

25¢
FIVE
DETECTIVE
NOVELS

WINTER
1952

5 DETECTIVE NOVELS Magazine

25¢
WINTER



BLOOD, SWEAT AND JEERS
By **DONN MULLALLY**

THANKS FOR MURDER
By **TED STRATTON**

**COMPLIMENTS
OF A FIEND**
By **FREDRIC BROWN**

**DEATH TAKES
NO HOLIDAY**
By **W. T. BALLARD**

**ANGELS
DIE HARD**
By **PAUL CHADWICK**

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

Reducing Specialist Says:
LOSE WEIGHT

Where
It
Shows
Most

REDUCE

MOST ANY
PART OF
THE
BODY WITH

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LABORATORY
APPROVED

Spot Reducer

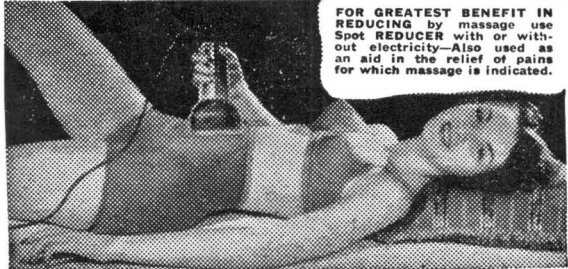
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Penetrating Massage



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GRASP
HANDLE
AND
APPLY



Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—**MASSAGE!**



FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use SPOT REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

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Don't Stay **FAT**—You Can Lose **POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY** Without Risking **HEALTH**

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.

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Your Own Private Masseur at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters laboratory approved.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only \$1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman \$8.95 plus delivery—or send \$9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of **FAT**. **MAIL COUPON** now!

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1025 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose \$1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only \$8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

Name

Address

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SAVE POSTAGE — check here if you enclose \$9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHEs AND PAINs



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Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.



MUSCULAR ACHEs:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY!

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

Give yourself an even break!

I.C.S. training is a key to advancement. Here's how three men cashed in on these down-to-earth home study courses.



"After serving with the U. S. Army Air Forces in World War II, I went to work for a sign company. Decided to take an I.C.S. course in Show Card and Sign Lettering to get ahead. Soon after beginning the course I became a partner in another sign company, and after finishing my I.C.S. training, I started my own sign business in California."

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"I signed up for I.C.S. training while working in a plant. Right away things happened. You might say that promotions outstripped my ability to keep up with my I.C.S. lessons. Recently I was made foreman of the welding setup and Assembly Department, and now I'm in charge of training three other men for promotion. Naturally, I'm determined to finish my I.C.S. training."

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5 DETECTIVE Novels

WINTER, 1952

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

• FIVE NOVELS

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The lovely victim was clad only in panties and bra		
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The blonde was a pippin, and the corpse was a lulu		
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The slayer seemed to have come from another world		

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He meant business—and his business was murder!		
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BE A SUCCESS AS A RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIAN

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If you expect to go into military service, mail coupon NOW. Knowing Radio, TV, Electronics can help you get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay. You are also prepared for great Radio-TV jobs upon leaving service. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN WITH N. R. I. NOW. Mail Coupon TODAY.

1. EXTRA MONEY IN SPARE TIME

Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while learning. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS to show you how to do this. Tester you build with parts I send helps you service sets. All equipment is yours to keep.

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Your next step is a good job installing and servicing Radio-Television sets or becoming boss of your own Radio-Television sales and service shop or getting a good job in a Broadcasting Station. Today there are over 90,000,000 home and auto Radios. 3100 Broadcasting Stations are on the air. Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-Wave Relay, Two-Way Radio are all expanding, making more and better opportunities for servicing and communication technicians and FCC licensed operators.

3. BRIGHT FUTURE

And think of the opportunities in Television! In 1950 over 5,000,000 Television sets were sold. By 1954 authorities estimate 25,000,000 Television sets will be in use. Over 100 Television Stations are now operating, with experts predicting 1,000. Now is the time to get in line for success and a bright future in America's fast-growing industry. Be a Radio-Television Technician. Mail coupon for Lesson and Book—FREE.



I TRAINED THESE MEN

Shop Specialists in Television. "Have my own shop. Am authorized serviceman for 8 large manufacturers, do servicing for 7 dealers. N. R. I. enabled me to build enviable reputation." P. MILLER, Maumee, Ohio.

NRI Graduate Doubles Salary. "Am with Station WKBO as transmitter operator. More than doubled salary since starting in Radio full time. N. R. I. has been helpful to me." A. HEER, New Cumberland, Pa.

\$10 Week in Spare Time. "Before finishing course, I earned as much as \$10 a week in Radio servicing in spare time. I recommend N. R. I. to everyone who shows interest in Radio." S. J. PETERUFF, Miami, Florida.

Gets First Job Through N.R.I. "My first job was operator with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Eng. of Police Radio Station WQOX." T. S. NOR-TON, Hamilton, Ohio.

I Will Train You at Home

Read How You Practice Servicing or Communications with Many Kits of Parts You Get!

NOW! Advanced Television Practice

New, special TV kit furnished to build high-definition scope... no oscillator with flyback power supply... complete TV set... many other sets. You see... responsible, non-teach extra fees. Get valuable PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE! Working and servicing TV, radio, electronic equipment.

Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience; many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE—build valuable Electronic Multimeter for conducting tests; also practice servicing Radios or operating Transmitters—experiment with circuits common to Radio and Television. At left is just part of the equipment my students build with many kits of parts I furnish. All equipment is yours to keep. Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time.

Mail Coupon For 2 Books FREE

Act Now! Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Coupon entitles you to actual lesson on Servicing; shows how you learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." You'll read what my graduates are doing, earning; see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2BQ, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 35th year.

Good for Both - FREE

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2BQ, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D.C. Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book about How to Win Success in Radio-Television. Both FREE. (No money will ask. Please write plainly.)

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Approved Under G. I. Bill



the LOWDOWN

ON BURGLARY INSURANCE



THE WARDEN put a finger on the switch of the wire recorder and said:

"We had listeners installed in the lighting fixtures when the new G block was built; the recording device can be switched from cell to cell by the prison psychologist. The fixtures are enclosed by a steel grating so the inmates can't get at them, and of course they don't know the 'listeners' are up there in the ceilings ready to record everything above a whisper, anyhow." He frowned. "But I'm kind of sorry they put the damn things in. I have to hear all the stuff they pick up, and I tell you, it gets me down sometimes."

I knew the warden only slightly, but his reputation was that of an honest and sincere man who took his job and his responsibilities for rehabilitating criminals pretty seriously.

"Does what you hear make you feel that the penitentiary is a crime breeder?" I asked. "I guess the cons spend their time putting each other wise to tricks of the trade."

Insurance and Crime

He shook his head. "No. Not exactly. We don't deny that a penal institution helps breed crime. But we feel that the really great crime breeders are respectable business institutions—and the worst of it is, these respectable outfits either don't know how much law breaking they're causing or they can't help it." He touched the switch. "You'll see what I'm driving at. Listen."

A well-modulated voice came from the square box of the talk-back apparatus. "From cell 21, floor 2, block G, at nine-forty peeyen, Thursday, October 4th, nineteen fifty-one—"

There was a half-minute of silence, broken only by the slight scratching sound of the magnetized wire running through the detector and amplifier. Then a faraway gruffness began.

"... crysake, haffa time the dopes don't even report it to the cops at all. They figure what-tahell, the insurance com'ny's gonna come through for the loss, so whatsa use goin' to the station and reportin' it to some dopy plain-clothes? He'll only write down a lotta guff on a card and ask a lotta dumb questions like 'Was the wing windows of the car bolted inside?' and 'Didja notice whether the rubber

gaskets on the windows was tore?' So they just skipsis and put in a claim to the insurance and that's the end of it. There ain't even no investigation, because the cops don't even know the overcoat's been stole."

Another voice, nearer, louder, added with intermingled obscenity: "... special plainey's are always watchin' them parked cars in front of hospitals. Specially them doctors' cars. Them jerks are always in a rush, hoppin' out of their heaps and tossin' stuff in the back seat without even lookin' up. But that's strickly for dummies, with them plainey's hangin' around."

The first voice suggested impolitely what the plainclothesmen could do, as far as it was concerned.

Report to Police Vital

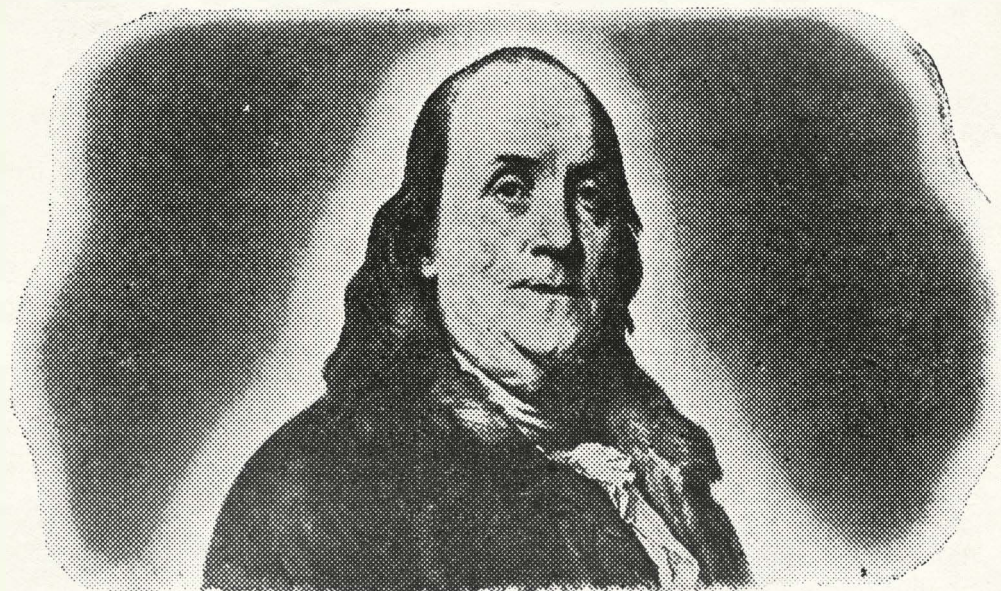
Followed a minute of silence, with only the sound of flushing water somewhere off in the distance. Then came a disparaging reference to the quality of the meat served at the evening meal interspersed with more profanity, and finally, the voice of the prison psychologist again:

"Inmate M——, who referred to the non-reporting of thefts from cars, is serving three to five years on counts of forgery and attempted forgery. As far as his record shows, he has never engaged in or been apprehended for robbery from automobiles. Inmate Y—— is better acquainted with such thievery. He is serving two years for package robbery from department store delivery trucks. Both, however, have the typical prisoner's point of view about the tendency of insured persons not to report thefts to the police when a claim made direct to the insurance company will serve to cover their losses."

The warden cut the switch. "Typical is right. In the last three or four months I bet I've listened to a good solid hour of the same line. Car thefts are the least of it, too. Take house burglary. I could take you out to the cell blocks and let you talk to men who're serving their fourth or fifth sentence for breaking and entering. They'll all give you the same picture: the houses of well-to-do people who can afford

(Continued on page 129)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



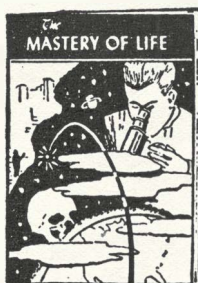
Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

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

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The **Rosicrucians**

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ZONE _____ STATE _____

AND THEN THE GAMBLERS MET THEIR MATCH...



THE BOYS SAY YOU'RE A RIGHT GUY, JIM. LIKE A REGULAR JOB?

SURE THING, MR. DAVIS

JIM READE, MASQUERADING AS A ROUGH-LOOKING SUPPLIER OF ILLEGAL GAME TO A SWANKY SUPPER CLUB, GETS THE BREAK HE HAS BEEN WAITING FOR...



IF THIS LIGHT FLASHES, THROW THE SWITCH IMMEDIATELY

SOUNDS EASY

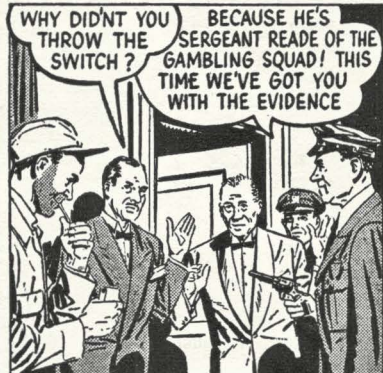
AT LAST JIM LEARNS THE SECRET THAT HAS BAFLED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS FOR MONTHS



WE'RE BEING RAIDED. SIGNAL THE BASEMENT

RIGHT!

LATER THAT NIGHT



WHY DIDN'T YOU THROW THE SWITCH?

BECAUSE HE'S SERGEANT READE OF THE GAMBLING SQUAD! THIS TIME WE'VE GOT YOU WITH THE EVIDENCE



AT HEADQUARTERS

THE SWITCH CONTROLLED A DISAPPEARING FLOOR THAT CONVERTED THE GAMBLING ROOM INTO A COCKTAIL LOUNGE

MY PAPER WOULD LIKE A PICTURE OF YOU AT THE SWITCH, SERGEANT READE

OKAY, BUT LET ME GET RID OF THESE WHISKERS FIRST



LOOKING FOR BLADES? TRY THESE

THANKS



THIS IS MY FIRST SHAVE WITH A THIN GILLETTE, BUT IT WON'T BE MY LAST!

THIN GILLETES ALWAYS GIVE ME SLICK, EASY SHAVES



READE'S A SMART LAD, INSPECTOR

THIS PUTS HIM IN LINE FOR PROMOTION

IF YOU WANT GOOD-LOOKING, REFRESHING SHAVES AT A SAVING, TRY THIN GILLETES --- THE LARGEST-SELLING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. FAR KEENER AND LONGER LASTING THAN ORDINARY BLADES, THIN GILLETES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY... PROTECT YOU FROM NICKS AND SCRAPES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETES



10-25¢

4-10¢



TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

DOPEY DOINGS



THIRTEEN MEN were indicted at Belvidere, Ill., for luring high school girls to haystacks for wild sex parties by plying them with ice cream sundaes and sodas.

A **DETROIT** checker player was taken to jail for biting the lip off an opponent in a dispute over the game.

A **DETROIT** policeman was suspended for stealing the lunches of his fellow cops.

A **NAPLES, ITALY**, traveling salesman was arrested for forcing his bride of a few months to wear a padlocked "chastity belt" during his absence from home.

A **DROXFORD, ENGLAND**, cattle dealer was arrested for obtaining 482 pounds, 18 shillings and 6 pence under false pretenses by removing worn incisor teeth from nine middle-aged cows and replacing them with false teeth so he could sell the cows as heifers to the Food Ministry.

A **HOUSEWIFE** in Petersham, Mass., was hauled into court because, when the garbage collector failed to pay his regular visit, she dumped her refuse on his front lawn.

DOWN IN South Portland, Me., a young lady was picked up by police for strolling down the street in diapers—and nothing else.

A **ROCK ISLAND, ILL.**, man was ar-

rested for slumping across his horn when he went to sleep in his car, waking everyone in the neighborhood but himself.

TWO YOUTHS in Paterson, N. J., admitted several robberies and explained they needed the money to pay a candy store operator for a candy bill they had run up.

A **DETROIT** MOTORIST was charged with reckless driving when police caught him steering with his knees, using his hands to comb his hair.

A **CHICAGO** man was arrested for wearing a wig made out of an old mop and scaring little children.

AN **OAKLAND, CALIF.**, man was jailed for ripping off his wife's nightgown, hoisting her on his shoulder, carrying her nude to a house party a block away and declaring: "Here she is—any of you fellows who want her can have her."

A **RICHMOND HILL, N. Y.**, man was arrested because, after an argument with his wife about the mother-in-law coming to live with them, he got so peeved he broke dishes, windows and furniture, then went down in the cellar and started a fire.

AN **ASHLAND, MASS.**, man was seized by police for trying to get gum out of a fire alarm box.



I

KELLY WILSON was not a guy to weep large, flabby tears over a situation. In the first place, he had never had it so good. He had never made so much money. He had never before had a chance to live like a slick-magazine hero, with time to play tennis, to ride.

There was a swimming pool ten steps away from his apartment door. Of course, it wasn't exactly a private pool—which was fine with Kelly, because most of the people he shared it with were female and lovely. He couldn't imagine a dog at Baron "Lucky" Starr's Rancho Club.

Naturally, he had to do some work to rate all this, had to put up with the old man's temperament.

Kelly wasn't even mildly sore at Lucky for breaking him out at five A.M. Maybe he had just gone to sleep, but that was all right. If Starr thought he had business with his head cop at that hour of the morning, he was paying for the privilege.

Starr had sounded tense, on the phone, had said, "Can you come up here to my place right away, Kelly?"

Kelly forced a bright, alert reply. "Of course. Be right there." He began pull-

BLOOD, SWEAT and JEERS

A Novel by DONN MULLALLY

Kelly grabbed the long club, and
the sheriff crashed into the drink



*The girl's lifeless body was clad only in panties and bra—and
Kelly was supposed to prove his boss hadn't laid a hand on her!*

ing on his socks. He dressed in the uniform of the day—sport coat, lightweight gabardine slacks, saddle shoes; skipped his morning shave.

The desert air was cold, made him move fast through the long shade patterns of the hotel building. He was almost trotting as he passed the swimming pool. He climbed into the sunlight when he got to the tropical garden that colored the hill below Starr's private hacienda. The sun felt good on Kelly's back.

From the top of his hill, Baron Starr looked down on the hotel casino and a few thousands of acres of desert valley, ringed by distant, blue mountains. A million-dollar view—particularly the foreground. The Rancho Club.

It was a nearly authentic Spanish adobe, built in an L; the south wing being the casino, the north, rooms for Starr's guests. There was a swimming pool, tennis courts, stables, bungalows for the really big-wheel customers. Also quarters for help, and a garage.

The whole little community had been landscaped to the desert; towering date palms, walks shaded by pepper trees, cactus gardens, flowers. From a distance, it could be mistaken for an early California mission.

STARR'S personal eyrie ran to twelve rooms—two-storied adobe-and-desert rock, with picture windows shaded by low, overhanging pink tile eaves. Bougainvillea was taking over its lower walls.

Apparently, Starr had been watching Kelly Wilson toil up the hill, because he opened the door before Kelly knocked. The old man had on a green silk robe which came almost to the knees of his black silk-striped evening trousers. He didn't look as though he'd been to bed—in his life.

Starr was the gray-fox type—blue-white hair, a sharp face, leathery. He was always deeply tanned. This morning, his color looked a little muddy, splotted, almost as though he'd been bruised in a fight. He said. "Good morn-

ing, Kelly. Come in."

The front door opened into the living room, a huge, double-storied room with two fireplaces, one at either end. The back wall was cut diagonally by a staircase made of solid oak timbers, rough, unstained, a bone-white desert bleach.

Kelly followed his boss around several islands of furniture and Indian rugs, to the foot of the stairs. He didn't have to ask Starr why he'd been called. The woman's body was lying there; twisted, battered. She had on panties and a bra. The skin looked white against the dark wood floor. Her legs were long, had probably been graceful. They weren't—now.

Kelly said, "Who is she?"

Baron Starr was standing beside him, hands thrust into the pockets of the green silk jacket. His face was gray, with spots of sick-looking color under his eyes. He shrugged. "I think she told me her name was Doris Mellani."

"I don't remember her around the hotel," Kelly remarked. "Is she a guest?"

The boss shook his head. "No. No, she came to see me yesterday afternoon. She wanted a job. Said she'd worked as a shill in Reno and Vegas."

"So you had her stay to talk it over," Kelly observed grimly.

The old man acted embarrassed. "As a matter of fact, I did. We had dinner together, a few drinks."

"I didn't see you at the casino last night." Kelly nodded. "I wondered about that."

Starr bridled. "Nothing happened," he declared. "Not what you're thinking, anyway. I can't explain this," he went on, "but my drinks seemed to hit me. I stretched out on the davenport over there by the fire, and—well, that's the last I remember until this morning and I—I woke up." He wiped his face with a wiry, sun-browned hand. "To be entirely honest, I'd forgotten about the young lady. I had this terrific head, thought I'd go upstairs and get myself an aspirin. Well, I didn't. I saw her, called you."

"What happened to her other clothes?"

Kelly asked. "Her dress?"

"I wouldn't know," answered Starr. "The last I recall, she was wearing it."

Kelly stepped around the girl's body, went up the stairs three at a time. He explored a couple of rooms opening off the balcony which ran the entire side of the living room. His second effort paid off.

There was a pool of women's clothes beside a bed—shoes, nylons, a garter belt, a dress. The dress was ripped nearly in half, as though someone had taken hold of it at the neckline, torn it off. A slip, shoulder-straps broken, was thrown over the foot of the bed.

Kelly took the dress to the balcony railing, held it so his boss could see, said, "Is this what she was wearing?"

Starr's immaculately barbered white head bobbed affirmatively.

"And you're positive you don't remember how she got out of it?" Kelly insisted.

He drew a negative shake.

Kelly wadded the dress into a ball and tossed it through the open bedroom door. He trotted downstairs, eyed the boss bleakly.

This had been a good job, the six weeks it had lasted. He hated to tie a can to himself, but the only thing he could say sounded like an equivalent for, "I quit, you bum!"

It had to be said. "We'd better phone the sheriff."

BARON STARR received Kelly's suggestion exactly as anticipated. He snorted, "Is that the best you can do?"

"Did you expect me to say I'd take the body out and bury it for you?" Kelly demanded hotly.

"Well, I—I—"

"Look," Kelly cut in. "We're in serious trouble as it is."

"But I didn't touch that young lady," objected Starr.

"I believe you." Kelly Wilson nodded solemnly. "And not only because I'm paid to, either. If you had been hassling with her upstairs, she broke away from you,

ran out here and accidentally tripped and fell down the stairs, I don't believe you'd let her lie there the rest of the night. Before I came to work for you I saw a lot of killers, and they either tried to dispose of the body or ran away from what they'd done. They didn't just curl up beside it and take a nap."

Kelly lifted the girl's arm. It was stiff, heavy; the flesh cold to his touch. He glanced at his boss. "That's in your favor, Mr. Starr—the fact she's been here ever since she fell, long enough for rigor mortis to set in. I think we can handle the sheriff. But, if we try to ditch the body and along the line we're seen—we're dead!"

Starr hunched his shoulders feebly under the silk jacket. "Okay. I guess you know what you're doing, Kelly. Go ahead and make the call."

It took Sheriff Tufts and a deputy over an hour and a half to drive out from the county seat. In the meantime, Kelly Wilson had to watch Baron Starr pace the corner of the living room where he couldn't see Doris Mellani's twisted body. Kelly had thrown an Indian rug over it, which didn't help too much. It still looked obscene.

Just to keep from going nuts, Kelly ran over the entire picture, from Doris's hennaed red hair to the puddle of clothing she'd left behind in the bedroom upstairs. It almost made sense, in a grim way.

The old man admitted drinking with the girl, passing out—he said—on the davenport downstairs. Kelly realized the fine line between passing out and drawing a blank. The torn dress and slip looked like one thing—the old man, feeling his booze, going crazy, tearing the dame's clothes off her back, maybe chasing her to the top of the stairs—

Kelly doubted there was that much life in the old goat. But it could happen. That's how the sheriff would want to buy it, the minute he waded into this mess up to his ankles. That's how it had seemed to Kelly, before he got wet all over.

Then he went upstairs again, had an-

other look at those nylons of Miss Mellani's. If the torn dress was supposed to give the impression Doris had been fighting for her honor, the nylons queered it. Kelly had little personal experience with such things, but he couldn't feature how the old man managed to peel the dame out of her nylons at all, and without putting a run in either one of them!

Kelly began to feel a lot better. He told the old man so. "I think we're going to get you off the hook," he said.

Starr had aged a lot since Kelly had been there. He looked stooped, feeble. He eyed Kelly suspiciously, grunted, "You damn well better!"

Kelly explained about the nylon stockings. "I'll admit they aren't a lot to be jubilant about," he continued, "but at least, another talking point."

The old man nodded. Kelly started to prowl the house. He didn't score again, or even get his hands on the ball. Everything seemed to be very much in place.

He returned to the living room, sat down to wait for the sheriff. He watched the old man tramp back and forth before the picture window which looked out over the valley, the road cutting a straight line across the desert. The road over which the sheriff would be driving.

Starr's Japanese houseboy came up the hill to start breakfast. Lucky sent him away, then, a couple of minutes later, turned and smiled sheepishly at Kelly, said, "Do you know how to make coffee?"

Kelly did. He went out to the kitchen, brewed a big pot. He and the old man were on their fourth cup when the sheriff got there.

Tufts was a slight-built young guy, a cotton-top. White eyelashes and brows gave him an eager look. Pale blue eyes, almost china blue eyes. He was wearing faded khaki riding pants stuffed into the tops of black Western boots with red inlaid flowers. He had on a small range hat. The back of his khaki shirt was stained with sweat.

Kelly met him at the door. He said, "Come right in, Sheriff."

THE sheriff's deputy towered over Tufts as they clumped across the bare boards in their high-heeled boots. Tufts took off his hat, wiped the sweatband with a handkerchief, his face. Across the cheek-bones, he was burned a crisp red. He had a pleasant smile.

He said, "What seems to be the trouble, Mr. Starr?"

Lucky was bearing up with as much dignity as he could spare. He looked to Kelly to carry the conversation.

Kelly led the sheriff to the body, saying, "Mr. Starr found her like this when he woke up. I threw the rug over it. Otherwise, not a thing has been touched."

Tufts flipped a corner of the rug back, squatted on his haunches beside the body. "Been dead some time, hasn't she?" he remarked. He stood up. "What can you tell me about her?" he asked Starr.

Lucky sighed, repeated for the sheriff's benefit the same story he'd told Kelly.

The deputy scowled—black. He seemed about to pounce, only waiting for a sign from Tufts. The sheriff was not over-free with signs. He kept his passions under control, listened carefully, before he turned to Kelly.

"You're an ex-homicide inspector, aren't you, Wilson?"

Kelly agreed that he was.

"Then, you ought to have some hunch about this."

"I have," Kelly declared. "But before I unveil it, there's something upstairs I'd like to have you see."

They went to the bedroom and Kelly showed the Sheriff the girl's torn dress, undergarments, the nylons. "I don't want you to get the idea I'm trying to do your thinking for you, Tufts," he said, "but you asked for my hunch. It's this—Doris Mellani, according to the old man, came to see him about a job as a shill. I never saw her before her body turned up

at the foot of the stairs, but I get the picture that she was a fairly sharp little operator. When the old man deferred the final decision about her job, started talking wine and caviar by candlelight, she figured to know what was on his mind. I can't imagine she was especially naive."

Sheriff Tufts nodded. "I'll go along with that."

"Good," said Kelly. "Now, here we have the old man overestimating his capacity for booze. This, I have to admit, surprises me. I've seen Lucky put away a considerable load and not show it. However, I guess we all occasionally have one of those nights. Starr passes out downstairs, as he says. The cook is

herself probably gave her some courage, too. Also fouled up her plot. First, she tried to make it too slick. She took off her stockings while she was undressing. Then, she got to the top of the stairs. Maybe she blacked out. I don't know what happened—maybe she just tripped."

Tufts removed his hat, ran his strong, blunt fingers through the tangle of white-blond hair on his head. He wrinkled his face thoughtfully.

"I suppose you could be right," he said. "But I don't understand how the girl fell downstairs—she must have screamed—without Lucky knowing it."

Kelly shook his head. "That doesn't bother me, Sheriff," he said. "Maybe



Ellen was floating lifelessly in the water

through for the night, and Doris finds herself in a choice spot.

"She'll run upstairs, tear her clothes off, come down in her panties and bra, somehow wake Lucky—maybe by throwing a drink in his face, which would have been a good touch, too—then start screaming and let him chase her out the front door, until she was certain there were plenty of witnesses. Then she'll claim Lucky tried to attack her, make the old boy pay through the nose."

"Do you think he would've?" Sheriff Tufts wanted to know.

Kelly shrugged. "He'd have to shut her up. He's in a sensitive position, and Starr isn't the hoodlum type gambler. If he were, she'd have been afraid of him. As it was, he looked easy to her. Of course, being more than a little loaded

because, when I was a young cop in L.A., I had a Main Street beat. I've tried to wake a few thousand guys who were canned. I wouldn't be surprised if Lucky didn't even turn over, when she landed at the bottom of the stairs."

TUFTS had walked to the bedroom window while Kelly Wilson was speaking; stood with his back to the room, looking at the desert. He turned, grinned at Kelly.

"There's nothing like having your work done for you, is there?" he said.

Kelly stiffened. "You asked what I thought, Sheriff. Remember?"

Tufts held up his hand defensively. "Take it easy, Kelly," he said. "I wasn't being sarcastic. I was only trying to say I agree with you. Suppose we go down-

stairs and call the coroner? It's a hot day. He'll want to get that body in the morgue icebox. . . ."

Coroner Clarence Liebert was a happy little man. He looked as though he sold something—real estate, insurance. He was built like a medicine ball. He showed at the Rancho Club wearing a baggy seersucker suit and a Panama hat. Where his arms and legs hooked on, the suit had accordion pleats, looked damp. He smelled.

He clucked importantly when he saw Doris Mellani. He asked a few pertinent questions regarding the girl's identity, listened passively as Lucky Starr repeated the story of the girl coming to see him about a job and so forth. The coroner backed his station wagon to the side door of Starr's *hacienda*, lowered the tail-gate. The sheriff and his deputy loaded the girl's body for him.

Tufts pulled out shortly afterward. The last thing he said to Kelly was, "We'll see what's in the coroner's autopsy report."

Kelly nodded, went into the house. Starr had finally walked himself out; was slumped in a big chair, looking thoroughly beat. Kelly didn't blame him. On top of everything else, the old man probably had a sensational hangover.

"Well," Kelly said, trying to sound cheerful and optimistic, "I think we're going to be all right. The sheriff's on our side, anyway, and I don't look for trouble from that coroner."

Starr raised his eyes wearily; sighed, "I can see you're a great judge of character, Wilson." He rose slowly and started across the room to the stairs. He stopped, turned to Kelly standing in the center of the room. "If anyone asks for me during the next twenty-four hours"—he grinned narrowly—"tell them I just left for Florida." He went on up to his bedroom.

As Kelly left the top of the hill, he could hear happy shrieks and splashes from the pool, which sounded like a good idea. He felt hot, sticky, miserable. He could use a few fast lengths of the pool

to stretch the kinks out, and a little baking in the desert sun. It wouldn't, he decided, exactly devastate his morale, either, to look at a few female bodies which were living. After all the years he had been a homicide inspector in Los Angeles, death—violent death—always left a lousy taste.

He hurried to his room and changed into his bathing trunks.

After a swim, Kelly Wilson spent a routine day. He checked the new arrivals, looked over the situation in the casino, settled a couple of small rhubarbs between guests and the help and passed the word that the old man wasn't to be expected off his hill. He didn't go into why Starr was suddenly so exclusive. No one in the hotel knew about Doris Mellani, which was jolly as far as Kelly was concerned.

Kelly was watching the play around the crap tables when he happened to look up, and saw the old man moving through the crowd. His blue-white hair shone like a halo in the thick haze of tobacco smoke, his eyes were intent. He wasn't counting the house.

Kelly managed to get to Lucky's elbow, say, "Is anything wrong, Mr. Starr?"

Starr shook his head, said, "No—nothing," and kept going. There was another old boy a step or two behind him. Kelly got out of their way.

He recognized Starr's companion. Myron Chase, a local big wheel Chase's family had once owned most of Las Palmas county He'd been smart about the desert. He'd promoted the county seat into a resort town and made plenty, selling the sand dunes as city lots. Then he'd attracted Starr down there to brighten the other end of the valley.

HE WAS a leathery gaffer, like Starr. Not as much hair, and what was left was a faded red. Kelly watched the two of them make their way through the casino to Lucky's office door

They went inside. Over in the corner of the room, Kelly heard two jackpots spill, one after the other. The crowd

heard it too, milled that way to watch a couple of customers scrambling on the floor after their loot. Kelly drifted along, just to identify the happy winners. Every now and then they would have trouble with a character who knew how to spill a jackpot with a piece of hooked wire. It was a good idea to keep track of people who played the bandits and won—too often.

By the time Kelly was satisfied these two lucky customers weren't pros, he had forgotten about his boss and Myron Chase. . . .

The death of Doris Mellani made only a minor splash in the press. After Coroner Liebert held his inquest and stated he'd found the cause of death to be accidental, there wasn't a lot of news in the facts. Except for a small item planted by a local correspondent for a Los Angeles paper, nothing.

This notice, and the inquest, caused a mild stir around the hotel but, as near as Kelly Wilson could tell, there was no loss of trade because of it. People seemed to be as anxious as ever to try to beat Lucky Starr's tables and slots. They stood just as good a chance of doing so.

III

IT WAS three days after Doris' death that Ellen Mellani hit the Rancho Club. The way the day clerk told it, she trotted briskly up to the desk and demanded to see the man who had murdered her sister. She spoke loud enough to be heard over the entire lobby, and wasn't at all vague. She said, "I want to see Baron Starr. He murdered my sister." A real conversation stopper, this kid.

Lobby gossip dried into about fifty expectant leers. The clerk told the girl he was sure she was mistaken about Mr. Starr. She said she wasn't.

The clerk saw the mob dragging its collective ear to catch every word. He thought fast, ushered her into a small business office in back of the desk, and sent a bellhop chasing after Kelly Wilson.

Kelly walked into the office without knowing what he was in for. The clerk had just said this young lady seemed to be off her rocker. She was on him, her claws out, before he had the door closed.

Kelly defended himself as best he could, finally caught her wrists and held them. She tried to kick him. He spun her into a chair, held her there sputtering some uncomplimentary things about his family background. Only it wasn't *his* background, he realized when she called him Starr for the third time.

He said, "Slow down, baby! You're wasting this on the wrong man. I'm not Baron Starr. My name's Kelly Wilson. I sort of look after things for Mr. Starr."

She stopped fanning her legs in wide arcs, trying to spin the chair so she could get at him again. He took a large chance and let go of her. She stayed put.

"You're not Mr. Starr?" She eyed him suspiciously.

"What do I have to do?" he asked. "Show you my Social Security card? No. I am not Baron Starr, by about thirty years and thirty million dollars. I'm just a hired hand." He turned his back on her and walked around the desk, sat down behind it.

"I said I wanted to see Mr. Starr," she said, her voice rising.

"He's particular about people he meets," Kelly told her. "Especially crazy people. If you'll tell me why you want to commit mayhem on him, what this is all about—"

She froze to the chair. Her lips stiffened, then she blurted, "He killed my sister!" Her hands were clenched in white, sharp fists in her lap.

"You're all wet, honey," soothed Kelly Wilson. "Or someone has been giving you some bum dope. Mr. Starr hasn't killed anyone. Not recently."

She took her handbag off the floor beside the chair, snapped it open and removed a neatly folded news clipping. She threw it on the desk in front of Kelly. "I suppose this is bum dope!" she said.

Kelly glanced at it—the story of Doris

Mellani's death. He sighed, "Oh."

"Is that all you can say?" asked the girl sharply. "You can't even deny he murdered her?"

Kelly rubbed the side of his jaw with his knuckles. "Yes, I can deny it," he declared simply, adding, "You're Doris's sister?"

"Yes, I am. I'm Ellen Mellani."

"I see." Kelly nodded. "Now, do you mind telling me why you say your sister was murdered? After all, the coroner, everyone else, is satisfied it was one of those things. An accident."

"I'm not satisfied at all!" Ellen snapped. "Doris was murdered. I won't stop until I prove she was. You can tell Mr. Starr that, if you're afraid to let me say it to him."

"But, look," Kelly persisted. "You haven't answered my question. What makes you believe your sister was murdered? You weren't here. Believe me, I was. I saw your sister's body. I know the circumstances. I've been a cop a long time, Miss Mellani, and I wouldn't kid you or myself. If there was any question of this being homicide, even Baron Starr doesn't have enough money to keep me on his pay-roll to cover up for him."

ELLEN MELLANI sat very straight, occupying two inches of the front edge of her chair. She said, "What would you think, if that"—she indicated the newspaper clipping on the desk in front of Kelly—"what would you think, if that was the first information you had that your sister had been killed?"

Kelly slouched a little lower in his chair, shrugged. "I'd probably say my sister should have carried more identification."

Ellen bristled. "Jack Terry knew where I could be reached."

Kelly nodded. "Fine. Who is Jack Terry?"

"Why—why—" For the first time, Ellen Mellani wasn't sure what her next words were going to be. "Why, he got Doris the job here."

Kelly wagged his head. "Your sister

wasn't working for us, Miss Mellani," he said. "She came to see about a job, but she hadn't been hired yet. In fact, I'm not even certain there was a job for her, although that isn't my department."

The girl looked as if she had been fouled. She half bent over, her eyes darting around the edges of Kelly's face.

Kelly Wilson decided the most merciful thing he could do was finish this right here. He said, "Besides, honey, that's a weak excuse for the accusations you've made."

She didn't finish. She came out fighting. "All right, then," she said. "Maybe you can explain why there was such a rush to cremate Doris' body. They didn't even wait to see if anyone would claim it. What were they hiding, if her death was an accident, as you say?"

Kelly felt suddenly feeble, light-headed. "You—you're sure they—" he stammered.

She nodded decisively. "I just came from the coroner's office."

"I don't know why the body was cremated," Kelly admitted, "unless it's some kind of a local practice when remains aren't claimed immediately. I don't know. I can find out for you. Believe me, Miss Mellani, there was nothing about your sister's body which—"

"Of course, I have to believe you—now—don't I?" The girl's eyes bored into his.

Kelly got to his feet, said, "Look, Miss, make yourself comfortable here for a few minutes. I want to check on a couple of things. I'll be right back." He left her sitting in the office, told the desk clerk to stay out of there, leave her alone until he returned.

Kelly stopped at the public telephone booths in the corner of the lobby and phoned the county seat. He spoke to the man who ran the crematorium, asked him who paid the bill for Doris Mellani.

The man told him he had been instructed by the coroner to bill Baron Starr.

Kelly said, "Thank you," and hung up. He established some kind of a record

for scaling Starr's private hill. He was sweating, winded, when he got there.

He was also temporarily blind in the darkened house, after the desert sunlight. The air-conditioned, damp air he was breathing seemed to stick in his throat. He was in great shape to pin down the guy who paid his salary.

Starr let him gasp for breath almost a minute, before he demanded impatiently, "Well, Kelly, what is it?"

"I've got a scoop for you, Mr. Starr,"



BRACELETS

"He gave me a bright pair of bracelets.
With his own hands he fastened them on me,
And I went with him without question,"
She babbled. "He certainly won me."

She was boastfully listing her conquests
And her wearings of love's jewelled tether,
But she failed to explain that the bracelets
Were the kind that are fastened together.

—Clarence E. Flynn

Kelly finally managed to strangle his words out. "We're in trouble. Serious trouble."

Right away Starr became concerned about Kelly's failing wind. He indicated a chair, with a movement of his hand. "Sit down, Kelly. Sit down. Tell me about it. Don't hurry yourself."

Kelly lit a cigarette, took a couple of gratis puffs before he tried to say anything else. "There's a girl at the hotel," he said at last, "who's after your hide. Name's Mellani. Ellen Mellani. Doris' sister. She kicked her cause off by an-

nouncing to everyone in the lobby that you had murdered her sister. By the time I caught up with her, the day clerk had sidetracked her to the office. She's waiting there for me now, while I get the straight of who gave the order to have Doris' body cremated."

KELLY watched the boss mix himself a Scotch and soda. He didn't offer to pass his liquor around to the help—which was all right, too. Kelly wasn't anxious to have this call disintegrate into a cocktail party.

The old man punctuated his answer by dropping ice cubes in a tall glass. "I had nothing to do with the disposition of Miss Mellani's remains, if that's what you wish to know."

"Then you'll be delighted to hear you're paying her bill at the crematorium. I spoke to a man up there a few minutes ago, on the phone, and he said the coroner had instructed him to invoice you."

Starr's thin shoulders rose and fell under the loud fabric of a Hawaiian sport shirt. He sighed, "I suppose we'll have to fight that out with Coroner Liebert. He'll probably cry poverty, say the county has no funds to take care of these things and no Potter's Field for burial of unclaimed remains. I wouldn't be surprised if, for a finish, I was stuck with the price of the service."

Kelly knocked the ashes off the end of his cigarette as he rose, walked to a window. "I wouldn't be surprised if you were stuck, period," he said. "This girl is suspicious of the whole deal. If she starts to scream, down Los Angeles way, she can build herself into a beautiful nuisance. It's impossible to throw a rock within a mile of the City Hall without hitting some lawyer who'd be wild to take her case."

Starr moved the length of the room, toward a large carved oak desk. He set his drink down, opened a drawer, took out a check book and did some scratching in it with a pen. He tore off a check, waved the strip of pink paper at Kelly.

"See if this won't change her attitude," he said.

Kelly glanced at what the old man had written. Ten thousand dollars.

"Suppose she gets the idea we're trying to buy her off?"

Starr grunted, put his checkbook away. "It's immaterial to me what idea she gets, so long as she signs a release. You might try to make the young lady understand I feel this is the limit of my responsibility—simply because her sister did die here as the result of an accident."

"And if the sister won't take the dough?" Kelly asked.

"That's your problem," the old man rasped.

Ellen Mellani was still perched on the edge of her chair when Kelly returned to the office. She hadn't even relaxed the tight lines around her mouth. Ordinarily, Kelly decided as he sat down across the desk from her, she would be a rather pert youngster.

There was nothing vivid about her, as he imagined there had been about her sister. Nothing phony—like hennaed hair, too much makeup. She had mouse-colored hair, and on her it looked good. Her complexion blended with it. Her eyes were large and dark. There was only a trace of lipstick left on her mouth, which made it seem small and petulant indeed. Her figure was all right. She was wearing a modest little Palm Beach suit, not too new.

He said, "Well, Ellen, I've talked to Mr. Starr. I told him you were here."

She started to leave her chair eagerly. He waved her down, continuing, "Mr. Starr can't see you. But he asked me to tell you he's very sorry about your sister, about your not being informed right away."

He saw her lip start to curl, but went on. "Mr. Starr wants to do the right thing, Ellen. He realizes Doris died here on the premises and, therefore, he has a certain responsibility to you. He—he asked me to give you this."

Kelly slipped the check across the

glass top of the desk.

She didn't touch it. However, she read the amount, said almost exactly what he had expected.

"What's this? Hush money?"

Kelly moved his head slowly. "I know my boss doesn't rate in your book, Miss Mellani. But, for all his faults, he's no piker. If he were really trying to buy you, he wouldn't start the bidding so low. Maybe ten grand sounds like money to you, but to Starr it's petty cash."

"Is that all he thinks my sister is worth—petty cash?" the girl said tartly.

"Look, Ellen." Kelly leaned his elbows on the desk. "Ellen, frankly, he doesn't have to give you anything. If you wish, you can sue him and his insurance company. That's your privilege, but I don't think you'll get a lot out of him. People fall down every day. When they've been drinking, that's called contributory negligence. It's hard to beat in court. I'd advise you to take his ten thousand and forget it. I realize it seems unfair, callous, to you—now—but it's for the best."

IV

ELLEN MELLANI made no move to touch the check. She stood up, tugging the coat of her suit smooth. Kelly realized he wasn't going to get to his pitch for her to sign the release. She wasn't having any.

She said, "No, thank you, Mr. Wilson," started primly to the door of the office.

Kelly said, "Wait a minute." He followed her out, picking up the check as he passed. He put it in his pocket, walked with her through the hotel lobby. She had nothing else to say as she marched out of the air-conditioned hotel into the dry, hot blast from the desert.

He kept in step with her, down the walk to the parking lot. She got into a more than slightly beat-up coupé. He crawled in beside her.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Trying to save a fat job," he con-

fessed, smiling.

"I couldn't care less," she declared. "Now please get out of my car."

"Look," argued Kelly. "I know you're completely convinced Starr murdered your sister, that I'm in conspiracy with him and the coroner and the sheriff. If I were in your spot, I might think just as you do. But look, Ellen. Give us a break. If you won't listen to Starr's deal, listen to mine before you throw me out of the car, huh?"

