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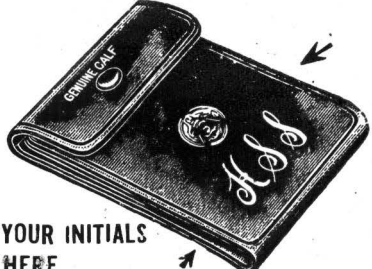
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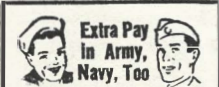
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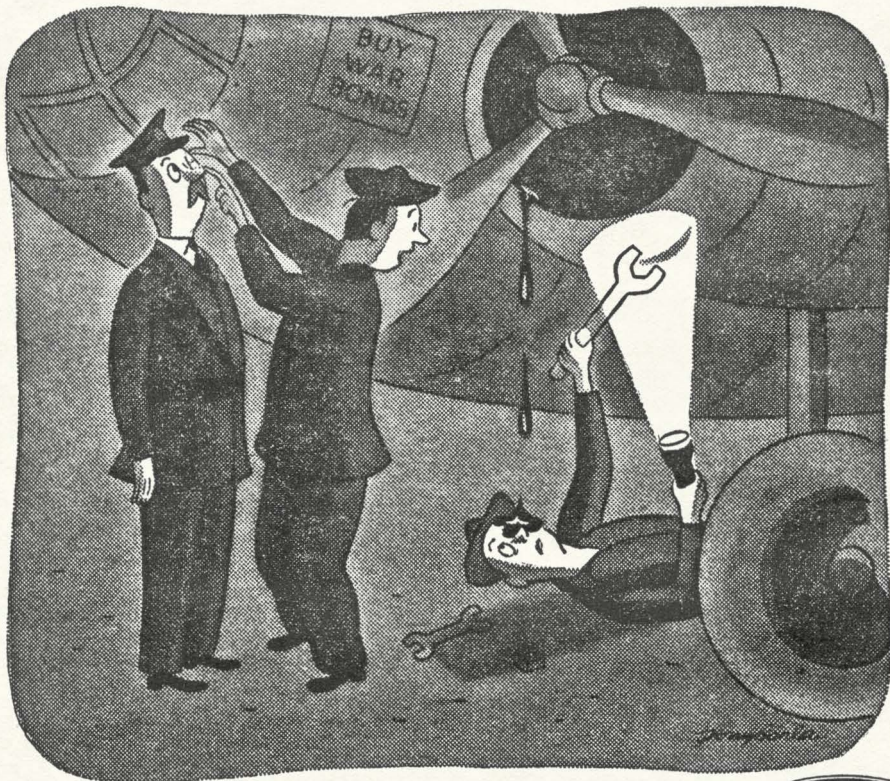


**BROADCASTING STATIONS** (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

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# DETECTIVE TALES

May Issue  
on sale March 24



VOL. TWENTY-FOUR      APRIL, 1943      NUMBER ONE

**Startling Mystery Novel**

1. **REUNION ON MURDER MOUNTAIN**.....Day Keene 8  
Neither the Army nor the F.B.I. wanted any part of big Cass Able, just out of the pen. No one wanted him—except the Murder mountain marauders and, after a while, the police!

**Two Dramatic Detective Novelettes**

2. **TERROR'S TWIN**.....Frederick C. Davis 54  
Here, indeed, is a baffling and tragic puzzle—a human drama of the lovely Chester twins . . . which only an inhuman murder could solve!
3. **MODEL FOR MANSLAUGHTER**.....William R. Cox 94  
Jean, Rickey, and the deadly Mr. Thomas flock to John Wade's battle standard—when he challenges the strange army of waxen killers!

**Five Outstanding Short Stories**

4. **CORPSE IN A TEST TUBE**.....Dale Clark 32  
Scientist John Hayden found murder fascinating. His girl found him impossible. And the murderer found him alone—on a dark, death-fraught night!
5. **DON'T YOU DIE FOR ME!**.....Robert Turner 46  
Duke could have taken the dirty beating the two men out of Nickie's past had dished out to him. He could have taken anything—but Nickie's flippant, derisive farewell!
6. **HOMICIDE AT HIGH TIDE**.....Edward Parrish Ware 69  
The storm-lashed Black River hid the actions of a greedy killer. And when the sun rose—no man trusted his neighbor!
7. **GLORY HUNTER**.....C. P. Donnel, Jr. 78  
His bullying, glory-seeking sergeant gives Patrolman Eddie Davis the idea of doing some headline sniping himself.
8. **IF THY RIGHT HAND OFFEND THEE**—.....Dane Gregory 85  
The misadventure of four of life's misfits, told as only Dane Gregory could tell it.

**A Short Short Story**

9. **TOO MANY ALIBIS**.....Edward S. Williams 41  
Harvey Brandt had planned on things getting hot . . . but he got cold feet—at the wrong time!
- And—
10. **THE CRIME CLINIC**.....A Department 6  
The mystery of the poisoned blood bank. . . .
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The adventures of an ultra-violet ray.
  12. **WHEN GANGDOM RULED**.....Windas 107  
Some murder memos from the trigger-quick Twenties.

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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# THE CRIME CLINIC

EVERYONE who reads this page has at one time or another seen a barber pole. It means a haircut, shave, shampoo and lots of other fancy things. But that is not what the original barber pole stood for. No, indeed. The first barber pole was the trademark of a surgeon—for all barbers were surgeons. And at that time it was a white pole—with bloody rags wrapped around it.

Those bloody rags signified “blood letting.” The early medical men believed that letting some blood out of your system would cure any ailment that you had. So when a doctor called on a patient, he cut his arm. If blood came out—that meant the patient had too much anyway and could afford to lose a little.

Then some of the pioneers in surgery figured that the blood of a sheep pumped into a weak person would fix them up fine. *These* surgeons were on the right track but had a long way to go before they achieved what they were trying to do. For the patients died when the sheep blood was transfused into them.

After that the surgeons hit upon the idea of using human blood. This had some startling effects. Some people, upon receiving human blood, just seemed to curl up and die. And in other cases, the patient got along fine. This amazing situation had the surgeons in a dither.

Well, this hit-and-miss method went on till an Austrian scientist, Karl Landsteiner, made the discovery that there were four types of human blood—and that to mix these blood types was fatal. This great discovery brought Landsteiner the Nobel prize, and was hailed as one of the most important milestones in medicine. For his discovery brought medical science a long way from the day of the bloody barber pole.

Today many hospitals have “blood

banks”—where carefully grouped blood is kept on hand for emergencies. Other hospitals have donor lists of men and women whose blood has been typed and who will answer S.O.S. calls at any hour of the day or night. And there are blood-donor agencies who keep donors on tap at all times.

The war has brought about a great need for large blood banks. And in this phase of total war the American Home Front can stand shoulder to shoulder with the lads on the Fighting Front. Americans everywhere are gladly donating their blood—that may save the life of a tough marine on Guadalcanal, or a salty gob on a fighting ship at sea, or a plucky tankman in North Africa.

The Red Cross needs blood from donors everywhere. And take it from one who knows—the procedure *is* painless. Your reward—besides saving the life of some brave American fighting man—will be a glass of milk, maybe an eggnog, maybe a shot of whiskey.

Blood is being shipped in great quantities to the distant battle-fronts. Now think—think what would happen if some of that blood had been viciously poisoned by an inhuman Axis agent. Think of the heart-rending problem that would confront the doctor who was in charge of that blood bank—and who *had* to have the shipment ready for a specially chartered army plane.

That was the problem confronting young Doctor Hawley—who was also being hounded and hunted by the police and hospital staff alike, as the man suspected of being the ruthless poisoner himself. Doctor Hawley's grim story is told in “The Blood Bank Killings,” a timely mystery novel by Harry Widmer in the May issue. Also in this big issue is a strong crime novelette by your favorite Day Keene “He Who Dies Last, Dies Hardest”; and a great lineup of carefully selected novelettes and shorts by Robert Turner, Edward S. Williams, Jack Bradley, Robert W. Cochran, Eric Provost and others! The May issue will be on sale March 24th!

The Editor.



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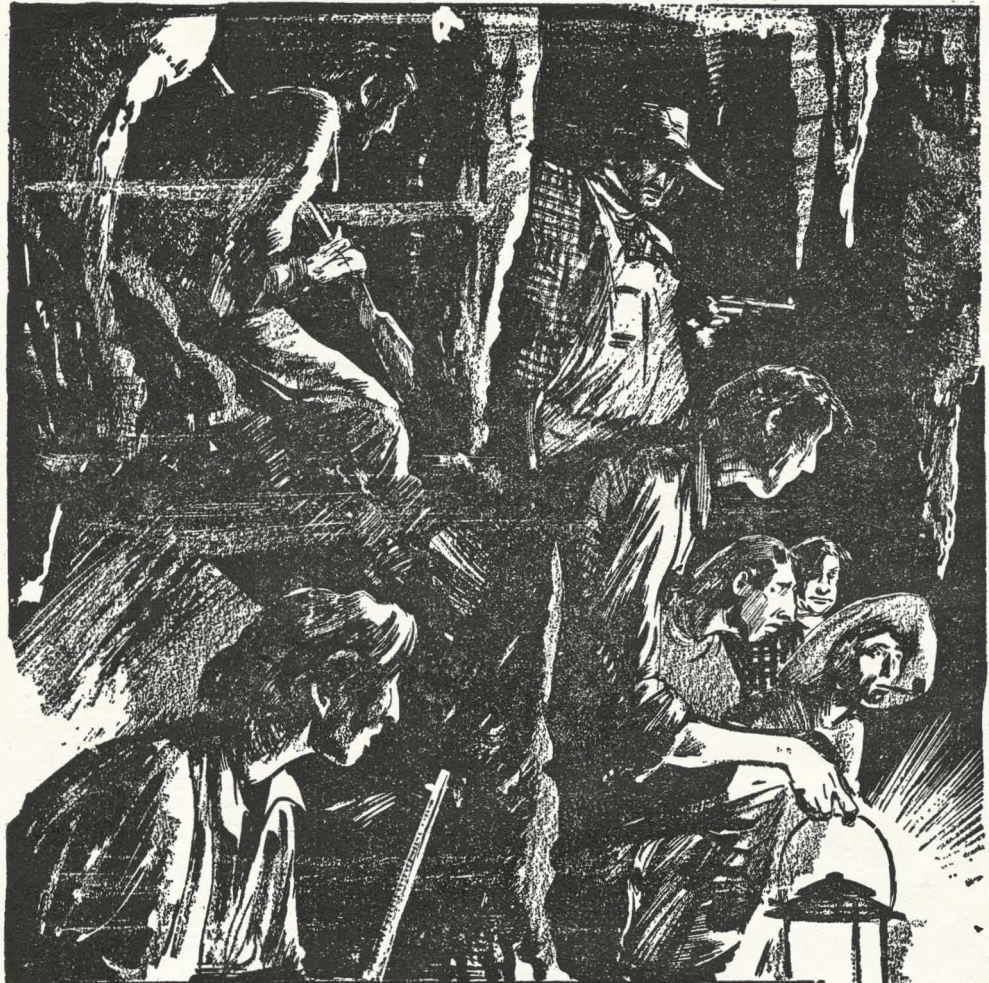
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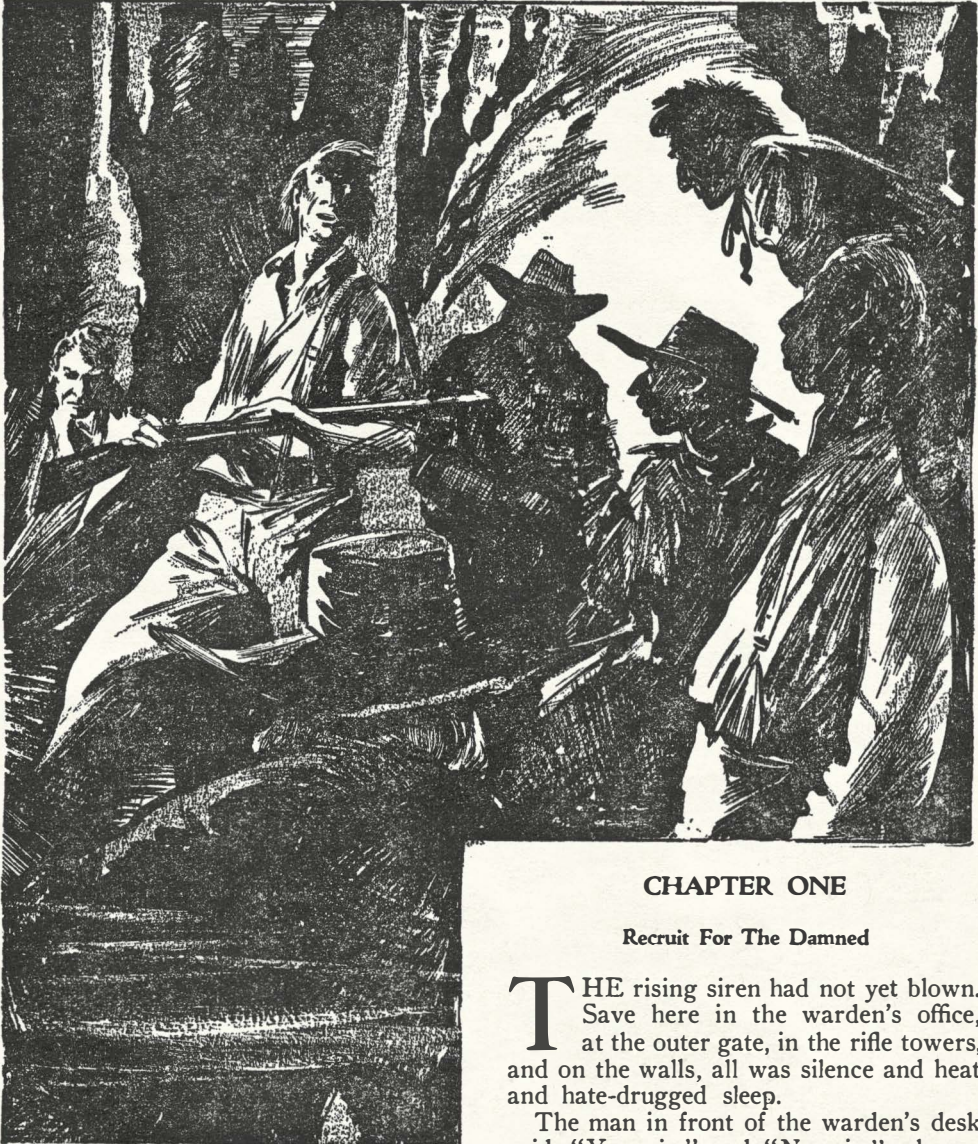
# REUNION ON MURDER MOUNTAIN

*Smashing Mystery-Action Novel*

**By DAY KEENE**



*Big Cass Able, fresh out of the pen and wanting to do his part in a war-torn world, found that no one wanted him—no one except the wild night riders on Murder Mountain, and the venomous honey-blonde whose beautiful eyes held a hideous secret. . . . A robust, pulsating story of the gathering of a killer clan!*



“What you got planned for us this time, Cass?”

## CHAPTER ONE

### Recruit For The Damned

THE rising siren had not yet blown. Save here in the warden's office, at the outer gate, in the rifle towers, and on the walls, all was silence and heat and hate-drugged sleep.

The man in front of the warden's desk said, “Yes, sir,” and “No, sir,” when a direct question was asked him. The rest of the time he stood kneading his cheap cap in his hands and looking over the

warden's head and out beyond the walls.

Warden Kane's voice droned on: "You've been in prison eight years, Cass. You'll find a lot of changes. For one thing, we're at war."

Cass Able managed another, "Yes, sir."

He couldn't stand much more of this. He had waited eight years for this morning. He wanted to be free. He had business on Murder Mountain. He had a man to kill by nightfall.

The warden lighted his dead cigar. "You still maintain that you're innocent, Cass? You still claim it wasn't you who shot Sam White?"

"I do," Cass said.

Warden Kane met his eyes. "And I believe you, Cass. I believed you when they brought you here." His voice became a rumble in his chest. The ashes dropped unnoticed from his cigar to mound in a flaky pile on his ample vest. "A mountain boy with no more advantages than any other mountain boy you pulled yourself up by the bootstraps. You got yourself a college education. You stood high man of your group in the bar examinations. You had a nice practice in Greenside. Your application for a federal agency was accepted and reported on favorably by the F.B.I. It was because of your past spotless record that the court reduced the charge against you from first degree murder to manslaughter.

The former lawyer's gray eyes narrowed. "Good Lord," he thought, "will the fat old fool ever finish?"

"Well, I guess that's all," Warden Kane concluded awkwardly. He took an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Cass. "Take this with you, son. Open it outside. Two roads fork from the prison gate. One of them leads back here. The other road is a little tougher going but it leads to the place you were headed before you—er—made this little detour."

He made a gesture of dismissal. He didn't offer to shake hands.

Cass strode through the door that led into the prison yard. The compound was drenched in sunlight. He waded it to the gate and handed the guard his pass.

"All right," the guard unlocked the gate. "Get going, fellow. And don't hang around outside. It might give the

place a bad name." He guffawed loudly.

The two guards in the east rifle tower laughed.

Cass didn't even hear them. His back to the prison gate his eyes had sought out the ribbon of white that wound up through the foothills to the mountains. He had sufficient money for bus fare. By noon he would be in Greenside. By late afternoon, early evening at the latest, he would reach the summit of Murder Mountain. He hoped Lem would be home.

Fumbling for his tobacco sack his hand found the envelope that Warden Kane had given him. He slit it open and found ten twenty-dollar bills and a brief note. The message read:

*Don't do it, Cass. I know how you feel, but whoever he is, he isn't worth it. Consider this a loan until you get back on your feet. Pick the right road, son. Good luck.*

The big man's pent-up anger drained from him slowly. Warden Kane believed in him, he trusted him. And Warden Kane was right. Lem wasn't worth killing. He would put the thought out of his mind, forget the past eight years, and start all over again. This time, with Rita beside him, there was nothing that could stop him.



TOM PINSON was the divisional head of the F.B.I. with headquarters in Greenside. He looked up swearing softly as Matt Humphrey entered the office. "Damn it to hell," he told him. "Those night riders on Murder Mountain are raising hob again." He pounded the teletype report on his desk. "And no one can tell me that there isn't a brain behind them. They just swooped down on the Tennessee side of the mountain and stuck up the High Ridge bank." "No trace—as usual?" Humphrey asked.

"No." Pinson shook his head. "Was there something you wanted, Matt?"

The agent nodded to the door. "There's a lad outside who insists on seeing you. His name is Able, Cass Able."

"Good." Pinson's lean face lighted with pleasure. "Come in, Cass," he called out. He got to his feet and shook hands cordially as the other man entered the door. "I'm glad to see you, boy," he said sincerely. "You just get out this morning?"

"This morning." The younger man smiled. He had invested eighty dollars of Warden Kane's loan in a new suit of clothes and a broad-brimmed Panama hat. Despite his prison pallor he looked like another man, almost the man he had been.

Sit down. Have a cigarette." Pinson offered the deck on his desk and held a lighted match. "I am glad to see you, boy. Damn glad. Now tell me what's on your mind. What are your plans and what can I do to help?"

Cass hesitated briefly. "First tell me this," he asked, "do you think that I shot Sam White?"

"I do not," the F.B.I. man answered promptly. "I pulled every wire I could to get you out." His voice was tinged with sarcasm. "But it seems that Sam was a first cousin of the local nanny goat that poses as a sheriff and he blocked everything I tried."

Cass nodded curtly. Sheriff Mills hated his intestines. The Ables and the Mills had been enemies for years.

"You had something in mind?" Pinson asked.

"I had," Cass said. "Before I got into this mess I had just passed my preliminary tests as a federal agent. And due to the war and the natural expansion of the F.B.I., I wondered if—"

Tom Pinson shook his head. "I'm sorry, Cass, believe me. But I think that you had better forget about coming in with us for a while. I know that you weren't guilty. But the stain is on your record. And until it is cleaned up—"

"I'm not wanted?" Cass asked hotly.

"I wouldn't say that," Pinson said. "But my hiring a man with a prison record would mean my own job, Cass, and it would never get by Washington." His hand dug into his pocket. "But if a personal loan will tide you over until we—"

The big mountaineer got to his feet. "No thank you. I just want to know where I'm wanted and where I'm not."

Before the older man could stop him he stalked stiff legged from the office. Pinson stared after him thoughtfully. "The hot-headed young fool," he said. "He doesn't know who his friends are and who aren't."

On the street, Cass elbowed his way through the Saturday afternoon shopping crowd. He knew most of the townfolks. Most of them knew him. Few spoke or even nodded. The thin lips of the loungers on the curb and in front of the beer saloons all said one thing:

"Look. Cass Able's out of the pen."

Abe Hooker who ran the pool room and the bowling alley sniggered audibly as Cass passed. "There must be some fire to the smoke that's going 'round. That's a better suit than they give me when I got out."

Cass held his temper with an effort. He didn't want trouble. He wanted a job. He wanted something concrete to offer Rita before he saw her.

In front of the postoffice he paused and stared up at Murder Mountain. It rose cool and fresh and green six thousand feet above the town that had mushroomed in its foothills. His father and his father's father had been born there. Both had lived and died high on the mountain. He had been the first Able to "go out."

"Perhaps," he tried to decide, "it's where I belong."

**H**E STARTED on, stopped, a broad grin on his face, as he saw the mobile recruiting outfit parked at the end of the block. There was a radio-phonograph combination playing martial airs just inside the trailer door. A big sergeant of marines stood in the doorway listening to the music and comparing the ankles of the local girls with those of the girls in the Islands.

His shoulders squared, Cass strode up to the trailer. This was the solution to his problem. This was what he wanted. His last year in prison had been hell knowing that his country needed able-bodied men.

"How's chances of joining up?" he asked the sergeant.

The marine, as big a man as Cass, removed a toothpick from his mouth and appraised the mountaineer. "For you,"

he said soberly, "I think we might make an exception. I believe we have just one uniform your size." He grinned suddenly. "Come in, brother. Come in. Let's you and I talk business."

"Just a minute there, Sergeant," Sheriff Mills called from the postoffice steps. "I wonder could I talk to you a minute."

The marine slapped Cass on the back. "Don't walk out on me." He grinned. "Hell. I get credit for two when I hook one your size."

Cass waited in bitter silence.

The marine's grin was gone when he returned. He demanded: "That true what the sheriff says? You shot an old guy in the back for his roll—and just got out of the pen this morning?"

"I've been in prison," Cass admitted.

The marine jerked his head toward the trailer door. "On your way, fellow. We don't want your kind."

Cass moved slowly down the street. The spring was gone from his knees. He was an ex-con. It didn't matter if he had been innocent or guilty. He had served time. He wasn't wanted. In front of the public library he stopped and looked in through the window.

Rita was standing behind the desk as cool and beautiful as the mountain that rose above the squalid little town. One hand went to her throat when she saw him.

"Cass," she said simply. "Cass."

But for an old man reading at a table they were alone in the library. Cass tried to take her hand. His hunger for her was a pain that blurred his eyes.

"No," she told him. "You musn't." Tears formed in her eyes. "I waited. I promised you I would. But you didn't play fair with me, Cass. You ought to have known that I wouldn't live on that sort of money."

Cass shook his head to clear it. "What sort of money?" he puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

The girl's lips twisted wryly. "Why make it worse by lying?" She slipped his ring from her finger and laid it in his hand. "We're quits now, Cass. Please go."

The big mountaineer stared at the diamond. This was the girl he loved. This

was the girl who loved him. "But, Rita," he protested. "I—what—?"

She was no longer listening to him. She had turned to stamp a book that a school girl had just brought in.

Hot blood flooded to Cass's face. "Okay," he said quietly. "Okay." His voice grew with anger until it boomed through the library. "If that is the way you feel. If that's the way everyone feels, to hell with all of you."

The young librarian buried her face in her arms and began to sob. Cass, his lips set in a thin straight line, went directly to Jake Levy's pawnshop near the depot.

"I want to pawn a ring," he told Levy. "And I want to buy a rifle and some ammunition."

He loaded the rifle in the pawnshop and walked slowly down Main Street to the Western Union Office.

The gaping curious no longer stared. They looked at his face and scuttled, frightened, into doorways.

The girl in the Western Union office smiled, expectant. "Yes—?"

Cass laid a roll of bills on the counter. "I want," he told her curtly, "to wire two hundred dollars to Warden James Kane at the State Penitentiary."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Blonde Bait

**J**OAD PETERS' Pig Pork Bar-B-Q is halfway up the mountain. Few travelers ever eat there. Those who do regret it. The hill men prefer Joad's liquid stock. There were three men in the bar when the bus stopped. Nate Carns was the first to see Cass.

"There's goin' to be trouble," he told Joad.

The other two men slipped out the back door of the bar and scurried up the wagon rut that led to Signal Rock.

Joad mopped at the bar with a greasy rag. "Not if Lem has been giving Cass his cut regular," he insisted. "Hell. With Cass's brains and our guts we should ought to make a mint."

He glanced out the fly-specked window. Cass had already disappeared into the green. The afternoon shadows were

growing long. The sun was already slipping below Signal Rock when Cass paused briefly at the edge of the clearing where the murdered Sam White had lived.

The cabin, unoccupied for years, sagged at the ridge pole like a sway-backed mare. Part of the chimney had blown down. Woodbine and wild honeysuckle had overgrown the whole structure. Cass drank from a trickling spring and sat down on the rotted porch to rest. The climb was taking him longer than he had thought it would.

He shut his eyes and remembered the clearing as he last had seen it. That had been on the night that the woman whom his father had married had died. Jim Frees had brought the news to Greenside.

"She's a going, Cass," he had said. "An' hit might be best for Lem's sake was you to come back to the mountain to see her laid away."

The woman had meant little to him. But Cass had gone, not for his half brother's sake, but out of respect to his dead father.

The Able cabin in the laurels had been

filled with silent hill-folk. Most of them had been there for the same reason as himself. John Able had been well liked and the woman had been his wife. Even Sheriff Mills had been there.

A demijohn of "mountain dew" had circulated freely. Twenty-year-old Lem had been his usual sneering self. He had tried to turn the "sitting-up" into a brawl.

"A store-dressed, swelled-headed pop-injay," he had called his elder half-brother.

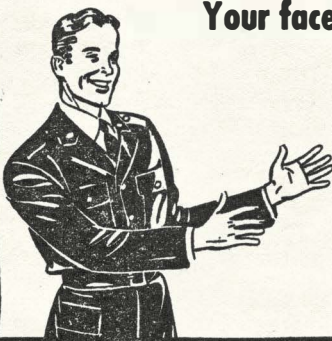
But Cass had refused to be baited. He didn't care. His last link with the mountain lay in a rough pine coffin and would be buried in the morning. In the morning Murder Mountain would be just a memory.

*But it hadn't turned out that way.*

During the night Sam White had died. Someone had pressed a rifle to the old man's skull and sent a .30-30 slug crashing into his brain before stripping him for the money he was known to carry.

Cass himself had suggested to Sheriff Mills that a ballistic test be made. The

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test had sent him to the pen. The bullet had come from his own gun that he had last seen leaning in a corner of the cabin.

Any of the mourners could have used his rifle. But only one man had. Now Cass knew, or thought he knew, who that one man had been. He had had eight years in which to think.

He got wearily to his feet and resumed his climb, taking care to avoid the wagon rut and occupied clearings on the slope. At Bubbly Creek he had to break cover briefly. A coon was industriously washing a half ear of corn in the rushing water.

Cass crossed the creek and a rifle cracked thinly up the slope. The slug sang past his ear to smack solidly into a dogwood tree behind him. The mountaineer flung himself flat on his face.

A second shot followed the first. It came so close that rock splinters needled his cheek and covered his face with blood. He jerked as a man does when mortally wounded—then lay very still on the rock. He had learned this business from his father. A sun glint on an unsmoked rifle barrel was all the mark he needed.

He watched in silence as the brush on the slope above him began to move and inched his rifle forward. The rifleman who had fired at him either didn't know his business or he was too certain of his kill.

Then the branches parted abruptly. Cass tightened his finger on the trigger of the rifle, then cursed softly.

The rifleman wasn't a man. It was a woman, a girl in her early twenties. She was too far away for him to see her face distinctly but he could see her curved figure was lightly clad in a halter and slacks. Her hair was the color of ripe wheat.

The girl stared searchingly down the slope, then stepped back into the brush. Cass, his mind a riot of unanswered questions, lay so still on the rock that the coon came back to the creek and resumed washing the ear of corn. The questions pounded through the big man's mind.

*Who was the girl with the wheat-colored hair? Where did she come into the picture? Why had she fired at him? What had Rita meant when she had said*

*that he hadn't played fair, that he ought to have known that she couldn't live on that sort of money? What sort of money?*

He searched his mind for some clue that his half-brother Lem might have dropped in one of the infrequent visits during the last two years. There was no reason for his reception. No reason for him to be treated as he had unless Lem had lied about something as he had lied about Sam White's murder.

Cass allowed his body to relax more completely, keeping only his senses alert as he waited for dark to fall. He had waited eight years for this. He could wait a few more hours.

+ + +

NOTHING had changed in the years he had been away. The cloying sweetness of honeysuckle still filled the clearing on the summit. The laurels still grew by the front door of the cabin. In the light of the newly risen moon Signal Rock loomed white above the roof.

Light from an oil lamp on the table in the cabin seeped out through the open door to form a pool of tarnished gold on the rough puncheon floor of the porch.

"Haloo," Cass called.

Unshaven, bare foot, half-drunk, Lem Able loomed large in the doorway. "That you, Pod?" he demanded. "What's the matter? What did you find?"

The snick of the rifle cut through the silence like a knife.

"What," Cass asked quietly, "were you expecting Pod to find, Lem? My body?"

His half-brother stood very still. "Oh, it's you, Cass," he said finally.

"Back into the cabin," Cass ordered. "And keep your hands where I can see them."

Lem Able did as he was ordered, protesting: "You got me wrong, Cass. You've got no call to hold ary a thing against me."

Cass followed him into the cabin. It was cleaner than he had ever known it to be before. There was a clean cloth on the table. The puncheon floor had been sanded white. There was even a

vase of wild flowers. The brown-and-white demijohn from which Lem had been drinking was familiar.

Lem continued to protest. "This ain't no way for a brother to act, Cass."

"Where's the woman?" Cass demanded, harshly.

"What woman?" Lem evaded.

Cass allowed the subject to pass for the time being. "You're going to tell me a lot of things, Lem," he said quietly. "Then I'm going to shoot you—*just like you shot Sam White!*"

His half-brother's mouth gaped open. "I never, Cass. You're crazy. I never done hit. Hell! Did I want to come one over on you I'd have shot you daid instead of framing you for murder."

It was a simple statement of fact. For that reason it was not unbelievable. Cass allowed his half-brother to lower his arms.

"What," he demanded, "have you been telling Rita? What kind of business does she think that I'm mixed up in?"

Lem Able sat down in a straight-backed chair and reached for the demijohn.

"Well, I'll tell you, Cass," he explained. "Hit's just folks be mistaken. They think I ain't got ary brains. And when I put me over some good deals like I've done, they think you told me how to go about hit. Understand?"

Cass did, too well. "You shining or robbing banks?"

Lem drank from the demijohn. "A leetle of both," he admitted. "You'd best come in with us, Cass. We—"

He stood up swinging—too late. Cass had crossed the room and grasped him by the shirt front with one hand while his other hand slapped Lem's head against the wall. His rifle leaned by the door forgotten.

"Damn you," he panted. "What kind of dirty business have you got my name tarred with? And who is that blonde girl who took two shots at me?"

His half-brother countered with a raised left knee that sent Cass writhing back against the fireplace. He tried to follow his advantage with a right hook to the jaw.

"Yah," he jeered. "You're not so tough now, are vou?" The right hook

blocked, he tried a left hook to the kidneys. Cass, straightening suddenly, sent him reeling back into the dish safe with a hard right to the heart.

The safe toppled over with a crash of china. A long barreled .45 that had been on top of it thudded to the floor. Lem spun crabwise on the floor to reach for it and Cass kicked it from his hand.

Both men had known for years that some day they would fight like this. It would be mountain rules and no hold barred. Only one man would leave the cabin.

Lem bit and clawed and slugged. Cass clung to him like a leech, driving hard rights and lefts into the younger man's face until it was a mass of battered pulp. They were up and down a half a dozen times.

Then Lem's big thumbs found Cass's eyes. His neck strained to the point of breaking and eyes aching balls of fire, Cass stopped slugging and his fingers bit into Lem's throat.

Lem Able's face turned purple. He flung himself backwards—in vain. His fingers digging ever deeper Cass rode him across the floor.

"Tell the truth!" he bellowed. "Admit you killed Sam White!"

"Stop! That is enough!"

The voice came from the doorway behind Cass. It was masculine and slightly undulating. A moment later a hard round object was rammed against the back of his neck.

"Stop I say!"

Somewhere a child began to cry. Still astride Lem, Cass glanced at the doorway. The blonde girl who had fired two shots at him stood holding a screaming boy of six or seven.

But it wasn't the girl who pressed the gun barrel to his neck. As Cass's fingers relaxed slowly a rotund little man with a cheerful smile and thick-lensed glasses stepped back a pace to keep the rifle barrel out of the danger of a sudden lunge.

"So. That is better," he smiled.

Cass looked from the plump little man to the blonde with the child in her arms, then back at the man again. At least the gun in his hands was real. It was Cass' own Remington rifle.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Midnight Bullets

“WHO are you?” Cass demanded of the plump little man holding the Remington. Cass’s eyes flicked down from the little man to the blonde, then back to the man again.

“I am *Herr Doktor* Hans Leyden of Vollandam,” the plump little man introduced himself. He seemed to assume that Cass recognized the name. “I am formerly from Holland. Now we live in the cabin by the falls which *Herr Able* had kindly rented.” He motioned to the blonde girl and the child. “And this is my daughter Gretchen and my grandson Halvor.”

Lem Able got up from the floor and massaged his throat. “It was lucky you dropped in when you did,” he croaked. “That damn’ fool nearly killed me.”

The blonde sat the child on the table. The boy had the face of a cherub. “You are a bad mans,” he told Cass. Then, Cass forgotten, he amused himself by pulling off the wings and antennae of unwary moths.

Cass backed slowly to the wall. “What’s this all about?” he asked the girl. “What are you folks doing here? Why did you try to kill me on the slope this afternoon?”

The blonde girl shook her head. “It was not I. We do not believe in killing.”

Lem took the demijohn from his lips and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. “They’re refugees.” He added, sneering: “And seeing as how that you weren’t using hit, I rented them that cabin by Echo Falls that you had built for you and Rita to summer in.”

“It is now eight months we have been here,” the plump man beamed at Cass. “But no,” he corrected. His hairless eyebrows knitted in a frown. He had no hair, no eyebrows and no lashes. His cheeks were a ruddy pink. His eyes were blue and small. They stared unblinkingly reptilian from behind his thick-lensed glasses. “No. It is almost ten months we have been here.”

Cass asked quietly: “And you came into this country legally? The F.B.I. knows that you’re here?”

Lem slammed the demijohn on the table. “Shut up, will you, Cass? You ain’t a lawyer any more. You’re nothing but an ex-con. And if you want to know about the Leydens go down and ask your F.B.I. boy friend Tom Pinson. He’s the one that told ’em that we had a cabin that we sometimes rented out to summer folks.”

The blonde gasped: “No!”

The boy on the table had left off his mutilation of the moths to try to drink from the demijohn. The girl re-stopped the jug.

“Leave him alone,” Lem roared with delight. “Let him take a swill. Hit’ll make a man outen him.”

“It is late,” the girl said pointedly. She looked at Doctor Leyden. “It is time Halvor should be in bed.”

Cass blocked the doorway with his arm. “If you don’t mind. Before you go, I’d like to have my rifle.”

The rotund little man looked at Lem.

“Give it to him,” Lem said. “I ain’t afeered of him. He don’t dare to kill me now. You two seen us fighting and he’d burn in the chair was I to come up daid.”

Doctor Leyden handed the rifle to Cass in silence and lifted the boy from the table. Cass saw for the first time that Halvor’s legs were helpless.

“Poliomyelitis,” Leyden told Cass soberly. “Some day we have hopes he may be well again. We have already taken him to Warm Springs where your own great President and so many others have been helped.” His flat shoulders shrugged expressively. “But we had not the money for treatment. All will depend upon the book.”

Lem sneered: “He’s writ a book about bugs.” He sniggered drunkenly. “Hit’s seems the mountain is full of ’em.”

Leyden and the blonde waded the puddle of gold and were swallowed up by the night. Cass and his half-brother stood in silence.

“You ain’t wanted down below, Cass,” Lem said finally. “You’re a mountain man and you ought to stick with your kin. I tell you what, you throw in with me and I’ll help you find out who shot Sam. More’n that—I’ll show you how to make some money, more money than you ever seen before in all your life.”



Cass was suddenly too tired to argue. He ripped a blanket off the bed and backed with it to the door. "Okay. I'll think it over," he agreed.



**S**IGNAL ROCK, a half-acre or more, lay flat as a table-top in the moonlight. Greenside was a faint white blur freckled with yellow pin points six thousand feet below. Cass folded the blanket into a seat and sat staring into space.

Lem wasn't lying about Sam White. It hadn't been Lem who had shot Sam. It wasn't Lem's fault that he had sat in a cell for eight years. On the other hand his half brother had unquestionably used

it with his fingers. He couldn't place Doctor Leyden and the blonde girl in the setup. If Tom Pinson had checked on them, they were okay.

*Still Gretchen had tried to kill him. She had told Lem she had killed him. Lem had expected Pod Martin to find his body by the creek.*

The night lengthened and the moon went down. Cass remembered with a start that he hadn't registered for Selective Service while he had been in Greenside. That would mean trouble with the Federal boys, perhaps Tom Pinson. A released prisoner was supposed to register on the day that he was released. True, he had tried to enlist. But that could be construed as deliberate evasion. The local draft board, controlled by petty

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**Day Keene, who has written this story of Cass Able, will be with us again next month with a compelling crime novelette. He calls it—"He Who Dies Last, Dies Hardest!" May DETECTIVE TALES will be on sale March 24th!**

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his name and brains to recruit a gang of night riders. The simple mountain folk undoubtedly believed that Lem's visits to the pen had been business trips to report past raids and to receive fresh orders. It was the sort of a thing that would appeal to them—a man running a crowd of night riders from a cell in the state penitentiary.

Cass rolled a cigarette and lit it. His face in the match flare was as hard as the stone on which he sat. He didn't care about the others. But Rita might have trusted him. She might have known that he wouldn't try to build up a stake that way.

Night riding was nothing new to the mountain. Men had ridden the twisted trails of its wooded slopes since long before the war between the States. The mountain was honey-combed with caves. Night riders had used them for years. Cass knew of at least a dozen where the loot from robberies had been cached and he had heard of as many more.

He sucked at his cigarette, then snuffed

politics, and in political debt to Sheriff Mills, might well claim that he had known that the Marines wouldn't have him.

"I'll have to take care of that in the morning," he thought. "And I'll get free of this mess somehow." Then he added: "I got off the mountain once. I can do it again."

Even as he spoke he doubted if he would be allowed to leave the mountain alive. Lem had talked too much. Lem wouldn't dare to let him leave the mountain now.

Cass rolled and lighted another cigarette. He still wanted the man who had killed Sam White and allowed him to serve time for the murder. But more than anything he wanted to talk to Rita. He shouldn't have been so impatient with her. He should have made her listen to him. Once she knew the truth everything would be all right. But the problem was to get back down the mountain that he had been so eager to climb.

The slap of a saddle on a horse's back and the faint jingle of a bridle in the

split-rail corral below the rock brought him to his feet looking at the luminous dial of his watch. It was exactly two o'clock.

Cass crept to the edge of the rock and listened. Lem's great bulk and bull-like voice was easy to distinguish. Four other men sat their horses outside of the corral waiting for Lem to saddle.

"Then he hain't goin' with us t'night?" one of the men demanded.

Lem cursed him into silence. "Not t'night," he said curtly. "He's up there on the rock a reasonin' out a killing that's going to make us all richer'n sin."

Cass considered calling out and spiking the lie. He decided against it. The truth would call Lem's hand and provoke the gun fight that he wanted to avoid. He no longer wanted to kill. His madness was gone. All that he wanted now was to leave Murder Mountain alive. But before he left he wanted to know more about Doctor Leyden and his daughter.

When the night riders had gone he climbed down from the rock. Lem had taken the only horse in the corral. The lamp in the cabin was turned low.

At the edge of the Able clearing, Cass paused to orient his ears to the night sounds in the woods. There was the wind in the tops of the pines, the almost noiseless padding of the furred things of the night as they searched for food. A long way off he could hear the musical rush of a stream.

The cabin by the falls was not as he remembered it. A screened in porch had been added. Cass paused by the door to listen, his eyes searching the darkened interior.

There was a pallet on the floor of the porch on which the boy Halvor lay. Dark objects humped on the bunks on either side of the main room of the cabin.

Cass listened intently a moment, then rounded the cabin to a window above one bunk. Netting had been stretched across the sash in lieu of screening. It was impossible to see through it. He dug out two tacks with his knife and lifted the netting.

The bunk smelled faintly feminine, but there was no one in it. The humped object he had seen through the door was

a carelessly tossed back blanket. He struck a match.

Neither Doctor Leyden or his daughter were at home.

Satisfied, he replaced the netting. At least one thing seemed certain now. Incredible as it might be, the bald little foreign doctor and his daughter, if the blonde girl was his daughter, were the "brains" of the night riding hill men.

Lem had been wise in his subterfuge. He had known that the hillmen wouldn't follow an outsider. That was why Cass had been elected. The hill men believed that one of their own had planned the raids.

He crossed back to the screened-in porch. The night had grown suddenly still. He felt the power of unseen eyes watching him from the dark, following his movements.

The roar of the heavy gun came from behind him, through the cabin and through the screening of the porch. The slug nicked the top of his ear, then ricocheted screaming from a rock. Cass flung himself flat on the ground twisting to face the gunfire as he fell. There was only the one shot. There were no succeeding streaks of flame to mark his target for him.

The child Halvor had awakened and was screaming: "Mama, mama, mama!"

His rifle barrel thrust before him, Cass opened the screen door and strode past the screaming child to the far window of the cabin. It was on a direct line with the door. The netting had been ripped aside. He thought, but could not be certain, that he could hear the sound of running feet pounding rapidly across the rock.

He returned to kneel beside the child. "Hush. You're all right, son," he consoled him. "Where did your mama go?"

