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by **DAY KEENE**

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by **JOHN K. POLITO**



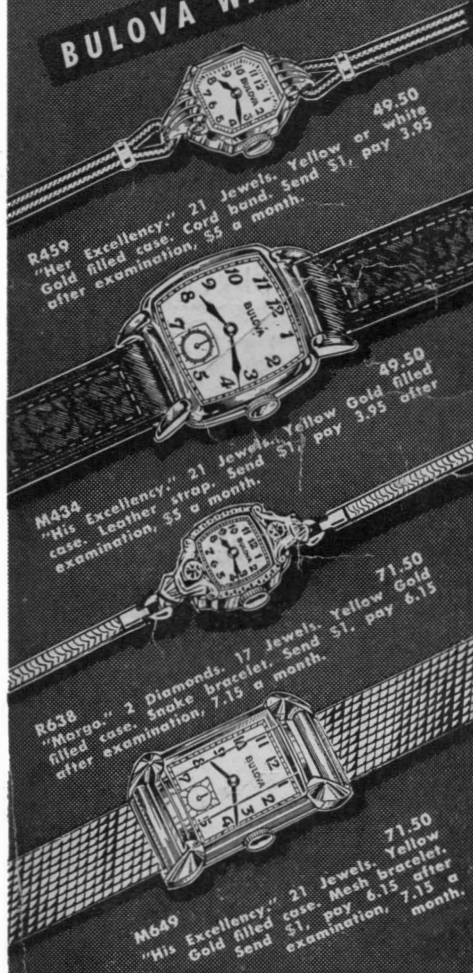
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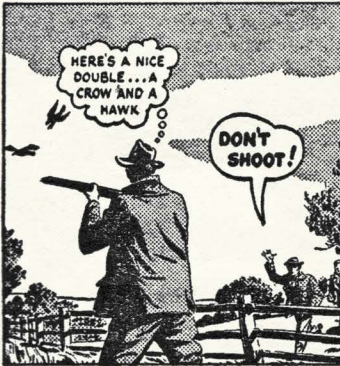
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VOL. FORTY-TWO

APRIL, 1949

NUMBER ONE

Two Dynamic Murder Novels

1. **HOMICIDAL BABY** *Day Keene* 8
—they called her, and all the corpses that studded Chicago could testify that it was a good name. Likewise, Detective Herman "The Great" Stone—who felt her lead pipe on his skull!
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BLOOD WILL TELL!

By

EDWARD D. RADIN

There's many a murder secret hidden in a little drop of blood—and Blood Sleuth Alexander S. Wiener is the man who can make even a corpuscle talk!

IF YOU are planning to commit a murder—don't sweat, blow your nose or smoke a cigarette. If you do any of these things, you may be leaving the equivalent of an engraved calling card at the murder scene for Dr. Alexander S. Wiener.

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To hear Dr. Wiener explain it, there is no magic in it at all. It is simply a matter of typing such things as sweat absorbed by garments, nasal spray in handkerchiefs, and saliva stains on cigarette butts. Under questioning he will admit that tracking down such slender clues is a bit on the elusive side.

During the past few years the science of identification by blood-typing has leaped forward in giant strides, with discoveries by Dr. Wiener playing an important role. And it doesn't make any difference where you live, since the blood detective has

(Continued on page 123)

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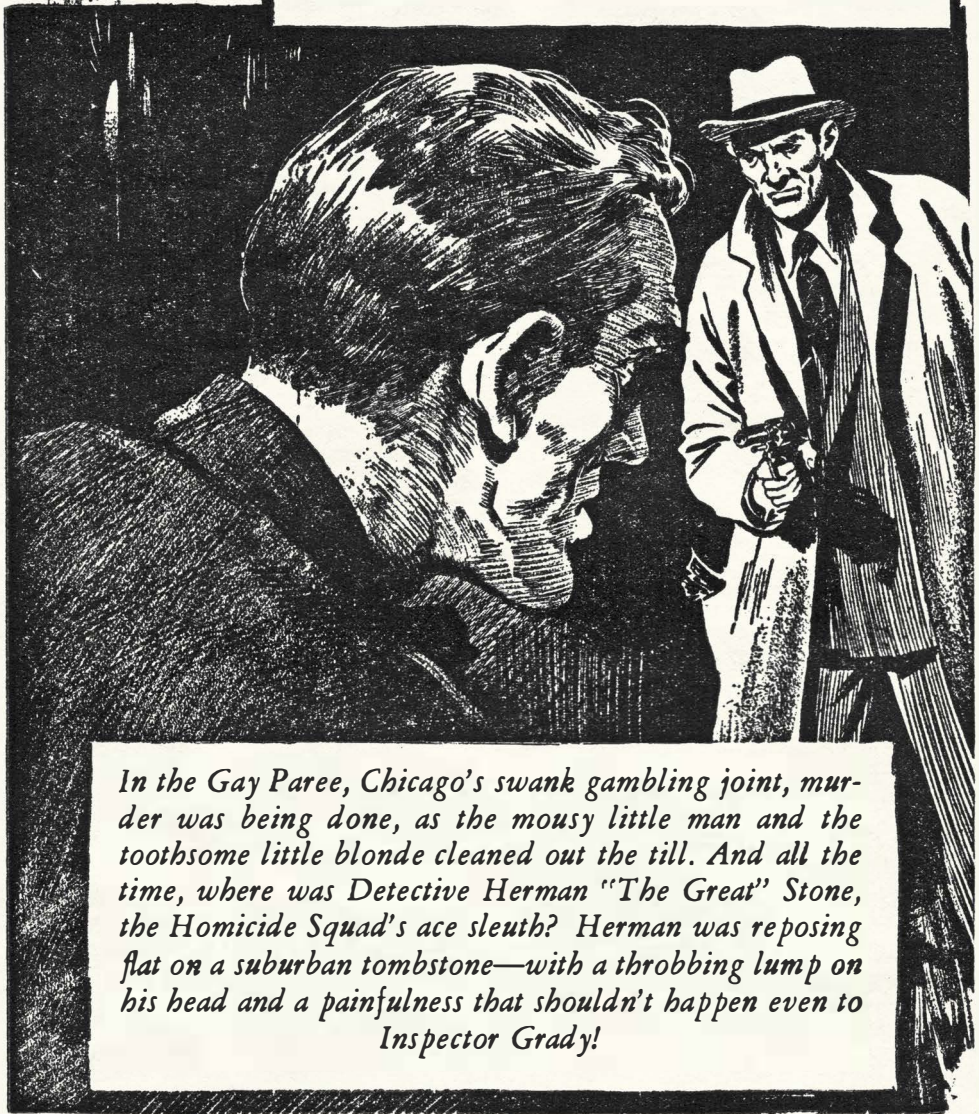
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HOMICIDAL BABY

By DAY KEENE



In the Gay Paree, Chicago's swank gambling joint, murder was being done, as the mousy little man and the toothsome little blonde cleaned out the till. And all the time, where was Detective Herman "The Great" Stone, the Homicide Squad's ace sleuth? Herman was reposing flat on a suburban tombstone—with a throbbing lump on his head and a painfulness that shouldn't happen even to Inspector Grady!

CHAPTER ONE

The Three-Eyed Corpse

THE MAN, three-eyed now, lay on his fat belly on the carpet, the muzzle of the gun in his hand pointed at the small hole in the baseboard. The mouse, its eyes bright with excitement, ready to retreat if need be, padded halfway out of the hole and stood waiting to see if the man would move.

He didn't. Emboldened, the mouse came into the room. The giant who had made his life miserable with traps and hurled objects would bother him no more. The outstretched hand was cold. The third eye oozed a cloying sweetness. Wrinkling his snoot in distaste the mouse ran nimbly up the leg of the table. The waiting



There was a second pop as the blonde pulled the trigger of her gun. "Hurry," she told her companion.

feast was even more ample than he had dared to hope. Moving between the beer bottles and loose gems on the table, the mouse nibbled first at one then at another of the three swiss cheese on rye sandwiches on which the dead man on the floor had wasted one dollar and twenty cents. . . .

* * *

A big blond man in his early thirties with the bland smile of a Chinese laundryman who has just been informed he has the winning ticket on the Irish Sweepstakes, the physique of an early Greek god, and the heart—as far as crime was concerned—of a Levantine pawnbroker trying to accumulate money to pay his passage to the United States, Herman Stone, more frequently called Herman the Great because of his uncanny ability to pick murderers out of thin air, was bored.

He showed it in a dozen ways. He had no appetite. He had barely been able to finish the second of the two sirloin steaks he had ordered for lunch. A barman had offered him a free beer and he hadn't even heard him. Lost in his blue study, he raked in pot after pot in the squad-room poker game with none of his usual elation or caustic comments on his fellow squad men's poker-playing ability. He whistled betimes, off-key, the cheerful childhood favorite, the words to which run:

Oh when you see the hearse go by,
You know that somebody's going to die.
They'll lower him down into the ground
Where there is no air or light or sound.
For he is dead and done with life,
And somebody else will marry his wife.

He had reason to be bored. As far as the homicide squad was concerned, business, even in that city of known and frequent violence, Chicago, was bad. What few murders there were presented little or no challenge to his agile mind. True, husbands and wives provoked beyond human endurance still hit each other over the head with sash weights and whiskey bottles, but they also as promptly got ginned up and phoned the nearest precinct station for a cop to come over and listen to a detailed confession.

It was no longer necessary to be smart to hold down a berth on the homicide squad. If a confession wasn't forthcoming even before the body was found, the tech squad, with its powders and test tubes and cameras and chemicals, picked up the corpse and ran it for a touchdown before a homicide man could say, "And where were you at eight o'clock on the night of September 18th?"

THE BIG MAN sighed as he looked at the deuce in the hole that backed the ten showing, and automatically stayed when Inspector Grady bet half a dollar on the aces he had backed. No one tried to get away with murder any more. They either did and were never suspected or they promptly confessed and put their faith and their lives into the hands of a high-priced lawyer.

He caught a ten to match the one showing on the fourth card and saw the dollar raise thinking of the good old days and still whistling tunelessly while Grady and Harry Purvis and Miles Hart and Jack Beamer squirmed.

He was pleased, but only midly, when his last card was a deuce and his two pair beat Inspector Grady's aces. Not so Inspector Grady. He took his poker seriously. Sweeping the cards from the table with apoplectic fury he ordered, "Out! Get out of here, Herman, and stay out until you're fit company for pigs! How can a man read his cards when a nitwit sits there whistling and throwing away good money with only a stinking deuce in the hole?"

Stone got meekly to his feet. He wasn't a coward. He had a dozen commendations for bravery on his record card. He feared neither man nor devil. But the hot-tempered little inspector was another matter. There are no detectives in Chicago. All are policemen assigned to detective duty. And Inspector Grady had the power to put him back in uniform. He didn't like his uniform. He hadn't worn it for six years. It was too small for him. Besides, the last time he had looked at his uniform pants it was evident that a flight of moths had lunched on their most strategic part.

He wanted to know where he should go. It was an effort for Inspector Grady

not to tell him. "Anywhere out of my sight," he spluttered.

"And when I'm fit company for pigs again I can come back?"

Busily shuffling the cards for the new deal, Inspector Grady nodded. "When you're fit company for pigs you can—" He stopped short, glowering at the door closing behind Stone's broad back.

Out in the corridor, still whistling tunelessly off-key, Stone debated between a beer, dropping down stairs to see how Sweet Reward had made out in the fourth race at Narragansett, and quitting the force entirely and moving out to the Skokie Valley and raising Muscovy ducks for a living.

He was still debating the fine points of each when the irate woman with the meek little man in tow attracted his attention by poking him in the vest with her umbrella and demanding to know if he was a policeman.

"There is some discussion," he admitted. He brushed the dropped ash of his cigar thoughtfully into the lapel of the expensive salt and pepper tweed that he was wearing. "But on the whole I think I can safely say I am."

Her thin nostrils pinched even closer together. "Then I want you to arrest this man." She pointed her umbrella at the little man in the shabby blue serge suit who was valiantly trying to swallow his oversized Adam's apple. "I'm Mrs. Clinton DeWitt." She added as an afterthought, "We're married. And I want my husband arrested."

A good judge of such matters, Stone had never seen a more unattractive woman. She was flat where she should bulge and bulged where she should be flat. Her face was innocent of makeup. Her nose was shiny. Her lifeless looking hair was gathered in a hard bun on the back of her neck. On her, the New Look looked as if it belonged. He looked from her to the man. They were well mated. A colorless man of slight stature, in his early or middle thirties, he didn't look physically capable of committing any breach of the penal code. "What did you do?" Stone asked him.

DeWitt defended himself. "I didn't do a thing, Officer. It's all in Matilda's mind. I never went out with that woman Mrs.

Kincaid said she saw me with. I certainly didn't kiss and fondle her in a night club. I've never been in a night club in my life. And all I was doing was standing on the corner of Jackson and Michigan Boulevard counting the pigeons on the stone lions in front of the Art Institute when the man with the green tie came up to me and insisted he owed me the five thousand dollars because a horse named Pegasus had just came in first."

Mrs. DeWitt sniffed, "A likely story."

STONE passed a hand over his eyes. Some days it would be a lot better if a man stayed in bed.

Mrs. DeWitt opened her purse and displayed a sheaf of bills. "I have the money right here. He's a cheat and a thief, and I want him locked up." Her voice was rich with scorn. "A man gave him the five thousand dollars. It's more likely he got it from that blonde he's been running around with! Although why any woman would want to give *him* money is more than I can understand."

Stone relighted his cigar. "I'm sorry," he informed the woman, "but I think you're in the wrong department. The Court of Domestic Relations is down on the third floor."

The man appealed to Stone. "But I don't want to be taken to court. If my boss found out about it, he might fire me. I didn't do a thing, honest. Believe me, Officer. Can I help it if someone who looks like me is running around with a blonde? Can I help it if a man mistakes me for someone else and insists on giving me money? What was I to do? Drop it in the street?"

A firm believer in money and the capitalistic system, the big detective was shocked by the thought of such sacrilege. His common sense told him to tell the DeWitts to be on their way. His curiosity impelled him to ask, "You were just standing there on the corner of Jackson and Michigan Boulevard when this guy comes up and slips you five thousand bucks?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'd never seen him before?"

"No, sir."

"And you hadn't put any dough on Pegasus?" Stone considered. Pegasus had

paid ten dollars for two. "A thousand dollars?"

DeWitt spread his hands. "Where would I get that kind of money to bet? I make sixty-two dollars and fifty cents a week. I indorse my pay check and turn it over to Matilda. She gives me back lunch money and car fare. I ask you, where would I get hold of a thousand dollars?"

Mrs. DeWitt whaled at him with her umbrella. "From that dirty little blonde Grace Kincaid saw you with. She said she was filthy with diamonds. I'll teach you to cheat on me! I'll kill you both and then I'll divorce you, you philanderer, that's what I'll do!"

That, if she could do it, Stone thought, would be a neat trick. He was reaching for the umbrella to save the little man further punishment when Harry Purvis, followed by Hart and Beamer strode out of the squad room. Purvis tossed his hat and top coat to him.

"A call from the Quincy Hotel," Purvis said, without breaking his stride. "A maid just found Turk Chorum shot through the head."

From the doorway of the squadroom, Grady said, "Now that you have something to occupy what passes with you for a mind, maybe you'll come halfway human again."

"That could be," Stone admitted. Struggling into his camel's hair topcoat, he fitted his forty-dollar Borsalino to his head and started after Purvis and Hart and Beamer—only to remember his duty to the taxpayers as represented by Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt. "Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt, Inspector Grady," he introduced them. He patted Mrs. DeWitt on the shoulder. "Now you just tell the inspector everything you told me and I am certain he will be most helpful."

Grady studied the couple with a jaundiced eye. "This has to do with homicide?"

"Believe me. It's murder," Stone said. He strode off, whistling, down the hall, the woman's voice rising petuantly behind him as she informed the inspector:

"I am Mrs. Clinton DeWitt. My husband has been cheating on me with a blonde hussy. And I want you to put him in jail."

CHAPTER TWO

The Blonde and the Mousy Man

IN LIFE Chorum had been a big man. He was still huge. But he was just so much worm meat now. Squatted on the floor beside him, Stone called his shots.

"A .38. Death instantaneous. Some time between twelve o'clock midnight last night and two o'clock this morning." He felt the dead man's cheek. "Say closer to midnight than two. He knew and trusted the guy who shot him. His gun was put in his hand afterwards."

Purvis wrote down the information as fact. He knew from past experience that the coroner's examination would back Stone's offhand observations.

Examining the diamonds on the beer-bottle and sandwich-littered table, Miles Hart, the newest member of the squad, wanted to know, "What color were the killer's eyes, Herman?"

"Green. Just like yours," Stone told him. He got to his feet and, lighting a fresh cigar, stood looking at the dead man. Turk Chorum wouldn't be missed except by a few second-story men and jewel thieves. Chorum had been a known, if unconvicted, fence for years.

Coloring, Hart said, "Funny whoever killed him didn't take the rocks. There must be twenty or thirty thousand dollars worth here on the table."

Purvis looked at the loose stones scattered on the table in between the bottles and the crusts of sandwiches. "I can answer that one. A few of those smaller ones are diamonds, but the bigger ones are zircons. I'd estimate their value at closer to eight hundred than thirty thousand dollars."

Stone glanced at the stones, then nodded. "Could be someone pulled a fast one on Turk. They could have told him they had a bunch of hot ice to sell and for him to have plenty of folding money on tap. But Turk had been in the racket for years. He knew at a glance, just like Harry did, that the rocks were zircons not diamonds. Probably whoever was trying to peddle them lost his head and let Turk have it between the eyes." Being careful not to disturb the position

of the body he searched it. "Clean as a preacher's mind," he reported. "Nothing but some silver."

The first of the tech squad bustled in, followed by a youthful coroner's assistant. Stone glanced at the table again, then inclined his head toward the hall. Hart and Purvis followed him out. Beamer, the fourth member of the squad, was coming down the hall herding ahead of him a chambermaid, a bell boy and a tousled-haired man in a dressing gown. He introduced them as the maid who had found the body, the boy who had delivered the beer and sandwiches, and the night desk clerk.

Purvis nodded them into an empty room across the hall. Nominally the head of the homicide squad, he and Stone had worked together for years. Usually what one man missed the other man picked up. Being questioned by them as a team was like being run over by a vacuum cleaner.

Stone kicked off. "What time did you find the body?"

The maid said, "Two o'clock. Or maybe a few minutes after."

"Why wait until two o'clock to make up the room?"

"Because there was a Do Not Disturb sign on the door."

"I see. The door was locked."

"Yes, sir."

Purvis caught the ball. "You're the boy who delivered the beer and food?"

"Yes, sir. That was last night, of course."

"What time last night?"

"I'd say eleven forty-five. Maybe a few minutes later."

Purvis lifted his eyebrows at Stone. He said, "There was a man and a woman with Chorum." It was a statement not a question. "Describe the woman."

The bell boy grinned, "Believe me, Officer, that's a pleasure. She was young, in her twenties, blonde, and really built. She was wearing a black suit, but she had the coat off. And a low-cut blouse which she filled out plenty. More, she's sitting with her legs crossed and—"

"A tart?"

THE BELL BOY shook his head. "No. I wouldn't say so. She acted more like she was acting tough. But she was still

one hot-looking number, believe me, Officer."

"And the man?"

"A mousy-looking guy in a blue serge suit. But he didn't need to act tough. He was. As soon as Mr. Chorum had paid me for the beer and sandwiches he gave me a slow once-over and told me to blow. And I did."

"This was between eleven forty-five and midnight?"

"Yes, sir."

Stone asked the desk clerk if he had anything to add to the description. He said he had not, but he agreed with the bell boy that the blonde had been a honey.

Purvis asked, "How about the shot? It was reported?"

The desk clerk shook his head. "Not while I was on duty. And I didn't go off until eight o'clock this morning. The first intimation anything was wrong was when the officer woke me up."

"But ~~you~~ did know Turk was a jewel fence?"

The clerk said, "I'd be lying if I said I didn't. But as long as a guest doesn't raise too much hell the Quincy doesn't care what he does for a living. Yes, I'd heard said that Mr. Chorum was a fence."

Purvis thought a moment, then told Beamer to allow the clerk to dress and then take him and the bell boy back to the bureau and see if they could pick either the blonde or the mousy-looking, tough-acting man from the pictures in the known jewel thief file. He told Hart, "And you wander up and down the hall banging on doors. Find out if anyone heard the shot."

He and Herman the Great returned to the room across the hall. The assistant coroner reported:

"I'd say he was shot with a .38. I'll tell you for certain when we recover the slug. But death was instantaneous and he has been dead for about fourteen hours. Say a few minutes one side or the other of midnight."

Purvis showed him the notations in his book and the other man looked at Stone. "How do you do it, Herman?"

The big man assured him soberly, "I just say to myself, now if I was a corpse what caliber gun would I like to be shot with and what time would I like to die?"

The coroner picked up his bag, gave Stone a dirty look, and left the room. Neilson, one of the tech men, grinned at Purvis. "This is one for you guys, I'm afraid, I hope. We can give you the brand of the lipstick after we break it down. But that's about all we can give you. The room is filthy with prints, but they all belong to the dead guy." He nodded at the table. "What's the big idea? Someone try to peddle Turk some zircons for diamonds and when he put up a squawk they killed him?"

"It looks like it," Purvis admitted.

After getting an all clear from Neilson, Stone pawed through the junk on the dresser that the tech boys had taken from Chorum's pockets. There was a fistful of change, a watch, a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, a letter from a former client in Stateville, and a telephone number scrawled on a scrap of paper. He copied the number in his book.

Hart came back to report only two guests were in their rooms. They were a honeymoon couple, and both swore they hadn't heard a shot. The tech squad cameramen were finished with their pictures now and Purvis gave the newspaper pic boys a break. Cork Harris of the *Times* stopped him and Herman in the hall. "What's the good news, Harry? Who done Turk in?"

Purvis lighted a cigarette. "Your guess is as good as ours."

"Yeah," the reporter said wryly. "But I don't get paid for guessing. How about you, Herman? You want to go on record?"

The big man thought a moment, nodded. "Yes. You can say that Officer Herman Stone believes he can truthfully say without fear of successful contradiction that—"

"Yes?"

"That the deceased died at the hand or hands of a party or parties as yet unknown to the investigating officers."

The reporter thrust his pad back in his pocket. "A wise guy. Herman the Great."

The detective shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. "Give us a little time. What do you want us to do? Sneeze the killer's name off a Ouija board?" He relented. "If it will help you build a story,

though, there is a dame in it, Cork. And according to two guys who saw her she's an incendiary blonde with all the best features of Grable and Russell."

Stone was forgiven. The reporter grinned, "A homicidal baby, eh?"

"So it would seem," Stone said.

LEAVING Hart to hold down any possible developments at the hotel, he and Purvis continued to the street. In front of the hotel they parted, Purvis to return to his office to put into motion the wheels that would set a city-wide drag net under way, Stone to attempt to learn more of the homicidal baby and her mousy-looking companion.

He liked Cork Harris' definition of her. According to both the bell boy and the desk clerk, the little blonde was a babe. And Turk Chorum's present shortness of breath was definite proof that both she and her companion would kill if forced to do so.

He stood a moment looking up and down the street, then crossed over to the White Orchard Bar. A flash joint that got most of its play at night, it also did a good cocktail trade.

All the barmen knew him. Maxie reached for a bottle of rye, then, glancing out the curtained window at the police cars clustered in front of the Quinsy Hotel, returned to the backbar. "This a pleasure or business call, Herman?"

Stone straddled a stool. "Turk Chorum got it last night. Any of you guys happen to notice a hot little blonde in here shortly after midnight?"

"Lotsa blondes drink here," Maxie said. "I can't remember 'em individually."

"This one you'd remember," Stone told him. "I mean she is a hot-looking number, lots of curves and plenty of leg. She was wearing a black faille suit with a low-cut white blouse, a black hat to match the suit, and either a grey squirrel or a grey broadtail coat. The guy with her was little and mousy looking, wearing a blue serge, but neither of our witnesses remember what kind of a hat or coat he was wearing. He was that kind of a guy. One you can look at in a crowd and not even know he's there."

The barman from Station 4 said the couple sounded familiar. His face bright-

ened. "Yeah. Sure. Both of them drank a plumber and his helper. I remember them distinctly now because when he ordered she said it was a 'ver' fonny' name for a 'dreenk.' You know, like she was foreign or something."

"A blonde Mexican?" Stone puzzled.

The barman shook his head. "Naw. She didn't talk like that. I'd say she was French. You know, oo la la. But she wasn't in here after midnight, Herman. I'd say it was closer to eleven."

Stone filed the information away. "They didn't mention any names?"

"No, they didn't."

"What did he call her?"

"Baby." The barman grinned. "And take it from me, she was one. You ought to see her, Herman."

"I'd like to," the big detective admitted.

He walked up to Randolph Street and combed it from State Street to Wells. The couple had been in some places. They had passed others by. But in the places in which they had been, they had dropped in frequently for a period covering the past two weeks. One waiter thought the blonde was Polish. Another thought she was a Swede. Still another said he would swear that she was top-flight Castilian. All were agreed on one thing. She was a little honey. None of them remembered the man distinctly enough to describe him, but all agreed he was a fast man with a buck and seemed to have a limitless supply.

The street was a blaze of neon lights and the early theater crowd was beginning to fill the Loop when he called it an afternoon and phoned the Bureau.

Purvis had nothing to report. Neither the bell boy nor the desk clerk had been able to find the couple's pictures in the files. He had put out a city-wide pickup on the description he had. Hart and Beamer were giving the stool pigeons hell but had turned up nothing so far. The couple had been seen in fifty places but were known in none of them, and without a single fingerprint to go by, it was impossible to learn if they were in the Washington master file.

Learning Purvis was talking to Herman, Inspector Grady came in on his extension. He was still chewing his anger. "Look, Herman. Fun is fun. But we're

in the murder business, remember? And if you ever take up my valuable time again by siccing another nitwit, lame-brained couple like Mrs. DeWitt and that mouse of a husband of hers on me, you will be back in uniform and out in Cragin herding goats before you can say trial board."

Grady expounded at length on what could happen to even valuable homicide aces when they got too big for their britches. But Herman the Great wasn't listening. His eyes closed, he was remembering DeWitt. *DeWitt was small and mousy. But little men frequently could be tough, and were. DeWitt wore a blue serge suit. One of his wife's women friends had seen him in a night club fondling and kissing a blonde woman. He'd told his wife a fantastic story concerning five thousand dollars.*

Stone jiggled the cradle of the phone impatiently, then realized Grady was still talking.

". . . and furthermore—"

"Look. I love you," Stone told him. "I'm sorry. I'll be a good boy from now on. But for God's sake, shut up and hang up, will you, Inspector? I want to make a phone call."

"What?" Grady demanded to know. "What was that you said?"

"I said I wanted to make a phone call," Stone said meekly. "A very important phone call. We're in the murder business, remember?"

Grady slammed down his receiver. Stone got the operator, then a supervisor. "This is Officer Herman Stone of homicide," he told her. "Star 21324." He looked at the scrawled phone number he had copied in Turk Chorum's room. "I wonder if you would give me the street address and the name of the party listed for Merrimac 72136?"

A moment of silence followed. Then the supervisor said, "The address, Officer, is one-uh, five-uh, thr-ree, ny-on North Nagle Avenue. And the name that we have listed for that phone is a Mr. DeWitt."

OFFICIALLY on his own time now, Stone bought a shot of rye to cut the dust in his throat, then tamped it down with two hot roast beef sandwiches, a

braunschweiger on rye, a second braunschweiger, and two steins of beer, before he phoned Connie to tell her he wouldn't be home for supper.

She wanted to know if he had eaten.

"Just a light snack," he told her. "Keep whatever you have hot in the oven."

Her words were verbal tapping toes. "And just how am I supposed to keep a planked white fish hot in the oven? It won't be fit to eat. Sometimes I wish I'd married a polar explorer. At least he would come home when he got cold."

His eyes thoughtful, Stone ate a bologna on whole wheat for dessert, washed his tonsils with another beer, and took a cab to within a block of the Nagle address. It proved to be near North Avenue, just across from Oak Park. There was a big bowling center on one corner. Behind it orderly rows of modest bungalows stretched into the soft fall night. There was a drugstore on the other corner. Stone bought a package of cigarettes and asked the druggist if he knew the Clinton DeWitt family.

The druggist grinned. "I guess everyone in the neighborhood knows them, brother. Especially since the brawl last night."

"Yeah?" Stone led him on. "What was the brawl about?"

"Well, the way I get it," the druggist confided, "she caught him cheating with some blonde. Anyway, Gracie Kincaid up the street saw them together and told Mrs. DeWitt about it. Then, on top of that, he came home last night with five thousand dollars he claimed some stranger had forced on him. But she wasn't having any. She figured he'd stolen the money to entertain the girl friend and called up the real estate firm where he works and tipped his boss. But the joker there was his boss said DeWitt's books were in order, so Mrs. DeWitt knew there was only one place where he could have gotten the money. From the blonde." The druggist polished his bald spot with his palm. "Boy. Would I like to meet a dame like that."

"Yeah. Me, too," Stone said. "What kind of a joe is this DeWitt?"

"That," the druggist chuckled, "is the payoff. He is a mousy, sawed-off-looking little guy you wouldn't think would have

nerve enough to say Lana Turner. He and his first wife lived on the street seven years without even causing a ripple. But since he married this battle-axe. Oh, brother." He realized he was talking too much. "But why all the questions? You a cop or a reporter or something?"

Stone showed him his star. "Yeah. Something like that. What's this Kincaid woman's address?"

Grace Kincaid was fair and fat and trying hard to conceal the fact that she was forty. She was more than pleased to talk. "I'll say I saw them together, not once but three times. And it's about time you cops did something about it." She finger-waved her hennaed hair. "Things have come to a pretty pass in this country when a little blonde tramp like that can break up the home of a good woman like Amy DeWitt.

Stone asked how long the DeWitts had been married.

She said, "Not long. Less than two months. That's what makes it so awful."

"You've talked to this blonde?" Stone asked her.

Mrs. Kincaid admitted she had not. DeWitt and his blonde companion kept strictly to themselves. They always sat in booths or dimly lighted corners where they could neck over their drinks. But she was positive the blonde was foreign. "She even wears a little black crescent beauty spot on one cheek. You know, like French women do. And you can see gold when she laughs." Mrs. Kincaid was smug about it. "And you should see the dives I've seen them in."

There was nothing she could tell him he didn't already know. He'd had enough of Grace Kincaid. There was always one in every neighborhood. "And just what were you doing in these dives?" he asked her. "Picking daisies or studying sociological conditions?"

She said she liked his nerve and slammed the door in his face. He stood a moment looking at the bungalow across the street in which the DeWitts lived. Despite the fact that it was only a little after eight o'clock the house was dark with the exception of a light in each of the two bedrooms. As he watched, Mrs. DeWitt came to one of the brightly lighted windows and pulled the shade. Her hair

being in paper curlers didn't add any to her charm. But as she turned sideways, drew her dress over her head and stood a moment silhouetted against the drawn shade, stretching her arms as she yawned, Herman the Great pursed his lips thoughtfully.

The pursing turned into a whistle as he walked to the end of the block, down to the alley, and came up on the bungalow from behind. Inspector Grady would have recognized the tune.

Oh when you see the hearse go by,
You know that somebody's going to die.
They'll lower him down into the ground
Where there is no air or light or sound.
For he is dead and done with life,
And somebody else will marry his wife.

You never, Stone reflected, would get rich being a cop. You would never have a yacht or a Biscayne Bay estate in Miami. But you did have a lot of fun.

He tried the door of the DeWitt garage. It was open. Their car, a 1941 Pontiac was locked. He leaned against one fender and waited for the woman in the house to go to sleep. He wanted to talk to DeWitt. He wanted to know more about the man in the green tie who had insisted he owed him five thousand dollars on a horse race. He wanted a more accurate description. But he didn't want to talk to DeWitt in the presence of his wife.

CHAPTER THREE

Blackout for Herman

AN HOUR passed in the musty silence of the garage. He spent it mulling over the fact that DeWitt called his wife Matilda while Mrs. Kincaid called her Amy. More, after seeing what he had seen silhouetted against the drawn shade it was difficult to understand why DeWitt would *want* to cheat on his wife. The woman had everything it took—even if she did keep it under wraps.

It grew to be ten o'clock. He opened the side door of the garage and froze in the doorway as two things happened simultaneously. A car drove down the alley and stopped. The back door of the bungalow opened and someone came out on the porch. There were a few stars in the sky but no moon. It was too dark for

Stone to see if it was a man or woman on the porch.

He retreated to the alley door and looked out. The stopped car was big and black and unlighted. As he watched, the horn of the car tooted softly. Then the driver lighted a cigarette, and he saw that a woman was driving. Her cheeks were bright with rouge. There was a black crescent beauty spot on the cheek nearest him. Blonde curls tumbled over her shoulder. Taking the cigarette from her mouth, she yawned in the last flare of the match and there was a gleam of gold in her mouth.

The big detective scowled. He had found the blonde for whom the entire department was searching. But he hadn't found her where he expected to. Slipping his gun from its holster he tiptoed back toward the side door and in the direction of the footsteps now plainly audible on the walk. Then suddenly they stopped. He could see the walker was a man. He was small. He was wearing a dark suit.

"All right. Hold it right where you are," Stone ordered. He raised his voice so the girl in the car couldn't help but hear him. "That goes for you too, out there in the alley. You try to wheel that car away and I'll fill it so full of holes you can use it for a flour sifter."

The man, a blob of black on the walk, said meekly, "Now just a minute, mister, please. Who are you? I—"

Stone took no chances with him. He had no intention of becoming another Turk Chorun. "Up with your hands. And fast."

"Just as you say," the man sighed. He raised his hands.

Stone leaned forward into the night, trying to see his face. He couldn't. It was too dark in the yard. The man's face was merely a slightly lighter blur. "All right. All right," he called impatiently. "You out there in that car in the alley. Come in here, blondie. The party's over."

Only the sudden yapping of the dog next door answered him. He stood a moment undecided. He wanted both of them. He had made a mistake, a big mistake, in not waiting until they were together. He would raise hell with a rookie

cop who made such a thoughtless bull.

"It's quite a problem, isn't it?" the man standing with his hands raised sympathized.

"Yes," Stone admitted. "It is."

And that was as far as he got before the heavy lead pipe caught him between his topcoat collar and his hair cut. His hat flew from his head as it jerked forward. He knew immediately what had happened: The blonde was no longer in the car. Slipping out of her shoes she had crept through the garage and up behind him. More, they had known he was in the garage, and their simultaneous appearance had been a prearranged trap.

He didn't dare turn from the man. He didn't want to shoot him unless he had to. Nor did he dare keep his back to the woman. Even now she was probably readying the pipe to swing it again. He attempted to side-step so he could face them both. It was a mistake. Unable to see where he was stepping he tripped over a coiled garden hose. The man rushed him, swinging a blackjack before he could recover his balance or pull the trigger of his gun. The blonde swung the pipe again. One blow caught him on the temple, the other across his gun arm. He went to his knees still clinging to his gun, and the woman kicked him in the face with one of the stockinged feet that had allowed her to creep up behind him.

"Heet heem. Heet heem hard," she advised the man in a sibilant whisper. "Knock heem, how you say, out. Then we weel put heem in thee car and take heem for a ride."

Attempting to follow her advice the man stepped on a small glass hotbed at the side of the garage, and there was a tinkle of glass. The dog next door yapped louder.

"Shhh! You fool," she said sharply, "do you want your wife or thee neighbors to hear us?" She kicked Stone in the face again. "Go out. Be unconscious."

He knelt, dazed by the succession of blows, unable to force his trigger finger to contract in response to the impulses his fogged brain was trying to send.

The small man was in position now. "This," he said, "is a pleasure. I don't know of anything I like better than beating out a cop's brains."

Tilting Stone's chin with the fingers of one hand, he swung the blackjack with the other. The big detective could hear the blow thud on his skull, but he felt no pain. He could feel the gun fall from the fingers he no longer had the power to control. Then, bending sharply at the waist as if eager to smell the rich, black loam of the garden, he buried his nose in it.

The blonde scoffed, "Herman thee Great. I theenk he ees Herman thee Suckair."

That's two of us, Stone thought. Then all sound, including the yapping of the dog, faded into a grey silence.

FINISHED with the small glass of anisette she had ordered to top off her meal, the blonde in the low-cut white blouse and black faille suit renewed her lipstick as her small mousy-looking companion paid their check.

Then she smiled, gold-toothed, at the waiter. "I am told you 'ave here—'ow you call them een these country—games of chance. Could these be so, garçon?"

Pleased by the substantial tip her companion had given him, the waiter nodded at a swinging door on the far side of the dimly lighted dining room. "You said it, baby. There's anything inside there that you want from a blackjack table to roulette."

Followed by her companion, the blonde threaded a way through the tables as the next act in the floor show, a dance team, came on. A dozen employees and fifty patrons saw them. The fact that there was gambling at the Gay Paree was an open secret. The play was high, but the evening was too young for the games to be in full swing. The gambling section of the club usually didn't begin to fill up until after midnight. Most of the tables were idle, with their dealers and croupiers gathered in little groups talking.

A lookout inside the swinging door eyed the blonde with approval as she paused just inside the doorway to survey the scene. Why, he wondered, couldn't his wife be built like that?

While his eyes lingered appreciatively on the blonde, her companion proceeded directly to the cashier's cage where the male cashier, finished with counting out

stacks of bills and chips against the nightly attack on the house, was affixing a red carnation to the lapel of his dinner jacket.

A well and orderly run house, owned by the all-powerful syndicate and prompt with its protection payoff, the Gay Paree in its some fifteen years of existence had never had any trouble with either the underworld or the police. The one knew better. The other had no desire to put out of business such a golden-egg-laying rendezvous for the wealthy geese of Chicago.

Reaching the cashier's cage the mousy little man in the blue serge suit reached under his right lapel as if going for his wallet.

"Yes, sir," the cashier smiled. His fingers fluttered over his chip drawer. "How many chips and what denomination do you wish, sir?"

"I'll take cash," the mousy man said.

Drawing a gun instead of a wallet he shot the cashier between the eyes. Then, still holding the gun in one hand, he began filling the pockets of his coat with sheaves of money. Few in the room heard the shot. It was little louder than the popping of a cork. The croupiers and dealers continued to chatter. The lookout was the first to realize what was happening.

Gasping, "Hey you! Just a minute, there!" he reached for his shoulder gun, only to have the blonde, no longer smiling, ram the muzzle of the gun she took from her purse into his stomach.

"One move out of you and I'll kill you."

He chose to disbelieve her. His hand continued under his lapel, and there was a second pop as she pulled the trigger of her gun. He stood with fingers laced across his stomach. "Hurry," she warned her companion.

He joined her at the door, his pockets bulging with money. "I got most of it. Let's blow."

She backed through the door—and they were gone, running swiftly between the tables. The holdup had been well planned and ruthlessly executed.

There was only one minor mishap. In running after the blonde between the tables of diners the mousy-looking little man in the blue serge suit lost his hat and didn't stop to retrieve it. The waiter

who had served them picked it up and gave it to Harry Purvis shortly after the homicide man's arrival. "You ought to pick 'em up in an hour," the waiter said. "I don't see how you can miss 'em. She's a gorgeous little blonde with plenty of this and that, plus a French accent. He's small. He looks more like a mouse than a man. And he's wearing a blue serge suit."

Purvis sighed. The pair who had killed Turk Chorum had struck again. Seemingly every hot spot in the Loop and the near north side knew the couple by sight, but no one knew their names or where they were holed up. He wished he knew where the hell Herman was and on what angle he was working. It wasn't like the big man not to check with the office every hour or so.

Then he turned over the hat in his hand. It would seem the triple killers hadn't been so smart after all. Despite an attempt to obliterate it, the name Clinton DeWitt was still visible on the band. And he'd heard the name recently. He remembered where he had heard it. Inspector Grady had spoken of the DeWitts with feeling. He was the man whose wife claimed he was running around with a blonde, the man who, according to Grady, claimed that a perfect stranger had come up and handed him five thousand dollars. . . .

HE WAS cold. He was wet. Every muscle in his body ached. It was raining. He was lying on something hard. Stone touched a hand to his head and his fingertips came away sticky with clotted blood. The little hood hadn't been kidding when he said he didn't know anything he liked better than beating out a cop's brains.

It was an effort to get to his feet. He stood swaying a moment, trying to acclimate himself, and realized from the dimly seen objects around him that he was in a graveyard. The dimly seen objects were tombstones. He had been lying on a flat one. The mousy little hood not only liked to beat out cops' brains—he had a sense of humor.

He sloshed down the road to the open gate of the cemetery and across the highway toward the distant neon sign of a

roadhouse. It was Flagle's Halfway House. He knew where he was now. He was still on the northwest side, about five or six miles from the spot on which he had been slugged unconscious.

He was the only customer in the bar. The barman was discreet. So the big man had been in a fight. So he had been mugged. So some husband had caught him with his wife. It wasn't any of his business. It happened every night in the week. He sold Stone the double rye he ordered. Stone, in turn, asked no questions. He had no need to ask questions. He hadn't been left for dead. It was very important to the blonde and her companion that he remain alive. Strange as it sounded, he was their best witness. He knew most of what he wanted to know. But proving it would be another matter. He looked at his watch. It was a few minutes of one. And unless they had changed the statutes in the last four or five hours the burden of proof still rested on the law.

Harry would laugh at him. So would Hart and Beamer. Grady would probably put him back in uniform if he offered so fantastic a solution to the Turk Gorham killing. He asked the barman to call him a cab. While he was waiting for it the one o'clock newscast came on.

After the announcer had finished with the latest peccadilloes of the Russians he turned to the local news:

"Flash! In a bold raid on the Gay Paree tonight the blonde gun doll and her nondescript companion, already sought by the police for questioning in the Turk Chorum murder, left two dead men behind them as they looted the well-known night spot of an estimated thirty thousand dollars. In a late statement issued by Inspector Grady of the Headquarters Homicide Division we are told an important arrest has been made and a confession is to be expected by morning. Trailed by clever police work to a northwest side bungalow, it is believed the police have at least one of the alleged killers in custody. . . ."

The cab honked in front of the road house and Stone sloshed through the rain to it. "Downtown Detective Headquarters," he told the driver. "And there's absolutely no hurry. In fact, you pay

your own tickets if you're pinched."

"You don't feel so good, eh, mister?" the driver sympathized.

"I feel fine," Stone said sourly. "In fact, if I felt any better I'd get out and run beside the cab." He realized tardily that he should have phoned Connie. If the planked white fish had been in the oven ever since his first phone call, it had undoubtedly shrunk to a charred hors d'oeuvre by now.

Grady and Purvis, Hart told him, were in the show-up room upstairs holding a lineup for their prisoner. "You're slipping, Herman," the younger detective chuckled. "While you have been out on a binge and getting yourself in a fight, we picked up the guy who killed Chorum." Hart was enjoying himself immensely. "And who do you think he turns out to be?"

"Molotov?"

Hart colored. "All right, big shot. All right. It would seem you are not infallible after all. It is an old friend of yours, a lad by the name of DeWitt. Remember? His wife tried to get you to arrest him this afternoon. And if you had two guys would still be alive."

Stone said that was interesting if true. "How did you get the guy? Did he write down his name and address and leave it with the headwaiter or did he drop his hat at the Gay Paree?"

"How did you know he dropped his hat?" Hart asked.

Herman the Great touched his head gingerly. "I'm psychic."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Boarder

IT WAS dark in the show-up room. He slipped unnoticed into a rear seat and looked at the mousy little man rubbing his eyes on the lighted platform. Standing beside him, Harry Purvis asked, "Does that finish the witnesses from the Quincy?"

A male voice in the dark that Stone recognized as the bell boy's said, "Make him say, 'Blow, bud.'"

Purvis nudged the little man. "Say, 'Blow, bud.'"

"Blow, bud," the man said meekly.

The bell boy was still hesitant. "He sure looks like the guy, all right. But he doesn't sound as tough as he did."

"They seldom do, once they're caught," Purvis said. "Now how many of you guys from the Gay Paree can finger him?"

The doorman, the headwaiter, the waiter who had served the couple, and three croupiers said they could.

The doorman was most positive. "He's the guy Lieutenant. Of course I didn't see him shoot the cashier and the look-out, but he's the guy who waltzed into the gambling rooms with the blonde. Where's she?"

Purvis shook his head. He looked tired. He was tired. "Clinton hasn't told us yet." He appealed to the smaller man. "Why not come clean, DeWitt? Why not tell us where your little blonde hell cat is holed up so we can pick her up."

DeWitt protested, "But I don't know any blonde, believe me, Officer." He looked as if he was about to cry. "I don't even know what all these gentlemen are talking about. I don't know any Turk Chorom. And I've never been in the Gay Paree in my life."

From one of the front seats, Inspector Grady said dryly, "You were home in bed sound asleep all the time, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you still insist a man in a green tie came up to you on the corner of Michigan and Jackson and gave you five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your wife's friend, Mrs. Kincaid, never saw you with a blonde?"

The little man was eager to be believed. "Grace Kincaid *couldn't* have seen me. I don't know any blonde, and I don't frequent night clubs."