Her mouth set in a grim line. She didn't say anything, but it could have been worse. She could have screamed. Kelly felt sweat popping out on his face, some of it dishonest sweat. He hadn't been kidding about the job.

"Let me work with you on this," he said. "I was a homicide inspector before I ever saw Lucky Starr. We'll give it the old school try. If we can prove your sister was murdered—I don't care who did it—we'll see they're put away. But, if the case develops so you're satisfied Doris met her death accidentally, you take Starr's check and—"

Ellen Mellani was shaking her head. She laughed, a little hollowly. "What do you take me for, Mr. Wilson? Am I supposed to believe you'd actually admit Baron Starr killed my sister, if you found all the evidence in the world?"

"Any time you think I'm welching on this deal, you can pull out and turn over the information you have to the cops," growled Kelly.

"How would I know what you'd found?" she objected. She was beginning to perspire, herself—a fine mist in the tiny hairs on her upper lip.

Kelly got out of his side of the car, walked around the front of it to her side, the driver's side, and pushed her gently from under the wheel. He said, as he started the car, "You'll know, baby. Because there'll be nothing up my sleeves. You'll see every move I make."

"Whe—where are we going?" she stammered.

"You mentioned a joker named Jack Terry. A friend of your sister's, who

was supposed to have had something to do with her landing a job here. Do you think we can locate him?"

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye as he pointed the coupé across the long, straight drag of road which parted the desert valley.

She bobbed her head. "He lives in Los Angeles."

"Good," Kelly remarked. "I was almost homesick for smog, anyway."

While they were driving to Los Angeles, Ellen gave Kelly Wilson a fill-in on her sister and her sister's boy friend, this Jack Terry. Incidentally, she revealed a lot about herself.

It seemed Ellen and Doris lived together, on and off, in Los Angeles. The "off" times were when Doris would be out of town on some promotion of her own. She did work in gambling houses in Reno and Las Vegas, as she had told old man Starr. She also, according to Ellen, hopped tables, worked in taxi-dance halls, a burlesque line, hosted at clip joints—all high-type employment. When she would wind up broke, she would come back to Ellen's apartment.

Ellen pounded a typewriter for a living. Nothing fancy, but there was always food, and a bed available to Doris when she'd ride the skids to the bottom. Ellen didn't say so, but Kelly Wilson gathered that Doris would hang around until she bought some new clothes on Ellen's charge accounts. Then she'd take off again.

ACCORDING to Ellen, Doris had met Terry at a bar on Wilshire Boulevard—which almost made it respectable. Ellen seemed to think Terry was a right enough guy. She didn't see anything strange at all in Terry touting her sister into a job as a shill for a gambling casino. Doris had done that kind of work before.

Ellen said she had come home from her office, found Doris packing a bag. Doris was gay, said she had a wonderful job, and had been advanced five hundred

dollars. She gave Ellen a couple hundred on account, which was like Doris, Ellen declared; open-handed. Jack Terry drove by for her. Ellen saw Doris get in the car with him, the last she saw of her sister, until they showed her a jar in the Las Palmas columbarium; a jar she was told contained her sister's ashes.

Ellen didn't have any definite ideas about what kind of work Jack Terry did. She said he always had plenty of money, drove a late-model convertible, dropped celebrities' names without bruising them. She knew where Terry lived, because she and Doris had been to his apartment for dinner. He'd done the cooking himself. He was a pretty good chef, Ellen asserted.

Jack Terry lived south of Wilshire Boulevard, in the old neighborhood which had mushroomed around Pershing Square in the early Twenties. The building was old, brick, looked institutional. Ellen said it was well-kept-up, had been redecorated on the inside.

At first, Kelly thought he would have to take her word. Jack Terry wasn't home.

They had dinner at a drive-in restaurant, waited until nearly ten o'clock before Jack drove up. He was alone. That simplified things a lot.

Ellen recognized his car, but Kelly held her back until Jack Terry had locked his convertible, gone to the door of the apartment house and was fumbling with his key. Then, Kelly turned Ellen loose.

She bleated Jack's name as they came up to him. Terry straightened, scowling. Then he recognized Ellen, said, "Hello."

Ellen said, "Jack, I'd like to have you meet a friend of mine. Kelly Wilson. He wants to talk to you—about Doris."

The two men shook hands. Jack Terry was no surprise to Kelly, not after Ellen's briefing. He was a good-looking guy—if one was not too particular about close-set eyes, no chin. He had a dark mustache, dark hair, a touch of gray in a plume through it. He was about thirty-

five, Kelly thought.

He dressed Hollywood—sport coat and slacks—which was all right, except the slacks were bright yellow and, in the dim light of the entrance-way, the coat seemed to Kelly to be purple. It was, too, he saw when they went upstairs and there was a better light. Jack had soft, limp hands.

He offered his guests a drink, cigarettes with built-in filters. Kelly said, "No, thanks," and smoked his own brand.

When Terry had stopped playing host, Kelly Wilson said, "Of course, you know what has happened to Doris. I understand you got her that job at the Rancho Club, Starr's place."

"Well," admitted Jack Terry modestly, "I did have some connections, and I—"

"You drove her there, didn't you?" Kelly asked.

An affirmative nod from Doris' friend.

"Did you stay with her until she was set?"

Jack Terry was making an effort to see behind Kelly's questions. He kept looking from Kelly to Ellen for some kind of a tip as to what was up. He hedged, "Well, I—I didn't really stay around. You see, I—she was set. I left her there at the hotel."

Kelly took out his notebook, a pencil, said, "Good enough. You mentioned connections, Terry. Do you mind telling me their names? I'd like to know more about them."

Terry's hospitality folded. He sounded hostile. "Look, old man," he said. "I don't know who you are. Of course, Ellen introduced you, but I can't give you that kind of information, not without speaking to my—my friends."

KELLY WILSON nodded, put away his notebook. "I'm Baron Starr's head cop. I've been in this hassel from the beginning—at least, from the time Starr found Doris' body I was in. It's only fair to tell you I know Doris had no

promise of a job from Starr. Your friends must have been a little optimistic about putting her on there."

He watched Jack Terry moisten his lips, try a feeble grin. "Of course," Terry said, "I suppose that's possible. I—"

Kelly cut him off at his conversational pockets. "Possible, hell!" he said. "It's a fact. Which brings us to an interesting question. Ellen tells me you were instrumental in getting Doris a five-hundred-dollar advance against her salary at Starr's. Since she didn't have the job, I'd like to know how you worked it."

Jack Terry crossed his long legs, slumped down in his chair. He was performing, now, a hundred per cent. He wasn't bad.

He laughed at Wilson's question. "I'll tell you about that," he said. "Doris was in debt to her sister. When this chance for a job out of town came up, she didn't want to take it. She thought Ellen would be in hot water for money, and we talked it over. She finally let me give her the money to pass on to Ellen. The story of an advance on her salary"—he chuckled—"I guess that was just something she made up."

Kelly studied the man across the room from him—the insolent smirk he'd used to tag his last statement. There were ways of breaking a guy like Terry, getting the truth from him but, Kelly decided, this wasn't the time. Not with Ellen there.

He knew enough, anyway. Sometimes a lie can be too reasonable, too glib, can point to more truth than a confession sobbed out after a beating.

Kelly got up, said, "Come on, Ellen."

Jack Terry started to untangle his legs, to see them to the door, but Kelly waved him back. "Don't bother," he said.

Kelly hammered Ellen's tired old coupé over the road to the desert. They pulled into Las Palmas just before midnight. The conversation on the way out had lagged, for Kelly was busy trying to make something of the sixes and sevens he had left over from his talk with Jack Terry.

[Turn page]

How to buy better work clothes



GET long wear from the tough materials and rugged sewing that go into Blue Bell work clothes. Blue Bell dungarees are cut full so they don't bind. They're Sanforized, and keep their roomy, comfortable fit as long as you wear them. Reinforced with no-scratch copper rivets. Plenty of pockets.

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WORLD'S LARGEST PRODUCER OF WORK CLOTHES

He was certain Terry had lied. If this could be proved, if Kelly could discover the source of Doris' sudden wealth on that last day of her life, he thought he'd be pretty close to the answer for her death.

He stopped at a counter lunchroom, treated Ellen to coffee and a hamburger. Then he led her by the hand to the lunchroom's public phone. He had her stand so she could hear every word he said. He called Baron Starr's private number.

He said, "Mr. Starr—Kelly. I thought you'd want to be one of the first to know Doris Mellani's death wasn't an accident."

"What's—what are you talking about?" gasped Lucky, his voice sounding like an old Edison cylinder recording. "Are you drunk? Where are you?"

"Relax a second and listen to this," Kelly said. "I just got back from L.A. I talked to a man down there who gave Doris Mellani five hundred dollars before she came to see you. He says he gave it to her because she was broke. I think that's for the birds. I believe she was paid to make a play for you because somebody wanted the two of you alone in the house. She probably drugged your drink. When you passed out, she let this party or these parties into the place. Whoever they were, they made her undress at the point of a gun, probably gun-whipped her silly before they shoved her down the stairway. Does this sound like anyone you know?"

There was a long silence on the other end of the wire. For a second, Kelly thought he had been disconnected, had been saying all this to himself.

Then he heard the old man sigh, "I can't say it does, Kelly. Look. I want you to drop the whole matter. Forget it."

Kelly replied, "I'm sorry, Mr. Starr, I'm not about to."

"I thought you liked your job, Kelly," the old man said.

"I did," cracked Kelly Wilson grimly. "But I'm turning in my suit. Good-by."

He hung up, met Ellen's eyes levelly.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

She looked confused, a little hurt. "I didn't ask you to give up your job," she said.

Kelly nodded. "I know you didn't. I meant, are you satisfied I'm playing this straight, that I'm not going to double-cross you?"

She said, "Yes. Yes, Kelly, I am."

"Good. Then, I'll tell you what you'd better do. This may get a little rugged. As we were driving into town, I saw one of the motels is advertising a vacancy. It's on the right-hand side of the road. Suppose you hop in your jeep, go on out and register. Stay there until I come by for you. I hope I'll have some good news. I think I will."

He went to the car with her, stood at the curb until she had made a U-turn and driven off toward the edge of town. Then he went back in the lunchroom and called the local cab company.

As it turned out, Kelly threw the cabbie a lot of business. First, he stopped by Coroner Clarence Liebert's home. It was dark, and no amount of door-kicking raised anyone inside.

Next, they hit the night spots in town and a few scattered around the desert. He asked a lot of people if they had seen Liebert—bartenders, hostesses, even a couple of cops. It would've been tough on anyone who picked that night to die.

He finally decided to give up until morning. Kelly had the driver take him to the motel where he had told Ellen to wait. He saw her coupé parked in one of the carports, figured everything was all right with her, and paid off his cab.

There was still a vacancy advertised. Kelly went to the office and signed for it, then he dropped in on Ellen. He had a little morale-building speech prepared to take the sting out of the fact he hadn't been able to locate Liebert.

He never got to deliver it—the speech.

V

KELLY knocked on Ellen's door, waited. At first, there was no answer from inside. Then he thought he heard

something like a groan. He tried the door. It was unlocked.

As it traveled open, the sound was louder. He'd been right. Someone was in pain. Ellen.

He could barely make her out in the pale green glow which filtered through the room's one window from the neon sign over the court. She was lying, fully clothed, on the bed, one arm across her face as though she were defending herself. He went to the side of the bed, touched her, saying, "What's the matter, honey?"

She half bolted off the bed, her eyes wide, her mouth open to scream. He held her where she was, said gently, "Hey, take it easy, honey. This is Kelly. Remember me? I just came by to make sure you were all right, and I—"

WITH HIS free hand, he snapped on the bed lamp so she'd be able to see him. It worked both ways. He could see her, too. The swollen place on her jaw, a dark bruise spreading under the skin.

He heard a movement in the doorway to the kitchenette of the cabin, looked up. The door was crowded. Coroner Liebert and a couple of other guys he recognized—Sheriff Tufts' deputy, the guy with the black scowl, and Jack Terry. The coroner held a gun in his fat little hand. So did the deputy.

Kelly didn't move. His grip on Ellen's shoulder tightened. He said, "What're you doing with the heater, Coroner—trying to build your clientele?"

Liebert's round face split in a grin. "You catch on fast, Wilson."

Kelly shook his head. He could feel Ellen trembling. "No, I don't," he remarked grimly. "I'm about as thick as an ex-cop can get. Otherwise, you wouldn't have the drop on me."

Jack Terry came over and shook Kelly down for the .38 on his shoulder clip. There wasn't a lot Kelly could do about it, except taunt, "You're off your beat, aren't you, Terry? This is a long way from Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street."

"I'll find my way back, chum," Terry smirked.

Kelly Wilson forced himself to smile at Ellen. "Well, honey," he said, "it looks like you win the consolation prize. You were right. Your sister was murdered, and I suspect these gentlemen can tell you all about it."

A dry sob shook the girl. "They tried to make me tell them where you were," she said. "When I said I didn't know, they—they hit me."

"I'm surprised they didn't burn your feet with cigarettes," commented Kelly. "They're that kind of people."

Coroner Liebert waved his gun at them impatiently. "Come on," he said. "Let's get out of here."

Kelly drew Ellen off the bed. "You heard what the man said."

"Wh-where," she stammered, "are they taking us?"

"Just out for a ride, Ellen," Jack Terry leered. "A moonlight ride."

Kelly and Ellen were herded into her car. Kelly was told to drive. Jack Terry got in beside them, his gun covering them, while Tufts' deputy squatted on the seat behind them. He held a gun at the back of Kelly's neck. The coroner walked on alone.

Terry directed Wilson to drive around the block, stop in the dark side street. Kelly made out the coroner's waddling form in the shadows, saw him get in a parked car, start it. He was ordered to follow the coroner.

They drove away from town on the main highway. The desert air was cold and dry. The moonlight seemed to coat the rugged landscape, like frosting.

They stopped once, at a little roadside bar. The coroner went in, was out again a few minutes later. This time, Kelly drove lead, with the coroner following him. Jack Terry was still giving orders. The front seat was crowded. Kelly could feel Ellen's elbow pressed into his side. She had stopped shaking, felt almost like a dead weight against him. There was no warmth to her body.

He tried to think of something en-

couraging to say to Ellen, but nothing occurred to him that would even start to come off as more than a grim joke. Kelly kept driving until he was told to stop at the head of a grade. Terry said, "Pull over here."

KELLY WILSON reached down to set the hand-brake, and that was all. He knew a tremendous jagged flash of light and pain. He seemed to smash his face into the steering wheel. Far off, he thought he heard Ellen screaming. . . .

Kelly Wilson came to with the steering wheel still beating him to death—only now it wasn't a single crushing blow. His head was bouncing on the rim, the spokes jabbing at his nose and chin. He was half off the seat, sprawled on the floor, the wheel spinning loose. He could hear the engine roaring.

He tried to pull himself up, got his eyes level with the windshield in time to see their lights fan out into the desert. He felt Ellen beside him, slumped in her corner of the seat. He tried to grab the wheel but as his hand closed on the rim, the car made a crazy, side-ward lurch, spun over. He had a flash impression of the headlights reflecting off something that looked like water.

It was water. They were in it—a seething, bubbling splash. The car settled drunkenly on its side. Kelly realized he had fallen on top of Ellen. Just

before the water closed over him, he sucked all the air he could get into his lungs, doubled up, reaching below him for the girl.

He got hold of her hair, unwedged her from where she was jammed between the floorboard and the seat. Her body floated upright against him. He found the open window on the driver's side of the car. Head and lungs pounding, he shoved Ellen's body through the open window, let it drift out of his grasp. Then he came out.

The water wasn't deep—not more than a couple of feet to the surface, once he was clear of the car. It was warm and dark, moved sluggishly. As Kelly gulped air and began to flounder blindly, searching for Ellen, he got the picture—what had happened to them.

As soon as he'd set the hand brake, Tufts' deputy had let him have it with the gun-barrel. Probably Ellen had received the same treatment. Then the deputy and Terry had got out of the car, let the hand brake off, put the car in gear and yanked the throttle, sending the car careening down the slope. It had left the road and piled into an irrigation ditch.

Kelly knew he had to find Ellen. Quick. He saw a small grayish patch moving on the surface of the water a short distance downstream, took out after it. It could've been anything. It wasn't.

THE ADVENTURES OF

IT SMELLS GRAND



SMIFF A WHIFF—
IT SMELLS RIGHT JOLLY!

IT PACKS RIGHT



CUT TO PACK JUST RIGHT, BY GOLLY!

When he swam up to Ellen, she was floating lifelessly on the water. He got a grip on her, made for the opposite bank, putting some distance between them and the car. He'd had time to think about that, knew Liebert and his two punks would be down to make sure business was set to boom around the morgue.

Just as he bumped against the bank, he saw flashlights start playing over the water. He swore, plunged back into the current, towing Ellen further downstream to where willow trees overhung the water. He got there, wedged Ellen's unconscious body as high as he could, said, "Sorry, honey. This is the best I can do for now. I'll try to get back."

He paddled to the other side, swimming upstream for a short distance toward the lights and confusion on the bank. Then he turned on a big, splashy crawl stroke he figured would attract attention.

A light started to bob along the shore in his direction. Kelly moved in under the bank, dug his hands into the sandy bottom to hold himself against the current. The light passed him, but Kelly got a look at the man carrying it. Sheriff Tufts! He also seemed to have a long club in his other hand. What a county! Everybody was a killer.

Kelly launched himself into the stream again, made enough splash to attract

Tufts back his way. He began to float on his face, giving an Academy performance as a corpse. Tufts found him with the beam of his flashlight, the water around Kelly turning milky white. He flipped over, just as Tufts was about to part his hair with the end of that long club. Kelly grabbed it, threw Tufts off-balance. The sheriff crashed into the drink, Kelly on him.

HE WRESTLED Tuft's revolver out of its holster before he dunked the sheriff the second time. Then he lifted Tufts out of the water by the hair on his head.

Tufts gasped, sputtered, "Where—what's wrong with you?"

"Not a thing," Kelly told him grimly, driving the sheriff onto the bank, prodding him with the gun. "I just hate guys who try to brain me with a fence post."

"I thought you were drowned," objected Tufts. "I was trying to fish your body out of the ditch."

As they came ashore, they could see another flashlight beam moving down the bank toward them. Kelly shoved Tufts behind an outcropping of rock, growling, "Shut up!"

The first two guys down the path, Kelly had expected. They were Jack Terry and that hood deputy of Tufts.

[Turn page]

UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET



A MERRY SMOKE—*Sir Walter Raleigh!*

IT CAN'T BITE!



SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE. THE LARGE SIZE CANISTER OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH—IN A BEAUTIFUL VULETIDE PACKAGE—MAKES THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT!

They walked carefully, their hands folded behind their heads. In another second, Kelly saw why they were mincing along like that.

The old man, Baron Starr, was behind them, carrying a large automatic. As they pulled abreast of Kelly, Lucky sang out for the sheriff: "Tufts, where the devil are you?"

Kelly sighed, nudged the sheriff. "Go ahead," he muttered. "Tell him. . . ."

A couple of long pulls on a bottle of Bourbon didn't stop Kelly's teeth from chattering, but they helped. He waited until he had paddled across the irrigation ditch, brought Ellen out, before he had stopped them. He watched Tufts in the beam of the flashlight, pumping water out of the girl. She didn't respond right away, but Tufts' silver-blond hair kept bobbing. Then she gagged, and Kelly stopped nursing his drink, had a real one.

Jack Terry and the deputy were sitting on the ground under Starr's gun, very good boys indeed. They would have been very dead boys, if they had wanted it that way.

Kelly took the bottle down from his lips, saving some for Ellen and the sheriff. He grinned at the old man. "Glad you decided to come to the party, Mr. Starr," he said. "Would you mind telling me what made you change your mind? I thought you were satisfied with the status quo."

Baron Starr snorted. "I didn't say that. I told you to forget it. I couldn't say any more on the phone, but I knew this was too big for you. If I was going to save your foolish neck, I'd have to do something I hadn't done for twenty years."

"What's that?" Kelly wanted to know.

"Get tough," the old man replied. "I've been buying my way out of trouble for so long I'd almost forgotten how to use one of these things." He indicated the gun with a slight wave of the weapon. "But not quite. What you told me about Doris being paid to make a play for me fitted everything else that had happened.

I knew who was behind all this, how far they'd go to stay out of sight. I spoiled it for them, a little. I went to see their Mr. Big."

"Who?" Kelly asked.

"Myron Chase. He's made a lot of money out of this desert, but he's a damn poor gambler. When he didn't have any more real estate to sell to cover his poker debts, he cooked up a sweet little political racket with his stooge, the coroner. They formed a phony mining company. Any time there was a question about a death, which was something they could arrange handily, Myron would suggest the coroner might find in favor of accidental or natural causes if you'd buy a block of stock in their company."

Kelly shook his head. "How much did he sell you? I saw him at the Club the night after Doris was killed."

"Seventy-five grand," the old man confessed sheepishly.

"That's very interesting," Kelly said. "But I still don't understand how you managed to turn up here when you did."

"After you called me, I telephoned Sheriff Tufts and had him meet me at Chase's place. Myron was doing a fair job of wiggling, until the coroner called and told him he'd picked you and Ellen up, was taking you out here to fake an automobile accident. I was listening on the extension phone. That did it. Chase is waiting at his home—handcuffed to a grilled window in his study."

"What about the coroner? Did he get away?"

"Maybe he thinks he did," Sheriff Tufts grunted, between applying pressure to Ellen's ribs and letting go. "He was in his car when we drove up, made a getaway. I radioed ahead for road blocks. I hope he tries to run one. I told them to shoot to kill."

Ellen groaned, moved her arm. Kelly extended the bottle of Bourbon to the sheriff, said, "Maybe she could use some of this now."

Tufts grinned up at him. "I don't know about her," he said. "I know I could."



the CRYPTOGRAM CORNER

by Simon Cipher

THE BELIEF is widespread that criminals do not commonly make use of ciphers and cryptograms in carrying on their activities. Such belief is unfounded. Criminals do make frequent use of codes.

Men who engage in crime on a big scale must keep records—as in any other big business. These records, however, are a potential source of danger to them if discovered, and so their bookkeeping is usually of the coded variety. The same goes for their communications with one another—another source of danger if such messages should fall into the hands of the law.

John Dillinger, probably the most infamous criminal of our day, made use of coded communications. When his gang of bank robbers was widely separated and a meeting was desired, railroad timetables were sent to them. The timetables were checked as to date, time and place of meeting. To the casual observer, the check marks were of no particular interest.

But to the recipient, they were as definite as any written message.

Codes are solved in much the same manner as a murder mystery—by tracking down clues, playing hunches, and using ordinary common sense.

Codes or cryptograms can be solved by simple trial and error substitution. More scientifically, they are solved by observing the frequency with which the code letters occur.

The letter E is by far the most frequently occurring letter in the alphabet. So, for example, if the letter X has been substituted for E in the code, you'll probably find it occurring more than any other letter. Also frequent are the letters T, A, O, N, I, S, H, R, in that order.

Count the number of times each code letter occurs. The most frequent letter will probably be E, the next T, etc. Watch for words that might be THE, or IN, AT, ON, OF. Play your hunches and use your ingenuity.

A Limerick for Beginners

M NPPNOQ STP NPPNOU M VWXNO
 NQYOU NP NOMZT NSP APXBC NXNPQD NP NPPN,
 DMYU NTO NSP NP NTO NXNPQ,
 "YD YN TMQUOQ NP NPPN, PQ
 NP NXNPQ NSP NXNPQD NP NPPN?"

Clues:

1. The one-letter word.
2. Pattern of last word—NPPN—suggesting the middle letter.
3. This will give you the two-letter word—NP—which will then suggest the other two-letter words—YN and YD.

You Can't Satisfy Everybody

GIH JKKL IMNH OPGGOH; QHRRMLT SKSH; GIH
 LPUI GKK VWUI; HSKWRI SKG KSH.

On page 130 you will find the answers and an explanation of how they were derived.

That small, slick-looking man who slid into the room had a face that seemed to warn—"I could go for a fast buck!"



Thanks for MURDER

A Novel by TED STRATTON

I

IT WAS one of those clear, blue days you get in New York before the summer ceiling rolls in low and brings the high humidity and haze that nobody can sell. It gave me a mood.

After parking the convertible at the curb, I went into the Clay Building on West 55th. I blew a kiss at the brunette behind the cigar counter and she said acidly: "You do that to everybody?"

"Just to females," I countered, and made the elevator before the door closed.

At the ninth floor, I told the operator: "Thanks."

"You pay for it," he monotoned.

Typewriter noise clack-clacked behind a frosted glass door that was numbered 920-928. When I entered, Miss Alice Rose sat at a desk. She had a tight marcel, straight lips, black dress with a detachable white collar to save cleaning bills, and a scowl on her fortyish face.

"You look nice," I said.

"So it's nine A.M., and what kept you



awake all night?" she wanted to know, handing over a memo that read: Call Ridgewood 8-009, urgent. "Some woman. Should I have underlined urgent?"

"Not unless she did," I decided.

There were eight desks in the big room, two chairs at each desk, eight filing cabinets, two hatracks in corners, and apple-green walls, standard for the Clay Building. I used the pay phone in a booth, the only spot of privacy in the multiple office.

Presently, a strange woman answered, and I said: "Mr. Ronald B. Darling, private investigations, calling from New York. Yes?"

She talked. Twice, I tried questions. Twice, she overrode the questions. Then, click. "Should I plane over, Mrs. Macon, or tunnel through rock?" I said into the dead wire, and hung up.

As I started out, Alice Rose said: "I just sit here and work all day and you have fun. What's it this time—hat pins in the spinal cord below the occipital bulge?"

"One pin does the trick and the word is *occipital*, darling."

"That's my line—darling," and she capitalized the "d". "Guns?" she prodded. "Blackjacks?"

"Don't get nosy," I said lightly, "because that's my line and it pays the rent. You rent eight desks to eight suckers at fifty bucks per, per month. Everything else you supply is an extra. You got a racket. I sweat for my dimes."

AT THE toll booth on the Jersey side of the George Washington Bridge, the guard took my fifty cents and grunted: "Thanks."

"Thank *you*," I said politely.

He grunted, "There's a car behind yours, bud," and grunted again.

He was in a grunt-rut . . .

After a while I found 14 Airline Drive, Ridgewood, New Jersey.

A long, low, multi-gabled house flanked by yews, flame azaleas, grass, and young pin oaks. Whistling, I strolled up the curved flagstone walk. On the

open porch, I started to poke the push button, but the door opened.

A middle-aged woman, wearing some kind of a white uniform, inquired, "Darling?" I nodded, and she let me in. She said: "Along the central hall, through the arch on the right, and take your hat off."

I did.

It was a rectangular room large enough to hold four pool tables and so expensively over-furnished that I simply held my breath.

Mrs. Lester Joseph Macon sat sideways at an *escritoire*. In her middle fifties. Minus makeup. Wearing pin curlers in gray hair. Her yellow housecoat had purple dragons chasing nude girls around the hem. Black, snapping eyes studied me.

"When Judge Harg recommended you," she said, "he didn't mention a tall, young man with crew-cut black hair, shaved face, soft shirt, white-dotted blue bow tie, grey flannel suit. He said you were tough and capable, not a tailor's dummy."

"And I wear blue socks," I murmured.

"Judge Harg did mention your bad manners," she said tartly, squaring around at the *escritoire*. "Young man, I'm a business woman of few words. I expect action. What do you charge for a job?"

"That depends entirely on what you want done?"

A forefinger tapped a knobby knee under the housecoat. "Pay attention, young man. My son is having an affair with a woman I never met and whom I don't, like a Kitty Watrous. I suspect she's camped at my summer cottage. That's Crystal Lake, two miles off Route 23, east side of the lake, fifth house in and the only place with a four-car garage. You should be able to find it without radar, young man. You're to break up the affair and bring Joe home where he belongs."

Whipping around, she picked up a gold fountain pen and scratched on a check. "Take this, young man."

I took the check, waved it slowly to dry the scrawls, but not before I had read the scrawls. Five hundred dollars, payable to bearer.

"Down payment?" I asked pleasantly.

"I don't understand."

"If you've stated the case correctly, Mrs. Macon, this undesirable woman might like more than five hundred dollars."

"That's your check," she said, standing up. She walked over, laid two fingers on my shirt front, said, "If my husband were living, he might think you were cute. What does the B in your name stand for?"

"Beverly, my mother's maiden name."

"Ronald Beverly Darling!" Her eyes lifted to the ceiling.

I started to growl, "Take this check and—" but remembered, in time, that foolish words don't pay the rent. I asked: "Isn't there more you want to tell me?"

"Ronald Beverly Darling!" she said, and snickered. . . .

BLUE water shimmered between wooded ridges. Beyond the dam, within the oak woods, were cottages. The convertible drifted along a narrow macadam road. A jay winged off, like a blue-white flash. A tame squirrel sat on its haunches and begged for a hand-out.

You couldn't miss the Macon cottage. It had a four-car garage and sat a hundred yards from the other places. I toiled the car between fieldstone pillars and down to the turn-around in front of the garages. I got out leisurely.

Nobody around. No cars in the garage, but there were fresh tire tracks in the dirt. Where were Kitty Watrous and Joe Macon, eh? Nobody came out to meet me.

I knocked on the back door. Nobody answered. I turned the knob. The door opened. I walked into a kitchen filled with refrigerators, chrome trim, and other culinary gadgets. The only signs of occupancy were a half-filled bottle of

Teacher's Highland Cream and two smudged glasses on a table.

Mrs. Macon's five-hundred dollar check told me I had a right to be here, so I pushed through a swing door into a built-in breakfast nook. Nothing here, except a quarter-filled bottle of Highland Cream and two more smudged glasses on the table.

Next, a long, wide, story-and-a-half living room, finished in dark, knotty pine. Red-leather chairs. Red-leather divans. Book shelves. Lamps. Ankle-deep rug. The stale odor of cigarette smoke. A divan in front of a fireplace that held ashes and a smoldering log. A pair of high-heeled, red slippers on the rug. A coffee table between the divan and the fireplace screen. A third-filled bottle of Highland Cream and two smudged glasses on the coffee table. It was getting monotonous. Young Joe Macon couldn't have been much with a woman or he wouldn't have needed all that Scotch.

Two doors opened off the living room. I looked in, ready to say, "It's morning and time to get up, kids." Nobody in either bedroom. Beds made. Okay, there must be more bedrooms.

There were, on either side of a corridor that left the living room. Nobody in the bedroom towards the garage. Nobody in either of two bathrooms. There was one room left, facing the lake. I rapped on the closed door. Nobody answered. No springs creaked in a bed. I listened for a moment, then opened the door.

Sunshine poured through four windows of a master bedroom. Two twin beds, three-quarter size and both were rumpled. Did he have *two* women with him? On a nightstand, between the beds, next to a tiny lamp with a rose-colored shade, stood the inevitable bottle of Highland Cream. This bottle was unopened. Well, considering the build-up in the other rooms, even Joe Macon should have been able to cross the goal line without any more Scotch.

From somewhere outside the cottage,

sounded the steady, rhythmic sound of a hammer. Bang-bang-bang, pause. If the guy with the hammer were a craftsman, if he were driving eight-penny nails, he was a skilled carpenter. Two bangs to set the nail deep, a third bang to drive the nail home tight in the board.

Bang-bang-bang, pause.

I strolled towards the mesh-curtained windows beyond the further twin bed and glimpsed the blue lake. A hundred yards distant, a man knelt on a boat dock. The hammer lifted, fell. Three times the hammer banged, and he pulled another nail from an apron pocket. A good carpenter, that man. Just three bangs and—

I turned sideways, slowly.

Oh, I would have found her without the aid of that bang-banging carpenter. Sooner or later, I'd have gotten around to casing this room and found her. She would have waited. They always wait for you when they have a bullet hole in the heart.

I knelt between the bed and the two windows. She was young, say twenty-two or three. She had curly black hair and smooth, tanned skin. She had full, red lips and a soft jaw line. There was more smooth, tanned skin above a bra and below the bra and below the panty girdle. The left leg was angled under the extended right leg. The bullet hole was no larger than pencil width.

WHOWER had gunned her was a craftsman with a .22. The killer had known where the heart was and had hit the bull's-eye. She had died quickly, mercifully, with no more fuss than a wasted breath.

Something stirred in the room and I stood up.

He had slid from the closet at the far side—a small, slick-looking man, hatless. He had sharp, beady eyes, and the expression on his face seemed to warn: "I could go for a fast buck." Somebody had cuffed him around recently. His right eye was puffy with dried blood

under it. He had used iodine on a long, thin gash down one cheek.

His left hand was jabbed into one coat pocket, the right held close to his body, the elbow slightly away from the coat. He had a short arm with stubby fingers and the fingers wrapped around a gun butt. Not a .22 toy, Darling. He gripped a Luger, and the muzzle yawned openly, like the Holland Tunnel at 3 A.M.

"Yeah?" he asked delicately.

I gulped. "She's dead."

"Yeah?"

"Somebody killed her."

"Yeah?"

"With a gun. A small gun. Not like yours."

The Luger moved a fraction. "Say something," he suggested.

I said, "I'm a friend of Joe's. Look, Joe sent me. He said something about a couple of girls. He said—"

"Get under the bed, Joe's friend."

He was very sure of himself. I crawled under the bed. There was dust on the rug, and it stuck to my nice, flannel suit. The crease on the trousers would be ruined, but Mrs. Macon would like that. Maybe, when I returned to Ridgewood, I'd look more like her version of a private detective.

A door closed. A key turned in a lock. It's safe to come out, Darling! I rolled out.

No bang-banging from the boat dock. The carpenter had run out of nails. I ran to the door. Locked. I opened a window at the front, stuck a leg over the sill, and heard a car start up and move off with a tearing of gears.

When I reached the convertible by the four-car garage, the sound of his re-treating engine was a faint purr in the distance.

II

THERE were a lot of things I could have done, like chasing him or phoning the police. Or hopping over to the Clay Building and picking up that .38 in my

desk. I didn't do any of those things. I got a spare, small, flat automatic out of the glove compartment, slipped it into the side pocket of my coat, and went back into the cottage. I stayed five minutes, then drove off.

A quarter-mile below the singing waterfall at the dam, at the private entrance to Crystal Lake, a low-slung,

FAKE BADGES



In every major city fake badges keep the police departments busy. Fake badges are used principally to ride free on street cars, subways and busses. Less often they are used to effect entry into theatres, etc.

It is during the rush hours that the fake badges are most successful. Some that have been used with good results were actually silver cigarette lighters cleverly palmed, junior G-man badges given away by radio programs, hammered and polished tops of tin-cans. In addition to these there are the imitations sometimes sold by novelty shops which at a distance of ten or more feet look reasonably like an honest fireman's or policeman's badge even to a trained observer.

Also employed are genuine factory badges that carry no courtesy, bank and factory guard shields, and in one instance at least an army officer's cap insignia which was almost mistaken for the gold badge of a New York City police sergeant by a BMT subway boothman.

—Carter Critz

cream-colored convertible with the top down forced me into the ditch. A character, wearing a blue beret and dark glasses, lolled on the front seat with the left hand on the wheel and the right arm draped on the seat top. A cigarette in a long holder jutted from his mouth at a sharp up-tilted angle. His car gunned past me with a swoosh.

"Driving like that, you'll kill yourself someday," I muttered and headed towards Route 23. To hell with the character.

The mood I'd been carrying around all morning broke its neck completely. "Thanks for murder," I thought bitterly. . . .

A YOUNG woman with smooth hips inside a tight, white dress was brooming the front porch at 14 Airline Drive, Ridgewood. She worked indolently, as if she'd never had a broom in her hands before.

I followed the curved flagstones, stopped at the steps. She had soft, blonde hair with a faint overtone of red in it. She wore a maid's frothy cap just off the forehead. She looked out of place, standing there, like something virginal, but you never know.

"Yes?" she murmured.

I said, "Mrs. Macon."

"You've an appointment, sir?"

"Does one need one?"

Lids lowered over dark eyes. Full lips smiled. It was a good trick. She said, "You've been here before, sir?"

"Have I?"

"We could do this forever," she offered. "If you go around the house, you'll find Mrs. Macon in back. On a chaise lounge with a padded cushion."

I walked across the lawn, turned at the house corner. Mrs. Macon lolled on a chaise longue with a padded cushion. She was reading a book, which she laid down at the sound of my steps.

"Well?" she asked.

I stood there, feet wide-spread, watching her closely. She still had the pin curlers in her gray hair. She wore no makeup. She had changed the garish housecoat for a loose, red-colored linen dress, but she didn't have her girdle on and she needed one.

"Thanks for not telling me what you should have told me this morning," I said, lighting a cigarette. I pulled out my wallet, extracted her five-hundred dollar check. I flicked on my lighter, touched the flame to the check. I dropped it onto the grass. When it finished burning, I ground out the ashes with a heel.

Blood had drained from her cheeks. Her lips were a straight, harsh line. "Yes?" she murmured.

"What's your Joe like, Mrs. Macon?"

"He's a—a good boy. Wild, perhaps, but no wilder than a lot of young men with too much money. Did you find him? Did you get rid of the girl? Did you—"

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-six, on the 14th of July. Did you—"

"Plenty old enough to know what he's about. Uh—before you called me early this morning, where had you been?"

"Been? Why—here."

"Not out to the lake?"

She sat up straight, swinging her feet off the lounge. She gave me a long, up-from-under glance, and there was anger in her eyes. "I didn't pay you to cross-examine me, Darling."

"You didn't pay me. There are certain rules you follow in this business, Mrs. Macon. You don't buy my services like so much lumber. You give me a job. You tell me the facts, all the facts. If it's legal, I go to work. If you and I hadn't known Judge Harg, if he hadn't suggested that you call me, I wouldn't have come over here and I certainly wouldn't have gone out to the lake. How much trouble has Joe been in before?"

"Not so much that money couldn't handle it," she said tartly. "Sit down, young man."

I SAT ON the edge of an Adirondack chair.

"What happened at the lake?" she asked.

"Her name is Kitty Watrous, 398 Avondale Road, Paterson. She's married, but the landlady at the Paterson address hasn't seen Watrous in over a year because he ducked out of sight. Twice, in the past month, two letters came to the wife post-marked Los Angeles. The landlady said they were in Watrous' handwriting. That cost twenty dollars, and you'll get a bill for it."

"What happened at the lake?"

I puffed on the cigarette. "How long

has she been running around with Joe?"

"Two-three weeks. What happened out at—"

"Her clothes were in the closet of the master bedroom. There wasn't much food in the house, but plenty of Scotch, so they had probably been just sleeping there. Think back. Can you place a small, slick-looking man with a hungry face, sharp eyes, about twenty-six or seven, weight one-forty, black hair and eyes?"

She thought back. "No."

"He's not the husband, who is tall and rather thick-set, according to what the landlady said." I was watching her face to see when she'd break. "The woman is a looker who'd attract men. She wasn't very attractive when I saw her because she was lying on the bedroom floor with a .22 caliber bullet in her chest. She was quite dead and rigor mortis was setting in."

She asked, "Which bedroom?"

"The master bedroom. I said *dead*, Mrs. Macon."

She moaned, low and piteously, and her face broke in a hundred pieces. But she was a game woman. She must have had to put up with a lot from young Joe. I didn't think she had had prior knowledge of the murder.

"You phoned the police?" she asked tonelessly.

I tramped out the cigarette in the grass. "No."

"Who killed her, Darling?"

"Look, climb down off the high horse. I'm in this, burned check or no burned check. Tell me what you should have told me this morning before I went out to the lake."

She told it evenly, calmly. "I have a wall safe in my office inside. I keep a lot of money in there and my jewelry. Joe didn't come home last night. This morning, I found the wall safe open. The money was gone, about twenty-thousand dollars in hundred and five-hundred dollar bills. Four or five diamonds were missing, but I couldn't be sure how many until I checked the inventory. The dia-

monds might add another twenty-thousand dollars to the take. I'm careful about the combination of the safe, but Joe could have got it—it's rather complicated—from a slip of paper I carry in my pocketbook."

"Insurance companies ask embarrassing questions," I said, "and they don't care who you are."

She dismissed the insurance company with a hand wave.

"You've a maid and a housekeeper on the premises," I said. "What about them and the safe?"

"Mrs. Byram has been with me for twenty-five years and I have no secrets from her and she's no thief. The maid—Eve Ankins—five weeks. The decorative type. . . . What I want you to do, Darling, is find Joe and bring him home. He wouldn't kill a woman with a gun. He might get drunk and run down a pedestrian but he wouldn't kill a woman with a gun. If you can wash this dirty linen without Joe's getting hurt—and I'm sure you can—I'll be happy to thank you and Judge Harg."

She stood up, suddenly. I stood up. She walked close to me and I could see her deep, worried eyes and down into her heart that beat only for son Joe.

"See Mrs. Byram before you leave and—and please bring my Joe back to me."

I walked to the house. In the kitchen, Mrs. Byram was baking a cake. She glanced up sharply, and said softly, "This must be pretty bad, Darling. You shocked her—I was watching from the window—and she's got a pretty strong constitution. Joe's been itchy for three-four days, like something big was in the wind. She thinks he didn't come home last night, but he did. I heard him in her office around four o'clock and then he went off. Twenty-one thousand dollars in hundred and five-hundred dollar bills, not to mention the diamonds, is a lot of money for one man to carry around."

"You've got a lot of information, haven't you?" I asked.

SHE dismissed the question with a hand wave that she'd picked up from Mrs. Macon. "I can even tell you the names of the mice in the cellar," she said. "What's he done this time?"

"How good is he?" I countered.

"Not even good enough to be no-good, but she loves him. What's he done this time and what's on your mind?"

There were two doors open in the kitchen. I closed them. I told her exactly what I knew. Not a muscle moved in her face as I told her, and her eyes never left mine.

Afterward, she was silent for a long moment, then pursed her lips and said, "Joe wouldn't shoot a woman, and I don't make the man with the Luger. He runs around with some strange playmates, though. What's on your mind?"

"What's he look like? What kind of a car does he drive?"

"Skinny, dark, weight about one-forty. A woman wouldn't give him a second glance if she didn't know how much money his mother has. She got that from her husband. Meat packer, dead four years. Joe's got the cream-colored Cadillac out and if he's in the Cadillac he'll have dark glasses on and a blue beret. License number, RS-3. He's—" She must have noticed my expression because she asked, "Did you catch up with him, Darling?"

"I didn't catch up with him. If he knows about the corpse, he'll start running. Any ideas?"

She thought a moment, said, "He's got an apartment in Paterson, 3-C, at 598 Rumney Court. That's not a good bet. He seems to follow a pattern when he's in a jam, Darling. Try the Paramus gin mills on Route 17 and 4. They all know Joe. Check back here every couple of hours. I've got my own phone here and an extension in my upstairs room. Ridgewood 8-940. Sometimes Joe calls me and not her."

She picked up a large spoon, started to beat the batter in a brown bowl. "Well," she snapped, "don't stand there! Get moving!"

"What about the Ankings girl?" I asked.

"A back number around here. Scram, Darling."

I went along the wide, central hallway to the front. Eve Ankings stood near the front door dusting off a mirror. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Eve," she said, turning and handing me the routine of lowered lids and smiling lips. "Um—" the lips barely moved,—"I have this afternoon off and—" The words faded.

"I've got to go sell insurance, Eve," I said. "Later, say tonight."

Eagerness and promise in her dark eyes. "Not tonight. Tomorrow night will be all right, Mr.—"

"I'll call, maybe tomorrow."

She leaned against my arm, and the back of my neck began to tickle. I opened the door, squeezed out, called back, "Tomorrow, then?"

She nodded, and I went out.

The flagstone walk had been freshly broomed, right down to the convertible, which waited patiently at the curb. I had a feeling, as I drove off in the late afternoon sunshine, that I'd been playing contract bridge at a cent a point for a long time and that I was out several hundred dollars.

III

MY VISIT to the lake cottage had not been too successful. Still, the slick-haired man had had the Luger. I should have phoned the State Police or whom-ever you phone in Jersey when there's been a murder. Maybe nobody could prove I had been out there.