Round-eyed with terror, his withered legs holding him prisoner on the pallet, Halvor continued to scream. "Mama! Mama! I want my mama!"

Cass got heavily to his feet, looked back at the rip in the netting, then up at Signal Rock. He had been foolish to think that he was free, that he could ever be free again. Sudden death lurked in back of every tree. He had merely exchanged one prison for another.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Satan's Sister

THE sun began to climb the mountain at six o'clock. Dawn had preceded it by half an hour. Mist lay heavy on the slope. High on Signal Rock Cass sat in a world of his own cut off by the rising vapors from even the cabin in the laurels.

He had heard Lem return with the dawn. Now the pungent fragrance of fried side meat began to penetrate the mist. He realized he was hungry. He had eaten nothing since noon of the day before. His blanket tied poncho fashion around his shoulders he climbed down from the rock. On the sagging steps of the porch he paused, embarrassed. Lem was not alone.

"Well," the blonde girl demanded when she saw him. "What do you want?"

Lem emptied the basin of rain water in which he had been dabbling and nodded to the table set for four. "He's hungry probably. Set another plate for Cass."

Gretchen shrugged and did as she was told.

Cass looked from his half brother to the girl. She was bare-legged and bare footed. A faded wrapper had replaced her slacks and halter. They hung on a peg beside Lem's Sunday suit.

Lem came in from the wash-porch lean-to yawning widely. "You were a fool to set up all night, Cass. They's another bed out in the shed. You can use hit t'night if you want to."

Cass shook his head. "I won't be here tonight." He drew a chair up to the table and sat with his rifle leaning against his thigh. "I'm going down mountain this morning."

Gretchen and Lem looked sharply at each other but neither made any comment.

Cass reached for the platter of side meat. "The way I see it," he continued, "you'll just have to think up another yarn to tell the boys, Lem. I'm resigning as the alleged brain of the night riders."

Lem asked through a mouthful of grits: "You'll be seeing Tom Pinson?"

"Undoubtedly," Cass agreed. He looked at Gretchen. "And by the way, your son missed you last night. It seems

that there was some shooting at your cabin after Lem left here."

Lem and Gretchen exchanged glances. "That's funny. We didn't hear it," she said finally. "And Lem didn't leave here last night." Her face turned sullen. "I know. I came back here as soon as Halvor was asleep."

"And your father—?"

The blonde girl shrugged. "My father spends most of his nights in the woods adding to his collection of moths. They only fly at night, you know," she added.

"No," Cass told her soberly, "I didn't know that. But I do know that the slug that breezed by my ear last night wasn't any moth."

A strained silence followed. It was broken by the arrival of Doctor Leyden carrying Halvor.

"I wish," he told his daughter, ignoring the two men, "that you would at least tell me when you do not intend to spend the night at home. Halvor tells me that some man came into the cabin."

"A bad man," the crippled child shrilled. He cocked one chubby hand and thumb in imitation of a revolver. "And the bad man went—boom!"

"You were dreaming," the blonde girl said.

Cass said nothing. He had a feeling that he was watching a thoroughly rehearsed scene in which he had become an uncoached actor.

Leyden sat the child in a chair and nodded curtly to Cass. "A good morning to you, sir."

Cass returned the greeting gravely. "What happens," he asked Lem, "if I do go down mountain this morning? That is, what do you intend to do about it?"

His half-brother stuffed his mouth with grits. "I don't give a damn what you do," he said through them. "But if you do go down mountain, you'll regret it." He shrugged. "But get hit out of your mind I care. Hit won't be any skin off my back. I kin explain hit away to the boys."

"Like you were going to explain my body to Pod Martin?" Cass demanded. "You going to claim that the decent element on the mountain shot me in an effort to break up the night riding that is giving them all a bad name?"

Lem forked more side-meat on his plate. "That could be," he admitted.

Cass pushed back his chair from the table and sat with his rifle across his knees. "You're going down mountain with me, Lem," he said coldly, "just as soon as you've finished with breakfast. That's the only way I can be certain that I won't be shot in the back." He looked at Doctor Leyden and Gretchen. "And Tom Pinson will probably be up to look you over. There is something in this set-up that smells. And it isn't as far as Holland."

Doctor Leyden stared at him blankly through his thick-lensed glasses. "I do not understand."

Cass smiled wryly. "I think you do. If it wasn't Lem, it was one of you who took another shot at me last night. You can't seem to make up your minds whether you want me dead or alive."

Gretchen wet her lips with the tip of a coral-pink tongue. "You are being ridiculous—" She stopped at the sound of horses' hoofs pounding up the trail.

Lem got up to reach his rifle off the wall. "What the hell?" he demanded. "Now what?"

CASS raised his rifle barrel slightly. "Let the rifle hang. If those are the boys I'd like a talk with them without you holding a rifle on me."

He herded Lem before him out onto the porch just as Tom Pinson, Matt Humphrey, Sheriff Mills and two of his deputies broke the edge of the clearing and pounded on up the trail to the porch.

Pinson was the first to speak. "You fooled me, Cass," he said. "What caliber rifle are you carrying?"

"A thirty-five," Cass admitted. "Why?"

Sheriff Mills said: "We can get along without the loose talk. You shouldn't have ought to have shot him, Cass. 'Pears like he's going to die."

With a swift sinking of his stomach, Cass demanded: "Who is going to die? What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's murder, if he dies, Cass," Pinson said. "It seems that you can take a boy out of the mountain but you can't take the mountain out of the boy."

Sheriff Mills whistled sharply. Rita, a deputy sheriff riding on each side of

her, rode out into the clearing and reined up before the porch. She looked first at Cass, then at Gretchen. Her face was as white as the laurel blooms behind her. Her eyes were red rimmed and swollen. She had been crying.

Cass asked her, puzzled: "What is it, Rita? What is this all about?"

"As if you didn't know," she said. "How could you do it, Cass?"

The big mountaineer exploded. "How could I do what?"

Sheriff Mills asked dryly: "You do admit that you two bust up yesterday, Cass—that Rita gave you back your ring?"

"She did," Cass admitted. "But—"

"And you admit that you pawned the ring at Jake Levy's and bought a five-shot auto loader thirty-five caliber Remington?"

"I do," Cass admitted.

Tom Pinson reached out a hand. "Let's see that gun, Cass."

Cass stepped back from the porch rail. "No. I'm holding on to my gun until someone tells me what this is all about."

Sheriff Mills snorted impatiently. "Don't try to put that over on us, Cass. You know why we're here. You snuck down off the mountain last night, eased up to where Sergeant Fillmore of the Marines was keeping company with Miss Rita on her front porch and, in a jealous rage, pumped three shots into him."

Cass looked at Rita. "So." He turned back to the sheriff. "I'm sorry—but you're wrong. I've been here on the mountain all night."

Rita's eyes begged him to prove it.

"I sat up on Signal Rock," Cass continued, "trying to make a decision. And I had just finished telling Lem that I was going down mountain this morning when you gentlemen rode up."

"You can prove that you were up here on the mountain all night, Cass?" Tom Pinson demanded.

"No," Cass admitted, "I can't."

Lem looked from the rifle in his half-brother's hands to the semi-circle of silent horsemen who sat with their hands on their gun butts. "You want me for anything, Sheriff?" he asked Mills.

"Not this trip," Mills said.

Lem stepped back into the cabin. "Then

if you don't mind, I'll get out of the line of gunfire." His voice was bitter. "And if I were you, Cass, I'd be damned if I'd let them take me. A hill man can't live behind bars."

Tom Pinson rode his horse in front of Rita's mount. "You'd best get on back down the trail. There's going to be some unpleasantness."

"Wait, just a minute," Cass stopped her. "You saw me, Rita? You saw me shoot this new boy friend of yours?"

Color crept into her cheeks. "No," she admitted. "I didn't. And he isn't my boy friend, Cass. I'm in charge of the U.S.O. dances in this section. All Sergeant Fillmore did was bring me home."

Sheriff Mills turned in his saddle. "Why all this twaddle?" he demanded. "You bring that hat with you, Pinson?"

The federal agent took a broad-brimmed Panama hat from his saddle bag and held it up for Cass's inspection. "You were wearing a hat like this, Cass, when I saw you yesterday noon. Could this be the same hat?"

Cass looked at the hat. It was his. The last time that he had seen it had been in Lem's cabin on the night before. For eight years he hadn't worn a hat. He had forgotten that he had left it behind him when he had gone up on the rock.

"And it won't do you any good to lie, Cass," Pinson added. "You know we can trace it back to the place where you bought it, if we have to."

GRETCHEN came out of the cabin to stand beside Cass. "Then why don't you?" she suggested. "Why accuse Cass before you are certain? And even if it is his hat someone deliberately dropped it to pin the murder on to him. He didn't shoot anyone last night. I know that he did not leave this cabin."

"You *know*?" Pinson stressed the word.

"I *know*," the blonde girl said simply.

Rita said, "Oh!" as if the other girl had slapped her.

Tom Pinson looked at Leyden. "How about that, Doctor?"

The rotund little man flushed angrily. "So far as I know it is true. At least I know that she did not spend the night in our cabin."

Cass tried to deny the lie and couldn't. His bitterness was a boil that wouldn't burst. Both Rita and Tom Pinson had been ready to believe the worst of him. There was nothing he could say that would change the situation.

"All right," Pinson said finally. "Let's go, boys. We'll trace back the hat and prove possession. Then we'll come back with a federal warrant. It's what we should have done in the first place."

Sheriff Mills hesitated, dropped a tentative hand on his gun butt.

"I wouldn't try it if I were you," Lem warned him from the doorway of the cabin. "Cass and me may have had our differences—but they ain't no lawman a goin' to take him against his will."

Mills looked at the rifle in Lem's hands. "Okay. But we'll be back. He added: "And I won't forget you next time, Lem. You're long overdue in the pen."

"Effen you can get me there," Lem jeered.

Rita was so close to Cass he could have touched her. "I was coming to you," he told her bitterly. "You might have had a little faith in me. You—"

She wheeled her horse away from the porch. "Don't try to explain. You can't."

"No," Cass agreed. "So I see."

He stood watching the little cavalcade until the tree branches hid it from view. Then he turned back to the others on the porch.

Lem was grinning openly. The rotund little doctor looked thoughtful. Even Gretchen was smiling.

"Still think you'll go out?" Lem asked.

Cass leaned his rifle against the wall and rolled a cigarette. "No," he admitted quietly. "It doesn't look that way. You've taken good care of that." The big man smiled wryly. He had been right the night before. He had been foolish to believe that he was free. He had merely exchanged one prison for another. "All right. Let's have it," he said as he shaped his cigarette. "Let's get down to facts and figures. Why the hell am I so important to you, important enough to frame for murder. Let's have it. What's the game?"

Doctor Leyden opened his mouth to speak and the crippled child struck him on the lips with both chubby fists.

"Hungry. Halvor still hungry," he screamed.

Resigned, Leyden re-entered the cabin.

"What's the game?" Cass repeated, looking from one to the other.

Gretchen compared Cass with his half-brother and a slow smile curved her full mouth. "You'll learn—in time," she said softly.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Forbidden Message

HERE in Crystal Cave the men's voices echoed like so many second selves. Cass studied the faces of the hill men, hot and eager in the white glare of the pressure lanterns. He knew most of them from his boyhood. They were the younger, wilder, element on the mountain. Night riding was a fillip to their sense. Most of them were wild, not bad. They belonged to a generation past when a man had lived by the right of his arms.

He had been on the mountain now four days. One day had followed another in stagnant silence. He had eaten. He had cat-napped. He had watched the down trail against the return of Tom Pinson and Sheriff Mills, his rifle ready to his hand.

Lem and Gretchen had left him alone. No more attempts had been made on his life. Both had refused to explain why they wanted him on the mountain badly enough to frame him to keep him there. Cass thought he saw Doctor Leyden's hand in that. He wasn't certain.

He knew something big was in the wind. It somehow concerned him. He had an uneasy feeling that he was a pawn in a much larger game than the nocturnal raids of the mountain men. Their past raids had been successful and credited to him. A dozen of the riders had assured him heartily that he had "brains" and now that he was free they would follow him anywhere he led.

But he had not been asked to lead them. Lem had issued the orders. Now as the younger man paused beside him in the cave he could sense that Lem was worried.

"Come up to the cabin right after the

meeting, Cass," he whispered tersely. "They's something I got to tell you." Sweat stood out on the younger man's face in beads despite the coolness of the cave. "I ain't sure, but I think I got us into something I don't like. I think that there's more to this next raid than just busting open a bank. Gretchen let slip—"

What Gretchen had let slip Cass never knew.

Joad Peters began to pound on a three-thousand-year-old stalactite with the butt of a revolver. It rang like a crystal bell.

"What say we get to business, boys?" he called. "I got to get back to the place." He looked expectantly at Cass. "What you got planned for us this time, Cass? Lem said that you'd figured out a killing."

Lem Able wet his lips. "That's right," he said. "Hit's another bank job. A two-hundred-thousand-dollar raid. We're a goin' to take the bank down to Warm Springs."

There was a mumble of murmured comment.

Pod Martin asked: "What's the matter with Cass telling us about it hisself. He ain't said ten words since he come back to the mountain. You didn't grow bashful down there to the lowlands, did you, Cass?"

There was a little burst of nervous laughter.

"N-no," Cass said slowly. "I'm not bashful." He chose his words with care. He knew these men. He knew how they reacted. If they learned that they had been tricked, neither he nor Lem would leave the cave alive. "But, well, Lem's talking all right to suit me."

His half-brother looked at him gratefully.

"Git to it, Lem," Pod said.

Lem mopped his forehead, began: "We'll start straggling out of here in ones and twos on Friday morning. We drift into the Springs the same way between sundown and nine o'clock. At exactly nine o'clock—"

He went on to sketch deftly the position that each man or group would take, told off those who would remain outside and those who would enter the bank to blow the vault.

Cass listened in begrudged approval. The raid had been well planned. By the

time that the sleepy little resort town had fully realized what had happened the riders would be streaming out of town again in a dozen different directions—to split up and diversify the inevitable pursuit.

Ike Merrill asked: "You coming with us this time, Cass?"

Lem answered for his brother. "A course he is. Cass is a goin' to lead us this time."

"Then I'm fer it," Ike agreed.

There was a loud voicing of approval.

Joad Peters volunteered: "We cain't blame Cass for laying low up to now, what with Sheriff Mills raising hob 'bout that Marine Cass caught sparking up to Rita. But I heered from a trucker this morning the Marine was a hull lot better." He guffawed loudly. "I also hear that Mills is raising hell with Pinson acause Tom checked up on that hat and claims that it didn't belong to Cass."

Cass eyed the speaker. If Peters was telling the truth, then Tom Pinson was deliberately lying to save him from Sheriff Mills. The hat was his. A school boy could have traced it back to the store from which he had bought it. "What else have you heard?" he asked Peters.

"Nary a thing, Cass." Then the Bar-B-Q owner hesitated, said: "Only they must be some reason for Mills to hate you like he does. And since you been away I been studying 'bout the night Sam White was murdered."

"Go on."

"Lem says hit wasn't you who shot Sam."

"I did not."

"Then why couldn't Sheriff Mills a

done it? He was up on the mountain that night. They was bad blood betwixt him and Sam for years. And the next week after Sam died the sheriff paid off the mortgage on his place."

"By dam'—" Lem said—"he did!"

"Thanks, Joad," Cass said simply.

**H**E FELT a sudden flush of kinship with these men. They were, after all, his people. Perhaps he belonged with them. Warden Kane had told him that there were two roads he could take. But the warden had been wrong. The road that Cass had wanted to travel was closed. No one wanted an ex-con.

"That's all. Let's scatter now," Lem said. He hesitated briefly. "Unless you git word otherwise, the Warm Springs raid is on."

The night riders dispersed slowly.

"At the cabin in ten minutes," Lem whispered to Cass. "I don't know for sure whether I want ary part in this or not." His lips tightened grimly. "I ain't got any call to hate the old he-coon. And hit may be that when we talk this over we'll call the whole thing off."

The words didn't make sense to Cass. The moon was white and clear. There was no light in the cabin when he reached it. Gretchen was not there. Lem as yet had not returned.

Cass lit the lamp and sat reading the Greenside paper. Doctor Leyden brought it daily when he returned from his long trip down to the mail box in front of Joad's Pig-Pork Bar-B-Q. The doctor claimed to be expecting a letter from some publisher in New York.



**"THAT'S FOR ME FOR ENERGY"**



The war news claimed the major part of the newspaper. Cass read it avidly. Then he read: Due to the grave world conditions the President would only spend two days instead of his usual two weeks in Warm Springs, Georgia. . . .

A little vein in his temple beginning to pound, Cass reread a sub-head again, then read the story carefully.

The President will arrive in Warm Springs Thursday morning. A fireside chat from the hotel is scheduled for Friday night at nine o'clock. Before the broadcast he will hold his annual party for his little friends and fellow sufferers who were fighting the good fight. Immediately following the fireside chat the President and his entourage. . . .

A haloo from the clearing lifted his eyes from the paper. He blew out the light and grasped his rifle.

"It is Hans, *Doktor Leyden*," the figure called. He scurried up to the porch. The rotund little man was more excited than Cass had ever seen him. His hairless face shone with perspiration. His shoe-button blue eyes danced.

"Where is she? Where is Gretchen?" he demanded. "I must tell her that it came."

"What came?" Cass demanded.

"The letter—the check," Leyden bubbled. "They are buying my book at last."

He produced a check and letter and insisted that Cass read the letter. . . . While due to upset world conditions the publishers did not expect much of a sale, still the book was the soundest scientific volume of its kind they had ever been privileged to publish. Doctor Leyden was to consider the check as a binder and an advance against possible future royalties.

"I must tell Gretchen—I must tell Halvor." Leyden beamed. "This will mean treatment, doctors for him. Perhaps his legs can be made well."

"Good Lord! . . . *He's dead!*"

Gretchen's scream came from the far edge of the clearing. Leyden and Cass raced toward her together. The now screaming Halvor clutched to her breast, the blonde girl was staring at a huddled object on the path.

Cass knelt beside his half-brother. Lem's body was still warm and bleeding. He had been shot twice through

the chest by a gun of some heavy caliber.

Cass shook his head to clear it. *He had heard no shots.*

Doctor Leyden took the crippled child from the blonde girl. "This," he told her soberly, "is the end. A child should not such things see. I am taking him from here away."

Cass got to his feet, "Where's the gun you did it with?" he asked Gretchen.

Her face was a white, fearful, oval in the moonlight. "I didn't kill him," she panted. "He was good to me. I—" She stopped abruptly as if in fear that she had said too much.

"Then who did kill him?" Cass thundered. "What did you let slip to Lem? What was he going to tell me? How was he killed when there weren't any shots?"

Gretchen's face turned sullen. Fear had conquered her hysteria. "I don't know what you are talking about," she lied blandly. "Perhaps you killed him yourself. It is what you came up here to do."

## CHAPTER SIX

### Gretchen Takes Charge

IT WAS the black hour before dawn. Greenside still slept heavily. Only a few early workers had begun to stir. . . . "That's a bad place where I picked you up, there in front of that Pig-Pork Bar-B-Q," the cross-country truck driver grinned good naturedly as he slowed down to let Cass off. "You were lucky to get a ride."

Cass admitted that he had been, thanked him for the ride and strode down Main Street. In front of the Acropolis Cafe he paused briefly to look behind him. It was impossible to tell if he was being followed. His footsteps echoing hollowly, he turned into the even deeper gloom of a side street lighted only by a hotel marquee.

The clerk at the Mont Eagle House was sleepily regretful. "Yeah. Sure. Tom Pinson's in his room," he yawned. "But shucks. I can't wake him up this time of morning."

"You don't have to," Cass said. "Just give me his room number."



Pinson sat up abruptly at the heavy pounding on his door. "Yes? Who is it?" he demanded.

Cass left off his pounding. "Cass Able. Let me in."

Pinson opened the door. In the dim light of the bed lamp he looked as gray and deadly as the revolver in his hand. "Well—?"

Cass brushed by him and entered the room. "The President is coming to Warm Springs tomorrow?" he demanded.

Pinson closed and locked the door. "He might be," he admitted. "Why?"

"There is going to be an attempt on his life," Cass said.

Pinson sat down on the bed and reached for a cigarette. "What the hell are you trying to do, kid me?"

"No," Cass shook his head. "Did you ever check up on Doctor Hans Leyden and his daughter?"

"I did," Pinson nodded. "Not once but several times." He eyed the younger man shrewdly. "What's the matter? You have a falling out with her?"

Cass flushed angrily but kept his temper. "I've never had anything to do with the girl. That alibi she gave me was a phony."

"Yes," the federal man said quietly, "I assumed that. You see, I found out that was your hat, Cass. But on the chances that it was a frame I compromised with my conscience and held out on Mills. As long as Sergeant Fillmore didn't die I figured you had been roughed up enough. But—about this other matter."

"They are going to try to kill him sometime Friday."

Pinson was skeptical. "Who and how?"

"I don't know," Cass admitted. "But the blonde let it slip to Lem."

Pinson grew definitely interested. "Lem's here in town with you?"

"No. Lem's dead. He was shot last night before he could tell me what he knew. He was shot with some new kind of a gun that doesn't make a noise."

Pinson cooled off as fast as he had grown interested. "What the hell! Have you gone crazy, Cass? Lem's dead? Who killed him? You?"

Cass shook his head. "I wasn't anywhere near him."

Pinson's gray eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"I wonder. I thought a lot of you, Cass. You're smart. That's your trouble. You're just smart enough to think up a wild yarn like you've just told me to cover up the fact you shot your brother."

"But I didn't," Cass protested.

"Isn't that what you went up mountain for?"

Cass admitted that it had been. "But I didn't do it, Tom. I know that this sounds fantastic but you have to believe me. Both Doctor Leyden and his daughter are enemy alien agents. And they are getting their orders from some agent even smarter than they are—the *someone who has been the brains behind Lem's gang of night riders.*"

Pinson hooted: "Now I'll tell one. Go on. Get out of here, Cass. You're either drunk or crazy. Hell, no one could get within two blocks of the President. We'll have the hotel and the grounds sewed up so tight that a midget couldn't crawl through the lines."

"But you don't understand, Tom," Cass pleaded desperately. "I—"

Pinson got up from the bed and opened the door. "I understand more than you think. Come on. Get going. All that I want from you is absence."

**B**UT for a drop light over one of the desks, Sheriff Mills' shabby office was dark. Art McCarthy sat under the light puzzling out the captions beneath the pictures in a magazine. He looked up from his magazine as Cass entered the office. "Yeah—?" He recognized Cass and lowered his chair legs to the floor. "Well I'll be damned! You've got your nerve coming into Greenside. What do you want?"

Cass said: "I want to swear out a murder warrant."

"Yeah?" McCarthy repeated. "Who killed who?"

Cass hesitated, said: "Doctor Leyden killed my half-brother Lem."

McCarthy's forehead wrinkled in thought. "Leyden? You mean that bald little Dutch bug chaser?"

Cass nodded. "That's right."

McCarthy returned to his magazine. "You're nuts. Go on now. Find some place to sleep it off before I run you in." He looked up suddenly again. "Hey.

Wait a minute. Did you say that Lem Able was dead?"

"I did."

"How do I know that you didn't kill him?" the deputy demanded shrewdly.

"You don't," Cass admitted. "But I do. Either Leyden killed Lem or he knows who did kill him. I'm willing to swear out a warrant."

McCarthy grinned: "Not in this office. I seen the little bald guy carrying his crippled grandson get on the two o'clock bus."

"Going where?" Cass demanded.

McCarthy seemed to have come to some decision. His right hand resting on his holstered gun, he crossed the office and blocked the door. "I don't think that's going to matter to you, Cass. At least we'll let the sheriff decide. You're staying right here until I phone him."

"No." Cass shook his head.

"The hell you aren't!" McCarthy made a vicious swipe at the other man's face with the long barrel of his revolver. He would have done much better to shoot. Cass took the blow on his forearm and his right fist came up to smack solidly into the deputy's fat jaw. Propelled by the force of the blow, McCarthy hurtled across the room, bounced off the wall, then sprawled grotesquely on the floor.

Cass strode out of the office without looking back.

There was no one at the bus station but a colored porter. Cass described Leyden and Halvor to him.

"Yes, sir. I 'member him," the porter nodded. "He was a little man without no hair at all. He git on the two o'clock Chattanooga bus carryin' a little cripple boy in a white sailor suit."

The porter did not know if the Chattanooga bus passed through Warm Springs. Cass gave him a quarter and left the station.

Two blocks up the street Art McCarthy had come out in front of the sheriff's office and was staring earnestly first up, then down the street. He seemed to be waiting for someone. That meant he had phoned the sheriff.

Cass turned into the alley by the Idle Hour bowling alley and cut across back lots to the small frame boarding house where Rita lived. He thought, but couldn't

be certain, that a car was pacing him on the side street.

The small frame house was dark. As he raised his knuckles to wrap on the screen door a phone in the hall began to ring. A moment later Rita came out of her parlor bedroom and snapped on the hall light.

"Mrs. Hall's residence," she said sleepily into the phone. "Rita Paige speaking."

The sleep left her voice abruptly.

"He is? I see. He did! Oh, my! Thank you for calling me, Sheriff Mills. Yes. If he should come here I'll phone you right away." She hung up the phone.

CASS tapped lightly on the frame of the screen door. "It's Cass, Rita," he called. "And please don't phone the sheriff until I've talked to you."

The girl whirled from the phone. Her eyes were wide with terror. "Go away, Cass. Go away," she pleaded. "Sheriff Mills says you're crazy. He says that you almost killed Art McCarthy."

"Listen to me, Rita," Cass insisted. "Lem is dead."

One white hand flew to her throat. "Oh, Cass! How could you?"

He wanted to shake sense into her. He couldn't. The screen door was securely locked. "I didn't kill him," he protested. "I'm not really certain who did. But I am desperately certain of one thing. Doctor Leyden and Gretchen are enemy agents. Someone *has* to listen to me. There is to be an attempt on the President's life sometime around nine o'clock tomorrow night."

Her voice when she spoke was wearily resigned. "How can you treat me this way, Cass?" She began to cry. "I waited eight years for you, loved you every minute that I waited. But you couldn't even wait to get out of prison before you started your night riders on the mountain. Did—" she sobbed, "did you kill Lem in a fight over that—that woman?"

"Sure," Cass said bitterly. "Just like I crept up to your porch here and pumped three or was it five shots into your marine boy friend." His voice rose with his anger. "No wonder Mills has been so eager to railroad me back to the pen. I know now who killed Sam White."

"Sheriff Mills?" the girl asked scornfully.

"Mills," Cass answered curtly. "And if you won't listen to me then to hell with all of you." She lifted the receiver from the wall and his sanity returned. "No, Rita. Please," he begged. "You have to believe me. You have to go to Tom Pinson and—"

"Get me the sheriff's office," the girl sobbed into the phone. "Hurry!"

Cass stood with his hand on the bracket of the fragile screen door a moment, then turned away in the first yellow light of dawn. He wouldn't have time to reach the highway winding up the mountain, nor had he any means of transportation up it if he could. His best chance of escaping would be to cut across lots and through alleys to the edge of town and lose himself on the wooded slope that began abruptly at the Greenside City limits.

Mills would take no chances on him now. He could kill him with impunity. The fact that he was unarmed meant nothing. Mills would manage to see to it that a gun was found on his body.

By the time he had crossed the street a siren had begun to shrill. Before he had reached the next street—the sheriff's car, yellow eyes probing through the dawn, had paused briefly in front of Rita's boarding house and was now circling to intercept him.

He raced on, sobbing for breath. A second car running without lights materialized out of the mist and braked beside him. A lean-jawed man whom Cass had never seen was at the wheel. A second man sat beside him. There was a woman in the back seat.

Gretchen opened the rear door of the car. "Get in," she ordered curtly. "You have seen what they thought of your story. Don't stand there gaping at me! Get into the car before they shoot you down like a mad dog!"

The sheriff's car rounded the corner and a rifle slug slapped the pavement at Cass's feet.

"Get into the car," the man at the wheel ordered.

The man beside him leaned out of the car and fired twice at the sheriff's car, then thrust the automatic into Cass's face.

"Get into the car!"

Cass got into the car.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A Stray Shot!

THE two men had not left him for a moment. While one man had slept the other man had watched. Both had discouraged conversation. All Cass had been able to learn concerning them was that one man's name was Leightner and the other one's name was Beckman. From time to time Gretchen had appeared to hold brief whispered conversations with one man or the other.

Cass lay on his back on the lumpy bed of the run-down tourist court in which their wild ride of the morning before had ended. It was growing dark a second time. They had been in the shabby cabin for thirty hours or more. By now the riders from Murder Mountain would be trickling into Warm Springs and taking up their positions near the bank. Cass raised up on one elbow to roll and lick a cigarette.

The two men were playing rummy with a deck of greasy cards.

"How long do we stay here?" Cass asked.

Beckman glanced at his watch. "Not much longer. Perhaps five, perhaps ten more minutes."

Cass lighted his cigarette, told them with small conviction, "You can't get away with this."

Leightner hooted. "I think we will. The F.B.I. is not infallible and neither is the Secret Service. Just because they have rounded up and shot a few of the boys who were landed from submarines is no sign they are super-agents."

Beckman drew and discarded a card. "There are quite a few of us in this country."

"A hell of a lot of us," Leightner added.

Gretchen came into the cabin. "It is time," she told them simply.

Leightner tuned in a small portable radio to check his watch. A commercial program was just signing off. The announcer gave the time and station, added:

". . . keep your dial tuned to this station. Tonight at nine o'clock Eastern

Standard time the President will make another of his historic fireside reports to the nation. Now at Warm Springs, Georgia winding up his annual visit with a party for his little friends, President. . . .”

Leightner switched off the radio. “Let’s go.”

Cass’s mouth felt dry. “What happens to me?” he demanded.

Beckman grinned. “You rob the bank, that’s all. We’ll take care of the other matter.”

He prodded Cass into a battered car that stood in front of the cabin. A second car, a powerful sedan waited beside it.

“I am to follow you in,” Gretchen said.

Cass rode with Leightner in the rear seat, the other man’s gun barrel nuzzling his ribs. A twenty-minute drive brought them to the outskirts of Warm Springs. “We are going to let you out of the car,” Leightner told him. “You walk straight to your position on the bank corner. You will be covered at all times.” He waved a hand at the crowded street filled with people eager to see their leader. “We have agents scattered through the crowd.”

Cass sat in sullen silence. He saw the whole thing now. The raid on the bank by the hill men was merely a diversion. A gun battle at the bank would distract attention from the focal point at which the planned assassination would take place.

As Beckman braked on the corner the little veins in Cass’s temple began to throb. He knew now how they hoped to make the planned tragedy come true.

*No one would have to break through the F.B.I. and Secret Service lines to reach the President. The killer was already inside the hotel, a guest at the President’s table.*

“Why so silent?” Leightner asked.

“He is afraid,” Beckman jeered.

Cass nodded grimly. He was afraid, not for himself but for the President. The planned assassination was so simply yet so cleverly devised that it had every chance of succeeding.

The attempt to rob the bank would serve a triple purpose. It would divert attention, subtract from the President’s guard, and give the unsuspected killer an even chance of escaping in the resulting confusion. The President’s death, if he

did die, would be credited at first to a wild slug from one of the cracking rifles on the bank corner.

Leightner opened the car door and nudged Cass with his gun barrel. “All right. This is where you get out.”

His voice was shrill with nervous tension. As Cass stepped from the car, Gretchen drove past slowly.

“Cross the street now,” Beckman directed. “Stand directly in front of the bank where all of the hill men can see you.”

Leightner added: “If you go through your part of this as scheduled you have every chance of getting out of town alive. Make one move that you haven’t been ordered to make—and you die. Is that clear?”

Cass told him that it was and crossed the street to the bank corner. Ike Merrill and Pod Martin drove past and parked four cars away. Both men saw him and winked but they were too far away for him to call to them without being overheard by Beckman and Leightner.

Cass glanced at the bank clock. The hands stood at four minutes of nine. Unless he could find some way of stopping it, red hell would break loose at nine. Sweat beaded the big man’s forehead. He wasn’t afraid to die. But if he tried to make a break, he had been warned that he would be shot and the crack of the rifle that killed him would be misinterpreted by the hill men as the signal for the raid.

On the bank corner he stopped and turned around. A group of chatting men strode by. Desperate, he joined them using their bodies as a shield. Miraculously the crack of the shot he was waiting for didn’t come. At the mouth of an alleyway a quarter of a block away he paused to determine the shortest route to the hotel. As he stopped the hard snout of a Luger pressed into his spine.

“We thought you might try this, Able,” Leightner said. His voice was steely with rage. “Back to the bank corner now—and fast!”

CASS whirled, instead—striking upwards with both fists as he turned. The Nazi agent dropped groveling on the walk. A passing woman began to scream:

"Police! Police!"

Pausing only to snatch up the Luger, Cass raced down the dark aisle growing a tail of screams and curses. The hotel was three blocks away. A burly Secret Service man stopped him at the gate.

Cass panted: "Tom Pinson. I've got to see him. I've got to get into that dining room. The President is going to be shot."

The Secret Service man misunderstood him. "Not by you, bud," he said coldly.

Cass thrust the Luger into the Secret Service man's hands, butt first. "Take my gun," he panted. "Handcuff me. Hold a dozen guns on me if you want to—but believe me."

Children's voices raised in song floated out the open windows of the hotel dining room:

"Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, dear—"

The guard reacted to the urgency in Cass's voice. "You're not lying," he said crisply. "Come on. Let's talk to Pinson."

The lobby of the hotel was crowded. There were radio engineers, announcers for the respective networks, some of the President's personal retinue, and several dozens of proud parents. Cass saw with a rapid quickening of his pulse that Doctor Leyden was among them.

Tom Pinson strode across the lobby as they entered.

"Get him out of here," he told the Secret Service man. "He's crazy. Throw him in the local jail until—"

Cass hadn't even heard him. His eyes were on the closed dining room door. The song had ended. The maitre de hotel was opening the doors and F.B.I. men and Secret Service men were forming a double line.

"You've got to believe me," he pleaded. "I—"

He stopped at the look in Pinson's eyes. No one was going to believe him. The little F.B.I. man actually thought that he was crazy, thought that the eight years he had spent in prison had been too much for his brain. With a lunge that left his coat in the Secret Service man's hand Cass plunged for the opening doors.

Behind him a heavy gun blasted. The slug tore through his shoulder. The im-

pact slammed him up against the glass as the lobby filled with screams. Then the children in the dining room screamed.

Hands clutching, striking at him, Cass fought his way through the door and up to the long tables set in an inverted V. He saw the face he knew that he would find—then glanced at the point of the V.

The great man had risen to face Cass, unafraid. His ever present body guard of Secret Service men were trying frantically to force their bodies between him and Cass.

A Secret Service man finally blocked the President from Cass—but Cass, half blind with pain, *could see that there was no one between the President and Halvor but a half dozen screaming children.*

His weazened face screwed up in triumph, Halvor, suddenly adult, had drawn a gun of strange design from under the blanket on his lap and had leveled it on the heart of the man whom he had come so many miles to kill.

Cass hurled himself across the table as he fired. All eyes had been on Cass. No one had seen the gun. Now it was pressed to Cass's brawny chest as table and wheel chair and Halvor crashed to the floor.

Cass felt lead tear at his chest as Halvor struggled to get free. Then a heavy blow from behind smashed his head into Halvor's lap. The midget beat at it savagely with his now empty gun and screamed obscene curses at the man who clung to him.

As if speaking from a distance, Cass thought he heard Tom Pinson say: "Get up, Cass."

Cass tried to get up. He couldn't. There was a great roaring in his ears. The faces gaping at him had become a spinning pin-wheel that suddenly straightened out and sky-rocketed into space.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### He Was Wanted!

THERE was no sound in the room but the heavy breathing of the man on the bed and the frightened sobbing of the girl. Cass pushed the doctor away. "I'm all right," he insisted.

"None of the bullets," the doctor admitted, "seem to have struck a vital spot."

Cass raised himself on the pillow assisted by the doctor. "You got Lightner and Beckman on the bank corner?"

Pinson nodded grimly. "We did."

Halvor, the midget, now squirming in Matt Humphrey's arms, continued his stream of sulphurous curses now in English, now in German.

Cass ignored him to ask Colonel Anders of the Secret Service. "And the President is all right? You weren't lying to me, sir?"

Anders opened the door a moment. The President's voice rose clear and firm from the lobby floor where he was making his fireside report to the nation into a battery of microphones.

The Secret Service man closed the door. "You see," he explained, "when you plunged over the table you deflected that first shot into the ceiling." He took the gun that the midget had used from his pocket and laid it on the bed so Cass could see it. "It's powered by a compression chamber filled with carbon dioxide, or carbice, commonly known as dry ice. That's why there was no sound. It's a clever but a deadly little gadget. You can increase or decrease the velocity of your shot by regulating the trigger valve."

Cass looked at the cursing midget. "That's what you killed Lem with. No wonder I didn't hear any shots."

"That's right," the midget sneered.

*Herr Doktor* Leyden whimpered: "I'll talk. If you gentlemen promise not to shoot me, I'll talk." His bald head gleamed with perspiration. His fat face was a fish-belly white. He pointed a shaking finger at the midget. "It is not right that Gretchen and I should be shot. We but took our orders from Guber."

"We had to do as we were told," the blonde girl sobbed.

Pinson flipped open a small note book. "So his right name is Guber?" he demanded of the rotund little doctor.

"Fredrick Guber," Leyden answered. "He is in reality twenty-five years old. He was well-known on the German stage and in German circus sideshows as the strongest midget in the world before infantile paralysis left his legs hopelessly crippled." Now Leyden had started talking there was no stopping him. "This mad idea was his own. He sold it to Himmler.

Gretchen and I are blameless. We were forced to do as we were ordered."

"You lie!" the midget shouted. "We all should die together!"

Tom Pinson demanded of Leyden: "But what the hell has a gang of night riders got to do with this?"

Cass told him, briefly, as much as he knew. "But the boys had no idea what they were getting onto," he concluded. "They would have lynched Leyden and Guber if they had known the truth"

ANDERS nodded slowly. "It was clever," he admitted. "If rifles had been cracking on the bank corner at the time the president was shot we naturally would have accredited the shot to a stray bullet. We would have tracked the hill men down. You undoubtedly would have faced a firing squad while Guber and Leyden and the girl went free and unsuspected."

"That was the idea," Guber spat.

Cass broke the silence that followed. "It was Guber who fired at me when I first came back to the mountain. It was Guber who fired at me in the cabin."

"How about Sergeant Fillmore?" Pinson asked. "I know now that he was shot to discredit Cass with me. But who shot him? Lem?"

"No." Gretchen defended the dead man hotly. "Lem knew nothing of the truth. *Herr Doktor* Leyden gave Cass's hat to Lightner and Beckman. It was they who shot the marine." Her voice broke slightly. "Lem was good to me. I tried to stop this awful thing by telling him the truth—and Guber shot him."

Pinson admitted. "I've been wrong, Cass, completely wrong."

He offered the man on the bed his hand and Cass's finger closed around it. From the lobby floor below them there was a sudden loud burst of applause.

"Well, I guess that's all," Colonel Anders said, "except that we can't allow this to get into the papers." He inclined his head toward the prisoners. "Take them out," he ordered one of the men. He hesitated, asked: "But how did you know, Able, that Halvor was a midget?"

Cass grinned: "Tom Pinson told me."

"I told you?" Pinson gasped.

"Sure." Cass grinned. "You said that

the President would be so well guarded that not even a midget could crawl through the lines. That set me to wondering what would happen if a midget was already on the inside."

Anders smiled and laid a hand on Cass's shoulder. "Not being able to break the story I'm afraid that we won't be able to give you the credit due you, at least for the duration."

Cass shook his head. "I don't want credit."

He lay staring at the ceiling long after they all had gone except the doctor and the nurse.

"In pain?" the nurse asked as she lowered his pillow.

"No. Not bad." Cass said. "I—"

He stopped abruptly as Rita, her cheeks stained with tears and her eyes swollen with crying, tiptoed into the room followed by Sergeant Fillmore.

"He shouldn't talk any more," the nurse protested. "He—"

Tom Pinson in the doorway grinned. "She won't hurt him." He added to Cass, "We couldn't keep her away so we de-

cidated to tell her the truth about you."

Rita clung to Cass's sound hand. "I started as soon as I heard that you were hurt. I've been a fool. Forgive me, Cass. I love you."

Cass raised his eyes to the big marine sergeant.

"And don't get me wrong," the burly sergeant grinned. "She's promised to be a sister to me." He inspected Cass's bandages with clinical interest. "Hell. You ain't shot up so bad. You should have seen the holes in me. How's about you and me talking business a little later, Bud? We still have one uniform your size."

"No," Pinson said sharply from the doorway. "Cass is coming in with us. We'll clear his record somehow. Will that be all right with you, Cass?"

Rita pressed her lips to his before the big man could answer. "I have first claim," she said.

The three were still arguing hotly as Cass drifted off to sleep. It didn't matter a damn which one got him. It was enough to know that he was wanted.

