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DETECTIVE FICTION

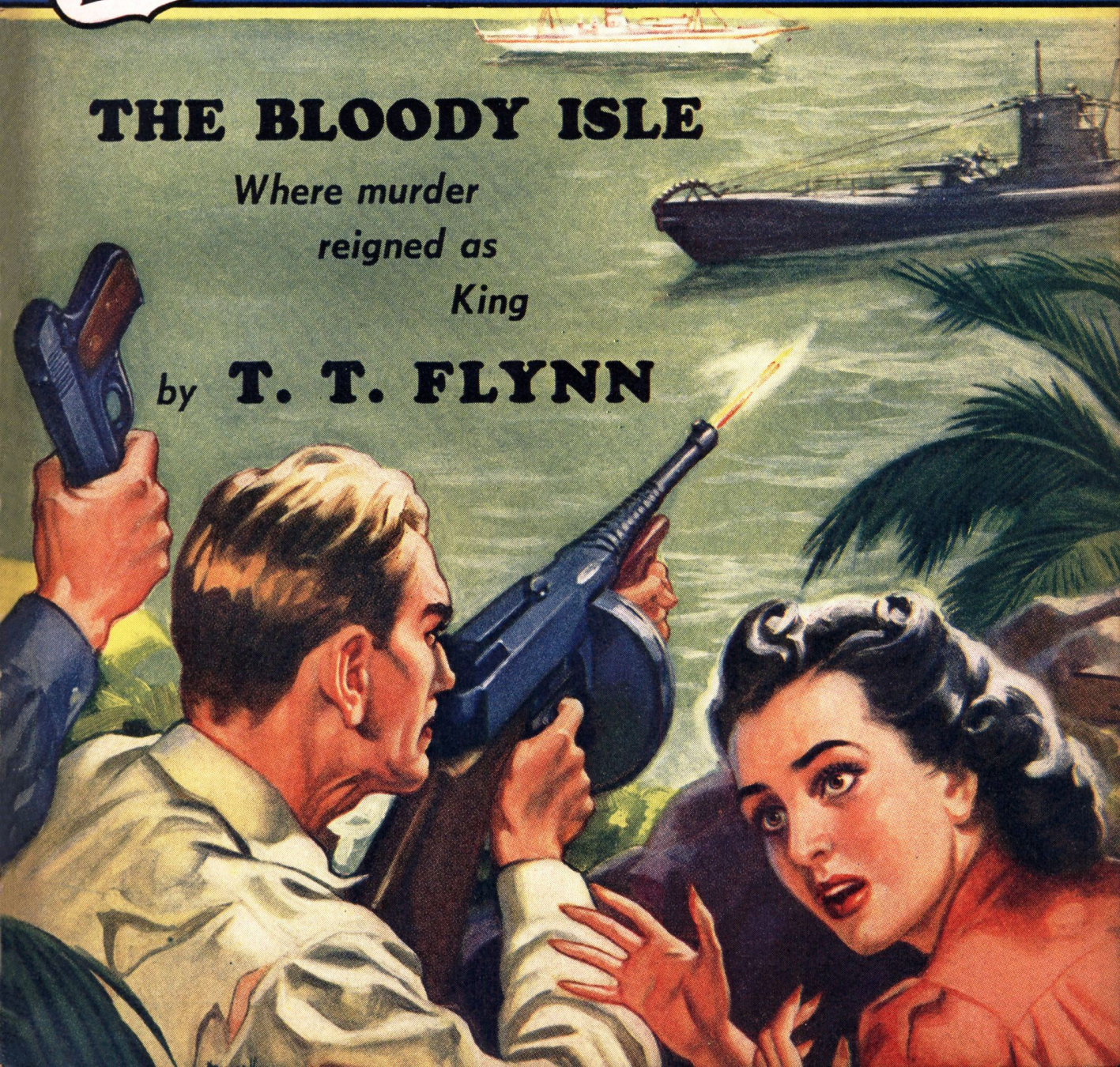
FORMERLY FLYNN'S WEEKLY

MAY 25
10¢

THE BLOODY ISLE

Where murder reigned as King

by **T. T. FLYNN**



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It can be *proved*, however, that there's almost always something more than luck involved.

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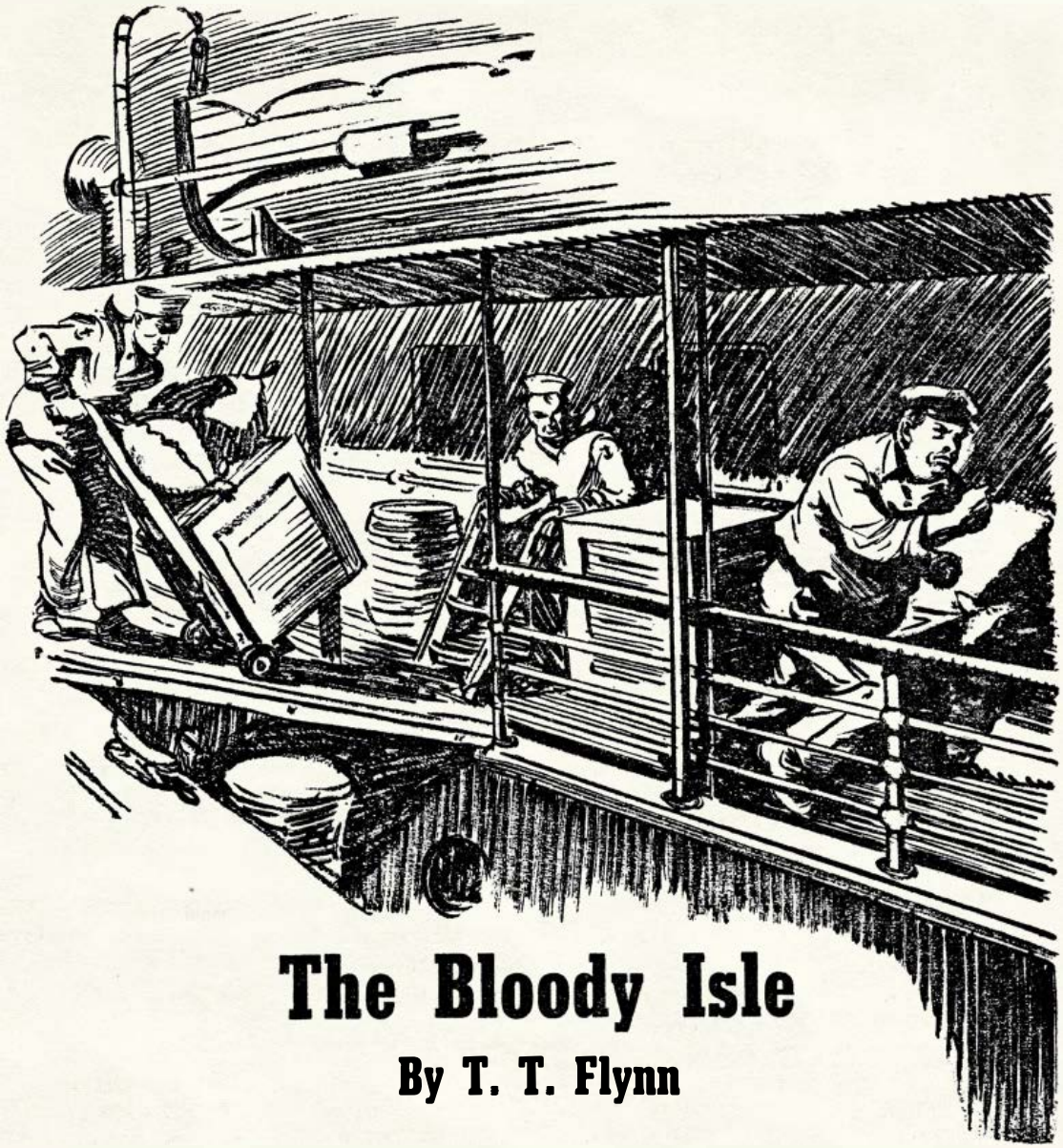


The Bloody Isle

By T. T. Flynn

A socialite's yacht, freighted with a mysterious cargo, and headed for—Where?

I

HOW could I know it was an invitation to murder, violence, kidnapping and as merry a little whirlpool of hell as Holly Barnes had ever met?

The fact that Bonnie Templeton telephoned the invitation should have warned me. Bonnie had a gift for trouble, together with the bluest, most mocking eyes I'd ever seen, and a devastating, reckless sense of humor.

Bonnie's father, old Rufus Templeton, owned the *Washington Press*, which was close to being the political Bible of the National Capital, and immensely profitable. Bonnie herself had been everywhere and knew everyone. In fact Bonnie Templeton was the most exciting thing that had happened to me since I'd made this latest visit to

He toppled backward over the rail

Washington in search of syndicate stories.

But I was firm over the hotel telephone this gray, gloomy Sunday afternoon.

"I'm slaving these days," I told Bonnie. "I can't possibly leave town. Thanks for getting the invitation though."

Bonnie gaily persisted.

"But it's a yacht trip, Holly. Through the Bahamas and down into the Caribbean. We might even go to Rio if everyone likes. Maggie Forrester is ready for anything. Really, Holly, it's one of those chances no one passes up. I know a dozen senators, and you-know-who in the Cabinet, who would run in circles if they thought there was a chance of being invited. And you've been working too hard lately, Handsome. You said so the other day."

"And the next day," I tartly reminded, "your father said the stuff I'm sending my syndicate from Washington is lousy. He suggested a dash of the old Holly Barnes snap was the only

thing that might stop his paper from canceling."

"That," said Bonnie comfortably, "was just Father talking."

"That," I corrected a trifle grimly, "was the owner of the *Washington Press* threatening to suggest that my syndicate toss me to the wolves. And such sharp teeth your parent has, Lovely. Thanks for rustling the invite from the great Maggie Forrester, but count me out."

Through the hotel window I could look out over the squat, gray Treasury Building to the White House. Patches of snow on the Treasury roof had turned as dark and cheerless as the weather. Offering Holly Barnes a carefree yacht trip through sunny islands on a day like this was almost cruelty.

If I'd had a lucky break or two recently, I'd have snatched at the chance. But I hadn't. Washington was thick with gossip, rumors, surmises, whispers. And none of it raw, exciting meat for the syndicate by-line of Holly Barnes, the Roving Investigator.

Bonnie must have suspected how I'd have liked the Caribbean cruise. She persisted:

"The yacht is getting some repairs and taking on supplies in Miami. Maggie says we'll all fly down to her private island in her amphibian plane and have the yacht pick us up there. You could go to the island at least. It's gorgeous."

"Stop!" I begged. "You're killing me—and I won't even fall for the island."

"At least come to Maggie's house this evening," Bonnie urged. "You've been wanting to meet her. This is a good time. You might find something interesting."

"Well . . . "

"Pick me up at eight-thirty," Bonnie said.

SO I taxied out on Sixteenth Street that Sunday evening to get Bonnie.

Maggie Forrester, I was convinced, would be worth the evening. For a decade Maggie Forrester had been around sixty years old. She had decided arbitrarily that she would die at sixty if it took her the next thirty years. She had ten or twenty millions, more or less, from Western mining interests. The exact amount didn't matter. What did matter was that Maggie's mother had kept a miner's boarding house. Maggie had waited on table, helped with cooking and dishwashing before she married young Ham Forrester, a penniless prospector, now dead.

Maggie Forrester hadn't forgotten the hard days. She was the terror of stuffed shirts in stiff-necked Washington. Real folks swore by her. Maggie herself, with great gusto, didn't care one way or another. In consequence all Washington paths sooner or later led to Maggie Forrester's estate just over the District line in nearby Maryland.

In the taxi Bonnie cheerfully informed me: "I told Maggie you knew all those old Western songs. She has a guitar and you can sing them for her.

"Can I?"

"You can," said Bonnie. "And don't object. Maggie really likes them."

The guests at Maggie Forrester's were as assorted as one would find under any roof in Washington. Politicians and their wives, a diplomatic couple or two, a dash of straight Washington society, a writer who was a celebrity and two I'd never heard of, but they looked regular. I met a retired rear admiral and a tanned, stocky man who owned a fleet of shark fishing boats in Lower California.

And there was Marylin Forrester and her fiance. . . .

Marylin was a niece, a sultry brunette who looked as if she'd been reared in the shadow of twenty millions and liked it.

I didn't—especially after I saw her bring the fiance to heel for getting interested in Bonnie Templeton. He was a tall, pale, blank-looking young Austrian with thinning blond hair, and a "Count" before his name.

Count Karilni, if I caught it right. Marylin Forrester called him Johnny. He looked bored and vacuous until he greeted Bonnie . . . Five minutes later he was maneuvering an apparently willing Bonnie into an unoccupied corner.

There was no mistaking Marylin's quick frown of annoyance, no missing the bite of her summons: "Johnny, come here a moment." Johnny knew his master's voice. He left Bonnie and came to heel.

"Trying to snag off a title?" I asked Bonnie a few minutes later.

Bonnie grinned. "It's fun annoying Marylin."

"She looks like she can claw in the clinches."

Bonnie crooked slender fingers and red nails. "I'm not so bad myself."

"If you brought me here for a catfight . . ."

"For that," promised Bonnie, "you'll sing—and I hope they hiss you."

So that was how I sang in Maggie Forrester's large drawing room, turning the clock back to bunk house nights when I'd been a kid listening to Slim Jim, Rawhide and the other hands.

Twenty years back that had been, and a far cry from the luxury that gold and silver mines had brought to Maggie Forrester. The guests seemed to like the song. The old lady, white-haired and alert in her chair, drank it up. I watched her leaning forward, smiling faintly, with a faraway look.

The guests applauded at the end. Maggie Forrester beckoned me to her chair. Her eyes were shrewd with humor.

"Young man, that did an old lady's heart good. Now tell me you're going to fly South with us day after tomorrow and sing for me again."

"I'd like to," I said. "But it's impossible. . . ."

"Tush," she said. "Nothing is impossible. I won't have it impossible. We'll have to—" She broke off and cocked her head alertly. "What was that?"

We'd all heard it. At night, even outside a big house, the terrified scream of a woman carries. . . .

II

MAGGIE FORRESTER stood up quickly, ignoring my helping hand and the gold-headed cane resting against the chair arm.

Count Karilni nervously exclaimed: "It—er—sounded like a woman!"

"Of course it's a woman! Staring at each other won't help! Get out there and see what's wrong!"

I was out front a moment later, where the broad sweep of grounds stretched down a gentle slope to the brick and iron boundary fence. Beyond the fence was a road, and trees across the road The house site had enough elevation so that one could see across the far trees to distant twinkling lights on the city hills.

My taxi had gone back, and other taxis evidently had returned also. Eight or ten private cars were parked around the loop of driveway before the house. Two of them had chauffeurs, who were cutting uncertainly across the driveway as I came out.

"Where was it?" I called.

"Did you hear something too, sir?" one of them called doubtfully.

"What the devil's wrong with your hearing? A woman screamed!"

"We were in my car listening to the radio. We thought we heard something but weren't rightly sure."

"Run around the other side of the house! Stop anyone you see!"

The scream, as near as I could judge, had been at the back of the house. I cut back that way along a pale strip of crushed shell driveway.

I hadn't heard a second cry. The night was raw, cold. Here and there under shrubs and in depressions were dull white patches of old snow. Naked poplars were gaunt and shadowy back of the house. Outbuildings back there were brick like the big light-studded house.

Men had run out after me. I could hear them calling to one another and blundering about in the dark.

The woman might be a few feet away, might be dead now, and her assailant getting farther away each second. And it was too dark out there to even make a guess at what to do until I found her.

The driveway widened before a three- or four-car garage. Living quarters over the garage were dark. The garage doors were closed and showed no light inside.

But at the left-hand side of the garage a lighted door stood ajar. I thrust it open and stairs inside led to the quarters above. At the right was another open doorway through which I could see the shadowy bulk of cars in the garage.

"Anybody here?" I called—and then I saw her crumpled on the floor in the garage. One of the housemaids, in white apron and cap, huddled on her side as if she had been struck down. As if dead.

I shouted back to the other men, and knelt by her, looking for blood, for a wound. She stirred slightly, and I grabbed her wrist. The pulse was beating strongly. She moaned, stirred again as the first of the men came bursting in.

The shark fisherman was first, panting, but not rattled as he saw me kneeling by the girl.

He'd probably seen far worse in his strange business.

"What happened to her?"

"I can't see that anything's happened," I said. "Pulse seems all right. Looks to me like she's fainted. *Listen . . .*"

I was chafing her wrists. She shuddered and began to moan: *"Dead . . dead . . . dead. . . ."*

The shark man was bending over her too, listening intently.

"Creepy, eh?" he muttered. "Well, it's a blasted cinch she's not dead anyway. We'd better get her into the house."

Scuffling steps crowded in from outside; excited voices, questions shattered the quiet of the dark garage. The maid shuddered again as I held her. Her eyes opened in a vacant stare that suddenly focused on my face. Pure terror twisted her features. The scream she uttered was ear-splitting. . . .

Just one scream—and then again she was limp in the circle of my arm.

Even the shark man was shaken. Bowles was his name, and his voice was unsteady. "She's had a hell of a fright Let's get her out of here."

"Can you carry her?" I asked. "Whatever frightened her might still be around. I'll look."

The other men were still hurrying in. "Somebody find the light switch," I requested as Bowles straightened with his burden.

A moment later overhead lights

flashed on. A bench and tool rack extended along the side wall. I snatched a Stillson off supporting pins.

And just then one of the men yelled: "My God, look at that!"

I came around in a crouch, wrench up. And at the front of the nearest car was the gruesome, ghastly white face that had caused the yell. I was jumping and swinging the wrench before I could stop.

But I did stop before the wrench came down on the staring face against the floor. I crouched by it, swearing roughly myself.

For there was blood on the face. An eye had been shot out. He was as dead as he would ever be, lying there in front of the polished automobile.

"The girl," I jerked out, "must have seen him and fainted! Or maybe she saw the man who crocked him. Keep back. The police won't want any evidence walked on."

Count Karilni had stepped up and looked over my shoulder. His voice, with only the faintest of accents, was unsteady. "It's Crowder, the airplane pilot! Who—who could have done this?"

I was wondering too. The pilot wasn't a pretty sight as he lay there, hat tumbled off on the floor, dark topcoat swathing his body. In life he hadn't been bad looking. Past thirty, I judged, lean and clean-cut.

There just didn't seem to be any reason for his lying there, murdered so callously.

"The Maryland police," I said grimly as I stood up, "will be wondering who killed him."

You would have thought we were past being startled—but I jumped as quickly as the rest when the portly and well-known Senator Pharr erupted in almost a squeal: *"Here's another one!"*

IT DIDN'T make sense. It was almost too much for even Holly Barnes to take—but there inside the automobile, where Senator Pharr's shaking hand was pointing, *was* another one.

"Don't touch that door handle!" I warned sharply as I went to it.

"I l-looked in there!" Senator Pharr stammered. "And there he was! Is he —is he . . . ?"

One more yell and half of us probably would have bolted out into the night. All the men were out back now. They were crowding the doorway as I whipped out a handkerchief and gingerly turned the door handle.

"He's probably dead, too," I said, and opened the door.

He'd slid down in the seat and slumped forward against the wheel with part of his weight against the door. He started to topple out as the door opened. With a quick shove I pushed him back upright, then jerked my hand away. Blood spotted the gray whipcord seat.

"Is this Mrs. Forrester's chauffeur?" I asked.

Count Karilni said: "Yes. Watson is his name. This—this is terrible!"

"At least it's double murder," I said. "Somebody telephone the sheriff's office. Better use the house phone. No telling what fingerprints are out here in the garage."

Neither of the men had been dead long. Half an hour, an hour was as close as I could guess.

The chauffeur had been shot also, in the side of the head. The door glass was up. I looked closely with a match and decided the shot had come from outside the car. With a little imagination I could visualize the car rolling in here, lights and motor being cut off, and the chauffeur opening the door to get out.

The killer must have been waiting.

The chauffeur had been shot as he opened the door, before he could step out.

And Crowder, the airplane pilot? Well, as near as I could guess, he'd either stepped out first or made a bolt out of the other side of the car when he realized what was happening.

It looked as if he'd tried to get around the front of the car and had been shot from behind as he ran. Which meant the killer had ducked around behind the car and chased him forward. Or else there had been two men.

Well, why not two men? I'd have believed anything at the moment. One other thing seemed certain. There hadn't been much chance of Crowder or the chauffeur closing the heavy garage doors. And the doors were closed.

"Phillips," said one of the men, "has gone to telephone the sheriff."

"Nothing else we can do then," I decided. "You can bet the killer didn't wait. He's had time to reach downtown Washington by now."

I thought a moment, and asked: "Did anyone hear sounds that might have been a couple of shots? Sounds you might have thought were an automobile backfiring out on the road?"

"I didn't," Senator Pharr mumbled. "Didn't hear a thing. Haven't the faintest idea what it's all about."

He wiped perspiration from his broad face. With a little imagination you could see that Pharr was mentally wondering what effect this publicity was going to have on a United States Senator.

A strained quiet had fallen. They were awkwardly uncertain, uneasy, now that the shock of discovery had passed and word had been sent to the police.

I was still puzzled. Why hadn't someone heard the shots? Two shots at least. The door through which the automobile had entered must have been open.

The maid's scream wouldn't carry any better than a gun shot. We'd heard her scream well enough. Why not the shots? For that matter, why the two killings? Maggie Forrester's chauffeur and airplane pilot probably hadn't been carrying valuables nor much money.

The police, I thought, would have many questions to ask, and so would I before I was satisfied.

Count Karilni had regained his composure. So much so that he annoyed me.

He seemed almost bored again as he said:

"I remember now. Mrs. Forrester mentioned that the chauffeur would pick Crowder up at his hotel and bring him to the house this evening. There were some details she wished to discuss about the trip to Oro Cay."

"Where?"

Karilni gave me a blank stare.

"Gold Cay," he explained as if I ought to know better. "Mrs. Forrester's winter home. It is an island off the Florida coast."

"So the pilot came out here and got killed," I said. "Looks as if someone didn't want him to go South this winter."

I WAS speaking words to fill in time while I tried to think. But I was still looking at the Count. The active dislike springing in his look wiped out all pretense that we'd ever get along very well together.

That went double as far as I was concerned. The more I saw of his blank, blond boredom, the less I liked him. And when he challenged: "Why should you make an idiotic statement like that?" I felt like pushing it back in his teeth.

"Only an idiot," I handed him nastily,

"would close his mind to any likely angle on a thing like this. Maybe someone had a good reason for not wanting him to leave town."

"Perhaps you can think of a reason," he suggested with a veiled sneer.

He had me there. So I shrugged it off and walked around to the other side of the car. The garage held three cars —the death sedan, a big limousine next to it, a sleek speedy convertible coupé against the far wall.

I touched all radiators. Only the sedan radiator was warm. And there on the concrete floor by the front bumper was the plane pilot. Poor devil. He'd probably been as anxious as myself to fly down to palms, surf and sunshine.

The door on this side of the sedan was still slightly ajar. God only knew what he'd seen or heard when he jumped out and tried to get around the front of the sedan. I suspected that he'd bolted out fast. I was sure of it when I noticed a gray suede glove half under the limousine running board.

The mate to the glove was on his left hand.

Then as I shifted position, the lights brought out a dent and two hand prints on the highly-polished rear door of the limousine. The marks were almost above the glove, lower down than the average person would be touching. There was something queer about them.

It took me a minute of study to get it, and then I grunted with satisfaction. The dent was fresh, made after the limousine had been polished. Only metal striking hard could have chipped in through the paint that way.

But that wasn't why I grunted. It was the hand prints. You'd have to be crouching low down with your back to the limousine to make clear broad prints like that with the thumb and fingers turned down.

Suppose a man had been knocked back so hard that only the limousine body and running board had saved him from falling?

A hand with a gun slamming back in search of support could have made that dent. And as the man got his balance and pushed hard up with the other hand he could have made those clear prints.

There wasn't any reason to believe that Crowder, the pilot, had been carrying a gun. So Crowder had come out of the sedan and knocked an armed man back against the limousine. And instead of finishing the man off there, Crowder had tried to flee around the front of the sedan. Which suggested a second man coming to help.

Neat, eh? It was a good guess even if wrong. And another guess said that more than one shot had been fired as Crowder tried to escape. So I turned to the brick wall where any shots that had missed Crowder would have struck.

I'd probably have overlooked the fresh, clean little nick in the bricks, about head high. A few fresh particles of brick dust were on the floor directly under. The bullet had bounced off; and if I wasn't suddenly sure of all that, I certainly would have missed the small lead pellet lying almost out of sight under the front tire of the limousine.

Maybe the police would have found it.

Anyway, Holly Barnes found it first. And I almost uttered an exclamation of delight as I turned the crumpled little pellet in my fingers and recognized its original hour-glass shape.

This was a lead pellet from a powerful air pistol. One of the heavy models. I'd seen them shot through pine boards. At point blank range they could kill a man almost as surely as a cartridge bullet.

III

NOW that there was safety outside, some of the women had ventured to the garage. Several had edged in. A low-toned babble of conversation came from the doorway. And Count Karilni spoke to me across the hood of the sedan. "You have found something?"

"What," I said, "is there to find? If you're so interested, why not look around yourself?"

"I suggest you let the police investigate this."

"I suggest," I told him, "that you go to the devil."

"I might add," he said coldly across the car, "that since you're a newspaperman, you do not take advantage of your position, as a guest here, to create additional publicity that will be unwelcome to the Forresters."

"Sonny," I said in my nastiest, "if you can think of any publicity that will beat a double murder like this, name it and I'll print it." And I walked back between the automobiles to shut him off. We just didn't like one another.

But I was feeling pretty good. Now I knew why the shots hadn't been heard. I knew the murders must have been well planned. Two men probably had come. They'd carefully closed the garage doors and coolly vanished.

Pretty good, eh, for a few minutes' work. I liked it myself. Only there was a lot more I wanted to know. The Count hadn't been far wrong. Holly Barnes, the Roving Investigator, had his teeth in something good and meaty and was going to town.

"Where," I asked, "are those chauffeurs who were waiting out in front?"

"Here, sir. I'm Holland, with Mrs. Myerson's car. This is Crocker, with Mrs. Jardine's car."

Holland's big, dark overcoat was unbuttoned. His broad red face looked distressed. I think he'd been waiting for someone to ask my next question.

"You two men were outside. Do you know anything about this?"

"No, sir."

Count Karilni spoke to him. "You'd better know that this is a newspaperman. He has no authority here, my good fellow. The police will have questions enough to ask you."

"Yes, sir." Holland swallowed as all eyes focused on him. "But I—we can't say anything about this. We were listening to the radio in Crocker's car and not paying much attention to anything else."

"Did you see this sedan drive in?" I asked.

"No, sir," he replied uneasily. "That is, I'm sure not. I believe we would have noticed it, sir."

"Well, how about another car leaving?"

"Oh, yes, several cars left. Mostly taxicabs, if I recall correctly. We could see them drive up and then go on. You notice such things while waiting, sir."

"Perhaps one of the parked cars pulled away," I suggested. "One that might have picked up a couple of passengers who'd killed these men, for instance."

"Why two of them?" Karilni challenged me again. "Will it make a better story?"

"Perhaps," I said. "You know how we newspapermen are. The bigger the story the better. How about it, Holland?"

Both chauffeurs had been watching the Count and me uncertainly. Now they shook their heads in concert. Holland said:

"I'd say we didn't see anything like that, sir. Did you, Crocker?"

Crocker was a shorter man, heavier, and positive as he shook his head again. Holland insisted with more assurance: "I'm sure we'd have noticed a car pulling out that way."

They seemed truthful. I left them for the police and spoke to the others. "See to it that no one gets near these automobiles to touch any evidence." And hoping that would keep them watching one another, I left the garage for the house.

OUTSIDE I met Bonnie. We moved out of earshot of any listeners. Bonnie said huskily: "It's pretty ghastly, isn't it, Holly? What do you make of it?"

"It'll be a spread for the morning editions. Better phone your father's paper."

"I'm not dumb," Bonnie said. "I telephoned as soon as I heard."

"Where is the maid who screamed?"

"Maggie Forrester sent her to bed. She's rather incoherent, but Maggie filled out the story. She's Maggie's maid, Cora. Maggie sent her to the kitchen to see if the chauffeur had returned. The cook believed she had heard a car enter the garage, but wasn't certain. So Cora went out to see. The sedan was there all right. Cora called up the stairs; when she didn't get an answer she stepped into the garage part. Enough light came through the doorway for her to see a white face on the floor in front of the automobile. She screamed and must have fainted."

"Cold as an icicle," I said. "Well, that disposes of that. Cora doesn't know anything. Did the cook say how long the car had been back?"

"I didn't stop to ask her."

"Let's," I said. "It might have a bearing on things."

We found the cook in the kitchen. You could see Maggie Forrester's honest taste in the cook's broad Irish face and in the hearty sympathy she was giving a sniffling housemaid seated at the kitchen table.

"Now be drinkin' this spot o' tay, dear. Cryin' won't bring the poor man back. And it ain't like you'd stood at the altar together."

The maid was rather raw-boned and not too pretty, I thought. But there's no accounting for tastes and one of the dead men had evidently liked her.

"More trouble?" I asked.

The cook gestured with a heavy arm. "Lucy, poor dear, was kaypin' company with Watson, the chauffeur. She's all broke up about it."

"It's a bad business," I agreed. "And no reason for it, that we can see. Maybe Lucy has some explanation."

Lucy choked on the hot tea and sniffled into her handkerchief as she shook her head.

"The poor child couldn't be havin' much of an idea," the cook told us over Lucy's head. "What with Watson only workin' here a few weeks an' all, an' bein' close-mouthed, too. Not at all like Jennings—rest his soul—whose job Watson got, thanks to knowin' Lucy here."

"You don't say?" I said. "Jennings was the former chauffeur. And did he die?"

"Heart trouble," said the cook. "He was here one day an' the next he wasn't. And a good man, he was too. Lucy, kaypin' company like she was with Watson, and him havin' the best of references, got the job for him."

"I see," I said, wishing I saw a lot more. "How long did you know Watson, Lucy?"

She blew her nose and answered miserably. "We'd been friends a few weeks. I met him at a dance. H-he said he'd like to work out here in the country,

not too far from town. So when Jennings died, I h-had him see Mrs. Forrester."

Maybe my sudden idea was a hunch. I've had luck with hunches. Anyway, the sweetly dovetailed sequence of events that had put Watson here on the job started me thinking. It was all too smooth for luck, if getting murdered on the new job could be called luck.

"Was Watson working when he met you?" I asked.

Lucy gulped: "He'd been working for a man named Peyton, on Massachusetts Avenue. Mr. P-Peyton had to let him go. But he gave Harry a good reference. Mrs. Forrester checked it."

" 'Tis murdered in our beds we'll all be," the cook muttered, and jumped as a hard thump opened an inner door of the kitchen.

IT WAS Maggie Forrester's gold-headed cane that had poked open the door. And Maggie Forrester stalked in with outraged vigor.

"Now what?" she demanded. "Lucy, what are *you* sniveling about? Oh, yes —you and Watson. Well, my girl, crying won't bring him back. And he's the third one I know of who's turned your head since you've worked here."

The old lady rapped the floor with her cane.

"Two good men murdered right under our noses! Lucy, what do you know about this?"

"N-nothing, ma'am," Lucy quavered.

"*Hmmmph* — I thought so! You haven't a head for anything so serious. Was there another man who might have hated Watson for paying attention to you?"

"Oh, no, ma'am." But Lucy showed a sudden interest in the idea.

Maggie Forrester's sniff was eloquent.

"There wasn't. You're a flighty little baggage. Any man who went with you would know it and blame you instead of Watson. Mr. Barnes, those women out back will have to come in. The police won't want gabbling females underfoot. What do you think about this?"

She glared at me as if I were guilty.

"I haven't an idea," I shrugged. "You know your chauffeur and airplane pilot better than I do."

"And little enough that it, I'm suddenly aware, Mr. Barnes. Watson was a new man. Crowder has flown the airplane for almost two years. Both came well recommended. The factory sent Crowder. He's been quite satisfactory."

"I understand you checked the chauffeur's reference."

Her look sharpened with an understanding gleam.

"Couldn't wait for tthe police to come before you tried to get at the bottom of it, could you? Well, I'm glad someone around here is thinking. Yes, I telephoned Watson's former employer. Some kind of an importer, I believe. He assured me that Watson had given him very good service, and only a forced retrenchment in his finances made him discharge Watson. And now there's no pilot to fly us to Oro Cay."

Even Bonnie was surprised. "Are you going South now?"

"Certainly," Maggie Forrester replied forcefully. "I promised this trip to Marylin and her friends, and I always go South at this time."

It made you feel that whatever Maggie Forrester decided became as certain as the law of the land. But she must have thought further explanation was needed, for she continued sharply:

"I'd stay here all winter if I thought it would help Crowder or Watson. But it won't. There's nothing I can do, except see that Crowder's family is taken

care of. None of us are involved. It is a matter for the police. We will answer their questions, do what we can, and in addition I'll offer a reward large enough to make even a numbskull think hard. I'll offer five—no, ten thousand dollars. You might see that Rufus prints that in his paper, Bonnie. Ten thousand dollars for a solution to this and the arrest of the guilty one."

"Very handsome," I said. "For ten thousand dollars even I might try to think hard."

"You're thinking already," the old lady charged bluntly. "But if you earn the ten thousand dollars, you shall have it, young man. However, I still expect you to go South with us. I've taken a liking to you."

Well, what was there to say? I reserved my ideas and murmured thank you."

"Don't thank me," she sniffed. "It's entirely selfish. We'll leave in a few days."

"If the police will let you," I reminded.

"When I'm ready to leave, I'll leave!" she snapped at me.

And by now I was almost a believer. This Maggie Forrester was a character if I'd ever met one. And I thought of something else. I was a pretty good airplane pilot, but I didn't intend to tell her. She'd have me flying her party South before I knew what was happening.

"I've just heard from an old friend who is a crack pilot and out of a job now," I said. "He might suit you."

"Another friend?" Maggie Forrester said suspiciously. "Any death around me seems automatically to produce friends who are waiting for the position."

"Sorry," I said with a trace of irritation. "Just forget it."

"Who is your friend?"

"Loren Sadler is his name."

"Can he fly a cantankerous old lady?"

"Lon can fly canary birds or elephants in anything from kites to bombers," I said. "He's a Pensacola graduate. They don't come any better."

"So I was convinced when my friend Commander Johnson entertained me at Pensacola last spring," she said without batting an eye. "Where is this young man?"

"In Boston."

"Wire him to take the train at once," she decided without hesitation. "Isn't that the police siren? . . . It is. Tell the man in charge I will see him in the drawing room."

