

ANC-T074

SUMMER 25¢

TRIPLE

THREE NOVELS IN ONE MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE



Even A Star Can Die

MURDER IN BRIGHT LIGHTS
by J. Joseph and B. Ford



They Caught Him
With His Alibi Down

THE DRAGNET
by William Degenhard



She Played In Rough Company

THE MAYOR IS DEAD
by B. J. Benson

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

I saw my job failure in my family's eyes



... but how they smiled when I.C.S. pulled me through

Take it from me. That's the hard way to discover a mistake.

I thought I was in solid down at the plant with my years of experience. They'd never lay me off.

But they did. And I was in solid—as long as business was good. But when things started getting tight...

"In times like these," the boss told me, "everybody has to pull his own weight and a little more. Experience is more than just adding up years. You have to learn something, too."

I was sore, sure. But when I calmed down I realized he was right. I decided then to start learning. I signed up for an I.C.S. Course, studied at home in my spare time.

Then I went back to the plant. The boss was so impressed with my I.C.S. diploma, he gave me another try... and soon after I even got a raise!

TRAINED men are in demand

It's a fact. Right now there are plenty of job opportunities for trained men. How do you get training and hold down a job at the same time? Simple. Study with I.C.S. at home, in your spare time, at a cost of only pennies a day.

I.C.S. is the oldest and largest correspondence school. 277 courses. Business, industrial, engineering, academic, high school. One for you. Direct, job-related. Bedrock facts and theory plus practical application. Complete lesson and answer service. Diploma to graduates.

3 FREE BOOKS

1. "How to Succeed," a gold mine of job tips that will open your eyes to your own mistakes.
2. An outline of job opportunities in the field of your choice.
3. A sample I.C.S. lesson text. Send for them today.



For Real Job Security—Get an I.C.S. Diploma! ... Easy-pay Plan... I.C.S., Scranton 9, Penna.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 22276E, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

(Partial list of 277 courses)

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW TO SUCCEED" and the opportunity booklet about the field BEFORE which I have marked X (pips sample lesson):

ARCHITECTURE and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

- Architecture
- Architectural Interior
- Building Contractor
- Building Maintenance
- Carpenter and Mill Work
- Estimating
- Heating
- Painting Contractor
- Plumbing
- Reading Arch Blueprints

ART

- Cartooning
- Commercial Art
- Fashion Illustrating
- Magazine Illustrating
- Show Card and Sign Lettering
- Sketching and Painting

AUTOMOTIVE

- Auto Body Rebuilding
- Auto Elec. Technician
- Auto Engine Tune Up
- Automobile

AVIATION

- Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- Aircraft & Engine Mechanic
- Advertising
- Bookkeeping and Accounting
- Business Administration
- Business Correspondence
- Public Accounting
- Creative Salesmanship
- Federal Tax
- Letter-writing Improvement
- Office Management
- Professional Secretary
- Retail Business Management
- Sales Management
- Stenographic Secretarial
- Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY

- Analytical Chemistry
- Chemical Engineering
- Chem. Lab. Technician
- General Chemistry
- Natural Gas Prod. & Trans.
- Petroleum Engineering
- Plastics
- Pulp and Paper Making

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING

- Civil Engineering
- Construction Engineering
- Highway Engineering
- Reading Struct. Blueprints
- Sanitary Engineering
- Structural Engineering
- Surveying and Mapping
- DRAFTING
- Aircraft Drafting
- Architectural Drafting
- Mechanical Drafting
- Mine Surveying and Mapping
- Plumbing Drawing and Estimating
- Structural Drafting

ELECTRICAL

- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical Maintenance
- Electrician
- Contracting
- Lineman
- HIGH SCHOOL
- Commercial
- Good English
- High School Subjects
- Mathematics

LEADERSHIP

- Foremanship
- Industrial Supervision
- Leadership and Organization
- Personnel-Labor Relations

MECHANICAL AND SHOP

- Gas-Electric Welding
- Heat Treatment
- Metallurgy
- Refrigeration
- Industrial Instrumentation
- Industrial Supervision
- Internal Combustion Engines
- Machine Design-Drafting
- Machine Shop Inspection
- Machine Shop Practice
- Mechanical Engineering
- Quality Control
- Reading Shop Blueprints
- Refrigration
- Sheet Metal Worker
- Tool Design
- Toolmaking
- RADIO, TELEVISION
- Industrial Electronics
- Practical Radio, TV Eng'ng
- Radio and TV Servicing
- Radio Operating

TELEVISION Technician

- Television Technician
- RAILROAD
- Air Brakes
- Car Inspector
- Diesel Locomotive
- Locomotive Engineer
- Section Foreman

STEAM AND DIESEL POWER

- Combustion Engineering
- Diesel-Elec.
- Diesel Eng's
- Electric Light and Power
- Stationary Fireman
- Stationary Steam Engineering
- TEXTILE
- Carding and Spinning
- Cotton, Rayon, Woolen Mfg.
- Finishing and Dyeing
- Loom Fix'g
- Textile Des'ing
- Textile Eng'g
- Throwing
- Warping and Weaving

MISCELLANEOUS

- Marine Engineering
- Ocean Navigation
- Professional Engineering
- Short Story Writing
- Telephony

Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to P.M. _____

Occupation _____

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada. ... Special tuition rates to members of the U. S. Armed Forces.

TRIPLE**THREE NOVELS IN ONE MAGAZINE****DETECTIVE**

Vol. 12, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SUMMER, 1955

3 FEATURED NOVELS**MURDER IN BRIGHT LIGHTS**

Because the great actor, Leo Murray, was the most hated man on Broadway, any one of a dozen people could have killed him

J. JOSEPH and B. FORD 8**THE DRAGNET**

Though innocent, they had him cold for the hot seat—and not even his own lovely wife could provide him with an alibi

WILLIAM DEGENHARD 66**THE MAYOR IS DEAD**

In a city of sin, Mike Dobson fights for the boyhood dream of a dead friend as well as the safety of a well-rounded redhead

B. J. BENSON 89**AND**

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| THE READERS' JURY | J. S. Endicott | 6 |
| ATOMIC FINGERPRINTS | Norman Renard | 31 |
| ANNIVERSARY (A Short Story) | Harold Heifer | 86 |
| TWO T'S SPELL TROUBLE | William Carter | 88 |
| LAW AND DISORDER | Crime Oddities | 114 |

Jim Hendryx, Jr., Editor

"Murder in Bright Lights," Copyright, 1950, by Best Publications, Inc., and originally published in *Mystery Book Magazine*, Summer, 1950. "The Mayor is Dead,"

Copyright, 1949, by Better Publications, Inc., and originally published in May, 1949, *Popular Detective*.

TRIPLE DETECTIVE—Published quarterly and copyright, 1955 by LITERARY ENTERPRISES, INC., 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Ind. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$3.50; single copies, \$.25; add 40c for Canadian, 75c for foreign and Pan-American subscriptions. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Ind., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Summer, 1955, issue.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive demonstration that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—get across to him or her your ideas? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be intentionally, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have

privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This Free Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. They will show you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. Use the coupon below and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed free book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)

Scribe M.X.L. The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

Name.....

Address..... State.....



DEATH OF A COAL MAN

By J. S. ENDICOTT

AS A COUPLE, Wilbur and Margaret Heldman, of Lorain, Ohio, had their ups and downs. Sometimes, after a fuss with her jealous husband, the vivacious and attractive Margaret would dash out of town to some member of her family for a few days. But she'd always come back and tell her salesman husband that she loved him and their baby boy.

It was after returning from one of these trips away from home that Wilbur kiddingly accused her of a murder that had been headlining the papers. The victim, Vernard E. Fearn, a coal dealer of Waco, Ohio, had been killed by a pretty and mysterious woman who had called on him on the night of Dec. 6, 1928.

Mrs. Fearn had answered the door bell, smiled at the strange woman standing there and asked her to step inside the house. The woman declined, but said she wanted to see Mr. Fearn. Assuming the woman must be someone wishing to pay a coal bill, Mrs. Fearn summoned her husband, a well-built, handsome man, who went to the door and stepped outside.

A second or so later came the sounds of shooting. Mrs. Fearn ran outside to find her husband dying. His last words were, "I never saw her before."

The young woman who shot him had disappeared into the night. Police were on her trail at once, but she had vanished.

The only clue to her identity that the police had was Mrs. Fearn's description of her—a young, pretty, small but well-stacked brunette. Knowing that the coal dealer had been something of a lady's man who liked to go out dancing at the roadhouses, the officers polished up their shoes, put on their snappiest off-duty clothes and began making the rounds of night spots, but uncovered nothing of any value.

Wilbur Heldman, who knew that his wife had known Fearn before they were married, teased her. "You better watch out, honey. You fit the description of this mystery woman the police are after."

Margaret Heldman merely turned without reply.

There is no telling what the upshot of the case would have been if, a few days later, Wilbur had not paused to read a crumpled piece of paper that fell from the waste basket he was emptying. It was a note written to him by his wife, saying she was going to leave him, that Fearn had made her life miserable, that he'd threatened to expose her to her husband if she did not continue her affair with him, that she could bring nothing but grief to her husband and it was best that she go away.

Wilbur went to his wife, looked her straight in the eye and accused her of being the woman who'd killed the Waco coal dealer. She admitted it. She said Fearn kept hounding her and she knew of no other way to break out of his clutches.

What would you do if you suddenly learned that your wife was a murderer?

This is what Wilbur Heldman did. He told his wife to pack—he was taking her to the police. "The only thing to do is to give yourself up," he told her.

She said all right.

Then began what must have been one of the most dramatic husband-wife trips of all time. He took her to Canton, 80 miles away, his hometown, where he'd been a special deputy.

Strangely enough, considering the circumstances, pretty Margaret Heldman seemed more relaxed than she'd been in a long time. Over and over again, but calmly, she kept saying, "You will take good care of the baby now, while I'm gone, won't you?"

Then, just as they passed the "Welcome To Canton" sign, there was a sharp report and a moan. Margaret Heldman had shot herself.

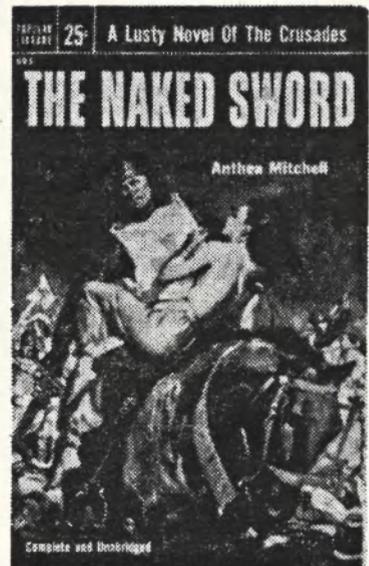
Wilbur sped the car to a hospital. But she lived only long enough to tell what had happened and to clear her husband of any suspicion in her death. That was only as long as she seemed to care to live.



A SURGING NOVEL OF THE CRUSADES!

Read "The Naked Sword"—an exciting novel of adventure and romance during the Crusades. A thrilling story of a Knight's passionate love for a beautiful Saracen princess. Another bestseller from POPULAR LIBRARY, America's leading pocket-size book publisher.

Buy your copy today.
On sale at all newsstands — only 25¢



MURDER IN

*Copyright, 1950, by
Best Publications, Inc.
Originally published in
Mystery Book Mag-
azine, Summer,
1950.*



BRIGHT LIGHTS

A Novel by **JONATHAN JOSEPH** and **BRYANT FORD**

Chapter 1

THE wonderful thing about the beauty of a young woman is that it cannot be hidden. It is revealed through whatever she may wear. It shines despite such vicissitudes as life may bestow upon her.

Looking at Ruth Murray anyone knew that within the severe little tailored suit was a delectable body, smooth and softly rounded, firmly and flawlessly molded. Her inscrutable young face, which told you only that she had been around, could not obscure the seductive sweetness in her gray-green eyes and the promise of passion in her scarlet lips.

Indeed that neatly tailored form and the faintly sad and cynical hardness of her glance served to heighten the speculative imagination of men when they looked at her—and few men failed to look at Ruth Murray.

Because the great actor, Leo Murray, was the most hated man on Broadway, any one of a dozen guys or dolls could have killed him



She was lunching alone that Monday at the Chafing Dish. And the men busily talking business at the bar and at the red checkered tables could not help wondering, among other things, why she should be lunching alone, what it would be like to be lunching with her. Not there, but in the seclusion of some sweet-scented apartment where she would let that smooth-brushed honey-colored hair fall wildly about the creamy oval of her face.

Above their own brassy masculine talk they could not help listening for the low throaty tones of her voice as she spoke to the waiter. Imprisoned in their chairs they watched her pick up her handbag and gloves, rise and go toward the door with a motion that was not merely walking.

But one man, a hulking fellow at the bar, left a half-finished drink and followed her out.

The brisk air of autumn was blowing across town from the Hudson River. As Ruth turned with the throng bustling west toward Broadway the man turned too, and with a flip of his hand signaled to the driver of a gray sedan at the curb. The car swung out into traffic and moved slowly westward with them.

At the corner the policeman's whistle shrilled, the light turned red and they were stopped. In the crowd halted at the curb, Ruth Murray stood thoughtfully staring across Broadway at the Murray Theatre. The big billboard announced the opening that night of a new Leo Murray production, *Hour's End*, a play by Leo Murray, starring Leo Murray and Lady Lawrence. Men were at work on the marquee, setting the lights.

DIRECTLY behind Ruth Murray stood the hulking man. The gray car was also waiting for the light.

The light turned to green, the cop's whistle shrilled, and the crowd began moving across Broadway. When Ruth stepped off the curb with the man close behind her the gray car moved forward, too.

The driver suddenly blew his horn and swerved sharply into Broadway. Ruth stopped to let him go by, and tried to step back a little to get out of the way, a violent push sent her right into the car's path. With remarkable self-control she recovered her balance and flung herself out of the way of the car bearing down on her. It was almost as if she had been expecting it.

But when the cop came to ask her if she had been hurt and began berating the driver of the gray car she said, "It wasn't his fault. Let him go." She was pale and shaken but spoke quietly. She looked around, but the hulking man was not in the curious crowd that had gathered.

"I'm all right, Officer, thank you," she said, smiling wryly. "I've got to go on."

He made way for her, waved the crowd away. The endless flow of Broadway traffic was resumed. She entered the Murray Theatre Building and took the elevator up to the offices.

The office door was impressively lettered:

MR. LEO MURRAY
Leo Murray Productions
Francis Xavier Boley,
Mr. Murray's General Manager
William Benedict,
Mr. Murray's Press Representative

Ruth glanced at two young actresses who were waiting on the bench just inside the door.

"You had better not wait," she said. "I don't think Mr. Murray will be in today."

She went on in behind the railing to her desk, and picked up the phone.

"I'm back, Frank," she said. "Any calls? All right. I'll take over now." She started to hang up but Francis Boley went on talking. Listening Ruth's face hardened a little. "Frank, I can't talk to you now—and you'd better put that bottle away."

As she cradled the phone, the door opened and Bill Benedict came in.

Anyone who knew Broadway at all,

knew that thin, well-dressed form, with the fresh linen handkerchief flowing from his breast pocket, knew that lean knowing face under dark curly hair.

"Any calls, Ruthie?" he asked.

"Herbert Bayard Swope's secretary called this morning for press tickets." Ruth looked down, consulting her desk pad.

"Send 'em out. He's always good for a note in Winchell."

"Traube, of the D.A.'s office, called for two. He's been promoted to first assistant."

"Okay."

"Nothing else of importance. Oh—a Sue Huxley is in town at the Astor, wants you to call her."

"Now, for the love of Pete, Ruthie, that's an *important* call!"

Ruth looked up from under her silken lashes. "Then why don't you marry her or one of the others and get them all off this phone?"

"Have a heart, Ruthie! Can I help it if I like women? I've got to have something to fill my days. And who knows, I might exploit them some day. Look at what your brother Leo has done with his sex appeal! The cops are expecting a thousand swooners at the stage door tonight . . . Get Sue for me, Ruthie?"

"Little Cupid, Ruthie." She switched the phone and dialed the Astor. "I ought to go around with a bunch of arrows . . . Miss Huxley, please."

Bill said grumblingly, "It wouldn't hurt you if you got one of Danny Boy's weapons stuck in you. Somebody's got to carry the great Murray dynasty along. Leo never will."

Ruth looked as if someone had suddenly slapped her. She flipped the phone switch. "She's not in, Bill." She looked down.

Bill was perplexed. "No hurt feelings?"

SHE looked up and shook her head, but her face was white.

"What's the matter with you today, Ruthie? You're not your hard-boiled lit-

tle self."

"You used to be a detective, Bill. What would you say if twice in one week a girl almost got killed—once when she was nearly shoved off a crowded subway platform and today when she was shoved in front of an automobile?"

"I'd say either her number was up, or someone was trying to get rid of her. But you're imagining things. New York's naturally a dangerous place, Ruthie. Anyway, I wouldn't worry about anyone trying to push *you* around. You can take care of yourself. That's one of the three things I like about you."

"What are the other two?"

He laughed. "You'd tell Leo if I told you, and then I'd lose my job."

"You don't trust me, Bill, do you?"

Bill looked at her speculatively. "I don't trust any woman, Ruthie, much as I like them. Besides, you're Leo's sister, which is certainly a handicap for any girl. But I wouldn't say you're a *bad* egg."

She eyed him coolly. "I suppose from you that's a compliment. Thanks."

Bill walked toward his office, down the corridor that linked Ruth's outside office with Leo Murray's exclusive precincts. Jutting off the hall were Bill's office and Frank Boley's with a toilet between the two.

Bill had to pass Boley's office to get to his own. He stuck his head inside to greet Leo's manager. "H'ya, Frank."

Boley nodded. He was smoking and his hands were busy. In his right, he held a bottle of Haig and Haig, in the other was a paper cup. For the last twenty-five years, it seemed, Boley had lived solely on the calories and vitamins found in good Scotch and twenty-five-cent cigars. He looked like a prosperous ward heeler, except for his bloodshot eyes, which had gone spongy.

Bill went into his own office, closed the door, lit a cigaret and pulled out a murder mystery he had hidden behind a pile of *Varieties*.

The phone rang. It was Ruth. "Leo's in."

"Thanks," said Bill. "And Ruthie, keep trying Sue Huxley at the Astor."

He cradled his phone and began to make sounds on his typewriter. He heard Boley's phone ring, heard Boley say, "Thanks, Ruth," and throw his whiskey-wet cup into the waste-paper basket, knew he was hiding the bottle of Scotch in his desk.

Leo Murray, though he had widely tailored shoulders walked softly for a man. He stopped at Boley's door.

"Good morning, Leo," Boley said deferentially.

Leo ignored the greeting. "Did they hang the new floodlights last night?"

"Yes." Boley looked away from Leo's too-handsome eyes.

Leo went on to Bill's door. "I want to see you in a couple of minutes."

Bill nodded. When Leo went into his own office, slamming the door behind him, Bill pulled the sheet of paper out of his typewriter and crumpled it with a sudden angry gesture.

He waited five minutes and went into Leo's office. He stood at the door. Leo was reading a newspaper. He didn't look up.

"What do you want, Leo? You said for me to come in."

Leo looked up. "Don't stand there like that Statue of Liberty." Leo hated anybody taller than he was.

Bill grinned and remained standing. The telephone rang. Leo picked up the receiver and listened.

"Why bother me with that, Ruth?" he said. "Tell him I don't want his lousy play. I don't care what I promised. . . . He says he counted on *me*? Tell him next time to count on the weather." He slammed down the phone and went back to his paper as if he had forgotten Bill.

"I've got work to do, Leo."

The actor-producer stared at him with nervous eyes. "Sit down."

Bill shrugged and pulled over a hard chair. He slumped down in it. Then Leo stood up and walked over to him, looked down at him.

LEO asked, "Did you hear what Finley said during our argument last night at Sardi's?"

"Yes. Said you robbed him of *Hour's End*. He said Beach promised to let him see it first. But Nick's always griping, like all producers. He accused Max Reinhardt of stealing *The Miracle* right out of his pants pocket."

"I want it stopped."

"Why don't you see a good lawyer, Leo?"

Leo paced up and down.

"Try buying him off," Bill suggested.

Leo stopped and glared. "Not a cent. Not if I knew I was going to make a million."

"What do you want me to do?" Bill asked. "And keep it clean. I won't commit murder, you know."

Leo carefully brushed some lint off the sleeve of his handsome blue suit. It had up and down stripes to accentuate his height.

"Get the columnists to run some stories that Nick won't like," he suggested. "How he stole my first angel from me."

"The boys don't like libel."

Leo reddened. "I'll go to court and swear it's true."

Bill laughed. "*You'll* go to court? Maybe you've forgotten that you lost me my private detective license because you wouldn't go near a court. Below your dignity, you said. Remember?"

"You hate me, don't you, Bill?"

"Yes."

"But you respect me for what I can do."

"Respect isn't the word. I acknowledge your wits and talents."

"That's all I want. The minute you think I'm a fool I'll know. Then I'll fire you."

"Is that what you called me in to tell me?"

"No. Everybody's ganging up on me. Not only Nick Finley and Charley Beach. All Broadway. They hate my taste. My success they call luck. My popular following they call your press agent work."

They can't stand something well done. They're eaten with envy."

"Some of them do pretty well, too."

"But I give Broadway its best shows. No can-can and no melodrama. Good theatre. I work with the writers. I make something out of the lousy scripts they bring in. Actors and actresses—they don't know how to walk. They don't know what to do with their hands. I teach them. Directors—I let them watch me and learn. But every one of them hates me."

"Where do I come into this sad picture, Leo?"

"I want you to do a fresh job with the papers."

"You're getting plenty of publicity now, with your name in all of it."

"I don't want any more of that cheap publicity, Bill. I'm moving into a new field with this play, co-starring with a British aristocrat. I'm not playing to the *hoi polloi* any more." Leo strode across the room. "I want it clearly understood by everybody that a Leo Murray production means everything Leo Murray from script to lighting to acting. I want fellows like Charlie Beach to be proud to have me rewrite their plays for them."

Bill looked up at Leo and narrowed his eyes. He got up slowly and walked to the door. "What you need is Napoleon's press agent," he said.

Ruth was persuading a pair of jobless actors—a man and a woman—that Leo wouldn't see them. "Not if you were John Barrymore's ghost and Katharine Cornell in tights, she said firmly.

As they went out a slight, sensitive-looking young man came in, Charlie Beach.

Charlie was thin from too little eating, and yellow from too much drink, and a dark fire burned in his too-intelligent eyes.

"Leo's not in," Ruth said.

"I want to see Leo," he said coldly, keeping his burning eyes below the level of hers.

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

"Don't call me Charlie. I'm still crazy about you—but you got all you wanted out of me for your precious brother, you cold-hearted witch!"

"He'll be back at five," she interrupted quietly.

"I'll wait for him in his office." Charlie swung open the gate leading into the corridor.

RUTH made no move to stop him. She called Leo on the phone. "Charlie Beach is coming in."

Boley and Bill saw Charley going by. He entered Leo's office and closed the door carefully. Leo rose from his chair. He was taller than Charlie.

Charlie said, "You can sit down, Leo. I know what you look like standing."

Leo hesitated, then sat on the corner of his desk. He cleared his throat. He smiled stiffly. "What's clouding your day, Charlie?"

Beach swallowed before he could speak. "Why didn't you put my name on the house boards and programs?" he blurted.

Leo relaxed. "Read any good plays lately?"

"Why didn't you put my name on my play?" Charlie's voice was weak with anger.

Leo shrugged hopelessly, got up and walked toward the window, turning his back.

"I deserve it," said Charlie with trembling lips.

"That's open to question," Leo said coldly.

"The idea is mine and most of the situations. It's still mostly my play, even if you changed the lines. I deserve it." Charlie's eyes were anguished.

Leo returned to his desk and fiddled with the telephone. "Everyone on Broadway knows that no one contributes to any show I produce," he said, and leaned toward Charlie. "You fool! I've paid you, haven't I!"

Charlie's face turned deep red. "If my name isn't on the boards and programs tonight," he said clearly, "you'll have a

premiere you won't forget."

Leo watched him a moment and smiled sadly. "Need any more dough, Charlie?" He took some bills out of his pocket and put them on the corner of the desk near Charlie.

The burning eyes dropped to the money, then were raised back to Leo's too-handsome face. Suddenly Charlie picked up the money. He tore the bills in two and threw them in Leo's face.

"You'll have a premiere you won't forget, Leo." He walked out.

Leo Murray wiped his face slowly as if the money had been wet. He wasn't angry—he felt elated. He stood in the dusty shaft of sunlight sloping down, and dialed Ruth.

"Send Bill in—and you come in too and take a letter."

Bill and Ruth came in together.

Leo pointed to the torn money on the floor. "Take those bills over to the bank," he said to Bill, "and get them exchanged for good ones."

Bill hesitated a moment; but he bent down and gathered up the pieces.

"Charlie Beach was in," Leo said in a pained voice. "He's a maniac. Delusions of grandeur. I feel sorry for him. Failure is fatal to some men—the kind who have big ideas and no guts." Murray rubbed his hands against each other thoughtfully. "People are inverted. Help them and they hate you." He paused, seeing Ruth's cool gray-green eyes fixed on him. "Someone ought to write a book about the psychology of social relations."

"Shall I bring the bills back here?" asked Bill, going toward the door.

"In every group of men—" Leo nodded and went on—"one is the powerful energizing heart. He sends out the fresh aerated red blood. Do you remember your physiology, Bill?"

Bill was at the door. "Charlie deserves a break. After all, he did contribute something to *Hour's End*, didn't he?"

"You know what the heart gets back?" Leo ignored the interruption. "The strong heart gets back the diseased and used-up blood, the tired dark fluid." He ran a slim hand wearily over

his eyes. "Go on to the bank, Bill. And see that Beach doesn't get into the theatre tonight. He was very threatening."

"You've got a lot of ionized gall, Leo," Bill said softly, and turned to Ruth. "If you get hold of Sue Huxley at the Astor tell her to come to the opening of *Hour's End*, if she can't see me before." Then Bill went out.

"Take a letter," Leo said to Ruth. Leaning back in his chair, he looked at the ceiling. "This is to Noel Coward. 'My dear Noel—'"

LEO'S eyes dropped and he saw that Ruth had not moved. She was sitting with her note-book still closed in her hand, just looking at him.

"I said, take a letter, Ruth."

"Leo," she said quietly, "why are you trying to kill me?"

He went white. "What are you talking about?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Last week someone tried to push me in front of a subway train, and today it was tried with a car, right across the street from here." Without raising her voice she went on steadily, "I've played your game, Leo. I've done your dirty work and I've kept the rules you laid down. No one suspects a thing about us. Why are you trying to get rid of me?" Her words were like small hammers.

Leo quivered. "You're crazy, Ruth. You don't know what you're saying! You're losing your mind!"

He saw a flicker of unsureness in her eyes, and at once his contorted face relaxed, and sympathy welled up into his own too-beautiful eyes. He went on hastily:

"I know, Ruthie. We're all unstrung today. This last week has been hard on all of us. You need a rest. Lie down here on the couch and I'll tell Frank to take the calls." He looked at his jeweled wrist watch and got up. "I've got to get down to rehearsal." He went to her and patted her cheek. "Be a good girl, Ruth and forget all that nonsense. This is an important opening tonight, the most important of my career. I've got to keep my mind on it."

Ruth looked up at him. Her eyes were steady again.

"Yes," she said in a flat, toneless voice, as if without feeling, "you'd better go now, Leo."

But when he was gone she flung herself down on the couch and burst into low and terrible sobs.

Chapter II

BY EIGHT-FIFTEEN the lobby of the Murray Theatre was crowded. The first-nighters eddied around the ticket entrance where Jimmy Burke in an ill-fitting tuxedo tore their tickets and passed them inside.

Sentineal, the doorman, opened limousine doors with dignity and offered his hand to dowagers. On the sidewalk loitered the critics. It was one of the most glittering openings Bill Benedict had ever seen.

He saw Ruth Murray with Katharine and Harry Traube. He went over to them and said, "Congratulations, Hank! On your promotion."

Katherine said, "The first assistant D.A. for a husband is no fun. You begin to wonder if kissing is a crime."

"It's certainly a misdemeanor," said Bill.

But he was looking at Ruth. She was wearing a gray outfit, a gray hooded cape over a matching dinner dress, the hood drawn up over her honey-colored hair. It was unadorned, but she wore red gloves and red shoes, and carried an evening bag that matched the scarlet lips in her ivory face. She was a knockout.

The Traubes started to go in, and Bill and Ruth followed them. At the entrance Bill asked Jimmy Burke, "Seen Charlie Beach around?"

"I've been too busy to watch, Bill," said Jimmy. "The cops seem to be on the job."

Sentineal came over and told Bill that Steve Levy, the stage manager, wanted to see him.

"I'm going around to the stage door," Bill said to Ruth.

"I'll come along," she said, and with a wave to the Traubes she followed him.

Steve was at the stage-door; nervous. "Lady Lawrence isn't here yet. Leo is getting frantic."

"Is she on at the opening?"

"About ten speeches after." Steve wiped his grimy face. "What the hell we gonna do?"

A taxi jogged to a half in front of them. "Here she is!" Steve cried with relief.

Lady Lawrence, slender and graceful as a reed, stepped out, followed by Ricky Linton, Leo's understudy, not quite as handsome as Leo, but even more soigné. He was very British and Lady Lawrence's friend. She had brought him with her from England.

"Your Highness is late," Bill said to Lawrence.

"Go to hell, my dear. I've never been late to my openings. See you at my party after the show."

She glanced at Ruth, but it was clear she was not including Leo's sister in that invitation.

"I suppose Leo is here," said Ricky. He could load five words with a ton of arrogance.

"Yes," said Bill, "and rarin' to go. I guess you won't get to play the part to-night."

Ricky followed Lady Lawrence.

"I'd like to kick his pants," the stage-manager said. "He and Leo had a fist fight at rehearsal this afternoon, when Leo suddenly ordered a change in the ending."

"He owns more than half the show," Bill reminded. "Try kicking him next year."

He and Ruth went back to the lobby. It was eight-forty-five and there were just the hurrying late-comers.

"If Charlie Beach tries to come in," Bill told Jimmy Burke, "I'll be at the end of the middle aisle, standing."

Ruth went down to her seat in Row J. The house lights dimmed.

Bill knew the play by heart, knew the first act was light and tenuous. He

scanned the audience. Ruth, hunched forward, was intent on the stage where Leo was beginning to weave his sexy spell. That talented heel could enchant even his own hard-boiled sister. From the balcony came the sighs of the swooners. There was no doubt about how the play was going with them. It remained to be seen what the sophisticates in the orchestra and the critics would say.

WHEN the first-act curtain fell and the house lights went up Bill caught Ruth's eye as she came up the crowded aisle. He joined her in the throng moving slowly toward the smoke-filled foyer. She had left her cape in her seat. In the gray glove-fitting gown, revealing only her slender young throat and the smooth bare arms above the scarlet gloved hands, she was even more striking.

"I think it's a hit," said Bill.

"The best rôle he's ever had," she said.

"La Lawrence makes a fine foil for him. She's as brittle and cool as he is passionate."

"Yes, she's a good match for Leo. Are you going to her party?"

"No. Society bores me stiff. I'll go to the Fifth Avenue Child's and wait for the reviews . . . You'll make a killing at the party in that outfit. It's cute. Little Gray Riding Hood—after eating the wolf."

"Thanks. But I'm not going. Lawrence doesn't want me, as you may have noticed at the stage door. For reasons best known to herself she's got no use for Leo's little sister. I'll sit up with you for the reviews—if you'll let me."

"Sure! I'll even play wolf and let you eat me. We'll go over to Child's together."

Sentinel appeared beside them and said that Leo wanted to see Bill. Bill left Ruth in the foyer and went back stage to Leo's dressing room.

Sight of Leo's avid egocentric eyes reflected above the row of bright lights

in the makeup mirror made Bill's gorge rise, and prevented him from saying anything flattering. He said instead, "What do you want, Leo?" and waited for Leo Murray to ask for the commendation he needed as much as he needed the breath of life.

"Has Charlie Beach been around?"

"No sign of him yet."

"Keep watching!" Leo went on penciling shadows of dissipation under his eyes.

"I will."

The door opened and Lady Lawrence came in, smoking a cigarette in a long slim holder.

"Hallo!" She looked shrewdly from Bill to Leo and back to Bill. "You two having a tiff?"

"Is that all, Leo?" said Bill. He saw exasperation boil up and overflow in the too-handsome face in the mirror.

"No!" Leo's voice rose hysterically. "There's something else. I want you to get rid of that pack of sighing teenagers who fill the balcony. They make me and Lady Lawrence ridiculous to a sophisticated audience."

Bill laughed. "They made you what you are today, Leo—and they pay for their tickets. We can't turn them away."

"But you can get something printed that will keep them away—an interview in which I express my dislike for that sort of thing."

"I can remember when you lapped up that sort of thing, Leo. Anyway I don't think it's a press agent's job to pass out insults—even if they're not quite 'the best people.'"

Leo was furious. "Do you want to lose your job?"

"No, but there's a limit to what I'll do to keep it. Even for the great Leo Murray. And don't be surprised if one of these days someone decides to get rid of *you* for a change."

From the corridor came the call, "Curtain going up!"

Lady Lawrence said, "Sorry I can't stay for the end. This is better than the

play. Mind you don't miss your cue, Leo!" She swept out.

Leo got up and put on his beautifully fitted dinner jacket. He didn't look at Bill.

"I didn't mean to go off the handle," he mumbled. "I'm on edge. Those females have been getting on my nerves." Bill was at the door. "There is something you can do for me, Bill."

"What is it?"

"Let me sneak over to your apartment for a nap after the show. It will keep those crazy kids from following me to Lady Lawrence's and it will set me up for the party."

BILL unhooked a key from his ring and tossed it to Leo. "Just leave the key on the living room table, and the door unlocked when you leave. I won't be coming in until after the reviews are out."

Leo said, "Don't tell anyone I'm going there." Bill was opening the door. "What do you think of the show?"

"It's a hit," said Bill, and went out.

The second act had begun when he got back into the theater. Ruth was again hunched up in her seat. Charlie Beach was nowhere in sight.

By the second-act intermission Bill knew that *Hour's End* was in the bag. He could tell by the way the critics tried not to be the first to admit it was good. Looking at them, he missed Ruth going out. Nor was she in the lobby, which was buzzing with enthusiastic exclamations.

Nick Finley was standing by himself looking heart-broken. Bill went over to him.

"Don't look so sour, Nick."

"Sour? A half a million bucks this show'll make. You like to get gypped out of a fortune?"

"Next time will be yours."

But Nick Finley would not be comforted. "Leo Murray is a four-star crook. And you can wire that for sound."

She switched on the light and saw him lying at her feet



"Nick, it's show business—dog eat dog."

"I know one dog that should be chloroformed, or something."

Bill smiled. "You'll feel better tomorrow." He left Nick and looked around for Ruth.

But Ruth wasn't there. Right after the second-act curtain, which came down on a breath-taking love scene Leo played to the hilt, Ruth had hurried back-stage. She didn't wait to knock at his dressing-room door.

When she opened it, Leo was trying to embrace Lady Lawrence, who was saying coldly, "But Leo, you know how much I dislike being pawed offstage."

It certainly made Leo look a bit ridiculous, after that passionate scene they had just finished playing. But even that couldn't quite account for the furious rage that flared in his face when, over Lady Lawrence's shoulder, he caught sight of Ruth.

"Dear me!" Lady Lawrence disengaged herself and swished out, carefully shutting the door behind her.

Ruth quietly latched it. Then she turned to Leo, all the excitement gone from her masklike face.

"You heel!" she said softly.

Leo sat down at the make-up mirror, turning his back to her. "What do you want now?" He spat the words at her reflection in the glass.

"I came to tell you what a fine performance you gave." She laughed mirthlessly. "This other one was certainly funny."

"Get out!"

"I *won't* get out. I have the right to be here with you, Leo." Her eyes, which had hardened, turned softer. A pleading note crept into her husky voice. "Even if I'm not your sister."

For a moment there was no sound at all. Then Leo turned slowly, fixed his eyes on her face and spoke deliberately.

"Listen! Let's get this over with now. I had to do that to shut you up or you'd have spoiled my popularity with those thousands of silly infatuated teen-

agers like you who were giving me the publicity I needed. As I explained to you then, I couldn't have a wife for the same reason, so I got you to pose as—"

"—your sister. And now?"

"I don't need those stupid swooners. I don't want them. I've got another audience, sophisticated, elegant. I'm climbing up—"

"—to Lady Lawrence."

"Yes, to Lady Lawrence."

"Now you love Lady Lawrence."

"Love? Don't be ridiculous! She can take me on up where I want to go. And she will, because I've got enough on her now to make her."

"Leo, did you love me at all when you took me?"

"I was taking everything that came my way in those days." With ungovernable impatience he sprang to his feet, but he did not raise his voice above that hateful whisper. "Don't you understand, you little fool? I despise women!"

"And that child you made me give away?"

HE TURNED back to the mirror and **HE** sat down. "I don't want to hear any more about that."

"But suppose I spill the story now? It won't set you up in the estimation of your new audience, sophisticated as they are."

"If you do, I'll have you found insane and put away. Your new story about my wanting to kill you will help. You've let everyone believe you're my sister. I know a psychiatrist who will fix you for me."

He turned around again. His tone changed, but it was still as ruthless.

"Listen, Ruthie, I'll let you go on being my sister if you like. But you've got to forget all the past, keep your nose out of my affairs, and do what I tell you like a good little girl." He stood up, straightened his vest. "Now tonight I want you to help me avoid that mob at the stage door. After the show you go out there and tell them I've already gone."

He smiled. "You might tell them it's unhealthy for a girl to hang around me. After all, it's true. It got you into trouble, eh Ruthie?" He laughed. "Then you get into my car and drive off, and when they're gone I'll go over to Bill's apartment at the Chicopee to rest for an hour before going on to the party. Right?"

He was unlatching the door for her. He looked into her face. It was a mask, pale, beautiful, inscrutable. She stood smoothing the red gloves on her hands.

From the corridor came the cry, "Curtain going up!"

Ruth turned from him and went out.

The curtain was up for the third act when she went into the theater, and she brushed by Bill without seeing him as she hurried down the aisle to her seat. Her eyes were fixed on the stage where Leo had just appeared and was bending over the sleeping Lady Lawrence to waken her with a kiss.

Then followed a scene of seduction done so adeptly that, though he knew it by heart and knew the black heart of the man who was playing it, Bill stood spellbound.

Near the middle of the act, Jimmy Burke came up behind him and whispered:

"Charlie Beach sneaked in through a fire door."

Bill turned swiftly. "Where is he?"

"Standing near the last aisle, to the right."

Bill moved over there quickly. Charlie was gripping the railing, his eyes burning bright with the reflected stage light. Bill took his arm. Charlie turned wildly. He smelled of liquor.

"Lemme alone!"

"Shut up!"

People turned in their seats and began to "shush." Charlie quieted down.

"Come outside with me," Bill said.

"Lemme stay."

"You'll raise a stink."

"I won't. Wanna see what he did to it. Wanna see how he used my stuff." Charlie's voice rose. An usher came over.

