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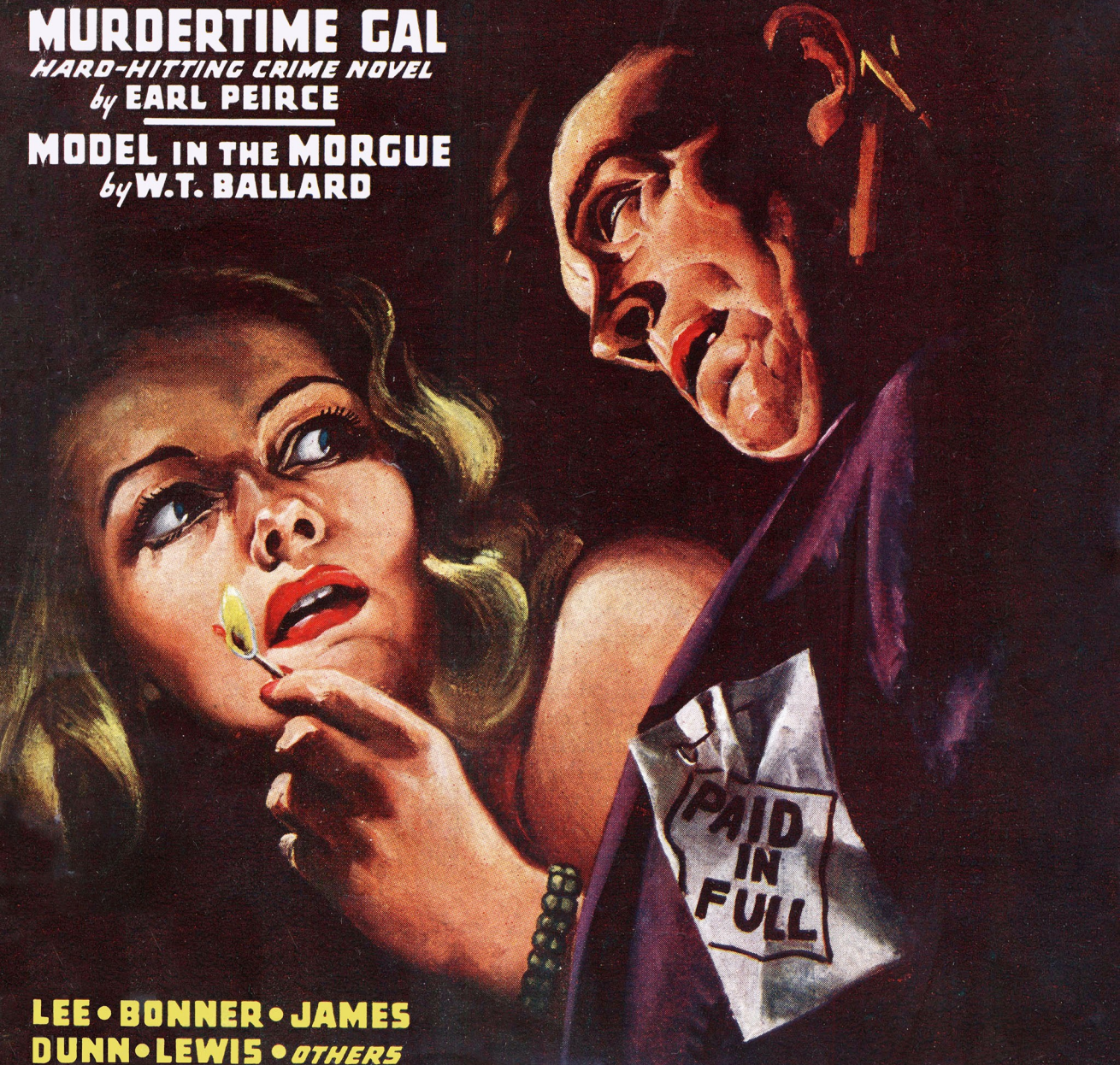
**MURDERTIME GAL**

*HARD-HITTING CRIME NOVEL*

*by* **EARL PEIRCE**

**MODEL IN THE MORGUE**

*by* **W.T. BALLARD**



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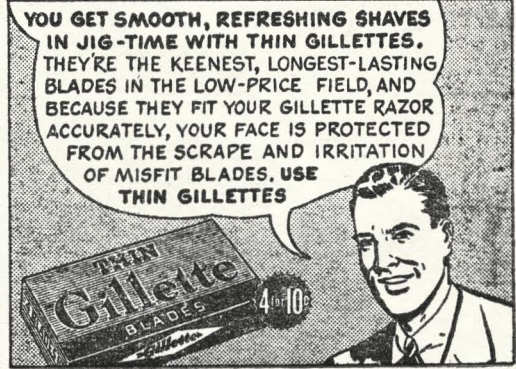
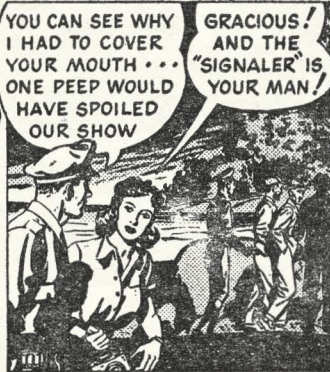
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HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE HURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE





# DETECTIVE

**12**  
STORIES

**TALES**

**15**  
CENTS

VOL. THIRTY-FIVE

DECEMBER, 1946

NUMBER ONE

*Feature-Length Manhattan-Murder Novel*

1. **MURDERTIME GAL**.....*Earl Peirce* 10  
—made a daytime nightmare of Randy Barron's life, when she decided to be the little girl who wasn't there!

*Two Outstanding Detective Novelettes*

2. **THE MERRY MEN OF MAYHEM**.....*Thorne Lee* 46  
—operated on the principle that he who laughs last gets the first coffin!
3. **MODEL IN THE MORGUE**.....*W. T. Ballard* 76  
—looked funny as hell, until the mannequin rolled over, and the corpse rolled out!

*Six Powerful Short Stories*

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—fathoms beneath the surface, to salvage a shipwrecked cadaver!
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January Issue Published November 27th!

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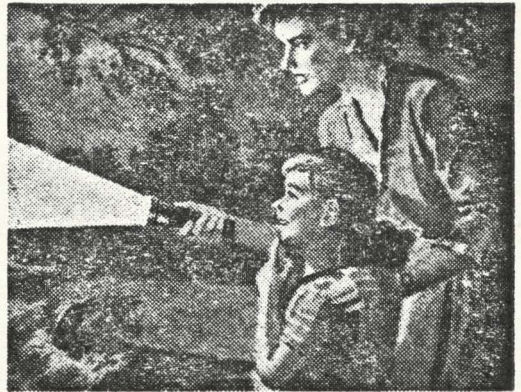
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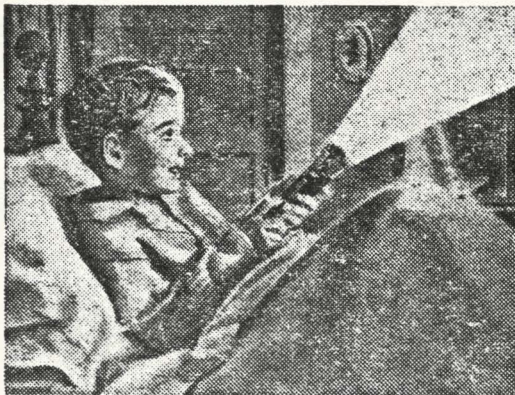
# How to help your child fight FEAR OF DARKNESS

... as recommended in the interest of child welfare by Rose G. Anderson, Ph. D.,  
Director of the Psychological Service Center of New York



**1** Fear of the dark is founded on a dread of the unknown. Many a grown man feels his courage ebb with the daylight. And to a child, whose limited experience makes him even more fearful, the dark can be filled with terrors... unfounded fears.

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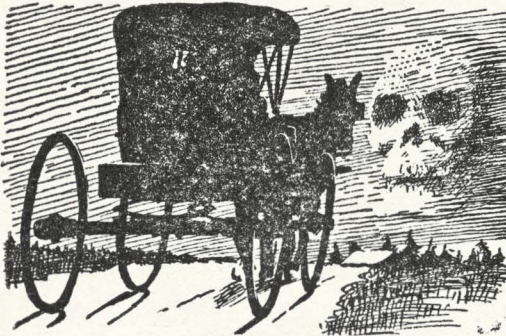


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# ODDITIES IN CRIME

by LEE and JAKOBSSON



← If you share the popular notion that authorities have to prove somebody's been killed in order to hang you for murder, banish the naive idea. On the night of March 8, 1900, Alma Nesbitt and her mother, strangers to Hood River, Oregon, were driven, at their request, to the homestead of one Norman Williams. No one ever saw the two women again. Five years later, Williams was hanged for their murder.

The Oregon state supreme court said of the case, "No universal rule can be laid down in regard to the proof of the corpus delicti. . ."

Williams mounted the gallows firmly, confided to the executioner, "You're hanging an innocent man."

The case can be and has been, cited as a precedent in every state of the Union by prosecutors whose corpus delicti is something less than deluxe.

Butler, Harry Linton, broker; born 1887; married; → clubs and organizations: president, Pasadena Realty Board; personal assets, \$100,000; credit standing, unlimited; activities, church and community service; residence—we'll come to that.

O'Rourke, Robert, detective lieutenant, Pasadena police force; planning to retire after 20 years of service, effective 1937 proud of never having killed a man in gun battle, though having fought several.

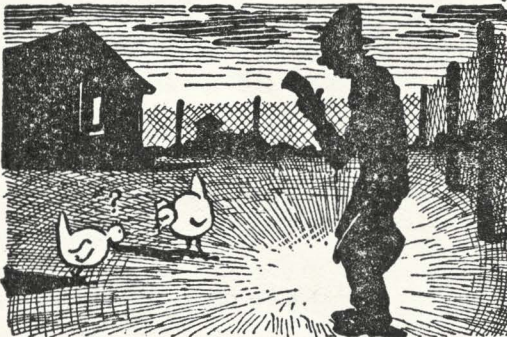
In January, 1937, Detective O'Rourke engaged in gun battle a notorious masked bank robber, who disobeyed orders to halt, opened fire. Detective O'Rourke killed his first man. Under the mask, he turned out to be Butler, Harry Linton, etc. . .

Trouble with plans is—they gang agley



← A Missouri farmer got up at his customary ungodly hour one morning not long ago, and went to feed his chickens. Instead of his usual cackling covey he found only a single rooster, leering at a lone, self-conscious hen. To the perch was pinned a note:

"We steal from the rich  
And steal from the poor.  
But we leave this pair  
So you can raise some more."



Among people who think on their feet, reserve a → place for Casimir Zohaski. Casimir had a twin brother he hadn't seen for half a lifetime, so finding himself in Warsaw shortly before the war, and knowing his brother lived there, he arranged a get-together. The brothers met, did the town—and Alexander, the twin, was so happy he died of heart failure!

Faced with the unpleasant task of breaking the news to the dead man's pretty widow, Casimir simply switched clothes and papers with his brother, sold himself to the widow as her husband—and collected a \$10,000 insurance policy he'd taken out on himself. A third brother detected the fraud, and Casimir wound up in the clink, while authorities sought to pin a murder rap on him. But nothing ever came of that.

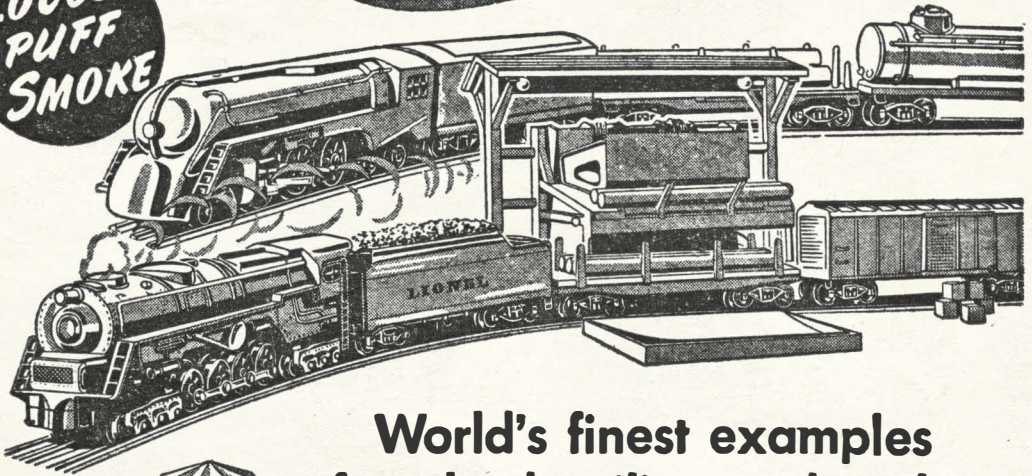






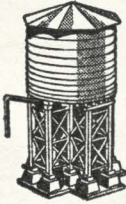
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# The finger points-- to Murder!



## ONE DETAIL

BRICE EVANS AND JAMES WARD, BUSINESS MEN, HAD A HUNTING LODGE IN IOWA. ONE DAY THE SHERIFF OF SEDALIA, IOWA RECEIVED A CALL, "COME AT ONCE, MY PARTNER, IS DEAD."

EVANS REENACTED THE SITUATION. "WE WERE HUNTING QUAIL," HE SAID, "I WAS OVER THIS HILL. I HEARD JIM CRY OUT THEN HIS GUN WENT OFF. HE MUST HAVE STUMBLER AND SHOT HIMSELF." I RAN AND CALLED YOU AT ONCE.

THE SHERIFF TOOK ONE LOOK AT THE SHOTGUN AND SAID, "MR. EVANS, I ARREST YOU AS THE MURDERER OF JAMES WARD."

WHY DID HE ARREST EVANS?

(Ans. on page 63)

Sheriff Olle

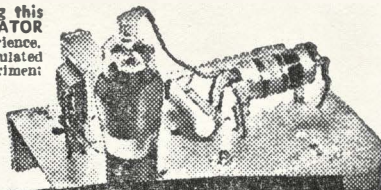






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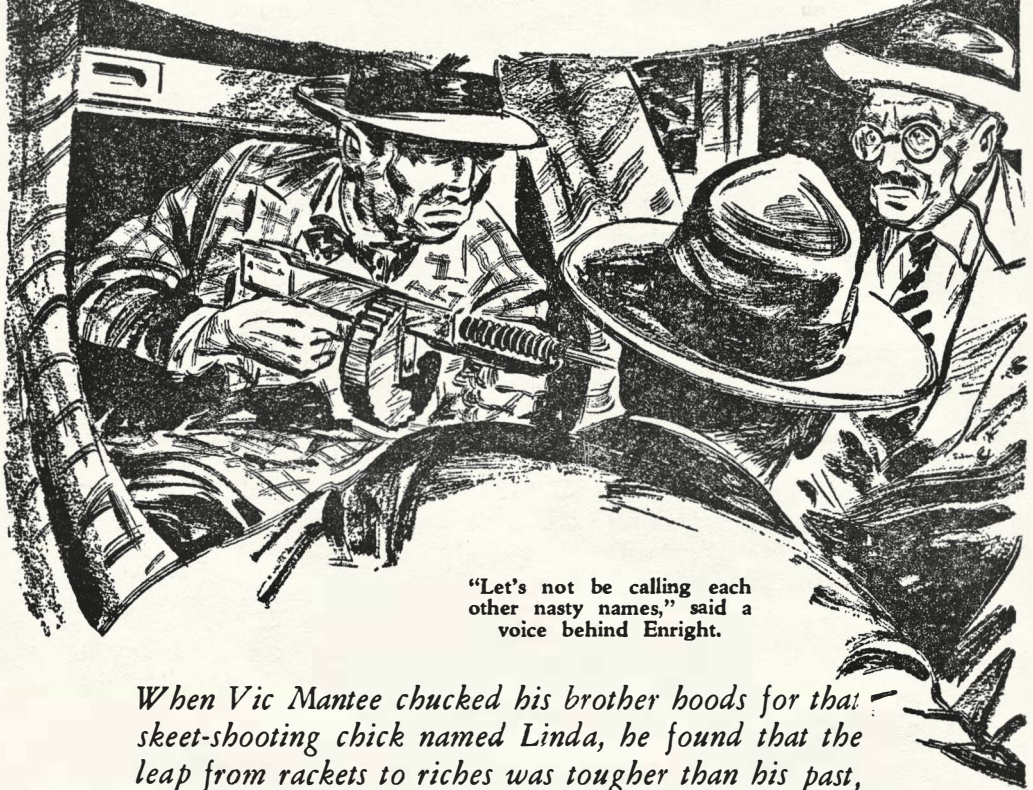
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# MURDERTIME GAL



"Let's not be calling each other nasty names," said a voice behind Enright.

*When Vic Mantee chucked his brother hoods for that skeet-shooting chick named Linda, he found that the leap from rackets to riches was tougher than his past, farther than his future—and as final as the pat of the spade on a grave!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Shivers for the Shavetail

I DIDN'T know which was more offensive, the garlic on the guy's breath, or the gun that he jabbed into my spine. But at the moment I was in no position to object to either. He pressed close against me, his voice cutting over my shoulder in a whisper just out of earshot of the pedestrians pouring out of the office buildings of lower Broadway.

"No tricks, pal. Just step into the alley here."

I was in no mood for tricks. I had an urgent appointment; and there wasn't enough of a roll on me to be worth risking a slug in the spine. But it was one hellova note, I thought, to get rolled within the shadow of the Building of Justice, with enough cops within calling distance to re-equip the Rainbow Division for combat.

The alley was a blind end, used by delivery trucks. Right now it was dark and empty, except for a mangy cat that scurried across my shoe. I walked ten or twelve feet toward the dark end, when the gun bored hard into my ribs again.



## Fast-Paced Manhattan-Murder Novel

"Okay, pal. Up against the wall—flat!"

I pushed my belly against the wall and waited to feel the dip's hand sink into my pocket. I was mad enough to chew the lead right outta his rod. What right did this guy have to take my money, I wanted to know.

But it wasn't money he was after. He thrust his mouth close to my left ear and hissed:

"You've come a long way for this, shave-tail. Here it is!"

Without another word he shoved his weight behind the gun and jerked the trigger.

He jerked the trigger. I felt the motion of his finger as though it were the swing of a club. For a moment that seemed endless I

had time to say to myself, "The scatter-brain is shooting me." I didn't wonder why. I didn't even wonder who this guy was. I was just incredulously trying to realize I was getting one in the spine, when into my stupefied senses penetrated the dull click of a misfire.

It was more of a surprise to him than it was to me; he had been keyed up to an explosion; I hadn't. So I came out of it quicker than he did. I threw myself sideways and ducked, my right fist driving like a bolt to the place I thought his garlic was coming from. It grazed his chin; but there was enough power to rock him backwards off balance. I caught a glimpse of a swarthy face that I had never seen before in my life, and before I



By  
**EARL  
PEIRCE**



could move in for better acquaintance he had ejected the dud cartridge from his foreign-looking revolver and was swinging the sights on me again, at close range.

The shot exploded nervously before he had taken time to line me up and the slug *singed* low over my head. I was too far away to rush him now. My feet realized this before my head did, for without thinking, I sprang away from the wall and with a hip-wreathing twist I was tearing down the alley for dear life.

Two more shots blasted the alley's silence like the beginning of a cannonade. The lead began to ricochet around the place like a couple of hornets trapped in a box.

I snapped my body one way then another, wondering what in blazes I would do when I reached the blind end of the alley. Then I saw the stairs leading down. I took off two yards away and sailed in like a player into home plate. My hands broke the fall as I crashed onto the steps, but the momentum piled me up in a heap on the cement landing, five or six steps below the alley.

I didn't arrive any too soon. Garlic-Face had taken time to steady that yapping pistol, and his next shot whipped square across the top of the steps in the exact center of the place my head had been an instant before, and clanged into the wall like a sledge hammer.

Clanged into the wall. I actually saw the flattened mushroom of lead drop at my feet before I realized the wall was broken by a solid steel fire door that led into the basement of the building.

**W**ITH my heart climbing to my mouth to whisper its own sweet prayer, I scrambled to a hunched position and grabbed at the door latch. It answered with a click and the door swung open on heavenly hinges. It opened a scant ten inches and then closed again, with me squirming inside faster than a shot-at rabbit goes under a picket fence.

Outside I heard Garlic-Face scuffling around at the top of the stairs and I braced my two hundred and two pounds against the door to hold him out. But for the next few minutes there was silence as he waited outside, wondering what to do; then I heard him run back down the alley to the sidewalk.

Every natural instinct in me was to follow him and sop up the gutter with him, but there were a couple of reasons which kept me momentarily on the safer side of the door. First, I didn't have my gun. Second, he seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of live ammo in that heater of his. And third, by the time I reached the street he could have dropped into a subway, been swallowed up in a bar, or simply turned into a harmless passerby whom I wouldn't know from Gromyko unless I got

within distasteful smelling distance of him.

But who was he? *Shavetail*, he had called me. So he must have known me when I was in the Army, up to last month or so. Yet I could swear I'd never set eyes on his ugly pan before in my life.

I groped around in the semi-darkness of the cellar and found a flight of stairs leading up to the lobby of an apartment building, where I promptly mingled with a dozen or more tenants milling out to the sidewalk to see what was causing all the back-fires. Here some cops were pulling up to the curb, and since I know most all the cops in town by sight I lowered my head and hurried through the throng to the sanctuary of the Building of Justice, on the other side of the alley where all the excitement had taken place.

"Afternoon, Mr. Barron," greeted the elevator starter cheerfully. "What's all the shooting out there?"

"Dunno," I remarked, squaring my tie and brushing the dust off my trousers. "Me, I'm strictly a corporation lawyer. The only loud noises I investigate are in Washington."

The elevator creaked and bounced and managed, as it always does, miraculously enough, to reach the eleventh floor. Here it opened to reveal a frosted glass second door with faded black-and-gilt letters which read:

## BARRON AND SON

Counselors at Law

I didn't often appear down here at the Broadway office. This was the firm's old, established address at the very hub of Wall Street, a convenient walk to any one of a dozen investment houses and banks where most of the firm's clients are located. For my own share of the trade I kept a small office in midtown Manhattan, much to my father's stern disapproval. But even he admitted it was better this way, since we didn't mix respectable Wall Street business men with the questionable hooligans, as he called them, who usually hung around me.

Even before the door opened I could smell the odors of cigar smoke, old leather and licorice which characterized this room. Grandfather Barron, it had been explained to me, was a fiendish licorice eater.

Mellow afternoon sunlight filtered through the yellow curtains behind my father's desk, silhouetting the two men sitting there. My father was up-right in the hard-backed chair, one long pale hand methodically rotating his Harvard pig watchfob and the other eloquently clasped at his lapel in a pose which great grandfather Barron had picked up apishly from Gladstone. The other man, lean,



white-headed and nervous as a cat, was poised on the edge of a stuffed Morris chair, his sinewy neck craned to see me enter.

"This is Mr. Carter Enright," said my father. "My son—Randolph."

I shook hands with Enright, who was about sixty and looked like he usually got what he wanted out of life. I knew him slightly by reputation as one of the industrial and financial bigshots you expected to find in this part of town, and the owner of Enright Lines, one of the war-baby shipping concerns that is here to stay.

"Please recapitulate, Carter," requested my father, motioning me into a chair. "My son was tardy, unfortunately, for this appointment."

Granting the reproach, I sat down opposite Enright, crossed my knees, and assumed a pose of devout filial attention.

Enright regarded me a little skeptically, as most of my father's clients do, but told his story in a low, level voice, with just a trace of nervousness.

His daughter, Linda, he explained, had disappeared from the family home. She was twenty-two, attractive, and a "usually damn sensible girl," to use his own words. She had been a Red Cross worker overseas, and had come back from Germany two weeks ago and told her father she intended to be married.

Enright pursed his lips at this point and narrowed his eyes at me. "She was very frank with me. She said that I would strenuously oppose the marriage, but that she was going ahead with it anyway."

"Who was the man?" I asked.

Enright glanced at my father a moment, then swung his eyes on me and replied in a low voice:

"His name is Vic Mantee."

**I** WHISTLED softly. The Old Gentleman shot me a blistering glance and I stopped whistling, but the expression of amazement still clung to my face like a stubble of beard.

"Vic Mantee!" I said.

Enright squirmed in his chair. "I thought Linda was either joking or out of her mind. I told her that if she ever said anything like that again, big as she is, I'd put her across my knee."

"And what did she do?"

"She said I'd better get used to calling her Mrs. Vic Mantee, and hoped I wouldn't judge him from what I read in the newspapers."

"And?"

"I refused to discuss it further. I thought of course she was joking."

"Where on earth," I began, "did a daughter of yours meet anyone like Vic Mantee?"

"She met him in a hospital in Germany. I'll say this: he had a damned impressive war

record. But then, killing and shooting is his profession. As I say, Linda isn't a stupid person, so when she went ahead with her marriage plans I became terribly worried—to the actual point of calling in a psychiatrist."

"And then she disappeared?"

"Yes, she disappeared. Three days ago. I haven't heard a word from her since."

I looked at my father. "If she's twenty-two, she can run off with anyone she takes a fancy to," I told him. "That's the law." I felt very foolish telling him what the law was, but I was merely checking off the preliminaries for Enright's benefit.

My father regarded me with the vast patience he has mastered in the past twenty-eight years and replied slowly:

"Precisely. No legal infringement is involved. Mr. Enright came to me because there was no one else he can come to, without inviting an avalanche of notoriety. He can't coerce his daughter to divorce or break off her engagement to Mantee, as the case may be, but he can and should, by paternal prerogative, try to rationalize her into following a wiser course. He doesn't require a counselor as much as he requires a sort of confidential agent who understands and is intimate with underworld characters of Mantee's ilk, and can trespass without causing undue suspicion through the disreputable fleshpots and honky tonks which these men inhabit. For that reason, my son, I sent for you."

It was one of those oblique compliments he occasionally tossed at me, and I acknowledged it by turning to confront Enright with the air of a specialist called to examine a difficult patient.

"You want me to find your daughter?" I asked.

"Yes, most definitely, yes! There is no telling what may happen to her with a person like Mantee. Even if he has reformed, completely reformed, his underworld commitments are so extensive that he could never possibly get clear of them. Already some suspicious looking men have taken to watching my house, and Linda herself has admitted that an attempt was made against Mantee's life by some hoodlums in a car, shortly after he was discharged from the Army. Do you understand why I'm so worried? She may be in a very dangerous position!"

"Yes, it's possible," I admitted. Vic Mantee had been one of Tex O'Hara's men, and O'Hara was out of Sing Sing now and reputed to be rounding up some of his old cronies. I had brushed with him in the past, although my path had never crossed Mantee's. "Are you sure," I questioned, "that your daughter has actually run off with Mantee? Maybe she just wants to be alone for a few days, to sort of mull things over."



Enright began shaking his head before I finished. "She would have told me," he countered emphatically. "That's one reason I'm so concerned. Whatever she has done, she would have told me, by wire or phone or something. She simply isn't the type of person to be secretive or underhanded. Besides, she would know how worried Mrs. Enright and I must be."

"In that case," I reasoned, "She must have been taken against her will and is being held a captive."

"By whom? For what reason?" shouted Enright. He was beginning to show some strain now. Perspiration flecked his forehead and his fingers twisted agonizingly with a damp handkerchief. He looked appealingly at my father for reassurance but my old man is a cold sort of a fish at times, who can call out a spade when he sees one.

"Hitherto," remarked my father, "no ransom note or communication of any kind has been received. However, it is very possibly the girl was abducted for blackmail of some kind, perhaps against Mantee himself, by some rival mobsters. I think the police should be consulted. However, if you wish, my son can conduct his own discreet investigation for a day or two, in the hope police intervention will not be necessary."

"Yes, I prefer that," said Enright eagerly. "Try to keep the newspapers out of it. Their kind of publicity would only be harmful."

I said, "You told us your house was being watched?"

"Yes! Mrs. Enright called my attention only this morning to a man loitering on the sidewalk. She had noticed him there yesterday, too. Also, I am being followed by a different man. I am sure he attempted to follow me here to this building, although I believe I lost him."

"What did this man look like—the one who followed you?"

**I'M NOT** sure. He's quite furtive. This morning as I entered my office I attempted to trick him by turning suddenly to confront him. He was quite flustered. He put his hand to his face and hurried past me, as though he were on legitimate business in my building. He was swarthy and ugly, with a strong garlic odor on his breath."

I felt my ears tingle up like a pair of plane detectors. "Garlic?" I demanded.

Both Enright and my father regarded me narrowly. My father asked, "Does the smell of garlic signify anything to you?"

"Hmm," I temporized, not wanting to throw a scare into Enright. "It may be enough to put me on the scent."

My father made a grimace and leaned back in his chair, putting his fingertips together

with austere magisterial reproach. "I think levity is least called for, Randolph. When and where can you proceed with this investigation? Your other duties, naturally, may be held in abeyance."

These "other duties", as he called them, consisted of proof-reading volume one of his projected six volume history of international corporate law. I was glad of the chance to get away from it for a while.

I said, "Vic Mantee once worked for Tex O'Hara. O'Hara is out of prison, and has opened a theater cafe on Fifty-third street, off Broadway. Quite a few of his former hoods have turned up, and it looks like he's starting up in business again. The cafe is likely a front—but it's as good a beginning as any." I got out of my chair. I was anxious to get going, not only to find Linda Enright, but to nail down that garlic-eating hophead who gave me the bad time in the alley. I couldn't figure his angle, and I needed to, before I went slumming with him again.

"Do you have a photograph of your daughter?" I asked Enright.

He dug through his pockets and produced three photos, two of them apparently slashed out of their frames.

"This is most recent," he said, showing me a 616 size snapshot of a girl in a Red Cross uniform standing next to a jeep against a background of shambled buildings. She was smiling, the sun was directly overhead, and it didn't tell me much except that she was good looking and nicely shaped, even in those manish clothes. The two other photographs were glamorous types that might have been made at Conover's. They showed an intelligent-looking blonde, with an oval face that was pointed at the chin like Enright's. She had a distinctive quality of breeding, which you sensed mostly in the aloof set of her eyebrows. She was a looker, alright. She wouldn't be hard to recognize.

I put the photographs in my pocket and buttoned my coat. I wished that I had brought a gun, just in case, but I hadn't, and I knew the Old Gentlemen never had one in the office. However, Enright had one. He handed it to me as I walked to the door, a small pearl-handled .32, fully loaded.

"I gave this to Linda when she went overseas," he said bitterly. "But I never thought she'd need one in her own back yard. Please, please find her!"

I promised him I'd find her. I dropped the gun into my pocket, shook hands with him, and stepped to the door.

But, of course, I didn't get away without my father's usual parting advice.

"Be careful of that firearm," he said. "And remember: in a man as in a car, the brake is more reliable than the horn."



## CHAPTER TWO

## Lay That Pistol Down, Babel!

THE Cafe O'Hara was an expensive, chromy after-theater club featuring burlesque comedians and a bawdy floor-show. It cost a buck to check your hat, a pack of smokes went for four bits, and all your drinks after the first one were watered. That kind of place.

I stood at the bar and ordered a bourbon while I looked around. It was fairly crowded for this early in the evening, although I couldn't see much because all the lights were toned down, except for a blue spotlight shooting on a gorgeous-looking brunette sensuously embracing a microphone. Her dress was cut so low it looked like she had it on backwards—until you saw the back. She had a convincing French accent, and lots of the right gestures which went over big with this kind of an audience.

I watched her for five or ten minutes, observing meanwhile that a couple of hoods posing as waiters had their eyes on me in a snirking sort of way that told me I'd been spotted for whom I was. That being the case, I would see nothing I wasn't supposed to see from this vantage point, so I polished off the drink and sauntered to the back of the joint, where O'Hara probably had his office.

The guy who opened O'Hara's door had an unpleasantly familiar puss, and so did the gazooney that O'Hara was chinning with across a big blonde wood desk. The first guy was Sad Sammy Giotta, who's done more stretches than a girdle; and the other one was called Pansy, because that's what usually grew over people whom he disliked, or so the story goes. O'Hara himself was a big, extroverted individual who had to shave three times daily so he wouldn't be mistaken for a baboon.

O'Hara and Pansy stopped the chatter when I came in and Pansy took a powder through a side door, but left me with the feeling that he was just outside. The other guy, Sad Sam, whispered, "Take it easy, mouthpiece," and closed the door behind me, leaving O'Hara and me alone.

O'Hara was friendlier than an insurance salesman. He shook hands with me, offered me a cigar, and poured me a bourbon I knew wasn't watered.

"I'm glad you dropped in," he said, fussing around to make me feel at home. "I've always said you're the smartest lawyer in New York. You're not afraid to tangle with the Hall if you think you're right. I like that in a man. I like a man to walk straight into it, if he thinks he has'ta."

"That's very nice," I said, "but I'm not here

to do you any favors. I'm here to get one. Where is Vic Mantee these days?"

"What do you want with Vic Mantee?" he asked, very conversationally.

"His grandfather died and left him an ice berg," I said. "I'm trying to liquidate the estate."

He smiled at that one, which is more than I thought he'd do, and said, still conversational, "I haven't seen pal Vic since he got out of the Army. I don't want to see him. He's a trouble maker from way back, and I'm a three-time loser who don't want trouble. I've run a legit business since my parole, and I'm gonna keep it that way."

"Perfectly understandable," I remarked. "One more conviction and you get put away for keeps, eh?"

"If you think I'm kidding, you're crazy," he insisted. "I'm over fifty. I've spent more than twelve years up-state, and I sure as hell don't want to spend my old age that way. I've learned, see! That's why I said to hell with Vic Mantee. I don't want none of him."

I stood up and put my empty glass down on the top of his expensive desk. "Okay, O'Hara. You haven't seen him and you don't expect to see him. Maybe you are getting smart. It's about time you did. If you're running a legit business, as you say you are, more power to you. I'd be glad to swing some customers your way, but I know only three millionaires, and none of 'em drinks."

He laughed hard and followed me to the door. "If I ever need a lawyer, I'll ring you," he told me, shaking hands. "Come in again, Mr. Barron, any time. Bring your father some time. It would do my place good to have a citizen like him showing up here."

"He'd order crackers and milk," I said, "and sit there reading 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'. So long, O'Hara."

"So long, Mr. Barron."

As I opened the door, Sad Sammy showed up again to be sure I disappeared through the right doorways, and the sight of his simian face reminded me of something else. I whirled to confront O'Hara, catching him momentarily off guard.

"By the way," I said. "Does one of your hoods eat garlic?"

Only for an instant did a flicker of annoyance show up in O'Hara's heavy-lidded eyes, and in another moment he belied it with a smile of innocence that would have done justice to a bishop.

"I don't have any hoods, Mr. Barron."

"That's good," I told him, "Because the dog catcher is looking for that one."

IT WAS my nice way of telling him that if he had sicked Garlic Face on me, he better not try a repeat, because that was one char-



acter I intended to nail on sight, whether our next meeting was in an alley or in the men's room of Toots Shor's.

I smiled a nice good-bye and turned to buy back my hat from the chick at the check window; then I stepped outside into the bland fall night, wondering just where in hell to turn next. Maybe the Army had a civilian forwarding address on Mantee. But where, at nine o'clock of an autumn night, do you find the Army?

I paused at the curb to light a cigarette before stepping across the street to my car. It must have been the flare-up of the lighter which momentarily blinded me, because by the time I did reach the car it was too late to pull back—unless I wanted a case of acute lead poisoning midpoint in my forehead.

"That's just dandy," I said, and pulled the cigarette from my mouth as I peered at the dame covering me with a palm-sized automatic. She was the French singer from O'Hara's cafe.

"Do you chew garlic?" I asked, disgusted with myself for walking into this.

"Get in. Close the door." Her gun wavered with the incontestible authority of a head usher's white glove.

I tossed down the cigarette and climbed in beside her. Her perfume was unfamiliar but interesting, and in the close atmosphere of the car I could feel the warmth of her body reach out to me. It wasn't unpleasant, at all; except I didn't like the proximity of that small gun.

"Who are you?" she asked me, without a trace of accent.

"Funny, but I was going to ask you almost the same question."

"Don't play with me," she warned, gesturing with the automatic.

"Baby, there's no one else I'd rather play with—except cops and robbers is too dangerous. I—"

"You were asking questions about Victor Mantee," she cut in angrily. "Why do you want him? Are you from the police?"

I chuckled, and I think she sensed a little friendliness in me. She said: "Then who are you? You're not one of Victor's friends that I know of."

"No," I said, lying a little. "I'm his lawyer. I'm trying to find him about a case, that's all."

"Is he in trouble?"

"Not yet, but he may be if I don't locate him pretty quick. What is Vic Mantee to you?"

"He—he's a very good friend. And if I thought you were trying to harm him—" Her gun came up and centered between my eyes again. She leaned closer to me. "If you're his lawyer, then you must want to help him.

But how do I know for sure I can trust you?"

I glanced at the gun. "With that in your hand you could trust a casting director. Put it away like a good girl, and I'll talk to you."

She hesitated, studying me with a frank, almost naive uncertainty. Then she opened her purse and dropped the gun in it, just like that. It made me feel flattered, and I started to like her.

"Have you got a name?" I asked.

"Toni la Rue," she said. "I met Victor in Paris while he was in the Army. He brought me to America. And now he has disappeared. I am terribly afraid for him. There is nobody who can help me."

"You're not French. What's your real name?"

Her shoulders moved perceptibly beneath her wrap. "It doesn't matter. I was born in St. Louis. I went to Europe with a show before the war. I got stranded, married a Frenchman, who was killed in the breakthrough. It was a helluva life, up until the Allied occupation. That doesn't matter now. What does matter is Victor's disappearance. His life is in danger."

"Why are you working for Tex O'Hara?" I wanted to know.

She waved a hand impatiently. "Victor had mentioned his name to me. I thought by working there I might learn something." She grimaced. "They are all such ugly men!"

"Did you learn anything?"

"Only this. They do not like Victor. They want to find him, too. Perhaps they have already found him. That is what I do not know, but I am afraid."

She was afraid all right. Her voice was taut; and her fingers, touching my arm, were tensed.

I decided to lay down one card. "What do you know about Linda Enright?" I asked.

She reacted as though I'd slapped her across the face. "What has happened to Linda Enright?" She caught my arm. "Has anything happened to her?"

"No, not that I know of," I said casually. "Do you expect anything to happen to her?"

"I—I—" She stammered uncertainly for a moment, then decided to play dumb. "Victor also mentioned her name once or twice. She was an old friend, I understand. That is all I know."

It was a pretty poor lie, but I couldn't every well beat the truth out of her and still keep this on a friendly basis. I said, "When was the last time you saw Victor?"

"Three days ago. He has an apartment near here."

"What address?"

"I do not know. I've been there in a taxi, but only at night, and I am unfamiliar with the streets."



I was wondering if this were a stall, when she again cut into my thoughts with candid frankness.

"I could show you how to get there. I myself have gone there every night, but always it is locked. Perhaps you could do something!"

"Perhaps I could," I agreed. I turned on my lights and kicked the starter. "Tell me where to turn, Toni. I'm in your hands."

