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BLACK MASK

DETECTIVE



JULY

**SHEATHE YOUR
CLAWS, HELLCAT!**

by

**ROBERT
MARTIN**

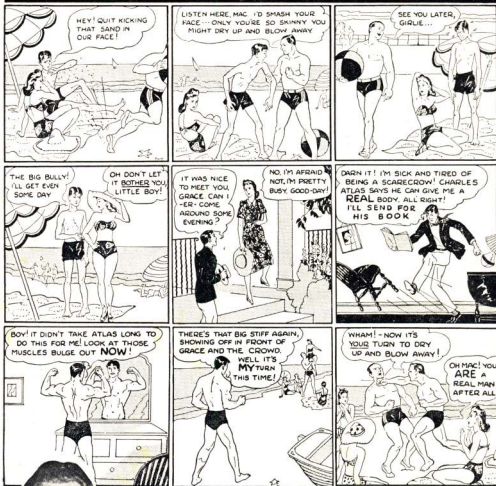
**BLOOD ON
THE MIDWAY**

by

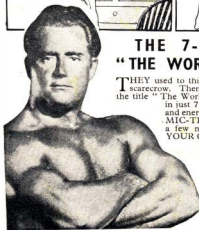
**SCOTT
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CHARLES ATLAS

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BLACK MASK DETECTIVE



A Magazine of Gripping, Smashing Detective Stories

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YOUR NEXT ISSUE WILL BE ON SALE
--- SATURDAY, JULY 19th ---

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SHEATHE YOUR

*Because the straying honey needed nylons,
Detective Jim Bennett played cat and mouse—
with a desperate killer.*



CHAPTER ONE.

FIVE-GEE BAIT.

IT started as a routine day for me, as routine days go with employees of The National Detective Agency, Incorporated. But it didn't stay routine for long. Murder may be common, but it is never routine.

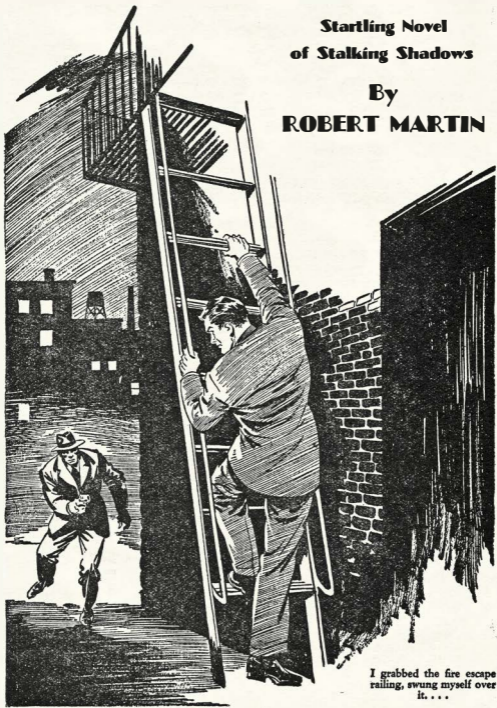
I had spent most of the day trailing a sixteen-year-old daughter of a local tycoon. The girl had skipped with the handsome but aging leader of a third-rate dance band. I found her where the Romeo band leader left her—in a juke-box joint. Three cheese-burgers and a malted milk convinced her



CLAWS, HELLCAT!

Startling Novel
of Stalking Shadows

By
ROBERT MARTIN



I grabbed the fire escape railing, swung myself over it. . . .

that she'd better return home to papa. When I drove her back to Cleveland, papa paid off with a fat check. Before I was off the front terrace, I heard him smacking the daylight out of her with what sounded like a sturdy flat board.

It was past seven in the evening when I arrived at the office. Sandy Hollis, my secretary, had left on my desk some reports to the boss in New York, and a penciled note which read:

Jim:

Boss called—collect. Said he was charging call to our office to teach you to get reports in on time. Had 'em all typed, but you didn't show up. Better sign and drop in box. Man named Alvin T. Bayne was in around 5:00 p.m. Quite upset. Wants you to call him as soon as you return. Perry 26544. Wouldn't tell me anything, but left \$500.00. Told him I was not authorized to accept fees, but he left it anyway. I put it in the safe. 'Night.

S.

I lit a cigarette and thought about Alvin T. Bayne. I had met him several times, and his life story was well known in industrial and civic circles. People liked to call him a self-made man, a rough diamond. He was the owner and operator of a fleet of trucks covering Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and western Pennsylvania, with a main office on the Square, and branches and terminals in six cities. He lived in a big sandstone house east of town along the lake. His credit rating was Double-A Plus, and he belonged to three country clubs, four fraternal lodges, and just about every civic and service organization there was to join.

He had quit school after the seventh grade to work on the lake freighters. Then followed ten years of driving trucks from Boston to Los Angeles for various outfits. When he was thirty years old, he had purchased a tractor and trailer outfit and had gone into business for himself. Ten years later he had pyramided his single rig into three hundred units, and the Bayne Roadway outfits were a familiar sight on the highways of the midwest.

A year previously, according to the know-it-alls on the Square, romance had come to Alvin T. Bayne. In a gaudy backstreet night club in the shadow of the Youngtown steel mills he had met a dancer named Arlene Aragon—real name, Beulah Zablonksi—and had become her husband after a midnight trip across the Ohio border into quick-marrying Kentucky.

I had never met Mrs. Bayne, but I remembered him as a big, hulking man with serious eyes and thick brown hair. His suits cost him two hundred dollars a copy, but they never seemed to fit him quite right. His drivers sometimes found him lugging freight on one of his loading docks, and he frequently climbed into a semi-outfit and personally delivered a cargo to its destination.

I rather liked and admired Alvin T. Bayne, but I was tired from chasing the teenager, and I hadn't had any dinner. Still, business was business, and a detective agency can't make any money by knocking off at five in the afternoon. I picked up the phone and called Perry 26544.

A female voice answered in an intimate drawl, "Hello there, darling."

I said, "Is Mr. Bayne there?"

There was a second's silence on the wire. Then the voice said cautiously, "Who is this?"

"My name is Bennett. Mr. Bayne left word for me to call him."

There was another short silence, and then: "Mr. Bayne is busy at the moment. He's in the kitchen stirring a pitcher of martinis. He likes martinis, but I like manhattans. I already have mine, and now he is making his. I hate martinis. We're having dinner shortly—I mean, Alvin is. I'm going out. This is Arlene speaking—I mean, Mrs. Bayne. Could I give him a message for you?"

I decided that Mrs. Bayne had had more than a couple manhattans. "Look, ma'am," I said patiently. "Mr. Bayne asked me to call him. I haven't any message for him, but he may have one for me. How about you stirring his martinis for a while and asking him to come to the phone?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly do that," she protested. "Alvin always insists upon making his own. He says I bruise them. But maybe I could stir them, ever so gently, while he talks to you. Shall I suggest that to Alvin?"

"By all means," I said.

I got nothing but silence for maybe three minutes. Then I heard a pleasant tinkling sound, and a man's voice boomed in my ear, "Hear that, Bennett? They're just right and ready to pour. How about coming out and having a few?"

"Thanks," I said, "but I can't tonight. If you're busy now, maybe we could get together in the morning. You can come

here, or I'll be glad to come to your office. About ten o'clock?"

"Tomorrow is no damn good," Bayne said. "This deal has to go through tonight. You come out here now, or you don't get a dime of that half-grand I left with that cute little brown-eyed gal of yours." He paused, and then added in a lowered voice, "I gotta see you tonight. That half-grand is only a start—if you come out now."

That got me. "How do I get out to your place?" I asked him.

He told me to follow the lake road out of town to the third crossroad and turn left toward the lake. His house was the last one on the right, facing the lake.

"O.K.," I said, and I hung up.

Before I left, I signed the reports Sandy had typed, placed them in an envelope and sealed the flap. Then, carrying the reports, I moved to the door. The phone began to ring, and I went back to my desk and lifted the instrument. "Yes?"

It was Alvin T. Bayne again. "Listen, Bennett," he said in a low, guarded voice. "I'm glad I caught you—wanted to give you a picture so you could be thinking about it on the way out. I couldn't talk with my wife here in the room. She's gone upstairs with her damned manhattan to get herself fixed up—to play bridge at a female party in town."

He paused, and added bitterly, "Or so she says. But I know better. She's got a date with a guy, and I'm sick of putting up with it. I want to divorce her, but unless I work it just right, she'll take me for my shirt. I've been wise to her for a long time, but I've played dumb, waiting for my chance. This is it.

"I know she's meeting this heel—John Damon—tonight. I came home early this afternoon, and I heard her talking to him on the phone. I want you to get a load of evidence that'll stand up in court, and—"

"Now, wait," I broke in.

"You fellows know how to handle a job like that," he went on, ignoring my interruption.

"I just want to get rid of her, and forget about her. After you get what you need, go to my attorney, Orvil Hewing, in the Great Lakes Building. He'll wait for you in his office tonight. The quicker we act, the better. That fancy dame has sure been a high-priced headache to me. Next time I'm gonna pick me a nice fat farm girl, and keep her barefooted and fenced in.

"And another thing—tomorrow I've got a date with Hewing to cut my wife out of everything—my will, life insurance, bank accounts, property, the works. I don't want her to get her hooks on a nickel of mine. Now, look. She's leaving pretty quick. You just mosey out here, and you and me will have a couple or three drinks. We'll wait a while, and then you go out there and surprise the hell out of them."

"Mr. Bayne," I said, "my agency doesn't do work of that nature. It's against regulations. But I'll be glad to recommend someone for you."

"Dammit," he snapped. "If I wanted a two-bit peeper with a damned flash camera, I'd hire him. But this has to be a first-class job with no slips. I want you. That half-grand is peanuts. If you do me a job, I'll pay up to five grand—to get rid of her. How about it?"

Five thousand dollars. For a simple divorce job. I gulped. I thought of the stern agency ruling against such work, but at the same time I thought of the boss, that greedy and shrewd old man, who had built a vast and profitable organization upon the human weaknesses. To him, I decided grimly, five thousand dollars would purify a taboo divorce job and elevate it to the respectable realm of assistance in domestic relations. I said cautiously, "Well. . . ."

"Good," he said. "Come right out. She's coming down the stairs now." He hung up.

I cradled the phone slowly, and leaned back in my chair. In spite of the prospect of a five thousand dollar fee, I wasn't happy. I knew about John Damon. A smooth, agate-hard character who dabbled in back-alley gambling joints and shady night clubs. He drove around town in a lemon-yellow convertible, usually with a brassy, painted doll by his side.

Six months ago the county sheriff's department had tried to connect Damon, or his men, with the murder of a wild playboy named Jeff Fairfax who had lost a big chunk of his dad's money at one of Damon's dice tables. The playboy's dad had tried to sue Damon, and the kid had promised to testify. Two day later the kid had been found in a quarry with a bullet hole in his head. There was a big rumpus raised about it, but the case had fizzled out for lack of evidence.

I knew about John Damon, all right, and I didn't look forward with anything like pleasure to getting mixed up with him. But five thousand dollars was a lot of

money, and business at the Cleveland branch hadn't been too good lately.

I took a short-barreled .38 from my desk drawer, checked the cylinder, dropped it into my inside coat pocket, locked the office, and went down to the street. I had a bowl of soup, a sandwich, and two cups of black coffee at a restaurant around the corner, climbed once more into the agency car, and headed east on the lake boulevard. It was after eight o'clock when I turned into the drive leading up to the home of Alvin T. Bayne.

There was a low black sedan parked in one stall of a three-car garage. The other two stalls were empty. I turned off my car lights, and walked across the drive to the house. It faced the lake. As I stood on the front stoop the wind beat against my face, and I could hear the waves pounding on a rocky beach below. I punched the bell button, and waited.

Through a wide window on my right I saw a softly-lit room filled with mirrors and pastel-tinted furniture. I punched the bell again. Nothing happened. I stepped down to a curving flagstone walk and moved around to the rear. Here was a latticed back porch, and I could see into a brightly-lit kitchen. I went up the porch steps, and peered through a screen door into the kitchen. On the sink there was a tray of melting ice cubes and an array of bottles. I recognized the ingredients for manhattan cocktails—whiskey, sweet vermouth, bitters, a jar of red cherries; and the gin, dry vermouth, orange bitters and olives for martinis.

I rattled my knuckles on the edge of the screen door. A gray-striped cat padded into the middle of the kitchen and gazed at me with steady green eyes. I rattled the screen door, noting that it was hooked from the inside. The only response I got was a meow from the cat. I went around to the front of the house again, and tried the door. It swung open, and I stepped inside.

"Hey," I said loudly.

Nothing but big chunks of silence. I began to move slowly through the elegantly furnished rooms, wishing that I was the hell out of there. On a huge low table before a long, tomato-red divan was an empty cocktail glass and two tall bar glasses. There was a long stirring spoon in each glass. From the contrasting diluted colored liquid in the bottom of each glass—amber in one, pink in the other—I

guessed that they had contained Alvin Bayne's martinis, and his wife's manhattans.

In the low-ceilinged dining room, I found the table set with a silver pot of cold coffee, a wooden bowl containing a salad of tomato, onions and lettuce, and a plate bearing two sandwiches. Nothing, apparently, had been touched. I picked up one of the sandwiches and took a bite. Tuna fish. I chewed on the sandwich and gazed about. Off the dining room was a small alcove containing a small desk and an ivory-painted telephone. I moved over to the desk.

On the open page of a combination calendar and appointment book was a scrawled notation: *Thursday—dinner bridge at Florence Markham's*. Today was Thursday.

I wandered back into the living room. On my right a curving stairway wound upward. I went slowly up the carpeted steps. I didn't want to, but I was in it now, and I had to finish.

At the top of the stairs there was a wide space, a sort of an upstairs sitting room. On a polished table was another telephone, and a long-stemmed cocktail glass. Except for a lone red cherry, the glass was empty. Beside the table was a straightbacked chair and a floor lamp. The lamp was turned on. I moved to the nearest door and opened it.

There was a slightly musty smell, as if the room hadn't been used. Probably a guest room. A tall chest of drawers stood against one wall. All of the drawers had been pulled out, and one lay upside down on the floor. I backed out and opened another door. It was a twin of the first room, with the same musty smell, with the drawers of the chest pulled out.

The third room had been lived in. It was big and masculine, apparently where Alvin Bayne had slept. The whole room was in a state of violent disarray—dresser drawers pulled out, their contents scattered, clothing and shoes strewn over the floor.

Then I backed out and stared at the fourth and last door across the wide hall. As I started to move toward it, an object on the floor caught my eye. I stooped down and picked it up. A man's wallet. I opened it. It was stuffed with various membership cards, all in the name of Alvin T. Bayne. The wallet contained no money—not a single dollar bill. I dropped it on the floor, and moved to the door. It was standing slightly ajar, and I kicked it slowly inward.

The scent of perfume was strong. I could see a huge mirror above a low dressing table. The mirror reflected my own image, showing that I needed a shave. Bottles and jars of beauty lotions on top of the table had been upset and scattered. I stepped inside the room and peered about. The same jumbled confusion. Various articles of women's clothing were scattered everywhere. Like the rest of the rooms, it had been quickly ransacked.

I swallowed the last of the sandwich. My mouth felt dry, and it was hard to get the sandwich down. I backed slowly out of the bedroom, and moved slowly down the hall.

I found Alvin Bayne in the bathroom. He was huddled on the floor, just inside the door. He wore a pair of green-striped shorts. Shaving cream lather was on his face, and a bullet hole under his left eye. A little blood had trickled down and mingled with the white lather.

The sandwich still seemed to be sticking in my throat. I turned slowly and went down the stairs. I walked straight out of the house, got into the car, and drove away.

CHAPTER TWO.

BACK TO THE WALL.

I SHOULD have called the police. But Alvin Bayne had been, or had been about to be, a client of mine. I knew that the five thousand dollars he had mentioned was now down the drain, but I figured I owed him a little something for the five hundred dollars he had paid in advance. The least I could do was notify his lawyer, and then maybe do a little snooping before the alarm went out and the cops took over. Bayne didn't need a divorce now, but I still wanted to earn the money he had given me. I knew I would probably get in bad with Homicide-Lieutenant Rockingham, but I had been in bad with him before, and I wasn't worrying about that.

As I turned into the main highway and headed for town, I thought I caught a glimpse in the rear-view mirror of a car behind me without headlights, but I wasn't sure. I kept watching, but as the traffic thickened around me I decided I had been mistaken.

The Great Lakes Building was on the west side of town. I found a parking space in front of a drug store two blocks away and walked back. The building was in the

middle of a block beside a dark alley. Inside the lighted foyer I glanced at the office directory board and saw that Orvil W. Hewing, Attorney-at-Law, was on the third floor.

Since the elevators were closed for the night, I climbed a narrow stairway. When I got to the third floor, I walked down a long hall lined with dark offices with frosted glass doors. I turned a corner, and I saw all of the doors in this hall were dark, too—except one. Hewing's name was on that door in black letters. I started for it.

Behind me, a soft voice said, "Hold it." I swung around. A big broad man in a gray tweed suit and dark brown felt hat stood about six feet behind me. He held a black automatic close to his side. With his free hand he crooked a finger at me.

"Come here," he said softly. He had a smooth, pleasant face, and he was smiling in a friendly manner.

I shook my head silently, and kept an eye on the gun in his hand.

He shrugged his big shoulders, and sauntered slowly toward me. When he was close to me, he cocked an eyebrow in a quizzical manner. "Packing a rod, friend?"

I didn't say anything. I didn't like the professional way he held the gun, and the watchful look in his eyes. He chuckled softly, turned a little away from me so that I couldn't make a pass for the gun. With his left hand he deftly lifted the .38 from my inside coat pocket. I let him. There wasn't much else I could do. He dropped my gun into a pocket of his tweed coat and grinned at me.

"I thought you fellows never got dressed without a shoulder holster," he said.

I found my voice, said, "That's just in the movies."

He smiled, and motioned with the automatic in the direction of the stairway. "This way, please," he said politely.

"Where?" I asked.

"Just a little walk, friend," he said. "Not far." He stepped behind me and prodded me in the back with the automatic. He wasn't gentle. "March," he said softly. "And no ruckus—or I'll do it here."

I walked.

He stayed a little behind me. As we went down the stairs, I said, "What is this?"

I heard him chuckle. "I don't mind telling you, friend—as long as you behave yourself. I'm just doing a little job for the boss. Really, you should know better than

concern yourself with Mr. Damon's lady friends."

We hit the landing. As we started down the second flight of steps, I said, "Then you followed me from Bayne's house?"

"Of course," he said.

"And you killed Bayne," I said. "I seem to remember a kid named Jeff Fairfax who was found in a quarry with a slug in his head."

"Now, now," he chided. "Don't be dragging out dead cats. Young Fairfax was indiscreet."

"So was Alvin Bayne," I said. "You killed him—for Damon. Because Bayne was going to make a stink about his wife and Damon."

"How you talk," he said in a hurt voice. And then he added pleasantly, "I wouldn't worry about it, Mr. Bennett. It really shouldn't matter to you—not any more."

I began to sweat then. My knees went weak, and I stumbled on the bottom step at the landing. I hung on to the rail as we started the last flight down.

The soft voice behind me said, "You see, Mr. Damon can't afford to have unfavorable publicity. The officials have been quite bothersome lately. Besides, Mr. Damon has become quite attached to Mrs. Bayne, and he simply can't permit you to meddle in his private affairs. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly," I said hoarsely. "Alvin Bayne was about to become bothersome, too."

"Tut, tut," he said severely. "That sort of talk won't get you anywhere."

We arrived in the deserted foyer. I moved toward the door opening on to the lighted street.

"No, no," the voice behind me said sharply. "This way."

I turned slowly. There was a sick feeling in my stomach. He was holding open a door beneath the stairway. Oh, he had it all figured out, all right. I sighed, walked through the door. We went down a semi-dark hall cluttered with mops, buckets and stepladders, until we came to another door. He opened it, and I could see out into the blackness of the alley which ran beside the Great Lakes Building.

"Out," he said softly. "Walk slowly along the wall, on this side." He paused, and then added, "Just walk slowly away from me—that's all you need to do."

I turned to face him in the gloom. The muzzle of his gun bore directly on my stomach. He smiled pleasantly. "Good-bye, Mr. Bennett," he said.

It was now or never. I was damned if I was going to walk meekly away and let him shoot me in the back.

I jumped out of the door, ran up the alley on the darkest side. No shots cut the night behind me, and I increased my speed. I shot a quick look ahead, saw the lighted street, the cars going past. Freedom and safety, just a half block away. I lurched over the bricks, my breath sobbing in my lungs, my eyes glued on the end of the alley.

Then, ahead of me, a man moved into the center of the alley. I saw him very clearly outlined against the light beyond. He walked slowly toward me. I could tell by the way he held his right arm that he had a gun in his hand.

I stopped suddenly, and flattened myself in the darkness against the wall. My breath came hard, and the sweat dripped down my face. I might have known, I thought hopelessly, that any hired gun of John Damon's wouldn't leave loopholes. I was trapped in a dark alley, with a killer at each end, like a duck in a rain barrel. There would be a couple of shots, indistinguishable from the clatter and roar of the traffic at each end of the alley.

They had picked their spot well. Shortly the boss would have to appoint a new boy to put his feet on the desk in the Cleveland office. I hoped that Sandy Hollis would like him.

I glanced up the alley in both directions. I couldn't see either of them now, but I knew they were there, getting closer. I felt as lonely as I ever had in my life, and I thought: "Oh, well, it's for the glory, and the honor, and the profit of the National Detective Agency, Incorporated. Immediately I asked myself what glory there was in coughing out my life on the muddy bricks of a Cleveland alley?"

Pressing against the brick wall, I stood quietly. If I made a run for it, I'd be a perfect target against the bright light at either end of the alley. I glanced over my left shoulder, and saw a sudden movement in the shadows. I edged along the wall, feeling the rough surface of the bricks catch and tear at my coat. I looked in the other direction.

In the blackness along the far wall I saw another furtive movement. Damon's boys had me pretty well spotted. They had held their fire until they were sure. Now they were closing in for the kill, like a couple of coyotes stalking a stray cow.

I edged another slow foot along the wall. My head bumped into something sharp and hard, and I raised an arm. My fingers felt the smooth, cold surface of steel. With both hands I felt—and I knew with a sudden surge of hope that the steps of a fire escape slanted upward above me.

Groping some more, I located the railing and the position of the bottom step. I glanced upward, between the towering walls of the buildings, and I saw a landing of the fire escape outlined in a stray shaft of light from the street. That would be a perfect spot, I thought dismally, for Damon's boys to pick me off. But the fire escape was the only way out of the alley. I would just as soon die on the steep steps fifty feet off the ground as on the bricks below. Still I needed a little leeway—not much, maybe a couple of seconds. If a couple of rods were waiting to get me on the wing, I figured I could climb steps pretty fast.

In my pocket my fingers closed over a cigarette lighter. It was a good lighter, a gift from a red-headed widow in San Antonio, and I hated to give it up. But I didn't have much choice. I threw the lighter down the alley, as hard as I could throw it. It struck the opposite wall and clattered along the bricks.

Immediately, a figure leaped from the shadows on my right and ran up the alley past me. The other shadow, farther down, jumped toward the direction of the sound my lighter had made.

Grabbing the fire escape railing, I swung myself over it, and lunged up the steps. I made the first landing in four jumps. Then I started up for the second. Again I made the turn against the rail and bounded up the home stretch, toward the dim bulb over a door. In the alley below me a gun went *wham!* and I heard the twangling zing of a bullet as it skittered off the iron railing. I grabbed the knob of the door, praying that it wasn't locked.

Another *wham!* and a bullet thudded into the door beside my nose. I twisted the knob violently, and kicked at the door. It swung inward suddenly. I pitched inside, almost sobbing with relief.

Behind me I heard the clattering feet on the steel steps, and I slammed the door. There wasn't any lock—it was just a door with a knob. I turned and ran down a long dim hall, turned a corner into a wider hall. I saw a row of frosted glass doors, all dark.

I tried a couple of knobs. Locked, all locked.

Where was Orvil Heming's office?

I ran. From the direction of the fire escape I heard a door slam and swift, scurrying footsteps. In my mind I pictured Damon's boys racing silently after me, guns in hands, eyes bright and alert, eager for the kill, wanting to please the boss.

I skidded around a corner. Another hall, long and endless, with the same rows of dark doors. Except one. At the far end I saw a light, glowing dimly through the frosted glass. *Orvil W. Hewing, Attorney-at-Law.* I knew it was his office. If I could make it, before Damon's boys turned the corner. . .

I made it, and I pounced upon the knob. The door swung open. I jumped inside, looking frantically for the light switch. I saw it beside the door, flicked it with a finger, slammed the door, and clicked the catch on the lock. The room was dark, but not completely dark. There was a light burning over a desk behind me. I swung savagely.

A girl sat behind the desk, her face a mask of surprise and fear. I jumped for her.

"Off," I snapped, "Off, off—the light."

She stared dumbly, and started to push her chair back. I reached the desk, found the light switch, turned it off. There was nothing but blackness then, and I lurched around the desk to the girl. She made a low stuttering sound, and I shot out a hand. My fingers closed on a mass of silky hair, and I jerked her head backwards.

The stuttering began to grow up into a school-age scream, and I cut it off by slapping a hand over her mouth. Then I got an arm around her, and I held her against me. Her teeth closed over one of my fingers, but I didn't care—just so she didn't make a racket. I cocked my ears for sounds from the hall.

Thudding footsteps passed the door, and died away. I waited, holding my breath. The steps didn't come back. I waited some more. The girl was trying desperately to squirm away from me, but I held her. When she began to make a swangled choking sound, I clamped my hand more tightly over her mouth.

"Shush," I whispered hoarsely. "Please, please shush."

Her teeth bit deeper into my finger. It hurt, but a bloody finger is a hell of a lot

better than a slug in the belly. Suddenly I felt her relax. I whispered:

"That's better, honey. I won't hurt you. Just don't make any racket." But I kept my hand over her mouth.

I couldn't hear any sound from the hall, but still I waited. Maybe five minutes. The only sound was a far-away tootling of traffic which wafted up to us through a screened window on the street side of the office. Suddenly I realized that the girl was no longer biting my finger. But still I held her, and the minutes dragged on.

Presently I whispered: "If I let you go, will you promise to be quiet?"

She nodded her head.

I hesitated for a couple of seconds, and then I released her. I figured I was as safe as I'd ever be, and I couldn't hide in the office all night. But she kept quiet. The frosted glass of the door let in a dim light from the hall, and I looked down at the girl's dark head. She didn't move—she was probably waiting for me to cut her throat.

My finger was smarting where her teeth had dug into it, and I took out a handkerchief and began to dab at the small wound. "My," I said softly, "what sharp teeth you have."

She made no sound, and I moved around the desk to peer at her in the dusky light. Her head was down, her hands out of sight beneath the edge of the desk. She was trembling violently.

"I'm sorry," I said quietly. "Don't be scared. A couple of men were after me, and your office was the only one with a light in it. Besides, I have an appointment with Mr. Hewing. Mr. Bayne called him."

She stopped trembling, but still she didn't answer. I moved softly to the door, carefully released the lock catch, opened the door an inch and peered up and down the hall with one eye. All clear. Damon's boys had apparently over-shot my trail. I locked the door again, moved back to the girl's desk, and turned on the shaded lamp.

The girl raised big, dark eyes to mine. She was rather a plain girl, with a pale oval face, a thin nose, and a well-shaped mouth devoid of lipstick. Her dark brown hair was combed back in severe fashion, exposing flat little ears. She wore a white long-sleeved blouse, with a small black bow tie at the throat.