The waiter said, "Listen to the rat. He knows he is going to stick up the joint. He knows he may have to kill one or more guys. Yet his appetite is still good. He eats every bite on his plate."

Grady made one last try. "Where did you buy the phenobarbital you fed your wife at supper tonight so she wouldn't know you were sneaking out to keep your murder date with the blonde?"

DeWitt lost his head and shouted, "I didn't buy any phenobarbital. And I didn't feed any to my wife. But I wish to God

I had. She treats the dog better than she treats me. I wish to God she was dead!"

Inspector Grady got to his feet. "Okay, Harry. Take him back to the squadroom and 'talk' to him a little more."

Stone lifted his voice for the first time. "May I ask just one question, Inspector?"

Purvis looked sharply at the voice. Grady asked, "Is that you, Herman?" "Yes, sir."

There was a pause as Grady started to ask where in the name of Tophet he had been, thought better of airing department laundry in public, and said, "Certainly."

Addressing the man on the stage, Stone said, "This is going to sound funny to you, DeWitt. But I want you to think carefully before you answer my question. Did you propose to Mrs. DeWitt or did she propose to you?"

DeWitt said, "She did the proposing. In fact, she did all the courting."

Anything else he said was lost in the gale of laughter that swept the show-up room. His eyes still thoughtful, Herman the Great left the room before Inspector Grady could force his way through the crowd of assembled witnesses. He didn't want to admit what had happened to him and tell where it happened until he had to. His story would be the determining finger that would send DeWitt to the chair. And despite all the witnesses and evidence to the contrary, if the hunch he was playing was correct, the little man didn't belong there.

TWO O'CLOCK became three. Three o'clock grew into four. Four nudged the squat figure of five. Still the off-key whistle went on endlessly:

Oh when you see the hearse go by
You know that somebody's going to die. . . .

Sergeant Corbett, in charge of the rogue's gallery stood it as long as he could, then exploded, "Look, damn it, Herman, quit it. Stop that infernal whistling or I'm going to call up homicide and tell Grady where you are." He added, without malice, "They say the old man is fit to be tied and that he's called your wife to get your uniform out of the moth balls."

Herman the Great was unimpressed. "So?" He added another picture to the

small pile on the desk beside him. The man's name was Herman Chominski. It was a courtesy picture from St. Louis, dated 1941, in which year St. Louis had cancelled a 'wanted' on him as he had been apprehended in Denver on another charge which had earned him a seven-year stretch in that state.

Stone scowled at the man's picture. He was proud of the name Herman. It had been his father's name before him and his father's father's name before that. "All crooks are dumb," he told Corbett. "The proof of it is they think that cops are."

So saying, he shook the pictures he had extracted from the file into a neat stack, put the stack into his pocket and walked upstairs to Inspector Grady's office. The office was blue with smoke. DeWitt sat on a chair in the center of a circle of men, the target of a barrage of endless questions. When he tended to go to sleep or failed to answer, one of the men in the group gave him a cigarette or a sip of water. No physical force was being used to make him confess, but the only light in the room was a powerful bulb that shone directly in his eyes.

As Stone entered the room, Hart was handling the questions. "Why did you kill Chorum?"

DeWitt was half out on his feet with fatigue and fear, but he refused to be stampeded into a confession. "I didn't kill him. I don't even know the name."

"Isn't it true that to get the kind of money it takes to chase around with this blonde of yours, you tried to sell him some zircons for diamonds and when he put up a yip, you killed him?"

"No."

"Tell the truth. Isn't that where you got the five thousand dollars that your wife found in your pocket?"

"I *am* telling the truth. And my wife didn't find the money in my pocket. I came home and gave it to her after the man gave it to me."

Perched on the edge of a desk Cork Harris, the reporter, scoffed, "A man in a green tie."

"A man wearing a green tie."

"Look, mister," the reporter pleaded. "You're lying and you know it. You *have* to break sooner or later. Why not break in time to let me meet my deadline? Why

not confess you killed Chorum and one of the guys at the Gay Patee? Why not give the boys the dirt on the blonde who got you into this? You don't want to go to the chair, do you, while that homicidal baby goes scot free and maybe even gets some other guy into this kind of a jam?"

Stone lighted the ceiling light, and the tense moment went flat. "Hello, boys," he said cheerfully.

INSPECTOR GRADY counted to ten, then exploded, "Where the hell have you been, Herman? Where did you get that face? No. Don't bother to tell me. I don't want to hear about it. Get out of here. You're suspended. Report to Cragin in uniform in the morning."

Ignoring him, Stone picked the phone from Grady's desk and, kicking a chair around, straddled it, facing DeWitt. "Hello, fellow. It's been pretty tough, eh?"

Wary, DeWitt nodded.

Stone persisted, "But you would like to get to the bottom of this, find out what it's all about?"

"I would."

Stone lifted the receiver of the phone from its cradle. "Then tell me the name of the butcher with whom your wife trades."

Grady exploded, "He's mad!"

His eyes narrow slits, Purvis said, "Let him alone. Herman usually knows what he's doing."

The requested information received, Stone got the butcher on the phone. Then the grocer. And then the milk company. His last call completed, he whistled the first few bars of *Melancholy Baby* thoughtfully and then stood up and pushed back his chair. "Outside of forty or fifty eye-witnesses and the fact his story is fantastic, how much evidence you got on the guy, Harry?"

Purvis said, "We found the gun under his pillow. Ballistics say it's the same one that killed Chorum and the cashier."

Stone looked at DeWitt. He said, "Won't you believe me, mister? I don't know *how* it got there. I got awfully sleepy and went to bed right after supper to-night. I don't even know what these guys are talking about. All I know is they woke me up and brought me here and they've been questioning me ever since."

"Yeah. Sure. I believe you," Stone said. He polished the nails of one hand on the palm of the other. "How's for going out and picking up the blonde and the mousy-looking little guy who killed Turk and the cashier, Harry?" He was very meek about it. "You know, like Inspector Grady always says, we're in the murder business."

Purvis said evenly, "You know where they are, Herman?"

Herman the Great nodded. "I think so. In fact, I am certain I do. And if you don't mind, let's take DeWitt with us. I want to stop off at his place for a minute."

Grady got to his feet. "If you're bluffing, Herman . . ."

The big man looked him in the eyes. "Do I ever?"

"N-no," Grady admitted unwillingly. His voice grew stronger. "No, by God, you don't." He scowled at Purvis. "Well, why are you just standing there? You heard what Herman said. Call down and order a squad car to be in front of the Bureau by the time we get downstairs."

THE POLICE MATRON whom Purvis had left to see Mrs. DeWitt safely out of the phenobarbital jag the woman claimed her husband had induced by drugged coffee said her patient was not only awake but restless.

Stone asked, "She kinda starts up every time she hears the wail of a prowler car in the distance, huh?"

The matron wanted to know how he knew.

"I'm the seventh son of a seventh son," Stone told her. "Besides, this is a dangerous neighborhood. I was watching this house earlier this evening when I'll be damned if the blonde we are looking for didn't drive a big car right up the alley and a few seconds later a little guy in a blue serge suit came right out this back door."

Inspector Grady scowled at DeWitt. "Explain that away, little man."

His eyes tortured, DeWitt said, "I can't."

"I can," Herman the Great said cheerfully. "What's more, I intend to."

A new voice joined the conversation.



The illustration shows a man in a suit and hat smoking a pipe, with a sun in the background and a bird perched on a branch. The text reads: "Country Doctor", "Mild...as spring!", "The Pipe Mixture with the KINDLY disposition".

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"Intend to what?" Mrs. DeWitt asked from the doorway of the bedroom. Her dull hair hung untidily around her shoulders. She clutched a soiled dressing gown together across her flat chest. Her eyes looked drugged.

"Explain the mice," Stone said. "You do have mice?"

DeWitt nodded. "We do. Night after night I've heard them up in the attic." His eyes were puzzled. "And we never had them before Matilda and I were married."

She screamed at him, "You lie! You're nothing but a dirty little liar and a cheat!" She threw the nearest object, a vase. "Get him out of here!"

Stone caught the vase and set it on a table. "Why so perturbed about a few mice, Amy?"

She said, "My name is Maltilda."

"Since when?" Stone asked. "Since a couple of months ago when," he took the thin stack of rogue's gallery pictures from his pocket, "Herman Chominski," he looked at the next picture, "or Maxie Feldman, or Jimmy Gotz, or Bill Tanner, was due to get out of prison and you wanted to feather a new nest for him?"

She appealed to Inspector Grady. "Get him out of here, please. I'm a sick woman. My husband fed me phenobarbital so he could go out on his killing spree with that blonde. I can't stand here and be insulted."

Stone nodded agreement. "That's right. You can stand there but you can't be insulted. I wouldn't know where to begin. Why not take off the tight brassiere, smear a little makeup on your face, put the gold caps on your teeth, and put on the blonde wig so we can get this over with. My wife's been holding supper for me since six o'clock last evening."

The blood drained slowly from her face. She had to hold on to the door jamb to keep from falling. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Stone turned to DeWitt. "Does she always look like that? Or has your wife, on occasion, a fairly normal feminine shape?"

"She has a beautiful shape," DeWitt said. "That was what first attracted me to her. But ever since we've been married she acts like she's ashamed of it and pulls

herself flat and looks like a frump every time we go out together." He warmed to the subject. "More, she lied when she said she loved me. She doesn't. She looks her bedroom door every night and—"

"Okay. Okay," Stone stopped him. He looked at the matron. "Mrs. DeWitt is wearing a tight brassiere?"

"It's more of a band," the matron said. "I don't see how she breathes. I tried to get her to let me take it off but she refused. It's—well, like she was ashamed of her shape."

THE BIG MAN shook his head. "No. *Afraid* of it. It's going to send her to the chair." He explained to Inspector Grady. "Bulging where she should bulge, wearing a blonde wig, and using a phony French accent, she's the dame who was in on the Turk Chorum killing. She's the dame who shot the lookout at the Gay Paree. And it wasn't DeWitt who gave her the phenobarbital. It was she who gave it to him. His story is on the level. The poor devil has been eating a lot of pheno lately, I imagine. He went to sleep right after supper just as he said he did, and he didn't even know what you guys were talking about."

Purvis protested, "But you said you saw him come out the back door."

Stone corrected him. "I said I saw a little guy in a blue serge suit." He felt his head. "I also made a bad bull, and between them they knocked me unconscious and draped me over a tombstone in Wildwood."

Inspector Grady was puzzled. "I don't get it."

Herman the Great explained, "I saw a man come out the DeWitt back door. He was about the size of DeWitt there. He was wearing one of DeWitt's blue serge suits. Grace Kincaid, across the street, probably tipped them I was in the neighborhood. And they wanted me to see the man. They wanted me to think he was DeWitt. They meant to kill two birds with one stone. They meant to heist the Gay Paree tonight and make enough to live on for two or three years without having to turn a finger. And they wanted to get rid of DeWitt by sending him to the chair. And they planned to use me as a witness against him."

"They?" Cork Harris asked.

"Yeah. Amy, there, *and the man in the attic,*" Stone said.

The woman standing in the doorway opened her mouth as if she were crying, but no sound came out.

Herman the Great continued, "As I see the story, it is something like this. Amy's boy friend was in prison, for doing what or for how long I wouldn't know. But I do know he was due to get out and Amy, here, wanted to feather a nest for him. Maybe it was just coincidence the con she loved and the widower she picked on were about of a size and coloring. Maybe she planned it that way. I wouldn't know that, either. But she married DeWitt and moved in. And when her boy friend got out of prison he moved in, too. Only he moved into the attic until they could figure out some way to get rid of the meek, little guy that Amy had promised to love, honor and obey."

Hart snapped his fingers. "That call to the butcher and the grocer."

Stone grinned at him. "That's right. About a month ago the DeWitt meat and grocery order increased by a third. Where she formerly bought two steaks she bought three. It was the same with the milk. DeWitt didn't know it, but he had suddenly become a papa bird, feeding a full-grown vulture. And they got away with it fine. He was away all day. She had her own bedroom. She was always careful to lock the door. And when he did hear an occasional sound in the attic, Amy told DeWitt it was mice. And he believed her."

DeWitt looked at his wife and said, "Damn you!"

"Good for you." Stone complimented. "I didn't think you had it in you." He continued his story. "But Amy and her boy friend weren't content to let well enough alone. They wanted more money than DeWitt could earn. They wanted to get rid of him. So as the first step in their campaign they figured out that deal with Turk Chorum. Amy's boy friend probably knew him well. He offered to sell Turk some diamonds he didn't have, and when Turk got the scratch together he shot him for it and left the zircons behind to confuse the trail. They killed him in cold blood for money."

"How much money?" Harris asked.

"Five thousand dollars," Stone said. "They needed it as the next step in their campaign. It was the boy friend wearing a green tie who insisted on giving it to DeWitt. They weren't risking a thing. They knew he would give it back to his wife. And it gave Amy a chance to call the law's attention to DeWitt and to the non-existent blonde. Or rather, the blonde that she became by letting nature bulge where it would and by wearing a blonde wig. The night they killed Turk they planted this phone number on him. After that they knew there wasn't much left but the shooting. They knew one of us would check the number. I happened to be the one."

"Tipped by her girl friend, Gracie, Amy here put on a good show for me. She let me see her prepare for bed back of a drawn shade. Then she put on her wig and her war paint, stole out the front way and drove the car they were using down the alley. Meanwhile, the boy friend, wearing one of DeWitt's suits, crept out the back door." He spread his hands. "And that's all there is to it, I guess, but picking up the boy friend and the dough they swiped from the Gay Paree."

STONE started into the bedroom. Mrs. DeWitt barred the doorway with her arm. "No. You can't come in here."

"The hell I can't, darling," Stone said. Picking her up he set her to one side and told the matron. "Take her into the other room and strip that band off her. I like my women, even killers, to bulge where nature intended they should."

The matron forced Mrs. DeWitt, screaming, into the other bedroom. Grady, Purvis, Hart, Harris, and DeWitt followed Stone into Mrs. DeWitt's room. Stone stood looking at the ceiling for a moment then spotted a plywood-covered crawl hole in the closet.

"Do you mind," he asked DeWitt, "if we put a few holes in the ceiling?"

DeWitt wasn't as meek as he looked. "If there is a man up there," he told Stone, "you can riddle it. If one of you gentlemen will lend me a gun, I'll help you."

The big detective called, "All right! Come on down, Chominski or Gotz or

Feldman or whoever you are! And bring the money with you!" He waited a moment, then, drawing his gun, he shot twice into the ceiling. "And that's just a starter, chum." He turned to the baby of the homicide squad. "Get a couple of tommy guns out of the car, Miles, and we'll riddle the ceiling from one end of the house to the other."

There were sudden sounds in the attic. "No! Don't shoot!" a man's voice begged. "I'll take my chances with a jury." The cover of the crawl hole was raised and a man's legs appeared. "It was all Amy's fault. She planned it all. She said it would be easy."

Stone caught the legs and pulled. Then, grasping the man by the collar, he held him at arm's length while he looked at him. He was of a size and coloring with DeWitt. That was all. They didn't look anything alike except that neither man would stand out in a crowd. Eye-witnesses, Stone thought, were very inaccurate creatures.

Cork Harris crowed, "*Out of the air!* By God, Herman's done it again. He picked him right out of the air."

Stone dropped the squirming man at Inspector Grady's feet. "Well, there you are, Inspector." He dusted his palms together in satisfaction. "And that would seem to be that."

Inspector Grady protested, "But, Herman. Who is he?"

"There," Stone admitted, "you have me. But having him, you can have him fingerprinted and find out." He handed Grady the pictures he had taken from the

file. "He looks a little like Chominski to me. On the other hand he could be Gotz. But whoever he is, he's the lad who killed Turk and the cashier at the Gay Paree. Have the B. of I. look him up." He winked at the inspector. "I haven't time for such minor details. Me, I'm in the murder business—remember?"

"Yes, Herman," Inspector Grady said meekly.

The big detective strode out into the living room looking for the phone just as Mrs. DeWitt, no longer flat chested, came out of the other bedroom wrapping her dressing gown around here. Her face sullen, she said, "Okay. You've got us, copper. But tell me this. What put you wise?"

Stone dialed his home phone number. "You did, sister. I happened to catch you in profile back of the shade without your bandaid on. And—" he grinned—"well, you were the first dame I had ever seen who deliberately tried to play down her best aspects." He told the matron, "Get a dress on her and take her out to the car. We're booking them both for murder."

He lifted the receiver to his ear. Connie's voice was strained. She sounded worried. She was a police officer's wife. She had waited all night for a call from, or concerning, her man. "Yes?"

"This is Herman, honey," Stone told her. "And I'm cold."

Life returned to her voice with a rush. She said, "Oh." Then her voice caressed him softly. "Well, come home, Herman. I'm waiting."

THE END

MURDER GADGET

A FRENCH KILLER, employing one of the world's weirdest murder gadgets, almost baffled the Lyon Sureté early in the century.

Agents de police found his victim's body, a triangular stab wound directly over the heart. Surrounding it in a tight, perfect circle were eight bullet holes. There were no powder burns.

What manner of marksman was this, the *agents* asked themselves, who stabbed his man in the heart then stood off and peppered him with eight shots in a circle so perfect it seemed aimed by a compass?

The eventual explanation proved the murderer had indeed peppered his victim—with an ancient pepperbox pistol, an early type of revolver whose cylinder consisted of eight barrels capable of being fired simultaneously, and with a dagger protruding from the center. He had muffled the sound of the explosion with a blanket, thus there had been no powder burns.

—Ben Nelson

BURN-'EM-UP LENNIE!

By
DAVE
SANDS



Lennie picked up the body and shoved it through the fire door, and all the time his tiny eyes stared hard and meaningfully at Hazel.

How could you blame fat Lennie Adams for wanting to kill his wife Hazel, or the gangster? After all, there was \$50,000 at stake, and Lennie had plans for a nicer, newer way of life, with fifty grand in his kick, and with Hazel in her grave!

IN HIS undershirt, his shoes off, a wet cigar in his mouth, fat Lennie Adams was reading the evening paper when a knock sounded at the front door.

He lowered the paper, took the cigar from his mouth, and yelled, "Hazel! Someone's at the door!"

Then he raised the paper again and stuck the cigar back in his mouth.

Hazel, his wife, was in the kitchen at the ironing-board. She tossed a loose

strand of hair from her forehead, crossed the kitchen piled high with the day's wash, went through the dining room and the living room. She was a thin woman, her shoulders stooped, her face worn, yet placid. She moved wearily, as if she were dead tired.

The knock came again before she reached the chair Lennie occupied.

"For cripes' sake, answer the door!" he said.

Wordlessly, she opened the door. In the dim light of the hall she failed at first to recognize the man who stood there.

"Mrs. Adams?" the man asked.

Behind her, Lennie, still in his chair, said impatiently, "Well, who is it?"

The little man said nervously, "It's me. Mr. York. From across the hall." He was short, with grey hair and a somber blue suit, and he held in his arms a package about the size of a suitcase, wrapped in brown paper.

Hazel recognized him then. "It's Mr. York. From across the hall," she repeated.

"What does he want?"

Mr. York stepped in. "I was wondering . . ." he said. "That is, I'd like you to do me a favor."

"Why, sure," said Hazel. "We're neighbors, aren't we?"

YORK hefted the package in his arms. "It's this. This box. I got to get it to a friend of mine."

Hazel said, "Yes?"

"I'll phone him," Mr. York explained, "and he's going to call for it. But now I've got to go out. I was wondering, could I leave it here for him?"

"Why, sure," Hazel said.

"It's not heavy," said Mr. York. "He'll pick it up in about an hour."

Hazel took the package from him. It was surprisingly light. "Glad to, Mr. York. We're neighbors, aren't we?" She put it on the shelf in the guest closet.

"His name's Kimberley," Mr. York went on. "It's very important that the right man get it. He's a tall fellow with a scar on his face."

Hazel said, "Don't you worry about it, Mr. York."

"I sure appreciate it." The little man moved back to the doorway. "I sure do.

I'd 'a given it to him myself but I just learned I've got to go out. I'm mighty thankful."

"Don't mention it," said Hazel.

Mr. York said abruptly, "Don't open it." Then he turned and moved rapidly down the front steps of the apartment building.

"He's got a nerve!" Lennie said. "Don't open it!"

Hazel closed the door and moved back toward the kitchen.

"We're neighbors, aren't we?" Lennie mimicked. "Bah!"

Flushing, Hazel hesitated, then went on.

"How many times has he been up here while I'm at work?" Lennie asked.

Still she did not answer.

Lennie said, "Don't think you're putting anything over on me! I wasn't born yesterday!"

With a wet finger, Hazel tested the heat of the iron. She hefted it in her right hand, looked speculatively at Lennie, then put it down again.

"Bah!" said Lennie. "I wasn't born yesterday."

He went back to the paper, spelling out the race results and then the headlines, "Six Injured in Bus Crash," "Congress Debates Old Age Tax," "Bandits Get \$100,000 from Armored Car." Hazel ironed quietly and patiently.

Perhaps five minutes passed. Then Lennie said suddenly, "What was the name of that guy?"

"What guy?" Hazel asked.

"The one who's going to pick up the package, stupid!"

"Kimberton, or something like that."

"A tall man with a scar on his face, wasn't it?"

Hazel carefully spread a large, immaculate white shirt over the back of a kitchen chair. "I guess so."

"That's the guy!" said Lennie. "Sure as shooting that's the guy! Look!" He waved the newspaper excitedly in the air, then smoothed it out and read from it: "Witnesses described one of the bandits as a tall man with a scar on his face and the other as being short and grey-haired and dressed in a dark business suit. That's York and this Kimberson, sure as shooting!"

"What did they do?" asked Hazel.

"They knocked off an armored car for a hundred G's." Lennie stopped suddenly. "A hundred G's!" He shoved his ponderous bulk out of the chair and walked to the closet. "A hundred G's!"

Hazel said, "There's lots of tall men and short men."

"A hundred G's!" said Lennie reverently. "I wonder—"

"You leave that package alone!" Hazel yelled at him, her voice suddenly shrill.

At that instant there was another knock at the door. This time it was a loud, peremptory knock, forceful, authoritative.

Lennie stared at his wife. "That's him now!" he said, his voice a hoarse whisper.

The knock came again.

"Open the door!" said Hazel. "Let him in!"

Reluctantly, slowly, Lennie turned the knob. Instantly the door was flung open, shoving him back in spite of his bulk.

NOT one man, but two, walked into the apartment, big, burly men in dark coats, serious faced, grim. They stood just inside the door, the bigger one teetering on his heels and coolly looking around.

"Police Department!" he said finally, taking a badge out of his pocket. "What took you so long?"

Lennie's florid face was a trifle whiter. "I was coming," he said, his voice almost a whine.

"Your name Adams?"

"That's right."

"You work for the city?"

"Yes, sir, Officer. At the garbage incinerator."

The cop said, "This here is Detective O'Rourke. My name's McKenna. Robbery Squad." He walked into the room and plopped into the chair Lennie had been occupying. O'Rourke stayed by the door.

Hazel had left her ironing again and entered the living room. "What's the trouble, Officer?" she asked.

McKenna smiled at her. "Don't get worried, lady. It's not you people. We want to find out about one of your neighbors."

Lennie said, "I knew it! That—"

"That what?"

"That man across the hall! I knew he was a crook!"

"What else do you know about him?"

McKenna asked quietly.

"Nothing," said Lennie. "I've seen him around, that's all."

"What makes you think he's a crook?"

Lennie chose his words carefully. "I just didn't like his looks. His eyes were shifty. You can tell."

"Is that so?" asked McKenna. "Is that so?"

Lennie flushed.

"This fellow we're interested in is a little man, grey hair, wears dark suits. Goes by the name of York. That the one?"

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"That's him," said Lennie.

Slowly McKenna said, "So you could tell he was a crook because his eyes were shifty. What else?"

"Nothing," replied Lennie. "I've seen him around, that's all."

"Did he ever have any visitors?"

"I dunno."

"Did he go to work?"

"Not so far as I could tell. I just saw him around, Officer, that's all."

"What about your wife?"

"Same thing," said Lennie. "I hope." He bared dirty yellow teeth in a leer that was supposed to be a grin.

The detectives ignored him. "How about it, lady?" O'Rourke asked.

"I've seen him, sure," said Hazel. "But I don't rightly know him. He just moved in a couple weeks ago. Tonight—"

Lennie interrupted. "He got out of here in a hurry tonight. We heard him."

"Tonight," said Hazel, "he—"

Again Lennie cut her off. "Tonight we heard him going out, about seven o'clock."

"Lady," McKenna said, "are you trying to tell us something?"

Hazel could feel Lennie's big, watery eyes fastened on her; she could sense the menace in his stare.

"No," she said. "Nothing."

"Did he ever have any callers? Anybody who came around to see him?"

"I didn't notice anyone," Hazel said shortly.

"How about this morning? Was he in his place about ten o'clock this morning?"

"I didn't notice."

McKenna got to his feet. "Okay," he said. "Okay. I'll take your word for it. I know you wouldn't hold out on us."

"We're not," said Lennie. "We don't know anything about him."

McKenna moved to the door. "For your sake, I hope that's the truth."

He and O'Rourke left, and as they walked out Hazel trudged wearily back to the kitchen.

AGAIN she tested the iron. Then she said, "Why did you lie to them?"

Lennie had gone to the window and was peering out. He didn't answer.

"You're going to get in trouble lying like that," Hazel said.

"Shut up!"

"What are you looking for?"

"Them cops," Lennie said. "Soon as they pull out I'm going to open that package."

"Don't you dare!"

Lennie paid no attention to her. Instead he left the window, switched on the radio, fiddled with the dial. Then he went back to the window.

"When the hell they going to leave?" he said.

The voice of an announcer filled the room, slowly growing in volume as the little table radio warmed up.

"The President," the announcer said, "has indicated he will press for a three percent tax, in spite of the reaction in Congress. And now we come to the local situation. Police—"

"Ssh!" said Lennie. "Let's get this."

"... they already have identified the two bandits who robbed an armored truck of almost fifty thousand dollars this morning after cleverly planting a bomb inside the truck. Police Commissioner Peters has announced that he believes the men are Duke Yankewicz, alias Yelton and York, an ex-convict and safe-cracker who is an expert with explosives, and Ralph Kenton, also known as Kimberley, who once was Yankewicz deadly enemy but apparently joined forces with him for this robbery."

"That's them!" said Lennie.

The radio droned on:

"The two men, Peters said, opened a small store and contracted for the armored truck service. They timed the movements of the truck carefully. This morning they hid an explosive, set to go off at a pre-determined minute, in a sack they gave the guards.

"The bomb went off near the intersection of Central Park Avenue and 51st Street. It blew open the doors of the truck and dazed both the guards. Hidden nearby, the bandits leaped out and had little difficulty looting the truck.

"The bandits then ran into an alley and separated, running off in opposite directions, thus adding to the confusion of astounded witnesses. Police believe each had a car parked nearby.

"The two guards, the few witnesses and officials of the real estate firm that had rented the dummy store to the bandits all

identified pictures of Kenton, Commissioner Peters said. An unidentified telephone tip named Yankewicz as his partner. Yankewicz was the one who scooped up the cash while Kenton held the stunned and bleeding guards at bay.

"First estimates of the amount of loot placed it at \$100,000. A closer check, however, has scaled this figure down to the neighborhood of \$50,000. Commissioner Peters has said . . ."

"The dirty rats!" exploded Lennie. "Only fifty thousand!"

"At the very minute that police were wrestling with this newest challenge, the budget committee of City Council was debating . . ."

Lennie switched the radio off. Then he resumed his peering out the window.

With a sudden movement his wife unplugged the electric iron and set it aside. She stepped around the board, into the next room.

"Lennie," she said.

He looked at her, and his eyes were tiny and dark and glazed with excitement. "What do you want?"

"Supposing you're right. Supposing the money is in the package. What are you going to do?"

Still watching the squad car parked at the curb, Lennie didn't answer her directly. Instead he said, "Fifty thousand dollars, clean, all mine, and she asks me what I'm going to do! Fifty thousand bucks—more than I ever saw in my life!"

"Lennie," his wife said, and her voice was flatter and lower and calmer than he ever had known it to be before. "Lennie, I'm not going to let you."

For the merest instant he darted a look at her. Then, again, his gaze was riveted on the car below. "She's not going to let me, she says," he muttered. "Fifty thousand bucks and she thinks she's going to stop me." He laughed mirthlessly.

"Lennie," she said, "you open that package and you'll never see me again."

THIS time he looked full at her. His face was flushed as if with a fever. Fists clenched, his mouth drawn into a line, he said, "I put up with your guff a long time, Hazel. I'm fed up with it and I'm fed up with you. I'm going to take that money and get out of here and you're

not going to stop me! Understand?"

Wordlessly they stared at each other.

And as they stared, they both heard the sound of an automobile engine accelerating, tires spurting into revolution on the pavement. They turned and watched the squad car move off down the street and each of them knew the climax of their marriage and of their life together had come.

As they watched, a figure moved slowly into view from the shadows across the street. The figure of a man, elongated in the light of a street lamp, stepping slowly toward the front door of their building, determined, sinister.

"It's him!" said Lennie.

Transfixed, they watched until the man had entered the door below.

Then Lennie sprang into action.

"You," he said gruffly, "keep him out until I tell you. Get me?"

He crossed to the closet, seized the package from the shelf and vanished into the bedroom.

"Lennie!" she called after him. "Lennie!" But he didn't answer.

She heard the shuffling feet on the stairs and the knock at the door.

She couldn't move at first. She stood there, frightened. The knock came again.

Somehow she managed to reach the door and open it. The man waiting there was tall, with a pale, grey face and deep-set eyes that burned at her. He was wearing a swede jacket zipped high up, hiding his shirt, and a hat that came down well over his forehead.

Nervously she said, "Yes? Who are you? What do you want?"

Uninvited, he entered, and he said, "My name's Kimberley. I came for my package."

"What package?"

"Don't hand me that stuff!" said the man. "Where is it? Quick!"

Lennie came out of the bedroom. He, too, had a jacket on over his undershirt.

"You the fellow Mr. York left that package for?" he asked.

"You're damn right! And I want it now!" Kimberley's hand was in his jacket pocket.

Lennie said, "You Mr. Kimberley?"

"I'm Kimberley, all right, and I want that package without no more stalling!"

"Okay," said Lennie. "It's in the basement storeroom." He stepped past both of them suddenly and walked out the door into the hallway. "Come on, I'll get it for you."

Kimberley hesitated momentarily, undecided. Then he followed, and both men disappeared down the stairs.

In the storeroom? Hazel stared after them, startled, uncomprehending. She went to the bedroom; then she remembered the door and went back and closed it and darted into the bedroom again.

The package was where she had expected, under the bed. She pulled it out and felt the impulse to open it and throw its contents out the window, scatter the money forever. She tore at the wrappings and stumbled backward in her hurry. The sharp edge of an open dresser drawer dug into her ribs.

An open drawer! She spun around and frantically tossed the clothes out, frantically fumbled through the drawer. She couldn't find it.

While she was searching she heard the shot—and she knew what had happened to the gun they had kept in that dresser drawer.

Just one shot, from the depths of the building. Muffled by the various floors, it might have been an automobile backfiring; it might have been a heavy object dropped on the concrete floor. In this neighborhood it would not arouse anyone, even though, in all probability, a man had been killed.

Automatically she went to the door of the bedroom and waited. She heard the footsteps, slow, heavy, coming up the stairs. She heard the man approaching. Lennie—or the stranger? Who was dead and who the killer?

Then she heard a key in the lock and she knew it was Lennie—and she knew she had been hoping it would be the other.

The door swung open slowly and Lennie stood there. The flush of his face was gone; in its place was a pallor, a hard, set look of determination and ruthlessness. Lennie, her husband. Lennie, the murderer.

"You shot him!" she cried. "You killed him!"

"Shut up!" said Lennie.

He brushed past her, unseeing, into the

bedroom, and appeared an instant later with the package under his arm.

"So you tried to open it!" he muttered. "You tried to get the money yourself! You double-crossing little crook!"

A new fear, chilling, constricting her throat and freezing her muscles, shot through her.

"I ought to give it to you now," Lennie whispered. He watched her, the malevolence in his eyes almost alive. Then his face softened a bit and he said, "Come on. We got work to do."

Still she couldn't budge.

"Come on!" he said. "Or I'll give it to you now!"

Mechanically, almost without a will of her own, she walked out the front door and into the hall and down to the basement.

DOWN there it was empty and damp and dark. When Lennie switched on the light she cowered near him and glanced wildly about. At first she didn't see it—and then she realized that the blob of shadow huddled near the coal bin, shapeless and inhuman and still, was the body of a man.

Lennie said, "I told him it was in the coal-bin and when he went in I shot him in the back of the head." He chuckled. "I'll put that coal in the furnace and there won't even be any blood left."

She shuddered and Lennie peered closely at her. "You keep your mouth shut, hear me?"

She didn't answer. And then Lennie said, "Wait here. I'll bring the car around in back."

She followed him to the door and waited there, alone in the basement with a dead man, as far from the body as she could get, afraid to turn around and look at him. Once she thought she heard him move, and her knees wobbled in fright and perspiration broke out on her forehead although the wind was bitter and penetrating.

At last she heard the car, and Lennie came through the door. He went past her to the body and picked it up under the shoulders.

"Take the feet," he ordered.

She didn't move.

- "Come on!"

"I can't, Lennie," she said. "I can't."

He let the body slump to the floor and walked over to her and slapped her, hard, in the face. "Take the feet!"

In a nightmare of jerky, stumbling action she picked up the feet of the murdered man and, her face averted, helped as they carried him out the door. They piled the body into the rear seat of the car and Lennie put the precious package on top of it and covered them both with a blanket.

"Get in!" he said.

Numbly she climbed into the front seat beside this man who had been her husband not so long before, this man she feared now as much as she had hated him the day before. They drove without speaking, because they had nothing to say to each other, these two. The body on the floorboards behind them said it all.

Halfway there he flicked on the car radio. It was tuned to a disc jockey and Lennie made no effort to twist the dial. The music was tinny and false; the comments of the announcer never were more superficial.

They came to the large expanse of vacant ground in the center of which the incinerator loomed ghastly and skeletal, an enormous structure still only half finished, steel girders bare and naked, and a tall, slender chimney reaching up into the night. A building where tremendous fires burned, day and night, in tremendous furnaces—fires kept alive to destroy the leavings of a big city. Fires that could eat up a human body in a twinkling of smoke and flame.

"The back boiler room," Lennie said. "Nobody's there at night."

They were halfway down the lonely, winding lane that led to the back boiler room when the disc jockey's voice on their radio was interrupted.

"We have just received a bulletin from our news room," an announcer said. "Police Commissioner Peters has announced that Duke Yankewicz, one of the two suspected armored-car bandits, has been captured at Municipal Airport as he tried to leave the city. He is now being questioned at Police Headquarters."

Aloud, Lennie said, "They can't get me now! I'm in the clear!"

He parked almost at the base of the gigantic shaft, and he opened a tiny door with a key from his pocket. Unceremoniously he dumped the body on the ground beside the car while he covered the brown-paper package with the blanket. Then, shoving his wife in front of him, he dragged the dead man into the boiler room.

The fire in there had been banked. He opened the draft door of the furnace and then the fire door, a tall door of heavy steel that was swung back by means of a huge lever. He stoked the fire while the light of its flames danced eerily on his flushed, grim, set face, and on the pale, trembling features of his wife and on the cold and grey countenance of the dead man.

"There," he said finally. He picked the body up and shoved it through the fire door. The flames crackled and hissed and leaped higher, a bright blue, and the body seemed to shrivel, and then Hazel could look at it no longer.

She looked instead into Lennie's face, contorted with hatred and cunning, at his

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tiny eyes staring hard and meaningfully at her. She screamed and fled as he lunged at her.

SHE RAN as she hadn't run since she was a little girl, desperately, frantically. For a way he chased her and she could hear his feet pounding on the roadway and his breath as he panted against his ponderous weight. Then the panting stopped, the footsteps died down—and a shot rang out.

He had fired at her.

Still she ran, alone on that prairie, heading for the lights of the homes perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead of her, ran until her lungs were sharp with pain and her heart was leaping.

Suddenly her shadow was in front of her. An engine roared behind her. He was in the car, trying to run her down.

Frantically she leaped for the ditch and tumbled down a slight embankment. The car swept by her, flinging gravel after it. On to the end of the lane, where it met the paved street, the auto went as she watched its headlights.

At the street it slowed and its lights swung in an arc and it headed back toward her.

She scrambled further down the embankment and hugged the ground, as close as she could hug it. The car roared down the road, up to her, twenty feet past her, and then it stopped. Lennie climbed out and walked to the edge of the embankment, peering over.

"Hazel!" he called. "Hazel! Don't be scared! I won't hurt you! I was only fooling!"

She must have fainted, for she had no memory of him leaving or the car driving off. She knew only that she closed her eyes and prayed and after a while she opened them and he was gone. She lay there for a long time.

Finally, though, she struggled to her feet and walked down the roadway, dizzily, not knowing into what she was headed.

At last she reached the safety of the paved street and the friendly reflection of light from the houses there. She stumbled on, and at the first corner she came to a little restaurant, dingy and dirty, but still

a haven. She opened the door and staggered in.

"Call the police!" she said.

Again she must have fainted, for the next thing she knew she was seated in a booth and the faces of the counterman and the solitary customer were hovering close to hers and a steaming hot cup of coffee was on the table in front of her.

And the radio was on, with a man talking.

She was safe, she thought. Safe. Free. Or was she? Would she ever be free of fear and danger, as long as Lennie lived? Would he come back for her, the light of murder in his eyes?

"You okay now, miss?" the counterman asked.

She nodded weakly.

"Here, drink this." He held the coffee up to her lips, and she gulped it. It burned her tongue and her throat, but it shocked reason and comprehension back into her brain.

"I'm all right," she whispered. "The police . . ."

"We called 'em."

The radio was next to her booth and suddenly, in a terrible, violent hum, it droned its way into her consciousness.

". . . a diabolically clever robbery to which Yankewicz confessed . . ."

"Quiet!" she said.

". . . and it ended, Commissioner Peters said, in the typical double-cross of the underworld. Kenton, according to the commissioner, tipped the police off to Yankewicz' hideout. In turn, Yankewicz managed to get away with the entire loot, which he was carrying in a valise when he was arrested. And he sent death to his erstwhile partner in crime.

"He made a bomb and put it in a package so wrapped that, as soon as it is opened, it will explode. He told Kenton his share of the robbery was in the package and he left it where Kenton would pick it up. Police are searching . . ."

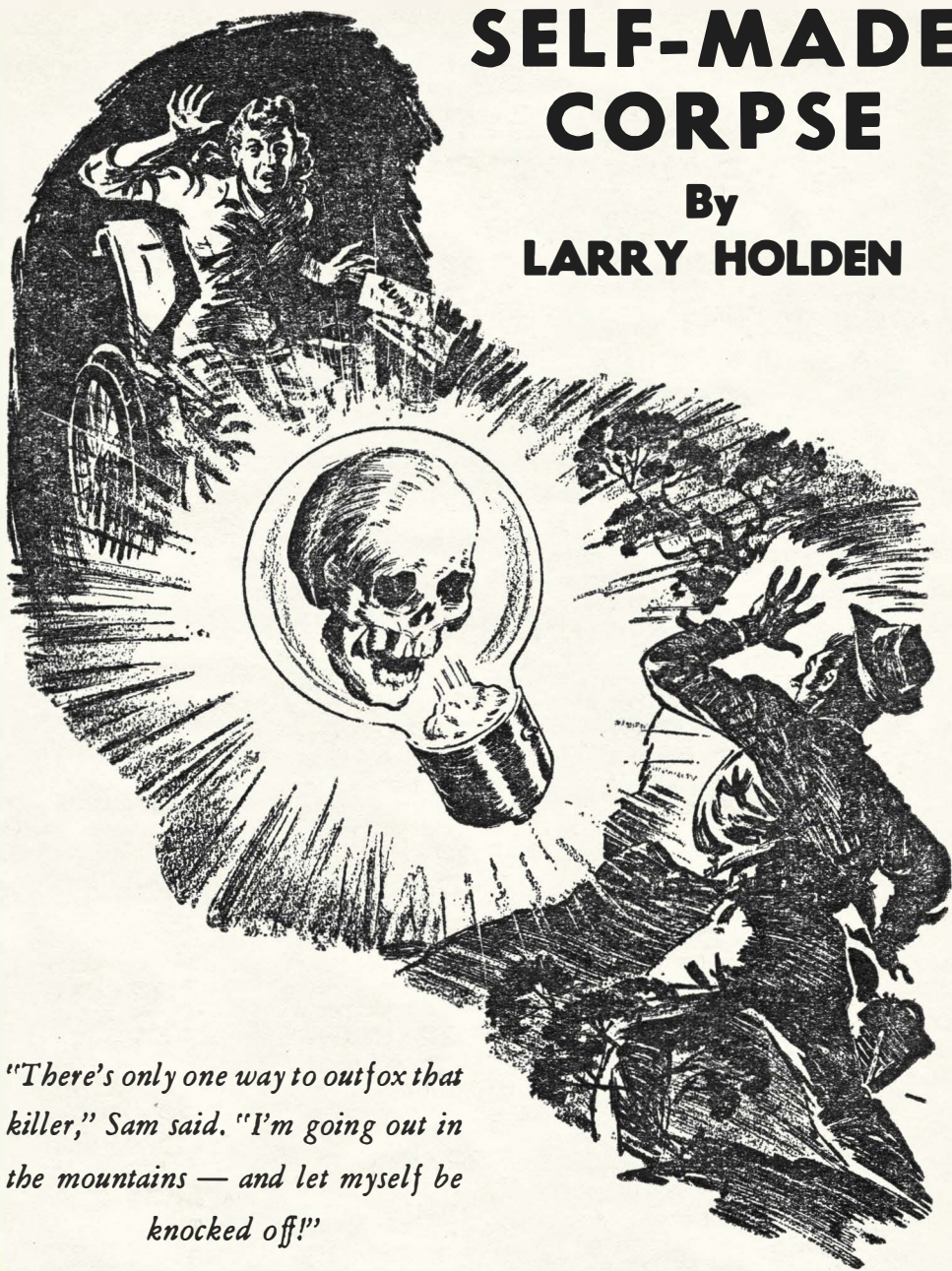
In the distance a dull, hollow roar sounded; the doors and windows of the diner rattled faintly.

"What was that?" the counterman asked.

She smiled. "Nothing," she said. "Nothing. It's all right."

SELF-MADE CORPSE

By
LARRY HOLDEN



"There's only one way to outfox that killer," Sam said. "I'm going out in the mountains — and let myself be knocked off!"

SAM stormed past the bleating receptionist and strode straight into Joe Cobb's private office.

"Joe," he said, "I want you to draw yourself up a power of attorney right now. I'm going away for a while." His red hair was fairly crackling with rage. Sam Daly was short and wiry, but he had the

unreasoning pride and temper of Lucifer.

The attorney looked up with a smile. "Now, Sam," he said mildly, "don't tell me you and Alice are on the outs."

A dangerous light danced in Sam's clear blue eyes, and even his freckles seemed to burn in his face.

Joe said quickly, "All right, Sam. I'll

have the papers drawn up right away."

He should have known better than to have mentioned Alice, Sam's wife. To everyone but Sam, she was a bitter, evil-tongued woman, filled with hate and venom. But despite the constant lash of her tongue, Sam watched over her with a devotion that Joe had never seen equalled. Alice was an invalid, a hopeless invalid. Perhaps, Joe admitted, there were excuses that could be made for Alice.

Joe called his secretary on the intercom and told her to draw up a power of attorney. Then he sat back and looked at Sam, who was seething on the edge of the chair beside the desk.

"So you're taking a trip," he said. "Alice going with you?"

Sam laughed harshly. "Not where I'm going, Joe. I'm going to die."

Joe said, "What!" and lunged forward in his chair.

Sam grinned whitely at him. "Keep your shirt on, Joe. Here, take a look at this."

He took what looked like a light bulb from his pocket and placed it on the blotter in front of the attorney. He gave it a little flick with his finger and set it spinning. Joe picked it up and looked at it with curiosity.

"It's a flash bulb," he said, "for your camera." He lifted his eyebrows, asking for an explanation.

Sam's manner had calmed considerably—Joe Cobb always had that effect on him—but the hot light still burned in his eyes.

"It's a flash bulb, all right," he said, "but with one little difference. Some damn fool scooped out the base and filled it with nitro."

Joe looked suddenly as if the bulb had grown unbearably hot. He stared at it with horror. Sam chuckled grimly.

"Don't get excited," he said. "I emptied it. I tried to take a picture of a pair of back-fence cats last night, and the bulb wouldn't go off. When I got in the house, I looked it over and found a wood plug in the end. I pulled the plug, and out came the nitro. Don't ask me if I'm sure it was nitro. I worked in the oil fields long enough to know that. There was enough nitro to blow me to smithereens. But the damn fool forgot to put in a center contact, so it didn't go off."

Joe breathed, "My God!"

Sam glowered at the attorney. "Somebody's trying to kill me, Joe," he said angrily. "And I want to find out why."