Bill pulled him away from the rail. With his fist muffled by a glove he hit Charlie across the jaw. Charlie sagged. Bill stripped the glove off quickly and stuffed it in Charlie's mouth. Jimmy Burke helped him haul Charlie out to the lobby and through the box-office door. Frank Boley was in there counting up the take. He had a soda bottle beside him.

"He'll come to in a minute," Bill said.

"You shut him up, all right."

"Frank, douse that drink on him."

Frank swished the soda that smelled like Scotch on Charlie's pale face. His eyes opened. He looked up sadly at Bill.

"You didn't have to do that."

"Sorry, kid."

"Call a cop?" Jimmy Burke asked.

Charlie's eyes clouded with terror. "No cops, Bill."

"Forget it," Boley said.

Bill said, "Okay. But if I see you back in the theater, it'll be cops and worse."

He watched Charlie go out of the lobby, then went back into the theater. He saw Ruth in her seat intently watching the end of the play.

LEO and Lady Lawrence got many curtain calls. The orchestra clapped heartily; the girls in the balcony screamed for Leo; and the play was an unmistakable hit. When the house lights finally went up and Bill looked around for Ruth she was not in her seat. Nor was she in the lobby.

But a woman's voice cried, "Bill!" and there was Sue Huxley, one of those vital newspaper girls, well turned out. Sue kissed him and talked a blue streak.

"You look wonderful, Bill! I'm so sorry I couldn't get to you again before this but I've been busy every minute of the day and now I must make the midnight plane for Rio—an unexpected assignment. Come on over to the Astor for a quick one and tell me you still love me and all the rest of the news while I pack. You're not married yet, are you? I thought not."

Before Bill could get in a word she

rushed on:

"While I was waiting for you I saw that sister of Leo Murray's come out in a tricky gray outfit with accessories of ruddy gore. Now that's a neat little number you'd do well to marry. You'd be fixed for life. Not that I'd envy you having Leo Murray for a brother-in-law, but that wouldn't be any worse than having him for a boss."

Bill laughed. Not seeing Ruth around he went over to the Astor with Sue Huxley and spent a pleasant hour. . . .

Ruth had gone back-stage before the curtain calls were over. When the crowd of cooing fans gathered between the stage door and Leo's car was at the curb, she went out and said:

"Listen, kids, Mr. Murray has gone out by another door. He is tired, and can't see you tonight."

She watched the eagerness die out of their foolish young faces.

"I know just how disappointed you are, but there's no use your waiting."

They made way for her and she got into the car and drove off. Driving east on 47th Street she passed the discreet entrance of the Chicopee Apartments.

The Fifth Avenue Child's had a side-entrance in the next block. She found a parking place right in front of it, went in, and took a small table by the window. The restaurant was just filling up with the after-theater crowd. When the waitress came she ordered a pot of coffee.

"That will be all," she said. The waitress made out a check, put it on the table, and went to fetch the coffee.

Ruth looked at the check, picked it up and on a sudden impulse picked up her red evening bag, got up and went across the restaurant to the front entrance on Fifth Avenue. She paid the check and went out.

By the time the waitress returned and left the pot of coffee and the cup on the table, Ruth had turned the corner from Fifth Avenue and was walking back quickly in the quiet shadows of East 47th Street. She had drawn the

hood of the cape over her head. At the Chicopee the slim gray figure disappeared into the discreet entrance. From the row of letter boxes she saw that Bill Benedict's apartment was 4A. She entered the small self-service elevator and pressed Button 4 with one red-gloved finger.

Fifteen minutes later, when she returned to the elevator and raised her right hand to press the button, she noticed that there was a break in the red glove. The seam between the thumb and palm had split. She stared at it, as the elevator descended—like one whose eyes are open but has not yet waked from a dream. . . .

The busy waitress at Child's, seeing Ruth finishing her coffee, stopped to ask if she wanted anything else.

"No, thank you," said Ruth. "Will you give me my check?" Her gray-green eyes were alert now.

"I thought I gave it to you before." The waitress searched the table.

"No, you didn't," said Ruth, smiling patiently.

While the waitress made out another check Ruth noticed again the break in the red glove on her right hand. She took off that glove. Then she sat looking through the window.

JUST after midnight she picked up the check and her purse and was getting up to go when Bill appeared on the street outside. He had spied the Murray car and was looking into it. Then he turned and saw Ruth inside. She had just sat down again. He waved to her and came hurrying in.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting all this time. Sue Huxley turned up in the lobby and not seeing you there I thought you'd changed your mind and weren't coming. Sue said she'd seen you go out. So I went over to the Astor with her."

"I had a little job to do at the stage door for Leo. Then I came right over here."

The waitress came.

"Something to eat?" Bill asked Ruth.

"No, thanks. I've been having a bit of indigestion. Had to go to the rest room for awhile when I was waiting for you." She smiled to the waitress, who nodded. "Musta' been somethin' I et. But you go ahead, Bill."

"Just bring me a cup of coffee," he said to the waitress, who made out another check and went to get it. Bill looked at Ruth. "You don't *look* bad."

"I feel fine now."

"That's good. I'll tell you something funny to cheer you up. Sue Huxley made a remarkable suggestion about you. She said why didn't I marry you. How d'you like that?"

He expected a jibe. But she looked up from under her silken lashes and said, "How do *you* like it, Bill?"

"Me marry!" She had let the gray cape drop back over her chair and was leaning toward him so that his glance fell from her gray-green eyes to her red lips and then to the exquisitely molded and smoothly clad form. "Not that I can't see as well as Sue Huxley that you're a pretty neat number."

So absorbed was Bill in his observation that he had not noticed the waitress setting his coffee before him. As he picked it up and drank it down he saw Ruth quietly examining him as if for the first time.

"Well, I'm not interested in marriage either, Bill. But I can see as well as Sue Huxley that you're a pretty good man. And do you know what makes you good?"

"No, Miss Interlocutor, you tell what-all is it that makes Bill Benedict a good hunk of man."

"It's that you really like women, Bill. So many men who chase women actually hate them. You love them. That's what makes you good. That's why Sue Huxley likes you, and why all the rest of those gals keep calling you up."

"Ah'm sho' obliged to you-all, Miss Interlocutor, fo' tellin' me—but how come you-all knows all this? Of course, you been chased a lot yo'self but I reckon ain't many men got to you account of

your brother, Leo the watch-dog, is there?"

Ruth did not answer this. She watched him finish his coffee. When he set down the cup she said, "Do we have to sit here until the reviews come out? Why not go over to your place?"

He shot a glance at her but her eyes were calm and inscrutable as ever, promising nothing.

"Sure," he said. Then remembering Leo, he looked at his watch. "Leo said he wanted to rest in my apartment before going to the party."

"Oh!" she said. "Has Leo been at your apartment?"

"I guess he'll be gone by now, but I'll have to check."

"Let's drive over and I'll wait downstairs while you see."

"All right." He took his check and hers and paid them and they went out into East 47th Street and she drove him over to the Chicopee. There he got out and she waited in the car.

He took the elevator up to the fourth floor. His door was unlocked, and the living room was dark. He stepped toward the switch.

As he reached out for it, something crashed on his head. He fell to the floor, unconscious.

Chapter III

SHORTLY after Bill went into the Chicopee, Ruth saw a man come out and walk swiftly away in the darkness. She waited almost three-quarters of an hour. Then she got out of the car, went into the apartment house and up in the elevator to the fourth floor.

Bill's door was unlocked. She walked in. It was dark. She felt for the light switch on the wall and flipped it. Bill was lying on his side at her feet, with blood on his head. Beyond him lay Leo Murray, face-down. A long hunting knife stood upright in his back.

Ruth paid no attention to Leo. She dropped to her knees beside Bill. She tried to pick him up. Bill groaned.

"Bill!" she cried, shaking him. "Bill!"

He groaned again, opened his eyes, and got up on his hands and knees.

"Bill, are you hurt?"

He rubbed his temple and looked at the blood on his hand. "Who did it?" he demanded angrily. "It's a helluva trick to play on a guy!"

"Bill! Look there!"

He looked where Ruth was pointing. He blinked drunkenly. Then his vision cleared.

"Holy—"

He reached over and felt Leo's hand. It was cold.

"What happened?" Ruth's face was working strangely.

He stood up unsteadily. "When I came in, the room was dark. Before I could switch on the light, someone hit me. It couldn't have been him." He stared at the blood which had dripped from the knife to the floor. "The guy's dead," he muttered. "Your brother's dead!" He shook his head unbelieving.

Ruth moved toward the body.

"Don't touch it!" Bill said.

"He's dead! Leo's dead!" Ruth's cry was strange, unearthly wild, like someone waking from a nightmare. She covered her face with her hands. "Call the police!"

Bill held her close to him. "No, Ruth, not yet. Please try to forget you're his sister for a little while, will you? Leo Murray has been murdered in my apartment—with my hunting knife. What does that make me?"

She stared at him as if he had revealed something to her. "The murderer?"

"That's what they'll think." The two of them looked at each other. Bill touched Ruth's ungloved hand. "Don't worry about me, Ruth. I didn't do it. Give me a chance to work this out before the police come in and tie my hands."

He went to the windows and lowered the shades, then looked in the bedroom and bathroom. There was no sign of a disturbance.

"I wonder what that guy hit me with? It couldn't have been just his fist."

Ruth sat down with her back to the body. "Don't waste time looking for clues, Bill," she said. "This isn't a job for an ex-detective."

"And it isn't something you get in a lending library for three cents a day. Help me wash this blood off my face."

Ruth took off her cape and the other red glove. She took the wet towel he brought from the bathroom.

He winced. "Go easy, Ruth."

She wiped the wound carefully.

"The killer was here when I came in," he said.

"Better phone the police," she said again, as she finished.

Bill folded the towel abstractedly, and put it back in the bathroom. He put on his topcoat and hat, pulling the brim down over the bruise on his brow.

"Bill, I think you'd better."

"Get your cape on." He helped her with it.

He took his key from the table where Leo had left it. He turned off the lights, locked the door behind them and pressed the button for the elevator.

On the sidewalk Bill hesitated a minute, lit a cigarette. Then he went to the car and opened the door for Ruth. When she got in he said:

"You better go home now, but don't call the police."

"The cops don't like people who don't tell them about a murder."

"Don't call them. I'll see you in the morning."

He shut the car door and when she had driven off he started walking west toward Broadway.

WHEN he got to Broadway he saw Frank Boley coming toward him, rocking like a coal barge in a heavy sea.

"Bill—Bill—Bill! H'ya, Bill!"

"Boley, you're tanked," Bill said.

"Boys will be boys. A drink?" Boley put his arm around Bill. "You're an okay feller, Bill."

"Where's Leo?" Bill asked abruptly.

"Hurray for Leo! Got a hit—man of hits! But who gives a—" he belched—"for Leo? It's Ruthie I've been lookin' for. Where's Ruthie?" He belched again. "Pardon. Belchin's good for the soul."

"Where's Leo?"

"Whaddya wanna know for?"

"Got a hundred-grand movie offer for *Hour's End*."

"That's important, Bill. Very important, Bill. Gotta get Leo right away." He staggered over to the wall and supported himself. "Leo's funny guy. Know where he is now?"

"Where?"

"Where no one can see him."

"Where is that, Frank?"

Boley took a long breath and squinted his eyes to get a better look at Bill. "Where no one can see him. The hell with Leo, and the hundred grand. Let's get a drink."

"Thanks," said Bill, starting to walk away.

"Wait a minute!" Boley grabbed Bill's arm.

"Tomorrow night, Frank."

He went across Broadway and down to the Murray Theater. When he went in the stage door he found Steve Levy still at work on the stage, haggard and dirty, drinking coffee out of a container.

"Forget something, Bill?" Steve asked.

"I want to check up for Leo. What time did the curtain fall at the end of the show?"

Steve took a piece of grimy paper out of his back pocket and referred to it. "Eleven-two."

"Was everybody on stage for it?"

Steve grinned. "Who'd miss a curtain call? The actor hasn't been born—"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." Steve looked at Bill queerly. "Why?"

"Was Ricky Linton there?"

"Linton? No, I don't remember seeing him around."

"All right, Steve. See you tomorrow."

He took a cab to River House where

Lady Lawrence lived. Her party was in full swing. With his shirt front rumpled and the bump on his brow he had some difficulty getting by her butler. He stood for awhile just inside the door of the long living room watching the glittering crowd.

Leo would have loved this party. It was what he had been working for, all his life. Between the tall windows overlooking the gleaming dark river and the long, sumptuous buffet-bar swarmed Park Avenue and café society, with a dash of the aristocracy of Hollywood.

Bill waited until Lady Lawrence came drifting by.

"Who's late now?" she cried, giving him her cool white hand. "And does Leo Murray think he is being frightfully original, making a dreadfully late entrance at his own party?" Her ice-blue eyes traveled to the bump on Bill's brow. "Or have you killed him by any chance?"

"No, Your Highness, I haven't. But he is a pretty sick man. He won't be able to play tomorrow night. You'd better tell Linton."

She turned and called, "Ricky!"

Linton was standing nearby with his back to them, talking with a group of people. He looked around, then came over.

"Ricky, Mr. Benedict says Leo is ill and that you will play tomorrow."

"That is a bit of luck, isn't it?"

Bill looked at them and thought either or both of them could have killed Leo and put on this cool little act. They were quite capable of it, these two.

Linton, impeccable from head to foot, glanced at the swelling over Bill's right eye. "Did you fall, Mr. Benedict?"

"A mosquito bite," said Bill.

"Rather a nasty one."

"I'm looking for the mosquito."

LADY LAWRENCE said, "Is Leo still at your place?"

"Yes. How did you know he went there?"

"He told me, of course. What's the

matter with him?"

She stopped the butler, circulating with a huge silver salver of champagne and they took glasses.

Linton lifted his glass. "Here's hoping it's nothing trivial."

"It isn't," said Bill. He drank his champagne and left.

It was half-past two. He took a cab back to the Chicopee, went up to his apartment and walked into the large arms of Detective-lieutenant Potts. Hake Potts was almost as broad as he was tall, meaning that he was built like a six-foot length of six-foot water conduit. He had been in charge of the Broadway district from the ingenue days of Ethel Barrymore. He knew everybody and distrusted everybody.

"Hello, Benedict," he said. "Don't you know the modern criminal never returns to the scene of his crime? He knows better."

Bill was looking around for Leo's body.

"Don't bother looking for Leo Murray. He has an aisle seat in the morgue. Sit down, my friend, and tell Potts all about it."

Bill glanced at the bloodstains on the floor, then sank into a chair. Suddenly he leaned toward Potts.

"When did you get here?"

Potts slid a cuff back from his big wrist and looked at his watch. "An hour and a half ago."

"Who told you to come?"

Potts grinned and said mildly, "How about *you* bein' on the receiving end for a while? What was Murray doing here tonight?"

"Resting. After the opening of his show."

"*Hour's End*, wasn't it?"

"Yes. He wanted to rest here before going to a party. I came back here about twelve o'clock. I walked in—the room was dark. I go to switch on the light—I get knocked out."

"Sounds like *The March of Time*," Potts said. "How come ya wasn't here when *I* walked in?"

Bill hesitated. "A friend came in and found me. When I came to we went out together."

"Who's your friend?"

"I'll tell you some other time. My friend knew nothing about this."

"And you thought Murray was layin' on the floor for fun, or maybe lookin' for termites?"

Bill lit a cigarette. "I knew he was dead."

"Whyn't ya call the Police Department?" Potts took a pack of chewing gum out of his pocket and split the cellophane angrily. "Whyn't ya?" He threw three chiclets into his capacious mouth. "The last time ya got into trouble I took your dick's license away from ya. This time, I'll put ya away for good. You're a menace."

"I know I'm in trouble, Potts. Don't lay it on."

Bill got up and walked around the room. Potts followed him with his large Irish-setter eyes.

"I played a hunch," Bill said finally. "I thought I'd find something to clear me before the cops stepped in."

"And messed things up, eh? Ya think cops are pretty dumb about these things, so ya was going to have the case all cracked. All we gotta do is make the arrest. You think the boys in blue are on the dumbwit side!" He chewed his gum resentfully. "That's what comes of readin' all them screwy detective stories. What was your hunch?"

"That there were others besides me who knew where Leo Murray was, although he had asked me not to tell anyone because he didn't want to be disturbed."

"Not a bad hunch," Potts said grudgingly. "Did ya find anyone?"

"Lady Lawrence, one of the two stars of *Hour's End*. And she must have told it to her friend Ricky Linton who owns a good half of the show."

"He certainly wouldn't want to kill Leo and stop the show."

"He is an actor, and has been understudying Leo. Would give his eyeteeth

to replace him. He hates Leo's guts. They had a fist-fight at the last rehearsal this afternoon."

POTTS' big round eyes were fixed on an imaginary object on the ceiling. "Did you see the knife that killed Murray?"

Bill hesitated. "Yes."

"Recognize it?" Potts' jaws moved faster.

"Yes. It's mine."

"What was ya doing with a hunting knife in the middle of Broadway?"

"It was given to me. I'm Ol' Daniel Benedict, the Times Square Trapper."

"By the Boy Scouts?"

"By the Fine Steel Company of New Haven. I was doing some promotion for them."

"Ya know what I think?" Potts asked mildly.

"What?"

"That you're lying." He rose and yawned. "And I'm too tired to find out why right now. So instead of crawling between your own cool sheets you come along with me and try a night at the station-house." He moved his two-hundred pounds of pavement-pounder to the door and sighed. "Tomorrow is another day. Everything's always different tomorrow. Tomorrow this will be different, too."

Hake Potts didn't wait till tomorrow. After depositing Bill in jail he drove swiftly uptown through the night and arrived at the Central Park West apartment hotel of the late Leo Murray at just four o'clock.

He telephoned up to the apartment from the lobby, and Ruth Murray answered so quickly that she must have been awake. She did not ask what he wanted when Potts introduced himself.

"You can come right up," she said.

She was wearing one of those long slim tailored tweed house coats over her night clothes. It was buttoned up tight to her slender neck. She looked small and alone standing before Potts. Like a

[Turn page]



World's toughest work clothes

Famous Lee Overalls give you greater value where it counts most—in longer wear. Exclusive super-tough Lee Jelt Denim resists scrapes, snags and rips. Form-fitting bib. Suspenders won't rope, twist or fall. Get more wear for your money. See your Lee Dealer. The H. D. Lee Co., Kansas City 8, Mo.

Every Lee Garment
Union Made—
Union Labeled

COPYRIGHT 1955

Lee
CLOTHES
for work and play

mouse between the paws of a lion—a gentle lion.

"Sorry to be disturbing ya at this hour," he said. "I have had news for ya. It's about your brother, Leo."

"I know," she said. "He is dead."

"How did you know?"

"Haven't you seen Bill Benedict?"

Potts nodded.

"Didn't he tell you about me?"

"No. He mentioned a friend who found him unconscious."

"I don't know why he is hiding things. I was with Bill at the Fifth Avenue Child's and then we went over to his place to wait for the reviews of Leo's new show. Bill told me that Leo had gone to his apartment for a rest and might still be there. So I waited in the car while Bill went up to see. When he didn't come down for quite awhile I went up to see what was the matter and found him lying unconscious beside Leo, who had been stabbed." She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Please try to go on," said Potts.

She uncovered her face. "When Bill came to, I begged him to call the police but he wouldn't. He told me not to call them and sent me home."

"Miss Murray, I must ask ya a personal question. Is Bill Benedict anything to you—anything special I mean? Ya know what I mean."

"He's nothing to me. Just a man who worked for my brother."

"Do you want to help me find your brother's killer?"

"Of course."

"All right. Were you and Benedict together at Child's from the time the show ended until ya went to his place?"

"No. I drove Leo's car over to Child's after telling the fans at the stage-door that Leo had left. He asked me to do that so they'd go away. I got to Child's about ten after eleven. Bill didn't get there until midnight. He said he had been with a friend he met in the theatre lobby.

"A lady friend?"

"Yes."

"Bill has lots of lady friends, hasn't he?"

"Yes. Bill likes women. That's a nice thing about him."

"He likes you too, doesn't he?"

"I don't think so. You see, I was Leo's sister, and Bill didn't like Leo." She stopped suddenly as if that were a slip of the tongue.

"Oh!" said Potts. "And what was the trouble between them?"

SHE looked away as if reluctant to speak.

"Just—just that Leo was overbearing, as he was with everyone, even with me. Leo couldn't help it. But Bill resented it and they would quarrel, especially when Leo would threaten to fire Bill as he did yesterday afternoon." She looked up at Potts, then added, "Leo quarreled with me, too, yesterday for that matter."

"Leo must have been in a particularly bad mood yesterday. He had a fight with Ricky Linton also. Do you think Linton might have done it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Potts. I don't know who might have done it. Leo had made so many enemies." She looked distraught and frightened. "The murderer may have been here, rummaging through his desk." She led him to a large ornate spinet desk, lifted the lid. "He kept this locked." Papers had been pulled out of pigeon-holes and left in disorder. Among them lay a bunch of keys. "Whoever it was stole these keys from Leo before he came here."

"What time did you leave here this evening?"

"Just before eight."

"What do you think was taken?"

"Maybe nothing. Maybe he was looking for these."

She pressed a button in the carving and a secret drawer sprang out. In it were a package of letters and some canceled checks.

Potts took them. "I'll look these over. Was your brother ever married?"

The unexpected question halted her for an instant.

"No," she said softly.

Chapter IV

"Then you are his heir."

"Leo told me he was going to leave most of his money to the Academy of Arts and Sciences for a Dramatic Foundation in his name—the Leo Murray Foundation. Leo always needed to have his name remembered. But he probably left me enough to get along on. I don't need much."

Potts sat down and fixed his round eyes on his imaginary object on the ceiling. "You're a brave girl, for your age. Not many women would go through this night as well as you have. You can help me."

"How?"

"With Benedict. I've put him in the pen. But he may have fixed an alibi with his girl friend. Anyway, innocent or guilty, I'm sure he has information I'll want before this case is cracked. I'm going to let him out. You keep close to him. Don't discourage him from liking you. I don't mean—Well, just keep tabs on him and let me know if he lets anything slip. I'll go after the other leads right away."

He picked up his hat and stood up, towering over her again—like a lion over a mouse.

She looked at him intently.

"Do you think Bill could commit murder?"

"Anyone could commit murder under certain circumstances. *You* could commit murder."

She stood up and led him across the room to the door.

"Good night," she said softly, and closed the door behind him.

When Potts got down to the lobby he took out a little black note-book and opened it to Section W. Under the heading "*Women*" were a number of brief notes.

With a stubby pencil he swiftly added another:

A woman dresses her face every day. A man shaves his. A man's face is naked. but you might just as well try to tell what's going on in a woman's heart by looking at her dress as by watching her carefully made-up face.

THE next morning about ten o'clock Hake Potts opened the door of Bill's cell.

"Come out and have some breakfast," he said in a friendly way.

He took Bill into his office and handed him a morning paper. A waiter entered with a tray of food.

"Feed all your prisoners this way?" Bill asked.

Potts shook his bulky head. "Extra-special for you."

"What makes me so important?"

"A fellow like you talks better on a full stomach." Potts leaned ponderously over the table and came up with a small roll which he proceeded to plaster with butter and jelly.

Bill dug into a grapefruit.

"Whyn't ya tell me about Charlie Beach last night?"

Bill looked up, wiping his mouth slowly. "How did you find out about Charlie?"

"You asked the cops to watch out for him at the theatre. Whyn't ya tell me?"

Bill concentrated on his food.

"I'm waiting to hear."

Bill remained silent.

"Need an earphone, Mr. Benedict?"

"Listen, Mr. Detective. When I've finished with breakfast you're either going to let me go or charge me with something so I can get a lawyer. Either way I'm as dumb as Harpo Marx."

Potts looked at him, amazed. "Now that's not what I call the cooperative spirit."

"*You* arrested me!"

"I didn't arrest ya. I brought ya here for your own good."

"Then give me my money back. The place stinks. I'm going to sue the city."

Potts poured some coffee into Bill's cup. "Sugar?"

Bill laughed. "Two—and cream." He watched Potts' thick fingers drop the pieces in.

"I've found out a lot of things I didn't know last night," Potts said ingratiatingly.

"I'm not interested."

Potts buttered another roll. "Sometimes a guy can't help being interested."

Bill put his coffee down. "What do you mean?"

A police sergeant entered and gave Potts an official-looking paper. Potts read it. He finished his roll in thoughtful silence.

"Got a cigarette, Mr. Potts?" Bill was trying not to look curious.

Potts handed him his pack. "Benedict, I think we was all carried away last night. There's gonna be a slight change in procedure."

Bill blew out a cloud of smoke. "If you're laying on the soft soap, Mr. Potts, thinking you're going to get me to break down and confess—"

"No soft soap, Benedict. I can't hold you for the chair. Not yet."

Bill rose. "Fine. That leaves me the rest of the morning to get a lawyer to draw up a bill of complaint against the city."

"Don't go yet. I just got a report from the post mortem examination."

"I suppose they found my fingerprints on the knife," Bill said bitterly. "My knife. Why shouldn't they?"

"Don't worry about fingerprints. The knife was as clean as the Legion of Decency. What's bad for me is that ya said ya come into your room at the Chicopee about twelve-thirty."

"So what?"

Potts tossed some gum into his mouth. His big eyes were sad. "Ya see, the medical examiner says Murray was killed between eleven and eleven-thirty."

Bill smiled.

"Which sorta opens the field—"

"That's tough for you, Potts."

"And besides—" Potts chewed glumly—"you got an alibi. From eleven to twelve you was with a dame at the Astor."

"How do you know?"

POTTS lifted his heavy shoulders with resignation.

"It so happens that Assistant District Attorney Traube and his frau who live

at the Astor seen you meet that lady correspondent in the theatre lobby after the show, and they was walking behind you to the hotel. You was so interested in this Miss Huxley, they didn't want to intrude. Traube's in charge of the Murray case. He told me about it this morning."

"Did he see me leaving the hotel, too?"

"No."

"Then how do you know I didn't come right out?"

"I know you're not the man to leave a dame you like in a hurry—even to murder Leo Murray."

"All right. So what am I doing here?"

"Any guy can make a mistake." The jaws had a slower rhythm.

"Sure, Potts."

"Then let bygones be bygones? I need some help, Bill. This is a Broadway case. I need the help of a Broadway in-and-outer."

"What'll you give me?"

"Your detective agency license back."

"What do you want?"

"Draw me up a list of everybody you know who had a grudge against Murray."

"That's easy," said Bill. "It's all done."

"Where is it?"

"See *Who's Who in the American Theatre*."

Potts sighed like a tree falling. "Any other time I'd be sore at a wisecrack like that." He frowned. "Bill, you're going to help me whether ya like it or not."

"Well, if you ask me that way."

"I'm not asking no more. I'm telling ya for your own health. I think there was two people that come into your room last night—the guy who bumped off Leo and the guy who socked you."

"Why couldn't they be the same?"

Potts spat out his gum in disgust. "They could. But no sane murderer would wait around even for the fun of banging you on the head."

Bill stared at him thoughtfully. "All right, so there were two."

"The second guy can't be sure whether ya got anything on him. Maybe ya caught a glimpse of him when ya fell. He can't be sure. That means he's gonna get after ya to find out how much ya know. If he thinks ya know too much—" Potts left the inference in mid-air. "So I brought ya here to keep ya out of trouble. And I advise ya to watch your step."

Bill's eyes narrowed. He wiped his lips with a napkin and took a deep puff of his cigarette. He squashed it.

"Thanks, Potts. I'm not frightened, but I'll help."

"Swell!" Potts stuck out his hand. "And when we catch them ya can go back and become a private dick all over again."

Bill smiled. "I'm going to sue the city anyway."

"Sue and be damned. But see that the *Hour's End* company remains on stage after the show tonight. I want to see them actors and actresses, especially that Lawrence and Linton team."

"Sure." Bill started for the door and stopped. "Lieutenant, I've got one question to ask you."

"We're buddies now. Go ahead."

"Who told you to come up to my room last night?"

"A call came in about one-thirty."

"Man or woman?"

"Man. We checked the call. It came from a pay station at the Brass Bar, a little restaurant on Forty-fifth Street."

"One-thirty at Forty-fifth Street." Bill seemed to be figuring. "Sure it wasn't a woman?"

"Sure."

Bill looked relieved. "You can reach me at Murray's office. I'll be there all day," he said, and left.

When Bill entered the office Ruth Murray was at her desk. She was wearing black. Her face was ivory white and her lips were pale. But she was cutting the reviews from the morning papers just as she had done on the mornings after all of Leo's openings.

"Come here, Bill," she said in a low, dead voice. She looked up at him when he came close to her. Her words came in a husky whisper. "A detective, Potts, came and questioned me. I had to tell him about last night."

"Don't worry about Potts."

HE PUT his hand on her shoulder, and she put her pale white hand up on his hand. Her hand looked cold but it was warm, and the fragrance of her honey-colored hair came up to him, and even the plain black dress could not hide the young beauty of her body.

Suddenly he remembered her saying, "You love them, and that's what makes you good," and he remembered that Leo, the watchdog, was no longer there. The next instant he was ashamed to be thinking such things at such a time.

He said, "Go home, Ruth. You'd better go home."

"I keep wondering who could have done it."

"We'll find out. Take the day off, Ruth. We can run the office, Boley and me."

She took her hand away. "No. There's so much to be done today. You know how it is, the day after an opening."

"When is the funeral going to be?"

"Tomorrow."

"Need any cash?"

She shook her head, and looked down at the papers on her desk. Her lips were bitter. "Leo would have loved these fine reviews."

"He sure would."

"I keep thinking how wonderful he could be." She picked up the scissors. "He showed people only the side of him that—that was rotten." Her voice was low.

"We're all rotten at times, Ruth." Bill patted her arm gently. "I'll be in the office if you want anything. I'll take you to lunch."

"Thanks, Bill. Linton is in Leo's office with Steve Levy. I guess Linton

will be taking over."

Bill walked down the hall. He saw Boley's red face and stopped at the business manager's door.

"Good morning, Frank."

Boley sat at his desk like a man in a trance.

"I want to talk to you, Frank."

"Get the hell out of here," Boley cried. "I don't want to talk to no one."

Bill took a cigarette and lit it, watching Boley.

"Okay," he said, and went on down the corridor to Leo's office.

Ricky Linton was sitting on the desk swinging his long well-groomed legs.

"So God's gift to the American Theatre got his," Ricky chirped. "Why didn't you tell us the good news last night?"

"Cut it," said Bill.

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, eh?"

"Oh, for the love of Pete, Linton!" Steve burst out.

"I say! Do *you* know Latin, too?"

"I went to school!" Steve said, bristling.

The telephone rang on Leo's desk. Bill picked it up. It was Ruth. "Lieutenant Potts to see you."

"Tell him to come in here."

Potts entered with Ruth and Boley.

"I wasn't expecting to see you again so soon," said Bill.

"I like to surprise people."

Potts was looking at Linton. Bill introduced him to Ricky and Steve Levy. Potts' checked serge suit made him look like a burlesque comedian. He sat down at Leo's desk, took Leo's pad and silver pencils.

"I've got a few simple questions I wanna ask all of ya."

Ricky murmured, "Haven't I seen this picture before?"

Potts shot him a sharp glance. "Miss Murray," he said, "where were *you* last night between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty?"

Ruth spoke quietly. "At Child's, having coffee."

"What Child's?"

"Fifth Avenue at Forty-seventh Street."

"Did ya see anybody you know there?"

"Not at that time. The waitress may remember my being there. I was not feeling well and I went to the rest room while she was bringing the coffee. Later, about midnight, Mr. Benedict met me there."

Potts made a note. "Had your brother told you where he was going right after the show?"

"No. I took it for granted he would be going to Lady Lawrence's party."

"All right, Miss Murray. Thanks. Ya can go now."

RUTH hesitated. She looked gravely at each of the men in the room and went out. Potts coughed and shoved his heavy body around to face Linton.

"Now you, Mr. Linton. Where were you last night between eleven-fifteen and eleven-thirty?"

Ricky stared at him with smiling arrogance. "You ought to get someone to write your dialogue for you, Lieutenant. That line's a cliché."

"Shut up and answer my question."

"I couldn't possibly do both, could I?"

Potts glared at him.

"I was at Lady Lawrence's apartment," drawled Ricky. "I had left the theatre before the end of the play to see that proper preparations were being made for her party."

Potts turned abruptly to the stage manager. "Do you keep a record of when people come and go?"

"Not exactly a written record."

"Did anybody else leave early?"

"Not that I can remember."

"Anybody arrive late—after eight o'clock?"

Steve thought a moment, avoiding Linton's stare. "Lady Lawrence."

"When did she check in?"

"At eight-thirty—with Mr. Linton."

"They come in a cab?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

Linton interrupted. "The reason Lady Lawrence was late was that she was not feeling well. I called for her at her apartment at seven-thirty. We were together from that time on."

"Seems like there was an epidemic of females not feeling well last night. Where were ya just before ya got to the theayter?"

"I don't remember."

"Did ya know where Leo Murray was last night?"

"No."

"Lady Lawrence didn't tell ya?"

"No. I first learned it from Mr. Benedict at the party."

Potts passed his box of chiclets around. He scratched the pad with his pencil as Bill and Steve helped them-

ATOMIC FINGERPRINTS



ACCORDING to exhaustive research made recently by police technicians at Tokyo, Japan, it has been definitely established that atomic radiation has no effect whatever on fingerprint patterns.

The subjects for the research were known criminals who survived the blast at Hiroshima and had been arrested again.

Since all of them had been fingerprinted previous to the explosion and their record cards were available for comparison, it was possible to determine the effect—if any—atomic burns had on their fingerprints.

Some of these criminals had been as close as 300 meters from the center of the holocaust, and their hands were so badly burned that ugly scarification had resulted. But the friction ridges on the finger-tips and in the palms of their hands had not been damaged in any way different than they would have been by other burns.

Thus the general belief that atomic radiation would not only distort or destroy one's fingerprints, but might cause the formation of entirely "new" patterns, has been disproved.

—NORMAN RENARD

"In the taxi, of course."

"Where'd you get it?"

"At River House, where Lady Lawrence lives. I got out at the Murray Theatre . . . This is getting to be an awful bore, Mr. Potts."

"What company was the cab, Mr. Linton?"

Ricky tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail. "Terminal."

Potts jotted it down. "Do you know Charlie Beach?"

"Yes. Slightly."

"When was the last time ya seen him?"

selfes. Ricky refused. Potts took some himself.

"I suppose Lady Lawrence will tell me the same thing as you?" he asked.

Ricky nodded.

"Reminds me one time Granville Barker was robbed by two hoofers. The boys alibied each other." Potts chuckled. "Both of 'em was proved guilty."

"You can get out of here and go to hell!" Linton was on his feet. Potts shoved around to face him. "You ain't boss in here yet. And if I ain't found someone I like less by midnight, Linton, I'm gonna have the boys pick ya up, if

only for insultin' an officer of the New York Police Department. We don't need ya this morning no more. Exit!"

Linton glanced at Steve. The stage manager turned away and sat down. Linton left.

Potts sighed and looked at Steve. "Any more to tell us, Mr. Levy?"

"No," said Steve.

"All right. Do *you* know Charlie Beach?"

"Yes."

"When did ya see him last?"

"A couple of days ago."

Potts looked up at his imaginary object on the ceiling. "Step outside for a minute, Mr. Levy."

Steve went out quickly.

Without looking down Potts said, "Mr. Boley. What about *you*?"

BILL looked at Frank. The man's usually flushed face was gray and tight. He exhaled a heavy whisky breath when he talked.

"I was in the box-office from seven-thirty on," he said.

"Have you seen Charlie Beach lately?"

"Last night." Boley looked inquiringly to Bill.

"You can tell him, Frank," Bill said.

"Bill brought him in the box-office while the third act was on. Charlie was threatening to make a stink. He wanted to get even with Leo. Bill stopped him."

Potts glanced at Bill with enlightened eyes. "Mr. Boley, you knew that Leo Murray was at Bill's place at the Chicopee after the show, didn't you?"

Boley looked puzzled. "No, I didn't."

Bill said, "Sure you didn't see Leo while you were tight?"

Boley rose angrily. His face was red again. He took a step toward Bill.

"Benedict, you're trying to wangle me into this thing. You know damn well I wouldn't touch Leo!" He was breathing hard.

"I'm not wangling you into anything," Bill said.

"Keep your shirt tucked in, Boley," Potts warned. "When was the last time ya talked to Leo?"

"When he went down for the rehearsal in the afternoon. I went down with him. I separated him from Linton when they got to fighting."

Potts turned to Bill. "When did Leo ask for the use of your room?"

"During the intermission between the first and second acts of the show."

Boley burst out, "I didn't know where Leo was, and if I had known, I wouldn't have done anything to harm him!"

"That's fine, Boley," Potts said soothingly. "You hang around the office today. I'll want to talk to ya later, maybe."

But Boley went out angrily. He slammed the door behind him.

Potts opened it and called Steve Levy in.

Steve, biting at a pipe, walked over to a chair and sat down.

Potts filled his mouth with chewing gum. "What time did Linton and Lawrence arrive at the theatre last night?"

"Just about eight-thirty. I told you that before. Bill can verify that."

"That's right, Potts, and Ruth Murray was with me," Bill said. "Steve was worried that Lawrence would be late for her entrance cue."

"And they came in a cab?" Potts persisted.

"Yes," said Bill. Steve nodded.

"What kind of a cab?"

Steve was silent.

"What kind of a cab, Bill?"

"To tell the truth, I didn't notice."

"The same with me, Mr. Potts," Steve added hastily.

"Why lie, Levy? Linton said he came in a Terminal. But it wasn't a Terminal, was it?" It wasn't a question.

Steve looked down at the pipe in his hand.

"Come on, Steve," Bill said. "Tell him what you know, if you know anything."

"I'll lose my job."

"To hell with a job, Levy! We're trying to find a murderer."

"Yeah, that's easy enough to say. But try and find a job if you get fired without a reference. I got a wife and kid."

"It don't have to go no further than me, Levy. Be a good guy and tell me. If Linton fires ya, I'll scare him into taking you back."

"It was a Yellow."

"Thanks, Levy." Potts made a note on the pad. "And don't worry about your job."

Steve left in a hurry.

POTTS smiled. "Stick to me, Bill, and you'll learn something. I may not be any educated, word-spoutin' Philo Vance. I don't take dope like Sherlock Holmes did. I don't love orchids like Nero Wolfe does. But I'll be a four-star pretzel-bender if I'm as dumb as the cops they got as stooges in them detective stories! Am I?"

"What do you do now?"

Potts studied his notes. "I don't say no one is outa consideration yet, even you and Miss Murray, but Boley's a hot Irishman with something burning his pants. Linton's lie about the cab and his coming in late ties him and his Lady friend in with something you don't know about yet."

The door opened and Ruth came in. "A call came from your office, Lieutenant. I said you were busy and they said to tell you Charlie Beach has disappeared."

Potts grunted. "He didn't sleep at home last night. His landlady said he called her this morning to tell her he was leaving town."

"The fool!" said Bill.

Ruth said, "What would *you* do if you had done it?"

The question floored him for a minute, but he grinned and said, "I'd do what I'm doing now. Stick around and act as if I were innocent."

