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FICTION WEEKLY

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FICTION WEEKLY



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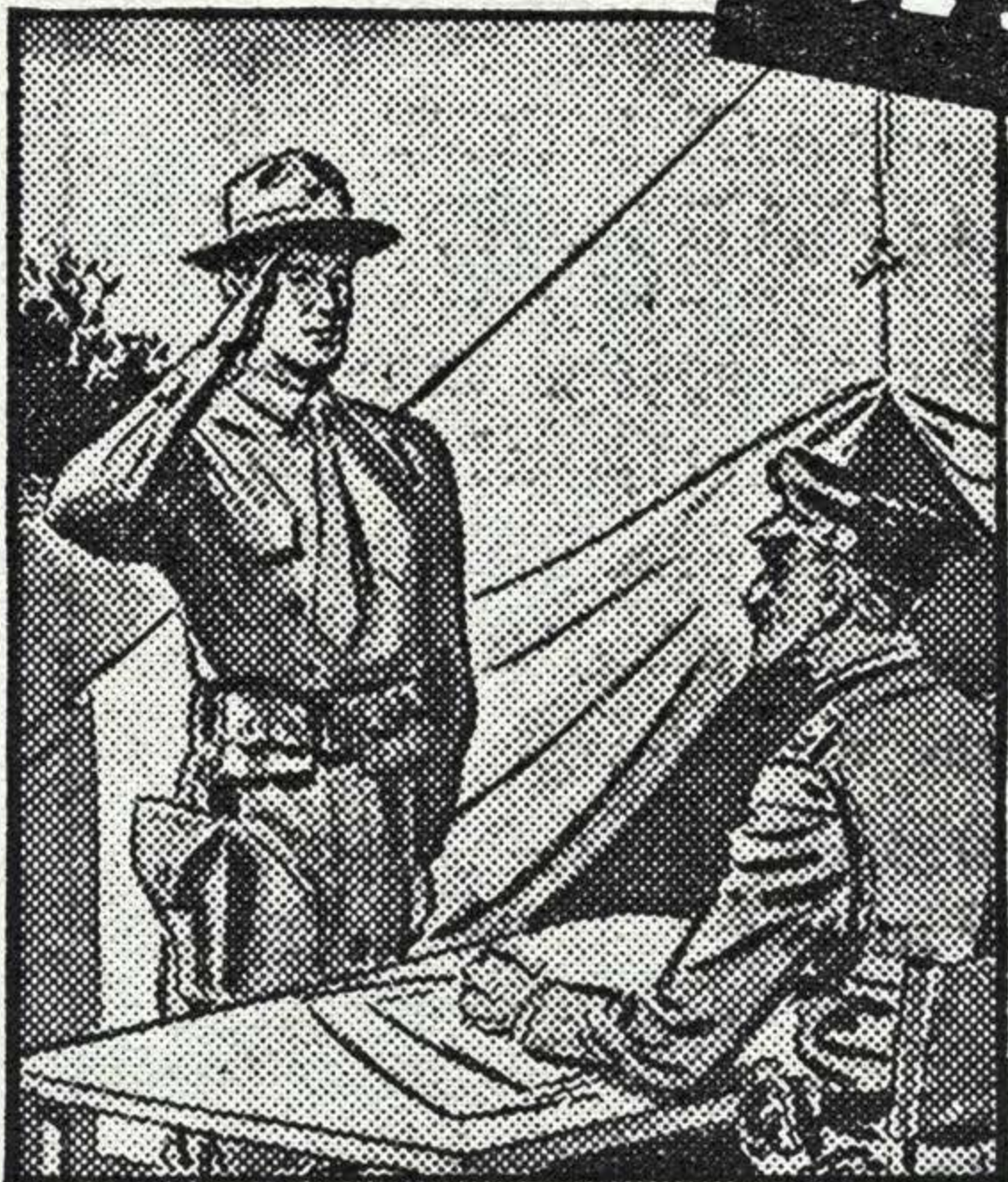
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MURDER



By Dale Clark

Author of "Mercy, Hijacked," etc.

Stanley James Baxter didn't want to go back to being a detective. He wanted to be a lawyer. But he found that a jack of two trades can trump an ace

BAXTER looked at his strap-watch. It was twelve minutes past two o'clock—and the client's letter said two o'clock sharp. It said so in typewritten words across a sheet of excellent bond paper; costly, watermarked paper with expensively engraved initials—*J C*—in an upper corner, over the impressively scrawled signature of Joseph Callum.

Stan Baxter looked at the letter again. It was brief, businesslike. It was also cryptic. Mr. Callum begged to see Mr. Baxter in the latter's law office on Bay Street, on Tuesday the eleventh, at two o'clock sharp, on a matter of the utmost importance.

The importance of the matter was emphasized by a slip of blue paper clipped to Mr. Callum's fine bond stationery. It was a bank check, drawn on the First National Trust & Savings

to the order of Stanley J. Baxter, in the amount of Five Hundred Dollars and No Cents. Across its stub end appeared the legend, *Retained Fee*.

An important check—but also a cryptic one. It lacked one detail. Mr. Joseph Callum had neglected to sign his name on the check.

Which left everything up in the air.

The hands of the strapwatch crept on to fifteen minutes past the appointed hour. Stan Baxter drew a long breath, exhaled slowly, and stared moodily across the law office. It was a very nice little office, neatly and modernly furnished. The single wide window gave upon a charming view of the oceanfront.

Stan Baxter, however, was getting a little tired of the charming view. A vigorous and athletic man is apt to find window gazing a tiresome sport, es-

WHOLESALE



pecially when indulged in for three solid months.

He suddenly laughed and said: "Those sons-a-guns!"

The laugh was only slightly tinged with bitterness.

He stood up, shrugged, and walked to the outer office. It was likewise newly and modernly furnished, and occupied by a very pretty and very red-headed young woman who sat at the reception desk. She had a pencil in hand, and was idly sketching wisdom teeth onto a notepad.

Stan Baxter said: "Okay, Delevan. Thanks a lot, but you might as well go now."

Miss Delevan was employed, by the dentist across the hall. For one month, Stan Baxter had a girl regularly at the desk, but she had quit, unable to bear the monotony.

The red-headed girl looked surprised. "But Mr. Callum hasn't come yet."

Stan Baxter grunted.

"He won't. It's a rib, a phony, a practical joke. If I make myself clear," said Stan Baxter, "Mr. Callum is only



"A dark figure hurtled down upon him"

a kind of a Charlie McCarthy invented by the boys at Sweeney's."

Miss Delevan said, "Oh-h. . . ." She knew that Sweeney's Confidential was one of the largest private detective agencies on the Coast. And she also knew that Stan Baxter had been—before he passed the Bar exams—one of Sweeney's prize operatives.

Her perfect lips tightened. She looked closely at Stan Baxter. There was neither sag nor a forced squareness to his wide and well-tailored shoulders. His flexible mouth grinned at her easily. His gray eyes were careless at their surface.

But Miss Delevan, being a woman, looked deeply.

"That," she said, "is a rotten trick. They must be a fine lot of heels, those playmates of yours."

Stan Baxter said, "Maybe they're right, at that. They said all along I was a sap to go to night school, and be a flop as a lawyer. When I really was a pretty fair dick."

Miss Delevan said, "You're no flop! All you need is the break, Mr. Baxter!"

"Maybe. But how to get it? I can't drag people in off the streets."

Miss Delevan said, "Well, my opinion is—"

Her opinion was never voiced. Because at that moment—eighteen minutes past the hour—the door opened. It did so slowly, being pushed by an elderly man.

"Baxter?" the man asked. "I'm Callum. Sorry I'm late. Infernal traffic today! But better late than never is my motto."

JOSEPH CALLUM announced his motto in the shrill tones of a deaf man. His voice was high, sharp, and more than a little acid. He wore a little black bakelite fungus back of his

ear, an audicle of the bone-conduction type. A wire from it went down Mr. Callum's scrawny neck and vanished inside the collar of his black coat.

For the rest of him, the client was not an impressive nor appealing personality. His sharp little face wore a shriveled and embittered look. His shoulders stooped, and his knees canted in outward directions. He was a man in whom the juices of life appeared mostly to have dried up—or turned to vinegar.

But he was a client. He looked very, very good to Stan Baxter.

"Come in, sir!" said Stan. "This way."

Mr. Callum hobbled into the inner office. Stan guided him to a chair in front of the desk, placed to get the utmost benefit of the sunshiny window. A detective's trick, that.

"Young man," said Joseph Callum, "I'll come right to the point. A bird in the hand is worth two beating around the bush, I always say."

And he laughed a cackling, shrill laugh.

Stan sat studying the man's sharp eyes. "Yes, sir?"

Callum came to the point: "I own some of that six per cent preferred stock in the Randt Camera Company. It isn't paying dividends. Maybe you knew that?"

Baxter nodded. He knew the Randt company—as most people in the small city did. It manufactured an inexpensive camera of the "candid" type, a nationally advertised product.

The Randt concern was one of the most reputable and successful of the local industrial enterprises. True, recent dividends had been skipped—but that was supposed to be because the company had put a good deal of money into building an addition to the plant.

Stan said, "You want to put your stock into some form of trust for your heirs, I suppose?"

Mr. Callum's wry mouth twisted into a sneer.

"Not a bit of it!" he said emphatically. "I want to bring suit and get my dividends."

A surprised look grew on Stan Baxter's lean features. "But, Mr. Callum, surely you understand—"

The older man interrupted brusquely.

"I understand plenty! I know that Randt is making a lot of money—a whole lot more than the semi-annual statement shows. Julius Randt isn't paying dividends because he's got control of the business, and he's using it to cheat the rest of us little stockholders!"

The young lawyer's eyes narrowed. Callum's charge was hard to believe. Stan Baxter knew of Julius Randt—not personally, but as a respected business name.

Randt was a member of the Better Business group, an ex-chairman of the Community Chest drive, and a subscriber to the Hospital Aid, to name only a few of his activities. There were really few charitable or public spirited movements which failed to get his support.

Callum's accusation sounded absurd.

And yet, Stan knew, many men just as respectable as Julius Randt had wound up behind prison bars. In fact, Stan had helped put more than one of them there.

He said, "That's an extremely serious charge. Can you prove it, Callum?"

Joseph Callum fumbled inside his black coat, drew a sheaf of papers from a flat leather case, and spread the papers before Stan.

The young lawyer grunted. "These aren't originals."

"Of course not!" snapped the old man. "I've got them locked up in my safe at home. They're valuable!"

STAN BAXTER scanned the copies swiftly. "It seems the Randt company has been shipping out a lot more cameras than its semi-annual statement shows."

Again the audicle caught sunlight as Joseph Callum nodded. "Exactly! Yes, sir! Julius Randt is putting that money in his pocket, and buying up stock, cheap, from poor people who're scared out by not getting their dividends regular."

Stan's lean features wore a frown. "How did you get this information?"

"The invoice copies? I bribed a clerk over there," said Callum. "Fight fire with fire, that's my motto! You have to be a little crooked to catch a crook."

"And you want to sue for your dividends?"

"I aim higher than that," Joseph Callum said severely. "I figure to have the court appoint a referee in the minority stockholders' interests. I want Randt's books impounded. You can't tell how much more dirty dealing may be going on. It's a referee's job."

Stan was a little surprised by Callum's acute knowledge of the legal possibilities.

He said, "That could be done. It would cost a devil of a lot of money. Are you in a position to fight your way through the courts?"

Mr. Callum's face was grim. "I'll do it if it breaks me!"

Stan inspected the man steadily.

"Look here," he said. "Randt may be as fraudulent as you think, or he may not. Your information comes by a bribery, and a man who will take a

bribe may be cheat enough to forge invoices. Why not try to settle this matter less expensively?"

"How, young man?"

Stan drew a slow breath. "Why, I happen to know Judge Elmore—he's legal representative for the Randt company. I could have a talk with him. We might come to a friendly settlement."

Mr. Callum grinned a sharp little grin.

"Now, wait," he said. "I'm not empowering you to go and sign a settlement with Horace Elmore."

"Of course not. I only want to see whether Randt is willing to open his books for inspection without a court order—it may be an honest mistake has been made."

"You won't get far. Horace Elmore will outsharp you, young man. He's a sharper from 'way back, the judge is."

Stan grunted. A peculiar smile lifted the corners of his wide, firm lips. "You haven't much confidence in me, Callum. Why hire me at all?"

The older man sniffed. "Because nine out of ten lawyers are *afraid* to tackle Randt. They know he's got the money on his side, and the newspapers, and influence enough to run a man out of business for daring to fight him. They know all about his political pull, too."

Callum's voice softened. "I looked you up, Baxter. You ain't the smartest attorney on earth, you got plenty to learn—but they can't scare you! You'll tackle *anything*! That's the reputation you had at Sweeney's, and I reckon it still holds good."

Stan said, "Even if I don't get far with Elmore, I'd like to try."

"Huh? Well, go ahead. Get his proposition, whatever it is." Callum stood up. "I'll sign that check, young man."

He bent over the desk, scrawled a signature onto the blue slip. Stan Baxter observed that the man's hand was well fleshed, and firm.

It struck him that Joseph Callum was not so old, after all—fifty, maybe. And perhaps he really did not need to hobble along in that painful walk of his.

Some of the flush of excitement had worn off, and Stan's detective training came to the fore.

"I want to see those original papers, Callum."

"Any time. Come out tonight." And Callum mentioned an address in the North Bay district.

Reassured, Stan picked up the check as the other hobbled out of the office. He looked at the blue slip with a grin. His first real retainer fee! There was a thrill in fingering the check.

MISS DELEVAN'S attractive figure slipped through the doorway a moment later. "Well?" the girl asked. "Did he—?"

Stan grinned happily.

"You're just in time for the ceremony." He walked to the wall where two picture frames hung. One contained the document which certified Stanley James Baxter as a member of the Bar. The other and smaller one held his private detective's license. He took down the license and tossed it into the wastebasket.

"Goodby, gumshoe days!" he said gayly.

A sudden thought struck Miss Delevan.

"Say!" she exclaimed. "What's wrong with being a detective, anyway?"

"Nothing. It was an exciting life—I enjoyed it."

The girl frowned. "Why'd you quit?"

What do you want to sit around an office and be a jury spieler for?"

"Because a private cop doesn't rate."

"Doesn't what?"

Stan smiled a little. "Doesn't count. For instance, did you ever hear of a private dick being invited into one of those Lycinth Hill homes—except maybe to watch the silverware at a party?"

Miss Delevan cocked her auburn head on one side. "Well, who wants to be invit—oh! Mr. Baxter, I bet it's a girl! A Lycinth Hill girl!"

CHAPTER II

Price of Honor

JUDGE ELMORE lived with his daughter in one of the largest homes on Lycinth Hill; and he had elaborate offices in the office wing of the Randt Camera Company plant.

Seated in his office, Elmore made a picture of hearty and genial middle age. He wore a fawn-colored waistcoat and pearl gray spats—he was a good deal of an actor by temperament.

He laughed softly. "I don't think there's a thing to Callum's story, Baxter. Do you know the fellow—I mean, personally?"

His tone was indulgent, kindly. Like-wise his florid face wore an indulgent smile. He was one of those hearty, hale men, like the hard-drinking, fast-living, high-gambling men who'd carved empires on the Coast two generations ago. Only *his* empire was already carved before he was born.

Stan shook his head. "I never heard of him until I got that letter."

Elmore took it all as rather a joke. He took life pretty easily, anyway—had never had to otherwise.

Also his manner was a bit patronizing. He remembered Stan Baxter as

the private detective who had cleverly recovered a diamond clasp stolen from the judge's daughter, Selma. But evidently he didn't regard the young man as a lawyer to be taken seriously.

"Didn't it seem odd that he'd pick you—without legal experience—to tackle such an important case?"

Stan frowned. "What are you hitting at, Judge?"

Baxter's eyes were watchful. He did not make the mistake of underestimating the big, florid man. He knew that Elmore could be exceptionally crafty if forced into a corner. Stan understood perfectly that Horace Elmore was not a famous attorney merely because he did not have to be: the man was lazy, perhaps, but not dull.

Elmore said, "I'm hitting at Callum. It happens that I *do* know him—have known him for a long time. Joseph Callum was a clerk in my father's law office, years ago, when I was first admitted to the Bar. He was older than I; around thirty then, and he hadn't yet passed his own exams."

"His exams?"

Elmore chuckled dryly. "I don't suppose he told you he was a lawyer himself?"

Stan Baxter shook his head.

"Oh, yes," said the judge. "Callum knows the law—knows it better than either you or I do. He specialized in corporation law. It's a racket with him. The man's a professional troublemaker."

Baxter said nothing.

"Callum hunts corporations," said Elmore. "He's a rotten sportsman, and likes to pick on cripples. But he'll jump any business that looks profitable to him. His method is very simple. He first buys a small amount of stock. That gives him legal rights as a minority stockholder, makes it possible

for him to threaten court action. He files a lawsuit on more or less trumped-up grounds. And then he permits the corporation to buy him off—make a 'settlement' as he calls it—rather than fight a long, expensive legal battle."

Elmore's tone was positive, a little tolerant. But of course, he represented the Randt company. It was his job to halt any move of Callum's, Stan Baxter reflected.

"You don't have to take my word for it," the judge said quickly. "You can look up his record for yourself. I said that Callum *was* a lawyer; he isn't, now. He was kicked out of the profession a few years ago. The charge was extortion. He made the mistake of trying to shake down a railroad, and they beat him badly."

Stan's wide lips tightened. "I'll certainly look into that, Judge."

Elmore took a cork-tipped cigarette from a box on the desk, offered the younger man one.

"Since then," he continued, "Joe Callum hasn't been able to try his own cases in court. He has to find other lawyers, and generally he selects young men. Chaps like yourself, Baxter, who are desperately anxious to get worthwhile cases. He never keeps them long, for the simple reason he never pays them. He swindles his attorneys just as he swindles everyone else."

"He wrote me a five hundred dollar retainer fee check."

"Did he? It's the last money you'll ever get out of him," Horace Elmore predicted. "And five hundred dollars isn't a big price to pay for a man's honor, is it?"

THE office door opened with the last words. A voice behind Stan exclaimed: "Oh! I'm sorry, Father. I didn't know—"

"No! Come in, Selma!" Judge Elmore stood up quickly behind his desk. "You remember Mr. Baxter, don't you, Selma?"

As Stan also got to his feet and turned, the girl came into the room. She was a slim young creature, brunette, with provocative brown eyes. She was more beautiful than he remembered her, and she had been very lovely then—at eighteen. She must be nearly twenty-one now.

Selma Elmore gave the young man a moment's study. She saw a powerfully built athlete, supple for all his strength; with a leanly hewn face in which were a pair of penetrating gray eyes.

She laughed softly. "Of course I do! My diamond clasp was stolen, and—but I'm sure you don't remember me, Mr. Baxter. A little thing like a jewel theft was nothing unusual for you. It was terribly exciting for me. And I thought you were too marvelously clever for words about it!"

Stan Baxter said, "I remember it! It was the first time I'd ever met people like you—and your father—to talk to."

He couldn't tell her how much that glimpse of her world had urged him on in his law studies.

Selma turned excited eyes to the judge. "What is this? Another case? I heard something about the price of a man's honor. Is it a secret, or—?"

Elmore smiled fondly at the girl.

"I was only telling Mr. Baxter," he said, "that five hundred dollars is a small price to pay for his future. It isn't enough to make up for his study and effort. You see, Selma, Mr. Baxter is a lawyer now. He's been offered a case, the kind of a case which could very easily get him disbarred and blacklisted, and I'm advising him not to take it."

The girl exclaimed, "For heaven's sake!"

"Yes," said Elmore. "Callum's been after him to do a job."

"Callum," the girl repeated. Her brown gaze returned to Stan Baxter. She said, very seriously:

"Please be careful, Mr. Baxter. I remember the last trouble Joseph Callum was in. It happened five years ago. I was at the Briarcliffe school then, and so was his niece. An awfully sweet girl. It was frightful for her when the story got out. You see, her parents were dead and she lived with Callum. The school sent her packing back to him when the scandal broke."

Stan said, "Sent her home! Was it her fault?"

"Of course it wasn't. But that's the way they ran Briarcliffe. You can call it snobbish," said Selma, "and it was—but it hurt Lois awfully. It really spoiled her life. Because her friends dropped her, and all."

Judge Elmore said, "Selma still sees her. But the poor girl has no social life. It's partly her fault, she's so sensitive about the disgrace."

Selma's eyes flashed.

"That's what happens to folks who get mixed up with Callum," she declared. "He's a hoodoo, that's what he is. And I hope Mr. Baxter tells him to go jump in the river—a nice, deep one!"

Stan quietly took in the situation. If his judgment of human nature meant anything, the girl was utterly in earnest. It would be ridiculous to doubt her sincerity.

But he was not so sure of the judge. Knowing his daughter's distrust of Callum, Elmore might have seized the opportunity to ring her in on the discussion. It would have been a clever move.

"Thanks for the warning," Stan said calmly. "I'll watch my step. But even if Callum has been a racketeer, a lot still depends upon those invoice copies. I will have to see those before I decide."

"They're probably forgeries," Horace Elmore shrugged. "There's another angle to this I haven't told you about."

"Well?"

"Do you know anything about cameras, Mr. Baxter?"

"Not much," Stan grinned. "I used to carry one to get evidence with. Why?"

"Because," said Elmore, "cameras are equipped with lenses. The Randt company does not manufacture its own lenses. We buy those from the Clarex people. There was some trouble about an inventor's royalties recently. I needn't go into it, except to say that I know positively how many lenses we've bought from Clarex. And the number checks perfectly with our production as shown on the annual stockholders' statement."

His florid face was bland. "You see, Baxter? We obviously could not sell cameras without lenses. We could not therefore be making the shipments as charged by Callum. I give you my word of honor on that."

Selma smiled. "I think Mr. Baxter is detective enough to see through Mr. Joseph Callum's game, whatever it is."

"I hope so." Elmore came around the desk to grip Stan's hand in a friendly clasp. "I hate to see a young man's career ruined by getting mixed into one of Callum's rotten shake-downs."

"All right, and thanks," said Stan. "I'll go over his evidence with a fine-tooth comb. Good day, and goodby, Miss Elmore."

"Wait a moment," said the judge,

"We'll have Harne in here in a moment."

HE LIFTED a phone from the desk and spoke quietly into it. Selma helped herself to a cigarette from the box, turned to Stan for a light. He snapped a lighter aflame. The delicate perfume from her hair reached him, then he was drowned in the cigarette's aroma.

She did not step back. "So you're practicing law now?"

"I'm—hoping to."

"It's slow at first." Her eyes rested on him curiously. "A lawyer. You don't look like one."

"I don't know—how do you mean?"

"Oh. They're mostly—the ones I know, anyway—rather bookish and dried up, and they talk like lawyers. I mean, they *subpoena* a girl to dance with them. You don't speak the lingo, do you?"

A well set-up, square-chinned man of about thirty came briskly into the room.

"This is John Harne, our general manager," Judge Elmore said. "What do the books show about that matter, John?"

Harne shook hands with Stan Baxter. "Callum? He bought his shares four months ago. He owns only six shares."

"You see?" asked Elmore. "It's the same old game. A man with six shares wouldn't be filing suit except to make a nuisance of himself."

Harne had turned to the girl. "Ready, Selma?"

She nodded.

"I'm driving Miss Elmore home," Harne said. "Can we drop you anywhere, Mr. Baxter?"

"No, I go the other way."

Stan Baxter walked slowly out of

the building. He stopped to stare at a street improvement steam shovel beside the high, wire riot-fence. He was still standing there when the gate opened and a low-slung roadster swung onto the pavement. He stared after the two heads: Harne's and Selma Elmore's. He wondered how well they knew each other, and whether—

He growled, "The devil!"

Harne was Randt's general manager, a successful man, one of the girl's set.

And Stan's own first step up the ladder seemed to have landed him on a very rotten limb.

He got into his own coupé.

It was super-powered and super-gearred—a costly "speedball" which reminded him forcibly of his days at Sweeney's agency. He'd made good money then. He was beginning to think he'd been a fool to quit making it.

CHAPTER III

Death Rings a Doorbell

IT WAS already dark when Stan Baxter emerged from the *Daily Bulletin* building. He'd gotten a good deal by consulting the newspaper's "morgue." There was quite a large envelope stuffed with clippings about Joseph Callum, and the clippings confirmed Judge Elmore perfectly. Callum had been disbarred, although the railroad's effort to jail the man for extortion had failed.

It hadn't been so easy to check the other angle. But a generous tip to the attendant had brought an armful of envelopes, from one of which Stan extracted a clipping relating to the Clarex patent suit. Horace Elmore had spoken truly of that also, or else a Federal court had erred badly.

Stan got into his coupé. Callum's check, he suspected strongly, would

have to be returned uncashed. After that, he could go back to waiting in the law office. Unless he said goodby to the legal profession, and picked his sleuth's license out of the wastebasket. . . .

He drove slowly along the palm-fringed boulevard, thinking the thing over.

Callum's was an old-fashioned, rambling house in the North Bay district. The North Bay being not really a bay at all, but a salt water marsh out of which the hills rose sharply. The Callum home clung to one of these hills. The large lot was bordered on one side by a twisting street, on the other by a cañon which had eaten deeply into the property. To halt erosion, a retaining wall had been built along the cañon's edge. The lawn on that side was freshly seeded.

These were all-important facts. Stan Baxter barely noticed them as he followed the concrete path to the doorstep. There was no porch, but a bulb burning over the entrance shed a yellow glow across the yard.

The door stood slightly ajar, six inches or so. Without glancing into the opening—why should he?—Stan applied his thumb to the doorbell button.

The ring that followed was extraordinarily loud. There were quick footfalls inside the house, and then a queerly choked voice that said:

"No! No! Go to the side door!"

The voice sent an electric thrill over Baxter's well-attuned nervous system. He sidestepped quickly to the cañon side of the flagged doorstep, and his gray stare probed into the door's opening.

The door was held by a stoutly linked burglar chain. Otherwise Joseph Callum would have tumbled out onto the step.

Stan Baxter ejaculated: "Aaah-ah!" and his leanly tanned face tightened and grew darker in the yellow light of the overhead bulb.

Joseph Callum was dead, by violence. There was a bullet wound in his chest, Stan instantly saw. It seemed to have been a bullet directly through his heart, though a layman could not be sure of that.

He had fallen against the door, crumpled into a curious sitting posture there. The sharp features, painfully twisted in death, peered blindly toward Stan.

"The side door!" that choked voice repeated. "I can't let you in here!"

It was a feminine voice. Its owner had moved along the hall, in an effort to look out the opening without closely approaching the dead body. Stan saw a young girl, very blonde. She might have been pretty, or not; her face was contorted with fright, a mask of horror.

STAN BAXTER said, "Yeah! Sure!" and ran along the side of the house. There was no walk here. His feet crunched deeply into the raw, new-spread earth. Twin lanes of concrete led to a garage back of the house; a wider lane branched from the nearer, and went up to the side door.

That door was open, held open. Stan got a second, sharp start. He cried, "Miss Elmore!"

It was certainly Selma Elmore who held that door open for him. Her brown eyes held astonishment rivaling his own. She said: "You! We expected the police. . . . Come in!"

The room was a parlor, furnished as parlors usually are: Baxter scarcely noticed it. He demanded, "What happened?"

The other girl answered. She stood

now in the other doorway, one that opened upon the hall. The opening was draped with a brown, fringed curtain, and the fingers of one hand were tightly buried in the drape.

She said, "He went to answer the doorbell. Someone standing outside shot him."

Selma Elmore interposed, "Lois, this is Mr. Baxter. I'm sure I told you about my clasp—that Mr. Baxter."

Lois did not acknowledge the introduction. She said, "The doorbell rang twice."

Lois was pretty, Stan decided. She had strangely colored hair, very like the color of a ripened lemon. Her eyes were an odd shade of blue. The straight young nose bore, at the top of its bridge, the prints left by Oxford glasses.

It was, however, a strained prettiness. Rather a morose young lady, Stan thought, recognizing the fine lines which did not belong on so young a face.

"I'll have a look," he said.

The light in the hallway was no brighter than such lights generally are, the bulb being enclosed in a pale amber glass lantern. He bent closely over Joseph Callum's body and studied the wound. And said, "Blamed queer!"

There was not a trace of powder burn on the smoking jacket.

Baxter straightened, inspected the door jamb where the bullet had buried itself. That, of course, meant little yet. Until the autopsy had disclosed the deflection of the slug as it passed through the man.

Stan walked back into the parlor. "You called the police?"

"Of course," Selma said. "As soon as it happened."

"When was that?"

"About five minutes ago, I suppose."

"You suppose?"

"We were too rattled to think about the time."

Stan said, "I'll have a look outside."

He strode along the garage drive to his car and snapped the flashlight out of its clips on the steering post. Returning along the front walk, he played the beam across the freshly seeded lawn, as far as the cañon wall. There was not a footprint anywhere upon that expanse of soft earth. Stan was shaking his head over it when the police car braked at the curb.

DECIDEDLY not happy to find Baxter already at the scene was Lieutenant George Andreason, Homicide Division. Private detectives have their place in the scheme of things, but they ought not meddle in murder—was his typical and official view. They are employed by individuals, and have an understandable prejudice in favor of their employers. Homicide, he reckoned, was the exclusive business of the State.

Andreason brightened as Stan explained. "Oh. You're in the law game now?"

"Yes, and Callum had asked me to handle a case for him." Stan Baxter hesitated a moment. "It was a suit against the Randt company, Lieutenant. Callum claimed to have some very valuable papers about that stored away in his safe."

The officer shrugged. "I guess it ain't important. The Randt company wouldn't go around bumping people off, you know."

"No-o; not likely."

"We'll go in and have a look-see," said the lieutenant.

The driver of the car was a uniformed cop; this man was stationed outside, to keep anyone attracted by the

arrival of the squad, away from the grounds.

Andreason and his men went in. The big bald lieutenant looked about the front hallway. The police photographer began to snap pictures.

Stan glanced through an open door into Callum's study. The iron safe in the corner of the room was closed. He stepped into try it, found the safe locked.

He returned to the parlor, stopped in front of Lois Callum, who now was seated on the divan. "Do you know the combination to your uncle's safe?"

She shook her head.

"We'll have to wait for a court order to open it, then," Stan muttered.

Andreason came in. "Miss Callum, which one of you is Miss Callum?"

He wanted to know whether the dead man had any enemies. Anyone who could have had reason to murder him? Any labor trouble? Had he been threatened by racketeers, then? These were routine questions. The lieutenant was simply striking out blindly into the dark, Stan Baxter saw.

Lois said faintly, "I don't know. He never told me anything about his business."

She seemed stunned by the tragedy.

"Well, you might have noticed," said Andreason. "Did he seem worried about anything? Anxious? Afraid?"

"He was quite as usual."

The lieutenant veered off, seeking an account of the murder itself.

"The doorbell rang twice. How far apart?"

Selma Elmore said, "Only a few seconds, officer."

"And then you heard the shot right away?"

Selma said, "No. I think half a minute later."

"Don't count." The lieutenant con-

cealed his silver watch in his large red hand. "Now—say when."

"When," breathed the girl after an interval.

Stan Baxter had kept looking at his strapwatch. Selma's half minute was in fact fifty-three seconds.

But Andreason put away the watch without comment. "What did you do when you heard the shot?"

"I ran out of the room," Selma related. "To the head of the stairs. I could see the front door from there."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "You girls were upstairs tonight?"

"Yes, in Lois's room."

The blonde girl looked up quickly. "I always entertain my own guests upstairs."

"You do, hey?" Andreason looked around. "I should think there'd be plenty of room down here for that."

Stan Baxter stood silently watching. He knew Andreason well enough to see that the man had a grip on some idea now.

"Anyway," said Lois, "there were the men downstairs."

"Men?"

"There were two of them to see Uncle Joe tonight."

"Yeah? Who?"

Lois said, "Mr. Frank Kendall came first, about an hour ago."

Stan started slightly. Frank Kendall—that meant the president of the Ameroptic Company. A business rival of the Randt concern. It struck him that the Randt affair kept pushing into this murder pretty consistently.

But Andreason grunted, "I guess we can count Frank Kendall out of any murders." And Kendall, like Randt, was one of the city's leading business men—not a very likely suspect. "Who was the other guy?"

"A tall blond man," said Lois. "He

came afterward, half an hour ago. I didn't get his name. Uncle Joe came out of his study and shook hands with him in the hall."

Stan saw the lieutenant's interest leap. Andreason couldn't imagine interests like the Randt and Kendall companies involved in murder. But a mysterious, nameless stranger—!

HE DEMANDED a description. What did the man wear? "A gray suit," Lois thought. How tall was he? "Six feet." How much did he weigh? "A hundred and sixty pounds."

Andreason resorted to a favorite trick. "Baxter here stands six feet. What do you guess he weighs?"

Lois said, "The blond man was about his size."

In fact, Stan weighed one-eighty-five.

Andreason shrugged. "How come you saw him, anyway? You were upstairs, you said."

Lois nodded. "I came down to answer the doorbell. Uncle Joe was deaf. He might not hear it with the study door closed."

The lieutenant looked surprised. "I'd call that the maid's job."

"Uncle hired no maid," said Lois. "He had a niece."

Her bitterness did not escape Stan or the officer. Andreason came closer to the blonde girl. "Yeah? But you didn't answer the doorbell when it rang twice?"

"No," said Lois. "Because Uncle Joe came out into the hall and said he would."

"How'd you know that?"

Lois drew a slow breath. "I'd come to get my glasses. They were in the kitchen. I was at the kitchen door when the bell rang. And I was still looking for the glasses when I heard the shot."

Lieutenant Andreason's face changed, tightened. He said hoarsely: "Yeah! You girls weren't *both* upstairs when it happened!"

CHAPTER IV

Under Arrest

STAN BAXTER saw that Andreason was no longer striking out blindly in the dark. On the contrary, every movement and gesture of the big, bald man became fired with decision. No nonsense about mysterious blond men now.

The lieutenant turned sharply to Selma Elmore. "You were at the head of the stairs. Looking at the front door. What then?"

"I ran downstairs. I turned to Lois and said, 'He's dead! He's murdered!'"

"How'd you know he was dead?"

"Because I looked at him."

Andreason nodded. "And where was Miss Callum?"

"In the kitchen doorway at the other end of the hall."

"Come on," said Andreason. "Come on upstairs. Where's this girl's room you were in?"

Stan shrugged and walked out into the hall. He watched Andreason and Selma go up the steps. A few moments later he heard the lieutenant's voice on the landing above:

"You ran out here. And looked down. Is that right?"

"I said so," answered Selma.

"You looked how long?"

"Only a moment."

"But you didn't see Miss Callum in the kitchen doorway from here?"

A trace of impatience came into the girl's reply. "The kitchen doorway can't be seen from here."

They came downstairs. Andreason

held the watch in his hand. He said: "That took almost a minute. You probably stopped on the landing longer than you think. When you saw that dead body and blood. It might have been more than a minute, from the time of the shot until you saw Miss Callum there in the kitchen door.

"Let's have that gun, Leo."

It was a six-shooter of foreign make, but chambered to take American ammunition.

"Look here, Miss Callum," said the lieutenant, "you've seen this before, haven't you?"

The blonde girl put on her Oxford glasses before replying. "It looks like Uncle Joe's gun."

"It was in his jacket pocket," Andreason rumbled. "What was he carrying a gat for?"

"I couldn't tell you. He bought it not long ago. He said he had important papers in the house," Lois declared.

"It ain't registered," said Leo. "I used the phone in his study; that gat ain't registered."

"A mail order gun," said the lieutenant. "How long since you fired it, Miss Callum?"

"I haven't!"

"It's been fired, though," Andreason asserted, sniffing the barrel. "And then loaded up again. Now, that slug, Leo."

Andreason said, "It's a .38. It's consistent with this gun of his."

At that moment the coroner's assistant and morgue wagon men reached the door.

The lieutenant sighed. "Well, we'll see about the autopsy showing. I guess, Miss Callum, maybe you better come down town with me."

Selma flared, "You're *arresting* her?"

"Oh, no. Not at all," Andreason said mildly. "We're just investigating."

STAN BAXTER drove Selma Elmore home. "Of course," he said as the coupé climbed the long, palm-lined ascent of Lycinth Hill Drive, "it's easy to see Andreason's theory. Lois rang the doorbell, and shot her uncle when he came to the door. She pushed a fresh cartridge into the gun, and reached into the doorway to push the weapon into his pocket. Then she ran around into the kitchen, and got there by the time you came downstairs."

Selma turned in the seat to stare at the young man's firm profile.

"Mr. Baxter, you don't think that. Lois didn't! I know she didn't!"

Stan's gray eyes were fixed straight ahead.

"I don't think she did, either. I looked. There was no powder burn on him. Those were smokeless cartridges in the gun, but at that distance. . . ."

Selma breathed her relief. And then asked, "Why didn't you tell him that? It clears her, doesn't it?"

"It ought to clear anybody. But he's dead. Someone killed him. Without leaving a powder burn or a foot print on the yard," said Stan. "My guess would be that the killer rang the doorbell, and then ran along the walk to the street and got onto the cañon retaining wall. That's where the shot came from."

Selma's brown head shook dejectedly. "But you said she didn't do it. Now you say she could have."

Baxter wheeled the coupé onto the curving driveway across Judge Elmore's grounds.

"No," he said, braking the car. "It's seventy-five feet at least from that wall to the door. Hitting a man—killing a man—through a six-inch crack at twenty-five yards with a pistol is *shooting*. Especially at night. And with one of those imported guns—they're

not accurate. I don't believe that a girl could do it unless she'd practiced a lot, and even then she'd need a better gun than that one."

"Besides, why should she try?" asked Selma. "Why should anyone try?"

"I expect he didn't want to be seen under the entrance light if anyone walked by. He might have expected Callum to step out onto the walk and look around."

Selma said. "You're a good deal smarter than Andreason."

"Not at all," muttered Stan. "The lieutenant has thought of all these angles, and one more. If Lois did it, what's become of the used cartridge? That's why he wants her downtown, to be searched by a police matron."

"Well, they won't find it on her!"

"No. It might have been thrown over the wall into the cañon, though."

Stan unlatched the coupe's door. But the girl's hand found his sleeve.

"Mr. Baxter," she said impulsively, "you've got to help Lois!"

Stan said, "She may not need a lawyer. The police won't press charges, not on the evidence Andreason has now."

Selma shook her brown head. "The police! It will be just as bad for Lois if they don't press charges against anyone. People will whisper. And she's suffered enough condemnation for other person's crimes, poor kid. I didn't mean as a lawyer. You're a detective. You could find out who really killed Joseph Callum."

She paused, studying Stan Baxter's lean face. It was a good face, the girl thought—hard and efficient, but decent in every line of it. He differed from the other young men she knew. He was stronger, surer, made of better metal.

"I'm going to trust you, Stan Bax-

ter," she said, having made up her mind in a flash. "There was something I didn't tell Lieutenant Andreason."

"What?" Stan looked startled.

"Yes. I was there tonight because Lois asked me to come. I had to break a date with John Harne to go to her. It was—she had come to a breaking point. Callum never showed the least affection for her. He sent Lois to Briarcliffe only because it was easier than having a growing child on his hands. For the last five years, Lois has been a drudge in that house—paid less and treated worse than a servant."

"Well?"

"She couldn't go without money. Tonight she told me about it," said Selma, "and I wrote out a check to help her. If the police matron finds that, Andreason will learn two things. First, the bad feeling between Lois and her uncle. And second, he'll decide I'm so prejudiced in favor of Lois that I might be lying about the whole thing to shield her."

"Stan Baxter," she concluded, "it's shameful for you to stand by and do nothing when you could so easily help that poor girl!"

"Not easily. It won't be easy, Miss Elmore."

The girl's lips curled into a vexed line. "Well! Is there some *reason* you won't promise to help Lois?"

Stan's lean face wore a strained look. There was a reason, but how could he tell her? A very definite reason why he hated to see Selma Elmore plunged into this tragedy. She was loyal and brave—and terribly young.

She'd never stopped to think that since Lois must be innocent, someone else was guilty. Stan's mind flashed again to the Randt company. He wondered whether Selma would not live to regret bitterly asking for an investiga-

tion of this murder. He could not say so, but he felt she was tempting the Fates by asking him to track down a murderer without suspecting where the chase might lead.

"Well?" the girl demanded.

Stari spoke slowly.

"I haven't refused. I've only told you it's a hard job. We'll watch. We'll see in the morning how it looks. The police may have it solved by then."

Her smile was relieved. "But if the police don't, you will!"

She unlatched the coupé's door; said, "No, don't bother to get out. Thanks a lot, Mr. Baxter."

Then the girl paused, her hand still on the sill of the coupé's window. "Call me up as soon as you learn anything, won't you?"