THE END



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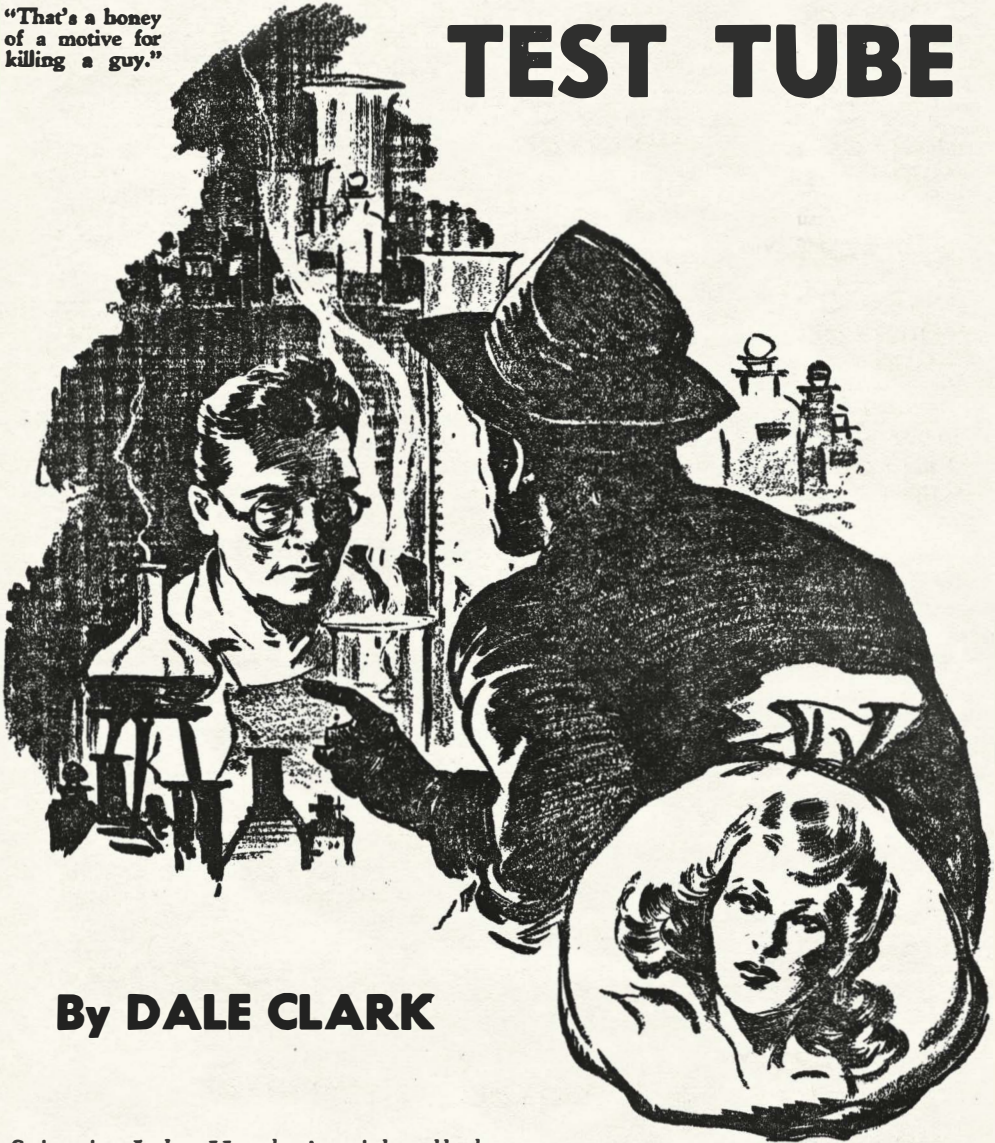
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# CORPSE IN A TEST TUBE

"That's a boney of a motive for killing a guy."



By **DALE CLARK**

*Scientist John Hayden's girl called him a walking test tube with a chemical formula for blood. For he had called her irascible uncle's murder a fascinating and intriguing study. . . . There's a chuckle or two neatly tied up with a very clever murderer in this timely and thoroughly entertaining yarn.*

**T**HE solution in the test tube was cloudy. It puzzled me. I weighed out another gram of sodium sulphite, added it to the mixture and again held the tube over the Bunsen burner.

As I did so, the phone rang.

I shifted the tube to my left hand, circled around the marble-topped bureau and reached my right arm across the foot of the bed to unhook the receiver.

"John Hayden Laboratory," I said crisply.



At the other end of the wire someone was sobbing.

"Why, Meridel!" I exclaimed.

Meridel Lambert said shakily, "Jack—Jack, please come over right away. . . . Something dreadful has happened. . . . *Hurry!*"

Opposites attract opposites, as the saying goes. Meridel has always been a creature of impulse and emotion, in contrast to my own strictly scientific nature. Doubtless that was why I had been drawn to her by an irresistible magnetic urge.

The fact that she was appealing to me now filled my being with a glad, warm glow. "Certainly," I replied comfortingly. "But be more explicit. What do you mean, something dreadful has happened?"

"It's—it's Uncle Aaron!"

"Why, what's that old tyrant done now?"

"I—I'm afraid he's *dead!*" Meridel's voice choked off.

Uncle Aaron was dead?

Automatically, I lifted the test tube to the light and squinted at its contents. The solution remained cloudy. I dumped it into the washbowl. I turned out the Bunsen flame, removed by rubberized apron and donned a street coat.

What did he die of?

I adjusted my necktie and gave my cowlick a hasty brush in front of the washstand mirror. I needed a shave. Instead, I sprinkled some talcum on the corner of a towel and rubbed the towel hurriedly over my face.

Heart failure?

Aaron Lambert's choleric temper must have imposed a severe strain on his heart, I thought as I backed my roadster out of the parking strip in front of the building. Driving down Altran Avenue, I remembered how beet-red Uncle Aaron had grown the day he fired me. Turning into Pearl Drive, I recalled that his complexion had been positively mottled the day he ordered me out of the house and forbade me ever to see Meridel again.

He was a man of dangerous rages, all right.

I'd shifted into second gear at the foot of the hill before I remembered my sodium sulphite. Or rather, didn't remember—whether I'd put the lid back on the tin or not.

As everyone knows, sodium sulphite readily oxidizes into sulphate unless carefully sealed. I was more upset about Uncle Aaron than I'd thought, to have overlooked that detail.

There were several vehicles parked in front of the house. To my surprise, these included a police car and a fire truck. A thick gray serpent of water hose crawled from the street hydrant through the open patio entrance. I got a whiff of the wetted, acrid stench of a recent fire as I entered the gate.

The water hose snaked along the side of the house and fed in through the shattered glass of a small greenhouse.

Meridel darted from the shadows. "Oh, Jack—Jack, it's terrible, ghastly!" Her slim figure was sob-shaken as she clung to me.

I patted her arm tenderly. "There, there," I said consolingly. "Death is neither ghastly nor terrible, honey. It is simply a natural phenomenon, like life itself. Just think how cluttered up the world would become if no one ever died. You see, it's not only natural—it's an absolute scientific necessity."

A group of men gathered on the lawn turned and stared at me.

"Lord, you're a cold-blooded fish, Hayden," Dave Lambert commented. "You wouldn't talk like that if you'd been through what we have."

**D**AVE LAMBERT was Meridel's first cousin—in other words, old Aaron's son. I never looked at his muscular chassis without recalling that a human being consists of \$1.89 worth of chemicals. In Dave's case, I was forced to regard this as sheer, regrettable waste.

"Hello, Dave," I replied, choosing to ignore his unnecessarily antagonistic attitude. "Well, what did happen here?"

"A fire started in the lath house." This was Claude Foye, the Lambert's nearest neighbor. A tall man, he spoke dourly around a cold, chewed cigar. "I'd been down to the drug store, and I saw the flames when I turned into my driveway. Dave and I dragged him outside and tried to apply first-aid methods but it was too late then."

"But how did the fire start?" I asked, going to the nub of the matter.

"A cigarette must have dropped onto a pail of sphagnum peat moss," responded Foye. "That's the only explanation we can figure out."

I stepped closer, to where a physician was kneeling beside Uncle Aaron's fully clothed form.

"But he isn't burned at all!" I exclaimed.

"He was overcome by the fumes," explained the doctor. "Carbon monoxide gas was the direct cause of Mr. Lambert's death."

I nodded and said, "I see. Evidently the peat moss smoldered and he was overcome before he even knew there was a fire."

"No such thing. He had an empty fire extinguisher in his hand when we found him," Dave Lambert corrected. "The fire jumped to the woodwork and the whole end of the place burst into flames immediately. Right, chief?" He cocked his head importantly.

The remaining two members of the party were clad in the uniforms of the Fire and Police Departments.

"I guess so," said the fire captain. "I don't see why he didn't run and yell for help. He must have thought he could save some of the plants by fighting it himself. Huh, Creedy?"

Officer Creedy was a simple muscular type, who no doubt had acquired the sergeant's stripes on his sleeves by years of seniority.

"Unless the kid here has got a better explanation," he rumbled. "How about it, sonny?"

"A scientific hypothesis cannot be spun out of thin air," I retorted. "It is the essence of the inductive method that the casual connection must always be inferred from analysis of the specific instance."

Creedy's jaw dropped. "Come again?" he growled.

"Let us look at the evidence," I shrugged, "and then perhaps a more plausible explanation will suggest itself."

He eyed me thoughtfully. "Okay—quizz kid. Strut your stuff."

He led the way into the lath house—a poor name for the structure, since at this season of the year its four walls were entirely closed in with glass. Fortunately the fire had not reached the electrical

conduits, and light rained down from a dropcord bulb above Aaron Lambert's work table as the sergeant clicked a switch by the door.

Despite the shattered glass, a powerful reek of wet, charred wood filled the place. Mingled with it was the thick, disagreeable odor of commercial fertilizer. I advanced across the water-soaked earth floor to the small, hand extinguisher.

"A *Quik-Quench* home model," I murmured. "An efficient instrument of its size, one of the carbon dioxide type. This marks the spot where you found the corpse, I presume?"

"Jack!" protested Meridel in a quivering voice. "You make it sound so—so—well, hard-hearted. . . ."

"It is necessary to approach these problems in a scientifically objective spirit," I reassured her. "This is the spot, is it not?"

"Yeah. He was there—with his hand on it," supplied Dave.

"The fire, then, was ten feet away," I mused. "Here, on the other side of the bench. But your pail's rather far from the woodwork, isn't it?"

"The ventilating system made a draft in here," explained the fire captain. He waved his hand at the air vents beside the work bench.

"True. It must have been an extraordinarily active fire, though." I bent over to examine the moss bucket at close range. To my amazement, the fire had burned almost through its metal bottom. I gingerly dipped a finger into the wet ash in its interior, and stirred the liquescent stuff about in my palm.

I exclaimed, "Milk of magnesia!"

They stared at me.

"Are you crazy, Hayden?" pitied Dave Lambert. "Nobody tried to put out this fire with milk of magnesia."

I WAS thinking intently. "Of course not," I said. "Water was thrown on the fire. Some of it got into this pail, and obviously became mixed with magnesium oxide which was already there. You folks know what magnesium oxide is, don't you?"

"Tell us, whizz kid," muttered Sergeant Creedy.

"It is an antacid preparation, used

medicinally for its laxative properties," put in the physician.

"Correct," I nodded. "And it is obtained by burning magnesium."

Creedy caught at the last word. "Magnesium!" he blurted. "You mean, like a fire bomb?"

"That is one of its war-time uses," I replied. "Magnesium may be described as a metallic element. It is silver-white in color, is malleable and ductile—"

"You mean, there was a *fire bomb* in that pail?" the officer interrupted.

"There was magnesium. It's the explanation of the extraordinary violence of the conflagration, generating sufficient heat to nearly melt through the bottom of a metal bucket."

The sergeant rocked on the balls of his feet. "That'd be *arson*," he rumbled. "It don't make sense to me. Who'd go to all that trouble just to burn down a lath house?"

"It is somewhat more involved than that," I said. "Remember, that fire extinguisher is of the carbon dioxide type. CO<sub>2</sub> is the chemical formula. Now, as I said before, you take magnesium, or Mg, and burn it to obtain MgO, or magnesium oxide. Magnesium, which burns at a temperature above four thousand degrees, will seize oxygen from a liquid source. That's why an incendiary bomb flares up in your face if you throw water on it. It converts the water, H<sub>2</sub>O into hydrogen by removing the oxygen. You can see the answer, can't you?"

Creedy didn't. He growled, "Wadda ya mean, answer?"

"It's simple subtraction. Uncle Aaron added carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>, to burning magnesium, and obtained magnesium oxide as one by-product. What he had left was CO—or the carbon monoxide which caused his death."

Nobody said a word.

"If I had a blackboard," I said, "I

could make it much more clearer to you."

Creedy swallowed several times. "Sonny, you really are nuts." He walked around the bench and picked up the bucket and said, "I'm gonna have this analyzed, just to prove how screwy you are. Murdering a guy with milk of magnesia—ha-ha."

To my astonishment, Meridel burst into fresh sobs as she turned and darted from the lath house.

Naturally, I hurried in pursuit. "Sweetheart!" I pleaded.

She whirled around in the side doorway of the house. "Jack Hayden, don't you come near me! Don't you even dare speak to me, you—you monster!"

"Darling. . . ."

"Uncle Aaron was right about you! He said you were nothing but a walking test tube with a chemical formula in your veins instead of blood. He said if I ever married you, I'd find out you had no more heart than a stone statue!"

I sighed. "Meridel," I said, "I dispute your conclusions. They are obviously founded upon unfair premises. Suppose we discuss this objectively—"

"Dave was right, too! You *are* a cold-blooded fish! The way you stood there and lectured about a man being murdered, as if it was just a nasty old laboratory experiment! You—and your Mg and MgO and all the rest of it!"

"Murder?" I gulped. "But *that* was Sergeant Creedy's idea."

"You said so first. You said somebody put a fire bomb in that pail so Uncle Aaron would spray carbon dioxide on it and be killed by poison gas!"

I shook my head. "Meridel, honey, no such thought ever entered my head. I swear it didn't."

"Then what were you thinking, Jack?"

"I wasn't thinking of Uncle Aaron at all, and the notion of murder never even occurred to me. I was fascinated by dis-

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---

covering the magnesium oxide, intrigued by the chemical reactions involved—”

“Fascinated! Intrigued!” she echoed dully. “A man is murdered, and you find his death fascinating and intriguing? Jack, you’re hopeless—you haven’t a spark of human feeling in you!”

SHE had opened the door, and now she flung herself inside—and slammed the door in my face. I heard a chuckle behind me. There stood Claude Foye, grinning at me.

“Unreasonable, isn’t she?” Foye sympathized. “Anyone would think she suspected you of murdering the old man.”

I sprang to Meridel’s defense. “Girls are like that. I remember in college how the co-eds used to shudder at a skeleton that hung in the physiology lecture-room.”

“They did, huh?”

“Yes. At first. Until they learned to forget that the skeleton had ever been the bones of a human being that once walked, talked, and perhaps made love in the moonlight.”

Foye eyed me quizzically. “I don’t suppose you ever shuddered at a skeleton, Hayden?”

“Of course not. Such ideas are sheer sentimentality—and there’s no sentiment in science.”

Sergeant Creedy suddenly popped around the corner of the house, and into our conversation. “There ain’t much sentiment in crime, either,” he said grimly. “A murder like this is a hell of a hardboiled proposition.”

“Then you admit,” I flashed, “you accept my theory about the milk of magnesia?”

“I’ll have it checked at Headquarters and let you know.” He shrugged. “I can get you by ameché, huh?”

“I beg your pardon.”

“Phone,” he said.

“I’m in the book. The John Hayden Laboratory, on Altran Avenue.”

Sergeant Creedy fumbled open the pages of a little black memo book. “Suppose I wanted to give you a buzz later tonight, though?”

“You can get me there. As a matter of fact, I walked out in the middle of a long experiment. I wish you would ameché me as soon as you find out,” I said.

But he didn’t.

He came to see me instead.

That was about midnight. I was still struggling to get a clear solution in the test tube when a knock sounded on the door—and there stood Sergeant Creedy, a pipe canted comfortably in the corner of his mouth.

“You win,” he announced with manly promptitude. “It was magnesium oxide, all right.”

“I felt sure of it.”

“That ain’t all they found, though. Guess what else?”

“You must give me a clue,” I said smiling. “Do you mean a chemical residue, possibly of potassium, or the charred bits of a fuse?”

The officer took the pipe out of his mouth. “It was potassium, but how the hell did you figure that out?”

“Very simply, Sergeant. It was necessary to ignite the magnesium. The obvious possibilities were a time fuse or a chemical agent. Let me show you something.”

I stepped around the bureau, entered the closet, and returned with a bit of bluish white metal gripped in a pair of tongs. “Potassium,” I said.

I tossed it into a water beaker.

“Gosh all gee-whiz!” muttered officer Creedy thickly, staring at the tongue of violet flame which licked up from the surface of the water.

“That’s how potassium reacts, forming potassium hydroxide and hydrogen. What you see is the hydrogen burning. It would only be necessary to place a water-filled paper bag in your wastebasket. Eventually the water would seep out, come into contact with the potassium and start a fire which would ignite the magnesium.”

“Yeah. Just like that. But where would a guy go about getting the stuff?”

“From a chemical supply house, ordinarily. Of course, there are other sources. Magnesium can be obtained commercially in powder and ribbon form. Personally, I procured a supply of shavings from a machine shop.”

“You got it on hand, huh?”

I nodded. “As a matter of fact, I am experimenting along these very lines,” I confessed. “I’m trying to perfect a liquid

extinguisher which can safely be used on incendiary bombs."

Sergeant Creedy grunted. "Well, now, sonny, that's very interesting. Why didn't you tell me about these experiments of yours in the first place?"

"You know how inventors are, officer. Always afraid somebody will beat us to the Patent Office with the same idea."

The sergeant's pipe stem played rat-a-tat across his teeth.

"Cozy little spot you've got here," he threw out, as if at a loss for other comment.

"I think I've fixed it up pretty efficiently."

"Yeah. It must be tough to sleep in the same room with all this chemical stink, though," he sympathized. "And what do you do, cook on that do-funny?"

I laughed. "On the Bunsen burner? Don't be ridiculous. No, I have an electric grill tucked under the bed."

"What have you been living on since you lost your job?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, I get along. Money really means very little to me. All this is purely temporary, anyway. One of these days I'll set myself up in a first-class laboratory."

"When you marry Miss Lambert?" he hazarded.

"No," I replied. "When I put my extinguisher on the market."

"Yeah, sure, when. But in the meantime, Meridel Lambert's got money now. I suppose you know she and Dave inherit old Aaron's estate, with her getting a third? You got any idea how much that amounts to?"

**"LET'S** see. Aaron was worth approximately one hundred forty-seven thousand dollars. The answer is forty-nine thousand gross, from which Federal and State inheritance taxes must be deducted."

He grinned. "Sonny, you're good. And money don't mean anything to you, either."

"It is not a fair test," I replied. "I formerly kept Uncle Aaron's books, so I could readily reckon up his assets."

"Bookkeeper, huh? That must have been tough on a genius like you."

I said, "It was merely a stop-gap job. I needed funds to complete my experi-

ments. But isn't all this rather beside the point, officer? I should think you'd be more interested in the murder than in my personal affairs."

Sergeant Creedy blinked at me. "Thanks for reminding me, sonny. I was working around to it. I don't suppose you can think of any motive for bumping off Aaron Lambert?"

"Perhaps not a murder motive," I ventured, "but you might investigate Claude Foye a bit."

"Why him?"

"Because they weren't on speaking terms. Foye happens to be an idle rich man, one who inherited a good deal of property and doesn't know what to do with his time. He amuses himself with photography. He once sneaked a picture of Uncle Aaron working in his rose garden. It was one of those rear end, humorous views and it got published in a snapshot contest. Of course, Uncle Aaron got sore."

Creedy said: "That's a honey of a motive for killing a guy. I can see the jury falling off their chairs. You gotta do better than that, sonny."

I said, "There's more to it. There were hard words, and the quarrel deepened as those things do. Finally Foye tore up a privet hedge along his lot line, and put in a solid row of Indian Cedar trees. They soon grew tall enough to shut off the afternoon sun and that ruined Uncle Aaron's rose garden, because roses mildew badly in shade."

"Ain't that something!"

"But Aaron Lambert was proud of his championship roses. He always won prizes in the flower shows. And don't forget his temper. He'd light into anyone and you could hear him three blocks away. He'd fry most people to a crisp, make them want to shrivel up and blow away—but of course some men won't take such abuse lying down."

Creedy studied me. "You ought to know. I understand he lit into you. Forbid you to hang around Meridel, wasn't that it?"

"I got off easy," I said. "I didn't have to live with him, as Meridel and Dave were forced to. They're the ones I felt sorry for, not Dave so much, but Meridel. She's the kind of sweet, lovable, inex-

perienced girl who'd listen to a crusty old dictator rather than to the promptings of her own heart."

"Yeah. I see how you felt about him."

Sergeant Creedy turned to the door.

"I tell you what," he said. "Maybe you could drop down to Headquarters in the morning? You might have a talk with the Homicide Squad and explain to them how that chemical stunt was worked. We'll have a stenographer there to take down your statement, so we can keep it for reference later on."

He startled me. I hadn't expected him to appreciate the value of scientific evidence.

"Gladly," I replied. "And a good night to you, officer."

I picked up the test tube again. I'd repeated the whole experiment from scratch and the solution was still cloudy. The only thing I could think of was that just possibly the dessicated sulphite I was using might be old stock that had aged in the chemical supply stock. I remembered I had a few crystals of sodium sulphite tucked away in the closet.

I went in there, knelt down, started fumbling under the bottom shelf. That's when I made the discovery—and it nearly pulled my eyes out of my sockets.

There was a sprinkling of white powder on the floor. I moistened my finger, tasted a grain of it.

The taste told me everything. I knew somebody had been in this closet, rummaging around in my chemicals. Whoever did it had knocked over the tin of dessicated sodium sulphite, and hadn't bothered to put the lid back on tightly. It explained why my experiment had failed tonight.

It explained more than that. I reached down, hauled out the box where I kept the magnesium shavings stored.

It was empty.

I backed out of the closet. I was sweating. For the first time in my life, I was afraid of my own logical thoughts. Only one person in the world knew about my work, could have known the magnesium was stored here.

I didn't bother with a coat, I ran out as I was, bare-headed, wearing the rubberized apron, and jumped into the roadster.

Dave Lambert answered the door.

"Meridel!" I choked.

"She's gone to bed. You can't see her tonight, you sap."

"I've got to see her! I'm going to!"

"NUTS to you, Hayden! The poor kid is heartbroken, already, and I know you'd just make it tougher for her with your damned cold-blooded ideas about things!"

"It's life or death!" I insisted.

Meridel couldn't have been asleep. She came into the hallway, tugging a negligee tight around her slender figure as we argued.

"Let him in, Dave," she commanded.

I shoved my way past Dave as he hesitated. I grabbed her arm. "Who'd you tell?" I demanded.

"Tell what?"

"About my invention! You told somebody!"

"You came in here in the middle of the night—" growled Dave—"to accuse her of giving away your damned fool, worthless invention?"

She was staring at me. "I didn't really tell him what it *was*, but when he said all those things about you, I told him someday the Government would be glad to buy your idea."

"Him?" I fairly danced in my impatience. "Who, who?"

"Why, Uncle Aaron, of course."

Uncle Aaron. That was no good. No good at all. Uncle Aaron hadn't broken into my room to steal magnesium to set fire to his own lath house. I groaned with disappointment.

"Why so white around the gills?" Dave Lambert sneered. "What difference does it make who knows it? Anybody might as well throw dishwater on a bomb as any formula you figured out."

I whirled at him.

"*You knew!*" I yelled. "Dave, you killed him!"

He swung from his hip. He put his weight into the punch, and he was twice my weight. He must have lifted me clear off my feet. I sailed across the narrow hallway and crashed through a door and rolled over on the floor.

Ten seconds were lost from my life forever.

My head was in Meridel's lap. I'd never realized my mouth was so full of teeth, all of them hurting at once.

"Dave, shame on you!" she was saying. Then she saw me bat my eyelids. "And shame on you, Jack! How could you say such a thing? Dave and I were playing gin rummy all evening. He couldn't possibly have set that fire."

I sat up dizzily. Dave had switched on a chandelier light. The book-lined walls of Uncle Aaron's study were tossing like a ship at sea.

"Yeah? What gave you that idea, nitwit? That I killed my own dad?"

"How'd you know about my invention?"

"That's easy. I heard dad say you couldn't invent any such thing in a thousand years. He said it at the top of his voice, right after he threw you out of the house that time."

I groped to my feet, grabbed the library desk and shook my head. A blob of red whirled in front of my eyes. It wasn't an optical illusion, either. I stopped shaking my head, and the red blob formed into a red rose.

A picture of a rose, on the cover of a nursery catalog lying on the desk. Uncle Aaron must have been poring over that catalog tonight.

A piece of yellow paper lay beside it—a yellow order blank. Partly filled in. He'd written down his order for one dozen bareroot Tangoes, six Californias, three Charlotte Armstrongs.

But he'd stopped raising roses! He couldn't raise them, since his garden was shaded by Claude Foye's cedar trees.

"I take it back, Dave," I mumbled. "I

should have realized you don't have the brains, anyway."

"I ought to sock you again!"

"Save your strength," I said. "You may need it. Come along, but stay outside. I'll yell for help if I want any."

He was still muttering, wondering what it was all about, when I left him standing under the Indian Cedar trees. The Foye house was darkened. I circled past Foye's garage, almost tripped over a coil of garden hose. I rang the bell, and after awhile a little oblong hole opened in the door.

"Mr. Foye," I said, "please let me in. I'm in trouble. The police were around and tried to arrest me for murdering Aaron Lambert."

He clucked his tongue. "I'm sorry, Hayden, but how can I help?"

"You could tell them the truth. You can tell them who really killed Mr. Lambert."

THE opening in the door made a frame for his expressionless face. "That's silly, Hayden. I went down to the drug store for some roll film tonight. I was a dozen blocks from here when that fire started."

I said: "But Uncle Aaron was dead before there was any fire."

He caught his breath. "Just a minute, Hayden." The peep-hole closed. The lock clicked. A chain rattled. "Come in, young man. Now, what's this theory of yours?"

He was in pajamas and dressing robe, with his fists pushed down into the pockets of the robe.

I said, "It's the police theory. They



think I parked my car in the alley and connected your garden hose to the exhaust. Then I'm supposed to have fed the other end of the hose into the lath house ventilator, trusting that Aaron Lambert wouldn't notice the exhaust odor because of the powerful fertilizer smell in the place."

"He might have seen the fumes, though."

"Not if I capped the end of the hose with a filter paper," I said. "That'd stop the oil fumes, and carbon monoxide itself is entirely colorless. Even if he had noticed anything, I could have jerked the hose back through the cedar trees. It was a safe way of killing a man, and much surer than trusting to the chemical reaction of CO<sub>2</sub> on burning magnesium. After all, a murderer couldn't be sure Aaron Lambert might not run out of the lath house instead of trying to fight the fire."

Foye frowned. "But then why did you set the fire at all?"

"To account for the carbon monoxide," I said. "And also as an alibi. I could be blocks away by the time the fire was discovered. I merely emptied the extinguisher, left it beside his body, and trusted to chemical action to start the blaze."

Foye nodded, and wetted his lips, and said: "Well, that sounds pretty convincing to me, as if they really had you. How did you talk your way out of it?"

"I didn't, Mr. Foye. I was in bed when the officers came. I stepped into the bedroom to put on my clothes, jumped out the window, and ran for my life."

"You're lying!" he said sharply. "You haven't got two rooms—" and stopped.

"That was a mistake, Mr. Foye. You shouldn't have admitted you were ever in my one room."

He peered at me. His eyes were as black as silver nitrate stains, now. "Damn you, Hayden!" he said. "It's lucky no one else heard me say that. As it is, of course, it's just your word against mine."

He was telling himself. Not me.

I said, "That isn't all. I know what Aaron Lambert had on you."

"What he—he—?"

"Exactly, Mr. Foye. I know why he was no longer worried about your cedars shading his rose garden." I didn't know, of course. But that's the way you find out

things in chemistry. Throw two things together, and see what happens."

Nothing happened. He just stared at me, dazed.

So I tried stirring the mixture. "You forget," I said, "that I used to be employed in Aaron Lambert's office. This isn't anything new. He'd been working on it a long time."

"Who—who else knows, Hayden?"

"Knows what?" I asked. "You mean the garden hose and all that—?"

"No, you fool! About this—my title to the property." He sweated it out, too scared to realize he was giving me the whole thing, the whole formula.

"So that's it!" I said. "You haven't got a clear title. And it isn't just this house. It's everything you inherited. There's a flaw in the probate somewhere—and he'd traced it. He was driving you to the wall!"

"Hell!" he raved. "You didn't even know! It's another damned trick!"

Sometimes those chemical experiments blow up in your face. This one did. Claude Foye exploded into curses as he launched his lank, maniacal fury at me. I hit him once. I went down anyway. His hands were at my throat and I couldn't do anything except kick my heels.

"You damned — sneaking shrimp — You'll never blab—"

The door swung open—and a thunderbolt seemed to hit the pair of us. A mallet of steel cracked my jawbone.

It was more than ten seconds this time. It was probably a whole minute.

I looked up, and my head was in Meridel's lap. I looked around, and nobody was holding Claude Foye's head. Dave Lambert, bent over, was rubbing his trouserleg. "Sorry," he blurted. "I must've kneed you when I tackled the guy. Now, what's the lowdown?"

"He heard that quarrel, and knew about the magnesium. It's the stuff they use in flashlight photography, so he knew how it'd work. You'd better ameche the cops," I mumbled.

"I better *what*?"

"Phone them, you dope."

I felt Meridel's arms tighten around my head. "Jack! You're using slang!" she crooned. "Oh, darling, you're getting human!"

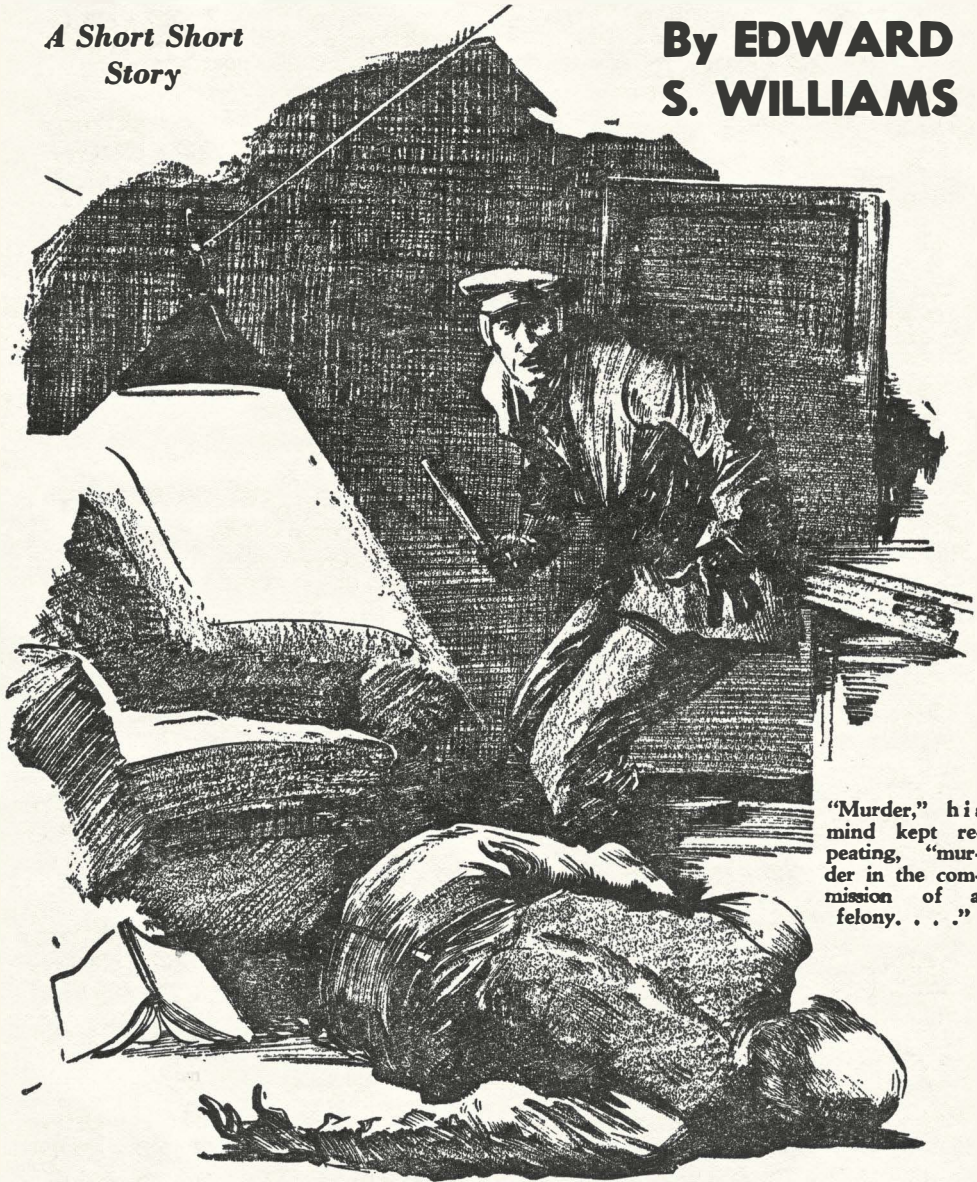


*Harvey Brandt had planned a crime with the meticulous skill of a campaign strategist. He had figured on everything but . . .*

# TOO MANY ALIBIS

*A Short Short  
Story*

By **EDWARD  
S. WILLIAMS**



"Murder," his mind kept repeating, "murder in the commission of a felony. . . ."

**I**T WAS eleven o'clock, and much colder, when Harvey Brandt got home from the movies. There was light in the Burtons' house, next door. The Burtons were still up.

But it was the McDaniels kid's car, parked as usual in front of the boarding house across the street, that gave Brandt greatest satisfaction. He had counted on that car being there.

The car was the only thing he'd left to chance. For months he'd seen it parked there, every night of the world. It had been partly responsible for his idea. At least it had shown him how he could cover himself, how he could build a perfect alibi that was not so perfect as to invite suspicion when he was questioned. He was not such a fool as to think he would escape questioning.

But when he'd come out of the movies and felt the wind and found how much colder it was, Brandt had had a moment's worry. Suppose the McDaniels boy had put his car in some garage for the night? Everything would have been off them. He'd have had to wait Lord knows how long for another chance—and Harvey Brandt *couldn't* wait. He had to act at once, tonight, before his skilful padding of the plant payroll was discovered in the impending annual audit. He had to cover that or go to jail.

But the car was there. Mary, his wife—of whom he was heartily sick and who he planned to leave as soon as this damned war was over—had gone to visit her folks. The Burtons were home. And Brandt's own car had been left in a garage downtown for an overhaul tomorrow which it didn't especially need, but which also was part of his plan.

Thinking it over again, Harvey Brandt opened his front door and went in.

He snapped on a light. He removed overcoat and a muffler and hat and tossed them across a chair. For a minute he stood over the square register of the pipeless furnace, subconsciously seeking warmth, before he realized that there was little heat coming up.

Brandt shivered. He heard the savage snarl of the wind under the eaves and saw the curtains at the windows sway where it filtered through. It was getting colder by the minute. With the wind rising as it was the temperature would be well below zero before morning. But he smiled.

So much the better, Brandt thought. That meant that no one who didn't absolutely have to would be out this night. It was a break for him. But he could at least get good and warm before he went out again.

He went down into the cellar and fed

coal to the furnace. He opened the bottom and pipe drafts and closed the check. Then he returned upstairs and stood once more over the register, feeling soon the increased flow of warmth. And thinking, checking and rechecking every item of a beautifully simple plan.

Harvey Brandt was a bookkeeper in the office of the Leverton Machine Company. He was thirty-eight, married, and therefore classed 4-H, so far, by the Draft Board. But a great many men were not so classed and the Leverton Company, retooled to turn out parts for tanks, was hard put for experienced men.

That was why Harvey Brandt had been pushed up and up until he was now assistant to the head of his department. That was why he had had opportunity to pad the payroll. With plant workers coming and going all the time, with the total personnel mushroomed from a normal three hundred to more than eight hundred, Brandt had had no difficulty in juggling the records.

And why not? he demanded defiantly. His salary hadn't kept up with his promotions. Why should he do the work of an executive for the pittance of a clerk?

But the hell with that, he thought. After tonight he wouldn't have to worry. He could make good the chicken-feed he'd got out of it so far, and still have plenty left. And when the war was over, and a man could move about as he pleased without reporting to Draft Boards and showing registration cards, he'd shake Mary and find a woman with class.

The Leverton payroll—and Brandt knew this, to the penny—amounted to thirty-four thousand, four hundred and twenty-seven dollars and eighty cents, this week. At this moment it reposed in the office safe, to which he knew the combination. But so did twenty other officials and employees. It was an old safe anyway, easy for any smart city cracksman to open.

And that brought up another point in his favor. Leverton was such a hick town that nobody ever distrusted anybody else. Half the front doors in town were never locked. That McDaniels kid had left his car out all night for months, locked, but with the spare key wired under the hood so he would always have it if he lost the other!

Brandt grinned.

Waves of heat were coming now from the register under him. He moved away from it. Wouldn't do to get too warm. He'd be leaving in a few minutes and might catch cold. He crossed the room and peered through a side window toward the Burtons' house next door. Their downstairs windows were still lighted. But he'd better get ready and get over there.

Harvey Brandt went upstairs to his bedroom. He undressed and got into pajamas. Then he put his shoes back on bare feet and didn't lace them.

He came downstairs again and put on his overcoat. It took quite an effort to open the door against the pressure of the wind. He knocked at the Burtons' door and slipped inside quickly without waiting for Tom to open for him. Brandt stood grinning, shivering.

"B-r-r-r!" he chattered. "Darned near froze between your door and mine, Tom. Only got on my pajamas," he held out a leg, "under the coat."

Tom Burton and his wife both chuckled. Tom said, "Yeah, pretty cold. We were about ready to hit the hay ourselves."

Brandt said, "So am I. It's late," he glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Gosh—eleven-fifteen! But I can't find our alarm-clock. Wife's away, y'know. I wondered, Tom, if you'd give my front door bell a buzz when you get up in the morning. My car's in the shop and I'll have to catch the bus to the plant. I'm such a heavy sleeper that—"

"Why sure, Harv," Tom cut in. "Be glad to."

Tom's wife added, "Why don't you come over and have breakfast with Tom."

Brandt said genially, "That'd be swell. Thanks a lot. . . . Well, I'll see you then. Good night."

"'Night," they chorused.

**T**RUSTING young saps! Brandt sneered as he ran back to his own front door and went in. *But they had seen him in his pajamas, at eleven-fifteen, ready to go to bed. They knew his car was in the shop. And the plant was six miles distant.*

His alibi was set and witnessed. He must work fast now.

Brandt turned out the downstairs light. He went up and switched on the bathroom light briefly—long enough to have brushed his teeth. He turned that out and went into his bedroom.

The clothes he was going to wear were all laid out. He got into them swiftly: pants and wool shirt and sweater. Over that he pulled dark denim coveralls. A cap with ear-flaps was as good as a mask. He donned rubbers over his shoes and put on black cotton gloves.

Again Brandt glanced at his watch. That had taken only three minutes. He went downstairs in the dark. He went out the back door, noting that the only light in the Burtons' house now was upstairs. They wouldn't see him leave. He was sure of that.

Crossing the street was the only risk he had to take, yet it was a small one and he took it unhesitatingly. Once across, two big blue spruce trees between the sidewalk and the boarding house, cast their shadow over the McDaniels boy's car. And the shriek of the wind covered the noise of lifting the hood and getting that spare key.

Brandt accomplished all that swiftly, deftly, just as he had rehearsed it in his mind. He got in and let off the brake. The slight down-grade that extended for three blocks gave him silent motion.

He started the car in gear, two blocks distant. The cold motor coughed a bit, but the wind covered that. Brandt saw no one, and thus no one saw him closely enough to recognize him or the car. He sped on. . . .

At exactly eleven thirty—on schedule to the dot—Brandt left the car in the shadow of a clump of trees, not three hundred yards from the plant gates. He jogged swiftly toward the fence.

That detail was planned too. He knew exactly where to climb the fence so as to have the cover of shadows. He knew his route across the plant yard to an unused door opening into the inspection room. Old Pop McAtee, the watchman, made that his reading room, between rounds. He had an easy chair and a light backed up to within reach of this door. And Brandt had the key to the door. He had seen to that.

Too bad, he thought, about Pop. But

if his plan worked out he wouldn't have to kill the old guy. Just a tap hard enough to put him out.

It was eleven thirty-four when Brandt put the key in the door. He was cautious now—very cautious and very slow. He had to be. He must open that door and strike before Pop turned his head and saw him. Brandt gripped the short length of iron pipe that he had left beside the door that afternoon. Slowly he turned the key, noiselessly . . . Then he lunged into the room.

Brandt went fast and struck confidently. The pipe hit the pink bald spot of Pop McAtee's head before it even started to turn. The watchman slumped down in his chair without making a sound. The magazine he had been reading rustled to the floor.

Harvey Brandt stepped past the chair with only a glance for the old man. Pop was out—cold. That much he saw and he ran across the inspection room, unerring even in total darkness. He snatched open the door of the outer office, forged through the gate into the wire cage of the book-keeping department and knelt before the safe.

It was eleven thirty-eight when his now trembling hands lifted out the big box containing the pay envelopes. But it was eagerness and triumph, not fear, that made him tremble. As swiftly and surely as he had come, Brandt retraced his steps. Only one other thing remained to be done. He did that quickly.

Brandt took the big watch that was Pop McAtee's pride from the inert man's vest pocket. He set it back to eleven twenty-five—not eleven fifteen, when he had hidden the Burtons goodnight, but ten minutes later. Brandt did not want a perfect alibi.

He put the watch back in Pop's pocket and hit it sharply with his length of pipe. Gingerly he pulled open the pocket and looked inside. The crystal was broken. He leaned down close to listen. The watch had stopped. He rose and toppled the limp body out of the chair to the floor. He saw the old man's face for the first time since he had hit him.

Then the smile of satisfaction froze on Harvey Brandt's lips. His eyes widened. His breath caught. His fingers snatched

at the limp wrist, probing for pulse that was not there. His hand fumbled under the ragged vest, searching for the heart-beat that he could not find. . . . Brandt rose, and ran.



ALL RIGHT, he thought, all right, you killed him. But get hold of yourself. Will it help to go to pieces now? You hit him too hard but that was an accident. You certainly didn't mean to kill him. Your whole plan was based on not having to kill him. That was the main point of the plan.

*But murder, his mind kept repeating, in the commission of a felony is murder in the first degree.*

All right—the answer was a frantic bleating in his brain— But you're safe. Nobody'll ever know. If you were safe before, if you were alibi'd for the payroll, you're alibi'd for—everything. Don't be a weak fool. Get home. Go to bed. Get some sleep and your nerves'll calm. What can they prove?

This: You went to the movies at eight o'clock. The Ellman girl, in the box office, saw you. Before that you left your car at Cliff Holloway's garage. Afterward you walked home. You got there at exactly eleven.

At eleven fifteen you went to the Burtons', in your pajamas, and asked to be called in the morning. They know it was eleven-fifteen because you told them. At eleven twenty-five—so they'll think—Pop McAtee was hit (he still couldn't call it murder) and the plant was robbed. That was the whole story.

Were yours the actions of a man who planned anything like that? How could you, with no car, get to the plant in ten minutes? No. The alibi's good. It covers everything. There isn't a thing in the world to worry about.

Get this car home now. In half an hour its motor will be stone cold. The kid will never notice the additional twelve miles on his speedometer. The last possible clue to link you with—with this will be gone. Get home.

Then he knew that he had forgotten *something*.

That knowledge was as certain as that

he lived and Pop McAtee was dead. He had forgotten something. What? *What?* WHAT WAS IT!

