurance money."



BLACK PUDDING BLUES by RUFUS BAKALOR

He had liked his music hot and jivey.

And, as Mommy observed at the funeral:

"He certainly died with his toots on."

DOES he have to play those records so loud?" Mrs. Milenberg asked across the kitchen table.

"He likes them loud, Mommy," said Donna. "He says Dixieland jazz can't be muted."

At that moment, Rod Rippey, hair and glasses askew, thrust his head in the doorway. "Catch the licorice stick on the *Squeeze Me* I picked up today? It's Faz. Oh, hello, Mommy. Fazola on the clarinet, Mommy. I'll spin it again."

His head jerked out of the doorway, jerked in again to announce, "Bauduc on the traps. Two-beat," and was gone.

Over the music, Mrs. Milenberg snorted, "Imbecile!"

"Oh, Mommy," said Donna. "You shouldn't call Rod an imbecile. After all, he's my husband."

"Well, perhaps a moron, then. A jazz maniac. A nut. A first-class screwball."

"He *does* overdo it," Donna conceded. "Overdo it? Morning, noon and night?"

Spending all that money on disgusting phonograph records while you haven't had a new dress in years. Rippey! What kind of a name is *that*?"

"Ummm," said Donna.

"You can't tell me that anyone in his right mind really likes that kind of music. Give me light opera any day. Semiclassical."

"Shush," said Donna, suddenly tense. "He'll hear you!"

Mrs. Milenberg sniffed, snorted, and said, "I know what I'd do if I were in your shoes. Yes, indeed I do."

"It's no use my putting my foot down, Mommy. It just doesn't work with Rod where his records are concerned."

"I'm not talking about putting your foot down. I'm talking about something else again. When it gets so bad that you can't stand it any more, you just let me know, Donna. There'll be time enough. In the meantime, you might encourage Rod to increase his life insurance." Mrs. Milenberg changed the subject abruptly. "I heard from John Fischer again today."

"Oh?" said Donna brightly.

"He's doing really well on that Palawan hemp plantation. Nine more years and he can retire. Next year, he's in line for the overseer's job. What a fine husband he'd have made for you, Donna. Instead of *that*." She nodded toward the source of the music and wrinkled her lips. "John. Now there's a good, level-headed boy for you. Some get-up-and-go to him and no nonsense. And a little birdie told me that he still loves you."

They were interrupted by Rippey. "Coming up: an old Gennett of King Oliver doing *Tin Roof*. Pretty old and lots of surface noise, but Louie— Oh, going so soon, Mommy?"

Mrs. Milenberg forced a weak smile and, with cool deliberation, removed a wad of cotton from each ear. "Yes, Rod, I really must mosey along. I'm going to an organ recital," she said recklessly. She leaned toward Donna and whispered, "Don't forget our chat."

Donna didn't forget their little chat. As a matter of fact, while the studdings of the house swayed rhythmically to Dixieland jazz, she lay in bed and thought of practically nothing else. Rod had declined her plump and delicious charms when he ignored the knock of opportunity—in this instance, a spike heel struck against the floor—in favor of The Mound City Blue Blowers.

I've stood it, for six years and I can't stand it any more, thought Donna. I'll get him to take out more life insurance and catalogue his records, which must be worth an awful lot of money, and then I'll see what Mommy has in mind. Ummmm.

AFTER Donna had persuaded Rippey to increase his life insurance and to catalogue The Rippey Collection of Dixieland Jazz, she apprised her mother of her readiness and heard of a very felicitous inheritance.

It appeared that the distaff strain from which Donna had sprung had had singular and consistent ill luck through the years in its choice of mates. Her great-grandfather, Mrs. Milenberg told her, had been an amateur flautist; her grandfather, a marimba addict; and her father, a tuba player.

Of course, this "curse," as Mrs. Milenberg called it, went back even beyond these three musicians and was lost in antiquity. Since necessity is the mother of invention, one of their female ancestors had happily concocted a recipe for black puddings, which, along with the principal toxic ingredient, was passed down from generation to generation as the need arose. Consequently, they all became young widows of well-insured music lovers.

Now the moment for the disposition of Rod Rippey, Dixieland jazz enthusiast, had come, and Mrs. Milenberg proudly gave Donna her birthright.

"The marjoram really isn't necessary. That, I believe, was a fancy of your great-great-grandmother's. You can suit yourself, but I made mine without

marjoram, and it worked wonderfully well. Only make it carefully, since this is the very last portion of the secret stuff that does the trick."

"Rod always says that he wants *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate* played at his funeral."

"Just don't you worry about the arrangements, Donna. We'll have it played nice and loud for him. You just think about the insurance money and the money you'll get for his record collection—if they can find anyone cuckoo enough to buy it."

Donna made a nice tossed salad to go with the black pudding, and Rippey ate them delightedly, saying that they reallocated her insurance money and went to live with her mother.

Several days later, in the midst of a Pee Wee Russell riff, Rippey passed away.

"That's the way he would have wanted to go," Mrs. Milenberg observed at the funeral. "He died with his toots on."

Donna sold the records to a dealer, collected her insurance money and went to live with her mother.

"Can anything go wrong, Mommy? I mean, about the police finding out or anything?"

"The recipe has never failed us yet, Donna, so don't you worry your little head about such things. It was perfectly painless and perfectly perfect. Think, rather, of the future. You're still young and beautiful, you know. And you have quite a bit of money, now."

"Oh, I don't know if I'd want to take another chance. Besides, it might seem suspicious."

"Nonsense, my girl," said Mrs. Milenberg. "Why don't you take a long trip to get away from it all for a while?"

"Ummm," Donna said thoughtfully.

"They say the Philippines are lovely this time of year. John Fischer's on Palawan, you know. Splendid boy, John Fischer. No nonsense about *him*. . . ."

At the pier, Mrs. Milenberg said, "The change will do you a world of good. Now, have a good time and don't fight destiny. . . ."

By arrangement, John Fischer met Donna in Manila, and after a whirlwind courtship, they were married. Following a thoroughly enjoyable and leisurely honeymoon and after a few little details, such as the opening of a joint bank account, had been attended to, John took his bride to the overseer's house on the hemp plantation on Palawan for a nine-year residence.

On arriving there, certain circumstances, which have already occurred to all stout believers in order, came to pass.

"My, John, you have quite a few records here, haven't you?" said Donna, trembling slightly.

"This?" said John deprecatingly. "This is nothing. The day we set up our joint account I cabled for the Rippey Collection of Dixieland Jazz. And what I'm going to do right now is unpack them cases and spin them discs."

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TRIPLE DETECTIVE



The hands around Al's throat were relentless steel bands

KILLER ON THE LOOSE!

by **WALTER MONAGHAN**

*"What good is money—you die soon," the note said.
But who would believe the words of a madman?*

AL O'CONNELL eased his car to a stop in the empty street across from the County Courthouse in White Plains. He heard the traffic cop on the corner behind him blowing his whistle madly, but slipped his keys out of the ignition and stepped out of the car anyway.

He saw the cop then, a smooth-faced young rookie with red hair, trying to blow his brains out through his whistle. His face

was three shades redder than his hair at that moment. He kept waving at Al to take the car away.

Al locked the car door. The cop stopped blowing the whistle and came toward him angrily, tugging his book from his back pocket.

"You can't park there, Mac. Gimme your license and ownership," he yelled.

Al slipped the leather case holding his shield out of his pocket. He showed it to the cop standing next to him now.

"I'm a detective, Officer," Al said. "I have to run in to see the District Attorney for a few minutes. I thought I could leave my car here. I won't be more than ten minutes."

Al saw the cop's blood pressure start down, his face went back to a normal crimson to match his hair. He saw him shove the book back into his hip pocket.

"Oh, a brain, huh?" the cop said in a lower tone. "Okay, Mac. But don't stay here more than ten minutes. I'd hang a tag on the Mayor's car if he left it here any longer."

Al smiled and thanked him. He crossed the street and ran up the Court House steps two at a time. A minute later he was in front of the door marked "District Attorney, Westchester County." He pushed it open without knocking and walked in.

The place was in an uproar. There were three men in the room and each of them was talking loudly into a telephone. One of them saw Al come in and slammed down his telephone. He ran over to Al and pumped his hand.

"Am I glad to see you, Al!" he said. "Come on in to my office where we can talk in peace. Have I got trouble!"

Al was mystified. "What's up, Mr. Kennelly? What's all the excitement about?"

Kennelly shut the door of his office when they were inside. He paced back and forth.

"Al, remember the Humboldt case? You were the arresting officer. Tell me everything you know about it."

Al pulled a pack of cigarettes out of

his pocket and lit one before he answered. He was trying to think back.

"Sure, I remember it pretty well. I think it was eight or nine years ago, though. I may be rusty on some of the details."

Kennelly kept walking back and forth. He couldn't hide his impatience. "Give me whatever you can," he asked.

"Well," Al began, "I think his full name was Karl Humboldt. He wrote his wife a pack of threatening letters before he killed her. I picked him up in Penn Station when he was trying to get away from New York. At his trial for murder he was found guilty, but the court alienist decided that he was crazy, a homicidal maniac. He was put away in a nut house as incurably insane."

"I've got news for you, Al," Kennelly said grimly. "He's out and I think he's up to his old tricks again."

Al let out a low whistle. "Wow! When did he escape?"

"He didn't. He was discharged six months ago as cured. I just checked with the State Department of Hospitals. But they also told me that patients like him are supposed to check back with their psychiatrists once a month. Karl Humboldt hasn't been seen or heard from in six months. And I have a murder on my hands that I think he committed."

"How do you figure that?" Al asked.

KENNELLY walked behind his desk and sat down. He pulled open a drawer and rummaged through it. "Let me ask you a question first, Al," he said. "Do you remember what those notes that Humboldt wrote to his wife looked like?"

Al looked up at the ceiling and his eyes narrowed in thought. "Yeah. He wrote about fifteen or twenty of them, they were all pretty much the same. They were printed in block letters on cheap stationery, and each of them had a short death threat. Some of them had death's heads drawn in at the bottom for a signature."

Kennelly pulled two packs of envelopes out of his drawer and shoved them

across the desk to Al. Each pack had a rubber band around it. "Would you say these are the same things?" he asked.

Al took the rubber band off one pack and looked through them quickly. They were pretty much the same. One read, WHAT GOOD IS YOUR MONEY—YOU DIE SOON, another simply, YOU DIE WITH MY HAND. Al looked through the other pack. They were identical. Several of them had death's heads drawn in on the bottom.

Al looked up at Kennelly and nodded. "I'm positive these are the same as the ones in the Humboldt case. You can check easily enough by comparing them with the originals. They should be on file in General Sessions in New York."

"I have no time for that," Kennelly said desperately. "One man has just been murdered and another man's life is in danger. We've got to get Humboldt before he can kill anyone else."

"I see," Al said. "Want to tell me about it?"

"There's not much to tell," Kennelly said, "except that I'm in a mess. You'll notice that all the letters in one of those packs are addressed to John Fordson. The others are to Henry Ahearn. Fordson was found dead an hour ago by his daughter at his home in Mount Kisko. His body had been stuffed into the trunk of his car with three bullet holes in his back."

"That sounds like Humboldt, all right," Al said. "He stuffed his wife's body into a closet and emptied a gun into her, six shots."

Kennelly nodded in agreement. "Fordson and Ahearn came in to see me yesterday afternoon," he continued. "They brought those letters and asked me to make an official investigation into the matter to find out who was sending them. While the chief is away I'm the Acting District Attorney. I should have assigned detectives to both of them until the thing was cleared up, but I didn't, that's why I say I'm in a mess."

Al nodded sympathetically.

"Neither of them attached much im-

portance to the threats made in those notes," Kennelly went on, "so naturally neither did I. They seemed to think it was the work of some malicious crank. I listened to their story and told them we would get to the bottom of it and let them know what we found out as quickly as possible. I was thinking about it last night when I remembered the newspaper accounts of the Humboldt case, how similar the notes were. The first thing this morning I called up a friend of mine on the *Times*. He dug up their morgue file; that's how I got your name as the arresting officer."

"What possible motive would Humboldt have to send these two men threatening letters, and then murder one?" Al asked in puzzlement.

"How can you determine motive when you're dealing with insanity?" Kennelly asked. "Fordson and Ahearn are, or were, business partners in a big textile plant in New Rochelle. It's called the Linco Textile Mills. I can't imagine why Humboldt would bother them any more than anybody else."

"How about Ahearn, does he know what happened to his partner?"

"Yes," Kennelly said. "I called him a little while ago. He's at the plant. He was pretty shocked about it, but he has armed guards patrolling the plant all the time. He's not afraid of Humboldt getting in today. I promised him I'd send a man over tonight at six o'clock when he leaves to act as a bodyguard. That seemed to satisfy him."

The telephone on Kennelly's desk jangled. He picked up, listened for a moment, then said, "Tell him I'll be right down."

He stood up and faced Al O'Connell. "That was the Medical Examiner. He's downstairs now. We're going up to Fordson's house together to examine the body."

"I wish you luck," Al said. "I hope you latch on to Humboldt soon."

Kennelly stood still for a moment, his brow knotted as if he were trying to make a decision. "Al," he said slowly,

"I wonder if you'd help me out on this. When I called Homicide in New York to ask you to come up here I had no idea this was going to break. I just wanted you to identify the notes. We're short-handed what with vacations going on and a couple of men out sick. All I have are some green kids to put on the case. You know more about this Humboldt than anybody, and you've worked for me before when I was in New York. If you will help out I think we can break it pretty quick."

Al was surprised. "Okay, Mr. Kennelly. It's a little out of my territory, but I'll do whatever I can."

"You're in New York City Homicide," Kennelly said, "but you're still a cop anyplace in New York State. Come on, let's go."

They went outside together and walked down the steps to a black Cadillac parked at the curb.

"Want to come up with us?" Kennelly asked.

Al thought a moment before replying. "No," he finally said. "I think I'll go over and see the other partner, Mr. Ahearn. That's the logical place to start. What did you say the name of the textile company was?"

"The Linco Textile Mills in New Rochelle. Tell Ahearn you're working with me. I'll be over there as soon as we're finished at Fordson's house."

"Okay."

Al watched him get in the car and drive off with the Medical Examiner. He crossed the street to his own car and put the key in the door lock before he saw the summons tied to the windshield wiper. He tore it off angrily and shoved it into his jacket pocket. Kennelly didn't know it yet, but this was one ticket he was going to have to fix for sure. Al pulled away and headed for New Rochelle, wondering why red-headed traffic cops liked to write so much.

HE FOUND the Linco Textile Mills without any trouble. It was on the outskirts of the city, a big sprawling

affair with huge buildings that looked like warehouses scattered around the grounds. A high wire fence with barbed wire on top ran around the entire site.

He stopped at the main gate and showed the armed guard on duty his shield, then drove in to a low building directly ahead which the guard said was the administration building. His car crunched to a stop on the gravel driveway. He got out and trotted up the steps.

A good-looking young redhead with a big, ready smile was sitting at a telephone switchboard just inside the door. She was wearing a very unbusinesslike green dress with a deep V down the front. As soon as she saw Al she used the smile on him.

Al slowed down to a walk, then stopped to admire the view. He was thinking that this seemed to be his day to meet redheads. He used his very best smile right back at her when he told her who he was and that he wanted to see Ahearn.

She kept right on smiling. "Second door to the right," she pointed. "Say, I never knew detectives could be so handsome."

"You're pretty handsome yourself in spots," Al shot at her. "Tell me something, Red, when you get mad does your face get redder than your hair?"

"The name is Anne. I never get mad at handsome detectives."

"If that's a promise, I may take you up on it sometime."

"Anytime at all," she said airily as he moved away toward Ahearn's office.

Al chuckled and made a mental note to take her up on it the first opportunity he got. He rapped on Ahearn's door, heard "Come in," and pushed it open.

Ahearn wasn't redheaded and he wasn't smiling. He looked about sixty years old and his hair was snow white. He also looked as if he had absolutely nothing to smile about, in fact he looked frightened. He got up from behind his desk and came forward to greet Al.

"I'm Detective O'Connell, New York

Homicide," Al told him. "I'm working with Mr. Kennelly, the District Attorney, on this case."

He shook hands with Ahearn.

"The guard at the front gate just called to tell me a detective was coming in," Ahearn said. "I'm glad you're here. Please sit down."

Al sat down in a big leather chair facing Ahearn. He pulled his cigarettes out, lit one and looked around the office. It was big and comfortably furnished.

"You know about your partner, what happened to him?" Al began.

"Yes. Mr. Kennelly called me to tell me about it. It's frightful," Ahearn said in a choking voice. "I can hardly believe it. John Fordson and I were partners for over thirty years. We built this business together. We were always the best of friends. It's just—horrible!"

"Yeah," Al agreed, "it sure is. What I don't understand is why anybody, even a nut, should pick you and Mr. Fordson out to send you threatening letters. He didn't attempt extortion or blackmail, judging from the notes. So we have to try to find out why he sent them, what possible purpose there could have been."

"Have you found out who sent them yet?" Ahearn asked.

"We have a pretty good idea, Mr. Ahearn. A psycho named Karl Humboldt was released six months ago from an insane asylum. He hasn't been seen or heard from since that time. About nine years ago he murdered his wife under very similar circumstances. He had sent her a batch of threatening letters, exactly the same as those you and Fordson received."

"I see," Ahearn said. His face was drawn and white, his hands shook a little. "Mr. Kennelly only told me he thought it was a homicidal maniac. He advised me to take every precaution here in case he came after me too. I've alerted all the guards in the plant. They'll be on the look-out."

"Good idea," Al said. "I was wondering about that. How come you have guards at a plant like this?"

AHEARN picked up a pencil and tapped it on the desk. "We do a lot of Government work," he explained. "Right now we're turning out thousands of yards of plastic fabric for the Navy. They use it to tow behind airplanes for targets. There's a certain amount of secrecy attached to it and the Navy requires us to keep the grounds restricted."