Stan Baxter said, "Yes," absently. He was staring at the ring on her left hand. He hadn't noticed it before.

John Harne's diamond, he guessed. She had broken a date with Harne to-night, she'd said.

It shouldn't bother him much. After all, he scarcely knew the girl. . . . But he drove away rather glumly.

IN THE morning, Stan found a note thrust under the outer door of his office. A very brief note, roughly pencil-printed on butcher's brown paper.

**KEEP YOUR PUSS OUT OF THIS OR
YOU'LL GET IT SHOT OFF WISE
GUY**

THE MOB

Stan Baxter's wide lips curled into a soured grin. He muttered, "Yeah? Oh, yeah?"

An hour later, Horace Elmore came into the office.

"Look here, Baxter," said Elmore. "I had a talk with Selma after she came in last night. I'm afraid she was a bit rash in all of the excitement."

"Rash? What do you mean?"

"I mean, in asking you to investigate that Callum affair." The judge shook his head. "It won't do. You understand, Baxter, that girl's not of age—to make even a verbal contract with you."

"I knew that."

"It's this way, Baxter. Selma is Lois Callum's principal witness. As I see it, the whole case hangs on whether or not Lois had time to kill Callum, get rid of the gun, and be back in the kitchen by the time Selma came downstairs."

"It is certainly a point," said Baxter.

"Man, it's *the* point!" Elmore insisted. "It all depends on how long Selma spent at the head of the stairs. The jury will have only her word for that. That's why I want her to remain disinterested, instead of hiring private detectives and so on. I mean, her evidence will be worth more if she isn't known to be so strongly sympathetic with Lois Callum."

Stan nodded. "I can see that."

"Because if she hires you, the State's going to find out about it. And bring it up at the trial, to show how strongly she's prejudiced in that girl's favor. It would throw a shadow on her testimony," Elmore argued. "Any jury would feel that a girl who would spend money on detectives would also lie a little bit about the time she took coming downstairs last night."

Baxter smiled; said dryly, "Don't worry. I'm not going to hire out to her."

"Good!" exclaimed the older man. "Not that I don't want Lois to have all the help possible, but—"

Stan took the brown butcher's paper from his pocket. "See this? I don't like being threatened, Judge. Selma doesn't have to hire me. I'm wading into it now on my own."

CHAPTER V

Thieves at Work

STAN'S expectations were correct. The police held Lois Callum without charges until that evening, and then she was booked for murder.

Lieutenant Andreason was tired at the end of a busy day. The big bald officer chewed on an unlighted cigar as he talked.

"We asked her about a lawyer, Baxter. She's willing to leave that end of it to you."

Stan shrugged. "I'll advise her to get a better one. I'm not hungry enough for publicity to gamble with her life, the first case I try."

Andreason said, "You can advise her better than that. Tell her to cop a plea. Being a skirt, she might get off with thirty years."

"You sound pretty sure."

"I am," the lieutenant said flatly. "We got a case the best mouthpiece on this Coast couldn't talk her clear of. I'll tell you about it, Baxter."

"Okay, Lieutenant."

Andreason said: "First, we got motive. She and that old codger lived like cat and dog—his fault, I admit you. Second, we got the gun tested. It was freshly fired. Third, we got a nitrate test of her hand—she's left-handed, by the way. A *positive* test! The girl claims she never fired that gun, but we've got it scientifically established that she used some kind of a gat. And fourth—"

The lieutenant yanked open a desk drawer, brought out a piece of checkered blue oil-cloth.

"We found it shoved in a bin beside the kitchen sink," Andreason muttered. "Look."

He unfolded the oil-cloth for Stan's inspection. Near one end of it was a

small burned hole, surrounded by characteristic tiny pits in the fabric.

"She had the gat hid under it," Andreason said. "That's why Callum didn't see what she had in her hand. And it's why there wasn't any powder burn on him."

Baxter's lean face became very grave. He saw how damningly the oil-cloth blasted Lois' best defense. Using it, if she had, the girl could very easily have fired from the doorstep.

He moistened his lips. "I suppose you also checked on Frank Kendall?"

"Yeah. He says Callum wanted him to put up dough for some kind of suit against the Randt company. He was out of there half an hour before it happened. He's got his time accounted for."

"And the blond man?"

Andreason grunted. "Don't think there was one. It sounds to me as if she made up that description to throw us off the trail."

"But the doorbell did ring."

"Some guy working his way through college," said Andreason.

"All right," Stan Baxter said. "I'd like to talk to her."

"Tell her she might as well confess," Andreason said.

TURNKEY led Baxter to a cell in the women's wing of the Central lock-up. Lois Callum was a discouraged huddle at the end of the cell cot.

She did not look up when the door opened; not until Stan spoke.

"Oh, it's you!" Her hand went up, made quick adjustments of the tumbled lemon-colored hair. "I thought they were going to question me again. Are they going to let me go?"

"I'm afraid not." Stan told her bluntly how the case stood.

She was quite calm—the calm of exhaustion.

"I might as well get used to it. I suppose I'll spend the rest of my life in a cell."

Stan asked, "Did you kill him?"

"No!"

"They found nitrate on your hand."

Lois Callum said, "Of course they did. My uncle got that gun, and ordered me to practice with it."

"You *had* fired the gun?"

"About five o'clock that evening," Lois said. "We drove out into the hills. He was showing me how to handle the thing."

"You went to a range, you mean?"

"No. Just into a field. He put a tin can on a fence post for me to shoot at."

"No witnesses?"

"I don't know of any."

Stan said, "You shouldn't have said you'd never used that gun, Lois."

"I know," the girl said wearily. "They were practically accusing me of murder. I—well, it would have been just as bad if I admitted knowing how to shoot it."

"What about the oil-cloth?"

She said, "We had the gun wrapped in that. Uncle Joe said it was against the law to carry a gun in an automobile without having it wrapped up."

"There was a bullet hole in it."

"I know. I accidentally discharged

the gun while it—while I was wrapping it up."

"When?"

"Before we started. About four o'clock. In the garage at home."

"Did you tell Andreason about that?"

"Why should I? The more you say, the worse they make it. If I hadn't said *anything*, I wouldn't be here. I'll save the explanations for my trial."

He said, "You're wrong, Lois. You've got to tell Andreason these things."

"I don't see why."

"Because he's a good deal more honest and fair than you think," said Stan. "He'll keep at this thing like a bulldog so long as there's a particle of doubt in his mind. And as long as he does, he's really working on your side."

She laughed shortly. "Is he? I'd never guess it!"

"I know. But, Lois, this 'explanation' of yours is terribly weak. The D.A. will tear it to pieces in court. You have no witnesses, you know."

The girl said, "You don't believe it."

"Yes, I do! And you've got to make Andreason believe it, too. At least, stir up enough doubt in his mind to keep him working on the case. You'll be in the greatest danger when the police *stop* questioning you, *stop* investigating it. Because then it's a closed case, and

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they'll be making no effort to find the real killer."

He stood up. "You tell him, Lois."

STAN summoned the turnkey by rapping at the cell bars. He walked back into the Detective Bureau.

"Andreason, she wants to see you."

The lieutenant got up, relieved. "She'll confess, huh?"

"She'll tell you the truth."

Baxter hurried out of the grim old fortress, across the street to the parking lot. He turned his coupé toward the North Bay district.

The Callum house was a lonely, dark clump in the night. Stan parked, unclipped his flashlight, and walked briskly up the concrete drive toward the garage. The twin doors were padlocked. He circled the building, found a small window on the south side.

Stan's muscular fingers probed the sash. It quivered, and glass rattled in old putty. The garage wall itself shook. Ka-boompah! A dull, heavy, muffled explosion. Not loud, but formidable.

Stan Baxter spun around. A panther-quick hand slid inside his coat, gripped the butt of the .38 Colt automatic on its .44 frame. His face was expressionless, as if carved of cold stone. He listened. . . . The sound was not repeated. But there *had* been an explosion.

He broke into a run. His gait slackened to a tip-toed, soundless prowling as he came to the back door of the house. His flashlight explored an entryway, not locked. It was left open for the milkman. An empty quart bottle sat on the floor. There was a milk card on the wall, a concrete wash vat, a broom closet. And the kitchen door.

That wasn't locked, either. Stan Baxter's nerves tingled. The outer

plate of the old-fashioned lock had been unscrewed, the keyhole enlarged to give access to the mortised lock.

Stan snapped off the flashlight. He eased the door open and tiptoed into inky darkness. Fumbling, he followed the wall, guiding himself by a vague memory of the house's layout.

A board creaked underfoot. Not alarmingly, but Stan heard it, and other ears might be as keen. His hand braced harder on the Colt. The hallway door should be somewhere ahead.

He found the door ajar; it swung either way. There was a faint glow of light in the hall. From the door of the study, Stan inhaled a breath that would last until he reached the study, fifteen feet away. He edged along under the stair banister, gun snouted ahead.

The attack came from above—a body hurdling the banister, hurdling down onto Stan's head and shoulders. . . . A startled grunt, the crash of bone and flesh, the *thunk* of the Colt as it struck the floor. And Stan's wrist was twisted, the gun skating out of his bent-back fingers.

All this happened in less than a second. And in the next second, the other man was astride Stan Baxter and panting, "Huh! Huh! Huh!" With each grunt, powerful hands grappled deeper into Stan's throat.

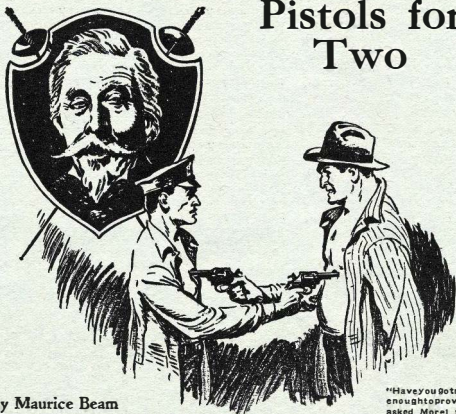
He strained, heaved himself off the floor—and fell back. But his hands were free. Fingers interlaced, he drove his fists upward.

Stan glimpsed the blow as it began, jerked his head away. A train of sparks ignited inside his skull, flared into one swift flame, and left a strange fog upon his senses. He was not entirely unconscious, but his reason wobbled crazily. He heard a choked voice:

"Run, you fool, run for it!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Pistols for Two



By Maurice Beam

Author of "A Little Knowledge," etc.

"Have you got nerve enough to prove it?" asked Morel without flinching.

Of a district that spawned a huge rat and a small lion, and the grim secret of their encounter

THIS much is known. Bull Arnett is gone from District 10 and Frenchy Morel—now a sergeant of police—remains there. Lopy Bradshaw is with the beautiful Sadie Jennings. Captain Keogh will be retired in another year. Slim Madigan treads, but softly, the dim and tortuous corridors of the underworld, though not in District 10.

These men were last seen together in the oak grove on the western fringe of the forest preserve. A few others saw them there that summer dawn not many months ago. But none of them, when someone asks of Bull Arnett, will

talk. They smile grimly and look away and talk of other things. To them, the incident in the oak grove is closed as tightly as the saga it reflected.

It should be remembered that District 10, where Bull Arnett and Frenchy Morel grew up, is an unlovely city region of sputum-spattered sidewalks, reeking garbage-cans, hot and dirty streets, dark and fetid alleys, squawling children, amid the raucous chorus of street cars and street venders. It is a region of grime and poverty, of crime and moving figures in the night. It is an elderly section of an elderly metropolis and in it, during a lost

decade, Bull Arnett beat Frenchy Morel often enough with his fists.

Bull hated the slim French-American boy. He hated Grandfather Morel, Frenchy's only living kin, a night-watchman down on the levee who supported Frenchy and sent him to school and taught him to fence. Grandfather Morel in his youth had been one of the great Continental fencers. Bull hated Frenchy's boyish boasting of this fact; the fineness of the Morels angered his ugly, surly, inferior nature. And Frenchy had little enough to boast about, then. In the tenth district it was Bull Arnett and fists that ruled, not the swords and pistols of old-time dueling.

But with the passing of that decade, Frenchy saw less and less of Bull Arnett. He worked at going to school and at helping his aging grandfather put food on their poor table; and he dreamed dreams. Bull never worked, then or ever. His fists at first, then guns and gangs, provided him with opulent maintenance. As for dreams, Bull's were not of the imagination. They wore high heels.

One night a speeding black car hurtled down on old Grandfather Morel and threw his gaunt body twenty feet over a curb and into eternity. It was such a car as Bull Arnett sometimes used as a lethal weapon. This much, covertly, was known in District 10.

Not long afterward, Frenchy Morel realized one of his dreams. He got on the cops, as the saying went. By this time, Bull was a king of sorts and a thorn in the side of even such a stalwart as Captain Jim Keogh of District 10 precinct station.

"Walk your beat an' take it—more or less," said Captain Keogh to Patrolman Morel. "We all got to. Arnett's got organization and friends down-

town. His pay-off's hard for an ordinary cop to beat."

"Yeah," said Frenchy Morel angrily.

Captain Keogh remarked moodily, "If we could run him out of the district, it'd be something, but what have we got on him—direct? Watch your step, Frenchy."

"Loppy Bradshaw's in his mob, isn't he?"

"Yes." Keogh smiled. "But Bull don't tell him much. Loppy's sore about this Sadie Jennings. Bull wants her away from Loppy."

"Then—that's what I meant—Loppy may talk, some."

"That's how I know what I do know," Keogh said.

Frenchy Morel spoke quietly. "I can get rid of Bull Arnett."

"You mean—knock him off?"

Morel was silent.

Keogh shook his grizzled head.

"Listen, Frenchy. You're a cop. You ain't a murderer. Sometimes a cop shoots when he shouldn't, but not often. I know about your grandfather, but you can't prove nothing. Shoot a man down it's murder whichever way you look at it."

"I didn't mean exactly that. But I know Bull."

"You was raised together, sure."

"Yes. There's one thing he's afraid of."

"What's that?"

"Sure death."

Keogh smiled at his young subordinate.

"Well, who isn't?"

"I mean," said Frenchy doggedly, "if Bull was absolutely sure he was going to die, he'd run fast and far."

"I remember," said Keogh gently. "Your grandfather, eh, Frenchy? He was a fencer, eh? One of those fel-

lows who fought with swords in the old country. What are you thinkin' of, fightin' Bull a duel?"

"It's an idea I've had," replied Frenchy simply. "It takes a brave man to fight a duel."

"'Scuse me, lad. Bull an' his gang'd laugh you down if you pulled anything like that."

"He *has* laughed."

"Oh, you've challenged him!"

"Yes, a long time ago when we were kids—to fight with rapiers, my grandfather's. That was foolish, I realize now. Bull knows nothing of swords and cares less and neither do those rats he travels with. But here's something they do know about."

"And that's—"

"Guns. Maybe Bull would fight with guns if everybody knew about it. Maybe he'd have to."

"Maybe. What are you drivin' at?"

"There's an old Prussian method of dueling. There were many different ways, you know. My grandfather told me about it. They used guns but not in the regular way. Pistols, then. But we would use revolvers. We—"

As Frenchy talked, old Captain Keogh's eyes lighted with interest. "Uh-huh, uh-huh," he kept saying, and then, "Go to it, Frenchy, but keep your mouth shut to everybody else. Try the Creole Bar."

FRENCHY came into what had been that famous old place in District 10. There was a new bar now, shining mahogany, mirrored, garish with repeal garishness, with little left of that old atmosphere of gaiety that had made the old Creole Bar famous in other days. The place, despite its brilliance, was cheap, forlorn.

Frenchy, tall and debonair in his blue uniform, asked the thin, rat-eyed

bartender for Bull Arnett. The fellow stared. Cops rarely entered the door these days. He pointed to the entrance of a rear room. What was a cop to Bull Arnett? Then he pressed a concealed button.

Frenchy walked through the door and came face to face with Arnett in person and three of his plug-uglies. Lippy Bradshaw sat dozing on a gilded chair in a corner. The others were around a table sipping highballs.

"Well, if it ain't old Frenchy Morel," said Bull loudly to cover his surprise, but with his hard eyes fixed warily on the policeman. "Heard you went on the cops. You always was like that. How's tricks—and how's grandpa?"

Frenchy's jaws tightened, but he held himself. Everyone knew of that hit-and-run driver and the lethal black car. Bull was playing a game.

"Tricks," he answered in a slow, white voice, "are all right with me. Yours, I know, are rotten as ever."

Bull rose to his mountainous height and grinned to hide his hatred.

"Still insultin', ain't you Frenchy? I used to flatten that face of yours for less than that. Remember? An' now I hear you and old Spindleshanks Keogh over at th' station are tryin' to run me out of the district. That's a laugh."

"Not Keogh. Me," said Frenchy with fixed soberness.

Bull walked forward and put his hand on the back of a chair. The others stared at Frenchy and at Bull and moved their hands nervously.

"Hear that, you guys?" said Bull without taking his eyes off the policeman. "This is th' guy I told you about. Him and me was raised together. He's th' guy used to do all this dueling, with swords like they do in the movies. Him an' his granddad." He moved

closer to Morel. "Remember how you used t' cry an' snivel when I laid this on you?" Bull lifted a hairy, freckled fist.

"Yes, I remember. You were a great fighter—when you were sure of winning."

Bull did not answer immediately. A dull flush came over his heavy face. His comrades looked up at him expectantly.

"Go easy, Frenchy. I might forget you're a cop."

"I say, that's the way you fought," continued Frenchy Morel softly, his eyes sweeping the group. "These boys know it, too. If there was even a small chance you might lose, you wouldn't ever fight."

"You say so. I got a notion to pop you right now, cop or no cop."

"That would prove nothing. And you know it."

"Then what th' hell did you bust in here for?" Bull's tone showed a vague desperation.

"This," said Frenchy swiftly. "One of us must get out of this district. I can't. I've a job here. You haven't. You never worked and you never will. It's you who must go."

"Yeh? Well, Keogh an' his mob of flatfeet have been tryin' to get me out but I'm still here. You're monkeyin' with dynamite."

Morel fixed his level gray eyes on Bull's face. Tension grew in the room.

"You're too cowardly to fight me fair," he said.

"Haw! You're pullin' that old stuff again, uh? Want me to fight a duel. I'd be a sap to fight you with swords like you want to, after your grandfather trained you from a baby."

"We won't fight with swords."

"No?" Bull's face was pale, and surprised.

"We'll use guns."

FOR a moment, silence, then one of the men at the table spat out: "Go ahead, Bull. Take him up. You're handy with a rod. It's a good way to get rid of him."

Arnett's small eyes lighted. "With guns, eh? With guns. Well, why didn't you say so? That's right down my alley. Listen, Frenchy, I'm—"

"Yes. I've heard. Keogh says you're the best shot in the district—when you're shooting at dead targets. You practice, don't you? Every day. You have a pistol range at your country home, just like the police range." Frenchy's sarcastic voice cut the room's stillness.

"You said it," sneered Bill. "Backin' out, eh?"

"No. It's you who will want to back out. You'll have no advantage in this fight. That yellow streak of yours will spread out and cover you when you find out that the odds are equal."

Bull's face reddened. "Whaddymean, equal?" he shouted. "We'll both have a gun. Ain't that equal?"

"Sure, we'll both have a gun."

"An' when somebody counts three we shoot, ain't that it? I seen duels in th' movies. Well, that's jake. On'y, we'll shoot three times at each other if you say so, just to make sure. At a hunnerd feet, say." His voice grew triumphant.

"Knowing I'd never handled a gun till I got on the force."

"That's your business. It's your idea."

Morel's voice, as he replied, was clear and loud. This was the moment he had planned for. He directed his words at the men sitting beside the table rather than at Bull Arnett.

"It is my idea to fight fair. We'll both have a gun, certainly. We'll stand, not a hundred feet from each other,

but three feet. And only one gun will be loaded!"

"One gun loaded!"

"Yes. Two police special .38's. We'll draw them out of a black bag. Neither of us will know who has the loaded gun and no one else will know, until the count of three. Then we both pull the triggers."

"You're screwy," interrupted Bull loudly. "They don't fight duels that way."

"It has been done. Many times. And you'll fight me that way unless you're yellow. If you refuse, the town's going to find it out."

"You're screwy," Bull said again, and the redness seeped out of his face, leaving it pale.

"Takes guts to face a gun you don't know for sure is loaded." Frenchy's voice was edged and biting, his face tense. "It's sure death for one of us."

Beads of sweat glistened on the coarse face of the racketeer. The cold, curious eyes of the others were watching him sardonically. Lopsy Bradshaw's chair-legs came down with a crack on to the floor.

"Pullin' this stuff—" said Bull dully.

Frenchy Morel broke into a hard laugh. Old, caged hatred was plain in his eyes.

"Keogh said you'd get it in your neck, you yellow four-flusher."

Bull's answer was explosive, an obvious effort at regaining his oozing confidence.

"I'll kill you, you—"

"Wait a minute," said Slim Madigan from behind Bull. "Who's going to put the guns in the bag?"

Frenchy replied instantly. "You bring along a police special .38. You've got plenty of them. Two of you act as Bull's seconds. Any two. Keogh and one other officer'll come with me. In

the police ambulance. Whoever loses will come back in it, dead. It will be booked as an unsolved murder. We'll meet you at the west entrance of the forest preserve at dawn tomorrow morning, at five o'clock."

"And who'll get the first draw?" persisted Madigan, "How do we know you bulls ain't framin' us?"

Frenchy was prepared for all this. "Bull can have first draw. You'll see both guns put into the bag. You'll see one of them loaded and the other one empty." He smiled grimly at all of them. Then he swung toward Bull.

"If you're not yellow, you'll be there, at dawn tomorrow."

Without another word, Frenchy Morel turned and left the room, going through the bar into the street.

He left them staring cynically at Bull Arnett.

"Haw!" said one. "This'll be good."

"Shut up, you," said Bull from white lips.

"You're gonna take him up, ain't you?" asked another.

"He's screwy," said Bull, but his voice shook. "He—"

Slim Madigan spoke suddenly: "Sure you're gonna take him, boss. It'll be easy. Listen." Slim leaned forward, talking nervously, while Bull sat down quietly, listening, and a cruel gleam entered his eyes. "Why take a chance on a punk?" Slim finished. "Them cops are silly enough to play straight, and right into our hands."

"Yeh," said Bull Arnett at last. "This is gonna be good, for sure. Hey, Lopsy! Go git a file."

Lopsy Bradshaw spilled forward off his chair.

"File?"

"Know what a file is, sap? Go out an' git one."

Lopsy Bradshaw went out the door.

He was skinny and white-faced but he moved with wiry vitality, thinking of Sadie Jennings.

"Here," said Slim Madigan. "Take my gun. It's one." He shoved it across the table toward Bull.

"A .38, uh?" said Bull and clutched it.

"Sure. Police positive. They're all alike. You git first draw. Put the mark right there, where you can feel it easy. Then practice feelin' it, so you can't go wrong."

"Slim, that's a keen idea."

Slim laid a finger on the top of the magazine frame. "You can easy tell which one's loaded. Then you got him," he said proudly.

"Yeh?"

"Yeh. We'll demand to see the guns put in the bag before us, right under our noses."

Presently, Lopy came in and handed Slim a small file.

At the same moment, Frenchy Morel was talking to Captain Keogh in the latter's office.

"Will you back me up?"

"Frenchy, we can't pull this."

"I've got to."

"It's murder. We're peace officers; don't forget that."

"It's a duel. Is there a law against dueling?"

"But somebody's bound to be killed. There—" Captain Keogh stopped, staring at Frenchy. "You put 'em in a bag, you said—"

The telephone rang. Keogh listened a moment, uttered a couple of monosyllables and hung up. He swung toward Frenchy and Frenchy was greatly surprised.

"Lopy," said Keogh. Then: "It's a go. We'll take Craig to drive the ambulance." Keogh began to laugh.

"You mean it?" asked Frenchy

tightly. At the moment, he was thinking of his grandfather. And of a black, roaring car.

"Mean it? I wouldn't miss it for my seniority," said Jim Keogh.

ON THE western fringe of the forest preserve, in the oak grove, the trees are stunted but thick with foliage. In summer the sunlight lays in little patches on the thin sod under them. At dawn it is almost dark here, the leaves are so crowded together. There is a narrow road running into a clearing in the grove. About the clearing the trees form thick walls and for silence it is like being on a mountain top.

Two cars stood at the edge of the clearing. Though one was blue—the police ambulance attached to District 10 station—and the other black, as were all of Bull Arnett's cars, in the faint light they both looked dark and sinister.

Lopy Bradshaw sat at the wheel of the black car. He was listening intently, eyeing the group of men in front of the cars.

"Here's our .38." Slim Madigan handed the revolver to Captain Keogh. "It's loaded."

They all crowded around as Captain Keogh squinted at the weapon. He broke it, exposing the glistening brass head of a single cartridge. Then he closed the gun and carefully revolved the magazine to bring the shell to firing position. Next, Frenchy Morel handed him another revolver exactly like the first. Keogh broke this one and held it up so everyone could see. Bull Arnett and Slijn stared hard. It was empty. Light showed through all six chambers. Keogh placed both guns into a black leather bag held in his hand. Then he fumbled them about with his fingers.

In the clear air could be heard the sharp click-click of metal against metal. Then Keogh's hand was withdrawn.

"Are you satisfied?" Keogh's voice was steady.

"Okay, Bull?" asked Slim Madigan.

"Yeh," said Bull. "Let's go."

Keogh spoke again. "Got anything to say, either one of you?" He hesitated. "One of you is goin' to croak."

Bull jammed his hands down into the pockets of his coat. He was shaking slightly.

"Let's go," he said.

"Accordin' to the rules," continued Keogh, looking first at Slim and then at Bull, "you guys draw the guns out of the bag, then you stand three feet apart and plant your gun over the other guy's heart. Now, take off your coats and open your shirts!"

"What's that for?" asked Bull.

"No bullet-proof vests go. Open your shirts, both of you!"

Frenchy Morel laughed, threw off his coat and opened his shirt all the way down to his belly. Bull, shivering, did the same.

"It's cold here," he muttered. "Let's go."

"You'll be colder in a few minutes," said Frenchy.

Keogh, his face grim and set, ordered: "Come on, Arnett. You get first draw."

"Yeh." Bull's hand shook as he plunged it into the bag. Sweat started from his forehead. He fumbled momentarily.

"Lookin' for your own gun?" asked Keogh innocently. "Well, that's okay. Maybe you're used to it. But they're both alike—almost—except inside."

Bull's eyes stared. He shot Keogh a quick glance. Then he pulled out one of the .38's. He held it in his hand and looked down at it. His hand trembled

so he could scarcely see. But he saw he was safe. He saw the file mark.

"All right. Step up, Frenchy," Keogh said.

Morel glided to the bag and took out the other gun and without a word stepped back, not looking at it.

"Now! Take your positions! Close together facing each other." Keogh himself took several steps backward and Slim followed.

Arnett and Morel faced each other, the guns in their right hands.

"Come closer," Keogh called. "Lay 'em right over the heart. Slim, you got a watch?"

"Sure." Madigan slipped up his coat-sleeve and bent down.

"Is there a second hand on it?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Look at the second hand and when it gets straight up and down start countin'. Half a minute between counts. Every time the second hand gets up and down. Count three and at the word three, you guys pull the triggers. I'll shoot the man who doesn't wait for the count!" Keogh's words clipped out and when he had finished, there was silence.

"Le's go," breathed Bull Arnett again. His hand was shaking more than before and he was staring at Slim. He wanted to tell Slim everything, was all right but he didn't dare make a sign. Slim stared back.

"Control yourself," suddenly sneered Frenchy Morel.

"Shut up!" said Bull.

"Now!" snapped Keogh. "Get set. You got one half a minute to say what you want to say. One of you is leavin' us. Is there any word we can take to anybody? Is there anything you want to say?"

Bull's teeth clamped shut, but French talked.

"Tell him," said Frenchy slowly,

"that I've always known who killed my grandfather. Hey!" he shouted at Bull. "Stop shaking. If you pull the trigger before the count, you're a dead man anyway." Bull's hand was now quivering so much that he had to lower the gun slightly. He did not answer.

"Get set!" cried Keogh.

THEY faced each other. The revolvers were centered directly over each other's heart. "Ready?" said Keogh to Slim.

Madigan nodded, his eyes on his watch. There was a moment's deep silence. Lopy Bradshaw gripped the wheel of the car he was in.

"One!" said Slim Madigan in a forced tone.

Bull and Frenchy stared into each other's eyes. Arnett's lips twitched but Frenchy's mouth was grinning.

"Ready to take it, Bull?"

Arnett forced a whisper. "Listen, you nut, I got the loaded gun," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

Keogh had motioned Slim back even farther.

"I know. It's marked with a file mark." Bull's voice was so low now that even Frenchy had difficulty hearing him. But its pitch could not hide the hatred in it.

"Have you got nerve enough to prove it?" asked Morel without flinching.

"You're crazy," hissed Bull.

"And you're a liar. You haven't got the loaded gun," returned Frenchy swiftly.

"Yeh? Then look down. See that file mark on top of th' magazine?"

"Two!"

Slim's voice held a quivering crescendo. Keogh kept his eyes on Slim. Slim did not look up.

At the second count, Bull's face went

deathly white. He heard, as Slim's utterance died away, a low whisper from Morel.

"Listen, you yellow pup, look down at my gun!"

Bull's eyes dropped in one long stare. His thick lips began to move. His tongue came out, then darted back. There, on top of the magazine frame on Frenchy's gun, was a file mark identical with the one on his own. For many seconds, no sound came from anywhere. It took that long for Bull to realize what he had seen.

"Three!" The single word was a whine from Slim Madigan. And with it, Bull jerked his trigger, at the same instant throwing up his left hand against Frenchy's weapon.

A sound like a scream came from Arnett's throat and drowned out the sound of the hammer as it clicked against an empty chamber. Morel's gun flew high in the air.

Then Bull Arnett was running through the trees. Frenchy picked up Arnett's revolver from where it had fallen on the turf. Keogh lifted his own gun and fired three times into the distant branches. Bull Arnett's heavy figure, moving with incredible swiftness, disappeared.

Slim Madigan sank onto the runningboard of the nearest car, where Lopy sat behind the wheel, transfixed.

Frenchy grinned at Keogh. "He *was* yellow."

Slim muttered an oath. "He had the empty one."

"Sure," Lopy whispered, protecting his secret. "He evidently couldn't see very well."

Keogh and Frenchy exchanged swift glances. Then the captain took both guns and put them back into the black bag.

"All right, you," he said to Slim and

Loppy. "Let's get out of here. Keep your mouths shut about this and when you see Bull tell him to come over to the station an' get his gun."

BUT Bull Arnett never claimed the gun. He has disappeared. Keogh and Frenchy Morel, it is said, got into the police ambulance with John Craig, the driver. Keogh and Craig laughed until something Frenchy said silenced them. Frenchy meant it so much.

"I wish I could have pulled that trigger," he said. "I let him knock my arm up. I couldn't shoot him in cold blood."

"Then you knew your gun was loaded?" asked Keogh quietly. He glanced at Craig.

"When his failed to go off, of course I knew," Frenchy said, and threw his chief a puzzled glance. "I knew then I was lucky. Those file marks being the same scared him so he couldn't aim."

Neither Keogh nor Craig commented further. But before they went back to District 10 the captain reached into the black bag surreptitiously and brought out three guns, not two. All of them

were .38 police specials and all of them were exactly alike.

Keogh was very careful that Frenchy saw nothing. Patrolman Morel, the captain realized, was a very brave man, as brave on a field of honor as ever Grandfather Morel had been. Patrolman Morel had known nothing of the third gun.

The third gun was inside a neat little pocket, padded and closed so that it appeared like part of the lining of the bag. This was Bull Arnett's gun, loaded with the single brass cartridge. The other two were exactly like it, even to the file marks on top of the magazine frames, marked there apparently by the same hand. But they were not loaded, either of them, and hadn't been at any time during that gray dawn in the oak grove.

Only Captain Jim Keogh knows fully the truth of all these things and only Loppy Bradshaw could ever guess the truth, since it was his hand that held the file. As for the rest, it remains a secret buried deep in District 10, deep as the cadaver of old Grandfather Morel resting in that old city.



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Deliberately Paul Peace tore
the confession into bits



A Long Novelette

MOST of those who knew him best spoke of him simply, and warmly, as the Champ. And most of them questioned no further.

As a matter of fact, few of the ones who knew him at all ever claimed to know much about him: where he came from, who his parents were, where he went to school. True, there was a "committee"—formed and inspired by his enemies among members of the Bar—who "investigated" him once, independent of any authorization by the Bar Association. But the results of that investigation never became known; because, some who admired him said, the committee could find nothing derogatory about him—beyond the fact that he had an ex-con as an office boy. But that was common knowledge anyway. So he remained, to those who knew him best, the Champ.

Champion, specifically, of anybody who found himself afoul of the Law, and who was able to convince the Champ of his innocence. Champion of

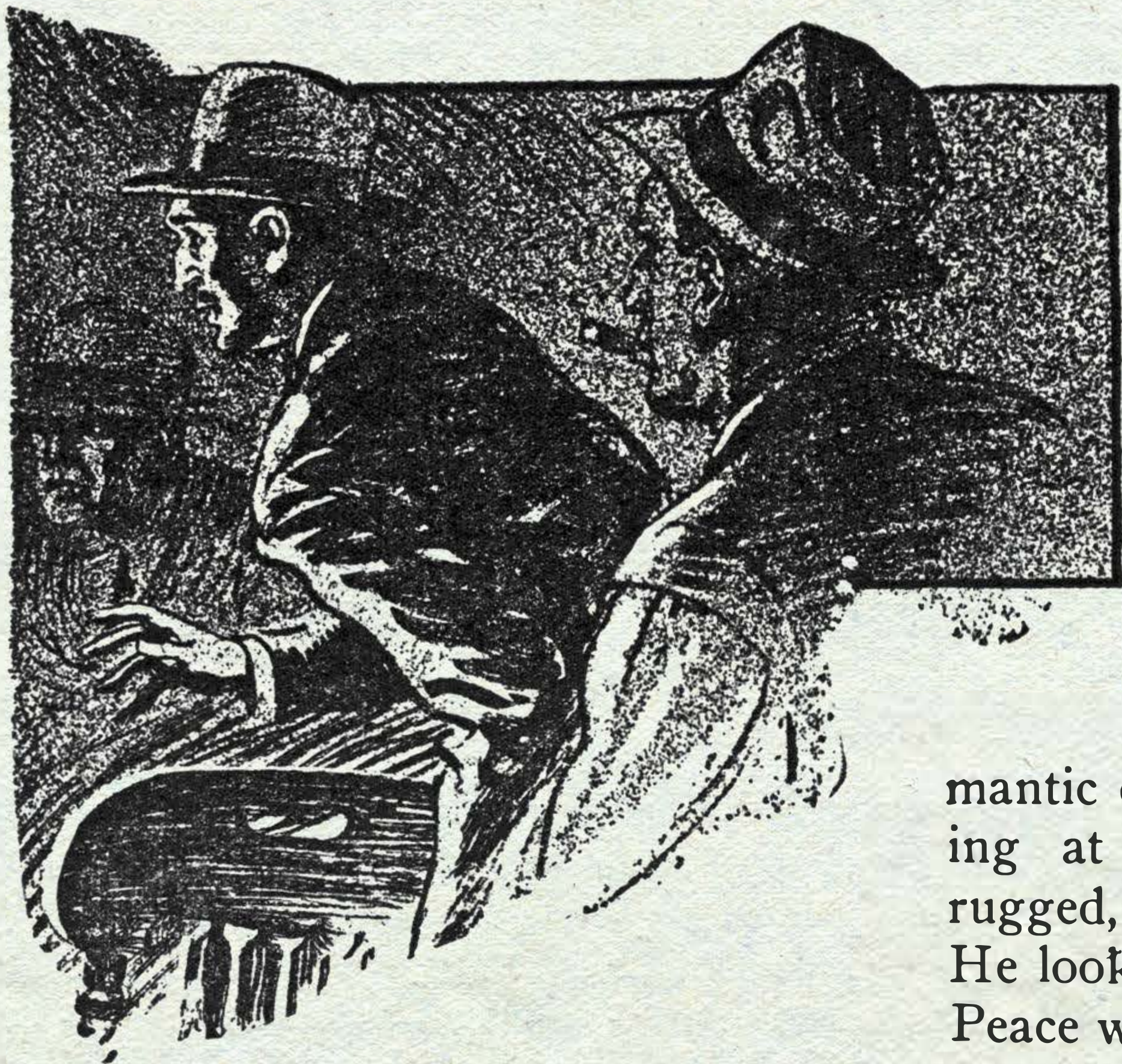
the under-dog, mostly; of men and women who couldn't pay him, even though their lives were at stake—and sometimes they were. Champion of Right, and Justice—and of Retribution, too. Champion of lost causes that had a way of turning into causes won when the Champ took hold.

Needless to say, he remained poor. Not necessary to add that he never moved his office into the swank Bar Building in the financial district. The Champ remained in the dusty, littered two-room "suite" on Lake Street, where the last of the decrepit trolleys of another era still rattled and clanked their dismal way under his window. His name remained on the glass door in flaking, barely decipherable letters,

Under One Law

By Edward S. Williams

Author of "Murder Makes Things Go Wrong," etc.



*Nobody knew who he was
or where he came from,
but everybody knew what
he fought for*

"You've gone too far this
time, Peace!" the D. A. cried

where he himself had painted it, four years ago. That door, when you stopped to study it, revealed the words: PAUL PEACE, ATTORNEY AT LAW. But nobody stopped to study it. Whoever had occasion to come in here at all knew who it was he wanted to see . . . the Champ!

He sat at an ancient roll-top desk that fitted into the scheme of things much better than a modern flat-top would have done. His feet were on the dusty window sill beside the desk. Tweed-clad legs stretched out—unbelievably long—and crossed, he slouched back in the tilted swivel-chair. His hands were stuck under the arms of the chair and into pants pockets, pulling back his coat, revealing the breadth of his chest, the flatness of his mid-section. But it was his face that gave the ultimate surprise. Here was no ro-

mantic dreamer; no Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. His face was a rugged, healthy rectangle of realism. He looked like a college fullback. Paul Peace was young—not over thirty. But old enough to have wisdom.

His door opened. "Hey, Champ!" The voice was low, insistent.

Joe Anslem was like a turtle with his scrawny neck stuck through the door out of a collar sizes too large. He had round, beady eyes and a beaked nose on a small bullet head. Anslem was a two-time loser. He was the ex-stirbird that Peace had hired, two years before; who was office boy, janitor, valet and *maitre d'hôtel* to Paul Peace. That Peace had hired? Maybe that's stretching a word. More often than not Joe Anslem didn't get paid. But that was all right with Joe.

He said again, "Champ! There's a client. A lady one."

"Who?" Paul Peace spoke without turning.

"Dunno." Joe came in and shut the door. "She looks like Chris'mus, though. Diamonds—real ice! An' a coat that ain't alley-cat."

PEACE grunted wordlessly, looked out of the dingy window at the dingy chimney pots and roof tops that comprised his "view." This, he thought, was the worst of having a rep for winning. Because he took grim delight in snatching some poor, bedraggled girl out of the shadow of a prison sentence for something she hadn't done, here was another—a woman with jewels and rich furs—who wanted him to . . .

"Please let me come in," she said.

Peace rose, his greenish eyes, his mouth—all his face cold, non-committal. She stood in the doorway, one hand still on the knob. Her coat was mink: twenty thousand dollars worth, at least. The diamond on the hand that touched the knob caught a dust-dimmed sunray from the window and revitalized it, cast it back into the room with cold, scintillating brilliance. But there was no purse-proud hauteur in her voice. There was a certain weary pleading in it, a deep and tragic weariness in her dark eyes: She was older than he'd expected, but beautiful with the full charm of maturity.

Paul Peace said, "How d'you do."

"I'm Nora Shea," she said. "You don't know me but that isn't important. I haven't come to you for Nora Shea. It's about a man named Dominick Ferretti."

"Ferretti—?" Peace said. His deep voice was vibrant when he repeated, "Oh, yes—Ferretti. Joe . . ."

"Yes, sir." Joe Anselm went out and closed the door.

Peace seated her in the chair beside his desk and waited, his veiled eyes searching, probing beneath the calm steadiness of hers, the magnolia whiteness of her face. His gaze seemed to pierce through to the mind, the thought, the character beneath.

Dominick Ferretti!

Odd, he mused, that he'd been thinking of the murder of Bruce Ramsey when this woman came to him. Bruce Ramsey the gambler, rich and handsome, with the cold indifference to women that drives some of them to do mad things. And of Dominick Ferretti, owner of the roadhouse where Ramsey had been stabbed to death in the bedroom of Ferretti's beautiful daughter. Nick Ferretti had done it, so they said. It was open and shut. Nick Ferretti's daughter was a star witness against him. The testimony of Rose Ferretti, the papers asserted boldly, would do much to send her father to the chair.