IV

HER cane tapped the floor smartly as she went out.

I looked at Bonnie. Bonnie was amused.

"You've met your match, Holly. Maggie is firm when she wants to be."

"Firm," I said, "is too mild a word. Come outside." And as we stepped out back again, I asked: "What do you think of it?"

Bonnie was thoughtful.

"Holly, I don't know. If this hadn't happened, I'd have heard the same story and not given it a second thought. But I can't help thinking it's awfully queer that this man Watson came here to work so abruptly and then was killed like this. What do you think?"

"The same thing. But of course there's the plane pilot."

"I've seen him quite a few times," Bonnie said. "Jack Crowder was tops. He'd have done anything for Maggie. And don't think Maggie's callous about his death. She'll take Jack's wife and child under her wing."

"I'm still wondering why the chap was killed. How about Crowder's background? Any old feuds or enmities?"

"I'll be willing to bet there are none," said Bonnie with conviction. "And here are your police."

We had reached the side of the house. Headlights were rushing up the driveway. A siren moaned briefly; the oncoming lights caught the people at the garage. The automobile drove on back. Three men jumped out.

Far down the driveway I could see another car coming. In no time we'd have police, coroner, photographers, newspaper men all over the place.

This first black sedan was lettered *County Police.* I wondered as I went to meet the officers how quickly I could make the next move.

The guests were sent to the house. The bodies were examined. Questions started as more cars arrived. The sheriff was a big lanky man named Myers, slow-talking, thoughtful. Since I'd been first in the garage, I was one of the first he questioned. And I did right by him.

I showed him Crowder's glove under the limousine running board, the hand prints on the limousine door, and I gave him the air pistol pellet. Why not? I wanted this case solved as quickly as he did. And at the moment I couldn't get any further information out of what I knew.

Still he was grateful.

"You thought fast, Mr. Barnes. All this will help." He scratched his chin. "But it's a hell of a puzzling thing just the same. You wouldn't have any other ideas about it, would you?"

"It doesn't make sense," I admitted. "But after all, I never saw any of these people before tonight. I've talked with the young lady who came with me," I added casually. "Miss Templeton. Her father owns the *Washington Press.* She doesn't know anything either. I wonder if we can't run in to the paper and file a story on this. If there are any more questions to ask us, a phone call to the paper will get us."

"Washington Press?" Meyers said. "Uh—well, I suppose it'll be all right. Go ahead. You might say we're on the job promptly here and have plenty of information."

"Leave it to me," I promised, and smiled inwardly as I left him. I'd given him all his information. Bonnie's name had carried the weight. This was Maryland, but everyone read the Washington papers.

I FOUND Bonnie outside the garage talking to Eddy Higgins, one of her father's reporters. Higgins and I had bought drinks together at the Press Club less than a week ago.

"I'm going to call a taxi and go into Washington," I told Bonnie. "Could you go back with someone else?"

"So it's that way?" said Bonnie. "Nothing doing, Handsome. You brought a lady and you'll take a lady when you leave. Maybe Eddy will lend us his car. He can ride back with someone else from the paper."

"Sure," said Eddy, grinning. He'd have walked back if Bonnie had asked. She was that way with everyone who worked on the paper.

But Bonnie was shrewdly blunt as I pointed Eddy's coupé toward Washington. "It's about this trouble, isn't it, Holly?"

"How could it be?" I asked innocently. "I don't know anything."

"Don't kid the little girl."

"Only with orchids," I said. "Suppose I drop you at your house before I go to the paper? You've had enough excitement for one evening."

"Says who?" said Bonnie. "I'll go to the paper with you. Although why you have to go to the paper, I can't see. You work for World-Wide Features, not the *Press,* you know."

"Your father made that clear the other day," I reminded. "And I ought to give you the bum's rush. I have to see a man."

"So it's a man now," Bonnie jeered. "Go right ahead. I'm in no hurry. Who is the man?"

"This Peyton, for whom Watson used to drive."

"I thought so," said Bonnie, snuggling comfortably in the seat. "Who could resist ten thousand dollars and a good story? Not Holly Barnes. Drive on, Handsome."

I'd looked the man up in the telephone directory before we left. Lungar G. Peyton, far up on Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest. The address proved to be a three-story house of gray stone, set close to the sidewalk, with stone columns flanking the front door.

Bonnie started to get out also. "Nix," I said. "You came for the ride, Lovely, and the ride is all you get. Wait here in the car for me." And I went to the house and rang the bell.

The ground floor was dark, save for a dimly lighted foyer inside the door. The second floor windows in front showed light around drawn curtains. When the ring was not answered, I pressed the bell button hard.

That brought someone hurrying; and the sharp, gray-haired little man who opened the door was in a vile humor.

"It's about time you got here!" he stated unpleasantly as he opened the door. "Me getting the devil because . . ." He was peering past me by then, and he bit off the words and gave me a startled look.

"I came as fast as I could," I told him, grinning. "I want to see Mr. Peyton."

"Who are you?"

"Tell Mr. Peyton that Mr. Barnes has something important to discuss with him."

Gray was his color: gray suit, gray hair, gray-white pallor on his sharp face. A sharpish nose twitched and his eyes darted nervously over me as he stood undecided.

"What do you want with Mr. Peyton?"

"I'll tell Peyton."

He cocked his head as if listening. His eyes watched me, and roved past me toward the street.

"Mr. Peyton isn't here. No one is here. I'm the caretaker and I'm here alone."

"Well, well," I said. "Alone, eh? Who was giving you the devil?"

Like most liars, he'd slipped on a hurried one—and tried fast to cover up or my name wasn't Holly Barnes.

"My—my wife is here. We're here alone. Mr. Peyton is in Miami, at his winter home. You'll have to see him there, if you see him at all."

"Oh, sure," I said. "I'll taxi down there tonight. So you're the caretaker, eh?"

"I am!" he blurted. "And I'm busy."

My foot blocked the door before he could close it.

"I'm busy too," I said. "But not too busy to talk. How long have you worked for Peyton?"

He was nervous, angry, and not too certain what to do, I guessed. He glared without answering, so I fed it a little stronger.

"Better talk to me or you'll say it all to the police when they come. I might save you some trouble."

"The police?" he repeated. "Police coming *here?*" He opened the door a

little wider. "Why are they coming here?"

"Remember Watson, the chauffeur who worked for Peyton?"

He nodded.

"Did you know him very well?"

"Watson worked here so I must have known him. What is this about the police? Who are you?"

"Watson," I said, "was murdered tonight. The police will be checking on him. How about the fellow while he worked here? Did he have any enemies? Anything peculiar about him?"

"Who are you?" he demanded again.

"I might be from the police."

He blinked. "I don't know anything about Watson. If he is dead, you'll have to talk to Mr. Peyton. He has a telephone in Miami. You can call long-distance. I'm only the caretaker here."

"So you said. You didn't kill Watson yourself, did you?"

I didn't think so. I only wanted to see what he'd do. I was the one who was surprised. His eyes widened, then narrowed—and suddenly he was smiling unpleasantly.

"So you're asking smart questions," he said. "Mister, I didn't kill anybody. You must be a newspaper guy snooping around for something to print. There's no story here. I'm only the caretaker. Get out!"

My foot was still in the doorway. He stamped hard without warning. I uttered a startled exclamation of pain. My foot involuntarily jerked back out of the doorway. He slammed the door in my face. The light inside went out.

I limped back to the car swearing under my breath.

V

"WAS that Mr. Peyton?" asked Bonnie sweetly.

"No. The caretaker."

"I suppose you took care of him," Bonnie said with the same sweet interest. "What did you find out from him, darling?"

"Never mind rubbing it in," I growled as I yanked the coupé around the next corner. "You saw him jump on my foot and slam the door. He said he was the caretaker staying there alone with his wife, and he wouldn't talk. He claimed Peyton was in Miami."

"Which may be true," said Bonnie. "This *is* the season, you know. But if his wife was the one who turned off the light upstairs and lifted one of the window shades to look out, I'm very surprised. Before the light went off, I was sure I saw the silhouette of a man's hat near the window."

"I thought so," I said, making another fast right-hand turn at the second corner. "The one I talked to may have been the caretaker. Peyton may have gone South. But someone else was in the house and they were waiting for another person to arrive. He thought I was the one."

"Very queer," Bonnie allowed. "What do you make of it?" And a moment later when I made a third right-hand turn, Bonnie sarcastically inquired: "Do you know where you're driving?"

"Where does it look like?"

"You're driving around the block!"

"I'm going back and see who's expected at Peyton's house."

"Oh, Holly, do you really think it might be important?"

"I don't think," I said. "I only hurt—in my foot. And I'm really curious now."

By then I was parking again almost at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue. Bonnie waited in the car again while I walked to the corner and looked

to the right, toward Peyton's house.

It was a good thing I'd wasted no time. A taxi was just stopping in front of the house. The horn blew. A man hurried out carrying a piece of luggage. The taxi made a U turn in the street and started back down Massachusetts Avenue.

I sprinted back to the coupé and was starting the motor when the taxi sped past the corner.

"Someone is taking a train out of town," I threw to Bonnie, and eased around the corner and started after the taxi.

But I was mistaken. The taxi turned south on Sixteenth, skirted Lafayette Park, rolled fast between the White House and the Treasury, dropped down to Fourteenth and headed south again past the light-bathed shaft of the Washington monument and the blue-white lights of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving beyond.

"He's going to the airport," Bonnie guessed.

"Evidently," I agreed. "And if he's not flying south to Miami, I'm a liar. Throw dice on that and see what you get."

"It—it looks suspicious, doesn't it?" Bonnie said breathlessly.

"Too suspicious," I conceded. "And it's probably only the butler or Peyton's brother-in-law flying down to join the household."

"Then why should the caretaker be so secretive about it?"

"For that matter," I said, "why a caretaker? Why a winter home open in Miami? Why expensive airplane fares when Peyton was too broke to keep his chauffeur? Did you bring any money?"

"Not more than ten dollars."

"I'm going to take the same plane," I decided. "I'll need more money. How fast can you pull wires at the paper and have some cash rushed out here to the airport?"

"It won't take long," Bonnie said with rising excitement. "I'll go too!"

"Over my dead body," I promptly refused. "Your father would have my column canceled from his paper and fires lighted under my syndicates. You stay here, keep an eye on what the police are doing, and answer any wires or telephone calls I make. And if you give me an argument, I'll wash the whole thing up and deliver you back where I got you."

I'd been driving well back from the taxi, so we wouldn't be spotted. Now we were crossing the long, light-studded Highway Bridge, with the airport just beyond. The bright lights on Bonnie's face showed her angry for a moment. She knew I'd do as I promised. Then as she caught my look, she smiled and replied with surprising meekness.

"You're the boss, Handsome. I'll telephone the paper while you get your ticket."

THE taxi's passenger was getting out at the waiting room entrance when I headed into the parking space a few yards away. I glimpsed a tall, spare figure with a dark topcoat over one arm. He didn't look toward us, didn't seem to suspect that he'd been followed.

But as I parked the coupé in a line of other cars facing the flying field barrier, I had my doubts about getting money from the paper in time. A big silver-colored plane was already on the starting line, steps in place, passengers going aboard and mail and luggage being stowed.

We hurried up steps to the broad, brick terrace before the building and I asked a redcap; "Is that the Miami plane?"

"Yas, suh. Goin' right out, suh."

The tall man carrying the dark topcoat came out on the terrace and started down to the gate through which passengers were passing to the plane. He didn't look around here either. I marked the lean angles of his face so I'd know him again, and hurried Bonnie on inside.

"I think I've got enough cash to buy a ticket," I told her. "You can wire me some in the morning. I'll leave a check with you."

But the young man at the ticket counter had it otherwise. I asked for Miami space on the plane just leaving.

"All space is sold," he informed me, and his glance included Bonnie beside me. "I'll not be able to give you two tickets to Miami before tomorrow, sir. Traffic is very heavy just now."

"The devil! One ticket is all I want, and I'm in a hurry."

"In that case," he told me, "I can give you one seat on a second flight that leaves in an hour. The space was just canceled."

I took it, and had time to get back to the hotel, pack a bag, cash a check and wire Lon Sadler to take the next train out of Boston. And when the airport lights finally dropped away under the plane and the last lights of Washington vanished in the raw, damp night, I wondered if I was smart or dumb.

Nothing much but another hunch was taking me to Miami. Maybe days of time wasted, expense money, and perhaps a clean miss on a whale of a good story about the murders at Maggi Forrester's.

By morning I was no more certain. But the bright Miami sun, the palms, the smiling people in summer attire helped that old debbil Winter Vacation get his hooks in me. It was nice to be down here on any excuse. Great to rent a car and drive leisurely across the long causeway to Miami Beach.

Graceful white yachts were moored off to the right. A speedboat knifed lacy froth over the blue surface of Biscayne Bay. Tanned bathers were in the lazy surf on Miami Beach.

Not bad, not bad. Back there across the bay Maggie Forrester's yacht was getting ready for the Caribbean cruise. Cuba, Jamaica, Panama, Trinidad, maybe Rio de Janeiro. All for Holly Barnes, if he said the word.

"Careful mug," I warned myself. "They're battling in Europe and parading warships on this side and you're not lousy rich and this guy Peyton's ex-chauffeur wasn't knocked off for peanuts. Don't forget it's business down here!"

The telephone directory had given Peyton's Miami Beach address. The same Lungar G. Peyton. I drove past the house, a Mediterranean style villa, bright with white stucco and red tiles, with a large yard, palms and shrubbery.

A maroon sport roadster stood in the side drive. A gray Packard was parked out in front. A yard man in overalls was spading flowers. Not even Holly Barnes could see anything to connect this peaceful scene with the two dead men up north. I drove slowly around the block and thought it over.

The killings at Maggie Forrester's had been put on the press wires. Today's *Miami Telegram* had a quarter of a column on it. No arrests, so the paper said, had yet been made. The local story was built around the fact that the Forrester yacht, *Eldorado,* was now docked in Miami for repairs and supplies.

The story had no mention of Peyton. Why should there be? I'd thought of dropping in to the Miami Beach paper to see if they had any dope on him. But

if Holly Barnes walked in and started asking questions, someone might get the idea that Peyton was worth investigating. Might stumble on something about the ex-chauffeur that would blow the story flat so far as Holly Barnes was concerned.

I circled the block, and fifty yards ahead of me a taxicab pulled in behind the gray Packard. On an impulse I parked behind the taxi.

The passenger who jumped out did not wait to pay the driver. But he stopped short when I pulled up. He was biting the end off of a cigar and striking a match when I got out. And a handful of matches and a box of cigars couldn't have hidden the fact that he'd stopped to watch me.

"Is this the Peyton house?" I asked him.

He was lean and bony, middle-aged and well-dressed in white linen and a Panama. Like any of thousands of tourists you'd see on either side of Biscayne Bay.

But you'd never mistake this man for a Northerner down for a casual vacation. Sun, wind and weather had turned his lean face dark as old leather. Squint wrinkles radiated from his eyes and the eyes themselves were a light, cold blue that fixed me over the smoking cigar.

"Peyton?" he repeated, taking the cigar from his mouth. "Never heard the name," he grunted.

"This is the address."

He grunted again. "Then I'm wrong. That's not the party I'm looking for." He jabbed the cigar back between strong white teeth, re-entered the taxi, gave the driver a direction I couldn't hear. He didn't look at me again as the taxi carried him off.

I got the license number and slapped it in a memo book before I forgot. I was reaching for a cigarette and staring after the taxi when it turned the corner. And unless I was seeing double, that lean, tanned stranger in white had turned on the seat and looked back hard just before he rolled out of sight.

VI

THE man had lied to me, of course, just as the caretaker had lied to me back in Washington. He'd taxied here to Peyton's house for some good reason. When I'd driven up like I might have been trailing the taxi, and asked my harmless little question, he'd tried to disassociate himself from Peyton by denying knowledge of the name and leaving.

But why? I was halfway to the house then, and the front door opened and a man stepped out on the porch and stood waiting. I guessed he'd seen that meeting out in front. He must have been expecting the other man. Now he was waiting to see where I fitted in. His inquiring scowl held little welcome.

"Well?" he barked when I reached the foot of the steps.

"Mr. Peyton?"

"What do you want?"

A tan tropical-weave was baggy over his big, meaty frame. He looked powerful and a little too well fed. Probably had high blood pressure from the bulgy look of his eyes.

He all but blocked the top of the steps, looking down on me as we talked. I walked up on the porch and faced him. Surprisingly I was an inch taller. He had more breadth and that meaty heaviness.

"Are you Mr. Peyton?" I asked.

His thick hand gestured impatiently. "I'm Peyton. What do you want?"

I gave him the oil for what it was worth.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Peyton. I'm a reporter. I suppose you've read about the murder in Washington?"

"No!"

"At the Forrester estate," I said. "Mrs. Forrester's chauffeur."

He jammed hands in the coat pockets and glowered.

"I don't know the woman. Why do you come to me? I'm in business in Washington and New York but I have no interest in what happens up North while I'm here on vacation."

"Naturally," I soothed. "My paper thought you might have some information about the dead chauffeur. His name was Watson. He used to work for you."

"So?" he said. "That one. I have no information. I discharged the man. I was through with him. I know nothing about him since."

His eyes looked ready to pop, his voice was rising with anger.

"I come always to Miami for privacy! Two weeks I have been here! Now your newspaper tries to drag my name into murders that happened in Washington last night! I will not have such publicity from something that does not concern me! You hear? I will not have it!"

The broad face was mottling with fury as he shook a fist under my nose.

"All right, all right," I said. "No use throwing a fit about it. We merely check on news stories like this in case some angle has been overlooked. You don't know anything about it then, and you have nothing to say?"

"Nothing! Not a thing to say!"

"Fine," I said, and gave him the axe smilingly. "Now then, Mr. Peyton, how did you know there was more than one murder last night? You didn't read about it and I didn't tell you."

"So! It's a trick, is it? You try to trick me?"

He looked close to frothing and swinging on me when a coldly angry voice warned from inside the house:

"Lungar! You fool! A newspaper man can ask questions!"

Peyton paled and was closer to fright all in an instant than I would have thought possible.

He gave me a stiff, jerky bow.

"I know nothing of this matter. I am sorry to lose my temper. It is a fault of mine."

"Think nothing of it," I said, trying to see who had spoken inside. But the door was partly closed and the interior was shadowy.

Peyton spoke stiffly. "You will come again, if it seems I can help you?"

"Have no fear," I said. "But I doubt if there'll be a follow-up on the story. Thanks for everything."

I smiled. Peyton smiled—and looked like it hurt him. He didn't like me. He was uneasy behind the forced smile.

I DROVE off wondering. Had the man inside caused Peyton's uneasiness? Or was it Holly Barnes with sudden questions about the ex-chauffeur?

But in either case, why should Peyton be uneasy? What was wrong with the fellow? What was I bumping into here? And now that I was here in Miami and had seen Peyton, what next?

I telephoned Bonnie Templeton, in Washington, and had to wait in the hotel room half an hour while the Washington operator located Bonnie.

"Are you hiding out?" I caustically inquired when the call finally went through.

"I'm at Mrs. Forrester's," said Bonnie cheerfully. "And I think the telephone is tapped."

"Fine," I said. "Anything else?"

"The sheriff had a fit a little while

ago when he asked for you and heard you'd left town," Bonnie chuckled.

"That sounds like no luck there."

"No luck," Bonnie agreed. "And very little sleep. Police, detectives, reporters, photographers and the dear curious public have been swarming over the place and falling over each other. Everybody suspects everybody else. The cook slapped a detective, sassed Mrs. Forrester and gave notice. Lucy, the maid, had hysterics. Mrs. Forrester is getting madder by the minute. The place is rapidly becoming a first-class mad house. Did you have some luck, Holly?"

"No," I said. "And yes. I don't know what I've discovered. And what I've discovered doesn't make much sense."

"You don't make it sound sensible," Bonnie chuckled. "I doubt if it does to anyone who may be listening. But you'd better work fast or think fast, Handsome. The sheriff is thinking of having you dragged back here."

"What? Is that guy nuts?"

Bonnie giggled. "He wants an arrest. He's convinced that this was an inside job. He's certain that someone who was in the house last night knows all about it. You were here, darling. You took the first plane out of town. It almost makes *me* believe you might be guilty."

"Listen," I said. "Are you egging that guy on to have me pinched?"

"Heaven forbid," Bonnie said, and I didn't believe her. The more I thought about it, the more I was irritated. "Stop that cluck some way!" I urged hotly. "I'm on the track of something. It looks good. No telling what it'll turn into. If the stupe has me arrested now, I won't have a chance."

"Honest, Holly, is it that good?"

"It's better!"

"I'll do what I can," Bonnie promised doubtfully. "But Sheriff Myers swore he'd get you back here. He's mad. Mrs. Forrester warned him we're leaving town in two or three days, if it takes an appeal to the Governor to end the sheriff's persecution. Her lawyers are out in force. Nobody's reasonable around here today, Holly. If the sheriff is determined to have you arrested, I'm afraid he will. If only for spite."

"Spite!" I said savagely. "To hell with spite and the sheriff too! He can't tie me up for nothing!" A knock on the room door made me jump. "Hold everything," I said. "Maybe he can. Someone's knocking. It might be the pinch now."

But a maid was waiting to come in. While she was entering and leaving the bathroom I told Bonnie: "It's only fresh towels. Has Mrs. Forrester heard from Lon Sadler?"

"He arrived about an hour ago," Bonnie said. "He's pleased and Mrs. Forrester is pleased. I think he's gone to check over the plane and get ready for the trip."

"So there's really going to be a trip?"

"Mrs. Forrester swears we'll leave."

"Then you will," I said.

"If you're in jail, Holly, I'll pass up the trip and bring you candy and books."

"Nice of you," I said sourly. "Use some of that energy to keep me out of jail. And don't waste time. If your wire is tapped, the sheriff may be talking to the Miami police now."

"Holly," said Bonnie suddenly, "Maggie suggested what you might do. Some place where no one will find you!"

"I might burrow into the beach."

"I'm serious," Bonnie insisted. "So was Maggie. And remember, someone *might* be listening to this. Do you recall

where Maggie wanted you to go while we were on the trip?"

"I remember what she said."

"Then go there now, Holly. No one will look for you there. You'll just vanish from the hotel—and that will be that. Do you understand me?"

"I'm not a dummy. Maybe you've got an idea," I granted. "If you don't hear from me, that's where I'll be. And you can bring the guitar. I'm going to hang up while I can scram." So I hung up, grabbed my bag and checked out.

VII

I TAXIED to the railroad station, and bought a ticket for West Palm Beach in case I was followed. I checked my bag and walked Flagler Street to the bay front. No one stopped me.

The afternoon sun brushed the palm tops in Bay Front Park. The fishing boats were not yet back at the city piers as I strolled north. An amphibian plane was tuning up at the seaplane landing. Gulls dipped gracefully over the bay. Bug-like cars were scooting along the causeway. And at the city dock I found cases, bags, hampers of food and supplies going aboard a rakish white yacht.

Maybe I'd have thought of it without Bonnie. What cop would look for Holly Barnes aboard a millionaire's yacht?

I followed a stevedore and a crate of oranges aboard—and was stopped by a chunky, grim-faced sailor in whites.

"No strangers allowed."

"I've business with the captain."

"What business?"

"Come, come," I said like I might have said in a movie. "The captain! Where's the captain? Don't keep me waiting."

That got him. He touched his hat with a hand bearing a scar from knuckles to thumb.

"I'll have a man take you." And he yelled: "*Joe!*" Joe came stalking to us —all six feet six inches of Joe—and the hard case at the gangway growled: "Stranger to see the cap'n."

"This way," Joe rumbled. He didn't say "sir," didn't touch the round sailor's hat perched on his big, lumpy head.

One of Joe's front teeth was missing. His nose was broken. A cauliflower ear lumped against the left side of his head. Joe looked harder than the man guarding the gangway. I noticed a couple more of the Eldorado's uniformed crew as I followed Joe topside. They also looked hard and competent.

Maybe, I thought, Maggie Forrester liked them this way. Maybe they made her feel safer out of sight of land. And speaking of leaving land, the amount of food coming aboard looked like Maggie Forrester was thinking of a world cruise. The *Eldorado* was sitting well down in the water, heavily loaded and getting heavier every minute.

Joe knocked on a brass-studdded door. A thick voice inside spoke querulously. "What is it?"

Joe rumbled: "Gent to see you, sir."

"Who is it?"

Joe looked at me.

"I'm not here to argue through a door," I said shortly. "Open up or get him out here before somebody gets in Dutch. Do you people act this way when the owner or her friends are aboard?"

"You know the owner?" said Joe. And when I nodded, he growled: "Whyn't you say so?" He lifted his voice. "It's somebody that knows the owner, Cap'n."

A chair scraped inside. I thought I heard glass clink. Finally the door was unlatched, opened, and a wave of Scotch fumes rolled out to meet us.

The captain was on the short side and running to fat. He was unshaven,

soiled shirt open at the neck and sleeves rolled up. Thinning hair was touseled, eyes bloodshot and baggy. He clutched the door as he stood blinking at the brighter light on deck.

Then his eyes focused on me and a smile was squeezed out of the pudgy face. He spoke thickly, like talking through flannel.

"I'm Captain Craddock, at your service, mister. You're a friend of Mrs. Forrester?"

I caught a covert sneer on Joe's lumpy face. It made me more curt. "I want to see you alone."

"At your service, sir. Come in."

The captain held on to the door and waved the sailor away. He got a sloppy, disrespectful salute that would have drawn quick trouble on any good boat.

The captain's room hadn't been cleaned recently. A broken glass or two had been kicked over in the corner. Newspapers littered the floor around an easy chair. Unemptied ash trays held cigarette and cigar butts. The bed was unmade.

"I'm sorry to bother you when you're so busy," I said sarcastically.

Captain Craddock squeezed another painful smile out of his flabby face, motioned me to a chair and muttered: "All this caught me a little under the weather. Health's been bad for some time. I didn't catch your name, mister."

"Templeton," I said, just to be on the safe side. "I'm to be one of the yachting party you'll pick up at Mrs. Forrester's island. I'm joining the boat now. I'll stay on board until you leave."

"This is rather unusual, Mr.—Mr.—uh—"

"Templeton," I said. "You can verify it by telegraphing Mrs. Forrester."

"Not at all, not at all," Craddock assured me huskily. He moistened his lips and looked longingly at a locker in the corner. "Uh—you'll have a drink with me?"

"Don't bother."

"I insist," he said, hurriedly opening the locker. He had half a case of assorted bottles inside.

HIS hand shook as he poured a drink for me and a triple dose for himself. He could hardly wait to pass my glass before he gulped his drink.

It jolted him. He belched and tenderly patted his stomach. "I'll feel better when we get to sea," he confessed huskily. "We're not in shape for passengers this afternoon, Mr.—uh— I'll have a stateroom ready for you this evening. Bring your luggage aboard after dinner and make yourself at home. We'll sail sometime tomorrow. Uh—a guest of Mrs. Forrester is a guest of the yacht, sir."

If the yacht had been mine, I'd have rushed this pudgy rum-soak over the rail. But it wasn't mine and I only shrugged and told him:

"I'll stay aboard now. Give me a stateroom and I'll do the rest. If you're not feeding on board yet, don't bother about me."

He gulped. Maybe he was thinking that his job was as good as gone if Maggie Forrester heard about this. You didn't have to wonder what the old lady would do about such an employee.

"Uh—just a moment, Mr. Templeton. I'll see what we can do for you at once, sir."

He went outside. A moment later I stepped out on deck also. Only a hog would have been comfortable in that stateroom. Captain Craddock had disappeared. I leaned on the rail and watched the supplies coming aboard. Down in the engine room a hammer clanged loudly on metal. The deck needed washing.

Well, it was Maggie Forrester's yacht and Maggie Forrester's crew. All I wanted was a room where the local police wouldn't think of looking for me, in case they were ordered to pick me up. Maybe it would give me a chance to discover what was wrong about this man Peyton.

I smoked two cigarettes and wondered what was keeping Captain Craddock. And was on the point of looking for him when the big, lumpy-faced sailor called Joe hurried up.

"Cap'n says to show you to a stateroom, mister."

"It's about time," I said. "Where's the captain?"

Joe spat tobacco juice over the rail and grunted: "Cap'n's busy. This way."

He led us down into the saloon where a sailor was adding a sack of potatoes to a dozen other sacks.

"This boat stores its supplies in style," I commented.

"Yah," Joe said without looking around or stopping.

It wasn't my boat or my trip; but even a landlubber could see that a yacht shouldn't be treated like this. I wondered again what Maggie Forrester would say.

And I wondered still more when I followed my guide into a passageway lined with staterooms and saw through a partly opened door one of the rooms almost filled to the ceiling with boxes.

"Where do the passengers stay if you're filling the whole boat with food?" I asked.

Joe's lumpy face was twisted in a sneer as he said: "Listen, mister, you ain't goin' get nosey, are you?"

The snarling undertone of his voice cut into my consciousness like a white light. This drunken captain, this surly insulting crew wasn't merely irregular—it was menacing! I wasn't a guest here—I was a prisoner!

Whirling, I bolted for the companionway as Joe bent over the lock of the stateroom door.

A glowering thug loomed up in front of me as I burst through the hatch. Running feet pounded the deck. The thug toppled backward over the rail as my fist caught him flush on the jaw, but at the same instant something hard jabbed into my back. It was a gun.

"One more trick like that," he snarled, "and I'll plug you and have it over with."

Two minutes later I was sprawling on the floor of the stateroom below. The door was closed behind me.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Murder is Where You Find it

By B. B. Fowler

I WAS listening to the High Jack program. You know, the one that comes on every Monday night in which they do mumbo-jumbo with telephone books and call up some guy to tell him that the studio is sending him a grand in cash.

Get me right, I'm not dope enough to hang in front of a radio and drool while I listen to see if they are going to pick me for a call. I'm optimistic but not that optimistic. But if you know the program, you also know that Jack Conway and his boys tootle for the listeners and I never miss a chance to listen to Jack.

So there I am, listening to the program, stretched out in my favorite chair, with a tall, cool one at my elbow. I was feeling pretty good. I'd just cracked a case that the cops had all sewed up. I got a nice fee and the kind of publicity that should bring me plenty more business.

Jack Conway had just finished the number I liked best. Then the announcer came on to say, "The Magic Wheel has stopped at your name. In a moment your telephone will ring and tell you that Beefo, the marvelous vitamin extract, is sending you one thousand dollars."

His bullet just missed me as I dived to the floor

Britt Odlum was so good that he could find things —including murderers—without looking for them

I said, "Nuts to you, Beefo," and snapped the radio off. I had all I wanted.

I was taking a long deep drink of the Scotch and soda when the telephone rang. Scotch and soda went down the wrong way and damn' near choked me. Then I started to get mad, figuring that there was someone gagging me. A lot of dopes must be getting a hell of a kick out of kidding their friends about that time, every High Jack program night.

I picked up the telephone and growled into it. A voice at the other end said, "Is this Britt Odlum?"

When I said, "Yes," the voice went on, high and jittery. "How would you like to make a thousand dollars?"

I started to hang up. But something in the voice stopped me. Whoever was on the other end of the line was scared or I had never heard a voice with fear in it.

The jittery voice went on, "I'll pay you that to make an investigation in a murder case."

"Yeah," I said. "Who will pay me for investigating what murder?"

The guy at the other end of the line drew a long, deep breath. He had the wind up, all right. He went on, "I can't tell you my name."

That was the most cock-eyed thing yet. I said, "I suppose Santa Claus will bring the thousand bucks if I'm a good boy and do a nice investigation."

The voice said, "Five hundred dollars will be in your hands inside half an hour after you tell me you'll take the case. You won't have to make a move until you get the money. Will you take the case?"

I didn't say, "Yes," and I didn't say, "no." I said, "Who is the guy that's been killed?"

"So you will take the case?"

Then I said, "Yes," adding, "when I see the five hundred bucks."

"You'll get it," the frightened voice went on. "I want you to find out who murdered Ross Andrews. Andrews was a partner in the firm of Angett, Art Dealers. I want you to find out who killed him. Pay no attention to anyone the police may arrest."

He drew another of those long breaths, then continued, "When you find the murderer you will get the other five hundred dollars. The first five will prove to you that I mean business."

I said, "Okay, brother, you've hired an investigator. When I get the five hundred I'll hit the trail." Then I hung up.

I POURED a second drink and sipped while I waited. I didn't have to wait long. In twenty minutes by the clock the buzzer rang. I went to the door and there was a uniformed messenger boy. He said, "Mr. Odlum?"

When I said, "Yes," he said, "This is for you."

He pushed an envelope at me and waited while I dug down for two-bits. Holding out the two-bits, I said, "Just a minute. Who gave you this to deliver?"

The kid said, "I didn't see the guy. He was in the back of the cab, parked in front of the office. He called to me as I was going in after a trip and gave me a buck to bring this around to you right away. He had his hat pulled down over his eyes and kept well back from the window while he told me what to do."

"I don't suppose you thought to take the number of the cab?" I asked him, but of course I knew what the answer would be.

I was right. The kid hadn't bothered

doing that. So I was still up in the air as to who had hired me.

I took the envelope into the room and ripped it open. Five nice crisp century notes fell out onto the floor. I picked them up, saw they were Uncle Sam's best and put them away in my wallet.

Before I made another move I looked up Andrews in the telephone book. He was listed as living on Washington Place.

After that I picked up the telephone and called Dinny Slade, a lieutenant on Homicide. Dinny and I were pals, though not quite such pals since I yanked the last case from under his nose and got all the publicity and credit.

"What have you got on the murder of a guy named Ross Andrews?" I asked Dinny when I finally got through to him.

"Nothing, you damned chiseller," Dinny growled. "I don't know any guy by that name, let alone anything about him being knocked off." His voice got suspicious, "What makes you ask?"

"That's funny, Dinny. My ouija board just told me that he had died violently. And I never knew my ouija board to lie to me."

Dinny roared, "You damned tramp, if you're trying to kid me . . ." His voice trailed off into a growl, then he hung up on me.

I sat there for a few minutes, wondering if someone had slipped something into my Scotch. Then I took out the wallet and felt again the five century notes.

While I fingered them I could hear the voice at the other end of the wire again, frightened and jittery.

Then a bad thought hit me a bang. I leaped for my hat and coat and went out on the run. I didn't even bother with the elevator, but ran down the four flights of stairs to the street, pulling on my coat as I ran.

On the street I signaled a cruising cab and piled in, yelling at the driver, "Washington Place, and don't spare the rubber."

The apartment house on Washington Place where Andrews lived was a nice, quiet place, with a lobby done in green and ivory with a big vase filled with flowers on a nice table. Everything about it was nice except the pair of harness bulls who glared at me as I came in. Then I knew the worst had happened.