His mind screamed and begged and cursed. He went over it all again, from movies to murder. He could think of nothing and yet he knew there was something. That part of his mind which said to him "*Murder in the commission of a felony is murder in the first degree,*" said also, "*There is something that you have forgotten. Think, Brandt! Think, you fool!*"

Although he hadn't noticed it, his watch pointed to midnight when he approached the corner above his house, and the boarding house where the McDaniels boy lived.

That, too, was part of his plan and Brandt's mind was following it strictly. He would cut off the engine at the corner and the same downgrade that had started him silently would bring him silently home.

So he turned the corner and he cut the switch and he saw then what was going on and he remembered what it was that he had forgotten.

Flames belched from the chimney of his

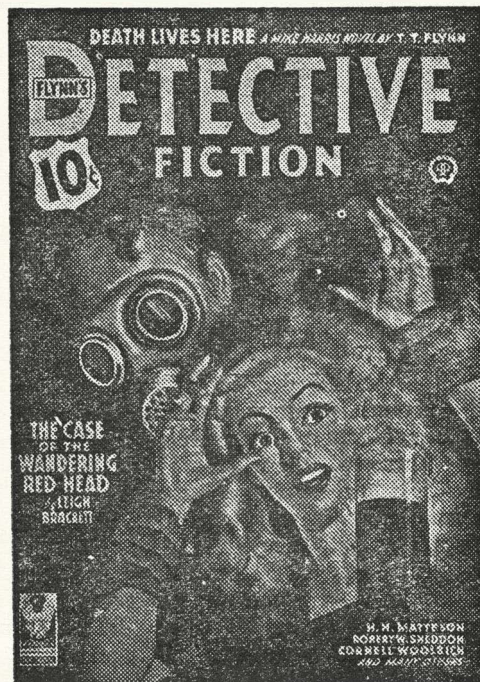
house. Already some of the shingles of the roof had caught. In this wind a spark became an inferno in minutes.

The fire-engine was already there and the volunteer crew was busy coupling hoses, placing ladders, forcing Harvey Brandt's front door. He saw them on the porch and on the lawn and in the street. He saw Tom Burton and his wife, and the McDaniels boy—no doubt trying to tell people that his car was gone. In the light of the leaping flames Brandt saw half the town. They all had alibis—and he had none.

With a sob of utter defeat and terror, Harvey Brandt turned on the switch key and trod hard on the gas pedal. He went past his burning house with a roaring motor. He drove out of town—and on.

They all had alibis now—and he had none. Tomorrow, or the next day, or next week they would catch him and he would go to the chair—for murder. He must die, soon, for one little thing that he had overlooked.

Harvey Brandt had forgotten to close his furnace drafts.



## RUN, GIRLIE, RUN!

But as you run, remember, that red head of yours has won a killer's love. When he finds you, someone is going to die!

Leigh Brackett tells what happens to Sheila Burke in *The Case of the Wandering Red-head*.

A call in the night . . . a house where Death wore two faces . . . a room where an unseen hand was busy setting the clock for murder—

The famous Mike Harris returns to our pages to tell about it in T. T. Flynn's gripping novelette, *Death Lives Here*.

## IN THE SAME BIG ISSUE—

Unexcelled crime fiction by Cornell Woolrich, H. H. Matteson, and the usual "unusual" features and departments which have made this old magazine tops in its field.

You will find them all in the April issue of FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION.  
On sale at all stands February 19th.



# DON'T YOU DIE FOR ME!

They piled over backward to the floor. . . .



**By ROBERT TURNER**

*Brown-eyed, blonde Nickie had walked out on Duke—and two sleek boy friends from Nickie's shadowy past had beaten him to a pulp. But Duke was a stubborn kind of a guy — and Nickie's flippant farewell had an undertone of fear . . . black despair!*

**I**T WASN'T the neat, all-out smacking around that they gave him. He could have stood that. Even though he was sprawled there on the flat of his back, with the room a crazy merry-go-around spinning about his head and with his face all pulped up and his nose streaming blood—he could have taken it. And he could have somehow got back onto his feet and lit into them again. Even though there were two of them, both

bigger than he was. He could have taken it.

It was what Nickie said that finished him. That took the heart out of him just the same as if someone had reached in and clawed it right out through his ribs.

He stared up at her. She was just a blur of white face and blonde hair streaming to her shoulders, and a red dress. Through his puffed lips, he said:

"You—you didn't mean that, Nickie. I didn't—I just didn't hear you right."

The lovely blur spoke. It said it again and this time he knew it wasn't that his numbed brain was playing tricks. She said it very distinctly:

"Stop being a hot-tempered fool, Duke. We're through, you and I. It's the kiss-off. I've just been waiting for a chance like this. I'm going with the boys."

He watched her step forward and spread out both arms as the two men he had been fighting with once more started toward him.

"No more," she said. "He's not going to fight any more. He's going to be smart. He's not going to get himself walloped again for nothing—are you, Duke?"

Duke smeared the blood on his face with the back of one hand. "No," he said dully. His voice sounded like someone else's. "No, I guess I'm not."

He got up then, off the floor, and leaned weakly against the wall, stuffing first the split knuckles of one hand into his mouth and then the other. He watched Nickie go out of the apartment with Lee and Bunty to Taylor.

He heard the door slam. For several minutes he just stared. Two words thrummed in his brain like the maddening beat of muffled tom-toms: *Nickie's gone. . . . Nickie's gone. . . .*

When he finally moved, Duke dragged himself toward the front windows. He looked out and down on the street and saw Nickie and the Taylor brothers get into a streamlined limousine. He watched the car spurt away, listened to the ugly blat of its horn at a crossing and saw it blend with the maze of traffic farther down and vanish.

He turned from the window, looked dazedly around Nickie's empty little apartment and he felt the aftermath of the shock that had slammed him when he first

came in and saw all the furniture gone. And then had come the second mental slap when he had seen Lee and Bunty Taylor, perched on window sills, watching Nickie pack a bag.

Nickie had looked up at him. Very pale and with her red lips tight lines against her teeth, she had said: "I was going to leave you a note, Duke. I'm sorry—but I've got to go away with Lee and Bunty."

Just like that. Duke knew the Taylors. He'd heard about them from Nickie. He looked at their expensive, neatly tailored clothes, at the amused smirks on their cruelly handsome faces.

"What are you talking about, Nickie?" he'd asked. He'd felt the flesh of his face drawing tight with anger. "You don't have to do anything of the kind. These two crummy clothing store dummies are making you say that. You know you don't *want* to go back to that life again. What are they pulling on you, Nickie? What's up?"

She hadn't looked at him, then. She'd stared straight across the room while she said: "Stop being dramatic. Lee and Bunty merely came and offered me a good job—and I decided to take it. I'm sick of penny-pinching, being poor, working my heart out for a few measly bucks a week."

He couldn't see that, he couldn't believe it. "That's not you, Nickie," he'd said, shaking his head. "You've been happy. I know it. There's some crazy reason for this, only it's not what you say."

Nickie hadn't answered that. At least if she had, Duke didn't hear it. Bunty Taylor had hit him then. He came up on one side, slightly from behind, and his fist caught Duke flush on the cheek.

"You heard what she said," Bunty told him. "She's going with us. Breeze!"

**H**E COULDN'T talk he was so full of anger. He just came up off the floor, swinging. Then Lee joined in. Duke was no Tunney. He was just an ordinary guy, built fast and compactly but not big. They gave him a terrific mauling but he was still far from being licked even after they'd knocked him flat three times.

It was then that Nickie had stepped in and said: "Why don't you quit it, Duke! I'll put it plainer—you and I are washed out, through. You can keep on fighting but you can't stop me from going. So why don't you quit, Duke."

And that had sunk in. It pierced the fog in his mind and hit home and stayed there. He'd asked for the repeat and got it, and then he had known. For sure.

Duke went back over all that again while he was in Nickie's bathroom, sponging the blood from his face and the front of his shirt with a handkerchief soaked in cold water.

When he had cleaned himself up a little he noticed a tiny pile of spilled face powder on the sink. The scent of it came up into his nostrils. He closed his eyes and for a moment it was just as though she was standing there with him.

He chucked the soggy, pinked handkerchief into a corner. "The hell with all that. This is what I get for being a sucker. This is what I get for having dreams."

In the cabinet mirror, the reflection of his face stared back at him. It grinned bitterly. It wasn't a handsome face, especially now—with one eye moused up and with the lips cut and puffed and an egg-lump on the jaw. But it was a good face, strong and dark.

He waved a hand at the reflection: "Well," he said. "So long, Nickie. It's all over. So long, kid."

Out of the apartment, he walked, and down the stairs. On the second floor, he heard the sound of a vacuum cleaner. He always heard it when he came up to visit Nickie. That woman always seemed to be cleaning. Duke had told Nickie: "I'll bet she's worn a hole in all her rugs." And Nickie had laughed. That soft throaty laugh of hers. And she'd said: "Duke, you're crazy." Only the way she said it, it was like a psalm.

He straightened his sore shoulders. Well that was all gone. By now Nickie was started on the road back. She and the Taylors would be discussing their first job. Or maybe by now they were taking time out to talk about him. To laugh about him.

Out on the street, he turned west to the subway. He rode out to the ship-

yards where he worked as a steamfitter. He managed to grin at the guys when they kidded him about his face, but he hardly heard their taunts. All through that furiously busy swing shift, he kept thinking about Nickie and the thing that had happened. And to him it was as though the steady staccato of the riveting and the deafening hum of the big drills, and the smells and the shouting and the showering sparks of the welders that fell near, were not there at all.

He remembered the night he had met Nickie. It was summer. They were coming out of a concert at the stadium. They had never seen each other before but their eyes met and they smiled. Pushing out with the crowds they talked about the music and the things a man and a woman will talk about when they're sparring through the first moments of meeting. And, Duke remembered, he couldn't keep his eyes off of her. He had never seen anything like her.

She wasn't pretty. Her mouth was almost too large and there were dusky shadows under her cheek bones. But her hair was like a field of golden, rippling grain he had once seen from a train window. And her eyes were dark and very warm.

Outside the stadium, he'd said: "A brown-eyed blonde! I've never known one before. You—you're Russian, aren't you?"

"Yes, why—" her eyebrows had arched. "How did you know?"

He had laughed then. "I didn't. I can't figure it. I've never even met anyone of that nationality before." He'd stopped laughing. "You see, I—I guess it's like they say in the movies. I guess I feel as though I've always known you."

She had looked at him a long time. "Yes. . . . It is that way, isn't it?"

**A**FTER that there was none of the awkward fumbling, the falseness, the tension of the usual pickup meeting. They went in a little tavern and drank beer and they learned that she was Nickie Rostov and he was Duke Cameron. They stayed there a long time and talked about his job and about things that they mutually liked and disliked.

It was very late when they left the



tavern and Duke started to take her home, but she wouldn't let him. "No," she'd said. "I'm going home alone, Duke." The way she had said it, there could be no arguing. She had said it softly and a little sadly too.

"All right," he had agreed. "When am I going to see you again?"

She hadn't answered right away, had looked off down the dark street. "It's just tonight, Duke. Let's just leave it like that. . . . And it's been a swell night."

She'd taken his hand, quickly and squeezed it and then ran swiftly down the subway steps. He had watched her go, wanting to run after her, but something in the way she had spoken, stopped him. And so she had gone. That was

Always with them, it had been like that. More than once they had found that each knew what the other was thinking.

They left the tavern after the first drink. They walked through the park nearby and she told him all about the things that were wrong. She'd told him how her mother had died when she was a baby right after they first came to this country, and that her father and her brother had brought her up. All during prohibition, they were in the liquor business. All during her girlhood Nickie had never known any decent people. She hadn't known anyone at all who didn't work and live outside the law.

When her father and brother were both killed in a hi-jack battle during the last

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the way it had began. Just like that.

Out in the yards at supper time, Duke had not sat with the other workers. He stayed a little apart and munched his sandwich and gulped his soft drink and looked, unblinkingly at the blue lights in the machine shop buildings.

He tried not to, but he kept thinking of that first night. He'd be sitting there, all hollow inside, concentrating on a conversation nearby, or something, and then the thoughts of her would force themselves through. And they would hurt like hell, those memories. It was like the time his mother had died and he couldn't realize she was gone, with remembrance of her and his boyhood all hot inside of him. It was something like that.

Nickie had been wrong. He had seen her again. A week later he had gone back to that same tavern, foolishly, just to sit in the same booth and think about her and wonder where she was and what she was doing and why she had acted so strangely. And she was there. She had come back, too.

few months of bootlegging just before Repeal, Nickie struck out on her own. She was only sixteen but she had seen and learned a lot. She joined forces with the Taylor boys who had been friends of her brother's.

Sketchily, she went over the next ten years. She and another girl had been a big help to the Taylor's. When they were making bootleg perfumes, perfect imitations of expensive, well known brands, Nickie and this other girl had peddled it around to unscrupulous druggists and women's shops. When it was a blackmail beauty shop racket, the women's touch had been a big help—and in all the other little scurvy businesses Lee and Bunty Taylor managed to cook up.

When she had finished telling Duke all that, Nickie had fallen into his arms. She hadn't cried—she had forced tears back so much of her life that now, when she could, when she wanted to let them, they wouldn't come. But she sobbed, dryly, and that was worse. Duke could hardly stand it.

He held her very tight. Softly, he asked: "What is it you want, Nickie? You want that to be all over? You want it to be us, from now on, with you having all that you've missed, that you've wanted so badly?"

When she nodded, he said: "When did you first know—I mean how long have you wanted to break away, Nickie?"

She pulled away and fixed up her face a little before answering that. They were sitting on a bench in the park. Leafy tree shadows had played over her face from the moon and her eyes had shone. She smiled.

"Well, after," she began hesitantly, "well, something happened to me, Duke, a few years ago—something I don't want to talk about tonight. But it was then I started to realize that I wasn't like other women, that everything was all wrong. But I never seemed able to do anything about it until I—we—until last week after the stadium concert."

So Nickie hadn't gone back that night to the hotel where she stayed with Lee and Bunty Taylor and the other girl, who was now Bunty's wife. She went to a furnished room near where Duke lived. The next morning—his day off—they found an apartment for her. Nickie had got a job, not much of a job, but enough to pay the rent and buy her groceries.

In the beginning, there, several times, he had asked her to marry him and those were the only times anything seemed to come between them. It was as though a solid steel gate suddenly dropped between their minds. The last time Duke proposed, Nickie had said:

"Not yet, Duke. There's something—well, just please don't let's talk about that, Duke. When the time comes—if you still want that—I'll let you know. You will know."



HE HAD never mentioned it after that. And they'd been happy, crazy happy, with their love and all the simple little pleasures that are so good, the movies, picnics, ball games and the crowds at Coney on a sunny summer Sunday.

And then, this past week, he hadn't seen Nickie at all. Whenever he called, she was out. He hadn't been able to figure it. But this afternoon, he had, all right. She'd explained everything then, in just a few sentences. So, now it was all over. He was the sucker.

After supper, all through the rest of the night, working harder than he ever had before, driving himself, Duke tried to keep from going back over all that—all those months with Nickie. But he couldn't do it. He had never had a girl before her. He'd tried—but nothing had ever seemed to click between him and the others.

One of the hundreds, pouring out through the shipyard gates at midnight, tired and taut, showing their buttons, Duke swore long and hard inside of himself. He told himself:

"It's like a good play or a good book that had everything, tears and laughs and the whole works, and was wonderful. But it's over now. You forget it, now. The world's just the same. The war's still on, everything's just the same."

He got to the jammed subway station on that and back over to Manhattan—and by then it wore off. He went into a bar and had a few drinks but he saw that wasn't going to work . . . that it was only sharpening the edge of his memory. He left and walked up to the park.

He sat on the same bench he had shared with Nickie, that night. He went to the Tavern they had first known, and walked all the way up to the empty stadium where the concert had been.

And every minute he kept seeing her, hearing her. Always, though, it ended up with him seeing her as she was there in her empty apartment, with the Taylor brothers watching, telling him that it had all gotten tiresome and she was getting out and going back.

Exhausted, he went back to his own flat, near dawn. He dragged himself up the stairs and fumbled the key into his lock. He let himself in. The apartment was dark. He didn't switch on the lights. He walked over to the window and looked out at the gray light of the morning breaking.

What made him turn around, he didn't know. He saw the cigarette end glowing

in the dark. How he knew it was Nickie, was never clear, but he did. He walked right over to her. Her name came out of his lips in a faint croak of sound.

"Shhh!" Nickie said. "Speak softly, Duke, please."

He snickered on a table lamp. He looked at her, sitting stiffly on the edge of the studio couch. She was white as cotton and he had never seen her eyes so large and dark, nor the shadows under her cheekbones so deep and dusky. There were little lines around her mouth. Sweat was dewed like a film over her high, beautiful forehead.

"I had to come here," she whispered. "There was no place else. I hated it, Duke, but I had to."

She looked down at the couch then and for the first time Duke saw the child there. She was about three, curled up there under one of his blankets, her head a mass of golden ringlets the same color as Nickie's. Even though they were closed in sleep, Duke saw that her eyes were like Nickie's, too.

A lot of things came to Duke then. All at once, like a rush of water pouring over a dam, they flooded into his mind.

"You," he said, slowly, "you and Lee—Lee Taylor. . . ."

"YES," she said. "I never was able to tell you, Duke. I don't know why. I wanted to. I tried, often, but it just wouldn't come out. I was working all the time to—to get a divorce. When it was all over I was going to tell you, I guess."

He came forward and slowly sunk to his knees by the couch. He put out his hands as though to touch the sleeping child, but he didn't. He kept staring down at her, his lips parted.

"What's her name?" he said. "What do you call her, Nickie?"

"Something nice and simple and sweet and American," she told him. "Ellen."

He repeated the name to himself, half aloud, several times and then he stood up. Nickie got up, too. She took his hands and the touch of her fingers was like ice.

"I've got to talk fast, Duke," she said. "I've got to tell you the whole thing and then I've got to go."

Breathlessly she spun out her story. A week ago Lee and Bunty Taylor had found out where she was living. They needed her. Bunty's wife had run away from him and they had a job where they needed a woman. So they came to her and they did everything, threatened and cajoled and cursed. But she had told them she was through, that they'd have to get somebody else.

A few days later Lee learned what private nursery she had been boarding Ellen at. He'd gone there and under some clever pretense, taken the child away. He had hidden her and then gone to Nickie again and told her that if she didn't chuck this life and go back with him, she'd never see the child again.

Lee had told her that if she promised to stick with them from now on, and if she'd prove her intentions by going through on tonight's job with them, he'd turn Ellen back over to her in the morning.

So she had cleared out her apartment and was ready to go when Duke had come up. She'd put on an act so that he wouldn't know she was being coerced and get himself killed fighting Lee and Bunty Taylor.

"But tonight," she finished, "I realized, just before we were ready to go out on this job, that I couldn't go through with it. That I could never go back to—well, after—after knowing you, Duke. I got a chance to go through Lee's pockets. I found out where he had the baby. And later I got a chance to break. I went and got Ellen and then I came here."

"I see," Duke said. "We'd better get out of here, then. They might figure you'd come here." He took her in his arms. "Get the child dressed, Nickie. We'll all beat it. We'll go a long way, where they'll never find us."

She clung to him for a moment and then she broke away. "I'm going to do that, Duke. But you've got to stay here. The police are after me. They have a complete description of me and everything. They'll probably get me, Duke."

He didn't know what to say to that. He fell back a step, swayed a little.

"I want you to look after Ellen for me, Duke," she went on. "If I make out all right, some time, later on, I'll

get in touch with you and you can get her out to where I'll be. But if—if—things don't work out like that, I know you'll be good to her, Duke. I know you'll—"

She couldn't finish. Her voice broke. She turned her eyes away from his.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You said you didn't go with them tonight, Nickie—didn't go through with it. Aren't you a little mixed? I don't get it."

Somehow, she managed to get it all out, to tell him. There had been a warehouse robbery. She was supposed to take care of the cop on that beat, keep him busy by some ruse. But when she ran out, Lee and Bunty had gone ahead with the job.

Nickie had heard it over the radio, here at Duke's flat. Lee and Bunty had bungled the job. There was shooting. Bunty had been killed. The warehouse watchman had been murdered. Lee had gotten away. But before Bunty died—either delirious or mad for revenge, holding Nickie responsible for their failure—he had told the police that a woman had been with them. He had told them about Nickie, described her. And now the police were looking for both Nickie and Lee.

"But you *weren't!*" Duke exclaimed vehemently. "Nickie, they can't do—"

He never finished. A voice from the doorway of the room interrupted: "Can't they? Don't kid yourself, boy scout!"

**D**UKE and Nickie whirled around. Lee Taylor was leaning against the door jam. A .38 dangled loosely from his fingers. His natty suit was messed and rumpled and his black curly hair was touseled over his forehead.

Neither Nickie nor Duke spoke. They seemed rooted to the floor. Lee Taylor moved across the room, stood so that he could look down on the sleeping child on the studio couch, and at the same time watch the others from the corner of his eyes.

He kept looking down at the little girl for several seconds. Then his tongue poked the long-ashed cigarette butt from his lips. It fell to the floor in a shower of sparks. Without looking up he said:

"Get your coat, Nickie, and the kid's. We're rollin' out of here."

"We can't. Lee!" Nickie's voice was almost a scream. She started toward him. "Not with her. I'll go with you, Lee—but leave her here. We *can't* take her. Suppose we get stopped? There'll be shooting—"

"No, there won't be," Taylor said. "Not while we have the kid. That's the idea. Cops ain't that bad. I said—get the coats."

"Please, Lee!" Nickie tried again. "You're her father, can't you see that—"

"Sure, I'm her father," Taylor's lips twisted up at the corners. "That's why I want my child with me." His eyes faded to little dull black knots between his lids. "All right, then we'll go as is. I guess the blanket's enough for the kid."

He stooped to pick up the sleeping child. He stopped before completing the move as Duke said:

"Wait just a minute, Taylor. You aren't taking that baby out of here. Nickie's right. You aren't going to use that baby for any shield against the cops."

The gun stopped dangling from Lee Taylor's fingers and suddenly pointed straight at Duke. "I'm sick of you."

Duke's cheeks blanched and his fists went into hard clumps of knuckle at his sides. He started toward Lee Taylor.

Nickie grabbed his arm, held him. "No, Duke!" she said. "Stay out. He'll kill you. You don't know him. He might even kill Ellen. I—I'm going to do as he says. Please don't butt in, Duke."

He stood there then and watched Nickie get into her coat. Anger swelled through him and his head hurt as though a continuous crashing discord of music was blasting in his brain. He watched Nickie tenderly pick the child up. He watched a little brown-eyed blonde baby, the image of the woman he loved so much, blink open her eyes.

They started toward the door; Nickie and the baby first, Lee Taylor behind them, walking backward, keeping an eye on Duke. Just before they got to the door, Taylor said:

"Thanks for not slamming the door shut so that I could get in without any rumpus—"

His voice stopped. Duke had been hoping, praying for it to happen. And when it did, he almost waited too long.

it almost caught him by surprise. Lee Taylor's foot caught on a scuffed-up rug and he lost his balance.

**I**N THAT second, Duke's feet left the floor. He dove forward and landed on the back of his head and shoulders like he and Nickie used to do at the beach, and somersaulted over. When he landed back on his feet, he was in close to Taylor.

Taylor was back on balance but the gun wasn't brought back to position. He shot it just the same. The bullet burned like a hot iron, creasing Duke's scalp. Then Duke's arms were closed around Taylor and they piled over backward to the floor.

Duke fought blindly, savagely, not knowing anything else but the feel of his fists slamming into Taylor's body. A half dozen punches blasted into his own already swollen features.

Over and over on the floor they rolled, first one on top, then the other. Finally, Lee Taylor managed to scramble to his feet. He got set and swung from the floor just as Duke stumbled dazedly erect. The blow exploded on Duke's chin. He fell backward, knocking over a table, but managed to catch himself, hurl forward once more.

The gun went off again just as he managed to wrap his numbed arms around Taylor's middle and hang on. Savage rabbit punches slashed down on the back of his neck and the ringing in his ears was like a million alarm clocks all going at once. And then he couldn't seem to hold any longer. He felt his arms slipping off. He felt his whole body slipping away from the jumble of sounds and the whirling haze of the room. It got very dark.

When Duke came out of it, came to his feet again, the room was full of cops and other tenants of the building. None of them were paying any attention to him. They were all standing in a tight circle near the window. Up in the front of the ring, Duke saw Nickie's golden head and Ellen's next to it. He pushed through.

Lee Taylor was stretched on the floor, near the window. The floor under him was smeared with blood. Taylor's face

was whiter and shinier than any Duke had ever seen. A peculiar, rasping sound was in Taylor's breathing. Two cops were bending over him, one with a notebook and pencil in his hand. The room was deathly quiet except for the sound of Taylor's voice, weak and hard to understand because of his breathing.

But Duke got what he was saying. He watched the cop scribble furiously as Lee Taylor finished telling what had happened down at the warehouse.

A strange, twisted look that could have been a smile, came over the dying man's moisture-sheened face. He said: "That was a dirty trick of Bunty's, Nickie. . . . Look, do me a favor and don't ever let the kid know that about her uncle—or about her father."

Nickie nodded. Taylor's eyes left her and turned to the cops. He told them that his brother had lied, that Nickie hadn't been with them, that Nickie had never had anything to do with any of the things he and Bunty had ever done.

Afterward, when they had all left the apartment, Nickie and Duke and little Ellen sat around his kitchen table. Nickie told him how Lee Taylor, after Duke had been slugged out, was breaking for the door—and then the cops had burst in. Taylor tried to shoot it out with them, tried to reach the window and dive out. But he hadn't quite made it.

While they sipped coffee, Ellen was blowing bubbles in her glass of milk with a straw. Duke watched her for a minute and then looked at his reflection in the dark kitchen window.

"Poor little tyke," he whispered to Nickie. "After all that's happened and now she has to see her new daddy for the first time, looking like this."

Nickie's eyes went over him, lingering on his battered features and the bandaged flesh wound on the top of his skull, like a caressing hand.

"You look wonderful, Duke," she said. "If you only knew how swell you look to me."

"Duke!" Ellen piped in. "That's a funny ol' name—but I like it." She reached out and grabbed each of their hands and went happily back to blowing bubbles in her milk.



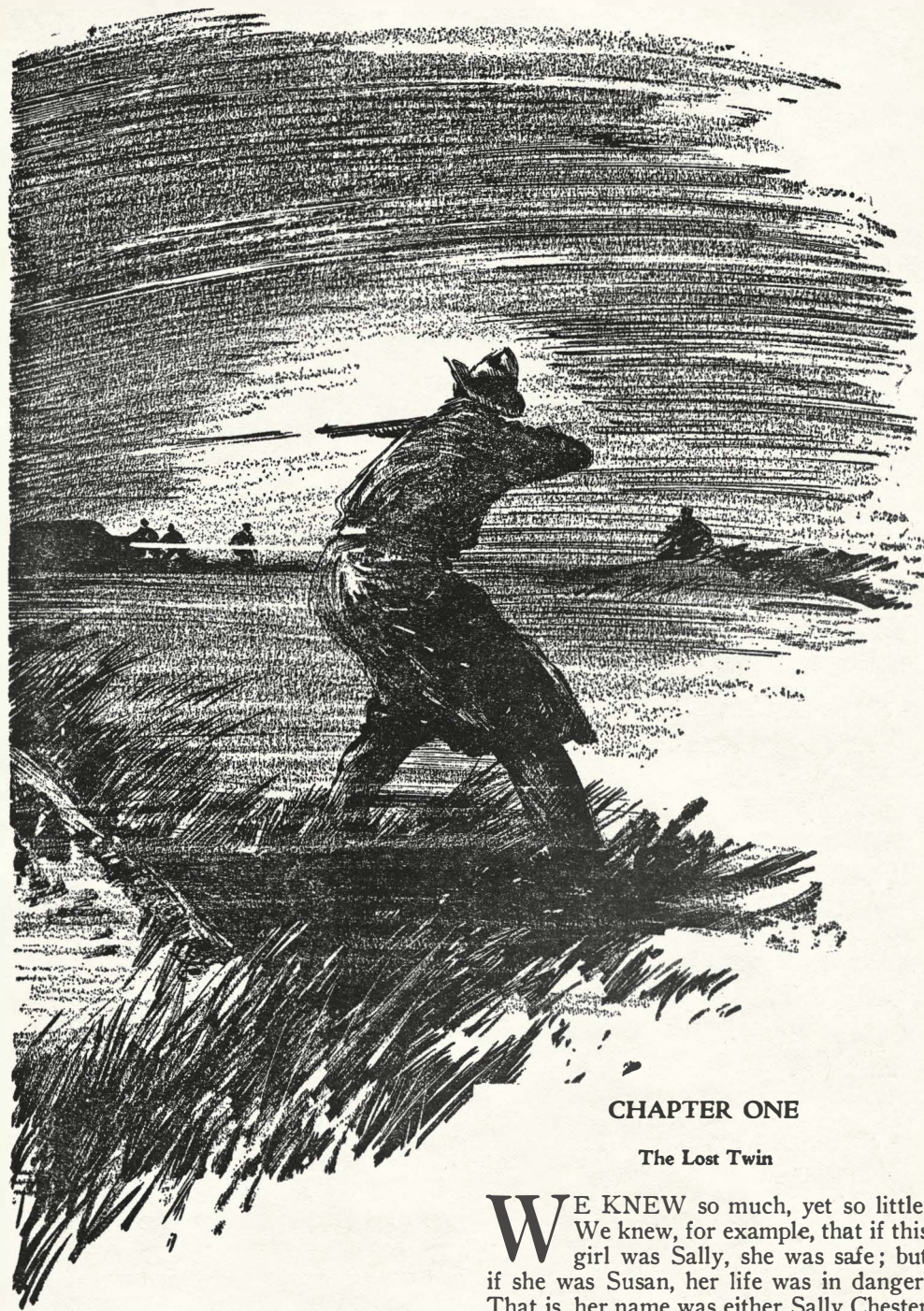
The rifle spat again.  
We were closing  
in . . .

*Intriguing Crime Novelette*

**By FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

*To Detective Lieutenant Carl Crocker the baffling case of the beautiful twin sisters was loaded with death and dynamite. For the twin who had survived the unknown assassin's bullets—had lost her memory. . . . An intriguing human drama of a murder mixup that only the killer could solve—by using another bullet!*

# TERROR'S TWIN



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Lost Twin

**W**E KNEW so much, yet so little. We knew, for example, that if this girl was Sally, she was safe; but if she was Susan, her life was in danger. That is, her name was either Sally Chester or Susan Chester—but which? One of these two twin sisters was dead, a killer's victim, while the other twin sister re-

mained alive, though in bad shape; and the all-important question was whether or not it was the living sister who was able to identify the murderer.

It had me stopped in a homicide investigation that was getting weirder by the hour. That was why I was glad to see Timothy Thatcher turn up, even though nobody'd asked him to come.

It was late evening when decisive knuckles rapped on the door of this rambling house that sat amid rolling sand dunes, a hundred yards back from its private, crescent-shaped beach, on Cape Gale. The blinds were drawn to the sill of every window, due to the dim-out regulations—and behind the entrance, in the vestibule, a deep blue bulb burned.

Charley Price was pacing about the vestibule when the knock sounded. A lanky, sandy-haired guy with shrewd gray eyes, Price covered police for the *Courier*. So far I'd allowed him to print only the barest details concerning the murder. Being restlessly impatient to splash the whole sensational thing all over the front page, he'd been haunting the Chester place during the past twenty-four hours.

"I'm Professor Timothy Thatcher," I heard a voice at the door say when Price opened it. "May I see the officer in charge of the case?"

I was in the living room with Townsend Chester, the Chester twins' uncle. He was also our superintendent of schools, a progressive and efficient executive. Usually he was a jolly sort—but not tonight. Looking tragically stricken, he was up to his triple chin in trouble—and the murder was only part of it.

The knock on the door had interrupted the man talking earnestly with Mr. Chester—David Weldon, his lawyer. Weldon was thick-set, with dark, bushy eyebrows and a quietly dogged manner. He'd been discussing the delicate problem that lay at the root of the murder—blackmail—but Mr. Chester was too distressed and pre-occupied, so when the knock came David Weldon rose to go.

Hearing the voice at the door, Mr. Chester, grasping at a new hope, said quickly, "I know Timothy Thatcher, Lieutenant. Perhaps he'll be able to help."

As Weldon left I brought Timothy Thatcher in and shut the connecting door

so Charley Price couldn't eavesdrop. I introduced myself—Carl Crocker, detective lieutenant in charge of the Homicide Squad. Thatcher explained that after having read the brief news stories he'd immediately left Northampton, Mass., with the thought that he might be of some aid, since he'd not only known the Chester twins for years, but also was an associate professor of psychology.

Not looking anything like a professor, he was young, tall and straight, and handsome as hell. When he turned his clear, sky-blue eyes on me I felt their force. While he talked with Townsend Chester I decided he was our best bet because he'd made a special study of the surviving sister's present peculiar affliction, amnesia.

"Tim," Mr. Chester said, "I'm completely at a loss. Tonight one of those two lovely girls is lying in an undertaker's chapel, a murderer's bullet in her heart. The other is lying in a bed here, injured only a little physically, but mentally torn—torn from the past. Try as I might, I can't tell—I don't know—"

"You don't know which of the sisters it is who's still alive—" Timothy Thatcher asked—"don't know whether it's Sally or Susan?"

Mr. Chester passed a trembling hand across his drawn face. "You see, Tim, death has caused slight changes in the face of the one, and severe shock has also slightly changed the face of the other. To save my soul, I can't decide which sister it is who's in that bedroom now. And she can't tell us that, either—not while her mind remains blacked out. But you, Tim—you must know of ways—"

As Mr. Chester broke off, I said, "Before explaining just what happened, you might try to get through the fog in her mind."

I started leading him to the bedroom but within two seconds he was leading me. At the door I stopped him.

"Professor, were you ever able—"

"Nobody except my students ever calls me professor. I'll probably be here for a while, so how about calling me Thatcher, or Tim?"

"Okay, Tim. Were you ever able to tell one of those Chester sisters from the other?"

"Not without their help," he answered



earnestly. "Usually, of course, there are small differences between twins, but Sally and Susan were absolutely identical in every particular—looks, actions and thought. Their closest friends couldn't tell them apart until they began wearing their little gold pins, one with Sally's name engraved on it, the other with Susan's."

"Those pins are no help at all now," I said. "They weren't wearing them when this happened. Damn it, Tim! I must say this thing burns me up. I can't stand college girls. They're spoiled, headstrong and flighty. Instead of making themselves useful, they dash around to cocktail dances and hairdressers and football games and dinner dances and hat shops and supper dances. They think the world is their special playground."

**T**IM THATCHER'S wise eyes were saying silently, "You're a young man, Lieutenant. It's surprising you feel like that. Did one of them, at some time, hurt you?"

Well, last year there was this girl named Neila, from Vassar, who spent the summer in town. She was the most exciting girl I'd ever seen. Every time I was with her, her high spirits, her friendly independence, hit me like a strong drink. Besides, she was class. Me, I've never had much schooling and I came up the hard way; but, intoxicated as I was, I made marvellous, dreamy plans. I had a diamond ring in my vest pocket the night an Army Air Corps pilot breezed into town. She knew him from 'way back. While waiting for him to get a furlough she'd just been having herself an amusing time. She'd taken me for a summer-long ride. Ah, well, this was none of Tim Thatcher's business and I had a right to feel sour.

"They're too smart for their own good," I added, "too selfish to think of anything farther away than their lacquered toenails, and they won't mind their own business."

"I don't share your opinion, Lieutenant," Tim answered. "In particular I've always considered the Chester twins to be level-headed young women with the courage to make and abide by their own intelligent decisions."

"Is that so!" I came back indignantly. "Look at what happened here. One of them poked her pretty nose into a criminal matter which she should've left strictly alone. It cost one of them her life—which one we don't know yet—and it also knocked her sister's mind off its pins . . . or her own mind, as the case may be. Thanks to her, I've got the damnedest, most ticklish murder I've ever tackled. College girls! Lord save me from any more of 'em! They're too scatter-brained, too—"

The bedroom door opened. The man who appeared from inside was Dr. Thomas Enroot, Mr. Chester's physician. Dignified and solemn, he wore an impressive gray-brown Vandyke. He wagged his beard to signify he'd made no progress with his patient, shook hands with Timothy Thatcher when I introduced him, then hurried along to report to Townsend Chester.

"Well, try your best, Tim," I sighed. "So damned much depends on finding out which sister it is in there! The whole case depends on it—and perhaps her own life."

"Her own life?"

"The man who killed her sister is a blackmailer. He's desperate to keep himself covered. That girl in there may be the only one on earth who knows who he is. She *may* be. We know one of the twins found out, but don't know whether or not it's the one in there. If she *is* the one—if she's Susan, and not Sally—then the killer may make another attempt to shut her up. That's what I'm watching out for. I've got men guarding this house right now."

Tim Thatcher quietly opened the bedroom door.

The girl lay propped up on pillows. Only a sheet covered her long legs. I had to admit she was lovely, even if she was a spoiled brat of a college girl. She was pressing her hands to the bandage wrapped over her reddish-brown hair, as if trying hard to remember, and there was a far-away light in her brownish-green eyes even after she looked up at Professor Tim Thatcher.

He sat quietly beside her and said, "Hello. You remember me, don't you?"

She thought a minute. "No-o."

"Psychology class."

After thinking hard again, she gave him a perplexed smile, not recalling any psychology class which he'd taught and in which she and her sister had both been students.

Then he said a strange thing. "If you're Sally, there's a very special reason why you should remember me." Gently he closed his hand over hers. "Don't try to use your mind now. Let it go. Just *feel*." He was smiling. "Isn't there something you feel inside you?"

Another moment passed, an awkward one. Finally she murmured, "I just feel lost—hurt and lost."

He nodded, as if he understood completely. "Don't worry about it. I'll help you to bring it all back, but don't try any more now. Just rest—sleep—and I'll see you again in the morning."

As he left the room without having accomplished anything, I thought to myself that this crazy mess looked hopeless. If it had been anybody except a twitter-pated college girl, I thought, I might have cracked the case by now. But as it was we still didn't know whether or not this girl could identify the killer—whether or not this same unknown killer might be desperately driven by the purpose of silencing her exactly as he'd already silenced her twin sister.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "He Has To Kill"

**I**N THE living room, Timothy Thatcher sat with Townsend Chester and me. The house was hushed. Charley Price, the police reporter, had left, saying he needed to get some sleep. And Dr. Enroot had left. The cops I'd stationed around the house would be on guard all night. It was quiet and we could talk.

"Lieutenant Crocker," Mr. Chester said, "you may tell Tim. I'm sure he'll respect our confidence."

I began, "First you've got to understand that the two Chester twins didn't live here. Their home's in California. They came here from college in Northampton to visit their Uncle Townsend at the start of their summer vacation, before going back to the coast—their first visit since they were little kids, twelve years

ago. They'd only been here a few days and hadn't gone into town at all. That's important. Remember, practically nobody around here knew that Mr. Chester had twin nieces—or if they did know it, they'd forgotten it. At any rate, the blackmailer was unaware of it."

"What about this blackmailer?" Tim asked.

"This is the part you've got to keep strictly under your haircut, Tim," I went on. "Out in the southwest, many years ago, Townsend Chester served a prison term for larceny. He was young then. It was a reckless mistake. He served his term and never broke the law again. He came east, worked his way through college, studied hard and became a teacher. He advanced to being principal of the high school here and finally was appointed superintendent of schools. He's done a fine job.

"Even so, you can understand what would happen if the Board of Education should learn that he has a criminal record. An ex-convict can't be permitted to head a school system dedicated to the training of our young. He'd get kicked out. All this grand life he's built up over so many years would be wrecked. Well, all this will never become known if I can help it—but somebody found out. How, I don't know—but that was the basis on which Mr. Chester has been bled for hush-money for years."

Tim gazed sympathetically at Townsend Chester. "Certainly I'll never repeat a word of this. You don't know who the blackmailer is?"

"He made his demands by phone, disguising his voice. He instructed Mr. Chester to wrap the money in newspaper, go to a certain corner in town at a certain very late hour of the night and drop the package in a trash receptacle. He always warned Mr. Chester never to wait around with the idea of spotting him in the act of picking up the money. Mr. Chester obeyed instructions. This went on for years, without Mr. Chester's ever having a sound suspicion as to who was bleeding him. And, living in fear, he said nothing to anybody about it."

Tim Thatcher's blue eyes were turning angry.

"It preyed on Mr. Chester's mind. De-

mands began to come more often. He was being bled unmercifully. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer—his secret dread, his secret impoverishment. The next time the blackmailer phoned, Mr. Chester had the guts to talk back. The blackmailer repeated his threats to expose him. It was a crisis, a showdown. And Susan Chester overheard Mr. Chester's end of that short but hot argument over the phone."

"You're sure, then, it was Susan who overheard, and not Sally?" asked the professor.

"We reconstruct it this way, Tim. When the blackmailer's call came, late at night, one of the twins had gone to bed and was asleep. The other sat up, reading a book. Half a minute after Mr. Chester left the house, to drive into town and leave the money, this second sister slipped out after him. Mr. Chester was gone, and she was just backing her own car out of the garage, when Mrs. Hodson, the cook, drove in. It was Mrs. Hodson's night off and she'd just come back from town. Seeing the twin in the car, she said, 'Why, where are you going, Sally—or is it Susan?' The girl answered, 'I'm Susan—don't worry, I'll be right back.' Then she sped off."

"It was Susan who overheard the heated telephone conversation," Tim agreed—"Susan who went rushing off after Mr. Chester."

"Nobody but a willful, spoiled college girl would have stuck her nose into her uncle's personal affairs like that, but I give her a little credit. Since arriving with her sister two days before, she'd noticed how worried and worn he was. She felt sorry for him. If her Uncle Townsend couldn't save himself from the blackmailer, she thought, then she'd try her best to do it for him. Her intentions were good, you see, but she was heedless of the very real danger involved. A smarty-pants college kid sticking out her neck, asking for murder!

"Mr. Chester drove into town, to the appointed corner, at the appointed time. He dropped the package of money into the trash basket and immediately turned back toward home. But not this bright little college girl! Oh, no! She had to play detective.