Such a thing, Paul Peace was thinking, was like a gift from heaven to Mark Carmichael, the district attorney, coming as it did just before election. A spectacular crime and a sure conviction should go far toward reelecting Carmichael. And Mark Carmichael was a crook. Otherwise how could Bruce Ramsey have run for two years—wide open—four luxurious gambling houses in the very heart of the city? Ever since, in fact, Carmichael had come into office.

Those things were in Paul Peace's mind as he sat waiting for Nora Shea to speak.

"Mr. Peace, I can't believe that Ferretti killed Bruce—Bruce Ramsey."

PAUL PEACE shrugged. "You don't have to," he pointed out. "It's not the prerogative of the newspapers to try and convict. Theoretically a man's innocent until proven guilty—in court!"

"I know . . ." She dismissed it with a small but forceful gesture. The diamond flashed blue fire. It was magnificent: emerald cut, almost as large as the joint of the finger on which she wore it. "But *you* know they're going to

convict him. Bruce—Mr. Ramsey—was often there, at Ferretti's place. He went because he liked good Italian food, and the *Lacrimae Christi* that was Ferretti's specialty. But you know what they're saying."

"Rose Ferretti," Peace said.

"Yes. The girl—oh, I don't blame her! Bruce was—was attractive to women. Too attractive! The girl was young, hopelessly in love with him, and I can understand that. She threw herself at him. Bruce laughed about it—but he kept on going back. And Ferretti—I can't blame him either. He thought what everyone thinks: that Bruce came to see his daughter. He threatened Bruce. Both the girl and that waiter there—Luigi D'Agostino—heard him. And they found him—they found Bruce in her room, with a knife from Ferretti's kitchen in his back. But *I don't believe Dominick Ferretti killed him!*"

Peace shifted his gaze to the window. The sun was low, light was going fast and the room was dusky already, but he made no move toward the green-shaded lamp over the desk. He spoke gently, apparently to the window.

"Nora Shea," he said, "twice you hesitated over Ramsey's name. Then you called him Bruce, openly. Are you—were you—his wife?"

Her voice lost none of its steady calm. "We were never married," she said. "If it matters, I loved him. I think he loved me, but he was—was Bruce Ramsey."

Peace nodded. "I know. He wasn't as bad as he's been painted."

"He was good!" Bitterness edged her voice. "Whatever he did, whatever laws he may have violated Bruce Ramsey never did a cheap or a small or a vicious thing in his life."

There was silence. The woman

looked at Paul Peace and he turned his eyes back to her. He said, "Who did kill him, Miss Shea?"

"Corey Brant!" she flamed. "Corey Brant had everything to gain by Bruce's death. He hated Bruce, wanted Bruce's casinos. He *had* to have Bruce out of the way before he could run his wired roulette wheels, his crooked card games, his loaded dice without fear of exposure. He wanted to move up from the rotten dives he ran, into the big money—but Bruce stopped him at every turn. *He* killed Bruce Ramsey! I know it."

"Can you prove it?"

She shook her head.

"Well—I'll try to," Paul Peace said.

"You—you will?" Her eyes leaped to his. She seemed dazed. She opened the velvet bag in her lap. There was a sapphire in the clasp that locked it. She faltered, "Then I—I want to help. Will this—?"

"All right." Peace nodded. He didn't reach for the bills she held out. She put them on the desk and said tremulously, "What do we do next?"

"You go home," he said, "I want to think, dig into things. Leave your address with Joe—" he paused and smiled, "my secretary. I'll see you soon."

He still didn't turn on the light. After she went he stood at the window, staring down, blind with thought. Joe Anselm came in and pulled the lamp chain. There was a startled gasp.

"Judas Priest, Champ—there's a thousand bucks here!"

"We may need it, Joe," Paul Peace said. "We're going to defend Nick Ferretti, I think. Get on the phone. Call Judge Bly. Find out . . ."

IT was near midnight His coat and tie were off, his desk swept clean of everything but the documents hav-

ing to do with the arrest of Dominick Ferretti, and the case against him. Paul Peace had worked with his customary speed. There'd been, as yet, no formal indictment; no bail had been set. Ferretti was simply booked for murder, following a preliminary hearing, and had sat, sullen and uncommunicative, in his cell when Peace had come in to see him. He had no lawyer.

The mention of Paul Peace's name had been the first shaft to penetrate Ferretti's morose silence. Paul Peace? Sure, Ferretti knew about Paul Peace—who didn't? And Paul Peace wanted to defend him? Si! Nick Ferretti would accept him as his lawyer. Nobody else though. To nobody else would he tell how he had not killed the no-good gambler, Ramsey . . . That was enough, for the moment.

Peace had returned to his office, to work; to a reading of documents that tore each sentence down into words, in a keen search for what might be read between the lines, behind the facts . . . The girl, Rose Ferretti, had screamed. Her father had been met, *coming down the stairs*, as waiters, a few patrons rushed up. And Bruce Ramsey lay with a broad-bladed kitchen knife through his heart, with the smudged fingerprints of Nick Ferretti on the haft of the knife. That much seemed certain, well established . . .

Then the phone rang. Peace placed it against his ear, said, "Yes?" and gripped the pencil in his hand so hard that it snapped. "Dead!" he snapped.

Peace knew the policeman whose voice came to him flatly over the wire. Lieutenant Gold, Homicide Squad, said, "Yeah, she's dead, Peace. I dunno how she lived as long as she did—half an hour, the doc says—with three slugs in her. But she lived long enough to ask for you. She said, 'Get Paul Peace here,

please. I'll tell him who shot me, not you.' Then she pegged out."

"I'll be over," Peace said . . .

He stood and looked down at Nora Shea's beautiful face, ashen but calm with the final, awful dignity of death. In *négligée* she lay at the foot of her bed, one hand outflung, the other covering one of the crimson blots on her breast.

Gold said, "Mind telling me, Counselor, why she asked for you? You her lawyer?"

"Yes," Peace nodded. "She came to see me this afternoon. She retained me to defend . . . Dominick Ferretti."

"Ferretti!" Gold's jaw dropped, "Wait a minute—what's wrong with this picture! You mean Ferretti—the guy that killed Ramsey?"

"The man who's charged with it."

"But—but— isn't she—wasn't she— Ramsey's woman?"

Peace glanced at him. The green in his eyes was more pronounced, more like the color of a deep, wintry sea.

Gold shifted, said, "Well, what I mean is, why the hell should she want you to defend the guy who killed her—well, who rubbed out Ramsey?"

"She doesn't think Ferretti killed him," Peace said.

Gold's eyes glinted. "Who did?"

"I don't know."

"Guess."

"Why should I?"

"Okay . . ." Gold's bark was irritable. "Who killed *her*? Why'd she hold it out for you? Lawyer—no lawyer, you're obstructing justice."

"Gold," Peace said, "you're an ass! I'm with you on this. If I knew who killed her—and Bruce Ramsey—I'd tell you. Ferretti didn't. I know that now. But when I find out for certain who did, you can have the credit. Is that what you want?"

"Well," Gold said, "I could use it."

Paul Peace turned and went out. Nobody offered to stop him.

It was cold on the sidewalk. Cold and late, and the clear sky was full of stars. They reminded him of the gleaming points of fire in Nora Shea's diamond.

The ring that held that diamond was gone from her finger as she lay dead on her bedroom rug.

II

"JOE," Peace said, "you saw that diamond." Joe Anselm sat on a table, across the room from Paul Peace. One knee was drawn up, heel hooked on the table edge, with an arm around it. His chin rested on his knee and he brooded, gargoyle-like. "Sure, Champ," he said. "I wouldn't never forget that rock."

There was silence until Joe sighed, "Jeeze, there was a real dame. Y'know, Champ, I often get thinkin' about what I'll do when some dame grabs you off. Wonderin' if she'll know—or give a damn—how you feel about things, how you like yer eggs berled three minutes, an' no starch in yer shirts. But I was thinkin'—after *she* left—there's a dame that would know. She was real!"

"Joe," Peace said, "who're the fences these days? Where'd that diamond be likely to go for a fence?"

"Cripes, Champ." Joe blurted, "don't nothin' ever get ya? Don't it mean nothin' that . . ."

Paul Peace was softly savage. "Yes! It gets me, Joe, to see a woman murdered! And to see one like that—killed brazenly, openly, because she was trying to get at the truth of another murder—when I might have prevented it. I—"

He abruptly stopped and his voice grew cold and even again. "Fences, Joe," he said. "You've got to get a line

on 'em somehow. I don't think she'd have taken that diamond off to go to bed."

"Forget it," Joe said flatly. He let his leg down, pulled up the other one and propped his chin on that. "Fencin' hot ice—a chunk of it like that one, anyway—is big stuff, Champ. It's almost a monopoly, y'might say. I've already got a line on where it'll go. When that diamond turns up, I'll hear about it."

Paul Peace rose and pulled a weather-battered hat down firmly over his eyes. He grinned faintly. "Joe," he said, "I don't know what I'd do without you. Remind me to give you a raise next payday."

"Next what?" There was no rancor in Joe Anselm's sardonic tone. He grinned, too. Then, "Where y'goin'?"

"Jug," Peace said. "I want to talk to Ferretti again."

"At this hour? Hell, Champ, he'll be asleep."

"Would you be?" Peace countered.

"Maybe you're right," Joe said. "Do I wait?"

"No. Go look for that diamond."

Joe went . . .

Paul Peace jogged up the steps to the heavy, stone-arched entrance. Carved into the arch were the words: EQUAL JUSTICE TO ALL UNDER ONE LAW. Peace read it again and his smile was tight, his eyes bleak, as always when he climbed those steps and read those stone letters. But even then he didn't blame the police. It wasn't the fault of the police that there was more than one law, that there wasn't always equal justice to all. He dumped the blame squarely where it belonged—into the lap of the public.

The public, if they would, could do away with men like Mark Carmichael, and Corey Brant—yes, and Bruce

Ramsey, gambler. It was only the public, aroused and determined, who could make anything but cynical mockery of those words: Equal Justice—One Law. But he dismissed that from his mind as he strode down a wide corridor and into a big room, railed off across the middle, with rows of chairs and a raised platform at one end.

Peace nodded to the swarm of Police Court reporters, the lounging attendants, a few plainclothesmen. Gold was there, he noticed. Lieutenant Gold eyed him watchfully. The reporters had a keen, leashed expectancy. They knew that Paul Peace was going to defend Nick Ferretti, and anything that Paul Peace did was news. But they knew better than to rush him.

Peace smiled at the sergeant behind the desk on the platform. "Evening, Soper," he greeted. "Like to see Ferretti a minute, if you don't mind."

THE sergeant laid down a pencil. Reporters edged nearer, waiting. Something else they knew was that Carmichael was back there. That the D.A. had hurried in, refused to make a statement and been ushered respectfully through the closed door behind Soper—the door that led to the detention cells where Ferretti awaited arraignment. Soper hesitated, looked at his blotter. If it had been anyone else but Paul Peace probably he wouldn't have hesitated. He'd have said, "No," positively. To Paul Peace he said, "Well, now, Counselor, I—I don't know about that. It's pretty late, I expect—"

Peace's eyes changed subtly. There was no change in the curve of his smile but his eyes made it frigidly inquiring. He strode to the door leading back, gripped the knob with a big hand and said pleasantly, "I don't think Nick

Ferretti'll care about that." He opened the door.

"Wait a minute!" the sergeant's voice sharpened. "Hey, Peace, you can't go—"

The door closed.

Gold laughed. Lieutenant Gold had never cared overmuch for Mark Carmichael and he had a hunch what Carmichael was doing now. The reporters must have had, too. They turned, as one man, in a rush for the telephone booths that lined the far wall.

Sergeant Soper came down from his high desk and snatched open the door. He called again, "You gotta wait yer turn, Peace. Carmi—the D.A. . . ."

Paul Peace glanced into the empty cell where Nick Ferretti should have been, went on, lengthening his stride. Soper caught him just as he touched the knob of a blank, solid looking door at the corridor's end.

Soper said hoarsely, "I ain't a lawyer, Peace. I ain't sure of the law about this. Maybe you got a right to go in there but—but Carmichael's got Ferretti in that room for—questioning. An' I'm a married man, Peace. I got kids to look after. It wouldn't help me none to get busted to a beat. Y'see?"

Paul Peace's smile was friendly, warm. Even when he hit Soper he swung without anger. The sergeant's head snapped back. His knees went rubbery and he sagged, slipped forward into Peace's arms. Peace let him down gently. He said, "You tried to stop me, Soper. See? You tried to stop me and I socked you. You'll have a skinned jaw to prove it. It's my responsibility now."

The sergeant's glazed eyes rolled upward. Dimly he comprehended. He nodded as though his head were too heavy for his thick neck and Peace

opened the door softly. A voice in there was tense, harsh, oblivious . . .

"Sign it!" Carmichael rapped, "Sign! Sign! Damn you, you'll sign it or I'll—"

Nick Ferretti swayed on the backless, armless stool on which they had him. A cone of light poured down on him, pitiless, inescapable. Sweat dripped from Ferretti's face. His eyes were blood-shot. His lips trembled, drooling saliva down over his chin. He rocked to one side until it seemed he must fall. Then he caught himself with a terrible, straining effort, came upright, rocked backward. Sobs shook his short barrel body. The thick hair on his chest, exposed by a ripped shirt, was matted, oily looking.

"No," he panted. "No. I sign not'ing. I want my lawyer. I want Meester Peace. He tell me—"

"Peace!" Carmichael rapped. "So you want Paul Peace, do you! Listen Ferretti—" Mark Carmichael's voice dropped to the deep, sympathetic, confidential tone that had trapped men before. He talked smoothly, but behind Ferretti three men came from the rim of dusk surrounding the puddle of light. They came nearer and one of them gripped a short length of rubber hose. They were not cops, Peace knew. They were from the D. A.'s own crew of man-wreckers. But Paul Peace waited . . .

"LISTEN, Ferretti," Carmichael said, "why didn't you say that before? You want Peace. Well, you'll get him. That's what this paper says, see? It's just a formality—routine. But it says that you've got a right to demand a jury trial and have a lawyer. This paper gives you Paul Peace as your lawyer. Why, Nick, you don't think we'd ask you to sign anything im-

portant without your lawyer being here, do you? You don't think we'd take advantage of you?"

"Peace—" Ferretti quavered, "that paper says I can have Meester Peace?"

"Sure. That's it . . ." With a small, urgent gesture, the district attorney waved back his men. Ferretti wavered, swaying on his stool, his eyes searching the broad, handsome face of the man who bent over him. Carmichael had the paper in one hand, his pen ready in the other. He thrust both at Ferretti—and Nick Ferretti took them with trembling hands. He signed, a shaken scrawl, trailing off in a running blot of ink. And Paul Peace came into the circle of light.

"I'll take it, Nick," he said.

Mark Carmichael's indrawn breath was audible. The three in the dimness came nearer.

"Meester Peace!" Ferretti gasped.

Carmichael exploded, "Give me that, Peace!"

Paul Peace read aloud, his voice savage, biting: "I, Dominick Ferretti, of my own free will, and without threat or duress upon me, do hereby make and sign this, my confession, as follows:

"One: That on the night of November 18, 1937, I did feloniously assault, with intent to kill, one Bruce Ramsey . . ."

"Peace!" Carmichael's face was a twisted mask of anger. "You've gone too far this time! If you think you'll get away with this—"

Deliberately Paul Peace tore the confession into halves, quarters, eights. He let the fragments dribble through his fingers. Nick Ferretti, like a tortured dog, looked anxiously, not understanding, from face to face. Paul Peace's voice was a frozen sound.

"I've gone too far?" he questioned. "Carmichael, you're through. You're

finished. Understand it? If you ever had a case against this man, you've got none now. If you know any law you know you've just made a mockery of it. If you're aware of the existence of justice you know you've made a travesty upon it. But you're through, Carmichael. I'm going to break you with the thing you counted on to reelect you. I'm going to—"

It came from behind him with a dull, thudding sound. Paul Peace staggered forward, head down, a perfect mark for the upswinging sap that poised, swished again viciously. But Peace, even dazed by that first over-eager, glancing blow, expected the second. Carmichael stepped in with a, "No damn you, Peters, not here!" And Paul Peace spun out of the light.

His fist brought a whistling, sobbing grunt. One man hurtled backward into another. Peace followed them, swinging, driving. The D.A.'s voice was a hysterical, bleating bellow. Pounding feet in the corridor, at the door, into the bare room, ended it. A photo-flash bulb was a blinding vulcano of light . . .

And the City rooms that had galvanized into life at the mention of Paul Peace's name swung into frenzied tumult now. Rewrite men all but wept over their typewriters—wept tears of incredulous delight. Reporters' voices over the wire were hoarse with staccato urgency.

PAUL PEACE BATTLES CARMICHAEL AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS

Newspapermen dream, at night, of things like that.

III

NICK FERRETTI sat on his cot. It was warm in the cell, but Ferretti shivered, his teeth clacking, his breath a whimpering sob. He sat

hunched up, with forearms on his knees and his dark face turned to Paul Peace.

Peace leaned against the wall, arms folded. His voice held the calm, reassuring tone of a man talking to a child. "Easy, Nick," he said. "Easy does it. That's all over now and they won't bother you again. They may come at you in a different way next time—through your daughter, maybe—and you'll have to watch for it. You'll have to remember not to sign anything, not to talk, no matter what they say. That's what I'm for, Nick. I'm your voice, now, and your signing hand. Understand?"

"Si," Ferretti breathed—breathed more easily now. He relaxed slowly. Only an occasional spasmodic shudder shook him. "Si, signor. I gotcha."

"All right, Nick. Now tell me what happened. Tell me everything you know about Bruce Ramsey and your daughter, and last night. Don't leave out anything, Nick."

"No . . . no, signor, I leave out no'ting." Ferretti paused and his eyes narrowed, gleaming in the half dark. The last vestige of his fear was gone. He was still child-like confiding in a stronger man whom he trusted.

"Signor," he said, "I love my daughter—my Rose—the little *bambino* who is no longer so little. Ah, signor, you cannot know, but it is so ver' hard. I am Italian. I come here to America when I am only a boy, an' I am ver' happy here. I love America but signor, I am still Italian, too. I cannot forget the old ways. An' when I see my Rose—night after night—go an' sit at the gambler's table while he eat, when I see him pour for her the glass of wine from his bottle, an' she drink, an' I see her eyes light an' glow over the rim of her glass, it is . . . I am—how you

say?—I am afraid until I am crazy.”

Paul Peace nodded. His searching eyes probed deep into the dark, troubled gaze of Nick Ferretti, but Ferretti's eyes were steady, unaverted. He went on, “Two nights ago, *signor*, I can stan' no more. I go to him—to the gambler—before the food he has ordered is brought to him. There is no one near. It is early an' there is no one to hear us talk. He look up at me, *signor*, he smile with his mouth. His eyes, they do not smile—they never do. An' he say, ‘Hello, Ferretti. Where's Rose tonight?’

“*Signor*, it is too much! Rich men, they do not marry the daughters of poor Italian innkeepers. They bring them no happiness. ‘Meester Ramsey,’ I say to him, ‘You mus' not come here again. You mus' not see my daughter again. If you do, I shall kill you!’

“You see, *signor*, I am crazy with the fear, but I mean what I say! For if something happen to my Rose, do you think I care what they do to me?”

He stopped with that question flung like a challenge. His eyes burned, then clouded again slowly as Peace said, “Go on, Nick. Everything.”

“He laugh, *signor*. This gambler, who is so cold an' han'some, an' rich, he laugh. But his eyes they do not laugh. I turn to see what it is at which he laugh an' there is Rose, behind me, and Luigi D'Agostino. They have hear what I say. *Signor*, I see in my daughter's eyes the thing that turn me sick with fear. I say to her in our own language, ‘Rose, go to your room.’ An' she go but there is that thing in her eyes. She love this gambler an' she hate me—her father!”

FERRETTI slumped, a huddled figure on the cot, his eyes wide and bleak. Then he went on monotonously,

“Las' night, he come again. I send Rose to her room at once, an' I go to my room. I am that crazy again, *signor*, that I do not know what I do. Perhaps I pray. I do not know that, or how long I stay there. I only know that I hear Rose scream and that it go through me like—like the knife have gone through the heart of the gambler. For what seem a long time, I cannot move. I stan' there as though I am cold stone. But then I come back to life, an' I run into the hall.

“*Signor*, it is like some bad dream. I cannot remember what I do. I only know that her door is open an' that I see his feet in the doorway. Then I see all of him, an' he lie on his face in her room, with the knife plunge to the handle in his back. An' Rose, she stan' looking down at him with the back of her han' to her mouth.”

Again he stopped. Beads of sweat glistened on his face. He whispered, “That is all, *signor*. That is all I know—that he is dead an' that I have not kill him.”

Exhausted, Nick Ferretti sat dumbly, waiting with the terrible patience of hopelessness for what might come. Slowly Paul Peace dropped his arms until they hung beside him. The fingers of his left hand beat a soft tattoo against the cell wall.

“Nick,” he said, “this Luigi D'Agostino—the waiter in your place?”

“Si, *signor*.”

“You trusted him?”

A shrug, and, “Why not? Luigi was a good waiter. I have not had him long but he do not steal from me, he do not offend my patrons.”

“How long?” Peace said.

“Five—six month, he work for me.”

“Was he—think, Nick—was Luigi in love with Rose?”

“Oh, no. No. *signor*, Luigi already

have a wife, Rose, she never look twice at Luigo, or he at her. I watch."

The fingers beat harder against the wall, stopped. Peace said, "Nick, the evidence is that soon after Rose screamed—when others started up the stairs—they met you *coming down*. That right?"

Again he shrugged. "*Si* . . . Yes, I come down."

"Why?"

Ferretti looked up hopelessly. "Why? *Signor*, why do the wind blow? Why do the rain fall? I do not know. Perhaps I think to call the police—to tell them that I have kill Bruce Ramsey because, *signor*, I think at first that Rose have done it. But no. No woman could drive a knife so deep. A stiletto—yes. *That* knife—not so!"

Peace asked, "Is there anyone at your place now? Cook, waiter—anybody?"

"No," Ferretti said, "unless the police still stay."

"Can I get in without asking the police for your keys?"

Ferretti was silent, then he breathed, "The cellar door, in back. There is a padlock, *signor*, but the key she is hang on a nail under the little roof over the door. High up, on the left."

"Okay, Nick. And remember I'm your voice and your right hand."

"*Si*, I remember, *signor*. You go now?" There was a swift return of fear to his swart face.

"I'll be back," Peace said.

IT was an old farmhouse remodeled. Set back from the main road—away from the filling stations and traffic and hot-dog stands that line most highways in the near vicinity of cities—Nick Ferretti's roadhouse stood empty, lonely, in the cold darkness. Paul Peace watched it for a minute

from the cinder lane that led up to the clump of bare elms and dark evergreens that marked the place. He saw no movement, no light. It was very late.

There was no police guard, or seal of the district attorney's office on the locked front door. Peace tried it then stood for a while, his eyes restless under the low hat brim. He saw nothing, heard no sound and yet the notion that he was watched—that he had been watched ever since he had left Ferretti—persisted strongly. His hands in his overcoat pocket gripped the butt of a gun and a small flat pocket flash. Abruptly he shrugged and turned toward the rear.

He found the door, the padlock, the key as Ferretti had said. Silently he let himself into a concrete-floored cellar, strong with the smell of strung herbs, onions, stored potatoes. His flash revealed row on dusty row of bottled wine, liquors, supplies. Peace followed the thin beam of his flash up steps leading to a huge brick-floored kitchen. The odor of highly flavored Italian cookery still lingered.

Peace stood in the middle of the kitchen and ran his flash guardedly about. One door led to the main dining room in front. Another, open, gave access to a smaller pantry-like room on the side. He went into it and stood looking at the closed door that led to the back porch he'd seen from the rear. A huge icebox occupied one whole wall of the pantry, the door on the right opened into a dark hallway leading to the front.

Paul Peace seemed interested in that: a back door opening through the pantry into a corridor leading forward. He followed it, felt growing satisfaction in the discovery that it led to the stairs going up. A partition separated the big main room from the corridor and the

stairs. It led to the thought that a man, unknown to anyone in the kitchen or dining room, could enter at the back, come through the pantry and this hallway and have unseen access to the upper floor. Peace went up. The stair treads muffled sound, gave no warning creak.

Upstairs was another hallway, paralleling the one below. Doors opened off one side of it. At the front was a small, tastefully decorated private dining room. Next to it, a lavatory. Then a room that was unquestionably Rose Ferretti's bedroom. The bed was canopied in satin, its four posts and headboard of carved rosewood. The rug was rich, colorful. The dark stain on it, near the door, was a violation of something fine and beautiful.

Nick Ferretti's room, last in line, was a spartan contrast. It was small and bare save for an iron bed, a battered bureau and one chair. Peace stayed there only a moment then went on to the end of the hall—to a gabled window opening onto the low-pitched roof of the back porch.

The line of possibility was completed now. A killer entering at the back, seizing a knife as he passed through the pantry, coming up those stairs—either before or directly after Ramsey had come up—stabbing him in the back as he opened the girl's door and escaping through this window to the low roof outside. An easy drop to the ground, an easy getaway in the surrounding darkness.

Paul Peace risked the steady glow of his flash at the window. Inch by inch he searched the frame, the sill, the carpet under it. He was looking for nothing in particular; he knew the futility of looking for fingerprints. Only the blurred prints of Dominick Ferretti had been found on the murder

knife. Blurred. That meant the knife was Ferretti's and that the killer had worn a glove. But if he'd gone out this way there might be something: a thread caught in a splinter, a faint heel-print on the sill, anything that . . .

As he raised the window carefully, Peace snapped a sharp oath, dropped on his knees and focused the light in the channel where the bottom of the window fitted into the sill. For a long moment he studied the faint dark smudge—a round blot impressed on the wood, with definite web-like markings in it—as though a wet piece of cloth had been pressed there. Then his free hand stabbed into a pants pocket. He opened the blade of a pen-knife and cut carefully, deep into the wood. He lifted out a rectangular sliver bearing the dark imprint and crouched, staring at it. And with a ringing crash glass shattered in his face. He felt the sting of flying splinters. A bullet buried itself in the wall behind him as he flung himself backward, plunged down stairs, gun in hand.

At the rear of the house all was still, cold darkness. There was no sound or movement . . .

IT had come. Execution stalked the night again—stalking him—but Paul Peace felt grim exultation. Every move that had been made had served only to point to the truth of Nora Shea's conviction: "I can't believe Dominick Ferretti killed Bruce Ramsey!" There was Nora Shea's death, after she'd come to him. And the sudden effort of Mark Carmichael to get a confession from Ferretti, after it was known that Peace was to defend him. Now *this*—a shot in the dark from a silenced pistol. An attempt on his own life.

It meant someone was aware of his

trip to Ferretti's place. Meant his instinctive feeling had been right: that he'd been followed as he left Police Headquarters, shadowed out of town, shot at as he knelt beside the window, a perfect mark. It meant—Carmichael?

But why?

Why should the D.A. be so bent on pinning the murder of Ramsey onto Nick Ferretti? That frame was becoming so obvious—to Paul Peace at least—that he ceased to think of it. He knew he could win an acquittal for Ferretti with what he had. With the utterly damning attempt of Carmichael to get a confession, with the dark smudged sliver of wood he carried in his vest pocket, Paul Peace knew he could raise enough reasonable doubt in the mind of any jury to get Ferretti off. But that wasn't enough. Why was Carmichael so plainly desperate? Who had killed Ramsey, and why? Why had Bruce Ramsey gone upstairs to Rose Ferretti's bedroom?

Corey Brant?

Corey Brant, Nora Shea had said, wanted Ramsey out of the way so that Brant could run his wired roulette wheels, loaded dice, marked cards. Ramsey had the reputation of an honest gambler but Brant hadn't. And Brant, Nora Shea thought, wanted to move up into the big money—make it even bigger than Ramsey had done. But Bruce Ramsey had stopped him at every turn.

Paul Peace returned to Lake Street. For the moment he had forgotten Joe Anslem, hunting for a diamond. Peace turned into the faded brick house where he and Joe lived in a top floor flat. Still deep in thought, nevertheless some atavistic sense warned him to enter even his own home cautiously.

For an instant he stood at his doorway, listening. Then he stepped inside,

his gun in his hand. Lieutenant Gold, and another Homicide man Peace didn't know, looked at the gun nervously. Then Gold's mouth tightened, his eyes narrowed. He asked inanely, "You got a license for that thing, Peace?"

Paul Peace grinned, then stopped it as though he had thought of something else suddenly. He said, "I have . . . and who gave you birds a license to break in here?"

Gold said uneasily, "We didn't break in. Your door was unlocked. I—dammit, I got a warrant for your arrest. Carmichael issued it."

Peace didn't lower the gun. He asked, "What's the charge, Gold?"

"Kidnaping," he admitted. "Intimidating a witness. Half a dozen others, all told."

"What!"

"Listen, Peace—man to man. I got nothing against you. I got lots against that heel, Carmichael. But I got a job, too, doin' pretty much what the D.A.'s office says. They say you were seen goin' into D'Agostino's flat tonight. You know—that waiter the State's got lined up to testify that Ferretti told Ramsey he'd kill him. And D'Agostino's missing, his wife says. She identified your picture, too. Kidnaping a prosecution witness wouldn't look so good for your case but don't get me wrong, Peace. I don't think even you're crazy enough to do that. But I got to bring you in, see?"

Gold smiled wryly and moved toward him—then stopped and the apologetic hesitance in his face faded into a tense question. Paul Peace's gun was the gesture that stopped him. Peace smiled again as he backed through the door.

"Not bad, Gold," he said. "Carmichael knows I've got no alibi for the

past few hours. And kidnaping a prosecution witness would be just as bad for my case as rubber-hosing a confession out of Ferretti is for his. So we're even. I think I'll leave it that way for the present."

The door closed. Gold rushed it, but the click of the key in the lock beat him by seconds.

IV

JOE ANSELM still hunted a diamond. It was two days since he had seen the Champ. A day and a night when he hadn't known where Paul Peace was, and even Joe's firm faith in the Champ's ability to look out for himself was shaken. Then, in the morning papers of the next day, the news had broken.

STAR WITNESS IN RAMSEY MURDER DISAPPEARS

Paul Peace, Charged With Kidnaping,
Eludes Arrest

Joe Anselm read on that the Champ had been shadowed from Police Headquarters to Luigi D'Agostino's flat. That he had been seen to enter and leave accompanied by the waiter. That Luigi D'Agostino's wife had been shown a photograph of Peace and sworn it was he who had lured her husband out. And her husband had not come back, she said.

Joe understood, now. At least he understood why the Champ had disappeared, and whether or not he had snatched the waiter it was a bad spot. But Joe had his orders. He went on hunting for a diamond and sooner or later, he knew, the grapevine would bring him news of it. No diamond such as Nora Shea's could escape the underworld telegraph. Joe Anselm knew how to tap that wire discreetly.

He knew, too, that when the Champ wanted him he'd let Joe know. There was always Billy's Place—a little restaurant tucked into a basement on a dark side street, and there was nothing the Champ could ask of Billy Schultz that wouldn't be done, somehow.

They had used it before, the Champ and Joe Anselm. Billy's back room was their secret rendezvous in times of emergency, the clearing house for exchange of information, for orders and instructions from Peace to Joe Anselm.

Joe had been there often in the past two days but each time Billy Schultz had shaken his head as Joe came in for a beer or simply passed the dusty front window. Now he knew why. In Joe's language the heat was on. But when the Champ was ready, he'd come out of his hideaway and there'd be those who'd be sorry for something. Meanwhile, Joe Anselm hunted for a diamond . . .

It was late. Joe shuffled from place to place, still turtle-like, even in his movements. But his very steadiness covered a lot of ground. Since early evening he had worked gradually uptown: always listening, always with an ear to the grapevine. He went from dingy saloon to garish restaurant. He visited hotels where men registered obviously phony names and addresses and nobody questioned them. He got into dimly lighted rooms where the click of dice, the soft slap of cards were the only sounds and the air was foul with smoke. Into other places, too, less wholesome. It was going onto two o'clock when he reached the white lights and brilliant neons of a gayer district, richer, more populous.

Joe Anselm was a figure out of place here. Glistening limousines appeared in the streets. Evening garb. Doormen in gold braid barred entrance, here, to

anyone who looked like Joe Anselm. But that was all right with Joe. He didn't want to enter. He was just looking. He shuffled with apparent aimlessness, on and on. At the entrance to the Club Basque he halted for the first time, stopped in the middle of the sidewalk as Gus Groff came out of the Club and raised his hand for a cab.

And it wasn't the fact of Groff's obvious—and sudden—prosperity that stopped Joe. It wasn't Groff's evening clothes or the woman who hung on his arm and laughed, metallicly, up into his pale, flat eyes. Gus Groff was one of Corey Brant's hangers-on, but it wasn't that either.

IT was the diamond that flashed on the woman's hand as it lay against the black background of Groff's arm. Emerald cut, unbelievably large, that diamond poured out a vindictive blue gush of light. Then Joe resumed his slow, forward shuffle. He passed Groff and the woman without looking at them again. Unnoticed he melted into the last taxi in the waiting line at the curb. "Tail that hack, bud."

Joe Anselm felt the excitement of a lucky break grow into the heart-pounding certainty of real discovery. As the cab ahead turned right Joe could almost see the Champ's green eyes narrow and glint when he told him. And even as Joe thought that, the cab turned left, then left again into the quiet, respectable street where he'd guessed it was going.

Gus Groff was headed for Corey Brant's apartment. And Joe—shamelessly eavesdropping when Nora Shea had been in the office with the Champ—knew all about her fierce accusation of Brant. Was the diamond to be the link between the murder of Bruce Ramsey, of Nora Shea and Corey Brant?

Joe didn't know. He didn't even try to guess. The Champ would do that, but it was he—Joe Anselm—who had found the diamond, trailed it to Corey Brant. All that was left now was to get that information to Billy's Place and wait for the Champ to finish whatever it was he was doing and break the case.

Joe paid off his driver. Still slowly he approached the lobby doors, but he paused in front of them long enough to light the snipe he picked out of the gutter. Groff and the woman were gone but Joe had an unimpeded view of the elevators. One of them was in motion. The arrow over it circled the dial to 8, paused there, started back. Corey Brant's apartment, he knew, was on the eighth floor.

Joe hurried now, three blocks north and one east. He dropped into the subway entrance there, rode downtown for ten restless minutes and got off. As soon as he emerged from under ground he saw the prowler car parked at the corner. Joe didn't hesitate, didn't act in any way suspiciously—he thought. But an alert cop yelled, "Hey, Anselm!"

"Yeah?" Joe paused anxiously, ready for flight.

"You're wanted, Joe. The D.A. wants t'talk to ya." The cop was out of the car, approaching him.

"What about?" Joe shifted his weight, crouched to get a better start but the cop didn't seem to notice. He shrugged.

"Search me. Come on—get in."

Joe Anselm's toe slipped on the smooth pavement as he started to run. He sprawled, struggled silently, futilely as the bigger man dived for him, dragged him to the car. . . .

PAUL PEACE sat motionless at the window of his rented room. It was a nice room, but that wasn't what had

attracted Peace. He'd rented it because it was directly opposite the house where Corey Brant lived. And for most of two days and nights Paul Peace had sat at his window watching the entrance to the apartment house.

It had been a long vigil but not a fruitless one. A lot of men were coming to see Corey Brant these days. Brant was a rising influence in the underworld, a growing big shot. It was evident from the men who were beating a path to his door. A lot of them, Peace knew, had been Bruce Ramsey's men before his death. But they had read the handwriting on the wall. They had gone over facilely to the enemy—to Brant. That was nothing new in the history of crime and it was unimportant to Paul Peace.

What *was* important was the fact that District Attorney Mark Carmichael also was in communication with Brant. Not personally. Peace had looked for nothing so incriminating as that. But among the steady stream of visitors who went in, stayed a while and came out again, was one whom he knew as a politician high in the confidence of the District Attorney. . . .

Then he saw Gus Groff arrive and go in with the woman. Peace couldn't see the diamond but he saw Joe Anselm. His eyes gleamed thoughtfully as he watched Joe shuffle up to the entrance, pause and then hurry away. Hurry! As surely as though he'd shouted it Joe's haste, his every action, told Paul Peace that the little ex-con had found something. Told him that Groff was important—or the woman. *

Was it the diamond at last? Had Groff, a Brant hoodlum, killed Nora Shea, fenced her diamond and been followed back to Brant by Joe Anselm?

Peace moved from the window abruptly. He took a key from his vest

pocket, examined it briefly and put it back. It had been simple, in the silent early morning hours, to take a wax impression of the lock that barred the basement entrance to the house across the street. The key had been made yesterday from that impression. Then a brief scouting trip, undertaken early this evening, had familiarized him with the layout of that basement. Paul Peace pulled his hat low over his eyes, turned up the collar of his coat and went out.

He crossed the street and entered the basement boldly. He knew where the freight lift was, a big automatic elevator that ran from the cellar. Peace entered the lift, touched the button marked 8 and steeled his nerves to the hum of the motor. That was a risk he had to assume. If someone heard it and came to investigate. . . .

He shrugged the thought away. His hand on the gun in his pocket tightened.

The lift stopped with a bouncing jerk, the doors slid back noisily. For an instant Peace stood still, glancing up and down the empty corridor. Then he shrugged again and strode to the door labeled with an engraved card stuck in a small brass bracket: Mr. Corey Brant. Peace gripped the knob. It turned—the door was open.

The high-pitched, unpleasant laugh of a woman met him as he went in. Swiftly he scanned the small cubicle of the foyer. There was no cover. There was a closed door to his right, and in front of him the drape-hung arch that must lead into the living room from which came the woman's laughter, the heavier lower voices of men. His gun was in his hand as he pulled one drape aside until he could see them. . . .

COREY BRANT was a small, darkly, handsome figure. Frail, almost sensitive in appearance, he stood in

front of the fireplace where the burned-out embers of a wood fire glowed, his hands behind him. His smile was pleasant, friendly, but in his eyes was the same yellow depthless gleam that is in a tiger's eyes. It was that which changed his whole appearance, gave him the sinister utterly ruthless air which few people saw. For most people, who saw him at all, saw only his warm smile, the soft womanish curve of his full lips, the thin, aristocratic nose.

Corey Brant said gently, "So Gus gave it to you, eh, Marcia?"

"Sure, Mr. Brant," she shrugged, "it's for my birthday."

"I see," Brant purred. "Congratulations, Marcia. It's your birthday so Gus gives you a little present—a diamond worth perhaps twenty thousand. A diamond that—"

"Twenty thou—" the girl's jaw dropped, leaving her face vacant, dazed. Slowly she raised her hand, the one with the diamond on it, as though it might break if she moved too fast. Her eyes widened as she gasped, "You—you mean this is—real ice? Worth twenty grand?"

Corey Brant smiled. With no change in his expression he moved with all the grace and speed of a cat. The hint of frailty vanished from his thin body when he gripped the girl's hand. His thumb-nail raised a red welt on her finger as he tore off the ring. For a second afterward she stood frozen, staring, then she screamed.

If Brant was the tiger, Paul Peace thought, she was the tigress—outraged, no less ruthless than he. Peace watched the curve of her lithe body as she sprang at Brant. He saw her slitted eyes, the long painted claws that were her finger-nails. The thing was so fast he could see only the forward surge of the woman, the crouching, angry ap-

proach of Gus Groff, the blur of Brant's movements.

He hit her with his closed fist. The crack of it was like a dry stick breaking. The girl was flung back, limp, into Groff's arms . . . and the lack of all movement was a sudden shock. They were so still that Peace could see the ring of white adhesive tape around Groff's little finger, the little finger of his right hand. Then Groff dropped the girl, lunged forward.

He stopped with Brant's gun a foot from his starched white shirt. Peace couldn't see his face: only Corey Brant's yellow eyes and full-lipped smile. Groff snarled, "Brant, you can't do that! That rock's mine. I grabbed it, didn't I? I want it—now!"

Brant opened his hand. Lightly he tossed the ring into the air, caught it deftly and dropped it into his right vest pocket. "*Mister* Brant—to you," he said, and his voice was chilling.

Slowly, as though he were being hypnotized, Groff straightened. The tightness went out of his bunched shoulders. His knees seemed to quake as he stood before the unwavering gun. His voice a hoarse whisper, he said, "I—I'm sorry, Boss. Guess I—lost my head."