I went past the bulls as though I was a regular tenant and started to walk up. I had noticed that the place was only five stories. I couldn't very well stop and see what floor Andrews lived on. That would have put the bulls onto me. I knew that I'd find out as I climbed.

I did. There was another harness bull on the third floor, planted squarely in front of a door. I knew that behind that door was Ross Andrews, and that he was dead.

Maybe you can see the kind of a spot I was on. I had called Homicide to inquire about a murder that hadn't been reported. Slade knew me well enough to check on me right away. He had probably looked in the telephone book for Ross Andrews. He might have tried to call him. When the guy didn't answer he had hot-footed it over to check some more.

And there I was, having tipped him to the kill, sitting right on the well known spot. But I went right on up to the cop. I might as well see Dinny now as later.

"The name is Odlum," I told the cop. "I'm looking for Lieutenant Slade."

The cop reached for the knob, growling, "The lieutenant has been raising

hell on the phone trying to get you."

He opened the door and said, "Here's Odlum, Lieutenant."

Dinny had one of those Irish mugs that are perpetually red, with a fine overhanging jaw and a pair of black eyes under a canopy of bushy eyebrows.

Just now his face was purple and his eyes were glaring as he snarled, "You've got a hell of a lot of explaining to do. How did you know Andrews was dead when nobody else knew?"

I told him my story realizing how screwy it would sound as I told it. But it was the only story I had.

"This time," Dinny said belligerently, "I've got you where I want you. I'll have your license for this."

But, for all his sputtering, he let me have a look at Andrews. In life he had been a tall, good-looking bozo, with black curly hair and a handsome pan. But he didn't look so good now. Someone had bent a poker over his noggin, cracking his skull open. Blood had run down over his face.

The medical examiner was saying, "Just what you see, Slade. He was hit once, hard enough to kill him instantly. The rest of it is yours."

Dinny made ugly sounds in his throat and glared at me.

I took another look at the dead Andrews, then gave the apartment the once-over. It was a nice apartment with sage green walls. A heavy broad-loom rug of mahogany-color covered the floor. Around the room was scattered plenty of modernistic furniture, upholstered in dusty-rose, and gray. There were a few really good etchings on the walls. Everything was in good taste except the guy on the floor.

When Dinny saw me gawping around, he growled, "I've got a good mind to take you down to Headquarters and work you over. Maybe I will yet. But, for the present, keep out and don't mess with this case."

As I was going out through the door, Dinny yelled after me, "And stick around where I can reach you. I'm not through with you yet. You and your damned screwy story about a telephone call and five hundred bucks."

I really felt a little better. Dinny didn't hate me as much as he pretended. He could have made it a lot tougher for me.

There was nothing I could do right then. My job was to sit tight for the moment and wait for the first break. I had a hunch that the break would come quickly. The guy who had called me had figured something like this. Whoever he was he was in a hole and wanted out.

So I went back home and had another drink before I turned in.

I WOKE up with the telephone yelling at me. I lifted it off the hook and heard Dinny's voice ripping along the wires. He said, "The case is closed." He went on with a heap of satisfaction in his voice, "We've got the guy who did that job. And we've got him cold. So you can keep your five hundred bucks and stay the hell away from this case."

I started to say, "Who—" but I only got that far when Dinny snapped, "See the morning papers for fuller details. I've got other things to do than rehash last night's news to you."

After I hung up I piled out of bed and got into a bathrobe. Then I called the elevator boy and had him go out for all the morning sheets. While he was gone I opened a can of tomato juice and made coffee.

Over tomato juice and coffee I read the papers. This Ross Andrews had been

a partner with a guy named George Getliffe in an art firm that used both names on the shingle, "Angett."

The way the story ran, the partners carried $50,000 worth of insurance on each other. Lately the partners hadn't been getting along so well. Getliffe had been heard by employees, raising hell with Andrews. He had gone so far as to warn Andrews that something might happen to him.

The latest and most bitter scrap had been over a shipment of curios and art objects brought in from Paris on consignment from one Countess Ileana Gradowski. Getliffe claimed that it wasn't the sort of stuff that the Angett Galleries should be handling. But Andrews had arranged with the Countess to handle the stuff.

The Countess was staying in town, in a suite at the St. Ricard. When the press got to her she clammed, refusing to make any statement at all.

Getliffe claimed that the reason for all the scraps between himself and Andrews was that Andrews wasn't paying enough attention to business and that the firm was suffering thereby.

What made Getliffe's spot worse was that the elevator boy in Washington Place apartment had taken him to Andrews floor about the time that the M.E. had fixed as the hour of the murder. Later the kid had seen Getliffe walk down, looking as though he had seen a ghost. Getliffe claimed that he had gone to see Andrews in response to a telephone call.

I laid the paper down and let my coffee go cold. I was sure that it was Getliffe who had hired me. The guy must have found Andrews dead and realized what kind of a spot he was on. He had probably seen my name in the papers in connection with the case I had just broken and called me to get on the job. He hadn't given his name, hoping that, by some miracle, the cops might not hang the murder on him. The guy had been scared enough to have any kind of a screwy notion.

So there I was. I had been hired to find out who really murdered Andrews. I remembered the jittery voice telling me to go ahead and find out the guilty party regardless of who the police might arrest. It added up to Getliffe all right. Also, to the fact that I had a dirty job on my hands.

The first place I visited after I had dressed was the Angett Galleries. It was up in the ritzy Fifties, just off Fifth Avenue. It had a front like a museum and was quiet and refined and stuffy inside.

I couldn't seem to get anywhere. The help went around with dazed looks on their pans and just tightened up when I tried to ask questions. The only note of relief was the voice of a woman arguing with someone at the back of the huge room.

I drifted down that way, studying the paintings on the walls. The gal had a slight foreign accent. She was standing with her back to me, in front of a table full of china ornaments and bric-a-brac. She was saying, "But zees ees preposterous. I do not see my leetle porcelain dog. It ees so valuable. Zee leetle dog must be here somewhere. Et was sent here with zee other things."

My ears pricked up as the old guy with her said, "But I assure you, Countess, that we are most careful of all objects placed with us. Mr. Andrews himself had personal charge of this shipment. He checked each article as the shipment was unpacked. Of course, you, ah, know about the shocking tragedy?"

The shocking tragedy, which she admitted knowing, didn't seem to bother

the Countess. She had her mind fixed on the missing little dog. It had to be a damned important little porcelain dog to work the gal up in the face of murder that she knew all about.

The clerk said, "You may be assured, Countess, that we shall make a thorough search. We will do everything in our power to find the missing piece."

"You must find eet," the Countess insisted. "You must. I shall be at my hotel eef you wish to reach me at any time."

She swept out past me, a tall honey in a sable cape, with a lot of the right curves in the right places. Her dark eyes would melt the fillings right out of a guy's teeth if she turned them on. I got a whiff of her perfume as she passed me and, for a moment, felt pleasantly dizzy.

I LEFT the Galleries and walked down Fifth, with suspicion growing fast. The Countess made too much fuss about a little porcelain dog, unless that dog happened to be damned valuable. I recalled what Getliffe had told the police, that the shipment of stuff from the Countess wasn't up to the standard of the Angett Galleries.

The thought of the little porcelain dog headed me for the St. Ricard. In the lobby I pinned my card to a piece of hotel stationery on which I wrote, "The 'private' in 'Private Investigator' means just that. I'm good at finding things and keeping my mouth shut about my client's busines. I might even find the little porcelain dog."

I gave the card to a bell hop and took a seat in the lobby while I waited to see what the reaction to my card and note would be.

I didn't have long to wait. The boy came back and said, "Countess Gradowski will see you. This way, please."

A Frenchy-looking maid met me at the Countess' door and gave me an eye as I came in. Don't get me wrong, the eye wasn't openly inviting or anything like that; it just gave me an idea that the gal had ideas.

She said in a husky voice, "Zees way, pleeze."

The Countess was out of her sables and into a gown that dressed her up like a stick of candy. Only that's a hell of a poor simile. She was more like some luscious, exotic fruit. I went dizzy again, but not so dizzy that I missed the appraisal in her dark eyes.

She waved a long, white hand at a big chair and said, "You will pleeze to seat yourself, Mr. Odlum." She made quite a funny mouthful of my name.

I decided to plunge right in. "About the missing porcelain dog. It was very valuable, I take it?"

The Countess smiled and said, "To me, yes. My agent in Paris who shipped my leetle collection, shipped also zee *petit chien*. That I did not want to sell. It has, what you call, ah, zee attachments sentimental."

I nodded. "Did Andrews, by any chance, know that the little dog was especially valuable to you?"

The Countess laughed throatily, "But, of course. Yesterday when I arrive, I call Mr. Andrews on zee telephone to inform him zat leetle dog ees not for sale. Mr. Andrews agree to send it to me today.

"Zees morning I read in zee papers about zee horrible thing zat has happen to Mr. Andrews. So I go to the Angett Galleries where I am told zat zee leetle porcelain dog ees disappear."

Now, when the Countess mentioned the horrible thing that happened to Andrews, she shrugged and made a little grimace of distaste. But that's

all it was, just distaste. There was no sympathy in her dark eyes. I began to think I wasn't going to like the Countess as much as I thought I would. Also, she knew plenty that she wasn't telling. The leetle porcelain pooch was beginning to look like a great dane.

"Have you considered, Countess Gradowski," I said smoothly, "the possibility that Andrews might have taken the china dog home with him last night? Perhaps someone else got the idea that the dog was valuable and killed him to get it."

The Countess gave me another of her throaty laughs as she said, "But zat ees fantastic, Mr. Odlum. You have seen zee papers. Mr. Andrews was killed by his partner, Mr. Getliffe. It ees so preposterous to say zat anyone should zink my *petit chien* so valuable to commit murder for heem."

But all the time I knew she was lying. Even her laugh was a lie. She was plenty worried. The old sentimental attachment stuff didn't go across with me. The dog was valuable; valuable enough to cause a murder. I knew it, and could see that she knew I knew it. It was in her dark eyes, staring out at me as she talked.

I knew I wasn't going to get any more out of the Countess. I stood up, saying, "Perhaps I can find the porcelain dog for you, Countess. I'll have a try at it anyhow."

"Zat ees so kind of you," she murmured. Even as she said it, I could see her dismissing me with her eyes. She had sized me up as just a guy who had overheard her at the Galleries and was trying to chisel in.

The maid gave me another optical perusal as I went out. I put her down in my memory book for a lookup when I got this case straightened out.

As I went through the lobby I spotted a guy sizing me up. He tried not to be too obvious about it. In fact he studiously avoided looking at me. But I caught one flash of his eyes measuring and classifying me.

He was a very smooth looking number with a thin, aristocratic face. His nose was thin and long and he had a penciled-line of black mustache across the upper lip. He'd have been better looking if his black eyes hadn't been set so close together. I tagged him, "Aristocrat gone to seed. Wants plenty of jack and doesn't give a damn what he has to do to get it, just so long as there is no hard work attached."

As I passed him, I said to myself, "I'll be seeing you, Long Nose." And I knew I would. The guy had a part in the little drama.

I DIDN'T try to see Getliffe. I stayed strictly away from Dinny Slade and Headquarters. If they thought I was staying out of this mess I wanted them to keep right on thinking so. I had a tough enough case on my hands without Dinny Slade riding me.

By the time I had run in circles all the afternoon I was almost ready to take a chance and see Getliffe. He might have something that would help me. But I kept away from him, telling myself that if the guy had had anything he would have given it to me when he phoned.

The early papers carried very little on the case beyond a lot of bouquets for Slade for having solved the murder so quickly. Everyone was certain that the right man was behind bars.

Which was a break for me. I wanted to look around the Andrews' apartment. If Slade was so sure of himself he would have pulled the cops off the door of the flat.

I killed time until late in the evening.

then went around to Washington Place. I could see no cops. So I stuck around until a couple of tenants went in. I gave them two minutes to start up in the elevator then went in and walked up.

It took me just about another minute to work the lock on the door. Then I was inside, gazing at the mess that someone had already made of the place.

It didn't worry me that someone had been there before me. In fact I was damned pleased about it. Because up till now I had figured that someone had socked Andrews with a poker, then walked out with whatever they had come for. The appearance of the place now, said that it hadn't been as simple as that.

The cushions had been pulled out of divan and chairs. Every drawer in the place had been given a going-over. Pictures hung awry. The rug had been pulled up and put down sloppily.

I wondered if the searcher had found what was wanted this time. If he hadn't I figured he might be still sticking around. I walked across the room and peeked through a corner of the heavy draperies that shrouded the windows.

There was a guy standing beside the steps of the house across the street, back in the shadows cast by the angle of the steps. He was smoking. All I could make out was that the guy was dark and lean. I recalled the bozo who had given me the close once-over in the lobby of St. Ricard.

I stood in the middle of the floor for a while, thinking it over. I wasn't going to waste any time in casing the joint. I had a hunch that there was no porcelain dog there. The thing I wanted to know now was the part that the dark guy was playing in the piece. I had an idea how I could find out.

I looked around the room for a prop. The thing that looked best was a bowl of fruit on a low table at the side of the room. I walked over, thinking it was real. When I found the fruit was wax it looked all the better.

Out in the kitchenette I found a paper bag and some string. I used the string right there. Lifting the gun from my hip pocket I tied one end of the string around the muzzle and dropped the gun inside my belt. I let it go down till it was hanging just below the knee on the inside of my leg. Only an expert would find it there if I were frisked for it.

I went back into the living room and dumped the wax fruit into a paper bag and went out, hugging the fruit as if I were afraid someone might see it. On the street I glanced both ways, the way guys do in the movies when they are looking to see if anyone is around. Then I turned and walked toward Washington Square, keeping to the shadows close to the building. I figured I was giving a good imitation of a man acting furtive.

It was good enough for the dark guy. He caught up to me as I was crossing the park. He came up fast behind me and jabbed a gun into my back, hissing, "Keep right on, my friend. You will go with me or I will kill you right here."

It was all very thrilling and quite according to the best detective fiction. I played my part, stiffening up, and glancing around in what I hoped was a scared way into the guy's face.

It was my friend of the St. Ricard, all right, looking very cold and mysterious. He gave me a glint of white teeth under the thin mustache, and said, "You will go quietly, no?"

I corrected him hastily, "But, yes, pal. You've got me. I don't crave to die."

He said thinly, "You are a very wise man."

We had no more conversation for awhile after that. We just waltzed across the park and caught a cab heading up Fifth. We left the cab on Riverside Drive, entered a rococco dump and rode on the elevator up to the tenth floor.

The dark lad had a cozy little nest. As we came in I noticed the quiet of the place. The joint was well-built, as well as cozy. I was willing to bet that it was very nearly soundproof.

There was a big desk across the room with a cone of light shining down from the parchment shade of a bridge lamp. In the light was lying what was left of a porcelain dog. It had been smashed under the lamp. The pieces told the story. Something had been hidden in the cavity of the porcelain dog. The opening through which the stuff had been inserted must have been filled with something like plaster of paris. I knew then just about what the game was and who my murderer was. There were a few more details I needed. I figured I'd get them if I stuck around.

The dark lad looked at the broken dog, too, and his lips parted in an ugly expression.

I said, "So Andrews took the dog home. You followed and socked him, then found out he had worked a shift before you got to him. You shouldn't have been so damned quick to bump him off."

ALL this time I was still hugging the bag of waxed fruit. Now he jerked it away from me and reached out and put it on the desk. Then he started going over me for a weapon. When he didn't find one he went behind the desk, saying harshly, "I'd like to know how you found out."

I just grinned at him as he rolled the fruit out on the desk. "Mind if I sit down?" I asked. And when he made no answer I sat down in a chair facing him across the desk.

The dark lad placed his gun down carefully beside him where he could make a quick grab. His eyes glittered as he reached out for one of the wax oranges.

I knew there would be a blowoff in a few minutes, so I got ready for it. Crossing my legs, I held the gun between them and stretched a little. When the string snapped I pulled my feet in close and let the gun slide down slowly and come to rest between them. I felt better with it there.

The guy started to split the wax orange with a heavy knife. Boy, was he going to get a surprise when he sliced up all that fruit and found nothing. I leaned forward a little, all set to go for the gun between my feet just when it was called for.

Oh, yeah, he was going to get a surprise. That's what I thought as I leaned forward watching the knife cut through the wax orange, and keeping one eye on the gun beside him.

The knife sunk just so far and then stopped. I could see the dark lad's eyes glitter and strain pull his lips away from his teeth. He twisted the knife, the wax orange split apart, and did he get a surprise?

He did not? It was me who froze with my jaw sagging, and forgot all about the gun below. The biggest ruby I ever saw in my life rolled out onto the desk. In fact, I never knew rubies came so big. And, knowing a little about the worth of such gems I knew I was looking at a sizeable fortune in one little hunk.

I was off balance. But the dark lad wasn't. He gave me one of his darting

glances and reached for a wax apple. That one was a dud. So were the next two. Then he hit another orange with the second ruby. He took four of the red stones out and settled back in the chair with a sigh before I got over the shock of being the little lad to blindly pick Andrews' cache. The guy had dug out the wax oranges and apples, slipped the rubies in, and poured melted wax back in. And he had done a job so neat and workmanlike as to be unnoticeable.

I knew it was then or never. As the dark lad settled back in the chair I bent over and went for the gun.

I had figured the boy for a fast one. But I never knew anyone could move as fast as that boy did then. His hand moved with the speed of a striking snake. He scooped up the gun and pulled the trigger all in one blindingly fast motion.

I kept right on going down. Even at that, the slug just missed parting my hair. I hit the floor, rolled over and threw a slug in his direction. Only he wasn't there to take it. He was crouched somewhere behind the big flat desk.

He was cold and crafty as well as fast. While you could count ten he made no move, no sound. Sweat sprang out on my forehead and trickled down my face.

I knew that when he did move it would be with the same speed with which he had gone after his gun.

I'd seen plenty of action in my time; played hide-and-seek with death; been jammed in some tight corners. But, there in that room, with the dark lad on the other side of the desk, I knew I would never be in a tighter jam. The guy was just plain, stark jungle ferocity and guile. The sweat on my brow was from the terrific tension of nerves and muscles that braced themselves for the shock of lead.

Then I got a break. One of those lucky breaks that you do nothing to deserve. The guy was ten times as clever as I was; cleverer and cunning and more efficient. I just had a streak of luck. He was wearing spats. I saw one of them as a foot twisted. I could tell by the position of the foot at the corner of the desk that he was going to leap out shooting.

My reflexes were right or I wouldn't be telling about it now. I saw the spat and threw a slug at it in the same split second. The guy yelped. But he didn't cave. It would take more than a shattered ankle to stop him. He dived forward, his gun spouting lead.

He fired twice, shots that came too damned close for comfort, before I made a ringer on the side of his head.

I was climbing to my feet when a voice, very low and steady said, "Hold it just like that, bud."

I guess I blinked. The guy had come into the apartment with the noise of the guns covering any sound he made. To me it was just as though he drifted in like smoke and took shape in front of me.

HE WAS a big guy with very level gray eyes and a clipper jaw. The gun in his hand looked as carelessly efficient as the dark lad's speed. Behind him I saw a stir of movement in the hallway. The guy had reinforcements, not that he needed them, the way I was fixed. I let the gun in my hand fall with a thud.

The big guy said, in a calm and easy voice, "You are a very lucky boy, Odlum, to be living after a gun battle with Gregor. It's the first time Gregor ever lost."

"And it'll be the last time, if that's

any consolation," I commented, with a certain amount of relief getting into my voice.

The big guy grinned. "Relax, brother. I don't think you and I have any argument."

I scowled at him. He made me mad, being so cool and calm and confident, while I was still keyed up like a fiddle string. "How the hell do you happen to know me? Who are you?"

"The name is Wilson. George Wilson. I'm with Continental Idemnity. We were working on this end to head off some stolen rubies that Countess Gradowski was smuggling into the country. She was working with Andrews. Gregor was cutting in. He got to Andrews last night and killed him."

"Can you prove that, big boy?" I asked. "Can you prove that this guy did the job?"

He just nodded. "I was in Andrews' apartment right on Gregor's heels; missed him by less than five minutes. Andrews was dead then. Getliffe didn't call till later. And, by the way, it was Gregor who called him and told him to go over to Andrews' apartment. I was busy tailing Gregor and let the police business wait."

The stir of movement behind Wilson moved into the room and became the gal with the provocative optics. I grinned and said, "Ah, the Countess' French maid."

The gal smiled back and said, "Nuts to that French stuff. The home address is Brooklyn."

Wilson explained, "We jockeyed her into the job with the Countess in Paris. She makes a damned good Frenchwoman at that. She spotted the porcelain dog and tipped us off. But Andrews moved too fast for us. We just got wise to Gregor." He glanced at the dead man. "Just a little late."

"The guy moved too fast for all of us." I added.

Wilson came forward and poked at the rubies with the muzzle of his gun. His eyes were gleaming.

My voice got hard, as I watched him, "How the hell do I know you're on the level. You could be another guy like Gregor."

"I'll call the cops and invite them over if that will help convince you," Wilson said.

He turned his head, "Call Headquarters, Cynthia, and tell the boys to come over. Tell them, incidentally, to have Countess Gradowski picked up at the St. Ricard."

"Also," I added, "ask for a big Irish mutt named Slade, Lieutenant Slade. Tell him to turn Getliffe loose before all the publicity in the world breaks over his head."

While she was phoning I kept saying, "Cynthia. Cynthia. That's a swell name."

She heard me and gave me another of her smiles. Now that I looked closer her eyes didn't look French at all. They just looked very nice and gave me all sorts of ideas.

After she had called the cops, I took over the telephone and called the reporters. After all, a guy has got to look after his publicity if he expects business to keep rolling in. Publicity had gotten me this job and I'd earned a grand very quickly.

Thinking of the grand gave me other ideas. "How about Continental Idemnity? Do I get some kind of a break from them?"

Wilson nodded. "I'll see that you get a cut of the reward money. After all you spotted the Andrews' hiding place. How did you happen to locate them?" He nodded at the rubies.

I tried to look mysterious and se-

cretive and what you might call, astute, as I said, "You'll never know. After all I can't give away all my professional secrets."

Then I went back to my original question. "A cut of the reward money is all very nice. I can always use the money. But I also meant something else. How would Continental Idemnity look on an attempt of mine to date up an operative?"

Wilson gave me just the faintest glimmer of a smile. "In such matters," he said dryly, "we leave all decisions up to the individual operative. Take it up with Miss Grover."

Miss Grover said brightly, "Cynthia to boys in the trade," and smiled.

Then I heard the sirens coming and said, "As soon as we get through with the boys I have a proposition."

I sat back and waited. I figured I was sitting very pretty indeed. I met Cynthia's smile and was more and more sure of it.

Later I was positive.

Next Week

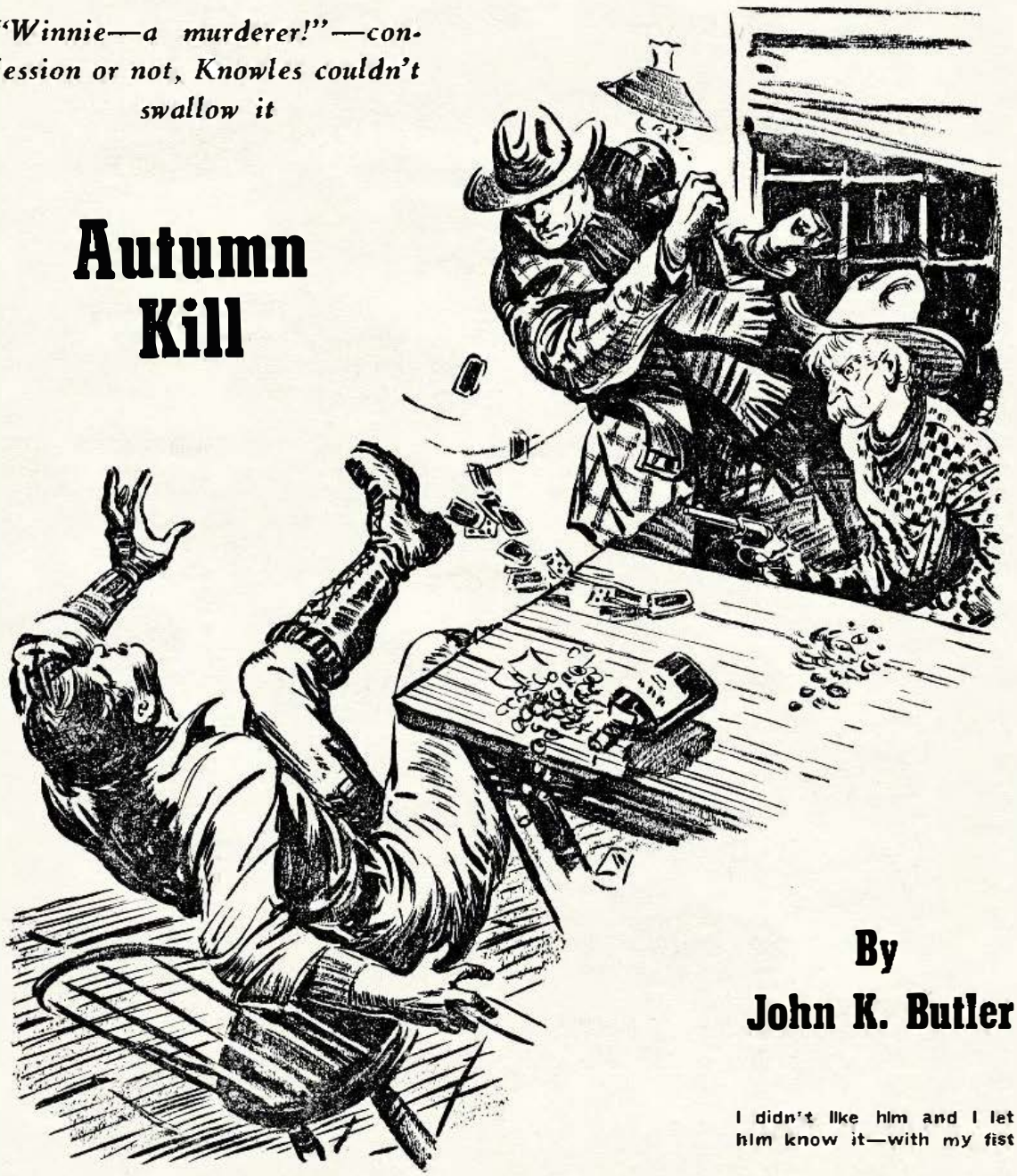
A New "Happy" Story

Grand Marshal McGonigle

By PAUL ALLENBY

"Winnie—a murderer!"—confession or not, Knowles couldn't swallow it

Autumn Kill



By John K. Butler

I didn't like him and I let him know it—with my fist

I

YOU know what it's like in the San Diablo Mountains in late October; heavy thunder-heads dark over the ridges, moving toward each other in military masses; the collision of clouds, with bright lightning flashes, distant rumble of thunder, and rain and wind lashing the big pines.

My cabin on the North Shore looked out over the lake, and I sat at the window, by the stove, and watched the rain come smoking through the trees, and I wondered if it was like this down below . . . a hundred miles away, six thousand feet lower, at the State Capitol. It might be storming there too, the wind howling around the stone and steel of the Prison for Women, and

Winnie Ruth Barclay might be looking out at this same storm. Looking out and waiting. Waiting for them to come and get her. Two days more . . .

I kept the radio on despite storm static, and I finally got the news flash and the one important item I was tense to hear.

"Today," the announcer said, "a woman sits in a death cell awaiting execution. Once more the lawyers representing Winnie Ruth Barclay have failed to secure the Governor's reprieve, and Winnie Ruth has forty-eight hours yet to live. In forty-eight hours this blonde tigress who murdered her husband in a lonely cabin in the San Diablo Mountains will become the second woman put to death for homicide in the history of this state. Today, at noon, Mrs. Barclay exhibited calm. 'I am not afraid to die,' she said. For breakfast, Mrs. Barclay had two cups of coffee, but refused anything more. She refused to pose for photographers and refused all interviews. However, it is learned from reliable sources that Mrs. Barclay's blonde dangerous beauty has not been altered by the knowledge of her fate. . . ."

I snapped off the radio, angrily and silently cursed the ghoulish news mongers who couldn't leave her alone, who weren't satisfied with her confession, her conviction, her sentence, who had to torture her, and torment her, and fictionize her, before they put her to death.

I couldn't get Winnie out of my mind. I couldn't rid myself of the mental pictures of what would happen to her in only forty-eight hours.

Winnie walking to her death . . . the prison matrons with her, holding her, and Winnie kind of sagging in their arms. The priest chanting. The electrodes attached to her ankles, her wrists, her forehead. A switch thrown on, and the sudden smell of burning flesh, like singed meat. The black cap tight over her face, and her slim body fighting against the straps. Lights in the prison wink low. A reporter faints. No sound but the whirr of electricity sputtering into her body, jolting her and burning her in the chair, and always the steady monotone of the priest. . . .

It was all too vivid in my mind. I could see it, and hear it, and smell it; and I couldn't stand any more thought of it, so I put on my mackinaw, my hat and slammed out the cabin door into the rain.

I got my car started, and drove around the lake, to the village.

YOU know the village—the type, I mean. A few log stores with steep roofs, facing each other across the muddy road. Lots of activity in summer vacation time, but nothing doing after September, and now most of the stores had windows boarded against winter snows, and the whole settlement appeared as deserted and bleak as a Nevada ghost town.

But Barney's was open, and I waded through mud and went inside.

The pot-belly stove glowed red-hot, and Wilbur Reed, the bartender, was sitting close to it and cleaning his fingernails. He glanced up with surprise.

"Why, hello, Mr. Knowles!"

"Hello, Wilbur."

We shook hands and he went around behind the bar and got down a bottle of cognac.

"When did you get back, Mr. Knowles?"

"This morning. Up here. Got back to the States a couple of days ago. Stopped down at the Prison yesterday."

"Oh," he said, and got a towel and mopped the bar under my glass. "You see Winnie?"

"No," I said. "She didn't want to see anybody."

"Sure," he said, and gave an understanding nod. "It's a lot changed up here since you went away, Mr. Knowles. Lots of things been happening these last two years."

I agreed on that, and we had another drink, and glancing around at the tavern, I found everything the same. Same deer heads on the walls, same snow-shoes crossed over the fireplace. Even the bottles behind the bar seemed the same.

And Wilbur Reed looked the same. A sharp-eyed little man who had been born and raised in these mountains. He was about sixty now, but agile and healthy, and he knew every inch of the mountains. He knew where to hunt deer, and ducks and bear, and he knew the trout streams as well as a guide He also knew every bit of gossip within hundreds of square miles.

"YOU been in China, huh, Mr Knowles?"

He knew that of course, without asking. He knew I'd gone to China two years ago to cover the Oriental war for Associated Press. He knew I'd come back again, with a stake, to settle in my cabin on the north shore of the lake and write another novel which would be another failure. He also knew I'd probably come back on account of Winnie.

He said, "Yes, Mr. Knowles, lots has been happening."

That, of course, was to sound me out. To see how much I knew about it, and if I wanted to talk about it.

"Let's talk frankly," I said.

He shrugged. "I wasn't sure you'd want to talk about it. You was always fond of Winnie. I always figured maybe you'd marry her yourself someday."

"So did I," I said. "Who's this guy she married?"

"Dave Barclay. Didn't you ever know Dave?"

I shook my head.

"A louse. A thorough louse. But he had a smooth front, and I guess that's why Winnie fell for him. That, and I guess Winnie was kind of sore the way you tramped off to China on her. You mind what I'm saying, Mr. Knowles?"

"Go ahead," I said. "Where'd she meet him?"

"Dance one night last spring. Her brother gave her the introduction. You know how she likes her brother. Any friend of her brother is good enough for her. Personally, I don't think so much of the Babe. Never did."

"Let's talk about Barclay," I said. "When did she marry him?"

"July. Right after the Fourth. They took a cabin on Sawtooth Ridge. Hell of a bleak place. That's where she . . . I mean, where he got killed. You object to what I'm saying, Mr. Knowles?"

"Go right ahead," I told him. "Why was her husband a louse?"

"Dave Barclay? Listen, Mr. Knowles, that guy had a reputation from here to Mexico. Card man. Con-man. But kind of a dandy, and kind of smooth with the women. I heard one time about a blackmail job he pulled in Santa Fe. But he was best at cards. Worked with a fellow named Leo Loftus. Little Leo One time there's this game over at the Constable's office. Six men in the game, and Little Leo dealing. Dave Barclay drops three cards for the draw, and holds only an ace and a jack. So Dave draws three cards, and Little Leo deals him two more aces, and another jack.

How you like that? I seen it with my own eyes. Little Leo builds up the bets for him, and together they whipsaw the betting, and then Leo drops out, and Dave Barclay hauls in three grand on a full house—aces over jacks. On a three card draw. How you like it? Arty Curran pulls a .38 revolver and lays it on the table. He's red as a beet. He says to them: 'You get out of here, you lousy rats! Get out and stay out!' "

I said, "Arthur Curran is the manager of the local bank, isn't he?"

"Sure."

"And he was in the game?"

"In that game." Wilbur Reed gave an amused laugh. "Guess it's the last game Arty Curran sat in. He lost a lot of dough in that pot."

"When was this card game?"

"About last January."

"Who was in it?"

"Well, there was Dave and Little Leo. And there was Arty Curran and me. Of course, I got smart and dropped out. There was Ed Joad, and a rancher named Norbert Needham. And Winnie's brother was in it too. The Babe dropped about two hundred dollars in that pot."

"How much did *you* drop, Wilbur?"

He gave a laugh. "I'm just a bartender. Forty cleaned me."

"These poker games been going on for a long time?"

"Years. But that was the last one for Dave Barclay and Little Leo. Up here, that is. Maybe they pulled stuff in other places, but not around here."

"I can understand that," I said. But I was beginning to get an idea. The more I thought of it, the more reasonable it sounded to me.

I said: "If Dave Barclay was a louse like that, with lots of enemies, maybe Winnie Ruth didn't kill him after all."

I wanted to think so, of course. When you loved a woman like I loved Winnie, you *had* to think so.

Wilbur Reed filled the glasses with cognac, and didn't look at me. His face flushed.

"Sure," he said. "I've thought that all along, Mr. Knowles. Never did take much stock in her confession."

He was lying, of course. I felt certain of that. Lying to be kind to me; lying because he knew how I felt about Winnie.

"That confession," I said. "She's still sticking to it?"

"Still."

"Tell me about it."

But he hesitated and glanced down at his feet behind the bar. "Kind of gruesome in the details, Mr. Knowles."

"I can stand it," I told him, and did.

II

ONE month of being married to Dave Barclay—Winnie had confessed—was enough to drive a woman almost mad. He turned out to be a drunkard and a sadist. But she was too proud to leave him; wouldn't go back to her folks and admit they were right when they warned her against the marriage.