At the entrance to Crystal Lake, on my way to Paterson, I hadn't done too well either. The character draped at the wheel of the car that had run me off the road had been young Joe Macon. He had been headed towards the Macon cottage and the dead Kitty Watrous. Why he hadn't been at the cottage in the first place eluded me, but a lot of things had eluded me this morning.

Now, he was off and running, with twenty-one grand and some valuable diamonds in his pocket. You can buy a lot of trouble in a hurry with that much money. Joe Macon seemed to be able to buy trouble with no money at all. What was he up to? Why had he stolen from his mother? Who was the slick-haired man with the Luger?

"I hope there aren't many bars in Paramus," I muttered, "and I hope Joe Macon is in the first one."

It was dark, no moon but a skyful of stars out, and after eight o'clock. I parked the car in front of a deserted gin mill with a sign that said in neon letters, PORKY'S PLACE.

In the past four hours, I had been in and out of sixteen bars. Twice, I'd phoned Mrs. Byram on her private phone. The last time, fifteen minutes previously, I'd said I'd try one more Paramus gin mill, then see if Joe were at the Paterson apartment.

For four hours, I'd been sipping Scotch and water, passing a five-spot out here and there. Nobody had seen Joe Macon. From what I gathered, they were happy they hadn't seen him. That, I could understand.

PORKY'S PLACE was a dimly lighted neighborhood joint with a half dozen tables, a juke box, one pin ball machine, and a long bar that ran the length of the back.

A big, black-haired man with John L. Lewis' eyebrows eased along the bar and eyed me dispassionately. He didn't say anything, so I said, "A Scotch, long on ice, short on Scotch and water."

He made the drink, expertly, quickly. I laid a five-dollar bill on the bar, leaned close to him, and said: "Joe Macon."

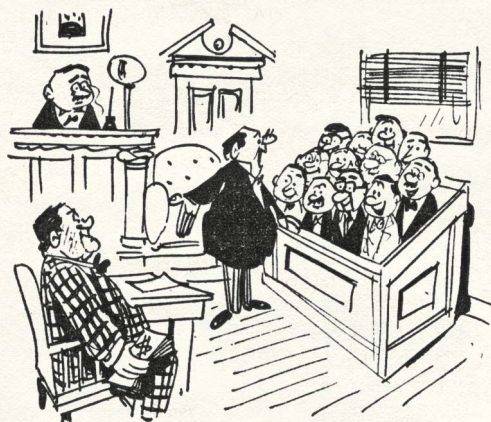
"Joe Macon," he repeated and picking up the bill, rang up a charge of fifty-five cents on the register and laid my change carefully on the bar.

"If all the people who came in here asking for Joe Macon," he said, his mouth crinkled humorously, "would stay and buy three drinks, mac, I could hire

a spare bartender. What's he done?"

"Seen him?"

"Nobody wants to see him." He tickled his chin with a stubby finger, and monotoned: "A week back he breezed in here with a girl. He was drunk, and I wouldn't serve him. So he picked up a stool, heaved it across the bar at me. I ducked." He gestured towards five gin bottles, full, stacked next to the cash register. "The stool hit the bottles. He got out before I could get around the



"My client would like to bet you gentlemen \$500 each you'll bring in a guilty verdict"

bar with a bung starter. His mother paid off, twenty-five dollars worth."

I sloshed the ice around in the glass, asked, "Why are you telling me your grief?"

"Because three of the bottles didn't break, and I'm wondering if any friend of Joe's wants to make anything about it. No, I haven't seen Joe today. I don't ever want to see him, not even at twenty-five dollars for two broken bottles of gin."

I drained the glass and turned away. "Your change," he said, and, I turned back, picked up the bills.

There wasn't much sense in driving over to Joe Macon's apartment in Paterson. I went anyway, figuring that if I

could get into the place I might pick up some information about where Joe might hole up or who some of his shady playmates were.

It was five minutes to nine when I reached 598 Rumney Court and parked around the corner. It was a five-story apartment house with the usual locked door in the vestibule and I had to wait five minutes until a woman with a terrier on a leash came out. I made a pretense of fumbling in one pocket for a key and slid inside the door before it clicked after her exit.

There was an elevator, but I used the stairs to the third floor. Apartment 3-C was at the back of the central corridor. I pushed the button and a chimes rang somewhere inside the place. Nobody answered either the first or second ring, I was just about to dream up some kind of a plausible story to hand the janitor so he would let me into 3-C, when I turned the knob and the door opened. I went in quietly, closed the door and leaned against it for a moment.

I was in a tiny, dark vestibule. A corridor led towards a living room. There was a dim light in there somewhere and a radio playing softly. I put my hand into the right pocket of my coat and my fingers closed around the butt of a small automatic.

My feet made no sound on the runner rug along the corridor. Just short of the door, I could sniff cigarette smoke. That was a relief. Joe Macon smoked tobacco and all along I had him pegged for a tea smoker.

I strolled into the living room. A man sat in a lounge chair, his feet on a huge, blue hassock. Two more steps, and my fingers tightened on the automatic. This wasn't Joe Macon. This was the slick-haired, little man. He had his coat off and a cigarette in one hand.

He seemed pretty sure of himself, sitting there calmly, even though he didn't carry a Luger. He smiled, a tight sort of smile that didn't quite erase the greed from his beady eyes. "Thought you'd never get here," he offered, mashing out

the cigarette in an ash tray. "What kept you, Darling?"

It wasn't a term of endearment. Somebody had been pretty cute in this game. Somebody had set this game up, for some reason I didn't know, and—

JUST a whisper of sound at my back. Before I could turn, before I could even think about the gun in my pocket, and before I could even snap, "Damn her—" something hit me hard on the back of the neck. I pitched forward and saw the rug coming up to meet my face. That was the last thing I saw. The last thing I heard came from the man in the lounge chair. He was snickering.

Some kind of dance music awakened me. It was the radio turned up too loud, and the sound hurt my throbbing head. I rolled over. My head ached some more, but not nearly as much as I had expected it would. Somebody who knew how to handle a blackjack and hit me in just the right spot, with not enough force to kill, but just the right amount to knock a man out for a while.

The music stopped with a crash. An unctuous voice said, "This is Mike Todd, your m.c. for the Hour of Stars broadcast, featuring—"

On wooden legs, I got up, walked to the radio, and shut it off. Then I pulled the small automatic out of my coat pocket, sniffed the barrel. It hadn't been fired.

The little slick-haired man whom somebody had worked over recently still sat in the lounge chair with his feet on the hassock. There was a bullet hole in the front of his open-necked, tan shirt. There was a little blood on the shirt, but not nearly as much as you'd imagine. He was quite dead.

I opened the shirt front, eyed the wound. It was no wider than the width of a pencil and the blood around the hole had just started to coagulate. The killer who was so sure of his accuracy that he knocked off Kitty Watrous and this man with a .22 had been around again. If the killer were a *he*.

Using a handkerchief, I fumbled out his billfold. He had a name. Anthony Y. Norelli, and a Paterson address that was no good to him any more. Age 28, and a lot of his years had not been good ones. There was a picture of a girl's face in the wallet's window, and I shook it out, careful of fingerprints.

Under the light of a bridge lamp, I studied the face. Soft, light-colored hair around a pretty face. Large, dark eyes, and the expression on her face, despite what had happened in the last few hours, almost virginal. But you never know.

She was Eve Ankins, Mrs. Lester Joseph Macon's maid out at 14 Airline Drive, Ridgewood, New Jersey. She was tied in to Kitty Watrous, dead at Crystal Lake; and tied in to Anthony Y. Norelli, dead in that chair; tied in to young Joe. Macon, with twenty-one grand and diamonds in his pocket. Yes, tied in to a .22 gun.

She had slipped up, had pretty Eve Ankins. After she had sapped me into unconsciousness and gunned her boy friend with the .22, she should have remembered to take this photograph of herself from Anthony's billfold. Police don't like a corpse dumped in their lap. It interferes with their pinochle game in the back room. But when they get the picture of a pretty girl from a dead man's billfold, they never give up until they have a name and address to go with the pretty face. They would catch her.

Put the pretty picture back in the billfold, Darling.

I put the pretty picture in my coat pocket, along with the small automatic. I put the billfold back into Anthony's hip pocket and even buttoned the button on the pocket, like it had been.

"Why," I muttered, "had she killed Anthony, and not you?"

I didn't know. I didn't care. Sometimes, you're just happy because you can breathe.

I started to leave the room, remembered something. Using the handkerchief, I lifted the French phone, waited until a voice said, "Number, please,"

asked for Ridgewood 8-940. The bell rang just once, and then Mrs. Byram asked cautiously, "Yes?"

I waited a moment, so the operator could go about her other business, then said, "I checked all the bars and came here. Did Joe—"

"For God's sake," she said almost hysterically, "get out to Crystal Lake! Joe phoned right after your last call. I told him not to go out there, but he said he was going anyway. Hurry, hurry!"

I cradled the phone. I went out, careful to wipe my prints off the front door handle, but sure that somebody had already done it for me. Then I remembered I should have asked Mrs. Byram what time Eve Ankins had left the Macon home. Hadn't Eve told me she would be busy tonight, to call tomorrow night for a date? Busy, yes. With a .22 and other little items, like murder for profit.

There was nobody in the upstairs corridor. I met nobody at all on the way to my car. I slid behind the wheel, tramped on the starter. I'd been lucky, meeting nobody. I'd met enough *bodies*, today.

Your wit's weak tonight, Darling, I thought.

IV

WHEN my headlights picked up the gates into Crystal Lake and I dimmed them as I drove past the water music at the dam. The first cottage was dark, so I parked the convertible off the road, switched off the dimmers, and got out.

Distant water music, steady and untroubled. A rustle overhead, and I almost jumped out of my clothes. It was only the breeze stirring the leaves. A tree-toad piped, loud and shrill. That couldn't be. It was too early for tree-toads. He piped again to make a liar out of my high school biology.

See how smart you are, Darling? See how dumb-smart you are?

Get along, Mr. Dumb-feet.

Don't miss the four-car garage under

the trees behind the forty-thousand dollar cottage, Darling. The only four-car garage at the lake, remember? Remember that dark splotch down there, the cottage where Kitty Watrous lies with a bullet in the smooth, tanned skin just over the bra?

I eased the automatic from my coat pocket. It seemed so tiny in my hand, but it could kill somebody—if your hand didn't tremble and you understood guns. I understood guns. There'd been a war, remember? In the next war, that everybody is cooking up, there won't be guns for you to carry, Darling. There'll be push buttons to push. Push-button Darling. I didn't laugh. You don't laugh at death. You shiver and hide your head under the covers and hope—

I almost walked past the only four-car garage at Lake Crystal.

Somebody had forgotten to turn off the headlights that glowed behind the closed, front doors of the garage. I feather-footed over to the partly open door at the side and peered in. In the third aisle, stood a cream-colored Cadillac convertible. In the front seat, under the raised top, a man was slumped over the wheel. He wore a blue beret, and dark glasses hung from his left ear.

There was somebody on the far side of the convertible. Just a vague, bulk, obscure outside the beams thrown by the headlights. I eased off the safety on the automatic and felt better. She was a marksman with that .22 she carried around. She knew exactly where a man's heart was. She knew there were two ways to a man's heart and she had the equipment to make it either way. Either with her pretty face and figure or with the .22 gun.

The bent shadow eased along the far side of the convertible and was gone for a second. To clear my line of fire, I pushed the door gently, and it swung open and creaked on the hinges just as the shadow rounded the back end of the car.

I said, "This is it, little girl," in a loud voice and went through the open door

with my shoulders hunched and the automatic straight out in front of me.

The shadow jerked erect. It metamorphosed into a wide-shouldered man with the top of his head above the roof of the convertible. Just as I fanned the trigger, he disappeared behind the car. The gun went off like a thunderclap. The bullet clanged off the back of the car and spanged into the far side of the garage.

I lunged toward the car, wondering why he hadn't fired that .22. As I rounded the rear end, I saw him leaning through the open front door of the car. He jerked at something on the front seat and then he turned, and there was a snarl on his lips and hate in his eyes.

"You bastard!" he snarled, and jerked his right arm from the car.

LITTLE things dropped into the right slots in my mind and were suddenly as clear as the lake's name.

I had no time for thought. I was too far from him to jump him and beat him over the head with the automatic in my hand. But I waited, just to be sure. When his hand came out of the car, when the .22 gun started to swing towards me, I stood flat-footed, rooted to the floor of the garage. Then I pulled the trigger.

It was him or me. I know that little automatic and how to handle it. The bullet caught him dead center in the chest. His chin jerked up, and the curse died on his lips. He fell backward against the open door. His shoulders slid slowly down the door and his right arm dropped tiredly. Then he slid down to the concrete and lay there, unmoving, his fingers relaxed on the butt of that deadly .22 gun. He was dead by the time I reached him.

I leaned across the front seat. Joe Macon still slumped forward with his head buried on the wheel. He didn't need the beret any more. He would no longer go scooting about the countryside, lolling at the wheel, with one hand draped across the top of the front seat.

The .22 had finished Joe Macon. There was a hole just behind his right ear, a hole the width of a pencil. The killer on the floor had finished off his third corpse and left the .22 in Joe Macon's right hand.

I shivered as if I had the ague.

I put the automatic away in my right coat pocket. I knew, now, why the killer on the floor had had to retreat to the front seat of the Cadillac before he could fire. He had killed Joe Macon, arranged the gun in his hand to make it look like suicide, to leave a murder trail that would lead straight to Joe Macon and far, far away from the deadly killer on the floor.

I bent over the man on the floor. I didn't know him, but I knew his last name, maybe. He carried a wallet in his hip pocket. The words on his driver's license told me that he was George M. Watrous, was Kitty Watrous' husband, fresh back from Los Angeles. So he had killed his pretty, young wife—probably for playing around with Joe Macon or to silence her lips. He had killed Anthony Y. Norelli in Joe Macon's Pater-son apartment so there'd be only two cuts—or one—into the roll that Joe carried.

The roll of bills, twenty-one thousand dollars worth? The diamonds that Mrs. Macon hadn't bothered to check against the inventory in her safe?

The diamonds, six of them, were in Watrous' coat pocket. They glittered, for a moment, in the palm of my hand, then I put them back into his pocket where the police could find them.

The roll of bills were in Watrous' other coat pocket. I stood there in the bright light from the Cadillac's headlights and counted the bills with numb fingers. All one-hundred and five-hundred-dollar bills, totaling twenty-one thousand dollars. A lot of money, Darling. More than you'll ever see in one roll again. A lot of temptation, Darling, isn't it?

I thought back, trying to drop all the little things into the right slots. When

most of them were in place, I peeled two five-hundred-dollar bills off the roll and stuffed the remainder back into Watrous' other coat pocket for the police to find when they came. I thought a moment, then folded the bills together, and slid them behind the ribbon band on the outside of my felt hat. Then I left.

It was a long way back to my car. It was a long way down to Route 23 and cars along the highway and the bright lights of an all-night gas station.

The attendant, a rolypoly man, came out when I braked to a stop. "Fill 'er up, young man?" he asked, grinning, and I asked, "What's the quickest way to get some law?"

"Why, the state police. Just phone the operator and—" He stared. "Have an accident, mac?"

"A slight one."

He followed me into the office. I used a nickel to get the operator while the rolypoly man was saying, "We get a lot of accidents along this highway, mac. The other day, one of them big milk trucks side-swiped a Plymouth sedan and the sedan ended up against a tree. There was two people on the front seat, a kid and his girl, and there was enough blood around for—"

HE STOPPED talking when I began to talk. I talked for a minute or so, short, clipped sentences about what the police would find in that four-car garage.

"Where are you?" a voice snapped in my ear.

I turned around to the rolypoly man. He wasn't smiling. He had a gun in his hand and I asked tiredly, "What's the name of this joint?"

"Don't you move!" he warned in a high-pitched voice. "Tell 'em Nick Crater's place. They know me!"

I told them Nick Crater's and hung up the phone. Rolypoly was still yelling at me, "Don't you move," and keeping the gun on me when the siren sounded faint in the distance and he was still saying it, only in a monotone, when two,

big, burly men piled out of a black and white police car with guns out and came toward the office on the double-quick.

I drove my car back to Crystal Lake, detailing what I had to tell to the trooper at my side. Behind me, rode the lights of their car.

I didn't tell them about Kitty Watrous and that I had found her this morning. They'd find her soon enough and be bright enough to figure the hole in her chest had been made by Watrous. I was praying, as I talked, that Mrs. Byram and Mrs. Macon would have sense enough not to tell them I'd been out here earlier. I told them how I got into the case and about the dead man in the Paterson apartment and more detail on the whys and hows of murder for robbery.

"You should have phoned Paterson when you came to in the apartment," the trooper said. He was a young, handsome man.

"I know," I said, "but if I'd stopped to do that I wouldn't have caught Watrous setting up a suicide in the garage."

"Did you have to kill him?" he wanted to know.

"Don't you have self-defense pleas in Jersey?" I queried.

He nodded. His eyes were bright and eager. He was going to love every bit of this. He was young, and crime was his game. "It's going to be a long night," he said.

It was.

V

IT WAS a clear, blue sky, but there was an ominous haze lifting on the far horizon, and the bright day wouldn't last until noon. I parked the convertible in front of 14 Airline Drive, Ridgewood, New Jersey and got out with weariness a galling weight on my shoulders.

Just lucky, I guess.

Mrs. Byram and Mrs. Lester Joseph Macon must have had so much trouble with young Joe that they always knew enough to keep quiet during the recital

of bad news and wait until somebody told them the score. They hadn't mentioned that I'd been out to Crystal Lake and found Kitty Watrous yesterday morning. The troopers hadn't minded a bit and had tied Kitty's death into George Watrous' gun.

"He's got a record as long as his arm," one of the troopers had said, "and he didn't like her running around."

Period, almost.

I walked up the curved flagstones, punched the bell. Mrs. Byram answered the ring, and her eyes were red-rimmed from crying. "Not for him," she said fiercely. "For her."

"Is she here?"

"No."

I went in. From somewhere upstairs, I could hear water running and a girl's voice singing. I cocked an eyebrow, and Mrs. Byram said: "That's Ankins. She always sings when she takes a shower."

"I didn't mention her name to anybody," I said, "and I'm sure neither you nor Mrs. Macon did. Which is her room?"

"At the back, last one. Is she in it, too?"

"No, no," I said, and went upstairs.

I sat down in the back room. Clothes littered the place. There were shoes on the floor, butts in the ash trays, a radio on low, and perfume and powder and other junk on the dressing table. Pretty soon, the shower stopped running in the bathroom. Pretty soon, steps pat-patted along the corridor, and she came in carrying a towel and not wearing anything that she hadn't been born with.

"Oh!" she said, startled. "You can't come in here!" There was a little anger in her words, but not too much.

"Slip into a robe," I said. "We're going to talk."

She stepped into the closet, left the door open. She was a long time getting a robe on, but that didn't seem to bother her. It was a long, white robe and it went well with her blonde hair.

"Talk about insurance?" she said brightly, sitting on the bed.

I pulled a silvered badge from my pants pocket, cupped fingers around it the way the cops do, and flashed it quickly so she couldn't see that it said Lone Ranger.

"A cop," she said, but she knew who I was and my vocation.

"What was the game," I asked, "and how deep were you in it?"

"What game and what about deep, Mr. Private Detective?"

I STOOD up. "I'm tired. I've been up all night. George Watrous came back from the West Coast. He muscled in on your little game. He killed Kitty. He killed your boy friend, Norelli. He killed Joe Macon and he would have killed me, only I know how to handle a gun, too. When he got around to you, he'd probably have strangled you, and that would have left him in the clear with twenty grand in cash and six good diamonds. You want to talk here or in a cell?"

She sat there for a long, long minute, arranging the information in her mind. Then she talked in a monotone, low and quick.

"The play was for Joe to steal the money, not the diamonds, and tell his mother he was going to buy into a business. Joe tires of a girl pretty quick, so we had to work fast. Joe was to meet Kitty at the lake and Norelli was to walk in with a gun and pull the outraged husband act. Joe would fork over the roll, and we'd have split it three ways. Watrous came back unexpectedly, beat the truth out of Norelli, and dealt himself in. I checked your license number and found out who you were and what you did, but you can't prove that, Darling. I listened in on Mrs. Byram's extension and knew where you were all the time and what you were doing. We set you up in Joe's apartment but we didn't figure murder. That was that gun-crazy Watrous."

She stopped. "Cigarette?"

I handed her one. She stuck it in her mouth and stood up. She was careless with the white robe, but I wasn't inter-

ested. I lit her cigarette, fired my own.

"You can't tie me in to any of it, not without a lot of trouble and a lot of stuff coming out that Mrs. Macon won't like," she said, as cool as if she'd been talking about the weather.

I didn't want to tie her into it. I had an idea left and I didn't want her to upset it. *What* could you tie her into? Very little, unless she signed a confession, and I didn't want that. She could have listened in on my phone talks with Mrs. Byram by using whichever part of the private extension system we weren't using. When Mrs. Byram had finished talking, she could have phoned Norelli or Watrous, whichever one was handiest. I doubted that she was a killer, but that had been a secondary thought with me.

"Someday," I said, inhaling cigarette smoke deeply, "you're going to get in so deep that nobody can work you loose. You're a pretty lucky girl, considering George Watrous. You don't get a dime to keep your mouth shut, so don't try. I've got my headaches in this case and I'm not free yet. You're not going to upset anything. Pack your duds and get out."

"I'm pretty *and* lucky," she said, and the front of the robe opened again.

"You've got five minutes to get the show on the road," I said and went out, closing the door.

She came downstairs five minutes later, carrying two bags.

"Maybe," Mrs. Byram said nastily, "I should check to see how much she's taking with her."

"You're so sweet," the girl said brightly.

I opened the front door and she whispered, "Will I be seeing you sometime soon?"

I pushed her out, closed the door. "I'll be back inside a half hour with this end of it wrapped up," I said and waited until Eve Ankings had disappeared along the street.

I came back in twenty minutes.

"When the funeral is over," I ex-

plained to Mrs. Byram, "and Mrs. Macon needs a lift to ease her way across the years, show her these."

I handed her two papers. One was an option to buy, for twenty thousand dollars, a local business that was on the market. The other was a receipt, from a reputable realtor, who could and would keep his mouth shut, for one thousand dollars paid on the option.

"The option expires in ten days and it's dated yesterday morning," I explained. "You won't take up the option, and the receipt and the rest is made out to young Joe Macon. The realtor will pocket the money and keep quiet. It's cheap at the price and gives Joe a motive for the theft. You can figure out something plausible for the diamonds. Okay?"

"I understand," she said.

"You *don't* understand," I said bluntly. "Maybe someday I'll get married and have a son to worry about."

See why I had kept those two five-hundred dollar bills? I'm Ronald B. Darling, private investigator. Just give me a ring. I'll solve your troubles and make an old woman somewhat happy down the dull, uneasy years ahead.

So I left Ridgewood. I didn't have to live there. . . .

IT WAS raining when I parked the convertible on West 55th and went into the Clay Building.

I bought a paper from the wise brunette behind the cigar counter and she smiled and inquired, "Why are you so grumpy, Mr. Darling?"

"The weather," I said and made the elevator just before the door closed. "Ninth," I said absently.

"Sure, sure," the man said.

At the ninth floor, he opened the door, said: "Looks like we'll have more rain."

He was smiling.

I wondered how the guard at the toll booth on the George Washington Bridge was viewing the rainy day.

Typewriter noise clack-clacked behind the frosted glass door that was num-

bered 920-928. It stopped as I entered. There were two men seated at desks, making like they were working.

Miss Alice Rose sat at her desk. She had on the same tight marcel, the same straight lips, the same black dress, but the detachable collar was clean and freshly ironed. She went to a lot of trouble to save a few nickels at the cleaner's. Old age security, maybe. She had a heart like a turnip and had to think about herself.

"Where have you been for the past five days?" she wanted to know, and stuck three memo slips in my hand.

"Getting over a binge." I said lightly, glancing at the memos.

The first said, "Call Millrose 9, 8764, about a suit you left at the cleaners." The second said, "A Mr. Adelton called, urgent." There was a second notation on this slip, in Miss Alice Rose's handwriting, and it said, "He called again yesterday so it couldn't be urgent so I didn't underline urgent." I didn't bother to look at the third memo. It might mean more work.

"—and I just sit here all day and work," Alice Rose was saying bitterly. "You gad about the countryside making

money and having fun and I have to sit here. So it wasn't hat pins below the occipital bulge this time, but a .22."

She read the papers. It had been a two-day sensation, and somehow I had come out unscathed. I started toward my desk, and she called out, "There's a special delivery letter on your desk, Mr. Darling. I signed for it."

I nodded to the slaves at their desks, sat at my desk and picked up the special delivery. It was post-marked Ridge-wood, New Jersey. I slit the envelope, and a wheat-colored check slid out. It was made out to bearer, in Mrs. Lester Joseph Macon's scrawl, and it was for one thousand dollars.

I put my feet on the desk, stared out the window. It was a gray, nasty day. The rain finger-tapped lightly on the pane, like death's fingers. Death's finger's—with a .22 gun.

"Right over there," Miss Rose was saying. "The tall man by the window, the one with the scowl on his face, Mr. Adelton." I glanced up.

A little man wearing a rain-soaked hat and dripping raincoat walked toward my desk, a smile on his lips but no smile in his eyes.



Next
Issue

THE MORNING AFTER MURDER

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Phil touched the clasp,
and the bag sprang open

KILLER UNDER GLASS

By DAVID X. MANNERS

THE police siren rolled across the night, sobbing, urgent. It pierced the little shack where a man sat in the glow of a pair of furnaces. The man put down his magazine and raised his eyes. He listened to the spiraling sound grow sharper, closer. There was some-

thing of anger and impatience in its insistence. He hoisted himself to his feet and limped past the furnaces to the window.

It wasn't often that anything exciting happened in Runley. And if anything exciting did happen, it wasn't likely to

The Thug Meant Business—and His Business Was Murder!

touch him, he thought. He looked past the seven greenhouses, that trailed away from the firing shed, to the highway skirting the desolate, ploughed-over fields, now stiff and hard with winter's frost. There was the old cauliflower field. There was last fall's Simpson lettuce patch. The siren's wail was receding, dying in the distance.

"Phil!"

The call came faintly through the shed's wall. He looked toward the door.

"Phil!" the call came again. He turned up his coat collar and went outside.

The wind was pushing hard, and he thrust into it, his breath trailing away in a ragged silvery ribbon. He gripped his coat tighter about his throat. By morning, he knew, it would be zero or below.

She was at the side window of the neatly kept colonial adjoining the greenhouses, her figure a hazy blur behind the frost-fretted window. In milder weather she would have raised the window to tell him what she had to say. Now, she motioned toward the door.

She was there by the time he reached it. She opened the double panels and he shut them after him as he stepped quickly inside. Pat Rizzuto was nineteen, her hair a dark soft wave, her face delightfully young.

"Did you hear the siren?" Phil asked.

"There was just a flash on the radio," she said. "It was the Runley Bank. Two men tunneled under it and into the safe."

"Is that why you called me?" Phil asked.

Her somber pout gave way to a smile. "Silly! I called you because I want you to go to the store for me and get some cokes and potato chips. Six cokes and two bags of chips. Mother and Dad always like to have some when they get back from the movies, and there's not a crumb in the house. Six cokes and two potato chips—will you remember that?"

WOULD he remember it? Was he a child? Anger rose in him and died.

What had been the start of it—these menial jobs and this solicitude that would make a spineless rag of him? Was it his limp? Well, that hadn't slowed him up. He was as competent as he ever had been. Was it because, at thirty, his hair was a grizzled gray? Well, if anyone had gone through—

"Did you hear me, Phil? Did you hear me?"

"Why, yes. Sure." He was back again in Runley. Back again, firing furnaces and trying to make a stake so he could have just one more try at a business of his own.

He said, "I'm thinking, Pat, if it's such a good idea to leave the houses in weather like this."

"But the store's only down the road. You won't be gone five minutes."

Five minutes? It would take ten, but, anyway, she was right. Nothing could happen to the flowers and cukes in the time he'd be gone. Tom Rizzuto hadn't liked trusting him, Phil knew. As if he weren't even capable of handling a simple stoking job.

"Okay," he said.

"You'd better put on a coat before you go," she called after him.

He didn't look back or answer.

In the boiler shed he threw several shovels of coal on each fire, level near the door and banked neatly on one side. The flames sang and licked upward, cracking the new coal so that chips flew. Phil closed the lower drafts and opened the dampers. It would keep them burning slowly. He shouldered into his coat and knotted his muffler.

The pickup was in the truck shelter out back. He slid into its chill cab. The metal of the dash and the plastic of the wheel were ice. The starter strained and labored, the motor barely turned. It went over once, twice, then gave up. Phil snapped off the key and waited before trying again.

Across the frozen fields he watched a man break from the woods. He followed the man's erratic course for a moment without really thinking of its signifi-

cance. The man was carrying a small suitcase. He staggered on the rough, bare terrain. Phil became alert with sudden realization only when the man fell.

Watching incredulously, he waited for the man to get up. But the man didn't move. Phil slid out of the cab, not taking his eyes from the fallen figure. He moved cautiously. Within seconds, however, his wary approach generated into a limping run. But he slowed again at the field's serrated margin. He crossed the last twenty yards the way he once had crossed a battlefield.

Phil bent, took the man by the shoulders, rolled him over. The thick-featured face was lax, masklike. The nose had been broken at some time, and there seemed even now a sullen, evil cast to the features.

Phil slipped free the top button of the man's coat and slid his hand over the left breast. It was soggy in there. When he brought his hand out again, he wiped his claret fingers against the man's coat. The man was dead.

He looked at the face again. If any man ever was, here was the stereotype of the bank robber, the thug.

NOT two feet away lay the bag. Phil touched its clasp, and its bulging sides sprang open. Phil pushed them wider. There was money, bills of hundred- and thousand-dollar denomination, circled by bank bands. Distantly the police siren was weaving again through the dark.

There wasn't just one bank robber. That was never the way it was. Pat had said two had tunneled into the bank. There was at least one other. They had separated, probably after this one had been wounded. Phil glanced once more at the crude-featured, death-hardened face. The man unquestionably had been a killer. His partner would be the same.

Phil forced the bag shut and started at a run across the furrows, back toward the house, the bag flopping at his side with each jolt. He would get

word to the police. They could back-track on the trail from here and perhaps pick up traces of the other robber. He'd get on the phone, and the urgent flash would go out by radio, immediately funneling the bulk of the search in this direction.

He heard a shout from the fringing woods. Brush snapped and crashed. Someone was running back there. Phil looked and saw a vague shape moving through the interlacing branches. He glanced down at the money bag and ran faster. If whoever was running back there were the other of the bank robbers, then Phil, with this bag in his hand, was in danger of death. If the man caught Phil in the house at the phone, he might kill Pat too.

But if he didn't have the money and the man caught him, it might be different.

He ran toward the Number Two greenhouse, snatched open its doors. He lurched inside, the humid warmth enveloping him like a bath. On the concrete benches potted lilies were being forced for next month's Easter trade. He threw the bag down under one of the benches, thrust it back. He punched it with quick jabs far back and to one side where no one—no one who didn't know about it—would ever find it.

He went out, closing the door, and started toward the house, bending low to take advantage of a screening privet hedge.

He was darting across the drive when he glimpsed the man in the gray suit approaching on his right. The man made a staying gesture. Phil knew then that he couldn't go into the house, not with Pat there.

As if he hadn't seen the man, he swung left, went into the boiler shed and closed the door after him. The smell of coal and the warmth were fixed in his mind as a sort of haven. But it was a desperate haven now. He picked up a coal scoop and leaned on it, trying to get his breath back. The wind sang in the flues; the heat was dry and biting,

not like the humid blanket of the houses. Then it happened, just as he had expected it would.

The door opened, and the man in gray stepped inside.

For a moment after the man had closed the door carefully, Phil wondered if there might not be some mistake. The man was too mild looking. His smile was friendly. He wore rimless glasses that made him look like a life insurance salesman or a college professor and not at all like the thug who lay dead in the field. His voice, when he spoke, was inoffensive, as if he were asking to borrow a match.

He said, "What did you do with the money? I saw you take it. I lost sight of you when you went around the building with it."

PHIL continued to lean on the shovel, but he shifted his weight ever so slightly onto the balls of his feet. It was odd, the thoughts a person got in moments of crises. Phil was remembering something he hadn't thought of in twenty years, something that went back to another crisis, when his father had died, and Phil was telling the high school principal he was leaving school to go to work. Over the principal's desk was a framed motto by Theodore Roosevelt. It said: "I know you can, and I think you will."

I know you can, and I think you will. . . .

Phil's fingers tightened on the shovel, and suddenly all that had been bothering him came into acute focus. He'd been growing more and more hot-tempered and touchy of late because he was losing confidence in himself. First, it had been the leg, and then the failures in business. He was resentful, afraid to face the fact that he might no longer be competent. Well, now if ever, was the time to draw the line—or quit deluding himself.

His weight was firmly on the balls of his feet now. He gripped the shovel, tensing to leap in with it. Then the

door opened again.

Pat had thrown her cloth coat over her shoulders and was clutching it about her as she stepped across the threshold into the boiler room. She tossed that soft lock of her hair to one side, and her large dark eyes were full of innocent unawareness.

"What's the trouble, Phil? Wouldn't the truck start? I saw you coming back. . . Oh, hello," she said with a pleasant smile to the man in gray, seeing him for the first time.

"Step inside, please, and close that door, Miss," he said. He was still mild, but he had taken a gun out of his pocket. "I mean business, and I have no time to waste." His eyes hardened behind his spectacles and they seemed like particularly small eyes because the lenses were thick.

"Where is the money?" he demanded. "My partner became panicky after we tangled with a cop and I had to shoot him—like I shot the cop. I'd hate to have to kill anybody else."

Phil heard Pat's gasp. He looked at the gun, and the shovel was suddenly useless. But if he could delay long enough, maybe the police would pick up the trail through the woods and find the dead man in the field. Then they might follow on past the greenhouses and—

Phil paced the words slowly. "It wouldn't do you any good to kill me, Mister," he said. "If you did, you'd never find your money."

"You think so?" A smile hesitated at the corners of the man's mouth as he reflected. Then he stepped over to Pat. His hand swung in a swift, open-handed blow to her face. Crying out, she fell. His gun covering Phil, the man dragged her up. He twisted her arm violently behind her.

His breath was coming quickly now and his eyes seemed to be concentrating into pinpoints. "I can get pretty ugly, you see," he said. "If you don't talk, I can kill her—and still have you."

Those pinpoint eyes were relentless, and suddenly Phil knew the answer, the

only answer.

I know you can, and I think you will. . . .

"All right," he said. "I give up. I'll take you to the money."

HE TURNED toward the door. The man thrust Pat in the way, stopping him.

"Where are you heading?"

"I'm not lying," Phil said. "I'd be a fool to lie. The money is in one of the greenhouses. I'll take you there."

The cold swirled in a gust about him as he stepped outside. He heard the crunch of the man's shoes behind him, Pat's reluctant steps. The man knew he wasn't lying. No one could afford to lie with the adverse odds stacked so overwhelmingly. What was there to fight for anyway? The money wasn't Phil's.

Phil passed the Number Four greenhouse, the Number Three, and paused at the door of Number Two, his hand resting on the knob as if he were uncertain, as if he were trying to quell a last flicker of indecision. Then the twitch of a muscle along his jaw showed his resolution. He pushed open the door and stepped into the humid swelter of the house.

Oddly, he seemed off-balance, and for support his hand went out to one of the potted plants on the bench. But it was more design than accident. He turned as the killer was stepping across the threshold.

The man bowed his head abruptly, as if something prevented his going on. His hands moved reflexively to his eyes.

Phil struck at that moment. Clutching the pot, he smashed it down on the crown of the gray hat. He picked up another pot and another and struck again and again until broken terra cotta, dirt and the wreck of lilies littered the floor and a figure lay there, inert.

He was aware that Pat had been screaming.

He looked up and saw her standing at the door, sobbing now in relief. Beyond her, blue-coated police were running up from the cauliflower field, their steps pounding on the crushed stone drive.

Phil dragged out the bag from under the bench. He handed the bag to the nearer of two policemen who crowded in the door. A third officer came puffing up, thrust ahead with a gold-braided sleeve. His gaze dropped from the bag to the body on the floor and then swung to Phil.

"What? How—"

"The bank robber," Phil said. "I got him in here. He wears thick lenses, which means he can't see without glasses. Coming in out of the cold, they fogged up completely. I figured they would and I was ready for him. You better take over. He seems to be stirring."

Pat's folks arrived back shortly. There were more police and reporters and photographers from the Runley papers. There was talk about a reward for captured robbers, perhaps enough to set a man like Phil up in a business of his own.

"Reward?" Phil said, and his voice had an assurance that hadn't been there in a long time. "It's reward enough just how this has made me feel." He turned to Pat and he was remembering how hurt and disturbed he used to be over some of the jobs he'd been asked to do. He guessed that when a man was sure of himself things like that really didn't mean much. It was only a matter of time until things would be different.

"Say, Pat," he said. "I never did get those groceries for you. What was that you wanted again? Six cokes and two packages of potato chips?"



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I

MY HANDS get cold and my stomach does a sort of flip-flop every time I think back on the talk that night. Sometimes I feel like smacking Vara Dean and sometimes I feel like kissing her. You know how it is when the dame you're nuts about suddenly goes hay-wire.

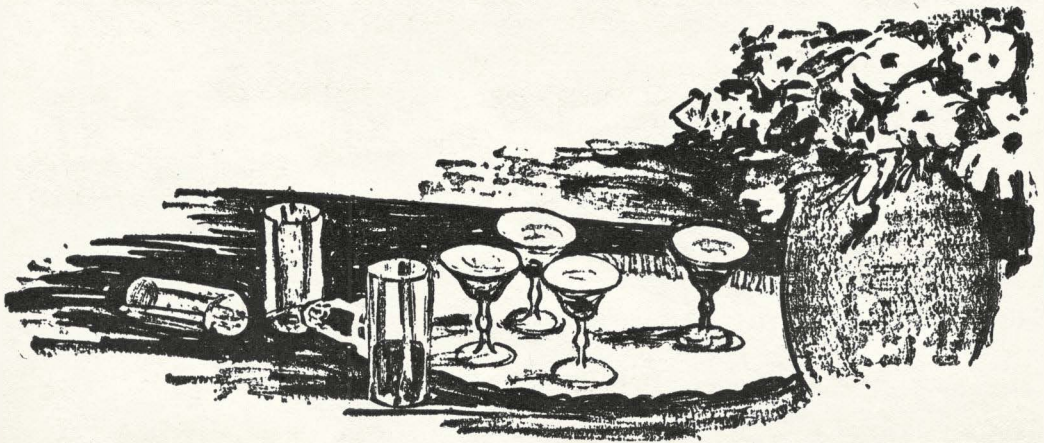
At the time, of course, I didn't take it too seriously. Nobody would have. Vara was only a kid anyway and the night we were introduced she was drawing her first pay on an Equity card.

When she spoke her little piece about

murder, I supposed she was just trying to be funny. The people at Ron Withersteen's party—Ed Lasker, the leading man; Joy Marlow, the star; and Doctor Lucius Tanner, the rich society medic who liked to pal around with actors—all seemed to take it in their stride. They smiled indulgently when Vara said in her gooiest stage voice:

"If only I could *kill* somebody—really commit a murder, I mean—I'd be able to *feel* my part a whole lot better."

Joy Marlow preened her Grecian hair-do prettily.



"Here—take it,"
said Vara,
holding out the
gold mesh bag



*Vara wondered what it would be like to be a murderess . . . how it
would feel to see a man dying of poison that she had given him!*

"Every gal's a murderess at heart when her love-life is threatened, Vara, darling. Remember that when you read those lines."

"That's just it, Joy," Vara told her. "Ed isn't actually my man in the play. It's only his money I'm after. Yet I'm supposed to kill him and put a lot of emotion into the part when I don't know how a murderess feels."

"Easy enough!" drawled Lasker. "Pick out some guy you're sweet on and bump him off."

Vara seemed to consider the idea seriously. She pursed her red lips, half closed her big brown eyes. She was sitting on the arm of my chair, leaning intimately against my willing shoulder.

I couldn't picture her murdering anybody. But then, of course, I wouldn't. I was so crazy in love with her that I couldn't even see straight. Ever since I'd watched her do her part in *The Other Man* and had talked my city editor into letting me do a review of the show, I'd been like her shadow, with her as much as I could be, moping like a sick sparrow when she was out of sight.

I gave her waist a possessive squeeze.

"Don't be a dope, honey," I whispered. "The only thing you could kill is a shaker of cocktails and you know it. I don't know why they cast you for the role in the first place, except for your husky voice and that slinky way you walk."

That must have hit her professional pride. Watch out for any actor or actress when pride lifts its ugly head.

"You wouldn't understand, darling," Vara told me pityingly. "You're just a sweet, insensitive newspaper guy with no real feelings—in here." She touched the left side of her evening gown below the spot where it started to swell out in a soft half moon. "I think I will kill somebody to prove my point."

"What point?"

"Oh, I don't know—that I can kill somebody."

OF COURSE it was silly talk. But Vara was only twenty. Her beau-

tiful head was stuffed so full of "theater" that she had a case of mental indigestion.

I gave her a drink and managed to steer the conversation back to normal. We danced after that. Every time Ed or Joy or Doc Tanner glanced my way I saw them snicker, and everybody began to razz me.

"You wouldn't understand, Nick. Vara's so serious about her work. Too bad you're so insensitive, old man."

They couldn't get a smile out of me, though. I'm too old-fashioned, or maybe too literal-minded, to appreciate dramatics. Murder has never seemed to me like a good subject for humor anyhow. I've done too much smelly copy on it.

When I got Vara off in a corner alone, holding her, soft and slim and warm in my arms while the dance band played, I gave her a little lecture.

"Try to grow up, honey-child," I said, "even if you are on the road to stardom. Keep your dopey lines strictly for the footlights, won't you?"

"You're being stuffy, Nicolas," she said.

Her brown eyes were close to mine, dark and shining, fringed by long silky lashes that were real. Her lips were close to mine, too, tempting as always. I tried to kiss her, but she shoved me away.

"Cave man!"

"Is it any worse than being a cave woman—chattering about murdering people?"

"You're tiresome at times, Nick darling."

"You're a fuzzy-brained kid."

I was going to add "even though I love you," but she didn't give me the chance. She slipped out of my arms and drew herself up to her full five feet four.

"I've got to be with some of my own kind, Nick precious. It—it's like—needing fresh air. You won't mind, I know, sweetheart."

She glided away then. She could slap me in the face like that, and I'd take it every time because the torch I was car-

rying for her nearly blinded me, it was so bright.

Sulking all by myself at the cocktail bar didn't help a bit. A wet sulk, I soon found out, is just as bad as a dry one, maybe worse. I began to feel sorry for myself, wondering if maybe I wasn't thick and if my secret notion of marrying Vara wasn't just about as crazy as her talk of killing people.

I drank, but I didn't get tight or even high. I just got soggy sad and lost track of time. When Vara wasn't around, time didn't mean much anyway. The only time that counted was when I was with her.

After a while somebody dimmed the lights in the ballroom and the band played a slow Argentine number that

THERE WAS a loveseat against the far side of the room, and a man was sitting alone on it. He sat there like a bag of cement, his legs spread apart, his shoulders bowed back, his face turned up to the ceiling and his mouth wide open.

He wasn't pretty any way you looked at him. He made me think of a singer who's gone to sleep right in the middle of his highest note. An empty cocktail glass had tipped over on the seat beside him and was balanced so near the edge that it looked as if it might roll off any minute.

I got closer still and saw his face.

It was Ron Withersteen, all right, the "angel" whose money was backing *The Other Man*. I could tell by the stringy

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made me sadder still. It was the sort of music Vara and I were always at our best in, and now she wasn't with me. She was most likely in the arms of "one of her own kind."

I drank and I felt terrible, and when the music stopped and the lights went up again, I wasn't in a mood for any sort of drama, real or imaginary. I was all set to call it a day and head for home.