Al nodded. "Mr. Ahearn," he said slowly, "I want to get to the bottom of this. I'm going to ask you some questions you may not like, but I have to get honest answers; you can appreciate that."

"Of course, Mr. O'Connell. I'm more anxious than you are. I'll help you in any way I can."

"Fine. Now tell me, who stands to profit by Fordson's death?"

"Only his daughter. He lost his wife about five years ago. The girl is his only child. Of course you'll have to check with his lawyer, but I'm almost sure she will be his only beneficiary."

"Could she have killed him?" Al asked.

"Absolutely not. She's only a child, eighteen or nineteen. She's a lovely young thing, red-headed, beautiful. . . No, she's absolutely incapable of doing such a thing," Ahearn said vehemently.

Another redhead, Al thought. "Okay," he said, "I only asked. How about you, would you profit by his death in any way?"

Ahearn's face paled a little, but he looked back steadily at Al. "No, I would not. We were equal partners in this firm. We controlled fifty-one percent of the stock. His share would go to his daughter, as I told you. I'm positive I'm not a beneficiary in his will."

Al went on relentlessly. "Suppose you are murdered, Mr. Ahearn, who would stand to gain by that?"

"Only my son. He's in the Army. He's been stationed in Korea for the last year. I've been a widower for twenty years, and he's my only child."

Al ground out his cigarette. "That's fine," he said. "So far we have two peo-

ple with a possible motive besides Humboldt, who has none. One is in Korea, the other is incapable of committing murder."

Ahearn kept tapping the pencil on the desk.

Al jumped to his feet. "Say, how many employees do you have here, Mr. Ahearn?"

"Almost six hundred. Why?"

"I just thought that maybe this Humboldt worked here. What kind of personnel records do you keep?"

"They're very complete." Ahearn stood up too, his face showing his excitement. "The Navy requires us to photograph and fingerprint every employee. Do you think it's possible that Humboldt might be right here in the plant?"

"Possible," Al grunted. "Come on, show me those files."

"Surely, they're just down the hall."

Ahearn led the way down the corridor. They went into an office that had six filing cabinets against one wall. Al noticed that there were six girls working in the room, three of them redheads.

"All the personnel records are kept in this cabinet," Ahearn said, pointing to the first one.

The top drawer was labeled "A to H." Al pulled it out and looked through the "H" cards. Each of them had a photograph pasted to it in the upper left hand corner. Al swore softly under his breath when he finished. There was no card for Karl Humboldt.

"Any luck?" Ahearn asked. He was watching over Al's shoulder.

"I don't see any card for Humboldt. I'll look again to make sure."

He was halfway through the group again when he pulled one out. It bore the name Anne Hennessy and had the picture of the cute red-headed receptionist who didn't get mad at detectives. Al slipped an envelope out of his pocket and copied her address and telephone number down before Ahearn knew what he was doing. He shoved the card back quickly.

He finished the group, examining each

card carefully, but there was still no Humboldt.

"I'll have to wade through the whole bunch," he told Ahearn grimly. "He probably used another name." He started flipping the cards under "A". Ahearn stood patiently by, not saying anything. Five minutes later Al rolled the drawer shut. He pulled out the one underneath and started in on the "I's."

HE WENT through them, one by one, carefully examining each picture. Halfway through he stopped and pulled a card out. He studied the picture closely. It had the name Frank Lowell on it and a picture of a man about forty with big ears and funny-looking hair, as if he were wearing a cheap toupée. It rang a bell in Al's memory, and then he had it. The guy's name wasn't Lowell, it was something else. He had seen a flyer on him in the Squad Room; he was wanted for abandonment. Al took the envelope out and jotted the man's address down for future use. He showed the card to Ahearn.

"Know him?" he asked.

Ahearn looked at the card closely. "Yes. He's the foreman of our whiting plant. He's been here about a year. I remember hiring him. He's an excellent man."

Al grunted and shoved the card back. He kept on searching. A minute later he pulled another one out and studied it closely. It had the name Miller on top, August Miller, but the picture was Karl Humboldt. The photo showed a man about fifty, with deep set eyes, bushy eyebrows, jet black hair. He was positive he could never mistake that face. He handed the card to Ahearn.

Ahearn studied it. "Why it's Humboldt. He looks like a homicidal maniac here. I remember him now. I hired him six months ago almost to the day."

"Can you find out if he's here now, if he's working?" Al snapped impatiently.

"Yes, right away." Ahearn stepped to a desk and picked up a phone. He said something, then listened for a moment.

He hung up the phone and turned back to Al. "He hasn't reported to work yesterday or today."

Al groaned. He looked at the card again. It had a Yonkers address. He jotted it down on the same envelope.

"I'm going to run over there now," he told Ahearn. "I don't think he'd be there now, but I may uncover some lead. Tell Mr. Kennelly when he gets here that I'll call him and keep him posted on anything that happens."

"Very well, I'll tell him that." Ahearn walked as far as his office with Al.

"Don't take any chances," Al warned as he left him. "There's no telling what a maniac like him might try."

Ahearn nodded silently, a worried look on his face as he turned in to his office. Al started for the front, but slowed up again. The red-headed receptionist was standing in front of the switchboard. She had been watching them.

"What's going on, Mr. O'Connell?" She had a puzzled look on her face.

Al thought she looked much better standing up. "Al to you," he said. "Want to take a ride and find out?"

She smiled briefly. "I'm a working girl, remember? It's only two o'clock in the afternoon. Try me after six."

Al grinned at her. "Don't say I didn't ask." He waved to her as he ran down the steps to his car.

The wheels screamed in protest on the gravel as he lurched it forward and sped out the gate, headed for Yonkers.

IT TOOK him only twenty minutes to get there. He had to circle several blocks near the waterfront to find the address he wanted. When he did he saw that it was a cheap, run-down rooming house. He left his car at the curb and went in.

A dingy card in one of the letter boxes listed Miller, A., for Room 4F. The hall was dark and quiet, there weren't even any kids around. Al went down the long hall, then climbed three flights of stairs until he saw 4F lettered in black paint

on one of the doors.

He slipped his .38 from his shoulder holster and held it ready in his right hand, just in case. He tried the door to the room. It opened to his touch. He pushed it all the way open.

The room seemed empty. It was darker inside than in the hall. The only window in the room was covered with a dark shade pulled all the way down.

Al stepped in cautiously, letting his eyes get used to the dim light. He saw an electric light hanging from the ceiling with a string coming down from it. He reached out with his left hand and pulled it.

He had to blink against the glare of the light bulb, but not before he caught a glimpse of the form hurtling against him. He tried to duck but it was impossible to get out of the way of the fury that descended on him.

He felt the smashing impact of another body against his right side. His arm buckled, his gun flew out of his hand across the room and fell clattering to the floor a moment before he landed with a thud on his side.

His arms and legs lashed out at his attacker, punching, gouging, kicking. He tried desperately to roll away, to get away from him for a moment, but it was useless. The other man was all over him, smashing his face and body with punishing blows.

Then Al recognized him. It was Karl Humboldt, his face twisted in fury, his eyes red with madness, his lips pulled back over his yellow teeth.

Al lurched upward with all the strength in his body. His right arm lashed at Humboldt's face, crashed against it. Humboldt laughed evilly, insensible to pain. His knee dug into Al's groin, doubling him up. Al groaned but fought back with all he had.

It was no use. Humboldt had the insane strength of five devils. His hands closed around Al's throat, hard as steel hands. Al felt the numbing quiet creeping up his arms and legs, saw the glaring bulb overhead start to spin around,

Humboldt's leering face waver in front of him.

He felt his head banged against the floor, time after time. His eyes were wide open but the bulb got dimmer and dimmer. He heard the voice coming from a long distance away.

"You'll never get me back, never. No matter what lies you tell, you'll never get me back. You hear? You—"

Al's head smashed against the floor for the last time. He felt himself slipping off to a peaceful blackness, a calm quiet where there was no Humboldt. Nothing at all. . . .

Sledge hammers were crashing inside his skull. He tried to open his eyes but the light from the bulb seared his brain. He lifted his head a trifle, groaning as a hundred hammers beat against it. Rolling over on his stomach to get away from the light, he lay there sick and giddy, every muscle in his body aching.

His senses came back slowly. He managed to stand up painfully and look around. The room was a mess. The one door to the hall was shut. Humboldt was gone. Al sat on the bed, his hands pressed against his head to ease the ache. His eyes caught the glimmer of light against metal on the floor near the wall. He went over and picked up his gun and shoved it back into his holster.

He looked over the room briefly. It was stripped bare of any clothing or effects of Humboldt. There were a few old tools on the floor of the tiny closet, nothing else.

HE STRAIGHTENED his clothes as best he could, pulled out the light and went downstairs. As he reached the entrance he fished in his jacket pocket for his car keys. They weren't there. He stepped out into the afternoon sun. His car was gone too.

He went through all his pockets quickly. Everything was gone, his shield, his wallet, and all his money except thirty cents in change. He saw a candy store a block and a half away. He ran to the telephone, cursing himself all the

way for being such a fool as to go in the rooming house alone.

The operator got him the Linco Textile Mills right away. He heard Red's voice announce it. He yelled at her to get the District Attorney on the phone for him. She yelled back to hold his horses, if he was still there she'd try to get him.

A moment later Kennelly picked up the phone. Al told him what happened, getting madder and madder at himself. He gave Kennelly the license number and description of his car to put out the alarm, and was just about to hang up when he remembered something else.

"I have another gun in the glove compartment," he said weakly. "If Humboldt finds it he'll be more dangerous than ever."

Kennelly was silent for a long moment. "I'll put the alarm on the teletype right away," he finally said. "You jump a cab and get over here. I'll wait for you."

Al heard the phone click dead. He hung up in disgust, wondering whether the green kids Kennelly mentioned earlier could foul things up any worse than he had. It was a quarter to four on the clock hanging over the door of the candy store. That would give Humboldt enough time to be a hundred miles away.

Al hailed a cab cruising by and told the driver where to go and that it had to be fast, then settled back against the cushions, wishing his head would stop aching. He kept thinking about what Humboldt had said just before he passed out, trying to make some sense out of it.

He could understand what Humboldt said about not going back; even a screwball wouldn't want to go back to an insane asylum. But what did he mean about telling lies? Al was positive he hadn't been able to say a single word to Humboldt.

When the cab stopped in front of the main gate at the plant he was still puzzling over it. Al got out, told the driver to wait. As he turned in at the gate, he stopped dead in his tracks, his jaw fall-

ing open in surprise. There were three cars parked in front of the administration building, Kennelly's limousine, a green and white police car, and his own.

Kennelly and Ahearn were standing next to his car. Two uniformed cops and a sergeant were right behind them. Kennelly saw him right away and came over, pulling out his billfold. He handed Al a ten-dollar bill.

"I thought you'd be surprised to see your car here," he told Al.

Al mumbled something. He handed the taxi driver the bill and pocketed his change automatically. "When did you find it?" he managed.

"Almost right after you called," Kennelly said. "The guard at the front gate said the man drove up about a half hour ago. He showed him his shield, or yours, I should say, and the guard let him in. He answered to Humboldt's description, but the guard didn't see where he went after he stopped the car here. Mr. Ahearn has guards searching this building from top to bottom, but so far there's no trace of him."

Al hated to ask, but he had to. "Did he get the gun out of the glove compartment?"

"Yes," Kennelly said soberly. He looked intently at Al. "Don't feel so miserable, Al. After all, it could happen to anyone. You were doing your best. It's only a question of time until we get him now. He can't get out of here."

"I hope he doesn't hurt anybody first," Al said. "He's vicious, mean crazy. I know."

They walked over to where Ahearn was standing. Al noticed that his face was deathly white. A guard came out of the building and went directly up to Ahearn.

"He's not in the building anywhere, Mr. Ahearn. We've looked everyplace."

"I think we should go inside," Kennelly said. "If he's anywhere around he might take a potshot at you, Mr. Ahearn."

Al followed them in, nodding to Red at the switchboard. She nodded right

back, and Al had to smile. He followed the other two men into Ahearn's office without saying anything.

"I think the only reason he came here is to try to kill you," Kennelly was saying, "whatever reason his twisted mind has for it, he's determined to try to kill you. I can't imagine anything else, logical or illogical, to explain why he came here."

AHEARN sat at his desk, his hands shaking, his face gaunt. He looked ten years older than he had earlier in the day.

"I hope you're wrong, Mr. Kennelly," Ahearn managed to say at last. "It's a frightful feeling, knowing that a lunatic is after you to kill you, even when you're surrounded by armed guards and police officers."

"Have you got a license to carry a gun?" Kennelly asked him.

"No, I never had any reason to, before this," Ahearn said. "I haven't touched a gun since I was in the Army in the First World War."

"I think it would be a good idea if you kept one on your person until Humboldt is caught," Kennelly said. "I can give you temporary permission. Do you have any extra guns, or could you get one from one of your guards?"

"Yes. We keep the guards' guns locked away in the Protection Office while they're off duty. I can use one of those."

His hand reached for a buzzer on his desk. Al noticed that the man's hands were still shaking. He also noticed the employment card of Humboldt, or Miller, face up on Ahearn's desk right next to the buzzer.

A plant guard with sergeant's stripes on his sleeves came in. Ahearn told him what he wanted. He came back in two or three minutes with a regulation police .38 revolver and handed it to Ahearn, then left. Ahearn opened the drawer of his desk and placed the revolver in it.

"I don't mind telling you I feel a lot better," Ahearn said.

Al saw a little color coming back to

Ahearn's face. He turned to Kennelly. "Did you find anything out when you examined Fordson's body?"

"Very little," Kennelly answered. "The M. E. thought he was dead about twelve to sixteen hours. That would place the time of the murder somewhere around midnight or before last night. His head showed several heavy blows, but not enough to cause death. I think what happened is that he was knocked unconscious, shoved into the car trunk, then shot to death."

"Any fingerprints of Humboldt on the trunk or around the car?" Al asked.

"No, he must have wiped everything as clean as a whistle."

"How come his daughter found his body in the car trunk?" Al asked, his brows knotted in thought. There was something wrong here, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"I checked that carefully," Kennelly said. "It struck me as pretty unusual, too. She was out on a date last night with some college kid. When she got home the car was parked in the garage. Her father had told her that morning that he might have to go to Boston for a day or two on business, that he might not be home that night. Usually when he went away like that somebody from the plant would bring the car home and leave it there, in case she wanted to use it. She went out this morning to the garage, planning to take the car to do some shopping, but found a flat tire. She called a service station to send a man up to fix it. When he got there about eleven o'clock, they found the body in the trunk."

"That adds up," Al said. He kept looking at the picture of Humboldt on the card on Ahearn's desk. "How are you planning to smoke him out? This is a pretty big place."

"Just before you got back I called the Chief of Police in New Rochelle," Kennelly explained. "He's going to send me twenty or thirty men. They should be here in ten or fifteen minutes. We'll go over the grounds inch by inch until

we find him. We should get him before dark."

Al nodded. He kept staring at the picture of Humboldt. He started to get the germ of an idea. "What kind of work did Humboldt do here at the plant, Mr. Ahearn?"

Ahearn picked up the card and turned it over. "He's a vat dyer. Any material we color has to be dyed in vats. Humboldt's job was to control the amount and color of liquid in the vats when the material was run through."

WHERE did he work?" Al was getting a little excited.

"All the dye work is done in Building Number Three. That's it over there." Ahearn pointed through the window to a big rambling structure about a quarter mile away.

"Do all the workmen have locker facilities in the buildings they work in, or is there a central one?" Al asked.

"Each building has a washroom for the men, and a separate locker room," Ahearn replied, sensing some of Al's excitement. "Do you think he might be in that building now?"

"No, I'm positive he wouldn't go there yet. I think he's hiding out somewhere in the plant, waiting for it to get dark. He may want to get something out of his locker, I'm not sure what, but I have an idea."

"I'll go over with you," Kennelly said. "Do you think we should take a couple of the police outside?"

"No, I'd rather not," Al told him. "I'm sure he's not in that building, but if he is, he won't surprise me a second time. It's better to leave the men here to protect Ahearn."

"Okay," Kennelly said. He hurried out of the office with Al.

Red wasn't at the switchboard. Another girl, a brunette, was sitting there. It must be afternoon coffee time, Al thought.

They hurried out and walked briskly across the distance to Building Number Three. A guard at the front entrance

saluted and told them that Mr. Ahearn had called him to tell him to let them in. Al asked him if he had seen anything of Humboldt. The guard said he knew him but hadn't seen him in a couple of days. He told them where the locker room was.

It was just down a little hall to the right. Al opened the door to it, his .38 in his hand. He and Kennelly went in. Al looked the room over carefully, walking between the rows of lockers that formed little aisles. It was empty. He put his gun away and started reading the names on the lockers. Miller's was at the far end of the room in the corner.

Al tried it but it was locked. He pulled the handle up as hard as he could, holding his foot against the bottom. The door twisted, then sprang open. He rummaged through the contents quickly. There were a few work-clothes hanging on the hooks and a box of tools on the floor, nothing else. Al swore.

"What did you expect to find?" Kennelly asked.

"I'm not positive . . . Wait a minute." Al reached in and turned the wooden box holding the tools upside down. The tools clattered to the cement floor of the locker room. Pasted to the underside of

the box with scotch tape was a legal-looking document. Al pulled it loose and flipped it open, reading hurriedly.

"What is it?" Kennelly was mystified.

Al handed him the bound papers. "It's his certificate of discharge from the nut house and a court order declaring him legally sane."

Kennelly scanned the papers, then handed them back to Al. "What does it mean?"

"I'm not sure. I think—" Suddenly he froze, every nerve in his body screaming an alarm. He heard a faint sound of something scraping against metal overhead.

"Duck!" he yelled at Kennelly. "He's on top of the lockers!"