JOE slowly and carefully laid the bulb back on the blotter. "Thirty thousand dollars *might* be a motive, Sam," he said, giving Sam a sharp glance. "That's just about what you're worth to date."

Sam said, "Huh?" Then, scornfully, "You're crazy, Joe. That's all tied up. Alice gets that when I knock off, and she—sa-a-a-ay! Is *that* what you're driving at?"

His face purpled and he started to rise from his chair.

Joe said hastily, "No, no, Sam. Not Alice. But somebody might figure that Alice, as a wealthy widow, might be easy pickings. Know what I mean?"

Sam almost laughed. "If he's figuring that, he just plain don't know Alice," he said decidedly.

Joe was inclined to agree with that. Alice Daly was no pushover under any circumstance. Quite the contrary. Alice was a tough turkey.

"No," said Sam, relaxing. "I figure it different. These things go in cycles. Four months ago somebody broke into the house of Harry Breese across the street from me. Beat his wife over the head with a hammer and got off with ten thousand in negotiable bonds she had hid under a mattress or someplace. Now the guy that did that knew Harry's habits down to a T. Every night at ten sharp, Harry takes a walk down to the diner at the bridge—it's about a mile—and has a cup of tea. Claims it makes him sleep better. Now you see what I mean? The guy that did that job *knew* Harry's habits. That's the reason I say these things go in circles. The guy that loaded that flash bulb, knows *my* habits. Night photography."

Joe had the legal mind. There was a loophole and he pounced on it. "Wait a minute, Sam," he said. "Maybe that bulb wasn't meant for you. Maybe it was meant for Alice. She's a kind of camera fiend, too."

"Nope. Alice won't use nothing but infra-red for night work. Me, I like the bright flash. I like to see it while I'm getting it. That guy knew what he was doing

when he loaded that flash bulb, and here's where he was very, very cute," Sam hitched his chair an inch closer to the desk and dropped his voice. "See them mountains out there?" He swept his arm toward the west window, from which could be seen the high, harsh crags of the Rockies. "Every week I'm out there, sometimes two, three days at a time. Why, Joe, I bet I been in places out there that ain't seen a face since the Indians. And the shots I got! Bear and lion, to say nothing of the small game!"

Joe nodded unhappily. The plot was becoming clear, too clear.

"Of course," Sam couldn't help boasting, "I'm taking a chance every time I do it. I don't like them fancy camera-traps where the animals take their own pictures while you're miles away and safe. I like to be right up close with my flash-gun. And there," he said triumphantly, "is where the guy was being cute again. *He knows that!*"

Joe felt sick. Sam looked as if he had achieved a major victory in figuring that out. Sam was right. The would-be murderer, or murderer, knew him inside-out. But Sam wasn't a man you could talk to.

"Now," said Sam, raising his forefinger, "what I'm going to do is this: I'm going out in the mountains, and let myself be knocked off." He winked and gave Joe that grim chuckle again.

Joe stared blankly at him. "I don't get it," he said.

"What do you mean, you don't get it?" demanded Sam impatiently. "I'm going out there tomorrow. There's going to be an explosion, and if anybody comes around to investigate, they'll find my car,

my hat and some blood spots—and I'll be gone, dead. Get it?"

Joe sighed. "Sam, I'll be frank. I don't get it."

"Damn it, use your head. It'll look like I'm dead, but I won't be! I'll be alive and coming back here to see what the murderer's up to. Now do you get it?"

Joe let his hands fall into his lap. He just sat back and stared. He started, "Of all the hare-brained, addleheaded, crackpot schemes I ever heard—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. This guy's out to get me, isn't he?"

"I concede the point," said Joe ironically.

"And I don't know who he is. Right?"

"Conceded."

"But once he thinks I'm dead, he won't keep on trying to knock me off, so I'll have a better chance of staying alive and finding out what it's all about, won't I?"

Something akin to respect and relief showed in Joe's face. "You're right, Sam," he said. "I agree absolutely. I positively agree."

"Well," Sam grumbled, "it's about time. Now let's get that power of attorney drawn up so you can look after things while I'm gone."

TO THE EYE, Sam was jaunty as he jumped out of his car in front of his house, but it was the jauntiness of crystalized anger, of rage that had resolved itself into a plan.

"... that made me love Mary, the Rose of Tralee," he hummed.

Across the street, gaunt Harry Breese was sitting on his porch, dead hands on his knees, staring at nothing. Since the

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death of his wife, Harry and been leaning further and further over the brink of the grave.

In a surge of momentary sympathy, Sam crossed the street, agilely leaped the fence and trotted up the walk, drawing down his face into the lines of gravity.

"It's a nice evening, Mr. Breese," he said solemnly. "Would you care to join me in a glass of beer?"

Breese looked down at him, then looked away. His eyes were ashes.

"Now, Mr. Breese," said Sam gently, "it doesn't do for a man to grieve his life away. It was a tragedy, I know, but there are those of us who are willing to hold out a hand to you, the hand of friendship, give and take, and I'd take it kindly if you'd join me in a glass of beer."

Breese turned his lack-luster eyes on Sam again. "Leave me alone," he muttered. "Just leave me alone!"

The last words came with such intensity that Sam blinked at the impact of them. He backed off a few steps.

"Why sure, Mr. Breese," he said. "No offense meant. But it would do you good to get out a little. I just don't like to see you keeping everything in yourself. I'd like to see you giving a little more. You'd be a happier man."

He gave Breese a cheerful grin, to cheer him up, and with a wave of his hand, he turned and trotted back down the path and leaped the little white fence.

Alice was in her room. Alice was always in her room. Alice had been in her room for five embittered years now, ever since she had tripped over the torn rug at the head of the stairs and injured her spine, and she had never let Sam forget that he had forgotten to tack down that torn bit of rug.

She heard him come into her room, and she knew it was he, for she had seen him cross the street and enter the house. But she did not turn her head. Her nephew was sitting on the floor at the foot of her wheelchair, reading Walter Winchell's column aloud to her. She loved Walter Winchell. She loved his sharp gossip, just as she loved to sit all day at her window and watch. To have missed even the least important event in the neighborhood would have soured her for days. Sam had seen it happen.

"Well now, Alice," he cried cheerily, "how did it go today? Did you get any good shots of the birds?" He gestured at the camera beside her wheelchair. It was equipped with a telephoto lens. It was the best camera money could buy.

He did not seem to notice that her glance was filled with bleak hatred. She said venomously, "William is *trying* to read to me, Samuel."

Sam grinned and said, "Hi, Willie."

Willie said unenthusiastically, "Hello, Uncle Samuel," and went on reading in that high whinnying voice of his. Sam waited patiently until he finished.

He had his own opinion of William. William had the brains of a titmouse and the conceit of a peacock. William thought he could play poker. Out on Route 29 there was a place that catered to people like William. It was called the Black & White Club. Sam knew the name very well. He had made out checks in the amount of fourteen hundred dollars to the Black & White Club which should have, but did not, prove to William that he could not play poker. Willie was hard to convince. Sam endured him only for Alice's sake, for William was the only blood relation she had left. To her, William was a son, a family, roots. He let her have William, just as he let her have anything else she demanded.

The moment William finished reading the paper, Alice turned on Sam and said viperishly, "You sound in a good mood. I suppose that means you're going off into the mountains again tomorrow."

"Now, Alice," Sam wheedled, "the boys tell me a white cat was seen, and it's a very rare thing. I'd give my very liver for a picture of that, I would. And you know you'd be just as proud as I would, if I got it."

He bent over her wheelchair to kiss her harsh cheek, but she turned her head sharply away.

"Don't nuzzle me!" she snapped. "It's hard enough to keep my hair in place the way it is. Get out!"

Sam closed his eyes. "All right, Alice," he said. "Don't upset yourself."

William followed him hurriedly. He cornered Sam in the hall.

"Uncle Sam," he rumbled, looking over Sam's shoulder, "I'm a little short and I

was wondering if maybe you would . . .”

“Those inside straights again?” asked Sam shrewdly.

William went right on mumbling. It was a ritual with him. He knew Sam would give the money. “It’s just until Aunt Alice gives me my allowance. I’ll pay it back. I’ve just had a little run of bad luck . . .”

Sam took out his wallet. “A hundred be enough?” he asked drily.

William snatched the bills. “It’ll do,” he said ungraciously. He riffled quickly through the sheaf of bills, counting them, gave Sam a brief, insincere smile, and muttered, “Thanks.” He darted down the stairs.

Can’t wait to lose them out at the Black & White, Sam thought wryly. William was an expensive necessity. Alice had a small income from some oil bonds, and Sam was sure William had that spent long in advance. He wondered vaguely how much William did lose at cards.

BY THE TIME it came to leave the next morning, he had forgotten all about William. There were so many things to remember, and he wanted to get out of the house before Alice awakened. By ten o’clock, he was high in the mountains.

He did not realize it, but out there alone, away from Alice, he was happiest. He could give rein to his pity.

Poor Alice. Nothing to do but sit at her window, day and night, nothing to keep her company but her camera and binoculars—and her bitterness, her everlasting hatred for everything but William. Sam never admitted the last of that, not even in his thoughts.

“It’s the pain, poor girl,” he thought consciously, and aloud, as if it were a sort of duty.

But it was with delight that he drew in the wild tang of the wind’s free wine.

By noon he had found the spot he wanted. It was a narrow, craggy side road on the rim of a gorge, and far below a ridiculously angry stream was tearing through the rocks on its urgent way. A jutting boulder made a natural platform, overhanging the gorge, and from it could faintly be seen the city he had left hours before. Now all he had to do was wait for

night fall. Night was necessary, and he had to wait. Whistling, he took from the car a frying pan, a coffee pot, a package of bacon, some eggs, a bag of coffee, a knife, a fork and a spoon.

He passed the afternoon contentedly taking pictures of squirrels, but with the first hint of dusk, he put his camera aside and got busy. He had everything ready—a fruit juice can packed tight with powder from shotgun shells, a detonator he had made himself, and a coil of wire.

He buried the can in a crack in the boulder and backed slowly down the road, paying out the wire. He had uncoiled two hundred yards of it before he was screened by the sharp turn in the road. He attached the free ends of his wire to his detonator box. He walked out to the middle of the road, took one last appraising look at the long, snaky wires, then trotted back and crouched down beside the box. It was quite dark now.

He grinned and said aloud, “Here goes nothing.” He raised the plunger and shoved it down hard.

The explosion was noisy and gratifying. There was the initial bellow as the powder let go, then the rumbling echoes, and after that a crashing thunder as the boulder split and tore down the mountainside into the fierce stream below. The flash must have been visible for miles.

Chuckling, Sam ambled back down the road. Half the boulder was gone, a window was broken in his car, and the side of it was pitted and dented. He tossed his hat into a bush and dropped an extra shoe at the edge of the ruined boulder. As an old explosives man, he knew how authentic a touch that was. An explosion of that force would have blown a man clear out of his shoes. But there was one more touch he had to give. Blood. There was nothing like a little blood to convince people.

He grimaced and said aloud, “Hold your hat, Sam!” then took the flat of his hand and slapped his nose as hard as he could. The resultant flow was very satisfactory. He leaned over and let it drip on the edge of the split rock. That really tied it up tight.

He recoiled the wire, gathered up his box and camera, then started up through the woods toward the cabin, two miles

off, where he planned to spend the night.

HE AWAKENED late the next morning. He took a noisy bath in the icy brook and danced wildly as he towed himself in the cold air. Now he needed something to eat. Over the mountain and down on the main highway was the Greyhound bus stop, the Midway Rest. That was step two.

The bus was in and the place was crowded when he arrived. He knew the schedule, and he had planned it that way. One extra mouth at the counter would never be noticed. On the way out, he picked up a paper and started the long hike back to the cabin. He was used to walking in the mountains, and he had a wiry strength that defied the miles. Back at the cabin, he lit his pipe, sat down in the sun and opened the paper. Left to himself, Sam could have spent the rest of his life doing just that.

The pipe dropped from his mouth, bounced off his thigh and lay burning in the grass. The banner headline leaped blackly at him:

WIFE SLAIN; HUSBAND SOUGHT

Underneath was his own picture, and a picture of Alice.

The world went dead inside of him. He dazedly read the story, but only certain phrases stuck with him.

“. . . brutally slain . . . Daly had been on bad terms with his wife for years, it was asserted by . . . Daly, an eccentric, often disappeared for days at a time to take photographs of animals in the mountains . . . according to Lieutenant Mitchell, Daly's movement have been traced . . .”

The fine print swam before his eyes, and Sam flung the paper from him. It fluttered crazily as a breeze caught it, and spread itself against a bush, flapping.

He lurched to his feet. There were tears in his eyes. Alice. The memory of her as a cruel-voiced harpy had been erased in a moment. He remembered only the way she used to smile before her accident, and blind rage came bubbling up into his throat. With a hoarse, inarticulate cry, he turned and plunged into the path that led to the side road where he had left his car. He was scratched and bleeding from whipping branches when he staggered out to the road above the boulder, panting.

He lurched the last few steps around the bend, then stopped. He stared incredulously, his eyes huge with bewilderment. The car was gone. His hat was gone from the bush into which he had tossed it. The shoe was gone! He leaped forward, fell, and scrambled to the edge of the rock on his hands and knees. Even the blood was gone. There was nothing to show that he had been there, except the new, raw split down the side of the rock!

* * *

Joe Cobb was tired, bone tired. He plodded into the living room, switched on the floor lamp and dropped limply into the sofa.

Behind him, a familiar voice whispered, “Joe, it's Sam.”

Joe did not move. He merely turned to stone. He breathed, “My God!”

“Put on a light in the other room and turn this one off.”

“B-but how'd you get in, Sam? The police have been following me for hours. They knew you'd try to contact me.”

“Ha, the police! I snuck in this afternoon. They didn't think to watch an empty house.”

“Stay where you are, Sam. I'll turn the light off.”

Joe rose and went warily into the kitchen. When he came back to the living room, he turned off the floor lamp, and Sam came cautiously from behind the sofa. He had washed the blood from his face, but the scratches still showed. He was wearing just the bare bones of his usual grin.

“I came back, Joe,” he said. There was a lash in his voice. “They killed Alice.”

Joe looked at him in despair. “You're in,” he said, “but I don't know how you'll get out. You're hot, Sam. They're looking for you in three states.”

“Don't worry about me.”

“But I am worrying, Sam. Y-you didn't kill her, did you, Sam?”

Sam did not answer. He did not have to.

Joe went on dully, “The police were in to see me today. I didn't dare tell them about . . . your little scheme. They already have you pegged as a crackpot, and that would only have made it worse.”

"I told you not to worry about me," Sam said metallically.

"Sam, realize the situation you're in," Joe pleaded. "Your giving me power of attorney makes it look premeditated. If there is anything you can do to clear yourself, for God's sake do it!"

Sam had prowled across the room in the darkness. He looked back over his shoulder and said, "I'm going to get the rat that killed Alice." He wasn't raging now, but he was too calm.

Joe knew that Sam hadn't listened to a word he had said. Sam's one blind spot had always been Alice.

"I got a theory," Sam was saying. "These things go in circles. The guy that murdered Harry Breese's wife did it for her bonds. Alice had some oil bonds. She took them out of the bank about a year ago and kept them in the house. I never asked her why. She was knocked off for those bonds, Joe. What do you think?"

Joe shook his head unhappily. "I don't know what to think. Don't get sore now, Sam, but when you brought that flash bulb into the office yesterday, I thought—I thought Alice had planted it."

Sam said coldly, "I can see there's no sense talking to you."

"Wait a minute, Sam. The fact that she was murdered changes my mind, doesn't it?"

"It should."

"All right. So listen to me. I did a little checking after you left the office yesterday. Do you know that your nephew, William, has lost over ten thousand dollars at cards during the past year?"

Sam said quietly, "What was that fig-

ure again? Ten thousand dollars?"

"Ten thousand, Sam. I put a private detective on it, and that's straight. I thought you were going at it the wrong way. I was trying to protect you, Sam."

"Ten thousand." Sam's voice sounded almost dreamy. "And all I advanced the little scut was fourteen hundred. Get on your coat and take a walk around the block, Joe."

"A walk?"

"Yeah, take a walk," Sam said impatiently. "The cops'll follow you, then I can get out of here."

He grabbed Joe's arm and half led, half dragged him to the front door. "Walk nice and slow, so they won't have any trouble keeping an eye on you."

Joe opened his mouth to protest, but Sam opened the door and shoved him out to the porch. Sam crouched at the front window. He saw Joe walk stiffly down the walk, then turn right. Across the street, a shadow drifted down the block, parallel with him. Sam waited until they had turned the corner before he left the house.

IT WAS a short walk across town to his own house. He came up through the back yard. Through the kitchen window he could see that the living room lights were burning—but the shades were down. Standing on tiptoe, he could see William moving to and fro, sometimes carrying something, sometimes just bent over, going through something, like a box.

He eased himself quietly into the kitchen. He stood for a moment at the living room door without saying a word. William had Sam's letter file open on the

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sofa, and he was greedily ripping through the papers. His face was pale and glistening under the light of the lamp on the end table. His hands shook.

Sam fought down the terrible rage that threatened his sanity. His voice was almost ordinary as he said, "Looking for something, Willie?"

William's head jerked up. His eyes rolled wildly and his mouth fell apart. He started up from the sofa, still clutching a handful of papers.

"Uncle Sam . . ." he whimpered.

Sam took two tense steps into the room. William uttered a frantic cry and scrambled for the doorway. His legs didn't seem to work right. They crumpled under him and he fell. He scrambled madly for the hall.

Sam leaped in front of him and swung his fist. It caught William squarely on the point of his soft chin. William collapsed with a moan. Panting, Sam ripped off his tie and bound William's hands, then took his own tie and bound his feet. He stuffed a handkerchief between his slack jaws. And all this while, William just lay and stared at him with mute terror.

Sam straightened up. "That'll hold you for a while," he said grimly.

He stepped over William's trussed form and bounded up the stairs. Alice's room first. He flung open the door and stared, aghast. The room had been practically ripped to pieces. The mattress was off the bed, the drawers were out of her bureau, her camera was smashed and trampled, and even her knitting basket had been torn apart.

But her wheel chair still stood before the window. Alice had sat there day and night, for often she could not sleep. He looked quickly away from the spot and crossed to the bureau. She had kept her bonds there, strapped to the back with cellulose tape. He swept his hands behind

it—and encountered nothing. They were gone. The bonds were gone.

Almost blindly, he stopped and picked up the ball of yarn, with which Alice had been knitting. It was egg-shaped and there was something hard inside, but it wasn't the bonds. He threw it on the bed and strode out of the room.

Across the hall was the darkroom, built there to make it easy for Alice to get in and out. She liked to do her own developing and printing. The enlarger had been pulled down and smashed, and the floor was a ruin of paper and film.

He plodded slowly down the stairs, his hands twitching. William saw him coming and tried to writhe away, but he collapsed limply and whimpered when Sam knelt on the floor beside him.

"You're going to tell me all about it, boy," Sam whispered, as if it were something intimate between them, "or I'm going to hurt you something awful. Don't yell, now, or you'll just make it worse." He jerked the handkerchief from William's mouth.

William moaned, "Nonononono . . ."

"The bonds. You did it for the bonds, didn't you, boy?"

William babbled, inarticulate with terror. Sam snarled and dug his thumbs into his eyes.

"Tell me!" he growled savagely. "Or I'll pop them out in my hands."

William frantically tried several times to speak, and when he finally did manage, he stammered so badly that he was barely understandable.

"Sh-sh-sh-she s-s-s-old them. Shesold themshesoldthemshesoldthemshesoldthem!"

"She what!"

"Soldsoldsold them. She sold them. I needed the money. She sold them."

"You needed a lot of money, didn't you, boy. Over ten thousand dollars."

"She gave it to me," William bleated.

— TO OUR READERS —

We are constantly experimenting in an effort to give you the very best reading surface obtainable. For this reason, there may be occasional slight fluctuations in the thickness of this magazine. Now, as in the past, every magazine bearing the Popular Publications seal of quality will continue to have the same number of pages, the same wordage, the same unparalleled value in top-flight reading entertainment that has been and will continue to be our Popular Fiction Group guarantee—the best reading value obtainable anywhere at any price!

"She gave it to me. She was always giving me money. She gave it to me. She..."

Down in the cellar, the coal shovel hit the concrete floor with a metallic clatter. Sam clapped his hand over William's mouth and crouched rigidly. In the silence, they could faintly hear the shuffling footsteps cross the cellar floor, then the creak of the stairs that led to the kitchen.

Sam warned William with a blazing glance, and reached out and switched off the lamp. He started to the door and stared through the dining room into the kitchen.

The cellar door opened inch by inch. A shadow bulked against the window for a moment, then came toward him. Sam's rage broke, and he hurled himself at the man with a bellow. He was struck twice across the forehead with something hard and sharp, but he scarcely felt the blows. He locked his wiry hands around the intruder's throat and drove him backward across the room until they hit the wall with a shock. The blows continued to rain on Sam's head, but he hung on, uttering strangled animal sounds.

And then the light went on. He found himself staring into the congested face of Harry Breese. Harry's eyes bulged; terror became horror. With maniacal strength, he tore himself from Sam's grasp and flung himself in a corner, screaming. Sam took a step toward him and the scream turned into an insane shriek. He crouched behind his hands. He burst into tears.

"You're dead, she's dead, they're all dead," he sobbed. "I know they're dead. I killed them, that's how I know. And you're dead. You blew up. You're dead."

Sam felt suddenly sick. Breese was mumbling now. The shock of seeing Sam alive had turned his brain.

JOE COBB came a few minutes after the police, just in time to hear Breese's confession—if you could call the babbling of a madman a confession. It was obvious that he had killed both his wife and Alice, and he had tried to kill Sam.

But only Sam seemed to know what he was really talking about.

After endless eternities, the police left.

Joe looked at Sam's haggard face. "He must have been crazy for months," he said.

Sam shook his head. "He thought I was in on it, too," he said dully. That's why he tried to knock me off."

"Come again?"

"I'll show you," Sam said bitterly. "But you'll be the last one I'll ever show."

He turned and left the room. Joe heard him plod up the stairs. When he returned, he had Alice's ball of yarn in his hand.

"It felt like a roll of film when I picked it up the first time," he said. "But it didn't mean anything until he started calling her names."

He slowly unwound the ball. There was no triumph in his manner when he held up the roll of film that had been the core of it.

"She knew he killed his wife." His voice dragged, as if he were ashamed of speaking. "She practically saw him do it. She was always sitting at that window. She never missed a thing. She blackmailed him, because she had to have money to give to Willie. But it wasn't her fault! It was that little rat's fault, him and his cards. She even sold her oil bonds for him. She did it for him!"

Joe shot him a quick glance, then soothed, "I can see that, Sam."

Sam blinked. "Well, let's take a look," he muttered.

He held the film up to the light. The first picture showed Breese's car coming out of the garage; the next showed the car returning. The third one showed Breese running toward the house. The fourth showed him running from the house, holding something in his hand that looked like a hammer. His wife had been killed with a hammer.

Silently, Sam held a match to the film and threw it into the fireplace.

"I owe her that much," he said woodenly. "I wouldn't want—"

"And you owe William something, too," Joe said quickly. "If he hadn't turned on that light, Breese might have cracked your skull with that flashlight."

Sam snorted. He sounded more like his old self. "The only reason Willie turned on that light," he said drily, "was to give the other guy a better chance at me!"

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THE COP and the MURDER- MACHINE!

CHAPTER ONE

An Honest Cop

I GOT down to the office at ten o'clock and, as usual, Scottie was there. He was sitting at the desk signing some reports, and he flashed me his good-

"Car Thirty-six to Bureau," the voice came over the police radio. "You know who that dead man is? It's Scottie!" Scottie—the best cop ever to wear a badge! Scottie—the cop for whom every man jack on the force would break every law—up to and including murder!



By
PHILIP WECK



Ed Lommar grabbed him
and threw him against the
wall. "Talk!" he roared.

natured grin and wrote his name again.

"I'll be out of your way in a second," he said. "Soon as I finish these."

I hung up my hat and coat and took off my shoulder holster.

"Let 'em go," I said. "Run along home and grab some shut-eye."

"Oh, I can't sleep, anyway," he said. "I've got something else to take care of before I get home."

He signed the last report, capped his pen, and stuck it in his pocket. "There," he said. "I'm done."

"Shopping?" I asked him.

"No," he said. "Business."

"Look here, Scottie," I said. "Your job is supposed to be administrative. I've told you that a dozen times. Stay off the street before you wind up with a slug in you."

Scottie grinned again as he lumbered to his feet and put on his coat.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I'll see you in the morning."

But I did worry about him. I'd been worrying about Scottie for a long time.

Scottie was one of those boys who won't play ball. Twenty years on the force, the smartest dick we've ever had, with more arrests to his credit than anybody else—and he was a detective sergeant, that's all. Simply because he wouldn't play ball.

Take this matter of working overtime, for instance. Nobody else did it unless it actually was required. Every district captain in the city and every desk man I've ever run into just let his reports pile up and signed them when he had to. I had a stack on my desk waiting for me.

But not Scottie. Every day, every report would be filled out, signed, ready for action—even if the case couldn't go into court for weeks or months. He'd work an hour, two hours, extra to sign them.

And why? It was just his nature, that's all. You don't get promotions on this force because you're thorough and competent. You get them because you play politics. That's a hell of a thing for any cop to say, but it's true. A man can work his way up to a sergeant's stripes by being diligent and smart. Beyond that, he's got to be cagey, and he's got to know his ward committeeman and his alderman and a few others. He's got to play along with them.

Scottie wouldn't. "I'm a cop, not a politician," he told me, many a time.

And he was. He pinched the mayor's nephew for being drunk and disorderly, and booked him. He smashed the slot machines in the East Side Republican Club, just a week after the Republicans had swept every office in the city. He gave Judge Cavanaugh a parking ticket every day for five days in a row.

I'd worked my way up with Scottie. We got our shields the same day. We pounded beats together in the tough River Ward. We wore out three squad cars, driving up and down on the east side. We became sergeants together. And there Scottie stopped, because he wouldn't play ball.

When I got to be chief of detectives, I made him acting assistant chief. Regulations call for a lieutenant to be assistant, but Scottie couldn't get over the "acting" hump. That was why he had the midnight to eight A.M. shift, too.

He was a cop's cop, a hard-working, fearless man, and everybody on the force knew it and respected him. But he was a sergeant, and nothing else. Right now, I thought, he likely was out doing some legwork looking for a hood who should be behind bars—legwork he might have left to a subordinated, except that the hood would have political connections and Scottie wouldn't ask anyone else to walk into a hot spot.

And some day, I knew, Scottie would pick up such a hood, and the hood would shoot first.

I didn't like it, even though I knew there was nothing I could do about it.

I tried to put Scottie out of my mind and dipped into that stack of reports of my own. But, of course, I didn't get very far with them. About half-past ten, Jenkins, my secretary, stuck his head in the door.

"The commissioner wants to see you, Chief," he said.

I got into the elevator and went up to the commissioner's office.

THE COMMISSIONER was a man of about forty, as honest as most commissioners can be, pretty efficient and a good executive, I guess. But he, too, was a politician. A big one and a smooth worker. There was a lot of talk about running him for mayor the next fall. And after that, who knows? If he had a good,

hard-hitting record as police commissioner, he might go far. Ever hear of a fellow named Theodore Roosevelt?

His problem, of course, was to get that hard-hitting record without pulling down too many fences, without getting too many people sore at him, and without offending any of the boys who can get out the vote.

As soon as I walked into his office and saw who was there, I knew he was face to face with that problem.

His visitor was Lonnie Pellini—smooth, suave, big and fat Lonnie Pellini, who ran the Third Ward, the ward that controlled the balance of power at most elections. He sat there puffing on a black cigar, as black as his hair, and he nodded pleasantly at me.

Pleasantly, yeah. But Pellini didn't go around making pleasant visits. He spelled trouble.

"Sit down, Mac," the commissioner said.

I sat down.

"Mac," he said, "Mr. Pellini has a complaint to make about one of your men."

A good politician isn't always a yes-man. And a good cop has to start out being tough.

"Okay," I said. "I'm always ready to hear complaints from a law-abiding citizen. You been law-abiding lately, Pellini?"

"I don't like your attitude, Mac," the commissioner said.

So I grinned. Sometimes a grin takes the curse off your words. "What's the complaint?"

"This man of yours," the commissioner said, "has raided Mr. Pellini's restaurant three times in the past year."

He was talking about Scottie.

I knew Scottie had raided the place. And I knew, as well as Scottie, that the "restaurant," the Ace of Clubs, actually was a horse-racing-roulette-craps-blackjack dive upstairs. Only, each time Scottie had raided it, the paraphernalia had disappeared somehow before he got there.

That was the difference between Scottie and me. He'd keep on raiding the place, no matter who owned it. I wouldn't.

"The raids were entirely unwaranted," the commissioner went on. "There wasn't a thing illegal uncovered in any of them.

"Yet your man persisted in them. And now, to make it worse, this detective has been loitering around the restaurant for a week, questioning Mr. Pellini's employes and in general making a nuisance of himself."

"You're talking about Scott, aren't you?" I asked.

"That's right, Scott," the commissioner said. "It will have to be stopped, Mac."

"Seems to me I've heard a lot of stories about the Ace of Clubs," I said.

Pellini waved his cigar at me. "Three times you raid it," he said. "Three times you find nothing. You can't prove a thing, so I want you should let me alone."

"It's none of my doing," I said.

The commissioner told me, "Anything that one of your detectives does is your doing, Mac. I don't want to hear any more such complaints."

That was an order. I said, "Okay, I'll speak to Scottie. Is that all?"

"That's all. But be sure you haven't misunderstood me, Mac."

Oh, I hadn't misunderstood him. If I couldn't call Scottie off, I'd be out in the



sticks again. That was what he meant.

WHEN I came out of the commissioner's office a couple of newspaper reporters were waiting in the hall. They're always around when you don't want them.

"I hear your Boy Scout's in trouble, Chief," said Williams of the *News*.

"Boy Scout?"

"Sure. Scottie. What's the pitch?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I told him and walked on.

Downstairs, I tried to figure out Scottie's game. Pellini ran a gambling joint, and a gambling joint should be closed, no matter who its boss is. Probably, I thought, Scottie was making a nuisance out of himself, scaring off the help if he could, just pestering the place.

Trouble was, his pestering came all the way back to me. I'd have to get hold of him, lay down the law, and hope he'd listen to reason.

I went back to my office and called his home. He wasn't there yet.

So I sat down and dug out the pile of reports. I tried to read a few of them, but I couldn't.

After a few minutes, Jenkins came in again.

"Something going on in the radio room, Chief," he said.

I strolled over.

"A holdup on First Street," the dispatcher told me. "They've got the guy cornered in an empty store."

Some joker, I discovered, had stuck up a grocery and lammed down crowded First Street. A traffic officer spotted him, chased him; a squad car came along. The holdup man ducked into an empty store and was barricaded there.

"What squad's in on this?" I asked the dispatcher.

"Fifty-seven, from the Second District," he said.

I grabbed the two-way mike.

"Bureau to Car Fifty-seven," I said. "Bureau to Car Fifty-seven. Come in, Fifty-seven."

"Fifty-seven to the Bureau," a fresh young voice answered. "Go ahead."

"What's the setup?"

"There's a big crowd here, Bureau. I'm afraid a couple of people might get shot if we go in after this boy."

"Fifty-seven," I said, "post the front and the back of that empty store and try to keep the crowd away. I'll get help."

I told the dispatcher to call the Second District and send out all the men they had available. Then I grabbed the mike again.

"Bureau to Car Four. Come in, Four."

"Four to Bureau," Ted Brzynski said. "Go ahead."

"Get over to First Street and take charge," I said.

Car Four is our "heavy" squad, equipped with riot-guns, tear-gas, bullet-proof shields, and anything they might need in the toughest jobs we run across. There're four men in that car, and every one of them faces death on every call they get. They know it, and that's why they're picked men. Scottie used to head the squad; now Ted Brzynski had moved into the job.

With a detail from the district to keep the crowd back, and Ted Brzynski on the spot, that holdup man was as good as in a cell, I thought.

Then another call came in.

"Car Thirty-six reporting. There's a drunk in the alley at Twenty-ninth and Fremont."

"Bureau to Car Thirty-six," I said. "Get off the air with these petty calls. Telephone your district on them."

"Roger," said Thirty-six.

"Bureau to Car Four," I went on. "Keep me posted. This is the Chief."

Ted said, "Oke."

We waited about three minutes for the next call. And then it was from Thirty-six again.

"Car Thirty-six. That's not a drunk. It's a stiff. The man's dead."

"Thirty-six," I said, "we've got a hot one. Telephone your district and keep off the air, will you?"

Thirty-six didn't answer.

And I got a funny feeling in the small of my back, suddenly. Twenty-ninth and Fremont—that was where the Ace of Clubs was. A dead man in the alley. . . .

"Car Thirty-six to Bureau," that voice said suddenly. "You know who that dead man is?"

I was afraid to speak.

"It's Scottie, Chief."

Scottie!

Dead!

"Thirty-six to Bureau. He was shot in the back, Chief. Shot down like a dog!"

The mike was quiet, quiet as a tomb.

Scottie! I remembered that grin of his. I remembered those long nights in a squad car, the time we chased a gunman up an alley. . . .

The microphone crackled suddenly.

"Car Three to Bureau. Three to Bureau. Are you there, Bureau?"

That was Joe Murphy in Car Three. And Joe was telling me to get to work. Telling me this was no time to sit and dream—no time to waste in tears.

I grabbed the mike. "Bureau to Car Three. Take over that call at Twenty-ninth and Fremont. Bureau to Thirty-six. Bottle up that neighborhood; don't let anybody near, and don't destroy any evidence. Cars Two and Five, take that same call. Two and Five—"

"Car Four to Bureau." That was Brzynski cutting in. "We're going out, too. Let somebody else handle this punk holdup."

"Bureau to Four," I said. "Stay where you are."

Then I sat down again. Scottie dead.

I couldn't believe it.

"Fifth District to Bureau." That was Ed Lommar, Scottie's brother-in-law, Fifth District captain. "Fifth District to Bureau. We're going out. All Fifth District cars, converge on Twenty-ninth and Fremont. All Fifth District cars, report in and converge on Twenty-ninth and Fremont."

The Fifth District cars called in, one by one, and I sat there, hardly hearing, hardly knowing what was going on. Scottie! Why, he'd been like a brother to me. Not Scottie!

CHAPTER TWO

Private Citizen

"FOUR to Bureau," Brzynski said. "Four to Bureau. Send a morgue wagon for that holdup man. We're on our way."

I should have stopped him; it's regulations for a squad to hang around and report to the coroner. But I couldn't have held Brzynski.

Right then I don't think I could have

held a man on the force if I'd ordered him off that case.

In a minute, Brzynski came back.

"Four to Bureau. Four to Bureau. You know what's at Twenty-ninth and Fremont, Mac?"

Did I know!

I knew only too well. I knew what it meant, too, with an election coming up. And I knew a little bit more, I thought. I knew what Scottie had been doing in that vicinity.

Over the microphone, Brzynski said, "That's Scottie who's dead, Mac."

My throat was tight. The mike shook in my hand, and I said, "Okay, Ted. Take the joint apart."

"Roger!" Brzynski said, and he sang the word.

"Bureau to Four and all cars," I said. "Arrest Lonnie Pellini on sight, and any man known to consort with him. All cars. That's an order from your chief of detectives."

"All Fifth District squads," Ed Lommar said, "you heard that order. I want Pellini and every one of his men brought in immediately. All Fifth District cars, report in and repeat that order. . . ."

I heard his voice and the voices of the Fifth District men as I went out of the radio room. I heard them again when I walked into the commissioner's office, where he had his two-way on.

His face was white. He looked at me weakly, and he didn't say a word.

"You heard?" I asked him.

He nodded.

I tossed my badge and gun on his desk. "I worked with Scottie for twenty years," I said. "Twenty long, hard years."

Still he didn't make a sound.

"A private citizen has the right to make an arrest," I told him. "And he has the right to shoot a man down if he's resisting arrest."

"From now on I'm a private citizen. And I'm going to kill Pellini when I see him."

Then I walked out.

I went back to the radio room; I don't know why. As a private citizen I had no right to be there. As Scottie's friend, they'd have to kick me out.

I walked in and sat down. The loud-speaker was quiet, strangely quiet. I

thought it over. What had Scottie been after? Why was he shot?

Frank James was there, too. James was an old-timer in the press-room, a cynical, nasty-mouthed, sarcastic reporter for the opposition newspaper, the *Echo*. He was the one who had given Scottie the nickname of the Boy Scout. I don't like newspaper reporters, and I liked Frank James least of them all.

He said, "So the Boy Scout got it, eh?"

I didn't answer him.

"What was he trying to shake Pellini down for?" he asked.

I said, "Shut up and get the hell out of here!"

He looked surprised; I don't often lose my temper. But he got out, and it was a good thing for one of us.

Then the speaker came to life. "Fifth District to Bureau."

"Bureau to Fifth District," the dispatcher said. "Go ahead."

"Who's there?" Lommar asked.

"This is Officer Schultz, radio dispatcher. The—"

I tapped him on the shoulder before he could go on and motioned him aside.

"I've quit," I said. "I resigned. I'm not the chief of detectives any more."

Schultz' jaw sagged. He couldn't believe me.

"Fifth District to Bureau," Lommar said. "Come in, Bureau."

"Get back to that mike," I told Schultz. "I'm not on the force any more. Remember that."

He went back to the mike. He stared at me for a moment. Then he said, "This is Officer Schultz, Bureau radio dispatcher. I'm alone in the office except for a private citizen."

Ed Lommar said, "Where's Mac?"

"There's a civilian in the dispatch room," Schultz said. "It's against regulations."

Lommar said, "You mean—"

"Yeah, that's right," Schultz said.

"Fifth District to Bureau," said Lommar. "Fifth District to Bureau. In the absence of any superior officer I'm taking command. Don't kick that civilian out. And get this:

"Scottie was shot in the back in the alley between Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth, about fifty feet from Fremont Avenue. It

looks like a very small caliber bullet, a .25 or .32. It entered beneath his ribs, and apparently penetrated his heart. He didn't have a chance.

"Watchmen in the block say Scottie had been hanging around the entrance to a restaurant every evening until almost midnight. They don't know why. . . ."

I knew what Lommar was doing.

He'd guessed what had happened to me—that I was out.

And he knew that, out or not, I'd want to be in on this case. More than that, he wanted me in on it.

SOMEWHERE in those twenty years I'd been wearing the shield, I'd picked up a bit of a reputation. I was what the boys called a "brain"—I was supposed to be able to reason things out.

On top of that, I knew Scottie pretty well. As Scottie's boss, I was supposed to know what he was doing, why he would be around Pellini's. I could probably help in a lot of ways.

That was Lommar's idea, anyway. Myself, I didn't see how I could help. I couldn't reason anything out of it.

Lommar finished. "Is that private citizen still there, Dispatcher?" he asked.

"Sure. He's got it all," Schultz chirped.

"I'll report in every five minutes," Lommar said. "I want that citizen on hand every time. Arrest him if you have to, but keep him there."

"You're under arrest," Schultz told me.

"Shut up!" I said. "Let me think."

"Yes, sir," said Schultz.

Think? I didn't know what to think about.

I'd figured all along that Scottie had been hanging around Pellini's just to pester him, drive him out of business.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he had some other reason. And maybe that reason was behind his murder.

What could it be?

Jenkins stuck his head in the door.

"Your wife wants you on the phone, Mac," he said.

"Mac" instead of "Chief." Already he knew.

"Okay," I said.

I walked back into the office that had been mine.

Mine and Scottie's.

Now it wasn't either of ours. Now, or in a few hours at most, two other men would be using it.

There was the big, old-fashioned, weather-beaten desk where Scottie had been sitting just that morning, just a few hours ago. There was the coat-rack where he'd hung his coat every night. There was the picture of Madge and his three kids.

Suddenly that office was empty and barren, and I knew it never would be anything else to me, no matter how many men crowded into it.

The phone was off the hook. I picked it up and said, "Hello."

"You crazy fool!" said Jennie. "What did you do?"

"What do you mean, what did I do?"

"Oh, don't try to lie out of it! I've got your radio turned on and I heard every word of it! You quit, didn't you? You got yourself fired! Oh, you fool! You fool!"

I said, "Scottie's dead, Jennie. Did you hear that?"

She went right on. "You didn't have to quit, did you? Why, you cut off your pension, even! You crazy fool!"

I remembered suddenly another phone call I'd have to make. A call to Scottie's wife. I was his best friend; I'd have to tell her myself.

"You're too old to get another job!" Jennie said. "What are we going to do?"

I was burning to a slow crisp. I listened to her half-hysterical, nagging, self-concerned voice.

For eighteen years she'd been like that. And so had I. For eighteen years I'd been playing it, not straight, but smart. For eighteen years, with Jennie behind me,

egging me on, nagging, I'd been the sharp operator, the one who buttered up the big boys, so he could butter his own bread. For eighteen years, while Scottie had been straight as a die.

And now Scottie was dead. Dead—and he wouldn't come back. Ever. He was lying cold in an alley somewhere, and Jennie was crabbing about a measly, piker job.

"What are we going to do?" she screamed.

"I haven't the least idea," I said. Then I made up my mind. "Yes, I have. I know exactly what you're going to do. You're going to pack your clothes and get the hell out of my apartment! And if you're not out of it by the time I get there, I'll throw you out!"

I hung up.

Somehow I stumbled through that next phone call. I'll never forget it. Scottie's wife didn't weep or scream hysterically. She took it, right on the chin. "Oh, Mac!" she said. "Oh, no, Mac! No!" Then, after a minute, "The kids, Mac, the poor kids! They loved him so!"

Everybody loved him, Madge.

I'd have gone up for murder if Lonnie Pellini had been within pistol range when I finished that call.

But he wasn't. So I sat there and stared stupidly at the top of the desk that had been mine. At the telephone, the blotting pad, the buzzer, the reports still stacked up there waiting for my signature—for someone else's signature now.

When Scottie went out of his job he didn't leave a batch of reports for someone else.

Scottie's reports!



AT LAST! A DRESSING AMERICA'S BEEN WAITING FOR

KREML KREME Dressing

MADE ESPECIALLY FOR STUBBORN HAIR

IMPORTANT: KREML KREME never leaves any white flakes or sticky residue on hair as so many creamy dressings do.

You can't beat this sensational new KREML KREME to control hair that won't stay put. Marvelous after shampooing — a real test. Also has added advantage of relieving dryness of BOTH hair and scalp — removes itchy dandruff flakes.



Maybe that would be my answer! Maybe those reports told why Scottie had been hanging around the Ace of Clubs and why he had been murdered.

THEY were all there on my desk, waiting for my own signature, under Scottie's. I grabbed them and went through them in a hurry.

Nothing. A couple of hoods arrested down by the river. A woman charged with abandoning her baby. A stolen car. A gas-station holdup. Another stolen car. A couple of raids the Vice Squad should have handled. Nothing else.

Scottie had been on this mysterious job for a week, the commissioner had said. I went to the files, dug out, day by day, Scottie's reports, made a big pile of them on the top of the desk.

Then Jenkins came in.

"That guy Schultz across the hall says you're under arrest and you're to come over right away," he told me. "What the hell is this all about?"

Jenkins was a war-horse, a forgotten man. He'd been secretary in the office of the chief of detectives for so long he had curvature of the spine. He knew his little blue handbook backwards and forwards; he knew every rule and regulation of the department and every red-tape restriction. But he didn't know much more than that. Another man who'd fallen by the wayside—not because he wouldn't play ball but because he didn't have any bounce.

"Wait a minute," I said. I looked around for something to wrap those reports in, and all I could see was a newspaper. It made a pretty bulky bundle.

"What's that?" Jenkins asked. "Records?"

"Homework," I told him.

He hesitated. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe you shouldn't take those out of here now. I don't know where I stand, but maybe I shouldn't let you have them."

"Okay," I shoved the bundle into his hands. "You carry them and come along."

We went into the radio room.

Schultz chirped into the mike, "Bureau to Fifth District. He's here now, Fifth District. Go ahead."

"Okay," Lommar answered. "Get this. The coroner's physician says death was caused by a small-caliber bullet which en-

tered the back, apparently penetrated the heart. The bullet is still inside the body. Time of death, indeterminable until autopsy; his wrist-watch is still running. Physician says he probably was rendered unconscious immediately. Little external bleeding. Scottie was not armed. Get that? He was not armed and he was shot in the back."

Schultz uttered a word that should not have been broadcast.

"Right," said Lommar. "The body is being removed for autopsy. Now here's something else. Seven of the employees of the Ace of Clubs have been arrested and are being held in the Fifth District station for interrogation. You tell that private citizen to get right over here. We need him now."

"Tell him I'm on my way," I said to Schultz.

I walked out of my office and down to my car, parked in back of the building. Jenkins followed me.

"I don't know about these records," he said as I climbed into the car. "Maybe I shouldn't let you take them away from the place."

"Get in the car and come along," I said to him.

He got in.

I'd just started the engine when James of the *Echo* ran up.

"Going to the Fifth District, Mac?" he asked. "I'm on my way to the morgue. How about a ride?"