"WITHOUT knowing exactly what she did next, we can make a very good guess," I went on. "She probably parked her car out of sight around the corner. She slipped into a nearby doorway, a dark store. She watched that basket. The better part of an hour must have passed, but she stuck. If the blackmailer took any precautions before approaching, he failed to see her until he was right there at the basket, taking the money out. Then—who knows exactly? Something drew his attention to her; he saw her. Right then and there murder was born—thanks to a college kid's dabbling in a deadly serious crime as if it were just a lark!"

"I find her courage rather commendable, Lieutenant," Tim said quietly.

I snorted. "Maybe the blackmailer made a grab for her on the spot; we don't know. We do know she ran back to her car, plenty scared. He chased her—not knowing who she was, understand—just that she could put the finger on him as a blackmailer. She rushed right back here to this house."

This was the part that griped me the most.

"She hurried in here, still scared. Her uncle was asleep. So was her sister. Late as it was, and frightened as she was, she didn't say anything to anybody then. Probably she intended to tell her uncle first thing in the morning. Seems to me her impulse was like a child's—to duck under the bedcovers and hide. Anyway, she pulled off her clothes and put on a nightgown.

"Now, up to this point I've been telling you what Susan did. From here on, we don't know which sister did what. All we know is what happened to them.

"There must have been a noise at one of the windows. That was the blackmailer getting into the house. He was still after the girl he'd seen, still determined to shut her up to save his own skin. Well, one of the girls upstairs heard him. Which one, we don't know. Maybe it was Susan, still awake. Or maybe the noise aroused Sally. Whichever it was, she came to the head of the stairs and snapped on the light. The crook was at the base of the stairs. That was the end of his hunt—or so he thought then. He lifted his rifle—"

"His rifle?"

"A twenty-two automatic," I said. "An awkward weapon to use at close range, I know. On the other hand, you don't need a license for a rifle. Carrying an unloaded rifle around in your car is not illegal. The commonest civilian weapon on earth is a twenty-two rifle. Use it to commit a crime—and if you lose it, or have to abandon it, it'll be hard as hell to trace. Besides, it packs plenty of firepower and its aim is far more certain than that of a side-arm. Anyway, the blackmailer fired his rifle just once and the bullet got the girl at the top of the stairs—got her squarely in the heart."

Tim sat forward, intently listening.

"She came spilling down the stairs, already dead. The murderer thought to himself his job was done—she couldn't put the finger on him as a blackmailer now. He unlatched the front door and stepped out on the porch, beginning to scam. Just then he got the jolt of his life. The gunshot had brought the second twin in a scared hurry to the top of the stairs. The murderer looked in and saw her staring down. Picture it, Tim!"

"He'd just shot a girl who was now lying at the bottom of the stairs, dead," Tim said quietly, "and yet she was suddenly back at the top of the stairs again—and alive again! Actually the girl up there was the identical twin of the girl lying lifeless on the floor, but to him she looked like the same girl!"

"Imagine his feelings!" I said. "He must've felt he'd gone crazy. Then the realization of the truth must have hit him—these two girls must be twins. That didn't help much. He'd killed one of them, yes, but was the dead girl really the one who'd spotted him? The girl he'd murdered might be the witness who could identify him, or, on the other hand, she might not be. How could he tell? He couldn't. He was panicky—and now there was only one way he could make himself surely safe. That was to shoot the second girl too."

"So he fired again. Remember, he was standing outside, on the porch steps. The second empty shell we found out there proves that. He could see her, but she couldn't see him. The bullet drilled at her out of the dark."

"It grazed the head of the second girl now standing at the top of the stairs. She fell, bumping her head on the steps as she tumbled. One violent physical shock added to another! She spilled to a stop right beside her dead sister. The murderer must've thought he'd killed her too. Anyway, both Mr. Chester and Mrs. Hodson were out of their beds now, calling to the twins, wanting to know what had happened. Then the killer did scam—without leaving a single trace to indicate his identity."

"That's the way the two girls were found, Tim. One twin dead and one twin unconscious, both lying at the base of the stairs, both wearing identical nightgowns and nothing else. Since then the surviving sister hasn't been able to remember anything at all. She can't tell us whether her own name is Susan or Sally. We don't know, so far, whether the killer actually succeeded in silencing the witness who was able to identify him, or whether he killed the wrong girl. But one thing I'm sure of, above everything else—he still wants to find out which is true."

"Sooner or later," Tim said, "the surviving sister's memory will come back to her—and then, if it's Susan who's still alive, she'll be able to identify him."

"That's it. If it's Sally who's still alive, she won't know from nothing. But if it's Susan, then she'll be able to recognize the killer. But Tim! This killer can't take chances. He knows it's a fifty-fifty toss-up that he'll be sunk the minute the girl in that bedroom regains her memory. It's too big a risk to run. His own life's at stake now. He's looking for another opening, another chance to kill the other twin. That's why I've got this house guarded, because if he finds his chance—"

The interruption electrified us. It was a scream—a shriek of terror in the room where the blank-minded girl lay alone—followed by a glassy crash.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Death in the Dimout

AS I ran along the hall to the girl's room Tim Thatcher passed me and pushed in. The room was black. Somewhere in the darkness the girl sobbed.

Tim snapped the wall-switch and we found her on the floor beside the bed, tangled up in a sheet, her widened eyes full of fear. A table lamp lay beside her, smashed. Across the room a window stood open, its blinds flapping in the warm sea-breeze.

While Townsend Chester helped Tim to get the girl back into bed, I stuck my head out the window and howled at the guards. Two of them were skirting about the lawn, looking startled and confused, their revolvers drawn. Obviously they hadn't even seen the prowler who'd sneaked in through the night. I roared, "Find that guy!" and they loped off aimlessly. Two other cops, who'd been stationed at other points on the property, also scurried into the general search.

"She's not hurt." Tim came to me with the details. "She heard a noise at the window. It was already halfway open, and she saw a man's head and shoulders. He had a handkerchief tied over his face. She screamed, slammed the lamp over and dove out of bed in the dark."

"Can't she give me a better picture of him than that?" I snapped. "No, she can't—being a dizzy college kid! Keep an eye on her!"

I ran outside and prodded the guards into a deeper search. A fine chance we stood! The dim-out made the whole shore blacker than hell's cellar. The nearest houses on both sides stood half a mile away. In between lay rolling dunes overgrown in patches with rank grass and rushes. The men's flashlights beaming off across the hummocks created baffling shadows that lured them into one wild goose chase after another. I could hunt around out there all night, with ten times as many men, and still find nothing but grass, sand and a steady inshore wind.

Finally I posted two men right outside the girl's window, and the others close around the house, and went in. After making sure she couldn't tell us anything more, we got her to swallow a sleeping tablet. When her eyelids drooped we left her. She seemed reasonably safe now, but it still burned me up to think the killer had managed to sneak in on her and then dodge away untouched.

"He'll try it again," I said, feeling a chill in my bones. "He's desperate and

I'm damn' sure he'll try it again. Isn't she able to remember anything yet?"

Tim Thatcher's lips quirked. "Not yet—and she still doesn't *feel* anything toward me, either. There was a reason why I tried to get that sort of response from her, Lieutenant. You see—though Susan was still fancy-free—Sally and I were informally engaged."

"Engaged to be married? You and Sally, the one who *didn't* play detective? That girl in there's not wearing a ring. If you'd only given her one, we'd know—"

"The ring was coming soon, Lieutenant." Tim gazed at me with deep, perplexed concern. "It's a hellish sort of uncertainty—not knowing whether it's my fiancée lying in there with her memory gone—or whether it's my fiancée who's lying dead in the undertaker's chapel in town."

\* \* \*

Late next evening we still didn't know. Tim Thatcher had spent most of the day probing into the darkness of the girl's mind without finding a single revealing gleam. Dr. Enroot had come and gone. Now, not being physically disabled, the girl was out of bed and moving about her room.

Charley Price, the reporter, disgusted after waiting another whole day without news, had left for town to find himself a late dinner.

While Mr. Chester talked with his niece, I said to Tim, "It's got to be somebody in town or nearby, somebody who's familiar with the situation here, in some way, because otherwise he wouldn't have known which window to go to last night. Who could've found out about Mr. Chester? Well, for example, take a newspaper reporter, like Charley Price, who knows how to dig for facts. He might have stumbled on it in the news files—and reporters don't make much money."

In an obscure way, Tim's mind was busy.

"Or take Dr. Enroot, even. Mr. Chester had to have an operation about a year ago. His medical history goes 'way back, of course, and overlaps the period when he was a convict. In checking his previous medical history, Dr. Enroot might have

come across that hidden chapter. Then too, people under the influence of ether sometimes blurt out things they'd never mention otherwise. Dr. Enroot has a good practise, but any man's capable of craving a lot more money than he's already making, particularly if he can get it just by asking."

"In the same way," Tim said, "an attorney like David Weldon often has to search through old court records and judicial decisions."

"It might be one of those three," I agreed. "Or it might be anybody else. There's just one thing I'm sure of about this murderer, and I can't forget it for a minute—he's desperate enough to kill again. I wish to heaven that girl would screw a new fuse into her mind! Our only chance is the fifty-fifty possibility that she'll turn out to be Susan. If she's Sally—that'll make you happy, of course, Tim. But then we're practically licked. Damn it all! If it had been anybody but a college kid full of butterflies—"

Just then Mr. Chester appeared with the girl on his arm. She'd put on a bright cardigan, a short plaid skirt, saddle oxfords and bobby socks. Though I still disliked her, I had to admit she looked as cute as a bunny, even with the bandages still wrapped around her head and that seeking, far-away look in her eyes.

"I T'LL be all right if I take my niece for a short walk, won't it, Lieutenant?" Mr. Chester asked. "She feels that the fresh air and a little mild exercise might help to clear her mind."

"Go out there? Good lord, Mr. Chester, you must realize—"

"It's very dark and we'll be well-guarded. I'm sure we'll be safe enough. Since my niece suggested it, I feel—"

Against my better judgment, but on the off chance that it might help, I said, "All right, but I'm going with you."

First I circled out, warning the guards to keep an extra sharp eye out. Tim came along as we moved toward the beach, my hand on my gun in my pocket. I knew in my bones I shouldn't allow this—something was too damned likely to happen—but we picked our way down to the smooth wave-washed sand, the girl cling-

ing to her uncle's arm. He had a flashlight which he blinked on for only a second or two at a time.

"That's right," I said uneasily. "Don't use that light too much."

My nerves snapped tight when the girl stumbled. She stayed on her feet, though, and Mr. Chester touched the flashlight button again in order to see what her toes had hit. It was one of a couple of logs left on the beach by the receding tide. Tim helped her around it.

"Please put that light out!" I snapped. "You're making yourself a target by—"

Then it came!

It was a single, spitting report—the crack of a rifle. From somewhere among the rolling dunes, or from somewhere along the smooth stretch of beach, it spoke. I didn't see the flash. Suddenly Mr. Chester pitched forward and the girl sprawled beside him.

Tim blurted, "Stay down!" Not knowing which was hit, if either, it was all he could say. "Stay down!"

The girl exclaimed breathlessly, "I'm all right!"

Mr. Chester moaned.

Not even waiting to see whether he was dying, I sprinted toward the house. While my fat legs pumped, I yelled at the guards. "Scatter out! Find that guy with the rifle! Head him back from the road! Get the guy with the rifle—find him!"

Inside the house, I grabbed up the telephone. In twenty seconds I had the telegraph bureau at headquarters.

"Flash the prowl cars stationed in Cape Road! Order 'em to stop all cars leaving the vicinity of the Chester home. Search every car and everybody, and to hell with their constitutional rights! They're also to grab everybody on foot. There's a killer on the cape and if he's trying to sneak out I want him stopped cold. Tell 'em to look for a rifle, a weapon of murder!"

Ducking out again, I found my guards scouting around the dunes with their flashlights slashing through the night. The way they scattered, helter-skelter, told me they hadn't actually seen the rifle flash either. The gun might have been fired from either side of the house, from any direction. This stretch of beach was a mile long and the dunes behind it were

more than half a mile deep. There were patches of reeds, countless hummocks, innumerable hollows, and the dim-out made the darkness baffling.

On the beach a flashlight gleamed steadily, lying where it had fallen. Mr. Chester was back on his feet. I heard him gasping, "I can make it alone, Tim. Take care of her."

He was trudging up the slope, panting hard. A quick look told me the bullet had smacked into his shoulder, and he was hugging his useless right arm. The bullet hadn't been meant for him, of course, but for Miss Chester. I thanked heaven it was no worse than that—but what had happened to the girl?

Tim was carrying her in his arms. She was limp all over—unconscious.

"Hurt bad?"

Hurrying her along, Tim answered, "No."

So then, I thought, she'd fainted. That, I thought, would be just like a college girl too big for her panties—who could ask for plenty of trouble but, when it came, couldn't take it.

"She struck her head on the other log when Mr. Chester pulled her down," Tim explained, trudging hard. "It knocked her out."

"Oh," I said grimly.

Tim hustled her into the house and got her into one bed while I steered Mr. Chester into another. Then I phoned Dr. Enroot's home. He wasn't there, I was told—he'd gone out on an emergency case, but they'd try to reach him. Not there? While I worked to stop the bleeding of Mr. Chester's wound, and while Tim fussed over the unconscious girl, that news kept buzzing in my mind.

While we were still waiting for Dr. Enroot a commotion sent me hustling to the front door. I found one of my guards, a cop named Egers, doggedly holding onto the collar of David Weldon, Mr.

Chester's attorney. Mr. Weldon was red-faced and indignant.

"This guy was drivin' in over the private road, big as life," Egers puffed, "and when I started to search him he begun talkin' big about warrants."

WELDON, I reflected, must have been in between the two prowl cars when they received my radio flash. Without being asked, he began explaining. He'd been to see the district attorney, and he'd come to tell Mr. Chester that they'd agreed on some legal maneuver or other which would permit them to prosecute the killer without revealing Mr. Chester's private affairs to the public. That was fine, I decided—provided the killer ever got nabbed.

"Any rifle?" I asked Egers.

"No rifle."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Weldon, but if you want to see Mr. Chester you'll have to wait. . . . Get the hell back on the job, Egers."

Five minutes later I was again brought to the front door by loud voices. This time it was one of the prowl car patrolmen, who had a handcuff around one of Charley Price's wrists. The reporter muttered curses under his breath while the patrolman explained that they'd spotted Price prowling along Cape Road on foot.

"Prowling, hell," Price retorted. "I was simply walking in. On the way back from dinner I ran out of gas about a mile from here. I showed this dumb cluck my car and proved to him the tank's dry. Whatever the hell this is all about, call him off, will you?"

"Any rifle?" I asked the patrolman.

"No rifle."

"Let him go. You can come in, Charley, but the lid's clamped on this case tighter than ever now, understand?"

The third to arrive was Dr. Enroot, with a prowl-car escort. His ruffled look

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meant he'd also been searched. I didn't need to ask whether a rifle had been found. Obviously the answer was no. When I sent the prowler car back, Dr. Enroot was already busily attending Mr. Chester.

I heard whispers buzzing in the next room. The girl had recovered consciousness and Tim Thatcher was doing most of the whispering.

"Well?" I asked hopefully, going in. "Has her memory improved any?"

Tim shook his head.

My nerves at a tight pitch, I trudged outside. The girl's continued amnesia was galling enough, but the way the killer had twice slipped past my men was even more unnerving.

This setup really made it impossible. Though he'd managed to dodge my guards, unseen on the night-covered dunes, the scope of his maneuvers was limited. Cape Road ran parallel to the shore, half a mile inland, and on the other side of it, stretching along for miles, were salt marshes—a broad morass of water, jungle-thick grass and quicksand—which nobody could cross. As for the beach itself, in both directions the sand ended at high, craggy cliffs which were definitely not climable, particularly in pitch darkness.

The escaping killer simply *had* to retreat to the road—where I'd had two prowler cars posted at strategic points. He certainly couldn't remain trapped between the road and the sea, and yet there was absolutely no way he could get out undetected—except possibly one.

That one possibility must be the answer. The killer *had* been stopped and searched; then he'd been allowed to pass simply because he didn't possess an incriminating rifle. If this was true, then the rifle itself must be hidden somewhere in that black expanse of sand.

Hidden at some spot where—if the chance came again in the eerie lightlessness of the dim-out—he could get hold of it once more!

#### CHAPTER FOUR

IT WAS evening again when, finally, worn out and overloaded with disgust, I had to call off the search. All day I'd had my men—every man I could possibly assign to the job—probing into

the beach. Somewhere in that stretch of sand the murderer's rifle must be buried—but where? That was the question buzzing in my mind hour after hour, like a gadfly—Where?

There was more than a square mile of smooth beach topped by undulating dunes. In the first place it was useless to look for any disturbances on the surface. My guards had been tramping around there all night, fruitlessly, leaving countless footprints. The steady inshore wind caused the sand to drift into smooth new hummocks, erasing the footprints and any other mark that might have been there before.

If the rifle had been buried on the beach itself, the surge of the tide and the constant washing of the waves had made that spot flat and indistinguishable from a million others. The only thing in the world we could do, lacking a steam shovel or some tricky magnetic device, was to poke and dig, poke and dig. An army couldn't have covered that beach more thoroughly, except by screening the whole beach and carrying it away by the truckload. When I finished, worn out, I was still morally sure the rifle was there somewhere—but we hadn't found it.

This uncanny certainty—that the desperate killer hadn't finished trying—rankled in my mind, but even worse was the sense of burning impatience and baffling frustration I felt because the girl was still answering all my questions with, "I can't remember."

When darkness fell my nerves drew tighter. The place was again under guard. The road was again posted. But in spite of all my precautions I felt more and more that something terrible was going to happen. My anxiety wasn't helped by hearing Tim Thatcher in the girl's room, their whispers buzzing and buzzing. When, finally, he came out, I cornered him.

"Still nothing, Tim?"

He was thoughtfully silent.

"Is she really trying? Doesn't she realize the spot she's in? If she's Sally, then we'll broadcast the news and the killer will know he got the right girl the first time. It'll leave my case hanging in mid-air—I'll probably never solve it then, Lord help me—but at least she'll be safe."

"She's aware of that, of course, but—"



"Well, it can't go on like this. We've got to get her out of here—take her to a place where nobody'll have the slimmest chance of getting at her.

"I've a still better idea, Lieutenant," Tim answered, "but first I've got to get Dr. Enroot's okay."

I listened while he called the physician on the phone.

"I'm confident I can solve this problem, Doctor," he said, "by taking Miss Chester back to a familiar point in time prior to the murder of her sister and gradually rebuilding her memory from there, step by step. That is, she came to Cape Gale from college, so I'll take her back to Northampton. I'll show her her old classrooms, her own dormitory, everything she's known best.

"We'll repeat her preparations for leaving for the summer; we'll drive back exactly the way she drove before, and so on. In this way, by re-enacting every incident leading up to the night of the shooting here, I'm certain we'll gradually get at the hidden truth. The first question is, do you feel she's well enough to travel?"

"I think she is," I heard Dr. Enroot answer. "It strikes me as an excellent course of treatment. When do you expect to leave?"

"Tonight," Tim said, "at ten o'clock."

As soon as he hung up I asserted, "I'm going with you."

"Sorry, Lieutenant. My whole purpose is to re-create a normal, familiar picture of her old self in her mind. A police officer was never a part of it. You'd spoil the effect. Don't worry about it, though. The murderer won't dare trail us. His very absence from these parts would give him away."

I wasn't too sure. I kept mulling it over while Tim told Mr. Chester of his plans. Mr. Chester lay in bed, his shoulder encased in a plaster cast. David Weldon was there again, and they'd been discussing matters. Both of them approved of Tim's plan. Tim wound up by saying, "We're all set, then. We'll leave here at ten-thirty."

**B**EFORE I could ask him why he'd changed the time of their departure, he was out of the room and bumping into Charley Price, who was still

hanging around hoping to get permission to print the whole story. Tim explained to him patiently that this new move couldn't be published either. It was far too important, Tim said, but he might have the big break for Price when he came back, after maybe two or three days. Meanwhile please excuse him, because he had to get ready to leave in the girl's car at eleven o'clock.

Wondering why Tim kept changing his mind about when they'd go, I paced around downstairs while he and the girl packed. I didn't like this one damned bit. It was too risky. I felt things building up to the bursting point. I didn't like this setup at all.

After Price left, and Weldon too, the house grew still and my feeling of imminent disaster grew stronger. I was responsible for this dizzy college girl's safety, and if she should happen to get herself killed there'd be hell to pay and the case would never be solved. My nerves were jumping when, finally, Tim and the girl came into the vestibule with their bags.

It was a few minutes before ten. He'd changed his mind back again. He looked grimly eager, but the girl was pale and tense—scared. It was just like her, I thought, to be afraid of what she might remember.

"I'll bring your car," Tim said quickly.

"You stay right here, Miss Chester," I said, "until you can hop right into it. I'm not taking any chances. I'm going to see you off safely if it's the last thing I ever do."

She waited while Tim hurried out. Presently a motor hummed up and Tim stopped the girl's car at the walk leading to the porch steps. To me the distance from here to there looked dangerously far. The porch was wide, there were twenty steps, then about fifty feet of walk. She'd be out in the open plenty long enough for a marksman hidden in the darkness to draw a murderous bead on her. Thinking of that—Tim had her bags and was about to lead her out—I snapped, "Hold it!"

Going out first, I called three men over. We gathered in a group on the porch. When the girl emerged we formed a ring around her. Our bodies gave her some protection, but not enough to reassure me.

I held my breath. With every step I expected to hear the crack of a rifle, to feel a bullet whizz between us, to see the girl fall.

That porch seemed as wide as the boardwalk at Atlantic City. The steps went down and down endlessly. The walk stretched off to an interminable length. Finally we reached the car. The girl slipped in, Tim took the wheel, and snapped on the dimmed headlights. I drew a deep breath of relief.

"All right, Miss Chester, now you stay 'way down in that seat," I ordered. Then I gazed at Tim. "You're all set. Well, why don't you get going?"

He was gazing with uncertain concern at Miss Chester.

"I—I really don't feel very well," she murmured. "Could I—well, just rest a little while first?"

"Of course," Tim said. "We'll wait until you're all right."

Good lord! After having gotten her safely out here, she had to go back! We had to run that risk all over again because this delicate, tender-skinned, spoiled brat didn't feel exactly tip-top. I gritted my teeth and took it.

Back we went—along the walk, up the steps, across the porch to the door—and at every step I died a separate death myself. But I got her into the house again and she was still alive.

She lay down and after a short while she reappeared, saying she guessed she could make it now. It was then that a suspicion began crawling around in my mind like a mouse inside a cage. She was all set again, and now it was just thirty. I thought I knew what that meant, and the mere idea of it froze my blood.

Still, I didn't say anything. At whatever time this girl might step outside that door she'd run a deadly risk, but the sooner she got away from here the better I'd like it. So, clenching my jaw, we started again—that unending, unnerving traverse to the car.

I held myself in while we crossed the porch, the girl again surrounded by the five of us men. I hardly dared breathe while we descended those steps. The whole length of the walk I felt like I was treading on live coals. But finally, again, we got her into the car without having heard

the murderous crack of a rifle. Tim slid under the wheel again, switched on the headlights again, and again I drew an easier breath.

"Tim," the girl said suddenly, her hand slipping to his arm, "I—I want to back out. I don't want to go. At least, not tonight. It frightens me, all this blackness all around us. Couldn't we wait at least until daylight?"

Tim said sympathetically, "I don't want to upset you. That would be the worst thing. If you prefer to go in the morning instead, we'll wait."

I GROUND my teeth together. We'd needed to venture into the open only once, but already we'd done it three times and now the fourth trip was coming up! I had plenty of supercharged opinions to voice on the subject of a college brat's whims, and it took all my will-power to keep myself from bursting my buttons. After all, I thought, daylight would be safer.

This time, though, I didn't allow her to dawdle. I grabbed her arm and hustled her back—along the walk, up the steps, across the porch and into the house—as fast as her little feet could catch up with themselves. Then I slammed the door and glowered at Tim.

"All right! That's all for tonight. Get a good night's rest, Miss Chester!"

She went into her room and Tim sat silent. I watched him intently, knowing in my heart exactly what was up. Soon—sure enough! My worst suspicions were confirmed when, quietly, Miss Chester appeared in the doorway still dressed. It was just half an hour later—a minute or two before eleven o'clock.

"It was perfectly silly of me to be scared of the dark, Tim," she said. "I'm all over it now. We don't need to wait any longer, really. Let's go."

"No you don't," I said, and I got up. "No you don't! I know what you're up to—and you're crazy, both of you. I'm damned if I'll let you try it again!"

"Why," the girl said, "whatever do you mean?"

"Tim," I went on, ignoring her, "you've let everyone connected with this place know you're confident that when you bring this girl back her memory will

be restored. In other words, tonight is the last chance the killer will have to silence her. You told Dr. Enroot you'd leave at ten, and that was part of a plan you'd cooked up. Then you told Mr. Weldon you'd leave at ten-thirty. You next told Charley Price you'd leave at eleven. They're our three chief suspects, and you've deliberately made a living target of this girl!"

I gave Tim no chance to talk back.

"You went out first at ten, and if a shot had been fired at her then you'd have automatically known Dr. Enroot had fired it. Next you went out at ten-thirty, and if a shot had been fired at her then you'd have been sure it was David Weldon. Now you think you're going out again at a time when, if a shot should be fired at her, you'll know it's Charley Price. If no shot is fired at her this time either, you'll know it's none of those three, but somebody else. Well, no shot's going to be fired. I'm responsible for this young woman's safety while she's here, and you're not going out again tonight!"

"Lieutenant," Tim said gravely, "I'd

advise you not to interfere. At this moment Miss Chester's mind is very finely balanced between an abnormal state and a normal one. Any small upset, any minor shock, might cause a very serious relapse. The normal condition is trying now to return, and if it's frustrated, turned back on itself—

"Well, if I were in your place, I wouldn't want to shoulder that responsibility. Your ill-advised attitude may cause your case to remain unsolved forever, and, what's much worse, it might cause Miss Chester's amnesia to become permanent."

"Besides," the girl added willfully, "nobody else is responsible for me now—neither you nor Tim. I'm responsible for myself, and I'm going."

It was a stern, professional shake of Tim's head that really put the damper on me. I could arrest this girl as a material witness and hold her, but I decided against it. Not understanding these special points of psychology, I didn't dare run the chance. I had to take his word for it. Besides, being so full of confusion, I was no



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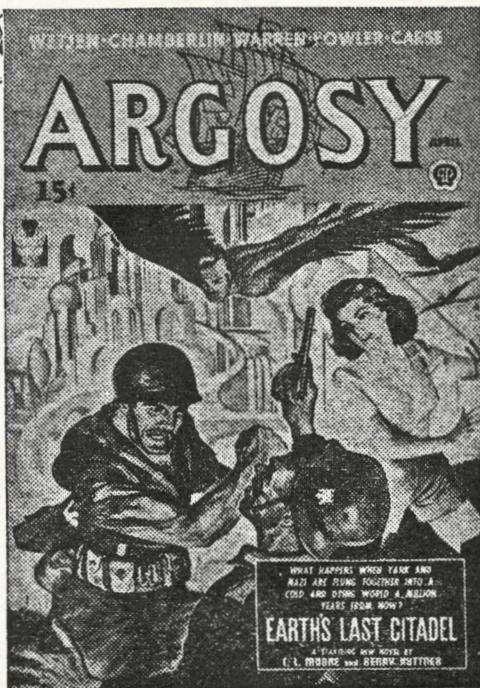
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longer sure that my accusation was well-founded—meaning what I'd said about Tim's plan to identify the killer. In the last analysis, the most important thing was to get this girl to a safer place and to bring her memory back.

"Let's go," I said, "and this time you *do* go."

I called the three cops back. We surrounded the girl the moment she stepped from the door.

The blood pounded in my ears as we crossed the porch. I growled to Tim and the three cops to stick close to the girl as we went down the steps. It was impossible to cover her completely, but we gave her barely enough room to move her feet while we went along that walk. I kept thinking, "The very last time!"

These tactics of mine weren't, of course, fool-proof. One shot could drop a cop and, before anyone else could do much about it, a second quick shot could reach the girl.

Now we were close to the car. Tim hurried around to the opposite side, slid in and snapped on the headlights. The rest of us shifted a little around the girl, and then—

**A**T FIRST I wasn't sure I'd heard it. I'd been expecting it so intensely, I might have imagined it. Then, staring over the girl's head, I couldn't doubt it. There'd been a thin, vicious, cracking sound somewhere in the night, then a sharp smack directly in front of me—and there, in the car's top, just above the door and not an inch from the girl's head, was a bullet hole!

"Price!" I yelled. "It's Price!"

I dove down, carrying the girl with me. The cops skirmished out. Up again, my gun in my hand, I ran at a crouch. A glance backward told me the girl was out of sight. Ahead spread the dunes, an utterly black desert. From scattered points inshore flashlights appeared. Their beams cut the darkness, criss-crossing. Then, from an unpredictable direction, came another dart of flame.

The rifle had spat again. The man with the rifle was trying to dodge out. Four service guns barked a challenge. Several of my men had managed to place the killer

between themselves and the headlight glare of the girl's car. We were closing in. Two more rifleshots brought another fusillade from my men's guns—and that was the end of the shooting.

Hemming him, we found Charley Price squirming in a deep hollow between several hummocks, still gripping the rifle, bleeding from both legs.

I went trudging back in a cold fury. The bullet-marked car still stood at the head of the walk, empty. Tim had hustled the girl inside. Slamming in, I found them in the living room. The girl was sobbing. She had her arms around Tim's neck, and she was babbling out sounds that didn't make words. Scared silly, I saw. But she wasn't half as scared as I was mad.

"I was right! That *was* your plan! You laid a trap for the killer with this girl as the bait!"

Tim looked up, grinning. "It worked," he said. "But I can't take credit for it, Lieutenant. It was Sally's idea."

"Sally's!" I stared at the girl. "You mean her memory's come back?"

"It came back last night, after she fell and hit her head on the log," Tim explained. "Her mind has been perfectly clear ever since then. She insisted on this thing, Lieutenant, so I had to see it through with her. Quite simply, her sister was very dear to her—her sister had been murdered, and she couldn't let anyone get away with that."

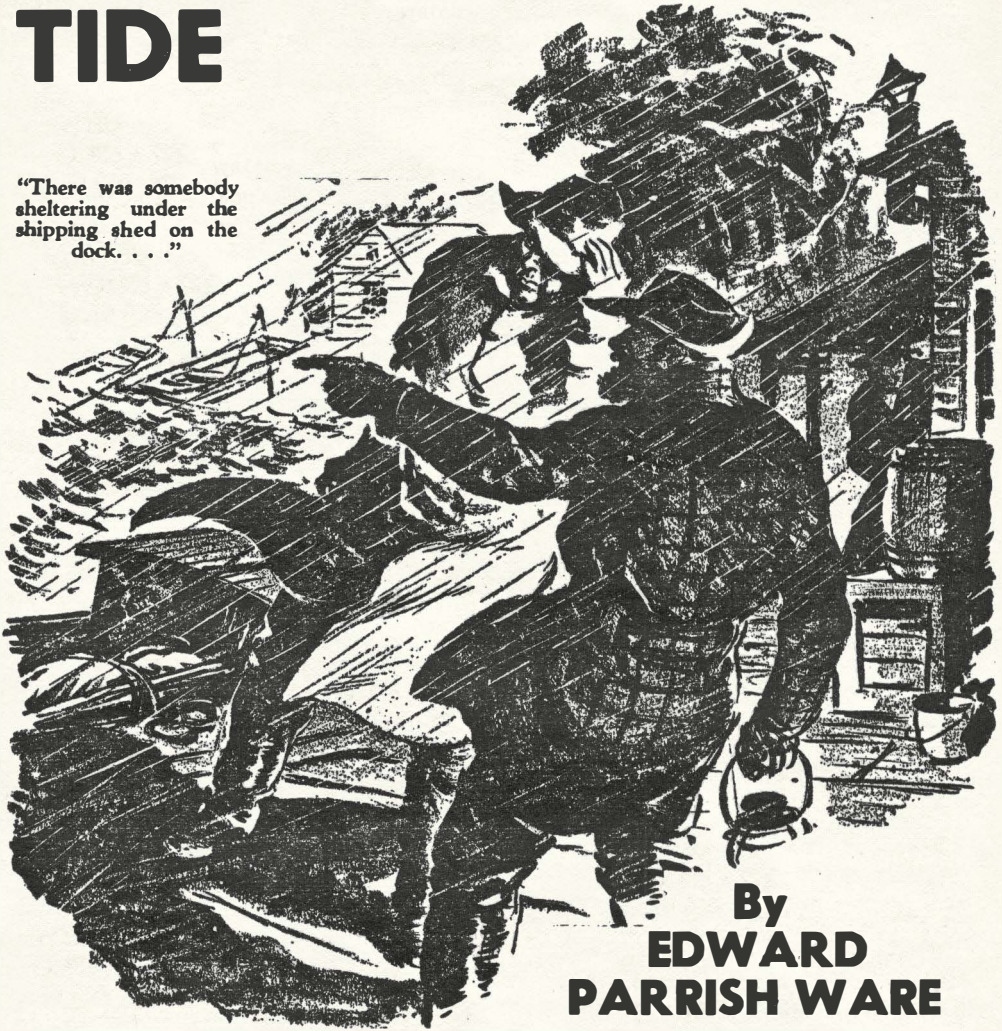
"Sally!" I repeated, still staring at the girl, who was smiling now through her tears. "Sally, the twin who *didn't* know! The killer got the right girl the first time! All you had to do was say so, and you'd have been perfectly safe! The killer would never have needed to make another move. But no! You had to keep your mouth shut. You deliberately and unnecessarily egged a murderer into taking a crack at you. You've solved my case for me, but great grief! Nobody but a spoiled, willful, dizzy college girl would have pulled off a stunt like that!"

I slumped into a chair, overwhelmed. "Nobody but a spoiled, willful, dizzy college girl," I repeated, "—with a head on her shoulders and plenty of courage. Lord, Tim, you're a lucky guy!"

**THE END**

# HOMICIDE AT HIGH TIDE

"There was somebody sheltering under the shipping shed on the dock. . . ."



By  
**EDWARD  
PARRISH WARE**

●

*Pearl buying on the storm-lashed Black River was a hazardous business—especially when a greedy killer used Mother Nature to twist the souls of men. . . .*

●

SHERIFF TUG BRANT, having handed over to Rix Chandler the fifteen thousand dollars in bills which he had brought out for him from the bank in Walnut Ridge, stretched his long legs toward the blazing fire-place and accepted the pearl-buyer's hospitality in the form of a long, hot toddy.

The October night was a fury of blasting wind and sheeting rain. Nobody in the county-seat town would be out-of-doors, except on urgent business. And certainly Tug Brant hoped that no urgent business would pop up for him, at least until he had had time to dry out before Chandler's cheerful fire. He sipped the

steaming, heady toddy and lolled contentedly.

"All here, Tug," the pearl-buyer said, having leafed through the big roll. "You saved me a trip to Walnut Ridge, and I'm obliged to you. How's tricks in the Eastern District?"

"Quiet and orderly. My deputies over there are just sitting around and drawing their pay," was the report. "It's here in the Western District that hell pops practically every hour of the day. Dang it, Rix, sometimes I wish pearls had never been discovered in Black River. Danged if I don't!"

Chandler chuckled. "You'd wish my bread and butter right out of my mouth, Tug!" he declared. "Just think of the dough fresh-water pearling has brought to Powhattan and the whole river country."

"And the crooks, tin-horns, killers—just think of them, too, Rix. And while I'm on that subject," Brant went on, a note of concern in his voice, "it ain't safe for you to have so much cash about. Not like things are now. Do you plumb have to have it?"

Before the pearl-buyer could answer, there came a heavy rapping on the stout oak door of the big cabin. Chandler set his half-finished drink on the table, got up and opened the door. A blast of rain-whipped wind caused the fire to roar in a red sheet up the sooty chimney, and extinguished the kerosene lamp. The sheriff looked doorwards as Chandler stepped aside and admitted a slicker-clad stranger.

"You Chandler?" the stranger asked, stepping in quickly.

"Yes. Come over by the fire. It's a hellish night to be out."

"That's right," the stranger agreed, shucking out of his dripping slicker. "But I got business. Understand from folks up Black Rock way that you buy rough pearls—and buy fair. That correct?"

Chandler grinned and nodded. The newcomer was a tall, heavy-bodied man in middle life. He had a strong face and deeply set blue eyes. An out-doors man, the sheriff was thinking.

"I buy good stuff, and give as fair a price as I can figure out," Chandler assured him. "Meet Sheriff Brant," he went on as the stranger walked to the

fireplace. "Maybe he'll vouch for me. Eh, Tug?"

"Yeah. I'll stand hitched for Chandler," Brant said. "Makes fine toddies, too," he hinted, looking wistfully at his empty glass. "That is, when he's minded to."

While Chandler mixed more drinks, the stranger tugged a bulging leather pouch from inside his flannel shirt. He placed it on the table, sat down and said:

"My name's Jaggard—Horace. Been pearling for quite a spell on the upper Black. Home-bound to Newport now, and want to sell to as fair a buyer as possible. Lots of sharks down around my home town. Take a look at my stuff," he invited, gratefully accepting the steaming drink.

Chandler, long experienced in judging fresh-water pearls in the rough, was surprised at the number and fine quality of those which poured in a satiny stream from the pouch. He set up his small, split-hair scales, fixed glass in eye, and became absorbed in the business in hand.

Brant got up, stretched and said:

"I'll leave you men to your knittin'. Got to be up and around early tomorrow. Glad I met you, Jaggard. And good-night, all."

+ + +

IT WAS exactly ten days after that rainy October night that Sheriff Tug Brant received a letter which caused his pleasant, middle-aged face to wrinkle worriedly. He read the letter through again, then sent a deputy after Rix Chandler.

"Rix," Brant began, when the pearl-buyer came in, "you recollect that feller Jaggard? You bought some pearls from him, that rainy night ten days ago. Remember?"

"Surely," Chandler told him, sitting down. "A fine lot they were. Had to be, for I ponied up ten-thousand bucks for 'em."

"Cash or check?"

"Cash. Some of that dough you brought out. Jaggard didn't want a check. Lots of 'em don't. Why? What's the trouble?"

"Trouble is, Rix, that Jaggard hasn't showed up in Newport, where he was

headed. Oughta been there two days after he was here. His brother just wrote me," tapping the letter, "asking me for information. Hell—I ain't got any!"

Chandler's face showed keen concern. "That looks bad, Tug," he commented.

"It is bad!" Brant exclaimed heatedly. "Another decent man knocked off by lousy crooks—and almost under my very nose! But—hell! Ain't any use getting het up over it. Better to ask you a few questions. Ready?"

"Fire."

"How long was Jaggard at your place, after I left?"

"About thirty minutes. I checked his stuff, he took the money and beat it."

"How did he carry the money?"

"In that leather poke he'd brought the pearls in. He turned it wrong-side out, dried it good at the fire, then pouched his roll and left."

"How was he traveling, or do you know?"

"In a cabin motor-launch. Had it so heavy with camp plunder, he told me, that it was riding right down to the gunnels. The wind-storm made the going tough. That's how he came to speak of it."

"All alone, I reckon?"

"Yes. Traveling alone."

The sheriff rested there, turned over more questions in his mind, and asked:

"How in time did he manage to find you that night, Rix? Him a stranger hereabouts. Somebody had to direct him to your cabin. Did he say?"

Chandler, too, became thoughtful. Then his face brightened. "He did and he didn't," he said. "He saw only one man at the river-landing, and that man directed him to me. Heavy-set fellow, face all full of black brush, hair rather long. Had on a slicker and an old felt hat. Jaggard, of course, didn't know his name."

"I do," Brant said, nodding slowly. "That would be Bryce Coppage. That feller that's house-boating across the river from Powhattan. Correct on that?"

"Believe you are. That describes Coppage. And he has called at my cabin a couple of times, selling me a few specimens. He'd know how to direct Jaggard. Yeah, Coppage probably was the man."

Brant called Deputy Tom Ash into his office and directed:

"Go across and collect Bryce Coppage. Want to ask a few questions. Don't let him know what about."

Ash went out, and Brant said:

"It just don't make sense, Rix, that a man and a motor-launch could simply vanish from the river. Man could, but that launch—hell, it couldn't!"

"Who said it had?" Chandler wanted to know. "It could be tied up somewhere—"

"Nope. It would have been reported before now. Motor-launches are scarce on the Black. Too many folks prowling around for it to have laid anywhere long and not be investigated. Well, anyhow, I'll put out a drag for it right off."

Bryce Coppage, heavy-set and bearded, came in with Deputy Ash. It was plain that he was not at all pleased at being there. He said complacently:

"I gotta vat fulla mussel-shells steaming, ready to open and prowl for pearls. So if you'll hurry this up—"

"Just a few questions, Bryce," Brant interrupted. "Won't take long. Remember a feller you sent up to Chandler's that rainy night ten days ago?"

Coppage thought for a moment, then shook his head negatively and said:

"Can't say I do. Nope. Sure I ain't sent anybody up to Chandler's—"

"Think again, Bryce," Chandler cut in. "He told me that night that you sent him—"

"He didn't know my— Oh, that feller!" Coppage was suddenly remembering. "Come to think of it, Chandler, some feller did ask me where you lived, and I told him. But I'd clean forgot it. Yes sir—forgot as slick as a whistle!"

**U**NDER questioning, Coppage declared that he had gone across the river right after sending the stranger along, and had not seen the man since. Never had seen him before, for that matter.

"But you knew, of course, that he would be a pearler with a poke of pearls on him," Chandler suggested. "You'd know that, Bryce, because he asked for me, eh?"

"Didn't think anything about it," was Coppage's answer. "If you fellers are through asking me damn fool questions,

I'd like to get along back to that vat of shells—"

"Just a minute," the sheriff ordered. "When we're through with you, Coppage, we'll tell you."

"We!" the houseboater blazed angrily. "Who is 'we', anyhow? Rix Chandler and you? Well, what right has Rix Chandler to be questioning me, I'd like to know?"

"Chandler's sort of assisting me, just now," Brant told him. "Which is my business. What I want to know is whether you saw anybody else at the landing, while you were directing the pearler to him. Did you?"

"Well, if that's all—why, yes," Coppage replied. "This is, I did and I didn't. There was somebody sheltering under the shipping-shed on the dock. He was smoking a cigarette—that's howcome I noticed anybody was there. Too dark to see who he was, but I can make a good guess."

"All right," the sheriff told him. "Make a guess."

"Chet Hardin. His skiff was tied at the landing, the only outsider there that night. I saw his name on the bow when I lit up my lantern."

"Was Hardin—if it really was Hardin—close enough to have heard what was said?" Chandler asked.