Ruth looked at him thoughtfully, then turned and went out with that

movement of hers that was not merely walking.

Even Potts' skeptical eyes were held by that slender black figure. Then he turned back to Bill and said, "I won't bother with the cast tonight. Make it tomorrow."

In the elevator going down he got out his little black note-book and stubby pencil. In Section W, under "Women" he wrote:

All women are curious about what men think. The information they get is useful in getting around men. A few men are interested in what women think, but it doesn't do them any good. They can't get any reliable information.

Chapter V

WHEN Ruth and Bill came into the Chafing-Dish for lunch it was rather late, and there were only two men at the bar. The hulking one, seeing them in the mirror, as they passed, said without turning his head:

"There she is now."

The other one looked and said, "Forget it. Murray's gone, and we don't have to go through with the job."

The hulking one said, "He wouldn't have paid in advance if he didn't wanna make sure it was done. And maybe he set someone to check up on us. Murray was the kind of a guy to do that. I'm not takin' any chances. We'll do the job."

The other one said, "It's gonna be harder now that she's runnin' around so much with Benedict."

And across the room, at a table, Bill was saying, "The suspects who were free at the time as far as we know were Ricky Linton, Lady Lawrence, Charlie Beach and Nick Finley. Frank Boley has an alibi, and so has Steve Levy."

"So have you and so have I," said Ruth in her low, throaty voice. "And so have the United States Marines."

The waiter brought their drinks, set them on the red checkered table and went away for the food they'd ordered.

Bill downed his drink. "I'm glad to see you getting your spirit back."

"What else is there to do?" Ruth lifted the thin black veil draped from her hat and sipped her drink.

The funny thing about her eyes, Bill observed, was that no one could be sure whether they were sad or smiling. He said, "I've been meaning to ask you—what about that idea you had yesterday that someone was trying to bump you off?"

She looked down, and smiled as if embarrassed. "I think you were right, Bill. I must have been mistaken. It must have been nerves." She looked up again. "Anyway I don't feel that way now. Although, as you said, New York certainly is a dangerous place in which to live."

A tall man with a Dutchman's round beer-red face, who had entered the restaurant, walked over to their table.

"Hello, Bill."

Bill looked up, not too pleased. "Hello, Happy. Happy Vorhaus—Miss Murray . . . Well, so long, Happy."

"Thanks, Bill," said Happy. "I'd be glad to join you for a bite to eat, especially as I've got some business with you."

Bill shrugged helplessly and looked at Ruth.

"Sit down, Mr. Vorhaus," said Ruth.

The waiter brought a tureen of spaghetti with meat sauce.

"Please bring a plate for Mr. Vorhaus," Ruth said to the waiter.

"And a bottle of beer," said Happy. He turned to Bill. "What are you going to do now? I mean by way of a job?"

"I'm going to hang onto Murray Productions as long as I get paid."

"I don't think that's going to be long."

"Why not?" Bill was mildly amused by Happy's prophetic manner.

"The dope is—Ricky Linton's arranging to hire somebody else. That gives you the well-known gate." Happy

puffed out his cheeks to denote the importance of his information. "Linton don't like you, Bill."

"The feeling's mutual. Got another job for me, Happy? How about my publicizing the new python they got at the Bronx Zoo?"

"This ain't no joke," said Happy, holding his plate while Ruth heaped it with spaghetti. "Last night I was having a bite to eat with Nick Finley and—"

"Where was that?" Bill had stopped smiling.

"At the Brass Bar. That little joint on West Forty-fifth."

"At what time?"

"Oh, about half-past one. What's the idea of the third degree, Bill? You don't think I had anything to do with—" Happy looked at Ruth, who was serving Bill.

"Of course not," said Bill. "What did Finley want?"

"He said he needed a press agent for a new show of his going into rehearsal next month, and he wished he could get you."

"Why didn't Nick ask me himself?"

"Well—" Happy's eyes glanced with embarrassment toward Ruth—"being that Leo and Nick was not exactly on talking terms Nick thought that you might hesitate before going over to him. Anyway Nick asked me to kind of broach it to you."

"Good old Happy," Bill said. "Always ready to jump into the broach."

NO ONE smiled. No one seemed to be really enjoying the spaghetti, although Happy quickly did away with two enormous portions of it. He finished his beer, lit a cigar.

"What about the Finley job, Bill?"

Bill spun the sugar bowl thoughtfully. "I'll talk it over with Miss Murray. If it's okay with her I go to work tomorrow. That is if he'll pay three hundred a week?"

"I'm sure he will," Happy said quick-

ly and rose. "I'll tell him. I know he'll be glad." He bowed to Ruth. "Pleased to have met you."

When Happy had gone Bill said, "There goes one of the things that makes New York life so dangerous. Happy would just as soon slit your throat as look at you—if there's something in it for him."

Ruth clinched her cigarette. "Bill, you asked for two hundred a week more than Leo gave you."

"Yes, I know. So does Happy. Something's in the air. Finley never paid a press agent as much as that before. And it not because I'm so good."

"What was all that about their being at the Brass Bar at half-past one?"

"That may be just a coincidence. Or it may lead me to the man who hit me over the head. It may even lead me to the murderer. We'll see about that tomorrow. . . How about dessert?"

A newsboy came by and dropped a paper on the table. Bill scanned the front page as he fished for a coin in his pocket. He laid a quarter on the table without lifting his eyes from a headline which had caught them. He did not pick up the change. When he raised his eyes to Ruth they had tears in them. He handed her the paper.

She read that an airliner had crashed in the hills outside of Rio. Among those killed had been Sue Huxley. Bill bowed his head in his hands.

Ruth beckoned to the waiter, said, "No dessert," and was about to pay the check when Bill aroused himself.

"I'm all right now," he said, and paid.

They got up and went out. The two men who had been at the bar were sitting in their gray sedan at the curb, watching for them. When Bill and Ruth came out and went along with the bustling throng toward Broadway, the gray car swung out into traffic and moved slowly with them.

Ruth said, "Were you in love with Sue?"

"Not in love," said Bill. "But I loved

Sue Huxley because she was such a good scout."

"She was also your alibi."

Bill, startled, looked down at Ruth. "You're right! I guess I've lost that, too." For a moment he seemed dismayed as he took her arm and piloted her across Broadway.

And when they had gone into the entrance of the Murray Theater Building the gray car, because there was no parking place in sight, picked up speed and disappeared. . . .

At the funeral services the next day the pews of the Riverside Memorial Chapel were garnished with as many celebrities as could get out of bed that early in the afternoon. Among those present "to pay their last respects to the theatrical genius of Leo Murray," as his best enemy among the critics put it, we're all the somebodies who get their names in the columns of Ed Sullivan, Danton Walker and Walter Winchell.

Hake Potts was standing around as unobtrusively as was possible with his great bulk. He saw Bill come in and went over to him.

"Seen Charlie Beach?" he asked.

"Not unless he's hiding in Mae West's new hairdo."

"I'm sending out a statewide alarm." Potts tried to whisper, but it came out a hoarse broadcast.

Someone nearby hissed, "*Please!* This is a funeral."

Potts lowered the creases of his face into a saintlike expression and folded his large red hands in front of him.

When the services ended and people began filing into the cars to go to the cemetery Bill got separated from Potts. He looked around and saw that the detective was with Ruth Murray, earnestly talking to her. Her face was hidden behind a heavy black veil, her slender body was enveloped in a black coat.

BILL felt a strong desire to go to her and say something to comfort her, but Lady Lawrence appeared beside

him, carrying a stole of priceless broad-tail.

"My advice to you, old dear," she said abruptly, "is stay away from all Murrys. They're dangerous."

"Thanks. May I ride with Your Highness?"

"Please do . . . Ricky!" she called to Linton. "Let's go with Mr. Benedict."

In the car, she said, "A wonderful production!"

Linton beside her added, "The first Leo Murray production no one has begrudged him. I say—" he turned to Bill—"have you found that mosquito yet?"

Bill drove back from the cemetery with Potts. The detective was glum, champing his gum listlessly.

"I take it the Leo Murray mystery is still a mystery," said Bill.

"What do ya think I am? He was murdered less than forty-eight hours ago. All I have to do is think and deduct and deduct and think and then make an arrest, eh? Hell, I haven't spoken to the cast yet. I haven't seen Charlie Beach. And why ain't ya been honest with me?"

"Honest ol' Bill is what they all call me on Broadway."

"Ya said ya would help me. So why'n't ya tell me about Nick Finley?"

"Tell what?" said Bill cautiously.

Potts crumpled a piece of cellophane and threw it away. "Don't you ever read Winchell?"

"I can't read small print."

"He says Finley and Murray had a fight at Sardi's. He says you were there."

"So I was. A lot of guys have had fights with Murray before."

"But Murray wasn't murdered before. Now if Finley turns out to be the killer Winchell will say, 'I told ya so.'" Potts glanced sideward at Bill. "I saw Finley this morning."

"You did?" Bill seemed nonchalant. "What's *his* story?"

"He says he was at the theayter from

eight-thirty on. And in Central Park after the show, walking alone. How in the name of honesty can a guy check on a story like that?" Potts massaged his gums and continued casually, "He wanted to know what you were doing at that time?"

"Me!"

"He asked it offhand-like."

Bill smiled. "Very interesting. And only at lunch today he had a henchman ask me did I want to work for him. Mr. Finley needs a little going over. He's on my list."

"The law's done all it can."

"Who said anything about the law?"

Potts was silent for a moment. "Now about *your* movements after the show."

Bill looked at him sharply. "I suppose you've heard of the death of Sue Huxley."

"Yes." Potts was looking at that imaginary object, on the ceiling of the cab now. "You understand that much as I like you, Bill, I—"

"I understand. But give me a little time."

Potts nodded.

Bill said he had arranged for the examination of the cast after the performance that night. Potts said he'd be there at eleven, and they parted at the entrance to the Murray Theatre Building.

Bill went into the Western Union next door and sent a wire to Nick Finley.

Then he went up to the Murray office. The door was locked. On it was a neat sign saying it was closed for the day on account of the death of Leo Murray. Bill let himself in with his key. He picked up a pack of telegrams of condolence which had accumulated and opened them.

One telegram made him stop and whistle. He held it before him on Ruth's desk as he dialed Pott's office. The detective wasn't in.

"Any message?" the desk sergeant asked.

Bill bit a nail. "No. I'll be seeing him."

He put the telegram in his pocket. For a few minutes he sat in the darkening office without moving. Then he got up and went to Boley's office. The door was locked. He went to his own office. In the open door was a key. He took it out and tried it on Boley's lock. It worked.

FRANK'S office was dark. Bill turned on the small desk lamp. He tried all the drawers. They were unlocked. In the biggest one were six bottles of Scotch and a hundred or more paper cups. The other drawers contained old *Variety*s and box-office statements. In the last one he found something he was looking for—Boley's checkbooks.

Bill made a list of people and stores to whom checks had been drawn. One name which appeared several times interested him—the Lionel Company. He was making a note of the dates of the canceled checks when he heard the outer office door opened. Quickly he put the checkbook back in place, turned out the light and went into the hall. It was Ruth.

"Hello!"

Ruth looked at him, startled. "Bill! I thought no one was here!"

"I came in to knock out a release on the funeral."

"Oh?"

"Ruth, you oughtn't to be hanging around here."

Tears filled her eyes. She pulled nervously at her black handbag. He had never seen her like this, looking upset and helpless. She was trembling.

"I can't help it. I can't stay home. I'm terribly lonely—and frightened. Not only for me, but for you, too, Bill." In the dusky light her face was turned up to him like a fragrant flower to the sun.

He put his hands on her shoulders to comfort her. He didn't mean to, but he bent down and kissed her. Her lips were warm, too, but she did not let him hold them long.

"I'm not afraid when I'm with you, Bill," she said gently.

"Come to dinner with me."

She smiled. "Thanks. Not tonight. I couldn't eat. Some other night." She looked around the darkening room, her white hands fluttering oddly from her black-sleeved arms. "There are scripts I ought to return. I'll keep busy."

She switched on her desk light, and looked at the pile of telegrams. He offered her a cigarette. She took one, and he lit it for her.

"There's a telegram for you from the murderer," he said.

"Are you trying to be funny?"

He shook his head.

"What does it say?"

"Come and have a drink first."

She followed him into his office. He lit the lamp, opened his desk and took out a bottle of Scotch and two glasses. He poured two drinks.

"Could I have some water in mine?" she asked.

He filled her drink with water from the cooler but drank his straight. Watching her drink he said, "You're beautiful."

"No," she said.

"No, what?"

"No, I won't marry you despite what Sue Huxley said."

"Who asked you to?"

"Then why did you say I'm beautiful? Now tell me about this mysterious telegram."

"It's from John Wilkes Booth."

"Then it is a joke. Why don't you tell it to Mrs. Lincoln? She'd be interested."

"It isn't *that* John Wilkes Booth."

"Oh, little Junior! I always say, like father like son."

"You've really got spunk, Ruthie, even if you do act frightened sometimes. I like girls with spunk."

"Yes, I know. You just like girls, period."

She took the telegram he handed her and read:

RUTH MURRAY 1121A 156P R108
 MURRAY THEATRE BUILDING
 NEW YORK
 WHAT YOUR BROTHER RECEIVED
 YOU CAN RECEIVE SUGGEST YOU
 CLOSE HOUR'S END IMMEDIATELY.
 BEST RETURNS OF THE DAY
 JOHN WILKES BOOTH

"Might be just a crank," said Ruth. "Is there anyone who gets anything by closing *Hour's End*?"

"The actors wouldn't. Linton wouldn't."

"Nick Finley?"

He shook his head. "The more hits, the better it is for every producer in town. He's sore about this one, but he's not a nut. I called Potts, but he wasn't in. I'll give it to him tonight. Maybe he'll put a man on to guard you."

RUTH swallowed the rest of her drink.

"Maybe Potts can trace the wire," Bill said.

"I have an idea," said Ruth.

"I know. You think Charlie Beach sent it."

She nodded.

Bill grinned. "Even Father Brown would have got that right off. Potts is looking for Charlie. But here's something else that's harder, which you might have an idea about. What's the Lionel Company best known for?"

She looked surprised. "Why—toys. Electric trains."

"Right, Ruthie. You go to the Quiz Kids next week. Now Leo was definitely not the kind of man who builds a railroad system in his back yard, was he? Nor did he go about buying gifts for his friends' kids."

She looked down. "Leo didn't have much use for children."

"Maybe not in general, but if there was one of his own somewhere—"

"But what makes you think there might be?"

"In Frank Boley's checkbook, in an account he ran for Leo, I found the stubs of several checks drawn to the order of the Lionel Company."

Ruth handed him her glass for another drink.

"My instinct," said Bill as he poured it for her, "leads me to look up the Murrays in the marriage records at City Hall."

Ruth drank half her drink. "Listen, Bill. Leo's will was read this morning. There was no mention of a wife or child in it. He left almost all his money for a Leo Murray Drama Foundation."

"All the same I'm going to look. Want to go with me?"

"When?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. I'll let you know what time." Bill was reaching for his hat. "I've got a date. Got to see a man who's a dog. You better stay here and I'll take you home later. I'll be back by eleven when Potts is going to examine the cast after the show. Potts may not want you around, but you can hide in a hole."

"Like a rabbit?"

"No, like a sweet little fox." He leaned over and kissed her lightly. "If Boley comes in don't say anything about the checks."

"Of course not. But I think you're wrong in suspecting Frank."

There was the sound of an uncertain key in the door. It opened and Frank Boley came in.

"Speak of the devil," said Bill, and asked Ruth, "Sure you don't want to come to dinner?"

She shook her head definitely.

"So long," he said, and went out.

Boley fixed his uncertain eyes on Ruth. "What's *he* up to?"

"He's been going through your checkbooks. He noticed the checks to the Lionel Company. It set him thinking Leo might have a wife and a child somewhere. He's going to begin hunting for them."

"You can stop him."

"How?"

"Tell Benedict the truth—that the kid is yours, and that I've been helping you and keeping your secret from Leo."

Now that your brother's gone you have nothing to fear. Maybe they'll give you back the kid—and maybe you'll marry me and let me take care of the two of you. I don't care whose kid it is, Ruth, so long as it's yours. You don't ever have to tell me whose it is. I'd do anything for you."

He sat down, trembling at the mere thought of getting what he had so long desired. He drew her toward him until she stood between his knees. He put his arms around her and leaned his head against her.

"I almost killed a man for you, Ruth."

"Who?"

"Charlie Beach. He came to me and said he saw you going out of Child's Monday night in time to get to—" He stopped. "I almost killed him. I told him if he tried to tell that story to anyone else I *would* kill him. I made him leave town."

Ruth put her hand on his heavy shoulder. "You've been a faithful friend, Frank. But don't ask me to marry you yet."

"Why not?" He looked up, puzzled and hurt. "I've waited so long!"

She saw the indignation rising in his muddled eyes. She bent over and kissed him. He tried to hold her but she disengaged herself gently.

"It'll never be," he said sadly. "And what about Benedict and those checks?"

"Wait, Frank. This thing will blow over. I think Bill Benedict will soon be too involved himself to be bothering about your checks to the Lionel Company. Leave him to me."

Chapter VI

BILL found Nick Finley at home waiting for him. Finley lived alone in a penthouse apartment on Central Park South. He met Bill at the door.

"I got your wire, Bill," he said.

"I thought you'd be here."

"Have a drink?" The stocky man

walked over to a cellarette.

"Scotch straight," Bill said. He looked at the room. It was large and furnished in modern style. Bill sat down on a huge sofa which was very low, facing a great glass window through which he could see the distant lights of Harlem beyond the Park.

"Nice view, eh?" Finley asked. The Irishman's golf-rimmed glasses caught the reflection of a chromium lamp. He handed Bill a drink and sat down at the other end of the sofa.

"Beautiful," said Bill. "Now tell me something, Finley."

"Sure. What?"

"Why are you willing to pay me three hundred buckeroos each week?"

Finley moved uneasily on the couch. "You're worth it."

"For what?"

"For doing your regular p.a. job."

Bill swallowed his drink. "You're a liar, Nick."

Nick got pale. He took off his glasses and wiped them with his handkerchief. "What makes you say that?"

Bill grinned. "I think you want to hire me so you can keep your eyes on Bill Benedict. That's what I think."

Nick tried to smile. "You ain't so pretty, Bill."

"What show you plan to do?"

Finley sat back and sighed with relief. "Have another Scotch, Bill."

"Thanks. What show, Nick?"

Nick got up off the couch and went across to a wide blond oak desk. He opened a drawer, took out a manuscript and tossed it to Bill. It dropped to the floor. As Bill bent to pick it up Nick slipped a service revolver from the desk drawer into his pocket.

Bill wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he looked at the manuscript. Then he dropped it on the couch and lit a cigarette. "*Hour's End*, eh?"

"Yeah."

"What makes you think you can have it?"

"It's going to close tomorrow night.

The cast will have to be changed and I'm going to reopen it."

Bill took the "Booth" telegram from his pocket and showed it to Finley. "Is that why you sent this? To frighten Ruth Murray so she'll sell out her share?"

Finley read it and began to tremble. He took his glasses off and wiped them. "I didn't send that. For Pete's sake, Bill, I didn't have to send that. I already own Linton's share."

"You're lying!"

"I bought him out this morning. I wouldn't send such a telegram. You think I'm crazy?"

"What about Leo Murray's share?"

"I don't need it. Linton has fifty-five per cent. That's enough for me." Finley went to the desk. "I'll show you our deal." He brought out a contract. "Look."

Bill glanced through the sheet. "Why would Linton sell?"

"Because the guy's lousy with money. He don't need the play. All he wanted was to act in it. But this murder has loused it up for him, he says. He wants to get away now. He's going to marry Lawrence and go back to Europe with her."

"Oh, he is?" said Bill. "And the murder fixed it for you. It'll make you half a million if it makes a cent."

"Maybe not with Lady Lawrence out of it."

"You've got Nina Gale."

"She's all right, but she can't pull 'em in all by herself. I'm trying to get Ina Claire. And I've got to get someone good for Leo's part."

"You going to keep the revised ending?"

Finley smiled weakly. "What revised ending?"

Bill grinned. He put his glass down and stood up in front of Nick. "Don't you know about Leo's last-minute change of the end?"

NICK waved him away. "Oh sure, that. Linton told me."

"He did, eh? What is it?"

"Oh, I don't want to discuss it now. I don't like it." Finley tried to get up.

"Oh, you don't like it," Bill said, pushing him down. "You don't like it because you never saw it. And you never saw it because it was done for the first time the opening night right before the final curtain."

"Sure," said Nick.

"Sure. Now that I've told you, you remember. But you didn't a minute ago and you can't tell me what the change was because you left the theatre before the final curtain to sneak up to my room in the Chicopee to kill Leo Murray."

"You're crazy!" Nick screamed.

Bill reached down and grabbed Nick's glasses. With the knuckles of the other hand he hit Nick's head hard—and again.

"Don't you remember, Nick? I came in and you got scared—and you hit me with something hard. What was it? It couldn't have been just your fist." He hit Finley again and the short man fell to the floor. "Do you remember how you knocked me out?"

Finley dived his hand into his pocket for the revolver.

Bill saw it in time and jumped him. He pinned Nick's hand to the floor and socked a knee into him.

Nick squealed. The revolver fell from his fingers. "Stop it!" he yelled. "You'll kill me!"

"You killed Leo Murray and tried to finish me off!" Bill slid his fingers around Nick's fat throat. "You did, didn't you?"

Nick gasped. "I'll tell—you! Let—me—up."

Bill released his hold and pulled Finley to his feet. He picked up the gun. "Sure, you'll tell me."

Nick dropped to the couch. "Get me a drink," he said weakly.

"You haven't any more of these toys around?" Bill waved the gun.

Finley shook his head. Then Bill poured a glass of Scotch for Finley and one for himself. Bill drank his. Finley

was still trying to catch his breath.

"Where are my glasses?" His near-sighted blue eyes blinked.

Bill picked them up and put them on him. Perspiration dripped from Finley's bald dome. Bill pulled his big linen handkerchief from his breast pocket.

"Here," he said, "wipe yourself. You're all wet."

Finley took some of his drink. "What about the revision? Did you just trip me up, or is that a fact?"

"The McCoy. If you were there you'd know the end had been changed. You knew how Charlie's play ended. Leo stole it from you, didn't he?"

"Sure he stole it."

"And you killed him."

"I didn't kill him."

"But you were in my room."

Finley drank some more of the whisky and coughed. "Yes, I went there but—I found Leo dead when I arrived."

"How did you know he was in my room?"

"I sat through the first two acts like a man sitting on fire. Then I met you in the intermission—remember? But I couldn't sit through the third act to the end and watch my million dollars going into another man's pocket. I went around to the stage door to wait for him. I saw his sister get rid of the fans, and when Leo came out I made him let me ride in the cab with him as far as the Chicopee."

Finley wiped his head. "I begged him for ten per cent. A million dollars he stole from me. It could be like *Grand Hotel* or *Our Town*. The least he could do was to cut me in. I was willing to pay for it but Leo was a guy without a heart. Something you step on before it bites you. A cockroach, a scab, a louse."

"Cut out the eulogy. What did you do then?"

"I walked around like a crazy man, maybe for an hour. Then I went back to the Chicopee. I was only going to threaten him unless he gave me a share of the show." Finley was trembling.

"Maybe I would've killed him. I don't know. My God, I don't know! I got into the room. The lights were on. I saw him on the floor, the knife sticking into his back like a toothpick in an olive. Then I heard the elevator and steps coming to the door. I picked up a book-end and turned out the light."

BILL touched his temple. "Yeah, I remember."

"I had sense enough to wipe the book-end and put it back, and then I beat it. I didn't kill Leo."

"Do you think the cops will believe you?"

"Bill, you ain't going to tell 'em, are you?"

"Sure." Bill got his hat and put it on.

"Bill, it'll kill me. I won't be able to stand it." Bill walked to the door relentlessly. "I'll give you a cut of the show if you shut up."

"How big a cut?"

Finley's eyes narrowed. "Two per cent."

"You cheap skate! For two per cent you want me to save you from the chair?"

"Five per cent," Finley bid, breathing hard.

"Not for your whole fifty-five," Bill replied. "I'm not a blackmailer. But I'll take your offer of the job beginning tomorrow—so I can keep an eye on you."

"But you won't tell the cops?" Finley kept wiping his chin.

"Not if I can find someone else who killed Leo. Where were you at one-thirty last night?"

Finley's lips twisted. "Walking in Central Park. I told that to Potts."

"Yeah. That's what you told *him*. But you're talking to *me* now. Come clean or—"

"I was at the Brass Bar, on Forty-fifth."

"With Happy Vorhaus. And you phoned the police from there. Why?"

"I was going crazy. I thought if they

found you there alone with him they might pin it on you. Looks now like Linton might've done it. Wish I'd've thought of that before. I couldn't beat him down in the sale."

"I'm going to reward you for your frankness, Nick. I won't tell Potts about you—yet." He pointed the revolver at Finley. The producer cringed on the couch. "But if you try anything funny, my friend, I'm going to *give* you to Potts. In pieces. Good night."

Bill tossed the revolver on to the couch and left.

Chapter VII

POTTS was out in front of the stage entrance with some plainclothes men when Bill arrived at the theatre.

"Picked up Charlie Beach yet?" Bill asked.

"Nope," Potts answered sullenly. "He's probably living next door to the police station. It's the safest place."

"An admission, Lieutenant. I thought you—"

"Ice it and put it away, what you thought. All cops ain't dumb and all cops ain't Perry Masons."

"My but you're in a bad mood, Lieutenant!"

"I'm working myself up for the questioning I got to do when the show's over."

People began seeping out of the theatre doors with the applause of the final curtain calls. Jimmy Burke came over.

"It's curtain time, Mr. Potts."

"Don't let nobody in, Burke," Potts ordered and went in back-stage followed by his men.

Bill went up to the office to get Ruth. She had cleaned up her desk. Boley wasn't there.

Bill said, "Finley was the man who knocked me out—but he didn't kill Leo. ~~That~~ was someone else."

Ruth was putting on her hat. Under the heavy black veil her gray-green eyes

were like cool pools in the shade. You wanted to get into them.

"Who do you think it was?" she asked.

"Linton's my best bet now. Let's go down and see how he acts for Potts."

As they came out of the building Ruth said, "There's a friend of yours. He wants to see you."

It was Happy Vorhaus, smiling, red-faced, who had apparently been waiting for Bill. "You're together so much. Whyn't you two get hitched?"

Bill said, "That's been suggested before. Miss Murray is considering it. What's really on your mind?"

Happy glanced at Ruth.

Bill said, "Since we're practically one happy family you can speak freely."

Happy said to Ruth, "Sure—and besides this should interest you, too, Miss Murray." To Bill he said, "Will ya gimme five grand if I put my finger on the guy who knifed Leo Murray?"

Bill said right back, "Make it two."

Happy's pleasant expression did not change. "Five."

"Three," said Bill.

"I told ya five," Happy glanced at Ruth. "Ya don't gimme it, I get it somewhere else."

Bill said, "Okay. When?"

"I'll have to have a couple of days."

"Take all the time you want, Happy. I'll need a little myself to get that much dough."

Bill took Ruth's arm and went with her into the theatre, which was empty now. They sat down in the front row.

The curtain had been rung up again and the cast and stage crew were scattered around the stage on various prop chairs and couches. In one corner sat Lady Lawrence, looking disdainfully amused, her dark hair glossy under the amber and rose spotlights. Standing by her was Ricky Linton, looking disdainfully annoyed.

Potts stood in the center of the stage with Steve Levy, checking a list of the company and stage hands.

"All right," he was saying, "I'm satisfied with everyone but Lady Lawrence and Mr. Linton. See that they don't leave, McNally. The rest of you clear out."

They hurried away back-stage.

Potts tossed some fresh gum into his big mouth.

Ricky Linton strode toward Potts. Before he had a chance to smack a fist into the detective's face McNally grabbed him.

"Hold him, Mac. If he don't like it, dirty that starched shirt of his."

Linton said, "You'll be walking a beat in Brooklyn for this."

Potts laughed. "Everybody from Dutch Schulz up and down has threatened me with Brooklyn and I'm still on Broadway. And anyway, what's wrong with Brooklyn? I live there."

A couple of stage hands lingering in the wings laughed.

"Get on with you!" shouted Potts, and they disappeared.

"I want to see my lawyer," Lady Lawrence said shrilly.

"I'm not arresting you, lady. Just holding you temporarily for questioning. Maybe when I'm through you'll get to see your lawyer." Potts sat down, stretched his thick legs and pointed a pudgy finger at Linton. "Why'd ya clinch with Murray at the last rehearsal?"

RICKY suddenly relaxed. "He insulted me while we were arguing about his sudden decision to change the end of the play."

"That's a fair reason. But that wouldn't of been enough for murder, would it? Could it of been that you wanted to lift his keys from his pocket?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"All right, Linton. Then why did ya lie to me about coming to the theater in a Terminal cab?"

"I didn't lie."

"It was a Yellow."

"I'm not in the habit of making entries in my diary as to what kind of taxi I take. I thought it was a Terminal."

"Ya knew it was a Yellow but ya didn't want me to check where ya took it from. That was foolish, Linton. When Terminal had no record of a trip from River House to the theavter, I tried the other companies. Even the driver recognized you Lady Lawrence." Potts opened his notebook. "Ya took the cab at Central Park West at ten minutes past eight. What were ya doing there?"

"Ask my lawyer about that."

"But I'm asking *you*." Potts' prognathous jaw came out further.

Lady Lawrence leaned toward Linton. "Don't let this ape make you say anything you don't want to, Ricky."

Potts reddened. "Lady, you better save your speeches for an audience that pays. Funny that you two should go calling on Leo Murray when you knew he was here at the theayter."

Linton adjusted his white tie. Lady Lawrence followed the pattern of the couch with her finger.

"What was Leo Murray to you, Lady Lawrence?"

She raised her cold blue eyes to him. "I've forgotten."

Potts stood up. "All right. Now try to forget this. Leo Murray's been giving ya a weekly check for the past year. Maybe he was just a good Samaritan though no one else thought that of Leo . . . Sit down, Linton!"

"I will not!" He lifted a vase and threw it at Potts.

Potts ducked, kicked over a chair that stood in front of him and slammed a large bricklike fist into Linton's jaw. Linton staggered. Lady Lawrence screamed, got up and swung her handbag at Potts. With one hand the detective caught hold of Linton's arm and twisted it.

"Let him go!" shrieked Lady Lawrence. "You're killing him!"

"Call a cop, why don't ya?" Potts

grunted. Linton slumped to the floor.

"What do you want of us?" Lady Lawrence knelt at Linton's side. Potts and McNally helped him up and sat him on a chair.

"I want nothing but the truth. Why did ya break into Murray's apartment the night of the murder?"

She looked at Linton. He lowered his eyelids and made a slight movement of his head. "We did not break into Mr. Murray's apartment," she said. "We weren't anywhere near it."

Linton got to his feet, straightened his tie. "And put that on your tape recorder and play it."

"What was ya looking for?"

"Lady Lawrence just told you we weren't there." Linton brushed his clothes. "Prove it. Where is your evidence?"

"If you have any evidence," said Lady Lawrence, walking offstage, "why not arrest us? And why not arrest Mr. Benedict, who was having a quarrel with Mr. Murray when I came to his dressing room between the first and second act? Or Miss Murray, who may not have wanted her brother to marry someone who would deprive her of his wealth?"

"I'll arrest people only when it suits me, lady," said Potts.

Linton took her arm. "Let's get out of here. Unless—" he turned to Potts—"the police would like to stop us?"

"No," said Potts. "I give ya the freedom of the city. As for our little argument, fair exchange is not even petty larceny."

They went out.

Potts came to the footlights rubbing his fist.

"Well!" Bill said. "That was quite a show."

"Well," Potts asked, "would you like to come up and do a turn?"

"Well," said Ruth, getting up, "I thought you had a date with me, Bill."

Potts looked sharply at Ruth. "Let's all three make a date," said Potts.

HE TOOK them to a room he kept in the New Yorker Hotel, which served him as a place to sleep when he was working late and didn't feel like going to Brooklyn.

He poured out three large drinks of Irish pot-still whisky, took off his coat and put a flowery smoking jacket.

The typical hotel room was cluttered with Potts' untidy paraphernalia. But over the bed he had hung a copy of the familiar marble death mask of a French girl. Ruth, holding her drink, stood looking at the smooth, lovely young face.

Potts said, "They say she was fished out of the river in Paris—committed suicide because some guy gave her the gate."

"A girl's a fool who commits suicide for that reason," said Ruth.

Bill smiled. "You said it. In her place you would have drowned *him*, eh, Ruthie? What's that old saying—'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned?'"

"I want to talk about the case." Potts turned to Ruth. "Can you stand it?"

She was sipping her drink. "Please go ahead," she said.

Potts gave her a pencil and pad. "You can take shorthand—take this down. And you listen, Bill. When I went over to Leo Murray's apartment night before last his sister—" Ruth was writing as calmly as if it were someone else he was talking about—"said someone had broken into the apartment that night. She couldn't say just what time. She had left the apartment before eight, and when she got home she noticed that someone had been fooling with Leo's desk. Its contents were disturbed and Leo's keys were in it. His sister showed me a secret drawer which the searcher hadn't found. It had some letters from Lady Lawrence to Leo, and fifty-odd weekly checks he had made out to her."

He tossed the package of canceled checks to Bill.

"Putting the checks and letters together it was clear that Leo had been supporting her for a year before he got

her this new play. Tonight I tried to scare her and Linton into giving themselves away and establishing their motive for the murder."

"That's simple," said Bill. "Ricky and Her Highness want to get married. She wanted to get those checks and letters back so Leo couldn't use them to blackmail her or Ricky." Bill refilled his glass.

"That fits," said Potts. "Don't you think so, Miss Murray? I hope this isn't bothering you."

"Not at all—not at all." She handed her empty glass to Bill to be refilled.

"This is pretty strong stuff," said Bill, who had been lapping it up.

"Never refuse a woman," said Potts.

Bill filled her glass. She rewarded him with a smile.

"Now suppose we keep adding one and one," Potts went on. "Suppose we say that not having found the letters and checks, and knowing that Leo is at Bill Benedict's place after the show, Linton goes over there and demands them. Leo threatens blackmail. Linton loses his temper—you saw how easily he does that—and picking up your handy Boy Scout knife—"

Ruth was sipping her drink and writing.

Bill said, "We don't have to go over that, do we?" He was looking at Ruth but Ruth did not even look up.

"I'm just deducting, that's all," said Potts, "and to do that ya must go over the thing from different angles. Like them crossword puzzles. Ya don't know a word but ya stick something in to see if it fits. If it does, okay. If it don't, ya try something else."

Potts unbuttoned his shoes and hoisted his feet up to a bureau top.

"Here's something else," he said. "The medical examiner can tell approximately the height and strength of the murderer by studying the angle of the wound. For example—"

Potts got up suddenly and went to Bill, who was standing with his back turned, filling his glass. Ruth looked up.

Potts took a pencil out of his pocket.

"The natural hitting stroke with a knife is down from above your shoulder." He raised the pencil above his head and stabbed Bill in the back.

"Hey! You mustn't hit a guy with liquor in his arms. I almost spilled it!"

"Stand still," Potts said.

Keeping Bill from turning around, he went on talking directly to Ruth, who had stopped writing.

"**WE** FIGURED from the way the body fell," he said to her, "he had his back turned and the murderer jabbed the knife in near the backbone, a bit to the left. If the killer was short the knife would have gone in lower. Here—" Potts took Ruth's hand and drew her to her feet—"you stab Bill with your pencil."

"I couldn't do that to Bill," she said a bit thickly, trying to free her hand.

Potts did not let go. "Just once."

"All right," said Ruth, suddenly compliant, "if you insist."

"You can't knife me, Ruth!" Bill cried. It was apparent that the whisky was getting to him, too. "We're not married yet."

"Eventually. Why not now?"

"You mean marry me?"

"No, knife you." She jabbed the pencil at his back. It landed about halfway down his spine and snapped.

"That hurt!" said Bill.

"You see what I mean?" Potts said, watching Ruth. "She hit you every bit of five inches lower than I did. That's because she's shorter."

"God help me if she were a pigmy."

Ruth, who had sat down on the bed, shied a pillow at Bill. Bill ducked and the pillow knocked over Mr. Potts' whisky, which he had hardly touched. The whisky wet his pants.

He laughed. "I'll have you both run in. This ain't no play street."

"Mr. Potts," said Ruth with elaborate gravity. "I—am deeply—'pologetic. I 'pologize and beg—"

Bill glanced at Ruth. Her gray-green

eyes, with a slight glaze on them, were drooping. Then she tried to rise and put out a wavering hand for help.

"I—guess—I'm going to—pass out." She fell over gently.

"She sure guessed right," Potts said drily as he lifted her legs to the bed and put a pillow under her head. "Never even let her smell Irish whisky again. It's death to females."

Bill said curiously, "Then why did you give it to her?"

"Just wanted to see if it still works. Don't worry, she'll come back. Anyway it looks like a tall man murdered Leo. Might've been as tall as you."

Bill, who had been looking down at her loveliness, glanced keenly at Potts. "I'm glad it didn't work this time."

"Fall for her, eh?"

Bill didn't answer. He took the John Wilkes Booth telegram out of his pocket and gave it to Potts, who read and re-read it, working the gum in his mouth reflectively.

"Can you find out who sent it?" Bill asked.

"No murderer leaves his name and address and telephone number. The bloke may have phoned it in from a pay station."

"That's fine."

"I'll stick someone on her tail so no harm comes to her." He nodded toward Ruth.

"Do that," said Bill, looking at her face, flushed like a sleeping child's under the halo of honey-colored hair.

Potts waved the telegram. "Sounds like a nut, don't it?"

"Could be Charlie Beach."

"Yeah. Could be Ricky Linton. Could be Nick Finley."

"No," said Bill.

"Why not?"

"Nick hasn't the guts."

"It don't take guts to send a wire."

"I meant—to kill Leo."

Potts sighed like the exhaust of a Mack truck. "All right. Then between Beach and Linton I choose Beach."

"On what?"

"A cross between a hunch and neuralgia. Like knowing it'll rain tomorrow. That's the feeling I've got now about this Beach."

"Charlie is short. You said he had to be tall as me."

Potts grinned. "Guess that rules out Beach. Though theories often have holes. You can be sure only that Murray was standing with his back toward the killer."

"That means he trusted the murderer."

POTTS looked at Bill in disgust.

"There you go swallowing that mystery story sewerage. It could be all his relatives and friends and enemies. Take Nick Finley, for example. That money-eating cannibal probably would've liked to sink his teeth in a piece of Murray. But would Murray be so suspicious he wouldn't turn around for a minute, maybe to reach for a cigarette? Bush-wah!"

"All right, all right. So where are you now?"

"Damned if I know." Potts yawned and jerked his thumb toward the sleeping girl on the bed. "How's about taking your friend home?"

Bill shook Ruth's shoulder. She opened her eyes and sat up.

"What happened to me?"

Potts winked at Bill and said, "Congratulations, Mrs. Benedict."

"I couldn't have been that drunk."

She looked at Bill, who said, "I'll take you home now."

"Thank you, Bill." She got up and took his arm.