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Yeggs and I

WE DROVE around Times Square a couple of times to shake any tails, then I turned north at her direction and cruised up Madison avenue until she told me to turn again at Sixty-third street. After another couple of blocks she told me to pull up in front of a respectable looking apartment-hotel, that was designed for comfortable discretion. This was a quiet, family neighborhood. Most of the people had their lights out already.

"Be careful of the telephone girl," Toni warned me. "I've seen her with the one they call Pansy. She may be working for O'Hara as a spy."

I grinned at her use of the word spy, but I guessed that was as good a word as any, under the circumstances. Telling her to stay in the car, I crossed the street, wondering if I'd find the telephone operator wearing black satin and deciphering a coded message; and as I crossed the lobby to the elevator I casually noticed she was a blonde dressed in a skirt and blouse, reading a paper-backed novel with the word MURDER printed on it in red. She glanced up; but I was already at the door of the elevator, and she never really saw my face.

"Fourth," I told the operator, in a loud voice.

Mantee's apartment was on the third, farthest down, on my left, Toni had told me. I got off at the fourth, wandered around until I found the stairs, then doubled back down one flight. It was quiet and dark. I hurried to Mantee's door and put my ear up against it. Hearing nothing, I tried half a dozen different burglar keys until one of them worked with a quiet click, then I let myself into the apartment and closed the door.

There was a floor lamp just inside the door. I pulled the chain and saw immediately this was a two room apartment which had been vacated in one hellova hurry. The bed was mussed; clothing was strewn about; there was some pocket change on the dresser; and an opened, half-unpacked suitcase stood on the floor at the foot of the bed.

I didn't know what I was looking for, so I

hunted around aimlessly hoping to turn up something of interest that might put me either onto Mantee's trail or his racket, and maybe both.

In the closet I found an Army captain's uniform with three rows of ribbons and six overseas bars. One of the ribbons was for the Purple Heart and another was the hard-to-get Soldier's Medal, which Mantee must have won before he got his promotion from sergeant to lieutenant. His lapel insignia were crossed pistols, which surprised me since I was in the M.P.'s myself and I don't recall ever having seen him. There wasn't anything in the pockets to interest me, so I turned my attention to some papers on the table near the bed.

For the most part these were references to his terminal leave status, although one set of onionskins seemed to have some significance. This was a type written list of hundreds of names, Army serial numbers and dates. Many of the names had been crossed off in pencil and the word 'Dead' written down. Opposite each name was the typewritten word 'Dsrted', followed by a date, and then by another pencil notation signifying a sum of money. Most of the sums were three hundred dollars or more, which for all these names added up to one sweet total.

It looked like some sort of racket, alright, although right then I didn't see the drift. So I folded the listing and tucked it into my inside pocket and began rummaging around some more. I spent about fifteen fruitless minutes, then I found something real hot: a French marriage license, dated three months ago, made out to Toni la Rue and Captain Victor Mantee.

This was the sort of thing I was looking for. I copied down the serial number of the license, the date, and the names of two French witnesses, then I walked over to the telephone.

"Get me an outside line," I told the operator. I didn't care if she knew a strange voice was calling from Mantee's suite or not; at any event, if the word got to O'Hara it would convince him of our seriousness in tracking down Mantee.

The exchange operator gave me my father's number and in a moment I had the Old Gentleman by the ear.

"I'm at Mantee's apartment," I told him. "No developments, except that I've learned he's married to a French girl he met overseas. It's some kind of racket, all right, although I don't see where Linda Enright comes in, unless it's a shake-down. What's new on that end?"

"Married?" he questioned, with some surprise in his voice. "That's disappointing, inas-much as I checked other channels and dis-



covered that Mantee and Linda were married by a justice of the peace three days ago."

"Bigamy, eh?" I questioned. "That's cute. Now what?"

"I also have reason to believe that Linda has taken Mantee to a summer place they own in Westchester. I deduced this from the fact that several cans of food and some other staples are missing from the Enright larder; hence they must be—ah—holing up someplace where food is unobtainable. Enright called to give me this information a short while ago. This place is just beyond Larchmont, at Fairglen Haven—"

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" I cried in a belated attempt to drown out the name of the place. "Yahdity yah! Yah! Yah! Yah!—"

"I beg your pardon?" asked my father, when I gave him a chance to speak. "Randolph, are you—"

"Don't say any more," I told him. "I got the drift. Will do. Stand by and—uh—keep your ears clean. Rajah!"

I hung up, hoping like hell he wouldn't call in an alienist before I had a chance to talk to him again. I was heart-sick, lest that gum-smacking blonde Mata Hari downstairs got a good earful of that Westchester address. It was time to make tracks.

I SNAPPED off the floor lamp and put my hand out to grasp the doorknob. But the instant before I touched it, the knob rotated, grazing my hand. I jerked my hand back, freezing. It was a moment or two before I realized that someone had just come up to the door from outside.

Whoever it was hadn't heard me talking, because he was inserting a key into the lock as quietly as he could. That was a break, because it gave me a chance to tiptoe away from the door and look for a hiding place. The closet was the closest possibility. I edged inside and pulled the door shut at the exact moment I heard the outer door open.

It was a woman who entered. I could tell by the utter lightness of her tread and the occasional soft clack of a spike heel on the floor. She closed the door again quickly and stood for a moment in silence. Then I heard the overhead light snap on.

Toni la Rue? I wondered. At once I canceled her out, because she would know I was here. Maybe that telephone operator? That seemed the likely possibility. I put my ear to the door and listened to her cross the floor toward the dresser at the foot of the bed. She seemed to know exactly what she was looking for. When she didn't find it there, she turned and headed straight for the closet—straight for me.

I drew myself up, wondering what a Yale man would do. I didn't figure out any cute

answer to this proverbial situation, and in another moment she caught the knob and gave it a twist. At almost the same instant she must have spotted what she was looking for someplace else, because her hand left the knob and her heels clacked hard across the floor toward the bathroom, leaving a silver of light creeping into the closet.

I put my eye to the crack just in time to see a shapely piece of anatomy cross my line of vision and disappear. She was gone a couple of moments, when I heard a peculiar metallic sound, and then she reappeared again and by some happy circumstance that looks over drunks and detectives alike she stood right opposite the opening in the closet door.

My eye bulged out so far I felt a draft on it. The girl was Linda Enright!

Linda all right. She looked grim right now, and a little dangerous. Cradled like a baby in her arms was a sawed-off, double-barrel shotgun.

A shotgun. She knew how to use it, too. She broke open the breech to inspect the barrels, then calmly produced two fat cartridges from her bulging pockets and patted one into each chamber.

It was a cute picture: The debutante daughter of a Park Avenue millionaire nursing that young cannon as though it were part of her make-up kit.

Well, it was a case of now or never; and I decided that if it was now, I'd better get started before she had that gun cocked. I hung my life out before me and pushed open the door.

"Miss Enright?" I inquired, as pleasantly as I could.

I had misjudged the lady. That shotgun snapped up to firing position before I got out the second word and for a dizzy instant I imagined flame bursting from both massive barrels not two feet from my face.

I swallowed and murmured: "You must play a lot of skeet, Miss Enright." Then, without her having to say anything, I put my hands up over my head. It just seemed like a natural thing to do, considering that she was about one shade short of letting me have it without any further to-do.

"I'm sorry I startled you," I said. "Perhaps I should have coughed or something."

My voice trailed off, and I got the decided feeling that if I had coughed I'd have gotten a dose straight through the door. There was no compromising with her. She was looking at me with her upper lip curled slightly and her green eyes as hard and cold as chips of glass.

"Go back in that closet," she ordered.

"Miss Enright, you don't—"

She threw the gun to her shoulder and drew an unwavering bead on me.



"Get back in that closet!"

I stepped back. I knew she was ready to pull those triggers. Murder lurked in her eyes like tangible sparks of fire. I stepped back farther, until I was again inside the closet. Then she walked deliberately toward me and kicked the door shut with her foot. At the same moment metal rattled in the keyhole as she locked me in.

"Miss Enright, wait!" I cried in desperation. "You don't under—"

I broke off at the sound of a door slamming shut, and held my breath. The long minutes of silence were mocking me. Linda

Enright had left me looking like the prize chump of the season.

I rolled up my eyes and gave myself a sound mental kick where it would do the most good. Of all prize saps! I should have jumped her, should have pulled that gun out of her hands with one flying leap out of the closet. Now look at me. Lunkhead. Creep!

Experimentally I rattled the knob and bent my weight against the door. The only way to get out of here was to smash my way out. And in a hurry, too, to judge from the determination in Enright's face as I had seen her loading that shotgun.



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**B**ACKING off, I hunched my shoulders and drove into the door. The wood gave with a groan under my weight, but snapped back again and bounced me back against the suits hanging in the back of the closet. Cursing, I drew myself up and tried it again. I relished the snap of cracking wood and felt the door give way even more. A couple hard ones now . . .

I checked myself suddenly, hearing a voice from outside. In another moment the key grated in the lock and the door was pulled open to reveal Toni la Rue's anxious, frightened face.

"Thank heaven you are not killed!" she exclaimed as I stumbled into the room. "But how—What—"

"Thank heaven you got tired of waiting," I cut in, dragging her toward the door. "Come on. We've got to find that chick, but pronto!"

I practically swept her down the stairs to the ground floor because I didn't have time to wait for the elevator. On the way down I got the drift of what she was trying to tell me between agonized puffs of breathing. Linda Enright had come running out of the apartment with the shotgun in her hands, and fury written in her face like fever. Without giving a look one way or another, she had piled into an automobile and sent it crashing down the street.

"I knew it was she," gasped Toni as we emerged onto the street. "I—I didn't know what to do. I shot at her car, but I don't believe it hit anything. She—she turned right at the next corner."

I tramped on the starter before I got into the seat, and the car took off like a whippet. "What kinda car?" I asked, pulling my door shut with one hand as I spun the wheels with the other.

"Black, very low, with the top down."

I gritted my teeth and bent tensely over the wheel. There was damn slim chance of locating her now, I knew, but it was worth every ounce of effort. I spun at the next corner. It was an express highway leading to the Ramp. Three blocks ahead a pair of red taillights weaved in and out of the sparse traffic.

I leaned on my horn and pushed the accelerator down to the floor. The car groaned and began to eat up the macadem in long, shuddering gulps. Thank the Lord the lights were green all the way. Cross traffic at Broadway or Sixth Avenue would have stopped me quicker than a broken axle.

Halfway between Tenth and Eleventh my luck changed as the traffic light turned yellow. I would have kept going, except a convoy of trucks began to lumber slowly out of Eleventh Avenue heading toward some warehouses. Instead I jammed my foot on the

brake and reached for the hand brake. The car screamed and bucked like a lassoed calf, then slowed down to a panting stop at the very edge of the intersection.

I looked at the girl beside me and swore softly. She was halfway out of her seat where the momentum had flung her.

"Honk at them," she pleaded. "Make them let us through."

I shook my head. Those trucks were bumper-to-bumper, and they had waited so long for this green light they weren't going to give way to anybody. Meanwhile the sleek roadster of Linda Enright was up on the Ramp, grinding out the straightaway toward the Cross County Parkway and Westchester.

What was that address my old man had given me over the phone? All I could think of was Yadhity Yah Yah! Some kind of 'glen', I thought he had said. Well, I knew Larchmont slightly. When we got there we could look around for Glen-whatever-it-was, even if we had to use the phone directory.

The last of the trucks lumbered across the cobble-stoned street just as the traffic light changed to amber again. We had lost about twelve minutes here, and more by the time we got up onto the Ramp. Disconsolately I shoved my car across the road and swung under the el, to the incline. "Sit back and enjoy the ride," I said. "The race is over."

Nevertheless I didn't idle, once I reached the smooth elevated highway paralleling the Hudson. The speed limit was thirty-five and I kept right up to it, although by now Linda Enright could be miles and miles ahead. Well, we'd get there. I was just hoping we'd get there in time to take that shotgun out of her hands.

Nearing the George Washington Bridge, we passed a filling station, probably the last before we reached the country. I glanced at my gas meter and was reassured; no trouble from that score.

"Smoke?" I asked. I fished out two cigarettes and gave them to Toni to light. Mine tasted sweetly lipstickky when she handed it back to me.

A car went past me at this point, going about sixty. I decided that if he could go that fast, so could I, since the cops would be more interested in a low, sleek black sports job than in my battered, dusty coupe—

**I** SAT up boltright at just the instant Toni let out a cry. We must have recognized that black roadster at the same instant, and before either of us could utter an articulate word I had jammed down hard on my gas.

"That's the car!" Toni gasped, coming to the edge of her seat again.

"I know," I murmured, tense at the wheel. "She came out of that filling station. Wonder



if your shot nicked a tire? It would have taken just about this long to get a change job."

I let the conjecture go at that and concentrated on keeping pace with the Cadillac, or was it a Lincoln? My speedometer climbed steadily to seventy and clung there, vibrating like a reed. Luckily the traffic was almost nonexistent. What few cars there were on the road slipped behind me in a blur.

She was heading for the Cross County Parkway, alright. But despite her speed I didn't know if she was aware that I was trailing her or not. I didn't think she was. So much the better, although when she did find out, that roadster would probably lose me in a burst of carbon monoxide.

We left Manhattan and burned two or three sideroads leading into the Bronx suburbs. About this time Linda must have noticed she was being tailed, because she put on a terrific burst of speed that shook my speedometer high above seventy. That was all right with me. I like a good pace as much as the next guy, although from the way my car was throbbing I wasn't sure how it was taking this exorbitant demand upon its old age.

We were in the Westchester area already, where traffic had thinned to a trickle. Quarter of a mile ahead Enright's rear lights burned for a turn-off, and I gratefully let up on the gas. A couple of reflector-studded roadsigns whizzed past, which I thought said Larchmont, and in another moment my tires shrieked around the turn and I thundered down a hill into a sideroad, with the roadster's lights just disappearing around a bend a thousand feet ahead.

This sideroad was narrow and winding as a length of spaghetti. The chick knew it, though. She whipped along at sixty or better, slowing for only those curves she knew were dangerous. I began to fall behind until we hit a piece of straight-away, then slowly I gained on her. About that time she decided to toss in the sponge. Her lights glowed up malevolently and she pulled over to the side of the road.

That was better, I thought. I shoved down my brake and swung over behind her. I was slowing down about a hundred feet to the rear, when suddenly she stepped out of her car into the glare of my lights, threw the shotgun to her shoulders, and fired both barrels at me at once.

That was it. Chalk it up on the score of Rand Barron IV, for future reference when the boobies are awarded. Oh, I ducked the blast, alright. So did Toni. All we got were some glass splinters in the face and some ripped clothing. But my car felt like a toy balloon caught under a steamroller. I distinctly heard both front tires burst into rags,

and felt the steering wheel tear out of my numbed fingers, as I zigzagged drunkenly into a gully. The car bounced to a standstill, and then seemed to settle, like an old man sinking into a wheelchair.

By the time I peered over the windshield, the black roadster was grinding down the road again at top speed. I could have flipped a couple of shots after her—but why? She wasn't supposed to be a gun-toting, easy-killing mama who shot up people in cold blood and left them for dead in a ditch. No, indeed! She was the well-educated, cultured daughter of a socially prominent family. Yeah!

"You okay?" I asked, when I could get around to thinking prosaic things again.

"She—she is a fiend!" gasped Toni la Rue. "I won't argue with you there," I muttered. I patted her knee and climbed out to inspect the damage. Plenty. Both front tires were a shambles, my radiator grill was shot to bits, and steam was boiling through a crack in the water casing. I gave Enright a little credit for charity; the core of that blast had been aimed at my tires, not at me.

What next? I took a disheartened look up and down the road, then slid back into the car and fished up two more cigarettes. We were stuck, alright. The chance of another car coming this way before morning was about nil. We could either sit in the car all night, which wouldn't have been a bad idea under other circumstances, or we could mosey back down the street and hope to find a lighted house where we could use the telephone.

I was mentally tossing a coin, when suddenly a shimmer of light spilled over the fragments of my windshield from behind. I swung the door open and leaped out. A car was coming toward us from the direction of New York City. I stepped up onto the crown of the road and waved my arms, hoping like hell the driver could see my white shirt.

He did. He slowed down, the car purring as quietly as a hearse. It was a big sedan, and two other guys were sitting in the tonneau. I held the rear door open for Toni, then climbed in beside her onto the little pull-back seats you find in limousines this big, just as the car took off again.

I thought these guys in the back were crowding us a little close; and then I was sure of it, because I could begin to smell the faint odor of garlic.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Sunk in the Sound

**T**EX O'HARA, who was driving, tossed me a look over his shoulder.

"You love birds have a little car trouble?"



"No," I said. "We would rather ride with you."

"You're doing it," he said, and laughed unpleasantly.

He was driving slowly and seemed to know the road. The two other people in the car were Sad Sammy and Pansy, sprawled comfortably on the rear seat behind us. A nice friendly little trio out for a clam bake, I supposed.

Was he chasing Linda Enright? Or had he been chasing me? And if it was a chase, why was he idling along at thirty, as though he were on a Sunday drive through the park? And if it wasn't a chase, then what was he doing on this particular road at this time of night, with his favorite torpedoes along for company?

"Going far?" I asked, when I couldn't get the answers by myself.

"Not far," said O'Hara.

He wasn't exactly inviting a quiz program. So I settled back to mull over another problem. Which one of these hoods was the garlic eater? It wasn't either Sammy or Pansy, because the odor was too faint. And it wasn't O'Hara, because I had been talking close-up to him earlier this evening. And I knew damn well it wasn't Toni. So Garlic Face had been in the car recently, but wasn't now. Well, add that to the other pile. Stack 'em all up. This merry-go-round was getting dizzier by the minute.

We drove for about ten more minutes, making turns here and there, until we came out on a beach road next to the Sound. I remembered what my father had said about the Enright's summer house, and I kept my eyes peeled for signs until we made a turn-off. Then I saw the legend: ENRIGHT.

This road was a downgrade for about two hundred yards toward the water, then made a fork. One way led to a circular gravel drive in front of a white-painted, sprawling mansion that was tightly boarded up, from what I could see in the splash of O'Hara's headlights.

The other road, the one we took, curved down a still steeper, bumpier grade to a boathouse at the water's edge. It was a good sized building with two stories and a chimney, and it was all lighted up like Macy's windows on Thursday night.

O'Hara stopped the car and climbed out, taking Sad Sammy with him. Toni la Rue and I were left in the tender care of Pansy, who lounged on the running board with one hand in his coat pocket.

O'Hara and Sam put their hands in their pockets too and walked toward the boathouse. They were gone about three minutes, when Sammy came back and told Pansy to let me come.

"But not the dame," he said.

Pansy took the trouble to lift the pistol from my pocket, then followed me down the path to the boathouse. I found O'Hara standing just inside the door in a cozy, pine-paneled little nest, complete with stone fireplace, bear rugs, a player-phonograph, books, bottles, and a bloody-headed corpse.

The corpse was that of a man sprawled in the open doorway to a staircase which led down to the boat mooring. He was face-down and distinctly un-pretty, because he had taken what looked like both barrels of a shotgun pointblank in the face.

"You wanted to find him," said O'Hara coldly. "There he is."

I felt my insides do a couple of flim-flams and I reflexively reached for a cigarette.

"Hmm," I remarked.

"This is the logical way for a rat like Mantee to cash in," said O'Hara uncharitably. "I don't blame the dame a bit. Not a bit."

So he knew about Linda Enright? Maybe that phone girl at the apartment had tipped him off about Linda's tearing through the lobby with a shotgun in her hands. That might be unfortunate, very unfortunate.

O'Hara looked straight at me. "It was supposed to be a snatch job. Mantee wanted me in on it. Offered me a half cut. But I told him to head in. I'm playing a straight game, I told him. I even warned him not to go through with it. Now look. The girl somehow got a heater and gave him everything it would hold. She's probably at the cops now, shooting her mouth. There'll be a hellova mess."

I pulled hard on my cigarette. "How come you're here?" I wanted to know.

"Mantee called me an hour ago and said he had the dame out here, and he wanted me to handle the contact with her old man. I tried again to talk him out of a shakedown, and when he wouldn't listen I decided to come out myself and get the girl away by force, if I had to."

"How come you are so interested in Linda Enright?"

"I don't give a damn about her. It's my reputation I'm worried about. Mantee is known as one of my boys. Whatever he does, people will blame on me. This now!" He jerked his thumb toward the corpse. "If the cops find Mantee like that, and Enright blows her top to the D. A., who the hell will they think was behind the snatch? I told you I'm a three-time loser. I can't even afford suspicion!"

**WELL,** I said, "you're going to have a fine time explaining yourself clean. The cops'll want to know why you didn't call them in when you first heard of Mantee's



plans, for one thing. Accessory before the fact, they'll call it in polite legal phraseology. Another thing, how come you happened to know the road so well. You've driven out here before."

O'Hara grinned and picked up a newspaper-wrapped parcel from a table. "You won't have a story to blab either, Mr. Barron." He unwrapped the parcel and showed me the sawed-off shotgun I had seen earlier in the possession of Linda Enright.

"This is the gun she did it with," he went on. "I found it lying on the floor here where she dropped it. But d'you think the police will ever find it?" He shook his head. "The cops won't find anything. I'm gonna deep-six 'em both—the gun and the stiff. Then I'm gonna clean up the mess around here, so nobody will know from nothing. Get it?"

I wasn't sure I did get it.

"No stiff, no gun—no crime," he explained simply. "The girl talks. You talk, maybe. But who'll believe such a crazy story with no evidence to back it up. They'll figure she's making a publicity gag for a movie career or something. At least it'll keep my name in the clear."

"So the corpse goes into the Sound?" I queried. I didn't think that was a bad idea. From what I knew of the case, Mantee deserved the bump-off, so why not hush it up all the way around? Carter Enright would like it that way. So would Linda, probably. So would the League for Decency.

"Maybe that's a good idea," I told him. "So long as you know the chance you're taking, obstructing justice and all that."

"I'll take that chance." O'Hara placed the shotgun back down on the table. "Sam! Pansy! Hunt up some chains and weights. Pal Vic here is gonna feed the fish."

Sad Sammy and Pansy scurried around in search of the ballast, leaving me alone in the room with O'Hara. He had his peepers fixed on me in a way I found disturbing.

"To make this work," he explained, "we'll have to keep you out of circulation for a few days, till the fish have time to work on that stiff."

That idea wasn't so good. I didn't have a chance to object, however, because the door banged open suddenly and Toni la Rue stepped into the room. She took two strides inside the door, spotted the dead man, and let out a scream that could be heard a mile.

We both jumped. And before we could get that ringing scream out of our ears, Toni had stambled halfway across the room.

"No, no!" she sobbed. "Victor! Victor, *cheri!*"

O'Hara cursed and started for the girl. As he caught up with her, she whirled upon him like a fury.

"She did this! That Enright woman! She killed my Victor!"

"Shut up!" snarled O'Hara. "Shut your face! Shut it, you hear!"

He raised his hand to strike her across the mouth, when Sad Sammy came in lugging some heavy chains. O'Hara dropped his hand and caught the girl's wrist, jerking her violently.

"Sam, get this twist outta here! Put her in the car. Sap her, if you hafta, but keep her outta here."

Sammy's chains clattered to the floor and he grabbed Toni and threw her across his shoulder. She had become suddenly limp. I wondered if she had passed out, but I couldn't see her face from where I stood.

"That damn dame—" cursed O'Hara, and then seemed to forget her as he turned his attention to the corpse. "Come over here. Take his shoulders while I turn him over."

"Who, me?"

"Come over here!" he rapped.

I didn't much like the idea, but I took a good grip on myself and walked over to the body. I seemed to smell the odor of blood. Stealing myself, I bent over to grasp the crimson-stained shoulders.

O'Hara had the feet lifted off the floor. He glowered at me. "Straighten his arms at his sides so he won't flop around," he growled. "What are you, a sissy?"

I had seen worse than this overseas—much worse, but violent death is always squeamish, and a man doesn't have to apologize for not relishing it. Obediently I straightened out the dead man's arms and tucked his hands in at his sides. He was still warm and flaccid.

"Now," said O'Hara.

Together we lifted the cadaver and flopped it over on its back. I avoided looking at the head as I straightened up.

At this point Sad Sammy came back in, wiping lipstick off the back of his hand.

"She's quiet now," he announced, grinning as though he'd hit a homerun in the big league.

O'Hara didn't answer. He laid out some chain and gestured to Sammy to help him tie up the body. He was sweating.

I decided this was as good a time as any to take a powder. I made a coughing noise and put my hand up to my mouth.

"I think I'll step outside for some air," I muttered.

O'Hara looked up ghoulishly. "Not so damned tough, are you, mouthpiece?" he chided.

I STUMBLED to the doorway, keeping my hand across my mouth. Behind me O'Hara broke into a nasty laugh; but when I got outside the last laugh was mine as I made a



bee-line for his sedan parked in the driveway.

Toni la Rue's luscious long legs were sprawled over the driver's seat, and I shoved them out of my way and tramped on the starter all at the same time. The motor caught with a rich purr of hi-test gasoline. I clenched gears and let out the clutch, and the big car started wildly up the hill with the accompaniment of rapid backfiring.

Then a tinkling of glass and a burning sensation across my shoulder told me it wasn't backfire. All three of those guys had run out at the same time and were throwing enough lead to armor-plate a destroyer.

I zigzagged crazily, ripping up bushes and stones, raising a curtain of dense yellow dust. After misaligning a couple of wheels, I reached the paved road and swung the car back toward town.

Toni la Rue stayed out until we had crossed the river and were back in upper Manhattan. I happened to glance over and see her sprawled back on the seat, her body limp, her head thrust forward and her eyes fixed abstractly on the dash-board. She might have been conscious for the past fifteen minutes, for all the noise she was making.

"Where can I drop you?" I asked.

She shook her head vacantly. Her eyes were dry as ash; I wished she would cry and go to pieces, to let all that emotion bubble out. I didn't like her holding everything in like that.

"There's nothing you can do," I told her. "By now the body is sunk in the Sound. All traces of that crime have been removed. For your own good, you better forget."

"She killed him," she muttered dryly, as though the words were being eked out of a phonograph record. "She killed him . . ."

"Forget it! That's the only thing you can do."

We drove in silence the rest of the way to the 46th Street exit, then I swung down off the ramp. She gave me the name of a small hotel off Broadway.

"Remember this," I said, letting her out. "O'Hara doesn't want the police to know about this. As you yourself said, he's an ugly man. He will kill you if you talk. Why die?"

It was as straight as I could give it to her, but I doubted if it sank in very deep. She stood on the sidewalk, looking at me with that attitude of stunned helplessness. I hated to leave her that way, but I had other things to do in a hurry.

Two blocks away I parked by a drugstore and went in to use the telephone. It had occurred to me during the drive back from Westchester that Linda Enright was no dope. She would know the consequences of killing a man, even a man like Mantee, and being smart, what would she do? I figured she get

in touch either with her father or her father's lawyer.

Acting on that hunch, I put through a call to my residence. The Old Gentleman himself answered the phone, and I immediately detected restrained anxiety in his usually placid voice.

"Linda Enright called me an hour ago from some place in Westchester," he said. "She was hysterical and badly frightened. Something about shooting someone. She was too hysterical to be coherent, so I instructed her to go to a hotel, and then sent Dr. Blandy over to take care of her. He called a short while ago to say she was resting and couldn't be questioned before morning. That's one facet of the situation. I presume you know the others?"

"Some of 'em," I admitted. "What hotel?"

"The St. Andrew, room eleven-oh-seven. But she can't be disturbed. She—"

"This can't wait until morning," I interrupted, and he knew it was urgent or I wouldn't have cut him short. "I'll have to ask her some questions now. Are you going to wait up a bit? I'll be home shortly."

"It's past twelve," he told me. "If I should doze, you'll find me in my chair in the library."

I said I wasn't surprised, and hung up. Ten minutes later I walked into the small lobby of the St. Andrew Hotel and took a rheumatic elevator to the eleventh floor. Dr. Blandy opened the door for me. He looked tired and distraught and a little peeved.

"I told your father distinctly—" he began, and I cut in on him impatiently as I entered the room. "How is she?" I asked. I looked around the suite until my gaze rested on a halfway closed bedroom that revealed darkness inside.

"Calmed down, but still frightfully apprehensive," he said, watching me closely. "I gave her a sedative, but her excitement is cutting through it. Please don't be long."

He stepped outside the door and closed it behind him softly. However, the sound must have been loud enough to penetrate to the bedroom, for in a moment the bedroom door opened and Linda stood facing me.

She was dressed in a slip and was barefooted, and looked like a doll of a child awakened in the night by a strange noise.

"How—how did you get here?" she breathed, her eyes widening suddenly with fright. She looked anxiously around the room. "What have you done with the doctor?"

WHAT do you mean, 'What have I done with him'?" I demanded. I took a step toward her, but checked myself as she recoiled away. "Listen," I said angrily, "you act as though you think I'm going to hang



one on you, or something. I'm only trying to help you. What do I get for it, but both barrels of a shotgun and a wrecked automobile. If you had stopped to listen to me earlier tonight, all this might not have happened. Now listen!"

Her hands moved to her throat uncertainly. She regarded me with the blank expression of someone listening to a foreign language. "You killed a man," I told her. "He deserved to die, I admit. But it's nevertheless murder, see? That means a homicide charge, a trial, a lot of publicity. That's bad. But here's something worse. A character named O'Hara was out there at the boathouse tonight. He's got the shotgun and the body. He's sunk the body in the Sound and tossed in the gun, for good measure, where only he knows where they are. Only he didn't toss in the gun, get it? He's keeping that—with your fingerprints on it. It that clear to you, Miss Enright?"

I didn't find out if it was clear to her or not. She continued to stare at me with that expressionless, distant expression that made me feel we were on different planets. Well, it was her funeral.

"The only way to beat the blackmail that O'Hara is certainly planning for you is to turn yourself in—now. You've a good excuse for this killing. You'll probably get cleared by a jury. And the little inconvenience of a few weeks in jail and some mashy notoriety are certainly worth the pressure that O'Hara could bring against your father if you try to keep this in the dark. Think of him, if not yourself."

She didn't respond to that, either. She seemed to get my drift alright, but not one flicker of emotion worked through that icy veneer she called a face.

"Think it over, Miss Enright. We'll talk to you again tomorrow after you've had some sleep. But better make a decision soon. The longer you put it off, the better chance O'Hara will have of blackmailing your father for more money than you could earn if there were ten of you all married to bankers."

I opened the door and called Dr. Blandy back. "We'll try to send over a nurse to relieve you. Meanwhile, keep her away from open windows. She's acting funny as hell."

It was after one now, and the street in front of the hotel was deserted. But I had walked only halfway across the street to the sedan I had swiped from O'Hara, when a voice came at me from close behind.

"That your car, bud?"

I turned swiftly to confront a uniformed cop whose face was vaguely familiar. "Uh—which car?" I asked, working up a fast lie. "This sedan?"

"Yeah, this sedan."

"Not mine," I answered calmly. "My car's busted. I'm walking these days."

He eyed me suspiciously, and finally peered closer into my face with frank curiosity. "Ain't you Mr. Barron, the lawyer?"

"I'm one of 'em, yes. You're—lemme see—Macy of the hotel squad?"

"Right," he said, and grinned broadly. Then he told me why he was curious about the owner of the sedan.

"I was about a block down the street. A couple of sailors were walking ahead of me, and 'bout the time they passed this car they both stopped, as though they'd heard something funny. Then one of 'em walks over to the luggage compartment of the car and opens it up. Whamo! A guy comes outta there like a jack-in-the-box, slugs the sailor, and takes off down the alley. Me, I started after him, but by the time I got here both the guy and the two gobs had scrambled. Whadya make of that, huh?"

I looked in the luggage compartment for myself. There was fresh blood on the metal braces on the roof of the compartment, where a person's head would have struck during the bumpy ride in Westchester.

"What did the guy look like?" I wanted to know.

Macy shrugged. "It was dark, and he was moving fast. A big guy, I'd say, with dark hair."

That could be Pansy, I thought. But what was Pansy doing in the luggage compartment of O'Hara's car, unless O'Hara had planted him there to tail me?

I told Macy I didn't know anything about it. The car was probably stolen, I pointed out, and the guy might have been the owner whom the thief had stuffed in there during a joy ride. It was his worry.

I left him at the curb scratching his head, and caught a cruising taxi to take me home.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Fall Guy

I FOUND my father exactly where I expected to find him—asleep in a chair in the library, with an open copy of *The Political Essays of John Fiske* spread on his bony lap. He waked when he heard the stream of soda water rattle into my highball glass.

"Hrrrumph!" he said, clearing his throat and trying to make me think he'd been in deep thought, "I presume you've seen Miss Enright?"

I nodded, offering him the glass. He refused it with the same worried shake of his head that he has refused it with for the past forty years, according to my Mother, and so I sat down opposite him, taking a healthy



pull on it myself and found it very good.

"Here's the story." I got down a couple of more fast swallows, then I launched into my recital, from the time Garlic Face had shot at me in the alley, to the guy who'd been crammed in the luggage compartment of O'Hara's car. Telling it objectively like that, I began to see a lot of loose ends that didn't tie together. Who was Garlic Face? Why had he shot at me, even before I knew of the case, or before anyone else knew I was going to handle the case? What was Mantee's racket? And what was Pansy, if it was Pansy, doing in the back of the car?

My father's brows puckered thoughtfully and he leaned back in his chair, touching the fingertips of one hand to the fingertips of the other.

"To predicate surmises upon such dissociated facts is misleading," he began in his best courtroom manner. "The gravest surmise, jurisprudentially, is that Victor Mantee was shot dead by Linda Enright. She admits shooting someone. You saw a corpse. However, Linda Enright was in love with Mantee. She had obviously been providing him with a hideaway from his enemies, some of whom allegedly had earlier made attempts upon his life. Why, then, did she shoot him? That is the first of several inconsistencies in your reasoning."

"She shot him because she learned about his marriage to Toni la Rue. Mantee was a rat. She found it out too late to undo her marriage to him, but not too late to undo his hold on life. I told you what she looked like when she walked out of his apartment with that gun in her arms."

My father crinkled his nose as though I smelled bad to him. "You recognize half a fact and repudiate the other half. What was Linda doing in Mantee's apartment in the first place, when they were supposed to be honeymooning at the boathouse. Obviously Mantee had sent her after his shotgun. Why? Because he feared further attempts on his life, and couldn't himself risk coming into the city to fetch the weapon. That would account also for Linda's attitude toward you. She obviously mistook you for one of the hoodlums after her husband. Did you explain that you were my son? Certainly not. You're lucky you weren't shot dead when you opened that door on her. Then, to make matters worse, you follow her in your car. She shoots at you. Why? Because she thinks you are trying to reach Mantee by following her. Now is it logical that the same girl would return to the boathouse and cold-bloodedly assassinate the man she has been trying to protect?"

"Okay," I said, draining my glass. "If she didn't shoot Mantee, whom did she shoot? And where is Mantee now?"

"You remarked that you thought O'Hara had been at the boathouse before, from the way he knew the road. Very well. Isn't it conceivable that while Linda was at the apartment holding you at bay, O'Hara, acting on information supplied by the telephone girl in that apartment house, drove out to the boathouse and surprised Mantee. And later, when Linda arrived, she was confronted by one of these hoodlums, whom she instantly shot. That, too, would account for the hoodlum who was missing, the garlic smelling one."

The old gentleman's logic was beginning to interest me. I found it pleasant to imagine Garlic Face as the guy who took both barrels of the shotgun point-blank in the face.

"Then what did O'Hara do with Mantee?" I wanted to know.

My father arched his brows at me. "What indeed? Inasmuch as he was pressed for time, he deposited him, probably unconscious, in the luggage compartment of the sedan. At this point, O'Hara had probably struck upon the daring plan of framing Mantee's alleged murder on Linda for blackmail purposes by using the hoodlum she did shoot as Mantee. This would mean disposing of Mantee in a very thorough manner later on. By stealing the car you undoubtedly threw him into great consternation—to wit the shots he took at you as you drove away. He certainly would not have shot, if one of his own men had been in the luggage compartment."

"Hmm," I said, temporizing to catch up to the long strides of his mind. "Then Mantee is loose in New York somewhere?"

"Yes," he concurred. "He's loose, and he's a marked man, as far as O'Hara is concerned. What's worse, O'Hara may learn from short wave that his stolen car has been found in the vicinity of the St. Andrew Hotel, and that would invite even more dangerous complications . . ."

The strident ring of the doorbell cut him short. He came halfway out of his chair, the copy of Fiske toppling to the floor.

"That will be Enright. I told him you were coming over."

I went to the door and admitted Enright. He was more distraught than an expectant father, but he shook my hand gratefully.

"I've just talked with Dr. Blandy. He left Linda sleeping. Thank Heaven she's alright!"

"He left her sleeping?" I queried. "Is she alone?"

"Oh, no—the nurse arrived. She—"

**NURSE?** What nurse?" I swung to confront my father as he came into the hall. "Did you send a nurse over to relieve Dr. Blandy?"

"No nurse was available. I—"

I scooped up the telephone. In a moment I



had the St. Andrew night manager by the ear. He admitted a nurse had arrived, and that Dr. Blandy had left. He gave a perfect description of Toni la Rue!

"Let's go," I yelled, with a hollowed-out sensation in my stomach. I didn't try to disguise the menace from either Enright or my father. We piled into Enright's car, and I sent it crashing out of our driveway.

Five minutes later we ground to a stop opposite the hotel. Enright started at a run across the street; I stayed a half moment longer to talk to my father.

"Will you wait here?" I clipped. "Linda's room is that top lighted window, on the alley side. If you see anyone on the fire-escape or on the roof, lean up here and honk this horn for all you're worth."

He nodded his head grimly. He didn't like to play cops-and-robbers much, at his age, but he was as gamey as an old Cocker Spaniel.

I caught up with Enright just as he entered the elevator, and we rode the ten flights in agonizing silence. As the door opened at eleven, the house dick came forward from near Linda's closed door.

"I knew there was something fishy, the way the manager explained about the nurse," he volunteered. "But the lady is alright. I just checked. No nurse ever showed up in her room. The elevator man let her out on this floor, but she disappeared before reaching the suite."

"Disappeared?" I questioned. I looked up and down the hallway.

"She could be on the stairs, or up on the roof," he said. "But she ain't in the room."

Enright didn't bother with this theory. He started to push past me to Linda's door. I caught his arm.

"Wait! No use worrying her more, right now. Let's find Toni la Rue. Check the stairs, charwomen's closets, and vacant rooms," I instructed the house dick. "Mr. Enright, let's take the fire escape and roof. She can't be far . . ."

Grudgingly Enright followed me to a closed window at the end of the hall that opened onto the fire escape. The window was unlocked and went up soundlessly. Peering out, I could see my father sitting stoically in the car on the street below. I waved, and he waved in reply. Then I climbed out onto the fire platform and started up the iron ladder.

In the moonlight, visibility was excellent. The elevator housing and ventilators stood in sharp contrast against the blue-black night. It looked deserted enough. I started the rest of the way up, when I stopped so suddenly I nearly knocked Enright off the ladder beneath me.