A month of terror. Her brother guessed. Saw her several times with bruises; once with a wrenched arm; once with her face bleeding. He tried to talk her into leaving Barclay, and when that wouldn't work, he talked to Barclay. Barclay told him to mind his own business.

One day—August tenth—the wind howled a cold gale over the ridge, and Dave Barclay got drunk and beat Winnie and forced her out of the cabin to to chop wood. He fought her to the chopping block, and she fought back,

with teeth and nails. She seized the axe and swung at him.

The axe split his skull.

Her fright was almost beyond control then.

She had killed a man. Killed her husband.

For a long time she stood and looked at him, and then she knew what she would do.

Cover it.

Protect herself.

Many times she had been on long hikes over the ridge—her walks had become habit—so she knew where Dave kept his bear traps, and now she dragged his dead body six miles over the ridge, through the howling gale, to one of the traps. There she placed his right ankle into the steel jaws, and the great spring snapped with a crunch of ankle bones.

She left him there and returned to the cabin. The wolves would do the rest for her. The wolves would cover her crime.

SHE spent that night sleeplessly in the cabin, and in the morning she drove the car twenty-seven rough miles to the village and told Constable Ed Joad that her hubsand had disappeared while out covering his bear traps. Had not returned.

The Constable immediately organized a search party, and late that afternoon—August 11th—found the body of Dave Barclay in the wilderness, one ankle crushed in the heavy bear trap.

The body was almost beyond recognition. The wolves had torn it in the night. And the obvious assumption was that Dave Barclay had accidentally stepped into one of his own traps, lay there in agony until the wolves came and put an end to his screams.

But Ed Joad had the reputation of being a crafty constable, and he wasn't satisfied with that assumption.

In the first place, Joad reasoned, Dave Barclay hadn't been equipped for a regular trip to his traps. The corduory cap which he always wore was nowhere about, and wolves, their hunger satiated, would hardly carry off a corduroy cap. Also, Barclay hadn't been wearing his boots. Also, there was no rifle around, and a man doesn't cover bear traps without a rifle.

So Joad returned to the Barclay cabin, and after careful investigation, found blood around the chopping block. He took the axe away with him, took it all the way down to the Capitol, and had it chemically examined by the Bureau of Criminology.

No fingerprints were found on it, but under microscopic examination, traces of Barclay's blood showed on the steel blade.

Then Ed Joad ordered an autospy, and from that came proof that Dave Barclay didn't die by the wolves in his own bear trap—as might be assumed. Barclay's skull had been cleaved by an axe. An axe which his wife might have wielded.

They confronted Winnie with that evidence. They stormed her with questions. They had learned from her brother that her life with Dave Barclay had been no bed of roses, and they threw at her all the questions cops can throw, with all the crafty technique, and in the end she confessed. Confessed to the last detail. And stuck to it.

I SAT there at the bar, brooding over the last brandy, and over what Wilbur Reed had told me. The little pot-bellied stove made the place warm, and stuffed deer heads looked down at me from the walls with sad eyes, while outside, the wind moaned loud, and you

could feel icy drafts creeping along the floor.

Wilbur Reed glanced out the window and said: "It's going to get cold tonight, Mr. Knowles. Wouldnt be surprised if this rain turns to snow in the next hour. I've seen it do it before in October."

I stared into my empty brandy glass and asked directly: "What happened to Dave Barclay's partner—this guy *Little Leo?*"

"He's around. Saw him this morning. Kind of drunk. He's living up at Dave's Cabin on the Sawtooth. He thinks somebody else killed Dave. Gets kind of loud-mouthed about it. Thinks he has an idea."

"Maybe he has," I suggested.

"Maybe." The bartender took the bottle and reached for my glass. "Cognac, Mr. Knowles?"

I shook my head. "Is Little Leo up at the cabin?"

"Might be," Reed said. "He was headed there this morning."

"Guess I'll go up and have a talk with him," I said.

"Sure, Mr. Knowles. A good idea." He filled his own glass. "But be careful. These roads are washing out in the storm, and it'll turn to snow."

"I'll be all right," I said. "Go up the road past Baker Lake. Turn up past the old Baker Mine. That the way?"

"That's the way," he nodded. "The cabin's right up on the ridge—just past Eagle Rock."

III

BACK of the village the road wrapped around the end of the lake and snaked along the north shore. The road was skiddy and rough. I drove past the turn-off to my own cabin, and then up a rocky narrow trail toward the Sawtooth, past giant trees with staunch brown trunks, the limbs of them gnarled and grotesque; the tops of them chopped by lightning, broken by gales; all of them battle-scarred from generations of hard weather.

Up on the ridge the wind blasted at my car, fought it, and ice began to form on the glass. On this same ridge, on a clear day, you could see down seven thousand feet into the desert. But on a day like this, you couldn't see anything; you were lucky to even see the road.

I found Dave Barclay's log cabin at the bleak spine of the ridge, and I left my coupé outside near the chopping block, the wood pile, and got out into a blast of wind that cut me with a million icy knives. I turned my coat collar against it, and leaned into it, and struggled up four wooden steps to the front door.

I didn't have to knock.

The front door was wide open and banging inside against the wall, driven by strong drafts.

I went inside and pushed the door closed behind me.

"Leo!" I called. "Leo!"

It was a rustic room with bare floor, a stone fireplace, heavy ceiling beams, local-built furniture, and a little man I guessed to be Leo Loftus lay flat on his back, in the center of it, his eyes wide open and as expressionless as the glass eyes in the stuffed deer-head over the mantel. Both his hands were clamped tight at his abdomen. That had been ripped open by a shotgun. You know what a shotgun can do to a man at close range. He lay flat on his back, eyes staring at nothing. Blood, still sticky wet, was slowly congealing, and his thin hands, wax-like, clutched in a death-grip to a belly that no longer existed.

I glanced around the room.

Logs still smouldered on the hearth. The fat little iron stove was warm, with dying ashes. I bent down and touched him. His body had no life in it. There was no pulse. His wrist was as cold and dead as an old milk-bottle.

I turned my back on him, and wondered where the gun was, and then I saw it on the cot. Double-barrel Iver Johnson, twelve gauge, and a devilishly cruel weapon to use on a man at close range.

I didn't touch it, but I stooped close-over it and sniffed the twin barrels. Recently burned powder was easy to detect. It was the gun that had done it.

A queer chill swept over my body as I stood there; and it occurred to me that I might not be the only living human in this cabin. The shooting hadn't happened very long ago. I hadn't passed anyone on the long twisting road to get here. The killer himself might still be here.

That wasn't a pleasant thought, and my chill turned to a tense shudder when I heard something crash in the kitchen.

For seconds I stood in motionless terror, and then I noticed a small flat pistol on the table by the cot. Colt automatic—.32 caliber. I picked it up and slid back the carriage, and an unfired cartridge popped out and hit the floor with a brisk little thump. I slipped the clip back into the butt, jerked a cartridge into the chamber, and with the gun in my hand I advanced to the kitchen door.

"COME out," I said.

My voice sounded harsh and not too demanding, not too confident. I tried it again.

"Come out!"

No answer, and I began to feel a little silly. Wind howled madly around the cabin, screeched like the cries of a thousand ghosts in flight. I reached out with my left hand, turned the knob, flung the door back so hard it bumped against the inside wall

I saw right away what had made the crash.

A bottle of milk had been knocked off the drainboard, and a furry black cat had followed it to the floor, daintily lapping the spilled milk with a tiny red tongue, cautiously avoiding the jagged bits of glass. The kitchen had no human in it, of course. No lurking killer. Just the cat.

I looked in the storage room, into the narrow bunk room, even went outside and looked into the woodshed and the garage.

No killer.

When I came back into the cabin I was cold, and the gun in my hand had become a lump of steel ice. The black cat meowed at me and brushed against my legs, arching its back. It padded on across the floor, hesitated at the body of Leo Loftus, touched a tiny sensitive nose to it, then retreated in a light scamper to the kitchen and began to lap the remainder of the spilled milk.

I closed the kitchen door.

I looked down again at Leo Loftus.

That wasn't easy on the eyes.

I bent close enough to discover an amazing fact.

The planks on the floor at each side of him had been peppered by shot, while no shot had struck any walls in the room. That meant he'd been blasted with both barrels while lying on his back on the floor. And that was odd!

The room was in good order. No sign of a fight. So how did Leo Loftus happen to be lying on the floor, on his back, when the Iver Johnson exploded both barrels into his intestines?

I didn't know why, and once again

I studied the room for sign of struggle. Still didn't find any.

Except the window.

The window over Leo's head had a pane smashed out of it. That accounted for the icy drafts I had felt creeping over me.

However, that smashed pane wasn't really a sign of struggle. Not just a single pane broken; with the rest of the room in order.

But I kept wondering about it, and then I went outside again.

The wind drove heavy gusts of sleet, made me squint my eyes, and outside I found what had broken the window.

A small copper ashtray. It was lying on the hard wet ground with bits of ragged glass of the pane.

I couldn't see any sense in that. A man faced with sudden death might pick up something and hurl it at the person about to blast him with a shotgun, but he'd pick up some better weapon than a light copper ashtray.

And there was still another thing to consider. The window had been at the back of Leo Loftus—to use the present position of his body as a guide. Therefore, it must have been somebody else who threw the tray. The killer? Hardly. A guy about to blast that double-barrel Iver-Johnson wouldn't take time to flip a flimsy copper tray.

So the broken pane in the window, I reasoned, wasn't a sign of any struggle occurring at the time of Leo's death. It happened before, or after, but not at that time. Or if it did, I couldn't see why.

I realized, of course, that maybe I was making a mountain out of a mole hill. Probably was. The window perhaps had nothing to do with it . . . the hurled ashtray nothing to do with it. That window might have been busted a couple of months ago.

Yet that wasn't so reasonable when you stopped to think of it. Mountain cabins are built to be snug, and on a cold ridge like this you'd seal a broken pane almost as soon as it became broken. Put paper against it . . . something.

Therefore, no matter how you looked at it, the broken pane had something to do with the killing.

Not being a detective by profession, or talent, I decided I'd better return to the village to get some law.

IV

THE San Diablo office of Ed Joad was a cabin twenty feet square, constructed of heavy, hewed logs which had been hacked and locked, pioneer-fashion, at the corners. There was a heavy storm door in the exact front center, and on either side of it plate glass windows bearing large gilt letters.

The lettering on the left window read:

ED JOAD
Constable
Justice of the Peace
Notary Public

The lettering on the other read:

ED JOAD
Real Estate
Insurance

He had always been an enterprising and energetic personality—this Constable—and he had only to move around lazily, in an office twenty-by-twenty, to operate in five different capacities.

When I opened the door and entered, he wasn't operating in any of them. He was asleep on a cot which had been placed against the back wall, dead center in the room. That put him in neutral territory, where he was neither Ed

Joad, the Constable, Ed Joad the Justice, Ed Joad the Notary—nor Ed Joad the real estate broker, nor Ed Joad the insurance underwriter. He was, at this moment, Ed Joad the Man. And he slept heavily and snoringly, flat on his back on the cot, as if long years of inactivity in all five capacities had finally worn him down.

I reached out and tapped his shoulder.

That didn't wake him.

He brushed my hand away, like brushing at a fly which annoyed him in his sleep.

I shook his shoulder, and he sat up suddenly, blinking his eyes.

"Huh? What? What's that you said?"

"I didn't say anything, Ed."

"Oh. Sure. Hello."

Sitting up, rubbing sleepy eyes with boney fists, he finally recognized me.

"Jack," he said. "Jack Knowles. Thought you were in China."

"I was," I said.

"Yeah. Sure."

He yawned and stood up. He worked his jaw, mouthing the bad taste of sleep, and squinted and looked sullen. Then he got a bottle of whiskey out of the desk and took a pull of it.

"Mouth feels like the bottom of a bird cage. Getting old." He gestured with the bottle. "Want a snort?"

He took another man-sized snort, set down the bottle on the desk belonging to Ed Joad, Notary Public, and picked up an iron poker from the desk of Ed Joad, Real Estate Broker, and dabbed at the fire in the stove. The stove was in the territory of Ed Joad, Justice of the Peace, but none of that mattered. He was Ed Joad the Man, waking from deep sleep, and he found the cabin chilly.

"Glad to see you back, Jack," he yawned. "We've had some trouble around here since you went away. Winnie Ruth married a guy named Dave Barclay, and there was some trouble. . . ."

"There's more trouble . . ." I said

That went over his head as if he hadn't heard it. The cabin was cold, and he poked at a fire already roaring fine, and added more fresh wood to it.

I said: "Got another murder case for you, Ed."

The poker stopped prodding the blazing fire in the stove. He turned and stared at me blankly. "Huh?"

"Another murder at Barclay's cabin on the Sawtooth. Only this time Winnie Ruth can't be guilty. She's in a death cell at the State pen. We won't believe her, even if she confesses to this one."

Ed Joad didn't know what I was talking about. He set the poker down, forgot to put the lid on the stove. The fire blazed hot, banked with fresh logs

"What the hell you talking about?"

"Another murder," I said. "Dave Barclay's cabin. Wilbur Reed, over at Barney's Place, told me Dave's old partner, Little Leo Loftus, was living up at the cabin since Dave's death. So I went up there a while ago. Wanted to talk to him."

"Did you?"

"No," I said. "Guy dead on the floor. Belly blown out with both barrels of a twelve gauge Iver-Johnson. Think it happened just a little while before I got there. Think the guy is Little Leo."

The constable scratched the back of his neck with long bony fingers. "You ain't kidding me, huh?"

"Did I ever?"

"No," he said.

He went to the desk which he used in the capacity of constable and opened one of the drawers and took out a gun

belt. The belt was of thick Mexican leather, hand-tooled, with loaded cartridge loops, and an open holster of the kind old-time Westerners wore. There was an ivory-butted Colt .44 in the holster.

A famous gun. Ed Joad's grandfather had used it to clean up mining towns eighty-five years ago. It had the name *Joad* engraved on the fancy carved butt, and that gun was known all over the county; and Ed Joad's marksmanship with it was likewise known.

He cinched the belt about his paunchy middle. The belt sagged on his right hip, and he fastened the bottom of the holster to his thigh with leather thongs. He was one of those old-fashioned gunmen, like his grandfather.

"I'll go up on the ridge and have a look at the trouble." he said. "Wanna come along, Jack?"

"Want me to?"

"It's not necessary," he said, and looked out the window at the driving sleet. "Hell of a rotten day. You can come if you want."

"I'll hang around town," I said.

"Sure. That's all right." He got into a heavy mackinaw, wedged a hat on his gray head. "You better wait around till I come back, Jack. I'll want to talk to you about this."

I gave him a crisp laugh. "You don't think I'll sneak away, do you?"

He returned the laugh cautiously. "Don't be dumb, Jack. It's just that I'll have to talk with you when I get back."

"Sure," I said. "You can find me over at Barney's."

He nodded and went out into the weather to his car. I watched from the window while he drove fast out of the village on the road to the Sawtooth.

Finally I went outside myself.

THE mud on the road through the village oozed up over the soles of my boots, but it was getting thicker with the cold. Probably meant a freeze. The sky had blacked out with low angry clouds, you could hear the rumble of thunder over the ridges. The sleet came down in hard white lines.

I crossed the road, went into Barney's and it was just like before—warm, with the stove going, and the deer heads looking down from the walls. And the crossed snow-shoes, and the smell of wood in the stove mingling with the smell of liquor.

Again it was empty, except for Wilbur Reed, the bartender, who was glancing over a newspaper as he sat slumped in a wooden rocker by the stove.

"Hello, Jack," he said, and folded the paper, and went behind the bar. He got down a bottle of cognac, put out a glass for me. "You look cold as hell, Jack."

"It's cold outside," I said.

"Yeah," he nodded. "Just like I told you. Did you get up on the ridge?"

"Yes," I said.

"See Little Leo?"

"I saw him," I said.

"What did he have to say, Jack?"

"Not very much. In fact he didn't say a single word."

Wilbur Reed didn't get me.

"Leo's like that," he said. "Talks a hell of a lot when he's drunk; says nothing when he's sober. In fact when he's sober, he's just about as silent as a corpse."

He began to talk about the duck shooting on the lake, and about what part of the lake you should go to in order to find the heaviest flights of ducks. He told me he'd only been out twice this season, but he'd gotten the limit each time. He showed me the gun he got them with; something new in

the way of an automatic twelve gauge Remington. I didn't pay much attention, not being interested in fancy guns for killing wild game.

He put the shotgun back under the bar.

"Saw a friend of yours a few minutes ago, Jack."

My eyes asked him who, and he said: "Winnie's brother, the Babe. He was just in here for a few drinks."

"I'd like to see him," I said.

"Well, he's easy to find. Up at his cabin at the end of the street. Playing cards with a rancher named Norbert Needham."

"Needham?" I said. "That name's familiar. Wasn't he a guy you told me about in that big card game last January—with Dave Barclay and Leo?"

"Sure, that's him. Funny old coot. Regular old-fashioned kind of rancher. Rides a horse with a silver mounted saddle; wears chaps, and guns, and stuff. Just like Ken Maynard in the movies. He's a funny old coot, all right."

"Guess I'll drop over and see them," I said.

But I had no definite reasons for seeing them—just something that kept creeping into the back of my mind.

Winnie Ruth hadn't killed Dave Barclay, and she shouldn't go to the chair for it, even with the confession. . . .

I was suffering, of course, with the unsound reason of a man who loves a woman so much he knows she can't be guilty of a crime—even if he saw her commit it.

V

THEY were gambling at the Babe's cabin just the two of them. Cutting the deck for high man at a dime a cut. That's a way to lose money fast. Or win it fast.

I had waded through the thickening mud in the village street to the Babe's cabin, and had seen his Chevrolet roadster parked outside, and a pinto horse standing beside it with head bowed in the driving sleet. A fine horse wearing a silver-mounted saddle and a braided bridle. The reins trailed into the mud.

When I lifted the latch on the cabin door, and walked in, they both glanced up at me from the card table. I saw the deck of cards, the little pile of coins and the bottle of whiskey.

"Hello, Jack," the Babe said.

He was a thin, gangling youth, maybe twenty-three, and he was just old enough to be able to drink and gamble; just old enough to think his behaviour was cute. He had a round pretty face, with a few of the features of his sister. Eyes like his sister; lips like his sister. But his chin was narrow and weak.

"Hello, Babe," I said. Not pleasantly. That was because I didn't like him, never did. And I liked him less now, seeing him sitting there cutting cards, drinking, when his sister didn't have even two more days to live.

The man he was playing with, Norbert Needham, seemed to be quite a mountain character; a tall, lean man who might have spent years on the range herding cattle and fighting range wars. But there were no more range wars; those wars had passed on years ago and were only kept alive in the movies. This Norbert Needham had iron gray hair, a narrow weather-beaten face, and eyes steely and gray. He wore jean pants, the bottoms of them stuffed into high-heeled cowboy boots, and the silver spurs on the boots had little bells on them. His shirt was checked flannel, with big patch pockets on the breast. He wore a pair of six-

shooters in open holsters on each hip.

"Howdy, stranger," he said, and I judged him as some old rancher with a "cowboy complex."

AT THE moment I was concerned only about Winnie's brother, the Babe. It sent me practically off my nut to see him sitting there so callous to his sister's fate. I got him by the collar and dragged him out of the chair. "You rotten little pipsqueak! Your sister only has another day to live. And you sit here playing cards, getting drunk!"

"Go to hell!" the Babe snapped nastily.

I had him by the collar with my left hand, and I brought my right up hard against his mouth. He fell straight backwards over the chair, took it to the floor with him. I rubbed my knuckles and looked down.

He gathered his legs under him, pawed at his split mouth, and when he got up he was swinging the chair.

He threw it hard, but I managed to duck it, and it smashed to pieces against the log wall over my head. He was screaming with rage.

He picked up the quart bottle of whiskey. Holding it by the neck, he had a good weapon. He swung it behind him and was about to break my skull with it.

Then Norbert Needham drew one of his guns with snake-like speed from an open right holster, and fired. The gun made a heavy blast in the cabin. The bottle which the Babe intended to crown me with suddenly exploded in his hand, and whiskey splashed on him, and he was left the neck of a bottle.

Needham said quietly: "Let's not have any trouble here, gentlemen."

The Babe snarled: "You keep out of this, you old fool!"

He hurled the broken neck of the bottle at Needham, but the old man ducked it and smiled, saying again: "Let's not have trouble, gentlemen." He said it kindly, with gentle assurance and firm persuasion, but the Babe ran over to the fireplace where there was a double-barreled Iver Johnson, twelve gauge, on the mantel. He grabbed for it, but the old man's six-shooter blasted again, and the Iver Johnson fell away from the Babe's grasp.

Needham smiled thinly over his smoking revolver. "Let's not have any trouble," he said meekly.

But I could see the Babe was drunk, wanted to fight, and didn't care much whom he fought. So I picked up a broken leg of the chair and crowned him over the head with it.

He went down, and stayed down.

He didn't move.

We stood and looked at him, the cowboy and I, and then Norbert Needham holstered his smoking gun. His face was bland and thin and bony.

I said: "You're pretty good with those six-shooters."

"Thanks, stranger," he said, and reached for his hat, a broad-brimmed sombrero. "I didn't want to hurt anybody. Just didn't want no trouble."

He was a thin, elderly gentleman, polite, with a soft voice, and his cowboy outfit looked ridiculous—like something out of the western movies . . . until you saw him pull his guns. Then he was something real. Almost too fantastic to be real.

I said: "If you'll step across the street with me, we'll have a drink."

He smiled with thin lips, glanced back once at the Babe on the floor, and opened the door into the sleet.

"Many thanks to you," he said, and swung out through the door with his guns riding low on narrow hips, cow-

boy boots sinking deep heels in the mud, Stetson catching the sleet and saving it from his ruddy thin face. "I sometimes take a little nip," he said.

VI

WE STOOD at the bar in Barney's and talked about the Babe's sister, and about Dave Barclay.

"There," he said, "was a varmint of a man, if ever there was one. I think it's a dirty shame this here woman has to go to the chair for killing him. Just goes to show how them rural juries will act. You get a bunch of sour-faced, narrow-minded farmers on a jury, and they'll convict somebody. Specially, they like to convict a young lady like Winnie Ruth, on account of she's young and got brains, and they get mad at her, and jealous, just because she ain't as stupid as they are theirselves."

I nodded at his mountain philosophy.

"Do you believe Winnie Ruth really killed Barclay?"

He stared thoughtfully into his whiskey glass, as if it was a crystal ball. "Yeah. I suppose she did. She confessed to it, all right. But what I don't like is her getting the chair for it. She ought to get a gold medal."

"Maybe she didn't kill Barclay at all," I suggested.

"But she confessed to it. Why would a woman confess to a thing like that if she didn't do it? Why. . . ." He broke off and stared once more into the whiskey. His eyes narrowed. "I see what you mean." His voice had a deep husky sincerity to it now. "Yes, sir, I see what you mean. She might confess in order to save somebody else from getting into trouble over it. A fine young woman like her . . . it's just kind of likely she might do it."

"To cover who?" I asked.

He glanced at me slyly. "I'm never a man to talk opinions unless I'm sure. I'm an old-fashioned kind of man, and I never accuse a person of nothing serious unless I'm so sure of it I'm willing to back up my opinion with gun smoke. But you have give me a kind of idea. I agree with you that maybe the young lady didn't kill her husband."

"Exactly," I said. "That's the theory *I'm* working on."

"You got a personal interest in this, Mr. Knowles?"

"Very personal."

He nodded, and grinned thinly. "Sure, young fella. In my day, I'd feel the same way. If any fellas arrested Ma Needham—that's my wife—I'd go right after 'em with both guns. There's nobody that could take Ma away from Norbert Needham. I don't care whether it's the law, or what. Whenever any fellas bring harm to the lady I love and respect, they gotta take their chances, and they're gonna see a lot of gun smoke, and they're gonna be on the wrong end of the smoke."

Primitive, pioneer philosophy from an old, out-dated man in a ridiculous cowboy outfit. Yet something so sound in him that it cut deep into the veneer of civilized sophistication and made you listen. He was absolutely right. He couldn't be wrong. Winnie Ruth was my own "Ma Needham," and "some fellas intended to bring her harm," and it was my duty, my only course, to "go after them fellas."

This old coot of a Westerner gave me a drive and an impetus that I'd never felt before, and I said to him now: "Thanks."

"That's all right, Mr. Knowles. We old fellas always gotta help the young fellas. That's about all we can do when we get old."

I BEGAN to feel alive and active and ready to go; my blood was charged with electricity that didn't come from brandy at the bar—it came straight from Norbert Needham.

I began to know for sure that Winnie Ruth wouldn't die in an execution chamber, in spite of the plans of the law, in spite of her confession.

I knew it, and felt it with hot-headed confidence. I knew I'd stop the execution, stop it myself, with the kind of action old Norbert Needham described. I knew, figuratively, that a pair of guns would be smoking—mine.

I said: "Look at this angle; Dave Barclay was a varmint—as you so eloquently describe him. That means there's a bunch of people who might have killed him."

"Sure," Needham agreed.

"He was a card player and a cheat, and he made a lot of enemies."

"*I'm* one," Needham said. "That fella took a thousand dollars off me last January in a card game. Him and Little Leo. Arty Curran was in the game, and pulled a gun, and told them to hit saddle leather. I'm a peaceful kind of man, so I didn't draw iron. But I'm telling you this—if them two fellas ever done anything like that again, dealing cards off the bottom, and whip-sawing bets, then I'd draw iron and make smoke."

"Sure," I said.

"This fella Dave Barclay was a varmint, and he deserved what he got. He deserved an axe cleaved into his skull. And somebody's gonna get his partner too. It wouldn't surprise me the least bit if some fella puts an end to Little Leo."

"Some fella already did," I said.

He eyed me slyly, thinking. "Did you say . . ."

"Let it pass," I said. "Fact remains that Dave Barclay and Little Leo worked cards together. They must've collected quite a pile of money. What happened to it?"

"I'd like to know," Needham muttered. "I'd be very much interested to know."

Wilbur Reed, the bartender, filled our glasses with whiskey. I didn't touch mine. I placed a dollar on the bar, and pushed away from it, putting on my hat. Wind and sleet rattled the windows. It was getting dusk outside.

"I'll be going now," I said to Needham. "And thanks for the advice."

He squinted into his whiskey glass, a shrewd, sly old man pondering over a crystal ball, and he called to me briefly over his shoulder.

"Go smoking, young fella. Smoke 'em with both guns . . ."

ARTY CURRAN had rooms over the bank, and I went around the side of the small, log building and climbed steep, sleety stairs and rapped on the door. His voice invited me to enter, and I found him preparing dinner for himself in a narrow little apartment up under the slope of the bank's roof.

"Well, well," he said, with the kind of professional, artificial greeting he habitually used for clients of the bank. His voice was cold and formal as the monthly statement of your checking account.

I said: "May I talk to you a moment, Mr. Curran?"

"Of course. Certainly."

He was a chubby little man, ageless—though probably under fifty—and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles with lenses so thick they gave his eyes an uncanny size. He wore a neat blue business suit, like bank managers wear in metropolitan districts.

"Please be seated, Mr. Knowles," he said.

I didn't sit down. "You're getting your dinner," I said, "and I won't keep you a second. Try to play all my cards in a hurry. Here's the point—I don't think Winnie Ruth Barclay really killed her husband; I've only got a few hours left to prove it.

"She confessed, Mr. Knowles"—a bank manager's factual statement.

"I don't believe it," I said. "Barclay was a rat. Lots of people could have killed him. She could have confessed to save somebody else."

He studied me shrewdly through the thick lens of his spectacles. "That's true, of course. It's possible, of course. But the law proved her guilty and sentenced her to the death penalty."

"The law has made one or two mistakes in the past," I reminded him, "and maybe the law's about to make another. Anyway, I choose to think so." I leveled a finger at him. "Look, there's a bunch of people who had motive to kill Dave Barclay; I'm running down the motives. And I think I've got an idea."

He moistened his lips with his tongue. "You have?"

"I have. In the first place, Dave Barclay was something of a professional gambler. Worked with a partner named Little Leo. They operated around this part of the country quite a bit. Played for big stakes. And gamblers like that carry around a lot of money. Cash. In big games, and small games, they exhibit currency and silver. Better than checks, because it removes the possibility of suspicion. Also, the shelling out of real United States dollars had a psychological influence on the players. Makes them greedy for it."

"Yes?" He waited politely for me to go on.

"I want to find out how much money Dave Barclay and Little Leo handled through your bank in the last few years."

His eyes narrowed and glanced away. He took the scornful attitude of a doctor who has just been asked to perform an illegal operation.

"That's unethical, Mr. Knowles."

"I don't give a damn about ethics. A woman's life is at stake, and when I ask questions I want answers. How much money did Barclay and Loftus handle through your branch bank?"

"I can't answer that, Mr. Knowles. The bank always respects the confidence of its depositors."

"You're a very ethical bank manager," I said.

"Yes, Mr. Knowles."

"Then maybe," I said, "you wouldn't like the directors of your bank to learn that you play cards in off-business hours."

He snaked the tip of his tongue over his lips, moistening them. "What's that?"

"Depositors of a bank never like to feel that an employee spends his spare time gambling. It gives them a suspicion that maybe the employee is sneaking a little money out of the till to finance his gambling. The directors of banks know that fact, and they usually dismiss any employees who gamble."

Curran's eyes bulged large behind the thick-lensed spectacles. "Do you mean to imply that I gamble?"

"I do," I said.

"That's a rotten lie, Mr. Knowles!"

"I don't think so, Mr. Curran. For instance, there was a little game last January. Barclay and Leo Loftus were in it. Over at the constables office. Wilbur Reed was in it. Also a man named Norbert Needham. Also Winnie Ruth's brother. Also *you.*"

His face got as white as baker's dough, and then it began to flush. "I hope you won't misunderstand me," he said.

"I hope the directors of the bank won't misunderstand you, I countered. "Now listen, my chubby pal, unless you give me the information I want—straight and fast—there's going to be a vacancy in the manager's position at the local branch of the San Diablo Bank."

PERSPIRATION formed in tiny beads on his forehead, and he dabbed at it daintily with a silk handkerchief, tried to smile. "Well, Mr. Knowles, in a case like this . . . in such a case . . . I must give you the information you desire."

"Exactly," I said.

He swallowed. "There isn't much I can tell you. Neither Mr. Barclay nor Mr. Loftus were ever depositors in the bank. They kept no money in it at any time."

"Safe deposit?"

"No, not even that. They only came to the bank to cash checks which various local citizens had given to them in poker games."

"Where do you think they kept their money?"

He shrugged. "Just kept it, I guess. Gamblers usually carry a large amount of cash."

I said: "When Winnie Ruth was arrested for the murder of her husband, she didn't say anything about any large amount of money, did she?"

"No," he said. His eyes became shrewd. "There was never any intimation that she killed him for his money."

"She didn't," I assured him.

"Do you think . . . ?"

"Never mind what I think," I said. "You're only in a position to answer questions—not ask them. Will you swear to me that neither Barclay nor his partner ever banked any money with you?"

"I swear it," he said.

"If you're lying to me, you can start looking for another job."

He shuddered with shock. "I'm certainly not lying to you, Mr. Knowles. In a case like this, I'm forced to take you into my confidence, even over bank ethics. I can only trust that you'll say nothing of that little poker game last January. After all, it was just a friendly little game."

I got up and buttoned my mackinaw and slapped on my hat. It was dark outside, and he guided me down the steps with the yellow beam of a flashlight. He was very courteous to me now.

VII

THE constable and Doc Miller brought Leo Loftus' body back from the Sawtooth at about ten that night. They took it directly to Miller's Clinic, and since I was waiting over at Joad's office, I didn't see them till nearly eleven. At that time I dropped into Barney's for a hot toddy, and they had both just gone in there for the same.

"Well," Joad said, "it was a shotgun that done it all right."

"That twelve gauge on the sofa?"

He shrugged. "No way of proving it."

I mentioned that when I had sniffed the barrels I'd felt positive they'd recently been fired.

"Sure," he said, "but that's no definite proof it's the same gun. And maybe we won't ever get none, either. A shotgun ain't like a revolver or a rifle; you can't get a ballistics report on a shotgun."

I hadn't thought of that. But it oc-

curred to me that it might be an important point. Maybe the killer had employed a shotgun so there *wouldn't* be a ballistics report. I mentioned that to Ed Joad.

"It's an idea," he agreed. "But it don't do us much good." His eyes narrowed a little as he studied my face over the mug of hot whiskey. "They tell me you've been barging around town asking people questions."

"Yes," I said.

"Why?"

"Because I don't think Winnie Ruth ever killed her husband."

"You got any concrete reasons for thinking she didn't?"

"Not yet. That's what I'm looking for."

"You like that girl, huh?"

I admitted it, and he put me through so many questions that he soon knew every step I'd taken from the time I'd left the China boat, gone to the state prison to try to see Winnie, arrived here in the mountains, and finally discovered the body of Loftus. I had no reason for not telling him all of it, of course.

He listened attentively, and so did the others — Wilbur Reed, drying glasses behind the bar; Norbert Needham staring into his whiskey; Arthur Curran, in a fur overcoat, sipping a sweet Italian liqueur at the far end of the bar. And Doc Miller listened attentively, too. He was a thin, sad-eyed little man who had been the one doctor up here in the mountains over the last twenty years. I remembered that he'd once saved the life of a man named Loftus in an emergency operation—appendicitis. This Leo Loftus, recently deceased, might be the same man.

While I was handing back to Ed Joad the automatic I'd carried away from the cabin on the Sawtooth, Winnie's brother came in. He was hatless, a bandage on his head where I'd clouted him. His eyes flamed when he saw me, and he removed his coat, threw it to the floor and took a swing at me.

I ducked, and at the same time Ed Joad caught his arm. The Babe was still drunk. He wriggled away from the constable's grasp and took another hefty swing at me. I tilted my jaw away from it, but his fist crashed against my shoulder so hard it knocked me back against the bar.

Then Ed Joad had him in check, wrestling him toward the door. The Babe cursed and struggled every inch of the way, kicking at Joad's shins But the constable had amazing strength, and he pitched the Babe out on the sidewalk, hurled his coat after him, saying: "You mind your P's and Q's, young fella, or I'll lock you up for disturbing the peace, and assault and battery!"

He slammed the door against the Babe's profanity, turned to me. "Mr. Needham was telling me you took a poke at that brat a while ago. Don't blame you much. The way that kid carries on when his sister's headed for the chair . . . it's a disgrace." And he added: "I won't be needing you any more tonight, Mr. Knowles—if you want to go home and get some sleep."