When they were gone Potts got from his jacket the little black note-book and his stubby pencil. In Section W under "Women" he wrote:

Women are like men in one way—maybe the only way—they are more likely to fall for what's dangerous than what's safe.

In the taxi Ruth leaned her head on Bill's shoulder.

And at her door she let him kiss her,

long and long—so long that he knew he had lighted a flame in that cool lovely lamp.

When he returned to the Chicopee, he found a note in his mailbox:

Bill—

Very important that I see you. I have something to tell you. Make it at the 45th Street end of Shubert's Alley tomorrow night at eleven. Please don't tell cops or anyone and come alone. Please.

Charlie B.

Chapter VIII

WHEN Bill dropped into the office the next afternoon to get his things, the end of Leo Murray Productions was well under way. There were no actors and actresses in the outer office. The stack of play scripts which usually leaned precariously in the corner like the Tower of Pisa had been broken into small piles for return to the various agencies. Ruth was directing a couple of boys who were packing papers in cardboard cases.

"It's all over, isn't it?" Bill said.

Ruth looked into his eyes, without answering for a moment. Her face was paler than usual and Bill thought it was that Irish whisky of the night before. He wondered if what had followed had also been due to the whisky.

"Yes, Bill. Linton's sold out to Nick Finley and there's nothing for me to do but move Leo's stuff home."

"Can I help you, Ruth?"

Shes took hold of his hand. "I'm worried, Bill, about something. There's a gray car I keep seeing wherever I go. This morning, leaving the house, and again on my way to lunch."

Bill smiled. "That's nothing to worry about. On the contrary. That's Potts' man trailing you to see that no one gets to you. Stick around with me and I bet you won't see that car."

"But this car—" The telephone rang. Ruth answered it. "It's for you, Bill." She handed him the receiver.

"Hello?"

It was Hake Potts. "I'm getting worried about Beach. Not a trace—"

"Be a good boy, Potts, and I may give you some dope on Charlie tomorrow morning. Or even late tonight."

"What?" Potts sounded as if he had swallowed his gum. "Say, if you're holding out on me one drop of dope I'll hang ya as an accomplice before and after the fact."

"I'm not holding a thing—yet."

"Charlie get in touch with ya?"

"Yes."

"Where are ya going to see him?"

"Want to scare him away?" Bill hung up softly.

"Are you going to see Charlie Beach?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, I'm going to see him tonight."

Ruth said, "I wish Charlie hadn't come back. I've been thinking how wonderful it would be if he just disappeared with his guilt."

Bill sighed. "That's a nice dream. But maybe he isn't guilty? Maybe he's got an alibi. Everyone else seems to have. Where's Frank Boley?"

"He's in his office, fortifying himself against the loss of his job."

"Did you ask him about those checks to the Lionel Company?"

"No. He's got enough to drive him to drink as it is."

Bill went along the corridor. Frank's door was locked. He knocked at it.

"It's Bill, Frank."

He got no answer. He went on to his own office and took from the drawers the few things he wanted, made a package and went back to Ruth's desk.

"Tell Frank I think I can make Nick Finley give him a job. Tell him to give me a buzz."

"I will."

"I'll take these things home and then I have an errand downtown. Will you meet me at three o'clock in front of City Hall?"

"I think it's a waste of time," she said. "But I'll be there."

He leaned over and kissed her. Her

lips were as warm and sweet as they had been the night before.

When he had gone she went to Frank Boley's door and knocked on it. "Let me in, Frank. It's Ruth." The door opened and she went in. . . .

AT THREE o'clock Ruth was on the steps in front of the City Hall. In dull black with touches of white, she was ravishing.

She said to Bill, "I saw that gray car again a moment ago when I got out of the cab."

He looked around. There was no gray car in sight.

"It's gone now," she said.

"What did I tell you? It's one of Potts' men. Seeing me with you he knew you'd be all right. You should keep me around all the time. That gives me an idea. Before we go to the Record Office let's stop in and see a friend of mine."

"Who?"

Bill smiled mysteriously. "Just a friend."

He steered her into the Marriage Bureau and stopped in front of a clerk.

"I want a marriage license," Bill said.

"Who are you going to marry?" asked Ruth.

"You. It'll save wear and tear on Potts' men, and it's good for heart-burn."

"Why not try bicarbonate?"

"What's the name of the man?" the clerk intruded sourly.

"William Benedict."

"And the bride?"

Ruth kept quiet.

"Ruth Murray," said Bill.

But when the clerk asked their ages and addresses and their parents' names she answered. When it came to signing Ruth asked the clerk whether she *had* to get married once she put her name on the application for the license.

"Lady," said the clerk, "you are your own boss now and you can be your own boss yet. This paper—" he waved the license indifferently—"don't mean a

thing. As far as the city's consigned you can use it to make out your next week's laundry list."

"Thanks for the suggestion." She signed it.

"That was a pretty gesture, Bill," she said as they went along the corridor to the Record Office. "You certainly know what to do to cheer a girl up."

"Never can tell," he said. "It might come in handy one of these days. We'll be alone in your apartment or mine and I'll have your highball nicely doped or maybe I'll just give you some Irish whisky. 'Will you marry me?' I'll say, and you'll be too cat-eyed to deny me anything. So you'll say yes. And if I have to wait to get the license the next day you'll change your mind. This way we can get the ball rolling right away."

"You think of everything," Ruth said.

They spent the rest of the afternoon going through dusty card catalogues and ledgers.

"There are almost as many Murrays in New York as Cohns and Smiths," said Bill.

Ruth kept telling him they were wasting their time. She proved to be right. There were records of the marriages of two Leo Murrays but neither one could have been the man they were looking for.

At the end, Bill said, "You win. Let's go and eat."

When they came out on the steps, Ruth looked around. There was no sign of a gray car. She looked relieved. She looked happy. She took his arm and they walked across the pleasant square to a Russian restaurant where they had onion cakes and sour cream and he held her knees between his under the table and was sure it wasn't just the Irish whisky that had lighted the flame in her the night before.

In the warm October twilight they walked through the deserted business district all the way up to Washington Square. They got on top of a bus there and rode up Fifth Avenue. Bill put his

arm around her and leaned her head on his shoulder. At 110th Street they fell asleep. At 168th Street and Broadway the conductor woke them up for their return fares.

A little later Bill pointed to the Hudson gleaming below them. "Look, darling, Niagara Falls."

Ruth looked up at him from under those long lashes and said, "You're wonderful."

BILL glanced at his watch. "Say, driver," he called down, "I want to get off at ten o'clock."

The driver said, "All right." Then, realizing what Bill had said, he said, "Nuts! Greenwich Village nuts!"

Ruth said, "I wish you wouldn't go. Forget Charlie Beach."

Bill said, "I'd like to, but I can't. This may clear things up. I'll come to your place right afterwards."

She sat quietly after that. At ten o'clock they were at 72nd Street. The driver called up to them.

"I have to leave you now," said Bill.

He kissed Ruth on her warm red lips and darted down the steps. He waved up to her, signaled a passing taxi and hopped into it.

"Forty-fifth and Broadway, brother," he said and leaned back, feeling sure things were going to be cleared up.

At a quarter to eleven he walked toward Shubert's Alley from Broadway. The audiences had not been let out yet. Groups of chauffeurs stood chatting in the warm squares of golden light thrown on the sidewalks from the lobbies. Ranked along the curb from Broadway to Eighth Avenue were limousines, reflecting the lights over the theatres. Taxis filled the middle of the street, purring like cats ready to pounce.

Bill took his stand a little way in the Alley next to the Booth Theatre. It was dark at his end, except for the red exit lights. He lit a cigarette and waited. His eyes moved along the length of the

Alley and up and down west 45th Street.

A few minutes before eleven the streets came alive with the first of the departing audiences. Gradually the wave of movement and noise mounted. Hackies raced their motors, chauffeurs started their limousines. The doors of the John Golden Theatre opened, then the Booth, letting out a burst of applause.

The little area at the end of the Alley became a whirlpool of people swirling in from the street, with the honking of horns and cries of, "Taxi—taxi!" and friends calling to each other and laughter and pushing and yelling.

"Hello," said a low voice beside Bill, and he was suddenly confronted by Charlie Beach.

"Where did you come from?"

Charlie made a quick gesture with his thin hand. "What's the difference?" His burning eyes shifted from side to side fearfully. He grabbed Bill's arm. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"What's up?"

They started pushing their way through the crowd.

"I've got to talk to you!" The words came with desperate rapidity. "You didn't tell anyone, did you?"

Bill almost got knocked off his feet by a stout gentleman with a flying white muffler who was making a dash for his car at the curb. He felt Charlie's fingers lose their grip on his arm. He was engulfed in the crowd. He lost sight of Charlie.

Then he saw him a few feet away, struggling to get back to Bill. His eyes burning with fear, Charlie was roughly elbowing his way through a group of chattering women. He must have hurt one of them. She stopped him, protesting.

Then Bill thought a car back-fired loudly, until he saw Charlie stiffen up and turn his head wildly from side to side.

"Bill!" he called, and slumped against the people around him, who drew back

from him in fear as he fell to the sidewalk.

Bill pushed toward him.

A woman screamed, "He's hurt! Get a doctor!"

A pool of blood was spreading around Charlie from a hole in his back. Bill turned him over and looked at the boy's anguished face. He was dead.

"Get back!" Bill ordered the well-dressed men and women who were trying to push in to see what was the matter. Charlie's blood lapped the toes of their evening shoes. They stepped hastily away. "Someone get a cop!"

A doorman whistled three times. From Broadway came an answer. A couple of cops ran up.

Bill pointed to Charlie's body. "Call Lieutenant Potts."

"You come along with me," said one of the cops.

"Sure—just a minute," said Bill. He leaned unsteadily over the curb and was sick.

Chapter IX

YA SURE do get around," Potts said with a chuckle that had no humor in it. "Is this what ya meant when ya said on the phone you'd have something to tell me about Charlie Beach tonight?"

Bill was silent. He took a long pull at his cigarette and closed his eyes. He was trying to recall the faces of all the people he had seen in Shubert's Alley. It made him feel sick, dizzy and hopeless. So did the voice of Hake Potts.

"Leo Murray gets killed in *your* room. Charlie Beach gets shot while walking with *you*. You should wear horseshoes. You need 'em."

"At least the hind pair," said Bill, opening his eyes.

Potts's office phone rang. He answered, listened. "Yeah . . . Uh . . . Okay . . . All right, send out word to be on the look-out for a thirty-eight service-type revolver . . . Okay." He hung

up and turned to Bill.

"A service-type revolver," Bill said.

"Plenty of them around."

"Yeah. Know anybody has one?"

Bill didn't answer.

"You were right near Beach when he got it. Didn't ya see nobody?"

Bill shook his head.

"Was it you?"

Bill smiled bitterly. "No."

Potts moved uneasily out of his chair and walked across the room, shaking his head from side to side like a big dog trying to shake off something annoying. Finally he said, "Well, that gets rid of Charlie Beach."

Bill said, "I assume that Beach had something on Leo Murray's murderer which he was going to tell me tonight. So Charlie was wiped out."

Potts looked at him skeptically. "What else do you assume?"

Bill deliberately opened a fresh pack of cigarettes. "That the murderer doesn't know Charlie didn't get a chance to say anything."

"So what?"

"So maybe I'm next on his list."

"So what?" Potts looked as if that were a matter of complete indifference to him.

"So I'd like to find that guy before he finds me."

"You wouldn't rather I'd put you away where he couldn't get to you?"

"No, I wouldn't. I'd rather you'd let me go look for him."

Potts was considering his imaginary object on the ceiling. "All right, go ahead. See how long you can keep out of the hands of the cops this time."

Bill got up quickly and reached for his hat. "Thanks," he said.

Potts stopped him at the door with a quiet question. "Anybody know you was going to meet Charlie Beach tonight?"

"No . . . yes."

"Who?"

"Ruth Murray."

"Oh."

"She didn't know where or just when.

I left her at ten o'clock."

"Where?"

"At Seventy-second Street and Riverside Drive. On top of a bus."

"So you've taken to riding on top of a bus. Well, isn't that ducky?"

Bill was gone before he had finished.

He got out of his cab a block away from Nick Finley's place on Central Park South. He made sure that he wasn't being followed and walked the rest of the way.

Finley opened his door cautiously.

"Oh—it's you!"

"Who'd you think it was—the cops?"

Finley locked and bolted the door.

"What's the matter, Nick? You look terrible."

"What kept you so long?"

"Kept me?"

"I been ringing you at the Chicopee since six o'clock. It was important. What do ya think I'm paying you three hundred a week for?"

"I thought I told you." Bill poured himself a drink. "What did you want, Nick?"

"I'm in a helluva fix. I'm being blackmailed!"

BILL laughed out loud.

"What's so damned funny?" Finley shouted.

"I'm sorry, Nick. But just the idea of *you* being blackmailed." His face straightened. "Is it Happy Vorhaus?"

Nick's jaw dropped. "How did you know?" Fear swept over his face, taking all the blood with it. "Has he started talking? I was with him all the time after I saw Leo, and now he wants ten thousand dollars, says he'll go to the cops and say I threatened to kill Leo and that he wasn't with me at the time Leo was killed. Something's gotta be done, Bill."

Bill put down his glass. "Is that all to the story?"

"So help me, Bill." Finley's face was covered with beads of perspiration. "Bill, you gotta get me out of this. Go

down and see Happy. Talk hard-boiled to him. You used to be a dick. You know how to handle mugs. I'll give you a grand if you get rid of him. He lives at Three hundred ten West Twentieth. Maybe you can scare him off."

"I'll try." Bill drained his glass. "Only it'll cost five grand."

"Five grand!"

"Happy wants ten. You give me five. That's settling for fifty cents on the dollar."

"Okay, I'll do it. But you got to get him off my neck for good."

Bill held out his hand, but not to shake.

Finley said, "You have to have the dough right now?"

"Yes."

"You don't trust me?" Finley looked hurt.

"Sure, I trust you, Nick. Only I work better when I'm well oiled."

"I suppose you want cash."

"You guessed it." Nick turned away to get the money. "And I'd like the use of that service-type revolver you had here to help scare him."

Nick returned with five one-thousand-dollar bills in his hand. "I'm not giving you a gun, Bill. If anything happened it'd be traced to me."

"Have you still got it?"

Nick ignored the question. "I'm not giving you a gun. Now what if Happy doesn't scare?"

Bill got up and took the money from his hand. "I'll return forty-five hundred. The other five is a service charge." He pocketed the money. "By the way, Nick, Charlie Beach was murdered an hour or so ago. He was killed by a service-type revolver."

Nick's face flushed, then blanched. "*Charlie!*"

"Yes."

Finley took off his glasses and wiped them with trembling hands. "This is terrible," he whispered.

"Yes, I figured that's what you'd think." Bill went out.

Nick stood still until he heard the elevator descending. Then he went to the telephone and dialed a Chelsea number.

"Hello . . . Call Mr. Vorhaus to the phone." He waited. "Happy? . . . This is Finley . . . Yeah. I made up my mind to come through. I'm sending Benedict with ten grand for you . . . Yeah, ten grand. And that's all you get from me . . . Okay."

He cradled the phone. He wiped his brow, muttering, and poured himself a drink.

Bill took a cab to the Chicopee. He told the driver to wait. He went upstairs and shoved the five bills under the corner of the carpet in his living room, then he went down and gave the driver Happy's address. He arrived at the shabby Chelsea tenement at one o'clock. He climbed the four flights to Happy's grimy flat and was a little surprised to observe that Happy was not surprised to see him.

Happy asked him to sit down, and pushed over a half-empty bottle of rye. "Drink?"

"Thanks, I don't care for rye. I got the money for you."

Happy nodded.

"Who killed Leo Murray?"

Happy looked surprised. Bill thought he was trying to be funny. "I haven't any time to waste, Happy. You tell me who murdered Leo, and I give you five grand."

"Ya gonna give me just *five* grand?"

Bill smiled. "Sure. That's what we agreed."

HAPPY rubbed his chin speculatively, without taking his eyes off Bill. He got up, went to the window, and looked out at the street.

"Well?" said Bill.

Happy turned. "Why do you want to doublecross me, Bill? I thought you was smart, but you're a dope. I know Finley sent you down here with ten grand, not five. To buy me off him, see? Not to find out what I know."

"Finley call you?"

"Sure. Ya think he's a dope like you?"

"Happy, I'm going to ask you a question." Bill watched Happy's right hand. "Did you kill Charlie Beach with your own gun or with Finley's service-type revolver?"

"You're way off the beam, Bill. I didn't know this Beach guy."

"What do you know about Finley?"

"That he gave ya ten grand to give me."

"Why?"

"Because he loves me. Now put the ten on the table."

Bill grinned. "One minute, Happy. If your sense of sportsmanship stops you from squealing on Mr. Finley, let me tell *you* how it happened. You'll just have to say yes or no. Nick Finley hired you to kill Murray or to help him do it. You did. You got paid for it.

"Now you're blackmailing him for more, and you were planning to put the bee on me and Ruth Murray. You sent her that John Wilkes Booth telegram to frighten me. Somehow Charlie Beach knew about your part in the murder. You had to get rid of him. You found out that he was going to meet me tonight at eleven o'clock in Shubert's Alley. I don't know how you found out, but you did.

"You killed him with a thirty-eight service type revolver. The cops know that already. What they don't know is that I saw a rod like that up in Finley's apartment. I asked him for it tonight. He didn't have it. My guess is it's here. What do you say, Happy?"

Happy laughed out loud. "You're a dope, Bill, a twenty-one-jewel dope."

"What's wrong with the picture?"

Happy opened a dresser drawer and took out a service-type gun. "You're right about my sending that telegram, and here's Finley's gun. But I got an alibi not even you can break. Ya know what? At eleven o'clock, when I'm supposed to be slippin' it to Beach—" He fished in the pocket of his jacket.

"What's your alibi?"

Happy brought out a piece of paper and shoved it in Bill's face. "A ticket for passing a red light. Got it right down here at Twenty-third Street. The time is marked on it. Now you dumb cluck, gimme my ten grand and get the hell out of here." He aimed the gun at Bill.

"I haven't got the money."

The pleasant expression on Happy's round red face did not change, only became more fixed.

"I left it home," Bill said, then something terrific hit him. Happy had slammed the gun down on his head.

Bill tried to duck but it hit him again. He fell to the floor.

Happy turned Bill over on his back and dug quickly through his pockets. There was no money in them except small change and a few bills in his wallet. Happy took those. He gathered a few clothes in a handbag and left the flat, locking the door behind him. . . .

ABOUT two o'clock Ruth got tired of waiting for Bill. She went downstairs to get a morning paper and a package of cigarettes. The headlines in the paper made her forget the cigarettes.

CHARLIE BEACH, MURRAY MURDER
SUSPECT KILLED
THEATRE CROWD HYSTERICAL AS
ASSAILANT ESCAPES

Charlie Beach, 26, promising young playwright, was mysteriously shot and killed in front of the Booth Theatre, on West 45th Street, as the audience was leaving the theatre.

Lieutenant Potts, in charge of the Murray case, revealed that Beach had been one of the suspects in the unsolved murder of Leo Murray, noted actor and producer.

With Beach at the time was William Benedict, publicity agent for the late Leo Murray, and well-known Broadway figure. Benedict was arrested on the spot by Traffic Patrolman Nealy who—

Ruth, reading the paper, was in the elevator when she changed her mind. She asked the operator to take her down again, went out, hailed a taxi and told

the driver to take her to the West 52nd Street police station.

At the sergeant's desk she brushed aside a couple of drunks and asked, "Where's Bill Benedict?"

The sergeant, more absorbed in the looks of the questioner than her question, repeated, "Benedict?"

"Yes, the man who was arrested after Beach was murdered."

The sergeant shook his head. "No arrest was made, lady."

She shoved the paper under his nose.

He took his eyes from her long enough to look at it. "Nope, lady, you shouldn't believe what you read in the paper. No arrest was made. Benedict left here a couple hours ago. Are you the wife?"

"No. Is Lieutenant Potts here?"

"Nope. Anything I can do for you?"

"Where is Lieutenant Potts?"

"Gone home."

"What's he doing at home when—"

"Now, lady, can't a cop even have a private life? But I'm sure he'll want to see *you*, so I'll tell you he ain't gone to Brooklyn. He's staying at his room in the New Yorker."

At the hotel she called Potts' room. "This is Ruth Murray. It's about Mr. Benedict."

"Come up," he said and met her at the door looking huger than ever in a flamboyant dressing gown.

He shoved a chair forward for her. "What about Benedict?"

She didn't sit down. "Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"I don't believe you."

She started for the door, but he stopped her. "When were you expecting him?"

"He said he would come to my place about midnight," she said.

"Do you know about Beach?"

"I just read it in the paper."

Potts said, "I let Bill go about midnight."

"He hasn't showed up yet, or called."

"Did you think you'd find him under

my bed?"

Ruth's eyes were inscrutable, her lips silent.

"Or did ya come to have a crystal-gazing party with me?"

"It's almost three o'clock. Someone may have got him."

"I see. You love that guy."

"What if I do?" she said quietly.

"I thought you were going to help me. Suppose he killed your brother? Right now he's the only suspect left who hasn't some kind of an alibi."

"I don't care. I love Bill. I know he didn't do it."

"Who do you think did?"

"Why ask me? I don't know, and I don't care any more. All I want now is to get Bill out of that mess and forget it. I wish we could all forget it. You, too."

"It's my business not to forget it, and to bring the criminal to justice."

"Suppose Charlie Beach did it."

"Even so. Who did it to Charlie Beach?"

Ruth said nothing.

His eyes softened a little. "I'll send someone out to look for Bill. But you've no reason to be worried. He's probably got his dates mixed. You know how Bill is with women. He'll get around to you tomorrow. Go home and get some sleep. I'll tell Bill ya were hot and bothered about him."

"Please don't."

"So I won't tell him," said Potts, still smiling. "Good night."

He closed the door, took off his dressing gown and got into bed. But he hadn't any more than turned off the light than he turned it on again, got out of bed and looked for his note-book and pencil. He opened the little black book at W and read the last note he had made:

Women are like men in one way—maybe the only way—they are more likely to fall for what's dangerous than for what's safe.

He thought a moment, moistening the

stubby pencil, and then merely wrote "Check" under that note.

Chapter X

IN VORHAUS' flat, when Bill came to, he battered down the door. The disturbance brought a policeman and he was arrested and jailed in that precinct, so far removed from Times Square that Bill Benedict was quite unknown there. It was well into the morning before he succeeded in persuading a skeptical desk sergeant to call Lieutenant Potts, instead of sending him to the Magistrate's Court.

When Potts arrived Bill was pacing his cell with a splitting headache. The bloody bandage on his head made him look like a captured brigand.

"New York has the dumbest police department in America," he declared with conviction.

"Ya seem to be attached to it. Ya didn't stay out of our hands long this time." Potts seemed amused. "Arrested for jaywalking?"

"The charge is drunk and disorderly conduct," said Bill, not at all amused.

"I hope the cops didn't give you that head."

"It was Happy Vorhaus and you'd better get your men busy looking for him. He may be able to tell us something about the Murray case and then again he may not."

"That's encouraging. When did ya see him?"

"Last night."

"This is a helluva time to let me know."

"I tried to explain to your cops but they wouldn't listen."

Potts' face reddened and he yelled his reproof and orders to the sergeant. "Now, Bill, tell me *all*."

Bill groaned and held his head. "I'm sick. Get me a doctor. My head feels like a balloon."

Potts got a police surgeon. He ordered Bill to bed with icebags. "You

came close to a class-B concussion. You really got hit. Here's a sedative to take—one every four hours until the pain goes away." He handed Bill a small box.

Bill said to Potts, "I'd be obliged if you'd let me go home."

Potts said, "I'll take you there. Ya can tell me what happened on the way."

In the cab, Bill said, "Night before last Happy offered to tell me, for five grand, who murdered Leo. Last night I went to see him to get the dope."

"Did you have the five grand?"

"Of course not. But he thought I did and he tried to doublecross me into getting the money without spilling, so I told him off. As a result I got beat up. And that's all I know. Maybe he was bluffing."

Potts was staring up at his imaginary object on the roof of the cab. "You're a liar, Bill. Ya mean that's all ya want me to know."

"Have it your way. My head hurts too much for an argument."

"I'm gonna find Happy Vorhaus, and if he lets on that you know more than you say you do, you're never gonna get your license back."

But in Bill's apartment, he helped Bill undress and get into bed. He gave Bill one of the sleeping powders from the box. He dissolved it in a glass of water. It was colorless and tasteless, but had a faintly pungent odor.

While Potts was in the kitchenette filling the icebag Bill called Nick Finley's office. His secretary said he was out of town. When Potts came in and was putting the ice-bag on Bill's head, Bill picked up the phone again and called Ruth and told her how he'd been hurt.

She said, "I'm coming down."

Bill said, "You don't want to come here again, Ruth."

She said, "What d'you think I am, a baby? I'll be there right away."

When he hung up Potts asked, "What did she say?"

"She's not a baby."

"That's a game girl, all right. I'll stay with you until she comes."

When she came in she was laden with bags of fruit and sandwiches. She invited Potts to have a bit of lunch with them.

"No, thanks," he said with a twinkle. "Three's a crowd. And by the way, I didn't tell him what you didn't want me to tell him."

"What's that?" asked Bill.

RUTH looked steadily at Potts and said to Bill, "I'll tell you later."

She went with Potts into the living room.

"That's a nice new rug you got in here," Potts called back to Bill.

"I'm going to sue the city for taking the other one," said Bill.

"When I find out who spoiled it you can sue *him*," answered Potts. To Ruth he said, "Don't let him get out of this place until I say so. Otherwise I don't take no responsibility."

"I'll keep him here." She closed the door behind him.

She went to the kitchenette and arranged the food on a tray with two tall drinks that she stirred with swizzle sticks. When she went back into the bedroom Bill said:

"That looks nice. But first tell me what Potts didn't tell me."

She put down the tray and stood looking at him, "That I love you, Bill."

He drew her down to him. After awhile he said, "We'll be married by a magistrate."

"If you insist," she interpolated.

"And have a wedding breakfast at Charles'. For our honeymoon we'll take a streamlined subway to Kew Gardens and find a little house with a refrigerator and a bed. That's all you really need in a house. And that's all I think we can get for five thousand dollars, which is all I have."

"When is this to be?"

"As soon as this case is cracked."

"Can't we forget this case, Bill?" She

sat up and stirred the ice in her glass with the swizzle stick.

"Of course not."

"Leo is dead. We can't go on looking the rest of our lives. It must have been Charlie Beach."

"Charlie wasn't tall enough. Potts proved it had to be a tall man."

"It could have been Charlie." She hesitated. "I can prove it." She stood up. "Sit up and bend over," she said.

Looking puzzled, he sat up on the edge of the bed and bent over. She jabbed him with the swizzle stick high up on his back.

He looked up and said, "Hit me again."

"Looks like I'm going to marry a masochist." She jabbed him again.

"Looks like you're right. If Leo was bending down it need not have been someone tall. It need not have been anyone taller than you."

Ruth said, "That's right. It could have been Charlie Beach."

"Get Potts on the phone," said Bill.

"Why bother Potts now? Let's forget it for awhile."

"All right, sweet. Let's forget it." He drew her down to him.

After awhile she said, "Now, Bill, will you please stop making believe you're Sherlock Holmes. Leave this business to Potts from here on."

"Yes, darling." He yawned. "That powder's taking effect. I'm going to sleep for a week. You go on home. When I wake up I'll be a new man. I'll come and marry you. Lucky we got that license, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is." She leaned down and kissed him.

He smiled, turned over and closed his eyes. In a moment he was sleeping like a child.

She stood looking at him, and because there was no one to see it, love and envy shone terribly clear in her gray-green eyes.

She picked up the box of sleeping powders. It said:

Aconite
A sedative
Danger!
Poisonous in large doses.

She slipped it into her handbag before she put on her hat and went out. . . .

BILL woke toward evening, refreshed. The doorbell was ringing. He got out of bed and went to open the door.

Ricky Linton was standing there. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

Bill couldn't return the politeness. "I've slept all I want to. What's on your mind?"

"It's something I'd like to discuss with you. May I come in?"

Bill led him into the living room and they sat down on the couch.

"I've come upon something that may point to the murderer of Leo Murray," said Linton.

"You, too? I thought you didn't want to be involved in this sordid business. I got the impression you didn't relish having anything to do with the police."

"The stupid police are making it necessary for me to do so. Lady Lawrence and I have reservations to sail next week. They say we cannot go until this matter is cleared up."

"Now that's just too bad, isn't it?" Bill was not at all sympathetic.

"But that isn't what I came to tell you. I came to tell you that Frank Boley, Leo Murray's manager, has been robbing Mr. Murray for quite some time."

"I'm sure I've given you no reason to believe I'd take your word for anything as against Frank Boley's."

Linton took some papers from his pocket. "In connection with the transfer of the business to Finley I've been going over the books. On this show alone I find a discrepancy of almost three thousand dollars between his total production cost and the sum of the actual charges."

"It's just possible your addition is not so good."

"All right, you needn't believe me. Look at the books. For example, he

charged us for five more stage hands than we have, or that the union demands. His prop account alone had a discrepancy of almost a thousand dollars. I don't know how much he's taken from Murray before this show."

"Have you talked to Boley?"

"I've tried to reach him, but can't."

"What makes you think this has anything to do with Murray's death?"

"Motive, my dear fellow, motive! Leo finds out that Boley is robbing him and threatens to expose him. Boley kills him to protect himself and perhaps kills Charlie Beach, too, because Charlie knows something about it."

"Why tell me this?"

"Because I want the money back if there's any of it left, and I thought you might be able to locate him. There would be a little something in it for you."

"And what makes you think you could get it out of him if he had it, even if I could locate him?"

"I'd threaten him with exposure, of course, unless he handed it over."

"And if he did you'd expose him anyway."

"Naturally."

"Just an upright member of society who wants whatever he can lay his hands on. Well, it happens I like Frank Boley. And I don't believe he would have murdered Leo even if it meant twenty years for embezzlement."

"I take it you do not care to locate him for me."

"That's putting it mildly."

Linton reached for the telephone. "Then I suppose I'd better take this matter direct to the police."

He lifted the receiver and started to dial. Bill put his hand out and stopped him.

"Give me a few hours. I'll try to find Boley and get you that money. Part of it goes to Ruth Murray, you understand. If I don't find him you can take it up with the cops. I'll call you if I give up. But if I find him and you get your dough, you're to leave him to me."

Linton nodded.

"And listen. If you call the cops either before I give up or after I find Frank for you I'll get a warrant out for Lady Lawrence on a charge of moral turpitude, and make such a fuss she won't be able to get a visa for any country. You'll have to spend your honeymoon at Niagara Falls."

HE PUSHED Linton out, got into his clothes, took the bandages off his head and concealed its ravages as well as he could under his hat and hurried out. When he got out of the elevator downstairs a stubby little man was in the small entry, looking at the letter boxes, blocking the way out.

"I'm looking for McCleary," said the little man.

"I've never noticed any such name here," said Bill.

"Must have the wrong address," said the little man, walking with him toward the cab stand at the corner where Bill took a taxi. The little man took the one behind his.

Bill spent a fruitless hour riding around, searching for Frank Boley. He tried all the drinking holes from the Café Deauville to Dinty Moore's, from Jack and Charlie's to John the Swede's. No one had seen Boley. He set others searching for Frank over a wider area.

At six o'clock he called Ruth.

"How are you now?" she asked.

"I'm fine."

"Good. I'll come right down and give you some supper."

"But I'm out."

"*Bill!* You shouldn't be out!"

"I've got to. Do you know where I can reach Frank Boley?"

"No." She hesitated. "Anything wrong?"

"No." He hesitated, also. "But I've got see him."

"Bill, I'd like to see you." Her voice was troubled.

"Sure. Coming right up. . . ."

She opened the door, and kissed him. She clung to him. "Bill, you shouldn't be

out. You'll get into trouble again. I'm worried about you, terribly afraid."

He laughed and kissed her. "But, darling, the case is practically cracked. I called Potts and told him your idea about Beach and he said you're a smart girl. But you're cracking under the strain and I don't wonder. Why don't you go out of town for a week or so? It'll be all over by then."

She looked into his face. "I won't leave you, Bill. I don't want ever to leave you. I don't want to live without you."

"Pretty serious, isn't it?"

"Yes, pretty serious."

He kissed her again and held her to him. "All right then. Stick by me until it's over." He drew her down to the couch and leaned her head on his shoulder.

After awhile she said, "Why did you ask me about Frank Boley?"

"Linton says he has evidence that Frank's been gypping Murray Productions out of a lot of money."

She sat up. "My God, *no!* That's a lie! It's impossible! Frank wouldn't do such a thing. Leo trusted him."

Her sudden unwonted excitement was strange and puzzling to him. "That's what I thought, but Linton seems to have proof."

She stared at Bill. "Are you keeping something from me? Has Frank been arrested? *Has* he?"

"No. I've been looking for him. He isn't anywhere around. I'm trying to find him to stop Linton from calling in the police. I've got some friends looking now. They'll call me here if they find him. Ruth, if Frank did take that dough it may be that he is involved in Leo's death, and even Charlie Beach's. You've got to be prepared for anything."

"I'm prepared for anything, Bill."

He kissed her. "You're really a great girl, Ruth. Now how's about a drink to soothe our nerves while we're waiting?"

She went to the kitchen and was making two tall drinks when the phone

rang. Bill took it. He went into the kitchen.

"It's from a friend in Harlem. He has found Frank at Mattie's, next to the Savoy. Hold those drinks until I get back, and make one for Frank."

Ruth said, "I'm coming with you, Bill."

"No, you aren't. It may be messy."

"I'm coming with you," she insisted.

IN AN alley between two tenements an iron stairway led up to a door with "MATTIE'S" painted on it. A huge, slatternly woman greeted Bill and waved an arm to a table where Boley was sitting, asleep, his head on his arms.

"He's been here since close to midnight," said Mattie. "Passed out once or twice, but we brung him to."

"Thanks, Mattie."

Ruth followed Bill to the table. Bill nudged Boley. He grunted and slowly raised his head. He had a two-day beard, his bloodshot eyes were barely visible between the puffed lids, and around the corners of his mouth was a brown crust of saliva.

He fumbled for his glass like a blind man. Then he looked up and saw Bill. His blurred vision did not take in Ruth. The glass rolled from his fingers. He leaned back in his chair, his hand automatically reaching to straighten his tie. He tried to grin.

"H'lo!"

"Hello, Frank. Where have you been?"

"Round. Don't know. Who wansa know? Cops?"

"No. Me and Ruth Murray."

Boley opened his eyes and saw Ruth. "Ruth!" He looked from one to the other. "You and Ruth."

"I'm glad we found you, Frank," said Ruth.

"Yes," said Bill. "Why did you disappear?"

"Don't bother him now, Bill," said Ruth.

"Didn't disappear," said Boley stubbornly.

"No one could find you."

"They didn't know where to look." He reached over and patted Bill's hand. "But you found me, didn't ya? Good guy, Bill. Ain't he, Ruth?"

"Come along to Ruth's place."

"Why?" He looked at Bill with sodden suspicion.

"Ricky Linton has found out that the accounts of *Hour's End* are cockeyed."

"Sure."

"You know about it?" asked Bill.

"Sure."

"You took the money, then?"

Ruth said, "Let's take him home first, Bill."

Bill said, "He'll be sober by then."

Boley shifted his eyes from Bill and tried to focus on Ruth. He shook his head to clear it of the fog and saw the signal in her eyes.

"No, I didn't," he said, and looked back to Bill.

"You gypped Leo Murray out of three grand."

"Yeah, sure. More than three grand."

"Why?"

He saw Ruth's warning eyes again.

"Lea' me alone, will ya?"

"Why did you kill Leo?"

Boley rose from his chair and belatedly, "Get outa here, you— Get out!"

Mattie came over. "You'll have to shut him up."

Bill pulled Boley back into his chair. "Okay, you didn't kill Leo. But why did you rob him?"

Boley waved the question away.

"Listen, Frank, if you don't come with us Linton is going to set the cops on you. I think we can straighten this out for you, me and Ruth."

"You and Ruth?" He seemed puzzled by that as he tried to focus on them both.

Bill called Mattie over and paid for his drinks. "There may be a little fuss while I'm taking him out."

"Okay. Only don't break anything."

"I'll pay for what's broken," said Bill. "Go and call a cab to the door."

Frank burst out laughing. "Look at that funny little man!" He pointed to a table in a nearby alcove.

It was the stubby little man Bill had met in the entry of the Chicopee.

"Hey, *you!*" Bill walked over to him.

"Speaking to me?"

"What are you following me for?"

"I never saw you before."

"You were looking for McCleary in my house."

"Go away, buddy, you're tight. Pick a fellow your size."

"If I see you again, my size or no size, I'm going to bust you wide open."

The little man grinned sourly. "You won't see me."

Ruth was saying quietly to Frank, "I'm afraid we're both in a tight spot, Frank. If we don't get out, thanks for everything."

Mattie went over to Bill. "The cab's waitin'."

Boley let himself be led to the taxi without a struggle.

Chapter XI

AS SOON as they were in the foyer of Ruth's apartment Frank said, "I'm going to be sick. Take me to the bathroom."

Ruth went on into the living room while Bill opened the bathroom door and took Frank in, to help him.

"Leave me alone, please," said Frank.

Bill went out, closed the door, and went along the hall to the living room.

Potts was standing there with his coat on and his hat still in his hand. Ruth was sitting down.

Bill said, "He's pretty quick, that little man of yours."

Potts nodded his head.

"You might as well hear it now that you're here," said Bill. "Sit down."

Potts sat down.

"Linton found that Boley had been gypping Leo of a considerable amount

of money. Boley has confessed that to me. What else Boley has done, I can't say yet. But I guess we'll find out." He turned to Ruth. "In the meantime he's making a mess of your bathroom. But I think it may be worth it, to have that other mess cleared up. I could stand a drink now—make mine double. And Boley will probably want a hair of the dog that bit him. How about you, Lieutenant?"

Potts shook his head. "I want to talk to Boley. I think he has something important to tell us." He looked straight at Ruth.

She got up and went into the kitchen. She finished the two drinks she had started and made a third one, a double. Then she went into her bedroom and got the box of sleeping powders she had taken from Bill's bedside.

She returned to the kitchen and divided the powders in the box between the first two drinks. She stirred them thoroughly, set them on a tray, then set Bill's double drink on it apart from the other two. She carried the tray into the living room and set it on the table.

"This is yours, Bill," she said, pointing to the double drink.

They heard a loud groan and the sound of a body falling.

Bill got to the bathroom first. Boley was on the floor, blood streaming from his throat. Bill tried to pick him up but the man was too heavy. Potts took a towel and tried to stanch the pulsing blood. But Boley was dying.

His washed-out eyes were fastened not on Bill or Potts but on Ruth, who stood in the doorway. He seemed to be trying to smile apologetically, before his eyes closed and all expression faded from his face.

Bill looked up and saw something scrawled on the bathroom mirror. It was done with soap.

TELL POLICE I KILLED MURRAY
AND BEACH

Ruth's eyes were fixed on it.

Potts said, "I guess you can forget it now." And to Bill, "Take her out of here. I'll attend to this."