"Here she is," I said softly. I hurried up the remaining rungs and swung my legs over

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the low parapet, making room for the older man to follow.

The body of Toni la Rue lay sprawled just beneath the parapet, face-up, arms and legs outflung in grotesque, helpless gesticulation. Moist blood zigzagged crazily from her contorted mouth.

"Is—is—" puffed Enright, sucking in his breath heavily.

"Very dead, is the expression." I knelt beside the body for a closer look, without touching anything. Black bruises formed a swollen choker around her neck. One heel was broken off. Her nylons were tattered shreds. The backs of her legs were smeared with soft tar that was still tacky on the roof.

"Strangled to death and then dragged up here out of the way," I said. "That means—"

The blast of an automobile horn cut me short. Enright jerked upright. The horn blared shrilly again and again.

"That's my car!" he cried.

"Yeah." My lips felt dry as I stood up. "Let's get down below."

I stepped past him to the parapet and leaned over. I was just in time to see a man climb through the window of Linda Enright's room, which opened onto the fire platform's farther end. I wasn't sure, but I thought I heard Linda cry out.

Cursing myself for not having a gun now of all times, I swung my legs over the ladder and slid down to the platform. The automobile horn stopped now; but I didn't take time to acknowledge this to the old gentleman. I reached Linda's room in three strides and dropped over the sill, counting on sheer surprise to give me the drop on the man who had preceded me.

But I needn't have been in such a hurry. The man was lying face-down across a couch, his chest heaving heavily. Linda was kneeling beside him, her arms around his neck, calling his name softly. His clothing was tattered and grease-stained. Dried blood caked the side of his head. I didn't need to hear his name to know he was Vic Mantee.

**WE'LL** have Dr. Blandy back, pronto," I said. I ignored Linda's gasp of recognition; our little song-and-dance was over. I caught Mantee's shoulders and turned him over on his back. His face was flaccid, but the eyes were normal. It wasn't concussion, at least.

"He probably lost a lot of blood," I told the girl. I let him settle back, then turned my attention to his shoes. They were scuffed, but devoid of any tar. But still I couldn't be sure. He might have strangled Toni la Rue and dragged her to the roof, without himself stepping in the tar.

I got about that far when Linda's father

came through the window behind me. I turned, expecting Linda to run to his open arms. Instead she backed off defiantly.

"This is my husband, you hear?" she cried. "My husband!"

Enright stood by the window, his arms hanging with limp helplessness. "Linda, dearest! Oh, my dear girl!"

I felt sorry for Enright, he looked so abjectly incapable of doing anything; but I had to cut in on him to get to the bottom of this quickly.

"Then he divorced Toni la Rue?" I asked Linda.

"Their marriage was annulled the day they arrived in this country. It was never really a marriage. It was arranged only so Toni could be brought into the country, as the wife of an American citizen."

"How much of your husband's activities do you know about?"

"He was doing some work for Army Intelligence—something to do with Tex O'Hara. The Army asked him to do it because of his former association with O'Hara. O'Hara got suspicious and tried several times to kill him."

"Is that why you hid at the boathouse?"

"Yes, Vic was afraid they'd try to get at him through me, when it came out that we were married. He had nearly finished his investigation. He had the information almost ready to turn over to the Army."

"Was Toni la Rue helping him?"

"Yes."

I turned to Enright, who looked more baffled than ever before. "I think I can supply the rest of the facts. This racket Mantee was investigating involved thousands of deserted and AWOL soldiers, who wanted to get back to this country from Europe. O'Hara's racket was bringing them back—at several hundred dollars per head. The Army suspected O'Hara, but needed proof. They asked Mantee to help.

"Mantee, in turn, enlisted the help of Toni la Rue. She was an entertainer in Paris, who knew a lot of these GI's by sight."

"Then who strangled her?" Enright asked quickly. He glanced dubiously at Mantee. He had taken so much these past twenty-four hours, he was no longer sure of anything.

"O'Hara strangled her. He was afraid she might have recognized that corpse as not being Mantee's—which would wreck his blackmail plan."

"B—but why this blackmail? I don't see—"

"You own Enright Lines, don't you? You have half a dozen ships plying between here and Europe, haven't you? That's why O'Hara wanted a hold over you, through your daughter. If his plan had worked, he'd be smuggling thousands of wanted GI's back to this country *in your ships!*"

Enright drew his breath sharply.



"Let's not be calling each other nasty names," said a voice behind Enright.

Enright and I swung together, like a pair of dancers. Linda gasped. I should have been prepared for this, but I wasn't. I stood my ground helplessly as Tex O'Hara swung the muzzle of a Tommy gun equally between me and Enright from where he stood on the platform, just outside the window.

"I guess I've heard about enough," he said softly. "So the rest won't take very long. I'll just chop this place up a bit, then drop ol' Vic and the gun over the railing here. Triple murder and suicide. It ain't what I planned, but you haven't left me any other choice."

A tight, nervous laugh ripped through his lips. He swung the gun deliberately toward Enright.

"You first, grandpa."

"One question, O'Hara!" I cried in a desperate stall for time. Humor him. Flatter him. Do anything for time! "One question. That—that hood with the garlic? Why'd you put him on me? That one's got me stumped."

"Has it?" he jeered. For an instant his gun swung back to me. "I'll tell you, mouth-piece. He was hoppy, see? He was one of the boys I brought back from France, but he was hoppy. He wanted a job, so I put him on grandpa's tail—a harmless job for a hoppy, I thought, till he sees you and recognizes you as an M.P. he's seen overseas someplace. He figured you were on to our racket, so he blows his top. A real hoppy, see? That's why I elected him to walk in on the dame here, when I knew she was heeled with a loaded sawed-off."

**T**HEN you doubled back from the boathouse in time to pick me up on the road, eh?" I asked, thinking of questions as fast as my brain would work. Maybe the house dick would come. Maybe my father had seen O'Hara on the platform and gone for the police. Maybe—

O'Hara's gun swung back to Enright.

"Wait, O'Hara! Tell me how you contacted these GI's in the first place? You must have quite an organization of—"

"Stow it!" he rapped. "I know when I'm getting stalled. Okay, grandpa. Here it comes."

O'Hara lifted the gun a scant half inch and centered it squarely on Enright's chest. Linda screamed. I saw Enright jerk convulsively, and then the shattering roar of the machine gun blasted the silence out of ten city blocks.

But something else happened at the same moment that scattered those slugs over the top of Enright's head. It happened too fast to know exactly what it was. I saw O'Hara throw himself sideways just the instant his gun began to chatter, and fling one arm up over his head. A moment later something crashed down on him from above and hurtled him backwards away from the window. I caught a glimpse of flailing arms and legs, silk-clad legs, smeared with tar, and there was a hoarse scream of terror as the impact drove O'Hara backward over the railing, and then the eerie wail of the scream tearing from his lips in a downward plunge to blackness and then . . . silence.

"That—that was a woman," gasped Linda.

I blinked my eyes and looked around for a convenient place to lie down. Enright had already collapsed on the rug, his face the color of talcum powder. I did better. I landed in a stuffed chair, and sat there trying to get my mouth to close. It felt as though I had a bit in my jaw.

I didn't say anything at all until the house dick and the police arrived a few minutes later; then I explained that the dame had jumped or fallen off the roof and carried Mantee down with her to the alley. They believed me alright, and why shouldn't they? It was a logical enough story, told objectively like that.

I just didn't bother to explain that Toni la Rue had been dead for about half an hour, that's all.

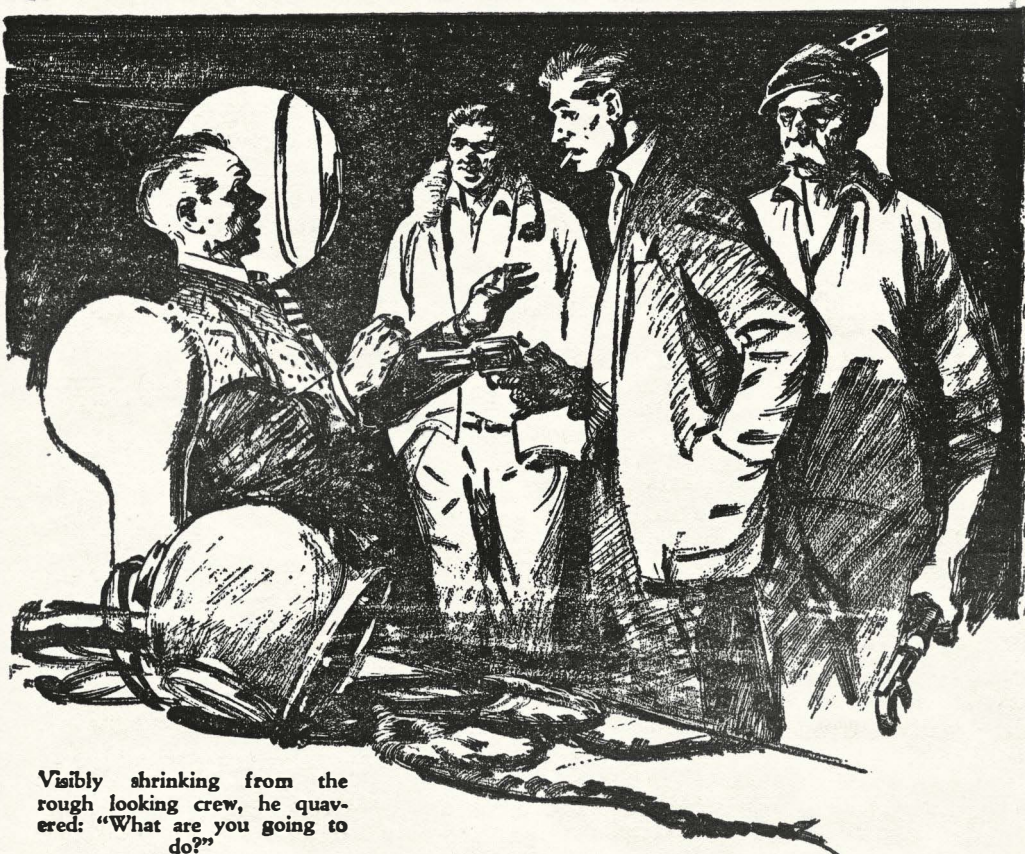
I didn't explain that to my father, either, when we rejoined him down in the car. In fact, after listening for a moment to my father's heavy breathing and seeing the beads of sweat still moist on the back of his thin neck, I decided to never mention the incident.

He's a sensitive man about some things, my father is; and there are some experiences of his scholarly life which he would fain forget. Tonight's experience on the roof of the St. Andrew was one of them.

He even threw away the expensive shoes he had been wearing. I guess he figured the tar would never completely come off.

THE END

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Visibly shrinking from the rough looking crew, he quavered: "What are you going to do?"

# DEATH TAKES A DIVE

By DANIEL GORDON

*When Councilman Meggs tried to muscle in on the marine salvage business, he still had a lot to learn about Davy Jones' locker. He didn't know that down there—unlike oxygen—murder won't turn off!*

IT ISN'T quiet in the woods. You think it is until you count the sounds, the myriad insect noises, the whisper of wind in the trees. And the city—but you know about the city, with the crash and roar of traffic.

But it *is* quiet on the ocean floor.

Doug Stanley, checking the run of his air and life lines and pushing deeper into the sunken yacht, stepped back with the light, the harsh white light, beating against his eyelids. Sweeping the covers back, he sat up in his rumbled bed.

The man behind the light said: "Stanley? . . . Douglas Stanley?"

"Who'd you think? Mamma Bear? Get that light outa my eyes!"

"I'm Halligan."

Doug Stanley looked at him. "Not tough, honest, fearless, Lieutenant Halligan," he said.

"Halligan of homicide," the other said.

Doug Stanley gulped. "Oh. I see. Ah— Had any tonight?"

"One," Halligan said. "Where's Lawton?"

"He's— Look, guy, Lawton's my partner. He wouldn't—"

"We think he's drowned."

Doug Stanley laughed his relief. "A gag," he said, "And at two A. M. What do I do



now, dash out and dive for the body?" The copper actually had him worried for a minute, until he'd come up with that drowning. For no matter how John Lawton tossed in his chips, it wouldn't be by drowning. Together the two of them had survived rum-runners, poison booze, knives and guns in waterfront brawls; then later, the Germans and Japanese. John might have drowned when the two of them started East Coast Salvage. They'd done their diving with risky gear in those days. But not now. Not since John married Paula. He was more business man than diver these days, with nothing more than a wistful look at a diving dress when a tough job had them slowed.

Doug Stanley ripped open a fresh pack of cigarettes and selected one. "You phone John's home?" he asked.

"Yes. He hasn't come home. And you guessed it."

"What?"

"We want you to dive for the body. I'll wait while you dress."

"Coppers!" Doug said fervently as he pulled on his trousers. "What started all this?"

"The watchman on the pier. He saw the light go out in Lawton's office. He turns the corner and hears a splash. He figures Lawton hasn't had time to get off the pier."

"John's been goin' to sea for twenty years," Doug said irritably. "You think he walked overboard?"

"Hurry up."

"Take it easy." Doug stuck a spare pack of cigarettes into the pocket of his jacket. "What did Mrs. Lawton say?"

"She'll be on the pier."

Doug shook his head in disgust as he held the door open for Halligan. John would turn up in the dawn after an all night poker game. Paula was easy to get along with, as near to perfection as a wife could be, Doug guessed. But if she'd spent the night on a windy pier raising them dive for John's body, she'd sure raise hell when John came home.

Halligan talked but little on the way to the docks. Once he said: "Who inherits East Coast Salvage with Lawton dead?"

"I do," Doug told him.

"Isn't that a little—unusual?" Halligan asked.

"Why?"

"Well, there's Mrs. Lawton."

"Oh," Doug said easily. "John never worries about that. There's some other property and he knows I'd take care of Paula if anything happened to that."

"A lovely arrangement," Halligan said. "Very cozy. Only I'll bet he didn't know how soon you'd take care of her."

Doug Stanley realized that he was beginning not to like the guy. In fact he was sure he disliked him. He said quietly: "Copper, I think

your teeth itch. One more crack like that and I'll scratch them for you." He heard Halligan chuckle as the car slid to a stop on the pier.

The floodlights were on and through the throng of policemen, reporters and casual on-lookers, Doug could see Paula Lawton leaning against the corrugated iron of the shed. He raised his hand and saw her answering gesture, then Pop Hamilton came up to him.

"What's up, boss?" Pop said irritably.

Some of Doug's ill-humor vanished as he looked at the gnarled hands, the weathered face. "Break out a dress, Pop. The Lieutenant here thinks that John has walked overboard. I'm to go down and bring up the body."

Pop Hamilton looked at Halligan and snorted. "Cops," he said, and spat expressively into the harbor. He walked away and Doug heard the chunk-chunk of the air compressors begin aboard the *Mary Lou*, watched as the men ran the lines along the margin of wharf to the spot indicated by the night watchman.

THE tenders dressed Doug Stanley, and minutes later he climbed down the ladder and slid into the dark water. He felt the soft impact through the soles of his lead-lined shoes. "On the bottom," he said mechanically into the receiver to the left of his faceplate. "Keep a strain on my lines," he added.

The wire was lying in loose coils. He couldn't see it but he could feel it, pressing softly against his legs, clinging to his feet. He leaned against the slight current and attempted to walk backward on his heels. And touched the body.

He knew when he touched the belt. He couldn't see, but he knew that belt, the silver-studded belt that John Lawton wore. How many times had he needed John about that belt? "Suit like a bank president; belt like a deckhand." "Folds my pants up," John would grin. Well, John wouldn't grin again—unless he was grinning now.

Doug tightened his grip on the body. "Coming up," he said.

"Coming up," Pop Hamilton's voice answered.

They took John Lawton's body from him at the ladder.

He clumped up the ladder, swaying his body from side to side to overcome the weight of the gear. He didn't have to think of that. Habit took care of it. But he did have to think. Boy, how he needed to think!

They didn't wait for the tenders to take the helmet off. They came at him through the faceplate. The dapper man with the light gray suit and the handsome pan pushed his face up close to the round opening. "Didn't take you long to find him," he sneered.

"I don't know who this noisy monkey is, but it's a hell of a world, him alive and kicking

and John, good old John, lying dead here on the dock," thought Doug. "I was lucky," he said evenly.

Lieutenant Halligan drew the tall man away. "It isn't as bad as it looks, Mr. Meggs." Halligan's voice seemed oddly respectful. "We told him where to dive, you know. The night watchman picked the spot."

The man called Meggs said, "Hmph."

They took the helmet off and Doug Stanley ran his finger under the rubber cuff of the dress to help the circulation of blood to his numbed hands. He looked after Meggs. "Who's my buddy?" he asked Halligan.

"Dawson Meggs, city councilman."

"What's he got against me?"

"Nothing but a hunch, probably," Halligan said grimly. "If he knew about that phone call, he'd really be after your scalp."

Bracing himself on the shoulders of his tenders, Doug kicked his feet and wriggled out of the dress. "Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"Won't do any harm to tell you," Halligan mused grudgingly. "I came to get you tonight because of a phone call. It came in just after the watchman phoned from the pier. This one came from a public phone. The guy said: 'Ask Douglas Stanley what's happened to his partner.' The guy wouldn't give his name."

"Then you might say someone else was interested," Doug suggested.

"You might," Halligan answered. "Only there's nobody who'd stand to gain as much as you. If we decide it was suicide—"

"It wasn't," Doug cut him off. "There's a loose coil of wire rope still down there. Somebody had tied a clove-hitch around John's leg."

Halligan looked at him oddly. "Funny," he said.

"Yeah. It's a scream. What's funny?"

"That you should be the guy to tell me. We still remember you, you know. I checked the files before I came to wake you up."

Thinking of John, there on the dock, Doug Stanley found the conversation almost unbearable. Five years ago he would have given the copper a light shove, stopped his yapping with salt water. But now, there was Paula. "I quit it," he said. "Used to murder 'em with an axe, flush 'em down the drain. One a night—except Sundays. I took Sundays off."

"Okay, comedian. Just see you stick around."

Comedian. Walking over to talk to Paula, he didn't feel funny. He felt like hell. All his early years prevented him from showing how he felt. But not to Halligan. Not to a copper. He skirted the shape under the blanket, gingerly, numbly. John Lawton had changed him from a waterfront punk into a partner in a reputable salvage firm. And now John was dead. No tears. Tears didn't help. He didn't

know how to cry. Now if he could get the guy who had got John. . .

Paula said, "Doug—John. . ."

"Easy, lady." Doug patted her arm, watching the cold glare of the lights on the water the gestures of the man called Meggs who was arguing with Halligan. Idly, he wondered why the politician disliked him. Not that he gave a damn. . . "I'll take you home," Doug said to Paula.

She nodded without speaking, her knuckles showing white as she clenched the ball of the handkerchief in her hand.

Halligan came over, saying: "Better come with me, Stanley. No charge. Just suspicion. Your reputaaa—"

Halligan's voice trailed off and ended in a grunt as he hit the dock. Staggering backward over Pop Hamilton's outstretched leg, he clawed for his gun, had it in his hand when the solicitous brushings and helpings of the old man sent it spinning along the planks.

**D**OUg STANLEY heard Halligan's angry oath as he dove into the warehouse shed, and knew that the gun had fallen between the timbers. Clawing his way over crates, slamming them aside and running when he found an aisle, Doug made the door and hurled himself into Halligan's car. The roar of the motor drowned the sounds of footsteps drumming along the pier.

Ditching the police car behind a parking lot, he joined the lonely motorman who was running the first trolley to the suburb where John had lived. He didn't know what Paula thought. He had to talk to her. What Paula thought was very important to him.

He stood in the tall shrubbery in front of the house, remembering John's pride in the place, remembering how thrilled Paula had been. They'd salvaged those sunken barges for the railroad company. East Coast Salvage had been in the chips and John had used his share to buy the house.

The car, its headlights knifing the dark silence, slid along the tree-lined street and came to rest at the curb.

The man got out and opened the door. Dawson Meggs.

"—and again, I cannot express the sympathy I feel," Meggs was saying.

"Thank you, Mr. Meggs. And thanks for bringing me home. I'll let you know," her voice trailed off wearily, "after I've had time to think."

Watching Meggs bow from the waist, Doug repressed the impulse to step out and hang one on him. The Romeo. The damned gigolo. But a fine looking guy, he supposed, by female standards. . .

When the car had gone, he came from behind the shrub and touched the button. The



soft chime sounded within and Doug Stanley remembered the day John had bought the chime job. "Pretty," John had said. "Like a church, kinda."

Paula didn't seem surprised. She said, "Hello, Doug."

"Sorry I had to check," he said. "Halligan's hot for me. I can't figure whether it's that horsing around I used to do on the docks, or something else."

"I know. Dawson Meggs seems to think you did it too."

"And you?"

She looked at him, the gray eyes, the level stare. "Of course not," she said.

Doug Stanley let his breath out, very softly. Not until then did he realize how he had hung upon her answer. "Fine," he said.

Paula said: "Oh, Doug. . ." and sank into a chair.

Mixing the drinks, he could see the pain in her eyes, the tautness beneath the weariness in the lines of her mouth. "What's Meggs want? Just making a routine pass?"

She sat up suddenly. "What makes you think he wanted anything?"

"I dunno. He seemed to hate me pretty bad, for a guy he never saw before."

"He wanted to buy my share of the company," Paula said slowly. "I didn't tell him that you have both shares now. Thought I'd talk to you first."

"Makes no difference. Halligan already knows."

"He seemed quite concerned about it. Meggs, I mean. And it's odd, his wanting to be in the salvage business. He doesn't seem the type, somehow."

Doug nodded. "More like a doctor or lawyer," he said. He kicked it around in his mind. The more he thought about it, the screwier it seemed. East Coast Salvage had a fair take—but only fair. Surely there wasn't enough dough in it to make a guy like Meggs commit murder. True, there was no competition in the harbor. But neither was there much work, not enough, for instance, to make the big firms eager to ease in and squeeze East Coast out.

"When's he comin' back?" Doug asked her.

"Who?"

"Meggs. For his answer."

"Tomorrow."

"Good. Give him a welcome. Tell him you might sell if the price is right. I'll be close by."

"But what? . . ."

"Just this. The guy knows something we don't. Maybe he knows who killed John."

"But, Doug, if only I could have a little time."

"I know," Doug told her, extending his hand, "but time's something we haven't got. Either I get out from under quickly, or else."

He let it go. He had to work fast. Halligan and his men were neither dishonest nor inefficient. His early reputation for brawling around the waterfront made him something less than a lily. And even though he'd had not so much as a traffic ticket for the last five years, it didn't matter. If they had him, they could relax. With the apparent motive he'd had for murdering John, the cops would be more than human if they went around looking for another candidate.

"I'll go out the back way," he said. "Be back tomorrow evening."

He could hear her soft sobbing as he passed through the kitchen.

The day was long. Doug Stanley found the address in the phone book and went to the home of the Mayor. They let him in, and that surprised him a little. He had to wait for the old boy to finish breakfast, but they let him in.

**T**HE Mayor lighted the cigar and waved it genially. "Good morning," he said. "You wished to see me?"

"You got a councilman named Meggs."

"That is correct. Mr. Meggs is on the city council."

"I'm looking for information. I want to know why the guy develops a sudden yen for the salvage business."

"I beg your pardon?"

The Mayor was polite enough. Too damned polite. You wasted a lot of time being that polite. "Brother Meggs," Doug said patiently, "is busier than a skin-diver in a nest of Barracuda. He's losing sleep nights trying to buy a chunk of East Coast Salvage. A guy like that always has a reason."

The Mayor looked at Doug Stanley, looked at him for the first time. "Ah—yes. Of course. Ah, suppose we step into my den?"

Doug Stanley followed the portly figure. The Mayor closed the door.

The cop was entering as he came out. They looked at each other and Doug nodded. The policeman returned the nod, absently, then turned to stare as Doug leaped into the waiting cab.

"Down town," Doug told the driver. He looked back. The cop had changed his mind about going into the Mayor's house. He was running for the blue car— "Step on it," Doug said. "Ten if you shake the car behind."

"I'll go for it until he makes with the siren. If he kicks the siren, deal's off." The driver sent the cab screaming around a corner and trod heavily upon the gas.

The Mayor had been interested, helpful. But cagey. He never interfered with the work of the police force. No, he couldn't call off the cops on the strength of a story that Doug might have dreamt up. . .

Doug Stanley had the ten in his hand when

the siren wailed behind them. "Pleasant ride, chum," he said. "Me for that alley!"

While the cab was still moving, he dove for the opening, reeling from the forward motion. Regaining his balance, he ran, then leaped, hauling himself to the top of a low garage. The cop might not follow the cab.

He didn't. The police car made the alley and cruised through slowly, probing the corners.

From his perch atop the garage, Doug looked down upon it. It had been close. Very close. The car came back once, then went away. Doug Stanley slid to the concrete and began to work his way down town.

Mingling with the crowds, ducking the cops by spending the hours in theatres, he felt that evening would never come. At two in the afternoon, he called the lunchroom opposite the pier. Pop Hamilton would be there. He was always there at two unless the tug was out on a job. Doug Stanley spoke briefly and guardedly. Then he left the drugstore, went into another movie.

Jolting along in the trolley, he tried to remember the pictures he'd seen and found that he could not. John Lawton's face kept coming between him and the images on the screen. Shoulder to shoulder in Panama, in Newfoundland, in Callao, Peru. That time they'd worked over the Callao cops and the old Swiss gal who owned the joint had tried to hire them as bouncers. . . . Doug Stanley got off the trolley and headed for the Lawton cottage.

"I didn't realize," Meggs was saying, "that Stanley would inherit your husband's share of the business."

"It doesn't matter," Paula told him. "Mr. Stanley would give me half if I wanted it."

"You do want it, don't you?" Meggs said.

"Why should I?"

"Yeah. Why should she?" Doug Stanley said, stepping into the living room.

"You—"

"Hold it, Meggs. I got very little to lose by planting a slug in you." Doug turned his hand so Meggs could see the flat gun.

"You can't—"

"I'm going to. Want to save time by telling me why you want in the salvage racket?"

"I don't want a partnership with you," Meggs said. "It seems most unhealthy."

"For you it would be. But we're wastin' time. Get going."

"Where?"

"To the dock. We'll go in your car. I been admiring it." Doug Stanley turned to Paula. "Give us a fifteen minute start, then phone Halligan. Tell him I'm issuing invitations for a ride on the *Mary Lou*."

Paula said worriedly: "Doug, are you sure—"

"It's my only chance," he said. Then, as Meggs rose on the balls of his feet, "Easy,

pretty boy. They don't use any more juice for two murders than they do for one."

The dock lights weren't on. Doug Stanley, his gun pressed gently to Meggs' side, said: "Hi, Joe," to the night watchman.

"Mr. Stanley," the watchman said. "I thought they had you in jail."

Doug grinned at him. "They changed their minds," he said. "We'll be casting off pretty soon. Will you turn on the lights, Joe?"

The tug pulsed with life. Dawson Meggs, visibly shrinking from the rough-looking crew that surrounded him, quavered: "What are you going to do?"

"Give you a taste of the salvage business," Doug informed him. "How do you know you like it if you've never tried?"

"I—"

"Dress him," Doug said to Pop Hamilton.

The old man spat nonchalantly. "Take off your shoes," he said.

Imploringly, Meggs scanned the grim faces. "You realize what you're doing?" he babbled. "You know what this fellow's getting you into?"

A squat seaman rolled forward eagerly. "You want I should knock 'im out, boss?" he said to Doug.

Doug smiled faintly and shook his head. "I need him kicking," then, as a look of hope crossed the face of Meggs, he added: "or dead."

**POP HAMILTON** was adjusting the belt as the police car screamed to a halt. Doug Stanley, seeing the figure of Meggs now bulky, weighted with breastplate, heavy belt and lead-soled shoes, nodded his satisfaction.

"Put his hat on," he ordered. "Hurry."

Pop Hamilton slipped the helmet skillfully in place and locked it with a quick twist to the right. He was spreading the cotter key in the safety catch as Halligan and a plainclothesman came over the side.

Halligan eyed Doug Stanley. "You must be crazy," he said. "We been combin' the town for you."

"I know," Doug told him, "and I'll go with you as soon as we get back."

"Get back, hell. I'm not going anywhere."

"It'll be easier, Halligan. My men and me get along pretty well. . . ."

Halligan, looking hard at the tug crew said: "Maybe too well. We got room for them up town."

"Look. It won't take more than an hour. If I'm wrong I'll go with you. No beef."

The crew of the tug crowded close, awaiting the answer.

Halligan shrugged. "Okay," he said finally. "But it's a screwy deal. Who's that?"

Doug Stanley grinned at the awkward thumping of the diving shoes. The helmet ef-



fectively hid Meggs' face and within the spun-copper helmet he could neither hear nor talk while the transmitter switch was off. "One of our boys," Doug said to Halligan. "A new one. This is his first dive."

Halligan sat down on a roller chock and lighted a cigarette. "I hope you know what you're doing."

The tug moved out into the stream. Pop Hamilton shouted back from the bridge: "Want to anchor? We got about seventeen fathoms."

"Let 'er drift," Doug called. To the tenders he said: "Put a safety-line around him and lower him over the side."

"Ladder?"

"He won't need it. Toss him over."

Watching the men laboriously rolling the ungainly figure over the side, Doug Stanley relieved the man on the airbank. Then, turning from the rows of valves, he drew the gun and leveled it at Halligan's head. "This won't take a minute," he said apologetically. "I just want to make sure we go through with it."

Halligan eyed the gun calmly. "Boy," he said, "you shouldn't point that thing at me. I'll get mad in a minute and whip you to death with it."

"And honest, too," Doug said admiringly. "I know you're not afraid, Halligan. But whatever you do, *don't try to prove it until I finish here.*"

Feeling the tension, his eyes on Halligan, Doug Stanley flipped the transmitter switch. "Below," he said clearly into the mike, "can you hear me?"

For the long moment it took Meggs to answer, Doug was afraid he'd passed out. Then the voice came to him shakily from one hundred feet, its tonal quality altered by the pressure: "Help!" it said.

The cluck would have to do better than that. Doug wanted the voice loud and clear. "Turn your head to the left," he said, spacing his words. "Talk into the little round job. You can feel it with your chin."

The voice was clearer now. It sobbed: "Get me out of here!"

"Soon," Doug Stanley said. "As soon as you tell me why you murdered John Lawton."

"I didn't!" the voice, already high-pitched, was almost a scream.

"Okay. I'm cutting off your air." Selecting a valve, Doug turned it slowly to the right. The whistle of air, audible in the transmitter as it entered the helmet of the diver below, diminished and died.

It was very quiet on the tug.

Halligan stirred. "Who's down there?"

"Meggs. Dawson Meggs."

"You—" Halligan, rising, seemed ready to leap.

The gun whammed sharply over the quiet harbor. Doug Stanley fired but once. He fired at the slender vent-pipe that projected above the deck at Halligan's side. "Next one's yours, Halligan," he said in clipped accents. "I told you we're going through with this."

Halligan sat down.

Quietly, like a drawling judge pronouncing a death sentence, Doug Stanley spoke into the transmitter. "You've got five minutes to live," he said. "Enough air down there with you to last five minutes. Maybe John Lawton's down there with you. Maybe if you look out through the faceplate you can see him walking toward you over the bottom. The bottom's close to you—only five feet away. He could reach your feet without stretching, Meggs. You see him?"

Meggs was panting, gasping, using more air than he needed as his panic grew. For a time there was only the sound of his panting, then a shrill scream that ended in a broken sob.

"Why did you do it?" Doug grated.

"Pull me up!"

"Why?"

"The Tribly!" Meggs screamed. "They're going to cluck her."

"You're driving that guy out of his mind," Halligan said warningly.

"Can't—breathe."

(Continued on page 94)



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# Let Nature Take Its Corpse



"I told you to call him off," he said harshly. "I don't like dogs."

*The killer thought that Old Eph had no weapons or friends left in that hell-ridden swamp. But he was as wrong as the ground he thought he was standing on!*



**E**PH knew a stranger was coming to camp half an hour before the man made his appearance. Knowing this required no great amount of intellectual discernment. As a matter of fact there were many times when you could ask Eph what state he lived in, and he would have been at a loss to give the correct answer. Some of the local wags have replied that Eph lived in a state of constant

confusion. Which was not entirely wrong, at that.

In the hazy recesses of Eph's brain there was no room for complicated problems. When he needed food he prepared it as simply and easily as possible. When he needed sleep, he slept.

And when the crows clamored over around Turkey ridge, as they just had a few minutes

● **By C. WILLIAM HARRISON** ●



ago, it meant a stranger was at the edge of the swamp. It had always been so, and Eph never questioned it—or worried about it. It had to be a stranger because Professor Carthage was too woods-wise to cause such a disturbance among the crows. It was as simple as that.

He paused briefly to listen to the crows, and then returned stolidly to his work of pulling a few of the weeds out of his small garden patch.

His crude shack and scrubby garden were on a low knoll that thrust up from the swamp, and all round him down below were murky waters and treacherous stretches of marsh. He worked thoughtlessly at his weeding. He had never bothered to do this before, but the Professor had said his cabbage and turnips and tomatoes would grow better if the weeds removed. So Eph unquestioningly pulled weeds.

A chicken hawk rose suddenly out of the underbrush near the lightning-scarred beech tree, and so Eph knew the stranger was coming into the swamp. The trail, as thin and uncertain as a shadow, passed near the foot of the beech, and no stranger to the swamp could have found or followed that crooked path without help. Therefore Eph knew Professor Carthage was with the stranger, guiding him to Eph's camp.

The two men came out of the marsh and approached the knoll on which was Eph's shack. Eph watched them indifferently. In his vague way he liked the little professor, and equally vaguely he resented the intrusion of the stranger.

Professor Carthage was a small thin man with thick white hair and a surprisingly deep voice. He slipped the bulging pack-sack from his narrow shoulders.

"Forage for the human animal, Eph. Bacon, flour, beans—manna from Morganville, and enough to last us a week." But he wasn't a man to give more than fragmentary interest to food. He waved his ever-present butterfly net.

"Caught this fellow on that hummock east of Bear Wallow. A beauty, Eph, an exceptionally fine specimen of the *Euproctis chrysorrhoea*."

Eph squinted through the close-meshed netting. "Ha?"

"Browntail Moth, to you," Professor Carthage said.

A thought struggled through the placid waters of Eph's mind. "You write Miz Carthage in town, Professor?"

The little man said with amused severity. "I told you to remind me to write my wife before I left for town, not after I got back."

Eph shook his big head uncertainly. "I guess I must've forgot."

PROFESSOR Carthage smiled. "But I didn't. I wrote the letter, and now Mrs. Carthage will feel confident I'm in my hotel room writing a profound paper on the caterpillars native to the north-central states. She'd have a hemorrhage if she knew where I really am. She thinks my health can't stand hunting specimens in a swamp."

He seemed to remember for the first time the stranger he had brought into the swamp with him.

He said, "Eph, this is Mr. Johnson. I met him in town, and he asked me to bring him here. He wants to hire you to dig some peat moss for him."

Johnson was not tall, but there was a suggestion of toughness and leashed energy in his compact shape. He stood somewhat back from Professor Carthage, and he didn't smile when he was introduced. He had quick dark eyes that were strangely humid in their restlessness; his mouth was thin and long.

Eph thrust out his hand. "H'lo."

Johnson didn't seem to see his hand. Eph let it sag uncertainly to his side.

Johnson said, "Quite a place you've got here. I don't imagine you have many visitors."

Eph considered this dully. Professor Carthage said with a chuckle, "Not in this swamp. I imagine I'm the first visitor Eph ever had out here. With the exception of you, of course."

A shadowy thought suggested to Eph that Johnson seemed oddly pleased with this information. But it was a thought that slid into Eph's mind and out again without leaving a mark.

He said, "You want to buy peat moss, ha?"

"Yeah." But the man's eyes were on the thin strand of wire stretching across the shingle roof of Eph's shack. "You got a radio here?"

"Ha?"

"A radio?"

"Uh-huh." Eph thought the man seemed displeased by this information. "But the batteries are dead, and it ain't much good."

A faint smile traced the stranger's thin mouth. "That's too bad." But he didn't seem to think it was too bad.

"The batteries went dead last night," Eph said. "You like radios, Mr. Johnson?"

"Sure."

"I like radios too. I like to hear music on them."

Mr. Johnson looked at Professor Carthage, and winked. "I like music, too." He seemed to think something was funny, and Eph couldn't understand it.

Eph said, "Last night the music was pretty. Then the music stopped and some feller said something about a bank or postoffice

being robbed up around—I don't rightly remember what town it was."

"Greenfield," Professor Carthage said.

Eph was unaccountably disturbed by some quality in Johnson's dry question. "You know about that holdup?"

"Just what I read in the papers while I was in town this morning."

Eph wished the stranger would go away. He felt more at ease when he was alone or with Professor Carthage. There was something about this stranger that made Eph feel as he did when he sensed the danger of quicksand out in the swamp. He didn't know what made him feel that way. He just wished the stranger was gone.

Johnson's softness asked, "What did you read about that holdup?"

Professor Carthage was bent, rummaging in the sack. "The usual newspaper account. A bandit held up the Greenfield bank yesterday afternoon. He killed the teller, and got away with an undetermined amount of cash. Before the teller died, he described the crook as medium tall, well dressed, and using a gun with a broken butt plate. The killer was believed to have fled in this direction."

The Professor found what he was looking for, a greasy brown-paper sack. He looked at Eph. "Where's Skipper? I brought him some bones."

Eph grinned broadly. "Skip like bones." He waved his big hand vaguely in the direction of the swamp. "Skip's out there someplace. Huntin', I guess." He pursed his lips, and sent a whistle echoing through the marshes.

It was just a little terrier with muddy feet and burr-tangled hair. The dog came bounding up the knoll, saw the stranger, and began barking challengingly. Johnson put his hand in his coat pocket.

Eph said, "Skip's all right. He ain't never bit nobody, and he don't see no strangers out here. Just let him sniff you, Mr. Johnson, and he'll be all right."

Johnson swore gratefully. "I don't like dogs. Keep him away."

Eph said, "He likes to play big, Skip does. But he won't bite, mister."

The dog walked stiff-legged toward the stranger, hackles raised, growling out his challenge. Johnson's hand came out of his pocket, gripping a blued automatic by its barrel. He bent and lunged toward the dog with sudden violence. His hand raised, and whipped down. The terrier yelped only once. The gun butt clubbed down again.

The stranger straightened and spun, holding his gun level. "I told you to call him off," he said harshly. "I don't like dogs."

Professor Carthage was looking at the broken butt plate on the automatic. He raised

his eyes. "Why—why, you're that murderer!"

The killer's laugh was a raw thing. "That makes you know too much, pop." His dark eyes were humid with mockery. "It ain't good to know too much about a guy the cops are hunting, pop. I suppose you're going to turn me in now."

**P**ROFESSOR Carthage was a mild little man whose world of science had not prepared him for the cruel realities of the civilization he lived in. To him crime was a thing to be read about and deplored but which never came into his personal life.

He should have been afraid, but he wasn't. He was a harmless little man who didn't know enough about the realities of life to be afraid. He should have known the futility of trying to get away. But he didn't.