Sleep? I didn't see how I could get any; not with the hours shortening to that fatal one when they'd lead Winnie Ruth into the execution chamber. I had the idea that I must keep moving, asking questions, doing lots, working fast —yet what was there I could do? I seemed stalemated. I thought perhaps it wouldnt be a bad idea to return to my cabin. Maybe if I sat and thought about it, weighed it, I might come out with "guns smokin'." I had to. Each tick of the big clock over the bar gave

me a jolt. Time advancing ruthlessly. Ticking seconds building into minutes. Minutes into hours. . . .

"Guess I'll take your suggestion," I told Joad.

"Sure. In the morning, early, I'll come over for you. Want to go back up on the Sawtooth and go over the ground with you, Mr. Knowles. In the meantime, I intend to try for fingerprints on that shotgun."

"You ought to fingerprint the whole cabin up there," I said.

"Sure. In the morning."

MY CABIN was icy cold when I got there. It was shortly after midnight, and the stove had gone out long hours ago. I built up a roaring fire and sat close to it with my mackinaw on until the heat soaked into me and thawed the chill. Then I made a pot of coffee and sat there thinking about the killing of Dave Barclay and the more recent killing of Little Leo Loftus, trying to find a line of reasoning which might connect them. I drank cup after cup of coffee, smoked a pipe with each cup, but when the old clock on the table chimed four, I had gotten nowhere . . . except I was beginning to get on the track of an idea.

I got up then and turned out the Coleman lamp and sat in the darkness absolute, except for the faint reddish glow from the stove and the flicker of fire in the cracks of the iron plates. The wind screeched incessantly outside and attacked the windows in violent gusts. Finally one of the gusts concentrated on the door, rattled it, thumped it. The thumps got louder, sharper, and after some seconds I realized it was someone knocking—not the wind.

I yelled: "Wait a minute!" but my voice probably didn't carry outside to the person in the gale. I groped for the table, pumped up the Coleman, put a match to it. The interior of the cabin became bright with the white light of the lamp, and in that light I had the luckiest break of my life.

I saw in an instant the shadow at the window, saw the gun barrel jab through a pane of glass. I had my right hand on the lamp and I flung it with all my strength. At the same time I flung myself to the floor; toward the window; under it.

The lamp smashed more panes out of the window in a crash that blended with the explosion of both barrels of the shotgun. The lamp went on through and outside. There was no flicker of light from it. The cabin was in darkness again, and the last clatter and tinkle of falling glass died away, leaving only a kind of memory of it in my ears, and the sharp blasting memory of the shotgun.

For seconds I lay motionless on the floor under the window. Then I began to crawl by cautious inches along the wall to the far corner of the room. I found my deer rifle in its rack, a Winchester 30-30. I knew it was loaded, that I only had to jack a cartridge into the firing chamber. I wondered where my flashlight was.

All this time there was no sound outside, except the screech of the gale. The cabin chilled rapidly with the icy drafts coming in the broken window. I kept groping for the flashlight, and, in the dark, discovered my stainless steel tobacco humidor. It weighed several pounds and I threw it across the room just as hard as I'd thrown the lamp. When it struck the opposite wall, the thump was loud enough to be heard outside, but nobody shot at the sound.

That relieved my tension a little, and I moved cautiously around the room until I located the flashlight. Then I

groped to the back door, opened it, and went out into the freezing night.

I stood for some seconds with my back flat against the outside log wall of the cabin. Through the noise of the gale, I heard a car starting, and heard it go away in low gear. The sound came from about a hundred yards down the road.

I ran in that direction, not on the road, but cutting out through the pines, straight through the forest. My boots skidded and slipped on the mat of wet needles, and twice I almost went down.

Half a mile away, the car was just a dark shadow among darker shadows, shooting twin beams of light ahead of it into the sleet. You couldn't tell at that distance whether it was a coupé, roadster, or ten-ton truck. I gave up and returned toward the cabin.

Nobody shot at me.

VIII

WHEN daybreak came the wind had stopped, and snow was falling. A covering of cold white lay an inch deep along the road and on the slopes, and the tall trees had cold powdery puffs on their branches.

I was just finishing a hasty breakfast when a sedan came down the road, clanking skid chains. It swung around in front of the cabin, stopped, and the horn tooted. I opened the door and called a greeting to Ed Joad.

"Come along," he said. "Let's get going."

"Better stop a minute," I suggested.

He shook his head without moving from behind the steering wheel. "Can't do it. If we don't get up on that Sawtooth and back in the next hour, we maybe can't do it at all. Not in a car. This might be the snow that lasts all winter."

"Somebody tried to kill me with a shotgun last night," I said.

That brought him out of the car. He shut off the motor as he stepped out, and he came lumbering around the sedan, a big, tall man with heavy boots laced to his knees and red, wool socks rolled down over the tops of them. He wore a coat as heavy as a horse blanket, and a flat-brimmed Stetson like the Forest Rangers. Snow powdered gently on his shoulders and the brim of the Stetson. Snow crunched up around his boots.

"What's that you say, Mr. Knowles? Something about somebody trying to kill you last night?"

I pointed to the broken window.

"What the hell did that?" he asked.

I told him, and he listened attentively, and then said: "Well, there's one good thing about it . . . this shotgun artist is still hanging around somewhere here in the mountains. And he can't get out of San Diablo now. Snow fell heavy on the main road last night; snow and land-slides. Anybody up in the mountains last night is gonna have to stay here another eight or ten hours till the State Highway fellas get that road cleared."

I said: "Eight or ten hours isn't much." I was thinking about Winnie Ruth, of course, and about her date with death. Her date with the electric chair. We didn't have much time left.

Ed Joad said: "Wonder why any fella would want to try to kill *you*, Mr. Knowles?"

"Maybe because I was asking too many questions up in town last night."

"That's possible, all right."

"It goes to show what I've been trying to tell you before, Ed. Winnie Ruth didn't ever kill Dave Barclay."

"Not so sure of that," he said. "This is the Leo Loftus case we're working

on. It doesn't have to have any connection with that other thing."

"Doesn't have to . . . but maybe it *does.*"

"Yes," he nodded. "Maybe."

I said: "Look. Ed; there's still a good chance we can trace this killer. Maybe he doesn't leave any ballistics report behind him, using a shotgun, but he leaves another kind of report."

"What's that?"

"Tire tracks," I said. "Look, Ed—the guy that came here last night to kill me, came in a car. In the storm I couldn't tag it. But it tagged itself. It left tire tracks in the road. Now the snow has covered the tracks, frozen them, and all we have to do is scoop off the snow, and we've got the tracks."

"You got something there, Mr. Knowles."

"Then," I went on, "we go up to that cabin on the Sawtooth and look for more tire tracks frozen under the snow. The same car was probably used by the killer when he went up there to kill Leo Loftus. See what I mean?"

"By golly!" he said, and rubbed a big gloved fist into a big gloved palm.

"Then," I said, "we only have to check the tires on the cars up at the village. We'll find the car we want inside of a few hours. It can't get away, on account of the main highway being blocked."

I was excited, tense; he was calm. He said: "We got to go up and check them tire marks on the ridge before we check these here ones outside your cabin."

"Why?"

"Because the snow is getting deeper all the time. If we don't get up there fast, we're gonna be snowed off the ridge. Let's get going, Mr. Knowles."

So we jumped into his sedan and were on our way.

WE GOT there before mid-morning. The cabin where Dave Barclay and Winnie Ruth had honeymooned, where Dave had died by axe, where Little Leo Loftus had died by shotgun, had snow on its roof, and powdery snow was several inches deep outside on the slopes. The snow kept falling fast and steadily, crowding us for time.

We piled out of the sedan and waded through snow and entered the cold cabin.

There was a stove shovel near the fireplace, and I handed it to the constable. "You're the first snow-digger. When you came up here late yesterday afternoon you made some tracks. Remember where you drove, and don't dig there. You know your own tires; we want some other tires."

"Sure," Joad said. "And there's another thing. Doc Miller drove his own car up here yesterday when I called him to pick up the body. He drives a model T. We got to ignore *his* tracks, too."

"And mine," I added. "You have to remember that I drove here in a car, too."

"And we have to remember that there's another road down off the ridge to the village. When I came up the road from the lake, the killer probably heard me, and he drove away on the other. That's our best bet for getting the tire tracks."

"Sure," he said.

The cabin was as cold as an old barn, as deserted as a haunted house. You could see the stains of blood on the floor, the tiny holes of shotgun lead where Little Leo Loftus had been killed. Everything about the place was just like I'd found it, except that the body had been removed, and the black cat was gone.

Wind came in the broken window, the one broken by a copper ashtray, and the iron of the stove was as cold as black ice.

A dead man's house.

And the constable and I were alone in it, pondering means for catching a killer.

Snow blew through the broken window in gentle flurries. The cold was intense. I crumpled up some newspapers and put them in the stove, put in some kindling, struck a match.

"Might as well have a little fire," I said.

That was innocent enough.

The constable smiled at me.

His smile wasn't pleasant.

"Look, Ed," I said, "in finding this killer, we only have to narrow it down to a few guys. The guys in town last night. The guys who knew I was asking too many questions."

"Yes," he said.

"Winnie's brother, the Babe, Arthur Curran, that softy banker who likes to gamble. Norbert Needham, the phony cowboy. Wilbur Reed, the bartender at Barney's. Doc Miller, who took care of the body for you. And . . ."

"Yes?" Ed Joad asked.

His smile still wasn't pleasant.

He stood spread-legged, the black revolver riding low outside his heavy coat.

I had been about to put a log into the stove; and the stove and the log and his face suddenly told me the answer.

"Hell, Ed . . ."

I had gone into this with innocence, complete innocence, and when I saw it now, it took me by surprise.

It didn't take Ed Joad by surprise.

He clasped fat hands behind his neck. "You're fast on thinking, Mr. Knowles. Me, I'm fast on the draw. Watch this."

His hands, clasped at his neck, broke away; his body crouched. In an amazing synchronization of muscular movement, his right hand snapped the gun from its holster, fired it.

Gunpowder scorched my face.

The bullet missed me by inches, punched a hole in the stove-pipe just over my head.

I didn't move, didn't duck.

Maybe I just flinched a little.

"You've got me, Ed," I said.

His smile turned into a sneer. The sound of his revolver made echoes over the ridge, outside the lonely cabin, in the light fall of snow. He holstered the gun again.

"I didn't try to kill you with that one," he said.

"Sure," I said limply.

My knees felt weak; my stomach was crawling up with sickness into my mouth.

"You've been doing too much thinking, Knowles," he said.

"You have to kill me, Ed?"

"Yes," he said. "Guess I do. I'm kind of sorry about it, Knowles. But I guess that's the way it has to be. . . ."

IX

WE LOOKED at each other across ten feet of floor, in a lonely cabin on a lonely ridge. Two men had died at this cabin before. There would be a third—me!

"Don't do it, Ed!" I begged him. "You don't want to add up another kill, do you?"

"At this stage of the game, it doesn't matter," he said quietly. "But I don't much like to do it, on account of, really, you beat me."

"I beat you?"

"Yeah, you out-figured me. You guessed the answers. Me, I'm just kill-

ing you on account of I have to, but I don't get much satisfaction out of it. And I gotta ask you one thing: *how did you figure me?"*

I thought that over before I answered, and couldn't see anything to do but tell him.

"It's like a tough problem in mathematics," I said. "You see a bunch of figures—so many they confuse you—but finally you see a clue to the problem, and it all falls into place."

"Such as what?"

"Well, I grabbed the idea that Winnie Ruth didn't kill Dave Barclay. I didn't know who did, and I couldn't guess, so I started with guessing *why,* instead of *who.* Dave and his partner were a couple of wise guys; crooks, card-sharks. They cleaned out a lot of guys up here, took a lot of money. And I found out they didn't bank their winnings; they kept them on tap. I found that out from Arthur Curran, the bank manager."

"So what, Mr. Knowles?"

"So I went ahead on the assumption that Dave Barclay got killed in revenge over a poker game and because somebody up here in the San Diablo Mountains wanted a loss back. Might be anybody in that poker game last January. Might be Curran himself, or Wilbur Reed, or Winnie's brother, or Norbert Needham, or Leo Loftus, or *you."*

"Go on from there," he said.

"I'm going on. I reduced it down to those few guys just on a gamble, and a lot of figures went jumping through my noggin. Just jumping. Then a few moments ago I saw the answer."

Ed Joad smiled unpleasantly. "That's just what I'm waiting to hear."

"I'll go back to the beginning again," I said, "back to that poker game last January. You lost a lot of money in that game, Ed. The other boys lost too. But you got especially mad when you found out Dave Barclay and Leo Loftus were dealing off the bottom. You had one idea—to get your money back.

"In the meantime, along came summer, and Dave Barclay married Winnie Ruth, and they honeymooned in this cabin. You heard stories about how they didn't get along together, but maybe you didn't have murder in your eye, not then."

"No?" he asked bitterly.

"No, not then. But in the beginning of August you found out where Dave Barclay kept his money, and on the tenth of August you came up here to see him. You wanted your losses back. You argued with Dave."

"That's right," he admitted flatly.

"You argued with him out there by the woodpile. Over money; over crooked card games. He pulled a gun on you. You grabbed up the axe and cleaved his skull with it."

My mouth was feeling a little dry. I didn't know at what moment he might snap out his gun and put a finish to me. But I went on.

"Some of this is guessing, of course. I don't know if you really got your money back or not."

"I got it," he said. "And your guessing is damned good. Guess some more."

"The rest isn't guessing," I said. "After you killed Dave with the axe, you tried to figure out how you'd cover yourself. You thought it over. His wife wasn't there. She'd gone out on a long walk over the mountains, and you'd heard about her walks before, and about how much trouble she'd been having with Dave. Maybe you could not only cover yourself, but let somebody else take the rap. So that's the way you worked."

Joad sat down in a chair by the stove, listening, but the holster con-

taining the black Colt was ready to his right hand.

"Go right on, Mr. Knowles."

"You wiped off the axe, since you might have left fingerprints on it, and you concealed your car, and then you carried Barclay's body over the ridge until you found one of his bear traps. You crushed his ankle in one of the traps and left him there. Then you came back to this cabin."

JOAD cocked an eyebrow scornfully. *"Then,* Mr. Knowles?"

"Dave's wife was still away on her walk. That made everything fine. You got into your car and scrammed out, and you stood on a pat hand till the next day when Winnie Ruth came to town and told you her husband had vanished."

"Yes," he said, nodding.

"So then you played the big shot constable. You organized a search party; and the party finally located Daves' body in a bear trap on the ridge. Worked over by wolves. You were set to let it go at that, except that Doc Miller might find out, from examination of the body, that Dave's skull had been cleaved, and that he really didn't die in the bear trap by wolves. So you got smart. You played the big shot constable, and you *discovered* Dave Barclay had been murdered. You even *discovered* he'd been killed by an axe. You even traced your own murder method, and that was damned smart. It left you in the clear, of course. It made you the hot-shot constable."

"Yes?"

"And then you got a swell break of luck. You'd arrested Winnie Ruth as a suspect in the murder of her husband, and Winnie Ruth had a brother-complex. She loved her brother, and she knew the Babe had already made drunken threats at Dave, and she thought the Babe had done the killing. So Winnie confessed to the crime. Thought she was saving her brother—but all the time she's unconsciously saving *you.* And you played into it, and you let her get convicted. Let her get sentenced to the chair for your own job."

He smiled at me with that hard bitter smile. "You're quite the two-for-a-penny Sherlock Holmes."

I said: "It's about the murder of Leo Loftus that really tipped me. I figured Leo's death was somehow connected with the death of Dave Barclay. And that holds water, too. It goes this way: Little Leo did some fast thinking after that fatal day of August tenth, and Little Leo figured that one of you boys in the card game last January was guilty of killing Dave and stealing the card money. Little Leo does some mental sleuthing, and he finally traces it down to our dear constable. He faces you with it. He wants hush money. So you decide you'll have to kill him to shut him up. And you did."

"Yes, Mr. Knowles?"

"I'll give you the gruesome details," I said. "You came up here to the cabin to argue out blackmail with Little Leo. You met him face to face, but you couldn't talk turkey with him, and he maybe started to fight; so you snaked out your gun and shot him in the belly. A revolver bullet sent him to the floor."

"He was killed by a shotgun," Ed Joad said. "You told me that yourself."

"Not a shotgun," I corrected. *"Revolver. Yours.* You shot him straight through the belly with it, and he fell. The slug went clean through him and punched a hole in that window over his head.

"You were in a tough spot, then. You'd shot him with your own gun,

and that gun is famous in the San Diablo Mountains. The State cops would get a ballistics report on the slug that went through Leo's belly and on outside where it probably stuck in a tree. You couldn't afford to risk a ballistics expert report. So you picked up a double-barrel Iver Johnson, a twelve gauge duck gun belonging to Little Leo, and you shot him in the belly with both barrels, and nearly cut him in half.

"Shrewd thinking," I continued. "A bullet from a revolver can be traced; a bunch of pellets from a shotgun can't. So you covered your first bullet from the revolver by a double-barrel blast from the Iver Johnson. That's why I was able to see that Little Leo had been blasted *after* he lay on his back on the floor. That's why I saw the pellet marks in the floor planks. You'd already plugged him with a revolver, but you were covering it up with a shotgun. It was a good trick. Only one thing went sour."

"What went sour?" he demanded sulkily.

"The revolver bullet that went through him, and punched a hole in the window, left a hole in the glass that any moron could detect as a bullet hole. So you picked up a copper ashtray and broke the entire pane of glass out. That's how you intended to hide the first bullet."

Joad said: "So you nailed me on account of that, huh?"

"No," I said. "That came later. I really nailed you because of a little matter of a fire in a stove."

"A stove?"

"Yes, Ed. You overlooked a little trick. When I went down to your office yesterday afternoon, you were sound asleep on your cot. You were even snoring. But the fire in your stove had a fresh log in it, blazing merrily, and if you were really asleep, then *who* put the last log in the stove? See what I mean? You'd only just come from killing Leo Loftus. You were only pretending to be asleep."

"Yes," he admitted, smiling scornfully.

"And after I told you Leo Loftus was dead, you went outside and started your car. It started right away. Motor must have been warm. Car couldn't have been standing there very long in the sleet. See what I mean?"

"Yes," he said.

"And then this business of shooting at me in my own cabin last night. That was *you*. You figured I was getting too warm. You didn't want me to examine the tire tracks, because I might find only yours. So you bluffed me into coming up here, where you planned another kill . . . *me* this time."

"Yes," he said.

"Why kill me? I'm not just pleading for my own life; I'm pleading for Winnie Ruth. I'm all that stands between Winnie and the chair!"

"Yes," he said, undaunted.

"You're an officer of the law," I begged, "and a married man, and you can't let Winnie Ruth Barclay go to the chair for a crime she didn't commit. She thinks she's protecting her brother. But she'll die without protecting him. It's you she's protecting and she's not aware of it. If you have any guts, Ed, you won't let an innocent woman die."

He said sneeringly: "Are you talking for yourself, or for Winnie?"

X

I WENT to the broken window and looked out. It was the luckiest break of my life, and, of course, I didn't expect it.

I just walked to the window with the idea I might jump out of it and try to escape from the guns of Ed Joad. I had nothing else on my mind when I glanced out and saw Norbert Needham crouching directly beneath the window-sill, in a gentle fall of snow, his right eye closed in a wink to me, a finger pressed to thin lips. And a hundred yards further on, his saddle-horse standing under a giant pine.

Seeing him at that moment was like seeing Santa Claus on Christmas Eve . . . there he was, a lean old fellow, in that ridiculous cowboy suit, covered with a mantle of snow.

I turned quickly from the window and faced Ed Joad.

He said: "I hate to kill you like this, when you ain't fighting. But I guess I gotta do it, Knowles."

"Let's go outside," I said. "Give me a chance to run. Like a Mexican execution."

He thought that over. No doubt it sounded silly to him, since he could drop me easily while I ran, but at the same time there was an element in it that he liked. He was having difficulty bringing himself to kill me in cold blood, even knowing it had to be, and it probably occurred to him that if I ran I became a sort of wild game, with a chance in a thousand, like a fleeing deer, and that chance in a thousand would be his sub-conscious justification for a nasty shooting.

"All right," he said, and reached for the door latch.

That's what I wanted. I'd been stalling for it.

He opened the door and a gust of snow blew in, and a tall lean man suddenly filled the doorway, facing him. The constable jumped back and stood against the far wall, his right hand jerking instinctively to the butt of his revolver. He didn't draw it out though.

"Hello, Ed," said Needham. He was casual, loose-jointed, and at ease, a pair of holstered guns on his hips, and he stepped on into the cabin as easily as a man enters a saloon for a few drinks. He smiled and closed the door against the wind. "What seems to be the trouble here, gentlemen?"

The constable finally found his voice, but it wasn't a firm convincing voice. It had fear in it. "What the hell you doing up here, Bert? You kind of scared us, walking right in like that."

Needham gave me a sly, friendly wink, shrugged narrow shoulders. "I just figured maybe I'd amble up here today."

"What for?"

Needham got out his sack of tobacco, cigarette papers, and slowly began to build a yellow cigarette, using both hands. His fingers were long and bony, and he kept watching them build the cigarette, paying no attention now to Ed Joad.

"Well," he said. "I'll tell you how it is, Mr. Constable. I been kind of wondering about them two gamblers getting killed. Dave Barclay and Leo Loftus. I been wondering what happened to all them gambling winnings they must've had on 'em when they died. So I just sort of ambled up here, me and my horse, to take a look around. And then, riding up the slope, I hear this pistol shot. So I swing down from my saddle and come up here to the window stealthy-like. I'm a curious kind of man. Whenever I hear a shot, I always wanna go see what it is."

Joad's face got pale. I'd never seen a face get so ghastly. "You've been outside that window?"

Needham nodded, fingers busy with the cigarette. "Sure. The young fella seen me. Didn't you, young fella?"

I DIDN'T say anything. Neither did Joad; but the knuckles of his right fist got white as he clung to his revolver. I wondered tensely at what second he would draw it, and I guess Norbert Needham wondered too, though the old man made no display of wondering. He didn't even seem to be looking at Joad as he said: "I think you're a dirty varmint and a skunk, Ed. Not just killing them two fellas, but letting a fine upright young lady get in serious trouble over it, and then wanting to kill this here young fella." He said that without emotion, said it quietly, just stating what he believed unalterable fact. "Yes, Ed, I think you're a rotten skunk. This young fella, he's sort of a city fella. Works for them newspapers. Just a kid. He don't know nothing about gun fighting, and it's no fair fight if you start blazing him. So me, I figure to sit in the game and play the rest of the kid's hand for him."

Joad snapped: "You get the hell out of here, you crazy old coot!"

Needham chuckled pleasantly and lit his cigarette. "You sure got a mean disposition, Ed. Now me and the kid, we're gonna take you back to the village, and we'll phone Judge Blake at the Capitol, and you'll do a little talking about things. Straighten everything out."

Joad's mouth curled into a tight sneer. "Suppose I won't go."

"Then I guess you'll have to start makin' a little gun-smoke, Ed."

Joad attempted to explain something about splitting money with Needham. I knew by his eyes that it was only a stall to set Needham off guard. I started to call a warning, grabbed for the stove poker, and I saw the action only out of the corner of an eye.

Joad's right hand jerked up.

At the same time, as though one man pressed all triggers, Norbert Needham fired both his own revolvers. I hadn't seen him draw them; too quick. One second he stood there, fingering a yellow cigarette; the next, he crouched low to the floor, tense, a gun in each hand, both of them roaring.

Joad went down as if someone had struck him with a sledge. He went down with a groan, and I jumped over to him with the poker ready—but I didn't have to use the poker. He lay still, only his legs thrashing mechanically, and his gun had fallen beyond his reach. I kicked it still farther, then whirled to Needham.

"Hell! If this guy dies before we get him to the village, before he talks, it shoots our chances to save Winnie!"

Needham was standing upright again, loose-jointed, at ease. Both his Colts were back in their holsters and he was leisurely building another yellow cigarette while a gentle eddy of gunpowder swirled around him in the draft. He winked and said:

"Nothin' to worry about, young fella. Ed won't die. I placed my shots kind of careful-like."

* * *

Late that night, down at the State Women's Prison, I waited in the cell with Winnie, waited for the *stay* to come in.

Finally the warden came along the corridor smiling cheerfully.

Winnie listened to the news that she wouldn't have to die for a crime she didn't commit, and then she kissed me on the nose, and hugged the warden, and she only managed to say one single word before she fainted.

She said: "Gosh!"

"Goin' rabbit huntin', maybe?" one of the thugs whined

Summer's End

By William Manners

NATURE was playing the bully. A big bully of sun and endless heat; of flat-bottomed, mocking gray clouds. It wasn't picking on someone its size in Jim Schlieper, standing in his east corn field, fighting it with bent, straining body and a little hoe.

He straightened. His forearm moved mechanically across his wet forehead. The sun overhead was white, squashed out and quivering in its own heat. Jim looked at it, at the clouds crouched along the horizon. His eyes moved as his forearm had just moved, out of habit, a habit strengthened by endless repetitions.

He'd tell his brother to get out, he was thinking. To get out. A man can stand only so much. . . .

And then he marched down the rows of corn, their premature tassles at his knees. Down the yellow, clod-paved aisles. He was thinking of Bernice now. That laughing sparkle in her eyes. He'd seen it again that noon. He'd just washed up, and was drying himself, still standing there under the catalpa tree, when the truck pulled up the road.

A wild one they called Bernice, and Jim's brother, sleek, dangerous, was the type to bring that wildness out

She'd been to Greeley; she'd come toward him with two big bags of groceries in her arms. It was then he saw her eyes. Big. Brown. Those of a youngster caught in a cooky jar. He was afraid. He turned his head and there was his brother, on the flagstone beside the pump.

His brother—Garrote McGee, Johnny Wilson, Abe Fineberg, Abe Fine, The Piecewood Kid. . . .

All afternoon, working under the burning sun, he'd talked to himself, thinking of it. Words he'd say to his brother. He wouldn't let him do this to him. He wouldn't let him take Bernice. If there'd only have been a baby, if there'd only be money now, that would hold her. The same words over and over again to make his tongue strong, so that when the time came he'd be able to say them. Get out, he'd say. Get out.

He walked along the fence. Slid down the clay bank. Cut across the meadow. His heavy shoes were on the cinder road now, crunching loud in the stillness with each step. He held the hoe at his side like a rifle. He moved like a soldier advancing over No Man's Land. He'd waited long enough, he was thinking. Maybe too long. Clear out, he'd say.

Between the brown-weathered barns. Around the empty silo. Across the flagstones.

There was a steel scraper at the porch's edge. He ran the soles and heels of his shoes aimlessly over it. Noticing that he was still carrying the hoe, he leaned it against the trellised pillar of the porch. Then he went through the screen door and into the kitchen.

HE STOPPED inside the door. The high-ceilinged kitchen, long and wide, with the giant, black coal stove, the varnished kitchen cabinet, the geraniums in the window that Bernice watered even though the cisterns were dry and the wells low.

The kitchen was too quiet. A fly buzzed through a sunbeam. The clock ticked loudly, importantly.

"Bernice," Jim called out with tentative restraint. He walked across the linoleum. "Bee . . . Bee . . .!" He stopped at the dining room door, turned and came back into the kitchen.

The milk bottle, empty and in the center of the kitchen table, caught his eye. There was a piece of paper under it.

Standing there, looking down, he read it. He read it as if he had read it many times before, as if he were obliged to read it. His eyes remained on the penciled lines after he had finished.

Jim dear,

I've gone off with John. Forgive me for hurting you. It's the only way that's clear to me, to the happiness I've always wanted.

His eyes moved down now to his wife's name signed at the bottom of the note, and John's name under it in bold, mocking, ribald scrawl.

Months ago, Jim might have let out an animal cry, gone racing in pursuit. But this was September. The sun had melted ferocity out of him. All that was left of him was a little dot in the fields, a little dot that scratched the earth in abject supplication and entreaty, day after day, day after day.

Jim picked up the sheet of paper and walked about the house holding it in his hand. He did not blame Bernice. She was a smart girl; she always knew what she was doing. You can't blame a person fleeing from a burning build-

ing—this house, these fields, his life, they were a burning building. Winter was running toward him, and his house with its bare shelves, its empty smokehouse, its barren cellar.

A burning building. The words obliterated time and space, spotlighted a night in his memory. It was the night the tenement on East Eleventh Street burned. His mother and father—his stepfather really—had been trapped in that fire. His stepfather, a bawling hulk with a fleshy face. He spoke German. When he was angry, however, and wanted to be certain that he was understood, he yelled in English.

John stayed on in New York after that. He hadn't taken it the way Jim had. John was hard; he was like his father. Jim was a male image of his mother, soft, easy going, kind. A Saint Bernard. John was a bulldog mixed with wolf and fox.

Jim landed in Greeley, Ohio, because he was walking across the country and was tired and the man who'd given him his last hitch also offered him a job. He worked in the general store for eight months. Then in the Challenge Gas Station. Then for old man Atkinson, in his abbatoir at the south end of town. And then he met Bernice.

For years, while he was yet a kid in New York, he'd said that some day he would be a farmer. And now that he'd met Bernice, and had saved every cent he possibly could out of his earnings, he bought this little farm . . . a house, outbuildings, scattered fruit trees, forty acres, ten in woodland. And a mortgage was thrown in as part of the transaction.

He never dreamed, let alone dared to hope, that Bernice would marry him. She was beautiful. He was fat, clumsy . . . a nobody trying to be a farmer. The talk around Greeley, that she was a wild one didn't escape his ears. A hundred fellows were courting her, all at the same time. She danced at the Redmen's with strangers. All this merely made Jim all the more self-conscious, and all the more miserable because she was so far beyond him.

But his awkward, groping advances were miracles. Bernice fell in love with him and they were married. All the others had been good-time fellows, unimportant episodes in her life. Jim was big and serious, the only man she could love, marry, and help build a home. That was the way she put it.

NOW Jim walked about in the big, empty, silent house. The note from Bernice still in his hands. Walked as though the house was a part of Bernice, and being a part of her, he wanted to be near it, in every part of it.

When they had come up the hill together, and she had seen it for the first time, she cried out, her hands clasped in excitement: "What a huge place!" She laughed then. "What a huge family of kids it'll take to fill it." That sparkle, mischievous, bright as a morning star, was in her eyes when she had said that. It was the first time he had seen it. It hadn't frightened him that time.

But he saw it many times after that. The time she spoke of going to the World's Fair, forgetting the financial impossibility of such a trip. The evenings he'd look up from his paper to see her huddled over a detective story, her eyes wide, shining. She read thousands of them. The day the plane flying over their farm circled, its engine missing fire, and then seemingly getting out of its spasm, shooting away and out of sight. . . .

She's a wild one, the people in Greeley said. But he only laughed at them and their tepid standards. Bernice was

vibrant with life; a robin with spring surging inside. Beside her, he was a gray clod of earth in the field. That was what made him afraid. How could she love him? Every day that she spent with him was a heavenly gift. Every day, every single day.

Cruelly his memory brought Jim to the present. The day, a week ago, his brother had come, come to stay awhile. Bernice was surprised; she didn't know that Jim had a brother. He covered his confusion with silence. And when she wanted to know what he did for a living, he lied to her, told her that he was a traveling salesman.

It didn't take the polished John, in his tailored clothes, a very long time. You could see he liked Bernice . . . in his way. And she—he didn't want to think about that. And then this noon, when she'd come back from Greeley, her eyes sparkling with joyous, excited fire. And the note . . .

This note. Jim looked at it, watched it as it dropped from his fingers, floated easily to the floor.

The shotgun, with the initials *J. S.* on its stock, rested on wooden pegs in the wall of the hallway. Long strides took Jim's hands to it. He walked out of the screen door with it. A hot dusk filled the back porch.

Tomorrow would be Sunday, he thought. Long, empty, painfully meaningless hours. Not Sunday alone, but all days. He'd go to Sunset Rock. Together they had watched many a day end there. It would be the right place —Sunset Rock. . . .

Shadows sprang out at him as he went down the road between the barns. The gun was wrenched out of his hands. "He's goin' rabbit huntin'," a voice laughed. "Rabbit hunting."

Jim struggled in the arms that were around him. They came off him. His heart pounded. He stood back, breathing hard. The three men were around him.

"Take it easy, brother," the man at his right said, impatience making a whine of his voice. "Easy. Easy. We want some information, that's all."

Jim looked at them. Between their heads he saw the hood of a car, its engine purring.

"We're looking for a certain party. We gotta get in touch with him. He's stayin' with you. Detroit's a long ways to come. Well . . . ?"

Jim said: "There's no one here. The house is empty."

The three men jostled past him. He stood there without moving. Lights blinked on, one after another, in all the windows of the house. He stood there looking at the windows, listening to the echoing tramp of feet moving across the floors inside.

Then the meaning of these three men broke through his daze, splashed cold reality into his face. Bernice was in danger! These men were killers! They were out hunting John! They wanted to kill him! Bullets would be flying everywhere! Bernice . . . !

The three men came out of the house. "We got a bum tip, mister. Excuse please." They went by him. They slid into the car, which backed, turned. Its headlight beams flashed over him. The car straightened. roared straight ahead.

THERE was no daze in Jim's mind now. It was cold and clear as a frosty morning. He had to get to Bernice. He had to take her away from John. Those were orders he gave himself. Greeley. The Redmen's Hall. This was Saturday night. Maybe . . . maybe. It was a long shot, but there was no other choice.

The truck tore over the two and

a half miles to Greeley. Down Eastman Street, over to Main and the dance hall. The place was a noisy jam, with music blaring proudly, triumphantly above it all. Fellows and girls sat in the opened windows. They filled the hall and the stairs leading to the second floor.

Jim pushed his way in and up the stairs. A young girl giggled at his set face. He moved along the bar, searching faces, out on the crowded dance floor, around its rim. The number finished with a double toot on the trombone signifying an intermission. Jim hurried to the stand. The musicians were putting their instruments down and standing up.

"Mrs. Schlieper!" he called out loudly. "Bernice! Bernice!"

Faces turned and looked up at him. Jim stood there, waiting.

He stepped down and across toward the door. The bartender called to him, finished putting a wine bottle on the shelf behind him. "Your missus was here earlier in the evenin'," he said. "Sport she was with said something 'bout goin' over to Elmwood, over to the Bordertown night club they got over there."

"Thanks, Ed," Jim said. "Thanks."

He turned, only to face the three who were out hunting John. They wore new clothes. They stood stiffly. "Say, Ed, what did this lady's boy friend look like?" one of them asked.

The bartender told them. He leaned on the bar and went into details.