"Who—who are you?" she asked in a low voice.

I took out my wallet, flipped it open to my license card, and showed it to her. She

read it silently, then looked up at me once more. A little color had returned to her cheeks. She got slowly to her feet, and I saw that she was wearing a trim black skirt. A trifle thin, her figure basically was good.

She took a deep breath, and I could almost see her pulling her nerves back into line. "Since I know now who you are, Mr. Bennett," she said in a cool, crisp voice, "I suppose I should forgive you for scaring me witless. Mr. Hewing is expecting you. He'll be here shortly."

I offered her a cigarette.

She shook her head. "No, thank you. I don't smoke."

I put a cigarette in my mouth and felt for my lighter. Then I remembered that I didn't have it any more, and I said to her. "Do you have a match?"

"No," she said, "and there aren't any in the office. Mr. Hewing doesn't approve of smoking."

"Does Mr. Hewing drink?" I asked politely.

"Of course not," she said primly. "Mr. Hewing has no bad habits."

"Does he eat hay?" I asked.

She drew her smooth, unplucked brows into a faint frown. "Pardon?"

"If he doesn't," I said, "it just occurred to me that he's not fit company for man or beast." I grinned broadly, to show her that it was a joke.

She gazed at me with an expression of distaste. "Very amusing," she said coldly.

I wiped a little more blood off my finger. She flushed faintly.

"I'm sorry I—I bit you," she said, "but, really—"

"That's all right," I told her. "The scar will always remind me of you."

Again there were steps in the hall outside the door. I quickly turned off the lamp. A shadow stood there before the door, and I heard the knob rattle. Then I heard the jangle of keys, and I knew that it must be Hewing.

I turned on the light again and moved to the door, unlocked it, and twisted the knob. A big man with a ring of keys in his hand stared at me blankly. He was wearing a neatly tailored dark suit and a gray Homburg hat. In his left hand was a bulky briefcase. He had a smooth ruddy face, a blunt nose, and a square chin. His eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses were blue.

I said, "Sorry to lock you out of your own office. I'm Bennett."

He gazed at me with puzzled eyes. Then he said, "Oh, yes—Mr. Bayne's man." He moved past me into the office, and glanced curiously at the girl.

She said hastily, "Mr. Bennett said some men were chasing him, and he hid in here. . . ."

Hewing laid his briefcase on top of a desk, and turned to me. After I closed the door, I gave him a quick account of my game of hide-and-seek with John Damon's boys. When I had finished, he shook his head. "That Damon is a bad character. But why were they after you?"

I said, "Damon found out what Bayne had hired me for tonight—and he didn't like it."

"How did he learn what you intended to do?"

"I don't know," I said.

Hewing shook his head again. "A bad business. I advised Mr. Bayne against any such action, but he insisted." He sighed. "But I need evidence, no matter by what devious methods we come by it. . . . Did you get it?"

I shook my head. "No—not yet. But I will, if you say so. Mr. Bayne hired me for a job, and I'd like to do him one—even if he is dead."

Hewing almost jumped, and his eyes bugged out. "Dead? How? Who?"

I told him about it, everything. When I had finished, he sighed.

"This is extremely unfortunate. I see much litigation looming. Tomorrow I had an appointment with Mr. Bayne to change his will." He sighed again.

"If I get the dope on his wife, will that help?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "If it is sufficiently strong, backed up by sworn testimony, it will help very much."

"It'll be strong," I said.

"Have you notified the police?" he asked.

"No. I wanted to see you first—and maybe run over to Damon's place before the cops begin looking for Mrs. Bayne," I told him.

He nodded. "That was smart, Mr. Bennett, but I'm afraid we can't wait any longer. We'll be criticized as it is for delaying the report." He turned to the girl. "Miss Loring, will you please call the department of homicide and report the murder of Mr. Bayne?"

"Yes, sir," she said quietly, and picked up the phone.

Hewing picked up his briefcase and moved briskly to the door. "I'll go right out to Mr. Bayne's place," he said. He hesitated, and frowned. "I'll have to tell the police that you found the body, but how will I explain your absence?"

"Tell them I phoned you about it, and that you don't know where I am. That'll keep Rockingham off my neck until I finish what I've got to do."

He nodded slowly. "Ah, yes. Lieutenant Rockingham. A shrewd and efficient officer. It'll be difficult deceiving him, but it's necessary in the interest of my late client." He gazed at me with his frank blue eyes. "Mr. Bayne engaged me by the year, you know. This year's contract runs for another eight weeks. I'm still obligated to protect his interests."

I grinned at him. "I think you would anyway," I told him.

He turned to the girl, who was in the act of replacing the phone. "You may as well go home, Miss Loring. Thank you for coming down this evening." He moved his big bulk past me into the hall.

I wagged my bitten finger at her. "Good-bye, Miss Loring."

"Good-bye, Mr. Bennett," she said coolly.

I followed Hewing down the hall. When he came to the corner, I grabbed his arm and pulled him back. He gazed at me in surprise.

"Wait," I told him, and I peered around the corner. All I saw was the empty hall, and the beginning of the stairway—the one I had gone down with my soft-spoken friend in the tweed suit. I motioned to Hewing, and he followed me to the stairs.

He said, "You fellows lead rather a dangerous life, don't you?"

"It's a living," I said.

When we hit the street, I glanced at my wrist watch. Ten o'clock. Traffic had thinned out a little, and the night had turned cool. I looked up the street toward the mouth of the alley in which Damon's boys had treed me, and I shivered.

Hewing said, "If you—ah—find Mrs. Bayne with this John Damon, you will be willing to testify in court and swear under oath as to the—ah—details?"

I nodded. "Sure. That's the whole point, isn't it?"

He said, "I am the executor of Mr. Bayne's will, and if we are successful in breaking it as it now stands—that is, eliminating Mrs. Bayne's claims—I believe I would be justified in paying you a fee, a

substantial one, out of the estate. For your professional services."

I grinned at him. "I never turn down money."

"You will most certainly have earned it," he said seriously. "The only chance we have of protecting Mr. Bayne's interests is the evidence you can secure tonight." He paused, and added, "Perhaps I should go with you. Another witness would make it better—but no, I can't. As Mr. Bayne's attorney, the court would regard me as prejudiced."

"I'll handle it," I told him.

"Call me as soon as you can," he said, "no matter how late it is. I'll either be at Mr. Bayne's house, or at home." He held out his hand. "Good luck," he said quietly. "And be careful." His hand was big and strong, and his blue eyes were friendly.

"Thanks," I said, and I moved up the sidewalk. I decided that if I ever needed a lawyer, it would be Orvil W. Hewing. . . .

Five minutes later I rounded a corner and approached the spot where I had parked my car. Lights from the bars and small restaurants glowed out on the passing cars and buses, and a nearby traffic light winked red, yellow and green. There were quite a few people on the sidewalks, and I passed a cop I knew. I nodded at him as I passed, and he said, "Nice night, Jim."

I came to my car. I took out my ignition key and opened the door on the driver's side. I started to get in, paused. A girl was sitting on the front seat, and I saw the glow of her cigarette.

A soft, throaty voice said, "I'd thought you'd never show up."

I got in beside her. And that's when my troubles really began.

CHAPTER THREE.

NYLONS TO THE RESCUE.

THE girl said, "Where *have* you been? I followed you all the way from Al's house. When you parked here, I couldn't stop in the traffic, and by the time I'd parked and walked back, you were gone. So I just got into your car and waited."

"I see," I said. The neon lights from a dinky bar fell fully on her face. She gazed at me frankly, a faintly amused quirk on her full red lips. I had never seen her before, but she was something extra special.

Not too young, maybe thirty, with a

hard-soft face, wise blue eyes, and shoulder-length hair which gleamed like silver in the neon glow. Her cigarette was in a long holder, and she held it gracefully, poised, like a fashion model. She was wearing a soft black dress, with a deep V neckline, and it draped subtly over her full figure.

I turned on the headlights. In the glow from the dashlight I saw a smooth expanse of nylon-clad legs, crossed prettily. On her feet were black shoes, high-heeled, thick-soled, expensive, with a slender strap buckled snugly around her slim ankles. I tore my gaze from her, and started the car motor. Remembering Damon's boys, I glanced uneasily up and down the street.

"Would you mind if I moved out of here?" I asked her. "I'm allergic to this neighborhood."

She waved her cigarette holder. "Drive on. Any place. The night's young and I'm not fussy." She laughed softly, a musical, pleasant sound. "Don't look so worried, Mr. Bennett. I won't bite you."

I didn't tell her that I had already been bitten by a female. As I pulled the car away from the curb, I said, "You seem to know me. Who are you?"

She laughed again. "You should know since Al said you were a detective."

"Do you mean Alvin Bayne?" I asked her.

"Of course," she said. "Oh, I'm so happy. Al told me all about it—how you were going to get evidence against dear Arlene, so that he could divorce her and marry me." She turned toward me, and doubled her legs on the automobile seat.

"I'm Marsha Morgan. Al and I have been in love for a long time. He asked me to come out tonight—after Arlene left, of course—and he told me that you might be there for a little while. I suppose you have seen Mr. Hewing by this time, and that it's all settled?" She paused, and then said, "Al is changing his will tomorrow, you know. He told me on the phone."

"I've seen Mr. Hewing," I said, "but it isn't all settled."

"You mean Arlene wasn't with Damon?" she asked quickly.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe I will, later. So you saw Alvin Bayne tonight?"

She hesitated for an instant. I swung my gaze away from the traffic and glanced at her. She was frowning and looking at the tip of her cigarette.

"No, I didn't," she said slowly. "That's what worries me. I can't imagine where he

could have gone. When I arrived at his house, I saw that Arlene's car was gone, but I parked down the road, just to be on the safe side, and walked back to the house. When I went inside, the lights were on, but I didn't see anything of Al. Then the doorbell rang, and I didn't want Arlene or somebody else to find me there. So I hid in a closet.

"When I heard you leave—what were you *doing* all that time?—I peeked out and saw you get into your car. I knew then that you must have been the Mr. Bennett who Al was to see tonight, and I ran out to talk to you. But you were already driving out. I got in my car and started to follow you. Then another car zoomed around me, and it seemed to be following you, too. Its lights were out, and it stayed between my car and yours all the way into town, and then it disappeared. I followed you here and well, here we are."

I stopped for a red light, and I said, "Did you—uh—go upstairs while you were waiting at Mr. Bayne's house?"

I felt her gaze upon me, and she laughed shortly. "What a funny question. No, I didn't go upstairs. I had just arrived, and then you rang the bell."

I turned right onto the lake boulevard, and headed back across town. I said, "What did you want to see me about?"

She moved on the seat until she was close beside me. "Can't we stop someplace?" she said. "And maybe have a drink, and talk a little?"

"I'm in kind of a hurry," I told her, nodding at the dash compartment, "but you'll find a bottle in there—if you like it straight."

She placed a hand on my arm. "I hate to hurry a drink," she said softly.

I made an illegal left turn off the boulevard and swung down a road leading to the lake. I stopped the car in the sand, and cut the motor. Above and behind us the boulevard traffic hummed along, but it seemed far away, and I could hear the waves lapping against the breakwater.

Turning off the lights, I took out a pint bottle of bourbon. It had been there a long time, and I knew that it was almost full. I unscrewed the cap and handed the bottle to the girl. She tilted it to her lips, and I saw her profile against the moonlit surface of the lake.

She had two drinks before she handed the bottle to me. "Thanks," she said huskily. "I needed that." She fitted a fresh

cigarette into the long holder and I plugged in the dash lighter for her.

Then I took a drink from the bottle. It was good bonded bourbon, but it tasted hot and bitter to me, and I replaced the cap. I thought of Alvin Bayne's lifeless body on the bathroom floor, and of the night's work confronting me. I thought of that terrifying experience in the alley. I knew Damon's two hired guns were still looking for me, that I couldn't keep running forever.

It was now a personal thing with me, over and above the money the agency might gain. I wanted to get going, get it over with.

The girl beside me sighed, and leaned her head back against the seat. "Why wasn't Al home tonight?" she said plaintively, "after he asked me to come out?"

"Why ask me?" I said.

She said in a tired voice, "Because he told me that you were coming out. You walked in as if you expected to find him, and then you went out. I followed you because I thought you were going to him—wherever he was. I—I want to be with him, if I can—especially tonight. He sounded so worried on the phone. It means so much to both of us, what you're going to do for us tonight."

"Al and I have been in love for a long time—ever since we met. But we didn't do anything about it, because Al felt a sense of responsibility toward Arlene—until he learned she was seeing John Damon. She's treated Al so shabbily, and I—I hate her so.

She turned to me, her eyes shining in the moonlight. "Take me with you," she pleaded. "It will mean so much to me to see the look on Arlene's face. And I can help you."

"No," I said.

Her fingers caressed my cheek, slid down to my chin, and gently turned my head until I faced her. She lifted her mouth, and her lips were soft and cool, with a subtle suggestion of withheld warmth. It was nice, and I liked it. I placed an arm around her shoulders, and I pulled her to me, while the waves beat upon the breakwater, and the traffic hummed above us. . . .

Presently she placed her hands against my chest and gently pushed me away. "You're nice," she whispered breathlessly. "I wanted to do that, to thank you—for Al and me. Al won't care."

I was sure that Al wouldn't care, not where he was.

"I mean what I said about helping you," she said.

"How?"

"Do you know where John Damon lives?"

"In an apartment on the east side. I'll find it."

She laughed softly. "See? I told you I could help. He doesn't live there any more. He moved last week into a new house he bought south of town. I forgot to tell Al when I talked to him on the phone this evening, and I was going to be sure to tell him when I saw him."

I turned to face her. "How do you know that Damon has moved?"

"Once," she said quietly, "John Damon was a—a friend of mine. Before he met Arlene, and before I met Al. John and I still have mutual friends, and they keep me informed of his doings." She looked away from me, and I saw her cigarette glow red in the darkness.

"I—I may as well tell it all. Two days ago I received a note from John. He gave me his new address, and said he wanted to see me again. And—and he enclosed a key to his new house. I—I'll give you the key, if you'll let me go with you."

"Is he getting tired of Arlene Bayne?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she said harshly. "All I know is that I don't want any part of John Damon any more. Al is so much finer, so honest, so much more of a real man—the only person I ever really cared about—really loved. Beside Al, John is just a heel." Her voice broke, and she turned her face away from me.

"Does Alvin Bayne know about your former friendship with Damon?" I asked her.

"Of course. I told him all about it. He doesn't care."

I turned on the ignition key. I decided that Marsha Morgan was a good girl to have around. But for her, I would have gone to the wrong address. And she was furnishing me with a key—a very handy thing to have for the job I had to do.

"O.K.," I said. "Get that key ready." I punched the starter button.

She turned and smiled at me like a little girl who had been promised at last that she can go to the circus. "Thank you," she said, and she began to wipe her eyes with a perfume-scented handkerchief. "But I can't understand what happened to Al tonight."

I nudged the gas pedal, and we began a slow turn in the sand. I felt tired and mean, and I wished the night was over, I said. "He's dead." I gunned the car up the hill. . . .

I needed a gun, and I drove fast across town to my apartment. It was kind of a nightmare ride. At first, Marsha Morgan stared at me like a crazy woman as I told her what I knew about the death of Alvin Bayne, while I wheeled the car through the boulevard traffic. She asked a couple of questions in a dead voice, and I answered them as best I could. After a while she turned away from me, and was very quiet. I felt a little uneasy about her, but I had worries of my own.

Parking a good two blocks from my apartment, I said to her, "I'll be back."

She nodded silently without looking at me. I moved up the sidewalk, worming my way through the late after-movie crowd. When I stood opposite my apartment I sized up the entrance and the street on both sides before I crossed and entered. I asked the night switchboard girl if I'd had any calls of visitors, and she shook her head. I skipped the elevator and walked up the stairs. I didn't see anybody except old man Goodwin, who was walking up and down the hall in his bathrobe, smoking a long cigar, as was his habit at this time of the evening.

I said, "Evening, Pop. Kind of quiet around tonight, huh?"

"Yep," he said. "Hey, Jim, how about some dominoes?"

I grinned at him. "Not tonight, Pop." Then I turned the corner, walked down the hall and stood in front of my apartment door. Everything was quiet. I took out my key, carefully twisted the lock, and gently turned the knob. I waited a minute, and then I kicked the door inward and flattened myself against the wall. Nothing but silence. I reached a hand around the door and flicked the light switch. All peaceful. I poked my head around the doorway, hoping that none of my neighbors were watching.

Everything looked normal. I moved slowly into my living room. Then I made a quick tour—bedroom, kitchen, bath, and I opened all the closet doors. No guns blasted at me, nobody knocked me on the head. I was relieved and a little disappointed. It was hard to believe that John Damon's boys would give up that easy.

From a desk drawer I took a spare gun

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £32 10s. Pleasend two more."
 B. C., Tredegar, S. Wales.

—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931

JOAN THE WAD

is the Lucky Cornish Piskey
 who Sees All, Hears All, Does All.

JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP.

If you will send me your name and address, a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a history of the Cornish Piskey folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the QUEEN of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

AS HEALER

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the lucky Well?"

AS MATCHMAKER

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has Joan the Wad.

AS SPECULATOR

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/6. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."



GUARANTEED DIPPED IN WATER
 FROM THE LUCKY SAINT'S WELL

AS LUCK BRINGER

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan.'"

AS PRIZEWINNER

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that—, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £,000, he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

JOAN THE WAD'S achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the Public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few Extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly GUARANTEE that these letters were absolutely spontaneous, and the originals are open to inspection at JOAN'S COTTAGE. Send at once for full information about this PROVED Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.

" SUNDAY GRAPHIC " PICTURE PUZZLE.

No. 175.—"Dear Joan the Wad, I received this week cheque for £71 8s. 7d. My share of the £1,000 Prize of the 'Sunday Graphic' Picture Puzzle. I have been near winning before, but you have brought me just the extra luck I wanted."—F. T., Salisbury.

WON £153 17s., THEN £46 10s. 3d.

No. 191.—"Genuine account of Luck... since receiving Joan the Wad... I was successful in winning £153 17s. in the 'People's Xword No. 178 and also the 'News of the World' Xword No. 289, £46 10s. 3d., also £1 on a football coupon, which is amazing in itself, as all the luck came in one week."—A. B., Lcamington Spa.

WINNERS OF £5 11s. 1d.

No. 195.—"My father, myself and my sister had the pleasure of winning a Crossword Puzzle in the 'Sunday Pictorial,' which came to £5 11s. 1d., which we put down to JOAN THE WAD, and we thank her very much."—L. B., Exning.

WON PRIZE OF £13 13s.

No. 214.—"Arrival of your charm followed the very next day by the notification that I had won a prize of £13 13s. in a Literary Competition."—F. H. R., Wallington.

" DAILY HERALD " PICTURE CONTEST.

No. 216.—"Since having received JOAN THE WAD I received cheque, part share in the 'Daily Herald' Picture Contest £3 1s."—M. E., Notting Hill.

£30,000 WINNER.

No. 222.—"Mrs. A. . . . of Lewisham, has just won £30,000 and says she has a JOAN THE WAD, so please send one to me."—Mrs. V., Bromley.

FIRST PRIZE " NUGGETS."

No. 238.—"I have had some good luck since receiving JOAN THE WAD. I have won First Prize in 'ANSWERS' 'Nuggets.' I had JOAN THE WAD in February, and I have been lucky ever since."—Mrs. N. W., Wolverhampton.

WON " DAILY MIRROR " HAMPER.

No. 245.—"I have just had my first win since having JOAN THE WAD, which was a 'DAILY MIRROR' HAMPER."—E. M. F., Brentwood.

WON " NUGGETS " £300.

No. 257.—"My Husband is a keen Competitor in 'Bullets' and 'Nuggets.' He had not any luck until I gave him JOAN THE WAD, when the first week he secured a credit note in 'Nuggets' and last week FIRST Prize in 'Nuggets' £300."—Mrs. A. B., Salford.

CAN ANYONE BEAT THIS ?

No. 286.—"Immediately after receiving my JOAN THE WAD I won a 3rd Prize in a local Derby Sweep, then I was given employment after seven months of idleness and finally had a correct forecast in Picture Puzzle 'Glasgow Sunday Mail,' which entitles me to a share of the Prize Money."—W. M., Glasgow, C.A.

All you have to do is to send 1/- stamp (Savings Stamps accepted) and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to

69, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN, CORNWALL

—a Colt .45 automatic. It was a bigger gun than I usually liked to carry, but now, as I checked the clip and hefted its smooth cold weight in my hand, I was glad I had it. It was too big to fit comfortably into my inside coat pocket, and so I tucked it beneath my belt on my left side with the butt pointing to my right. Then I went to my telephone stand, looked in my city directory for the number of Florence Markham, and called it.

While I waited I glanced at my wrist watch. Twenty minutes until midnight. The evening was getting along. There was a click in my ear, and I heard the subdued sound of a shrill feminine chattering.

Then a crisp woman's voice said, "Yes?" "Mrs. Markham's residence?" I asked politely.

"This is Mrs. Markham speaking."

"Is Mrs Alvin Bayne there?"

"Yes, she is. Do you wish to speak to her?"

"If you please," I said.

"Just a moment." There was a moment's silence, and then the voice said, "Oh, I'm sorry. We're on the last rubber, and Mrs. Bayne is trying for a grand slam. I think she'll make it, too. I hate to disturb her now. Could I give her a message, or have her call you in a few minutes?"

"Never mind," I said wearily. "Thank you." I hung up.

I called information, and asked for the telephone number of John Damon. She said, "I'm sorry, sir, but that is a private number."

"Can you give me his present address?"

"Just a moment, sir." I waited. And then she said, "Mr. Damon lives at fourteen-twenty-one Aberdeen Road."

"Thank you, miss," I said, and I hung up slowly. Marsha Morgan hadn't been kidding. I knew that Aberdeen Road was in a new subdivision on the southern fringe of town. I turned out the lights, locked my door, and went down to the street.

Marsha Morgan was still waiting. As I got in beside her, I said, "Still want to go with me?"

She nodded, not looking at me. "Yes, yes."

"Look," I said, "why not just give me the key? I'll put in a taxi. No use in you getting mixed up in this."

She shook her head slowly, and her bright hair moved over her shoulders. "I want to go with you. I must go with you—now." She gazed at me, and her eyes held a queer glittering light.

I said gently, "I didn't tell you before—but I'm sorry about Alvin Bayne."

She lifted her shoulders slightly, and her lips twisted bitterly. "That's all right," she said carelessly, and she attempted a bright smile. "Shall we go?"

I said carefully, "Did you see anyone at Bayne's house tonight, before I got there?"

She shook her head. "No, no."

I started the motor, and wheeled the car out into the street. The .45 beneath my belt pressed uncomfortably against my stomach.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE HELLCAT PURRS SOFTLY.

JOHN DAMON'S residence turned out to be a big sprawling brick affair far out on the south side, where the fields began. It stood on a rise of ground, and there wasn't another house within three blocks. I drove past once, not too fast, not too slow. There was a big lawn, already thick with grass, and a blacktop drive curving around to a double garage in the rear. A five-thousand-dollar sedan with pale paint and a lot of chrome was parked in the drive, and behind it, half inside the garage, was a station wagon. The front of the house was dark, but I saw a faint light in a middle room.

I said to Marsha Morgan, "Does Arlene Bayne drive a station wagon?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

I drove for maybe a quarter of a mile before I came to an intersecting road. I turned the car around, headed it back for Damon's house—and stopped. I said to the girl, "Why don't you just wait here? I'll pick you up . . . when I'm finished up there."

She shook her head. "No. I'm going with you." She shivered a little, and then said in a tight voice, "If—if I had known while I was hiding in the closet, that all of the time Al was upstairs . . . dead . . ."

"Try and forget it," I said. I took the .45 from my waistband and checked the safety catch. I knew what I had to do, but I wasn't in a hurry about doing it. I stared across the empty lots, weedy and ragged in the moonlight. "It looked like robbery—like somebody got into the house and was ripping through the place. They ran into Bayne unexpectedly, and they shot him. That's the way it looked."

She said bitterly, "It wasn't just robbery—it was murder."

"How do you know?" I asked quickly.

"I don't *know*," she said quietly. "I feel it." She paused, and gazed out at the night. "Maybe I shouldn't tell you this," she went on slowly. "Maybe I would never tell you if I didn't hate her so—Arlene, I mean. John Damon needs money, a lot of it, quick. Things haven't been going so well for him lately, and a Chicago syndicate is closing in on him—for not paying off after losing heavily in a dice game.

"He knew about Al's will, in which he leaves everything to her, and about his life insurance policies naming Arlene as the beneficiary, and their joint bank accounts. And maybe Arlene learned, somehow, that tomorrow Al intended to change it all—cut her out of everything. And she told John." She paused, and then added, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know."

I said, "How do you know about Damon's financial troubles? Via the same grapevine—your mutual friends?"

"Yes," she said. She grasped my arm, and I felt her hand tremble a little. "Can't we go now?" There was a faint note of eagerness in her voice.

"In a minute," I said.

I heard her sigh. She said, "Could—could I have another drink?"

"Help yourself."

She got out the bourbon and took a long swallow.

"With Bayne dead," I said, "Arlene would get his money and be free to give Damon the money he needs. Is that the way you figure it?"

She tilted the bottle again before she answered. Then she said in a choked voice, "It—it's horrible. I—I don't know what to think."

Half thinking out loud, I said, "But how did Arlene know about Bayne changing his will? He surely didn't tell her." Suddenly I snapped my fingers. "This is the way it was—Arlene knew about the whole deal, and she tipped off Damon. She was listening on the upstairs extension while Bayne was talking to me. He told me she was upstairs, and that she had carried a Manhattan cocktail up with her. I saw the empty glass, with the cherry still in it, on the upstairs telephone table.

"She heard it all—about Bayne hiring me about his will, everything. And that's why Damon's boys were hanging around Bayne's house tonight, and why they followed me into town and tried to kill me in an alley.

One of them killed Bayne—Arlene, herself, or Damon, or Damon's boys. They tried to make it look like robbery, and then they tried to get rid of me—because I knew too much." I held out my hand to the girl. "Give me that key."

She gazed at me in the moonlight, and her eyes were puzzled. Then she reached into her purse, and dropped a flat key into my hand. "It's for the side door," she said, "by the garage."

I didn't mean to say it, but I did. "You've used it?"

She looked away from me. "No, Mr. Bennett," she said in a cold voice. "I haven't used it. John told me in his note which door it fitted."

"I'm sorry," I said, and I pressed a thumb against the starter button. The motor purred softly in the night.

Marsha Morgan laughed shortly. "That's all right," she said, and she turned toward me. Her eyes searched my face. "I—I think I like you, a little. Please be careful—up there." She gazed up the road in the direction of Damon's house.

"Sure," I said. But I remembered the business-like manner in which the soft-spoken man in the tweed suit had herded me into the alley, and I thought of the careful generalship which had planted another man at the head of the alley in case I make a break. I knew that I was lucky to be alive, and I wished that I had a machine gun instead of the .45. Once more I urged the girl to get out of the car and wait for me to pick her up.

"No. I want to go with you."

"All right," I snapped, "but stay behind me, and do what I tell you."

She nodded slowly, and looked at me with solemn eyes.

I said, "Do you know what I think? I think that in spite of Alvin Bayne you're still carrying the torch—maybe a little one—for John Damon."