Bill put his arm around Ruth and went with her into the living room. At sight of the drinks on the table he said, "Those will sure come in handy," and was reaching for one when Ruth leaned against the table. The glasses fell over and the drinks spilled down on the carpet.

Ruth covered her face with her hands and began to cry softly.

"Go and lie down," said Bill.

He took out the large linen handkerchief he always wore in his breast pocket and mopped up the wet place on the floor. He went into the kitchen to wring out his handkerchief at the sink. He saw the small medicine box standing there, and took it with him when he went into the bedroom.

Ruth was lying on the bed. She stared at him as he sat down beside her, holding the box in one hand and his damp handkerchief in the other. They could hear Potts in the living room, telephoning for someone to come for the body and bring a photographer.

"Did you take this from me?" Bill held out the box.

"Yes. I thought I might need it." Then, seeing that there was no look of suspicion in his eyes, Ruth took it from his hand.

Bill smiled and said, "Better let sleeping powders lie. It's all over now, Ruthie. Come on. Let's get out of here and forget it." He leaned over and kissed her.

He helped her up and went into living room while she got herself together.

POTTS was sitting there. "Here." He took a badge out of his pocket and handed it to Bill. "I suppose I'll have to give ya that dick's badge now that you've cracked this case."

Bill smiled. "Thanks." He folded the damp handkerchief and put it in his pocket before he took the badge and

pinned it inside his jacket.

Ruth came out of her bedroom.

"I'll have the place all tidy for you by the time you get back," said Potts.

"Thank you," she said softly.

In the street a mild evening breeze was blowing across from the park, laden with the autumn fragrance of falling leaves.

"Let's go into the park," she said.

As they started across the street she said, "There's that gray car."

Bill looked in time to see a car go around the corner. "It's your nerves. Forget it."

They went across and walked up a shady path and sat down on a bench. Bill put his arm around her and held her tight.

After awhile she said, "Let's go away, Bill, as far away as possible, as quickly as possible."

"All right," he said. "Let's go tomorrow. You pack a little bag and come to my place about four o'clock. I'll get tickets tonight on a plane that leaves in the evening for some nice warm place, Mexico or South America. We'll get married, have dinner and fly away."

"Bill, you're wonderful!"

"I'll ask Potts to marry me. He's a justice of the peace. Will you do something to please me?"

"Anything, Bill."

"Wear that outfit—that gray cape, with the red gloves and shoes. You were a knockout. I fell for you in that."

"I'll do anything to please you, Bill—anything."

Bill grinned. "I'll call Potts tonight. I'll tell him to come at five o'clock."

Right after Bill's call, Potts went to see Henry Traube, Assistant District Attorney. He took his stubby little man along.

Traube passed out some cigars and said, "I've been waiting to see you, Potts. I've read your reports."

"Mr. Traube," Potts said, "it's almost a week since Leo Murray was killed in Bill Benedict's room. Ya left the case

entirely in my hands. Ya ain't pressed me and I'm grateful for that. It's the toughest case I've ever had, and getting worse every day. I been playing the cards my own way. Now I gotta lay them on the table for ya."

"One minute, Lieutenant. If you don't mind I want a girl to take down what you say for the record."

Potts nodded and the D.A. rang for a stenographer. When she appeared, Traube said:

"Go ahead, Mr. Potts."

"At first I figured that Charlie Beach was a hot prospect. He disappeared, and in my experience that's as good a clue as any. Then he sends Bill Benedict, who gave ya a partial alibi, a note to meet him. Benedict goes to pick him up and Beach is knocked off. Mind ya, that was the second murder with Benedict somewhere around."

Traube looked troubled. "Are you suspecting Benedict?"

Potts waved a heavy hand. "Let me continue."

"Okay."

"That phony telegram signed 'John Wilkes Booth' which was sent to Murray's sister was found by Benedict. Benedict again."

"He reported it to you, didn't he?"

"Sure. All the same I assign Nelson here—" he pointed to the stubby little man who was sitting in a corner, paring his nails—"to tail him. Which he does." Potts relaxed and sighed like a steam locomotive. "Benedict finds Frank Boley, who was hardly in the picture, and all of a sudden, out of a clear sky, Boley commits suicide and leaves a confession after Benedict brings him to Ruth Murray's apartment and puts him in the bathroom."

The D.A. murmured.

"YOU conclude, therefore, that Benedict killed Murray, then killed Beach to protect himself, and finally Boley to mislead the police?"

Potts hesitated. "No, Mr. Traube,

But I don't blame you for thinking that." He cleared his throat. "I think Ruth Murray killed Leo Murray. Don't ask me why now, because we haven't got a case against her yet. But we have got a case against Bill Benedict, and they are going to be married tomorrow and will fly to South America. I got to take action."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want a warrant from your office for the arrest of Benedict on the charge of murdering Murray, Beach and Boley. I don't think Ruth Murray will let me arrest him."

Traube looked grave. "If she does, we will be on a spot."

"I think I know something about women. I'll stake my job on it." Potts looked determined.

Traube smiled and said to the stenographer, "Be sure to make a note of that." He walked to the window and looked down into the street. "All right, Potts. You get the warrant. . . ."

When Bill awoke the next morning it seemed to him that he had been singing in his sleep. "This is my lucky day—" The tune was still ringing in his head. He hummed, whistled and shouted it as he shaved, got out of his pajamas, into the stinging shower, stood drying his vigorous body before the long bathroom mirror. And a fine golden fall day it was, he observed through the windows as he put on his best suit.

Then he began to empty the pockets of the suit he had worn yesterday. Having transferred the things from the pants pocket—the loose change, the keys, the wallet—he took from the pockets of the jacket the bill-fold, the cigarettes, and the soiled handkerchief with which he had mopped up the spilled liquor from Ruth's carpet. He crumpled it in his hand and was going to toss it into the laundry bag when two things stopped him.

The linen seemed to be disintegrating in his hand, and a familiar, faintly pungent odor came from it. He pulled at it and it came apart as if its fiber

had been eaten by acid.

He held it to his nose and in a flash he saw himself in bed, drinking the sedative Potts had fixed for him, and then in Ruth's kitchen, wringing out the handkerchief and noticing the box, and then in her bedroom, asking her about it. And her saying, "I thought I might need it."

His mouth went dry.

He put down the handkerchief, poured himself a drink and sat down with it, but a tumult of things kept running through his head and he forgot to drink it. After awhile he got up and finished dressing.

He picked up the handkerchief and smelled it again, then got an envelope and was putting the handkerchief in it when the telephone rang. He reached for it but withdrew his hand and waited while it rang and rang. When it stopped he put the envelope in his pocket, got his hat and went out. It was almost ten o'clock.

At ten-thirty he had left the handkerchief at a chemical laboratory.

At eleven he was in the offices of the Lionel Company, manufacturers of toy trains on East 26th Street. He talked to the vice-president, a busy man who had to be persuaded—with the aid of the badge Bill had got from Potts—that his bookkeeper should take the time right away to trace those orders charged to Leo Murray Productions.

"It will take at least an hour," said the vice-president.

"I'll be back at noon," said Bill, who suddenly realized that at least part of that feeling in the pit of his stomach was due to the fact that he hadn't had breakfast.

HE WENT out to a restaurant and ordered but he couldn't eat because he kept hearing Ruth talking. "Can't we forget this case? It must have been Charlie Beach."

He wished to heaven he could forget it. "Now, Bill, please stop making believe you're Sherlock Holmes. Leave

this business to Potts." He could see her happily packing. "You're wonderful, Bill."

He got up, paid his check and went to the telephone booth. As he looked up the number of the chemical laboratory, he was thinking, If the handkerchief is okay, I won't go back to the Lionel Company.

The chemist said, "Aconite . . . Oh yes, a toxic quantity."

Bill went back to the Lionel Company and they gave him the name and address to which the toys had been delivered last Christmas and on May 16th. The name wasn't Murray or Boley. The address was in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

It was half-past one when he located it—they had moved to another address since May—a simple cottage on a quiet street on the edge of town. A sweet-faced woman came to the door, wiping her hands on her apron. Bill's badge troubled her at first, but he quickly reassured her, and she led him into the spotless living room.

Her husband was at work, she said. Yes, they had a child—an adopted child. She had met the mother in the hospital, had shared a room with her, when she herself unfortunately had lost her own baby and was told she could have no more. The mother had called herself Mrs. Smith, but she had suspected it wasn't her real name. The mother had not explained why she had to give her baby away.

No, she had no idea what had become of the mother. But on the child's birthday and at Christmas gifts came, and generous sums of money were sent regularly with unsigned notes directing that part be set aside for the boy's future needs and education.

"He's a bright child, and he loves music. He's talented. We think he may be a musician."

As they were talking a school bus full of children stopped before the house and a little boy got out amid the clamorous good-bys of the others. The woman went to the door to meet him.

"Please don't say anything about it before him," she said to Bill.

"Of course not," said Bill.

"Mommy!" The boy was bursting with excitement. "I got a star and a book!" He opened it to show her. "See? A is for arms." There was a picture of a child in its mother's arms. "B is for box."

"That's wonderful!" she said, taking off his coat and hat.

His hair was curly brown, his cheeks ruddy—a handsome, husky little boy. Bill thought he might be anybody's little boy—until he turned to look at Bill. His eyes were gray-green.

The woman said, "Say hello to the gentleman, Leo. . . ."

In the train on the way back to town Bill felt as if he had fallen into some dreadful morass and was being drawn into it deeper and deeper. He struggled to rise from it, and listened to the whisperings of reason that rose in his brain above the hard clatter of the train.

What if she had had the bad luck to fall for some rotter? Five years ago she had been just a foolish kid, and she had named her child for her great brother, Leo, whom she adored. Thousands of kids her age who hadn't been his sister had adored Leo.

He'd kept other men away from her because he'd loved his little sister and, being a heel himself, he had known what heels could do, not knowing what she had been through already, not knowing that Frank Boley was robbing him to help her provide for the child.

BUT why would Boley do that and kill Leo when Leo found out? Was it because the child was Boley's? Then why hadn't Boley married her? And how had she stood by without a cry and seen her lover, the father of her child, lie there on the floor with his eyes on her?

And then she had let him, Bill Benedict, make love to her and plan their marriage! She would have to be a monster!

He saw those inscrutable gray-green eyes, half-sad, half-smiling. It was a hopeless tangle. No use trying to work it out himself. He would ask her, and she would tell him the truth and it would be something quite simple and forgivable, and he would take her in his arms.

At Penn Station he got into a cab and gave the address of the Chicopee. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and kept his mind on taking her in his arms.

The cab slowed down to make the turn from Fifth Avenue into 48th Street, and Bill, glancing out, saw the side street window of the Fifth Avenue Child's. Just inside the window a waitress bending over, clearing a table, the very table at which he and Ruth had sat that fatal night.

"Stop. I'm getting out here."

The cab stopped. He got out and went into Child's and sat down at the table. It was the same waitress.

"What will you have?" she said, without looking at him.

"Just coffee. Weren't you on the night shift the beginning of the week?"

She was making out the check. "Yes. We work days one week and then one week nights. We change on Wednesdays." She tore off the check and looked at him. "Oh, yes. Weren't you here at this table Monday night with a young lady who had on a gray cape and red gloves?"

He nodded.

"Well, ain't that funny. I've been wondering if I'd see you again."

"Why?"

"Well, because a funny thing happened. You know she was here first, waiting for you, and she ordered a pot of coffee and when I brought it she was in the ladies' room. Remember she told you she had been sick or something? Well, when I come by later and asked if she wanted anything else she said I hadn't given her a check, though I felt sure I had. Anyone's liable to make a slip once in awhile. We couldn't find a check on the table, so I made one out

for her and you paid it with yours when you left together, remember?"

He nodded.

"But the funny thing was that when the two cashiers—the one at this entrance and the one over there at the Fifth Avenue side—checked the checks for that night with the kitchen orders they found I'd made out *two* checks for that pot of coffee. Both had been paid—one to this cashier and the other to the one at Fifth Avenue. I couldn't figure when and why your girl friend paid that first check I gave her. Funny, wasn't it? You ask her." She smiled and went to get his coffee.

When she returned Bill said, "That first check might have blown off the table and been picked up by someone else who used it instead of paying his own larger check. There are people who would do that."

"Ain't it the truth!" she said. "Say, you're good! No why didn't I think of that? I just couldn't figure it out." She went off to tell it to the cashier.

Bill tried to drink the coffee, but couldn't. There was a weight in his chest that had to be got off. He got up and paid, went out and walked quickly to the Chicopee.

WHEN he opened the door she was standing by the window in that slim gray dress, beautifully unadorned. Her gray cape, the red gloves and red handbag were on a chair. A traveling bag stood by it. She turned eagerly as he came in, her eyes alight with anticipation. Already her face was transformed with happiness, all sadness and hardness gone.

"Where have you been all day? I tried to—" At sight of his eyes the light went out of hers. "What's happened?"

He stood still and spoke gently. "I've learned three things today, Ruth. That the liquor you spilled yesterday was poisoned, that there is a little boy named Leo with eyes like yours in Elizabeth, New Jersey, that the first check the waitress gave you in Child's on Monday

night was paid. Will you tell me the truth?"

"Yes." Her eyes were like a gray-green wall. "I—" She stopped, holding to the last precious moment of safety. "I killed Leo."

"Why?"

"I was not his sister. Leo wanted it to be believed I was. It was a terrible thing to do, but I couldn't help it when he calmly turned his back on me and bent down to tie his shoe, saying he was through with me. You know that saying you quoted—about a woman scorned. It's true. That little boy was ours." Her eyes lighted a little. "Is he well? Is he a nice boy?"

"He is a fine little boy. Who was the poison for?"

"For me and Frank. Frank was my friend, nothing more, Bill. Because Leo would do nothing for the boy, wouldn't give me money to send him and because Frank loved me, I told Frank about the boy—but not about Leo. Frank got the money for me."

"What about Charlie Beach?"

"He was in Child's Monday night. I didn't see him, but he saw me go out. Charlie went to Frank and told him I might have done it. Frank was in a rage, forbade him to tell anyone, threatened to kill him if he did, and got Charlie to go away. But Charlie, afraid of the police on his trail, tried to tell you. Frank shot him. When we brought Frank home and I saw Potts there I knew the jig was up for both of us. I poisoned Frank's drink and mine."

Her eyes filled with anguish. "Oh, Bill! You didn't think—But I can't blame you if you did. At first I tried to get Potts thinking you might have done it. I was desperate. But I fell in love with you, Bill. I didn't mean to. I knew it was a bad idea but—well, I did. I love you, Bill. You must believe that."

He looked into her eyes and saw that it was so. "I believe you, Ruth." He looked at his watch. "Potts will be here at five. If you stay here I'll have to tell him." He took two tickets from his

pocket, handed her one.

She looked at it. "Mexico City. It would have been wonderful with you." Then she looked straight at him. "Which would you rather I'd do? Stay or go?" "Go."

"Why?" Her eyes seemed bitterly mocking. "Because I've said I love you?"

"No. Because I love you."

She almost smiled. "That's all I wanted to hear, Bill." She picked up the gray cape. He helped her on with it. She turned her head to him. "You wouldn't want to kiss me once more?"

He took her in his arms and forgot everything until she put him away.

"I'd better go before Potts comes." She took the red gloves and the handbag, picked up her traveling bag and went to the door.

SHE came out of the entry and turned west, with that movement which was more than mere walking. The sun setting in the Hudson shone red on her honey-colored hair.

A car parked across the way left the curb and moved westward, too. It was a gray car. As it came abreast of her, Ruth suddenly turned and ran out into the street directly in its path. . . .

When Bill got down there a crowd had gathered, and the hulking man from the car was protesting, "I couldn't get out of her way."

She was dead—her gray-green eyes closed forever, her pale smooth face at peace like the marble mask of the girl who was fished out of the Seine in Paris. Her lips were almost smiling, as they had been when he had told her, "Because I love you."

A police car pulled up. It was Potts. "How did it happen?" Potts asked the hulking man.

"It was an accident," said Bill. "I saw it from my window. She was cutting across the street in a hurry to get to my place."

The hulking man said nothing. He looked curiously at Bill. So did Potts.

Bill looked as if he believed it. . . .

The Dragnet

A Novel by WILLIAM DEGENHARD

Though innocent, they had him cold for the hot seat

—and even his own lovely wife couldn't alibi him

Chapter I

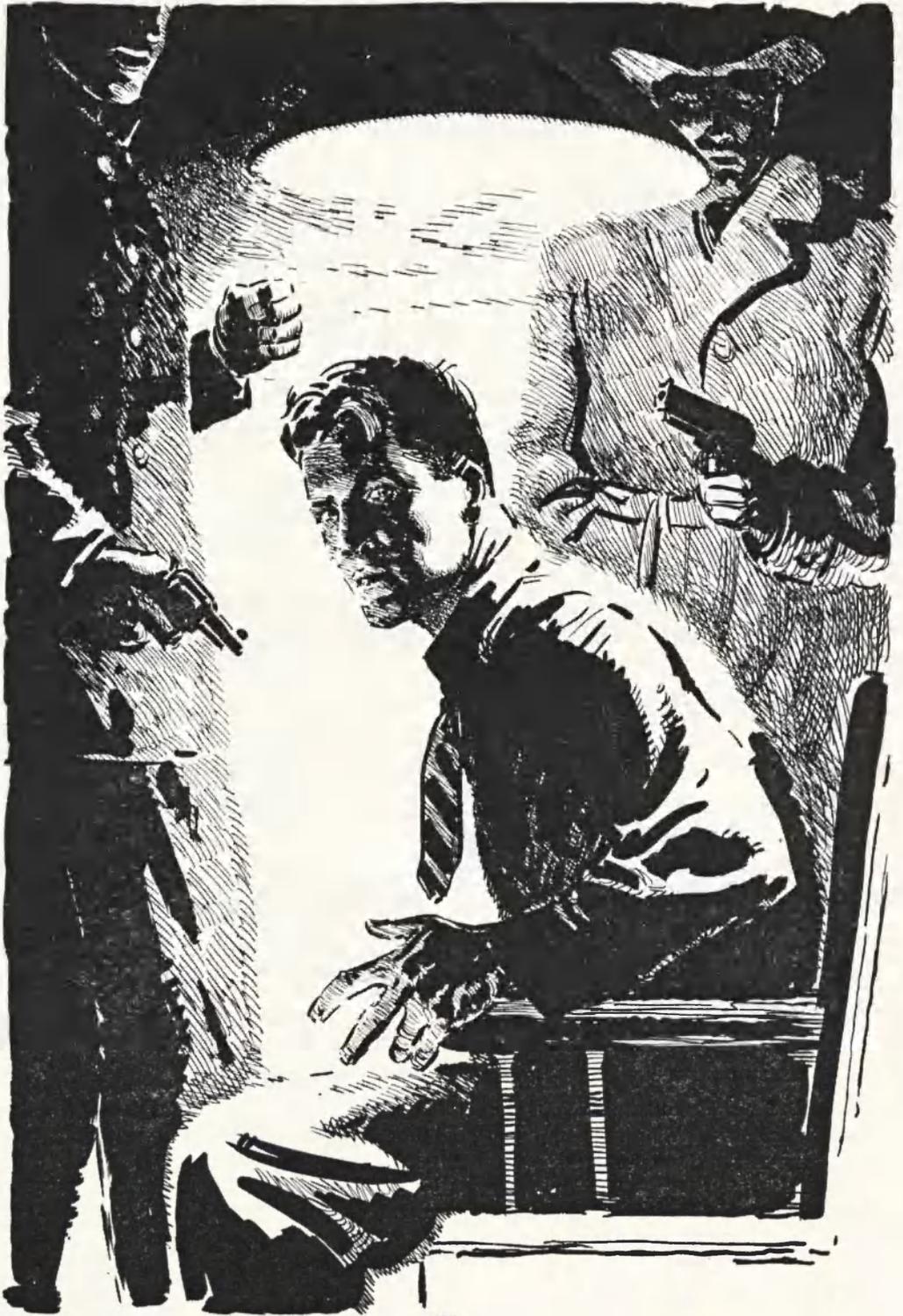
SINCE Larry Thorpe had been married, he hadn't often got the chance to go out looking just as shabby as he pleased. But now as he walked down the deserted street alongside the park he needed a shave, and he hadn't changed from his worn, dirty whipcord work pants and lumberjacket. Cora agreed with him that a man who worked hard all day building small homes, wrestling with plumbers and electricians and plasterers, needed a little time to himself to do as he pleased. Besides, this was the night for her civic club, dedicated to reforming the city.

As Thorpe heard a car coming along slowly behind him he tensed slightly. Muggings had been pretty frequent in and near the park of late, with the slums just across from it.

The car stopped and he glanced over his shoulder. Two men were getting out of a small black sedan. One was squat, broad-faced; the other was young, average-sized, smooth-faced. The two hurried toward him, spreading apart a little, almost as if he were a dangerous animal they'd cornered. "Muggers" flashed through his mind again, yet somehow that didn't seem to fit.

"What's your name?" the squat man demanded, his voice harsh and grating. Larry Thorpe's hands, deep in his pockets, curled to fists. "Who wants to know?"

The man's hairy fist came up. "Wise guy."



"Wait a minute, Vic," the younger man cut in, and flashed a badge. "Cops. Now what's your name, Buster?"

Thorpe glanced at the badge, but couldn't see it too well. He heard a squawk from their car that sounded like a short wave radio. Cops all right, he supposed. Plainclothes.

"My name's Thorpe," he said. "Larry Thorpe. I live over here on—"

He had reached into his back pocket for his wallet when he remembered he'd left the wallet on his bureau. He stiffened as both men drew guns.

"Put your hands out," the squat man ordered. "Keep him covered while I frisk him, Stan."

Thorpe protested, "Now, wait a minute. You can't do that—"

"Shut up!" the harsh-voiced man barked.

Larry Thorpe wasn't the kind to get panicky. And he knew the futility of arguing or resisting. But anger rose in him as the squat man searched his pockets, slapped him under the arms, around the waist, between his legs.

HE STOOD still. What else could he do with that gun pointed at his guts?

"Clean," the searcher said finally. "Nothing on him but some keys." He eyed Larry narrowly. "He fits, doesn't he?"

"He may," his partner conceded.

The squat man jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Okay, Thorpe, get in that car."

Thorpe felt a churning in his stomach. "Now, wait a minute. Am I under arrest? What for?"

"Vagrancy," the older man snapped.

Thorpe shouted, "Are you crazy? I'm a contractor—with a bank balance of around ten thousand dollars! I told you I left my wallet at home! Take me—"

"Get in that car!" the man cut in sharply. "And no more lip, understand?"

Thorpe walked stiffly to the car, his fury rising. They were treating him as

if he were a dangerous criminal. But he said nothing. That gun was still pointed at him.

"Look," he did say as he settled in the back of the sedan, "the least you can do is tell me what this is all about."

The younger man gave him a small smile. "You mean you haven't heard Gus Palidaris was murdered over on—"

"Shut up, Stan," the other man broke in quietly.

The man called Stan grinned. "The guy says he's a contractor." He shrugged slightly.

Thorpe felt a chill creeping through him. Gus Palidaris murdered! Palidaris, the labor boss, head of the Logansburg Labor Alliance, known for his uncompromising honesty. Well he, Thorpe, had never even met the man, so nobody could say—

A sudden cold fear gripped him. He'd had a hassle with the union once when a delegate named Mort Howell had threatened to pull a strike on him because he'd fired some workmen for stealing cement. Surely a small incident like that couldn't link him with murder! But the brusque treatment these cops had given him! The police would be desperate for any kind of break that could pry the yammering newshounds and outraged union men off their necks.

A nightmare, all this. He had just gone out for a short walk, had been feeling pleasantly relaxed, without a care in the world. And now—Something told Larry Thorpe that he was going to need a good lawyer—and fast.

In the police station a clamoring mob milled around the big desk. Telephones were ringing. Uniformed cops were rushing in and out. Detectives were rushing up and down the broad marble staircase, shouting at each other on the fly. Reporters were getting in everybody's hair. Tempers were explosive.

Thorpe was pushed around in the milling crowd. Vaguely he heard his captors reporting, and learned then that the squat man was Officer Vic Haber, and that his younger partner in the patrol

car was Officer Stan Malone. Then, before Thorpe could even speak to the desk sergeant he was roughly shoved toward a side room. A thin-faced man with Slavic cheek-bones tried to reach him, yelled at him—Len Wycoff, a reporter he knew. He wanted to tell Wycoff to call Jim Mansfield, his lawyer, but never got the chance. Squat Vic Haber pushed him into the side room and slammed the door on him.

At least it was quieter in that room, and after a few minutes Thorpe's near-panic began to abate. After all, he had nothing to be afraid of. Inconvenience, sure, but he'd be turned loose as soon as he had a chance to identify himself. He shrugged away his anger as he looked around.

He was in a long, wide room with sickly green walls, into which about forty men had been herded—bums in ragged, filthy clothes, bleary-eyed drunks, some men in lumberjackets or sports coats. All looked bewildered. In one corner, a hulking West Indian was softly singing an eerie calypso on the sadness of being poor and such easy meat for the jailer. An Italian boy was asking plaintively in broken English why he had been brought here. A frantic, thin young man in an old GI arctic jacket was demanding the right to phone his wife he hadn't been killed on the way to the drug store to get her medicine.

THE impassive guard at the door paid no attention to any of them. With a slight shock, Thorpe spotted the familiar face of slender, black-haired, shifty-eyed Pinky Armond, a bookie's runner Thorpe had seen taking bets from construction job workmen. It had been Pinky who had tipped Thorpe about the cement thieves. He'd said the stealing was an organized racket. Knowing that had given Thorpe the upper hand over Mort Howell, the union delegate, with his strike threat. So Howell had dropped the whole affair.

Pinky looked as if he'd gone downhill

since that time. He was wearing a worn blue jacket and ragged brown slacks, and there was a livid scar on his right temple.

Pinky shifted, and his bored expression left his face as Thorpe came over to him. "What are you doing here, Mr. Thorpe?"

"I was out for a walk, minding my own business," Larry Thorpe said bitterly, "and the cops grabbed me. But they got the wrong guy. I'm going to sue the minute I get out of here!"

Pinky chuckled. "Relax, Mr. Thorpe. It's the old dragnet routine. You'll be out as soon as Bull Hannegan can get around to us." His eyes narrowed slightly. "You ain't hooked into the kill, are you?"

"Of course not," Thorpe snapped. "How about you?"

Pinky shrugged. "They hauled me in for questioning on another deal—a fur loft burglary. That's the way the cops operate here. The minute anything breaks, they throw out the dragnet, grab everybody in sight. But my friends know about this, so I'll be out as soon as—"

Thorpe said quickly, "Look, Pinky, it's worth something to let my wife know where I am. She'll be frantic. How about it?"

Pinky shook his head. "Like to help you out, Mr. Thorpe, but I got to keep my nose clean. Sorry."

Thorpe moved off, scowling, though he could understand Pinky's reluctance. He tried desperately to think of a way of getting word to Cora, or to his lawyer, but there seemed to be none. He felt numb, telling himself over and over, This can't be happening to me.

The door banged back and a bulky, broad-shouldered man with a bull neck and thin lips slashed across a square face stalked in, a half-dozen detectives at his back. Bull Hannegan. Uneasiness, fright showed on every face as Hannegan's little eyes darted around.

He ordered sharply, "Everybody back against the wall."

The men scurried back. Hannegan's big forefinger emphasized his command:

"The men I point out come over here and stand facing me.—You—"

A tall, cadaverous man in a clean jacket leaped forward. Hannegan indicated three more men, all wearing short jackets, then the finger pointed at Larry Thorpe. As he stepped into line he felt as sweaty as if the steam had suddenly been turned on him.

Hannegan nodded to his detectives. "Okay, bring him in."

A small, paunchy, elderly man with close-cropped gray hair and thick, steel-rimmed glasses was brought in. He came in hesitantly, blinking, as if to adjust his eyes to a bright light. He was in a baggy gray suit and a storekeeper's white half-apron. As he glanced nervously around, unaccountably Thorpe's fists curled, tightened.

"Okay, Mr. Jaffrey." Hannegan's head lowered. He looked like a charging ox. "Take your time. Is he here?"

The old man's washed-out gray eyes darted to the line, inched along. There wasn't a sound in the room, except the nasal breathing of the young man next to Thorpe.

The light glinted on the old fellow's glasses, obliterating his eyes and Thorpe only vaguely realized the man was looking at him. Then, in a hollow voice, the old man spoke.

"He had on a cap—a black cap. But that's him, all right. He's the man."

A plump, moist finger lifted—and pointed straight at Larry Thorpe.

As he stared at the man, he was conscious of a weird, detached feeling, as if he were standing outside himself, watching the man pointing at someone who looked like the Larry Thorpe he had always known. He wanted to laugh and tell the little storekeeper that his identification was absurd, fantastic. But his throat was as tight as if a band had been clamped around his windpipe. And instinct told him to keep his temper, that in calm was his only hope of escape.

He saw detectives rush toward him, felt them grab his arms and hold him as if subduing a wild beast. He felt himself being hauled out of the room and through the gabbling, yelling crowd. He caught a glimpse of Wycoff and tried to yell at the reporter to call Cora and Jim Mansfield. But again he never had a chance, for the cops, pushing the newspapermen out of their way, jostled their prisoner hurriedly up the broad marble staircase.

Chapter II

IT WAS quiet upstairs. Thorpe was taken down a long, dimly-lighted corridor and shoved into a cavernous room, empty of furniture except for a few long tables against the walls. A cane-bottomed chair was set significantly under a drop light in the center of the floor. Thorpe was pushed down on it.

A switch clicked, throwing off all light except that glaring one burning hotly over Larry Thorpe's head. There was no sound but the shuffle of feet, a few whispers. As the numbness left Thorpe he blinked and tried to pick out faces in the gloom beyond the circle of light. He had read of things like this, but had believed the stories exaggerated. It was still hard to believe what was happening was true.

Hannegan's heavy, deeply lined face was the first he made out. Then Vic Haber's, and next to Haber was a tall, round-shouldered man with the sharp face and pointed ears of a fox. Thorpe knew that face. The man was Simon Tindal, Mr. District Attorney. "Old Needlenose," the caricaturists had labeled him.

"Anything to say?" came Hannegan's rumbling voice from the gloom. "Be smart. Confess, and we'll go easy on you."

Thorpe was blazing with anger, but he knew he must keep his voice level, calm. "This is all a mistake," he said. "My name is Larry Thorpe. I live at Twelve-thirty-one Wilton Avenue. I'm

a builder. I was out for a walk when I was picked up. My wife should be home about now. She'll be worried. Let me call her and—"

"And you'll confess?" Hannegan broke in.

"Confess!" Thorpe exploded. "To what? To being picked up? That's all there is to confess. And that's all I'm going to say until I see my lawyer. That's my right and you goons aren't going to—"

Hannegan bounded forward. Thorpe was too astonished to move. He saw stars shatter before his eyes, felt himself flying backwards. He landed on his shoulder, rolled, scrambled to his knees and saw several detectives drawing guns. He climbed slowly to his feet, deliberately righted the chair and sat down.

"I served on Okinawa," he said in a low voice. "One night out on patrol, the Japs grabbed me. They wanted me to talk. They used gun-butts on me." He bared his teeth. "See those? GI crockery. Go ahead, Hannegan. But remember fists leave bruises."

Hannegan stepped forward again. Tindal grabbed his arm. Tindal reached back to the table behind him and picked up a gun.

"Ever see this before?"

Thorpe looked at the gun. "I've got one like it. And I've got a license for it. I carry a lot of pay-roll money at times."

Tindal showed a slug in the palm of his other hand. "A thirty-eight revolver, a thirty-eight slug—the slug we dug out of Gus Palidaris's body."

"So what?" Thorpe asked scornfully. "Don't tell me you had a ballistics expert match the slug to my gun."

Hannegan snorted. "He thinks we're stupid. We know all about how guys like you can beat that scientific stuff, Thorpe. Just run a rattail file through the barrel and the land markings are destroyed."

Thorpe felt a prickling all through him. He saw a faint smirk on the squat Haber's face. His scalp felt tight as he

remembered he hadn't cleaned his gun since he'd recently done some target shooting with it.

"Gonna talk now?" Hannegan asked softly.

Thorpe said stiffly, "When my lawyer gets her. Not before. You know him—Jim Mansfield."

Tindal's eyes narrowed swiftly. "The great reformer. We know there's politics behind this, Thorpe. And we know your personal motive for killing Palidaris." He waved to someone across the room. "Will you step over here, please?"

A heavy-set man with dark, unshaven jowls stalked over. His black brows were bushy, his mouth loose, and his weathered face lumpy. His brown suit was untidy. And Thorpe would never forget him—Mort Howell, the union delegate with whom he'd had trouble over those cement thieves.

THEY looked at each other levelly.

Mort Howell had climbed high since that day, was a power in his own union now, had been close to Palidaris, in spite of his reputation for ruthlessness and vindictiveness.

"You see, Thorpe?" Tindal purred. "We know how you hate union men. Mr. Howell, tell us again what Thorpe said to you the time you had trouble with him."

"He said he'd rot in hell before he gave in," Howell said in a chillingly flat voice. "He said he'd get us—all of us, from Gus Palidaris down—if we didn't leave him alone."

Thorpe remembered. Yes, he had said something like that. But Howell had omitted enough to twist the meaning outrageously. What he *had* said was that he'd rot in hell before he gave in to *racketeers*, union or not, that if the union sheltered thieves, he'd fight them and get them, from Palidaris down. Hot words, when his temper had snapped.

"Be sensible," Tindal said. "Confess, and probably we can arrange for a lesser plea."

"Look, I know you're up for reelection."

tion, that you're under fire and desperately need a conviction. But you're not going to use *me!*"

"Look at the evidence," Tindal said smoothly. "You have no alibi. You had a gun. You had a motive. We have an eye-witness who swears he saw you commit the murder. Can you doubt I can get a conviction? Be sensible, Thorpe. Confess."

Thorpe looked up into the sharp face, and felt as if the walls were closing on him like a giant vise, to crush him to death.

"I'm not saying anything more," he said hoarsely, "until I see my lawyer."

"Okay, you can go, Mr. Howell," Hannegan said. "Looks like I take over again."

The detective opened the door to let Howell out and pandemonium gushed in. One sharp, crisp, angry voice rode in on the crest of the babel. Jim Mansfield's voice!

"Don't hand me that nonsense!" Mansfield was shouting. "You tell Tindal I'll be back in fifteen minutes with a court order if I don't get to see my client!"

Tindal and Hannegan exchanged quick looks. Tindal shrugged slightly.

"Let him in, Joe," he called.

Jim Mansfield strode in, a deep scowl on his long, horse face. He gave Thorpe a tight smile, then looked around coldly.

"Well, well, the old Third Degree—the bully boys in their Inquisition Chamber." He looked at Thorpe carefully, tenderly touched the bruise on his cheek. "We'll have to get a picture of that," he snapped.

"Now, look here, Mansfield—" Tindal began.

The lawyer swung on him. "Is he a suspect in the Palidaris murder?"

"A suspect!" Tindal exploded. "We've got an air-tight case against him!"

"Air-tight, eh?" Mansfield nodded slowly. "Just how air-tight."

Tindal outlined his case. When he finished, Mansfield said, his voice crisp and confident:

"All right, Tindal. I concede you have

enough to hold my client. But I'm going to insist that you book him and arraign him immediately in night court. Otherwise I'll get a writ and force you to."

A bland smile crept over Tindal's face. "I've decided to let Mr. Thorpe go, for the time being. But I expect him to be in my office tomorrow morning at nine."

There was a quick, startled silence. Hannegan started to protest, then changed his mind. Thorpe felt stunned, and Mansfield looked suspicious.

Tindal lifted a hand holding a key case. "These are yours, aren't they, Thorpe? You must have lost them down in the detention room."

Mansfield snorted. "You'll have a hard time making that stick in court, Tindal—if you try to introduce evidence obtained by illegal search and seizure."

Tindal shrugged indifferently. Thorpe took the keys. As he was turning away, his eye fell on the table behind Tindal. Next to the gun was a bulb-handled file—a rattail file—from his own toolcase at home!

THE plan—the whole monstrous, fiendish scheme—was suddenly horribly clear. Hannegan hadn't picked out of thin air that remark about the way the experts could be beat by reaming out a gun-barrel with a file. That gun *had* been reamed out, and would be strong proof of guilt. He was being framed!

It also was clear now why Tindal was letting him go. The frame would be more certain of sticking if Larry Thorpe wasn't around to defend himself when the case came to trial. He understood dimly that the stakes in this must be big. And above all, Tindal and the forces behind Tindal wanted to be sure Thorpe never got a chance to break the frame that something would be done to keep him from showing up at the D.A.'s office in the morning!

As Thorpe and Mansfield walked down the long, narrow corridor, neither spoke until they reached the head of the mar-



"I called the police," she said, "but they gave me the runaround. . . ."

ble staircase. There they stopped, looked at each other. And Thorpe saw then that Mansfield also had guessed what was in Tindal's ruthless, calculating mind.

"He can't be that rotten," Thorpe said huskily.

His lawyer's mouth was grim. "A rumor's around that Gus was killed by a hired gunman. Gus was honest, a bulwark against the return of racketeer rule. With him gone—"

"Hannegan's out to get me," Thorpe said bitterly.

"No, it's bigger than that, much bigger. Hannegan's primitive but honest,

with his brains in his fists. An easy tool for men like Tindal. There's the boy to watch. If big racketeers are moving in on this town they have to have the D.A.'s office before they can operate. If Tindal can get a quick break in the Palidaris case, his stock will zoom, and he'll be reelected hands down. So Larry—maybe you can see why Tindal and the men behind him won't hesitate to kill you to get their hands on loot."

Thorpe said numbly, "Such things can't happen to people like me. Not in a big city, a modern city like this."

Mansfield said soberly, "Larry, I asked

you to help us keep the reform ticket in office, so we could modernize our Police Department, clean out the crooks, keep racketeers out, but you—and a lot of others—were too busy to help.”

“All right—all right,” Thorpe said wearily. “Let’s leave politics for later. What are we going to do *now*?”

“Sit tight. Eye-witness testimony is notoriously unreliable. That witness will be the weak link, and—”

Thorpe cut in tensely, “We’ve got to see him tonight!”

“Don’t be a fool, Larry. If you go near him, that may give them an excuse to—”

“Shoot me down?” Thorpe said bitterly. “But suppose *he* dies before morning, shot with *my* gun?”

Hansfield’s fist closed. “We need help, powerful help. You go on. I want to talk to Len Wycoff. His paper’s been fighting Tindal tooth and nail. Wait for me outside.” He paused. “Cora’s out there. Try not to look too worried.”

Thorpe had to smile. Sure, try not to look worried.

The foot of the staircase was blocked off by uniformed cops holding reporters at bay. The newsmen asked questions, of course, and some didn’t seem to believe Larry Thorpe had been picked up by mistake. But their real interest was in Tindal, so they let him go. He felt their eyes on him all the way out.

Just outside the entrance Cora came running to him. Then she was in his arms, and he felt her trembling.