One of the three, shorter than the others, a dent across the bridge of his nose, stepped up close to Jim. The bar was against Jim's back. He couldn't get away from the slap that caught him hard across the cheek and mouth. It came again, landing on the same place Jim took it. The other two stood there, ready to back the play of the fellow with the banged-up nose, if Jim should be fool enough to make that necessary. That was plain. Satisfied, they turned and left.

Then Jim was racing down the stairs and into his truck. The shotgun was in the seat beside him. Though he knew following these men was hopeless, what else could he do? Perhaps John and Bernice hadn't stayed at the Bordertown. His prayer was made of that hope.

He pushed the truck to the limit, crossed the Pennsylvania state line and entered the village of Elmwood. He couldn't see the other car in the wide, empty street.

Then, as he crossed the double railroad tracks, he saw it. The car was coming back. It whizzed by. Jim's body chilled into a single piece of ice, for he knew what that meant. They had already seen John. Their murder visit was over. John was dead—killed. And Bernice. . . .

But then he saw the prowl cars ahead. They were a pure white. Lined along the curb, they reflected the glint of red and green and blue neon that ran up and down the gables of the Bordertown.

"Thank God!" Jim exclaimed. Those three hard men in new clothes who'd come to murder John . . . one look at the white cars of the law and they'd been frightened off. Or was that it? "Oh, God!"

Jim hurried out of the truck, ran across the walk and down the tree-bordered path that led to the night club. State troopers were at its double doors.

One of them stepped in his way. "Not so fast! What's the matter there, mister? Where yuh goin'?"

"My wife!" Jim gasped, out of

breath. He could feel his heart pounding hollowly inside him. "My wife! She—she's in there."

"Jim!"

The trooper turned at the shrill shout behind him. Jim dashed past him into the amber light of the foyer and into Bernice's arms. Tears were running down his cheeks. He held Bernice with both arms tight about her.

OVER her shoulder, he saw a police officer, gold braid on his coat. "She's a swell little lady," the officer said, nodding his head. "You got a swell little lady."

Beyond him, on the small rectangle of dance floor, was John. He was alive. He was bent forward in a straight-backed chair; his black hair, usually plastered into one solid piece, was mussed into wildness now. There was a circle of troopers about him.

The officer was rambling on: "Can you imagine her nabbing the Piecework Kid, and all by herself? Can you tie that? And him a guy that put the three McGovern boys to the wall up in Detroit, blastin' 'em down!"

"Let's get out of here," said Jim. "Let's get out of this place."

Bernice's tiny hand was on his arm. "But, Jim—wait a minute. I've got to see the officer. It's something about some money we get."

Jim was glad to get out of the Bordertown. Bernice stepped up beside him in the truck. Softly he put his fingers to the curve of her cheeks. She was here beside him. Alive. Real. Taking her into his arms, his lips met hers.

"I had to write that note, dear," she was saying. "It was the only way to trap him."

"Trap him? You mean, trap John?"

"I knew all about him the first night he came," she said excitedly. "He tried to kiss me. And I gave him a good stiff punch in the jaw. But he got ahold of me. Squeezed up against him. I felt the gun under his arm. I recognized him then. The Piecework Kid. I'd read lots about him in magazines. How he didn't like women. Or liquor. Said that in his business you had to leave them both alone."

"Darling," Jim said proudly, happily.

"Honestly, Jim, you didn't want to turn him in did you? You couldn't; he was your brother. But I knew what you thought."

"I don't know what I wanted to do. I just didn't want him around. I didn't want to have anything to do with it."

Bernice made a small-girl display of twisting her shoulders proudly. "May I brag?" she asked. "Thanks. Well, this woman-hater went wild about me. Said I wasn't a lot of chrome and blond upholstery like the other women he knew . . . those are his own words. So I eloped with him, and got him out here for a drink in my honor. A whiskey sour . . . then another one. I knew he couldn't take it, because he wasn't a drinker. Then he had a Tom Collins, I believe it was, on top of that. He asked for that one himself."

"He surely must have been drunk!"

"I told the waiter to phone for the state cop then. Of course I knew about the reward—that's really why I did it, that's why I had to do it. This morning when I was at Greeley. . . ."

"You're wonderful, darling," Jim said, putting his cheek to hers.

"Jim dear, will you listen to me? This morning when I was at Greeley, Doc Moorhead . . . Jim dear, we're going to have a little Jim."

Her eyes were sparkling in that way again.

A True Story

"How do you know it's human flesh?" he demanded

Honeymoon at Eastbourne

By Dugal O'Liam

HE MIGHT have been Basil Rathbone soaking up atmosphere for his Sherlock Holmes parts. A Moriarty, for example, or a Hound of the Baskervilles.

And why not? He was tall and gaunt and impeccably attired and his long, aquiline nose divided deep set eyes that brooded beneath heavily arched brows.

Moreover, he sat in a chief inspector's office and drummed with nervous fingers on a littered desk top and swore wordlessly behind his even, white teeth.

He was Chief Inspector Percy Savage of the Yard and he was wondering why everything happened to him at once and why it was that handsome young wives became inarticulate when something a bit unusual happened to them.

There was the case of Mrs. Patrick Herbert Logan of Pagoda Avenue, Kew, who was this very moment sitting across from him. Mrs. Logan had nothing else in all the world to become excited about except a railway checkroom stub and she had to come in and worry him about it.

"Why did you bring it to me?" Inspector Savage asked her, as gently as his feelings would permit.

"Oh—these things make me creepy." the woman said. "It always seems that they should be taken to the police."

"And you found it in the street?" Savage said.

"Just as I turned into Pagoda Ave-

she said. "I asked my husband what to do with it and he said to take it to the Waterloo station, where it comes from. But I felt creepy about it. Bodies and things like that being found all the time. It gives one the creeps, it does."

Now obviously this was a woman with nothing to conceal and doing an excellent job of it. There was nothing in her manner to indicate anything other than a too deep absorption in the wilder criminal news reports of the day and a predilection for horror movies and mystery novels.

Scotland Yard got a lot of them, harmless, neurotic creatures who saw in every bit of pasteboard, or every stray piece of human attire, or every abandoned hat box or portmanteau, a mystery as grisly as all the genius of the diabolical Landru and the bizarre Professor Moriarty, combined, could cook up.

"Your husband told you to take it to the station," he said as the woman nodded excited verification. "Well, then, you should have taken it to the station. Someone'll probably pop up there and try to claim the bag without it and then there'll be a rigamarole . . . and all because you didn't do what your husband told you to do."

The woman, crestfallen, looked helplessly around her. But she wasn't ready to give up yet. The more the pity. If she had, she might have been spared enduring heartache. But she had sensed the kill, she had had a taste of being a part of a mystery, she had felt the blood tingling in her veins and she didn't propose to be denied her thrill so easily.

"I shan't be taking it there," she said. "I want no part of it. It's creepy, that's what it is. It's lost property and I've taken it to the police where lost property should be taken—to the Yard. Now you've got it. I wash my hands of it . . . but if you should need me, you have my address."

Inspector Savage bade the woman "good day." He rang for a subaltern and explained the check stub. He pointed out that it was from the Waterloo station in London and that it had been issued a week before, in April of 1924.

"Make the routine check," he said. "Someone's probably called for it already. Put it in your rounds book."

INSPECTOR SAVAGE was ready to get back to more important things. His regular afternoon game of draughts, for instance. But it was not to be. This was his busy day and his business was featured, it seemed, by women. For even as he settled himself behind his desk and prepared to take up some papers, a second woman, not so young as the first, and somewhat bleak of countenance, was announced.

She was a tall woman, erect and white-faced. She was attired in a severe mode, something on the order of the nurses in some of the more subdued London hospitals, or perhaps after the manner of a governess in a middling well-to-do household that believed in conservatism.

"It's about my chum," the woman said. "She's disappeared."

"How long ago?" Inspector Savage said. Women who had everything disappearing from pet rabbits to old maid aunts seemed to pick on him, too. If this made one, it made ten such cases he'd had in a week and every last one of them had been as routine as bubble and squeak.

"Ten days ago . . ." the bleak woman said. "She never went off like that before. She'd been interested in some man,

but I didn't expect this. Really, I didn't."

"How old was she?" Inspector Savage said.

"Middle thirties," the other said, "but extremely handsome. A very lovely figure and fine face and a most affectionate, but circumspect creature."

"This man?" The Inspector had to ask all the questions somebody else might ask in a pinch. "Did you know him at all?"

"I'd met him," the woman said. "He was handsome and most gracious, probably thirty-four or -five years old and well spoken."

"Do you know what he did?"

"I believe he was a salesman, or perhaps a sales manager," the woman said. "At any rate, he did well and he spent money freely and he met Miss Kaye—my chum's name was Emily Kaye—in an office in Copthall Avenue in this very city of London where she worked."

The Inspector then dutifully took his caller's name and treated himself to the conclusion that an attractive woman in her middle thirties had met an attractive man in his middle thirties and that they had decided on an elopement and would turn up soon. However, this was a case that would require some attention and again he summoned a subaltern and suggested the usual check, plus a report to him and a full posting of the woman's description.

AFTER that it seemed that he surely could relax and enjoy himself berating the thick soup that was passing for weather outside his window, but that wasn't to be either. A detective named Thompson, who had been assigned to the Waterloo station matter, came in and there was something about him that suggested this hadn't been a mere missing checkroom stub, after all.

He was carrying an ordinary brown, gladstone type bag of the kind that sells somewhere down close to the minimum for such bags. It appeared reasonably new, but there were several dark stains on it, where it telescoped at the bottom. The dark stains on a so obviously new bag had first intrigued the attention of Thompson, when he'd gone to Waterloo to make his checkup, and he'd decided to bring the grip in.

Savage surveyed the dark spots and frowned. Thompson went for a series of keys kept convenient for such purposes. None of them fit. A mechanic came up with a hammer, a cold chisel and a screw driver. With this equipment and a hairpin a woman could open the Bank of England, but Inspector Savage and Detective Thompson had no hair pins, so they battered the bag open with what they had.

The interior revealed, first, a strong odor of a certain type of disinfectant used in London copiously at the time. In addition there were two strips of new, white silk, a gay silk scarf and a towel, all of which were spotted by some brownish liquid which might easily have been blood, or might have been the disinfectant.

There were other things in the bag. There was, for example, a pair of pink twill bloomers that had been torn and, in addition, a canvas bag such as is used to carry a tennis racket. The bag obviously held some handled object and Thompson opened it gingerly.

A large meat cleaver, such as would be found in an abbatoir, but seldom in a private home, fell out. It was new, it was spotlessly clean and it was very sharp. Also, it hooked up quickly and completely with the brown stains on the silk, the scarf and the towel.

But that wasn't all that hooked up

with these exhibits. Down in the bottom of the bag, in a corner, Savage saw a brown paper bag. It had been twisted at the top to close it and it obviously contained something.

He opened the bag and found a second bag inside it. Inside that he came upon a sheaf of oiled paper wrapped around a piece of flesh. Pink, fine flesh, like veal, and a very small piece, with no bones in it.

Gone was the disinterest that had gripped Savage when he interviewed Mrs. Logan and Miss Early, chum of Miss Kaye. Gone was the torpor of a miserable, soupy day.

"Get the full description of the Kaye woman, immediately," he told Thompson.

"Shall I summon the other one . . . ?"

"Never mind that now," Savage snapped. "No use to have her on our necks, if this isn't a lead."

Savage studied the piece of flesh, clucking his tongue against his palate. Then he took up the bloomers. He looked for the size number and found it and he checked this against his dimensions chart. Then Thompson came in with the description of Miss Kaye.

"Five feet six," he said. "Weight, one hundred and thirty-two, waist, twenty-eight, hips, thirty-six . . ."

Savage was making comparisons against his own charts. The size of the garment corresponded exactly with the measurements of the missing Emily Kaye.

WITH Thompson, he went at once to the place where Emily Kaye had worked. He contacted her immediate superior there. He discovered that she had been frugal and thrifty and that she was known to have some money in the bank. She also was known to have planned going away for a week-end and, after that, on a trip to America.

Her office, too, had been worried about her, but they knew that she was desperately in love with this handsome salesman of hers and that she might have eloped, so no grave fears were developed. Except, possibly, for her social well-being. Oddly enough, while the suitor had been seen with her in the offices, none remembered his name beyond something that might have been Moran, or even McCann, or McEllvain.

"He was tall," one of the office workers volunteered, "with fine features and hair that had been black, but was graying around the temples, and deep, dark eyes and flashing teeth. He was, in fact, plenty of man to carry off a sweet, sort of sequestered girl like Miss Kaye."

Savage and Thompson went to Miss Early's flat. They found her in, stern and severe and frustrated as ever. She regarded them with dislike, as if she felt they had done nothing about her chum's disappearance and intended to do nothing. When, however, they told her they wanted to ask some questions, she softened.

To begin with, they wanted a photograph, if possible, of the missing woman. Miss Early obliged with several which adequately supported her assertion that Miss Kaye had been a beautiful woman. Her features were daintily chiselled, her hair abundant, her eyes large and finely oval and her chin and mouth cameoesque in their loveliness. She was a woman who would be noticed anywhere.

"Have you any idea where she might have gone with this man?" Savage said. "On that projected little week-end, that is."

"What week-end?" Miss Early demanded, quickly.

"It's all right, we know all about it," Savage said. "She told co-workers she intended going on a week-end and might go to America later. There's no use to hamper us by trying to protect her reputation. No doubt it was a perfectly harmless week-end; certainly her pictures show her to be the acme of respectability."

"She was that," Miss Early said, frigidly. "As for the week-end, I believe she said something about Eastbourne. I'm positive it was Eastbourne."

"Isn't it rather early in the season for a seashore resort?" Thompson said, but Savage had other ideas and signalled Thompson not to press that point. He, on the other hand, suggested that Miss Early might tell them where Miss Kaye had done her banking.

"Then something has happened . . . she is dead," the white-faced woman said, her hands clenching until they showed blue and dead gray. "You know she is."

"We know nothing of the kind," Savage said. "However, if you'll try to be helpful, we have an excellent chance of finding out. Do you know where she banked."

The woman gave them the information and they left the flat.

"A woman like this would be most likely to pick some place such as Eastbourne," Savage said, "because there would be virtually no one there, especially from the city, at this time of year. She wouldn't want to be seen. Besides, the Eastbourne trains come in at Waterloo station."

THE bank was quick and positive with its information, as banks have a habit of being with inspectors from Scotland Yard. Miss Kaye not only banked there, but a week before had drawn $2,000 from her total savings of $3,000 and had intimated that she expected to take a long trip and might be in to draw the remaining two hundred pounds before she left.

"She seemed gay and eager," the bank teller said. "I hope nothing's happened."

"Nothing," Savage said. Scotland Yard can be as evasively taciturn as police anywhere else and usually is.

Savage now had definite reasons for suspecting that Emily Kaye might have met with foul play. He had every reason to believe that the piece of flesh found in the grip could have been human flesh, he visioned the cleaver as at least one of the instruments used in a murder and he saw the two thousand dollars as an adequate attraction for anyone bent on murder.

Together they returned to the Yard. They took the piece of flesh and the soiled towel and strips of soiled silk to the Yard chemists and asked for an early report. It required the chemist a little less than an hour to finish his report. He came back with it, snapped it out in his matter of fact way.

"The stains on the silk and on the towel were made by human blood," he said. "The flesh is human flesh, cut from the thigh of a human being, probably a woman from its soft texture, doubtless within the last week or ten days at the most, the disenfectant having had the effect of preserving it."

Now Savage was active again. He was ready to go to Eastbourne. But first he wanted to talk to the checkroom attendants at Waterloo station. Since they would depart from there for Eastbourne, that was easy. They went to the station. They found the employee who'd received the brown bag. He paled as he saw their badges, but he talked. He hadn't, however, remembered who gave him the bag. He hadn't

even noticed it as unusual. He only became interested in it after he learned that it had been taken to Scotland Yard. He was, indeed, a total loss.

Savage made one more trip to the offices where Emily Kaye had worked. He checked against the memories of her fellow workers and still he got no further information on the identity of her suitor, or his business connection. He went back to Waterloo station with Thompson and they entrained for Eastbourne.

Eastbourne was virtually devoid of visitors. The picturesque old cottages were deserted, or being slicked up for the coming summer rush. All but a few. Some of them were used the year around by the owners. It didn't take long to check the comings and goings of the few year-round inhabitants of the town and certainly no longer to check against the cottages that were or were not occupied.

"Isn't there any cottage here that has been rented recently, for a week-end?" Savage asked the sleepy little registrar.

The registrar scanned his books. He halted an ink-stained finger half way down a final page. Then he looked up over his glasses.

"There's a Mister Mahon here, now and then," he said. "He's been coming to that cottage for several weeks. Brings his wife. Don't know what you'd want of him. They're very respectable."

"They?" Savage said. "Have you seen his wife lately?"

"Sure—of course," the registrar snapped. "We make it a point to mind our own business here, since tourists don't like to be bothered, but I guess I got a right to see her walking to the station with him now and again."

Savage was bewildered. It might readily be that Mahon was in reality McIllvain, or Moran, or McCann, as the fellow workers of Miss Kaye had remembered him. Yet if his wife was still with him, they were up against a *cul de sac* right.

THEY walked down the lane to the cottage indicated as Mahon's. It was a small, stone and stucco house with a high brick and stone and mortar fence about it, a cozy, romantic retreat, indeed.

They knocked at the door. There was movement in the house, but no immediate reply at the door. Savage whacked the knocker down hard against its base. The door opened and a young woman, extremely pretty, stood framed there.

"We're looking for Mr. Mahon's cottage," Savage said.

"This is it," the woman said.

"You're Mrs. Mahon?"

"I am," was the quick answer. "My husband's in the city. He'll be coming along soon."

Savage was flabbergasted. Here was a beautiful girl, but too young to be Emily Kaye. Yet she obviously was Mahon's wife and Emily Kaye wasn't at Eastbourne at all, but off somewhere else—if she still lived.

"Your maiden name . . . was it Kaye?" Savage said, on a long shot.

"It was Duncan," she said. "What is it you want to know. Perhaps I can help you."

"How long have you been married?" Savage then asked, "and where may we reach your husband. We're interested in selling seashore property and understand he may be in the market."

"He's with Consols Automatic Aerators," the woman said. "He's sales manager at the Nanworth Road branch in Sunbury."

"We'll try to reach him there—unless we could interest you in a place

beforehand," Savage said, pleasantly.

"Oh, no, please take it up with him," the woman said and Savage and Thompson left. They went back to the station and entered a return train for London just as it was unloading. Traffic was light. There were, in fact, four passengers getting off at Eastbourne, two women, dowdy women of the settlement, an elderly man, obviously of seafaring vintage, and a tall man, well-dressed and brisk, who set off at a quick walk from the station toward the line of beach cottages.

Back in London Savage called Mrs. Patrick Herbert Logan. She came to his office, agog.

"What did your husband say about your turning that check over to us?" Savage said. "I haven't heard of any domestic violence out Kew way."

"I didn't tell him," she said, giggling. "I knew he'd never like it, after I talked to you I knew he wouldn't. I'd be afraid to tell him. He might leave me."

"He hasn't left you yet," Savage grinned.

"No—not yet," she giggled again.

"Then just don't tell him and I won't," the Inspector said. "Maybe we can have a talk later—with some excitement in it."

"Creepy excitement?" Mrs. Logan said.

"Bloody creepy." Savage promised her and she started back to Pagoda Avenue in Kew, fairly aglow.

Savage went back to Waterloo station. He took the check with him. He asked for the superintendent of the checking booth.

"Have you heard anything about this check today?" Savage said.

"We hear about it every day," the superintendent said. "The same man comes here, as I told you, morning and evening. I keep putting him off."

"What time does he usually come here?" Savage said.

"About eighty-forty in the morning, when the early train comes in, and about shore train time in the evening," the man said. "Like he was stopping off on his way to an office or something."

Savage went to a telephone and called Thompson at the Yard.

"Bring the case out here," he said. "Fix it as near to the way it was, inside, as when we first saw it. Hurry."

Thompson arrived with the case. He had it carefully wrapped. Savage took it to the superintendent. He took the wrapping off. Then he handed the superintendent the check.

"When he comes again," he said, "tell him the check was brought in and that he can have the bag now."

The superintendent nodded and then Savage stationed Thompson to watch the check room. He went back to the Yard to wait developments. Besides, there'd probably be other women there looking for him by now with relatives, chums and luggage to run down.

AT WATERLOO station Thompson took up his weary vigil. It was one of those monotonous jobs that all detectives hate, one of the jobs that takes the romance out of sleuthing. It meant hours of walking and sitting and walking and sitting. Even days, perhaps.

Yet this was one of the most important assignments a detective could have. Even in romance-clothed Scotland Yard. Perseverance, doggedness, exacting attention to detail, these are the foundations of all good detectives and unless they are schooled in them, they never become detectives in the true sense of the word, only policemen saving money on uniforms.

Evening train time came and there

was no sign of a call for the check. Another hour passed, another, another. Ten o'clock came and Savage appeared at the station with a relief man. He sent Thompson home and assigned the relief man to an all night vigil. He wondered how the fact that the check had turned up so long after its owner had been told it was lost would affect his prey. After all, if he was smart, its sudden appearance would be a little questionable. At least to an alert killer.

"Thank God most of those guys who kill women are stupid," Savage said to himself.

Thompson was on the job the next morning. He stayed in the station all day long. He waited until time for the last train to Eastbourne and was prepared for another loathsome evening of monotony. Then he saw a tall man, well-dressed, brisk and handsome, approach the checking window. He looked at the man and wondered where he had seen him.

Then he remembered. He'd seen him getting off the train at Eastbourne as they got on. And a little while before, he'd seen him in the Waterloo station, as he and Savage were talking at the check window. The man hadn't stopped then. He'd seemed about to stop, but had gone quickly on.

He wondered why he'd happened to fail to see the connection on that day they'd gone to the shore. And Savage, too. He'd failed to notice him, or to connect him.

He sidled over to the window. The check boy was calling the superintendent. He saw the superintendent as the superintendent saw him and the man's eyes were afraid and nervous. Thompson walked over toward the gates that led to the Eastbourne train. He saw the superintendent and the well-dressed man talking. Then the superintendent brought out a grip—the brown, inexpensive grip with the stains on it.

The man looked at the grip narrowly, then accepted it, paying the small fee. He came across the station rotunda toward Thompson. At the gate to the Eastbourne train, Thompson took his arm.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but are you sure that's your grip?"

"Of course it's mine," the man said. "I checked it a week ago and they lost the check, someway. I just got it back."

"Please be certain," Thompson said, "because I'm quite sure it's mine."

"Nonsense," the man said. "It's mine . . . I must go now. You'll excuse me, please."

"Not now," Thompson said. "Perhaps after we've seen Inspector Savage."

"Inspector Savage?" The man grinned broadly. "Are you playing cops and robbers, my man?"

"Yes," Thompson said, "and Inspector Savage wants to play it with me. We'll meet him at the Kennington station."

THE man looked at Thompson quizzically. He bit his lip in annoyance, then he smiled again. He was a handsome man and his smile was amiable and a little tolerant.

"Listen," he said, "I have an important appointment. If you're so damned sure this is your grip, take it and be damned. Only give me my things out of it. I need them."

"I wouldn't think of it," Thompson said. "At the station, we can make sure whose it is and then there'll be no confusion to be settled afterward. Come along."

The man started to protest again. Thompson gripped his arm firmly. The

man jerked, as if to free himself.

"I'm a detective," Thompson said, "and if you don't come on without any more annoyance, I'll whistle for a Bobbie or two."

It took Savage only a short time to get to Kennington station. He grinned amiably when he saw the prisoner.

"So it really was you, after all," he said. "Considering your description and everything, I thought it was singular that I should see you at Eastbourne after noticing you near the checkroom at Waterloo, too."

He looked at Thompson. Thompson indicated the suitcase. Savage turned to the prisoner.

"You don't mind if we have a look inside, do you, Mahon?" he said.

"Certainly not," the man said. "Since the checkers managed to get it a deal mucked up and it's been out of my sight and possession for days, I can't be responsible for what you'll find in it. I can't, in fact, even be positive that it's my property."

Savage was a little discommoded. The man, in a measure, did have an alibi for himself there. It was a fact that the grip had been out of his possession for several days. Its contents might well have been altered. Even Mrs. Logan might have altered them, innocently curious and eager to set the police to work as she'd been.

Still Savage opened the grip. He'd no more than laid it back than Mahon spoke.

"That's none of my stuff in there," he said. "That isn't even my grip. Somebody's changed grips on me. What a blundering system."

"Are you positive, sir?" Inspector Savage said. "We have reason to believe . . ."

"To believe what?" Mahon was aggressively affronted. "What would I be doing carrying such trash as this? I had two freshly laundered shirts, some linen, a jacket and pair of trousers and a pair of shoes in my bag. And it wasn't soiled inside as this one is. It looks as if someone had been using it to carry provision to a kennels."

He got to his feet, somewhat contemptuously.

"I'll be going, now," he said. "If you'll return that grip to the Waterloo station, I'll go there and see what can be done about getting my own back. Can I depend on you?"

"The police usually are dependable," Savage said, "so I'll make a deal with you. You call Miss Early, Miss Emily Kaye's friend, and tell her where Miss Kaye can be found and we'll return the grip to the Waterloo station."

"Miss Emily Kaye? I don't understand you. How should I know where Miss Emily Kaye is?"

"Don't you?" Savage said, arching his brows. "Could it be that there are two men answering your exact description and one of them is paying ardent court to a pretty, office worker while the other is getting involved with stray grips containing bloody garments and bits of human flesh? It's all very weird."

"I know Miss Emily Kaye," Mahon said. "I wouldn't deny that. But the last time I saw her . . . well, she lost her temper with me because I told her I wouldn't be able to marry her, and left me. She said she was going either to America or to South Africa."

"Was it because you chose to marry someone else," Savage said, "that you quarreled?"

Mahon smiled condescendingly. He seemed to feel that he could afford to humor this persistently apologetic man with the Sherlock Holmes face and the uncertain air.

"I don't suppose you would quite

understand," he said, "but I became involved with Miss Kaye before I realized what was happening. We went out to luncheon once or twice, then to the theater and then . . . well, we went for a week-end and then she asked me to divorce my wife and marry her.

"Your wife . . . we met her at Eastbourne," Savage said, "Quite charming."

"Thank you," Mahon said, assuming an attitude of polite rebuke for the familiarity.

"She seemed very young to have been married long—that is, long enough for her husband to start being interested in other female company," Savage remarked.

"I DIDN'T come here to have my private life probed," Mahon said. "I'll go now."

"Splendid—to Eastbourne, and I'll go with you," Savage said.

"I hadn't intended going to Eastbourne tonight," Mahon countered.

"Oh, you must have changed your mind," Thompson put in. "You were at the Eastbourne gate when I stopped you. Remember?"

Mahon's face paled and his eyes flashed his growing rage.

"Why must I be subjected to anymore of this rot," he said. "Hasn't a man any rights at all. I'm found with a bag that isn't mine and have to put up with a third degree that might be used on a murderer."

"It so happens," Savage said, "that the bag you claimed contained garments saturated with human blood and a segment of human flesh. Unfortunately, Scotland Yard doesn't allow anyone to laugh, or scoff, things like this off at their pleasure. If it did, not very many boring wives or insistent sweethearts would be safe in England."

"I keep dogs," Mahon said, now grasping at straws, "and I was taking home some veal to cook for them . . ."

"But it wasn't your case," Inspector Savage said, pretending to be startled "You said it wasn't."

Mahon's attitude suddenly changed. He eyed Savage with hateful suspicion. Then he was sharply alert and wary. He saw the trap he'd fallen into and wriggled angrily, his eyes narrowing as he searched Savage's bland face.

"How do you know that's human flesh in that bag?" he demanded. "You can't tell just by looking at it."

Savage took the chemist's report out of an inside pocket and tossed it across the table. "This might interest you," he said, slowly.

Mahon studied the report, then looked up at Savage. His mouth was loose and dry now and his fingers were white and static on the desk.

"You had that grip—that's where it was—you had it while I was looking for it," he mumbled.

"We did," Savage said.

"How'd you get it?" Mahon said. "I lost the stub—how did you get it—did she . . . ?"

"If you'll sit down, I'll have Mrs. Patrick Herbert Logan come in and tell you how we got it," he said. "You see, her husband told her to take it to the station, but she wanted a part in a creepy mystery, so she brought it here."

"That damn woman . . ." Mahon caught himself and stared at Savage. Savage called an attendant and gave him Mrs. Logan's number and asked him to have her come at once to the Kennington station.

He left Mahon under guard of two wardens with instructions to them not to speak to him. Then he and Thompson went to have a spot of tea. It was get-

ting late and they'd missed their tiffin and scones. A man couldn't be alert and miss that. They went back to the station and found Mrs. Logan there.

"Has something happened?" she asked, eagerly. "Oh, I hope it's creepy."

"Come along," Savage said, "we want you to meet a gentleman who seems to think wives should do as their husbands tell them and keep out of mysteries."

Savage led her into a side office, where he'd questioned Mahon. Thompson went for Mahon. Mahon came into the room, scowling. He looked at Savage, then at Mrs. Logan. He flushed when he saw her, then paled, seemed to be trying to signal to her. She looked at him, her face went deathly pale, her trembling hand sought bloodless lips.

Then she screamed.

"Patrick? Oh, My God, I didn't know . . . I didn't know . . ."

"You never did know anything," Mahon said.

The woman had buried her face in her hands and was sobbing hysterically. Savage turned to her.

"What was it you didn't know?" he said. "If you tell us, maybe we can help you out."

"He's my husband," the woman said.

"Yes, I thought that," Savage said. "But your name's Logan and his is Mahon."

"Shut up," Mahon snapped at his wife. "You've said enough."

"Take him outside," Savage ordered. Then, when he was gone: "You may talk now—nothing will happen to you."

"Our name was Mahon," she said, "for a long time, but Patrick thought the name was hexed or something and he changed it. I found . . . well, I found the check in his pocket, not in the street, as I said, and he told me he had found it in the street, just up the walk, and put it in his pocket."

"Your husband has been away weekends recently," Savage said.

"On business, I suppose," Mrs. Mahon said. "He's a salesman and has to travel considerable."

Thompson came into the room and said that Mahon wanted to talk.

"Bring him in," Savage said.

THOMPSON came in with Mahon. He glowered at his wife malevolently. Then he faced Savage.

"Try to get a little time away from a stupid woman and she puts your head in a noose," he began. "All right, I owned the ticket. She went snooping through my pockets and found it. I'd been using the bag for week-end trips and I didn't want her to know what was in it, or that I had that sort of a bag. So I told her to turn it over to the station and I intended to go get it then and take it to a place of safety.

"When I finally got it, it had been tampered with or it wasn't even my bag, I don't know which. Now I hope that satisfies you gentlemen and that she's satisfied with all the trouble she's caused."

The woman ran to him, clutching his arm and sobbing, "I didn't mean to do it, Patrick, I didn't mean to do it . . . I'm so sorry—"

He pushed her away. Savage turned to her and told her she could go home, that he might want to see her later. She brightened, but when he told her Mahon would have to stay, she became hysterical and had to be led away.

"We'll make the trip to Eastbourne, now," Savage said. "Of course, your explanation is perfectly satisfactory, but there's a very pretty, lonesome little wife out there, too, and she'll be expecting you."

"Damn it," Mahon exploded, "why all this bother, I've got my tail in a crack and I'll have to play ball. Are you ready to listen?"

"Yes," Savage said, signalling the inevitable stenographer.

"All right, here's the story," Mahon said. "I was seeing Miss Kaye. I had promised to marry her . . . too much champagne and things and I lost my head. Then she began to get insistent. We went down to Eastbourne on April 12. We were going to stay there, I told her, until we could reach some sort of an adjustment.

"We'd been there only a little while when she became abusive and violent. She accused me of all sorts of things and finally she struck me in the face. I shook her and she subsided for a moment, then she went into the kitchen and came out at me with a meat cleaver. I grabbed her as she struck at me and threw her away and she fell and her head struck a coal scuttle.

"She didn't move for a long time and when I felt her pulse, there was no pulse. I tried to revive her, but she was dead. I guess her neck had been broken. Anyway, I got panicky and before I knew what I was doing, I had started pushing her into the furnace and when she wouldn't go in, I cut off part of her hips and then pushed her inside and burned the body.

"I guess I lost my head, but that's the way it was."

"Lock him up for the night," Savage said. "I'm still going to Eastbourne."

He went to Eastbourne. He found the girl there. She told him her name was Ethel Primrose Duncan and that Mahon had picked her up, in his car, on April 15. She was hungry and cold and had no place to stay, she said, having lost her job as a waitress, and he took her to Eastbourne with him.

"He was nice to me," she said, "but the place was creepy. That is, it was until the trunk went out. It seemed better after that."

"What trunk?" Savage said.

"A trunk that was in the back hall when I came," she said. "He told me it had valuable books in it and that he was shipping it off to a dealer. Then one day I went to the city and he came home ahead of me and when I got here it was gone, it was."

SAVAGE and Thompson studied the furnace in the cottage. It hadn't been used in weeks. There were no signs of anything having been burned. The girl said the house had been cold when she came home that day, had been cold when she came, and that they warmed it by fireplaces.

Savage examined the coal scuttle Mahon had described. It was a frail receptacle, set on soft leaden feet with a leaden filigree about the top and a covered chute. The filigree hadn't been bent, nor had the legs been broken down. Savage pushed down on it smartly with his foot. The filigree collapsed and the leaden legs pancaked.

"Nobody ever fell against that thing hard enough to get even a good black eye," he said.

Now Savage made a last checkup of the town. In a small hardware store he found where a man answering Mahon's description had bought a meat cleaver and a saw on April 11, the day before he'd taken Miss Kaye to Eastbourne.

Savage went back to London. He sent for Mahon. He confronted Mahon with the evidence. He laid out his proofs, one by one: the fact that he had picked up Miss Duncan on April 15 and taken her boldly to Eastbourne, the fact that Miss Kaye had drawn out

four hundred pounds from her savings on the day she met him to go to Eastbourne, the fact that the trunk had disappeared, the fact that the furnace had been inactive, the fact that he had bought cleaver and saw—good for dismembering a body—on the day he sent for Miss Kaye and the fact that there was no sign whatsoever of a body having fallen against the coal scuttle.

"All right, I'm trapped, thanks to a woman's big mouth," Mahon said. "We had a fight and I hit her with something because she had kicked me and caused me such pain I didn't know what I was doing. Then I kept striking her because I was out of my mind with pain. Then I put her body in the trunk and later I started to dismember it, but I didn't get far. So I took it out in a boat and dumped it in the Deep Pool at Eastbourne and I had five hundred pounds of scrap iron wired to the body so it would never come up.

"I went back to the house and found the bloody things from the trunk and one piece of flesh I'd forgotten. I put them in the bag and took it to London with me and checked it, planning to get rid of it later and then my wife found that damn check stub and here I am. Damn women, anyway."