She hesitated a moment, and then she moved close to me, speaking with her lips close to my cheek. "Every man a girl loves takes a little of her away with him," she said huskily. "There were others before John, and before Al, and there'll be others after. Tomorrow, let's have a quiet drink somewhere, you and I, and I'll try and forget all the others."

"Until another one comes along," I said.

She moved her lips to my mouth, and I kissed her for the second time that night. It was nice, almost too nice. Then I felt

the .45 pressing against my ribs. I pushed the girl gently away, and wheeled the car down the road toward Damon's house.

I switched off the lights and stopped a good block away. Marsha Morgan and I got out, quietly closed the doors. We walked side by side on the grass at the edge of the street. As we approached the house, I saw that the light was still burning, and that the pale sedan and the station wagon were still parked where I had seen them. I stopped in the shadow of a clump of small fir trees, and grasped the girl's arm. The whole scene before me—the house, the grounds, the parked cars—was quiet and peaceful in the moonlight. Too quiet, too peaceful.

I was jittery and scared, but I could understand that—it was a familiar feeling. Any man who says he's never scared is either an idiot or a liar. But there was something beside fear—a queer, uneasy feeling. Guns blasting from the windows would have made me feel better.

I pointed to a white door near the rear of the house close to where the garage jutted out. "That the door?" I whispered.

She nodded silently, and she followed me as I circled the lawn, trying to stay in the shadows of the trees and shrubs. Presently I stood in the dew-wet grass beside a tall rose trellis, and gazed across the drive at the white door in the dark brick wall of the house. The rear bumper of the station wagon was about four feet from the door, with the front of the car in the darkness of the garage. I touched the girl's arm, nodded silently at the door, and she looked up at me.

"Yes," she whispered.

It was the first time I had seen her closely outside of my car. She had a slender, erect body, and her pale hair lifted gently in the night breeze. She was watching the door, her lips parted in anticipation and excitement, and the moonlight made deep pools of shadow beneath her eyes.

I had her key in my hand, and I loosened the .45 beneath my belt. "Stay here," I whispered. "Don't try to come in until I let you know." I paused, and then I added. "If I don't come out, run like hell for the car and drive to the nearest phone and call the cops. Got it?"

She dug her fingers into my arm. "Yes, yes," she said breathlessly, and she looked up at me. "Please be careful, darling," she whispered.

I patted her cheek, and I moved away from her across the wet grass.

Abruptly I stopped. Something was wrong, as wrong as all hell. What was it? The quiet, the peace, the silent house in the serene moonlight? Was it the sudden remembered sound of a voice, the inflection of a word? A word, perhaps, like *darling*? A common word, affectionate, friendly, a term of endearment bandied freely about in gay circles.

My mind raced back to a time six hours earlier, and once again I heard Arlene Baynes' throaty drawl. *Hello there, darling*. The same tone of voice, the same inflection of words. *Please be careful, darling*.

I turned slowly, moved back to the girl standing in the shadow of the rose trellis. She watched me silently, her eyes big and bright. As I moved close to her, she backed away from me. She knew that I knew, and for an instant the knowledge lay there naked between us.

I jumped for her, clamped an arm around her throat, and I smothered her scream with my hand. She twisted and struggled violently, a choked strangling sound in her throat, but I held her, dragging her across the lawn toward the fir trees. I wanted to get out of the moonlight, find cover, lay low. But in my urgency and haste, my hand slipped for an instant from her mouth.

"Johnny!" she screamed. "Over here!"

I knew then that it was no damn use in trying to get clear. I let her drop, and I jumped for the scanty shadow of the rose trellis. I unlimbered my .45 just as two men boiled out of the garage from behind the station wagon. They stood crouched in the moonlight, gazing out over the lawn, and I saw the glint of the guns in their hands. I raised the .45.

Then I was aware of a swift crawling movement on the grass beside me. Fingers pulled at my gun arm and clawed at my face, and a mad scream beat against my ears.

"Here, Johnny! Kill him!"

From beside the station wagon a streak of orange flame stabbed the night. I tried to rip the girl's hand from my wrist, but her fingers were like steel claws, and I couldn't bring my gun up. I raised my left fist, aiming it at the girl's jaw close to my face.

Another shot, and I heard her sigh deeply, and her fingers slipped from my wrist. She was on her knees beside me, and she fell slowly forward, her bright hair a silvery curtain over her face.

I began to shoot then, and the big gun bucked in my hand. It was a fierce pleasant feeling—the smooth pull of the trigger, the power-packed recoil. I fired three times, I think, and the night breeze wafted gun smoke across my face. I lifted the gun muzzle, and peered toward the station wagon.

One of the men was on his face in the grass beside the drive, and the other was leaning against the car, his head down, his arms hanging limply. I chuckled gleefully, and raised myself to a half-stooping position. I was wild, crazy, trigger-happy.

Something moved at the far corner of the house. I ran forward, stooping. A gun exploded, and flame reached for me in the moonlight. My left leg jerked, as if it had been hit with a sledge hammer, and my face hit the wet grass. I heard footsteps running on the drive. I pushed myself up, and I hobbled toward the drive. My leg didn't hurt—it just felt heavy and numb. I heard the frenzied sound of a car starter, and the motor of the pale sedan roared to life. I could see the car very plainly—the pastel paint, the bright grinning teeth of its grill, and the sloping graceful windshield.

Stumbling and falling forward on the grass, I leveled the .45, steadying my wrist with my left hand, and emptied the gun into the left side of the car's windshield. The car swerved from the drive and backed violently into the side of the house. There was a crashing, crunching sound, and the car jolted to a stop. The motor coughed once and died, and then everything was quiet.

I pushed myself slowly to my feet, lurched along the drive, and peered into the car's left front window. A man was lying on the seat beneath the wheel. As I watched, one hand slipped slowly from the wheel and dropped limply to the seat. The man wore a gray tweed suit, and a brown hat was crumpled beneath his head. I recognized my soft-spoken friend who had invited me to take a death walk in an alley beside the Great Lakes Building.

I pushed myself away from the car, turned, and hobbled back up the drive. My left leg above the knee felt numb and stiff, but I could navigate if I didn't try to bend the knee. As I neared the garage, I paused, remembering that my .45 was empty, and I moved cautiously forward. I saw three figures lying within a twenty-foot area, and figured I could stop worrying about my gun being empty.

I peered down at two men lying by the station wagon. They lay as they had fallen after jumping out from their hiding place in the garage, where they were waiting for me to walk into the trap. One man was on the grass, just off the drive, his face turned upward to the stars. I couldn't see where my bullet had hit him, but I knew he was very dead. He had a thick coarse face, with heavy black brows. I had never seen him before, but I guessed that he was Gray Tweed's pal of the alley-rendezvous.

The other man was lying on the drive beside the station wagon. He was John Damon, in person. His eyes were open, and he stared at me silently, like a wolf caught in a trap.

"Where're you hit?" I asked him.

He coughed faintly, delicately. "Damn you . . . in chest . . . get doctor."

"Presently, presently," I mumbled, and I moved stiff-legged away from him. I crossed the grass to the rose trellis. She was lying on her side, her legs doubled beneath her, her cheek on an out-stretched arm, with her pale hair strewn in thin strands across her face.

Her eyes were closed, and in the moonlight I saw the bright glisten of blood on her lips and at one corner of her mouth. I tried to kneel down beside her, but I couldn't make it with my stiff knee, and so I carefully lowered myself to the grass with one leg stretched out. Supporting myself with one hand, I touched the girl's shoulder.

She opened her eyes slowly, like a person awakening from a pleasant dream, and she gazed at me with friendly, drowsy eyes.

"Where are you hurt?" I asked.

Her lips curved in a little smile. "Does it matter?" she whispered. "Johnny's aim wasn't . . . very good, was it?"

"I'll call a doctor," I said, and began the slow process of pushing myself to a standing position.

"No," I heard her whisper, and I looked down at her. "Don't . . . bother. No use."

I turned away from her and moved as rapidly as I could to the white doorway in the side of the house. As I passed Damon's form, I saw him stir a little, and he watched me silently with cold eyes. I didn't say anything, and neither did he. I didn't need a key for the door—it had been unlocked all the time. I went inside, found a telephone, and called Alvin Bayne's house.

It took an argument to convince the cop who answered to call Orvil Hewing, but I finally got him. I told Hewing where I was, and to have Rockingham send out a doctor and an ambulance. He got excited, and started to fire questions, but I snapped, "Hurry," at him and hung up.

I went outside and crossed the lawn to where the girl lay. Once more I maneuvered myself into a sitting position beside her. She moved her head slightly, and stared at me with dull, heavy-lidded blue eyes. Painfully I shifted, stared back at her.

"Hello . . . darling." Her voice was so low that I had to duck my head to hear. "Why didn't you use my key?" she said reproachfully. "Johnny counted on that. When you stopped at the door, that . . . that was his signal."

"I know," I said wearily. "I know now. The key was just bait, to get me into a trap where Damon could kill me at his leisure. But you *were* telling the truth about his moving from his apartment in town to this place."

She attempted a weak smile, "Of course. We couldn't have you blundering into the . . . wrong house, could we? But why didn't you go . . . to the door?"

My leg was hurting now, bad, and I felt the sweat on my face. I tried to shift its position, but it began to pain more, and I sat still.

I said, "You are Arlene Bayne. Not a girl named Marsha Morgan—she never existed. But as Marsha Morgan you could give me the true story of what happened tonight, putting all the blame on Arlene and Damon—so I would be sure to go to Damon's house. You didn't care what you told me, just so you could lead me into the trap.

"You heard your husband's conversation with me on the upstairs phone, and when he went upstairs to shave, you shot him. Then you tore up the bedrooms to make it look like robbery, and scooted over to Damon's and told him what you had done. He put a couple of men on my trail, and when they failed to kill me, they reported back to Damon.

"You volunteered to be the bait, by posing as Marsha Morgan, to lure me to Damon's house so that they could conveniently take care of me. Your husband didn't have any girl friend. You killed him so that you and Damon could get his money—before he changed his will." I stopped talking, and rubbed my leg, it had started

to swell, and I hoped the doctor would arrive soon.

"Yes," Arlene Bayne whispered. "It was like that. I—I killed him. He looked so surprised when I pointed the gun at him. Poor Alvin. But how did you know that I was Arlene? You never met me. What did I *do*?" She asked me, low and plaintively.

I looked down at her slender form lying on the grass. I had the eerie feeling that we were a couple of other people, two strangers on another planet whispering together on a moonlit summer night; or a couple of disembodied characters in a painting by Dali. Maybe it was fatigue, and the pain in my leg, and the let-down from tension. I heard my voice saying:

"You should have said it sooner—I mean when you called me 'darling.' You called me that on the phone tonight, when I called for your husband, and you said it in a special way. I remembered it. A while ago, just as I was about to use your damned key, you said it again, and I knew that Arlene Bayne and Marsha Morgan were the same person." I looked up at the stars, and they seemed to be too bright and too close to the earth.

I said, "I suppose Mrs. Florence Markham, your bridge-playing friend, had been tipped off to cover up for you?"

I heard her say, "Don't blame Florence. She's a very close friend of mine. When I—I would go to see Johnny, I would tell Alvin that I was playing bridge at Florence's house. Florence is very understanding. She . . . she never let me down."

Just to be saying something, I said, "She sure didn't."

The night became very quiet. The crickets were singing a muted song, and from behind me I heard John Damon groan faintly. I didn't look around. To hell with John Damon. To hell with everything. The hot pain in my leg was crawling up to my hip, and I couldn't think of anything else.

Arlene Bayne's fingers plucked weakly at my sleeve. I glanced down at her, and I saw her lips moving. I lowered my head, and her soft whispering words barely came to me above the sound of crickets.

"Good-bye . . . darling. . ."

I saw her body stiffen, and then relax. She died with a little smile on her lips. I wasn't glad, and I wasn't sorry. I didn't feel anything but the pain in my leg.

From far across town I heard the tiny wail of a siren. I sat huddled beside the still body of Arlene Bayne and waited.

BLOOD ON THE MIDWAY

Dynamic Circus-Crime Novelette

By SCOTT O'HARA

*Under the big tent everybody was one scared family . . .
when the two-time slayer—started cutting up.*

CHAPTER ONE.

COAST INTO HELL.

A MOOCH who fancied himself a good rifleman had been giving Lew Sudreau who runs the shooting gallery pitch a loud argument. When I got the word, I moved in and Lew loaded it with the special slugs. I took all the black out of the ace of spades in the required four shots and that shut the mooch up. I picked an electric clock off the prize counter, purposely missed on the next four. When the townie and his buddies had moved off, I gave Lew back his clock.

It was then that Wally Hinkley's youngest came up and told me that Wally wanted to see me in his trailer right away. Wally, a hard, wooden-faced character in his forties with arms that hang down to his knees is our knife-thrower and he is billed as Count Steinmetz. He lives with an oversized wife and four kids in a trailer slightly larger than a doghouse.

I went down the midway, absently noting that Unit 8 of Crown Carnivals, Inc., was doing pretty well for an overcast Tuesday afternoon. The shills were working to build up the tips at the posing show and the freak top, but the kids were four deep at the rides. I walked through the jangle-music of the merry-go-round, the steel roar of the Whip, the bally-boom of the platform drums, the yelling of kids.

The door of the Hinkley trailer was open. I went on in, Ma Hinkley overflowed half the eating booth. Wally was sitting on one of the bunks. He works in tails and he sat there in pants, false shirt front and slightly gray underwear. He had a faintly greenish look around the mouth. Ma Hinkley looked grim.

The girl I had hired the day before—Brenda Hanson, she called herself—sat in the one chair staring at the folded hands in her lap. She wore the rhinestone outfit

for the act and the adhesive of a new bandage was across her ribs.

"What the hell did you hire for me, heh?" Wally growled.

I sat on the other bunk. I looked at the bandage. "Losing your eye, Wally?"

"I nicked Ma in the ankle eighteen years ago, Jerry. And I ain't missed since."

The climax of Wally's act is when the target girl flattens herself against a board the size of a barn door, spread eagled. There are stirrups for her feet and handles for her hands. The board is balanced on a pivot so that it turns like a big paddle-wheel, end over end. It spins pretty fast. Each time she is upright, Wally chucks a knife close to her until he has her outlined. It goes over good.

"What happened?"

"She did good on her first bunch of shows yesterday, Jerry. Not scared at all. I work down the left side and up the right side. So a half hour ago she shoves her middle over toward the knife. Like to give me a hemorrhage. I creased her and you shoulda heard the marks yell. How good did you check on her, Jerry?"

"You know I didn't have much time. Linda shoved off without warning. She'd been looking for a rich mark for two years and grabbed the first one who asked her."

"Did you go to an agency, Jerry?" They were both looking at me hard.

"Okay," I said. "You've got me. I couldn't find anybody the right way. I found her in a bus terminal drinking coffee."

It was a bad confession to have to make. When a more alert ownership took over the twelve units of Crown Carnivals, Inc., they had hired young men with junior executive experience but, without carry experience to work in as managers, believing that, in that way, overhead would be more under control and financial reports more intelligible. After the war I spent two and a half years building a National-Bank

size inertube around my middle. I jumped at the job. And now I'd done something contrary to all rules of good management.

You pick replacement talent through the agencies. I'd grabbed one off the street. It would have been better to fold that part of Wally's act until the agency could supply us with a target girl. Maybe the seven months with Unit 8 was beginning to warp my judgment.

Ma glared at me and Wally sighed heavily. The girl didn't look up.

"Why did you try that, Brenda?" I asked.

Her knuckles whitened but she didn't answer.

"We've asked her and asked her," Wally said.

She was too thin, really. What should have been a very lovely slimmness was gauntness. Her ribs were too easy to count. The hollowed cheeks and good bone structure of her face gave her the look of a dieting fashion model. Silver-blond hair of cobweb fineness hung straight to her shoulders. The way she was sitting, hunched over, a wide strand of it half concealed one eye. She wore the make-up for the act, heavy and theatrical.

Ma chuckled unexpectedly. "Lord, Wally! She'd be hard to hit if you tried."

"Think she'll talk to you, Jerry?" Wally asked.

I shrugged.

He said, "Come on, Ma. Let's take a walk."

We were alone in the trailer. I remembered how she had acted like a frightened little woods animal until I had convinced her that I was legitimately offering her a job. Her suitcase was battered imitation leather. Her suit was of cheap stuff that had bagged badly where she sat down. She had agreed meekly that she could use a job. When I had taken a deep breath and told her what the job was . . . "Absolutely no danger at all, Brenda . . ." she had agreed without a moment's hesitation.

I had taken the pickup in because I had to pick up some slum for the sales pitches at the freight terminal, and Brenda had sat silently beside me on the way back out to the lot. Wally had been satisfied and I had gotten her a bunk in the sleeping top with Mae Cassidy and her domineering mother. Mae is the husky girl who rides a bike down the loop the loop and into the tank of water. It is our big free act, once in the

afternoon and once at ten o'clock at night with the spotlights on her.

"Look at me, Brenda," I said. She slowly lifted her head. Her gray eyes were expressionless. "Tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell."

"Did you try to move over so you'd catch that knife in the middle?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I just—wanted to. That's all."

"Do you like it here?"

"It's all right."

"Wally and Ma have been nice to you. They pay well. If you'd done what you tried to do, Wally would have been through. Knife-throwers who kill the girl, no matter how, are always through. That's why he was so scared. He doesn't know how to do anything else. That would have been a hell of a nice favor to do him, wouldn't it?"

Two big tears detached themselves from her lower lids and slid down, making dark tracks of mascara. "I didn't realize that."

"But you do now?"

"Yes, Mr. Howard."

"You won't try it again?"

"No, Mr. Howard."

"Will you try to kill yourself in some other way?"

She didn't answer.

"What is gnawing on you, Brenda?"

"They—they'll find me and kill me anyway. I know they will."

"Who? Who would want to kill you?"

Is it something you know? Why don't you go to the cops if somebody is after you?"

She grew more pale. "No!" she gasped.

"Well, that's your business," I said. "But if somebody was trying to shut my mouth, kid, I'd write it all down, seal it and leave the dope where it would be opened if anything happened to me. And then I'd let it be known."

She was shivering a little. There were goose bumps on her pale skin. But it was warm in the trailer. For a moment there was a glow of hope in her eyes. Then that faded.

"It wouldn't do any good," she said.

I lit a cigarette. "I ought to fire you and chase you off the lot, you know."

"Why not?"

"Damn it, can't you meet me half-way? I'm trying to give you another chance."

"If you want to."

I went to the trailer door. Wally and Ma were twenty feet away. They saw me

and came over. I said. "She won't try it again."

Wally got brick-red. "Damn it, I can't take a chance on that! I won't have it. You get her the hell off the lot and get me somebody I can trust."

I learned a little in seven months. I looked at Ma. "The kid's in trouble."

"Lord, Jerry! We got four of our own cluttering up the trailer now and—"

"It's not any old trouble. She needs help." Wally kicked at the trailer step. "Well . . . in that case . . . hell, I'll leave it up to Ma."

Ma looked in at the girl. "You going to do that again?"

"No. I promise."

Ma sighed. "Okay, Jerry. Maybe she helps the food concessions. The customers watch her and go away hungry. Kid, go get your face fixed. We go on again in fifteen minutes. And for the next act, how about smiling?"

She came out and tied the robe around her and I walked with her toward the Cassidy sleeping top. She said, "I know I can't ask for anything, Mr. Howard."

"What do you want?"

"Mae and her mother sleep awfully hard. The thunderstorm in the night didn't even wake them up. If I could sleep where there are more girls, I'd feel safer."

"Meet me after the next show outside the freak top on the scenic railway side and I'll see what we can do."

I went out to the gate and checked admissions, dropped in at the food top and went over inventory for a few minutes and then got back to the show top in time to catch the finale of Wally's act. He set Brenda spinning and went back to his mark with the cluster of knives in his left hand. She was spinning so fast that it made her look like one of those old-time flickering movies.

Wally's arm moved like a flash of light. Chunk, chunk, chunk. Armpit, waist, side of thigh, ankle. Four more up the right side. Ankle, thigh, waist, armpit. Chunk, chunk. So fast that the two knives seemed to be in the air at the same time. One on either side of her head. I felt faintly ill as I thought of what might have happened if she had decided to move her head instead of her body.

The last knife was over her head, the weighted hilt angled down so that it projected over her forehead. Wally throws that one in such a manner that it doesn't

quite complete its spin and the angle makes it look a lot closer than it is.

He stopped the board. Brenda wore her painted smile. There was a good applause. She stepped off the board, held a guy rope to kill the dizziness for a moment, bowed to the crowd and grabbed her robe. Wally started his slum pitch, selling a booklet of instructions on how to throw knives, plus one steel throwing knife. The book and knife cost him twenty-eight cents wholesale, and he gets a buck for the outfit—no sales to children under fifteen. A shill made the first buy and then they started to go fast.

I caught up with Brenda and said, "Have you got any objections to sleeping with the other girls?"

"No."

"Come on, then." We went around to the back, to the little dressing top. I could hear the languid music on the phonograph inside and I recognized it as the final pose of the show, a Hawaiian number.

I stood near the flap and called Lady Bee. She runs the show and she's close to fifty. But she's kept herself in such shape that when any of the girls are sick, she can stand in by softening the lights a little. Close up she has a face that looks as though it were cut out of Vermont rock.

She came out and gave me the usual broad grin. "Boy, we got 'em drooling in there today." She glanced curiously at Brenda.

"Lady Bee, this is Brenda Hanson."

"Too damn skinny," Lady Bee said.

"No. She's Wally's new target girl. I want to bunk her down with your mob if it's okay."

"Okay by me. Get this straight, Brenda. No noise a half hour after we close up. No borrowing. Come here, and I'll show you where the cot gets set up."

They went away. I had my back near the dressing top flap. A pair of warm arms slid around my neck from the back and there was a husky giggle in my ear.

"Quit it, Maida," I said.

She giggled again.

"Damn it, are you trying to sabotage my authority?"

"You've got too much dignity, pal."

"Leggo."

"No. I'm holding on until I get a date out of this."

I sighed. "Fifteen minutes after you fold tonight, we'll go for a ride."

"Same place," she said. She kissed me on

the ear and slipped back behind the flap. I walked away to tell Mae that Brenda was moving out.

The management insists that more dignity is maintained if the manager lives in town. I'd rather live on the lot. It would make life simpler. The crowd was beginning to thin. It would be very slim through the dinner hour and then pick up again in the evening, reaching a peak at about ten, tapering off until one, with the last regular shows on a little after midnight.

I drove into town in the coupe, wondering about Brenda all the way. She seemed honestly frightened. The way she talked indicated a certain amount of breeding, at odds with the sleazy clothes she had been wearing in the bus terminal. And, no matter how safe it is and no matter how much a person wants to stop living, it does take a respectable amount of courage to hold still while those knives arrow into the pine close to your flesh.

Markson, our advance man, was waiting for me at the hotel, back from a trip along our planned route. While I shaved, we carried on a conversation. The weather was holding and our gross was running good. On the last poop sheet from the management, we were in second place on net for the year and I could plan on a very respectable season bonus if all went well.

We had drinks together and a big dinner on the firm. He hit the sack and at ten o'clock I drove back out to the lot. My assistant, Weber, told me about a drunk who tried to tear up the penny pitch game. When I asked him how it came out, he blew softly on bruised knuckles and said:

"He listened to reason, boss."

The drum roll was loud because all the rides shut down while Mae does her loop on the bicycle. We watched her. I know the act is as safe as churches, but it never fails to give me the quivers to see her high on that platform. She uses a heavy suntan makeup to contrast with her shining white one-piece swim suit. Face to face, Mae looks as though she could break you over her knee—but high on the platform she looks very frail and feminine. The chrome-plated bike stood beside her.

She waved down and you could feel the silence settle over the crowd, over the gawping unturned faces. Even the kids let their cones melt. I knew that Mae's mother was in their sleeping top, her head buried under the pillow so that she couldn't hear the drum roll.

Mae got onto the saddle, pushed off and arrowed down the ramp, picking up speed with every fraction of a second. The way it always works, she and the bike go off the end of the jump, with the net catching the bike and Mae flattening into a dive that takes her beyond the net and into the tank—an impressive stunt.

She whirled up and around the loop and hit the jump. My breath caught in my throat as I saw that the angle was wrong—way wrong. She was going out too flat. It seemed to take an eternity. The bike turning lazily in the spots, the hard brown body frozen against the night sky.

The bike cleared the net, too. It was too close to her. The animal moan rose in the crowd and I had the fleeting thought that it was loud enough for her mother to hear even with her head under the pillow.

The moan rose to a scream as Mae, her feet high, hit the far edge of the tank with the small of her back. The tank was six feet deep, twenty feet in circumference. The husky body broke like a twig. Weber stood beside me, cursing monotonously, hoarsely. An elderly man near us bent over and was ill. She clung a moment, bent backward over the rim and then slid slowly, head down, into the water.

CHAPTER TWO.

DEATH'S UNWILLING DECOY.

I WANTED to turn and run. Anywhere. But I had to walk steadily down to the tank. They had her out on the grass when I got there. The bike had hit the exact center of the tank. The carny folk were herding the morbidly curious away. Someone covered her over with a tarp. I sent Weber down the road to phone the police.

Mae's mother came pushing her way down through the ring that stood silently looking at the tarp. Her mouth hung open and her eyes bulged.

That was something I couldn't watch. I turned away.

Fools had left the spots on the ramp. There was something odd about it. In a moment I saw what it was. The very last board was gone, and the two steel supports curved up the last few inches, like skeletal rib bones. The missing board would have served to throw her and the bike to the right height. Without it, the trajectory was too flat. Too deathly flat.

I went under the ramp and kicked around in the tall grass looking for the board, but I knew it wasn't there. I had seen the ramp assembled too many times. The boards were held in place by small U-bolts on either end, bolted through holes in the steel supports. And the boards themselves were made of hard thick plywood, so that there would be no danger of warping. I looked at the steel framework of the supports of the ramp. It would not take an exceptionally agile person to climb up there.

The crowd was thinning fast. They come to see an act like Mae's with the hidden hope that something horrible will happen. But when it does, it takes the heart out of them. I went down the midway and gave the signal for the games to close the moment play stopped. Sirens howled in the distance and I headed for the gate.

I made myself known to the man who seemed to be in charge. He had a flat, wedge-shaped face, bristling eyebrows and the pits remaining from bad adolescent acne.

He said that he was Lieutenant Folm, and I took him over to the body. They had gotten Mrs. Cassidy back to her sleeping top and he said that he would have to see her later to ask the routine questions.

The coroner arrived and clucked as he examined the body. He straightened up. "Instantaneous death, Lieutenant. Shattered the vertebra, smashed the pelvis, apparently, and raised general hell. Healthy specimen."

The lieutenant said, "You bill this as a dangerous stunt?"

"She kept track. I think this was somewhere in the twelve or thirteen hundred series."

"But not a good insurance risk, eh?"

"Insurance companies are touchy."

He looked at the ramp. "Lot of equipment. If it was a little out of whack—"

"She always checked it herself. They all do. Like jumpers rigging their own parachutes."

"Know anybody that would like to have her dead?"

I could answer confidently. "She didn't have an enemy in the world."

"How long will you be here, Howard?"

"I estimated another ten days. We have such heavy rides to put up that we squat as long as we can. When the gross drops below a certain minimum limit, we move on. But this will probably drag it out longer."

"How so?"

I shrugged. "They'll come to see where

it happened. And we'll get another girl to do the act in three or four days."

"Cold-blooded, aren't you?"