Kennelly dove around the corner of the lockers. Al hit the floor fast, crouching behind a wooden bench, tugging desperately at his gun. A shot boomed out in the room, showering Al's face with cement chips. Another smashed into the bench right in front of him, the spent bullet stopping with a squeak as it broke through the heavy oak.

Al caught a glimpse of Humboldt's enraged, insane face looking down at him from the top of the lockers. He crawled backward, pulling the bench with him. Without aiming, because he didn't dare



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raise his head over the bench, he fired a shot where he thought Humboldt was.

He lay there a few moments, breathing heavily. Then he heard a scurrying on the top of the lockers, and a thump as Humboldt jumped to the floor. Al sprang up, his gun ready, just as Humboldt leaped through the entrance door.

"Come on, he'll get away!" he yelled at Kennelly.

Al raced to the door and down the corridor. He saw Humboldt turn off to a side exit before he could get a shot off. He pounded after him, tearing through the exit Humboldt used. He saw him dodge behind a truck parked almost two hundred feet away. Al ran wide of the truck, trying to get on the side Humboldt was on, then he saw him again, running like a deer for another building about a hundred yards away. Al fired a shot over his head, but the man only went faster. Then Al pulled up short, took careful aim at Humboldt's back, and fired again. It was too far. Humboldt scurried around the corner of the building.

Al dashed after him, circling the corner warily, in case Humboldt might be crouching there waiting for him. He wasn't. He was farther away than ever, heading for a clump of trees and bushes on the edge of the grounds.

Two plant guards ran around the building, their guns drawn. Al slowed up to catch his breath. He pointed out Humboldt's crouching, racing form disappearing in the trees. The guards took off after him. Al watched him a second, saw Humboldt turn to the right, away from the heavy growth of shrubs. He knew with a dreadful certainty that Humboldt was going to circle around and head for the administration building.

AL MADE a dash for the administration building. Humboldt was much closer to it on the other side, still going strong. The pain in Al's lungs was excruciating, but he kept on.

The three policemen and the plant

guard in front of the administration building saw Al coming toward them. They ran to meet him, guns drawn. Al tried frantically to yell to them that Humboldt was on the other side of the building, coming around to the front, but he couldn't. He was gasping for breath. He heard the four men shouting something at him.

Al kept on, pointing behind the four men. Finally they stopped and looked at the entrance but it was too late. Humboldt tore around the far side of the building and dashed up the steps. A guard ran out the door, almost knocking Humboldt over. Humboldt grabbed him and smashed his gun in his face. The gun flew out of Humboldt's hand, crashing against the wall. Humboldt dashed into the building.

"Come on, we got him now," Al gasped.

Somehow he managed to keep ahead of the three policemen and the guard as they rushed for the entrance. Al was halfway up the steps when he heard the shot. He ran in, then stopped dead in his tracks. Red was sitting in her chair screaming, her face white, her eyes rolling.

Halfway between the switchboard and Ahearn's office Humboldt lay spread-eagled on the floor, a widening red stain covering his shirt front, blood bubbling out of his mouth.

Ahearn stood in his office door, his face ashen, his whole body trembling. A smoking revolver dropped from his right hand.

"Good Heavens, I killed him," he quavered.

Al went over and scooped the gun off the floor. He bent over Humboldt to examine him. His face was calm and peaceful-looking now; there were no more bubbling noises. He was dead. Al heard Kennelly rush in.

"What is it, what happened, Al?" he cried. Then he saw Humboldt's body stretched out.

"He's dead. Ahearn shot him," Al said simply.

"Too bad he had to go that way," Kennelly said. "I almost feel sorry for the poor creature. His mind was gone, you can't blame him for what he did. But at least this closes out the Fordson murder."

"No it doesn't, Mr. Kennelly," Al said wearily. "Humboldt didn't murder Fordson. Ahearn did."

"What!" Kennelly stared at him, astounded.

Al watched Ahearn closely, his gun ready, waiting for anything the man might try. He saw Ahearn's body stiffen, his head come erect.

"You must be crazy! That's fantastic! I'm a respectable business man." Ahearn was so mad he was sputtering.

"Humboldt wasn't armed," Al lashed at him. "Why did you shoot him down in cold blood?"

"He *was* armed. I thought he was armed. He came rushing in here to kill me. I shot him in self defense. The District Attorney himself knows he came here to try to kill me. He was a homicidal maniac and he got just what he deserved."

"No good, Ahearn," Al snapped. "I can put the whole thing together easily. A little more investigation can clear up any doubtful points."

"How do you figure it, Al?" Kennelly asked dubiously.

"The way I see it," Al began, "Ahearn wanted his partner out of his way, not for any immediate gain, but to get complete control of the business. He may have some other reasons too. When he hired Humboldt, or shortly after, he discovered Humboldt's background. That was easy, all he had to do was go over the old newspaper files. That gave him ideas about how to kill his partner, Fordson. My guess is that he coned Humboldt into writing a bunch of notes addressed to him and Fordson. He probably told Humboldt he was just playing a little joke. Humboldt was scared stiff of losing his job and he would do anything Ahearn wanted him to, anything short of murder, that is."

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—Edwin Markham

WHAT do you mean?" Kennelly asked.

"Ahearn tried to blackjack him into murdering Fordson by threatening to send him back to an insane asylum if he didn't," Al went on. "Humboldt feared that more than anything. When Ahearn tried that on him Humboldt's mind really snapped again, making him useless to Ahearn. Then Ahearn decided to go through with it anyway, making the actual murder look as though Humboldt had committed it. He wasn't afraid of anything Humboldt would ever say; his testimony would be easy to discredit. Only Ahearn made one mistake there."

"What was that?"

"He wiped the car clear of all fingerprints. Only a cold, calculating mind would think of that. Humboldt in his deranged condition would leave his prints all over the car."

"That's stupid!" Ahearn shouted at him. "What kind of evidence is that to accuse a man of murder?"

"You're the one that's stupid," Al came back at him. "But then most murderers are. The trouble with you, you made too many mistakes. Before I pulled Humboldt's, or Miller's, employment card out of the file, I showed you one of another man, quite by accident. You didn't say anything about him being Humboldt, but as soon as I showed you the card for Miller, you identified

the picture of the man immediately as Humboldt and said he looked like a homicidal maniac. I remember that I had a little difficulty identifying him right away, and I practically lived with the guy for weeks during his trial for the murder of his wife."

Ahearn's shoulders sagged, he had a beaten look about him.

"What started me thinking right," Al explained to Kennelly, "was that when Humboldt jumped me in his room he accused me of telling lies about him. Actually I never even had a chance to say boo to him. He also said I'd never get him back, and I figured he meant to the nut house. When I thought about it, it all began to add up. Humboldt came here to get the court orders he had hidden in his locker which proved him to be sane. When he found out I had them, he got worse and went completely berserk. I'll guess and say that he didn't run in here to kill Ahearn, but to beg him to tell us the truth about him, that he wasn't crazy and that he wouldn't commit a murder again. His thinking was a little mixed up, but you have to make allowances."

"I see," Kennelly said. "And you think that Ahearn saw his chance to get rid of him permanently, that he shot him deliberately when he ran in here?"

"Exactly," Al replied. "That way nothing could ever come out and Ahearn would be sitting pretty. Everybody would feel sorry for him and pat him on the back for being such a big hero. Only Humboldt was inconsiderate enough to drop his gun outside. That means that Ahearn murdered him too. Self defense is out of the question. And I'll bet that you can find the gun he used to murder his partner right here in the guards' locker room. He didn't have time to plant that on Humboldt."

Ahearn was a beaten man. He babbled something incoherently.

"I've heard enough," Kennelly said. He turned to the police sergeant standing next to him. "Take him down to headquarters and book him for murder.

I'll be down as soon as I'm finished here."

"A pleasure," the sergeant grunted. He slipped the chain handcuffs off his gun belt and looped them around Ahearn's right wrist, then led him out.

Al bent over Humboldt's body and went through the pockets of his clothes, picking out his shield and wallet and money. The car keys were in the man's shirt pocket, sticky with blood. Al wiped them off on Humboldt's coat. He heard a woman gasp, and looked up to see Red watching him open-mouthed. Al grinned at her.

"That was a nice piece of work, Al," Kennelly said. "I'm certainly indebted to you."

"Forget it," Al said. "It was nothing. I'm going out and have something to eat, I'm starved." He shook hands with Kennelly and started out, grabbing Red by the arm as he went.

She let out a little squeal but went with him willingly.

"I know it's not six o'clock yet," Al said, "but the boss isn't around. You can duck early. I want to buy you your dinner."

"How nice." She sat in the front of his car with him and did nothing but smile as he backed around and went through the gate. "Gosh, mister," she said, "you're awfully big and brave. I hope my kid brother can grow up like you. He's only a traffic cop now."

Al got a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. He felt in his left jacket pocket. The traffic summons was still there; he had forgotten to give it to Kennelly. He pulled it out and looked sideways at the signature. It read "George Hennessy."

"Is his first name George?" he asked her.

"Yes, how did you know?" She was really surprised.

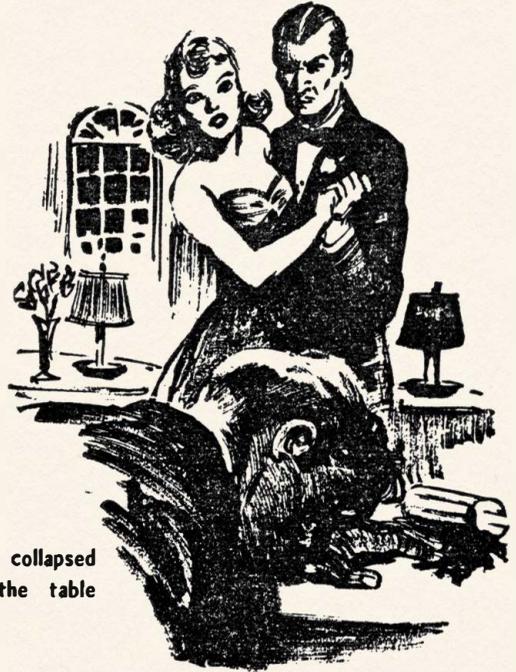
"Never mind," he laughed, "I'm a detective, remember?"

After all, he thought, watching her laugh back at him, maybe she can make up for her brother's misdeeds. ● ● ●

*Bennie was a mug, but in
his chest ticked a . . .*

HEART OF GOLD

By DAVE DRYFOOS



Jess collapsed
on the table

BENNIE FENN felt pleased with himself. It had been a long, hard pull, up from the slums, but he was successful at last.

Tonight, for the first time, the evening papers had referred to him as a betting commissioner, instead of using that old line about gangster, or hoodlum. Only thirty-five, Bennie reminded himself, and already a winner.

Standing in the office of his night club adjusting his jacket in preparation for the evening, Bennie glared reprovingly at his mirror-image in sudden memory of the none-too-distant past, then put the thought aside and grinned again in anticipation of the future. He was on his way, he figured, out of the half-world of organized crime and into the full life of a respectable businessman.

Gentleman Bennie Fenn, he was called these days—the Gamester With the Heart of Gold. Clever kid, that public relations guy.

Still grinning, he left the office for a quick look around. The gambling rooms were empty but ready. In the dining room there was only one couple—a kid of maybe twenty, who looked like a mechanic, and his girl. Blonde. Tall like Bennie himself.

Her back was toward him, so he couldn't see much. Something about the way she

held herself made him cross to the bar, signal for a rye, and examine her in the mirror.

He liked her. Pert, she was—and decent-looking. And therefore out of place.

He knew the type—sharpshooters. These two wouldn't gamble. They'd come only for the dinner that was put out at cost as bait for the game rooms. On about ten bucks they'd have an evening of food and entertainment that would have come to forty at a first-class hotel.

Normally, Bennie despised such deadheads and subjected them to rudeness and poor service till they left. But tonight was different.

A girl like that, now, probably smelled of lots of soap and little perfume. As different from the cheap chippies and expensive wives who usually came to the place as a betting commissioner is different from a gambler.

"How did you know I'm not used to this?" the girl asked him half an hour later. They were dancing by then, the natural result of a magnum of champagne sent to her table. "Do I look green? Hay in my hair?"

"No hay, Hilda," he said, smiling down at her. "You just got here too early."

"Jess gets hungry. He's a machinist, eats his lunch out of a box and works hard all afternoon."

"Engaged to him?"

Hilda smiled and shook her head. "Fancy free," she said. "Free, at least. Not so fancy."

"That's okay, kid," Bennie told her. "I see too many of the fancy ones."

She responded to the hand that pressed her back by laying her cheek against his. But when the number ended, she said, "We'd better go back to the table. Jess'll be getting lonely."

"I could line up a babe for him."

"I'm gonna dance wit de guy what brung me."

BENNIE was prepared for that, let it appear to settle things. But at the table he appropriated a chair for himself.

Jess looked at him fish-eyed. "Go 'way," he said.

Bennie smiled.

Hilda frowned. "Jess!" she said, shaking him. "You're drunk!"

"One drink," he hiccuped, head rolling. "One rye. Waiter brought it. Free, too." He collapsed and slept.

Wide-eyed, Hilda turned to Bennie. "I've never seen him this way before," she said. "Could you get me the check and have a waiter help us to a cab?"

"There'll be no check," Bennie said. "And stick around—I'll have the boys take this home."

"Oh, I couldn't do that! Please, it's been so nice! But Jess will want to have paid the check. And I couldn't stay here unescorted."

"What's the matter? Isn't my place respectable?"

"Of course it is, Bennie!" she said, laying a firm hand on his wrist. "But so am I."

"Okay, kid. But you and Jess, here, come back Friday night—on me. Tell Jess it's because he didn't have a good time. Kind of a refund, see. A raincheck."

"A raincheck. I'll tell him."

THE trouble with Mickey Finns, Bennie reflected, is that they burn so bad you can tell you've had one. When Jess brought Hilda to the club Friday night, suspicion was painted all over him, and he pointedly

ordered nothing but milk.

It wasn't much comfort to Bennie that Hilda had made Jess bring her. She danced so close mainly to show the kid, he decided.

Bennie didn't like that idea. Out on the dance floor he said, "The boy-friend don't seem happy tonight. Is he jealous?"

"Maybe. But he makes me sore!" Hilda asserted. "Keeps calling you names and preaching about the law. Some laws are all wrong!"

Bennie nodded solemnly. "Law's not justice," he said. "Take the guy in the headlines tonight. Foreclosed on that old woman for no good reason. It's legal, but it isn't right. And there's things people want to do that aren't legal, but are all right, so people do them anyhow."

"That's what I keep telling Jess," Hilda agreed. "There wouldn't be places like this if people didn't come. But tell me more about that old woman. I didn't see tonight's paper."

"Well, it's like I say. The old gal had some painting done, and the painter overcharged, so she couldn't pay and she wouldn't. So he slapped a mechanic's lien on the house, and she didn't do anything about it, and the first thing you know the place was foreclosed. The papers are giving that painter a bad time—but it's still legal."

"It's horrible!" Hilda said. She shuddered and leaned tight against him as if snuggling into a dream engendered by the music.

Bennie smirked—till he noticed Jess, glowering at the table. Then he remembered that Hilda was probably using him to punish Jess for passing out. He scowled.

"What do I have to do?" he demanded bluntly, "to get you back here tomorrow night—without the kid?"

Hilda looked at him with something like pity on her clean young face. "There's nothing you can do, Bennie," she said softly. "I'm a cashier, you're a—the proprietor here. If I get mixed up with you, I lose my job. And people are bound to see us together in a popular place like this."

"There's lots of other places!"

"No, Bennie! We live in entirely different worlds."

"I've got a good reputation!" he said, suddenly angry. "I could buy or sell most of the men in this joint, not to mention the women! I've got a successful entertainment business. But people always knock the guy on top."

"Sure, Bennie, but—but if only you could do something that would show everybody how nice you really are. Did you know Jess is afraid of you? He won't admit it, but he's not the only one. You've got to show people how kind you are, giving us a rain-check and all."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"I wouldn't know, Bennie. . . . Yes, I do! That old woman. The one in tonight's headlines. She needs help—do something for her. Publicly! Seems to me I've seen something in the paper about your heart of gold."

"I've got a press agent."

"You've got a heart, too, Bennie. Show it to the world!"

"Okay, kid. Watch for tomorrow night's headlines."

HE LET Jess take Hilda away soon after that. He was anxious to get going. Hilda, he felt, knew what was right. She even managed to be respectable without having money.

An hour after she'd left the club, the next day's work had been arranged. Bennie took three of the boys into his office and explained things, wishing Hilda were there to hear him.

"You don't have nothing to worry about," he told the boys. "The law won't bother you—they're taken care of. The public won't mind—they'd be for it. You're going out on a legitimate job."

"You read about the old woman who was gypped out of her home by this crooked painter? Well, I'm sending you guys to do something for her. Be sure the painter knows who sent you and why."

"You won't have to work hard. This is just kind of a sentimental gesture, see. I want even that painter to know I'm good-hearted."

"So don't kill the guy—just beat hell out of him."

DECISIONS

●

Photographers who shoot pictures of nude women must paint bathing suits on them before the pictures are printed.
—*Vienna Police Department*

●

Any cat found more than 200 yards from his home is considered to be a wanderer.—*Paris City Government*

●

Comic books are forbidden in jail.—*a South Dakota warden*

●

A woman need not wear a thing on stage as long as she remains perfectly still.—*an English Censorship board*

●

It is illegal for a señorita to wear men's trousers.—*a Spanish Police Department*

●

Teachers have no right to beat knowledge into their pupils with a paddle.—*Indiana judge*

●

A person is not entitled to a new set of teeth if he loses his while surf-riding.—*an English Health Council*

●

By Jack Benton

The Lady's out



"Don't come near," she warned. "I'll shoot!"

for **BLOOD!**

A Myro Catin Novel

by **STEWART STERLING**



She had an unanswerable question: "What jury will convict me for shooting the tramp that stole my husband?"