But a woman over at the far side of the room made a noise in her nose. It was half squeal, half whinny, not very loud but startling. A hum of men's voices followed it. Then everybody began moving in one direction.

I moved, too. It's funny how the herd instinct hits you. My feet were on their way even as I gulped the last of my highball.

All I could see were the backs of people; the white backs of women and the black backs of men. They reminded me of a lot of penguins all headed the same way. "It's Mr. Withersteen," a woman up front said. "Soemthing awful has happened to him."

I pushed through the other penguins, close enough to see what the excitement was all about.

blond hair, the high forehead and the long thin nose. But his complexion was white and waxy and mottled. His eyes were wide open and staring, and his lips were bluish. One corner of his mouth seemed to droop. Then I saw that it wasn't his mouth at all, but a colored froth that was spilling over.

My mind flashed "poison," just as a man beside me said in a flat, scared voice: "He's dead!"

We all stood silent and embarrassed, looking at Withersteen, till Doc Tanner squeezed his way through the crowd. He didn't have any black bag with him, but you'd have known him for what he was anyhow by the fussy, authoritative way he moved.

I'd never had much use for his kind of medic, the rich, party-loving, clothes-horse type. But he didn't waste time now.

Cool as an ice cube, he bent his round pink face over Ron Withersteen, felt Ron's pulse, rolled back an eyelid and said almost matter-of-factly:

"This man is dead. He's swallowed a lethal dose of some sort of quick-acting, corrosive poison. It's a case of suicide or murder. We'd better call the police at once."

II

NATURALLY the cops took a prejudiced view of the thing right from the start. I couldn't blame them, either. When I say "cops" I'm speaking mostly of Police Lieutenant Walter Richardson.

Rich is a good guy, a hard guy, a guy who would collect evidence against his own mother if he thought she was guilty.

He knew, as we all knew, that Ron Withersteen wasn't the type who would be likely to kill himself. Ron had everything to live for; money, good health, and a hobby of backing shows that always seemed to turn out smash hits. *The Other Man* had been pulling 'em into the box office ever since it started.

Turning his big, bullet head to one side and staring down at Withersteen's body, Rich said quietly:

"If this is suicide, I'm a Zulu." He added, loud enough for us all to hear, "Don't any of you folks try to leave for a while."

It was just a moment after he'd spoken that I spotted Vara.

She was moving along the darkest side of the room, moving slowly, with that slinky, sinuous walk of hers and with a look of guilt spread over her face. Right ahead of her was a hall that led to the ladies' room, and I figured that was where she was going.

Rich saw her, too. His round blue eyes, protruding slightly from his bright red face seemed to have the range of a wide-angle camera. If you held a book behind Rich's back, I think he could have read it.

"What's your hurry, Miss Dean?" he said.

It was an embarrassing question to ask any lady under the circumstances, but Rich was never one to worry about the amenities. Murder was his feat. Murder, red and raw and ugly.

Vara stopped. I didn't like the look on her face. She had a right to be scared after what had happened, but she didn't need to look guilty about it.

I walked toward her with Rich at my side. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Everybody there, I guess, remembered her foolish chatter earlier in the evening. My palms were sweaty and the back of my neck felt stiff. I opened my mouth to say something, but Rich got ahead of me.

"Stay out of this, Nick."

I didn't plan to stay out of it, not by a long shot, but it wasn't the right moment to interrupt Rich. You don't grab meat out of a hungry dog's mouth if you value your mitts.

"All I asked, Miss Dean, was what's your hurry. And, if you don't mind, let's see what you have there in your hand."

I could have spanked Vara then. She was supposed to be an actress, maybe not a great star, but an actress. Yet she was hamming as I'd never seen her ham on the stage, trying to keep something hidden behind her back and at the same time pretending that she had nothing. Not only was she hamming, but she had picked the wrong time to do it.

Then I saw what was the matter with her. Terror, plain, stark terror had jellied her thoughts and made her as awkward as a kid on a commencement-day platform.

Her face was white, almost as white as Ron's there on the loveseat. She tried to say something and couldn't. She made ineffectual gestures with her left arm, then suddenly she took a crazy, erratic dive toward the hall. Rich caught her before she'd run three steps.

VARA gave a high-pitched squeal like a pony that's being whipped. My right fist doubled up, for I wasn't going to let anybody, not even a homicide dick, man-handle the woman I loved. I was hunting for a soft spot on Rich's body to go to work on when Vara collapsed.

That's the only way I can describe it. All the squeal and the spunk and the movement went out of her. She leaned against Rich's big, calloused hand and looked up at him dough-faced. In a low trembling voice that only he and I could

hear she said:

"You might as well know. You'll find out anyway. The police always do. Here—take it."

She brought her right hand around from behind her back then and opened her fingers that had been tightly holding a little gold-mesh handbag. Rich took it quickly, eyes glassy-hard.

"I was going to wash them down the basin," Vara said tonelessly. "I knew how it would look—what you'd think."

Rich opened the handbag. There was a collection of the odds and ends that every woman treasures—a lipstick, compact, a tiny mirror, a ring and a couple of keys. But these weren't what Vara had meant.

Rich's fingers had found and pulled out a small glass vial. In it were two little white sticks like miniature sugar candy. Rich opened the vial, sniffed it cautiously, closed it carefully and held it the way you'd hold a baby cobra by the neck. I'd seen him in action on a dozen murder cases and this was the first time that he didn't seem to know just what to say. Vara said it for him.

"It's poison, of course. There were three sticks. One was stolen to kill Ron."

"Stolen?" said Rich dazedly.

She nodded. "Of course. I left my handbag over there on the window ledge back of the radio when I danced. I shouldn't have done it, I know. I ought to be punished for leaving such things around. But I didn't murder Ron."

"You didn't?" Rich was getting back his customary poise. "What did you carry the stuff for then—just to chew on?"

Vara made a husky sound in her throat, and her teeth actually chattered. It might have been funny if we hadn't been faced by tragedy.

"You wouldn't understand," she said.

"Why wouldn't I?" Rich shoved his face close to hers.

"Because I don't know that even theater people would understand."

"I guess they wouldn't," said Rich. "I guess nobody would. It doesn't make sense."

"Oh, yes it does." Vara perked up a little, her brown eyes flashing. She smoothed the hair back from her forehead with a half defiant gesture. "I didn't intend to murder anyone, not really. But having the cyanide with me helped to give me what I want—a feeling of guilt and secrecy that a murderess must have. Nobody knew, none of my friends, not even Nick here, most of all not Nick."

"Most of all? Then somebody *did* know?"

"I don't see how anybody could have, except the person I got it from. And he's perfectly innocent—a harmless old man who cleans silver for a living. I told him I wanted it to use in collecting insects. He believed me."

"What's the guy's name?"

"That isn't important."

"Says you! What's his name, Miss Dean?"

"I'm not going to tell you. He sold it to me as a favor, knowing it was illegal, I suppose, and I'm not going to get him into trouble."

"You'll have to tell us," Rich insisted.

"I won't."

Rich shoved his face closer still, glaring.

"You expect me to believe you carried the stuff just to help your act?"

She shook her head till the curls at the back of her neck stood out straight.

"I don't expect you to believe me. A man of your type wouldn't."

RICH looked baffled and sore as hell. "What made you decide to poison Ron Withersteen?" he asked bluntly.

Vara's luscious lips curled in contempt.

"Would an actress be so stupid as to kill the angel who's financing her play?"

"She might." Rich's voice carried a sneer. "A lot of things go on in the theater besides stage business. You're under arrest, Miss Dean, on a charge of first degree murder."

Vara nodded hopelessly.

"Look, honey," I butted in, "I know

you couldn't kill anybody. Even if you've been the silliest little dimwit that ever stepped in front of footlights, I know you didn't murder Ron Withersteen."

"It wasn't silly," Vara protested. "Having that bottle with me really did help."

I grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her hard.

"Come down to earth, bird brain. All it did was help you get into the biggest mess of your life. You're being booked for murder—murder! Do you get it?"

"You're hurting me, Nick."

"I've got a right to hurt you. I love you. Love is always half hurt. Look how you slap *me* around. Who did steal that pill anyway?"

"Since when did you get on the homicide squad, Nick?" Rich muttered petulantly. But he let me go on. He was all interest suddenly at my being in love with Vara. It was the interest of a tiger who smells fresh game. I knew, but I didn't let it bother me.

"Anyone could have stolen it, Nick," Vara said. "Anyone who knew."

"But who could have known? Who did you tell? Think back."

"Nobody. That is—you know how I sometimes start talking after a few drinks, saying things I shouldn't and forgetting them afterwards?"

I did know and I groaned.

"If I'd only slapped some sense into you weeks ago," I said. "Kids like you ought to be paddled regularly."

Rich spoke impatiently at my elbow.

"This isn't getting us anywhere. She's guilty, even if you can't see it or don't want to. Dames like her are poison. I've met 'em before. She was probably two-timing you with Withersteen. Or maybe you, Nick—" He looked at me out of his bulging, all-seeing eyes. I was glad I wasn't guilty. If I had been, Rich would have watched me fry and enjoyed the smell. "I'll take you down to headquarters for a little looking into," he said, "after I've got a little dope out of these others here. They know Miss Dean better than I do."

They did and they were glad to talk about it. Everyone there was ready to yap about Vera's wild talk earlier in the evening—particularly Ed Lasker and Joy Marlow, who were supposedly her friends.

"She spoke about killing someone tonight," said Lasker. He wasn't smirking now. His lean, complacent, good-looking face held an expression of naive regret that was just a little bit too stagey. I remembered his own humorous advice to Vara and wanted to smack him.

Joy Marlow put in her oar, too.

"Vara's a darling," she said, glad to be the center of attention. "We all simply *love* her and we'll help her any way we can. But she did say that she thought committing a murder would help her understand her part in the play, and you *did* find that horrid poison on her. It's fantastic, of course, but—"

"But you'd like to shove her down a little deeper in the hole she's in, wouldn't you?" I put in.

"Nicolas! Don't be sadistic."

"What's your opinion, Doctor Tanner?" asked Rich suddenly. "You hear Miss Dean make threats, too?"

"Not threats," said Tanner. He stood, slimly elegant, smiling and precise, the perfect picture of the successful society physician. "I heard her make the wild statement that has already been referred to. It disturbed me a little, but I didn't suppose—"

"What do you suppose *now*, Doc? Would anybody carry cyanide around with 'em if they didn't intend to use it?"

"They might." Tanner fingered his eyeglasses and seemed to hesitate. He cleared his throat. "Miss Dean could be the victim of an unfortunate obsession, you know."

"Victim!" Rich snored. "There's only one victim here, and that's Withersteen."

"You don't quite understand me, Lieutenant. Miss Dean may be another sort of victim, a victim of her own inner compulsions. Let me explain. There's a

threshold beyond which it is dangerous for any of us to step—the threshold of reality. Miss Dean was close to that threshold, I believe. I'm no psychologist, but I've studied the new psychosomatic medicine a bit. I know that the mind and its worries can affect the body. Miss Dean, disturbed over her supposed inadequacies in her part in the play, may have been emotionally off balance. She could have used the poison on Withersteen without actually realizing the tragic consequences of her act."

"You mean that Vara's nutty?" said Ed Lasker in a hushed voice.

"Not exactly. I'm only suggesting—"

"We'll help with the sanatorium fees," said Joy Marlow brightly. "We'll see that she gets the very best of care."

"In a strait-jacket!" I growled. "You all love Vara but you don't mind seeing her land in a bughouse?"

"It's better than another place I can think of," Rich reminded me nastily.

III

DOWN at headquarters, with Vara locked up in a cell and guarded by two police matrons, Rich lighted a cigar and said:

"I don't hold with Tanner's notion that Vara Dean is crazy. I think she's just as sane as you or I, Nick. I think she had a reason for killing Withersteen."

"I don't," I said.

"Any jury would convict her on the mere possession of the poison," Rich went on. "People don't like poison or poisoners, not even if they're good-looking dames. There's something about poison—"

I knew what he meant. I remembered the color of Ron Withersteen's face and shuddered.

"She's guilty, Nick. You may be the type of guy who can love a murderess, I don't know. But she's guilty all right, unless you yourself—"

"Bumped off Withersteen because I was jealous."

"Exactly." Rich flicked cigar ashes. "I'm not counting that out, Nick. Neither is the D.A. He's asked me to find out just how well Miss Dean knew Withersteen outside of business hours."

"She didn't," I said. "Neither did I. Believe it or not, the party tonight was the first time either of us had ever met him socially."

He *didn't* believe me, I could see.

"Withersteen was her angel," he said softly.

"Yeah. But angels sometimes keep to themselves in heaven. That's how it was with Ron. He backed shows but he didn't mix with stage people any more than he could help. Actors rather bored him, I guess."

"Maybe actors, but not actresses."

"Actresses, too."

"Bunk! Withersteen was a good-looking bachelor. He had lots of dough, a big house, a big car—"

"And a private life that nobody could pry into," I said. I leaned over and grabbed Rich's arm. "What do you actually know about Ron?"

Rich was stumped for a moment and very annoyed.

"Listen, Nick. Until a guy gets himself murdered, or is mixed up in murder, homicide doesn't pretend to keep tabs on him."

"But a newspaper does," I told him. "Or tries to. Withersteen made quite a splash in this town with his successes in the theater. The *News* has tried to get his life story more than once and has never been able to. Where, for instance, did he get his dough?"

"From shows, of course."

"But before that," I persisted. "It takes dough to make dough in the show business. Ask any angel. You're likely to lose as much as you make, getting started. Ron never told anybody where he got his money. He never told anybody anything about himself."

"I don't see what that has to do with Vara Dean."

"I do. What's more, if you don't put the irons on me, I'm going to find out."

"I'll go with you," said Rich, putting on his beat-up old hat.

WE WENT back to Ron Withersteen's house in a squad car. Flanked by Rich on one side and Sergeant Sam Lucas on the other, I felt like a prisoner already. I wondered if Rich would give me enough freedom of action to find out what I wanted to know. Just what that was I didn't know myself. But I couldn't let Vera wear her life away in jail or an asylum. Nothing that had happened tonight had made me any less crazy about her. The show might go on, with a stand-in playing Vera's part, but my life couldn't go on the way I wanted it to unless she was with me.

A cop on the Withersteen porch let us in. There was another cop inside. The only other person there was a Filipino servant, named Ramon, whom Rich had already questioned. Rich went at him again from a different angle.

"Did Mr. Withersteen have many parties here?" he asked.

The Filipino shook his head.

"Did he have any special women he liked to entertain?"

"Maybe. I no see," said Ramon.

"Did Miss Dean, the girl we arrested, ever come here?"

"I no see."

Rich began to get red around the neck. He gestured toward me.

"Did you ever see this guy with Mr. Withersteen?"

"Only tonight," said Ramon.

I could have kissed that Filipino.

"Where's Withersteen's personal stuff?" Rich demanded. "We want to look it over."

Ramon led us to the second floor and into a little room which had a desk in it, several chairs, a filing cabinet. "Den," he explained. "Ever'ting here."

Everything *was* there. It would have taken several certified accountants and a banker or two to go through all the papers and letters having to do with shows. But they were all dated within the past five years. There was nothing that shed

any light on Withersteen's past—nothing, that is, until I found the photo.

It was a class photo, a little faded and yellow. Withersteen hadn't taken much care of it or thought too much of it, apparently, for it was shoved back in a drawer of his desk.

Judging by the faces of the students, it was a college photograph, some jerk-water college somewhere, I thought, for the class was small, not more than thirty or so.

The heads were pretty small, too, but I could pick out Withersteen in the front row by his stringy hair, high forehead and long nose. On the back of the photo it said: "Fairfield College. Class of '26."

"This is it," I told Rich. "Let me take it and work on it and I'll dig up every chapter of Ron's past life. The college will give me the dope."

"I'll take it," Rich said in a heavy voice. "There's nothing a newspaper can find out that the police can't."

I tried to argue, but he wouldn't listen.

"Just remember, Nick," he reminded me nastily. "You're a suspect not a dick. The only reason I'm letting you string along with me is to watch you."

Of course he was partly kilding, but not about the photograph. He wasn't going to let me get my mitts on it. He put it back on the desk.

We tried to find something else that might tell about Ron's background, but there was nothing, not even addresses of relatives. We went into other rooms, even searched the pockets of Withersteen's spare clothes. I felt something like a ghoul picking over a dead man's body, but Rich took it in his stride.

The cop downstairs sauntered up while we were working.

"There's a press photographer trying to get in, Chief. Sweeney's thrown him down the steps twice. Now he's back."

"Throw him down again," said Rich. "We're busy."

"Wait!" I yelled. "What paper's he from?"

"The *News*, he claims."

I grabbed Rich's arm.

"It's Louie Claus. Let him come in. What harm can a few pictures do? One of you right on the job at the scene of the crime wouldn't be bad publicity for the department."

Rich scratched his head and looked at me hard. Then he grunted and nodded.

When Claus joined us he grinned at me. "Hi, Nick."

He was a little man, bow-legged, cheerful, seeming to bend under the

"What guy?"

"The one who gave her the poison."

It was only an excuse. I didn't expect Vara would tell even me. I knew how stubborn she was. But Rich fell for it.

"Okay. I'll take you back when I go. But don't try to doublecross me or chisel in, Nick. I'm going to watch you from now on. You got something on your mind."

It made me shiver a little the way he looked at me.

TROUBLE ON THE DOUBLE



Smugglers who try to get through at the Mexican border have been having twice as much trouble evading the law since the United States customs inspectors began using a special new device. It was designed for examining the underside of automobiles, which is a favorite spot for tucking away contraband.

The gadget is equipped with both a spotlight and a mirror and is constructed so that it can easily be pushed under any conveyance. Metal rods hold the looking glass at an angle so that the officer can see "what's doing" without getting down on his hands and knees.

The contrivance has reduced the examination time of the car bottoms from a full three minutes to a scant twenty seconds—and is definitely more accurate.

—Bess Ritter

weight of his big Speed Graphic.

"Just a few shots inside the moider house is all I want," he said.

"Come downstairs, Rich," I said. "Let Louie take you in the very room where Withersteen was poisoned."

Rich finally agreed.

ON THE WAY down, walking behind him, I grabbed Louie's shoulder and whispered in his ear.

"There's a class photo on the desk upstairs. Shoot it close up if you can. Don't ask any questions. Give it to me later."

After Rich had allowed his picture to be taken he seemed to be in a better mood. I tackled him at once.

"Let me go back to headquarters and talk to Vara a few minutes, Chief."

"What for? You seen her an hour ago."

"I can never see too much of her. Besides, I might be able to get the name of that guy."

Back at headquarters, I was allowed to go into the women's cell block and talk to Vara.

"Ten minues is all," said Rich grumpily.

The two police matrons didn't like it when the jailer told them I was to speak to Vara alone.

To say that Vara was glad to see me is putting it mildly. Just that one hour in jail had made a big difference. There's something final and sort of terrifying, I guess, about having a barred metal door clang behind you. She came straight into my arms, forgetting her slinky walk, forgetting everything except that she was a scared little girl and I was the man who loved her.

"Oh, Nick! Nick, darling, I don't like it. I'm—I'm frightened. They really think I did it. Sometimes I almost wonder—"

I put my hand over her lips. "Don't say it! You didn't. Don't let them kid

you into anything."

I took my hand away and kissed her while one of the police matrons, watching from a distance, gave a cough that sounded like a bellow. This time Vara didn't shove me away.

"I must have been crazy," she whispered. "Crazy—carrying that poison around with me. How can even you believe I'm innocent, Nick?"

"I can believe anything," I said, "when you look at me out of those big brown eyes. I'm going to get you out of here."

"How, Nick? How?"

"Don't ask me yet. I'll get you a good lawyer, the best there is. I'll get you old Blair Dillingham."

Vera looked up at me out of eyes that were really tragic.

"He can't help me, Nick. No lawyer can. They found the poison on me and that's enough. I realize that now. And, Nick, I know what Doctor Tanner was telling you. I couldn't help hearing some of it. They'll railroad me to an asylum."

"They won't railroad you anywhere unless it's to a beauty contest," I said. I took her face in my hands, the most beautiful face I've ever looked at even if it was pale and even if there were prison bars for a background. "Will you tell me the truth about something if I ask you, honey?"

"I'll tell *you* anything, Nick—anything."

IV

IT WAS just a little dusty windowed shop on a narrow side street, but it had an air about it. In the window, there were a few pieces of handsome old silver arranged tastefully in front of faded velvet drapes. It was the sort of place you'd expect rich collectors of antiques to patronize.

I'd had a hard time shaking off the boys that Rich had set to tail me. It had taken more than an hour, changing cabs and ducking in and out of alleys. But I

knew that none of Rich's bloodhounds was spying on me now. I wished the big baboon would trust me.

The hour was late, nearly twelve, and I didn't think anybody would be up. I had come just on the chance and because I wanted to verify what Vara had told me. Not that I didn't believe her. But I had to be doing something. Thinking of her in jail, I couldn't have slept anyway.

But there *was* a light in back. I could see it through the dusty pane of the shop door. When I rapped, there was a movement of curtains, then the silhouette of a thin figure in a smock shuffling toward me.

Before he opened the door he looked out at my face through the glass. I caught a glimpse of a white mustache and thin old features that had a sort of delicacy to them.

I'm not trying to hand it to myself, but my own face isn't too bad, not when I smile anyway. I turned on my best copy-getting smile now, and the old bird opened the door immediately.

"Hello, there," he said. "Did you want to see me about something? It's rather late, but—"

His voice was soft, melodious, a voice that seemed to have been trained.

"You sell silver?" I said.

"Yes. I've a few pieces, some of them rather good if you care for antiques. But I don't usually do business at night."

"You clean silver, too?"

"Yes. That's what I do mostly. People bring me things, their treasured pieces, you know. Did you have something for me to work on?"

"No. Your name's Scott. You know a girl named Vara Dean."

He nodded and brightened.

"A very charming young person. She's an actress. Some day I think she'll be famous."

"I hope not," I said. "I'm going to marry her. It would be hell, trying to keep up with a famous wife. But I wanted to ask you, Mr. Scott, if you gave Miss Dean some sticks of cyanide a while ago?"

A SHADOW passed across his face and his hands began to tremble.

"Come in," he said quickly. "Come into the back room where we can talk."

He looked at me closely when we got into the lighted room. It was a little workshop with tools and polishes, a lathe and a bushing machine. Scott's eyes were watery, but the pupils were clear. They looked worried.

"What's this about cyanide? I hope nothing has happened to Miss Dean."

"She says you let her have some. It may have been illegal—I don't know—but I'm not here to make trouble for you. I just wanted to find out."

"I hope nothing has happened," he repeated. "I did give her three little sticks from my cleaning box. She asked for them after she had brought in some silver for me to do, an old vase that belonged to her mother. We got to be friends. I used to be an actor myself years ago. That was a bond between us. She said she wanted to collect insects as a hobby in the summer. I thought it was a little odd, but she has a very persuasive way with her. I told her how to make a cyanide jar and warned her to be careful."

His hands were shaking now. There must have been a look on my face that told him there was something wrong.

"Miss Dean's okay," I said, "but a man has been poisoned with the cyanide that you gave her and that she carried in her handbag."

"She carried it with her? Didn't she realize—"

"It's a long story, Mr. Scott. Vara—Miss Dean—is young and a little flighty and has some ideas all her own. The point is, they think she's a murderess. She isn't. Someone stole the stuff out of her bag. But the police are trying to pin it on her. I thought you might help."

"How?"

"Did you ever tell any of your clients about giving Miss Dean the cyanide?"

"I don't recall that I did. I may have. People are sometimes interested to know that silver-cleaners frequently use cya-

nide. I could have said something, I suppose."

"Who to? Other stage people maybe?"

He bobbed his white head, wringing his hands in dismay.

"It's possible. I don't remember."

"Anybody named Lasker or Marlow?"

"I don't remember. Those names sound familiar, but I may have read them somewhere. I don't think they've ever been here."

"Any of these?" I gave him the names of all the people in *The Other Man*. He shook his head.

"Try to think," I said. "You may save Miss Dean from prison or worse. What sort of people come to your shop? Do you keep a list of them?"

"Let me see." He got up and fumbled around in a little desk, rustling papers frantically. "No, I'm very unbusiness-like, I'm afraid. My customers always pay cash. I'll try to remember, though."

His face brightened for a moment. He took a handsome silver coffeepot down from a shelf and turned it bottom-side-up.

"The only record of any sort I keep is my mark on the pieces I work on—WKS—my initials. I do it the way watch repairers scratch their numbers inside watch cases, you know. It may help."

He stood there, tall and thin as a scarecrow in his dirty smock, his old face working. There was a squeaking noise in the front of the shop and he set the coffeepot down.

"Excuse me. I must have left the door ajar."

I should have thought more quickly, but I'm no policeman. I'm not used to violence. A newspaperman generally gets to the scene *after* something has happened.

It was that way this time. I was too late to see who it was or to stop him. The two shots that rang out came so close together that one sounded like the echo of the other. They were the sharp, crackling shots of a small gun, possibly a .22.

My brain registered that. It also registered the heavy thud of a body hitting

something. Then it stopped registering for a few minutes. For just as I ran into the shop and glimpsed Scott, face down on the floor, giving the last feeble twitches of a dying man, a bullet nicked the top of my head. It knocked me into a well of darkness lighted only by a few shooting rockets.

MY HAIR was soggy with blood when I came to. I was lying on the floor near Scott. The front door was still open. I reached over, made sure Scott was dead, then got dizzily to my feet and stumbled out into the street.

There was nobody in sight, of course, nothing to hear. The whole city seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

Back in Scott's little shop I picked up the phone. My hands were shaking and so was my voice. I felt like a fool, but, along with my chagrin at having muffed things, I was excited. Someone, the same person who had killed Ron Withersteen, of course, had murdered poor old Scott as a cover up.

"Hello, Rich," I said. "This is me, Nicolas Thatcher."

"Where you at, punk? Why did you work so hard shaking off my boys?"

"Because"—I tried to keep my voice as calm as though we were just having a friendly chit-chat—"I had to look up the chap who gave Vara those poison sticks. I've found him, Rich. I didn't learn anything from him, though. He's just been murdered."

There was a dead silence at the other end of the wire. Into the phone I fed the details of what had happened. I could begin to hear Rich breathing hard.

"You lousy, no-good so-and-so!" he exploded when I finished.

"Hold on," I said. "It means, of course, that Vara Dean isn't guilty." Then I gave him Scott's address. I wanted to be as helpful as I could.

"Stay right there till I come," he ordered. "Don't move. Don't touch anything. Don't try to sneak out."

"Listen, Rich—be broad-minded. Would I be calling you up if—"

But he had cut me off. I knew that in a few seconds messages would be flashing out to squad cars. I knew that the cruisers and Rich himself would be there in a very few minutes. Even if I didn't have a gun, they could make it tough for me, say I'd hidden it, and snarl me up in so much red tape I couldn't move. I wanted to move fast, too. I had a lot of work to do.

With a lump in my throat as well as the lump on my head, where the blood was beginning to dry, I left old Scott. I left the door open, knowing that no prowler could hurt him now.

I stopped only long enough, in a doorway, to tie a handkerchief around my head and settle my hat over it. Then, after I'd put as many blocks as I could between me and Scott's shop, I hopped a taxi and went to the News Building. Rich wouldn't be expecting me to turn up there just yet.

Halfway up in the elevator I got off and went into the photo studio. Louie Claus was inside with one of the dark-room men. He waved something at me.

"Just got your picture printed. It ain't bad for a copy. But we got some better pictures of Withersteen, if that's what you want, down in the morgue, taken last year."

"It's that old picture that's the best scoop, Louie. I'm going to phone Fairfield College and get the dope on him."

"We'll enlarge this," said Louie, "so you can really see him."

In the original photo I had recognized Withersteen, all right, but he was really clear in the blown-up print that Louie handed me, wet from the fixing bath. I stared hard. It was funny to think that here was the face of a college kid who was destined to be murdered. It made me realize that none of us can ever be sure what's around the corner. I looked at the other young faces in the picture, and suddenly one of them seemed to hit me right between the eyes.

"This other guy, Louie," I yelled, "here in the third row, second from the left—ever see him?"

"No," said Louie, goggling over my elbow.

"I have. I know it. He's a lot older, of course. The likeness didn't show in the small photos, but here in this enlargement—" I patted Louie on the back till he began to cough. "Maybe that glass eye of yours has uncovered something big, something that's going to crack this thing wide open."

"Who is he, Nick?" asked Louie.

"I know who he is now," I said. "But I don't know who he was then. I'm going to phone Fairfield College and find out before I do any yapping. This is red-hot stuff, Louie."

V

EVENTUALLY the long-distance phoning was finished—seventeen dollars worth. I had stuck so many coins into the slot that bells were still ringing in my ears. The clerk in the all-night drug-store where I had done my calling had handed me so much silver in exchange for my greenbacks that I felt I owed him an explanation.

"It's expensive," I told him, "having your dames scattered all over the map like that."

His eyes got big and round and envious.

"You're lucky. I wouldn't mind having a few myself."

But there weren't any dames, of course. All my calls had been to men, mostly big shots, from the president of Fairfield College right on down.

There wasn't one of them that didn't act sore at being hauled out of bed so late and there wasn't one either who had told me all I wanted to know. I had found out plenty about Ron Withersteen's early days, but the man in the third row of the photo was still a blank. For once, though, not getting a line on my man was more significant than getting it. I had drawn a blank in another direction, too, and the two blanks fitted together perfectly, making a snappy sort of picture.

The bells in my head were bothering

me a lot. So was that place where the bullet had taken a hunk out of my scalp. I knew it needed attention and there didn't seem to be any use in suffering any longer. Before I went on my way, though, I had one more local call to make.

I ducked into another drug store for that. Rich's men were looking all over the city for me. Rich had probably found out by this time that I had called Fairfield College. He'd be tracing the call back to the spot it came from, and I didn't want to be picked up by a squad car just yet.

I put my last nickel in the slot, winced when the bell rang, and called homicide.

"This is Nicolas Thatcher again," I said to the police switchboard operator. "Connect me with Lieutenant Walter Richardson, please."

"Thatcher—Nick Thatcher!" I could hear the excitement in the cop's voice. "Wait just a minute."

"Let me talk to Richardson right away," I yelled. "I've been plugged. I'm losing blood. I'm getting weak and I'm on my way to see a doctor."

"The lieutenant's out looking—"

"For me. I know. Tell him he'll find me at Doctor Lucius Tanner's."

I hung up then. I was only four blocks from Tanner's. With luck I'd get there and get my head bandaged before the cops arrived. After that I didn't care. In fact, I hoped they'd be there to pick me up on time. I had plenty to tell them.

A CAB set me down outside Doctor Tanner's office two minutes later. There was no sound of police sirens anywhere yet. The city was quiet. Everybody seemed to be sleeping. Tanner seemed to be sleeping, too. There was no answer to his night bell for almost a minute.

I held one hand to my throbbing head and kept the other on the button. His office was in Galen Hall, an apartment hotel run exclusively for the wealthiest, most successful doctors in town. Just having your address there was a sign

that you had arrived and were too snooty to attend any but the "best people."

That didn't scare me, though. I kept pressing the button, knowing Tanner would fix me up because I had been introduced to him at Withersteen's party.

He opened the door finally, his courtly figure wrapped in a silk-embroidered dressing gown, his eyeglasses glittering and his smooth pink face bland as lard. I could see the luxurious furnishings of his office behind him and the hallway to his apartment beyond that.

He didn't recognize me at first. I was pale and red-eyed and unshaven, and with my hat off and the bloody handkerchief around my head, I must have been a sight. Then finally he figured out who I was and nodded.

"Mr. Thatcher! It looks as if you'd been hurt."

"I have. Sorry to get you up so late, doc, but I bumped into something."

He nodded again.

"We doctors expect to be called any time, day or night. It's part of our job, you know. Come in."

He made me sit under a light, pulled my home-made bandage off and clicked his tongue.

"A nasty scalp wound. It must be painful."

"It is. I'm seeing stars right now, Doc, shooting stars."

"What did you say you bumped into?"

"I didn't say—just something—a hunk of lead, maybe."

"Lead? You mean you've been shot?"

"It looks that way, Doc."

He felt around the edges of the wound and I waited to see if his fingers would tremble, but they didn't. They were cool and steady, but the touch of them made me shiver.

"You newspaper men," he said, "must get into all kinds of tight places. If it's a bullet wound, you know, I'm supposed to report it to the police."

He touched my scalp with some kind of antiseptic that smarted like Old Harry and began to apply gauze and tape. I gripped the arms of my chair and looked

up at him.

"Are you going to report it, Doc?"

"Perhaps not. It's up to you. You probably know your own business."

"I hope so. Sometimes I'm not sure."

I looked him full in the face then. His eyes, magnified by his glasses, looked inhuman, like a frog's eyes.

"How well did you know Ron Withersteen, Doc?" I asked.

"As well as a doctor ever knows his patients. Mr. Withersteen wasn't often ill. He called me only a few times. Why?"

"How long had you known him?"

"Let me see—three years, ever since his third play became so successful."

"And you didn't know him at all before that?"

"No. Not at all. Why?"

"Just *this*, Doc."

I took the picture that Louie Claus had made for me out of my pocket. It was still slightly damp.

"Ever see that?" I said.

His pupils contracted a little as he looked at it. That was all.

"No, I haven't. That seems to be a young picture of Mr. Withersteen in the front row."

"And the third row, Doc—recognize the guy sitting there?"

"No," said Tanner coldly, "I don't."

"I do. It's you, Doc—you under another name, your real name, back in college days."

"Are you out of your head, Mr. Thatcher?"

"I hope not. I'm lucky I still have a head—after that shot you slung at me."

"You *are* ill, Mr. Thatcher."

"No. Keep your hand out of your pocket, Doc—the right one. You might have that little gun on you still. In fact, you probably have."

HE SPREAD his hands in a show of innocence.

"I have no gun. I don't know what you're talking about. Will you please explain?"

"Gladly. You shot Scott tonight and

nearly got me. You stole the cyanide out of Vara Dean's handbag and poisoned Withersteen. You knew Vara might tell me about Scott and you were afraid Scott would remember that you were one of his customers and that he had told you about giving Miss Dean the poison sticks. You were watching Scott's place and when you saw me go in, you killed him to cover up and tried to kill me."

"And *why* did I kill Withersteen? I'm interested in your psychopathic ravings, Thatcher. As a professional man such things are worth a little study." He was sneering now, sneering but backing away, and I was watching his right hand. This was one time I wasn't going to get there *after* it happened. I didn't think I'd look pretty as a corpse.

"He was blackmailing you," I said. "That's how he first got his money to back shows. You were a rich and successful society doctor making about fifty grand a year, and Withersteen made you pay up."

"Why?"

I waved my hand toward the framed medical school diplomas and the licenses that told what a fine doctor Tanner was.

"Because you got those under a fake name, and you know it. I've been doing a lot of telephoning tonight—long-distance stuff. I phoned Fairfield College. They didn't have any Tanner in the class of '26. That made me suspicious. There was a guy named George Wayland, second from the left in the third row of the class photo. That was you. You studied medicine after graduating from Fairfield. Only two years after you started practicing, you got into a bad scrape when a patient died, following an illegal operation and you went to prison. After you got out, you disappeared. Nobody I talked to knew where you were or what had happened to you. But I did.

"Withersteen worked his way through Fairfield. He was an orphan with no relatives to inherit dough from. At college he was interested in amateur theatricals. The rest was easy to figure, Doc. He happened to run across you and

saw his chance to get the dough he wanted to back shows.

"You had to give it to him or he'd have exposed you as an impostor and ex-jail-bird. Even when his shows made good he went on bleeding you. Finally you decided to kill him and throw the blame on Vara Dean. It looked like a cinch to have her shut up as a homicidal maniac. Does that explain everything, Doc?"

"No. You're mentally unbalanced and I'm going to—"

He made a dive at me then and his hand came out of his right hand pocket. I got quite a surprise, for he didn't have a gun, after all. He was too smart to be caught with the rod that had killed Scott. It was a surgical knife, long and sharp, and I sensed exactly what his game was. He planned to murder me, call me crazy and say he'd done it in self-defense.

To keep the knife away from me I grabbed his wrist, and that gave him his chance to knock me off the chair onto the floor. He was on top of me like a tiger then. I was a little dizzy from the head wound, a little slow in my reactions. I just didn't want him to get that knife between my ribs. I had an idea a doctor, even a bum one, might know too well where to put it.

Our little tussle was interrupted first by the ringing of the doorbell, then by the smashing in of the door. It was a shame the cops had to do that to such a nice office.

Tanner didn't seem to mind, however, for, as the door burst open, he dropped the knife beside me, jumped off me and faced the men who were coming in.

"Thank goodness you're here, Lieutenant Richardson," he said. "Thatcher is a raving lunatic. He came here and attacked me, first accusing me of all sorts of things."

"Yeah?" Rich looked at me, his big bullet head wagging from side to side. "We've been tailing him all night, Tanner. He's led my boys a chase."

"Now you've got him," Tanner gloated. "Don't let him pick up that knife. He's really dangerous.

"There's only one thing, Doctor," Rich said softly. "He phoned me a few minutes ago and said he was coming here. Funny way for a nut to behave, isn't it?"

"No. It's quite in keeping with his mental condition," said Tanner. "I'll explain."

"I'll explain," I told him.

I DID. Rich listened without interrupting, to the whole story. I waited, watching Tanner out of the corner of my eye for the first sign of his breaking, but he didn't. He had the coolest nerves I've ever seen.

"There's not a speck of proof in any of this," he said after I'd finished, "proof that is, that I killed Withersteen or Scott. Thatcher's a newspaper man with a lurid imagination, Lieutenant."

"I couldn't imagine anything as bad as you, Doc," I said. "Not unless I had a nightmare."

"How about the rest of it, Doctor?" Rich asked coldly. "Do you deny that you were in jail or that your present name is a phony?"

Tanner batted his eyelids for a bare second at that. Then he said, with the humble air of a man who's making an honest confession:

"I don't deny *those* charges. I realize I face another prison sentence. But as for being a murderer—"

"You didn't even shoot Scott then?"

"Of course not. I didn't know him. I can prove—"

"Hold on," I said. "Poor old Scott was no businessman, but— You probably have a little silver around here, Doc."

His eyes followed me, flashing murder, as I went into the next room. I

found what I wanted—a big silver tray, monogrammed and polished, and two silver candlesticks.

"You're a hog for punishment, Doctor," I said. "A man has to push your head under water three times before you'll drown."

I turned the tray over, held it under the light, and there was what I expected to see—the little, scratched initials *WKS*. The same initials were on the candlesticks, too, and I explained them to Rich.

Rich laid his big hand on my shoulder, and it felt as heavy as a ham.

"I've misjudged you, Nick. You ought to be with us on the homicide squad. You're wasting your time working for a lousy news sheet."

"I was working for my girl," I said. "A guy will do almost anything for the dame he's nuts about."

Later, down at headquarters in her prison cell, Vara greeted me in a pair of pajamas that the city had provided. She looked funny and small and cute with the over-sized pajamas wrinkled around her legs and her hands sticking out of the rolled-up sleeves.

"I couldn't sleep, Nick," she said, looking at me out of heavy, shadowed eyes. "I'm so glad you're here, darling."

I told her the good news and kissed her, even though one of the police matrons was standing only three feet away. Vara hugged me and cried on my shoulder.

"Promise me, honey," I said, "that you'll never threaten to kill anybody again."

She looked up at me, her eyes shining through her tears.

"I promise, Nick, unless—well, unless I decide to love you to death."

SH-H-H-H!

SPEAK SOFTLY TO THE DEAD

Dale Bogard's rough, tough and torrid novel with this title is featured in the January **POPULAR DETECTIVE**—Now On Sale!



DEATH takes no holiday

A Novel by W. T. BALLARD



*The blonde was very beautiful—
and the corpse was very, very dead!*

I

THE girl's hair looked like yellow taffy, creamy and soft spun as if it would be nice to get your hands into. She sat at the small round table, close to the restaurant entrance and ate a tuna sandwich.

Any girl who can manage to be attractive while eating a tuna sandwich

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is worth a second look, and Harrigan had given her several since coming in. It wasn't only that she was his business of the moment. He'd followed a lot of people in his time without getting excited about them. But this girl was different.

She had that certain something which they are always talking about in pictures. Harrigan couldn't put it into words. He was a big young man who needed a haircut and a new hat. Aside from that he was nondescript. He was that way purposely. The less people who noticed a detective, the better. But the girl wasn't noticing him at all, and the thought made him slightly unhappy.

He rose when she did and moved forward to pay his check. This wasn't good tactics. In fact, he shouldn't have come into the restaurant at all. He should have been lurking in a doorway across the street. But it's hard to lurk when you weigh two-twenty without any fat around your middle, and Harrigan had given it up long ago.

Harrigan was a very unorthodox detective, which, perhaps in a measure, explained his success. That and a good deal of common sense, plus a lack of fear made him West Coast's most valued operative.

The girl paid no attention to him at all. She paid her bill, went out and got into a cab. Harrigan got into a second cab and told the driver to follow the girl.

If she knew she was being tailed, she gave no sign. The cab deposited her before a swanky apartment on Sunset. She went past the uniformed doorman and disappeared inside.

Harrigan climbed from his cab a quarter of a block away. There was roll to his gait as if he had spent some time at sea. He said good morning to the doorman, although it was past five in the afternoon, and went amiably into the lobby.

There was a girl at the switchboard, and the elevator was just closing. Harrigan watched the indicator climb in its

bronze half-circle. It paused at the figure five, then came down again.

The girl at the switchboard looked up and her quick eyes appraised Harrigan's coat, his hat and his general appearance.

"You wished to see someone?" she asked.

Harrigan gave her his most Irish grin, a little abashed, like the small boy who had just bathed the cat.

"No," he said. "I made a bet with my wife. We were driving past a minute ago and we saw a girl come in. She thought it was Barbara French, the actress. I said it wasn't, and she made me come in to find out."

HIS hand appeared from his pocket and there was a bill in it. His blue eyes smiled at her appealingly as if telling her that he knew it was silly, but she must remember that wives could be troublesome.

She returned his smile when she saw the bill.

"Your wife loses," she said. "That was Miss Walker and she is not in pictures."

Harrigan ambled out, leaving the bill on the edge of the switchboard. His cab took him to a drug store on the strip. He went into a phone booth and dialed a number with a forefinger that was almost too big for the small round holes.

He got his connection.

"Mr. Gaudel? Harrigan," he said. "Yeah, she just went to earth, Park Hall Apartments, fifth floor. She's using the name of Walker. It's up to you to get in yourself."

He replaced the phone, sighing heavily. He liked the yellow-haired girl very much indeed, and he didn't like Mr. Gaudel at all. But Mr. Gaudel was his principal and Mr. Gaudel was paying the West Coast Agency fifty dollars a day and expenses for his services.

That was the trouble, detectives weren't supposed to like or dislike people. They weren't supposed even to think about it. They were just so many gadgets on the wheels of investigation,

like nuts on a Ford car.

He went out into the street and watched the sun sink slowly behind the roof tops of Beverly, then he turned and walked back toward the Park Hall Apartments. He wasn't on business now. His assignment had ended when he located the place where the girl was staying and what name she was using. It had taken three days, a hundred and fifty dollars and thirty for expenses. He wished now that the expenses had run to more money, but old lynx-eye, the agency bookkeeper, would kick as it



DETECTIVE HARRIGAN

was. From the way the old goat squawked, you'd think the money came from his own pocket.

The doorman had changed when Harrigan reached the apartment. He glanced at his watch. He wondered if the whole staff changed at six. He hoped so, for he couldn't think up another story for the girl at the switchboard. He was going to do a foolish thing. He knew that it was foolish, that it would undoubtedly get him into trouble and probably lose him his job.

He went past the doorman with his head held high and an expression which said that he had just foreclosed the mortgage on the whole place. There was

a new girl at the switchboard. This one had glasses and a librarian look.

Harrigan pulled a blank envelope from his pocket, wrote "Miss Walker" across its face in a round, flowing script and handed it to her. The girl took it, barely glancing at him, swiveled to a row of pigeon-holes behind her and stuck it into the one marked 515.

When she turned back, Harrigan no longer was beside the desk. He had rounded the pillar and slid into the elevator.