The morgue was just the other side of the Fifth District station. I wanted to slam the car door in his face, but I couldn't. I waited.

He climbed in and we were rolling before the door closed and he could turn to face me.

"So you're botching this one, too, eh?" he said.

I didn't answer.

He said, "Who's the new chief of detectives?"

A truck cut in ahead of us, and I had to slam on the brakes fast and swerve to miss it.

"Take it easy," said James. "I want to live."

I said, "Why?"

"Maybe I'm just not a Boy Scout," he said.

CHAPTER THREE

Lost Reports

I PARKED in front of the Fifth District station and went in on the run, leaving Jenkins and James to get out by themselves.

Three or four cops were clustered around the desk. They snapped to attention when I ran through, and saluted me.

Yep, they saluted. I'd never been saluted before; I was flustered. And then I got it. They weren't saluting me. They were saluting Scottie.

Big Ed Lommar was waiting in his office.

Ed is just about the biggest man on the force. Big and direct and tough. He looks like a friendly, kind old man when he smiles. When he doesn't smile he's a man to watch out for, a man who could break your neck in one silent squeeze of his giant hands, and a man who wouldn't lose any sleep after doing it.

He wasn't smiling that day.

"There's nothing at the scene," he told me. "Nothing. Brzynski and Murphy are taking the neighborhood apart, but they won't get anywhere. It's been an industrial district for twenty years. They're hoping they'll find a truck-driver or—"

He stopped, and he sounded hopeless. Then he said, "What happened? The commissioner?"

"He didn't say a word," I answered. "I didn't let him. I quit."

"Good," Ed said. "Good. Don't worry about it; he'll take you back tomorrow. These punks are in the squadroom; I thought you'd like to hear what they have to say."

He bellowed to one of his men, and they brought the punks in one at a time.

The first was a great big fellow with a broken nose. He was the doorman at the Ace of Clubs, name, Stanley Luszniki, age 23.

"Three years in the reformatory for car theft," Lommar said. "He's still on parole. No other record."

"You want to go back there, Stanley?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said.

"This was a friend of mine who was killed, Stanley. I don't like to see my

friends get killed. You're going back anyway, for parole violation. Do you want to go back right away or after you get out of the hospital?"

He said, "Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir, what?"

"I mean—I ain't got nothing to tell you. Honest."

"What do you know about this?"

"Nothing."

"Did you see Sergeant Scott hanging around the club recently?"

"No, sir," he said.

I got to my feet and stuck my face almost into his.

"Ever see a man who was clipped under the knee-cap?" I asked him.

He wet his lips nervously. "Yeah," he said. "I seen 'em."

"What did Scottie ask you when he came up the first time?"

"He wanted to know how long I'd been workin' for Pellini."

"How long was it, Stanley?"

"Six months. Since I got outta stir."

"What else did he ask?"

"If anybody around had been with Lonnie back in 1933."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him the truth. I dunno."

"What day was that?"

"Last Wednesday. He's been hangin' around since, askin' everybody else the same question. Honest, that's all."

Wednesday. A week ago. That was the day Scottie had started this business.

"Toss him in the lockup," I told Lommar. "Let him think it over a while."

The next man was a porter, scared white. He didn't know a thing; he didn't have a record. Scottie had asked him the same question; he'd been working for Pellini only five years. We let him go.

And so it went with six of the seven.

The seventh was a croupier, an older man. Smooth. Not the kind of smoothness that goes with sleek, black hair; his hair was grey and sparse. But easy. He knew when he could say, "Yeah," instead of "Yes, sir," and when he could grin and when he should look a little bit scared, although you could see damn well he wasn't scared at all.

His name was Ruditz and he'd been picked up a dozen times. Larceny, assault, burglary, bookmaking, the whole list. But

there wasn't one conviction anywhere. "I seen this dick—this Sergeant Scott—hanging around all week," he said. "I didn't know he was the law. He come up to me last night about a quarter to twelve."

"What did he ask you?"

"If I was workin' for Lonnie in 1933."

"Were you?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Then what?"

"He wanted to know if I remembered what happened August twelfth."

"What happened then?"

Ruditz shrugged his shoulders. "How the hell should I know? That was a long time ago."

"What else did he ask?"

"Nothin'. He said he'd be around tonight to refresh my memory. But it wouldn't 'a done no good; I ain't no history book."

He talked a little more but he didn't say a thing. He was telling us, "Go ahead, get your rubber hose. I've said my piece."

So we let him go, too, and Lommar put a tail on him. Then Lommar called the Bureau to get a little more on his record.

THERE was one point in that full record. He'd been picked up three times in the last two years and each time Scottie had been the arresting officer. A guy like that would have recognized Scottie quicker than I would.

But we did have a date out of him. August 12, 1933.

"You check on that," I told Lommar. "I'm going to dig into Scottie's reports."

Jenkins was waiting outside, fanning the breeze with the desk sergeant. His arms were empty.

"Where's those records?" I asked him. "In the car."

I went outside and Jenkins followed. The records were gone.

We took the cushions out. Nothing. We looked in the trunk. A spare tire, tools, no records. We poked along the curbing and in the trash cans, and after fifteen minutes Jenkins found them, half a block up, in an alley. They'd been torn in half, spread apart and burned, and the ashes had been churned up with a stick. Someone must have taken a half-hour to do it.

We went back to the station and my

heart was as black as the coal-tar dye in Lonnie Pellini's hair. I took Jenkins into Lommar's office.

"Look," I told him, "I don't want any baloney. Who burned those records?"

He was scared. "You mean those records was mixed up in the case?"

I cursed him for almost a minute.

"I don't have to take that from you no more," he said sullenly.

Ed Lommar leaned forward, his big hands opening and closing by his side. "Answer the question, Sergeant," he said.

"I don't know what happened to them records," Jenkins said sullenly. "I left them in the car."

"Jenkins," I said, "where were you in 1933?"

"What the hell's this all about?" he asked.

Ed Lommar bellowed, "Answer the question, Sergeant!"

Jenkins flushed. Then he counted up on his fingers. "I was right here," he said. "In the Fifth District. Drivin' a squad car."

"You remember what happened on August twelfth that year?"

"How would I remember that far back?" he demanded.

"We can find out," I told him. "Maybe you'd better remember. Pellini was mixed up in it."

"There was a shooting scrape along about that year outside Pellini's joint. But it was in the winter, not August."

"Who was shot?"

"I dunno. It's in the records somewhere."

"Who plugged him?"

"We never found out. Cripes, Mac, that was a hell of a long time ago."

Ed Lommar said slowly and deliberately, "Jenkins, if you're holding anything back I'll get you busted off the force so damn fast—"

"I don't know a thing!" Jenkins blurted, and his voice was indignant.

The phone on Ed Lommar's desk rang, and somebody outside yelled, "Call for you, Captain. It's Johnny Leavitt."

Leavitt was the dick tailing Ruditz. Lommar passed on his report.

He'd left the station just a minute after Ruditz, and the man was not in sight. He cruised around and almost half an hour

later he'd picked Ruditz up only a block away. He tailed the croupier to a rooming house at 3243 Fremont; he was planting the joint, waiting for Ruditz to come out.

"That half-hour gave Ruditz just enough time," Ed Lommar said. "Jenkins, you're lucky."

"Ruditz?" Jenkins said. "Hey—"

We waited.

"Scottie asked me to dig up his record the other day."

"Now you tell us," said Ed Lommar. "Jenkins, you'd better get out of here before I—"

Jenkins didn't answer. Instead, his face drawn, he got up and walked out of the office, staggering a bit, like a man in a dream. Ed Lommar said, in a tight voice, "Watch that guy, Mac."

"Not any more," I told him. "I'm out."

Lommar shook his head as if he were trying to clear it. He looked tired, exhausted; I hadn't realized before how old he was.

Outside, in the squadroom, someone was making a pot of coffee. The warm, tasty odor drifted in the door.

"There's nothing else, Mac," Lommar said. "Nothing at all."

Then neither of us spoke while the coffee outside simmered and the smell became stronger in that cluttered, weather-beaten, close little office.

AFTER a minute I said, "There's a duplicate of those reports in the commissioner's office, Ed. Think you can get them?"

"I'll get 'em," Ed said. But there wasn't much hope in his voice. "Was Scottie assigned to anything or was he on his own?"

"On his own," I replied.

"Then he wouldn't have made out a report."

That was true. When a detective is working on an assignment he has to make out a report daily; when he's on his own he usually doesn't turn in anything until he's ready to make a pinch.

The reports wouldn't help us much. Nothing would.

James of the *Echo* came in and I asked him about the autopsy.

"Nothing," he said. "They got the slug out of him, but it hit his collarbone and it's so badly damaged they can't use it for

comparison. It's smashed out of shape."

We didn't even have that to fall back on.

"What kind of a gun?" I asked him. Even though the slug was too smashed for comparison tests, I knew that the ballistics boys might be able to tell what size and make of gun had been used.

"It's a Bergmann," James said. "A Belgian gun. You got anything new here?"

"Nothing," I said.

The Bergmann was a popular target gun in this country before the war. And now there probably were hundreds of new ones, brought back from Europe by the GI's.

Ed Lommar cursed.

"Looks like you're hung up," James said. "The murder of the Boy Scout goes unavenged."

Lommar got slowly to his feet. James took one look at his face and made for the door.

He bumped into the desk sergeant, who was coming in, stepped around him and went out of the station, walking fast.

The sergeant, a fat, sloppy fellow named O'Brien, watched him go. Then, timidly, he said, "There's something for you on the ticker, Captain. It ain't good."

The teletype machine was clattering away behind the sergeant's desk. We gathered around it and read the message:

"Seventeenth District to all stations. Lonnie Pellini surrendered voluntarily to this district. Questioned and released. Arrest order on him hereby rescinded."

It was signed, "John Palmer, Captain, Seventeenth District."

O'Brien said, "The lousy, no-good, back-bitin' son—"

But it didn't do any good to curse. It was the handwriting on the wall.

John Palmer was a tough monkey, and a smart one. He was on the other side of the fence; he'd been chief of detectives before me until the last election brought in a new administration and he was shifted out into the sticks.

So Pellini had surrendered to him. And Palmer was smart enough to make capital out of it.

We went back to Lommar's office. He opened his desk, brought out a shoulder holster and a gun, loaded it.

"Look, Ed," I said, "I'm not on the

force any more. Pellini's my baby. Let me take care of him."

He stared at me bleakly. Then he slipped his suit-coat off, put the holster on, then the coat again.

"I won't do it in your district," I said.

"I ought to break your neck for that," he said. And he meant it.

"I'll take care of Pellini," I repeated.

He didn't say a word to me. Instead he bellowed, "Leavitt!"

"Leavitt's out on that tail," O'Brien yelled back.

"Okay," Lommar said. "You'll do, O'Brien. Come in here."

When the sergeant walked in, he went on, "Put somebody else behind the desk. Get over to the *Echo*. There was a man shot in front of the Ace of Clubs in 1933. I don't know when; I don't know who was shot. Go through their library and get the dope on it. Bring me a copy of the newspaper if you can."

O'Brien said, "Okay," and went out.

Lommar paced up and down in his office and I sat there. We didn't say a word.

Pretty soon the door opened and Ted Brzynski came in.

We both looked at him. But he didn't open his mouth. He sat down near the wall and the three boys in his squad followed him, one by one, and sat near him.

Then Joe Murphy came in, and his squad. The little office was packed with men, big men, all of them. And there wasn't a sound except the shuffle of feet and once in a while the noise one of them made clearing his throat.

I couldn't stand it very long. I picked up the telephone and called Charlie Smith, the lab man.

"This is Mac," I said. "I want a report on the bullet that killed Scott."

Charlie said, "Well, we got it, if that's what you mean."

"Any chance of a comparison test on it?"

"Nope. It's mushroomed; we can't even count the lands and grooves. I just washed it off and it's in the spectrograph right now."

"The what?" I said.

"The spectrograph. We want to be sure there's no foreign matter on it."

I didn't know what he was talking about but I said, "Okay, thanks," and hung up

and told Ed Lommar what he had said. He didn't answer me.

"There's only one way to handle this," I said.

"One easy way," Brzynski said. "I don't want it."

I said, "What do you mean?"

Ted was a short, squat man who'd followed Scottie around like a dog. He had a reputation for being soft-spoken and gentle; he never roughed any of his prisoners, never yelled at them, never lost his temper.

But he wasn't soft-spoken and gentle this time.

He said, "You put a slug in him and he dies, in a couple of hours anyway. This is one man I want to see die slow, Mac. Real slow. I want him to sit in the death cell for a year, listening to a dozen other guys going out the way he'll go."

The other boys didn't say a word. They felt the same way.

"Okay," I said. "Okay."

CHAPTER FOUR

Eye-Witness

O'BRIEN came in then and he had the copy of the *Echo* with him.

It was dated November 12, 1933, and the story was written by Frank James. I read it and passed it around. It said:

A man was shot to death and robbed tonight almost within sight of this reporter.

The shooting occurred just outside the Ace of Clubs at Twenty-ninth and Fremont Streets, and, according to witnesses, the dead man was carrying \$10,000 he had just won on a roulette wheel.

He was identified as F. L. Carver, a real estate salesman, bachelor, and heavy gambler.

Officer Hjalmer Jenkins theorized that the slayer had spotted Carver inside the club as Carver pocketed his winnings. The slayer followed him outside and down the street to a lonely spot adjoining a vacant lot.

There, Jenkins believes, the slayer shot Carver in the back, stole his wallet with the \$10,000 in it, and fled.

This reporter was just around the corner at 11:20 p.m., on his way home, when he heard a shot. He ran up to Fremont and saw the dead man lying on the sidewalk. The killer had already disappeared.

After attempting to administer first aid, this reporter . . .

The rest of it didn't matter much.

In fact, none of it mattered much to us.

We could make a pretty good guess that Scottie had been investigating this Carver murder. But aside from that, we weren't any further than we had been.

We knew that the story Ruditz had given us was full of holes. But what good would that do?

The telephone rang and somebody yelled from the desk, "It's for Mac, Skipper."

"If it's the commissioner, I'm not here," I said.

But it wasn't the commissioner; it was Charlie Smith at the lab.

"About this slug we took out of Scottie," he said. "It's a very interesting case."

Everything was "very interesting" to these laboratory boys. They would measure things and photograph them and wash them and analyze them, and if it helped solve a murder, that was beside the point.

"What about it?" I asked him.

"We washed it and put it through the spectrophotograph test," he said.

"Yeah, you told me that."

"There wasn't any foreign body on it," he said. "A slight trace of the primer, indicated by the presence of lead tri-nitroresorcinatate, but that was all. Nothing organic."

"For cripes sake, come to the point!"

"We put it on the scale just now. It weighs seventy-six point three grains. Know what that means?"

"No."

"Allowing three-tenths of a grain for primer, that means it was from a Belgian gun, a Bergmann automatic."

He stopped as if he were waiting for me to congratulate him.

"What about it?" I asked. "There's thousands of them in the country."

Patiently he said, "Look, Mac, it's from 6.5 mm. Bergmann. It's about the same size and shape as any .25-caliber cartridge. Until we weighed it, we all thought that's what it was. But there isn't any .25 that weighs more than fifty grains."

"Wait a minute," I said. "You mean you just weighed it now and found that out?"

"Sure," he said.

"How long ago?"

"Just now."

"Thanks, Charlie," I said. "Thanks. You boys are right on the beam."

I hung up and told Lommar.

"Let's tell the newspaper boys," he said. "All of them."

We went into the squadroom. Most of the reporters were there; we waited until the rest showed up.

They crowded into that dingy squadroom, half a dozen of them, young, punk kids and old, battle-wise reporters, some of them who knew their way around, some who didn't. And some who knew too much.

"What's up?" one of them asked.

I waited until they quieted a bit.

"It's about the murder of Scott," I said. "I just got a report from the laboratory."

"What did they say?" Frank James asked.

"Plenty. They found out that the death gun was a Bergmann 6.5 automatic, a Belgian gun."

The boys waited, as if they'd heard it before.



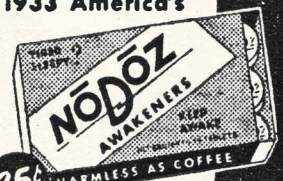
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HARMLESS AS COFFEE

"The point is," I went on, "they just found it out. The only way to tell a battered slug from this gun from a battered slug from a .25 is by weighing it. The lab just now finished weighing it."

STILL they didn't say anything. One of the kids was taking notes; the wise ones kept their pencils still. James put his back into his coat pocket.

"Is that all?" Williams of the *News* asked.

"That's all," I said.

They wandered off, perplexed. They didn't know what to make of it.

All except one of them. He knew, all right. He'd been trying to get out of the squadroom first, but somehow Ed Lommar or Ted Brzynski or Joe Murphy got in front of him without saying a word, and pretty soon all the rest of them were gone. There was just James of the *Echo* and the cops.

Ed Lommar grabbed him and threw him against the wall. Hard. He slumped all the way to the floor.

We crowded around him. Squat, short Brzynski. Big, burly Joe Murphy. Ed Lommar, with his face set and hard.

And he was scared. He was so frightened he shook.

"James," I told him, "an hour ago you knew what kind of a gun killed Scottie. The lab boys just found it out ten minutes ago. How's come?"

He said, "I—I—I—I—"

He was too frightened to go on.

Lommar picked him up by the coat collar and shook him. "Talk!"

He looked at us, from one to nother. Me. Lommar. Brzynski. Murphy. All of us, just waiting for him to talk.

"I did it!" he said. "I did it! I'll tell you!"

Lommar slapped him across the face. "You're a liar!" he yelled.

Again James looked at our faces, as if he were searching for reassurance.

Then he keeled over in a dead faint.

O'Brien and Murphy stretched him out on the floor and tried to bring him to.

"How about it?" Ed asked me.

I said, "It stinks."

He paced up and down the room. "Yeah, it stinks. It doesn't make sense."

He turned and faced me. "That guy

doesn't have guts enough to kill himself."

"He's coming to," O'Brien said.

James sat up, blinking his eyes. His face was green. He groaned.

Lommar went over and stood in front of him, almost on top of him. "How about it?" he asked quietly. "You going to give us a statement?"

James closed his eyes and shuddered. "Yes," he whispered. "Yes, I'll give you a statement."

O'Brien got his notebook out.

"First," Lommar said, "I got to warn you that anything you say can be used against you. If you killed Scottie we're going to send you to the chair." He got down on his hands and knees and shoved his face into James's. "And if you're lying to us, you'll wish you'd gone to the chair before we're through with you. Get that?"

I've never seen anyone as frightened as James was. He licked his lips and his whole body shook. "It's the truth," he said in a high, cracked voice. "I killed that fellow back in 1933, outside the Ace of Clubs. Scott was getting wise and—"

The phone rang in Lommar's office and Ed yelled, "Somebody answer that!"

I did, while James went on lying, brokenly, between sobs.

Leavitt was calling, the dick who'd been tailing Ruditz.

"The Skipper there?" he asked.

"No," I said. "He's busy. This is Mac."

"Good. Listen, Mac, something's up. I tailed this boy Ruditz to a joint on Fremont at Thirty-third. A rooming house."

"Yeah. We got that already."

"Well," said Leavitt, "Pellini just went in there."

"Gimme the address again."

He gave it to me. 3243 Fremont. While he was talking Lommar came in.

"What do you want me to do?" Leavitt asked on the phone.

I slipped my finger over the hook, closing the circuit. "And as far as the job's concerned," I said into the dead receiver, "I don't want it back."

Then I hung up. "The commissioner," I said to Lommar.

He wasn't interested. He said, "What the hell is that reporter scared of, Mac?"

I stood up. "I dunno. I'm going to take a walk and think it over, Ed."

He went back into the squadroom.

I strolled past the desk, where the coffee was still simmering, out the door, down the steps onto the sidewalk. Nobody followed me.

I walked up to the corner, turned around.

Nobody was in sight.

I walked back slowly, until I was abreast of my car. I jumped into the car, stepped on the starter, and pulled away.

Technically, I suppose, I had stolen a police car; I no longer was on the force.

But that didn't matter. Nothing much mattered. Because I was on my way to kill a man.

You see, I wasn't a copper any more. A copper has to have evidence to act. I didn't.

I WASN'T sure just who had shot Scottie. Maybe Ruditz, who looked as if he could double as a torpedo. Maybe Pellini himself. One of those two, I was sure. Because James, the reporter, wasn't afraid of us when he pulled his phony confession. He was afraid of them.

I didn't care whose hand actually held the gun. What was important to me was that Pellini was behind it. Pellini and his whole rotten political machine. It had to be smashed.

Without any real evidence the police couldn't smash that machine, even for a murder. The only answer that I could see was the extra gun I kept in my pocket. Maybe I'd go to the electric chair myself; more likely I'd wind up with a few slugs in me. But I'd make sure I took Pellini along, wherever I went.

The rooming house on Fremont Street was big and gloomy, and it looked deserted. Leavitt wasn't anywhere in sight. I parked half a block away and walked right up to the front door.

It was unlocked. I went in.

The first floor was deserted and dank, and it smelled of wet rugs. I hugged the wall behind the door, listening. Not a sound.

I went up the carpeted stairs, near the edge to avoid creaking. The second floor had a long hall, with half a dozen rooms opening off it. I listened and waited. From one of those rooms, I knew, I should hear the murmur of voices.

But I didn't. I tried the third floor. Still nothing. That was all—three floors.

Something was wrong. Either they'd gone since Leavitt called, or they were wise to me, hiding in one of those rooms and waiting.

I went back to the second floor. I started down again toward the first.

A voice behind me said, "Drop it, fellow, and put those hands up!"

I whirled, raising my gun. I got just a glimpse of Ruditz when the blackjack took me across the back of the head.

I tried to shoot, but I couldn't raise my arm high enough. Everything was black and there was the floor and the dirty brown carpet an inch in front of my eyes.

I wasn't out more than a minute. When I opened my eyes there was a sharp pain in the back of my head, and it felt soft and spongy. Pellini and Ruditz were standing in the hall looking at me, and I didn't have my gun any more.

"... in the river," Ruditz was saying. "It's simple; they'll never find a trace."

"It's no good," Pellini muttered. "It's no good."

"Sure it's good. If you'd let me take care of the other one this morning, instead of doing it yourself and leaving him there, nothing would of happened."

"It's no good," Pellini said again, shaking his head. "He finds us, so do the others."

"That's why we gotta act fast," Ruditz said.

"Listen!" Pellini held up his hand. "Already they come."

He'd heard it too: the soft closing of the door, the patter of feet on the carpeted steps.

They faced the head of the stairs, and an instant later a man's head came into view.

It was Ted Brzynski.

I dived for Ruditz' feet, and I hit them just in time to deflect his shot. It went thudding into the wall over Brzynski's head, and before Ruditz could fire again Ted put a bullet between his eyes.

I grabbed Ruditz' gun as he fell. All I wanted was one shot at that big, quaking, slobbering Pellini. Just one shot.

He was standing there, with his mouth open, pasty white.

"No, no!" he said. "Don't shoot! No!"

I raised the gun, and Brzynski shot it out of my hand.

He came on up the steps calmly and slapped a pair of handcuffs on Pellini.

"You crazy fool!" I yelled at him. "You might have killed me!"

"Yeah," he said. "I might have."

Everybody was in the building then. Lommar, Murphy, O'Brien, Leavitt, the whole Fifth District. But it was all over. Ruditz was dead; Pellini was under arrest and I was standing there rubbing a sore wrist and cursing Brzynski.

"Shut up!" Lommar told me. "So that was the commissioner calling, eh? Lucky for you Leavitt called back right after you left."

"All right, what about it?" I yelled at him. "You still have to convict this fat slob. Let me alone and you wouldn't have had to worry about it."

"We'll convict him, all right." Ed opened and closed his big fists. "We got a good statement out of that cheap reporter now. He wasn't scared of us, Mac. He was scared of Pellini. We taught him different."

You see, Lommar told me, James hadn't killed that man back in 1933. He didn't know, really, who had. But he had put enough together to accuse Pellini of it and to shake Pellini down for a job in the rackets.

The result was that James became tip-off man for Pellini and, in addition, because of his position, he was able to spread a little graft around City Hall and the Municipal Court for the gang.

Scottie got wind of it. Trying to find

out who had tipped off his raids, he fixed on James by a process of elimination. He went into it further and dug up the 1933 story written by James. He had the whole workings of the graft and the slaying in his reports—the reports James had burned, but which, fortunately, Scottie had made out in duplicate. He started asking questions about that 1933 murder and James got scared.

That morning Scottie had run into James at the bar in the Ace of Clubs. James was frightened; he decided to make a clean breast of it. He told Scottie he'd meet him out in the alley. But Pellini overheard and got out there first and shot Scottie in the back. James had witnessed the whole thing.

"James had it figured this way," Lommar told me. "If he ratted on Pellini he was signing his own death warrant. But it he copped a plea, he'd go to the pen and Pellini would use his influence to get him out in a few years."

I said, "You still don't have any evidence."

"Sure we do. James was an eye-witness. And when you get through shaking the Third Ward up, Pellini won't have enough influence to fix a traffic ticket."

"Me?" I said.

"Sure. You. You're going to see the commissioner and get that badge back. Now."

"Nuts," I said.

"Don't be a fool. You have to live. It doesn't pay to be a Boy Scout, Mac."

Well, I went with him. I guess he was right, at that. Jennie says he was.

THE END

SURE DEATH

A NEW ENGLAND gentleman determined upon self-murder is reported to have met his problem in a highly resourceful manner—which both succeeded and failed.

Dousing himself with gasoline, he climbed to the rail of his summer cottage porch overhanging a lake. Then he fastened a cord to a hook above his head and thrust his neck into the nose in the other end. That done, he gulped poison, lit the gasoline and jumped.

From that point everything went wrong. The gasoline quickly burned through the cord, dropping him into the lake before he strangled to death. The plunge put out the fire, and he swallowed so much water that he heaved up the poison before that could do him serious injury, either.

But he was dead when his floating body was found later. He hadn't drowned. According to reports he had died, ironically, of a heart attack. —John Lane

END OF THE LINE



"This is the end of the line," he said.

By
DON HOLM

A hundred feet above the roaring Clackamas River, the small cable car moved slowly across the gorge. But Hart knew that one of its two occupants would never arrive. . . .

THE CLACKAMAS RIVER was a hundred feet below us. Halfway across, Haskell stopped the cable car. "Hard work," he said. "Let me rest a second." I glanced at his muscular truck-driver shoulders and wondered what was going on in that mind of his.

Haskell looked down at the river. A

humorless grin spread across his wide mouth. "This would have been the place to kill him, instead of running a gaff hook through his neck."

"Don't you think we'd better hurry," I suggested. I was worried.

"Stenzel isn't going any place."

"It's May I'm thinking about," I said.

"She's all right. I took her across fifteen minutes before I found the body. She said she wanted to go up to the car and rest."

I'm not good at mathematics but I tried to do some figuring. If the cable car had been on Stenzel's side of the river when he was killed. There was a riddle long ago about six sheep and six wolves, and a shepherd whose problem was to ferry them across a river two at a time. I hadn't been able to figure out that one either. I wondered if the sheriff could.

Haskell reached up and grabbed the cable with his strong, thick hands and pulled our little two-seated cable car the rest of the way across.

I thought of something sarcastic. "You don't seem very much worried about the girl you're going to marry."

"She's still your wife—remember?"

Haskell grinned.

I remembered. And I remembered that the sheriff might like to know who had spitted the neck of Jarrold T. Stenzel, Attorney for the Plaintiff, with a gaff hook.

THE SCREEN DOOR slammed behind Haskell and Sheriff Martin Meeker. The sheriff pushed back his wide-brimmed Stetson. "This is the craziest thing I ever seen," he said. "Who in hell would want to murder a lawyer just because he went fishing?"

I had been sitting here all the time in this fly-spotted inn, down the road a ways from where I'd parked my car that morning, drinking muddy coffee. We had walked down here from the cable car to phone the sheriff, and Haskell had volunteered to take the sheriff back to the murder scene. Now they were back.

Meeker took a nickel notebook from the pocket of his forest-green shirt. "I suppose I might as well get all the information I can while we're waiting for the state troopers."

I told him my name was Jefferson Hart,

that I was thirty-one years old, and that I was a timber cruiser. He had already talked to Haskell and found out that he was thirty, a gypo log-hauling contractor and, I suppose, that he was in love with my wife.

I also told him, and he cramped it meticulously into the notebook, that I had just returned to town after a two-month field trip and driven up here to the river alone at daylight to go fishing.

He looked up then. "Seems to me you'd get enough fishing out in the woods."

"I don't enjoy fishing on company time," I answered. "And I was anxious to try out a trick of rolling a bucktail streamer to resemble a salmon fly."

"A purist, eh?" he said chummily. "Me too. What were you using?"

He was trying to trap me. "Royal Coachman streamer on a number ten hook with a 4X leader."

He nodded. "Do much salmon fishing?"

"No. That's Haskell's sport. He hates trout fishing. I hate salmon fishing."

"This is the craziest thing I ever seen," he repeated abruptly. "You come back after being away two months and without hardly kissing your wife you drive up here alone to go fishing. Then, for some reason, your wife and Haskell decide to join you."

"Have you found her yet?"

"A search is getting under way. It's a cinch she didn't go back to the car like she told Haskell... Now, why would Stenzel follow all three of you up here?"

"To serve me with divorce papers," I suggested.

He nodded. "We found them on him. I guess he figured he could do a little fishing while he was at it. Now, here's another thing: What would a salmon gaff with a three-inch hook and a three-foot handle be doing up here on the Clackamas? Trout fishermen use a net."

"Somebody could use it to kill somebody," I suggested.

"Right. But who had a reason to kill Stenzel—except you? It was you he was going to serve with papers."

I had been waiting for this. "There are thousands of lawyers. I couldn't kill them all."

"Anything between you and Haskell

here? Are you friends or something?"

"We were shipmates in the seabees. We settled down here afterwards." I looked up and saw Haskell painfully fingering his forehead when I mentioned the seabees.

"How long you been married?" he asked.

"Five years."

"Considering your time in the service and your present job, you and your wife must be practically strangers, eh?" Meeker glanced at Haskell's rugged handsomeness and then at me. I knew what he was thinking. I knew he would make some crack about when the cat's away the mice would play. But I didn't tell him it wasn't Haskell I hated. I wouldn't tell him I'd given up fighting with May months ago—when it was decided that I thought more of my work than I did of her, and that all she thought about was being a good-time Charlie. I didn't tell him I'd given up giving a damn about May. I didn't tell him anything of that.

Tires raked on gravel outside. The sheriff twisted his neck and glimpsed the green uniforms through the screen. "The state boys are here with the mobile lab," he announced. He closed his notebook. "That's all for now. You boys hang around till we need you."

WHEN Haskell and I walked out of the roadhouse the sheriff was in a huddle with the state cops. We walked along the orange-striped pavement until we intercepted the Forest Service trail that led down the gorge to the cable car. Haskell had suggested we go back and search for May.

We padded in silence down the steep trail through heavy greenery to the log platform where the cable car was moored. I got into the small seat, facing the shore. Haskell eased his bulk into the opposite seat, facing me. He reached up and began pulling us across the gorge. I leaned back, thinking of May and gazing at the grey, ghostly spars sticking out of the green second growth where a fire had once stripped the mountainside.

The cable car stopped halfway across. Haskell was staring at me and fingering his forehead—the spot he'd laid open once when he fell off a bulldozer on Saipan. I had often thought he hadn't been the same since that accident. "This is the end of the line," he said.

I glanced down once at the boiling, froth-topped green Clackamas River below. I knew now. "Why did you have to kill Stenzel?" I asked.

He grinned. "Because he didn't come up here to serve you those papers. He had just found out that I was already married—to a woman in Seattle before the war."

"Did May see you do it?" I asked slowly.

He nodded once. "Sure. But she won't talk. I didn't take her across the river. I tied her up in that old powder shack by the falls. You've always stood in my way, Jeff. Even when you didn't give a damn about her you always stood in my way. That's why she dragged me up here today—to see you. She wouldn't have gone through with the divorce as long as you were alive."

I saw Haskell's hand reach behind him and come out with a hammer. "I'll tell

(Continued on page 126)

Boy, what a
HEADACHE!
starting to throb.



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CADAVER WANTED!

Everyone knew that Ethel Glenmore had murdered her husband, but proving it was another matter. For when Joe vanished, the only way the cops could have gotten hold of his corpse was to set up a dragnet beyond the Pearly Gates—and then get the Devil to page him!

By ROBERT ZACKS

I WAS comfortably sleeping in my apartment on Twenty-third Street when the phone rang. I started up, swearing a little, until I saw it was morning. I yawned and grabbed the thing. It was Ethel Glenmore. Her voice



Joe was supposed to be out of town, doing an audit. In fact, Ethel had seen him off.

sounded breathlessly odd on the phone.

"This is a heck of a time to call," I growled. "What do you want?"

Maybe I wasn't civil, but I didn't have to be, not at seven in the morning when someone calls who should know better.

"Mike," Ethel's voice said in a sort of gasp, "Joe's gone."

Then she didn't say anything, just waited, as if I knew what she was talking about or could do something about it. I stared at the telephone.

"What do you mean gone?" I said vaguely. I was still half asleep.

"He isn't here," said Ethel, frightened. "I woke up and he isn't here."

"Aw, now, Ethel," I groaned. "You must have been dreaming or something. He's probably gone down for a paper or for breakfast. For heaven's sake, is that a reason to call me at this—"

"You don't understand," said Ethel frantically. "All his clothes are right here on the chair where he usually puts them. He—"

"Look in the kitchen," I said patiently, wondering why everybody in our crowd always picks on me for things like this. "Or under the bed. Maybe he's kidding you. Or take a peek in the clothes closet, maybe he got locked in or fainted in there, or—"

"I went through the whole house," she said hysterically. "He's not here. Mike, I'm frightened. I—"

I gathered my scattered wits. I laughed with a touch of exasperation in my laugh.

"Listen, quit being silly. He hasn't got wings. He probably put on another suit and went out."

"I checked all his suits," screamed Ethel. "I checked every pair of slacks and they're all here. He only has three suits and two pair of slacks. They're all here, every one. I had all his shirts in the laundry and the two that are left are still in the bureau. He's only got four pair of shoes and they're all in the house. Even his athletic sneakers are here, and his slippers. Nothing of his is touched. Nothing. And he's not here, Mike, he's not here!"

I GOT down there fast. Sure enough he wasn't there.

It looked very odd. Scattered around

the room were a man's things, dropped the way they are when a man sleepily undresses. Shorts and undershirt were on a chair. His pants were there too, and under the chair his shoes and socks. His blue sport shirt was on the bureau.

Ethel watched me breathlessly as if I were Houdini and would pull him out of a hat. She was a lovely blonde and it was the first time I'd ever seen her in a housecoat. She was as beautiful in the morning as she was at night at our parties. Right now she was twisting her hands into an agonized knot, her face pale as death.

"Relax," I said impatiently. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"I woke up and looked toward his bed," said Ethel, her voice thin, close to breaking. "He wasn't there. I thought he was in the bathroom. He took so long I went to see. He wasn't there either."

I stared at her helplessly, a chill beginning to climb up and down my back.

"Look," I said. "Let's quite being silly. He put on different clothes and went down."

Ethel said tightly, "Mike, you listen to me. I know every piece of clothing Joe has. Every piece. They're all here."

I stared at her baffled.

"You mean," I said sarcastically, "he went down naked? He's roaming around the streets without any . . ."

I stopped. We stared at each other in horror.

"By George," I said, stunned. "That's an idea. Maybe he's sick in the head and he went down without clothes on."

I grabbed a phone and called the police. Then I said to Ethel, "Did he have a fever or something that would make him go out of his head?"

"No," said Ethel, sinking into a chair, putting her face in her hands. "Nothing like that."

I tried to reassure her until the cops came, but it wasn't much good. The police sent down two detectives and a patrolman and they listened to the story with a polite skepticism that annoyed me.

"If he doesn't show up in a few days," said the detective, giving us a phone number to call, "get in touch with me."

I took the number because Ethel was crying on the couch.

"Can't we check the hospitals to see if a nude man was picked up?" I asked.

"We'll check it," said the detective drily. Then he stared at Ethel. "We'll check it very carefully."

WE WAITED a week, two weeks, a month. Joe Glenmore had disappeared from the face of the earth. Ethel nearly went out of her mind. I could see she was headed for a nervous breakdown. The thing was so damn odd! First of all, when we examined his pants we discovered his wallet and personal papers were all there. A man doesn't go off without his wallet, without his clothing.

Then we discovered that his shaving materials, left untouched in the bathroom, had not been used that last morning. We put a careful watch on all his bank accounts—he had a number of small ones scattered in various savings banks. Nobody ever drew a dime from any account. Nobody showed up at all.

The whole gang stuck by her during this tough time. Larry, who is a particularly close friend of mine, was especially upset about the whole thing. He had been closer to Joe than the rest of us, had grown up with him. Larry called the police every day and demanded action until they told him to stop bothering them, they were doing all they could.

Then one day when Larry and I were up at Ethel's place doing our stint to keep her company, the detective showed up.

His face was pretty hard naturally, but now it was like granite.

"Your husband carry any insurance, Mrs. Glenmore?" he asked quietly.

"Why, yes," said Ethel. Then a wave of dull red swept over her face. She stood up furiously, and snapped at him, "What are you implying?"

The detective stared at her steadily. "I'm not implying anything. How much did he carry?"

"Forty thousand dollars," said Ethel.

Both Larry and I let out a gasp. That was an awful lot of money for a man with Joe's salary. It was almost as if Ethel read our minds. "He wanted it," she said defensively. "He was always afraid what would happen to me if—"

She stopped.

"If what?" Larry was on his feet, glaring at her. "If what?"

Ethel's eyes blazed at Larry in a look that could kill. Then she said to the detective, fighting to control her voice, which was shaky and quavering.

"Yes, it's an awful lot of insurance. My husband loved me very much."

Then she turned and walked into the bedroom and closed the door. As Larry and I stared at the closed door the, detective—his name was Regan, I think—said to us, "Did he?"

"Did he what?" I asked stupidly.

"Love her. What kind of relationship did they have?"

I gave it to him straight and with great feeling. "He was absolutely nuts about her. You never saw a more beautiful relationship. They were the talk of the town. Newlyweds used to pray that their marriage would turn out like the Glenmores'."

Detective Regan looked at me stolidly.

"Forty thousand dollars is a lot of money," he said.

Suddenly Larry put his face in his hands. "Oh, God," he said.

I had a sickness in the pit of my own stomach. "You don't think . . ." I muttered.

Detective Regan said meditatively, "Forty thousand dollars is a lot of money."

Then he got up and walked out, and we left right after him.

Outside, Larry said to me, his face a grey mask, "Do you think she actually . . . really could have. . ."

He couldn't even get the word out.

"Don't be a fool," I snapped. "What possible reason could she have? They were deeply in love, and she was being supported by the guy. She didn't live high, but she lived well and she was better off with a steady life income than with forty thousand that she'd blow in a few. . ."

I stopped aghast. There I was, already allowing my mind to go down the channels of reasoning against her. Already I was unconsciously putting the finger on her.

"Look," I said grimly to Larry, who looked as if he were about to faint. "Don't jump at conclusions. The cops are looking into it, aren't they?"

"There was his clothing right there on the chair," muttered Larry dazedly, "with his wallet in it. And the bank accounts haven't been touched. None of his clothes were touched. . . ."

"Listen," I yelled at him. "Cut it out. It isn't that easy to get rid of a body."

"Forty thousand dollars," muttered Larry. "Forty thousand dollars."

I got really sore. "You're putting a noose around her neck," I warned. "You're forgetting you haven't sufficient motive."

I went over it again, the business about it not paying her to give up a lifelong meal ticket for a few extra thousand. I repeated stubbornly what I wanted to believe, what seemed only fair to believe. "No motive," I said. "Insufficient motive."

LARRY never visited Ethel again. Even when the police arrested her and she was in a real mess for a while, he never would lift a finger to help her. He thought she *did* have sufficient motive, and even when it turned out after an investigation that she wouldn't get the forty thousand insurance because the last premium had not been paid and the policy had lapsed, Larry insisted that Ethel must have thought that Joe Glenmore had paid all premiums up to the time of the disappearance.

It was this failure of Joe's to pay the last premium that saved Ethel Glenmore from a murder trial. At least I thought so until the police pointed out that there was no proof a murder had been committed.

Nevertheless the entire incident had a disastrous effect on Ethel. The fearful mental strain over an extended period left her with a thin, harried expression. She walked with her head bent because of months of people staring at her and photographers trying to get pictures of this woman who might have gotten away with murder, yet lost the fruits of her crime through an oversight on the part of the victim. Her smooth, groomed look was lost, and in six months she was an aged, unattractive woman.

When it was all over, and interest in the case had died, Ethel Glenmore had to find a job. She was trained for nothing

except to please a man. We used to delight in watching her little coquetries as she used them on Joe. He had adored her to the point of the ridiculous and denied her nothing out of his ordinary salary. She had dressed very well, and eyes had turned as she walked with him on the street. Joe had been proud of the way men would turn and stare at Ethel. Now, however, she had to take a job as a waitress. She lost the job in a week—the work was simply too hard for her soft body.

I slipped her some money, and some of the crowd did the same, but you can't keep it up forever. And most of the old friends of Joe wanted no part of her. They remembered that the thing had never been cleared up. Especially Larry. He would turn white and curse when Ethel's name was brought up, and when he found out I'd given her money he wouldn't talk to me for a week.

After a while Ethel moved, a broken, unhappy woman, and she dropped from sight. We forgot her and only occasionally talked about the whole thing.

* * *

A few years passed and I had occasion to take a business trip to Mexico to arrange some financing of a new tourist hotel. I took Larry with me, since he was on his vacation and wanted an exotic time for himself.

I left Larry in the hotel, when we got down there, and went out to the outskirts of the city where the tourist hotel was to be built near good water and with magnificent scenery. I liked the setup a lot and on the way back passed through a picturesque quarter of the city.

I think it was that moment when I rounded a corner, stepping carefully over a pile of woven straw hats, that I got the biggest shock of my life.

There, sitting against an adobe wall, in the shade, with a colorful Mexican blanket around his shoulders, nude to the waist, was Joe Glenmore.

Our eyes met, and we were both rigid, statues in the hot Mexican sun.

His face was thin and brown but healthy. The softness was gone, and I wouldn't have said that he looked exactly happy. **Just calm.** I'd say he had peace of

mind. His thin brown hair had blonded under the sun, and his blue eyes seemed more blue because of his tanned face.

He didn't move a muscle as I moved my feet in a slow, stunned way to get myself up to him. He looked up at me quietly and didn't say a word.

"Holy jumping Jupiter," I muttered, taking a long, long look to make sure it wasn't somebody that just looked like him. "It's Joe. It's really you, Joe, isn't it?"

"Hello, Mike," said Joe calmly. "Yes it's me. Sit down. How's things?"

Just like that! How's things. I wanted to explode. I wanted to laugh and cry. How's things.

"Just dandy," I said sarcastically, sitting down opposite him, staring at him. "Just wonderful. Do you mind if I pinch you. I want to be sure you're alive."

"I'm alive," said Joe shortly.

I stared at him wordlessly. Then I yelled at him, "Man alive, don't you realize what's—what's—" I stopped. I didn't know what to say.

JOE shrugged. "I'm sorry we met," he said quietly. "I hope you'll forget you saw me."

"What the hell happened to you?" I snarled, thinking of Ethel and what she had gone through. Then I put the thought into words. "Do you realize what Ethel has gone through? Don't you realize—"

"Has she?" said Joe, giving me his first smile. "Good. I'm glad."

I stared at him. A rueful grin twisted the corner of Joe's lips.

"I suppose I might as well explain," he said.

"Yes," I said. "You might as well."

Joe was silent for a moment.

He gave it to me straight and simple. "I adored Ethel," he said simply, like a kid reading from a book of memory. "She was my whole life. What was wonderful was the complete understanding we had. We weren't two people, Mike, we were one person. Two bodies but one person, one mind. You know that."

I knew that. I nodded, afraid to talk, afraid he would stop.

He went on almost monotonously, as if it were something so far away it hadn't

ever really happened. Like a fairy tale.

"It's a wonderful thing, knowing you know your wife so thoroughly that you can almost anticipate every thought. It was a great shock to find that I didn't know her at all, that I only knew the part of herself she deliberately planned to show me. It was incredible to learn that there was a whole secret, deceitful world in her mind."

He stopped. I still didn't get it.

"I found out she was having an affair with a man," Joe said simply. "My incredible marriage, our wonderful, beautiful dream of a marriage," Joe laughed harshly. "Just another clever lie. I was just another deceived husband."

I looked at him stunned. "Are you sure. Are you—"

"Yes," he said savagely, leaning forward. "Very sure. I was supposed to be out of town doing an audit on one of our branches and Ethel was to stay with her friend in the country. She saw me off, but I felt ill on the train and got off and took a cab back. I came in quietly. I heard them. All the lights were out; I could just hear their voices."

Joe's face was a tortured mask. He wasn't with me, he was back in the dark house.

"I must have stood there for an hour," he whispered. "Listening. Listening. Listening. Listening."

He repeated the word almost in a hiss. I sat as still as stone.