Chapter I

THE ROOM was quite dark; only the merest slit of light came from beneath the bathroom door. Still, the girl reached for an undergarment hanging on the chair beside the bed before slipping out from beneath the blanket. She didn't step into the nylon briefs, merely held them over her nakedness as she tiptoed quickly across the thick carpeting to the

bureau. She picked up her handbag, snapped the catch.

The man in the bed twisted his head restlessly on the pillow. He flung out an arm as if to make sure she was still there beside him, but the even tempo of his breathing didn't alter. She remained rigid for more than a minute, the handbag open in one hand, until she was satisfied he was still asleep.

Through the open window behind the venetian blinds came an occasional sound of cars speeding on the wet highway. At the crescendo of the exhaust roar the lights of passing cars would send momentary flares of brilliance through the slit above the window. Just enough brilliance for the man in the bed to have seen, if he had not already known, that the girl had a remarkably voluptuous figure for a nineteen-year-old; that her legs were long and gracefully proportioned; that there was also, in addition, some arresting and oddly aristocratic quality in the proud poise of her head and shoulders. If his eyes had been open at the exact instant when a car rushed past the motel, he might also have seen the gun.

It wasn't the sort of pistol designed to fit into a girl's handbag. It was a long-barreled target pistol—a .22. She'd had to stick the muzzle deep into one corner and cram the top of the bag down over the butt to get the gun in at all.

Now she held it away from her, stiffly, in the manner of someone not accustomed to firearms. She tiptoed back to the bed, the bit of gauzy nylon still draped across her middle in September Morn-ish fashion. She didn't get back into the bed; merely perched on the edge of the straight chair over the back of which her bra and stockings were draped. Then, using both hands, she cocked the gun.

The small click roused him.

He felt on the pillow beside him. "Sweet . . . ?" he mumbled.

As if in the circling beam of a beacon, light bathed her with fragmentary paleness, glinted on the metal barrel.

"Holy—!" He came awake fast. "Holy Pete, Linda!" He twisted away, rolled out on the opposite side of the bed, crouched there on one knee, bedclothes trailing around his bare shoulder as if he were an Indian warrior. "What you doing with that gun!"

She looked across the bed at him. "I'm sorry you woke up," she whispered.

"My God!" He came to his feet, backed against the wall. "You were going to shoot me in my sleep!"

"No." Her voice was still hushed and heavy with hopelessness. "I was going to . . . use it on myself!"

"You're crazy!"

"I have been, for a long time. Crazy about you. Crazy to believe you." She lifted the muzzle toward her own forehead. "I'm not blaming you. I knew what I was getting into . . . letting a married man make love to me."

"Put that down." He stood up, came around the end of the bed slowly, cautiously, a ghostly vagueness in the gloom. A car light flared again through the slit above the venetians; his nakedness was starkly outlined against the pale green wallpaper of the motel room.

"Don't come near me!" she warned. "I'll pull the trigger before you touch me."

"For Pete's sake, sweet—"

"You can't talk me out of it. I made up my mind before I agreed to come out here with you tonight. I thought I might be entitled to one last evening of happiness before I—went away. But I can't stand it any longer, darling, that's all there is to it—I simply can't. It's been more than a year since you and I—spent a night together that first time. The ninth of March it was; this is the eighteenth—a year and a week—while you've stalled and promised, put off and promised, made excuses and—"

"And now, just when I've finally gotten everything all set so in a week or so we *can* be together—" he let anger rise in his voice—"you want to go off the deep end! Damn it, I *told* you, at dinner—"

"How many times before have you told me!" she asked wretchedly.

"Hester'll be out of our hair in a week. I give you my absolute word of honor! Put that thing away, for Pete's sake!"

"I've had your word of honor on several other occasions." The muzzle drooped a little.

"This time it sticks. If she isn't—out of our way—in a week, I'll take you to Mexico myself on the first of the month; we'll stay there until—"

"How can she be 'out of our way' in a week? Even if she does go to Reno, it'll be at least six weeks!"

"Something may happen to her." He reached out, warily, seized the barrel. "Maybe there'll be a plane wreck—" he put an arm around her shoulders—"something . . ." he continued vaguely.

"What do you mean—'something may happen'?"

"Nothing. Or anything you like. Forget it."

SHE LET him take the pistol. "I don't understand you." She shivered, nestling her head against his chest. "I don't understand myself, either. When you say 'she'll be out of our way' like that, it frightens me. Yet—I don't know why, exactly—but for the first time in months, I believe you, when you say it."

"You'd better," he assured her. "Though I didn't mean anything really. Just that whatever happens, you and I will be together, forever, in another week." He broke the gun, picked out the cartridges. He glanced at her to see if she was watching; when he was sure she wasn't, he opened the suitcase on the luggage stand, slid gun and cartridges inside.

She flung herself face down on the bed, weeping. "I believe you," her voice was muffled in the bedclothes, "but I'm afraid! So—so terribly afraid!"

"You're not afraid of me?" He caressed her soothingly, but she only shook her head, would not look up at him.

Presently he went to the bureau,

poured himself a drink from one of the silver flasks in the saddle-leather case. His hand shook a little—some of the bourbon dribbled down onto the glass top of the bureau.

Another car passed. In the brief instant of illumination he stared at himself in the bureau mirror. Before downing the drink, he turned his head as if to avoid seeing his own reflection.

Chapter II

DOCTOR MYRO CATIN, Medical Examiner for Naverl County, answered the telephone before he was quite awake.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Samaritan Hospital, Doctor. Emergency case here you might want to look at."

"Mmmm." The doctor reached for the walnut humidor. "Why?"

"Girl shot herself. Claims it was an accident. Hasn't much chance to pull through. Captain Sanders says there's no need for you to come over. He's taken an *in extremis* statement."

"Has he now!" Myro pawed around on the bedtable in the semigloom—found the familiar box—extracted a long, thin, black stogie—stuck it between his bearded lips. "You may tell the Captain that I greatly appreciate his solicitude—but I'll be over to see for himself." He bit off the end of the cigar.

"Right, Doctor. You understand . . . there's not much time."

"Be there in two shakes."

Like many a general practitioner, Myro invariably slept in socks and underwear; his trousers were on the bench beside his bed so that, fireman fashion, he had merely to slip into them, cram his feet into loafers while putting on his shirt, grab his coat and be ready to respond to duty's call.

Before he reached for his black string tie, he took the precaution of replenishing his supply of stogies from the humidor. The cigar projecting like the bowsprit of a clipper ship from his round,

amiable countenance was as much of a Catin facial characteristic as the horn-rimmed spectacles through which his black eyes peered with an air of permanent astonishment, or the luxuriant black beard which he cultivated to demonstrate that in spite of his enormous expanse of bald skull, there was still some fertile ground on the premises.

He drove his ancient Chevy to the hospital with terrifying abandon. In the first place, he fiercely resented the idea of young girls shooting themselves. In addition, his gorge rose to formidable heights at the notion that any blustering precinct Captain should presume to tell Myro Catin, M.D., his business. It was recorded in the statutes that every accidental shooting must be investigated by the Medical Examiner for possible evidence of homicide. No bulldozing bucko in plainclothes was going to sidetrack the lawfully-required examination.

Along the antiseptic corridor outside the Emergency Ward Captain Sanders stalked toward him, the detective's beer-keg body expressive of a cocksure arrogance, his meaty bartender's face registering scornful tolerance. "Hi, Doc. Didn't they tell you there was no sense comin' over?"

"They told me *you* said so, Captain. Law says, to earn my pay, I have to see for myself." The stogie tilted up at an aggressive angle. Myro kept on toward the door marked *Emergency*.

"Suit y'self, sawbones." Sanders closed his eyes, hunched his shoulders. "I got a statement. It's all we need. Kid says she was putting the gun away, dropped it on the corner of her dressing table, it went off. You see if you c'n get anything more'n that. You do, I'll buy you a crate of those stinkadoras you use for disinfectant."

Myro went through a door into the ward. The girl on the cot was young—perhaps nineteen—very pretty, with lustrous chestnut hair above a broad and placid brow. She was dressed, except for the shirtwaist and brassiere which had been stripped off to let the nurses

stanch the flow of blood.

She lay still as death, her eyes closed, face ashen. The wound, now covered, of course, was at the base of her throat. Myro judged the bullet had missed the jugular by no more than a hair's breadth. Even so, she must have lost a dangerous—probably a fatal—amount of blood.

RUBBER tubing led down from a plasma bottle to one pallid wrist. An interne was giving her an injection. Another looked up as Myro came to the cotside. He drew the Medical Examiner a discreet distance away.

"No chance, I'm afraid, Doctor Catin. If we'd gotten to her ten minutes earlier. . . ."

"Yes. Bad. What caused the delay?"

The interne explained, defensively. "It wasn't our fault. We didn't bring her in the ambulance. She didn't even phone us."

"Who'd she phone?"

"Well, see, that was the trouble. She couldn't make herself understood. She must have tried to call 'Help' but then apparently she fainted and the operator couldn't get her at all. Of course the girl on the switchboard did notify the police—but it took the officers ten minutes to get around to her room and rush her over here. That ten minutes made a big difference."

"Mmm." Myro picked up the brassiere, turned to the nurse. "You take this off?"

"Yes, Doctor."

He dangled the twin cones of pink satin thoughtfully. "Not much blood beneath this, when you washed her?"

"No, not much." The nurse seemed surprised.

Myro examined the crimsoned shirtwaist with elaborate care. "What happened to the button?"

"Button?" The nurse didn't understand.

Myro pointed to a filament of thread where a small pearl button had been—the third from the top at the back of the

girl's blouse. "Did it come off when you took off her shirtwaist?"

"No, Doctor." She was positive. "I removed her upper clothing myself. I'm sure that must have been missing. I know I didn't rip it off."

The interne with the hypodermic motioned to Myro. "She's conscious, now, Doctor."

The Medical Examiner bent over the pitiful figure. "Is there anyone you'd like to have us get in touch with, my dear?"

"No." The girl stared up at him in wild fear. "No one. No one—at all." She looked beyond him, at the ceiling, at eternity.

"What were you doing with the gun, child?"

Her eyes came back to his, despairingly. "Nothing. What does—it matter? It was—all my fault—from the beginning . . ." Her gaze remained glassily fixed, her mouth remained open.

The interne reached up, shut off the flow of plasma.

"From the beginning," Myro repeated with anger in his ordinarily amiable tone. "What beginning—to bring her to this?" He studied the dead girl's face for a moment, jammed a fresh stogie between his teeth and went searching for the Captain.

SANDERS was at the Receiving desk, filling out his report. "I'm making it '*Injuries self-inflicted*,' Doc. You ready to certify to that?" He looked up smugly.

"I have not completed my investigation." Myro read the bold calligraphy over the thick-set shoulder:

Greening, Linda, 160 Mayview Avenue, (rm. hse.) Picked up 4:10 A.M. Mch. 23, '53, response to Hqtrs radio notification. Found barely conscious, del'd to Emerg. Samaritan Hosp. 4:27 A.M. after obtaining In Extremis statement, appended.

"I lack your faculty for hurtling to conclusions, Captain; mine but a slow and plodding patience. Do you mind if I read her dying attestation?"

"Hell, no. I don't try to make a mys-

tery out of every accidental shooting, like some people within sneezin' distance. Here." The Captain produced a leaf torn from a detective's detail book.

Asked girl if she knew she was dying; said she did. Inquired if she'd been alone at time of shooting; stated she had been all alone. Asked how wound inflicted, replied she had dropped gun while putting it away; it had discharged, bullet entering her throat. Victim then fainted, so rushed immediately to hospital.

Sanders hooked a thumb in the arm-hole of his vest. "Airtight, ironclad and rockbottom, Doc. No chance for an imaginative Medical Examiner to grab off a headline out of that."

"No." Myro let the stogie droop, dolefully. "You seem to have been very thorough. Yet . . . you leave certain questions unanswered, to my mind."

"Such as and for instance?"

"How did she phone while lying down on the floor? Because if she'd stood up to make the call, her brassiere and shirtwaist would have been soaked with blood. They weren't."

"Ah." Sanders made a pushing-away gesture of derision. "Prob'ly she clapped a handkerchief to her throat soon's she knew she'd been hurt bad, held it over the wound while she tried to get the operator."

"Did you find the handkerchief? Or anything she'd used to stanch the flow of blood?"

"No. But I'll look for it when I go back to her room."

The stogie rose slowly like the boom of a derrick being hoisted to a steep angle. "If I were you, Captain, I'd also look for the man who was with Miss Greening at the time of the shooting—the man who put her clothes on after she'd been shot—who left her alone, dying, to wait for someone to take her to the hospital, instead of bringing her here, himself."

Sanders let out a snort of disdain. "An' you claim I'm the one who jumps to conclusions! Th' kid *said* she was all alone."

"Yes, yes," Myro agreed. "One of the problems. Why did she? Who was she

trying to protect? Sad business. But not as simple as your report makes it out to be. Mine won't be quite so simple, Captain." He took the villainous cigar from his bearded lips. "By the way, these are Wheeling Thins. Two-fifty a box—at any good cigar store. Good morning."

Chapter III

DURING his nine years as Medical Examiner for Navel County, Myro Catin had been called, in his professional capacity, to practically every section of Navel City, from the dreary and depressing slums of the wastelands below the railroad tracks to the haughty residential district of Riveredge Park. Street names, in many cases, were but filing references for attempted suicides, gory razor slashings classified in the police records as 'aggravated assault,' bloody murders with axe or hammer.

As a medical man he could not allow his feelings about these various evidences of human savagery to prejudice his judgment. But as a very human individual he found it impossible, after some investigation of man's brutality to man—or woman—not to carry in his mind an indelible association of the surroundings with the violence involved.

Carter Street, for example, would always remain in his memory as the place where the cook had poisoned the four members of the Van Sandt family because they had commented impolitely on her state of unmarried pregnancy. In the same manner, Willey Lane would forever be coupled with the assassination of Judge Weeks by the Sunday School teacher sentenced to the workhouse for impairing the morals of a minor, and so on.

Mayview Avenue, however, had no association for him, one way or the other. It was a quiet, narrow, treeless street quite unworthy of the title of avenue. The houses were one-and-two-family frame structures with small garages at the sides. Clothes dryers spread their

branches like leafless maples at the rear, scraggly shrubs in front tried to conceal the lack of paint on the porches.

Yet, even under the chill glare of early morning street lights, Myro's impression was one of comfortable homes—solid citizenry. The sound of a pistol shot in the night would certainly have roused this serene community. Yet Sanders was ready to believe the girl had been unable to attract anyone's attention for a quarter of an hour after the shooting! Myro snorted with incredulity as he parked in front of 160.

It was a two-family house. The name on the card tacked above the doorbell on on the eastern half read J. Sturker. Myro crossed to the other door. Beneath the bell, a small aluminum plate was stamped *Greening*. He tried the door; it was open. He stepped inside.

He could not have gone on the witness stand and sworn to it that he had heard something moving inside the house. But he had the clear impression there was someone there in the darkness close to him. He felt for the switch, found it, clicked on the hall light.

The hall was bare, unfurnished, carpetless. A flight of stairs at the left were gray with dust. At the right were two doors, the one nearest to him ajar.

This, Myro told himself, is one time you may regret your practice of never carrying a weapon! If there is anyone in that room, he is not likely to look upon you as a friendly intruder!

He waited a moment, listening.

Probably what you heard was someone moving about in the other half of the house, he reassured himself.

He reached around the jamb, pawing at the switch. Something softly enveloping dropped over his head. Muscular arms wrapped themselves around him, lifted him, flung him to the floor.

He tried to grapple with the unseen assailant but folds of woolly fabric hampered his arms. A terrific smash on the head—as if he'd been struck by a thinly padded hammer—stunned him momentarily so all he could do was struggle in-

stinctively against suffocation. His twisting away brought him up against the leg of a table or chair with a jolting impact against his teeth.

THERE was no sound except the bumping of the furniture. He shielded his head with one arm, in anticipation of another shattering blow. None came.

He clawed away the smothering cloth, saw only the rectangular panel of light from the half-open door. He stumbled erect, snatched at the shade on the front window and sent it up with a whir. Light from the street flooded in. There was no one in the room—no one visible on the porch or sidewalk.

He put on the light—a cream-shaded standing lamp. The cloth which had been thrown over his head was a camel's-hair coat, a girl's coat. He picked it up before moving to the door. The hall was empty. His attacker had vanished.

The only tangible evidence that there had been someone else there was the lump at the top of Myro's skull.

But if it hadn't been for his hat and the softening effect of that coat, he might himself have been in need of the attention of a Medical Examiner, he decided. There was no longer any possibility the girl's death had been accidental. In all probability the unseen intruder had been the murderer, come back to retrieve some article which might have given the authorities a clue to the killer's identity.

Myro inspected the room with astonishment. The furnishings were luxurious to the point of elegance. The double bed was circassian walnut, magnificently paneled. The matching bureau and dressing table were certainly more luxurious than anything the doctor had observed in the upper-class boudoirs of Naverall City—and he had been in a great many of them. The rug was thick, almost spongy underfoot, cream white . . . and new, or nearly so. There was a huge radio-record player-television set in bleached moderne. It didn't go with

the elaborate bedroom suite, but quite as surely was it out of place in this modest dwelling.

He investigated the door down the hall. A bathroom—nothing fancy about that. Old-fashioned fixtures—imitation tiling. Yet the toilet articles on the girl's dresser had been of silver—handsomely engine-chased and engraved! Why had a young lady, able to afford such extravagances, been living alone in one room on the ground floor of a shabby house in this drab street? He went back to the bedroom.

On the walls were framed prints, mostly nudes. One was a reproduction of a photograph which certainly could never have been sent through the mail. The girl's face was hidden by an arm which she'd thrown protectively over her eyes, but her position on the white bear rug concealed nothing else. Myro thought the original of the photograph might be the girl at Samaritan.