"Indeed I shall report you, sir!"

He went down the weedy slope of the knoll, a small man hurrying to bring justice to a wanted murderer. He didn't once glance back over his shoulder. It didn't occur to him that such things as violence and murder could ever touch him.

He started along the narrow path that bridged the swamp waters, and it was there that the bullet struck him between his shoulders. He fell face down in the stagnant water and didn't move.

What had happened was slow sinking into the hazy depths of Eph's brain. When realization finally came full and strong into him, he could show only a simple man's childlike resentment.

"You killed my Skip, and he never hurt anybody in his life." He put his dull eyes on the murderer. "You killed Professor Carthage, and he was good to Eph. You shouldn't ought to have done that, mister."

He brought up his huge hands. He said heavily, "Now Eph will kill you. Eph never hurt anybody before, but Eph is going to make you dead."

The killer said with brittle harshness. "You big ox, I've got the gun, see! You try anything with me, I'll put a slug in your guts. You're big, but you're not bigger than a bullet. Get that into your thick head, and don't forget it."

Slow-dawning realization of danger halted Eph's advance. But fear never got to him. He looked at his big hands, and he looked at the killer, and a crafty light stirred sluggishly in his resenting eyes.

Johnson said corrosively, "We're going to stay here in this camp, just you and me. You're going to cook meals, if you know enough to cook, and if you ever try to slip away I'm going to put a bullet in your stomach. No one will ever look for me here, and I'm staying until the pressure is off."



Eph said heavily, "Sometime Eph is going to make you dead like Skip and Professor Carthage. You just wait and see, mister."

Eph made his break the next morning. There was no great cunning in what he did. He walked out of his shack, the killer following him warily. He paused at the crest of the knoll where he had dug the graves for Skipper and Professor Carthage. He paused to gaze down at the fresh-turned earth, the dim recesses of his mind awed by the swiftness with which death can replace life. He wished he could hear Skip's excited barking again when he treed a 'possum. He wished he could again see Professor Carthage's slight shape prowling through the swamp trails after an elusive butterfly for his collection.

Behind him the killer said, "The same thing can happen to you, pal-o. Keep that tucked away in whatever you use for a brain."

Eph turned heavily. "You wouldn't kill Eph. You say you would, but you wouldn't."

"Just try me and see, pal-o."

"Only big Eph knows the trail out of the swamp. You make Eph dead and you can't get out alone."

Johnson said malevolently, "I'd rather rot in here than let you bring the cops in after me." He showed his gun, and the tawny glint of danger was in his dark eyes. "Get back to the shack, dumb-o."

"Eph wants to walk."

The big man turned his back on the gun. He went down the knoll's slope, and moved onto the path that bridged dark stagnant water. The killer followed, silently watchful.

The sun rays had been bitter on the shadeless knoll, but here beneath the green roof of the swamp trees it was quite cool. The air was stale and clogged with the heavy wetness of the marshes, and the dank smell of decay was everywhere. Turtles, disturbed by the passing of the two men, slid down muddy banks into the stagnant waters, and somewhere not far away a bird ribboned the silence with its raucous cry.

"Any snakes in here?"

"Copperheads and moccasins."

Johnson's eyes narrowed. "So that's your pitch! You're hoping you can walk me around in here until I get snake bit. It won't work, dumb-o. We're going back."

Eph kept walking.

Johnson said harshly, "I said we're going back, damn you!"

Eph's walking had carried a low-hanging limb with him, and suddenly he released it. The branch lashed Johnson's face, and he heard the sound of the big man's heavy running. He curse savagely, broke clear of the limbs, and jerked up his gun.

HE FIRED, and saw Eph stumble. But the big man kept running. Johnson broke into a run. Limbs clawed at him, and he fought through tangles of brush, goaded on by the red lust to kill.

He fired again, and knew his bullet had found its mark in Eph's leg, but he couldn't stop the big man. Eph's direction changed sharply, turning his flight across a low grassy knoll. Johnson fired again, but he hurried his shot and missed. He sprinted on to the knoll.

"You damn fool, you can't get away!"

Even the dim working of Eph's mind must have told the big man that. But he kept running heavily, limping and weakened by hurt. The knoll ended on a cutbank, and there was water beyond, broken a short distance out by a narrow spit of sand. Another island lay past that.

Eph's leap overshot the sand spit, and he splashed heavily in the muddy water. He slogged on toward the island.

The killer ran to the edge of the cutbank. He shouted harshly, "I've got one more bullet left in this gun, but I've got plenty more back at camp. Come back here, damn you. You ain't got a chance to get away now."

Eph kept moving on.

"Then I'll come after you," Johnson swore.

The sand spit curled like a bent finger jutting out from the island. Johnson leaped for the sand, and his judgment of the distance was good. It was too good.

The killer struck the sand, but there was nothing dry and solid to it. It seemed to melt away as he touched it, and he plunged to his hips in loose, heavy wetness. He cursed and struggled with swift panic plunging through his brain.

"For God's sake, man, do something! Pull me out of here."

"You made my Skip dead, Mister Johnson. You shouldn't ought to have done that."

"I'll give you enough money to buy a dozen dogs. Get something and pull me out."

"You made professor Carthage dead, Mister Johnson."

The offer of money could not argue against big Eph's simple condemnation. The gritty wetness was rising across the killer's chest, swiftly and inexorably toward his shoulders, his neck, his face.

He leveled his gun on big Eph. "Damn you, I'll kill you! I've got one more bullet in this gun. I'll put it through your guts if you don't help me!"

But Eph did not move. And the killer did not shoot. He had only one more bullet in his gun, and he could not wait until the quicksand locked all air from his lungs.

Only one more bullet, and the killer could not wait. . . .



# Serenade to a Wealthy Widow



He motioned for us to sit on a divan and took a chair facing us, the gun threatening in his hand.

By  
**DON JAMES**

**T**HE SLOT machine was rolled and was costing me money. I put in another fifty cent piece, watched two plums settle and the third hesitate and then slip away. I put in another fifty cents. It already had cost me over ten dollars, but it began to pay off with that coin—not from the machine, but from the woman at the machine next to me. That was what I wanted.

She hit her quarter machine for five and smiled at me.

"A little better luck than you're having," she said.

I gave her my most friendly smile.

"Not much luck," I agreed. I didn't add that you couldn't expect luck when the machines were fixed for an 80-20 payoff; the 20 per cent to the sucker. The joint clipped you at the machines and everywhere else. For your money you got soft music, luxurious atmosphere, and lousy drinks.

But I didn't say a word about any of that.

*It's a tough job to pin a two hundred grand rap on the gal you love—it's a mad race between duty and heart. Well, I finally entered, but when I did, I was already one love—and two corpses—behind!*



I tried my best to look like an ordinary tourist who probably sat at a desk somewhere during most of the year. I tried to look friendly, naive, respectable, and pleasant.

It had taken over ten bucks to get *her* to start the conversation with a stranger. It took almost another ten bucks before we were casually acquainted enough for me to offer her a drink at the bar.

I could see her appraising me as we drank cocktails and chatted. She was a nice girl; that is, she had breeding and plenty of looks and background. She was intelligent and she had charm. She would be very careful about striking up acquaintanceships at cocktail bars. Only a very respectable, pleasant man—maybe in his thirties as I am—could even hope for a smile from her. And from her smile I knew that I qualified and it was going to blossom into a beautiful friendship.

She didn't know that she would have been safer playing with a coiled rattlesnake.

Her name was Cora Bledsloe and mine is Dan Moore. It started six months before when neither of us had heard of the other, and as we sat at the cocktail bar she still didn't know much about me, but I knew a great deal about her.

For instance, I knew that she was 28 years old, that she had been born in North Dakota, had a university degree, had worked for an advertising agency two years as a copy writer, and then had married Laird Bledsloe who had too much money for one man. When he died he left most of that money to her.

I knew other things about her. I knew where she got her hair done, where she lived and how many rooms there were in her cottage. I knew that she drove a convertible coupe, that she occasionally went out with a man named David Simpson and that sometimes they parked on the ocean highway and did a little necking.

I knew that her hair was naturally cornsilk blonde because I knew a lot about her even when she was still Cora Knudsen in a North Dakota high school.

I knew how she looked walking down a street; where she bought most of her clothes; who handled her business; what time she usually arose and the time she usually went to bed.

You can't check on a woman as thoroughly as I had checked on her without learning most of those things, and a great many more.

In fact, I got to know her so well, before she knew me, that I began to regret what I would have to do to her. No woman so exquisitely formed, so vibrant, so desirable should be kicked around. I didn't like to think about it.

An hour after our first drink together when we left the place and she offered to drive me to my hotel we walked down the sidewalk in

the hot afternoon sun to her car. It was parked in front of a shoe repair shop that had a window display of rubber heels.

**I** THOUGHT, as I glanced at them, that I should be in the display with the rest of the heels. It wasn't funny to me. It made me a little sick because sitting in the car beside her I could feel her shoulder against mine and suddenly I wanted her.

By the time we arrived at the hotel I knew I'd made the grade as a nice, respectable guy. Things were going according to plan.

"How about dinner tomorrow night?" I smiled as I got out. "I don't want to appear . . . well presumptuous, but I'm a stranger here and I'd like to take you to dinner."

"I'd love it," she smiled. Her teeth were white and even and she had a dimple in her right cheek.

"Where do I call for you, Mrs. Bledsloe?" She'd told me her name and about her widowhood.

She gave me her address, that I already knew, and we fixed the time. She gave me a friendly wave as she drove away and I went into the hotel.

There were no messages in my box. I went up to my room. It was just four o'clock. Back in New York Tim Savage would be home. I put in a long distance call for him. It went through in a hurry and Tim's grating voice came over the wire.

"I met her today," I said. "Just left her. I'm taking her to dinner tomorrow night."

"Good. Be careful, though. Don't tip your hand."

"When did I ever tip my hand?"

"Never, as far as I know," Tim chuckled. "Only I hear she's a good-looking gal. Don't go soft on us."

"I'm tough," I said grimly. "Anything special for me?"

"No."

That's all, then. You said to get in touch with you every other day."

"That's right, Dan. You're doing fine. Call me day after tomorrow."

"I will."

"And remember—don't get soft."

"Forget it. I'm doing all right. Good-bye."

"Be sure to call, Dan."

We hung up and I got a bottle out and had a long drink of Bourbon. I wished I didn't look forward to having dinner with her so much. I still remembered the touch of her shoulder.

At the end of the third week it was dinner together most evenings and David Simpson wasn't seeing much of her. The beautiful friendship was blossoming. At least, that's what I told Tim.

I was being careful and playing it as shrewd-

ly as I could. If I wanted it to work right I had to work slowly. She had to trust me and confide in me. Then the rest would come in time.

So I did all the right things in the right way. Flowers and dinners and theaters and occasionally a night spot, but no passes at her and I kept on being the nice, respectable guy who was a little on the shy side.

One thing was wrong about the picture. She was getting under my skin. I wouldn't admit that even to myself.

The third week she told me about her husband's death.

"He drowned," she said quietly. "We were at the summer place on the lake and he went out in a sailboat. Later they found the cap-sized boat and we knew that he couldn't have made shore. His heart was weak. He couldn't swim over a hundred yards. They didn't find his body. The lake is terribly deep."

"What was he like?" I asked gently.

"He was older than I am, over forty. He was good to me, but—" she hesitated and then continued, "sometimes I didn't understand him. We were never very close to one another. There was always a strange distance between us."

Her black evening gown made the whiteness of her shoulders soft and lustrous. I touched her hand across the table and she smiled. I took my hand away. It was just an understanding gesture. I was being the very nice young man, but inside me the touch of her hand kindled fire.

I looked away from her and saw the small, dark man. He was sitting at a corner table watching us. His eyes shifted instantly to watch the dancers in the hotel Blue Room where we were spending the evening.

I'd discovered him the first week. I knew his name—George Blaine. He lived at a medium priced hotel and no one I casually questioned seemed to know what he did for a living. He was registered from New York. He drove a rented coupe and he usually followed us. I never mentioned him to Cora and obviously she had never noticed him.

On Wednesday of the fourth week Cora was nervous and she was thinking a lot about something. We drove around in her car for a while that night and at about ten o'clock she drove to her place.

"I just want to talk," she said. "Let's have a drink and sit where we can watch the lights."

As we left the car I saw Blaine park a block away.

Her cottage was one of those expensive dwellings built on the side of a hill. We climbed stairs to it and inside she turned on lights and opened French doors that led to a patio overlooking the city.

**S**HE MADE drinks and went to a phonograph and radio combination and put on a piano concerto. I stood at the door and looked at the lights below us. She didn't join me and I turned to look at her. The whiskey was warm through me and the piano of the concerto filled the room with suppressed excitement.

She turned and faced me as if she knew I had been watching her. I looked into her eyes and it was as if I looked into a book that was forbidden to me because I saw secret fear.

I walked across to a coffee table where she had placed the whiskey and poured another drink. I glanced a question at her and she nodded. I gave her another drink, too.

We drank silently, standing apart. I went to the phonograph and started the record over again. When I turned she was watching me and fear still was in her eyes.

When I put my glass down and took hers our hands touched for an instant. I placed her glass on the table beside mine. She still stood watching me and the piano was playing a crescendo into my pulse. Tim Savage flashed across my mind but I put him far away and out of my thoughts.

I went to her and looked into her fear-widened eyes. My hands were on her shoulders and she didn't move; just watched me mutely. A small muscle at the corner of her mouth twitched. I slid my hands flat against her shoulder blades and then down to her waist and pulled her to me.

Her lips parted and her tongue touched them for a second. They were wet and glistening and she was firm and warm in my arms.

Her head went back and she shut her eyes. I kissed her.

We swayed with the concerto and I felt her arms about my neck as the kiss became deep. The music stopped and the record scratched throatily.

When I took my mouth away she dropped her arms limply at her sides. There was the clean odor of her hair.

"No," she said. "We mustn't . . . we can't. There was a letter today and . . ."

She clung to me while the excitement of holding her fought a snarling fight against the thing I had to do.

"What?" I asked softly.

Then I heard the small movement behind me and looked over my shoulder. George Blaine stood in the French doorway. He smiled crookedly and his right hand was bunched in his coat pocket. He could be holding a gun, I thought.

"The girl gets around," he said.

I felt Cora stiffen and push away from me.

"What do you want?" she whispered.

"The letter," he smiled.

"Get out of here," Cora said.

He shook his head and walked over to snap



off the switch on the rasping phonograph. "You heard her," I said. "Get out!"

He pulled the gun from his pocket. He motioned for us to sit on a divan and took a chair facing us, the gun threatening in his hand.

"I'm in a hurry or I'd have waited until the boy-friend left," he told her. Then he smirked again. "I couldn't wait that long."

I glanced at Cora. Her eyes held fear again and a thin white line was etched about her lips.

"The letter," Blaine said.

"No! You can't—" Instinctively her eyes flashed to her pocketbook on a table.

Blaine caught it. He stood and walked to the table and opened the purse. He smiled again and brought out a letter.

I started to get up, but he motioned me back with the gun.

"Don't bother," he said.

"No!" Cora cried sharply. She stood.

He shook his head and walked to the door and through the entrance. It was dark out on the patio and the light from the room framed him for an instant. He slipped the gun into his pocket and glanced over his shoulder at us. Then he was gone. We heard his footsteps in the night.

Suddenly a shot ripped through the darkness and we heard the footsteps falter and stop.

Instinctively I pulled Cora down beside me and watched the door. Nothing happened. There was no sound outside. After a while I crept to the doors and closed and locked them. Keeping to the walls I got to the switches and turned out the lights.

Cora was crouched beside the divan sobbing. I knelt beside her and pulled her up to her knees so that we faced each other in the dark. I found her lips again and they were wet and salty with tears. She clung to me frantically and her breath sobbed against my lips.

After moments she relaxed and was quiet. We got up and sat on the davenport and she was in the circle of my arm.

"You'd better tell me what this is all about."

I knew that we both watched the doors in the darkness. It was quiet. Beyond the living room in the small kitchen an electric refrigerator snapped on automatically and we both started with the sound.

"I shouldn't have brought you here," she said.

"THAT doesn't matter now. Let's skip everything up to right now. I love you. I don't know how it happened, but that's the way it is."

She drew away from me.

"You can't," she whispered. "You can't love me."

I held her again. She fought and then I held her tight and forced her head back with one hand cupping her chin. It was another of those kisses and she wanted it as badly as I wanted to take it. She was crying again, her face wet against my cheek. Tim Savage could go to hell, I thought.

"Do you understand?" I asked. "I love you."

"Yes."

"Is it all right?"

"I can't do anything about it."

"All right. Tell me about the letter."

"I'm afraid to tell you," she said.

"Don't worry about that guy who took it..."

"That isn't why I'm afraid. It's something I don't want you to know about. It will make a difference in how you feel about me."

"Is that important to you?"

"Yes."

I didn't say anything for a moment. I wanted to remember how it had sounded from her lips.

"Then you'd better tell me," I finally said. "It's better for me to know than to wonder about it."

She moved in the darkness. I felt her hand on my face and when she spoke her voice was almost a whisper.

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"My husband is still alive," she said.

There it was, laid out on a platter for me. Something tightened through me and I began to hear my own pulse beats like muffled drums.

When I didn't speak she said, "I knew I shouldn't tell you. I knew how it would be."

Her hand left my face and I reached for it in the dark and my fingers closed over hers.

"Do you love him?" I asked.

"No," she said simply.

"What about the letter?"

"It was from him. I thought he was dead until I received the letter day before yesterday. He told me to wait for a phone call from him last night. I did. That's why I didn't see you. He's coming here tomorrow . . ."

I thought of the shot in the night. "Or he did tonight," I said.

She stood suddenly and was outlined dimly against the French doors. She swayed a little and her body was tense.

"Why don't you go?" she demanded. "Why don't you get out of this before it's too late? Everything else is too late . . . for us."

I got up and stood near her so that I could feel her breath on my throat. I stared into the darkness above her head.

"It's no use for me to go," I said. "That wouldn't stop the way I feel about you. And there was murder here tonight. The cops would find out that I've been here, anyhow. We're both on the same sleigh ride now."

Bitterly I thought of Tim Savage.

"But you can—" she started to protest.

"No. It's going to be my way. I'm going out and get the letter—if it's still there."

Her hands clutched my arms.

"He won't have it and . . . and what if someone is waiting out there?"

"I have to find out," I said. "Whoever shot him probably is gone. It's only luck that the cops aren't here yet. Someone besides us must have heard that shot."

"Cars going down the hill backfire," she said. "We're used to hearing sounds like shots up here."

"I'm going down there."

I walked down the steps and bent over him. He was sprawled face down with one leg doubled beneath him and his arms outstretched.

Blaine was dead. The bullet had gone into his head. I felt his pockets for the letter. It wasn't there. I lifted him and felt beneath his body. It wasn't under him.

Then I heard the starter grinding on a car in the street below.

I scrambled up the stairs. Cora was standing motionless in the doorway.

"Your car keys—quick!" I snapped. I saw them beside the pocketbook and snatched them.

In the doorway I stopped for a second.

"Call the cops," I said. "I'll be back . . . don't tell about your husband. Stall them."

CORA'S house was out a long boulevard that dwindled to a stop high in the hills. There was only one way out.

Her convertible was fast. I was doing seventy when I saw the rented car that Blaine had used.

He knew I was after him when I nudged up to his rear fender. I saw his face as he glanced back. Then a hand came out the driver's window and a gun flashed.

I edged closer and spurred ahead. I felt my fender jolt the smaller car and I fought the wheel as I swerved.

The rented car careened and I flashed past it. Behind me there was a crash. When I braked to a stop I looked back. The car was wrecked against a pole and in the middle of the boulevard a man was stretched out on the pavement.

I ran back and looked down at him.

I had studied enough pictures of him to know him anywhere from any angle. He was breathing and blood dripped slowly from his nostrils.

The letter was in his inside coat pocket. My fingers trembled as I pulled it out.

Though the night and the miles I could almost feel Tim Savage's eyes and the smile on his lips; the hard, cold, cynical smile; and his warning, "Don't go soft on us, Dan."

I took a deep breath and read:

Dear Cora:

This will be a great surprise to you to learn that I am alive . . .

It was all I needed to know.

Down the boulevard sirens howled and I saw the red flashing lights on police cars. Cora's call had gone in.

The man on the pavement was dying. The cops knew it and radioed for an ambulance. One of the cars began to speed on to answer Cora's call, but I stopped the cops.

"That's a homicide call you're answering," I said. "A man named George Blaine was killed by this man on the pavement. I was there and came after this guy. Forced him off the highway."

A gray-haired cop looked at me keenly. "You know who he is?" he asked.

I nodded. "Laird Bledsloe. He's the husband of the woman who called you."

"And where do you come into the picture?"

I pulled out my identification. "Investigator for an insurance company."

From the group about the fallen man one of the cops called, "He's trying to say something."

"Get it," the grey-haired cop said. He was out of the car in an instant and hurrying to the group. He knelt beside Bledsloe. "Bledsloe, can you hear me?"



Bledsloe murmured something that sounded like "Yes."

"Listen carefully," the cop said. "You're badly hurt and you may die. This may be your last chance to talk. Did you kill George Blaine?"

Bledsloe was silent for a few seconds and when his eyes opened they looked glazed.

"Killed a man at my wife's place . . ." he said. "Yes . . ."

I was beside the grey-haired cop. "He still has the gun," I said. "Ballistics will prove it was his gun that shot Blaine. Let me ask a question?"

The cop glanced at me and nodded.

"Bledsloe . . . did your wife know you were still alive before you wrote to her?"

Again the hesitation and then the single word, "No."

I stood. There wasn't any use trying to ask more. Bledsloe's eyes had closed.

"We'd better get to the house," I said.

Cora was waiting in the living room. Her face was pale with emotion, her fists clenched at her sides. The grey-haired man, who said his name was Lieutenant Carlton, used a telephone to call for a wagon to take Blaine in.

He cradled the telephone and went to the table and spread out things he had taken from Blaine's pockets.

I went over to Cora. "It's real this time," I said quietly. "He's dead."

A shudder went through her and she stared at me with wide eyes.

"Dan . . . what's this all about?"

Just then Carlton spoke. "The man's name wasn't Blaine. It was Horgan. He was a private eye in New York. His identification is here."

After a few seconds I said, "That ties it up."

Carlton said, "I think you'd better make some explanations."

"OUR company had Bledsloe insured for two hundred thousand," I explained. "We paid the claim after his reported drowning, although the body wasn't found. At first there was no reason to believe that it wasn't on the up and up. Other bodies have never been found in that lake. He was supposed to have had a heart condition.

"But we made a routine investigation and things began to show up. His will was probated and we discovered that he was broke—although he was reported to be wealthy.

"We checked with his doctor who said he didn't know that Bledsloe had a bad heart. We remembered then that his wife had told us that—"

Cora interrupted in a dull, flat voice. "He came home one afternoon and said that the doctor had diagnosed a heart condition."

I said, "We suspected that Bledsloe and his wife cooked up a deal. They'd fake the drowning. Bledsloe would get away and hide out. She'd collect the two hundred grand and meet him later. When she left for this West Coast place of theirs it looked suspicious.

"I went on the case, investigated her thoroughly, and then struck up an acquaintanceship with her. We were sure Bledsloe would communicate with her if he were alive, and I wanted to be on the inside."

I told Carlton about the letter she had received.

"How about Blaine—or Horgan?" he asked.

"He must have learned that the company was suspicious and worked the case on his own. We pay ten per cent of what we recover in a deal like this to anyone who gives us proof of fraud."

I glanced at Cora. She was very still as she watched me.

"But Bledsloe got there tonight," I continued. "He must have been in one of the rooms, or outside, where he saw and heard the whole thing. He saw Blaine get the letter and killed him to recover it. It was the only proof that he was alive. He found Blaine's car keys and used his car to get away."

I looked back at Cora. "What did he tell you when he called last night?"

"That he wanted the money I'd collected. That if I told what had happened, he'd claim I was in the conspiracy and I'd go to prison with him."

Carlton nodded and asked me for the letter.

I gave it to him and said, "You'll see in the first sentence that he exonerates his wife."

Carlton said, "Obviously she's innocent."

One of the cops stepped through the doorway and asked for him. He went out and Cora and I were alone.

"So all of it was—was part of your job," she whispered.

"No."

"I can't believe that you—"

"Listen to me, Cora. At first it was my job, and then something happened. I fell in love with you. You've got to believe me."

She shut her eyes and tears edged beneath her eyelids.

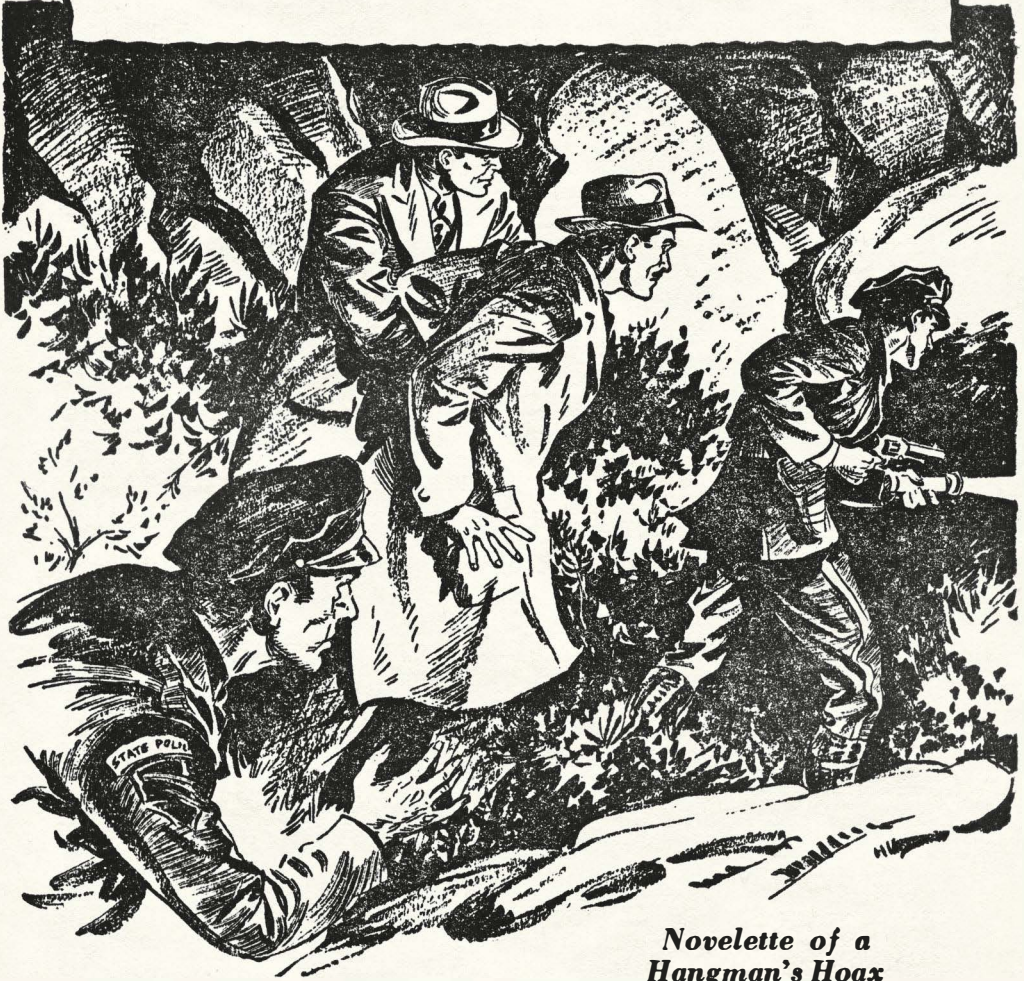
"Dan . . ." she whispered, ". . . what if I'd been guilty? what if the letter hadn't read that way? If I had known he was alive and had been part of the plan? I've got to know, Dan . . . what would you have done with me?"

I drew a curtain between Tim Savage and us, and I closed my mind to the question and the fear of what the answer might have been.

"Don't ask me that," I whispered. "I love you—that's enough."

She lifted her lips to me and she's never asked again.

# THE MERRY MEN OF MAYHEM



## *Novelette of a Hangman's Hoax*

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Morals for the Mouthpiece

**E**USTACE T. CARAWAY had his tongue in his cheek when he read a paragraph in his own newspaper column on the morning of March 22:

The so-called "Perfect Crime" is a contradiction in terms. Perfection is man at his best. Crime is man at his worst. The only

perfect crime would be one performed without personal malice, one which brought no actual injury to any living creature; and that, I repeat, would be no crime at all!

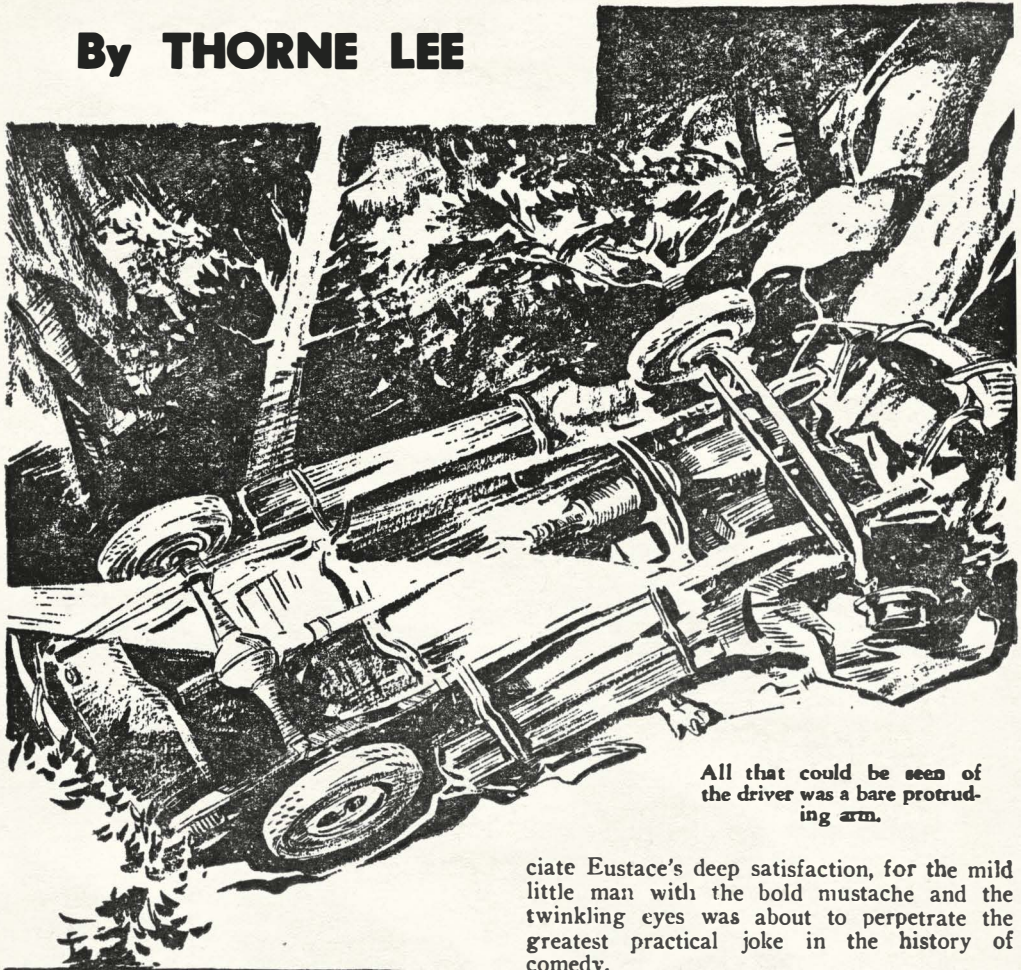
Eustace chuckled over the irony of his typewriter, because at that very moment he was contemplating a perfect crime by his own definition. Within twenty-four hours he would have committed a murder that was not a murder, a homicide without a corpse.

Only a rare sense of humor could appre-



*Eustace T. Caraway, would-be dean of American pranksters, plotted a playful kill—all in fun. But his hoax hatched a corpse and gave Caraway the crime of his all-too-short life!*

**By THORNE LEE**



All that could be seen of the driver was a bare protruding arm.



ciate Eustace's deep satisfaction, for the mild little man with the bold mustache and the twinkling eyes was about to perpetrate the greatest practical joke in the history of comedy.

A month from tonight, if all went well, Eustace hoped to be installed as the Dean of American Jokers and honorary president of that highly secret society known as "The Buffoons."

Eustace was a charter member of The Buffoons, but he had never been awarded the annual prize for the best hoax of the year. This year—Eustace's chest surged with confidence—the award was in the bag!

Eustace had hit on his prize idea only a few weeks ago, a sheer inspiration:

What joke could possibly be funnier than the setting of a pack of trained detectives on the investigation of a phantom crime, a murder which had happened only in their own imaginations?

Every good practical joke, since it demands



a certain disrespect for the dignity of the human race, involves an element of risk. Eustace realized that. He knew there was a certain danger that the law would violently resent being made the object of a joke, but Eustace's plan was designed to appear in the final revelation as an accident. Only the seven members of The Buffoons would ever hear the full story of the fake murder.

The big hoax was set for the night of March 22. An accomplice was required to play the victim of the crime, and Eustace's choice for the role was the movie star, Larry Hale, a fellow member of The Buffoons. Hale had retired from an active career and become a sort of bachelor recluse. Except for Eustace himself, the actor had no intimate friends or relatives who would take his supposed murder as a personal grief. He was admirably suited to the plot Eustace had in mind.

That fatal March evening Eustace Caraway left his Hollywood office as usual and ate a lonely bachelor dinner in an uptown cafe. Once off the boulevard in the abrupt darkness of the California night, he slipped like a thief into a dark parking lot, slid into the back seat of his own car and exchanged his clothes for a nondescript outfit he had collected over the past few days. A little dust on his two-day beard gave him the look of a grimy old rogue inclined to sulk too deeply into his collar.

Eustace spent the next hour making his way by devious channels to the beach home of Larry Hale, always giving the impression of a man who did not want too much of his face to be seen.

Getting off the bus at a lonely spot along the coast, Eustace lingered uncertainly in the doorway to give the driver a clear impression of his head and shoulders. It would be great sport to read the inaccurate descriptions of himself in tomorrow's papers.

Hale lived in a low white cottage high on the slope of the beach, about a hundred feet below the highway. The actor himself answered the rap of Eustace's gloved fingers.

Hale was a tall, lean, healthy specimen with wavy grey-brown hair, cool grey eyes, and an engaging grin. "Enter the murder!" he roared, ushering in his guest. "The stage is set, Eustace. I die laughing every time I think about it. I hope our friend, Mathis, takes this case himself!"

Hale conducted his visitor through the semi-darkened living room, with the long glass facade overlooking the ocean. A slim brown finger pointed out tiny strategic blood stains planted about the room.

**H**ALE taped a long strip of adhesive on his cheek. "Took a neat little gash out of myself while shaving. If the police ever question me about the blood, I'll claim that this

cheek wound was reopened when I tripped over the telephone in the dark and fell on that steel andiron by the fireplace. The iron has several stains on it, including some hair oil directly from my scalp! That will be the murder weapon, of course . . ."

Eustace inhaled, beat his solid chest like a conquering ape. "Great! It should go off like clockwork, Larry. Best murder I ever performed."

They both laughed heartily.

"Remember one thing," Eustace warned: "You will only stay on the island for five days. By that time the law might have me clapped in irons."

Larry nodded, grinning. He glanced at his wrist watch. "By your schedule we've got about a half-hour to wait."

They killed the time by discussing the humorous merits of their joke. "Don't worry about winning the prize, Eustace," Larry encouraged. "There won't be a joke that can touch you this year!"

The actor ran through the list of Buffoons, scornfully discounting their chance. There were only seven men in the club. It had been organized three years ago by a group of noisy poker players from that unique social clan which wanders back and forth between Broadway and Hollywood. There were four charter members, and each year thereafter a new joker had been invited into the circle.

Hale counted the Buffoons off on his fingers. . . . Silvers, the Broadway playwright, was always good for a laugh, but he had won first prize two years in a row and was not likely to get any support for a third award. . . . Fairchild, the movie producer, always staged elaborate stunts; but, like most of his moving pictures, they were strictly Class B. . . . Pharr, the newspaper publisher, had told Larry that he was too busy to plan any jokes of his own this year. . . . Mathis, of the district attorney's office, had been quite a cut-up while he was still a private lawyer, but last year he had given up his wealthy practice to work for the state. His new respect for law and order was quite a handicap to a practical joker. . . . Russo, the gambling playboy was involved with so many women at this point, that his sense of humor must be as hard as flint.

"How about yourself, Larry? Too bad you can't share the prize with me," Eustace expanded, generously. "After all, you're doing a good half of the work."

The actor shrugged his solid shoulders. "No matter, Eustace. I've had one prize already. I'll be glad to bask in your reflected glory."

Eustace Caraway's round face flushed with pride. Like many another man of serious pursuits he was most happy when behaving like a schoolboy. He glanced at his watch. "Nine-



thirty, Larry. Time to move! Are you ready?"

The scene from then on was mechanical as a stage play. They had rehearsed the murder trick endlessly and Hale had all the props set up. Eustace moved over to a small card table set with two drinking glasses, a deck of cards, and a pad scored for gin rummy. Down in a corner of the pad were some calculations and the pencilled item \$5,000, as if the loser of the game was that much in debt.

Eustace lifted one of the cocktail glasses and drank it to the bottom, then threw it hard against the baseboard of a wall, shattering the glass. That should take care of the fingerprint question.

As for fingerprints on the playing cards—it was an old deck and there would be any number of Larry's card-playing guests involved.

The show was now up to Larry himself. Eustace moved out of range and watched.

Hale had his telephone stand in such a position that the long phone cord draped across the floor between himself and the card table. He took a short little run, hooked the cord with his toes, and tumbled forward. His outstretched left arm caught the card table, toppled it over with a crash. His right arm, striking near the fireplace, knocked over the stained andiron.

Hale's toe, meanwhile, had jerked the phone set off the stand. The receiver lay about ten feet from the sprawled body of the actor.

Hale waited breathlessly for the faint sound of the operator's voice and then cried: Help! . . . Oh, murder! . . . Oh! . . . Oh!"

Hale dragged his body across the floor toward the phone with a great clatter and thump. His final moans were uttered quite close to the mouthpiece and he punctuated each of them with a blow of fist into palm to sound as if a human body were being suddenly beaten: "Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Oh!"

Eustace stepped quietly into the scene at that point, picked up the phone, wiped it off carefully with his handkerchief. He could hardly restrain a laugh at the shrill words of the operator: "Hello . . . Number please? . . . Hello, hello!"

Eustace dropped the phone back on its cradle. This was not a dial phone; so the operator would be able to trace that call. The wild commotion and Larry's dramatic words undoubtedly would be reported to the police.

"The law will be out here in a hurry," the actor said, rising carefully to his feet. "From now on we'll have to move fast."

"One thing, Larry," Eustace said hastily. "How do you plan to explain that phone business to the police, if they ever put the pressure on you?"