"Five," he told the Filipino, and the car shot upward.

The door of 515 looked solid and uninviting. He hesitated. It wasn't too late to back out now, but it would be too late in a minute.

The hesitation was momentary. A Harrigan never retreated, especially when a yellow-haired girl seemed to be in trouble. He raised one big-knuckled hand and beat it gently against the panel.

He stood there, shifting uncertainly from one big foot to the other. He was almost afraid for that door to open. He tried to frame what he was going to say.

BUT it didn't open, not at once. He almost moved away down the hall. Then he heard a noise behind him and turning, saw the yellow-haired girl coming along the hall.

She paused at sight of him and then came slowly forward.

"Were you looking for me?"

"Yes, Miss Walker," he said. "I have a message for you."

Her brows went up and the look of uncertainty spread across her face. He knew what she was thinking. Her name wasn't Miss Walker. She wasn't a "Miss" at all, and no one was supposed to know that she was staying at the Park Hall Apartments under the name of Walker.

"All right," she told him. "What is the message?"

His Celtic smile lit up the broad, ir-

regular features.

"It's very private, Mrs.—I mean Miss Walker. I'd rather not give it to you in a hallway." He was leaning backward a little, his big shoulders resting against her door. He dropped one hand to the knob and turned it idly as he spoke. The latch clicked over, and his weight pushed the door inward. It hadn't been locked.

Harrigan almost fell. He made a wild pawing gesture and his fingers caught the door jamb just in time to save him. He struggled upright and grinned sheepishly.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to bust in."

He turned and glanced idly at the inner hall. Then his big body stiffened and the half embarrassed smile wiped away from his lips.

A man lay in the hall, just beyond the range of the open door. He lay on his back, his face turned upward for Harrigan to see. It was Mr. Gaudel.

The girl sensed the change in Harrigan. From where she stood, his big body blocked her view, and she could not see that the inner hall had an occupant.

"What's the matter?" She sounded nervous.

Harrigan did not answer. He took two long strides into the apartment and knelt at Gaudel's side. He knew the man was dead the minute he touched him.

It wasn't that the body was cold. It was still warm, but as he touched the coat, it fell open, showing the gaping blood-rimmed hole in the vest just above the heart. Only by a miracle could a man live with such a wound, and Harrigan well knew that the age of miracles was past.

He sat back on his heels and spoke sharply to the girl.

"Better shut the door. We don't need an audience."

She had come forward and was standing over him. Her face was very white, save where the make-up made crimson patches. She did not argue, but turning, closed the door, and Harrigan heard her shoot the night latch into place.

Then she came back to where he still

squatted at the dead man's side.

"Is he—" She couldn't finish.

Harrigan nodded.

"Very." His tone told nothing, but his eyes were asking her a question which she recognized and answered immediately.

"I wasn't here," she said quickly. "I went to the roof. I was there this morning, taking a sun bath, and I left my book."

His eyes dropped to her empty hands. They were nice hands, and Harrigan noted that she wore no rings. Well, you couldn't expect a woman who was hiding from her husband to wear her wedding ring. But there was no book, either, and she read his look.

"It wasn't there," she explained. "Someone must have taken it."

He rose, and there was no stiffness in the action.

"I hope that someone saw you," he said.

SHE didn't pretend to misunderstand his meaning.

"They didn't," she admitted and her brows twisted a little with thought. Some of the color had come back into her face, and there was no sign of grief there. If Harrigan hadn't known that the man on the floor was her husband, he'd have thought that Gaudel must be a stranger. "I have no alibi."

He was thoughtful, speaking more to himself than to her.

"Few people do, when innocent," he said. "You didn't kill him, huh?"

"I most certainly didn't."

Harrigan sighed. "A lot of people are going to think that you did," he told her. "People like to think that pretty girls do bad things. It improves their egos because most of them aren't pretty."

His words brought color to her face. "Who are you?" she asked. "What was the message you had for me?"

He said, "The name is Harrigan, plain Joe Harrigan. If you paid more attention to things around you, you'd have

noticed me before. I'm a detective and I've been trailing you."

"A detective?" She caught her lower lip between white teeth. "Trailing me?"

He nodded. "For him." He pointed to the still figure on the floor. "He paid West Coast Agency fifty bucks a day to find out where you were living."

She considered his words.

"And what message did he send you here with?" she wanted to know.

Harrigan shook his head.

"You've got it wrong," he answered. "The message was my own idea. I found out where you were staying and called Gaudel. That was what I was paid to do. But then I got to thinking that it was a dirty trick, so I came up to warn you. I didn't like Gaudel the first time I met him."

She was very serious. "I wish I had your foresight, Mr. Huntington—"

"Harrigan," he corrected her. "Everyone gets it wrong."

"Harrigan, then. But I wouldn't have gotten into a lot of trouble if I had known. He wasn't much of a husband."

Harrigan was embarrassed. He had a quaint, old-fashioned notion that family affairs were private and no place for outsiders. He knew that he should walk out, but another look at the girl made him hesitate.

After all, she and her husband had been quarreling in the newspapers for months. Their affairs couldn't be called private by any stretch of imagination.

"Look," he said, "this isn't my business, see, but if I hadn't called Gaudel, he wouldn't have come up here and got killed, so I feel kind of responsible. Better let me stand by."

Her eyes thanked him, and he turned, stepped across the body and moved to the phone. He called the sheriff's substation, explaining to the girl that the apartment house was in the county strip and therefore not under the jurisdiction of the city police.

When he got the substation, he asked for Thomas and told him to come over and get a dead man. Then he hung up.

"This isn't going to be nice," he said. "And the newspapers are going to say a lot of things."

Her smile was weak. "I'm used to that," she told him. "The papers have been taking pot shots at me for three years."

II

DEPUTY SHERIFF Gar Thomas had a long face with a horse-like look about it. He came in with four men and asked questions in a sing-song voice as if he were practising for a part in a Chinese tragedy.

After the girl had told her story, he pulled Harrigan to one side.

"Come on, give."

Harrigan gave. He explained that he had been trailing the girl, trying to locate where she was staying for Gaudel.

"You know all about her, of course," he said. "Everyone who reads the papers knows all about the Gaudels and their little troubles."

Thomas shook his head. "I never read the papers unless my name is in them. Come on, tell me."

Harrigan shrugged. "Okay. The girl inside is Ray Gaudel. Three years ago she was one of the best dancers in town, with plenty of money, a good job, and a bright future. Then she met Ed Gaudel.

"Ed invented the name playboy. His family came from Kansas or somewhere like that and had half the dough in the world. Ed has a brother, Morton. Morton is older and steady. He runs about a hundred apartment houses around town. This joint is one of them. The family kicked like mad when Ed wanted to marry a dancer, so he and Ray hopped a plane and had the knot tied in Yuma. It was a three-page scandal. The father cut Ed off with a nickel, or maybe three cents. The girl went back to work, dancing in pictures, and Ed went on playing the town, only now he was spending her dough instead of his dad's.

Nice picture, huh?"

Thomas was unmoved. "Go on."

Harrigan shrugged. "They had a kid, a boy. Ed Gaudel's mother died and by her will left one million dollars to the boy. He's two, and whoever takes care of him gets the income from that million.

"Last year, two companies in which the Gaudel tribe had a lot of money tied up failed. The old man and Morton were hard pressed, their apartment houses were mortgaged. They could have used that million.

"In the meantime, Ed Gaudel and Ray separated, and Ray got the kid. But the Gaudels started a court fight to get control of him. So Ray disappeared.

"Our agency located her four days ago. She didn't have the kid with her at the little hotel she was using, so we figured she had another place somewhere. I tailed her, and she ran to cover here. I called Gaudel, and that's the story."

Thomas nodded.

"So he came up to see her," he said, "and she blew a hole in his vest. Sad, very sad. But I never trust blondes."

"Now listen." Harrigan was getting red-faced. "I called you because I thought that, of all the muggs at the sheriff's office, you might have some sense. As sure as my name is Harrigan, that girl didn't kill Gaudel, although if she had, I wouldn't blame her.

"You heard her say that she wasn't here, that she was up on the roof. Well, Gaudel hadn't been dead long when I walked in. His body wasn't cold, and in the time between my phone call to him and when I found him, he didn't have much more than just time enough to get here."

Thomas was not impressed.

"Look," he said, "who are you working for—Gaudel or the dame?"

"I'm not working for anyone, stupid," Harrigan answered. "I'm just trying to help."

"Then how did you happen to be here?"

IT WAS a question that Harrigan had been dreading from the first. He stalled for an instant, then lied.

"I just came up to see if Gaudel had found her all right. That would have ended the case for us."

Thomas wasn't satisfied. Harrigan could tell by his look. He added:

"Look, pal. The little lady didn't shoot, see, but if she had, what would she have done with the gun?"

"She probably took it up to the roof and tossed it away," Thomas said.

"Or stuffed it under a cushion on the divan," a voice said behind them. Turning, they saw one of Thomas' assistants carrying a .38 carefully wrapped in a handkerchief.

The deputy pounced on the gun.

"Where'd you find that?"

"At the end of the couch," the man said. "There are no prints. At least, there don't seem to be. Someone wiped them off, but look." He turned the gun sideways, and they saw engraved on the metal:

Ray from Ed. Don't ever use this on me.

The deputy laughed harshly. "Looks like Gaudel was a prophet," he said. "I'll bet, when he walked in and found himself facing her with that gun in her fist, he wished he'd never given it to her."

"There's a flock of newspaper men outside," his assistant informed him.

Thomas growled, "Chase them—no, wait. I'll talk to them." He turned and went out.

Harrigan went back into the front room. The girl was sitting in a chair beside the big front window, staring out at the dark sky. She turned as Harrigan came in and gave him a wisp of a smile, which faded almost as soon as it had appeared.

He cleared his throat. "Look, Ray," he said, "they found your gun, the one Gaudel gave you. That makes it bad."

"My gun!" She showed surprise. "But, Mr. Harrigan, I didn't have any gun here. The only one I ever owned was

one that Ed gave me shortly after we were married. He was a nut on shooting, a swell shot, and he thought I ought to learn. But I was scared to death of it. I only fired it twice in my life."

He looked down at her, and her gray-blue eyes met his appealingly. Harrigan took a deep breath.

"Boy," he said, "either I'm the prize sucker or you're telling the truth. I don't know which and right at this moment I don't seem to care. You're behind the eight ball and you need a lawyer, bad. Know one?"

She nodded. "Yes. Phil Scott."

Harrigan blew out his cheeks thoughtfully.

"Is he any good?"

"He's one of the trustees of my son's estate," she said.

Harrigan shook his head. "Ixnay. You want a lawyer that never even heard of the Gaudels. This Scott is out."

"You've got it wrong, Mr. Harrigan," she pleaded. "Scott is no friend of Father Gaudel or of Morton. He was Mrs. Gaudel's lawyer, and they tried to break her will. He'd fight them from dawn to breakfast."

"That," said Harrigan, "is exactly what we need. Gimme his number."

He moved to the phone just as Thomas came back into the room.

"What do you think you're doing?" The deputy's horse-face had gained two shades of color.

Harrigan was unperturbed. "I'm going to call her lawyer."

"Oh, no, you're not." Thomas reached out one hand and planted it on Harrigan's shoulder. Harrigan reached up, caught the wrist and without apparent effort, removed the hand.

"Don't paw me," he warned. "I don't like it." He turned without another word and went over to the phone.

SCOTT sounded excited when Harrigan told him what had happened and said that he would be right over. Harrigan hung up and went back to the girl.

There was a disturbance at the door and two men came in. Harrigan recognized them from newspaper pictures. He sucked thoughtfully at his lower lip. The girl stiffened and rose slowly to her feet.

Harrigan muttered, "Take it easy, beautiful, I'm right behind you."

One of the men was old. He walked with a cane and his slight form was bent as if the weight of years was too much for his frail shoulders. He paused in front of the girl and shook a bony fist under her little nose.

"Murderess!" he cackled. "Murderess! You'll hang for this if it takes every dollar I have."

The girl did not move. Her eyes had deepened until they looked almost black in the smooth whiteness of her face.

Harrigan stepped between them. "Take it easy, Grampaw. Calling names never got anyone anywhere."

The old man stared at him for a full minute from beneath heavy white brows. His eyes, despite the multitude of wrinkles surrounding them, were still sharp and very shrewd. Anger glinted in them as he raised his heavy cane.

"Get back, get out of the way!" he shouted and swung the cane at Harrigan's head. Harrigan caught the descending stick in one large hand and wrenched it from the old man's grasp. The old man would have fallen had not Harrigan caught his arm.

Morton Gaudel was a powerful man. The thick-lensed glasses he wore gave him a deceptive appearance of weakness, which was belied by his roar as he charged forward.

"Take your hands off my father!"

He grabbed the detective's shoulders with both hands, meaning to spin him around, but something happened so rapidly that none of the watchers could follow the action. Harrigan turned as Morton grabbed him. His big body shifted sideways so that Gaudel was behind him, then he caught the man's right wrist and flung him over his shoulder. The next instant Gaudel was lying on

the rug, flat on his back, with the breath knocked from his body.

It all took place so rapidly that the sheriff's men had had no chance to move.

Harrigan dusted off his palms, stooped and lifted the prostrate man by the coat collar.

"Let that be a lesson to you," he said as he hoisted him to his feet.

Gar Thomas cleared his throat angrily.

"Where the devil do you think you are?" he demanded of Harrigan. "You can't go around tossing people over your head that way."

A loud argument at the door prevented Harrigan's answering. The dark, slender man who pushed his way into the room scowled at the two Gaudels and then went directly to the girl.

"Ray—" his tone was so low that it barely reached Harrigan's ears—"this is terrible. You didn't kill Ed, did you?"

"Of course not." Her voice was steady, composed.

The man smiled, and it seemed to light up his dark features. Harrigan made a note that he was handsome and a nice guy besides. He wondered vaguely why that thought made him uncomfortable. Why shouldn't the girl's mouthpiece be a good guy? He listened with only half his attention while she explained to Scott what had happened. Then Harrigan found himself shaking the lawyer's hand.

"Glad to know you, Harrigan." Scott's voice had a hearty sound as if he really were pleased. "Ray needed help, and you certainly gave it to her."

"She'll need more help," Harrigan told him in a low voice, "more help than I can give here."

"She'll get it," Scott assured him, and went over to see Thomas.

HARRIGAN could see them arguing at the far side of the room, then Scott went to the phone and talked a long time. Finally he came back with a worried look on his face.

"I've just been talking to the D.A."

he told the girl, "and it's going to be tough. He's coming over here himself, and I think I can arrange it so that you'll be admitted to bail."

The color faded from her face. "You mean that I'm going to be held for murder?"

He shook his head. "Not that, but he feels that you are a material witness and that you should be kept in the jurisdiction of the court. The bail will probably be high, around ten thousand, depending on the judge, and I don't know where I can raise that much. If you know someone—"

She brightened. "Hilly Wright will put it up."

Harrigan frowned and moved toward the door. He guessed that he was no longer needed here. He'd have to talk Thomas into letting him go, but with Scott taking care of the girl and Hilly Wright putting up her bond—The name of Wright made him frown deeper. What did a nice girl like Ray Gaudel know about Hilly Wright, the gambler?

III

JOE HARRIGAN was catching it. That it was coming over the phone made it easier to take, since all he had to do was hold the receiver away from his ear to cut down the volume of his chief's angry words.

He gathered that the Gaudels, father and son, had complained about his actions; that the sheriff's office had also complained; and that the district attorney had called and threatened to lift his license. All in all, he decided that he was not very popular. He replaced the phone and glanced at the watch on his broad wrist. It was a quarter after twelve, and he knew that he should be asleep.

He went toward the bedroom door, intending to turn in, but he had not reached it when the apartment buzzer sounded. He hesitated, wondering who could be calling at that hour. It certainly could not be a friend, since he seemed to have no friends left, and then he

thought of the Gaudel girl.

Perhaps she needed him, after all. Perhaps she had come over to thank him for what he had done that afternoon and evening. Perhaps— He turned, and his long legs carried him into the small entry hall.

He reached down and pulled the door open, a welcoming smile on his big face. But it wasn't the girl. It was the Gaudels.

Harrigan's smile died, and he started to close the door, but Morton Gaudel's hand-sewed shoe was in the way. For

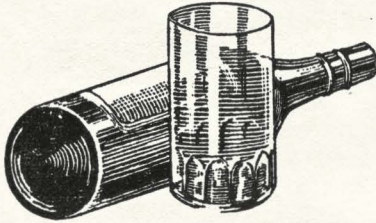
and he had never in his thirty-one years seen a more perfect example.

"You already have," he said sourly. "I had just finished talking to my boss when you came."

Morton Gaudel's smile was thin and satisfied.

"That was just by way of warning," he explained. "We really did not put the pressure on, you know. We just made a complaint."

Harrigan said nothing. He knew that these men had come to him for some purpose and he wanted to find out what



DOWN THE HATCH!

Sewickley, Pa., detectives who raided a cockfight had to drop charges of illegal liquor sales because the 102-man audience drank up all the evidence. When the detectives appeared, the onlookers rushed to a makeshift bar and drank up all the whiskey and beer before the officers could halt the procedure.

just an instant they stared at each other. They were almost of a size and could easily have worn each other's clothes. But while there was a line of flabby fat around Gaudel's middle, there was no corresponding bulge on Harrigan, whose stomach could have done service as a washboard. What covered Harrigan's big bones was muscle.

"Well," he said, and his tone sounded anything but inviting.

"We want to talk to you." Morton Gaudel sounded nervous, and the pinch glasses which rode the high bridge of his aquiline nose threatened to drop from their perch. "I'll tell you that you won't lose by giving us ten minutes."

Harrigan made up his mind fast.

"What have I got to lose?" he queried and stood aside for them to enter.

They came into the front room but they did not sit down. Morton Gaudel cleared his throat uneasily.

"I suppose you realize that we're in a position to cause you a great deal of trouble," he said.

Harrigan did not like stuffed shirts

it was. Nor did they keep him waiting, for the older Gaudel at once took the offensive.

"My son Edward hired your agency to locate my grandson. We think that you have located him and we would like to know where he is."

THE detective's eyes were bleak, but his voice was toneless. "Keep talking."

"We'll pay you five hundred for the information," Morton said, "and your agency need never know anything about it."

"No!"

His two visitors exchanged a quick glance, and the son's face hardened.

"Now listen, Harrigan," he bellowed, "I told you before that we are in a position to cause you a great deal of trouble and I meant exactly what I said. We don't want to be forced to do that. I'll raise the offer to one thousand dollars, but that is our top figure."

Harrigan shook his head. "I'm almost sorry that I don't know where the kid is

because I'd get a lot of fun out of telling you to go to the devil. Now, get out of here, you crook, before I let myself go and heave you out on your slimy neck."

They went.

Harrigan was still angry when the door buzzer sounded again five minutes later. He stomped into the entry, thinking that his unwelcome visitors had returned. This time, it was the girl who stood there. Harrigan's knees went a little weak at sight of her. She looked lovely, with her fair hair shining against her dark coat. She slipped in and quickly shut the door.

"Mr. Harrigan," she said, and his name had never sounded so nice, "I need help."

He took her small hand in his big palm and smiled down at her.

"You came to the right place, honey. Who is it you want me to kill?"

The strained look left her eyes, and she smiled. Then she turned very sober.

"It isn't that," she said anxiously, "but I'm afraid for my son. He's so little, and none of this is his fault. But they want to get hold of him. He's worth a million to them."

Harrigan said, "Who?" although he knew the answer before he asked.

"The Gaudels," she answered. "They would stop at nothing. You'd think that it would make a difference to them that my son is their own flesh and blood, but it doesn't. All they want is to get control of him so that they'll have the income from his trust fund until he is twenty-one."

"But what good will it do them to get possession of the child if you are his guardian?" asked the detective.

"They'll bring action in court. They're trying to show that I'm not a fit person to have him in my charge." She sounded bitter. "As if *they* were fit. But as long as they don't know where he is or whether he's in the jurisdiction of the court, they can do nothing. That's what Phil Scott tells me."

Harrigan's generous mouth tightened a little at mention of the lawyer's name,

then it relaxed, and he asked:

"And what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go get the boy," she said. "I want you to put him in a safe place somewhere and keep him there until I let you know. I don't even want to know where he is because if I'm summoned into court, I want to be able to swear that I don't know where he is."

Harrigan frowned at her, and she saw the look.

"I know what you're thinking, Mr. Harrigan. You're thinking that I am an unnatural woman, that I'm ready to send my son off with someone who is little more than a stranger, but that isn't so. It's like tearing the heart from my body to do this, but I'm desperate. I haven't any other place to turn. I'm being watched. I can't go to him. I may be arrested for murder at any time, and in that case the court would certainly take him from me. It's either you or Phil Scott, and they would think that he had him. They aren't apt to think of you."

Harrigan opened his mouth to tell her about the visit which he had just received from the Gaudels, father and son, but changed his mind. She had enough to worry about without that.

"All right," he said, "I guess I can't get in any deeper than I am. Where's the kid?"

SHE ALMOST wept with relief. Had she been the crying kind, Harrigan would not have known how to handle her. He was glad she didn't cry.

"All right," he said. "All right. Take it easy, and everything will be okay."

She fumbled her purse open, found a wad of money and thrust it into his hand. He tried to tell her that this wasn't necessary, but she would not listen.

"Take it," she urged. "It really belongs to Jack—my boy, I mean. It's his money and it should be used in taking care of him."

Harrigan did not argue further. "All right, where's the kid?"

"In the chambermaid's room in the building where I live," she said. "I didn't

tell the police the whole truth. That's where I was when my husband was murdered—in her room. I leave the baby there whenever I go out, but I couldn't tell the police that or the court would have known where he was."

Harrigan nodded. "Was the maid there at the time?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, I still haven't an alibi. No one was there. I talked to the maid on the phone a while ago. She knows that you are coming, and I've written a note. Here." She thrust a folded piece of paper into his big hand. "Good luck, Mr. Harrigan, and God bless you."

He watched her go without making any effort either to speak or to stop her. When she had gone, he put on his hat and went down to the garage for his battered car.

Fog made long fuzzy stringers around the street lamps as he drove from the garage and turned west.

IV

WHEN Harrigan entered the maid's neat little room, he could see that she was nervous and upset. She heaved an audible sigh of relief as she put the blanket-wrapped, sleeping child into Harrigan's arms.

"It's worth my job," she whispered as she let him out the back way, "if Mr. Gaudel ever finds out what I did."

"He won't from me," Harrigan assured her and walked to his car. As he laid the blanketed bundle on the seat, the baby stirred. Harrigan prayed the child would not wake up and begin to cry. He was afraid of babies and he was sweating profusely as he drove across town.

South of Jefferson he turned into the driveway of a modest white stucco house. He went around to the rear and knocked heavily on the screen. A man's sleepy voice came out of the darkness, demanding to know who the hell he was and what the hell he wanted.

"It's Joe Harrigan," he called. "Hurry up. I've got a baby out here and from

the feel, I'd say that he needs attention."

A light came on inside the house and the kitchen door was opened. Al Rinkle and his wife Mary stared open-mouthed at Harrigan.

"Gimme that," said the woman and took the baby from his arms.

Harrigan gladly gave up his bundle. Rinkle squinted at him thoughtfully. He was a small man, sandy-haired and nondescript. He worked for West Coast Agency occasionally when they needed an extra man, which was not often. The rest of the time he spent at odd jobs, picking up a dollar here or there where he could get it.

"Who's the kid?"

Harrigan said shortly, "The less you know about it, Al, the better. You get fifty dollars a week for every week he's here. I figured that Mary would know about kids, having two of her own." He drew the wad of money from his pocket, separated two twenties and a ten and thrust them into Rinkle's hand.

The man was none too anxious to take it.

"You didn't kidnap it, did you?"

Harrigan looked hurt. "Who, me? I wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Well, I dunno," Rinkle told him. "I don't trust you, Joe Harrigan, and I don't want any trouble."

"Did I ever get you into trouble?" Harrigan demanded. "That kid was put in my keeping, and right away I thought of you. I knew you could use the dough and—"

"Don't do me any favors," Rinkle interrupted. "The last time you helped me, I did thirty days for contempt of court."

Harrigan grinned in spite of himself. "Could I help it if the judge had a tummy-ache that morning—"

He was interrupted by a happy cry from the woman.

"My but he's cute," she purred, as she dressed the child.

The baby was cute, all right, with blond curls and blue eyes like its mother. He laughed and extended his arms to

Harrigan. The big detective only became more embarrassed at this and ducked out as fast as he could.

HE DROVE back to his garage. He was so tired that his big feet seemed to drag as he went down the hill to his apartment house. He fumbled for his key—but he didn't need it. The door was opened from the inside, and a pleasant voice told him to come in.

The voice was a lot more pleasant than the gun in the man's hand or the face above the gun. The face had a little scar on the left side just above the corner of the thin-lipped mouth. The scar drew up the mouth a little, giving the appearance of a mocking smile.

"I said come in." The voice was not so pleasant now, and the gun moved in a little jerky motion to emphasize the words.

Harrigan stepped in and raised his hands. He was searched. Then the man motioned him into the other room.

Hilly Wright was seated in Harrigan's favorite chair. He was a slight man with fair hair and eyebrows so light you couldn't see them against the pronounced pinkness of his skin. His clothes were plain and carefully tailored, and he wore no jewelry, save a large square ruby on his right hand.

The ruby glowed redly in the lamp-light as Hilly raised a glass to his lips and drank. He lowered the glass and nodded.

"Hello, Harrigan. You buy good liquor."

Harrigan stared at the gambler without change of expression. Almost disinterestedly he asked, "What do you mean, breaking in here?"

"The door was unlocked," Wright said with a smile, "but never mind that. Where's the kid?"

Harrigan didn't know whether the man was lying or not. He had always been careless about doors. But that wasn't important now.

"What kid?" he asked.

Wright's face tightened. "Don't make

us get unpleasant, Joe. I always hate to level on a pal."

"You're not my pal," Harrigan told him. "I don't pal with the likes of you. When I play, I like the cards to come from the top of the deck."

Wright straightened, and his mask of smiling good humor had slipped away.

"Look, punk. I'll take no lip from you. I'm a business man and I run that business my way. A girl I know, a girl who used to dance at my spot, wound up behind the eight ball tonight and squawked for bail money. I put up ten grand for her, and I don't put up that kind of dough for my own sister if I'm not certain that she'll be in court when the judge swings the gavel.

"This girl has a kid. I'm pretty sure that she wouldn't run out on that kid, so if I keep him, I'm certain she'll be around and my ten grand bail won't be forfeited. I want that kid. He won't get hurt, and I'll see that he's well treated, but I'll also know that his mama will play me no tricks."

Harrigan had to moisten his dry lips. He knew Hilly Wright and he knew a lot of things Wright had done. The gambler would think nothing of busting up the face of a private cop if it served his purpose.

"I won't pretend that I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "But you got it all wrong. I don't know where the Gaudel kid is."

Wright took one step forward and hit him squarely in the mouth. The gambler's arm moved with the speed of a rapier, and the blow went home before Harrigan even knew it was coming. He'd been standing with his feet wide apart, so it didn't knock him down. But his teeth felt loose, and the salty taste of blood was in his mouth.

He tried to swing but the scar-faced man behind him ordered him to stop.

Harrigan let his muscles relax but a dull anger was slowly burning through him.

"That's for lying," Wright told him. "We talked to the maid at the apart-

ment house, and she described you. Where's the kid?"

Harrigan lied again. "I turned him over to his mother like she asked. I don't know where she went."

"Louie."

The scar-faced man stepped forward. "Yeah, Boss?"

"This guy doesn't understand," Hilly Wright sad. "Maybe he'd understand better if you worked him over with the gun."

"Yeah." Louie sounded pleased. "Sure, Boss. He'll sing plenty when I finish with him. I—"

HE STOPPED, for someone was knocking loudly on the outside door. The men exchanged glances, then Wright said to Harrigan in a savage low voice, "Who the hell is that?"

Harrigan shook his head. "I don't know—maybe Thomas from the sheriff's office. He called a while ago and sounded riled about something, said that he was coming up."

Wright swore under his breath. "We don't want trouble. Get out there and tell whoever it is to go away. No tricks, either. Louie will have a gun on you."

Harrigan did not answer. He moved across the little entry hall, Then, taking a deep breath, he ripped the door wide open, plunged through and slammed it shut behind him.

He piled into Phil Scott and almost knocked the attorney off his feet. The wall saved them both as they staggered clear across the passageway. Harrigan was the first to recover. He grabbed Scott's arm and yanked him around the corner of the hall.

"Got a gun?" he demanded without turning.

Scott had recovered some of his breath. "I must say, this is quite a reception. I—"

Harrigan cut him short. "Got a gun? There's some fresh guys in my apartment who think they have the world by the tail. I'd like to show them they haven't."

The lawyer did not answer, but drew a flat automatic from his pocket and slipped it into Harrigan's hand.

The detective slid around the corner and moved toward his door, keeping his big body pressed tightly against the wall. He was as silent as a cat.

When he reached the door, he eased it open very slowly and peered around it. Nothing happened, and he slid inside. After a few minutes, Scott cautiously followed him.

Harrigan was standing in the center of the small kitchenette, looking disgusted.

"They thought you were the cops," he explained, "and went out the back way. I'll have to settle with them later."

He bolted the kitchen entrance, returned Scott's gun and told him to go back to the sitting room. Harrigan made drinks before joining the lawyer.

"What's on your mind that you're wandering around so late?" he began.

Scott apologized. "It's Ray," he explained. "She's in worse trouble than she thinks. I'd never had gotten her out on bail tonight, but the Gaudels talked to the district attorney."

Harrigan showed his surprise. "The Gaudels! You mean they helped her get out?" He sounded as if he didn't believe it.

Scott nodded. "Yes. You see, they aren't really interested in Ray. What they want is to get custody of her son so that they can control his money. They don't know where the boy is and they figured that if Ray was out on bail, she might lead them to the child."

Harrigan sipped his drink.

"But she gave them the slip," Scott continued. "She came to me and I suggested that she see you. I thought you might be a good one to take care of the boy."

"So now," said Harrigan, "you want to know what I did with him."

SCOFF shook his head. "That's the last thing I want to know. If they get me up in court, I want to be able to swear

that I haven't an idea as to his whereabouts. I came up to see you about something else.

"Ray told the sheriff's men that she was up on the roof at the time her husband was killed. I know that she was down in the maid's apartment, but we can't tell the police that for obvious reasons.

"What I want to see is if, by switching the time around a little, we can't make your alibi for her so strong that it will clear her at the hearing."

Harrigan puffed out his lips.

"Look, Scott, I'm not getting sore, see, and the reason I'm not is because I figure that you're in love with the gal. I can't blame you for that, either, but I'm not lying about a thing like this.

"I figured at first that it was just a mean, low-down husband hounding a pretty wife, so I butted in. But then, here comes murder and musses things all up. No, pal, I've told my story once and it will have to stay that way. It's too late to change, but I'll help any other way I can."

Scott nodded. "I see your point and I can't blame you. The only thing I can do is thank you for the help you've given Ray already."

He rose to leave. Harrigan followed and escorted him out, making certain that the spring lock was in place and would snap shut. He fumbled in his pocket for his keys. They weren't there, and he couldn't remember what he had done with them. He shrugged and went to the desk.

As he took his gun from the drawer, he glanced at the case where he kept a spare that had been given him by a friend. The case was empty.

He swore under his breath. The boy who cleaned the apartment was always lifting things. He'd see the kid in the morning. Now for some sleep.

V

THE sound of the apartment buzzer jarred him into full wakefulness. Shiv-

ering, he got into robe and slippers, caught up his gun and padded toward the entry.

Outside it was just beginning to get light.

He opened the door cautiously and blinked when he saw two men in the hall. One was a detective from the homicide bureau named Sterns; the other was Thomas.

Harrigan backed out of the way to let them in and closed the door.

"You guys are up early."

"I haven't been in bed," Thomas said sourly. He implied that Harrigan was responsible for his sleepless state.

Sterns peered around the apartment as if he expected to find Dillinger's ghost hiding under a chair.

Harrigan looked from one to the other. He wasn't in such a pleasant mood himself.

"Well, let's have it," he said, trying to be patient.

Sterns stopped searching the desk.

"Know a guy named Rinkle?"

Fear, like a cold knife, slashed through Harrigan's body.

"Sure."

"He's dead," said Sterns, "and his wife figures that it's your fault. She said you brought a kidnaped kid out there last night for them to keep. A couple of hours later, Rinkle heard a noise in the kid's room, went in for a look and stopped a bullet with his belly. He didn't live long after that."

Slow anger was rising in Harrigan. With all his faults, Rinkle had been a friend.

"And the kid?" he asked through his teeth.

"The kid's gone," Thomas put in, "and you've got yourself into a swell spot."

"Nuts."

"Nuts nothing." Thomas was remembering his sleepless night. "You didn't play the game with us. I know who that kid is. We've been asking questions since Rinkle was killed, and the maid at the apartment house talked. You'd better watch your step."

Harrigan's smile was deceptive.

"Now look. I haven't done a thing. The girl asked me to find a home for the kid, and I found one. I don't know who killed Rinkle, but you can bet all the chips on the table that I'm going to find out. He was a pal of mine and he got his trying to do me a service."

"Big man talk," Thomas sneered. "How do we know that the girl asked you to take the kid? How do we know that you weren't playing a little game of your own, getting ready to hold the Gaudels up for a wad of change? We've talked to them, too. They say that you called them last night and had them come over here. That when they got here, you offered to find the child for them for ten grand."

Harrigan made a bitter mouth. He had been about to tell Thomas about the Gaudels' visit, but they had beat him to it, using their own version. He knew that Thomas was not kidding. He was in a tough spot, and it might be even tougher than it seemed.

WHAT if the blond girl were playing him for a sucker? What if she had shot her husband? What if she wanted to get rid of her child? After all, she was the baby's nearest relative; and if he should die, she'd inherit the million from him, now that her husband was dead.

She was already under suspicion in her husband's murder, and if anything happened to the baby while he was in her care, she'd have a time getting free. But the baby hadn't been in her care. Both the maid and Scott would swear that Harrigan had taken him, and Mrs. Rinkle would back them up.

Harrigan began to sweat a little. If the girl were pulling a fast one— But his mind refused to believe it. A nice girl like her— Harrigan didn't altogether trust his judgment on women. It had played him false before. There was that fan dancer who had said she was single, and—

Thomas' voice recalled his straying thoughts.

"Come on, stop stalling."

"I'm not stalling." Harrigan sounded angry. "Gimme time to wake up, will you? I can't think when I'm half asleep."

"You can think on the way to the D.A.'s office," Thomas said unkindly. "Come on, get your clothes on."

The district attorney wasn't glad to see them. Harrigan grinned a little to himself. It was a tribute to the importance of the Gaudels that the great man had dragged himself out of bed at this hour.

The district attorney was short and pompous and important. He ruffled through some papers on his desk and cleared his throat.

"Your record is anything but clean, Harrigan, but you've never been mixed up in anything as serious as kidnaping before."

Harrigan did not answer. He'd learned long ago when it was wise to keep his mouth shut. The district attorney went on:

"I've communicated with the federal authorities, and we have also issued an order for Mrs. Gaudel to be brought in. Where is she?"

Harrigan shook his head. "I wouldn't know," he said. "Why don't you ask her lawyer?"

The district attorney nodded. "He's coming down here at nine. Now, I want to warn you that you are in very serious trouble."

"I'll say he is," agreed Thomas who had come into the office. "This your gun?" He laid it on the desk before Harrigan.

Harrigan picked it up and saw that it was the automatic which had been missing from its case before he went to bed.

"Yes."

Thomas was enjoying himself. "We just checked it, and the slug that killed Rinkle came from that gun. Now, Harrigan, you'd better start to talk."

Harrigan blinked. The gun had been missing. It had been taken from his apartment, but when and how? Also, why should the murderer have used his gun, unless he was trying to frame the

killing off Harrigan?

The detective could make no sense out of it.

"Where'd you find this?" he asked.

"In a case on your desk," said Thomas. "Sterns searched the joint after I brought you down."

Harrigan was thinking rapidly. The person who had stolen the gun must have returned it while he was asleep. He reviewed the people who had been in his apartment—Hilly Wright, the girl, Scott. Any one of them could have taken the gun, but to have returned it to the desk was another matter. They would have had to have a key. Well, his keys *were* missing.

Hilly Wright must have had one—unless he had been telling the truth about finding the door unlocked when Harrigan got back from Rinkle's and found him and Scarface waiting in the apartment.

Someone must have followed him to Rinkle's house. He knew that now and cursed himself for his carelessness. But cursing himself wouldn't help. He had to *do* something and he couldn't if he was going to be cooped up in a cell.

HE GLANCED down again at the automatic and was surprised to see that the clip was in place. Thomas had been in such a hurry to get up to the D.A.'s office that he hadn't removed it.

Harrigan pumped a shell into the chamber before they knew what he was doing.

"Here!" Thomas said, too late. Harrigan had backed away, covering them both.

"On your feet," he told the district attorney, "and keep still. You, Thomas, turn around and face the wall."

He took the deputy's gun. Then slipping both automatics into his pocket, he marched the men into the hall and down to the elevator. It was still early, and they saw no one save the elevator operator.

When they reached the street, he made them get into Thomas' car and drive out

North Broadway and into Elysian Park. He left them in the most deserted spot he could find. Then he drove back to Vermont Avenue and parked the car on a side street. He took a bus across town to Tenth and then a second bus, then doubled back and caught a Hollywood Boulevard car.

When he got out, Harrigan called his landlady and told her he had lost his keys. He asked her to watch his apartment closely and let no one in. Then he went to call on Wright.

Hilly Wright lived on the top floor of a Vine Street apartment house. It was a swanky building and ordinarily no one of Wright's social position would have been allowed to live there. But Wright owned the building, and the personnel were his personally chosen employees.

Harrigan knew this and chose to enter through the basement garage. No one was on duty, as it was still too early for the morning attendant, and the night man had already gone home. Harrigan rode the automatic elevator to the top and went down the long hall.

Years before he had served as a special guard at the opening of a Wright night club and had had occasion to come up here for orders. He paused before the door and gave the remembered signal—two short rings and one long one.

The door opened almost at once. Before the scar-faced man could say anything, Harrigan shoved his automatic against the man's belly. Silently he took the man's gun.

"Take me to Hilly," he said tightly.

Scarface hesitated. "He ain't up yet."

"So what?" Harrigan wanted to know.

"This is no social call."

Under the pressure of Harrigan's gun the man turned, walked across the living room and through into a bedroom. Hilly Wright stirred out of sleep as they came in, rubbed his eyes and sat up in startled surprise.

"What's this!"

The gambler wore purple silk pajamas edged with gold braid. Harrigan snickered, then became serious.

"Look, Hilly," he said, "I never kid this early in the morning. Last night you were looking for Ray Gaudel's son. An hour or so after you left my place he was kidnaped from the house of one of my pals. Did you get him?"

Hilly looked incredulous. "Listen, Harrigan, if you think you'll throw us off by coming up here with a story like that—"

"It's true, Chief," Scarface cut in. "It come over the radio not ten minutes ago. They arrested Harrigan, and he walked out with Thomas and the district attorney under his gun."

Hilly Wright was fully awake now. He swung his purple-covered legs over the edge of the bed, found his slippers and rose. When he straightened up, he was grinning.

"Snatched the D.A., huh?"

"Right out of his own office." There was awe in Scarface's voice.

Wright chuckled. "This is the best laugh I've had in years. You're quite a guy, Harrigan, but, boy, you've built a fire under yourself in this town." He sobered, and his voice changed. "So someone got the kid. How?"

Wright listened thoughtfully as Harrigan told him.

"My guess is the Gaudels," he said when the detective had finished. "Well, that lets me out. I know when something is too hot to play with. If Ray jumps her bail, I'm out ten grand, but I'd rather be out twice that than be tied in with a snatch."

Harrigan hesitated. He didn't know whether to believe Wright or not. The man would probably have acted about the same if he had taken the child, but there was nothing Harrigan could do.

"Okay," he said. "My mistake. I thought it might be you. I'm getting out. If you want to tell the cops I was here, I can't stop you."

"No. After what you've done, I'd give you a break even if I loved cops," Wright answered. "Scram. No one will turn you in from here."

Harrigan scrambled. He took a cab

out to Holmby Hills where the Gaudels occupied a huge mansion. Telling the driver to wait, he went up the steps and rang the bell.

A NEGRO houseboy answered the door. The detective gave Scott's name and said that it was urgent.

Morton Gaudel was eating breakfast on a small sun porch and asked the visitor to join him before he realized who it was. He started out of his seat and then settled back slowly as he saw the gun peeping above the top of Harrigan's pocket.

Harrigan sat down. The coffee smelled good, and he asked for some.

Gaudel did not speak until the servant had left to get china and silver. Then he said:

"You certainly have your nerve, coming here and calmly asking for breakfast."

Harrigan watched the man's face.

"You wanted me to do something last night. I wouldn't then. I will now—for ten grand."

As he spoke, his mind was working rapidly. If the Gaudels had stolen the boy, Morton would be astounded by the offer and his reaction would show in his face. At least, Harrigan had hoped that it would, but he was doomed to disappointment. Morton's face showed nothing but craftiness.

"That's too much," he said. The butler reappeared and served Harrigan's coffee. As soon as the man was gone, Gaudel said, "We'll give you two thousand."

They haggled, and for a while Harrigan thought that the Gaudels might really have the child and that Morton was putting on a poor act.

They finally agreed on thirty-five hundred. Harrigan was to deliver the boy that night.

He left the house with a distinct feeling of relief and rode his cab downtown.

From a corner drug store he called his landlady and listened carefully to what she had to say. She was very ex-

cited about something. He reassured her and hung up. Then he called Walters, the manager of the West Coast Agency.

When the manager heard Harrigan's voice, he almost exploded.

Harrigan talked fast. He told him to get in touch with his, Harrigan's, landlady at once.

"I want some information," he said, "so listen before you start bawling me out. I want to know about that trust fund for the Gaudel kid. Has his uncle taken any legal steps to try and get his fat fingers onto it? And if the kid should die, who would get it—the mother? Yeah, I'll call you back, and don't get excited every time I get my name in the papers. It'll kill you with your high blood pressure, and, yeah, one other thing—they got my name wrong again."

He hung up quickly and dialed a second number.

A girl answered and said that Mrs. Rinkle couldn't come to the phone. But Harrigan outtalked her, and Mrs. Rinkle was not long in coming.

She sounded excited when she heard who it was.

"Wait until I tell the police, just wait—"

Harrigan said desperately, "You want the guy who killed Al, don't you?"

"Yes"—she was quieter—"yes, I want him—bad."

Harrigan's voice gritted as he said, "And so do I. Al was one of my best friends, whether you believe it or not. The only way I can square things now is to get the killer. Did you see him at all?"

"Just a glimpse."

"Was he alone?"

She was silent for a moment.

"I think so. When I ran in, after Al was shot, he was going out the door with the kid. I saw him get into a car. I think he was driving himself."

"Now think carefully," Harrigan urged. "How big was he? Was he—I mean, do you think it could have been me?"

SHE ANSWERED almost at once. "I know it couldn't. When you walk through a door, you pretty well fill it. This guy didn't, even with an overcoat on."

"Thank you." Harrigan's voice had a sincere ring in it.

"Joe"—she sounded distressed—"I didn't mean what I said to the cops this morning."

"I know, sure," he answered. "I'll be around to see you pretty soon, Mary. Maybe tomorrow."

Harrigan went out to the soda fountain, drank a coke, then went back to the phone and called his chief. "Get the dope I wanted?"

He listened closely while the man at the other end of the line talked. He said, "Uh-huh," a couple of times and kept nodding his head.

"... so if the kid should turn up dead," Walters concluded, "Ray, being his mother, would get the dough."

"All right, now listen," said Harrigan and he talked at some length. "Do that and call me here." He gave the number of the pay phone to his chief. "And hurry. If it's a wrong guess, my goose is fried."

He hung up and turned around, ready to leave the booth. Two plainclothes men whom he knew had come in.