He transferred his attention to the heavy carpet. About six feet from the side of the bed, which obviously had been slept in, a muddy stain discolored the cream-colored chenille of the floor covering. That would have been where the police found her, bleeding to death. But he noted it was at least two or three steps away from the telephone on the bedtable.

If she'd fainted at the phone, why hadn't she fallen there?

He searched for the shirtwaist button, with no success. He poked into the bureau, the dressing table, the drawer of the small Chinese Chippendale table where books, magazines, record albums, flower vases, a candy dish and a cigarette box tried to crowd each other off the small surface. In the table drawer he found nothing except a packet of old letters bound with an elastic band. They were from different places, in various handwritings, one or two with the envelopes typewritten. But they were all addressed to *Miss Linda Greening, The Helpful Finance Company, 32 W. Main St., Naverall City.*

HE SCANNED the letters swiftly. A note of deeply grateful thanks from someone signing herself *Mag*, for the money so thoughtfully sent in time of need. An inquiry from a used-car dealer as to whether Miss Greening was still interested in a Lincoln convertible. A long letter from 'Your affectionate cousin' expressing delight at Linda's approaching marriage. Nothing in any of them to indicate the girl had been in trouble or in danger. But nothing from a possible suitor, either. Either she'd destroyed his letters, Myro reasoned, or the intruder had taken them—or, most likely, the man in the case lived in Navel City.

The phone's sharp jangle made Myro jump.

He lifted the receiver. "Yes?" He kept his voice low, a throaty whisper.

"Boss?" Apparently the man at the other end was so keyed up he failed to recognize who was answering.

"Yes?" Myro whispered again.

"They got him! They got that guy!"

"Oh!" Myro had to hold it to a monosyllable.

"He'll pop his top, sure's hell, boss."

"Oh!!"

"You better blow—before he does . . . say, who is this? Is this—?"

Myro tried once more. "Go on," he urged hoarsely.

The receiver clicked sharply.

Chapter IV

THE OFFICES of the Helpful Loan Company were on the second floor of a narrow brick building on West State, sandwiched between a Sears Roebuck and a J. C. Penney store. The place reminded Myro Catin of a hospital waiting room—the same soiled smell of sweating humans—the same atmosphere of mingled hope and despair. Here, too, he mused, people came in misery and some went away feeling better, others departed in dejected foreboding.

A bronze sign announced:

It's Our Business To Help You

The blonde teenager behind the low oaken counter seemed uninterested in helping anyone but she consented to listen to Dr. Catin.

"Miss Greenin'? Yeah, she's Mr. Fussell's secretary, she ain't in yet." The blonde glanced at the clock, shifted her cud of gum, sighed meaningfully. "The libbaties some girls take when they're supposed to show up at nine! But bein' she's his secretary, prob'ly she knew he'd be late this mawnin', too."

Myro politely inquired why.

"Mr. Fussell was over to Cleveland yestiddy. Our home office is in Cleveland. He goes there twice a month. But he ought to be in any time. Didja wanna see Linda on *pers'nal* business . . . or could I be of assistance?" She hitched at a shoulder strap, jiggling her brassiere in the process.

Myro explained that the visit was in his official capacity. He was endeavoring to locate some of Miss Greening's friends or close acquaintances.

"No kiddin'! Is there somethin' the matter with Linda? Is she sick or somethin', mister?"

Myro said Miss Greening had been seriously hurt—did the young lady know anyone who ought to be notified?

She didn't. She thought Linda came from somewhere in Indiana, near Vincennes, somewhere. But she didn't believe the Greening girl had any relatives in Navel City. Men friends? Well, Linda was the foxy kind—never had her "boy-frens" call at the office for her. But she had one particular heavy date. All the blonde knew about him was that his name was Bill and he was an engineer who was out of town a lot.

A big, broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced man of thirty-five or so strode into the office. He had a sandy red moustache, bristly red eyebrows above large, moist, brown eyes. Myro noticed the whites were inflamed—as if he had a severe hangover or had been crying. He brushed past the Medical Examiner, pushed through a door on which was lettered "Wilbur Fussell, President."



"Put your—hands—up," the man gasped

The blonde breathed confidentially, "That's the boss."

"So I suspected. Will you give him my card and tell him I have to see him immediately?"

She went into the private office. The big man came out hastily, squinting at the card. He still had on his hat and coat. "Sorry, Doctor, I have a most important engagement. If you'll phone me later in the day. . . ." He attempted to push past.

Myro caught his arm. "It concerns the death of your secretary, Mr. Fussell."

"What? *What?*" The brown eyes

bulged with shock and horror.

"Miss Greening was shot early this morning and died in Samaritan Hospital shortly afterward."

The blonde said, "Good Lord, no!"

WILBUR FUSSELL stared, open-mouthed. "Shot? Dead? No! My God, no!" He bent forward, peered into the Medical Examiner's face. "Did you see her—yourself?"

"I was with her when she passed away."

"When—" Fussell rubbed a hand over his eyes. "What time was this?"

"Shortly after four." Myro followed

the man back into his private cubicle.

Fussell leaned against his big, flat-top desk, dazed. "Did she—say anything? Before she died?"

"Yes. You understand I can't tell you what she said—a doctor hears a good deal he's not privileged to repeat." Myro neglected to add that what the dying girl had said to Sanders would be in the afternoon papers. "Were you wondering if she mentioned any names?"

"No, no." Fussell glanced at him sharply. "But this—coming at the same time with the other—it's such an incredible coincidence. I can't help believing there's some connection—though that's such a miserable thing to think about her."

Myro made a blind guess. "You think some man was involved?"

The loan president took off his hat, massaged his temples with the tips of his fingers. "I forgot—you couldn't know about the robbery." He studied the physician's noncommittal expression. "I was in Cleveland last night. Came in on the morning train. Took a taxi home from the station. Found my wife in a state of collapse. Our house had been burglarized during the night. A lot of extremely valuable silverware was taken. A neighbor saw the man on our porch roof—phoned the police. They came in a radio car and caught him. But he got away from them.

"They think he's wounded. One of the officers shot at him when he made a break just outside the police station; they are sure he was hit." Fussell shook his head in bewilderment. "So you see, someone must have tipped the fellow off that I wasn't going to be home, evidently thinking my wife was going to Cleveland with me. Only person who could have known about my trip would have been someone in my office."

Myro remembered what Linda Greening had said about its being all her fault from the beginning. "You think she may have been intimate with this burglar, and, on learning of his capture, de-

cidated to kill herself for fear she'd be implicated in the crime?"

The blonde put her head in the door. "There's a detective here—says he has to see you, Mr. Fussell."

Chapter V

BEFORE THE loan man could comment, Captain Sanders stalked in majestically. His pale gray eyes opened wide at the sight of the Medical Examiner. "Don't tell me you're poking your puss into police business again, doc!"

Myro knocked the ash from his stogie with elaborate care. "Before certifying Miss Greening's death as murder, I wish to make sure of all the facts in the matter, Captain. One of the possibilities seems to be that she may have been mixed up in a burglary at the home of her employer."

Sanders made a visible effort to conceal his ignorance concerning Linda Greening's employer. "Look, doc. At your own job you may be okay, though I hear there are those who think different. Maybe you can make with the test tubes and the microscope slides and all that medical claptrap. But what you don't know about cop work would fill the City Library. *This* business," he jabbed a thumb aggressively at Fussell, "is strictly for the badges, see! When we need your help, we'll holler. Until then. . . ."

"I will continue to look into the possibility that Miss Greening was murdered by the man responsible for the burglary at Mister Fussell's home." Myro replaced the stogie between his bearded lips—his jaw stuck out so the cigar jutted up almost perpendicularly.

The president of Helpful Loan spread his palms in a gesture of indecision. "I didn't say that was how it happened, but it would certainly explain why the robbery took place on the one night in the last two weeks while I was away from home."

"Yeah?" Sanders was belligerently skeptical. "One thing it don't explain is

what happened to all the stuff your wife claims was stolen, Mister Fussell. This crook the boys nabbed in your yard didn't have anything on him but a pocketful of teaspoons and a couple sets of salt and pepper shakers. Mrs. Fussell says a set of twelve gold goblets and a solid silver coffee set also are missing. We figured he might of stashed th' loot out in the yard somewhere—lowered it out th' window in a pillowslip or somethin'—and gone back in the house for more. But the boys've been goin' over your place with a fine tooth—they ain't come up with a thing."

Fussell shook his head, puzzled. "Perhaps Linda was with him. Maybe she took the other things and got away before the police came in the patrol car."

Myro murmured: "I should have thought your private secretary could have found an easier way to rob you, if she'd wanted to, than by helping to stage a burglary, Mr. Fussell. I'm not one who insists on saying nothing but good about the dead. But I don't care for pointing a finger at a poor soul who can't answer back. Captain Sanders thinks Miss Greening shot herself by accident—I say she was murdered. You think she helped some criminal loot your home. Until something develops to convince me otherwise, I shall have to conclude the girl was the victim of circumstances—and a peculiarly cold-blooded killer."

Chapter VI

THE Chevy slanted out into West State Street traffic with an abruptness which caused a jamming-on of brakes and squealing of tires on the part of those unfortunate drivers unfamiliar with Myro's casual handling of the wheel. He paid no attention to the aggravated hornblowing, having more important matters to consider.

There were several points in Captain Sanders' recital of the facts which seemed quite inconsistent. The escaped burglar reportedly had been discovered on the porch roof. What had he been

doing on the second floor if he'd been after goblets and a heavy coffee set—which would have been in the dining-room on the ground floor? Presumably he'd taken the most valuable portion of his loot outside the house. Why hadn't the police found it? If the girl had been the robber's accomplice, why hadn't she warned him of the approach of the patrol car?

None of these questions disturbed Myro as much as two others which Captain Sanders could not reasonably have been expected to answer. Who had been the intruder grappling with the doctor there in the darkened room? Had he been the 'boss' of that agitated individual on the phone? Myro reduced a Wheeling Thin to ash and frazzled stub, considering these conundrums.

He slowed the Chevy to an erratic forty as he reached the exclusive residential section of Riveredge Park. A passing postman directed him to the Fussell residence on Sprucetree Walk. He had no difficulty locating the big, brick house with the gray-blue shutters and the winding, hedge-guarded walk up to the glassed-in veranda. It was apparent Wilbur Fussell needed no helpful loan—at least not in those small amounts so attractively offered by monthly-payment finance companies.

It was hardly mid-morning yet, but there were signs that the Fussell household routine had not been paralyzed by the nocturnal raid. Towels fluttered on the line beside the two-car garage. A plume of smoke feathered away from a wire-basket incinerator.

Myro parked a block away, sauntered back. He could observe no one through the curtained windows. The garage doors were closed against the blustery March wind.

He strolled in the graveled drive, crossed the yard between two circular flower beds, now resembling a couple of large mud pies. He was within a dozen feet of the smouldering incinerator when a squeaky high voice demanded what he was doing!

The owner of the voice was a short, enormously-fat woman in her early thirties. She wore a lavender house dress with a ridiculous little yellow apron. Her arms were bare above her elbows. They were huge arms, more suitable to a wrestler or a longshoreman than a dumpy housemaid. Her face was round and pale as a cabbage. Little rolls of fat around her eyes made them seem like raisins in a pan of dough. Huge sausages of blubber sagged beneath a chin which had almost disappeared.

Myro smiled apologetically. "I'm just looking around," he answered vaguely, continuing toward the incinerator.

"You just better look around somewhere else, then, mister—before I call the police."

"You wouldn't want to do that, would you?" he inquired plaintively. "Your mistress must have had enough of the police, last night." He saw that the stuff smouldering in the basket was a wad of half burned white fabric.

"Mistress!" the stout woman bridled angrily. "I'll have you understand I'm mistress in my own house, Mister Snoop-erdooper! Go on, now! I won't have any of you newspapermen around my place! *Get off my property!*" She lifted her voice to a shrill screech. "Theobald! *Theo!*"

MYRO gazed at her with mild horror. This lard-tub, the wife of the loan company president? Perhaps she could have been attractive at one time, but, he concluded, it must have been a good many years ago. That amount of unhealthy weight couldn't have been accumulated in less than a decade.

And this was the woman who was supposed to have been incapacitated by the shock of the burglary! "My apologies, madam—" he began but did not finish.

A slender young man in olive gray and shiny black puttees burst out of the garage. "Did you call me, Mrs. Fussell?" He came on the run.

"Put this man off my premises, Theo-

bald!" The gross creature advanced at a pugnacious waddle. "Throw him off! Instantly!"

Myro regarded the chauffeur soberly—it was extremely unlikely there were two voices with such marked similarity in tone and timbre—this was plainly the agitated individual who had rung Linda Greening's phone in the middle of the night to warn his 'boss' of impending disaster. Theobald was good-looking, even handsome, in a sharp-faced manner, but his mouth was too small and thin-lipped for a man, in the doctor's opinion.

"There'll be no need for bouncer tactics," the physician stated calmly. "I am the Medical Examiner for this county. I'm here in pursuance of my official duties."

Theobald approached, scowling. "You got no right pokin' around here without a warrant."

"Medical Examiners require no court orders. But all this seems a lot of to-do about nothing, doesn't it? There's no reason why Mrs. Fussell shouldn't burn all the old dust cloths she wants to, as far as I'm concerned." Myro pointed at the incinerator. "It's not against Health Department regulations."

He bowed, wandered slowly away, gazing up at the porch roof, peering interestedly at clumps of shrubby large enough to hide a sizable amount of swag. It would never do for them to be aware he knew the old dust cloths had been practically-new percale sheets and a lime-green blanket.

Moreover, now that he was sure of it himself, he was uncertain just what it meant, or what he should do about it. Burned fabric, when connected with a homicide case, in his experience, usually indicated an attempt to destroy incriminating bloodstains.

At the sidewalk he turned, waved nonchalantly. They stood close together, watching him sullenly. They didn't wave back.

His amiable countenance took on a pained expression.

Chapter VII

THE reeking fumes of iodoform and formaldehyde which permeated every corner of the Medical Examiner's office provided him with a degree of desirable isolation. Even legitimate visitors who could temporarily put up with the higgledy-piggledy confusion—chemical apparatus on filing cabinets, tables and laboratory sinks full of bowls and basins containing various human organs in advanced stages of dissection or decay, microscopic and spectroscopic paraphernalia scattered on desks or piled on stacks of toxicological tomes—could seldom stand the stench for long. To Myro's nostrils, however, it was the preferred atmosphere in which to enjoy lunch.

He munched a sandwich of Stilton cheese on pumpernickel, held out his 200 cc beaker for a refill of the coffee which his attractive lab technician had brewed in a Florence flask over a Bunsen burner. "More cream, my charming chef. And less sugar."

Paulette, a picture of crisp starchiness and glowing pink complexion against the helter-skelter furnishings of the combination office, laboratory and dissecting room, eyed the doctor with irritation. "Don't we have enough work to do around here, without your making more by going out of your way to aggravate the Police Department?"

"I'm not going out of my way, my precious pretty. I'm simply not going their way—if you're referring to this nasty Greening business."

"You know very well I am. That afternoon paper quotes Captain Sanders as having heard the girl say she shot herself."

"Oh, she did say so, my intelligent imp. I heard her say it, too. That's what makes it nasty. She was trying to protect some man with whom she was in love. Obviously he wasn't the sort she should have fallen in love with, because he killed her."

"You think it was Mister Fussel."

"I didn't say so, my hasty handmaiden. I didn't even say so to myself. Several other facets must be considered. For example, there's the engineer named Bill, who spent a good deal of time out of town."

"And about whom you know nothing except what a gum-jawed teenager told you." Paulette filled his glass beaker for the third time.

"That is one of the odd facets. Why hasn't the Braggadocio Boy, Captain Sanders, learned about the secretive Bill? Another curious aspect is the burglar. Listen to the *Sentinel's* reporter." He rattled the paper. "The burglar, described by the two detectives who first captured, then lost, the elusive criminal, was a strikingly handsome man of forty, tall, well-built, with a classic Grecian profile and curly silvered hair. His poise and manner, no less than his well-tailored suit, put the robber quite out of the ordinary classification of second-story worker. In the opinion of First Grade Detective Kerry Bostwin, the thief could easily, on his face alone, have secured employment as a movie or television actor."

"That," Paulette sniffed, "is what is known as the phony human interest angle. Take an ordinary run-of-the-jail housebreaker, give him a buildup as a combination Cary Grant and Bob Mitchum—*alagazam*—you have a story! Probably when they find the fellow, he'll look like the laundry driver."

"You've become blasé from seeing too many thriller dramas, my skeptical siren. Though no one can say you nay until they do find him. Why haven't they?"

"Doesn't it say there he got away on a truck?"

NOT QUITE, my invaluable imp. It says that after Sergeant Jules Levinson shot the man—having first called out for him to halt—the escaping criminal caught hold of the tailboard of a speeding produce pickup truck and rode it out of pistol range. The driver

of the truck later stated that the burglar dropped off and hobbled to the sidewalk near the intersection of Belhaven and Foster Streets. Since then no one, apparently, has seen him."

"He's most likely hiding out in one of those cheap flophouses down there," Paulette said.

"Perhaps. Or possibly he's dead. Sergeant Levinson is quoted as saying he fired at the man's legs but the fellow was running in a sort of crouch to make a smaller target of himself. The Sergeant is positive his bullet took the fugitive in the back. I know Sergeant Levinson—he's reliable. If he says he's sure he shot the man in the back, I'm prepared to accept it as a fact. Now a thirty-eight bullet in the back is a very dangerous sort of wound."

"Suppose he *is* dead?"

"That—" Myro ignited a fresh stogie in the Bunsen's blue flame—"would probably relieve the minds of several other people. Including, possibly, Captain Sanders. But I don't think our burglar is dead. If he were, I think the police would have found the body."

"They haven't found him alive, have they?" Paulette glanced significantly at the tray piled high with reports and analyses awaiting the Examiner's signature.