Brant nodded. The gun disappeared behind his left lapel. He said softly, "That isn't all you may lose, Gus. You fool—don't you know this diamond is registered with some insurance company. Don't you know a hundred people may have seen it—remembered it, just as I did now. How much have you talked—to her?" He indicated the woman with a contemptuous gesture of his eyes.

She was trying to get up now, sobbing monotonously. Her makeup was a livid mess, the point of her jaw already swollen and red. Groff looked at

her and blurted, "I ain't talked none. I swear it! I wasn't gonna let her keep the rock anyway."

"That," Brant said, "remains to be seen, Gus. But I'll keep the ring, and you've got your orders. Get her out of here. Get out of town yourself, and stay out until I send for you. And if you don't—" He stopped, but the threat in his soft drawling voice was more terrifying than anything he could have said.

Groff bent over the woman.

Paul Peace closed the door soundlessly behind him and strode back to the freight elevator. He beat Groff and the woman to the street. When they left, walking, Peace shadowed expertly.

SO Gus Groff had killed Nora Shea! Paul Peace's mouth was a hard line across his face, his eyes like points of green flame. Beyond noting the address where Groff left her, Peace had no immediate interest in the woman. He was not ready, yet, for her testimony. Paul Peace believed Groff when he'd said he hadn't talked. Why should he talk? Why should Groff admit—to anyone—that he had murdered a woman and stolen a diamond from her dead finger as the price of his crime?

And yet, Gus Groff himself was nothing but a tool in the hands of men with brains. Warped, distorted though they were, Corey Brant and Mark Carmichael had brains. It was one thing to know their guilt and another to prove it. The law, rightly, demanded proof. The law demanded of her servants a higher intelligence than that of men like Brant.

Peace followed Groff more closely now, risking discovery. He would have preferred to take him in his rooms or wherever it was he was going. But there

was an alley not more than a block ahead where it was dark, where a narrow gap between buildings, at the far end, offered unseen exit to the next street. Paul Peace knew his city. He timed his stride to overtake the man at the mouth of the alley.

He drew nearer—nearer. Groff must have been sure of himself, or lost in whatever murky thoughts stirred in his small bullet head. He walked on, oblivious, until the car swept down on them both.

It was a sedan. It came with a distance-muffled purr that grew into the rhythm of a car at high speed, changed to a whining shriek of brakes and rubber. Paul Peace lunged ahead, toward the alley, toward Groff, but the man himself must have known what was coming. Peace heard his gasping, sobbing breath as he ran, past the alley, away from safety. A perfect mark from the sedan, Groff tried to make the haven of a garage doorway across the street. The gush of flame from the car ended his wild flight.

The sound of the motor was lost in the stuttering, snare-drum explosion of a machine gun. Bullets bounded in little dust-balls from the pavement around him, slugs wrote a sentence of death across the front of the house behind. Gus Groff stopped running, staggered, carried by his own momentum for half a dozen more steps. Then as though his feet couldn't keep up with him he stumbled, became a huddled shapeless heap in the street.

The gears of the sedan growled softly, whined. Far away the keening of a siren came nearer. Paul Peace slipped from a narrow aperture between two buildings fronting on another street and walked unhurried away. But he smiled grimly. Another death and yet he was one step nearer the solution

he sought. For a split second, illumined by the flash of the gun, Peace had seen the face behind it, the face of a man he had seen two nights before standing behind Nick Ferretti with a length of rubber hose in his hand. A member of the D.A.'s own strong-arm squad.

Slowly, Peace thought, Carmichael was weaving the noose about his own neck—but it still remained for Paul Peace to spring the trap.

▼

JOE ANSELM was no longer aware of pain. When they hit him, his mind registered only the dull, heavy shock that had brought unconsciousness twice already. Then there had been a merciful lapse, too brief, when he had known nothing. But he always came back to it again, to the impact of Carmichael's words, the incessant punctuation of blows.

"Where is he?" Carmichael raged. "Where's Peace? Talk, Anselm, or I'll have you beaten to a pulp. Tell me where—that's all you have to do—where!"

Time stood still for Joe Anselm. After a while he ceased even to protest that he didn't know. He stopped saying anything. He thought now that even if he knew he couldn't have said what they wanted him to say. Speech, through his bashed lips, through the racking sobs that tore his throat and seared his lungs, would have been impossible. And there was a part of his brain that wondered how it was possible for a man to go on living under this torment. But he did. Even unconsciousness was slow in coming.

"Joe, listen." Carmichael was wheedling again. Carmichael's voice had run the gamut of its emotions that night. But if Joe could have seen his eyes he would have seen the stark desperation

in them. Mark Carmichael's eyes were blood-flecked, red-rimmed. He went on talking but his voice, to Joe, kept receding, got more remote, harder to hear. And then Joe heard nothing again. . . .

When he came back he lay where he was for a long time with his eyes still closed. He tried to stifle his breathing as much as he could, tried to prolong the appearance of unconsciousness. Maybe they wouldn't work on him again if they thought he was seriously hurt, or dead. He lay motionless while the chaos in his mind cleared slowly. Events sorted themselves out into some semblance of ordered recollection. Memory insisted on going back to the very beginning for some obscure reason. But there *was* a reason, Joe felt sure. There was something that had happened at the very first of this nightmare that he'd told himself he must remember.

Painfully, like a man gone suddenly blind, he tried to retrace his steps. The prowl car—the D.A.'s office, not Police Headquarters—and after that they'd brought him here in a car. That was it. He'd known that something special was in store for him when they'd brought him in that car, Carmichael and two other men, to this house.

No. . . . No, that wasn't it either. There was something else.

The house? Joe knew where he was—street and number. He hadn't been blindfolded; he'd noticed the street sign when they passed the corner: Morris Avenue. And the number, 1273, as they'd brought him in. . . .

As they brought him in!

There it was. A man already in the house had opened the door for them—a crack at first, then wide enough to let them enter. That man had been lean, furtive, frightened; sallow-faced, black-

eyed. And Carmichael had called him Luigi.

That was the thing he had to remember. The waiter—the man the Champ was supposed to have snatched—was an Italian named Luigi something. And he was here—or had been.

Joe Anselm found himself staring up at a dirty ceiling, heard all at once the rasping, quickened tempo of his own breathing. Then desperate fear sent his gaze darting about the room and for a second his breathing stopped. He was alone. It was over. They'd gone and left him, not even tied, and Joe lurched up drunkenly—crashed full length to the floor again. He was so weak he couldn't stand. And—someone was coming.

It was a trick. They hadn't gone. They were waiting in another room, waiting to resume the beating where they'd left off. They'd kill him now, he thought dully, but even as he thought it he was crawling, dragging himself toward the door.

He reached the chair beside the door, conscious only of a hot desire to reach it, to lift and swing it, to brain the first man who entered. Those pounding footsteps were nearer, almost there, as Joe's hand caught the leg of the chair. He struggled to his knees, fought to lift the chair—couldn't—and collapsed again as the door swung open. The chair overturned and the man who rushed in tripped over it, went on his face as Joe rose.

It was Luigi. Stunned, the man grovelled dazedly on the floor. He got his hands under him, lifted to hands and knees. Braced on the chair Joe Anselm won to his feet first, swung his right foot. The toe of his shoe caught Luigi directly behind the ear. Again the man went down—flat, motionless. Staggering, Joe Anselm

stepped over him and out through the open door.

BYOND the glittering rage in his green eyes, Paul Peace's face was changeless, implacable as a face carved from stone. He stood over the slumped figure of Joe Anselm, inert and all but lifeless in the chair where Peace had put him, and listened to Joe's words.

"It was Carmichael, Champ," Joe whispered. "He got me just as—as I was comin' here. I found the diamond, Nora Shea's square diamond, Champ. It's—"

"I know," Peace cut in gently, "I was watching you and Groff, and his woman."

"Cripes." Joe's eyes were pools of disappointment, "Can't I never beat you to nothin', Champ?"

"You beat me to that, Joe. You found it. I wouldn't have known without you. What else? What'd Carmichael do to you?"

Joe's broken mouth twisted. "Does it look like he had me to tea? He tried to make me say where you were. But if I'd known I wouldn'd ha' told him. You know that, Champ."

"Yes, I know, Joe. I know something else, too. He won't get away with it. I'm going to—"

"Wait! Wait, Champ, that ain't all! That Luigi—the waiter they say you snatched—he's there, where they had me. It's Morris Avenue, Champ, 1273. We've got t' get him before—"

Paul Peace whirled to face Billy Schultz. Billy stood against the closed door of the back room where he had witnessed much between the Champ and Joe Anselm. He stood motionless, in his eyes a steady dog-like devotion, a burning anger.

"Lemme go wit' ya, Champ!" he pleaded. "This mug Carmichael's got a

strong-arm squad that'll stop at nuttin'. They'll kill ya—claim y'was resistin' arrest an' get away wit' it! Lemme—"

Peace gripped his beefy shoulder, hard. He smiled, shook him roughly. "Okay, Billy, you can help. Get a doc for Joe then beat it to that address—1273 Morris Avenue. Watch whoever goes in or comes out, and tail 'em if they leave. Got it?"

"Sure, Champ, but what about you?"

Paul Peace said, "Joe took his chances, Billy. You're taking yours. I'll take mine." And he forced past the big man in the doorway, crossed the darkened restaurant to the street door. . . .

Peace strode through deserted streets. It was all worked out at last. The rope was woven, the noose tied and it circled the neck of Mark Carmichael. Woven, tied and placed there by himself. All that remained was the springing of the trap.

Kidnapping—third degree—intimidation. Those were the weapons that Carmichael had turned against him. But he could turn them back—or could he? It was a gamble, but Paul Peace had never held his hand from a gamble that had the least chance of success. Left alone to work all he knew into a damning pattern of guilt, Peace was sure he could clear Nick Ferretti, and that in so doing he could pull down Carmichael and Brant and the whole pyramid of graft and crime on which they stood. But would he be left alone? There was murder—another potent weapon in the arsenal of the enemy. Already that weapon had been used against him three times, and Ramsey, Nora Shea, Gus Groff were silenced.

No! It was now or never—all or nothing. Even as the alternatives ran through his mind, Paul Peace knew he was going to take his case to the Court of Chance. He was going to gamble.

Lieutenant Gold lived alone, Peace knew. He had rooms in a building not far from Police Headquarters and Peace passed that grim stone building as he emerged from the subway and went on. His lips moved, twisted with sardonic emphasis as he muttered aloud: "Equal Justice To All—Under One Law." Maybe that was about to work out, now.

GOLD opened his door and stood blinking into the muzzle of Paul Peace's gun. The lieutenant was in pajamas, hair on end, eyes still struggling against sleep. But he was awake enough to recognize the grim purpose in Peace's face. Paul Peace smiled.

"Sorry to break up your beauty-sleep, Gold. You need it all right."

"Damn you, Peace! You can't do this to me forever. What the hell is it now?" Gold's hands closed into hard fists, half raised but an upward motion of the gun checked him. He backed, sullenly, as Peace came in and closed the door.

Peace said, "Gold, I keep my promises. I made you one the other night—remember? I promised you all the credit when I was ready to make an arrest. Well, I'm ready."

"You mean—" the lieutenant faltered, "you know who got Ramsey—and the woman?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Mark Carmichael."

"Are you nuts?"

Paul Peace said, "Gold, you weren't born yesterday and you're an honest cop. But you're yellow, yellow as your name! Yellow because you're afraid of—"

"Put down that gun and I'll show you if I'm yellow!" Gold's voice trembled.

Paul Peace's jaw muscles bulged, but he spoke in that same even tone. "All right, Gold," he said, "I'll put it down."

He tossed it through the open bedroom door and Gold's fist lashed hard and true to Peace's jaw. But Peace was faster. The movement of his hand as he threw the gun was continuous. Gold rocked backward, smashed into a chair and fell. He was up instantly. He crouched, eyes blazing, came in more carefully the second time. Peace didn't attack.

Gold led with swift, jabbing lefts. He crossed his right. Again the counter-punch was in first, incredibly hard and fast. Again the cop was hurled backward and this time Peace followed, his fists like steam driven pistons. Gold slammed into the wall, helpless, his mouth hanging open, all but out. . . .

As though nothing had intervened to stop him, Paul Peace said without rancor, "Not personally, Gold. Nobody doubts your physical courage. But you're like everybody else—you're afraid of politics and politicians. Because it's something you can't get hold of, can't hit with your fist, or shoot, you're afraid of it. But tonight, Gold, you and I are going to hit it. Maybe we're going to have to do some shooting before we're through. Maybe we'll wind up behind the eight-ball but we're going to make or break tonight! D'you understand?"

Slowly the big policeman got his wind back. Gradually the glassy, dazed stare left his eyes to be replaced by a curiously eager light, a mounting, hot excitement. Gold rasped, "You're still crazy—but I've got no sense either. I'll try it once. Let's go!"

He started for the door, but Peace stopped him. "Get dressed first, Gold. In uniform. You look more impressive that way."

While he dressed, Peace outlined his plan.

VI

COREY BRANT stood in front of the fireplace and looked from Gold's grim, battered face to Paul Peace. His full-lipped smile was warm and friendly as he returned his gaze to Gold, but the yellow tiger's eyes were his dominant feature when he asked, "Been fighting, lieutenant?"

"Maybe you'd like to fight?" Gold snapped pugnaciously.

"No," Brant said. "Oh, no."

"Then shut up, Brant. You're on a spot and I'd as soon beat the truth out of you as not. But the counselor wants to talk first. Go ahead, Peace."

"The great Paul Peace." The gambler's voice was suavely sardonic, but in his eyes was a shadow of doubt, a first hint that his bland poise was shaken.

Paul Peace had waited for that, played for it. Beyond his drawled, "Hello, Brant," when they had entered, Peace hadn't spoken. They had come in together and Gold had acted his part perfectly. He was the tough cop personified. With no explanation, he had shouldered Brant roughly aside. Gun in hand, he had gone through the three rooms of Brant's apartment like a tornado: opening closet doors, looking behind pictures, pulling out drawers and scattering their neat contents.

When he found the round steel door of a wall safe behind Brant's bed his snarled, "Open it!" had been obeyed with elaborate mockery. Gold had emptied it of its contents: life insurance policies, some bonds, a bulky, flat stack of currency—thousands of dollars. Through it all, Peace had lounged in doorways, slouched in chairs—silent, waiting.

Brant had remained cynically unruffled. But now for the first time a shadow crossed his face as he stared at Paul Peace. The silent treatment, the uncertainty, was having its inevitable effect.

Peace didn't move from where he sat, legs spread wide. He didn't take his hands from his overcoat pockets. Under the turned-down brim of his hat his eyes were hard to see. He said, "Brant, Carmichael sent us. He sent me because I'm Nick Ferretti's lawyer, because Carmichael's convinced, now, that Ferretti didn't kill Ramsey—and that you did. That mean anything to you?"

"Carmichael?" Brant smiled. "Oh, yes—our brilliant district attorney. I think I've met him."

"I think you have." Peace said.

"I think—" Brant's voice flared suddenly, "I know him well enough to have you thrown out of here, shyster. To get this cop trouble enough to last him for a while. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Why don't you call him up?" Peace challenged.

Brant was suave again. He crossed to the phone and spoke to the switchboard girl in the lobby downstairs. "This is Mr. Brant," he said. "Get me District Attorney Mark Carmichael."

It was so quiet that they could hear her reply over the wire. Paul Peace had anticipated this call—had angled for it—and yet everything depended on a girl. He had instructed the switchboard operator carefully, before they came up. The whole gamble depended on her. Would she follow instructions? Make it convincing? They waited. . . . Her voice came again, thin, barely audible. Peace heard, "Mr. Carmichael is out of town, Mr. Brant. Is there any message you wish—" and then it was cut off as

Brant's involuntary stiffening jammed the receiver against his ear tightly.

"Out of town!" he said. "Did you say who was calling?"

There was a long pause. Slowly his eyes focused in space, Corey Brant replaced the phone, turned and walked back to the fireplace.

"The D.A.," Paul Peace asked, "wasn't in?"

BRANT'S gaze flicked to Peace and Paul Peace's green eyes were mocking now. Gold got up off the arm of the chair and came nearer to Brant, waiting. But Corey Brant didn't seem to see him. He looked as though he were thinking of something else—something that narrowed his light eyes thoughtfully. The nostrils of his aristocratic nose flared.

Paul Peace rose, towering over Brant's slight figure. His voice was like a whip. "Brant, you should have known that what Carmichael let you do to Ramsey, he'd let somebody else do to you. Or do it himself. But you're like every other crook—you thought you were brainier than the rest, that you couldn't be caught in any such squeeze play as got Ramsey. You killed Bruce Ramsey. You killed Nora Shea. You thought Carmichael was covering for you, but because I've got proof of the whole rotten deal, Carmichael's going to let you burn! Carmichael won't turn over his hand to save you. Carmichael's—out of town! All right, Gold, arrest him!"

Peace stopped abruptly. There was silence, while Gold made no move—while color flowed back into Brant's face and insolence into his eyes. Brant laughed suddenly.

"The great Paul Peace!" he jeered. "Why you brainless fool, if you run me in on *that* charge I'll break you both,

and you know it. You're bluffing, Peace. I get it now. You had the girl on the switchboard coached. That's why you were so anxious for me to call Carmichael. The whole thing's a—"

"You think so, Brant?" Peace's tone was deadly soft. The movement of his hand was like a striking snake as he ripped the pocket out of Brant's vest—the lower right hand pocket—and a diamond fell to the floor and lay glittering, like a live flame, between them. Brant's sucking breath was the only sound. Then Peace spoke again.

"Did you forget *that*, Brant? There's a man named Gus Groff who didn't. Groff came to me and I took him to Carmichael. Groff swore you killed Ramsey, and the motive's plain. You wanted Ramsey's casinos—and you're running 'em now. Groff says you killed Nora Shea because you were afraid of what Ramsey might have told her, and that you stole a diamond ring from her finger. Is that the diamond, Brant?"

Corey Brant stared at the jewel on the floor. Beside him, Gold seemed to crouch, to gather himself in preparation for what might come, for what came. In one moment Brant stood motionless, staring at the diamond. In the next, his gun was in his hand.

Gold grabbed the arm, fought against the unbelievable strength that was hidden in Corey Brant's thin body. In an utterly silent struggle they swayed, strained. Sweat broke out on Brant's face. Gold's breath came in gasping grunts as he forced the other's arm up, back—back until it seemed the arm must break. And Gold won, suddenly. Corey Brant stood panting and disarmed against the wall, all poise, all suavity gone from him. His eyes blazed, teeth showed beneath lips pulled back in a wolfish snarl. Then, "So Carmichael thinks *I'm* going to burn. He

thinks he can let me burn and save himself, does he! Listen, Peace, while *I* talk!"

He straightened. Slowly his breath came back. His gaze fixed in space, Brant grated, "The night before Ramsey was killed, Carmichael came to me. He told me the setup at Ferretti's roadhouse, told me Ferretti'd threatened to kill Ramsey, and why. He said—oh, our D.A.'s a clever man, he thinks!—said that if Ramsey were killed it'd be a pushover for the right man to step into Ramsey's spot. He said he could fix it for me for a fifty grand campaign contribution—"

Brant stopped. All at once his eyes were distant no longer. They opened wide and the yellow gleaming hate in them congealed suddenly into fear. Paul Peace whirled. Gold's voice was hoarse warning. But the shot came—a dull coughing sound from a silenced pistol.

THE gambler lurched, caught himself and relaxed against the wall. A red spot, like a dab of crimson paint, grew slowly on his white shirt front before his hands covered it, tore at it. Slowly he slid down the wall.

Carmichael came into the room through the drape-hung arch. The two men who came in after him were armed. One of them grinned at Peace, a thick-featured caricature of a smile. He was the man who had machine-gunned Gus Groff. Then Mark Carmichael spoke flatly.

"Peace," he said, "this must be my lucky night."

Paul Peace didn't answer. He stood with his wintry eyes fixed on the gun in Carmichael's hand. It was a .45 automatic. The silencer protruding from its blue muzzle was a cumbersome thing, awkward. Gold crouched beside

Brant, the gun he had taken from him still in his hand.

Carmichael said, "There isn't room enough in this town for both of us, Peace. But I think things are going to turn out pretty well—for me. I can see the headlines: ATTORNEY AND POLICEMAN KILLED IN GUN-FIGHT WITH GAMBLER. Get it? Brant kills you and Gold—when we all come to arrest him for the murder of Nora Shea—then spills his guts to me and dies of his own wounds. And it's brass-bound, my friend, copper riveted. There's the Shea woman's diamond, and we'll find D'Agostino wasn't kidnaped after all. Ferretti can still take the rap for the Ramsey kill and everything'll work out all around. Don't you think?"

Paul Peace nodded, smiled faintly. He looked at Gold—and dived at Mark Carmichael's knees. As though it were rehearsed, as though Gold had read his mind, Gold lunged for the only light in the room, a bridge lamp. But the guns came first. Gun-fire was a hammering, drumming roar. It filled the room. Darkness only emphasized it. Darkness made visible the criss-cross of stabbing flame streaks as the guns sought for them in the dark. But Gold's voice rose above the clamor, dominated it in a reckless shout, "Peace! Where are you?"

There was no answer. The guns were silent, waiting for a repetition of that call, for an answer. But none came. Silence crept in like a tangible presence, a palpable, suffocating weight. A minute was like an hour in that intolerable lack of all sound. Lack of sound? No—there were sounds. Of breathing, suppressed but audible. Of creeping movement in the dark. And then light returned.

It was blinding, after that darkness.

Light from the ceiling flooded the room, revealed them all. The sharp crack of guns came again. Corey Brant's gun, in Gold's hand, spoke twice. The man who had killed Gus Groff was dead before he hit the floor. The other spun completely around, sat down heavily and stared at his bloody wrist.

Paul Peace stood beside the light switch, the gun in his hand ready. Carmichael was on his knees in the middle of the room. His gun lay beside him, where he had lost it in his heavy fall. For an instant Carmichael's face was dazed, his eyes wide and vacant. Then he saw Peace and his hand lunged for the gun. He got it—but Peace's gun remained motionless. Gold leveled his swiftly. Peace's harsh, "No!" swung Gold's eyes away for a split second, long enough for Carmichael to squeeze the trigger, but there was no shot. Paul Peace's voice took the place of it.

"You didn't know, did you, Carmichael, that your automatic only fires once—silenced! You didn't know that a silencer prevents most automatics from recoiling, reloading. That's why I took a chance with you. I thought your gun was jammed, after you shot Brant. And now you can't even shoot yourself. You'll die in the chair, Carmichael!"

PEACE stopped, and strode across to the still upright, sitting figure of Corey Brant. The smile that twisted the gambler's bloody mouth was terrible. But he spoke again, frantic in his desire to get it all said before death overtook him.

Yellow eyes fixed on Mark Carmichael, he panted, "Ramsey was—paying him plenty. Carmichael shook him down for thousands. Ramsey got tired of it—when Carmichael wanted

fifty thousand—for his campaign fund. He refused—Carmichael raided him—Ramsey threatened to expose Carmichael's graft. I hated—Ramsey, Peace, just like—I hate you. But I hate a—doublecrossing rat worse. That's why I'm talking—now. . . ."

His eyes never left Carmichael's face. Carmichael mouthed, "I never doublecrossed you, Brant."

"No," Corey Brant snarled. "No, you didn't—doublecross me. Groff did. Oh, no, Rat—you didn't doublecross anybody. You were just going to let me take—the rap!"

"Groff!" Carmichael all but sobbed. "Groff's dead. I came here to tell you that. And you let this shyster—"

Then Corey Brant laughed. The sound of it was a thin, choked rattle in his throat until, suddenly, he stopped laughing and his head sagged forward. But one more whispered sentence came from his stained lips.

"The great . . . Paul . . . Peace!" he gasped. Slowly he toppled over on his side.

Peace said, "Where's that girl? Rose Ferretti?"

"We can get her," Gold said.

"Let's go."

They shouldered roughly through the crowd in the corridor, the lobby downstairs. At the curb radio cars were rolling up, disgorging cops.

THE back room at Police Headquarters was deathly quiet. Ferretti was there, his troubled gaze never once leaving the beautiful, half-averted face of his daughter. Rose Ferretti stared wide-eyed at the man who sat alone beneath the hot flood of light in the middle of the room. Already D'Agostino was sweating, twisting on the stool.

"All right!" he mouthed hoarsely. "You win. I—I can't stand no more."

"Who killed Bruce Ramsey?"

"Groff," D'Agostino panted, "Gus Groff."

"And you helped him?" Peace rapped.

"No!" the man sobbed. "No! I—he made me do it. The D.A.—Carmichael. He knew Ramsey was come out to Ferretti's a lot. He ask me an' I tell him yes. I tell him about Rose. I tell him the boss don't like it—that he say he kill Ramsey. But I—I don't know the D.A. want Ramsey killed."

"Then you didn't know," Peace said, "it was Carmichael who wanted Ramsey killed?"

"Yes . . . No . . . how can I know?" D'Agostino flung back. "I only know Gus Groff stop me that night in the pantry where the icebox is. He say if I talk—if I tell anything to anybody—he kill me. He ask if Ramsey is there, an' I tell him yes. He ask where Rose is an' I tell him. Then he say I mus'



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go tell Ramsey that Rose want him, to come to her room."

"And you did?" Peace shot at him.

"Yes."

"What'd Ramsey say?"

"Say? He laugh at firs', then he say, 'Luigi, you tell Rose I miss her company but I still enjoy the food.' Then he say, 'No, I'd better settle this myself, an' he go. But I see Gus Groff go up after him. I see the knife. Then I hear Rose scream. An' that's all I know. I swear!"

"But you knew," Peace clipped ominously, "that Ferretti hadn't killed Ramsey. Why didn't you tell the police? Why'd you let Carmichael take you to that house where we found you? Why'd your wife swear it was I who'd kidnaped you?"

"Because—" the waiter's tone was bitter, now, hopeless, "because I got a record—I'm on parole. The D.A. tell me firs' he'll send me back because I forget, one month, to report to the parole officer. An' then—afterward—he tell me something happen to my wife an' kids if I don't do what he say. Mister—" he got up off the stool suddenly, whirled to Peace, pleading, "you send me back now? To the Big House?"

SLOWLY the light over Luigi D'Agostino faded out and other softer lights glowed. For a moment Paul Peace looked at Nick Ferretti. Nick was oblivious to everything but Rose. She sobbed quietly.

Peace gripped D'Agostino's shoulder and smiled at him. "No, Luigi," he said, "I don't think they'll send you back. We need you, to send Carmichael where he belongs."

Then Gold approached.

"You called it, Peace," he said. "I thought your theory that the killer came up through the pantry and out the

window, was too easy an answer. But you called it. How?"

Peace grinned and took a rectangular fragment of wood from his pocket. On it was the dark smudge.

He told him how he'd found it, then said, "They only found one or two of Ferretti's prints on the murder knife, Gold. The rest were badly blurred. This mark, on the wood, looks like a bloody fingerprint. But it's not, it was made by a fabric glove. You can make out the faint impression of the cloth.

"Afterward, knowing that Groff had killed Nora Shea, I put him down as a possibility for the Ramsey murder because he had a strip of adhesive around his little finger. I figured his hand had slipped down over the blade of the knife as he stabbed Ramsey—that he cut his hand and left the print in his own blood. But that's only circumstantial evidence. We had to have more than that and—"

"And you got it." Gold rapped.

"We got it," Paul Peace amended.

"Remember, Gold? The credit was to be yours."

Gold grinned, then sobered. "It won't be, though," he said, "You know what they're saying, Peace?"

He shook his head.

"Paul Peace for D.A.," Gold exploded. "Peace for Governor. Hell, men, in another week it'll be Paul Peace for President. And damned if I don't think you'd be elected."

"Oh, no," Peace said, "not I, Gold. D'you know what they call me down on Lake Street?"

"Sure," he answered, "the Champ."

"That's it—the Champ. And, Gold, that's all the title, that's all the office I ever want, or need."

There was a pause, then, "Maybe you're right," Gold said. "Maybe you're right at that!"

Trouble for Tony

By Samuel Taylor
Author of "Lucky Day," etc.



Tony frowned. "You
bad man, Joe; you
betcha!"

IT WAS after midnight when the doorbell rang, and when Tony went to the front door the street light behind the man on the porch of the cottage made of him only a black silhouette of hat and overcoat.

A match flared before the silhouette, revealing a pale, sharp face. The face sucked at a cigarette; the match spun away.

"Tony?"

"You betcha." The peaked face was vaguely familiar. So many people knew him at his fruit stand. . . .

The man slipped past Tony and went inside, along the short hall and through the door to the right into the front room. Tony had left that door open.

Tony followed, closed the door of the front room so any conversation wouldn't drift across the hall and maybe wake Maria and little Franklin. The little man pulled down the front shade,

*A mistake after midnight—
and a correction before dawn*

then came back across the room, sat down with his leg over the arm of an overstuffed chair, pushed back his hat and began unbuttoning his overcoat.

Tony got a flash of shoulder holster and revolver butt under the suit coat. Tony was trying to place the man. The fellow was small and scrawny. He had a putty-white face, and a sharp beak of a nose that was pink along the ridge. Tony saw so many people at his fruit stand in the station. Seeing anybody away from the stand. . . .

"Wine?" he suggested when the other didn't speak.

"Sure."

The decanter was on the side table by the radio. Tony poured a glass,

started to pour another, and dropped the decanter as his eye fell on the evening newspaper lying on the table. The white-faced man's picture was on the front page. That's why he had seemed familiar. Tony had spelled out the story earlier in the evening. The picture was there, and the headline said, *Convict Escapes From San Quentin*.

The decanter bounced on the table when he dropped it, and the tapering neck tilted and threw some of the red wine on the newspaper; then Tony had caught it, and he finished pouring. He turned with the glasses.

The fugitive was grinning, thin lips twisting crookedly under the pink beak nose.

"Nervous, Tony?"

"Nervous? Ha, ha!" Tony laughed nervously.

The fugitive gulped the wine, and it shook his scrawny frame. He handed the glass for a refill.

"Where's Red?" he asked.

Tony didn't know anything about anybody called Red. He turned to pour some more wine, and said nothing.

"Ain't Red got here yet?"

"No. No got here yet," Tony said, taking the cue.

He handed the fugitive the glass and wondered what chance there would be of overpowering the little man before he could get that gun out of the shoulder holster under the coat.

The little man tossed off the glass and handed it for another refill. Tony obliged with alacrity. A man in prison wouldn't be used to liquor. Maybe, if the fugitive got enough . . .

Tony didn't know why Joe Budro was calling on him. All Tony knew about Joe Budro was what the papers had said. A break at the prison. One guard doped with a doctored cigarette; another killed. And Joe Budro loose.

That's all Tony knew—except that the fugitive was sitting in his front room right now drinking wine and asking about somebody called Red.

"Red ought to be here," Joe Budro mused after tossing off the third glass. "Wonder if he got picked up? No; they wouldn't have nothing on him. There wasn't no hitch." Budro chuckled. "Red sure didn't want to come anywheres with me! He slipped me the clothes and the address and scrambled!"

"Ha, ha," said Tony.

The criminal began absently looking at the books on the table. "*How to Become a Citizen*," he read, grinning. "*The Meaning of the Flag*." That's good, Tony. What's this?—*Naturalization Laws of the United States*. You want to be a citizen, huh?"

"You betcha," agreed Tony. "Already, I gotta first paper. Mebbe getta last paper next week, mebbe."

"You want to be a citizen!" laughed the scrawny fugitive.

Tony didn't see anything to laugh about, but under the circumstances he said nothing. Look at this nice house he was buying. Furniture. Car. Wife and child across the hall asleep. Good business with his fruit stand. All this in six years since he arrived. This was his country, you bet. What was funny about becoming a citizen. He already was an American, Tony figured. He'd named his baby Franklin Delano Varacchi. He waded through English language newspapers. He listened to politics on the radio.

"But maybe that ain't such a bad idea," Joe Budro mused. He talked as if he had a cold, in a sort of a half whisper. "They couldn't never deport a citizen, huh? Tony Gaudio, citizen!"

Tony Gaudio!

Tony Varacchi saw the thing plainly

enough, now. Joe Budro had, in some way, called on the wrong Tony! How? Of course, there were plenty of Italians here in Daly City. This very street was filled with them. And Tony was a common enough name in this district.

"More wine, hey, Joe?" Tony suggested. If he could get Budro drunk. . . . He'd have to be careful. If Budro suspected that he was the wrong Tony. . . . There was Maria and little Franklin asleep in the other room; Tony had more than himself to think about. "I'll take another glass," Budro agreed. "But I wonder where Red is at?"

Tony got another idea. "Mebbe so I go find Red, huh?"

"Where?" Budro was watching closely. Tony's hand shook as he handed the glass.

"Dunno. I go looka—"

"Say, what's wrong with you?"

"Drink wine, hey, Joe?" Tony urged. "Nice fellah, Joe."

Budro threw off the wine, lighted another cigarette, and kept looking curiously. "I'll be go to hell," he finally said. "So this is Tony Gaudio. From what Red said, I figured you slick as glass. And you must be, the way you handled that stir break. But you sure don't look it, mister."

"Ha, ha," Tony managed. "Have some more wine, hey, Joe? Then I go out, bring back Red, mebbe, huh?"

"Sure," agreed the criminal. The wine was softening him. It was making his nose more pink in contrast to his face. He picked up one of the books and sat there thumbing through it. Tony got another glass of wine for the little man, then went out the door into the hall, and toward the front door. If he could get outside. . . . A cop lived next door. Angelo Perinoni. He could run over

and wake up Angelo, come back and—"Tony."

Tony turned. Joe Budro was in the hallway, half crouched, with a revolver in his right hand. The pink bridge of his beak nose made a line down the middle of the putty face.

"You better not go out," Budro said. His habitually hoarse voice was down to a whisper.

TONY saw a small yellow card in Budro's left hand, and understood. It was his library card, with his name and address on it. He had a habit of using it for a book mark.

"You better come back in here, Tony Varacchi," Budro advised.

"Tony Varacchi? *Me* Tony Varacchi? Ha, ha! *Me* Tony—"

"The name's Gaudio, but it ain't your'n," Budro said. "Come back in and sit down, Tony Varacchi. I got to think."

Tony didn't argue with the guy. Budro had killed a guard at the prison just a few hours before. Tony went back into the front room, with the scrawny criminal backing in before him. Tony wondered about his wife and baby sleeping in the bedroom across the hall. What would they do if—when—he died?

Budro closed the door, never taking his little eyes from Tony. "Thought it was funny Red wasn't here," he muttered. "How did I—say, this is Bismark, ain't it? 682 Bismark?"

"You betcha," admitted Tony, a bit wanly. "More wine, hey, Joe?" he suggested. Maybe . . .

"No more wine," the fugitive said. "I got to figure this out. Red told me to come to 682 Bismark, and Tony would be there." He leaned back against the closed door, watching Tony, holding the revolver ready. The blood-

less lower lip kept running in and out between his teeth as he tried to think.

Tony heard a small sound, and his heart stopped dead. If Maria was up, and should happen in, maybe scream at sight of the gun. . . . But there was just the one sound. He had to do something quick, however. Maria always got up about this time of the night to feed the baby.

"If they're trying to cross me up, giving me the wrong address—" Budro was mumbling suspiciously. "But, hell, they wouldn't. I'm the only one which knows where the stuff is at. They helped me burst out of stir on that account. So they wouldn't cross me up now. But if they did. . . . Here, hand me that telephone book, Tony."

The book was on the radio, and Tony felt its weight in his hands. Heavy and thick. It wasn't much of a weapon; but Tony didn't have much choice. He knew he had to do something pretty soon. Budro wouldn't let him live to tell about the mistake. Tony took hold the back of the thick book with his right hand, and when he got close enough to Budro he gave the book a swing, backhanded, as hard as he could, and with his left hand he grabbed for the revolver.

Budro instinctively recoiled, and he hit the back of his head sharply against the door. Tony felt the weapon in his left hand, felt the cylinder trying to turn as Budro squeezed the trigger. The book had only hit the little man on the side of the face. Budro was pulling the trigger of the weapon, and using his other hand and his legs for any kind of fighting that was handy. The little mouth under the beak nose was snarling, and Budro was fighting like an animal. Tony let him have it with his fist, and felt bone solidly under his knuckles as he drove Budro's

head back against the door again. Then Tony had the weapon.

He motioned Budro into a chair, then took the telephone book over by the radio, and keeping an eye on the fugitive, looked up Tony Gaudio's number.

Gaudio, Antonio, r 862 Bismark . . . RAndolph, 0379

"Plenty excite, huh?" Tony said. "My place, 682 Bismark. Gaudio, he live 862 Bismark. Easy mistake, you betcha, when a man excite, mebbe." Yes, it was easy enough to understand, now. A man fresh from prison, on edge. Murder of a guard fresh on his mind. Even trained accountants made mistakes like that every day—682 for 862.

Tony picked up the telephone. He kept the revolver in one hand.

"Wait a minute," came the husky whisper from the fugitive. In the chair, he seemed to have shrunken. The pinched face was a ghastly gray, with the red bridge of the nose making an unhealthy line of color. "Don't call the cops, Tony. Wait a minute."

"For why not, hey?"

The thin lips twisted under the beak nose. "You don't want to call no bulls, Tony. Remember what happened when they caught Big Boy Jackson over in Berkeley? Remember how they put the guy in prison who was hiding Big Boy out? You call the cops, Tony, and I'll tell 'em that you was hiding me out and then we got in a quarrel and you decided to turn me in. I'll swear that, Tony."

Tony frowned. "You bad man, Joe; you betcha."

Budro straightened a bit in his chair. His voice got up a bit above a husky whisper as confidence returned.

"And even if you get loose from the cops, Tony—then what? Listen, there's

a hundred grand in cash that I know where it is. That's why Tony Gaudio and Red helped spring me. If you turn me in, then Gaudio and Red are goin' to be sore, see? I'm the only one knows where that stuff is. And maybe they'd get you for it, Tony. Or somebody close to you. Get it, Tony?"

Tony said nothing.

Budro lighted a cigarette, and squinted calculatingly through a puff of smoke. He was getting plenty of confidence.

"Listen, Tony: you ain't got nothing on Gaudio and Red. And they'll sure be sore if you bust up their chance for a cut. But what if you'd come in with the three of us, Tony? You split a hundred grand four ways instead of three, and it still ain't hay. I know where that haul is cached, Tony. We split four ways, huh? I guess you could use twenty-five thousand, couldn't you, Tony? It wouldn't be so hard to take, huh?"

Tony stood there a long moment. There sounded a squeal of a hinge. He put the revolver in his pocket. The hall door opened. Maria was there, eyes puffed with sleep, dark hair disheveled, a robe over her nightgown, the baby's bottle in one hand.

"Tony, you'd better stop studying and come to—oh!" as she saw Budro. "I didn't know—"

"Old friend," Tony said. "Joe old friend. You betcha. He say mebbe we go over for see Tony Gaudio, me and Joe."

"Tony Gaudio?"

"Neighbor. He live couple block down the street. 862 Bismark. Come on, Joe. You no care, Maria?"

"It's late, Tony."

Tony laughed. "Be back soon, you betcha! Come on, Joe."

Maria didn't object any more. As

he went into the hall, Tony saw her stoop to pick up a cigarette stub Budro had ground into the carpet. Maria was a neat woman. Always so neat. She wouldn't go to sleep now until she had straightened up that room.

TONY went outside with Joe Budro, and the scrawny fugitive turned up a crooked grin, saying, "I knowed you was wise, Tony. A quarter cut of a hundred grand ain't hay."

"You betcha," agreed Tony. He kept his hand on the gun in his pocket. There was nobody else on the street this time of night. Nice neighborhood of small houses with lawns, inhabited by the sort of families who are always seen polishing the car Sunday morning. Tony looked straight ahead as he passed the house of Angelo Perinoni, the cop.

Blinds were drawn at 862 Bismark, but light showed behind them in a front room. The house was one-story stucco. Joe Budro rang the bell. The lights behind the blinds blinked off.

No sound, no sign of life in the dark house; but the uncomfortable feeling that eyes were watching.

"It's okay, boys," Budro said into the night with his hoarse half whisper. "This is a pal of mine. He's got an at-gay in my ibs-ray, boys. Just a pal. A umb-day op-way, boys. Good friend."

"At-gay, huh?" came a voice.

"Sure, just a pal," Budro said. And to Tony: "I'm giving him the pass-word."

"You betcha," said Tony.

The door opened. Budro went in first, and Tony followed into the darkness. Quick motion somewhere; the feel of it; then a crashing blow to the shoulder. Tony flung up an arm too late. Another blow sent lights flashing

as something smashed against his head.

He came to on an iron-framed day-bed covered with a lumpy mattress. The lights still seemed to be flashing inside his head, banging against his skull trying to get out. It felt like a big soft tomato was hanging from behind his right ear, and throbbing.