"If he wasn't deaf he could," Coppage was positive. "I could have reached out and touched him with a fishing-pole, he was that close."

Brant let him go, then, and sat querying Chandler with his eyes. Chandler's eyes queried the sheriff right back.

Chet Hardin had been a prosperous pearl-buyer in that section not long before, but the temptation to use his expert knowledge too much in his own favor had overcome him—and the pearl-ers were not long in finding that out. Hardin's business dropped to nothing. And Hardin himself had dropped to the status of a gambler of decidedly tin-horn caliber.

"Well, Rix," the sheriff asked finally, "what's on your mind now?"

"Chet Hardin," was the prompt answer.

"Prefer him to this Coppage guy?"

"No. But we've had Coppage. He tried to deny having seen the pearler that night, but tripped up when I said Jaggard had

told me he was the man. Let's shelve the houseboater for the time, and get hold of Hardin."

When Chet Hardin—a tall, slender chap of thirty-odd years, then living five miles down-river at a mushroom camp called Rudlets—was brought to the county-seat that afternoon, Brant sent for Chandler.

Rix Chandler came at once. He greeted the darkly handsome, well-dressed ex-buyer with a nod, got a nod in return, then sat down for the questioning.

"I was there under the shed, that rainy night ten days ago," Hardin readily admitted. "Hoping the rain would slack off before I started down home to Rudlets. Heard a pearler asking for Chandler, and heard Bryce Coppage direct him. The rain held on, and I went down-river a half-hour later. That's all I know—about the pearler."

"Did he overtake you before you got home to Rudlets?" Brant asked.

"Don't remember if he did. Somebody else did, though."

"Who? Do you know?"

"Sure. Rix Chandler. He came helling along in his launch, just before I got to Rudlets. I thought, then, that it must have been something mighty important, Chandler out on a night like that."

He fixed black eyes which were undisguisedly hostile upon the buyer.

Brant's face tightened into thoughtful lines, but he did not look at Chandler nor make comment. Presently he asked:

"Hardin, can you fix the time you arrived home at Rudlets, by any other watch than yours?"

"No. I didn't see anybody before I got to my cabin. It was a rotten night."

He turned to Chandler. "About half-past eight, I'd figger, when Jaggard left your place?"

"That won't miss it far," Chandler agreed.

The sheriff had evidently run out of questions to put to the gambler. He checked it to Chandler.

"Anything you wanta ask him?" he queried.

"What right has Chandler to ask me questions?" Hardin demanded, his black eyes cold. "What has he got to do with this?"



"Better take it easy, Chet," Brant cautioned. "You may be on a hot spot—and gettin' tough won't make the spot any cooler. Now—Rix?"

"How, Hardin, did you know this man was a pearler?" Chandler asked. "You said, a bit ago, that you heard a *pearler* asking for me. How did you know he was a pearler?"

"I didn't tell him," Tom Ash, the deputy who had brought the ex-buyer in, spoke up. "Didn't tell him nothing, except he was wanted."

"Hell's fire!" Hardin scoffed. "Am I so dumb that I wouldn't know that any stranger from the river, asking for a pearl-buyer, would be a pearler with stuff to sell?"

Brant nodded agreement with that reasoning.

Chandler asked: "You said my boat overtook you that night. Couldn't it have been the pearler's?"

Hardin gave him a look of withering contempt. "You bought that cabin-launch from me, when I went bust—remember it, don't you?"

"Yes—and I paid your price for it," Chandler retorted.

"You did. Now, I know that engine's voice—every damned tone of it. Naturally. And that's how I know it was you that overtook me. Done questioning me—Mr. Assistant Sheriff?"

Chandler nodded. "For this time—yes," he said.

"Then, by damn!" Hardin blazed hotly. "I'll ask a question or two on my own hook—and see if you can answer as straight as I did!"

"Pipe down, Hardin!" Brant ordered sternly. "You ain't been invited to ask—"

"Let him ask," Chandler interrupted coldly. "I had my innings."

"I'm going to ask—" Hardin declared—"what took you down the river, Chandler?"

"Hold on a minute, Chet," Brant ordered. "Rix hasn't said he went down-river that night. How about it, Rix?"

**C**HANDLER nodded briefly. "Yes. I had business at Three Points. I left Powhattan shortly after Jaggard pulled out. Maybe half an hour after."

"Well—I'll be teetotally damned!" exclaimed the ex-buyer in mock surprise. "Your able assistant has been holding out on you, Sheriff! That beats me, so it does! Why hadn't you wised your chief up, Chandler—or do you intend to keep that secret too?"

Chandler's face, hard now and tight-drawn, betrayed nothing more than his dislike for Chet Hardin. Brant, looking at him with concern in his eyes, waited for the answer. Finally it came:

"My business at Three Points was of a confidential nature. I can tell you this much: A certain man in that section, well known thereabouts, struck a big pocket a while back. Rich stuff. He wanted to keep it secret. Made an appointment for that night at Three Points, and I went down for the purpose of buying his pearls. It had been my intention, however," Chandler went on, "to tell Brant about the trip privately, in case he failed to turn up something important right away. That satisfactory—tin-horn?"

The tin-horn showed his white teeth in a wide grin. "Just one more question to ask the able assistant sheriff," he said purringly. "Did you keep that appointment at Three Points, Chandler. Meet that lucky guy with all those pearls? Mind telling just that little bit more?"

Chandler did not answer immediately. His face whitened and his gray eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"I did not," he said finally. "Anything further—tin-horn?"

"Just this: Would you have volunteered that last information, Chandler?"

"Under certain circumstances—yes."

"Like hell you would!" Hardin scoffed. "That appointment was a good alibi for you, Chandler—until I blew it up. You might have kept it, for all I know, but it seems you didn't. Now, just this one more: When did you get back to Powhattan that rainy night—and where did you go, if you didn't go to Three Points? Going to let your chief know that?"

Sheriff Brant's face wore a troubled look. His voice was grave when he spoke.

"Rix," he said, "it looks a heap like you kept stuff back about yourself, whilst helping me uncover two other fellers. Now—you going to say why you missed your appointment, and where you did go?"

The inquiry had taken a totally unexpected turn. The pearl-buyer, however, appeared thoughtful rather than concerned.

"Tug," he said presently, "I didn't get to Three Points that night. Fifteen miles down-river, about ten this side of the points, my motor went out on me. Trouble was in the flow-line. I had to tie up and fix it. Took me a matter of an hour and a half. After the line was working again, I returned to Powhattan. My appointment was past-due more than two hours, and I knew my man wouldn't wait. I would have told you the name of my prospective client, had things remained as they have been between you and me. But since you turn in suspicion on me, then I'll keep that to myself—and all other information I now have or may get. If I've got to blow this thing wide open in order to protect myself—then I'll do it alone. I'll not ask help from you or anybody else!"

Brant's face hardened, and he bit off his words. "I'd advise you, Rix, not to get tough. Advise you to tell me all you know that bears on this case. I'm the law—and I ain't taking anything off you, or anybody else, that I don't like. Now—who was that jasper you was to see?"

"I won't betray him, Brant. The deal was to have been secret—for reasons known to him. You just as well not ask."

"And there goes Mr. Chandler's alibi—blown plumb to hell!" Hardin cried exultantly. "Plumb to hell-and-gone!"

Chandler got up slowly, hard eyes fixed. "Brant," he said icily, "you've got three likely suspects. Hardin, Coppage and me. And I've got this to say: Be damned sure you don't sell yourself too completely on any one, before the other two are in the clear. As for this tin-horn here," with a contemptuous flick of his eyes at Hardin, "if he'll just step outside with me for a pair of minutes, I'll give him something on a long over-due account."

HE TURNED and walked out of the office. Brant let him go, dismissed Hardin with instructions to be around if wanted, then sat for a while in deep thought. That period of thought resulted in a hard-jawed determination, and he got up and went in search of Rix.

He found Chandler at the landing, and Chet Hardin there too. Chandler, evidently unobserved by the gambler who was down nearer the water, watched something out on the river. The sheriff soon saw what it was.

Green Garner, a native, was approaching the landing in his johnboat, with a skiff in tow. The native made the landing, saw Hardin and called:

"Yore skiff, Chet! Seed it ketched in a drift three mile down, and towed it up. Almost swamped, it was, with water. Rain-water, Chet. When did you miss 'er?"

"Somebody stole it, a while back, Green," Hardin told him. "I gave it up for good, and got another. You can keep that one—"

"Stole it from you—on the night a man named Jaggard sold me some pearls?" Chandler asked suggestively. "That when you missed it—tin-horn?"

Hardin whirled around. "What the hell do you care?"

"Careful, tin-horn—careful," Chandler warned. "Get too tough, and I'll slap you into the river. Now—that boat was nearly swamped with rain-water, *and found in a drift well above Rudlets*. It rained that night in question—and *not a drop since*. Also, the rain stopped at half-past ten. I know, because I was out that night. So—fly close to the ground daytimes, Mr. Tin-Horn, and roost high at night, else a big hungry hawk might get you!"

Brant, who had been an interested listener and observer, stepped forward.

"You headed for home, Hardin?" he asked suggestively, and watched the gambler get into a skiff and point down stream. Then he spoke to Chandler. "Rix, I got some vital questions to ask you, and you can answer 'em or go to the jug and stay there until you come to yore senses. What's it going to be?"

"I'll answer questions that do not involve my business transactions," Chandler said shortly. "What do you want to know?"

"Did you overtake Jaggard when you went down-river that night?"

"I did."

"About where?"

"Close to five miles below Rudlets."

"You just ran on past him?"

"Sure. I had no business with him. Why should I stop?"

"You said you tied up and lost an hour and a half. About where was it you tied up?"

"Five miles farther down. Say—two miles below the mouth of Bearpaw Creek."

The sheriff nodded satisfiedly, as though he felt he was getting somewhere. "All right. Now—you would have seen and heard Jaggard's launch if it had passed where you were tied up. Ain't that a fact?"

Chandler started slightly. Became thoughtful. He said:

"I've been thinking so hard about something else, Brant, that I overlooked that point entirely. Of course I'd have seen his lights and heard his motor. I saw and heard nothing of the sort. No power-boat passed me there that night, and I encountered none on the return trip."

"And, if he hadn't been stopped, Jaggard would have passed you long before you got that flow-line fixed?"

"Sure. He'd have been well below Three Points. What the hell you getting at, anyhow?"

"Just proving," Brant said thoughtfully, "that something happened to Jaggard on a stretch of water between Powhattan and where you tied up that night. I figger that trouble overtook him not far above the mouth of Bearpaw. Now, there had to be a way of getting that launch out of the river, and there ain't but one place it could be done. All right. I'm off down-river. Ash is gone in my launch. Mind lending me yours?"

Chandler handed the sheriff the keys, and walked back toward the village.

Brant set out down the Black. When he came opposite the mouth of Bearpaw Creek he swung out of the channel and into the creek.

Two miles inland he came to the beginning of Bearpaw Swamp. It was there that sluggish Bearpaw Creek drained the surplus water from a vast marsh, leaving a mire of water-impregnated mud which had about the consistency of hot tar—and a bottom far, far below the surface.

Into that loathsome sea of brown mud Jaggard's launch could have been driven to a place far back of the donnicks, water-

oaks and lush bear-grass, and sent to the bottom, never to be seen again. And Jaggard's body, in the launch, could never be recovered.

Brant went on up the creek until it became so narrow nothing but a john-boat could have navigated. It was possible that there would be some sign he could read, but there was none.

He felt a shudder pass through him when he passed back by the swamp. It was a grisly, miasmatic spot, and the sheriff was glad when he was once more on the clean waters of the Black.

Had a murderer made a trip into the swamp on that rainy night ten days ago, and hidden beyond possibility of recovery the body of his victim?

Tug Brant was convinced of it.

When he was once again in his office, Brant sent for Chandler.

The pearl-buyer came in, sat down and asked: "Which jug? The dirty one here, or the dirtier one at Walnut Ridge?"

"TAKE your choice. But this one here is closer. Now, young feller," Brant went on seriously, "I'm going to reconstruct this crime—and do it in damned few words. Jaggard's killer hid away back of the plunder in his cabin-boat while it was tied up here at the landing. Somewhere between the camp of Rudlets and the mouth of Bearpaw, this killer slipped up behind Jaggard and killed him. Maybe used a wrench, or hammer, or even a knife or gun. Anyhow, he killed and robbed him.

"After he'd done that, the killer took the wheel of the launch, drove her up Bearpaw Creek and sank her in Bearpaw Swamp. No other way that launch could have been made to disappear. Couldn't have burned it, because the hulk would have floated and somebody would surely have seen the fire. So the boat and the body lie deep down in the mire. The killer got out, of course, in the pearler's skiff.

"Only you, Coppage, Hardin and I were in the know about the pearler. You are known to have been on the river in your own boat. That lets you out. I've got a good alibi. Clears me. So it narrows down to Coppage and Hardin. That water-logged skiff, that didn't take Chet

down to Rudlets that night, makes it look pretty much like he's the man that done it. He set it adrift before he hid aboard the pearler. Any comments?"

Chandler nodded vigorously. "That skiff convinced me, too," he declared. "I think Chet Hardin killed the pearler."

"But we haven't got a corpse to prove that the pearler has been killed, much less to bring up a charge of murder against the tin-horn," Brant regretted feelingly. "We ain't got one damned thing on Hardin that would stand up for one minute before a jury—and getting that body out of Bearpaw Swamp is wholly out of the question. Looks to me like we're in one helluva hole!"

"Maybe we can get out," Chandler said encouragingly. "Now, I'm going to give you one more piece of evidence that isn't worth a damn in a court of law, because it would be just my unsupported word against Hardin's. But it is the one absolutely damning thing against him. Something which, if you believe me, will prove your theory about the killer hiding in Jaggard's boat to be absolutely correct."

"All right!" Brant exclaimed eagerly. "Let's have it!"

"Chet declared that he knew that I was on the river because I overtook and passed him *between here and Rudlets*. He knew it was me because he knows every tone of that motor—which he surely does. Now," slowly and convincingly, "Chet heard the motor and recognized it right enough, but not between here and Rudlets. He heard it well *below Rudlets*—because I couldn't get my motor started until I was three miles below that camp. *I merely drifted with the current until then!*"

Brant's mouth fell open—and stayed that way a full minute. Then he burst into lurid and expressive profanity.

"Why, Rix," he exploded, "that dirty tinhorn couldn't have been three miles below Rudlets and heard your motor, unless he got there in a power-boat—and yours and Jaggard's were the only ones on this section of the river that night. His own words blast him higher than a kite!"

"Exactly. We know who the killer is, Tug, but what we have would never get a conviction. We can't bring along a body,

but we can manage to get along without one. We can wangle an admission of guilt out of the killer and maybe get some concrete proof besides. You willing to play my game?"

"Hell, yes!" Brant exclaimed. "What is your scheme?"

"You have Coppage and Hardin brought in on some pretext or another. Have your deputies park them in the outer office, where they can't see who is in yours and we can't see them. The door will be open between. Then I guarantee to make Hardin betray himself, if he really is guilty—and there isn't a chance that he is not. Okay?"

"You bet. Any further instructions," humorously, "before I send Ash and Biddle after Hardin and Coppage?"

"Yes. Have a pair of good horses ready for you and me to make a fast ride. A car won't do. We're going over rough country."

An hour later the two deputies entered the outer office with their men. Chandler, unseen by them and, presumably, unaware of their presence in the outer office, was talking.

"And that's my advice, Tug. You've got three suspects. Hardin, Coppage and me. It stands to reason that whoever has that poke of dough has kept it where he can lay hands on it at a minute's notice. That would be, in my case I know, right in my own cabin. Some good, secret cache. So I suggest that you search Hardin's cabin and mine, and Coppage's houseboat. Take the joints apart, piece by piece, if necessary—but make it thorough."

"Yeah—and if I find a poke, what then?" the sheriff offered dubiously. "One leather poke looks pretty much like another. How in time could I prove the identity of Jaggard's poke, anyhow?"

"That's something I remembered just today. How that poke can be positively identified," Chandler told him. "Remember me telling you that Jaggard turned his poke wrong-side-out and dried it good before he put that roll of paper money in it?"

"Yeah. I remember you did. What about it?"

"Well, Tug, Jaggard had the same habit I have. I brand the bottom of my pokes,

inside, with my initials. Use a hot awl to do it. Now, when Jaggard had his poke wrong-side-out, I saw his initials burned into the leather plain as day. A big H and J. Possession of that branded poke would prove a murder case against the possessor—plumb to the hilt."

"Right!" Brant exclaimed. "That makes a search worth while. Hey, Ash!" he called to the deputy. "Them two fellers been brought in yet?"

"Just now, Sheriff," Ash answered.

"All right. Tell 'em for me that I had them brought in to warn 'em that if they try to leave where they're now living, I'll jug 'em and keep 'em jugged. Either one of 'em. Then let 'em go."

When the two had gone, Brant got up. "The horses are out back, Rix," he said. "It'll be good dark by the time we get there. Let's ride!"

THEY rode, and rode hard. Over rough hill-trails and through brushy hollows. Nightfall caught them near the camp of Rudlets.

"Better go ahead on foot from here," Brant said, swinging down and tying. "We've probably beat him by half an hour."

The two men crept through brush and timber until a touch of the sheriff's hand on Chandler's arm warned that they were near the gambler's cabin. They stopped there, crouched on bootheels and waited.

There was no sound to warn them, but half an hour later a light appeared in Hardin's cabin. A curtain was jerked across the one window. Brant and Chandler crept up to the cabin. Each sought and found a chink-hole between the logs, and looked inside.

Hardin was working swiftly. Crouched before a built-in woodbox beside the stove, he was removing its front end. The end removed, a hole in the floor was revealed. He snatched a leather poke from the hiding-place, turned to the light and fumbled with shaking hands at a thong which bound the throat. His face was white and his black eyes like live coals of fire.

The thong loosened and he ripped the throat open. The next instant he stood with a big roll of bills in one hand, while he started turning the poke wrong-side

out. Encumbered by the roll, he tossed it onto his bunk and tackled the poke with both hands.

Sheriff Tug Brant's heavy body crashed the door, smashed lock and bolt, and he leaped inside. Chandler was on his heels.

"What in hell!" the gambler bleated—then, dropping the still unturned poke, went for his hip in a flash.

Brant, slow at best, had his gun only half drawn when the gambler's flashed in the light. Hardin had been fast—but Chandler had been faster. His sixgun roared, and Hardin's right hand, minus two fingers, let his unfired gun fall to the floor.

"By damn!" he raged, clutching his mutilated hand. "You ain't got any right to come busting in on me like this!"

"Shut up!" snapped Brant, taking the gambler's gun off the floor.

"We've got you dead to rights, tin-horn," Chandler told him, retrieving the leather poke. "Tell him about it, Tug. Then we'll bandage him. If he bleeds to death, the State won't get to hang him."

Brant rapidly reconstructed the case again, this time for the murderer's benefit. When he came to Chandler's disclosure about his motor being dead until he was three miles below Rudlets, Hardin's jaw dropped. But he made a pale recovery.

"My word against Chandler's!" he bleated. "Mine's as good as his—in law!"

"This big roll of money, in possession of a busted tin-horn, alone would be enough to hang you," Chandler said with quiet certainty.

Hardin's face paled until it appeared absolutely bloodless. His knees buckled and he sat down heavily.

"I could beat all that," he complained weakly, "only those initials branded in the bottom of the poke. I oughta sunk the damned thing in the swamp, along with Jaggard's body. I could beat everything else, but the branded poke—hell, that's something that never occurred to me!"

"Nor to me either, until today," Chandler said with a grin—and turned the poke wrong-side out.

The leather was innocent of markings of any description.

# GLORY HUNTER

By C. P.  
DONNEL, Jr.



The man's arm chopped down like an axe!

*Patrolman Eddie Davis figured that a copper didn't have much chance with pretty Mary Tolliver. But Eddie had just enough moxie, just enough sense—and just enough resentment for his bullying, glory-seeking sergeant—to make a desperate, foolhardy bid of his own for headline acclaim.*

**E**DDIE forced himself to stare at his reflection in the dark window of Benny's Pawnshop. It was like biting down hard on an abscessed tooth. The uniform, for all its flattery of his height and shoulders, was a mockery.

He muttered a short, ugly word. Then, because he was only twenty-two, he swallowed against a lump in his throat.

Behind him, high heels clicked along the sidewalk, trailing a bright ribbon of conversation: “. . . transferred to the

Air Corps now. And honest, Myra, he's the slickest thing in that uniform. . . ."

Eddie winced. For the thousandth time he reviewed that fateful afternoon when he and Tom Janney, on lunch hour from the bank, had stepped into the recruiting office.

For the thousandth time he saw the bored eyes of the Army doctor light up as he turned from Tom Janney's pudgy whiteness to Eddie's rangy, long-muscled frame. Then came the raised eyebrow as the doctor fingered that little crook in Eddie's right elbow. Then the slow, regretful shake of the head. In that moment Eddie had paid, with interest compounded at astronomical rates, for the glory of the day when he had scored for Belleville High and been carried dramatically from the field at the very stroke of victory, his brain drunk on the cheering, his smashed elbow mercifully numb.

So the Army doctor had shaken his head, as would, later, a Navy doctor and a Marine doctor. Tom Janney was at Fort Eustis. Somehow the bank had suddenly become unbearable. So Eddie had joined an outfit which was less particular about non-crippling minor deformities.

Now he had a uniform: Patrolman Edward Davis, Division of Police, assigned to a down-town beat, 11 P. M. to 7 A. M.—doomed to spend the war trying doors, inspecting alleys, and issuing parking tickets.

Small consolation that Tom Janney was shackled to an adding machine in the Quartermaster Corps. Tom was in it. And Eddie, who should have been prowling Pacific skies for Jap bombers, or bucking the gray North Atlantic on a tin can, was not.

Eddie blushed in the darkness. Kid stuff, these pipe dreams of glory. He did not guess that major-generals of sixty sigh to be lean brown lieutenants leading forlorn hopes against blazing ramparts, just as lean brown lieutenants dream of sitting at a desk and issuing crisp, daring orders for a division.

"You nailed down, Davis?" Street Sergeant Chester Rumson, for all his bulk, could move like a burglar.

"Huh!" Eddie wheeled from the pawnshop window, heart racing.

"I said, 'you nailed down?'"

"No, sir," said Eddie. The "sir" was reluctant.

"Then get movin'! The city don't pay you for smirkin' at yourself in store windows. You're paid for poundin' a beat." He paused conscious of Eddie's sullen stare. "What're you waitin' for?" he bayed with sudden fury. He jerked a splay thumb over his shoulder. "There's a car up Manders Lane. Check on it. Get goin'!"

Eddie got going, cheeks burning. Three alleys further on, he found the car, a shiny sedan that had no business up an alley at midnight. He checked its license against the list in his notebook, and forgot his resentment at Rumson in the clean thrill of his find. Stolen!

With palsied care he inspected the windows and rear doors of the stores bordering the alley. No break-in. The car must be abandoned. He remembered to use his handkerchief to turn the gleaming handle. Ignition key in place. He searched the interior thoroughly. No clue, except—

It was under the steering column: just a shred of cabbage. Eddie smelled it. Then he ran to the street and put his whistle to his lips.

Sergeant Rumson, arriving breathless, was ostentatiously unimpressed. "Okay, okay," he said impatiently. "So you found a stolen car." He climbed in, started the purring motor, and stuck his beefy face out of the window. "I'll take it in. You get back on your beat."

"But this—" Eddie proffered the cabbage shred—"this was in the car. Here, smell."

Sergeant Rumson, jerking back peevishly, bumped his head against the door frame and loosed a purple oath.

"It's cole slaw," said Eddie, desperate, "like they put in barbecue sandwiches. The guys that stole this car must've stopped at a barbecue joint. Tonight, too, because it's still fresh."

Rumson's pop eyes narrowed. "Back on your beat, I said." Eddie had to jump aside as the sedan shot back.

His reaction almost frightened him. He didn't just want to punch Rumson's Roman nose. He wanted to beat Rumson's brains out. It was 3 A. M. before his anger cooled to sullen defiance of all

police authority. And in this mood he turned into Tolliver's All-Night Restaurant for coffee.

**B**EHIND the cash register Mary Tolliver was counting change. She had taken over the night side when her brother enlisted. Bill Tolliver had been Eddie's best friend. And Eddie had seen a lot of Mary.

That, however, was before the war. With Bill and Tom Janney in uniform, Eddie had stayed away from Mary. Without analyzing his reasons, he knew dimly that if his uniform had been khaki instead of blue he would not have stayed away. On the contrary!

The instant he entered the restaurant he regretted it. A boy in khaki, about his own age, was chatting with Mary. Eddie shriveled.

The soldier eyed Eddie with faint hostility. Eddie slunk to the far end of the counter and stirred sugar into a cup of coffee as black as his spirits. He did not see Mary excuse herself to the soldier and start down behind the counter. She was opposite him before he was aware of her.

Her white uniform emphasized the softness of her hair and skin. Prettier than ever, his stepped-up pulse indicated. Something in her brown eyes troubled him, but all she said was, "Long time no see. Been busy?"

"Fairly."

She set a plate of doughnuts before him. "Really?"

Eddie flinched, fearing sarcasm. She saw the dull suspicion in his eyes. She had noted his reaction to the soldier. It would have amazed Eddie to know how accurately she had divined his state of mind.

He told her about finding the sedan; about his deduction from the cole slaw.

She smiled. "I think that's darn clever," she said enthusiastically, and saw the hang-dog look leave his face, and felt the old, quick warmth between them. It emboldened her to say, "How about dropping by the house for supper tomorrow night. Mother's been asking about you."

A lurking demon turned Eddie's eyes toward the cash register. The soldier was lingering, watching.

He shook his head. "Can't compete

with the Army these days." As light humor, this was a dismal failure, and he knew it instantly. "So long," he muttered, and strode heavily out, shoulders sagging.

Mary waved the counterman away and busied herself with the cup and saucer, keeping her head down because her eyes were swimming. "Why don't you try, you big lug?" her mind was demanding furiously. "Why don't you try?"

At 5 A. M., in the gray dawn, Eddie stopped a newsboy and bought a paper. His hands shook. It was on the front page, a two-column head:

**SHRED OF COLE SLAW  
TRAPS AUTO THIEVES**

Officer's Deduction  
From Cabbage Scrap  
Results in 2 Arrests

He withdrew into a store lobby to read the story.

The story told how Sergeant Chester B. Rumson, upon discovering a shred of cole slaw in a stolen automobile, had visited barbecue stands until he found a curb girl who recalled having served two men in that same car earlier in the night. Sergeant Rumson had located this pair in a rooming house and had taken them into custody after a sharp struggle. There was no mention of Eddie.

The sun was rising now, but its rays failed to light the dark reaches of Eddie's soul. That Rumson!

Worse, Mary Tolliver would think Eddie had been lying about his own part in the affair.

Thus it was that at 7:05 A. M., after dismissal, Eddie halted Sergeant Rumson in the hall at headquarters and inquired loudly what the blankety-blank was the idea? Grinning patrolmen stopped to listen.

"I ought to take a sock at you," concluded Eddie, very distinctly.

The grins broadened. Rumson was not popular.

Now his fleshy face was scarlet. "If you wasn't so green," he announced pompously, "I'd haul you up before the chief."

"I don't want any favors from you," said Eddie warmly.

But Sergeant Rumson preferred not to



discuss this incident before the chief. He tapped his assignment sheet.

"Fourteen days extra duty," he snapped. "Seven to seven. Insubordination. Transferred to—" he ran a cold eye down the sheet—"Number Twenty-two Beat. Nice, quiet stretch," he added nastily, and stalked off.

Patrolman Chris Walker, stout and gray, said, "Wha'd he do, kid, pinch a case off'n you?"

Eddie related the cole slaw episode. Listening heads nodded.

"He's a glory hog," said Walker bitterly. The heads nodded in unison. "Always been one. Got to be sergeant that way—stole a case off Vernie Miller."

"I ought've socked him," said Eddie. Walker shook his crafty gray head. "You got guts but no sense," he said resignedly. "You can't do nothing about sergeants. And Chesty'll be out to jam you now, kid."

Eddie realized that he might have been a trifle hasty with Rumson.

"Watch out he don't louse up your beat," warned Walker.

"Louse it up?"

"Load it," explained Walker, and ambled away.

"Oh," said Eddie, too proud to ask for a more detailed explanation. Which was a mistake.



**H**E SLEPT poorly that day. He kept waking up and thinking of Mary Tolliver and how she must despise him for trying to assume credit for a catch which—the newspaper had made it very plain—belonged to Sergeant Rumson.

At headquarters he learned that Rumson had been promoted to sergeant-at-large, with a car and authority to follow his big nose anywhere within the city limits. Also, Eddie's new street sergeant informed him that the Twenty-two Beat was a pip, so big that he'd have to hustle to cover it twice in twelve hours. It included half a dozen blocks of suburban stores.

"And don't forget to try them store doors," concluded his new sergeant, who knew Rumson.

So Eddie sallied forth into many square miles of poverty-stricken suburb, unlovely with squalid cottages, shrill with dirty-faced children who became silent and wary at the sight of brass buttons.

Thoughts of Mary Tolliver knifed him as he pounded along. Mary Tolliver talking to the soldier. Mary Tolliver asking him to supper. Mary Tolliver talking to the soldier. A hard knot formed inside him. He loafed, miserable. It was well past midnight before he reached the stores.

Pull doors—go up alleys? The hell with it, Eddie decided. Do your best and what happens? Extra duty. His feet hurt. He chose a dark doorway and lit a defiant cigarette. Nuts to Rumson! Nuts to the police force! And the heck with. . . .

No, not Mary Tolliver. His innate sense of fairness asserted itself morosely. Why shouldn't Mary like soldiers? This was war. Besides, what was her alternative? A cop! A dumb cop, doing extra duty.

And not even doing that. It dawned on Eddie that he wasn't working for Rumson.

The cigarette spun away in a spate of sparks. Better try those doors, even if, way out here, he was safe from pussy-footed sergeants. Half-heartedly he rattled the door against which he was leaning.

A flicker of movement beside his ankle caught his eye. He stooped. It was a small square of white cardboard. Apparently it had been wedged between the door and the door frame, so that when he shook the door it had come loose and fell. Eddie turned it between his fingers. Who'd wedge a piece of cardboard into a door that way? Unless. . . .

His heart skipped a beat. What was it Walker had warned him about? Something about Rumson "lousing up" his beat!

He sprinted back two blocks to try the door of the first store in the row. A tiny square of cardboard fell.

Eddie wiped a damp forehead. He knew now what a "loaded" beat was! Rumson had placed the cardboard squares, which would drop only if the door was tried. If Eddie failed to try even one door, and Rumson found the tell-tale card-

board still in place, Rumson would have him on toast.

Eddie suddenly experienced an overwhelming desire not to be "on toast." Suppose Mary Tolliver read in the paper that Patrolman Davis had been suspended on charges of neglect of duty.

Panic spurred his feet. He filled the night with the rattle of store doors. Even now Rumson might be cruising by on an early tour of inspection. Luckily all the doors were locked; that meant no disastrous delay while Eddie got in touch with a careless owner.

He crossed and re-crossed the street, running. Rumson had baited his traps with the thoroughness of malice. No door but yielded its bit of cardboard.

One block done! Another. A casual observer would have wondered at the frenzied energy of this long-legged young patrolman.

But there was no casual observer. The sole observer was present in an official capacity. Sergeant-at-Large Rumson was easing along behind Eddie in the shadows. Rumson's broad mouth was smug. Davis had spotted the cardboard trick. But Davis, in his haste, was neglecting to go up his alleys. And across each alley-mouth Rumson had tied a black thread, ankle-high and invisible in the darkness.

Eddie passed under a red-and-white wooden sign that read, "H. H. Hylton, Feed and Seeds," and strode across a wide, old-fashioned store veranda. He rattled the doorknob, looking down. No cardboard fell. He tugged harder, surprised at Rumson's oversight. His surprise lasted less than three seconds.

**T**HE two shots, the crash of glass beside his cheek, came with paralyzing suddenness. A third flash of orange flame inside the store thawed his frozen reflexes. Glass rained over him as he dropped to his knees and scrambled across the veranda. He was raging, not at the attempt on his life but at being forced to crawl like a baby.

He flung himself prone on the sidewalk, trembling. Not a foot from his face a gun went off. He heard the crash of the bullet in the store.

It was his own gun, he discovered. He pulled the trigger again, consciously this

time. Then he took stock of his ague-like shivering and chuckled with undiluted pleasure and pride. It wasn't fright; simply excitement.

One heavy hand fell on his shoulder, another caught his gun muzzle as he twisted. Rumson! Rumson, on his fat tummy, a shiny .38 in his plump, dimpled hand.

"Get around back!" croaked Rumson, firing a wild shot into the store by way of emphasis. The store spat back twice. Eddie heard the bullets whine.

"Listen—" objected Eddie, guessing Rumson's purpose. Rumson was preparing to hog the glory.

"Shut up!" bellowed Rumson, eyes on the store front. "Go hold the back." He glanced briefly at Eddie, his pop eyes menacing. "You leave that rear for a minute and I'll break you, so help me."

There was nothing to do but obey. Eddie wormed his way to the alley beside the store and up it he ran, cursing Rumson between gasps for air.

The rear windows, the rear door were heavily barred. No escape for the store-breakers there. Eddie dashed up a flight of outside stairs, found the second-story rear door padlocked. The roof-edge was within reach. Eddie seized it and chinned himself, and even in that hectic moment spared a wish that the Army doctor could see him. Along the flat roof he galloped to the front.

The street scene was like a dream. There was Rumson, spread-eagled on the sidewalk. A shot from the store, and Rumson's shiny revolver winked in the moonlight as he fired back.

Eddie turned, tripped heavily over the raised lid of a trap door. The pebbly roof raked his cheek as he went down a-sprawl. He went feverishly to work on the wooden lid, using his gun-barrel as a lever.

In the street Rumson's gun spoke again, spitefully. Answering shots from the store sounded hollow and sullen. The trap door yielded, grudgingly at first, then with a ripping of wood.

Eddie dropped into an odorous loft and ran aft between heaped-up sacks of grain. The stairway, he guessed correctly, was in the rear. Down it he peered into the blackness of the store. A spurt of flame below obligingly placed one man for him. Under cover of the reverberation of the shot he

started down, crouching, cringing at the thought that one of Rumson's bullets might find the wrong target.

Halfway down, in the chill hush following the shot, a creak betrayed him. He paused, feeling nakedly alone and defenseless. It came to him that he would be vastly better off on floor level, instead of skulking on the stairs, a clay pigeon for eyes accustomed to the darkness.

He stepped tentatively down. A loud creak! No need for stealth now. He plunged down recklessly, a veritable avalanche of noise, and misjudged the proximity of the floor. He crashed to his knees.

He was nearly up when he heard the rustle behind him. The man's arm chopped down like an ax with a pistol for a blade. Again Eddie found himself on his knees, this time with lightning flashes of pain darting behind his eyes. The second blow was a dull, far-away thing. The grimy floor became a pillow for his cheek. Conscious, but temporarily bereft of the power to move, he heard a voice close to him whisper hoarsely:

"Bill!"

From behind a counter came an answering grumble.

"Bill," whispered the nearer voice again, "it's a copper."

Scrabbling of feet; heavy breathing. The second man was crawling around to join the first. They conversed in unintelligible whispers.

The full ignominy of his position came to Eddie. Just when he had been about to take the play away from Rumson with a bold, slashing attack, here he was on his face. Some portion of his strength returned on the tide of shame and anger that rose in him. The men were still whispering. Eddie's buttons ground into his breastbone as he shifted position. If he could only get to his feet. . . .

A rough hand shook his shoulder. "Get up, copper," ordered the man who had slugged him.

Pettishly, like a child, he tried to twist free of the hand. He hardly felt the foot that thudded against his ribs.

"Get up." The hand retained its hold. Eddie braced himself against it, to find himself swaying first on his knees, then on his feet.

"Tell yer buddy out there to quit the shootin'," ordered the man. "Hurry up!"

Eddie heard a voice vaguely like his own call, "Hey, Sarge!" The words seem to hang in the air.

"You in there, Davis?" Silence. "You got 'em?" called Rumson, incredulous.

A snicker behind Eddie, then, "Start walkin'."

The dim outlines of the store rocked sickeningly as Eddie put a foot forward.

"Davis!" called Rumson, puzzled, impatient.

"Keep goin'," advised Eddie's captor. Eddie lurched ahead, heard the two men padding softly behind him.

The door, its lock shattered, hung open. Broken glass crunched under Eddie's feet and the night air fanned his hot face.

Rumson was up now, gun in hand, his rotund form frozen. Eddie felt the men close in behind him. A hard point pressed his shoulderblade.

"Drop it," said the first man, to Rumson. Eddie, squinting, saw Rumson hesitate, his gun-barrel wavering.

"D ROP it," repeated the voice, "or I'll plug your buddy here. The second man jumped forward, picked up Rumson's gun as it clattered on the sidewalk and stepped back.

Eddie saw cold calculation in Rumson's eyes, in the position of Rumson's shoulders and hands. So did the two men. One said, "Listen—"

"Put down those guns and come along," ordered Rumson evenly.

"Say—"

Rumson's shoulders shifted a trifle and the atmosphere became supercharged. His intention was so plainly evident that Eddie let himself go limp even as Rumson's shoe scraped the sidewalk. He was halfway to the pavement when the two shots cracked out over his head. The corner of his eye caught a flash of Rumson checked in his stride, tottering. Then he found his arms entangled with a pair of legs. Instinctively he hugged those legs, just as instinctively threw his shoulders and weight into a savage tackle.

The swift arc of the falling body disclosed the second man, momentarily undecided what to do. His indecision was

fatal. Eddie's foot lashed out, even as the first man struck the sidewalk, and caught him in the stomach. The man screamed hoarsely and collapsed slowly.

Far off a siren wailed. Eddie tried to stand up. In his mind's eye he saw himself in this, his hour of glory, handcuffing his prisoners, rendering swift and expert first-aid to Rumson. But his head went to his knees instead; to his horror he found himself sobbing. Not until the siren was virtually upon him was he able to straighten himself and get to his feet.

\* \* \*

It is not easy to thank a man—a man whom you genuinely dislike—for deliberately charging two guns in your behalf, but Eddie, his head large with bandages, did his best.

Rumson, an interne hovering about his bullet-creased forehead, frowned down his nose at Eddie's halting words. The hospital emergency room smelled like the back room of a drug store.

"Get this," interrupted Rumson acidly. "There's gonna be reporters here in a minute. I'm doin' the talkin', see? And if you let out one peep—one single peep—about them guys marchin' you outa the store, or about me doin' the fool stunt I did. . . ." He stopped and his glance angled up suspiciously at the interne.

"I can't hear a thing, pal," the interne assured him soberly.

". . . I'll break you, so help me," concluded Rumson. He twitched irritably as the needle bit him.

Eddie gaped. "But you—you sailed right in and—"

Rumson, his eyes hot and impatient, said, "How do you think it'll look for the force if the papers tell about you bein' frog-marched out of a store by a couple o' punks. And them makin' me drop my gun. And you disobeyin' orders in the first place and goin' into that store like a—"

Eddie flushed under the interne's quizzical gaze. "Cole slaw," he muttered.

Rumson understood. He snorted. "That was between you and me," he rasped, without shame. "Sure I like to get in the papers, when it don't hurt the department none. But not if I got to tell the whole world I got a rookie that won't pull his

doors or check his alleys; a rookie that I got to load his beat to make him work. That don't make us look good."

In the back of Eddie's mind a voice repeated, "us." He grinned, suddenly at ease. "So you waded in to keep the department from looking bad, eh, Sarge?"

Rumson smelled sentiment. He brushed the interne's hand aside, rose on a shaky elbow. "Suppose them guys *had* got away?" he demanded. "Wouldn't that have looked just lovely? Besides, you got just enough moxie, and just little enough sense, to have got yourself knocked off if I hadn't. . . . We ain't got enough men on the force as it is." He sank back, fuming, and avoided Eddie's eye.

"Besides," he added, shutting his eyes, "they'll probly make you detective for this, that bein' the way they do things nowadays." He snorted again. "I work like a dog six years, get nothin'. Then I snag a couple o' kid car thieves and wham! I'm sergeant-at-large. And you—you pull one lucky catch and—wham!—you're a detective. And you not even knowin' how to work a beat right."

"Relax," advised the interne humorously; Rumson subsided.

Eddie let himself down on a small metal chair. Of Rumson's tirade, only the warm flavor of that "us" remained in his muddled mind. He began to brush his uniform coat. He wouldn't be wearing it much longer. Detectives wore their own clothes. Funny thing—just in the last few minutes that uniform had begun to feel pretty good—pretty good.

His hand went to the bandages on his head. His thoughts flew, with quick pity, to Tom Janney.

Why, Tom Janney would probably go through the whole war without a scar to show for it. Why, even that soldier—the one who'd been trying to date Mary Tolliver—didn't have a wound yet.

Mary Tolliver! Mary Tolliver!!

Eddie stood up. The interne glanced curiously at his trembling lips, his pallor, and the odd excitement in his eyes. The interne said, "Ammonia, nurse."

Eddie shook his head. The interne raised his eyebrows.

"Mind if I use your phone?" said Eddie.

By DANE GREGORY



Peale used two of the ten  
cartridges . . .

## If Thy Right Hand Offend Thee—

*This misadventure of Mr. Fleery who smelled like shoe polish, and rag-doll Dell, and old Pop Peale is the most brilliantly written, viciously characterized story we've ever read. We won't attempt to tell you about it. . . . Dane Gregory has done a masterful job of doing just that—and here it is!*

**T**HERE had been a wind in the night that picked the icing off the hills like a child's greedy fingers. From his second-story bedroom Peale looked out upon the curved, clean blue of the mountain against the sky.

It was a ritual that opened his day, as the gurgle of mouth wash across the hall opened the neat Mr. Fleery's. It had taken the form of ritual some time between the death of Peale's first-born son in a Guernica foxhole and his second-

born in a polio ward out at Yakima. . . .

Peale's lips moved silently. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. Whence cometh—"

Mr. Fleery's door jarred open on the tinkle of shaving utensils. The smell of shoeshine seeped in to Peale, for it was an odor his guest distilled at all times as less tidy men exuded the odor of toil. "Dell! Oh, Dell! Anything on the morning newscast?"

Downstairs, his new daughter-in-law slapped her feathered mules to the foot of the stairway and answered in a voice that cringed ever so slightly. The cringe bothered Peale somewhat more than the baby's spindling cry. "Only the war news, Mr. Fleery," Dell called.