“I was frantic when I got home and found the house all upset,” she said breathlessly. “I called the police and they gave me the runaround, so I got suspicious and called Mr. Mansfield. It’s all right, isn’t it?” She drew away sharply. “Where’s Mr. Mansfield? It isn’t over, is it?”

He couldn’t lie to her. “No, not yet.”

She looked scared, but she didn’t break.

“If I’d staved home tonight you’d have an alibi.”

“Yeah, and if I hadn’t decided to take

a walk—” He shrugged.

Then Mansfield came out. With him was Len Wycoff, a dour scowl on his bony face. Cora’s hand tightened on her husband’s.

“Mansfield tells me —” Wycoff stopped, eyed Cora, then shrugged. “I guess she knows the score. Mr. Thorpe, it’s plain as day that Gus was gunned down by a hired killer so racketeers can move in. And Old Needlenose needs a fall guy. Mansfield says you’re elected. He gave me the bones. You better put the meat on it.”

Chapter III

LARRY told the whole story, from the moment he had left the house to take his walk. Wycoff rocked on his heels, listening carefully, his expression blank. When Thorpe finished, the newspaperman gave Mansfield a dour look.

“Tindal’s taking a big risk letting Thorpe loose. I don’t get it. Why did he do it?”

“He knew why I insisted on booking and arraigning Larry immediately. Tindal would have to lay out his evidence at the arraignment. He’d know, too, that I’d insist on impounding the gun and having a parafine test taken on Larry’s hand to establish whether or not he had fired a gun tonight.”

Wycoff’s brows went up. “That jerk Police Department hasn’t got a scientific lab. They didn’t even take pictures of the murder scene or the corpse.”

“I know. Only a few of the big cities have labs. Politicians don’t want them. It’s hard to tamper with that kind of evidence. Some cities use competent amateurs, and we have one right here—Doc Sorensen. We used him while we had control of the Department. Tindal knew if we got Sorensen in, his case would be blown sky-high.”

Wycoff nodded slowly. “Now, I see it. Maybe I could get the boys to nose around and come up with the name of the hired killer. But to keep Thorpe off the hot seat, we’d have to have solid

evidence. Any ideas?"

"That witness," Thorpe put in quickly. "I believe he'd change his mind about identifying me if he saw me again. I want to talk to him—with you present, Wycoff."

Wycoff smiled thinly. "Need me for a shield?" Obviously he wasn't keen about the idea, but he finally said, "It's a big story. And I'm just sucker enough to stick my neck way out to get it—if it's true."

Thorpe felt a quick surge of anger. But he understood Wycoff. Cynicism, skepticism were ingrained in him, but his nose for news and his urge for a beat would keep him on Thorpe's side. Which was all right with Larry Thorpe.

He kissed Cora and told her to go home and wait. She took a step toward him. She wanted desperately to stay with him, help him. But he shook his head. This was something he had to handle without her. And Wycoff vetoed having Mansfield, a lawyer, along either.

When Thorpe and Wycoff reached the slum district it was almost midnight, and all was quiet. A tomcat scudded across in front of Wycoff's slowly moving car. An occasional passerby scurried along, and a few teen-agers were hanging around an all-night lunchroom near the corner where Gus Palidaris had fallen. But there were no crowds of the curious still around.

Wycoff nosed the car into a parking place just off the corner and they got out. They stood there a moment, looking around. Not a soul in sight. No cops anywhere. And Thorpe had expected this place—the home of the eye-witness to the biggest murder the city had known in years—to be heavily guarded against the possible return of the killer.

Wycoff led the way to the doorway of a dingy old grocery store. The store was dark, but light showed around the edges of the shades on the windows of the first-floor apartment. As they went up the creaky staircase, Thorpe caught the scurry of footsteps overhead. Then silence. Wycoff knocked on the opaque

glass of the door.

"Open up, Mr. Jaffrey."

After a pause, the door was pulled back an inch, the chain rattling. Wycoff showed his press card.

"Wycoff—from the *Advance*. Sorry to bother you, but—well, that man you identified as the killer. They decided he wasn't. The killer's still loose." He lifted his hand quickly. "I'm here to help you."

The chain rattled and the door opened. The moment Jaffrey caught sight of Larry Thorpe he shrank back against the wall, the blood draining from his plump face.

"Don't be frightened, Mr. Jaffrey," Wycoff soothed. "The police released him. They wouldn't have let him go if they'd thought he was the killer, would they?"

THE old man backed into the kitchen, his eyes wide behind the thick lenses. There was a quick opening and closing of a door. Probably the man's wife, hiding in the bedroom. Thorpe wished he could say something to relieve their minds.

The kitchen was small, and coffee cups and cake on the table showed the old man and his wife had been having a snack.

"I've got nothing against you, Mr. Jaffrey," Thorpe said quietly. "I just want to clear up something. It was noisy down there, and everybody was excited. Look at me again. Are you sure I'm the man you saw at the scene of the crime?"

The old man's flabby jowls quivered. "Y-yes. I'm sure—pretty sure."

Thorpe shook his head. "You know you'll be called to the witness stand in court, don't you? And if the jury believes you, you'll be helping send me to the electric chair?"

"I have to tell the truth, don't I?" Jaffrey asked nervously. "Yes, I am sure."

Thorpe felt a dull hopelessness. This old man was determined to defend the

stand he had taken.

"How close were you to him?" Wycoff asked.

"Right across the street," Jaffrey said. "He came out of that alley. He had a gun in his hand. He ran over to the curb by the fire hydrant, fired those shots, then ran back into the alley. He stumbled and his cap fell off, and I got a good look at him."

Larry's pulses leaped. "Did he pick up the cap?"

Jaffrey frowned. "I—I don't know. I—I don't think so. He kept running."

Thorpe said slowly, "If we could find that cap—"

"What a chance!" Wycoff said. "A couple of thousand people trampled all over the place. If the cops didn't find it, some kid probably picked it up."

Thorpe's lips pressed together. "We've got to look. It's a clue—maybe my only hope of clearing myself."

Wycoff shrugged. "We've got nothing to lose by looking. Want to come along, Mr. Jaffrey, and show us where you saw the cap fall?"

Jaffrey hesitated, then went out. They could hear him arguing with his wife. That might mean the old man was beginning to have doubts. Finally, he came out again with a coat on, and the three went downstairs.

Wycoff got the flashlight from his car, gave it to Thorpe and the three crossed the street and Jaffrey pointed out where he had seen the cap fall from the head of the escaping gunman.

Thorpe got to his knees and threw the light under the parked cars, looked along the littered curb, then into the alley back of the drug store. He searched feverishly, pulling away the garbage cans to make sure the cap hadn't dropped or been kicked behind them, turned over papers and boxes strewn about, plunging deeper into the darkness. The farther in he went, the more his hopes oozed away.

At last, he had to give up. The cap couldn't possibly have got so far down the alley. Wycoff probably was right.

Some kid must have got it. When he came out to the sidewalk, Wycoff and the old man were standing by the hydrant. Scowling, he turned the light once more into the alley, reluctant to give up.

A tingle went through him as the light focused on a garbage can there. A piece of greyish cloth showed at the edge of the tilted lid. He bounded to it, snatched off the cover, and his hand shook a little as he picked up the cloth. It was the cap!

He wheeled as he heard Wycoff and the old man coming over, held the cap up triumphantly.

"This is it!" he said breathlessly. "It has to be!"

Jaffrey looked dubious. "He was wearing a black cap."

"Go across the street and stand where you were standing," Thorpe said angrily. "See if this doesn't look black to you from there in this light."

Wycoff nodded slowly. "I guess it would," He shrugged. "So you got a cap. Now what? Take it to the cops?"

"You know what would happen to it if I took it to them," Thorpe said acidly. "They'd lose it. No, we're going to take it to Doc Sorensen. Let him examine it."

WYCOFF rubbed his mouth. "Sounds reasonable. Sometimes Doc finds things nobody would dream—"

He stopped abruptly, swung around. Thorpe turned, too, tensed. Haber and Malone, the two cops who had first run him in, pulled up in a squad car. Thorpe's hand clenched on the cap and he took a step toward the alley.

"Hold it!" Haber called hoarsely, and the squad car's spotlight laid its white path across them.

"Beat it!" Wycoff spat out.

Thorpe bounded forward as if springs inside him had snapped. If Vic Haber got his hands on this cap—

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Haber yelled.

A shot thundered through the night and brick chips spattered just as Thorpe

hit the mouth of the alley. He ran desperately, glanced back once, saw that Wycoff had stepped in front of the detectives and was arguing with them shrilly. Thorpe spotted a wooden fence just ahead, sprinted for it, leaped, grabbed the top and clambered over. Another shot whined after him as he dropped on the other side.

He picked himself up, heart hammering, and raced on. He knew what this meant. The alarm would be out for him now. He would be fair game for any cop he ran across. Any of them could shoot him down on sight.

As he raced down another dark alley and across a deserted street he realized that he couldn't run forever. And he didn't have a dime! Anyway the railroad stations, the bus terminals, the highways would all be covered. He knew then the lonely terror of the hunted. He had embarked on a path from which there was no turning. He must risk all on what Doc Sorenson could make out of this cap.

Slowly, carefully, he worked his way back across to the better residential section of town. In the distance, he heard sirens. Each minute he expected swarms of cops to be at his heels. He wanted to go home, wanted to see Cora. But home was the first place the police would look for him. Whatever the risk, he *had* to go straight to Sorenson!

He stopped at an all-night drug store and looked up the doctor's address in the phone book. He was conscious that he looked like a bum, and that the soda jerk and the lone blonde at the fountain were eying him suspiciously. He got out of there as fast as he could.

Sorenson lived on a street of well-kept brownstones, a few of which had been remodeled into fairly expensive small apartment houses. As he came up the silent street, he glanced back, acutely conscious of the echoing of his footsteps. But no one was following him.

He stopped short as he caught sight of a man sitting on the stoop of one of the houses down the block. He got the

number from the nearest house, counted down. The man was sitting on Sorenson's stoop, all right. Thorpe moved on warily, fairly sure he knew who that man would be. He felt the tightness leaving his chest as he came closer and the lean, bony face of the waiting man took on sharpness.

Wycoff got up as Larry approached, his scowl deep. "They chased you," he said grumpily. "So I just walked away. I knew you'd turn up here. You had no place else to go." He paused, then grunted sourly, "Now, you got *me* in up to my ears. Let's see what Sorenson says about this cap business. He's still up. I've talked to him already."

He led the way around to the basement door. The iron grill was slightly open. Wycoff went in, waited, then slammed the gate after Thorpe came in. The newspaperman went on ahead again, through a vestibule, then down a long, narrow, deeply carpeted hall to the back of the house and to the room which had once been the kitchen, but now was the doctor's examination room and lab.

It was a big room, gleaming white, with neon lights blotting out every shadow. There were cabinets, a big diathermy machine, a fluoroscope, an examining table.

SORENSEN was examining some X-rays on a lighted ground glass screen when the two came in. He was a thin, spidery man with a sharp chin and a scraggly mustache, and he wore a seedy-looking black suit with a black string tie and an old-fashioned collar. He didn't look much like a modern man of science.

He put on steel-rimmed glasses, looked up at Thorpe. "Is *this* Jim Mansfield's friend? He looks like a bum." He frowned. "Is that the cap?"

Thorpe said awkwardly, "I don't know what you can do with it, Doc, but I thought—"

Doc said sharply. "You haven't even learned how to think yet, young man,

You should have put this in a clean bag." He showed uneven teeth in what he supposed was a smile. "Assuming, of course, that you had one in your pocket. Let me have it."

He took it to the table in the middle of the room, then went to his cabinets.

"I put all my equipment away when the old crowd got back into City Hall," he remarked. "Hannegan's been around to consult me once or twice, but—well, you know Hannegan. He still thinks the fist is the greatest crime detection machine ever invented. And it's remarkable how many times he's right."

Chapter IV

RUMMAGING around in the closet, Doc Sorenson brought out a small, portable tank vacuum cleaner. From the upper cabinet, he brought out a package of filter papers and put fresh ones into the thick, tubelike attachment at the end of the vacuum cleaner hose.

Hooking up the cleaner, he vacuumed the cap slowly, carefully, paying particular attention to the underside of the sweatband. Thorpe was impatient, for he had gambled his life on what this gnomelike man might find. He hardly dared even to hope.

The job finished at last, Sorenson removed the filter paper and placed it on the table. It was blackened with dust. With a huge magnifying glass he examined the dust intently. He grunted finally, and from another cabinet hauled out a microscope and a rack of cleanslides. With tweezers, he picked something out of the dust and placed it on a slide, clipped the slide to the stage of the microscope and peered into the eyepiece and focused it. He finally looked up, his lips pursed.

"Well, the first thing we can say about the owner of this cap is that he has jet-black hair."

Wycoff glanced at Larry Thorpe's light brown hair. "You're sure? How wrong can an eye-witness be?"

Sorenson said, "Assuming this cap

belongs to the killer, the eye-witness can be very wrong. A street light glinting on black hair could make that witness believe the hair was light—even blond. But let's see what else we can find out about this man. There's more in that dust."

He picked up his magnifying glass and peered into the dust again. On one clean slide he placed some small white particles; on another, some longer hairs. He examined them and straightened.

"Well, now we have a better picture. The black hairs were cuttings, such as adhere to a man's hat after a haircut. Those small white specks—they look like lime and are quite numerous. So, I'd say he works in the building line. Those other hairs—the long ones—look like animal hairs, shed hairs, probably mink. So, I'd say he might have contact with the fur business."

Thorpe's eyes widened. It was like a photo materializing in his mind. Yet there seemed to be something missing, a vital part.

"Can you tell anything else from the cap?" he asked eagerly. "I think—"

Sorenson waved impatiently. "I'm not a miracle man, Mr. Thorpe. And these conclusions are based on a superficial examination."

"And we're not even sure the cap is the killer's," Wycoff objected. "Jaffrey's identification of it wasn't positive."

"I'm sure," Thorpe said irritably. "It wouldn't have been in that garbage can by accident. That sidewalk had been cleaned after all the excitement was over, and the cap was right on top of the garbage."

Sorenson wasn't listening. He was examining the cap again. Thorpe strained to link those facts together—black hair, lime, fur. The answer seemed maddeningly at the tip of his tongue.

Sorenson grunted sharply, picked up a knife and drew over a fresh piece of filter paper. Slowly, carefully, he scraped the fabric on the underside of the cap near the sweatband. Small black specks fell on the white paper.

But he didn't put the specks on a slide. From another cabinet he brought out two bottles and a rack of clean test tubes. He opened a bottle marked, "Peroxide" and poured a small quantity of it into a tube, and a larger amount from the other bottle which was labeled, "*Leuco machite*." Then, with a thin glass tube he sucked up a little of the light green liquid and let a drop fall on the black particles on the white paper. Even though Thorpe couldn't understand, he watched breathlessly.

The green stain on the filter paper began to darken. It became a deep blue-green. The doctor nodded solemnly.

"Just as I thought. Blood."

"What of it?" Wycoff growled.

SORENSON said, "Well, from the position of the stain on the cap, I'd say this man has recently been cut on the temple near the cap line. You ought to find a scar there."

Thorpe's breath came out in a gush as the picture flashed before him.

"Pinky!" he breathed. "Pinky Armond!"

Wycoff turned slowly. "What about him?"

"It fits," Thorpe said, his voice taut with excitement. "Pinky works around building jobs. He has a livid red scar on his temple. He was in the detention pen with me. He told me he had been picked up for questioning about a fur loft burglary. Wycoff, I'm sure of it! Pinky Armond's the killer!"

"Now wait a minute," Wycoff objected. "That little punk's nothing but a small-time bookie's runner."

"He's in with racketeers, too," Thorpe said tautly. "When I was having trouble with those cement thieves, Pinky told me it was an organized racket. Actually, he was warning me not to fight them, but I was so mad I didn't take it that way. You see? He *must* have been in contact with racketeers. He'd kill his own grandmother for a few bucks. He's the killer!"

Wycoff's eyes narrowed. "It makes

sense. When they found you were going to make trouble, they must have decided you were too small to bother with, and laid off. Rather than raise a howl in the papers."

Wycoff stalked over to a phone on a small side table and dialed rapidly.

"City room, please . . . Joe Falk there . . . Yeah . . . Joe? This is Len Wycoff." A squawk came from the receiver. "Okay—okay, so I'm wanted. Now, shut up and listen. Have they cleared out that downstairs detention pen yet? . . . Well find out. And be quiet about it." There was a longish pause, then, "Yeah, I'm still here . . . All of them? . . . Who?" His mouth tightened. "Thanks, Joe. That's what I wanted to know."

The phone clattered into place. Wycoff turned slowly, his lean face grim.

"Pinky's still there."

Thorpe could feel an artery ticking in his temple. He said hurriedly, "I'll call Mansfield—get him to bail Pinky out and—"

"Don't be naive," Wycoff broke in quietly. "The minute you make a move like that, Pinky will disappear. You'll never get a smell of him again. They'll rush him out of town—or maybe wrap him in concrete and drop him into the river to make sure he never talks."

"If I could get a sample of his hair," Sorenson put in mildly, "I could establish definitely whether or not he owns that cap."

Wycoff and Thorpe looked at Sorenson, frowned. Finally Wycoff said:

"That's it, Thorpe. We've got to go there."

Thorpe stiffened. "Are you crazy? The minute I step foot in that station house, they'll toss me into a cell and throw the key away."

"Not if Doc establishes that the cap belongs to Pinky."

"Then the cap disappears."

"Hannegan's honest," Wycoff said flatly. "Okay, have your doubts. But you've got to take the chance."

"I'll come along," Sorenson offered.

"Perhaps I can get wax out of his ears to discover whether it contains lime and bits of fur. I may help to make him talk."

Larry Thorpe wanted to run and keep running. But he had no place to go. He walked over to the phone, dialed, and heard Cora's anxious voice asking him where he was. Yes, Mr. Mansfield was with her. He told her to have the lawyer meet him at the police station. He barely heard Sorenson packing some bags. He felt as he imagined a man would feel when he walked down the last lonely mile. . . .

THE grim old station house seemed deserted. Hardly a sound came through the wide-open front doors, and there was plenty of parking space along the silent street. As the three men got out of the car with Doc Sorenson's bags, Cora and Jim Mansfield darted from the shadows beside the entrance to meet them. Thorpe took her in his arms, held her close. They didn't say anything. There was nothing to say.

"You did the smart thing, coming straight here," Mansfield said. "I've notified Hannegan."

Thorpe didn't answer. He was wondering if he were walking straight into the jaws of a deadly trap. He realized, though, that his fate now was no longer in his own hands, but in the hands of his lawyer and this gnome-like little man with his microscope—and a bull-headed cop who might or might not be honest.

Wycoff and Doc Sorenson briefed Mansfield quickly as they drifted over to the entrance, carrying a suitcase, a small medical bag, a boxlike affair that looked like a recording machine and a microscope case. Cora gave her husband's hand a quick squeeze as they went in.

The law was waiting over by the sergeant's desk, Hannegan looking drawn, but still a harassed bull, while Simon Tindal slightly nervous, puzzled. Mort Howell was with them, his lumpy face set in grim lines.

Wycoff's brows went up slightly. "I thought you'd gone home long ago, Howell."

Howell's jaw was hard. "The boys are demanding action. When I heard—" He scowled. "We're not resting until Gus's killer is behind bars. You know what he meant to us all."

Everyone did know how fiercely loyal every union man in town had been to their big boss, how high Gus had stood in their affections, how deep was their grief and sense of outrage. As Howell stared at him, a new wave of uneasiness swept through Thorpe. It grew as he saw two uniformed cops take posts at the entrance. He was a prisoner!

"Suppose we get right down to business," Tindal said crisply. "Has he decided to confess?"

Mansfield smiled. "He decided to come in and make sure you get the right man this time."

Hannegan eyed the lawyer levelly. "All right, you tell me. Who's the right man? Where is he?"

"Here," Mansfield said blandly.

Hannegan's eyes shifted from face to face. He scowled as he saw the big grin on Wycoff's face.

"Right here in this station house," the newsman said. "You picked him up tonight and never knew it. You and your dragnet."

"We let 'em all go," Hannegan growled. "Except one punk we're holding for questioning on a loft burglary."

"You better take another look at him," Wycoff said drily. "Because we're pretty sure the cap fits him."

Doc Sorenson lifted the paper bag he was carrying. "This is the one he means. Hannegan, your witness said the killer was wearing a cap, didn't he?"

"Sure, but—"

"But you didn't find it, or even look for it."

Hannegan said defensively, "How do I know it's been found?"

"Ask Stan Malone and Vic Haber," Wycoff said. "Or didn't they bother to

(Turn to page 82)

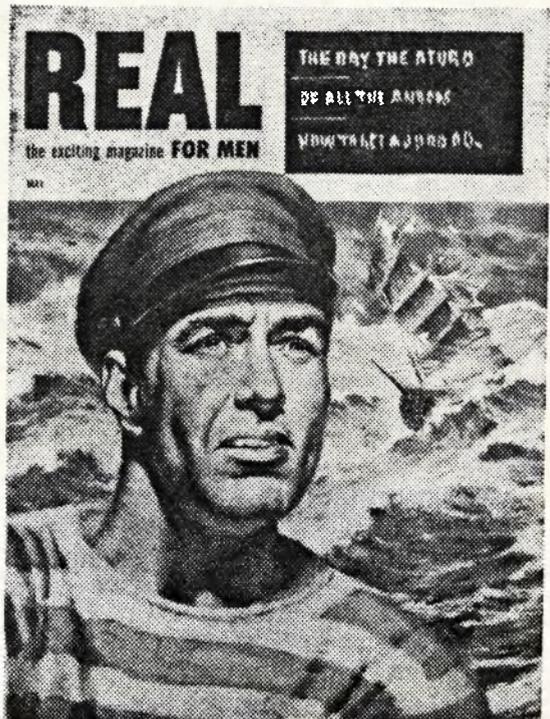
Read It Now In REAL!

"DANGER IS MY DESTINY"

**SOON TO BE PUBLISHED AS A \$3.00 BOOK
READ ITS EXCITING CHAPTERS SERIALIZED
IN REAL MAGAZINE, BEGINNING NOW.**

An adventurous saga of Captain Dod Orsborne, a modern sailor-of-fortune, typical of the thrilling features which add up to more excitement per page in every issue of REAL.

**Buy your copy of the
current issue of REAL today.
On sale at
all newsstands.**



mention it?"

"They said you were intimidating the witness."

"That's a damn lie!" Thorpe burst out. "We were—"

"Easy, Larry," cautioned Mansfield. "Hannegan, we want Doc to make tests and find out if the cap found out there belongs to Pinky Armond."

"It wouldn't prove a thing," Tindal said quickly.

"It wouldn't be sure proof he was the killer," Mansfield conceded, "but Pinky would have some tall explaining to do. Like, how did the cap get there?"

Hannegan finally nodded. "Okay, we got nothing to lose by making the test."

He turned abruptly and led the way into the detention pen. Thorpe hesitated as he saw Cora coming also, but she was determined. They trailed into the pen and the door closed behind them. A guard took a post with his back to the door.

Chapter V

THE stench in the long, dimly lighted detention room was almost overpowering. Smoke curled round the yellow bulbs like an evil fog.

Pinky Armond was leaning against an iron support, almost as if he hadn't moved from the spot since Thorpe had last seen him. His eyes narrowed slightly as he spotted Thorpe. He didn't look at anyone else. He took a drag on his cigarette, dropped it, ground it out carefully with the tip of his toe, evidently striving desperately to be nonchalant.

Thorpe wondered if Pinky was aware that only one of them would leave this room a free man, that the other would be walking straight toward the electric chair.

There was an uneasy shuffle of feet, then Sorenson asked, "Could you get me a hair from his head, Hannegan?"

Tindal started. "Now, see here—"

Hannegan swung around. "I suppose it could be called illegal. Want to make a point of it, Tindal?"

The D.A. glanced around quickly, then shrugged. Hannegan stalked over to Pinky, who backed away, as if to run. The scar on Pinky's temple stood out vividly.

"What gives?" he demanded shrilly. "You got no right to—"

Hannegan grabbed his arm and slammed his face to the wall. Pinky squealed as Hannegan grabbed his hair and yanked. Hannegan's fist came away with a tuft of hair.

"He doesn't have to be so brutal," Cora said in a low, angry voice.

Hannegan heard her. He gave Pinky a shove, walked over and gave Sorenson the hair.

"Don't try to tell me how to run my business, lady," he told Cora harshly, and added in a resentful tone that might mean a deep-seated sense of guilt, "I had a brother once. He was soft. He laughed when my father—he was a cop, too—told him a cop can't be soft. They gave my brother an inspector's funeral."

In those few cryptic words, Hannegan seemed to have told the story of his life. A man taught the doctrine of the iron fist by his father, convinced of its worth by the death of his brother yet knowing in his heart that his brother had been right. Hannegan was a confused man, for he was not a sadist.

Doc Sorenson had set up his microscope on a bench, was examining the hair from Pinky's head intently. Only Tindal's heavy breathing broke the breathless hush.

Sorenson got a slide from his box and slipped it under the lens. He studied that for a long time, too. Finally he lifted his head.

"I'd have to make further tests to be absolutely certain, but there's hardly a reasonable doubt. The hair clippings I found in the cap match the hair from this man's head."

Hannegan took the cap from the paper bag and showed it to Pinky.

"This yours?"

Pinky's eyes flicked over it. "Never saw it before."

"You're sure?" Hannegan's voice was ominously soft. "Doc found your hair clippings in it. And you never saw it before?"

Fear crept into Pinky's shifty eyes. "I had a cap like it once. I lost it."

"It's been found," Hannegan said grimly. "Right near where Gus Palidaris was murdered."

Pinky shrugged. "So what? I had a cap like it. I lost it a week ago—in a fight. He touched the scar on his temple. "You can't pin that kill on me. I ain't talking no more—not until I see my lawyer."

Tindal murmured, "He's within his rights, of course."

"Strange, isn't it?" Mansfield murmured. "Mr. D.A. suddenly shows a touching concern for a prisoner's rights."

Hannegan gave Tindal a long, puzzled look.

WYCOFF was smiling tightly.

"They're making a sucker out of you, Hannegan," he said softly. "You know why Gus was murdered? To get him out of the way so racketeers can move in. Tindal—"

"Just a minute!" Tindal cut in sharply. "Everyone know the *Advance* has been attacking the District Attorney's office and is looking to smear me with falsehood and innuendo to defeat me at the next election. This is not the time or place for politics." He turned to Hannegan. "Suppose we concede the cap belongs—belonged—to this man. What does it prove? It does not prove he was at the scene himself."

Wycoff smiled at Hannegan. "See what I mean? The D.A. defending a cheap crook. Why?"

Sorenson suggested sourly. "Suppose we keep this on a more factual level. Armond, would you swear you haven't fired a gun tonight?"

Pinky shrugged with feigned indifference.

"How about you, Thorpe?" Sorenson asked.

"I'll swear to that," Thorpe replied quickly.

"I can give both these men a paraffin test," Sorenson said. "You're familiar with it, aren't you, Tindal? When a man fires a gun, nitrates are driven into the skin. When hot paraffin is poured over the hand, and allowed to cool, the nitrates are drawn out of the skin. A reagent will bring out spots if nitrates are present. Would you submit to the test, Thorpe?"

Larry Thorpe nodded. "Any time." "It would only prove," Tindal said testily, "that a man did or did not fire a gun. It would not prove that the gun had been fired at Palidaris."

"It might be corroborating evidence in a chain," Sorenson said gently. "However—" He picked up the case that looked as if it held a recording machine. "A lie detector. Would you be willing to submit to it, Thorpe?"

Thorpe grinned broadly. "I'm ready." Sorenson cast a blandly look. "Armond, are you willing to prove you're telling the truth?"

Pinky's face went white. "I ain't going near that machine. It—it's unconstitutional."

Wycoff snickered. Hannegan grew red with rage and took a step toward Pinky, who shrank back, terror in his eyes.

"Go ahead—beat me!" he snarled. "See where it gets you!"

Hannegan's paw closed on Pinky's shirt. "Somebody's making a sucker out of me, and I want to know who!. You're going to tell the truth. You killed Gus, but you're only a hired killer. I want the man who hired you. Pinky, talk or I'll break every last bone in—"

"Wait!" Cora cried out. She was flushed, shaking. "You can't beat the truth out of him, Mr. Hannegan, not with the chair staring him in the face! Let someone else here submit to the lie detector—Mr. Tindal, for instance."

Tindal gasped. "Are you implying—"

Wycoff glanced at Cora, then at the D.A., and a slow smile spread over his bony face.

"You've got a smart wife Thorpe," he said softly. "Sure, rackets couldn't operate without protection from the D.A.'s office. So, even before Gus was killed, the head boy of them had to be sure he had the D.A.'s office in his pocket. A good story, eh, Tindal? And I'm going to write it—unless you submit to the test."

Tindal shouted, "This is an outrage! The dirtiest kind of politics. You're out to ruin me with lies and filthy innuendo!"

"Mr. Mansfield," Cora murmured, "if he is in on it, he'd be an accessory to murder, wouldn't he?"

Tindal's cheeks flamed, his fists clenched and, for a brief instant, it looked as if he meant to spring on her. But he just stood rigidly for a time, then slowly his shoulders began to sag, and a blank, dazed look came into his sharp features.

At a slight movement on Thorpe's right he shifted slightly, and caught sight of Mort Howell edging toward the door, his eyes flicking toward Tindal.

THORPE cursed himself. What an idiot he had been for not guessing before! The man who had been behind those cement thieves and racketeers, the man who had hoped to climb over the corpse of Gus Palidaris to be boss of the racket-ridden unions, the Big Boy, could only be Mort Howell!

He inched forward. Hannegan shot a swift glance at him, then his eyes shifted to the union boss. Before either could move, Howell leaped.

He grabbed the cop guarding the door, dumped him, swung around. Hannegan's hand slapped down for his gun, but froze as he saw that Howell had the cop's gun and was leveling it at his guts.

"You won't get far, Howell," Hannegan said in a low, savage voice. "We'll get you. No matter where you go, we'll get you."

Howell showed his teeth in a contemptuous smile. "That's what you

think. I didn't find out until tonight what a weak sister I had to deal with. Not Pinky. You can beat his brains out and he won't talk—I told him he was playing with dynamite trying to pin it on Thorpe. But he wouldn't listen. Him and his perfect schemes!" He shrugged. "I prepared my way out. So I'm leaving."

Hannegan grunted. "Don't move, anybody. Let him go. He won't get far."

Tindal swung around, his face livid. "You're going to leave me to take it alone!"

Instantly sensing what Howell was going to do, Larry Thorpe lunged forward, vaguely aware that Hannegan, too, was streaking toward the man. The gun went off with a thunderous roar. But Howell had been too rattled to aim and the bullet smashed harmlessly into the ceiling. With a roar Hannegan went for Howell with both fists flying.

Pinky was racing for the door, but Larry Thorpe stepped into his path, whipped up his right. Pinky ran smack into it, stumbled backward, went over flat on his back, and was still.

When Thorpe spun around again, it was all over. Mort Howell was a crumpled heap, his lumpy face bloody and battered, his eyes tightly closed. Hannegan stood over him, breathing heavily, like a bull at the end of a long charge.

He stood there frozen for a moment, then his fists slowly opened. He lifted his hands, stared at them, and a flush spread over his heavy, tanned face.

"You got to admit these have *some* use," he growled.

Dr. Sorenson chuckled. "No one ever said they didn't, Hannegan. You just should learn to use them more scientifically. You're not too old for that."

Hannegan scowled at the doctor, then his eyes shifted quickly to Thorpe. "I guess I owe you an apology, Thorpe. Yeah, maybe I do have something to learn."

Wycoff yelled, "Hey! Let me outta here! I got a story to write!"

Thorpe grabbed the reporter as he headed for the door. "Look, give the credit for this to Doc Sorenson."

"Politics," Tindal said in an ugly tone of voice.

"No," Mansfield said, a little sadly. "If I know Larry Thorpe, all he wants is to be left alone to work in peace. He's too busy for politics."

Thorpe suddenly felt tired; embarrassed, too. "All I want is to go home, if I can."

He couldn't, at the moment. There were details to clear up first. And he couldn't show enough gratitude to Doc Sorenson, for without the doctor's scientific knowledge, he'd be practically on his way to the chair.

At last Larry Thorpe and his wife were let out the back way, and they walked down the long, silent streets, laughing at themselves. Neither of them had taxi money. Larry hadn't had a cent since he'd left home, and Cora had rushed out so fast she had left her handbag at home.

Finally Thorpe said, "Thanks a lot, Cora."

She looked up at him in surprise. "For what?"

"For being so smart," he said. "First, you figured out something had happened to me and called Jim Mansfield. And you broke it wide open in that detention room."

SHE shrugged and shook her head. "I didn't do anything—nothing much. I kept thinking if I'd stayed home tonight, if I hadn't gone to that civic club meeting—"

"Then someone else, equally innocent, might have got what I almost got," he finished gruffly.

He was thinking of the thin, frantic, young man in that filthy detention pen, pleading to be allowed to phone his sick wife, just as he himself had wanted to call Cora and assure her he hadn't been in an accident. He was thinking, also, that there was much to be done to make their city what it should be, much dead-wood to be cleared out, new men to be trained, old men retrained, new methods introduced to the Police Department.

Hannegan couldn't bring about such changes, nor could Doc Sorenson, nor even Jim Mansfield, with all his work for reform. It was up to the small people like Larry and Cora Thorpe to get to work, helping to provide clean government. For without it they could never be sure of adequate police protection, so they could go about their work in peace, or even go for a walk on a quiet evening without the fear of being drawn into the brutal toils of the dragnet.

Larry Thorpe said, "The next time you go to that civic meeting, Cora, I'm going along. We'd better get some others, too. We'll all be safer that way."

Coming in the Next Issue

DON'T WAIT UP FOR ME

A Mystery Packed with Suspense

By **LARRY HOLDEN**

PLUS

TWO OTHER TOP-FLIGHT DETECTIVE NOVELS





ANNIVERSARY

By HAROLD HELFER

Little things add up to big things—like death

AS HE LOOKED out of the window and regarded the sky, so delicately pink-hued in the sunrise, Frank Halbert wondered what other men must think about on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. And it came to him that the general scope of the memories must be the same—some of the tender honeymoon moments, the shock of the first quarrel, the wondrous making-up, and then the pattern of conviviality and quarrels becoming pretty much a matter of routine, yet growing more deeply etched with the passing years.

An essentially sentimental man, Frank Halbert supposed he found himself dwelling more on their happier moments than others might. There was that wonderful cruise they had taken to Hawaii, and the whole summer they'd spent in Florida, and the time they worked together planning and building their cozily small-townish cottage. But even as all these pleasant memories came flowing wistfully back to him, the thought

of Mary Grace's first sharp words kept intruding, needling his subconscious mind.

They'd been married about seven or eight months at the time. He was in the living room, reading the paper, when she called out to him from the outside, "Frank, please come out here."

"I'll be with you directly," he'd answered, and had gone back to finishing up whatever he'd been reading.

He couldn't recall now just what she'd wanted. Whether it was for him to look at a new plant that had sprouted out in the yard, or to help her move something, or what. But he could still remember the displeased look she gave him when she came into the house a few seconds later.

It had come as something of a blow to know that Mary Grace could feel anything but respect and passion for him. And he could still remember what she said to him that day, "Frank, I do wish you'd have come when I asked you, in-

stead of saying what you did."

Quarrels, like almost anything else in life have a way of falling into a habitual pattern and blending into one another. But their fourth or fifth quarrel still stood out for Frank. He'd been upstairs shining a pair of boots when Mary Grace had called up to him, "Frank, please come down, will you?"

"I'll be with you directly," he'd called back.

Well, Mary Grace had been simply furious afterwards. Of course, he hadn't realized that a neighbor was calling or he might not have waited the three or four minutes it took him to finish his boots before making an appearance. But the thing that he remembered most about this occasion were Mary Grace's caustic words to him after the neighbor had left.

"I wish you'd never again use that expression—I'll be with you directly!" she said. "It infuriates me!"

And these five words, Frank realized, summed up the fundamental gap between them. Mary Grace expected him to be a cavalier-lackey who instantly dropped whatever he was doing to immediately be at her side, body and soul, at the slightest gesture from her. She couldn't tolerate independent leisure in a husband.

FRANK felt that actually he was far from a lazy person. He'd consistently been a better-than-average provider, was always doing something around the house, patching up a fence, painting the back porch or gathering up the leaves.

A sentimentally-inclined individual, he always remembered anniversaries, birthdays and such. But he did resent the idea that he shouldn't feel free to knock off a few minutes or even a few hours and just take it easy, if he felt like it. And that, if pressed into some husbandly about-the-house chores, he shouldn't have the right to let a sighful moment or two pass before responding.

Sometimes Frank remembered how much Mary Grace resented his phrase,

"I'll be with you directly," and refrained from using it. But sometimes, when an interruption by Mary Grace had annoyed him, he used the expression deliberately. To assert his independence. To let her know he was no automaton, incapable of no force or emotion except to respond to her slightest command.

Whenever he used that expression, inadvertently or otherwise, it always made her see red. It invariably led to a bitter quarrel or to smoldering silence. The long slide of years only seemed to deepen, to make more bitter, this conflict between them.

He recalled the time she'd thrown a shoe at him after he'd given her an "I'll be with you directly." They had been getting ready to go to church that morning. It had been Easter. Not that it mattered . . .

Now, on this twenty-fifth anniversary of his marriage, as Frank Halbert started out of his window at the delightfully fresh colorations in the sky following the rising sun, he remembered happier moments, too. Some of their Sunday evening outings on the bank of the creek. The annual office dance, always a gay affair. Their trip to Mexico, and the fun they'd had that night in Monterey hiring, for a few dollars, a miramba band to follow them around the cobbled streets all night and serenade them.

And, of course, there was something else that Frank remembered now, too. The happening on a Saturday afternoon this past November. It was hard to believe that it was only a few short months ago. It seemed more like ages.

But he could remember the whole thing so well. Even the score of the game he was listening to. Southern California was ahead of Notre Dame, 13 to 7, but, with less than three minutes to play, the Irish, having taken possession of the ball on their own five-yard line, looked like they might have begun to roll. A Notre Dame back had just completed a 12-yard plunge when Mary had called out to him from another room.

"I'll be with you directly," he told her.

And about a minute later Mary came stalking into the room, walked up to his chair and, without saying a word, leaned over and shut off the radio.

His eyes blazing in anger, he had stood up and confronted her. She had slapped him, and he grabbed her by the wrist. Then with her free hand, she had slapped him again and again and again . . .

The whole thing, which wound up in a blur of bizarre motions, seemed fantastically incredible now, as Frank looked out from his window at the un-

spoiled loveliness of a new day's dawning.

Frank was still standing there, motionless, when there was the metallic noise of a key turning in a lock behind him.

"About ready, Frank?" a familiar voice asked.

Frank Halbert permitted his eyes to range downward for a moment now, so that they took in the gallows in the jail courtyard below, and without turning, he answered the warden.

"I'll be with you directly," he said.



TWO T'S SPELL TROUBLE

THIS is a piece about how the "T formation" broke a kidnapping case. It was one of the most daring kidnapping crimes on record. A car just came along and swished away with John J. O'Connell, scion of an important upstate New York family, as he emerged from his Albany home.