He turned his eyes to see Budro sitting with two other men across the room on a moth-eaten davenport. They had made inroads on a bottle of hard liquor that was setting half full atop a battered radio on the other side of the room. The plaster walls were dirty and the floor was littered with cigarette stubs. Good thing Maria couldn't see a filthy place like this. Maria so neat and tidy. Smoke coiled around the single light and was heavy in the room. Budro was sitting in the center on the davenport. On his right was a man big and rawboned, with a lantern jaw and freckles. That would be Red, and so the man on the other end of the davenport would be Gaudio. This one was a darkly handsome fellow, well dressed, with prominent white teeth. Tony had seen him a couple of times, as you might see a neighbor two blocks away.

"How do you feel, big shot?" Budro asked. He got up and came across the room, swaggering and reeling a little from the effects of liquor. His sharp beak nose was more pink in contrast to his gray face. "Smart guy, huh? Come along for your cut, did you? But listen, Tony, you'll never be an American until you learn one thing. You can get your final papers a dozen times, but you won't be an American until you learn hog-Latin."

"You smart guy," admitted Tony. He sat up on the daybed, and with elbows on knees supported his hammering head.

Budro's hoarse laugh came. "You

dumb punk! All that's kept me alive for eight years in stir was knowing I'd have that stuff if I got out. You wouldn't figure I'd hand a cut over to a greasy chump like you?"

Budro grabbed Tony's curly black hair and jerked the head back. "Look at me! And when I tell you what I'm going to, you listen good."

"Wait a minute," spoke up the well-dressed Gaudio from the davenport. "I don't like letting him in on it. A dumb cluck like him might spoil the whole play." Gaudio had no trace of accent.

"Sure not, Joe," rumbled rawboned Red, sticking out his lantern jaw. "The three of us has handled the deal this far, so why let him in on it?"

Gaudio said, "I'll go get the stuff myself."

Joe Budro smiled with what he perhaps fancied was sweet derision. "You'll go get it! I'll tell you where it is and you'll go get it! I haven't got a doubt of it—but listen, you butter-mouthed dude, when would I ever see you again if you went and got it?"

Red raised bleached eyebrows at Gaudio beside him on the davenport. "Trust and brotherhood. So definitely touching!"

"SURE, I'll trust you," croaked Budro in his half whisper. "I'll trust both of you as far as I can pick up this here house and carry it. I know why you boys engineered that jail break. And it wasn't because you liked me. You knew I could put a finger on that armored car haul that nobody's ever found. That's why you helped me out and that's the only reason. I didn't even know you before I got the proposition by grapevine. You don't love me, boys, and it goes double for me. When we split the stuff, I blow, and

I won't see you or need you, and you won't never want to see me."

"Okay, okay," Gaudio said wearily. He edged up a razor crease of his trouser leg, crossed his legs. "But I still don't like sending this dumb Annie for the stuff."

"How else?" Joe Budro demanded. "I can't do it myself, because I couldn't get that far. When I blow, I've got to have dough to grease the skids. And I ain't going to sit here and let you go get it, because you wouldn't never get back. And so"—the fugitive jerked a thumb at Tony—"our friend runs the errand for us. And he's a good boy, because he wouldn't want his family to be hurt while he's gone."

"Family?" Red spoke up. "That's kidnappin'."

"Imagine that!" mocked the little fugitive. "Kidnapping! What d'you think it is to kill a screw in a stir break? Remember you helped me bust out of that place, and so you're just as guilty of killing that screw as if you held the gat instead of me. That's the law, boys, and you'd better swallow it. We're all in on this up to the neck."

"Okay, okay," Gaudio said. "This guy goes for the stuff. Give him the inside dope on it."

"Not that easy," Budro said slyly. He went to the radio, snapped it on, took a swallow from the bottle atop it while the tubes warmed, tuned in an all-night recording program and turned the volume fairly loud. Then he came over to the daybed and began giving directions to Tony. Gaudio and Red, across the room on the davenport, couldn't hear the hoarse whisper because of the radio.

Even as he listened, Tony felt a warm sense of well-being that he wasn't a suspicious crook like these three. All that held them together was

that hidden loot. Budro couldn't go get it; the other two didn't know where it was. Tony wondered what would be the eventual outcome. They'd have to make the split of the loot. And then. . .

Budro was saying in his hoarse whisper: "Take a plane to L.A. and go to the Denver Hotel on Main Street and sign up for Room 32. Take the screws out of the doorknob plate and you'll find a folded stub between the plate and the wood of the door. It's a stub to a storage company, and the name of the company is on the stub. You go there and get the trunk that goes with the stub. The storage is paid a long while in advance. You get that trunk and ship it to this address. Then you go home, and you keep your face closed until your family gets back. Otherwise they won't never get back. See?"

"You betcha," Tony admitted. "I see."

Budro crossed over to the radio and snapped it off.

"All fixed?" immaculate Gaudio asked suavely.

Budro nodded. "When he gets the stuff he ships it to this house and then he keeps a closed puss until he sees his family again."

"That's kidnappin'," Red rumbled again.

"Okay, Joe," Gaudio agreed.

Red shrugged loose-jointed shoulders.

Joe Budro got out a cigarette from his right-hand coat pocket, then took another pack from his left-hand pocket and tossed one to Tony.

"A couple puffs of that and you'll be dreaming," he said cheerfully. "While you're asleep we'll take the dodge and arrange a trip for your family. Nice pretty girl you married, Tony. When you wake up, you do what I told you. Or maybe you won't see

much of that pretty wife no more."

Tony tapped the cigarette on his thumbnail carefully, and tried to do some thinking. Budro lighted his cigarette and advanced with the match in his cupped hands to where Tony was sitting on the daybed.

"Light up and drag her down, Tony. It won't hurt you. Just put you to sleep, is all."

THE match advanced with the palms cupped behind it. Tony got a glimpse of Gaudio and Red watching from across the room. Clever enough, doped cigarettes in a prison break. A man will always accept a cigarette. Budro had been a trusty. That probably made it easy.

Tony took the cigarette from his mouth, and shook his head, grinning, looking up at Budro's pinched face.

"Why for I smoke this?" he said. "What you think I am—an umb-day op-way?"

This hog-Latin was like dropping a hammer on the heads of the three men. If Tony had understood hog-Latin all along, and still had walked in here. . . .

Tony didn't give them time to think about it. He was coming up from the daybed, and forward. There was a blinding pain as the top of his head rammed Joe Budro's chin. Tony was groggy as the force of his lunge carried both him and the little man sprawling onto the floor. Budro was limp.

Tony blinked groggy eyes from the tangle on the floor. Gaudio and Red hadn't been sitting still. They were up, ready, crouched, and each held an automatic.

"Git up!" rumbled Red.

Gaudio showed fear. "If you knew hog-Latin—"

Tony grinned. He began untangling himself from Budro on the floor. He

could feel the bulge of Budro's shoulder holster under the coat.

"You betcha," he grinned, bringing his hand up slowly under the coat. Budro's body was between Tony's hand and the other two men. "I know the hog-Latin. Me real American. I know—"

Then Red shot, seeing Tony's hand move. In the closed room, the explosion was a physical force that smashed at the ears. And the slug knocked Tony backward like the blow from a sledge. Budro's gun came in his hand as he went over, and he just kept pulling the trigger. Everything in the room was a roar and a haze. He saw Red stiffen and begin to cringe forward. Somebody yelled. Guns were going. Gaudio was taking his time, cool in the noise and smoke. Tony couldn't pull the trigger any more. He didn't have the strength in his finger to fight the trigger back against the spring of the double-action mechanism. Gaudio was taking his time, arm outstretched, bringing his automatic down like a man at signal practice.

Then the automatic went off, shooting into the ceiling, and Gaudio crumpled. He went down and yet there was a man standing there. It was a man in pants and a nightshirt stuffed into them, with a policeman's club in his hand.

It was Tony's neighbor, Angelo Perinoni, the cop. Angelo took the guns from all men, hoisted Tony onto the daybed, staightened out Red and Gaudio, and pulled Budro, who was reviving, to his feet.

"Well, you got us," Budro said. "You got all of us. We was all of us in on it."

Angelo Perinoni used a right cross and Budro went down again. "That dirty rat, trying to pull you in on the

deal!" he said to Tony. "Me, I was listening at the door all the while. Your wife came over and told me you and Budro had come here, so I came and got what I could while she called headquarters."

THE police came soon afterwards. Tony went to the hospital. His wound wasn't serious, but they wanted him at least overnight for observation. The District Attorney came in person to see Tony, and he got in, which was more than half a dozen reporters and cameramen could do. Tony explained things as simply as he could.

"I see," said the D.A. "You were afraid of being implicated with Budro, when you had him in your house. So you went with him to the Gaudio place."

"No; not afraid. Not Tony. I know nobody could say I am partner of Budro before he go to prison. Because I am in Italy when he go to prison."

"Then you were afraid of the vengeance of Gaudio and Red if you turned Budro over to the police?"

"Afraid! Not Tony!"

"Then *why*?" asked the D.A. "Why did you risk your neck by going with Budro, when you had him in your own house with a gun on him?"

"Risk?" Tony frowned. "No risk. I know Maria will clean up room before she go to bed. She will wipe up wine spilled on newspaper, see picture of Budro. She will know where I am. She will tell the neighbor who is cop, Angelo Perinoni—"

The D.A. smiled sweetly. "So simple as that! No chance at all, as you might say."

"We-ell, little bit of chance," Tony admitted. "But I want to get all three, not only Budro. Want to know where at is the loot."

"That's a cop's job, Tony."

"But the book! The book, she say it is my job!"

"Book? What book?"

"The book about how to be citizen. She say every American he is to enforce law, hey? Me American. Gotta first paper. Getta last paper next week, mebbe. You betcha!"

Then Tony said quickly, worriedly: "But this trouble. It no make trouble for Tony, huh? No make for trouble about to get the last paper for being citizen?"

The D.A. rubbed a big paw over his mouth. "Well, no, Tony," he admitted. "It hadn't ought to make trouble. In fact, we need a few more citizens like you."



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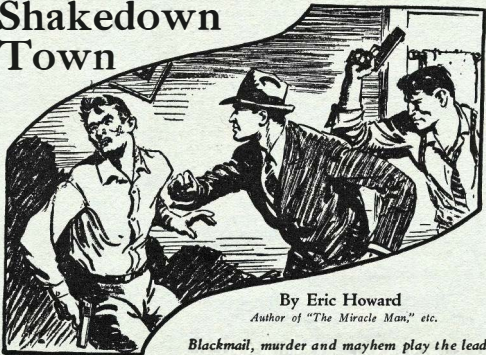
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I bopped one and
the other bopped me

By Eric Howard

Author of "The Miracle Man," etc.

Blackmail, murder and mayhem play the leading roles until a private dick steps in as stage director

THE dame was a beauty fifteen or twenty years ago, and she's still a pretty good eye-ful. I thought I remembered her from somebody's chorus line-up back in the big town, when I used to get free seats in all the music shows—girls and music, I mean. And I did remember her, but not under the name she handed me.

"I'm Mrs. Burton Mack," she said. "I've come to you, Mr. Neal, because I want you to make a confidential investigation of—of what my husband is doing with his money."

"Tut-tut," I said. "Maybe you wouldn't like to know, Mrs. Mack."

"It isn't another woman," she said, with a toss of her platinum hair and a flash of her eye. "If that was it, I could handle it."

I'll bet she could too.

"My husband is Burt Mack, the comedian," she went on.

"Oh, sure!" I said. "The boy's good. He's about the only guy in pictures that can make me roll in the aisle. I used to see him in the big town. When he headlined at the Palace, he always stopped the show."

"Yes," she smiled. "He's good, one of the best. I used to be in the Frolics—Gretchen Graves, my name was—and after I married Burt we toured in vaudeville together. Then he crashed the pictures and now he's under contract. He gets two thousand a week and will get twenty-five hundred next year. But he's always broke and worried about money. That's what I want you to figure out, Mr. Neal."

I remembered Gretchen Graves, all

right. She had put away too many calories, maybe, but in the old days she had been slim and lovely, billed as the world's most beautiful show-girl.

"You know how it is," I said, dragging on my cigar. "This is an expensive burg. By the time he pays off his agent, his publicity man and buys the hangers-on a round of drinks, his two thousand berries is shot. It doesn't take long."

I was stalling. I didn't want to investigate Burt Mack's income and outgo. I had heard too much. I had heard that it wasn't safe to pry into such things. Two guys I knew in the private detective racket had gone on long, long trips and had not come back. They wouldn't, either. And the cops don't weep too long when one of us boys gets it.

"Burt's the most generous man in the world," Gretchen said. "He'll give me anything I ask for and he's always giving me things I don't ask for and don't even want. Every bum in show business knows he's an easy touch. He throws five dollar bills around like confetti and always has. That's all right. I've got a heart, too. I wouldn't care if he gave half his salary away to people that need it. But this is different. Somebody's taking it away from him, making him kick through. He's worried. He can't sleep. He's drinking—and he never drank much before. It's got him so bothered that he snaps at me and then gets apologetic. He won't tell me what's wrong. He's scared. It's affecting his work and getting him down. I've got to know! I've got to do something! I'm in love with Burt even if we have been married fifteen years and I can't stand . . ."

She went sobby and put a little handkerchief to her eyes. I'm a soft-hearted

sap, when pretty women cry, and I said soothing things.

"Then you will help me!" she jumped at the conclusion. "I came to you because Bill Haynes told me you were a swell guy. Bill would want you to help me."

I winced. I couldn't stall—not if she was a friend of Bill's and Bill would want me to help.

"Oke," I grunted. "Tell me all you know or guess."

IT WASN'T much. After Burt made his first hit in pictures—he stole the show from two stars—and got into the big money, Gretchen urged him to get a business manager to invest his money. He agreed, then backed down. He went secretive on her, which he had never been before, and he flew into rages over bills. He had never cared how much she spent before—his line was, "Baby, the world is yours! Nothing too good for you!"—but now he set up a howl whenever she spent fifty bucks for a dress. Somebody was taking his dough away from him, in large chunks, and had him scared to death. That's all Gretchen knew. Burt had lost weight, had grown irascible, and was worrying himself sick. It couldn't go on. She wouldn't let it go on. If she could spot the crooks she'd fight them herself.

I got rid of her by telling her I'd do my best. Then I put my feet up on my desk, there in my office cubby-hole, and puffed at my cigar. I was kind of scared, myself. I had heard plenty. There was a flock of loan racketeers working over the small-fry in the picture town, and they were pretty dangerous. I had them linked with big shots up above who were shaking down the big-money boys and girls. There was too much loose money

in the town, and it was easy to get. There were so many ups and downs in pictures, for everybody but those on top, that everybody needed a loan now and then.

The way the sharks worked it was this: they'd hang around the sets, as extras, and spot the people who needed dough. They'd steer 'em to a joint where they could borrow, anything from five to five hundred. After that, the racket started. Twenty per cent interest, with all kinds of threats if they didn't pay up. They'd point out cripples, guys with battered faces, broken arms, as fellows who didn't pay. Scared, the boys and girls had to raise the money—some way, anyway. I had got this dope from an extra I knew; they kept him over a barrel for a year, until he managed to beg, borrow and steal enough to pay off. On a hundred dollar loan, he paid back four hundred. He told me about it when he was drunk, and then he begged me not to let it out or "they" would mutilate him, make it impossible for him to work. It was a big-money racket.

With the big-money people, they used other methods—blackmail, scandal threats, and so on. There's a morality clause in every contract and every contract player has it hanging over his head. One break and his option is not renewed.

But what did they have on Burt Mack? He had been married fifteen years, he was in love with his wife, he was a big-hearted guy with a million friends. How could they shake down a boy like that?

Gretchen didn't know. Neither did I.

I shot old Bill Haynes, in New York, an air-mail letter. Did he know anything in Burt's past, preceding his marriage to Gretchen, that would give

blackmailers a toe-hold? He fired back a long telegram that went like this:

YEAH STOP FORMER VAUDEVILLE PARTNER OF COMIC HAD CHILD WHICH SHE SAID WAS HIS STOP QUIT HIS ACT AFTER BATTLE AND SKIPPED OUT WITH ANOTHER GUY WHO MARRIED HER AND DESERTED HER STOP BELIEVE COMIC WHILE DISCLAIMING PATERNITY HAS SINCE THEN LIBERALLY SUPPORTED MOTHER AND CHILD STOP PROBABLY ONE THING HE NEVER TOLD WIFE STOP LETTER FOLLOWS STOP BOTH SWELL FOLKS STOP DO YOUR BEST FOR THEM STOP BILL

His letter said the same thing, but in greater detail. The dame who had been Burt's partner had been known as Dolly Dascom on the stage. She had been with Burt a couple of years. He liked her and stood for a lot of tantrums, including some alcoholic hysteria. Then she got in with a bad lot and tried to shake him down; he settled out of court, offering to give her and the child an allowance. After that she married a tramp who deserted her and later went up the river. Tony Bassetti, Bill said his name was. Dolly quit the stage and had since been living on the allowance Burt sent her. The child was now a seventeen year old boy. Where Dolly was, Bill didn't know. But he thought she could be in California and Tony Bassetti might also be enjoying our climate and fog.

I phoned the extra who had spilled the talk about the loan and interest boys and told him to hurry down to the office. He said he couldn't. I said, "You better," and hung up.

HE POPPED in, looking scared, half an hour later. He was a handsome young guy and if you had seen him you'd wonder why he was still an extra and not on top. But

Hollywood is full of boys and girls like that, kids who seem to have everything but "the breaks."

"Sit down," I said.

"Have a heart, Neal," he pleaded. "I don't want anybody to know I know you. If they—"

"Forget it," I said. "'They' are not watching you every minute. They're through with you; they collected. This is a big business and they can't keep their eyes on all the customers all the time."

The guy was jittery—fear and booze and maybe marijuana cigarettes.

"You don't know!" he wailed. "They have spies in every studio. Nobody knows who they are, but they're there. It might be your best friend. Or your girl."

"Okay, Paul," I said. His name was Paul Hughes. "I just want to ask a couple of questions. Then you can beat it. Next time you see me, you don't know me. Nobody saw you come here."

"If you want to stay healthy, you'd better drop this."

"I can't now. I'm in. First question: did you ever hear or see anything of a former show dame, who'd be about forty, and who might be called Dolly?"

I was shooting in the dark, and I was astonished by his reaction.

"Dolly!" he gasped. "Oh, my heavens!" And went as white as two sheets.

"Dolly," I repeated. "And she might have a son seventeen or so."

If he had been jittery, he was worse now. He folded up, as though his spine had collapsed. He was breathing hard. He seemed sick. Then he got mad and smacked his fist on the desk.

"Tell me," I urged gently.

He had a wild look in his eye. He

was killing mad or suicidal, I didn't know which. And breathing so hard it hurt him.

"There might also be a tough Italian in the picture," I went on, "named Bassetti or something like that."

"Bassett!" he yelled, and jumped to his feet, shaking his fist. "Bassett!"

I grabbed him and shoved him back in his chair.

"What the hell?" I said. "Why do a couple of names stir you up so?"

He gulped and swallowed and looked up at me. Pitiful.

"I can't say anything, Neal," he pleaded. "I'm—scared. I told you, they're everywhere. Your best friend, your girl—"

I shook him. "Who's Dolly?" I asked. "And where?"

He wouldn't talk. I shook him some more, told him he had to give me a lead. That's all, just a lead. Nobody would ever know it came from him. I got rough and persuasive, all at once.

He talked. "Dolly runs the rooming house where I live," he said. "I've been there three or four years. Her kid, Joe, is about seventeen. Bassett—he looks like Italian, but says he isn't—stays there, off and on. Mostly bit players and extras. Dolly—"

"Okay, Paul. Run along home and keep quiet. Don't do anything."

He was glad to leave. I got up, grabbed my hat and went down to the D. A.'s office. Myers, a big, dumb, tough cop, was on his staff of investigators. I found him in his office, with racing forms all over his desk.

"Look, Neal," he said, "loan me ten bucks to put down on Floating Leaf in the fifth."

"I loaned you the last ten bucks years ago, fella," I told him and shoved all the papers off the desk.

"Forget the ponies for once. I want to talk about something else."

"If I had ten bucks—"

"Shut up! Here's what I want to know: why does that fat little boss of yours lay off the loan racketeers? What about the picture shake-downs? Who told him to lay off?"

Myers shrugged. "We don't get any complaints," he said. "If we don't get complaints, we can't—"

"Uh-huh! The same old song and dance. Okay, toots. You'll be getting some complaints. What I want to know is this: if I bust something wide open, can I count on this office or are you owned?"

Myers got shifty-eyed. "Neal," he said, "I like you, even if you won't let me have ten bucks. I wouldn't try to bust anything open. It won't bust easy and—"

I shook my fist under his nose. "Who's the guy on top? Who kicked in big money to your lousy boss's campaign fund? Huh? Who's the cheese that's getting protection?"

"Me, I'm just an office boy here," Myers said. "I wouldn't know such things, even if they happened. I wouldn't want to know 'em. Why don't you get smart, Neal? A stone wall is no place to bump your head."

That made me mad and I started cussing. But his phone rang and he picked it up.

"Huh?" he said. "Well, why tell me about it? I can't help it. If a dumb egg wants to inhale gas, I can't stop him if I ain't there. What's his name? . . . Paul Hughes? . . . Okay."

"Who'd he say?" I yelled.

"Some mutt named Hughes—aged thirty, movie extra—did the Dutch in his room on Lexington. The sergeant thought I'd be interested. These cops—Hey, where you going, Neal?"

I WAS already gone. A few minutes later I was going up the steps to Dolly's rooming house. It was a big old stucco, with ten or twelve rooms, that needed paint and remodeling. A colored maid let me in and called, "Miss Dolly."

Dolly was a buxom little brunette, plastered with makeup. The mascara was dripping down her cheeks, and she was dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. She was pretty drunk.

I told her I had known Paul and she wailed, "Oh, the poor boy!"

She went on about how sorry she was for him, mentioned the rent he owed her, and so on. She let me take a look at his disordered back room. It was about eight by ten and so full of junk you could hardly turn around in it. There was a little closet, full of clothes—most of his money had gone into wardrobe—and it was in this closet they had found him. He had slipped the gas hose under the closet door, turned it on and banged the door shut. The door flattened out the tube, but let plenty of gas get in. He had been dead a while when they smelled gas and found him.

"Too bad," I said. "What made him do it? Was he unhappy or drunk or what?"

"I dunno," Dolly said. "He came in a while ago and told me he didn't get the job he went after. He said he couldn't pay me. I give my people a lot of credit. I told him he'd get a break. He went to his room, then. After a while, the maid smelled gas and . . ."

It sounded very phony. I saw a bruise on Dolly's neck. I was betting my money Paul had come back here mad enough to kill her, they had had a battle, and then . . . But how had they got him to commit suicide? Or was

it murder? My money said murder.

I beat it down to the morgue and looked at Paul. His white, soft hands were scarred up some. He had landed a few blows before they put him in the closet and turned on the gas. Under one of his fingernails there was a blood-stain and a small piece of something that might be flesh.

Sergeant Hicks, of Homicide, came in while I was there.

"What are you doin' on this job?" he asked.

"I knew the guy," I said. "Listen, Hickey, do me a favor." I pointed to the fingernail. "Have one of your scientific boys get to work on that. And see if you can find any signs of ropes or a gag?"

"What you drivin' at? He did the Dutch. We found him in the closet, full of gas."

"Somebody could have put him there, tied up and gagged. Get me, Hicksy? It could be homicide."

He grunted, but called a pop-eyed Russian chemist, Ordynski, who was on his staff. This guy was a wiz. Inside an hour he told us things that had Hicks as nutty as a greyhound after a rabbit.

Under Paul's finger nail, he found a piece of human flesh—from some man's cheek, for there was a dark, wiry hair from a beard in it. He also found a thread or two of brown silk clinging to Paul's cuffs; he could have been bound with a silk cord from a bathrobe. And at the back of his neck, concealed by his hair, there was faint evidence of pressure; a knotted gag could have made it.

Paul had clawed the guy who tied him and threw him in the closet.

"I'll get him," said Hicks. "Damn it, I'll get him! I'll go out there and check everything. Come on, Neal—

and tell me all you know on the way."

"The D. A. will tell you to lay off," I said.

"To hell with the fat little runt!" he growled. "I'll open it so wide he'll have to go to bat."

So I told him, leaving out Burt Mack's name. Told him about the dame, Dolly, Bassett or Bassetti, her boy and the picture star who was on the wrong end of a shakedown.

"Uh-huh!" said Hicks. "I've heard about it. If they'd let me, I'd go after 'em."

"Who's the guy on top?" I asked. "Ever hear?"

"Naw," he growled. "He wouldn't be directly in it, anyway. Some mug like this Bassett runs the biz; the big boy just takes a cut."

DOLLY must have put away another half-pint or so. She was giggling drunk when we arrived, and the maid had called a doctor.

"Mr. Bassett here?" I asked the maid.

"Lordy, no," she said. "He ain't been heah for mo' 'n a week. I dunno wheah he is. Miss Dolly says he was up in Reno. But I dunno wha' fo'. He ain't got nobody to divo'ce." She giggled, too, and I smelled gin.

No use hanging around while Hicks went over the premises. Besides, I saw a dark-haired boy, about seventeen, fooling with a motorcycle in the back yard. Dolly's kid. I might get farther watching him.

I beat it, telling Hicks I'd phone him later. I walked up to a service station at the corner, got a pack of cigarettes out of a vending machine, a handful of salted peanuts out of another. I could spot the kid if he rode out. He did, after a while, and came right into the service station.

The boys knew him. They called him Jerry. He left the motorbike there to have some work done on it and took a walk. I asked a few questions, then ambled after him. All I learned was that the kid had plenty of spending money.

He went into a beer joint six blocks away. Me, too. He drank a beer and started feeding dimes into a slot machine. The boys here knew him, too, and treated him like a good steady customer.

When he got tired of the dime-wasting, he had another beer and drifted out. I went along, a little later, and picked him up down the street. He was turning a corner toward Santa Monica. He turned another and pulled up before an expensive apartment hotel on the boulevard. He went in, after a quick glance over his shoulder.

I went in, too. There was a pop-eyed clerk on duty.

"Mr. Bassett in?" I said.

"N-no," he told me, and added: "There's no one here by that name."

"No? That's funny. You mean to tell me my old Pal Tony Bassett ain't here? He told me in Reno I'd find him here."

"In Reno? Oh." The guy popped his eyes out like a frog and sized me up. He smiled a little. "Come to think of it, one of our guests—Mr. Jordan—has a friend named Bassett. He might be up there with Mr. Jordan."

"Reno" was a password, I guessed. The clerk gave me the number and I said I'd go right up.

But I let myself out of the automatic elevator on the floor below. The clerk would tell them I was on the way. I went up the stairway and took a peep. A dark-haired guy—with a little court plaster on his cheek—was looking out of the door. Bassett or Bassetti. He

looked a lot like Dolly's kid, enough to be the boy's father.

I ducked down and waited a few minutes. He slammed the door. I went on up and stood near the door. I could hear them talking in there, but I couldn't get the words—just a mumble. I pushed on the bell.

The boy opened the door.

I shoved my big foot in. I had my hand on my gun in my pocket.

"Come in, flatfoot," said Bassett.

The kid swung the door wide, with a mean grin on his face, and there was Bassett in a big chair, pointing a gun at me.

"So we met in Reno, did we?" he snarled. "You sure it wasn't Sing Sing? Take your hand out of your pocket—easy—and speak your piece."

"How are you, Tony?" I said. "Who scratched you? That white court plaster shows up on your mug like a neon sign in a dark street."

I sat down across from him and reached for a cigarette on a table.

He kept staring at me out of his mean black eyes. I knew he was plenty bad, but I took it easy.

"Put your toy away," I said. "You won't need it. Let's make it a friendly little chat."

"Yeah?" he croaked. "What you want to talk about?"

"I'm not on the cops," I said. "Just a private dick. With one client, right now. Just one. He's all I'm interested in. He's laid a lot of golden eggs and maybe he's a goose. But he's slipping, pal. He can't keep up the payments, see? The struggle is too much. Get it? If he lands in a sanitarium, that's the end of his contract. No more jack. For anybody. That's happened to two or three in the big money. Remember? Catch on? Now if people would lay off him, be reasonable, and give him

a little peace of mind—he could keep up the payments longer.”

I was just trying him out, wondering what the angle was. If Tony just wanted money, I was giving him good advice.

But he started cussing, and the guy he was cussing was Burt Mack. He was down on him, he hated him, he wanted to smash him even if he lost money.

He was so mad he couldn't talk straight. But from his spluttering I got the idea he thought Burt had hired Paul to spy on him. More than that, he thought Burt had been seeing Dolly. That was funny! I figured that Dolly had handed him a drunken line, just to make him jealous, about Burt. That was the dame's idea of fun.

THEN he turned his mad on me, tapping the plaster on his cheek with his finger. He knew, no matter what I told him, that I knew what he had done to Paul. Maybe he knew Paul had talked to me.

“Go on home, Jerry,” he said to the kid, after cussing me out. “Take care of her. When the doc sobers her up, don't let her get any more for a while—only enough to keep her steady.”

He tossed the boy a small roll of twenties. “Be smart,” he added. “You don't know anything.”

“Okay,” the kid said. “I'd like to go with you. It'd be fun to watch this cop—”

“Never mind,” said Bassett. “You look after her.”

The boy beat it.

“Stand up and face the wall,” Bassett said. “With your dukes up.”

I did. He took my gun. I was watching his shadow on the wall. He swung his own gun. I ducked, whirled and

socked, all at once. I knocked him off his pins. He landed against the wall, snarling at me, wanting to shoot, but afraid of the noise. I laughed at him. If I'd only had Bassett to handle, I might have jumped him, kicked his courage out of him and got him ready to turn over to Hicks. But I had forgotten that this was Mr. Jordan's apartment. I forgot there was a guy named Jordan. He came out of the bathroom, behind me, hit me over the head. And all I knew, in that brief flash, was that I was going out.

I WAS out for a few hours. And when I came out of it, with a splitting headache, I wasn't in Mr. Jordan's apartment on Santa Monica. I was in a big, partly furnished room in a house that smelled old—they must have cooked corned beef and cabbage in it every day for years; Bassett was there, a big tough—Jordan, probably—and Burt Mack!

The comic looked ten years older than on the screen, and he wasn't funny. I was sorry for him, even with that headache.

The big guy, Jordan, who looked like a bruiser, was taking a drink.

“We just want to show you, funny-man,” he said to Burt, “that we can do things. You hired this dumb dick”—that was me—“and you talked to that extra, Hughes. Hughes is dead—he committed suicide—and the dumb dick is right here.”

“You're nuts,” I said. “I never saw Burt Mack before except in the pictures. And Hughes was murdered. One of you mugs is going to the lethal chamber for that.”

“Wise guy, huh?” asked the big one. “How'd you like to be crippled up some?”

I subsided. That was their specialty,

mutilating people to make them pay up or to scare them to death.

"That's right," said Burt. "I never saw this detective and I didn't hire him. Do you think I'm a fool? As for Hughes, he happened to be working in one of my pictures. He knew some friends of mine, in New York, and we talked. But not about this."

"You gave him money," Bassett accused him. "What for?"

"He touched me for twenty bucks," said Burt. "He hadn't been working and he needed a little money."

Jordan laughed. "You don't want to be so liberal with *our* money," he said.

Burt colored up and bit his lip. Jordan went on talking.

"We want you to know we can do things," he said. "Something might happen to your wife, see? Or a story might break about you and Dolly, your kid and—"

"Yeah!" said Bassett. "Every time I leave town for a while, Dolly calls you up and you're right there! You think I'll stand for that?"

"I haven't seen her for years!" said Burt.

"Oh, no?" Bassett sneered. "That ain't what she says."

"She's giving you a line," I told him.

"Who asked you anything?" he growled. "How'd you like a good poke in the nose, huh?"

I shut up again.

"Now, now," said Jordan, in a piping voice, "play nice! You can go, Burt. But just remember what we can do. We got somebody watching you all the time. You've got to play ball or else. Remember what happened to Hughes. You don't want your wife to get hurt in an automobile accident or anything. Beat it, boy, but remember your lesson."

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Burt, pointing at me.

"Oh, don't worry about him," Jordan said genially.

The comic was game. He leaned forward earnestly and said, "I didn't hire him. I never saw him before. Let him go with me. You can't—hurt him. It's all a mistake. Let him go with me. Aren't you getting enough out of me? Why do you have to . . ."

"Big-hearted Burt Mack!" Jordan laughed. "Always trying to help somebody!"

Burt had nerve. I admire the fellow.

"I won't go unless you let him," he said. "I'm not going to stand by and see another man murdered."

Bassett moved over to him and slapped him hard.

Jordan said, "Hey!" got up and shoved Bassett back.

"Let me show you how."

He took Burt's arm, twisted it, brought him down to the floor. It hurt him, all right, but he didn't say anything.

"How'd you like those funny legs of yours busted," asked Jordan, "so you'd never do your comic dance again? Huh?"

"Lay off," I said. "Let him go. Beat it, Burt. Don't mind me. I've been in places like this before. Go ahead."

"Another big-hearted guy!" Bassett sneered.

"Yeah," I snapped at him, "and I'll live to see you get yours for murdering Hughes!" I didn't think so, but it was a relief to say it. "He clawed your cheek and there was a piece of your hide under his fingernail. Ordynski can prove it came off of your ugly mug—and that's all any jury will want to know. Maybe your boss can fix the D. A., but he won't try this time. With

evidence like that, he'll let you take the murder rap. They always do."

Bassett came over to me. "You'll live to see me get it?" he asked. "Like hell you will!"

Jordan had Burt twisting and squirming on the floor like a contortionist. Burt moaned once, then clamped his lips together. Bassett was taking a swing at me. He caught me on the jaw and jarred me.

I tried to get away from his punches. I was watching Burt, too. We were both going to get it. Then I saw the door open slowly.

THERE was a terrific roar. Somebody said, "Burt!" Bassett was turning away from me and clawing for his gun. I pulled up my knees and let him have it with both feet.

Jordan, the big one, had doubled up on the floor. Burt was standing up, staring at the woman who had fired the shot.

"Burt, honey!" she was sobbing. "Gretchen, baby!"

I couldn't take in this tender scene, as they went into a clinch. I was busy with Bassett. I had my knee on his right arm. He couldn't use his gun. And I had my hands on his throat. His eyes popped and he started to turn blue. I was all for killing him when I remembered my promise: he was

going to the lethal chamber for killing Paul.

I slugged Bassett hard. That put him out. I took his gun and got up, puffing.

"Cut," I said to the others, still in a clinch. "Beat it—quick! You don't want to be in on this. Scram! Call the cops, tell 'em to come here."

I shoved them toward the door, with Gretchen crying and thanking me.

"You get the thanks, sister," I said. "How come you got here?"

"I've been carrying that gun, just in case," she said. "I went to the studio today to pick up Burt. I saw him going away in a car with these men. I followed."

"Beat it!" I insisted. "You don't want this to get out."

I poured a drink out of Jordan's bottle, and I was sipping it when the sirens sounded in the street. Then my pal, Hicksy, came running in with his boys; and I gave him the story, leaving Burt and Gretchen out.

"Nice work, Neal," he grunted. Nobody tried to fix the murder rap. Bassett kidded himself that he'd get out, right up to the last. But he didn't. Dolly was locked up. Incurable, they said. Her boy, Bassett's boy, was last seen on his motorbike, heading north.

Me, I got a good job out of it—Burt's bodyguard. Nobody has tried to shake us down.

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ADV. 1

The Smartest Doll on Earth

By Edgar Franklin

Author of "Them Cards Don't Lie," etc.

Johnny Dolan goes in for mass production but a beautiful doll and a priceless vase put him out of business

"HEY, will you kindly lay off gigglin' like your teaspoonful o' brains had melted an' run outen your ears, an' lissen?" snapped Mr. James (Red) Binney, as he leaned on the bar of his fearsome little cellar saloon and fixed a hard eye on his old friend, that all-time champ in the field of criminal dumbness, pug-nosed young Johnny Dolan. "What I mean, we discussed this a'ready probably eighty million times, always gettin' nowheres whatsomever. What I mean, it is the same as Sears Roebuck, or one o' them other big writers, says about the weather: everybody keeps beefin' about it, only who has the nerve to take a sock at it?"

"Well, I tell you, Red," Johnny Dolan snickered genially, on account of he really felt good this evening, "how it seems, I probably left night school before they give out the answer to that one."

"Okay, then here it lays," Mr. Binney ploughed on. "Take for instance you go out on some simple little job such as snatchin' a old lady's handbag, which a ten-year-old boy could pull whilst doin' his homework an' never get a scratch. Only, every time, you get brought back on a stretcher, wit' a couple o' compound fractures an' possibly an eye missin' Well, why is this?"



It seemed as how the vase was suddenly leaping from the stand

"Why, it is probably on account of it ain't mass production," Johnny Dolan said, after a moment's thought.

Mr. Binney blinked thrice, scowled, briefly jiggled a little finger in his ear and shouted:

"It ain't *what*?"

Johnny cocked his head knowingly. "Mass production. Y' see, Red, in any line o' business—"

"Whatever it is you're tryin' to say, you're wrong," Mr. Binney corrected. "It is simply on account o' this: y'ain't got the speed!"

"Sez you—talkin' in your sleep,"

Johnny Dolan chuckled. "Well, lissen, Red, I—"

"What I mean, you're always tryin' to hit eighty, when you couldn't do ten wit'out pullin' out the rear end an' crackin' a axle. So, *at last*," Mr. Binney said with profound satisfaction, "I got it fixed so you can go on a snail's face, as they say, an' still make a livin' wit'out gettin' your back teeth shoved down your t'roat an' your toenails tore out by the roots. Hey, Hopeless!" he bawled, at the bundle of rags draped over the corner table. "Step over an' meet the new helper . . . I got it arranged, John," he explained in conclusion, "so you can string along wit' Hopeless Harris."

It was so peculiar you could not really understand it, but it seemed Johnny Dolan felt so good this evening he was actually laughing hearty. What he meant, any other time, you could give one good gander at Hopeless Harris and be that full of willies you had to sit down and cry.

No kidding, the poor old slug always reminded you of something which had got dug up on account of the undertaker's bill was not paid. He had long gray hair waving all around him whenever there was a breeze, such as Buffalo Bill might have wore if he had went on the rocks in his old age, and he also had a crop of gray spinach growing out of his face, where you could really give better than even money that many little birds had raised their grandchildren since the last time it was combed. Supposing this was not enough, he always walked like his dogs were a ton each of scrap iron, pulling one after the other till you expected him to fold up and kick off in front of your eyes.

AND, at that, the old punk certainly had his nerve with him, on account of he was now looking at Johnny

Dolan the same as you would look at the cat when it drags in something that got run over quite some days since.

"Hey, lissen, Binney!" he said. "I didn't understand it was Dolan you were speakin' about."

"An' you wouldn't find no harder-workin', honest young crook in the whole country!" Mr. Binney beamed.

"Okay, only I always heard Dolan was a jinx."

"Lissen, Hopeless," Mr. Binney began.

"I heard it time an' again. I heard it ever since I first heard o' Dolan," Mr. Harris insisted, quite peeved, you could see. But then he shrugged. "Well—what t'hell! You play a harmonica, Dolan?"

"Look, Hopeless, when I start playin' a harmonica, you see everybody lookin' around and askin' where can them angels be singin'," Johnny Dolan laughed, kidding him along, understand.

"Here it is, then," Mr. Harris sighed. "This last couple o' years, I been workin' the Queens subways exclusive—the blind stuff, like this," he said, suddenly rolling back his eyes so you could see just the whites and feel your stomach getting all flat, like an envelope. "Whoever is workin' wit' me, leads me an' jiggles the tin cup wit' one hand an' accompanies me on the harmonica wit' the other, whilst I sing. I sing probably better'n anyone else in this line, Dolan, seein' the number o' ladies which always bust out cryin' when they hear me. I sing mostly Headin' for the Last Roundup, only supposin' you tip me off there are many elderly ladies in the car, I sing Nearer My God To Thee. Twict a'ready I had ladies go in hysterics on the Astoria train whilst I was singin' Nearer My God To Thee, an' then come through

wit' a buck. Any time you get the chanct, you start a conversation, explainin' how I am your dear old papa which got his eyes shot out in Ballyhoo Woods durin' the war, an' consequently all the children has starved to deat' but you."

"Lissen, Hopeless, I am certain'y not a proud guy, but that is askin' a great deal, that dear old papa stuff," Johnny Dolan said, still kidding him along.