"Then I went outside and waited. They came out. They went to the station, and he kissed her good-bye. Ethel then went to her cousin in the country. So if I'd checked later, she would have been there. And they couldn't have been interrupted in the apartment because she wasn't supposed to be there. All the lights were out anyway. They just wouldn't have answered the bell.

"I nearly went crazy. I kept watch after that. It had been going on for a long time. Yes, a long time. It had been carefully planned. Ah, my sweet Ethel. My dear, sweet Ethel. What a blind, trusting fool I was. I remember we used to have serious discussion about some unfortunate marriages we used to watch, where affairs were taking place. How

(Continued on page 127)

DETECTIVE TALES

ON THE SPOT

For Next Month



"I want to get a picture of Nina Cantini in a compromising position," blackmailer Bellamy Blade tells dollar-hungry Deegan, and Deegan agrees. Which is why Deegan, on the floor where he has been belted, is still all business. . . .



Back at his office, Deegan is offered the job of protecting Nina by her fiancé, Dan Caxton, the man who had just stuck his fist in Deegan's face. But life is full of strange things, and Deegan agrees. . . .



Deegan goes back to Nina's apartment, sneaking around to the rear. He peers through the French doors. Bellamy Blade is there, a brand-new hole in his head. Deegan shakes his head. What next? he wonders.



Enters, then, Eileen, who will inherit a fortune if she can keep Caxton from marrying Nina. And the thing in her hand says that she doesn't intend to get mixed up with murder—even if she has to commit murder to do it!

The conclusion of this story will be told in Robert Martin's dramatic murder novel, "Deegan and the Deadly Dolls" . . . featured in the May issue of DETECTIVE TALES.

HIS OWN FUNERAL

When those three partners fell out, luckily there was a man like John Murdock around to make the separation . . . permanent!



Murdock had it all figured out: A little poison in Harris' bourbon, and then, . . .

By JOHN LANE

THE SOUNDS of the angry voices came so clearly through the thin walls that John Murdock could have sworn his partners were fighting in his lap. He sat, clenching his fists in cold rage, staring rigidly at the blotter on the desk before him.

This continual fighting was bad enough, but they had a customer in there with them—a customer whose account ran into the thousands. And there they were, battling again, like a pair of drunken bums on a street corner.

The door swung open and the customer

stormed out. He paused just long enough to snarl at John.

"Believe me, the next time I come into this madhouse, they'll have to carry me in a strait-jacket!"

The outer door slammed then, and he was gone. And with him went the thousands that meant a respectable profit to the firm of Murdock, Harris & Fisher, Investments.

Murdock sat turned to stone in fury.

This was not the first customer his partners had driven out with their wrangling. There had been three in the past week alone, to say nothing of the week before, or the week before that. In his anger, Murdock forgot the times that *his* bickering with the other partners had driven customers out of the office. All he heard now was the voices still raised in contentious wrath.

He rose stiffly from his desk and strode into the other office.

Harris stood at the window, his face apoplectic. "Just say that once more," he yelled, "and I'll wring your stinking neck!"

Fisher leaned across the desk and shook his skinny fist. "Oh, you will, will you! Let me tell you this. Just try it, that's all. Just try it. I'll beat out your brains with the telephone!"

Murdock watched bitterly as fat Harris pranced across the floor, skirting the desk. He had a pair of shears clenched in his hand, and he brandished them wildly.

"I'll cut your heart out!" he cried. "I'll rip the throat from under your chin!"

Fisher's grey face fairly quivered. "Oh, you will, will you! Let me tell you this. Just try it, that's all. Just try it!"

Harris prowled around the desk, just far enough away so that Fisher could not reach him. He waved the shears like a saber.

"I'll slice off your ears!" he howled, intoxicated by the sound of his own voice. "I'll pin you to the wall!"

Fisher clawed the desk-top. "Oh, you will, will you! Let me tell you this. Just try it, that's all. Just try it!"

MMURDOCK leaned against the door frame, wearily wishing they would get close enough to each other to accom-

plish the mutual destruction they were threatening.

What a wonderful thing it would be if they *would* kill each other! What a boon! What a blessing! They fought with each other and they fought with him—and in the melee, one customer after another was deserting the firm, outraged, indignant, and disgusted. One more month and they'd be eating each other in order to survive.

"Cut it out, both of you," he growled. "We just lost another customer. Why I ever went into business with a pair of lunk—"

Harris whirled. "Who asked you to stick your nose into this?" he snarled.

Fisher cracked back into his chair. "That's all we needed!" he screamed, his eyes blazing. "You!"

Harris turned to the wall and beat his hands against it. "Heaven deliver me from this nut hatchery!" he moaned. "May lightning strike them both dead in their tracks!"

Murdock ground his teeth, turned, and stamped out, *slamming* the door behind him. The receptionist, beside the door, quickly ducked her blonde head and rapidly began to type: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog the quick . . ." In a fracas like this, she had learned, it was the innocent bystander who got it *in* the neck.

Murdock paused at his desk and put out his hand as if to steady himself. Too much was too much.

"Miss Georgius," he said heavily, "I'm going downstairs for a cup of coffee. If there are any calls for me, please do not give them to either Mr. Harris or Mr. Fisher."

He plodded out of the office.

He did not wait for the elevator. He was in no mood to stand with people. He wanted to be alone. He walked down the ten flights of stairs to the first floor. He was seething when he started. By the fifth floor he had made up his mind that something had to be done. By the third floor, the grim knowledge of *what* had to be done was firmly planted in his mind.

It was not a new thought. It was not something that had come in a flash. It was something that had been evolving in his

infuriated, agile mind for a long while.
Murder.

Not just the impulse to murder, but the actual, settled fact that it had to be done if the business was to survive. If *he* was to survive. The business was deteriorating so rapidly that if something drastic were not done soon, there would be no business.

It had been a mistake right from the beginning. He fought with them, they fought with him, and they all fought with the customers. They had talked it over, had agreed to keep the peace—but even while they were agreeing, they had been at each other's throats, fighting over the terms of the peace. It was just no good.

As John Murdock placed his right foot on the tile of the first floor lobby, he had made up his mind. Harris and Fisher had to die.

He didn't have the money to buy them out, and they didn't have the money to buy him out. He would have bought them out if he'd had the cash, for the business was essentially sound. All it needed for success was a little peace and quiet.

Harris and Fisher had to die. There was no other solution.

BY THE TIME he had finished his coffee in the luncheonette around the corner, Murdock had the details firmly set in his mind. Harris would die and Fisher would be blamed for it.

They were all bachelors, and in the spirit of momentary good will when they had started the business, they had exchanged keys to their apartments. There had been other tokens of amity, too—little gifts. Murdock recalled sourly that he had given fat Harris a bottle of brandy. What a mistake *that* had been! It had taken them only ten days to discover that Harris was the All-American lush.

Well, all that was coming in handy now.

Murdock went back to the office, the very picture of a staid and thoughtful businessman. Harris was gone. There was nothing new in that. Harris always disappeared after a scrap. His nerves, it seemed, were very delicate, and he needed the steadying effect of alcohol. He would now spend the rest of the day in the bar, steadying himself.

A few minutes after Murdock had

seated himself at his desk, Fisher staggered from his office, his face as grey as a weathered skull.

"I have to see the doctor, John," he gasped to Murdock. "I feel terrible."

A scene with Murdock or Harris always set his ulcers to jumping like popcorn on a hot griddle.

"You ought to take better care of yourself," Murdock said ironically.

Fisher's gaunt face twitched. "John," he stammered, "I can't tell you how sorry I am about that little tiff we had. I apologize. I want to see you later and apologize more fully. I feel like an absolute dog, John. I want to—"

"You'd better get to the doctor's," Murdock said drily.

Fisher staggered out, holding his stomach. Murdock ground his teeth. He could not decide which was worse—Harris' drinking or Fisher's ulcers. Fisher always had an attack after a fight, and the pain seemed to drive him to extremes of self-abasement, contrition, and tearful apology. He drove everyone nearly mad with his groveling. And it didn't mean a thing. It would last until he made everybody thoroughly uncomfortable, and the following day he would be as belligerent as a bantam again. Murdock glowered at the closed door with hatred.

Miss Georgius, the receptionist, left promptly at five-thirty. Murdock locked the door and went immediately into Fisher's office. In the bottom drawer of the steel file was a bottle of bourbon that Fisher kept for customers. Murdock lifted it out carefully with his handkerchief. It was covered with Fisher's fingerprints and they were going to be very valuable in the very near future. Valuable and damning. Murdock chuckled grimly as he slipped the bottle into his briefcase.

Before taking a cab to his own apartment, he went into the bar across the street. He was not surprised to see fat Harris standing there, hunched over his glass, bitter and silent.

He looked up when Murdock stopped beside him. "So he's driving you to drink, too, eh?" he said darkly. "Him and his stinking apologies."

Murdock murmured, "Poor Fisher."

Harris made a harsh noise in his throat. "He came in here to beg my pardon, no

less! But would he have a friendly drink with me? Not him. He just stood there holding his lousy belly and sniveling until I told him to get out and leave me alone. You're next, Murdock," he said sardonically. "He'll be up to apologize to you. Just wait."

Murdock could have laughed aloud. It was getting better and better. Harris and Fisher had now had a public scrap. The bartender would remember that.

"Why don't you go out and get yourself something to eat, Harris," Murdock said persuasively. "The way you keep drinking, you're going to end up with ulcers, too."

Harris flared, as Murdock knew he would.

"And why don't you drop dead?" Harris said nastily. "Think anybody'd miss you? You're crazy. You and Fisher both. Leave me alone."

Murdock walked out of the bar, grinning with satisfaction. Harris would now stubbornly stay there for the rest of the evening. Nothing would budge him.

Murdock was a methodical man. He liked to be sure of each step as he made it, and the next step was to go home.

THE ELEVATOR operator greeted him cheerily. "A touch of spring in the air, hey, Mr. Murdock?"

Murdock shook his head. "Maybe

that's what's wrong with me, Jake," he said lugubriously. "All day I've been feeling like the end of the world, but I guess it's just a touch of spring fever."

"Sulphur and molasses, Mr. Murdock. Best thing for it."

"I think I'll just go to bed, Jake. If anyone drops in to see me tonight, tell them I'm not in, will you?"

The operator said, "Sure," and folded his fingers around the dollar bill Murdock slipped into his hand.

That would take care of Fisher, if he came around to apologize. Also, the operator would now swear that Mr. Murdock spent the entire murder evening in his apartment—if it came to that. It might not be necessary, but it was always good to be sure. And on top of that, if Fisher came, he would be sure to make a nuisance of himself, perhaps even become belligerent—and the operator would remember that, too!

Murdock wove slowly, but when he finished, the pattern would be tight.

Inside his own apartment, he went quickly into the kitchen and took down a small container of potassium cyanide, a grim reminder of the time he'd poisoned the noisy airdale in the apartment across the hall. He tipped a more than lethal amount into the bottle of bourbon that he had taken from Fisher's office. He shook it and held it to the light.

*When two cuties start hair-pulling
Watch the corpses fly . . . in*

The Merry Queen of Murder

While Ardelle's blonde rival swore to undo the strutter's stuff, and leave her draping a cold slab . . . ex-sleuth Thackeray Hackett hounded the hot spot—to pick up the remains.

Exciting Headliner Files Novel
by Frederick C. Davis



There's thrilling reading in the April issue, with crime-adventure stories by Robert Martin, John D. MacDonald, Dorothy Dunn and others . . . on sale March 4th.

**DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE**
CONTAINS WITH FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION

The stage, he thought, was set. There was poison in the bourbon, and Fisher's fingerprints were on the bottle. There only remained the simple task of putting the bottle in Harris' apartment—simple because Harris would be out and because Murdock had the key to the door.

Harris' apartment was but five minutes away by cab, but a twenty-minute walk. Murdock walked. There was no sense in taking a chance that an obscure cab driver would pop up at an inconvenient moment and recall that he had taken Murdock to the murder apartment on the night in question.

Murdock had thought of everything.

Twenty minutes later, he let himself cautiously into Harris' apartment. He tiptoed first to the bedroom to make sure that Harris had not come home after all and tumbled into bed to sleep it off—but Harris was not home. Murdock wrinkled his nose in disgust at the sloppiness and disorder. The bed was unmade, an ash-tray had been upset on the floor, and worn shirts, socks, and underwear lay wherever they had been flung. He walked into the kitchen. Harris' liquor cache was in the cabinet over the sink, and Murdock carefully removed every bottle. He emptied them in the bathroom, then replaced them—putting among them the one he had loaded with cyanide.

No matter how much he drank outside, Harris always had a nightcap before he went to bed. Or two, or three. Tonight, Murdock thought grimly, he would be restricted to one.

As he walked slowly homeward, he wondered, in a detached way, if he'd be called to testify in court. Miss Georgius, the receptionist, would of course testify that Harris and Fisher were always quarreling. The bartender, from the tavern across the street, would add the little bit that Fisher and Harris had scrapped. Perhaps it would be better, Murdock mused, if he himself tried to minimize the tiffs between the two men, to say that these things always occurred in business and that the arguments were unimportant. That would create sympathy for himself—and would have no effect on the final verdict. For Fisher's fingerprints *were* on the murder bottle. There would be no getting around that. Murdock nodded

and smiled. Yes, that would be the best way to work it.

He approached his own apartment with wariness. It would not do to have anyone see him on the street now—and a moment later he had reason to congratulate himself for his caution. Fat Harris staggered from the apartment, teetered on the curb, wildly waving his arms at the cab that cruised slowly down the opposite side of the street.

That was a bad moment, the worst moment. Murdock leaned weakly against the side of the dark doorway, in which he stood concealed. His stomach turned and a wave of nausea rose in his throat. He had not counted on seeing Harris again—alive. Murder by poison had seemed, somehow, impersonal. But seeing Harris there, knowing where he was going, knowing what was going to happen when he got there—it suddenly became horribly personal, and he felt like rushing to the phone in the basement of the apartment and screaming to Harris *not* to drink from the bottle.

But he just stood there, frozen. Relief came when the cab roared out of sight, and Murdock was his methodical self again. In five minutes Harris would be home. In six minutes he would be dead.

MMURDOCK stood, eyeing with fascination the creeping minute hand of his wristwatch. It passed the bar of the final minute, and he said heavily, "Dead."

He was glad then that he had told Jake, the elevator operator, not to let anyone into his apartment that night. It would have been the crowning horror if he had been the one with whom Harris had spent the last minutes of his life.

He had come out through the rear entrance of the apartment, and he crept back the same way. He was half-way up the stairs when a darting beam of light shot up from the bottom of the steps and a hard voice yelled, "Here he is, sneaking down the back way!"

Murdock whirled, galvanized by fear. Caught? So soon? Frantically, he turned and leaped up the stairs. A burly figure pounded after him. There was a heavy thunder of feet from the top of the stairs,

(Continued on page 130)

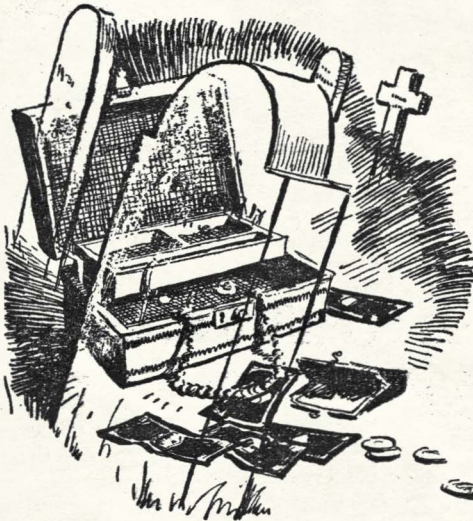


By NELSON and GEER

THE KID'S "PERFECT" CRIME

Perfect! Perfect to the last detail, the murderer told himself, as he looked down at the dead woman, elderly, crippled Mrs. Agnes Roffeis, stretched on the floor of her Chicago home that August evening in 1936. Her head was a pulp from blows of a hammer and her own gold-headed cane. A twisted wire dug into the wrinkles of her throat.

He checked again—hands scrubbed, all traces of blood removed; hammer, cane, everything he'd touched wiped clean of fingerprints. Then he



pocketed the jewel box with its meager contents and the \$8 from her purse.

When Detective Captain Martin McCormick questioned 16-year-old Roland Monroe, precocious choir boy and paper-route carrier, the kid told him glibly, "I stopped at Mrs. Roffeis' for the paper money at about 8 o'clock. She paid, and gave me a glass of orange juice. She's always doing nice things for people, taking an interest in them. Everybody loves her. We talked a while about my career. I—I want to be a detective, you know. After that I left."

Then he made his one mistake.

"I read about all the murders and study them," he added shyly. "Did—did you find any fingerprints on the hammer?"

McCormick picked that up quick.

"Quit lying!" he snapped. "You killed her! And thought you'd committed the perfect crime when you wiped everything off. But you didn't." Then he embroidered the truth a bit himself, but it got results. "There were a couple nice prints you overlooked, Roland. Now come clean!"

The chagrined kid confessed, not realizing he'd betrayed himself by mentioning the hammer, something known only to the police—and the killer. He said he wanted money for a ball game.

Tried and convicted, Roland Monroe's "perfect" crime netted him a sentence of 199 years.





"Of course I understand," Burke said quietly, gazing down at Collie's head of tangled curls.

HERE COMES KILLER JORDAN!

When the cops picked up Martha for murder, Burke Jordan did nothing. For when it came to death chairs, Burke was the kind of affectionate husband who liked to say, "After you, my sweet!"

By
**FRANCIS
K.
ALLAN**

CHAPTER ONE

The Wild Winds

IT WAS October and the last week Burke could stay at the cabin. Last night it had looked as if it might snow, and tonight the wind was pouring through the trees, making them bend and groan.

Burke sat on the open platform of porch with a whiskey and a cigar, with his old flight jacket turned up at the neck and his long legs crossed in front of him. The lamp gave a fluttering light in the one



• • •

Gripping Crime Novelette

• •

room behind him, and he listened to the Atlantic as it smashed rhythmically against the Maine coast. He did not want to go back to New York. He wanted nothing. Or rather, precisely nothing that he had, and everything he couldn't get.

He sought for the whiskey bottle in the dark and poured another drink. He wondered if he were drunk and considered the idea of standing up to find out. He decided it would be more practical simply to finish the bottle and save the trouble of finding out. Presently again he began to play an ironic game with himself: He tried to visualize where Martha was this moment, somewhat after ten at night. What was she doing? Thinking? What was she wearing? Was she laughing? And how would she look if he walked in and put down his cigar and smiled and said, "I've got a surprise, Angel. Guess. No . . . not candy or cake, or diamonds or dimes," that was the old phrase they'd used. "Something you won't guess, Angel: I'm going to kill you. . . ." Burke listened to the wind and tried to imagine what Martha would say, and how. And the wind cried that she was lovely, lovely, lovely. . . .

Burke listened. It was time to go home to New York.

IT WAS almost six in the evening when he got off the train at Pennsylvania Station. The reactions of habit began to touch him again. He thought of going by his office and taking the accumulated mail home. He considered a drink at Durley's; it was the right time. But in the end he took a cab directly to the apartment. It was on the ninth floor of a rather old building on that part of Park Avenue below Grand Central Station, and once Burke had liked it.

The living room was long and comfortable and cluttered. There were books and enough lamps for every chair and a mended place in the Oriental rug. There was a wood-burning fireplace, and on the mantel were four of the bird figures that Martha had carved that summer in Mexico. The happy summer three years ago, Burke mused.

He put down his one suitcase and walked slowly across the room to the hall. The water was gushing in the

shower, and in the bedroom an evening dress lay over the foot of the bed. A celophane box of orchids lay on the dresser, and within was a card: "From Yesterday, for Tomorrow, Collie."

Burke looked at it, and finally he smiled slightly. He looked up at the picture that hung on the left of the windows. It was a picture of a man with a gay, slender face, with blond, curly hair and an open shirt. It was signed: From Collie Wayne to Burke, The Best Agent In The World.

And Burke kept smiling. He had been a good agent for Collie. From a piano in an orchestra to a Hollywood shack with two swimming pools and a bar in every bathroom; from best man in Collie's long-forgotten wedding to—what would you call it?—the other guy? The counter-for-the-knockdowns at the end. And Burke kept smiling. Maine was the place to think. It was cold in Maine, and lonely, and the ocean screamed.

The water was still gushing in the shower when he walked quietly down the hall again. He pushed his suitcase in the coat closet and took the elevator downstairs. As he remembered it, this elevator operator went off duty at seven o'clock.

The cab driver said he didn't get it, just sitting around for laughs. Burke asked him who was laughing? After that they just sat there across the street from the apartment building, and Burke smoked a cigar. This, he supposed, was what they called self-torture. But it wasn't really. The torture had come eight, nine weeks ago. This was what they might call the cat-and-mouse game.

At seven-thirty Martha ran out of the building and took a cab. For a moment, under the light, her dark hair had glistened with the shade of water at midnight. And again Burke heard the Maine wind crying, "Lovely, lovely, lovely. . . ." And something in him cried, too.

"Turn uptown," he told his cabby. They followed Martha's taxi to Forty-fifth Street, then west across Times Square. There, at the corner of Broadway, she got out and dissolved through the door of Turnatti's Grill. Burke recalled how Collie liked Turnatti's broiled shrimp.

He left his cab and walked by the window of Turnatti's. They were sitting in a booth, and Collie was talking. He al-

ways talked with all his face, smiling, grimacing, lifting and lowering his brows. His fingers were long and graceful, and Martha was listening. She was bare-headed. She laughed, and the waiter brought two whiskey-sours. Burke remembered the time when Martha tasted her first drink—a long time, wasn't it?

The wind was cold. It had a gaunt sound, a homeless sound, unlike the sound in Maine. It took no splendor from the touch with buildings. It wanted no pause in the brick canyons here. It was a running wind.

At eight-forty they came out of Turnatti's and walked three blocks uptown to the Emerald Theater where the marquee blinked the title of Collie's latest picture and, beneath in bolder lights, proclaimed his presence *In Person*.

At ten-thirty they reappeared. "Go downtown," Burke told his new cabby. They left their cab at the Oyster Feast Bar, and at eleven o'clock Collie kissed Martha good-night near the doorway of the old Park Avenue building. Burke slowly crumpled his cigar between his fingers. How long had it been? Not the eight weeks in Maine, but how long *in blindness* since he'd known a kiss that was his, and only his?

The smashing of the ocean seemed to fill his ears again, and then it came to him. He smiled slowly, and his dark eyes twinkled softly in the night. It was fascinating, he mused, how inspirations worked. Whether they concerned a contract, a stunt, a new variation of a ham routine, or whether they concerned something so childishly new as death, inspirations were all alike—you found them sud-

denly, after looking a long time in the wrong place. . . .

Burke walked slowly behind Collie, then more swiftly. Collie cut through Grand Central and out onto Lexington Avenue. He paused to buy a pack of cigarettes, and Burke thought how useless it was: One or two more would have been enough, if Collie had only known. Five minutes later Collie disappeared into the Regal Tower on Fifty-first Street. Burke was pleased to know he hadn't moved; probably nothing was changed. Servants had always made Collie uneasy, anyway.

THE LOBBY was quiet. The clerk's head hovered in shadow behind the frosted glass of his cage. The elevator doors were closed. Burke set out up the stairs. He paused at the ninth floor to rest and throw away his frayed cigar. Then he continued to the sixteenth floor.

He knocked and at last Collie opened the door. Already he was in his robe. His blue eyes widened in surprise. Then he pulled the door open wide. "Burke! This is great! When did you come back?"

"Not long ago." Burke dropped his hat on the couch, and Collie said he'd do a drink—or would Burke rather have beer? Judas, but he was glad to see him back! Not that Dave Tyler didn't make a lot of motions at running the agency right, but Dave always gave you the feeling he'd forgotten to wake up that morning. . . . Dave was Burke's one-third partner.

As Collie opened up the portable bar and kept talking, Burke smiled at him. He was the Halfback Dream of a co-ed's heart; five thousand a week's worth of

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them. He was the Golden Age Of Love. He went well with the ivory walls, too. His smile was both innocent and yearning.

"How was the vacation?"

"Quiet. I went to a cabin in Maine where I used to stay. There are lots of trees and the ocean. It's a good place to think, Collie."

"It sounds a lot better than bending a big smile on the Emerald stage. Burke, I'm getting sick of it. I—I saw Martha the other day, and we talked about it. We—well, here's to being back!" He handed Burke a Scotch and water. "I was telling Martha," he continued as he walked restlessly around the room, "I've saved enough money to stop running for a while. I'm tired of waving my pretty hair at people, but I don't know what else to do. I want to do something sort of plain and quiet."

"Why don't you sit down? That's plain and quiet," Burke said.

Collie stopped, then grinned at him self-consciously. "All right. I always do what you say." He sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"You're probably in love, Collie," Burke said idly.

The match froze a few inches from Collie's cigarette. He glanced up, then flicked the match out as the flame touched his fingers. A flush crossed his face. "What makes you think that?"

"Men often do and feel strange things when they're in love." Then he laughed. "What you need, Collie, is a long trip."

Collie stared fiedly at his glass on the coffee table. "I've been thinking the same thing," he said slowly. "But I don't want to go alone. Don't you see?" He kept staring at the glass. "Don't you see?"

"Of course I see," Burke said quietly as he stood behind Collie and looked down at the head of tangled curls. And then, unhurriedly, he reached for the ice breaker on the bar and brought it down in a powerful stroke that crushed the mass of curls.

Collie made a sobbing sound and seemed to huddle down. His hand went out and pushed over his drink. Burke struck him again. He turned his back, then, and looked out the window as he finished his drink. He took out his handkerchief and polished the glass, then put it on the

shelf inside the bar. He wiped the handle of the ice crusher and picked up his hat. At the door he looked back.

Collie was huddled on the couch, head down on his chest. The spilled drink was dripping off the coffee table and the cigarette was burning in the ashtray. And Burke thought again: Collie hadn't needed the new pack of cigarettes at all, really.

He closed the door and rubbed the knob, then went calmly down the stairs.

THE APARTMENT was dark when he let himself in, but he could hear Martha's bedside radio tuned softly. His suitcase was still in the closet behind the coats. "Angel?" he called gently.

The radio became silent. The bed rustled. "Burke!" Martha called. Her bare feet hurried. "Burke!" she cried from the doorway, then opened her arms and ran to him. "Oh, Burke, you're back, you're home!" She kissed him, and his fingers tightened slowly on her shoulders. He looked into her eyes for several moments; then he kissed her back—slowly and deeply—and she rubbed her dark hair against his cheek.

"I had it all planned to hate you when you came back," she whispered. "What made you do it? Just disappear and leave me waiting until finally Dave remembered to call and say you'd taken a little trip! Why, Burke?"

"I was tired. I'd been seeing things that shouldn't have been there. I just wanted a thinking spell." He held her away from him. Her hair touched her shoulders. Her eyes were the color of summer midnight. She is so lovely, so lovely, Burke kept thinking. No one will ever be more lovely than my wife.

Martha wanted to know where he'd gone, what he'd done. His face looked all windy and browned. Didn't he want a beer? Why didn't he have a beer and tell her everything that had happened.

Burke told her how quiet it had been at the cabin; the wind and the ocean made different sounds—not noise sounds. She sat on the couch, her feet tucked under her, her eyes glowing eagerly. It came to Burke then with a curiously exciting thrill that he was quite odd. He could love and hate at the same time. And yet that wasn't odd, because the deepest hate

is simply made out of pieces that used to be love. . . .

"Now, tell me what you've been doing," he said.

"Oh . . . nothing. Just making motions." She looked around the room, as if trying to see what was out of place. "I've seen Collie now and then. Dave took me to the opening of a new play; it was terrible. But nothing really. I'm awfully glad you're back, Burke," she said with sudden intensity. "Things seem to—change shape when you're gone."

She said it again, after the lights were out and they were in bed. "I'm glad you're back. Promise you won't go away like that again."

"I won't, Angel," he promised. "I've done all my thinking, now."

* * *

At ten o'clock the next morning, when he was shaving, Martha screamed.

"Burke, Burke, Burke!" She burst into the room, her face bloodless. "Burke—on the radio! Someone killed Collie! *Someone murdered Collie!*"

Burke looked at her and thought how peculiar, how fortunate, that he should have lather on his face this moment. "I don't believe it," he said.

"But it just said! In his room, and a hotel maid found him! He—Burke, don't just stand there! Find out! Call someone, Burke!"

At that moment the telephone rang. It was Dave Tyler. When he heard Burke's voice, he heaved a desperate sigh. "Thank God you came back when you did! Burke, listen and get this: Collie Wayne has been murdered. It happened hours ago in his suite at the Regal. His head smashed. The police called here, trying to locate the next-of-kin. They want somebody to come over there. Burke, for God's sake, will you go?" he begged. "You can handle that sort of thing, Burke, so much better—"

After five seconds Burke answered quietly, "I'll go over immediately."

He turned slowly to Martha. The lather was dry and puffy on his face. He glimpsed himself in the mirror. He looked like a clown, he thought suddenly. "It's true," he said. "The police want someone to

come over. I'll be back when I can."

Martha sank down and stared at him uncomprehendingly. "I don't see," she whispered gauntly. "I don't see how anybody *could*. Everybody loved Collie. Everyone loved him." She looked at her fingers. Her lips trembled.

CHAPTER TWO

The Prisoner

BURKE shook hands with a tall, loose-jointed man. His face was worn and rather shabby looking, his voice was quiet, and he made Burke think of a country doctor. He was Lieutenant Conway. He had heard of Burke, he said; he was sorry to have to bother him this way, but he needed to ask a few questions.

Burke answered thoughtfully: He'd known Collie Wayne for nearly nine years and had been his agent for most of that time. . . . Wayne had been married once and divorced five years ago—to the girl who'd sung in the same orchestra where Wayne had played the piano. Elsie Dennis had been her name; he hadn't heard of her for years. . . . Collie's father was still alive; he lived in St. Paul. Otherwise he knew of no close kin. . . . A motive for the murder? No, that was a question he couldn't answer. As his wife had said only a few minutes ago, everyone loved Collie.

Conway frowned patiently. "Robbery apparently wasn't the motive," he said. "He had a pocket full of cash and an expensive wristwatch on the dresser. He'd started to bed, it appears. Then he came back to this room and was having a high-ball. I think he must have known his murderer very well." He paused and rubbed his ear lobe. "I understand you've been away from New York for several weeks, Mr. Jordan."

"I've been in Maine. I got home last night," Burke answered calmly.

Conway seemed ill at ease. "Can you tell me if your wife—you spoke of her—was a close friend of Collie Wayne?"

Burke looked back at Conway for several seconds, trying to make up his mind what Conway was thinking. "I know that Martha—that is, my wife—found Collie pleasant. Most people did, Lieutenant.

She knew him quite well. He frequently came to our apartment when he was in New York. Does that answer your question?"

"I think it does," Conway replied in a tone that made Burke know it didn't answer the question at all. . . .

From Collie's apartment, Burke went to his office on West Forty-seventh Street near Broadway. Donna, his secretary, looked at him in wide-eyed curiosity. "Do they know who killed him?" she breathed.

Burke smiled wryly. "They didn't tell me, if they did." Dave's door was closed, and voices drifted out. "Tell him I'm here when he gets through," he said, then went into his own office and closed the door.

First he gathered a thick sheaf of the piled-up letters off his desk and thrust them into a bottom drawer. He adjusted the shade and watched the tangle of traffic in Times Square. He sat down at the desk and found himself looking at another of Collie's pictures—the one from *Bermuda Love Song*. The dark paneled walls were circled with photographs of actors and actresses that Burke handled, or had handled, or simply knew. And it crossed his mind that in his thirty-six years he had known a mass of people, and yet none of them had known him. Those people, the dramatic personalities and the public idols, had never known him, really. . . .

He smiled abruptly. Perhaps he was just another one of those damned frustrated artists who dreamed of themselves as kings. He shrugged at himself and lit a cigar. His face was lean and browned by the Maine wind. His eyes were dark and clear. His hair was black. He was hard of body and his nerves were good. He spread his fingers and watched the cigar carefully. Yes, his nerves were all right.

Dave Tyler rushed in. He was always short of breath. His tie was crooked. "Burke, my God, how glad I am you're back! This thing with Collie has knocked me over. What did they say when you got there?"

Burke told him, and Dave kept mopping his jowls. He was Burke's age, but he looked older and somehow clumsy and, as Collie had said, as if he'd forgotten to wake up that morning. When he drank

enough—and that wasn't much—he liked to sing; he had a terrible voice. He had never married, probably because he loved everybody. And anyway, a wedding would have frightened him to death.

He kept mopping and perspiring and blinking hopelessly at Burke. "I don't guess they mentioned any . . . suspects?" he asked.

"No. That was what they asked me."

Dave walked around and stopped at the window, his back to Burke. "It hits me. Down in the stomach it hits me," he said. "He was by here day before yesterday, asking when you'd be home. It was late in the afternoon, and we went down together and had a drink at Durley's. Two or three drinks, in fact. He wanted to talk about something. You could see it coming to the surface, and he'd push it back, and then—"

"What did he say, Dave?" Burke asked curiously.

"Nothing . . . exactly. He was worried, Sort of discouraged with his life. Something was eating at him and it hurt."

"Didn't he tell you what it was?" Burke insisted.

"He— No, he never did," Dave said finally, and Burke knew he was lying. Dave had never been able to lie smoothly.

AFTER lunch and two martinis, Burke returned to the office and read the accumulated mail, dictated replies, filled his luncheon calendar for the next week, framed a letter to be sent to Collie's father in St. Paul, asking for any instructions and offering every assistance. At fifty-three when he went out, Dave's door was closed again. Burke frowned as he listened to the wordless murmur of voices, then glanced at Donna.

"A detective," she whispered in awe. "His name is Conway."

"Hmm." Burke frowned lightly. "Hmm," he said again. "Well, back to the streets again. Be good." He walked three blocks to Durley's bar on Forty-fourth and ordered a whiskey. He lifted it and measured his grip against the line of the mirror. The nerves were doing fine, thanks.

Patrick, the bartender, said wasn't it a sad thing, what had come to Mr. Wayne? Patrick poured a round for Burke and

one for himself and solemnly said, "He was a fine man."

Burke nodded. He drank and thought of phoning Martha. The time had been, he could recall, when she would meet him here, and later they'd eat at Trevor's or somewhere in the Village. He hunted for a nickel. There was no reason to forget the good times, no reason not to play the old games. . . . He turned toward the phone booth, and came face to face with Lieutenant Conway.

"They said I'd probably find you here." Conway's face looked drab and grey and his eyes were tired. "Would you mind sitting down a minute with me?"

Burke didn't mind. He was puzzled and curious, and Conway was awkward. "There are lots of jobs that aren't nice jobs for us, Mr. Jordan," he began uncomfortably. "There's nothing personal—nothing except my regrets. And my hope that I'm wrong," he added. "I wanted to tell you myself." He looked patiently at Burke. "I have had to arrest your wife in connection with Collie Wayne's murder, Mr. Jordan."

Burke presently remembered that time was moving by. He remembered that it would not look correct to laugh. He moved his tongue slowly across his lips. "Don't play jokes, please, Lieutenant."

"I'm not. I wish I were. It's true, and I wanted to tell you, and also to tell you why I've done it. Please listen to me: As I said earlier, Wayne had started to bed, then apparently changed his mind, and I decided that surely a friend had murdered him. As ordinary routine I tried to find out who had been with him when he was last seen. I am afraid that he was last seen alive in company with your wife." Conway paused. "I learned that from the theater manager of the Emerald Theater, but prior to that, I had found a cigarette case on Wayne's dresser. It was engraved: 'From Burke to Martha, On This First Anniversary.'" Again Conway paused and gestured clumsily. "I am afraid she may have left it in Wayne's apartment. I— Please, let me finish," he said as Burke started to protest.

"Shortly after I saw you, I went to your apartment and questioned your wife," Conway continued. "She failed to tell me the truth at first, I am sorry to say.

Later she admitted she had had dinner with Wayne last night. She maintains that she must have given Wayne her cigarette case at some time during the evening, but she denies having gone to his apartment. She denies completely any knowledge of the murder. I . . ." Once again Conway paused and rubbed distractedly at his ear lobe. "I was so inclined to believe her," he said. "Yet her fingerprints are in Wayne's apartment. Finally, upon second questioning late this afternoon, she admitted seeing Wayne at his apartment, night before last. Your wife—I suppose we get accustomed to dealing with cynical liars. She is such a poor liar, Mr. Jordan."

"Go on. What else?" Burke said very softly.

"The next part involves another very poor liar—your partner, Dave Tyler. I'll explain. On Wayne's table I found an unfinished letter to Tyler. It began something like this: 'It is sane daylight again, and I beg you, please, to forget entirely what I made such a fool of myself about last night. . . .' Conway looked up. "Something about the tone of that sentence . . . I questioned Mr. Tyler. He was evasive. I knew he was not telling the truth, and at last I made him tell me the truth. And I am not happy to inform you of what he told me."

"What did he tell you?" Burke asked sharply.

"Wayne was in love with your wife," Conway said heavily. "He had said something about it—not much, but something—during a drink with Tyler. Apparently it made him feel guilty, because of his friendship with you. He was confused. He didn't know what he wanted to do. After he mentioned it to Tyler, he regretted it. So, for a third time, I went to your apartment and questioned your wife. And at last she confessed a—a fleeting infatuation for Wayne. Nothing more, she maintains.

"Wayne had begged her to go away with him, to get a divorce. She refused, she says. She was obviously shaken, frightened, Mr. Jordan. She asked me to excuse her for a moment, suddenly. I agreed. It was pathetically obvious that she wished to do something. She went into the bedroom. In a moment I intruded to

find her trying to destroy a bloodstained handkerchief—hers, with her initials. She became hysterical. And it was then that I felt that I had to arrest her. Later our laboratory established that the blood on the handkerchief was Collie Wayne's blood. Your wife was scarcely able to talk. She made an effort to tell me that Wayne had broken a cocktail glass and cut his hand, and she'd dabbed at the cut—Mr. Jordan," he said nervously.

Burke was laughing. It was too fantastic. It was comic to the point of irony. A cocktail glass . . . a cut . . . a dab of the handkerchief. And then, in the unseen future, the links had come together in a chain. . . . He turned his laughter into bitterness abruptly as Conway kept staring at him.

"You fool! You're mad!" he gasped. "My wife didn't kill him! She couldn't kill the crippled puppy we once had when—I killed Wayne! Listen to me, I killed him, do you hear!"

Conway looked at him and looked away awkwardly. Burke hammered the table. "Listen to me, you maniac! I killed him! Don't you believe me?"

"No, Mr. Jordan," he said quietly, "but I am sorry for you, and I understand."

Burke exhaled a long breath and leaned back. It had been perfect, hadn't it? It had been a beauty, hadn't it? He reached across the table and seized Conway's wrist. "I can see her, can't I? A lawyer can talk to her? You won't keep her in jail? You can't!"

"You may see her, certainly. A lawyer can see her. But murder—It is not a bailable crime in this state, Mr. Jordan. Of course there are some ways, but . . ." His voice drifted away. Burke rose slowly.

"I want to see my wife," he said harshly.

HE WAITED, and presently the door opened and Martha came to him in the bleak white-plaster room where Conway had told him to wait. She stood with her back against the door, with one hand to her lips, and her eyes locked desperately with his. And then she said, "Everything is true but the ending. I didn't love him and I didn't kill him, Burke."

He opened his arms, and then she was

in them, crying. "If you hadn't left me, if you hadn't gone away. . . . It started before, but I was trying to stop it. I wanted to stop it, and then you went away. Things change shape when you're not with me, but I didn't kill him. I promise you."

He looked into her eyes. He kissed her and then he looked at her again. "Martha," he said, "you must tell me the truth, you know."

She sobbed terribly and turned away. "I am, I am, I am! I didn't do it, I didn't, I didn't! Oh, Burke . . ." She turned toward him desperately. "Don't you believe me, Burke? Tell me you believe me!"

He took her in his arms. "I love you," he said.

She thrust him back and looked at him strickenly. "Oh, dear God," she breathed. "You don't believe what I swear to you with all my—"

He caught her as she fainted. He held her and the flesh of her cheek was cool against his hand. The color of her hair was the color of summer midnight. "I love you," he whispered gently as she smiled. Then he carried her slowly across the room to the door, and into the corridor where Conway and another man were waiting. "She fainted," he said very simply.

* * *

Dave Tyler was sitting on the foolish high-backed couch in the lobby when Burke reached the building on Park. He looked frayed and breathless. "What's happening? What are they doing, Burke?" he asked frantically.

"The police?" Burke looked at him heavily. "They've arrested Martha."

"Oh, no! No, Burke!" Moisture fogged his glasses, and he blinked desperately. Burke nodded.

"I need a drink, and so do you. Come up with me," he said.

Dave stumbled behind him into the elevator. In the living room, he stood in the center of the room as if he had lost his way, forgotten his purpose. Burke pushed a highball into his hand and the fingers closed automatically. They seemed to release a trigger that started Dave's choked words:

"I'm to blame, Burke! A man named Conway came to see me. He wanted to know about Martha and . . . about Collie. He'd found a letter. He—I tried to throw him off, but he kept backing me into corners. I couldn't avoid—Burke, why didn't I keep my mouth shut?"

"Take it easy," Burke said quietly.

"I can't. I— She didn't do it, Burke. They're wrong, aren't they?"

Burke moved his hands emptily. "I don't know. I can't think clearly. Conway had proof. I don't know what to think."

"You don't have to think! You believe in her, don't you?" He stared at Burke. "You're not going to just . . . sit down and take it?"

"Dave, listen to me," Burke said harshly. "When Conway told me, I went through the same thing you're going through now. I even confessed to the murder myself, understand? I shouted I'd done it. But that isn't the way they work things. Now—now I'm trying to stand still a minute and look at it from the distance. I'm trying to think."

Dave looked at him humbly. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound the way I did. It's harder on you than anyone else." He sat down wearily. "But I can't understand. Why do they think she did it? The motive?"

"I suppose it will be called one of those Crimes Of Emotional Crisis," Burke said wryly. "It appears now that Martha and Collie were perhaps a little . . . closer than friends. He wanted her to go away with him. Apparently they had a scene about it, and in the heat of the fight, Martha must have hit him. Perhaps she was trying to break it off, and he wouldn't take it. I don't know. She hasn't talked to me about it yet."

"Yes. No," Dave said miserably. "Burke, I didn't want to tell you. Collie talked to me about it."

"That's all right. Conway has already told me."

"Oh. Well." Dave stared at the floor. "Burke, you can't blame him for something he couldn't help. I know that a lot of people have loved Martha. I've loved her since the first time I saw her. Collie and I—we were just the guys sitting on the bench outside, don't you see? There

aren't many people in the world like Martha. I—I'm not saying what I mean, somehow."

Burke gave him another drink. In another drink, he knew, Dave would start to cry. "She didn't do it," Dave whispered. He waited. "But even if she did, it doesn't matter. It was something she didn't mean to do. You've got to tell them that! Make them understand!"

"The world doesn't play that way, Dave."

Dave picked up his drink, then put it down slowly. "How do they know she did it? What kind of proof did they find?"

Burke told him of the cigarette case, of Martha's first failures to tell the truth, of her fingerprints, then of the blood-stained handkerchief. Dave listened and kept blinking mistily.

"But all of those things could be just . . . coincidences, Burke," he said doggedly. "It could be just a nightmare of irony."

"Perhaps it is," he agreed. "But only the murderer and Martha know for sure, and they won't believe Martha."

Dave fumbled his drink again. "Maybe I killed Collie," he whispered. He looked up at Burke, his moist eyes glowing strangely. "How do they know I'm not the murderer?"

"Dave, keep your shirt on. Give that drink back to me before you start seeing whales in it. You better—"

Dave lurched to his feet. "You don't know what I might have done!" he cried. "You don't know what goes on inside me—nobody knows that about anybody! How do you know I didn't kill Collie and—"

"All right, so you killed him. But I don't believe it and the police won't believe it, so what does that make you? The killer that nobody wants. They'd rather have Martha." Burke laughed dryly, then put his hand over Dave's shoulders and steered him toward the door. "No more medicine for you tonight. Go straight home and pin yourself in bed."

Dave turned in the corridor and faced Burke with the expression of a huge enraged child. "You don't know! You don't know what I could do," he flung out again.

Burke closed the door on him and went back to his highball. He put the bottle on the floor beside a chair, pulled off his coat and tie, turned off the lights, and sat down. After the fourth drink, he could close his eyes and the trees were crying above him. The ocean was chanting of his hate-of-love, and he smiled. He smiled and wanted to cry, because he loved her so much.

A tear went down his cheek, and another, and he yearned to hold her in his arms. To clasp her shoulders and tighten his fingers until her flesh was white beneath his grip.

Oh, to see her and hold her in his arms!

He laughed suddenly, harshly, then hushed his laughter and sat in rigid silence for long minutes. Finally he held the glass tightly and, in the darkness, moved it slowly toward the handle of the chair. When it almost touched, he tried to steady his hand. But the glass in the darkness rapped jerkily on the chair arm. The nerves were not so good. . . .