Ransom notes immediately began to flow to the victim's family. It was clear that the kidnapers meant business.

The O'Connell family was willing to part with a considerable amount of money for John. The immediate hitch was an intermediary to handle the transaction. As requested by the ransom notes, the family would place names in the paper of people it thought might serve in that capacity. But the kidnapper turned them all down, one by one.

It was beginning to look pretty grim. And then one day the O'Connell family got the word, passed along from the underworld, that one Manny Strewl, who had a reputation as a bootlegger—this was a couple of decades ago—would be acceptable to the kidnapers.

So the O'Connells contacted Strewl. Sure, he said, if he could do any good he'd be glad to help.

A few days later Strewl was given \$42,500. And John O'Connell was a free man.

There was little O'Connell could tell the police about his kidnapers or where he'd been held. He'd been blindfolded.

The police had practically nothing to go on. In fact, about the only tangible link they seemed to have with the crime was Manny Strewl, and he chipperly denied doing anything more than carrying out the instructions of some anonymous criminals.

He laughed blithely at the police notion that he himself might be the real kidnapper as well as the go-between.

"That'd be awful daring, wouldn't it?" he replied with a grin.

He also grinned when the police asked him to sit down and write some words they told him to put down. "Sure, anything to oblige," he said.

They gave him words like "trouble," "tomorrow," "animal" and "learn." They also gave him the word "racketeer."

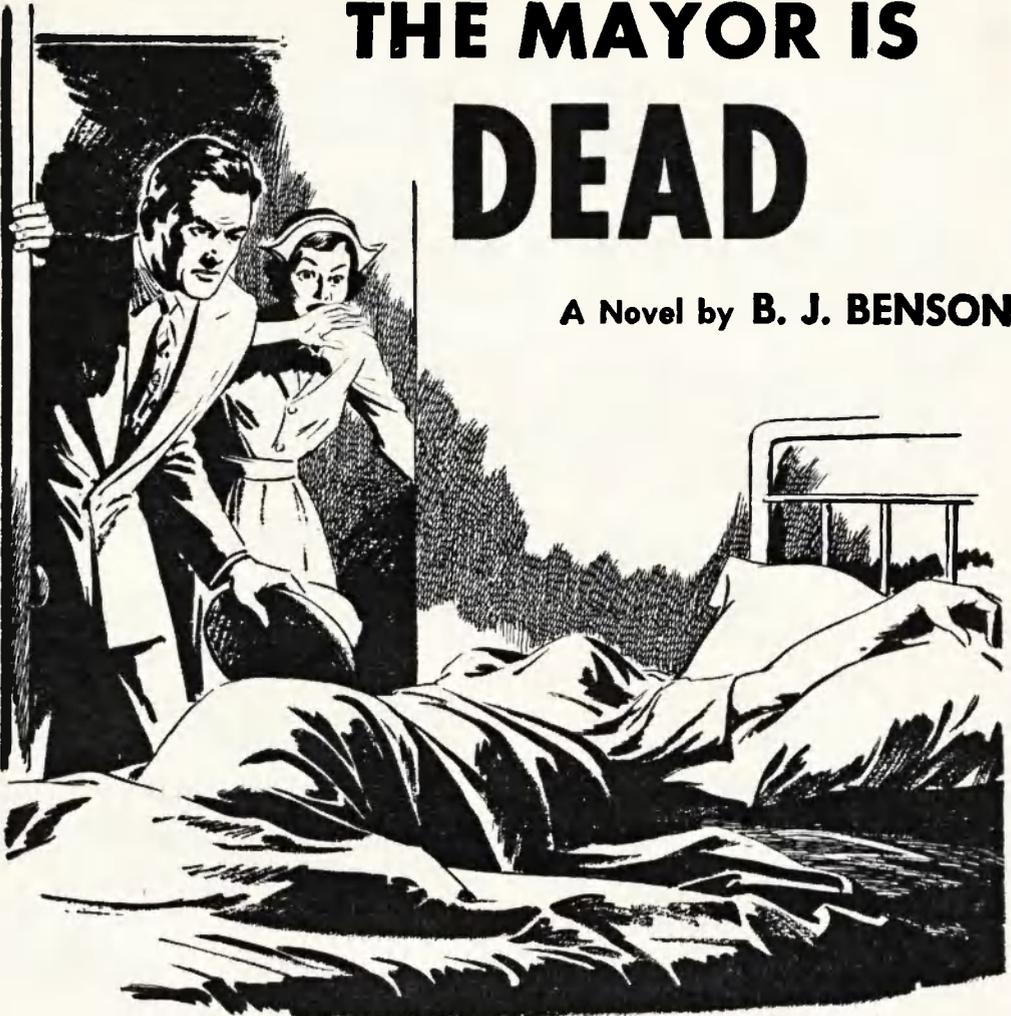
As soon as he wrote down this last word they arrested him. He spelled it, "racketeer," which was the way it had appeared in all the kidnapping notes.

That extra T sent Strewl to jail for 50 years.

—William Carter

THE MAYOR IS DEAD

A Novel by **B. J. BENSON**



Copyright 1949, by Better Publications, Inc. From May, 1949, Popular Detective.

Chapter I

WHEN I drove into Jefferton it was just past noon. The city was dirty and weather-beaten, with long grimy rows of cheap tenements and lines of frayed wash flapping in the wind. There was one modern business street with some fine shops, but surrounding this were blocks of second-rate stores and run-down hotels.

There was one modern hotel, the Jefferton Plaza. I took a room there, got shaved, and had

In a city of sin Mike Dobson fights for a dead friend and a redhead

dinner in the dining room. After that I drove down to the Jefferton National Bank. There I rented a safe deposit box big enough for my State Police credentials, my private license, my .38 Colt Detective Special and shoulder holster. I put them all in, and left.

I trundled my car down to the smoke-colored railroad station and called my office long distance. They promised I'd have the cards and forms by morning. I hung up and headed back uptown.

I hit smoke shops with slot machines; betting parlors; poolrooms that ran books and sold marihuana. I chummed up a few people and spoke to a drowsy young blonde at a frowsy old bar. I refused her offer to see some etchings.

When it got dark I drove back to the hotel. In the lobby I spotted the house dick leaning against the cigar counter. He was a dapper little man with a smart suit and a hard eye.

I went over to him and said, "My name's Dobson. Room Four-thirteen. You're the house detective."

"Yeah," he said. "How'd you know?"

"I know," I said. "Come on, I'll buy you a drink at the bar."

"I ain't supposed to drink with the guests, mister. 'Course if it's business—"

"It's business." I opened my hand, showing a folded ten spot. He shook hands with me and snagged it.

"Let's go," he said.

He ordered a Haig and Haig pinch bottle double without soda that cost me a couple of dollars. I had a whisky sour.

"Okay," he said as he downed it, "what's the gimmick?"

"How's that?"

"Come on, come on. What do you want? A girl? Good gambling spot?"

"I don't need you for that. I want information."

HE BROUGHT out a cigarette and lit it, but didn't offer me one.

"You'll get ten bucks worth," he said. "I'll let you know when you've asked enough."

"Fair enough," I said. "I represent the Footwear Research Institute."

"The what?"

"Footwear Research Institute. We conduct polls on the wearing of shoes. Similar to the Gallup poll. We take a cross section of people, so many in each town. Find out how much they walk each day, what their occupation is, and all that. From our survey the shoe manufacturers plan what type of shoe to make."

"Yeah?" His eyes narrowed and he sniffed suspiciously. "You're a big boy, too big to be fooling with that kind of stuff. And your nose has a dent in it. You look like you've been in the ring."

"Football," I said. "But in the line. All work and no glamour. Now, what I want to know is, how's the town on house-to-house interviewing? Do I need a permit?"

He blew smoke in my face. "Yeah. See Gravel Pants Munn down at Police Headquarters. The permit is half a buck. Sweetening's ten bucks more."

"Nice town," I said.

"Nobody asked you to come here, mister."

"By the way, what's this about the mayor being murdered last week? All the papers in the state are raising the devil about it."

"Look, Mr. Dobson. You worry about shoes. The mayor is dead. That's all."

"And nobody knows who did it or why."

"He's dead. That's all, brother."

"But the guy just took office two weeks ago. What's his name—Bell? That's it, Bell. Mason Bell. He wasn't even in office long enough to *make* any enemies."

His eyes glinted and he got off the high stool. "You've had your ten bucks worth, mister, and here's a little tip for you free. Don't ask too many questions in this town. It ain't healthy."

He went quickly out of the bar. When he got to the lobby he went over to the desk clerk. I saw them checking through the register. . . .



I let go from way back and hit
him as hard as I could

I got up early the next morning and went down to the desk. My graphs and charts were in from my agency in a big package marked "Footwear Research Institute." I bought a paper and looked at it. Bell was out of the headlines. There were two columns on his slaying halfway down the front page in a medium spread, headlined:

NO CLUES IN BELL MURDER
POLICE BAFFLED

I went into the dining room, wrapped myself around some bacon and eggs, then drove down to Police Headquarters.

It was an ancient brick building with dirty flyblown windows. Inside was an outdated high desk with a rickety railing in front of it. There was a smell of stale cigar smoke and old furniture.

"I want a house-to-house permit," I said to the unshaven, bald-headed desk sergeant. He wore a stained blue tunic with tarnished gold stripes, and dirty gray civilian pants.

"You one of these peddlers?" he asked.

"No. This is research work." I showed him the charts.

He yawned. "Go upstairs and see Captain Munn. License Bureau."

I went upstairs.

"Gotta use my own discretion on cases like this," said Munn. He had a beefy face, red with drink. He leaned back and leered at me. "Gotta watch out for con men and protect the citizens."

I gave him ten dollars.

"Police Fund," I said. "You can send the receipt."

I went out with the pink slip that cost me fifty cents more. . . .

The house was set back a little from the street. It was a little Cape Cod Colonial, painted white, and with black shutters. The lawn had been nice once, but was now unkempt. It was 1525 Wilbur Avenue, and it was the home of Mrs. Mason Bell.

I went up the flagstone walk and rang the bell.

Across the street I noticed a black coupé with a twisted short-wave aerial. There was a man sitting on the front seat. He had law written all over him.

I could hear footsteps clicking in the hall and the door opened.

SHE startled me. She was only about thirty-three but looked fifty. She had once been pretty, but now her face was a slate-gray and her black hair was straggly. She was tall and painfully thin and her house dress wasn't too clean. Most of all, her eyes bothered me. They were wild. As stared out at me the pupils were like pinpoints; eyes that were fastened on me, yet weren't.

When I pushed in, she didn't say anything. She followed me into the living room. I turned and faced her.

"Marian," I said, "it's Mike Dobson. You remember me? I grew up with Mason. We were kids together."

She stood there staring right through me. She sighed and turned her head away. I took hold of her hands. They were like damp dish rags.

"Remember Center City?" I said. "The old jalopy I had?"

She stood mute. I tried again.

"I've come to help, Marian. I've come to find out who killed Mason. There's nothing to be afraid of any more."

She shuddered, and I felt myself grow cold inside. Then I noticed again the deadness of her skin and her eyes. I grabbed her arm and pulled up the sleeve. I saw the tiny punctures on her upper arm. I went into the hall where I had seen the phone.

"Emergency," I said to the operator. "Mrs. Mason Bell, Fifteen-twenty-five Wilbur Avenue. Narcotic poisoning. Get an ambulance here in a hurry."

I went back to the living room, led her to the divan, and went into the strewn bathroom. There were no spirits of amonia. As I returned to the living room the door bell rang. I opened the door.

He was well past middle age, the man who stood there, with silvery hair under a battered hat. He had a long bean-pole body and his face was heavily lined. He flashed a nickel-plated buzzer.

"Stevens," he said. "Captain of Detectives. I was in the radio car across the street. I got the emergency flash."

He moved in and his hands patted me.

"Never mind the frisk," I said. "Mrs. Bell is sick. I think it's narcotic poisoning."

We went into the living room. He lifted one of her closed eyelids, grunted something, and turned to me.

"How'd you know it was dope?" he asked.

"I've seen it before."

"What's your racket, son?"

"No racket?" I said. "I'm conducting a survey. I called on Mrs. Bell. I saw she was sick."

I showed him the charts and the pink permit. His face was impassive.

"Munn gives those to anybody who drops ten bucks on the floor," he said. "I've seen you before."

"I don't think so. I'm new in town."

"I never forget a face and seldom a name." He thought for a moment. "Your name is Dobson or Dobman. Last time I saw you was at an F.B.I. school a year after the war. You had just got out of the Army. You gave a lecture on insurance frauds. Good, too."

"Thanks," I said. "The name's Dobson. Mike Dobson."

"Yes—Dobson," he said. "Private investigations. Big gun in Massachusetts. Glad to see you again. On business here, Mr. Dobson?"

"Yes, Captain. Working on a case."

"Good cover up, that survey business. Legal?"

"Yes. Registered and copyrighted."

"No use asking you what you're working on. Confidential, I suppose?"

"Sorry. I don't trust anybody, Captain."

"Funny your case should bring you in this neighborhood so soon after the Bell

killing. It's not the Bell case, Dobson?"

"No."

"Funny, just the same." He fished into his pocket and brought out a stubby briar pipe. "Maybe," he said. His voice had become hard, metallic. "Maybe they brought you in to muddy it up."

"They? Who are *they*, Captain?"

"I'm not afraid to mention names, Dobson. *They* is the Fusion Party. The Sevard-Conge-Wheeler clique. The gang Bell licked when he got elected mayor. The political gang that ran the city for four years, and ran it right into the ground."

I SAID, "I've heard of them. The smell reached right out of the state. Sevard, Ralph Sevard. Owns the industries and the newspapers. Wheeler, who was mayor and errand boy. Conge, who ran the town and pulled the strings. They called themselves the Fusion Party. I don't think I'd care to take their money. You're wrong there."

"Maybe I am wrong. You look tough, but you look clean and fairly honest, and, if I remember right, you've done some good work in Center City."

"Clean work, Captain. No divorce work and no politics. I didn't have to get down and wallow around in the mud. Sometimes a cop has to."

He shook his head.

"Not all cops. I've been a cop for years. Politicians said I had a funny habit of stepping on people's toes. When Sevard brought Conge in four years ago, they moved me right out of Homicide. Put me in charge of Records and Identification. Some day, I said, if I wait long enough, I'll see a fairly clean town. I thought that day had come when Mason Bell got elected mayor. He moved me right back into Homicide. It sure was funny."

"What made it so funny?"

"He put Mapes in as Chief. Mapes was in traffic. There was a deal made somewhere. But anyway I went back to Homicide. This is my first case since then. It'll probably be my last. You

know what the papers are saying?"

"You always could have joined the big parade, Stevens," I said. "You could have climbed the gravy train."

"Yes." He smiled. "I guess I could have. But you're looking at a freak, son. An honest cop in a crooked city. Don't laugh. There are a few of us. And that's about the funniest kind of freak there is. But I guess a fellow has to live with himself. And he's got to live with his wife, after thirty-eight years of marriage. Kate would get pretty mad—in fact, she'd walk out on me if I hopped over to the other side of the fence. I'd sure look funny getting divorced at my age."

Chapter II

I HEARD the siren wail in the distance. I went to the front door and opened it. The ambulance swerved over to the curb and stopped. A white-coated intern hurried up the walk with a black bag in his hand. People began to look out of doors and windows and a small knot of kids gathered on the sidewalk.

A white prowl car came up and one of the cops got out. He watched the ambulance driver and the helper bring up the stretcher. He followed them. When he saw Captain Stevens he hesitated, then saluted carelessly. Stevens snapped at him and he went back and cleared the sidewalk.

In the living room the intern opened his bag and shot something into Mrs. Bell's arm. The ambulance men put her on the stretcher and rolled her down to the ambulance. "The intern turned to Stevens.

"I'm not sure," he said. "but I think she'll pull out of it all right."

He went down the walk again and got into the ambulance. The siren wailed again. Stevens closed the door.

"Where'd Bell get knocked off?" I asked him.

"Right outside on that flagstone walk. It was eleven o'clock at night. His wife

found him with his throat cut. Nothing was found—no weapon, nothing."

"That's tough."

He reached into his side pocket and brought out a worn tobacco pouch. His gnarled fingers expertly tamped an aromatic blend into the pipe bowl.

"It sure is funny, the whole business," he said. "Now it looks like somebody's moved in close to the new governor. Pearson and Lang, the two State cops on the case, were pulled off this morning."

"Maybe nobody wants the case solved," I said.

"Maybe. Maybe somebody does. So far I'm satisfied the way it's going. In a case like this there are a lot of angles and it all depends on what you're looking for. An opportunity to smear somebody so that the people never get a decent administration, that's one thing. So sometimes solving a case solves nothing in the long run. I'm sitting back just a little. I'm in no great hurry yet."

"Well, I am, Captain," I said. I went to the front door and opened it. "I wish you luck. I hope things work out the way you want them."

"So long, Dobson," he said. "If you ever want to team up, let me know."

"What do you mean?"

He smiled. "I just happened to remember that Bell originally came from Center City. Of course, it could be just one of those funny coincidences again."

The Jefferton Memorial Hospital was on Branch Avenue. I got past the reception desk and up to the fifth floor. The nurse on duty was young and her nice legs didn't belong in severe white stockings and flat white shoes. The name plate on the desk said Miss Fisbee.

It was eleven A.M. An hour had gone by since I'd left Stevens.

"How's Mrs. Bell?" I asked.

She smiled, showing white teeth. "Mrs. Bell is resting comfortably. She's in Room Three."

"I'd like to see her," I said, flashing a visitor's slip.

She shook her head. "Sorry, Mr.

Dobson. The doctors said no visitors."

I started down the corridor to Room Three. She ran after me.

"Mr. Dobson!" she cried plaintively. "Those are the orders."

The door to the room was partly open. I pushed it all the way back and went in.

The room was small and bare, with gray walls, a white metal bed, and a small white chest of drawers. The bed was rumpled and the sheets tangled. She was lying half out of the bed with her head dangling near the floor. I said her head was dangling. It was almost severed from her body. Her throat had been cut wide and deep and the blood had run out. Her long black hair was meshed into the pool of crimson on the linoleum. Her eyes were wide open and her mouth was a twisted, tortured monstrosity.

BEHIND me, Miss Frisbee shrieked. The scream jarred me loose from my thoughts. I turned and grabbed her.

"When's the last time you were in here?" I asked.

"Twenty minutes ago," she sobbed. "She couldn't have done it to herself. We made sure! There was nothing in the room."

"She didn't. There's still nothing in the room. There's no weapon."

"But who—"

"Anybody come by here? Answer me! You were at the desk the whole time."

"No, I wasn't at the desk. We're so short of help I have seven rooms to take care of. I was with Mrs. Grady, a post operative case, in Room Seven. I was there most of the time. Oh, what am I going to do, Mr. Dobson? What am I going to do?"

"Nothing. I'll do it. Where's the phone?"

"Back at the desk, Mr. Dobson."

I went back and called Captain Stevens at Police Headquarters. . . .

I was in the Homicide office looking out the window at the city of Jefferton.

It was late afternoon, and on the roof of an adjoining building some pigeons rose and flapped around, then settled down again. Stevens got up from behind his desk and came over to me. His face was haggard.

"Nothing," he said. "A million people in and out of the hospital. Nobody knows anything. Nobody saw anything."

"Something will turn up," I said.

"Maybe," he said. "I guess that's all for now, Dobson. Stick around town for a few days."

"I'll be here. But tell me—what about the dope in her?"

"I found the set-up in her bedroom after you left. Her prints were on the hypo needle. She was taking the stuff herself."

"Where'd she get it? What about the Treasury boys? The stuff's floating all over town!"

"Easy. If somebody has connections the stuff can be got legitimate. This is a town with a lot of connections."

"Nice town," I said.

I picked up my hat and went out, pushing past a reporter from the *News-Herald*. Outside, it was getting dark. I drove back to the hotel.

In my room I looked around. My bag, which I had placed so carefully on the rack, had been moved. I opened it up. It had been searched. The lining had been ripped and my things had been gone through expertly and put back carefully. I went to the closet door and opened it. My suit was there, but the hanger had been moved a little. I pulled a bottle out of the desk drawer and poured myself a stiff drink.

There was a knock at the door.

He filled the doorway. He was a good six-feet-three, two hundred and fifty pounds, and not much fat. His smooth pink face was closely shaved and he had pale blond wavy hair brushed back over a high smooth forehead. He was carefully groomed, wearing an imported tweed suit and pebble-grained brogues. He wasn't more than forty years old.

"My name's George Hartlett," he said, and reached out and shook my hand vigorously.

I invited him in. He sat down on a lounge chair near the window and refused a drink.

"From what I've heard of you, Mr. Dobson," he said, "I expected a much older man."

"I'm thirty-four, Mr. Hartlett," I said. "Six-one, and two hundred pounds. Unmarried. Is there anything else you want to know about me?"

He grinned broadly. "No offense, Mr. Dobson. I thought we'd have a little chat, seeing we're engaged in the same profession."

"You're in the survey business?"

He grinned again. "I run the Hartlett Detective Agency, the biggest agency in this part of the state. I made it my business to look you up. I've heard of you before, Dobson."

"That's just dandy," I said. "Everybody seems to have heard of me. But I haven't heard of you, Hartlett. Are you in the Association?"

"There have been difficulties," he said.

HE TOOK out a silver cigar case and offered it. I shook my head. He took a cigar out and lit it. He puffed for a moment.

"The Association turned down my membership," he said. "A few irregularities."

"I know what you mean," I said. "You're in the dirty end of a dirty business."

"Your frankness is refreshing. I believe in frankness, Dobson. I'm going to put my cards on the table. I know why you're here and I think we can make a little deal."

"Go ahead. You're dealing."

"I can help you, Dobson. You've come here to crack the Bell killing. Now there are two of them. You have no sources of information here, no contacts. I have."

"Suppose you tell me more."

"I'll tell you, because you'll find out

anyway. I've been tied in with Ralph Sevard and John Conge. I've done work for them. Some of it, as you say, was dirty, some of it downright unpleasant. I want to get out from under."

"Keep going," I said.

"Killing is a nasty business. I was willing to go along with the rest of it, but now I want out. I'm willing to cooperate with you. I have a good organization, and I know things you'll never find out yourself. Of course, it will mean sticking my neck out and I'll want some protection. I want the people behind you to cover me when this whole thing breaks."

"There's nobody behind me, Hartlett."

"Very well, let it go at that. Let's say then, I have respect for your reputation."

He could not mistake the way I shook my head.

"I don't make deals, Hartlett. If you want to turn State's evidence and take a chance with the D.A., that's your business."

"That's the best you'll do?"

"Yes."

"All right. What do you want to know, Dobson?"

"I want to know who was in back of Mason Bell. What was his political organization? Why was a deal made to put Mapes in as Chief of Police?"

"Bell was D.A. of Somerworth County," he said. "He was the Better Government League's candidate for mayor. He was elected in the biggest sweep in the city's history."

"Who's the League?"

"Nobody and everybody. Thousands of little people—clerks, schoolteachers, store owners, factory workers. They donated nickels and dimes and quarters. Bell had no strings on him. He owed nobody a thing."

"Who ran with him?"

"Henry Luther, as president of the city council. He's mayor now. He's clean. Lawyer and ex-member of the school committee. Personal friend of Bell's."

"What about Mapes?"

"Oh, he's not so bad. He was an inspector in the traffic division. A little slow upstairs, perhaps, but his hands were cleaner than most of them."

"Maybe he wasn't in any position to get much. What about Stevens? Why was he passed over?"

"That's where everybody got fooled. They expected a cleanup when Bell got in. Clem Stevens is honest, and he was passed over. The little folks were disillusioned and they began to mumble. There was no clean-up. Bell clammed up. Now Luther's clammed up."

"Why?"

"Politics," he said. "Deals. It gets the best of them. The streets of Hades are paved with the good intentions of would-be honest politicians."

"If a deal was made, why was Bell killed?"

"A man in politics has enemies. Bell was working at City Hall late that night. There was a rumor he was going to clean house, and there are a lot of grifters on the pay-roll. It might have been anyone who had it in for him. I think it might have been somebody off the beam."

"And his wife?"

"That's why I think it was a crazy person."

"I see," I said. "Well, thanks, Hartlett."

"I hope you can trust me to go along with you, Dobson."

"As much as you trust me," I said.

"I don't get you."

"There's a small metal plate in the lobby of this hotel. It says the place is protected by the Hartlett Agency."

"Yes? What about it?"

"Just this. Tell your man, the smooth little house dick, to keep out of my baggage. So long, Hartlett. I'll see you."

Chapter III

NEXT morning I was in the Jefferson National Bank Building. I went up to the seventh floor where the

Conge Enterprises had a swank set of offices. There was enough rich carpeting to furnish a good-sized home. The blonde mahogany furniture and the pastel walls looked like an interior decorator's fancy job.

The receptionist at the switchboard was a redhead with a turned-up little nose, a shapely body, and a soft, translucent skin that had a healthy sheen to it. She was wearing a thin nylon blouse and a green gabardine suit that matched her big friendly eyes.

She looked me over carefully, flicked her long eyelashes once, then opened her warm lips and said:

"Yes, sir?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Conge."

Her eyebrows arched. "Have you an appointment?"

"No."

"Sorry, Mr. Conge sees people by appointment only. If you'd care to leave your name and the nature of your business I can call you."

I laughed. "There's no time for that. I'd bet a Scotch and soda you let in people you know."

"Sometimes. But I don't know you, Mr.—"

"Dobson. Mike Dobson. And yours?"

"Valdina Foster, and don't laugh."

"They don't call you Valdina, do they?"

"Vallie. My father was a gambler. He named me after his favorite race horse. I guess I wasn't very lucky for him. He died broke. I guess they all do."

"Usually," I said. "Well, now we know each other. It wasn't hard, was it?"

"Whoa!" She laughed. "You're a little too fast for me."

"I'm not usually that way," I said, leaning over. Her tailored skirt was molded against a perfectly shaped thigh and she had beautiful, well-rounded legs. "I'm conducting a survey on footwear and I must see Mr. Conge. And apparently the only way I can, is for you to know me. Well, you know me

now. I'm thirty-four, black hair, blue eyes—and look! I have all my teeth. In a pinch I can furnish three references, if you'll take relatives."

She laughed again. "You're cute. You must be a stranger in town."

"I am. I hope they won't shoot me for it."

Her eyes became serious. "It's not a very good town, Mike Dobson. Somebody should have let you know that."

"All right," I said. "You can tell me all about that tonight."

"I should say no, shouldn't I?"

"Yes, but you won't."

"I know it. I've always had a weakness for the big husky type." She scribbled an address on a slip of paper and handed it to me. "Tonight at eight?"

"Right."

"Now if you'll wait a moment, I'll see if Mr. Conge is busy."

She spoke into the switchboard piece and nodded to me.

"Go right in through the gate. He'll probably give me all outdoors for this, but it's worth it."

I went in. The private office wasn't as big as a hotel lobby but it was close to it. There were yards of thick luxurious carpeting and the walls were murals, well-done in nudes.

He sat behind a big white mahogany desk. He was alone. He was big, and he was hard, and he looked smart. His face had no expression. He was in his early thirties, with jet-black hair and a pale complexion. He had on a conservative dark blue suit that looked like big money.

"How do you do, Mr. Conge," I said.

I gave him my card and then the Footwear Research business. He wasn't impressed.

"Your name's Dobson," he said in a flat voice, as he looked at the card. I saw him lean his foot over a little and I knew there was trouble. "My shoes are custom made," he said. "We don't like strangers coming to Jefferton asking questions—any kind of questions.

We don't like it at all."

THE foot button had worked fast because I heard some scraping of footsteps on the thick carpeting behind me. I turned around. There were two of them.

"This punk is Dobson," said Conge, lighting a cigarette. "He's the guy who was at Mrs. Bell's yesterday. He's the guy who found the body at the hospital. He gets around. See what he's carrying."

"Who's doing the looking?" I asked.

The one with the bullet-head and apelike arms pushed me up against the wall.

"It's all right, chum," he growled. "We're the police."

The other one laughed. He had a bashed nose and an ugly scar across one eye.

"Sure," said Bashed Nose as he pulled out a badge. "We're honest cops."

"Never mind the preliminaries," said Conge. "Go through his stuff, Sergeant Lopat."

I started to say something, and the bullet-head slapped me hard across the mouth. It began to trickle red. Sergeant Lopat put the badge back in his pocket and moved in. He was an expert. He put all my things on Conge's desk.

Conge went through my wallet.

"From Massachusetts," he yawned. "Who you working for?"

"Footwear Research," I said.

"Hit him again, Winn," said Conge. "Maybe he'll remind himself of something."

Winn grabbed me with his left hand, bunching my shirt and pulling me toward him. He balled his right hand and let one go. I tried to ride with it but he was holding me tight and I got it across the temple and went down. My head was spinning as I tried to get up. Winn kicked me viciously.

"Stay there," he said.

Conge turned to Lopat who stood there with a look of enjoyment on his face.

"He's stubborn," Conge said. "I can't

stand a stubborn guy. Mark him up a little."

Lopat grinned and his small eyes lit up as he reached into a hip pocket and brought out a pair of brass knuckles. He put them on deliberately and came over.

"Get up," he said in a husky voice. "Get up on your feet."

I got up; tense, ready.

The buzzer on the desk sounded. Conge held up his hand. Lopat looked at him. His hand flicked the switch.

"What is it?" he said tonelessly.

"Mr. Sevard is here to see you, sir." It was Vallie's voice.

"Send him in," said Conge. He looked over at me and then at the two detectives. "Get the punk out of here!"

"We can throw a charge at him," said Lopat. "We can sweat him downtown."

"No," said Conge, looking at me. "Saved by the bell, Dobson. You're a lucky boy. Whatever your pitch is, get out. Get out of town and get out fast. Understand?"

I nodded. I went over to the desk and took my things. There was a door on one side of the room. Conge pointed to it.

"Take him through there," he said. "See that he leaves the building."

As I turned to go I got a peek at Sevard coming in. He was of medium height and about sixty. He had light sandy hair that was gray at the temples, and a small clipped mustache. He was carrying a light cane. He looked at my bloody face as I went out. He didn't seem much interested.

I was pushed into a private automatic elevator. As we went down Winn turned to Lopat and said:

"We can still give him a time."

"Forget it," said Lopat. "Conge said no." He turned to me. "If you're smart, chum, you'll get out of town right now and forget what happened. I wouldn't want to tangle with Conge again."

THEY let me off at the ground floor and watched me as I got into my car

and drove away. I straightened my clothes out, wiped my mouth, then circled twice around the block and back to the same parking place. I went back into the building.

I entered the bank, went downstairs to the vault and opened my safe deposit box. I left the shoulder holster in there, but took out the gun and tucked it in my belt. I picked up the credentials, slid them in my pocket and came out. The bank guard pursed his mouth at the sight of my puffed lip.

I got back into my car, put the credentials under the floor mat near the clutch and hooked the .38 under the dashboard. Then I went down to Police Headquarters. I had a little trouble getting to Chief of Police Mapes, but I got in.

"Make it snappy," said Mapes. He wore a food-stained wrinkled uniform with gold stars on the shoulder straps. He had jowls like a turkey gobbler.

"I want to swear out a warrant against a man named Conge," I said, "and two of your men, Sergeants Lopat and Winn. Assault and battery."

His mouth dropped and he blinked a pair of moronic eyes.

"Sure there ain't a mistake?" he sputtered.

"No mistake. I was in Conge's office and they assaulted me."

"You must be new in town," he grunted.

"I am."

"On business?"

"Yes."

"Business all done?"

"No."

He scratched his head. "I think you'd better wind it up right now, young feller. If Conge don't like you, you ain't going to get any business, anyway. Not in this town."

"I've been told to stick around," I said. "I'm the one who found Mrs. Bell's body."

"Oh, you're the one who's been nosing around. Well, you can leave town pronto. I'll tell Stevens I okayed it."

"All right. What about the complaint?"

"Forget it."

"I don't want to forget it. I'm new here, but from where I come cops don't push the citizens around."

"Oh, I'll give them a real talking to, don't you worry about that. Now I tell you what. You be a nice feller and run along. Besides, I ain't got nobody that'll serve a warrant on Mr. Conge. Sure as sin I ain't. No sense kicking up a fuss and getting him mad at us. Of course," he added, as his eyes grew cunning, "if you're going to be mean about it and kick up a rumpus we have ways—"

"Don't get subtle on me, Chief," I said. "I know what you mean. Maybe I'll forget the whole thing."

"Now you're sensible," he said.

I left his office and went into the corridor that smelled strongly of cheap disinfectant. I saw Clem Stevens going into his office. When he saw me he stopped and looked at my face.

"Bumped into two members of your sterling Police Force," I said. "It's a nice town you have here."

He looked at me sadly. "I told you to stick close to me," he said, as he walked into his room and closed the door.

It was almost seven-thirty and I had the Foster date at eight. I showered and shaved, and I put on my best bib and tucker. Just when it was time to get started I heard a key go into the lock and the door opened.

Lopat and Winn came in. They closed the door and locked it.

"Conge hasn't only got the law in his vest pocket," I said, "but he has the hotels, too."

"Tsk, tsk," said Winn, coming closer. "Conge said to tell you to look up a good plastic surgeon. Because when we get through with you, nobody will recognize this guy Dobson."

"A couple of heroes," I said. "Make it some other time. I have a date."

"I guess he don't know Conge," Lopat said. "He don't understand Conge told us to fix him good. He's dumb. He don't

know nothing."

"Yeah," said Winn, moving closer. "He's yellow, too. Runs to the Chief. Big guy like him with no fight in him. Spoils it. Come on, let's give it to him."

JUST as he said that I let go. I caught him with a long hard right across the jaw that sent him up against the wall and down. Lopat looked surprised as he quickly slipped on his brass knuckles and started at me.

I beat him to it. I feinted with a roundhouse left and he ducked away and moved in, I got him in the middle with my knee. He dropped to the floor and rolled over in agony. Winn was up on his feet again and away from the wall.

He came up with a sap in his hand, mouthing curses. I grabbed him and hit him again and again, holding him against the wall and letting my anger well out into my fists until I could feel his nose mash and his teeth break under the impact of my knuckles.

Lopat stopped clawing at his stomach, twisted around, and came up with a .38 Police Positive.

"Get away from him!" he gasped.

"It's a respectable hotel," I said. "Besides, Conge didn't say anything about shooting, did he?"

As he hesitated I pushed Winn at him. At the same time I lashed out with my foot and kicked the gun out of his hand. He started to get up and I saw it was no time for fancy fisticuffs. I kicked him hard in the side of the head and he dropped without a sound and fell over the limp body of Winn. I looked them over. They were both out.

I went into the bathroom, put some lotion on my bruised hands, combed my hair, straightened myself out with a swig from the bottle, and went out.

Chapter IV

THE Paradise Club was on the outskirts of town. It was owned by Conge Enterprises and they said it had cost a half million to build it. It was

white, with severe modern lines, and the lobby was walled-in glass brick. We went in through doors which were solid blocks of chromium. The head-waiter looked at the smartly groomed Vallie in her smart black evening gown and bowed.

"Right up front for Miss Foster," he said to the captain of waiters.

We moved through the lush surroundings and sat down near the dance floor. The waiter hurried over with a wine list and we ordered.

"You were a little late," said Vallie. "I was worried, because I didn't see you come out of Conge's office. I know there's another door, but—"

"But what?"

"Nothing," she said. "Never mind. We're here to have fun."

We had a few, and I looked around. The place was half empty.

"We're early," I said. "Hardly anybody here yet."

She took a long sip at her drink. She was starting to feel them.

"Some of them are in the gambling rooms upstairs," she said. "There are all kinds of rooms here for all kinds of things."

"Nice town," I said again. "I'll bet your boss comes here often."

"You're cute," she said. "Really cute. But don't be wrong. I'm not his type. He likes them sophisticated. His current flame is a slinky brunette who sings here. He sees this Marcia Drago all the time now, but he'll soon tire of her like he does of everybody else."

"He'll probably be here soon," I said.

"Now don't be afraid, Mike. He probably won't even notice you. Besides, he goes right up to the gambling rooms with Mr. Sevard."

"Sevard comes here?"

"Sure. Every Wednesday night. He comes here to gamble. That's a scream. He's really betting against his own money."

"I don't get it."

"He put the money up for this place," she said, looking at me with half-closed

eyes. "Now the boss is so strong he's getting control of the whole town."

"Sevard doesn't like that," I said.

"Course not, darling. Sevard brought Conge in to watch Wheeler when Wheeler was mayor last term. And now that they lost the election and Wheeler is back as Sevard's business manager, there's nobody to watch Conge. Sevard and Conge are like a bulldog and a tiger, that have one another by the tail. Neither of them dares let go. But they just have to get along. I suppose they've got enough on each other to hang themselves. It's a scream, isn't it?"

"Yes, very funny," I said. "What time does Conge get here?"

"I told you not to worry, Mike. You won't have a bit of fun worrying like that. I know his exact routine. He leaves his house at eight forty-five, picks Marcia up at her apartment, and gets here at nine-thirty. He's always on time."

"He must live near Marcia," I said.

"No, he lives in Carlton, a small town five miles from Jefferton. He has a big estate there at Sixty-three North Carlton Drive. But he drives that big Cadillac at ninety miles an hour and makes it in no time at all."

I looked at my watch. It was nine o'clock. I got up. She looked at me unhappily.

"Sometimes I talk too much," she said. "Now we're leaving because Mr. Conge's coming."

"I'm leaving," I said. "I want you to stay right here. I'll be back in a half-hour. Have fun. And wait for me."

I whipped the Packard out of the parking lot and into the Carlton road. The road was deserted as the car hummed along. I didn't pass anything.

I SLOWED down when I got into Carlton. At a corner drug store I got the directions to 63 North Carlton Drive. I went through the sleepy little town and into the highlands.

It was a big English manor-styled

house with spacious grounds in a stand of Douglas firs. There was a high hedge all around that concealed a chain link fence. I cruised around slowly. The area looked unguarded. I pulled over to the side of the road, got out and strolled along the fence. I couldn't see an alarm system. I went over the jouncing steel grillwork and dropped to the turf inside.

In the rear of the house, in what I took for the servant quarters, there were lights. The rest of the house was dark.

I cased the house carefully. There was a wing with facing French doors that extended out near the concrete driveway. I moved along the shrubbery until I got there. The doors were locked. I put on my kid gloves and opened the doors with a wire. Stepping inside, I used my pencil flash.

I was lucky. I was in the library. The furniture was heavy period stuff. In a corner was a massive ornate, mahogany desk. I went over to it, rummaged through the drawers that were unlocked, but found nothing I could use.

There was one drawer that was locked and I had a little trouble getting it open. There I found something. I found a ledger with dates and names and payoffs. I found a list of places where anything could be had for a price. I found dummy corporations and trusteeships and I had enough to send most of the Jefferton Police Department and Ralph Sevard and John Conge away for a long time.

But I didn't find what I was really looking for. I found nothing about Mason Bell or Mrs. Bell or the present mayor, Henry Luther.

I tucked the ledgers under my arm. Just then I felt something move in the dark and I snapped off the flash. I started to move quick, but I wasn't quick enough. Something came out of nowhere and hit me hard on the back of the head. I saw a bright flash of colored pinwheels, and the pinwheels began to revolve as I dived into blackness and out. . . .