"Izzat so? Give a look in the mirror an' ask yourself how *I'll* be feelin'," Mr. Harris came back, very sour. "Anyhow, ain't you gettin' paid for it?"

"And another thing you gotta take in consideration, John, towin' this old piece o' cheese t'rough a subway car is exactly your speed," Mr. Binney put in earnestly. "It is very rarely you read about a party gettin' the puss socked offen him whilst leadin' a blind person."

You hear the same lousy joke over and over and you get slightly fed up, on account of which Johnny Dolan yawned in Mr. Binney's face.

"Lissen, Red," he said, "I would laugh some more only my lips are all chapped, see? What I mean, it is only since I been wit' Zipper I find out I got so much speed myself that—"

"This ain't Zipper Malloy?" Mr. Binney asked.

"Positively! As I was sayin', since I been wit' him—"

"A punk like you is tied up wit' Zipper Malloy," Mr. Binney demanded, and really you might think the poor goof's eyes were about to roll down his cheeks, "which moves so fast he would be in Yonkers before you could get across the street?"

"Hey, you ain't never seen how fast I move when I let myself out!" Johnny Dolan said hotly. "Startin' from scratch, I can be in Berlin, Italy, before

this Zipper number gets his bag packed. What I mean, you really start thinkin' about it an' then you leave all them horses an' buggies behind an'—well, it is the same as in mass production, Red. Take for instance—"

"Hey! *For the love o' tripe!*" Mr. Binney gasped, clutching the bar.

You had to bust out laughing at the mug, with his nerves and everything. What Johnny Dolan meant, suppose you did not know that Zipper Malloy always slid the banisters on account of it was much quicker than walking down the steps, you would probably be quite startled seeing him whizz off the iron handrail that way, like something out of a gun, and land on his feet halfway across the dump. Yeah, and he was now over against the bar and you had hardly seen him move!

THERE was certain parties that always kept saying how Zipper Malloy was a phony, but that, Johnny Dolan reflected comfortably, was on account of they were jealous at not being such an extremely swift number themselves. Zipper was one of these classy dressers and always standing on tiptoe; he spoke so fast you had to listen with both ears to get it all and when he hung them gray eyes on you, you seen at once he not only knew what you were thinking at present, but also what you would be thinking this time day after tomorrow. Otherwise he was, as you might say, mostly twitches.

"Evenin', Binney! Rye—five fingers—the same for Dolan," shot out of him, like bullets. "All set, Dolan?"

"Show me which way an' watch me beat you to it!" Johnny Dolan said happily.

"Okay! Swell! Now lemme see." Mr. Malloy continued, jerking out a notebook and rapidly flipping the pages.

"We got quite some business to handle betwixt now an' mornin' . . . Here is this guy Cohen, comin' off'n the ten-six from Cleveland wit' the roll an'—no! no! I gotta scratch that one," Mr. Malloy hurtled on, running a pencil across the page. "It might easy take us twenty minutes, tailin' him to some place where we could put on the heat, an' it ain't more'n five or six grand, anyway . . . Um. Now here is this Fifteenth National bank job I got down for tonight; that is all cash an' quite nice—around two hundred grand, I unnerstan'. Yeah, an' here is this box I gotta crack in Jones, Jones, Levy & Jones' office, too. That is all bonds an' just on the next block. Look, Dolan, I can drop you off at the Fifteenth, an' you can be bumpin' off the two watchmen whilst I'm dumpin' that Jones box, huh?"

"Why—why, yeah, sure, Zipper," Johnny Dolan began palely. "Only I—I gotta slight cramp in my right hand t'night an'—"

"Never mind; skip it for the moment. First we gotta see this Apsley dame. I give her my word I'd take her job on tonight, sure," Mr. Malloy scowled annoyedly. "Hell, I dunno why I done that! Them suburban jobs take too much time. At that, it's only just this side o' Colburg an' we'd ought to get it all cleaned up by midnight. Yeah, and then we could stop off for five minutes at the Colburg Cement Works, an' cool the special bull they got there, thus pickin' up the payroll, which I hear is in the office every Tuesday night; an' in that case, gettin' back here around two, say, there is a crap game I got it down here to stick up an'—"

"Hey, lissen!" Mr. Binney interrupted dizzily. "*This is all gonna get did in the one night?*"

Mr. Malloy shot his slightly aston-

ished eyes straight through Mr. Binney and, the way it looked to Johnny Dolan, practjically cracked the mirror behind him with them.

"Absolutely! So what?"

"So I guess I was brought up old-fashioned," Mr. Binney sighed. "What I mean, in my time you bumped off a couple o' guys an' called it a night an' went to bed an' got your rest an'—"

"Okay! You was brought up old-fashioned and it ain't your time no more," Mr. Malloy sneered, throwing one of his two-second laughs at the poor old lob, who was at least thirty-five. "Look, Binney! What makes a Ford car?"

"Some guy named Henry Ford, naturally, an'—"

"Uhuh! Mass production, know what I mean? *Mass production*, Binney! See! One guy figures he'll turn out three cars a day—this other guy figures he'll turn out three million, I think it is, so consequently he is now the richest guy in the world an' the other guy is on the back end o' the breadline. Okay! It is the same in our racket! Get twenty jobs did whilst the other guy is doin' one, an' presently you retire whilst you still got your yout' an' healt'—am I right? . . . I got no more time to discuss it, Binney," Mr. Malloy said briskly, slapping the notebook back into his pocket. "We gotta see this Apsley dame now, Dolan."

"Yeah, only lissen, Zipper," Mr. Binney persisted feebly, "wit' all this high-speed stuff, how come a mug like Dolan, which moves that fast you can frequently see his shadow get impatient an' run around in front o' him, can—"

"I got my reasons!" Mr. Malloy barked out, with another of his little laughs. "Lissen—just for the one in-

stance. Last month I have Sneakin' Tommy Spitz workin' with' me—a handsome lad. We start shakin' down a certain playboy, usin' a moll. What happens? She falls for Sneakin' Tommy an' the two o' them take a powder—an' I am out around thirty grand. Get it? Okay!" He pointed at Johnny Dolan's face. "Is any moll wit' an eye in her head stringin' around wit' *that* pan, which a little child would be screamin' in its sleep for six months after one look at it? No! Come, Dolan! Snappy! I said *snappy!*"

And with that, believe it or not, Johnny Dolan observed, ducking back so as not to get run down, he was gone!

Absolutely! He was gone the same as a flash of light when you turn it off at the switch. One second you seen him at the bar and the next second you seen his rubber heels disappear from the top of the stairs.

ONLY you certainly had to laugh loudly at Zipper Malloy, getting the idea he had any edge on Johnny Dolan in this speed thing. Johnny Dolan also started for the stairs and—well, it was very astonishing, but there was a very loud crash, like the whole place had exploded, and then it seemed Johnny Dolan was flat on his face, with the stomach knocked out of him in one piece and a great deal of glass everywhere! Yeah, and even whilst you were getting up and shaking off some of this fine glass, it got to you: would anybody but a dumb cluck like Red Binney ever put a baseball slot-machine right in the middle of the floor, where a person could not help running into it and knocking it over?

What Johnny Dolan meant, here was this toy pitcher, busted off at the waist, and the guy on first base had nothing

but his feet and ankles left and it also seemed the toy catcher had no head no more. Still furthermore, it seemed Hopeless Harris had opened his dirty old whiskers and was giving out a great laugh and Red Binney, getting all purple, was for some reason just about to throw a large bottle—and, at that, even supposing he was doing it on his hands and knees, it seemed Johnny Dolan was at last on the sidewalk.

Zipper Malloy stood tapping one foot.

"Look, Dolan!" he said irritably. "In mass production you cannot hang behind like that, polishing your nails an' stickin' around for a last drink."

"Well, it was—this way, Zipper—" Johnny Dolan began, on account of—even supposing he had to do without a stomach for the rest of his life—his breath was now coming slightly back.

How it looked, though, Mr. Malloy's coat-tails were flapping in the breeze thirty feet away and still going. Yeah, and he had now unlocked the door of a small coupé and stepped in; and maybe one second later he had his head stuck out of the window and he was snarling:

"Well, what t' hell is it *now*, Dolan? Did you drop dead? Ain't you got no idea at all of mass production? Would you kindly sit in here, so we get started before midnight?"

"Well, it was like this, Zipper—" Johnny Dolan began again; only this time it seemed the head was jerked off his neck and knocked out the back window, as Mr. Malloy started his car.

"Get this fast, Dolan!" he cried, flinging out the words. "This Audrey Apsley dame. I meet up wit' her in a certain night club last week, see, an' right away I see she has somethin' on her mind beside the permanent. So one thing leads to another an' I keep on workin' on her, an' presently she comes

clean. This is a very smart doll, Dolan, an' in the money. First off, I tell her, not a cent under fifty grand an' she says, not a cent more'n thirty grand. So we call it forty grand—twenty for you an' twenty for me, sucker, an'—huh? Foocy for the red light; I am color-blind!" Mr. Malloy bellowed jovially, as they roared on uptown. "Hey! Why is them dumb smokies blockin' up the street wit' their fire-engine?" he demanded irritably, as he shot around it and missed the motorcycle cop ahead by, the way it looked, around a millionth of an inch.

II

ONE thing you had to say: you can sit on a keg of powder the wrong way or maybe get your pants booted off this George Washington bridge and probably you move quite rapid; only, beside taking a little ride with Zipper Malloy, you are practically stationary.

What Johnny Dolan meant, it seemed Zipper had at least two airplane engines under the hood, so no sooner you seen you were on one block, you noticed you were on the next block, if you looked quick, and if you did not look quick you were at least five blocks farther uptown. Also, it seemed any second you were not coming down so sudden the end of your spine made a hole in the seat, you were slamming the top with your head. And at that, for some reason no professor could explain, it seemed they were still alive when Mr. Malloy ran to the curb and stopped so short that Johnny Dolan leaned forward and hit the windshield so hard with his head you could feel it bend outward, and then sat down on the floor.

"Be a little more careful, Dolan," Mr. Malloy said, as he stepped out. "The last guy I had wit' me done that

an' got scalped, the same as by an Indian, an' I also took him for the eight fish it stood me to get new glass. Now lissen!" he said, and it was the same as if he had turned off the current for a second, on account of he was now standing still like a human being. "In mass production, you gotta move very fast, but you don't never want to give the customer the idea you are in a hurry an' he ain't gettin' proper attention, know what I mean? We get upstairs there, we walk in very slow an' easy, like we got all night ahead of us, Dolan, on account of, the way I told you, this is a very smart doll an' I don't want to take no chance o' gettin' her peeved an' losin' her future business. Come, punk!" he said and, the best you could tell, turned on the current again, and he was gone!

It seemed there was only a very small lump, maybe the size of a goose egg, where his head had hit the side of the windshield, so Johnny Dolan could now look around again and see how this where they were going was one of them smaller apartment houses, only still very ritz. There were a couple of guys in monkey-suits in the hall and another in the elevator beside Zipper Malloy, who was sticking out his head and beckoning quite angry.

Yeah, it was so ritz that even on this fifth floor they had fake palms pretending to grow in imitation pots, Johnny Dolan could see as they got out of the elevator and Mr. Malloy pressed a button; it was even so ritz a doll in a trick white apron opened the door and bowed them into the front room and—well, absolutely, you could not describe it, except it was like some guy with a mitt the size of a ham had took you by the throat, whilst a thousand bugs with very cold feet started playing tag up and down your back and a million gal-

lions of beautiful perfume exploded in your face!

What Johnny Dolan meant, you see dolls and you see dolls and then you see more dolls; only if you live to be five hundred years old you could never see more than one doll like this that sat smiling at them in the big chair, on account of this doll was so beautiful you knew you would drop dead any second, only you had to keep alive to look at her!

She was maybe twenty-five and very nice and round, with sort of fluffy black silk hair and a couple of large black eyes that started the steam coming out of your ears, every time she threw them at you. Yeah, and it was Johnny Dolan she kept looking at and not this Malloy number.

"Well, Zipper!" she said, in her wonderful voice. "You've been to the Zoo! Did they give it to you or did you have to buy it?"

"Now, lissen, Audrey," Mr. Malloy said, very smooth and pleasant, "you get used to lookin' at Johnny Dolan an' he won't scare you no more."

"Oh, he doesn't scare me now. He fascinates me. I never saw anything just like it before," said this beautiful doll; and even then you could tell she was kidding. What Johnny Dolan meant, no matter how crazy it sounded, you could tell from how she looked at him she was getting slightly that way about him and keeping it from Zipper Malloy! Only now she sort of sighed: "Well—I suppose you read all about it in the papers, too, Johnny?"

"Well—the last paper I seen, I got out of a ash-barrel last week an'—"
Johnny Dolan stammered.

"Well, it's a long, sad story, Dolan, an' I can probably put it in fewer words than Miss Apsley here," Mr. Malloy broke in genially. "It is like this: maybe

a month ago, she falls very hard for a louse by name o' Penham Langley and naturally at the same time he goes nuts about her, see? Okay! This Penham's papa has maybe five million fish an' everything is hotsy-totsy and last week they are goin' down for the license; only about this time some dirty friend o' the family gets wise an' cables Penham's papa, which is in Europe an' cannot get back for a month, an' immediately Penham's papa cables Penham all bets are off an' if he marries this judy he can henceforward work for a livin' an' also see this five million fish get left to a home for crippled tomcats."

"The catch is, I'm a show-girl," the beautiful doll stated, still looking at Johnny Dolan, "and the old palooka got bit by one when he was young and tender."

"No, lady," Mr. Malloy corrected, "the catch is, the dumb punk insured his life for three hundred thousand fish in your favor, just in case—and it is now in case."

"Seems an awful mean thing to do to Penny, though," the girl sighed. "Swell guy, you know," she explained to Johnny Dolan. "Ten feet tall, muscles on him like a fighting bull and—"

"That ain't no way to look at it, Audrey," Mr. Malloy broke in sternly. "No sooner he hears from his papa, the yellow streak comes out an' he gives you the air, yeah? An' you now hate him, yeah?"

"What? Certainly I hate him!" the doll said, coming, the way it looked, out of a little dream.

"Okay! Then there is only one thing to do, on account of we all have to protect ourself," Mr. Malloy continued. "So, gettin' back to the story, Dolan, here is this rotten slug sleepin' in the

palatial family home up to Colburg an' here is us runnin' up there in a few minutes. We get in through a window, we sneak up to this room, which I got a map of, we take the shivvy here," beamed Mr. Malloy, suddenly snatching out a shiny eight-inch blade, "and—blip! The guy can't never swallow again on account of—well, figure it out for yourself!"

IT SEEMED that Johnny Dolan was now getting very hot around the collar. What he meant, you could easy tell Zipper Malloy was not used to handling ladies' trade, on account of he now had the doll staring at the shiv like she was hypnotized. Both them lovely eyes were sticking out of her head and she kept pressing her chest like she had a heavy cold.

"You—you're not going to use that?" she sort of choked.

"Lissen, Audrey," Mr. Malloy chuckled, "he never knows what hit him, see? Two minutes after we are in the house, you have the same as three hundred thousand bucks in your pocket."

"Two minutes?" this Audrey gasped and you could see she was getting nervouser and nervouser every second. "No, I—I don't want it done like that. So fast, I mean. You might—why, bungle something. You might—why, just half or—or quarter kill him or—"

"Lissen, Audrey," Mr. Malloy said, "I am not in the habit o' doin' this, but if you wish I will give you a written guarantee, when I am through workin' on this guy, he is all dead."

He had now got her so nervous she was walking up and down the floor, shaking her head.

"No! No! I won't have it done that way!" she said, almost batty. "I want it done slowly, carefully. I've got—got

a feeling. I want you to wait at least five minutes after you get into the room, to make sure he's sound asleep and—and so you can get at him without waking him. At least five minutes! Will you promise that, Zipper?"

"Well—I don't know," Mr. Malloy scowled. "In mass production, the way I explained to you, every minute is valuable an'—"

"I don't give a damn about mass production or anything else!" the doll cried, even more excited. "I want it understood that you're to wait at least five minutes and be sure!"

"Okay! Okay!" Mr. Malloy said impatiently. "After all, I suppose a pleased customer is our best advertisement, but—"

"And I want you to give that knife to Johnny Dolan, too!" Miss Apsley went on, and suddenly flashed her eyes at Johnny Dolan, practically causing him to faint. "I think I—I want him to do it. I think he's more careful than you are and not so—well, pell-mell about everything."

"Say, lissen, lady!" Mr. Malloy said indignantly. "I a'ready stuck this shiv into some o' the best people in New York City an' I still gotta hear the first complaint."

Well, it was very funny indeed, but suddenly you could see this beautiful angel had more than just her looks. What Johnny Dolan meant, she was now shutting her lips together very tight and pinning them lovely lamps so peculiar on Zipper Malloy that if you were not that way about her you would probably be scared.

"Zipper, I want Johnny Dolan to take that knife and—and do the job with it!" she said, very soft. "And if you don't give it to him the job is off. So what about it?"

Yeah, and it was still funnier how

Johnny Dolan now started getting boiling hot all over and feeling like one of these nights in armory you see in a book. What he meant, it seemed he was now standing over by Zipper and saying, very tough indeed:

"Gimme that shiv, the way she says, before I take it an' cut off your snoot, punk!"

"*That,*" said the beautiful doll as Mr. Malloy, looking very much surprised and peeved, handed the knife to Johnny Dolan, "is the stuff, kid!" And now she was standing close beside him, causing him to shake all over. "You put it in this inside pocket, Johnny. There!" she said, patting the pocket. "I think I like him better than I like you, Zipper."

"Okay wit' me, so long as we get goin'," Mr. Malloy snapped.

"Well, you can clear out of here, because I'm going to bed," Miss Apsley said, "but you mustn't be up there before quarter past eleven. The whole household gets to bed a little before eleven and he's asleep in five minutes. After that, you could fire cannons over him all night without waking him."

"An' lissen, baby," Johnny Dolan said, and it seemed he could hardly speak, "when this is over an'—an' you got them three hundred grand, I—well, it might be you can see how I feel about you, an' I am comin' back an'—well, lissen, baby, you an' me could get a long way together an' . . ."

"John-ny!"

Positively, she was now rubbing up against him! She was shooting them wonderful eyes at Johnny Dolan so hard he had to make all gargling sounds to breathe at all.

"You come back when it's all over and we'll talk about that, Johnny," she said, knocking him for three loops and into a tailspin with the eyes. "And, Johnny!"

"Y-y-yeah?" Johnny Dolan chattered.

"Remember—er—darling, I'm trusting you absolutely," she finished, smiling up at Johnny Dolan so wonderful he could feel the heart explode inside him, the same as a pineapple when you chuck it through the window. "*At least five minutes.*"

"**L**OOK, Dolan," Mr. Malloy said, as they cleared New Rochelle and headed west, "I seen 'em runnin' loose that thought they was Abraham Lincoln an' I seen 'em in booby-hatches that was always catching birds an' lizards that wasn't there, but I never seen anything as goofy as you gettin' the idea that beautiful doll—"

"Yeah, you handed me that same line several times before," Johnny Dolan yawned, on account of this Zipper really gave you a pain in the neck. "It is one account of you do not understand love at first sight."

Zipper sorta sighed.

"Yeah, but—well, look, Dolan. Take another angle. Say that moon up there would suddenly fall in the road an' bust open an' send maybe a million bucks into your lap? That is impossible, hey? Okay! It is what you could call a everyday happenin' compared to this judy givin' a tumble to a monkey-faced bunion like you! Why, see, Dolan, this is a very smart doll indeed an'—"

"Zipper, this is the smartest doll in the whole world," Johnny Dolan replied comfortably, "on account of she got the mutt insured for three hundred grand. An' so I am a very lucky guy, huh, gettin' her an' also all the jack, which we will probably be spendin' in Monte Cristo an' such places."

Briefly, since they were jogging along at a mere sixty, Mr. Malloy let go the wheel and, staring quite crazy

at Johnny Dolan, pressed his head with both hands.

"I do not kid you, Dolan," he muttered. "I think I am goin' nuts!"

"Well, you are a very smart number yourself, Zipper," Johnny Dolan chuckled, "so you are probably right."

"Huh—"

You could see from how he twisted up his pan, even crazier, that one would hold him for quite some time, so a person could sit back and think very pleasant indeed about how everything would be when the insurance guys come through with the three hundred grand and her and Johnny Dolan went downtown for the license, like a couple of happy kids just let out of school. Yeah, and talk about this Monte Cristo where you hear there are some elegant crap games where a person can sometimes clean up three or even four bills for an evening of light work. You would say they would most likely be living in around ten rooms in some large Monte Cristo hotel, with mugs to serve your meals in bed and . . .

"Well, this is it!" Mr. Malloy hissed and it suddenly got to Johnny Dolan they had just rolled up a long drive and stopped some distance from a very grand house, with maybe half a mile of white sandstone terraces and balconies out front. "So blow the wax outen your ears an' get a load o' this," Mr. Malloy continued, sounding like himself again. "I do not get the idea o' this five minutes stuff, but I am runnin' my business, not that doll. Get it?"

"Oh, yeah," Johnny Dolan replied, for it was quite difficult, coming to.

"Okay, then to hell wit' her five minutes!" Mr. Malloy continued forcefully. "We go in—we go up—we go over to the guy an'—blip! We are leavin' the house in probably one minute after we go in!"

"Well, now, lissen, Zipper—" Johnny Dolan began.

It was slightly confusing, but it seemed Zipper was no longer there. It seemed Zipper was doing the flash of light thing again, on account of he was already on the terrace and looking at windows. Johnny Dolan hurried after him, on account of when you promise a doll like that you will wait five minutes, you—well, it seemed Zipper had already raised a window and was inside, waiting for Johnny Dolan.

"Look, Dolan," he breathed, pointing to the door of this beautiful drawing-room, which was around the size of the Yankee Stadium. "It is gettin' to me, I made a mistake takin' you on, but do not have the idea you are interferin' in my mass production. I still pack two rods an' when you start slowin' the show I will give it to you wit' the one an' him wit' the other, see? Lissen!"

It was really not necessary to listen, on account of you could not help hearing this snore from upstairs. It was very long and deep, going like: "Um—haaw—pff!" and then waiting a few seconds and going like "Um—haaw—pff!" again.

"He has about three more o' them to do, an' then he can rest his haw-puffer for a couple o' million years," Mr. Malloy snickered pleasantly. "Dolan! All set? On your toes! *Let's go!*"

And he was gone again! Absolutely, he was now whizzing up them broad stairs, only you could also say Johnny Dolan was whizzing after him quite good. It is very difficult to see when you are whizzing that fast in a poor light; but it seemed in this upper hall there was all, like, large Chinese vases on stands and this one at the head of the stairs was the largest of all and

maybe four feet tall and—well, you can never explain how a thing like this happens, unless it is you are whizzing so fast you cannot tell distance very good. What Johnny Dolan meant, it seemed one second this large vase was around six feet away, only the next second his elbow must have flew out and hit it!

YEAH, it seemed him and Zipper were both the same as paralyzed, watching this large vase rock back and forth once, and then back and forth twice; and then, just as Mr. Malloy grabbed for it, it was like this vase laughed in his face and gave a jump off the stand, starting downstairs with a loud "blop!" on the third step and then hitting the sixth step with a much louder "blop!" and then jumping four more and coming down with a "boom!" which really made you jump out of your skin. And then, just when you were holding your breath, it hit the floor at the bottom with a "*blam!*" like a powder-mill had let go and went into maybe five thousand pieces!

It was very confusing indeed. What Johnny Dolan meant, it was now so still when you let out your breath it sounded like you had opened the valve on a tire, only it seemed this sleeping guy did not care about his crockery, on account of he merely said: "Um—haaaw—pff!" And then, with him and Zipper still standing the same as paralyzed, it seemed somebody was moving very soft and, wherever he came from, a fat old guy with white sidewhiskers, in a thick bathrobe, was right beside them with a finger on his lips. And, believe it or not, he then whispered:

"Psst! Ssssh! You'll wake the young master!"

Johnny just gawped while:

"Well, what the—what the . . ."

Zipper was saying—and now the old guy was smiling and whispering:

"Prowlers, eh? And just a couple of boys! Now aren't you ashamed of yourselves?"

"Lissen, punk—" Mr. Malloy started to say, only the old guy put his finger on his lips again.

"Hush, I said! You'll be waking the young master!" he said, very soft indeed. "Now, downstairs and out of the 'ouse with you, and don't ever let me see you again. *Ain't* you ashamed?"

Absolutely, it was like something you would meet up with in a dream! What Johnny Dolan meant, he was now leading them down, very kind and gentle and smiling, with Zipper making funny little noises and not giving him the business and Johnny Dolan the same as floating! He now had them in the drawing-room and he was shaking a finger at them!

"Now go on about your business and leave decent people sleep!" he said, very reproving. "'Ow did you get in? By the window? Then out the window with you—and another time when you're prowling about a 'ouse, just mind the vases and such! Get along, now!"

Yeah, and he had pushed them out the window and, leaving it open the same as it was, you could see him walking back up the stairs. How it looked, Zipper Malloy was almost too weak to stand; he kept rubbing his hand over his forehead and opening and closing his mouth, like a fish.

"L-look, Dolan!" he got out at last. "That didn't happen! Nothin' like that could happen in a million years!"

"Well, I—I do not know, Zipper," Johnny Dolan managed, on account of he also felt greatly surprised. "It is like he might be the butler and has a very kind heart an' maybe lads of his own

in our line o' business an' this is—well, professoral courtesy, like when they give you free tickets at a theatre, know what I mean?"

Mr. Malloy gave himself a great shake, like a dog when he comes out of the water.

"Well, t'hell wit' his kind heart!" he said. "If he is that dumb we will—come, Dolan! *Come!* It will be mornin' before we get this guy croaked!"

And he was gone *again!* He was once more inside the house and listening and it seemed everything must be okay, on account of he was now beckoning, very impatient, to Johnny Dolan. Johnny Dolan stepped through the window and also listened. All you could hear was this guy they were about to rub out, saying: "Um—haaw—pff!" the same as before.

"Now, there is around a million pieces o' that jug still on the floor, Dolan, so would you kindly not fall over more'n eight or ten?" Mr. Malloy asked, really nasty. He glanced at his watch and whined, the same as a small puppy when you kick its slats. "For the love o' Mike!" he said. "We are now so far behind we will have to pass up the crap game! *Come!*"

III

AFTER a certain time, it seemed you got used to it. What Johnny Dolan meant, Zipper Malloy was again on the stairs and waiting for him. Yeah and he was now up the stairs and waiting again, with an arm out in front of the next large vase. They listened. The guy in the front bedroom just said: "Um—haaw—pff!" once more.

It seemed he slept with his door slightly open. Mr. Malloy pushed it wide, very swift and careful, and after that, the way it looked, you had to depend on the moonlight, which was quite

strong—and even in the moonlight, you seen at once that this was one of them jobs which has to be did very quick and thorough indeed.

What Johnny Dolan meant, here was this bed, around eight feet long, and still this um-haaw-pff number had his head on the pillow and his feet at the bottom. No kidding whatever, you would expect to give up a dime and go in a tent, before looking at anything that size. He was laying on his back, however, very inviting, with his throat all stretched and ready, like he had been expecting them, and—

"Gimme the shiv! I said *gimme the shiv!*" Mr. Malloy hissed.

"Well—well, lissen . . ." Johnny Dolan stuttered.

"Will you kindly gimme that shiv," Mr. Malloy snarled, "or would you like first to get in beside him an' have a little sleep?"

"Well, look, Zipper," Johnny Dolan tried again, on account of he was so greatly startled he could hardly speak, "it seems I must somehow have lost the shiv. What I mean, you seen me put it in this pocket, but—"

"*You done what?*" Mr. Malloy gasped. "Did it—did it fall down in the lining o' your coat?"

"Positively not. I been feelin' everywhere for it," Johnny Dolan whispered, very excited. "You know, Zipper, I been thinkin' quite some time now it was very light in that pocket, to have a shiv there an'—"

It seemed Zipper Malloy was now feeling over his coat with both hands and also breathing very peculiar, in small whistles. It seemed however he was now convinced, on account of his hands dropped and his chest started going up and down, so you could see it.

"Lissen, Dolan!" he said, like he was choking to death. "I always—always

laughed at jinxes. Well, I don't never laugh at jinxes no more. Only onct we are out o' here, I am standin' you against the first wall I can find an' pumpin' you so full o' slugs a window screen will look like a brick wall beside you an'—I am talkin' wild," Mr. Malloy stated, mastering himself with a great effort and looking at the bed. "Okay! Okay! I cannot give him the business wit' a rod, on account o' the noise, an' at the same time—look, Dolan! The statue!"

"Well, what statue is this you are speakin' about?" Johnny Dolan whispered, somewhat hoarse, on account of he was slightly scared, the way Zipper was holding his arms with mitts that shook very peculiar and the way his eyes started shooting sparks, exactly like a person which is what they call mentally irresponsible.

"Cluck," he whispered, slow and distinct, "out there in the hall is a bronze statue around three feet high, o' some old palooka holdin' a sheet around him wit' one hand an' pointin' in the air with' the other. Get me that whilst I am lookin' him over for the best place to sock, an' I will knock the block off this punk in one piece. An' lissen, Dolan!"

"Well, I am lissenin', Zipper, only—"

"What wit' you knockin down the pot an' losin' the shiv an' one thing an' another," Mr. Malloy continued, "I now lost more time than on any ten jobs together in the last month. So if that mug in the sheet ain't safe in my hands in thirty seconds, I am forgettin' everything an' givin' it to you, here an' now—an' no jury in the land will convict me when I tell them the trut'!"

He then gave Johnny Dolan a light shove, only—well, it so happened Johnny Dolan was standing on one foot at the time, so he at once started

toppling over toward the bed. Yeah, he was going the same as the large vase had gone! He was going over and over and presently he would stick his head in the pit of this um-haaaaw-pff guy's stomach and—no, it was okay! It seemed he had caught himself just as he was about to fall on the guy, with Zipper Malloy clutching his hands together and looking like he was about to scream.

At that, he was shaking like a leaf, and no wonder. What Johnny Dolan meant, you have a little trouble with a sane guy and you can figure what he will do, only you get jammed with a mentally irresponsible person like Zipper Malloy certainly looked, who is also packing a couple of rods—and, lissen, too! The fat guy with the side whiskers and the bathrobe also had to be screwy, on account of no guy with a brain hitting on all eight will ever act like that; and still furthermore, supposing he would run into this guy again in the hall—well, you can never tell what these mentally irresponsible cases will pull. One second they smile at you and then, no sooner your back is turned, they are sending a meat-axe through your lungs from behind . . . Johnny Dolan wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. It seemed, after all, he was alone in the hall and this must be the statue, on account of the old bronze guy was pointing in the air.

Yeah, and if Zipper had not got you so extremely nervous, you could not say this statue was heavy. What Johnny Dolan meant, you could easy pick it up, only it seemed probably it was better to hold it over your head, so you could see where you were going.

ZIPPER MALLOY was waiting, over by the bed. Johnny Dolan kept on—and really you could wish

they had spent money for a carpet in this room, instead of throwing all them small rugs around. Take for instance the one you could see was blue and had the edge sort of rolled; you could easy trip over that, so Johnny Dolan steered around it and—well, it seemed that the light one also had the edge sort of rolled and he was now about to trip and—yeah! It seemed he had absolutely tripped!

What Johnny Dolan meant, one second he was walking along fine and then, the next second, he was slanting forward very rapid indeed, still holding out this statue, like he was deliberately about to slam it down on the floor and—well, from then on it is practically impossible to say what happened!

It seemed Johnny Dolan was now flat and looking at a great many stars and it also seemed the statue had reached the floor at about the same time, as you might say, only you could not tell which made the louder crash. You could only say it sounded like the whole building was falling down, with all the windows rattling and Zipper Malloy losing his nerve and letting off this screech.

And almost before you could get on your knees, this large guy laid off his um-ha-awing and bounced out of bed, the same as a rubber ball when you slam it on the sidewalk; and you could see he was broad like Red Binney's ice-box and that tall his dome nearly bumped the ceiling—and *there was even more things happening!*

What Johnny Dolan meant, it seemed there was suddenly lights everywhere and some lady let off a yell that would bust your ears, and then there was shots! There was first one bang and then, very quick, bang! bang! bang! and you could see plaster falling

off a wall and then, the best you can describe, you could see nothing for a few seconds, on account of this large number had picked you up by the back of the neck like you were a week-old kitten—yeah, and he had Zipper Malloy the same way in the other hand. What got you so confused, he merely stood there, swinging them sort of absent minded, for several more seconds, and then he shouted: "Audrey! Audrey!" and, however she got there, you then seen this Apsley dame was in the doorway, with a rod in her hand, still smoking.

After that it was like, no kidding, you had gone completely nuts.

Take for instance this Penham Langley, which was still standing there; and then, very suddenly, it was like some careless person had let in his clutch with a jerk, on account of he leaped forward and threw his arms around the Apsley dame, all the while holding Johnny Dolan in the one hand and Zipper Malloy in the other, so they swung around like a couple of Indian clubs. Their chatter was even goofier than the rest!

"You here! Darling—why—" Langley said, and then the Apsley number was crying on his shoulder and (you positively could not believe your ears!) she was saying: "Oh, Penny, my love, you're safe! You're safe! Yes, I—I drive up here every night, just to be near you, sweetheart. I sit outside and look up at your window," she said, evidently not scared of being struck dead, "and tonight these men sneaked and I—I was afraid they'd hurt you and I followed as quickly as I could with my pistol and I—I—I was just in time!" she said, starting to cry. "Did I shoot them, dearest? They were going to—to stab you!"

"Hey, you rotten little doublecross-

in'—” Zipper Malloy started to say, only it seemed he could get no farther, on account of the big slug had now thrown his arms so hard around the judy that Mr. Malloy's head hit Johnny Dolan's head very violent indeed—and after that, everything was like in a very heavy fog.

What Johnny Dolan meant, you could hear voices like they were coming down from the sky. You could hear this dirty little judy sobbing about how she would give her life a thousand times over for the big slug and you could hear the big slug saying that not for all the parents in the world would he lose her again and they would get married tomorrow morning early; you could also hear him telling the fat old guy in the bathrobe, which it seemed had somehow got back in the picture, to prepare the blue room for Miss Apsley. Then she started to laugh, slightly crazy, and said:

“Look, beloved! You're still holding those two—two rats.”

“What's that? So I am! Well, to the devil with 'em! I ought to put 'em in jail, but they brought us together again, so . . .”

And with that it seemed he was swinging Johnny Dolan and Zipper Malloy around his head, like they weighed maybe a pound apiece; and he was now letting go of them at the same second and laughing very loud and it seemed his aim was absolutely wonderful, on account of they were now flying side by side at the large window, which was closed. And you could still hear him laughing as they went through the glass with a terrible crash and into a large tree and also yelling: “Kiss me again, baby! Kiss me a million times!”

It then did not matter who got kissed or who did not get kissed, on account of Johnny Dolan had sat so hard on the

ground his head practically flew off him and back up in the tree; but, at that, when you figure a guy twice the size of a lighthouse may change his mind and come after you, you can still run very good. Johnny Dolan immediately ran as fast as possible along this drive, with Zipper Malloy trying to keep up behind; only it seemed they must be running in the wrong direction, on account of they now slammed so hard into the door of a large garage that several panes of glass fell out. It seemed Zipper was trying to say something, like:

“Absolutely—smartest doll in the world—the little louse! We—got framed—good! Lissen, Dolan! She had—the butler in on it, see? It might be she took the shiv an'—an' you was too dumb to—”

A party talks like that when you really got no interest except to be somewheres else, you cannot stop to listen.

Johnny Dolan was now running again, in the direction where Zipper's car had to be and he really had to laugh, also like crazy, thinking about how this Zipper lug had the idea he was fast. What Johnny Dolan meant, here he was already in Zipper's car and backing around and all you knew about Zipper, he was gasping somewheres in the dark, in the distance, and yelling for you to wait, which any sensible person would know you could not do, with that big slug almost doubtlessly already on the way downstairs and able to pick the arms and legs offen you, the same as you would offen a fly for amusement.

MR. JAMES (RED) BINNEY, now that the midnight rush was over, was yawning over the sporting page when what had to be Johnny

Dolan came hurtling down the steps and dashed across to the bar, arriving with a dull thud. As nearly as Mr. Binney could count, there were seven different bumps on his head and many scratches on his face, and his coat and pants were all sliced, as if by glass. But it was the eyes of him that got you; the lad looked like he had just met up with a regiment of ghosts.

"Lissen, Red, you—gotta hide me," Johnny Dolan gasped out. "What I mean, this big slug chucked the two of us—well, lissen! It can easy be he is after me, on account of he looks like—well, what I mean, I just lost the one rear wheel on Zipper's car an' the top got knocked off by a L pillar on Sixth Avenue that must 'a' got bent over, but that don't matter. What I wanna ast you, would you—"

"Say, lissen," Mr. Binney said mildly, "would you kindly unscramble this conversation, so a person can tell is it Chinese or what is it?"

"On account o' havin' to go so fast, but Zipper can get another car, supposin' he needs it. What I mean, supposin' the big slug didn't get him an' tear the face offen him, see?" Johnny Dolan continued intelligently. "What I mean, speakin' a speed, once you get the idea this big slug is behind you an'—well, what I wanna ast—"

"Well, what is it *now*?" Mr. Binney inquired interestedly, as Johnny Dolan folded gently to the floor.

Mr. Hopeless Harris who, it seemed, had not yet found anyone to lead him through subway cars, went down on his knees with much grunting.

"It seems like he is in one o' these commas, from exhaustion, Red," he reported, after listening. "It seems he is tryin' to say somethin', but—wait! I am gettin' it. Once more, Dolan. Oh, it is like that?" said Mr. Harris and looked up at Mr. Binney. "He is tryin' to say, will I ask you if you will stake him to the price of a harmonica."

Much Ado—



IT WAS thought that the ultimate in useless thefts had been reached in the winter of '86 when a man named Whistledune walked into the front room of J. Whittaker Milbaker, of Sauk Center, and purloined a discolored suspender button. But recently in Brooklyn, N. Y., a new record was hung up when someone walked into the Brooklyn Federal Court and took an indictment from the files. Government officials immediately convened a session of the grand jury and obtained a superseding indictment, leaving the thief in possession of a legal document of no apparent value except as a dubious collector's item.

Since coming across this item, our nights have been disturbed no end with visions of the gentleman, or gentlemen, in question pausing during the day's hurly-burly to peer at the document in his satchel and sadly shaking his head in bewilderment.

—Paul McGillicuddy

The Man Who Couldn't Wait



He bent over the steam radiator, the tube in his hand

By William Edward Hayes

Author of "Kill the Umpire," etc.

Who greases the skids must watch his step . . .

DEL PROUTY heard the doctor's verdict on Thursday afternoon. He took it like he took everything in life. Quietly and without visible emotion. His small, thin face remained fixed in that expression of piety that no one had ever seen him without, his small tight mouth open and closed, his small lusterless eyes blinked rapidly.

The doctor said old Mr. Moats would be up and around by the first of the week. The old gentleman, so long with one foot in the grave, still had the other foot on firm ground despite the illness which, only a few days before, had seemed fatal. Old Mr. Moats would not die. Bad heart, high blood pressure,

a half dozen other things vitally wrong with him—and had been wrong with him for years—and yet here he was, once more out of danger, once more pronounced able to get out of his bed.

So it was on Thursday afternoon that Del Prouty knew he would have to do something about this. Old Mr. Moats was seventy-one. His eyes were not dimmed and his mental force was far from being abated. He was tall and thin and permanently stooped. He had no known relatives and his personal fortune was well over a million. Very few people had an idea that old Mr. Moats was so wealthy.

Del Prouty knew exactly how much old Mr. Moats was worth. Del Prouty

knew more about Mr. Moats than that gentleman himself knew.

Del Prouty knew positively by Friday morning that old Mr. Moats would die on Monday before noon. The old man had one foot in the grave anyway and a good, hard shove on the other. . . .

Yes, it would be murder! Del Prouty was surprised that he could contemplate this and be so calm about it. And the more he contemplated it the more he realized that murder had been back in his mind ever since he'd met the red-head who owned the beauty parlor three doors down the street.

Nobody would think, to look at Del Prouty, that hot blood could pulse through the veins behind that dull gray face. No one, gazing into those lusterless eyes, would suspect that those eyes could burn with a queer kind of fire at the glimpse of a well-turned ankle, or the curve of a feminine hip.

A vast number of people knew Del Prouty—knew him as the right and left hand of poor old Mr. Moats. Small merchants, restaurant owners, barbers, dentists, tailors, hand laundrymen in that district of narrow streets and queer smells and garish lights just off Grand Street had almost daily contact with Del Prouty who was agent, manager, bookkeeper, stenographer and everything else for Mr. Moats and the vast amount of business real estate Mr. Moats owned.