Harrigan saw them order coffee and sandwiches. He swore under his breath. It was hot and close in the booth, and it grew steadily worse. He eased the door open a little. Twice he had to turn and pretend that he was using the phone. Just as he was beginning to think that he could stand it no longer, the instrument rang. He heaved a sigh of relief.

"Any luck?" he asked his chief. He listened. "Yeah, sure, I know," he said at last. "Okay, now listen." He talked fast.

After he hung up, he called Phil Scott's office. The lawyer sounded surprised to hear his voice.

"Boy, you certainly started something," he said.

Harrigan cut him short. "Have the

cops found Ray yet?"

Scott said, "Not that I know of."

"Stow that," Harrigan said roughly. "You know where she is even if you won't admit it. Now listen, I've got to see you both. It's important. Here's what you do. Both of you get into a cab and at exactly two o'clock drive through Westlake Park on Wilshire. I'll make contact when I'm ready."

He hung up before the lawyer had a chance to answer. He looked out of the booth and saw, to his relief, that the two plainclothesmen were gone.

VI

BY TWO O'CLOCK, Harrigan was parked in a U-Drive-It in front of the Otis Art Institute on Wilshire. At three minutes past two, a cab with Phil Scott and Ray Gaudel in it went past him, headed west. He drove up behind them, after making sure that no one was trailing them, and followed almost to the corner of Highland, where he maneuvered the cab over to the curb.

"Why, pal," he said, leaning out. "Haven't seen you for a long time. Come on, ride with me."

They got out and into his car. Scott was silent; Ray Gaudel, white-faced.

"Mr. Harrigan, what have you done with my son?" she asked.

He grinned a little as he turned into Highland.

"Safe, Ray," he said, "but I'm in a mess, and you've got to help me."

She caught her breath. "You're not lying? He is safe?" she gasped.

Harrigan nodded. "Yeah, but I'm apt to go up for kidnaping him. There's only one way out."

"What's that?"

"Wait until we get to my apartment," he said.

Scott started to speak, then changed his mind. The girl was restless, uneasy. Harrigan pretended not to notice.

He pulled up in front of his apartment house, told them to get out.

"Have to get the keys from the man-

ager," he said as he led the way. "Seem to have lost mine."

He knocked at the manager's door, got the key, and they went upstairs. Inside the apartment, he whirled around.

"Now, I told you that I was in a jam," he said, speaking to the girl. "No matter what you say, the cops aren't going to believe that I was acting for you when I took your child from that maid. But if you were to fly over to Yuma and marry me—"

She caught her breath. "Marry you?"

Scott was red-faced, angry. "What are you trying to pull, Harrigan?"

Harrigan looked bland. "Nothing. Listen, Ray, I'm in a tough spot. I helped you and got into it, now it's up to you to help me. I can play rough if you don't. I can make you."

"Make me?" she said slowly.

He nodded. Sure—I've got the boy."

She didn't pretend to misunderstand. "All right," she said dully. "You win. I'll marry you. But I don't see why you should want—"

"You can't marry him, Ray," Scott said quickly. "Don't you see what he's after? If your boy should happen to be dead, you are heir to a million dollars. Now, if you marry Harrigan and something should happen to you, like falling out of the plane on the way back from Yuma, Harrigan, as your husband, would inherit that million."

Harrigan smiled. The girl looked at him, horror growing in her eyes.

"You mean—"

"He means exactly what he said," Harrigan put in, "but if you don't marry me, something will happen to your son."

Scott laughed. It was a high, shrill sound. The man's control was slipping.

"You lose, Harrigan. You shouldn't have brought her here to spring your proposition. The boy is safe, right here." He turned, crossed the room with quick strides and jerked open the closet door.

Staring unbelievably into the empty closet, he stiffened, then swung around, his lips twisted in a snarl, a gun in his hand.

"Where is he? What did you do with the boy?"

Harrigan did not appear excited.

"What made you think he was in the closet, Scott? Is it because you bound his hands and feet and put him in there to smother?"

"Why you—" There was the sound of a shot—but not from the lawyer's gun.

Scott dropped his automatic and grasping his broken wrist, stared at the kitchen door where the chief of the West Coast Agency had appeared. The wounded man turned and dashed for the door.

Harrigan stuck out one big foot, and the fleeing man was stopped, falling directly into Thomas' arms as the deputy dashed into the room.

* * * * *

RAY GAUDEL was holding her son on her lap, his fair hair against her shoulder.

"But I still don't understand."

Joe Harrigan was sleepy but he couldn't refuse her anything.

"Scott planned it all—to kill your husband, to make away with the boy and to marry you. That way he would get his hands on a million bucks. But I walked into the picture, and he decided to make me the fall guy. He suggested that you turn the kid over to me for safekeeping, didn't he?"

She nodded.

"You see," Harrigan said. "It was simple after that. He trailed your husband up to your apartment and killed him. He knew that the maid was keeping the boy, so he just waited there until I came along. Then he trailed me out to Rinkle's.

"The next thing was to get my gun. He came up to the apartment and stole my keys. I'm careless with them, mostly leave my door unlocked. Apparently I did last night, and Wright walked in.

"That threw me off for a while. I thought he might be guilty, but I couldn't figure what he would gain by killing your husband. Well, I checked with Mrs.

Rinkle and found out that the killer was a small man. That kept Wright and Scott in the picture, but it eliminated Morton Gaudel, who is my size and who had been worrying me, too.

"Then I had a bright idea down at the D.A.'s office this morning. If the guy wanted to frame me so badly that he first stole my gun, killed Rinkle with it and then brought it back to my apartment, he might hang the kid on me, too. So I called my landlady and told her to watch.

"She did and she saw Scott bring in the boy while he thought I was safe in jail. He tied up the baby and put him in the closet. As soon as Scott left, she freed the child and took him down to her apartment. She described Scott over the phone, and I knew for certain who the killer was."

Ray's eyes were fixed on him. "If you knew, why didn't you tell the police?"

Harrigan gave her a sheepish grin. "I knew it was Scott, but I couldn't be certain that you weren't in on the play. I pulled that comedy about you marrying me so that I could tell by the way you acted whether you had anything to do with his plans. Don't get sore. I had to know."

"I'm not sore," she said. "Was it all comedy about marrying me?"

Harrigan was dumb for a moment. He wasn't thinking very clearly.

"Look," he said, "you've got your wires crossed. My name is Harrigan, plain Joe Harrigan, and I'm just a big-footed private cop. You deserve the best, not a mug like me."

"I like the name." Her grin matched his. "It would be a relief to be named Harrigan. Perhaps the newspapers wouldn't bother me so much."

He got to his feet. "They always misspell it, or something," he warned as he stooped to kiss her.

Looking at the story in the papers the next day, she read:

The former Ray Gaudel flew to Yuma last night where she married a detective named Huntington.

Such is fame.

It didn't seem possible that anyone could be as dumb as—

THE DAME FROM CHICAGO

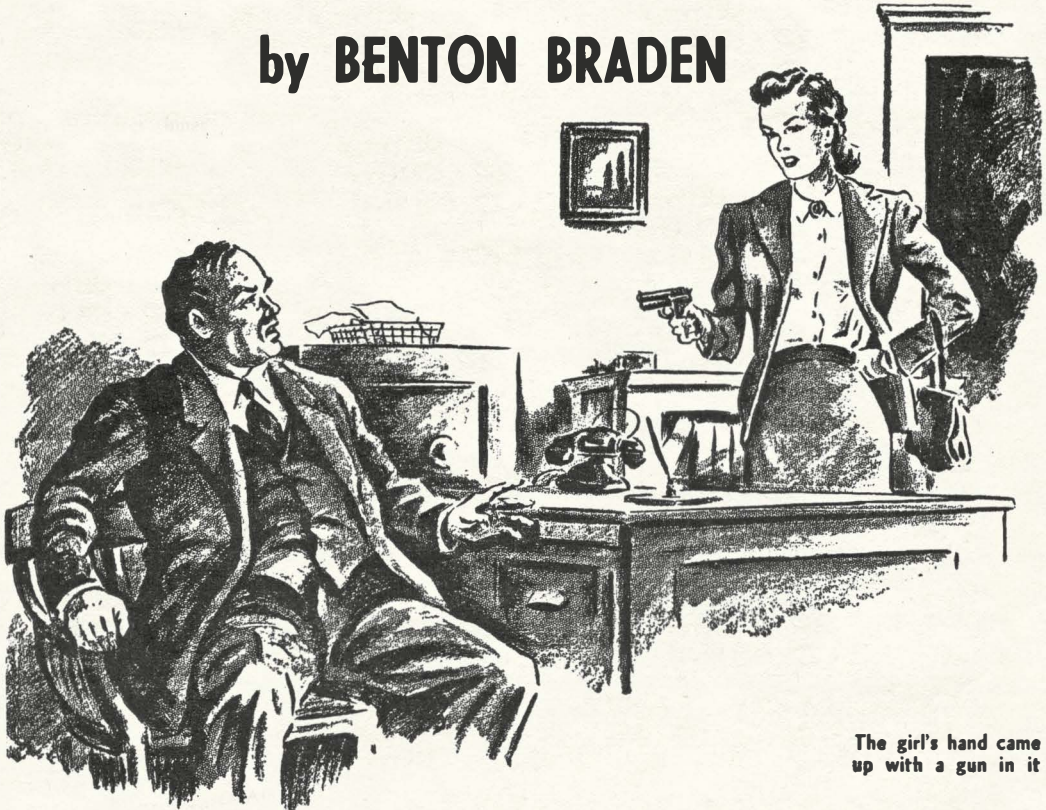
JOSEPH MALIK was only mildly interested when, through the small glass pane in his private office, he saw the girl come through the front door of his neat little jewelry store and approach his clerk at one of the counters. The girl was pretty but she was a bit over-dressed and she swaggered a little. At the best she would probably buy no more than a ten-buck gaudy bracelet.

Joseph Malik wasn't interested in ten-buck sales or, in fact, in any of the petty sales that were made in his store. His

store was small, well kept, but located inconspicuously on a side street where it did only a modest business. Legitimate business, that is. But Malik was doing a most satisfactory business in other and devious ways.

Joseph Malik was a fence, although not an ordinary fence. He was wily and cautious in his dealings with the underworld. He had found that it was much safer to do business with a few big-time crooks who, like himself, were interested only in big stakes. Right now he was

by **BENTON BRADEN**



The girl's hand came up with a gun in it

doing very well by concentrating his attention on one mob that sneered at anything less than a five-figure take.

So Malik wasn't interested in the girl who had entered his store—until the door of his private office opened and he looked up and saw her standing there. She was smiling, and Malik noticed that the smile showed complete self-confidence. She closed the door and, without invitation, walked over and seated herself in a chair that stood at the opposite side of his desk.

"Hello, Malik," she greeted him airily. "How's every little thing?"

She spoke easily in a nice contralto voice. But Malik stiffened a little. He was quite sure he had never seen the girl before and he did not care for familiarities, especially from slightly overdressed girls. He noted, too, that she was the type that went a bit too strong with the make-up. Even at that, she was an exceptionally pretty girl.

"Everything is all right with me," he replied with a frown. "But I don't quite remember having—"

"Of course, you've never met me before," she broke in with a little laugh. "But what's the use of a formal introduction between parties—who ought to be friends. To my way of thinking we have a lot in common."

Joseph Malik didn't like this approach at all. He had guessed already that the girl was a cheap little crook who had heard that he had been known to buy slightly warm merchandise. She'd probably pull out a junky diamond ring and try to sell it to him for twenty bucks. He'd have to get rid of her as quickly and quietly as possible.

"If we have anything in common, I am not aware of it," he said sharply. "And I might as well tell you right now that I am not running a pawnshop. I buy only from regular wholesale markets."

"Sure, I know," she said, and her tone was mocking. "I don't blame you for being a bit slow on the bite. I'm not so dumb as to think I could walk in here cold and get you to handle something without producing some very good references. I'm not local talent, Malik. I'm from Chicago. Not hot there at all. Just came on here with a pal for a change of

scenery. But before we left Chicago we were advised by a very knowing guy that you might be in the market for high-class stuff if the price was right."

"I can assure you that you have been misinformed," Malik told her. "I am not in the market for any kind of 'stuff'—at any price. I am running a strictly legitimate business here."

"Sure." She smiled knowingly. "Strictly legitimate, except when you absolutely know that you're dealing with the right people. Now I'm right people and I can prove it. I have what you might call a letter of introduction. Just take a glimmer at this."

HER HAND came out of her big purse with a paper in it. She unfolded it and placed it on the desk before Malik's eyes. It was a newspaper clipping. Malik stared at it uncertainly for a moment. The curiosity got the better of him and he picked it up and read it. It said:

COPS NAB MAN IN STICKUP

The police grabbed one of two men who participated in an armed robbery at the Belton Arms Apartments last night. The victim of the robbery was Mrs. Henry Staunton. Mrs. Staunton had attended a large reception during the evening and was wearing a diamond necklace valued at more than a hundred thousand dollars. The two men confronted her as she was entering the lobby of the apartment hotel. One of them covered the clerk at the desk while the other tore the necklace from Mrs. Staunton's neck. Up to this point the robbery was a success.

But Patrolman John Hapnick happened to pass the entrance to the building just as the two yeggs were leaving. Mrs. Staunton screamed and Hapnick called on the two men to stop. They ran for it. Hapnick fired and hit one of them in the leg. The other bandit ran around a corner and got away in the darkness.

The captured man refused to talk but he has been identified as a well known criminal from Chicago. Although both the yeggs were dressed in coveralls and masked, police suspect that the smaller of the two may have been a woman. Unfortunately the one who escaped had the necklace. Police are checking with Chicago authorities in an effort to get a line on the fugitive gunman. Mrs. Staunton stated that the necklace was fully covered by insurance.

Joseph Malik finished reading and looked up. The girl was smiling broadly.

"That's my letter of introduction, Malik," she said brightly. "But you ain't seen nothing yet. Here's my reference."

Again her hand came out of her purse, and she carelessly tossed something on the desk before Malik's eyes. His mouth opened, and he couldn't suppress a slight exclamation as the stones glittered beneath the light. It was a diamond necklace, and Malik's trained eyes instantly told him that it would be a bargain in any retail store at a hundred thousand dollars.

"You—you mean—"

"Your brain's working now, Malik. Sure. The cops were right. One of 'em was a dame. Poor Mike. He wasn't much of a sprinter in the pinch. That cop nailed him when he was within five feet of the corner. I made it and kept going fast. I got to our car and got away fast and I mean fast. I ditched the coveralls as soon as I got a chance and drove on like a perfect lady. But I had the necklace."

Joseph Malik pushed the necklace across the desk toward her. "Get it out of sight," he said. "I don't like it. How do you know the cops haven't spotted you and tailed you here? This Mike may have squawked on you."

She shook her head confidently. "Not Mike," she said. "They won't get a thing out of Mike. He'll take his rap and keep his mouth shut. He's not only a right guy but he's nuts about me. They'll never get anything out of him. And I'll guarantee you that I'm not being tailed. I've been around too long to overlook a tail, Malik. Besides the cops wouldn't fool with a tail if they did spot me. They'd pick me up and quick and make me cough up the bauble. But I'm not too anxious to carry it around. I'd like to turn it into quick cash."

Malik looked at her for fifteen seconds, a gleam in his eyes and his mind working in high gear. "I don't think I'd be interested," he said finally. "I have a nice little business here and I had decided not to take any chances. In spite of your letter of introduction and your reference—still I am not acquainted with you. Suppose I bought the necklace from you. For all I know you might sing like a canary if the cops picked you up later."

"I wouldn't chirp!" she denied fiercely. "Besides the cops aren't going to pick me up. They can check all they please, but they won't hook me up with the job.

I'm a big girl and a smart one. The cops haven't even got my prints or picture. For the record, I'm clean."

Malik leaned back and folded his hands and looked thoughtful for a moment. "I'm short on ready cash," he said in a hard voice. "Three thousand would be the most I could raise at the moment. You probably wouldn't be interested in an offer like that."

"Three grand!" she exclaimed. The smile had left her face, and there was a sneer in her voice. "You know damn well I wouldn't let it go for that. Those diamonds are worth at least forty grand wholesale. Allowing for risk and profit and everything, you could well afford to pay ten grand and you know it as well as I do."

Malik frowned heavily and seemed to consider. "I wasn't stalling about being short of cash right now," he told her. "But I might be able to raise more if I had a little time. I might be able to meet that ten grand figure in a day or so."

"I can wait," she said quickly. "When shall I come back?"

"You ought to know better than that," he said severely. "You can't be running in and out of here. For all I know, cops might be watching my place at any given moment. When I get things ready I'll have to get in touch with you. I'll tell you where to meet me to make the deal and I'll pick a place where we will both be in the clear. How can I get in touch with you?"

"Easy," she said, letting the necklace run slowly through her fingers and into her bag. "I've been in town two months. I have a nice little apartment. My phone is Colbert 89663. You just give me a ring when you're ready and I'll meet you wherever you say. And you can call me Caroline. But no one else would ever answer my phone."

A MINUTE later she walked out of the store. The pasty-faced clerk looked back through the pane in the private office as though he expected he might get a signal from Malik. But Malik shook his head. The clerk stared at the girl. He saw her look out carefully along the street before she opened the door. She took another quick but comprehensive glance as she opened the door and walked

out. Then she turned right and disappeared.

Still seated at his desk, Joseph Malik was smiling now. He rubbed his hands together as though he were very well pleased with himself. He started to pick up the phone on his desk, then thought better of it. He rose, put on his hat, and left his store. He walked two blocks to a drugstore and found a telephone booth. He entered it and dialed a number.

"Jake?" he said when a heavy voice answered. "This is J.M. I've got a line on a sweet job for us. A dame came to my office while ago. She had a string of shiners. Worth plenty. If you read the papers, you'll know how she got 'em. Her pal was picked up on the job. I stalled her—got her phone number. With that I'll check in a cross-index and get her address. Get it? All you'll have to do is walk in on her and take it away from her. She won't dare squawk because she's plenty hot. You can tell her you saw the story in the newspaper and phoned a pal in Chicago and got the line on her. Now you meet me at Cleary's in fifteen minutes and I'll have the address and we can work out the details. Got it?"

Malik heard the affirmative grunt and hung up, his grin showing that he was quite satisfied with himself. He walked out of the drugstore, went to the corner, and flagged down a taxi. . . .

The girl from Chicago had told the truth about one thing at least. She did have a nice little apartment in a nice neighborhood. She had a pleasant living room that overlooked a small park and a bedroom, bath, and kitchenette.

At the moment she was seated in her living room. She wore a becoming blue frock that harmonized with her surroundings. She picked up a magazine from the small table beside her chair, glanced at it for a few minutes, then threw it aside impatiently.

At that instant, knocks sounded on her door. She rose from her chair, her face sobered and the blue eyes centered a frown for an instant. She walked to the door, hesitated a few seconds, listened, then opened the door.

Her quick effort to close it again was blocked. A big man pushed the door open, shoving her aside in the same motion. Two other men came in right be-

hind him. The last man in, the smallest of the trio, closed the door.

"What's the big idea?" she flared. "What is this—a heist?"

"I wouldn't say that, baby," the big man grinned. "Now just take it easy. This is just a little deal between friends. You might say it's strictly business. All you got to do is play nice and you won't get hurt."

"I can't imagine having any business that would concern *you*," she said as she backed toward the chair where she had been sitting.

"That's it," he nodded. "Go ahead and sit down and make yourself comfortable. We might be here for quite a while. That depends on you. Lippy, you take a look at that big purse on the table. She might have a gat in it."

Lippy, the middle man in stature of the trio, went over and picked up the purse. "Yah," he said. "She had a gat." He held up a small automatic.

"I ain't surprised," big Jake Haker said heavily. "I ain't got much doubt that she'da used it on us if she'd had a chance. I was set to grab her hands when she opened the door till I saw they were empty. Just sit down there in the chair, baby. You ain't going to get a chance to grab another gat if you've got one under cover somewhere.

She sat down. "That's the only one I have," she said with a little sneer on her lips. "You three lugs ought to be pretty safe now. You're three to one, and I'll concede I might get the worst of it if I started a free-for-all. So what's the play."

"The play is one you won't like, baby," Big Jake said. Then he grinned broadly. "We're detectives. Employed by a certain insurance company. Now that company had insured a diamond necklace owned by a Mrs. Staunton. Two very mean guys did her a dirty trick. They stuck her up in the lobby of her apartment hotel and took that necklace away from her. The insurance company wants that necklace back. Now we ain't looking for blood. You hand over that necklace, and we'll walk out quietly, turn the necklace back to Mrs. Staunton, and keep our mouths shut to the cops."

The girl leaned forward, and there were sparks in her blue eyes. "You three

apes might get by in a cage at a zoo. But if you walked into the offices of any insurance company and they saw you coming, they'd call for the marines. I don't recall ever having seen three such ugly mugs in one display before. If you're detectives I'm a—"

"Shut your trap," big Jake exploded angrily, "or I'll slap you silly. Now we'll get down to tacks. I seen that squib in the paper about that Staunton stickup. It said that this guy the cops winged was from Chicago. It also said that the cops suspected the little guy was a dame. I got pals in Chicago. I phoned one of them that knows about everybody around the Windy City. The guy called me back six hours later. He gave me the dope on a man and a girl who had got a bit hot in Chicago and come on here. He don't know your name but he gave me a good description of you."

"And you just took the description and came straight here to my apartment," she jeered.

"No, I didn't," big Jake denied. "I got brains. I knew that the dame that had the Staunton necklace would want to get rid of it quick. So she'd get to a fence quick. There are only three fences in town that would handle an item like that necklace. Get it? There are three of us. We each watched a fence. Lippy, there, was keeping an eye on a smooth fence by the name of Malik. He saw you go in Malik's place. He tailed you when you left, tailed you right here."

THE GIRL smiled. "Nice work," she said pleasantly. "To look at you, I'd swear you didn't have enough brains to figure out a play like that. I would have guessed you were about the most stupid punk I'd ever laid eyes on. Now I'll have to admit you're smart. So you've come here to make me cough up the necklace."

"That's it!" Big Jake grunted.

"There will be just one small difficulty," she said almost sweetly. "I don't have the necklace in my possession now."

"You're lying!" big Jake charged. "If you ain't got it here, where is it?"

"I'm surprised you can't figure that out yourself," she replied. "Lippy, there, saw me go in Malik's place. He saw me come out. I'll admit when I went in I had that necklace. But I didn't have it

when I came out. I sold it to Malik."

"You're lying!" Big Jake bared his teeth. "Malik never makes a deal without dickering. Lippy said you weren't in his place more than thirty minutes."

"Lippy's absolutely right about that," she admitted. "And you're right about Malik not making a deal without dickering. When I asked for ten grand he stalled. But I happen to be in a jam. I needed dough and needed it quick. So when he offered me four, I took it."

Big Jake stared at her for a few seconds. Then his eyes lighted up. "Okay, sister," he said triumphantly. "It's all the same to us. If you're telling the truth about it, just hand us over that four grand. I'll even do better than that. You say you're in a jam. You just slip us three grand and we'll let you keep one grand to operate on."

"But I haven't got the four grand here," she murmured.

"What'd you do with it?" he demanded.

"I put it in an envelope and mailed it to my poor old grandmother in Seattle," she said, her eyes guileless. "I send all the money I get to grandma. You see, she's on heroin and it takes about fifty bucks a day to keep her going and I—"

"Shut up!" big Jake howled. "I'm through listening to your yapping. Let's go over the joint. She's got that necklace hid somewhere, and we're bound to find it. Get moving, you guys. I'll keep an eye on this smart little dame from Chicago. You take the bedroom, Lippy. You take the bath and kitchenette, Gus. And you sit right in that chair and don't move, sister!"

The three men went to work at their respective assignments. Big Jake went over the living room, keeping a close eye on the girl. Lippy and Gus finally came back into the room and shook their heads. Big Jake had drawn a blank, too.

He walked over to the girl and took her wrist in his tremendous right hand. "This is it, baby," he told her. "We know you've got that necklace here, and you're goin' to tell us where it is."

He began to turn her wrist very slowly. She set her teeth. But as he slowly continued to turn her wrist she finally winced and her face went pale.

"I can stand it just as long as you

can," he told her savagely. "If your arm-busts, it's your fault, not mine. And if you let out a yell, we'll gag you and use matches on your feet. You might as well save yourself the agony and come clean."

She didn't answer. Big Jake continued to turn her wrist. She twisted her body in a vain effort to relieve the tension. Big Jake only twisted harder.

"All right," she groaned. "Let go. I'll come clean."

Big Jake relaxed the pressure a little.

"It's—underneath the dresser—in my bedroom," she gasped. "Stuck to the boards on the bottom—with Scotch tape."

Lippy wheeled and went into the bedroom. There was a big grin on his face when he returned. He held up the necklace. "That does it," he gloated.

"Fair enough," Big Jake said. He let go of the girl's wrist and stepped back. "We got some tape ourselves," he told her. "We might need a little leeway. We'll tape you up light so you can get loose in a few minutes. All right, Gus. Fix her up."

Gus moved over, pulling a roll of tape from his pocket. Quickly he lashed her arms to the arms of the chair and her ankles to the legs. He finished by gagging her.

"No hard feelings," Big Jake told her as they prepared to leave. "Just one of those breaks. Now you stay right here and be a good girl. One of us will slip you a grand for getaway money just as soon as we can peddle the brights."

The three men opened the door, filed out, closed the door behind them. The girl began to sway her body as she sought to loosen the tape that held her wrists.

Joseph Malik sat in his private office. From time to time he glanced expectantly at his phone as though he might be awaiting a word of good news. He didn't hear the door of his office open, didn't realize that he had a visitor until he looked up and saw the girl.

FOR a moment he blinked and stared. Then he frowned hard.

"I told you not to come here again!" he snapped in a highly irritated tone. "I told you I'd get in touch with you when I was ready to talk to you again." As

he spoke, he turned his head and looked sharply through the little window that viewed the salesroom of his shop. But his pasty-faced clerk was not in sight.

"You needn't get excited about it, Malik," she said soberly. "Even if the cops walked in on us now, they wouldn't have a thing on us. I don't have that Staunton necklace on me."

"Well, I'm glad of that, at least," Malik said. He tried to conceal his elation. His scheme had worked out. Big Jake had carried out his share of the plan. Malik leaned back in his chair and relaxed, even permitted himself a slight smile as he looked at his victim. Somehow she looked better now. The neat gray suit she wore was becoming, and she had been more careful with the make-up this time. She was really a neat number, he thought. Too bad she was so dumb. "If the cops ever caught you with that necklace, it would be just too bad," he concluded.

"The cops haven't a chance to catch me with it now, Malik," she said evenly. "Because I haven't got it. A while ago three very tough customers walked in on me at my apartment. In some way they had managed to find out a little about me and get my address. They knew I had the necklace. It wasn't too hard for them to put pressure on and take it away from me."

"You don't say!" Malik exclaimed in simulated sympathy. "Well, that newspaper story was probably read by every mobster in town. And some of 'em have ways of finding out things. Some of 'em may even have had a line on you before you pulled that job. This pal of yours may have got acquainted with some of the local boys."

"I'm quite sure that he didn't, Malik," she returned. "This mob that took the necklace from me said they had phoned Chicago and got a line on me through a pal there after they had read the newspaper story. But I knew better than that. They were just trying to make it look good."

"You think somebody tipped them off?" Malik said blandly. "Maybe somebody in the building where you live had got ideas."

She slowly shook her head. "It wasn't anybody in the building, Malik. It was

someone else. Maybe you."

"It wasn't," he denied. "It couldn't have been me. I didn't know anything, except that you wanted to sell me the necklace."

"You had my phone number," she said in a steady but accusing tone. "It would have been easy for you to have checked and got the address."

"You're just imagining things," he said harshly. "I did no such thing."

"You know something, Malik?" she asked. "I didn't just come in on you blind when I called with that necklace. I'm too smart for that. I wanted to know a lot about you before I offered you that necklace. And I found out plenty. For instance, there was a big job pulled on the Harnett Jewelry Company a couple of months ago. Harnett had a very wonderful emerald necklace on display. It was valued at two hundred grand. A mob walked in and took them for that emerald necklace and shot down a guard at the same time. You know about that, don't you?"

"Who doesn't?" he countered. "It was headlined in the papers for days. But if you think I bought those emeralds from the mob, you're crazy."

"Maybe you didn't exactly have to buy them," she said with a faint smile. "Maybe you were a partner, a silent partner, on the job. Because it was noticed that you had been in Harnett's a couple of times before the robbery on the pretense of selling them some small diamonds on which you said you were overstocked. It was also noticed that you came in and took a look at the emerald necklace when it first went on display. You looked everything over very carefully. So you might easily have fingered the job for the mob."

"Ridiculous," he sputtered. "I never did any—"

"Then there was the Ridgeway payroll job," she interrupted. "You went out to the Ridgeway plant shortly before that job and tried to get Ridgeway to buy a diamond bracelet for his wife. He hadn't intimated he wanted to buy anything like that. You said you just had a hunch he might like it. That gave you a good chance to finger the plant for your mob. Then there was the job at the Jones Construction Company. You—"

"I've heard enough of this!" Malik shouted. "You can't come in here and blackmail me, you little tramp. Get out! You can't pin a thing on me."

"Oh, yes I can, Malik." She raised her voice a little. "You were the only person in the world who could have tipped my address to a mob. You had my phone number. You checked in a cross index, got the address, phoned your pals, told them it would be a cinch to take the necklace away from me. The mob told me they had phoned Chicago and got a line on me. Well, I did come from Chicago—but that was ten years ago. And if your mob had really got a line on me, they'd have avoided me like poison."

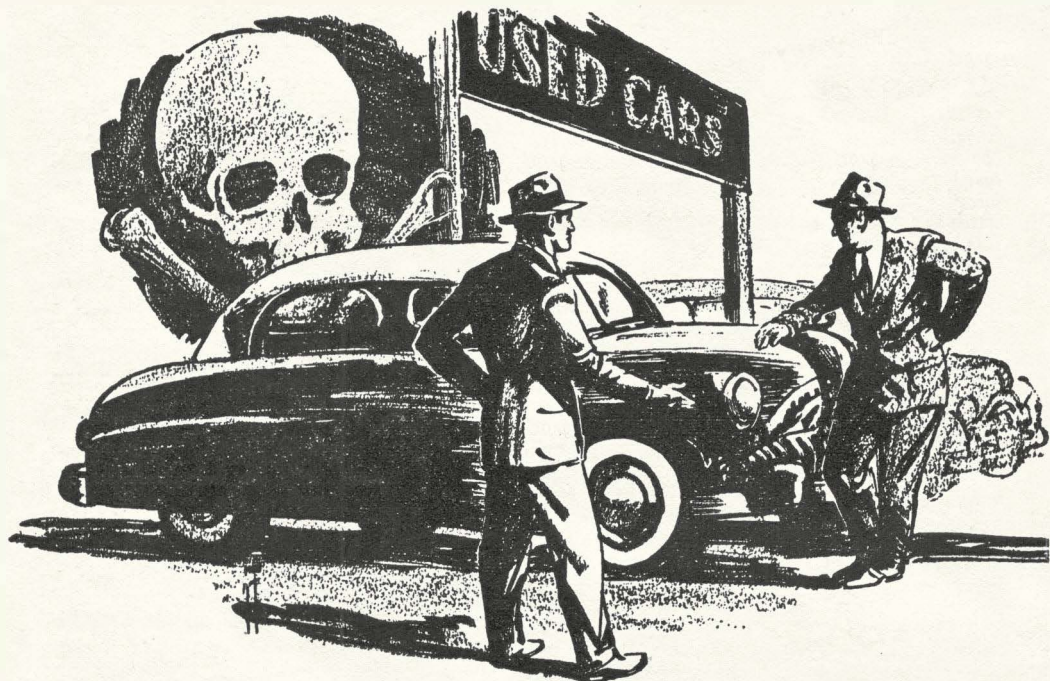
"You mean—that you're a—dick?" Malik gasped.

"Not a dick. Just the wife of a dick, Malik. My husband was the young guard from the Wales agency who was shot down by Big Jake's mob in the Harnett robbery. He just barely pulled through. While he was fighting for his life, I made up my mind I'd try to do something. I talked to the regular detectives. They were suspicious of you. So we decided to smoke you out—and your mob, too. The Staunton job was faked, Malik, and your greed got the best of your judgment when you thought you could get those splendid gems for nothing. You put your mob on me. They got the necklace and ran into a flock of cops when they tried to leave the building. Lippy was the weak spot. We put the pressure on him. My husband accused him of firing the shot that sent him down. Lippy blew up and said it was Big Jake who did the shooting. Lippy is down at headquarters right now, dictating a full confession."

Malik's left hand was down beneath the desk, pressing furiously on a button.

The girl's hand came up with a gun in it. "You're wasting your time, Malik," she told him. "Your bodyguard-clerk isn't answering any buttons. And it's a pleasure for me to arrest you—as the brains of that dumb mob. You want to see my special commission before I blow my whistle?"

Malik's face was white, and he seemed to have shrunk a few inches. He opened his mouth wide, but no words came. Caroline Potter took a whistle from her purse, raised it to her lips, blew it shrilly.



THE TOO GOOD DEAL

A True Story

by HAROLD HELFER

The police got the killer—before they were sure there had even been a murder!

USED car dealers are supposed to be a particularly money-mad bunch. It's a sort of running gag among radio comedians. Actually, though, it seems, they're pretty much like the rest of us. This is a piece about a used car dealer in Dallas, Texas, who—because his conscience bothered him some after an auto trade—brought about the downfall of a cold-blooded killer.

"Conscience" is really too strong a term to apply in this instance, though. Everything in the transaction was open and aboveboard. But just the same the auto dealer couldn't get it off his mind.

The well-built rather handsome young man had shown up with an almost new Buick. He wanted to trade it for an older

and smaller car and cash. The used car dealer had said, all right, he'd give him a two-year-old Chevrolet and two hundred dollars in cash for it.

Now that really wasn't the most equitable of offers. But, on the theory that there probably would be a little "horse-trading" involved, as generally happens in this kind of auto deal, the used car merchant had started out with an offer on the low side. But much to his surprise the young man had taken him up on it immediately.

The car dealer didn't even have that much cash on hand. But the young man said he'd take the eight dollars in cash that he did have and a check for \$192. He explained he had two youngsters

who were sick and that he needed the money urgently.

The auto dealer had so obviously got the best of the deal that it worried him. Why should anyone snap at a first offer so quickly? Of course, it was possible, just as the young fellow had said, that he had two kids and just needed the money. . . .

Still, the whole thing bothered the used car man so that he got in touch with the police about it. He explained that he really had no complaint about the deal, he'd got the best of it, but that's what worried him. It really had been too good a deal.

From the used car man detectives got the young chap's name, Robert Lacy, and his address. They called on him. With his wife and two kids hovering in the background, Lacy discussed the matter with them.

He seemed to speak freely enough. He'd bought the car from one Harry L. Helfman, who'd just driven down from New York. Helfman had brought the car into the garage where Lacy worked for some repair work. From talking to Helfman, Lacy had learned that the New Yorker planned to sell his car because he was returning to Manhattan immediately, so Lacy had made a deal with him. He'd paid him seven hundred dollars for the auto. Then he'd decided to swap it for a smaller car and cash.

Lacy didn't seem to be living under the most affluent circumstances and the detectives asked him where he'd got the seven hundred. The young man said from his mother-in-law.

So the detectives made a call on the mother-in-law—but now with a definite feeling that something might be wrong. Now it was more than just the foreboding of a used car dealer. But there were those two kids of Robert Lacy. Instead of appearing to be ailing, they had seemed to be just about as lusty as a couple of youngsters can be.

When the mother-in-law flatly denied giving her son-in-law any money for a car, the detectives were now pretty sure they were on the trail of something sin-

ister. And this feeling was heightened by the fact that upon finding the room where Helfman had been staying, the officers could find no indication that he had left for New York or had any such notion. His clothes and other belongings were put away as if he intended staying there indefinitely.

Thoroughly alarmed, the detectives returned to Lacy's home. He was gone. So was his wife and their two youngsters. Checking with the mother-in-law again, the officers learned that Lacy had left his two children with her and that he and his wife were heading for Mexico in his recently acquired Chevrolet.

But the officers had a hunch. There was a good chance that Lacy hadn't yet cashed the \$192 check. In that case, he might be waiting around Dallas until the next morning for the banks to open. Where would Lacy be hanging out until morning, knowing that he might be wanted by police?

Their guess was some tourist camp on the outskirts of town. So the detectives made the rounds of the tourist camp fringe—and, sure enough, toward morning, at one of the motels, they came upon the Chevrolet they were after.

Without any ceremony, they kicked open the door of Lacy's "cabin." He jumped up out of bed with a startled look. There was a shotgun nearby, but the detectives covered him before he had a chance to get to it.

Thus it came about that, due to a funny feeling that a used-auto man had about a deal—even though he'd got much the better of it—police, in a matter of hours, managed to corner a brutal murderer—before they had any body, seen any blood or knew for a positive fact that any crime at all had been committed!

Robert Lacy, in the presence of his wife, promptly broke down and confessed that he'd shot Helfman to death for his car while the latter was demonstrating it for him. He led the detectives to the New Yorker's watery grave in a ditch just out of Dallas.

Lacy went to the penitentiary for life.

COMPLIMENTS

Tommy Lederer knew it was no creature from outer space which had horribly mangled the body found lying at the roadside. . . .

Or Could It Have Been?

I

IT DIDN'T start like a madman's nightmare. It started like a good joke. Otherwise, I wouldn't have gone. I didn't have to go. Walsh had other operatives he could have sent.

Matter of fact, I wasn't officially working for Walsh, yet. When I'd come back to the office, I'd told him what the doctors had said when I'd got my army discharge. Walsh had been nice about it.

"They're right, Tommy. You shouldn't do anything for a while. Take it easy

till those nerves get back to where they were. Meanwhile, the joint is yours. Hang around and get the feel of things again. And if you need any money before then, let me know."

So I'd been hanging around the back room of the Walsh Agency, playing gin rummy with whoever happened to be doing nothing at the moment, and getting myself up-to-date on what went on.

An idyllic existence, while my money lasted.

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of a FIEND

A Novel by FREDRIC BROWN



But I was getting restless after a couple of weeks of it. I was glad when John Walsh stuck his head through the door and said:

"Tommy, come in my office a minute, will you?"

I went in and shut the door behind me.

"How you feeling by now, Tommy?"

"Pretty good, I guess."

"That's swell, Tommy. Listen, a client was just here and left a little job for us that's practically a vacation. Uh—riding trains won't bother you, will it?"

I shook my head.

"That's about all there is to it. Little trip downstate, to interview a guy who's getting radio signals from Mars."

"Huh?"

"That's what he says. Look, here's the set-up. Client lives here in Chi; he's got plenty hay. He's from this little hick burg downstate. Old boyhood friend of his down there just wrote to put the bite on him. Dough for experiments on super-sensitive radio—"

"That he gets Mars on?"

Walsh chuckled. "Well, it'd make a better story if I put it that way, but let's be fair. I saw the letter; in fact, he left it here. The guy claims only that he's getting some inexplicable signals on a mike—mike—"

"Micro-wave outfit?" I suggested.

"That's it, micro-wave."

WALSH glanced at a letter lying open on his desk. It was placed so I couldn't see it, of course. Until and unless I said I'd handle the case, he wouldn't mention a name or an address.

"He says he doesn't know anything about the signals except that certain indications lead him to suspect that they might be of—uh—" he glanced down at the letter again — "of extra-terrestrial origin. He's pretty cagy about coming right out and saying they're from Mars."

"So what does the client want done?"

"Wants you to talk to the guy—no pretext—you can tell the truth, diplomatically, about why you're interviewing him, and get an idea whether he's got a screw slightly loose, or whether it's missing completely."

"Or straight fraud," I suggested.

"Client doesn't think so. After all, the

guy is a friend of his. Says he's honest, and was sane a few years ago. He also wants you to make inquiries, discreetly, around the town, to see what gives with the guy. I gather he's going to slip him a little money, whatever gives."

"Then why the investigation?"

"Partly curiosity, I think. Partly to determine the amount of the loan and how to handle it. If he finds the guy's an out-and-out nut, he'll slip him a few hundred for old times' sake and write it off the books. If there's a chance he's got something—not Mars, of course, but something that may have a patentable value in radio reception—then he'll up the ante and take an interest in the patent rights. There's just a chance he's got something valuable, if I get what he means."

"I think we get what he means. Well—okay, I'll take it on. Sounds easy enough."

"Good. You're on the pay-roll again, as of this morning. It's about eleven now. You can catch a train after lunch and get there by six o'clock. If the trip tires you, don't do anything this evening; just hole in at a hotel and start tomorrow. Otherwise, you can see this Reeder tonight, and make your other inquiries tomorrow morning."

"Reeder? Walter Reeder?"

"Yeah. No time limit on the job. If you think you've got the picture in a day, come on back. Take a few days, even a week, if you have to. Where'd you hear of Walter Ree— Say, didn't you come from Haverton or live there once?"

"Lived there. For four years—from when I was sixteen till when I was twenty. I know Reeder, slightly. And your client would be Emil Wingerman, I guess."

"Right," Walsh said. "Well, this job should be a cinch for you. Kept up any contacts there? Let's see, that'd be seven years ago, wouldn't it?"

"Seven years." I nodded. "No, never went back there. My father and mother both died there, in that four years, and I came to Chi and never went back."

Walsh looked up at me sharply and shrewdly. John Walsh is nobody's fool. "Tommy, if you feel like that about it, if you don't want to go back, I can—"

"Skip it," I told him. "I'll go."

I'd told him I'd go, before I'd learned where the job was, and I wouldn't back out just because—because I'd intended never to go back to Haverton. After all, I told myself, there wasn't any real reason why I shouldn't. Seven years is a long time.

Riding on the train, I tried to remember everything I knew about Walter Reeder. Up to seven years ago, he hadn't been an out-and-out nut. A little eccentric, smart, and with a whale of a temper that let go only once in a long while, but made him into a completely different person when it did let go.

Ordinarily, a mild and meek little chap. Even smaller than I am, and I'm pint-size for an operative.

He'd lived in a big house that he owned about two miles out of town. He'd been somewhere in the upper forties when I'd known him. That meant he'd be in the fifties now.

HIS HOUSE was a farmhouse, but he didn't farm. He'd sold off his land to the farmers on either side of him. He didn't even raise chickens.

Come to think of it, he didn't have any visible occupation except pattering around with radio and electrical apparatus. He was supposed to have a small but regular income from royalties on a couple of things he'd made quite a while back. One had something to do with the method of exhausting the air from a vacuum tube and the other with the mechanism of a repeating shotgun.

Since he was an inventor, with the notorious lack of business sense of most inventors, probably he had little income from royalties on those articles, but by now he would have other irons in the fire. I wondered how I could find out. Such information would be part of the picture.

Mr. Ambers would know, of course. Howard Jerome Ambers, Attorney. He handled Reeder's business affairs for him. But I didn't want to go to Ambers, if I could avoid it. He was Mary Ambers' father for one thing. Only she wouldn't be Mary Ambers by now; she'd be Mrs. Nick Eklund. I didn't want to see her, either.

Well, in a town the size of Haverton,

everybody knew everybody else's business, and probably anyone I talked to could tell me what Walter Reeder had invented lately—besides Martian radio-receivers.

"Haverton!" called the conductor.

I got my overnight case from the rack and when the train stopped, I got down. I seemed to be the only passenger getting off.

There were a few people on the platform; I didn't know any of them. Not too surprising, I realized. After all, there were five thousand people in Haverton. I hadn't known more than a fraction of them, even when I'd lived here.

It was early dusk. I walked around the little station and I was on the main stem. The buildings hadn't changed much. Haverton wasn't an industrial town; just a shopping center for a farm district.

There was the same sign on the Illinois Hotel across the street. I crossed over and went in.

Joe Brophy was behind the desk. I'd been in high school with him, but he didn't recognize me until I said:

"Hello, Joe. Got a room?"

"Tommy Lederer! Sure, I got a room. In town for long?"

"Day or two," I told him.

I put my name on the register and got a key. He started asking questions, but I stalled him off. Told him the truth—that I wanted to see a man that evening. I'd have plenty of time to talk when I got back.