"Still having a war, are they? What's wrong with Baby?"

"He didn't sleep good at all las' night. I think maybe he's got a little cold."

"A little cold what?" said Mr. Fleery. "Well, warm it up and tell him to cease and desist. After all, who did sleep well last night?"

The door closed, then banged back open. "I'm beginning to see why that famous traveling salesman dossed in the barn," said Mr. Fleery. The door closed again.

"Whence cometh my help," Peale whispered to the hills.

They were the western walls of his life, broken only by the rocky mantelpiece of road where eight-cylinder beetles crept to loading platforms. Or tumble-bugs, as the case might be: he had seen a truckload of Jenkins' Club blow a tire on that grade and spin its driver, screaming, down the mountainside. But he had never resented the clasp of the walls. Either they wadded a man into his own smallness or drew him out to fit his dwelling.

Mr. Fleery's whistle ceased and his palms came together smartly. He had reached the crucial phase of *Deep in the Heart of Texas*.

Peale turned his face from the hills. He combed his white hair before the tall bureau-dresser above which, bedded in a scarred saddle-boot, the Peale heirloom rifle dreamed. He dusted its dark walnut gently with the tails of his cast-off shirt.

It had descended to him from the proud

old Peale who had once owned half the Yakima valley and had died in the Indian rebellion at Union Gap. It would descend from him to his third-born and last, the Roy Peale who worked for the neat Mr. Fleery and whose wife Dale cringed at Mr. Fleery's call.

And from Roy to the new Peale, the strange Peale belowstairs—the baby with sapphire-blue eyes. . . .

**D**ELL was a small thing bent over the baby's crib so that the dark roots of her hair emerged from hiding. Her flowered kimono looked odd to Peale against the broken stone fireplace. But apparently she knew how to perk coffee. Its aroma crept out of the kitchen to lay the shoe-polish smell from above.

"You didn't have to make breakfast, Dell. I've been the cook around here since Ann died, but I guess I slept overtime today. Mr. Fleery's midnight newscast kept me awake."

"He's int'rested in the news."

"Not," said Peale, "the war news, it seems. That strikes me as a little queer, too, but then I guess a restaurant man hears so much war talk he needs a vacation from it now and then."

Dell adjusted the baby's bottle. The baby's eyes were like polished distance above it. Dell said, "Uh-huh."

"Gas situation being what it is, I'd call it more than nice of him to drive you and Roy clear over from the Coast to see me. And Baby. Not many big restaurant men would do that much for an ordinary counter-hopper."

"Oh, they're good friends! We're all good friends. He likes Roy fine, Mr—"

"To you, Dell, I'm just Pop."

Dell said, "Pop," as dutifully as the weasel. Dell's dark-lashed eyes were amber and round in a face they had outgrown years before. She had the look of a child at a circus—a Roman circus, thought Peale. He said:

"Is it me you're afraid of, Dell?"

"Why would I be?"

"You don't have to be. Naturally I was a little surprised to find out Roy had a wife and new baby. He's never been anything of a hand to write. But you're all right with me, Dell. Come often."

She blotted out a sozzle on the baby's chin. "I like it here. Cow-opera country, Fleer—Mr. Fleery says. But I never knew that people could live like this. Quiet."

"It's that. I'll play you an old song on my fiddle some time—*There is Peace in the Silence of the Hills*." Peale touched the baby's cheek. The baby's cheek was warmer than it ought to be. "No one has to be afraid of anything up here, Dell. The hills are big enough to shut terror out of the heart."

"I'm not afraid! You talk like I'm afraid."

Peale said, "You're right—the baby has a cold. Keep him under plenty of covers. We grow pretty wheat, too. Ever wonder what wheat country was like when you ate your daily bread?"

The droll mouth aged and was hard. "What daily bread?"

"It was like that, was it? I'm sorry."

"You don't have to talk decent to me! Maybe I'd rather you didn't even try! You can see what I've been."

"I can never," said Peale, "see what anybody has been."

"It was First Avenue theaters and dirty jokes when I was lucky, see? It was shows under canvas the rest of the time. You don't have to rupture yourself making out you're glad Roy married me!"

"I don't even have to breathe hard," said Peale. He took the baby's feebly waving hand and tucked it back under the blanket. "They're pretty tender at eight months, Dell. Keep everything covered."

"Everything and anything, Dell," said Mr. Fleery. "We wouldn't want Baby to catch a bad chill, now would we?"

MR. FLEERY came out of the hallway in neat blue serge and a sherry-colored tie with kerchief to match. Mr. Fleery's face achieved distinction by the very lack of it; it was a colorless, urban face locked severely against the warmer hues of emotion. Only at rare intervals did small yellowish dimples take shape at his mouth-corners so that his lips were caught unexpectedly in a sort of grim and mocking humor.

He wore cowhide carpet slippers un-

der his neat cuffless pants. They had apparently never been polished. But Mr. Fleery smelled of shoe-polish.

Peale said to Dell's large eyes, "I think Baby will be all right, Mr. Fleery. We don't have all the conveniences up here, but I've taken care of several babies in my day."

Mr. Fleery said to Dell's large eyes, "That's fine, Mr. Peale. I'll bet the morgue is just full of them. Your collection of pictures, I mean to say—that's the newspaper word for it."

"I must show you the one of Roy wearing his first starched collar," Peale told the cretonne drapes. "It did something for his chin—maybe because it was his own collar, Mr. Fleery."

The drapes receded shyly and Roy's sport sandals made brisk off-stage noises in the room beyond. Roy's shining morning face came through the drapes, frantically buoyant under its touse of curls. Roy was roughing it, Peale decided. He wore a flannel slack-and-shirt ensemble that melted his brown eyes into pure poetry.

Roy said, "Nothing like this high altitude to work up a good breakfast appetite, is there?"

Mr. Fleery said, "As the girls used to say, *The north wind is full of courage and puts the stamina of life into a man*. I ought to know. I slept in a hard north wind all night."

Peale said, "If there's any truth in the adage, Fleery, I'd be glad to have you change bedrooms with my son."

"I like to be called Mr. Fleery," confided Mr. Fleery.

"I've noticed that."

The radio dial burbled under Roy's fingers. Roy shouted through *Star Dust*: "No newscast this hour the day, I guess! Why don't we eat, Sweets? Fry up some eggs, will you?"

Peale gathered the rose-pink coverlet higher about the baby's throat. The baby's cough was a small sound of brasses under *Star Dust*.

AT MID-DAY the wind of the night had returned to buff the runneled fields beyond the house soft as brown corduroy. The hills were edged

in a beauty that burned the eyes. The baby breathed with effort in his caul of warm flannel, reaching upward for the rarefied air above the cigarette and shoe-polish vapors.

A card-table topheavy with Mr. Fleery's chips nursed its crooked leg near the fireplace. Dell Peale had noticed, had discarded half of her double pinochle without melding it. Roy had not melded his thousand aces. "Well," Mr. Fleery assured his mashed potatoes, "you put up a good fight anyhow, kids."

Peale's bowed head lifted to the world past the square of cloth. "And for the promise of full harvests in an hour of want," he said, "we thank thee, Lord. Amen."

"Amen," said Mr. Fleery. "A full harvest in our hour of want—and an early planting. Still and all, I like Shakespeare."

Roy coughed as brassily as the baby. Peale said to Mr. Fleery, "*You spotted snakes with double tongue. . . . Nexets and blind-worms, do no wrong.*"

A mound of potato balanced itself on Mr. Fleery's quiet fork. A beam of sunlight searched his silver eyes for the withdrawn irises.

He reversed the fork and struck it musically with the flat of his knife. The potato fell.

He said: "What was that, Pop?"

"Shakespeare," said Peale.

"Shakespeare," said Mr. Fleery. "Dell, does the baby have to make that noise? Does he *have* to? Will you do something about it, or—"

"He's got a little cold," whispered Dell miserably.

Peale said: "I'm sure Fleery would be glad to let you break one of his many hairbrushes on the baby."

"Be delighted. Don't the books say it is better to spoil the rod than spare the child?"

Mr. Fleery added: "I like to be called Mr. Fleery."

Dell's scream was a sound that barely got past her teeth, as the pressed-glass butter dish slipped from her hands. It splintered close to Roy's sport sandals. Roy lifted a face only slightly ruddy from the effort of bending down.

"Butterfingers," he chided his wife.

Peale said gently: "That's all right, son. Rather it had happened to some other dish, though. That was the last piece of the set I bought Ann when you were born. Kind of a peace offering, I guess—she had a pretty hard time with you."

"Get you another," Roy implored.

"You must let me," said Mr. Fleery. "Tell the jawbone how it was, won't you, Pop? Tell her the oleomargerine backfired and broke Dell's arm at the elbow."

"She's dead," Roy explained. "She's dead, Mr. Fleery!"

"Oh. Well, naturally I didn't know that—I assumed she was visiting kinfolk in Kansas. Naturally I didn't mean it quite the way it sounded, Mr. Peale."

Peale said: "*If thou but frown on me, or stir thy foot, or teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame, I'll strike thee dead. Shakespeare again—The Life and Death of King John.*"

He added: "Fleery."

THE sunset was a torchlit storming of the western wall. The swung torches loosened the mortar of shadow so that it ran out of every cleft and cranny to alloy itself with the grays of twilight below.

Peale's fingers flexed and opened in a pattern that brought the milk spurting into the galvanized pail between his knees. The barn smelled of loose hay and stanchioned Jersey. The vapors of the afternoon faded in Peale's head and left him but one clear memory of it: the baby's breath rattling like a dry seed in his throat.

He fed the cat. He shook a bonus of hay into the Jersey's stall. He cleated the barn door behind him and went straight out into the winnowed lamplight from above.

A shadow moved against the lamplight. Peale walked toward it past the baggy seams of the produce truck and the tailored dove-gray of Mr. Fleery's sedan, complete from white-walled tires to musical klaxon.

Peale said: "Roy?"

The shadow said: "No milking machine yet?"

Peale set the bucket of milk down on the ribbed walk. "Is that what you came



better than two hundred miles to ask me, Roy?"

"You know why I came, Dad. I thought it was high time you met Dell and—"

"And Baby," said Peale.

"Well. Yes. Baby."

Peale said, "It was always hard for me to talk to you, Roy. I don't know—it was like knocking at the door of an abandoned house. I've barked my knuckles till they're raw, son, but I'm still getting echoes back."

"Good Lord, what do you *want* me to say?"

"Whatever you want to say. After all, I'm old enough to be your father."

Roy was silent, modestly contained in his shadow.

"If Fleery's your rock to lean on, maybe I could at least be a—"

"He likes to be—"

"Called Mr. Fleery. I had an idea that was what you came out to tell me."

"All right! So he's a little queer sometimes, maybe. But I told you when we came here he was right on the edge of a breakdown. Overworked. Worried about his business. If you'd—"

"I'm a little worried about it, too."

"And what does that mean?"

"What *does* it mean, Roy?"

"About as much as any the other cracks you've been making all afternoon. *Miching mallecho, there's mischief afoot*. Shakespeare. Mr. Fleery don't like it. I don't like it myself. It looks to me like you could at least—"

Peale caught up the milk pail and said to his son: "That's all you have to say to me, Roy?"

Roy said: "What else is there *to* say? You're seeing things, that's all."

"Yes. Seeing things. Let's go in."

Ahead of them, the kitchen door flung open and Dell's white face stared out at them.

"Pop!" said Dell. "The baby, Pop. Pop! Pop! The baby."

"The *baby!*" said Roy.

"Pop!" she said. "I'm talking to Pop!"

**P**EALE made a V of his forefingers and pressed it to the baby's bared chest in a soft, coaxing rhythm. The blue eyes opened and shrank. The baby's

breath was no longer a dry seed shaken in his throat. The seed had taken tight root there and spread a foliage of cyanosed veins above.

Peale said, "You've been using the warm towels?"

"The best I knew," said Dell. "But I don't know. Pop, I don't know."

"It's croup."

"Croup?"

"The false kind, I hope. He's at least a year too young even for that. Membranous croup, I hope not."

"What's mem—"

"I'm behind the times. They call it diphtheria now."

Mr. Fleery turned off the radio.

"It would mean," said Peale, "an intubation tube. Tracheotomy. And a doctor from Mabton, which is a good thirty miles below. I can't get priorities on a truck tire till spring. That puts it up to Fleery."

Mr. Fleery held his eyes on Peale's. The sedan keys were a small hoarded sound in his pocket.

He said carefully:

"No."

The baby gasped under Peale's fingers.

Mr. Fleery said, "I'll have no horse-doctor spitting on my windshield for thirty miles. Not over a road like yours."

Peale pumped the baby like a fragile bellows. "I can see your point of view, I guess. Even a horse-doctor might want to know why a proud mother would wrap her son in a rose-pink baby blanket."

It was some time before the baby would gasp again.

"And even a hick on a hilltop," said Peale "has some slight acquaintance with biology. My brown-eyed children outshone the Dionnes when they gave me this blue-eyed grandchild."

Mr. Fleery had a small-bore automatic that rose from his inner works on a spring when he tugged the silk kerchief over his breastbone. The effect was Oz-like. The room tipped out of normal perspective so that Mr. Fleery was an enameled gadget between two dolls, Roy a soft-rubber doll, Roy's wife a rag one warped by hard rains.

Roy would say "Uncle" if you squeezed him, thought Peale. The analogy was complete.

The rag doll worried her limp mouth between her palms. "Pink one for a boy," she mumbled. "That's *men* for you!"

"Dell," said Peale.

"Big restaurant man," Dell intoned. "Is that what they're calling baby-killers this year?"

She rocked. She ruffled the mop of bleached yarn on her head. She said, "In a blanket they bought on the way—all wrapped up, small like that, and not even a blue blanket to die in. They tied *that* around the nurse's head. 'Be a mamma or else,' says Fleery."

Mr. Fleery went toward her.

Dell screamed, "Connaughty's kid! And so what of it—is it the kid's fault his folks are rich? Maybe it ain't even theirs, waiting back there afraid to cry cop or look cockeyed at each other or—"

"Hysteria," said Mr. Fleery.

Peale said through the baby's gasp, "Ann and I are sorry for what we did to you, Dell."

Mr. Fleery pointed the gun at Peale.

"He's my old man," Roy remembered vaguely.

"Does the Lindbergh law care about that? Is *he* thinking about it, Roy boy?"

"I'm trying not to," said Peale. "The pathetic part of it is that he hitched his wagon to Haley's comet, Fleery. Parents aren't buying the clothes of their dead kids any more."

"I didn't know you cared."

"Ten minutes," said Peale. "I can't save him if there's a membrane. Maybe I can't save him, anyhow. But ten minutes, *Mr. Fleery*. For the kid."

Mr. Fleery said, "Don't use them all up asking for them."

The baby had died under Peale's fingers. Peale put his mouth over the small, slack lips and emptied his own lungs through the baby's sealed trachea. There was a pulse in his fingertips that might have been his or the child's.

"Dell," said Peale. "Tea-kettle, Dell. Hot water. Steam. Hurry, Dell. Hurry."

THE heir to Connaughty millions lay under a chipped granite tea-kettle set on parallel slats across his crib. And a wedding-ring quilt pegged down with flat-irons so that it held crib, kettle and heir in a tent of warm vapor.

The baby wheezed, ruefully alive again. The silence beat with the muffled small sounds of his struggle.

Peale raised a flap of the tent and freshened the steam with another brand from the fireplace. Dell said, "Does he—"

"He's not a very big baby, Dell. Let's wait."

Mr. Fleery said: "The tongs, Pop. Hang them up carefully. I'm not altogether sold on this idea of parboiling a sick kid."

Peale spoke to the pallor that was Roy. "You might write him an endorsement, son. We saved you that way when you were three. I forget just why."

"Pop," said Dell. "Pop! He's—"

The baby's breath crowed dismally in his lungs and died away into the hiss of the kettle. A pock in the tent-cover marked the course of one sinking hand.

The cover did not move again.

Mr. Fleery said fatalistically, "Seems to be it."

Peale spread his shoulders to the automatic and bent over the opened crib. The baby's eyelids were a flutter of shadow. The baby's bluish lips distilled a moisture on his palm. The Connaughty heir lay sleeping.

Peale said, "Well, we tried, Dell," and swung her backward into the pinochle table.

Dell sat down against the overturned table and watched Mr. Fleery's poker chips dance on the floor. Mr. Fleery was swinging his gun. Peale walked in a crouch and came up under the gun, plying the granite tea-kettle with which Ann Peale had once scalded a rabid coyote in her kitchen.

The automatic was a ringing sound against the kettle in Peale's hands and dissolved in a cloud of steam.

Mr. Fleery bent from the hips. He gave up the gun to draw his fingers across his lower face. He screamed suddenly at the fingers, a pulling animal scream unlike that of any animal Peale had known.

"Gun!" said Roy.

Peale stamped on Mr. Fleery's hand and broke it across the cylinders of the gun.

Mr. Fleery crept over to the Dutch door. He followed his fingers to the

upper frame and patted at it ineffectually, unable to decipher the door. "Roy. Hurt. Roy boy. Roy."

"No," said Peale.

He had the gun. He put it on the nape of Roy Peale's neck. "Don't, Roy. Face it, Roy. Don't!"

Roy's weight drove Mr. Fleery through the door. His shadow tangled with Mr. Fleery's; they ran together, partners in panic as in crime. Peale stood lonely in the dusk and watched the shadows flow into the shine of the sedan.

He looked at the small gun on his palm. He shouted for the last time:

"Roy!"

The sedan swung its lights across his eyes and rolled down into the hollow west of the house where the driveway ran to meet the hills. The girders of the timbered bridge crossed its tail-lights out. Peale went to the house again.

"It don't matter to me," said Dell. "Not any more. I'm sorry for you, that's all."

Peale said: "Fleery. What's wrong with him? Crazy?"

"It's juju. Marijane. Marijuana. He's high on it morning, noon and night. It wasn't shoeshine you smelt on 'm. They put the stuff in shoeshine, too."

"Oh."

"And he can't *stand* it to be hurt. He

hurts worse than other people, maybe on account of the juju. I don't know—it drives him crazy just only to cut himself shaving."

"What will they do now?"

Her eyes came up from the baby's face and turned wide and bright on Peale's. "Tommy-gun!" she remembered. "They parked it in the sage a couple miles down. They were afraid you'd see it."

"They'll come back here, you mean?"

"Oh, no. You hurt Mr.—you hurt Fleery. Mabton—that little town below. Fleery talked about how easy it'd be to go through it with the Tom and just knock over everything. They need money, Pop. They—"

Peale said, "You mean they'll kill people in Mabton. Friends of mine."

"Not Roy. Fleery."

"They're together," said Peale.

"It's too late. You have a phone or a car it'd be different, but it's too late. Don't think about it, Pop! Don't look like that, Pop! Where you going, Pop?"

"Upstairs," said Peale.

**A**T DUSK torches had fled backward to leave the wall standing solid as stone against the smoke of their retreat. Darkness had already cemented the rifts where the loosened mortar had run.

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The beams of Mr. Fleery's neat sedan were two white fingers that fumbled past Peale's window almost at eye-level, carefully tracing the convolutions of the wall.

Peale looked at his own slack fingers.

Peale thought: If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out—but what of the man who hath no other eye in his head? And whither the pride of the proud name, and what of the Peales crying out from their graves for its perpetuity? Or were they silent in their graves, knowing a name could only be as proud as the man who carried it?

Peale looked at the hills again.

Mr. Fleery's neat sedan crept stealthily toward the last visible bend of the road. Mr. Fleery's headlights struck the rocky scarp that had once spun a truckload of good winter wheat offside into the gorge. The fingers of light bent at the knuckles to hold the car in a hand of light, poised and counter-poised there in the flashing, frightful moment of choice.

And Peale saw then that the choice had been written on the wall from the first.

He saw them together, the hills and the car: and the car was small against the hills. It was a loyalty reduced to myth in the face of the justice it opposed. It was the lie that dwindles against an old truth, the shadow that strikes substance and is gone. It was a little gray tumblebug of a car bearing little gray tumblebugs of men across an architecture neither should have sought to defile.

The Peale heirloom rifle was a gaunt Martini-Henry built for velocity, carrying-power and bison. Thomas Edgeworth Peale had equipped it with a peep-sight by which a hair or a white-walled tire could be divided into two equal parts. And there had been ten cartridges in the magazine when it fell from the proud hands of Thomas Edgeworth Peale to the equally proud hands of his son.

There were the hills and the car and the steadying rifle. And the steadying rifle and the car.

Peale used two of the ten cartridges.

Then there were the rifle and the hills. . . .

Dell had her face between her hands again. Dell said, "Was it Roy or—"

"The scream?" said Peale. "Why, I don't know, Dell—I wondered, too. I guess it's the sort of thing a person always wonders about."

Dell squeezed her mouth at the corners to hold it steady. "They wouldn't maybe be—"

"Alive?" said Peale. "Oh, no, Dell. You must have glanced into that gorge on the way up."

He looked at the baby. The baby had faded to a natural hue again. He said, "My next door neighbor twelve miles over has a good closed car. We'll get the baby back to his folks as soon as he can be moved. There are a few other—arrangements that will have to be made."

"I take the fall, huh? Well, I don't mind, Pop. Not a hell of—not much, anyhow."

"I didn't mean that, Dell. A kidnaper at gunpoint is no kidnaper in my book, and there'll be no trouble from the Connaughtys. Not from a family so scared for the child they haven't even reported it missing."

Dell straightened the coverlet around the baby. "I could take the fall," said Dell. "Maybe I could take it and like it. What's for people like me, Pop? I been sick and hungry and scared to death all my life."

"Why, for you," said Peale, "there's a home. Here. With me. Nobody talks about an old man, you know. A little later I'd like to have you meet my neighbor, Dell—he's a young fellow and not nearly as good-looking as Roy. Gets pretty lonesome, I guess. Roy ran away with his wife when he went to Seattle a couple of years ago."

"Oh," said Dell. "Oh. I didn't know about that."

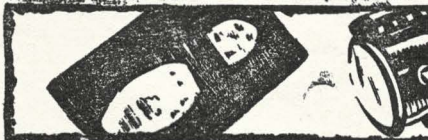
She took Peale's hand in hers and began to cry softly into his palm. She said, "I wouldn't want you to think he was really bad, Pop. Not like Mr.—like Fleery. Not poison. I don't know—he was just—oh, I don't know—it just seemed like he didn't—"

"There was no strength in him," said Peale. "I guess I've always known that, Dell. He spent twenty-four years of his life in this place, but I don't believe I ever saw him look at the hills."

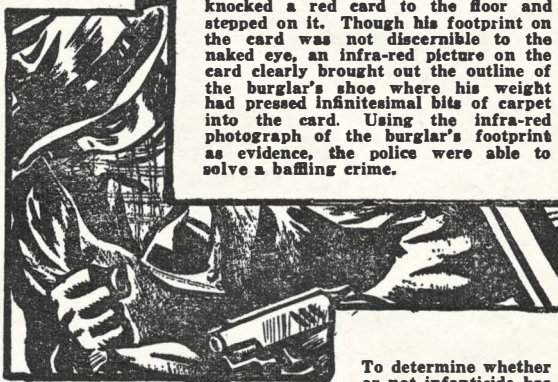
# ODDITIES IN CRIME



A barrel containing the unclothed body of a man, a pillow-slip and a bit of cloth was discovered in a garage. Neither the man who left the barrel nor the victim could be identified. Ultra-violet light revealed animal and vegetable fats in the screening across the top of the barrel—and it was assumed that it had been used previously to cover a window or ventilator in a restaurant. The piece of cloth surrendered coffee, milk and bread stains under ultra-violet light—and had served formerly as a table-cloth, it was decided. The pillow-slip bore the name, "Merz," on a faded laundry mark. A tiny piece of lettered tape was found between the staves of the barrel, and ultra-violet discovered on it the name of a city 100 miles away. This evidence led to the tracing of the window from which the screen had been removed. And, with ultra-violet leading the way, the scene of the crime was located. It led subsequently to the confession of the murderer!



Making his exit hurriedly, a burglar knocked a red card to the floor and stepped on it. Though his footprint on the card was not discernible to the naked eye, an infra-red picture on the card clearly brought out the outline of the burglar's shoe where his weight had pressed infinitesimal bits of carpet into the card. Using the infra-red photograph of the burglar's footprint as evidence, the police were able to solve a baffling crime.



One of the many petty-larceny rackets designed to make the honest suffer, goes this way: A stranger, who is obviously in a hurry, will make a purchase after the banks have closed and will pay for it with a check. The merchant will then receive anonymous warnings that the article he has just sold has been RESOLD by the stranger for half-price. The merchant, then imagining that he has been given a worthless check and that the stranger is trying to unload the article quickly at whatever price he can get, will rush to have the stranger arrested. . . . The stranger will remain in jail until the banks reopen—whereupon it is discovered that his check is perfectly good, and he has merely wished to dispose of his own property at his own price. The stranger is then free to sue the merchant for damages due to false arrest.

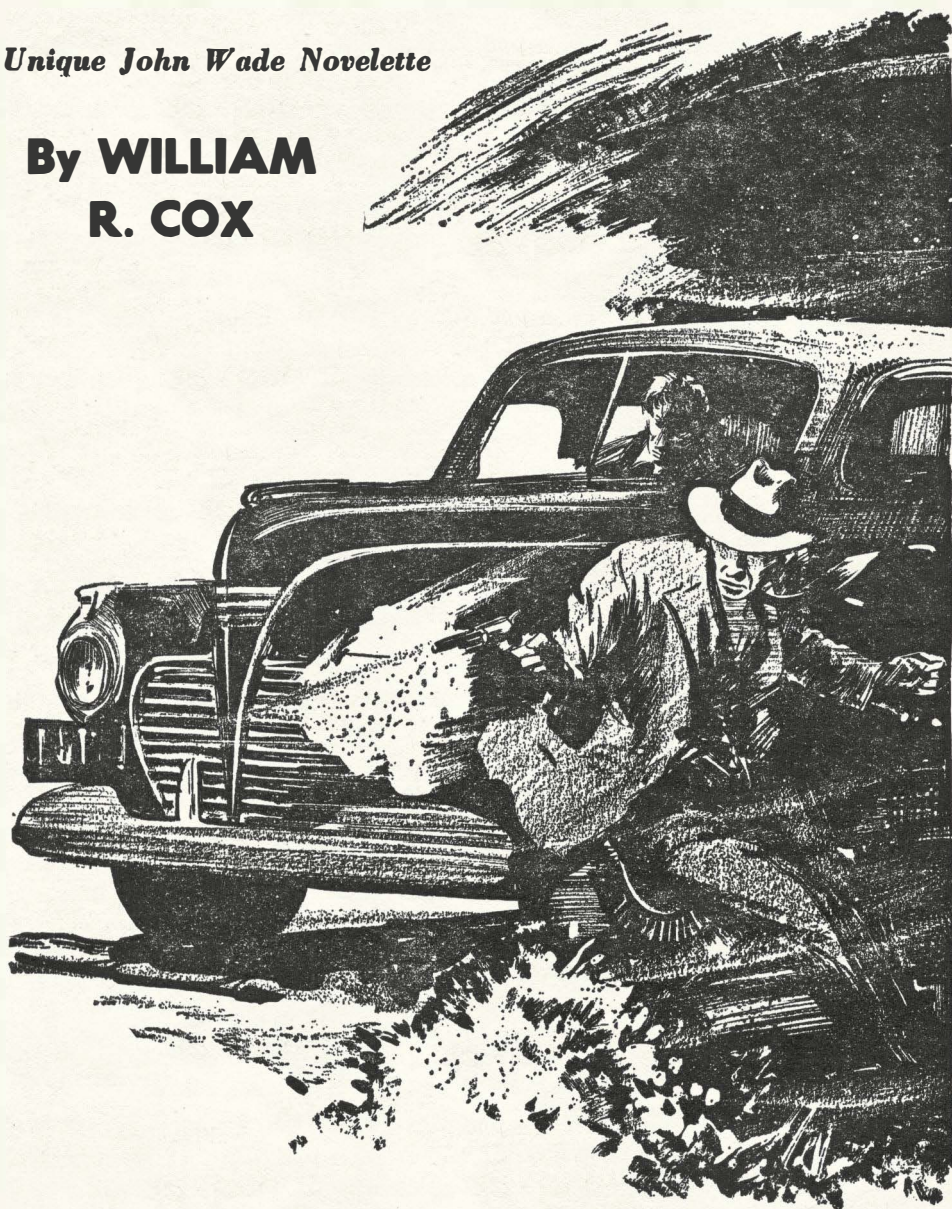
To determine whether or not infanticide has been committed in the case of an abandoned new-born baby, it is necessary to show that the child was not BORN dead. This is done by removing the lungs from the body, and placing them in a basin of water. If the child lived even briefly after birth, the lungs contain air and will float; if the child was born dead, the lungs will sink.



# MODEL FOR

*Unique John Wade Novelette*

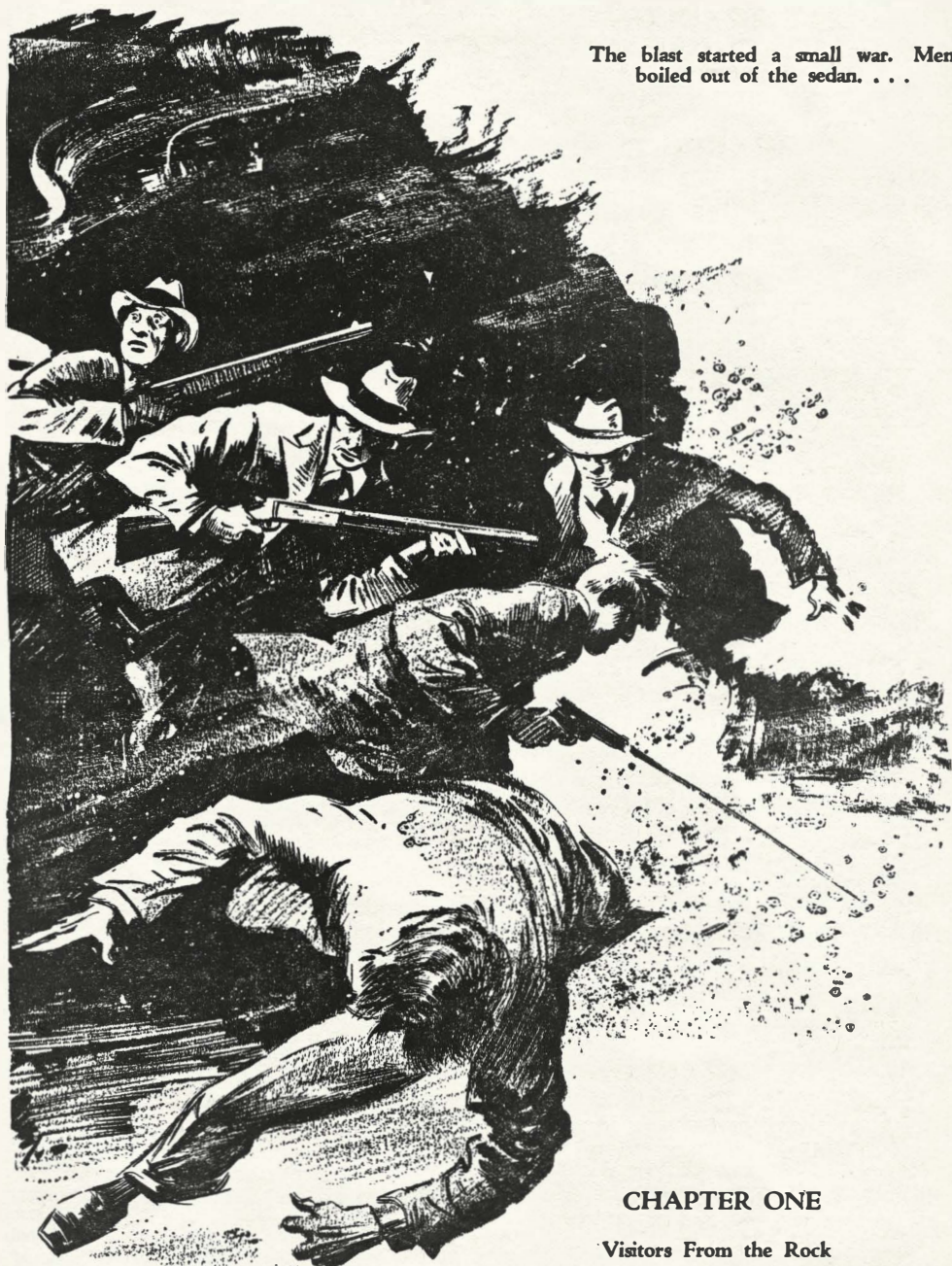
**By WILLIAM  
R. COX**



*John Wade couldn't get into the army—so with the lovely Jean, Rickey and the lethal Mr. Thomas, he joined battle with the strange army of waxen killers. . . . A highly dramatic, fast-moving story of how John Wade in wax signed the death warrant of John Wade in the flesh!*

# MANSLAUGHTER

The blast started a small war. Men  
boiled out of the sedan. . . .



## CHAPTER ONE

### Visitors From the Rock

**T**HE front of the porticoed white house on the outskirts of Midburg was pleasant, well-kept; the grounds abounding in green shrubs and well-

clipped grass. The polished brass plate on the door bore the letters, *M.A.D. Morgan, M.D.*

On the roof of this semi-sanitarium the sun beat down through blue glass, limning the lean, naked torso of John Wade. There was a livid scar upon the right side. Yellow-toothed, ill-favored Mad Morgan, doctor to the underworld, pursed his tobacco-stained lips, saying, "Another week, John. You deserve a rest. That was a forty-five slug—and the infection set you back."

A buzzer sounded, a signal in code. John Wade slipped on an English broadcloth, striped robe. He said, "That will be Jean Morrow, visiting the sick. . . . I may not be able to spare a week, Morgan. There is a matter unfinished. Something about wax figures too lifelike. They provide alibis. . . . After all, the armed forces don't want me and the F.B.I. cannot afford to hire an ex-con man—and I've got to do something."

"You're a restive spirit, John," said Mad Morgan. His greenish eyes were opaque. "We all want to win the war. . . . But Ricky's watching the Governor and Tony Marreta is a square copper. And the feds are all over Midburg. . . . Of course, Mike Canniff got out the other day—"

John sat erect, staring at the doctor. "Mike the Killer? Out of Alcatraz?"

The secret elevator purred to a stop.

Jean Morrow came from the lift, smiling. She was blonde, beautiful and clever. She was Governor Fortney Castle's secretary and she knew everything that went on in Midstate. She said:

"Senator Blank, the well-known defender of civil liberties, found a flaw in the original indictment. Mike is out and reported seen about Midburg. . . . Have you met Guy Manton, John?"

A tall, muscular, handsome young man stood behind Jean. He had frank, blue eyes and his skin was fresh and clear. He looked like a college fullback but he was a famed sculptor—John knew—brother to Governor Castle's personal physician, Doctor Rex Manton.

John said, "I know his brother. Are you sure you should have brought him here, Jean?" He could not dissipate the frown between his brows.

"I insisted, Wade," Guy Manton said. "Rumors are flying about town that this Canniff has sworn to get you and the Governor—and Jean."

"He thinks I cannot protect this poor working girl!" said Jean gaily. "Tell me, how are you today, John?"

Mad Morgan stood silent, his ugly face impassive. Not many people had gained access to this secret roof-retreat where only the cream of his underworld patients were allowed to rest and recuperate. The green eyes examined Guy Manton as though the sculptor were a specimen under a microscope.

John spoke restively. "I'm fine. If Mad would let me out, I'd go home with you." Then to Manton, "I hear you are selling a lot of War Bonds along with those caricatures of Adolph Hitler and the Axis partners."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand, so far," said Manton eagerly. "I saw Hitler, many times, when I was in Germany, you know. I think I've got him cold!" He drew a tiny figurine from his pocket. It was a cruel lampoon, deftly made, marvelously accurate, of the Fuehrer. It inspired laughter, yet it was loaded with the frantic fanaticism of the Dictator.

Jean said, "Guy is donating all of his time and money. He wants to join the army—but he's doing twice the good where he is. . . . Rickey will be up later, John. He's mooning about, mourning the inaction, aching to go out and look for Mike Canniff." She picked up her bag. "We have to go right back. Guy is meeting his brother, and we'll have a cocktail at Mandy's Grill."

John's watch pointed to 1:30 when they left.

Mad Morgan mused, "Strange she should bring him up here. Manton was carrying a rod, did you notice?"

John muttered, "He's young—clean—handsome. Everything I'm not. She should go with men like that."

"You're a fool, John," said the doctor in his cool, professional voice. "Ah, well—I'm a fool, too. We're on both sides of the law, you and me. We have the devious mind. That is why we are successful. You at catching criminals—I at mending them. I've mended Mike Canniff, twice. I wouldn't do it again, I con-



fess. We change as we grow older, John. . . . But you should marry that girl!"

"No!" said John. "I'm a crook! I can't forget it. Even now, as you say, my mind works along torturous paths. All right, I'm on the side of law and order, now. But the army won't have me, nor the navy, nor any other service!"

The buzzer sounded again, on a different note. Mad Morgan said, "I'm needed below. . . . I still think you should marry her!" He grinned, showing his yellow teeth, and went down in the silent elevator.

John turned, throwing aside his robe, letting the sun bite into his body. He would need the strength its rays could give. Already there were Axis agents prowling. And if Killer Mike Canniff was loose, that would mean danger to them all—to Rickey Boles, to Jean and the Governor.

**H**IS MIND slid inevitably back to Jean Morrow. He had loved her since he had first turned straight, to aid Governor Castle in cleaning up Midstate. Seeing her with handsome Guy Manton had been brutal injury to his spirit. Yet he could, in all fairness, conclude only that Jean should see more of young, upstanding men.

The soul of a crook is a dark place, he thought bitterly. Even now he was most useful to Law and Order because he could often by prescience foresee the workings of the minds of underworld denizens. His understanding leaped ahead, because he was akin to them. Right now, considering the wax figures which had turned up about town, he was thinking what a wonderful alibi they would have provided for a swindle-expert.

Rickey Boles, that big, hard-headed, ready killing handyman was not such a crook-mind, John thought unhappily. True, Rickey would rather let off his precious Mr. Thomas at a gang of enemies than eat his considerable lunch. But also, Rickey was an honorable gent who would not steal a dime, nor ever had!

But John—why the very bullet which had put him here in Mad Morgan's hospital would have killed him had he not jerked aside, knowing a split-second in advance when the killer was going to pull

the trigger . . . and that John would be expected to go backwards, in fear and retreat, instead of attacking as he was shot.

Into John's bitter thoughts a sound from below cut sharply. Then Mad Morgan's inter-hospital loud speaker cut on swiftly. Morgan's voice said harshly, "They're in! Canniff. . . ."

Shots sounded, then the instrument was cut off. John was off the cot already, headed for the closet. He chose slacks, a blazered jersey, even in this moment of haste matching the color scheme. His nerves ran taut as he picked up the .38 S. & W. which was always near him.

Someone had gotten past Beefy and Jeems and the Doc's electric system. Someone had been tipped off how to raid Mad Morgan's establishment. His watch said 1:55. John stepped into a pair of sandals and walked to the elevator. It came up at the touch of his finger on the button. Perhaps they did not know about the elevator.

He heard noises in the shaft, but they were echoes. Again a shot sounded. He could escape this way, go out the back door and through the garage which was so near to the house. It would be very simple to escape. . . . The cage stopped. John entered, firmly pressed another button.

The elevator slid noiselessly down. It stopped at a door marked "2". He held the revolver steady at his hip. He felt pretty good, at that—steady, at least. He hoped they hadn't killed Mad Morgan. The Doc was one of the best friends John possessed.

He kicked the door-release. The portal slid back. A clock struck two, and he heard a voice calling, and then there were footsteps on the stairs, going down. John came into the room fast, his gun jabbing out ahead.

Mad Morgan lay across his desk, arms outflung, blood streaming from a wound in his scalp. A nurse was on the floor, lying very still, blood maculating the white of her uniform.

John hurtled to the window, overlooking the side street entrance. Three men were climbing into a sedan with heavy, bullet-proof glass and plated armor. John knew that car. It had been in storage since Mike Canniff was put away on The Rock.

The first man was already in—a high-shouldered, sharp-faced man with lips thin as slits. John turned loose, taking small aim, just spraying as fast as his double-action gun could throw lead. One man stumbled. The other got into the car. Canniff gave the word and the chauffeur drove off. The wounded man tried to arise. John shot him in the leg.

Jeems and Beefy were coming from the far end of the grounds.

John called through the window, "Bring him inside! Quick!"

He stared down at Morgan's cracked skull, dialing a number. Mandy's Grill reported that Miss Morrow had rushed from the place just a moment ago.

John knew that if it hadn't been for Morgan, they'd have had him, all right. Although why they had run off so quickly?

The Governor's house answered. A frightened voice said, "Mr. Wade! They shot the Governor. . . . Mr. Wade! Rickey got one of them—the others ran!" It was Fortney Castle's valet.

John asked, "How bad is the Governor hurt?"

"I—I don't know. Only the shoulder, I think. Dr. Manton had just left. He's coming back now, with his brother and Miss Morrow. . . . Come at once, Mr. Wade!"

John pronged the receiver. Dr. Manton, beloved society medico, handsome as his brother Guy, a few years older, would take care of Fortney Castle. Meantime—John brought water, cloths, bathed the head of Mad Morgan, who had somehow tried to fight them, and had saved John Wade's skin.

The doctor groaned. He was alive. John stretched him on the floor. Then he turned to the dead nurse. The dark girl had been quite pretty, but the sight of death had frightened her. Her lips were parted, her eyes stared. There was a hole under her left breast.

Mad Morgan opened his eyes. He croaked, "Jeems—Beefy—"

"All right," said John grimly. "They just killed the nurse!"

"Canniff!" said Morgan. "He knew the way in—but I had changed it, you see. I don't understand, John—I'd changed the signals. How did he know them?"

John said, "I'll find that out, too." He thought of Guy Manton, of the promptitude with which things had happened after Guy's visit. He said, "Hold everything. I'll send your men up. They went after the Governor at the same time, you know."

He went downstairs. In a back room, the two attendants—ex-patients of Mad Morgan's, who had stayed to work out their debt and had never left when it was paid—had propped John's victim on a chair.

Jeems, a former drug peddler said, "He looks kinda dead to me." He slapped the wounded man's pinched face with a hard palm.

The wizened, vicious features were vaguely familiar. The buck teeth parted, the man muttered, "Two bells. . . . Sure—I get it. . . . Two bells. . . ."