"It's often easier to locate a dead man than a live one." Myro ignored her appeal. "What I *can't* understand is why he hasn't called on some physician to treat his wound."

"Any doctor would have to report it to the authorities, wouldn't he?"

"Exactly. So unless we admit to having some medical man in our midst who is in cahoots with a criminal, this good-looking porch climber must be in a bad way."

"Probably he's miles away by now."

"A contingency not to be dismissed. But he couldn't have gone by train or bus. No truck or taxi driver would have taken him as a passenger, except at a great risk. He couldn't have driven a car himself for any distance. If he had

a confederate, still he'd have wanted to get medical assistance as soon as he dared. And, though Sanders can be supremely stupid at times, he certainly isn't one to overlook the routine procedure of notifying all the surrounding police departments of the wanted man's description."

Paulette put the remainder of the cheese in the dissection-specimen refrigerator. "I wouldn't let it worry me too much."

The stogie performed gyrations akin to a pole vaulter's pole. "But it does. It distresses me. That poor girl—" he gazed gloomily at the still figure beneath the rubber sheet on the autopsy slab across the littered room—"has no one to take her part. She was betrayed by one man, I feel morally certain. If I don't do what I can to defend her good name, I'll feel as if I've betrayed her a second time."

"And I feel as if you're wasting your time on something that's strictly up the Police Department's alley!" Paulette was exasperated. "Look at all that unfinished work!"

"She said it was all her fault, from the beginning." Myro's tone was plaintive. "And it couldn't have been, you know."

His technician sighed. "But what on earth can you do about it?"

"Find that extraordinary burglar—if I can."

"You, alone? There must be a dozen plainclothesmen making a house-to-house search of that wholesale district."

"It's conceivable they're hunting in the wrong kind of houses. That's one of the disadvantages of following a predetermined routine. Your mind becomes inflexible—you see things only in one dimension."

Paulette gazed at him with genuine awe. "And where, pray, will *you* direct your search? In the fourth dimension?"

"After a manner of speaking, yes." He smiled, patted her shoulder fondly. "And while I'm prowling around in the realm of relativity, my cherub, see if a

magnifying glass shows any lime-tinted lint on Linda Greening's skirt."

Chapter VIII

IN ALL probability, Myro told himself, you are allowing yourself to be deceived by your active imagination. The chances against its turning out to be as simple as you have figured it out to be, must be several hundred millions to one.

Nevertheless he unfolded the Naverall City map which he always carried in the Chevy's glove compartment and studied the street layout in the Riveredge Park area with great deliberation. His reasoning, he felt was sound enough, but there were so many loopholes in mere logical deductions.

The burglar, according to the police, was a striking individual. Yet they had never seen him before. The only conclusion was, he wasn't a native of Naverall City.

If he had come from some nearby city—or even if he had merely stopped in town while enroute from coast to coast—probably he had come by car. Traveling by train, plane or bus would be somewhat inconvenient if large quantities of heavy swag were to be spirited away unnoticed.

The Fussell residence was a mile and a half from the center of the city. It seemed unlikely the burglar had intended to lug his loot that far on foot. Therefore the likelihood was that he'd driven to some spot in Riveredge Park, out of sight of the house he planned to rob. No doubt he'd intended to return to his car after making his getaway from the burglarized mansion—but the police had prevented that.

If he hadn't returned to his car—and if his serious wound had prevented his doing so after his escape from the police—the burglar's automobile must still be parked somewhere in the vicinity of the Fussell place. True, the police hadn't reported finding it. But that was undoubtedly due to the fact that they

hadn't bothered to look for it.

The problem would be how to determine which of the cars standing along the curb in Riveredge Park might have belonged to a midnight marauder. Myro drove past the Fussell house for the second time, noting that no smoke feathered up from the wire basket in the yard. As far as he could tell from his speeding glance, the incinerator was empty. He saw neither the stout matron nor the slender chauffeur.

Driving around the block he eliminated from consideration all those cars bearing license plates which had K6 as starting numbers—those would all belong to Naverall County owners.

A block-and-a-half away, on Pinecone Place, he saw a black coupe, with a B2 license number. There were dead brown leaves and a sprinkling of cinnamon-colored pine needles plastered on the shiny hood, showing that the car must have been there for many hours. Myro pulled in behind it, got out of the Chevy.

The windows were up but the coupe was unlocked. Moreover, though the keys were not in the ignition, the ignition lever was at 'On.' A man who wanted to be sure he could get into his car and start it quickly might have left things like that.

The glove compartment resisted Myro's efforts to open it. There was nothing on the seat or on the ledge back of it to indicate who the owner was. But under the seat were a road map of the state, a packet of paper matches and an oil-smudged card:

Ed Emerson
The Premier Auctioneer

The Man Who Sells the Mostest
For the Bestest Prices

Columbus, Ohio Phone King 2617

An auctioneer, Myro reflected, might be expected to have a special interest in golden goblets and silver coffee sets. He went around to the back of the coupe. The trunk compartment lid was immovable. But his eye fell on the metal ex-

tension welded to the frame of the coupe just beneath the handle of the luggage compartment. A trailer coupling.

PERHAPS you were laying it on a bit thickly there at the office, with your reference to the fourth dimension. But even so, Paulette would have to admit you had succeeded in transferring the search to a different strata than that of the house-to-house-combing police! They'd not be likely to search a house that moved around!

He drove to Belhaven and Foster with a degree of recklessness which would have indicated his concentration on the problem at hand, if the up-and-down, derrick-like movements of the stogie had not been a sufficient barometer of his state of mind.

The wholesale district spread out along Belhaven for a good half mile, fronting on the freight spurs angling off from the main line of the B & O, backing up to the dismal procession of flea-bag hotels, flophouses and grimy warehouses which eventually merged into the newer concrete-and-glass showrooms of Automobile Row—used-car lots alternated with *Pontiac-Chrysler-Buick-Packard*-dealer buildings near Foster there was a vacant lot boarded up at the Belhaven side and heaped with rusty wreckage, abandoned trucks, bus skeletons and half a dozen ten-year-old models bearing *For Sale* signs. Next to these was parked a dingy gray trailer with *Ed Emerson, Auctioneer* blazoned on its sides in flamboyant orange letters a foot high.

Cars and trucks rolled past on Foster in a steady stream but no one seemed to pay any attention to Myro as he pulled in beside the gray trailer, cut his motor.

White venetian blinds covered the windows of the house-on-wheels. Myro's attempt to peer through the curtained rear window brought him nothing except a glimpse of a newspaper-littered table and a gas stove. The trailer door was locked. But on the single aluminum

doorstep were yellow-brown splatterings which glistened in the afternoon sun—dried blood.

He went to the other end of the trailer, put his ear to the gray metal side. It was not too easy to distinguish the deep groaning, beneath the roar of exhausts and the grinding of gears. But the doctor had had his share of experience diagnosing faint noises heard through a stethoscope—someone inside the trailer, with his head close to where Myro had his ear, was in mortal agony.

The Medical Examiner wasted no minutes going to the nearest showroom and phoning for police assistance. Before the authorities could arrive, the man might be dead. Anyhow, after they got to the scene, they'd have to break into the trailer. For it seemed clear the burglar must have locked himself in and then been unable to rouse himself sufficiently to unlock it again and call for help.

A tire iron which Myro kept in his car levered the trailer door open at the first attempt. It was done as quickly and easily as if he'd used a key. None of the drivers thundering along Foster Street would have been apt to notice anything out of the way in Myro's getting the door open.

He stepped inside. A deafening explosion shattered the quietness of the trailer—an angry, keening whine of lead ricocheting from metal to metal fought with echoes of the pistol blast as Myro flung himself flat on the floor.

"Hold it!" he called. "I'm a doctor." He lifted his head enough to see the face of the man on the bed at the far end of the trailer—a white blur in the shaded gloom. After a moment Myro made out the dark bluish metal of the automatic pointed in his direction.

"Put—your—hands—up." The man's voice was surprisingly strong, but faltering, as if he had no more than strength for one word at a time.

Myro said, "Wait till I get up on my knees."

"Quick—about—it." The man groan-

ed. "Come—here."

Myro stood up, walked toward the gun.

THE MAN on the bunk was as the two policemen had described him—a man of distinction despite the pain-twisted features. His overcoat and suit coat lay in a heap on the floor. He had tied a bath towel, now blood-soaked, around the small of his back. Myro saw instantly that the burglar's lips were leaden, his skin a waxy gray.

"Better let me take you to the hospital, Emerson."

"You—a doc—on the—level?" The automatic fell to the trailer floor.

"Yes. I'll have to carry you to my car."

"I thought—you—" the waxy face writhed with pain, "were—that—double—crossing—bastard. . . ."

"I'm Doctor Catin. Can you sit up? So I can get your weight over my shoulder?"

"Think—I've got—a chance—Doc?"

"If we can get a transfusion into you. Put your arm over my shoulder."

"All—I—want," the arm draped limply around the Examiner's neck, "live—long—enough—to—even—up—with—" Emerson's head fell back, the arm slipped back onto the blood-drenched spread.

Myro felt for the pulse. There was none.

Before he went to telephone he made a hasty examination of the trailer. If the burglar had actually stolen any goblets or heavy silver pieces, he hadn't brought them to his home on wheels.

And if the dead man had made use of burglar tools, Myro found none hidden. Nor any indication the man had been other than a law-abiding auctioneer.

Chapter IX

PAULETTE took the Examiner's hat from the sink and put it on his roll-top desk, removing the umbrella which had been placed so it dripped muddy wa-



EXPLANATIONS

Nabbed by police as he strolled through downtown San Francisco wearing only a wrist watch and a right shoe, a man explained, "I got so hungry I just shoved off to get breakfast and forgot to get dressed."

A 20-year-old University of Michigan student, confessing to four holdups and an attempted bank robbery, explained he was just trying to work his way through school.

When Syracuse, N. Y., police wanted to know what she was doing in someone else's parked car, a woman stated, "I often sit in parked cars hoping the owner will come back and give me a ride downtown. I hate buses."

Charged with assault, an indignant Mikeli, Finland, citizen told the court: "After all, I didn't hit anyone but my wife!"

Charged with theft, a Detroit man stoutly maintained he had driven off in a bus just to prove he could drive one!

In Tacoma, Wash., a stranger discovered atop a roof explained to police, "I was just looking for a bus to McChord Field."

Arrested for smashing a shoe store window in New York and making off with a pair of brogans, a man told police, "The high cost of living drove me to it."

The Neustift, Austria, man who blows the bugle that summons firemen to the job admitted he'd set fire to a number of buildings. He explained, "I like to blow the bugle and didn't have much opportunity otherwise."

A deer hunter who kept shooting at other deer hunters near Salt Lake City explained how come: "I hadn't got me a deer and so I decided to fire at everything that moved."

Wyoming highway patrolmen explained why they hadn't been impounding all livestock found "in any public lane or roads" as the new law required. "The legislature didn't tell us how to catch the critters," they pointed out.

—Harold Helfer

ter on a batch of autopsy carbons. "You're getting terribly absent-minded, doctor."

Myro squinted up at her through a haze of stogie smoke. "My mind is not absent, child; it's merely preoccupied."

"Still with that Greening business?" She shook her head reprovingly. "It's been nearly a month since the police and the papers announced it had all been cleared up. And gave you full credit for tracking down that Emerson fellow."

"Thirty-two days, to be exact." Myro's eyes went to the calendar advertising a funeral home. "What they didn't give me credit for was realizing that it couldn't have happened the way Sanders claimed it did."

"They had the girl's admission and the pistol with which she was shot. The telephone records showed she'd made a long-distance call to Columbus only two days before the robbery."

"Try to be accurate, my pet. The records showed *someone* had called Emerson's number from Miss Greening's phone, nothing more."

"You're absolutely determined Wilbur Fussell murdered her, aren't you? Isn't that what the psychiatrists call an *idée fixe*?"

"Let's call it a moral certainty, my belittling beauty. The trouble with a moral certainty is, it's considered highly immoral to act on it without plenty of supporting facts—and I have only a few. I testified before the grand jury that Linda Greening couldn't have shot herself. They believed what Sanders told them, instead."

"My belief that the Fussell's chauffeur was the man who phoned the Greening girl's number while I was in her room is not a fact but an unverified opinion. Consequently, I didn't use it in my sworn testimony. I did include Emerson's dying reference to 'a double crossing so-and-so.' But, as the caustic Captain pointed out, the remark could have been made about the girl. Though one seldom hears a young lady referred to as 'that bastard'."

Paulette said: "Why don't you let sleeping dogs lie?"

Myro took the stogie from between his bearded lips. "Because my professional integrity has been challenged, pet. My opinion flaunted. Disregarded. You know that mouldy canard about doctors burying their mistakes; well, the unreticent Captain will never allow what he considers my mistake to be buried. He will refer to that grand jury verdict of suicide every time he sees me; has done so, a dozen times in the past four weeks. I shall be forced to justify myself . . . or my tenure as Medical Examiner in this county will be unbearable." He examined the tip of his stogie. "How would you like to be pregnant?"

His assistant dropped a pair of crucible forceps with a small clatter. "Do mine ears deceive me?"

"I didnt mean it as a proposition," Myro corrected himself solemnly. "Perhaps I should have said 'how would you like to pretend to be *enceinte*.'"

She eyed him warily. "Think of my good name, Sire."

"You'll have to change that. I mean, it'll be necessary for you to take the name of one of your friends, the technician's at Samaritan Hospital. Wilbur Fussell would never have anything to do with you if he knew you were my assistant."

PAULETTE made a face. "I don't think I'd like him to—to have anything to do with me, as you so daintily put it—under any circumstances. Or any name."

"I wouldn't ask you to go so far as to risk your virtue with the gentleman. But if you could lead him on to . . . um—make advances, let us say—it might be of the greatest value in unraveling this terrible tangle."

"Are you suggesting I let him try to seduce me?"

"All I'm suggesting is that you approach him as I presume Linda Greening must have, some months ago. As a desirable young female apparently in

desperate need of a loan—which you are prepared to go to almost any lengths to obtain.”

“Why am I supposed to need this money?”

“You will have to be cagey about that. It won’t do to blurt it right out that you are in what is popularly known as a delicate condition—though still single. It would have to be drawn out, possibly as a slip of the tongue, after vague references to an unspecified operation—a personal matter not to be discussed—and so on.”

“I’m surprised at you, Doctor! For you to think that a girl who admitted, or even hinted at, being pregnant, could have any attraction for a man . . . other than the one supposed to be responsible for her sad state.”

“The one you should be astonished at is Wilbur Fussell.” Myro let the stogie droop dolefully. “There are men—often-times those who feel they have been cheated in marriage—whose amatory instincts would be roused to an extravagant degree at coming into contact with a girl in such a predicament. But,” he shrugged dismally, “if you do not feel able to carry out such a dangerous masquerade—”

“It’s not that I’m afraid,” Paulette said defensively, “only I don’t see what would be gained.”

“He will ask you what security you can offer for this loan you need for an unspecified—but perfectly well understood—purpose. You will reply that you have nothing but the furniture in your little apartment.”

“Ah, ha! Then he will ask to come and see it, so as to judge if it is worth enough to make the loan—and also to make a few passes at me!”

“Precisely, pet.”

“And what do I do with this wolf at my door?”

“Lead him on. Not too far, naturally. Or too fast. But enough so he may hope to become . . . ummm—intimate with you at some time after the loan is granted. That would, I suspect, have

been the way it went with the poor Greening girl.”

“I don’t want it to go that way with me!” Paulette shuddered. “Suppose he decides to murder *me*?”

“He won’t—as long as you’re unattainable. If you can get close enough to him to learn anything about his relationship with that gross Hester—enough to have him ask you out for the evening—I think you may safely leave the rest to me.”

“You have more faith in my ability to play a part like that than I have.”

“I know you can do it, if you’ll try.”

“When do you think I ought to begin to parade my charms before him?”

“The sooner the better. Let’s say this afternoon.”

Chapter X

THE BOX of Wheeling Things lay on the Examiner’s desk surrounded by spring-blade knives bearing yellow identification tags, a half of an automobile headlight lens, a length of rubber tubing which had once been attached to the pipe of a gas oven, and other odds and ends of his peculiar practice. “Where’d these cigars come from, Paulette?”

“A boy brought them.” She looked up from her trituration pipette. “I thought you sent them up from the cigar store.”

“No. No, I didn’t.” He hefted the box gingerly, sniffed at it, regarded it with round-eyed suspicion. “Can it be our bull necked Captain has so far reformed that at long last he is paying off on bets?”

“Don’t be cynical,” she chided. “Probably one of the patients you’ve been treating without taking any pay is trying to ease his conscience.”

“Every time I begin to have doubts about the fundamental decency of humanity, you make some remark like that and restore my faith. Nevertheless. . . .” He pried open the lid of the cigar box with painstaking care. The stogies were packed together as tightly as he was accustomed to find them. But he carried

them cautiously over to his ultraviolet apparatus, cut in the glowing lamp. Instantly the tips of the stogies shone like a phosphorescent stump at dark.

He cut off an inch of one cigar, placed it in a beaker, poured ether over it, filled a hypodermic with the discolored fluid. From one of the guinea pig cages which added to the helter-skelter aspect of the laboratory, he took a furry, quivering creature. Thirty seconds after he had injected the hypodermic's contents into the animal, it lay stiffening in convulsions.

"Aconite, at a guess." He smiled sadly at Paulette.

She stared in horror. "If you'd chewed on one of those things for half a minute—"

"Yes. Risky business, to call down the wrath of a Fussell upon one's head."

"You don't think Wilbur sent those? That he suspects I work for you! That I'm trying to trap him?"

"I have no way of telling," Myro admitted. "But it's impossible to be too careful in dealing with someone who has learned how simple it is to murder."