I went to my room and cleaned up a bit, then went out. It was only seven-thirty. I could get out to Reeder's farm not much after eight, which would be early enough. As I recalled him, he wasn't an early-tobedder; often worked half the night. It would be dark when I came back, though, so I stopped at a drug store and bought a plastic-cased flashlight.

The druggist was still Hank Foy. Well, I couldn't get out without talking to Hank a while, nor did I want to. I'd liked Hank, and found I still did. I had to tell him what I'd been doing since I'd left Haverton, including Korea, and when I mentioned the detective agency and told him to keep that part of it

under his hat, he nodded.

"Reeder?" he said. "Nope, he hasn't changed much. Still putters; still hasn't hit anything world-beating. Understand he turned out a couple of little gadgets that the signal corps is using."

"Know what he's working on now?"

"Monkeying with hydroponics last time I talked to him," Hank said. "He was in here a few days ago and bought some chemicals for them. Little out of his usual line. Jeff Pogue's working for him again."

"Jeff Pogue? Oh, Karl Pogue's brother. He was helping Reeder with some radio stuff while I was around town. You say 'again.' What has he been doing meanwhile?"

"Jail," Hank said. "Funny situation. Five-six years ago—yeah, that'd be after you left—Reeder hired him as a full-time assistant. He swiped an invention of Reeder's—I never did find out what it was, but he sold it for five hundred bucks. Reeder found out and hit the ceiling. You know that temper of his. He prosecuted and got Jeff sent up for two years.

"Then he cooled off and started working to get Jeff out of jail. Spent more money getting him out than in. Ambers made five or six trips to Springfield to see the governor and the pardon board. Got him out eight months ago, after fourteen months in. And hired him back. Tie that?"

I COULDN'T. I couldn't see that it had anything to do with messages from Mars, but I filed it away for future reference, along with the more pertinent information that Reeder wasn't talking around Haverton about those messages. If he'd been here in Hank Foy's drug store only a few days ago, then that was since he'd written the letter to Emil Wingerman which I had in my pocket.

I looked up at the clock and said I'd better beat it, and that I'd drop in again.

It was getting dark when I left the drug store, but there was going to be a bright moon. I went a little out of my way, heading for the edge of town. I didn't want to pass the house I'd lived in. My mother had died in that house eight years ago, my father seven years ago. Not that I didn't want to think

about them, but I didn't want to see lights on in that house. I didn't want to think of other people living there now.

The cemetery, just outside of town—that was different. I wanted to stop, but in there, under all the trees, it would be too dark to find my way. Tomorrow I'd go there; for the first time, and maybe the last.

There were only two places in Haverton I wanted to avoid. They hadn't been places I'd hated; they'd been the places I'd loved. My own house and Mary Ambers' house.

My own because my parents didn't live there now. Mary's—well, Mary wouldn't be there any more, either. She'd have married Nick Ekland years ago. Probably have kids by now. Probably—

"Quit thinking, you fool," I told myself. "Or think about Walter Reeder and messages from Mars."

II

WHERE Beech Street quits being a street at the edge of town and turns into a road, I stopped to light a cigarette. My hand was shaking so I had to brace my wrists, one against the other, to hold cigarette and match steady. Jitters again; worse than they'd been for several weeks now.

I walked past the cemetery, with the low wall in front of it. I passed Karl Pogue's farm. There was a light in the kitchen. Funny guy, Karl Pogue. As near to a hermit as a man can be, in times like these, hating and avoiding the whole world except his brother Jeff, who worked for Reeder.

Past Hetterman's farm, with Winthrop's coming up. The moon was bright now. The corn was more than head-high and waving and swaying in the evening breeze, gray-green in the moonlight.

I was looking at the tall corn when just for an instant I saw a dark shadow, man-high, between the rows. A lighter oval, head-high, that might have been a face. There was the sound of a growl and for just a fraction of a second my eyes supplied details for that face. Details that weren't there at all, for it was the face of a devil.

The growl must have done it. Men don't growl; not like that sound—a bestial, vicious, murderous growl. A sound that would never come from the throat of a sane human being, except from the throat of a sound-effects man on a horror program.

Then the shadow and the lighter oval weren't there any more, nor the sound. It wasn't a disappearing trick that would have rated high in the annals of magic—he need merely have taken one step backward into the cornfield to have vanished that way.

But I didn't chase after him. Or it. I kept right on walking. Right then I didn't want anything to do with people or things that growled in cornfields after dark. I was on my way to see Walter Reeder on a purely business proposition. I kept walking and tried to whistle.

Me, Tommy Lederer, who'd once been the toughest operative Walsh ever had, trying to whistle because I was scared. What's worse, not succeeding; the whistle just wouldn't come. Just because of a shadow in a cornfield and a growl, I was too scared to run. I just kept walking.

Around the bend in the road, and I saw something lying half in the road, half in the ditch between the road and the fields.

It looked like a man.

It was a man, lying face-down. I spoke, then shook his shoulder, and he didn't move. I took hold of myself first, then him, and rolled him over.

It was a man I didn't know, that I'd never seen before.

His throat had been torn out.

It wasn't nice to look at, but for what seemed like seconds, I couldn't look away. When I did manage to straighten up, my first thought was defense. Whoever or whatever had done this wasn't far away, and I didn't have a gun nearer than Chicago. I wasn't in any mood to tackle, bare-handed, whatever or whoever had done that to a man.

The best thing to do was to keep on to Reeder's place and phone the authorities from there. It was only a quarter of a mile further on, but it was a mile and a half back to town.

There were lights at Walter Reeder's

place. I went up on the porch and knocked. Footsteps shuffled to the door and it was opened.

Walter Reeder had aged a lot in seven years. He was, as I have said, a mild-looking little man, the kind you'd not look at twice unless you happened to notice his eyes. They were bright shoe-button little eyes, with unusually small irises. And they were as keen as they looked. He'd never worn glasses in his life.

They were sizing me up now and he got as far as, "Aren't you Tom—" before I cut in.

"Yes, I'm Tommy Lederer, Mr. Reeder. I've got to use your phone right away to phone the sheriff. There's a dead man a quarter of a mile back along the road."

HE OPENED the door wider and said, "Come on in," as casually as though dead men were an every-night occurrence on the road outside.

He chuckled. "Ed Magnus'll be mad. This is his poker game evening."

I thought, "Ed Magnus is still sheriff." Well, there wasn't anything I could do about that now.

A door down the hallway opened and Jeff Pogue looked out.

"Who is it, Walter?"

"Hello, Jeff," I said. "It's me, Tommy Lederer."

I'd reached the phone by then and had the receiver off.

"Get me Sheriff Magnus, please."

Jeff came on out into the hallway. He was a big man with thick black hair and one of those blue-black beards that make a man seem to need a shave the moment he's through with the razor. He had on old overalls with a once-white sweat shirt under them, and carpet slippers. He made a strange contrast to the dapper Reeder, who always wore a white collar, a vest and suit coat. Reeder was the type of man who'd wear full dress on a desert island.

"Something wrong, Lederer?" Jeff Pogue asked.

Then Ed Magnus' raspy voice was on the wire asking what I wanted.

"Tommy Lederer, Magnus, talking from Walter Reeder's place. There's a dead man on the road, toward town, a

quarter of a mile— Huh? No, I didn't drive out from town; I walked. He wasn't run down by a car, anyway. He— No, I don't know who he is. Never saw him before. His throat— Huh? Sure, I'll wait here— No, I'm not going to leave town. I'll ride back to town with you and make a complete statement."

I hung up.

"You look kind of pale, Tommy," Reeder said. "Have a glass of wine. Come on in the living room and I'll have one with you. You, too, Jeff."

"Maybe I better stroll down the road and see who the dead man is," Pogue said. "If he's from around here, I'll know him."

Reeder shook his head.

"Sheriff's started already, and he drives fast. He'll be there before you could walk that far."

He went into the neatly furnished living room and took a decanter and glasses from the sideboard. I looked around. It was always difficult to believe, in Reeder's house, that he was a bachelor. He had a woman's touch with furnishings and decoration. And neatness far surpassing that of the average housewife.

He handed us glasses and lifted his own.

"To—" He hesitated. "To the soul of the poor man back in the road."

It was an unexpected toast. Reeder looked a bit embarrassed at having given it. But we drank.

"You started to say something about his throat," Jeff Pogue said. "Was it cut? Was he murdered, I mean?"

"It was a violent death. His throat was torn as by an animal. But—"

"But what?" Pogue wanted to know.

An animal or a human devil, I'd been thinking. A homicidal maniac, possibly. At any rate, if the thing I had seen in the cornfield had been the killer, then it hadn't been an animal.

"I didn't examine the wound closely," I hedged.

"Let the boy alone," Reeder told Pogue. "He's jumpy now, and Ed is going to turn him inside out when he gets here. Uh— Tommy, Magnus never did like you, did he?"

"It was mutual," I told him.

"Don't let him get you down. Tommy.

His bark's worse than his bite."

"His bark's bad enough," I said. "It should be peeled off him in strips."

"An animal," Pogue said thoughtfully. "Only a wolf or a dog kills that way. There aren't any wolves around here. Nor any killer dogs."

"That police dog of your brother's," suggested Reeder. "He—"

"No, not Emperor. He's a good watch-dog, but not vicious. And he's trained not to go off Karl's place. You couldn't tempt him off."

Reeder turned to me.

"Back in Haverton to stay, Tommy?"

"Here on business," I told him. "To see you, as a matter of fact. I was on my way out here when— Listen, if you don't mind, I'd rather wait until this other business is over with before I talk to you about it. Magnus'll be here any minute and I'd just get started by the time he came. And he'll probably want me to go back with him to make a statement—if I know Magnus."

"Okay, Tommy. I'll be home any time you want to come out again, tomorrow or the next day. Stay for a meal with us, if you'll take pot luck. Find any changes in Haverton?"

WE WERE on our second glass of wine when the car stopped out front. Magnus had brought his deputy, Tip Overholt, with him.

He came in, when Reeder opened the door, like a bull charging into a china shop. He talked and acted like a bull. So help me, he even snorted once in a while; you wouldn't have been surprised to see him paw the ground and charge.

He went right past Reeder without even speaking to him, and stared at me.

"What's the gag, Lederer?"

"Gag?" I said. "Didn't you find it? He was lying half in the road. You couldn't miss seeing him, driving by."

"Come on—you show us. Wait! Want to ask you a few questions first. What you doing in Haverton?"

No, Ed Magnus hadn't changed a bit. He still had those little red-rimmed pig eyes, and if he took off his hat, he'd still have that short-cut, bristly carrot hair. Broad shoulders, too, and arms like a gorilla's.

"Here on business," I told him.

"What kind of business?"

"He came down to see me, Ed," Reeder cut in, trying to pour oil on the waters.

"What about?" Magnus swung around to Reeder, ignoring me. His manner had said he wasn't going to believe anything I told him anyway.

"He hasn't told me yet, Ed. But I think I can guess. And if I guess right, it's a private matter. He wouldn't want to tell you—not until he's talked to me about it first."

"That's right, Sheriff," I said. "And it's a business matter that has nothing to do with corpses on the road, so you can leave it out of this."

Magnus grunted ungraciously.

"You walked out from town?"

"That's right. Phoned you the minute I got here. When I found the body, I figured I could get here and phone quicker than get back to town."

"Sure he hadn't been hit by a car?"

"His throat was torn out," I said.

"His throat—" Ed Magnus' face started to get red.

"Just a minute, Ed," Reeder cut in again. "We didn't get the whole story. We'd like to hear it, too. How about you and Tip Overholt sitting down and having a glass of wine and letting Tommy tell it his own way. Then you'll know what questions to ask him, and— Well, sit down."

He'd obtained two more glasses while he was talking, and filled them. Magnus still looked mildly apoplectic, but he took the glass of wine, and sat down. Overholt took his and thanked Reeder, but leaned against the wall beside the door to drink it.

"Go ahead, Tommy," Reeder said. "Take your time. And don't interrupt him, Ed."

It did me good to hear someone tell Magnus where to get off. I don't know how Reeder got away with it, but he did.

"Okay," I said. I told him just what had happened, from the time I'd seen the figure in the tall corn and heard it growl, until I'd reached Reeder's place.

"Strange," Reeder said.

Magnus got up, heavily.

"Come on, let's get going. You can show us the place, Lederer."

When we got out to the car, I got in

the back seat, and Magnus got in with me. Tip Overholt got in front alone, and drove.

"Just a little this side of a clump of elms between a cornfield and a field of alfalfa, right side of the road, quarter of a mile from here." I told him.

Overholt nodded without turning around. Magnus didn't talk and I was glad of that. I didn't want to talk to him either.

Overholt stopped the car.

"About here?"

"Yeah," I said. "Ten or fifteen yards ahead." I looked out through the windshield and couldn't see any sign of it.

"You can walk that far," Magnus said. "Get out and find it for us."

III

ED MAGNUS' tone of voice was not to my liking, but I got out, and walked up ahead. I took the flashlight out of my pocket and played it around in the ditch. There hadn't been any rain for two weeks, so the ground was dry and hard. I didn't find a thing. Whoever had moved the corpse—and I was sure it hadn't walked away by itself—hadn't left any sign that I could find. I came back.

"You didn't move it?" I asked. "You're not being funny about this?"

"Get back in the car."

"What for?"

"You're under arrest—material witness to a crime. If there wasn't any crime and you got me out here for the fun of it, then it's disorderly conduct."

I got in. He had me there, all right. My neck was out a mile.

When we arrived in front of his office, he spoke to Overholt.

"You go on ahead. Tell the boys I'll be there later. You, Lederer, come on in here. We're going to have a little talk."

"I should never have come back here," I thought. "I'm going to hit him pretty soon and end up in the jug, a glorious finish to a triumphal return— Nope, can't do that. I'll pretend I'm scared of him, and nothing will happen."

"Sit there," Magnus said, and pointed to a chair in the corner, where I'd have the light in my eyes. He put his hands

in his pockets and sat on a corner of the desk, facing me.

"Now," he said, "what was the gag?"

"No gag. I found a corpse. I reported it as soon as I could."

"Then it got up and walked off?"

"I wouldn't know."

"You lie like a rug, and I want to know why. Listen, Lederer, you were a fresh young punk when you left here. I saw you were headed for trouble, but I thought Haverton was rid of you."

"I thought so, too. Business brought me back, but it won't be for long."

"What business?"

"To see Walter Reeder."

"What about?"

"That's confidential."

"It is, huh? What's your racket? Who do you work for? And if you can't answer that because it's confidential, you're a set-up for a vag charge." He grinned, not a nice grin.

"I work for the Walsh Detective Agency, Chicago."

His eyes got wider.

"I shoulda known. A shyster private detective. From Chicago, at that. I shoulda guessed you'd go for something like that."

"The Walsh outfit is a reputable agency. Look it up."

"Heck, all Chi private detective outfits are shysters. They're twice as crooked as the Chi cops. And agency business sent you down here to see Reeder?"

"That's right."

"Packing a rod?"

I laughed. "To interview Walter Reeder? No. And they don't call them rods any more in the nasty town of Chicago."

"I'll check that. Stand up."

I hesitated and his hand came out of his pocket with an ugly looking blackjack in it. I shrugged, and stood up.

He went over me with one hand, keeping the blackjack in the other. He patted my pockets, and then, before I knew what he was going to do, reached inside my coat and came out with the papers that were in it.

I grabbed for them, but he stepped back, cocking the blackjack. He walked around to the other side of his desk, nutting it between us, then started look-

ing through the papers, keeping a watch on me out of the corner of his eye. I got the idea he rather hoped I'd try to take them back.

I SHRUGGED again and sat down. After all, there wasn't anything there I wouldn't have shown him if he'd been a right guy.

There were a couple of personal letters and receipted bills that wouldn't mean anything to him, there was my letter of identification from the Walsh Agency, my medical discharge from the army, and there was a copy of the letter Reeder had written to Emil Wingerman—not the original, of course, but a verbatim copy.

The other papers he just glanced at; that one he read through carefully, twice. Then he folded it and put it on the desk with the others.

"Emil Wingerman sent you, huh?"

"Wingerman hired the Walsh Agency to investigate what Reeder had, before he invested money in it. Now you got the whole story. I'd have told you sooner if you'd asked politely."

"Yeah," he said. "Now I know everything. Except why you pulled a corny gag about finding a stiff."

He came around the desk and handed me back the papers.

"Look," he said. "You were in the army. Maybe you were a bloody hero. I don't know and I don't give a rap. Some of the worst gangsters make good soldiers, because they've got the killer instinct."

"Thanks," I said.

"In my books, Lederer, you're still marked rotten. A crooked Chicago shamus is worse, to me, than a hood. I can turn you in for false alarm about the corpse, and don't think Judge Reholm will give you a break. Get your business over with and get out of town by the five o'clock train tomorrow afternoon, and don't come back."

I stood up and put the papers in my pocket.

"Thanks again," I said. "Of course, it would change the picture a bit if I found out what happened to the corpse."

"It would, at that. I think I'd even want you to hang around for a while. Yeah, find me a corpse and you can stick

around." He came closer and tapped a sausagelike forefinger on my chest. "Listen, Lederer—"

"Tommy," I told myself, "you're doing swell. You've held your temper, and acted like a little man. He's been trying to bait you and you outfoxed him. Another minute and you'll be on your way out of here."

"Listen, Lederer, when you leave, don't ever come back, see? You've kept out of stir thus far, or you wouldn't have been in the army, but if you're a Chicago dick, you're a crook. Like your fath—"

He didn't even finish the word. I hit him.

But he'd been crowding me back against the edge of the chair I'd just got out of. I couldn't set my feet, and when you're as light as I am, you've got to get your body back of a blow to make it tell.

It caught him flush on the mouth and it shut him up, but that was all. And he'd been expecting it, even more than I was. He was already swinging the blackjack, and I didn't have time or space to duck it.

It knocked me down, but not quite out. I was numb, though. I felt the half dozen kicks he gave me, but they didn't hurt much.

By the collar of my coat he dragged me out into the hallway. He locked the door behind him.

"That's a sample of what bad boys from Chi get in Haverton," he said. "Tell 'em that." He went out, the floor shaking under his heavy footsteps.

The numbness faded away, and my head and my right side hurt like the devil. I raised myself up. It hurt when I bent over, but I managed to brush off the worst of the dust from the floor. Then, walking carefully, I went outside. Luckily, the Illinois Hotel was only two blocks away.

THE lobby was empty. Joe Brophy was still behind the desk.

"Good grief, Tommy, what happened to you?"

"Accident," I said. "Had a bad fall in the dark. Think maybe I busted a rib or two. Who's the handiest doctor?"

"Doc Reynard."

"He still coroner?"

"Yeah, but he still practices, too. Shall I send for him?"

"Yes. I can make it up to my room, and he can look me over there."

"Right away," Joe said. "Wait till I phone him, then I'll take you up in the service elevator."

He made the call and then said, "He'll be here in fifteen minutes. Come on."

The service elevator—the hotel was only four stories high and didn't have a passenger elevator—was in back. I was glad to take Joe's offer because my room was on the top floor.

Going up in the elevator, he said:

"There was a call for you. The word you were in town must have spread fast."

"You helped it along, I suppose."

He grinned. "The call was from Mary Ambers."

"Mary Ambers? Isn't she married yet? She was engaged to Nick Eklund when I left."

"Nope, she didn't marry Nick. They broke it off. Nick married Elsie Thomas—remember her?"

"Vaguely. Well, it's too late to phone Mary tonight."

"Okay. I got to get back to the desk. You can make it along the hall?"

"Sure," I said. "Thanks a lot."

In my room, I started undressing and was stripped to the waist by the time Doc Reynard got there. He went over me pretty thoroughly.

"One rib cracked, but not too badly. I'll tape it up tight for you and it'll be all right. Nasty bump on your head, but no concussion."

A few minutes after Reynard left, Joe came up.

"Reynard told me you ought to stay in bed as long as you can," he said. "Anything I can get for you?"

"No thanks, Joe. I'll be all right. Listen, the phone in here—is it connected with a switchboard downstairs?"

"No. We haven't got a P.B.X. It connects with the phone company. So if you want the desk, you phone six-two-four, the hotel number. Screw system."

It was, but it suited me fine. If I decided to make a call, it wouldn't be overheard by whoever was on duty downstairs in the hotel.

I got the long distance operator and reversed charges on a call to John Walsh, at his home.

"This is Tommy, John," I said when he answered. "Calling from the Illinois Hotel in Haverton. I want you to send me some more expense money. This case may have more to it than I thought."

"Sure, Tommy. Shall I tell Wingerman anything yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Couple of hundred be enough? That, plus time for a week or so, oughtn't to hit him too hard. He's got it."

"That'll be plenty. I don't think it'll take too long, but I may have to hire a lawyer to keep me out of jail long enough to wind it up."

"Out of jail? Listen, Tommy, should I send another op down to give you a hand? Dutch is free for a couple of days."

"No, I want to handle it myself. Something came up that makes me want to handle it myself."

"Okay, Tommy. Uh—how you feeling?"

"Swell," I told him.

AFTER I'd put the receiver back, I walked over to the window, and stood looking out. A clock struck twelve, and the street lights went off. That's the kind of town Haverton is.

There was a bright red glow in the sky to the north—almost, but not quite in the direction of Reeder's place. A fire, somewhere out at the edge of town or a bit beyond. The glow was fading, though, and in ten minutes or so it was gone.

My head hurt and I couldn't think clearly. But tomorrow would be another day. I lay down gingerly on the bed.

Knocking on the door woke me up, and it was bright daylight. It was a boy with a telegram. That would be the money from Walsh. I gave him a quarter, closed the door, and read the telegram that went with the money order for two hundred.

TAKE IT EASY, TOMMY. SEND FOR HELP IF GOING TOUGH.

Exactly ten words, of course. Walsh is famous for his ten-word telegrams. He can give complete instructions for

handling a complicated case in ten words, if he has to; he can and does take a full ten words to say "Yes" or "No" if that's all that needs to be said.

It was ten o'clock by my wrist-watch. I bathed, dressed, and sent out for breakfast. Didn't feel as bad as I should have felt. My head didn't ache at all, although it was plenty sore to the touch. The adhesive plaster on my side bothered me more than the rib did.

I got my two hundred at Western Union. I took a look at myself in the mirror, and didn't like the looks of my suit after what it had been through the night before. I bought a new one and left the old one for cleaning.

It was eleven o'clock, and I decided I'd better quit stalling and make my phone calls.

IV

BUSINESS came first, so I called Walter Reeder.

"When shall I come?" I asked him.

"Going to be pretty busy this afternoon, Tommy. Can you make it this evening?"

"Sure. About eight?"

"Uh—Tommy. Did Emil Wingerman send you here?"

"Yes," I said.

"I thought so. Emil mentioned in a letter, some time ago, that he'd heard you had been in the army—but that you had come back to Chicago and were a private detective again. If that's why you want to see me, Tommy, the later you come the better. Maybe you can hear some of those signals I told Emil about, around midnight or one o'clock. If we get them at all tonight, it ought to be around that time. But come a bit earlier so we can talk first."

"Okay. I'll be there between ten and eleven."

"Good. Uh—Tommy, I hear you didn't find the dead man last night."

"No. There wasn't anybody there. Magnus didn't seem to like it."

He chuckled. "Don't let Magnus worry you, Tommy."

"I don't. I wouldn't think of it."

"He pops off, but he's a good guy underneath. If he likes you, he'll give you the shirt off his back."

"That's wonderful," I said. "If he did I'd have it fumigated."

He laughed again. "He isn't that bad, Tommy."

"You had a fire out your way late last night, didn't you? I saw a glow in the sky around midnight."

"Yes, Bill Janson's barn burned down."

"Janson? I can't place him."

"Not on this road—the one west of here. The Holmsburg road. About a mile from here, if you cut across the fields."

"Think I know where it is. Well, I'll see you about ten, Mr. Reeder. 'By."

I called Mary Ambers' number next. Her father answered.

"Mary isn't here right now."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll call later."

"Is this Tom Lederer?"

"Yes."

"You came here, I understand, to see Mr. Reeder about an invention of his?"

"Things get around fast, Mr. Ambers."

"In a town this size, they do. Listen, Lederer, I'd like to talk to you about it. Can you drop in my office tomorrow? I won't be there today at all."

I told him I would. I hadn't intended to look him up, but if he wanted to see me, I was willing. Maybe I could get more information out of him than he could get out of me.

My next call was pretty well indicated. The *Haverton Chronicle* was only a few doors away. If Aunt Margaret Singer was still running it—She was, as I saw when I stepped through the door.

"Hello, Tommy," she said in that dry voice of hers, and neither she nor her voice had changed a bit in seven years. And she said it as casually as though she'd seen me seven hours ago.

She wasn't my aunt, incidentally; she was everybody's aunt.

"The *Haverton Chronicle* still see all and know all?" I asked.

"And tells everything—almost," she chuckled.

"How would you like a nice murder case, Aunt Margaret?"

"It would be lovely, if you can commit it before we go to press tomorrow. After that, no. It would have to wait till next week's paper. A *Haverton* mur-

der must be committed late in the week, not early. Sit down."

"You'll have to help me," I said.

"At my age, Tommy? If you don't commit a murder before you're fifty-nine, it's too late to start."

"You don't look a day over fifty-eight, Aunt Margaret. But you won't be an accessory. I just want you to make a phone call for me, and then tell me a few things. The phone call hasn't anything to do with murder."

"Have you looked up Mary Ambers yet, Tommy?"

"Her father answers the phone. That's the call I want you to make. He says she isn't home. To a woman's voice she might be. I'd like to have lunch with her if she can make it."

"All right," she said. "Twelve-thirty, Grader's Restaurant."

"Huh?"

AUNT MARGARET laughed at my bewilderment.

"It's my appointment, but I'll make the sacrifice. You can keep it for me. She wasn't home this morning, incidentally; she's working at the Red Cross today. Ambers could have told you that, if he wanted her to see you. He doesn't know she phoned your hotel yesterday evening."

"How much do you know about me?"

"Why you're here and who sent you. That you claim to have found a body last night, but misplaced it afterward, and that you told a wild story about its throat being torn out by invaders from some other world who have been communicating with Walter Reeder. That you're leaving on the five o'clock train back to Chicago. Or are you?"

"Aunt Margaret," I said, "*Haverton's* too little for a talent like yours. You should be telling Walsh how to run his agency. I'll bet you even know what I'm going to ask you next."

"Man by the name of Dave Otis," she said. "He's a truck farmer. Lives half a mile past Reeder's place."

"He didn't come home last night?"

"No, he didn't. His wife was calling around this morning, trying to locate him. She's worried, but not about his being killed. She thinks he's on a jag. He's gone on them before and been away

for a day or two. He's medium height, stocky, brown hair, blue eyes. Fit?"

"I'm ashamed to confess," I said, "that I didn't take too good a look. Just enough to see it was somebody I didn't know. It never occurred to me he'd walk off before the sheriff got there. You know where he was in town?"

"Did some ordering at the Wilshire Emporium. Did a little drinking at Swanson's Tavern, but was still sober when he left there. Then got in a poker game in the back room at Pete Lakota's."

"Aunt Margaret, how much do you know about Pete Lakota?"

"Not much, Tommy. I wouldn't trust him with a wooden nickel, but as far as I know he doesn't do anything worse than run a tavern and bowling alley and have poker games in the back room. They're technically illegal, but Ed Magnus plays there sometimes. So, by the way, does Attorney Howard Jerome Ambers, so don't be surprised who you run into there. Now move, young man. You've just got time to get to the restaurant."

I stood up. "Thanks, Aunt Margaret. You're a brick." I turned to go.

"Wait a minute, Tommy."

I turned back and her face was very serious.

"Take good care of yourself, Tommy," she said. "If you're going to wander around at night, take a gun with you. And don't try to reason with a homicidal maniac."

"You think—"

"What else would kill that way, Tommy? A dog turned killer, maybe, but a dog wouldn't come back and hide the body afterward. You be careful, Tommy—Now run along, and give Mary my love."

Mary wasn't at the restaurant. I took a booth from which I could watch the door.

Seven years, I thought, is a long time. A girl changes a lot in the seven years after she's nineteen.

Then she came in. I didn't notice whether she'd changed or not. I just knew that it was Mary. I went forward to meet her. She wasn't surprised.

"I'll bet Aunt Margaret phoned you I was taking her place," I said.

She wrinkled her nose at me.

"She did, but it was worse than that."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't too much of a surprise when she phoned. When we made the lunch date this morning, she said you'd probably see her today to get information, and that if it was before lunch time, she'd send you around."

"Aunt Margaret knows too much. She'll burst some day."

WE TALKED nonsense for a while.

I guess we ate something. Over coffee, Mary turned serious.

"Tommy," she said, "I'm awfully sorry, but—don't phone me at the house." She looked down at the table. "My father was furious when he found out I'd phoned you last night. He—well—"

"I understand, Mary." After a moment, I asked, "What about Nick Eklund. Mary? Why didn't you marry him?"

"We—I—we just found out we didn't love each other. I wish now that—"

"I wish I had known that. A long time ago."

She put her hand on mine.

"I won't lie to you, Tommy. I would have written to you if I'd known where to write. But no one here knew where you'd gone.—I suppose it's shameless of me to talk like this when you haven't even told me that you still—"

"I do," I said. "There's been a big hole in my life, ever since I left here. What are we going to do about your father?"

"Give me a little time, Tommy. I'll bring him around, make him understand. He doesn't know—I don't want to hurt him, Tommy. Not too suddenly, anyway."

The waitress came to the booth to leave the check. When we were alone again, Mary said:

"Aunt Margaret says you were in the Army, that you were wounded, sent home, and got your discharge after you left the hospital."

"I wasn't exactly wounded."

"Was it pretty awful, Tommy? The fighting, I mean."

"I guess it must have been," I told her, "that time I got mine. We were out to take a hill away from the enemy—we

took it—but how much fighting it took and what kind, I wouldn't know."

"Then how were you—"

"Fell out of a tree. Up there getting a line on some pill-boxes. Made a one-point landing and broke an aileron and both rudder-wires. And a man not all in one piece is not much good to the army."

"Tommy, you're kidding me. You're making that up."

"I am not. Look, will you keep in close touch with Aunt Margaret, so I can reach you in a hurry when I have free time again? I don't know just when that will be."

"Oh, Tommy, aren't you getting into something dangerous? I think Mr. Reeder is crazy."

At one-thirty I took Mary back to the Red Cross so she could help with the blood donors, and left her there. I was walking on air, and yet—

Funny, I thought, how little things can change in such a long time. We loved each other once; we did again. And her father had managed to break it up before, and again Mary might—

"Cut it out," I told myself. "This is your busy afternoon and evening. Remember?"

I started walking toward the place where, last night, I had found the body.

In the bright sunshine, the cornfield didn't look sinister at all. It looked like an Illinois cornfield in late summer, with the corn tall and ripe, or almost ripe for picking.

I crossed the ditch and stepped past the first row of corn, into the field, looking down. There weren't any footprints; with the ground so hard, I had expected none.

I came out again and walked on up the road to the point where, as nearly as I could reconstruct it, was the spot where I had found the body.

My luck was better here, a little. There was a place where the gravel had been kicked around, as though to cover where blood had been. I scraped some of it away with my fingers. There was what might have been dried blood on some of the lower layer of gravel, but I couldn't be sure. There was no use taking any of it along. Magnus wouldn't be interested enough to have an analysis made.

V

MY OTHER hunch had to be good if I was going to produce a corpus delicti for the sheriff. There are two ways to get rid of a corpse. One is to bury it; the other is to burn it.

I cut across fields to the adjacent road and the farm of Bill Janson. Back of the house, a pile of ashes marked where the barn had been. A tall man, so thin as to be almost emaciated, was changing the tire on an old Ford truck.

"Mr. Janson?" I said. "I'm an insurance adjuster. About your barn—"

"Huh? I didn't have any insurance, mister."

"I know," I told him. "But our association asks me to send in reports on all fires in my territory, whether insured or not. You see, we work with farmers in cutting down the number of fires, by helping them eliminate the causes. Do you know what caused yours?"

He shook his head slowly.

"Not an idea, mister. The noise of it, the crackling, woke me near midnight and she was shooting high then. Too late to save anything. Nobody's been there since eight. I dunno what started it."

"Spontaneous combustion, perhaps?"

He took off his hat and scratched his head. "Heard about it, but don't rightly know what it is. Whenever they can't find what started a fire, then it's spontaneous com-combustion. That the way I understand it."

"Not so far wrong, at that." I grinned. "You had a hay-loft in the barn?"

"Half full," he said bitterly.

"Do you have a dog?"

"Well—not what you'd rightly call a dog. Wife's got one of these toy terriers she keeps in the house, but I wouldn't call it a dog."

"Lose any stock?"

"Nope. That's the lucky thing. Sold off my team last week and been dicker-ing for a pair of Percherons, but hadn't bought 'em yet. A week sooner or a week later, I'd have lost a couple horses. I don't keep cows, and luckily the pig-pen and chicken-yard weren't close to the barn."

"Mind if I look around, Mr. Janson? In the ashes, I mean?"

"Go right ahead."

I found myself a stick to poke with, turned up my trouser cuffs and waded into the ashes. Janson watched me curiously for a moment or two, then went back to fixing the truck tire.

The ashes were pretty deep and it was a tougher job than I had figured it to be. It took me half an hour.

I scraped the ashes away carefully, then called Janson over. I pointed down without saying anything.

"If you've got a phone," I said, when he'd stood there looking for a while, "you'd better call the sheriff."

"Sure," he said. "Well, that tears it. Now I do get a dog, a real dog."

I didn't follow it. I said, "Huh?"

"A watchdog. Then no tramp'd sleep in my barn without my knowing it, and set the place on fire smoking. Drunk, too, likely."

"A man named Dave Otis disappeared last night," I said.

"What'd Dave be doing in my barn? He doesn't even live on this road."

"Did Dave Otis ever have a brain operation? Was his skull trepanned? And did he wear a wrist-watch with a metal-mesh band?"

He looked down at the blackened thing around the left carpal bones of the charred skeleton.

"If you stand over there," I said, "you can see the trepanning of the skull without moving it."

"Then it's Dave all right. But by George, how Dave ever happened to be—"

After a moment's silence, he turned and walked into the house.

I WENT over and sat on the grass. I cleaned the ashes off my shoes and knocked them out. I was retying the laces of the second one when Ed Magnus drove into the barnyard. Overholt was with him again. Janson came out of the house.

I waved toward the ashes.

"You wanted a corpse, Magnus," I said. "Help yourself."

He glared at me, and waded into the ashes. After a minute or so, he came out.

"It's Otis, all right. Tip, you go in and phone Doc Reynard. Dunno what kind of an autopsy he can do on that, but he always wants to see a body 'fore

we move it."

Ed Magnus walked over to me, and I stood up.

"Did you know Dave Otis?" he asked.

"No," I told him. "I killed him just for the fun of it."

"You weren't at Lakota's, maybe, any time yesterday?"

"No," I said. "Were you?"

Tip Overholt came back out of the house.

"Doc be here pretty soon," he said.

Magnus said, "You weren't convinced, last night?"

"You crowded me in a corner, and you used a blackjack. With your hands empty, I'd like to see you do it again."

Slowly he started to take off his coat. I peeled mine and laid it on the grass, then stepped back into the road and waited.

He wouldn't use anything but his fists here, I knew. Not with witnesses. But I had to keep clear of those fists. He was big, but he was slow and ponderous.

He didn't know that I had a cracked rib—but then he didn't know that I was something of a boxer, almost a welter champ. Given plenty of room for footwork, I could slice him for bologna and take my time doing it—unless that rib and the adhesive tape were too much for me. That, I figured, evened up things between us.

He came walking in confidently, his left arm raised in what he thought was a guard, and his right cocked for a hay-maker.

I danced around to his left and put in one over the guard and one under. His swing missed by a yard.

The rib, I found, didn't slow me up any. It hurt, but I could take it. It hurt worse when I hit with the right, so I settled on a campaign of left jabs with only an occasional light right. That was okay; a boxer can put more smoke in a left jab that travels six inches than an ordinary man can put into a full right swing.

He kept coming in, and I let him. I rode the bicycle in a backward circle, and alternated between his face and his spare tire.

In three minutes, or maybe four, he was breathing like a locomotive, his face was getting puffy, and a trickle of blood

from his lower lip was running down his chin.

I took only one of his wallops; a roundhouse swing that caught me alongside the head. It made my ears ring and brought back my headache from the night before.

I went backward faster than usual, and he charged in, panting, for the kill. But I was still on balance. I sank a right into the lower edge of his vest. He went "Oooof" and sat down. Not knocked out, just out of wind. He didn't look in a hurry to get up.

"You young fool, you" a dry voice said. It was Doc Reynard. I hadn't heard him drive up or get out of the car, but he was walking briskly toward us.

Ed Magnus got up slowly, his hands at his sides. He was through fighting.

"S all right, Doc," he panted, and headed for the watering trough to wash the blood off his face.

Doc followed him, and I put my coat back on and leaned against a tree to wait for the riveters to stop work inside my head.

AFTER a minute, Doc and Magnus walked over to where the barn had been and I followed, to hear what Doc had to say about the skeleton there. Muttering under his breath, Doc waded into the ashes and bent over.

"It's Dave Otis all right. Besides that trepanning, there's an old fracture in the right femur. And the teeth are—Yeah, it's Dave all right. Incidentally, he's dead."

"I guessed that," said Magnus. "What you're supposed to tell me is how?"

Doc Reynard stared at him.

"And just how am I supposed to tell that? Don't be a dope, Ed."

"Can't you perform an autopsy?"

"How? I'll make a stab at it and give you an official sounding report, but barring miracles it won't tell what he died from."

"What kind of a miracle?"

"Well, there are a few poisons that would show up in a bone structure or in chemical analysis of ashes. That's one possibility. Then again, when we sift the ashes under the skeleton, we might turn up a bullet or something, which wouldn't prove he'd died of that. but it

would be a strong presumption."

"If he'd died of a torn jugular?" I asked.

"If he did, all the angels couldn't prove it now."

That was what I'd wanted to be sure of. I nodded and started walking for the road.

"Where you going?" Ed Magnus called.

"Town."

"Wait a minute. You can ride in with me."

"To jail?"

"Not this trip. I'll buy you a drink."

He left his deputy to help Reynard and he and I got into the car. On the way in, I asked: "Which way is it now? Am I under order to get out of town or to stay in it?"

"Guess you'll have to stick around for the inquest. You found the body. Twice, if your story of last night's true."

"You don't believe it?"

"Look, let's start all over again. Doc told me you got a busted rib. If you had spunk enough to want to fight me this afternoon in spite of that, well—Oh, shucks, do I got to apologize? I don't know how to."

"Just skip it," I said. "We'll start over from here. And now about this murder—"

"Wait a minute," he said, and swung in to the curb in front of a tavern. "I don't know about you, but I want a drink."

"I can use one," I admitted.

We didn't get back to murder until one was under our belts and we were looking at the second. Then I started again.

"About last night. Why don't you believe, now, that I found the corpse?"

"I didn't say I didn't, quite. But look—you got to admit it's a screwy yarn. Guy growling at you. Dave with a torn throat, disappearing and turning up a mile away, burned. Are you sure he was dead when you found him? I mean, it wouldn't be so screwy if he'd been hurt. Look, tell me what you think of this:

"Dave gets hurt, hit by an auto maybe. He's unconscious and there's blood on this throat. You find him, having let your imagination get away with you

after hearing a dog growl in a field, and think he's dead. You go on to Reeder's. He comes to, wanders off in a daze, gets into Janson's barn, tries to light a cigarette."

"It's nice," I said, "but I can't buy it. First, he was dead. And his throat wasn't just bloody, it was torn. Second, I did see something in the corn, and it wasn't a dog. It was erect, man-high, and a lighter oval where the face was."

"You make it tough," he sighed. "You pretty well narrow it down to a homicidal maniac. And we haven't got any homicidal maniac around."

"You can't tell by looking. Some of 'em act sane enough, except once in a while. We had a case like that in Chicago once. So help me, the guy was a department store Santa Claus."

MAGNUS grunted. "Could be. Doesn't it make you the best suspect, though, to look at it that way?"

"Me? I didn't even know Dave Otis?"

"Insanity doesn't need a motive. You just got through telling me I wouldn't necessarily know a nut if I was talking to one. I admit it, so maybe I could be talking to one. You were in the fighting in Korea. Maybe it did something to you."

"It did," I admitted. "But not that. So I'm a suspect now?"

"Drink up," he said, "and don't get tragic about it. Heck, you know the game if you're a detective. Anybody's a suspect who's near the scene of a crime at the right time. There's no evidence except that you were there. Lack of motive doesn't mean anything, because your own story makes it look like a motiveless crime."

"Who would have a motive for killing Dave Otis?"

"Nobody that I know of. Except maybe his wife. And she won't even kill chickens. Dave had to do that for her."

"What reason did she have?"

"Just that he drank and gambled plenty. He wasn't a bad guy though. She could have done worse."

"He didn't, by any chance, win yesterday? I mean, he wasn't carrying a lot of dough?"

"I don't think so. That's one of the things I've got to check. Another is

blood. I'm going out the other road, now, and excavate a bushel of gravel where you said the body was. I'll turn it over to Doc Reynard and listen to him cuss. Want to come along?"

I did.

VI

THIS time I looked around more thoroughly and found what I'd missed before. And the answer, incidentally, to why there'd been so little blood where I'd found the body.

The blood was on the other side of the road, along the shoulder. There was a big oval blotch of earth there that was definitely darker than the area around it.

We stood looking down at it.

"This must be where he died, Sheriff," I said. "The killer had already started to move him, had carried him twenty yards when he heard me coming and dropped him. He ran back, unencumbered, to the shelter of the tall corn to see who was coming."

"Um," said Magnus. "Could be. That looks like blood. I'll take some back to have Reynard test. But look—if it was a maniac, how come he didn't attack you?"

I shrugged. "You can't predict what a nut will or won't do."

He scooped some of the darkened earth into an envelope and folded the flap over carefully.

"I'm going back to Janson's farm now," he said, "to give this to Doc. Want to come along or shall I drop you off in town on the way? I got to go back there to get on the other road."

"I'll drop off," I told him. "I've got some other things to do."

In the car I said, "Just occurred to me that I can relieve your mind on one count. I can eliminate one suspect for you."

"Who?"

"Me," I told him. "I've got an alibi."

"How come? We don't know when Dave was killed. Or do you?"

"No," I admitted. "That isn't what I meant. But whoever put him in the barn set fire to the barn, and that wasn't until after eleven o'clock. I'm covered from the time I got to Reeder's around eight, until almost midnight. Must have been

after ten-thirty that we parted. Anyway, there wasn't time for me to get to Janson's and back before Joe Brophy can tell you I got back to the hotel. He sent for Doc Reynard, who was taping me up about the time the barn was fired. Doc didn't leave until nearly midnight."

He grunted. "Sounds pretty good. Of course there's only your story that Dave was dead before he reached that barn. He still might have been drunk and wandered in there and lighted a cigarette—"

I laughed so hard it hurt my rib. Magnus turned and looked at me, and after a second he realized how silly his words had been, for if there'd been neither murder nor arson I needed an alibi as badly as I needed sinus trouble or a wooden leg. He chuckled, too, and slowed down the car.

"Near as I'm going to the middle of town. Be seeing you."

I remembered my promise to the press and went to the *Chronicle* office.

"Got your murder for you, Aunt Margaret," I told her. "And in time for this week's paper."

"You found Dave Otis?"

I told her everything that had happened, except the part that was private between the sheriff and me.

"Thanks a lot, Tommy. How about finding out for me, before we go to press tomorrow morning, who did it?"

"That's not my job, thank heaven. As long as I've convinced Ed I didn't do it, I'm in the clear. I see Reeder tonight at ten, I make the rest of my inquiries about him, and then I'm through. And by the way, now that you know the rest of it, what is your opinion about Reeder?"

"You mean whether he's crazy on this extra-terrestrial angle? I don't know, Tommy. He's brilliant, in a feeble-minded sort of way, if you know what I mean."

"A genius, except for occasional blind spots?"