HALE shrugged. "That'll be easy. That word, 'Help,' was a natural outcry after such a violent tumble. The groans and all

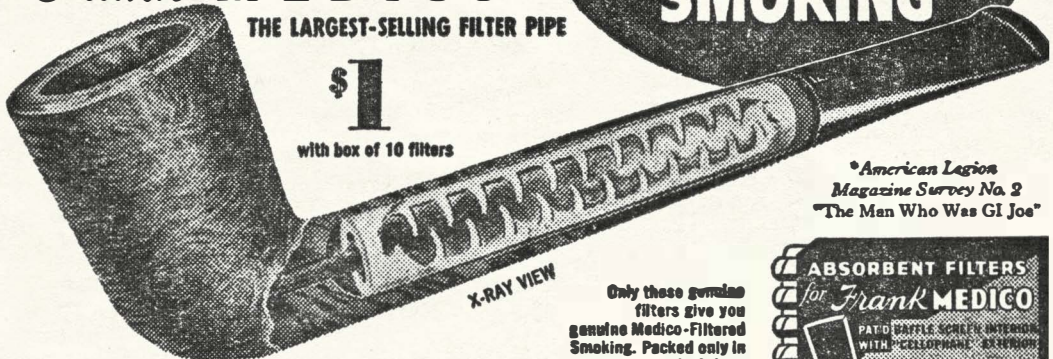
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that extra racket could be the normal sounds of a man who had taken a nasty fall. Frankly, I don't expect to have as much trouble with the cops as you may have!"

Eustace chuckled. "For a joke like this, I'll take that chance. I figure the law will be so red-faced it won't say a word! You'd better go now. Thanks for a good show, Larry. I'll see you in the clink!"

Hale grinned and stepped gingerly over to a glass door opening upon the beach. Outside on a cement terrace his tall figure stooped, grabbed the collar of a huge duffel bag loaded with equipment for a week's camping trip. "Well, here I go!" he called back. "Carry on, old boy! I'll be laughing my head off!"

Hale marched off across the beach dragging the bag. The heavy bundle would leave a swathe exactly like that of a human body being dragged toward the ocean. The soft sand would show one man's footprints but not accurately enough to be identified. Out on the harder sands the print would be washed entirely away.

Eustace waited long enough for Hale to reach the narrow wooden pier which served the actor as a boat landing. After that Eustace moved quickly about the room, testing doors, checking the murder scene. It was okay. He switched off the lights and slipped out the front door, making sure it was locked.

The doors had to be locked, because the final explanation to the police would be that Hale had departed suddenly on a hunting and fishing trip to one of the channel islands, not even bothering to clean up the mess created when he tripped over a phone cord in the dark. The police might be skeptical, but they would never admit they had been hoaxed.

A few hundred yards from the house Eustace found a convenient boulder just off the highway. He waited there, lurking in the shadow, until he heard, far out on the ocean, the purr of a motorboat taking off. He imagined Hale out there turning loose the rowboat with which he had been hauling the big motorboat. That rowboat would wash back to shore as if it might have been used by a murdered to dispose of Hales' body in the ocean and then to make a getaway somewhere along the beach. As for the motorboat, it would never be missed, because Hale had secretly transported it on an auto trailer from Lake Arrowhead, where it was usually stored for the winter at his mountain cabin.

Larry Hale's part of the plot was now over and the man was off for a pleasant vacation on a wild island rendezvous known only to himself.

Eustace waited until he heard the distant wail of a police siren. Then, chuckling gleefully, he made his way by roundabout methods

back to Hollywood and his own apartment

## CHAPTER TWO

### Hangman's Hoax

ON THE morning of March 23 Eustace Caraway sat down to the most promising breakfast of his life. He had bought a paper on his way to the little hotel coffee shop and it lay spread across the white cloth just beyond his grapefruit.

The sensational murder story exceeded Eustace's wildest dreams. Death of a famous star like Larry Hale was headline material. Almost the entire first page was devoted to it. Eustace's solid shoulders quaked violently with subdued laughter. . . "Boy, oh Boy! Just start counting the red faces when Larry comes back, alive and well!"

Eustace read greedily through the details. In the eyes of the law the plot ran exactly as the two jokers had planned, beginning with the fake alarm by telephone and following through the successive clues—blood stains, the overturned card table, the 5,000 gin rummy debt, the bloody andiron, the single set of footprints on the beach, the deep rut in the sand obviously made by a dragging body, the empty rowboat drifting with the tide, and—

Eustace had to read that next paragraph three times to grasp it:

Suspicion of murder was realized early this morning when the body of the victim was found by sheriff's officers washed up on the beach a mile from the Hale home. The head showed obvious signs of a severe bludgeoning. The victim of the violent gambling quarrel was quickly identified as the movie star himself.

Eustace sat, head stiffly back, while the blur of words seeped into his brain. Numbness began in his throat, ran painfully through his chest, down the lumps of his arms.

. . . . the body of the victim was found . . . .  
washed up on the beach . . . .

A friendly waitress strolled by. "Why, Mr. Caraway, you look— Are you sick, Mr. Caraway? Is there anything—"

Eustace waved her away with the feeble flap of his hand. Somehow he managed to leave a tip, pay for his uneaten breakfast, and stagger drunkenly out to the street, the newspaper wadded under an arm. For a while he seemed to stand stupidly on a curb shredding that dreadful story to bits with stiff, clawed fingers.

The first drug of terror gradually drained away. His mind cleared a little. The bushy black brows crowded tightly against his nose. . . . "Wait a minute, now, Eustace!



Just get this nonsense out of your head! The thing could not by any stretch of imagination be true. You saw Larry Hale, alive and smiling. Larry could not possibly be dead!"

There was some mistake, of course. The murder set-up at Hales' home had pointed distinctly to the fate of a body, bludgeoned and tossed into the ocean; so some over-zealous reporter had taken the body itself for granted.

Yes, of course! That's how it was! Eustace recovered a trace of his lost dignity, trundled down the boulevard toward his office. The mistake would be straightened out in a later edition. Just one of those things. A lucky break, in fact. It put the joke across with a greater shock than was planned. It even shocked the joker himself for a minute. Ha, ha!

Eustace talked himself up to such a point of courage that he was able to march straight to the office and sit down at his typewriter.

It was now proper that he should write a grief-stricken comment on the death of a friend. Eustace never got it written. A sudden fear swept through him like a chilling, sickening fever. He rushed madly, hatless, out to the street, and bought another paper. This paper was the final blow. Spreading across three columns was a photograph of Larry Hale's body, sprawled face down against the sodden sands.

Eustace staggered back to the mocking security of his little office. The creeping knot of terror grew tighter and tighter around his waist. It made him want to crawl under desks, to run squealing like a mouse into a corner, any corner. Fortunately his secretary was late that morning. She did not see him in this paralysis of fright.

Eustace finally forced the rubbery flesh of his hand across the desk, pulled the phone off its hook, clawed out a number on the dial. He choked words through stiff lips: "Daily Tribune? . . . Mr. Pharr's office, please. . . . 'Lo, that you, Pharr? This is Caraway, Eustace Caraway. Say, what is this terrible story about Larry Hale? I mean, it isn't true, is it? Can't be true! I mean, that body they've found. Just a body, isn't it? Nobody's proved it was Larry Hale? . . . Sure, I know everybody knows Larry, but that doesn't prove anything when it comes to a corpse! I don't say your star reporter would make a mistake like that! I just say. . . . What? You say he *saw* the body? He took the picture? He's sure it was the body of Larry Hale? . . . Thanks. I—I'm very upset, that's all. Very upset about it all. . . . Yuh. Thanks."

**EUSTACE T. CARAWAY** was a man of superior logic. He had become one of America's outstanding newspaper writers by his simple philosophy and intelligent reason-

ing on great issues. His column—*AND SO FORTH* by *ETC.*—was a national institution. Nevertheless, on the morning of March 23 Eustace found his logical mind straining desperately at the leash of sanity. It was absurd that a man could be trapped by such a weird coincidence, and yet, if Larry Hale was really dead, coincidence was the only explanation. Some freak disturbance of the ocean must have struck Larry and his motorboat last night, must have buffeted man and boat so severely that Larry actually floated ashore with all the appearance of a man who had been beaten to death.

That was the final answer, as Eustace argued it to himself, but memory would not let him get away with it. Last night the ocean had been calm, the air perfectly clear of storm, the wind gentle. Larry Hale would never have risked a motorboat trip on a stormy sea.

Then what on heaven or earth, Eustace groaned, could possibly have happened to the man?"

By afternoon Eustace refused to believe even the word of the Hollywood Tribune and its publisher. He forced himself to make a special trip to the morgue. His offer to identify the body was not necessary. Identification had been made. Larry Hale was officially dead.

But Eustace refused to be denied. He would believe only his own eyes. It was not too difficult, with his newspaper connections, to get past the homicide men at the morgue, though his heart was lead and his knees were water as he bluffed his way in. He needed only one look at that ghastly face upon the slab to admit the truth. "Larry, Larry!" the little man sobbed in the resounding depths of his chest. "What have I done to you, Larry? What chain of misfortunes has my unworthy humor set in motion?"

By evening Eustace had recovered a certain calm. It was artificial, the false front of the pursued criminal, but it was better than a case of hysterics. Returning to his little bachelor apartment, he forced himself to read in the evening paper a full description of "the mysterious little man with the dirty beard." last night he had looked forward to a big laugh at the difference in eyewitness testimony; but now strangely, the bus driver, street car conductors, and men on the street seemed to have formed a union against him. He gathered that every other person between Hollywood and the Pacific Ocean had managed to see him sometime on that fatal night, and they all agreed exactly upon his looks. Eustace's prancing little body had emerged from the rest of humanity like a sore thumb.

The question now was, simply, how long would it take homicide squad to tab him?

What could he do to prevent it? Hide the evidence?

Eustace suddenly found himself performing the mechanical motions of a criminal. First thing, he had to get rid of that silly disguise he had worn down to Larry's house. On the point of tying up the bundle of old clothes to be dumped in a dark alley somewhere, Eustace caught himself up short. . . . "No! Wait! Don't do that! Whatever you do, don't act like a criminal, Eustace! That's the one fatal mistake an innocent man can make. If you ever have to explain your practical joke to the police, you must have all the properties intact! To destroy them would be to cry out your own guilt!"

Trembling over his hairbreadth withdrawal from such a terrible mistake, Eustace tucked the outfit back into a drawer.

There was no dinner for the little man that night. Food would never pass the tight constriction of his throat, but he did manage to brew a cup of tea.

Over a hot tea, he brooded, "A joke, that's all. I can take a joke. Larry Hale could take a joke. Can the law of the state of California take a—"

Eustace set down his cup sharply, splashing the liquid over the velvet lapels of his smoking jacket. By golly, there was still one hope left! Mathis, the assistant district attorney! Mathis could take a joke. Mathis himself was a member of The Buffoons!

With a sudden revival of spirits Eustace trotted over to the telephone, put through a call to the Mathis home.

"Hullo, Mr. Mathis? Hullo. That you, Mathis? . . . Yuh. This's Eustace Caraway. . . Yuh. About that Larry Hale business, terrible, wasn't it? Are you on the case yourself? . . . You are? Good! I'd like to have you tell me one thing. Off the record, of course. I can't believe Hale was really murdered. Larry was everybody's friend. That part of the story could be a mistake, couldn't it? I mean—well, frankly now, Mathis, you're not absolutely sure he was murdered. . . . Huh? You are? . . . Skull crushed, hey? Couldn't that have been an accident of some sort? . . . Yes, even on the ocean. I mean, a man might get turned over in a rowboat, get knocked around by the boat itself, the oars— A club, you say? I know the ocean doesn't wield clubs. I guess you would know a clubbing when you saw one, Mathis. . . . A steel club? Larry's andiron, you think? Then there was no doubt Larry was murdered?"

Eustace dropped the receiver, sagged back in his chair, black eyes burning deep holes into his skull, receding, hiding. He found himself still mouthing words after the phone was dead. Ridiculous words: "Just a joke, Mathis. You see we were hoping to win The Buf-

foons' annual prize, Larry and I. I pretended to marry Larry, but I didn't murder him! You must believe me, my friend, I didn't actually murder him!"

The words were not heard, fortunately. Not even a confirmed joker like the Assistant D. A. could believe in such a ghastly coincidence. Not even Eustace Caraway, the logical, the supremely sane Eustace Caraway could believe in it.

Eustace was suddenly sitting up, stiff as a bent nail, on the edge of his seat. "If it was not a coincidence, then what else could it be?"

The answer was so terrifyingly simple that it lifted Eustace right out of his chair, set him bouncing like a rubber clown, heel to toe, toe to heel. . . . It was not a coincidence. Larry Hale was definitely murdered. No murderer could have fallen into such a lucky circumstance by chance alone. Therefore, the murderer must have been someone who knew in advance about the practical joke hatched up between Hale and Caraway—someone who took advantage of that joke to dispose of Hale and leave Caraway holding the bag!

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Laugh Lashes Back

THE night of March 23 brought no sleep to Eustace Caraway. He lay, stiff and naked, in his bed, the sheet drawn tightly to his chin. So motionless was his small, lumpy body that he might have been, like friend Larry, a corpse upon a slab.

Eustace's mind, however, was far from dead. It was desperately alive. In the deep darkness it seemed to detach itself from his person and go winging off in search of truths beyond the limit of the naked eye.

Eustace was no coward. Now that he knew his enemy was not Fate itself, but a real flesh-and-blood murderer he felt a certain relief. Where he had been no match for coincidence, he would certainly stack his wits against any criminal who ever lived!

His neat mind lined up a row of questions and swiftly wrote the answers, as if the darkness were a blackboard and his nose the chalk. Question: How could anyone else—the murderer, to be exact—have known in advance that Caraway and Hale were creating a fake murder situation with Larry as the victim? Answer: Since Eustace himself had never so much as dropped a hint of the trick, it must have been Larry Hale who gave the secret away. Q.: Why would Larry—a true Buffoon—do a thing like that? A.: You've got me there! Q.: Granted that some third party knew the exact time and circumstances of the murder trick, how would he go about



killing Larry? A.: Very simple. He would approach the Hale home along the deserted beach and lie in wait for Larry at the end of the pier. He could easily surprise poor Larry, bash in his head, and toss the body into the rowboat. Q.: How would the murderer make his getaway. A.: Equally simple. He would row out into the ocean exactly as Larry had planned to do, dragging the motorboat far enough out for the sound to go unnoticed from shore. There he would dump Larry's dead body into the water, release the rowboat to wash ashore as planned, and take off in Larry's motorboat according to some escape plan of his own. Probably by this time the motorboat would be gutted and sunk somewhere along the Pacific Coast. Q.: What fact stands out like a wart above all others, Eustace? A.: That's easy! The fact that the murderer, in order to work out his own plot so expertly, must have known every detail of the Caraway-Hale plot. Q.: Who could have given him every detail? A.: Larry Hale, of course! Who else? Q.: And you don't know why Larry would do a thing like that? A.: But I do! I do know why!

Eustace was sitting bolt upright, naked chest streaming with sweat, eyes leaping in their sockets. "I do know why!" he hissed. "Larry, you old goat! You old double-crosser!"

Eustace fell back against the pillow, panting. Except for the fact of Larry's death, he would have felt like cheering. "Larry Hale was one up on me all the time! He was just pretending to help me out on my own joke! Actually, he was planning to turn my joke into a better joke of his own! He was going to make me think that my own trick had backfired. He was going to give me the scare of my life! Larry was actually planning to appear as if dead, in the flesh! At least he would arrange it so I would think he was dead. To do that Larry invited in a third accomplice, and that third person double-crossed both of us by murdering Larry and letting me, Eustace Caraway, take the rap!"

Another thought yanked Eustace completely out of bed, naked, shivering like a dog out of water. "Maybe the joke is still on! Maybe Larry is not really dead! Maybe I just think he is—"

That agony of hope passed as quickly as it had come. Larry was dead, all right. Eustace had seen him dead. Granted that a corpse could be faked, there would be just too many people involved in the matter for a practical joke. The murder was in all the papers, on all the tongues of Hollywood. The sheriff's office and the whole police department were in it. Even Larry could not carry a joke that far.

Eustace switched on a light, brewed himself

some more tea. He felt better. He was on the right track, certainly. Larry must have planned to turn the tables on Eustace by seeming, somehow, to be really dead. If the actor had pulled it off, it would have been the classic joke of all time. Instead of pulling it off, Larry had managed only to throw temptation in the way of a third party, and that third party was the true murderer, with the true hatred in his heart!

Eustace paced around his little apartment, a scarecrow in a flapping robe and oversize carpet slippers, reviewing his own logic. A half-hour of testing it for loopholes convinced him he was right.

Next step was to sift the thing down to personalities. That was not as hopeless a task as it might seem. For one thing, Eustace felt that suspicions must be limited to members of The Buffoons; he was sure that Larry Hale would never go outside the sacred circle to find an accomplice for a hoax.

The Buffoons boasted only seven members. Minus Hale and Caraway, that gave Eustace five names. He sat at his desk and scribbled them on separate sheets of paper. Oddly, in trying to sketch the characters of the men from memory, Eustace found he knew very little about them. The only link between himself and the individual Buffoons was a boisterous sense of humor. Even Pharr, the newspaper publisher, was only a social acquaintance. Eustace's column was not featured in any Pharr paper.

**W**ELL, there's an important point in itself. Eustace thought. . . . None of the members is very close to me personally. Likewise none of them would have a personal motive against me, conclusion: The murder was aimed directly at Larry Hale, not at Eustace Caraway. Caraway was simply the Fall Guy for a vicious, premeditated crime against Hale.

Then which one of the five Buffoons had sufficient motive to kill Larry Hale? Eustace was able to cross off one name immediately. Nick Russo, the wealthy playboy, had no connection with Larry outside of The Buffoons. Granted that the two men shared a mutual taste for women, they had always stalked their game in separate fields.

Concerning the four other names Eustace found himself scribbling down little bits that might add up to murder:

Silvers, the playwright—associated with Hale on several Broadway productions. Larry walked out on Silvers' last play, declaring to the press that Silvers' technic was "obsolete, stilted, and academic. Only a fish could speak such lines with the proper accent!"

Mathis, Assistant District Attorney—in-

vited into Buffoons three years ago while still sporting a smart Hollywood legal practice. Why did Mathis drop his lucrative position for a difficult salaried job? Was it purely a desire to serve the state, or was Mathis involved in some unsavory deals that he had to worm out of? Could Larry Hale have known about any such deals? Was Larry a threat to Mathis' career?

Pharr, the publisher—old university chum of Larry's. Larry swears he once made bet that he could get farther by fair means than Pharr could by foul. Pharr is planning to run for congress. Larry intended to write a book of his memoirs. Would Larry's life story reveal some secrets that might ruin Pharr's political ambitions?

Fairchild, the movie producer—when Larry finally freed himself from a long-term contract with Fairchild studios, he described the odor of Fairchild pictures in no uncertain terms. Was Larry's disaffection the first step in Fairchild financial collapse?

Eustace ground his pencil into an emphatic period. There you have it! There's a lot of "friendly enemy" stuff, but just where do the normal human angers get out of hand? Where do they cross the borderline of sanity into the ugly field of murder?

Miraculously, the dawn of March 24 came around before the night was half over. Or so it seemed. Time was running wild. Eustace needed time.

He managed to eat a piece of toast for breakfast, liberally sopped with coffee. He dressed himself in a normal manner, and the coffee gradually penetrated his sleepy mind. He suddenly turned upon his image in the dressing mirror. "Eustace, you poor dope, you're fishing the wrong pond! You're working this out backwards! You should begin not with the murder plot, but with the plot of that classical joke which Larry Hale tried to pull off. You've decided that Larry roped in a third person in order to turn your joke into a better joke of his own. Question is—which member of The Buffoons would Larry have needed to make his joke succeed?"

Eustace let out a chirping bird-sound. The black mustache danced a rumba on his lip. He darted back to his list of four names. Immediately, his pencil scratched one out. That left three persons, any one of whom might logically have helped Larry to stage his master joke.

Question: What, in fact, was the basic point of Larry Hale's joke? Answer: It was simply, to make Eustace Caraway, on the morning of March 23, believe that Larry Hale was not only pretending to be dead but actually was dead beyond the shadow of a doubt. Question: What single person was so situated that he could make Eustace believe a thing like that?

He scratched out another name. He now had it narrowed down to two. Which one of those two men could have made the best possible joke against Eustace Caraway? An absolute foolproof joke it would have to be, because Caraway was no fool! At the same time it must work so neatly that the joker himself would not get into trouble.

Eustace shut his eyes tightly, tried to reason as Larry Hale would have reasoned. When his eyes came open, he had the answer. He crossed out another name, stalked stiffly to the telephone, placed a call:

"Hullo! District Attorney's office, Mr. Mathis, please? . . . That you, Mathis? Eustace Caraway again. I'd like to have a little chat with you. . . . Huh? You'd like to have a chat with me? About my newspaper column? . . . Oh, you mean that bit about 'The Perfect Crime'? . . . Yes, it is a coincidence. Startling coincidence. In fact, if you can arrange to see me, I think I can tell you something about Larry Hale's murder which is even more startling. . . . Exactly. You name the time and place, Mathis. I'm at your disposal. . . . Your office? . . . Right!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### An Appalling Coincidence

THE little bar between Hollywood and Sunset had a gloomy, smoky twilight of its own, deeper even than the gathering night outside. This place was well chosen for an appointment with a murderer.

Eustace rose with a tight little bow when the dark man came in. He hadn't bowed like that in twenty years. Right now he wanted to appear small, shy, a little afraid.

The newcomer nodded glumly in greeting, ordered a drink. He was about the size of Eustace, but smaller-boned. His features were rather flat, the eyes blank. The thick gray-black hair was groomed to give him a dignity that his build and face could never command. Only the thin, precise lips acknowledged Eustace's presence.

Eustace wondered how this man had ever qualified for The Buffoons.

The man wasted no time. "Well, Caraway?"

Eustace shivered noticeably. "Shocking about Larry Hale, wasn't it, Henry?"

"Death is always shocking."

"Great chap, that Larry. Great!" Eustace breathed.

"Your choice of words is rather inept, Eustace. Amusing, I would say. Amusing chap. Greatness is a hard earned compliment, not a flair!"

Eustace's brows bristled. "You didn't like Larry?"

"Like him?" The shrug reminded Eustace



of the cold shifting of a glacier. "Everyone liked him. That was always Larry's favorite boast."

"Yes, yes," Eustace mused. "May I develop that? May I say that everyone *admired* Larry."

"Oh, indeed you may say it. My wife has often said the same."

"Your wife?" Eustace tried not to breathe too tensely.

A blunt, manicured hand came out to accept the small cocktail glass planted deftly by a waiter. The eyes frosted with anger. "Wives are notoriously discontented creatures. Some of them regard amusement more highly than they do success. Success, I find, is rarely amusing!"

"Depends upon the person, I guess," Eustace said. "Larry always got a lot of fun out of his own brand of success."

"Success founded upon pleasure is like a house founded upon sand."

"You mean the wind can blow it down?"

"Exactly. *The wind.*"

Eustace trembled at the chill emphasis, as if the wind itself had swept into their tiny booth. He stiffened his spine with a deep drink. His face came up from the glass, red-cheeked, fever-eyed. "Henry, I have a grave confession to make. I asked you here to be my witness."

"Well?" The voice was dull, remote.

Eustace inhaled and plunged into his story. Without omitting a detail he described his actions on the night of March 22, his supreme shock on the morning of the 23rd to find that Larry Hale was really dead.

"A coincidence, of course," Eustace concluded. "An appalling coincidence. Personally, I believe that Larry died by accident, but what could I possibly advance as proof? How could I convince a jury that my murder plot was a practical joke and not an invention that came to mind in my criminal desperation?"

The listener whistled softly. The eyes regarded Eustace with veiled contempt. "I must say, Caraway, you were wise to approach a friend with this yarn, rather than the police. If I were not a member of The Buffoons myself, I would be inclined to call it poppycock!"

"Exactly!" Eustace groaned. "You can understand the depth of my worry."

"Worry?" the man exploded. "If I were in your shoes, I would be scared to death!"

Eustace bit his mustached lip. "That's just the point, Henry!" he said hoarsely. "That's why I'm worried, rather than afraid. My friend, you *are* in my shoes!"

"*What?*" An emotion at last, splintering the icy scorn of the face.

Eustace leaned forward, whispered. "Or to be more exact, I was in your shoes the night of the murder."

"What do you mean?"

Eustace dropped a hand to the seat beside him, pushed away his own folded topcoat and revealed a brown bundle beneath it. He pulled back a paper corner of the bundle, inserted a hand, drew forth a grey vest. "Recognize that, Henry?"

Henry gasped, snatched it. "That's my vest! My old loafing outfit! Where did you get that?"

Eustace spread his hands helplessly. "I said I had a confession to make. This is it. You see, Henry, I carried that practical joke of mine one extra step, a step too far. I thought it would be very funny to cast suspicion of murder on some member of The Buffoon other than myself. Not even Larry Hale knew about that part of the hoax. I was afraid Larry's conscience would not permit such a trick!"

The head across the table came up, swallowing, sputtering, gulping air as if it had been held too long under water.

Eustace went on shrilly: "I hired a disreputable detective firm to steal these clothes from your house. In one of your downstairs closets they found a lot of old odds and ends. You see, Henry, it was your old grey suit I wore that night, not mine. I wore your shoes, your topcoat. All the planted evidence will be against you, not me. We are the same build, same complexion. The witnesses saw a dark man in your clothes, not mine. If the police found shoe prints around that house, they were yours."

The man was livid. "You sneak!" he hissed. "You insufferable, conniving sneak!"

**E**USTACE reared his shoulders, waved the flat of his hand. "Now, now Henry! Anger will do us no good. At least, you must admit I was fair enough to come to you. I had planned originally to have those hired detectives secretly return these clothes to the closet where they were found. When I discovered Larry was really dead, my honor would not allow me to take that easy way out. I finally nerved myself to come to you."

The dark little man pawed helplessly at his cheeks. "How could you do this to me, Eustace? What'll I do?"

"Well, as I see it, you have two choices," Eustace offered. "You can go to the law with the full story, and I must back you up in it; or you can destroy these clothes and take your chances along with me."

The eyes were shattered. A trembling hand crawled out, clutched at Eustace's lapel. "You *would* back me up?"

Eustace shrugged. "Of course. That would be my duty; though I must say the story would sound to skeptical ears like a friend's fantastic effort to save the neck of a friend!"

The eyes brightened feebly. "Those detectives you hired to steal my clothes! We could get them to testify!"

"No, we couldn't!" Eustace said hastily. "I made a bargain with them that they would have no connection with the joke, whatsoever!"

Eustace fought down a low chuckle at his own ingenuity. His opponent was crouched down in a tight little ball of dismay. Eustace chose the moment to thrust the bundle of clothing across the table. "Here! The decision is yours!"

Eustace stood up, stiff with assured heroism, bowed at the waist, and got out of there while the getting was good.

Eustace bounded swiftly up the street, slid into the rear seat of a black sedan.

The big shadowy man at the wheel of the sedan spoke. "Okay?"

"Okay!" Eustace muttered. He turned to another man in the rear seat, a long, thin shadow. "Henry swallowed my story hook, line, and sinker! Have you spotted his car?"

"It's directly across the street."

The man named Henry suddenly emerged from the little cocktail bar with the bundle of clothes tucked under his arm, glanced furtively up and down the street, and crossed over to his car, a long grey convertible coupe.

The sedan gave it a block headstart, then swung in a wide U and took up the chase.

"If he's not guilty, then he's a wonderful actor," Eustace remarked. "An innocent man would have been a little more outraged.

"That's your story," grunted the man.

Eustace chuckled. "There's one thing he might figure out, Walter, but I doubt it. He's not quite that deep. His conceit will never admit that I could possibly have traced the murder back to him. I doubt if it will ever occur to him that I had those clothes stolen from his closet, not a few days ago as I told him, but this very afternoon!"

"I wash my hands of that part of the deal," grumbled the man named Walter. "In fact, the whole thing from now on is on your head."

"It's a big head, I've been told," Eustace boasted.

"He's going home," Eustace remarked, with a note of disappointment.

"Don't worry. I have men planted out there."

The pause at home was very brief. The man did not enter his own driveway. Instead he parked on a side street behind the big mansion. His dark figure slipped through a grove of fruit trees to a small shed. In a moment he was back in the street and a long dark object was gripped in his hand.

Back on the highway the car ahead opened up to sixty miles an hour. Its driver, whatever his purpose, was in a desperate hurry.

"He's picked up a highway patrol!" muttered the driver. "Now what happens?"

"Dunno!" Eustace said. "The show is his from now on!"

One motorcop, noting the persistent headlights in the rear, drifted back alongside of them. A light flared up on the dashboard of the sedan. The driver raised his hand, flashing a badge. The cyclist wobbled, righted himself, and stiffly saluted.

The tall, thin man leaned out of the rear window. "Let that chap go, will you, fella? We want to see what he does."

THE patrolman nodded, gunned his motor, and bounded ahead. The coupe and the other motorcycle were already lost to sight. The sedan roared up to eighty miles an hour to keep pace, but the pace would not be kept. Finally the road straightened out and far ahead two headlights slanted up a sweeping curve. A third, single light splashed across the rear of the grey convertible. Suddenly, the front machine performed a fantastic exercise. It seemed to vault up on the stilt of its headlights, turn a flip, and vanish from sight.

The sedan rolled up into the curve, parked behind the two motorcycles. Eustace, Walter, and their driver leaped out together, ran to the lip of the curve. The first patrolman held a pistol loosely in his hand. He was chattering, pointing down the steep slant of the road grade to a jumbled pile of metal at the bottom: "He wouldn't stop! He tried to run it out with me! I thought it might be that bank robber we was told to watch for. So I let him have it in the rear tire. I'm not sure whether I got the tire or the sound scared him off the road!"

A flashlight came out in somebody's hand, found a steep path down the grade. The men plunged after it, single file, Eustace last.

The coupe seemed to have shortened in length, butting its steel rage against a giant boulder. It was upside down, canvas top crumpled and strewn along the ground. All to be seen of the driver was a bare protruding arm. By the strange twist of it, Eustace could sense that it was cold—cold as the brain that had directed it.

The flashlight played on down the slope. A brown paper bundle had been tossed free, bursting open to strew its contents wide. Beyond the scatter of clothing was another object, long, black, gleaming at the end. *A garden spade!*

Eustace explained about the spade on the drive back to town: "The man's reactions were typical of a true murderer. Having a crime to hide, he set out to hide it. He was taking that bundle of clothing out into the country, planning to bury it in some spot where it would never be found.

"When that motorcop gave chase tonight, Walter, the man showed his true colors. He didn't dare to let a policeman see that bundle



of clothing and the spade in his car and report same to headquarters."

"Yeah, they all break up in time," agreed Walter, stroking the dark wedge of his chin. "The prettier the plot, the sooner they crumble, but I still don't see how you pinned it down to this particular man, Eustace."

Eustace eased back in his seat, sighed importantly: "Well, there were only five names to work with, Walter. I eliminated Nick Russo entirely. He was too remote from Hale's life. He would have no motive. Then, as I told you, I tackled it from a different angle. I looked for the man who could have best helped Larry work his joke against me, the man who might have been able to make me think Larry was really dead. That eliminated Anthony Silvers, the playwright, who spends most of his time in New York. Silvers might have written a good script for the stunt, but he did not have the means to pull it off.

"Next, I considered Ben Fairchild, the movie producer. Ben could have staged an excellent murder show. With the aid of his actors and studio props he could even have rigged up a fake corpse of Larry Hale; but, supposing he went that far, how would he get me to view the corpse without getting himself tangled up in police affairs?"

"That left me with two names, and either one of them made strong possibilities. Off-hand, I might have picked you, Walter. As Assistant District Attorney you might have had enough authority to plant a fake body in the morgue. You could have set your men to grilling me unmercifully as a murder suspect. That's how it looked on the surface, but I soon decided it was no good.

"THAT left me only Henry Pharr, the newspaper publisher, and at once the plot was so perfectly simple it was like reading a newspaper. The perfect joke would have happened exactly as it did happen to me. If I read in a newspaper that Larry Hale's body was found, if I actually saw a photograph of the body, how could I doubt? Henry Pharr could very easily have ordered his employees to cook up a special murder edition for Eustace Caraway only. It's a joke that's been worked often enough. But the joke conceived by Larry Hale would not stop at that. Larry would know that I might not take the word of a single newspaper. Pharr would have to print more than one paper. There must be special editions planted at every newsstand in my vicinity. All of Pharr's newsboys must be coached with my description.

"Not until I went straight to the police would I know that I was the victim of a joke in reverse. Meanwhile, I would be suffering

the tortures of the damned. If I actually went so far as to inquire at the morgue for the body of Larry Hale, the laugh would echo through the Buffoon Club for years to come! That newspaper trick was the only possible joke that would not get the joker into trouble. As long as the paper was not sold to the general public, Pharr would be safe enough. It was clear that Henry Pharr was the only man who could have successfully fooled me. When I decided that, it only remained to pin him down to a motive."

"Did you manage to do that?" Mathis demanded.

"I think so," Eustace muttered. "It was tied up with a lifelong endurance contest between Pharr and his school chum, Larry Hale. Hale took life with an easy stride. Pharr trampled life underfoot. Pharr's formula for success was a mixture of arrogance, ruthlessness, double-dealing, and downright hatred. The single burning fact that ate constantly into Henry was the obvious fact that Hale was equally successful. Larry had proved that good succeeds as well as evil and leaves no bitter taste in the mouth. But to get down to more definite facts—there was the matter of a book Larry was planning to write, his personal memoirs.

"Larry was a very frank man. Knowing as much as he did of Pharr's unsavory methods, he was very apt to reveal them in his book. Pharr was looking forward to a big political career, beginning with a campaign for congress. The publication of Larry's story might have ruined his chances. Then to top it all off—Pharr told me tonight that his wife greatly admired Larry Hale. That would be like rank poison to the man's conceit, a bitter climax to his long contest with Hale. When a perfect murder set-up fell into his lap, he seized the chance to eliminate his old rival. You see, Walter, there's always one last trump for men like Pharr. Whom they cannot defeat in fair battle, they can always destroy by foul play!"

The big official sedan slid up to a stop sign. A thin light turned Mathis' face a deep red. He turned and tapped Eustace on the chest with a long, hard finger. "Brother Buffoon, I hope you take this as a lesson that it is wrong to make sport of the laws of this land."

Eustace shuddered. "I do! I do!"

"I am forced at this point, Eustace, to take your logic at its face value; but if you are wrong—if there's any loophole in your reasoning, then the murderer of Larry Hale may still be at large, and that, *Brother Caraway, would be no joke!*"

Eustace laughed. The little mustache danced a jig on his lip. He let all the fear out of his chest in a single gusher. He threw back his head and roared.

THE END





# COME DIE WITH ME!

By  
**KEN LEWIS**

*That marriage didn't go on the rocks—it went on the rockets—sky rockets that burst forth into a huge star-spangled frame of murder which fit D.A. Sam Foster only too well. . .*



*Its tail light dissolved into the dark like a drop of red ink into the sea.*

**I**F THE sound of the car rushing through the fog outside reached my ears at all, I didn't know it. It did not penetrate the fog in my brain. Ever since Mary Ellen had suggested the divorce, I had been too busy with my own thoughts to pay much attention to things like street sounds.

So it wasn't till I heard the shriek of tires on watery pavement, the sodden fog-muffled grunt of impact, that I realized there was a car on the hill at all. Then my only reaction was a dull prick of irritation that some fool should have missed the jog in the street outside and smashed a wheel against the curbing.

I got up sluggishly at first, like a man only half aroused from stupor and moved through the house to the front door. The car had stopped now. I could see the twin blobs of its headlights glowing thinly down by the gate. And that was all I could see. The fog wrapped the hilltop like cotton batting.

I remember calling out, "Need any help?" and starting to feel my way through the mist. Water dripped from the eaves behind me, and far in the bay below a foghorn groaned mournfully.

When I was maybe halfway down the long drive, the click of a closing door drifted to me,



and the car began to leap forward again, gathering invisibility with each rasp of the gears, its tail light dissolving in the damp like a drop of red ink spilled into the sea.

I was conscious of a vague lift of relief because no one had been hurt. That was all. If I had stopped to think about it, I would have turned around and gone back to the house right then.

But I didn't think about it. The active part of my mind was still so exclusively occupied with Mary Ellen, that already it had walled off this surface distraction caused by the car, and forgotten about it. And because I had started the mechanical process of putting one foot ahead of the other, it didn't occur to turn around until I reached the street.

Otherwise, I might never have found her. She might have lain there, crumpled against the curb like a broken doll, till some chance passerby discovered her after the fog had lifted ten hours later. And I suppose that would have been better, all around.

As it was, my foot caught in the hem of her dress, and I looked down and saw her. She was lying there so white and quiet, with one crushed hand outstretched as though in sleep, that the concept of death never entered my head. My only thought, I remember, was that though tomorrow I would lose her forever, there was still one thing left that I could do for her tonight.

I got down and slipped my arms beneath her and picked her up, moving back up the drive as mechanically as I had come down it. I remember having trouble with her head. It kept falling back over my arm, like a flower twisting on a broken stem.

I got a knee beneath her and held her up, poising on one leg like a gull in the sand, while I dabbed at the wisp of blood on her lips and adjusted the limp head against my shoulder.

It was then that I realized she was dead.

**I**NSIDE the house, the phone was ringing, the sound cutting like jeweled saw teeth through the dark. I fumbled open the door, carried her in and placed her on the bed, then turned and lifted the receiver. Andy Harrison's voice flowed over the wire, warm with the mellow drawl good Scotch always gives it.

He was apologizing for not keeping some appointment. "—but that damned Bar Association dinner lasted so long, and now this fog . . ."

The words brought back some measure of reality, and I remembered that the divorce was scheduled for Andy's court in the morning, and the three of us had planned a conference here tonight to complete the details, so that

the action would take only a minimum of court room time and fanfare.

"Andy," I said, "I wish you'd come over . . . Something terrible's happened to Mary Ellen. . ."

By the time he arrived, I'd already discovered that the diamond was missing. The stone had been in our family a long time, and it was worth a good deal of money. A lot more than I'd have been able to afford on my salary as district attorney. But when Mary Ellen agreed to marry me, my mother had relinquished it and I'd had it made into an engagement ring.

Mary Ellen had been wearing it when the car struck her down, and one of the car's wheels, passing over her outflung hand, had twisted the platinum band and sprung the setting, so that the stone had undoubtedly been loosened.

I knew now why the driver had been in such a hurry to get away. Why he'd preferred to risk a hit-run homicide rap, rather than stay around to face the music. He'd gone back to see what he'd struck, and had noticed the diamond glittering there in the fog. He'd realized its worth and taken it off her dead hand and lammed with it.

Andy followed me into the bedroom when I answered his knock. He stood there with his hat clasped over his paunch and his white brows stiff with emotion, while I told him what had happened. When I finished, pain was like a sickness behind his eyes.

He said, to cover it up: "That Scotch I had with dinner is beginning to die, son. Could I have a drink?"

"Sure."

I led him into the kitchen and poured it for him. I didn't take one myself. I don't know why. I guess it would have seemed almost sacrilegious, with her in there, not able to join in. . .