Savage's diffident exterior was swept away now. He glared across the desk at Mahon, his fists tightly clenched.

"If I weren't an officer of the crown, I'd come around there and give you the thrashing a conceited fool deserves, and I don't care if you were your school's best athlete."

Mahon looked startled and straightened.

"Oh, we know it all, now," Savage said, throwing a sheaf of papers on the desk. "We know you married your wife when she was sixteen and you were twenty and the pride of your school and church athletic teams. And we know that less than a year later you forged a check for $500 to take another woman to the Isle of Man and that your wife went to work and toiled in the mills to get money enough to get you out.

"We know, too, about your moving to Wiltshire and getting a job there and stealing three hundred dollars from your firm to take women out and about how your wife went to work again to send you money and support herself while you spent your twelve months in prison.

"Then you got out and went to Calne and after a while you needed money again for the other women, so there began to be a series of burglaries and then you moved to Sunningdale and the burglaries in Calne stopped, but they began in Sunningdale and when you went into the bank there and hit an old charwoman over the head when she recognized you, you got caught and did five years.

"And your wife? Well, she went to work as a waitress and worked for five years to support herself and the child you had by now and to send you money in prison. And then when you got out she went to the Consols people, where she'd finally gotten work, and convinced them that you were all right and did such a good job of it and that you became the sales manager there—and immediately started up with other women again.

"Now you know what I know about you, you filthy rat, who can sit there and say 'Damn women' because your wife unintentionally helped to catch a cold-blooded murderer."

Mahon said nothing. Saying nothing became a habit of his, even at the trial, where he only repeated that he was innocent and that he'd not known what

he was doing when he killed Emily Kaye in his Eastbourne cottage.

He said nothing, too, when they led him out through the old portcullis of Wandsworth Prison on the following September 3 and marched him up thirteen narrow steps and put a noose around his neck. It was only as they dropped the hood that he finally spoke.

"I am innocent," he said, "and the victim of a woman's blundering."

Then he shot through the trap and the noose choked his final cowardly denunciation of the woman who'd remained faithful, even to now, into a hideous scream.

Cipher Solvers Club For Feb. 1940

(*Continued from May* 18)

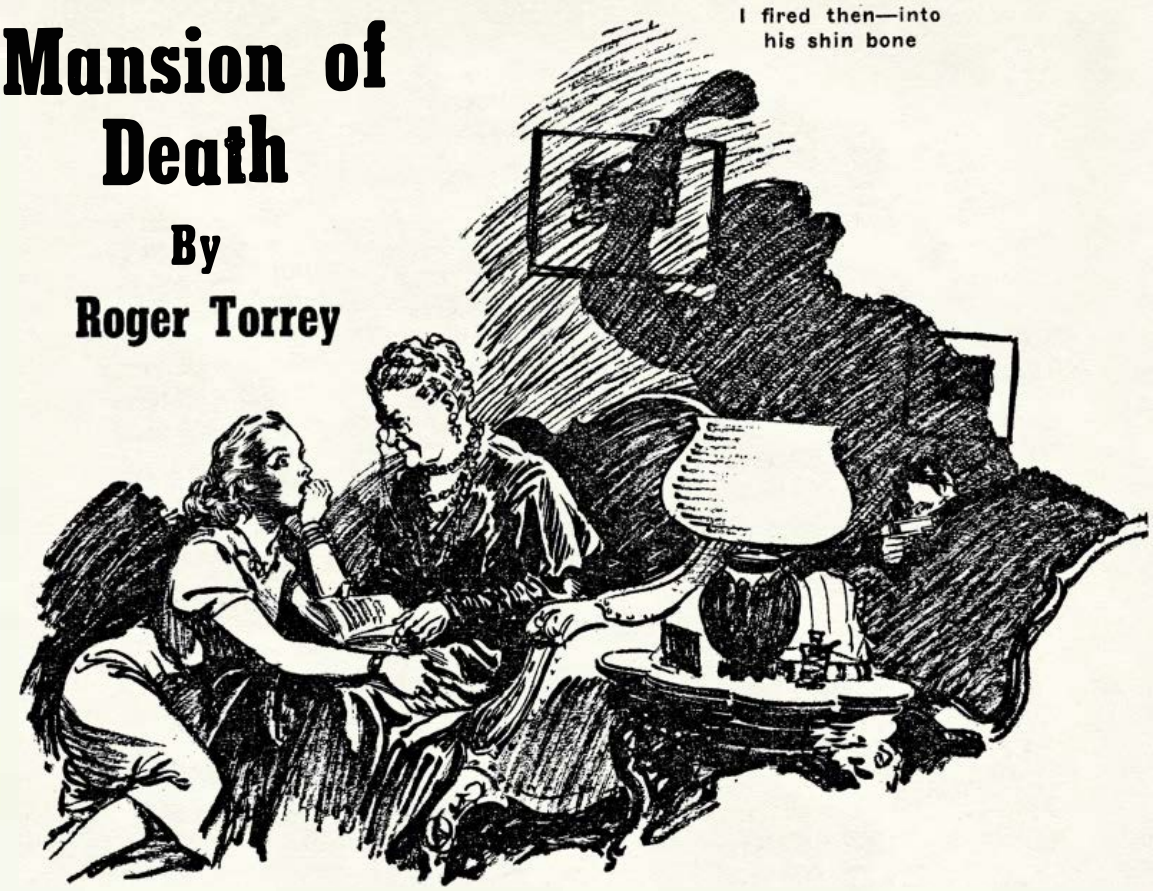
Twenty-four (Continued)

°Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y. †R. C. Clark, Port Stanley, Ontario. °Cliff II, Branch, Mich. †Codela, Allston, Mass. †Codela II, Winchester, Mass. °Comrade, Baltimore, Md. †Floyd E. Coss, Ferndale, Mich. °Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr. †Cryptox, State College, Pa. †Short Sir Cuit, Arden, Del. †Curly, Washington, D. C. †Paul Daeke, Henderson, N. C. °W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind. †A. Dane, Toronto, Ontario. †Debutant, Calgary, Alberta. †W. A. Deen, San Antonio, Tex. J. N. D., San Francisco, Calif. °Derfy, Canton, Pa. †Mrs. C. E. Descy, Poughkeepsie, N. Y. †Dickie, Yonkers, N. Y. †Henry F. Dolliver, Belmont, Mass. †Susie Douglas, Mayfield, Ky. †Drokaj, Baker, Oreg. †Drol, Warren, Me. †e, Atlanta, Ga. °M. E., Scranton, Pa. H. W. Ebner, Ewan, N. J. Eve Eden, Denver, Colo. °Edmaca, Albany, N. Y. †Efdee, North Sacramento, Calif. †Efemeses, Overland, Mo. †Envy El, Minneapolis, Minn. †Cap Elliott, Spencer, Iowa. Sir Elson, Dallas, Tex. °Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa. †Jay-En-Ess, Denver, Colo. †Jay Essee, Ft. Benning, Ga. °Ezymarc, Franklin, N. H. E. H. Field, New York, N. Y. †Pee-Five, Alexandria, Va. †Flouncy, Brooklyn, N. Y. °Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky. †A. M. Fraser, Los Angeles, Calif. Henry W. J. Fritz, Flushing, N. Y. °G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio. †S. E. Furneaux, Methuen, Mass. †W. R. G., Maywood, Ill. †Joseph K. Geibel, Washington, D. C. °Michael G. H. Gelsinger, Buffalo, N. Y. †I. Givup, Rifle, Colo. †Gnilpik, Newport, Oreg. †Clarence P. Greene, Venice, Fla.

(*Continued on page* 105)

Mansion of Death

By Roger Torrey



Miss Conklin didn't have anything against detectives; she simply liked to solve murders her own way

I LIKED the old lady the first time I saw her . . . but then, I've always gotten along better with old ladies than with the young ones. Though maybe that's because I've never worried about the old ones as much. Anyway, she came in the office and held out her hand as if she expected me to bow over it, and said:

"I'm Miss Conklin! I talked with you over the telephone, young man."

I bowed, though I hadn't intended any such foolishness, and told her I was glad to meet her in person. And she twinkled her bright little blue eyes at me and shook her finger at me and said:

"Now young man! You're glad to see me because I'm a customer."

And then she perched on the edge of the chair I'd bounced around the desk and brought up for her.

She was really cute. She looked like an old-fashioned grandmother dressed up in Fifth Avenue clothes. They fitted her beautifully and undoubtedly had cost her a lot of money. But she didn't seem to belong in them. She should have been wearing a lot of ruffles with lace around her neck and a poke bonnet. And Congress gaiters instead of high-heeled shoes. I sat down on my own side of the desk and asked:

"What was it, Miss Conklin?"

"I've been robbed," she said calmly. "And I don't like it. I don't like the feeling of not being able to trust my own household."

I said that was understandable. She went on: "There was $1,864 taken from my desk drawer. There was an envelope containing slightly more than $50,000 in negotiable bonds directly beside the money, but that wasn't touched. No one had broken in the house and it's self-evident that some one in the house itself is guilty of the theft. I don't wish to have the police tramping over my house and asking innocent people a lot of silly questions, but I *do* want to catch the thief."

"Suppose I find the guilty person. Will you turn him—or her, if that's the way it turns out, over to the police?"

She shook her head and said: "I will not. I have an odd household, Mr. Shay. If you'll ride up to the house with me, I'll explain that remark on our way."

I took my gun from its place in the upper desk drawer and started to slip it in the clip under my arm—and she frowned and said:

"You will not need a weapon, Mr. Shay. I'm sure there'll be no necessity for one."

So I put the gun back and reached for my hat instead. She hadn't talked about payment for what I was or wasn't going to do, and I thought I'd better look over things before bringing the subject up.

I wasn't worried; people who leave eighteen hundred odd dollars loose in desk drawers can usually pay a private cop's starvation wages.

HER chauffeur was an ugly bird that looked as though he'd just got out of jail. And the funny part of it was he just had. She told me all about it on the way up to the house. She said:

"My house is staffed with people who have been . . . well, let us say in houses of correction. I believe they should be given a helping hand and a chance to earn an honest living, once they have paid their debt to society."

"And you keep eighteen hundred dollars, loose, in a desk drawer. Along with fifty thousand dollars worth of bonds that could be hocked with any fence."

She said: "I have never been robbed, young man. Never."

"What about now?"

She sounded stiff and old-ladyish now. "There is some mistake, young man. Of that I am sure. One of my people must have faced a problem that only money could solve. Something he or she couldn't come to me about."

I told her I faced the same sort of a problem every rent day and listened to more. She had a nephew and niece with her, besides the jail help. And then I got a shock. She said:

"My nephew is George Lawrence, Jr. His sister is Frances Lawrence. I understand they are fairly well-known among the younger set."

"I know Georgie, Miss Conklin," I said. "If you have your driver stop, I'll get out here and go back to my office."

She asked me what was the matter and I told her. I said: "I had the pleasure of knocking young Georgie almost over the *Black Cat Club's* bar, just night before last. I'm surprised you didn't hear about it—the newspapers had a lot of fun with the thing."

"I know all about it," she said placidly. "In fact, that's one reason I came to you. George has had that coming to him for some time. He came home

with a black eye, after my lawyer bailed him out of jail, and told me all about it."

"What did he say?"

She twinkled her eyes at me and said: "You can depend on it not being the truth. But I asked questions and found out the truth. That should happen oftener to the boy."

"You're not sore about it?"

"My goodness no! I'm grateful to you, Mr. Shay. You'll find George isn't the kind to cherish a grudge, Mr. Shay . . . Just forget all about the episode."

Personally I thought young Georgie would carry a grudge until the day he died, but I didn't care a whoop whether he did or not. He was one of those loud-mouthed freshies that grates on me, and I was perfectly willing to knock him over a bar whenever we met. A bar was the logical place to look for young George. The kid was a society swack and they don't come any swackier than that.

And then we pulled into the driveway and up to her house.

It could have been turned into a library without much trouble; it had the lines and the size. An old place and very dignified. I helped her, judging her to weigh not over eighty pounds wringing wet and with lead in her shoes, and as we watched the chauffeur swing the car on and around toward the garage, she cautioned me:

"Now use tact, Mr. Shay! I want none of my people worried. The innocent shouldn't suffer for the thoughtlessness of one."

Then the butler opened the door and we went in.

I GOT a break right off the bat. Fresh from the griddle. The butler was Preacher Toomey, who usually did his time for slipping up on some confidence racket. Of course he'd taken one jolt for armed robbery and another for assault with intent to kill, but they were outside of his regular field of endeavor.

"Why hello, Preacher," I said.

He bowed and looked at me out of mean little eyes.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Shay."

Little Miss Conklin twinkled her eyes at both of us and marveled: "Well, isn't this nice. You know each other then?"

"You might say a professional acquaintance, eh, Preacher?" I said.

Preacher said: "Yes, sir."

And then Miss Conklin and I went in the library and found the maid.

She hadn't been dead long . . . and her name had been Mary Morse. At least that was one of them. She'd done time for everything from shoplifting on up. Somebody had caved in her right temple with something that hadn't broken the skin at all. The skull bone there is not much thicker than paper and it was crushed in all right, but there was no blood. Just a sort of darkening, where blood vessels below the skin had broken.

Miss Conklin and I had walked in on her together, and I turned to catch the old lady when she fainted, but she just caught the corner of the desk to steady herself.

"My goodness sake!"

"I'll call the police," I said.

She waved her hand, palm up, in front of her, but didn't speak for a moment. And then she said: "Not for a little while, please. I ask that, Mr Shay."

"It's the law, Miss Conklin. They have to be notified at once."

"Not for a little while, please. I can handle any trouble resulting from your

not calling them at once, I can assure you."

I thought the moment I got a chance at a phone I'd call, so didn't argue. Just looked at the dead girl.

She'd been pretty. She was maybe twenty-five or twenty-eight, not over that, and she'd been a good-sized wench. Probably around a hundred and thirty, though she didn't look half that big lying there.

Dead people never do look their weight—they seem to shrink.

There was no sign around of anything she could have been hit with; I decided it was probably a shot-filled sap, though it could have been some home-made affair, filled with sand or anything like that. She was right by the desk. and the drawer above her was half open, as though she might have been searching in it. She was dressed in a neat little black and white outfit—the kind that has a little apron all frilled at the edges and a cap to match.

The cap was still on her head, but it was riding a little cock-eyed.

"This is murder, Miss Conklin, and the the first thing to do is call the police."

"I know exactly what to do, Mr. Shay," she said. "Please don't ask any questions now. Just come with me."

WE WENT out in the hall then and found Preacher Toomey still puttering around there. Miss Conklin said:

"Toomey, have there been any visitors?"

"Why no, Miss Conklin," he told her. "Mr. Franks is here calling on Miss Lawrence, but that is all that I know of."

"Is Mr. Lawrence in?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You haven't been out, have you, Toomey? You'd surely know if there's strangers here?"

"I've been here all afternoon, ma'am."

"Noticed anything wrong?"

"Why no, ma'am."

She told him that was all and we went back in the library. She said then, in a tired voice: "Well, I wanted to be sure. I'll call the police now. . . . It was possible somebody else had killed poor Mary, but now it's surely someone in the house. Toomey would say if there'd been anybody else here."

"Would he know for sure?"

She said: "If he knew this had happened, he'd have said that various unknown people had been in and out. Toomey is no fool, Mr. Shay; he would realize that he and everyone else in the house would be under immediate suspicion. Because of their past lives, you know."

That made sense. Then there was a knock on the door and Toomey followed it, stopping just inside where he couldn't see the dead girl's body.

"Might I have a few words, Miss Conklin?"

She said he could. He looked at me and said: "Of course I know Mr. Shay is here investigating the robbery, Miss Conklin. I'd just like to say I know nothing about it. I want to tell both you and Mr. Shay that I'm innocent, that I'm leading a decent life."

"I'm sure you are, Toomey," she said. "But I'd like to know just how you knew about the robbery. I told no one."

"Morse told me of it, ma'am. I'm sure I don't know how she knew. . . . She informed me it was confidential, but all of us seem to know of it."

He bowed then and left, and Miss Conklin said: "I told no one about the robbery but George and his sister.

Do you suppose one of them could have told poor Mary?"

I didn't know the sister but I knew George, and the way he chased girls. And I knew that Mary had just adored being chased—and had never run very fast when pursued. And she'd still been a good-looking gal and young George had money. I got the answer right away, but I only said:

"I'm sure I don't know."

"I'll call the police now," she sighed. "I *do* wish this hadn't happened. The police will certainly be most abrupt with my people—there's nothing I can do to prevent it."

I thought her using "abrupt" as a description of what the police would be with her collection of jailbirds was a miracle of understatement, but I let that go along with the other. She picked up the telephone and I wandered out in the hall.

Toomey was waiting for me. He beckoned me away from the door, and when I followed he said:

"Look, shamus! That's gospel that I gave in there. I haven't done a thing."

"I believe you," I said, "that's the funny part of it. If it had been you, you'd have taken the bonds along with the dough. You'd have gone hook, line, and sinker—and left the town because you couldn't take that along too. Okay! *Now* what?"

"I didn't want you picking at me all the time, is all. Maybe I'm no lily, but I'm clear on this deal."

"I get it, Preacher. You were holding off—waiting to get a chance at a *real* killing. Who's this guy Franks you told Miss Conklin was here?"

"He's the gal's sweetie. He tags her all around. He comes here every day."

"What kind of a guy is he?"

He shrugged. "*She* likes him. She's going to marry him.

I WENT back in the library and Miss Conklin hung up the phone and said: "The police tell me they will be here at once. Oh my goodness! The trouble my poor people will have."

I grinned and she saw it. She said sharply: "Mr. Shay! These poor unfortunate victims of our society are entitled to decent treatment, once they have made penance. There's no reason why they shouldn't be treated as any decent citizen should be. I want you to think of that."

I thought of Preacher Toomey and the cutthroat that had driven us to the house—and the Lord knows what other specimens she had around—and said:

"You think of it, Miss Conklin. I'd as soon live in a cage with wild tigers as here."

"That is very unfair," she said.

I waved toward the desk that shielded the dead Mary Morse and said: "If Mary could talk, I'll bet she wouldn't agree with you."

THE cops came and there was merry hell to pay. They lined up the help and of all the collection I ever saw they won in a walk. They'd have made the average police line-up look like a meeting of the Ladies Aid. The chauffeur had served time in Dannemora and Joliet. One gardener had taken a course at McAlester, in Oklahoma, and a P. G. at Folsom, in California. The other one had graduated from Leavenworth, which is a Federal pen. The cook was an old gal who'd killed her husband with a frying pan and had done seven years for the trick. The two other maids were about in the dead Mary Morse's class, though they didn't own the looks she'd had.

And then there was young George Lawrence, who was a worthless bum

if one ever walked. He was half drunk, and when he saw me wanted to pick up the argument where we'd left it off two nights before.

The cops stopped him quick on that —telling him they'd do all the fighting necessary.

Franks, the Lawrence girl's fiance, was a thin-faced, dark young fellow. He seemed to be okay. I didn't know anything about him, but I wondered how a honey like the Lawrence girl could go for him. She could have done better, with what she had to work with, which was practically everything it takes.

She was small and blonde, and had that wide-set appealing stare that makes you want to pick 'em up and cuddle 'em and tell 'em everything will be all right.

Nobody had any alibi—the cops found that out right away. Nobody had any notion about who didn't like Mary Morse. Or said they hadn't. And then I got a break. The cops were ganged up, talking to one of the gardeners, and Preacher Toomey caught my eye and beckoned me over to him. He said, so no one else could hear it:

"Listen, Shay! I'll do you a favor and maybe you can do one back for me. The kid, young Georgie, was mixed up with the gal. She was clipping him for all the dough he could get his hands on."

"You sure?"

"Certain. She bragged about it."

"Did his aunt know about it?"

"Listen, Shay! If there's one single, solitary thing goes on in this house that she don't know about, I'll put in with you. She's so smart it's painful."

"Nuts!" I said. "If she was, she'd never have a bunch like she's got here around her. Was the kid still playing around with the Morse dame?"

"Sure. But she was taking him for dough and he was sore about it. He beat hell out of her three weeks ago. . . . His aunt kept her from calling the cops in on it. That'll give you an idea of how much she knows about it. You going to tell the cops?"

"Why don't you?"

He said gloomily: "That'd make 'em think I was trying to pass the buck to somebody else. The best thing I can do is keep my mouth shut."

I told him I thought it a very good idea . . . and I did the same. I figured there'd be plenty of time to tell it later.

IT ENDED right there. The Captain in charge, Chick Williams, grumbled to Miss Conklin: "And what can I do about it? I tell you I'll take your crew down to the station for questioning and you tell me that you'll have 'em out on a writ of habeas corpus as soon as you can get in touch with your lawyer. What can I do, lady?—You tie my hands."

"I know very well what would happen to them at the station," Miss Conklin said primly. "They would be browbeaten, if not physically beaten. They have told you what they know."

"Every damned one of them has stood in front of me and lied by the clock."

"Can you prove that, officer?"

Williams admitted he couldn't. Miss Conklin said: "Then I certainly wouldn't make the statement. These people look to me for protection and I intend to see they have it."

Williams went away, growling about making a check on everybody in the place and on the dead girl's past life. And as soon as he left I told Miss Conklin what Toomey had told me. She gave me a queer stare and said:

"But you didn't tell the police?"

I said that I hadn't as yet. . . .

"Give me a couple of days, Mr. Shay. If I don't think of a plan by that time, you and I will go together, taking Toomey with us, and see he tells his story to the police. I naturally don't want my nephew in jail if he's innocent, though if he's guilty that's the place for him."

I said: "Will you tell me honestly what you think about it?"

"I don't think George is guilty—I can tell you that much," she said, pursing her lips and looking like a grandmother making up her mind about how many jars of pickles to put up. "No, I really don't."

"Why not?"

"He hasn't the nerve, Mr. Shay. He's too dependent on me to do a thing like that. Rather than kill the girl, he'd have come to me and made a clean breast of the matter."

"He did—once. When he beat the girl up and you went to the front for him and kept her from calling in the cops."

"Toomey told you that, too?"

"You bet."

She smiled then. "Doesn't that support my theory, Mr. Shay? If he'd had murder in his mind, wouldn't he have committed it then, rather than just abuse the girl? He knew then I'd find it out."

"People can change," I told her. "Sometimes a man can be driven just so far. And then he'll back up."

She admitted that maybe I was right and that she'd get in touch with me at my office in a day or so. And I left, wondering why I didn't tell the cops what I knew and have them take the young punk down to the station and sweat a confession out of him.

He was my customer for the killing and there wasn't a doubt in my mind about it. And the only thing holding me back from turning him in was the old lady. In my business, a client's always right, at least until proved a mile wrong. She was a client and so I went along with her on the two days of grace she asked for. I couldn't see it, but there was an outside chance of somebody else having done the killing —and it was just possible that she had an idea who it was.

And, after all, the cops could pick up young Lawrence just as well two days later as then.

SHE came in two days later, looking even smaller and more fragile. She gave me her pretty, anxious smile and said:

"I have thought it all out, Mr. Shay. There is absolutely no way to prove who killed that girl. Nor who took my money."

"That's ridiculous," I told her. "The cops could take the whole bunch down to the station, and they'd have a confession in twenty-four hours. You know that."

"It wouldn't be fair to the ones that didn't do it," she said stubbornly. "I have a deep feeling about such things. Now I have worked out a plan and I'm sure it will be successful. But I need your help."

I said I was still working for her, as far as I knew.

So then she told me what she wanted —and I finally said I'd do it. I'd argued two hours and hadn't won a point, before I caved.

"Then I'll depend on you," she finished. "I'm supposed to be playing bridge this afternoon, and I'm not expected back until around eight. As I told you, I told George and Toomey that I knew who'd killed Mary Morse and that I intended to tell the police

about it tomorrow. I can depend on Toomey telling the others about it."

"They'd think it was funny you not telling the police right then," I said.

"Oh no! I told them I was waiting for certain proof," she said. "And that I'd find that out tomorrow. But that there was no doubt in my mind right then. So you see I've thought of everything."

"I'm beginning to think you have," I said.

I GOT into the house easily enough. . . . She'd given me the key to a side door that opened into the library, and it was just a question of making sure no one was in the room and then walking in. I moved a couch, at the corner of the room, far enough out to climb behind it, then got it back in place. It made a snug little nest. If I sat down naturally, the thing was just low enough for me to see over, and if I ducked my head a little, I was entirely out of sight.

And then I waited.

Miss Conklin came in a little after nine and never even looked toward where I was. She had that much will power. She was humming to herself, as though she hadn't a care in the world. She got a book from a shelf and sat down in a big chair that almost hid her. Her back was to the door. I could hear pages rustle as she turned them. . . . Then there was a knock on the door, and she called "Come in!" without looking around.

It was young Georgie. And he looked bad with the black eye I'd given him. I slid my gun out of its clip and got ready to go into action. He passed around in front of her and stood.

"Aunt Alice," he said, "I've got to talk to you."

"Go ahead, George."

And then I got a shock. "I heard what you told Frances," he said, "and she told me you'd told Toomey the same thing. That you knew who killed Mary."

"That's right," she said. "I intend to notify the police tomorrow. As I told Frances, there's one little detail I want cleared up and I can't do that until tomorrow."

Then came the pay-off. The kid said: "I'm going to stay right here with you, Aunt Alice. Don't you realize that you're in danger? The same person who killed Mary knows by now that you know who he is. He's liable to try to silence you. I'm going to stay right here with you."

Miss Conklin said: "No, George. I'm perfectly all right. But I thank you for the thought. Now run along—don't waste your time talking to an old lady."

"I'm going to stay, Aunt Alice."

The old lady didn't raise her voice, but it now had a snap in it. She just said: "George!"

"All right, Aunt Alice, you know best."

He marched out of the room, just barely giving me time to duck out of sight. Then the old lady said, as if she were talking to herself:

"Nice boy, George."

SO THERE was my number one suspect cleared. . . . I was just getting over the shock of that when there was another knock and the niece came in. Looking like a million dollars! She bounced over in front of her auntie and knelt down and said:

"Oh, Aunt Alice! Aren't you afraid? You know this is Toomey's night off."

Miss Conklin said: "Yes, I've thought of that."

"But aren't you frightened, Aunt Alice?"

I didn't hear what Aunt Alice said because I was too busy ducking back out of sight. The hall door was opening—very quietly and softly—and I wanted to be out of sight until whoever it was had passed me.

And he did. It was young Franks, the girl's fiance. He was walking on his toes and he was swinging a sap in his left hand. The girl looked over her aunt's head at him and said to the aunt:

"I just thought I'd better stay with you, Aunt Alice. Just in case of. . . ."

I shot young Franks then, taking him just below the knee, where I had a lot of brittle shin bone to aim at. A slug from the kind of gun I shoot will wreck bone structure of that kind and leave a man crippled for life . . . and I was thinking of that. The girl stood and screamed. It cut through the roaring thunder the big gun made in the room. And Miss Conklin got up from her big chair and peered down at Franks, who was rolling around on the floor and making a lot of noise.

"It's as I thought," Miss Conklin said calmly. "Mr. Shay, will you telephone for the police. I'm going to be very busy for a few minutes."

She didn't pay any more attention to me, but went over to a drawer built in the bookcase. She pulled out a heavy riding whip. And then she went back to the girl and said:

"Now, you little sneak! I'm going to take the hide right off your damned back. You ungrateful little—!"

And then, by heaven, she did. She had a nice command of language and every time she gave the girl a new title she came down with the whip.

I didn't want to interfere, but finally I had to.

"You don't want to kill her, do you?" I said.

She stopped then.

"Did you call the police?" she asked.

I said I hadn't but would right away. And then somebody said, from the door doorway: "I did, ma'am!"

We turned and looked that way. And here was the cook, the chauffeur, and the two maids staring in. The chauffeur said:

"I called when I heard the shot, ma'am. Then I came in to help."

I said to Miss Conklin: "You going to turn the girl over to the cops?"

"Certainly not," she snapped. "I can take care of her very well. The man, the sneak, he will certainly go to prison, if he doesn't hang."

"He'll limp when he goes down that hall to the scaffold," I told her. "Did you think it was him all the time?"

"Of course," she said.

And then the cops came.

SHE came down to see me the next afternoon again. Just as nice as though nothing had happened. She even blushed a little when she asked me how much money I wanted. And I blushed even more when I told her—because all I'd done was what she'd told me to do. She'd supposedly hired a detective and then she'd done all the detective work. She gave me a check.

"Miss Conklin," I said, "I don't like to appear too dumb, but what made you think it was young Franks who'd killed the maid? You told me you had that idea right along. Of course we know now why he did it—she'd seen him swipe the dough from your desk. She started to blackmail him, the same as she was already blackmailing your nephew. Of course not for the same reason. But I'd like to know why you picked him as the guilty one, instead of George, or Preacher Toomey, or that thug chauffeur or those gardeners?"

She twinkled her eyes at me and said: "Why it just *had* to be him, Mr. Shay. I knew that none of my people would steal—and of course I knew my nephew wouldn't. Not that I'd put it past the boy, but there was no need for him to steal; all he had to do was ask me for the money and I'd have given it to him. So that left only Frances and her friend. And do you know, I've never trusted that young man since the first time I met him."

"But you'd trust that collection of jailbirds you've got?"

"Why of course," she said pensively. "You see I know their peculiar psychology. And then I had another reason for thinking young Mr. Franks the murderer. You see poor Mary had been struck on the right temple—that showed me a left-handed man had struck the blow. Just try it—you're right-handed, and you'll notice if you strike another person on the temple it will invariably be on the left side. This was just reversed. And, of course, my nephew, and all the others in the house, happen to be right-handed. Young Mr. Franks is the only left-handed one. But I really didn't need that proof—and it isn't the sort of thing that would stand up in court."

She went out then and left me trying to figure things out. Not the left-handed angle—that's one of the simple things you overlook because it is *so* simple.

It was the old gal herself. Here she'd acted like one of the nicest ladies I'd ever met—up to the time she'd found out for sure her niece was in the plot to kill her. And even then she didn't turn the girl over to the police. Instead she gave her a beating, and kept her where she could keep an eye on her.

And then the language she'd used was hardly the thing a lady knows.

And to top the whole thing off—having that collection of thugs around her and actually protecting them from the police.

It was all by me.

IT STAYED that way until I met Chick Williams, the police captain, who'd been in charge of the case. I ran into him on the street and he laughed and said:

"You still working for the Conklin woman?"

I told him I'd like to have her for a partner . . . that she'd shown more brains in the thing than either he or I had. He didn't like this so well and told me that if he'd had his way, and taken the whole bunch down to the station and sweated them, that he'd have had the answer before the old lady had it.

I agreed. And then he laughed again and poked me with a finger and said: "You know who that old gal *is?* I just happened to mention her to one of the old-timers, who dropped in the office . . . and he remembered her."

I said I didn't know who she was, other than she seemed like a nice, old gal with a lot of money. Then he poked me again and winked and said:

"She's *the* Miss Conklin. The one that scragged her sweetie, over forty years ago, and did sixteen years in the pen for it. Cold-blooded murder it was, according to the old boy. He said it was a wonder they *ever* let her out. She'd fell into a bunch of dough while she was doing time, and that probably had something to do with that angle. Ain't that a kick, Shay?"

I said it was very funny and felt a lot better. It solved the puzzle. Here I'd been wondering why she'd looked after her convict help and claimed to understand 'em. Why shouldn't she?

And it explained the language she'd used to the girl and the whip act. They talk rough and they handle their own problems in the women's wards in jails.

I left Williams. I was thinking that it would be a good bet the jail was glad to see her go. I'm willing to bet the warden slept better.

Because I had the notion that Miss Conklin would be top dog wherever she was. . . . She was one client of mine that had been right on every count.

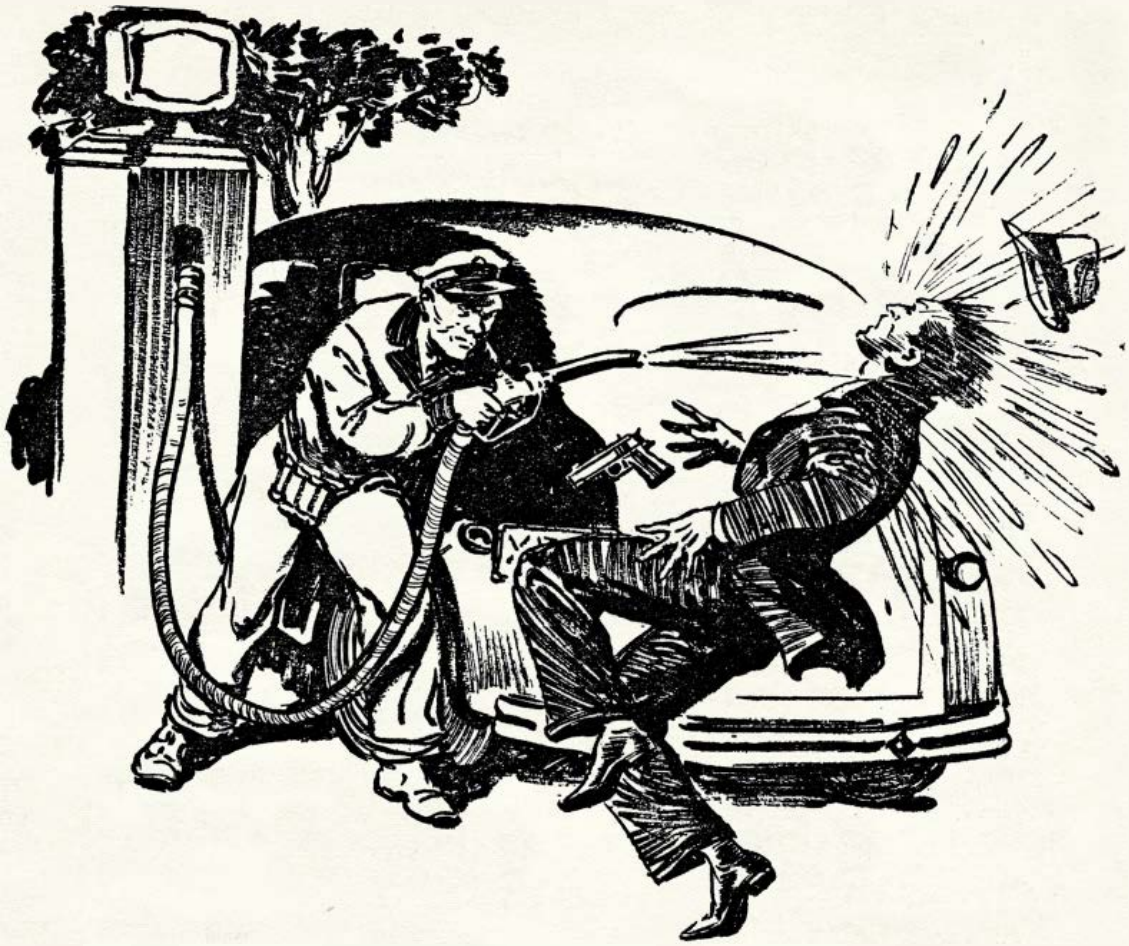
Portrait of Death

A thrilling New Novelet

BY PHILIP KETCHUM

Next Week!