"Is there any point in trying to make me sore, Lieutenant?"

He grinned and I began to almost like him. "Standard procedure, Howard." He looked at the ramp again. "Anybody on the lot know anything about that act? I mean, is there anybody who could fill in for the Cassidy girl?"

"No, there isn't"

"How do they do it the first time?"

"Stretch a big net and go into it a dozen times. Then you know where to spot the tank."

"I think I'll post some men around that outfit until your new performer shows. How long will it take?"

"I'll wire tonight. But there may not be one available."

"I'll take a chance on that. I want the opinion of a pro on whether or not anybody jiggled that rig to spill her. Okay with you?"

I manufactured a shrug. "If you can spare the man and if you don't interfere with business."

"See you around," he said. "And I'd feel pretty bad if anybody all of a sudden decided to leave the show."

"Nobody will."

The stragglers were leaving. The usual gambling was starting in the G-top. For carnies only. One persistent mark accompanied by gal-friend was still heaving baseballs at milk bottles. I moved him off gently.

My car was inside the lot around the corner from the gate. I went and sat in it with the lights out. My cigarette end glowed in the dark. The car door opened and Maida slid in beside me.

"Hnm," I said. "What's the new poison?"

"Comes in a green bottle. Savage Conquest, they call it. Give up?" She snuggled close. "Baby needs bourbon," she murmured. "Bourbon and Jerry."

"In that order?"

"Start the car. I got the old creeps. Poor Mae. I want some laughs, honey."

We stopped at the first roadside tavern with a respectable sprinkling of cars and took a maple booth in the bar. Maida drew eyes like they were fastened to strings. She has cornsilk hair, big dumb blue eyes, and the sort of exaggerated build to start a Petty girl crying into her telephone. Tonight she had the build poured into a diagonal

red-and-white candy-striped dress that looked as though it was tattooed on.

There was the usual consternation over her standard drink of a double bourbon in a glass of orange pop, and the bartender made it with a pained expression.

"Here's to drinking first," she said.

I downed my shot.

"Why so grim, honey honey?" she said.

"Oh, I like to see women broken in half."

She shuddered. "Don't, Jerry. I want laughs and I want you to take me stumbling home by dawn's early light, all happy. So let's start cheery. That little Brenda you saddled us with gave me enough trouble."

"What did she do?"

"Oh, She went into a trance after it happened. Stiff as a board and white as death. She sounded like she was choking to death. Lady Bee shoved some rye down her and she went off into hysterics. And then she was going to leave right away. We held her, and the second time that bottle really worked. My rye, too. She passed out in about ten minutes."

I waved for a refill. It bothered me. Brenda was scared. Brenda slept in the same top with Mae. Mae gets—murdered. I let the word come to the top of my mind for the first time. And when Brenda hears about it, she has a reaction that intense fear could bring.

"Say, are you glaring at me?" Maida demanded.

I focused my eyes. She grinned and gave me the parted lips, sultry eyes routine. She laughed.

"Maida," I said. "You are my favorite hobby, but right now I want to talk to Brenda. Who's home?"

She pouted. "Lady Bee, Ethel and Brenda. Stacey, Beth and Carol went on a triple date. Say, what has she got that I haven't got more of?"

"Come and help. What's an hour out of your life?"

"I could be struck by lightning. Would not that be a terrible waste?"

We drove back fast and she was reasonably cheerful. I waited outside and she went in and talked to Lady Bee. In a few minutes they let me in. Ethel was snoring softly. Brenda slept with her mouth open, flat on her back.

We shook her for ten minutes and Lady Bee began to put a little beef behind the face-slapping before we woke her up. She was groggy. Then her face changed to a mask of fright.

"I've got to get out of here," she said.

"Shut up. Why did Mae's accident scare you so badly?"

She was off-guard from being awakened. "Last night, after the thunderstorm. I was crying. Mae heard me. I felt so alone. She sat on the edge of my cot. I—I told her what I was scared of. She said she wanted to think it over and then we'd do something about it. We were both jumpy. She thought she heard a noise. She went outside the tent but there wasn't anybody there, she said. I know there was somebody there. And they killed her because I told her." Her voice had risen to a wail. She rolled over onto her face and sobbed.

"The time has come," I said, "to tell us."

"No." Her voice was muffled.

Lady Bee rolled her over roughly. "Damn it, girl, Mae was a friend of mine. A good friend. You come around here with your troubles and get her killed. It wasn't your fault, I know. But I've got a yen to see somebody burn."

"No!" Brenda said.

I said slowly, "I think you'd have enough guts to want to help us fix whoever murdered Mae, kid."

She sat down slowly. We stood around her. "All right. My name is really Brenda Kailer. I lived with my mother in Louisville. She was a widow. Four months ago she married again. A younger man. I ran away, three months ago. I couldn't get a job. In Omaha, I was down to less than a dollar.

"I found a want ad for a nursemaid for a small child. I wrote to the box number. A man came to the address I gave and hired me. I thought he was quite nice. He questioned me carefully and I know now that he made certain that I had no friends or relatives in Omaha and that Hanson wasn't my name. He took me to a big country place outside of town, where there was a small boy who cried all the time. On the third day I found out that he had been—kidnapped.

"Things were going wrong for them. They thought that with a woman around, the child would begin to eat again. On the fourth day, in the afternoon, they locked me in a room. I heard him scream once. I knew they killed him and I knew they'd have to kill me. I dropped out the window and hurt my ankle but I got away. With no money, I couldn't go far. A man gave me a ride all the way to Kansas City. I don't know how they managed to trace me, but they did. I had seen one of them on

the street and I went into the bus terminal. I knew they couldn't kill me there.

"Then you came in, Mr. Howard. At first I thought you were—one of them . . . They must have seen the name on the truck. Today when I tried to get in front of the knife, it was because I saw one of them watching the act."

"You told Mae all this? It doesn't seem enough to warrant—"

"I told her the exact address of the house. I described the three men and I told her the name of the little boy. I'd better tell you that too. The house was—"

She was looking beyond us toward the tent flap. Her eyes widened slowly and the cords in her thin throat stood out.

As I started to turn, there was a whispering sound in the night air and then the noise that you make with the first thrust of a knife into a watermelon. The weighted hilt of one of Wally's knives protruded grotesquely from Brenda's chest.

She looked down at it as though in mild curiosity. Her hands lifted and she touched the hilt. Then blood spouted suddenly from her mouth and she folded slowly over onto the boards, rolled onto her side and lay still.

I raced out of the sleeping top to the sound of Lady Bee's metronomic screams. The guy rope hit me across the ankles and I fell so hard that it drove mud into my mouth and dazed me. I picked myself up and saw people running toward us. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand, yanked the tent flap shut as Lady Bee screamed for the last time.

To the excited questions I said, "Lady Bee was having a nightmare, kids. Go on back to sleep." I made it loud enough to be heard inside the tent.

When they cleared away, I went back inside. Ethel was sitting up. She was staring at Brenda and her lips were saying voiceless words. Lady Bee had a bottle tilted high and her hard throat was working spasmodically. Maida grabbed the bottle away and up-ended it. She solemnly handed it to me and I killed it.

We stared at each other. "Poor little gal," Lady Bee said. "You got another bottle, Ethel?"

"N-n-no."

"What the hell, Jerry?" Maida said in a taut voice. "Are we going to stand around and stare at her?"

I turned to Lady Bee. "I've heard you keep some protection around."

She opened her trunk without a word and dug out the biggest pistol I've ever seen. It was a .45 caliber Colt revolver with a barrel that looked half as long as her arm. She smiled without humor. "Some of the marks believe what they see in the show. It's loaded and at a hundred feet I can shoot the heel off a running man's shoe."

I handed it to Maida. She took it as though it might blow up in her face. "This will be some protection. Go over and wake up Wally and send him over here. Then take my car. Here're the keys. Go into town and come back here with Lieutenant Folm. Tell him that I have my own reasons to keep this quiet. I'll tell him when I see him."

"But, it's d-d-dark outside," she said.

"You're a big brave girl," I said. She gave one uncertain backward look and went out into the night. Lady Bee was spreading a blanket over Brenda.

Wally came in. I showed him what was under the blanket. He swallowed hard. "Sure anxious to collect one of my knives, wasn't she?"

"You're sure it's yours?"

"Made it myself. I'm beginning to get the idea of Maida wandering around with that cannon. Wouldn't mind one myself."

"Wally, I don't like to say this. It is your knife. It was thrown from outside the tent. You, as far as I know, are the only knife-thrower in these parts. The police are going to have questions."

He looked at me and suddenly giggled. It was a surprising sound. "Jerry, I'm in luck. Two hours ago I met one of them cops guarding the ramp. He was a Marine in the first war, too. We've been shooting the breeze ever since. That's where Maida

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found me. She stayed back out of the light so he wouldn't spot the artillery."

I heaved a heavy long sigh of profound relief.

We sat patiently and we didn't say much. Ethel sat up in bed and cheated at solitaire with a greasy deck of cards. Lady Bee tapped her foot. Once gasses or something in the blanketed body made a gurgling sound. We all jumped a foot.

When Folm's ugly face peered in at the tent flap, I could have kissed him. He had the coroner and a lab man with him. Maida followed them in. She looked smug. Folm took off his hat, mopped his brow and said, "Ever try to drive that car of yours with this girl breathing down your neck?"

"Repeatedly," I said.

"When a girl's frightened," Maida said, "she's just got to be close to a man. And when she isn't frightened, she just naturally wants to be close." She was waving the gun. I took it gingerly out of her hand and Lady Bee popped it back into the trunk.

"Who're you?" Folm asked Wally.

"Knife-thrower. Somebody threw one of my knives into her."

Folm pulled the blanket back. He seemed happy that nobody had touched her. The coroner went into his clucking act again. The lab man dusted the knife handle but there were no prints discernable. The coroner pulled the knife out. The lab man wrapped it up and put it in his bag. They covered her up again.

Folm sat down, tamped his pipe full and lit it. "Now talk."

I talked. I gave him everything, including the one missing board on the ramp.

"Did you notice that before?"

I swallowed hard. "After you left, Lieutenant."

He checked Wally's alibi and then ordered him to go look at his knives and find out if only one was missing. Wally was back in five minutes with a gray look.

"Lock's busted on my trunk. Three knives gone, Lieutenant."

Folm studied me. "You look like a man with an idea."

"Probably a poor idea. It came to me as I was spitting out mud. The light in there is bad. The knife-thrower was outside. I don't think he really had a chance to know he got her. I don't think he's connected with the show. I'm sure he isn't. So he had a good reason to kill her. A good enough reason to try again. I don't see how else

you're going to land him, unless you give him a second chance. I happened to think, while she was talking, how near alike her hair is and Maida's."

Maida stood up suddenly and started backward toward the tent flap. "Now look!" she said. "Now look! Sitting ducks are fine in the shooting gallery. Not little Maida. No sir. Not me." She had backed to the flap.

"Honey, it's dark outside," I said.

She gulped and bounded away from the flap.

She touched her hair. "I could dye it black, maybe."

"Sit down, dammit!" Folm bellowed.

Maida sat down with a surprising meekness. Folm chewed on his pipe stem. He looked at me. "You got a hospital tent?"

"Yes."

"We got to have a goat. Lemme see now. Hinkley, you can stay under cover couple days, can't you?"

"Sure."

"I can fix the papers. We'll make like we booked the knife-thrower. The girl was wounded, but not badly. We got a photographer who can make a picture of her there on the floor look like she was a tooth-paste ad. We can hop it up a little. Victim of knife-thrower will be strong enough to 'tell all' in a few days. Promises startling revelation. And we can shove yon buxom lassie into the hospital bed."

"Not me!" Maida said firmly.

He beamed at her. "Let me see now. You mentioned the little item that you don't have a driver's license. And I dimly recall some law that says something about carrying a cannon around without a license. I think we might be able to give you up to a year. That starchy food in there is terrible. I bet you'll weigh one-sixty time you get out."

Maida gently touched her very slim waist. She stuck one leg straight out and inspected the ankle. "Quack, quack," she said. "Where's the gallery?"

Wally hadn't been listening. He grumbled, "Still don't see how in hell an amateur could do so good with one of my knives. They're built for me."

"Luck," Folm said.

Wally handed him a knife. "Happened to bring one along. Give you ten to one you can't even stick it in the floor ten feet away in three tries."

"I'll take a dime of that," Folm said.

The hilt hit every time. Folm paid his

dime. They sneaked the body into the basket and out under the back flap. Ethel got the stains scrubbed up just in time, just five minutes before the other three gals came home.

Maida, protesting every inch of the way, was led off to the hospital tent. She particularly objected to sharing it with one small chimp who was under an oxygen tent with a bout of pneumonia.

CHAPTER THREE.

CUT TO THE QUICK.

THE next morning I bought a paper in the hotel lobby. It gave me a creepy feeling to see Brenda's face looking at me from the picture in the box on page one. She smiled wanly up from what was apparently a hospital bed. Her shoulder appeared to be bandaged.

I ate hurriedly and went out to the lot. I picked one daisy just inside the main gate and took it to Maida.

"Very funny," she snorted. "People have brought better presents."

"I thought nobody could come in here."

"Lady Bee and Wally are allowed in." She took the pint of bourbon from under her pillow. "Lady Bee understands."

The cop sitting in the dark corner licked his chops and sighed.

Her mouth tightened. "When'll it happen, Jerry?"

"My guess is tonight."

She shivered. "I hope they got an army around me. I'm too young and luscious to die."

"Nothing can possibly happen to you."

"Nothing at all, lady," the cop said wearily. "And that's the thirty-sixth time I've said that since breakfast."

The day seemed to drag by. Crowds were good. Mae, being a trooper, would be glad to know that even in dying she'd increased the gate. Folm had come through with any number of men who managed to look not too much like the law. The lot was a-crawl with them. At two o'clock, the wire came from the agency offering a citizen complete with equipment who could dive sixty-five feet down into three feet ten inches of water—but no looper.

There was a convention in the city. Something about plumbing and heating. Everywhere I looked I saw a pudgy little man with an alcoholic waver, a paper lapel

flower and his hat brim turned up all the way around. With a closer inspection I saw that it was not always the same man but rather several of him, as though some duplicating machine had been set to turning him out. Folm's cops, out of pure habit, lightened my duties by stomping hard on every emotional conflagration which broke out.

Folm caught me as I came out of the eating top a little after two-thirty. He said, "Is there any *good* way to stop our decoy from singing? She's in good voice. Isn't she something, though?"

"I'll fix it."

I went in just as Maida wound up an interesting vocal dissection of one of the kings of England. She stopped when she saw me. The cop in the dark corner looked up from his notebook. "You went too damn fast," he said disgustedly.

I smiled at her. "Lambie, right now only one character, we hope, wants to put out your lights. Keep singing and they'll be standing in line to strangle you."

"You always liked my voice," she pouted.

"In a husky whisper, yes. Go to sleep."

"Honey, honey, I don't want to wake up dead."

"Bad morale," the cop said. He scratched his chin. "I don't like this. It seems like an amateur idea. Now if it was me, I'd grab every stranger on the lot, bust every one of 'em a few times and see who starts talking."

"Our insurance doesn't cover that, friend,"

I said. "Will you be good, Maida?"

"If *you* ask me, Jerry." She sounded gay but there were shadows in the back of those big dumb blue eyes. Maida is just another dizzy blonde who keeps up her annuity payments. I smoothed the hair back off her satin forehead and kissed the bridge of her nose.

"Damn poor aim," she said.

I went out. I was restless. I went down to the far end of the midway and Mitch Lane called me over. His pitch was empty for the moment. He has a face like a gray monkey with the tummy ache.

"This outfit goes to hell fast," he said.

"Naturally."

"Gets so a man's got to tie down his stuff. Nail it to the floor, yet."

A mooch and his girl came up and looked curiously at the targets. Mitch beamed and said, "Show the little lady how you would have done in the days of old, friend. Three bolts for a dime. Take three clothespins

off the wire in three shots and she can take her choice of any one of those delicious boxes of candy."

"How they work?" the mooch asked.

Mitch wound the thong back with the screw and notched it, set a bolt in the groove. The mooch lifted it and aimed. He overshot the clothespin by a good two inches.

The crossbow bolt hit the backdrop with a healthy thud.

Mitch said, out of the corner of his mouth to me, "Probably kids. Got into the box and lifted one of the crossbows. Surprised they didn't take 'em all."

I grabbed one off the counter. "Right back, Mitch," I said. I heard him yell feebly after me as I galloped off down the midway.

Wally gave me a knife and I located Folm. I took him behind the G-top where there was a bale of hay. He watched curiously. I laid the knife in the groove and the thong was against the blunt handle. I tripped the trigger and the knife chunked into the hay so far I had to dig to get it.

"My, my!" he said. "Lemme try."

It worked just as well for him.

"Cute," he said. His voice was a rasp. I knew that he saw in his mind, as I did, the knife chunking into Brenda's frail chest.

At dusk I went to the Hinkley trailer. With me, Wally, Ma and the four kids in there, it wasn't exactly roomy.

"Anything new?" Ma asked.

"Not yet. But we don't think anybody could get to her with a Sherman tank."

"We've been talking," Wally said soberly to me.

"Yes?"

"This isn't much of a life for the kids, Jerry. All this going on has sort of shook us up. The grouch bag is heavy and we figure that we'll stick around until you can replace me and then try an honest living for a while."

"I'll be sorry to lose you folks."

"We'll be sorry to go. But with what we've got laid away we could get a little farm, maybe. Raise chickens. The kids would like that."

My restlessness drove me back out. Folm came up to me in the shadows. "Got something for you to chew on, friend. No such a person as Brenda Kailer in Louisville. Just came in over the tape a while back."

"Then why the hell would she—"

"Exactly. This gets screwier as it goes on."

The crowds were getting thicker. The

carny noise, usually so gay, had a dry and mournful sound in my ears. A dirge for dead wooden soldiers. The moon was a pale million miles away and clouds scudded across it. Folm told me that he had twelve men in a careful perimeter around the hospital tent. He had the lot circled with enough men so that, when the attempt was made, he could close it up like a mouse trap.

I had a yen to see how Maida was weathering it. I cut behind the freak top, went by the dark living trailers, parked at the top of the slope and went on down to the hospital tent. A pencil flash hit me in the face and a gun barrel showed under it. I got the nod and went by. The oxygen was off the chimp and he lay on straw in a sad little heap, bright eyes dulled, the breath harsh in his throat.

Maida said, "I'm scared, Jerry. Really scared. Something's after me."

"That's the general idea."

I sat on the edge of her bed and cupped her cold hands in mine.

"I feel better with you here, Jerry."

"Then I'll stay a while."

"Turn your back, George," she whispered to the cop. His chair scraped as he turned it around. Her arms slid around my neck and her lips were warm. I heard the hoarse shout of alarm, a muffled trundling noise, coming closer. She stiffened in my arms.

"Look out!" a man yelled, panic in his voice.

I yanked her out of the cot, pulled her across the floor.

It was luckily in time. There was a ripping, smashing sound and the canvas fell around us in soft folds. Then there was silence. She shuddered.

This was no time to consider the property inventory. I took out my pocket knife, opened the blade and slashed the canvas above us. The stars were high overhead. A flashlight hit me as I stood up.

Folm barked, "The girl! She okay?"

"Oh, dandy!" Maida said.

Other flashlights flickered around. I saw it then, a heavy, four-wheel goods trailer turned onto its side. It lay where Maida's cot had been. I swallowed hard and tugged at my collar. The chimp was making a frightened, mournful cheeping sound.

They took care of Maida and I got on the PA system and closed the place. The rides stopped and the holiday sounds were over. The crowd stood in puzzled clots.

"There has been a murder attempt on the lot," I said, as calmly as I could. "The management regrets inconveniencing you. Police will interview each person as he or she leaves the lot. Families with children will be given preference."

At ten o'clock they had finished. With Mrs. Cassidy in the city being treated for shock, we had set up headquarters in their empty living top, with a table for a desk. Folm's face was gray with fatigue.

"Stupid!" he said. "That's what we were. Any fool could have seen that one trailer was lined up to hit the hospital tent. All they had to do was kick the chocks away. And whoever did it got out of here through the gate, all nice and orderly, with a cover story that we didn't even get suspicious about. Damn it to hell and gone!"

I stretched out on Mae's cot and lit a cigarette. I said, "We're off somewhere. We started wrong somewhere along the line."

His voice was nasty. "Go on, Jerry."

"I should have seen it in the beginning. This is a specialized business. Now listen to me cut my throat from ear to ear. It all smells to me like somebody in the family, some carny."

He waited a long time. "Proceed."

"Okay. Starting on that premise, Lieutenant, we have to forget our idea of motive. That raises questions. Was Brenda killed to smokescreen the real victim? Did the murderer want to kill Mae all along?"

He grunted. "I don't like that angle. It doesn't take care of how frightened Brenda was."

"Another switch. Maybe she handed us the wrong yarn. Maybe she was frightened for another reason."

"What carny type would want to kill her? What did she have?"

"Maybe something of value, Folm. Maybe she had something somebody wanted."

Maida, wearing blue jeans that would have stopped the roundup at the Bar X, and a white fuzzy sweater, pushed the flap aside and said, "Can anybody play?"

"What are you doing wandering around alone?" Folm roared.

"Don't be silly. Three of your nice men walked me over here."

"The question before the house," I said, "is what Brenda could have had that anybody might want."

She sat down. "If I wondered about that, I'd take a look in her suitcase."

Folm and I gave each other disgusted

looks. He sent a man over to Lady Bee's tent. The man came back with the big cheap suitcase.

We opened it under the light. Folm said, "This is pretty big to jump out a window with."

Maida handled the clothes. She said, "This stuff doesn't come out of chain stores. Why did she wear the cheap stuff and carry the good stuff?"

The lining in the inside of the lid had been badly torn and re-mended. "Now how would you go about mending a tear like that?" Folm asked.

"By ripping it to take something out, of course," Maida said, very demure.

Folm cut it open without disturbing the neat stitches. He laid the triangular flap back. Then he held his nose close to the inside. He straightened up with a funny expression. "Money! Keep money in an enclosed place and you can always smell the ink. Sort of acid smell."

I checked and he was right.

We talked. Ideas began to come faster. We began interrupting each other. Then Folm stood up and said grimly, "It's worth a try."

We found Wally in the show top, practicing by the light of a gasoline lantern. He nodded, smiled, and said, "Got something new?"

"Could be. I suppose you and your wife like to check on the new girls," Folm said.

"Sure."

"That first day Mae and her mother went into town after Mae's afternoon show. During one of your shows your wife could go over and take a quick look through Brenda's stuff."

"Now Ma wouldn't do a thing like that." He yanked the knives out of the board and stepped back. *Chunk, chunk, chunk.*

"But if she had, she'd have found some money inside the lining. A nice wad of money, Mr. Hinkley."

"That right?"

"And then that would have given you a problem. Brenda was in on the kidnaping. She double-crossed her friends and took off with the money, wearing cheap clothes to be inconspicuous. She was afraid she had been traced by her playmates. They'd be very angry with her. You would suspect she was outside the law. Ma could have lifted the money and you could have tried to put a knife right through her.

"But the training of years, the subcon-

sicious conditioning, would have deflected your hand at the last moment. You just creased her a little, and then you told her it was a warning and that you had the dough. Be good and be quiet and maybe you'd give her back a share of it. Actually, it was hijacking."

"Man, you can sure dream," Wally said.

"She was afraid to trust you. She moved to Lady Bee's tent, not knowing that the night before you tried to put a knife in her during the act, you'd listened outside hoping for a chance to kill her in her bed. But you heard her talk to Mae. You heard her tell Mae that if anything happened to her, it would be because Wally Hinkley wanted it to happen.

"You lifted that dough the first day she worked and either you or your wife let her know you had it. You heard Mae say that she'd go to the cops, and heard Brenda talk her out of it. On second thought, maybe that creasing was just to frighten her. You couldn't risk puncturing her good with Mae knowing the score. It wasn't hard, early in the evening, to take the board off Mae's ramp."

Wally threw three more knives. He didn't answer.

Folm went on. "The best way to kill Brenda was with one of your own knives. But you really scratched yourself to give yourself an alibi. It had to be a carny who lifted one of the crossbows. Your wife did the shooting, I imagine. She stood out there and heard Brenda giving Jerry here a song and dance. She was still so greedy for a share of that money that she didn't quite dare name you. But I think she might have been working her way up to it. The knife put an end to the conversation."

Wally went up to the board and yanked the knives out. "Okay, smart guy. I knew Brenda was dead. Why that trailer running loose then to kill Maida, who was just a decoy?"

Folm's smile wasn't pretty. "The odds were that it would miss her. But any attempt against her, successful or unsuccessful, would be the best way to prove that you and your wife had nothing to do with it."

Wally yawned. "It's a pretty story, Lieutenant. Good imagination. But you ought to be out rounding up the killer instead of wasting my time and yours."

"We can waste just a little more time, Hinkley. We can go through that trailer of yours with a fine tooth comb. The money

will be there. It's the money you were going to live on after you left us."

It hit home. I saw the slow disintegration of Hinkley's face, saw the animal look come over it. His big hand reversed one of the knives and held the blade in a practised grip.

He said, "So the killer was hiding on the lot. Don't forget he stole three knives. That leaves one for you, Lieutenant, and one for you, Jerry. No! I wouldn't do that, Lieutenant. I can have a knife in your heart before you touch the butt of that popgun. Now turn around slow, Lieutenant. You get it first and in the back. Your guessing was too good. Forty thousand dollars worth of guessing."

Folm was pale. He began to turn slowly. I watched Wally's big hand. I knew that it would flash up and down again. As it started to lift, I jumped toward him in one great bound. I saw his arm swerve toward me and a hard, hot pain thudded into my chest. My right fist, with the force of the spring behind it, hit him flush on the jaw. The jolt felt as though it tore my shoulder loose.

He went down to the ground like a tree in the wind.

Folm put the pretty bracelets on him and then straightened up. A drop of sweat fell from the tip of his nose. "Did you go nuts?" he asked weakly.

"A knife-thrower holds the blade. At fifteen feet, the knife makes a half turn. I had to get close so fast that it couldn't complete its turn. That's why it hit me flat."

He looked at my chest.

"Flat, eh?"

I looked down. It had made just enough of its turn so that when it hit the keen edge of the blade had slashed my suit, my shirt, and very shallowly into my hide. Great bells rang and darkness swooped around me. I sat down hard.

* * * * *

The tape on my chest itched. My knuckles throbbed steadily. The little man from the management had just left my hotel room, muttering about proper hiring methods. Folm had phoned me to report that the forty thousand was on the way back to the parents of the kid who had been returned after the payoff, whimpering but otherwise okay.

Brenda's identity was giving the F.B.I. a

lead on the other characters in the gang who had taken the kid. Folm told me that Brenda was a graduate pickpocket who was taking a post-graduate course in the bigger time.

I yawned. A hot shower and then to bed. I called room service and had some ice and soda sent up. I left the door unlocked and went into the bathroom, stripped down and adjusted the water. Above its roar I heard the tap on the door. The boy with the ice and soda, undoubtedly.

I yelled that I was in the shower. It felt good. Then I turned around and peeked through the gap in the curtains. There was a nicely rounded arm coming through the doorway.

"Go away!" I yelled.

"Come on out, honey honey."

I shouted. "I have prestige to maintain, dammit!"

"You got nice bourbon, too. Come on out. You saved my life. I want to be grateful."

"You—you—you carnival madcap!"

"Are you coming out, or aren't you?"