These people knew Del Prouty as a quiet, neat but drab little man who came and went without fuss or flurry, who listened to their complaints, who saw to their comforts as tenants, who unobtrusively came to collect the rent if it happened to be more than reasonably overdue. These people were conscious of Del Prouty as one is conscious of a bootblack or a headwaiter

or a streetcar conductor—a fixture in their business lives, inviting no confidences, and giving none.

The red-head in the beauty parlor was a tenant—a new one. She had been there for three months. She had come to the Moats office wearing a small green hat and green suede shoes and a smart tan coat. She had a round face with a short nose and lips a little too full and much too red. She had learned, through experience, the proper use of her well-accentuated feminine points to get a lot for nothing. She obviously had been quick to sense Del Prouty's reaction to the amount of silk stocking she displayed, probably had seen the fire come into his eyes.

Del Prouty had swallowed hard. He had then put on his coat and hat and escorted the red-head to the vacant store room that she wanted to see. Together they explored the room, then they went back to the office on the parlor floor of the old brownstone in which Mr. Moats both worked and lived. They had set together at a small table in Del Prouty's private room to discuss the lease and somehow Nina, the red-head, leaned over and her hair brushed Del's cheek, and Del had started thinking.

DEL, PROUTY didn't know how much old Mr. Moats had set aside for him in his will. The amount would be substantial. A hundred thousand anyhow. Hadn't Del Prouty been faithful and considerate? Could anyone have devoted more time to his employer's interests? Could anyone have worked longer hours, or handled any greater volume of detail?

Old Mr. Moats was kind. Never in these years had he spoken a cross word to Del Prouty. At Christmas, Mr. Moats had always been more than gen-

erous. A hundred dollars in gold until the gold standard changed, and since then it had been a hundred dollars in crisp new greenbacks. Through the worst years of the big depression, with half of his property vacant, and with income sharply curtailed, old Mr. Moats had not even suggested a cut in Del Prouty's salary.

And more than once Mr. Moats had suggested that Del had too much to do. Mr. Moats had told Del to hire an assistant.

"I'm getting to where I can do less and less." Mr. Moats had said not four months ago. "It seems a shame to shoulder you with all this, Del. You hire a young lady—a bookkeeper, and maybe a collector if you think we need one. It won't be long before I won't be able to do anything at all."

Del Prouty was glad now that he hadn't hired anybody. Now that he had to get that other foot in the grave. . . .

That was the only thing that disturbed him—the thought that he simply had to do it. Four weeks ago the doctor had said that Mr. Moats stood no chance at all. And Del had believed him—believed to the extent that for the first time in his life Del Prouty had stolen.

It had all been so easy. Those signed checks in the safe for regular expenses. Then that one signed personal check Mr. Moats had left to be cashed for medical expenses—the doctor and all. It had been so simple to use that personal check for an amount beyond all reason.

Three hundred dollars for that week-end with Nina at Atlantic City. The hot blood constricted his throat every time he thought of it. Incredible that two people could spend that much money from Friday until Monday

morning. How many years had he dreamed of just such a woman—of just such an excursion.

Other parties had followed—parties and presents.

And old Mr. Moats hadn't died. Monday morning he would be in his private office. He would lean back in his swivel by the steaming radiator and he would tell Del Prouty that the fiscal year would end on Tuesday and that they'd better arrange to have the auditors in the first thing Wednesday morning. Then Mr. Moats would tell Del to call the bank for complete statements on both the business and the personal account so that the auditors could have them without delay.

Mr. Moats must not discover that Del Prouty was a thief. Mr. Moats would not call in the police. He wasn't that kind. He would be hurt. He would dismiss Del Prouty with a sad shake of his white hair, and then he would change his will.

Del Prouty was not sorry that he had used those checks. If the auditors ever get at those books they would find around four thousand dollars missing. Four thousand dollars amounted to so little when you thought of all Mr. Moats had.

But the auditors would not see the books on Wednesday. They would have to see them of course to wind up to the old man's affairs after his death, but Del knew just what he would do to the books so that the auditors would find everything in good shape. They certainly wouldn't be able to ask old Mr. Moats any questions about certain entries that positively couldn't be made if Mr. Moats lived.

Del thought of Monday morning, then he thought of Nina and the trip they'd planned for the week-end. A trip to Washington. The best hotel in

the town. A night spot. The glitter of light on crystal and silver. The shimmer of light in Nina's hair, the perfume of her lips. . . .

It was on Friday afternoon that Del Prouty knew he would have to call off the Washington trip. There would be time for many other trips—after a week or so. He didn't mind sacrificing this one.

On Friday afternoon they brought Mr. Moats home from the hospital. He was up and dressed, and he had a nurse with him, and the nurse looked at Del Prouty with some mild resentment when he went upstairs.

Mr. Moats looked at the nurse and said, "I'd like to be alone with Mr. Prouty for just a few minutes." There was a queer look in the old man's eyes and it upset Del.

For some reason Del had trouble swallowing. His throat was very hot and tight. He met the old man's eyes as Mr. Moats stared at him. The pinched, lined face told Del nothing at all.

Finally Mr. Moats said, "Everything's been going all right, Del?"

What on earth did he mean by that? Del shook his head mechanically.

"About as usual," Del said. "I've got some collections Monday to make. Nothing to be disturbed about." He thought his voice sounded tight and queer.

Did Mr. Moats notice it? The old man continued to stare, unblinking.

"About as usual," the old man said as if to himself.

What was going on in his mind? Had he some inkling about these shortages? Del felt two warm spots in his cheeks. He wet his lips. The old man was shrewd. No one knew how shrewd.

"Yes," Del said. Why didn't the old fool speak what was on his mind? Why

did he just look through you that way? Del felt sharp resentment like a cleaving blade through his small soul. Resentment and something else. Was it hate? Yes, that was it. Why couldn't the old fool have died in his bed, peaceably? Why did he have to come back, a walking skeleton, looking so—so—

"You'll be in the office tomorrow, Del?"

"Why, yes. Certainly. I—"

"I want you to get Mr. Teasdale on the phone, Del. Now." The old man indicated the telephone with a nod of his head.

Teasdale, the old man's attorney. Del bowed meekly and swallowed. What was he wanting with Teasdale? Did he suspect?

"Tell him to be here tomorrow at one."

"You won't be down in the office tomorrow," Del said, astonished.

"I'll see him up here," Mr. Moats said. "I don't see why I can't go down to the office, but Dr. Huyler says no. He says if I continue to improve I can go down for a couple of hours Monday. He says I can get rid of this pesky nurse Monday morning. That won't be any too soon for me. Bah! Doctors and nurses. Just having to look at that nurse, all dressed up 'white starch, gives me a—a sense of decay and death. Decay for me, But I'm alive, Del Prouty. Alive."

The old man smiled queerly.

"And it's nice to see you back and feeling better and—"

"Is it?" There was that peculiar stare again. Then the old man snapped out of it. "Go on, Del. Call Teasdale."

"Yes, sir."

DEL PROUTY had a small apartment on the West Side. It consisted of a living room with an in-a-

door, bed, and a compact but comfortable kitchen. There was an iron door in the kitchen wall that let into a chute direct to the building incinerator. Early on Monday morning Del Prouty stood in his kitchen and smiled.

The drabness left his face and into it came a queer sort of cunning. Del Prouty was very pleased with himself. The week-end of course had not been what he had planned, and Nina had been across about it—had, in fact, refused in a huff to let Del come up to her place on Sunday afternoon.

But that didn't worry Del. After today nothing would worry him again. He would stay around faithfully and help clean up the old man's affairs. He would eventually receive whatever the old man willed him and then the world would be open to him. There would be travel, fine hotels, gay clubs, exotic music. There would be Nina at his side, warm and full bodied and radiant.

His mind went methodically back over all the plans he had made for this day. Back to the rehearsal he had staged for himself Saturday while he had been waiting for the lawyer to come.

And that lawyer's visit! Nothing to worry anyone. He had sneaked up the stairway and had heard the old man laughing and had heard Mr. Teasdale's encouraging words.

"You're looking fine. Feeling fine, too, all things considered, I'll wager."

The old man answering, "No complaints, Teasdale. Small matter I want you to fix for me. Looking fine, like you say, but at my age, and with all they say that's wrong with me—you never can tell."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" Teasdale's reassuring laugh.

Then a mumble as the voices were subdued.

It hadn't taken long, whatever it was, and Teasdale had stopped in for a word with Del on his way to the street.

"Fine old man, Mr. Moats," Teasdale had said, lighting a cigarette.

And Del had said, "Nobody knows that better than I do—the years I've been with him. I couldn't stand it if anything happened. . . ."

"We've all got to go some time," Teasdale had answered. "Stay close to him, Prouty. Watch after him. He's contrary about nurses. Ought to have one with him constantly, but he won't stand for it."

"I'll watch after him," Del had promised.

And Del had gone over to sit with the old man through a part of Sunday evening. And had thought as he sat there how great a shame it was that the old man had jerked that other foot back from the grave.

But here it was Monday and everything was set. Del went over his kitchen. He sniffed the air, satisfied himself that he had cleaned up everything well. But just to make sure he glanced about him, searched every corner. No trace of any chemicals, nothing to indicate that last night this kitchen had been a laboratory.

There it was on the sink's drain-board. The result of his effort. The gray light coming through the small high window caught in the clear liquid that he had sealed in that short piece of tube. He went over and touched it with his fingers gingerly.

There was instant death. How instant!

A small light gleamed in his eyes. He took the thing and placed it carefully in his topcoat pocket. Then, methodically, he went through his usual routine. He made his bed and folded it up and straightened his room.

He was careful to observe that his hands didn't tremble. He made coffee and fried an egg. Then he glanced at his electric clock and went through his shaving. He shaved very slowly and very carefully just as he had done on countless other mornings in his thirty-five drab years.

Within a few hours a man would die, and he, Del Prouty, would be the killer, but no one would ever know it. A very old man, with one foot in the grave, would pass without a struggle and Del Prouty would not be anywhere near. Del Prouty would have a first-class alibi.

The whole thing depended on his timing, and Saturday he had rehearsed it three times, had spent most of the day with a watch in his hand, and the timing hadn't varied five minutes one way or the other.

He left his apartment at half past seven. Just as he had left it every other business morning since he'd lived here. He walked over to Wanamaker's at Broadway and Eighth Street and took a bus downtown. He read his newspaper, frowned at the boldness of Japan's aggression, studied a two-column picture of Mussolini and secretly admired the Duce's under jaw and wished that he himself had a jaw like that.

Del let himself into the parlor floor office and went immediately to the old man's private room. It was five minutes past eight.

The room was cold. The outside temperature was close to freezing, perhaps a degree or two below. Del stopped and felt of the steam valve. It was tightly closed. Just as he'd left it.

His fingers fumbled with the flanged collar that fitted over the steam pipe where the pipe entered the gaudy old-fashioned radiator. The flange was be-

tween the valve and the radiator proper, and it was loose.

Del had not removed his gloves. He satisfied himself that everything was as he had left it. Then he closed and locked the old man's door and knelt over the pipe. From his pocket he carefully removed the small sealed glass. It was about the size of a man's thumb from the joint to the tip.

For the first time a tremor ran through his fingers. He felt a queer tightness in his throat. This wouldn't do—getting rattled now. After all it was so simple. And so absolutely safe and sure.

He took a spring clip from his coat pocket and attached it to the short piece of glass tube. He moved the flanged collar back and fastened the tube in place on the pipe. Then he shoved the collar up and stood back. He found, surprisingly, that his knees trembled and there was a queer upheaval at his middle. The palms of his hands were wet inside his gloves.

He glanced down at the flange. It completely concealed the thing he'd placed there. He drew in a deep breath, glanced at his watch, went out to his own room and took off his topcoat and hat. He tried to light a cigarette but somehow didn't want it. He glanced over his shoulder toward the old man's door. The door was closed tightly but he could see through it. He could see the old man sitting in there. He could see the old man suddenly start forward, gulp for air. . . .

Del was gulping himself. Again he breathed deeply, his little narrow chest expanding with a tremor.

THE nurse came down with the old man at five past nine. Outside the sky was murky and black. Lights burned in the outer office.

The old man leaned heavily on his cane and it was obvious that he didn't feel any too well, but he was making a stubborn show of appearing cheerful.

The nurse said, "Here's my telephone number, Mr. Prouty. If you need me I'll be right here. I'll come. I don't like going this way. . . ."

"I'll call you," Del promised.

"You'd think I had both feet in the grave," old Mr. Moats growled bravely. "Well, not yet I haven't. I'm all right, I tell you. I'm only going to stay down a couple of hours. Want to look over some files. Sort of get my hand in again."

The nurse finally left but she didn't appear happy about it.

The old man sat at Del's desk. He glanced up at Del queerly. "You've notified the auditors to come in, Del?"

"Why, yes. You told me Saturday—"

"Yes, yes, I know. All right. It's cold in here, Del. Or do I imagine it?"

"It's not as warm as it should be," Del said. "Maybe you'd better go back up and wait until—"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. Sa-a-a-y! What is this? You and that nurse, and Teasdale, and Huyler. You all talk to me as if—well, never mind. You've got some reports and statements for me to examine, Del?"

"Yes, sir. As I told you last night. I'll have them on your desk in a minute."

"You're going out?" the old man asked, glancing up.

"Oh, yes. I don't believe I told you about it Saturday, but I've got those alterations over at Tausswig's store to see about. I'll be there until noon, if you want me. Then I'll go up to see after those repairs on the Thirty-Fourth Street apartments. It'll probably be late when I get back here. But I'll keep

in touch with you by telephone. When you get ready to go back upstairs you can buzz for the janitor."

"What do I need to buzz for anybody for?" Mr. Moats demanded.

"I was only thinking that the strain of those stairs—"

"Strain nothing! Can't you get some heat in here?"

"Yes, sir. It's getting warmer. I'll speak to Jennsen about this heat business. Since you've been out sick he's gotten a little lax. I'll see how it is in your room. . . ."

Del Prouty's heart was beating wildly as he went into the old man's private office and whirled opened the steam valve. It would take but a few minutes for the radiator to heat. He had timed it three times Saturday. He should know.

"I'll switch on this electric heater until the steam catches up," Del said through the open door. "That will keep your feet warm."

"My feet aren't cold. They're all right." The old man got up and leaned on his cane.

He entered his private room and drew up his shoulders. Del pulled back his swivel for him. The old man dropped into it, glanced down at the electric heater and shuddered slightly.

"Here are the reports and statements you asked for," Del said. He brought heavy manilla filing envelopes from a steel cabinet.

The old man glanced at them. Del glanced at the radiator. He hoped the old man would detain him with a lot of questions. There was no time for that. He would have to hurry as it was.

"I'll lock the front door as I go out," Del said casually, but his voice wanted to tremble. No use your being bothered with peddlers and agents and—"

"I don't want to be bothered by any-

body. Lock it. You say you'll be at Tausswig's?"

"Yes."

"All right. Tell him to call me about his rent, too, will you?"

"You mean about that back balance?"

"Yes, it's time he caught up. Business ought to be good with him."

Del nodded and glanced again at the radiator, then at his watch. Five minutes since he'd turned that valve. Not another minute to lose. He put on his hat and coat then went to the door of the old man's office. The Yale lock was in the position that would lock the door when Del pulled it shut.

"It'll be hot enough in there in a little while," Del said. He shut the door. It struck him queerly that he would not see the old man's face again—alive. The old man's eyes had turned up to him with pain behind them. Well, shortly there would be no pain. It would all be over . . .

Shortly! He glanced at his watch, locked the door of the outside office, ran down the steps. Jennsen, the janitor, was on the sidewalk, getting ready to take in his empty ash cans.

"How's the boss?" Jennsen asked quietly.

"Much better," Del Prouty said hurriedly. "Very much better."

He heard Jennsen mumble, "That's good," and mumbled something himself as he headed for the corner. Once out of sight of the building he hailed a cab and drove up to Union Square.

AT Tausswig's store he found the short and genial Mr. Tausswig all smiles.

"I thought you wasn't never going to make it," Tausswig said. "Three carpenters you got here already and they are waiting a half hour."

"I had a couple of matters to take up with Mr. Moats," Del answered.

"Oh, yes," said Tausswig. "And how is Mr. Moats? Well, I hope, No?"

"He wants you to call him," Del said with a frog in his throat. "It's about that back balance, I think."

"Call him? I will not do nothing else until I tell him how glad I am he has still got one foot on the ground."

Del watched while the call went through. The sweat came out beneath his hatband and he wanted to take off his hat. He held his breath.

Then he heard Mr. Tausswig say, "Oh, so that's you, Mr. Moats. . . . Very well, thank you, and I hope nothing. . . . Oh, the matter of that little balance? I was just going to give your young man a substantial check. . . ."

It was all right. Here was Del Prouty's alibi just in case an alibi was needed. But what would he need an alibi for? He was getting jittery.

He went and found the carpenters, and presently Mr. Tausswig joined them and they discussed the alterations and the carpenters went to work.

Del Prouty sat where he could watch the store clock. He was aware of the pulse pounding in his throat. A voice in his mind said, "Now! This is the minute! Right now! You're murdering a man and yet you're sitting here watching three carpenters put plywood sheets together to fix up some dressing rooms. You are killing the only friend you ever had because you robbed him when you thought he was going to die!"

Del Prouty swallowed. This wouldn't do. The old man had had one foot in the grave.

The time. Fifteen past ten. And hour and ten minutes since that steam valve was turned. This was the instant perhaps when the paraffin seal on that

tube was giving away, allowing the contents to escape on the hot pipe.

In his three tests Saturday one had taken an hour and eight minutes, another had taken an hour and twelve and another an hour and ten exactly.

Del Prouty, in his mind, saw the wax seal melt, saw the vapor rise. Right now the vapor was in that small, tight room where old Mr. Moats had worked for a half a century, a recluse of whom so few people knew anything at all. The vapor was in that room at this minute. The strange smell of a bitter peach seed.

Old Mr. Moats was stiffening in his chair, perhaps clawing at his throat. He would pitch over. He would fall to the floor. Perhaps he was on the floor now with the gags from that cyanide mixture full in the tissues of his old lungs.

Del Prouty rose. His body was wet with sweat. He had removed his overcoat.

Mr. Tausswig, coming by to stop for a moment said, "I didn't know it was so warm in here."

"Yes—it is warm." And Del quit mopping at his forehead.

He got up and went over past the place where the carpenters were at work. He drank at the fountain by the wall. The water was cold to his tight, hot throat.

Then he got hold of himself. It was all right. Everything was all right. Didn't he have an alibi? That is, if he needed an alibi, which he wouldn't.

There would be no trace of the cause of death by the time the body of old Mr. Moats was discovered. Nobody knew he was in that office. No one but the nurse, and the nurse had been dismissed. The old man had had no appointments for the day. He never had appointments.

Late this afternoon, after dark, Del would slip into the office from the rear entry. No one would see him. He would remove his tube from under that flange. He would open the windows. The smell of the peach seed would be gone. The blueness, if there had been any at all, would be gone from the skin. It would look natural.

No one would know anything about any chemicals. No one knew that Del Prouty had been very good at chemistry during his schooling which, unfortunately had been curtailed. So there would be no questions from that score.

No, he would air out the place, remove the tube, slip back out, come in by the front entrance and find Jennsen. He would ask Jennsen casually if he had helped the old man back upstairs. Then, at Jennsen's blank look, Del would say, "By the way, there's a radiator in here I meant for you to look at. Hard to get it going." And then he'd take Jennsen in with him and Jennsen would be with him to discover the body.

Del would call Dr. Huyler. Huyler would come from way uptown and that would take almost an hour. The police, of course, would have to come in to hold their routine investigation, but it would be nothing else but routine. Huyler would certify that the end had come naturally. A perfect plan all the way.

Perfect except for that business of slipping in the back way. The more Del thought about it the more he frowned on it. Finally he decided to eliminate that feature altogether. After all it wasn't necessary to have Jennsen with him to discover the body. He would go in the front way and discover it, and take his time about it. He would get the room aired, if it needed any

airing and then call Jennisen and the doctor.

He would act shocked. He would be very careful about his acting. Not too melodramatic. A few tears. One or two quiet ones rolling down the cheek . . .

At ten-thirty Del went to the telephone. He dried the palm of his hand before he took up the receiver. His fingers went taut when he dialed the Moats office number. He waited with the pulse pounding against the top of his head, with his collar suddenly too tight, with his heart hammering his ribs.

The automatic ringing signal buzzed intermittently in his ears. There was no answer. A trickle of sweat ran down his face. He hung back the receiver slowly and sucked in his breath. His teeth were locked to thwart a chattering.

Old Mr. Moats was dead.

DEL PROUTY returned to the old brownstone in a cab. It was five minutes to five and very dark. The rain, which had started in the middle of the afternoon, was coming down in torrents. A cold rain that had a hint of sleet in the way it slashed at you.

Del paid his driver and dashed up the flight of stairs to the entrance. The wind was fierce. It whipped his coat about him, staggered him as he fumbled at the lock with his key.

He let himself into the dark hall, leaned against the door to get it shut. His heart was pounding again and his palms were cold. He glanced all about him. The darkness was familiar, undisturbed.

After a long moment, steeling himself for what lay ahead of him, Del Prouty unlocked the office door and went in.

One finger was about to press a light

button when he withdrew it. First he would get that glass tube from under the flange, and crack a window back in the old man's private room. No light yet. A little time, now.

He knew the office so well that he passed directly to the locked door behind which old Mr. Moats had come to his end. He halted there as he took out another key.

The end. The way the old man had glanced up at Del this morning just as Del was shoving the door shut—sealing the old man's doom.

Yes, that's what it amounted to. Sealing his doom.

The key clattered against the brass face plate of the lock and made a strange metallic sound in the heavy darkness. Del set his teeth and presently located the hole. The key slid into place and Del turned it.

He would stay close to the old man's desk. He didn't want to touch the thing that lay in there. He didn't even want to see it.

He was in the room. He sniffed the air. There was no trace of odor. A feeling of confidence swept over him. After all these hours there should be no odor.

Wait! What was that? Del Prouty sniffed again. There was a smell in the air. Not of a bitter peach seed. Something else. Something that eluded him. Never mind that. The peach seed smell was the thing. And that was gone.

He reached a hand ahead of him in the dark. Then he made out the swivel chair. It was empty. The thing, then, was there on the floor.

Del put a foot forward, gingerly. Then another. He was at the radiator. It was piping hot. He stooped and his fingers, still in his gloves, found the pipe.

There was the flange. It made a little

tinny, scraping noise as he carefully slid it back.

His fingers felt for the glass tube with the spring clip holding it.

The tube—was gone!

The brilliance of sudden light covered him. Del Prouty whirled and faced it and blinked. His mouth froze open, his thin nose twitched, his little eyes distended.

A voice said, "Here it is, Prouty," and Del saw something flash in the circle of the light and drop to the table top in front of him.

It was the tube. He stared at it and saliva wet the corners of his mouth. His knees were giving away. There was no substance behind his belt. His brain was buzzing loudly.

Then the room lights went on and he saw two men. One was very tall and thin with a hard, thin jowl. The other was shorter and thick in the shoulders. The thin one had the flashlight which he now snapped off.

"Mebbe you wanna talk, Prouty," the thin man said.

"Talk? Talk?" It was Prouty's voice. But he didn't recognize it. It seemed to him to come from a long way off.

The thin man approached him and took his wrist and the grip was like that of a toothed steel trap.

"Yes, talk. We know you did it. We can't figger out yet why you did it."

"Did what?" Del Prouty was fighting with all his little rat strength to make some kind of stand. "You say I did it—did what?"

"He wants to know what, Al," the thin man said to the thick one. Then he gave Del Prouty's hand a hard wrench.

"It was a swell murder setup," the thin man said. "Practically without a flaw. If you'd turned off that electric heater before you left here this A.M.

everything mighta worked out like you wanted it to."

"Electric heater?" Del remembered it with a vast seizure of panic that overwhelmed him.

"Electric heater," the detective said quietly. "When the old man croaked he fell against it and it made a short circuit. It blew a fuse. Your man Jennsen. He found it later in the day when his wife's iron wouldn't heat. He put in a fuse and it blew right away, so he put in another. Then he went to hunt the trouble. He found it—here."

"Jennsen?" Del Prouty's throat was almost closed. He swallowed hard and it hurt.

"Yes, Jennsen. He saw the old man on the floor, he smelled the gas—the almond stink your fluid made. He backed out and called the cops, and the old man's doctor. Cyanic gas, the doc said. So mebbe you'll tell us why."

"Why? Why?" Del Prouty stared at them. This couldn't be real. It couldn't be happening.

"Yeh, why you wanna bump a poor old guy that just changed his will and made it so'd you'd come in for a cool half million almost any day. His doc gave him no more'n six weeks to live—if that."

"A—half—million. . . ." Del Prouty sank into the swivel and buried his face in his arms. Six weeks at the most. Nina, distant countries, gay hotels—a half million—

"Are you gonna talk? Or are we gonna have to persuade you?" The thin man jerked him. "Looks like a guy could sort of stick it out when he knew the old fellow had one foot in the grave that way. Sit up here!"

Del Prouty heard his voice saying things—things that meant nothing—but the two dicks had to hold up his head while he spoke.

Snow

A study in ambiguity



By Cyril Plunkett

Author of "Dark Blind," etc.

THEY parked the black sedan, both front doors unlatched, and let the motor run. Joe Evans said: "You got it now, Holly? You're set?"

Holly Bland licked his lips and the pupils in his yellow eyes were dilated twice their normal size. He jerked his hat—the hat that carried two extra "decks" of coke in the sweatband—more firmly on his head and nodded. "I'm set."

"He comes out and heads straight for the taxi stand, see?" Joe went on, two red blotches splashing his pale cheeks. The visor of the cap pulled low on his forehead, the heavy overcoat, collar up, made his thin-nosed thin-lipped face seem a little like an excited gnome's. "You listening, Holly?"

"Sure I'm listening," Holly snarled, and his too-bright eyes swept the snow-covered street, the passing throng. The humming motors, blaring horns, made music in his ears, made him feel that he sat here like a god this morning. Those cars with their cautious clatter while the lightness, the strength singing through his own veins was inexhaustible, with no need of caution.

Holly bared crooked teeth and told himself the bulls were stupid apes, even though both he and Joe had once done a stretch in stir. His blunt face found its reflection in the rear vision mirror and the grin widened. Dark browed, dark skinned, it looked like a fighter's face. It flattered him. It seemed to say: "You're king-pin, boy. No one can touch you now!"

Holly was "high."

"I've been casing this play a month, and I know," Joe's hoarse voice continued. "He carries the rocks in his inside coat pocket. I know that, too, because he always stops just outside the door and feels of his pocket to be sure they're safe. *Diamonds, Holly!*"

"Well, where is this diamond salesman?"

"Take it easy, boy. The train's just pulled in. He'll be along all right. It's his day in this burg. I checked that, too. Now, you got it? No gun play. Quick, fast—I slug him. You ain't too hopped up with snow to use good sense?"

Holly cursed and licked his lips again, but the little guy came out of the railroad station then. Stopped just outside the swinging doors, slender, bespectacled, alert. Joe Evans whispered, "Okay, Holly, here we go!"

Holly Bland slid from behind the car's wheel, lips twitching, one hand tightening on the gun in his coat pocket. The cold wind slapped his big body but he didn't feel it. His veins were rich with springy warmth, his mind smooth as silk. Joe was closing in from the other side. They met their quarry half way across the walk. Joe Evans grated: "Freeze, buddy. It's a stickup."

The salesman's jaw dropped, eyes becoming wide, distended, pleading. There was a glimpse of leather swiftly changing hands; of Joe Evans' gun, appearing, flashing like a club. It happened then, suddenly, unexpectedly. The man began to scream. And falling seemed to paw his pocket—as though for a weapon. Holly Bland cut loose, two stabs of flame that tore apart the scream before it was half uttered.

Simultaneously there was a bellow from the station's door. A red-faced,

charging man that could be only a *dick*.

Joe panted: "Damn you, Holly—"

HOLLY'S gun spoke twice again. The red-faced man spun, slid, fell, but a Police Positive was in his hand. And sprawled though he was, it began to bark. The first bullet clipped Holly's hat, so close to his head he could feel it burn. The second tripped the hat from his head. The third report and Holly's fifth shot came together. Holly didn't even hear that slug—but he saw the *dick* crumble. He heard, too, above the frantic cries around them, Joe Evans yell: "Holly, *run!*"

Holly's mind was blazing, but not with fear. Exhilaration. A "the slobs can't touch me!" coolness, born of the drug that whipped his nerves. One quick glance showed him a uniformed patrolman far down the street, too far yet to matter. He turned, saw his hat lying in the snow, caught it up. Joe Evans was at the car, jerking the door open, tumbling in. Holly began to laugh. Joe looked like a little dog, white faced, scared, too scared to shoot.

"Step on it, Holly!" Joe cried.

Holly slid behind the wheel, slipped it into gear. A taxi tried to hem him in. He slapped its fenders and sent it skidding into the curb. He was into the street then, tooling the light sedan like a dancer on a tightrope. Around a truck, around a corner. They had the jewels! The little guy and the red-faced *dick* would never testify against them. The other people, bystanders, had scarcely seen their faces. Sweet? It was perfect and he had to laugh again.

He said: "Joe, we ditch this hack and pick up our own." He added, without taking his eyes from the road: "Joe, we circle the town and then—"

Joe Evans groaned. "Holly—the dick blasted me. In my side—low down."

Tough, but that wouldn't stop him. Stop *him*, Holly Bland? Like hell. He thought at first he'd leave Joe in the stolen escape car; only that, of course, would never do. Even if he bumped Joe off, the body, identified, might point to him. But Joe couldn't walk and Joe's hand, pressed at his side was wet with blood. Circling the town, slipping quietly into the dump they roomed in, plainly now was out. They'd planted the other car, *their* car, innocently before a side street vacant lot. Holly drew up behind it, helped Joe make the change and settled down then to figure the thing out.

The "high" feeling still was with him. He was one slick fellow, he told himself. He could bust little guys and cops. He could do anything!

"I told you not to lose your head," Joe breathed.

"That guy was going for his rod."

"I was—was nuts to cut a cokie in. Now I—"

"Shut up, will you? You ain't dead yet," Holly snapped.

Joe shut up, slumped down in his seat, face white, eyes closed, but his lips were open, quivering at each breath. And Holly began to whistle softly. Diamonds . . . money . . . "snow." Two decks in his hatband to see him through this emergency, to get rid of Joe if the monkey didn't snap out of it, then—he raised his hand to hat, fingers touched the silk outer band. They hovered there, fluttering. Holly caught his breath, swore suddenly, jerking the hat off.

The dick's bullet had cut the felt in two. Worse . . . far worse than creasing his own head, the bullet had ripped through his little hoard of dope. Ex-

cept for tiny scattered particles, the cocaine was gone, spilled to the ground when the dick's slugs lifted the hat off his head.

FOR a dazed moment, Holly couldn't believe this true. It wasn't that he needed another shot—yet. It was the horror that, the heat on behind them, they'd have to lam, hole up somewhere away from their usual haunts. Away from contacts with his peddler. Going back, chancing that someone *might* have remembered their faces, was asking for trouble and Holly never asked for trouble. He only wanted accessibility when he *would* need another shot. And almost instantly alarm trickled through his body. Almost instantly alarm became appetite. He wet his lips. His fingers tightened on the wheel. His nerves began to twist.

The car leaped forward and Joe moaned.

"Holly, what are we going to do?"

Holly muttered something unintelligible even to himself.

"I—I got to have help, Holly."

"You want a doc? You want a doc to call the cops?" Holly snarled.

Joe whispered. "Damn you, Holly. Cokie's always—"

Holly cried abruptly: "Got it!"

"Got—got it?"

"You're damned right. Cokie you say? Cokie Tyler!"

"I don't know any Cokie Tyler. Is he a doc, Holly?"

"Doc? Who cares about a doc? Cokie Tyler has a hut up in the hills. I laid up with him once and I know the place. He runs snow, he's always got snow!"

"Holly—you can't—"

"Can't what?" Holly snarled again. And the car gained speed. Holly could whistle now once more. It began to snow.

They'd left the city, the suburbs, and the open country was a rolling plain, tree dotted. The trees became gradually thicker, the hills higher and the falling snow was like a blanket around them. The dash clock showed two o'clock when they turned off the main road and here the going became more difficult. No plows had opened the way but the road was gravel underneath, and safe, and Holly put the car in second on the steady incline. The appetite was growing in him.

They hit a village, rolled through it, on into higher country; and the gnawing inside his brain began to grow. Four, then five miles wound by before they came to a curve and beyond it heavy drift. The car hit the drift, spun and stalled. Holly backed and tried again, and again the motor died. In the gray light here in the woods he could see the way was fairly clear beyond the drift. He backed once more, drew up a little off the road, turned the switch. Cokie Tyler's place couldn't be much farther off. He could do the rest on foot.

Joe groaned again when Holly lifted him from the seat. Holly found the salesman's leather packet, transferred it to his own pocket and slung Joe's body over his shoulder. The car, alone, would be safe enough; found *with* Joe too dangerous. He knew now, however, that Joe alive or dead would not soon be found.

He hadn't gone two hundred yards when he saw the shack.

IT looked like Cokie Tyler's shack—the covered stoop, the two bunks inside, the cracked fireplace—but of course it wasn't because it was empty. But it would serve as a place to leave Joe safely for the present. Holly dumped him on the floor. Joe's body

shuddered, tried to raise, fell back trembling.

"Holly," Joe gasped. "Holly!"

"I'm here," Holly said.

"Where are we, Holly? I can't hardly see. Holly, I—I'm dying."

"Yeah?" Holly sneered. "You lay there, guy, and think things over."

"Where are you going?"

"To find Cokie Tyler," Holly snapped.

"But you'll be back? With some whiskey and bandages?"

"Sure I'll be back," Holly chuckled. Maybe with a spade, he added to himself.

There was still enough light to find Cokie's place—if he hurried, and hurry now was paramount in his mind. One shot was all he needed, just one little shot—quick, to wash away the depression stealing over him.

He followed what he thought might be the road, but he couldn't see the road. The falling snow, so still, so soft, began to blot out everything. Twice he drew up on the brink of a cliff; twice he doubled back on his dim trail and started over.

But the lasting silence began to get him. There wasn't even wind to sigh through the bare trees. Nothing but sleepy flakes of white and Holly drew up in the dusk finally, startled, dismayed. It flashed across his frantic mind at last that the covered stoop, the twin bunks, the cracked fireplace in the shack behind had had meaning from the first. Dreadful meaning which his driving urgency hadn't let him understand. That there were *two* such shacks, so alike, simply couldn't be! He'd reached Cokie Tyler's place after all—and Cokie had cleared out.

Holly began to shiver and the shakes, long coming, clutched him completely. Gone was his courage and his strength.

Frenzy came to take its place. He didn't know what to do. The shadows lengthened all around him, became leaden. No longer gray but black. He began to think: I've got to get a shot—I've got to get a shot. I'll go crazy if I don't get a shot. It pounded through his mind over and over and gradually he realized that he was stumbling back the way he had come; first following his own faint tracks; angling oddly into other tracks that were newer, more pronounced.

The silence became less marked. A whisper at first, overhead; then a blast sweeping from behind him. The wind! It caught up the snow and swirled it like a veil. It made the black shadows white and dancing.

Holly began to run, sobbing. When he fell, countless times, he scrambled to his feet again as though the white ground were hot, burning. *No time to lose—no time to lose* taunted him, screamed to him. The tracks were growing fainter, the snow deeper. Had it been to his knees before? He didn't know, couldn't remember. He'd thought only of a shot before; he still thought only of that shot somewhere ahead, in the village, perhaps a doc's office, easy to break into. His hope expanded like a balloon within him, pressing at his nerves, whipping his heart. It was *must* and agony.

He reached a clearing and saw a light. He'd gone half way across the clearing before the light had curious menace. Yellow, dim, *from a window*. The window was in a shack with a covered stoop.

Joe couldn't have managed to light a lamp. Joe had been almost in a stupor. There was a sudden sharp sound, rusty hinges squealing. Then a figure, heavy-coated, fur-capped, coming out the door. Holly huddled, dismayed. It came to him at last that it had been

this man's faint tracks he had been following, that his own former trail had long since been covered. It came to him that someone had found Joe Evans. was now on his way to the village.

For the fur-capped figure, bending low, had turned away, was already disappearing in the darkness.

HOLLY BLAND tasted the blood from his own lips, snarled a curse and stumbled forward. The frenzy was whipping him now until his mind was flame, but in it was a last warning voice, a last plea for caution. He had to see if Joe were dead. He had to know what that receding figure had found.

He crept to the door, opened it, stepped inside. Joe Evans lay in the lower bunk. Burlap and Joe's overcoat covered the outstretched body. Joe was still breathing.

The eyelids, dirty white, fluttered open. Showed eyes glazed with fever. "You came—back?"

"I'm here, ain't I?" Holly rasped.

"I didn't think—you would, Holly. I—I thought you'd lammed. When the palmer came, I—"

"Palmer?" Holly cut in hoarsely.

"The parson, Holly. He was coming down to the village from a family in the mountains. I was laying here in the dark. I—I'd been thinking about—dying. Holly, that slug got me through—through the—" Joe's eyes closed and his breath began to rattle.

Holly grabbed his shoulders, shook him. "Talk, damn you. What happened?"

Joe gasped, swallowed and tried to moisten his lips. "I didn't want to die. Holly, like I—I didn't want you to kill—today. I—was calling for you and—and he heard me. He's going to get help for me but it'll be too late. I knew, so

I—I figured I'd go clean. Holly, I got it all off my chest. I made—my peace with—"

"You squealed?" Holly cried.

"Not—your name, Holly. You'd gone—anyhow."

Holly's fist traveled a bare foot, but it came hard and fast. It hit Joe Evans' jaw and there was a crushing, sickening sound. Joe didn't even sigh, his body shuddered once. And his eyes stared, sightless, at the ceiling. That one blow had done the work.

He'd squealed, Holly thought with fury. The fury leaped through him, fiery, burning, and he hit Joe's face again, caught the lifeless head in both trembling hands and began to beat it against the bunk rail. But it struck him abruptly that this delay was madness; more, every tortured nerve within him was howling for relief. The parson had but a few miles to go, was even now tramping toward the village. Unless he stopped him, he might never get the thing he needed, *snow*. Might never have another chance, moreover, to remain free. The parson would call the sheriff.

No damned black-coat would beat him! And Holly Bland tore open the door, winced before the bitter wind, threw himself into the swirling night. The tracks, though almost covered, were still visible.

He ran then, for what seemed hours, and drug-racked desperation drove him on long after his strength was gone. He fumbled for his gun, carried it in one hand, ready, cursing each flake that stung his face, the whole whirling, jeering panorama from murder that morning to the moment when he saw dully, sprawled in the snow, that his gun was jammed with ice. The snow had packed itself into the muzzle, was frozen from the faint heat of his hand.

A gun, he realized at last, he could no longer use.

He'd seen a man once try to shoot a barrel-jammed weapon. The man had blown his own face off. Holly panted: "It's Joe's fault, and the dick's—this morning. It's the palmer's fault, coming past Cokie's cabin tonight. It's everyone's fault. But I—I'm gonna get that black-coat, and I'm going on and get—a shot of coke!"

THE tracks he followed were growing plainer. Presently he saw the figure beside three twisted pines, still bent low braving the wind, plodding slowly, deliberately through the flaky waste. Holly yelled twice before the figure turned. Holly staggered close and laughed.

"Padre, eh? Guy who listens to men squeal!"

"Good heavens, man, who are you?" The padre's lips were blue with cold, but firm. The face, almost hidden by a wollen scarf, was middle aged, serene.

"What did he tell you," Holly screamed. "Don't stall—the guy in the cabin."

"Oh, I—I see," the padre answered. "He made his peace with God."

"And so you're running to squawk?"

"My good man, don't you understand? That dying wretch found peace through sorrow and repentance. I believe I realize who and what you are, but what he said is between him and his Maker. I assure you—"

Holly was still laughing, but recklessly, happily. He'd caught the black-coat! He was on his way back—to the village, and a doc's office—to find the thing his mind was clamoring for. He couldn't *shoot* the gun he carried, but he could use it nonetheless. It flashed up, a streak of metal; came down hard. The parson cried out once,

half turned the blow by one upraised arm. Holly leaped him, bore him down, struck until his weary arm could no longer raise.

Numbed fingers felt for the padre's wrist, could find no pulse. Holly staggered erect, kicked the prone figure, shrieked his glee. Joe was dead; the padre dead. No one knew he had the diamonds. He had only to go on, two, three miles farther to warmth, to safety, to relief.