First there were some little men hammering at the back of my head, then there was a red haze in front of my eyes, and my lids were so heavy I couldn't open them. I started to cough and I got the aroma of spirits of ammonia. I moved my arm to my head and it came away wet and sticky. I opened my eyes.

I was lying on the library floor near the desk. Bent over me was a well-built, well-dressed brunette. When she saw my eyes open she got up. She put the ammonia bottle on the desk, sat down on an overstuffed chair, and crossed a pair of shapely, long legs.

"How long has he been out, Sam?" a voice said.

I looked around when I heard that, and my stomach muscles tightened. It was John Conge. He was sitting in back of me, faultlessly dressed in dinner clothes, and smoking a cigarette.

"Half hour I guess, Mr. Conge." This came from a short squat man with powerful shoulders. He stood in front of me with an ugly sap in his hand.

"I want this guy to be able to talk," Conge said. "You're careless with that sap. I've told you that lots of times."

"Honest, Mr. Conge," Sam said, "I didn't mean to hit him so hard. But he was so big looking in the dark, I thought he'd need an extra push."

"This man should never have got in here in the first place," Conge said. He got up and went over to the desk. He picked up a light riding crop and flicked it idly. "Where were you?"

"In back, making some coffee. I heard the burglar alarm buzzer and I knew someone was at the French doors. I came right out. Then I seen the flash in the library and I got up behind him and sapped him."

Conge struck out with a crop and hit him across the face, leaving a long red welt from eye to chin.

"You're a liar," Conge said flatly. "You took your time. You've been fooling around with the maid again. Where was Peters?"

SAM stood there as the welt deepened. "In the garage, Mr. Conge," he whispered. "Cleaning the sedan."

"Get this man up in that chair," Conge said.

Sam put the sap on the desk and lifted me onto a chair. Conge came over and offered me a cigarette from a jeweled gold cigarette case. I took it. He held up a matching lighter.

"You get around, Dobson," he said. "You've got nerve playing things alone in a strange town. You've got nerve, but you're not very smart. I told you to get out of town today. The Jefferton police went over to the hotel to make sure. You gave them a bad time. Detective Winn is in the hospital with a broken nose and a wired jaw, and the whole Police Force is looking for you. One of them is an old friend of yours." He turned to the girl. "Marcia, go tell Sergeant Lopat to come in here."

I rubbed my head as she swayed her long, lithe body to the door.

"Dobson," said Conge, "I don't make threats; just statements. I want you to talk, and talk fast. I want the truth. I promise you nothing. If you don't care to say anything, Sam here will gouge out your right eye. If that does no good he'll gouge out the other. Is that clear?"

As I nodded, I felt the sharp pain. "Do you believe I'll order it done?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe you would."

"Good," he said. "We understand each other. Now, Dobson, who sent you to Jefferton?"

"I came myself. Mason Bell is from my home town in Massachusetts. We were old friends."

"So you came here to find out who killed him."

"Yes."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing, except to find out now who killed his wife, too."

"Did you find out?"

"No, not yet."

"You think I'm tied in with it?"

"Are you?"

"Don't get clever on me, Dobson," said Conge. "I'm asking the questions."

"All right, then," I said. "I don't know how you tie in, not yet."

"I think you're leveling, Dobson. If you did know you wouldn't come prowling around here. But you found out other things."

"I haven't got the ledgers now."

"No, they're back in the same place they were. You'll never have the chance to use any of what's in them. I'm turning you over to the police. Breaking and entering is a serious offense."

"I'll take my chances with the Carlton law."

He laughed mirthlessly. "You've got nerve, Dobson," he repeated. "I'll say that much. As long as there's a Jefferton cop here, I'll turn you over to him."

"Lopat has no jurisdiction here."

He laughed again. "You're not getting technical on me, Dobson? Not now."

The door opened and Marcia came in with Lopat and a man in a chauffeur's uniform. Lopat looked at me and the muscles in his cheek twitched.

"Come on, John," said Marcia. "I'm late for my number now."

"Shut up," Conge said. "You're working for me and don't forget it, ever. Go out and wait for me in the car."

When she left, leaving a whiff of expensive scent, he turned to Lopat.

"He's all yours, Sergeant," he said. "I know you have a pay-off to make. Take him back over the city line. Of course, if he should happen to make a break for it there, and you have to shoot—"

"It'll be a pleasure, Mr. Conge," Lopat said.

CONGE turned to me. "That your Packard around the corner?"

I didn't say anything.

"Take his car, and take Sam with you," Conge said. "Get the car over the Jefferton line before you do anything. Peters will follow you in the sedan."

Lopat drove my car with me beside him. Sam sat in back with a Luger

pointed at my head. I was still a little groggy. They didn't tie my hands, for they didn't want any marks to show on my wrists.

"I'm going to give it to him," said Lopat, through his swollen lips. "I'm going to grind his face with my gun butt. Then what's left of him can try and make a run for it."

"Nice cop," I said. "You must be proud of that badge you're carrying."

"Shut up," he said as he took a hand off the wheel and backhanded me across the mouth.

We tore along the empty road. The headlights picked up a sign that said:

JEFFERTON—DRIVE SLOWLY

Lopat flashed by the white marker and jammed the car to a quick stop. As he did I fell forward, got my hand under the dash and unhooked the .38. I pushed it under my coat.

Lopat looked down at my hand.

"The tough guy's feeling sick," he said. "Come on, get out. In a minute you'll be a lot sicker, chum."

I heard the Lincoln sedan pull up behind us. Peters got out and came over to my car. The wind moved the tree branches, and that was the only sound as Sam got out of the back with the Luger on me.

I started to get out and as I did I slipped and fell to the ground. Lopat was half out of the door on his side.

Coming up, I fired three shots at Sam.

Even in the darkness I knew that at least one of them hit, because he stood stock-still for a moment with a look of surprise on his face. Then the Luger dropped from a shattered arm as he tried to swallow. I looked at Peters out of the corner of my eye. He stuck his hands up fast.

Lopat fired twice over the hood of the car and missed. I was down on my stomach, snaking around to the front bumper as Lopat ducked. I looked over at Sam who was sitting in the grass looking stupidly at his dripping arm. I motioned to Peters.

"Lie down on your back," I said, "with your hands over your head."

He got down and stretched out.

"All right, Lopat," I called. "You might as well quit. Throw your gun out."

Lopat filled the air with curses. "Come on, Peters!" he yelled. "Let's rush him!"

I looked at Peters. He shook his head.

"I'm coming around the car, Lopat,"

I said. "Here's your chance. We'll make a hero out of you." I got up on one knee.

"Wait a minute," Lopat said.

I waited. I heard the gun clatter to the road.

"Come around to me with your hands in the air," I said.

He came around the side of the car. His arms were up. I got to my feet and moved in. I ran my hands over him. I took his sap and key ring and threw them into a clump of bushes, but I held on to his steel bracelets.

I pushed him around to the trunk of my car where I got the tow rope. I tied his arms behind his back.

"You're yellow," I said. "Big noise and all, it stuck out all over you. Get in the sedan. On the back seat."

Chapter V

LOPAT walked back to the Lincoln and I trussed his legs up and put him on the floor. Then I went over to Peters and waved him up with the gun. I brought him over and pushed him into the front seat, cuffing his left arm to the steering wheel. I got in behind the wheel beside him and spun the car across the gravel shoulders and in among the trees.

Then I took the key and put it in my pocket.

"I'll have somebody pick you up after awhile," I said. "In the meantime, if you get bored, there's always the radio."

I went back to the road and picked up Lopat's Police Positive. In the grass was the Luger. Sam was still sitting there looking dully at his arm. I looked

(Turn to page 106)



THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!

***SEE Magazine tells you
How You Can Survive
World War III!***

This urgent article in SEE Magazine tells you how to save yourself and your loved ones in case of atomic war. An article typical of the timely, important features published month after month in SEE Magazine.

Be sure to buy the current issue of SEE Magazine today. On sale at all newsstands - only 15¢



at it. The blood had soaked through his coat sleeve but was now drying. I led him over to the convertible and got in beside him. The two guns went into the glove compartment. My own I slid in my belt.

"I'm taking you to the Jefferton Hospital," I said. "I don't think you'll talk. I don't think Conge would like it. . . ."

The Paradise Club was crowded when I got back. It was ten-thirty. Vallie was still at the table, talking to a dapper, sleek-haired man in a dinner jacket. When I came over I recognized him. It was the hotel detective from the Jefferton Plaza.

Vallie's eyes flashed from me to her companion.

"Don't go, Al," she said to him. "This big bruiser here with the dirty hands said he'd be gone only a half-hour. It's been an hour and a half."

"Complications, darling," I said. "Sorry." I turned to Al. "Good-by, Al. Thanks for keeping Vallie company."

I sat down. Al looked at me with a sneer on his face. I looked at him and half-rose.

"Everybody wants to fight tonight," I said. "I'm like a red cape in a bull ring around here."

Al got up, shrugged his shoulders and left.

"What did he want?" I asked Vallie.

"I shouldn't talk to you," she said. "Most men like my company."

"I love your company, Vallie. What did he want?"

"Information about you. That's Al Bonner. Private detective. Works for George Hartlett."

"I know him, and I'm flattered at his interest. What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I didn't tell him how interested you were in John Conge. I didn't think it was his business."

"Thank you," I said. "You're a clever girl, Vallie. When did Conge get here?"

"About a half-hour ago. He's upstairs, and I think Mr. Bonner just went to see him."

"Let's get out of here," I said, getting

up and sliding her chair back. "There'll be a hue and cry in just about a minute. I'm as hot as a pancake on a griddle."

The barroom to which I took her was a long narrow place with sawdust on the floor, and an old mahogany bar along the middle of it. We sat in a booth in the rear.

The place was deserted except for two old barflies who kept looking over at Vallie's well-carved legs.

"Lovely," said Vallie, putting her drink down and looking around the place. "That's what I like about you, Mike. Nothing like diversified entertainment, is there?"

"Nothing like it," I agreed. "Nice and private here."

"Who's behind you, Mike? What kind of a lone hand are you playing?"

"I'll tell you. But first let me ask you something. What do you think of the government in Jefferton?"

"Every time I think of it I want to put a clothespin on my nose. All of us do, except Sevard and Conge and Hartlett and Al Bonner and the ones like them. The rest of us voted for a clean administration. We didn't get it."

"No. But if you do get it, you'll lose your job with Conge."

"There are other jobs, Mike. What's more important are clean streets and decent schools for the kids and honesty and efficiency and a good municipality."

I SAID, "I wanted to hear you say that!

I All right. I was hired by Governor Hines to run down the Bell murder. I came to him and asked him for the job. Mason Bell was an old friend of mine. I'd like to grab his killer. I'd like to grab the killer of Marian Bell, too. I think it's the same person."

"Why did the State Police go off the case?"

"The Governor and I agreed that they were too well-known, and were bucking a stone wall. Besides I like to work alone. Less chance of leaks."

"And you know who the murderer is?"

"I have a pretty good-sized hunch," I said. "But I need a little help."

"I always wanted to be a Rover Boy," she said.

"It will mean sticking your neck out."
"It's my neck."

I got up and went over to the public phone booth. I picked the phone book off the hook and thumbed the pages until I found Hartlett's number. I stepped inside the booth and called him. He was home.

"Hartlett," I said, "this is Dobson. I have something red-hot. Can you come downtown?"

"Immediately," he said. "How about my office? No interruptions there."

"Suits me fine."

"Give me ten minutes," he said.

"Four-eleven Dexter Building. . . ."

He was alone in a private office as massive as he was. He sat behind a big desk riffling through some papers. There was a locked wall safe behind him flanked by a picture of ex-Mayor Wheeler on one side and John Conge on the other. He saw me looking at them.

"It'll be a comfort to see those two in the penitentiary," he said.

"You said you wanted to tie in with me," I said.

"Yes, I want to help all I can, Dobson. You understand my position. I don't want to get caught on a sinking ship."

"All right, Hartlett. I have enough evidence to convict practically everybody of importance in Jefferton, including you. But to finish it off I need evidence of the killings. I have a strong lead on that. Vallie Foster knows something."

"That pretty redhead in Conge's office?"

"Yes. Switchboard operators can pick stuff up sometimes. This one knows how to add. I have her downstairs in my car. She's been a little reluctant, and I thought a little romancing would help."

"Of course. I see what you mean."

"Do you know of a good spot to put a girl in the mood?"

"Lookout Cliff. They sometimes call it Lover's Leap. It's on top of a high bluff overlooking the river. Ask Miss Foster. She'll know."

"Thanks. I'll take her there."

"Good. I hope you have all that evidence in a safe place."

"Right with me in the trunk of my car. When I get through with Vallie, I'd like to turn it over to you. That's a strong safe you have there."

"Perfect," he said.

"I hope you're the only one who has the combination."

"I am. I changed it just last week. I do it every so often. Can't take chances, you know."

"Fine," I said. "Will you wait here for me?"

"I'll wait," he said. . . .

A soft breeze rustled the leaves, and a cricket made rhythmic noises.

"I like it with the top down," said Vallie, looking up at the stars.

"I like it, too," I said. "Mostly because the cops are looking for a Packard convertible with a black top."

"I don't think they'll look here on Lookout Cliff," she said as she snuggled over closer to me.

I PUT my arms around her as she lifted her face. I bent down and kissed her warm lips.

"This is the best part of the case," I said.

She moved away from me.

"So it's part of the case," she pouted. "Your duty."

I laughed and pulled her to me again. "This piece of it is strictly personal, Vallie. Are you cold?"

"A little."

"You'd better take off your coat."

"That's really logical. I'm asked if I'm cold. I answer yes. I'm told to remove my coat."

"You'll see why," I said.

I helped her off with her coat and stepped out of the car. I went around and opened the door on her side as she came out. I took her coat and waddled

It over the leather seat. Then I took her by the hand and crossed the narrow road. We sat down beside a tree.

"If my hunch is right," I whispered, "we should have a little company in a minute."

We waited. A cloud moved across the moon, partly obscuring it. Down below us, on the turn of the road, a car went by. Vallie moved close to me and I put my arm around her soft body. Near the car I thought I heard a swish, as though a branch had snapped back. I eased away from her and crouched by the side of the road.

There was a scratchy sound, this time nearer the car, as though a foot scuffed on the gravel of the road. A black figure darted suddenly from the underbrush and made for the car. The moon glinted on the blade of a long stiletto as the arm moved up, then down, plunging into the bunched-up coat on the front seat.

I leaped. I went across the road and hit him as he turned. He tried to bring the knife into play as I brought him down, but I grabbed his arm and twisted. The bone snapped like a dry twig. He screamed in anguish and brought his head back hard, hitting me on the side of the jaw and bouncing me back down on the road. His white face was a blob in the darkness as he got up. My hand went to the gun in my belt.

"Hartlett!" I called. "Come back! I've got a gun on you."

He snarled something and ran to the back of the car. I got up quickly and followed. He slipped, went down on one knee and scrambled to the edge of the cliff. When I got to him he looked at me with a face filled with hatred.

Then he turned and jumped.

I went over to the side and looked. A few small stones clattered down, and then there was silence. Below me the river wound like a twisted band of silver. Vallie came over.

"He's gone," I said. "It's a long jump."

She shuddered.

"What's down there?" I asked.

"An old dirt road that runs along the bank of the river."

"Can we get to it?"

"Yes," she said. "But—"

"I'm looking for something. Let's go."

I stopped for the knife, picking it up with my handkerchief. We got into the car and drove down the steep grade. At the turn of the road leading to Lookout Cliff we passed Hartlett's car. We turned left and came to the old river road. I cruised along slowly until I thought I was at the spot. I got out.

Fifty feet away I came across his body, wedged between large rocks, broken and misshapen. I went through his pockets, using my small flashlight. In a compartment of his wallet I found it—a small card with numbers and figures on it. I got up and went back to the car. . . .

I MADE short work of the door to Hartlett's office. Once inside we put the lights on. I put the slip of paper in front of me and handled the knob on the wall safe. I heard it click and I swung it open. In a small metal box I found some pictures. I brought them over to the desk.

Vallie gasped.

They were pictures of Marian Bell. She was leering at the camera, with a hypodermic needle in her hand. She was stark naked.

"That's it," I said to Vallie. "I was looking for something like that. Hartlett was behind the whole thing, the whole rotten, dirty mess."

"It's all over my head," Vallie said.

"It was over mine, too, most of the time. This Hartlett came to me and wanted to cooperate. He talked and talked, but he said nothing. Yet I knew he was in a position to tell a lot. He didn't. So I tried to figure things out myself.

"Hartlett was in with the Sevard-Conge-Wheeler administration. When the people pushed Wheeler out and Bell

in, Hartlett knew he was through. But he was smart, so he had laid in some groundwork. Just in case. He had, somehow, made a hophead out of Marian Bell. When election was over he took those pictures to Mason Bell. It was a beautiful piece of blackmail, and Bell was stuck. If he told Hartlett to go to the devil, and if he let those pictures come out, the people would have been so disillusioned about the Better Government League that all he had fought for would have been gone. So he compromised. He yielded temporarily by putting Hartlett's stooge, Mapes, in as chief."

"Then why was Bell killed?" Vallie asked.

"Because," I said, "Bell felt he couldn't carry on any longer. He was going to expose the whole thing, no matter what it meant to him and his wife personally. Bell was that kind of a guy. I know."

"So Hartlett killed him."

"Yes. He had stooges planted all over City Hall so he knew the blow-off was coming. Hartlett was so tricky, and such a master of the double doublecross that he wouldn't trust anybody else to do the job. That's why he used a knife. It takes a sadistic person to use a knife the way he did. He wanted them to suspect a maniac, and not a polished business man."

Vallie's forehead wrinkled, showing her distaste. "But why Marian Bell, too?" she asked.

"Well, the first killing could be blamed on Hartlett's old buddy, Conge. He felt safe now. So he went to the new mayor, Luther, with the pictures. He had Luther over a barrel the same way, and Luther had to play ball. Then I came along and began to pry. Hartlett was a good detective. He knew where I came from and how well I knew the Bells."

"He knew Marian Bell would talk when she came out of it. So he killed her before she had the chance. Now he

[Turn page]



Find URANIUM!!

GEIGER COUNTERS for uranium detection. All models and sizes — from low-cost, portable to super-sensitive alpha units. Prices start at \$37.50. Also **TREASURE DETECTORS** and **MINERALITES**. • **FREE INFORMATION** •

Detection CORP. Dept. 27-A
5528 Vineland, North Hollywood, Calif.]

ACCOUNTANT AN EXP

SEND FOR FREE SAMPLE LESSON

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$4,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A.'s examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement counsel. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," and sample lesson.

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution, Dept. 7329 H, Chicago 5, Ill.

LATEST CONSTRUCTION JOBS!

BEST LIST

- Accurate
- Up-to-date
- Nation-wide

ACT NOW!

Invaluable! Jobs breaking, jobs under way...everywhere. Tells what, who, for, where, amount, contractors, addresses. Issued monthly. Copyrighted. Carries money-back guarantee. Send just \$1.

DEMPSTER'S CONSTRUCTION SCOUT NEWS,
BRIDGEPORT 26, ILLINOIS

RUPTURED

BE FREE FROM TRUSS SLAVERY

NOW there is a new modern Non-Surgical treatment that permanently corrects rupture. These Non-Surgical treatments are so certain, that a Lifetime Certificate of Assurance is given. Write today for our New FREE Book that gives facts that may save you painful and expensive surgery, and tells how non-surgically you may again work, live, play and love and enjoy life in the manner you desire. There is no obligation.

Excelsior Hernia Clinic, Dept. 9805, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

EARN OVER
\$25 WEEKLY

Address Our Postcards at Home
Good Handwriting Necessary

WRITE ATLAS BOX 188, Dept. 15
MELROSE, MASS.

JOIN



RED CROSS

thought he was in the clear. If I broke the corruption in the Fusion Party, he would show he had helped me. If not, he was still in with the old gang. He was playing the whole field. The middle and both ends. There are private detectives like that."

"Thank heaven it's all over," she said.

"Not yet. I'm thinking of all those Jefferton kids you were telling me about. I'd like to make sure they get some good schools. And I've got an old score to pay off. I want to see John Conge again under different circumstances. I want to be on the giving end this time."

"Here we go again," she said, and smiled.

"Yes," I said. "You grab a cab back to the Paradise. When you get back they'll ask questions. Say you had a fight with me and that I went back to the hotel. Keep them there. Try to stall as long as you can. Will you do it?"

"I'll do it, Mike."

"I didn't want to ask you because I don't like the idea of you going back alone. So be careful, kid."

Chapter VI

WHEN I reached State Police barracks in Torrance it was almost midnight. There was a young corporal in a neat forest green uniform on the night desk. He looked at me with sleepy eyes.

"I'm Deputy Inspector Dobson," I said, as I flipped up the leather case. The gold-plated buzzer gleamed in the light of the desk lamp.

His eyes squinted and he blinked for a moment. He stood up.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Tell the lieutenant I want to see him," I said. "Now."

"Yes, sir," he said.

He went into the ready room and came out with two husky troopers. They eyed me curiously as they took up positions on either side of the door.

I waited. The corporal went back to

the desk. The man at the teletype machine turned and took a respectful look at me. A sleep-befogged middle-aged man came in, hastily buttoning a tunic with a silver bar on each shoulder strap.

"Lieutenant Barrett, sir," he said. "You're not on State Police roster, Inspector. I'm sorry, but I'll have to see your papers."

"I'm tired and worn," I said. "My head hurts and I need a drink badly. But I'm not crazy, Lieutenant. I have a temporary appointment from Governor Hines." I brought out the credentials.

"They seem in order, sir," he said dubiously.

"You still think I might be a phony," I said. "Get the superintendent, Colonel Adams, on the phone, not the teletype. While you're at it you can check on me."

He gave an order to the man at the switchboard. The call went through and Barrett went over to the desk and picked up the receiver. He spoke a little, then looked over at me. "He'd like to speak to you, sir," he said.

"Hello, Colonel," I said.

"You all right, Dobson?"

"Yes," I said. "I've run down the Bell killer. It was a private eye named Hartlett. He's a suicide. Now I want to wind up the rest of it. I want your permission to move into Jefferton and take over the town with State Police."

"Great, Dobson!" he said. "Great! The Governor will be delighted with the news. As for the rest of it, can you wait until I get there? I can make it by plane in an hour."

"I can't wait," I said. "I've got a girl planted in Jefferton, and her life isn't worth a plugged nickel right now. I'm going in."

"You're sure of your ground, Dobson?"

"I'm sure."

"Go ahead then. I'll be there as soon as I can. Where will I meet you?"

"At the Paradise Club in Jefferton. One more thing. I'm putting some Jefferton cops under arrest for malfeasance, nonfeasance, and whatever else

you can think of. You can straighten out the legal technicalities with the attorney general and arrange for John Doe warrants. Bring them with you, lots of them."

"I'll do that, Dobson," he said. "Good luck."

"Thanks," I said. "Give my regards to the Governor."

I hung up, faced Lieutenant Barrett.

"We've got a load of work to do. How many men in this platoon?"

"Fifteen available, sir," he said. "If you need more I could call in the high-way patrol. Or we can get the Kelton substation on the other side of Carlton."

"Kelton will fit in fine. Call them and have them send some men to Sixty-three North Carlton Drive in Carlton. While they're waiting for the warrants there they can padlock the place and hold everybody they find. Have them send a couple of men to Route One-o-five at the Carlton-Jefferton line. They'll find two men tied up in a Lincoln sedan in a clump of bushes. I want them brought in . . . You writing all that down, Corporal?"

THE corporal grinned. "Yes, Inspector."

"Well, don't look so surprised, because there's more. I want a sergeant and ten men from here to take over Jefferton Police Headquarters."

"I'm beginning to like this, sir," said Barrett. "I'm beginning to like that new Governor of ours."

"The world changes, Lieutenant. You have to have faith to stick things out. That's why I want a call in to Captain Stevens of the Jefferton Police. Have him get over to the Paradise Club right away, and have the dispatcher locate Mayor Luther. I want to talk to him."

I spoke to Luther and when I was through I went outside. The State cops were buckled, booted, and ready to go. The cruisers were brought around front and the cavalcade moved out with a motor-cycle in front, clearing the way.

[Turn page]



LEARN AT HOME

- to be a Nurse's Aide
- Practical Nurse
- or Infant Nurse

Prepare in spare time for a fascinating, high-pay career. Thousands of men and women, 18-60, are graduates of this physician-endorsed course. High school not required. Easy payments! Earn as you learn. Trial plan. 5th year.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 427, 25 East Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4, Ill.
Please send me free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name
City State Age

FREE FOR ASTHMA

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.
462 NIAGARA ST.

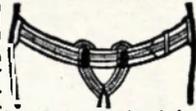
60-K FRONTIER BLDG.
BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

RUPTURE!

An amazing Air-Cushion Invention allows body freedom at work or play. Light, neat, cool, sanitary.

Durable, cheap. Day and night protection helps Nature support weakened muscles gently but surely. No risk. Sent on Trial! Write NOW for free Booklet and Proof of Results. All correspondence confidential.

Brooks Company, 391-D State St., Marshall, Mich.



JOBS THAT PAY TO \$1,500 MONTHLY

Thousands jobs open. S. America, Europe, Africa, U. S. A., etc. Fare paid if hired. Application forms available. All trades, Labor, Drivers, Clerical, Engineers, etc. No employment fees! Free information. Write Dept. 75W, National Employment Information Service, 1020 Broad, Newark, N. J.

ARTHRITIS—RHEUMATISM VITAL FACTS EXPLAINED

FREE DESCRIPTIVE BOOK

How crippling deformities may be avoided. This amazing FREE BOOK explains why ordinary methods give only temporary relief —if that. Describes a drugless method of treatment successfully applied in thousands of cases. Write for this 44-page FREE BOOK today. No obligation. BALL CLINIC, DEPT. 504, EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MO.

When You Visit Your Favorite Newsstand, Look for the Slogan

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

ON THE COVERS OF THE MAGAZINES YOU BUY!

We made Jefferton in about twelve minutes.

We pulled up to the Paradise with lights off. In the darkness Barrett spread the five troopers to cover the building. I went in alone. At the bar I saw Stevens. He put the glass down.

"I had an idea it was like that," he said, and his wise old face wrinkled in a grin.

"Do you know Vallie Foster?" I asked. "Works for Conge?"

"I know her."

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

I went into the dining room. I pushed by the crowded tables. Vallie was gone. I went back to Stevens.

"How do I get to the gambling rooms?" I asked.

"Up those stairs there."

"I want to get up there without being seen. Is there a private way?"

"There is," he said. "Near the kitchen there's a door that opens from the outside which leads to the basement. But right at the stairs there's a small door. It goes upstairs to the game room."

"I'm going up there with Lieutenant Barrett," I said. "When I leave, you hang around the staircase in case Conge comes down this way. Wait five minutes then come up."

"Good hunting," he said.

I started out to the front door. Something nudged me and I turned around. It was Al Bonner, with a smirk on his sallow face. He had a hand in his pocket and something hard was in my side.

"Don't push," I said. "Where's Vallie?"

"She's upstairs, pally," he said. "We've been looking for you. Keep walking."

"The spider and the fly." I laughed. I walked outside with him beside me. "Glad to oblige, Al," I said, when the door closed.

I hooked a leg behind him and pushed. As he tumbled down the marble stairs a trooper ran over and yanked him up.

"Take his gun away," I said, "and put him on ice. He's going to have company soon."

We found the door easily enough, Barrett and a young trooper and I got up the stairs fast and into the game room. I noticed a hawk-faced roulette dealer press a foot buzzer. Some women started to scream and the crowd began to mill around. Barrett barked orders to them, and they began to file quietly down the stairs.

I went over to the roulette dealer. I took him by the throat.

"Where's the office?"

He pointed. I went over to the office. As I was about to go in, the door opened and Conge came out.

"I'm looking for Vallie," I said.

He looked at me and his face tightened. "She's in there," he said, jerking his head back. "You're as lucky as a cat with nine lives. You keep coming back."

"This is the last time," I said. "I've got a badge in my pocket that says Deputy Inspector, State Police. You're under arrest, and we're taking you to the Torrance barracks for fingerprinting. You can call your lawyer from there."

"I want to see some warrants," he said.

"You're not getting technical on me, Conge? The warrants will be here. Of course, if you want to make an issue out of it, I'd be only too glad to oblige."

"No," he said. "I'm not fighting you. I don't fight when the show's over."

I PUSHED by him and into the office. Vallie was sitting there in a white leather chair. Her face was tear-streaked and her gown was torn. A red mark showed on the soft skin of one shoulder.

She got up and ran to me. I turned back to Conge. "You shouldn't have done that," I said softly. "I'll take a lot, but not that."

I measured him. I let go from way back and hit him as hard as I could full across the jaw. He crashed back and

bounced off the desk. His legs twitched spasmodically, and he was still.

Stevens came pounding in with an old-fashioned long-barreled pistol in his hand. "It's all over, Clem," I said. "Pick up the garbage on the floor."

"I'm glad it is," he said, putting his gun away. "I haven't had much sleep." "You knew Mrs. Bell was taking dope?" I said.

"I knew. I couldn't bring it out. Not when the League election meant so much to the little folks."

"It's all right now," I said. "Hartlett killed both of them. He's dead now, and that winds it up. Nobody has to know about Marian Bell. Oh, incidently, there's a new police chief in Jefferton. I spoke to Mayor Luther."

"I hope I can work well with him."

"No reason why you can't. His name is Clem Stevens."

His eyes moistened. "Kate will be happy about that." He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.

"You'd better get a big broom," I said. "You'll need it."

"I'll know how to use it," he said. "We've got a lot of young vets in town, and a long civil service list."

"I was going to recommend a good secretary," I said, as I put my arm around Vallie. "But after I buy her a new coat tomorrow maybe she'll go back to Center City with me. I like the way she works. I like a lot of things about her."

"Be careful what you say," she said. "I have a witness here."

Lieutenant Barrett came up. "Is that all, sir?" he asked.

"No," I said. "See if you can get me a sheet of paper. I want to have my resignation ready when Colonel Adams gets here. I'm leaving fast. I'm going back to insurance investigations. You can have my share of politics. A guy can get hurt messing around with that. For a peaceable guy like me, it's too strenuous a life."

Stevens looked at Lieutenant Barrett.

They grinned at one another. ● ● ●

High School Course

2 1/2 Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. HB58, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37
Canadian Residents: Complete Canadian Course Available.
Write American School, 1610 Sherbrooke St. West, Montreal.

ADDRESS POSTCARDS AT HOME!!

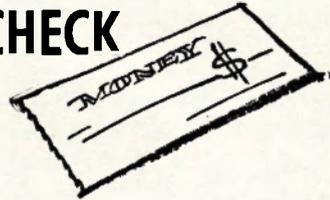
write BOX 14, BELMONT, MASS.

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book. "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

fight cancer with a CHECK



and a CHECKUP



give to

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY



LAW and DISORDER

*A Page of News Oddities from
the Annals of Crime*

By HAROLD HELFER



AFTER a Palisades Park, N. J., concessionaire had paid off ten kewpie dolls, four Teddy bears, and a set of china to a super-sharpshooting, balloon-busting dart thrower, the concessionaire discovered that the marksman had a confederate behind the backdrop with a long hatpin.

MOST FRUSTRATED FEELING burglar of the season undoubtedly is a fellow from around Pulaski, Va. He broke the lock on a smokehouse—but found no meat. Then he sawed the lock off the chicken house—but there weren't any chickens. As a last resort, he hacked a large lock off the garage—and there he found no car!

ARRESTED AFTER SIX slot machines had been found at his home, a Doylestown, Pa., resident declared he'd acquired the machines in order "to save change for Christmas presents."

IT IS DOUBTFUL whether a certain motorist of Detroit will ever be so impatient again. Driving into a filling station for some gas, he could see people inside but no one came out to wait on him. He began tooting his horn. Still no one came out. His blasts grew louder and louder—but no service. Finally, utterly disgusted, he sprang out of his car and went inside. There, the bandit, who was in the process of relieving the attendant of \$180 at gunpoint, also helped himself to the motorist's wallet.

AN OAKLAND, CALIF., prisoner did something few men on the outside have ever been able to accomplish. He bit himself in the throat. He did this by letting out such a

tremendous yawn that his false teeth slipped down his throat. Prison physicians had to pry them out.

THIEVES who broke into a Richmond, Va., ice cream parlor failed to batter open the safe, but they derived some consolation. They ate three pints of ice cream!

A CONVICT who escaped from Oregon Penitentiary gave himself up a week later. "You can take this outside world," he declared bitterly. "Someone stole my luggage—that never would have happened in the pen."

IN DETROIT, a prisoner, being taken through a revolving door into a receiving hospital, gave the door a mighty shove and, while his deputy sheriff escort was spinning around like a top, escaped.

IN TOKYO, Model Hatsu Kawaguchi was arrested for robbing artists while posing in the nude.

TEMPTATION—IN THE FORM of a cigarette butt—proved the undoing of a Chicago character. Impersonating a blind man for the purpose of begging, he was doing all right until he spotted a likely looking cigarette butt and stooped to pick it up. A cop with very good eyes also saw the movement and carried the phoney panhandler off.

A MAN ARRESTED IN Fort Worth, Tex., for prowling about a used car lot had in his possession a card which identified him as a member of "The Crime Prevention Club."

Bass Fishermen will Say I'm Crazy . . .

until they try my method!



But, after an honest trial, if you're at all like the other men to whom I've told my strange plan, you'll guard it with your last breath.

Don't jump at conclusions. I'm not a manufacturer of any fancy new lure. I have no rods or lines to sell. I'm a professional man and make a good living in my profession. But my all-absorbing hobby is fishing. And, quite by accident. I've discovered how to go to waters that everyone else says are fished out and come in with a limit catch of the biggest bass that you ever saw. The savage old bass that got so big, because they were "wise" to every ordinary way of fishing.

This METHOD is NOT spinning, trolling, casting, fly fishing, trot line fishing, set line fishing, hand line fishing, live bait fishing, jugging, netting, trapping, seining, and does not even faintly resemble any of these standard methods of fishing. No live bait or prepared bait is used. You can carry all of the equipment you need in one hand.

The whole method can be learned in twenty minutes—twenty minutes of fascinating reading. All the extra equipment you need, you can buy locally at a cost of less than a dollar. Yet with it, you can come in after an hour or two of the greatest excitement of your life, with a stringer full. Not one or two miserable 12 or 14 inch over-sized keepers—but five or six real beauties with real poundage behind them. The kind that don't need a word of explanation of the professional skill of the man who caught them. Absolutely legal, too—in every state.

This amazing method was developed by a little group of professional fishermen. Though they are public guides, they rarely divulge their method to their patrons. They use it only when fishing for their own tables. It is probable that no man on your waters has ever seen it, ever heard of it, or ever used it. And when you have given it the first trial, you will be as closed-mouthed as a man who has suddenly discovered a gold mine. Because with this method you can fish with-in a hundred feet of the best fishermen in the county and pull in ferocious big ones while they come home empty handed. No special skill is required. The method is just as deadly in the hands of a novice as in the hands of an old timer. My method will be disclosed only to a few men in each area—men who will give me their word of honor not to give the method to anyone else.

Send me your name. Let me tell you how you can try out this deadly method of bringing in big bass from your "fished out" waters. Let me tell you why I let you try out my unusual method without risking a penny of your money on instructions or lures. There is no charge for this information, now or at any other time. Just your name is all I need. But I guarantee that the information I send you will make you a complete skeptic—until once you try it! And then, your own catches will fill you with disbelief. Send your name, today. This will be fun.

ERIK N. FARE

317 S. Milwaukee Avenue, Libertyville 2, Illinois

Erik N. Fare, 317 S. Milwaukee Ave., Libertyville 2, Illinois

Dear Mr. Fare: Send me complete information without any charge and without the slightest obligation. Tell me how I can learn your method of catching big bass from "fished out" waters, even when the old timers are reporting "No Luck."

Name

Address

City Zone... State.....

NOW!
The Greatest
HOSPITALIZATION
VALUE
EVER OFFERED



Smiling and healthy today — in a Hospital bed tomorrow! Be ready! Sky-high Hospital bills can wreck your life savings. Insure now! We pay benefits for as long as you stay in Hospital. **NO TIME LIMIT!**

PROTECTS YOU and YOUR FAMILY
IN CASE OF SICKNESS or ACCIDENT . .

No Time Limit
HOSPITAL PLAN
PAYS BENEFITS FOR FULL STAY IN HOSPITAL



MAIL COUPON



COSTS ONLY
Pennies
a Day

WE PAY CASH DIRECT TO YOU

IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU MAY COLLECT FROM OTHER INSURANCE
 Go to the Hospital for a day, a week, a month, a year or longer — your **"NO TIME LIMIT"** Policy pays Benefits for sickness or accidents just as long as you stay — **there's absolutely no time limit!** What blessed help! What's more, the **"NO TIME LIMIT"** Policy pays off in cash direct to you — regardless of what you may collect from any other insurance policy for the same disability, including Workmen's Compensation.

Policy Sold Only By Mail! Good Anywhere in U.S. & Possessions!
 If sickness or accident puts you in a Hospital bed — you'll look back and thank your lucky stars you were wise enough to take out the **"NO TIME LIMIT"** Policy.



SO SUDDEN!

It's the sensible, practical way to protect your own bank account against the onslaught of high Hospital costs. So **ACT TODAY!** Do it before trouble strikes.

YOU CAN GET MATERNITY
 For slight extra cost husband and wife can have a **MATERNITY RIDER** attached to their regular Policy and this will entitle the couple to a liberal Benefit for childbirth confinement and care.



WHO'S NEXT?



HAPPY DAY!

POLICY BACKED BY STRONG RELIABLE COMPANY
 We do business in all 48 states and U. S. possessions. Claims are paid promptly in strict accordance with Policy provisions.
LIFE INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA
 Wilmington 99, Delaware

Mail Coupon for FREE BOOK
NO OBLIGATION NO AGENT WILL CALL

ACCIDENTAL DEATH, SURGERY, POLIO BENEFITS
 We give you more coverage, better coverage, longer coverage at low cost. You get generous Hospital Room and Board Benefits for sickness or accident (Exclusions: Gov't Hosp., Rest Homes, Sanitariums; Mental Diseases; War Casualties; Suicide) . . . you get Cash Benefits for 73 Surgical Operations . . . In lieu of other benefits you get Lump Cash for accidental death . . . Cash Payment for loss of eyes, hands, feet . . . special Polio Protection. Policy can be continued at Policyholder's or Company's option. One Policy covers individual or entire family, birth to age 75. You'll see the low costs in the booklet we send you. **DON'T TAKE CHANCES — BE PROTECTED.** Send for our **FREE BOOK** which tells all about this remarkable insurance.

DON'T WAIT TILL IT'S TOO LATE! ACT NOW!

RUSH COUPON FOR VALUABLE FREE BOOK

LIFE INSURANCE CO. OF AMERICA
 Dept. 75-16, Wilmington 99, Del.

Please send me, without obligation, full details about your new, low cost **NO TIME LIMIT HOSPITAL** Plan. No agent will call.

Name
 Address
 City Zone State