"Please, Maida. Go away."

"All right," she said firmly. "If you aren't coming out, I'm coming in. This coy act has gone on long enough."

"Maida," I pleaded, "will you marry me?"

"What else did you think I was going to do? Be a mother to you?"

"Tomorrow we get the license?"

"At nine in the morning, honey honey. There! Got it?"

A strange woman said, "Yes, all of it."

"Who's that?" I yelled.

"Just the hotel stenographer, honey honey. She'll have it typed up by the time you get out of there. And you'll have a drink waiting for you. I like to have things written down in black and white, honey honey."

The door shut. The only thing left to do was to be certain to read the small print on the marriage license. Dear, simple, ingenious little Maida!



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IT'S TIME TO SQUIRM

By ROBERT TURNER

*Hard-boiled Zachow didn't know his own power . . .
when he short-circuited voluptuous Zelma
—into the slumber chair.*

IT isn't always a clever, involved, premeditated, fancy affair. Sometimes murder strikes haphazardly, without form or recognizable features. Then it drives the police crazy, if they even suspect it for what it is. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's just a killing. It doesn't fit into any special category. Sometimes it's like this. . . .

By noon time that day Zelma was drunk and glad of it. It was better that way. She couldn't stand herself sober. She couldn't stand anything, hardly. But when she got like this, with a rosy glow on, everything was different. She could even look at her own face in a mirror without getting nauseated.

She not only didn't look so ugly but she could actually see some of the nice things about her features that Doreen claimed to see. Doreen was a good kid. Doreen was always telling her beauty is only skin deep and that she, Zelma, had character in her face and that was a thousand times more valuable.

Zelma held the dresser hand mirror off at arms' length and inspected her features. With her other hand she fluffed her hair a little around her ears. Her hair was beautiful—she had to give herself that. It was as yellow and soft and shiny as corn silk. What if her chin was too long and square? All right, so you could hang a lantern on that jaw of hers, like some guy had once told her.

So what! She'd pushed a few of his teeth in for that. And the nose—well, there wasn't much really that she could say for the nose, even looking at it through this glorious alcoholic haze. It was too big and too hooked and spread all over her face and that was that.

The trouble was, she reflected, staring into the glass, the whole mold out of which her face had been cast was too generously cut. Even the cheekbones jutted out like doorknobs.

The eyes, though—that was where she'd gotten a break in the face department. They were large, too, only you didn't

notice their largeness in that face. They were long-lashed and velvet-brown, those eyes. She had beautiful eyes. Doreen had told her so. And the eyes are the mirror of the soul, Doreen said.

It was all right for Doreen to talk like that, Zelma thought bitterly, putting down the hand mirror. Doreen had a beautiful figure and a lovely face. She had everything. Doreen could afford to be generous with her compliments, damn her. She didn't really mean that, though. Doreen was good to her!

Wasn't Doreen sharing this big beautiful apartment with her and wasn't she helping to break her of the liquor habit and loaning her dough and teaching her routines, so that she, too, could be a big-name star like Doreen, with her name in lights? There wasn't anybody like Doreen. She'd do anything for that kid, Zelma told herself, anything.

She whirled her way out into the living room, feeling all light and feathery, and fortified herself with another shot from the three-quarters empty quart bottle on the cocktail table. She winced and shuddered at the drink went down, then giggled. Doreen was going to be mad at her for falling off the wagon like this, but she didn't care.

It was fun, being here in the apartment all alone for a change, wearing one of Doreen's costumes and getting pleasantly stuccoed. She had planned it from the moment she had heard that Doreen was going downtown early this morning to do some shopping. She had pleaded a headache to get out of accompanying Doreen, so that she could stay here alone.

There was a full-length mirror in the bedroom, in front of which Zelma walked. She was wearing one of Doreen's stripper panels, the skirt that wasn't really a skirt but two pieces of floor-length velvet.

The costume did things for Zelma's figure. She let her eyes roam over her reflection and a smile played over her ugly features. She didn't have to give anybody odds in the figure department, not even

Doreen, Zelma told herself. She had it. Just once let the audience get a good gander at that voluptuous torso of hers and they'd tear down the house.

Zelma closed her eyes and stood there, swaying. In her mind she could hear that applause. And soon it wouldn't only be in her mind. Good little Doreen was taking care of that, too. Always before, agents and theatre managers had looked at Zelma's figure and sighed—then glanced at her face and groaned.

"Sorry, girlie," they'd tell her. "You've sure got the chassis for it and then some—but . . ." They hadn't gone into the details on the rejection. They didn't have to. Zelma knew why she was getting the turn-down. It was her face.

But smart little Doreen had figured a way around that. She said that in another few weeks, after Zelma had a little more practise with the routine, they'd be ready to spring their surprise. It would work, too. It would go over, no question, Doreen said.

Standing before the mirror now, Zelma put on the mask. It was a lovely, expensive thing, the part that fitted over the eyes and forehead and nose, black silk and studded with sequins. The black lace skirt that hung from the top part of the mask was filmy and feminine looking.

When she was wearing that mask, no one would see any of her features. It had a tantalizing, provocative effect. It gave her an air of mystery which, coupled with her superb figure, was devastating.

The Masked Marvella! she would be billed. *The Mystery Woman! Who Is She?* She would be the sensation of the business, Doreen had promised. The same men who had refused to give her a chance at a career would then be clamoring for her. She'd never be able to repay Doreen for that.

To make good was the one big dream of Zelma's life. Her mother—whose statuesque figure she'd inherited—had been one of the biggest names in the business. But fate had punctured that dream when it had given Zelma her father's brawny face. Now, though, she was getting a second chance. Thanks to Doreen.

She went and switched on the bedroom radio. "I can't let Doreen down," she told herself now. She felt a little ashamed. "I'll just practise a few steps in front of the mirror and then I'll sober up in time to meet Doreen and Tommy after the two

o'clock show. I'll cold-shower and drink a bucket of black coffee and I'll be all right."

In front of the full-length mirror, Zelma danced to the beat of the radio band. She was completely lost in the intensity of her own performance when she heard the sound of clapping behind her and a man's shrill whistle of approval. She spun around, a scream rising behind her teeth.

He was standing in the doorway, a tall, thin, middle-aged man dressed like a cartoonist's version of a racetrack tout. A fawn-colored fedora was pushed back on his balding head. A cigarette drooped from one corner of his mouth. He grinned around it, a cold expression. He was a handsome man in a sort of rough, hard-boiled and rakish sort of way, the kind of a guy with more brass than a flophouse bed.

"Who—who are you?" Zelma demanded. "How did you get in here? Get out! Get out!"

He put up a hand, palm out, like a traffic cop. "Easy, sis. Don't get your eyeballs in an uproar. I applauded, didn't I? You should save talent like that for an audience. Okay, I'll be your audience. Continue dancing."

She held back a smile. Zelma was pleased by the flattery and she had to give the guy credit for his gall. "Look," she said. "I'm not fooling. How did you get in here? Not that it really matters. You scram right now before I start screaming. I've got lungs and they'll hear me to hell and back!"

"Go ahead," he told her, the insolent grin still stuck on his face. "I found the door on the latch, so I walked in. If you can find a cop who'll arrest me for entering my own daughter's apartment, go to it, sis."

She remembered that the door didn't shut properly unless you went out of your way to slam it. The super was supposed to fix it. Then the import of the man's words penetrated Zelma's liquor-fogged mind. *His daughter!* This guy was Doreen's father, about whom she'd heard so much!

He walked toward her. He swaggered just a little when he walked. He stopped just a few feet away from her, wrinkled his nose, sniffing. "Hey, kid, you've been hitting a bottle. How about sharing the wealth? Maybe a drink'll cut through the inch of fuzz on my tongue."

Zelma didn't move. She just stood there, staring at him, letting her eyes go over him from head to toe.

"Hey," he said. "You think a tough old

gæzer like me can't have a pretty dish like Doreen for a daughter? Doreen! Listen to that! She's even got *me* calling her that. What was the matter with Dora Zackow? She had to make with the Doreen and change the last name to Darling. Doreen Darling!" He made a spitting sound with his lips as though getting rid of something that tasted bad.

Zelma still didn't say anything. She was remembering things. She was remembering Doreen crying and telling her about the nights she and her mother went without eating because her father gambled and drank up all of his pay. About the time he pulled out on them altogether, with her mother sick in bed. They went through hell for three or four months and didn't see him again until three years later.

He came back then for a week and got drunk, beating the daylight out of both Doreen and her mother. He took her mother's pay and the four hundred dollars she'd managed to scrimp and save during those rugged three years.

One thing Zelma knew. She had to get rid of him. She had to get him away from here. Because once Doreen had told her: "Honey, if he ever shows up again, I'll kill him! My mother should have done it long ago. She's dead now and can't, but I can. I mean it, Zelma, I'd kill him."

The funny part was, as sweet and gentle a kid as Doreen Darling was, she *had* meant it. Zelma knew. This man, Doreen's father, had cut deep into the kid. It was because of him that Doreen believed all men were heels. For a long time she'd even thought that about Tommy Anders and still wasn't sold on his being okay.

"Listen, mister," Zelma said. "Maybe I'm talking out of turn but I'm going to tell you something for your own good. You've heard Doreen's in the big money now and you've come to cut yourself in. Well, I don't think you'd better try that, Mister Zackow. Doreen ain't goin' to put up with it. She hates your guts. She—"

"Wait a minute." He stopped her, holding up the hand in the policeman gesture again. His face got ugly and Zelma could see the evil in it. His muddy brown eyes were full of it. She saw his fists ball at his sides. "Who do you think you're talkin' to? Maybe you'd like a little back-of-the-hand thanks for your advice! Maybe I ought to—"

He broke off. Some of the ugliness washed away and the cocky grin came

back. "Aw, hell," he said, his eyes dragging slowly over her. "Why do you want to rile me like that? I don't want to get sore at a babe that's constructed like you are."

"Keep my architecture out if it," Zelma told him. "You—"

"How can I, honey?" he cut in. "Hey, listen, what's the idea of the mask? You incognito or somethin'? Take off the mask and let's see your kisser. Then you and I'll go in and have a little drink while we wait for Doreen. And listen, I ain't the heel you think I am. I got dough. I'm loaded."

He stuffed a hand into both trouser pockets, brought out a fistful of greenbacks. "I hit a parlay I got ten and ten on it and the top horse pays a juicy price. I'm a money man, today. Where's that bottle you've been punishing?"

The lift from being here alone in Doreen's apartment was all gone now. But the liquor was hitting Zelma harder, if anything. It was getting her a little groggy, a little fuzzy around the edge of the mind, so that she couldn't think straight. And she had to think straight to get this sharp, fast-talking heel out of the flat before Doreen got back—and somehow keep him out. Outside of sobering up altogether—and there wasn't time for that—the next best thing was to take another stiff jolt. It would straighten her up, at least temporarily.

"All right," she said. "Come on. I'll buy you a drink." She led the way into the living room. She poured herself a whacking three fingers and downed it fast, watched Doreen's father do the same. She felt a little better and some of the cobwebs cleared from her brain. But she stayed on edge, jumpy.

She kept looking at this man and remembering the things Doreen had told her and hating him more and more for the kid's sake. That grin of his, that cockiness and fast chatter were beginning to give her the creeps. He was on her nerves and rubbing them raw. She had to get rid of him fast.

"Okay, Mr. Zackow," she said. "You've had your drink. Now beat it."

"Hey, what's the hurry?" He arched his brows in surprise. "And skip that mister, stuff. I'm Pete to my friends."

"You're no friend of mine," Zelma said. She felt her voice rising. "You get out of here before Doreen gets back. If she finds you here she'll kill you! She—"

His laughter prevented her from finishing.

He roared with it, then cut it off suddenly. The ugliness flowed back into his good-looking, middle-aged face suddenly. "Are you kidding? Listen, if she so much as opens her lip with any back talk to me, I'll beat her silly. She's still my kid, remember. Any kid of mine's got to show respect for her old man."

"Respect?" Zelma laughed now. "For you?"

He was staring at her mask all the time now. He ignored her sarcasm. He said: "Why don't you take off that mask? I asked you before nicely. Now take it off! Or maybe you're ashamed to? Hey, that'd be a good one, if you were wearing that thing because you got a face like a witch, now, wouldn't it? That would—"

"Shut up!" Zelma screamed it, only the sound broke before it reached full height and came out only in a hoarse rasp. Her hands and feet suddenly felt numb. Pains shot through her head like streaks of fire. Something seemed to go wrong with her eyes. She couldn't see this Pete Zackow clearly. His face was all twisted, distorted and separated from the rest of him like some grotesque gargoyle. His voice came through the ringing in her ears, then:

"Now you've got me really curious! Take off that damned mask!"

She couldn't seem to move. It was suddenly as though somebody had nailed her feet to the floor and lead weights were hanging on the ends of her arms. She knew what he was going to do but she couldn't seem to stop him. She felt the mask rip from her face. Another scream formed in her throat, but, somehow, no sound came out.

"Hell!" she heard him say. "I was wrong. Not like a *witch*! Like a *horse*! Hey, kid, you ain't related to one of them nags that brought that parlay in for me. are you? A horse-faced dame with a torso like Cleopatra! Now I've seen everything!"

Horse-face! Horse-face! Those two words and his laughing voice kept hammering in her ears after he stopped talking. They grew into a shout, echoing as though a huge hall had filled with thousands of men shouting the nickname at her. And then mingling in with them were childish voices, kid voices from the long ago, using the same hated words. Then they suddenly cut off and there was only the ringing in her ears again.

She felt his hands on her arms, but the paralysis was still upon her and she

couldn't do anything about it. She saw his grinning face come close toward hers. She heard his voice saying; "I'm sorry. I was only kiddin', you know that."

"Stop it!" The sound of her own voice sounded far away and unreal. She knew what he was thinking, what they all thought: *I'm going to give this dame a break! Hell, a dame with a phizz like that, doesn't get much attention.* That's what he thinks!

He ignored her. His hands were on her shoulders now, the fingers digging in cruelly. She heard his voice, suddenly whispering, "Listen, sugar, why don't you just slip that mask back on? I go for you in that. I—"

That did it. She wrenched away from him. She felt drowned in the sudden white heat of anger. *Slip the mask back on!* Different lyrics, a little subtle, but the same old tune, the same old story!

She felt her fingers around the neck of the whiskey bottle on the cocktail table. There didn't seem to be any weight to it at all as she raised it. She suddenly felt very tall and as though she was looking down on him from a great height. Her arm swung the bottle up and then down, savagely, with all her strength, against his skull. It made a funny noise when it broke and glass and the liquor that was in the bottle spilled down around his head.

He stood there for a moment, his thinning gray-blond hair suddenly filled with blood, his eyes walling back. Then as though somebody had kicked his legs out from under him, he went down.

The tallness swept away from Zelma and now she felt very small and alone. She looked down at the neck of the broken bottle, its jagged edges glittering, that she still held in her hand. A noise came from her throat, a crazy noise, half sob, half silly giggle. It kept coming and she tried to stop it but couldn't.

How long she stood there like that, she didn't know. But when she came out of it, she was cold sober. She looked down at Pete Zackow. Something about the way he lay twisted told her he was dead.

Zelma took the edge of the kimona and raised it up, took hold of the broken edge of the bottle with it. With her other hand, she wiped the part where her fingers had gripped it. She didn't know exactly why she did that, only that it had to be done. Then she dropped the bottle onto the thick rug with the rest of the broken glass.

She went into the bedroom and changed her clothes. Then she left the apartment without looking at the dead man again. She looked at the clock, though, and saw that it was after two. Doreen would be finishing up the early matinee show. She could catch her about now, having coffee with Tommy in the cafeteria around the corner from the theatre. She thought she had better go to Doreen and Tommy and tell them what had happened.

But Zelma didn't do that. Outside, the fresh air hit her and cleared her brain a little. The shock began to wear off. She began to think about what she had done. She had killed a man. She had committed murder.

Now, something like this had to happen! Just as she was getting a break, just when every dream she'd ever had was about to come true. It couldn't be this way.

She walked to a nearby park and sat down on a bench and thought about it some more. Then an idea came to her. Nobody knew *she'd* killed Doreen's father. They couldn't know. She'd wiped off her fingerprints, the only thing that could possibly give her away. Nobody would even think that she'd killed him . . . if she didn't say anything.

They'd think it was Doreen! That struck into her brain like a hot knife. Everything worked out that way. Every day, after they had their coffee, Doreen and Tommy took a walk down by the river between shows. Only today, Doreen would do that alone. This was Thursday. Tommy Anders was a musician in the pit band at the theatre and every Thursday he went down to the Union Hall.

Zelma stopped thinking along those lines. She couldn't *let* that happen. Not to Doreen. Everybody knew how the kid felt about her father. They'd really hit her with this thing, if Zelma let it be that way. But she couldn't do that. She owed Doreen too much.

But *did* she? What about Tommy Anders? Who owed who for that? *She'd* introduced Doreen to Tommy. She'd been crazy about Tommy herself, still was. What difference did it make that Tommy had never felt the same way about her, that she'd only been a friend to him? Maybe if Doreen was not around . . .

Zelma thought she must be going crazy. She couldn't think things like that, not about Doreen. But they kept coming to her. She thought about how with Doreen

arrested for murder, there'd be a big hole in the show tonight. She, Zelma, had the routines down pat enough to get by. They were only going to wait another couple of weeks so she could put some final polish to them. She could go on in Doreen's place tonight!

"They'll go after Doreen for this, anyhow," Zelma told herself. "The only thing that could stop them from grabbing her for it would be my going to the cops and telling them the truth—that I killed him!"

She got up off of the bench and started walking toward the heart of town, suddenly knowing that she couldn't do that. She couldn't sacrifice herself for Doreen. Not that way. It was too much. Nobody could make that kind of sacrifice.

Downtown, she went into a movie house. The police, in routine questioning, would want to know where she'd been. All right, she'd tell them. Her headache had gotten better after Doreen left and she got bored, went out to a movie. As simple as that. . .

But Zelma didn't see any of the picture. She didn't even know what picture was playing. She kept thinking this thing out and the whole business kept running through her mind. The part that had happened, like a movie reel running in slow motion—the part that was *going* to happen, like a preview of a coming attraction.

And Zelma knew that she couldn't go through with it. To see Doreen being put in jail, to live through the trial, to read about the thing in the newspapers, to hear it on the radio, to have people they both knew talking about it, to see the look on Tommy Anders' face. To try to sleep nights. To have this thing to live with the rest of her life. . . .

It was late in the afternoon when she got back to Doreen's apartment. She noticed almost absently that the door was either fixed or somebody had slammed it shut. She keyed it open and went in. It was very quiet inside and she wondered if the murder hadn't been discovered yet. But that was impossible. The cleaning woman came on Thursdays, about three o'clock. She would have seen—

Zelma walked into the living room and saw the two men sitting there. One was a stranger, heavy set, with a florid complexion and sleek gray temples, a shrewd-looking, distinguished-looking man. The other was young and handsome in a boyish sort of way. Distracted looking now, with

his black hair rumped and the fine lines of his face strained with anxiety. He jumped up out of his chair and came toward her when he saw Zelma.

"Tommy!" she said and wanted to say some more but nothing more would come out.

He stopped in front of her, took her hands. "Where've you been, Zelma?" he demanded. "We've been worried sick about you. We thought maybe the shock . . . you might be wandering around in a daze or something. Doreen and a police sergeant have gone out looking for you."

"Doreen!" Zelma gasped. "But I—I was afraid they might think she—you know—that Doreen had killed him. I—"

"Don't be silly," he told her. "Doreen was with me all afternoon. I didn't go down to the Union Hall today. Anyhow, they knew you did it. They found your fingerprints on some pieces of shattered glass. And they found a strand of blonde hair under his fingernail." His back was to the big man sitting in the chair. He suddenly winked very hard at Zelma. "Don't worry, kid, the police have pretty well figured out what happened. They know about that door. And this guy had a record for breaking and entry. It was either you or him. I—"

She didn't hear the rest of it. She was suddenly dazed and weak. The things Tommy Anders had said whirled dizzily in her brain. But one thing screamed out at her: They knew *she* had killed him! She'd have only made things worse for herself by pleading innocent, trying to work that silly movie alibi.

She felt Tommy lead her to a chair and she collapsed into it. She was aware of the big man with the gray temples coming over and standing by her. He was Lieutenant Drake, he was saying. He realized she was upset and they didn't want to make her worse, but there were a few details they'd like cleared up. She had nothing to fear, he said. It was a clear-cut case of self-defense against an armed burglar whom she'd caught by surprise.

For a moment she could just stare up at Drake and Tommy. Then it dawned on her that there'd been no mention of the man she'd killed being Doreen's father. They thought he was a burglar and that she'd caught him trying to rob the apartment. Obviously, he must have had a gun in his pocket that she hadn't known about.

Somehow, she got through that inter-

view with Drake. There was a little confusion on her part but nobody seemed to think anything about it. They seemed to expect it, knowing she was upset. She learned, too, that the police were very glad the thing had happened. They'd been after this Peter Zackow for a long time, they said. She'd just saved them the trouble. It seemed that he had killed a bookie in a holdup the day before.

Later, when it was all over, Zelma and Doreen and Tommy went in for a drink.

Doreen told her that she hadn't used her real name in years and that nobody in this town knew it, so there was no way anybody could connect her with the dead man found in her apartment, as long as she didn't say anything.

For a long time after they finished telling her that, Zelma was quiet. She thought about how she might have spoiled everything if she'd persisted in her plan of trying to make Doreen take the rap for it.

Also with some twist of logic, she felt as though now she could live with that ugly face of hers and the incongruously beautiful body that went with it—as though the disastrous combination had finally done some good for the world.

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ROCK-A-BYE KILLER

By JOHN BENDER

*With the redhead siding him, Dooley aimed
to show the weed-happy hoods—
how to make a violent exit.*

NOBODY had to tell Dooley that something was wrong at the Club. He sensed it as soon as he walked in. Some of the boys had a game of basketball going, but when they spotted him, the movement of the game almost stopped. They made a big thing of hollering it up again, not looking, Dooley noted, in his direction, pretending not to see him.

He shrugged and went on down the hall to his office—a big, amiable young man who kept the smile on his face even though he was aware of the tension, the silence now, in the main gym behind him.

It was one of the cardinal rules in Dooley's place—the James Doolittle Callahan Boys' Club—that all kids were welcome, and on their own. They made their own way and got advice only when they asked for it, which wasn't very often. They were a clannish, independent lot, these neighborhood kids, and you did not stick your nose in where it wasn't wanted.

Dooley knew. Years ago, before he'd become the ball player who had pitched the Titans to three pennants, he had been a kid in this same neighborhood himself.

There was no one waiting for him in his office, which was something else unusual, for a Saturday afternoon. The place was generally jammed with kids, noisy, jabbering youngsters, rough-housing Dooley and each other, fighting for his attention.

On a hunch he went out to the bulletin board in the main hall. The boys sometimes left messages for him there. Jabo, the middle-aged "boy" whom Dooley had put on at assorted jobs around the club, also used the board as a means of communication with his boss.

There was nothing but the notice Dooley had tacked up that morning:

Johnny Toker, the manager of the Titans, promised me twenty-five tickets for tonight's game with the Giants. Anybody interested, check with his folks and sign below.

A notice of that sort usually brought the signatures of the hundred or so neighbor-

hood kids who used the Club. And sometimes the signatures of their male parents as well. Now, there were less than half-a-dozen names pencilled on the sheet.

And Dooley could not read them because they had all been scratched out, with a heavy, crayon pencil.

He rubbed his lean, dark face with his hand and stood there for a moment, considering. He went back to the gym room and interrupted the basketball game long enough to ask if anyone had seen Jabo. No one had.

In the swimming pool, Tony Davito, the teen-age monitor who kept the budding water artists out of trouble, shook his head also. Dooley tried the reading room and the storeroom without success.

Down in the back of the locker rooms, he heard the sobbing, the hushed youthful voices, and Jabo saying it would be all right—not to cry—it would be all right.

Behind the last row of lockers he found them. In the space sometimes used to store extra equipment, Dooley discovered two kids and Jabo Johnson. The Carter twins—two twelve-year-olds whose father Dooley had gone to school with—sat against the wall, their young faces bruised, their clothing torn and dirty. Jabo was applying a cold-water rag to David Carter's nose, which had bled all over the boy's shirt-front.

"Well," Dooley said, "when did the cyclone hit here?"

He knelt and made a quick, professional examination. The bruises on the boys' faces were colorful and ugly, but Dooley didn't think that they were serious.

"You'll be wearing that mouse to school for a while, Tommy," he told the blond Carter twin. "You and Dave have a little gentleman's argument back here?"

"Not that, Not that at all, Dooley," Jabo said. "They wasn't fightin' one another. No siree! It's that no-good Joey Burns. He been around."

"He beat them up?"

"No, he jes' git things started, what I kin make out. I'm over in the storeroom—we got some crates of sportin' goods come in this afternoon. They's addressed to Mr. Hanson but they's all sports 'quipment, says so right on the boxes, so's the delivery man he say why take 'em over to the Alderman's office when I kin they got to come right back here and—"

"Joey Burns?" Dooley reminded.

"Well, I'm working in the storeroom 'n I hear this commotion over here. So they's a couple, three boys back here with this Burns 'n they's so much smoke you think the place is on fire. Lord! So he's givin' the kids these here cigarettes, 'n I tell you, some of them boys, they's really gone."

"Reefers?" Dooley was astounded.

"Yes, siree."

With the help of the Carter twins, Jabo told it economically from there. They had refused to take any of the cigarettes, they said, and some of the other boys had got nasty when the Carters wouldn't join them for a couple of "kicks." There was a lot of pushing and shoving, and finally quite a fight. The sight of blood, finally, had served to sober things up and the "smokers" had fled.

Dooley listened carefully to it all, the anger building slowly within him.

Dope wasn't new to the neighborhood. This tenement district was a place that bred the need for many kinds of temporary escape. But Dooley had never had any trouble with it in his Club. He had kept the kids busy and contented and clean. The thought of dope itself was bad enough; the thought of these kids of his getting mixed up with it was appalling.

"I want you to close up early, Jabo," he said. "Never mind that new equipment that came in. I want you to take these two boys home, too. Tell their father I'll call him later on."

"Gosh, Dooley," David said. "Jabo doesn't have to take us home. We'll be all right."

"You take them home," Dooley repeated to Jabo. He buttoned his topcoat. "I'll go have a little talk with Joey Burns."

He walked briskly through the chill April sunshine that was disappearing behind the tenement roofs. Crossing Pennoyer Street he heard the youthful voices, the shouts in his direction: "Get the ball, Dooley! Hey, Dooley, toss it here!" and without thinking of breaking his stride, he scooped up

a low-bounding rubber ball and whipped it back into the stick-ball game.

Immediately, he regretted it, feeling the twinge in his left shoulder that was not quite a pain, but the memory of a pain. He recalled a day, two years ago, the shadows reaching out from the grandstand to the pitchers' box, the pain a knife in his shoulder as he handed the ball over to Johnny Toker and called it quits.

The doctors had been right—the arm was burned out, useless, incapable of hurling a baseball any more, and that was that; a life ended. So he begun a new one. There was the Boys' Club he'd always thought about and for which suddenly he had the time, and more than enough money earned in his six years as the Titans' highest-salaried star to swing the deal.

He hadn't envisioned any trouble, any interference, from men like Joey Burns.

The building, sandwiched between a barber shop and a bar, wore its faded sign like a dirty undershirt, with no pretence at elegance. "*Bowling—Billiards*," the sign said and underneath, "*12 Snooker Tables*," in smaller letters.