COPPER
by STOOKIE ALLEN
Jacob Hays
FIRST AMERICAN DETECTIVE
"OLD HAYS" BECAME A NEW YORK POLICEMAN IN 1802. HE PERFECTED HIS OWN TECHNIQUE FOR BREAKING UP GATHERINGS OF UNRULY CITIZENS WITH A SHORT "BILLY." HE KNOCKED THE SILK "TOPPERS" FROM THE RING-LEADERS' HEADS AND WHEN THEY BENT TO RETRIEVE THEM, DELIVERED A KICK WHERE IT WOULD DO THE MOST GOOD!
ALL WEEK
HAYS BELIEVED HE COULD INFALLIBLY TELL A "CRIMINAL" FACE FROM AN "HONEST" ONE; AND SO DEMONSTRATED IN THE FAMOUS MISTAKEN-IDENTITY CASE OF TIMOTHY REDMOND IN 1828. IN SPITE OF DAMNING EVIDENCE HE PROVED...
....REDMOND INNOCENT OF FORGERY AND BROUGHT THE REAL OFFENDER TO BOOK!
"OLD HAYS" DEVELOPED "SHADOWING", AS DETECTIVE WORK WAS THEN KNOWN, AND INTRODUCED THE "THIRD DEGREE" AND THE TRICK OF SECURING A CONFESSION BY CONFRONTING THE MURDERER WITH HIS VICTIM'S CORPSE.
NEW YORK'S FIRST AND ONLY HIGH CONSTABLE, OLD HAYS WAS THE TERROR OF ALL EVIL-DOERS AND EASILY THE MASTER SLEUTH OF HIS TIME.
HE INSISTED THOSE OF QUESTIONABLE REPUTE TIP THEIR HATS WHEN HE PASSED!



Be Your Own Cop

By James Hargan

NOT long ago Mayor LaGuardia of New York awarded a certificate of valor to a delicatessen proprietor who had successfully fought off two bandits. He told him that his actions were a real demonstration of courage in combatting crime. Everybody knows that the conventional thing to do when one is confronted by the business end of a revolver is to allow yourself to be herded into the washroom. At the sight of picture wire and adhesive tape you are supposed to lie down and suffer yourself to be bound and gagged.

But some people just won't take it. If crime is to be wiped out, citizens must cooperate with the police. Crooks will go out on the prowl as long as they expect to find cowards ready to toss over their money bags. It is heartening, therefore, to discover an increas-

ing number who are bold enough to stand up for their rights.

For instance there was the shoe clerk who let the robbers get past him twice but the third time got his man. A five-foot jeweler chased three astonished wise guys from his shop. It is stories like these that should make the headlines. Having read about this exploit, another jeweler, who only weighed 110 pounds, went into action when the time came and stampeded four robbers. In their haste they even forgot to take with them a couple of guns and two expensive watches which they had pretended were in need of repair.

Just because a man with cauliflower ears and a flattened nose points a ten cent weapon at you, it isn't necessary to wilt. If you can't kick off a concealed switch that operates a burglar alarm, you can at least think up a bright idea of your own. One jeweler frustrated a hold up by crashing his fist, not at the burly intruder, but at the plate glass window. Plenty of people came to see what all the noise was about. A gasoline station attendant who saw a fellow waving a gun at him simply squirted a little gasoline into the fellow's eyes and had him tied up before he could see straight. Whatever is handiest usually works all right. The proprietor of a liquor store found that champagne bottles sped to the mark with such accuracy that he could boast of having routed three assortments of gunmen in five months. When a butcher dared to throw his knife at an unwelcome visitor, the startled man dropped to the floor and begged for mercy, even if he wasn't scratched.

If necessary, the younger generation can show the old man how to do it. A red-cheeked captain of the wrestling team of Grover Cleveland High School in New York was not dismayed when he entered his father's store to find him cowering before a bandit. He not only subdued the guy but he commandeered a milk wagon and drove him triumphantly to the police station. On an Illinois farm twelve-year-old Marvin efficiently clubbed an intruder who demanded money, threatening to burn down the house; then he ran to a neighbor's to telephone police. A boy can run faster than a man any time. In Arizona, members of a high school basketball team stopped their play long enough to capture three killers who had just made a getaway over the prison wall. Three boys from the Bronx who chased and tackled a thief were awarded medals by the Police Athletic League. Any cop would be glad to have such helpers on his beat.

THE title of amateur champion in the bandit rodeo is probably held by Matt Gardner, a one-armed gasoline station proprietor in Elyria, Ohio. At the last account he had captured nineteen holdup men and had killed another punk who tried to beat him to a trigger squeeze. Since Matt worked in Texas in his youth, as a cowboy, he knows all about six-shooters.

"Why, we almost cut our teeth on six-shooters in my day," he explained to the last four robbers whom he had lined up to wait for the sheriff. "The cattle country used to be plenty tough, and we were raised with revolvers. Reckon I'm just prejudiced against these newfangled automatics. You see, boys, I lost everything in the depression. I rigged up this station to make a comeback, and no gunman is going to interfere— automatic or no automatic."

Yokels are not only good on the strong-arm squad but when they put their minds to it they can turn out a good imitation of Sherlock Holmes.

In Connecticut a man watched parades for two years until last Armistice Day he finally saw a drum that had been stolen from him. A Rhode Island contractor, who went to Florida in 1938 and lost $16,000 in a horse race swindle, dyed his gray hair and mustache the next year and went South again. His erstwhile acquaintance did not recognize him until he found himself being propelled to the police station.

The arm of the law is proverbially long but so is private vengeance. Apparently there had been no witnesses to an automobile killing, and the magistrate was obliged to discharge the suspect for lack of evidence. But the dead man's son was not content. He had 18,000 circulars printed and hired men to distribute them to pedestrians and motorists in the neighborhood and at the hour the accident had happened. People in cities move about on schedule, and the composition of a crowd on one day should be paralleled on another day. The appeal was touching.

"To the lady who saw my father fatally injured at 58 Street and Third Avenue, Tuesday P. M., Nov. 29, 1932: I need, can use, and beg for cooperation. I will gladly pay for any possible loss of time. Please communicate with this address."

As a result of this plea, two witnesses got in touch with him, and on their evidence the reckless chauffeur was indicted by the grand jury.

Complaining witnesses often lose interest in cases and decline to prosecute, especially if satisfactory restitution has been made to them. Prosecutors and judges who have been annoyed by such trifling procedure point to the late Arthur W. Cutten of Chicago as a model bloodhound who would not give up the trail until he came to its end.

Nine burglars had locked Mr. Cutten and his family in a vault and had then made off with property valued at $50,000 . "The property loss is not so important," said Mr. Cutten, "but they used profanity in the presence of my wife and locked us in that vault where we might have suffocated. I will catch those men if it takes the rest of my life, and I will use every dollar at my command."

It took this Nemesis and his private detectives eight years to accomplish his purpose. One by one the guilty men were lodge behind prison bars. First came a former servant who collapsed under investigation, confessed that he had planned the robbery and went on to name his accomplices. By this time they had scattered far and wide, but one by one they were tracked down. Last of the fugitives gave himself up, although in the years that had elapsed he had become a respected resident of a small town in Michigan.

"It's no use," he said in despair. "They'd get me sooner or later, and I might as well surrender myself."

It is pleasant to record that Mr. Cutten, being convinced of the man's reform, was generous enough to extend mercy to him.

THE application of science to the solution of the problems of crime offers another rich field for amateurs. No police department likes to have a pseudo Nero Wolfe, who acquired his tin star through the mail, sticking his nose into matters that do not concern him. But it is another story when competent citizens pool their experience and work under guidance.

Sergeant Gustave R. Steffens, secretary to the police of Elizabeth, N. J., reports that such a co-ordinating council is of distinct service to the authorities. A group there includes doctors, dentists,

automobile experts, photographers, locksmiths, chemists, and lawers, Their combined intelligence has proved of tremendous value.

Instead of spending their money for fishing tackle or golf sticks, they buy microscopes and other scientific equipment. Every Friday night they meet for consultation, with special meetings when a case is hot. They have been able to find blood spots on the clothing of murder suspects, to solve arson cases, to identify automobile tracks and firearms and uncover important clues.

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover has publicly commended their efforts. They have set an example that might well be followed by other towns. Not every place is as well endowed with experts, perhaps, as in Elizabeth, but the amount of talent that could be put to use would be surprising.

Men need not think that they have the field of amateur police work all to themselves. Not all girls who make the headlines are gun molls. "Women yells, thugs flee" is an old formula that still works. Variations of it appear in the newspapers every day. "Screams of Actress Rout Robber. Lone Woman's Shriek Routs Pair Robbing 17 Men in Drugstore. Girls Give Chase on Broadway. Calm Woman Foils Three Bank Thugs. Woman Hurls Pork and Beans at Intruder. Woman Fifty Uses Fists to Rout Bluffing Bandit."

It is no wonder that professional criminals say, "Dames is poison", and leave them alone. The tradition of the clinging vine has been given a streamlined, modernistic interpretation by women in their encounters with criminals. "Girl Throws Arms Around Neck of Holdup Man; Clings to Thief Until Help Arrives."

Just because women carry purses underworld novices think it is easy to pick on them. But it doesn't always turn out that way. When it comes right down to it, it is pretty hard to get the best of a woman in an old-fashioned tug of war. If she won't let go, you can't make her. For instance there was Miss Regina of the Delite Pastry Company who drew a $500 pay roll from the bank and put it in her bag with her lip stick and whatever else it is that women carry. On the way to the plant some one grabbed it, but she never relaxed her grip even though she was rolled roughly in the mud.

An ancient princess who doted on the golden apples of the Hesperides, refused to marry any man who could not beat her in a foot race. Most of her unlucky suitors failed. Girls today are as fleet of foot as any ancient beauty. A shop girl recently rode herd on three shoplifters down the Gay White Way and corralled them in no time. A youth in Central Park who jumped to the running board of an automobile that stopped for a red light got a woman's purse all right, but he didn't keep it long. High heels or no high heels, she jumped out after him, and in the cross country race she was the winner.

Out in Chicago a Miss Mary Jones was taken by surprise. A man grabbed her handbag containing $700 which she had been instructed to take to the bank. This was on the eighth floor. The man did not wait for the elevator and neither did Mary. On the seventh floor she got hold of his coat, and to make a getaway he had to wriggle out of it. On the fourth floor she caught him again and ripped off his shirt. On the third floor she really went to work on him, and he decided it would be wise to surrender before she made a nudist of him.

"Flowers for Miss Talmadge," announced a man's voice once in Hollywood. A maid unlocked the door to find a gun aimed at her. "Keep your hands above your head, and don't say a word," she was told. Women, however, pride themselves on not doing what they are told. The maid screamed, and Norma Talmadge emerged from another room to join the feminine duet in crescendo. The man dropped his flowers and fled.

The scream may be old-fashioned but it works better than the most modern burglar alarm. The "Cat Burglar" of the Bronx went his way unmolested until he made the error of invading the bedroom of a woman who could yell loud enough to attract a radio car.

SOME women like to provide a little action to accompany the sound track. Out in Iowa Mrs. Nelson sent a bandit scampering when she hurled a hot plate of pork chops, beans, and potatoes with gravy. Mrs. Burnet in Connecticut chose a can of hot water for her barrage and then followed up with such vigor that her opponent fled for his life. In Chicago a woman was dragged from a car by a masked man who, gun in hand, intended to use her as a shield. When she dug her finger nails in his face with such fury that they broke, he was glad to release her and take a chance on bullets.

Down in Greenwich Village a girl who came home to spend a peaceful evening switched on the lights to discover a burglar all packed up to go places with her typewriter and radio. He was a heavy-set brute while she was just five-foot-two and weighed merely a hundred pounds. Even so he found himself arraigned the next morning in Jefferson Market Court on a charge of burglary. His eyes were blackened, and he was bruised here and there, but he could not blame it on the third degree. It had all happened before his arrest, or as he might have termed it, his rescue.

"He tried to get tough by rushing me and making a grab for my throat," explained the girl demurely to the judge. "I just swung from my toes and landed a left on his right eye. That staggered him. Then I grab *his* throat and threw him for a loss."

"If I had any medals to give away," said a Harlem magistrate to Georgette Hopkins in 1937, "I would certainly give one to you. Anyhow I discharge you on this technical felonious assault charge."

"Thank you, judge," she replied. "You see I got plenty over-heated when those men burst in my restaurant yammering for money. Nobody is going to take away my hard earned cash. So I just shot one of the nasty little things with his own gun."

For sheer bravery it is hard to surpass Mrs. Elizabeth Maranz of New York. She actually talked a man out of murdering her. She had called in a man to help with the house cleaning and had given him a hammer to work on a kitchen shelf. Instead he followed her into the kitchen and struck her on the head. It was a repetition of the hammer killing of Mrs. Mary Hastings Case that had occurred not long before. Instead of yielding to her fright, Mrs Maranz began to talk. She told the man that the police would get him and that he would go to the electric chair. She managed to slip out of the kitchen and run for the hall door, but her assailant caught her, threw her to the floor, and struck her again. But she kept on talking until she convinced the man that the best thing he could do was to wash the blood off his hands and get out

quick. Then and only then did Mrs. Maranz decide that, in the Victorian manner, she might swoon.

Once it turns into a battle of wits women can tame robbers in a way that mere man cannot duplicate. Mary Kane of Illinois just asked her robbers if they were hungry and dished out such excellent food that they not only thanked her but returned the money they had taken from her father's cash register. Although June Williams was alone in a San Francisco candy store when a young bandit pointed a gun at her and demanded money, she wasn't in the least frightened. "Why, you're too young to be a holdup man!" she said witheringly and continued so pertinently that her visitor finally tipped his hat meekly and left.

OUT on Long Island a woman by the name of Christina turned out to be quite as able as her patrolman husband in battling the rackets. After a shopping tour she found that her automobile would not start until she had enlisted the helpful services of a young man standing nearby. Her notions of chivalry were rudely shocked when he demanded five dollars for his tinkering and even became threatening. Caspar Milquetoast might have yielded promptly, but the female of the species is made of sterner stuff. Christina abandoned the car and marched around the corner looking for a policeman. Of course, the helpful mechanic had vanished by the time they returned. Yet with typical criminal stupidity he disconnected a wire in the very same car a few weeks later while she was in the grocery store, and that time she caught him.

Another Long Island heroine, Helen Van Dyck, managed to hide behind the furniture when four armed men entered the bank where she was employed. Stealthily she crawled to a telephone booth and succeeded in getting the receiver off the hook unnoticed and whispering a call for help. With the sharp eye of a school teacher, Margaret Hubbell, in Ravenna, Ohio, for a day's shopping, thought that a car looked suspicious. She copied down its license number; investigation by skeptical males proved that it had indeed been used in a holdup.

When several unfamiliar men called repeatedly for mail in St. Michael's, Pa., the postmistress thought their presence odd. Then she realized that an approaching pay day at the mines might account for their interest in the locality. Acting on her tip, state police searched the hotel room of the strangers and found loaded revolvers that proved her point. Moreover the men were linked to another holdup. "Woman's intuition," cops said admiringly.

The robbery of the Sharpsburgh, Pa., postoffice might never have been solved had it not been for the alertness of Mrs. Helen Scott. She had a twenty-inch telescope which she used to watch for the homing pigeons that her husband sent out. Two days after the crime at the postoffice, she happened to glance earthward. Half hidden in a clump of weeds she saw a man a mile and a half away busily taking letters from a mail pouch and tearing up those without value. She made a telephone call and then watched the officers slip up and get him.

With their eye for detail it is not surprising that women are good at catching counterfeiters. A woman clerk in Grand Rapids accepted a counterfeit half dollar once; thereafter nothing got past her. A purchaser of a pair of stockings discovered this when she presented a fake bill. Her arrest resulted in the roundup of a gang for which secret

service operatives had been searching for months. Had it been left to men, who can not even match one ribbon to another let alone detect a counterfeit, the gang might still have been operating.

Women are good at identification too. If they see a man once, they know him the next time. A salesgirl astounded detectives by the assurance with which she picked a young man out of the thronging thousands at Coney Island. A thug hasn't a chance to strike twice in the same place if there is a woman in the case. Thus Miss Kane, alone in a liquor store while her boss went to supper, gazed out of the window looking for customers. She saw one she knew too well, a ruffian who had taken $249 not long before and was coming back for a second helping. "Just a minute, please," she said as she locked the door in his face at the same time pretending that she thought he was just another patron. Having phoned the police station, she admitted him and let him take his choice of rye. She seemed very agreeable and he lingered a while, long enough indeed to find his arms pinioned to his sides by detectives who had responded to her call.

Women seem to have such powers of observation, in fact, that they can tell what a man has been up to just by looking at him. A Brooklyn woman returning to her home wondered why a youth she met on the street looked so nervous. When she got to her front door she knew the answer. The house had been burglarized. In the distance she saw him waiting for a bus. Before she could reach the vehicle he boarded it and was away. She noticed, however, that the next traffic light was red so she started out in pursuit.

She caught the bus and collared her victim.

"I didn't do nothing," he protested.

"Hush up before I smack you," she said. "You can't fool a woman. No use trying to lie!"

Cipher Solvers' Club for February, 1940

(*Continued from page* 86)

Twenty-four (Continued)—°The Griffin, Swansea, Mass. °I-dan-ha, Soda Springs, Idaho. °Henry J. Haewecker, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Hamcie, New Hartford, Conn. †F. M. Hansen, Minneapolis, Minn. °Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif. °T. Hegarty, Brooklyn, N. Y. °H. N. H., Buffalo, N. Y. †Heliotrope, New York, N. Y. †Henty, Winnipeg, Manitoba. †Hilda II, Carmel, Calif. †Hopado, Ann Arbor, Mich. °G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass. °L. S. H., Washington, D. C. °Opal Hurt, Chicago, Ill. °Herbert J. Huthwiate, Brooklyn, N. Y. °H. Hyman, Philadelphia, Pa. °Alter Idem, Welland, Ontario. °Sam Isen, Saginaw, Mich. †Ixaxar, New York, N. Y. †Jaybee, Oklahoma City, Okla. °Jayem, Bellingham, Wash. °U. U. Jeff, Massillon, Ohio. °Kate, Crowley, Okla. °Keystonian, Marysville, Pa. °Kismet, Corona, N. Y. Joe C. Kusmierz, Cleveland, Ohio. †Remle Legof, Pittsburgh, Pa. †Lady Lilith, Oklahoma City, Okla. °Loydeh, Chicago, Ill. °Nice, A. M., Indianapolis, Ind. †Mystic Mac, Miami, Fla. °Macaw, Massillon, Ohio. °Retlaw Maldim, Dayton, Ohio. †R. J. McNeice, Pittsburgh, Pa. °A. Meredith, Pittsburgh, Pa. Reshockl Mesloh, Milwaukee, Wis. °Minerva, Marion, Ind. Thos. A. Moran, Oakland, Calif. °Mossback, Crescent City, Calif. °Nedyah, New York, N. Y. †Norvic, Baltimore, Md. °Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill. †Eber A. Oden, Guthrie, Okla. †Orkayo, Chicago, Ill. †Betty S. P., Albany, N. Y. °Penny, San Diego, Calif. †Alroy S. Phillips, St. Louis, Mo. †Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio. †Half-Pint, Wichita Falls, Tex. °Copper-Plate, Saranac Lake, N. Y. °W. F. P., Galesburg, Ill. †Kee Pon, Malden, Mass. †Posius, Boston, Mass. †Abe C. Pressman, New York, N. Y. °Primrose, Baltimore, Md. †Quintuplex, Rochester, N. Y. Gene Ralsteel, Astoria, N. Y. †Red E. Raser, San Diego, Calif. †Rekroywen, Bronx, N. Y. °Rengaw, Chicago, Ill. Retlaw, Moncton, New Brunswick. †Ray F. Richer, Herkimer, N. Y. †Frank C. Ringer, Chicago, Ill. Joseph Risko, Cleveland, Ohio. †Ty Roe, Bartlesville, Okla. °Alice Routh, Oklahoma City, Okla. †Saco, La Mesa, Calif. Betty Saladee, San Francisco, Calif. †Bea Em Sea, Bradford, Mass. °Mrs. H. A. Seals, Cleveland, Ohio. °Kay Vee See, Seattle, Wash. °O. I. See, Caroleen, N. C. E. Shrdlu, New York, N. Y. †Robert Simons, Hackensack, N. J. °Box Six, Lapeer, Mich. †Skeet, Portsmouth, Ohio.

(*To be Continued*)

Solving Cipher Secrets

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

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 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. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 121—Read As You Ride. By Carson Rollins.

ABC DAEFGCD GH ABGD KLMLNGHC FCLOOP CHACFALGH! LHR LD SEF ABC TFPUAEMFLKD, ABCP ETTVUP KP AGKC RVFGHM KP OEHM FGRC AE XEFY CZCFP RLP!

No. 122—An Empty Creel. By †Nujak.

ONOGURF OXLDUF, BDJ-BSPVSXL, PAEFXP OKZSAU EB ZUGUFOXP; BDOSDP OTERG HSGV ZSLEF TRG XE PYSDD. AOGAVUP VOG, ODPE AEOG EB AENCOXSEXP, LRXXJ POAY, GFUU DSNTP. HSXKP RC HSGV VEEY SX EHX EZUFODDP.

No. 123—Superfluous Props. By Periwig

XFPGGNU RHYYNUE ZNHKS HK XFCDXRUE. NZVA BPDR RZKV YZS ZGGFHZXRUE. XFPGGNU DFPGE NZVA BPDR XFCDXR. NZVA TZNNE. XFPGGNU LZOUE HTT, RZKV YZS PK HKU RZKV, XFCDXRUE PK HDRUF. "GHNPXU!"

No. 124—Just Pretending. By †Envy El.

SHIFTED SIGN BEARD BIEGULFN TXHK TMDUKEYULTG. VTPPD VHKMN, IZOZIKVFN IDYHGVD FTZHKHV FIVVHK. DFLRD DLVHZLDH, PIFFD PFIU. YLKYED YIRHKD!

No. 125—Obstreperous Stranger. By †I. Givup.

MODERN IVER, ALERVUZ OTVERN OTHER, CLERKY RULER; MOTHER OIVER, MOVERN ACLER FHER; MOHER. MCVER ILERFLU, MUVERKTVUZ, FDERKY: "GHVER! YKTTVER! BTKER!" SCHERN OTHERFLU OIBLERKY IKERCKT.

PAPPY, Pipersville, Pa., writes: "Why not print a few messages couched in ordinary language, making them rather longer than the regular ones, without offering any clues as to whether a given cipher is a transposition, or substitution, or what? In other words, give us a real crack at a real job of cipher solving, just as if we were settled at a desk in the Black Chamber!"

No. X-89. Military Message. By †Volund.

IGDH	RWDV	UGUW	GKUW	UFLZ
JULS	OVRE	MNLR	GCQX	SAXR
JVVW	VDMI	DVUE	JFLR	HRDV
UKHW	FXHV	ZGIJ	PTWA	JNOF
FODH	FDBV	BKGM	OISE	SVLI
TVRX	BMHT	SKVS	OGUW	TKJR
FFPE	KQUK	FPHV	BNMS	OGV

This sounds like a swell idea, and especially so since other solvers have also made the same proposition. Hence, †Volund's No. X-89 is being published without any suggestions whatever as to the type of cipher employed. Further, †Volund himself has a word to say, which should provide additional incentive for you in tackling his cipher.

Says †Volund: "From what I have seen of message center personnel, in actual field service, this type of cipher would be (and remain) an unsolved mystery until long after any war of reasonable length. However, this type has been used, at times, much to the dismay of the code clerks affected." So there you are, cryptofans! The full explanation of No. X-89 will be published in two weeks.

"By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurl'd;
Here once the embattl'd farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson.

abcde fghijk lm nop qrstuvwxyz
FIRST BATTLE IN OUR REVOLUTION

Message: "By the rude bridge ...
Cipher: "IO OTT ELST IETSAT ...

Herewith are the key-phrase alphabet, translation, and an illustration of the encipherment of last week's No. X-88, by †Watsy Cal. The text is the beginning of Emerson's "Hymn Sung at the Completion of the Concord Monument." OTFO (*that*), OTT (*the*), and OU (*to*) provided the necessary entry in solving the cipher.

Current Crypts: Carson Rollins offers his first cryptogram, in which ABC, ABGD, and AE will unlock DAEFGCD. In †Nujak's message, try for SX and -'SXL, XE and EHX, HSGV and VOG. In Periwig's contribution guess HTT (low-frequency symbol T), following up with HK, PK, and HKU. In †Envy El's alliterative pairs, pattern IZOZIKVFN will help you with FIVVHK. The digraph ER occurs in every word of †I. Givup's Inner Circler, par 150 answers! Which reminds us, †Papauli's "Sayyid Tourist," No. 47 of Feb. 24, par 200, brought in 292 solutions! The key to the division, by Ragus, runs, *0123456 789*. Answers to No. 121-26, next week.

No. 126—Cryptic Division. By Ragus.

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Y E L ) L U E R L Y ( E E V
        L R Y U
        -------
          L G G L
          L R Y U
          -------
            L S E Y
            I N L Y
            -------
              I L S
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LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

115—The usefulness of the null-type radio direction finder is seriously impaired by the inherent low gain of such a device, which renders its use during poor conditions difficult or impossible.

116—Pinochle game runs riot. Two players, confused, bid high, neither giving in. One has thousand aces, other has double pinochle. Dealer, silent, has grand time. For he had stacked the cards!

117—Billboard poster, advertising "malt and hops," incorrectly laid out, should have had more space between "malt" and "and," and "and" and "hops."

118—Captious Cassius concocted cunning conspiracy concerning Cæsar. Cautious Casca commenced combat, callous comrades consummated cabal, concluded Caius' career. Catastrophic crime!

119—Whilst hungry lynx crept beyond peaceful twilight byway, big snowy owl, flying overhead, swooped swiftly downward, caught plump young ptarmigan.

120—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
M E N T A L W O R K

All answers to Nos. 121-26 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for May. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Handwriting Secrets

Character Clues in Pen and Ink

By Helen King

IN THE spring many a fancy turns toward love, and that, of course, means marriage. The readers of this magazine are no exception; at least two dozen young men have written in the past few weeks telling of their approaching marriage. Naturally the question came up: "Can you tell if the girl would make me happy, according to her handwriting?"

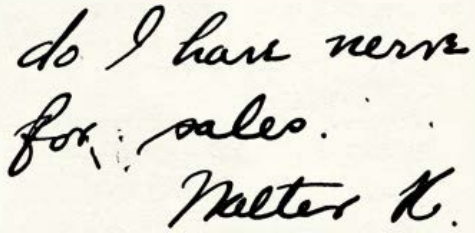
A character analyst can give you the facts about yourself or others. How the future will work out is something no one can tell. Perhaps two characters will blend beautifully during prosperous conditions, but some quirk of fate may bring adversity—and then the two persons disagree. We can tell how you would act under given circumstances, but nobody can tell what conditions will arise from other sources. Thus it is possible to say: "Yes, this girl is ideal for you under normal circumstances."

A graphologist can tell you the facts, but your use of them is something for you to decide. It is a help to know the strengths and weaknesses of your future wife, but knowing isn't enough. You must know also how to blend your own traits with hers. Strangely enough, no prospective groom asked if *he* would make the girl happy! All were worried about their own happiness. Such is mankind.

Dear Miss King:

Do I have enough nerve to become a salesman? That seems to be the essential trait, as far as I can see, and I wonder how I would do at it.

Walter H.



Dear Walter:

It isn't nerve that makes the successful salesman—it is a knowledge of his product, and enough psychology to know how to make the customer understand its value to himself. Know your line, and know the other fellow's need for it. That is salesmanship. Knowledge of a subject usually gives assurance, which you have mistaken for nerve. A good salesman likes to meet others, like to deal with them, because he realizes that in selling himself he is also selling his product.

Your writing shows that you can sell, but that you must be in a position where the leads come to you, as you are hesitant about forcing your way to see people.

H. K.

Dear Miss King:

With the universal teaching of communication via typewriters, won't that interfere with your business? I'm not being fresh, just curious. Every place I go I see children being taught to typewrite, and I wondered what would happen to the writing teachers, handwriting experts, etc.

Rol L. O.

Dear Rollo:

As long as it is simpler to carry a pencil than a typewriter, we handwriting folks won't worry too much. As the ages go by man tries to simplify things, not make them harder.

H. K.

This week a number of characteristics came up in the mail, for rapid analysis. Many readers want to know offhand how to tell certain things (probably checking up on a pal), so these next few lines are dedicated to that group of quizzers.

Wit: is shown by a wavy *i*-dot.

Will power: is designated by a firm *t*-bar, and usually a steady, even style.

Weak will: is found in a weak light writing accompanied by an equally weak, light *t*-crossing. Sometimes the ends of the crossing will be turned up.

Versatility: is found in the writings of those who have original letters, and several manners of writing one letter.

Vanity: is shown by flourishes, and an inflated capital *I*. You won't be popular long if you pin this trait on any of your associates.

Tyranny: will be found in heavy shading, a club shaped *i*, and a club shaped *t*-crossing. You should look for all three of these signs, not just one, although the last will give you your "final straw."

Thrift: moderate margins and letters which are closed at the top (such as *a* and *o*) give you the clue here.

Tenacity: is found in hooks, and in curves, as though the writer couldn't bear to let go of the pen.

Temper: is found in shading, and a downward pointed *t*-bar. Turn the writing upside down to look for shading—the more of it that is present, the more the trait is evident in the person.

Tact: is shown by a moderate tapering of words.

Talkative: people give themselves away by writing letters which are open at the top, such as *a* and *o*.

PURELY PERSONAL

E.J.C., Pa.: Yes, you are a bit gullible. That's why you complain about being "taken in" so much. You must learn to say "NO" in a big voice, so that the earlier impression will be destroyed. There are people who will take advantage of you, if they can.

A.L.F., Island Falls: If you filled out a questionnaire properly, and you know your problems were correct, you have a right to demand an inquiry. However, your letter to me was difficult to understand; possibly the same tone was used in the questionnaire.

MISS HELEN KING,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY
280 Broadway New York, N. Y

This coupon not good after June 8, 1940.

I enclose handwriting specimen for advice and analysis.

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

.....

A STAMPED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY THIS COUPON

(Canadian readers, please send U. S. stamps, or coin. Readers from all other foreign countries should send International Reply Coupon, properly stamped by post office.)

R.E.A., Arizona: Your son's writing is not as developed as your daughter's, despite the age difference. However, don't let it worry you, for very often girls develop more rapidly than boys. Don't take it out on the boy. He is a different type, through nobody's fault. His sister will be matured at twenty-one, or thereabouts, but he will constantly develop, probably right up through old age. One matures early, the other late. It takes both kinds to make the world go round and round. An early maturer yourself, it is difficult for you to understand any type other than your own, but believe me, this type is needed. They are the Edisons and Fords of the world.

J.E.O., Ohio: What do you consider "nice writing"? I'd have to see the writing mentioned, as a description doesn't help much.

Prize Letter Contest

Use the coupon below to vote on the stories in this issue, and don't forget that the reader who writes the best letter of 50 words or more on the reasons for his (or her) first choice will receive a cash award of $10.00.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

In my opinion the stories in the May 25th issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:

	No. Here
THE BLOODY ISLE by T. T. Flynn	.....
MURDER IS WHERE YOU FIND IT by B. B. Fowler	.....
THE AUTUMN KILL by John K. Butler	.....
SUMMER'S END by William Manners	.....
HONEYMOON AT EASTBOURNE by Dugal O'Liam	.....
MANSION OF DEATH by Roger Torrey	.....
BE YOUR OWN COP by James Hargan	.....

Attached is my letter of 50 words or more giving my reasons for selecting.....

.....as the best story in this issue of DFW. I understand that all letters are to become the property of The Frank A. Munsey Company.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE.....

(This coupon is not good after June 1, 1940)
(Address all letters to the Prize Letter Editor)

Coming Next Week

When the condemned man came out of prison, once more a free man, there was a sudden interest in art for the ex-convict held the secret to a hidden treasure. Somewhere there was an oil painting masking thousands of dollars. And the man with the secret found himself posing for the

PORTRAIT OF DEATH

By PHILIP KETCHUM

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

(On sale next Wednesday, May 22)

THE CRIME JURY

DETECTIVE FICTION'S Guide to Detective Fiction

Crime and Criminal	*Charge*	*Plea*	*Sentence**
SABOTAGE *Cleve F. Adams* (Dutton: $2)	Saboteurs try to wreck great dam project. Accident piled on top of accident and whole town is held in the grip of terror.	Rex McBride, private detective carries the top honors. And carries them well, we might add. This ran as a serial in DFW.	20 years to life
AS GOOD AS MURDERED *James O'Hanlon* (Random: $2)	A Hollywood would-be scenario writer thinks up a good murder plot and then it comes to life.	Good fast dialogue and some fresh twists to the plot. Put this on your list.	Life
MURDER THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS *Robert George Dean* (Crime Club: $2)	A double killing against the background of newspapers and the South, Suh! In the carefree school.	Handled well with a lot of frisky dialogue — if you like that sort of thing.	20 years to life
WITCH WOOD *Christopher Hale* (Crime Club: $2)	Murder at a cabin resort with Bill French, of the N. Y. State Homicide Squad, doing all the work.	Characters are handled rather well and there's a good surprise finish, but nothing to get excited about.	30 to 50 years
BRANDON IS MISSING *Dennis Allan* (Mill: $2)	A headless corpse, found in a New York taxi, competes with a lot of rare books.	A liberal education in the rare book field, if you're interested.	15 to 30 years
FINDERS KEEPERS *Geoffrey Homes* (Morrow: $2)	An old blue diary brings death to several people and almost gets Campbell, the detective with an accordion.	Bright, fast-moving story with plenty of punch. A little romance thrown in for seasoning.	20 years to life

**The longest sentence indicates the best book.*

As a convenience to our readers, any of these books may be secured, postage free, by sending the amount of the list price (check or money order) to the Frank A. Munsey Co., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

Send Coupon
Don't Pay Until Relieved

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ; whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show, H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin which enables it to get to parasites that exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try; so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot, why wait a day longer.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

GORE PRODUCTS, INC. **M.**
860 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

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