She pressed clenched fists to her cheeks. "It's been like living through a nightmare, all the time knowing you can't wake up and shake it off. But I still can't believe Wilbur's the sort of person who'd commit murder. It's been two weeks now, since that first evening when he came up to my apartment—and got so lingerie conscious. In the half dozen times I've seen him since then it's true I've had to slap him down a lot because he has hand trouble. But even at that he's been a lot easier to handle than some boys I've been on dates with. Wilbur's so—so *gentle*. I can't imagine him really hurting anyone."

HE BLINKED at her through the owlsh spectacles. "Do you remember the Beetross business? Clyde Beetross shot his wife because he didn't want her to suffer as a result of discovering he was in love with another woman."

"Wilbur wouldn't do anything like that, I'm positive, Doctor. He doesn't like his wife—he told me so right out, flat, last night. And though he didn't tell me he's afraid of her, I'm convinced he is. He always wants to drive as far out of town as possible, to one of the roadhouses, whenever he takes me to dinner. The only time we went to a restaurant here in the city, he sat with his back to the door. Every single time anyone came in from the street, he turned around, ready to jump out of his socket."

"Not a comfortable dinner companion, I should think. Has he repeated his offer of a job?"

"Every hour on the hour, practically. He'll pay me ten dollars more a week than he thinks I'm making out at the hospital if I'll only be his private secretary."

"But you have been properly reluctant to step into a dead girl's shoes."

"I have my hospital career to think of. It makes a better excuse—and I think he respects me for it," she said. "You know, he can be very understanding and—well, attractive—when he isn't pawing around feverishly."

"Oh, yes, the healthy he-man type. Arouses all the latent female instincts."

"They're not so latent," Paulette retorted. "He's quite an arouser. And—you'll laugh, I know—but I really think he loves me—after his own fashion."

Myro looked at her sharply. "Perhaps I let you in for more than I'd bargained, my pet."

"No," she shook her head. "Not yet. But he's getting to be a terrific strain on my girlish self-control."

Myro used a dissecting knife to cut the remainder of the cigars in small pieces. "How much longer do you think you can hold him—at arm's length."

She flushed. "Not much longer. He's getting so—impatient. I'm as exhausted as if I'd been in a wrestling match, after an evening in his car. I've stalled him about as much as I can with that story about my doctor's advice to be careful."

"You said he's been urging you to take an overnight trip with him?"

"He's been *insisting* on it!"

"Could you get him to make it Friday evening?"

"Doctor!"

"Now, now. I don't intend for you to go through with it, my seductive Sherlock. But if you could get him to make one of his phony trips to Cleveland, on Friday night, let him drive you out to one of these motel dance-and-dine places he seems to fancy—perhaps we might bring this whole business to a head."

Paulette colored even more deeply. "And, pray, what is the lamb supposed to do when the wolf gets her alone in the bedroom?"

"She will become suddenly very ill."

"He'll see right through an excuse as transparent as that."

"Probably. But he won't be able to do anything about it." Myro reached into the lower drawer in his desk. "The lamb will demand to be returned to her fold. Once there, she will use her wits—and this—" he held out a compact thirty-two automatic—"to hold him at bay until I come to her rescue."

She took the pistol hesitantly. "*What to do until the doctor arrives—in ten cartridges—By Myro Catin, M. D.*"

"If you have to use it, aim two inches above his belt buckle, pet."

Paulette shivered. "I don't want to use it! I don't believe I could!"

"I hope you don't have to change your mind about that," he answered gravely.

Chapter XI

FRIDAY NIGHT was starless and dark. Clouds hung low over River-edge Park. A brisk breeze made the evergreens sigh dolefully as Myro made his way through the shadow of the hedge surrounding the Fussell garage. He moved with caution, pausing every few moments to study the windows of the big house.

He did not know precisely what to expect but he was mentally prepared for

the worst. To invade a man's premises at two in the morning, stealthily and with the purpose which Myro had in mind, was an invitation to disaster. But there was no light in any of the windows of the house. And, though the garage door was unlocked, the interior was spookily quiet.

There were two cars, a Mercury and an Anglia. The latter was parked within a foot of the stairs leading up to the chauffeur's apartment above the car-space. Myro's flashlight poked into the British car, found nothing to interest him. But a brief examination of the Mercury showed him that the slip covers were new, shiny nylon—obviously not more than a few weeks old. Yet the Mercury itself was a '52, couldn't have been in Fussell's possession more than a year at most. Why should the upholstery covers have had to be replaced within that brief space of time? Perhaps Theobald, the chauffeur, could suggest a plausible reason.

Myro went up the stairs with less noise than a cat. The door to the apartment was wide open, the windows closed. A moment's careful listening detected no sound of a sleeper's breathing. He risked a splinter of illumination from his flash. The bed was empty. The Examiner nodded understandingly, turned his beam on the telephone on Theobald's bedstand, went downstairs.

On a shelf was piled a stack of old newspapers. He appropriated them, noting that the top few were suitably damp and mildwed. He added a handful of oily rags from a can by the Anglia's bumper.

Out in the yard again he felt his way along the rear hedge to the wire incinerator basket. He stuffed the crumpled papers into it, wadding the oily rags down hard on top of the more loosely crumpled lower layer of newsprint.

The small, steep stairs to the little vestibule to the back porch outside the kitchen door creaked a little as he climbed them. He waited a full minute before trying the outer door. Then he

stepped inside the screened porch.

One of the kitchen windows was open a foot or so from the top. Careless, Myro thought, of a family so recently burglarized. He set the wire basket on the cement floor of the porch, touched a match to the crumpled paper, waited long enough to make sure the wind was whisking smoke through the open window into the house, and slipped outside to the shadow of the hedge once more.

His luminous watch-dial counted off the long minutes. Nothing happened. He could see the faint orange glow of the stuff smouldering in the wire basket. Occasionally a gust of the capricious wind sent enough smoke in his direction for him to smell the acrid fumes of the rags.

MAYBE he had miscalculated. Perhaps enough of the smoke was being sucked out other windows on the second floor so the remainder would not annoy a sound sleeper. Possibly the blubbery woman wasn't even at home. No—someone was inside there. Lights were going on up on the second floor.

Presently a far-off siren wailed, came nearer. The clangor of approaching gongs disturbed the quietness of River-edge Park. The bloodshot eyes of fire apparatus glared through the gloom.

The front door of the Fussell home burst open as a pumper, a hose wagon and a chemical truck thundered to a stop in front of the house.

"In here—in here!" cried an agitated voice. Theobald's voice.

Rubber-coated, booted, black-helmeted men piled off the throbbing apparatus. With hand lamps and axes they clumped into the house. The dwelling blazed with incandescence.

Myro paid the Naverall City Fire Department a silent compliment. It was less than a minute before the back door opened to let a burly hoseman gawk at the burning basket. He seized it, carried it to the lawn, dumped its contents, stamped on the wind-blown sparks.

Hester appeared—a flour-barrel-of-a-

figure—wrapped in a pink dressing gown. Theobald emerged onto the back porch, wearing his uniform pants and a striped pajama-top. Loud voices protested ignorance of the smoke's source.

Myro crossed the street, went unobtrusively around to the front of the house.

The front door stood wide open—except for a couple of firemen on the pumper, all the others were out back.

He hurried in, as if he'd been a neighbor offering assistance or satisfying curiosity. The living-room was empty. He opened the coat closet, stepped in, shut himself into stuffy darkness.

The commotion outside continued for ten minutes. Then the gongs of the apparatus clanged irritably, motors roared, their rumbling thunder died away. The front door slammed. He heard the bolt shoot home. Voices penetrated to the closeness of his hiding place but he couldn't distinguish what the chauffeur and his mistress were saying.

When the voices became entirely inaudible he ventured to turn the knob of the closet door quietly. The two were upstairs, but their angry altercation was quite distinguishable now he had the door open.

"... who else would have tried to set the house on fire, with me in it, tell me that, Theo!"

"Oh, for God's sake, use some sense, Hesty! If he'd wanted to burn you alive, he'd have put the damn basket *in* the house, not out on the porch. You *ask* me, all he was after was evidence to get a divorce . . . all those damn firemen seeing me galloping around half-dressed! *There's* his evidence!"

"Hell of a lot of good it'll do him! He'd never dare to file a suit against me! He'd be too afraid I'd spill the whole keg of nails about his shooting that secretary of his—and I *would*!"

"For Pete's sake, let's not go over all *that* again! I know all about your hold-in' a whip hand over him—your bein' able to make him sit up an' beg. For the hundredth time I'm tellin' you, Hesty;

you don't know him as well as I do if you think he's the kind who'll let you have anything on him for long. He's just as liable to try an' pin that business on me an' you!"

"Oh! If *you're* going to turn on me, Theo!"

"I'm not turnin' on you. I'm just tryin' to get you to see what spot we're both in. Suppose he comes up with someone who saw me go to her room and bring her here?"

"Who could have seen you?" Hester's voice became a whiny croon. "You're getting cold feet, darling. Put them over here, let me warm 'em for you."

THERE was a moment of silence. Then Theo:

"This being in the middle—between you'n Wilbur—it's getting me, no kiddin'. If he was to run away with this new kid he's so hot about an' sue you for divorce . . . an' if *you* started to talk back to him in court, where'd *I* be?"

"You know I'd never, lover-boy!"

"If you did—you can be damn sure I'd have something to say about your sluggin' the Greening babe with the heel of your shoe; don't think I wouldn't!"

"Now, lover-boy—let's not *you* and *me* fight! All we have to do is keep bearin' down on Wilbur; show him he can't scare us . . . an' we're sittin' pretty. Or lying pretty." Hester sniggered.

Myro resisted an impulse to throw up, eased noiselessly out of the closet, tip-toed to the front door.

Five minutes later he tramped on the starter of his car, parked on Pinecone Place.

"To the police station, James," he said to no one in particular. "And don't spare the horsepower!"

Chapter XII

POLICE HEADQUARTERS at Naval City smelled like all police stations: musty with stale tobacco and the odor of sweat of unwashed bodies. The chair on which Myro waited was hard

and uncompromising. Sanders, when he finally arrived, was surly and bellicose. Being wakened at 3 A.M. to answer a brusque summons from the Medical Examiner did nothing to improve the Captain's temper.

Myro made no apologies. "I have sworn out a warrant for one Theobald Carty; I would like you to execute it immediately."

"Who's Carty?"

"The Fussell chauffeur."

Sanders sneered coarsely. "Yah! Ain't you forgettin' you already pulled the boner of the year in that case?"

"The error was not mine," Myro said calmly. "I'm now charging Theobald with being an accomplice in the murder of Linda Greening."

"I wouldn't arrest a cockroach on your opinion—unless you got some facts to back up your goofy guesswork."

"You have no choice but to execute the warrant, once I've sworn it out—as even you must be aware, Captain. But to reassure your shallow skepticism, I do have a few facts. One thing: I heard Theobald admit his crime. For another: he will almost certainly make a complete confession after I've talked with him for a few minutes. The Greening girl wasn't killed in her room. She was murdered at the Fussell home. Theobald brought her there. Whether he also took her back to Mayview in a dying condition, I'm not quite sure. Likely Wilbur Fussell did that."

Sanders tilted his swivel chair against the wall. His thumbs sought the armholes of his vest. "How you can louse up a simple suicide like this, I'll never be able to dope out. Still, it'll be your headache. If this chauffeur sues you for false arrest, an' if the City Council asks you to turn over the keys to your office, maybe you can get a job as veterinarian in the dog pound."

"Your solicitude touches me," Myro said coldly. "Are we ready to go?"

"We?" Sanders glared. "You think I'm takin' you along when I'm makin' a pinch? Stick to your test tubes, Doc;

I'll handle the cop stuff."

"I think you would be well-advised to take me with you."

"Then I'm advised lousy. Where'll I find this Theobald party?"

Myro told him. "He won't make any trouble. But Mrs. Fussell might. I should warn you; she is a treacherous individual."

"That's no skin off my schnozzola." Sanders scoffed at the warning. "I'm not going to bring *her* in."

"It might not be a bad idea." Myro put his lighter to the tip of a fresh stogie. "If she becomes violent at her paramour's arrest, it might be wise to hold her, temporarily."

"How many times I have to tell you, I'm handling this *my* way! I wouldn't bother to go get the guy at all, except I haven't had a real good belly-laugh for a week—an' I want to enjoy it when he tells you off. Gimme that warrant."

WHEN the Captain had gone, Myro closeted himself in the odorous phone booth, to no avail. Paulette's number didn't answer. She should have returned to her apartment long before then. He thought with growing anxiety of the various things which might have happened to his attractive secretary out in some isolated motel room.

He'd been wrong to urge her to go with Fussell. The danger had been too deadly. If anything had happened to her—and something must have, else she'd be there at her home by now—Myro would never forgive himself. It was all right for him to run a risk such as he had taken earlier in the evening, but he'd had no right to put Paulette in a spot where she might be forcibly ravished—or worse.

He sweat it out until 4:10 A.M. when Sanders and a patrolman named Kennedy marched into the station with a disheveled Theobald between them. Sanders had a purplish-blue discoloration at the corner of his right eye. Theobald's nose was swollen and his lip had been cut.

The Captain eyed Myro with grudging respect. "Could be we got a thing here, Doc." He gave Theobald a shove toward the booking desk. "Been my experience that a innocent party very seldom puts up much resistance. I hadda practically tear this guy's arm off an' whale him to death with it before he agreed to come along nice."

Theobald spat. "Wait'll I get my in-nings! Wait'll I get hold of my lawyer! Beatin' me within an inch of my life before I have any idea who you are! Never even told me you were cops! I'll get you guys yet!"

The patrolman said, "Ah, ah, now! None of that!"

Sanders growled. "I read the warrant to you before I laid a hand on you, Carty. 'Accomplice before the fact of murder.'"

Theobald spat again and swore. "Don't make me laugh."

Myro said, "That was not my intention, Theo. But," he altered his voice in as good an imitation of the chauffeur's as he could summon: "*'Suppose he comes up with someone who saw me go to her room and bring her here?'*"

The prisoner recoiled as if Myro had hit him. "You! You're that damned snooper!"

"I'm the one you talked to on the phone at Miss Greening's the night she died, yes. The one who saw your attempt to burn up the bloodied sheets and blanket after she'd been taken back to Mayview Avenue."

Theobald recovered some of his poise with an effort. "I don't know what you're babblin' about."

"No?" Myro went close to him, imitating him once more. "*'You can be damn sure I'd have something to say about your slugging the Greening babe with the heel of your shoe!'*"

The chauffeur's thin mouth gaped, remained open, slack-jawed. "Lord!" he managed. "She come to you, huh? I shoulda known she'd turn on me! Lord! If she's tryin' to make me the patsy, I'll fix her! I'll talk! I'll talk my head off! I shoulda known she was comin' here to

throw the gaff into me!"

Myro pricked up his ears. "Captain! Did you find Mrs. Fussell there at the house?"

Sanders touched his black eye resentfully. "I told you I wasn't going to bother with her. No. I didn't find her there—because she wasn't there. Maybe she skipped out when she heard my car driveup. I dunno. *Hey—where you going?*"

Myro called over his shoulder, "I'll be back to get his confession."

"Listen, Doc!" Sanders followed him out to the street. "You can't leave us holdin' the bag like this!"

The Medical Examiner stuck his head out the window of his Chevy to answer. "I may bring you back something else to put in that bag—if it isn't too late." He got the car moving. "If it isn't too late," he repeated, knowing well the Captain was out of earshot. "*Pray God it isn't!*"

Chapter XIII

IN FRONT of Paulette's apartment house stood a *Drive-Ur-Self* car. Behind it Myro recognized the Anglia. He saw the light in his technician's living room before he cut the switch of his own car. She was here—but if the presence of the Anglia meant what he feared it did, she might already be a subject for the Examiner's final autopsy.

He took the stairs three at a time. As soon as he'd reached the second-floor corridor he heard Hester's high-pitched venom: "You'll not get a chance to run away with this little tramp, either, my beloved husband! And I'll save you the trouble of putting this one where she belongs. I'll do it myself."

Wilbur, out of Myro's sight, exclaimed in shocked disbelief, "You're not insane enough to think you could get away with it, Hester!"

"I'll have your help," the shrill voice retorted. "Even if I haven't planned for a fake burglary so the death could be

[Turn page]

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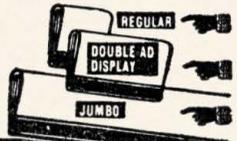
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blamed on the robber. You'll help me get away with it, Wilbur darling. You'll tell the authorities she meant to kill me—and you tried to stop her—and in the scuffle, she shot herself.”

Through the half-open door Myro could see Paulette, frozen with horror, her back to the living room table, her hands pressed to her cheeks. Neither of the Fussells could be seen from his angle. He tiptoed softly to the door.

“No!” Paulette cried, holding one hand up suddenly before her eyes.

Myro jabbed the doorbell, to distract the Fussell woman, if only for long enough to let him get into the room. Instantly he called, “Hello, there,” and marched in.

It was an ugly tableau in that charming, chintz-draped, flower-bedecked little apartment. Wilbur, wild-eyed and pale, with sweat beading his heavy brows and glistening on his forehead, half crouching, half kneeling on the arm of the divan. Paulette, stiff-faced with terror, half shielding her face against the expected shock of the bullet. Hester, barefooted but wearing a mink coat over her nightgown, standing straddle-legged facing them, holding the .45 in both pudgy hands. The raisin-eyes were bright with malice in their casing of doughy fat.

Paulette cried involuntarily, “Doctor!”

Myro kept his voice at an ordinary level. “I’m afraid that won’t do you a great deal of good, Mrs. Fussell . . .” he glanced with deprecation at the weapon . . . “in view of the statement Theobald has just made at the police station.”

The muzzle of the gun moved slightly away from Paulette, toward him. “You ain’t tricking me with that old gag. All you’re doing is putting one foot in the grave, yourself!”

Wilbur cried hoarsely, “Hester! This man is the County Medical Examiner!”

The gross woman sniggered. “I’ll give him something to examine in a minute, all right!”