When, at last, he tilted the bottle and nothing came, he tried to rise. He fell back in the chair and stared at the dark wall. He sighed and relaxed. The bottle rolled over the floor and stopped. He wondered if Martha were sleeping this moment.

CHAPTER THREE

Into the Past

THE PALE morning sun filled the window when he woke. His neck ached, but that was all. Burke almost never had hangovers. He stood up and pushed the empty bottle behind the couch with his foot. He started a shower and drank a can of tomato juice.

In the shower he heard the telephone ringing. As he padded, wet-footed, along the hall, he realized it was the doorbell instead. "Who is it?" he called out.

"Lieutenant Conway."

Burke opened the door and apologized as he retreated for his robe. "I'm afraid I got drunk last night."

Conway smiled wearily. He looked immensely tired. "You must have been sleeping hard. I tried phoning you two

hours ago." Then his smile was gone, and his drab face looked grey. "I have news for you—good and bad, Jordan."

Burke glanced at him intently. "Yes?"

"The good news first: We're wrong about your wife. She didn't kill Collie Wayne. And as for the bad . . ." For one instant Burke knew a lightning pang of fear: Was this it? What had happened to tell Conway? "As for the bad," the detective repeated, "your partner, Dave Tyler, has committed suicide. He left a confession. He admitted to stealing from. . . ."

Conway's lips kept moving, but his words faded into a silent void, and Burke stared. This was a joke, of course. A very bad joke. "You must be crazy!" he exploded. "Dave! Not Dave!"

"I am afraid so. Ironically, he didn't really need to kill himself to save your wife. For we have been ready to release her for hours. We have been simply too busy to—"

"You were going to release Martha anyway?" Abruptly Burke sat down.

"Yes." Conway gestured uncomfortably. "I questioned her late last night, when she was able to talk clearly. She remembered when and where Wayne had broken the glass and cut his hand. She even remembered that at the time it happened, the bartender at Larrabie's bar had been standing, talking to them. I went to Larrabie's and talked to the bartender. He repeated, chapter-and-verse, what your wife had told me. Thereafter I went to Turnatti's Restaurant where they had eaten dinner that last night. I found the waiter who'd served them, and he cleared up the cigarette case affair. Your wife had left it on the table. When they went out, she'd gone ahead. The waiter found it and gave it to Wayne. He obviously forgot to return it. So there we were, convinced of your wife's innocence, when Dave Tyler called on the phone and asked for me."

"He called you? He called you, then killed himself?" Burke gasped.

"Yes," Conway said heavily. "He said he was in his office. That a complete explanation was on his desk, and that he would be dead when I arrived. He said he would leave the door unlocked," Conway said wryly, "and the light would be

on. He said it was a grotesque trick of fate that, of the millions in New York, the one person he most worshiped had been charged with the crime he had committed. I—I yelled at the poor devil. I told him to hold on and wait. He hung up. By the time I got there, only minutes later, he was dead of a pistol shot in the roof of his mouth." Conway gestured wearily again. "I've tried countless times to phone you, but. . . ."

Once more Conway's words seemed to dissolve, while his lips rambled foolishly on. Burke was seized with a wild desire to laugh until Conway's eyes popped out. This was turning to the wildest of fantasy! Dave—gentle Dave with his terrible voice and his foggy glasses. . . . And he'd really loved Martha that much! It was impossible, and yet it was exactly Dave's kind of pathetic grandeur. Burke unthinkingly groped for a bottle beside his chair, and Conway kept explaining in his worn voice.

It appeared, both from the confession and from the books of the agency, that Dave had been taking money from Wayne's account for nearly eighteen months. Over fifty thousand dollars, a hasty accounting revealed. Apparently Wayne had discovered the theft. Instead of making a report to police, he had attempted to reach a settlement privately with Tyler. . . .

Burke heard with a fraction of his mind. Even this part was a scene in the fantasy, he mused. For he remembered when, eighteen months ago, Collie had made Dave promise to skim so much a week off his checks and bank it where he couldn't get it to lose to the bookies. What would Conway think, Burke wondered, if he told him *that*?

"So I am going to release your wife," Conway was saying. "And I am so glad. It was no pleasure to solve a case in which she was guilty, and I am glad it didn't turn out that way. Would you like to come with me to bring her home?"

"What?" Burke started, then heard. "Oh, Oh, yes," he said slowly. "Yes, indeed I would like to come and bring my wife home, Conway. I'll be only a minute dressing." He walked slowly back to the bedroom and stared into the mirror. Finally he began to smile. His eyes glowed.

He selected his newest suit, a bright tie, and a striped shirt. He sang under his breath as he combed and brushed his hair. Then he returned to Conway. "This is a happy day for me, all in all."

Conway nodded. "I can understand. She is too lovely to lose."

And I've lost her once, Burke was thinking. Or was it twice, or a dozen times? And that was only the beginning. Tomorrow? Next summer?

When she came to him she looked thin, as though the night had starved her of living flesh. Her face was white and her eyes were dull. "I want to go home and pull down the shades," she said. "I'm so tired."

They took a cab. She closed her eyes and did not speak. When Burke spoke, she only moved her head from side to side. At home she pulled down the bedroom shades and lay down without undressing. Burke paused, then slowly closed the door and left her alone. There was nothing to do, he reflected, but go to the office and try to piece things together.

Donna was wide-eyed and stricken when he got there. He told her she could go home. He went into Dave's office. The rug beneath the desk was dark with the bloodstain. There was a kitchen box of matches and Dave's rack of pipes on the desk, and a packet of the tissues he'd used to clean his glasses. There was a note on the calendar pad for today. It said, from Dave to Dave: "Remember to get a haircut, *absolutely*."

Burke tore it off and crumpled it slowly before he tossed it away. "I'm sorry, old guy. Nobody wanted to hurt you." Then he wrote a note on a sheet of paper and hung it on the outside knob of the suite: "Closed Due to Death."

It was after one-thirty before he went to Durley's. The story had gotten around, and they treated Burke with the tender silence and the grave sympathy of a shattered man. "A man does not know," Patrick said heavily. "Sure he was a kind man when I saw him. Sometimes wanting to sing too loud, but a kind man in the eyes. We do not know sometimes."

"We never know," Burke agreed quietly. "That's just as well." He had a Scotch, and another, and at the end of the second he realized that he intended to

drink all afternoon. He paid his bill and went home.

The bedroom door was still closed. He took off his coat and tie, pulled a bottle of Scotch from the shelf and carried it to the chair in the living room. He shifted the chair slightly so he could look into the hall to the bedroom door. He poured a drink and leaned his head back and gazed at the ceiling. Now it was time for the winds to cry again. . . . Let them cry and let the ocean pound again. . . .

AT FOUR that afternoon, the door opened. Burke raised his brows: "Angel?"

Martha came into the living room. Her dress was wrinkled. She looked, Burke thought, like a child that had been lost in the woods. "Yes, Burke?" she asked quietly.

"Wouldn't a drink help a little?"

"I don't think so." She pressed her hands against her cheeks and stared at the window. Then again she looked at him. Slowly she came toward him and touched his knee. She sat down cross-legged on the rug in front of his chair. "Burke, there are so many things I've got to say, and I can't say them well. I don't know where to start."

"You can start anywhere with me. Can't you, Angel?"

"I don't know. Sometimes it seems that you and I have gotten so far apart that even if we shout, the wind carries our words away. But about Collie, Burke," she said swiftly, "it wasn't what it seemed. I swear not. I loved him, but not the way I loved you. It sounds hollow, but Collie was a child hunting for a toy, Burke. Can't you close your eyes and remember him and see that? He was tired of all the old toys, and he wanted something new. And I cared for him—a little the way I think I'd care for a child. It was more than that, yes, but not much. He was lost. Burke, in the middle of plenty."

Burke raised his head. "We're all lost, aren't we?" he asked softly.

"Not the way Collie was. He didn't have anything in him but charm and money, but he had sense enough to know it, and it drove him!"

"And Dave? What did Dave have?"

He saw the blow drive in. He could

almost hear Martha gasp. She lowered her head and her fingers trembled on his knee. "Dave. . . . I don't ever want to think of Dave again. He was so sweet."

"He was sweet to you, Angel," Burke said quietly.

"I know. There was never a time—" She raised her head stiffly. "What? What, Burke?" she whispered.

Burke waited while the wind sang again above him. "He didn't kill Collie, Martha. Dave didn't kill Collie."

"What are you saying? Burke!" She grasped his legs and shook them frantically. "What? What?"

"Please. The people downstairs, Martha," he murmured. "Dave was here last night. He'd heard about your arrest. And he told me how much he'd always worshiped you. He said it didn't matter, whether you killed Collie or not. He said you'd had a reason—"

"Burke! Burke, no; for God's sake, don't—" Martha gasped.

He leaned forward and held her chin in his hand. "Do you remember when Collie asked Dave to slice his salary and save him from the bookies?" At last Martha scarcely nodded. Burke released her chin. "That was the motive he gave to the police in his note—that he'd been stealing the money. He worshiped you, Martha. Naturally, I couldn't tell them the truth. When he'd killed himself for you, it was the only thing I could—"

Martha screamed. It was like no scream Burke had ever heard before. It was soft and it trembled and broke and left her lips open, her eyes black as she stared at him. Then she tried to form words: "Why didn't you . . . kill me before . . . you told me that. . . ."

"But, Angel, Dave adored—" Burke began. But Martha's eyes had closed. For the second time in her life, she had fainted. Burke looked at her for a long time. Her fingers were curled, as if in sleep. Her dark hair was tumbled over the rich pattern of the rug.

He lifted her in his arms and carried her to bed. He spread her hair across the pillow, then leaned over and kissed her gently. Then he turned and walked back to his chair and reached for the bottle of Scotch.

When he woke the next morning, the

bottle was empty. He shook his head experimentally, then rose and started toward the bathroom to run a shower. Martha was sitting at the little table in the kitchen, drinking coffee.

"Oh," he said. "How do you feel, Angel?"

"Better, I suppose, since it would be impossible to feel worse. Will you sit down and have a cup of coffee with me, please, Burke?"

"No cream or sugar." He lighted a cigarette. "I'm afraid I did it again last night."

"I don't blame you," she said humbly. "I want to ask one question: Do you want a divorce, Burke?"

"Do I want— Are you crazy?" he demanded. "Or do you?"

She looked up and slowly shook her head. "No, I love you," she said quietly. "I only asked because of . . . everything. You don't know, even yet, whether I killed Collie or not."

"But it doesn't matter, does it?"

"But I didn't kill him, I swear, Burke. I didn't. I did many things, but not that." She hesitated. "Do you still want me?"

"You know that I do. What makes you ask that?"

"Then we— Listen, Burke!" She walked around the room, her cheeks flushed. "Burke, could you believe about Collie? And could we go back across . . .

across time? Could we go back to Mexico and begin again, just the way we did three years ago? Couldn't we?" She turned to him in desperate appeal. "Couldn't we, please, start again?"

Burke frowned momentarily. Then he nodded and began to smile. "Yes. I'd like to do that. Too much has happened. It needs to be wiped out."

"We'll do everything just the same! Wednesday was the day, remember? And we didn't have the money to fly all the way. We'll take the train. . . ."

THEY took the train on Wednesday. They drank Manhattans in the bar car and, as the train sang heavily on its way, Burke felt himself floating backward to the day in the past when all of this had been done for the first time. The taste of happiness came into his throat, and the breathlessness of tomorrow beat in his blood.

"Remember what we used to say?" he asked suddenly. "Not candy or cake, or diamonds or dimes. . . ."

"And then you'd have a surprise. I remember!" Her eyes glistened strangely. "And remember when we passed through Harrisburg that first time, you spilled a drink all over your brand new suit?" She laughed. The train was slowing for Harrisburg, and she reached over and tipped his glass, sending the Man-



What caused that gruesome parade of headless corpses, which spotted Manhattan on those nights of blood-red terror? Only one man had the clue to those corpses—and his own neck made yet another target for the hidden, hungry knife!

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hattan down his coat. Then she began to laugh in a shrill, breathless way that filled the bar car. Burke stopped mopping at his coat and stared at her.

"Martha, what's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"Burke, Burke, listen. . . ." She leaned over and clutched his arm. "Bend down and I'll whisper a secret. Listen: *I killed Collie.*"

"You— Martha, stop it! Quit acting like a crazy—"

"Yes, honestly, I did." Her eyes were immense and childishly solemn, as if she were telling a splendid fairy tale. "I promise, cross my heart."

"You're soaked. It's time for you to take a walk to bed. Easy does it. Up and on the way. Watch the door, now."

He held her elbows and guided her through the cars to their compartment. She was laughing again, in the gasping shrill laugh of before. "I killed him, cross my heart!" she almost screamed. "It's a secret, and promise you won't tell—"

"Lie down. Be still." He slammed the door of the compartment. "For God's sake, what's the matter with you? Only three Manhattans and you—"

She sat on the side of the berth and stared at the wall before her. Suddenly she was agonizingly quiet. Burke knelt down and stared into her bright, dark eyes. "Martha, look. Listen. Who am I, Martha?"

She stared. "Secret. Secret, secret," she whispered softly.

"Who am I?" Burke shouted wildly. "Answer me! Talk to me!"

She smiled mistily and touched his chin with shy curiosity. "I killed Collie, killed, killed. . . ."

"You're crazy! Martha, you've lost your mind!" He shook her violently and shouted in her face. She was slipping away from him. She was gone, into another world where his words could not reach her, where his phrases had no pain or meaning! She was leaving him! He was losing her, and he dragged her up and shook her again in an agony of desperation. "Martha! You're crazy! You didn't kill him! Come back here, come back to—" He threw her back against the berth and lunged into the corridor. "Doctor! Porter, get a doctor for—"

"Why do you want a doctor, Mr. Jordan?" a voice asked quietly. Burke spun and came face to face with Lieutenant Conway. He was looking at Burke with tired grey eyes. He was speaking again: "How could you tell your wife that she didn't kill Collie, unless you know who did? And you told her last night that Dave didn't kill him? How could you know, unless—"

"She's crazy! She's— You're crazy!" Burke shouted. "I was only trying to make her answer me!"

"Yes, Mr. Jordan? But couldn't this be the suit you wore to Collie's apartment when you killed him?" Conway held out Burke's grey suit. "And couldn't this be a drop of Collie's blood?"

Burke did not answer. He did not breathe. He stared at the drop of blood, and he stared at Conway's face. He heard the grinding of the train wheels, and then it came to him that all of Martha's laughter, all her smiles and yearning to go back all of those things were traps that led him here. And still he could not breathe, nor could he speak.

"Can't you answer me, Mr. Jordan? How could you tell your wife she hadn't killed Collie, unless you knew who did? Where were you that night, Mr. Jordan? Why didn't you tell me Dave was innocent? Why didn't you tell me about the bookie arrangement on the money, Mr. Jordan? And how did Collie's blood get on this coat? It is his. I have learned that. How—"

A roar of rage poured from Burke's throat. He hit Conway, knocking him backward along the corridor. He seized Martha's door and twisted the knob. The door was locked. He hurled himself against it in insane fury. Conway was getting to his feet. There was no more time. His fingers would not touch her. She was gone! He turned and ran wildly toward the door.

Conway shot him. The conductor was calling, "Harrisburg, Harrisburg!" And Burke heard him as he fell. He remembered so clearly the other time, when his marriage was new, and they had been drinking Manhattans in the bar car, and he'd spilled his cocktail down his new suit. And he could hear the wind still crying, Lovely, lovely, lovely. . . .

THE END

ODDITIES IN CRIME

By **MAYAN** and **JAKOBSSON**

1. When the late Mme. Putuy's two maidservants came before a Paris court some years ago, the judge looked carefully into their record and decided to let them go. For in seven years, it was proved, the two girls from the provinces had only once failed their meticulous mistress, whose constant inspections made their life hell. When they had had enough, they slew her with an axe. French justice decided the girls were innocent, though proven guilty, freed them.

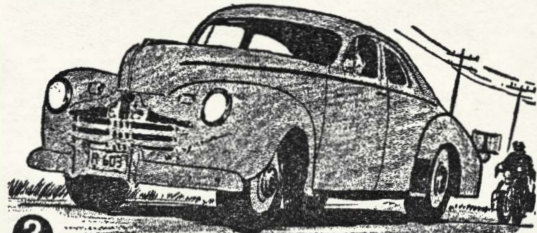


2. One Piet Jonas recently laid uncontested claim to the title of South Africa's rightest wrong guy. Jonas has managed to spend literally all of his responsible lifetime in jail without committing a single major crime. Queried by an exasperated judge sending him up for the umpteenth time for theft, Jonas explained that his education had never fitted him for a job that would pay better than jail fare, promised that he had his next theft all planned and timed for the day when his current sentence expired, and that he intended to continue making a prisoner's life his career.

"I may not be very bright, Your Honor," he explained, "but I know my legal rights."

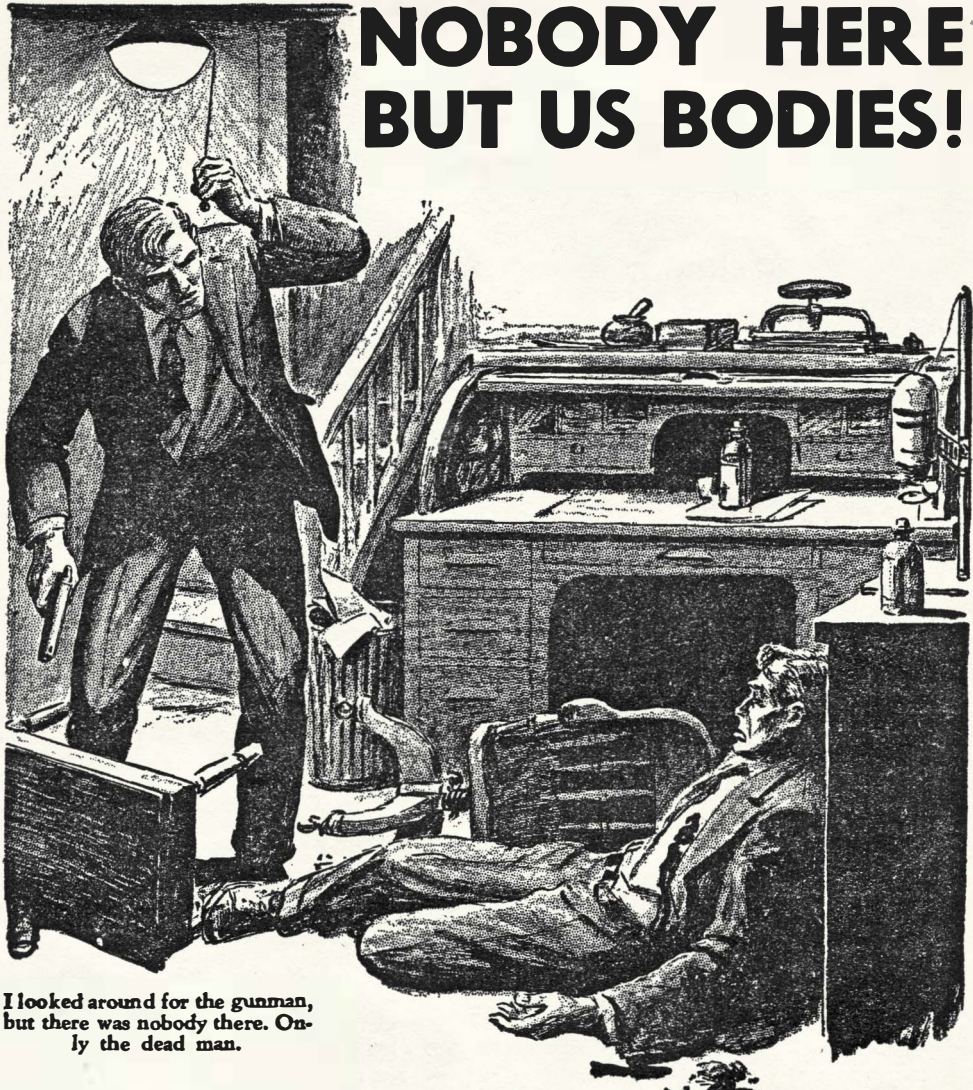
3. From the State of Washington comes word of the most exclusive fraternity yet. Still little understood, it is known as the Car-of-the-Month club, and its membership is limited to boys in their upper teens who scorn to drive the same car two months running. Socially minded parents, whose sons fail to make the roster, are urged not to worry about it.

For, though one of the rules of the club forbids raiding Papa's pocket, few involved fathers are grateful. Cash transactions are forbidden, and each boy, each month, must steal his new car or resign.



4. Charles Ninth, King of France, was long and wistfully remembered as a monarch whose servant problem cost the taxpayers nothing. In lieu of wages, he presented his household staff with the concession of robbing the well-heeled royal guests.

NOBODY HERE BUT US BODIES!



I looked around for the gunman, but there was nobody there. Only the dead man.

By C. WILLIAM HARRISON

He should have stood in bed, amateur detective Sandy McTavish told himself, instead of lying here, beside the dead man, waiting for the bullet to tab him number two on that night's murder parade!

YOU would have thought all the furniture had been bought at a two-for-the-price-of-one sale, for everything in the office was in duplicate. A pair of olive-colored filing cabinets faced each other from the opposite ends of the room,

and there were two matched sets of chrome-and-leather chairs, and a pair of desks large enough to use for ping-pong tables.

But there was only one dead body. Clara Hollis, the dead man's secretary,

stood just inside the office door, with hysteria still glassy in her eyes. She was tall and slim, and every time I looked at her I regretted that my swap shop could not afford a secretary like her. I wouldn't have cared whether or not she could type.

I watched Homicide Lieutenant Zachary Thall as he made his entrance. He was short, with a ramrod back and sundried features. His eyes were the same color as the Pacific after a storm in January, more green than blue, and very cold. He let his glance travel from the dead body to Clara Hollis, and rancor rose in his eyes like thin steam as he looked at me.

"McTavish, Sandy A." He reversed my names, as if that was how he would have liked to enter them on the police blotter. "San Pedro's Trader Horn. So it's you again!"

I said, "Just happened to be around, Zach."

"You always seem to be around when something unpleasant happens," he said disagreeably. Then malice sharpened in his stare. "That damn gun you swapped me last month is no good, McTavish. Misses fire every other shot, and the cylinder jams. I want my old gun back."

I nodded. "We can work out a deal, Zach. You throw in that deep-sea reel you never use, and we'll call it an even swap—your old gun back for the one I traded you."

He stared at me bitterly. "Don't gyp yourself, McTavish. Maybe I'd better toss in my car, too."

He turned and examined Maurice Ghent's body as if dead men with arrows in them were a part of his daily routine. He asked for names, accepted them expressionlessly, then looked toward Clara Hollis. "Now tell me what happened."

She took her hands away from her face and looked at him dully.

Thall said, "I want *all* the details, Miss Hollis. As I understand it, you'd just returned from lunch when you heard Mr. Ghent's buzzer. Was it sounding at the time you opened the door, or did it begin buzzing *after* you entered the office?"

SHE closed her eyes tightly as if that helped shut out the memory of horror. "It was already buzzing when I opened

the outer door. I'm certain of that." Her voice was thin, trembling.

Thall nodded. "Then Ghent was dead before you came in. His hand probably fell on the buzzer when he died. Go on, Miss Hollis."

She kept her eyes closed, speaking mechanically. "I hurried to Mr. Ghent's door, opened it. I didn't even take time to get my notebook and pencil. He—he was just as he is now. I said something to him, but he didn't move. At first I thought he'd had another heart attack."

Lieutenant Thall watched the girl intently. "That's when you screamed?"

"Yes." It was a whisper. "When I saw the arrow in him—that's when I screamed."

"You didn't touch him. You didn't move him?"

She shuddered. "No."

"How long after you screamed was it that McTavish came running in?"

"I don't know. Not more than a minute or two. I don't really know."

"Then you stood here in this door all that time? You didn't see anyone until McTavish came in?" Thall's voice hardened. "You'd better think again, Miss Hollis. Bow and arrow experts don't wander around in the middle of an office building without being noticed."

She shook her head dully.

Thall said biting, "The only way the killer could get out of this office was through the door you used. He couldn't have done this murder from the street, even if the window were open. He'd have been seen. So he was in here. Are you sure you didn't notice anyone in the hall when you stepped out of the elevator?"

She opened her eyes and there was a trapped look in them. Her lips shaped the word *yes*, but she held it back and shook her head. "No."

I said, "Let her alone, Zach. She's had enough for one dose."

I crossed the room with Thall watching me angrily. I bent over the desk, and under the dead man's arm was a small box that I knew would contain Maurice Ghent's heart medicine. He was a short man with the blocky shoulders and muscular neck of a weight lifter. His head was down, one cheek flat on the desk, his

eyes open. The arrow had struck just below his left armpit, its slender shaft pointing implacably to the heart it had pierced.

I bent closer, squinting along the shaft, and in that direction it pointed directly toward the open window of McKay's Studio of Physical Culture, across the narrow street and one floor below. I wondered about that.

I looked around at the detective. "I was across the street in the art studio Steve McKay runs in conjunction with his gymnasium. I had a deal on with him, but I had to wait until he posed for an advertising photograph. McKay was all dressed up in a Tarzan outfit—leopard skin and bow and arrow, and his best set of muscles."

Zach Thall's lips formed a thin, hard line.

"McKay was posing with the bow drawn and the arrow pointing in this direction," I said. "The photographer took too long snapping his picture, and the arrow accidentally slipped from McKay's fingers. It shot up here. In this direction, anyhow. That was when I heard Miss Hollis scream."

Thall swore. "Why in hell didn't you say so before?"

"You didn't ask me."

Thall snapped orders that put his technical squad to work, and started grimly toward the door. "Come along, Sandy. I want a word with that bow and arrow expert."

I paused halfway across the room, looked at the girl. "Did you say Mr. Ghent had heart trouble?"

"Yes." Her voice was quieter now. "About a year ago he began working out in McKay's gym. He overtaxed his heart, and the doctor had been giving him digitalis."

I asked who used the vacant desk across the room, and a faint shadow of uncertainty crossed the girl's face.

"Phil Carthage." She almost whispered it. "He was Mr. Ghent's partner. Mr. Ghent was trying to buy him out."

"Any luck?"

Clara Hollis hesitated noticeably. "They were to close the deal for fifty thousand dollars today."

I said, "That's a lot of cabbage. How does it go now that Ghent is dead?"

She looked at her hands, and they were trembling. "Now that Mr. Ghent is dead, Phil—Mr. Carthage—will be sole owner of the business. Neither had relatives, and their wills were made out in favor of each other. They were very close friends."

I murmured, "I wish I had a fifty-thousand-dollar friend." Then I remembered the murder, and I wasn't so sure.

Lieutenant Thall spoke harshly from the open door. "I want to see that guy today, not tomorrow."

But Steve McKay had his own ideas about being questioned by the police. He was gone when we climbed the stairs to the gymnasium.

MY "STOP and Swap Shop" was on the east edge of the city, a broad frame building that had long ago seen its better days. The few improvements made in the five years since I had swapped a yearling steer and a low-grade mine claim in the San Bernardino mountains for the property had been on the interior. My quarters wouldn't have earned a place in *Modern Homes*, but they were comfortable enough if you didn't mind odds-and-ends furnishings taken in on swaps. I didn't mind them at all, even if they would have given an interior decorator the horrors.

I was in my office wondering how I could line up a deal so that I'd come out ahead if I had to return Zach Thall's revolver, when the other gun came in, followed closely by Steve McKay. I took my feet off the desk, and looked at the man, but he wasn't impressed.

I said, "If you've got any sense, you'll get rid of that cannon and turn yourself in. The cops are looking for you."

He looked powerful enough to play tiddly-winks with sewer lids, and probably was. Even in gabardine slacks and sports coat, he had the kind of a body that is made, never born. His left hand was thrust deep into his coat pocket, and his eyes were hard.

"I didn't want to bring this gun. But I'm in a jam and I couldn't take any chances."

I looked at the weapon, an old Frontier Model Colt with a muzzle that looked large enough to walk into. An ancient weapon, but a deadly one. I wished I

could be certain it was the same gun I had swapped off to Charley Griswold last month. If it was, I didn't need to be afraid, because the barrel of that gun had been too leaded up to be usable. But I wasn't sure. I watched McKay narrowly, and then the desperation cracked in his eyes.

"It was just bluff, McTavish." He let the gun sag, moved his shoulders wearily. "I couldn't have used this. I'm not a killer."

I took a cautious breath. "The police think so."

"Yeah—because of what you told them."

I couldn't keep my eyes off of the Colt. "They'd have heard it anyhow from the photographer."

"Mac Benham? He won't talk until someone prods his memory with money. Then he'll remember only what the money wants him to remember. That's Benham for you."

"Nice guy." I wondered if I could hit McKay with the paperweight if he raised the gun again. I decided not.

McKay said harshly, "Advertising photography isn't Benham's only business. He does candid work on the side, shooting businessmen and lonesome wives who think they can cheat a little without being caught.

"Blackmail is one name for it. I should have chucked him out of my place a long time ago, but his sideline was no affair of mine. Nobody ever squawked, so the cops weren't onto him. He was a topnotch photographer, and he had some big advertising accounts. I was only hired to pose."

I put my hand on the paperweight. "Why tell me?"

"I'm on a spot. I need help." He put the gun under his belt, shook a cigarette from a pack. He used his left hand to bring a lighter from his pocket, and that hand was bandaged.

He saw me look at the bandage, said shortly, "I tripped when I ran out of the gym and almost broke my hand. I need help, McTavish. I'm on a spot."

"You're on a hell of a spot."

The man's eyes were desperate. "You've handled jobs like this before. You've got to help me. I didn't shoot that arrow into Maurice Ghent today. I aimed

at him—yes—but only because Benham said that would help get the picture he wanted.

I said coldly, "That's only half of it. Benham said he was working to get a definite expression from you, and he was playing for it like a Hollywood director. I was there, McKay, and I saw it. He said you hated Ghent, that you'd like to kill him. Why did Benham say that?"

"Because—" McKay's mouth whitened. "Because Ghent recently clipped me for ten thousand dollars on a stock deal. He did it because he claimed it was my fault that he had overworked his heart in my gym. It was his way of getting even."

He rubbed a big hand across his forehead. "Sure, I know that sounds like a motive for murder. But I didn't do it. I changed the direction of the arrow the instant it slipped out of my grip. Someone put grease or wax on the arrow so it would be hard for me to grip. Benham is a good cameraman, and he usually works fast. But you saw how slow he was today. Someone must have hired him to stall until the arrow slipped from my grip."

"Who?"

He gave me a trapped stare. "I don't know. Maybe Ghent's partner, Phil Carthage—I don't know. Nothing makes sense, except that I know I didn't kill him. The arrow I shot went past the corner of Ghent's office building."

I looked around cautiously for an angle. If what McKay said was true, it was possible to dream up a fair motive for the photographer to want Ghent dead. Ghent had looked like a gay dog with a preference for other men's wives. Maybe Benham's camera had recorded such a clandestine affair, and Ghent had threatened to go to the police rather than pay off.

But that angle had a second corner. There was Ghent's partner to consider. With Ghent dead, Carthage owned everything with nothing lost but the risk of murder—a profitable business and the fifty thousand dollars the police had never located in the dead man's pockets or desk.

McKay said hoarsely. "I need someone I can trust and someone who has handled jobs like this before. I need you, McTavish. I'll pay you well."

I studied him narrowly. "How much?"

"Any price you ask."

"Money is no good to me. You can't eat it or wear it, and anything you buy nowadays is junk and two prices too high. What will you swap?"

McKay shook his head wearily. "I haven't anything to trade. You'll have to take money—my check for a thousand dollars, if that's enough."

I didn't like the idea, but I couldn't get around it. I took his check, and asked to look at the Colt. It was a heavy weapon, with age-yellowed ivory butt plates and an empty cylinder. I tossed it back to McKay. It was a poor throw, and he had to catch it with his bandaged left hand. Then he winced visibly, let the gun fall.

"Sorry," I said. I reached for my hat. "I'll see what I can do."

IT WAS easier than I had expected to find the second arrow. I tried to imagine where I would go if I were an arrow fired as Steve McKay claimed, and decided I would fly past the corner of Maurice Ghent's office building, strike the red-brick structure farther down the alley, and fall to the ground with a splintered tip. I walked down the alley, following my imagined flight as an arrow, flicked on my flashlight, and there I was—the arrow, I mean.

I bent, careful not to touch it, and the notched end was just as Steve McKay had claimed, coated with a thin, slick film of wax. So McKay had been telling the truth after all. Someone had waxed the end of the arrow to make his grip uncertain, someone who had been familiar with his habit of pinching a drawn arrow between thumb and bent forefinger, rather than hooking the fingertips around the bowstring. Someone had hired the photographer to aim the steel-tipped arrow at Maurice Ghent in the office across the street, and then stall until the waxed shaft slipped from McKay's grip. Someone—but who?

I left the arrow where it was, returned to the street, and used a drugstore booth to telephone police headquarters.

"Zach? This is Sandy McTavish. Have you picked up Steve McKay yet?"

Lieutenant Thall's voice was savage. "He just walked in and gave himself up. And me with the whole city netted!"

I said, "Don't book him, Zach." I waited until Thall's voice settled down again to a mild roar, then went on: "No . . . I never kid coppers on Thursday. Don't book him, Zach; it might be embarrassing. You see, he didn't shoot that arrow into Maurice Ghent. I just found the arrow he shot behind the Linmore Building, about where he claimed it would be. McKay was leveling."

Thall said, "When were you talking to him?"

"When he came into my office tonight," I said. "And don't try to ride me for not notifying you; he turned himself in, didn't he? You'd better give some thought to the arrow I just found for you. Did McKay give you his side of what happened?"

"Yeah." Thall's voice was sour. "He said the arrow was waxed, and the photographer stalled until the shaft slipped—"

I cut him short. "Did you learn anything from Benham?"

"He swore he was working with his camera and never saw anything."

"How about Phil Carthage, Ghent's partner?"

"We haven't seen him yet. We've been too busy with McKay."

"Have they done an autopsy on Maurice Ghent yet?"

Lieutenant Thall said, "They removed the arrow and probed for a bullet. We thought maybe Ghent had been shot with a gun, and the arrow was pushed into the wound to throw us off. It was a lousy guess."

I said, "I'll bet you a steak dinner the autopsy shows enough digitalis in Ghent to kill two men." Thall's cursing clogged the wire for a full minute. Then I said, "Ghent had heart trouble, didn't he? And you found a box of digitalis tablets under his body, and at one side was the bottle of whiskey he generally used to wash the pills down."

The detective sneered. "So Ghent killed himself with an overdose of digitalis, then shoved the arrow into his heart just to make a good job of it!"

"It does sound implausible, doesn't it?" I hung up the receiver gently.

Mac Benham's studio was near the beach, and with its ornate wrought-iron

fence and ginger-breaded gables, it was a holdover from that period forty years ago when fashion was at its architectural flossiest. Now it was just another old grey house on another old grey street, its only light poking through a basement window to spread a sickly glow against the darkness.

I pulled the old-fashioned bell cord twice, but there was no answer. I opened the door and walked into what appeared to be a reception room, with mounted photographs showing under the exploring beam of my flashlight. A portrait camera was in the adjoining room, with floods and spotlights arranged around it. This was a room where the click of a shutter could prove to a girl on film and sensitized paper that she actually was what she knew she was not. Glamour was another name for it, the synthetic illusion manufactured by a makeup kit, low-key lighting, and your best boudoir expression. Glamour a la Hollywood.

I followed the flash beam down a hallway and to a stairway that led obviously to the photographer's basement darkroom. I called out once for Benham and heard my voice disappearing into the silence. I was halfway down the stairs, following my flash beam, when I abruptly realized that the light I had seen through the basement window was no longer on. Someone was here, someone who had turned off the lights to avoid being discovered.

I shivered, and it was like mice running up my spine on tiny, icy feet. I switched off the flashlight, took three quick steps down the stairs, and halted. Something moved down there in that blackness, the sly, secretive scrape of shoe leather on concrete. Then a gun flashed in the darkness, and I heard the spang of a bullet against the wall beside me. I ducked, swung over the stair rail, and dropped to the basement floor. Flame stabbed at me, the whippy bark of a small gun cutting a ragged hole through the silence.

I started toward the gunman, as scared as I was angered by this kind of fighting. I bumped a chair, picked it up, and threw it blindly. I hit nothing. Another shot ripped the silence, a full ten feet to one side of where I had hurled the chair. I threw the flashlight at the muzzle flame, but the gunman had moved again.

I began inching forward cautiously, and my foot touched something on the floor. I picked it up—a piece from the broken chair—and sent it clattering across the floor. Gun flame slashed viciously through the darkness, and I threw myself at it. My knees slammed against something that felt like a low bench, and I plunged headlong over it. My outstretched hands only partially checked my fall. My head struck something hard and unmoving in the darkness, and a thousand lights exploded behind my eyes. I rolled over, and my groping hand touched something warm and damp, like the sweaty flesh of a bare arm or leg. I clutched it, and then a gun came down through the darkness and clubbed the back of my head. The killer was rushing up the stairs and out of the house! I knew that. I didn't even care.

I LAY there with my face against the concrete until my senses gradually cleared. I rolled over, sat up, and wondered if I was going to be sick. I got to my feet, struck a match, located a drop cord and hung my weight on it until the light came on. I looked around for some sign of the gunman, but all I saw was the dead man.

It was a broad basement room with a huge roll-top desk in the middle. On the near end of the desk hung a calendar picturing a girl all decked out in a smile and a lot of suntan, poised impishly on the end of a diving board. The lower half of the calendar was wet, and on the floor below it was a small brown bottle, shattered.

Mac Benham was seated on the floor with his back propped loosely against the corner of a work bench that held a contact printer, enlarger, and brown bottles of photographic solutions. The photographer was looking at me, but he wasn't seeing me. The bullet had cut a hole through his shirt pocket, but he was beyond caring. He was dead.

I stared curiously at him, wondering what he might have told about the murder of Maurice Ghent, but would now never reveal. Still, the case was adding up. Someone had hired the photographer to stall long enough for the drawn bow to loosen Steve McKay's grip on the waxed

arrow—that was certain now. Mac Benham's murder proved that. The photographer had known too much, and now he was dead.

I moved across the room to the body, bent, and touched the dead wrist. It seemed cooler than I imagined it should have been, and there were no power burns on the dead man's shirt. The slug had cut a clean hole through the cloth, had torn the life out of Benham's heart and completed its passage through the body. The slug lay within a few inches of the body, on the concrete floor. It was a .32-caliber slug, its leaden side showing no visible marks of rifling. That I decided, lets out McKay and his .45 Colt.

I prowled the basement until I located one of the empty cases ejected by the gun the killer had used on me in the darkness. It was a .25-caliber casing. It was one way to tangle the case for the cops—give them so many different slugs to examine that they'd think they were hunting an army.

I found the burned paper in the shadow of the desk. It had been wadded and ignited, dropped to the floor to burn, but only part of it had been destroyed. I smoothed out the unburned remains, and it was part of a typewritten letter.

... McKay is proud of his strength, but ... stall taking the picture until the arrow ... slips from his grip ... a good joke on McKay well worth the enclosed check ...

And there was part of the signature. ". . . Philip Carthage."

So it was Maurice Ghent's partner who had hired Benham to stall at his camera until Steve McKay could no longer grip the drawn arrow. A nice, tight frame for murder. Phil Carthage had agreed to sell out his interest in his partnership with Ghent, holding out for cash rather than a check. He had pocketed the cash, murdered Ghent with an overdose of digitalis, and then shoved the arrow into Ghent's body to frame Steve McKay. Afterwards, he had murdered the photographer to remove the only evidence that could be used against him.

I scratched a match, touched the flame to the fragment of paper, wondering grimly why it had not burned. The flame flickered, and died on the paper. I stared

at it, and then at the strange black stain on my left palm. Everything had been clear—but now it was obscure again. I couldn't make the paper burn and I couldn't understand where I had picked up the black stain on my hand.

I used the desk phone to call police headquarters. "Thall? I've got another corpse to add to your collection. It's the photographer this time—Mac Benham. After you're through looking his place over, meet me at Phil Carthage's house. I'm going over there now to see a man about a corpse."

PHIL CARTHAGE was a tall, tweedy man in his middle thirties, lean, brown, and with worried agitation etched around his eyes and mouth. He paced the room restlessly, and then abruptly wheeled toward me as if he could no longer stand the pressure of the waiting.

"You came here ten minutes ago, introduced yourself, and said you wanted to talk with me about the murder of my partner," he said sharply.

I nodded, watching him. "That's only half of the subject. A photographer named Benham has also been murdered."

Something changed in Carthage's eyes, tightened. "Then get on with your questions! What are you waiting for?"

"Just giving you time to figure your chances, that's all," I told him. It was a cozy room, but not a small one. The walls were grey, and the ceiling was toned the faintest of blues. Chintz draperies framed a broad picture window, and the stone fireplace at the end of the room had been built to accent Clara Hollis' patrician loveliness; she was the woman who rounded out the picture of a beautiful and comfortable home.

She watched me through the silence, with strain lurking deep in her eyes. "You're being difficult, Mr. McTavish. Or is all this supposed to be the psychological approach?"

I smiled at her, like a character in a Hitchcock movie, answering her with silence. Her dress was soft and clinging, the rich color of a good sultan. A rose was tucked in her hair, and it made the heavy lisle stockings she wore seem all the more out of place.

I said, "You've got nice legs, Miss

Hollis. They'd show off better in silk or nylon, don't you think?"

Startled alarm rushed into her eyes, and she fought desperately to hide it from me. She looked away, biting her lips.

Phil Carthage swore. Then the door chimes sounded, and he listened with his head tilted to one side like a man trapped in his own web of fear and guilt. He crossed the room in quick, jerky strides, opened the door, and Lieutenant Thall came in, followed by Steve McKay. McKay looked at me, and his smile was one of relief and gratitude.

Zach Thall spoke with cold-edged bluntness. "It might interest you people to know that Steve McKay has been cleared of suspicion. He had motive and opportunity to murder Maurice Ghent, but the evidence against him was the kind that makes for a frame."

Clara Hollis slowly went white, and Phil Carthage made a visible attempt to remain expressionless.

Thall said, "McKay told the truth when he said he changed the direction of that arrow the instant he felt it slipping from his grip. We found the arrow he shot, and we found the mark it made when it struck the Brick building down the alley from Ghent's office. It had been waxed near the notch to make McKay's grip slip if he held the bow drawn too long."

The detective's deliberate reviewing of the evidence was piling pressure against Phil Carthage and Clara Hollis.

"Another thing: If Ghent had been struck by the arrow, his body would have been moved by the impact. Instead, Ghent's body was found with the arrow pointing directly toward McKay's studio window across the street, proving he was already dead when the shaft was pushed into his body by the murderer."

I looked at Thall in surprise. I'd thought I was the only one smart enough to have noticed that fact. But I mentally patted myself on the back when Thall revealed that the autopsy had proved that Ghent had been killed by an overdose of digitalis, not from the arrow.

Thall said coldly, "The murderer had been stealing digitalis from Ghent's supply for quite some time. When he took a sufficient supply, he loaded Ghent's whiskey with the stuff, knowing Ghent's habit

of taking a drink every time he took a pill, in spite of the doctor's orders. When Ghent took his medicine today, it was the extra digitalis in the whiskey that killed him. Then the murderer shoved the arrow into Ghent's body to frame McKay."

The detective looked at Clara Hollis. "When I asked if you had recognized anyone outside Ghent's office today, you started to admit it. But you lied because you're in love with Carthage. Isn't that the truth, Miss Hollis?"

She said frantically, "No—no!"

Phil Carthage said bitterly, "It's no use, Clara." He licked dry lips. "I was at the office, and she saw me as I ran to the fire escape door. But I didn't kill Ghent."

He moved his shoulders wearily. "I had agreed to sell my share of the partnership to Ghent, and we were to close the deal for fifty thousand in cash as soon as Clara came back from lunch. I got there a few minutes early and found Ghent dead at his desk."

Thall said, "You got there early because you knew Ghent would be dead by then from the digitalis. You pocketed the fifty thousand and shoved the arrow into him. You'd hired Benham to stall at his camera until McKay accidentally shot the arrow, and you knew that would frame McKay. Later tonight you murdered Benham in his studio darkroom, but McTavish walked in on you before you could completely burn that letter. Benham knew his number was up, and tried to hit you with that bottle of photographic solution—the silver nitrate—the bottle we found shattered against the end of his desk."

I sat up straighter. I wasn't as smart as I had imagined. I hadn't bothered to check that broken bottle. I stared at the black stain in the palm of my hand. Silver nitrate!

I said, "Wait a minute, Zach." I got out of my chair, moved closer to the fireplace where Clara Hollis stood. I said, "It wasn't Carthage who went to Benham's studio tonight."

Clara Hollis' hand was sliding toward her purse on the fireplace mantel. I lunged forward, jerked her hand away from it. Carthage cursed me and swung his fist. I ducked under the blow, rammed my shoulder against his chest, and drove

him backward. Then I grabbed the purse and stepped back from the fireplace.

"It was Miss Hollis I caught in Benham's studio tonight." I opened the purse, took out the small automatic. "It was this gun she used."