Holly Bland staggered on. . . .

The road? Hell, where was it? Gone in the snow-clad night, gone in a dancing wilderness. The padre had known the way, he realized. He'd killed his one certain guidance, stopped the padre's tracks.

"But I'll make it!" Holly screamed. "I got to make it!"

Every inch of his big body sobbed for dope. One tiny deck, one pinch of snow. Snow . . .? But there *was* snow—all around him. White, blessed powder—a world of it. *Cocaine!*

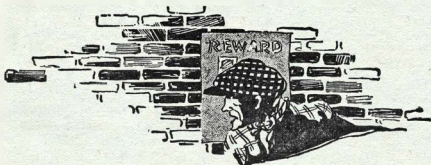
Holly went to his knees, clawed white handfuls up to his mouth, crouched shivering, waiting for relief. When there was no relief, he cursed the snow. Broke, then, the flesh on his forearms with his own finger nails, tore at it until blood stained the ground

around him. The quicker, surer way—into his veins. But he cursed again when the "sing" would not come.

Snow. Pounds, tons of it . . . mocking him, refusing its singing strength. He began to crawl on hands and knees that were like numbed sticks. When he looked up finally, he saw three twisted pines. They seemed familiar, and Holly gasped. It was the place where he'd killed the padre!

He could even see now the depression from the padre's figure—but there was no figure. The body was gone! He knew that couldn't be, and yet it was. A part of his mind wailed, "You didn't strike hard enough. You were too weak. The fur hat saved his skull. He's going on—to report you. He—" Faint in the white whirlpools beyond were tracks. The way to salvation!

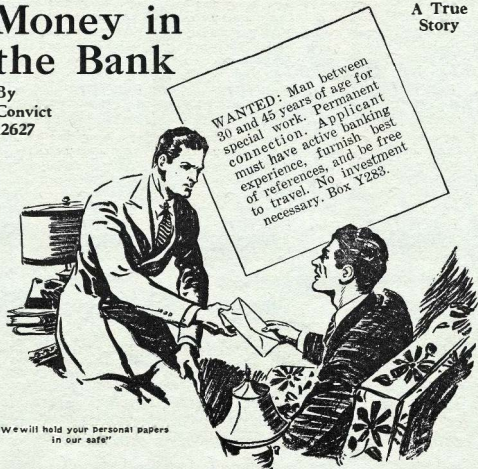
Holly laughed once more, a shrill cackle. Tracks ahead—sure they were ahead. He was following them, wasn't he? Or behind, reversing himself, his own tracks again? It didn't matter. The gnawing was leaving him, the snow was taking its happy hold. Contentedly he brushed it from his face, his nose, so he could breathe. It was so very soft, so warm. It sang to him at last, a tender lullaby. It whispered: "Holly, why don't you go to sleep. . . ."



Money in the Bank

By
Convict
12627

A True
Story



"We will hold your personal papers
in our safe"

IT IS a common saying among the denizens of the underworld that the confidence man spends less time in prison than any other type of criminal, but occasionally one of these suave workers does run afoul of the law and finds himself in the Big House. Herbert Dickens—that's the name he was using when I knew him in the Big House—was there because of his own error, and strangely enough, he admitted it which is something unusual for a convict.

"I have no one to blame but myself," Dickens told me, when I mentioned that he did not seem to be worried about his predicament. "I had taken this man for five grand once and left him satisfied that everything was on the level, but when I

found myself in the same territory a year later I decided to give him another play. It seems that he knew he had been taken for a ride the first time, but he realized that he didn't have a chance to prove anything in court, but the second time he led me right up to the slaughter, and like a chump I followed him. Oh, well, they say this Big House time is all part of the overhead."

When Dickens sought an interview with the warden and expressed his desire of enrolling for a correspondence course in accounting that official seemed to be surprised.

"Of course, Dickens," the warden said. "you can enroll for the course. I presume you are able to pay for it. But tell me this:

Do you really have intentions of following the straight and narrow when you leave here. I have always heard that you fellows in this confidence racket never quit the game once you get into it, and I know that this short term you have here isn't so hard on you that it is reforming you."

"Prisons do not reform anyone, warden," said Dickens, playing his part well. "A man's reformation must come from within himself. I have always been proud that despite my wandering from the straight and narrow I have still retained a certain amount of principle. Since I have been here I have studied my fellow prisoners closely, and, warden, if you don't mind my saying so, they are a pretty shabby lot. Their word is no good; there is nothing too small for them to steal, and they have countless other faults too numerous to mention. I have just begun to realize that I, by putting myself outside the law, put myself in the same class with them, so I have decided to quit the racket."

Dickens received the correspondence course, and the warden was pleased that one of his charges had decided to quit being a crook upon his own initiative. This would be something for him to discuss when he visited the convention of penologists the following year. But Dickens had no intention of becoming an "Honest John" when he again faced the outside world. He was merely playing percentage as he had played it all his life. He had no intention of seeing this time in prison wasted and he was going to use it to lay the foundation for what he hoped would prove to be the most profitable confidence game in which he had ever taken the principal part.

DICKENS seemed to take to his studies eagerly and he often displayed to me the favorable reports he received from the school. It was not until a few weeks before his sentence expired that he revealed to me the real reason for his industry.

"I'm not going to give you all the inside dope," he told me one Sunday in the prison recreation yard, "but I've got the biggest scheme of my life figured out, as far as money is concerned. I believe I've got a

new racket regardless of the fact that most con men say there are no more new ones. This one should bring me from thirty to forty grand and I don't see how it can miss going over. It's just like money in the bank. I have really plugged on this accounting course and I believe I can hold my own with any other fellows in the same line of work."

"Well," I remarked, "I don't want to seem to be moralizing, but in that case why not be satisfied to follow that line of work on the legitimate? I understand there's pretty good money in it."

"Yeah," Dickens said, "there is good money in it, but did you ever stop to think how I'd go about to get a job with this prison record in back of me and no previous employment record?"

"You might encounter difficulties there," I admitted, "but I believe there are employers somewhere who put ability before past record, and if a man laid his cards on the table and proved his sincerity I believe he would be given a chance."

"Oh, you've been talking to the 'sky pilot' (prison chaplain) too much," smiled Dickens, and walked away. I didn't get to talk to him again.

If I had known the details of the clever scheme Dickens had planned I might have been tempted to try it myself, but seeing how it eventually turned out it perhaps is just as well that I didn't.

Dickens had an advantage over the average discharged convict when he left the prison. He was well supplied with money, and this was very necessary for the operation of his new confidence scheme. His first move was to purchase new clothing for all confidence men know that a good appearance is a very valuable asset. This done, he journeyed to a city some five hundred miles distant where he engaged a room at a leading hotel. Visiting a newspaper office, he inserted an ad.

WANTED: Man between 30 and 45 years of age for special work. Permanent connection. Applicant must have active banking experience, furnish best of references, and be free to travel. No investment necessary. Box Y 283.

Dickens instructed the newspaper not to give the name of the advertiser to any inquirers. To those who replied by letter he advised them to see him at the hotel. He arranged his appointments, however, so as to not conflict, for he did not know, of course, if the first or last applicant he interviewed would prove to have all the qualities necessary for his racket. His line of talk with each applicant was the same, and at the close of the interview he did not commit himself, promising each of them that he would advise them later of his decision. If anyone had been listening to the conversation between the confidence man and the applicants, all eager to make a profitable connection, they would have had no reason to become suspicious.

"Now, Mr. Alberts," Dickens told the man he eventually decided was best suited for his racket and whom he had recalled for a second interview, "I have selected you from a number of applicants principally because of your excellent past record. I have made inquiry of your former employers, your friends, the places where you have had charge accounts, and your minister, and I have had very fine reports from all. As I told you at the time of our first interview, this work which I am offering you is of a very confidential nature. And one of the reasons I have selected you is that you are not a family man and have no close relatives to whom you will have to account for your activities or whereabouts."

"I am very glad to have this opportunity to work with you," said Alberts, "particularly since it is a work in connection with the apprehension of criminals, but I confess I am curious to know just where I will have to go and what I will do."

"Naturally," answered Dickens, smiling, "but until such time as you prove your worth to our organization you will be required to work more or less in the dark, following instructions without knowing why you are doing so and reporting to us just what progress you are making. This is a highly specialized work and is not to be confused with the ordinary private detective agencies. Our work is altogether in

connection with bank defalcations and for you to be known as an investigator of this type would be detrimental to your success. You must stay in the character which we will assign you in each case and never let yourself be caught off guard."

"I am sure I can do that," said Alberts.

"The first thing I am going to ask you to do," said the confidence man, "is to leave with me all the personal papers you have which bear your name. These will be placed in our safe and you can have access to them any time you need them, but you must not carry them with you or in your baggage. If you were to leave them with a friend it would only cause questions to be asked, embarrassing questions. Then, secondly, I want you to drop in the bank where you were employed until it changed hands a couple of weeks ago, and tell them you are going to Chicago where you hope to make a connection with a bank. I'll want you to meet me here at seven o'clock tomorrow evening at which time I will give you further instructions. And please be prompt, for we have a case pending at this time that demands immediate coverage, and I believe it will be a good one for you to become accustomed to the work, as we do not anticipate a closing of the case perhaps for several months."

WHEN Alberts reported at the hotel the following evening he had a letter of recommendation which he stated that the bank had given him voluntarily. Dickens took this and placed it with the other personal papers stating that he would put them away for safekeeping. The confidence man then instructed Alberts to meet him at the railroad station the following afternoon.

"Be there by three o'clock," said Dickens. "I'm not going to tell you until you get there where you are going, for I don't want you to be tempted to reveal your destination to any of your friends. After you have worked for us a time you will understand why secrecy is important in all our operations."

Alberts reported at the railroad station promptly and Dickens handed him a rail-

road ticket with pullman reservations to New Orleans together with the name of the hotel where he was to register and the name he was to assume for this particular case.

"You must use this name in registering," said Dickens, "and in filling in your registration card, if there is a space provided for such information, you will give your occupation as a salesman. All that will be necessary for you to do is take things easy and play the part of a vacationist. You will receive expense money each week in currency which will save you the trouble of identifying yourself to cash a check. Each day you will go to the race track and you will be allowed ten dollars daily for this. It might be well for you to make two or three two-dollar bets each day for if you are a regular visitor there and don't bet you will be conspicuous. Within a day or two after you arrive there you will receive in the mail a photograph of a man whom we are attempting to locate. This will include a complete description of the man, his correct name, which he probably will not be using, and also other useful information. This man may be in New Orleans at this time, but if not he probably will be there very shortly, and being a race horse fiend he will frequent the track. You will keep on the lookout for him at all times and when you spot him and are positive he is the man whom we are seeking you will wire me at an address which will be given you in this letter. You will not make any report to the local police officials regarding this man. I think that is about all I need to tell you now, except to warn you again that if you should forget yourself and reveal your real mission to anyone you will immediately be dismissed from our service. I am furnishing you with \$100 expense money which will be sufficient until such time as you receive your first weekly allowance."

When Dickens saw Alberts pass through the gates to the waiting train he smiled. The first steps in his well planned scheme had been taken and everything had gone through without a hitch. This was to be the confidence man's "one big job," and he

wasn't going to overlook any details. It was an obsession with Dickens since his prison term to always look out for the minor details. Those were the things, he had learned, that caused confidence men to get callouses on their hands doing hard labor for unrelenting prison guards.

The day following Alberts' departure for New Orleans Dickens boarded a train for Chicago. The next step in his scheme was dependent to a certain extent upon opportunity, but he was confident he would find this opportunity in the help wanted columns of one of the metropolitan dailies. He had scanned these pages during his months of confinement and often had seen the ads, one of which was now to bring him fortune if everything went in accordance with his plans. It was one of these ads which had caused him to first formulate this new scheme in his mind.

Dickens spent two weeks in Chicago before he found the type of ad he was seeking. In the meantime he had written to Alberts at the New Orleans hotel, sending him a photograph of the "wanted man," a photograph which the confidence man had bribed a convict clerk to steal from the prison record office. He also sent Alberts expense money in accordance with his promise and again cautioned him against revealing his mission to others. He felt sure that everything on that end was progressing nicely although he had had no letter from the former bank employee, having instructed him to contact him only in the event he found the "fugitive."

ONE Monday morning Dickens presented himself at one of the leading commercial employment agencies where he identified himself as Alberts.

"I wish to make application for the position of cashier in an out-of-town bank advertised in Sunday's paper," he told the girl at the information desk.

He was shown to the private office of one of the interviewers where he showed his credentials, the papers he had taken from Alberts for "safekeeping."

"You certainly have some fine recommendations, Mr. Alberts," said the em-

ployment official when he had read some of the letters. "There is no question but what your previous experience qualifies you to fill this position, but I am wondering if the remuneration mentioned in the advertisement will be suitable to you."

"It isn't as much as I have earned in the past," said the confidence man, "but I have taken care of my money and have not been out of employment long and I would rather make a connection now for less money than to wait for a better one. I am sure there will be opportunities for advancement in this position."

"Of course there will be," said the official. "The town is not so small; that is, it is about 35,000 population and there are quite a few industries located there, and this bank gets the bulk of the business from these industries. Our usual procedure in bank positions is to send the applicant to the bank for a personal interview and if he is acceptable to them we investigate his past record or leave it up to the bank. In short, the applicant does not take up his duties until such time as his past has been investigated thoroughly. You are financially able, I presume, to take care of your personal expenses pending this investigation. You will also be required to pay your expenses to this town which is some two hundred miles distant. I will give you a schedule showing our charges in connection with positions of this type and I suggest you think this matter over and come back in the morning if you decide you care to go down there for interview."

Dickens, of course, knew that he was going to accept this proposition, but he did not want to rush into the matter, reasoning that this might possibly excite the suspicions of the employment agency. The following morning he presented himself at the employment office and stated that he was willing, if acceptable, to take the position.

"Now, Mr. Alberts," said the employment official, "I don't think there is any doubt but what you will get this position. I talked with the bank president on the telephone yesterday after you left and told

him something of your past connections and he seemed to be quite eager to have you come down for an interview. It seems that his former cashier died and one of the bank officers has tried to take care of the work but has found it too much for him. I'd suggest that you go down there today if you can."

"I'll leave on the next train," said the confidence man. "I'm anxious to get to work."

When Dickens was ushered into the bank president's office he prepared himself to put on the best acting of his life, for, he told himself, this was to be his one big job, the one on which he could retire and no longer worry about prisons. The bank official, a middle-aged, jovial fellow, greeted him effusively.

"I'm glad you managed to get down right away, Mr. Alberts," he said. "Mr. Wilson, our vice president, has found that he tackled too much when he attempted to do the cashier's work in addition to his own. Now, you have your references with you of course, and I understand the employment agency told you of the salary we are prepared to pay, which I presume is satisfactory or you wouldn't be here. The only reason I wanted you to come down for this interview was so that I could have a good look at you. I rather pride myself that I am a good judge of character and I like your appearance."

"Thank you," smiled the confidence man. "I am sure you will find my references, both as to previous employment and character, satisfactory. I don't drink nor gamble. I am single, don't even have a girl friend, so there is nothing to take my mind from my work. I like banking work and am very anxious to make a connection where there is a future."

"There certainly is one here," said the bank official. "We have a small institution but we also have all the larger accounts in the city. And if our organization does not offer you enough opportunity for advancement you will always be in a position to contact the officials of various local industries and perhaps they may offer you something. If you decide to make a change

later and can better yourself we certainly shall not stand in your way."

"That's fine," said Dickens. "All employers are not so unselfish."

THE following day Dickens returned to Chicago and to the employment office where he reported that the bank had agreed to accept him if his references proved satisfactory.

"Pending this investigation," said the confidence man, "I am going to take a little vacation up in the country. In the meantime I will leave a telephone number where you can leave any message for me. This will be sent to me wherever I am and I will report within twenty-four hours."

The confidence man did not go on any vacation. He stayed in Chicago. The telephone number which he had left at the employment office was that of a friend, and he knew that this man could be trusted to inform him if there was any slip-up in his plan, or any visit by detectives. It was a week before he received notice to report at the employment office. He lost no time in doing so.

"Your references have proven entirely satisfactory," said the employment official. "Now all that remains is for you to sign this agreement for our commission and then report for duty. The bank president told me on the phone this morning to have you come down as early as possible."

"I'll leave tonight," said Dickens, his heart racing now that he knew the last obstacle to a fortune had been overcome. He was about to step into a bank, into a position of trust where thousands of dollars would be placed in his care. The confidence man congratulated himself that he had taken care of his money before going to prison, for had it not been for this foresight he would not have been able to finance his present scheme. Before leaving to take up his new duties he sent another remittance to Alberts at New Orleans and cautioned him to be on the alert for the "wanted criminal." He also instructed his friend in Chicago to forward any mail to him upon receipt of his new address, and to enclose the letter in an-

other envelope and to address it to the name of Alberts, the name he was using in this position. These matters taken care of he boarded a train and reported to the bank for duty, but before assuming these duties he queried the bank president about a place to live.

The bank official directed him to a private home and within an hour the confidence man had moved in and was settled.

As Dickens gradually became accustomed to his new duties he was glad he had put in those long hours of study in the prison. The system of accounting at this bank was very simple and the confidence man had specialized on banking procedure while pursuing his correspondence course. He, in common with most confidence men, had a likeable personality and it was not long before he had many friends among the patrons of the bank.

It is likely when Dickens received his first week's salary it was the first honest money he had ever earned, and even though the salary was comparatively small he was quite content and not once did he think of pilfering any small amounts to augment his salary, although this could have been easily done.

The bank handled several industrial payrolls, but the one the confidence man had selected for his own came twice monthly. The money for this arrived at the bank the afternoon preceding the day it was to be turned over to the factory's paymaster and it was the duty of the cashier to check the money and have the payroll ready in accordance with the paymaster's instructions. Twice he handled this transaction to the satisfaction of all concerned, but he awaited the arrival of the third payroll anxiously.

On the day before the confidence man was scheduled to make up his last payroll he visited a clothing store and purchased a suit of clothing. Some alterations were necessary on the suit and he instructed the clerk to have them made and deliver the suit to the bank the following day. The suit box was delivered shortly after the arrival of the semi-monthly payroll. Dickens placed the suit box on the floor be-

neath the counter while he continued with the work of checking the money.

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that the confidence man saw the bank president and vice-president depart for the golf links earlier than usual that day. Fate was smiling upon him. The closing of the bank and the setting of the time lock on the huge vault would be left entirely to the cashier, and when that was done Dickens knew that his new suit of clothing would be safely reposing in the vault in the place of sixty thousand dollars which would be packed in the suit box.

"I think I'll take a run out in the country tonight," said Dickens that night at dinner. "I bought a suit today and there is an old fellow living a few miles out in the country who seems to be pretty much up against it and I think I'll give him the old one."

In this manner the confidence man prepared for the trip which was not to end a few miles in the country but at a town some forty miles distant where he intended to leave his car and board a train East.

AS Dickens prepared for his departure he went over the room carefully to make sure he was not leaving any evidence of identity behind him. Having made sure that everything had been taken care of he placed the suit box under his arm and started downstairs to enter his car parked at the curb. He was met in the hallway by his landlady.

"Here is a letter that came for you today, Mr. Alberts," she said.

Dickens thanked her, placed the suit box on the floor, and opened the envelope which he knew was from his Chicago friend. Inside the envelope he saw another stamped envelope. Examination proved that it was a letter he had sent to Alberts at the New Orleans hotel. It was marked—"unclaimed, not here." Frowning, Dickens read the few scribbled lines from his friend, stuffed the letter into his pocket, and started for the door. His way was blocked by two men.

"Good evening, Mr. Alberts," said one of the men. "Were you going out?"

"Yes," said Dickens, smiling, although

he recognized one of his visitors as a detective.

"We'd like to have a talk with you," said one of the men. "That is," he added, "if you are not in a hurry. Shall we go upstairs to your room?"

Without replying Dickens led the way up the stairway.

"This gentleman here," said the detective, indicating his companion, "is a representative of the banker's association. We have a warrant to search your room and your effects."

"Go right ahead," said the confidence man, lighting a cigarette. "But if you don't mind, I wish you would hurry as I am late for an appointment."

Dickens placed the suit box on the bed and sat down beside it, watching the officers as they systematically searched the room.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" he asked. "Not quite," returned the local detective. "We'll have a look at this box."

There was a low whistle as the lid was lifted from the box and the stacks of bills were revealed.

"Well, well," said the officer. "It doesn't seem possible, but it looks like he hasn't spent much."

"I guess you've got me," said Dickens, his mind immediately going back to those long, weary months in prison. "But tell me this: How did you learn so soon that the money was gone? The time lock on the vault was set and I didn't think it could be opened before morning."

"Time lock?" repeated the officer. "Why, man, time locks only last a matter of hours. It has been weeks since you left the employ of the bank where you stole this money. You probably thought that you had doctored the books so cleverly that they wouldn't discover it, and they probably would not have found it had it not been for the state bank examiners coming in. But you certainly were a chump, going to another city and getting a job in a bank under your own name and referring back to the bank you had robbed for a recommendation. Well, let's be going or we'll be late for our—appointment."



It's True Love...
when it Lasts for 30 Years

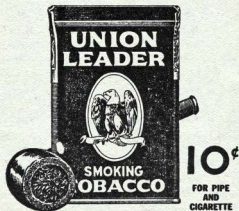
WHEN a feller wins the right gal he don't go blind. But, if he's smart, the only wandering he does is with his eyes . . . and not too much o' that.

It's kind o' like that between a man and his pipe tobacco. Take me . . . I been married to Union Leader 30 years, come Fall. Sure, I've flirted with other brands in my time. But I've always had the horse-sense to come back to Union Leader. I figure that a sweet, easy-goin' disposition

should be treasured in a tobacco . . . or a woman. That's why Ma and me and Union Leader are still a happy family.

Union Leader

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE



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In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DETECTIVE FICTION.

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. O'MAYER
Editor

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

LAST year our cryptofans scaled new heights in cipher solving! During 1937 we published 260 cryptograms, 52 cryptic divisions, and 12 "X-specials." Twelve of the cryptograms, challenged with an aggregate par of 1925 solutions, drew a total response of 2,427 answers! And one of these, †Piscator's "Acrid Imbroglis," No. 234 of Sept. 25, was probably the toughest cipher of the year, netting but 118 solutions! However, the total response to last year's puzzles reached the dizzy figure of 79,283 answers, well beyond our previous high mark of 71,874 answers established in 1936.

Besides, activities in special groups of solvers also surpassed former showings! For instance, by submitting 100 or more solutions each, 102 cryptofans qualified last year for our †Honor Roll, raising the total †HR enrollment to 647 members! The first half of the †Honor Roll for 1937, listing members with totals of 250 or over, will be published next week. The second half, listing those who have less than 250 answers for the year, will appear in two weeks. All †HR members are distinguished by the dagger sign, and once you win your dagger, it's yours to keep! Henceforth, this year's 102 new †HR members will be so identified in this department.

Further, our "Inner Circle Club," which includes cryptofans who have individual solving records of 1,000 answers, likewise made great strides last year! Beginning with 42 Charter Members in 1935, and with 65 members in 1936, the "ICC numbered 101 "thousand clubbers" at the close of 1937! Two members qualified in December: *Porthos, Fall River, Mass., totaling 1,000 with the Dec. 4 issue, and *Mrs. H. A. Seals, Cleveland, Ohio, 1,003 with the Dec. 18 issue. The standing of all "ICC members will be published in three weeks. So be sure to see the next three issues, cryptofans! And let's

look forward now to an even more successful department this year!

Ellephes opens the current cryptic spread, his puzzle using a key-phrase divided: 01234 56789. Eliminate for zero. Then compare $A \times C = G$ with the other two multiplications to find symbol C. Scheherazade's quotation was written long ago—in 1760, to be explicit! But the day referred to is still quite popular! GPU. -'H, -'H', and HR will check with HUG, GPUKHUODUH and HRKU following soon thereafter. Note the connective SLP in El Kayo's cryptogram. Continue with LEG and SYBE; ELYF, XB, and XL; then the long fourth word.

*Qpkwins explains a term in his message that caused considerable bewilderment in a recent problem. Strange as it may seem, No. 82 will also help you with No. 79. Anyway, start with ZYX, USZY, ZG, and ZUG. Next complete word four, duly noting SP-, -SPH, and -SPHO. †Waltraw's alliteration uses HL—seventeen times initially! Note the doubles and patterns. Spot your own leads in †Peter Penguin's inner circle concoction! And see next week's magazine for all of this week's answers. Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

No. 79—Cryptic Division. By Ellephes.

H A A) Y Z W H C G (Y W C
Z R T T

R H L C
R Y C Y

Y R L G
Y R L G

No. 80—Origin Unknown. By Scheherazade.

"GPU TNLHG RT *ZSLNO, HRKU VR HZA NH HUG ZSZLG
TRL *ZOO *TRROH' VZA; YFG BPA GPU SURSOU XZOO NG
HR, ERL N, ERL GUA GPUKHUODUH, VR JERB."—*SRRL
*LRYNE'H *ZOKZEZX.

No. 81—Two Plus Two. By El Kayo.

GKFXLT NEKPB VEK ZEUXLXSGXELB XB TKOSG VAL!
GRAB, XL "PETUS" SLP "DADDOG," NO LEG ELYF RSMO
"PET" SLP "DOG," HAG SYBE "US" SLP "DAD."

No. 82—A Celtic Antique. By *Qpkwins.

ZYX WVUZY, TVSRSSZSQX SPOZVNRXPZ VXOXRLKSPH ZYX
QSGKSP, YFE OSD OZVSPHO, BGNV BGV ZYX LGU FPE ZUG
ZG LX TKNWAXE USZY ZYX ZYNRL.

No. 83—Auditor Agog. By †Waltraw.

HLUZB-HLUNDBFBO HLBBANVPG HLUYYN HLUNDBR, HL-
UNTBFN HLUF AHUGO HLETTBFN, HLUANZ HLBRYPSB
HLPFYVPG, HLUNZAUGX HLBKUAR, HLUZZABN HLUV-
NUSPA HLUF A UXUX HLPZGEZ.

No. 84—Jolly Life. By †Peter Penguin.

UEAO IPKQMXEH QPY HPLRE, JORYBMO YELP, YRASO
ZRAML MASHP YEA, KEVDMA YSEZPKQ, EVOA HRVN, FH-
EXRA XPJOMH, XEOPX UEAQECVL. PJUCX YOVSPA QEPA?
OMPQ, ZPV!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

73—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
P O W E R Y A C H T

74—East and west, city and farm, plain and mountain, how close we are today, linked by all the modern miracles of communication.

75—Distinct lava types: "pahoehoe," relatively smooth; "a-a," rough and scoriaceous. The former develops into fantastic formations.

76—Rhyming dictionaries serve cryptofans faithfully, help with refractory endings. Also, anagram blocks prove useful in determining cryptic division key-words.

77—Odd, clumsy youth snatches satchel. Unhappy owner waxes furious. Passer-by pursues, captures ungainly wretch, rejects requital.

78—Rustic cleric found magic runic rubric. Pedantic medic urged basic logic mythic. Psychic laic, sophic mystic, juridic stoic dub polemic antic tragic.

All correct solutions of the current puzzles will be duly listed in our Cipher Solvers' Club for April! Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



This is the one-hundred-and-thirtieth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

A FRAUD order is never a casual document. Someone doesn't just sit down and put one word after another until it is finished, as children string beads. Back of every order are months, and sometimes years, of careful investigating by highly trained postal inspectors with years of experience, and when they close their case few lawyers can successfully controvert the evidence of fraud they have prepared.

I am going to review a recent fraud order (issued January 25, 1938) first, because it is educational in every sense of the word and, second, because it uncovers a vicious racket.

On January 27, 1937, the General Institute, which sold Civil Service courses through the mails, obtained a charter from the State of Missouri. Their lessons, sales literature, collection letters and other materials, as well as a goodly number of sales agents or "field advisors," as they were termed, were obtained from the promoter of the defunct Public Service Institute of St. Louis against which the Post Office Department issued a fraud order on September 15, 1936.

Some of their "students" were obtained by means of circulars distributed from door-to-door or sent through the mails addressed to "Post Office box-holder" in accordance with postal regulations. These circulars were quite flamboyant: "Every man is entitled to his rights as an American citizen! You have a right to a United States Governmental position, or at least an equal chance for one, under Civil Service Regulations. Our aim is to help you! Help yourself by being informed," and on and on. A post card was provided for a reply and this brought a "field advisor."

These men had previously sold courses for the Public Service Institute under false representations, according to the order, and were paid a 30 per cent commission. The instructions issued by the company to the "field advisors" are interesting. Here's how they were told to sell:

"To prospect: I am Mr. Blank, Field Advisor of the General Institute; we have an inquiry here regarding your securing a position with the United States Government in Civil Service. It will take only a few minutes and I will make a report on whether or not you are qualified to get into Governmental service. (answer) All right! Let's see what you are qualified for. (Fill out application sheet as to age, height,

weight, etc.) (From this you can get your set-up for sales talk. If married, have wife present, if a minor, have one or both parents there. This is very important.)

"Mr. Prospect, the General Institute are specialists for one purpose only. Each year in the different congressional districts we select a certain number of men and women who desire training for the coming competitive Civil Service examinations. To those who will follow through and finish the entire training and guidance course according to our contract, we guarantee results.

"You will receive personal instruction, personal criticisms, and personal attention on every lesson. You will *not* receive stereotyped or printed criticisms. Your training is thorough. . . . You are trained closely, understandingly, helpfully, at every step. Upon completing your course you have the assurance that you are qualified to take and *pass* a Civil Service examination."

When the field advisor was not provided with these leads, here is how he was instructed to sell:

"Pick out any town, preferably small, that has a four-year high school.

"Call on someone in a store or garage and get the name of one of the boys of the last year's graduating class who can be seen quickly.

"Call on that one and tell him. (Use first name always with these young fellows.) 'Bill, you can help me a great deal on some special work I am doing and do a big favor to some of your friends who graduated with you. I am Mr. R, Field Advisor for the General Institute. We specialize in the training of young men and women.

"I want the names of six or eight of your classmates of good character and good homes, who were at least fair students in school.' (Qualify the names

given as to finances if possible and get all on farms if possible as they are the best. Be sure to get accurate directions as to how to reach their homes and all information about each boy, so as to impress him and his parents.) By this time the boy's curiosity is aroused and many times he is included and sold."

But let's go on. The field advisors did not always follow instructions blindly:

"Affidavits of thirty-three persons who have had actual transactions with the General Institute, supplemented by an even larger number of other written statements of such individuals, offered in evidence at the hearing, show that sales of courses have been procured by 'field advisors' on a widespread scale under further verbal representations to the effect that the concern is connected with and operated under the auspices of the United States Government, and that persons who diligently pursue the studies prescribed in the so-called courses are assured of passing examinations for and securing speedy appointment to various specific positions therein.

"In the face of the foregoing representations it is shown by other evidence that neither the General Institute, Mr. Mandell, nor anyone else connected with the concern has any connection whatsoever with any branch of the Federal Service. The evidence shows further that none of the promoters of the scheme have had any experience or training which would serve as a proper justification for the claims made by them as to their ability to train patrons of the enterprise to pass examinations for and secure Civil Service positions. The so-called 'executive staff' of the organization consists of Mandell, who was formerly in the real estate business, and G. E. Paul, a youth who 'brought papers' to his superior upon

the occasion of a visit to the place of business of the enterprise by the post office inspector who investigated this case.

"An alleged 'training staff' is shown by the evidence to consist only of 'Vice President' A. R. Corham, whose qualifications are manifested solely by an authorization to teach in the public schools of North Dakota. Further, in the face of the representations herein-before quoted to the effect that patrons of the enterprise are given close personal supervision in their studies, the evidence shows that lessons submitted to the home office are merely graded by this individual 'A,' 'B,' 'C' and 'D,' and as a result of this character of marking, students are unable to perceive in what, if any, particulars they have erred."

The "course" is sold to the student for \$65 cash, \$80 on time. Soon after the student had enrolled he received a letter from which the following is quoted:

"What happens when your enrollment is accepted:

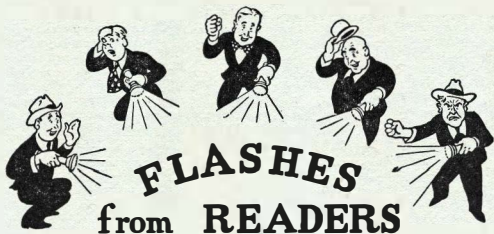
"We immediately expend nineteen dollars and seventy-five cents (\$19.75)

more than you have paid to our field advisor, in preparing text material for you, assembling lessons and affixing them with your student number, and in addition immediately place an order for certain books with our publishers, at a further cost to us. This material unless used by you has no value to anyone else. . . ." Now here's what the government explains about that fairy tale:

"The foregoing statements are false, the truth being, as the evidence shows, that the materials furnished 'students' by Mandell, including the lessons, atlas, dictionary, etc., are obtained by him at a total cost of \$2.31. The evidence shows further that the 'lessons' are printed in bulk, a thousand or more at a time, and there is nothing about either the lessons or the atlas and dictionary which accompany them which would prevent their being used by any other victim of this scheme."

Next week's installment will report the testimony of a prominent U. S. Civil Service Commission official who explains in detail just how government jobs are obtained and exactly what *your* chances are.





EDITING this magazine has a tendency to disorganize our relations with the calendar. For instance, Christmas comes twice a year: first when we put the Christmas issue together and again, a couple of months later, when snow covers the earth and Santa Clauses clang their bells on the street corners and our youngsters begin behaving with premeditated angelicalness.

All the seasons are likewise topsyturvy. When the July sun turns our office, in spite of electric fans, into a miniature inferno, we commence enjoying the crisp coolness and changing colors of Autumn—in theory, at least.

What we're leading up to is this: While we sit here, on the eighteenth day of February, writing these words for the April second issue of **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**, it feels like Spring to us, and we're filled with an urge to visit the seed store around the corner and to start planting our patch of garden.

A letter from a Chicagoan who prefers to be known merely as

A READER

raises a point concerning credibility and

the *modus operandi* of murderers.

DEAR EDITOR:

I had been a reader of your fictions for no less than ten years; then due to hard times I had to let it go for a couple of years. Now I've started to buy it again and am surprised at the new trend, like *A Hearse for Hiawatha*. In the matter of killing by a woman, especially a small one brought up daintily in frills and furbelows, it seems strange that she should choose a knife for her killings, then go to it again with a gun. The sight of spilt human blood has usually the same effect on a woman as seeing a scampering mouse. It throws her in a fit. Is that writer trying to say a new species of woman has come to light with the recent depression? No sense in that. A murderess alone, especially a small and dainty one would choose a bloodless murder, using gas or poison or overturning a boat if she can lure them there. Even the average American men hoodlums shrink from using a knife.

It must take a mighty heave to throw a paper cutter knife with enough strength to sink it to the hilt, and then, too, one must know where to aim so that the knife don't ricochet on a rib. If it does, the victim has time to yell and grab his assailant, no matter if dying, considering the ever-present reserve supply of energy and the instinct of self preservation. If that little woman went straight to the bed to plunge her knife it would have been the same, the man would have grabbed her arms and twisted them and she would have been spattered with blood. So much for the dying. Now for the blind one: Even if she had success with her knife, just how could she heave a dead man over a fence breast high? And she a small woman? Then, too, when she reached

the jetty in the country place, how come the policeman couldn't recognize a woman's voice ever if Daffy kept him in the dark? If she thought she was alone with the Jap, why should she try to disguise her voice? No need for it. And even with disguise, a small woman can't have much success assuming a man's voice, especially when her nerves were all on edge trying to save her own skin. A man would have more success in imitating a woman's voice; he would have to only talk shrilly. Not so when it is the reverse. Still the policeman never tumbled he was dealing with a woman. Funny, isn't it? I like your stories, otherwise I wouldn't buy your magazine but when it deviates too much from the reality it sounds like bedtime stories. The fictions in them show too

much like glaring white basting on your new suit that you wear on the street. Chicago, Ill.

We believe that a quick resumé of murders by the ladies would disprove A Reader's contention. During the last few years, murderesses have used weapons ranging from axes, hammers and pieces of lead pipe down to nail-files and the spike heels of their shoes. We have a theory, indeed, that most murders are committed with the *handiest* weapon.

COMING NEXT WEEK

PAUL ERNST begins the excitement with a thrilling novelette: *The Dead Get Mail* . . . RICHARD SALE presents Candid Jones' baffling experience with a ghost in a novelette entitled, appropriately: *Banshee* . . . DALE CLARK continues with the second baffling installment of *Murder Wholesale* . . . There will be a fine assortment of short stories by HUGH B. CAVE, WYATT BLASSINGAME, HERMAN LANDON, EDGAR FRANKLIN, and several others . . . Plus an unusual true story and the famous weekly features.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

PROMOTION AT LAST!

....AFTER CLEVER WIFE SUGGESTED
"PAY-RAISING APPEARANCE" PLAN



WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? WORK HARD BUT I'M NOT GETTING AHEAD?

COULD IT BE YOUR APPEARANCE, TOM? CHEAP OVERALLS MAY BE COSTING US PLENTY!



AT DEALER'S NEXT DAY:
I WANT YOUR BEST-LOOKING, LONGEST-WEARING OVERALLS...ONE THAT STAYS GOOD-LOOKING!

THAT MEANS LEE JELT DENIM OVERALLS AND LEE SHIRTS, BOTH IN TAILORED SIZES.



FEW WEEKS LATER:

TOM, I'VE NOTICED YOU LATELY, YOU'RE DOING GOOD WORK AND I'M PROMOTING YOU TODAY!

BOY, IT SURE PAID ME TO IMPROVE MY APPEARANCE!

THANKS A LOT, BOSS



I KNEW THEY'D SEE YOUR ABILITY IF YOU LOOKED THE PART!

YOU AND LEE GET THE CREDIT FOR MY PATTED PAY ENVELOPE!



LEE CLOUDBROOK™ SHIRTS AND TROUSERS

LEE BOYS' OVERALLS

LEE PEPPERLICK

LEE HUNTER BRAND OVERALLS



LEE B-H-T'S



LEE SPENCER



LEE SHIRT-PAIS



YOUR PROTECTION

All Lee Garments are Sanforized Shrink

... LET LEE HELP YOU WITH YOUR "PAY-RAISING APPEARANCE"!

Two big Lee features step-up your pay-raising appearance:

Lee tailored-sizes that give every man a perfect fit...and super-strength genuine Jelt Denim, Sanforized Shrink to keep that perfect fit. See your Lee dealer!



TAILORED SIZES

Perfect fit for Every Build.

THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY
Kansas City, Mo., Salina, Kans., Minneapolis, Minn.,
South Bend, Ind., Trenton, N.J., San Francisco, Calif.

FREE! MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON

THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY
Dept. AP-4, Kansas City, Mo.

Please send me "How To Save On Overalls", a sample of Jelt Denim, and the name of my nearest Lee dealer.

Name _____
Address _____
Town _____ State _____

UNION-MADE
Lee OVERALLS
SANFORIZED SHRUNK

"Are Camels Really different from other Cigarettes?"

A QUESTION OF INTEREST TO EVERY SMOKER



"I've never been very fussy about cigarettes myself. Do you think that Camels are really as different as some people say, Bill?"

"You bet, John! A fellow in any work as hard as selling has to figure a lot of angles on smoking, such as how it agrees with him. And just notice how many salesmen smoke Camels. I changed to Camels and found a distinct difference in the way I enjoyed smoking. Camels agree with me!"

... H. W. DALY, 34, rayon salesman, and millions of other steady smokers say: "Camels are really different." Camels are preferred by the largest body of smokers ever known.



A KISS FROM MARITA: Mrs. Daly and Bill is off to his job. The Dalys agree about Camels. Mrs. Daly smoked them first. "Now it's Camels with both of us," she says.

A FRIEND DROPS IN. Daly passes the Camels and answers a question: "Steady smoking is the test that shows Camels in a class by themselves. Camels don't make my nerves 'edgy.'"

PEOPLE WHO APPRECIATE THE
COSTLIER TOBACCOS
IN CAMELS

THEY ARE THE
LARGEST-SELLING
CIGARETTE IN AMERICA



MARITA'S PLANNING a grand feed. "We enjoy entertaining," she says. "I like plenty of Camels at the table. Camels cheer up one's digestion. They even cheered up Bill's disposition."



ON WEEK-ENDS, Bill's a camera fan. On week days he "pounds the streets." "When I get tired," he says, "I get a quick 'lift' with a Camel."



A matchless blend of finer—
MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—
Turkish and Domestic

Cigarette, 1936, R. J. Reardon Tobacco Company, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

ONE SMOKER TELLS ANOTHER.. **"Camels agree with me"**