Dooley went down the long, steep flight of iron stairs, into the place. This cavern of muscular activity held its own offensive breath against the fresh air that he brought in with him.

Most of the pool tables were occupied; on one of them a dice game was in progress. From the rear came the regulated thunder of falling bowling pins.

The men in the place wore different clothes, but there was a sameness to them all that was more pronounced than any uniform. There were the generation of his own age, who could have used a place like the Boys' Club in their early youth.

Dooley spoke to one of them. "Joey Burns around?"

The man chalked his cue. "Over on the alleys, I think."

There was a crowd of men bowling on the last pair of alleys, Joey in the middle of them, a little noisier than the rest. In his shirtsleeves, he was a tall and thickly-ched individual whose pants, it seemed, sought refuge in his armpits.

Dooley walked over and stood behind the twin row of spectator seats until Joey Burns looked his way. Then Dooley called him over. Joey was feeling very very high, he saw. The sight of the man, the bright hard eyes, disgusted him anew.

"Wassamatter, you get tired playin' hero

for those kids of yours? Or you looking for somebody to go to the ball game with you?" Joey laughed coarsely, the spittle running out of the side of his mouth. "Hey, boys, look who's here! Mr. Boy Scout."

"You were over to my place this afternoon," Dooley said, ignoring the others. "I don't want you pushing reefers on those kids, Joey. I don't want you marking up my bulletin board. Don't come around again, understand."

He emphasized the final word, remembering about his left arm and using just the right hand, spearing it into Joey's solar plexus.

Burns doubled, his face draining of all color. Dooley brought the flat of his hand up hard against the man's nose. The scream of pain tore Joey's mouth. Another right staggered him toward the wall. As carefully as a butcher cutting up a beef, Dooley stalked him, driving the right hand like an axe.

When he finished, the hulk in the corner bore only a slight resemblance to the dapperly-dressed individual who had been bowling.

The men who had watched this thing take place, looked from Joey to Dooley. Then one of them said, "I'm on a spare. C'mon, let's get rolling. . . ."

On the street again, Dooley had calmed down. Perhaps he had solved little, if anything, by this recourse to violence, but he could not deny that he felt immeasurably better for having worked Joey Burns into something resembling last week's laundry.

He supposed that there would be unpleasant complications. He had no doubt that Joey was just a local pusher, a reefer-happy hood who took orders from a higher echelon. It would be wise, he decided, to talk to Harry. Honest Harry Hanson, the people's choice for alderman, who ruled the neighborhood like a minor kingdom, which, in truth, it was. To Harry came the mighty and the meek, the kids, the grown-ups, the favor seekers and the party patrons, the scum and the cream of this polyglot society. For over fifteen years he had ruled the neighborhood, quietly but firmly, guiding it politically and morally from his small and dingy office over on Adams Street.

It was to him that Dooley had gone six months before, with his idea of a Boys' Club for the neighborhood. Harry had been intrigued by the plan and Dooley had been amazed at the speed and ease with

which Honest Harry had found for him a suitable, tenantless building at a reasonable rental. Hanson had even offered to supply quite a bit of the sports equipment needed, and through some devious arrangement Dooley found himself "on salary."

From the phone booth in Straus' little candy store, Dooley called the alderman's office.

"He isn't here," the female voice quickly answered Dooley's first question.

"Do you expect him back today?"

"Who's calling?" The girl's voice was one he didn't recognize. He told her his name and learned that Mr. Hanson was expected back and he hung up. He wondered what the girl on the phone looked like. It was that kind of voice.

He called the Carters and talked to Mary, Ed's wife. The boys would be all right; she thanked Dooley for having sent Jabo home with them.

"That horrid Burns," she added scathingly. She was not a woman who cursed absently or lightly, Dooley knew. "It's not bad enough, all the dope in the neighborhood. They have to get the kids in on the dirty stuff now."

"Don't worry," Dooley said. "Don't worry. I'll keep it out of the Club."

He hoped he could. But the more he thought about it, the worse it seemed. Some of the neighborhood kids were running loose on the weed even now, and he was worried about them. If the neighborhood wasn't boiling with trouble, it was sure as hell simmering. Honest Harry Hanson, Dooley was convinced, was the man to see. The only one who could straighten out this thing.

The alderman's office was a small affair of two rooms on the second floor of a loft building. Dooley pushed in on the door marked simply, "*H. Hanson*," and promptly ground to an abrupt halt.

Honest Harry Hanson's secretary was new, all right. He had never seen her before, and she was the kind of girl you would remember. The red hair alone would have been enough to keep a man from forgetting. And there were other charms, even more attractive, Dooley saw.

"Well," he said.

Quite casually, but aware of him, she finished smoothing her sheer nylon stocking. She said, "I've got a face, too, if you're just in here to wear your eyes down to the quick."

He raised his eyes. Within the silken

copper of her hair, the face was very nice indeed. Her eyes were gray and frankly staring, estimating him. She was as lovely as the called third strike that won a no-hit game for you.

She said, "After you stop drooling, are you going to say something?"

Dooley grinned. He took off his hat. "I ought to come in and see Harry more often, that's for sure." More seriously he said, "You told me on the phone a little while ago that you expected him back. I'm Dooley Callahan."

"Ah, the sport world's gift to young America." The gray eyes widened just a trifle and she seemed to bristle less. "I'm Marcy Williams, Mister Hanson's new and beautiful secretary." Her brashness amazed him. "I didn't figure there'd be anyone coming in this late."

Dooley laughed. "Should I have whistled?"

"Before—not after you came in. Wolf whistles annoy me—occupational hazard. But this is my first job; I don't really need a club."

The light-hearted frankness in this red-haired girl was the brightest note of the day, he decided.

"Grab a seat," she told him. "He ought to be back soon." She went over to her desk. "That true about you bein' out of baseball for good, Dooley? Not just newspaper talk?" She read the answer in his eyes. "When you had it, you had it good, Dooley. You were the best. Pop used to take me to all the Titans' home games. He don't think much of southpaws, ordinarily, but you were top man in his book."

It went that way, easy conversation, the talk moving with the fluid speed of pepper practise before a ball game. It was fifteen minutes more before Hanson arrived, but Dooley and the girl didn't notice the time passing.

Honest Harry came in quietly, wearing his typical sad expression and the inevitable cigar, which no one had ever seen lighted. He was a thin man, reaching scarcely to Dooley Callahan's chest, and what there was of him could be contained successfully in a hundred-pound potato sack. He tossed his hat to Marcy and motioned Dooley to follow him into the inner office.

"I hear you had some trouble over at the Club," he began. "I hear you also put the beef on Joey Burns." He frowned. "You should have called me, Dooley, before you started throwing the muscle. Bad business."

The little alderman opened a desk drawer and took out a bottle and a pair of shot glasses. He poured two drinks and carried one over to Dooley.

"What was it all about?"

Dooley told him, holding the glass idly in one big fist. "Burns brought marijuana into the place, fed it to some of the kids." He explained the rest of it while Harry Hanson nodded, the frown fixed on his thin, gray-palored face. "Burns was on the stuff himself. He was feeling cocky, I guess." He mentioned the business of the bulletin board and the scratched-out names. "It looked like bowling alley crayon, and Joey hangs out at Vince's place. So I went over to the alleys and told him to stay away from the Club."

"You didn't call the cops at all?"

"The cops!"

"To cover yourself. Now—it may not look so good. Well, no matter." Honest Harry downed his drink, made a rough noise of distaste deep in his throat. "Dooley, somebody found Joey Burns in an ashcan a little while ago. In the alley back of Vince's place. Two slugs in his chest."

As Dooley came to his feet, some of the liquor in his glass spilled out over his hand. "Was he—"

"That's right. Dead," said Honest Harry Hanson. "Dead as hell."

The drink did very little for him. He got up and put the empty glass on Harry's desk and rubbed his big hands together.

"I didn't kill him, Harry."

The little alderman waved his hand. "Nobody's saying you did, Dooley. I trust you, Dooley. You think I just let anyone run a Club in my neighborhood? But the cops are going to be full of questions, is all. How much can you tell them?"

"As much as I told you. As much as I know. Nothing."

"Well, they're not panting for you yet. We have some time."

The door opened and Marcy's red head popped inside. "You told me to remind you about your date with the Downtown Civic Association," she told the alderman. "You gonna make it?"

"Okay, okay," Hanson said. He looked at Dooley. "Don't worry too much about this, lad. I'll put my ear out, see what I can come up with. I don't think the precinct boys will give you any trouble."

Dooley smiled. "That's okay with me." He had no desire to tangle with the law.

"I'll be down at the Club if you want to get in touch with me."

"You work nights, too?" Honest Harry frowned.

"Some stuff came in today. I ought to clean it up. We got some more equipment this morning—thanks to you. Sports stuff. I ought to get it uncrated."

The alderman walked to the door, shaping his hat carefully to his head. He ran the tip of his tongue over his thin lips. "Why don't you let it go? Take it easy tonight. Won't it wait until Monday?"

"I suppose so."

"Then forget it. Why don't you hang around here? Then I can check with you later."

He was gone, then, and Dooley saw his shadow on the frosted glass of the door as the little alderman talked a moment with his secretary. As the outer door banged shut, the inner door opened. Marcy Williams came inside.

"Long day," she said. "The boss man said I was to keep you entertained." She put a neatly-manicured hand against her mouth and made a silly gesture with her fingers. "Will that do?"

Dooley grinned. She was very lovely, and he wished that he had met her long ago. She was the kind of girl who could make Saturday night the finest night in the week. He saw her eyebrows climb and he realized that he was staring openly again.

She frowned, saw the bottle on the desk. "How about a drink? Would you like a drink?"

"No, thanks."

Marcy shook her head. "This is one hell of a job, Dooley. Mostly I'm supposed to shoo people out of the office. Not keep them in."

He started for the door. "Well, just consider me crazy. Anybody will tell you southpaws are crazy."

He said good night and left. The thought of sitting around Harry's office, even with such a pleasant companion as Marcy Williams, was not enough. He did not feel in the least bit sociable with this business on his mind, nor was he entirely satisfied to be alone. Downstairs, he decided to go back to the Club and get the stuff uncrated. It was something to do at any rate, while he waited for Harry to get the slant of this thing.

Less than half a block away from the alderman's office he heard the tapping of high heels behind him. He turned, and it

was Marcy Williams, her glorious hair caught in a silk scarf, a belted camel's hair coat engulfing her. He had not realized that she was so small.

"You're worried about the kids, aren't you?" she asked. She fell in step beside him, taking his arm.

So, all right, he was. The death of Joey Burns had put a darker shading on the affair. Abruptly Dooley realized that she was not demanding that he apologize for running out on her; she was simply talking fact.

"You think you can find something at the Club?" She had a knack for essentials.

"It's a long chance," he said.

She grinned. "I guess my boss meant for me to stick with you. I've never been in a boys' club before."

Going in the front door Dooley said, "You don't really have to hang around, you know. I'll tell Harry you did your best."

The red-haired girl smiled. "You don't get rid of me that easily, Dooley, me boy."

They went inside. Dooley pointed out the gym, the pool, the reading room; and she professed to be quite fascinated.

"You've a wonderful place here," she said. "It's fine for the boys, Dooley."

As they approached the storeroom, they heard the sound—the clank of metal on a stone tile floor.

"Some of the kids do night work?" Marcy asked.

"Probably Jabo came back," Dooley said.

He could see the faint light coming from the storeroom, which did not strike him as strange until he pushed open the heavy, metal fire-stop door and found the man inside.

Most of the crates had been opened, and the crow bar which lay on the ground indicated that the man who faced them had been working at the task. He was a tall man, well-dressed, and the gun in his hand seemed a natural addition to his wardrobe.

"Busy little joint, ain't it?" the gunman said, holding the two of them in the beam of his flashlight. "Come on in." He waved the gun at them.

"What are you doing here?" Dooley demanded.

"Waiting for a street car." The man looked from Dooley to the crates. "Which one of these things has the footballs in it?"

When Dooley did not answer, the man came over to the doorway, waving the flash-

light toward the packing cases. "Okay, buster. You look like you got a strong back. Open up them crates. G'on. There're footballs in one of them."

Marcy shuddered. "Humor the fellow, Dooley. Give him a nice new football. For heaven's sake, give him a dozen footballs!"

They moved toward the big boxes. Dooley had no clear idea of what was happening, but he realized that the man behind the gun was not making idle conversation. The weapon was in earnest. He had a sudden, intuitive impression that the gunman was somehow connected with Joey Burns, deceased. He paused, standing just beyond the axis of the open door.

"You seen Joey Burns lately?" Dooley asked.

The gunman started. In that brief unguarded second, Dooley thrust out with his long leg, slamming the metal door, virtually sweeping the other man out into the corridor. Plunging behind the motion, Dooley caught the door with his shoulder and slammed it shut. He swung in place the long metal brace which pivoted on a stud bolt in the center of the door, locking it.

A pair of shots tore into the silence. They thudded into the door and Dooley fell away.

"Dooley! You all right?" There was no panic in Marcy Williams' voice, just the quiver of excitement.

"I'm okay," he told her. He nodded at the door. "He can't blast his way through that thing."

She took a deep breath. "This isn't my idea of fun for a Saturday night. I suppose Jesse James outside will go away."

As if in answer, the man called, "Open up! Play it smart and you don't get hurt. Lemme in!"

Dooley and the girl stood close together in the darkness, their breathing rapid. He felt her trembling. She was nervous, as was he, but she was not complaining, and it pleased him.

He found the lights and snapped them on, then went over to the packing crates. He pried open the remaining boxes. There were footballs in one of them, sure enough. They lay flat, deflated, in the sea of excelsior. But a couple of them, near the bottom of the crate, were suspiciously lumpy.

With his penknife, Dooley slashed the leather and examined their contents. Two packages, not very large, and wrapped

tightly in wax paper. He whistled softly, holding them for Marcy to see.

"This is what he was after."

She looked at it. "Dope?"

Dooley nodded. "Looks like it. Uncut. Heroin, I think."

The girl whistled. In the corridor outside there was another shot. The door bolt jumped in its housing, but it held.

"Open up, dammit!" the gunman called.

"What do we do now?" Marcy asked.

Any number of things suggested themselves to him, but they were impossibilities all. The small room was windowless, without connection to the outside world of the neighborhood. There was no phone, and even if there had been an extension, all the calls funneled into the switchboard in the main office, which was untenanted.

He held the packages, looking around the room. "Wait a minute!" In the corner, behind the many stacks of baseball bats, old and new, he spied the seldom-used sink. "Go over there and run the water," he told her.

As she did so, Dooley carefully applied his weight against two of the larger, heavier crates, moving them silently until they stood almost tightly together. Into the space between them, he dropped the packages of wax paper, then he jammed the boxes as flush as possible.

He raised his voice, calling to the man outside: "Hear that water? We're running this junk down the drain!"

The gunman yelled, "Wait a minute! Don't!" The water splashed into the basin. "Look, just open the door, and nothing happens. Honest! You got a half a million bucks worth of junk there, man!"

He broke off with an abrupt angry squawk, and the sound of his footsteps receded down the corridor. Dooley motioned for the girl to shut off the water, listening for any further sound from outside. There was only silence.

"Is he gone?" Marcy asked.

Then they heard the scuff of feet in the corridor, the sudden, naked command, "Drop it! Drop that gun!" and the pounding stutter of two guns. A pair of shots exchanged. Then a third, reverberating, rolling the waves of sound against the door behind which Dooley and the girl crouched.

"Dooley?" came the voice. "You all right?" the little man outside asked.

"Why, it's Mr. Hanson!" Marcy said.

"All clear out here," Honest Harry Hanson called in to them. They could hear

the alderman chuckling grimly. "You can relax," Hanson said, "I got him."

With a sigh of relief, Dooley opened the metal door and stepped outside. He saw the little alderman, the unlighted cigar in one corner of his mouth, the smoking revolver in his hand. Then Dooley felt the searing pain shatter his vision into a vivid, red-tinged cloud of nothingness and he was conscious only of the plunge which he was taking. The walls, the faint light, the alderman—everything swam into a red mist and he was falling, falling, his legs weak and ineffective. . . .

He was lying in the corridor, his head and shoulders cradled in the girl's lap, and she was speaking to him, calling his name as if from a great distance. His head was a balloon that threatened to soar away from his body; the side of his face was numbed beyond all pain.

"He's all right," a voice said gruffly. "I didn't clout him that hard."

"Come on, Dooley. Come out of it."

He opened his eyes part way and saw Honest Harry Hanson standing there, the gun in his hand held casually but with unmistakable purpose, saw the gunman siding him, covering him and the red-haired girl who tended him.

It was a long trip back to full consciousness, because the things that came into his mind distracted him with their significance. The full detail was missing, but the shape of this night's events was enough to fill him with despair. This betrayal by Honest Harry Hanson was the final, bitter knowledge.

He heard the girl say, "Don't!" in an anguished whisper, but the politician's foot dug into Dooley's side, jarring him. He sat up groggily.

"Where's the stuff you took out of the footballs?" Harry asked.

Dooley grunted, "I ran it down the drain, inside."

"The hell you did! Don't try stalling. We didn't find any traces of it in the sink. I want it, Dooley. Real bad. A half million dollars worth of junk ain't peanuts."

"I haven't got it," Dooley said.

He was not stupid enough to think that handing the stuff over now would end this nightmare. Sure, he was stalling. So long as they didn't find the dope, he and Marcy were safe; they had five hundred thousand dollars worth of insurance.

"Don't make me get rough about this," Hanson said. The small man's smile was

cold. "I'm willing to play ball with you, Dooley." He grunted an imitation of a laugh at his own humor. "We can work this thing out nice for all of us."

Dooley got to his feet. "Honest Harry Hanson, friend of the people. 'Sure, Dooley, I'll get your Boys' Club started for you. Get it all set up. Don't worry about a thing.'" He spat.

"The Club was the perfect front you'd been hoping for, wasn't it? Hide your dirty sideline behind the kids' place. Cover the whole thing up with Dooley Callahan's reputation." He shook his head. "But you had to start passing the stuff to the kids, too! That's the worst—"

"No," Harry said. "No, Dooley!" It seemed important to the little alderman that he plead a point. "I wasn't after the boys. That was Joey Burns' idea—all his own. He was just supposed to make sure the shipment was in. But he had to play wise guy, and get some of the kids weed-happy. I took care of him for getting careless."

He stopped, aware that he had said too much. His small, beady eyes considered Dooley and the girl. He threw his cigar away, and he waved the gun menacingly.

"Come on, Dooley, use your head."

There was a chance, a bare chance, that someone on the outside had heard the shooting and would eventually investigate. There was a chance that Jonniver, the beat cop, might come in the door any minute. There was a chance, Dooley thought, as the seconds ticked away and Hanson's eyes grew tighter, that General Custer and his cavalry would come riding in, sabers drawn and bugles blaring.

"The hell with him," the gunman told Hanson. "Lemme work on the babe. She knows where he put it. She'll talk when I get through with her."

The silence hung between them. Dooley watched the girl's full lips tremble at the threat. Then her gray eyes flashed her defiance, and she shook her head.

"Don't worry, Dooley," she said. "I'll take my turn at bat. We're still in the old ball game."

Foolish? A nervous attempt at flippancy? He was amazed at her reaction, but even more amazed at the effect within himself. The cold shiver of anticipation ran through his lean body as the idea came alive.

He cleared his throat. "Don't!" He looked from the gunman to Hanson. "Leave

her alone, Harry. I'll show you where the stuff is."

"Don't be a fool, Dooley!" she cried.

He didn't feel that he was being a fool. He felt exactly like he had that day when the last pennant was in sight and hung on one more pitch. He was cold inside figuring the thing, making his decision. This one was the big one.

With Hanson and the gunman trailing him and Marcy, Dooley led the way back into the storeroom. He walked toward the huge packing cases and beyond them, toward the stacked baseball bats, his ears picking out the sounds of the men's feet behind him.

Now, he thought, *you get one chance, and it has to be good.*

"In here," he said as casually as he could, leaning without eagerness, spreading the pile of bats with his sweaty hands. He touched the taped handles, then his fingers closed about one of them and his lean body jack-knifed erect, the bat swinging in a quick arc.

The gunman screamed as it caught him just below the throat. He never got a chance to fire. Farther back, Honest Harry Hanson squealed in rage, pumping off one shot. Dooley felt the explosion burst within his shoulder, and it staggered him, but his forward impetus was such that the slug did not drive him out of range.

The return stroke of the bat found the frantic alderman within its deadly path. There was the queerly muted *thwack!* as the bat struck Hanson's skull, mashing the ear into the bone; and Hanson catapulted across the room, out of the ball game.

It was sometime later, after the police had taken notes and the ambulance interne had patched up Dooley's shoulder, that he took Marcy Williams home. They walked the silent, empty street of the neighborhood until they reached the brownstone where she lived.

"Mom and Pop'll probably have the Titans' ball game on the television set," she said. "Come on up." She grinned impishly. "It's Pop's favorite theory that pitchers can't hit worth a damn. Wait'll I tell him how you did with that willow tonight!"

With his good arm, Dooley held her close in the dim hallway. "Gotta watch us southpaws," he said. "We're full of hidden talent."

She looked at him. "Start pitchin', Dooley, me boy."

PSORIASIS

Whatever the extent, and it may be anything from two or three small spots on elbows and knees to large patches on the scalp, body and limbs. Psoriasis is always most distressing and embarrassing to the sufferer.

Psoriasis forms a white lustrous scale on a reddened area of skin. Both the scale and skin are always dry unless broken or brought away by too much force when scratching or combing.

In most cases the reddened skin is of a normal temperature and the scale thick and raised on the skin, especially on the scalp, elbows and knees. Where the skin is of finer texture as on the body, scaling takes place as thin flakes or a light powder. In severe cases all the scales—thick, thin, flake or powder—will come away in shoals.

The onset of Psoriasis varies considerably. It may be hereditary, may occur with puberty, may follow injury, exposure, shock, worry, faulty nutrition or faulty elimination. It may also be persistent and recurring, and sufferers despair of ever having a clear, healthy skin.

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No matter how long you have suffered, no matter how many eruptions you may have, no matter how extensive the eruptions may be, the brochure will bring renewed hope of a clear and healthy skin. It tells of others who suffered for years but have had complete relief. Psoriasis that was very extensive and persistent yielded to a skin without blemish.

Think what a healthy skin means to you. No unsightly scale, nor distressing patches or redness, no irritation and no more embarrassing anxiety when you are at work or with your friends. With a healthy skin you can work with pleasure; you can join freely in sports, recreation and social activities with your friends; you can dress with pride; you can share the freedom and happiness of holidays, a new life is opened out to you.

Here is the opportunity you have sought. Send for Brochure and full particulars of Tremol Treatment. They are of vital importance to all Psoriasis sufferers. Do not despair and suffer needlessly. Write to-day enclosing 6d. in stamps. You will receive the Brochure and particulars by return of post. Address your letter to:—

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF HEALTH
ENQUIRY DEPARTMENT S.M.
GREAT CLOWES STREET
BROUGHTON, MANCHESTER, 7

ALL BURNED UP

By TEDD THOMEY

*When high-voltage Natalie started shooting off his
Magnum . . . private-op Richardson made fast
tracks—over the nearest electric fence.*

WHEN I woke up, I had a giraffe-sized crick in my neck—and my Magnum was missing. I had left it within reach on the small, ash-blond end table beside my chair. Then I'd dropped off for thirty-eight or thirty-nine winks after supper.

A Magnum is a heavy, high-powered revolver that handles either .38 or .357 caliber slugs. Believe me, it is no weapon for a kid.

Yet I had a nasty hunch that eleven-year-old Hughie Marsh had gotten his sticky little hooks on it. No one else would be apt to take the holster, too. The idea made me mad.

That hard, mohair chairback had really stiffened my neck. Rubbing it, I made a sixty-second search around the expensive, overfurnished bedroom. I caught a glimpse of myself in the tremendous, blue-tinted mirror over the fireplace.

I am not a good-looking guy. My hair—it's the color of a rusty bucket—was mussed. My eyes were angry and that meant they were sort of a dirty dark brown color. My jaw stuck out and my gray tweeds were rumpled.

Sliding up the knot on my maroon tie, I stepped out into the hallway, which was slightly smaller than the lobby of Butte's biggest hotel.

Sure enough, Hughie was out there waiting for me, sitting on the rug playing with a toy pinball machine.

"All right, kid," I growled. "Where is it?"

His big blue eyes looked up at me softly. "Where's what, Mr. Richardson?"

"You know damn—" I started over again. "You know blasted well what I mean!"

He shook his head. "Gee, Mr. Richardson, you talk in circles."

This kid, you've got to understand, was smart. But to look at him you'd never think his grandfather, old R. W. K. Marsh, owned enough C-notes to build a four-lane highway to the moon. Hughie's lemon-yellow hair always needed wimming. His T-shirt

was soup-stained and there was two or three days' worth of grime on his face.

I don't want this to get around—but I grabbed that brat by the torn seat of his blue jeans and shook him till his little pine ears rattled.

"One minute!" I barked, making sure no one was watching us. "One minute to show me where that gun is!"

He didn't say anything. He led me down the big white marble staircase, through the plushy drawing room and out the side entrance. It was dark outside. Hughie took me over to a large poplar tree which grew beside the house's massive, red-brick west flank. Silently he pointed upward.

By squinting, I could just barely make out the shadow of the holster and its straps hanging from one of the branches. I felt like giving the kid the back of my hand across his chops. Instead, I grabbed a low limb and swung myself up.

For a guy that's pushing thirty-three, I climbed pretty fast. My fingers found the tan leather holster. I draped the straps over my shoulder, congratulating myself that it had been so easy.

And then I saw that all the damn holster held was one of Hughie's water pistols. I started to let out a bellow.

But from the edge of my eye, I saw that something was going on in the R. W. K.'s den on the second floor. The window was only about ten feet from the branch I was standing on.

Natalie Dott entered the den on two slim, nyloned legs that never should have belonged to anyone so ordinary as a housekeeper. She pushed aside the shiny, soft leather divan, exposing the round steel face of a wall safe. After spinning the chrome combination knob, she opened the door, exposing another door on the inside which had a keyhole.

As she poked in a key, a large, knobby hand grabbed her shoulder. R. W. K.'s hand. He'd followed her in.

He grabbed away the key. I heard them

shouting at each other although I couldn't understand what was said. Natalie broke from the old man's grip. He pushed her and she stumbled backward, sitting down abruptly on the divan. Her red mouth was twisted and she spat some heavy language at him.

Then her hand came up from under the leather cushion. Orange flame winked from the gun she held. I could tell by the solid blast and the heavy shape of it that it was a Magnum. My Magnum.

Old man Marsh took two steps toward her. He put something in his mouth and swallowed it. He fell at her feet and lay there without moving.

Natalie's oval face was white and stiff-looking. I knew how she must feel, because I felt the same way. It had happened so fast, so unexpectedly. My heart was knocking itself out against my ribs.

"Jee-miny!" said somebody nearby. "She shot Grandpa!"

I nearly fell out of the tree. Perched on a branch below me was the little wise guy, Hughie. Out of the darkness, his eyes now loomed up at me like bright tin-cans.

"Get down!" I hissed. "And don't make any noise!"

For once, he did what he was told. When we dropped to the spongy lawn, I grabbed his plump little arm.

"Did you hide my gun in that divan?" I demanded.

"Yes, Mr. Richardson," he replied in a small voice.