Beefy, once a goon for the rackets, said, "Talk plainer, Moose. . . . That's Moose Miller, Mr. Wade. He used to be with Canniff. He's inna snow if I know my stiffs."

"Sure!" said Jeems. "Had a bundle in his vest. He was allus a snowbird. He won't sing none, Mr. Wade."

Moose Miller sighed, then coughed a little. He slid off the chair, landed on the floor. His heels kicked once.

Beefy said, "The Doc—is he—did they—?"

"We had a yell—off at the end of the grounds," said Jeems angrily. "It was a plant, to stall us. Is the Doc—?"

"He's alive," said John. "But he got it in the skull."

"We'll go up," said Beefy eagerly. "We got foist aid—jist like the civilian defenders. Doc give it to us hisself. We'll take care of 'im."

"Yeah," said Jeems. "And send a good doc, Mr. Wade. The best—it's none too good for Doc."

Moose Miller jerked convulsively on the floor. Beefy's low brow contracted, he shot out his number 12 boot. It clunked against Moose's head. The gunman did not move again.

Jeems said apologetically, "He wouldn't of sung anyway, Mr. Wade. Doc's been awful good to us gees. Beefy is sore because the Doc got his lumps."

## CHAPTER TWO

## Mark of the Axis

IN THE cellar laboratory of Governor Fortney Castle's mansion, Rickey Boles stood over a newly-made corpse and said, "They hit fast—down here, where the Gov is over there makin' a stink over somethin' on the tables. Three of 'em, right through the trick door, but fast. I pops the first one, and then they're in. They nails me with a jack and takes a crack at the Gov. He goes down. I'm

like Tossport Firenzo. Remember him?"

"It ain't his brother!" said Rickey. "He was run out with Canniff back in 'thirty-eight. There is a leak somewheres, John. They got in Morgan's—in here."

"They knew where to get Colonel Rankin and Kale," said John grimly. "They know too much."

He led the way upstairs. In the Governor's bedroom, Jean was pale, stricken. But the Governor's sharp, lined features were serene. He said, "Rickey was magnificent. How did they get in, John?"

"This has been planned for months,"

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**If you enjoy the way William R. Cox tells a story, you'll want to read his "Warrior Breed" in the April ARGOSY. A versatile writer, Mr. Cox turns in this novelette to the great days of the frontier West and gives you a vivid, dramatic tale of Indian fighting. Don't miss the April ARGOSY—on sale now!**

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still frin', see, but my head is woozy. One of them, so help me, is a broad!"

"A woman killer?" demanded John. "How did you hold them off?"

"I threw that stool," said Rickey, pointing. "Then the clock struck two, and they lammed. They coulda had me, 'cause I was groggy. How did they get in, John? Almost nobody knows how to get in those doors."

John said, "Two o'clock—two bells. It was timed for two."

He picked up the phone, called Headquarters. Tony Marreta came on, speaking excitedly, "Hell to pay, John. Somebody killed Colonel Rankin as he left the airport. He was Intelligence, you know. And at the same time Porter Kale, head of Civilian Defense got popped off."

John said rapidly, "And at the same time Killer Mike made a try for me. And it looks like Obie Smart and his wife, Sal the Gun Gal, made a try for the Governor. . . . All the rats are back, thanks to Senator Blank, damn him! . . . What's the most likely spot for them to make an attack this afternoon?"

"Jeez, John, Midburg's fulla defense work!" said the Captain of Detectives.

"Get every man out," said John. "I'll be around." He hung up and walked over to the corpse in the corner. "That looks

said John. "Canniff merely fitted into someone's smart scheme."

Doctor Rex Manton, looking very like his sculptor brother, said softly, "I think Fortney should sleep."

"Just a moment," said the Governor. "Tell me everything, John." He listened with closed eyes while John made a full report of what had happened. Then he said vigorously, "They plan something for this afternoon. There's a map, John. It's coded. Jean knows about it. Put your finger on a spot. You'll get a clue. I depend on you more than all the others."

Dr. Manton said, "Please, now! The shock of a gun-wound is considerable, you know. Fortney must have rest." He shepherded them out of the room, a pleasant man. "If I can be of any assistance, Wade—I'd like to have a crack at those murderers."

John said, "Thanks, but we'll handle it—I hope. The Governor is not in danger?"

"No," said Manton. "Boles' promptness saved him again. While they are giving out medals, they should decorate you and Boles several times." He bowed, going out silently through the front door.

Jean said, "Here's the map, John."

The telephone rang, and Jean signaled that it was for John.

Tony Marreta's voice sounded puzzled. "We just picked up Canniff, the Smarts, Ringy Scholtz—you remember Ringy, the gunsel. They got a perfect alibi. They were at a place called Caleb Polk's Farm. . . . Friend of Miss Morrow's, I believe. They were eatin' there between twelve and two o'clock."

John said crisply, "Who are their witnesses?"

"Jeeze!" said Tony. "They got about eight. All reputable people. They were in a side room. Waiter named 'Charlie' handled them. What is this, John?"

"A plant!" said John. "I'll call you back."

His mind was flowing again in devious channels. He said, "Wait! Are you still holding them, Tony?"

"Can't," said Marreta disgustedly. "Blank's lawyer's here."

John hung up. He took the map of defense projects in and about Midburg from Jean's hand. He studied it while the girl translated the black dots. "That one is the Mastiff Plant, where they are making a new secret powder," she said. "It's about ten miles out Route Forty-three, behind Caleb Polk's farm."

"Polk? What about him?" demanded John.

"An eccentric old bee-man," said Jean. "Serves good meals. A harmless old southerner."

"The car!" said John. "Rickey will stay here and guard the Governor. You and me better see this Polk. He alibi'd Canniff and his mob. We know he was wrong. And the Mastiff Plant right behind him, eh? Hurry, Jean!"

+ + +

**T**HEY raced to the garage and wheeled out the swift coupe kept for such emergencies. On Route 43, John said, "Guy Manton. What about him?"

"Why—he's nice," said Jean. "Studied in Paris for years. Just getting famous when war broke out. Fought with the Loyalists in Spain, got a wound. Now he auctions off those figures and tries to get into service."

John started to say, "He's ubiquitous—just before trouble starts." But he re-

strained himself. He said, "You trust him?"

"Certainly!" said Jean. "He's all right!"

"I think I can use him," said John thoughtfully. "Yes, I am sure we can! Have him around tonight, at the Governor's lab—will you, in case I forget? . . . And let's go faster!"

Jean said soberly, "They're really closing in this time. A timed, concerted attack upon the key men of the city! I'm lost on this one, John. Have you any ideas?"

"Tell me more about Caleb Polk," said John.

"He's an old-timey American. Hates society as such," said Jean. "I've eaten there with the Governor, often. Caleb is queer, but he wouldn't alibi Canniff unless he believed it."

John muttered, "Still—his land runs down to the Mastiff Plant. Canniff uses his place for an alibi, thereby throwing everyone off Polk's farm for awhile by appearing in town. There's something wrong about the picture. I'll have to talk to Mr. Polk. He doesn't ring true."

"But he's quite harmless!" objected Jean.

"Maybe," said John shortly. Guy Manton was good people. Caleb Polk was good people. Too many good people kept bobbing up in this business. They drove into a parking yard before a rambling, low-slung farm-house.

Jean said, "Why—no one's around. Must be between meal hours."

It was four o'clock. Perfect timing would allow for plenty of action since—say, three, when Tony had picked up Canniff, been forced to free the killer and his cohorts. John said forcibly:

"Please, Jean, forget that Polk was your friend. This is serious. We'll spread, and go in from opposite sides."

"Whatever you say, John." Jean got out her tiny .22 revolver with its pearl handle—John's gift. She was very expert in its use. They entered the farmhouse-restaurant, each from a different door.

A waiter in a white jacket and dirty white pants shambled in, announcing, "Lunch is over, too early for supper." He turned without further ceremony and started back to the kitchen. John swung

after him, through the swinging door.

It was a big, old-fashioned kitchen, with dozens of large, burnished pots and pans hung on its walls. Several huge pots simmered on the stove. It was a tremendous cooking range for such a small place. The waiter turned, and his face was ugly. He was broad of beam and round of skull and unprepossessing in the extreme.

John said affably, "What's your name?"

"Charlie," said the man dully. "There ain't anybody here, only me."

"Are you going to scald yourself in all that boiling water?" asked John genially.

"None of your damn business!" flared the man. His face changed subtly, became hard and wary.

John said, "Catching on, are you, Karl?"

The dull mask readjusted itself, making the man's features heavily stupid again. "I'm Charlie. Karl ain't here no more." He turned away, as though to adjust the stove.

Then, like lightning, he wheeled back, holding a long, sharp butcher knife. He dove at John with the practiced upward sweep of a trained wielder of lethal blades. As a surprise attack, it was a nice piece of action. And John admired it even as he stepped inside the attack, cutting with the edge of his right hand.

The stabbing blow was meant to follow through against a victim who retreated. John's hand on the knife wrist made the weapon fly into the air. John's fist hammered home on the heavy chin of the kitchen guard. Karl-Charlie's head struck the edge of the stove and he began to bleed on the kitchen floor.

Jean came in with her .22 revolver ready and said, "No one seems to be around. . . . I see you took the German type. He's new to me, and I've been here often."

"Where is Caleb Polk?" asked John.

Jean said, "Maybe he's out with his bees."

"Bees? The stinging kind?"

"He has millions of them," said Jean. "Caleb sells a flock of honey. Take one of those helmets from the wall and drop the veil over your handsome face, John."

There proved to be a fence across the backyard of the property, and in the fence a gate. It was unlocked and beyond it

were rows and rows of beehives, neatly painted, laid out in pleasing geometrical fashion.

Jean said, "Caleb is very proud of his bees. I haven't seen him lately, but he was making quite a bit of money last year from the hives. . . . There he is, now! Bending over that hive at the end of the lane!"

John looked at the stooping figure of the elderly man. Caleb wore a veil, similar to the one they had on. John said, "Mr. Polk! We'd like to speak to you!"

THE stout old man did not answer. John said, "Is he deaf?" Then he caught his breath and stared forward. He covered the distance to where the figure stood in no seconds flat. He walked around it, bent close, lifted the veil.

Jean, following at slower pace, said, "Mr. Polk! You remember me! I'm the Governor's secretary—"

John breathed, "Save it, baby! Take a look at a masterpiece!"

Jean said, "Why—he's—he's dead! But he's standing up! John! This can't be!"

"It's a waxwork! It's one to make Madame Tussaud turn over in her grave. The Germans were making them lifelike, even mechanical, early in the 18th century. Steele spoke of them, in *The Tatler*."

Jean said, "The alibis! Mike Canniff and the others—they were wax figures!"

"Handled by Karl-Charlie," agreed John. "But look at this thing! It's perfect. Only a real artist could make it!"

Jean said, "Those big pots, boiling!"

"Beeswax must be melted in water, if you want to use it again. I looked this all up while I was sick, you know. On account of the wax figure in the Caruthers case. The figures themselves would be hard to handle, to hide. So they just melt them up. . . . They must have taken a hell of a lot of Caleb's honey to make all that wax!"

"But where is Caleb? And his helpers, those other two old Southern men?"

John said gloomily, "Dead, no doubt. Is that the way to the Mastiff Plant?"

"Yes," Jean nodded.

"We'll go up there with binoculars," said John. "If we're in time. . . ."

He went as fast as he could. There was a lane leading up the steep hill, but it was crooked and not well-kept. There was a shed at the top. A freshet ran conveniently from the Hihola River. Again there was a large pot, scorched on the bottom, and the remnants of a fire.

"Beeswax!" said John. "This is where they got the wax!"

He took the glasses from Jean and gazed down into the valley. There was barbed wire about the Mastiff Plant's far-flung environs, and men in uniform patrolled. The guard seemed quite adequate to John. There were watch towers, with an airplane warning system. He searched the ground between, but could find no sign of activity.

He could be wrong, of course. Such an obvious, nearby place might not be the objective of the wily Axis agents. Perhaps, expecting detection sooner or later, they had laid their trap near the Mastiff Plant to gain time in which to strike some other place.

If it had not been for that new, secret explosive— John fixed the glasses upon a sentry at the nearest gate to the foot of the hill upon which he stood. The man was leaning against a barbed wire, his gun at his side. He was quite motionless.

John said, "Jean! Go back and phone the nearest Army mobile trouble unit. Phone the Red Cross, the State Cops, the City Police! Hurry! Get them up here!"

He tossed her the glasses and added, "That sentry!"

She took a look, stared for a second. Then she turned and her pretty legs sped back to the house of Caleb Polk.

John let his momentum carry him down the hill. He had no idea of what he would do when he arrived. He had full expectation of dying, however. In a moment there would, he knew very well, come a holocaust which would shake even Jean in the house of Caleb Polk.

At the barbed wire the sentry made no motion. He did not raise his rifle or speak. He just stood there, leaning against a fence post, trailing his useless weapon. He was made of wax!

John went through the gap in the fence, where somehow the charged wires had been burned. He sped along uneven ground, almost falling. He was not as

swift as he had been before his wound, and soon he was gasping for breath.

He saw a figure and called. The man turned, stared at him. Another man came from behind a shed which was set apart from the other buildings of the Mastiff Plant. A bullet cut the grass at John's feet, a voice called "Halt!"

It was a spot indeed. John had no way of knowing whether these men were friends or enemies. He stopped. One of the men came forward, saying, "Who are you? How did you get in here?"

John gasped for breath, faking extreme exhaustion. He said, "Just a moment. . . . I—can't talk . . ."

The second man started to go back. John's sharp eye went past the one who had accosted him. He saw narrow, high shoulders, a long, prognathous jaw. He caught a glimpse of pointed ears and a wolfish grin. He knew that face. That was Mike Canniff, and he was already getting out of reach.

The first man had the heavy indecision of an underling in his aspect. He said, "You're on gov'ment ground, cull!"

John said, "Am I?" He pretended to be frightened. He stepped back, stumbled, dropped to one knee. His gun came up. He fired one shot, straight into the middle of the man with the revolver in his hand.

**T**HEN John was running for the shed, his second wind coming to him. He rounded the corner, fully expecting to be greeted by a hail of lead, his finger on the trigger of his weapon. There was no one in sight.

He plunged through the open door of the shed. He saw two men on the floor, saw blood. He saw a square box, black and ominous, on a work bench. He seized the heavy object and ran out of the door. He set sail for the fence through which he had come, and now he was aware that someone was ahead of him, running away.

The chances of ambush increased, except that they might think he was the dead man back yonder, and that they were in danger of the bomb exploding. That he was in horrible danger, John did not pause to remember. He was running away from the shed where it had been placed, and which he could assume was a very important shop. He just kept running.

He made the fence. He went through the gap, and up the hill he saw two men high-tailing it. They went over the prow of the hill, into the apiary of Caleb Polk.

John's good sense asserted itself. He gingerly weighed the bomb in his hands. He had no way of knowing its potency. He only knew that Jean was up there and that Mike Canniff and some of his gang was headed right for her. He started climbing. He got halfway up the hill and it occurred to him that the bomb would be timed precisely to allow its authors to make the road and get away.

That time seemed mighty close. He cursed himself, then. He ran laterally upward. He came around and espied the silvery ripple of the stream. He leaned back. He balanced the bomb upon his palm, swung himself in the old shot-putting technique. He heaved, squatting, watching the course of the thing.

It went plop!—and water arose. It was safe. John heaved a deep sigh and got his legs gathered for a sprint after Mike Canniff, hoping against hope that Jean had concealed herself.

Sudden concussion struck him. The ground wavered under his feet. The hill rocked and dirt slid from its sides. John flung himself down, staring disbelievingly at the stream where he had dropped the bomb. . . .

But the explosion was below. It was not in the little shop where John had absconded with the bomb. It was on the other edge of the plant. There was a column of smoke, and whistles were screaming, but it was far away, and there were men running to the little building, which was intact.

There had been two bombs! The Axis had meant to strike twice at the same time! John's quick work had saved only half the damage which the enemy had meant to inflict!

John got up wearily. Too little, he thought bitterly, and too late! If he had started sooner, if he had gone farther, he might have saved all. Now there would be dead workmen, who could not be spared. There would be less powder to sink an Axis ship, to kill Axis soldiers.

He staggered over the top of the hill. He saw Jean, running, pale-faced, coming towards him.

She called, "I thought you were in it! I thought you were gone—like the others! Canniff came through here and they had a car camouflaged right over there. We didn't even see it under the trees! And John—there was a woman with him. In slacks! A young, hard-looking woman!"

"Gun-gal Sal Smart," John nodded. "Her husband, Obie Smart. And Ringy Scholtz. They were here at two, eh? But of course they wouldn't be anywheres near here, now! Nor in town, because the wax images are melted in the kitchen. They will be out of town some place, on a farm, or something, and Senator Blank will be indignant if they are picked up in their retreat."

Sirens were sounding on Route 43. The Red Cross and the police would be there in time to help with the wounded.

John was sick at heart. He said wearily, "Get in the car. We'll go back and see if we can mop it up."

Jean said, "You almost had it! You got on their trail!"

"You're loyal," he said. "You're fine. I got one bomb, at that. . . . I'll have to find out if that little building holds the secret experiments. I'd like to know."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Doubles in Death

IT WAS a very weary John Wade who slouched on a chair in the basement laboratory of Governor Castle. The Governor himself was there, pale, his arm in a sling. Rickey was there, and Jean Morrow, and the very handsome Guy Manton, who was quite cool and collected and intensely curious about the wax figures.

John said, "The source of the figures is important. I don't know anything about art, but they are startlingly like their subjects. If you knew Max Carruthers, you get the idea."

"I've seen the replica of Carruthers, and I agree," said Manton. "It may not be art—but a genius is turning out these figures, and evidently at tremendous speed."

John said, "You wouldn't have any idea. I mean, you should know all about sculptors. Is there one about whom you might have any suspicion?"

Unhesitatingly, Guy Manton said, "No. And I do think I know them all—in Mid-state. This work is being done by an unknown—probably by a man you would least expect to be an artist. Mechanically, it is perfect. But it is heavy-handed in its very realism. A first class man could not help putting something of himself into it—you see what I mean? A real artist would aid in the deception by giving more life and less actual exactitude to the figures. Furthermore, you say that the mannikins at Polk's place seemed to breathe and move. That indicates a mechanic on the job—not an artist!"

John said slowly, "It was once an art—this making of wax figures. Then the Germans made it cheap, with their mechanics."

"Exactly." Manton nodded. His white, even teeth gleamed at Jean. "Your friend understands. I think you can get at the bottom of this by seeking out a man who is intelligent, handy with his fingers—"

John asked, "Could you make wax figures like these, Manton?"

The young sculptor considered. He said, "Why—yes! Of course. Better ones—but they would not move and breathe."

"You are a good artist," said John softly. "You could make them *appear* to move and breathe—by your art!"

Manton narrowed his eyes. He said, "You may be right."

"I'd like one of Ricky—one of Jean—one of the Governor and one of myself," said John. "How long would it take if we got the materials right here and began now?"

"Six months!" said Manton promptly.

John chuckled. "You have tonight and tomorrow. Rickey reports that a certain character lately a guest of the government has retired from the neighborhood for that time. When he returns I want these figures. Jean and I will help you. Rickey will do the heavy work. What do you say?"

"Impossible!" said Manton. Then he added, "But of course we shall try! No clay—work right with the wax, eh? Can you get all that wax?"

"Enough for the heads," nodded John. "And the hands. Also hair. I've made arrangements with a hair-dresser. And Doc Morgan will be able to receive us

tomorrow. He's hurt bad, but able to walk around. He will take care of forming the bodies of our wax people. He's already told me how."

Guy Manton said, "This is very mysterious. But I take it we are fighting the Nazis?"

"Yes," said John. "Rickey—go get the wax."

The kitchen at Polk's had yielded tubs full of the malleable beeswax. It had hardened, but Jean's swift lab retorts glowed hot, and the wax melted in another water solution. Manton donned a lab apron and set up an improvised work table, using the Governor for his first model.

Manton's hands were big and strong and sure. They were also swift. Jean helped him, handing him the scalpels, keeping the wax at proper temperature. The head assumed rough shape in miraculous time—then Manton was pressing for accuracy, his glance darting to the posing Governor, his hands correcting, rearranging. He used calipers for careful measurement of proportions. Time sped by, the Governor was growing desperately tired.

John muttered, "This will never do. Too much time. . . ."

He siezed upon some wax. He roughed it together. He sat Rickey on a chair and began modelling the corrugated features of the big bodyguard. Manton called, "I say, old boy, that's asking too much of yourself, isn't it?"

John said, "Yeah. It sure is. I do that regularly!"

**M**ANTON bit his lip, was silent. The wax under John's hands continued to take form. Rickey stole a glance at it, and ejaculated. "Cheeses and cream! It looks like me!"

Manton wheeled and stared. He said crisply, "I apologize, Wade!"

John revolved the head. It was crude, but it did resemble Rickey. John's long, slender fingers were nervous tentacles of his restive mind. He took more wax, began on Jean. He did not have to pose the girl. He knew each lineament too well.

Manton said, "I think the Governor might retire, now."

John went over and touched the finished head. "Show me how to put the



hair on. I have it in a box—over yonder. Wig-maker gave it to us.”

The likeness of the Governor was startling. There were paints, and Manton’s knowledge of color went to work mixing the proper shades of coloring. John adjusted the white hair. The dawn came up over Midburg, but none of the members of the party in the basement were aware of it.

They finished the Governor, and Manton said, “I wouldn’t have believed it—but you were right, Wade. With your help we can do it.”

They worked on, snatching a bit of sleep in relays when their hands fumbled from exhaustion. It was four in the afternoon when the last head was done, and John exchanged glances with a hatchet-faced, wax likeness of himself.

Manton, dripping with sweat, was done in. He threw himself down and said, “You are all quite phenomenal people, you know! This could not have been done. It is impossible.”

“That is the way it had to be done,” said John. “We’re up against a ruthless killer, backed by a master mind of some caliber—a mind which can conceive broad operations such as timed murder attacks. The Mastiff Plant job was only the beginning. After a day’s haul, to put us off our guards, they will strike again. They killed Porter Kale—therefore they intend hitting at civilian morale. They killed Colonel Rankin, so they must be going to have a whack at the army air fields or the camp. It is comparatively easy to figure what they will do—but not when and where. One thing we know—they fear us and if given the chance to kill the Governor, they will first attempt that.”

Manton said, “These heads—where do they go?”

“You will excuse me for not saying,” murmured John. “You have helped us tremendously. Perhaps your skill will save thousands of lives—much property. But it would be better if you did not know what is planned. Will you sleep here? Jean will get your meals sent in. We’ll be back in a few hours.”

Rickey was putting the finished heads into hat boxes.

Manton frowned. “That sounds as though I were a prisoner.”

“Doesn’t it?” said John pleasantly.

“But—why?” asked Manton.

“No reason,” said John gently. “Just take a sleep, like a good fellow, eh?”

Manton said, “Now see here. . . . Miss Morrow, I appeal to you. I’m a well-known Nazi-hater. I want to go through with this. I think I deserve a chance.”

Jean said, “Couldn’t we use him, John? He’s been awfully good about it, you know.”

John arose wearily. He said, “I don’t like it. I never like taking outsiders into our plans. But if Jean asks—could you keep quiet, obey orders without question?”

Manton said, “Try me!”

John considered. Then he said, “Go with Rickey to Mad Morgan’s. Help him set up the heads—taking Morgan’s directions. Maybe you can help at that—maybe you can stay among the figures, if you want to risk death.”

They brought out a stretcher, and John placed the wax head of the Governor thereupon. They bundled clothing beneath the sheet, making it appear as though Fortney Castle was being carried out. John called Pete’s Place and said, “Send up the ambulance. We’ve got to keep this from the public, you know. Mad Morgan’s the man to pull the Governor through.”

On the other end, Pete’s voice said, “Okay, John.”

In a little while two men entered the basement room. They were dressed in white, but they did not look like internes nor hospital attendants. They looked like strong-arm men.

They were. They lifted the stretcher, now laden with hunks of pig-iron to make up the weight of the Governor. They carried it carefully upstairs and placed it in the black, mysterious ambulance without a name-plate. They drove off to Mad Morgan’s, and Guy Manton was with them.

Jean said, “Guy resembles his brother. Anyone spotting him will think Dr. Manton is attending the Governor on his trip.”

“Smart!” said John. “You like this guy Manton, Jean?”

“Yes!” she said. He’s quick and clever

and a fighter. He's a fine fellow."

"You know that somewhere in defense circles there has been a leak," said John slowly. "The timing of those raids, the death of Kale and Rankin—and of Morgan's poor nurse—the wounding of the Governor—someone had mighty good inside information."

"Certainly not through Guy Manton!" exclaimed Jean.

"Through some trusted person." John lifted the head of Jean Morrow from its hat box. "This fellow is mighty good—and quick. He said it couldn't be done—but he did it. Who else in Midstate can do work like this?"

"I don't believe it was Guy!" said Jean. "I tell you, that man is all right! I'm hardly ever wrong about these things, John. Guy Manton is not a crook—and he is a real patriot!"

John said, "All right, Jean. We won't quarrel." The phone rang and she was talking to Dr. Manton about the Governor.

John replaced the blonde head, touching it gently with his fingertips. The iron bit deeply as she defended the handsome young sculptor. But he had always expected that a younger man would come along, he had often determined to step aside should Jean find herself interested in a man nearer her own age. Maybe now was the time. Certainly, he could not expect her to wait forever while a crook made up his devious mind to ask her to marry him.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Strange Suicide

**M**AD MORGAN wore a strip of adhesive tape upon a shaved head. He looked more than ever like a mummy. He said to John, "Come across the street. Look!"

They went out of the sanitarium and around the block via the back door and deep shadows. They stood across the street and looked up at the second story of Mad Morgan's pleasant white house.

The lights were not too strong, but they gave a good picture of a sick room, with a nurse moving about. Guy Manton passed in front of the light. Raised upon a pillow,

the pale face of Governor Castle was plain to see. Jean Morrow was beyond him, notebook in hand. Rickey stood near the door, menacing in his bulk.

And at the foot of the bed, leaning forward, was John Wade himself, faultlessly attired in a double-breasted suit from Bond Street, a carefully contrived cravat, his thin face earnest, as though he spoke urgently to the Governor.

Morgan chuckled. "Perfect." He whistled, and the shades were immediately drawn by the nurse. "With Manton to give it life, the scene is unbelievably true. You should be a stage director, John."

John said, "Yes, perhaps. Anything—except a crook!"

They went back, swiftly, by the same devious route. They went through the darkened lower floor of the house, to where Rickey and Jean awaited them.

John said, "I've got four State Policemen in the room with the Governor at his place. The cops everywhere are alert and waiting. The army is on its toes, and I don't believe we can slip up. But whoever is on the inside and is tipping off the enemy will also know all that. The blow tonight will be at us—as guardians of the public welfare. Some joke!"

Rickey said sturdily, "We been guard-in' it plenty, pal."

Jean said, "Guy Manton says he intends to stay up there, to move when the signal is given. Then whoever watches will know that a live man is in the room—and will never suspect our wax figures."

"A brave man," said John. He was almost convinced about Guy Manton. Jean was never wrong in her estimate of people. Himself a hunch player, John had deep respect for the decisions of the girl he loved. "All we can do is stay out of sight and wait. Pete is to let out the word that the Governor is hiding here. They should make an attack."

Rickey picked up Mr. Thomas, the machine gun which he had saved through the years since he had ridden booze trucks for certain bootleg kings. He had newly procured a part which he had long been needing, and the old gun was working in fine order. Rickey could write his name on a moving screen with his favorite

*(Please turn to page 108)*



# WHEN GANGDOM RULED

AN ILLUSTRATED CHRONICLE OF THE TURBULENT TWENTIES by WINDAS

"When thieves fall out, honest men come by their own."

At no time in our history was this old adage more aptly illustrated than in the torrid twenties, when organized outlaws occupied the seats of the mighty. Bitter and vicious rivalry was often the Nemesis of those Caliphs of Crime. Spike Zeigler (whose beer-trucks literally hauled liquid gold for their owner throughout the length and breadth of New Jersey) died in his luxurious office at the hand of his smooth-faced rival Petrio Spinelli



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## DETECTIVE TALES

weapon. He said, "I want a ringside seat. I want that Mike Canniff."

"There's a woman—Sal Smart," said John. "There's Obie Smart and Ringy Scholtz. Then there will be others—bundsmen who have been saved by Senator Blank and his ilk. It will be an attack with bombs—grenades—everything. They'll try to burn the house."

"Trying to scare us, John?" Mad Morgan grinned. The doctor looked like a lean wolf. He spun two huge Colt .44 revolvers on his trigger fingers.

Jean held her .22, with which she was more than competent. John's two .38's were in his coat pockets, with extra cartridges. Upstairs, Guy Manton carried a brace of automatic pistols from Mad Morgan's arsenal of weapons taken from criminals who had been treated under this roof.

John got up. "I'm going outside. The rest of you stay here. Rickey will cover me."

Jean said, "Let Rickey go with you!" "Beefy and Jeems are covering the back." He smiled at Jean's concern for him. It was good that she thought of his safety—but there was a handsome young man upstairs who would be much better for her than John Wade.

He slid out like a silent ghost. This would be a good time to get killed, he thought. His wound throbbled—it had been infected, and he should not be exerting himself. That run at the Mastiff Plant hadn't helped any. He wondered where the killers had hidden the boxes of old Caleb and his helpers. He wondered who was tipping off Mike Canniff and the Nazi agents.

A car went through the street at normal speed, a coupé with a low license number. John read the figures on the plate and sucked in his breath.

**H**E HAD been partially right, then. His instinct had only deviated a trifle from the truth. Once again he had detected crookedness where apparently there was only the normal, respectable, everyday existence of a citizen of Midburg.

Before he could do more than glance up at the windows behind which the wax

**MODEL FOR MANSLAUGHTER**

mummies and Guy Manton were placed, there were two more cars. One came from the north, the other from the south. They were roomy jobs; not new, heavy. John threw a handful of pebbles at the second story window.

He could hear Manton move across the room. The window shade snapped up. John poised with more pebbles. As the nearest of the two sedans got within range of the window, he tossed stones again, to warn Manton to re-draw the shade, as though its snapping upward had been an accident.

Manton faithfully withdrew the blind. The two sedans came together, paused. John wondered if the scene had been duly noted, holding his breath, his eyes straining at the dimness. He chucked a pebble at the downstairs window, where Rickey waited with Mr. Thomas. Beefy and Jeems would be at the rear. . . .

A man hurtled from one of the sedans. He reached the back, threw something. John ran forward, crouched low behind a hedge. The object sailed through the air, glinting a bit in the light of the corner arc lamp. John intercepted it. There were no shots at the upper window!

John hurled back, sending the grenade from whence it came. It exploded too soon, midway, but it started the small war.

One car roared away. The other de-bouched men who ran forward, guns in their hands, firing as they came.

It was all making a clear pattern. John thanked heaven that he had left the Governor at home, under safe guard. These men were not deceived by wax figures.

He rested on one knee, lightly. He heard the whispering song of lead. He leveled his two revolvers. He was not, and never would be, a fancy shot. But he had been under fire before and there was unyielding steel within him. He deliberately potted the leader, who carried the sub-machine gun. He saw the man go down, saw another trip over him. He killed the second man on the ground, without compunction.

This was like being on the front. They had denied him service in uniform, but his neat and somewhat gaudy sports coat and slacks would do for a costume.

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## DETECTIVE TALES

He saw the other deploying. There were at least a dozen of them. He could not spot Canniff or any of his gang. These were solid bundists, good targets with their thick bodies—

They began to outflank him, and he could not pick them off at leisure. He fired two more shots, then knew he was himself a target as bullets whipped past him into the white paint of Mad Morgan's house. He dropped to his belly, snaking through the grounds to the rear of the house, remembering the car which had fled.

The police and Army would be up pretty quick. They had to hold their own positions of strategic importance, where defense work might be hurt. But some of them would come at the sound of firing. Meantime, there was, somewhere in this darkness, Mike Canniff, the wolf.

Out in front, Mr. Thomas coughed. Rickey was going into action. Rickey would hold off an army with his skill on that typewriter. John covered the rear, wondering at the silence.

Suddenly a woman came fleeing. She called "Beefy! Jeems! They're after me! Let me in, pals!"

She came into a light place, and John recognized Sal Smart. She was taking a chance that the underworld never forgets a pal, that Jeems and Beefy would not know that she was tied up with the mob who attacked their employer.

John cried, "Get her, Jeems!"

Beefy was already outdoors, going to help the woman. She ran past him. Shots sounded from the garage. Beefy howled in pain and skidded upon his face. Jeems did not hesitate. He fired point-blank with the shot-gun.

Sal Smart reeled, screaming. Jeems deliberately let her have the other barrel. A fusillade of shots raked the house. Jeems called out once, then tumbled down the backstairs.

John waited, not firing. He wanted to catch the rush. He saw them coming, eight or nine of them. He held his revolvers steady, pumping lead.

Three piled up in the van. The others were checked. Mike Canniff came, then around the edge of the garage, the last of the pack. His thin, distorted face pointed

## MODEL FOR MANSLAUGHTER

at John. He called in a high, sing-song voice:

"Over here, you jerks! Wade! Get him first!"

He had a machine gun of his own, one of the new type. He propped the butt against his middle, threw its muzzle around at the spot from whence John had fired. He cut loose a barrage of leaden pellets, writing death.

But John had moved. John was heading like a dark streak for the rear of the contingent of attackers. And from the building came Mad Morgan's steady hammering of long-barrelled Colts, and then the slight whine of a .22. And finally, from upstairs, glass crashed and an automatic spoke its flat speech.

John made the last turn about the garage. He called, even then unwilling to do murder from behind, "Here I am, Mike! Try it over here!"

**MIKE CANNIFF** came around. The machine gun was heavy, and the jail years had made him a bit slow. John fired twice, aiming low.

The gun clattered on the concrete. Mike Canniff shrieked, seizing his middle with both hands. John came forward, reloading his guns with sure, nimble fingers.

Mike Canniff drummed his feet upon the ground. Beyond him lay men in distorted positions. Obie Smart dragged his gun arm up, but John heard the automatic crack again, and Obie dropped back beside his dead wife.

Mad Morgan's voice called, "There's some left—but I hear the Army trucks coming."

"Stay in the house!" called John. "Let the Army take over."

He suddenly had made up his mind to look into the bandit cars. He raced around front. A lurking figure in the grounds fired at him and missed. He skidded across the street as the six by ten came to a screeching halt. He spoke briefly to the young lieutenant in charge. Uniformed men with fixed bayonets began combing the grounds of Mad Morgan's sanitarium. A man came running from the house.

John said, "Manton! I told you to stay inside!"



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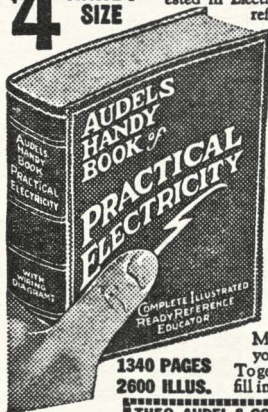
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## DETECTIVE TALES

Manton's face was hard. He said, "I had a thought. Are you looking for that first car? It drove away. I could see the back street from the second floor."

John crawled from behind the wheel of the first sedan. He said, "All right. Let's go."

They drove swiftly, avoiding the main streets, trying to pick up the trail. Quite by chance, they saw a tail-light swinging and raced after it. The car was big and resembled the bandit machine. They tailed it, silent, each thinking his own thoughts.

The car stopped, a man got out. He began loping towards a taxicab which was parked at a corner. Guy Manton leaned out the window. He held the automatic in his hand.

John slowed, giving him a chance to aim. "Wound him! We'll want to talk to him," he cautioned.

The man was in plain view, under a corner light. John stared, said, "Good Lord, man!"

The automatic spoke. The tall figure fell sideways, rolled over in the gutter. The taxi driver leaped about four feet, drove frantically away.

John bent over the dead man. He said, "Your own brother! You've killed him, Guy!"

Guy Manton's face was whiter than ashes. "He could model. Very well. I remembered it—didn't want to give him away. I hoped he'd get killed—tonight. When we were kids—he was a better sculptor than I. He studied medicine in Germany—while I was in Paris."

John put his hand on the other's shoulder. "You're a very brave man, Guy."

"He was always cleverer than I!" said Manton, his voice tortured. "He wanted to be a sculptor, but he had to make money. He went into medicine. He had genius, I tell you! He was a fine doctor—but he studied in Germany. . . . He went back often, after 'thirty-two. I knew he had the confidence of the Nazis, but I thought that was all over, when we got into it. . . ."

John said, "It's tough on you, pal."

"Now—I'll be marked. I was getting into the Air Corps," said Manton. "That'll be finished. The girl—in Canada



## MODEL FOR MANSLAUGHTER

—who is waiting for me— This is bad for me, John, but I had to kill him. He's the brains of this gang, I tell you! I know he has been tipping them off. . . ."

John remembered the phone call to Jean, just as they had finished their terrible night's work at the wax figures. It had been Doctor Manton, inquiring about the Governor's health.

John said suddenly, "Girl? You've got a girl?"

Guy Manton said, "Jean knows. She's been so good to me!"

John said energetically, "Look! You go back and reassure Jean. Don't mention your brother—to anyone. Just forget all about it. That's his car. I recognized the number on the license, back there. I did suspect him, and you too, for awhile, you know. . . . You'll never have to pay for his murders, Guy."

Manton stammered, "Why—that's impossible. You'll get into trouble, John!"

"Your brother committed suicide," said John flatly. "And if I can't frame that, I'm a helluva ex-crook! He'll be found in his own garage, with the weapon in his hand. Gimme that gun. I'll have to file off some numbers, maybe, in a hurry. Now you go back and pacify Jean! Hurry!"

He was placing the body of Doctor Manton in his car, with almost super-human display of strength. He was climbing in, pushing the open-mouthed Guy towards Mad Morgan's house. He stuck his head out and called:

"And send my love to Canada with a wire telling her you're in the Air Force!"

He drove off beside the corpse of the brains of the Nazi underground in Mid-state. The brains were leaking a little from a hole in Doctor Manton's head.

But John was whistling, *Praise The Lord and Pass The Ammunition*, quite gaily. Somehow or other he had always felt kindly towards the Canadians—more like our own people!

Jean should probably have a nice young man for herself. But perhaps Guy Manton wasn't exactly the right one! And after all, anyone could make figures out of clay—at least out of wax. Hadn't John practically proved that?

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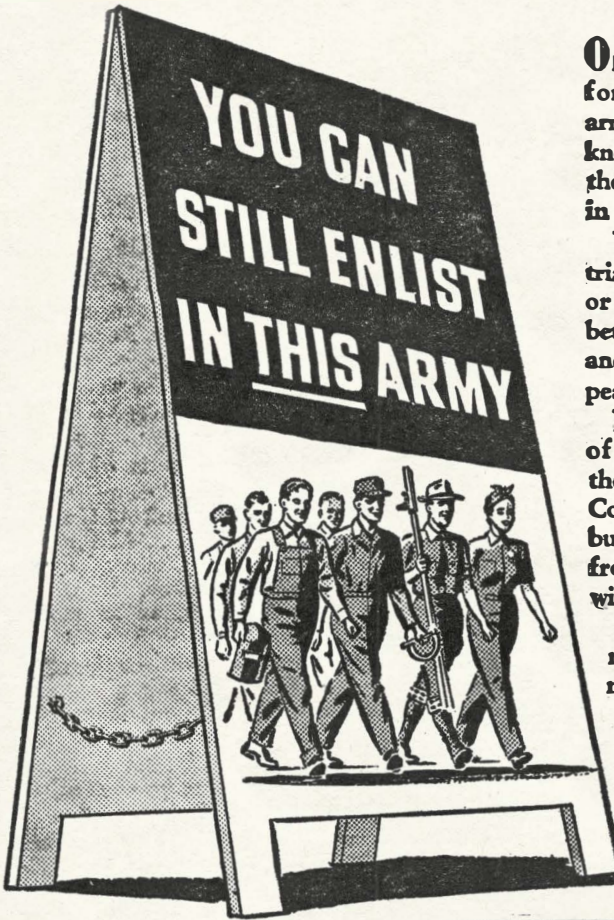
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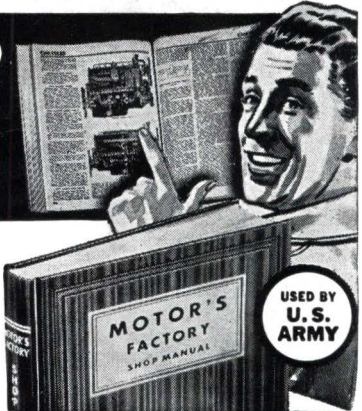
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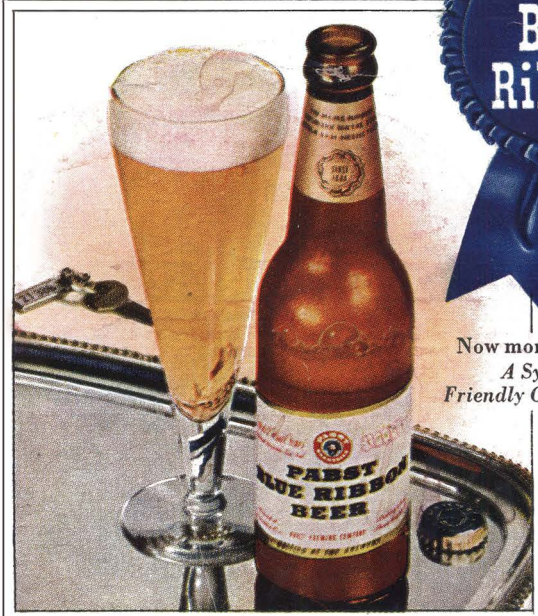
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so nice and befriending  
As Blue Ribbon Beer with its  
*full-flavor blending*—  
That softer and kindlier taste,  
Pabst obtains,  
By blending it just like the  
finest champagnes."



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Now more than ever—  
A Symbol of  
Friendly Companionship

Now that wartime has brought a return to simple pleasures in Blue Ribbon Town (your town—everybody's town), Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer has become, more than ever, the symbol of friendly companionship. Enjoy that softer, kindlier taste—obtained by the FULL-FLAVOR BLENDING of 33 master brews.

Pabst is blended like fine champagnes—to give you *all* the delicious taste tones of a well-rounded beer. There is no finer beer in all the world than Pabst Blue Ribbon.

**33 FINE BREWS BLENDED**  
into One Great Beer

In standard 12 ounce and full quart size bottles.  
Also on draught at better places everywhere.