Phil Carthage lunged at me, trying to get the gun. I yelled to Steve McKay, "Catch!" and threw the gun to him. I side-stepped Carthage, rammed the heel of my hand to his jaw, and he went down. Even as that happened, I saw McKay spear out his left hand, catch the automatic expertly, and hand it to Thall.

I said, "A cute trick like Miss Hollis doesn't wear heavy lisle hose for the fun of it. She's wearing them because she got some of that silver nitrate on her leg in Benham's studio, and that stuff leaves a stain that can't be washed off. How about it, sweetheart?"

HER EYES were suddenly wet with tears, her voice low and frightened. "I thought he could tell something about the murder, but he was dead when I got there. Then I heard you come in. I thought you were the murderer coming back. That's why I started shooting at you."

So I had rushed her and got the silver nitrate on my hand when I grabbed her leg in the darkness—the stain, and an aching head where her automatic had landed. I looked at Zach Thall.

"You were right, Zach—almost. But it was McKay, not Carthage. McKay loaded Ghent's bottle with digitalis, waited until he was dead, then went over there while Miss Hollis was out for lunch, pocketed the fifty grand, and pushed the arrow into Ghent's body. Then he went back to his studio to pose for the picture, and fire that arrow while I was watching him.

"McKay's plan was to put such an obvious frame around himself, so much planted evidence, that you would never believe him guilty. But he was careful to leave enough evidence to point to Carthage. The partially burned letter with Carthage's signature on it was part of that double play."

McKay's big body stiffened, and alarmed hatred darkened his eyes.

Thall said, "Benham was shot with a .32, and McKay was carrying an old .45 Frontier Colt when he turned himself in tonight."

I said, "My guess is it was that Colt he used on Benham. He probably shimmed up the barrel and cylinder so that it would fire a .32, and one shot was all he needed. Then he knocked the shims out. The slug that killed Benham had no rifling marks on it, and that was because it was fired through a length of tubing he had pushed into the Colt to cut it down to fit the .32 bullet.

"The partially burned letter is something else. He stole a letter with Carthage's signature on it, used ink eradicator to remove the original typing, and then typed in his own message so it would look as if Carthage had hired Benham to stall until McKay fired the arrow. McKay didn't want the entire letter burned, so he dipped part of it in an alum solution so the flames would die on that section. Another part of the frame he built around Carthage."

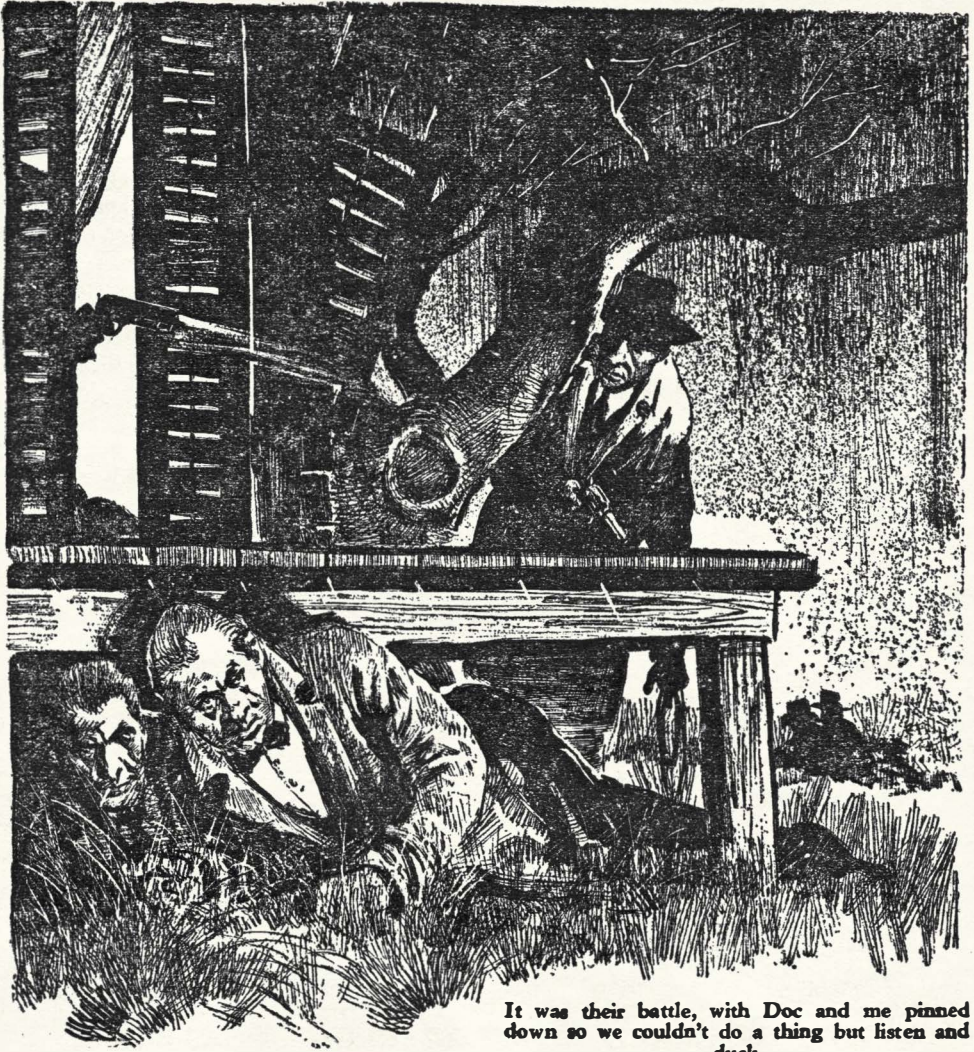
I looked at McKay. He looked powerful enough to knock the head off an ox, and I hoped I could duck fast enough.

"McKay claimed he hurt his left hand when he ran out of the studio today. But it took him a long time to remember the injury when I threw the Colt to him tonight in my office. And he forgot to put on his act when I tossed the automatic to him a minute ago. If you'll look under that fake bandage, you'll find the silver nitrate stain he got when Benham threw that bottle."

McKay moved fast. Faster than I did. I didn't have time to duck when he swung, and his blow caught me on the side of the jaw. It didn't hurt as much as I had expected, not at all. I hit him, just once, and he folded.

"All that nice muscle," I said, "and he's got a glass jaw."

Then I looked at Lieutenant Thall. "How about keeping him from seeing a lawyer until after the bank opens tomorrow, Zach? If I've got to take cash for this job, I don't want him stopping payment on the check he gave me. Not that I care about the money—it's just the principle of the thing."

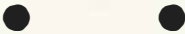


It was their battle, with Doc and me pinned down so we couldn't do a thing but listen and duck.

DARK JOURNEY

By WILLARD NEAL

Eyes closed, Doc Howard led those policemen over a perilous route . . . to a deadly destination!



CHIEF SEARS sent for me, and I found him cornered with a short, stout old fellow, who had an innocent, moon-like face and a mole at the corner of his nose. When the old man looked up, though, his eyes didn't seem so innocent. He squinted a little, but that was from habit; those eyes were as keen as an

eagle's. I had the feeling that he could see all and know all—and tell only as much as he wanted me to hear.

"Ryan, this is Dr. Howard," the chief said. "He may have a lead on the Rakestraw gang."

I had been turning the town over for any kind of information on that bunch of cop-killers. We had descriptions and pictures of the members—three young ex-cons, a girl who hadn't served time yet, and Jake Rakestraw himself. Jake was middle-aged, tough, and smart enough to hijack a fortune every time he got out of jail, but not smart enough to avoid eventual capture. He was serving his third term when he escaped from Tattnall a month ago with his three partners. They knocked off liquor stores at a hundred to a thousand dollars a clip, until they hit the jackpot with the thirty-two-thousand-dollar receipts of a department store's bargain sale. A traffic policeman tried to stop them as they came out of the store and winged one—we found a splotch of blood on the paving—and they killed him, thereby nominating themselves for the electric chair.

If Dr. Howard had a lead on that gang, I was ready to vote him an Oscar as the nicest guy of the year.

"This is in the nature of an experiment, Ryan," the little doctor said. "It may not turn out right, at all. You see, I was kidnaped at my home last night by a gang of hoodlums who carried me blindfolded to a certain house, where I removed a bullet from the back of a man who fits the description of Jake Rakestraw. The bullet had passed through his shoulder and rested dangerously close to the spine, but the operation was successful; unfortunately, the patient will live."

"We'll take care of that circumstance, Doctor," I promised. "Just tell us where the house is."

"I haven't the faintest notion," he said. "I tried to find it this morning, but conditions weren't right and I got all tangled up."

"Then how the devil—"

Chief Sears stopped me. "Better try it, Ryan. Do everything just the way Dr. Howard wants it. He's got the dangedest idea I ever heard—but it might work."

"Thank you, Chief Sears," the doctor

said. "I would like to ride with Mr. Ryan and two other men, in a new Chevrolet, if possible—that's the kind of car they had. You can use your own judgment, but I would suggest that reinforcements follow us at a little distance. We'll start from my house on Exeter Road at nine o'clock, which was the time they came for me last night."

JONES and Sturdevant, two very dependable men, sat on the front seat, and I was in back with Doc Howard. He wrapped a black scarf around his head as a blindfold and slid down on the floor at my feet. "This is how it was," he said. "No, wait. It rained last night and the windshield wipers were going. Could you start them?"

Jones turned on the wipers, but the glass was dry and they dragged. He grabbed a couple of coke bottles, filled them from the hydrant in Dr. Howard's yard, and dashed a little water on the windshield. The wipers clicked happily.

"Drive about the speed limit," the doctor said. "One of the men kept cautioning the driver about being arrested. Don't talk to me or to each other, for I have quite a strenuous mental task ahead. Now we can go."

Sturdevant stepped on the gas and moved out at twenty-eight miles an hour. That's three over the limit, the speed that everybody drives. Three more squad cars, loaded with men and munitions, followed a few car lengths behind.

Doc sat on the floor at my feet, his shoulders hunched between his knees, hand clenched on wrist, his entire body tense as he concentrated. After a couple of blocks he called, "Turn left." We turned. Three blocks farther along he yelled, "Please observe traffic laws. You overran a stop sign."

Jones exclaimed, "By golly, we did!"

The street curved uphill to the left, and Doc nodded his head as if he remembered it all. Extra pull on the motor slowed the windshield wipers, and Jones dashed more water on them. At the top of the grade Doc ordered a right turn, and we were on Ansley. We crossed three stop streets and he sent us left, into Montclair. "Speed up a little," he directed. "Yeah," Sturdevant told him, "we're in

the thirty-five-mile zone along here.”

We rocked along for about ten minutes without a word out of Doc, but every time we took a curve or a hill I'd see him nod to himself. Finally he called, “Turn left!”

Sturdevant whipped us into a new street, but Doc stopped him. “This isn't it. Back up and go to the next left turn.”

It was nearly a quarter-mile to the next street, Stonecliff Road. It's a truck route, and the asphalt is rough. The Doc nodded again when we started taking the jolts. We went up a hill, down a hill, took a couple of sweeping curves, and Doc sang out, “Turn right.”

Sturdevant headed into a driveway that ran over a little creek and up toward a crumbly old brick house which had no lights showing. We were right in front of the door when Doc yelled, “This is it!”

He spoke a history book full.

Sturdevant automatically clamped the brake and we stopped on a dime. I knocked the right door open, the one toward the house, caught Doc by his collar and yanked him out behind me. Some kind soul in times past had built a porch there, and had left it open underneath. I dragged Doc under and pulled the scarf off his head.

Lights from the cars following us made the place as bright as day, until the drivers saw us piling out and switched them off.

THERE was a lot of running around inside the house, but it took at least twelve seconds for Rakestraw's boys to get a tommy gun going, and that gave Jones and Sturdevant a chance to move up against the building. The men behind us grabbed their guns and took to the bushes—just in time, too, for their cars were riddled. From then on it was their battle, with Doc and me pinned down.

Finally a barrage of tear gas grenades landed in the windows on the north wing and cleared that side, giving the boys a chance to move up, and the battle was just about over.

When we had the three men and the girl in irons and were waiting for an ambulance to come for Rakestraw, I asked Doc how he had found the place.

“It was timing,” he said. “When those gangsters abducted me I hardly hoped to come home alive. But the moment they started putting the blindfold on me I realized I had a chance, and I resolved to help catch them if I could. I knew that my heart beats seventy-eight times a minute. As I sat on the floor during the ride I counted my pulse and memorized the number of beats between each turn.

“But we could have been thrown entirely off by our driver failing to observe the stop signs. It's quite fortunate I caught him on his first violation.”



IT'S DEATH FOR THE DICK

when millionairess Madalynne's murder trail leads Dan Storm into the bloodiest slaughter syndicate of the century and into the scented, clinging arms of the

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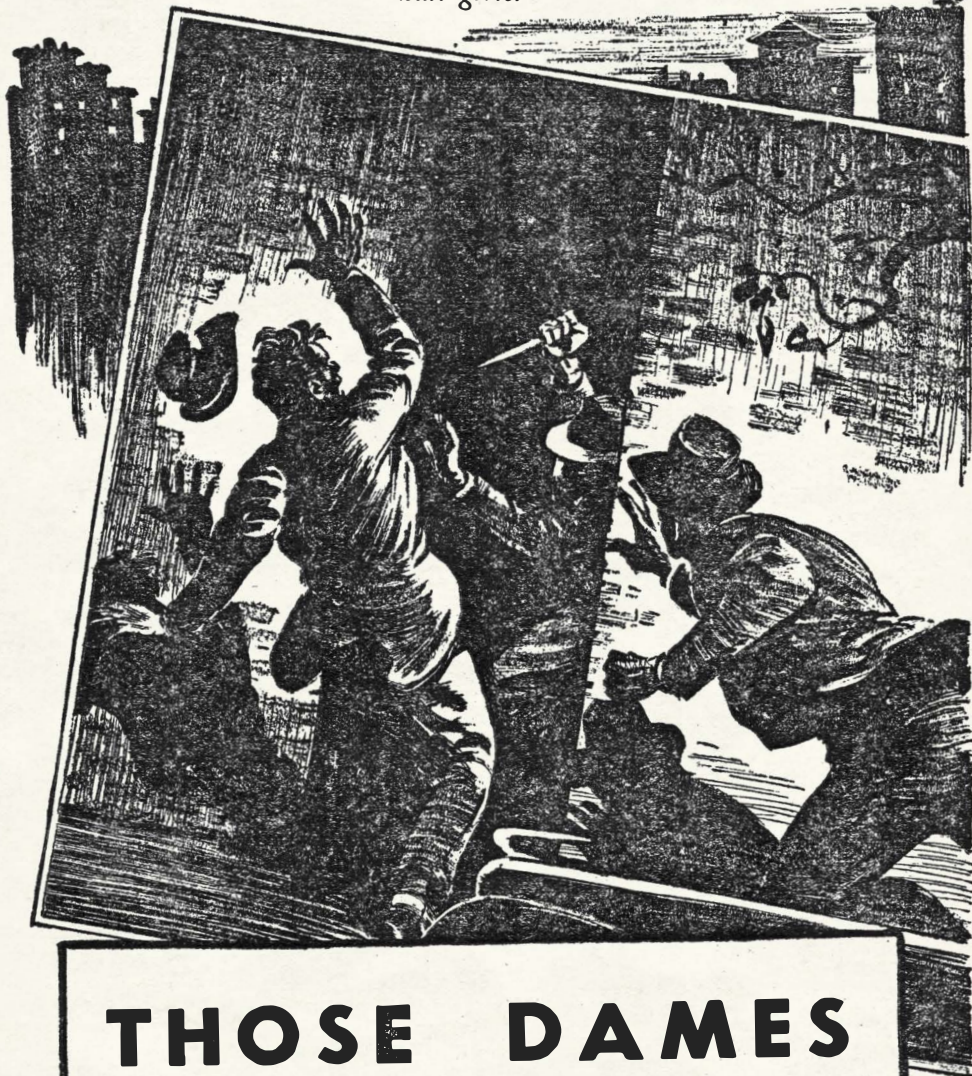
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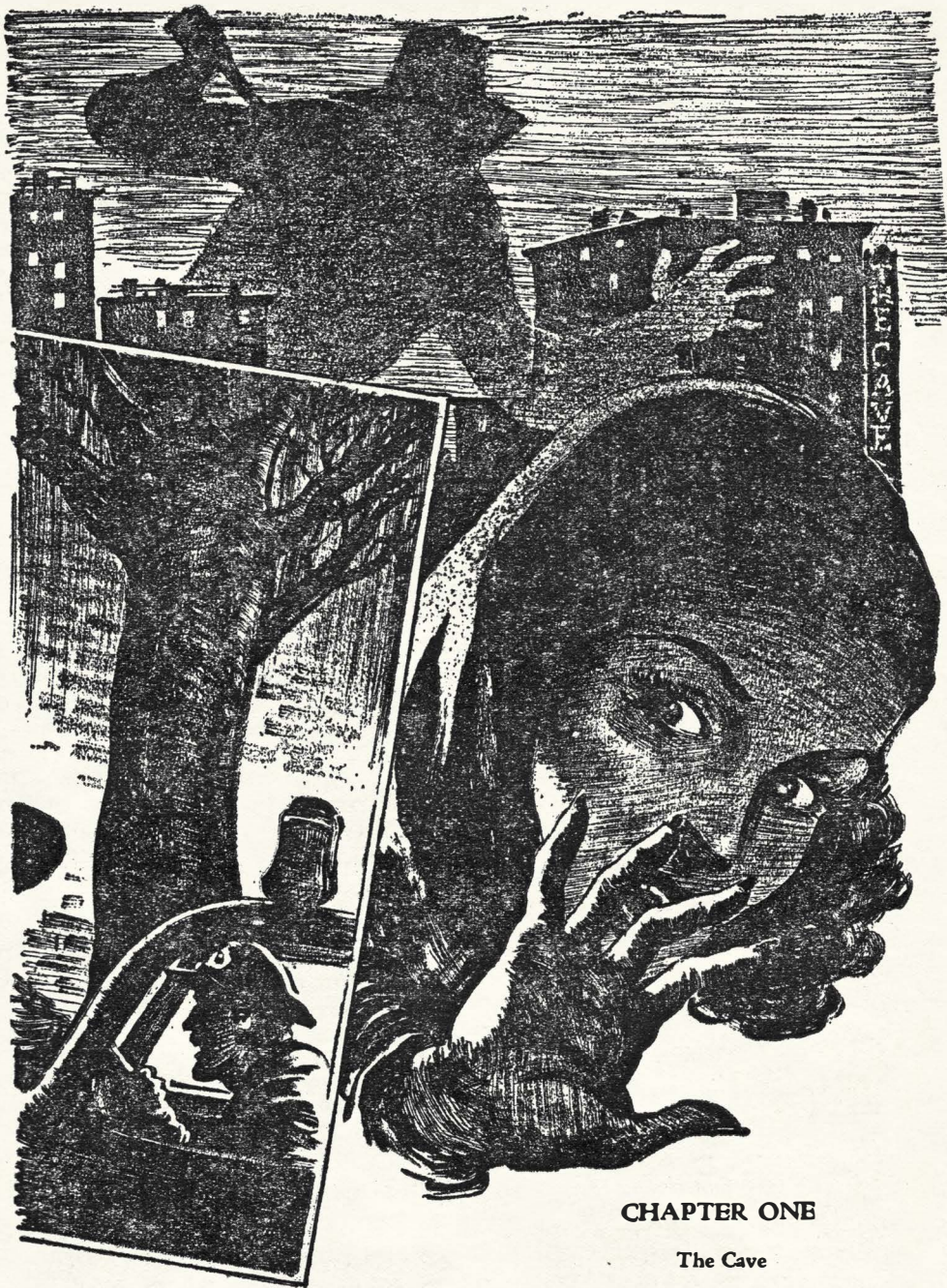
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Somewhere in the long shadows of Olive Street, the killer waited . . . the killer who was always one step ahead of the cops, and who walked, nightly, one step behind those lovely—and doomed—dance-hall girls!



**THOSE DAMES
ARE DYNAMITE!**

By JOHN K. POLITO



CHAPTER ONE

The Cave

I leaped for the sidewalk as a pale gleam flickered above Norwood's head.

HER FEET hurt, as usual, and she favored the right one slightly as she hurried along Olive Street. Absently, she noted that Culver Way was just ahead, and while her mind shrank back from its dark, tunnel-like mouth, her

body pressed ahead more swiftly, to pass beyond the threatening portal, to gain the last block stretching in seeming endless darkness ahead.

Olive Street was dark and lonesome and hot on this July night, the tall lamp posts supporting thick, yellow blobs of light which almost seemed to attract, rather than repel, darkness.

Just two steps from the black hole of Culver Way, Anna Marie shuddered, not premonitorily, not with the cold chill said to touch one when a future grave has been stepped upon. It was just a sound in the night, a lone metallic note in the hot, dark gloom—the sound a cab makes in the night, far away, as it rolls over a loose manhole cover.

One step more and Culver Way would be past, home would be near, and the "joint," as Anna Marie always called it in her mind, just another memory for another night. A bad memory, as dime-a-dance joints must always be to the sad, pretty girls who whirl and twist grimly under the blue spots, who nightly fix frozen smiles on their faces as they step reluctantly from the grime of their dressing rooms into the arms of strange men.

One more step to clear Culver Way. But, as the step began, somewhere in the reflexes of Anna Marie's mind began also the knowledge that the step would never be completed, that Culver Way would forever be an impassable barrier. With that knowledge a great scream tore through her frail body and cried for release, pounded against the walls of her throat as it was blocked swiftly and brutally by a thin, wiry hand that sealed her lips for all time, a hand that reached out from the maw of Culver Way. Then, before the efficient pressure of the one hand had eased, the other hand quickly pierced the backward-arching throat with a bright, cold blade.

Slowly, then, she slipped to her knees, a frail girl in a print dress, bowed head staring with blind eyes at her life's blood flowing in a dark pool across the pavement of Olive Street into the black maw of the tunneled passage. . . .

THUNDERHEADS piling up in the east gave false promise of release from the thick pall of heat that had hung over

St. Louis now for twenty-five long days.

The clouds shadowed the canyons of downtown St. Louis and helped blur the shabbiness of the Angelica Building, but did little for the shabbiness of my office up near the top of that oddly named structure.

The gold leaf of the sign on my door was curling from the heat, giving the "tor" of Private Investigator a raffish twist. The twist trembled as I watched it absently, trying to make up my mind to go out and get some food. I watched the curl of gold leaf tremble again as the door opened slowly.

A young girl, about seventeen, slim and lithe, stepped cautiously inside. She stopped when she saw me and closed the door slowly with one hand behind her. She was wearing a white bolero outfit and too much lipstick for her age, and the complex swirl of her light chestnut hair gave her the odd look of a little girl who had gotten into her mother's dressing table.

I dropped my hat on the floor and waited as she picked her way daintily across the room. She stopped at my desk and stared, her head turned a little, as if she might take off if I moved suddenly. Her eyes were long, half closed now, and a deep green in color. Her face was thin, with high cheekbones and skin pale as bone china.

She twisted a strip of chiffon in her long-fingered hands, and I wondered which would give way first, the thin, delicate fingers or the web of chiffon. Her slow voice made the words seem significant: "You are Michael Starker?"

"Mike to my friends. Won't you sit down?"

At her dubious glance I hastily brushed off the larger pieces of dust with my handkerchief. She gave me a tiny flicker of a smile, enough to display a soft, firmly carved mouth, and white even teeth.

"Someone is going to kill me, Mr. Starker."

She said it evenly, her enormous eyes fixed on me without a flicker.

"I don't believe—I mean, maybe you'd better tell me—"

"My name is Omber Norwood. I'm a taxi-dancer."

"Amber Norwood. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one, and the name is Omber—O, not A."

"Omber. Okay. But you're not twenty-one."

She fished in a little-girl reticule and slid a folded sheet of heavy paper across the desk at me. It indicated that Omber Norwood, mother Bettina Norwood, was twenty-one. I shook my head, looking into her eyes.

"Well—I bought the form; a man sells them for twenty-five cents. I'm really eighteen. All the girls at the joint have these. On account of the police."

"The joint?"

"The Cave, west of Grand on Olive Street. Taxi-dance, fifty lovely lassies."

I knew about the Cave and the slicked-up punks who clustered around the doors every night, eye-raking passing women and commenting in half-audible voices from narrow, rat-lipped mouths.

"You sound as if you don't like it," I said. "Why do you go on working there?"

"I—I have to." She stopped for a second and then explained as if I were stupid not to know it, "On account of Claude and Bettina."

"Oh—Bettina. And Claude."

"My mother and brother. He works in a bookstore, but he doesn't make nearly as much money as I do."

Her quaint family I could worry about later. I asked, "About these threats, or whatever happened. What makes you think someone wants to kill you?"

Her lips trembled. "Someone always follows me home, just far enough behind so I can't really see them. I thought all along I was imagining it, but last night on my way home from the joint he jumped out of the shadows near Culver Way and—and grabbed me."

Her voice shuddered to a halt, and while I tried to think of something reassuring to say, she went on: "I kicked him as hard as I could and screamed, and he ran away. Up Culver Way, I guess. There was no one near."

Her simple statement held more of terror than any vivid description of the dark night and the shadowy figure of hate could have.

"Now I'm afraid. All the time. Like Anna Marie, I guess."

"Have you told the police about this?"

"Yes. They won't help me."

"Oh, now wait a minute—"

She broke in on me: "Oh, they'll see me home for a few nights, but they can't keep that up forever. And they think I should quit my job and stay home and—well, I don't think they took it very seriously."

"I don't see that there's a murder connect—wait a minute."

The name of Anna Marie emerged in my mind from her previous remark, and I went to my file cabinet and pulled out some newspaper clippings from my "morgue." I took them back to the desk and studied them for a minute. Then I looked up at the frail girl with a new attitude.

"Did you know this Anna Marie Lavery who was killed near Culver Way?"

"She worked with me. And Betty Johnson and Dolores Merina."

I looked back at the clips. Anna Marie had died of a deep stab wound in her throat—just as the other two girls had been stabbed to death, stabbed to bleed away their little lives quietly and alone on a dark street.

"Okay, what do you want me to do?"

"Find the man who killed these other girls. Help—me."

The control that had kept her emotionless broke now, and she began to shudder. She dropped her head suddenly as though her neck were broken and cried softly, with a high, keening note. I got up and put my arm around her shoulders. She pushed her head against my chest, and I touched her soft hair.

After a minute or two the sobs quieted and she dried her eyes primly and with a half-shamed glance at me.

"Bettina would be ashamed of me."

I made a disgusted noise in my throat. "Look, suppose I take you home now and get started on this. Can you take tonight off?"

"This is my night off. I couldn't come earlier because I had to straighten out the house and things like that."

I reached for my hat and she said, "I can go home alone. It's early. I'm not afraid, until late."

"Well—all right. I'll get in touch with you some time tomorrow. About the—"

She was ahead of me. "Your fee. I was

told it's usually twenty dollars a day."

"Nix, that's only on special cases. Ten will be plenty."

Her chin came up. "I can pay my way, Mr. Starker. I *always* pay my way."

A sick feeling hit me for a second. I insisted, "Ten will do it. No arguments from the customers."

She looked at me for a long moment. "All right, Mike. No arguments. At all."

I let it go. She slipped out the door and was gone, and I sat there with a tiny golden ghost and the faint scent of ver-bena. . . .

I HAD supper in a restaurant on the corner. A juke box stridently damaged the little areas of silence left over from the street car, auto, and human screech of the street outside. It was like eating sawdust in a boiler factory. I paid my check to a waitress whose face seemed to have forgotten the brassy smile she had placed there when she put on her uniform.

Up Olive Street from the corner, papier-mache walls flanked the narrow entrance to the Cave. They should have made it look like a cave, I suppose. It merely looked like a dirty way to fall into a trap. Two lads with collar-length haircuts stood nearby, sneering at passing women.

I went up sagging wooden steps, a muffled rhythm beating harder as I mounted higher. A grilled window flanked a sign in screaming show-card colors, announcing a new and sensational band next week. The sign had been there since horse cars ran along Grand Avenue. Opposite the money window, a dark portal into the ballroom was guarded by a ropy-haired blonde.

I shoved a five into the grill, and a talon shoved back a handful of narrow slips of paper. As I passed the blonde to enter the dime-a-dance paradise, the odor hit me. The bitter old-bed odor of sweat and dirt and cheap cosmetics, the aura of ten-cent vice, of gold-plated glamour. I stood inside a minute to get used to the gloom that was lit up from time to time by a flashing, mirror-checked ball twisting in the dusk above the floor.

Spider-legged tables were parked in front of a counter that sold five-cent drinks at two-bits each. Leaning against

a paper-wound rail, three girls chewed gum and exchanged sour comments across the prescribed two-foot space—the two-foot space that would permit a man to choose any of them without seeming to be breaking into a crowd. Psychology.

I selected the one with the high Grecian nose, greedy eyes, and pouting lower lip. Her gown was, except for color, the exact counterpart of the others. Narrow shoulder straps. Deep décolletage.

As she advanced to meet me, one hand moved automatically to grab the tickets. At the bulk of the strips her eyes widened in pleasure, and she leaned forward just a trifle. I let her have one strip, a dollar's worth, and the smile that had parted her lips faded.

The band had stopped for a ten-count and now swung into another number, distinguished from the others by nothing my ears could detect. My partner got under way in a kind of shuffle that seemed to combine the greatest appearance of motion with the least possible exertion. We edged away from the soft-drink stand into the gloom of the ballroom and the purple baby spots.

"What's your name, baby?" I said.

The band stopped and she stepped a decorous six inches away. She gave me a glitter of teeth.

"Billy, honey. Whyn't you give me the rest of the tickets?"

She simulated a little shiver of pleasure and added, "I like the way you dance. You don't want to dance with any of the other kids, do you, honey?"

The band began its tired blaring again and Billy clutched me, pressing against me. I deliberately put a little distance between us, and she looked up with a frown.

"What's a matter, honey, don't you like Billy?"

"Sure, Billy, but you don't have to wear yourself out that way. This is good enough."

She turned that over in her mind with suspicion. While she was still chewing on it I said, "Did you know Anna Marie Lavery, Billy?"

Her eyes came up slowly, naked fear apparent for a moment while the rhythm of her step was broken, then, quickly and skillfully, resumed. We moved away toward the edge of the floor, bumping oth-

er couples. It took a long moment before her features relaxed.

She smiled a little and said, "She ain't familiar, honey, but you know how it is, girls come and go. There's so many of 'em and sometimes they use different names, you know?"

I nodded and yielded a little to her pressure, which was edging us more rapidly out of the crowd.

I said quickly, "This one was killed, Billy; her throat was cut, remember?"

Her eyes opened wide and her mouth parted as though she might scream. Her arms fell away from me just as a hand at the edge of the floor grabbed me firmly above the elbow. As Billy began to fade away from me I shoved the remaining dance tickets at her. Between surprise and shock she halted for a second, and then with an odd gleam in her narrow eyes grabbed them and vanished.

The hand, which had not relaxed its grip, the hand that Billy had somehow, unknown to me, signaled for, turned me slowly. My eyes turned flush with the saw-tooth edge of a dirty grey collar. The collar encased a neck made of some hard wood, like red mahogany. The smell was human, though, and the battered face was also, in a vague way, human. It said, "We don't like guests which pull rough stuff with the hostesses. Now beat it and don't come back."

CHAPTER TWO

Out of the Shadow

THE BLUNT FINGERS of the hand dug in suddenly and began to push me towards the door. I brought my arm up in a hard jerk against the thumb pressure and the hand flew away. I stepped back quickly, got a wall against my back, and half crouched, my arms hanging wide of my body. The giant started for me.

"Maybe I can't take you, buddy," I said quickly, "but I can make a hell of a racket before you take me. Enough to bring police. Take your pick."

The giant stopped at the word *police*. He smiled through the thick, broken mouth.

"Okay," he said. "You want your dough back, huh? Okay, okay, no rough

stuff. You just go ahead of me to the door."

He half turned, waiting for me. I said, "Not the dough. I want to see the boss. About business."

The gears and wheels rattled for minutes, then he answered hesitantly, "Huh. The gal signaled you was pullin' rough stuff. But you just wanted to see the boss, huh?" He smiled happily. "A smarty, huh? Okay, the boss likes to talk to smarties, come on."

I hesitated, and he said reassuringly, "I'll go first, smarty. Don't worry, I wouldn't hurt you for nothin' in the world."

I followed him off the floor, through a narrow, plaster-walled passage that had soaked up a concentration of the ballroom smells. We stopped at a door somewhat cleaner than the surroundings. The hulk rapped a couple of times and a deep voice answered. We entered.

My first impression was that death sat behind the desk. It was just the brighter light, however, after the gloom of the outside rooms. He was alive. But the purple-shadowed temples, sunken eye cavities and thinly fleshed mouth structure were those of a man not too far removed from death.

"Mr. Norbert," the hulk said, "this gee is pushing muscles with Billy. She signals he pulls some rough stuff. When I start to toss him, he busts my grip and sez he's gonna holler copper. Sez he wants to see the boss. I think maybe you would wish to see such a gee."

Out of breath, the hulk stopped and smiled uneasily, watching me with the corner of one eye.

Mr. Norbert's deep voice said without emotion, "You behaved correctly, Meehan. I'll entertain our guest, now."

Meehan moved away, out of the room.

"My name is Starker, Mike Starker," I said. "I'm a private dick, and I'm investigating a matter that involves some of your hostesses."

The clay-colored skin didn't move. Only the shadows in the cavernous eyes seemed to deepen.

"I don't understand your spectacular method in visiting me, Mr. Starker," he said.

"The reason is a professional secret.

What can you tell me about the three girls who worked for you and ended up with knives in their throats?"

"First, a correction. Only one girl, the Lavery child, worked for me when the murders occurred. The others were employed elsewhere. Then, you are a private detective. Altruism is not among your motives, surely, in this investigation?"

I laughed. "Money, Mr. Norbert. Always money."

"Of course. And the money is being supplied by?"

"A client. No name."

He didn't care for that. The deep eyes looked down at an immaculate desk pad, white, like the wood of the desk, white like all of the furnishings of the small office. An even whiter handkerchief came out of the breast pocket of Norbert's dark suit, and bony fingers held it to the narrow slash of his mouth.

"I think you are unreasonable. You want me to give information in exchange for none. That seems a poor way of trading."

"A thing like too many murders could hurt you. Indirectly, if you help me stop them, find the man who committed them, you help yourself."

He parted the thin lips in the merest sliver of a smile. "The police have talked with me. Our relationship is cordial. Why should I give you information that I would conceal from them?"

"The police haven't accomplished anything. Maybe I will."

"The police are quite competent. They are searching for killers, Mr. Starker, plural."

"You don't think these crimes were connected."

"Their common link is the sex, approximate age and social level of the victims. Is that enough to connect these crimes?"

"You left out occupation, method of killing and the time and circumstances of the murders. Maybe the police are looking for plural killers. I'm not."

Norbert stirred a little and then waved to a ceiling-high bookcase. "Moll. Bloch. Stekel. I am familiar with most of the famous psychiatrists. From that familiarity I go along with police ideas about these affairs."

"Well?"

NORBERT waited for a long moment and then answered, "I often wonder about the various motives behind the visits of my customers, about their interest in my hostesses. The answers often lie between the covers of those books."

The smile was inward-looking, not for me. He added, "It helps me anticipate their—a—shopping habits."

I let it go. "You won't help me?"

"In my own way, yes. Drop this matter. You will, if you continue, annoy and harass my employees. You will frighten them, for they are simple creatures and anything unfamiliar or connected with the law holds many terrors for them. I had difficulty in keeping them here in adequate numbers after these other affairs. Your visit here tonight will stir that up and I shall have trouble again, soothing them."

His eyes had an odd lightness in them, an expression of pleasure that belied his words. He snapped out of it suddenly, and the deep voice became harsh. "Forget this matter and I will double your client's fee."

He paused and then added in the same harsh voice, "You will refuse this counter offer at your own grave peril, Mr. Starker."

"I don't whistle off a case that easily," I said slowly. "And that Karloff number of yours don't scare me either. So forget the whole deal."

I got up, angry at myself for losing an easy round, angry at this half-dead fool, sticking his half-dead hands into the never-never land of abnormal psychology for whatever second-hand thrills he could get. I tried to yank the door off the hinges as I opened it. His dry, hollow voice followed me out the door:

"I won't forget, Mr. Starker. Quite the contrary."

As I slammed the door behind me I thought I heard him laugh. I sneered at the idea of Mr. Norbert laughing. At the head of the stairs the hulk was talking to the rosy-haired blonde. I noticed she had a swollen jaw, and the acid bite of creosote was mixed with the other odors about her.

Meehan gave his idea of a courtly bow as I left. He called after me, "Come again, Smarty. Next time, dance with me."

His hoarse rumble of a laugh carried me as far as the street. Outside, the air seemed cool after the smothering atmosphere of the Cave. As I passed the darkened doorway of a closed jeweler's shop, a shadow moved suddenly and called, "Hey, honey—come here."

I half smiled to myself as I continued on. Then the voice, the "honey," sounded familiar, and with careless slowness I stopped, lighted a cigarette, and turned around. Billy came swiftly out of the shadows.

"I didn't thank you for the extra tickets. You're a good guy."

I turned my head. "You didn't duck out like this to thank me for the tickets, Billy. What's the gag?"

There was silence for a moment. Then she said, "You on the level about Anna Marie?"

"Sure."

"You know some place where we can talk?"

"I live at the Capital Hotel on Olive."

"Okay. I get off at one. What's your room number?"

"202. The door will be open if I'm not there. Wait for me."

"Okay, but keep it under your hat, or I'll get in trouble."

I walked back to the corner of Grand and Olive. Eleven-thirty. Enough time to see Omber and her family before Billy turned up. I picked up my car and headed for the Norwood home.

Delmar, just west of Spring Avenue, is an extension of downtown Skid-Row, as though poisonous spores from that derelict area had spread on a hot, contaminating wind and settled on the old mansions and stately apartments, on the tortured strips of lawn and grit-filled gutters. Culver Way was not far from here.

I stopped in front of Omber's house and parked. I threw my hat in the back seat and walked up to the door. Inside, the halls smelled of calcimine and old illuminating gas and corned beef and cabbage.

On the third floor I stopped outside a scratched door and rapped. The door swung open and Omber stood there, surprise giving way to some other emotion, not yet definable. "Well," she said slowly. "Hello."

AS I STEPPED past her I inventoried the dimly lit room quickly. Light came from a lamp with a flower-painted glass shade set on a round library table in the center of the room. A low bed blocked off one corner of the room. The blankets seemed scarcely raised by the figure under them. At one side of the table a pair of long-fingered, graceful hands held a book. The arms disappeared in the shadows, but a little higher, light flickered off thick glasses that rode a long, pale nose, set amid a pale, thin face with a bulging forehead. A couple of chairs, a tired rug, and a window covered with motionless curtains. Home. The Family Circle.

Omber walked me to the center of the room.

"Mother, this is Mr. Mike Starker."

Bettina Norwood smiled from a worn, tired face. She murmured something I didn't catch. I murmured something too.

With a wave of her hand Omber said, "Claude."

As I took his hand she watched him intently. Or perhaps it was the poor light. He was tall, and his eyes were pale and blank behind the thick glasses. His hair was as fine as his sister's but darker, and it needed cutting. His grasp was strong for so frail a looking lad, and I noticed that his deceptively thin arm had long, flat, laminated muscles.

He said, "I expected beef and a red face. Your nose is a little long and your chin too sharp. You're a lightweight for your height. Like me." He grinned, showing good teeth and a firm mouth. He continued, "Good eyes, too, a little sullen and much too introspective for your profession. I like it. I think you're a good man."

He sat down then and crossed his arms and just looked, easily, expectantly.

"You should do a mitt act in a carney," I said. "You'd made a million bucks."

He blinked, and Mrs. Norwood said from her couch in the corner, "Claude writes, Mr. Starker. One of these days he'll finish his book and then our confidence in him will be rewarded, won't it, dear?" She looked at Omber.

Omber had on white broadcloth shorts and a man's white shirt open at the throat. The soft down on her bare legs gleamed golden in the dim light. She held a slim,

glinting nailfile poised against a slender finger tip. Her eyes were bright, seeming to pick up light from the sharp, glittering tip of the file.

"Yes," she said sharply. "Oh, yes!" Her eyes came away from the file then, and I wanted to see what they held as they stared fixedly at Claude. In a second she had turned and run from the room. I stared after her and back at Mrs. Norwood.

Mrs. Norwood sighed and explained, "I don't quite know how to express it, a family affair like this. Well, Omber thinks Claude should earn more money now, find another job. The job Claude holds now gives him time so he can do more writing, and while he doesn't make much now, it seems to me—oh, I don't know. I just don't know."

It made me uncomfortable, like prying into a strange laundry bin. I said, anyway, "Maybe it's because of the kind of job she has. It doesn't seem like quite the place for a young girl—"

Claude broke in, "She likes that job, Mr. Starker. We have suggested others, but she insists she can make more in that job than others open to her. And I suppose she can, so far as money goes."

Mrs. Norwood took up the ball. "I am ill, Mr. Starker, a widow and with not much longer to live. I have had to prepare my children as best I can to carry on alone. To make them individualists, to teach them to make their own decisions." Her voice faded a moment.

"Omber has the right to make her own mistakes. I would not intervene. Her feeling toward Claude is—oddly mixed. At times she is more than a sister, and at others—but these things are becoming too much for me."

The voice stopped now and I was glad that the shadows in the corner were deep enough so that I wouldn't have to look at that thin face. Claude went to her, and there were whispers and soft sounds, and I wanted to be out of there. But I had a job to do.

"You know why I'm here. Can either of you tell me anything useful?"

Claude said, "We are almost strangers to Omber's life away from here. She feels there is a connection between these other girls and her experience last night.

But I don't know much about it."

"Did you know any of these girls?"

"Only slightly. I sometimes call for Omber after work. It's a bad neighborhood. Waiting, I have sometimes met one or another of the girls who work with Omber."

"Date any of them?"

CLAUDE laughed. "Using the term very loosely, yes. A coke now and then. Once or twice a movie. I don't have the kind of money for a very gaudy night life."

"These girls who were killed—did you ever date any of them?"

"Yes, as it happens, all of them. But not steady, or anything like it. One or two dates with each of them."

I hadn't seen Omber enter, but her voice cut through the heat in the small room: "You didn't have any business running around with those girls. They're no good—and besides you don't have the money."

I turned to her. "Look, you and Claude can fight your little personal battles later. If I'm going to handle this, there's one thing I insist on: Claude will meet you every night after work and come home with you. At least for a few days."

I turned to Claude. "Okay?"

"Yes, it's agreeable with me."

Omber's red mouth was tight in a pout. "All right, if he's there on time. I don't like to wait in that neighborhood."

"Now, sis, you know I've always been there before they close."

"I don't care, sometimes I want to leave early."

I wanted to shout, but I kept my voice down. "All right, okay. Now straighten it out between you, but I'll drop the whole damn thing if you don't. Good-night."

I got up and headed for the door. I was hot, mad, and confused.

Claude said, "That's the hall closet, Mr. Starker."

I turned from the door and Omber laughed, a sudden little-girl sound. She came to me as I reached the door.

"I'll try to be good, Mike. I'll really try." Suddenly her face was grave and grown up. She repeated, "I'll try very hard, Mike."

I got out of the steaming house and into my coach, heading for home, the Capital

Hotel, my hideout from the cares and sorrows of the world. My worst enemy shouldn't have such a good home.

I pulled my creaking sedan around to the back of the hotel, where a cinder-covered lot made shift for a garage. The noise and racket of Olive Street seemed distant now. I got out and started for the areaway between buildings at the back of the hotel. About ten steps away a shadow moved and I stopped. The shadow moved toward me, seeming to break into two parts.

"Got a match, buddy?" a voice said.

One-half of the shadow was edging out of my line of vision. I reached for my pocket with the foolish hope that never seems as stupid as it is. The first blow at the back of my head was so rapid that I couldn't seem to remember crashing to my knees in the sharp cinders. I started to shake my head, wondering how I got there. The last I remembered was a voice saying, "Make it fast now. We ain't got much time."

CHAPTER THREE

Fast-Moving Man

A DENTIST was trying to drill a tooth through the side of my cheek. I groaned and pushed him away, and his face was rough and sharp-edged and cut my hands, and suddenly I was trying to push the sharp surface of the parking lot away from my face, and the dentist's drill was just a sharp-edged cinder cutting into my face. After another try I could sit up.

I brushed a few more cinders off my face and counted my arms and legs. Okay, but the wrong head. A fine, big head, true, but not my own.

After I spat out a few more small cinders, I checked around. My pockets were empty, likewise my shoulder holster. I listened for a while to the hiss of the street cars on Olive Street. I heard nothing more, and I groped around in the cinders on my hands and knees. I found my possessions in a heap. The billfold was rifled, but everything was there as far as I could tell. My lighter was the last item. I flipped it on and surveyed the scene and myself. A mutual mess. I filled my pockets again, gave myself a very

brief valeting and finished my journey.

I stopped outside my door, expecting to see a yellow strip of light under it. Probably the same shadows who had banged me on the head had come up here, cut Billy's throat, and buried the body in my bed. The hell with it, I said. I'll sleep in it anyway. I unlocked the door, entered, and flipped on a light.