"About that. One thing I will tell you, though; he's honest. He thinks he's got something all right, or he wouldn't try to borrow money for it. I understand he tried to borrow from his own lawyer, Ambers. But the deal didn't go through."

THAT surprised me.

"Is he broke?" I asked.

"Oh, he has enough income to live on, but the research he wants to do on that radio idea, whatever it is, would cost several thousand dollars."

"You don't know what it is?"

"Some new form of radio—about as radical as 'frequency modulation'. As he told it to me, he's got it so it works, but wants to perfect it himself rather than release it half-baked.—Say, young man, what was the idea of handing Mary that yarn about falling out of a tree when you were in service?"

"Yarn?" I asked. I hung my head. "Listen, Aunt Margaret, the truth sounded so silly. Did I want to tell her I'd been discharged because I strained my back carrying a garbage can while I was on KP for not having my shoes shined?"

"Shut up and get out of here, you impudent young puppy—Wait a minute. Are you carrying a revolver?"

"A revolver? What would I want with a revolver?"

"For hunting a homicidal maniac, of course. And don't try to tell me you won't be doing it, as long as you're around town. I've got one here, a thirty-eight, and you can use it if you haven't one."

"Put that thing away," I told her. "I'm not hunting any homicidal maniacs. I'm strictly minding my own business."

She grinned at me, but I dead-panned my way out.

From there I went to the Haverton Municipal Library. I browsed in vain for a while until I thought of looking up "werewolf" in the *Brittanica*. That gave me the word I hadn't been able to think of. Lycanthropy.

Lycanthropy is that rare form of madness in which the maniac believes himself, at times, to be a wolf. While under the influence of that belief, he will kill—if he kills at all—in the manner of a wolf. Lycanthropy is the basis for the werewolf legend. Lycanthropy, itself, is not a legend at all.

I went through the indices of the most promising volumes and put aside those which had more than a casual reference to lycanthropy.

A deposit served in lieu of a library card and I took them back with me to

the Illinois Hotel. Joe Brophy was back of the desk again.

"There was a call for you. Jeff Pogue called, for Mr. Reeder. Said to ask you to get there at nine-thirty sharp, if you could."

I went on up to my room with the books and started reading up on insanity. I got so interested I almost forgot to eat. But at seven I went down to a lunch stand for some hamburgers and came right back to read some more.

There'd been two major questions in my mind. The first was whether the actions of the killer of Dave Otis had been consistent with the symptoms of lycanthropy. As nearly as I could decide, they had been. Maniacs who had killed—as wolves—had on occasion, upon return to normalcy, disposed of the bodies of their victims to avoid detection.

There was even specific mention of a case in France in which the mad killer had tried to cover his crime by setting fire to the cottage in which he had made his kill. There were several cases in which victims had been buried in shallow graves.

Nor was it out of character that he should have growled at me from the cornfield in which he was hiding, although he was already in the process of moving the body to dispose of it. Recovery from an attack was not always as sudden as the turning on or off of a light. There might be an intermediate period wherein mentally he was half wolf and half man. Man enough to realize he must dispose of the body, man enough to walk and stand erect. Wolf enough to growl at a stranger.

The other question was whether or not a lycanthrope could appear normal and sane most of the time and whether there was any way he could be spotted.

ACCORDING to the books, he could seem normal, particularly in the early stages of the madness. There was no definite way in which he could be singled out, but it was more likely that he should be an introvert than an extrovert. He was quite likely to be the secretive, hermit type who lived alone and avoided rather than sought the company of others. He was quite likely to be a cranky, solitary individual.

I thought, of course, of Karl Pogue, Jeff's brother. That description fitted Karl Pogue like a glove. He was a morose, solitary man who seldom left his farm, who lived alone and seemed to like it, and who avoided the company of everyone except Jeff. He did like Jeff, who was a few years younger than he was.

And he liked his dog, Emp, short for Emperor. That was out of character a bit. Wolves don't like dogs. Karl was crazy about his. Emp was getting old, but he was still a good watchdog, and beautifully trained. He wouldn't let anybody but Karl or Jeff on the place.

But what, I thought, if Emp had gone bad? Sometimes a police dog will go bad and turn into a killer. A sheep-killer or a man-killer. And a police dog kills as a wolf kills.

A sudden idea hit me. Suppose the mad killer had been Emperor—was Karl Pogue screwy enough to try to save his dog by disposing of the corpse? He might be, I thought; he was crazy about Emp, all right, and hated almost everybody.

If Emp came home with a bloody muzzle, would Karl have got the dog to lead him to the victim. Had it been Karl Pogue in the cornfield, holding Emp's collar, closing his hand over the dog's muzzle to silence him after that one growl?

Then, when I'd gone on, carrying off the body to dispose of it in such a manner that it could not be proved that a dog had done the killing?

Maybe I had something there, I thought. I'd ask Ed Magnus what he thought of it. Karl Pogue was a big strong man, too, big enough to carry a body that far. So, for that matter, was his brother Jeff. But it hadn't been Jeff who'd moved the body. I was sure of that because I'd walked rapidly from the body on to Reeder's place, and Jeff had been there and he hadn't just come in. He'd been in carpet slippers and he'd been working with Reeder on an experiment. And if he'd been behind me, in the cornfield, and had run fast enough to beat me there by that much of a margin, he'd at least have been breathing hard.

No, neither Jeff nor Reeder could possibly have moved the body, for I'd been

with them from a few minutes after I'd found it until I'd left with the sheriff and we'd driven right to the spot in his car.

But Karl Pogue— The more I thought of it, the more I liked Karl Pogue as a suspect. He could be mad himself. Or Emp could have turned killer and Karl could have—

I glanced at my wrist-watch and it was nine o'clock. I'd have to leave right away to have time to walk to Reeder's home without hurrying. The Otis business could wait until tomorrow. I'd have to clear my mind to concentrate on the job at hand—the radio matter.

I walked briskly and succeeded in forgetting werewolves while I was on the streets of Haverton. Then the edge of town and the dimly moonlit road. And I'd forgotten my flashlight.

Things are different at night on a country road. You can sit in a brightly lighted hotel room and think objectively about madmen and mad dogs and werewolves. Alone on a dark road on which a man has had his throat torn out you think about them, too, but your thoughts don't fall into orderly grooves of reasoning; they breathe on the back of your neck. They gibber at you from every dark clump of bushes and every fence corner.

It didn't help, either, when I reached down to pick up a stick of wood beside the road. The stick of wood slithered away quickly. It wasn't one.

I WAS opposite the woods now, and had a quarter of a mile of it to pass, until I got to the other side of Karl Pogue's place. Karl's farm is on one side of the road there, the woods on the other. Karl was in bed already; his place was dark. Emp started barking when he heard my footsteps on the road.

I didn't mind that. The barking of a dog is a homely, familiar sound. And a barking dog may or may not bite, but he is seldom a killer. Anyway he was chained up. I could hear the scrape of the chain. That sound made me breathe a bit easier.

But then my theory about Emp and Karl must be a dud—Emp, anyway. Karl was still the best bet for a student in the school of lycanthropy although, of

course, I didn't know all the people living around Haverton, by any means.

The barking stopped behind me. The woods were behind now, too. Nothing had come out of them. Now I was passing the cornfield.

Beyond it a clump of elms overhung the road, under them a patch of shadow darker than the rest of the night. But it was only shadow; there was nothing there.

Except— Yes, now that I was only a few paces away, I saw something lying there in the road that seemed to glow faintly. It looked as though it might be the luminous dial of a watch.

It was a watch, lying there in the road. As I bent over it I could hear it ticking and I could see that the hands were at nine twenty-five. I reached down quickly to pick it up, and—

VII

I WAS lying somewhere where it was very dark. My hands and face seemed to be sticky with mud. My legs weren't there. My head was a balloon that inflated and deflated with every breath I took.

I was outdoors, for I seemed to be lying on grass and there was an occasional breath of cool wind. But somebody had put out the moon—or else I was blindfolded or blind.

That last thought gave me courage to move. My hands weren't tied and my right one felt of my left wrist and my wrist-watch was still there. I got my left wrist up in front of my face and could see the glowing figures of the dial. I wasn't blind.

W a t c h—luminous dial—I'd been reaching for a watch lying in the road and that was the last thing I'd known until now. What had happened? Where was I?

I made my eyes focus on those faintly glowing figures and on the hands. The small hand pointed to ten and the long to eleven. Five minutes to ten o'clock. I'd been unconscious for half an hour.

Somewhere not far away I heard the sound of an automobile stopping and a car door opening and closing. Low-pitched male voices.

My legs were coming back now, and

my head quit inflating and deflating; it started to throb and it hurt like hell.

I rolled over and pushed up to a sitting position on the grass.

Now I could hear the rustling of leaves overhead and see a faint dapple of light where the moon shone through a thin place in the leaves. I was in a woods or grove of trees; that was why it was so dark. Nobody had put the moon out.

I heard the voices again. I thought I should get up and try to reach them. Or maybe I should call out and let them find me—call out, that is, if my throat was still there.

I felt for it, and it was still there.

But I decided not to yell if I could walk. I got to my knees and then to my feet, and my groping hands found the bole of a tree and I leaned against it until I felt a bit stronger.

I felt my head. It was sore all over, but there was no break in the skin and no bump except what was left of the one Ed Magnus' blackjack had given me last night.

A sandbag, I thought. Someone had been in the tree, directly over the watch in the road. It had been a beautiful booby-trap. Walking through that patch of shadow I'd be bound to see that glowing dial and hear the ticking of the watch. And when I stood right over it, he'd dropped or swung the sandbag.

The voices were louder now. They sounded excited, almost scared. One of them was Ed Magnus' voice. I heard him say, "Good gosh, Tip!" Then a low rumble that would have been Overholt's voice.

I could see better now, too. I could see to make my way between the trunks of the trees and reach the edge of the grove and the moonlight.

I'd been in the clump of trees back of Walter Reeder's house. The garage was to my left and the dark bulk of the house straight ahead.

Magnus and Overholt each had flashlights. Ed was at the window of the house, looking in and using his flashlight through the pane of the window. Overholt was faced away from the house and he was being sick.

He looked up and saw me coming, and he stopped being sick. He threw the beam of his flashlight at me, then

grabbed a revolver out of a shoulder holster.

"Put up your hands!" he yelled, as though I was a mile away. The gun was shaking in his grip.

I raised my hands slowly, and in the beam of the flashlight I saw them clearly. It wasn't mud that made my hands and face sticky. It was blood.

Magnus had whirled from the window and his gun was on me, too. "Cripes," he said, huskily. "Cripes—"

HE CIRCLED me, keeping his distance, and his face was dead-white. But his gun was steady. He got behind me and the muzzle of it pushed into the small of my back.

"Frisk him, Tip."

Tip Overholt shoved his revolver back into the holster with shaking hands. He came closer, reluctantly. "What for, Ed? Let's tie him up good and—"

"You don't tie up a man with weapons on him."

"Weapons? What does he need with weapons?" Overholt shuddered. "With teeth that can—"

"Reeder was stabbed, wasn't he? Get his knife. Hurry up!" The sheriff sounded plenty nervous and jittery.

Overholt went over me with one hand, keeping the other out in a protective guard, as though to be able to push me off if I jumped him.

"Was Reeder killed?" I asked. Time enough later, I figured, to tell them what had happened to me; time, when they had calmed down and got that look out of their faces and that sound out of their voices. There are times when it doesn't pay to argue.

Overholt tapped my pockets first.

"He ain't got—wait a minute."

He'd felt something down inside the lining of my coat. I could feel it, too, now that his hand pressed it against me. He turned back the coat and the point of a knife jammed through the lining. He pulled it through the hole it made; there wasn't any haft to stop it. It was a paper-knife with a sharp, stiletto-like blade and an onyx handle.

Some of the blood came off on my coat as he pulled it out, but there was enough left to show that the last use to which it had been put was not the open-

ing of envelopes.

"Reeder's own knife," Overholt said to Magnus. "The one he kept on his desk. Musta grabbed up the knife and—"

"Is Reeder dead?" I asked again.

I was talking into a dead mike.

"There's some strong cord in the door pocket of the car, Tip," Magnus said. "Go get it. We'll tie his hands behind him."

"Listen, Ed, things aren't what they look like to you right now," I said quietly. "I'm not crazy, and if Reeder is dead, I didn't kill him. I'm not—"

"Don't move," Magnus said. "Don't try to make a move."

They took no chances. Magnus had me lower my hands slowly and bring them around back to me, together. He didn't move his gun a millimeter until my hands were back there, and then Overholt jammed his revolver into my ribs from the side and held it there while Magnus took the cord and tied my wrists.

Tied them tight, too. It was thin but tough cord and he wrapped it several times around my crossed wrists and then tied knot after knot in it. It was too tight. It stopped my circulation and my hands began to feel cold.

"Keep that gun on him, Tip," Magnus said. "I got to—" He scratched his head. "Blamed if I know what to do. Suppose I ought to—"

"Don't move 'em," Overholt said. "Get Doc Reynard on the phone and get him out. We got to have an inquest, Ed, even now we know who did it. Even a maniac killing, you got to have an inquest, don't you?"

Magnus nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I can use the phone here. And let Doc worry about getting 'em in to the undertaker's."

He went up on the porch and into the house. This time, he turned on the lights; before he must have used just his flashlight. The window was open and I could hear him talking.

"Yeah, Doc. Reeder and Pogue, both. Might's well have Harvey bring his ambulance along, to take 'em back. Sure, both deader'n—Huh? Reeder was stabbed. Jeff was—well, killed like Lederer said Otis was killed. And Lederer oughta know, all right— Yeah, throat

torn out. We may be gone before you get here, but go right on in. Don't knock."

ED PUT the receiver back on the hook on the second try and came out.

"Ed, that cord's too tight," I said. "You'll find out you're mistaken about me, but I don't want to lose my hands meanwhile."

"Don't take any chances with him, Ed," Overholt said. "Lookit what happened to them in there."

Ed nodded. "We're taking him in right now. Reckon his hand'll be okay till we can get him in a cell."

I doubted it; they were cold and beginning to feel numb already. I remembered that a tourniquet should be loosened every fifteen minutes, and my hands had been tied five or more already, while Magnus had phoned.

"Let's get going then," I said. "I want this off."

"In a minute," Ed told me. "You'll be there a long while—or in the state asylum."

Anyway, he was talking to me now. Pretty soon he'd be listening enough so I could try to explain what happened. And if I could get the blood washed off so I didn't look like what they thought I was, I'd stand a chance of getting him to listen intelligently.

Meanwhile, the quickest way of getting that cord off would be to get into town with them and get it over with. Overholt had stepped back from me now, although he still held the pistol aimed squarely at me and his finger tense on the trigger.

His face, in the flashlight glare, still looked scared stiff.

I moved slowly, so as not to make Overholt's trigger finger any more nervous than it was, but I started walking toward the car. Both doors were open.

"Get in back," Magnus said.

I got in, leaned back, closed my eyes and tried to think. All my fine ideas were under the bridge. With Jeff Pogue and Walter Reeder both killed, nothing I'd thought of before made sense. Emp, Karl Pogue's dog, might have killed Dave Otis, but Emp, wouldn't have killed Walter Reeder with Reeder's own paper knife. Not to mention sandbagging me

and putting the knife in my coat lining, or maybe in my pocket where it had cut through and dropped into the lining.

Karl Pogue—that didn't make much sense, either. Pogue was crazy about his brother and certainly wouldn't have killed him, unless he was simply a raving maniac, and no raving maniac had sandbagged me and put me on the spot to take the rap for the crimes. That had been beautifully timed and worked out so well there wasn't even any use trying to explain to Ed Magnus what had happened. Not right now, anyway.

I leaned back further in the seat and the back of my hand touched something round and metallic. I could tell by the feel and shape of it that it was a flashlight. An extra one, apparently, because the sheriff and his deputy each carried one.

"Keep an eye on him, Overholt," Magnus said. "I'm going back in for a while. Just thought of something."

He turned and left, not in any hurry, about it. Overholt stayed beside the car, his gun still in his hand.

Five minutes passed and Magnus hadn't come out. I began to worry seriously about those cords. There might be other stops and delays on the way to jail.

My hands were nearly numb already, but I found I could get hold of the flashlight behind me and twist off the front cap. The round disk of glass had a rough edge and I got my fingers doubled up and started sawing at the cord with it.

The cord parted just as Magnus came out of the house. My hands tingled as though they'd been asleep, from the blood coming back into them.

Magnus had something in his hand as he walked toward the car. When he got close enough I could see it was a stump of candle.

"In the basement," he said to Overholt. "Burning down toward some waste soaked with oil. In a few more minutes the whole place would have been ablaze."

"Then that's how Janson's barn—"

"Sure," Magnus said. "He had an alibi for the time the barn burned, didn't he? But he used something like this when he put the body there earlier. If I hadn't thought to go back and look, that joint would've burned down."

He got in the front seat of the car and

pulled his pistol back out of the holster.

"You drive, Tip. I'll sit facing him. We take no chances with a guy like this."

VIII

● VERHOLT got in and started the car.

"Stop at Karl Pogue's place on the way," Magnus said. "I got to tell him about Jeff."

The deputy drove slowly, as though the road was paved with eggs. He pulled to the side of it across from Pogue's.

"Watch him, Tip," Magnus said, and got out, walking heavily toward the house.

The dog started barking again. Overholt, his own pistol in his hand, turned part way around in the seat and rested the gun on top of the seat back.

Magnus hammered on the door and after a minute it was opened. Pogue was in his nightshirt. He had a shotgun in his hand as though he'd picked it up on his way to the door. He stuck it under his arm, aiming down, when he recognized Magnus. I could hear their voices, but not what they were saying.

Magnus was doing the talking; Pogue answered in monosyllables. Then he stepped down from the doorway and started walking toward the car, alongside Magnus.

I could see him clearly as he stepped into moonlight. He was big, with thick black hair that was turning gray and a thick black mustache that wasn't. He didn't seem to realize that he was barefoot and wore only a short nightshirt.

His face looked like a mask, and suddenly I was afraid. Karl Pogue had just been told that Jeff was dead and that I had killed him. Karl Pogue had a shotgun under his arm, and I saw now that his finger was inside the trigger-guard. And I remembered him as I'd known him; sullen, morose, unpredictable. Hating everybody but Jeff. Perfectly capable of letting that shotgun go off accidentally in my direction. Capable, for that matter of not bothering to claim or pretend that it was an accident.

His face was still and rigid like that of a man walking in his sleep, and I thought I saw death in its stillness.

They were twenty paces away. I didn't

wait. I let the cord drop down off my wrists and closed my right hand around the flashlight. With Magnus coming back, Overholt was glancing toward him instead of my way and the revolver wasn't aimed directly at me.

I brought the flashlight around and hit his knuckles with it. He yelled and dropped the gun, and I was out of the car almost before it hit the floor boards. I kept the car between me and Pogue as I ran into the patch of woods beside the road.

I kept hold of the flashlight; I knew I might need it later, if it still worked. I could see the first trees and get through them, and then it was dark. I had to stop running to avoid bashing myself against a tree trunk, but I walked rapidly and turned at a sharp angle to parallel the road instead of going in straight.

I came to the edge of the brook where it ran out of the culvert. There was a break in the trees. It was only a few feet across, but there was a fast current, I noticed, as it came churning out of the culvert.

I jumped it, easily, but my heels landed on a short piece of board that was lying on the other bank, and it was noisy. I heard Magnus' voice call out to the others. And I could see the yellow of their flashlights.

The current gave me an idea. I flicked the switch of the flashlight in my hand to see if it worked, and it did. I picked up the board I'd landed on; it was a half-rotten piece of one-by-six about two feet long. I put the lighted flashlight on it and put it down on the current of the brook.

The current whirled it away.

If I could see the light from their flashes, they could see that, and maybe they'd follow it. They did. I heard them change direction to head diagonally downstream after it.

I stepped out into the road again and ran toward town, running down in the ditch so my feet wouldn't scuff gravel. After a hundred yards I was around a turn in the road and I slowed down to a walk. It was only a ten-minute walk into town from here and if they combed the woods that long, I'd make it. If I heard the car starting behind me, I could take cover until they passed.

JUST OUTSIDE town I had to duck behind a hedge to let a car coming toward me go past. It was the meat-wagon from Harvey's Funeral Parlor and I knew Doc Reynard would be sitting with the driver in the front seat.

I reached town and no car had come from behind me.

Looking as I must have looked, I headed for the alleys. I was half-way down the first one when the sheriff's car roared past the mouth of it. If I'd been near enough, I might have yelled out and given myself up. My only reason for escaping had been to avoid being shot by Pogue. And Pogue, dressed only in a light nightshirt, certainly wouldn't have come to town with them.

The first thing to do was to wash my hands and face. I ducked into a yard and found a side hydrant. I turned it on, just a trickle so as not to awake the people in the house, and washed as well as I could.

I braved the street then, and looked myself over in a mirror in the window of a closed drug store. It wasn't so good. There was blood on my shirt collar and a spot of it on my tie. My suit was torn from the run through the woods. My shoes were muddy and scuffed.

But I could turn up my coat collar to hide the bloodstains and look no worse than a tramp.

I was a little punch-drunk, a little silly. There was a police dog on the sidewalk before me, and I stopped and looked at it, and it looked at me. It growled a little, low in its throat.

I could see the lithe, smooth strength of it, and its teeth. Teeth like those could do to a man's throat exactly what had been done to Dave Otis' throat.

It growled again, low.

That, I knew now for sure, was the sound I'd heard from the cornfield. Not a man. A dog like this one.

"Hello, boy," I said quietly and the dog stopped growling. I stepped closer to it, without moving fast, and held out my hand. It sniffed my hand and then I patted its head and scratched it behind the ears. Its tail began to wag.

I stood there with my hand on the dog's neck, without moving, for maybe a full minute. Something began to percolate.

I gave the dog a farewell pat and started walking, fast. Ahead of me I could see the sign of a drug store that was still open. I went in and called the Haverton *Chronicle* phone number. Margaret Singer would still be there, I knew, for this was press night for the weekly paper.

Her voice answered.

"This is Tommy Lederer, Aunt Margaret."

I could tell by the little gasp that she'd heard from Magnus.

"Are you all right, Tommy?" she asked.

"Do you think I'm a werewolf, Aunt Margaret?"

"What did happen, Tommy?"

"Too much to tell over the phone," I told her. "If you don't string along with Magnus in thinking I'm a maniac, I'll come around and tell you. You might get a story out of it. But I don't want Magnus to get me for an hour or two yet. I'll come if you promise not to phone him."

"I guess—Tommy, honestly, I just can't believe what Ed Magnus told me, but according to him you were practically caught in the act. You—you aren't crazy, are you, Tommy?"

"No," I said. "But I'd say that, wouldn't I, even if I were? It's a silly question to ask."

"I see your point, Tommy." She laughed a little scared laugh. "All right, Tommy. Come on around. Rap on the window. It won't be a trap for you. As for me, I'll take the gamble."

I was nearing the center of town now, so I took to the alleys again. I reached the alley back of the *Chronicle* office and rapped on the window.

Margaret Singer opened it and stepped back. I saw she had a revolver in her hand, the .38 she'd offered to lend me that afternoon.

I CAME in through the window. She moved back against her desk.

"Come over where it's lighter, please," she said.

I moved into the light and stood there quietly while she looked into my face.

She must have seen something, for she said, "Thank heaven," and put the revolver back into the desk drawer. She

went over and turned the key in the door that led back to the composing room. "Sit down, Tommy. You look like the fall of Pompeii, but you're not crazy. Tell me what happened."

I told her.

"It sounds screwy," she said, "but I believe you, now that I've seen you. What do you want me to do?"

"First, tell me this: If you wanted a police dog in a hurry, and didn't want to buy it in Haverton, where would you get it?"

"I'd drive to Carterville, twenty miles. That's the nearest town big enough to have a full-size pet shop. They might have police dog puppies in stock. Might even have an adult dog, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean. And suppose they didn't have one?"

"Man named Peterson lives just outside Carterville and has a kennel. Breeds police dogs. I think the pet shop there buys puppies from him. If you offered enough, he could sell you one of his studs if he didn't have anything else."

I nodded and said: "He has a phone, if he's in business. But as a newspaper, you can get away with phoning him long distance, even at this time of night. Will you phone him and ask if he sold an adult dog today?"

She picked up the phone.

"If he sold one," I said, "let me talk to him."

Five minutes later, we knew that he'd sold one, and I'd talked to him about it. When I put down the receiver, Aunt Margaret looked stunned.

"Do you mean—"

"Phone Magnus at his office. He's probably there and letting the state police do the leg work. Ask him exactly what he found there besides the bodies. I mean, particularly, what shape Reeder's experimental apparatus was in and whether his papers had been ransacked."

She called Magnus and talked to him for quite a while. Then she put the phone down and turned back to me.

"Hashed. Papers burned and every radio hook-up torn apart, the tubes smashed, everything. Looked like a madman had been through the place."

Pieces of the puzzle were falling in

place. There were still things that didn't fit, but I could dream up a sequence of events that made sense.

"Karl Pogue's in town," Aunt Margaret said. "Got dressed and came in to make a formal identification of his brother. Reeder hasn't any relatives, so Magnus is getting Mary's father, as Reeder's lawyer, to come down and make the identification there."

"Aunt Margaret, how'd you like to gamble on having the real story for your issue tomorrow morning?"

"Who do I have to kill to get it?"

"Nobody, I hope. You phone Magnus to come around here, and bring Magnus and Pogue with him. Don't let him guess I'm here, or he'll bring the whole state militia with him. Lend me that revolver, but take the bullets out of it first. Never mind why, about that."

"I know why, Tommy."

THAT startled me.

"Huh? How could you?"

"I've got your story in tomorrow's paper, Tommy. Home town stuff. Last night when I first learned you were in town, I started tracing. I phoned the Chicago papers on the chance you'd be in their morgue and you were. I even bought the pix they ran; had them rushed down airmail."

She sniffed. "Falling out of a tree! Straining your back carrying a garbage can! You got a medal for what you did in uniform, and I know how. I'm printing it, too."

"Oh, Lord!" I said.

"And you were shell-shocked. But Tommy, an unloaded gun is too dangerous. You pull it on Ed Magnus and he might draw on you, and he'd probably kill you."

"I don't think so. And the sound of a shot, that close—Aunt Margaret, I'd go through the roof. I'd as soon be shot as fire a gun. When I thought Pogue was going to let go with the shotgun tonight, that's mostly why I scrambled. Ed might have knocked the muzzle down, or I might have, but if that shotgun had gone off at all I'd have been a wreck. I wouldn't want to shoot Magnus anyway. If he goes for his gun, I'll drop mine and raise my hands. Okay?"

[Turn page]

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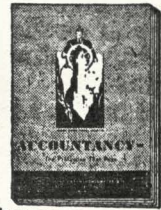
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IX

AUNT MARGARET looked at me for a long minute, then picked up the phone and made the call. When she put down the phone, she took the cartridges out of the gun and handed it to me.

"If your bluff doesn't work," she said, "I'll try to stop Magnus from shooting. It'll be ten minutes before they get here. Want to bolster your morale by reading the article about you?"

"No."

"It's a good article." Aunt Margaret said. "I've got your career as a detective before you went into the army, too. And I didn't even mention that you're a werewolf on the side."

"Shut up, Aunt Margaret. I'm trying to think."

But before I could do any more thinking I heard a car stopping out front and I went over and moved the sofa out a bit from the wall and got down behind it.

Four men came in. Magnus had brought his deputy as well as Pogue and Ambers.

The moment the last one of them had closed the door, I stood up. Ed Magnus made just the start of a move toward his shoulder holster, then raised his hands instead. Overholt's went up more quickly.

Ed Magnus turned his head toward Aunt Margaret. His voice was crisp.

"So this was what you wanted! Aiding a—"

"Shut up," I said. "She made that call at the point of a gun. Anyway, all you're going to do is listen, Ed. I'm giving myself up—if you still want me—in fifteen minutes. But for that length of time you're going to listen. Just listen."

He drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Before he could speak again I started.

"There hasn't been a madman in this case at all, Ed. But there has been a mad dog. And a fiend who took advantage of that circumstance to cover up a murder. One murder—not three.

"The dog was Emperor, Pogue's police dog. Last night he got loose—probably broke loose just after Dave Otis passed Pogue's place on his way home—ran after Dave Otis and killed him.

"Karl Pogue heard him get loose and

followed up the road to bring him back. Found him just after he'd made the kill. But Karl still had enough control over the dog to manage him. Now comes the hard part, and if you didn't know Karl you wouldn't believe me, but Karl decided to cover up for Emp, so the dog wouldn't have to be shot. Don't forget Karl hated everything in the world, just about, except his brother Jeff and his dog Emp. A normal man wouldn't do it—and in that sense there was a touch of insanity in this case—but he waited till I'd gone by, then carted that body to Janson's barn.

"And he fired the barn, knowing that then nobody would be able to prove Emp had made the kill. He must have figured that my story wouldn't be believed, and he was pretty right on that. If nothing more had happened, you'd eventually have written off Otis as an accidental death."

"That's crazy, Lederer," Magnus said. "I saw Emp this evening and so did—"

"Wait," I said. "I'm coming to that. Something happened this afternoon that turned things inside out. It was a murder. Jeffery Pogue killed his boss, Walter Reeder. I'll give you part of the motive. Reeder, in making an extra careful check of things because I was coming out tonight to check his radio hook-up, found out that Jeff Pogue had been tricking him, that those mysterious signals came from a tiny set Jeff had rigged up in the basement. He probably had it fixed up with a recording so he could turn it off and on somehow from upstairs, so he could be right in the room with Reeder when it was going.

"I figure it was in the basement, because the loop antenna got best results pointing up and down. Reeder, not suspecting trickery, never considered the down part.

"But when Reeder discovered it—well, you know what his temper was. He'd flare up. I wouldn't be surprised if he attacked Jeff physically and that the murder was self-defense. It was done with a paper knife that was right on Reeder's desk."

MAGNUS grunted, and I plunged on. "It wasn't premeditated. Jeff didn't see any way of covering up, any-

thing to do but beat it and be a fugitive the rest of his life. He got out of there and went to Karl for help, probably to get all the money Karl could give him." I paused. "And he found Karl dead!"

I saw Magnus' face change. He'd been listening seriously up to then, but his face started to turn red.

I hurried up.

"Emp had been madder than Karl figured. A mad dog doesn't recognize its own master, and Emp was definitely mad. When Jeff got there, Emp tried to break his chain"—I was improvising here, but it made sense—"to get Jeff. Jeff got Karl's shotgun out of the house and shot the dog.

"And then he got his idea. Why not change places with Karl, and not have to run out? Karl was dead anyway; if he exchanged appearances with Karl and put Karl in the room with Reeder and messed up everything in the house, it would look as though a madman had killed both Reeder and Jeff Pogue. And the police would write Jeff Pogue off as a victim instead of looking for him.

"He had lots of time—up to my appointment with Reeder late in the evening. He buried Emp's body. He got Reeder's car and took Karl's body to Reeder's place.

"Then he drove to Carterville and bought a police dog from a man named Peterson, to stand in for Emp. And he bought the few things he'd need otherwise—hair dye and bleach and the stuff make-up men use for an artificial mustache, which he'd have to wear until his own could grow out.

"They were on the same build and looked alike except Karl was a bit older, had graying hair and the mustache. Jeff had to take off Karl's mustache and blacken his hair and dress him in some of his own clothes and put his glasses on him. As Karl, he would make the formal identification and it would never occur to anybody to doubt it."

Ed's face wasn't quite so red, and he looked puzzled now. He opened his mouth to interrupt, but I didn't let him. I wanted to finish.

"So he made the change and set himself as Karl Pogue—didn't you, Jeff?—and then he saw the one hole in his

[Turn page]

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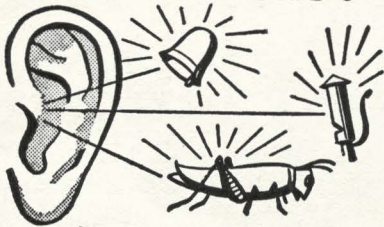
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scheme. It would be taken for the work of a madman, yes, but suppose you got the idea that Karl Pogue was the madman? If you investigated, you'd find something screwy easily enough.

"To be perfectly safe, he needed a scapegoat. And that was me, because I'd found the other body and I was already under suspicion. With the little set-up he pulled on me this evening, you'd be so sure I did it all, you wouldn't look any farther. How did you happen to be Johnny-on-the-spot at ten o'clock this evening? Because Jeff Pogue—as himself—phoned you this afternoon to be there for the appointment with Reeder! And he left a message at my hotel for me to be there half an hour early.

"Further, when he came out of Karl's house with the shotgun tonight, he was going to kill me, I think, to end the investigation completely. He'd have discharged that shot-gun accidentally in my direction. You might have suspected that it wasn't too accidental, figuring I'd just killed his brother, but he thought you wouldn't press the point. It would save you a lot of trouble, too, and you'd have been willing to write it off as an accident. Wouldn't you?"

Magnus' hands had been going down slowly, and he'd been turning to look at Pogue instead of at me.

"I'm through, now," I said. "All I ask is a light tug at 'Karl' Pogue's mustache. Then if you want more, phone the kennels at Carterv—"

MMAGNUS glanced sideward at Pogue and I could see by both of their faces that it was all over. I saw Magnus reach for his gun and tossed mine onto the sofa. It had served its purpose, and it was empty anyway.

But Pogue moved before Magnus had his gun clear. He pushed Magnus into Overholt, sending them both off-balance, and ran for the window. He was out of it before any of us could grab him, although I just missed.

I went out of the window, too, with Magnus and Overholt right behind me. Pogue was running down the alley, silhouetted clearly against the street lights beyond.

He ran fast, and so did Magnus—or maybe things had caught up with me

and I wasn't making such good time. Anyway, Magnus caught up with me and Pogue drew ahead.

Then, almost in my ear, Magnus' gun went off.

I didn't stumble, but I lost stride and stopped. I leaned against the building at the side of the alley and jittered. I closed my eyes and put up my hands to my head to hold it on. It was pretty bad.

But not, I realized, even while my head went in circles, as bad as I'd feared, not as bad as it had been the last time. It wasn't so bad but that in time I'd get over it. Even be able to fire a gun myself without wincing.

There wasn't another shot, and after a while I opened my eyes. Pogue was down, twenty yards ahead, and the sheriff and deputy were bending over him. I turned and walked slowly back to the *Chronicle*. Margaret Singer and Howard Ambers looked up as I came in.

"They got him," I said.

"Dead?"

"I don't know."

I didn't care much, either. I put my hands into my pockets to keep them from shaking, and sat down on the sofa.

Ambers was reading a galley proof. Aunt Margaret winked at me, and I guessed what the proof was. I didn't care about that, either.

Ed Magnus came back in. He used the phone to call for the ambulance.

"Dead?" I asked.

He nodded. "Rotten shot," he said disgustedly. "Aimed for his legs. Lived long enough to talk, though. We got what you missed."

"The reason for the monkey-business with the radio?"

"Yeah. Fool reason. Must have been a little crazy, too. It ran in the Pogue family, I guess. Hated Reeder's guts for having put him in jail once. Played up to him to get back, and was going to get his revenge by making a laughing-stock of Reeder. Was going to let him work up regular communication with Mars or whatever, and announce it to the world. Then Pogue would have pulled out his gimmick and left Reeder up a tree.

"And you guessed it right about what happened early this evening. Reeder found out and jumped him. Said it was

[Turn page]

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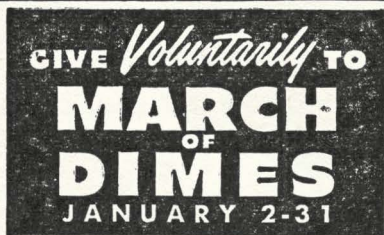
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self-defense. Not that it matters now."

I looked at Ambers and he looked at me and grinned a little. "You thought I was in on it, I'll bet," he said. "You knew I'd offered to invest in that radio experiment and got turned down because I hired Jeff Pogue to gum it up so Emil Wingerman would laugh at it instead of putting up money, and Reeder would take me in after all."

I admitted it.

"But I'm glad I was wrong," I said. "Now about another matter, I—"

"You win on that one. Margaret has sold me on it, with this article which I suspect was written mostly for that purpose. I withdraw my objections. I'll be a willing father-in-law."

HE STOOD up and put out his hand and I met him halfway.

"And if it's any satisfaction to you," he said, "as I guess it will be, I'd have been a father-in-law, willing or not. This time, Mary told me off. We were still scrapping when I left, and I don't imagine she's gone to sleep. If you want to drop out, I've got some bonded stuff I'll give you a drink of."

I grinned. "All this, and whisky too? Soon as I put in a phone call to Chicago, Mr. Ambers."

I called Walsh.

"Case is over. Reeder's dead and the set is smashed, so our client can't invest. I'll send you a full report airmail tomorrow. I'm taking a week or two off."

"In Haverton? Thought you didn't like the place."

"On a honeymoon," I said, "it'll be different."

"Honeymoon? You've only been there a day and a half and find time for romance? I told you the case would be an easy one to start out on, but I didn't think it would be that easy."

"Yeah," I said. "It was a lead-pipe cinch." ● ● ●

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the LOWDOWN

(Continued from page 6)

to take out burglary insurance—and generally do—are always the best for looting and usually the safest. Such people don't bother to protect their property as well as the uninsured citizen who takes care to lock every window, put away the silver, leave a light burning when they go out, and so on. The more wealthy folks figure that they're protected by the insurance people, so they seldom raise as much stink at police headquarters as the poor guy who has his TV set stolen and has no policy to cover his loss."

I said: "Still, that hardly makes the insurance companies breeders of crime."

How They Get Started

"Not intentionally or willingly," the warden answered. "But consider a first-time offender who was sent up here last week. He had a small mercantile business in one of our coastal towns; business had been bad for some months because of a big construction project going on beside his store; people wouldn't come in to trade with him since they couldn't park anywhere near his store. His insurance agent had kept urging him to take out a larger fire policy on his building and stock on account of the inflated values of real estate and merchandise. Well, he did, and when times got too tough he 'sold the whole works to the insurance people,' as he put it, by touching off a gallon of gasoline neatly distributed around the store. Incidentally, an old woman burned to death in the fire that followed. The underwriter's arson hunters got on his trail—and here he is for seven to ten years."

I began to get it. "When an insurance policy makes a person careless, either in protecting his property or in his respect for the law, then it may be a crime maker."

"That's right," the warden nodded. "Understand, I don't think it's the fault of the insurance companies, though sometimes the over-eagerness of agents who sell the policies may be a contributing factor in causing crime. But I do know that a sizable proportion of the inmates here were started on the road that led them to a cell by the lure of easy money obtainable, in one way or another, from the insurance companies. Look at J—S—' who's in the lifers' block."

Lure of Money

I remembered that murder trial. A woman of thirty-eight had put barium sulphide in her husband's beef stew in the hope of collecting a five-thousand-dollar life insurance policy after said husband had lost his job and earning ability through an eye injury.

[Turn page]



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"She might have murdered him anyway, just to get rid of him," I suggested.

"Not likely. She'd never have risked the chair, except she got greedy every time she thought of what she might do with that five thousand. You know, homicide authorities claim one out of every twenty murders is committed in the expectation of collecting insurance."

"Maybe so," I admitted, "but no one can claim the insurance companies or their agents ever instigated such a crime."

"I'm not saying so," he sighed. "I'm only suggesting that sometimes insurance breeds crime. It isn't my idea; I got it straight from the cell-blocks."

—Stewart Sterling

THE CRYPTOGRAM CORNER

(Answers to cryptograms on page 29)

The Limerick

A tooter who tooted a flute,
Tried to teach two young tutors to toot.
Said the two to the tutor,
"Is it harder to toot, or
To tutor two tutors to toot?"

The clues given you should have provided all the help necessary to crack this one. The one-letter word, occurring twice in the first line, left little doubt as to its identity. The two-letter word NP when compared with the other two-letter word PQ, which repeated one of the letters, could only logically be TO. Going on to the three-letter words NTO and NSP, only NTO could be THE, for we have already identified P as being the letter O.

You Can't Satisfy Everybody

The poor have little; beggars none;
The rich too much; enough not one.

The three-letter word THE was a dead giveaway, appearing twice in a sentence of thirteen words. The pattern of the second word JKLL offered the letter O as first choice for the doubled letter. This eliminated one of the two possibilities in the three-letter word TOO, which otherwise might have been taken for ALL. Of course, when the letter O was suspected, the first letter T became readily apparent.

\$100.00 A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU

FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

**Policy Pays for a Day, a Week,
 a Month, a Year—just as long as
 necessary for you to be hospitalized!**

SAVE MONEY!

There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

JUST LOOK
**The Large Benefit This Low
 Cost Policy Provides!**

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for about everything—for every accident, and for all common and rare diseases after the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious disease such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diseases involving female organs, sickness resulting in a surgical operation, hernia, lumbago and sacroiliac conditions originating after the policy is in force six months are all covered . . . Hospitalization caused by attempted suicide, use of intoxicants or narcotics, insanity, and venereal disease is naturally excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your \$1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES
MATERNITY



Benefits At Small Extra Cost
 Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays \$50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO



Benefits At No Extra Cost
 In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
 For Hospital Bills, up to \$500.00
 For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to \$500.00
 For Orthopedic Appliances, up to \$500.00
TOTAL OF \$1,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS \$100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of \$50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

**This is What \$100.00 a Week
 Can Mean to You When in the
 Hospital for Sickness or Accident**

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

**Examine This Policy Without
 Cost or Obligation—Read It—
 Talk It Over—Then Decide**

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospital Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of Nebraska and with policyholders in every state. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

REMEMBER—\$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY \$14.25 PER DAY!

**FREE INSPECTION . . .
 MAIL COUPON**

**The Actual Policy Will Come to You
 at Once Without Cost or Obligation**

The Service Life Insurance Company
 Hospital Department P-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska
 Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....
 Address.....
 City or Town..... State.....

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Assets of \$13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951

Hospital Department P-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska



I need 500 Men to wear **SAMPLE SUITS!**



PAY NO MONEY—SEND NO MONEY!

My values in made-to-measure suits are so sensational, thousands of men order when they see the actual garments. I make it easy for you to get your own suit to wear and show — and to **MAKE MONEY IN FULL OR SPARE TIME! MY PLAN IS AMAZING!** Just take a few orders at my low money-saving prices—that's all! Get your own personal suit, and make money fast taking orders. You need no experience. You need no money now or any time. Just rush your name and address for complete facts and **BIG SAMPLE KIT** containing more than 100 actual woolen samples. It's **FREE!** Get into the big-pay tailoring field and earn up to \$15.00 in a day! Many men are earning even more! You can begin at once in spare time to take orders and pocket big profits. All you do is show the big, colorful different styles. Men order quickly because you offer fine quality at unbeatable prices. Yes — superb made-to-measure cutting and sewing — and complete satisfaction guaranteed. It's easy to get first orders, but repeat orders come even easier. With my big, complete line you begin earning big money at once and you build a steady, big-profit repeat business at the same time.

No Experience — No Money Needed EVERYTHING SUPPLIED FREE!

You need no money — no experience — no special training. Your friends, neighbors, relatives, fellow-workers, will be eager to give you orders once you show them the outstanding quality of the fabrics, the top notch fit of made-to-measure tailoring and the money-saving low prices. Every customer is a source of additional prospects. In no time at all, you'll find the orders rolling in faster and faster. And every order puts a handsome, spot-cash profit in your pocket! Mail the coupon for your big **FREE OUTFIT** of styles and samples **NOW!**

**PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. C-377
500 S. Throop Street, Chicago 7, Ill.**

Mail Coupon for **FREE OUTFIT!**

We supply everything—sample fabrics, full-color style cards, order forms, measuring materials — all packed in a handsome, professional leatherette-covered carrying case. Work full time or spare time. Either way you'll be amazed at how fast you take orders and how your profits begin to mount! Fill out and mail coupon today.

Send No Money — Mail Today — No Obligation

PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. C-377
500 S. Throop Street, Chicago 7, Ill.

Dear Sir: I WANT A **SAMPLE SUIT TO WEAR AND SHOW**, without paying 1c for it. Rush Valuable Suit Coupon and Sample Kit of actual fabrics. **ABSOLUTELY FREE.**

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....