I let go of him and ran back to the side entrance. Taking the steps three at a time, I raced up the marble staircase under the monstrous crystal chandeliers that were supposed to have cost old R. W. K. five thousand dollars apiece. When I got to the door outside the den, I halted because I had heard the patter of little feet behind me.

Turning around, I told Hughie I would spank him to a crisp if he didn't remain in the hall. I went in.

Natalie was no longer in the den. But old R. W. K. was there. He hadn't moved. And he would never move again.

Even in death, Old Man Marsh looked like a financial giant. He was lying on his right side. He was a long, broad man with a huge, bald and veined head. Staring out from under the gray bushes of his eyebrows were two blue eyes that looked fierce enough to melt concrete. His mouth was

open. It was mean and wrinkled and there was a little jungle of wrinkles in the skin above his white collar. His hands were wide and thick with big knuckles. They were the hands that had swung a pick in the Montana mines in the years before R. W. K. Marsh gained that extra initial and the capital that started his career as a copper king.

The bullet had gone in just below the breast pocket on his navy-blue smoking jacket. It had made its exit directly behind his heart.

As I knelt beside the body, I heard a small scuffling sound.

Hughie, of course. He'd disobeyed me and was standing beside red shelves full of the Harvard Classics. I wanted to grab his ear and lead him back to the hall. But I reconsidered. Old R. W. K. didn't look bad—very little blood was noticeable. And if ever a kid needed a lesson, Hughie was the one. I hoped he'd get a good bellyful.

But the kid surprised me. Death didn't crack his wise-guy, eleven-year-old veneer. He placed grimy little paws on the copper-riveted hips of his blue jeans.

"Well, Mr. Richardson," he said, importantly. "Don't you think you'd better put in a call to the sheriff?"

"Shut up," I told him. "I'm busy. Try being seen and not heard for once."

"I don't think you're much of a detective, Mr. Richardson." Hughie moved his yellow head slowly from side to side. "You should be capturing the housekeeper. She may try to get away!"

The kid was right, but I needed another moment to look around. I noticed that the inside, second door to the safe was still locked.

"You're not even looking for clues," added Hughie. "Like for instance what was it that Gran'pa put in his mouth?"

Hughie got down on his hands and knees beside me. He peered down seriously at old R. W. K.'s open lips.

And then abruptly Hughie stood up. There was a pained expression in his blue eyes. "Gee, Mr. Richardson."

He placed a hand on his stomach. He was a nice, bilious green around the gills. "Gee, I don't know why—but I don't feel so good."

As I led him briskly away, he didn't look back at his grandfather. Feeling pleased with myself, I locked him in his room which was next to mine. Then I headed for the extension phone in the master bed-

room. I knew I didn't have to worry yet about Natalie trying to get away.

There had been no tell-tale flicker of the lights in the house. They always got brighter whenever the power was shut off on the electric fence which surrounded the estate.

I entered the bedroom and picked up the French-style phone which was copper-plated in keeping with the copper decorations elsewhere in the room.

Immediately, I heard Natalie's voice. She was on another extension.

"No, Charley," she was saying. "I can't wait that long. You've got to get here right away—even sooner!"

"How big a door?" asked a man's voice. It was gruff and not too well-educated.

"About ten inches square," said Natalie. "And it doesn't look too tough to crack."

She was right there. The inside safe door looked about as strong as a cheese box. I had missed the first part of their conversation but I could guess why Natalie needed help. Old R. W. K. must've swallowed the key to the safe just before he died.

"How much is there in it for me?" asked Charlie.

"Twenty per cent. That means you'll get around fifteen thousand cash—which isn't bad for a half hour's work."

"No," said Charley. "But you're going to get sixty thousand." Charley paused. I began to see that he wasn't so dumb. "Who else is around?"

"Just the kid," replied Natalie. "And the private detective from Butte that the old man hired to look out for the kid. His name's Jack Richardson. He might be hard to handle, except for one thing. I've got his gun."

"Okay," said Charley. "I'll be right out!"

Natalie's voice grew cautious. "Remember, though, don't touch that front gate until it swings open by itself. Otherwise you'll get a shock that'll knock you into the middle of next Thursday!"

They hung up. The dial tone came on. After waiting a long minute, I spun the wheel for the operator. I knew I had to work fast. I would have to catch Natalie and get control of the Magnum before Charley arrived and complicated things.

I told the operator to get me the sheriff's office.

"One moment please." Along the lines, switchboards gave out assorted clicks.

There was a big angry, grunt-like sound in my ear and then the phone went as dead

as King Tut. I pressed the cradle lever down a couple of times, but I knew I wouldn't be getting any outside help.

Score one for Natalie. She'd gotten to the phone line with a knife or a hatchet.

I wondered where I would find her and how I could catch her off-balance. In the old habit, my right hand slid inside my gray tweed coat. It came out feeling surprised. Without that heavy Magnum, I felt naked. I am not the kind of a guy who likes to do things the hard, dangerous way. I've been a private investigator for nearly ten years now—ever since I resigned as a sergeant on the Butte police force. Butte is a tough dirty miner's town and during these years I learned something—I like my hide the way it is. Free of .38 caliber perforations.

But I could see that in this situation the hard way was the only way. I couldn't leave the estate—not with that thousand-volt electric fence humming and crackling in all directions. Only two people had known the location of the control box that regulated the fence. Old R. W. K. Marsh and his housekeeper, Natalie. Now only one person knew. And it wasn't Jack Richardson. I cursed myself out for not making a harder search for it.

It came to this. I would have to find Natalie, get the gun from her somehow, and—if necessary—knock her around a bit till she told me the location of the control box.

Before going downstairs, I stepped into Hughie's room. He was sitting in a chair throwing feathered darts at a football. He wasn't much interested in the target, but he seemed to be feeling all right. I knew he wouldn't miss his grandfather very much. The old man had never given the kid any affection. R. W. K.'s affection went to his mines, his copper smelters and his library of bank books.

I left Hughie in his room. On what I hoped were silent cat feet, I went down the stairs and through the entrance hall with its six polished granite columns flanking the gigantic front doors. I walked into the dining room. Like a steering wheel, my head kept swiveling around on my shoulders as I examined the room in all directions at once.

Maybe it was because she was young and pretty—but Old Man Marsh had trusted Natalie Dott. I didn't intend to make the similar mistake of under-estimat-

ing her. She had a gun. I had none. I didn't want to be surprised by her.

She wasn't in the dining room. I sneaked down the hall, cussing like a stepped-on pup. Since it was the cook's day off, I glanced into her room on the chance that Natalie might be there. She wasn't.

Continuing down the hall, I entered the kitchen, which was white and shiny and as big as the galley on a battleship. Everything was in order. The dozens of cupboard doors were all closed. Plates and cups were drying in the automatic dish-washer.

I started toward the service porch—and then I halted because it occurred to me that I wasn't using very good tactics. It might be smarter to wait some place and force Natalie to look for me, so I could surprise her. I decided to return to the drawing room.

As I turned around, the pantry door opened smoothly and Natalie stepped out. It was the first time I'd been on the wrong end of my Magnum and I'd never realized before what an ugly thing it was.

Two quick steps took me toward the service porch. The kitchen filled with fire and noise as the Magnum stuck its orange tongue out at me. A lot of hot air slapped my right shoulder. I decided to stay where I was.

Glancing down at my coat, I saw that had been a wise decision. Stiff, black strands of horsehair were sticking out through a big hole in the shoulder padding.

"I was raised on a ranch near Kalispell," said Natalie sweetly. "If you want the next one between your horns—just place your order!"

She held the heavy gun as confidently, as steadily, as a lipstick or a perfume atomizer. Her dark, almost black eyes roamed icily over my five feet ten inches. She wore a black dress which was her housekeeper's uniform—but the tight, shiny taffeta fitted her trim hips and narrow waist in a very unhousekeeper-like way. The only jewelry she wore was a thick gold wire circling the white column of her throat. So black it had blue highlights, her long hair tumbled softly across her wide shoulders.

"Will you take your flat feet to the drawing room?" she ordered coldly.

My feet aren't flat. In fact, if anything the arches are too high, but I didn't feel like arguing with her. I was sore—sore at myself for being such a bean-headed fool that I walked into her not-too-clever trap.

I went back down the hall to the drawing room. I strolled along, hoping she would come close enough so I could wheel around and bat the Magnum from her fist. But she was smart. The click of her high heels stayed a good seven or eight feet behind me.

In the drawing room, she had me sit on the biggest of the three chesterfields. She took a strawberry-colored easy chair opposite me, keeping the Magnum trained on me from her neat little lap.

"Where's Hughie?" she asked.

"In his room."

That was the extent of our conversation for the next twenty minutes. I sat there with a headful of assorted thoughts that weren't worth a straight paper-clip. I thought about my job, I thought about Old Man Marsh, the electric fence and the hidden control box.

When I took the job, I figured it would be an easy way to put a thick green lining in my wallet. The year before, R. W. K. had received some threatening notes about the kid. Some unknown party claimed he would kidnap Hughie unless given five thousand cash. The police investigated, but the thing gradually blew over. The cops figured it was the work of a crank, mostly because such a small amount of money had been asked for.

The kid spent only the summers with his grandfather. The rest of the time he lived with his married brother in Colorado. To protect him this summer, R. W. K. had the fence built and hired me as an armed babysitter. Twenty bucks a day plus room and board was all I could hit the old man for. And because we spent all our time at the estate in the Rockies about fifty miles east of Butte, I couldn't pad up any expenses either.

The fence was quite a project. It was eight feet high with strands of barbed wire running almost as close together as wires in a screen. Big black and white signs were erected every few feet warning people to stay away. At night they were illuminated. An ordinary wooden fence ran outside the electric one to keep any strolling deer or other wild game from rubbing their noses against a thousand volts. A similar wood fence ran inside to keep Hughie's nose safe.

Natalie stepped over to the blond-walnut console radio on which stood a chrome galleon at full sail. She turned a dial. In a moment the strains of an orchestra came lightly into the large drawing room.

I grinned at her. "Care to dance, honey?"

"No, thank you." She smiled. A pleasant smile—hardly that of a girl who'd just shot and killed a man. "You know it's really too bad you're a cop."

I shook my head. "A private cop."

"Same difference," she said. She sighed a little. "I'd much rather cut you in than Charley. I like the way your red hair curls in the back and I think you've got the nicest teeth I've ever seen in a man."

I wondered if she was kidding me.

"It's too bad I can't trust you," she added. Her black eyes were cool, but friendly.

"Try me and see," I suggested.

She shook her head and the dark hair rippled against her shoulders. She walked over to the wall behind the divan I was sitting on. I felt my pulses kick up their heels a little and turned around to look at her.

"No," she said. "Keep looking the other way."

I turned and glanced over at the radio. "What kind of a game is this?"

"Use your head and you won't get hurt," she warned. "I'm going to turn out the lights, but this gun will still be aimed at the skin above your collar!"

I knew she wasn't going to put out the lights to play kiss-in-the-dark. It was obvious that her friend Charlie would arrive any minute to crack the safe and she would have to cut the juice in the fence so he could get in. She didn't want me to know where the control box was hidden. By putting the lights out, she would conceal the tell-tale flicker that would occur when she flipped the fence switch. That way I wouldn't know when she stepped away.

The wall switch clicked behind me and the lights went out.

"Just keep looking at the radio," she said, gently, still behind me.

I sat there stiffly for a full thirty seconds, staring through the blackness at the soft, crescent-shaped glow of the radio's dial. A nerve did a little Irish jig in my throat.

I turned around suddenly.

The Magnum blasted orange flame over my shoulder and I heard pottery crash across the room.

"Eyes straight ahead!" snapped Natalie.

I swallowed. One moment I was sure she had left. The next moment I was sure she hadn't. But I knew she meant busi-

ness—she'd proved that by the quick way she'd shot old R. W. K. I sat there on pins and thumbtacks, wondering why she didn't shoot me and get it over with.

It seemed to me that the control box must be nearby, possibly in the hall outside the drawing room. Obviously, she could spend only a few seconds getting to it and back. If she stayed away longer than that I would have a good chance of discovering she was gone. I strained the skin on my eardrums trying to hear her foot-steps or her breathing. I heard neither. I heard nothing but silence.

She spoke suddenly from her chair over by the radio. "All right, Jack. You can put the light on now."

I swore. She'd moved around the room like a ghost. I got up, stumbled immediately over a hassock and finally found the wall switch.

The overhead chandelier came back to life. "Thank you," smiled Natalie. Big and bold, the Magnum was still clenched in her slim magenta-tipped fingers.

"You're not welcome!" I growled.

She got up from the chair. "Let's go over to the window, shall we?"

She stood at one end of the ten-foot-square piece of plate glass and I stood at the other. We looked out over the grounds. Straight as the edges of a checkerboard, the electric fence surrounded us, its lights glowing brightly.

In front of us, the black iron front gate was open. I grunted. That meant Natalie had gotten to the control box, all right.

As we watched, the brilliant front eyes of a car came through the gate and up the paved driveway.

Charley walked in carrying a small blue canvas bag. He was a big, lumpy guy in his late thirties wearing a dark serge suit that looked like it had been pressed by a cement mixer. He had a big flat nose with a broken, knuckle-like bridge. When I noticed his scaly gray eyes, I got uncomfortable. They were several sizes too small for his large face. They were severe and suspicious. They stated plainly that Charley whatever-his-last-name-was would kill me just as easily as he would brush crumbs off his necktie.

I tightened up inside as Charley took the gun from Natalie and aimed its round black mouth at my chest. He handled it like a professional.

"All right," he said, "where's the apple

crate? And you—" he meant me—"you try one trick and it'll be your last. Understand?"

I didn't do him the honor of answering. I stared stonily at the Magnum. We went upstairs to the den, where Charley handed Natalie the gun and proved that the safe was an apple crate, all right. A few cracks of a ball-pen hammer against the cold-steel chisel he took from the canvas bag—and the inside door snapped open.

Old Man Marsh was still lying there quietly by the divan. The front of his smoking jacket was a darker red than before. I didn't like to think about it, but it was two to one that Natalie and Charley would give me the same treatment to make their get-away safer.

I waited until Charley brought out the rubber-band-wrapped packs of green bills. Natalie's eyes left me to roam greedily over the money. The Magnum's front sight dipped a little.

The den's windows were French style. High and narrow and hinged at the side. Two were open.

I pulled in my head, spun around and crossed the golden Oriental in three long jumps. My eardrums quivered, waiting for the Magnum's thunder.

"Natalie!" yelled Charley. "Get him!"

I launched myself through the window as though I were still playing left halfback at Montana State U. A lot of things happened at once. I gave the screen the benefit of a hundred-and-seventy-pound shoulder block—and it split like waxed paper.

As I caught one of the top branches in the poplar tree, the Magnum found its voice. It bellowed and the branch broke—either from my weight or because a bullet struck it.

I'm no Tarzan, and I don't want to be one. I dropped a sudden ten feet. My stomach felt like it was wrapped around my ears. When my flailing hands finally found another branch, it bent like rubber. Half-a-dozen times I shot down and then up. I let go and aimed for another branch farther down, but the night was dark and I missed. My fingernails scraped bark.

The next thing I knew I was hanging upside down, my coat draped over my face like a potato sack, my left ankle caught in a forked branch.

Natalie was screaming. Charley cursed. I heard their feet smacking the stairs inside. In a moment, they would be under the tree waiting for me.

And there I hung, more helpless than a new-born possum. Leaves swatted my neck. My ankle bone hurt like hell. Twice, three times, I bent at the middle, straining my arms up toward a branch that seemed as far away as the big dipper. I caught it finally, freed myself and went down carefully.

When my heels hit the lawn, Charley and Natalie were dashing from the house's side entrance maybe twenty-five yards away.

I took off toward the front gate, hoping Natalie hadn't had time to close it. I was wrong. She'd been at the hidden control box again. The gate was locked.

As I veered off to the right, running as fast as I could. I knew I was licked. There were no trees on the estate's grounds, not even a rock big enough to hide under. It wouldn't take them long to run me down.

The Magnum let go again. Its echo crashed up into the nearby Rockies and a long streak appeared in the grass ahead of me. Angrily blinking the sweat from my eyes, I zigzagged, swearing at myself for being fool enough to get into such a situation.

I drew closer to the three fences. The wooden ones ran protectively inside and out. Between them, the barbed electric fence was humming and mumbling to itself, its bright warning lights marching straight through the darkness like lamp standards on Main Street.

There was only one thing to do, one last chance to take. Charley's big feet were making noise on the lawn close behind me. I'm a great believer in the law of averages. Sooner or later, I knew, the numbers would click into place and one of the Magnum's big slugs would find me.

I scrambled up the first wooden fence. I went up fast with enough momentum so I could balance on the top for a moment like a tight-rope walker.

A few paces away were the angry electric strands strung to steel poles that were a good ten feet higher than the fence I was standing on.

But I didn't balance there more than two winks. A glimpse set me off. A glimpse of Charley halting and sighting carefully.

My heart was beating thickly in my throat as I thrust my legs as hard as I could against the wooden top rail.

I sailed up—and I knew instantly that I wasn't going to make it, that I was going to miss clearing the top electric strands by about two inches.

My whole body felt as stiff and electric as the fence itself. My brain had room for nothing but fear.

The toes of my shoes scuffed the wires. Trying desperately to hurl myself forward, I flopped down across the fence and the barbs cut through my gray tweeds right into my skin. I gave a last lunge with my legs and toppled the rest of the way over. I was completely surprised that I was still alive to do so, astonished that the thousand volts hadn't burned through me.

I landed on the back of my neck between the electric fence and the outside wooden one. Bouncing up, I sprang over the wooden job as if it weren't there.

I hit the rocky ground running and dodged behind the first pine tree I came to. Peering past the sap diamonds crusted on the bark, I saw Charley climb the inside wooden fence, preparing to tackle the electric one as I had done.

And then suddenly the fence was humming and crackling again.

Before, I hadn't noticed the absence of the electric noises. I'd been too amazed at not being electrocuted. Now, though, I realized that the fence hadn't been working when I was caught on it.

Halfway up the wooden fence, Charley cringed as if the electric strands were a coiled-up rattler. He bawled over his shoulder to Natalie:

"Get back to the house and shut the damn thing off!"

I dropped to my knees behind the pine tree and picked up a couple of fist-sized rocks. I waited until Natalie had trotted halfway to the house.

Still on the fence, about thirty feet from my tree, Charley was illuminated beautifully by the lights. I clamped my fingers around a rock and launched it with a lazy spiral. It shot past Charley's shoulder and thumped into the grass.

He looked around. And then he glanced at me. Just in time. My next toss was a perfect pass into the end zone. It got him right between the eyebrows. Without a grunt, he fell off the fence and the Magnum went skidding along on its squatty barrel. Charley lay without moving.

Natalie turned around, and saw what happened and started running back. For the Magnum, of course.

I ran to the outside wooden fence and clambered up. If necessary, I was prepared to dash back to the shelter of the pine tree as soon as she drew closer to the gun.

Climbing to the top rail, I listened to the electric fence's hum.

Natalie grew closer and I could hear the taffeta swish of her black skirt.

The fence continued to hum. Just as I was ready to run to the pine tree, the fence became silent. I jumped to the ground beside it. As I climbed its warm strands, the sharp barbs tore at my fingers and clothes. I got to the top, wondering what I would do if the electricity suddenly came back on. Then I jumped to the inside wooden fence and from there to the grass—just as the wires began to hum again.

My knees folded and my chin dug up divots. Like an animal, I scrambled on my hands and knees toward the Magnum. Natalie got there first—half a tick before me. She raised the gun.

It was no time for any Sir Galahad stuff. My shoulder struck her trim waist. As she went over, I wrenched the gun from her long fingers.

I was glad I'd been rough. The language she used on me would've sizzled Sir Galahad's ears.

Charley was rubbing his eyebrows and moaning something about stars and pinwheels. Natalie sat on the grass, staring up at me with eyes as dark and angry as hot obsidian.

About a minute later, Hughie came strolling along, whistling, his grimy little hands stuck in the pockets of his blue jeans.

"I gather," I said, "that it was you who shut the fence off. How long've you known where the control was?"

Hughie stopped whistling long enough to explain that he'd discovered it several weeks ago by spying on his grandfather. "All you have to do," he added importantly, "is pull out one of the knobs on the radio."

"Nice going, kid," I replied, my voice sober. "You saved my life."

The corners of Hughie's mouth lifted impishly. "Jee-miny! Mr. Richardson, I wasn't trying to save your life or anything! I kept trying to give you a hot foot with the fence, but you jumped off every time before I could get from the window to the radio to turn the juice back on!"

I didn't say anything. Abruptly, I grew very cold inside.

It wasn't until later, when the sheriff's men had arrived and taken over, that I placed Hughie tenderly across my knee—and whaled the hell out of him.

DERELICT'S DERELICTION

By ALVIN YUDKOFF

*From the bottom of the junk heap came Travis—
to get himself a new coat of guilt.*

THE Bowery by night is like a view of Hades seen through dark glasses. The steel beams of the rust-seamed El overhead cut away even the angled light from the evening sky.

The shuttered stores are dark with heavy iron gates in front of every window. While in the flop houses, stretched unconscious on the pavements, curled up like crumpled socks in half-lit doorways, hurriedly sopping up bread and stew in the soup kitchens—are the men of skid row, like sleepwalkers in a nightmare.

Now and then, almost like a space-ship from another planet, a sleek new car may turn slowly onto the Bowery. The car is crammed with outsiders anxious to see the sights. For New York hosts have found this to be a wonderful routine to liven up a dull party:

"C'mon," they say when the scotch runs out, "let's go slumming on the Bowery!"

Vagrants on the Bowery are a practical folk, who know that slummers are always good for a handout. That is why on this particular night Travis felt no resentment when he saw the long black sedan turn onto the Bowery from Canal Street and head north very slowly.

Inside the car, two men were looking very carefully on both sides. No, Travis was not annoyed but he was curious. These two men had been cruising up and down the Bowery for the past half-hour . . . and they didn't look the tourist type.

Cops maybe? But as Travis took the last possible drag from the butt he had found on the subway steps, he shook his head. Cops didn't bother about Bowery people as long as they kept out of serious trouble.

Shivering, he drew himself back into the store doorway. It was going to be a bad night. Rain . . . cold enough for snow, he thought. He swallowed hard and his throat hurt. There it was again. A drink. He needed a drink. He'd do anything for a drink.

And it wasn't just the chill, either. A

couple of shots would burn up in a flash of heat the warm thoughts that lay like dry tinder in his brain. Thoughts which rose up now and beat at him. Thoughts of Emily, of Dick—Travis wondered how tall he was by now—thoughts of the quiet block in Duluth where they had all lived so happily.

Travis scowled angrily. He didn't want to think, he couldn't bear it. He was grateful for the noise which broke in on his senses. It was the sound of a car heading slowly along the street past him. The same black sedan. He watched it stop for the light at the corner.

It was worth a chance. Travis lurched to his feet and ran up to the car. "How about it?" he said, his tongue heavy in his mouth. He couldn't make out the faces inside the car. "Something for a square meal?" he asked.

He heard a throaty chuckle from the man at the wheel. The other man, who was nearer to Travis, was eyeing him carefully. The driver said: "Way prices are these days, Johnny, a square meal takes a lot of dough."

"Whaddya say?" Travis pleaded. After a few months on the Bowery he was used to the teasing of those from whom he panhandled. "Two bits then. How about it?"

The light changed to green. "Go soak your head, you bum!" the driver said gruffly. He shifted into first. Travis felt the car move forward. He held on to the door handle.

"Please," he cried.

"Hold it, Kip!" the man nearer to Travis said. His high-pitched voice had a decisive hardness about it. The car jerked to a stop.

Now the man opened the door and stepped out next to Travis. The driver remained in the car. "Cigarette?" the man said, holding out an open cigarette case to Travis.

Travis didn't understand this, not at all,

but next to a drink a cigarette was what he wanted most. His fingers managed to close around one and he put it in his mouth.

"You need a light," the stranger said, flicking a lighter. He was a young man, Travis could see, tall and thin just like himself. The flame from the lighter was a powerful one and over the rim Travis could see the man looking hard at him. Suddenly he felt frightened, he wanted to run. But already he had inhaled and the warm tang of the cigarette made him stay. Besides, there was still the chance of a drink.

"What's your name?" the man said.

"Fielding," said Travis. "Mike Fielding." It was the name he had used the last six months, since he had run away from Duluth.

"How long you been bumming around here?"

"What is this?" Travis said. The cigarette didn't taste so good any more. "You a cop?"

The young man smiled. "Hear that, Kip?" he said to the driver.

Kip laughed. "You'd make a good copper at that, Frankie," he said.

Frankie opened the rear door of the sedan. "A little ride, Mike?" he said.

"What is this?" Travis repeated, backing up slightly.

"We're not cops. Relax," Frankie said, his thin face curled into a grin.

"What do you want with me?" Travis said.

"A couple of laughs, that's all," said Frankie. "I'm looking for some local color to tell the folks back home. I'll even buy you a drink." Travis hesitated and Frankie scowled angrily. "All right, chump, crawl back into your doorway!" He got into the car.

"Hold it. Don't go!" Travis said. He pulled the door open and slipped into the seat next to Frankie. He forced his face into a smile, said, "Did you say something about a drink?"

Kip, alone up front now, made a U-turn and drove north. Travis settled back against the soft upholstery. Frankie pulled out a flask, an old-fashioned prohibition type, and handed it to Travis.

"Go ahead," he said. "It's better than what you're used to."

It was better, it was wonderful, Travis felt as he gulped down the whiskey. It was smooth, not the throat-searing stuff he had

been drinking. Frankie pulled the flask away and some of the liquid spilled onto the bristles of his chin.

"Easy. There'll be more," Frankie said. He hesitated for a moment, then he said: "What's your name?"

"I told you," said Travis.

"I mean your real name." Travis leaned back again and did not answer. "None of my business, is that it?" Frankie smiled.

"That's it."

"All by your lonesome in the big city?" asked Frankie. When Travis remained silent, he handed over the flask. "All alone in the big city?" he repeated now.

"Yeah." Travis took a long swig.

"How long you been on the street?"

"Couple of months," Travis said. "Tell you the truth, I don't remember exactly."

"What did you run away from?"

"My wife and kid," Travis said. He realized he made no sense so he added, "I got into some trouble in Duluth, my home town."

"Woman?"

"That's it," Travis said. Now that he saw Frankie didn't want the flask, he relaxed a bit. Travis liked Frankie; he was so sympathetic, so understanding. "A new girl was hired at the plant where I worked. I—" his voice thickened—"oh, you know how it is. She was one of those dames you can't keep away from. She made me leave Emily—my wife." He shook his head slowly and took another drink.

"Then the new babe left you?"

Travis looked admiringly at Frankie. "Yeah . . . soon as I ran out of dough. I couldn't go back to Duluth. I couldn't face my wife and kid again."

"So you wound up on the Bowery," Frankie said. "Sure, I understand. I know how you feel." He paused. "But what about your wife? Doesn't she know where you are?"

Travis looked at the flask. "No," he said. "She probably thinks I'm dead. Everybody I knew probably thinks I'm dead." Hurriedly, he raised the flask to his lips again because he was certain now that his story was over Frankie would let him go. But the flask was empty. "And that's how yours truly ended up here," he said, turning and pointing to the window.

He was surprised to see they had left the Bowery and were driving through a strange neighborhood. Frankie leaned over to the front seat and his hand came back with a half-full bottle.

"There's still some left in this," he said and he handed it to Travis. "Help yourself."