"Have you—called anybody about this yet, Sam?"

I shook my head. "I—I guess I wanted these few minutes alone with her, first. But I'll get the police right away."

"The police?" His brows arched. "Hadn't you better let your own office handle this, Sam? The city boys don't love you too well, you know. You've refused to prosecute too many patsies for them."

"It happened in their jurisdiction," I said. "Of course I'll put Barney on it, too. But I want no special handling of this case, just because I happen to be district attorney."

He gave me a long slow look, and I knew what he was thinking. It had been a point of half-humorous contention between us for years.

"Still the knight in shining armor," he mused. "Still the little boy going out to battle

Evil and Inequity, armed only with an unshakeable conviction that Truth and Justice always prevail in the end."

"No," I said. "It's not that. It's just that I don't want any claims that the case was hushed up, afterwards. When they catch the killer, I'll even let Earl Ransom prosecute him."

He sighed. "Barney's all right," he said, "But watch out for Ransom. He's a smart boy, Sam. An ambitious boy. And he's not above playing politics, even if you are."

He poured himself another drink. "I don't suppose it's occurred to you, son, that Sam Foster himself may come under suspicion. That the bigger headstart you give Barney over the rest, the better it may be for you, later."

"It's police business!" I said stubbornly. "All they have to do is find the car, or the diamond!" I strode into the living room and dialed headquarters.

Andy put on his hat and found the door. "If you insist on letting them crucify you, Sam," he said grimly, "I don't intend to stay around and watch it happen. If you need me for anything, let me know."

**T**HEY didn't crucify me. Not then. The city police were most cooperative. I released the body to them and told them my story.

"Cover the pawn shops," I instructed. "Especially all the known fences. And for once in my life, I'm going to suggest that we hold something back from the papers. That's the importance of the diamond in this case. I don't believe I'd mention it yet."

Barney McCay stayed after the others had left. He was a dark rapier-thin djck in his early forties, who combined the hard intelligence of a secret service operative with the dogged persistence of a Broad Street runner. I'd worked with him on one of my early cases, when he was still with the F. B. I. But later I'd talked him into joining my team, as chief investigator.

"Concentrate on the stone," I told him. "That's the crux of this whole thing. Forget the rest of it. Just find that stone!"

I know he followed my line of reasoning. The municipal men could handle the search for the car, the body, the routine. But that diamond meant money. And where too much dough was involved—well, the city police had been suspected before. . .

The diamond couldn't be kept out of the inquest, of course. But because no sign of it had been found, I touched upon it as lightly as possible in my testimony. Keith Barron, the pale handsome yacht club boy Mary Ellen had fallen for, told with a set face of driving her home that night, and how she's made him

let her out at the foot of the hill because he was unfamiliar with the neighborhood and might get lost up there in all that fog.

Lieutenant Corcoran of homicide described the latent tire marks found on her dress, but said that the tread was a more or less common one otherwise there were no distinguishing features. So the coroner's jury returned an open verdict, with the added comment by the foreman that since the death had occurred in connection with grand larceny it would automatically be classed as homicide, and as such might be subject to further investigation by the county grand jury.

Something about the way he said it made me wonder if the words hadn't been planted in his mouth; and when Andy Harrison drove over to show me the *Herald's* latest edition that night, I was sure of it. The *Herald* was the mouthpiece of the local machine, and its front-page story bristled with question marks:

Why had Mr. Foster failed to notice the license number of the alleged death car? Why had the body been moved before police were called? And did the public know that the tire treads of the district attorney's car were the same type found on his dead wife's clothing?

Reading that story, you'd have never guessed that there was any fog that night to hinder vision. That anyone but me had ever bought a set of that particular brand of tires. Or that any man in his right mind, finding his wife unconscious in the street, would have picked her up and carried her into the house before calling copper.

"Don't let them crowd you into it, Sam," Andy warned. "They're afraid to come right out and arrest you. They know what a stink that would raise among voters. But if they can get a grand jury indictment—"

"It looks to me," I interrupted, "as if a grand jury investigation is my only sure hope of clearing myself."

He snorted. "Just because you've gotten away with playing with fire this long, don't get the idea you're *immune* to burns!"

I grinned. I knew what he meant. His influence had gained me the appointment as acting district attorney, when the former incumbent died five years before. He'd just been elevated to the state bench, and couldn't take the job, himself. So he'd tossed it to me, a clerk in his former law office.

And because I was too young to have learned the art of compromising, or maybe because I had no hope of continuing in office beyond the next election anyway, I'd set out to run things my own way. My first act had been to break openly with the political machine which controlled the county. When its officers brought me patsies to prosecute,



in the hope of sparing some protected politician, I went to work to exonerate them instead. And I consistently refused to soft-pedal issues merely to advance my own political fortunes.

It used to worry Andy. He said I was ruining any chance I might have for a future public career. Ideals, he said, were the backbone of American democracy—so long as you were in a position to use them. But you had to be practical about it, too. In a word, he said I couldn't get away with it.

But the funny thing was that I had gotten away with it. The non-machine papers loved my foolhardy methods, and so did the voters. Twice they'd swept me back into office, and they were all set to do it again in next fall's election.

That was what the machine feared and hated. That was the why behind the story in tonight's *Herald*. They'd known I couldn't let such a challenge pass.

"The evidence goes to the grand jury tomorrow," I said. I'll appear only as a witness. Earl Ransom will represent the D.A.'s office."

For the second time that week, Andy Harrison walked out my front door shaking his head.

**E**ARL RANSOM, my chief trial deputy, was a tall curly headed black Irishman, with a mind as cold and bright as a rattlesnake's eyes, and a voice which could play on the human heartstrings like a gypsy plays on a violin.

He was very considerate of me on the stand, very solicitous. No direct accusations; just a carefully-phrased reiteration of the questions in the *Herald* the night before. You could see it hurt him something awful to have to tear his dear old boss to pieces that way. But his duty, he made it quite clear to the jurors, was evident.

They led me out after I'd finished my stint—grand jury proceedings are very hush-hush—so I didn't have a chance to hear him work on them afterwards. But he must have done a beautiful job—in his own behalf, Earl Ransom, God and the machine willing, meant to be the next district attorney.

The day the grand jury returned a true bill, Andy Harrison came to my cell to see me. There were pouches under his gray eyes, and his usually rosy cheeks were pale and flabby.

He didn't spend any time saying, "I told you so." He just put an arm around my shoulder and gave me that old fighting grin. The lump in my throat threatened to choke me.

"Thanks, Andy," I said. "But you shouldn't be here. You're a judge and I'm an accused killer."

"You think I'd stay on the bench while

this went on?" he demanded harshly. I'm resigning tonight, to handle your defense!"

I shook my head. "No, Andy. You mustn't. Not just because it would mean your job and kill you politically. But—well, I've already got a mouthpiece."

It hurt him. I could see that. And because of that, it hurt me, too. But what else could I do? I couldn't let him throw away his whole life, because of me.

"Who—who is it, son?"

"Me."

He blew up, then. "Sam—you *can't* be that dumb! Earl Ransom will rip you to shreds! Look, son: a mere hung jury won't be enough in this case. It may save you from the gas chamber; but what good's that if you have nothing left to live for, anyway?"

"I know what your job means to you. It and Mary Ellen have been your whole life. You've lost the one, but I'm damned if I'll see you lose the other, too. There's only one way you can come out of this and be able to pick up where you left off: That's with an acquittal so convincing that no breath of suspicion can ever touch you again."

I tried to grin. "And how would you turn that little trick?"

"By finding the real killer. You can't do it, locked up behind bars. But maybe, with my connections, I can!"

My head shook. "No, Andy I've made up my mind. I'll represent myself. You could do it a thousand times better. I know that. You were the best criminal lawyer this state ever had . . . But that's the trouble. The public knows that some of your clients were guilty, even if the juries ruled otherwise. And I don't want to be lumped in the same class. I've stood against legal trickery all my life, and—"

I think he began to catch on. "You're thinking about me," he said. "What it'll do to my career. Well, don't. I can take care of myself. I'm no knight in shining armor, even if you are. The next time you see me, son, it'll be in the capacity of counsel calling on client."

"Andy," I said harshly, "don't make me do it! You're a practical man. Don't make me disown you in court, and call for another lawyer!"

He stared at me blankly for a moment, as though I'd just cracked a joke he didn't understand. Then gradually the pain began to well up in his eyes again.

"You—you'd do that?"

"Sure," I said coldly. "I don't want them saying afterwards that I went free because of some shyster's tricks."

It was the most unfair thing I'd ever said in my life. And I knew that when I said it. But how could I break clean, under the cir-

circumstances? I couldn't let him sacrifice himself for me.

He turned and stumbled out of the cell, his big shoulders sagging, his face a middle-aged mask of tragedy.

**THE TRIAL** drew a packed house. Because of his previous friendship with me, Andy was automatically disqualified from hearing it, so Judge Hugo Larrabee, one of the machine's old guard, took over.

Aside from the circumstantial evidence—Barney still hadn't been able to find any trace of the death car or the missing diamond. I think it was Keith Barron's testimony which hurt me the most. Ransom called him to the stand on the third day, elicited his name and occupation—investment broker—and the statement that he had been planning to marry Mary Ellen. Then . . .

*Q.* What was delaying the marriage?

*A.* The fact that she was already married to the defendant.

*Q.* But she had asked for a divorce?

*A.* She had.

*Q.* And he refused?

*Defense:* I object to this entire line of questioning, Your Honor, as irrelevant and immaterial to this case, and as such not a part of the *res gestae*—

*Prosecution:* I am merely inquiring into a possible motive for this crime, Your Honor.

*The Court:* Objection over-ruled. The witness will please answer the question.

*A.* He had refused, for months.

*Q.* Did he give any reason for his refusal?

*A.* She said that he told her he would rather see her dead than married to anyone else!

*Defense:* I object to that statement as hearsay, and as such improper testimony in a court of law!

*The Court:* Objection sustained. I order the last question and answer stricken from the records, and instruct the jury to disregard it in their deliberations.

Well, that was the crux of it. You can strike a statement from the records, but you can't strike it out of a jury's minds. Ransom called me next:

*Q.* Did you, at any time, threaten to kill your wife if she insisted on a divorce?

*A.* I did not!

*Q.* Did you ever tell her you would rather see her dead than divorced from you?

*A.* A man may say a lot of things he doesn't mean, in the heat of a quarrel.

*Q.* We are not here to listen to your views on human nature, Mr. Foster. Did you say those words, or didn't you—yes or no?

*Q.* Did you refuse her a divorce?

*A.* I did at first, but—

*Q.* Why?

*A.* Because I thought that any two people who had been as happy together as we had, shouldn't break off the marriage relationship hastily. Because I loved her so much that I didn't want to see her hurt! But when I realized that was really what she wanted, I agreed. That's why she was coming to see me that night: to complete the arrangements—

*Q.* The fact that you would be up for reelection as district attorney within a few months, and that a divorce at such a time might hurt you at the polls, had nothing to do with your refusal?

*A.* Certainly not!

After that, he asked me to give my version of what had happened that night. When I had finished . . .

*Q.* You found your wife lying dead in the street, allegedly the victim of negligent homicide by a hit-run driver, and yet you picked up her body and carried it into the house before notifying anyone? Surely, after five years as district attorney, you knew the importance of leaving the corpse undisturbed until police arrived!

*A.* I didn't know she was dead when I picked her up. I didn't realize that till we were almost to the house.

*Q.* You knew she was dead when you reached the house? And as district attorney, you knew how seconds count in a case like this? That to delay a single minute might mean the difference between catching the killer and letting him get away? And yet you admittedly waited, not one, but almost *thirty* minutes before notifying the police? Why, Mr. Foster? *Why?*

*A.* Be—because I was stunned and shocked. Because I didn't know what I was doing, I guess. I just wanted to be alone with her for a little while first—

*Q.* You wanted to be alone with her, Mr. Foster. Just for a little while. Just long enough to remove the set from her engagement ring, so it would look like robbery by an outsider had been the murder motive?

*A.* I object, Your Honor—

**IT WASN'T** until that night that I fully appreciated Andy Harrison's respect for Ransom's court room prowess. His closing plea to the jury was a masterpiece:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the hardest task I have ever faced now devolves upon me. I have known the defendant for almost five years. I have worked with him in his office, day by day. And I must tell you that I have only the greatest respect and admiration for the manner in which he has discharged his duties as district attorney.

"But ladies and gentlemen, a murder has been committed. A lovely girl has been brutally slain. And my task is clear: I must



ask you to mete out to her murderer the same unrelenting measure of justice he has so often demanded for others.

"I think the state has proved beyond the least shadow of reasonable doubt, exactly what happened on the night Mrs. Foster was killed. She had been insisting on a divorce from her husband—a divorce which, in his own words, 'he would rather see her dead' than obtain. Nevertheless, she *was* about to obtain it. The law was on her side; and she was going to visit him on that very night to complete arrangements. In his mind, there was only one way to stop her.

"I think we can all visualize what happened next: can see him slumped behind the wheel of the car parked on the fog-shrouded street outside his house. Within him at that moment burned two of the most overpowering motives that have led to homicide: a savage, implacable jealousy, coupled with a driving desire to prevent a divorce which would have done great damage to his public career . . .

"The fog was dense, but not so dense that he could fail to see her as she stepped from the opposite curb to cross the street. Perhaps she saw him, too, and hurried toward him, never guessing the thing that was in his heart . . . That doesn't matter. What does matter is the sudden rasp of gears, the roar of the motor—and a few seconds later, the blood of a murdered woman staining the pavement . . .

"Then, after a delay of many minutes, while he takes the steps he thinks necessary to hide his own part in the crime, he finally calls the police . . . In view of all this, in view of the overwhelming evidence which makes these facts irrefutable, the state can do no less than ask you to find this man guilty of murder in the first degree . . ."

The jury was out for three days. While it was still deliberating, Barney McCay came to the jail to see me. I hardly recognized him at first. His gaunt face was stubbled and his eyes were hollow and his clothes didn't look like he'd had them off for a week.

"Barney, let up a little," I told him. "You're killing yourself!"

"I'd rather do that than let them kill you, Sam," he said. "I've pressured so many fences and looked at so many sparklers these past few weeks, that I'd swear diamonds were as common as sand in this town. But none of them fit, Sam—*none of them fit!*"

When the jurors finally filed back to the box, some of them looked almost as tired as me. Larrabee rapped his gavel and we all stood up, while the bailiff unfolded the verdict:

"We, the duly constituted jurors . . . find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree . . ."

After that, the death sentence was just a formality. But Larrabee had to drag it out by postponing it till the next day. That night in my cell, I took out the straight-edge razor my dad had given me when I was sixteen. I'd never grown accustomed to any other kind, so the bailiff, being a friend of mine, had let me keep it with me here. For the first time I began to realize fully just how much that kindness of his could mean to me.

I stood with my back to the bars a long time, studying it. And then, at last. I shook my head. I'd been stubborn so long, I was damned if I was going to give up, now! That would be the easy way out. That would only be a confession of defeat, nullifying all I'd stood for so far. I put it back in its case and dropped it in my pocket.

The court room was jammed for the sentencing. Just as Larrabee opened his mouth to begin, a girl screamed. Two deputies tried to hustle her out, but she kept shouting that she had to see the judge.

Ordinarily, that kind of hysterical play wouldn't have got to first base. But while they were trying to drag her through the door, she held out her hand, palm up, and opened her fingers. The deputies paused a moment, uncertainly; then turned her around and made way for her toward the bench.

The thing she held in her hand was a diamond. And I could tell by the look on Barney

(Continued from page 8)



**ANSWER TO—  
THE FINGER POINTS TO  
MURDER!**

**AS THE EJECTOR ON WARD'S GUN WAS NOT AUTOMATIC, BUT HAND OPERATED, THE SHERIFF KNEW THAT WARD HAD NOT ACCIDENTALLY SHOT HIMSELF AS EVANS MAINTAINED. EVANS CONFESSED. HE KILLED WARD TO GET CONTROL OF THE BUSINESS.**

McCay's face as she passed him, that it was *the* diamond! The judge had to clear the court room before we could hear her story above the racket.

She was a plain little thing with scared tragic eyes and not enough makeup. Her name, she said, was Carrie Wilkins, and she was a part-time maid at one of the big houses up the hill from my place. She was driving home late from work the night of the fog, and hadn't seen Mary Ellen until too late . . . .

Afterwards, she'd jammed on the brakes and run back to see if the person she'd hit was badly hurt. She'd found her dead.

After that, she got panicky. Her employer had been having a party that night, and she'd drunk a little of the wine before leaving the house. Not much; but she didn't know how much it took to classify you as a "drunk driver." She was afraid of the sobriety test.

**S**HE didn't have any money to pay a fine, and she couldn't afford a jail sentence because of her two kids, whose old man had been killed in the war. So she'd lost her head, and beat it.

She didn't find out about the diamond till later. After she'd put her car in her garage, and was looking it over to see if the accident had left any telltale marks, she noticed the stone glittering up at her from one of the rear wheels. When the front wheel crushed the ring it must have rolled free, and been picked up in the tread as the rear tire rolled over it. You know—like those little pieces of gravel you find in your treads, after you've been for a ride in the country.

Well, there it was. A thing that might not happen again in a million tries. But it had happened this time, and she had the stone to prove it.

She'd thought it was just an imitation at first, and fearful that it might somehow be traced to her, she'd tossed it into her backyard incinerator. But last night, when she'd gone out to empty the incinerator, the diamond had rolled free with the ashes and lay there staring up at her like an evil eye or something, and all at once she couldn't stand it any longer. She'd known then that she couldn't let an innocent man die for something she'd done, however unintentionally. So she'd come to court today to make it right.

It was a typical Hollywood ending. It sounded so phony I couldn't believe it at first. But Larrabee postponed sentence till her story could be checked; and the wonderful thing was that it did check. Her name, where she worked, the party at her employer's house that night, the fact that she had to drive by my place to get home, her two kids, with their father killed in the war . . . .

And best of all, the diamond, the real clincher, checked! I identified it, and so did the insurance appraiser who'd okayed the policy Mary Ellen had taken on it.

The day they turned me loose, it seemed as if everyone I'd ever known was there to join in the cheering. Andy Harrison left his own court room to congratulate me, and there were tears in his eyes when he did it.

That night, after I'd combed the last reporter out of my hair, I drove back to the jail to see this girl. I wanted to thank her, and offer to sign her application for probation, if she'd let me.

The matron said she already had a caller, but I could wait in the hall outside the visitor's cage till he left. The door to the visitor's room was ajar when I got there, and I couldn't help hearing what went on inside, or identifying the male voice as Andy's.

"Don't worry about a thing," he was saying. "I'll take care of the children while you're gone. The worst you can get is a year or so for manslaughter; but the board'll rush your parole right through, I'll see to that. You'll be out in six months, and the rest of the money'll be waiting for you, then . . . ."

Money? What money? . . . . Then it hit me, like a sledgehammer blow below the belt: *The money he was paying her, of course, to take the rap for somebody else!*

But the diamond . . . . The real killer must have furnished that! Who was my pal Andy covering for?

I guess I went a little crazy. All the strain and excitement of the past few weeks had been too much, to be climaxed by a mockery like this. I still had the razor with me, and when he stepped through the door a moment later, the light highlighted its blade in my hand.

He saw it there, and even in a moment like that, that hair-trigger brain of his came to his rescue.

"Relax, Sam. I had arranged to handle this a simpler way. But I guess I could scarcely expect my way to satisfy a knight in shining armor."

"Who did it, Andy?"

"I did, Sam. I was drunk—you must realize that. I was hurrying to keep my appointment with you; didn't see Mary Ellen until too late . . . . It happened just the way the girl described it, only it was I who found the diamond caught in my tire tread later; not her.

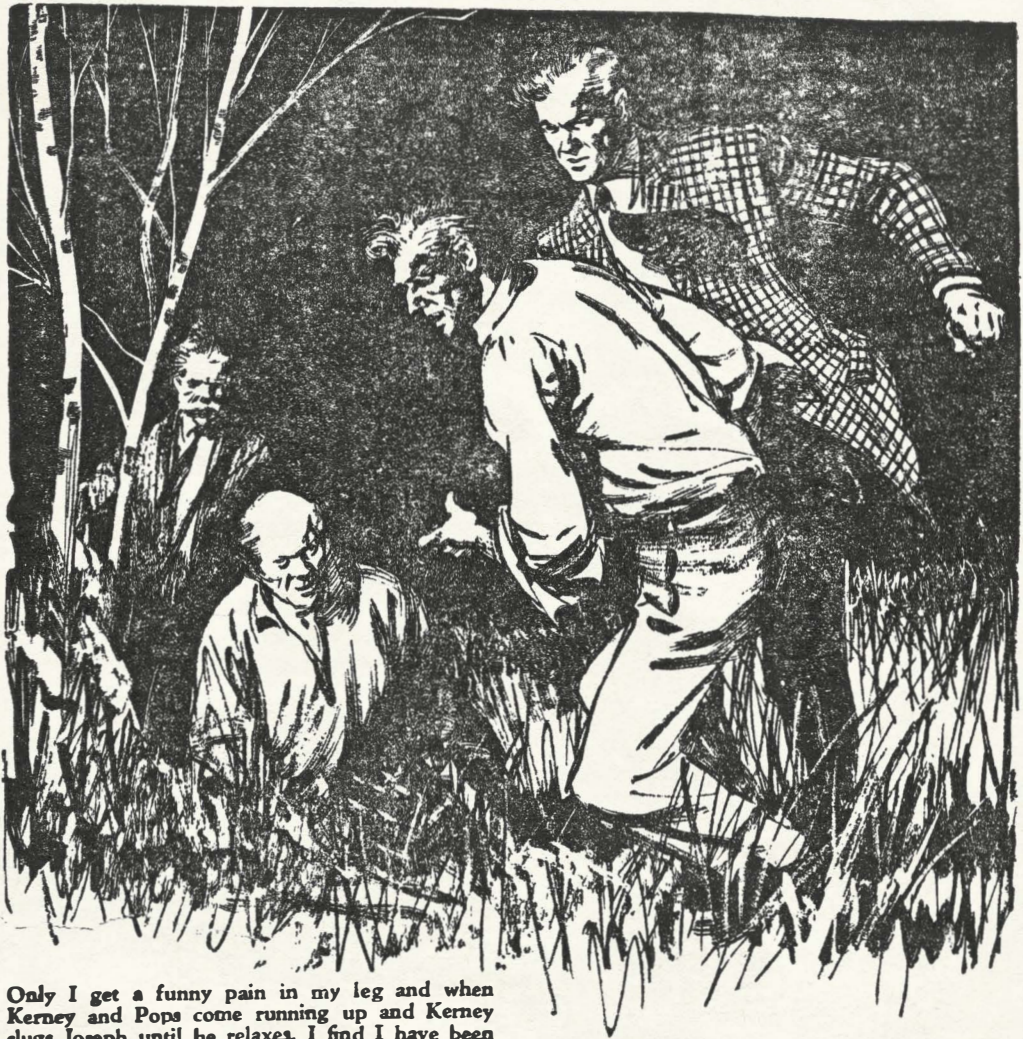
"But you phoned right afterwards—"

He nodded. "I stopped at the first drug store down the hill to do that. I was at least sober enough to want an alibi."

I was stunned. I didn't know what to say next.

He said it for me: "Shall we go upstairs, now, and tell it to the judge?"





Only I get a funny pain in my leg and when Kerney and Pops come running up and Kerney slugs Joseph until he relaxes, I find I have been twisting my own toe.

# Toe-Hold on a Torpedo

By PARKER BONNER

*If Hymie the Hackie hadn't been a city slicker, he'd have known that crooks are often like bass: if your lure is right and your cast is straight —you can hook 'em every time!*

**Y**OU gotta understand, Mamie, that it is merely your suspicious nature which makes you think I would sneak off for a vacation without you. Did I ever go on a vacation without you? Me, I am a guy who does not hold much with vacations since the only one which I ever have is the time we go calling on your brother in Jersey and he puts me to making beds for cows, and squeezing them to make them give out with the milk.

As for fishing, you can buy better fish in Fulton Market than I ever see come out from any lake.

Besides, there just isn't room for you what with all the gear this fly artist loads in my hack, and besides I don't know I am going north of Grant's Tomb until we are under way, and then I don't have the opportunity to even call you.

I'm cruising Lex when the doorman whistles me down and I see this lug standing in a big pile of baggage. He looks like moola and I figure he is headed for Grand Central or maybe Penn Station and he should be good for a four-bit tip, so I haul over and we load up.

When we're in the cab he takes a look at my picture and kind of grins. "Hit the Bronx Parkway," he says, "and keep driving until I tell you to stop, Hymie."

Well, I figure he is headed for Westchester or Connecticut or some of them commuter stops, but he don't tell me to turn, and we just keep rolling north.

At Scarsdale I begin to wonder so I pull over and turn around. This guy is a big, good looking joe with health written all over him like those ads for that body building course which you get me to take through the mail. He is too big for me to handle, even with my padded wrench, so I suggest mild like that I wish to have a understanding because the meter is ticking like crazy and Juanita, our female checker, is very particular that I turn in each and every dime which shows on the clock.

"Ah," he says. "So you doubt my integrity, Hymie."

"It ain't nothing like that," I tell him. "It's just that driving a hack you see the worst sides of human nature, and I been around Times Square and the Rialto so long I don't even trust my wife . . . a figger of speech, like, and not meaning personal present company. You understand, Mamie."

Well he laughs, and he gets out a wallet which is loaded and gives me a hundred and I'm to tell him when that is used up and he will shell out some more.

So then I ask where we are headed and he says it is a lake well up in the bushes toward a place called Canada. So I like his looks and although he is sugar heavy, I don't see why he should spend it all on a hack, so I ask isn't there some other way he can get to this lake.

He just grins, and it's a nice grin, and says it would mean changing trains and riding busses and such, and maybe take him a lot of time and he is in a hurry. Besides he's got a bum gam, having lost his real one to the Japs, so he feels more comfortable riding although he moves around about as good as me or maybe better.

Well, we get pretty friendly then and it winds up by his not only wanting me to drive

him to the woods but I'm hired for a week to hang around and listen to his chatter. For this I get twenty bucks a day, which listens like a right deal since I am always having to listen to fares yak-i-ty-yak for free.

"I'm the happiest guy in the world," he says. "I'm young. I'm getting used to this piece of structural steel which they give me to walk on and I've got ten thousand pieces of eight which I earn with honest dice, and most of it comes from a top kick so dough heavy he doesn't even miss it.

"Besides which," he adds, "I meet this nurse in the hospital and she is a very sweet and loving gal, and we are now engaged on a pilgrimage to see her and her folks.

"And this is the rub," he sounds a little doubtful for the first time. "They are nice and quiet and respectable hicks, and I do not know how they will cotton to me because I have been raised around Broadway and I have some of the dirt on my shoes."

Well, personally, I can't see what is wrong with a character being raised around Broadway, but then, he is in love and people in love are not normal like the rest of us, so I don't argue.

**WE** just talk back and forth and all the time we are driving north as fast as the old kettle will perk. So he asks me what has been happening around the Garden and Jacobs' beach, and we talk of this and that and the wise boys and the phoneyes. He knows a lot about them.

I don't make his racket, but I am a guy which strictly figures that a man's racket is his own. We get talking about the liquor days, and the big shots which once handled the stuff and what they are doing now, and finally he goes to sleep and I follow a marked map which he gives me and about five hours later we pull up at this lake.

It is not so bad if you go for lakes and pine trees and such, but it is kind of lonesome even if there are cottages about. There is a store with its feet in this lake, and my fare gets his leg set and bounces up the steps and slams the door open. Through the window I see a chick that does not belong in a rural community. She comes around the counter fast and they meet and I think what a nice world the place is after all.

Then a car pulls up beside the hack and two guys give me the eye and then look in the store. When they see I am watching, they haul freight, and I notice their jalopy is a Packard and I think I recall having seen them on the road, and I begin to wonder.

But just then my fare brings out the chick and I forget because close up she is even better. He says this is Miss Betty Foster but that if we are lucky we will take her back to



town with us as Mrs. Ralph Kerney and maybe I can be best man.

Well, she is a sweet dish and we haul the stuff into the store and I get a room upstairs which outlooks on the lake, and she explains that her folks are at the square dance. Until then, I do not realize how uncivilized the whole joint is.

But I like it, all but the quiet which even ain't too bad since the chick brings out bottles of cold beer and I begin to think that maybe there is some thing to this vacation business after all.

I guess it's the funny air they have up there which makes me sleepy, because I hit the sack and I don't know nothing 'til it is morning and they are serving ham and eggs.

Her folks turn out to be nice quiet types and they are very polite and do not seem to take it strange that Ralph brings a hackie on his vacation, and they ask me a lot of fool questions about New York and this and that.

The old man is kind of good looking only the clothes he wears, and the mama is just as sweet and all as you can wish. After breakfast we are down on the dock waiting for Betty to get into her swim suit and show up so I think of something which has slipped my mind.

"Look," I say to Ralph. "I do not wish to spoil your fun, but I see a Packard last night which has tailed us up the road. I see them maybe a dozen times but I don't pay attention because tourists are always coming and going. But it could not be an accident that they follow us all the way from Central Park and wind up here."

He turns and looks at me startled for a minute, then he gets the nice grin on his puss. "Hymie," he says. "You have lived in New York too long. I'm not hot. I've got a nice clean discharge from the army and I was in there four years. There's not a soul along the stem that cares if I'm alive or dead."

"It's your business," I say, but I figure he is not coming clean because those two in the Packard have certainly been interested in us and that interest is not directed at me.

Anyhow, the tomato comes out in a bathing suit and I forget all about the Packard and a lot of other things, just looking at her. We swim, and then we lie around in the shade and in the afternoon I sleep. In the evening Kerney wants to go fishing and he says I can go along and run the kicker.

Well, we run way down to the end of the lake where Betty says we won't find no one but fish. But she's wrong, because we have been there only maybe ten minutes, and Kerney is happily heaving a big bass plug at a bunch of lily pads when up puts another boat. The guys from the Packard are in it, and I see right away they are from Broadway and know their way around good.

One is a big blond with a mean grin, and the other is not so big, but is tall and thin and his eyes are narrow from trying to think fast.

"Hello, Junior," he says to Kerney. "Long time no see."

Kerney gives them a little surprised look and says, "What brings you boys so far from the stem? Business getting too warm?"

The tall one turns his mouth and shakes his head. "We're here to see you, Junior. Your old man give you something for us?"

Kerney looks real surprised then. "I haven't see my old man in four years," he says.

The tall punk nods. "We know, but he gets word out of the can every now and then. Be nice, Junior and give it to us peaceful."

Kerney shrugs at me and then says to the guy, "Perhaps, Joseph, if you would give me some idea of the nature of this stuff. . ."

Joseph nods again and smiles. "The nature is fifty grand in cash, of which you have ten grand in a New York bank, minus the grand you dragged out to lam up here on."

**K**ERNEY starts to laugh, then changes his mind. "I know from experience that you have not got a sense of humor," he says, "so you must believe what you're saying. But in the first place you may remember that my old man never gave me more than four bits at a time in his life. Second, if he had his hands on fifty gees I cannot stretch my imagination so far as to see him passing it on to you when he is getting out in six months. And thirdly, I haven't got fifty gees from anybody. Go away now. You're scaring the fish."

"No," says Joseph. "Listen, Junior. Your old man works a pigeon with us and he gets the fifty gees and we are going to split three ways. Only he is picked off by the cops and gets time. I go to see him and he laughs at me. He says the dough is hid good and there won't be no split until he is out, and anyway he wants half for the extra trouble he is going to."

"This is six months ago, Junior, and pretty soon we hear you are home on ice in a hospital with a bum leg. We check up and find you got a bank account and all of a sudden you bounce ten grand into it. Boom. Like that. You do not make ten grand like that in the army. We put it together and we get it that your old man turns our dough over to you. That is the way it is, and now we want our fifty grand from you. Period."

The period is this, he has got a gun out and is pointing it at Kerney.

Well, Mamie, I feel like a sitting duck, as the punks' boat is too far away to reach or even jump at, but it is not too far for us to get shot from very nicely. So I look at Kerney and am surprised he is smiling. Like a dope, just standing here jiggling his fish pole out the far side of our boat, and I have a funny

picture of how it will slide overboard when the slug hits him.

But he is not so dumb after all. He doesn't move anything except his wrist a little bit, but all of a sudden that bass plug is going through the air fast, and it goes straight at Joseph.

I do not yell, but he does, and ducks and his gun goes off, knocking a hole in our ship. He does not duck in time though, and the plug catches him right in the puss, and all three hooks glom into his cheek and he is a caught fish.

Kerney jerks on the pole and Joseph screams and jumps. It happens so fast that the boat turns over before the big blond can use the gun he is trying to wrestle out of a shoulder holster, and both of them are in the drink.

It is very funny, Mamie, especially when they come up splashing around and have dropped the guns somewhere below. Kerney sees this fact and grins and motions me to start our kicker.

When it is going I tell him it is too bad to mess up a nice lake with bodies like that, but he shakes his head.

"It is only about four feet deep there, Hymie," he says. "They'll find it out pretty soon and wade ashore." He sounds very depressed.

"This fixes things, but good," he mutters as we putt away. "The Fosters aren't going to love having their daughter all tied up with Slick Kerney's son."

I looked at him then for I've heard tales about this Slick Kerney. He and a character named Broadway Sam are confidence men who moved into the liquor business and operated it with brains. They'd specialized in good stuff, running it in from Europe and Canada and way points, catering to the high class trade while the muggs handled the bulk goods.

"Look," I say. "You should worry about what your old man is. You're a right guy in my league and that should be good enough for these hay-seeds and dumb clucks up here."

"You don't get it," he says. "They think I am a Broadway business man when all I know is how to gamble. The old man taught me that and it's about all I ever got from him."

"So what's wrong with gambling. Louie the horse player makes himself twenty gees a year and a nicer guy you will never find from Forty-eighth Street to the Battery."

"You're right," he says, "and you're wrong, Hymie. You and I know one world. These people up here know another. The two worlds just never get together. You and I are heading back to town tomorrow morning, and we're going alone."

"Well, I know he is not a quitter because he didn't lose that leg running away, but he is surely quitting now and I figure I should maybe do something about it. I have got that

course which you have me take by mail on how to influence friends and make people be nice to you, and I try and remember what it says in lesson five on how you should build up a guy's morals so he will be proud and certain of himself, only I can't remember all of it because I think that is the part which the baby spilled milk on and I never got to read.

But by the time we get back to the store I have not thought of an angle, and I don't have much time to think because the chick is getting ready to feed us and after same we are all slated to turn up for the dance.

Ralph tries to beg off because of his tin gam, but Betty won't go for the routine because she says she is a nurse and she knows what he can and can't do and he should be as good with one leg as most are with two because he has the natural ability.

So afterwards we all start for the dance and Ralph seems to have forgotten the boys who did not drown in the lake, but I have not forgotten because Joseph and his pal seemed to me to be very serious minded citizens, and not the type to forget fifty gees because they got fish hooks in the face and a bath in a lake.

**B**UT I don't see nothing of the Packard and I think perhaps they have decided that this Ralph plays too rough and they will turn their attentions to easier chumps.

The dance is in a big red barn-like building right on the lake about a mile from this store and there is a hick band with a fiddle and a squeeze box and a piano. The stuff is corn like you get on the radio from them hill-billy programs and every one is doing a screwy jitter like I never see before. I figure these timber wolves never see a real dance so they thought this one up themselves.

Kerney still tries to beg off, saying he's bushed, but the tomato won't have any so they do a couple of numbers and then she waltzes me around the squares while Kerney wanders out to inhale some moon glow.

These local gates have a funny rhythm and you go bobbing about swinging hands with a bunch of strangers. But you remember me Mamie and the old chowder club picnics when we was courting, so on the second whirl I get the idea and it's no harder than passing a traffic cop on Forty-second.

After the second heat I'm pretty bushed so I tell the chick, she can now stop being kind to me and go find Ralph and show him the moon. I duck back into the corner where they sell beer and I'm just working on my second can when Ralph shows and wants to know where Betty is.

I'm not concerned, thinking that some local yokel has snared her and is cutting a rug, but we take a gander and she is nowhere on the floor. We go outside then and look around.



It is nice and quiet in the woods with only some bugs making traffic noise around the swamp, and a couple here and there chit-chatting in the shadows.

We patrol around, like a prowler car looking at neckers, but Betty ain't among them present and I suddenly remember Joseph and his blond pal and say as much to Ralph.

We're standing in the lighted doorway when his face tightens up and he is a different guy and one that I wouldn't like to meet under the El after midnight.

"If they so much as put a finger on her," he says, "I'll beat them to death with my tin leg."

He's not kidding because he is not a character who goes around talking in a loud voice. "We've got to find her father."

"Look," I say. "He is a nice old farmer and he feeds me well, but this Joseph and his boy friend are rough citizens and we need someone beside farmers to handle them."

Ralph shakes his head. "You're wrong, Hymie. You aren't in Manhattan now. This country is different and we need someone who knows it." He turns and goes into the dance hall with me tailing along at his heels.

We find the old guy swinging a wide hoof with an elderly dame and they act like they are not more than two year olds. Ralph signals Pops and we lead him out onto the moonlit porch. Kerney don't spare himself none. He spills the works, all about his Dad and what he done before he gets into the service and such.

"Of course," he says, "I don't know they have her but I can't afford to wait and find out."

Pops gets a funny look on his pan, then without a word he goes in to where there's an old fashioned telephone hung on the wall. He twists the crank and does some talking, then twists it again and talks some more. Finally he hangs up and his face is kind of stretched and drawn.

"Come on," he says, leading the way toward his old jallopy. "I think I know where she is."

My hack is parked down the line and I point out that maybe it will move faster. He doesn't argue but follows across the parking lot.

On the seat is a paper, on the paper printing. We read it under the dome light. It says:

"Junior. We've got your tomato, you've got fifty gees that belongs to us. Let's trade. Don't yell copper. If you do, the chick gets it and you'll never find her. If you're ready to deal, row out into the lake at seven tomorrow morning and wave a white shirt. We'll see you."

Ralph swears. He has quite a list of words. I think I knew them all but maybe the army taught him a couple I never hear. "I've only got ten grand," he said. "They can have every dime of that."

Pops shakes his head. "If they think you

have fifty gees, they'll never deal for ten. Never mind. Come on."

We all crawl into the hack and he tells me to take the first dirt road to the right, then settles back and lights his pipe.

"This road," he says, "used to be called the hi-jack trail in prohibition days. The boys hauled liquor from Canada over it, and they had stash points that they laid over for a day now and then. One of these spots was run by Frenchie Voorhees, and after repeal, Frenchie and some of the other boys stayed in the country since the big town was a little hot for them.

I made a few calls, and Frenchie has had a couple of strangers staying with him since last night. They drive a Packard."

**NONE** of us say a thing. The road ain't so good. It winds around through the trees and it's dark and there is a lot of chuck holes. Finally he tells me to make a new turn and we are in a jungle trail like you see in them western pictures, only believe it, we are still in New York state, and my axel is dragging and I expect maybe a rock will split the pan, only somehow I keep thinking about that nice tomato and don't seem to care.