I can frisk a room and no one except another expert can tell I've been there. Somebody was too cheap to hire help that good. Whoever searched my room had just emptied everything that could be emptied, then kicked the whole mess into the center of the room.

Rye, without water, helped for a moment. I sat in the one soft chair and drank it. In a moment a soft rustle penetrated the pounding in my ears. There were two places I could look—the bathroom, which I could see was empty, and a clothes closet. The door was opening slowly.

I called out, "Come on out, I'm too tired to fight. Only do a good job this time."

The door opened the rest of the way, and Billy, white-faced, trembling, with sweat shining on her forehead, stood there staring at me.

"Don't be frightened, it's me," I said. "I just wear these cinders to keep out the heat."

She came across the room and sat down in a chair across from me.

"Ba-rother! Somebody sure gave you a going-over!"

"Clever girl. Want to try for sixty-four bucks?"

She got up and went to the bathroom, throwing over her shoulder, "Oh, you'll be okay. I been beat up that bad myself."

She worked over my face with a cloth and warm water and then rubbing alcohol. Maybe she was slightly on the tarnished side, but she was an angel to me. After we quit the doctoring and had a couple more drinks going I asked, "Why the business in the clothes closet?"

"When I come in and see this mess, I get scared. Then I hear steps outside and I think it might be the same guys coming back to wait for you."

"They found me downstairs."

"Honey, whatever you're doing you better lay off, huh?"

"Oh, no. Not me. I love it. If a night passes without a sapping, I get the bell-boy to hit me with a bottle. I sleep better that way."

"You're kidding."

"Yeah. Now what did you have on your mind when you hid in that doorway?"

She looked around the room uncomfortably. "Well, I took you for just another guy up there at the joint until you give me those extra tickets. Hell, those cheap punks never give you nothing."

"Forget it. I was tired of dancing anyway."

"You're some kidder." She paused thoughtfully and then said, "I did know Anna Marie."

I WAS wide awake. "And the other two girls?"

"Sure. You don't never forget anybody you work with, not in a creepy place like that."

"Is it any worse than any other dime-a-dance joint?"

"Well, no, they treat us pretty good. But that Norbert, I don't like him, the way he always looks at us girls."

I asked, "Does he ever date any of the girls?"

"No, or anybody else, far as I know."

I said, "Now about Anna Marie?"

"I think she was mixed up in something funny. Some of the other girls too, kind of. A couple of times when we was leavin' at night, a *vino* would come up to one them and say somethin', not much, and kind of stumble away. A couple of the girls, Anna Marie I know, was afraid afterward, but they never would say nothin'. Ever hear of a guy with a funny kind of name, Mello somethin'?"

"No."

"Well, he's got a joint down on Valentine near the river. The girls say you could take a good customer there and—well, this Mello would kind of help you out."

"What do you mean, protect you?"

She laughed. "Are you kiddin'? Help you roll the guy if he looked like dough. I think maybe if you went down there once with a date and then didn't show up for a while, maybe this guy would send one of

them stumble-bums out to kind of remind you to get on the ball."

"In other words, this guy rigged a hook-up with some of the girls at the Cave, gave them a good quiet place to go for a drink where their dates wouldn't be afraid of being seen, and then get them drunk and roll them?"

"Uh-huh. But the way I hear it, you got to be pretty sure the guy's got money, and he's married or somethin' respectable."

"So there's no kick-back?"

"Sure. Most of them married guys that come to the Cave are scared to death anyway, afraid the old lady will get somethin' on 'em."

"It looks to me like you're taking a hell of a chance tipping me off if this character has anything to do with the murder."

"Well, you're kind of cute and—hell, I'm scared, like all the rest of the girls. If I could do anything else, I'd get out of that dump."

"What's stopping you?"

She laughed, a caricature of humour. "I got a kid two years old. I never went to school much and so it's this or waitin' tables. This pays better dough—and it costs dough to raise a kid."

I couldn't think of any arguments to that. I said, "Look, it's late—you could stay here if you like."

At the glitter in her eyes, I added, "Don't get me wrong. I can stretch out on the floor. It's late for you to be starting home."

Her smile was slow and friendly as she got up. "Thanks, but I got to get home to the kid."

I handed her a bill.

"This'll take care of the cab fare."

She shook her head. "Not five bucks—give me two, that'll be enough. I wouldn't feel right about taking money from you now we're sort of friends."

I took back the five quickly and handed her two ones. Her parting words were, "I'm off on Wednesdays, in case you want to know anything else, I mean if I can help—hell, kiss a girl good-night anyway, won't you?"

I did. It surprised me. I went to bed thinking of another girl though, and a faint blonde ghost stepped in and out of my dreams all night. . . .

I woke up the next morning with my pillow wet and soggy, my neck wearing a strand of perspiration and my face stiff and full of small pains. When I sat up my head throbbed like a blacksmith's bellows. I could even see flames.

I lit a cigarette and sat there quietly cursing my two friends of the night before. If they were Mr. Norbert's boys, he certainly had wasted no time getting to me. But if it was a warning, it was no better than his words had been. If he hoped to find some clue to the identity of my client he was equally out of luck. But, why? Why would he want to knock off these girls? Especially, in the case of two of them, why wait until they had left the Cave for employment somewhere else?

I climbed out of bed wearily. Who ever knows why a killer does the things he does?

After the initial shock of seeing my battered face in the bathroom mirror, I got squared around to face the blistering day, now crackling and sizzling on the street outside.

I spent the day like a gambler shooting his last buck. Blank. I read newspapers and talked to neighbors of the murdered girls and barkeeps and other citizens of the night who might have seen something, known something, that might point somewhere, anywhere.

No hurried footsteps in the night, no screams, no note of alarm. Nothing but a lone girl walking a solitary street. Nothing but the silent sharp shadow of hate and death and a pitiful body lying in a pool of warm blood.

It didn't make sense. Or maybe it made good sense, in the fashion of the shadow world where people live who kill quickly and without fanfare in the quiet night. Out of all the welter of fact and gossip and rumor the killer began to take a little shape, like a gust of oily smoke, but still better than before.

He moved fast, knew the blighted areas of the city well, and it seemed he must know the victims well or they knew him well. Or perhaps he hid so well that none of the three had a chance to cry out.

There were no boy friends to check, or rather there were so many that a check on them would take months. None of the girls seemed to have any steady boy

friends, though. That made it harder.

I talked for a while to Tony Wayne, on homicide, a pal from school days. He had little to offer. His voice bounced in tinny resonance from the telephone onto the gritty walls of my office:

"... with slum areas scattered all over the city as they are, we were able to place several of our habitués near one or another of the killings, but never near two of them.

"We thought they might be unconnected killings, one being the fuse to set off the others, but the method is too identical, the weapon evidently the same, some sort of long, thin blade, not an ice-pick yet not wide enough for an ordinary knife. Then too, the girls are too much of a pattern—taxi-dancers. Some nut is on the prowl, but until we find something more than we have now we'll have to assume he's a new one, never picked up before. And that means—"

I finished for him, "Some other girl might get it tonight."

"Right. Not much we can do about it. So far we've checked about three hundred girls who have worked at the Cave at one time or another. We couldn't detail three hundred men on them even if we were sure that was the connecting link."

He hung up with a promise to call me if anything turned up.

I got back to my hotel about dusk. I thought about seeing Omber again and talking to her family. I couldn't think of even a lousy excuse.

In prying through old newspaper files during the day I had found a couple of small paragraphs that mentioned Claude Norwood as placing in some distance events held by a heel-and-toes club. So he was a track man, a speed-walker. A man who moved fast, a slim figure who knew the city, who had known the girls.

CHAPTER FOUR

Malo Padre

AFTER a supper of greasy sawdust, I drove my groaning heap down through the heat-blanketed streets to the waterfront. Looking down Valentine Street after I parked the car I could see lights from the Cahokia Power Plant on the east

side dancing in the slow roil of the Mississippi. Looking across the street I could see a plate-glass café front, lacking any decoration or identity beyond laminations of grime.

The only light came from a couple of fifteen-watt bulbs, if they make them that small; and in the half gloom, figures that might have come from someone's inferno moved sluggishly around scattered tables, hit them now and then and stopped like great, bumbling insects.

I crossed over and walked in. The smell was something like the hold of a troopship in mid-Atlantic, plus a sweet, greasy odor like rotted grapes. I walked up to the bar. It was wet, ancient, and smelled faintly of garbage and roaches. The roaches I could see, fat, black and lazy.

The bartender was a short, wide-shouldered man whose head came just high enough to see over the bar. His arms were heavy and muscled, long enough to swat a customer across the bar if necessary.

A row of high-backed booths with flaring sides that partly concealed the occupants flanked the wall opposite the bar. Wirelegged tables and chairs, reminiscent of old-time ice cream parlors, made spidery shadows in the rear.

The head behind the bar disappeared for a moment, then popped up, and the long arm flourished a bottle. It was dirt-encrusted, the label blurred with time, and it had a Spanish cork in the neck. He removed the bottle from the cork and poured a tawny liquid into a glass. He shoved it across to me.

"What curse of conscience brings you to my door?" he said.

I waved my hand in refusal of the drink, and he protested, "This is no sweet Lucy, like the drink of my boys—" he nodded across the bar to the somnolent figures clotted around the weary tables—"this is a sherry, an Amontillado of dignity. Drink and banish *el hambre*, the hunger."

"I'm not hungry. I'm looking for someone."

"So. Who is it that you search for?"

"I don't know—yet."

"That will be difficult. I am a *fonctionnaire*, I serve a purpose for those who seek for a long-lost brother or father. Many of the lost ones talk to me in the long even-

ings when they drink for sleep and forgetfulness. I know much about them and I remember all. But if I have no name, no description, I am lost. I am no *hechicero*—no wizard."

"Look, I'm investigating a matter of murder, three murders to be exact, if there aren't more by now."

"Murder!" He held his hands palms up, then crossed himself. He looked around the room, waved a hairy hand. "These ones, my boys, they do not commit murder."

At my sneer he protested, "But truly, that is so. Sometimes when they have too much sweet Lucy, or perhaps too little, who can know what small mischief they accomplish. But then it is not themselves but *el spiritu mal*, something that lives behind their sick minds."

He looked sadly at the bar and added, "When that happens, then I too drink much and am sick for a time. Because I should know, I should watch more carefully."

"I don't get all this," I said impatiently. "Are you a loony keeper, or what?"

"I sell wine. That is my business. But also I watch over these derelicts who bring their dimes and nickels to me. Long ago someone calls me *El Malo Padre*, the Bad Father, to mean I am the father of the bad ones, the drinkers of wine, the old men who are lost and try to find their way back to another time, or perhaps forward to a better time, I do not know. Always I try to protect a little these sick ones. Sometimes I give them nothing, sometimes much, it depends on their spirit, their mood. They are not wicked men, but they have no one to care for them. This I do a little to atone for my sins."

And, I thought, to make a nickel now and then. I said, "Three girls are dead. Perhaps a sick mind is responsible. Sick or well, I want to see that no more throats are cut."

"If I can help, I will," he said matter-of-factly. "Now, let me think."

He did some thinking, also sold several glasses of a muddy wine. I noticed that dimes and nickels were slid across the wet splinters of the bar, and the drink was always the same, whether it was a dime or a nickel. He moved finally back to me with a gliding, silent step. He

tapped his head gently with two fingers.

"These young girls, now I remember. I have seen the picture—the police bring it here. No, it is none of my boys. I will show you."

He barked something sharply, a name or a word. One of the figures got slowly up from a scarred table and shuffled across the room. His clothes looked as if they had been stolen from a dead man. His mouth was a thick smear, and his eyes were lead-colored glass peering from behind grimy folds of flesh.

MALO poured a drink into a small glass and shoved it at the figure. He reached for it, then hesitated and turned his side toward Malo as though trying to discern a puzzle.

Malo shoved the glass a little further and said, "Drink, it is paid for by the stranger."

The man turned to me and mumbled something that might have been thanks, and with practiced skill upended the glass between yellowed teeth with a quick, long jerk. Malo glided silently back to me as the drinker slowly shuffled across the room back to his table.

"You see? It could not be one of them." I didn't see.

"Regard, one of these girls, she is killed on Culver Way. Another is Maiden Lane, away across the city. I have a good memory, no? The first, it is in Wellston, away from the other three. This requires motion, much motion.

"These lost ones do not move so vastly. These few blocks you call Skid Row, these are their world. The girls are dead only seconds when found. The police find no one suspicious for blocks around. One supposes an auto, or one who walks swiftly. Not possible with one of these. They cannot move quickly, they have no possessions, they cannot plan as much as where they shall sleep each night. This affair of three murders is an affair of planning, of quick motion, and strength, and a quick retreat."

"Yes. Maybe you're right." I scanned the gloom pessimistically. "Any women ever come in here?"

"As a matter of habit, no. Sometimes to search for someone."

"Never any young girls? Never any

who might like something different—a novelty in drinks, for instance?"

"You know about such drinks?"

"Laudanum and gin—beer with a little ether?"

He laughed quietly, and suddenly I didn't care for him. His laugh cut off. He leaned across the bar and said in a choked voice, "What is this you want from me? I tell you what I know, in friendliness—are you from the police?"

"No. Private dick. Why?"

"Who pays you to make the inquisition on an old and helpless man? Is it that I am one of great wealth to be bled? Is it that there are no others who search the dark streets for their prey?"

He brought up his great hands and pounded the bar in a frenzy, the black eyes flaming with rage:

"Go to the one who pays you and say for me that I am no killer of young girls, that I am an old man whose blood is cold and heavy in his body. Say for me—" He broke off suddenly, breathing heavily, his face clay-like and glistening.

I said quietly, "And that you didn't know these girls, they never came here so you could help rob their escorts?"

Without looking up he said, "Yes. This I do a little. Of these murdered ones, Anna Marie was the only one I remember though. Yes. Now you know."

He looked up suddenly and there were tears in his eyes. He asked, "What of this, then? Do I go to spend my last days in the jail? Is this what you want?"

"I want only to find the killer."

"Look, then, for a young, strong one. Do not look for a man who has made his peace with the angel of death. In my country sometimes the young one has become crazed, has done such a thing as this."

"Nuts." I moved toward the door. I said, "What is your country?"

His voice was faint: "It is so long ago, so far away, I have forgotten. It is in another place."

The fresh air hit me like a quick shot. The sick, sweet smell of wine blew away in oily shreds and a little nagging memory wagged its head at me.

In a second I got it, the sweet smell that hit me before the lights went out the night I was sapped. Wine. Some of Malo Padre's slow-moving boys, no doubt. I

could see Norbert making a quick phone call as I left his office, and then Malo Padre's long, strangler's hands reaching out in the dark city to find two of his boys where they were quickly needed.

AS I walked back to my car I tried to unscramble more impressions of the old man. Sure, he said he was no murderer. Who wouldn't? And, in a way, he had been forthright about his questionable business practices. I wondered if a man not guilty of a greater crime would have admitted under so little pressure participating in lesser ones.

I could imagine that Anna Marie and the others might have discovered more at Malo Padre's than I had been able to learn so far—and that those big, sinewy hands of his might quickly silence a young voice by driving a sharp blade into a tender young throat. I could imagine a dry-voiced connoisseur of abnormal psychology doing the same thing, too.

At least, now, I had something to keep my mind occupied while I waited for disaster. And I had an excuse—a good one this time—to see Omber again. If she were hiding information about Malo Padre's activities. I had placed her in even greater danger. He would lose no time in silencing her; I could be sure of that much.

Neat deduction, Starker, I sneered at myself, only it wasn't Malo Padre who ground your face into the cinders last night. Of course he and Norbert could be partners—but I couldn't quite see it that way. I had a feeling that Norbert knew nothing of his employees' extra-curricular activities on Valentine Street—not if I could believe what Billy had told me about him.

Nine o'clock—plenty of time for a shower before I picked up Omber. The phone was ringing before I got inside my room. I picked it up and Wayne's voice said, "Another kid murdered, Mike. We're going out your way. Want to tag along?"

"Sure. Do—do you know who—"

His voice cut in sharply, "No identity yet; it was just called in by the beat man. See you later."

While I waited I tried to tell myself that Omber was okay, that she probably hadn't even gotten off work yet. But I didn't convince myself. A phone call got

me the ugly voice of Meehan, the strong-arm character at the Cave. I asked for Mr. Norbert. Not there. I asked for Omber. He said, "She had a belly-ache or something. Got off early. What's it to you?"

"This is important, smart guy. I'm not just playing games. When did she leave?"

"I wouldn't know. I seen her go in to ask Norbert, maybe an hour, hour and a half ago. The joint had hardly opened up. That's all for you, smarty."

He hung up in my ear. An hour. Plenty of time. Plenty of time for anything.

I could hear a siren faintly in the hot night and I hurried down to the sidewalk outside the hotel. Wayne's squad car pulled up at the curb and leaped quickly away after I got in. I asked the obvious question again.

"Don't know yet," Wayne said. "Only that she's dead. Description was just young, fair complexion, five-two, hundred and five, brown hair, around twenty."

"Any witnesses?"

"The beat cop who found her had seen someone walking away from the body. By the time he discovered the body the someone had disappeared."

Our tires screeched and I leaned heavily as we careened into Jefferson Avenue going north. I asked Wayne, "Where is it?"

"Middle of the block on Slattery Street."

I remembered Omber as I first saw her, frail, almost childish, in manner, anyway. I lit a cigarette. I cursed myself and the racket and the pure lousy bad taste of life to wind up in dark corners like this.

THE CAR lurched again, and we rocketed west on Benton and then swung into Slattery. The neighborhood was old, mean, and of mixed inhabitants. Away at the far end of the little street, St. Louis Avenue was awake and noisy with street car and auto traffic, an artery that hummed and rattled most of the night. Out there would be lights and tipsy couples laughing and the faint racket of neon-fronted bowling alleys and all-night restaurants. Here, in the shadows, were tenement and hovel, brick and rotting wood, dirt and stench, life—and death.

A few flashlights winked yellow eyes

as we pulled up and leaped from the car. The driver switched off the red spot and snapped on the white. As we moved across the sidewalk the spot picked out a mound near a picket fence that guarded a precious two feet of lawn in front of a frame house. Someone had thrown a raincoat over it. Two uniformed men stood silently watching as we came up, and a few ragged figures stood at the far edge of the splash made by the spotlights.

Wayne stopped and pulled the raincoat back, brushing one edge in a dark, wet pool as he moved it aside. I looked, with the skin around my eyes tight and hot and my mouth dry as the taste of death. Gently Wayne moved the face toward me.

I heaved a deep sigh, between gladness and nausea. It wasn't Omber—but Billy was dead, little Billy, with a horrible deep wound in her throat. I walked back to the squad car and fought to keep from being sick.

A high keening cry suddenly ripped across the hot darkness. I looked up in time to see a uniformed man catch a short, dumpy woman to keep her from falling. The woman had apparently been looking at the dead girl. I could guess who she was even before Wayne walked over to me, tucking a notebook back into the hip pocket.

He said, "Billy Sanders—twenty-one." Worked in the Cave."

"Yeah, I know. I saw her once there. Anything more?"

His voice was weary: "Only worked an hour tonight—her old lady scrubs floors in an office building, had to go in early tonight, so Billy takes off to be with her kid."

"No witnesses?"

"Not a damn thing. Every scout car in the area had been warned before, of course, and they're out looking now. Not much hope there."

"How about the guy the beat cop saw?"

"Nothing. Just a dim figure walking away quickly and disappearing."

"Yeah," I said bitterly. "Nothing."

Suddenly I wanted to see Norbert, find out where he'd been the last hour. Malo Padre, too, but I felt sure that however Malo Padre was implicated, Norbert would be the boy behind the shadow.

First, though, I wanted to call Omber

and make sure she was home and safely off the streets. I told Wayne I wanted to make a call and he nodded as though he understood. There was an odd note of sympathy in his voice that puzzled me.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Killer

I WALKED hurriedly toward the lights of St. Louis Avenue, where I could find both a phone and a cab. Out of the glare of the police spots and flashlights, Slattery Street was old and dark and quiet as an ancient cemetery. In the middle of the block, before I reached St. Louis Avenue, an alley crossed my path, its shadows darker than the street. I had just passed it when a faint rustle reached my consciousness—not a sound, but the shadow of a sound.

I halted, fear creeping in my blood, waiting for the unknown, waiting perhaps for a quick, muscled hand to close my gaping mouth. Again the faint whisper, this time a word, a plea. I turned back to the alley, trying to see through the gloom, unloosing the gun from my shoulder holster.

I had it in my hand and had begun to bring up the barrel when my foot hit something that yielded softly and I stumbled to my knees. I felt around for a second and heard another whisper as I felt a body under my hands.

I flipped the wheel of my lighter. The flickering flame cast bright tongues of light across a pale, drawn face, but not as bright as the blood that bubbled from tightly drawn lips, not as bright as the blood that throbbled up from a deep wound in the throat.

I asked the obvious question. "Who did it, Norbert?"

His eyes rolled for a moment and then his teeth drew together in strained effort. He whispered, and the sound of his draining blood was in the whisper.

"Claude—"

His eyes closed. There was no doubt he was dying. I grasped the sleeves of his coat with both hands and shook him gently.

"You mean Claude did it? And the others, too, the girls?"

He made a tremendous effort. The froth was clogging his mouth faster than I could wipe it away.

"He'll—get—his—I'd kill him myself—had the chance—Malo Padre too. Omber—loved her. Love and hate—and—pain." His lips peeled back off his teeth in a death's-head grin. "Claude'll—get—his."

Norbert's body straightened and then grew limp.

I walked out to the middle of the street and yelled long and loud. A police whistle blew somewhere, and in a few minutes Wayne's car drew up. Wayne looked briefly at the body.

"What's he doing here?"

"He passed out before he could say much of anything."

Wayne eyed me curiously but said nothing.

"Listen," I said desperately. "You know me, give me an hour. It's a long story. If I stop to explain now you'll have another murder on your hands before the night's out."

He gave me another odd look, but he let me go. This time I got to Grand and St. Louis without trouble. I got a cab at the corner.

"Grand and Olive as fast as you can make it."

"Life and death, buddy?"

"Yeah, more than you know."

"Okay, chum."

Norbert's words had given me a strange assortment of new ideas. Some of them were not so new, at second glance—ideas I didn't like, ideas that had been nudging me for attention all along, and which I had refused to face. The time for kidding myself was all over now. This was the payoff, whether I liked the ending or not.

Norbert had said he loved Omber. Within the limits of his own bizarre nature, I suppose he had. Loved her enough, and hated Claude enough, to kill, or at least desire to kill. Here again was the strange twisted jealousy angle that had run clear through the whole deal.

I was sure Norbert must have known, or at least suspected, who the killer was all along. That was why he had been so cagey when I called on him; that was why Norbert was back there now, pouring his blood out on the ground; and that was why I took a sapping, why my room had

been ransacked. To get me off the case.

The taxi ride lasted for years. Omber's face appeared in my mind, her young eyes frightened, and I cursed the irony of fate that would have me panting after a kid young enough to be my daughter. And Claude's face, blank, emotionless, controlled, showing only what Claude wanted revealed. It was past eleven now, but as we wheeled around the corner of Grand into Olive I saw that the lights of the Cave were still burning.

I told the driver to move slowly west on Olive, and I searched the sidewalks with tired eyes for a dark figure walking quickly and with determination in the shadows.

We turned off Olive at Spring, leaving the bright neon signs and shuddering juke boxes behind. The shadows were deeper, and a few old trees cast quivering blots against the night sky.

UP AHEAD in the next block I saw a solitary figure moving along close to the building edges. I didn't know what to expect, and yet I suppose in some way my mind had gotten tired of trying to hide things from me, and I was remembering the hate in Omber's voice when she spoke of Claude, and to him. And that a taxi-dancer would have tough leg muscles, tough as any distance walker's, and plenty of endurance from long nights of prowling the blue air of the Cave. And good arm muscles, and tough, even though slender, hands, from fighting off the men who pawed over her.

And even as we dimmed the headlights and slipped up as slowly as possible to the strolling figure, I was a little sick and would have given anything I possessed to be able to forget all these things. And to forget that jealousy and envy is a kind of madness that can affect women as well as men.

And now we were abreast the strolling figure. Even as we pulled to the curb, it passed, this slender shape walking alone in the shadows, and I could see it beginning to twist and turn as though struggling against a shadow strong as steel, there in the darkness, hardly visible, a shadow dark as night and strong as death.

I leaped for the sidewalk just as a pale gleam flickered above the head of Claude Norwood. I was at his side and tearing

at the arms of another slender figure, a figure in men's clothes, with a long sharp blade in its hand, trying desperately to get to Claude's throat. And even as we struggled silently and hotly there in the gloom I knew that this was no man who held the knife against Claude, but a woman—Omber Norwood. And I knew now the nature of the murder weapon—the unique, slender stiletto that masqueraded as a nail-file.

Finally I secured her hand and twisted it to impotence. Claude leaned against a brick wall, exhausted, while Omber twisted and fought against me.

Suddenly the violence left her, and she leaned against me. I could feel her heart pounding like a hammer, and her breath was hot on my face. Holding her in my arms, I turned to Claude:

"Can you get home all right, kid? And do nothing about this until you hear from me?"

His voice was a hundred years old. "You can't let her go. She's my own sister, but I won't let her go on—"

I interrupted him: "You can trust me. If I was on her side, I'd have let her kill you, wouldn't I?"

He peered at my face for a moment. "Okay. I'll go home. I want to get home to Mother before she hears any of this."

He turned and moved away with the fast, smooth gait of the professional walker. He hadn't looked at Omber again.

I put Omber in the cab and walked back to the sidewalk. In a minute I found it, the slender nail-file with the tip razor-sharp and thin as an ice-pick.

We drove back through the hot, sullen night to my office, the cab driver curious but saying nothing. Thunder was coughing heavily out around the edges of the city as we went silently through the dark corridor and into my office.

I turned on the desk light, and Omber sat in the chair where I had first talked to her. She was calm, and her face was young and smooth and beautiful. She watched me expectantly, and if there was terror or fear in her eyes I couldn't find it.

I poured myself a drink, started to ask her if she wanted one. Instead I just poured it and pushed it in front of her. She sniffed it delicately and then picked it up and swallowed in a gulp.

Finally I said dully, "You were the one."

She sat up very straight then and pushed her slim shoulders back. "Yes. And I would have killed him, too, if you hadn't stopped me."

"I know why, but let me hear you tell it." I wanted to hear her say it. Then perhaps I would begin to realize what I already knew.

"He had no right to those girls. He did nothing. He let me work. He hardly ever even talked to me—but then he spent money and his precious time on them."

Just like that. Simple. You naturally kill people who don't cut their lives according to your pattern.

"Why not go for Claude in the first place?"

She pouted for a moment, then said slowly, "I—I didn't want to hurt him. I guess I wanted to punish him." Her voice became precise. "I didn't want him to go out with those girls."

"Then why Claude tonight?"

"He suspected me. He was ready to go to the police. Tonight I—Mr. Norbert's dead, I killed him. And Billy. Norbert saw me kill Billy, and Claude saw both of them. He'd have turned me in as quickly as anyone else."

Billy, too. I remembered her quick little kiss. I said, "But why Billy? What did she ever do to you?"

Her mouth turned hard, her eyes old.

"I went to your hotel that first night. I saw Billy leave." She stared for a second, her eyes wide, her lips parted, glistening. She said slowly, "Did you kiss her?"

THERE was something so outrageous about the question, so wrong, that for a moment I felt sick. I thought to myself, sure, I gave her the Judas kiss, the kiss of death.

I said, "The hell with it. Why her?"

"She came to your room. She was like the rest of them. I was afraid she knew something about me, was telling you about it."

She leaned forward to me, her voice soft and frightened. "You won't go to the police? You'll help me?"

I had expected that.

She went on, "I never liked men;

they're all like Claude. And Norbert—that pig—always spying on me, trying to run my life. But I could like you. We could go away. I could make you happy, I know how, I do . . .”

I cut her off, got up, and walked around the office. She sat there motionless, only her eyes following me. The hell of it was I wanted to do it. I wanted her and her arid love and twisted passion. Knowing what I knew about her, that no man could be happy with her even if he could forget five murders, still I wanted to.

I calmed down after a moment and went back to the desk.

“Why the men’s clothing? And why did you come to me?”

“To make people believe it was a man. I came to you because I was afraid the police might begin to suspect something, and maybe if I hired you they wouldn’t. I kept my things at the Cave.”

I don’t know what I was waiting for. It fitted together in the way that a nightmare makes sense. I knew I had to pick up that phone, and there had never before in my life been anything I hated more.

I asked another question: “Where does Malo Padre fit into all this? Were you ever mixed up in his cheap little racket?”

“Not really. I went down there once, a long time ago, just for the fun of it. I heard about the old men down there. I thought it would be interesting—”

She must have seen my sick eyes. She cut herself off and tossed her head defiantly.

“He threw me out. Then, a few nights ago, I got a perfect customer for a roll. I needed a little extra money.” The words fell off her fresh, warm-looking lips as casually as ice off a tin roof. “I took him down there, and Malo threw me out again. Mr. Norbert found out about it. He said he’d kill me if I ever went near Malo Padre’s again. He wouldn’t have, though. I laughed at him. That’s why he followed me home tonight, spying on me. He deserved to die!”

I turned my back on her and dialed Wayne’s number.

When she realized I had actually done it, she got up abruptly and walked over to the window overlooking the river. Her shoulders moved a trifle in the dim light,

and I crossed over and stood behind her. She leaned back and turned her face up to me. Tears stood quietly in the corners of her eyes.

“Will it be very bad?”

We were still standing there when Wayne and another special came in.

WAYNE and I sat in the back of the Juvenile Court on the last day. The court was in recess preparatory to sentencing, and Omber had left the room with a matron.

Wayne said, “It’s hard to believe. Even when she sits there and tells it, it’s like a little girl talking about some candy she snitched.”

“Yeah,” I mumbled. “Envy and jealousy and hate.”

I didn’t want to say it. It was in the back of my mind, like so many things I had tried to cover up. But I said it, anyway.

“That jealousy thing. Do you think she could really have been in love with her brother, and not even known it herself—” I hurried on before Wayne could interrupt me—“and all the rest of the story just a fable she built up to keep even herself from recognizing what must have been a thing she would never want to admit.”

I had it out now and I breathed easier. Wayne looked at me curiously as he answered. “You read too many books, Mike.”

I nodded, looking straight ahead. He went on as though trying to be comforting: “But I don’t think that was it.”

He wasn’t convincing. And I knew I would worry about that along with the rest of it. I would worry for three years, anyway, because I was the guy who hired her a lawyer good enough to get the case into Juvenile Court. Omber was just eighteen now, and the most the Juvenile Court could give her would be three years, three years until she was twenty-one.

As the judge came back into the room and the matron walked in again with Omber, sad and tiny and fragile looking, I tried to comfort myself by thinking I would have three years to spend before I’d have to make a decision. Maybe in three years I could exorcise this frail, golden ghost.

THE END

(Continued from page 6)

made his findings available to law-enforcement officials everywhere in this country.

Five years ago if you bumped off your favorite enemy and claimed that the fresh bloodstains on your clothes came from a nosebleed, there was one possibility in three that you would get away with it. Today, with more than five hundred different possible blood-typing combinations, the odds are two hundred to one against you.

Rh is the key. In 1940, newspapers had a gay time when Dr. Wiener, then 32 years old, and Dr. Carl Landsteiner, the father of blood-typing, revealed that they had found a new factor in blood. With a whimsical nod to the rhesus monkey that had supplied the blood used in the research, the physicians named the new factor *Rh*.

Newsmen seized upon the monkey angle and wrote humorous pieces about *Rh* monkeyshines. The public learned little else about it. In fact, there was little that



She had been bludgeoned to death.

could be said at that time since practical application of the discovery still had to be found.

Carrying on after the death of Dr. Landsteiner, Dr. Wiener was able to unravel some of the mystery of *Rh*. As a direct result, hundreds of American soldiers wounded on battlefields are alive today, and infants once doomed to an early death now can grow up and live their normal span.

Although Dr. Wiener is a mild-mannered, slender man of average height, who wears rimless glasses and a gentle sort of mustache, his entry into a courtroom has

caused more than one killer to leap up and hurriedly "cop a plea." Prisoners regard "the Doc" as poison, because they don't understand how he built up his evidence against them. While the blood sleuth de-



Tracking down murder clues with science is plenty tough.

livers his testimony in an unemotional voice, it falls with the effect of pile-driver blows on the terrified killer.

The four basic blood groups of *A*, *B*, *O* and *AB* were discovered in 1900, but little use was made of the find in detective work. Police were mildly excited at first, but their interest cooled rapidly when they learned that blood tests helped eliminate suspects but did not definitely identify the killer.

The first serious attempt was made by Inspector Faurot, the man who introduced fingerprinting in this country. Three men had been hacked to deaths with a meat cleaver in a particularly gory case. One was a corpulent restaurant owner; the second, a husky worker; and the third, a thin watchman. Faurot dashed to the scene and ordered detectives to bring bloodstains to headquarters for examination.

The sleuths gouged holes in the wall plaster, ripped fixtures from the ceiling, and tore up floorboards. Reporters, entranced by the sight, wrote glowing predictions of how bloodstains would solve the triple murder.

Days passed with no word from the Inspector. Reporters finally swarmed in on him and demanded to know what the bloodstains had shown. Maintaining a straight face, Faurot replied that the tests conclusively revealed that the restaurant owner had eaten well, the worker had eaten steadily, but the watchman hadn't done well at all.

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ADVANCES since then have come fast in the blood-identification field but the knowledge most of us have of it dates back to the horse-and-buggy days. Recently a prisoner on trial for murder was brought up to date on the subject.

The man had laughed at all police efforts to link him up with the body of a woman, bludgeoned to death, found in a vacant lot next door to the apartment house where he lived. From the position of the body, detectives knew that the woman had been tossed from that building, and searched all apartments. The man was arrested when sleuths found a bloodstained towel on his balcony, which faced the lot.

The prisoner insisted that he had never seen the murdered woman and explained that the blood on the towel came from his face when he cut himself while shaving. Later, when bloodstains were found on the carpeting in his apartment, he said the stains had come from a woman guest. He grinned as he said he did not know her name or address. She was a pickup.

The suspect shrugged when he was informed that the blood on the towel and the carpeting matched that of the murdered woman. It made no difference, he countered. After all, a lot of people belong to the same blood group.

Nothing could shake him from his story during the months that followed. He felt secure as he repeated his story at his trial. Then Dr. Wiener took the witness stand. He had typed both the blood of the prisoner and of the murdered woman. The man belonged to group O, and the woman to B. Forty percent of the population are in group O, 20 per cent in group B. The man on trial smiled at this point.

But the rest of the physician's testimony jolted the prisoner out of his chair. It was true that the murdered woman was group B, but also type Mn, Rh₁ Rh₂—the exact grouping of the bloodstains on the towel and carpeting.

Dr. Wiener revealed that he was 99 per cent certain that the murdered woman had been in the man's apartment. Mathematically speaking, there was just a one per cent chance that somebody else in New York had that exact blood-grouping combination. But the possibility that that person would be a woman, would be in that

BLOOD WILL TELL!

man's apartment, would injure herself at the same time that a woman was murdered and tossed from that particular building, was stretching from the point of coincidence a little thin. The prisoner showed that he got the point when he stood up and ended his trial right there by pleading guilty.

In one case the killer gladly allowed Dr. Wiener to take a sample of his blood. The slayer had strangled a woman with two knotted handkerchiefs and knew that there had been no bloodstains. But what the strangler did not realize was that he had left his signature on the soiled handkerchiefs. The expert typed the nasal residue in the handkerchiefs, found it matched the blood sample, and another killer wound up behind bars.

An attorney, who evidently had read the rhesus monkeyshine stories and remembered them, cross-examined Dr. Wiener sharply. He wanted to know if it was true that monkey blood was very similar to human blood. The physician agreed that it was. He next demanded to know if Dr. Wiener had tested to make certain that it was human and not monkey blood in this particular case. The witness admitted that he had not.

With a cry of indignation, the lawyer demanded that the blood doctor's testimony be thrown out. His hopes collapsed with a shout of laughter from the jury when the prosecutor drily remarked that there were no monkeys hanging from trees at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street in front of the Empire State Building.

As a rule, Dr. Wiener only goes to the scene of a crime in an important case. Detectives have been trained to preserve fresh bloodstains by keeping them moist and cold and rushing them to his office. At a lecture he delivers each year at the police school, he advises officers to place wet stains in a test tube or other container and then pack ice around the receptacle. Dry ice, however, is no good, since it will freeze the blood and damage the blood cells.

After a busy day tracking down clues, Dr. Wiener relaxes by reading a detective story or going to a mystery movie. But, he admits with a wry smile, he seldom spots the murderer in fiction.

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 63)

them you went crazy and attacked me too," he said. His voice shook. "They'll think you're the murderer."

"Only salmon fishermen use a gaff hook," I said, fighting for a little time. "The sheriff will tumble to that. You could plead temporary insanity because of your cracked head. Don't make it any worse for yourself."

It was too late for words. Haskell was standing up, grasping the cable with one hand. I saw the hammer come down and tried to duck. It glanced off my temple and exploded lights in my head, but I clung to the seat. Then in a daze I heard the *zing* of a rifle shot over the sound of the rushing water below, and the thud as the bullet struck Haskell. He jerked stiffly and then slowly cartwheeled out of the car. I shook my head clear while the car swayed back and forth like a pendulum—a pendulum of death. Then I saw Sheriff Meeker standing on the platform at the end of the cable with two state cops.



I wanted to see May. Maybe I had doped things out a little better these past few moments.

He had trailed us here. He was holding a rifle in one hand and waving me to come back with the other.

I reached up and grabbed the cable and began pulling the car the other way—toward the other side. The sheriff had doped everything out correctly. He could wait. I was in a hurry to get to the old powder shack above the falls and see May. I wanted to find out if I too had doped things out a little better these past few moments.

CADAVER WANTED!

(Continued from page 68)

nauseated my lovely Ethel used to be. Disgusting, she'd say, with horror in her eyes. Horrible."

Joe looked at me and laughed. I didn't laugh back. I suddenly wished I had never met him.

"I wanted to kill her," said Joe, wearily. "But what was the use of that? What good would it do? Finally I figured it out. I just wanted to get away from her, from the whole filthy business. I didn't want any of our money. Let her have it all. I wanted nothing, nothing to remind me of her. I must have been a little crazy, I suppose.

"I bought a new suit of clothes and hid it in the closet. Then, when we had gone to bed and she slept, I got up, left everything exactly as it was, clothing, everything. I dressed in the new suit—I'd bought a shirt and shoes too, of course—and I quietly walked out. No fuss, no recriminations, no tears. I just shed my whole life like a skin.

"I shaved in the Grand Central Station men's room. Then I bought a ticket for Mexico City. It took almost half of the money I had. It was all premium money for the insurance I carried. I didn't want her to get the insurance. Did you know she talked me into getting forty thousand dollars' worth?"

"I knew you had it," I said, beginning to feel sick. "But I thought you wanted it yourself."

Joe said softly, "Why should I? That much? I didn't expect to die."

We looked at each other and I began to get it then. He had beaten her to the punch.

"I suppose you realize what you left behind?" I said. "There was hell to pay."

"I know," said Joe, staring at me. "I wanted it to happen just the way it happened."

"Who was the guy?" I asked. "The guy with her, I mean?"

Joe said quietly, "It was Larry. Larry, my best friend."

SUDDENLY the whole picture fell into place like a jigsaw puzzle completed. It was a nasty picture.

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DETECTIVE TALES

I said through stiff lips, "You know, Larry is with me down here."

Joe said calmly, "Is that so?"

"You know," I said, looking at Joe intently, "Larry thinks Ethel killed you. For the insurance. He didn't know, he says, that you had insurance."

Joe showed only a flicker of muscle on his cheek. "He knew she was my wife," said Joe.

We were both silent. There was no answer. Then I said, "Don't you want to know how Ethel is?"

"No," said Joe.

"She and Larry hate each other," I said, thinking it out. "I can see just what happened. He thought she planned to ki—"

"I don't want to hear about it," said Joe in a dead voice. "I don't care what happened to either of them."

I got up slowly. I stared down at him. He didn't look up at me. "Shall I tell them I've seen you?" I asked. "It would clear up a lot of things. They think she's killed you."

Very wearily, Joe lifted his head.

"Hasn't she?" he asked with the voice of the dead.

I looked at him and around at the dirty shack where he probably lived. I saw the look in his eyes. I nodded.

"Good-bye," I said.

Joe didn't say anything. He closed his eyes as if to sleep. I gave him a last long look, then turned and went away.

I went back to the hotel. Larry had left a message at the desk that he'd be in the dining room. I went in and found him at one of the tables, eating a thick Mexican steak. I sat down at the table, ordered lunch, and watched him.

I looked at him a long time. He ate as if he enjoyed himself, as if life were a lot of fun. I noticed again, as I'd noticed for years, that he was a good-looking guy, and I suddenly remembered little things, little signs of popularity that Larry had with his friends' wives.

Suddenly he looked up at me and caught my expression.

"What's the matter?" he asked, startled.

"Nothing," I said, staring at him. "I think my business here will be finished

CADAVER WANTED!

sooner than I thought. I won't be able to stay an extra week with you as I'd planned. I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Ah, hell," said Larry in disgust. He leaned back moodily. "I thought we could have some fun. I don't want to stay alone."

You louse, I thought. I'll bet you don't.

Then I said, "Well, then come back with me. I want to see Detective Regan anyway."

"What for?" said Larry uneasily.

"Well, there must be something new on the Joe Glenmore case by now," I said casually.

"Are they still working on that?" cried Larry.

"Why, they never stop, Larry," I said smoothly. "Don't you know that? They assign a man and he stays on the case for good. It takes years sometimes, but they break the case eventually. All they have to do is find the body, then they'll get Ethel on the stand and make her talk."

Was it my imagination or was Larry just a shade paler? I went on. I was enjoying this with a joy I'd never known before. I heard the words coming out of my mouth as if I were an instrument wielded by a higher authority.

"Last time I spoke to Regan he said Ethel probably was working with somebody, a lover, probably," I said in a confidential manner. "This is in strictest confidence, Larry, of course. I'm the only one supposed to know that. Regan says he's sure they both planned it and did a nice job of it. The only thing they overlooked was the insurance premium not being paid. They always slip up some way, Regan said. What he's counting on is that since the plan went wrong the lovers must have split up. They probably hate each other. If Regan can break Ethel's silence and find out who the guy is . . ."

As Larry stared at me, his lips ashen, I slowly drew a significant finger across my throat.

Then I got up. Larry, numbly, got up also.

He followed me like an automaton as I went up to pack. I knew that for as long as it would last, Larry would be made to pay and pay and pay for what he had done.

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 74)

and two policemen hurtled down at him. Murdock sagged, fainting, against the wall, wondering what had gone wrong.

He felt himself seized and roughly rushed up the stairs.

Above the confusion, he heard the elevator operator bleating hysterically, "He asked me not to let anybody up to his apartment, because he felt sick. But this fella came, and he looked sick, too. He said he had to apologize to Mr. Murdock because he wanted to be friends with him again, and he couldn't sleep unless he apologized. He looked so sick, I let him up to Mr. Murdock's apartment. Then right after, I heard all this yelling and fighting, and then somebody shot off a gun, and the voices stopped all of a sudden. I knew right then I better call the cops. . . ."

Somebody gave Murdock a rough shove and said with satisfaction, "Caught him trying to sneak down the back way, Lieutenant."

By this time, Murdock had recovered sufficiently to realize that this could not possibly have anything to do with the poison bottle in Harris' apartment.

"I was not sneaking out of the apartment," he said indignantly. "I was coming in."

A tall, still-faced man appeared in the doorway of Murdock's apartment. He had an air of authority, and Murdock addressed him.

"I—I simply went down to the corner and was returning," he amplified.

The tall man turned to the elevator operator, "Does he usually go down the back way?" he demanded.

The operator shook his head.

They shoved Murdock into the apartment. The tall man held out a gun.

"Yours?" he asked.

The fleeting glance that Murdock gave the gun told him that it was his, but his eyes had fled to the still and bloody figure of Fisher, lying on the rug.

He started to babble, "H-Harris. . . ."

And then, and only then, did he realize that the only man who could save him from the electric chair had been dead for several minutes.

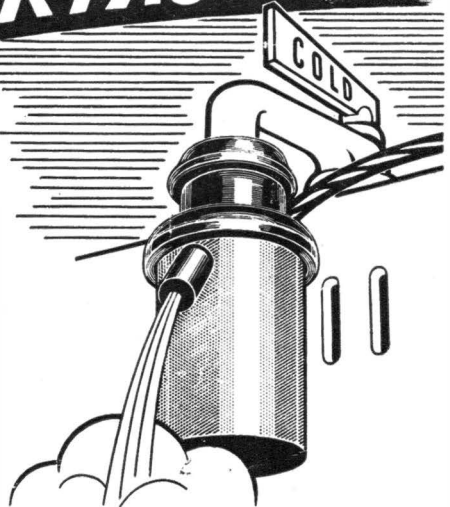
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