When Travis came to, his teeth felt clamped vise-tight on his lower lip. Hot shafts of pain hammered within his head. He forced his mouth open and then his eyes—and as he did the pain became even more severe. He groped about in the cramped darkness and his hand brushed across the rough upholstery of the seat. He was still in the car.

But it wasn't moving. It was parked somewhere and he was alone. He managed to raise his head and look out. The car was in a closed, two-car private garage. Travis got out of the car, walking as carefully as he could to the garage door. The odor of gas mingled with the dry smell of tires. He unlatched the door and pushed it open slightly, holding his breath as it scraped across the gravel. Then he squeezed through the opening into the cold night air.

He stood there, lost in the blue-black darkness, wondering what to do next. He was drenched with sweat and his torn clothing offered little protection against the chill breeze that fanned across the yard. In front of him, about fifteen yards away, was a ranch-type house, its open patio facing toward the garage.

Then, from the patio: "—no coward, you know that, Frankie, but this thing gives me the shakes."

Now Travis could make out the two men seated on the patio, talking in low tones. "Stop stewing about it, Kip!" he heard Frankie's high-pitched voice.

"I need another drink," Kip said. Travis ran his tongue over his lips as he heard the clink of glass against bottle.

"Go easy, Kip!" Frankie said. "I'm going to need you tonight. I don't want you as worthless as that lush in there!"

"Worthless?" Kip snorted. "That's a laugh. If you can use him to get clear of the cops for good, he's not so damn worthless. Yeah," he said softly, "if Frankie Niles can go walking down Broadway because of this little caper, the bum in there is worth his weight in gold!"

In the garage doorway, Travis felt his body stiffen. Frankie Niles. The baby-faced killer who had cut down two cops in a Forty-fifth Street box office hold-up. Frankie Niles. A one-man Murder, Inc. whom the police and F.B.I. had been try-

ing to corner for two years. Travis sucked in his breath.

"Keep your damn voice down, Kip," he heard Niles say.

"Relax." Kip's voice was the calmer now. "The bum passed out an hour ago. If he wakes up, there's plenty of hooch on the back seat. He'll drink himself out again. There's nothing to worry about."

"Well, no use taking chances."

"We're taking a big chance on this," Kip said.

"Are you? Who knows about this bum? Who cares? Nobody gives a hoot in hell whether he lives or dies!"

That's not true. Travis thought desperately. *My wife cares, my boy cares, people who knew me back in Duluth care. . . .*

"So this morning the house burns up. We'll set it for three o'clock when nobody's roaming around." Frankie Niles was speaking in an impersonal, business-like manner as if dictating to a secretary. "A bad stove—I've arranged it already. The house will go up like that," and he snapped his fingers.

"An unknown body—or what's left of it—is found in the ashes. I leave papers around. My papers. The body is so badly burned identification is impossible. But the size is right, the papers are right. So next day the headlines say: 'Frankie Niles Dead!' And that's it."

"It still sounds too damn simple," Kip protested. "The cops these days are no goons. They got all sorts of ways to identify, fingerprints, teeth—"

"The bum's fingers will be so toasted, they won't be good for anything," Frankie said. "Teeth marks? I've never had a cavity in my life, I've never been to a dentist, so where would they check? No, Kip, the cops will be glad to accept the news that Frankie Niles got himself stinking drunk and burned himself and his house down. Sure, usually fire insurance investigators make trouble. Well, I've taken care not to insure the place. I lose ten grand, okay, but so what? I've got a plastic surgery job all lined up and you know what hair dye can do."

There was a pause. For a moment Travis was afraid Frankie had seen him crouching in the dark. But Frankie continued: "This new dame doesn't like hiding out all the time. She likes good times and so do I. We're going down to Florida for the races, we're. . . ."

Travis slipped back into the garage. He

went to the car and, sure enough, some whiskey was there. To settle himself he took a short nip, and with great effort forced himself to put the bottle down. He had to control himself, he had to think! But what could he do to save himself?

They would see him if he left the garage since the door was the only way out. If he yelled for help, they would finish him off right away. There was a point to that though, he thought grimly. At least his death would be neater.

He looked around him. It was a large garage and since there was only one car in it, there was plenty of room. It sloped up slightly toward the side and in the far corner stood a rough wooden table, used apparently as a workbench. Travis stepped to the back of the car and tried to open the trunk. Perhaps there was a jack in there, or a monkey wrench, something he could use as a weapon. But the trunk was locked.

His eyes swept across something on the table. It looked like a—but no, that would be too lucky! Unbelieving, Travis blinked hard before he looked again. Yes, it was true, there was a rifle on the table.

He stepped quickly across the floor and picked up the rifle. All at once, whatever hope had surged within him abruptly died away. For this was no rifle—it was a boy's B.B. gun, unused for years, with the bolt action so rusted it couldn't even be moved.

On the table, along with a variety of dusty junk probably left by the people who had sold the house to Frankie Niles, Travis could see an unused box of B.B. pellets. Angrily, before he thought, Travis threw the gun down on the table. It bounced off and fell on the concrete floor with a clattering noise. Then Travis realized what he had done.

But it was too late. He heard quick steps across the yard, the garage door was wrenched open and Kip stood there, his powerful body framed in the half-light.

"Oh, you're up," Kip said. "How do you feel?"

"What do you want?"

"Now, now," said Kip. "Take it easy."

"Damn it, what do you want with me?"

Travis shouted, his hand fumbling behind him for the box of B.B. shot. He managed to get it open but his hand was shaking and he was only able to grasp a few of the pellets. He tried again and his hand slipped. The paper box toppled to the floor and

the round pellets spilled down the incline toward the door. Travis blocked off most of them with his feet.

"Come on, we'll give you a drink," Kip said amiably.

Travis felt the hardness of the table against the small of his back. "No," he said, "leave me alone."

"But Frankie wants you."

"What for?"

Kip hesitated. "To—to talk with you."

"You lousy liar!" Travis snapped.

"Listen . . . I heard you before. He's Frankie Niles and you're his gorilla." His voice rose to a shout. "But you're not going to do it, you're not going to murder me!"

"You need a drink," the big man said quietly.

"Listen," Travis pleaded. "I'm a human being too. Yeah, down-and-out, a Bowery bum. Yes, but a human being." His voice choked up, his legs felt stiff and cold. "Please, please Kip."

"Look, bobo," Kip said, "it's all common sense. It's you or Frankie Niles." There was a rumble of laughter from the doorway. "You or Frankie Niles."

Me or Frankie Niles, Travis thought. Of course . . . and he, Travis, was just a worthless, bumming derelict. Then, impelled by Kip's loud laughter, anger raced through him and for the first time in many months of apathy and despair he felt the hot fury of hate. *Me or Frankie Niles. Me or a ruthless killer. Well then . . . me!* he thought.

He could see Kip start walking slowly toward him, lifting his feet up as he stepped forward on the slight incline. Quickly Travis shifted his feet and the blocked B.B. pellets rolled down toward the approaching Kip. At the same time he flung the few pellets he had in his hand at Kip's head. But his aim was high.

He heard Kip's surprised gasp as the big man's foot slipped on one of the steel balls. There was the jounce of Kip's heavy flesh falling against concrete. Travis stepped forward and kicked out. The point of his shoe ground into Kip. Travis heard a choked gurgle as he whipped his left foot into him. Then he flung himself past Kip, lurched through the garage door and sprinted down the driveway.

"Frankie!" Kip was shouting behind him when he reached the sidewalk. "The bum's scrambled! He's made a getaway."

Travis could barely make out the side-

walk ahead of him as he ran. At the corner he turned left and hurried down the street, a tree-lined paved road with dark, wooden-frame houses on both sides. Then behind him he thought he heard a car motor sound.

"Help!" Travis shouted, but his cry seemed to be lost in the night. This was a drunken nightmare, he thought wildly as he stumbled along the silent street. Now he heard the car behind him. He didn't dare look around.

"Help!" he shouted again and tried to run faster. But his legs felt stiff and uncontrolled, his chest burned with every breath, his throat was choked with phlegm.

The car was even with him now, then a little ahead, then braked to a stop. "Help me!" Travis yelled at the shadowed houses as he saw a man jump out of the car. He shifted a step, tried to turn around quickly and fell to the ground. He felt a hand grab him by the collar and he was hauled to his feet. "Don't . . . don't," he stammered, trying to break out of the grip.

Then he saw it was a policeman. A few yards behind was a radio car with another policeman at the wheel.

"What's the matter with you, bud?" the cop said. He was a dark young man, short and stocky, very earnest. "Creating a disturbance this time of night. What's the matter with you?"

"Help," Travis said breathlessly. "Please help me. Frankie Niles is after me! Back there . . ." His voice cracked into a whimper.

Now the other policeman got out of the radio car and came up to them. He was an older man. As he pushed his hat back on his head, his graying hair caught the light of the street lamp. "What's up, Gino?" he said.

"Dunno, Sam," the younger policeman said. "This guy is working up a case of D.T.'s but good! Keeps blabbing something about Frankie Niles no less."

The gray-haired policeman turned toward Travis, and his shrewd eyes swept over Travis' clothes. "Uh huh," he said. Then: "So you think you're Frankie Niles, eh? Is that it?" he asked gently.

"No!" Travis almost shouted. "He's after me, Frankie Niles is—" and suddenly he couldn't get his tongue working; he felt his throat gag up.

"Whew," Gino said, stepping back with a sour expression on his face. "Enough

alcohol on his breath to anti-freeze my car."

"Yeah," said the older cop. "What's your name, buddy?"

"Fielding," said Travis.

"Where do you live?"

"I—" Travis broke off weakly. "I've been staying on the Bowery. Oh, I know what you're thinking, but look here—"

"No," said the policeman. "You look here. You bums have a nerve. Coming up to a nice residential district like this and trying one on, noising up the neighborhood. I ought to dish it out to you!"

"Please," Travis said. "All right then, take me with you."

"Look, friend," the cop said. "We're going off our shift now. You're a lucky guy. It just so happens that today's my birthday and my wife and kids—three of them are staying up to give the old man a party. So you're not going to sleep off your drunk in jail while I have to fill out a long report on you."

Travis started to protest but the policeman waved him quiet. "Two blocks down this street you'll find a small park. Stay there tonight but don't let me catch you around here tomorrow!"

"No," Travis said, "I'll go with you." He saw the amazed look on the policeman's face. "Frankie Niles—"

"Dammit," Gino, the younger policeman, was angry now. "Don't you know when you're well off or do you want us to run you over to Bellevue?"

Both policemen were facing Travis now and he was looking back in the direction from where he had come. Then he saw the long black sedan cruising slowly toward them. Instantly he realized the cops were with their backs to Frankie Niles. They would be cut down before they could even draw.

"Okay," Travis mumbled, "sorry to bother you." He turned and trotted down the street. He did not look behind. As the policeman had told him, a park was nearby. A small grassy area with a grove of trees in the center, it was the highest point in the neighborhood, which dipped down in a long straight hill below it.

Travis turned onto the park pathway. His running steps sounded loud against the silence of the night. He heard a noise behind him. It was an automobile motor, the heavy throb of a big car. He glanced behind. The black sedan was pulling to a

stop alongside the park. They were coming for him.

Travis plunged down the pathway. He thought his lungs would crack wide open but he forced himself on. The pathway was lit by lamps about ten yards apart. He turned off the pathway and ran toward the dark grove of trees.

But something caught at his feet and he sprawled forward on the damp grass. Then he saw it—a low fence bordering the pathway. He tried to fight his way to his feet.

"Get up!" He heard Kip's voice from above, angry now, the good humor gone. "You lousy bum, get up!" Travis felt the point of a shoe rip into his ribs. "Or I'll—"

"Not there, dopey!" Frankie said. "There are coppers back there. We'll take him back to the car. Hurry!"

Kip reached down and pulled Travis to his feet. The two men, one on each side, tugged him to the car. Except for them, the street was empty of people. Travis didn't fight back. He was hopelessly, overwhelmingly exhausted.

The car was parked at the entrance, motor running, lights out, its wheels cut to the curb so it wouldn't roll down the hill. Frankie was shoved onto the back seat hard.

"You drive, Kip," he ordered. He got in beside Travis. Kip walked around the front of the car.

Suddenly Travis dove forward. His left hand reached the emergency brake and thrust it downward; at the same time his right hand turned the wheel straight. Frankie blasted the butt of his gun down on Travis' head but the car started down. There was a scream from Kip as the left fender drove into his hip and Travis couldn't see him any more.

Now he jerked about and lashed out at Frankie. Frankie, too, had been thrown forward by the sudden movement of the car, which was gathering speed as it coasted down the hill. Travis' hand closed around the gun butt. Half dangling over the front seat they scratched at each other, kicked, cursed, bit—anything that would give an advantage. Frankie's thin pale face was wrinkled in hate. His left fist punched out at Travis again and again.

Frankie was stronger, and slowly he brought the gun up and forced it toward Travis, pinning him back over the front seat. Choking from the exertion, Travis

clawed at Frankie's gun hand, tried to keep it off. But the muzzle swept toward him.

The car was hurtling down the hill. The whine of the tires sounded over their heavy breathing as they wrestled. The muzzle was wavering in front of Travis' face now, the pain stabbed at him as Frankie kneed him. Travis drew his left hand back and groped for the wheel. Grasping it, he yanked at it savagely. At the same moment he brought his right arm up.

Frankie was spun against the seat as the car veered crazily. For just a fraction of a second the gun jerked upwards. Then there was a roar that deafened Travis. Suddenly Frankie's grip relaxed and he slid to the floor.

Travis whirled around and grabbed the wheel. The car was skidding badly toward the left. He tumbled over to the front seat, shifted into second and braked it lightly. The car hit the curb, jounced up onto the sidewalk and sideswiped a billboard before he managed to stop it.

He cut the motor and, suddenly, everything was quiet again. Travis looked about. He was at the bottom of the long hill, the beginnings of a business district. A trolley car waited at the end of the line before starting its return trip. Across the traffic square, Travis saw the lights of an all-night bar.

Then he heard the police siren. It was at that moment that he started to shake. It was as if all the tension of the night had mounted up and was now overflowing and he couldn't withstand it any longer. Shivering, he bent over the wheel. He felt the coldness of the spokes against his face.

The next he knew, a hand was gripping him by the shoulder. Still shaking, he managed to look up and saw it was one of the policemen, the gray-haired one.

"Easy does it, guy," the cop said gently.

"It's Frankie Niles all right!" The other cop was examining the body in the back of the car. "With half his face blown off!"

"And Kip Saunders back there . . . out cold," the older cop said, eyeing Travis carefully. "This boy's had a busy night, Gino."

"You can say that again," Gino said.

Travis was trying to control himself but he couldn't. His entire body was sweat-soaked and the midnight air felt like an ice-cold shower. His head quivered, his stomach felt like a pitching mass of jelly.

The car seemed to be rolling and he was afraid he would be sick.

"Golly, he's in a bad way, isn't he?" Travis heard Gino say.

"Yeah," said the other cop. "And I know it's against regulations but this guy deserves it. Here," he said. Travis felt the pressure of a few coins in his hand. "Pull yourself together. Get yourself a drink across the street while we call head-quarters."

"Thanks, bud, thanks," Travis said. He managed to get out of the car and half ran, half pushed across the street to the bar. It was almost empty. A solitary drinker was at a rear table chatting with the bartender. Travis tried to catch the bartender's attention. He felt like screaming: *Hurry up! Hurry up!* But the bartender didn't notice him.

Travis looked out of the bar window, watched Gino guarding the car while a knot of people gathered. He saw Gino point toward him. Then a few of the on-lookers came across the street to the bar door and looked at him in wide-eyed, frank stares.

Travis was used to stares, but there was something different about these. For the first time in many, many months, people were looking at him not with contempt but with admiration and respect.

All at once his eyes were wet with tears. Ashamed, he forced himself to look away. His eye caught the gray-haired policeman at the police call-phone on the street corner. As the cop talked, Travis saw him look at his watch. Travis thought: *Poor guy, he's going to be late for his birthday party with his wife and kids.*

Wife and kids. The words clawed at Travis.

"What'll it be?" The gruff voice of the bartender broke in over his thoughts.

Travis started to answer: "Anything, a shot of anything," but then his gaze wandered out to the gray-haired cop again. He was still reporting to police headquarters, still looking sadly at his watch.

"What'll it be, Mac?" the bartender said impatiently.

Travis shook his head, turned and walked slowly toward the rear of the bar. Next to the juke box he could see a telephone paybooth. As he headed for it, he figured out just what time the call would awaken them at home in Duluth.

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FOR THE REST OF YOUR DEATH

By ROBERT TURNER

CAREWE was taking this well. Everybody told him so. He was being the original stout fella, with stiff upper lip, chin up and all that sort of clabber. They didn't even question the fact that his right fist was bandaged. One of the kids had slammed the car door on it, he'd said. He hadn't told them that he'd deliberately smashed it against the wall of the garage right after this thing had happened. It hadn't seemed to be anybody's business.

He was alone in his study, now. The funeral had been this afternoon. It was all over now. Jinny was not only dead but buried. Gone. A real gone gal, as his son Will would say in the vernacular of the teen-ager. Gone but not forgotten.

He had come up here to get drunk and break down and do whatever else was necessary to purge his system. The study was sound-proofed and he had locked the door. But now that the time was here, he was finding it a difficult thing to let go after holding on so grimly the last couple of days.

He stood in front of the mantel mirror, with a long-stemmed cocktail glass in his hand, filled with straight bourbon. It was his third. It should have been tying one on him by now, but it wasn't. He toasted himself in the mirror, a big, rawboned man, with shaggy, iron-gray hair and a sternly carved face.

"You look the part, Carewe," he told himself. "You look like the type who would work himself up from a beat policeman to police commissioner of one of America's biggest industrial cities. Jinny even told you so. Drink up, hero. Drink to Jinny! And to you!"

Jinny. Tall without looking tall, and slender. Willowy, some called her, but that was hardly the word for Jinny. Twenty years married to a mugg like him, fighting beside him every inch of the way up the long, rugged road and hardly showing a line in her face. With the softest smile he'd ever seen on a woman's face. With a disposition that made the kids, and everybody else, worship her. With a mature beauty that made men turn their heads when they walked into a restaurant on their rare nights out.

That was the trouble, he realized now; those nights out had been too rare. He had been so obsessed with climbing to the top

and staying there that he'd forgotten that Jinny was a woman. That dressing up and going out and having a man being romantically attentive can be like life and blood to a woman.

He had sworn that he'd never let himself think about the other night. He would forget it. That was the object of this private little binge. Yet he found himself thinking about the thing that had happened, going over it and over it in his mind, every little horrible fine point of it.

It had been here in the study that it happened. The Burkaw papers had been in the wall safe. The papers, mostly bookkeeping records and debt notes, had been impounded that day in a flash raid on Jimmy Burkaw's headquarters. Burkaw was the bookmaking king of the city, the county, the state—some said the whole country. Carewe and the D.A., Smithers, had been going over the papers late that night. Nobody knew they were in Carewe's house. They were supposed to be in a vault at City Hall. Nobody but he and Smithers and Jinny knew they were at his home.

What awakened Carewe just before dawn, he'd never know. He wanted a cigarette and he'd left them down here in the study. He came down to get them and he'd caught somebody rifling the wall safe by flashlight with a cloth wrapped around it to dim it. The light was so dull that he couldn't see the face of the marauder. All he saw was that a pair of hands were holding the light and quickly shuffling the papers, and that the figure was wearing light-colored slacks.

He remembered, now, the hundreds of times when he'd seen the unfairness of circumstantial evidence. Of all people, he knew that things were not always as they looked. But he hadn't thought about that then. He'd gone swiftly, padding on silent bare feet, back to his bedroom and gotten the automatic from the drawer in the dresser. He hadn't awakened Jinny, hadn't wanted to frighten her. He'd come back down here to the study.

A board had creaked under his feet. The figure by the wall safe had wheeled around with a frightened gasp, and in the second before the muffled flashlight was dropped, Carewe saw the unmistakable glint of a nickel-plated revolver. His policeman's in-

stinct to shoot first and ask questions later asserted itself. As long as he lived, he would never forget the door-slamming sound of the shot, the fire-flash from the weapon in his fist.

When he snapped on the wall light, the figure huddled by the safe wasn't a man in slacks, wasn't one of Burkaw's hooligans come to steal vital evidence against his boss. It was Carewe's wife, Jinny, wearing her tan lounging pajamas.

How long he stood there looking down at her, numbed, sick, a man suddenly scooped hollow of everything that was in him, he didn't know. But when he once again started to think, faint gray dawn was easing like a wraith through the windows. He only had to look at the way Jinny had fallen to know that she was dead. Dead by his gun; dead by his hand. The question kept scurrying around in stupid, dizzying circles through his mind, like a panicked, trapped rat: What was she doing here? Why had Jinny come down while he was asleep, to go through the Burkaw papers?

Smithers, the D.A., who had stayed over so that they could start right in again the next morning to go over the papers, came downstairs from the guest room, awakened by the sound of the shot. Smithers saw what had happened and, reluctantly, he gave Carewe the answers to the questions in his mind.

"You might as well know now," Smithers said bluntly. "She was seeing Burkaw, last winter, while you were at that police convention in Florida. A few of us in town knew it but we thought it best to keep it from you."

He stared at Smithers in slack-mouthed stupefaction. "Jinny?" he said. "Jinny and Burkaw?"

Smithers nodded.

They figured it out between them. Burkaw must have had something, some evidence, that he could hold over her. He'd used it to make her get certain of those papers for him. That was all. A simple thing, once you could get used to the terrible idea of Jinny and Burkaw together.

It had been Smithers' idea to hold back the truth to protect the children and Jinny's name. Carewe had gone along with it. They had cooked up the story for the newspapers between them. Mrs. Carewe, they said, had caught a prowler at the safe, frightened him away. She had been going through the papers to see if anything was missing when her husband came down and found her there. In the dark, he'd made a mistake. It was one of those things, a tragic accident.

Smithers had said that he could take care of Burkaw, shut him up. It had all come off all right. Nobody had known—or even suspected—the truth.

Nobody except Carewe himself. And that was the bad part. He thought that probably he could have taken the other, Jinny's being dead. It was the knowledge of her and Burkaw and that she would sneak around like a thief in the night to betray her husband that shattered him.

What was the matter with her, Carewe asked himself. Didn't she know that she could have come to him, and that he would have forgiven her, seen her through the thing? What kind of a man did she think he was?"

The knock on the door came then. At first he didn't answer it. He finished his drink, waited for the knocking to stop, for the servant or whoever it was to go away. But the rapping became more insistent and he finally had to unlock the door. It was Smithers. Smithers, young, handsome, ambitious, a man who was going far and fast in politics, a man with the same ruthless set to his jaw that Carewe had had when he was that age.

"Sorry to disturb you," Smithers said. "Something's come up."

Carewe shrugged. "Come in." He let the other man pass him into the room, and he shut and locked the door again. He poured Smithers a drink, handed it to him, watched the other man's intense features as he drank. "What is it?" he said. "What's come up?"

Smithers set the drink down, put his hands into the side pockets of his sport jacket. He took a deep breath, tilted up his jaw, put his level, cold gray eyes hard on Carewe's. "I've got bad news," he said. "The whole thing's blown up in our faces. The story's out."

Carewe felt the blood go from his face. "About Jinny and Burkaw?" he said. "How could it? How in hell could it?"

Smithers smiled, showing all of his perfect teeth—the smile that showed up so well in the newspaper pictures. But it was only a smile of the mouth. Smithers' eyes weren't in on it. Very softly he said: "Because I gave it out. I called them and told them the truth of the whole thing. And then I told them that you couldn't face it any longer, that you'd written a statement and left it for me and then blown your brains out."

Carewe looked at Smithers as though he was a stranger who had been jabbering

at him in double-talk. He said: "You *what?*" Then he saw Smithers' hand come out of his jacket pocket, holding Carewe's automatic, the weapon that had killed Jinny.

Smithers said: "The newspaper people will be here soon. There isn't much time." He backed two steps away from Carewe, keeping the automatic trained on him. "The other night the thing actually happened the way we told it. There was a prowler and Jinny *did* frighten him away. I was the prowler. You understand? What actually happened was the story you thought we cooked up. Jinny wasn't robbing the safe; I was."

Carewe blinked at him. He didn't try to speak. He knew he couldn't.

"You're seeing Burkaw tomorrow," Smithers said. "I was afraid that you'd let something out, that you would soon see that my story about Jinny and Burkaw was a lie. I couldn't take a chance on that. You see?"

Carewe saw. When he nodded his head in affirmation, it felt as though it would fall from his shoulders. He managed: "What were you after in the safe? Why were you messing with those papers?"

"You're not very bright." Smithers smiled smugly. "Burkaw is a big gun. He's filthy rich and has a lot of high-powered connections. There were some documents in his records that you passed over lightly, as not having any definite bearing on the immediate charges against him. I spotted them as being items that Burkaw would go to any extreme to keep from being made public. I wanted them. Those papers would be a big help to an up-and-coming young politician. But of course you wouldn't know about such things, Carewe. Rock-of-Gibraltar, Honest-John Carewe!"

"I see," Carewe said. One fact began to isolate itself, and it brought some of the life back into Carewe's great gaunt figure. Jinny was innocent. She was still dead, but had died with honor. Jinny hadn't let him down. She hadn't ripped the skids out from under him.

Carewe watched Smithers take a typewritten letter from his pocket. Smithers said: "Will you sign this for me, Carewe, or shall I have to forge it?" He shrugged. "It won't make much difference. If the signature looks strange, it will just be that you were upset. A man is always upset just before he kills himself."

Faintly, through the soundproofed room,

came the thin wail of a siren. Smithers tightened all over.

Carewe shrugged. "All right," he said. He managed a faint, cynical grin. "Why should I make it more difficult for you, Smithers?" He moved around behind his desk. "Give me the thing. I'll sign it."

Smithers stood a respectful distance from the desk and tossed the typewritten letter in front of Carewe. Carewe had a little difficulty, with his bandaged right hand, dipping the pen into the marble holder desk set. It took his left hand to steady the thing. Then it seemed that the ink was low in the well and he had to tip it to fill the pen. He tipped it toward Smithers, and with one great effort flung the heavy desk set, ink and all, at Smithers' face.

Carewe threw himself over the top of the desk at almost the same instant. He slammed the automatic out of Smithers' grip just as it went off. The thunder of it rang in his eardrums. He got his hands on Smithers, felt him struggling against him. It became elemental then. Because of Smithers, Jinny was dead; because of Smithers and his dirty, ruthless ambition. For the first time in his life Carewe wanted to kill. . . .

It was the terrible pain in his injured hand that finally brought him to his senses. The film over his eyes cleared away. He saw that he had been holding Smithers by the jacket front with his good hand and smashing Smithers' handsome face with his bad hand. He'd ripped the bandage loose, and the pain was almost more than he could stand.

Smithers was unconscious. Carewe turned his left hand loose and let the D.A. crumple to the floor.

Carewe shook himself all over like a giant mastiff and turned and moved toward the door. When he opened it, several reporters and two uniformed cops were hurrying down the hall. They all stared at Carewe as though he were a ghost.

"We—uh—heard there was some trouble here, Commissioner."

"Yes," Carewe said. "Quite some trouble. Mr. Smithers will tell you all about it, when he's able to talk."

He let them in past him, watched them stare stupidly at Smithers on the floor. While he told them the whole story, he went to work on the bourbon.

Strangely, this time it seemed to take hold. He knew that now he was going to be able to get roaring drunk. And he knew that Jinny would have approved.



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