We cruise through this forest for maybe twenty minutes, and then Pops tells me to cut the lights and we move along on foot, me stumbling in the ruts and wondering how Ralph makes it with his trick leg.

The woods is very dark and I hear animals running around and I can't help wondering if they are fierce like the ones you make me take the-kids to at the zoo. The only thing I have is my wrench, but I pull the padding off this because these citizens are not customers and I do not care whether their skin gets broken.

It is so dark that it looks like Holland Tunnel with no lights and we must have walked half way to Canada before we reach the edge of the trees and see a cabin sitting in a park which is almost a block wide.

The old man gives a little grunt of satisfaction because there is light in the window and we stand there, watching. Finally Ralph Kerney leans over and whispers. "You stay here, Hymie. It isn't your fight."

"Are you charging admission?" I want to know, but Pop shushes me.

"We don't want trouble. If I can talk to Frenchie, maybe there won't be any. He knows me."

I don't say nothing. Pops is a nice joe, but he has a hole in his head if he thinks characters like Joseph and the blond will give up the tomato without a rough house.

"There is a back door," he tells us. "I'm going around there. Count two hundred and then move in from the front. If Frenchie won't listen to reason, close in."

*(Continued on page 95)*

By  
**DOROTHY DUNN**



"It was luck. I saw her putting it into the cup with an eye-dropper, and she didn't know I was standing at the door."

## WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY—

**B**ILL VOGEL was slumped over his kitchen table asleep. He looked just the way he'd looked last night when I left him—only messier, more bleary-eyed.

I waded across empty bottles and shook him. He flung out an arm, knocking a glass over. The last flat highball that he'd passed out on spilled out, soaking into the the cloth.

"Come out of it, Bill! This is the third day. You're beginning to look like a good corner for spiders."

"Go away, Julien," he muttered. "You're always bothering me. Stop bothering people. Quit shaking me!"

"Look at this mess, Bill. Nine o'clock in the morning. The sun coming in on all this. It stinks."

"Damn the sun!"

"And you, Bill. Don't know which is worse, this smelly kitchen or you. Come on. At least take a shower and get into some clean clothes. Martha's coming home today."

*That clever gal Martha served cyanide sandwiches to her husbands, and alibis to the cops. It paid off plenty—and so did she—when a blackmailer's key to an empty box turned the lock of the death-house door!*



"Have a drink, Julien. And if you don't like the odor around here, just scram."

"I will. But if you think I'm going to let Martha find you this way, you're nuts."

Bill gave me a sly look out of his puffy eyes.

"Whaddya care how Martha finds me?"

"She's my sister, Bill."

"And my wife. I got the most say."

"Granted. Look, Bill, don't get the idea I'm interfering. I just know you wouldn't want her to find you this way. You'll thank me later."

"I'll thank you to mind your own business."

"I'm doing that. Martha is my . . ."

"Cut it out, Julien. You're a little ridiculous, you know." He fumbled toward the half-emptied bottle of bourbon and got it to his mouth with a trembling hand. "Brrr!" he shuddered, as it went down. "Hair of the dog . . ."

"What got you off on this bat?" I asked, now that he seemed fully awake. "Just because Martha took a little trip to see the folks is no reason for you to get blind."

"I'm not blind."

"Okay—so you're not blind. But you've certainly been on a bat."

"Not funny, Julien."

"Not meant to be," I said. "Look fella, this isn't at all like you. What started it, anyway?"

"Own business. Remember?"

He waved an imperious arm toward the door. I agreed with him. It was his own business if he wanted to stay drunk forever. But this was different. Martha was coming home today and she'd be sore as a new blister if she found Bill in this condition. She hated drinking so much that she might even be sore enough to leave him, and I didn't want that to happen.

She was arriving on the early afternoon train. I had just four hours to get Bill cleaned up and out of the mood. Four hours to do that and clean up the kitchen. I'd need a shovel for that, I thought.

After much protest, Bill gave in with a nasty smile. At two o'clock I was plenty tired, but we were ready for Martha. He looked quite decent in a blue flannel sport shirt and gabardine slacks fresh from the cleaners. The smell of shaving lotion didn't kill the alcohol odor, but what's a couple of beers among friends? I had a bottle beside me to back him up.

We were ready. I had scrubbed the linoleum, washed a mountain of dishes, and walked blocks to throw the empties in somebody else's ash pit.

"You think of everything, Julien," said Bill, as we sat there waiting. "One would think you were setting a stage. What a mind for details!"

"Ordinary," I told him.

"MAYBE," he said, lighting a cigarette and holding it over the stained places on his hand. "But I'd say that it's more than ordinary. Tell me, why all the pains? What's it to you that you spend four hours of your pleasure-loving life to keep me out of the dog house? What's your angle?"

"Charity," I said, "begins at home."

"In a pig's eye."

"Martha's my sister. She hates drunks and she's not good at concealing her hates."

"No," said Bill, running a shaking hand across his face. "She's not good at concealing things, is she?"

Something about the way he said that frightened me. He looked bitter and harassed, as though the bottom had dropped out of his dream house.

"What's wrong, Bill? What's eating you that you break one of Martha's commandments? You've been a good boy for the two years you've been married to her. Why the sudden urge for a binge?"

He shook himself back to attention. God knows what he'd been thinking about. I doubt if he'd heard much of what I'd said until the last part.

"Good boy, Julien. Yes, indeed! I've been a model husband, wouldn't you say?"

"Martha thinks so, no doubt about that. That's why I . . ."

"Stuck your nose in this morning?"

"Skip it," I said, getting sore. "I should have let you wallow . . ."

"Yes," he said pointedly. "You should have. I feel like the devil now."

I tried to be sympathetic.

"Want something to eat?" He looked like he hadn't taken anything solid for days. His cheek bones seemed higher and his face was drawn. "I could fix you a sandwich."

He winced. "Have a heart, Julien. And stop banging your fingers on that table!"

"Sorry. But isn't that train late? She was due in at two. It's almost three now."

Bill just sat there, looking miserable. At last he said: "All right, Julien, you asked for it. You had to hang around and wait. You had to clean house and play nurse and now you've had your fun. The joke's on you. *Martha isn't coming back!*"

"You're kidding!" I said, getting to my feet angrily. "Martha called the day she left and told me she'd be back on the fifteenth at two o'clock."

Bill grinned unpleasantly. "Why should I kid, Julien? She's not coming back—ever."

I didn't get it. I looked around at the house. All the stuff she'd accumulated through the two years of her marriage. The silver coffee service, the rosewood desk that she'd talked out of Grandma, the sewing basket with her crochet needle stuck through a ball of

thread. If she'd been leaving Bill for good, she'd not have left any of the possessions she liked so much. Not Martha. She was as acquisitive as a squirrel and you could never pry her loose from so much as an empty candy box.

"Where is she?" I asked.

Bill just shrugged and that made me furious.

"Don't you even know whether or not she arrived safely in Peoria?" I asked. "Did you hear from her, or from the folks?"

"Not a thing, Julien. But they're your folks. Did you get any word?"

"No, but I'm on the black list with my family. You know that. Do you mean to say that your wife has been missing for a week and all you've done about it is soak your head in bourbon?"

"Something like that," said Bill.

"You don't care?"

"Why should I?"

He had me there. Martha is my sister, but I don't like her much. She's overbearing. However, I was anxious for her to get home and be on good terms with Bill. I wanted that desperately because I needed money again. Bill wouldn't let me have it, but Martha would draw it out of her personal account the minute I spoke the word. She'd have to do it. I'm probably the only person in the world who knows that she killed her first husband to collect his insurance.

\* \* \*

I sat around for another hour, stewing.

"Aren't you worried, Bill?"

"Worried? Why should I be? Martha can take care of herself. She's quite a self-sufficient woman."

"Yes—she is."

Bill didn't know the half of that. Martha had plenty of money he didn't know anything about, and she'd got it all for herself. But I wanted to know where she was. I'd been banking on getting the five thousand I owed in gambling debts from her.

"Why don't you phone Peoria, Bill? Find out from the folks if she's there."

He gave me a silly, disinterested smile.

"Call them yourself, Julien. They're your folks and you're the one that's worried. I'm not."

**I** THOUGHT about the folks and decided against it. They were stiff-necked and grim. I didn't like them any better than I did Martha. But I needed money.

"How do you know she's not coming back, Bill?"

"Because I told her not to," he said, taking a shot of whiskey to chase down with his beer.

"You put up with Martha for two years and then decide that your marriage is a flop? Just

like that? Why did you wait so long if you wanted a divorce?"

"She never tried to kill me before," said Bill calmly.

I gasped. If I hadn't known about Martha's first husband, I'd have thought Bill was pulling another one of his bum jokes. Like letting me clean up the house. But I could see my sister in the role too plainly. I knew her hunger for possessions, her passion for money. Nothing else counted with Martha. But I tried to act shocked.

"Are you sure, Bill?"

"Sure I'm sure! I hadn't intended to tell you, but if you're going to sit around here asking stupid questions, you might as well know. Cyanide, Julien. Lovely stuff, cyanide. Especially if you drop it into your husband's tea."

"Good Lord, Bill! Why, just a drop of that stuff . . ."

He took another drink.

"How right you are. Just a drop or two. I was just lucky. I saw her putting it into the cup with an eye dropper, and she didn't know I was standing at the door."

"Maybe you were mistaken," I said. "Maybe it wasn't cyanide at all."

"Oh, no, Julien, my boy. I was too smart for her. I told her if she'd get my check book I'd leave her a blank one for any shopping she wanted to do. As soon as she left the table, I poured the tea into an empty mayonnaise jar and slipped it into my coat pocket. When she came back, she thought I'd drunk it. That was very amusing, Julien! You should have seen her face—the expectant gleam in her eyes as she waited for me to die. I believe she'd have told people I committed suicide. It was a lot of fun fooling her, Julien. You've no idea."

"You're getting drunk again," I cautioned.

"Sure. Sure I am! And why not? I had that little mayonnaise jar, remember? And I own a drug store. Also a diploma for pharmacy. It wasn't much of a trick for me to analyze a cup of tea! It was loaded with cyanide. So I told her to get out and stay out. Would you care for a drink, Julien?"

I poured some of his whiskey into a shot glass and drained it.

Then at his insistence, I took another. There was a strange kind of excitement coming over me then. I decided to forget about Peoria and trying to find Martha to get my five thousand. Maybe I had a bird in the hand. Right here. Maybe I was going to get something on Bill that would be worth a little change.

"Terrible thing to have happened to you, Bill. I can't understand it. She must have gone out of her head to try a thing like that. I just can't imagine Martha attempting . . ."



"Can't you, Julien? Even if she was doing it for money?"

"Money? You don't have that kind of money," I said. "Not the kind people murder to get. Or do you?"

I wanted to know about Bill's money right then. How much he had, how deep I might be able to cut into him later on. I needed a permanent source.

He just laughed. "Insurance is money, Julien. Just like money to the beneficiary. I'm worth twenty thousand dollars on a slab. Imagine that? Martha placed a high value on her husband, didn't she?"

"Martha?"

"Yes. She said she believed in insurance and she talked me into taking the policy. Lovely girl, Martha. So practical about the future. Incidentally, Julien—"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you resent these accusations I'm making against your sister? You were certainly being solicitous about her feelings this morning."

I gulped down another shot before I answered, trying to get my angles figured out. I wondered vaguely if Bill had done away with Martha—if they'd had a violent quarrel and he'd killed her. It just didn't seem logical to me that she'd have left the house without taking her own belongings with her. Not sister Martha.

"Resent what you're saying, Bill? Why should I, if you're telling the truth?"

He gave me a steady stare.

"Why should I lie?"

I didn't know why he should lie, but there was a look about him that didn't quite ring true. I got up and paced the room nervously, wondering how far I could go with him. There was a huge oak chest in front of the windows, beautifully carved and as mellow as a museum piece. Martha counted it as her prize possession and would never sell it, although it was worth a lot of money. Something else she'd worried out of Grandma. If she'd gone away of her own volition, she'd have taken that chest with her, I knew that.

I walked toward it, wondering what was kept inside. But Bill's voice made me freeze, my hand outstretched.

"Stay away from that window, Julien!" he yelled.

I had that funny feeling that stays in your system for a few minutes after you've been startled. But I had another feeling, too, as I went back to my chair and looked at Bill's face. His breathing was ragged and he looked white. He wasn't acting now. He'd been very much afraid that I'd open the chest.

"The window, Bill?" I teased. "You meant the chest, didn't you? You meant don't touch the chest. Right?"

HE DIDN'T answer. He just stared moodily into his glass. But I was sure I was right. The chest was about six feet long, I noticed. About three feet deep. I felt pretty confident all at once, pretty sure of myself.

"Interesting piece of furniture," I drawled. "Grandma used to tell wild tales about the way it came into her possession. It's out of a royal house in Spain, according to her. All hooked up with pirates and bloodshed. Martha was crazy about it."

"The bloodshed—or the chest?" he asked.

I smiled.

"The chest, Bill. She'd never have gone off for good without that chest."

He gave me a strange look.

"Something on your mind, Julien?"

I nodded, glad that the showdown was here.

"There's five thousand dollars on my mind," I told him. "I was very fond of Martha."

"And you'd be satisfied with money instead of justice?"

"Sometimes a man takes justice into his own hands," I said with a shrug. "If she tried to poison you—well, I can see your point. I'm the only person in town who would ever think of looking for Martha, or reporting her disappearance to the police. You know how the folks are. They're glad when they don't hear from their ungrateful children. And if you'd like to pay me five thousand dollars for—well, for cleaning your house this morning . . ."

"Why five thousand, Julien. That's little enough for that type of work. Would you want more later?"

"No . . . no, indeed. But if I have five thousand, I can clear up a certain debt that's pressing."

I wished I'd made it ten thousand right off the bat. They always yelp when you ask for the second payment.

Bill filled two glasses and we raised them in a mock toast.

"You're a bright boy, Julien. You keep your eyes open."

"Or closed, according to the price." I was feeling pretty good. I'd just got another idea. "Incidentally, Bill, I believe I have another little item you'd be interested in buying for another five thousand. It would be very cheap at that price because it might insure your safety later."

"Safety insurance?" asked Bill.

"Yes. I have a little gadget that's real evidence against Martha—positive proof of her guilt in another matter."

Bill's eyes half-closed and he tensed in his chair.

"I see you're interested," I said.

"Depending on what the evidence is and what it proves."

"It's an eye-dropper with some cyanide left in it, with Martha's fingerprints on the glass

part. It proves that Martha killed her first husband—Avery Chandler.”

“That’s very interesting,” he said. “I’d heard that Chandler committed suicide. I suppose he had a lot of insurance?”

“Yes, he did have. But the insurance company couldn’t prove Martha’s guilt. They paid off. Now suppose you were ever arrested for killing your wife—just a supposition, of course—this evidence wouldn’t exonerate you. But it would help sway the jury, lighten the sentence.”

“I can see that it would,” said Bill. “You know, my insurance policy has a suicide clause, too. I’ve forgotten what arguments Martha advanced to have it included, but I didn’t suspect her at the time and let it go through. Later, I began to wonder about it.”

“Lucky for you that you wondered, Bill. Do you think ten thousand is too much for my complete uh—co-operation?”

“Not at all, Julien. I consider my life is worth that much. You see, I was in a very strange position. I couldn’t have Martha locked up because I couldn’t prove that she’d put the cyanide in my tea. My story would have sounded foolish if she had denied it. And I couldn’t just let her go free, either, because I’m sure she’d have tried it again. At the moment, I couldn’t accuse her of murder. No murder without a body, you know.”

I looked at the carved chest pointedly, sure that Martha was there.

“But where you have a body,” I said, “you have a very dangerous set-up. Will you write a check, Bill, or would you rather draw out the cash to-morrow?”

“Cash, I think. Unless you’d be able to get that evidence over here tonight?”

“Afraid I couldn’t do that,” I told him. “It’s in my safe-deposit box and the bank’s closed.” I needed time to go out and buy an eye-dropper and there wasn’t any point in looking too anxious.

“Tomorrow, then,” said Bill, reaching out to shake hands.

I wasn’t expecting it. He jerked me off my feet in a quick judo twist over his knee. Then he tied me to a straight chair and walked over to the chest behind my back. I could feel my scalp crawling as I heard the lid of the oak chest creaking. Surely, he wasn’t going to kill me and dump me in there beside Martha to await a fool-proof method of disposal! But maybe he was. I’d been an idiot to tell him so much. He knew that the folks wouldn’t bother to look for me, either. And he’d only been pretending to be drunk. I felt sure of that now.

My back was toward the chest and I couldn’t jog my chair around. I could just hear the noise of the lid and the scraping footsteps around it.

Then Bill came over to the desk and took a gun from the side drawer. He flipped the chamber open, making sure it was loaded.

“Don’t shoot me, Bill! I’ll give you the evidence for nothing . . . I’ll . . .”

**S**TOP whining, Julien. Of course you’ll produce that evidence for nothing. You’ve probably bled Martha for years. I’ve always wondered how you managed to live without working.”

“I’ll give it to you, Bill! Only don’t kill me the way you did Martha!”

He worked his jaw back and forth and then swung my chair around so that I could see the chest.

It took a little while for me to understand, for the panic to strike. The small man sitting on the lid had yellow-colored hair and looked a lot like Avery Chandler, Martha’s first husband. But it wasn’t Avery. I knew that. It was Tom Chandler, Avery’s brother.

“I see that you recognize me, Julien,” he said.

“Yes. But I don’t understand . . .”

Tom Chandler’s laugh was bitter.

“You don’t? Then I’ll tell you, Julien. When my brother died three years ago, I was sure he hadn’t committed suicide, that Martha had murdered him. But I couldn’t prove it. I decided to play a waiting game and spent a good bit of money having you watched. Finally, I realized that Martha was paying you blackmail and decided that you must be the one who had evidence.”

I felt trapped and cheated. I turned to Bill.

“You were lying, weren’t you? About Martha trying to kill you.”

“No, Julien, I wasn’t lying. I did see her load the tea with poison. The only difference in the story is this. I didn’t say anything to her about it. I just encouraged her to take the trip to see her ailing grandmother. Then I did some checking with the insurance company. Through them, I got in touch with Tom Chandler and we decided to concentrate on you for what we wanted. I believe we have that now. The police can get an order to open your lock box at the bank.”

“You had Chandler hidden in the chest to listen? Was that it?”

“To listen and record. There’s a dictaphone in there, too. That’s why I wanted you to keep away from the window. I was afraid you’d trip on the wires. But your type of mind has to jump at its own sneaking conclusions.”

Then my senses returned and I realized they didn’t have anything that would hurt me. It had been Martha that killed Avery Chandler—not me.

“Suppose you untie me, Bill, and stop being dramatic. I haven’t killed anybody.”

“Just sit still, Julien. Martha’s due home



any minute. She wired that she'd be here on the late train instead of two o'clock and asked especially that I have you wait for her."

Tom Chandler went to the phone and called the police. "We're ready now," he said. The two plain-clothes men got there just before Martha's cab drew up.

She came in with a big smile, telling the taxi driver to be careful with her bag.

"Greetings!" she called gaily. "I'm home at last."

I believe she was talking to the house and all the things she owned.

"We have company," said Bill in a grim voice.

She saw Tom Chandler then and turned as white as a funeral lily.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded. "Bill, you know I can't stand drinking parties, all those bottles, and what is Julien tied up for?"

"Julien has a key that we'd like to have," said Bill quietly.

Tom walked over to the chest and turned on the record for the detectives. He spoke to Martha for the first time. "I believe this will interest you, too."

When it was over, she gave me a look of hatred.

"Your lock-box key . . .?" said one of the detectives.

"In my wallet," I told him.

He got it out of my pocket and Martha watched him tossing it in his palm.

"Shall we go?" he asked her.

"Never mind," she said. "I know what you'll find because I've paid a lot of money to

keep it hidden. Sure, I killed Avery Chandler! But my brother helped me plan it. I believe you ought to take him along, too."

She flashed me a look of contempt and I felt a new crawling fear inside of me. I hadn't helped her! I'd found that eye-dropper by accident and guessed the rest. And now she was going to name me as an accessory!

"That's a lie, officer!" I had just been untied.

"Come along," he said in that same bored, quiet voice.

I got panicky then and tried to bolt, but Bill tripped me. The detective handcuffed my wrist to Martha's.

In the car, on the way to headquarters, I hissed in her ear: "You fool! You didn't need to confess. There isn't any evidence in my box at the bank! Look at the mess you've got us into."

"No evidence, Julien?" Her voice was shaking. "You told me you had the eye-dropper . . ."

"Well, I don't have it," I told her. "I found the thing that day and threw it into a sewer. I was just protecting you at first. It didn't occur to me until later that it was worth money."

"So all this time I've been paying you, there was no evidence?"

"No evidence," I said. "But you couldn't wait to confess! You were just too anxious to get even with me!"

Her laughter was high-pitched and eerie. I wondered if she was going to put on an act and plead insanity, or if she really was crazy.

Personally, I didn't care much. At the moment, I wasn't feeling any too bright myself.



## The Long and Short of Murder

I knew something was up when Joe Frazoni's Number One muscleman wanted *me* for *his* bodyguard, but the fee was so fat I took it. Right off, Frazoni showed up with a blood-etched cravat, and from then on in, a mad midget named Claude, his giant bird—and I—were certainly meant for mayhem's meat! Don't miss D. L. Champion's thrilling new novel. . . . In the next issue. . . .

"Dear Butch,

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# MODEL IN THE

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## CHAPTER ONE

You've Made Your Bed . . .

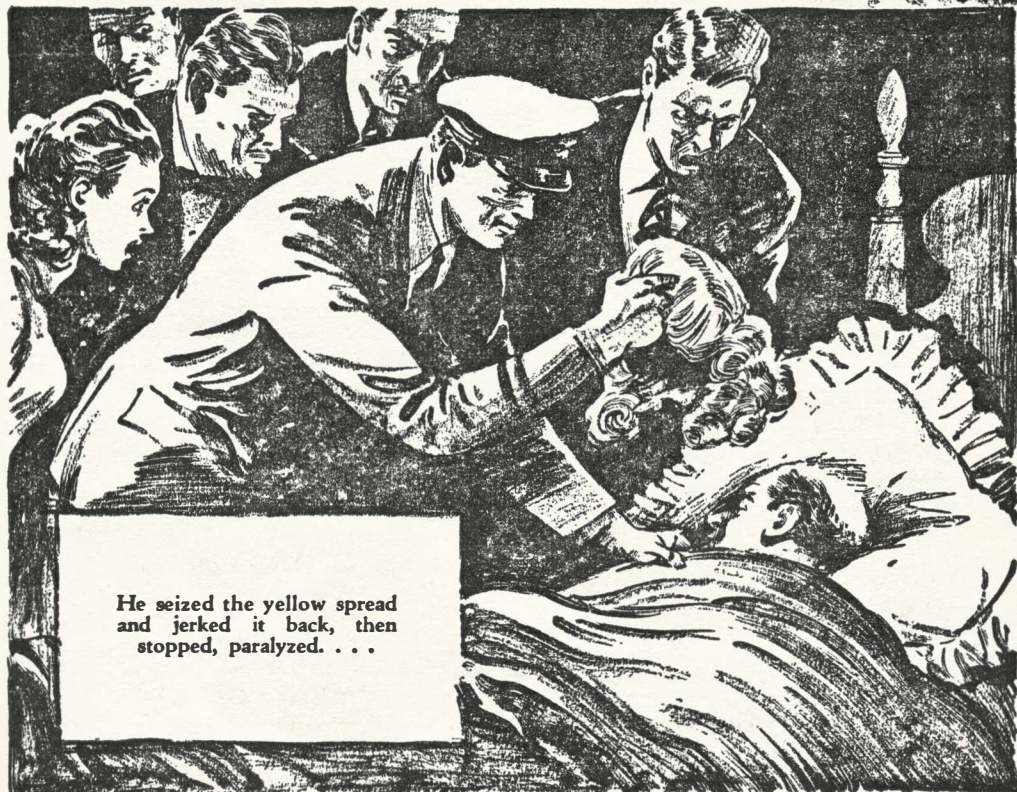
By

**W. T. BALLARD**

**E**VEN with the housing shortage making for screwy deals, Sam Drake had not expected to receive a body with his purchase.

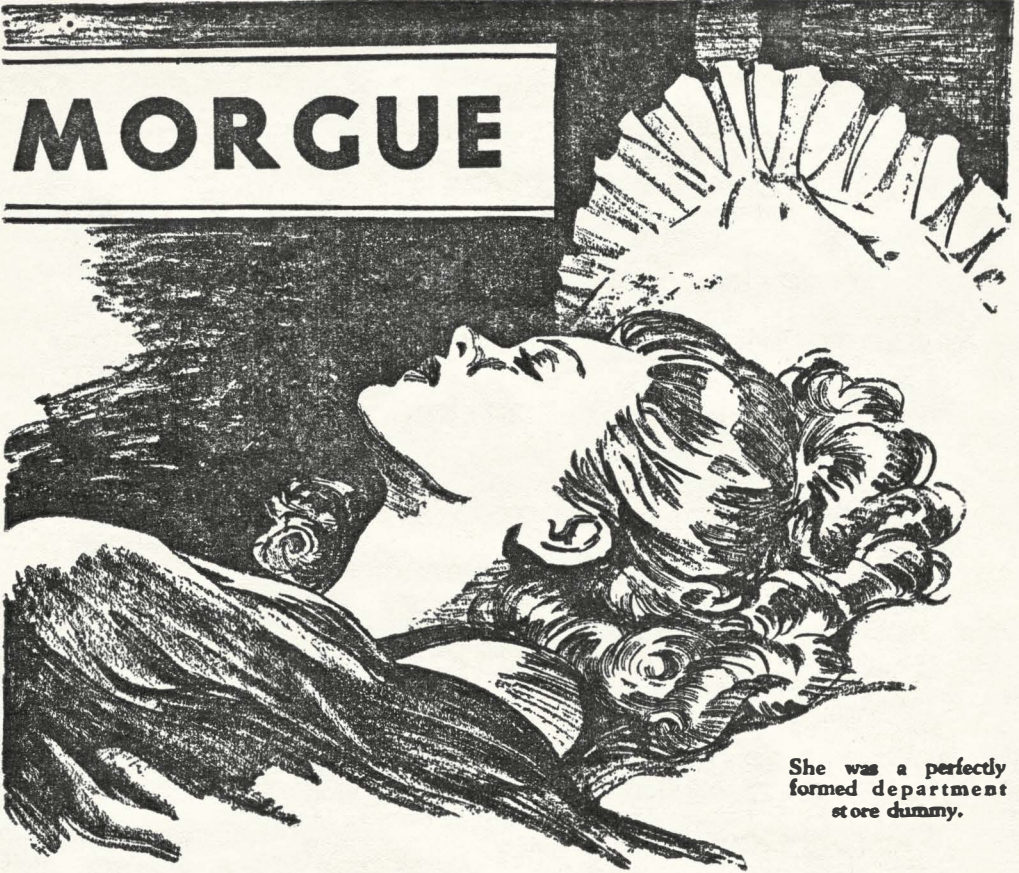
No one had expected Sam to buy a house. He was not the type you associate with carefully tended yards, neat flower beds, and low, white picket fences.

He had spent most of his thirty years in hotel rooms and apartments. He'd eaten in restaurants, and home meant only a place where he went to sleep. But as Mary Carmen, his office girl pointed out, a place to sleep was





# MORGUE



She was a perfectly formed department store dummy.

*That pastiche model in a bachelor's bed looked funny as hell, till the mannequin rolled over—and the corpse rolled out!*

a place to sleep now days, so, he bought the house.

"Well squire," said Mary Carmen. "You are now settled down. You can raise rabbits and chickens, and pick bugs off your tomato plants and lie to the neighbors about the size and color of your roses. You are on the path to becoming a dull and substantial citizen."

Sam Drake grinned. He was almost six feet, solid without being chunky. His hair was black, so were his eyes.

"Yakitty, yakitty, yak. Your mouth runs, darling. Use the dust mop and not the tongue and you'll get the floor cleaner. The guests will be arriving and they'll have to have a place to sit."

She sighed, and finished cleaning the living room. "My mother told me I'd meet men like you, but I didn't believe it. Of all the screwy

ideas you've cocked up, this deal of giving a house warming party for all the shady characters you know, and giving it without a stick of furniture. . . ."

"Didn't I tell you," he said. "That's the deal. They come to the party and they bring some furniture. What with the price of tables and chairs nowadays, the party should pay off but big."

The guests started to arrive almost at once. First was a Greek restaurant man who presented Sam with a slightly used steam table. A Chinaman brought a flat iron, a dentist a used studio couch. A billiard table with chipped slates was carted in by sections. After that it rained household goods.

"We shouldn't be detectives," Mary Carmen thought bitterly. "We should be in the used furniture business. Everyone in town is



getting rid of his worthless junk on Sam."

But she had seen nothing yet. At seven, Lowell Young appeared. Young was a lawyer who served as business manager for a number of Hollywood stars. Behind him marched two dray men, carrying a box spring. They went back to the truck for the rest of the bed which they set up and made. Young barred everyone from the bedroom until everything was set, then summoned them.

When the guests trooped in, the room was complete with a night stand, a chest of drawers, a chair and the bed. The bed was made. A yellow spread covered it and beneath the spread, her face turned away from the door, lay a blonde, snuggled down in apparent comfort, only her yellow curls showing.

The light was not good and Mary Carmen gasped angrily. Young laughed in delight. He jerked back the spread and exposed the blonde. She was perfectly bare, perfectly formed—a department store dummy.

The guests left her there and moved to the kitchen, but every new arrival was ushered to the bedroom and introduced to the blonde. Over a hundred people came, ranging up and down the social scale from a police judge to Shorty Emmerson.

Emmerson was no friend of Drake's. He was no friend of anyone. It was rumored that he did not even like himself. He ran handbooks all over town and sold racing information to lessor bookies. They bought from him or else, a little guy with a big head and an ugly face. If there was a racket he hadn't had his finger in, Drake didn't know what it was.

Mary Carmen was certain she hadn't invited him. Sam couldn't remember. He was always vague about such things, but Shorty arrived, bringing his bodyguard and a slot machine. "It's nice to have around," he told Sam. "It only pays five nickles for every hundred it takes in. You can make expenses any time you have guests."

Sam nodded. The party was getting a little out of hand. He and Mary shooed the guests to the big cellar. "At least," she pointed out. "They can't tear down the concrete walls."

Sam wasn't certain. He'd grown discouraged. Already he'd caught a couple of pickpockets making traveling money in the crowd.

"We'll amuse them," said Mary. "We'll play games." She organized a sack race, appointing herself starter. "Shorty can make book on the result. Come on you cellar athletes, get into your sacks."

A dozen volunteered. Mary lined them up. "One for the money, two for the show. Three to get ready, and four to go.

"One . . ."

The race was on. Lowell Young came in ahead. His legs were so long the sack barely

reached his knees. Shorty Emmerson claimed a foul, but there were no stewards to rule on the claim.

After that, the party got entirely out of hand and Mary gave up and went home, leaving Sam to run things the best way he could. He never knew how the fight started. One minute everything was merely noisy, the next guests were flying through windows and busting against walls.

They were in the living room by now and he sat on the hall stairs and let them fight. He was a very peaceful guy when he wasn't getting paid for trouble. After a while sirens made noise and the fight ended abruptly. Most of Sam's guests were not fond of the police.

**T**HE radio prowler car men were young. After they served a few years they would be hardened to such scenes, but at the moment the total wreck of the house stunned them.

Sam had not moved from his place on the stairs. Sadly he eyed the slot machine. Someone had knocked it from the table and one of its corners had gone through the floor.

He rose, muttering. "My mother always warned me never to own anything." Then he turned to greet the police.

They weren't helpful. They wandered about, viewing the wreckage, and finally reached the bedroom. The younger officer jumped when he saw the blonde in the bed. "Hey, I'm sorry, I didn't realize . . ."

"It's all right," said Sam. He was discouraged and sleepy. He chuckled hollowly. "She's a phoney too, just a dummy, look." He seized the yellow spread and jerked it back, then stopped, paralyzed.

The dummy had disappeared. In her place lay Shorty Emmerson, his face turned away from them, the dummy's yellow wig pasted on his bald head. He was dead. Someone had poked a knife in his ribs.

Sam Drake didn't bother to answer questions until Conelston got there. He knew that the radio men weren't important. Conelston was. He was the head of the homicide squad.

He came in, tall and thin, dressed in funereal black, his suit hanging loosely from his bony shoulders, his hands looking big and claw-like at the end of his bony wrists.

"So, this is the way you entertain, Sam? I'm glad I was too busy to make your party."

Sam Drake grunted. He was sober now, and very low. He stood watching the coroner's man examine the body, wishing he had never bought the house, never given the party. "You know I didn't kill him, Bert."

"How do I know that?" said Conelston. "You've gotten away with everything but murder for years, and some people believe that you've gotten away with that."

Drake looked injured. "Crack wise, go



ahead, get a laugh for yourself." His active mind was considering the possibilities. He cared nothing about Shorty Emmerson or the man's death. He doubted that anyone cared. But he wished the bookmaker had chosen a different bed to get knifed in.

A private detective lived by publicity. Publicity brought business into the office, but there were different kinds of publicity and this was the wrong kind. Sam had a good, solid business. He had two big banks as clients, and half a dozen insurance companies. He didn't touch divorces, or the crummy two-bit stuff which rode along the edge of the law. He was strictly on the level.

Conelston was looking around the wrecked house. "I'm surprised you invited the heel to your blowout. I've been hearing along the Boulevard that you and Emmerson were at each other's throats."

"Not quite that bad." Sam Drake passed a tired hand across his eyes. He felt he was living in a nightmare and he didn't like it.

"I heard different." Conelston didn't raise his voice but his level tone carried impact. "I heard he welshed on a bet and you were out to make him pay."

Drake considered, trying to decide how much to tell. He'd known Conelston for years and he wasn't deceived by the ease of the homicide man's manner. He respected Conelston's brain, but you couldn't like the man. He inspired all the emotion of a cold fish.

"It was this way," said Drake, deciding to come clean. "A big shot at one of the studios made a sizable bet with Emmerson. After the horse won, this big shot looked for his ticket and couldn't find it. The ticket had been lifted from his home. He tried to collect, and Emmerson laughed at him, saying he knew nothing about the bet. So, this big shot went to Lowell Young, the lawyer, and Lowell came to me.

"Legally they couldn't do a damn thing, but Lowell offered me five bills if I'd go to Emmerson and talk to him. I did. I pointed out to Shorty that most of his heavy play came from the studios and that if it got noised around town that he'd welshed on a bet, his play would fall off. I told him he'd better pay up and charge it to advertising.

"We were in Shorty's office, out at the Corn Club. You know, the joint he runs on the Strip. Shorty got nasty. He said it was a holdup, that there had never been such a bet, and that he didn't know I went in for blackmail.

"I got sore. No punk like Shorty was going to call me a blackmailer and get away with it. I went across the desk after him. I'd have heaved him through the wall if his bodyguard Pedro Gomez hadn't put the iron on me and flushed me out of the joint."

"That isn't the way I heard it," Conelston wasn't impressed. "I heard you were both around town, calling each other names."

**N**OT me," said Sam Drake. "I don't know who peeped. I never mentioned it to a soul, and Shorty shouldn't have. I don't get the angle."

It was obvious that Conelston didn't get it either. "So who was this movie big shot who made the bet?"

"I don't know."

Conelston stared at him. The bony man seemed to swell a little with rage. "What kind of a deal are you trying to hand me?"

"No deal," said Drake. "I don't know. Lowell Young didn't tell me. He said he didn't want his client's name kicked around. He said there was no need to use the name, that Shorty would know who I was talking about."

Conelston considered him. He said, slowly, "You're either a sucker, or the damndest liar I've met. I never heard you were a sucker. Come on, let's ride downtown."

Sam Drake's office had once belonged to a movie agent. It had white panelling and a beige rug. Sam always felt that he should clean his shoes before stepping on it. At the moment he felt as if he should have had a bath. He'd spent the latter half of the night in jail.

Mary Carmen was at her desk, separated from the reception room by a little glass panel. She raised her eyebrows as her employer came in.

"I thought you were already in the electric chair."

"I was," said Sam. "The current failed. Conelston decided I was too tough to burn." He started for his own office but Mary stopped him.

"You've got a visitor."

"Reporter?"

"This is something special. It looks like a Powers model, with curves." She gave a wolf whistle. "You get around. I put her in the private office."

Sam said something unkind and moved to his own door. The girl beside his desk was very blonde. Her skin was very light and very clear. The eyes were dark pools. They made the effect stunning without help from the clothes, which were extra in themselves, a powder blue outfit that Adrian might have dreamed up.

"Well," he said, "Well," and ran the heel of his hand across the unshaven chin. "I'm dreaming."

The girl beside the desk turned and gave him a slow, steady look. It was like turning on a cyclotron. It dissolved his atoms one by one.

"Turn it off," he said. "You're wasting your dynamite on an old guy like me."

Her smile was slow and sultry. "You carry your age well, Mr. Drake."

"I take vitamins," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm Sally Emerson," she said. "Shorty's daughter."

He'd been about to sit down. He paused, halfway, then dropped heavily into the cushioned seat. "Say that again."

She repeated the words. "What's so surprising about that?"

He didn't tell her. He couldn't say that he was surprised that a human louse like Shorty could have a daughter like her. You didn't say such things, not when her father had been dead less than twelve hours.

"I didn't know Shorty had a daughter."

"You know it now."

He looked at her. Certainly she didn't sound friendly. He wondered what she had come for. He didn't wait long to find out.

"I'm not wasting tears on Shorty," she said. "He pushed my mother around, and he wasn't exactly the model father as far as I'm concerned, but I don't see any reason to let you get away with it either."

"With what?"

"With the ten grand."

He leaned forward slowly. "Look, sweetheart. I don't get this. I never saw you before and until a couple of moments ago I had no idea that friend Shorty had a daughter. Now you come in here and give me the business about ten grand. Let's start all over. Let's take it slow and easy and not get excited."

"I never get excited," she said, flatly, and he believed her. She looked cool, and calm, and a little dangerous. But mostly she was beautiful, so beautiful that it hurt to look at her.

"All right," he said. "You aren't excited. Neither of us is excited, but I still don't get the angle. In fact I don't get any of it."

She considered him with her dark eyes. "I understood you were shrewd and hard. Well, I can be hard too. I'll give you the full story. My Dad was about broke when he died. Oh, I don't mean he was out on the corner collecting pennies, but he'd been in the big dough and he wasn't in the big dough any longer. The Corn Club cost him plenty and it never paid out. He backed a place in Vegas, and his partners crossed him. Then you came around last week to put the finger on him for ten grand."

"Which he owed," said Sam Drake.

The girl shrugged. "I don't know anything about that. He claimed he didn't owe it, but last night after the call from you he decided to pay off."

"The call from me?" Sam was puzzled. "I didn't call him."