Myro took a startled step backward and sideways. as if recognizing the

menace in her attitude for the first time. “If Theobald was telling the truth, Mrs. Fussell, up to this moment you are liable to no more than the penalty for being an accessory to a murder.” His new position was between the gun and Paulette. “Surely you don’t intend to make your own execution mandatory by committing a second murder here!”

THE small eyes almost disappeared beneath the puffy lids as she squinted at him malevolently. “There ain’t a jury in this state would send a woman to the chair for defending her home against a tramp who was trying to break it up. And if you happen to get in the way when I’m doing what I can to protect my marriage, that’s just one of those things!” She waddled crabwise to get where she could see Paulette over the front sight of the pistol.

Myro moved, too, hoping his assistant would take the opportunity of dropping to the floor and scooting out of the apartment, behind his back. But Paulette was too paralyzed with fright.

Myro said, “Shooting someone in cold blood isn’t quite the same as knocking a girl senseless with the French heel of your shoe. And a shot here will certainly arouse some of the neighbors, so that, unless you kill me instantly, I shall surely have time to tell them what happened, before I—pass on.”

The piggish eyes glittered evilly. “The hell with the neighbors and you, too! There’s an unwritten law says a woman has a right to shoot a tramp who steals her husband.”

She sidestepped once more to aim at Paulette; the crabwise waddle took her within a yard of the divan. Myro moved again to shield Paulette. At the same time, he advanced on the fat woman.

Hester swerved the muzzle toward his heart.

He kept on. “Put it down!” he commanded firmly but without much hope. The creature was determined to kill. Nothing would stop her, now.

“You want some?” she squeaked, en-

raged. "Okay, I'll give you some."

Myro saw her features contort as she pulled on the trigger.

Wilbur sprang, a yard away. He knocked the gun down as it exploded.

Hester swung the barrel up again, her doughy face purpling with fury. Her husband grappled for the weapon. It went off again, as Myro closed in on the woman.

Wilbur gasped, flung his arms about the mink coat, collapsed to the floor, blood gushing from his mouth. Myro caught the woman's hair, slugged her solidly behind the ear as she toppled.

A door opened in the hall. Paulette screamed for help.

Myro took the pistol from the unconscious Hester's hand. "If you'll just call Captain Sanders, pet. I think he'll be all the help we require at the moment."

Chapter XIV

SALMON-pink in the eastern sky brightened the chintz curtains, lent a little color to Paulette's white face. The police had departed. The Fussells had been taken away, one to the morgue, the other to the lockup. Myro lit his last stogie carefully.

"Was it pretty bad, pet?"

"With Wilbur?" She grimaced. "I don't want to talk about it, Doctor."

"Then don't. Let the dead past . . . and so forth."

"Ugh. He offered to refurnish this apartment—" she smiled wryly—"to replace all my lovely, hit-or-miss things. Wouldn't that have been awful!"

"Especially since it would have been second-hand furniture that he'd repossessed when some borrower was hard up and couldn't meet his monthly payments. That was a measure of the man. He'd been so disappointed and deceived in his marriage that his whole life was an attempt to buy love on the installment plan—nothing down and small weekly payments on happiness. Yes—but he forgot that his wife could fore-

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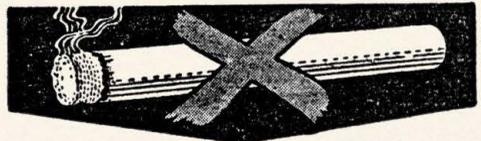
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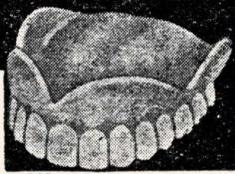
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close on him at any time—and she did, when he planned to run away with Linda."

In a small, weary voice Paulette said she could understand how a nice girl could easily have fallen for Wilbur—especially if he'd promised eventual marriage.

"Oh, he did. And the time came when he meant to make good on his promises. That meant Hester's death, because he knew very well she'd never let go of him, legally. So he planned a trip to Cleveland, with the intention of staying right here in Naverall City, returning to his home early in the morning and shooting his wife while she slept in her bed. Since he knew there would have to be a logical suspect, he arranged with this auctioneer, Emerson, to stage a fake burglary at his home that night. The idea was, of course, to have the police believe the burglar murdered Mrs. Fussell. Wilbur would have an alibi, he could marry Linda, everything would be managed without scandal or suspicion."

Paulette said, "But something went wrong."

"Theobald did, for one thing. That scurvy individual was playing both ends against the middle—pretending to help Wilbur carry on his illicit amours without being caught *in flagrante* by his wife . . . and sleeping with Mrs. Fussell when Wilbur was 'out of town.' Probably his loyalty—if such a diseased mentality can be said to have any loyalty—was to Hester. Anyhow, it was from Theobald she discovered Wilbur was about to make the great break for freedom. That made her cautious, possibly fearful. She found Wilbur had taken a pistol which he'd brought home only a week or so before, a twenty-two. She put two and twenty-two together . . . and added up to a scheme for murder."

"How frightful. He really did mean to shoot her?"

"Oh, yes. But Hester had, as I noted before in the matter of the poisoned cigars, a truly Borgian touch in matters of this sort. She decided to let Wilbur

have his murder—only with a different victim than he'd intended. She sent Theobald to Linda, in the early hours of the morning, with a message that Wilbur had been seriously injured in an accident—he wanted to see her urgently on matters connected with the office.”

“Oh!” Paulette cried out at the thought of being in the fat woman's power.

“Exactly. Hester met her, knocked her out with the heel of a shoe, undressed her, put her in her own bed . . . and waited, watching there in the darkness, until Wilbur stole in, put his pistol to the still form beneath the covers and pulled the trigger. Then, since he hadn't killed Linda immediately, she cried out. He recognized her. It isn't pleasant to attempt a reconstruction of that scene, with Wilbur heartsick at seeing what he'd done, the girl dying but still conscious of what he must have been planning to do.”

“IT'S TOO frightful to think about!”
 “Well, one has to think about it, pet. To see how the rest of it happened. Wilbur understood instantly that his plan to attribute the crime to his auctioneer friend had gone wrong. Even if Emerson should be caught—though if it was any part of Wilbur's scheme he should be—it would mean only ruin if Linda were found dead in his wife's bed. The chances are he was badly rattled—and could think only of getting the poor girl out of the house and back to her apartment.”

“But she was undressed!”

“Hester helped him dress her. That must have been a pleasant few minutes for Linda. Knowing her lover had shot her, suspecting she was mortally wounded—yet aware that the woman responsible for her predicament was standing over her, handling her body, gloating over her pain and her approaching death. Yes, a nasty business. As I believe I said.”

“The part about the burglar. I don't

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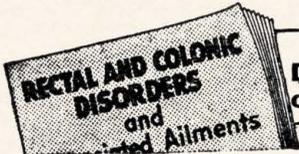


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quite see the point of all that."

"Wilbur must have done business with Emerson before, probably a good many times. Sold him stuff to be auctioned, stuff which had been taken over by the Helpful Loan Company when the borrowers couldn't meet payments. It may have been a source of good income for Emerson, so quite possibly he was merely willing to do Wilbur a favor by pretending to rob the Fussell home. More likely Emerson had combined a little judicious thieving along with his auctioneering, on previous occasions. Be that as it may, Wilbur paid him off in part before Emerson ever came near the house. With those golden goblets and the silver coffee service, I expect. But Linda's shooting upset the entire scheme."

"Upset! What a way to put it!"

"Well, the commotion caused by getting Linda out of the house and into the Mercury—he had to buy new slip covers for it later, because even through the blanket her blood soaked through into the upholstery—must have wakened some of the neighbors. Or perhaps the shot did. In any event, someone nearby was alert enough to spot Emerson when he attempted to leave the house. The police were notified; they caught him; he tried to escape because he was convinced Wilbur had double-crossed him by warning the cops."

"It seems to me," Paulette said slowly, "that Wilbur double-crossed everybody. Including himself."

"And nearly including you, pet."

"Thanks to you, he didn't."

Myro shook his head. "At the end, he showed his true colors. Belatedly, to be sure. But finally he must have realized the harm he'd done, the evil she might do. He took his life into his hands to save mine."

"Poor devil." Paulette turned away to hide the tears. "What will happen to her and the chauffeur?"

"I feel fairly sure," Myro said, "that no judge will extend easy terms to them."



TREASURE ALLEY

By

Norman Renard

A BUNCH of kids racing headlong through an alley late one evening stumbled upon a treasure trove of good folding money stacked neatly in five packets against a brick wall.

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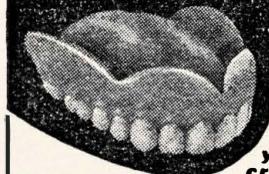
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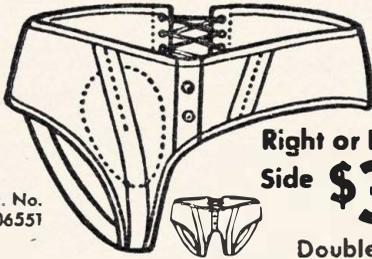
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Let us help you enjoy life again. You will marvel at this revolutionary new method. Using your own old plates, we will remake them completely in only 24 hours. Missing teeth are carefully matched and replaced. Work is done on an absolute **MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**. **SEND NO MONEY**—Just rush your name and address to us for full **FREE DETAILS**. If your teeth are loose, we'll tell you how to tighten them before duplication. Act now. Quit suffering!
Tri-Grip Dental Labs. 7th Fl., 127 N. Dearborn St. Dept. 15, Chicago 2, Ill.

Immediate Comfort
And Relief for You with Patented
RUPTURE-EASER

T.M. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. (A Piper Brace Product)
For MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN



Pat. No.
2606551

Right or Left
Side **\$3.95**
Double **\$4.95**

A strong, form fitting washable support designed to give you relief and comfort. Adjustable back-lacing and adjustable leg straps. Snaps up in front. Soft flat groin pad—**NO STEEL OR LEATHER BANDS.** Unexcelled for comfort, **INVISIBLE UNDER LIGHT CLOTHING.** Washable. Also used as after operation support.

● **THE MOST EFFECTIVE HERNIA SUPPORT.**

Thousands of people who have tried old-fashioned, expensive devices turn to Rupture-Easer for new comfort.

● **RUPTURE-EASER IS SANITARY.**

Can be washed without harm to fabric—you never offend when you wear Rupture-Easer.

● **NO FITTING REQUIRED.**

Just measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and specify right or left side or double.

Over 400,000 Grateful Users

Harley Decoteau, Montpelier, Vt. writes: "The last brace you sent me was wonderful. I have been ruptured for 30 years. I am now 36, and in 30 years, I have never been more pleased."

Minnie LaJeunesse, Minneapolis, Minn. says: "... the Rupture-Easer is very comfortable and almost a miracle as to the way it holds one in place, and am very much pleased and satisfied with the belt."

Frank H. Lewis, Adrian, Michigan writes: "Thanks to your Rupture-Easer I am able to continue my work."

BLESSED RELIEF DAY AND NIGHT—You can sleep in it—work in it—bathe in it!

10 DAY TRIAL OFFER

Money-back guarantee if you don't get relief.

Piper Brace Company, Dept. TF-33

811 Wyandotte, Kansas City 6, Mo.



PIPER BRACE CO., DEPT. TF-33

811 Wyandotte, Kansas City 6, Mo.

Please send my RUPTURE-EASER by return mail.

Right Side \$3.95 Measure around lowest part of
Left Side \$3.95 my abdomen
Double \$4.95 is INCHES.

(Note: Be sure to give Size and Side when ordering.)

We Prepay Postage except on C.O.D.'s.

Enclosed is: Money Order Check for \$..... Send C.O.D.

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

RUSH THIS COUPON NOW!

alley, the FBI was called in and each employee secretly interviewed. It was the porter's words that did not ring true. An immediate investigation of his recent expenditures was launched. In no time at all they came up with some startling and incriminating facts.

The porter had girl trouble. About six of them!

Confronted with this damning evidence, the porter broke down and confessed. Just how he had managed to collect all that money was not quite clear, but he told how he had spent most of it.

He had given, he said, a large sum of money to one girl just to show her his heart was in the right place. For another



insistent doll, he'd paid all the bills she'd acquired over a period of a year. Girl friend number three had wheeled a wardrobe of tailor-made clothes out of him, and number four a \$300 television set. The fifth one—he must have been getting tired or disillusioned along about then—got off with a mere table-model radio to replace an old one of which she'd pointedly complained.

But it was the sixth babe who was the cause of the boys finding the money. It seems the porter distrusted her. On the night he'd gone to visit her, his intuition had warned him against her infidelity. So he had stacked the five packets of \$20 bills against the brick wall in the alley back of her house.

Arrested and convicted, he had no qualms whatever about having misappropriated all that money. But he did have one beef, and against the bank which he had victimized. Because of all the trouble that institution had caused him, he declared indignantly, he would never—no, never!—work for it again.

So there!



Learn **RADIO-TELEVISION**

Servicing or Communications at Home in Your Spare Time



America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You

I Trained These Men



**Employed as
Transmitter
Operator**

"A former employer recommended NRI training. Am now operator at Station WKBO." A. Herr, New Cumberland, Pa.

\$10 to \$15 Week Spare Time



"4 months after enrolling, averaged \$10 to \$15 week spare time servicing radios." William Weyde, Brooklyn, N.Y.



**Makes Money
With Own Shop**

"Am doing Radio servicing full time. I owe my success to N.R.I." Curtly Stath, Ft. Madelon, Iowa.

Works on TV Color Control



"My position with WNBT is video control engineer on the RCA color project." W. Deen, Malverne, N.Y.



**Praises N.R.I.
as Best Course**

"I realized a profit of \$300 by the time I completed the course." J. Hopper, Nitro, West Virginia.

1. EXTRA MONEY IN SPARE TIME →

Many students make \$5, \$10 a week and more EXTRA fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while learning. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how. Tester you build, with parts I send, helps you make extra money servicing sets, get practical experience. All equipment I send is yours to keep.

2. GOOD PAY JOB →

NRI Courses lead to these and many other jobs: Radio and TV service, P.A., Auto Radio, Lab, Factory, and Electronic Controls Technicians, Radio and TV Broadcasting, Police, Ship and Airways Operators and Technicians. Opportunities are increasing. The United States has over 105 million home and auto Radios—over 2,900 Broadcasting Stations—more expansion is on the way.

3. BRIGHT FUTURE →

Think of the opportunities in Television. Over 15,000,000 TV sets are now in use; 108 TV stations are operating and 1800 new TV stations have been authorized—hundreds of these expected to be in operation in 1953. This means more jobs—good pay jobs with bright futures. More operators, installation and service technicians will be needed. Now is the time to get ready for a successful future in Television! Want to get ahead? Find out what Radio and Television offer you. Mail card today!



See Other Side

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT NO. 20-R
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

NO POSTAGE STAMP NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

4c POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE

16th and U Sts., N.W.

Washington 9, D.C.

TELEVISION



**Is Today's
Good Job
Maker**

TV now reaches from coast to coast. Qualify for a good job as a service technician or operator. My course includes TV... you learn by practicing on circuits common to Radio and TV. Mail card. NRI training is a tested way to better pay.



I Will Train You at Home for GOOD PAY JOBS in RADIO-TELEVISION

J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C., has trained more men for Radio-Television than any other man.

Do you want a good pay job, a bright future, security? Or your own profitable business? Then get into the fast-growing RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience, many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from my easy-to-understand illustrated lessons. Get practical experience on actual equipment I furnish. Read below how many make \$5, \$10 a week and more extra fixing neighbors' radios in spare time while learning, get good jobs, build

successful businesses of their own. It's where you find growth that you also find opportunity. Radio-TV industry is growing fast. Send for MY FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Postage-free card entitles you to an actual lesson that shows how practical it is to learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-Page Book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning, see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Cut out and mail card today... no stamp needed! J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 39th Year!



SEE OTHER SIDE

You Practice with Parts I Send

Earn While You Learn



Keep your job while training. I show you how to earn extra money while learning at home. I start sending you Special Booklets that start teaching you servicing jobs the day you enroll. Multitester you build with my equipment helps. Many students make \$5, \$10 and more a week extra fixing neighbors' radios evenings and Saturdays.

Shown at right are just a few of the many pieces of equipment NRI students build with kits of parts I furnish. You use this equipment to get practical experience, make many tests. Practice servicing radios or operating Transmitter. You build Multitester valuable in servicing sets, earn extra money fixing neighbors' radios in spare time... experiment with circuits common to both Radio and Television. All equipment I send is yours to keep.

Mail Card—Actual Lesson and Book FREE

CUT OUT AND MAIL THIS CARD
Sample Lesson & 64-Page Book **FREE**

This card entitles you to Actual Lesson from NRI Course; see how you learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to be a Success in Radio-Television." You'll read what my graduates are doing, earning; see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Cut out and mail this card now!

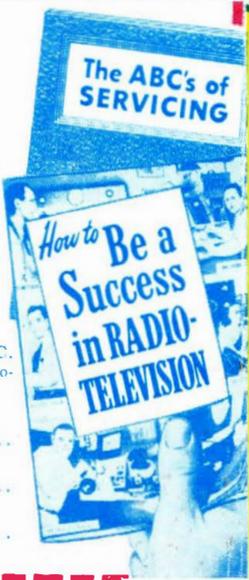
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Mr. J. E. Smith, Pres., National Radio Inst., Washington 9, D.C. Mail me Sample Lesson and Book, "How to be a Success in Radio-Television." (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

NAME AGE

ADDRESS

CITY ZONE STATE



Want Your Own Business ?

Let me show you how you can be your own boss. Many NRI trained men start their own business with capita learned in spare time. Robert Dohmen, New Prague, Minn., whose store is shown below, says, "Am now tied in with two television outfits and do warranty work for dealers. Often fall back to NRI textbooks for information."