Her eyes which had been merely warm blazed suddenly. "I can stand anything but a liar," she said between her teeth. "Don't try to lie to me, Mr. Drake. I was in my father's office yesterday afternoon at four-fifty when you called. I was just looking at my watch to see if I had time to keep an appointment when the phone rang."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Time Has Come

I HEARD him say, 'Yes, Sam. Yeah . . . the hell I will.' Then he listened for a while and finally hung up. His face was very white, his eyes strained as if he'd seen a ghost. I thought he was sick, in fact he was sick. I got him a glass of water but he waved me away, then he rang for Gomez and told Pedro to get all the money from the safe.

"We're going to have to pay off that blackmailer Drake," he said. "He just called. We're to come to his housewarming party and we'd better bring ten grand or else."

Sam Drake stared at her. If she was making this up she was doing a good job.

"So?"

"So they came to your party." Her voice was very low now but it vibrated with anger. "You took the ten thousand and you killed my father."

"Now wait . . ."

She held up a hand. "I've been talking to the D.A. all morning. He told me that they couldn't hold you, that there were a thousand people in Hollywood who had better reason to wish Shorty dead than you had. I didn't give him the motive, but I will."

"So, now I have a motive?"

She nodded. "The best in the world. You collected ten thousand dollars from my father. You were supposed to be collecting for a man who won it on a horse race. But only my father knew that you had collected, so, if he were dead, you could pocket the money yourself and no one would ever be the wiser."

"I'm a smart boy," said Sam Drake. "I didn't realize how smart I am."

Her anger flashed up. "I should kill you. I should turn you over to the police, but I need that ten thousand. I've got to have it." Her voice broke a little. "I'll give you one last chance. Hand it over and I won't tell the police."

"No," said Sam Drake. He saw no need of arguing with her. She wouldn't believe him anyhow.

"All right," she said. "I gave you your chance." There was a gun in her hand, squat



and wicked looking. "We'll try it this way. I count five, then I shoot."

Sam Drake got a funny cold feeling along his spine. Something about this girl told him that she wasn't kidding, that she never kidded.

He looked at the gun, at her, "one," she said, steady and confident. "Two . . ."

"All right," said Sam. He felt very tired, as if he were replaying the second act of a show he had played before. "You win. The money's in the safe." He rose and crossed to the small wall safe. As he turned he caught a glimpse of Sally Emmerson's face. He saw contempt in her dark eyes. He paused before the safe and twirled the dial, pulling the door open. There was a thick envelope at the right. He picked it up, twisted. The girl still sat beside his desk, the gun held rigid.

"Here, catch." He flipped the envelope directly at her.

She put up her free hand. It kept the envelope from striking her face, but she failed to catch it. It fell, striking her wrist, knocking the gun down.

Sam Drake jumped. For a big man he could move fast when he chose and he chose now. He was on top of her, wrenching the gun free before she knew what had happened. He tossed it across the desk so that it landed in the leather cushion of the desk chair, then he caught up the blonde, reversed her in the air, spread her across his knees and spanked her thoroughly.

Not until the stinging of his palm told him that she was really spanked did he stop. Then he set her on her feet and grinned sourly.

"Tell that to the cops, sweetness, along with the pipe dream about that ten grand." He stooped and caught up the envelope from the floor. She watched with angry eyes.

"What's in that?"

"My insurance policies. I'm worth ten grand dead, it says here."

Her voice was biting. "I hope the companies have to pay off on them, soon. Will they have to pay when the state burns you in the electric chair?"

"A nice point," he conceded, "but don't let that worry you. Here's Conelston's phone number. You want to call him from here or wait until you get outside?"

She didn't answer. She slammed the door on the way out.

**PEDRO GOMEZ** came into Sam Drake's office as if he were walking on eggs. Even Drake, who did not like him had to admit Gomez was handsome. The Spaniard had appeared in Hollywood some eight years before with pretensions as an actor. His acting had not been good and he finally went to work for Shorty Emmerson as a collector, then a body-guard. He was reputed to be dangerous and

the whispers said that he'd killed at least two men who had refused to pay their gambling losses.

He'd been arrested, but nothing had ever been proved. Somewhere, a long time ago he had been marked by a knife. It had left a long, thin white scar across the bulging curve of his left cheek. This scar showed up now against the dark olive of his handsome skin.

"Mr. Drake," he said, softly with his slight hissing accent. "I have come to warn you."

Sam Drake was beginning to feel the need of sleep and his temper was short. "Save the warning," he said. "Everyone has spent the whole day warning me or asking questions, or both. I'm tired of it. My office is on the second floor as you know and it would give me great pleasure to throw you into the street."

Angry red stained Gomez' cheeks and he controlled himself with obvious effort. "No one talks that way to Gomez," he snarled.

"I do," said Drake. "I don't like you. Your hair oil is stinking up the office."

The Spaniard's hand moved instinctively toward the back of his neck and Drake's eyes narrowed. He'd come up against knife men before. It was something to remember. Gomez stopped the motion half way and let his anger drop from him as if it were a cloak.

"Why should we quarrel, Senor?"

"You're making the quarrel," Sam Drake said. "The easiest way to keep from fighting with me is to stay out of my way."

"But yes," said Gomez. "I will be delighted. Merely give to me the ten thousand, and I can promise you that Gomez will make you no more trouble."

"So, you're going to sing that song too. I told Miss Emmerson I didn't have it."

"Ah, that girl." Gomez made motions with his hands. "Women are all alike. They go off without considering. Me, I think of each angle. I put myself in your place. I say, 'Gomez, how can he give up the ten thousand without admitting that he is the slayer of my patron, Emmerson?' So I say, 'I will go to Mr. Drake. I will explain that there are no bad feelings, that Emmerson was not a nice man and that even his daughter is not too sad because he has died.' I explain all this, and then I say, 'We will not go to the police if we find ten thousand, say beside the steps of the library.'"

"Get out."

The Spaniard shrugged. "You will be sorry." He promised, "oh, so sorry." He went out, but he didn't slam the door. He shut it very quietly indeed.

Mary Carmen came into Drake's office and looked her employer over thoughtfully. She was a small girl with nice, fair hair and solemn gray eyes. She looked mousy, but Drake knew this was only a kind of front that she

put on around the office to avoid trouble. "Your clients have active hands," she had once said, "and they all have ideas. The more I look like a mud fence, the easier it is to fend them off."

Outside the office it was different. Drake had taken her dancing a couple of times. Then she looked like a million dollars with a dipper of ice cream on top.

"Sucker," she said.

"You've been listening on the interphone again," he accused.

"What did you expect to do, with that blonde in the office? I was afraid she'd set the furniture afire."

"It smoked a little," he admitted.

"So now they've gone to the cops," she said. "That's all the police wanted, a nice motive. First you have a battle with Shorty, then he gets knifed at your party, and then there is the missing ten grand."

"Nice, huh? Start ducking, Junior. Here comes a frame."

"You think so," she mocked.

"Why should anyone want to frame me. Everyone in town loves me like a brother."

"Don't ask me," she said, "but you'd better start covering your tracks. Call up that lawyer and find out who the mysterious big shot was that made the bet with Emmerson."

He looked at her, sharply. "You know, Cuddles, sometimes you have a germ of an idea."

"I've got the only brains in this office," she assured him, "and don't call me Cuddles. I hate it."

"Okay, beautiful." He reached for the phone and called Lowell Young. While he waited for the lawyer to answer the girl said,

"What I don't understand is Conelston. If he had anything on you, he'd arrest you."

**SAM DRAKE** shook his head. "There's where you're wrong. Conelston is smart for all he looks like an undertaker. He knows I've got a good business here and that I'm not going to run out. He's letting me play around and watching every move I make."

"How can he watch you?"

Drake shrugged. "Don't ask me, just take my word that Conelston can repeat everything that's been said in this office. That shamus has second sight."

He got his connection and spoke to Lowell Young into the phone. "Hi, shyster. The time has come for you and me to have a talk."

"Look," said Young. "This is my busy day. I've got two briefs to get ready and an old dame with twelve million coming in to have a will drawn and . . ."

"And I've got a murder rap riding a couple of inches away from my shoulder." Drake's voice held no humor. "You'd better get over

here, and but quick." He replaced the phone and looked at Mary Carmen.

"You know, sweetheart, there's something strange and very stinking here."

She said, "What?" dutifully.

"That guy Young. He's a big shot. He's the kind of monkey that should tell me to dash over there if I want to see him. But does he? He does not. He's coming over here like an office boy."

She gave him a long look. "What's it mean?"

"I don't know." He rose from his chair and took a turn of the office, then went back and sat down. "Send him in as soon as he arrives."

Lowell Young arrived in ten minutes. He was about forty, a big, bluff, hearty man with a quick handshake and a ready pat on the back. Sam Drake always felt that he should be running for some kind of office.

"What's this," he said. "What's all the excitement?"

Drake told him. "I should cut your throat. If it hadn't been for you I'd never have gotten in this mess in the first place, and if you hadn't brought that bed and the dummy to the party, they wouldn't have had a place to park Shorty's body."

"Now wait, you can't blame all that on me."

Drake leaned forward, his face hardening. "I'm not blaming you, Lowell. I know you serve as business manager for a lot of stars, and as such you can't talk about their affairs. But I'm going to find out which one made the bet with Shorty if I have to take a list of your clients and talk to them one by one."

The lawyer wet his lips. "That would ruin me."

"I'm damned near ruined myself," said Drake, "and between the two of us, I'd rather it was you that caught it in the neck. Who was it you made the bet for?"

Young still hesitated, then seemed to come to a decision. "I made the bet for Shorty's daughter. . ."

"You what?"

The lawyer nodded. "You see, Shorty and his wife are divorced. The woman is in serious trouble. She needs an operation badly, and Sally has been trying to get the money from her father. I offered to give it to her, or lend it to her, but she didn't want it that way."

"She suggested the bet. She said that her father often got good information on the races and that she'd get Pedro Gomez to give her a tip on a hot horse, that then I should call up and make the bet as if it were for one of my clients. . ."

"Of all the screwy deals." Drake swore. "What if the horse had lost?"

Young said, "It was screwy, but it never



dawned on Sally that the horse could lose. She doesn't know much about races, she thinks that they're all fixed."

"Go on," said Drake.

The lawyer shrugged. "That's all. We made the bet. The horse won and Shorty failed to pay off. I called Emmerson and he laughed at me. The way I get it, he was nearly broke. So, I called you in. You're tough. I'm not. I figured you could scare him into paying off."

"I didn't," said Drake, "But someone did. Shorty got a phone call from someone yesterday afternoon. It was supposed to have been from me, someone using my name. Whoever it was threatened Shorty. They apparently knew something about him. They told Shorty to come to my party with the ten grand or else. Did you make that call?"

Young was surprised. "Of course not. It's the first I've heard of it."

"Someone made it," said Drake. "That someone is the murderer. He spotted Shorty at my house. He got the money from his pocket and killed the man."

"Not me," said Young, and rose. "I've told you everything I know."

Mary Carmen spoke from her little nitch. "Nice going. He told you nothing at all."

"He told me a lot," Drake chuckled. "That's the screwiest thing I ever heard."

"You believe everything you hear."

He growled at her. "Go home. It's almost five. Tomorrow you can look for another job."

"I like it here."

"Get out. You're fired. You annoy me."

## CHAPTER THREE

### If the Frame Fits

**W**HY does she?" Conelston had opened the hall doorway and slipped into the office so quietly that neither of them had noticed him. He stood against the cream wall, looking like a black exclamation point.

Drake turned slowly. His face showed no pleasure. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for ten thousand dollars."

"Oh," said Drake. "So now our cops are turning honest, they come right out and request bribes. You heard him, sweet. You can be a witness. We'll have him up on charges."

"You're not very funny," said Mary. "If you weren't so busy making wise cracks, Conelston might help you."

"Sure," said Drake. "Mama's little helper. Look at him. Did you ever see a vulture walking around in pants before?"

Conelston didn't seem to hear. "Let's take a look in your office."

"You mean you expect to find Shorty's ten grand in there?"

"Let's take a look."

Sam Drake stopped arguing. There was something here which he did not like. He led the way into the private office, moved around the desk and sat down. As he did so he noticed Sally Emmerson's gun. It lay on the corner of his desk, partly shielded by a stack of papers. He waited for Conelston to notice it. He meant to have a little fun. The man could take the gun and trace it.

But Conelston never approached the desk. He stopped just inside the door, looking around, his eyes centering finally on the wall safe.

"Mind if I take a look?"

Drake said, "You've forgotten to show your warrant."

"I can phone down and get one. Only thing, it will make us both late for dinner."

"Go ahead and look, look under the carpet too, look in my hollow tooth. I usually keep ten grand there, just for lam money."

Conelston moved to the safe. He started to remove things, laying them carefully on a chair. He pulled out one envelope, looked inside, then at Drake.

Sam had been watching. He couldn't see the envelope, but he could see Conelston's face and his stomach muscles tightened.

Conelston opened the envelope, then said in a quiet voice, "Do you always keep ten grand in your safe, Sam?"

Drake never moved. "I keep my dough in my pants pocket."

"There's ten grand here. I wonder if some of it will check with the numbers of Shorty's bills. You see, the ten grand he took to your party last night came from the Corn Club. They've got a careful bookkeeper there. He noticed the bills numbers before he gave them to Shorty. This looks like quite the business."

Drake's mouth had a dry metallic taste that wasn't put there by the drinking of the night before. "A beautiful frame." He said, and he was speaking more to himself than he was to Conelston.

"Every crook in the business yells frame," said Conelston. "I thought you had more sense."

"You don't even know me," said Sam Drake, and he picked up Sally Emmerson's gun from beneath the pile of papers.

Conelston looked at the gun. He watched Drake come to his feet. "Now, you are being a fool."

"Sure," said Drake. "I'm a sucker. Everyone I know has called me that in the last twenty-four hours."

"Put it down," said Conelston. "Come along with me. Get yourself a smart lawyer and . . ."

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"And sit around a cell, sweating it out while you boys wire up the chair to burn me. Look, Conelston, you cops are human. You don't solve crimes for the fun of the thing. You solve them because it's your job. Well, you get a guy that the D.A. will bring to trial, and then you sit back on your rear and wait for some other poor jerk to get murderer. With me in a cell, you'll stop looking, but this isn't going to work that way because I'm not going to be in a cell. I'm tired of playing nice and civilized. I'm going to get out and have some fun. Keep your hands up, fasten them to the back of your neck and turn around."

He advanced carefully and got Conelston's gun. "I'm going to lock you in that closet. You can batter your fists or your head, beating down the door, or you can wait fifteen minutes. I'll take my office girl with me. She isn't in this and I'll send her back from the corner. By the time she releases you, I'll have the start I need."

**YOU'RE** not a sucker, you're a damn fool," said Mary Carmen. She was very angry and a little disgusted. "You've put yourself right in the middle."

"Someone put me in the middle," Sam Drake said. They were walking down the street toward the parking lot. "Someone who was in my office today slipped that money into my safe."

"Who was it? Gomez, the girl . . . ?"

"Or Lowell Young. He was in there too, remember."

"So was I," she reminded him.

"Did you, darling?"

"Certainly. I always wanted to work for a murderer. I couldn't find any other way."

They reached his car and he slid under the wheel. "Go on back and let Conelston out of that closet. I'd hate for the poor guy to miss his dinner. He's too thin as it is."

"To hell with him. I'm going with you."

"Oh no, you've been seeing movies. I'm not the kind of a private eye that lets my secretary pull me out of jackpots." He pushed her away from the car and trod on the starter.

"But Sam," she wailed. "How can I get in touch with you when I solve the murder?"

"Put it on the radio," he said and let the clutch in. He drove across La Brea, not going anywhere in particular, trying to think. Someone had put the money in his safe. Who?

There had been three people connected with the case in his office that day. Sally Emmer-son, Pedro Gomez, and Lowell Young. He



## MODEL IN THE MORGUE

tried to recall which of them had been close to the safe door. He'd unlocked it on the girl's orders. That seemed to implicate her, but it had stayed unlocked for the rest of the day.

And the bet. He couldn't get the bet out of his mind, and the fact that Emmerson had welshed on the payment.

Not that Shorty wouldn't welsh on a bet if he could do so without hurting himself, but a gambler as smart as Emmerson would have had to realize that if he failed to pay off, he'd lose his reputation and therefore customers.

Drake pulled his car to the curb before a drug store, went in and to the phone booth. He looked up the number of the Corn Club in the directory, dropped his nickel and spun the dial. A girl's voice answered and he said, "This is Mr. Steward of San Francisco. I just got into town and heard of Shorty's death. I'm trying to reach his daughter, Sally. I'm an old friend."

The girl never questioned him. She gave the phone number. He called a friend who owned an automobile agency and a criss-cross.

"Look, Steve. I've got a name and a phone number. I want the street address. Can do?"

The friend said "Can do," and Drake gave him Sally's name and number.

"It's in Boyce Canyon," said the friend after checking. "1810. Know where Boyce is? It runs off Sunset."

"I know," said Drake and thanked him. After placing two other phone calls, he went back and climbed into his car.

He started the motor and drove carefully. The last thing he wanted was to be involved in a traffic accident. They must have him on the radio already. He couldn't tune in because his car set wasn't working, but he could almost word the call.

"Attention all cars, all cars. Watch out for Sam Drake, thirty, private detective, six feet one inch, dark hair, dark blue eyes, tanned, about one-ninety. This man is wanted in connection with the murder of Shorty Emmerson. He is probably driving a Ford coupe, license . . ."

Sam passed a prowler car. It seemed to him that the two cops turned to look at him. He couldn't be certain. Unconsciously his foot pressed a little harder on the accelerator and the small car gathered speed. He turned into the first side street and watched the rear view mirror. Nothing turned in behind him and he breathed deeply.

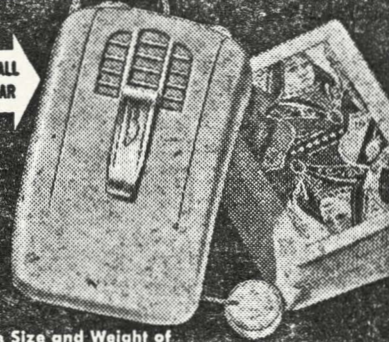
"I'm getting the willies," he thought. "Me, old case-hardened Sam. I'm sweating this

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out like an eighteen year old on his first case. I'm nuts." He laughed, but the sound was hollow, even in his own ears.

He drove faster now, keeping to the back streets all through Beverly and coming into Sunset at the curve west of the hotel.

Boyce canyon was paved but narrow. It ran through a cut in the hills with banks rising steeply on either side. It was damp at the bottom, water oozing from little springs and making wet patches on the worn macadam.

He thought, this is the way this country was before the war, quiet and restful.

The houses were set far up the banks on either side. Most of them were so obscured by live oaks that you wouldn't have guessed their presence had it not been for the garages cut into the bank at road level.

He found 1810 without difficulty, parked the car in the little turnout before the garage and climbed the stairs.

The house sat on a level shelf, cut out of the sloping, brush-covered rock. It was long and white, a single-storied affair with a wide concrete gallery. The gallery was roofed and the porch posts gave the effect of a colonnade.

A small, woolly dog came rushing out as if to drive him from the property and flood lights came on as someone inside punched the switch.

**D**RAKE expected to see the blonde in the doorway. Instead he found himself facing a white-haired old lady with a kindly face. "Yes?"

"I . . . I'm looking for Sally," he fumbled. The woman's presence bothering him. "I'm a friend of her father's."

"Of my husband." The woman looked at him closely as if surprised that any of Shorty's friends would come to the house. "Come in, Mr . . ."

"Stewart." He said, and followed her, swaring softly under his breath. It had not occurred to him that he would find Shorty's mysterious wife at the house.

His surprise must have been mirrored in his face for the woman said, "Mr. Emmerson and I didn't live together. That's probably why we've never met."

"Probably," said Drake. He was trying to picture the woman as Emmerson's wife. She looked as if she didn't know anything about the kind of world in which Shorty had lived.

"Sorry about his death," said Drake.

She nodded, but there was no sorrow in her face. "There's no use my pretending, Mr. Stewart. Mr. Emmerson and I did not see things the same way. I never approved of the



## MODEL IN THE MORGUE

methods by which he made his money, and since I did not approve of him, I stopped living with him."

Drake could find nothing to say.

The woman had almost forgotten him. She was looking back down the years and her expression softened. "But I guess Shorty tried to make amends. Just before he died, he offered ten thousand for an operation I have to have."

"Oh," said Drake. "He offered ten thousand. That was nice of him."

"I didn't expect it," said the woman. "In fact I told Sally not to even think of asking."

"Yes," said Drake.

"I didn't like her to go to that awful club her father ran. I don't like the Spanish gentleman who is always calling on her. I like Lowell Young much better. He's a lawyer, and he manages the business for a lot of picture people. Do you know him?"

Drake nodded. "I know him."

"Don't you think he's nice?"

Drake was relieved of the necessity of answering by the little dog which suddenly began to bark.

"That must be Sally," the woman said. "I can always tell when she's coming by the way he barks. He's so glad to see her."

Drake heard her heels click on the concrete gallery, he heard the door open. He was standing when she stepped into the door.

"You," he said.

"Me. You didn't expect me to be here!" Her eyes had darkened until they were almost purple. "You have a great deal of nerve, Mr. Drake, coming here, to this house, bothering my mother."

"Drake," the white haired woman was looking at him. "Drake . . . you mean he's the man who killed your father . . . and I sat here . . . talking to him." She swayed a little. "Oh . . ."

Drake caught her before her frail body hit the floor. He carried her into the bedroom.

"Do something, quick."

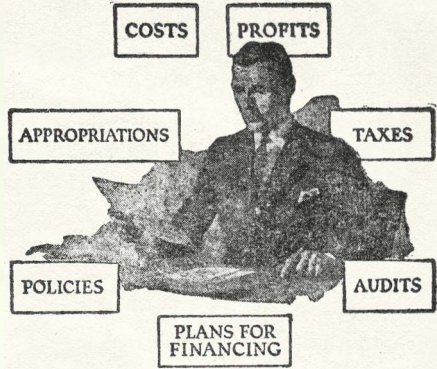
The girl was doing something. She hurried into the bath room. She came back with a little glass ampule which she crushed in a handkerchief and then held the ampule beneath her mother's nose.

"She has a bad heart," her voice was bitter. "You shocked her."

"Want me to phone a doctor?"

"I can manage." Her tone was scathing. "I can even handle a murderer, Mr. Drake. I'm not afraid of you."

"Look," said Drake. "I don't know why I waste my time, saying this, because I don't expect you to believe me, but I didn't kill your father."



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"The police think you did. I heard it on the radio."

"You helped give them that idea," he told her, "and they found ten thousand in my safe which came from your father. I suppose that money now belongs to you." He glanced toward the elderly woman who was stirring faintly. "I guess you need it."

"The money," her eyes lighted for a moment, then, "Why did you kill my father?"

He ignored her. Instead he said. "It was a nice little trick of yours, yours and Lowell Young's, trying to blackmail your father into paying off that phoney bet. Who thought of it? That was one thing your Dad couldn't stand, publicity that he had failed to meet a bet."

"Lowell thought of it," she said in a low voice. "But don't tell my mother. She's had enough to stand."

He nodded. "And it was a clever deal, roping me in on the proposition. I suppose Lowell thought that one up too. He knew that Shorty would be more apt to listen when I talked because I know a lot of characters who did business with Shorty."

Again she nodded mutely.

"And when it didn't work, your friend Lowell spread the news all over town that Shorty had welsed. Naturally Shorty thought I was the one doing the talking."

She didn't say anything.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**Model Murder**

AND your father was killed in my house. It couldn't have been that Young planned to kill him, and brought the bed and dummy for the purpose?"

"Of course not. Why should Lowell want to kill my father? Why, I'm engaged to marry him. That's why he helped me with the bet."

"I thought you were going to marry the Spaniard, Gomez. Your mother mentioned him."

"Pedro," she looked startled. "Me marry Pedro?"

"That," said Drake, "was the general idea."

She was still impatient, pushing the idea away from her with words. "I don't care what Pedro Gomez is planning. Certainly I have no intention of marrying him."

"You don't know Gomez," he said. "If he had the idea of wanting you, he wouldn't stop at anything, not even murder."

Her eyes widened at that and she caught her breath. "You mean . . . ?"

She shook her head. "I don't believe it." "We'll soon know," Drake told her. "I



## MODEL IN THE MORGUE

phoned him. I said you were in trouble. He's on his way by now."

Sudden fear came into her eyes. "No."

"Yes," he said. "But don't worry. You won't be alone with him. I called for Lowell Young too."

She stared at him, sharply. "What do you plan to do?"

"Accuse you of murder," he said. "I'll even prove it. How do you like that, sweetheart?"

The strain of waiting was telling on the girl. She walked up and down the living room like a caged lioness. Finally they heard a car pull up at the garage below.

"The party grows," Drake said, and tried to put more assurance into his voice than he really felt. He faced the door, waiting, and saw it swing inward and Gomez slide into the room.

"What's the game, Senor?"

Drake grinned. It took an effort. Gomez always affected him this way. "You'll know in a minute," he said.

Gomez nodded and his voice was dry. "That car which pulled up behind me, was it the police?"

"Merely a lawyer," said Drake. "We want to keep our talk all nice and legal, everything orderly."

Gomez smiled, but there was no humor in the smile. "I smell tricks," he said. "And Gomez does not care for tricks. I warn you, Senor, I will cut your heart out."

"Consider yourself warned," Drake told himself aloud.

"I'm warned," he answered. "You think Mr. Gomez means what he says?"

"I know it," said Drake.

The Spaniard swore. "Cut out the foolishness, talking to yourself like you are a crazy one."

"Sometimes I think I'm crazy," Drake agreed and broke off as Lowell Young burst in at the door. He was puffing from having run up the steps, and he did not see Gomez as he dashed in.

**S**ALLY, are you all right? What's happened, what...?" He looked around then, saw Drake and Gomez and his face froze. "What is this? What are these men doing here?"

Drake said, "I thought she might need a lawyer, Lowell, so I sent for you."

"Need a lawyer?" Young stared at him.

"It's very simple," said Drake. "You see, after Sally failed to collect the bet from her father, she got desperate. She needed the money, so, she dug up a sweet little item from his past, had a man phone Shorty in

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## DETECTIVE TALES

my name and threaten exposure unless Shorty paid the bet. She sent her stooge to my party. Her father saw him, suspected and refused to pay, so, they knifed him."

Gomez, who had glared at Young when the lawyer appeared, came forward slowly. "She did that, my little one? She killed Shorty?" His black eyes snapped. "It is wonderful. She is a great woman. Long ago when I first see her I say to myself, 'Pedro, there is the woman for you. No morals, no inhibitions. She has beauty, and nerve. She and I will own the world!'"

"So," said Drake. "And did Shorty know that you pictured yourself as his son-in-law?" Gomez twirled his mustache. "But of course. He think it a great idea. He need me in his business. With Pedro around, his clients pay their bets, quick. Without me, he have trouble to collect."

Young said, "What foolishness is this? Shorty never considered you as a son-in-law. He thought you a necessary nuisance."

"You should talk." The Spaniard bubbled with anger. "You, you chisler, you collect a cut from Shorty for every bet your clients make with him."

"Shut up," said Young.

"I won't shut up," screamed Gomez. "I know what you hope. You hope to marry the girl. You try last year and Shorty warns you he kill you if you don't let his daughter alone. The only reason he let you stay around is because you know he is an escaped convict."

Drake stepped between them. "Shut up, both of you!" He looked at Gomez. "Do you mean you'd marry her, even if she had killed her father?"

"Poof." The Spaniard snapped his long fingers. "Do I care about a small murder. Murder does not hurt as long as no one knows."

"I know," said Drake. "So does Lowell Young."

"Ha!" A gun had appeared in Gomez' hand. "You know, but you do not tell. You die. I take your body to Young's office, I kill him too. Sally, she calls the police. She tells them she is in the office and you come to Young for help. It is clever, no? He refuses, he shoots you, you shoot him. The police are stupid. They are satisfied."

Young had been paying little attention to Gomez. His eyes were on the girl. "What kind of foolishness is this? You didn't kill your father, yet you make no protest when Drake accuses you. Who are you trying to protect? What are you trying to do?"

Drake gave the girl no chance to answer, "Just how are you so certain that she didn't kill her father, Lowell?"



## MODEL IN THE MORGUE

"It's obvious," said Young, "very obvious. Why, look at her. You could tell by looking, even if you didn't know her."

"Could it be," Drake asked, "because you killed Shorty yourself?"

Gomez was too surprised to do or say anything. He let his gun arm sag and stared at Drake open mouthed. Young laughed. "Now we are being silly. You're scared, Drake. You're afraid they'll fry you. You're reaching for anything, any way out of the jam. You haven't a thing against me."

Drake shrugged. "Maybe, maybe not. For one thing, I've narrowed it down. It's very plain that Pedro didn't kill Shorty. Emmer-son's murder doesn't worry him at all. When he thought the girl did it, he still loved her and was ready to kill both you and me to keep her from falling under suspicion.

"You yourself said the girl wasn't guilty. If you're right, that leaves you, my friend, for one of you three killed Shorty Emmer-son."

"How do you make that out? A thousand people hated him badly enough to want him dead."

"But there weren't a thousand people in my office today," said Sam Drake. "I only had three visitors. The girl, Gomez, and you. One of you put ten thousand dollars in my safe, money which had come from Shorty's pocket. One of you tried to frame me for the murder. I think it was you."

Lowell Young laughed. He said, "This is very crazy. Your whole premise falls down if you are the murderer. You could have placed the money in the safe."

Drake shook his head. "I'm not the smart-est guy in the world but Shorty was murdered at my house, I'd had trouble with him and I'd be a bigger jerk than I am if I didn't realize that I'd be the first one the cops would finger. I certainly would never have hidden the money in my safe."

Young said, "But that still doesn't tie me to it."

**Y**ES," said Drake, "it does. Gomez gave me the missing pieces. I couldn't figure your motive, I couldn't figure the threat you used to Shorty on the phone when you called him, posing as me, for you made that call. Sally couldn't have, she was in her father's office at the time. Pedro couldn't either. He too was at the club. So let me guess what happened. You wanted to marry the girl. Shorty wouldn't hear of it, knowing what a chiseling louse you are. You pulled the bet gag to get some dough for Sally and sent me to collect. When Shorty didn't come through, you called him on the phone, pretending to be



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me, and threatened to write to the eastern penitentiary he'd escaped from.

"He agreed to pay then. He got the money and came to my party, but he knew the information about his being an ex-convict could have only come from you. So when he saw you he got into the bedroom and quarreled with you, maybe threatening to expose your chiseling to your clients, perhaps threatening to turn Gomez loose on you. At any rate you knifed him and stuck the body in bed in place of the dummy. You had plenty of chance while the fight was going on.

"You can't prove it," Lowell Young's voice was tight and dry.

"I'm not trying to prove it at the moment in a court of law," said Sam Drake. "I'm proving it to Sally. She was in love with you. If I'd told her you were guilty, she wouldn't have believed me. I tricked her into helping by letting her think I suspected Gomez."

Lowell Young turned to the girl. "He's crazy. You don't believe . . ."

One look at her face told him how wrong he was. She did believe.

"That tears it," said Young and reached for the gun in his pocket. He shouldn't have done that. Gomez was quicker than he was, and Gomez had his gun out. He only had to raise his arm. He shot, and the heavy bullet knocked the lawyer to the floor. He stood, watching then until a voice from behind him said a little shakily.

"Drop that gun."

Mary Carmen was standing behind Gomez. Mary Carmen held a tiny twenty-five automatic.

Gomez did not obey. His instinct was to swing and shoot. He spun and Drake, seeing the danger to the office girl jumped for him. His heavy body crashed into Gomez as Mary Carmen's small gun spat. The bullets sailed over his head and one popped a bulb in the ceiling.

Drake climbed shakily to his feet after wrestling Gomez' weapon free from the man's hand. The Spaniard got up slowly. Mary Carmen said, "You fool, why did you jump at him? I might have shot you."

He said, "And he'd have killed you if I hadn't. Where'd you come from anyway?"

She said, "After you ran out I thought I'd help. I suspected Gomez from the start, so, I got my car and drove over to the Corn Club. I waited until he came hurrying out, then I followed him."

Drake looked at her helplessly. "I told you, I don't like an office girl chasing me around. I guess I'll have to marry you. A man always manages to keep his wife out of his business."

**THE END**



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## DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 35)

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"Can't—"

"It's over, Meggs. You got your pretty suit wet. The cops'll find it at the cleaners. Did you kill him?"

"Yes. Yes!"

Doug Stanley cracked the valve and sent the life-sustaining flood of air whistling below. Suddenly, he was very tired. He put the gun in his pocket and smiled wanly at Halligan. "Your boy will be up soon," he said.

"What's that line about the *Tribly*?"

"She was a liner—torpedoed during the war. She's lying just outside, partially blocking the harbor entrance." Doug watched his crew as they hoisted Meggs. "Decompress him," he warned. "I don't know what a shot of juice would do to a case of bends."

The guy must've slipped a cog, Stanley. A city councilman and everything. . ."

"Not so balmy," Doug corrected. "There's a fortune for the company that does the job. And the city fathers will probably show preference for the local boys—which, in this case, is East Coast Salvage. Meggs figured all that when he heard of the job. He was in on the voting. So he knocks John on the head, knowing John won't sell. He'll buy it for peanuts from John's widow."

"But I thought she didn't own half?"

"Right. But if he kills John and frames me, that's two of us gone. Paula would be sole owner. Until she sold to Meggs."

Pop Hamilton skillfully swung the tug in beside the dock. The men ran out the lines. Halligan looked at the figure of Meggs huddled forward near the rail. "You know," Halligan said, "I almost jumped you when you were playing cowboy."

Doug smiled at him wearily. "I know you did. And I'm sorry about that, Halligan."

"Think nothing of it," Halligan said with a wicked grin. "With the dough you'll make on the *Tribly* job, you'll be at least a city councilman. I might as well start getting along with you now."

On the dock, Paula was walking toward the tug. Doug Stanley, having known her for years as a pal, as the wife of his best friend, was suddenly conscious of her grace. The thought took away some of his weariness, somehow. But he put it from his mind.

The future would take care of itself.



## TOE-HOLD ON A TORPEDO

(Continued from page 69)

"Well, Mamie, I never met no Indian, slipping silent through the bushes, but this old gent sure knew his way around. Kerney is counting and I figure he is maybe better at it than me so I just stand there and wait.

Then we hear Pop's voice around in back. He is calling Frenchie's name and then he starts jabbering in Frog lingo. I don't know what is being said but I hear someone inside the cabin answer. Then I see Joseph move past the open door fast and that is a kind of signal for Ralph and I to close in.

We get to the door and I see this Betty tomato sitting by a kitchen table, her arms and legs tied. I also see Joseph swing his gun against a character's head and guess this must be Frenchie.

I don't have much time to figure, but I make it that this Frenchie has been talking to Pops and is about to deal, and that Joseph is cold-cocking him.

**A**NYHOW, what with this and that I am extremely not happy about the whole situation, and I make a grab for his leg, but he steps away and I don't know where he has gone in the darkness.

I am climbing to my feet when I see a shadow move into the moonlight which shows the open door and then I see it is a man carrying something white and I recall that this tomato is wearing a white dress.

Maybe my eyes are getting used to the dark, or maybe that carrot I ate last April did help, but anyhow I manage to get across that cabin without falling down and I dive out into the moonlight like a Brooklyn fan after an umpire.

He is doing pretty fair considering he is lugging the tomato and that the ground is rough and no asphalt pavement I can assure you. He almost gets to the trees before I get to him and the last five yards I make a dive, like a Notre

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## DETECTIVE TALES

Dame back, sliding hard and fast for the goal post.

I cinch myself around his legs and the three of us go down in a pile with the chick on top.

This Joseph is rough, and I do not have my wrench which puts me at a disadvantage since I have been trained that a sensible citizen hardly ever engages in physical conflict without a wrench or something. But I recall how I read about toe holds and things in that wrestling course which I take and we are all wrapped up together and I reach down and get a hold of a shot and start twisting.

Only I get a funny pain in my leg and when Kerney and Pops come running up and Kerney slugs Joseph until he relaxes, I find I have been twisting my own toe. I tell you, Mamie, them toe holds are positively dangerous. It is at least half an hour before I can walk.

Well, we gather them all up and the old man finds some rope in the cabin and throws one of them half-hitches on the prisoners, and everything is quiet and orderly and peaceful except that Kerney is worried about this chick and keeps asking her if she is all right and if they hurt her or anything. And when finally she convinces him that she is all in one piece and not even damaged at all, he then goes into the routine about all this being his fault.

"I should never have come up here," he says. "I am not good enough to walk the same ground with you." Honest, Mamie, he lays it on beautiful, like that French actor Boyer. It almost makes me want to cry.

"My old man's in Sing Sing," he adds, "for grabbing other people's dough, and before I get into the army, I am nothing but a tout and a gambler. I don't know how to make a living and with this tin leg . . ."

"Anyone who can handle a boat and throw a bass plug the way you do can make a living guiding up here," says Pops. "Betty knows the ropes, and I need someone to handle the boat rentals and such."

Kerney flushes up like a kid. "That's very swell of you, sir," he says. "But it would be a rugged deal for Betty to tie up with me."

"Why," says the chick. "You're not responsible for what your father did. You're not like him at all."

Kerney shakes his head. "It wouldn't be fair. Your folks are decent and honest and respectable."

Pops chuckled. "You kids can have this camp to start out with. There's a pond behind it and a little stream which leads down to the north shore of the lake."

"This camp?" Kerney looked puzzled. "You mean we can buy it?"

"I'll give it to you," said Pops. "It's mine, I built it back in the twenties and Frenchie ran



## TOE-HOLD ON A TORPEDO

it for me while I was handling liquor from Canada. In those days they called me Broadway Sam."

Kerney looks dazed. "You mean you were my father's old partner?"

Pops nodded. "I dropped out of it at repeal. I kind of liked the country."

"But that I should meet Mary, run into you. It surely is a coincidence?" Kerney sounds as if he was dizzy.

"It was no coincidence," Pops says. "Mary wrote us from the hospital that there was a patient there named Kerney. She'd heard me mention the name. So, she checked up and found out who you were. I told her to be extra nice to you."

Kerney looked at the girl. "You never told me."

Pops chuckled. "She isn't like her Pa either. She isn't very proud of the things I used to do. She kind of keeps them to herself. Come on, Hymie, you'll have to run out for the sheriff."

"Let them go," said Kerney. "Tonight, I couldn't turn a louse in."

I looked at him, and at Pops. For my dough it is a mistake to leave citizens like that loose, but I know how Kearney feels. He doesn't want to do nothing which would stir up Pop's past and spread it around among the inquisitive natives.

We untie them and tell them to scam. And for me, it worked out fine. It seems Joseph had wrecked the Packard against a tree, so I haul them back to New York and make a double fare.

So now, if you think I was having fun while you was sitting home in your nice cool flat, you know different and if you don't believe me you can go down to the drug store where all those characters hang out and ask Joseph if everything I said wasn't the truth, only I wouldn't advise that you do same because the last I saw of him, Joseph wasn't pleased with his vacation and did not want to discuss it.



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